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Grants management in government – are legacy systems limiting transparency and oversight?

With federal government pushing hard to see the results of grants spending, the need for effective grants management systems is acute.

Annually, the federal government utilizes grants to invest $billions in mission-critical programs each year – such as the response to the COVID pandemic. But, with reliance on legacy applications and systems, it's hard to gain oversight as to the success of these programs, potentially leaving unresolved problems and wasting taxpayers' money.

In this era of accountability, agencies are required to maximize value from grants without increasing cost and complexity. High overheads can mean the difference in receiving or not receiving an award. Indeed, reforming grant administration to focus on project performance instead of recipient compliance, has long been a priority within the federal government. However, this is only possible through access to valid, consistent and credible data aligned with grant program objectives.

The problem is there are currently a lot of different systems out there - so organizations looking to find grants face a massive challenge from the outset in just interfacing with them all. Sadly, the challenge doesn't end there, because once they have found a grant and made their application, they then have to work out how to track its progress. Was my application received? What's my application status? Is it being awarded? Utilizing current systems, it's often impossible to know.

Enabling tracking and transparency

In response to changing accountability requirements there needs to be a move towards standardizing and normalizing processes, as well as enabling a two-way flow of information. Systems must be in place for applicants to not only apply for grants but also to provide information back to the awarding organization on how the grant was utilized and the societal benefits it provided. The federal government needs oversight to see the return on the money spent.

The number of grant applications is growing exponentially, creating stress on legacy systems and applications. Added to that, the sheer volume of grants now being issued involves a huge number of different systems, and that alone makes replacing manual processes and inefficient systems with grants management technology for process automation and a two-way flow of information, a number one priority.

For a moment let's talk about it in terms of education. When applying for government funding, university and Department of Education systems aren't connected and don't talk - on top of that you have students applying for university funding via yet other unconnected systems. The question is how do you join up all of these conversations across individual legacy systems, and deliver the oversight the Department of Education needs to see the impact of its spending?

Within the grants system, it's a simple fact that transparency is needed. Using the education example again – maybe it's a university applying for money, perhaps it's a student applying for a place in higher education, or maybe a school board looking for a grant to implement new benefits for their students in their school district. Whoever is applying and whatever they're applying for, there needs to be transparency and oversight into how the budget is being spent, that it's being effectively used and is achieving the desired outcome. So, in future if and when new funding requests are made, it's clear any previous grants were well used and delivered a positive citizen result. But, how can this be achieved?

