Howard County: Running Local Government Better with Integrated Solutions

With its reputation as a top place to live in the United States, Maryland's Howard County does things right when it comes to running the business of government. To gain even **greater financial control and improved departmental efficiencies,** Howard County leaders replaced their outdated legacy systems with LocalGovOne – a qualified SAP® Business All-in-One partner solution.

Partner

optimal

Executive overview

Organization
Howard County

Location
Ellicott City, Maryland

Industry
Public sector

Products and Services
Local county government

Employees
2,800

Budget
US$1.5 billion

Web Site
www.howardcountymd.gov

Partner
Optimal Solutions Integration Inc.

BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION

The company's top objectives

- Retire a collection of outdated, disparate, and nonintegrated legacy systems
- Standardize business processes
- Gain greater control over core business operations such as finance, procurement, and utility billing

The resolution

- A project governed by a comprehensive requirements document and interim milestones
- Selection of LocalGovOne, a qualified SAP® Business All-in-One partner solution, and the SAP Billing application
- Alignment of business processes with recognized best practices for the public sector

The key benefits

- Improved operational efficiency and greater visibility across departments
- Ability to respond faster and more cost-effectively to constituents' needs
- Reduced level of financial risk

Read more

"Fiscal responsibility is a top priority. SAP software helped us streamline financial management and made it much easier for us to make the most appropriate decisions when it comes to spending."

Ken Ulman, County Executive, Howard County

TOP BENEFITS ACHIEVED

80%
Reduction in procurement order cycle time

33%
Reduction in utility billing cycle

99.9%
Availability for planned uptime

See more metrics

Executive overview

Company objectives

Resolution

Business transformation

Future plans

A great place to live

The residents of Howard County, Maryland, have a lot to be proud of: top-ranked public schools, a robust recreation and parks program, and one of the lowest unemployment rates in the state. It's no wonder that Howard County has been cited in national surveys as among America's best places to live. The county – situated between the cities of Baltimore and Washington, D.C. – has grown dramatically in recent decades. Howard County is now home to around 290,000 people, and the county landscape has gone from a relatively rural area to a much more suburban one.

When Ira Levy joined Howard County as CIO a few years ago, he discovered that this transformation had pushed the county's existing business systems to their limit. "Our legacy systems were disassociated and outdated," says Levy. "We definitely needed enterprise-level systems that were more aligned with how the county had evolved."

Officials such as Levy and deputy CIO Sandra Stecker wanted to ensure that the government's business operations could effectively support the county executive's vision for the future of Howard County. They recognized the potential for standardized business processes, improved control over public finances, and greater efficiencies in operations such as procurement and utilities. The goal was to modernize the business systems and enable Howard County to respond more quickly and cost-effectively to the needs of its constituents.

> "Greater visibility into our county programs, including associating revenues with corresponding expenses, enables us to deliver the public services that our constituents really want."
>
> Sandra Stecker, Deputy CIO, Howard County

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A vote of confidence for integration

Howard County knew what it wanted in terms of new systems and business processes. "We needed an integrated solution that could handle the full range of public sector issues – from utilities to grant management," recalls Levy. Further, the forward-looking county saw the opportunity to update business processes and accelerate the implementation using recognized best practices.

Howard County based its system search on a comprehensive requirements document that included specific milestones designed to ensure timely project completion. "We evaluated offerings from several vendors," notes Stecker, "and we also contacted other governments to better understand their implementation experiences."

Ultimately, Howard County chose LocalGovOne – a qualified SAP® Business All-in-One partner solution from Optimal Solutions Integration Inc. This integrated software is based on the SAP ERP application and is tailored with best practices to enable state and local governments to streamline and automate their core processes. The county also decided to use the SAP Billing application to help manage its water and sewer utilities.

Howard County and consultants from Optimal Solutions then put together an implementation team dedicated to "problem solving and getting the job done." In addition, the team followed Optimal's OPTIMIZE methodology for structuring and managing SAP implementation projects. The result of their successful collaboration was a project delivered on time and within budget.

"What we really like about LocalGovOne, which is based on SAP ERP, is that it supports best practices for the public sector that have already been identified, vetted, and documented."

Ira Levy, CIO, Howard County

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Benefits that extend beyond county lines

"Today, Howard County has the level of visibility and financial control you need in a US$1.5 billion organization," says Levy. Each department has the ability to drill down into its expenditures, and everyday operations such as procurement are performed with checks and balances following documented processes. "In the past, you could buy boots out of the consulting budget," quips Levy.

This improved control extends from the purchase of $20 footwear to managing a multimillion-dollar grant. Taking the lead for 10 different jurisdictions in central Maryland, Howard County is managing a nearly $100 million portion of a federal grant to implement new broadband technology across the state. The 1,000 miles of cable in this intercounty broadband network will ultimately connect over 1,000 schools, colleges, libraries, hospitals, and public safety facilities. "We couldn't have managed this grant without our new system in place," says Levy.

KEY BENEFITS

80%
Reduction in procurement order cycle time

33%
Reduction in utility billing cycle

99.9%
Availability for planned uptime

~$100 million
Federal grant managed for 10 jurisdictions

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A walk in the park

"With better financial management, our county departments can focus more of their time on core functions," says Stecker. That means faster utility billing times and greater visibility for activities planning and costs by the Department of Recreation and Parks.

County officials are now planning to drive even tighter integration in functions such as treasury, supplier relationship management, and human resources. Howard County is also investigating mobile technologies to further empower its workforce of some 2,800 employees.

Whether it's high-speed broadband or online bill payments, Howard County remains in the vanguard of providing its constituents with modern, innovative, and sustainable public services.

Howard County is a great place to live. Just ask the folks enjoying one of the county's "Sunset Serenade" concerts in the park.

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