Finance Department Strategic Plan

Framework for the Lee County Clerk of Courts, Finance Department

LEE COUNTY, FLORIDA

July 1, 2015
Updated September 15, 2021, May 31, 2023

Authored by: Terry Mallow, C.P.A., Chief Financial Control Officer

Finance Department Strategic Plan

Framework for the Lee County Clerk of Courts, Finance Department

Table of Contents

Enterprise-Wide

Overview

The Clerk of Courts is referred to as the Clerk to the Circuit Court and Ex Officio Clerk to the Board in the Florida Constitution and Statutes. This elected Office handles functions for both the State of Florida and the Board of County Commissioners. The Lee County Clerk of Courts and Comptroller Office has a focus on our customers' needs. We recognize that to improve service, we must be a learning organization that seeks continuous improvement.

Organizational Vision Statement

To be recognized as the premier model of exceptional government.

Organizational Mission Statement

To protect, preserve, and maintain the public records, public funds, and public trust.

Organizational Values

Celebrate Success - **L**ead Our Industry - **E**xcel In Service - **R**espect & Trust - **K**aizen

Organizational Goals

Five outstanding goals have been incorporated throughout the Office of the Lee County Clerk of Courts thereby are also the ultimate goals of the Finance Department.

Provide exceptional customer service, meeting our customers' needs, wherever they may be
Ensure accurate, timely and meaningful work for all of our responsibilities
Effectively perform our duties while managing cost
Recruit, train, and mentor positive and professional team members
Empower our workforce by recognizing and valuing differences

Finance Department

Overview

The Finance Department (“Finance”) is comprised of five offices and one sub-office devoted to providing mandated and necessary financial reporting and services for the Lee County Board of County Commissioners (“County”), Lee County Port Authority (“Port Authority”), Lee County Clerk of Courts (“Clerk”), and County funded portion of Lee County Court Administration (“Court Administration”), herein collectively known as the entities.

The finance functions include complete responsibility for the payroll, financial reporting, cash management, banking, investing, portfolio management, accounts payable, and fixed asset functions. In addition, Finance is also responsible for the County’s debt functions, which include; being an active part of the County’s debt issuance process; handling the debt service responsibility; ensuring continuing disclosure; ensuring compliance; and arbitrage oversight. Finance has support offices that focus on internal controls and help ensure that our main functions and responsibilities are performed properly, accurately, efficiently, and timely.

Principles

The following principles are contained in the Lee County Clerk of Courts’ *Enterprise Strategic Plan* which guides the Finance Department within the Lee County Clerk of Courts; while working cohesively with the enterprise as a whole, as well as an individual department within the agency.

- ✓ *Produce accurate and timely financial statements, financial reporting, and tax reporting for the County, Port Authority, and Clerk*
- ✓ *Pay County, Port Authority, and Clerk employees and vendors accurately and timely*
- ✓ *Safeguard financial integrity by ensuring that the County, Port Authority, and Clerk adhere to financial-related federal, state, and local laws, rules, regulations, and requirements*
- ✓ *Protect the bond /debt ratings of the County and Port Authority which secures their borrowing ability by ensuring accurate and timely debt service payments and required continuing disclosures*
- ✓ *Implement proper and effective internal controls to safeguard County, Port Authority, and Clerk assets*
- ✓ *Implement conservative and effective investing policies to ensure the County’s Investment Portfolio is managed properly with an emphasis on safety of principal*
- ✓ *Effectively perform the pre-audit function and review to ensure the proper use of public funds*
- ✓ *Employ standards that allow accurate and timely recording, maintenance, and retrieval of all non-court data and records, including the Official Records*

Values

1. **We act with integrity.** As guardians of public funds, we uphold the highest ethical and professional standards.
2. **We strive for excellence.** Our high standards promote operational excellence and are integral to realizing our goal to provide exceptional products and services.
3. **We work as a team.** The value we place on our different experiences and perspectives creates a collaborative spirit that enables us to produce outstanding results.
4. **We lead with vision.** As stewards of public funds, we understand that due diligence measures are crucial.
5. **We think creatively.** We thoughtfully question established practices as we work to strengthen internal controls and find efficiencies.

Run, Grow, Transform!

