

Streamlining Government Procurement with a Modern Acquisition Management Solution

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Government organizations looking for new technology are bound by outdated requirements lists—but software that meets a list of requirements doesn't necessarily improve collaboration and efficiency.

The mass shift to remote work in 2020 gave the public sector a wake-up call: their technology wasn't built for collaboration, and the need to modernize came much more quickly than anticipated. The unexpected disruption of the pandemic emphasized gaps in workflows and technology that were once easy to ignore and prompted government organizations to begin modernizing applications. With changing regulations, unprecedented remote work environments, and teams looking to shift from waterfall to agile methodologies, modernization became an imperative.

Government organizations looking for new technology are bound by outdated requirements lists—but software that simply meets a list of requirements doesn't necessarily improve collaboration and efficiency.

As a result, organizations piece together disparate technologies to check off requirements rather than building a unified IT infrastructure that will meet challenges for years to come.

Acquisition processes are not immune to this. Government procurement teams are using technology that is inflexible, limiting, outdated, expensive to support, and hinder agency workflows. Agencies aren't given a wealth of resources and often rely on spreadsheets, email, shared drives, and other manual methods of documentation to develop requirements and communicate with contracting teams. This results in an inefficient, drawn-out process with little-to-no visibility into status or estimated time to completion, making it difficult to accurately plan, monitor for roadblocks, and receive goods and services in a timely manner.

The reality is, multiple, disconnected systems won't fulfill acquisition teams' technology needs—and customizing multiple commercial off-the-shelf (COTS) solutions extends implementation timelines and drives up cost.

Government acquisition impacts every aspect of the public sector, making the need for modern workflows even more urgent. Teams working on procurement in federal, state, and local governments face several challenges as a result of outdated acquisition technology and workflows:

- **Disorganization and wasted resources.** Agencies and programs risk wasting billions of dollars when they cannot accurately plan, track, or manage awards for the goods and services that they need to accomplish their missions.
- **Delivery delays.** With inefficiencies in the acquisition cycle, critical goods and services are delayed.
- **Tedious, costly tasks.** Manual management processes are inefficient and expensive.
- **Communication difficulties.** There is often poor collaboration between contracting organizations and government customers.

Making critical decisions based on outdated systems sets the acquisition process back from the outset. And though modernizing acquisition technology is the right solution, it isn't a linear path—most agencies can't simply remove old technology and implement new solutions to address these challenges. That's why agencies need an acquisition solution built on a complete automation platform that brings together existing systems; that way, they can choose to retire legacy systems when they see fit while still benefiting from modern technology.

Let's discuss where procurement teams should begin their journey to modernization.



79% of government officials indicate that automation has a positive impact on their business.¹

Agency IT teams are often short-staffed and overwhelmed, working with a limited budget to support their organizations. IT team budgets are built around legacy solutions, as are their modernization strategies—meaning agencies are currently investing more to “upgrade” their legacy systems which, no matter how “modern,” don’t have a meaningful impact on efficiency, ease of use, or return on maintenance (ROM).

To begin modernizing acquisition solutions, agencies should identify the processes that are foundational to their workflows, rely heavily on manual tasks, involve many people and systems, and have a long list of regulatory requirements. Then, they should work with procurement leaders and internal IT teams to find a solution that brings together legacy applications and streamlines information and workflows. Automated workflows deliver time savings and more efficient procurement processes to agencies of all sizes across the entire acquisition experience. In fact, 79% of government officials indicate that automation has a positive impact on their business.¹

1. Deloitte Center for Government Insights, [Government Trends 2021: Global transformative trends in the public sector](#), Deloitte, 2021.

Modern acquisition solutions streamline procurement.



The integral phases of acquisition—building requirements, solicitation, evaluation, award, and post-award—each reap their own benefits from technology that unifies legacy systems. Here's how.

Requirements.

Government acquisition, particularly at the federal level, is highly regulated. To get the most out of the requirements stage of acquisition, it's important to identify key needs upfront, well before contracting selects an acquisition path. Without the tools, knowledge, or background to know what's needed, requirements staff base their needs for new procurement on old projects and include unnecessary items while leaving out the essentials.

How acquisition solutions help.

A sophisticated solution provides visibility into the requirements management process, allowing both internal customers and contracting professionals to update and execute on requirements from within one application. These intelligent processes offer suggestions and guide users through the requirements development process, helping to eliminate confusion and drive efficiency. These platforms also pull data for reuse from other systems to create documents quickly and easily. Visibility into milestones provides complete awareness as documents, correspondence, and critical updates are no longer locked within a single user's account, rendering them unavailable after reassignment.



