



THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO AN EFFICIENT (AND TRANSPARENT)

CITY HALL



PRIORITIZING EFFICIENCY IN A PROCESS-HEAVY ENVIRONMENT

Working in local government is rewarding on so many levels, and empowers leaders around the world to make a real difference in their communities. But it's hard work — and often, there isn't enough time in the day to complete all managerial items and get larger projects across the finish line.

This is why efficiency is of the utmost importance — it can free up local government leaders' time to accomplish greater goals. With ever-changing laws and mandates dictating the way governments connect with citizens, it's important to prioritize efficiency to keep up with new demands. Many city clerks — arguably one of the most process-oriented roles in government — report feeling like they're increasingly expected to “do more with less.”

Additionally, today's digital environment means that as processes improve and local government becomes more efficient, citizens have greater access and visibility to progress leading to an increase in transparency and citizen satisfaction.

Whether your organization is a town, township, county or special-purpose local government, there are four primary processes that can be greatly improved by digital solutions and, as a result, benefit from transparency: managing day-to-day operations, optimizing meetings, increasing engagement with citizens, and streamlining records management.

ONE: MANAGING DAY-TO-DAY OPERATIONS

One of the primary roles of local government is to oversee and manage services that impact citizens' lives, such as parks and recreation, public works, and economic development initiatives. An important component to ensuring these day-to-day operations run smoothly is having the right people on board and commission positions. Too often, however, managing the appointments can be cumbersome and prevent the best people from being appointed. By creating an effective process for appointing the right leaders, local governments can not only improve services, but also increase citizen satisfaction.



Managing Appointments: By implementing technologies specifically designed for efficiency, clerks have the ability to prove a hard return on investment for their organizations while also empowering staff with

the right tools. Because the process of tracking various board members can be incredibly time-consuming, digital programs such as [Granicus' Boards and Commissions](#) solution saves time and effort. Allowing citizens the ability to apply for various boards or commissions online can also lower costs because paper applications don't need to be manually typed into a spreadsheet (or other program) by a staff member.

Example: For many years, the [City of Stockton, Calif.'s clerk's](#) office managed 24 boards and commissions by using several spreadsheets. The City also maintained a separate database used to track applicants and post information to the City's website.

Tired of trying to keep track of so much information in multiple places for so many different meeting bodies, the City of Stockton implemented Granicus' Boards and Commissions software in 2014 to help ease the city clerk staff's burden and improve processes.



TWO: OPTIMIZING MEETINGS

Public meetings are an essential part of the local government process, and are a great opportunity for transparency and visibility into local government projects. But public meetings aren't always run at a high level of efficiency, and organizations don't see as much engagement from diverse audiences.

There are two different challenges clerks in particular face with this process: getting their agenda compiled and out the door on time, and making sure citizens are well-informed and engaged with public meetings. Both of these challenges can be solved with the right automation platform.



Agenda Compilation: When agenda items are compiled manually, it can be difficult to track every document or item necessary to meet important deadlines, which can sometimes be missed. Is an item with a department head, the attorney or on the manager's desk? Tracking down agenda items sometimes takes a series of emails, phone calls and even office visits. Since the agenda process is driven by deadlines, knowing if an agenda item is going to come in on time or if changes need to be made to a piece of legislation can be frustrating.

In contrast, an agenda process powered by software allows clerks to gain instant visibility into the exact location of a missing item. Agenda preparers and coordinators can digitally track incoming items to be placed on the agenda or gain insight into where bottlenecks exist, allowing them to reroute approvals or assist in moving items along.

Example: [North Richland Hills](#) Mayor Oscar Trevino is quick to point out that when government staffers spend less time on manual processes, it becomes easier to interact with citizens and focus on community improvement. Because of this, Trevino has placed a high priority on implementing technology during his 15 years as mayor.

As Mayor, he's overseen the implementation of an entire suite of [Meeting and Agenda](#) products from Granicus. The City now enjoys vast process improvements when it comes to agenda compilation and distribution, as well as in-meeting processes, such as tallying votes and recording minutes.



Meeting Information Distribution: Agenda delivery in a world without software involves printers, binders, hole-punchers, staples and of course, reams of paper. These paper-heavy agendas then need to be physically handed to any and all relevant parties, which, in larger organizations, could be a lot of people. This can cost an organization money (using third-party delivery companies), the use of various staff members (even police officers) and a great deal of time.

With a digital solution, packets are delivered instantly and electronically. This negates the need for large-scale printers (and the costs associated with them), rooms dedicated to agenda assembly and any third-party costs, such as shipping. This saves time, money, and effort and allows clerks and their staff to move on to other tasks. And if something needs to be added after the fact, that's as simple as clicking a button.

Example: [North Pacific Fishery Management Council](#) had a big job: to distribute meeting agenda packets to over 80 council members, plus other meeting attendees and relevant parties. The cost of printing these massive packets alone was enough to consider automation; however, there was also the logistical challenge of sending packets to every meeting attendee, some of whom were working out in the Bering Sea.

By implementing [iLegislate](#) (along with Legistar), the Council has recouped over \$30,000 a year in printing costs alone, plus another \$7,000 in shipping costs. Now staff members report that since their processes are more efficient, they have time to worry about other projects, such as updating their website.

After the meeting is over, it's important to immediately publish minutes, whether on your website or through another engagement platform (including agenda management applications). This is a process that can be easily automated. Allowing citizens to easily access minutes can help them see the important and relevant issues that were discussed. Furthermore, they can review decisions that were made and understand how they will be affected.

