Federal Election Commission

The Federal Election Commission (FEC) recently worked with 18F to redesign its website. By hosting FEC.gov on cloud.gov and moving its data to the cloud, the FEC anticipates saving 85% in hosting costs and is better prepared for peak traffic events.

CLOUD.GOV

Federal Election Commission

$1.2 million annual savings

Political campaigns and committees across the country periodically submit financial reports to the FEC which are then disclosed to the public on FEC.gov. Around elections and filing deadlines, the website experiences significant spikes in traffic far in excess of normal demand. To ensure the old website was responsive and available enough, the FEC had to predict future spikes and build for them. To that end, FEC spent $1.4 million annually on the data center supporting the old FEC.gov. This included servers and their maintenance, databases, and various software licenses. According to the FEC's Deputy CIO Wei Luo, maintaining all of this was expensive and "could take up to 3 months." Since beginning their migration to cloud services, including cloud.gov, Luo says they plan to retire all 14 servers by the end of the fiscal year.

While they won't know how exactly how much they'll spend on cloud.gov until next year, initial cost estimates show $1.2 million of annual savings. "We plan to reinvest those savings in IT and cloud migrations over the next five years," said Luo.

Better prepared

The dates of FEC's traffic spikes may be predictable, but it's hard to prepare for the extra demands on the system. "A server that's still operable but near the end of its life can have unexpected problems" and buying a new server can take months. But on the cloud, "this isn't our problem." The team can adjust the resources they need in a matter of minutes and only pay for what they need, when they need it.

Moving forward with the cloud

FEC's cloud experience has been so positive that they're looking to migrate more of their IT systems to the cloud. Up next is the e-filing system candidates and committees use to submit their campaign finance reports. Like FEC.gov, this system also spikes around filing deadlines, and in this case the traffic is even harder to predict because it depends on the number and behavior of donors. For example, if we compare the presidential election seasons 2000 and 2008, we see not only more money raised but also far more individual donors. On their existing system, the FEC has no way to prepare for a dramatic shift like this other than to buy and provision more servers. If the demand is higher than predicted and they don't have the servers to handle it, they must patchwork together a solution and risk downtime during a critical time for their constituents. If the demand is lower than predicted, then the money they spent on extra servers was wasted. By moving this system to the cloud, they can immediately ramp up or down their capacity to meet whatever the actual demand turns out to be, with dramatic improvements in both cost and reliability. cloud.gov makes it easier to move systems to the cloud.

Let's talk

To learn how cloud.gov could help your agency, contact us at cloud-gov-inquiries@gsa.gov.

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