

CASE STUDY



PROS

Readability Risk Assessment™

How a **Fortune 1000** manufacturing company cut
writing and reviewing costs by hundreds of thousands of
dollars a year



we de-risk your
documentation.



01 *The problem* **The client came to us with**

An F1000 manufacturing company came to us with what they thought was a documentation problem; specifically, deviation/investigation reports were unclear, so the company was having trouble rectifying situations.

The company was concerned as well that more deviations seemed to be occurring and they were unsure if that was due to the unclear reports or something else.

02 **Background**

The professionals in this company, who were engineers by trade, wrote a variety of documents, including user manuals, SOPs, internal documentation, and investigation reports. These professionals were not trained writers and most had taken no formal writing training except in college.

The reviewers themselves were managers or senior directors so, while they reviewed documents, doing so was not their primary job in the company. They were managing their teams, overseeing work production, and involved in production planning.

This company was growing rapidly and hiring quickly, which put pressure on the new hires and existing personnel to produce documentation quickly.

03 *What we uncovered* **during our assessment**

During our PROS Readability Risk Assessment™, we identified several root causes:

- New hires had no training in how to write the documents the company required; they were often given samples to imitate with no mentorship or guidance
- Reviewers lacked standards to guide them in terms of what to review for; consequently, reviewers disagreed about what quality looked like
- No process in place for reviewing, resulting in writers who were often unsure if they would get feedback on their documentatio
- Writers would often go to sources such as LinkedIn and other social media platforms to learn more about writing
- Inconsistent feedback and document quality
- The increase in deviations was partially due to the poor quality of the reports

JHW

No guidance for new hires put them on track to fail

- New hires are a good place for companies to begin to enforce how they want their professionals to write and review. When a company assumes that writers have the skills to write documentation, that's a big mistake. Most writers, these included, had no formal training and certainly no training in how to write investigation reports.
- Because they were given old investigation reports to use to learn how to write, they would often cut and paste information. Cutting and pasting often meant that old information that wasn't relevant was left in. And, in many cases, these new writers made assumptions about causes and mitigation.
- Training writers to write to the standards of the organization didn't exist; writers were given samples of old reports and were basically instructed to figure it out themselves. This lack of training resulted in inconsistent investigations in terms of quality and ability for management to figure out what was happening and why so that they could mitigate the issue

"I didn't even know what an investigation report was. I used some old ones that I found, but they kept getting kicked back and I was never sure about what I was doing right or wrong. Writing them was a lot of trial and error. Very frustrating."

SUPERVISOR

■ No process for reviewing resulted in inconsistent and often contradictory feedback and long review times

- The reviewers (again, managers) had no guidance about how to provide actionable feedback; in fact, when interviewed, most said that they gave feedback based on how they'd been given feedback, either from former employers or teachers.

- The issue is that no standardization or process means that reviewers may be providing feedback that doesn't enhance document quality, focuses on pet peeves, or that is contradictory.
- Long review times resulted from the fact that there was no guidance in place for how long document review should take or what the reviewers should prioritize in terms of feedback. Consequently, reviewers felt no urgency to provide feedback, nor did the company help reviewers understand what they should prioritize

■ No writing process resulted in guesswork

- Writers were unclear about expectations and many had never written an investigation report; consequently, the reports were often verbose, didn't focus on the real issue, and didn't include a mitigation strategy. Writers wanted clear guidelines for writing: what was expected, transparency in terms of reviewing, and better information about how to write certain documents, including investigations.
- Just as the lack of process resulted in long review times, these writers, because they weren't given guidance about priority, would procrastinate when a writing task was due; this procrastination was often the result of them waiting for additional guidance about their documents, which never came.



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Conclusions

Taken together, these findings point to a single root cause: the organization never established a formal system for how investigation reports should be written or reviewed and left both writers and reviewers to fill that vacuum on their own. New hires learned by copying old reports rather than by training, reviewers gave feedback based on personal beliefs rather than shared standards, writers guessed at expectations instead of following a defined process, and everyone worked around inadequate templates instead of with them.

These four problems are not independent, they compound one another. Writers without training default to whatever templates and past reports are available; when those tools are unusable, writers seek outside sources of uncertain quality; when reviewers lack standards, their feedback can't correct the underlying skill gaps which adds confusion and delay. The result is a cycle in which poor documents go in, inconsistent feedback comes back, and neither writers nor reviewers have the guidance needed to break the pattern. The frustration is evident in writers' own accounts of "trial and error" and reports repeatedly "kicked back" without clear explanation.

