

Background

The City of Boca Raton is on a paperless initiative and one of our many projects is to incorporate Laserfiche technologies into our current Enterprise Resource Planning System (Sungard Financials).

Sungard Financials does not include a departmental routing and approval process for Field Purchase Orders (FPOs). FPOs are non-procurement related requests for reimbursement.

With this, our organization faced the following business process challenges:

- 1) There was no way to determine the approval status of an FPO while it was being routed for approval. Only the immediate staff member involved with the FPO at the time knew its status.
- 2) The manual routing of FPO documents sometimes led to delays in the approval process.
- 3) The FPO review results were not always propagated to the appropriate parties in a timely manner.

Our Achievement

Our significant achievement was the development and implementation of an automated review and approval process for FPOs. Our solution, called the Electronic Field Purchase Order (EFPO) process, introduces a new fast, efficient and paperless method to route FPOs for approval and provides electronic retention of the FPO related documents by using the technologies from Laserfiche:

- Import Agent – technology that monitors a file folder for specific changes, and is customized to perform actions when the changes occur
- Forms – web-based tool to collect data from users
- Workflow – programmable engine to perform tasks based
- Document Storage – repository of documents with ability set retention policies
- WebLink – view only access to documents in the repository

Below is a map of the implemented EFPO process:

1. The FPO is entered in Sungard Financials FPO Entry screen.
2. The entry user selects the option on the FPO Entry screen to “Start Approval Process”. This generates an electronic version of the FPO and saves it on the AS400. The soft copy is an improvement as we were generating hard copies of the FPO before implementing our solution.
3. Laserfiche Import Agent monitors the folder and when the new FPO document is saved, Import Agent moves it into the “1-Incoming” folder in the Laserfiche repository.
4. Laserfiche Workflow #1 monitors the “1-Incoming” folder and when a new document is placed here, it uses the FPO number via ODBC to obtain, vendor information, FPO date, amount, account numbers(s), entry user and user email address from the Sungard Financials Database. The workflow emails the entry user a link to start the approval process, passing many of the form’s variables values as parameters in the URL.
5. When the user receives the email, they click on the link to start the approval process.
6. The initial form contains a link to WebLink so that the user can view the FPO form that was saved. The entry user completes the required fields, uploads the supporting documentation and completes the form.

7. Workflow #2 moves the FPO, and related documents to the "3-Processing" or "3-Legal Bills" folder. Certain FPO's contain sensitive information and routed via the "3-Legal Bills" folder which has specific Laserfiche user group access.
8. The EFPO process routes the FPO and supporting documentation to the required reviewers, providing an email notification to each user when they have to complete a review. This is considered an improvement compared to our previous method of notifying users via inter-office mail. Each time a review is completed, Workflow #3 updates the "FPO Approval Status" metadata field with the next step in the review process for that FPO. The users are trained to view this field, via Weblink, to determine the status of their FPO.

The following reviews takes place for the typical FPO:

- Accounts Payable Manager
 - Department Approvers (up to 3 depending on the amount of the FPO)
 - Human Resources (for tuition reimbursements)
 - Accounting Manager (for refunds)
 - Accounting Manager Staff (as indicated by Accounting Manager)
 - Budget Manager (depending on the accounts used on FPO)
 - Accounts Payable Staff
 - Financial Services Manager (for certain FPOs such as Legal Bills as indicated by Accounts Payable Staff)
9. If the FPO is disapproved by any review, the entry user and Accounts Payable Manager are notified via email as to why the FPO was disapproved. Workflow #4 moves the FPO, and related documents to the "Disapproved FPO" folder.
 10. If the FPO is approved by all reviewers, an email is sent to the entry user after the final review is complete notifying them that the FPO is in the queue for check processing. Workflow #4 moves the FPO, and related documents to the "4-Pending Payment" folder.

The EFPO solution provides the following benefits to our organization:

- Reduce paper costs: the solution eliminates the need for our organization to generate any paper for the approval of FPOs.
- Improve FPO approval processing time: the solution greatly speeds up the approval process for FPOs, since instant electronic notifications are generated to reviewer(s) instead of sent via inter-office mail as hard copy documents were routed manually. An FPO can be reviewed and approved by all required parties in minutes, rather than days.
- Easily identify the status of the FPO: the solution allows any employee in the City, to view the approval status of the FPO at any time via Laserfiche Weblink.
- Faster recovery for FPOs that have been disapproved: the solution notifies all required parties instantly when FPOs are disapproved allowing for a quicker opportunity to resolve issues and get the FPO back into the review queue.

The future of our solution

The EFPO solution will be enhanced to:

- Allow users to generate statistical reports based on the data collected via the Laserfiche forms.
- Allow users to cancel the approval process, if needed.
- Warn users of duplicate FPO submissions.

The Accounts Payable division has embraced the Laserfiche tools into its culture. Some upcoming projects that the division will be working on include: utilizing the Laserfiche tools to streamline the travel policy and related form, and to participate in a focus group to assist with standardizing the construction application (AIA) documents and schedule of values.

Electronic Field Purchase Order Approval Process

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