Our visions do not often change, typically only to accommodate our missions. Directives from the Clerk are incorporated into our goals and consequently our tangible objectives. Our goals and tangible objectives can overlap into multiple Enterprise Strategies thereby can simultaneously be a component of running the organization while also being part of the growth and transforming strategies.

Vision, Mission, Goals, and Objectives

A **Vision** is what we pursue.

A **Mission** is our purpose and what we want to accomplish.

A **Goal** is the approach we take to realize our mission.

A **Tangible Objective** is a measurable step we take to achieve a goal.

Vision Statement

To possess optimal awareness, skills, knowledge, and ability to successfully realize our mission.

Mission Statement

To provide assurance as to the proper accountability for, and prudent use of, public funds while adhering to the highest professional and ethical standards.

GOALS	**ENSURE BUSINESS CONTINUITY**	**MAINTAIN A HIGH LEVEL OF QUALITY CONTROL**	**COLLABORATE AND COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY**
TANGIBLE OBJECTIVES	**Employ a Robust Cross-Training and Succession Plan** Adhere to a 'three deep' coverage strategy and viable succession plan	**Adhere to a System of Strong Internal Controls** Routinely test, evaluate, and improve existing internal controls	**Share Information** Effectively and timely share information to applicable persons
	Continue to Improve Our Electronic Environment Continue to move towards an efficient and effective paperless environment	**Employ Suitable Resources** Screen new employees thoroughly, develop minimum standards, and cultivate underutilized talents	**Hold Constructive Planning Meetings** Focus on effective plans to accomplish goals
	Employ an Effective Disaster Recovery Plan Routinely update and test feasible disaster recovery and business continuity plans	**Cultivate Knowledge** Utilize a proper training program, maintain effective procedures, and develop expert knowledge	**Encourage Creativity** Provide an open work environment to encourage creative ideas and thinking 'outside the box'

Offices

General Accounting Office

Overview

The General Accounting Office ("General Accounting") is responsible for a comprehensive system of accounting and internal controls. They prepare all of the financial and tax reporting for the entities. In addition, the Accounting Systems Area is a sub-office with-in General Accounting and the two are interlinked.

The accounting team must routinely interpret and implement applicable new or revised accounting pronouncements, Florida Statutes, Florida Law, Florida Administrative Codes, Rules of the Auditor General, IRS Rules and Regulations, regulations set by the Municipal Securities Rulemaking Board ("MSRB"), County Administrative Codes, County Ordinances, County Resolutions, and any other applicable Federal, State, or County laws and regulations.

General Accounting provides the final examination for the financial information of the entities. This office monitors their budget and financial transactions for accuracy and proper accounting treatment, records and tracks fixed assets inventory for the County, Port Authority, and all the Constitutional Offices (except for the Sheriff). This office reads all the County's debt documents for new money bond issues, refunded bond issues, loans, and commercial paper. They are also responsible for continuing disclosure, debt compliance, and prepare and monitor IRS arbitrage calculations and reporting. In addition, they reconcile all the bank accounts for the entities.

General Accounting prepares various financial reports including those related to bond compliance; federal and state tax returns; audited financial statements; state financial reports; various interim financial reports; and various state and granting agency reports. Reports that they prepare, while not a complete listing, include: Lee County Comprehensive Annual Financial Report; Lee County Port Authority Component Unit Report; Lee County Single Audit Report; State of Florida Annual Local Government Financial Report; State of Florida Solid Waste Management Facility Letter from Chief Financial Officer to Demonstrate Financial Assurance; Auditor General Local Governmental Entity Audit Report; Statement of County Funded Court Related Functions; Continuing Disclosures filed with the MSRB; Department of Environmental Protection Petroleum Report; Annual Certification for State Revolving Loans; Commercial Paper Report; Local Highway Finance Report; Lee County Leasing Corporation Federal and State Tax Returns; the monthly Financial Report to the Board of County Commissioners; Sales Tax Reporting; Clerk's Special Purpose Financial Statements; Clerk's Annual Budget; and the Clerk of Courts Expenditure and Collection Report.

General Accounting utilizes electronic information sharing where possible. General Accounting is consistently awarded the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Finance Reporting. The Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting is presented by the Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada to government units and public employee retirement systems whose comprehensive annual financial reports achieve the highest standards in government accounting and financial reporting.

