

City of Milwaukee, WI

Pioneer of legislative automation achieves powerful results over 24 years



Fast Facts

Agency Type: Local Government
Population: 594,833
Solution Type:
Legislative Management Suite
Active Since: 1987

The City of Milwaukee is the largest cultural and economic center in the state of Wisconsin. To keep city business running smoothly, Milwaukee City Council handles roughly 2,000 pieces of legislation per year—managing and tracking these was extremely time-consuming. This is why they pioneered legislative automation back in 1987 by helping design and implement Legistar[®], the core application in Granicus' Legislative Management Suite. Since then, it's become the model product used to solve fundamental legislative challenges in municipalities across the country. It's also been the catalyst that's revolutionized Milwaukee's legislative workflow over 24 years, driving \$1.85 million in total cost savings and heightened levels of government transparency.

Success Highlights

- ✓ Saved \$1.25 million in printing costs and reduced \$600,000 in labor costs
- ✓ Leverages online automation to efficiently manage and retain 2,000 legislative files per year, totaling nearly 50,000 files to date
- ✓ Increased accuracy and efficiency in legislative recordkeeping and reporting
- ✓ Empowers citizens and over 30 city departments to research and track legislation instantaneously

// It has really revolutionized our legislative process. We were able to define Council rules, work processes, and assign personnel in ways that saved us time and money. //

- Ron Leonhardt,
City Clerk, City of Milwaukee, WI

Success Story

Challenge

The City of Milwaukee needed to streamline their legislative workflows to promote productivity and cost-savings. “Our processes were totally paper-based and manual. A single ordinance could be typed and re-typed more than a dozen times before it was passed,” says Ron Leonhardt, City Clerk for the City of Milwaukee. Here’s an overview:

- **Manual agenda production** - Agenda processes required extensive staff time and effort: compiling items, hand-typing, proofreading, routing approvals, publishing, and delivering hearing notices.
- **Managing ordinances on 3x5 cards** - City ordinances were filed on a 3x5 card and then indexed by sponsor, subject, and key dates. This made tracking and management extremely tedious.
- **Generating certified copies was time-consuming** - Certified copies of an ordinance were printed in the newspaper and stored in a vault. It was expensive and time-consuming to fulfill requests for certified copies.
- **Assembling binders for committee meetings** - Hundreds of pages of legislative files and supporting reports needed to be printed and assembled every month.
- **Minutes creation was lengthy and paper-heavy** - Meeting minutes took roughly four days to complete. It took another three weeks to print and bind them into a Journal of Proceedings.

Solution

In 1987, Milwaukee implemented Legistar, Granicus’ Legislative Management Suite, to automate legislative recordkeeping, reporting, and research for council, 8 standing committees, and 22 other bodies. “We needed a system to manage the birth to death of a legislative file,” explains Leonhardt. Here are their key solution attributes:

- **Online Submission System (OSS)** - Departments transmit drafts of legislative files to the Clerk’s Office electronically online. “This may be the most efficient piece of software I’ve ever used. It has reduced 40% the work we spent shuffling paper and re-typing agenda items,” said Jim Owczarski, Deputy City Clerk for the City of Milwaukee.
- **Complete agenda process automation** - Agendas are automatically assembled by file number based on Council rules. Agenda publishing to the web and delivery of hearing notices are also automated to ensure members of the public and staff stay informed of upcoming items for deliberation.

- **eBook creation** - The system compiles a paperless packet including the agenda and related files for elected officials.
- **Meeting minutes software** - Minutes creation and cross-linking to their council meeting video is all managed electronically and requires minimal effort from staff.
- **Web-based research center** - Anyone can access a convenient web portal to keyword search and retrieve legislative information including indexed videos, agendas, reports, and meeting actions.
- **Digital certified copies** - The city delivers certified copies and department notifications electronically instead of manually.

Results

Milwaukee has processed nearly 50,000 legislative files over the past 24 years with greater speed and agility. The system, standard data formats, and workflow rules allow everyone involved in the legislative process to operate more cost-effectively. Here’s a summary of their results:

Return on Investment	Saved \$1.85 Million to date!
Paper savings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Saved roughly \$1.25 million in printing costs • \$52,080/year saved
Labor efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$600,000 saved in labor costs • Gave staff more time to focus on their citywide initiatives
Increased time-savings and accuracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agenda process: 16 hours to a few minutes (99.8% reduction) • Minutes production: 32 hours to 8 hours (75% reduction) • Risk of human error is practically non-existent
Enterprise-wide legislative enhancements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 81 users across 18 different departments use the system to drive recordkeeping efficiencies and cost-savings
Convenient legislative research and tracking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizens and staff can easily track legislative issues from the web. “I don’t receive public records requests anymore; I simply refer them to our website.” says Jim Owczarski, Deputy City Clerk.

“ The council agenda would have taken two solid days to produce manually, now it takes 10-15 minutes! ”

- Ron Leonhardt,
City Clerk, City of Milwaukee, WI