“Working with the SolutionsIQ team was a very high-quality experience. Because of our close involvement and working together as we did, there was a high percentage of ‘getting it right the first time’.”

- Jeff Nicholls, Project Manager, Washington Scholarship Coalition

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theWashBoard.org is a Web-based service that facilitates the match between students seeking scholarships and scholarship providers. It offers a centralized catalog of vetted opportunities for scholarships that yields targeted matches with eligible students and an engaging experience for its users. Moving from “searching” for scholarships to “matching” students with real opportunities is the primary innovation of theWashBoard.org compared with the competition. The site was created by the Washington Scholarship Coalition, a public and private collaboration among foundations, state government, financial aid experts, and higher education professionals, established to improve access for students seeking higher education in Washington State.

**Challenge**

The initial goal was a live site where providers could post scholarships and seekers could find them. After obtaining feedback from providers and seekers about what was working well and what wasn’t, the need for Phase Two functionality improvements was evident. “From the student-seekers’ standpoint, it was about ease of use,” said Nicholls. “On the provider side, some better administrative tools were needed.” Key goals included:

- Process enhancements to make applications easier to read and give reviewers tools to evaluate and indicate award recommendations and comments.

- Additional fields to allow Providers to indicate scholarship award recipients and dollar amounts.

- The ability for Providers to display the total number of Seeker profiles in the system that meet scholarship criteria.

- Functionality for Counselors to easily submit letters of recommendation for scholarship applicants without requiring a login.

- Capability for Seekers to create a demo user profile without registering on the system.
Solution

Phase Two of the project, executed by SolutionsIQ, completed the next round of feature enhancements in support of the Coalition’s mission, while also addressing known issues and improving the stability of the product platform. The SolutionsIQ team delivered:

- The ability to manage attachments to both scholarship providers and scholarship applications.
- A change in architecture to allow dynamic creation of both question and answer values in the scholarship seeker profile and scholarship requirements.
- The power to manage scholarships over multiple years, allowing Providers to easily roll a scholarship to a new year after it has been granted in the current year. Likewise, a Seeker can now maintain a list of scholarships that they are interested in over several years.
- Additional access roles for teachers and counselors that influence students.
- The capability to allow other parties to submit letters for Seekers.
- The ability for scholarship providers to have multiple reviewers who can access scholarship applications easily in a PDF.
- The capacity for Providers to specify seekers from more than one state.
- The ability for Providers to preview the existing applicant pool based on scholarship requirements.

Results

The new site has attracted many new student-seekers (a 14% increase) and providers (+5%) since its deployment in October 20, 2010. The Phase Two enhancements have generated excitement among providers who are looking forward to posting their scholarships for the upcoming academic year: nearly two-thirds of registered providers surveyed reported a “very good” or “great” experience, and they consider the most important features of the site to be the fact that it is free, Washington-focused, and now has a range of flexible options.

“The SolutionsIQ team got up and running very quickly. We had identified some limitations of the scalability of the app, and we wanted to address those. The team was always great with me about these priorities, coming to me with ideas and sizing them, and letting us make those choices,” said Nicholls. “The fact that the team was very quick to become familiar technically with the application enabled us to run very quickly and efficiently as a team. SolutionsIQ’s Agile development methods are a great way to incorporate changes and deliver results quickly.”

The SolutionsIQ Advantage

SolutionsIQ has proven expertise in using Agile methods to develop cutting-edge software.

Our practitioners and coaches teach by example and share their real-world experience, working side-by-side with our clients to develop and deliver software.

For over thirty years, SolutionsIQ has combined technical expertise and a hands-on approach to serve clients ranging from early-stage startups to the Fortune 500.