



The Computerworld Honors Program

Honoring those who use Information Technology to benefit society

Final Copy of Case Study

Status:

Laureate

Year:

2013

Organization Name:

NASA Office of the Chief Information Officer

Organization URL:

<https://labs.nasa.gov>

Project Name:

IT Labs Program

Please select the category in which you are submitting your entry:

Innovation

Please provide an overview of the nominated project. Describe the problem it was intended to solve, the technology or approach used, how it was innovative and any technical or other challenges that had to be overcome for successful implementation and adoption. (In 300 words or less.)

The IT Labs Program mainly focuses on improving the innovation process for IT related ideas at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). Established in 2011, program operates out of the Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO) at NASA Headquarters. This allowed IT Labs to see potentially ground-breaking IT ideas coming from all the NASA centers across the country. It also helped identify three major issues: 1) Despite identifying many ideas, there was not a clear approach on how to progressively explore them. 2) In the cases that a clear approach existed, funding might not have been available. 3) Additionally, many innovation-type efforts had started at each Center, sometimes resulting in multiple centers looking at very similar ideas independently. These

issues either lead to investing resources in a non-viable idea, a previously analyzed idea, or not investing in potentially useful idea. The IT Labs Program's services were designed to meet these issues and encourage innovation in general. For instance, the Program's process clearly explains how to progressively explore new ideas in phases. Funding limits and regular progress evaluations during each process phase help minimize the probability of investing more resources than necessary. IT Labs also works with other innovation efforts at the Agency and Center level to integrate IT projects where necessary. This integration has prevented several duplicative efforts saving the Agency time and money that could be used on other ideas. As a result, this program has used a small budget to invest in over 30 potentially feasible technology projects over the past two years. The success of the process has also increased its adoption to other internal organizations outside of the OCIO as well.

When was this project implemented or last updated? (Please specify month and year.) Has it incorporated new technologies and/or other innovations since its initial deployment? (In 300 words or less.)

Since starting in May 2011, the IT Labs Program has continually improved to achieve its goals. For instance, it created a new phased approach for users to explore unproven information technology ideas. This process promotes collaboration by engaging multiple levels of NASA management and organizations at each Center. This broad engagement allows the IT Labs program to prevent duplicative efforts and foster others by connecting resources working on similar efforts. To effectively implement this process, IT Labs members created a central web portal in Microsoft SharePoint to take advantage of its collaboration capabilities and extensible platform. IT Labs also found more efficient ways to operate and collaborate using cloud-based solutions. For instance, Google Apps for Government has been used extensively to generate, share, and store products. Automating time-consuming tasks, such as collecting applications for new ideas and status reports for existing projects, allows program team members to concentrate on other work. As a result, these improvements allow the IT Labs Program to effectively operate an Agency-wide program with only six people. Keeping such a low labor cost increases the Program's budget allocation for funding new ideas.

Is implementation of the project complete? If no, please describe the project's phases and which phase the project is now in. (In 300 words or less.)

Although the IT Labs Program has made some significant accomplishments in its first two years, it is still building up its capabilities. The program founders identified three phases each spanning a year and with a different focus. During Phase 1, the program focused on acquiring resources to help build up the

