

HOW MUCH OF TODAY ARE YOU SPENDING ON YESTERDAY?

Executive Briefings

Key Takeaways

- **Maintaining an existing system or process is an investment decision, even when it feels like doing nothing.**
- **Evaluate legacy environments by the total capacity required to sustain them – not simply their visible technology costs.**
- **Reconsider the process before modernizing the technology so yesterday's inefficiency is not preserved on a newer platform.**

Estimated Reading Time: 4 minutes

Every government organization inherits something.

Systems selected years ago. Processes designed around requirements that may have changed. Reports created for purposes few people remember. Applications supporting programs that evolved while the technology beneath them did not.

Some remain essential.

Some remain because replacing them would be difficult.

And some remain simply because they're already there.

The cost of that inheritance isn't always visible in a budget line.

Sometimes it appears in how much of today's capacity is spent keeping yesterday operational.

Maintenance Is a Choice, Too

Keeping an existing system or process can feel like the absence of a decision.

It isn't.

It requires people, funding, attention, expertise, security, support and time. When something fails, someone responds. When requirements change, someone adapts it. When it cannot do what is needed, someone creates a workaround.

None of that means an older system should automatically be replaced.

Longevity isn't failure.

But continued investment deserves the same question as new investment:

What are we receiving in return?

If the answer remains compelling, maintaining the existing environment may be exactly the right decision.

If nobody has asked recently, that is worth knowing, too.

Find the Cost That Doesn't Look Like a Cost

The expense of maintaining an operating environment extends beyond licenses, contracts and hardware.

There's also effort.

How much staff time goes toward reconciling information?

How much specialized knowledge is required to keep an aging application functioning?

How many additional steps exist because two systems cannot communicate?

How much time is spent producing information in a format required by an old process?

How difficult is it to make even a modest change because of what surrounds the system?

Those costs can remain invisible precisely because they have become routine.

People stop experiencing them as exceptions.

They *become* the job.

Preserve What Still Serves the Mission

Modernization shouldn't become an argument for replacing everything old.

Government cannot — and should not — operate that way.

Some established systems are stable, understood, secure and well suited to the work they perform. Some processes exist because they protect accountability, ensure compliance, or reduce risk.

Age alone tells leadership very little.

Purpose tells much more.

The question is whether the existing approach continues to serve the mission effectively enough to justify what the organization invests in sustaining it.

That requires judgment rather than a technology refresh schedule.

Sometimes the right decision is replacement.

Sometimes it's improvement.

Sometimes it's integration.

Sometimes it's leaving something alone.

Knowing the difference is the work.

Don't Modernize the Past

There's another trap.

An agency can decide that an aging process needs modernization and immediately begin looking for a newer way to

perform the same process.

But what if the process itself deserves reconsideration?

Digitizing an unnecessary step does not make the step necessary.

Automating an outdated workflow does not make the workflow current.

Moving an inefficient process onto newer technology may simply preserve the inefficiency for another generation.

Before deciding how to modernize something, ask whether the organization would design it the same way today.

If not, the better opportunity may begin before the technology does.

Closing Thought

Government leaders rarely have unlimited resources available for improvement.

That makes the capacity consumed by the existing environment particularly important.

Every hour spent compensating for an avoidable limitation is an hour unavailable elsewhere. Every specialized resource devoted to preserving unnecessary complexity is a resource that cannot address another priority.

The objective is not to erase the past.

It is to decide deliberately which parts of it still deserve support.

Keep what works.

Improve what can work better.

Question what survives primarily because it has always survived.

And make room for what the mission requires next.

Finish strong by remembering that you cannot change everything you inherited. But you can decide how much of the future you will spend maintaining it.

Start the Conversation

- Every successful modernization initiative begins with a shared understanding of where you are today and where you want to go next.
- If your leadership team is evaluating modernization priorities, Anchor Bridge Innovations would welcome the opportunity to start that conversation.