Acquisition solutions centralize government-wide regulations and agency-specific policies in a single application.

Solicitation.

Contracting offices' tools are currently narrowly focused on creating a solicitation document. They're not helping to shape the acquisition strategy, ensure proper coordination with stakeholders, assist with reviews, or help create required supporting documentation by pulling data from multiple sources. One of the biggest bottlenecks for contracting offices is selecting clauses and provisions. Most government contracting offices operate with no centralized capability to automatically determine which provisions and clauses should be inserted into solicitations, awards, orders, amendments, and modifications. So, a contracting officer must spend time interpreting clauses, when they should be focusing on more strategic work.

This whole process hinges on individual interpretations of clauses and templates that are specific to different types of purchases, with limited logic maintained within the agency's contract writing systems. These inefficient methods lead to inconsistent application of the provisions and clauses in contract actions, increased contractual risk to the government, and contract actions that are non-compliant.

How acquisition solutions help.

Acquisition solutions centralize government-wide regulations and agency-specific supplement clauses and provisions in a single repository. Based on the characteristics of procurement, as well as wizard-driven information obtained from the user, a solution will suggest the appropriate set of clauses based on configurable business rules derived from regulations. As emerging technologies like tools with robust artificial intelligence (AI) capabilities mature, they can be easily integrated into these solutions, making the selection of clauses more effective. Automation quickly collates selected clauses in an easy-to-audit portal to ensure compliance and accuracy and save time in the audit process.

Evaluation.

The way government organizations evaluate vendors' quotes and proposals for goods and services is complex, regulated, and often protested. Selecting vendors usually doesn't come easily for procurement teams. The government spends an inordinate amount of time on source selection, largely due to management overhead and document-heavy processes.

How acquisition solutions help.

Transparency into the vendor evaluation process allows both evaluators and contracting professionals to update and execute on source selection from within a single application. Sourcing staff can easily ensure government regulations and agency policies are followed. The required documentation is generated automatically, minimizing manual input, ensuring sensitive documents are kept secure. Evaluation teams also benefit from process automation, because it allows all of the data to be collected within one system and easily combined to build consensus.

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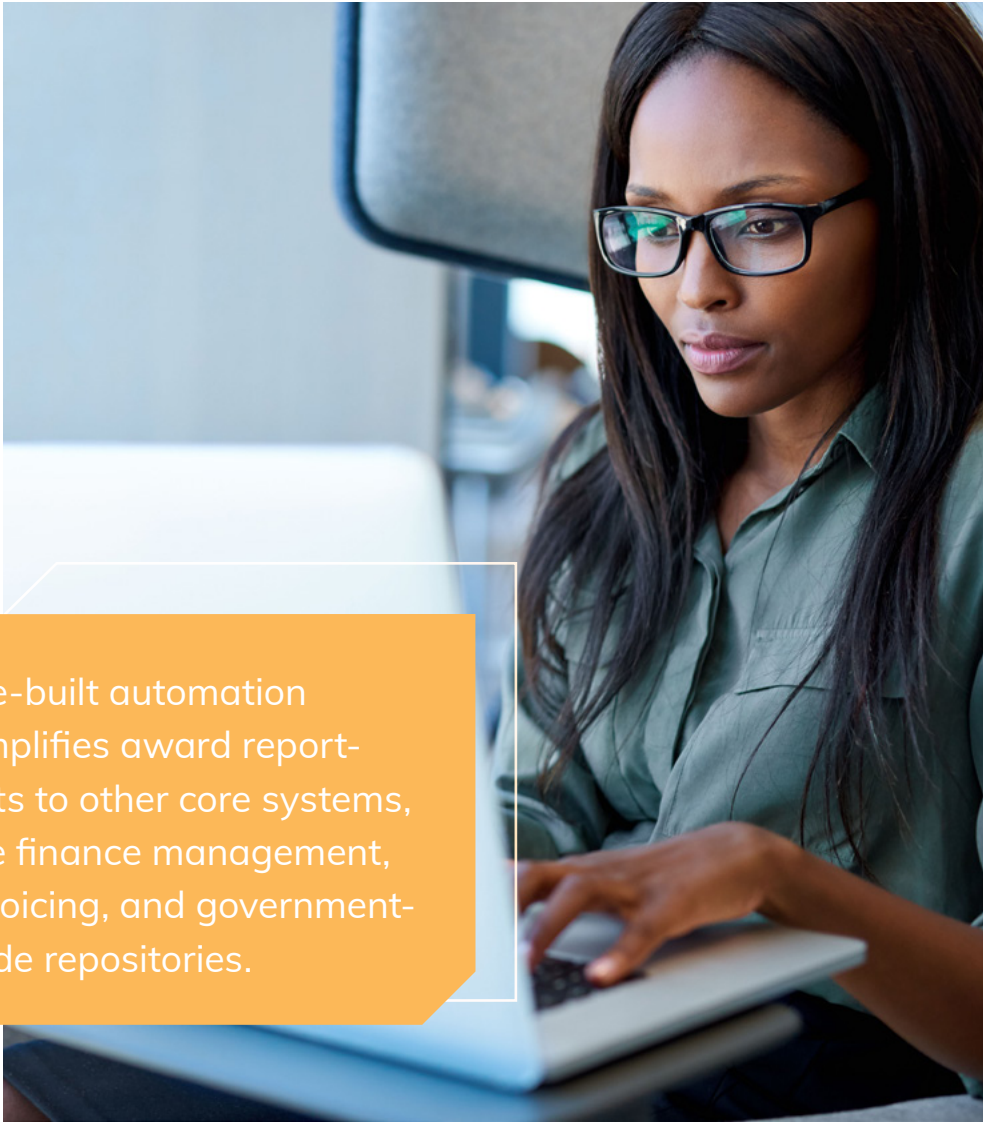
Award.