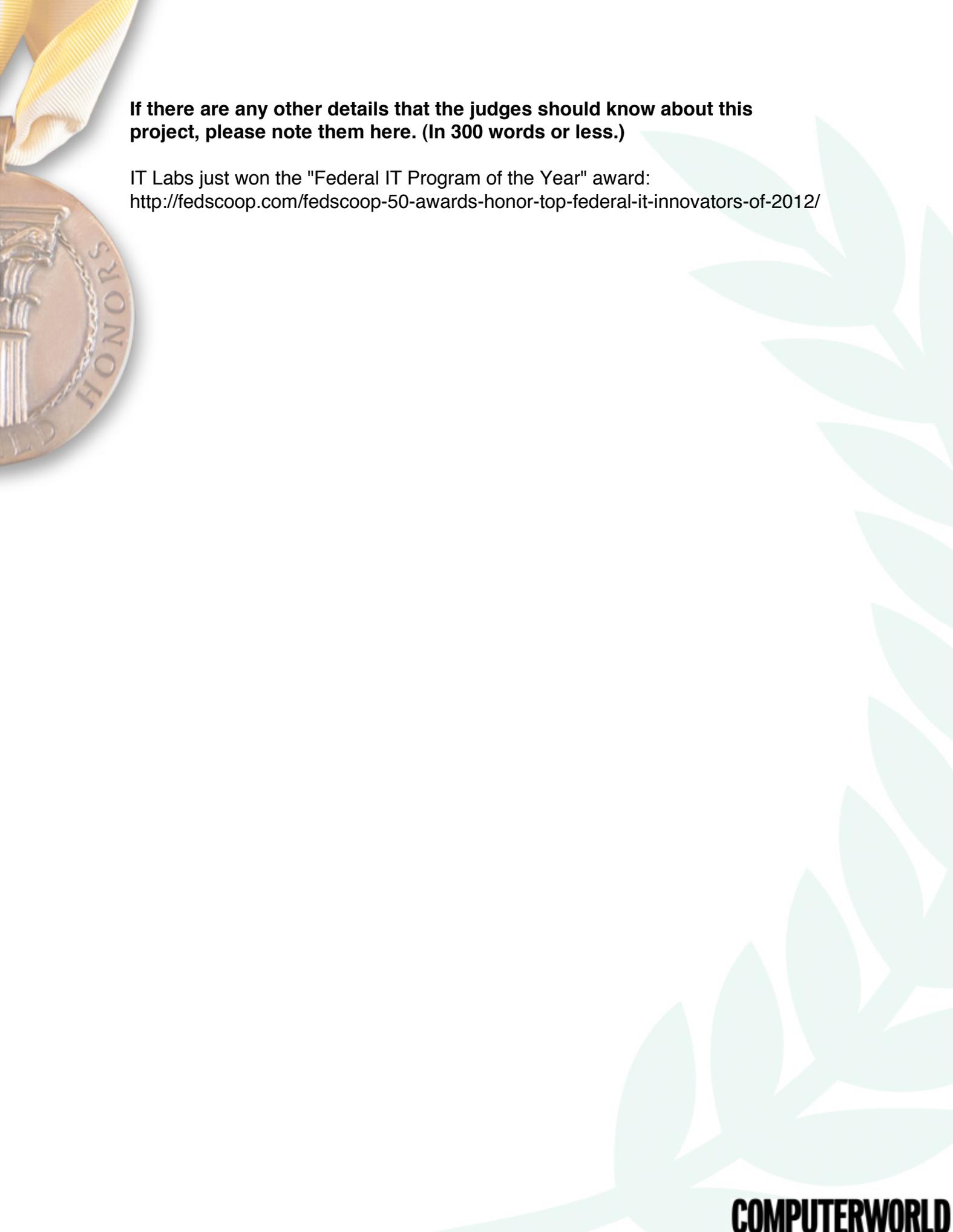
program. This included a project coordinator to monitor the progress of the funded projects, IT subject matter expert to help evaluate the merit of funded projects, a software developer to create a web portal, and a location to host that portal. The people acquired also performed multiple other roles in addition to their major roles listed previous. With people in place to do the work, Phase 2 focused on developing the new innovation process and the web portal to facilitate it. IT Labs successfully held its first annual request for ideas from across the Agency. The new web portal was also instrumental in centralizing information about IT Labs and the work that it has done. With the basic program elements in place, the current focus is on Phase 3. This phase involves fostering new partnerships with other federal organizations, industry, and universities. These groups will bring in fresh perspective to generate more out of the box ideas and opportunities for collaboration. Additionally, this phase will also look at improving upon the work done in Phase 2 by acting on feedback from people who have used the process and the web portal.

Please provide at least one example of how the technology project has benefited a specific individual or organization. Feel free to include personal quotes from individuals who have directly benefited from the work. (In 300 words or less.)

IT Labs provides benefit by providing seed money, a systematic process, and connecting experts to allow innovative ideas to flourish. Several of these ideas have benefited other organizations either directly or indirectly. For instance, one project funded by IT Labs involved determining the feasibility of using Google Apps for Government at NASA. While trying to stand up this system, a flaw in the Agency's Identity Credentials and Access Management policy was discovered and fixed. Another example is of IT labs providing funding for an effort to help consolidate the different Virtual Private Network (VPN) solutions at each NASA Center. Without IT Labs' funding, that effort would not have been possible.

Would this project be considered an innovation, a best practice or other notable advancement that could be adopted by or tailored for other organizations and uses? If yes, please describe that here. (In 300 words or less.)

The IT Labs program model could be considered a best practice. Setting up a centralized innovation program an organization has many benefits that could be utilized by other federal agencies.

A gold medal with a ribbon is partially visible on the left side of the page. The medal features a classical architectural design and the word "HONORS" is inscribed on its edge. A laurel wreath, a symbol of honor, is positioned on the right side of the page, extending from the top to the bottom.

If there are any other details that the judges should know about this project, please note them here. (In 300 words or less.)

IT Labs just won the "Federal IT Program of the Year" award:
<http://fedscoop.com/fedscoop-50-awards-honor-top-federal-it-innovators-of-2012/>