

2026

The true cost of **maintenance billing**

A property manager's guide to billing clarity, best practices, and operational profitability.

Compiled by Property Meld from information provided by ProfitCoach, Deb Newell of Real-Time Consulting Services, and Charles Powell, Director of Maintenance at Home Forward.

ProfitCoach

Janie Frobisher & Brad Johnson

Deb Newell, PhD-ABD

Real-Time Consulting Services

Charles Powell

Director of Maintenance, Home Forward

Contents

What's inside

-
- 01 **Executive Summary**
 - 02 **Why Maintenance Billing Breaks Down**
 - 03 **What Poor Billing Actually Costs You**
 - 04 **Building a Billing Process That Works**
 - 05 **The Pre-Flight Brief: A Framework for Invoice Readiness**
 - 06 **Why Companies Struggle to Change, and How to Actually Do It**
 - 07 **Making It Sustainable at Scale**
 - 08 **Conclusion**
-
- **Appendix: The Pre-Flight Brief Checklist**
-

01

SECTION ONE

Executive summary

Maintenance billing is one of the most consistently underbuilt financial systems in property management. Most companies are leaving money on the table, dealing with owner disputes, and absorbing costs they should be recovering — not because they lack information, but because they are left trying to stitch together a story and pick up the pieces from disparate systems without proper context.

This guide was compiled by Property Meld from information provided by ProfitCoach, Deb Newell of Real-Time Consulting Services, and Charles Powell, Director of Maintenance at Home Forward, to help answer a straightforward question: how can operators improve the billing process to optimize operating income?

The answer involves several connected operational improvements. Teams need consolidated workflows, stronger owner communication, disciplined general ledger coding, and properly framed coordination fees. Just as importantly, teams need a documentation infrastructure that ensures every bill is complete before it reaches the accounting team. Each of these elements is covered in practical, actionable terms in the sections that follow.

The contributing perspectives in this guide come from Janie Frobisher and Brad Johnson of ProfitCoach, Deb Newell, founder of Real-Time Consulting Services, and Charles Powell, Director of Maintenance at Home Forward, whose on-the-ground operational experience grounds these recommendations in day-to-day reality.

02

SECTION TWO

Why maintenance billing breaks down

The gap between the work and the bill

Most property managers would say that maintenance takes up the majority of their day. Intake and triage, vendor coordination, resident follow-ups, and owner approvals create constant, high-volume operational demand. Yet despite the time and effort invested in getting the work done, the financial side of that work — how it is billed, documented, and communicated — is consistently handled as an afterthought.

The result is predictable. Money gets left on the table. Owners push back on charges they do not understand, whether that means third-party clients reviewing owner statements or internal leadership teams evaluating portfolio performance. Accounting teams chase down missing details and vague invoice descriptions. Companies that believe they are running a healthy maintenance operation discover, often only when reviewing year-end financials, that maintenance has quietly been a drain on the business rather than a contributor to it.

\$ FINANCIAL REALITY

Janie Frobisher, Director of Accounting at ProfitCoach, sees this pattern regularly. In many cases the property management side of the business is performing well, but the maintenance operation is quietly pulling resources in the wrong direction. The management company ends up subsidizing maintenance rather than the other way around.

Where the invoice process goes wrong

The breakdown in maintenance billing rarely happens at a single, obvious point. It accumulates across a series of small failures, each minor on its own but collectively significant. The most common failure point is the moment an invoice is received.

In many companies, invoices from third-party vendors flow directly to accounting without passing through any review by the maintenance coordinator or project manager who oversaw the work. Accounting staff are not maintenance professionals. They have no reliable way to evaluate whether the scope is correct, whether the hours are accurate, or whether the charges reflect what was authorized. They can only confirm whether funds exist to pay the bill.

For in-house maintenance teams, the problem takes a different form. Without a disciplined process for capturing labor time at the point of service, billing becomes a reconstruction exercise. The longer the gap between work completion and billing, the more detail is lost and the less defensible the charge becomes.

