City of La Quinta, California

City streamlines capital improvement program tracking with integrated software applications

Challenges

When Krystena Blondell began overseeing accounting for the city of La Quinta’s Capital Improvement Program in 2015, it was a mass of confusion. The rolling, five-year program is designed to identify capital improvement needs, corresponding budgets, and timelines. New projects — like city drainage enhancements or turf conversions — are presented and started each year.

Accurately accounting for the budget for this program requires keeping track of anywhere from 10-15 projects at a time, all in differing stages of completion with various funding sources. This would be no easy feat in the best of circumstances. But, in 2015, manual tracking of projects coupled with high employee turnover left the city’s finance department without an accurate picture of budget and expenses.

To track the Capital Improvement Program, the finance department relied on individual general ledger accounts specific to each of the program’s projects. A unique project number was assigned in the general ledger, along with corresponding design, construction, and technical costs.
“It got to be a lot of opening and closing of accounts. Up to 100 a year, and sometimes projects would have to be carried over fiscal years,” Blondell said. “To get an accurate number for remaining budgets and expenses, our spreadsheets needed to be maintained weekly.”

A weekly process that, Blondell said, had fallen behind.

“Staff turnover left this process sadly neglected. We saw a real need to get expenses recorded, budgets updated, revenues recognized, and reconciliations completed regularly,” she said. “It was a huge project that would need to be tackled.”

**Solution**

The city turned to Tyler's Incode® software for help; specifically, Incode Project Accounting™ to enable budget tracking on an unlimited number of accounts across unlimited fiscal years.

“When I inherited the Project Accounting application, the full potential of the software wasn’t being realized,” Blondell said. “Eventually, we began to use the full Incode suite to get a complete picture of all of the pieces involved.”

**Results**

Today, an integrated solution suite has streamlined tracking of the Capital Improvement Program.

“The efficiencies we’ve gained have been huge, “ Blondell said. “We utilize Incode Project Accounting to create projects with specific categories. Since it integrates with Incode Accounts Payable, expenses are updated along with packets. Purchasing allows us to encumber funds and the two work beautifully together, so we can see the progress every time a packet is updated.”

And, because the software gives finance staff the ability to enter individual project budgets, adjustments can be made along the way.

“Say there’s a change order for a construction company and $50,000 is added to their contract. We can go in and increase the construction budget, and increase the funding source,” Blondell explained. “It’s all there. Every time they run a report, it shows the budget in real time.”

City employees are thrilled with the new software — including one department, in particular.

“Engineering has loved it. We’ve had a lot of turnover, but one thing that has remained the same is our consultant,” she said. “He’s been here for over 20 years. Trying to get a number that reflected what was really happening was so difficult for him because spreadsheets weren’t being maintained when people left. Now there’s no more estimation. It’s real-time numbers.”

While she hopes the days of high turnover are past, Blondell feels confident the processes they have in place can be continued should any occur.

“This is a beast that works on its own. Once you get it going, it just takes care of itself.”

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**In Their Own Words:**

“Being able to track the overall cost of a project when it comes from multiple accounts or funds by using our software instead of a spreadsheet is wonderful. [Incode] has improved both the accuracy and efficiency of the process.”

— Krystena Blondell, Accountant, City of La Quinta, California