

CLIENT SUCCESS STORY



Photo by Jeff Roffman

THE ATLANTA OPERA

The Atlanta Opera



INDUSTRY
Cultural Arts



LOCATION
Atlanta, Georgia



FEATURED SOLUTION
Abila MIP Fund Accounting™

CHALLENGE

The Atlanta Opera had designs to expand its programming, grow its operating budget, and make opera accessible to all. However, its antiquated fund accounting software was unable to keep up with the changing times.

SOLUTION

With the help of Abila Business Partner 1st Choice Advisors, the opera selected and implemented Abila MIP Fund Accounting™ to help move the organization forward.

BENEFITS

Abila MIP™ has provided great clarity around the opera's fiscal condition, allowing management to monitor the progress of operations in real-time, expand programming, grow its operating budget, produce significant results, and clearly illustrate these accomplishments to the board.

The Atlanta Opera Sings Coloratura with Abila MIP Fund Accounting™

Through its colorful, dynamic, large-scale productions, The Atlanta Opera is striving to establish Atlanta as one of the leading opera houses in the United States.

In addition to each season's high-quality opera productions, The Atlanta Opera also provides education opportunities, such as The Atlanta Opera Studio Tour, which takes live performances and workshops into local area schools. Additionally, it's always looking for creative ways to engage and collaborate with audiences through its audience development programs, such as Pre-Opera Talks, which are held prior to each performance and provide opera attendees context around the performance they're about to see.

Much of what The Atlanta Opera offers to the community is extremely affordable – opera tickets start at just \$26 – and often, the education and outreach programs are free of charge. With an average mainstage production costing approximately \$720,000, securing adequate funding is no easy feat.

Only 30 percent of its \$7 million annual budget comes from ticket sales. A huge portion of the remaining 70 percent comes from individual donors; with the residual from corporate partners, foundations, and a small amount of government funding.

Turning Around the Finance Department

When CFO Paul Deckard joined The Atlanta Opera in 2014, he knew he had his work cut out for him. Deckard immediately set out to rebuild the finance department, which was feeling the effects of staff turnover, and employed just one remaining staffer – an accounts payable clerk who left the week after Deckard started.

“There was nobody here with any institutional knowledge of our general ledger system,” Deckard says. “Additionally, our legacy fund accounting software was so outdated, and in desperate need of replacing. Its chart of accounts was 35 pages long, year-over-year financial comparisons were nearly impossible, reconciling to spreadsheets in Excel was quite complicated, and financial reporting was a real challenge.

“Our board wasn’t getting timely financial reports – they were seeing numbers that were 90-plus days old,” continues Deckard. “Consequently, board members weren’t getting a clear picture of our current fiscal health, and forget about trying to do any meaningful forecasting.”

Abila MIP™ Provides Staff and Board with Clear Financial Picture

The opera enlisted the help of Abila Business Partner 1st Choice Advisors to find and implement a modern, true fund accounting™ system.

“What I instantly found appealing about Abila MIP is its ease of use and robust reporting capabilities,” explains Deckard. “It has a beautiful multi-dimensional chart of accounts that’s completely customizable, so we can choose how we set up segmentations. We’re able to really bend and twist it to our specific needs.

“Additionally, the balancing and non-balancing segments are really critical for us, because they help ensure proper transaction entry, while offering the flexibility to track items and classify transactions that might cross funding boundaries. And, the ability to code gifts as restricted and unrestricted, and then run reports on restricted or unrestricted activities gives us quick and easy insight into satisfied and existing obligations. All of these capabilities have provided us with great clarity.”

This clarity has allowed management to monitor the progress of operations in real-time, expand programming, grow their operating budget, produce significant results, and clearly illustrate these accomplishments to the board. “We have long-time board members, some who’ve been with us for 10-plus years,” says Deckard. “They’ve told me they have never seen this kind of clarity around our finances.”

“When I arrived here two years ago, every member of our executive team attended every board meeting. We would all sit in chairs lined up against the wall behind the board, more as observers than active participants at the meeting table.

“Now that board members are seeing the results we’re producing, they have a new level of trust in the management team,” continues Deckard. “We’re no longer sitting in chairs lined up against the wall. We have literally earned a seat at the table.”

Looking Forward

“Our fundraisers do an amazing job. And, our controller does brilliant work. But, we wouldn’t be here without Abila MIP, which gives us access to appropriate financial data – enabling us to analyze it and make real-time, fact-based decisions that positively impact our mission.”

Abila MIP Fund Accounting™ has done more for The Atlanta Opera than just provide a clear fiscal picture. It has facilitated the establishment of new, much-needed internal controls. And, it’s integrated with the opera’s donor database, allowing for the easy import and export of data between the two systems. Abila MIP™ has also helped greatly improve the audit process. “For the first time, our recent audit came back completely clean. Zero adjustments were needed,” Deckard concludes. “In a nutshell, MIP has helped us move from an organization that looked in the rearview mirror, to one that’s looking forward.”

About Abila

Abila is the leading provider of software and services to nonprofit organizations and associations that help them improve decision making, execute with greater precision, increase engagement, and generate more revenue. Abila combines decades of industry insight with technology know-how to serve nearly 8,000 clients across North America. For more information, please visit abila.com. To subscribe to our blog, visit Forward Together at blog.abila.com.



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- Paul Deckard
CFO

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The Abila logo, featuring the word "abila" in a lowercase, sans-serif font. The letter "i" has a dot that is a small teal triangle. The logo is set against a teal diamond-shaped background.