

eScribe Boosts Efficiency, Consistency and Compatibility of Agendas, Resolutions and Minutes for Livingston County

The Client

Livingston County, MI



About the Client

Located in Southeastern Michigan – the most populous region of Michigan, where nearly half of the state’s population resides – Livingston County was founded in 1836 and named after Edward Livingston, the Secretary of State for President Andrew Jackson. Situated within an hour’s drive of major metropolitan centers including Detroit and the state capitol of Lansing, Livingston County is also roughly midway between the University of Michigan and Michigan State University. An estimated 2017 population just shy of 190,000, places Livingston County as the eleventh most populous county in the state, while its tax rate ranks lowest and its median income highest amongst Michigan’s counties.

The Challenge

In 2016, IT and administration staff at Livingston County kicked off a project to replace the legacy, “homegrown” system they were using to manage agendas and resolutions for the County Board of Commissioners.

“Due to the age of the system, associated components were unreliable,” recalled Diane Gregor, Livingston County Applications Manager. “We wanted to replace the system before it became unusable. If that happened, it would have been extremely difficult to recover. A lot of people relied heavily on that system.”



Looking to not only replace but improve upon the previous system, County staff sought significant improvements in efficiency for generating agendas and minutes.

“Our old system actually consisted of multiple, separate products,” explained Livingston County Administrative Specialist Natalie Hunt, who handles the vast majority of agendas and minutes across the County’s boards and committees. “Agendas were generated out of our internally-developed system, but minutes were done in Microsoft Word and agenda details needed to be manually copied over. There was also no real workflow in the system; people could be notified of the availability of materials for their review, but there was no enforced workflow or approval handling.”

Last but not least, the age of the custom system’s underlying platform created compatibility issues with the software applications being used by County staff.

“Most of our users were on Microsoft Office 2013 or 2016,” explained Steve Hoyer, Application Developer at Livingston County. “Because our agenda and resolution system was running on SharePoint V2, all supporting Word documents had to be saved as Word 2003 or earlier format. Similarly, supporting PDF documents needed to be a particular version or lower; otherwise they were incompatible with our system.”

The Solution

Hoyer’s research led Livingston County to evaluate the eSCRIBE meeting management system. The County’s evaluation of comparable products found similar product offerings, with eScribe’s pricing being highly competitive. Beyond fulfilling their immediate goals and cost-effective pricing, the team found existing and upcoming modules for the eScribe platform attractive for future initiatives.

“We saw that the upcoming Board Manager module would streamline another area where we had significant inefficiencies,” said Hunt. “We also like the rich functionality of eScribe’s Webcasting Plus module. It certainly is a viable option, if we were to choose to broadcast our meetings.”



References from existing eSCRIBE customers were also key factors in the County's purchase decision, particularly when compared to what they heard about eSCRIBE competitors.

"eScribe customers provided glowing references," explained Gregor. "Their reputation for support, responsiveness, and integrity really impressed us." eScribe's openness to feedback and requests from their customers also stood in contrast to peers' reports on competitors. "We really liked how eScribe offered a community forum for engaging with their customers and getting suggestions about enhancements," said Hunt. "That was a good sign for the type of relationship we could expect."

The Results

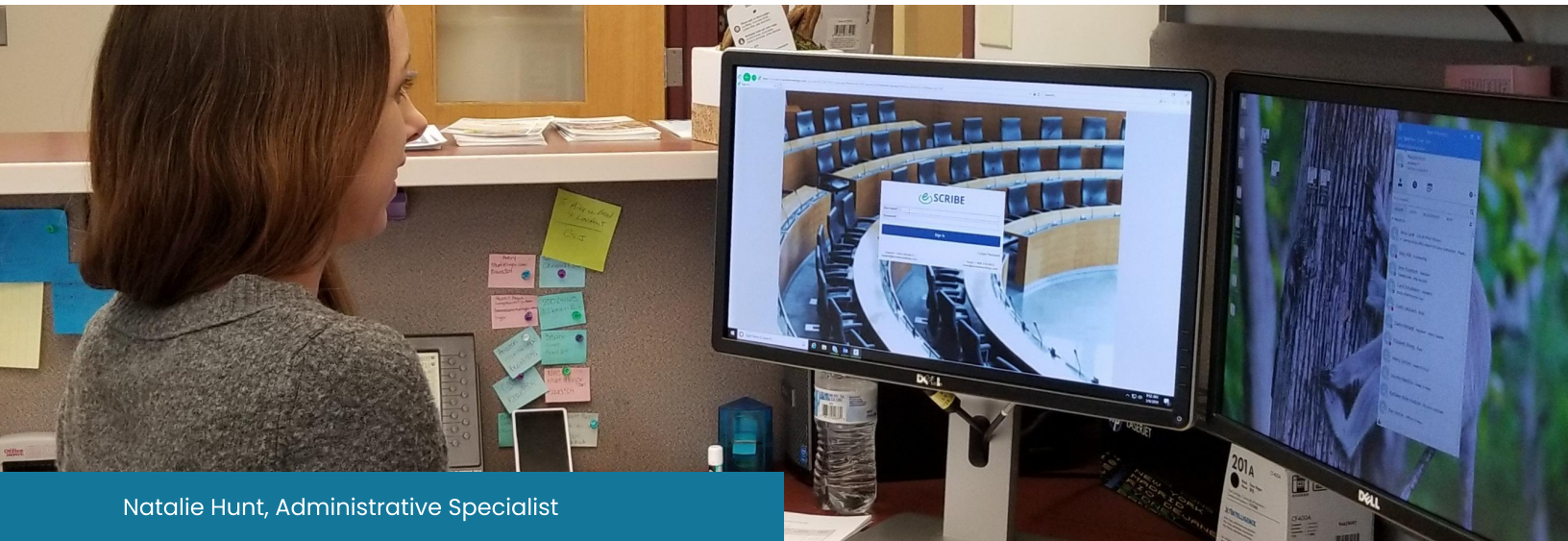
Livingston County signed on with eSCRIBE in October 2017. Implementation began two weeks later, with an official "go live" in February 2018. Initially rolled out to support the County Board of Commissioners, Livingston County has subsequently expanded the use of eSCRIBE to other departments and committees. Since then, the County Veterans Affairs Committee, Election Commission, and Tax Allocation Board have adopted eScribe for their meeting management platform.