Deb Newell, founder of Real-Time Consulting Services, identifies the most common inconsistencies she encounters when assessing a company's billing health:

Most common maintenance billing inconsistencies

-  Invoices with vague or incomplete scope descriptions that accounting cannot interpret
-  No established cost expectations or pricing references for common work types
-  Incorrect expense categorization, with repairs coded the same as turnover work or capital improvements
-  Markups applied inconsistently, sometimes charged and sometimes not, with no documented policy
-  Internal labor rates that are misunderstood or under-supported, leading to chronic undercharging
-  No formal invoice approval process before charges reach the owner's statement

Charles Powell, Director of Maintenance at Home Forward, describes exactly this breakdown. His team runs roughly a quarter million dollars a year through the maintenance department, but before they had a system for capturing material costs at the job level, significant sums were simply disappearing into the gap between what was spent and what was billed. The culprit was not fraud or carelessness. It was the absence of a reliable process for tracking materials at the point of use.

In three months, \$60,000 in material can add up. A receipt that gets missed, or someone forgets to put that stock in, adds up significantly. And then I have to backtrack and try to figure out where it went.

Charles Powell — Director of Maintenance, Home Forward

The misconception that keeps companies stuck

For many property management companies, the billing problem persists not because they lack the ability to fix it, but because of a deeply held misconception: that maintenance coordination is simply included in the management fee.

As Deb Newell of Real-Time Consulting Services explains, owners sometimes plant this idea, and property managers, uncomfortable with conflict, accept it rather than push back. Over time it becomes the company's de facto policy, even if it was never a deliberate business decision. The financial reality is different. Maintenance coordination involves vendor sourcing, scheduling, quality oversight, issue resolution, and documentation. Each of those activities requires time, headcount, and infrastructure. A company that absorbs those costs rather than billing them is not offering a generous service. It is quietly eroding its own margins.

A second misconception, equally common, is the view that maintenance is simply a cost center. The companies that perform best financially tend to treat it differently — as a service line with its own profitability potential that can be structured, priced, and managed with the same discipline as any other part of the business.

03

SECTION THREE

What poor billing actually costs you

The hidden financial losses

The financial impact of poor maintenance billing is rarely visible in a single line item. It shows up across the business in ways that are easy to misattribute, and by the time the problem is visible it has already compounded significantly.

ProfitCoach has identified the areas where losses tend to concentrate most heavily. For companies with in-house maintenance teams, one of the most significant contributors to inefficiency and loss is caused by a lack of infrastructure around technician time tracking and job assignments. Without tracking Direct Labor Efficiency (DLER) and measuring average job completion times compared to industry standards, many companies overspend on technician labor and have longer turnaround times than necessary. As a result, companies may underutilize or overpay across hundreds of individual jobs each year.

A second area that is commonly overlooked is inconsistent or non-existent maintenance markup policies. When markups are used inconsistently, it can cause the company to lose credibility. Owners who receive inconsistent charges are more likely to question all charges, even the entirely reasonable ones. Not utilizing markups, or applying these inconsistently, also impacts company revenue. This loss commonly underlies a weak value proposition and lack of protocol in communicating the benefit of maintenance to individual property owners at the time the management relationship begins.

\$60K

in material can slip through unbilled in a single quarter when receipts aren't captured at the point of purchase.

The third area of loss is the failure to separate expenses by type. When routine repairs, turnover work, and capital expenditures are all coded to the same general ledger account, the data becomes meaningless for analysis. Companies operating this way cannot identify spending trends, forecast seasonal demand, or have informed conversations with owners about the true cost of maintaining their assets. Many maintenance companies miss reimbursement opportunities or may not fully bill out their maintenance material expenses because of an incomplete or under-utilized chart of accounts.

Charles Powell describes the challenge at the job level with real specificity. When a technician picks up materials at a hardware store, the receipt might include saw blades that are part of the team's standard tooling, a Red Bull, and insulation that was legitimately needed inside a wall. Without a line-by-line review, those costs either all get charged to the owner or none of them do. Neither outcome is accurate, and neither builds the kind of trust that keeps owners from questioning the next invoice.

KPIs every PM should track for maintenance financial health

Based on guidance from ProfitCoach and Deb Newell, Real-Time Consulting Services

- ✓ Billable hours per technician per day, targeting consistent output across roughly 260 working days per year
- ✓ Billing by expense category: plumbing, HVAC, electrical, lawn care, and others
- ✓ Days off market and speed to turnover, since maintenance delays directly affect vacancy loss
- ✓ Speed to repair, targeting a median of 6 days and top performers at 3 days or fewer; work orders exceeding 5.5 days to resolution carry less than a 1% chance of generating a positive resident review
- ✓ Average work order completion time, tracked separately from average turnover time
- ✓ Separation of service requests and project or turnover work, with distinct GL codes for each
- ✓ Markup consistency rate: whether coordination fees are applied on every applicable invoice per policy
- ✓ Work order callback rate, with a median target of 5% and top performers at 0%; callbacks are one of the clearest signals of quality control breakdown and directly erode technician efficiency and profitability

The owner relationship consequence

The damage from poor billing is not only financial. It is relational. Owners who receive statements they cannot understand, or who experience inconsistent charges from month to month, begin to lose confidence in the property management company regardless of how well the actual maintenance work is being performed.