06 The Plan

Because these issues stemmed from a single systemic gap, the absence of documented standards and process, we were able to put a plan in place to address them with a coordinated set of fixes rather than four separate initiatives:

We put an 18-month plan in place that included:

- A standardized process for training new hires, which included mentorship and guidance
- Guidance on reviewing, which included hands-on training and practice under the tutelage of our experts
- Written guidance for writers, including customized writing workshops on how to write investigation reports
- Revising and creating new templates and other tools to improve document quality and make writing and reviewing consistent



Investing in these four areas together improved the quality and consistency of investigation reports but also reduce review cycle times and relieve the frustration reported by both writers and reviewers, ultimately giving management the clear, reliable information it needs to identify and mitigate issues effectively.

07 Results and impact on the company

■ After the company implemented our plan:

- New hires reported greater job satisfaction and less confusion
- Reviewers reduced reviewing time by 33%
- Writers produced documentation 25% more quickly
- Writers reported that they felt “more confident” in their ability to produce investigation reports that management could use
- Management reported that investigation reports were clearer and that it was easier to put mitigation strategies in place



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Wasted time and money: *the numbers*

■ Writers

The average salary of the writers in this company was \$148,500 per year, with the average hourly wage \$71.39. Each writer spent roughly 8.94 hours per document and each wrote roughly six documents per month, which cost the company \$3,829.36 per writer per month. Multiplied by 22, the number of writers on the team, and that equaled \$84,245.91 per month or almost \$1M a year just on writing in this one department!

We estimated, based on the success with other projects, that with our system writers could reduce writing time by 50%, to 4.5 hours per document. Reducing the writing time by 50% would save the company over \$500,000.00 a year.

■ Writing time cost and comparison

These tables and charts compare current investigation-report writing costs against projected costs under the proposed system, which is estimated to reduce writing time per document by 50%.

