Building Consensus for Software System Replacement

How to grow & sustain stakeholder momentum to secure project funding.

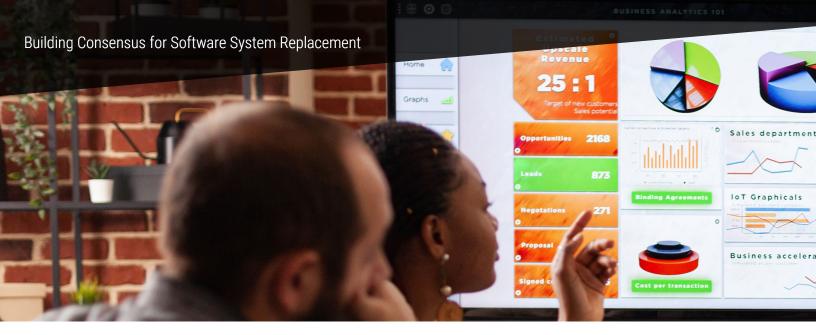COMPUTRONIX®

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Introduction

Pandemic relief funding has created an unprecedented budget allocation for local and state/provincial agencies. More importantly, with over 50% of American Rescue Plan funds still not budgeted with states having until 2024 to obligate the funds, the question is no longer, "Where can we get the funding and what we can we spend it on?" but, "Who is going to get it?"

This unprecedented access to project funding is a boon for government leaders striving to modernize their software systems and digital services, but competition amongst agencies both internally and across jurisdictions is fierce. To secure the necessary budget allocation for your agency, you must have an effective action plan to build consensus among your various stakeholders. Doing so will require some fact finding and bridge building, but in addition to securing your funds, these efforts will pay dividends in the long run—ensuring that your future system meets or exceeds the needs for all involved.

Envision Your New Software System

The government leaders that are most successful in securing funding for technology initiatives are those that can present an exciting vision for the future and advocate on behalf of the investment needed to make that future a reality.

For a software system replacement project, the best approach to properly visualize your future vision is by participating in a no obligation Discovery Demo with a potential software vendor. Not only does this Discovery process help to better inform your eventual project requirements when you embark upon an RFP process; from it you'll also gain an invaluable perspective on the true extent to which this technology can transform your organization.

Typically based on the most recent implementation of the system, a Discovery Demo will give you both an overview of the entire technology platform as well as showing you the specific use cases that will resonate with key department heads and senior level stakeholders. As you 'walk through' the system, not only will you gain a more nuanced understanding of the technology, but most importantly, you'll begin to envision how the system can be leveraged to its utmost to accomplish the Change Narrative that will form the foundation of your proposal to build stakeholder consensus and secure project funding.

It's important to emphasize that a true product champion and change agent doesn't restrict this discovery process to product demonstration alone. After all, when meeting with an experienced Solution Provider like Computronix with over 40+ years of successful government system implementations, you're chatting with folks who've successfully stewarded new technology projects past every conceivable challenge. You will never find a better resource to help you articulate the innovation vision that will eventually become the compelling business case that charms the skeptics and galvanizes your decision makers.

Approach your Discovery Demo as an opportunity to form a true consultative relationship. Doing so provides you the opportunity to leverage the Solution Provider for guidance to help address the early-stage challenges that can prevent your project from gathering the necessary momentum to succeed:

- How do you accurately communicate anticipated ROI from your new software system?
- If you're a business champion, how do you get internal IT onboard as a value-add partner?
- How do you communicate the value of the system as a pillar application delivering value to other agencies and/or partner organizations? This point is especially crucial for winning broader budget acceptance outside your own agency.
- How will the new system help to achieve your jurisdiction's overarching innovation strategy?
- How can you best leverage the success stories from comparable agencies to 'sell' your vision?

Most government agencies are reluctant to lean on a Solution Provider to this extent until the project goes out to RFP and that is a shame, because having this no obligation consultation earlier in the process can be a true win/win for both parties.

- For the Solution Provider, it's an opportunity to help an agency envision an innovation strategy that fully exploits all that the technology is capable of as both an off-the-shelf system and a long-term development platform.

