



# OREGON

## *Unemployment Insurance & Paid Leave*

*"The staff navigated through a lot of challenges and maintained their positive attitude. They focused on the end goal to implement benefits on time."*

*-Juan Serratos, Acting Director for Paid Leave Oregon*

The Oregon Employment Department's (OED) mainframe, implemented circa 1990, was inflexible, relied heavily on manual entry and review, and provided only minimal communication channels for OED's customers to reach the department. OED knew the system was holding them back and was in the process of sourcing a modernization vendor when the COVID-19 pandemic drove record-shattering numbers of Oregonians to claim unemployment benefits. The mainframe lacked the flexibility to handle the surge of claims, and staff were forced to implement workarounds to distribute pandemic relief funds.

Just a few months prior to the pandemic, Oregon's state legislature passed Paid Leave Oregon, a new program to ensure pay for Oregonians who need to leave work for family, medical, or safety reasons. Paid Leave Oregon was a brand new program for the state and would require a dedicated team to administer it. Staff on this new team would need to sort out the details of administering the program and implement new software to support the program—all within the deadlines imposed by the legislation.

To ensure OED could meet the legislative deadlines for the Paid Leave Oregon program without delaying the desperately needed unemployment insurance system modernization, they opted to tackle both projects together.



Left to right: Alex Kasner, Stephanie Stevens Weston, Jae Voelker, Kristen Cunningham, Ashli Machado, Cassidy Freedman, Brad McKinney, Nathan Flynn, Mike Dees, Andrew Pinvises, Rocky Beaty, Jetro Butac

## A SYSTEM FOR THE FUTURE

In July 2021, the Oregon Employment Department (OED) partnered with Fast Enterprises (FAST) to implement Frances, a modern system that would position OED for long-term adaptability and growth, while incorporating new functionality for the new Paid Leave Oregon program.

Looking toward the future, OED understood that continued success would require flexibility, and their mainframe was not up to the task. “During the pandemic, we had to stand up numerous ad hoc programs and websites just to keep up with all the work. It was more than our system could handle,” said Ashli Machado, Business Analyst. OED also knew that refocusing workloads would help them meet customers’ evolving needs. “The agency’s goals were to make the

process easier for its users, employers, and claimants. We wanted to allow people to do more for themselves, which would free up staff and agency time,” said Marcos Morales, Administrative Specialist 2.



Left to right: Timothy Valery, Brian Thaden, Lisa Schriever

Frances enabled OED staff to rework their business flows to rely less on manual work. “We upgraded to modern ways of doing business, as well as modern technology,” said Lisa Schriever, Deputy Director for Operations and Policy. Freeing up this time enabled OED staff to focus more on what mattered most—helping Oregonians.

Danielle Willey, Deputy Director of Contributions and Recovery, said, “We’ve got to get it right for the customer. It wasn’t something that could be half-heartedly done.”

# BALANCE & ALIGNMENT

To launch Paid Leave Oregon, OED formed a new team and tasked them with developing the processes and procedures for the program. “Everything was new. The law was new. We had to develop everything basically from scratch,” said Juan Serratos, Acting Director for Paid Leave Oregon. However, the new team wouldn’t have the luxury of time to deliberate—tight project deadlines meant that staff would need to develop the processes at the same time as they were building them into Frances. “It was exciting and terrifying and thrilling all at once, but it also presented some unique challenges. We were being asked to define a process for something that didn’t exist yet, and so we would have to make a decision and then immediately give it to the Frances team,” said Danielle Willey, Deputy Director of Contributions and Recovery.

To make matters even more complicated, paid leave and unemployment insurance (UI) functionality were being added to Frances simultaneously, and some functionality would be shared by both programs. “We had to make decisions about what was going to be the best for both benefit programs, and it was not always easy,” said Sara Cromwell, UI Deputy Director for Benefits. Balancing the needs of each program required teamwork, communication, and flexibility from both sides. “There



Left to right: Andrew Pinvises, Mike Dees, Bradley Steele, Donovan O'Brien, James Terrusa

were a lot of difficult conversations around change. We heard a lot of ‘well, this is how we’ve always done it,’ and we had to push back. We were pushing to make changes because it was going to benefit everyone,” said Ashli Machado, Business Analyst.

Throughout these discussions, one undercurrent held steady: that the customer’s needs came first. “The project has taught me about what’s really important—it’s the relationships you build and making sure everyone can get in a room and find a resolution that will provide the best experience for the customer,” said Brad McKinney, Deputy Director for the Modernization Program.

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*It was a race against the clock, and the amount of work that had to be done was just astronomical.*  
—Danielle Willey,  
Deputy Director of  
Contributions and Recovery  
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# PROJECT TIMELINE

R1

**SEPTEMBER 6, 2022**

*Unemployment Insurance Tax,  
Paid Leave Contributions*

R2

**AUGUST 14, 2023**

*Paid Leave Benefits*

R3

**MARCH 4, 2024**

*Unemployment Insurance Benefits*



## IMPROVEMENTS

### System Automation

“The claims review process is much faster now. Simple claims don’t require as much manual intervention and staff can focus their time on the more complicated cases.”

