

# How City of Reno Achieved Faster Public Records Turnaround, Greater Efficiency, and Cost Savings with OnBase

## OBJECTIVES

- Cut reliance on paper and scanners
- Gain control over document access
- Improve transparency with agencies and constituents
- Enhance process efficiency

## RESULTS

- Gained electronic import capabilities, slashing paper and scanner use
- Achieved control over document access and tracking
- Improved transparency with agencies and constituents
- A highly scalable solution that can be improved over time
- Faster turnaround for public records requests and accelerated project timelines
- Greater efficiency and productivity for staff
- Cost savings

## The Challenge

Prior to starting their OnBase journey, City of Reno spent years grappling with the limitations of their old document management system. One of the most significant challenges was the system's heavy reliance on paper and scanners. Katelyn Scarlett, Records System Manager at City of Reno, explained, "While we could grant permissions for many people to use the system, you could only enter records into the system if you had access to a scanner and paper."

The trouble is, scanners are extremely expensive, so only departments who processed a high volume of records were able to justify investing in one. As a result, despite being an organization of 1500+ employees, City of Reno only had six scanners, which meant that only a maximum of six employees could enter documents into the system at once. So naturally, scanners weren't always available. This meant if an employee wanted to get a record into the database, they often had to print it and place it on a stack of documents waiting to be scanned when a scanner became available. Then, when availability opened up, it would finally be scanned into the system.

It's also worth noting that the lack of a dedicated scanning team further exacerbated the problem. Even if a scanner became available, employees didn't necessarily have the bandwidth to scan them immediately, slowing down the process even further. It was a long, complex process that simply couldn't keep up with the City's needs.

Converting microfilm and microfiche was equally tedious. It required the use of only two machines that could convert microfilm or microfiche, and again, there was no dedicated staff. Beyond that limitation, the process of converting these records required staff to perform multiple time-consuming steps: convert the film, save it on a computer, print it, and finally scan it by hand into the document management system.

With so many steps and so few machines, staff often instead pursued the workaround technique of saving the record on a computer and releasing it as a public records request when there was a need for it. But since this meant the record never entered the document management system, if there were ever a request for that record again, they'd have to manually perform the workaround technique all over again.

Lastly, the system also lacked document tracking capabilities, making it difficult to monitor access. Katelyn explained, "You would never know how many times somebody accessed a document once it was deleted. And you had no way to pull any reports related to it. There just was no reporting system at all that could connect to the document."

## **An Urgent Call for Change**

The City of Reno had been planning to upgrade to a new document management system for some time but was unable to make the change immediately due to budget priorities. But this abruptly changed when the City of Reno was informed that its old system would be out of commission within a year, as its provider would be shutting down all its servers on that date. This news suddenly blasted the City's upgrade plans to the top of the priority list. After all, if they didn't find a way to transfer all their documents to a new system within the year, they would be lost forever – that's over 20 years of work vanished.

In response, City of Reno immediately began searching for alternative document management solutions and ultimately settled on OnBase. The biggest deciding factor hinged on the City's tight deadline, so OnBase's ability to fit within the budget and be implemented quickly was invaluable.

## **The Solution & its Impact**

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### **ELECTRONIC IMPORT OPTIONS BRING TIME AND COST SAVINGS**

One of the most impactful features of the City's OnBase solution was its electronic import capability. This eliminated the barrier of needing access to a scanner to input documents, allowing all employees to enter documents whenever they needed to. Katelyn explained, "I think the biggest most exciting factor we had from the move to OnBase was the possibility of how much more work we could turn around in a fraction of the time it used to take."

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With these time savings, the City has naturally saved money, which has been reallocated to further developing the OnBase system.

### **PROCESS IMPROVEMENTS ACCELERATE PROJECT TIMELINES**

When the City of Reno initially implemented OnBase, their rigid deadline required them to take the most straightforward approach to conversion, essentially taking the structure of how the document types were built in their old system and mimicking them in OnBase. This way, the records could be safely transported to the new system with the keywords they had intact.

Still, the team knew there were process improvements to be found, and when the conversion process ended, they were able to do just that, starting with implementing the BPD. This change alone made a massive impact, accelerating the City's turnaround times on its projects and its timelines for making records accessible.

### **GREATER STAFF ACCESS ENHANCES PRODUCTIVITY**

The introduction of OnBase also meant that departments that had never had electronic records capabilities now had them at their fingertips. It also opened up the possibility of cross-referencing and cross-searchability across all the City's departments that had OnBase. In the previous system, if you wanted to see records from one of the other departments, you had to ensure there were staff available who had time to pull that record for you. Now, you can pull whatever document you need yourself, saving both you and that other employee time that can be reallocated toward other projects and duties. Plus, OnBase allows you to give and restrict access as needed, which is vital.

Similarly, the City has been able to use OnBase to help its sister municipalities like Truckee Meadows Water Authority and other government agencies access public records more easily. To do this, the City set up a secondary web access client that it was able to grant access to these sister municipalities, which reduced the number of emails City staff received with records requests. This has saved staff significant time, allowing them to complete their jobs in a timely manner. Katelyn said, "OnBase is a system that takes very minimal upkeep, but it sure does reduce our workloads by a whole lot."

