Systematic Approach Drives ERP Transformation and Smart City Success

The city of Coral Gables, Florida, is a trailblazer when it comes to using technology to make life better for its 75,000 inhabitants. It has won numerous awards, including first place for a city of its size in the Center for Digital Government's Digital Cities 2018 competition, as well as national recognition for using technology to address residents' needs during the pandemic. These successes reflect the leadership, vision and dedication of the Coral Gables Information Technology Department as well as the CGIT team's long-standing commitment to proven best practices.

"Our team works hard every day providing services and applications to the enterprise, as well as improving quality of life with smart city initiatives," says Raimundo Rodulfo, who joined the city in 2004 and serves as director of information technology and chief innovation officer.

Under Rodulfo's leadership, the IT department has implemented a number of Infor cloud-based enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems to transform processes citywide and meet the city's goals of eliminating paper, going digital and becoming more efficient. His team is currently working with the Finance and HR departments to implement Infor's financial, human capital management (HCM) and supply chain management modules to streamline processes and enhance business capabilities. The project, which will replace the last legacy system in the city, launched in June 2021 and is on track to meet its aggressive 18-month schedule.

"We are in a time where all systems need to be able to interoperate and to connect to customers, employees and the supply chain whenever you need them. It makes a lot of sense for an ERP solution to be in the cloud. Besides the scalability and availability of the cloud, we need the agility to easily deploy solutions, content and containerized applications and to move applications to an environment where they are beyond the issues of hardware or browser compatibility," says Rodulfo.

The city needed a system that allows innovation across ERP functions and business sectors. Infor's state-of-the-art technology and investment in research and development (R&D) were important differentiators during selection of the multi-tenant ERP solution.

"Coral Gables is a smart city, and we look for world-class quality-of-life standards for everything. We also have to look for world-class, industry 4.0-ready solutions. We don't expect to be in the same place five years from now. We're looking for organizations that invest a lot of their bottom line and their profit into R&D, so they can take us through this journey for multiple years," says Rodulfo.

Post-modern ERP system raises bar for efficiency and user experience

Although the city already had an electronic system that performed finance, HCM and supply chain management functions, it was missing out on opportunities to automate processes and aggregate data through industry-specific analytics and artificial intelligence (AI).

"A post-modern ERP system is pretty much AI-driven. The legacy system lacked a lot of the integration and data-driven capabilities that we're looking for in the post-modern ERP era," says Rodulfo.

The new modules will allow the city to leverage data to gain actionable insights in real time, engage in more advanced business intelligence reporting and enable forecasting of variables in multiple fields. It will also help meet organizational goals such as improving efficiencies and customer service.

"Our city focuses on providing excellent customer service through our organization. All the different modules that we're implementing align with that," says Rodulfo.

The financial management application, for example, is expected to improve reporting, accessibility and the customer experience for tasks that range from paying a bill to looking at financial transparency dashboards in the city's smart city hub. More advanced automation capabilities and better data reporting will also streamline HCM processes for HR workers as well as employees throughout the job application, onboarding and employment life cycle.

Built-in best practices minimize customization and expedite deployment

Infor applications include best practices that are tailored to state and local government and to specific ERP functions. Built-in accessibility and compliance as well as real-time, data-driven processes are especially important to the city and will help meet the goal of minimal (if any) customization.

"With industry best practices and preconfigured modules, you can pretty much satisfy all your needs. Of course, you always have that particular thing that is different than anybody else; in that case, you have to look inward and find ways to adapt your processes to the new technology," says Rodulfo.

■ Getting started: Rigorous research and planning pave the way for success

The IT team follows Project Management Institute (PMI) best practices, systems engineering best practices and agile implementation methodologies to manage its diverse and complex portfolio of smart city solutions. Doing extensive research and preparation before getting started is foundational to its approach and long-term success.

"Our goal in all our smart city projects is to have quick wins and a phased approach so we can deliver the ROI and the benefits that citizens can touch quickly," says Rodulfo.

The following best practices reflect the department's overall approach:

Evaluate the current state and establish goals. This process entails researching and analyzing the system's current capabilities and what challenges or needs the organization, stakeholders and constituents want to address. Once analysis is complete, the project team identifies and prioritizes goals. These goals align with the city's and IT department's strategic goals, priorities and plans.

Define success. A clear definition of success is important for evaluating potential service providers, holding them accountable if they are chosen and ensuring the project continues to align with the organization's mission and vision over time. Definitions and benchmarks should include metrics, timelines and other quantifiable data as well as less tangible success indicators for everything from security and compliance to customer support.

Seek outside expertise. As part of its upfront research, Rodulfo's team routinely seeks expertise from multiple domains, including industry experts, academia, research institutions and nonprofit organizations. It also analyzes case studies from other cities that excel in implementation of new ERP systems.

"We always look at the case studies that have shown quick deliveries with quick wins along the way, but also with excellent results at the end," says Rodulfo.

Establish a project steering committee right away. The committee should include representation from all major stakeholders and executives that will work on the project, including the city manager, finance director, HR director, risk manager and city attorney. It's also important to create multidisciplinary work groups within the project team. Doing so helps cultivate ownership and accountability.

Engage an organizational change management expert. To fill this role, the city brings in a senior business analyst who provides advice and best practices related to the change management journey. By design, the analyst is not part of the organization, so they can bring objectivity and a fresh pair of eyes to the process.

Communicate regularly. Transformative change requires the participation and acceptance of stakeholders. But those stakeholders have other responsibilities as well. Realistic expectations and transparent communication about goals, responsibilities and progress encourage buy-in, ownership and accountability.

■ Maintaining momentum day-to-day

Implementing an ERP system that manages all the finances, human capital and supply chain for a city is easier said than done. Despite the current project's magnitude and steep change management curve, Rodulfo is confident that his department's tried-and-true approach to strategic initiatives — along with an outstanding team and great city leadership, as well as tight collaboration and state-of-the-art technology from Infor — is the right formula for success.

"Without all those things, we wouldn't be able to accomplish so many things in so little time," he says.

This piece was developed and written by the Government Technology Content Studio, with information and input from Infor.