

BQE CORE CUSTOMER CASE STUDY



# Riley Engineering

Tucson, Arizona

25+ Employees

Civil & Water Resource Engineering

riley-eng.com



## Engineering water access through operational clarity



*“CORE has been huge for us because it gives us live data and confidence in what we’re seeing. That confidence frees us from spreadsheets and manual work, so we can focus on building relationships, delivering meaningful projects, and helping communities who need access to water”*

**John Duncan**  
Marketing & Business Development Director



## Water-first engineering that scales with clarity

Riley Engineering was founded for a reason that is simple and urgent.

Ronson Chee grew up on the Navajo Nation. He saw something most people in the United States never have to think about. Many homes did not have running water. In winter, people walked through snow to an outhouse. Families drove hours each week to haul drinking water in large tanks. That meant gas money, lost work hours, missed school, and health issues that compounded over time.

After earning his PhD in civil engineering in 2017, Ronson started Riley Engineering to help change that reality. The firm specializes in water resources engineering. About half of their work serves tribal communities, and the other half supports municipal, residential, and commercial clients. The mission stays consistent across all of it.

Help make sure everyone has the water they need to live a good life.

Based in Tucson, Arizona, Riley Engineering has grown steadily since its founding. The team now includes about 15 people, most of them engineers or engineering interns, supported by a small non engineering group focused on operations, finance, and communications.

As the firm grew, so did the complexity of the work. Projects became larger. Timelines stretched longer. Billing requirements varied by client, especially across tribal and government work. More people were involved in each project,

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***Ronson grew up seeing that 15 to 30 percent of people on the Navajo Nation lived without running water. Over time, he saw how that single issue created cascading effects, from poverty to serious health challenges.***

**John Duncan**  
Marketing & Business Development Director

and leadership needed clearer visibility into budgets, hours, and performance across the firm.

What once worked for a small, founder-led practice was no longer enough. Riley Engineering needed a better way to manage projects, finances, and growth without pulling focus away from the communities they were trying to serve.

## When the systems did not talk to each other

Before Riley Engineering adopted a firm management platform, the business side of the firm was held together by QuickBooks and Excel.

The tools themselves were familiar. The challenge was how much lived between them.

Project budgets were tracked in one place. Time was recorded somewhere else. Invoices were created separately, with no direct connection back to project progress or hours worked. Getting a clear picture of how a project was actually performing meant pulling data from multiple systems and reconciling it by hand.

As the firm took on more work, that manual effort grew. Every new project added another layer of review. Every invoice required careful cross

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***Anytime you don't have an integrated system, you're doing a lot of additional manual work. We didn't have a way to manage projects that was connected to accounting and time, which meant pulling data together manually just to understand where a project stood.***

**John Duncan**  
Marketing & Business Development Director



checking. The risk was not just inefficiency, but the constant possibility of missing something because the data never lived in one place.

At the center of all of it was Ronson.

As founder and principal, he was responsible for nearly everything that kept the firm running. He served as principal and project manager on every project. He handled invoicing. He was the primary point of contact for clients. Strategic decisions, financial oversight, and day to day delivery all flowed through one person.

Selah, who later joined the firm as Marketing and Communications Director, described it simply.

He was in charge of everything. But that created bottlenecks everywhere. It wasn't sustainable.

That model worked in the earliest days. But as Riley Engineering grew and the work became more complex, it became clear that the firm needed a better way to manage projects and finances without putting all the weight on one set of shoulders.

# A new foundation for growth

Riley Engineering adopted CORE in 2022. Over the following months, the firm also went through a major shift in scale. They doubled their staff, added new specialties, and began taking on larger and more complex work.

CORE played a key role in making that growth manageable because the work stayed connected.

Projects, accounting, and time all lived in one system. The team could see where a project stood in real time. Invoices did not require a separate process that lived outside project data. The firm had live visibility without rebuilding the picture every month.

That visibility also gave Ronson a practical way to lead differently.

He set up dashboards that were highly customized to the way he thinks and manages. He is now able to check profitability and performance multiple times a day with ease. Combined with the support of a controller, that gave him more time for business development and for building relationships with larger clients.