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### **DETAILED RESTRICTION CAPABILITIES ENABLE SYSTEM CONSOLIDATION**

The City has also appreciated being able to give and restrict access wherever appropriate, even down to the most granular detail. This ability is one of the features of OnBase that Katelyn deems most impressive.

On the finite detail in which OnBase allows you to grant and restrict, she said, "This allows for such a wider use of OnBase in our organization. We had so many different platforms in government that we use for every single thing we touch, and a lot of that is because, with a lot of systems, you only have so much capability on what you can bring and restrict." This necessitates workarounds where staff need to resort to a different system that can provide whatever specific access is needed. Katelyn continued, "Because of the way OnBase can grant access and restrict down to the smallest detail, what we've found is we can really consolidate a lot of our processes down into just OnBase." This consolidation has even helped the City save money since they don't need to use certain systems anymore.

## **FASTER PUBLIC RECORDS TURNAROUND TIME SLASHES COSTLY LAWSUITS**

City of Reno has another system that handles its public records system, but it uses OnBase to hold all the records to release to other systems. But since implementing OnBase, its public records turnaround times have exponentially reduced. A side benefit from this gain is the City now has fewer lawsuits stemming from their failure to get public records out in the lawful time that the state requires. With the tedious, time-consuming nature of their previous process, getting public records out in time wasn't easy, leading to expensive lawsuits. However, with OnBase allowing the City to have more electronic records at a faster rate, it's able to serve its constituents faster and avoid these costly lawsuits.

## **TRACKING CAPABILITIES GRANT FULL DOCUMENT VISIBILITY**

OnBase has also given City of Reno a full history of its documents. This was a huge win for the City, finally being able to pinpoint where information was missing, track who could and could not access and make changes to records, and discover process improvements it had never thought of before. And that's all thanks to the full document visibility their new system offers. Katelyn said, "Seeing all of this allowed us to be able to keep all staff more accountable, which I think in any job, especially in government, is a very big thing. Taxpayers like to know that jobs are being done right, and the more we can prove that, the happier the agency and everyone else is, too."

City of Reno has also found transparency gains from implementing an EEC that connects from OnBase to the City's website. This reduced the number of public records requests that needed to be handled by staff, saving additional time.

**"Our [turnaround] times went down and our public records' events and the queues went down with OnBase. The world loves to see things more transparently and quickly, and we were able to make that happen. I know our elected officials are really happy with the system and so are a lot of our constituents, based on feedback."**

*-Katelyn Scarlett, Records System Manager at City of Reno*

## **Leading Through Change**

Navigating change is always challenging, but City of Reno has managed the transition to OnBase effectively. Starting out, the very real threat of losing records from the old system if action didn't occur within the year helped garner buy-in from departments that were already using the old system.

But for departments new to electronic records, the transition required more effort, with some staff members feeling skeptical and really putting their foot down. To address this resistance, the City took a strategic approach by first focusing on three major departments and a couple of smaller departments in OnBase. After completing straight conversions for these departments, they zoned in on improving their processes until they had impressive success stories in hand and enthusiastic OnBase champions.

Having these shining examples of the benefits that OnBase could offer was instrumental in getting other departments on board with their own introductions to OnBase, especially those who were more resistant toward the change.

On the difference it made, Katelyn reflected, "If we didn't have those very large success stories, I can't imagine where I would have been on onboarding the rest of the city in the last three years."

They were also able to convert a handful of smaller departments who were open to the change relatively easily, which helped keep the momentum going. This tactic of both checking off smaller wins while also making progress with the bigger, more challenging departments worked well for Katelyn and her team. She said, "I think the myriad of those two strategies balanced out really well for us for a win."

## Vision for Future Progress

City of Reno's journey with OnBase is ongoing. With 80% to 90% of departments now using the system, the focus is on further automating processes and enhancing public transparency even more. The City aims to reduce staff workloads and improve efficiency by automating manual tasks with workflows and forms.

The ultimate goal is to make government operations more transparent, accessible, and faster for the public. "With that effort, it's finding positivity wherever we can," Katelyn explained, "It's a matter of automating the tasks that can be automated so our staff has additional time in their day to do the things that are harder and can't be automated in government. And there's so much you can do with that, too, automation-wise. So, that'll be exciting."

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City of Reno is also committed to continuous improvement across all departments. This ongoing goal continues to see progress, thanks in part to the deep bench of OnBase-related training resources they have access to. As a team of four, Katelyn sees these resources as invaluable. If a team member has an idea, she can easily look it up and see if it's possible. And by taking certification courses and attending training sessions, she's been able to stay up to date on the latest in OnBase and get inspired by new ideas for process improvements and new ways to use tools.

The City is also utilizing Naviant's process consulting services to make progress with its process improvement ambitions in addition to their own continuous learning and training. As Katelyn said, "When we don't know about something, we can't propose it, so having the Naviant team there to suggest these ideas we never would've known about is incredible," Katelyn said, "The quick turnaround on anything we need help with is also big."

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Katelyn is excited for further solution improvements, and the future is looking bright.

"At this point, my project task list says we're literally about a year and a half to two years ahead of where we thought we'd be, looking back to our estimations prior to working with Naviant," Katelyn said, "we're excited to see how much further ahead we can get in the coming year to two years as well."