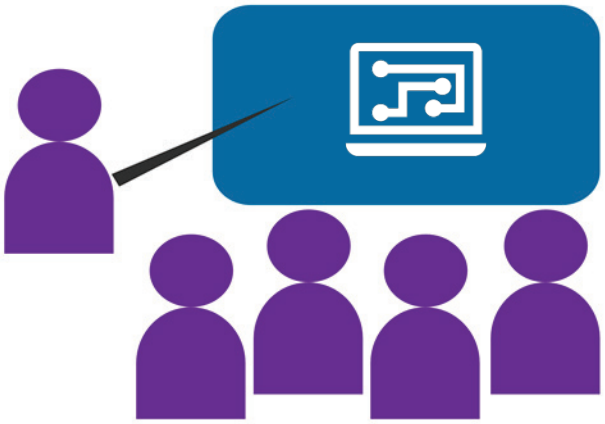
Technology Additions: Tips on Implementing New Software



Introduction

This brief provides an overview of the process for state agencies to purchase, procure, install and implement new/upgraded technical software solutions.

One thing to remember when acquiring and implementing new software solutions is that proper planning is crucial. There are many steps and people involved in this process. Being able to clearly define and articulate your organization's wants, needs, and requirements is key in determining ultimate success.

Acquisition and Procurement

Before you decide what software selections to make, have a discussion with your acquisition partner. The acquisition partner can help you identify the best software solutions to fit your organization's budget, timeline, needs and requirements. Your purchaser or acquisition partner will walk you through the procurement process and help you understand the necessary contract and financial steps involved. Familiarize yourself with the procurement process including the paperwork and timeline involved from start to finish. Building a good relationship with your acquisition partner is part of the foundation for making sound decisions in the software purchasing process.

Changing and incorporating new software can be stressful and may even seem intimidating. However, this brief outlines concepts to help you make better informed decisions to minimize frustrations and reduce expenditure.

Build Your Team - Roles and Relationships

Putting a new software application in place requires good partnerships and relationships. You will have project and system roles. Project roles contribute directly to the project. Each of these roles are essential to your project's overall success. Let's take a closer look at each project partner role.

- **Stakeholders** - Any program/business process owner that makes a required contribution to your current system or prospective business process
- **Project Manager** - Manages the timeline and escalates risks to the project team which includes stakeholders.
- **IT Manager/Director** - Executes and delegates the technical tasks that make the software work for your organization.
- **Business Analyst** - Analyzes business operations and processes and provides business requirements through data

analysis, information gathering, interviews, etc.

- **Developer** - Executes coding or configuration for the software application.
- **Executive/Director** - Usually sponsors the project; can be an operations or IT Leader.
- **Subject Matter Expert (SME)** - This is an operations or program process expert who knows the intricate details of the business process.

System roles may overlap with project roles. System roles are mostly specific to the program/business operations. For example, an experienced social worker can serve as a SME on the project team and be a resource on the system side as a superuser. Roles that support the system include:

- **Report Specialist** – Creates, modifies, and updates ad-hoc and management reports.
- **Team Lead** - Leads efforts in operations and business process execution. May also be considered the subject matter expert (SME).
- **Superuser**- Uses elevated role and permissions that extend beyond the general user role to update or modify the system.
- **System Administrator** - Configures and manipulates system settings from a technical perspective to meet the business' needs.

Each organization is different. In your current operations these roles may not be necessary. They are sometimes performed by the IT function. If required, these roles can be integrated into your current business model with proper planning and preparation. Choose the path that best suits your needs.

Define Success

Success is defined upfront and early in your discovery process. Before you take the big leap in choosing and implementing a technology solution, decide what you want to get from the product. At a bare minimum, make a list of what you want the application to do for the organization. This would be the basis of your business requirements. For example, the implemented solution should (1) capture APS data, (2) have the capability to input data from computers and mobile devices, and (3) integrate with downstream applications that are currently used by your organization.

Once you have some ideas jotted down, you will be ready to select a system that meets your business needs with the required functionality. Another approach would be to outline what the current system does well and pinpoint desired areas of improvement.

Please note all desired improvements and business needs may not be addressed in the first installation. Some organizations aim for quick wins that are easy to implement, while others shoot for functionality with the biggest impact.

Issues that are not initially addressed may be pushed down on the list and implemented at another time. This is called a phased approach.

Devise a Plan

Timeline

The project plan is the documented approach and timeline used for implementing the project. The relationships fostered with the cross-functional departments (purchaser, IT, etc.) will help to structure the project plan. For example, the acquisition process is usually predefined. This can be the start of the project plan. This includes detailed

steps and dates for the purchase of the solution. The IT department can assist you with adding project plan tasks.

