



WHITE PAPER

IT Consolidation - What's Next for Government and Education Modernization Initiatives?



IT Consolidation

INTRODUCTION

IT consolidation has been a high-priority government and education initiative for many years. While many state and education organizations are already on board, or boarding quickly, the move may be born of a different catalyst than you may expect—certainly different than federal agencies.

Federal agencies are consolidating IT efforts largely in response to federal mandates such as the [Data Center Optimization Initiative](#) (DCOI) and the [Federal Information Technology Acquisition Reform Act](#) (FITARA). For state and local government and education, however, consolidation is coming far more from a need to create a unified IT approach as well as a need to enhance value.

Organizations that have already made significant IT consolidation progress are experiencing lower costs, more efficiency, greater availability, and enhanced security. These organizations are also experiencing greater effectiveness in managing data. Cloud services, for example, can provide elastic computing, shared storage, and shared services, which combine to help scale computing power and resources without scaling personnel.

[CIO.gov](#) reports federal progress (since 2016) of savings and cost avoidance of nearly \$2 billion, plus closure of over 3,000 data centers.

[Massachusetts, North Dakota, and Washington](#) state are some examples where successful IT consolidation has brought benefits to the organization as well as to state citizens.

Some government and education organizations have even begun consolidating and centralizing purchasing to further enhance that centralized approach, increase value, reduce underutilization, and move toward best-in-class products.

All this said, while the value of bigger-picture IT consolidation is increasingly clear, many organizations are still grappling with disparate departmental systems and/or silos of information within different state agencies. Despite dramatic shifts toward consolidation, many still lack a centralized view or centralized control.

It's critical for government and education IT pros to understand a key piece of the equation: to realize the full value of IT consolidation, organizations must also consolidate their IT operations management (ITOM) tools.

Imagine this scenario: you've done extensive IT consolidation, but still have tools monitoring and managing different portions of your networks, servers, storage and other IT infrastructure—tools that don't talk to one another and don't pass information back and forth. While you may have

started consolidating your hardware, software, and systems, you may not yet have a consolidated view across the enterprise, which is one of the primary advantages of IT consolidation. Within this scenario, despite your IT consolidation efforts, you're still operating in a disjointed environment.

ITOM tools must evolve along with the consolidation of IT infrastructure.

THE BENEFITS OF TOOL INTEGRATION AND CONSOLIDATION

If you've taken even the first steps toward IT consolidation, you'll already know that non-integrated monitoring and management tools face a range of challenges, from duplicate or underutilized tools to higher training costs to greater security concerns. Even understanding what you currently have deployed can be labor-intensive if you have to collect data from multiple tools and edit spreadsheets. You likely also know that since network devices and systems have become standard, proprietary or customized monitoring solutions are no longer necessary—and are often not recommended within a best-practices scenario.

In fact, modernizing and consolidating your ITOM tools offers a broad range of benefits, including:

- » Consolidated Dashboard—Streamlining your monitoring tools allows you to easily create a single network operations center (NOC) dashboard view for visibility across your entire enterprise.
- » Out-of-the-Box Integration—Data integrated and correlated across the enterprise means your single-view dashboard includes vast amounts of information, allowing easier troubleshooting and more efficient network operations.
- » Improved Asset Discovery—A consolidated view gives you the ability to more easily discover and track network devices, servers, applications, connections, users, and more.
- » Improved Compliance and Reporting—With consolidated logs, configurations, and patch data, you can more effectively meet compliance requirements and improve the reliability of compliance reporting.
- » Improved Security—Centralized information through a consolidated view means improved visibility of your control mechanisms, which can greatly enhance organization-wide security.
- » Enhanced Alerting—Centrally managed alerting eliminates related or redundant alerts and lessens alert fatigue.
- » Easier Support—Consolidated tools provide the means for easier support all around with a single support desk for your monitoring and troubleshooting solutions.
- » Simplified Administration—One view of your entire enterprise means more accurate and easier maintenance renewals as well as more effective capacity planning.

There are more advantages than these. Consider training. A single user interface with a common look and feel means enhanced usability—more people will use the system—and reduced training time and costs.

Consider, too, the ease of procurement, which can be a show-stopper for government and education IT pros using the products and services to best meet the needs of the organization. Consolidating tools means consolidating purchasing, which can provide dramatic discounts and an easier procurement process.

WHERE TO BEGIN

Once you've recognized the value in tool consolidation to enhance your organization's IT consolidation, where do you start?

We've provided five steps to help you more easily make the transition.

Step 1: Define Scope

First and foremost, define your scope. This is the most important step you'll take, as it sets the stage for the rest of your initiative and will determine your subsequent steps.

Understand what you're trying to achieve—on multiple levels. For example, define the scope first; what organizations within your organization do you want to include and where are these organizations geographically located?

Once you've determined the organizational scope, determine the technical scope. Do you want to include network, systems (virtual and physical), storage, and application monitoring tools? What about database performance tools? Consider, too, the phases after monitoring, such as log management and patching tools.

