



County of Fairfax, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

December 13, 2021

TO: Bryan Hill
County Executive

FROM: Edward H. Blum, Chairman *EHB*
Information Technology Policy Advisory Committee (ITPAC)

SUBJECT: FY 2023 ITPAC Interim Budget Letter to the County Executive

Drawing on its members' expertise as IT professionals and regular interactions with DIT senior leadership ITPAC examines challenges and solutions for strong IT-based citizen services, staff facilitation, cost-effective technology use, technology strategy and IT investments. This allows the Committee knowledgeably to recommend alternatives and support County innovative and responsive practices.

The County/DIT continually address changing requirements as needs grow and technology rapidly evolves. In particular, ITPAC commends the DIT team for leadership and professionalism in effectively addressing technology-related challenges during the pandemic. The Committee stresses that to continue meeting changing community and operational needs it is important to expand and strengthen IT investments despite an uncertain fiscal environment. DIT must be able to address as needed new challenges or opportunities and repurpose resources as all activities become more technology dependent. Also, when necessary, it must be a "positive disruptor" for the potential of IT to deliver solutions that achieve County goals and are sustainable.

ITPAC endorses the DIT strategic roadmap, as the agency is positioning to be more proactive, effective, innovative, and strategic. Focus areas include enhancing and expanding mobility, re-shaping organization culture, and building a digitally focused government.

IT Use and Leadership Are County Strengths:

DIT has delivered successful relevant technology solutions supporting the Board's goals and strategies for government service and efficiencies. The County's IT Program continues to be acknowledged as a national best practice for governance, investment, and low-risk delivery.

Although recognition is welcome, it is critical that DIT aggressively addressed operational challenges during the past two years of a widespread epidemic. DIT, with the assistance of DMB and other partners, identified and implemented technology options to support the needs of an instantly remote workforce and citizenry, including the expedited roll out of Microsoft Teams. It solidified a framework to allow Boards, Authorities and Commissions (like ITPAC) to meet remotely and thus continue to serve in their advisory roles. And it implemented other technologies to enhance the ability of staff to work remotely. These were done quickly for an immediate need, but they are likely to reflect how government operates into the future and need to be strongly supported in budget planning.

Impediments to Achieving the Mission:

Staffing Challenges: Nearly 25 percent of DIT staff are either in DROP or eligible to retire within the next two years. DIT is continually challenged to identify, hire and retain needed IT personnel. As the DMV region continues to build its reputation as a hub for IT and cyber security talent, the marketplace for that talent is continually growing more competitive. Many IT professionals are lured to private sector employers at a speed and compensation the County's hiring practices cannot match. Maintaining DIT's high level of performance is in serious jeopardy unless a new plan for hiring technical talent can be implemented. ITPAC recommends the County seek creative opportunities, collaborations, and solutions in this area. For example, recruit IT professionals who can maintain their employment while realizing long-term career benefits by working for a time with local government helping residents, businesses and influencing positive change in local communities.

Protection of Wide-Spread County Data: Cyber threats continue to grow and become more sophisticated while the County's technology footprint is expanding. Timely deployment of security protection supporting all levels of applications across the entire County must ensure resilient and uninterrupted operations as well as protected access to a wide variety of data. This is now a key component of the County's overall security infrastructure and must continue to be a priority in the budget.

Growing Value of Data Analytics with Data Proliferating: Data expansion and use drastically increases requirements for technology to gather, manage, preserve, and analyze data. This is critical to support service efficiency and productivity for County agencies. Satisfying demand for these new capabilities must be balanced with investments in maintaining existing automation.

Agencies' Business Process Transformations: As agencies seek to be more efficient through process transformation, proposed changes often have significant IT implications. To achieve effective and successful results, it is critical for DIT to be engaged early in the process as a trusted partner. For cost plans, it is important to consider IT implications (both within the agency and in the central IT department) to achieve the goals and create long-term sustainability.

Agility and Time Required to Execute Contracts: The County would benefit greatly from increased contracting agility and a reduction in time to execute IT contracts. Current law and related requirements often extend the timeframe required to implement needed technology investments. Slow contracting that causes the County to fall behind technology advances can actually prevent implementation or increase the cost of implementation.

Efficiency and Effectiveness Recommendations: ITPAC supports the following for more effective use of resources:

- Continue to focus on projects and expenditures that improve a mobile workforce's ability to conduct County business remotely while maintaining a secure environment. The criticality of managing Cyber Security to reduce risk of disruptions to operations and services is paramount.
- Expand work on enterprise-wide data governance with analytics and citizen portals. Harness the enormous amount of data to make more effective budget and programmatic decisions aligned with the County's strategic plan.
- Seek ways to provide and incorporate equitable access to technology across Fairfax County.
- Collaborate and partner with others in the area (such as FCPS or IT companies with significant local presence) to co-create solutions and services. Examples include predictive analytics, artificial intelligence (AI) and related "smart/connected communities" concepts.

- Promote strategies encouraging future growth. These include state investments and efforts to explore and analyze opportunities to deploy innovative technologies that enable business growth across all sectors. Some ideas may include applications of blockchain, new electronic payment methods, artificial intelligence, robotics, automation, and others.

Additional FY23 Recommendations:

- ITPAC supports continuing to use Federal and other revenue sources to make additional IT investments. Some areas currently being supported include reinforcing the County’s IT infrastructure security, expanding video tele-conferencing capabilities and enhancing/updating WiFi networks in County facilities.
- The County and DIT should work with Federal and State agencies to benefit from the massive infrastructure investments to be funded from the recently enacted Federal infrastructure legislation (PL 117-58). Many billions of dollars are designated for broadband coverage equity and related areas within DIT’s purview that could notably help the County.
- Continue the innovative multi-year, multi-budget process investment strategy for major IT projects such as the Planning Land Use System (PLUS), the Human Services Integrative Roadmap and similar projects for operational improvements to benefit from technology innovations and provide timely funding.
- Provide additional funding as needed to obtain and maintain required licenses for software and other core systems. Costs are increasing rapidly and will continue to grow in future years.

Conclusion:

ITPAC looks forward to continuing to support Fairfax County’s best practices for technology governance and implementation strategies. As with other high performing organizations, the County’s reliance on technology continues to increase. With the need to protect against constantly evolving cyber threats and the rapid advance in the use of information and technology to deliver services, the County must stay abreast of the latest technologies and applications to meet its goals. ITPAC is pleased to work with the County to achieve this.

cc:

Information Technology Policy Advisory Committee

Gregory Scott, Chief Technology Officer

Christina Jackson, Chief Financial Officer/Director, Department of Management and Budget