

Graham Construction and Engineering

Kelowna and Vernon Hospital Expansion



COMPANY FACTS

- Headquartered in Calgary, Alberta, Canada
- Canada's fourth largest construction company
- General contracting, project management, design-build, and construction
- Projects totaling US\$2.5 billion
- 100% employee-owned

“On large projects, the amount of communication is massive. To be successful, we need to control the flow of information and track how each document is handled.”

—Eric Willden
Director of Major Healthcare Facilities,
Graham Construction and Engineering

BENEFIT HIGHLIGHTS

Mitigating risk

- Neutral platform increased adoption by all parties
- Dramatically reduced risk of disputes and litigation
- Streamlined information flow to eliminate communication gaps
- Enforced process steps to ensure compliance with contractual obligations

Maximizing return

- Significantly reduced costs of managing documentation
- Boosted productivity by targeting distribution of information
- Improved ability to adapt to project changes
- Enabled growth in capacity with existing staff

Complex communications create roadblocks

At Graham Construction and Engineering, Canada's fourth largest construction company, email had become the de facto document management platform as it is in many other organizations. But the sheer volume of messages was overwhelming the staff. For example, the project director for hospital construction received 13,000 emails in one month, with 600 in one day alone—an unmanageable amount for any individual.

In addition, on large, multi-party projects, there were up to 42 staff members dedicated to the project, which complicated the flow of communications. Even so, the right information didn't always get to the right people at the right time. More importantly, it was difficult to ensure that the right actions were always taken in a timely manner.

Graham is growing its business by taking on larger infrastructure projects. But larger projects mean higher complexity in terms of people, communication processes, and paper. Without a strong collaboration solution, communications bottlenecks would continue, and process inefficiencies could escalate risk, and cause schedule delays.

Collaboration on a massive scale

In a significant win, Graham had been awarded the US\$432 million expansion of the Kelowna and Vernon Hospitals in British Columbia, the province's largest public-private partnership (PPP) hospital development to date. They well understood that risk was high in a PPP due to the large numbers of stakeholders, huge amounts of documentation, extremely tight timelines, strict regulations and intense scrutiny, and financial penalties related to delays or compliance issues.

Typically, these projects required a host of support personnel including document controllers and administrative assistants who prepared, delivered, and tracked documents. In addition, an enormous amount of correspondence was going to be exchanged and logged for the record.

Graham executives knew that they couldn't rely on email for collaboration between the stakeholders on this massive project because there was no way to ensure that participants had actually received and read the communications sent to them or to know if they had taken the required action. The company had used Microsoft® SharePoint® for sharing files between team members, but knew that it alone wouldn't be sufficient for managing information on a PPP project because it didn't offer construction-specific capabilities to control process flows or enforce compliance.

Graham wanted an online collaboration platform that would efficiently capture all information related to the project while enabling them to reduce risk by controlling the flow of documents between participants and driving the appropriate actions to achieve compliance with required workflows. Management via a neutral third party was also needed to ensure levels of confidentiality and security that would encourage all stakeholders to participate more fully in the online communication flow.



An expert partner and proven solution

Graham's first criterion for a collaboration solution was that it be absolutely secure and operated by a neutral third-party provider. Because of the strong commitment of Aconex to protecting the information rights of all participants, project stakeholders found they could trust the system with even their most sensitive documents. In addition, everything was backed up in a secure secondary data center to protect against loss. The system effectively maintains a real-time electronic record that cannot be deleted—providing a single source of truth for dealing with defects and resolving potential disputes. Graham was also impressed with the ability of Aconex to transfer virtually unlimited amounts of data at high speeds. Documents could be delivered to individuals immediately, with notifications sent along the chain of command so that each responsible party could track the resulting actions.

In order to reduce complexity and ensure the highest usage possible, Graham also wanted a solution that was easily tailored to fit their project workflows. They appreciated the fact that the Aconex platform incorporates best practices from thousands of multi-party construction projects worldwide. And because of the project director's experience with Aconex on previous projects, he knew they could handle even the most complex PPP communication paths.

In terms of support, Aconex was responsive and proactive to a degree Graham had never before experienced from a solutions provider. The Aconex team worked closely with Graham to adapt the robust and configurable workflows module to align with Graham's processes and quickly made Graham employees and partners comfortable with the new solution through unlimited free training sessions. Aconex even monitored usage during the course of the project and performed regular project health checks—at no charge—to ensure all project stakeholders were actively using the system. These health checks even brought important process compliance issues to the attention of Graham's project director, who then intervened to resolve them before they escalated.

“When we can control the schedule, we can control our costs. Aconex delivers the right information exactly when and where we need it, and drives a timely response. It has become a critical tool for reducing our timeframes, which is a key competitive advantage in this industry.”

–Eric Willden, Director of Major Healthcare Facilities, Graham Construction and Engineering

Driving excellence for competitive advantage

With Aconex, all stakeholders receive instant notification when documents are available and have been processed by responsible parties according to the mandated workflow. Using the system as a “process watchdog,” document controllers and project assistants can more efficiently track the progress of critical documents and correspondence, quickly identifying and resolving any roadblocks. They can drive accountability without actually dealing with content that isn't intended for their review, which frees them up to focus on higher-value tasks.

After the system went into production, the project director for hospital construction saw his email inbox volume drop from 600 to two or three messages per day. Instead of trying to manage correspondence, he was free to focus on ensuring compliance and keeping the project on schedule. In fact, he and his team can now take on more work and more accurately assign production resources to handle bigger and more complex projects.

At the same time, transparency is higher within teams who need full visibility to each other's work. All sensitive documents are kept completely confidential until they're ready to be published, regardless of where they originate. This has driven adoption rates for the Aconex system to the highest levels across the entire project.

Because Aconex has clearly demonstrated its value in PPP settings, Graham will be looking to use this system for future complex contracts. And on a larger scale, the cost and time savings delivered through Aconex have created a competitive advantage for Graham that will help sustain the future growth of the company. According to Eric Willden, Graham's Director of Major Healthcare Facilities, “Integrity, commitment, and reliability are the basic cornerstones of our business. Aconex gives us a competitive advantage by making it possible for us to do the job better, faster, and more accurately.”