



Toronto and Region Conservation Authority Maximizes Resources by Implementing a True Meeting Management Solution

Customer
Toronto and Region
Conservation Authority

Location
Vaughan, ON

Industry
Government
Agency

About the Client

One of 36 Ontario conservation authorities, Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) works in partnership with the province, local municipalities and community stakeholders to protect nine Toronto-area watersheds and the Lake Ontario shoreline. With more than 60 years of practical experience in protecting the environment, educating young people and creating resilient communities, TRCA works with government, businesses, local organizations and individuals to build a greener, cleaner, healthier place to live.

TRCA receives funding from six participating municipalities and from the province. Ensuring that these resources are used efficiently is a high priority for TRCA.

With about 90 regular and special meetings annually – including 24 board meetings, staff meetings, and one or two committee meetings per month – automating the workload associated with them can lead to significant time and money savings. As a result, in 2000 TRCA engaged a company to custom-develop an agenda management system for them, hoping it could help them achieve those goals.



The Challenge

While the system worked superficially, the back end was another story. The coding the company was required to use was so complex that as they tried fixing bugs throughout the years, they often broke it themselves.

The Burden of a Lifeless System

Over the years, TRCA managed to make it work, but not without significant constraints. They stopped working with the original software company, but the new developer they brought in on contract found it challenging to understand the coding style that had been required at the time the database was created. As a result, staff chose to not allow anyone to touch the code in case it broke, which was highly likely.

TRCA badly needed a replacement. The workflow was no longer adaptable, changing agendas meant increased workload and stress on staff, and because the system didn't support attachments in their native formats, staff often chose not to use them at all rather than reformatting them for upload. Beyond these limitations, a more user-friendly, web-based system is preferred in today's operating environment. TRCA's existing system had hit the end of its life.

TRCA's Kathy Stranks was tasked with the responsibility of selecting and contracting the system's replacement. As Senior Manager, Corporate Secretariat – similar to the clerk function in municipalities – Stranks handles the board activities as well as managing the corporate records department. Having been with the TRCA for 30 years, 19 of them as the board secretariat, she had extensive knowledge of the needs of the organization and its staff.

The Search for a Meeting Management Software

The entire process, from research to finally selecting eSCRIBE, took two to three months. After starting her initial search on the internet, Stranks narrowed it down to three companies, then delved into understanding and evaluating their systems. She also spoke to one of TRCA's partners to get their feedback and recommendations.

Of the three offerings on Stranks' shortlist, two had limited formatting options, and also felt "clunky" like the old system. eSCRIBE was the clear winner.



The Solution

One of TRCA's partner organizations was already using eSCRIBE, and the recommendation from them was positive. Some TRCA board members were already familiar with eSCRIBE, and had even shown interest in the iPad app – one of the latest developments from eSCRIBE.

"I was really impressed with eSCRIBE's use of Microsoft Word documents, as it truly set them apart from their competitors," said Stranks. "And eSCRIBE fits with our sustainability mandate and purchasing policy."

Everything Stranks heard and tested with eSCRIBE made her more than confident to make the final decision.

More Than Just Efficient Agenda Creation

eSCRIBE did more than just fix agenda workflows for TRCA, making the entire organization more efficient. eSCRIBE is now used on a daily basis for multiple activities such as preparing workflow reports for the board and advisory board; agenda and minutes preparation; task tracking and follow up; and more.

The ability to use Microsoft Word was a huge plus, as staff were considerably more comfortable with using it. Gone was the "clunky" feel of the previous system, replaced with a more streamlined and user-friendly alternative. Formatting documents was now possible, indexing and pagination were quick and painless, and everything they needed for meetings was all in one place.

A Short Learning Curve for All

Staff reaction to eSCRIBE was very positive. When Stranks introduced them to the new system and how they would be using it in their daily operations, their reaction was "That's it? It's that easy?!"

"My assistant, who creates the agenda, is in love with the system. She just LOVES it. It used to be very difficult to accommodate changes; now it takes two seconds to make the change," says Stranks.

Impressive Support Team at Hand

By selecting eSCRIBE, TRCA gets more than just a product: they also get eSCRIBE's dependable support. Throughout the implementation, eSCRIBE's team was there to make sure the workflows and features were working as TRCA had envisioned. And whenever there was a problem, they were quick to respond. "I found eSCRIBE's customer support excellent," stated Stranks. "The way they always followed up with a helpful, accommodating attitude was refreshing."



The Results

The switch to eSCRIBE saved TRCA significant time and money, enabling resources from partners and governments to be better allocated and used more effectively. Some highlights include:

- TRCA no longer prints hard copies of agenda packages, saving paper, money and the environment.
- Everything is electronic – a link to where everything is posted is shared with meeting participants, so they can access it from anywhere, on any device. No more scheduling couriers for deliveries.
- Preparation time is reduced by an estimated 40% per meeting, allowing staff to put that time savings towards other tasks.
- Post meeting task times are reduced by about 30%.

A Growing Future with eSCRIBE

Satisfied with the benefits eSCRIBE is already delivering, TRCA has plans for expanding what it does for their organization. They plan to webcast future meetings using the eSCRIBE video module, then leverage the solution's ability to automatically insert videos into their electronic documents and records for online posting. Stranks says that more of the internal committees will start using eSCRIBE, and while a single board member currently uses the iPad app, she expects that once word spreads about how easy it is to access meeting-related information, the number of board members wanting to use the app will increase.

"I'm extremely happy with our move over to eSCRIBE," Stranks concluded. "It's helped relieve workloads and alleviate the 'agenda day' stress for our team. We work closely with eSCRIBE on how we can continue to raise our efficiency and transparency, so that we can stretch the dollars we receive and ensure our staff's valuable time is wisely spent. eSCRIBE is dedicated to making continuous improvements to their product, and I look forward to seeing their next move."



Kathy Stranks, Senior Manager, Corporate Secretariat