Looking for new tech for your local government? Make incremental improvements, so you don’t throw the baby out with the bath water.

If you feel like this guy using your agency’s technology, make immediate improvements with...
If you are frustrated with the technology your city, county, department or agency is using, it’s tempting to throw up your hands and start looking for something new. Surely, there has to be a better software tool for whatever you’re trying to do, some new system that won’t have the same limitations and issues as the current platform. We see a lot of people who believe that the perfect system must be out there — one that can magically unite all their old legacy data and improve operations. But it’s almost always more complicated than that.

I’ve been there and felt your pain. But wholesale change, for instance from one ‘big system’ vendor to another, is always more complicated than you’d think and won’t be seamless. It’s almost always far better to test, experiment, start small, and make gradual, incremental improvements and changes. And that’s what we let you do with CityGrows.

**What’s your procurement process?**

Let’s start there: if you decide you want a new tool, can you just go out and buy it?

Probably not.

One organization I talked to recently had a eight- to twelve-month
process for an RFP process- for an off-the-shelf system. Hiring a vendor to set up the tool could well double that time, and then it might take even more time to actually do the work. And that kind of timeline isn’t so unusual in government. That’s going to be a difficult, complicated process. By the end of it, the technology you originally wanted could already be obsolete.

It also doesn’t help that other people who haven’t used the system might not understand how it’s problematic or why a new one would be better.

And what happens while you’re going through procurement?

You still have to use the old, frustrating software.

But let’s say you are able to make it through procuring a new system. Then what happens?

Nothing is perfect; the grass is always greener.

The aphorism holds true in government, too. With any major change, there are going to be speed bumps, features that don’t work as well as they should. Forms might not be setup the way you need and you’ll either have to change how you operate or put in the time and effort to change the system.
**There’s a better way.**

Instead of trying to completely change systems, you can start small. Rather than trying to change everything at the same time, you can (and *should* in our opinion) be able to field test a new tech product on one, two, or a few workflows, to see what it’s like. You can get a sense of how a software platform really works that way, and understand if it’s a good fit for your needs, your staff, and your budget, without having to spend $10–25K before you even see whether it works for you. A demo is always going to make a product or platform look great — you can’t really understand what it’s like to use it, unless you use it.

That’s how we recommend governments use CityGrows. You don’t need to move all your forms and processes over at once before launching. Instead, you can do it one at a time and use those processes as test runs for what implementing CityGrows across your organization would be like.

Unlike most tech tools for government, CityGrows is set up and managed by government employees themselves - that means that the people who are managing processes day to day — the administrative staff who are actually issuing the special event permits, the parking passes, or the dog licenses — get involved in setting up the new system.

And with CityGrows, it’s totally free to get started. You don’t need
to pay anything to try it out and see if it works and there are no upfront setup fees. You can even use it for free and pass along credit card processing fees to constituents. And if you decide to use additional features or support, just pay a monthly fee. (See our pricing page for more info).

With the slower, more incremental process, you’ll be making an immediate difference in the user experience for both government employees and staffers. You’ll let the departments that really need a solution now go first, and the most tech-savvy people on your team get started right away. Then those folks can share their experience and help people who are more suspicious of new technology get comfortable with the idea, without you having to force it.

You’ll discover questions, things you hadn’t considered about what it means to move processes online, and be able to resolve them earlier on, with your initial pilot teams. And you’ll be able to change how you operate or how you use CityGrows without the stress of having to deal with 20 different processes at once.

Setting up CityGrows or implementing any other innovation with gradual, incremental improvements will be smoother and you’ll have a better time with results and benefits that you’ll be able to see in real time.
And in two years, your whole organization will have transitioned to the CityGrows platform. By contrast, if you do a traditional procurement process and wait to roll everything out at once, you might just be starting to implement a new system by then.

Want to improve your government’s systems, one process at a time? Sign up for CityGrows now!

Thinking about Google Forms or Wufoo for your local government workflow? Think again.
Stop dealing with all these paper forms and don't settle for a form tool that can't handle government work. **CityGrows can help!** *(Photo courtesy of Dvortygirl)*

Need to quickly get a form up online? Maybe you have a permit process that you’re trying to digitize, or want a job application that candidates can submit from a website. You might think about using Google Forms or a similar form app like Wufoo or SurveyMonkey. …
Summertime means summer permits! Using CityGrows for online permitting and licensing for local governments

Summer is prime time for local governments! There are block parties to approve, fish to be caught, beach parking stickers to issue, boat moorings to assign, park grills to reserve, and much more. Which of these summer activities does your town require permits or licenses for? ...
Why start: I just couldn’t sit back

I’ve been thinking a lot recently about why I’m working on ShakingNews, my project to cover and explain what’s happening in state politics (starting in New York).

The last few weeks have not been easy. Two people who had offered to work with me on various pieces of getting ShakingNews…

Read more · 5 min read

Jan 17, 2017

A Failure of Policy and a Failure of Politics
Obama came into office on a tide of high hopes. Now, eight years later, we have Trump.

Last week, Matt Stoller wrote an important article about the failure of Obama’s financial policies. As inspiring as Obama was as President, many of his policies boosted Wall Street and weakened working Americans across the Midwest. …

Read more · 4 min read
Jan 5, 2017

The Right Goal for A/B Testing

If you’re doing an A/B test, you’re typically looking for what will bring in the most money, either directly (donations, sales, etc.) or indirectly (email signups, link clicks, lead generation forms, petitions or the like). But I want to suggest something that might be contrary to what you’d think:

Unless...

Dec 12, 2016

How a Small Advocacy Group Can Get Powerful

Angry? Want to start a new organization? Read on...
Are you upset about the election? Angry that Donald Trump seems **more interested in making money** than **knowing what’s going on in the world**? Upset that the new cabinet is opposed to **the work of government**? Scared that a new McCarthyism will **doom our planet**? …
It seems the media has found a culprit for Donald Trump’s election: fake news. Websites made up pro-Trump stories because his supporters would read and share them. The Russian government helped disseminate them. These invented news stories changed the dynamics of the race and helped destroy Hillary Clinton’s reputation.

Everyone…

Read more · 6 min read
Talk Less, Listen More: Why Big Data Isn’t Enough

After President Obama’s two successful campaigns, a myth spread around Democratic campaigners. As long as you built a campaign that operated like Barack Obama’s campaigns — canvassing, volunteer leaders, and substantial digital outreach, all guided by data — you’d win. Then, that theory ran into reality. …
It Can’t Happen Here (or can it?): Three Lessons for Fighting Fascism
Over Thanksgiving, I read Sinclair Lewis’ Depression-era work, *It Can’t Happen Here*, his telling of how fascism could come to America.

Like *The Plot Against America*, the politics don’t necessarily make too much sense. In *It Can’t Happen Here*, a Trump-like figure wins the Democratic nomination and then the Presidency...

Read more · 3 min read
Regardless of what kind of machine your county uses, your vote may not be counted correctly.

Over the last few days, a lot of folks on the left have taken up the banner of #AuditTheVote. Dale Beran suggested that differences between the Presidential polls and the actual vote in swing states may have been a result of Russian hacking. When I first saw it, I dismissed…

Read more · 7 min read
Like so many people, I was distraught about the results of last Tuesday’s election. But while it’s cold comfort, it’s important to remember that most Americans did not vote for Donald Trump. ...