5 KEYS FOR REIMAGINING CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT WITH TRANSFORMATIVE TECHNOLOGY

Deploying a Digital Government Platform

'Find something that few can do and do it well'

For those seeking a fast-track to sustainable career success, these ten simple words carry the wisdom of the ages. But the question has always been, what is that certain 'something' that will play to your specific strengths and take your career to the next level? Fortunately, if you're currently a key player involved in procuring or implementing a government IT project, the answer may be right under your nose.

**Delivering government technology projects on time and on budget:
Something that very few can consistently do well.**

Across North America, demand is spiking for government agencies to modernize their IT software platforms[1] to meet a growing need for seamless citizen services while at the same time, reducing operational budget overheads through improved workflow efficiencies. With revenue generating civic services such as land development, licensing, permitting, and alcoholic beverage control, falling under this new purview of 'digital governance,' we are a point in time where it is abundantly clear that a substantial opportunity exists for those working on the front lines of government technology innovation.

The challenge, as always, lies in doing it well—as the latest findings make exceedingly clear.

According to a 2017 Project Management Study[2] conducted by KPMG:

- **Only 31% of organizations are likely to deliver projects on time**
- **Only 29% of organizations are likely to deliver projects on budget**
- **Only 33% of organizations deliver projects that are likely to meet original goals or business objectives**
- **Only 34% of organizations deliver projects that are likely to achieve stakeholder satisfaction**

In short, the rewards still beckon for those government project teams capable of delivering transformative government software projects on time and on budget, but the ability to mitigate the associated risks of such projects is often preventing both the timely delivery of improved services to taxpayers and the anticipated career 'wins' for those dedicated individuals embracing the challenge of cost-effective enterprise software implementation.

So, how does the savvy professional best mitigate these project risks to firmly place themselves in the coveted category of '**the few that can do it well**?'

'Those that do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it.'

George Santayana

Before we jump into the '5 Keys to Deliver Your Government Technology Project On Time & On Budget,' it's important to acknowledge the substantial elephant in the room. As the data indicates: many, many capable government project management and IT professionals have been down this road before, and often through no fault of their own, are now living with the reality of an underwhelming IT project implementation at best, or an outright failed project at worst.

This sober reality is important to recognize for two critical reasons:

1. Our career failures (both collectively and individually) must be examined in excruciating detail to ensure that we learn from them and don't repeat our mistakes. Human beings have an understandable tendency to rapidly distance ourselves from those experiences that disappoint or demoralize us. When it comes to this type of multi-variable team endeavor however, some unbiased self-examination through the lens of 20/20 hindsight can prove to be a very valuable and oft empowering exercise.

