New Jersey Department of Transportation
Bureau of Research

Technical Brief

NJDOT Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act (FFATA) Reporting

The New Jersey Institute of Technology (NJIT) worked in support of New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT) to meet the reporting requirements pertaining to the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act (FFATA). The purpose of this work was to identify deficiencies in the current system and develop solutions to enhance the effectiveness of NJDOT's reporting process. NJIT helped NJDOT achieve a more streamlined and accurate reporting process that centered around rectifying the vendor file information, submitting the reports to the FFATA Subaward Reporting System (FSRS) website, correcting the information and errors in the NJDOT Vendor Files, and modifying the system programming.

Background

Enacted into law in 2006, and amended in 2008 the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act (FFATA) requires information about Federal awards to be made available for public access. The guiding idea for the Act is that public should be informed about the accountability of the Federal awards process. Early in the process of adopting FFATA requirements, NJDOT began preparations to conduct periodic data uploads to the FSRS reporting site using established criteria that was captured and entered into an automated process. During this process, NJDOT identified certain areas where their reporting process was deficient and recognized that they needed help to address these deficiencies. To achieve the goal of the responsive reporting system and to ensure NJDOT's compliance with the regulatory requirements, the NJIT research team was tasked with assisting in the evaluation and improvement of the reporting mechanisms used by the NJDOT.

Research Objectives and Approach

NJIT's role, and a broad objective of this study, was to provide assistance and support to NJDOT with addressing these deficiencies. More specifically, this entailed identifying and resolving the identified deficiencies in data element of the reporting process, so as to ensure timely and complete submission of required information through the Federal website. While NJDOT's web based application was being used to report the federal dollars spent, the NJIT team found there were certain areas where the data needed to be validated and cleansed to comply (i.e. ensure consistency) with the FFATA reporting formats.

Findings

In the early stage of the project the NJIT research team conducted a detailed review of FFATA reporting requirements, focusing on format and content of the data records included in the required data fields for online submission. This provided a basis for review of data that NJDOT was submitting through the FSRS, necessary data corrections, and refinement of the web-based software tool developed by NJDOT to facilitate online submission of data records to the FSRS website. Submitted data was reviewed in several instances, before and after submission attempts. The research team looked for inaccuracies and inconsistencies in data records that could not be successfully uploaded into the federal reporting system. Once these inconsistencies were identified, the data was scrubbed by correcting corrupt or inaccurate information. The project team documented data cleansing actions, assisted NJDOT with refining the software code for the online data submission, and provided recommendations to ensure efficient submission of required data under the FFATA mandate. The NJIT research team also performed the following improvements to refine the existing data collection system:

1. Cleaned up the vendor file information, which is expected to improve the FFATA reporting counts to the government significantly.

2. Performed a successful upload of the 2013 data. Researched and updated the data for the year 2014. During this phase of the work, other causes for data rejection were investigated to ascertain the exact nature and causes of the discrepancies.

3. Devised a strategy to compensate for data entry incompatibilities, such as the "legislative code" data point mentioned previously.

4. Developed a methodology for determining the degree of compliance with what NJDOT was reporting and what the Federal Government requires.

5. Achieved a better understanding of the causes of upload failures, which led to designing an improved reporting process.

6. Finally, the NJIT-assisted NJDOT teams in developing corrective protocols to ensure improved compliance in future FFATA submissions.

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A final report is available online at: http://www.state.nj.us/transportation/refdata/research/. If you would like a copy of the full report, send an e-mail to: Research.Bureau@dot.state.nj.us.

NJDOT Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act (FFATA) Reporting
NJDOT Research Report No: FHWA-NJ-2017-009