

Finance Department

The mission of the Eau Claire County Finance Department is to facilitate the effective and efficient use of County resources and to provide a record and accountability for those resources. The Finance Department maintains financial records according to established accounting principles, coordinates budget preparation and implementation, and provides financial information to the County Board and County departments. The goal of the department is to provide accurate and timely data that provides insight and contributes to the overall fiscal management of Eau Claire County.

Program Performance Management Outcomes

The primary programs for the Finance Department include; General Accounting, Budgeting Administration, and Fiscal Oversight. The department strives to be an effective business partner to the various departments within the County. While 2018 was a challenging year with leadership and personnel changes, the Finance department was able to meet the performance management objectives. The department was also able to increase the interaction between staff and departments, particularly working more closely with fiscal employees working within departments.

The processing of Accounts Payable continued to evolve during 2018, with much of the invoice entry portion of the process being transitioned to the individual departments. The accounts payable process continues to be evaluated for process improvements and effective cash management. During 2018, the department issued 13,351 checks and processed 350 1099s by the appropriate due dates. The number of checks written in 2018 decreased over 2017 due to continued increased usage of the County's procurement card. Finance department staff worked diligently during the 1099 process to consolidate vendors and confirm 1099s were issued appropriately and as a result fewer 1099s were issued than the prior year.

During 2018, the payroll team began the implementation of a new time and attendance tool: NetTime. By the end of 2018, all County departments, with the exception of the Sheriff's department, were fully operational with NetTime. During 2018, Payroll processed 17,061 paychecks and 765 W-2s. Response time to employee questions was timely and any issues were resolved efficiently.

2018 Accomplishments

The Finance Department during 2018 had considerable transition of personnel, utilizing some contractual services to provide personnel assistance at times during the year. For the first half of the year, the department was without a Finance Director. By the end of 2018, half of the personnel were new to the department.

The Department continued to progress on the rollout of the Direct Pay Initiative, completing the rollout by the end of 2018. Multiple process improvements and additional internal controls were implemented throughout the rollout. The Finance Department continues to review and audit payments, as well as ensure compliance with internal controls and County policy.

With some external assistance, the department was able to complete the 2017 financial statements for the County, which was a significant accomplishment for the Finance Department during 2018. Eau Claire County became one of only a few counties that prepare the County financial statements internally with staff, versus contracting with external audit firms for completion.

During 2018, in support of more meaningful, efficient, and consistent financial reporting for both internal and external users, as well as more efficient financial statement preparation, the department embarked on a Chart-of-Accounts (COA) conversion for the County general ledger system. The department spent considerable time and effort working directly with departments on their account structure and providing assistance in development of efficient general ledger account structures that would provide more consistency and meaningful financial data. By the end of 2018 the COA conversion was in place and in addition, the new account structures also provide account alignment with the required State of Wisconsin annual financial reporting structure.

The Finance Department during 2018 made great strides in strengthening and developing collaborative business partnerships with the County departments. The implementation of a monthly extended Finance forum that includes the departmental fiscal support employees assisted in providing a forum for discussion of relevant financial policies, practices, and creation of greater consistency in handling of financial matters.

Alignment with Strategic Plan

Funding & Revenue Generation: The Finance Department continues to work on creating monthly and quarterly reporting package for departments to review and present timely financial information for their oversight committees. In addition, a consistent quarterly reporting package is being developed for presentation to the Finance & Budget Committee, and ultimately, the County Board. In addition, the Finance Department is reviewing and evaluating current department procedures in order to implement more efficient data handling. This includes clearer financial policies, streamlined reconciliation processes, and more reliance on capabilities within the Alio software.

Communication: Members of the Finance Department have been conducting regular monthly meetings with department fiscal support employees to foster more collaboration and interaction with Finance. The monthly meetings provide a mechanism to strengthen the business partnerships between Finance and the departments.

Issues and Challenges Ahead

The greatest challenge for the Finance Department in the future will be continuing to adapt to the changing financial environment and the resulting required financial support. The department will continue to transition from more of a focus on transactional processing to a more strategic and forward-thinking focus. In addition, the continued introduction of new financial processing mechanisms, such as block-chain, will become challenging for the department and County to adapt to. Implementation of new technologies and training staff will continue to be a challenge given the fiscal constraints.

The continued fiscal challenges facing the County will require additional support and assistance from the Finance Department. Creating the time and resource availability to support financial sustainability will be a challenge for the department, especially considering the relatively short tenure of the staff.

Future Opportunities

The Finance Department is fully staffed and will continue to gain knowledge and expertise in 2019. With the stability of financial leadership in place, the department staff will have leadership to provide priority and focus. The department will continue to work on enhancing the business partnerships that have been formed between Finance and the departments, with a focus on financial education, consistency, and business support.

In support of continuous process improvement in the department, a number of financial processes and procedures have been identified in which efficiencies can be improved through a greater dependence upon technology. In 2019, one focus will be on automating manual processes and working toward a paperless environment in processing Accounts Payable and archiving supporting data.

In addition, a focus in 2019 will be on fiscal oversight, taking the form of improved financial reporting as well as more structured financial analysis and awareness. New financial reports, as well as new processes and procedures, will support greater financial awareness to the oversight committees, the County Board, employees, and citizens.

The Finance Department has been working closely with County Administration on highlighting financial sustainability and support of that initiative will be another area of focus in 2019. The current state of the County necessitates continued assessment of fiscal priorities to balance the needs of the County with the available resources. It will continue to be the County's goal to decrease its dependence on borrowing to finance capital projects and require continued research of alternative revenue sources.

The major initiatives for the Finance Department during 2019 include:

1. Complete 2018 external audit with fewer audit adjustments than the previous year and with less external audit fees.
2. Prepare the 2018 financial statements internally with no outside assistance.
3. Establish consistent quarterly financial reporting for Departments, Oversight Committees, and the Board of Supervisors.
4. Develop and implement a set of financial policies and modify existing County code structure as appropriate.
5. Develop and establish new processes and reporting for capital projects and the capital projects fund.
6. Establish new processes, procedures and reporting for the County insurance funds to provide greater visibility and insight.
7. Implement process/procedures for scanning, processing, and archiving of County invoices.
8. Develop and implement processes/procedures to transition to use of vendor payment terms within Alio.