

Trusted advisor: US utility company places long-term confidence in Harbor's legal department expertise

"More so than with other consulting firms, Harbor's specialization with law firms and law departments really shines through when finding innovative ways for lawyers to be more efficient, productive and adaptable to change."

Director of Legal Operations at US energy company

Since 2014, legal industry expert Harbor has played a key role in shaping the technology investments and strategic approach to outside counsel utilization for a leading US energy infrastructure company.

The utility's law department is organized into practice groups, including regulatory, litigation, commercial, environmental, and real estate. A shared legal operations service provides support to over 100 attorneys.

The benefits of coordinated outside legal counsel engagement

While the practice areas independently serve their internal clients, the company collectively engages with outside legal counsel. Working with Harbor, the utility has instituted a preferred law firm panel of around 20 firms, through which it undertakes over 80 percent of its outside counsel spend.

"Prior to that, we were using several hundred law firms, which hindered efficiencies of scale and meant we spent valuable time repeatedly bringing outside attorneys up

to speed with our key business directives," says the company's Chief Legal Officer (CLO).

In 2014, after a period of acquisitions and divestments, the utility implemented a convergence plan to reduce costs and improve efficiencies. Harbor's idea of instituting a panel of preferred outside counsel firms was embraced by the organization's then General Counsel and formed a fundamental pillar of the proposal.

"We drew up standard retention agreements with all our designated outside counsel," says the CLO. "The arrangement has managerial and administrative benefits and provides us with exceptional utilization."

It has seen the organization implement a tiered fee discount model with its preferred firms upfront to help reduce costs. More importantly, the initiative is an effective relationship-building exercise, allowing the utility's lawyers to focus on a smaller subset of firms and build closer ties with key outside counsel who actively engage and support the program.

Together with advising on the best practices of a firm convergence panel, Harbor also offered insights into establishing analytics to help the company tease out where its spend went and what it looked like across different business areas. Armed with this data, Harbor facilitated the selection of each firm for the panel and offered some ideas to make it unique.

Tech-driven efficiency: streamlining legal operations

During its ongoing partnership, Harbor has provided high-level guidance and helped implement several technologies that have streamlined the utility's legal operations, including the Mitratech matter management system, TeamConnect, and the document management system, iManage.

Before TeamConnect, the law department suffered from a manual-based billing process that involved printing out invoices from outside firms and sending them to various departmental heads for approval and sign-off.

"TeamConnect has vastly simplified the law department's accounts payable and invoicing process, automating invoice approval and integrating it with the firm's financial management system," says the CLO.

The Harbor difference: creating a legal powerhouse

According to the company's Director of Legal Operations, Harbor's strengths are three-fold: Its consultants offer top-level thought leadership and advice for business initiatives, it can execute end-to-end technology deployments, and finally, it provides change management capabilities to ensure newly implemented applications land successfully.

"Our law department values the external perspective Harbor brings to discussions. With law firm and corporate legal department clients worldwide, Harbor provides critical advice on the latest practice trends, technology developments, and individual application roadmaps—information that helps inform our business processes and technology decisions."

The company prioritizes a long-term partnership with Harbor, valuing its commitment beyond initial implementation. Harbor provides comprehensive support, including essential user training and fostering seamless technology adoption.

"The partnership with Harbor exemplifies the benefits of a strategic approach to legal operations," says the Director of Legal Operations. "By leveraging Harbor's expertise, we have optimized our legal spend, improved efficiency, and strengthened our relationships with outside counsel. This long-term collaboration drives value, ensuring the company remains at the forefront of the energy infrastructure industry."

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Harbor is a globally integrated team of strategists, technologists and specialists focused on helping law firms, corporations, and their law departments achieve breakthrough outcomes. We are also helping to steer a legal industry in the midst of turbulent change. We navigate alongside our clients and partners, providing salient insights, scalable resources, and seasoned advice.