- For the Agency, it's an opportunity to learn and apply proven techniques that have been gleaned over dozens of project engagements to garner stakeholder consensus and budget approval.

Once a Discovery Demo is complete, your project vision may seem crystal clear and compelling, but here is where the effective Product Champion and Change Agent takes a step back to challenge this vision by engaging with two crucial stakeholder groups:

1. External System Users
2. Internal System Users

Engage Your End User Community for Feedback

Whatever your agency's mandate your software system will inevitably provide services to end users.

Agencies utilizing an enterprise land management system like POSSE LMS will count property developers, builders, inspectors, and business owners amongst their end users. Conversely, Alcoholic Beverage Control agencies utilizing a solution like POSSE ABC will include liquor licensees as well as wholesalers, distributors, retailers, and hospitality venues among their end users.

Before you articulate an innovation vision that transforms the service offering for this diverse group of constituents, it's important that you engage with this community to fully understand how the current system fails to meet their needs and con-

firm what innovations will truly move the needle for them going forward.

Modern day governance is strongly focused on citizen engagement so it's entirely possible that your agency will have existing infrastructure in place to help facilitate effective engagement and information gathering with your end user community. To maximize your efforts in this area, we recommend the following steps:

• Identify the national organizations that represent your end users and seek out the studies they have published on recommended best practices for future technology implementation. In the case of a land management software system like POSSE LMS, this includes organizations like the National Association of Home Builders, the Internation-

al Code Council, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the American Planning Association.

- Reach out to constituent organizations and your agency counterparts in communities where effective new solutions have been launched recently to quantify their end user benefits and overall system assessments. These first-hand accounts of system usage will provide you with invaluable insights on the technology 'pain points' that plagued their previously compromised or antiquated systems, as well as the effective user experiences within the new system that facilitate legitimate efficiencies and growth. Take note of the historic pain points to ensure your final proposal rectifies them all AND to ensure the necessary fixes are captured as core system requirements for your software system of choice. Again, a consultative Solution Provider can be of assistance here in routing you to the appropriate contacts to facilitate this investigation.

- Define a short list of potential end users that each represent one of the key use cases in your envisioned system and facilitate an open dialogue with them to define what their 'wish list' service solution would look like. Too often, the vision for a future technology solution is hampered by the constraints of a current solution that end users have simply learned to live with. Particularly with solutions like POSSE LMS that provide an underlying development platform and business rules engine, it's preferable to reimagine business processes from a clean slate to better envision a system that truly maximizes the technology's capabilities to facilitate the substantial leap forward defined in your jurisdiction's overall innovation strategy.

- Throughout this end user engagement process, consolidate your findings and compare them to the system vision that you articulated in the Discovery Demo phase. Pay particular attention to the features and benefits that end users deemed as crucial that solved key pain points. Flag these as high priority points of emphasize as you progress into the next phase of crafting your Change Narrative. Similarly, flag benefits that end users deemed as low priority or non-essential. These 'nice to have' features could represent areas for future requirements de-scoping, particularly if they represent custom development outside the boundaries of the out-of-box solution.

- For a final sanity check, consolidate your product vision into a final benefits list and survey your end user base providing them the opportunity to grade your envisioned project wins, as well inviting them to make suggestions for future improvements that may not have arisen from your previous discussions.

Ok, engaging with your external end users was a lot of work, but the good news is you now have a firm grasp what your product solution needs to make taxpayers excited and supportive of your project. Now it's time to engage with the audience that will likely welcome you with open arms, your agency colleagues that are having to make do with an underperforming legacy system. It's time to engage with your internal users.

Engage Your Internal User Community for Feedback

In engaging with your external user community, the goal was to encapsulate a product vision that effectively served the needs for a diverse set of use cases AND then compare that vision to the technology solution envisioned in your initial Discovery Demo. The goal is the same in engaging with your internal end users and arguably much easier, as you'll have far greater access and opportunity to drill down in detail on system specifics with internal users matching every possible use case scenario—many of whom have years of experience with the current system and are intimately acquainted with its relative pros and cons.