After the chosen vendor is selected, the award process begins, and it is often challenging to manage. In addition to creating the contract document, in this part of the procurement process, contracting staff spend time documenting progress, seeking approvals and signatures, and ensuring contract file compliance. Managing these tasks means managing the myriad of systems that must be checked or updated before the vendor can receive the contract. These tasks often must be completed under significant pressure and tight schedules so vendors can start work on time.

How acquisition solutions help.

Pre-built automation simplifies award report-outs to other core systems, like finance management, invoicing, and government-wide repositories. It also distributes the award to the customer and the vendor. No-code integrations help government agencies easily verify the status of their vendor with results from vendor verification automatically stored in the contract file. And if any issues are found, the contracting office is immediately notified for resolution. Robotic process automation (RPA) simplifies data retrieval from systems that lack modern web services or APIs, and automated document creation and bulk uploading of contract files streamlines management, auditing, and approvals.

A robust acquisition solution will streamline collaboration among stakeholders and systems during the award stage of the procurement process.



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Post-award.

Agencies and programs risk wasting billions of dollars when they cannot accurately plan, track, and manage existing awards for the goods and services that they need to accomplish their missions. Bridge contracts that are needed as a result of missing options or failing to appropriately plan for a follow-on contract increase the costs of goods and services. Missed contract options also increase the costs and prevent the delivery of resources. Manual award management processes are difficult and costly to manage with poor collaboration between the contracting and government organizations.

How acquisition solutions help.

Post-award processes are often document-heavy and difficult to organize. With complete automation and intelligent document processing (IDP) technology to unlock unstructured data, contracting

staff can access data more readily and unlock workflows without manual effort. They get an early view into option exercises and contract expiration dates, helping to eliminate expensive bridge contracts or lapses in service. Automatic alerts and notifications ensure that deliverables and activities are completed on time and that immediate action is taken if a workflow is disrupted.

With the help of automated workflows, agencies and acquisition teams increase the number of clean audit results and reduce acquisition and financial non-compliance findings by better following regulations and best practices. Procurement staff are also provided a guided acquisition experience, which demystifies the award management process by giving users the ability to track, manage, and view the real-time status of all their contracts. Ultimately, a low-code platform can connect a lot of disparate processes between program and contract offices as they manage vendor disputes, novations, changes in scope, option exercises, and incremental funding through contract closeout.


Acquisition solutions with complete automation drive process improvement.



For agencies with a plethora of systems housing mission-critical data, going through the procurement process can feel like working on a puzzle where the pieces aren't made to fit. Upgrading one solution to improve processes and efficiencies doesn't resolve the manual, time-consuming processes that are necessary for the steps before and after the use of that solution—it's a band-aid fix that doesn't deliver tangible results.