This plays out in predictable ways. Owners request access to raw vendor invoices. They ask why certain charges were not approved in advance. They want to introduce their own vendors. Each of these requests is a symptom of the same underlying problem: the owner does not trust what they are seeing on their statement, and they are trying to verify it themselves.

If I can't justify the invoice to myself, how do I expect my owner to accept what's on their statement? That's where the pushback starts — and once an owner stops trusting you, it takes a long time to earn that back.

Deb Newell — Founder, Real-Time Consulting Services

Providing raw vendor invoices is not the solution. The invoice from a vendor is a business document between the vendor and the management company. Sharing it with the owner exposes the company's vendor relationships, its pricing structure, and in some cases its markup. The better answer is a statement that is clear enough on its own that the owner never feels the need to ask for the underlying document.

Liability exposure

There is a third category of risk that is often overlooked: legal and operational liability. Property management companies that lack documented, consistent billing processes are more vulnerable to disputes that escalate into formal complaints or legal action. When an owner challenges a charge and the company cannot produce a clear approval trail, an itemized scope of work, and documentation of who authorized what and when, the company's position is weak regardless of whether the underlying charge was legitimate.

Vendor relationships carry their own liability dimension. When owners attempt to insert unapproved vendors into the maintenance process, they bypass the vetting, insurance verification, and accountability structures the management company has built. Maintaining clear vendor policies and documenting compliance is not just good business practice. It is a form of risk management.

04**SECTION FOUR**

Building a billing process that works

Start with standardization

The single most impactful thing a property management company can do to improve its maintenance billing is to standardize the process before trying to optimize it.

Standardization means defining, in writing, how every invoice will be received, reviewed, approved, coded, and communicated to the owner — and then applying that process consistently across every work order, every vendor, and every property in the portfolio.

In practice, most companies have allowed their billing process to evolve informally, shaped by whoever happens to be handling invoices at a given time. The result is a patchwork of individual habits rather than a repeatable system. Two coordinators handling similar work orders may produce billing that looks completely different. Neither may be doing anything wrong by their own standards, but the inconsistency itself is the problem.

Billing standardization: decisions that need to be made explicitly

Based on guidance from ProfitCoach and Deb Newell, Real-Time Consulting Services

- 1** What is the invoice approval workflow, and who is responsible at each step before an invoice reaches accounting?
- 2** What GL codes are in use, and are they clearly defined to distinguish service requests, turnover work, and capital expenses?
- 3** What is the markup policy: by what percentage, applied to which cost categories, and with what exceptions?
- 4** What is the pricing structure for in-house labor, including the shop rate, travel time treatment, and flat-rate services?
- 5** What documentation is required on every completed work order before billing is initiated?
- 6** What is the standard format for invoice descriptions on owner statements?

Flat-rate pricing for recurring work

One of the most effective tools for achieving billing consistency is flat-rate pricing on recurring service types. Rather than billing time and materials for work like rekeying a lock, replacing smoke detectors, or performing a standard HVAC filter change, the company establishes a fixed price for each service type, revisited annually to account for changes in labor costs and materials.

Flat-rate pricing eliminates guesswork for coordinators, produces predictable charges on owner statements, removes per-job negotiation friction with vendors, and dramatically accelerates the billing process during high-volume periods like turnover season. The annual review discipline is important: flat rates that are not updated quietly erode profitability over time.

Markups, trip charges, and coordination fees

Markups and coordination fees are among the most consistently mishandled elements of maintenance billing — not because property managers do not understand them, but because they are uncomfortable charging for them. The result is that fees are applied inconsistently, or not at all, with coordinators making informal judgment calls about what feels justified in a given situation.

The solution is to build a clear enough rationale that the company can communicate it with confidence. Maintenance coordination is a service that involves vendor sourcing, technician scheduling, dispatch, quality control, issue resolution, and documentation. A coordination fee is not profit extracted from the owner. It is compensation for a distinct set of professional activities that protect the owner's asset.