This is precisely why we advocate engaging with your external users first—to not lose sight of the fact that your new system must meet and exceed the needs of the business community it serves—and with that in mind, it's crucial that your external end users receive equal prioritization AND input in your solution vision.
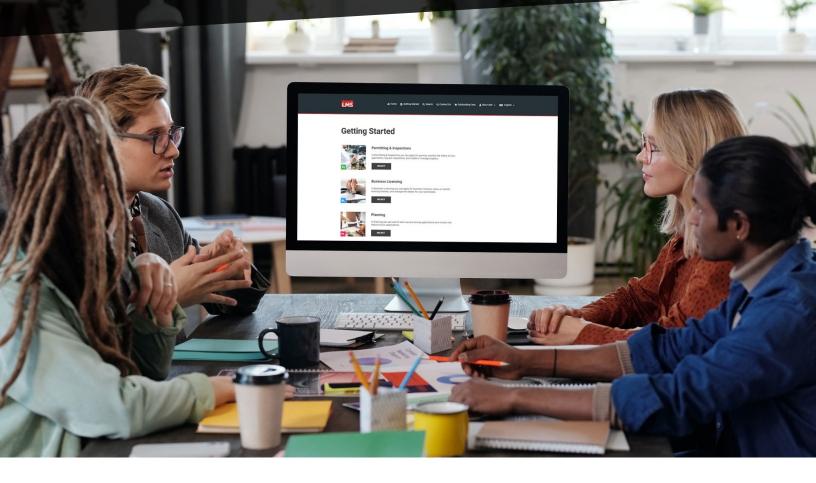
With government staff fully hands-on with such systems daily, it is far easier for an agency to articulate its own internal pain points and system requirements. Unfortunately, this natural temptation can result in a product vision dominated by a voluminous and detailed set of internal user requirements and a vague, poorly defined set of external user requirements.

Again, your Solution Provider can prove an invaluable resource here, providing you with effective information gathering tools that will ensure your internal end user engagement is properly directed, capturing the system perspectives of both parties: your colleagues and the citizens they serve.

Unlike a detailed Fit/Gap Assessment and Change Management Analysis, your goal as Product Champion and Change Agent here is not to land on the definitive set of software requirements that will define your eventual system deployment. Rather, you are focused on articulating an overall Solution Vision, one that you can compare with the Solution Visions resulting from your previous Discovery Demo and End User Engagement phases. In essence, each Vision is one quadrant of a Venn Diagram with the intersection of these three quadrants representing the essential Solution Vision that will most resonate with the vast majority of stakeholders. In time, your Solution Vision will need to incorporate the needs of fourth and fifth quadrants, the IT and procurement/finance teams who will need to see their own requirements satisfied in the proposed Solution Vision. For now, you must focus your efforts on merging the visions of your external and internal users and the software solution that can satisfy them both.

To most effectively engage with your internal users to inform your Solution Vision, take the following steps:

- Ensure that you have a focus group representing all use cases within the current and future systems from front-line personnel interfacing with the public to senior management reliant on the system for report analysis and strategy intel.

- Include other internal agencies that interface with your current system on a consistent basis. From these discussions, ascertain where the current system is missing the mark in inter-agency data-sharing, process automation, collaborative planning, etc. Identifying solution wins in these areas will prove invaluable as you seek to build broad consensus with stakeholders throughout your organization. Senior Leaders in particular will appreciate a cost competitive software system that can deliver value across a wider footprint as a true pillar platform.

Focus your investigation on five topics of enquiry:

1. What works well in the current system?
2. What are the pain points in the current system?
3. What are the highest priority modifications you would make to the current system?
4. What does the system require to provide a better end user experience?
5. If you could start with a blank slate, what do your ideal business processes look like?

Utilize information gathering tools that equip you to cast as wide a net as possible. As budget is approved and your solution proposal gathers momentum, there will be plenty of opportunity to form a more focused working group representing the interests of key stakeholders

As this stage draws to a close, you're probably getting excited. You can see the common areas where the needs of your internal and external users meet, and you've identified a definitive list of features and benefits that align closely with the outputs from the software system assessed in your initial Discovery Demo.

You're ready for the next crucial step. It's time to craft your Change Narrative.

