

THE REAL VALUE OF TRUST BETWEEN THE CIO AND THE CONSULTANT

Case Study

The George Washington University (GW) is one of the world's premier educational institutions. Located in the heart of Washington, D.C., GW offers a curriculum that is at the core of American government, policy and law, and at the convergence of the worlds of science, technology, media and the arts. In an effort to continue to attract and retain top students, GW strives to improve its reputation as a research institution, while continuing to leverage its capabilities, assets and partnerships for the greatest benefit to the community. Core to the strategy is a long-term plan of strengthening the GW infrastructure, including technology.

THE CHALLENGE

In an effort to meet these goals, GW's Information Systems and Services (ISS) needed to define a long-term vision for the technology future of the university. Led by CIO Ron Bonig, ISS developed a plan to deliver new and expanded technologies and create top-performing business and service operations to support GW's academic excellence. The team is an integral part of every business improvement initiative at GW.

As in most IT organizations, Bonig faces a variety of challenges on any given project: multiple sponsors across multiple business units; a myriad of siloed initiatives; a multitude of suppliers; and an ever-changing technology landscape. Combine those challenges within an academic environment, and additional issues arise. Some projects require 40+ stakeholders to support a common solution, in part because educators tend to be "consensus driven."

As a result, the university sought a consulting partner that could help them navigate the many business initiatives on the radar while systematically addressing internal stakeholders.

THE CLIENT:

The George Washington University (GW), one of the world's premier educational institutions.

THE CHALLENGE:

An academic organization faces multiple IT challenges with a broad scope of stakeholders, fragmented business units, and a consensus-driven environment.

THE SOLUTION:

Developing a strategic partnership with consulting firm North Highland was necessary for GW to fulfill its IT vision.

THE VALUE:

After more than 20 projects, North Highland and GW have developed a trusting partnership that has resulted in an improved student experience, improved/expanded reputation, increased applications, and ultimately, a higher caliber of incoming student.

THE SOLUTION

It became apparent that substituting vendors for every initiative based on skill or price would no longer meet GW's long-term strategic objectives in its complex environment. GW executives understood that real success includes establishing a solid relationship with one consultant of choice, North Highland. GW's relationship with North Highland grew over time, and the successful working relationship may be credited to three key tenets:

KNOW OUR BUSINESS AND LIVE OUR CULTURE

While many consulting firms have demonstrated the ability to understand the day-to-day operations of educational systems, North Highland's approach is one that is proven by walking the halls of GW and learning the organization, inside and out. Rather than staffing a project with a rotating team of consultants, North Highland has a long history of being engaged across a number of GW's departments. Consultants live in the DC area and are back the next week to help fulfill long-term goals. Furthermore, the North Highland team shares similar values and work ethic with GW and blends with GW's organization, building upon its strengths. Per Bonig, "North Highland operates as if it were a group I hired specifically for my organization, with a leadership team I can trust. It holds itself to the same measures I apply to any part of my organization."

EXPERTISE IS A MUST

North Highland has successfully executed a variety of projects at GW, and this ability to deliver repeatedly on expectations requires a deep expertise in program management. Some projects required deep technical knowledge, while others required a stronger functional expertise. All, however, require the ability to deliver and implement the program for GW.

BE WILLING TO CROSS-POLLINATE

North Highland not only shared tactical knowledge and research from other industries, but also provided coaching and training for GW's employees. North Highland coached IT executives on best practices in the area of project and program management, team building and communications, strategic and tactical planning, and performance management. And, by staffing teams with a hybrid of both GW and North Highland resources, GW developed core project management capabilities. "They help other people develop new ideas rather than merely offering 'standardized' solutions," says Bonig.

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RON BONIG

Chief Information Officer,
The George Washington
University

THE VALUE

North Highland has helped GW execute more than 20 successful IT projects over the course of four years. As such, GW now looks to North Highland as a trusted business advisor with sound business decisions. Leveraging North Highland as a consulting partner allows GW's ISS team to offer increased student services and responsiveness to business partners. This results in an improved student experience, improved/expanded reputation, increased applications, and ultimately, a higher caliber of incoming student.

ABOUT NORTH HIGHLAND

North Highland is a global management consulting firm that delivers unique value, relevant big ideas and strategic business capabilities to clients around the world. The firm solves complex business problems for clients in multiple industries through an integrated approach and offers specialty services via its Data and Analytics, Managed Services, and Sparks Grove divisions. North Highland is an employee-owned firm that has been named as a "Best Firm to Work For" every year since 2007 by Consulting Magazine. The firm is a member of Cordence Worldwide (www.cordenceworldwide.com), a global management consulting alliance. For more information, visit northhighland.com and connect with us on [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).