



CASE STUDY: **FARMERS BANK OF WILLARDS**

MODERNIZING
TECHNOLOGY
LEADERSHIP
THROUGH
FRACTIONAL CIO
LEADERSHIP





BANK SNAPSHOT

- **Founded:** 1925
- **Assets:** ~\$550M
- **Headquarters:** Willards, Maryland
- **Footprint:** Rural community bank
- **Engagement:** Fractional CIO Leadership

As Farmers Bank of Willards (FBW) grew beyond \$550 million in assets, leadership recognized that technology had become a limiting factor to the bank's stability, efficiency, and ability to compete. Core infrastructure was aging, technical debt had accumulated over years, and recurring outages were increasing operational risk.

At the same time, the bank lacked a strategic technology leader who could provide executive-level oversight and direction. In a rural market, recruiting and retaining a seasoned CIO was neither feasible nor affordable.

“We knew technology was holding us back, but hiring a full-time CIO just wasn’t realistic for our market.”



A Growing Concern:

“We don’t have control of this.”

What began as frustration with slow progress turned into broader concern about the bank’s long-term resilience.

Executives lacked clear visibility into technology risk. Confidence in IT decision-making was uneven. The gap between what customers expected digitally and what the bank could reliably deliver continued to widen. Leadership knew that technology had become mission-critical, yet no one was clearly accountable for aligning it to the bank’s business strategy.

Several issues converged to create urgency:

- Accumulated technical debt increasing operational and regulatory risk
- Aging infrastructure leading to outages and instability
- Limited access to CIO-level talent due to the bank’s rural footprint



Engaging Fractional CIO Leadership

CFarmers Bank of Willards partnered with Hartman Executive Advisors to serve as the bank's accountable CIO through a fractional leadership model, backed by a broader CIO leadership team and firm-level capabilities.

Hartman stepped directly into the CIO role, with a CIO leadership team working closely with executive leadership and the board to bring structure, clarity, and ownership to technology decision-making. Rather than acting as an advisor on the sidelines, Hartman assumed responsibility for technology strategy, governance, and execution oversight.

“Hartman didn’t just advise us on technology. They stepped into the CIO role and took ownership, which changed how our leadership team experienced IT.”

One of the first actions was establishing a formal technology steering committee made up of senior leaders across the bank. This provided consistent visibility into priorities, trade-offs, and progress, while aligning technology decisions with business objectives.

By separating day-to-day IT operations from executive-level oversight, Hartman reduced the management burden on leadership and restored confidence in how technology was being governed.



Stabilizing the Environment and Building for Growth

With leadership and governance in place, Hartman focused on stabilizing the technology environment and addressing long-standing technical debt.

Outdated infrastructure was modernized, vendor relationships were reviewed and restructured, and telecommunications contracts were renegotiated, resulting in a \$90,000 credit back to the bank. A formal project management office (PMO) was introduced to bring discipline, accountability, and predictability to major initiatives.

As the bank's needs evolved from remediation to growth, Hartman seamlessly transitioned CIO leadership to align with FBW's changing priorities. The fractional model allowed the bank to always have the right level of leadership without disruption or rehiring risk.



Results That Restored Confidence

Through Hartman's fractional CIO leadership, FBW moved from uncertainty to a stable, well-governed technology environment.

Executives gained visibility into technology risk and direction. Regulatory interactions improved as governance matured. Financial discipline increased through stronger vendor accountability.

“Having Hartman accountable gave us confidence. Technology stopped being a constant source of stress and became something we could plan around.”

Outcomes included:

- Improved regulatory outcomes through stronger governance and documentation
- Financial savings through vendor accountability and contract renegotiation
- A modern, stable infrastructure supporting future digital initiatives
- The PMO became so effective that non-IT initiatives, including facilities projects, adopted its structure, reinforcing a culture of accountability across the organization.



Conclusion

By engaging Hartman Executive Advisors for fractional CIO leadership, Farmers Bank of Willards addressed a critical leadership gap by gaining an accountable CIO function with depth, continuity, and firm-level support, without the burden of hiring a full-time executive. The bank replaced uncertainty with clarity, restored trust in technology decision-making, and built a foundation that scales with its growth.

Today, FBW operates with confidence, knowing its technology leadership evolves alongside the bank, not behind it.