2. While not the statistical majority, there are a substantial number of truly transformative IT projects that have been implemented **on time and on budget.** Each of these projects share core commonalities that you can emulate and execute to effectively mitigate your project risks and guarantee your organizational rewards. In short, given another opportunity, *you can do this well.* The key to playing on this winning team is gathering the right combination of players and relying on a proven playbook.
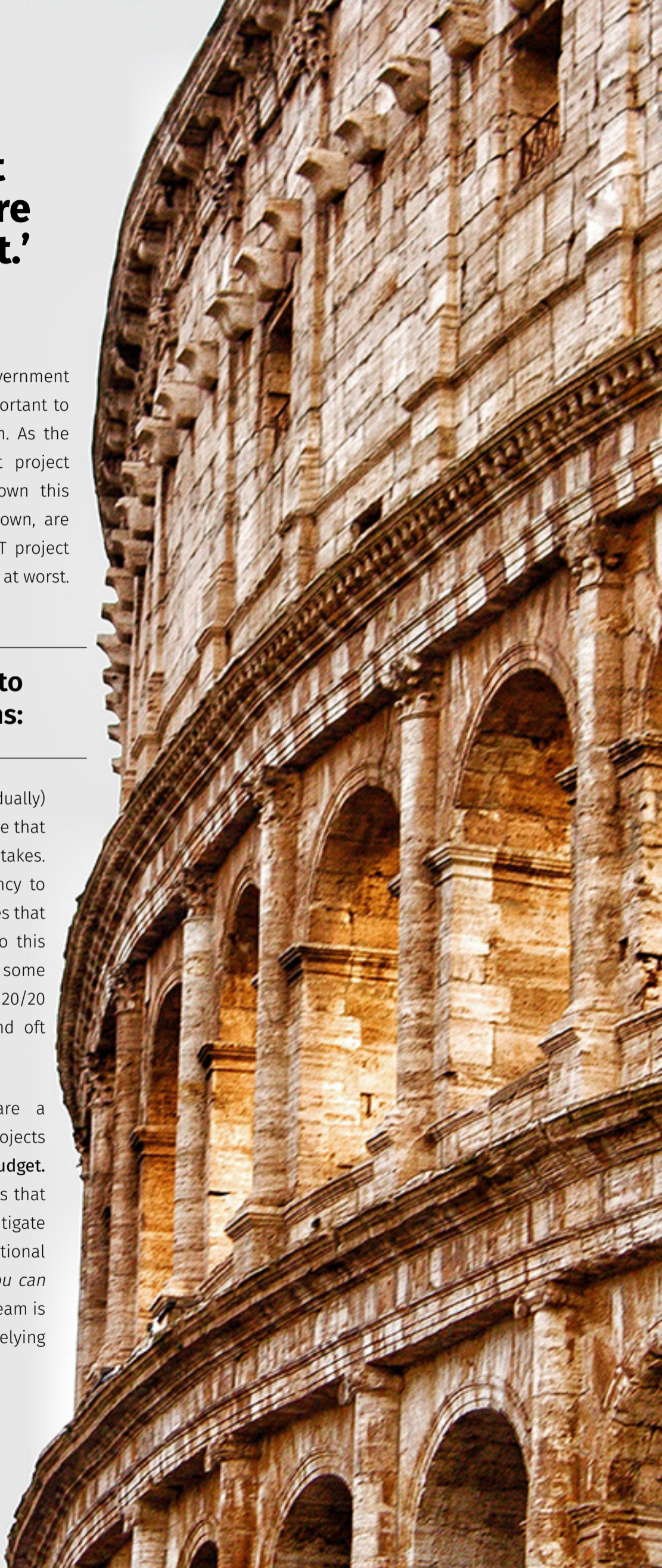
What can history teach us?

If you're currently working with an underwhelming or failed software implementation in your government agency, while it may not feel like it—there is a significant silver lining to your present situation. You now know with a high degree of certainty the areas in which your project went astray internally—and of even more critical importance, those areas in which your current implementation vendor may have fallen short or continues to underperform with their service and delivery model.

Granted, this wisdom may have come at a high price, but the root cause audit you are now able to perform will establish an invaluable framework for your future success. Of equal importance, if an exit strategy is required to transition you from an underwhelming platform to a more mature enterprise solution, an effective audit will help you to tease out those internal organizational and technology assets that you can best leverage going forward to help defray the impacts of previous sunk costs. This is an important consideration for government leaders feeling as if they're 'stuck' with an underperforming vendor, and thus mulling the long-term implications of maintaining a mediocre status quo—never an attractive proposition for citizens OR administration alike.

A guideline for an effective enterprise project transition is that an effective solution partner can typically enable satisfactory migration to a platform meeting or exceeding all business requirements for **a 10 year cost that is LESS than the licensing, maintenance, hosting and support costs associated with maintaining the inferior solution over the same timeframe**.

Certainly costs will vary according to the scope and complexity of the project, but it is important for government leaders invested in providing quality services to their citizens to know that currently stalled implementations are rarely as constraining as they can appear on the surface—with an effective Transition Readiness Audit often resulting in a concrete direction and newfound optimism for those organizations still resilient enough to embrace the right path to innovation.