Craft a Change Narrative to Inspire Innovation

In the final step of this process, you will develop a Pitch Presentation designed to build consensus among the key decision makers in your budget decision process. To ensure the success of that communication, you'll need to set the hook with a concise 'elevator pitch' that captures the attention of the widest possible audience and inspires them to embrace change and seek innovation. Once articulated, this will become the unifying theme in your Pitch Presentation.

This is your Change Narrative.

Before we jump into what an effective Change Narrative looks like, let's discuss what it is not:

- A Change Narrative is not a full condemnation of the current system. In all likelihood, some of the principles who signed off on the implementation of the current legacy system are still around. Your Change Narrative needs to inspire not embarrass. Your more detailed Pitch Presentation will need to emphasize some of the obvious drawbacks of the current system, but that information will be for necessary context, not the lead.

- A Change Narrative is not overly technical or complex. Yes, your new system should certainly leverage leading edge technology to ensure you are launching a true generational platform delivering a sustainable cost of ownership, but technology alone does not inspire. What inspires is what technology can do to make people feel more rewarded, engaged, and effective.

- A Change Narrative is not inward focused (i.e., what the system can do for your agency), it is outward focused (i.e., what the system can do for our constituents and the organization as a whole).

To quickly and easily see how to craft an effective Change Narrative, let's start with an effective example and reverse engineer it to identify the critical elements:

"Project eCLIPSE will transform the way residents, business owners and developers do business with the City of Philadelphia. It will eliminate redundancies and the need for in-person paperwork and payments while emphasizing accessibility and convenience for citizens," said Mayor Nutter. "Over time, Project eCLIPSE will improve public safety, government efficiency and delinquent tax collections, reduce vacant and blighted properties across the City and help attract new businesses and development by easing the application, permit and payment processes." Former Mayor Michael A. Nutter City of Philadelphia

Leveraging POSSE LMS – Land Management System, Project eCLIPSE was a truly [transformative project](#) for the City of Philadelphia generating $12M in recovered tax revenues while increasing trade license renewals by over 40% and business license renewals by 60% in the system's first year. As exemplified in the above quote, civic leaders like Mayor Nutter leveraged an effective Change Narrative to galvanize budget support and maintain organizational commitment through the duration of the project.

Let's dive into the details to identify the key elements in this winning narrative:

- Brand your solution: To capture the imagination and inspire change, your initiative needs a memorable brand. Project eCLIPSE stands for electronic Commercial Licensing, Inspection and Permit Services Enterprise. The specifics of what the system does are there for those inclined to dive into the details of the acronym (i.e., it does what is says on the box), but the heavy lifting is done by the brand name itself.

By association, an eclipse conveys a memorable moment of magnitude when one achievement surpasses another. In short, it is an inspiring and memorable word to summarize the ascent of a new solution replacing an outdated system. A core element in building consensus is inspiring people to remember your vision and associate it with a positive outcome. Brand to win budget allocation. It works!

- Identify your external change advocates: This is where your earlier efforts to engage external ends users start to pay dividends. Having done the legwork to define their pain points with the current system, 'shouting out' your external constituents within your Change Narrative (residents, business owners, developers) signals their input into the process and more importantly, reinforces their value as external change advocates as more information is released confirming the concrete ways in which the new system addresses their input. When your City's Senior Property Developers start asking the Mayor, "What's happening with Project eCLIPSE?" your brand and end user outreach are working in tandem.

- Summarize the 'pain relief' to rally your change advocates: By defining specific pain points that the new system will fix for both internal users (e. g. eliminate redundancies and the need for in-person paperwork and payments) and external users (e.g. emphasizing accessibility and convenience for citizens, easing the application, permit and payment processes), you offer both audiences the proverbial light at the end of the tunnel in the form of a new system designed to alleviate long

standing deficiencies. Every daily frustration they encounter with an obsolete legacy system will spur them to advocate on your behalf now that concrete proof exists of a better solution on the horizon.

- Align your solution with larger policy initiatives: Here again, the information gathering you performed with your Discovery Demo and End User Outreach pays off as that research will inevitably tease out opportunities to leverage your new system across a wider organizational footprint—one capable of addressing inter and intra-departmental challenges such as improving public safety, government efficiency and delinquent tax collections, reducing vacant and blighted properties, and attracting new business and development. In identifying a legitimate pillar application capable of meeting both the core needs of your agency and a broader organizational mandate, you inspire your agency counterparts, technology, and political leaders to get onboard with a vested interest in supporting a vision that simultaneously moves the needle for their core objectives. This is how budget allocations are won!