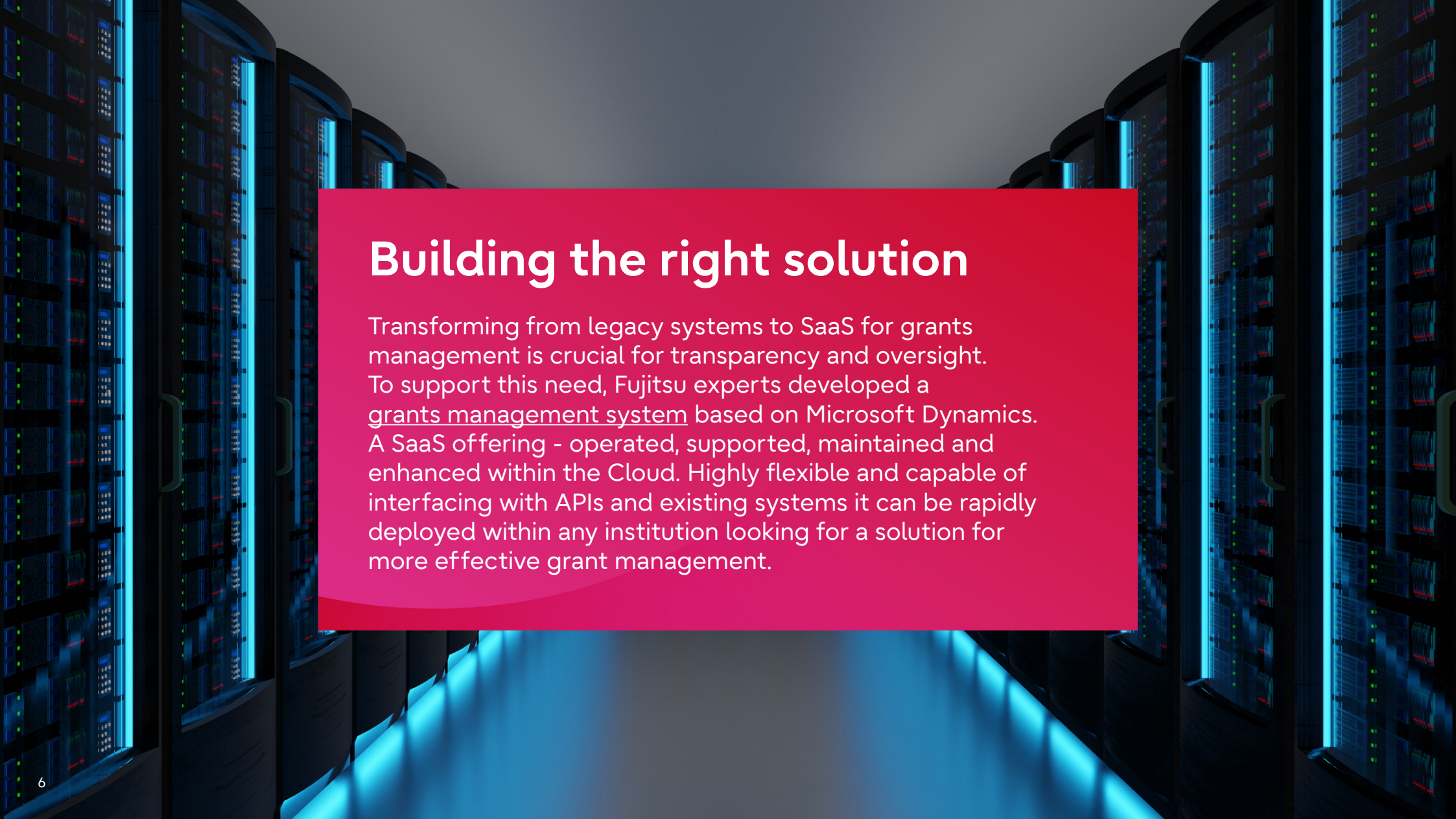
The value of SaaS grants management

Looking back, it can be said that there has previously been a lack of oversight within government spending, which has led to unnecessary wastage. With disparate legacy systems and in some cases even more outdated paper systems, it hasn't always been easy to see where money has been spent and that it's delivered the desired citizen outcome. As well as delivering two-way communication, transparency and improved oversight, implementing a full end-to-end lifecycle SaaS grants management system can also trim waste by as much as 30%.

So, what does this mean for citizens?

Simply put, it means successful funding applications making a more significant impact. Using the education example again, if grants funding is made available for devices for students in K through 12, cutting wastage means more funding being available for getting devices into students' hands, reducing the technology gap, decreasing the teacher to student ratio and allowing students to achieve their full potential.

Utilizing SaaS and moving away from legacy applications to a grants management solution also addresses the issue of data centralization and costly technical debt. Where data is built on open standards, it's built as Software as a Service leveraging APIs which means eliminating those worries and doing away with reliance on proprietary systems.



Building the right solution

Transforming from legacy systems to SaaS for grants management is crucial for transparency and oversight. To support this need, Fujitsu experts developed a grants management system based on Microsoft Dynamics. A SaaS offering - operated, supported, maintained and enhanced within the Cloud. Highly flexible and capable of interfacing with APIs and existing systems it can be rapidly deployed within any institution looking for a solution for more effective grant management.

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Contact us at Fujitsu. Speak to us to find out more about our grants management solution and how it is enabling increased transparency, two-way tracking and reduced wastage.

For more information check the Public Sector webpage.

Author:

Matthew Hon
CTO Public Sector Fujitsu North America

Matthew is responsible for helping government agencies leverage technology solutions to address business and society problems.