Moving past 'fingerpointing' towards root cause mitigation and elimination

The process to turn requirements into reality must be a clear and communicative one, providing ample opportunity for dialogue and discovery for all project stakeholders.

One of the challenges in performing this type of project audit is defining where internal responsibilities end and external vendor accountability begins.

Because failed enterprise software projects often involve the failure to achieve a clear and common understanding on business requirements vs. anticipated feature functionality and user experience, failed projects can all too easily devolve into finger pointing exercises between client and vendor with both parties expressing frustrations with communication disconnects throughout the process. The most common expression of this is clients identifying system issues as 'bugs' or 'feature gaps' whilst the vendor insists on labeling them as a new development work (e.g. change requests). The root cause here is the lack of a common frame of reference on what exactly the product should look like on Go Live Date and beyond.

While not wishing to give a free pass to government clients that contribute to poor project implementations with incomplete, vague or 'moving target' business requirements, it is important to stress that the lion's share of responsibility to ensure that business requirements pass muster as actionable workflows must reside with the enterprise software vendor. Just as a homebuilder must ensure that blueprints provide a common frame of reference and a clear construction plan for his prospective homebuyers, the implementation vendor (as the defacto subject matter expert for their software solutions), must ensure that the process to turn agency requirements into reality is a clear and communicative process providing ample opportunity for discovery and dialogue for all parties involved.

This mission is especially critical as the relationship evolves from one of product delivery to one of product support and optimization, and it here that government clients will often start to recognize the signs of a software vendor struggling with a poor service delivery model..

Warning signs that a software vendor is lacking with their service delivery model

If a 'happy home' is your eventual goal signaling IT project success, here are some warning signs that your current enterprise solutions provider may be leading you down the garden path instead:

In a successful IT project implementation, the client/vendor relationship typically matures to one of mutual respect and ongoing product refinement that benefits both parties equally. With a stable and responsive platform established, internal product teams shift their focus to widespread adoption, feature customization and innovation, or platform expansion into other business areas and workflows. The work continues, but like our homebuilding analogy, the structural heavy lifting is largely finished, and the happy owners focus on turning their new house into a 'home.'

By contrast, if the new homeowner is consistently reaching into their pockets to pay for crucial 'fixes' not anticipated long past the initial possession date, the relationship may be headed down a potential rocky path.

If a 'happy home' is your eventual goal signaling IT project success, here are some warning signs that your current enterprise solutions provider may be leading you down the garden path instead:

- Your Go Live Date is continually pushed back with inadequate explanation or rationale provided

- The project is launched with significant feature gaps and/or extensive bug fixes required

- Product launch presents as 'feature-lite' with efforts to achieve your full requirements list requiring ongoing and cost prohibitive change requests and/or new project costs

- Feature gaps are addressed via a promised upgrade path that never seems to arrive

- Support requirements and costs seem to be escalating prohibitively with the possibility of balloon payments and/or tiered service billing models hamstringing your ability to cross the goal line with your requirements met in full

- Project requirements are de-scoped early and often by the implementation vendor, pushing previously agreed vendor responsibilities and costs back onto the client

- Core infrastructure costs such as licensing, hosting, managed services, etc. are increasing at an alarming rate not consistent with industry or inflation trends

If you are encountering one or more of the above scenarios with your current enterprise software vendor, it is wholly appropriate to flag their service delivery model as a potential root cause risk that must be properly mitigated going forward. In fact, given their domain knowledge expertise and the absolutely vital role that your enterprise solution provider will play in your eventual project success[3], it is appropriate to begin our countdown of the '5 Keys to Deliver Your Government Technology Project On Time & On Budget' with the key first step you can take to ensure your software vendor is a true partner in your project success.

