



APPLICATION FORM

All applications must include the following information. Separate applications must be submitted for each eligible program. **Deadline: June 2, 2017.** Please include this application form with electronic entry.

PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Prince William County

Program Title: ASCEND/ERP Project Implementation

Program Category: Information Technology

CONTACT INFORMATION

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SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

Name: Christopher E. Martino

Title: County Executive

Signature: 

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Overview

Many local jurisdictions can recount war stories following their Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system implementations filled with the pain of extended deadlines, funding overages, and failed projects. It is refreshing, then, to tell the story of Prince William County's success with an 18-month ERP project that also fell within the allotted budget of \$11,317,350. While it begins as a normal tale of replacing a legacy system, it ends with the implementation of a baseline product affecting hundreds of County employees and thousands of vendors and with far greater potential for use. That success can be attributed largely to the commitment and collaboration of three major County departments, though several financial and technical staff members invested many hours of hard work from the beginning to completion of the project. However, the planning effort put forth prior to when the project began laid out a structure and process that were sure to guarantee project success. Today, the system has been accepted by all County agencies and is heavily used throughout the day for general ledger accounting, purchasing, budgeting, and all accounts receivable, accounts payable, grant, project and capital asset management activities.

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Problem

Prior to the initiation of the ASCEND/ERP project, the County had been using a financial application implemented in 1999 to resolve a “Y2K” problem. The software company changed owners three times over 15 years and the product was reaching its end of life. The number of nationwide users was quickly dwindling, signaling County staff that there was a need for a more sustainable solution.

Process

In 2012, the County's governing body (“the Board”) approved a funding request for \$300,000 to secure consulting services to develop an Request for Proposal (RFP) to obtain professional consulting services to document the County’s requirements for a new solution and assist with the development of an RFP for an ERP system solution. The idea was not to duplicate the existing system but rather examine the way the County needed to evolve its business for greater efficiencies and find a system to facilitate those processes. The Board also approved \$10 million for software and implementation services to both install and configure a new ERP system. The RFP was developed and published in August of 2013 for the combined software and implementation services. Following the review of a selection committee, site visits based on multiple proposed solutions, and contract negotiations, a final contract was signed in October of 2014.

The project, named ASCEND, began in February of 2015 after selecting an Oracle Managed Cloud Services ERP solution and an integrator interacting with Oracle and Prince William

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County. It is important to note that the County specifically requested one contract for the combined software solution and implementation services to prevent the existence of a gap through which either the implementer or software solution provider could blame each other if there were issues during the project, potentially ending in contract disputes and costly litigation.

The success of the ASCEND project is largely due to the cohesive efforts of three county departments: Finance, the Office of Management and Budget, and the Department of Information Technology. The Finance Department hired a dedicated project manager with experience in ERP systems implementation. The project team, consisting of Financial and Technical leads and support staff from the Finance Department, Office of Management & Budget, and the Department of Information Technology, respectively, had many years of experience working with staff from multiple departments and were familiar with the various legacy systems and processes from those departments.

To secure its success, the project structure also included an Executive Steering Committee made up of the County Executive and key department directors, plus an Advisory Change Champion Team with members from all departments who worked within their respective department to relay important information throughout the life of the project. The project team had three major components that interacted frequently: financial, technical, and change management/training & development. Though additional staff was brought into the project intermittently, 50% to 100% of the project team members' time was devoted to the project. That required the main three departments to backfill with temporary staff on

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occasion so that work outside of the project could continue. Finally, an auditing firm was hired to perform independent verification and validation (IV&V) throughout the life of the project. The firm found that the project controls were well defined and documented, the data from the old and new systems matched, and stated to the Board of County Supervisors Audit Committee that the project was by far the best managed and executed ever encountered during their years of performing IV&V services.

The three phases of the project centered on specific functions: core financials with some procurement and reporting, budget, and advanced procurement. Project cost included implementation and data migration services, post-implementation support, interfaces among required systems, on-site training for staff, first-year licensing for financials/reporting, first-year cloud hosting and maintenance, and 3,000+ hours of flexible consulting services.

The project had its technical bumps that were resolved fairly quickly due to the dedication of the three main participating agencies, the project team and an engaged Executive Steering Committee that met consistently throughout the life of the project. No additional funding was needed to correct issues with either the software or the integrator. Early in 2016, the Board added \$492,350 to modify other County systems to mirror the redesign of the chart of accounts, plus \$525,000 for additional report development that was not considered part of the original project scope.

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The result of the fruits of their labor is a usable and maintainable vendor-managed product that could serve the County for potentially the next twenty years. Benefits include:

- Decentralization of some processes resulting in better segregation of duties
- Elimination of duplicate or “shadow” systems
- Budget development tools eliminating the use of multiple spreadsheets
- Ability to implement greater transparency for systems
- Enhanced vendor self-service portal capabilities
- Enhanced system controls

Perhaps one of the best unintended consequences is the untapped potential encompassing other system functionalities so that additional legacy systems may be retired. Other modules that could be explored are Human Capital Management, Work Order Management, and Inventory. Like a strong tower, the foundation has been laid so now the County just needs to build on it.

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Summary

The key to a successful ERP implementation is not just the proper planning of a project timeline, experienced staff, or the proper software, as Prince William County can attest. Rather, it is a combination of proper planning, staffing, project structure, agency collaboration and executive support that results in the successful installation and configuration of large-scale software and training of all the staff that use it. The software was deployed on an \$11,317,350 budget and on-time in just 18 months for a County of 35 departments and agencies and approximately 5,000 employees. While work during the project was challenging at times there was an active oversight committee and risk mitigation procedures that helped alleviate the difficulties. Most importantly, there was a strong commitment among three major County agencies to collaboratively stay within the timeline and budget provided.