While Hunt remains the eScribe system's primary user, handling roughly 90% of agendas and 85% of minutes, separate staff members handle certain agendas and minutes depending on the particular meeting and department. The county now has close to 100 overall eScribe users spanning many departments, including people who create and submit resolutions. In addition to administering user accounts and creating workflow assignments, Gregor is also a content contributor herself, writing resolutions for IT and related projects.

Hunt cites the efficiency and ease of eScribe's unified approach to generating agendas and minutes as being the biggest benefit for her role, reducing minutes preparation time by 50% as well as decreasing agenda preparation time by roughly 30%.

"Having agenda content automatically populated into the minutes is a real time-saver," said Hunt. "I don't need to re-create my minutes with every meeting; they're in the system and I can just go in and tweak them."





Natalie Hunt, Administrative Specialist

Hunt similarly praises the benefits of eScribe's template based approach.

"I really appreciate being able to select standard language from a drop-down menu for my minutes and resolutions, so I don't have to manually type in everything," she explained. "It also helps lessen errors and maintain consistency within our minutes and agendas across our committees and boards, which is very important to us."

The eScribe platform's compatibility with the latest versions of Microsoft Office and PDF creation tools has also eliminated common document generation obstacles. "With our old system, there were many times we would be creating an agenda and stumble on rogue documents that we would need to manually tweak, reformat, or re-print into earlier document variants just to get them into the agenda," said Gregor. "eScribe has eliminated most of those hiccups."

eScribe's document workflows helped the Livingston County team enforce consistent practices and improve visibility. "We had some initial resistance from end-users to overcome, as nobody likes change," explained Hunt. "We're now getting most people on board with why the workflows are there and how they operate. It has been a really good feature on our end, as it notifies the appropriate managerial staff and gives us visibility of who has reviewed a document, who has made changes, who has signed off on it, and so forth. Everything is better documented now." eScribe has also streamlined transparency for the County, automating the process for publishing agendas and minutes to their public website.

"We used to have to upload a PDF to our website document library, and then link it to the web pages by hand," said Hunt. "It was all manual, and if an agenda was subsequently revised, we needed to remove it and re-upload it. eScribe efficiently handles all of the publishing for us, including revisions."



At the time of this writing, Livingston County is in the process of implementing eScribe's new Board Manager Plus module to bring similar efficiencies and enhanced transparency to managing their roughly 25 boards and committees. "We expect Board Manager to replace the spreadsheets we use for tracking," said Hunt.

"Our existing processes for recording membership, updating the roster, recruiting, and taking applications are all very manual. Board Manager Plus will help us simplify and automate those functions in a single place. Plus, Board Manager's integrated publishing capabilities will give the public the ability to see what all of our boards and committees do, including some they might not even realize exist."

The Livingston County team plans to expand the use of eScribe into even more departments and committees, and looks forward to eScribe's upcoming Legislative module to enhance their ability to track and inquire on resolutions, including historical records. In the meantime, Hunt continues to enjoy working with the eScribe platform and personnel. "Their customer service team is always pleasant and quick to respond, and when we came across things where the system didn't yet work the way we expected, they've been great in finding creative ways for us to accomplish what we needed. We really appreciate that effort." The entire Livingston County team is similarly pleased by how eScribe communicates with their customers.

"They keep all of our team informed, and we love that eScribe reaches out to us for ideas, taking our input when they're developing new features and modules", concluded Gregor. "I'm anxious to see what things they come up with that we haven't thought of yet!"

Get in Touch for More Information

eScribe understands every organization is different. Get in touch for a free-of-charge ROI assessment to help quantify the specific benefits your organization can gain.