1

Set a goal for 100% referenceability and project success
and do not deviate from this objective

2

Evaluate the vendor's R&D infrastructure and product roadmap
to ascertain long-term partner stability and project viability

3

Quantify your potential government software platform
as a truly integrated solution

4

Consider your software vendor's partnership
qualities and their fit with your culture

5

Examine and verify your potential partner's service
commitment, setting the highest expectations possible

Identifying a software provider that is invested in your success beyond the sale

It's frankly perplexing that with a procurement process as robust as the standard RFP Process for government clients seeking enterprise partners, that the final result is so often a mismatch between client and vendor. However, as a cogent study of ERP Project Success factors[4] reveals, a key contributor to this issue is the inherent bias of an RFP process that skews more favourably to quantitative scoring of product feature matrices as opposed to the more qualitatively measured—but no less critical—project success factors of implementation methodology, service delivery capabilities, and product lifecycle optimization.

The good news is there is a better way to evaluate your potential implementation partner by focusing your investigation beyond product fit predominantly to include a handful of core company indicators:

1. **Set a goal for 100% referenceability and project success and do not deviate from this objective**

2. **Evaluate the vendor's R&D infrastructure and product roadmap to ascertain longterm partner stability**

3. **Quantify your potential government software platform as a truly integrated solution.**

4. **Consider your software vendor's partnership qualities and their fit with your culture**

5. **Examine and verify your potential partner's service commitment, setting the highest expectations possible**

Unlike our homebuilding analogy, where a careful examination of previous builds will reveal a great deal about the builders themselves, focusing your software implementation evaluation too narrowly on product suite 'features and fit' can result in overlooking the more crucial attributes of project acumen, service ethos, and support capabilities, that will ultimately define your vendor partnership and, as a result, the success of your project in meeting and exceeding your business goals.

With this in mind, let's commence our '5 Steps' countdown to drill down in detail on the crucial steps you must take to ensure you have a legitimate ally in this enterprise with a verifiable track record.

Verify your vendor's service commitment setting the highest standards possible

Setting vendor expectations for service

Good vendors produce a trail of happy and loyal customers.

At their core, enterprise IT projects are exercises in multi-variable problem solving with those who **do it well** recognized by their ability to think on their feet and stay committed to final project success despite the challenges and obstacles that will inevitably arise.

For this reason, it is imperative that you are rigorous in your investigation of your prospective software vendor's partnership qualities and team culture, as best quantified by their relationships with current and past customers. You want the best, or at the very least, the best within your budget. With that in mind, here's the types of questions you should be asking of a potential vendor in seeking these key partnership abilities:

- Do ALL projects consistently meet or exceed business requirements?

- Are ALL clients satisfied with project outcomes?

- Would they endorse the implementation vendor directly?

- Are there abundant examples of happy customers providing referrals?

- Can they provide a complete contact list of past clients? If no, why?

- Can you contact clients not on the provided reference list? If no, this should raise red flags.

While this latter point may seem harsh or invasive, it's important to emphasize that vendors that are truly excelling with their client services approach will not balk at this request, but rather will heartily invite your frank discussions with their satisfied customers. Good vendors produce a trail of happy and loyal customers.

Conversely, 'vendors' who are not wholly invested in your project's success past the sale and initial implementation are revealed via the following traits:

- Provided reference lists are limited or sanitized

- Few examples verified of clients confirming ALL project requirements met

- Few examples verified of clients providing direct referrals

- Client reviews and ratings on sector specific website are not overwhelmingly positive, or if they are, often appear superficial without a nuanced project perspective

- Third party corporate culture and employee retention rankings such as GlassDoor indicate low levels of employee satisfaction and high turnover

The service commitment of your chosen vendor and their willingness to fully integrate within your teams' culture is a mission critical factor in determining the success of your government IT project. For that reason, taking shortcuts in this area of your evaluation or worse, failing to set the highest standards for service commitment in your selection criterion is the single biggest error you can make in finding your perfect vendor.

