

Bill.com Enables this Non-Profit to Build Better Relationships with its Local Chapters and Save Thousands of Dollars a Month



Joshua Caulfield
CEO
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Architecture is widely regarded as one of the toughest college degrees. Architecture students don't have a lot of time for any sort of paperwork, outside of their books and blueprints. They especially don't have time to chase paper checks around their dorm room, as Joshua Caulfield, IOM, quickly discovered.

Caulfield is the CEO of the American Institute of Architecture Students, a 7,000-member nonprofit organization with a full-time staff of just three. When he started, three years ago, one of the first things he did was create an online application form for new and renewing membership.

The process worked this way: members would sign up online and pay their dues to the national office, then the national office would send the local student-run chapters a paper check for their share of the dues. All told, AIAS was writing around 150 checks a month.

Sounds simple. But the system depended entirely on those time-squeezed architecture students to actually cash the checks.

"Here's what happened before Bill.com," Caulfield explains. "We'd send the local chapter a check. They'd get it in their student mailbox. Then it would sit on their desk in their dorm room. Then they'd put a bunch of books or papers on top of it. Then three weeks later they'd find it and put it on the shelf with the intention of depositing it right away. Then four weeks later they'd find it behind a book on the shelf. Then they'd put it in their bag. Then, four months later, they'd call me up saying they had this check that was no longer valid."

No accounting process is built—or rebuilt—in a day. But Bill.com fixed the AIAS system practically overnight.

With Bill.com, Caulfield simply collects bank account details from each local chapter and adds each as a vendor. Now he deposits each chapter's portion of the dues directly in the chapter's account. It's all done online. There are no paper checks buried in books on a desk or a shelf.

Bill.com saves time for the students because they don't have to go to the bank to deposit their AIAS checks. It saves time for Caulfield

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and his staff of three because they don’t have to spend hours every month stuffing envelopes, sticking stamps and sending out payments.

And it has greatly improved the relationship between Caulfield and his local chapter heads. “The chapters in the past would get frustrated because they’d think they hadn’t been paid—because there are 100 different ways a check can get lost,” Caulfield says. “Now I can show them we’re doing the job at the national office.”

And they’re doing it in far less time. When he was still sending paper checks to the AIAS’s 187 local chapters, Caulfield and his staff were spending eight hours a day three times a month to process the checks. Now they handle each month’s payments in less than a day.

“Bill.com is ridiculously easy to use,” Caulfield says. “We were spending 20 to 24 hours every month to process our 150 checks, plus the cost of the checks and the cost of the ink in my printer, plus postage and envelopes. Plus we were paying a bookkeeper \$65 dollars an hour.”

All those expenses have gone away, saving AIAS approximately \$750 every month.

Bill.com has also helped Caulfield streamline his days by keeping records and tracking payments for him. Bill.com sends him reminders when payments are due. It monitors outstanding checks and keeps an eye on cash flow.

“Cash flow for us can run tight, so it’s helpful for me to always know how many checks are outstanding and what my potential balance is,” Caulfield says.

When he gets a call from a local chapter wondering where its payment is, Caulfield can go to Bill.com and immediately pull up the chapter’s vendor file to check on the payment. “And I can do it from anywhere,” he says. “If we were just using QuickBooks, I’d have to be on a computer that had our QuickBooks loaded to search for a past payment. Now I can do it from anywhere, because Bill.com is in the cloud.”

Caulfield’s auditors also appreciate that searchability. When they need financial information, it’s easy for Caulfield to pull it. No more rifling file cabinets for a piece of paper.

“We perform an audit once a year,” he says. “In the past, pulling those files for auditors would take two days of onsite fieldwork. Now, going forward, I’ll be able to give them access to the system

and they won’t even have to come into the office. And that saves me those two days I spend working with the auditors pulling files for them.”

In addition to its local chapters, Caulfield has about 100 AIAS vendors that he makes payments to. Because it’s a nonprofit, the organization has a double signature requirement for checks over a certain limit, in this case \$3,000.

In the past that was a problem, since the authorized signers—the treasurer and the president—are not in the office three weeks out of four. Caulfield would approve a vendor’s paper invoice, the bookkeeper would prepare a check and then it would wait for the required signatures. Payments would often take 45 days. Now they take 48 hours.

Caulfield scans an invoice into Bill.com, schedules the payment, notifies the approvers, they cosign the check digitally, then he pays the check. The bookkeeper is no longer needed and it’s easy for the treasurer and president to access the system and sign checks wherever they are.

“Bill.com is so simple and intuitive,” Caulfield says. “It’s doing things nobody else is doing.”