Once you've landed on your preferred Change Narrative, test drive your 'elevator pitch' on some of your most ardent supporters and critics. Remember, you want this narrative to be as compelling and convincing as possible. Once you've fine tuned it to the point where it's clearly setting the hook and exciting your audience to learn more, it's time to move the final step in your plan to build consensus for your new software system. It's time to develop your Pitch Presentation.

Tailor Your Pitch Presentation to the Needs of Your Stakeholders

Whether it's a video, a powerpoint deck, a micro-site, or all of the above, the key thing to remember with your pitch presentation is that it should not be a 'one size fits all' communication approach.

Due to the diversity of your stakeholders, you're best served creating a compelling and concise core element that summarizes your Solution Vision and Change Narrative. From there, you can direct your defined stakeholder groups to content designed to address their specific pain points and new system aspirations. You have this information already through your earlier engagement process, so it's simply a matter of closing the loop on those conversations by summarizing the pain points and system requirements each key user group expressed and linking those to product specific information verifying the functionality, benefits and user experience anticipated within the new system. Once again, your Solution Provider can be of assistance here in providing product information specific to these needs.

Rather than drilling down into the details of specific use cases here, focus your efforts instead on aggregating this information into a compelling transformation story appropriate for senior leaders and decision makers. Through your earlier engagement phase, you've given everyone a voice in defining the final Solution Vision. Now is the time to articulate this vision in the language that will resonate with those holding the purse strings for final budget allocation and project approval.

With this in mind, let's look at the two stakeholder groups that sit outside the direct influence of your agency that will play a pivotal role in giving your project the green light. To get your new system over the goal line, you'll need to build strong bridges with these groups. As with your prior engagement phases, the key to doing this is identifying the key factors that will contribute to their project and budget approval and tailoring your pitch presentation to address each to the fullest.

Information Technology

Achieving buy-in from your internal IT Branch and/or Innovation Office is mission critical for building consensus for your new software system replacement. With that in mind, it is imperative as an effective Product Champion and Change Agent that you build a bridge to a true innovation partnership with your Senior Technology Leaders, one that overcomes the constraints of the internal client/service provider relationship.

To do so, focus your initial engagement efforts on inviting their expertise as experienced consultants and sounding boards to refine your Solution Vision and Change Narrative. Like you, these savvy professionals are keen to achieve innovation via transformative technology. The key is demonstrating that you're keen to have their team make a strong contribution to the initiative, rather than going over or around them to achieve the required consensus.

To get this initial dialogue moving in a productive, team-oriented direction, consider some of the following as key discussion items for consideration.

- Information Technology Leaders have core expertise assessing procurement factors such as Total Cost of Ownership (TCO), Technical Debt, and the potential for Shared Costs/Services. Invite their input in these areas and offer the services of your agency and those of the Solutions Vendor to assist in these calculations. The output from this analysis will yield information that is crucial for inclusion in your Pitch Presentation to Budget, Finance, and Procurement Leaders.

- Deploying modern technology assists in your IT Branch's efforts to recruit and retain top-flight technical talent. Work with IT Leadership to identify how the new system will maximize the usage of IT resources where desirable, and conversely in areas where IT resources are limited, strategize opportunities to maximize the new system's workflow automation and low code design tools to maximize non-technical business users as alternative 'IT' resources.

- Technology Leaders are continually being challenged to do more with less. Share with them the findings of your Discovery Demo and Engagement Analysis to define ways in which the new system can accomplish exactly that. A mutually beneficial dialogue here should recognize obvious opportunities for the new system to consolidate existing legacy application sprawl, equipping your IT Branch to sunset inefficient, outdated, expensive, maintenance heavy systems in favor of a more agile, fully integrated software system.