Step 2: Perform Inventory

Next, understand what's already in place. This may be one of the more difficult steps, yet another of critical importance.

Interview your IT operations team. Learn as much as you can about current tools, policies, processes, and procedures. What's in place today? What's working, and what isn't? Another important question: what's not doing its intended job? For example, you may find tools intended to monitor your entire infrastructure monitoring only a small portion. Which leads to the next question: what's missing? This last question enhances adoption of your new solution if it fills current gaps or pain points.

Once understand what's in place, visit the finance team regarding which tools are under maintenance and which are not. This conversation has the potential to provide interesting—possibly unexpected—findings. For example, you may find that your organization is paying maintenance fees for unused tools.

Step 3: Conduct Needs Analysis

You've already interviewed the IT operations team about what's in place; now comes the time to ask them what they need to do their jobs more effectively. Remember, the IT operations team must adopt and use the selected tools for the solution to be effective. In fact, this is the team that will do the care and feeding of the tools, so their buy-in is critical.

Imagine if you don't get their buy-in: users resist the tool because they weren't included in the decision-making process; monitoring solutions aren't used or maintained; management data and reports aren't accurate. Best to avoid this scenario.

Other groups to interview are the IT security team and IT leadership.

- » The IT security team may be your strongest ally. The more effectively you can monitor and manage the enterprise, the stronger your organization's security posture.
- » The IT leadership team has unique needs, different than the IT operations team. Leadership often requires dashboard-style views and higher-level reporting. Make sure to understand their needs and choose a solution that will help them do their jobs more effectively.]

Step 4: Conduct a Market Survey; Look for Differentiators

Once you understand your organization's needs—including those of the IT operations team, the security team, and the leadership team—now comes the time to see what products and services will best meet those needs.

You will, of course, have technical requirements that many offerings will provide. How should you differentiate?

Consider tools that go beyond your technical requirements.

- » Look for tools that are powerful; easy to try, use and configure; and affordable. This is an uncommon combination provided by very few vendors.
- » Consider a solution that offers modular products to allow different stakeholders to get the specific tools they need and supports a phased approach to consolidation.
- » Be sure to find scalable tools. Specifically, as you continue down the IT consolidation path, you will need tools with the ability to scale as you consolidate.
- » To help further gain the support of the security and leadership teams, look for tools that provide customizable role-based access controls. This will help enhance security and speak to your commitment to a greater security posture.

It's also important to consider the vendor when you make your product choice. Be sure to choose a stable and growing vendor that regularly enhances its products to meet your evolving needs. Also, strongly consider a vendor with a large government and education installed base, and one that makes investments in application security and Common Criteria certification.

Step 5: Keep Moving Forward

Once all your decisions are made, it's time to move forward.

Start with a solid migration plan. Map out specifically how and when your migration will take place. Define the foundational elements first—what will set the stage for the rest of the migration. Once the foundation is determined, plan to move forward in phases. Migrating in phases reduces risk and will allow assessments and baselining before moving to subsequent phases.

And, finally, be sure to have solid change management practices in place. The more effectively changes are communicated and executed, the smoother the transition, and the greater likelihood of success.

SOLARWINDS, A PLATFORM FOR ALL YOUR IT CONSOLIDATION NEEDS

SolarWinds provides a wide range of network, systems, database, security, and help desk tools that are powerful, affordable, and easy to use. Numerous organizations have found the depth and breadth of our offering to be an exceptional platform to achieve their ITOM tools consolidation objectives.

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Fault, Availability, Performance, and Deep Packet Inspection
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Real-Time Network Utilization and Bandwidth Monitoring
- » **Network Configuration Manager**
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- » **IP Address Manager**
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- » **User Device Tracker**
Automated Device Tracking and Switch Port Management
- » **VoIP & Network Quality Manager**
VoIP QoS Management and WAN Performance Monitoring
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Correlate Log and Performance Data for Troubleshooting

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Over 60 Must-Have Tools for Network Troubleshooting

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Performance Monitoring and Capacity Planning – from VM to Storage

» Server Configuration Monitor

Monitor systems changes and easily compare configs over time

» Storage Resource Monitor

Multi-Vendor Storage Capacity and Performance Monitoring

» Web Performance Monitor

Website and Web Application Monitoring]

DATABASE SOFTWARE

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Find & Resolve Database Performance Issues

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FTP Server Software for Secure File Transfer and File Sharing

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SolarWinds provides IT management and monitoring solutions to numerous common public sector IT challenges including continuous monitoring, cybersecurity, network operations, compliance, IT consolidation, data center operations, cloud computing, mobile workforce and devices, DevOps, and scaling to the enterprise. SolarWinds software is available through numerous channel partners and systems integrators worldwide as well as the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA®) Schedule, United Nations Global Marketplace (UNGM), Crown Commercial Service (CCS), and United Nations Atlas.

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