



Enterprise Government Case Study

Gaston County, North Carolina

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Executive Overview

Organization Profile:

Gaston County, NC, is the second largest county, by population, in the Charlotte Metropolitan Area.

Situation:

The county's IT infrastructure was outdated, and could not support the sophisticated automation tools that would enable employees to move beyond manual, paper-based processes.

Solution:

When a new CIO took the helm in 2004, he updated the county's network, servers and PCs so that they could support technology that would streamline and transform key business processes enterprise-wide. In 2007, the county selected Laserfiche as its enterprise content management (ECM) standard and began to deploy it on a department-by-department basis. To date, Laserfiche has been rolled out within eight departments, and the county has near-term plans to deploy it in three more.

Benefits:

- Over six million records are stored in the Laserfiche repository, allowing staff to save time on filing and finding blueprints, forms, documents and more.
- Service delivery to citizens is faster thanks to the speed of search and retrieval; some departments even enable citizens to search and find relevant records for themselves via the Web.
- Laserfiche Workflow, a business process management tool that is part of the Laserfiche ECM suite, facilitates case management within the social services department.
- Standardized metadata (i.e. common template fields) improves cross-departmental collaboration by linking disparate record sets together.
- Overall, Laserfiche enables the county to save 28,500 man hours—the equivalent of 14 full-time employees—each year.

AT A GLANCE		
GOVERNANCE: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Auditing• Business Continuity• E-discovery• Enterprise Risk Management• Enterprise Search and Retrieval• Information Life Cycle Management• Transparent Records Management	INTEGRATIONS: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Client Management System	PROCESSES: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Accounts Payable• Case Management• Medical Records Management• Timesheet Management

Introduction

Located just west of Charlotte, North Carolina’s largest city, Gaston County offers mountains to climb, rivers to explore, a diverse industrial base and one of the most renowned hospitals in the Charlotte Metropolitan Area. Governed by a seven-member Board of Commissioners, Gaston County is a large organization with approximately 1,400 employees and an annual budget of more than 203 million dollars.

Committed to providing broad-ranging citizen services, Gaston County’s leadership knew that the county could use technology to reduce costs and promote efficiency. When Brandon Jackson came onboard as CIO in 2004, he quickly realized that Laserfiche enterprise content management (ECM) could play a central role in helping the organization achieve its goals.

GASTON COUNTY BY THE NUMBERS	
15	Municipalities in Gaston County.
206,679	Citizens living in Gaston County.
\$203 million	Annual budget for Gaston County.
1,400	People employed by Gaston County.
29	IT staff serving Gaston County.
35	Departments served by Gaston County’s IT staff.
8	Departments currently using Laserfiche.
6.4 million	Pages managed in the Gaston County Laserfiche system.
28,500	Man hours saved annually with Laserfiche (14 full-time employees per year).

The CIO's Perspective

Adding ECM to the IT Infrastructure

As Gaston County's new CIO, Jackson was determined to bring greater efficiency to the enterprise by updating the county's IT infrastructure—including the network, servers and PCs—to support more sophisticated automation tools.

“When I got here in 2004,” Jackson says, “our business processes were very manual and very paper-based. It was costing the county lot of money in both lost productivity and excess paper consumption. I knew that we needed to do more from an automation standpoint—that automation could improve our processes and reduce our workload.”

“ Our IT department supports 35 distinct departments. In this type of varied environment, standardization is key. ”

In 2007, Jackson and his department completed a massive datacenter modernization project, featuring VMWare-based virtualized servers and two Storage Area Networks (SANs). Today, the datacenter provides disaster recovery for 1,100 users across 35 departments and 25 sites and houses data for 85 Microsoft SQL-based, third-party and custom applications.

“We implemented ECM in conjunction with our new, virtualized datacenter,” says Jackson, “because we knew our new infrastructure could support this kind of sophisticated technology.” Today, Laserfiche centrally and securely manages approximately 6.4 million pages of the county's content while offering eight different departments the flexibility to configure local solutions for their specific needs.

“My background is in the private sector,” says Jackson, “so coming into a local government organization was quite a switch. Our IT department supports 35 distinct departments. In this type of varied environment, standardization is key.”

Establishing an ECM Standard

IT standards ensure consistency, promote efficiency and allow organizations to leverage economies of scale. Even before implementing Laserfiche, Jackson knew that establishing an ECM standard would have a number of benefits for Gaston County, primarily:

- **Ease of use.** Staff and citizens only need to be familiar with one ECM interface, simplifying system access.
- **Decreased support and maintenance.** IT staff only need to administer one system, minimizing support and maintenance demands.
- **Increased cross-departmental collaboration.** Although different departments may use different forms, standardized metadata (i.e. common template fields) links disparate record sets together, facilitating cross-departmental collaboration.

