



Automating financial compliance and governance obligations

Authority Procure to Pay allows Port Stephens to protect its community by automating its financial compliance and governance obligations.

A large LGA north of Newcastle, NSW, Port Stephens Council serves a community of over 75,000 residents. With an annual expenditure of \$120 million per year it's understandable why financial oversight is high on the agenda. Having used Civica's Authority Finance for many years, Council's Finance Expenditure Unit is now taking transparency and accountability to the next level with Authority Procure to Pay.

Working for Port Stephens Council for the last 37 years, Beth Wood, Financial Expenditure Specialist, has witnessed a lot of changes during her tenure - most initiated by herself over the last 7 years. The implementation of Authority's Procure to Pay was no different with Beth's manager - Mark Murphy, Finance Expenditure Manager, admitting it was Beth's vision. "Beth always knew what she wanted to achieve," Mark remarked. "She just needed the technology and the support of management to achieve that."

Since implementing Procure to Pay - the online purchase requisitions system, four and a half years ago, Beth and the accounts payable team have been able to create - together with the existing Authority accounts payable module

and its new dashboard - a finely tuned, rules-based accounts payable workflow (AP workflow) that has been a game changer for her department.

More Transparency

"Prior to Procure to Pay, I guess we really had no idea where we were up to," Beth reflected. "Staff out in the field used paper order books to order all their supplies. Those manual order books were our undoing, we might not get to see those books for a month and then someone would have to key everything into the system. It's now more transparent and much easier to manage budgets. You're chasing a lot less information. Also, if somebody hasn't raised a purchase order, the invoice is no longer set aside, because it not only has a place in the new AP workflow but also alerts the person responsible to what they need to do."

Port Stephens Council has been able to fully comply with all financial delegations issued by the governance section that now are balanced to the hierarchal organisational structure Council - initiated to protect the community from fraud or financial mismanagement.

Key Outcomes

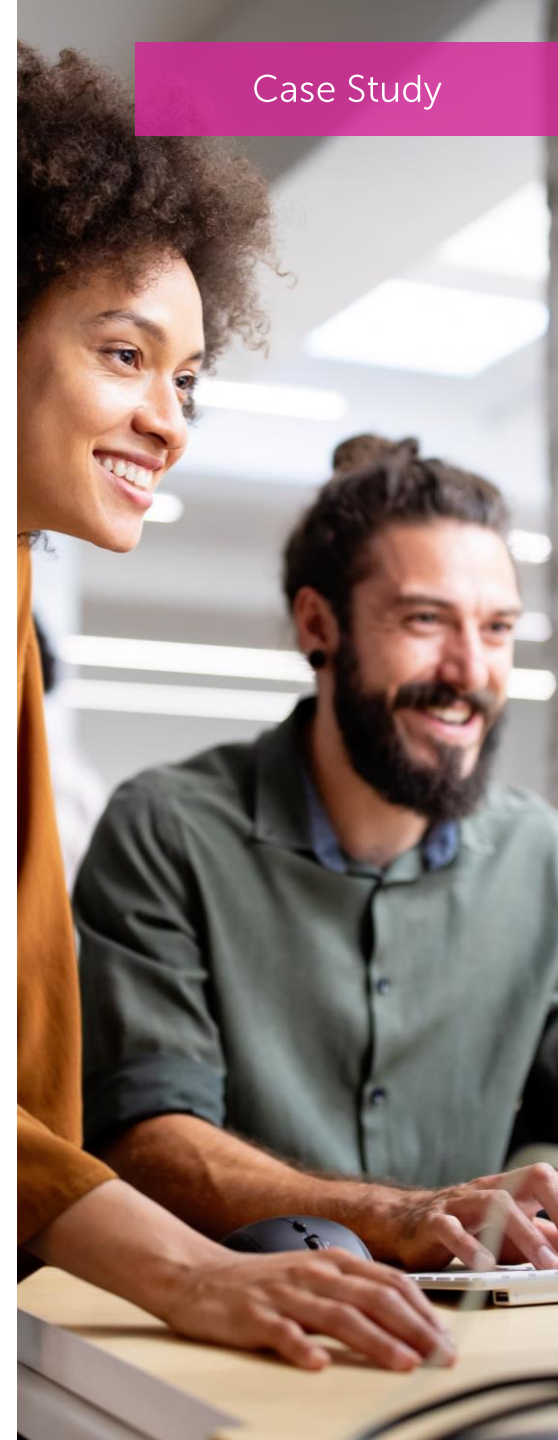
- 1 A completely paperless office, saving time and reams of paper
- 2 Ease of reporting, better financial efficiencies
- 3 Streamlined operations, more workload completed

"At the push of a button, we can now print an audit report and supply the auditors on the lifecycle of any transaction that's been put through the P2P system."

