Finding the Right ERP Provider:
6 Questions to Ask

Choosing a new enterprise resource planning (ERP) software provider is a consequential decision with long-term ramifications. As the Government Finance Officers Association has noted: "It is expected that the government will become a partner with the chosen (ERP) vendor for the next 10-plus years. You want to make sure the partnership will last."[1]

Much is at stake, including the financial and resource commitment to initial implementation and the day-to-day functionality of dependable, user-friendly software that is the backbone of financial operations. Because selecting the right partner is paramount, vendors require thorough vetting. Here are six key questions to consider when selecting an ERP provider that will meet your needs now and in the future.

1 Stability: Will the provider be your partner for the long haul?

It's imperative to know that the provider has a strong foundation and that you can count on your vendor to meet expectations next month, next year, and beyond.

A recent history of being sold or radically restructured is a possible warning sign of vendor instability. Employee churn often follows a company's sale or other uncertainties. Unfortunately, departing employees often include the most experienced workers who choose to take positions at more stable companies.

Ask how new owners plan to maintain standards going forward and if the new owners have experience with public sector ERP. Decades of experience in the public sector is usually an indicator of a solid foundation. A stable company has more consistent access to resources to build upon its current offerings, support its clients, and innovate for the future.

2 Deployment: How does the provider approach implementation?

Implementation of a new ERP solution is a significant undertaking. The good news is that an experienced provider will have established systems in place to minimize the pain. For starters, the company's implementation team should follow Project Management Institute methodology. In addition, the vendor should have experience with successful remote implementations, which are becoming increasingly prevalent because of cost savings, more flexible scheduling, and more efficient use of vendor hours.

An experienced ERP provider will be much more agile in responding to and solving inevitable issues. A valuable asset for implementation teams are workers with public sector experience who can help clients get the most out of their ERP software.

To assess a vendor's implementation capabilities, it's vital to look at past implementations and talk to current clients. If you want to understand a company's core, it's important to see how it performs with complicated deliverables and if it has a history of going live successfully on time and within budget.

[1] Government Finance Officers Association. (2018.) Transparency: A Means to Improving Citizen Trust in Government. https://www.gfoa.org/sites/default/files/TransparencyApril2018.pdf

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3 Support: What's the commitment to supporting clients — now and in the future?

ERP software and data integration are complicated. Questions and issues are inevitable. The key is how quickly and competently issues are resolved. Experience, resources, accessibility, and responsiveness are the building blocks of top-tier customer service for ERP providers. It's not just the number of people operating phones and handling email and message queries; what counts is the experience, expertise, and dedication of the support staff. Discussions with a vendor's current clients will provide insight into how a provider's support promises intersect with reality.

Digging into client retention numbers is one way to gauge the quality of client support. A rate of more than 95 percent indicates a high level of client satisfaction.

4 Public Sector: Does the provider understand the unique needs of local government?

A company specializing in the public sector understands local government's unique needs, which include user-friendly software that facilitates civic engagement. The optimal provider knows that a city, town, or county can't simply adopt software designed for the private sector.

Ideally, a company selling ERP software to local governments has employees with government experience, whether as engineers, finance officers, or city managers. These employees understand:

- Financial transparency requirements

- The need for systems that break down silos and ensure seamless data flow between departments

- State and federal reporting requirements

An experienced ERP provider knows the importance of dependability and security. System downtime can paralyze a city or town, freezing permitting and inspections, or blocking citizen payments; therefore, the ERP provider must have the resources and expertise necessary to help local governments avoid disruptions and quickly resolve issues.

Providers dedicated to the public sector know clients depend on software to meet community needs day in and day out. Successful providers share this responsibility each day with their clients.

5 Cloud: Does the vendor offer a proven cloud solution?

Local governments are turning to cloud solutions because of many advantages, including:

- Elevated data security

- Scalability for optimized performance

- Reduced hardware and infrastructure responsibility and expense

- Access to new, evolving technologies

Because of this trend, it is becoming increasingly crucial for ERP providers to have cloud capabilities and experience. Companies with expertise in software-as-a-service (SaaS) and cloud services can deliver a dependable, easier-to-deploy, and always up-to-date solution. A proven, well-supported cloud environment is the foundation of a cloud solution you can count on.

6 Innovation: Can integrations improve operations?

It's important to have confidence that a provider will continue to innovate and have a strong vision for the product's future. Forward-thinking providers offer software ecosystems that eliminate data silos and ensure information flows seamlessly between departments.

This connected vision can best be achieved by selecting a provider that offers a breadth of products and services that are easily integrated. Choosing a provider with a comprehensive collection of ERP applications tailored to public administration can simplify implementation and enable data integration throughout your organization since the software is purpose-built for integrations.

For example, mobile civic engagement, asset management, 311, cashiering, payments, and utility billing from a single provider simplify the user experience and connectivity within an organization — compared to stitching together solutions from multiple vendors. A strong ERP candidate will offer product integrations that can improve your operations.

If you'd like more information about ERP solutions, contact us at info@tylertech.com or visit tylertech.com.

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