



## **ADDENDUM 1**

**RFP 102-359 – Consulting Services to Implement Business Office Modernization and Transition**

May 19, 2025

### **Questions submitted and responses listed as follows:**

1. Beyond Ellucian Colleague, Etrieve, NC E-Procure, and Web Cashier, are there other integrated systems or processes (e.g., via API) within scope?

**Response:** Official Payments

2. What specific modules or functionalities of these systems are currently in use, and what enhancements or integrations are envisioned?

**Response:** Official payments is part of the Web Cashier

3. How are these systems currently managed? Does ICC have internal personnel for workflow adjustments, or is full outsourcing expected?

**Response:** Operations are currently managed internally, led by a Controller and Assistant Controller with oversight from the VP of Operations/CFO.

4. Is ICC seeking a one-time engagement or a phased approach (e.g., 16 weeks followed by reduced quarterly support)?

**Response:** Awarded bidder should anticipate a phased approach.

5. Are there internal or political milestones we should align to beyond what's stated in the RFP?

**Response:** Such milestones are actively being identified and will be shared with the awarded bidder.

6. Can the Phase I Operations Report be shared in advance to inform proposal development?

**Response:** The Phase I Operation Report has been attached to this addendum.

7. How many staff are expected to be trained? Should we plan for in-person, virtual, or hybrid training formats?

**Response:** The staff size for trainings will be six. Trainings will need to occur in a hybrid format.

8. What is the timeline for the Controller's retirement, and how far along is ICC in succession planning?

**Response:** This transition will occur in the first half of FY26, during which time the awarded bidder will help to facilitate succession planning.

9. Is there a target or ceiling budget for services?

**Response:** The awarded bidder will be selected based on best value for services.

10. Are annual renewals anticipated, and would the scope/rate be renegotiated each year?

**Response:** Renewals beyond year one are not guaranteed at this time.

11. Will finalists be asked to present or interview live?

**Response:** Finalists will be asked to interview in-person.

12. What is the anticipated project start date and completion timeline?

**Response:** The anticipated initial timeline for services is June 2025 – June 2026.

13. How often will firms be expected to meet with leadership or the Board, and will these be onsite?

**Response:** Biweekly meetings with the VP of Operations and monthly meetings with the President are anticipated.

14. Are there required formats for deliverables, or can we propose our own?

**Response:** ICC welcomes proposed formats for deliverables.

15. Should all areas of finance operations be included in the scope (procurement, AP, student AR, budget, fixed asset, etc.)?

**Response:** Yes

16. Is payroll part of the finance office at ICC and should it be in the scope of this work?

**Response:** Payroll is currently part of the finance office, and the awarded bidder must be able to provide consultation on payroll processes.

17. Has there been any recent assessment(s) of finance operations and technology utilization, or would business process reviews be the first part of this process?

**Response:** Process review would be a key part of phase one.

18. Can you provide a copy of the Phase 1 Operations Report referenced in the Introduction section of the RFP?

**Response:** The Phase I Operation Report has been attached to this addendum.

19. On a scale from 1-10, please rate the following:

- a) Colleague customizations (**1 = baseline, 10 = significant customizations**)
- b) Utilization of Colleague (**1=several processes outside of Colleague, 10=optimized Colleague**)
- c) Documentation of processes (**1= none, 10=up-to-date policies, procedures**)
- d) Integrations (**1=few, simple, 10=many, complex**).

**Response:**

- a) Our Colleague is provided by the NCCCCS, and I understand it is very customized, so we will say 8
- b) 8
- c) 5
- d) 3

20. The RFP states that references should be from “related work performed in the last five years in North Carolina public education and/or community college environments.” Does this mean references should only be from North Carolina? The same question applies to the first bullet point in the Evaluation Criteria.

**Response:** Although North Carolina-specific experience is preferred, references are not required to only be from within the state.

21. Where did the need for the services come from?

**Response:** This need emerged with an upcoming leadership transition and business office reorganization.

22. Do you have a set budget for the project?

**Response:** Although there is no set budget, the final project budget must not exceed available funds.

23. Does management have a preference for the work to be completed remotely, on-site, or hybrid? If the work is to be completed hybrid, do you have an expectation for the amount of on-site time?

**Response:** Work will be completed in a hybrid modality with on-site visits required 1-2 times per month.

24. Has there been any significant turnover in the Business Office in the last three years? Are there any current vacancies in the Office?

**Response:** No significant turnover, but one recent retirement and an upcoming retirement (Controller).

25. Does ICC utilize a software for budgeting, financial report or forecasting?

**Response:** The College utilizes Colleague/Datatel for budget management. The awarded bidder will be responsible for implementing improved financial reporting and forecasting processes.

26. I noticed there is no pre-proposal meeting for RFP-102-359. As such, how would you suggest small businesses learn of other interested proposers to seek out partnership opportunities?

**Response:** Pre-bid conferences are permitted under the North Carolina Administrative Code, but are not mandatory. However, interested parties are encouraged to submit specific questions regarding the RFP and the College will gladly provide responses.