When that narrative is part of the management agreement and communicated during onboarding, owners rarely object. The objections almost always arise when the fee appears unexpectedly, without context or explanation. The right fee structure depends on how maintenance is organized. Industry benchmarks by model are summarized below.

Maintenance structure	Typical fee	Notes
Third-party vendors only	10–15% markup	Applied to vendor invoice total; or use a flat \$20–\$40 coordination fee per non-turn work order for lower-cost jobs.
Separate maintenance company with mix of in-house and third-party	15–20% markup	Reflects added coordination and oversight when managing both vendor and technician workflows.
In-house technicians only	~3× hourly rate	Assumes ~80–90% technician utilization; at 70% utilization the multiplier rises to 3.9× to maintain target labor efficiency.

For trip charges specifically, the most defensible approach is to build them into a structured labor rate rather than billing them as a separate line item.

Callbacks and warranty work

Warranty work and callbacks are among the most common billing gray areas in maintenance operations, and the absence of a written policy is almost always the source of the friction. A callback occurs when a technician or vendor returns to a job because the original work failed, was incomplete, or did not resolve the underlying issue. Industry practice is to absorb the labor and material cost of true callbacks within a defined window — typically 30 days from the original work completion — on the principle that the owner has already paid for the work to be done correctly.

Warranty work performed by a third-party vendor is handled differently. In that case, the cost is generally billed back to the vendor under their standard workmanship guarantee, not to the owner. The management company's role is to enforce that guarantee, document the outcome, and ensure the owner is not charged twice for the same repair.

What matters operationally is that the policy is written, applied consistently, and communicated to owners at onboarding. Owners who understand that true callbacks are absorbed are more tolerant of the occasional repeat visit. Owners who are billed for a callback without explanation lose confidence quickly. The policy should also draw a clear line between a callback, which covers the same issue at the same scope, and a new service request, which covers a related issue or an expanded scope. That distinction is where most owner disputes originate, and a documented definition prevents most of them.

Owner communication: what to share and what to protect

Effective owner communication around maintenance costs is not about maximum transparency. It is about the right kind: sharing information that helps the owner understand the condition of their asset while protecting the operational details that are the management company's business to manage.

The owner statement is the primary communication vehicle, and it should be written with the owner in mind, not accounting. That means clear, plain-language descriptions of work performed, distinguishing routine maintenance from larger repair events, and enough context that an owner can understand what happened without needing to call and ask.

Before-and-after photos are among the most effective tools for building owner confidence, and they are underutilized. An owner who can see that a deteriorated water heater was replaced with a new unit is far less likely to question the associated charge than one who receives only a dollar amount on a statement. What should never be shared with owners is the underlying vendor invoice, which contains vendor relationships, pricing agreements, and markup structure.

Charles Powell does not interface directly with owners, but he sees the downstream impact through his monthly meetings with property managers. When billing descriptions became more detailed and costs more accurate, those conversations changed. Property managers could point to specific job types where costs had risen, identify where they had been undercharging for years, and communicate that to owners with actual data behind the conversation rather than an estimate.

Owner communication best practices

Based on guidance from ProfitCoach and Deb Newell, Real-Time Consulting Services

- ✓ Write statement descriptions in plain language focused on what was done and why, not internal codes or vendor shorthand
- ✓ Include before-and-after photos on all significant work orders
- ✓ Proactively communicate any work approaching or exceeding the owner's maintenance cap before it is completed
- ✓ Use predictive language when trends suggest upcoming costs, such as aging HVAC systems
- ✓ Never share raw vendor invoices; the owner statement is the owner-facing document
- ✓ Establish a consistent communication cadence so owners know when and how they will receive updates
- ✓ Establish a minimum owner reserve at onboarding to prevent funding gaps that delay vendor payment

Setting the stage before work begins

The most effective time to reduce billing friction with an owner is before any maintenance work takes place. The management agreement is the right place to establish expectations: the maintenance cap, the approval process for work that exceeds it, the markup structure, the minimum work order threshold, and the documentation standards the company maintains. Owners who sign that agreement have consented to the process, and that consent is the foundation for every billing conversation that follows.

Go deeper: the 2024 PM Operations Standards

Published by ProfitCoach and supported by Property Meld, the Operations Standards provide milestone maps, benchmark targets, and metric definitions for both the maintenance request and turnover lifecycles.

