Mission Accomplished: Choosing the Right Vendor for Your Government Financial Software

Your challenges

Being accountable — to one's coworkers, managers, the American taxpayer, and the President — has always been a given for the US Government, but in today's world, it's harder than ever. The technological speed is breakneck, mistakes are glaringly visible, and the stakes are high. News organizations, like CNN, are reporting on wasted millions for government software that may be completely unsalvageable. Costly oversights result in lengthy testimony before grilling senators. A Government site is under tremendous pressure to optimize resources and stay within operational budgets. Looming deadlines are imposed for software deployment and for the secure, accurate data the software must produce.

A financial software solution must meet literally thousands of stringent requirements from the Department of the Treasury, General Accounting Office, Office of Management and Budget, and Office of Personnel Management. Stipulations for speed, accuracy, integration, and methodology are unprecedented.

After you compile your own set of requirements, being mindful of the unique complexities of your site's mission, you must launch the quest for a contractor — one that's reliable and responsive, and showcases an established client base.

How to choose a software vendor

- Educate yourself on the shortlist of vendors that have been certified by the Joint Financial Management Improvement Program (JFMIP): http://www.jfmip.gov/jfmip/kb_summary_qualified_software.htm. These companies have undergone rigorous and diverse test scenarios and report checks. The companies that have been certified for more than one product (currently only Digital Systems Group) are intimately familiar with Government regulations.

- Discern each candidate vendor's ability to implement a multi-module system within a period of days. (Digital Systems Group "hit the ground running" and implemented its financial system, IFMIS, within only 90 days at two new customer sites — the Naval Facilities Engineering Service Center (NFESC) and the Department of Justice/Office of Justice Programs (OJP)).

- Tabulate facts about the companies, like size, health, and employee longevity. Don't rule out a company just because it's small. Smaller businesses can often respond much more quickly because there's closer communication and less chance of "passing the buck."

- Evaluate the product. Is it Web-based? Can it handle millions of transactions? Are all modules completely integrated? Is it flexible enough to accommodate your site's mission requirements? Does it yield accurate standard reports and offer facile querying capability? Is it designed in such a way as to handle changing goals and requirements? Are there short-circuiting drop-down lists and default values to reduce errors? Is the Online Help clear?

- Play with the system yourself, but don't assume that a capability is missing because an option behaves differently than you expect. (The system is thousands of lines of code to meet the regulations, and you haven't been trained yet.) Uncover a transaction's integrated effects — has the predecessor transaction been affected? Have interest, penalty, and administrative charges been attached with a change in system date? Have the right Standard General Ledger accounts been updated? How easy is it to query the data?

- Ask how the vendor manages the software lifecycle. Check out the system specifications. Learn how code versions are maintained. Investigate how quality assurance is carried out — how are bugs reported, assigned for correction, tracked, and retested? How are changes implemented? What is the experience level with system interfacing?

- Get the company's full track record of performance on other related Government contracts. Examine the scope of its work. Ask your references pointed questions such as, "Would you buy it again?" "Would you recommend this product to another site?" "Did the company support you to your satisfaction?" "Are you happy with the product?" "What problems have you had?"

A proven solution… Digital Systems Group, Inc. is the industry's only JFMIP-compliant vendor with more than one product certified. The Integrated Financial Management Information System (IFMIS) is now joined by iCore, a tightly integrated package containing

modules for *Funding*, *General Ledger*, *Cost Accumulation*, *Disbursing*, *Accounts Receivable*, *Workflow*, *Inventory*, *Loans*, and *Cost Distribution*. iCore's supplementary subsystems round out the functionality: *Common* for business entity, document type, and document element maintenance; *Utilities* for file importing; *Administration* for security and site parameter specifications; and *Reports* for standard output.

Meet the people who have met DSG…

Digital Systems Group has had fruitful, long-standing, professional relationships with several Federal Government agencies and activities. Its hallmarks are supplying solid, site-tailored software within a time frame limited to days, fast turn-around of modifications, and attentive support.