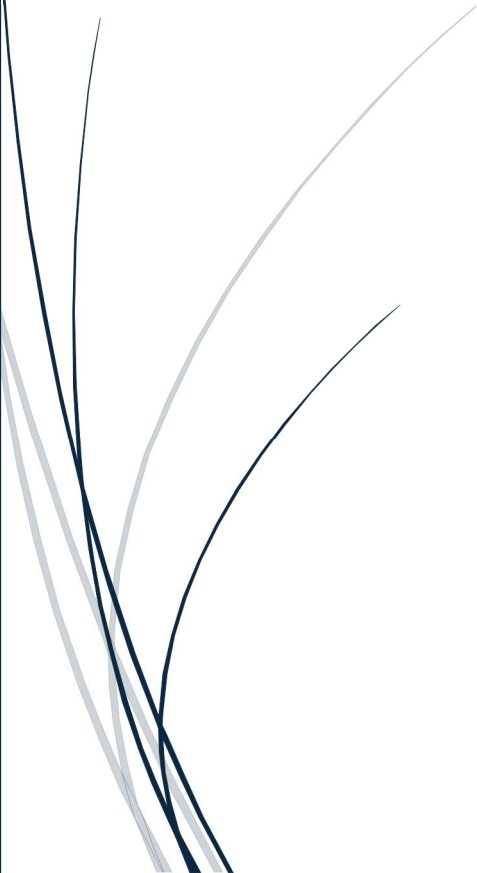
Procurement/Equipment Coordinator



5/9/2025

# Phase I Operations Study

Isothermal Community College



Prestige School Solutions  
RUTHERFORDTON, NORTH CAROLINA

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Isothermal Community College's business office is staffed by experienced professionals with a demonstrated commitment to financial integrity and compliance. Recent operational assessment procedures identified several opportunities to strengthen efficiency, reduce operational risk, and align business office functions more closely with the college's strategic goals.

The assessment focused on five key areas: process modernization, procurement redesign, internal control enhancements, personnel development, and leadership transition planning. While the business office consistently delivers on its core responsibilities, it faces several challenges including outdated manual workflows, underutilization of enterprise technologies, and communication disconnects across departments. These factors contribute to workflow inefficiencies and place pressure on a small number of individuals who currently serve as key knowledge holders within the office.

Technology platforms such as Ellucian Colleague, Etrieve, and Web Cashier are in place but not yet fully leveraged. Manual transaction cycles, spreadsheet-based reconciliations, and decentralized procurement practices were noted as opportunities for streamlining and automation. Additionally, certain internal control practices—such as check resolution processes and the timing of reconciliations—present improvement opportunities to better manage risk and enhance financial reporting.

The review also highlighted a workforce that is deeply committed and open to change, but in need of additional support, communication, and training to confidently adapt to modernization efforts. Leadership transitions present both challenges and opportunities, particularly in preserving institutional knowledge and strengthening cross-functional collaboration. The upcoming departure of a long-serving leader reinforces the need for formal succession planning and the documentation of key processes.

To address these needs, a phased transition and modernization strategy is recommended. This includes strengthening leadership development, supporting staff communication during change, increasing automation of reconciliation and reporting processes, optimizing the use of technology platforms, and investing in staff development and knowledge transfer.

Institution-wide change of this nature also requires thoughtful communication and a renewed focus on institutional culture. Strengthening trust, reinforcing shared goals, and establishing regular feedback loops will be essential. With intentional planning and the right implementation support, the business office is well positioned to evolve into a more agile, integrated, and strategically aligned contributor to institutional effectiveness.



## SECTION I: GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

### Summary

Isothermal Community College's business office has cultivated a strong foundation of compliance and operational consistency, driven by a team of experienced professionals who take pride in delivering accurate and timely financial services. Staff members are diligent and committed, particularly in areas involving regulatory compliance, daily transaction processing, and internal reporting. This foundation provides a stable platform upon which further modernization and strategic alignment can be built.

At the same time, the business office's current operating model is shaped by several legacy conditions that limit scalability and adaptability. Chief among these are continued reliance on manual, paper-based workflows, uneven use of available enterprise technology, and a high degree of operational dependency on the knowledge of a small number of individuals. These factors constrain efficiency, hinder responsiveness, and increase risk exposure, particularly during times of transition or institutional change. Communication gaps between operational and executive leadership have further contributed to a perceived misalignment in priorities, even as both groups work toward shared institutional goals.

The observations presented in this section are based on interviews with staff, direct review of processes, and assessment of technology usage across the business office. These insights highlight actionable opportunities to reduce redundancy, clarify roles, and increase institutional confidence in financial processes. With targeted investments in communication, technology, and personnel support, the business office is well-positioned to evolve into a more agile and strategically integrated unit.

### Detailed Discussion

#### *Process Optimization Opportunities*

The assessment revealed that many financial workflows within the business office, such as purchase order generation, invoice matching, and transaction approvals, continue to rely on paper-based forms and manual handoffs. While these practices have historically ensured control and audit readiness, they also create inefficiencies and introduce opportunities for delay, error, and duplication of effort. Multi-step processes often require repeated data entry, extended approval routing, and physical movement of documents, all of which contribute to slower cycle times.