The Accounting Systems team has high focus on Finance's internal controls and takes a primary and active role with any of our software conversions, upgrades, implementations, and requirements. The analysts provide user support for the software programs used by all offices with-in the Finance Department. The team troubleshoots issues and translates between our Department of Innovation and Technology personnel and the users. In addition, the team assists with documenting procedures to implement proper controls and train users on new software, enhancements and changes to workflow processes.

Vision Statement

To improve efficiency and transparency while producing reliable financial information by employing competent professionals who are innovative, resourceful, collaborative, and committed to integrity and excellence.

Mission Statement

To provide accurate and timely financial information for use by both public and private entities and ensure compliance with prescribed deadlines, rules, and regulations.

GOALS	PROVIDE SUPERIOR CUSTOMER SERVICE	PROVIDE ACCURATE, TIMELY, AND RELEVANT REPORTING	ENSURE ACCOUNTABILITY AND ASSURANCE
TANGIBLE OBJECTIVES	**Provide Accurate Information** Actively pursue information between departments to ensure accuracy of data	**Ensure Timeliness** Implement any changes in reporting structure as soon as feasibly possible	**Adhere to a System of Strong Internal Controls** Routinely test, evaluate, and improve existing controls
	Ensure Compliance Verify authority and practice of operations to ensure compliance	**Ensure Accuracy** Continually verify authority and data	**Cultivate Knowledge** Utilize an effective training program with updated procedures
	Provide Transparency Gather and present information in the most transparent and comprehensive manner possible	**Ensure Compliance** Maintain a schedule of reporting requirements that meets or exceeds directive authority	**Share Information and Collaborate Effectively** Maintain an open work environment so that information flows easily

Cash Management and Investments Office

Overview

The Cash Management and Investment Office ("CMI") is responsible for all aspects of the cash management functions for the entities, which includes managing their daily cash flow movements and needs. CMI continually evaluates the entities investment portfolio's short term and long term positions to determine proper cash movement and placement. In order to make proper investing decisions, CMI closely monitors the financial markets to develop appropriate investment strategies.

CMI effectively manages the County's approximate $2+ billion (average balance) cash and investment portfolio. On a weekly basis, CMI analyzes the portfolio's composition to allow proper coverage of the known cash needs of the entities. Based on our current investment strategy, CMI will contact multiple brokers to secure the purchase of fixed income securities and bring these bids, as well as current investment information, to weekly investment meetings for the Investment Committee to evaluate and vote on. CMI maintains the broker relationships and ensures primary broker/dealer status to remain on our current participation list. As part of their oversight, CMI values security collateral weekly and annually marks-to-market fixed income investments.

CMI created and routinely updates the County's Investment Policy whose primary objective is to ensure the safety of principal. Each investment transaction first seeks to ensure that capital losses are avoided, whether from security defaults or erosion of market value. To accomplish this, while also minimizing credit and investment rate risks, the Investment Policy is structured to restrict investment options and requires diversification.

This office also overseas all banking functions and maintains the banking relationships, including periodically negotiating the banking contract. To ensure protection of public funds, CMI evaluates and implements antifraud products/options, such as positive pay. CMI manages and reconciles the investment accounts and handles all banking-related paperwork and reporting, including submitting the Public Depositor Annual Report to the Chief Financial Officer.

Furthermore, CMI manages daily cash management work papers waterfall, prepares daily wires, records all revenues, and confirms that all funds have cash and budget availability to allow payments and/or posting of all transactions. In addition, they process the County's interfund loans, manage the petty cash and change funds, and perform the Clerk's accounts receivable function.

Vision Statement

To be accessible, inclusive, and continuity striving to find ways to improve performance and services.

Mission Statement

To provide a product/service completed timely and accurately with efficiency.