That shift showed up in the firm's trajectory.

Riley Engineering doubled the size of the firm over a few years. They also landed their largest project ever and have continued to see the size of projects increase. The contract value for that single project was roughly equal to the firm's highest grossing year to date.

Selah tied that growth back to something very specific.



Ronson now has time to meet with big clients and build relationships that lead to larger work. He is no longer caught in the weeds of managing spreadsheets, opening his time for more valuable work.

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***He built CORE dashboards around how he thinks and leads. He logs in every day, often multiple times a day, to understand profitability, track performance, and stay connected to how the firm is really operating.***

**John Duncan**  
Marketing & Business Development Director

# Bringing structure to projects that matter

Riley Engineering's work is not abstract. It is deeply human.

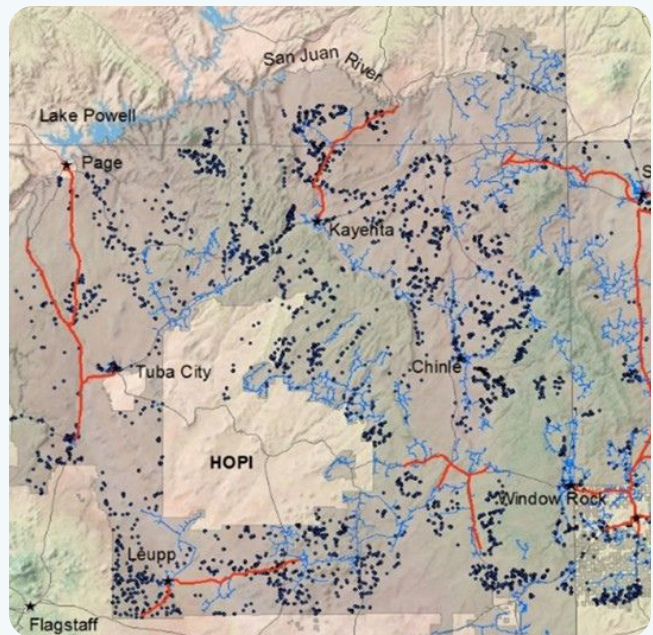
The firm works closely with the Indian Health Service and the Navajo Engineering and Construction Authority to support sanitation infrastructure projects on the Navajo Nation. In some rural areas, that work includes designing first ever pipelines. In others, it means creating cisterns and septic systems for homes that have never had running water.

For many residents, these projects represent the first time water will be available inside their homes. Some are elderly grandparents who have lived their entire lives without it. The impact is immediate and personal, touching daily health, dignity, and quality of life.

Riley Engineering leads the design and the community coordination for this work, partnering closely with tribal stakeholders throughout the process. Once the plans are complete, the construction drawings are handed off to the Nation for delivery.

The contracts are intentionally structured so that tribal enterprises and tribal members are directly involved. That approach does more than deliver infrastructure. It supports long term capacity, local participation, and investment within the community.

As these projects have grown in size and complexity, structure has become essential. Clear project phases, defined tasks, and consistent tracking allow the team to manage large, multi-year efforts without losing sight of the people they are serving.



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*We're designing cisterns and septic systems for houses that have never had water. Many of the people who live there are grandparents who have lived their entire lives without running water, and now they finally have access to something most of us take for granted..*

**John Duncan**

Marketing & Business Development Director

## The monthly close that stopped taking days

One of the clearest operational shifts for Riley Engineering came from invoicing.

When Selah joined the firm in April 2022, invoicing was still a heavy lift. Even after CORE had been implemented, monthly invoicing regularly took a couple of days. Every invoice required careful review, cross-checking, and follow-up because project data, time, and approvals were not yet flowing through a consistent process.

Over time, that changed through a combination of better use of CORE and a deliberate shift in how the firm approached billing.

Brenda, the firm's controller, became the internal owner of the system. Each week she runs the CORE timecard report and reviews it with the project managers. Together, they confirm that hours align with expectations on each project and follow up with employees while the details are still fresh. Issues are resolved weekly instead of piling up at the end of the month.

That weekly rhythm changed invoicing for everyone involved.