Staff widely acknowledged these inefficiencies and expressed openness to adopting modern alternatives. Several team members specifically noted that the current volume of paper and manual tasks reduces their capacity to take on more strategic or analytical work. Despite this, the business office has access to enterprise systems, including Ellucian Colleague and Etrieve, that offer tools for automating many of these functions. However, adoption of these tools has been inconsistent and, in some cases, incomplete.

Addressing these process inefficiencies will require a combination of system configuration, workflow redesign, and user training. A clear implementation plan supported by change management and ongoing feedback can help shift the office toward electronic forms,

automated routing, and real-time status tracking. This, in turn, will reduce administrative burden and free up staff to focus on higher-value activities.

### *Continuity Planning and Knowledge Transfer*

One of the most pressing concerns identified in this review is the college's current dependence on the knowledge of a small number of individuals for critical financial functions. In particular, several high-frequency, high-impact tasks such as reconciliation, reporting, compliance review, and account oversight are known in detail by only one person or a very limited number of staff. While this reflects deep expertise and long-term dedication, it also poses a significant continuity risk in the event of unplanned absences, turnover, or retirement.

This risk is especially pronounced given the planned departure of a long-tenured financial leader who holds substantial institutional knowledge and handles a wide array of both routine and strategic functions. In the absence of formal documentation or cross-training, the college could experience disruption to financial operations, delays in reporting, or compliance gaps during the transition.

To mitigate these risks, the college should prioritize the creation of a succession and knowledge transfer plan that includes written documentation of critical workflows, identification of backup personnel, and structured mentorship between current and future role-holders. This effort should also include mapping out task dependencies, establishing a formal cross-training matrix, and introducing shared ownership of key responsibilities across the team. These actions will strengthen institutional resilience and allow for smoother transitions in both planned and unplanned circumstances.

### *Technology Utilization and Integration*

The college has invested in several enterprise technology platforms designed to improve efficiency, reduce paper reliance, and strengthen internal controls. These systems—including Ellucian Colleague, Etrieve, and Web Cashier—are capable of automating many core functions across procurement, accounts payable, reconciliation, and reporting. However, the full potential of these tools has not yet been realized.

In several instances, systems have been partially implemented or deployed with limited training, leading to uneven adoption and user uncertainty. For example, while Etrieve has been introduced to support electronic forms and approvals, some workflows remain paper-based due to confusion around design, usability, or routing logic. Similarly, Colleague's reconciliation and reporting functions have not been fully configured, leading to continued reliance on manual Excel-based processes.

To maximize the value of these investments, the college should revisit its rollout strategy for key platforms. This includes revising training plans, re-engaging system administrators to streamline configurations, and clearly communicating the operational benefits of digital tools. A comprehensive system optimization initiative guided by input from end users can help align technology usage with institutional goals and eliminate inefficiencies caused by fragmentation or underutilization.

### *Operational and Strategic Alignment*

The business office is highly focused on compliance, accuracy, and procedural integrity which are core strengths that have supported the institution's financial stability. However, this operational orientation has sometimes been perceived as disconnected from broader institutional strategy. Conversely, staff have expressed a desire for more visibility into campus-wide priorities and more clarity about how their work supports the college's mission and long-term goals.

At times, differences in communication styles and areas of focus have created a sense of disconnect between the business office and executive leadership. Business office staff may feel excluded from strategic discussions, while other departments may view the office's adherence to process as overly rigid or risk-averse. These perceptions are not uncommon in higher education but must be addressed to foster a more unified institutional culture.

A renewed commitment to cross-functional dialogue will be key to improving alignment. Leadership should work to create structured opportunities for collaboration between business office personnel and campus leaders, ensuring that operational perspectives are included in planning discussions and that financial guidance is delivered with both compliance and strategic outcomes in mind. Establishing shared goals, mutual expectations, and recurring touchpoints will help close the gap and reinforce the value of each unit's contributions.

### *Cross Departmental Communication*

Underlying many of the challenges outlined above is a broader theme of communication disconnect. Business office staff have expressed a desire for more consistent communication from executive leadership, particularly regarding the rationale behind changes, timelines for implementation, and expectations for staff roles. In the absence of clear messaging, employees report feeling reactive rather than proactive, and at times uncertain about their place within larger institutional initiatives.

Conversely, some campus stakeholders have shared the perception that the business office wields disproportionate influence over institutional decisions stemming not from actual overreach but from a lack of clarity around authority and decision-making roles. These dynamics, if unaddressed, can lead to misperceptions, reduced trust, and strained working relationships.

To strengthen communication and rebuild cohesion, the college should facilitate structured, recurring meetings between the business office and executive leadership. These sessions can serve as a platform for clarifying institutional priorities, coordinating timelines, and aligning expectations across departments. Equally important is the reinforcement of decision-making structures. Leadership should communicate clearly that strategic direction originates from the top and that operational decisions must flow from and support those strategic aims. Doing so will clarify roles, reduce friction, and foster a more collaborative culture across the institution.

