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The Cost of Delaying Agenda Automation

Shrinking Budgets for Local Governments, But More Responsibility

Every tax dollar counts for local governments. Mounting pension commitments, infrastructure in need of repair, and many other factors have tightened the financial vise. Post-recession, local governments saw state aid drop by 12.6 billion dollars between 2009 and 2010, while property taxes declined and 22 states saw a reduction in local government employees by up to 5 percent. While there's been a slow rebound, funding and property tax dollars still haven't returned to pre-recession levels in many states.

The legislative demand for improved accessibility, namely the need for citizens to access information online 24/7, continues to grow due in large part to programs like the US Federal Government's Open Government Initiative. The financial picture is a bit different region to region, but the reality is local governments face a significant challenge — dealing with an expectation for improved service without any reprieve in budgetary pressure. The answer for many local government managers is to load additional responsibilities onto current staff — but how far can it go?

What Is Agenda Automation and How Does It Impact Productivity?

Agenda automation is achieved with specialized software built for local governments that eliminates the manual tasks related to creating, publishing and distributing agendas. Ideally, these systems have Records Management and Action Tracking components so that the benefits of a digital system are experienced deeply across different departments.

A Clerk or Clerk's Department manages information, builds and publishes both agendas and minutes digitally and ensures every item is complete and on the agenda. This process alone results in improved efficiency, but the impact goes much deeper. There is a bit of variability based on previous processes, but it's common to see **a reduction in agenda prep time by up to 50 percent across an entire local government organization** as the opportunity to automate approval workflows, and automate the delegation of post-meeting follow-up tasks and the ability to search through years of documents digitally, results in substantial time savings for staff across different departments.

The automated method of managing documents has a big impact on public transparency as well. Just as a staff member can publish an agenda for Council and staff in one click, that person can also follow the same method for putting meeting documents and other

records on their website. One of the first steps when moving to an agenda automation solution is to create a searchable online database for documents that integrates seamlessly with any website. Once set up, it's usually as simple as putting a digital file into a folder. It's a quick step to improve transparency and ultimately reduce inbound calls from the public for information.

Why Should Agenda Automation Rise to the Top of a Crowded Priority List?

This all sounds great, but how much is it going to cost? This is where it gets exciting, because as illustrated in a few examples below, you'll see that in many cases the cost savings on paper and copying alone is more than the annual cost of a system. Local governments often experience savings from US$300 to US$1,000 per a meeting depending on organization size and previous processes. Remember, what you'll see below does not include the time savings element outlined above.

Scenario #1 – Small Local Government (5,000 – 30,000 residents)

20 agenda packets of about 100 pages are required per a meeting; 5 packets are couriered to Council members, and others may need to come pick one up. Let's say there are 24 meetings a year.

> $20.00 – Agendas (20 at $.01 a sheet)
> $240.00 – Copying Costs (Toner & Ink)
> $150.00 – Courier (Shipping to 5 Council Members)
>
> **$410.00 per a meeting in paper costs**

Scenario # 2 – Mid to Large Sized Local Government (30,000– 75,000 residents)

50 agenda packets need to be printed at an average of 250 pages in length; 5 packets need to be couriered to Council members before a meeting, and we'll assume there are 48 meetings a year between Board, Committee and Regular Council Meetings

$62.50 – Agendas (50 agendas at $.01 a sheet)

$431.25 – Copying (Toner & Ink)

$150.00 – Courier (Shipping to 5 Council Members)

$643.75 per a meeting in paper costs

Scenario # 3 – Local Government with Agenda Automation

3 agenda packets are printed, with digital versions for Council, Staff and the public. The agendas are 100 pages in length and there are 2 meetings a month.

$3.00 – Agendas: 100 pages at $.01 a sheet = $3.00

$26.00 – Copyink (Ink, Toner)

$0.00 – Courier: 0 agendas to ship

$29.00 per meeting in paper costs

Results

In the small local government example before agenda automation, they were spending about $10,000 annually. By moving to agenda automation software they can expect to save a little over $9,000 dollars. Again this isn't taking into account the reduction in staff time dedicated to agenda preparation and the ability for a local government to be more accessible to the public online. There's the added value of a 50 percent reduction in agenda prep time that increases the bandwidth of staff, enabling them to take on new projects.

For the medium or large sized local government discussed in example #2, it works out that they are spending about $2,500 a month, or $30,000 a year in paper costs to support

their paper-based agenda process. But with an agenda automation solution and four meetings a month, they should expect a savings of $28,560 annually.

Agenda automation software is typically priced by population size, and in both of these cases the cost savings in paper and copying would likely surpass the annual fee to use a web-based system.

Cost per a Meeting

	Agenda Automation	Small Local Government	Medium to Large-Sized Local Government
Printing	$3.00	$20.00	$62.50
Copying	$26.00	$240.00	$431.25
Courier	$0.00	$150.00	$150.00
Total	$29.00	$410.00	$643.75

Conclusion

It's the combination of time and financial savings that make an agenda automation solution such an attractive option. The savings will pay for the software and typically put some extra money back into the budget. But perhaps more notably in an era where local governments are being squeezed by tight budgetary constraints, agenda automation software reduces the amount of time staff spends on agenda preparation, records management and transparency; **improving productivity and freeing up key staff to take on new projects.**

Agenda Automation Success Stories

Here are some of the success stories from local governments who've made the transition to agenda automation. Click on one of the links below to watch a video of their story!

City of Fort Dodge, Iowa

Town of Whitby, Ontario

City of Issaquah, Washington