

Public Sector Reform Column



MAKING BARBADOS WORK BETTER

SMART MOVES WITH SMARTSTREAM

The rolling out of SmartStream, a reform initiative to improve the Financial and Human Resources management system, is nearing the final implementation stages. The improvement in the delivery of services in the public sector has been universally recognised and the Government of Barbados has seized the opportunity to implement reforms in the advent of information technology. The SmartStream software program created by Geac Computer Systems Incorporated was selected by the Ministry of Finance in conjunction with the Ministry of the Civil Service as the vehicle to modernise the management of financial and human resources within the public service.

SmartStream

SmartStream is a client-server series of products that allows organisations to change their business processes, broaden decision making authority and extend business processes for suppliers, partners, customers and users. The Ministries selected three series comprising eight software modules which were:

- SmartStream Financials (Ledger, Funds Control, Accounts Receivables and Budget Modules);
- SmartStream Human Resources (Payroll, Personnel Modules); and
- SmartStream Procurement (Payables, Purchasing Modules).

Pilot Project

The SmartStream Financial and Human Resource System went into production in the public service in 1998 as a pilot at the Central Purchasing and Treasury Departments. The SmartStream Human Resources and Personnel modules commenced in July 1999 at the Personnel Administration Division and The Ministry of Civil Service.

Room to Grow

The SmartStream Software Package is designed to facilitate the solving of real business problems and has built-in flexible features to accommodate growth, productivity enhancements and globalisation. The product suite consists of several applications that can be implemented individually or together. This comprehensive suite of systems covers Financials, Procurement, Human Resources, Project Management and Real-Time funds Checking.

Additionally, SmartStream is an enterprise solution (client/server environment), which allows easy access and management of information by the use of a centralised database managed by Administrators and Database Managers. Connectivity to this database is through existing telecommunications infrastructure, which makes the information more readily available.

Regional Focus

To date, seven Caribbean states have selected SmartStream Financials and Human Resources application suites. The island nations of Anguilla, Dominica, Grenada, Montserrat, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines embarked on the implementation of SmartStream modules during the year 2000 as part of a collaborative effort by the OECS (Organization of Eastern Caribbean States) to reform the Eastern Caribbean Governments' administrative systems.

Benefits of SmartStream

Standardisation of many processes within accounting and human resources areas in the public service is the result of the drive for a more responsive, efficient and accountable administrative function. Given that the accounting functions within the public service are decentralised, the SmartStream Financial System has assisted in the control and management of spending practices of the public service agencies. Individual budgets within each agency are now managed in real immediate processing times by features and policies that prevent spending of monies in excess of either the voted amounts predetermined by the Annual Estimates or the finance warrants set by the Ministry of Finance.

“Real” Management Tools

Senior Accountants now have the ability to easily reconcile financial records and check the accuracy of disbursements. Previously, reconciliation of items such as payroll, pensions and expenditure was time consuming due to the amount of information within vast paper-based systems. The built-in analysis features of SmartStream facilitate comparative and trend analysis reports, with specific criteria from the store of historical financial and human resource information. This feature has improved accuracy and turnaround times on requests relating to finances and staffing, improving the overall service to internal and external customers and other stakeholders.

Security

Rules and regulations are present throughout government and the monitoring of adherence by staff is crucial. The SmartStream provides strict levels of security in all its modules. Security can be defined as the practices and procedures that ensure information is safeguarded from unauthorised access, modification or accidental change and is readily available to permitted users on request. SmartStream operates as a centralised database, whereby users are assigned the appropriate level of security to access and change information within the system pertaining specifically to their agencies. This process ensures the integrity of information. For example, transactions concerning monies and personnel can only be accomplished with the appropriate authorisation.

Accountability

The SmartStream system also facilitates the implementation and enforcement of rigorous methods of detecting irregularities through the use of policies and audit trails. An audit trail will document the path of information from entry into the system through to final output and provides enough information to reconstruct or verify an entire sequence of events through automated tracking procedures. Accountability and transparency is improved, because any changes that are being carried out in relation to funds and personnel by users can be traced at any time for further reference. This feature can also assist internal auditors in performing value for money audits in a timely and efficient manner.

Overall Improvements

The levels of coordination and support have improved, evidently by the increase in the flow of information throughout government agencies. The improved physical infrastructure of the pilot agencies has created a firm base for the development of an intranet system. Also, recent changes in legislation have facilitated electronic communication between agencies, reducing delays in the dissemination and processing of information. Another communication initiative will see the future launch of a web page on the public service intranet for the benefit of public officers. This web page will improve the dissemination and access of vital information such as the General orders, Health in the Work Place and Basic Computer “Trouble shooting Tips” for all users.

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