

Selecting an IT/MIS Vendor Checklist and Timeline

An Eight Step Model for Selecting the Right Vendor

Introduction

Selecting the right information technology/management information system (IT/MIS) vendor is an important part of making technology improvements that meet your organization's needs to effectively and efficiently support a robust NWD System. The experience of states thus far indicates that the IT/MIS selection and implementation process may take several years from the planning stages to having a fully implemented system in place. Some may choose off-the-shelf products (OTS) or implement enhancements to new or existing systems. This checklist is a helpful guide that primarily details steps involved in building a new system.

Step 1: Establish Leadership and Support (3-6 months)

An important first step is to ensure that NWD leadership, such as the Governing Body, and any required state agencies are on board with the decision to move forward with a new IT system. Often the move to a new IT/MIS system is the decision of the state. The steps below provide suggestions for how to build support and onboard the necessary leadership that will guide your process.

1. Identify core IT/MIS work group or team (drawing from key project staff at state and local levels, advisory board members, consumers)
2. Request input from and secure support of key management, grant staff, IT subject matter experts, advisory board, professional front-line users (pilot site staff, partners, and/or consumers), other stakeholders.
3. First steps for your core IT/MIS work group include:
 - a. Engage in a business process mapping and requirements activity. The process should start with an "As Is" state, meaning what the current business processes and corresponding IT and data flow looks like today across all required and engaged NWD System partners, and a "To Be" state, which is the desired future business process and IT data flow. Diagram key business processes and identify areas in which automation already does support or should support these processes. This may include a conclusion that an entire IT redesign is necessary. The end result should be a very clear "As Is" and "To Be" diagram. For examples, see the resources below.
 - b. Identify potential barriers (people, politics and systems), and develop strategies to address each barrier.
 - c. Develop a communication plan for the project to ensure there are clear points of accountability for each step of the project.

Suggested Resources:

- [Selecting the Right Technology Vendor](#) (NPower Network, February 2006)
- [The 9 Steps of Planning a Successful Technology Project](#) (TechSoup.Org, April 2014)
- [10 Tips for a Successful System Implementation](#) (cognition24.com)

Step 2: Assess Feasibility and Resources (Up to 3 months)

1. Organizational readiness, program, and IT staff availability
 - a. Identify staff and organizational partners with technical skills.
 - b. Consider hiring a technical assistance provider or IT subject matter expert.
 - c. Engage your state agency to determine if there are any IT managers that can support or guide your group.
 - d. Identify local volunteers or other groups with relevant knowledge.
2. Identify financial resources for initial purchase, ongoing maintenance and long term, sustainability (e.g., NWD System grant funds, other state funds, in-kind support, legislative financial support, public/private partnerships)

Step 3: Gather Business Requirements (4-6 months)

1. Assess the current technology systems in place, considering how all systems work together to support the business process.
 - a. What works well?
 - b. What needs improvement?
2. Conduct analysis of new system's critical requirements such as:
 - a. Web-based for professional and/or consumer users
 - b. Search capabilities
 - c. Client tracking features
 - d. Reporting capabilities
 - e. Capacity for data sharing with outside entities and interoperability requirements and opportunities (e.g., FHIR, HL7 standards)
 - f. Capacity for online-applications and tools
 - g. Data storage needs
 - h. Security requirements
 - i. Accessibility, limited English proficiency, and support for other languages (if applicable)

3. Map out the current IT system in an “As Is” business process map diagram and a “To Be” diagram
4. Draft an IT/MIS development plan that outlines available resources, budget, requirements/needs, and next steps for developing new system

Suggested Resources:

- [NWD System Business Case Toolkit](#) (ACL TA Community)
- [NWD System Management Tool Data Elements](#) (ACL, 2022)

Step 4: Research and Refine Options (4-8 months)

1. Research off-the-shelf technology options currently available on the market to answer the following preliminary questions:
 - a. How well could this technology meet our project/organizational goals and critical requirements;
 - b. What is the potential cost for implementing the system; and
 - c. Where will this technology option position our organization to go next?
2. Establish evaluation criteria based on critical requirements (consider ranking criteria in terms of priority)
3. Develop evaluation matrices to document vendor capabilities and differences
4. Conduct research and define targeted list of vendors
5. Work with state or local contracts/procurement office to determine whether an RFP or RFI is needed or appropriate. If so,
 - a. Use system requirements and time frame to develop an RFP (example RFPs are posted on ADRC-TAE website)
 - b. Create and post vendor RFP or Sole Source Contract

Suggested Resources:

- [Checklist of Requirements for Federal Websites and Digital Services](#) (Digital.gov, June 2022)
- [The RFP Process: An Overview](#) Information Sheet (NPower Network, May 2006)
- [Technology Planning Guide](#) (Progressive Technology Project, 2002)

Step 5: Evaluate Vendors (3-6 months with Step 6)

1. Receive proposals
2. Use evaluation criteria and matrices to evaluate vendors

3. Schedule product demonstrations as necessary (including end-users, as appropriate, in demonstration process)

Step 6: Evaluate Vendors (3-6 months with Step 5)

1. Conduct negotiations
 - a. Confirm business requirements and deliverables
 - b. Approve testing plan
 - c. Build in change request process and budget
 - d. Build in Service Level Agreements (SLAs)
 - e. Agree upon remedies and penalties
2. Work with vendor to set realistic timeline for development of customized features, review and revisions, implementation and user training
3. Develop contracts to the above

Step 7: Manage Implementation (9 months to a year)

1. Assign implementation responsibilities among staff at state and local levels
2. Actively engage in all user-acceptance testing and testing plans
3. Develop an evaluation plan for tracking progress of implementation and mitigation plan for any unexpected outcomes
4. Implement, potentially in phases as appropriate (implementation is complete when all users are trained and using the new system). Use rapid-cycle quality improvement processes to immediately address testing or user malfunctions and engage closely with vendor to develop mitigation strategies before further expansion

Step 8: Evaluation, Support and Maintenance (Ongoing)

1. Update the technology plan as needed based on user feedback, new requirements, new target populations, expanded scope of services
2. Plan for annual evaluations of all users for feedback on performance and recommendations for enhancements or user value-added features
3. Conduct ongoing staff training (for new staff and new features)
4. Ensure appropriate resources (e.g., technical support, patches/maintenance, ongoing training, upgrades) are available on an ongoing basis