In determining which ECM system to standardize on, Jackson had a few choices. In fact, the Clerk to the Board of County Commissioners was already using Docuware to digitize and store meeting minutes, contracts, ordinances and a variety of other documents necessary to Board actions and general county business. However, it was clear to Jackson that Docuware could not meet all of the organization's business needs.

“Docuware lacked Web publishing and OCR capabilities,” he recalls, “and its architecture couldn’t scale to support additional departments or our more ambitious initiatives.”

Keeping in mind present needs, future plans and his desire to find a system that would work across the enterprise, Jackson authored an RFP. His goal, he says, was to implement an ECM architecture that could have a high impact on both internal business processes and external service delivery.

“What ‘high impact’ looks like is different in each department,” explains Jackson. “We needed a system that would meet the needs of the entire organization, as well as the specialized requirements of individual departments.”

Laserfiche met all of the county’s specifications, and it was cost-effective to boot. “Return on investment was probably our chief criterion, and Laserfiche offered the quickest ROI of all the potential solutions,” Jackson says.

Deployment

In 2007, Jackson set out to standardize the county on Laserfiche, working with Laserfiche reseller One Source Document Solutions. The county started with a pilot project in the environmental health department, which was able to scan and store more than 55,000 septic system records into Laserfiche within six weeks.

The HR, finance and building inspection departments soon followed. “It was really a ‘first come, first served’ process,” Jackson says. “These departments really wanted to be the initial adopters of the new technology.”

Deploying at the departmental level proved advantageous in convincing decision makers that Laserfiche would support their goals.

“It allowed us to present concrete cost savings to the commissioners,” Jackson recalls, “so they’d be on board with expanding the system. It also helped us persuade the few skeptical staff members that, when all is said and done, Laserfiche would make all our jobs easier.”

It turned out that staff didn’t need much persuading. “The resistance to change has been far less than for other applications or new business processes,” he adds. “Employees all realize how tedious working with paper is, and that the opportunity to digitize will help them tremendously.”

To date, Gaston County has implemented Laserfiche in the following departments, each of which this case study will explore in greater detail:

- › Building Inspections
- › Economic Services
- › Emergency Medical Services
- › Environmental Health Services
- › Finance
- › Human Resources
- › Public Works
- › Tax

Next to deploy will be the Clerk to the Board of County Commissioners; after that, the planning and zoning department and Public Health.

“We are still very early on in our adoption of Laserfiche,” concedes Jackson. “There are 27 departments that have yet to benefit from Laserfiche, and so much more that each of the departments using Laserfiche have yet to do.”

Even so, he says, **“Post-implementation surveys show that, with Laserfiche, Gaston County is saving over 28,500 man hours—the equivalent of 14 full-time employees—a year.”**

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

Fall 2004	Brandon Jackson joins Gaston County as CIO.
Fall 2006	Gaston County issues an RFP for a content management solution.
Winter 2007	Gaston County purchases Laserfiche from One Source Document Solutions, a Laserfiche reseller based in Greensboro, NC.
Spring 2007	Gaston County completes large-scale datacenter modernization project and deploys Laserfiche.
Spring 2007	Environmental Health implements Laserfiche, which stores thousands of septic system records and grants citizens self-service access to them via the Web.
Fall 2007	Building Inspections implements Laserfiche to store permits and related documents, granting citizens on-demand access to inspection reports via Laserfiche WebLink.
Winter 2008	Finance implements Laserfiche and Laserfiche Quick Fields in order to automatically capture and store employee timesheets and accounts payable documents.
Spring 2008	Public Works implements Laserfiche, which allows the department to scan and store blueprints.
Spring 2008	Gaston Emergency Medical Services implements Laserfiche to securely store patient care reports and EOB forms, eliminating misfiles.
Spring 2009	Human Resources implements Laserfiche to enhance efficiency in the department by organizing and storing job applications and employee files.
Spring 2009	Economic Services implements Laserfiche to automate, streamline and accelerate the application and case review processes.
Spring 2010	Tax implements Laserfiche, which allows the department to scan and store a variety of forms and applications.
Summer 2010	Clerk to the Board of County Commissioners implementation. The office will migrate from Docuware to Laserfiche to facilitate inter-departmental information sharing.
Fall 2010	Planning and Zoning implementation, which will allow the department to increase access to permits and applications.
Winter 2011	Public Health implementation. The department will use Laserfiche to complement its electronic medical records (EMR) system by archiving inactive medical records.