Customer/Mission	DSG Assignment	Challenge	Response
Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)/To lead America to prepare for, prevent, respond to, and recover from disasters.	Implementing IFMIS (Funding, General Ledger, Cost Posting, Disbursements, and Accounts Receivable), including technical support, programming, data conversion, documentation, training, project planning, workflow analysis, transaction analysis, operational analysis, interfaces, and maintenance.	• Stop the imminent threat to FEMA of having its disbursing authority revoked after its unsuccessful attempts with other financial systems. • Consolidate financial info into one system from many disparate systems residing on different hardware platforms, written in a number of languages, and using a variety of database packages. • Solve the key weaknesses: "the lack of full integration among financial and accounting systems [and that] required financial data is either inaccessible or not maintained, especially data needed for management reports." • Provide an automated Accounts Receivable system. • Interface with FEMA's new Disaster System, NEMIS.	• Supplying a Disbursements module that complies with Treasury requirements and implementing a formal General Ledger. • Integrating incongruent systems, standardizing data and data formats, and converting legacy data. • Creating batch processing options for importing NEMIS commitments, obligations, and housing payments; fire and flood grant vendor and obligation data; and preliminary damage grant vendor and obligation data.

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Navy Public Works Centers (PWCs)/To provide facilities solutions and services worldwide, including utilities, facilities maintenance, family housing services, transportation support, engineering services, and shore facilities planning support for operating forces.	Implementing IFMIS (Funding, General Ledger, Cost Posting, Disbursements, Accounts Receivable, Billing, and Travel), including workflow analysis, transaction analysis, data conversion, interface analysis, programming, customized reporting, help desk support, documentation, training, and maintenance	• Upgrade the PWCs' accounting systems as well as their business practices, which had fallen seriously behind evolving requirements. Current systems were not complying with the Federal Manager's Financial Integrity Act, not providing accurate and timely financial data, and not offering adequate tools for managing costs. • Introduce budgetary accounting. • Convert books to the US Standard General Ledger. • Introduce object classes for categories of expense. • Support an extensive array of business systems. • Train personnel not only in the use of IFMIS, but in new business practices.	• Standardizing the most critical business operating procedures of the nine far-flung PWCs. Replacing antiquated systems to improve funds tracking in a Defense Working Capital Fund environment. • Instituting a General Ledger module that accommodates site-specific accounts, yet holds the USSGL accounts. Formulating a crosswalk that maps a document type (for instance, a commitment on the budget) to the right transaction code (for example, one representing the proper budgetary accounts). • Creating a Budget Object Class menu of options for maintaining and reporting on object classes. • Developing numerous incoming and outgoing interfaces, importing several non-financial data elements into IFMIS to support non-financial analysis and reporting. • Instructing with hands-on training, end user's manuals, training guides, and technical notes.

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Document Automation and Production Service (DAPS)/To provide document automation and printing within the DoD and the Federal Executive Branch Agencies, encompassing electronic conversion, retrieval, output, and distribution of digital and hard copy information.	Implementing IFMIS (Funding, Cost Posting, Disbursements, General Ledger, Accounts Receivable, Billing, Inventory, and Property), including workflow analysis, transaction analysis, data conversion, interface analysis, programming, customized reporting, help desk support, documentation, and training,	• Replace a 1970s accounting system with a commercial off-the-shelf one conforming to JFMIP Core Financial System Requirements. • Refine and standardize major business processes at over 300 DAPS sites. • Train users across the globe.	• Performing site surveys at over 250 locations to unify business procedures as part of IFMIS implementation. • Sharing our business process methodology as a basis for DAPS' reengineering of its practices, and undertaking numerous reconciliations and translation efforts to convert the legacy data from the diverse DAPS operations. • Ensuring that all DAPS sites were on IFMIS within 360 days of the start by training the trainers and fanning out to the users.
Naval Facilities Engineering Service Center (NFESC)/To identify and apply engineering solutions, developed by private, public, and academic technology leaders, that provide the best possible facility engineering support to the Navy.	Implementing IFMIS (Funding, General Ledger, Cost Posting, Accounts Receivable, Billing, Travel, Procurement, and Time and Attendance), including system analysis, data conversion, creation of data interfaces, development of enhancements, testing, and training.	• Supply a new, compliant financial system within 90 days, owing to the impending decommissioning of NFESC's legacy system. • Work without a customer Project Organization and Management setup.	• Delivering IFMIS, converting data, and training diverse users to support Defense Working Capital Fund and Navy General Fund policies and to comply with the Federal Managers' Financial Integrity Act for assessing the effectiveness of management controls. • Directing the implementation and the financial process with express approval from the client.