\$1,010,951

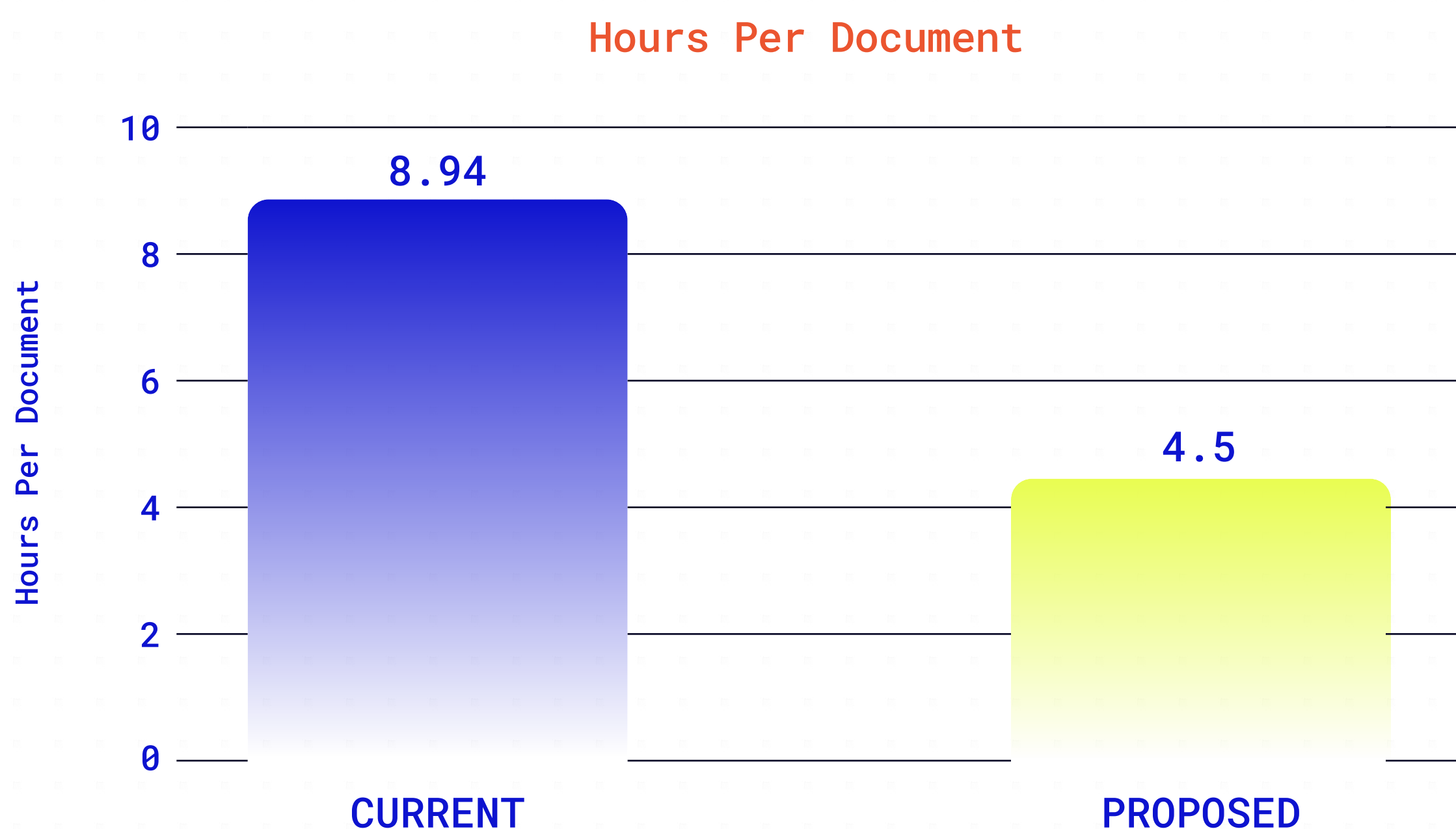
CURRENT ANNUAL COST

\$508,873

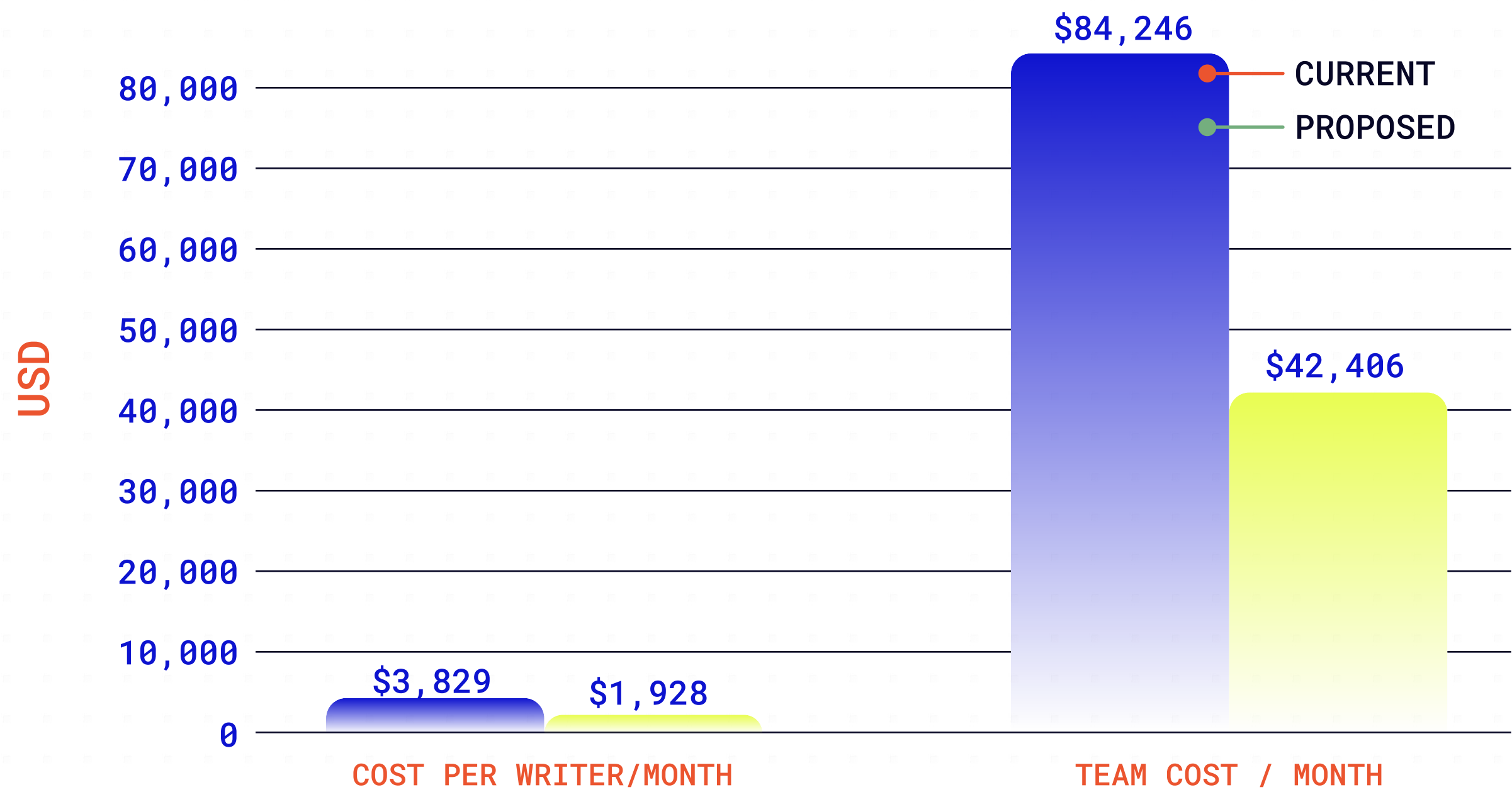
PROJECTED ANNUAL COST

\$502,078

ESTIMATED ANNUAL SAVINGS



Monthly cost: current vs. proposed



Reducing average writing time from 8.94 hours to 4.5 hours per document lowers the cost per writer from \$3,829.36 to \$1,927.55 per month. Across the 22-person writing team, that reduces monthly cost from \$84,245.92 to \$42,406.05 — an annual savings of roughly \$502,000.