## SECTION II: OPERATIONS

### Summary

Isothermal Community College's business office continues to demonstrate a strong commitment to compliance, stewardship, and operational reliability. Staff manage essential financial functions with care and consistency, despite working within a process environment that has not fully evolved to match the institution's technological capabilities or strategic goals. While current procedures are effective in ensuring accuracy and control, they are also heavily manual, time-consuming, and dependent on staff-driven workarounds rather than integrated system workflows.

This review identified meaningful opportunities to modernize key financial operations through the expanded use of existing enterprise systems, automation of repetitive tasks, and simplification of procedures. Improvements in reconciliation, procurement, disbursement processing, and reporting would increase overall efficiency, reduce risk, and strengthen the business office's ability to support informed decision-making. At the same time, more effective use of technology would relieve administrative burden on staff and improve alignment between financial operations and broader institutional strategy.

### Detailed Discussion

#### *Modernization of Core Business Processes*

Many core financial functions within the business office continue to rely on paper forms, spreadsheet calculations, and manual approval routing. Purchase orders, invoice approvals, bank reconciliations, and budget transactions are often completed outside of the college's ERP system, despite the availability of modules designed to automate these tasks. This reliance on manual processing requires staff to spend significant time entering data, verifying calculations, and managing hard copy documentation. As a result, the office is more vulnerable to delays, data inconsistencies, and duplicative work.

Staff expressed a willingness to transition to more modern tools, noting that existing practices limit both individual productivity and the team's overall responsiveness. Several functions that are currently performed using Excel can and should be migrated into workflow-supported environments that allow for better tracking, auditability, and real-time updates. For example, monthly bank reconciliations could be conducted within the Colleague system or an integrated platform to streamline exception handling and provide immediate visibility into outstanding items.

To implement these improvements, the college should assess which current processes can be migrated into available system functionality, identify configuration gaps, and prioritize system training that emphasizes how automation will reduce workload rather than add complexity. Adopting automated workflows and digital approvals will allow the college to strengthen internal controls while freeing up staff time for more strategic tasks.

### *Procurement Process Refinement*

The college's procurement environment includes more than twenty individual requesters initiating purchase transactions across various departments. These requests move through a four-step approval chain, which was originally designed to ensure proper oversight but has grown increasingly complex over time. While this structure protects against unauthorized purchases, it also introduces delays, inconsistencies in coding, and confusion regarding responsibility for approvals and documentation.

Several refinements are recommended to simplify the process while maintaining appropriate controls. First, the approval structure should be reviewed to determine whether certain steps can be consolidated or modified based on the value or type of purchase. Introducing approval thresholds for lower-risk transactions would allow routine purchases to move more quickly without sacrificing accountability. Second, the college should consider reducing the number of decentralized requesters by implementing a shared services model or designating trained purchasing liaisons in each department. This approach would promote consistency in coding, improve accuracy, and allow business office staff to focus on validation rather than correction.

Front-end validation within the procurement system should be enabled to catch budget code errors at the point of entry. This will eliminate the need for after-the-fact corrections and reduce the risk of misaligned financial reports. In addition, the college's travel reimbursement workflow within the Etrieve platform should be redesigned in collaboration with end users. Feedback during the assessment indicated that the current form is difficult to navigate, resulting in errors and delayed reimbursements. A revised workflow should emphasize clarity, ease of use, and compatibility with routing logic.

These changes will help streamline procurement operations, improve user satisfaction, and ensure that purchasing activities support the institution's fiscal goals and operational needs.

### *Internal Control Enhancement*

The business office has developed internal control practices that prioritize compliance and accuracy, but several areas present opportunities for increased automation and more timely intervention. A notable area for improvement involves the college's handling of outstanding checks. Reports indicated that each month, hundreds of checks remain unresolved, many of which require follow-up action. This volume complicates cash reconciliation, increases the risk of duplicate payments, and may affect compliance with state escheatment regulations.

To address this, the college should implement a process for monthly monitoring and resolution of outstanding disbursements. A staff member should be assigned responsibility for reviewing aging reports, initiating vendor contact, and determining whether checks should be voided or reissued. Any unclaimed property should be reported to the North Carolina Department of State Treasurer within the required timeframes.

Bank reconciliation practices should also be modernized. Instead of relying solely on monthly spreadsheet-based reconciliations, the college should adopt a rolling reconciliation approach that allows staff to match transactions as they post. Whether conducted within Colleague or through an integrated treasury tool, real-time reconciliation will increase accuracy and allow the institution to detect errors or irregularities more quickly.

Additionally, the college's use of positive pay to prevent check fraud should be enhanced. At present, positive pay files are submitted to the bank after check runs are completed, which reduces the system's effectiveness. A stronger control process would involve submitting check data at the point of issuance to ensure only authorized disbursements are honored. This improvement would significantly reduce exposure to check alteration, duplication, or unauthorized payment.

By implementing these enhancements, the college can modernize its internal control environment, improve financial oversight, and reduce the operational risk associated with manual monitoring processes.

