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HOUSTON
AIRPORTS

Population:
6.8 million

Solutions:
Workiva Wdesk & Wdata

City of Houston, Texas, and Houston Airport System

From time to time, affiliated organizations call on FHB to guide them through concurrent software implementations. Such was the case for the Office of the Controller at the City of Houston, Texas, and Houston Airport System.

While FHB Principal Consultant Joy Richardson, CPA, was leading the Controller's office through automation of their ACFR, her colleague, FHB Principal Consultant Jill Moats, CPA, began working with Houston Airport System to automate theirs.

LEAVE NOTHING TO CHANCE

"We had expressed at the very beginning that we needed to speed the project up so that we would finish at the same time as the City. [FHB] pivoted and got that done."

Nicki Thibodeaux,
Division Manager – General Accounting & Financial Reporting,
Houston Airport System



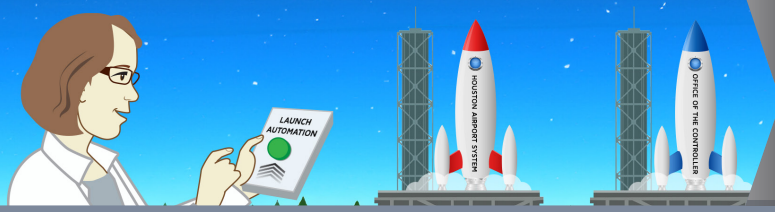
The Challenges

When we met the two teams, ACFR preparation was manual and cumbersome, requiring a great deal of data entry. "We used spreadsheets, linking, PDFs," said Conrad Lin, Deputy Director–Financial Reporting, Office of the City Controller, City of Houston. "If we changed one page number, we'd have to [manually] change 25 other page numbers," he said.

Collaboration *within* each separate team was difficult. "[We saved] the spreadsheet into network folders, and you could only have one person in there at a time.

So, you'd see emails coming through saying, 'can you get out of the file?'" said Conrad.

Collaboration *between* the two teams was also challenging. "The airport would prepare their own financial statements, then send a spreadsheet to the City Controller, who would enter it into the controller's spreadsheet. Once it was published, the lines wouldn't line up...it caused a lot of a lot of issues between the departments," said Conrad.



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Leaving Nothing to Chance

Both the Airport and City teams chose to implement Workiva for ACFR automation. Out of the box, the software is a blank slate to build upon. In the hands of the skilled and knowledgeable team at FHB, it becomes a powerful tool for process optimization.

Why Not Self-implement?

Some finance teams may opt to self-implement Workiva. However, Conrad advises against it. "I wouldn't think that would be a good idea...you need some experience with it in order to set it up correctly. Doing it yourself would take a lot of trial and error. A regular user wouldn't know how to write a script. If there are issues later on, you're going to be spending more time and money to try to fix them instead of just doing it correctly from the start," he said.

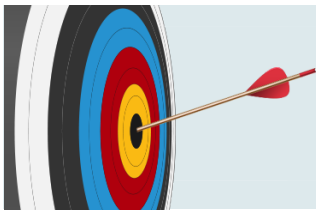
A Powerful Partnership

Both the City and Airport System teams were very pleased with FHB's performance and partnership. "Joy was very knowledgeable. She's been an auditor. So, [our] implementation was great," said Conrad.

"Jill was awesome... [FHB Technical Consultant Michael Spurlin], [Principal Consultant Faith Olanipekun, CPA], all of them, were really quick to respond. Communication was seamless. We were able to get everything done right away, with no issues at all," said Nicki.

Public Sector Expertise

In addition to their software expertise, FHB's Principal Consultants are CPAs with a wealth of public sector experience. We asked Conrad, on a scale of one to 10, how important government experience was to the success of his project. "A 10," he said. "I saw another implementation without the experience, and there were multiple issues, missing pieces, costly to fix... they didn't have the knowledge of accounting or the Government Accounting Standards Board (GASB) requirements. You have to have governmental experience to know how to fix the issues," he said.