Project managers gained confidence that their project data was accurate before invoices were created. Brenda no longer had to reconcile weeks of uncertainty in a single billing cycle. For Ronson, it meant fewer surprises and less time spent reviewing invoices line by line.

By the time invoicing day arrives, the work is already validated.

Today, invoicing typically takes half a day and in some cases only a few hours. As Selah described it, the process has become simple.

Run it. Review it. Send it.

That shift matters. Riley Engineering processes invoices across their of active projects, many with specific client requirements and reporting expectations. What could be complex and time-consuming has been simplified with CORE. Cutting invoicing time from a couple of days down to a couple of hours did more than save time. It reduced friction, increased confidence, and freed the team to focus on higher-value work.

One of the project managers even added a smiley face to the invoicing email. That had never happened before. A sign that the new systems is better for everyone.

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***When we first got CORE, invoicing literally took a whole day, if not multiple days. Now it's run it, look at it, it's good, send it out. Having everything connected means fewer surprises and a lot more confidence in what's going out the door***

**John Duncan**

Marketing & Business Development Director



# Better data for better decisions

As Riley Engineering grows, visibility is just as important as efficiency.

CORE has become the place where the firm goes to understand how the business is actually performing. From both a firm-wide perspective as well as project by project.

The leadership team reviews profitability on every project. They can compare similar work led by different project managers and see where outcomes diverge. That makes it possible to move past instinct and ask better questions. Why did one project perform differently than another? What support does a project manager need? Where should specific strengths be applied next? What processes need to be improved?

Those conversations are grounded in data the team trusts.

Ronson, the firm's founder and principal, relies heavily on CORE dashboards that he has customized to reflect how he runs the business. He checks them often, monitoring profit and overall performance in real time. That constant access to accurate information gives him confidence in both day-to-day decisions and long-term planning.

The same data supports the rest of the firm. Project managers use CORE to understand how their projects are tracking against budgets. The controller pulls reports weekly to confirm time, validate expectations, and keep financial data current. Utilization and profitability are reviewed regularly as a team, giving the firm a clearer picture of how people and projects intersect.

That visibility has supported more than operational improvements.



As Riley Engineering doubled in size, expanded into a larger office, and invested more intentionally in its team, the firm needed systems that could scale with it. They introduced team development tools like the Six Types of Working Genius assessment, celebrated their first PMP certification, and strengthened their internship pipeline, converting one intern into a full-time hire.

Those investments worked because leadership could see what was happening across the firm. Growth without visibility creates noise. Growth with visibility creates learning and opportunity.

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***We look at the profitability of every project. When similar projects perform differently, we can see it clearly, understand what's driving the difference, and use that data to coach teams and make smarter decisions***

**John Duncan**  
Marketing & Business Development Director

CORE provides that visibility. It gives Riley Engineering a single place to understand performance, build confidence in decisions, and pursue larger, more complex work without losing control of the business behind the mission.

## Built to scale what matters

Riley Engineering has reached a new chapter.

The firm has grown beyond its earliest years and into work that demands greater coordination, deeper visibility, and steady execution. Projects are larger. Teams are more specialized. Client expectations are more complex.

The work itself remains grounded in purpose. Riley Engineering continues to design infrastructure that directly improves daily life, delivering water systems that support health, stability, and opportunity in communities that have long gone without them.

What has changed is the foundation beneath the work.

With a single, trusted system supporting projects and finances, the firm can operate with clarity instead of complexity. Leadership has real time insight into performance. Teams know where their projects stand. The business runs with a cadence that supports growth without distraction.



That clarity creates momentum.

It allows Riley Engineering to take on meaningful work with confidence, invest in its people, and expand its impact without compromising the care that defines the firm. The result is a business that is equipped not just to grow, but to endure.

For Riley Engineering, CORE supports something larger than operations.

It supports the ability to keep moving forward, focused on the work that matters most.

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***We just landed our largest project ever, with a contract value roughly equal to our highest grossing year. By giving us clear, real time visibility into the business, CORE freed Ronson to focus on relationships and business development, which directly enabled that growth.***

**John Duncan**

Marketing & Business Development Director

**Your ambition scales, clarity grows, and creativity thrives with BQE CORE.**

**Request A Demo** →