### *Technology Integration and Reporting Consolidation*

The college operates a number of financial systems that are capable of supporting more integrated and automated workflows, but these tools have not yet been fully aligned. As a result, key financial data remains spread across disconnected platforms, which requires staff to perform duplicate entry, maintain multiple tracking systems, and manually compile financial reports. This fragmentation creates inefficiencies and limits leadership's ability to access timely and comprehensive information.

A strategic review of system integration opportunities is recommended. Within the Colleague ERP system, additional functionality may be available to improve transaction posting, reporting, and reconciliation. Where current modules are insufficient, the college should evaluate third-party integrations that offer stronger audit trails and more dynamic reporting tools. For example, modules that allow for automated feeds from bank accounts or interfaces that support automated data transfers between financial aid, procurement, and accounting functions would significantly improve transparency and reduce error rates.

The business office should also consider consolidating its financial reporting tools. At present, staff must gather data from multiple sources to produce budget and expenditure reports, which slows delivery and increases the likelihood of discrepancies. Implementing a centralized reporting platform or leveraging Colleague's native reporting functions more fully could allow for standard dashboards, automated updates, and clearer data visualization. These tools would help decision-makers across the college understand their financial position and make more informed choices.

Another area for review is the accounts receivable environment. Interviews revealed that some departments are using separate systems to manage receivables and collections. Where feasible, these functions should be consolidated within a unified system to ensure consistency in invoicing, payment tracking, and reconciliation. Consolidation will also reduce the burden on staff who currently reconcile balances manually across platforms.

As part of a long-term strategy, the college should develop a technology roadmap that outlines planned upgrades, integration priorities, training milestones, and performance indicators. A well-defined roadmap will ensure that system improvements remain aligned with institutional needs and that technology investments deliver their intended benefits.

## SECTION III: PERSONNEL

### Summary

The personnel review conducted as part of this operational assessment revealed a highly dedicated and experienced business office team that demonstrates strong institutional knowledge and a deep commitment to their roles. Staff members bring valuable continuity to college operations and play a critical role in supporting the institution's financial integrity and compliance posture.

Alongside these strengths, the assessment identified several opportunities to enhance engagement, communication, and preparedness for organizational change. Staff expressed a desire for clearer visibility into upcoming transitions, more consistent leadership communication, and expanded access to training related to evolving technologies. The anticipated departure of a long-serving financial leader adds urgency to succession planning and highlights the need for proactive knowledge transfer and leadership development.

Encouragingly, there is evidence of strong internal commitment to professional growth and openness to modernization, provided that changes are implemented collaboratively and with sufficient support. With intentional investment in staff development, structured coaching, and transparent communication, the business office is well-positioned to navigate transition and build greater organizational resilience.

### Detailed Discussion

#### *Institutional Knowledge and Workforce Commitment*

The business office is staffed by individuals with substantial tenure and deep operational familiarity with the college's systems, processes, and compliance environment. Interviews indicated that personnel take pride in their work, understand the importance of their roles, and are motivated to uphold standards of accuracy, accountability, and service.

Many employees have served the college for several years and have developed highly specialized knowledge in areas such as procurement, reconciliation, and reporting. This depth of experience is a foundational asset for the institution and contributes to consistent and reliable performance of core functions.

Staff demonstrate strong ownership of responsibilities and maintain a high degree of attentiveness to detail. In several cases, employees have taken initiative to streamline tasks or assist colleagues with cross-functional responsibilities. These qualities reflect a positive team orientation and a collaborative mindset that can be further cultivated through leadership support and engagement.

#### *Succession Planning and Continuity Readiness*

The impending retirement of a key financial leader represents a significant transition point for the business office. This individual has long served as a primary knowledge holder and operational lead for many financial processes. While their expertise has been instrumental in maintaining continuity, their pending departure underscores the importance of formal succession planning and documentation of institutional knowledge.



The review found that many critical processes are managed through individual familiarity rather than standardized or systematized documentation. In the event of staff turnover, this reliance on unwritten knowledge could delay onboarding, interrupt transaction processing, or lead to gaps in compliance and reporting.

To mitigate these risks, the college is encouraged to develop and implement a structured knowledge transfer plan that includes process mapping and documentation of core workflows, cross-training and shadowing opportunities for potential successors, establishment of clear transition timelines with defined responsibilities and use of system-based checklists and guides to support consistency.

In parallel, identifying internal staff with leadership potential and providing coaching support can help build readiness for future supervisory or interim roles. Leadership development initiatives should include both technical and interpersonal skill-building, with an emphasis on communication, change navigation, and cross-functional coordination.

### *Change Readiness and Staff Engagement*

Personnel expressed a willingness to adapt to change, particularly where improvements are shown to reduce inefficiencies and support daily workflow. However, this openness is accompanied by a need for clear communication, inclusive planning, and reassurance regarding role stability.

Many staff indicated that prior technology transitions were experienced as abrupt or insufficiently supported, leading to uncertainty and reduced confidence in new systems. Others shared that, while open to modernization, they felt under-informed about the rationale and timeline for certain changes, and unsure of how these changes would affect their responsibilities.