Simplifying Storage, Search and Retrieval

Public Works and HR

The public works and human resources departments use Laserfiche at its most elemental level—as a content repository that simplifies document storage, search and retrieval.

According to Mike Lee, contracts and projects coordinator for the public works department, “We scan medium and large blueprints into Laserfiche, which enables us to find them quickly and duplicate them easily.”

Pam Briant, HR technician, explains that her department uses Laserfiche to store job applications and employee files (active and terminated). She appreciates the speed with which Laserfiche allows HR employees to search for, retrieve and print files: “Because we don’t have to leave our desks to search through file cabinets, we’re much more efficient.”

In addition, the department benefits from:

- **Role-based security.** The IT department assigns Laserfiche rights and privileges to staff through Windows Active Directory, limiting access to HR files to those authorized to view them.
- **Simultaneous access.** With Laserfiche, multiple employees can view the same file at the same time, further enhancing efficiency.

The HR department has applied for approval from the North Carolina Office of Archives and History to go paperless. This will enable it to shred and dispose of the hardcopy records that are stored in Laserfiche.

Tax Department

The Gaston County tax department is busy, processing anywhere from 13,000 to 15,000 forms a year. According to David Turbyfill, assistant director of revenue, “Laserfiche is a time saver. It cuts down on manual filing and accelerates document retrieval.”

The department currently scans and stores four types of documents in Laserfiche:

- Personal property listing forms.
- Exemption applications.
- Real property maintenance forms.
- Sales questionnaires.

In the near future, the department plans to add additional document types—including business property listing forms—to that list.

Despite the time savings that accrue from using Laserfiche for content management, Turbyfill has bigger plans for the tax department: He would like to integrate Laserfiche with ONETax, a software system that is specifically designed to meet the unique needs of North Carolina tax departments, in order to expedite online forms processing. According to Turbyfill, this could be achieved by identifying a path to the stored Laserfiche image, which could then be launched within ONETax for processing.

“When the resources become available, this department would absolutely benefit from expanding its use of Laserfiche,” says Turbyfill. “The ability to process electronic forms using Laserfiche would streamline our workflow a great deal.”

Eliminating Medical Misfiles

Gaston Emergency Medical Services

Charged with “preserving life and promoting safety,” Gaston Emergency Medical Services (GEMS) must also protect and preserve the integrity of its patients’ medical records—while at the same time ensuring that authorized personnel have access to necessary information. This is hard to do when paper charts are misfiled, and it can be extremely costly and time-consuming to find these files again.

GEMS turned to Laserfiche to digitize and store patient care reports (PCR)—which consist of emergency medical records and other supporting documents. It also uses Laserfiche for explanation of benefits (EOB) forms from commercial insurance companies and remittance advices for Medicare and Medicaid.

According to Penny Jenkins, business services coordinator for GEMS, “We don’t worry about misfiles in Laserfiche. Our PCRs and EOBs are all organized by date, which staff triple checks before scanning them into the system. As long as the dates are accurate, it is very easy to access information stored in Laserfiche.”

Access to these records is critical, particularly in the face of a subpoena or the investigation of a claim. “It’s quicker and easier to find records in Laserfiche than sorting through paper files,” says Jenkins. “People can quickly access data without leaving their desks. We’ve been able to eliminate a number of file cabinets as well.”

Role-based security also ensures that no one outside of GEMS has access to the digitized patient files. Medical records stored in Laserfiche are safe, secure and accessible, which is

why GEMS is working toward back-scanning all of its PCRs and EOBs. “Laserfiche is a time saver,” Jenkins concludes. “I look forward to the day we have a working, up-to-date scanning timeline in place.”

Delivering Citizen Services with WebLink

Building Inspections Department

The building inspections department enforces State Building Codes on new construction, conducting inspections and issuing permits. As such, it is required to keep up with “a huge and growing volume of documents,” explains Building Inspections Director Ken Jackson.

- › These documents include:
- › Building permit applications.
- › Zoning and health department permits.
- › Contractor license verifications.
- › Worker’s compensation verifications.
- › Inspection result reports.
- › Additional correspondence related to permits.