"I have seen implementations that ended up with issues and more issues. So, I would say ours was a 10 out of 10,"

Conrad Lin,
Deputy Director – Financial Reporting, Office of the City Controller, City of Houston

The Results

Accuracy

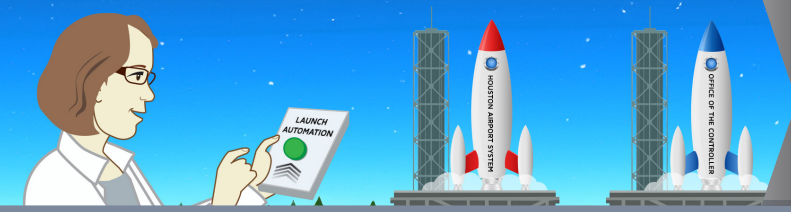
Nicki is relieved that many opportunities for manual error have been eliminated from the Airport System's ACFR process. "We put our number in one spot and it goes to the five places that it needs to go to... so, a lot of that tedious crossfooting is taken care of."

Time and Cost Savings

The Airport System is grateful for the time their new process will save. "Typically, our ACFR [isn't] released till the end of December. And we were done on our deadline, Nov. 15—a month and a half early. Everybody sees how much [this implementation] has improved our process, immediately," she said.

Conrad's team saw similar results. Last year marked their **first time meeting the ACFR deadline**. "I don't think it had ever happened 'til last year...we actually finished it," he said.

The City's implementation resulted in a **time savings of 75 percent**, reducing four months of work (for 10 people) down to one month, Conrad said. This dramatic reduction in workload means "more efficiency, less stress for the staff, and reduced turnover," he said. It also means **savings of approximately \$150,000**, which can be allocated to other City projects.



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Benefits of Concurrent Projects

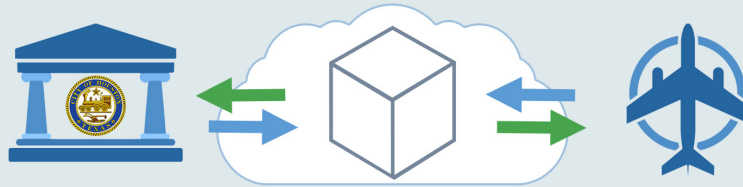
"The fact that [FHB] did the City and Airport System implementations at the same time—we saw right away how that benefited both sides," said Nicki. "I loved how Jill and Joy collaborated, using the work Joy did in the first month with the City to speed up Jill's work on the Airport," she said.

Having FHB work with both the Airport and the City, "eliminated a lot of unnecessary conflict," said Conrad. "It's good that [FHB] got everything set up at once and applied the same standards, procedures, that really helps," he said.

Because the two interconnected systems both implemented the same software, communication and collaboration became simpler and timelier. "The way Conrad was able to add comments to [the Airport's documents]...it was real time collaboration. There was no delay," said Nicki.

"It's much easier now that we have all the workspaces connected to the airport...[the Airport] pushes data to the City, the Airport has access to the City data, and we can look at it together at the same time, so there's no difference between [the two]. It's a much quicker process," said Conrad.

Having the two systems integrated saved the City "days of time."



What's Next?

As a testament to the effectiveness of FHB's training, following implementation, Conrad and his team successfully added their "trends" report (a shorter, simpler report than the ACFR) into their new system without any additional guidance. In the future, "we want to learn how to write script and...how to get different reports, so if we need to create another monthly or quarterly report, it doesn't affect the ACFR file," Conrad said. His team is also open to discussing future Treasury and GASB work with FHB.

With the Controller's and Airport System's projects successfully completed, the City's Finance Department is now looking to optimize its monthly financial reporting process, Conrad said.

Nicki and the Airport System team have their eyes on a couple of future projects around financial close reconciliations and interim reporting/variance analysis. "So, we'll probably be reaching out to FHB as we get to those," she said.



DID YOU KNOW?

FHB offers a live, CPA-led course on Structured Query Language (SQL) and the basics of chains. [Register for Workiva 201 today.](#)



For more than 25 years, we have ensured public sector finance & budget departments like yours optimize their most challenging and time-consuming processes. Automating the drudgery to focus on high-value work is so essential to our clients that they choose to Leave Nothing to Chance. They engage us to review their processes, recommend, implement & support the ideal enabling technologies and best practices.

[Book a meeting](#) to discuss how we can automate your ACFR process.

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