GOALS	**ENSURE BUSINESS CONTINUITY**	**PROVIDE ACCURATE, TIMELY, AND RELEVANT REPORTING**	**COLLABORATE AND COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY**
TANGIBLE OBJECTIVES	**Employ a Robust Cross-Training Plan** Employ a ‘three deep’ coverage strategy	**Maintain and Follow Strong Internal Controls** Routinely test and analyze existing controls	**Share Information and Communicate Effectively** Embrace and employ open communication
	Continue to Improve Our Electronic Environment Continue to move towards an efficient and effective paperless environment	**Properly Train Resources** Utilize a proper training program and maintain effective, updated procedures	**Hold Constructive Planning Meetings** Routinely hold team meetings to create ideas and plans to accomplish goals
	Employ an Effective Disaster Recovery Plan Routinely update and test feasible disaster recovery and business continuity plans	**Cultivate Knowledge** Develop underutilized skills in current staff	**Encourage Creativity** Encourage new and creative ideas

Payroll Office

Overview

The Payroll Office ("Payroll") is responsible for the accurate and timely payroll processing for employees within the entities. Each of the four pay companies has their own policies, leave accruals, and unique requirements. The County has two unions in their Public Safety Department and the Port Authority has two unions in their Fire Department. This brings the total up to nine different policy manuals that the Payroll team must understand and apply.

Payroll performs the pre-audit function by verifying all time and attendance submissions are authorized to be paid and processes a minimum of two payrolls a week using a bi-weekly cycle for all companies. During week one, the Port Authority and Court Administration are processed. During week two, the Clerk of Courts and the County are processed. Voids and manual (out of cycle) payments are also routinely processed in any given week, which must go through the whole payroll process.

The payroll process involves making accurate, timely monetary and reporting submissions to the United States Department of Treasury, IRS, Florida Retirement System ("FRS"), Florida Department of Revenue, and applicable credit unions, deferred compensation organizations, payroll-related vendors, and court-mandated payments. Also required is maintaining a permanent record of earnings, retirement benefits and deductions for employees. In addition, Payroll is responsible for testing existing internal controls to identify control weaknesses and analyzes the need for additional internal controls. Moreover, Payroll must follow and know applicable State Statutes, IRS regulations, applicable Federal and State reporting requirements, FRS regulations and requirements, County Administrative Codes, and each company's Employee Manual and guidelines.

In addition to payroll processing, this office is responsible for numerous voluntary and involuntary deductions, the proper application of the various payroll taxes, the quarterly 941 Reports, Unemployment Compensation reporting, and monthly FRS contributions. The Payroll team continuously processes employee changes (address, bank, pay, department, deductions, etc.) that need to be updated and verified prior to the following payroll after receipt; thereby much time is devoted to maintaining employee payroll information and records. Payroll works closely with the applicable Company's Human Resources, County Benefits Department and Clerk's Department of Innovation and Technology to ensure a smooth experience for all employees from "new hire" to "retirement."

The strategic plan of the payroll department including security and integrity of employee and company data, automation and verifying of data entry vs. manual entry, business continuity and improved customer service. Payroll has many protocols to protect sensitive data of the employees such as direct deposit information, social security numbers and personal data. As a step to improve customer service to the employees, the department is working towards enhanced self-service options such as W4 and Direct Deposit changes and improvement access to payroll data and W2s while maintaining integrity and security priorities. Over the years, Payroll has processed mass updates through individual manual data entry. Processes have improved to allow automated mass entries with verification of data which has allowed for more timely and efficient large changes such as annual COLA increases. Payroll is continually working to plan for business continuity for any and all potential disasters.

Vision Statement

To provide a cost effective delivery of excellent customer service to employees via a highly trained staff and the use of technology and paperless initiatives.

Mission Statement

To provide employees with the accurate and timely handling of their wages, deductions, and benefits, while maintaining outstanding customer service and security/integrity of personal data.

GOALS	**ENSURE BUSINESS CONTINUITY**	**ENSURE ACCURACY AND TIMELINESS**	**EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT**
TANGIBLE OBJECTIVES	**Employ a Robust Cross-Training and Succession Plan** Adhere to a 'three deep' coverage strategy for all functions	**Ensure Timeliness** Employ proper measures to ensure timely completion of all tasks	**Cultivate Knowledge** Utilize a comprehensive training program
	Continue to Improve Our Electronic Environment Embrace technology, working remotely, and paperless initiatives	**Ensure Proper Verification** Employ proper measures to ensure proper verification of all information	**Hold Constructive Planning Meetings** Routinely hold meetings to be able to properly execute plans
	Employ an Effective Disaster Recovery Plan Maintain strong disaster recovery and business continuity plans	**Ensure Accuracy** Maintain and adhere to strong pre and post audit policies and procedures	**Encourage Creativity** Embrace new ideas and suggestions

Accounts Payable Office

Overview

The Accounts Payable Office (“Accounts Payable”) handles the vendor payments and corresponding 1099 reporting to the Internal Revenue Service (“IRS”) on behalf of the entities. Accounts Payable is responsible for the pre-audit function of all payment requests made by vendors providing goods and services to the entities, paying vendor and contract invoices, tracking payments according to the entities’ contracts, withholding and balancing contract retainage, and reconciling monthly vendor statements to invoices paid. Invoices are monitored for accuracy and compliance with vendor quotes and contracts, County Ordinances, County Administrative Codes, Florida Statutes, and Federal law.

