Issue Brief

Positioning Government IT for the Future

Understanding drivers and applying key strategies strengthen IT's readiness for change

The dynamic nature of technology and government activity means that IT must be well-positioned to both drive and accommodate change. By understanding your organization's drivers and applying key positioning strategies, you can improve IT's readiness for the new business demands and technology opportunities that are sure to come along.

Recognizing IT Drivers

Understanding the drivers for your IT organization can help to shape new IT investments and ensure that those investments match the expectations of your elected officials and constituents.

For instance, your efforts might be *trend-driven* if you are asked to focus on some of the most current constituent concerns and technology opportunities. This could include becoming more transparent about government decision-making and purchasing, leveraging citizen self-service and mobile access, or implementing shared IT services. Examples of solutions that meet these trend-driven efforts include agenda management, online access to documents/records, accounts payable solutions, online application processes, geographic information systems (GIS) applications and enterprise resource planning (ERP) solutions.

Or, your efforts could be *strategy-driven* if you need to focus on stakeholder adoption, prioritization of competing departmental needs, return on investment (ROI) and total cost of ownership (TCO) factors. Solutions for strategy-driven efforts often cut across the entire organization such as human resources (HR) solutions that automate employee actions, integrations that connect a data system and document management, or online solutions that generate revenue through Web-based document access.

By contrast, you might be *reaction-driven* if you are responding to urgent constituent demands, staff reductions, funding cuts, compliance problems, and the changes requested by new organization managers or elected leaders. In this case, solutions for document management and workflow that enable online access to public records help to meet constituent demands for accountability and transparency while reducing the number of staff needed to do

this work. Solutions for accounts payable and human services can help offset staff cuts, and automation and document management solutions can be the foundation of creating systems for better compliance.

No matter which factors drive the decisions and activity in your IT organization, "To remain relevant, chief information officers need to ... rekindle the spirit of entrepreneurism and innovation that has taken a backseat to budget-driven austerity," says Todd Sander, executive director of the Center for Digital Government. "They also need to create and manage the key relationships within and between governments and with the private sector that will define public service in an era when the source of support is much less important than the outcomes."[1]

IT Positioning Strategies for Future Investments

Sander's advice is also helpful for making effective technology investments today that will continue to meet future government needs and opportunities. The key strategy is to keep the IT view focused on the enterprise level because that perspective helps both IT and business-side stakeholders understand the balancing act necessary among core IT services, funding availability and staff allocations.

Additionally, according to a National Association of State CIOs (NASCIO) committee, an enterprise-level IT architecture can streamline procurement, decrease costs and increase the value of IT investments.[2]

The initial goal of an enterprise view is to simplify, centralize and consolidate IT infrastructure, systems, applications, documents and data. Follow-on goals may include reduced costs, duplication avoidance, simplified management, and the flexibility for future growth and change.

But what do these enterprise goals mean in a government context when it comes to IT deployments? They mean adhering to several IT principles that deliver enterprise-level value.

Central repositories, no silos. For reasons of cost savings, employee productivity and efficiency for delivering services, data and documents can no longer be isolated and duplicated among departmental or system silos. The enterprise view

is to create a central data repository that is accessible (with appropriate security controls) to multiple users and systems.

Integrated systems, data and documents. Centralization also makes it possible to achieve greater integration among systems and the data and documents they access. Outcomes include better information, improved flow of work tasks and data, and faster decision-making.

Single, secure, scalable platforms. By taking an enterprise view, IT computing and network infrastructure can be consolidated onto single platforms that are simpler to manage and secure, and can be scaled up or down to meet changing needs.

Phased and flexible deployments. With the needs of the enterprise in mind, IT projects can be implemented in flexible yet controlled phases. This type of deployment may be completed faster, with fewer problems and rework, which reduces overall project costs. Enterprise solutions often have flexible components and functionality that can be used in multiple departments, stretching your investment's impact and reach.

Departmental solutions based on an enterprise vision. Cross-departmental solutions become apparent in an enterprise view. For example, listing new properties for tax and land-use planning purposes may involve records in multiple departmental systems within a municipality. Integrating these records for central access is a cross-department implementation that will simplify the property listing records and workflow.

Process maps. Clear and detailed diagrams, flow charts, or lists of systems and work processes give you a solid understanding of IT roles in your organization's business activity today. These visuals can also help you define where IT needs to go for the future. Create these process maps as part of a discovery activity for a new IT project, then remember to update them after the new system is in place. This will enforce accountability and help to show improvements of time and costs before and after your new solutions.

User introduction and training. Educating users is critical to adoption of a new IT solution and to the project's overall success. Internal user groups and user days are great ways to demonstrate and share information about new IT solutions. For example, you can illustrate how a new solution will yield improvements in the user experience and/or reductions in user workload. Current users can explain to new adopters how they work with and benefit from a particular technology solution in clear, relevant and non-technical terms.

Additionally, the education resources available through your vendor can be a cost-effective way to train users instead of developing your own programs or bringing in a consultant.

Reporting results. For many users and business managers, IT is invisible until they experience a problem. A government IT annual report can discuss issues and progress on your organization's challenges as well as improvements in systems, processes, information access, and other technical and business parameters.

Conclusion: Sustaining the Enterprise Vision

The work of IT truly is never done. But that work can become easier by:
- Understanding the drivers for your IT choices and investments
- Applying IT principles for solid project implementation
- Keeping a visionary eye on new business opportunities and how they can be served by new technology trends

Together, these strategies will place your IT organization in a solid position for the future.

Detailed insights and recommendations for this topic are presented in the Center for Digital Government guide, "Selecting and Sustaining IT Investments in Government." To download a free copy, visit www.govtech.com/technology-investment-guide or www.governing.com/technology-investment-guide.

Endnotes

1. Center for Digital Government Special Report, "Smarter, Leaner, Faster: Governments in the Age of Enterprise IT Services," http://forms.erepublic.com/gt-paper-step1-default?r=gt-paper-step2-default&contentID=155681845
2. "Leveraging Enterprise Architecture for Improved IT Procurement," National Association of State CIOs (NASCIO), www.nascio.org/publications/documents/NASCIO_LeveragingEA_July2012.pdf

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