“ Laserfiche has saved us the equivalent of one to one and a half full-time employees; in a 20-person department, that has a huge impact. ”

Today, all of these documents are stored in Laserfiche and are instantly available to department staff at the click of a mouse. “With Laserfiche, we spend less time finding and filing documents and more time on customer service,” says Ken Jackson. “It’s saved us the equivalent of one to one and a half full-time employees; in a 20-person department, that has a huge impact.”

According to Gaston County’s CIO, Building Inspections has been the first department to receive approval from the North Carolina Office of Archives and History to go paperless. As a result, this department has been able to

free up office space that was previously used for document storage. In the future, the space may be converted into a conference room.

And the benefits of the Laserfiche implementation extend far beyond the building inspections department itself: With Laserfiche WebLink, a secure Web content portal, citizens can now access inspection reports for themselves over the Web.

According to Ken Jackson, “WebLink helps construction-related companies mine our records for information on projects that are underway.” This information includes:

- › Project location.
- › Names of contractors and/or sub-contractors.
- › Type and size of project.

“These are all public records,” he says, “but before Laserfiche, people who wanted to access them had to travel to our office to go through paper records. WebLink has decreased the amount of time and manpower that contractors, sub-contractors, vendors and service people need to gather information about potential customers. It’s had a tremendous impact and the response from the construction industry has been very enthusiastic.”

He concludes, “My staff is a lot more productive because we don’t have to make paper records available to outsiders anymore.”

Health Department – Environmental Health

Environmental Health Services—the division of the county’s health department charged with ensuring safe food, water and septic systems—was the earliest adopter of Laserfiche within Gaston County. According to the county’s CIO, “Environmental Health Services came to us because it knew that it would benefit from having a centralized and secure digital repository for its records.”

The division uses Laserfiche to store onsite wastewater records, which come in the form of as-built drawings submitted whenever a septic system is installed and inspected. Back in 2007, the division back-scanned approximately 55,000 records dating back to 1950. Today, it continues to add new as-built drawings to the system in order to make the records accessible to on-site wastewater and clerical staff within the health department, as well as to the public and other county departments through Laserfiche WebLink, which is accessible via Gaston County’s Website.

Environmental Health Program Supervisor Samantha Dye reveals, “We organize our records by owner name, and we love the robust search functionality Laserfiche offers. It’s way more efficient than going to the file room and looking through hard copies.”

According to Dye, records are searchable through a wide number of criteria, including:

- › Owner’s name.
- › Owner’s PIN.
- › Address.
- › Subdivision name.
- › Year installed.
- › Code or grid number.

- › Parcel identification number (obtained from GIS).
- › Lot number.
- › Block number.
- › Improvement permit number.

“Laserfiche cuts down on the amount of time it takes for staff and citizens to gain access to septic system information,” says Dye. “We find that realtors in particular benefit from the secure online access to septic system records that WebLink affords.”

Moving forward, Dye would like to expand the content stored in Laserfiche to include applications and improvement permits—both of which will be linked to as-built drawings for specific septic sites. “Having everything digitized and available in one place will make us even more efficient,” she concludes.

Quick Capture with Quick Fields

Finance Department

Gaston County is a large organization with approximately 1,400 employees and an annual budget of more than 203 million dollars. The daunting task of keeping track of the county's financial activities and verifying that all financial transactions are conducted and recorded in accordance with the budget ordinance and all applicable laws, policies, guidelines and generally accepted accounting principles falls to the finance department.

One of the county's chief financial activities is payroll, which is dependent on having accurate and accessible employee timesheets. Laserfiche provides a fast, dependable and secure method of storing timesheets, and eliminates the need for staff to retrieve and copy these documents.

According to Finance Department Administrative Assistant Jan Wiggins, the department uses Laserfiche Quick Fields, a high-volume document capture and processing tool, to digitize the timesheets as follows:

- The department prints barcodes on each timesheet.
- Quick Fields reads each barcode and automatically:
 - Populates relevant data fields in Laserfiche.
 - Files each timesheet based on employee information contained in the barcode.
- Timesheets are stored by department, with subfolders for calendar year and month.
- Role-based security limits access to each department's timesheets to authorized employees.

This process eliminates the need for manual data entry and filing, organizes timesheets in a logical, easily-retrievable manner and ensures document security.

The department also uses Laserfiche and Quick Fields to scan, recognize and store accounts payable (AP) documents. Although AP document preparation is time consuming (AP documents vary greatly in size, configuration and paper quality), Wiggins believes that once the North Carolina Office of Archives and History gives the finance department approval to make a full transition to digital records, the time saved in filing hard copies will offset the time spent in document preparation. According to Jackson, State approval for digital records should be granted in the next few months.