The good news for government agencies is this: modernizing the solutions agencies use doesn't have to mean eliminating all existing technologies and starting fresh. Instead, implementing a mature acquisition solution brings existing solutions together to streamline pertinent information in a single view. This drastically reduces the inefficiencies experienced by agencies that lack insight into the full context of their acquisition history and rely on manual processes throughout the acquisition experience—this solution extends the systems currently in place, connects data, and presents it in a more meaningful way.

Acquisition solutions built on a low-code platform augment the human actions within the acquisition experience while automating lower-value tasks—processes that need to be manual are left to the experts while mundane, menial tasks are left to the digital workers of AI, RPA, and other automation capabilities within the platform. Agencies can modernize their technology piece by piece, keeping data in multiple systems until they're ready to take on a larger implementation. And they can do this while still reaping the benefits of integrated technology. Low-code gives agencies a flexible path to modernization.



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Driving process improvement with low-code.

Visualizing and monitoring the workflows needed for acquisition using a low-code platform with process mining capabilities, agencies can identify roadblocks and minimize processing time to get procurement approval. Historical data on previous applications helps agencies make informed decisions in applying for funds, which increases chances of approval and saves time. Automating mundane tasks within the process and leaving value-driven tasks to the human workforce helps government organizations do their jobs more efficiently and effectively while freeing up time to think more strategically about the acquisition experience.



Implementing an acquisition solution with the power of low-code to modernize an agency's acquisition experience doesn't have to mean a strenuous removal of existing technology and a cumbersome implementation process for new solutions.

Rather than focusing on outdated requirements lists and depending on disparate systems, government organizations can seamlessly integrate existing technology to drive efficiency and deliver tangible results. There's no need to sunset solutions immediately or worry about technology certifications or lack of coding knowledge. Instead, low-code acquisition solutions unify and extend siloed technology and bring immediate, measurable benefits.



It's important to note that low-code platforms exist on a spectrum. The technology is evolving and some platforms have evolved more than others. Because each has its own set of features and capabilities often aimed at different users, it's helpful to categorize low-code. Forrester divides the low-code market into four segments:²

1. **Low-code for business (or “citizen”) developers** – Often called “no-code,” these solutions target business users who need to solve pressing challenges without involving the IT department or professional developers.
2. **Low-code development platforms for application development and delivery (for professional developers)** – These platforms are typically aimed at professional developers who need to build and deploy a variety of applications to meet business needs.
3. **Digital process automation (DPA) platforms for wide deployment** – Solutions in this category help both professional developers and citizen developers quickly automate moderate workflows and processes.
4. **Software for DPA platforms for deep deployment** – Professional developers use these platforms to rapidly automate the full spectrum of processes.

2. Rob Koplowitz, “[Navigating The Rapid App Delivery Market](#),” Forrester, September, 17 2020.

With a comprehensive acquisition solution built on a low-code platform, agencies can improve their bottom line and deliver a positive return on maintenance with technology that saves time, costs less to maintain, and gets more done with fewer resources.

To modernize the acquisition experience, agencies should consider a sophisticated low-code platform that automates manual back-end processes and allows them to focus on tasks that have the most impact on the acquisition experience. Look for a low-code platform provider that meets these requirements:

- A proven track record of serving the acquisition community with features built into the platform that directly address acquisition needs.
- Investment in the public sector and native pre-built acquisition solutions on a low-code platform.
- A track record of successfully delivered projects within the acquisition space.
- Compliant with required certifications for faster, easier, and safer software deployments.

With a comprehensive acquisition solution built on a low-code platform, agencies can improve their bottom line and deliver a positive return on maintenance with technology that saves time, costs less to maintain, and gets more done with fewer resources—all the benefits of modernizing the acquisition experience without having to build from the ground up.



Learn how the General Services Administration (GSA) used BPM and low-code to automate reviews for 11 different approval chains while boosting innovation and efficiency.

[Read the full story.](#)



The US Air Force standardized contract writing, driving efficiency for the acquisition and contracting communities, reducing costs, and providing a platform for making functionality enhancements and statutory changes fast, all with automation.

[Read the full story.](#)



With low-code, DISA created the cloud-based Integrated Defense Enterprise Acquisition System (IDEAS)—the largest and most comprehensive BPM-based acquisition management solution in the United States Federal Government. IDEAS connects procurement operations, systems, and DISA personnel in a single end-to-end procurement solution that manages all aspects of procurement work from pre-award to award and post-award activities.

[Read the full story.](#)



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