■ Reviewers

The average salary of the reviewers was \$159,633.00 per year, with the average hourly wage \$76.75. Each reviewer spent roughly 2.3 hours per document and each reviewed 28.92 documents per month, for a total spend of \$5,105.10 per month per reviewer. There were nine reviewers on the team, so this equated to \$45,945.90 per month or \$551,350.80 per year.

Based on our success with similar companies, we estimated we could reduce the time reviewers spent per document to 1.3 hours, saving them roughly 29 hours a month, or \$2,225.75 per reviewer.

07 *Reviewing time cost and comparison*

These tables and charts compare current review costs against projected costs under the proposed system, which is estimated to reduce review time per document from 2.3 hours to 1.3 hours.

\$551,351

CURRENT ANNUAL COST

\$310,970

PROJECTED ANNUAL COST

\$240,381

ESTIMATED ANNUAL SAVINGS

12 hrs.

WRITING HOURS / MONTH

\$58

HOURLY RATE

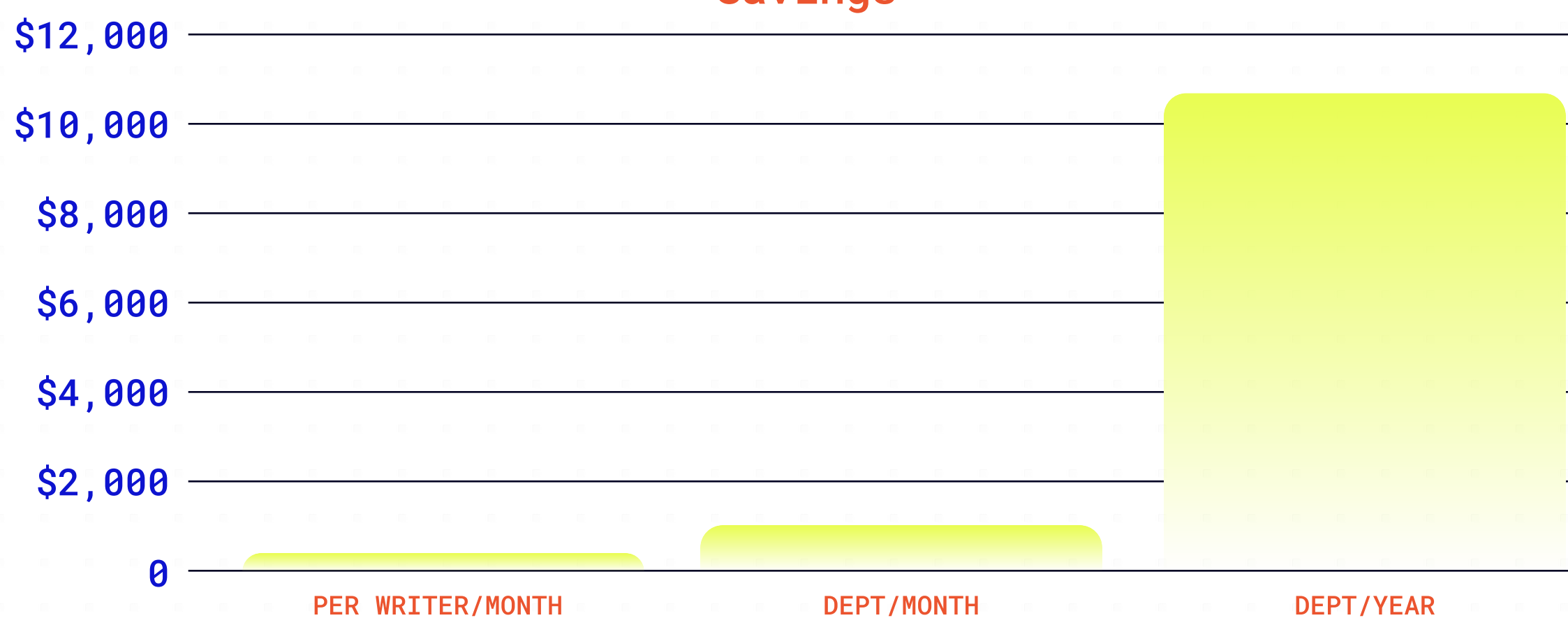
50%

TIME REDUCTION

5

WRITERS IN DEPARTMENT

Savings



USD



Reducing average review time from 2.3 hours to 1.3 hours per document lowers the cost per reviewer from \$5,105.10 to \$2,879.35 per month. Across the nine-person review team, that reduces monthly cost from \$45,945.90 to \$25,914.15 — an annual savings of roughly \$240,381.