Montana’s Lessons Learned and Key Takeaways
Bill Drafting System: A Collaborative Effort – NCSL Boston 2017

Collaborate Early and Often

✓ Have a bill drafting expert involved as early in the process as possible
  o Success story: Montana had a bill drafter and committee staffer on the contractor selection team. Her perspective was valued during the selection stages, and she was able to add contracting process context during the system development stage.

✓ Have a business analyst or an IT staff member who is “fluent” in bill drafting terminology and process
  o Success story: Montana has IT staff who developed the current bill drafting system over two decades. They were able to translate many of the bill drafters’ needs and requests to the other staff developing the new systems.

✓ Offer system users an avenue to suggest updates or minor fixes
  o Success story: During the session, bill drafters could save suggestions for updates and changes to the system. They could log good ideas right away so the concepts weren’t lost in the rush. It took the pressure off the project staff to juggle lots of ideas that couldn’t be implemented right away.

Budget the Time to Do It Right

✓ Prioritize time for visioning what the new system could be
  o Bump in the road: Montana devoted significant time outlining the current system but significantly less time to brainstorming and “dreaming” of what the new system could be or do. We didn’t think through what a new system could mean for our existing paper-based business processes, so in many cases the new system simply transferred current paper forms and checklists into electronic versions with little variation or improvement. It was a lost opportunity.

✓ Take the proposed timeline and extend it, especially if you are redesigning multiple systems or processes at once
  o Bump in the road: Delays in creating a different IT system pushed the work on the bill drafting system back, meaning there was inadequate time to test and improve the new bill draft request system before it had to launch.

✓ Test, test, test. Don’t rush the testing.
  o Bump in the road: Drafting staffs’ perceptions of the new bill drafting system were colored before it launched because of the well-known difficulties other staff encountered with a different computer system. Don’t try to train nontechnical staff on an untested system.
  o Bump in the road: Make sure the right people are involved in the testing. If multiple divisions or types of staff have their fingers on a bill draft, each type of staff needs to be involved in testing the new system for that work. For example, a bill drafter cannot provide the legal director’s perspective or substitute for an editor.
Make Communication Easy

✔ Set up a process to communicate system updates or interruptions quickly, emphasizing in-person communication when possible
  o Success story: Montana’s business analyst responded to many of the bill draft questions and triaged what she couldn’t fix or explain. She spent time at the bill drafters’ desk, seeing the problem from their side, gathering additional potential issues, and hearing the drafters’ frustrations. This personal response helped in several ways – the bill drafters felt heard, the problems could be solved more efficiently, and the IT department had another presence with the bill drafters. The business analyst also attended drafter staff meetings to give updates and discuss upcoming changes in person.
  o Bump in the road: Montana redesigned its existing email notification system for IT system updates to distinguish immediate problems or shut downs of the bill draft request system from regular weekly or nightly routine system updates or other run-of-the-mill notices that weren’t time sensitive.

✔ Translate technical terms and processes for nontechnical staff who will use the systems
  o Bump in the road: For project staff, project terminology and structure, rituals and routines of testing, loops of feedback and changes, and development were all second nature. This is not true of bill drafters, who felt very anxious when things took longer, or didn’t look the way they should. Some of this project cycle made the drafters feel overwhelmed, overworked by the project, and unimpressed with how the system was functioning. Better communication about how projects function, how testing works, and how developers learn through our testing and feedback could have made them more comfortable with the process.

✔ Have a business analyst who represents the Legislature involved in meetings and give that person the ability to make decisions
  o Bump in the road: Drafters who provided input during the design phases were often meeting with consultants without a business analyst or manager who could make decisions related to business processes and system design. It put the drafters at a disadvantage with the consultants, and it was inefficient because several additional meetings had to be held with managers to redesign workflows.

Contacts
Rachel Weiss      Susan Murray
Research Analyst     Business Analyst
Office of Research and Policy Analysis Office of Legislative Information Services
Montana Legislative Services Division Montana Legislative Services Division
406-444-5367     406-444-1383
rweiss@mt.gov     smurray@mt.gov