



Ballad Health Optimizes Capital Planning and Tracking with Syntellis' Axiom Software

Streamlining processes for system with 21 hospitals, 15,000 employees, \$2 billion in revenue and a commitment to under-served communities

In early 2018, Ballad Health was formed by the merger of Mountain States Health Alliance and Wellmont Health System, with the goal of preserving access to care in rural areas of northeast Tennessee and southwest Virginia to meet the community's healthcare needs.

Ballad Health is committed to addressing common health issues through population health initiatives. As part of the merger and the resulting commitments to state officials in Tennessee and Virginia, Ballad Health has important capital needs that must be planned, tracked, and managed appropriately.

Solving challenges

Prior to implementing Lean process improvements and Axiom™ Capital Planning and Tracking software, Ballad Health had a very complex approval process for capital projects. Approvals were slow to make their way through the system, and poor visibility into workflow queues caused



delays. Additionally, the health system's former software solution had been overly customized in an attempt to accommodate needs across the organization.

The reliance on manual processes and workflows coupled with a single system administrator left Ballad Health with inefficient, inaccurate capital planning and tracking processes. All requests were submitted offline and manually rekeyed into the system. "We had a lot of dissatisfied end users," said Kellie Simpson, vice president of finance and accounting. On the tracking side, Finance lacked the visibility to balance capital funds, so staff couldn't ensure capital funds were being used appropriately or earmark excess funds for other projects.

To prevent these challenges from getting in the way of patient care, Ballad Health leaders redesigned capital planning and tracking processes using Lean methodologies and collaboration across departments. "I can't stress



Increased accuracy of fund balancing and reallocation



Reduction in cycle time for capital requests



Improved user satisfaction and efficiency

how important it is to involve your operations team. They understand what's going on with the equipment and what the needs are in the hospitals. I really believe if we hadn't engaged the operations team, we would not have been half as successful," said Simpson.

To support this process change and implement desired automation, Ballad Health secured Syntellis' Axiom™ **Capital Planning and Tracking** software. "We first took advantage of Axiom's functionality to automate our workflow, including simultaneous approvals," said Andrea Pennington, Ballad Health's senior financial analyst, whose primary focus was streamlining the capital process.

Significant improvement in process efficiency

Ballad Health measures monthly flow-time metrics — the time it takes from initial project input until a purchase order is issued. Ballad Health's target was to decrease flow time by 66%. Axiom helped them exceed this goal by reducing total flow time from 117 days to 33 days, a 76% decrease. "We're very proud of this accomplishment," Pennington said. "We've been recognized internally with quality awards for

that time savings and for the efficiencies achieved for the organization. We also have more satisfied end users."

Ballad Health team members also spend less time on administrative functions, freeing up Finance and end users to spend more time on value-added functions. "They're working on actual project management and trying to get the most value out of the dollars they're allotted now, rather than trying to get capital projects approved," Pennington said.

Improved accuracy via reporting and funds balancing

"Our fund balancing report is something we never really had a good grasp of before," Pennington said. "We're now able to accurately track what we have in each fund." With many different funding sources, each facility gets its own pool of budgeted funds. "Now we use this report to see the amount of budgeted funds remaining per facility and how the budgeted dollars have been spent to date," Pennington said.

Additionally, Axiom supports active fund balancing and reallocation of funds at Ballad Health. "I can't stress enough the importance of reinvesting those funds back into the organization, where those dollars might otherwise have just been sitting somewhere unbeknownst to anyone," Pennington said. "Accurate capital improvement plan reporting also is critical. We're no longer digging through the general ledger trying to determine where we are in relation to large capital improvement plan projects in particular. We can pull up that tracking report for each of those capital improvement plan workbooks within Axiom and see where we are, down to the penny." Rather than trying to export data, users can now see that information on their own rather than asking Finance.



Improved user satisfaction

Self-service access to data, a simpler user interface, and reliable software has resulted in users who are “less frustrated and confused, which has been extremely beneficial to us,” Pennington said. “We’ve used our time to educate our staff and provide training.” Users are complimentary of the solution, indicating the ease of use of the system and how intuitive it is compared with their prior system.

Implementation and support expertise

Ballad Health believes the expertise and guidance team members received during the implementation process was extremely valuable. “I can’t say enough good things about our implementation consultant,” Pennington said. “He provided a solution for every business need we raised, including specific requests related to reporting and workflows, which he handled with ease. He also provided sound advice and recommendations on the best way to accomplish our end goals.”