To increase engagement and build trust during transition periods, the following strategies are recommended:

- Early and inclusive communication about upcoming changes
- Regular opportunities for feedback through surveys or listening sessions
- Defined training plans that accommodate different learning styles and paces
- Visibility into how staff input is incorporated into implementation efforts
- Transparent messaging about the impact of changes on roles, expectations, and job security

By establishing consistent feedback channels and offering responsive support, the college can improve staff morale, reduce resistance to change, and foster a culture of shared ownership in institutional progress.

### *Emerging Leadership and Team Strengths*

Several staff members are already demonstrating initiative in process improvement and cross-departmental collaboration. These individuals are well-positioned to serve as internal champions for modernization and may benefit from targeted development opportunities such as coaching, mentoring, or involvement in strategic planning efforts.

The business office also includes personnel with strong reputations among peers and a demonstrated ability to work across functional boundaries. With appropriate support, these



individuals could contribute to knowledge transfer efforts, internal training, or interim leadership responsibilities.

Overall, the team shows a willingness to evolve and a sincere interest in contributing to the success of the college. While levels of comfort with change may vary, there is no indication of broad resistance. Instead, staff emphasized the need for structure, clarity, and affirmation of their value in the midst of transition. Leadership's continued investment in relationship-building, professional development, and open communication will be critical to sustaining this momentum.

## SECTION IV: TRANSITION STRATEGY AND MODERNIZATION PLAN

### Summary

To support Isothermal Community College in strengthening its business operations, a phased transition and modernization strategy is recommended. This strategy focuses on enhancing leadership capacity, supporting staff during periods of change, modernizing financial processes, maximizing technology investments, and facilitating knowledge transfer. The approach is designed to minimize disruption, foster staff engagement, and align business office functions more closely with the college's strategic priorities.

By implementing a combination of leadership coaching, structured meeting facilitation, technology optimization, and staff development, the college can improve operational efficiency, reduce process risk, and build long-term resilience. These efforts will not only position the business office to operate more effectively today but will also create a sustainable foundation for future institutional growth.

### Detailed Discussion

#### *Leadership Coaching and Capacity Building*

As Isothermal Community College prepares for the planned retirement of a long-serving financial leader, proactive leadership development and transition planning will be essential to preserving institutional continuity. This transition presents a strategic opportunity to cultivate new leadership, redistribute responsibilities, and formalize the knowledge that has historically resided with a small number of individuals. A targeted coaching and transition strategy should be implemented to ensure readiness among both current and emerging leaders.

Individual coaching sessions held on a biweekly basis can help new leaders develop core competencies in strategic decision-making, delegation, conflict resolution, and team oversight. These sessions should be tailored to the specific challenges of leading a business office through operational change and modernization.

In parallel, the outgoing leader should be supported in conducting structured knowledge transfer, including formal documentation of procedures, walk-throughs of critical workflows, and mentorship of designated successors. Shadowing arrangements between incoming and outgoing staff will help bridge institutional knowledge gaps and instill confidence during the handoff.

A clear 90- to 120-day transition timeline should be established to sequence these efforts, define milestones, and ensure accountability. Where appropriate, "dual accountability" periods can allow outgoing and incoming leaders to share decision-making responsibilities for a defined window, providing an added layer of oversight and learning.

These efforts will help the college maintain operational stability while building the leadership bench strength necessary for long-term success.

#### *Structured Staff Meeting Support and Change Communication*

During periods of operational change, consistent and transparent communication is key to maintaining trust, reducing uncertainty, and aligning teams around shared goals. Staff members are more likely to embrace change when they feel informed, included, and supported.

To foster these outcomes, the college should implement a structured schedule of weekly or biweekly business office meetings during the initial phase of the transition, ideally over a three- to four-month period. These meetings should serve as a forum to update staff on progress, provide clarity around new processes or responsibilities, address concerns in real time, and celebrate milestones or early wins. In the early stages, it may be helpful for an external consultant or facilitator to co-lead these meetings alongside college leadership. Doing so will model effective communication techniques, reinforce transparency, and help ensure balanced participation. Over time, facilitation responsibilities can transition fully to internal leaders as confidence and communication structures strengthen.

In addition to regular meetings, a written change communication framework should be developed. This framework should include key messages that explain the purpose and timing of each change, how decisions are being made, and what resources are available to support staff throughout implementation. Importantly, it should also define mechanisms for staff to ask questions, share suggestions, and see their input acknowledged and addressed.

Taken together, these practices will promote two-way communication and build a workplace culture grounded in clarity, accountability, and mutual respect.

#### *Automate and Modernize Financial Reconciliation and Financial Reporting*

The college has made commendable efforts to maintain compliance and control in its financial operations, yet many of its core processes, particularly in areas such as reconciliation, disbursements, and financial reporting, remain manual and time-intensive.

To reduce administrative burden, improve accuracy, and align more closely with best practices, several modernization initiatives are recommended. First, the college should transition from spreadsheet-based reconciliations to automated, system-supported processes using either its existing ERP (Ellucian Colleague) or a compatible third-party platform. This shift would enable rolling reconciliations that detect discrepancies in real time and enhance visibility into cash balances.

