Digital Agreements Help California Agencies Conserve Statewide Natural Resources and Protect Water Delivery

Made up of about 20,000+ employees, the California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA) is the parent agency to 26 distinct departments, conservancies and commissions. CNRA is dedicated to the restoration, protection and maintenance of the Golden State’s natural, historical and cultural resources. Within CNRA is the Department of Water Resources (DWR), which protects, conserves, develops and manages California’s resources and runs one of the nation’s largest state-built water delivery systems.

“As in most government entities, the department was undergoing digital transformation efforts to become more efficient and effective in delivering services” said Kevin See, the Deputy CIO for DWR. See is leading digital transformation efforts across the department’s business operations, including its human resources, fiscal, information technology and business services. They chose DocuSign to help DWR navigate this initial transformation and then scale to an agency-wide switch to digital agreements and better interoperability between departments.

The first, fruitful steps toward digital agreements

The agency wanted to make changes that could transform its workflows and resource usage to be as cost-effective and speedy as possible. “The business had started saying, ‘we need this technology, and we need it now,’” See says.

DWR became an incubator for DocuSign’s solutions. The department adopted eSignature first and used it to streamline one particularly complex use case: the procurement process for DWR’s purchasing contracts.

Historically, these documents were error-prone, costly to ship and took weeks or months to get signed and returned. But with DocuSign, contracts were delivered electronically, cutting hard paper costs by 75% and reducing turnaround time: “DocuSign in many cases reduced this timeframe to less than a couple of minutes for a contract signing ceremony to be completed,” according to See.

The process of filling out purchasing contracts became more intuitive: Before sending, DocuSign allows DWR to specify required fields and tag users in important sections, making incorrect data entry less likely. And, because DocuSign removed the need for paper and ink, DWR’s environmental impact was reduced.

Results

| 1 minute | Contract approval time |
| 75% | Reduction in hard paper costs |
| 800% | Increase in DocuSign usage |
| 570 | pieces of paper saved per month |
| 70% | of MSA documents signed and returned the same day |

“The business had started saying, ‘we need this technology, and we need it now.’ Back then, before we had DocuSign, our contract approval would take two to four weeks to get a contract signed. Now it’s a matter of minutes.”

Kevin See
Deputy CIO
Department of Water Resources, State of California
The beginning of an agency-wide switch to digital solutions

After this first successful integration of DocuSign eSignature, DWR wanted to implement wider changes. They had intended to expand their DocuSign usage to the entire department, but due to the scope of this endeavor, they needed to build a scalable process.

See and his team called upon DocuSign’s Customer Success team to help establish a center of excellence (COE)—a centralized group to drive adoption across multiple DWR departments—and gain executive sponsorship for the projects. With its COE in place, DWR then provisioned all 3500+ employees with DocuSign accounts and began rolling out new use cases in other departments.

For example, the department’s human resources staff needed a digital solution to manage the distribution of merit salary adjustment (MSA) certifications. Prior to DocuSign, DWR’s HR team had to send and track 125 of these paper forms, which are used to determine pay increases, to different administrative offices at the agency every month. From there, the forms were re-routed to employees’ supervisors, filled out, and returned to the HR office. This process was time-consuming and complicated.

DocuSign added speed and clarity: The department used DocuSign’s Bulk Send feature for mass envelope sending and customization, and the Reminder and Notifications feature to prompt supervisors to complete or return forms before the deadline. With the Advanced Workflow feature, MSA certifications were sent to administrative offices and supervisors simultaneously, which enabled offices to redirect forms if an employee has a new supervisor or if their current one is unavailable. And then, once the certification is signed, DocuSign automatically delivers a completed copy to their electronic records management system. With DocuSign, the department’s HR team saves about 570 pieces of paper per month. In fact, over 70% of the MSA documents are signed and returned on the same day they are sent out.
Adding digital solutions—and using them to overcome the COVID-19 crisis

DWR’s partnership with DocuSign’s Customer Success team became especially crucial in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The team set up change management processes for the department’s switch to remote work. They digitized crucial paperwork like the emergency telework request form within 24 hours and, in a matter of days, converted the entire department to use the DocuSign platform for all documents that required signatures.

As a result, adoption has skyrocketed: The department’s use of DocuSign has increased by 800%, and in April alone, employees sent more than 19,000 digital forms.

For departments like DWR, the pandemic accelerated its ongoing digital transformation efforts to become a digital enterprise. With DocuSign, DWR was able to more easily manage this crisis—and is now primed to handle future transformation initiatives. In fact, the department has also integrated DocuSign’s Guided Forms powered by SmartIQ, which provides a step-by-step process for filling out complex forms by adapting questions based on previous answers. Part of the DocuSign Agreement Cloud, this solution has automated many of the department’s most frequently used forms, including its ten-part workers compensation claim form and its appraisal and development forms. “In the past, it would have taken six to twelve months to create custom, digital forms. But with DocuSign’s Guided Forms powered by SmartIQ product, we had the ability to implement a digital form in a matter of weeks,” See says.

Looking forward, the department plans to continue deploying DocuSign’s digital solutions and using the Customer Success partnership to provide both strategic and technical guidance, enable new users, drive adoption and manage future change.

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