- If possible, facilitate a Discovery Demo for your key IT Stakeholders via your Solution Provider consultant to get

everyone on the same page regarding the potential technology wins. Seeing is believing and simply participating in a brief demonstration is often the key piece of the puzzle in getting your Technology Leaders fully onboard with your Solution Vision and Change Narrative.

Conversely, an IT Leader leading the innovation charge can easily pivot this action plan by leveraging your branch's core expertise above AND by shifting the focus of the prior **Engage Your Internal User Community for Feedback** step to effectively engage with your internal agency colleagues in need of software system replacement.

Budget/Finance/Procurement

Courtesy of initiatives like the [American Rescue Plan](#) (ARP), there is funds available, but with opportunity comes competition. To ensure your Pitch Presentation stands out from competing agencies both within your jurisdiction and across the state/province/region, perform the necessary outreach with your colleagues to fully understand what factors are uppermost in their mind and which measurables are most likely to swing budget approvals in your favor.

Factor of likely consideration will include the following:

- Can you present your Solution as a 'Package Deal' with associated external funding such as ARP?
- Verifiable calculations on Total Cost of Ownership, Technical Debt, and Shared Services
- Quantifiable Return on Investment projections including reasonable proxies were appropriate

- Capital expenditure vs. operating expense considerations (i.e., purchase model vs. subscription)
- New system fit within the overall technology roadmap. Again, the ability of your system to deliver ROI as a pillar application across a wider organizational footprint is a key win here.
- Cybersecurity pedigree of the proposed solution. Fortification against ransomware threats.
- Human resource costs associated with deploying, learning, and maintaining the new system.
- Projected operating expense reductions from system automation and streamlined workflows.
- Opportunities for staged delivery to deliver 'quick wins' and a potential installment payment scenario.
- Savings from reduction in physical services infrastructure and reduced carbon footprint.

Finally, to lessen the initial budget allocation, your budget stakeholders may ask if your considered Product Solution can be deployed initially as a high fit off-the-shelf product with the ability to configure the technology on an ongoing basis for custom specifications. COTS applications like POSSE LMS meet this need for budget flexibility offering a deep feature off-the-shelf solution in conjunction with a powerful PaaS engine perfectly suited for enabling ongoing configuration and expansion of the toolset as requirements and demands evolve. For more information helpful for addressing key budgeting considerations, refer to the following articles:

- [High Fit & Hands-On: Achieving Lower Cost Enterprise Implementations](#)
- [How COTS+ Solves the 'Buy vs Build' Conundrum](#)

Going Forward

Once all your stakeholder groups are suitably informed and fully engaged, your final step is to get them working together in a concerted advocacy effort to build consensus and momentum for your new software system. If you've followed each step in this Action Plan, most of this activity will likely occur organically as the logical steps for project approvals progress within your pre-defined procurement process.

It is here that you'll need to pay close attention to the rules of engagement specific to your agency and jurisdiction, as well as those most respectful of the contributions of your external stakeholders.

Synergizing these efforts may be as simple as launching a working group in conjunction with your technology leaders where you work together to make your Change Narrative a reality by formalizing the content of your Engagement Analysis and Pitch Presentation into a detailed business case suitable for senior level consideration. Key stakeholders you've identified along the way can participate in this group either directly or 'softly' by providing their direct endorsement of and/or letters of recommendation for the proposed solution path.

The key here is to play by the rules that govern your approved procurement practices and augment these efforts by providing all stakeholders in this process sound, factual and timely information that resonates with their vested interests. By engaging and equipping each member of this decision team with compelling arguments to help make their case on your behalf, you have essentially created a team of 'influencers' each of them working in tandem with your efforts to achieve a bright new innovation vision for your agency, government, city, and region.

The funds and the technology are available.

Why not start the process now by scheduling a Discovery Demo of one or more of our 'Powered by POSSE' Solutions?

- POSSE
- POSSE LMS
- POSSE ABC
- POSSE ELS

Computronix provides civic government agencies with transformative enterprise software solutions for land management, alcoholic beverage control and enterprise licensing. Powered by POSSE, an award-winning platform included in the Smithsonian Institution's collection of ground-breaking software, this wholly integrated suite of enterprise products empowers public sector agencies to automate critical processes and streamline business workflows for improved efficiency, accessibility and civic engagement.

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