Wiggins identifies three major benefits of Laserfiche for the finance department:

- Improved access to timesheets decreases the amount of time spent locating and copying them.
- It is easier, cheaper and faster to e-mail digital AP documents to auditors and other government agencies than it is to fax or mail hard copies.
- Digital records provide backups in the event of catastrophic loss due to fire, tornado, flood, etc.

Moving forward, the finance department hopes to enhance efficiency to an even greater degree by implementing Laserfiche Workflow, a tool that automates collaborative business processes such as AP processing.

Working with Workflow

Department of Social Services – Economic Services

With 167 employees, Gaston County’s economic services division runs a variety of programs that provide temporary financial and employment services to qualifying adults and children in the county. These programs include:

- Child Support Enforcement (CSE).
- Food and Nutrition Services (FNS).
- Medicaid.
- Work First.

Economic Services has always prided itself on being responsive to citizens’ needs, but in recent years the large number of people seeking support made it difficult for staff to process benefits in a timely manner. There was a danger that those in need might start falling through the cracks.

The division needed to automate, streamline and accelerate its application and case review processes—both of which were heavy on paper and manual processing—to ensure that people who needed the county’s support would receive it without undue delay. After discussing its needs with the Gaston County IT department, Economic Services decided that automating these processes with workflow technology was the way to go.

With the help of the Gaston County IT department, Economic Services chose to deploy Northwoods Compass Software, a suite of applications designed exclusively for human services agencies, and integrate Laserfiche on the back end.

With Compass, Economic Services gets forms and templates—such as the North Carolina food stamps form—that are tailored specific-

ly to its needs. Laserfiche adds robust records management and additional workflow functionality.

Phase I of the implementation went live on June 1, 2009. It included 100 seats for employees in FNS and Medicaid. Phase II (which kicked off in spring 2010) includes 50 more seats for CSE and Work First.

According to Economic Services Administrator Rebecca Lamphiear, employees scan a variety of client paperwork into the Compass/Laserfiche system, including:

- Completed applications.
- Completed case reviews.
- Identification documents such as:
 - Driver’s licenses.
 - Birth certificates.
 - Social security cards.

Once these items have been scanned, the system automatically e-mails reminders (including links to documents stored in the Laserfiche repository) to the staff members who need to review each item.

According to Lamphiear, implementing the joint Laserfiche/Compass solution has “reduced paper use, made it much easier to retrieve documents and facilitated greater efficiency in processing benefits.”

The Future

Of the eight departments that have already implemented Laserfiche, many of them plan to expand their use of the system. For example, the IT department is currently in the midst of creating an in-house field application for the building inspections department that uses the Laserfiche API to generate reports and tie them directly into a SunGard HTE permitting application—eliminating the need to print and scan the reports into Laserfiche. Staff will then be able to access the reports on their wireless tablet PCs.

“ I really anticipate that, within five years, Laserfiche will become as widely-used as e-mail. ”

which intends to integrate Laserfiche with its electronic medical records (EMR) system. “EMRs only store current medical data, so Public Health will use Laserfiche to archive inactive files,” Jackson says.

Always looking to the future, Jackson explains, “I knew that ECM and digital records management would be a major asset, not only in the short term, but also further on down the road. I really anticipate that, within five years, Laserfiche will become as widely-used as e-mail.”

And with 27 additional departments under its purview, the Gaston County IT organization is just getting started. “The biggest barrier to getting everyone on Laserfiche,” says Jackson, “is the IT department’s time.”

Next to deploy will be the Clerk to the Board of County Commissioners, which will migrate from Docuware to Laserfiche during the summer of 2010. “Standardization is vital to the long-term success of the whole organization,” explains Jackson. “This isn’t just about what Docuware is or isn’t doing for the Clerk’s office—it’s also about having a consistent ECM standard across the county.”

After that, Planning and Zoning will begin storing permits and applications in Laserfiche, followed by the public health department,

Laserfiche *Institute*[®]

The Laserfiche Institute teaches staff, resellers, and current and prospective clients how to use Laserfiche most effectively. As part of this mission, the Institute conducts more than 500 Webinars each year, covering a variety of topics. The Institute also hosts an annual conference where members of the Laserfiche community attend presentations and network to share ideas and learn best practices. Additionally, the Institute conducts a number of regional training sessions and provides resellers with content for more than 100 user conferences each year.

The Institute also develops and distributes educational material through the Laserfiche Support Site. On this Website, clients can access training videos, participate in online forums and download technical papers and presentations that help them become savvier ECM users.

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