

CUSTOMER SUCCESS

Urban Land Institute

Urban Land Institute sought a way to speed and streamline its procure-to-pay-cycle, empowering its 80 offices around the globe to enter and monitor vendor invoices and check requests.

A Global Operation. A Global Challenge.

Urban Land Institute's organizational structure includes 55 domestic councils and an additional 25 across Europe and Asia employing nearly 300. While each council has an executive director responsible for the council's fiscal operations, the organization's headquarters, located in Washington D.C., handles the overarching accounting functions for every council.

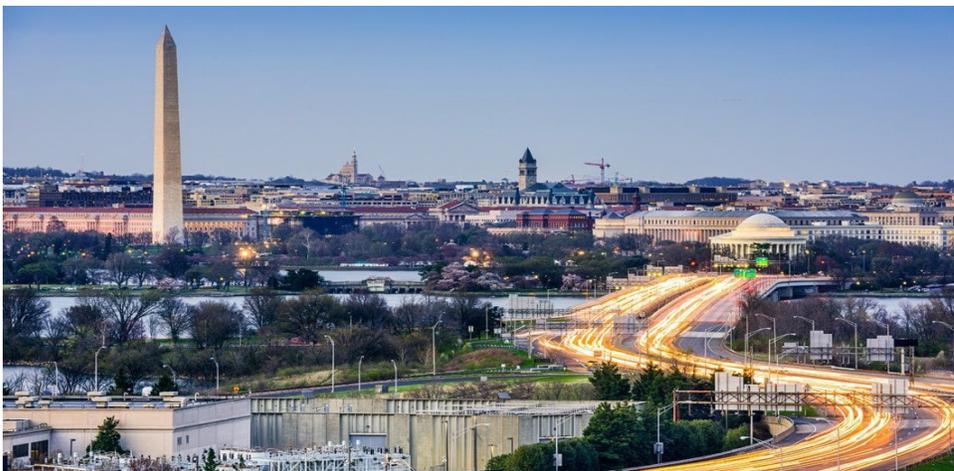
"We use Microsoft Dynamics GP as our accounting software," says Steve Slepian, Senior Vice President of Finance at Urban Land Institute. "Each council is set up as a separate cost center in the software with its own financial statements. So essentially, we're handling the accounting for 80 separate companies."

As it works to support the hundreds of projects, events and initiatives the organization and its councils engage in, Urban Land Institute is a high-volume purchaser. "We have an enormous number of smaller, one-time purchases—including things like meeting hall rental and catering fees—which results in a lot of vendor contracts, a lot of invoices and a lot of paper," Slepian explains.

Lengthly Manual Processing Sparks Search for Efficiency

Until recently, Urban Land Institute's purchasing process was almost entirely manual. "We had a paper voucher system," Slepian notes. "Council offices would email the invoices to us with a 'front page' detailing the expense categories and including hand-written approvals."

Once headquarters received invoice packets, personnel would print the documents and hand key the data into the accounting software. "We were drowning in paper," recalls Slepian. "And our councils felt we were too slow to pay. We wanted our AP department to serve and facilitate operations, not be a bottleneck. So, we began looking for ways to automate the entire procure-to-pay cycle."



Paramount WorkPlace Checks all the Boxes

Slepian and his team began researching e-procurement solutions. One priority was for the application to integrate with Microsoft Dynamics GP. The organization had tried Concur in the past, but it lacked direct integration to the accounting application, meaning staff had to import and export data. As a result, they found that it didn't cut any time from the cycles and even further complicated the process."

"Paramount WorkPlace offers just what we want," says Slepian. "It writes and receives data directly from Microsoft Dynamics GP. There are no imports and exports, so the data is available in real time. The screens are clean and intuitive and easy for new users to learn. We love the account-masking feature where each council only sees the general ledger accounts associated with their location. In addition to providing a higher level of security, this simplifies data entry as staff doesn't have to sift through thousands of accounts to find the right one."

The ability to include attachments associated with check requests is another feature that Urban Land Institute appreciates. Documents such as vendor contracts and invoices then follow the check request through the approval process and become part of the overall audit trail.

Speeding the Procure-to-Pay Process

With global offices, Urban Land Institute receives invoices in multiple currencies and Paramount WorkPlace handles these transactions effortlessly. "Staff inputs the check requests into Paramount WorkPlace in the native currency," explains Slepian. "As the approved transactions are transferred to our accounting application, the conversion is made. It's straightforward, convenient and keeps the process moving smoothly."

As a nonprofit, Urban Land Institute is keenly aware of its obligations to provide transparency into its operations. "Paramount WorkPlace maintains a complete audit trail of every transaction and interaction," explains Slepian. "That's very important to us and to our stakeholders. And our users can always see precisely where in the process their requisition or payment lies."

To better monitor its goal of speeding its procure-to-pay cycle, Urban Land Institute engaged Paramount WorkPlace to design a report that draws upon the audit trail the software maintains and shows the average time it takes Slepian's team to perform their work. "The clock starts when a request for payment is received and ends when the check is cut or the ACH payment initiated," Slepian says. "We set an internal goal to turnaround payments in 10 days, and currently we are at four days. We know we've dramatically sped up turnaround, but honestly we had no way to measure it before, so we're not entirely sure how much time we've cut from the process."

Thanks to the efficiencies the organization is realizing it was able to reduce its payables staff by one. "There's just less data entry to do, so when that individual left, we didn't need to replace them," says Slepian.

A Global Solution

Today, Paramount WorkPlace is in action across 12 time zones and is in use by 300 Urban Land Institute users. Slepian receives feedback from the councils that the new system is working—and working well. "People love it," he says. "It's been transformational for our individual councils and for our organization as a whole."



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