PMOpsStandards.com ↗

05

SECTION FIVE

The Pre-Flight Brief

A framework for invoice readiness before payment is approved.

Even when the maintenance team follows every best practice, there is still a final step before a bill is ready to be paid: the accounting review. Trust accounting staff are not maintenance professionals, and they should not need to be. Their role is to confirm that everything that should have happened before payment did happen, and then approve the transaction with confidence.

The framework. Brad Johnson, CEO of ProfitCoach, developed what he calls the Pre-Flight Brief to define exactly what accounting needs to see before approving a maintenance invoice. The analogy is apt: just as a pilot reviews a checklist not because they distrust the aircraft, but because a systematic check is the only reliable way to catch what might otherwise be missed, an accounting team reviewing maintenance invoices needs a structured view of all relevant information in one place. The goal is a single screen that proves every box has already been checked.

Four layers of invoice readiness

Layer	What accounting needs to confirm
1 Permission	Invoice is at or below owner Not-to-Exceed (NTE). If exceeded, owner approval is documented with name, date, and method. Owner has sufficient funds at the property level.
2 Accuracy	No duplicate invoice exists for this vendor and work order in the past 90 days. Actual cost is within acceptable variance of any estimate. Vendor COI and W-9 are current.
3 Documentation	An audit summary note is present. Before-and-after photos are attached. The original vendor invoice is attached as a reference.
4 Coding	Correct GL code is applied. If a markup was applied, pass-through cost and coordination fee are clearly separated. Description is owner-readable.

The goal is simple: accounting should be able to see everything they need to approve a payment without clicking into a work order, searching for an email, or calling anyone. If they can do that, you've built a real process.

Brad Johnson — CEO, ProfitCoach

The Invoice Risk Score

Brad Johnson recommends assigning each invoice a risk score based on how completely it satisfies the four layers. Accounting staff can then triage their queue efficiently, spending time on the exceptions rather than reviewing every invoice from scratch.

● Green

Under cap, approved vendor, matches estimate. Accountant can confidently approve payment.

● Yellow

Slight cost variance or missing photo. Requires a targeted review before approving.

● Red

Over cap without documented approval, or an unapproved vendor. Return to maintenance team.

Once a team develops confidence in the process, green invoices are processed in batches. Yellow invoices get a focused review on the specific gap. Red invoices are returned to the maintenance team for resolution before payment is considered.

Charles Powell's review process at Home Forward illustrates why this kind of structured review matters. He does not personally handle every invoice from the start, but he reviews them all before they are finalized. The line-by-line breakdown of receipt costs is what makes that review meaningful rather than perfunctory. Without it, he would only ever see the total at the bottom of a receipt and charge accordingly. With it, he can distinguish a legitimate material cost from a personal purchase, catch an item that was missed entirely, and make sure the final invoice reflects what actually happened on the job.

06**SECTION SIX**

Why companies struggle to change, and how to actually do it

Most of the property management companies that struggle with maintenance billing are not struggling because they lack information. They know the process is inconsistent. They have felt the owner pushback. They have seen the accounting bottlenecks. The problem, in most cases, is not awareness. It is implementation.

The two real reasons teams resist change

1 The team does not see the urgency

The team does not understand why the change is necessary. They have been doing things a certain way for months or years, and from where they sit, the process is working. The urgency is not visible from the coordinator's desk the way it is visible on the P&L.

2 The team is already at capacity

The team is already overwhelmed. Maintenance coordination is a high-volume, high-interruption role. Coordinators are managing active work orders, fielding calls from residents and vendors, and handling approvals, all simultaneously. Any change introduced without acknowledging that context is likely to be deprioritized or implemented halfway.

Understanding these two dynamics is the prerequisite for any successful change initiative. A company that tries to enforce a new billing process without addressing the why or the workload reality will get surface-level compliance at best.

Building the case internally

The most effective change management starts with leadership connecting the billing process directly to financial outcomes the team cares about. That means showing, in concrete terms, what the current process is costing the business. How many hours per month does accounting spend chasing down missing details? What is the dollar value of markups that were not applied last quarter because there was no policy in place? How many owner conversations devolved into disputes over charges that were not clearly documented?

When the maintenance team can see those numbers, the change stops feeling like an administrative burden and starts feeling like a solution to a problem they have also experienced. Coordinators who have dealt with frustrated owners or been caught off guard by an over-cap invoice understand the cost of a disorganized process firsthand.