The Accounts Payable staff must be knowledgeable of:

- Applicable State Statutes, IRS regulations, County Administrative Codes, and relevant legal opinions
- Each entities’ purchasing manuals and guidelines
- The Florida Uniform Accounting System object code listing
- Familiarity with the entities’ offices and departments

Except for the check writing process, Accounts Payable operates in a paperless environment, utilizing a document imaging software with workflow to move the image throughout the entities’ offices rather than paper. Most Accounts Payable clerks work from home for the majority of the month utilizing remote desktops and images of invoices, statements and contracts. This office also encourages vendors to utilize ACH (Automatic Clearing House) to avoid issuing paper checks. The paperless environment is crucial for business continuity and disaster recovery since it enables the Accounts Payable team to work from anywhere there is an internet connection available.

Accounts Payable adheres to strict deadlines and must follow the Prompt Payment Act mandated by Chapter 218, *Florida Statutes,* which, as the name suggests, sets the requirements for prompt payments. Once received in our office, the invoice is filtered to the appropriate persons for verification, approval, processing, and payment.

Vision Statement

To be recognized as a role model for following the highest of Governmental Accounts Payable practices.

Mission Statement

To diligently adhere to all applicable laws, policies and guidelines to ensure our vendors are paid timely and accurately while providing a high level of professional service.

GOALS	**ENSURE BUSINESS CONTINUITY**	**ENSURE ACCURACY AND TIMELINESS**	**COLLABORATE AND COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY**
TANGIBLE OBJECTIVES	**Employ a Robust Cross-Training and Succession Plan** Adhere to a 'three deep' coverage strategy	**Adhere to a System of Strong Internal Controls** Maintain and adhere to strong pre-audit policies and procedures	**Share Information** Effectively share information
	Continue to Improve Our Electronic Environment Continue to move towards an efficient and effective paperless environment	**Employ Suitable Resources** Screen new employees thoroughly and maximize talents in existing employees	**Hold Constructive Planning Meetings** Routinely hold meetings to discuss strategies to meet goals
	Employ an Effective Disaster Recovery Plan Keep disaster recovery plans and workflow procedures current	**Cultivate Knowledge** Employ a comprehensive training program with an emphasis on detail	**Encourage Creativity** Encourage creative thinking

Finance Operations Support Office

Overview

The Finance Operations Support Office performs essential functions to support the Finance production offices. The team works to achieve a paperless environment and is the start of the extensive pre-audit responsibility for the accurate and timely payment of vendor invoices for the entities.

Vision Statement

To optimize efficiencies with the use of technology and effective processes.

Mission Statement

To provide timely fiscal and clerical support in order to promote accuracy and transparency.

GOALS	**ENSURE BUSINESS CONTINUITY**	**PROVIDE SUPPORT**	**COLLABORATE AND COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY**
TANGIBLE OBJECTIVES	**Employ a Robust Cross-Training and Succession Plan** Adhere to a 'three deep' coverage strategy and viable succession plan	**Digitize Documents** Accurately and timely scan and index paper documents for electronic routing	**Share Information** Effectively and timely share information to applicable persons
	Continue to Improve Our Electronic Environment Continue to move towards an efficient and effective paperless environment	**Provide Effective Administration Functions** Efficiently provide administrative functions to help the Finance Offices to run smoothly and effectively	**Ensure a Proper 'Global' Understanding** Properly communicate understanding of purpose, tasks, and relationship between departments
	Employ an Effective Disaster Recovery Plan Routinely update and test feasible disaster recovery and business continuity plans	**Provide Assistance to the Public and External Customers** Assist visitors and callers to reach the intended person(s)	**Encourage Creativity** Provide an open work environment to encourage creative ideas and thinking 'outside the box'