Mark Murphy,
Finance Expenditure Manager,
Port Stephens Council

Learn more:
[Civica.com/authority](https://www.civica.com/authority)

Contact email:
LGenquiries@civica.com.au



As well as operational efficiencies, Port Stephens Council has been able to fully comply with all financial delegations issued by the governance section that now are balanced to the hierarchal organisational structure Council – initiated to protect the community from fraud or financial mismanagement.

“We had fixed the compliance of the workflow at the front end with a detailed list of permissions and processes, but we needed the technology to support these rule-based processes in the backend,” Mark explained. “The new end-to-end transparency not only makes everyone accountable but makes it so much easier to retrieve information.”

Mark Murphy, Finance Expenditure Manager, Port Stephens Council

Training

Port Stephens embarked on a training program to help council workers understand the new processes but like any change management process there were a small percentage of people taking their time to get onboard. “Although we do have ongoing training, we’ve also decided to build a report at the end of each month – showing outstanding tasks associated with both accounts payable and credit cards,” Beth explained. “It’s then down to their managers to get these tasks resolved and hopefully encourage them in future to follow the correct process from the start.”

Reporting

Another strength Port Stephens is finding in the Procure to Pay module is the ability to report on any online requisition or accounts payable workflow Task. “At the push of a button we can now print an audit report and supply the auditors on the lifecycle of any transaction that’s been put through the P2P system,” Mark said. “It’s also much easier to do end of financial year, as we have the transparency of the Tasks requiring actioning in order to close out the year-end. Building on this success we now do a mini end of financial year in December too. This gives us another opportunity to coach people on the merits of raising online requisitions before the commitment to purchase. Once people understand that an online requisition creates the expense and not the invoice it seems to sink in that purchase orders are the only way we can track against our budget.”

Paperless

Since digitising everything, Port Stephens’ accounts payable department is in the enviable position of having a paperless office. “We now have no paper floating around waiting to be approved, even our supplier credit applications are attached to our supplier maintenance screens” Beth reflected. “None of that mess – all digitised – saving reams of paper every year. Prior to this, the process was very time and paper intensive. We would start by printing out all the invoices – collating them into alphabetical order with an alphabetised piece of paper between all the letters and then scan them all back into our system with a file name and date. This made it tricky to find invoices because we had to remember when the invoice was filed. On top of that, we had to pay the storage facility to store all the paper invoice files. You’ve just got no idea where we’ve come from in the last four years.”

Efficiencies

The streamlined processes – now operational since implementing Procure to Pay, continue to provide efficiencies on all fronts. This gives the accounts payable staff – two part-time employees, more time to get their workloads completed.

“Before Procure to Pay we would have up to 800 emails at any given time in our accounts payable inbox, now we have around 300,” Beth remarked. “This alone has freed up a lot of time to do more things that we didn’t get to do before, such as regular statement reconciliations and better purchase order management across the organisation. We no longer have to work late nights or weekends to punch all the information leading up to the end of the financial year because we are now in a much more controlled transparent state”

100%
Digital

60%
Less emails in the AP inbox

20+
Hours saved per week for the AP team

Learn more:
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Case Study



PORT STEPHENS
COUNCIL

Port Stephens Council has come a long way, but we’re not finished, with the next step well underway.

“We’ve just commenced the installation of Authority’s eInvoicing capability,” Mark said. “This will eliminate our accounts payable staff having to do data entry for invoices. We are setting up templates for the intelligent mapping that will give the system the ability to pull all the required information in. This more efficient process will save the department many hours of work per week, freeing us up even more so we can spend time constructively on purchase order management and financial record keeping which in turn helps our balance sheet and our bottom line.”