Example: For organizations overseeing smaller communities, efficiency is of the utmost importance because most staff members report having to wear multiple hats. In the [City of Castle Pines, Colo.](#), this was certainly the case, as City Clerk Sharon Washington reports.

It used to take her upward of 10 hours per week to reproduce and publish minutes from each City Council meeting. Since the implementation of [Granicus Minutes](#), she's able to publish minutes with the touch of a button, freeing up time so she can help other departments that might be short-staffed.



In-Meeting Process Enhancements: When it comes to public meetings, how are votes counted? How are minutes taken? If your organization is still doing these things manually, it might be time to think about automation. While it takes time to tally votes and document minutes, it takes little to no time to push a button, allowing votes and minutes to be recorded.



THREE: INCREASING ENGAGEMENT WITH CITIZENS

Facilitating the flow of ideas and information between local government and citizens is an important responsibility of local leaders, which is why citizen engagement is so important. [Expanding audiences beyond the likely suspects](#) (or the regular attendees at public meetings) is essential to ensuring your organization is hearing from a representative portion of the population. Having the right tools can not only make this process easier internally, but can also increase transparency and participation in the public process.

As recently as 10 years ago, it wasn't easy to collect this type of information. But with new digital platforms, there are suddenly hundreds of ways to collect valuable feedback. Utilizing dedicated feedback channels can alleviate the amount and quality of citizen input in public policy decisions.



Gathering Citizen Feedback: Many local governments use a dedicated citizen engagement tool to gather feedback. Make it easy for citizens to request to speak at public meetings by enabling them to do so online. [eComment](#), a Granicus product, allows citizens to give online feedback on specific agenda items; it also gives them the ability to make a request to speak in person. Empower citizens by giving them an easily accessible avenue to connect with their government.

Example: The [City of Austin, Texas](#), uses the Granicus platform SpeakUp Austin!, to gather feedback from its constituents. The City uses suggestions from its very engaged community to improve the lives of the public. This is part of the reason it was awarded a "designation as one of the top-ranked U.S. Digital Cities" in U.S. in 2016. The City primarily uses its SpeakUp page to give citizens a platform to introduce new ideas.



Increasing Communication From City Hall:

In order to keep up with growing digital trends, government agencies are turning to text messaging and/or email services to engage easily and effectively, and public meetings are one of the best places to collect feedback. An extremely effective way to get instant feedback is with text message surveys. Consider passing out fliers with a text message survey, or advertise the survey at your meeting. With 95 percent of Americans owning a cell phone, surveys via text message can be a very accessible way for people to provide feedback.

[Email is also an effective means of communication](#). Citizens can easily sign up to receive news about happenings around their community, emergency alerts and more. Of all digital platforms, email has the [highest return on investment](#) and the greatest capacity to reach more people, and should be on the shortlist of communications platforms to consider when reaching your audience.

Example: For the [City of Saint Paul, Minn.](#), a mission of transparency and public service has been made easier by leveraging software both in managing the information flow of public meetings, and in distributing that information to those in the community who wish to be informed.

Today, the City has not only streamlined how it prepares for and runs its public meetings thanks to [Granicus' legislative and webstreaming software](#), it has successfully leveraged GovDelivery Communications Cloud to quickly and conveniently promote that information to the public.

FOUR: STREAMLINING RECORDS MANAGEMENT

From marriage licenses to building permits, it's easy for local government to get bombarded with paper management. As more and more organizations are finding, going digital can save paper (and headaches!) by making it easy to manage the records process starting with document creation, online submission and backend management.

Public records requests are time-consuming because states mandate they be completed within a certain time period. By finding ways to provide more information to the public online through database searches, digital records repositories and self-service portals, you can help your organization save substantial time and effort. Ultimately, these time savings could be spent handling other projects and increasing citizen engagement.



Managing Land and Vitals: For many cities and counties, records management takes a significant amount of time. Records management systems can often be unintuitive and clunky, which sometimes deters organizations from implementing them. When set up well, however, records management system such as [Granicus' Land and Vitals](#) system can shave off hundreds of hours managing paperwork freeing up staff time.

Example: [Saint Charles County, Mo.](#), had been trying to find new and better ways to manage its hundreds of thousands of land and vital records for many years.

By leveraging automation in the form of Granicus' [Land and Vitals](#) system, Saint Charles has greatly improved processing times. Because citizens can now apply for licenses and search for records online, staff members have to spend fewer hours of their workday on repetitive, manual tasks, freeing up time for other things.

AUTOMATION MAKES THIS IMPORTANT WORK POSSIBLE

Governing is not easy. But when processes are efficient and streamlined, local leaders are able to make bigger impacts and better serve their communities. Not only that, but budgets can go further because a lot of the so-called "busy work" is delegated to software solutions. That means that officials and other staff members have more time to spend on critical projects, including new initiatives and legislation. After all, we know there is only so much time that public servants can dedicate to bettering their communities — and automation can help make this important work possible.

Not sure where your organization stands in terms of efficiency and transparency? **Take this quiz** and read your suggestions for where to focus next.



ABOUT GRANICUS

Granicus provides technology that empowers government organizations to create better lives for the people they serve. By offering the industry's leading cloud-based solutions for communications, meeting and agenda management, and digital services to over 3,000 public sector organizations, Granicus helps turn government missions into quantifiable realities. Granicus products connect over 150 million people, creating a powerful network to enhance citizen engagement. By optimizing decision-making processes, Granicus strives to help government see better outcomes and a greater impact for the citizens they serve.

For more information on Granicus, visit [**granicus.com**](https://www.granicus.com).
To schedule a consultation, email us at [**info@granicus.com**](mailto:info@granicus.com).