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Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs (OJP)/To provide federal leadership in developing the nation's capacity to prevent and control crime, improve the criminal and juvenile justice systems, increase knowledge about crime and related issues, and assist crime victims.	Implementing IFMIS (Funding, General Ledger, Cost Posting, Accounts Receivable, and Disbursements), including maintenance, analysis, data conversion, creation of data interfaces, development of enhancements, testing, documentation, and training.	• Replace a largely manual and disjointed legacy financial system with a commercial off-the-shelf, Y2K-compliant one within only 90 days. • Revamp a financial environment requiring "significant user intervention" to update the GL, lacking a commitment-recording system interface to GL, having multiple vendor files, and using a paper or modem-connection system for grantees' submittal of SF-269A reports. .	• "Standing up" an accredited, fully integrated working financial system within 90 days. • Communicating expertise in budgetary accounting and transaction codes to enable OJP to meet its federal requirements for General Ledger and Funds Management. Resolving issues immediately. • Creating a Web-based SF269 Grantee System for viewing grant information and sending the Financial Status Report Form SF269A electronically; including the capability for scheduling email notification of expiration of grants and deadlines for reports.

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Federal Communications Commission (FCC)/To regulate interstate and international communications by radio, television, wire, satellite and cable. The FCC's jurisdiction covers the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and U.S. possessions.	Implementing IFMIS (Accounts Receivable), including maintenance, analysis, data conversion, creation of data interfaces, development of enhancements, testing, documentation, and training.	• Centralize all financial activity related to managing loans, revenues, collections, and receivables. • Handle fee processing for actions such as granting licenses or filing tariffs; auction processing for auctions of electromagnetic spectrum licenses; normal accounts receivable and collection from day-to-day operations; enforcement actions involving assessing fines and penalties; loan processing; international communications settlements; and waiver and exemptions. • Correct a historical out-of-balance condition with the loan deposit amount.	• Providing a tailored version of the IFMIS Accounts Receivable Subsystem to meet statutory financial record-keeping requirements for fees, fines, forfeitures, and auction proceeds. • Developing a specialized Auction Processing menu for auction bills, receipts, refunds, and reports; creating a Loan Processing menu for managing a portfolio of over 1,700 active loans, and verifying the deposit amount file before loading; and producing an International Telcon Settlements menu with bill, receipt, disbursement, and non-sufficient funds processing.

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Information Services Activities Group (ISAG)/To develop software for the DoD, including medical and supply systems.	Implementing IFMIS (Funding, General Ledger, Cost Posting, Accounts Receivable, and Disbursements), including system programming/testing, and performance and test of data conversions.	• Reduce the number of Defense Working Capital Accounting systems in the DoD by implementing a single, compliant, commercial off-the-shelf system at multiple sites. • Add fields and functionality, including fields for Cost Objective, Service Level Agreement, and Function Code; allow monthly application of overhead using a calculated percentage; and prioritize the application of cost across multiple funding documents.	• Performing a comprehensive Gap/To Be analysis of the functional and technical requirements, and producing the business process models. • Completing IFMIS implementation one week ahead of schedule and under budget, including site-specific menu options for new functions and maintenance options for new fields. • Being instrumental in two ISAG sites' receiving the Financial Management System Improvement Award from the Under Secretary of Defense and the Team Achievement Meritorious Performance Award from the American Society of Military Comptrollers.

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Defense National Stockpile Centers (DNSC)/To provide safe, secure and environmentally sound stewardship for strategic and critical materials in the United States National Defense Stockpile.	Implementing IFMIS (Contract Sales, Funding, General Ledger, Cost Posting, Accounts Receivable, and Property), including application development, interface development and installation, data conversion and testing, training, and documentation.	• Require a system to replace a sales process that is based on paper flow through the directorates and lacking sufficient data access for users. • Eliminate out-of-date features of current system, including data's not being input from a single source and an offline GL. • Fulfill a need to offer material for sale through the DNSC Web page, moving into a paperless environment.	• Tailoring IFMIS for the depot sites for capturing data once at the detail level, providing an audit trail for all transactions, maintaining accountability and internal controls, and interfacing with standard DoD and other government computer systems. • Developing the easy-to-use and secure Web-based Contract Sales Module to enable DNSC to post solicitations and amendments, register purchasers, receive bids, make awards, receive shipping instructions, and conduct all internal transactions involved in selling commodities.

Crunch time… When it's time to make the decision, choose the company whose software looks easiest to master, has the most logical design, runs on the strongest technology, and contains the fewest obvious problems. A poor foundation today results in cobbled-together scrap tomorrow.

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