Remember, only a few can do this well. For that reason, you must set and maintain the highest standard for performance to ensure you separate the many that do not excel in their service delivery model. It's one thing to build an excellent product. You're also looking for those rare vendors who can work with you as a true consultative partner with a service ethos that can sustain over the many years demanded of core governance infrastructure.

Consider your software vendor's partnership qualities and their fit with your culture

Finding a true project & product partner

Does your solutions provider feel like a true partner in the project?

One of the key aspects that separates successful project implementations from the disappointments is the degree of compatibility that exists between client and vendor. In failed projects, internal client teams often feel as if they're 'going it alone' with communication from the vendor often feeling sporadic or even evasive. By contrast, with successful projects, the vendor implementation team often feels like 'part of the family' with communications provided in a timely fashion and consistently adding value to the process.

As always, frank and open discussions with current and past customers of your prospective software solution vendor(s) will provide the most revealing insights here. In seeking these truths, it's important to not confine your conversations to C-Suite or Technical Lead contacts only, but rather to gain perspective from a broad sampling throughout the organization—from key project stakeholders through to frontline end users of the software suite.

Whereas the accumulation of this type of qualitative customer data was once fraught with dead ends or unanswered calls, the ubiquity of career centric social media such as LinkedIn empowers a process that makes it possible to achieve a representative survey quantifying vendor partnership traits and culture compatibilities in an easy and expedient fashion.

A sampling of some of the questions you might ask include the following:

- Did this solutions provider feel like a true partner in the project?

- Did they create processes and opportunities to fully integrate with your internal teams? If so, how?

- Were they consistently responsive to enquiries and suggestions in a timely fashion?

- Did their responses consistently move the needle forward towards solutions, or did they often simply stall or buy time?

- Was communication with the vendor clear? Did you feel you always had a good sense of the project or did it feel sometimes as if you were left 'in the dark?'

- Does the vendor feel invested in your long-term success beyond the initial product launch? If yes, how is this perception cultivated and maintained?

- How did the vendor respond when issues were encountered in the project? Was issue resolution collaborative or acrimonious?

Again, it's important to emphasize that this process will only appear invasive or prohibitive to a potential vendor IF their customers have core dissatisfaction with the project implementation, their software platform, or their customer service approach. Satisfied customers will be happy to sing their praises and similarly, an implementation vendor that places a high degree of emphasis on partnership and culture traits will prove extremely cooperative in facilitating your investigation of same.

Quantify your potential government software platform as a truly integrated solution

Emphasizing integration over acquisition

Meeting or exceeding all of your project requirements within a single wholly integrated platform is difficult—but it is worth the effort.

Given the scope and complexity of modern governance processes and workflows, it is becoming increasingly difficult to identify a software solution that can meet or exceed all your project requirements within a single integrated platform—but it is worth the effort.

As the pace of innovation is increasing, so too are the demands for government enterprise software platforms to do it all[5] – particularly in a modern government setting where citizen calls for improved engagement are clashing with the inevitable realities of budget constraints.

To respond to this appetite for solutions that 'tick all the boxes', enterprise software providers with more limited platforms have responded by going on a buyer's spree of mergers or acquisitions to build out a solution that more adequately reflects the needs of the marketplace. While laudable in its pursuit of full feature functionality, the downside of this approach is it often results in poorly integrated software platforms that represent significant challenges in terms of their capabilities for facilitating cost effective implementation, performance, stability and upgradability.

Given the direct impact it can play on both the success of your project implementation as well as the long-term viability of your governance platform, a core aspect of your product evaluation should therefore focus on a comprehensive evaluation of the product pedigree as scored via the following attributes:

• What is the software providers' core development focus? Is government software their primary mandate, or are they a larger conglomerate dabbling in the space as part of a larger play?

• What is the development history of the product and is there ample information provided in a transparent fashion that tells this story? What you're looking for here is a verifiable narrative that confirms a company creating innovative products specific to governance, and refining their platform over time to create a fully integrated, fully realized product suite that stays abreast of emerging technology trends.