—**Josh Westbrook, Organizational Change Management Analyst**

### Seamless Identity Verification

“I really like how we implemented identity verification into our system—we are reducing the risk of fraud but still making the system easy for claimants to access.”

—**Lisa Schriever, UI Deputy Director for Operations and Policy**

### Improved Customer Experience

“We were dedicating a lot of time and resources to answering questions about how the old system worked. We no longer have to answer those types of questions. The new system is easier to understand because it goes through each process step by step.”

—**Marcos Morales, Administrative Specialist 2**

### Streamlined Processes

“Tax rate calculation in the legacy system was almost a six-month process, and a lot of manual calculations were done pre-Frances. Now, those issues have been resolved.”

—**Stephanie Stevens Weston, Operational and Policy Analyst 3**

### Integrated System

“It’s more efficient now. Everything is integrated into Frances and connected in one centralized location. You used to have to work in a separate program, and then that program fed into a second program.”

—**Niki Lopez, Business Analyst**

# EASE OF USE FOR CUSTOMERS

OED's new online portal, Frances Online, gives customers 24/7 access to paid leave and unemployment insurance accounts. Frances Online enables customers to quickly and easily access up-to-date information about their claims or filings, upload information for OED staff to review, and use a slew of other new features, all in a format that is easy to access on the go. "It was clear to us that customers needed to be able to create an account, log in, apply for benefits, and get the information they needed online," said Leanne Singleton, Business Analyst.



While building Frances Online, OED staff prioritized ease of access for all Oregonians. "I think the project did a really good job of keeping Frances Online as usable as possible from an accessibility perspective, a usability perspective, and a



Left to right: Ashli Machado, Alex Kasner, Brad McKinney, Stephanie Stevens

multilingual perspective," said Cassidy Freedman, FAST Team Manager for Frances Online. OED invested extra time into thorough usability and accessibility testing throughout the project. "We wanted to ensure access for everyone. People have different skills and abilities, and making the application process the easiest we

could was the right thing to do," said Juan Serratos, Acting Director for Paid Leave Oregon. OED staff also performed a thorough plain language review and translated their communications into the most commonly used languages in Oregon. "It was extremely important to support English- and Spanish-speaking populations on day one," Cassidy said.

Enabling customers to easily access information via Frances Online has paid dividends. Josh Westbrook, Organizational Change Management Analyst, said, "The fact that you can go online, file your claim, immediately have your fact-finding questions available to answer at the same time, and somebody can look at the claim that next day—that's a massive victory for Oregonians. They get paid much faster, and it's just such a smooth process."

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*One of the biggest benefits of Frances Online is people can use a smartphone to get what they need and not have to go find a computer or go to a library or fill out a piece of paper.*

*—Stephanie Stevens Weston,  
Operational and Policy Analyst 3*

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**Project Name**  
*Frances*

**Project Type**  
*Unemployment Insurance  
Paid Leave*

**Agency Name**  
*Oregon Employment  
Department (OED)*

**Population**  
*4.27 million*

**Capital**  
*Salem*



Frances Perkins

*The program was named in honor of Frances Perkins, a trailblazing workers' rights advocate and the first woman to serve in a presidential Cabinet. As Secretary of Labor under President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Perkins spearheaded numerous landmark programs for workers, including unemployment insurance.*



Ashli Machado



Brad McKinney



Danielle Willey



Juan Serratos



Leanne Singleton



Lisa Schriever



Niki Lopez



Sara Cromwell



Stephanie Stevens

## WHAT'S NEXT

Implementing Frances has enabled the Oregon Employment Department (OED) to expand beyond the limitations of their mainframe system and look toward the future with a robust set of tools at their disposal. “We now have a system that can support both paid leave and unemployment insurance and for us that’s a game changer. Having this integrated system is a huge asset to us now,” said Juan Serratos, Acting Director for Paid Leave Oregon. OED staff are eager to leverage the tools within Frances as they continue refining their processes and finding more efficient solutions. “We’ve

already made such great strides, and I think having Frances sets us up for even more success. It lets staff complete their work better, dive into the parts of their job they couldn’t access before, and find new ways to support our customers,” said Ashli Machado, Business Analyst.

As they consider how to streamline and improve processes further, OED staff are iterating on the decisions they made during the project. “Nothing is ever going to be 100% perfect—there is always room for improvement, especially as agencies, laws, and legislation change the work that we do,” said Niki Lopez, Business Analyst. These adjustments are all aimed at one thing—providing Oregonians with the support they need as they navigate difficult times in their lives. Brad McKinney, Deputy Director for the Modernization Program, said, “The customer doesn’t care how many clicks we make—they care about being able to get money in their bank accounts, to buy groceries for their kids or pay rent. We need to keep that customer-focused mindset and make the right decisions for them.”

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*Every week we process 4,000 new claims and 44,000 weekly claims for benefits, and we pay \$14 million to \$19 million to Oregonians. That’s money people need to buy basic necessities while they’re bridging the gap. Our staff show up every day and say, ‘how can I help?’ Every day they’re doing work that gets millions of dollars to people who need it. It’s those day-to-day things that result in super remarkable work.*

*—Sara Cromwell,  
UI Deputy Director for Benefits*

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