

Can California Fix Its IT Planning Process?

Colin Wood | October 10, 2013



The California Department of Technology, formerly known as the California Technology Agency, changed more than just its name on July 1. The department is now changing how IT projects are planned and managed.

A new methodology for project planning has been outlined by the agency and the first phase was implemented on Sept. 11, with three more phases on the way. The changes are intended to avoid past [problems](#) the agency has had, including state IT projects going over schedule and [over budget](#), and some upgrade projects even being [abandoned](#) before they are completed.

State CIO Carlos Ramos called the change an opportunity for collaboration, rather than a shift in strategy for the department.

"We're going to take lessons learned on big systems projects ... and use it to remake everything from way we approve and initiate projects, to our FSR [Feasibility Study Report] and SPR [Special Project Report] processes, to the way we acquire our contracts for big systems integration projects," Ramos [said](#). "The idea would be to

make the procurement processes shorter, to reduce bureaucracy and foster greater competition when we go out to bid.”

Kari Gutierrez, deputy director of the California Department of Technology’s Information Technology Project Oversight and Consulting Division, said the state’s changes to IT project planning bode well from what she’s seen.

“I think where we’re going to see a big difference is in the cost area, the procurement area,” she said. “I think that as we get better, we’re going to see better business requirements come out of this process, then that leads to better proposals, better bids, better costs, not having to re-do things.”

Gutierrez added that the old way of doing things meant that projects would always take a long time to complete and there would often be a lot of retracing old steps and redoing things. If everything went right on a project, it would take two years to complete, and in that time technology and the state often moved on to other things.

For example, she said one of the biggest time-wasters in the old process were special project reports. When bids on a project would come back much higher than outlined by the agency’s original concept statement and Legislature-approved plan, a special project report was needed to go back and fix all the things that were apparently wrong in the original plan.

Gutierrez explained that the new process consists of four stages and is designed so that once a project moves onto the next stage, there will be no need to go back, which will lead to faster and cheaper project deployments.

“By breaking up it up into stages and gates, each component will prepare for the next stage,” she said. “The intent is that departments don’t get too far down the path without making sure they’re really ready. We’re not necessarily changing the order, but we’re basically having departments as they’re moving through this, that they’re doing it in a more focused way.”

<http://www.govtech.com/budget-finance/Can-California-Fix-its-IT-Planning-Process.html>