• Does the product suite offer a combination of underlying platform configurability and mature COTS products with robust feature sets? This integral combination gives you the best of both worlds enabling ease of configuration for unique business rules, workflows, and operational processes, whilst also providing deep feature product modules with elegant user experiences and robust reporting capabilities.

• Are there credibility markers that speak to the innovation quality of the product itself? Have the products or underlying platform won awards or industry citations? Does the company follow certified best practices in their development methodologies? If so, how are these certifications maintained and are they current and verifiable?

• Does the vendor implement their own software solutions or do they outsource implementation via a third party, thus putting them at arms-length for complete project accountability?

• How agile is the product in both it's ability to scale and to be reconfigured for different jurisdictional requirements or diverse business models? A hallmark of a well- designed enterprise software platform is the facility of the underlying architecture to accommodate a diverse range of deployment scenarios without cost prohibitive 'redevelopment.'

Evaluate the vendor's product roadmap to ascertain longterm partner stability and project viability

Establishing a generational platform

Sourcing and implementing a solution that becomes indispensable infrastructure for this generation and the next is a career 'defining' move.

When it comes to core infrastructure investment, perhaps no factor is more important to consider in your project planning than the attributes this infrastructure will provide your organization in terms of long-term product stability, growth potential, and future upgradeability.

Properly sourcing and successfully implementing a government software platform that meets all of your current agency requirements is undoubtedly a career building move. However, sourcing and implementing a solution that becomes indispensable infrastructure for this generation and the next, that is a career 'defining' move.

From both an operational efficiency and citizen services perspective, the optimal scenario is a robust toolset and service delivery model that maintains leading edge functionality over the entire lifecycle of the software platform whilst eliminating the taxpayer burdens associated with forced obsolescence and eventual replacement. The key to achieving this win/win for administration and citizenry alike is restricting your vendor selection criteria to include only those vendors committed to substantial longterm R&D reinvestment in their product suite, with an accompanying product roadmap confirming a development path that ideally aligns with your long-term strategic goals.

More than simply an abstract expression of dollars committed to R&D in the future, what you're most interested in assessing in this area is historic efficiency of spend and commitment to ongoing product refinement as quantified through the following:

- What is the company's tenure in the marketplace? 20+ years? 30+ years? 40 years+ or more? Have they demonstrated an ability to effectively iterate their product solutions over a generational lifespan? Do they have 'institutional' customers that have been with them since the beginning and remain satisfied with their solutions?

- What do the lifecycles look like for their core platform and individual COTs products? Is there a clear narrative of consistent upgrades and feature milestones conveying a culture of superior product engineering and innovation? Does this narrative reinforce the ability of the vendor to consistently evolve their product suite to stay current with emerging technology trends?

- Is there a demonstrable track record of long-term customers increasing the deployment footprint of the technology throughout their organization as the platform has deepened to full maturity through the product lifecycle? Are their strong indicators of the product consistently establishing itself as indispensable infrastructure for those adopting it?

- What does the product roadmap look like in terms of near future milestones? Are confirmed next releases delivering robust, leading edge features or do they more resemble 'catch up' upgrades providing outdated feature functionality already approaching obsolescence?

Set a goal for 100% referenceability and project success and do not deviate from this objective

100% referenceability & project success

You can lead the charge for your government agency and be one of the very few to do this well <u>if</u> you're willing to insist on <u>two</u> critical requirements.

The sobering statistics[2] conveying the frequency of failed IT enterprise projects continually reinforce a harsh reality: this is an endeavor that only a few can consistently do well.

Once you embrace that reality and commit to your own participation in becoming one of the talented and ambitious few to pull this off, it becomes absolutely essential to identify a prospective project vendor with a verifiable track record of consistent achievement in this arena. This is done, not to absolve or largely remove the client from project participation, but rather to empower project stakeholders with a proven product solution and delivery process that has consistently validated itself with each-and-every successful implementation—without fail.