Proper planning and execution of tasks are paramount to your success. Delays, setbacks and mishaps are often an unavoidable part of the process. Therefore, it is good to have a flexible budget and timeline. Create milestones - markers on your timeline that identify and recognize the completion of grouped tasks. These should be realistic and achievable. Tasks should be timed and adjusted to fit your business calendar. Remember to consider times like vacation and holidays when your organization is understaffed. Also, consider high volume seasonality. Again, try to make the plan as realistic and executable as possible.

Funding and Budget

Resources should always be taken into consideration when the project plan is created. Funding may be limited by priorities and budgets. Carefully research licenses and fees associated with the selected solution(s) to make sure they fit into your budget. Often the application starts with low fees but after the second year or a maturity date the licenses and fees may double or triple. Inquire about the expenses for a 5–7-year period.

Lastly, the total cost of ownership should be forecasted in your plan. This includes costs associated with service enhancements and maintenance. Service enhancements are changes to the system that you may need but did not consider in your initial plan. These can be due to a change in legislation or even a pandemic. Maintenance is required for the upkeep and overall health of the system. Partner with your IT department to forecast these costs.

Define Your Process

Now that the plan has been mapped out, take the time to review your operations and business processes. Write your procedures out and confirm them with the proper operations leaders and SMEs. These will eventually become the business rules and requirements. A proper discovery process and good business requirements are the backbone of your entire implementation. These rules will be mapped to the functionality of the technology solution. Gaps should be identified, and work arounds or customizations can be implemented, if needed. This is also the time to review business processes and procedures. Identify inefficiencies and make improvements.

Review Your Data

Clean up your data and reports. Within the discovery process, data is sometimes overlooked or underestimated. A data cleansing process should be undertaken to delete stale and bad data. If you know that there is bad data in your current system, perform a data scrubbing process to clean it up. Establish rules that will minimize bad data. These are called edits or standards.

Next, review your reports and take an accounting of what should be brought forward. Items not migrated to the new solution can be archived. Keep the legal retention periods and your overall business needs in mind.

Track Your Progress

Make a record of what you've planned. Tasks in your plan should be given a start date and an end date. Tracking the execution and overall completion of this work will ensure the project is delivered on time and on budget. Get frequent updates from the resources assigned to the tasks. Status reporting and periodic project meetings assist members in executing the

work. This also measures the overall health of the project.

Continuously monitor and adjust your plan. Stay true to the requirements and overall scope of the defined work. As tasks are being executed, be on alert for items that fall outside the range of the defined work. These are increases in the scope of work, also known as scope creeps. Scope creeps can sink the project in dollars and time. Conclusively, celebrate milestones to create project team cohesiveness. With all milestones completed you will successfully deliver your software addition.

State Experience

Input from panelists during the APS TARC webinar Technology Additions: Tips on Implementing New Software.

- **Heidi Cresta**, Director of Quality Assurance, Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Disabled Persons Protection Commission (DPPC)
- **Jean Frejuste**, Director of Information Technology, Disabled Persons Protection Commission

What technology solution did you implement?

We implemented a custom solution:

- FileMaker Pro – designed for collecting, sorting, and analyzing data. It is known for its flexibility and ease of use. We were awarded a grant 3 years ago and we rebuilt our database from the ground up.
- We have a separate document management system.

What are some the challenges that your team come across within your implementation?

- Scope creeps along with budgeting for the build, maintenance, and enhancements requests were more than a challenge.
- DPPC's structure and the fact that not all investigators work for DPPC. Some have their own systems. This posed challenges with licensing and buy-In from partner contracting companies.
- Our IT department is somewhat de-centralized which can be tricky.
- Getting buy-in from leadership, front line staff and external partners may be a challenge.
- Redefining workflows and policies/procedures during the rebuild can cause confusion and may be costly.
- Data migration should be considered as it is paramount in the new system's functionality. Consider the records retention.
- Changes requested during development adds to your timeline and overall budget.
- Administration of training for new functionality or a new system can were also a challenge. This may run in conflict with regular job duties and schedules.
- We underestimated the number of resources (especially time) needed from our own staff.

What were some of the lessons learned that can be shared with the reader audience?

- Always budget for more than expected (scope creep WILL happen); I remember being advised to "build in a LOT of IT hours"!
- Be VERY thorough and thoughtful during the discovery process
- Be as flexible as possible – you will not likely have thought of everything!
- Find Your Team, include the "doers/users"
- Have the right people at the table, and not more than necessary ("Too many cooks in the kitchen" is not a good thing).
- Communication is KEY, along every step of the way! Early and frequent communication with stakeholders so they have ample time to adjust their own internal processes.
- Hearing and sifting through (and prioritizing) all stakeholders' needs/wants.
- Be thoughtful about when to begin/go live.

APS TARC
Adult Protective Services Technical Assistance Resource Center

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