Equipping the team to hold the line with owners

One of the most important and most overlooked components of a billing improvement initiative is preparing the team to communicate the new process to owners. A coordinator who has been told that the company is implementing a coordination fee but has not been given any language to explain it is in an impossible position. When an owner asks why they are seeing a new charge, the coordinator will either stumble through an answer or back down entirely.

The solution is to treat owner communication as part of the training, not an afterthought. Give coordinators and property managers a clear, confident explanation of what the fee covers and why it is part of the service. Role-play the conversation before it happens. And make sure that when the first owner pushes back, the company holds the line consistently, because inconsistency is what generates the most friction over time.

If you don't tell your team why the change is happening and give them the language to explain it, you can't expect them to hold the line. The process is only as strong as the people carrying it.

Deb Newell — Founder, Real-Time Consulting Services

The rollout sequence that works

- 1 Update the management agreement to explicitly address the maintenance cap, approval process, markup policy, and billing standards. New clients sign the updated agreement; existing clients are notified with clear explanations of why each element is being formalized.
- 2 Standardize the GL structure. Establish the correct account codes for service requests, turnover work, and capital expenses, and ensure every invoice is coded correctly going forward.
- 3 Introduce flat-rate pricing for recurring services, starting with the highest-volume, most predictable service types.
- 4 Formalize the markup policy. Define the fee structure by category, document it, apply it consistently, and communicate the policy to owners proactively.
- 5 Implement the Pre-Flight Brief as a standing requirement before any invoice moves to accounting.
- 6 Train for owner conversations. Coordinators and property managers should be able to explain every element of the billing process clearly before they encounter it in a real call.

Charles Powell's experience at Home Forward captures this dynamic precisely. He had been aware of the billing gaps in his operation for two years before he had a reliable system to address them. The problem was never ignorance. It was the absence of a tool that could surface what he already suspected.

I was aware of basically everything. Just no way to really be able to track it. For one person to figure out the tracking system manually was impossible. This gave me a way to say, okay, these are the conversations I need to start having.

Charles Powell — Director of Maintenance, Home Forward

07**SECTION SEVEN**

Making it sustainable at scale

The practices described in this guide are not complicated in concept. The challenge is doing them consistently — across hundreds or thousands of work orders, across multiple coordinators and technicians, across different markets and property types, month after month.

A process that depends on individual memory and manual verification does not scale. The coordinator who built the system in their head leaves, and the institutional knowledge goes with them. What looked like a working process turns out to be a working person. Sustainable billing at scale requires the process to be embedded in the tools the team uses every day.

What needs to happen automatically

For each element of the Pre-Flight Brief, there should be a system-level check, not just a human-level one. NTE limits should be flagged at the work order level before work is dispatched. Owner approvals for over-cap work should be documented in the platform where the work order lives. Vendor compliance should be verified in the system. Labor time should be captured at the point of service, not reconstructed from memory at the end of the day.

Cost projection is another area where automation changes the dynamic. Before a technician is dispatched, the system can surface an expected cost range based on repair type, historical data, and market benchmarks. That projection gives the coordinator and the owner a shared reference point before work begins, rather than a surprise when the invoice arrives. When actual costs land within the expected range, the invoice requires no explanation. When they fall outside it, the coordinator already has the context to explain why.

The more of these checks that are handled systematically, the more reliable the process becomes, and the more time coordinators and accounting staff can spend on work that actually requires human judgment.

The billing workflow: from work order to owner statement

1	Work order created with NTE limit visible. If probable cost exceeds cap, owner approval obtained before dispatch.	COORDINATOR
2	Technician completes work. Labor time logged at point of service. Material costs captured with receipt photo.	TECHNICIAN
3	Coordinator reviews completed work order: scope, photos, and costs confirmed before invoice is created.	COORDINATOR
4	Invoice generated from actual cost data with correct markup applied per policy. GL code assigned.	COORDINATOR
5	Pre-Flight Brief checklist completed: all four layers confirmed.	COORDINATOR
6	Invoice moves to accounting queue with risk score. Green processed in batches; yellow reviewed; red returned.	ACCOUNTING
7	Approved invoice syncs to trust accounting system. No duplicate data entry.	SYSTEM
8	Owner statement reflects work in plain-language terms with supporting documentation available.	SYSTEM

Where technology fits in

The workflow described above is achievable with disciplined process design alone. Technology does not change what needs to happen. It changes how reliably it happens, and how much of the coordinator's time it requires.