Second, quarterly accrual adjustments should be introduced to replace the current practice of annual, year-end-only adjustments. More frequent accrual entries will improve the accuracy of interim financial statements and support more timely, data-informed decisions by college leadership and the Board.

Third, the business office should implement a standardized review process for outstanding checks to reduce the volume of stale-dated items. This process should include monthly aging reports, proactive vendor outreach, and timely cancellations or reissues, all aligned with North Carolina escheatment requirements. Positive pay protocols, already in use at the college, should be further strengthened by integrating them into the check issuance process, rather than applying them post-disbursement.

Finally, the business office should establish a routine financial reporting calendar that includes monthly or quarterly budget-to-actual reports, cash position summaries, and variance analyses for both internal leadership and external oversight bodies.

These improvements, when executed in a phased and supported manner, will reinforce internal controls, improve efficiency, and enhance institutional confidence in the accuracy and timeliness of financial information.

### *Enhance Technology Utilization and Integration*

Isothermal Community College has made strategic investments in enterprise technology platforms, including Ellucian Colleague, Etrieve, NC E-Procurement, and Web Cashier. However, many of these systems are not yet fully optimized or integrated in a way that maximizes efficiency and data quality. At present, several workflows continue to operate outside of the core systems, resulting in redundant data entry, fragmented reporting, and limited visibility into financial operations.

To address these challenges, the college should conduct a diagnostic review of current ERP usage, identifying features that are underutilized or misaligned with daily workflows. Particular attention should be given to optimizing modules related to purchasing, approvals, project accounting, and real-time general ledger reporting.

The Etrieve platform, in particular, warrants a focused redesign of high-use forms such as travel authorizations and reimbursement requests. These forms should be simplified and redesigned with input from frontline users to improve usability and adoption.

Concurrently, the college should assess the feasibility of implementing ePayment capabilities within Colleague or through integration with a third-party platform to reduce dependency on paper checks and accelerate payment cycles.

Current practices involving multiple, department-specific accounts receivable systems should also be reviewed, with the goal of consolidating into a centralized receivables platform that enhances data integrity and simplifies reconciliation.

As part of a broader sustainability and cost-control initiative, the college may also wish to implement print reduction strategies by expanding the use of digital workflows and monitoring paper usage through existing tools such as Papercut. To ensure long-term success, these efforts should be anchored in a technology roadmap that defines upgrade timelines, integration goals, training plans, and vendor support strategies.

By pursuing thoughtful system optimization, the college will enhance operational alignment, improve data quality, and better equip staff to deliver timely and consistent services.

### *Invest in Staff Development and Knowledge Transfer*

As Isothermal Community College implements operational and technological changes, investing in the growth and preparedness of its staff is essential to ensuring continuity, reducing disruption, and reinforcing long-term institutional resilience. The assessment confirmed that business office personnel are capable, experienced, and committed to their responsibilities. However, to adapt effectively to evolving processes and expectations, they will benefit from enhanced training, clearer communication regarding role development, and structured opportunities for professional advancement.

A formal knowledge transfer plan should be developed to address potential loss of institutional knowledge due to staff transitions. For each key position, critical functions and high-frequency tasks should be documented in detail, including step-by-step instructions, relevant timelines, and links to associated systems or documentation. This process should be supported by the creation of concise resource guides specific to each role, which can be used to train future staff and reinforce process consistency. Where transitions are anticipated, outgoing staff should

be asked to conduct structured knowledge-sharing sessions to walk through these materials with designated successors or backup personnel.

To improve campus-wide financial literacy and reduce common errors in budgeting and procurement, the college should offer an annual training series for department-level budget managers. These sessions should address the college's chart of accounts structure, best practices in account coding, procurement thresholds and procedures, and the proper use of budget reporting tools. Participants should also be trained on documentation and compliance expectations so that departmental transactions align with institutional policy and public accountability requirements.

Cross-training within the business office should be formalized through the development of a staff coverage matrix. This matrix will identify backup personnel for each critical task and ensure that no single individual is solely responsible for essential functions. Regular cross-training exercises and temporary role rotations can help familiarize staff with overlapping responsibilities and allow for more flexible staffing during periods of absence or turnover. This approach will improve continuity, reduce risk, and promote collaboration among team members.

Beyond internal training, the college should support professional development by encouraging participation in external workshops, webinars, and industry conferences. Membership in higher education finance associations—such as the North Carolina Association of Community College Business Officers (NC ACCBO) or the National Association of College and University Business Officers (NACUBO)—can offer valuable exposure to emerging practices, peer insights, and training resources. Where appropriate, the college may consider covering the cost of certifications or courses that align with staff responsibilities, particularly in areas such as financial reporting, procurement, or enterprise system management.

Finally, the college should continue to foster a culture that values and recognizes staff contributions. Leadership can support retention and morale by offering structured career pathways, providing timely feedback and recognition, and promoting from within whenever possible. These efforts will reinforce a sense of institutional commitment and create a more confident, future-ready workforce capable of sustaining the college's financial operations through periods of growth, change, and renewal.

