Greensboro's Orchestrated Move to the Cloud

How the North Carolina city overcame legacy obstacles for a smooth transition to its new ERP platform

Migrating an enterprise resource planning (ERP) platform to the cloud might sound daunting, with many moving pieces that must be addressed differently. Project success depends on careful planning, focusing on desired outcomes and effective collaboration between stakeholders.

ERP software ties together an organization's core administrative functions — finance and accounting, supply management, human resources, payroll, and more. With so many parts to orchestrate, leaders often migrate ERP to the cloud in phases so they can address obstacles as they appear.

The city of Greensboro, North Carolina, moved its key ERP functions to the cloud all at once, allowing the city to standardize operations and eliminate manual processes. Greensboro's success shows how local government can overcome legacy obstacles and reap the benefits of the latest cloud innovations.

Legacy Systems Present Limitations

In 2003, Greensboro's IT team upgraded from a main-frame and adopted its first on-premises ERP solution.

The IT team customized the system to mimic the old mainframe's operations, but limited internal documentation for the customizations led to constraints that became more obvious after Infor acquired the city's ERP vendor in 2011.

The city started missing opportunities such as taking advantage of new product features and using application programming interfaces to share data securely and seamlessly. New product releases provided improved functionality and better user experiences, but the city's customizations required extensive compatibility testing, and bugs were difficult to diagnose.

"Infor started pushing out more features," says Ja'Tia Thompson, Greensboro's deputy chief information officer.[1] "It was becoming difficult to take advantage of those features because we were so customized." Migrating Infor's ERP suite to the cloud gave the city a chance to standardize operations on a centralized plat-form. Moreover, configuration options within the apps would let the city eliminate a host of manual processes.

Managing Complexities

Planning was critical to the city's transition to the cloud.

"The migration gave us the opportunity to rethink our business processes and assess their efficiency, and we discovered some areas for improvements," Thompson says. "We worked with Infor Global Professional Services to talk through all our transactions and processes to move from that highly customized operations model."

Other goals included preserving institutional knowl-edge and developing a standard full-featured training

program. The User Acceptance Platform from Infor enabled the city to create scripts, videos, tutorials and simulations to guide staff through the migration process and to learn how to use new features with embedded contextual help.

"It gave the organization a chance to practice certain transactions before we went live with the system," Thompson says.

Infor solutions are designed to give IT teams the option to toggle new features on or off to test their impact before internal releases. Thompson's team also convenes roundtable meetings to familiarize business users with new features provided by Infor's regular biannual product releases.

"We are making sure everyone has a seat at the table before we make any major changes," Thompson says.

Simplicity and Scale on a Multi-Tenant ERP

Greensboro migrated to Infor CloudSuite Public Sector, a multi-tenant platform that shares computing resources among multiple customers, reducing cost and complexity while improving efficiency and security.[2] Thompson compares it to an apartment building: Residents own their furnishings but share the physical infrastructure, while landlords handle maintenance and repairs for everyone.

"Multi-tenancy helps us save money," Thompson says. "It also ensures we don't have to worry about fixing issues ourselves because we have Infor helping us behind the scenes."

Infor applications operate on Amazon Web Services (AWS), which provides the scale the city needs. Multi-tenant operations on AWS also allow faster implementations compared to typical possibilities with a single-tenant architecture.

Infor's unified platform standardized reporting for the city, simplifying what had been a complicated chore. "We don't have to worry about personally writing reports, maintaining reports and updating the code in the reports," Thompson says.

Key Features

As the third-largest city in North Carolina, Greensboro needed robust cloud-based solutions that could streamline operations. The city benefitted from:

- Full ERP cloud multi-tenant migration
- Retiring nearly 30 outdated applications
- Toggle capabilities for accepting new features
- Help with training and adoption from UAP

The multi-tenant infrastructure also provides the right building blocks for advanced technology functions like robotic process automation to streamline repetitive tasks and Infor GenAI to innovate and simplify workflows.

Migrating the ERP components together required a skilled combination of planning, listening and collaboration. Now Greensboro is poised to enjoy the returns on its investment of time, talent and money. "We had to work through a lot of unforeseen challenges, but it was worth it," Thompson says.

Best Practices for ERP Migrations

Greensboro's ERP migration project revealed these keys to success:

- ▶ **Change management.** Executive buy-in is fundamental from the first day. Effective communication and collaboration helped people cope with the transition.

- ▶ **Optimization.** Legacy business processes must be refactored for cloud architectures. Modern ERP platforms often have drag-and-drop, no-code tools that let business users tailor configurations to their specific needs without complex scripting and other hard-to-manage customizations.

- ▶ **Documentation.** Greensboro thoroughly documented its new procedures so that it doesn't lose institutional knowledge when staffers retire.

- ▶ **Testing.** IT teams can double-check the functionality of new features and toggle them off if problems arise.

1. https://webinars.govtech.com/Navigating-ERP-Migration-Complexity%3A-Lessons-and-Insights-from-Greensboro-142622.html
2. https://www.infor.com/resources/why-multi-tenant-matters

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