

Philadelphia Works to Digitize Paper-Based Processes

Zack Quaintance | June 19, 2018



The technologists and administrative experts in Philadelphia’s City Hall are well aware they have some longstanding procedural efficiency problems that if solved could make wide-spanning improvements to local government.

To that end, they have targeted what Jeannette Bruno, the city’s assistant chief administrative officer, calls “low-hanging fruit,” or internal processes that can be fixed without massively overhauling entire departments.

Bruno and her team set out to solve three such problems with what she called an enterprisewide approach. Recently, she spoke to *Government Technology* about the results, noting that the central question for the efforts was, “What are the things that are going to have the biggest bang for their buck across city government?”

The first of these projects was an overhaul of the request for proposal (RFP) process, which an informal survey of project managers and others who work with it across city departments found to be ineffective. Basically, Philadelphia’s current RFP process, which is paper-based, takes about 246 hours to complete, or roughly six weeks of work time — and that’s all before an RFP is even posted.

To that end, the city is currently piloting a small solution called [Govlist](#).

“You can think of Govlist as a Turbo Tax program for writing and reviewing RFPs,” Bruno said.

The hope is that the city can procure an accompanying customer relationship management (CRM) system to answer basic questions about RFPs, with an end goal of making the process faster and the RFPs themselves standardized. The initial pilot of this program included 20 RFPs from throughout fiscal year 2017. The city subsequently found that the new process takes just 27 hours, an 89 percent decrease from its prior iteration.

The second solution City Hall is targeting is the position requisition process, which is what must be navigated to create or backfill a job. Currently, that system is entirely paper-based, and to rectify this they are now working with a local tech startup.

The third and final project is the furthest along — it is already live and in use — and centers around Philadelphia’s authorized signer process. Each department in the city is required to keep records of signing off on HR processes, payroll, benefits and other decisions, another process that was formerly entirely paper-based.

In the past, departments were required to keep separate cards for signing off on the aforementioned decisions. Any time a slight change occurred, they’d have to redo entire cards and sign off again. Some cards required up to 12 signatures to approve certain processes, and if an edit had to be made before the card went to approval, the entire card would have to be redone.

That process, however, has now been automated using the relatively common signature authentication program DocuSign. This means that to get a decision authorized, it no longer requires physically walking paper cards to as many as 12 different people for signatures. Now, it can all be done online. Vendors can also send the city completed contracts electronically instead of in the mail on paper.

Stephanie Tipton, chief of staff for the office of the chief administrative officer in Philadelphia, said as dry as this all may sound, it really makes a difference for day-to-day employees in City Hall.

“It’s exciting to us,” Tipton said. “I don’t know how exciting and sexy it is to other people, but this stuff really jazzes us.”

If you break it down into simple terms — more work is getting done in less time, saving the taxpayers money — probably a lot of people could get jazzed about that.

<http://www.govtech.com/civic/Philadelphia-Works-to-Digitize-Paper-Based-Processes.html>