Purpose-built maintenance billing tools can automate the NTE check, surface vendor compliance status, enforce documentation requirements before an invoice can be submitted, calculate the correct markup based on the company's rate structure, generate the owner-ready invoice description, assign the GL code, and sync the approved bill to the trust accounting system without manual re-entry. Each of those automations removes a step that, when done manually, is a potential point of failure.

Property Meld's TrueCost suite was built specifically to support this workflow. From AI-assisted cost benchmarking at the work order stage to white-labeled owner invoicing and direct trust accounting integration, it provides the infrastructure to make the practices in this guide consistent and scalable across a portfolio of any size.

Charles Powell's experience at Home Forward is a concrete illustration of what that shift looks like in practice. Before his team started capturing costs at the job level, his spend-per-unit figure was approximately \$65. Once receipts were being photographed and parsed at the point of purchase, that number jumped to \$122. The underlying spend had not changed. What changed was the visibility.

WHAT CHANGED WAS THE VISIBILITY

\$65

Spend per unit,
before



\$122

Spend per unit,
after



I realized, oh wow, we're spending a lot more than we're charging. It was a major difference — to where I could crack down on, hey, where are these receipts? Because I see a big difference.

Charles Powell — Director of Maintenance, Home Forward

The adoption story at Home Forward also illustrates something important about how technology change actually works in a maintenance team. The platform was implemented before Powell was even formally introduced to it. A few technicians who were already comfortable with apps started using it on their own, the billing numbers shifted noticeably, and Powell noticed the change before anyone told him what had happened. The best technology does not require a mandated rollout. It produces results visible enough that the team asks to use it.

His advice to other maintenance leaders who are skeptical of the process is straightforward: ask questions. Not of the software itself, but of the data it surfaces. The system can show you where the gaps are. The conversations that follow — with technicians, with dispatchers, with property managers — are where the real change happens.

08

SECTION EIGHT

Conclusion

Maintenance billing is not a back-office problem. It is a business strategy problem. The companies that get it right are the ones that have made deliberate decisions about how billing should work, communicated those decisions clearly, and built processes that reinforce them consistently.

The practices in this guide are not aspirational. They are being used today by property management companies that have decided to treat their maintenance operations with the same financial discipline they apply to every other part of their business. The results show up in cleaner financials, fewer owner disputes, faster payment cycles, and more confident teams.

The starting point is simpler than most companies expect. It is not a technology overhaul or a full process rebuild. It is a decision to stop accepting inconsistency as the default, and to build, one step at a time, a billing operation that reflects the quality of the work being done every day. Even if you do not view maintenance as a profit center, it cannot be a charitable donation. The discipline to bill correctly is the same discipline that earns and keeps owner trust.



ProfitCoach

The True Cost of Maintenance Billing — a 2026 white paper compiled by Property Meld from information provided by ProfitCoach, Deb Newell of Real-Time Consulting Services, and Charles Powell, Director of Maintenance at Home Forward.

© 2026 Property Meld. All rights reserved.

Go deeper at PMOpsStandards.com



APPENDIX

The Pre-Flight Brief checklist

Use this checklist to confirm that every maintenance invoice is complete before it is submitted to your trust accounting system. Any item that cannot be confirmed should be resolved by the maintenance coordinator before the invoice advances to accounting.

1 PERMISSION

- ☐ Invoice amount is at or below the owner's not-to-exceed limit
- ☐ If the cap was exceeded, owner approval is documented with name, date, and method
- ☐ Owner has sufficient funds in their draw to cover the invoice

2 ACCURACY

- ☐ No duplicate invoice exists for this vendor and work order in the past 90 days
- ☐ Actual cost is within acceptable variance of any previously approved estimate
- ☐ Vendor certificate of insurance and W-9 are current and on file

3 DOCUMENTATION

- ☐ An audit summary note is present describing what was found, done, and decided
- ☐ Before-and-after photos are attached
- ☐ The original vendor invoice is attached as a reference document

4 CODING

- ☐ Correct GL code is applied, distinguishing service requests from turnover and capital
- ☐ Markup is documented separately from the pass-through vendor cost
- ☐ Invoice description is written in plain language appropriate for an owner statement
- ☒ Any item left unchecked should be returned to the maintenance coordinator for resolution before the invoice advances to accounting.