## SECTION V: CHANGE MANAGEMENT & COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

### Summary

As Isothermal Community College undertakes significant updates to its business office operations, including leadership transitions, process redesign, and system modernization, it is essential to manage change in a way that is inclusive, transparent, and responsive to the needs of staff.

Many team members have long tenures at the college and possess deep personal and professional ties to the institution and the surrounding community. For these reasons, thoughtful and deliberate change management is not only a best practice but a necessity to ensure trust, minimize resistance, and preserve morale. Institutional change initiatives must be communicated with care, implemented with structure, and reinforced through authentic engagement at all levels of the organization.

To sustain positive momentum, leadership should invest in strategies that build rapport, recognize contributions, and create space for honest, two-way communication. These efforts will help to reduce uncertainty, clarify expectations, and establish a shared sense of ownership over the college's transformation goals.

### Detailed Discussion

#### *Cultivating a Culture of Recognition and Rapport*

In any organization, recognition and personal rapport serve as powerful motivators, especially during periods of transition. At Isothermal Community College, leadership has an opportunity to deepen trust and reinforce a collaborative culture by consistently acknowledging the contributions of business office staff. This can be achieved through both formal and informal means, including direct expressions of appreciation, celebrating key milestones, and recognizing efforts that go above and beyond during times of increased workload or complexity.

Equally important is the demonstration of personal attentiveness to staff wellbeing. Acts as simple as asking about a team member's family, recognizing a personal achievement, or offering support during a difficult time can build strong interpersonal bonds and reinforce a culture of care. These gestures, while small in effort, can yield significant benefits in morale, trust, and team cohesion.

As staff are asked to adopt new processes, systems, and workflows, maintaining this sense of rapport will be critical to sustaining engagement.

#### *Establish Feedback Loops*

Building lasting change also requires intentional structures that invite and respond to employee input. Feedback loops should be embedded throughout the implementation of operational changes to ensure staff have the opportunity to ask questions, offer insights, and express concerns. These mechanisms might include structured listening sessions, targeted surveys, standing advisory groups, or anonymous suggestion tools—each designed to make participation accessible and meaningful.

The effectiveness of these feedback mechanisms depends not only on their availability but also on how feedback is received and acted upon. When staff see their ideas being considered

and incorporated. or at a minimum, acknowledged with clarity, they are more likely to feel valued and invested in the process. Even when input does not result in specific action, transparency about the reasons why builds credibility and reinforces trust. Over time, this transparency establishes a norm of open communication, which is essential to sustaining change and improving institutional culture.

In compliance-oriented environments such as higher education finance, the absence of proactive communication can create confusion, particularly when longstanding processes are adjusted. To avoid this, leadership should prioritize early and frequent communication about what is changing, when it will change, how it will impact roles and responsibilities, and where staff can turn for help. This information should be delivered through multiple channels—emails, meetings, visual guides, and training sessions—to ensure accessibility and clarity.

By approaching change management with humility, responsiveness, and authenticity, Isothermal Community College can navigate its business office transition in a way that builds institutional resilience. These efforts will help ensure that the improvements being made today are not only technically successful but also culturally embraced.

## SECTION VI: CONCLUSION & NEXT STEPS

This evaluation identifies a comprehensive set of actionable improvements ranging from workflow automation and internal control enhancements to cultural realignment and succession planning. With coordinated effort and structured implementation, the business office can evolve into a more agile, transparent, and strategically integrated unit that enables mission-critical decisions and safeguards public resources.

To operationalize the recommendations outlined in this study, we advise the college to explore engaging a professional firm with experience in financial operations, communications, auditing, accounting and reporting standards, management consultancy and process improvement and initiate the following next steps:

### *Solicit Bids for Professional Services Through a Formal RFP*

Develop and release a Request for Proposals (RFP) to identify and engage a qualified consulting firm that will:

- Lead process modernization and workflow redesign
- Provide leadership coaching and succession planning support
- Facilitate technology integration and system optimization
- Support change management, communication, and staff training initiatives
- The RFP should explicitly align with the five major focus areas identified in the report:
  - Manual process elimination and automation
  - Procurement system streamlining
  - Internal control reinforcement
  - Staff development and leadership transition
  - Cultural and strategic alignment through improved communication

We recommend that an RFP request that all time and costs are included in final pricing to avoid unexpected fee and cost overruns.

### *Develop a Comprehensive Implementation and Execution Plan (Post Award)*

Upon selection of a vendor, the college should collaboratively develop a detailed implementation roadmap that translates this report's recommendations into phased, actionable steps. The roadmap should define clear deliverables, designate accountable personnel, and establish timelines for each workstream. It should also identify required resources including staff time, software configuration support, and training sessions as well as mechanisms for progress tracking and performance reporting. Regular check-ins between the consulting team and college leadership should be scheduled to monitor implementation status and adapt plans as needed based on emerging priorities.

Through thoughtful execution of these next steps, the college can not only address current operational challenges, but also establish a culture of continuous improvement that will serve it



well into the future. With structured support and intentional planning, the business office is well-positioned to become a more agile, collaborative, and strategically aligned unit that contributes meaningfully to the institution's mission and long-term success.