In focusing your energies in exacting detail on choosing a project vendor with an extensive history of project delivery excellence, a demonstrably superior service culture, and a fully realized product solution with generational longevity, you are bringing both a winning team and the winning playbook to your project. Now your project risks are reduced to the internal factors directly within your control, and because of your chosen vendor's confirmed expertise in both service delivery and culture assimilation, you can rest assured that your vendor's proven best practices will guide your internal project teams over potential hurdles as you achieve the common goal of 100% project success.

You can lead this charge for your government agency and be one of the very few to do this well and you can approach this challenge with justifiable confidence that the project will be an unmitigated success if you're willing to insist on two critical qualifications from your platform implementation partner:

1. They must have a track record of 100% project success.

2. They must be willing to facilitate 100% client referenceability so that you can perform an unbiased assessment of every selection criteria factor detailed in this guide.

Find a partner that's never failed in this endeavor and verify that assumption through a comprehensive investigation of their client projects. Pursue this path and you are placing your own career on a firm foundation to become one of the very few that do this well. Better still, you will play a vital role in delivering transformative technology that will improve the lives of your colleagues and citizens for this generation and the next.

So, how do you start?

Next Steps

In addition to providing invaluable insights on both potential vendor fit and product pedigree, a discovery demo is an informative process well suited to optimizing your project requirements for emerging technologies.

1. Take advantage of the opportunity to complete a no obligation Transition Readiness Audit Survey to establish your organization's baseline attributes entering the processes, as well as flagging up those project gaps to be addressed prior to starting.

2. Conduct research through unbiased sources for vendor information on government technology providers, focusing your initial investigations on your 5 corporate fit qualities:

   I. Service commitment

   II. Partnership qualities & culture fit

   III. Product pedigree

   IV. R&D commitment and product roadmap

   V. 100% project success & 100% client referenceability

3. Upon sourcing potential vendors meeting this initial evaluation criteria, contact the vendors directly and go over some of the key questions in this guide to assess their responses. In addition to the specific information they provide, try to get a sense of their service culture and product development ethos. Are you sensing a good 'partner' fit?

4. If satisfied with their responses, ask to schedule a no obligation 'discovery' meeting to better assess the vendor's fit with your detailed selection criteria. If appropriate, the vendor may suggest a product demo that should prove helpful in confirming their product pedigree, roadmap, and potential fit with your core business requirements.

5. Following a demo presentation and, assuming both parties are satisfied with the process to date, ask if the vendor is willing to facilitate a process whereby you can investigate and verify your non-negotiable requirements of 100% project success and 100% client referenceability.

6. Progress with the detailed reference checks recommended in this guide utilizing the questions provided and grading the vendor on the 5 core evaluation factors summarized in the second point of this checklist.

7. Upon confirming a final list of vendors passing muster in your reference checks, particularly on your core criterion of 100% project success and 100% client reference-ability, shortlist these vendors for inclusion in your standard RFP process.

8. If assistance is requiring in developing your initial RFP document, take advantage of a complimentary digital government software specific RFP template, providing helpful guidance on the drafting of your project and system requirements - a crucial step in every successful enterprise software project.

9. Finally, if you'd prefer direct assistance and a guiding hand through the initial phases of your evaluation process, feel free to contact one of our qualified solution consultants directly for a no obligation discussion on your next best steps.

[1] https://discoverorg.com/blog/federal-vs-state-tech-spending-trends/
[2] https://assets.kpmg.com/content/dam/kpmg/nz/pdf/July/projectmanagementsurvey-kpmg-nz.pdf
[3] https://www.computer.org/csdl/proceedings/hicss/2011/4282/00/09-06-03.pdf
[4] https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/14430/1/MPRA_paper_14430.pdf
[5] https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/top-six-digital-transformation-trends-federal-government-ashok-nare/

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