

Strategic Technology Planning and Investment

ALIGNING PRIORITIES. BALANCING CHOICE, COST & OUTCOMES.

Technology investments can be complicated and more often than not, the challenges begin almost from the moment a school system begins to consider next steps in the overarching technology plan. With tight budgets and multiple stakeholders involved, each with valid concerns, a framework for evaluating technology initiatives and tools for arriving at well-supported decisions are more important than ever before. The CoSN SmartIT initiative gives school system leaders tools and resources to evaluate, rethink and strengthen technology decision-making, aligning investments with your strategic goals, financial and human resources, and improvements in student learning.

THREE ESSENTIAL FOCAL POINTS for SmartIT decisions

When technology initiatives are viewed as investments rather than simply costs, we have the opportunity to apply decision-making analytics that are meaningful in an education context. With this framework, we can think of investment planning as a triangle, with three equally important, interdependent perspectives.

1 • Total cost of ownership

Educational technology comes with direct and indirect costs. Using Total Cost of Ownership (TCO) analysis addresses the initial investment and the operational and support costs over the life of the investment for your entire technology environment. A TCO perspective helps all decision-makers holistically understand the costs of implementing and maintaining devices and related infrastructure. A sound TCO assessment will give you and your team the data you need to make informed decisions about technology initiatives and investments going forward.

CoSN offers a comprehensive set of TCO tools available at cosn.org/tco to assist in calculating the TCO of your school system's entire IT environment, including the costs of acquiring and maintaining the school system's entire IT infrastructure and operations. The tools cover all infrastructure, user hardware and software, staff support costs, and user-related costs. This kind of comprehensive assessment will help you articulate in quantifiable terms the overall effects of proposed budget cuts, investments in new initiatives, delays in previously established plans, and other strategic decisions.

2 • Total cost of ownership

Making technology central to the teaching and learning mission supports the drive to increase student achievement even as budgets shrink. While short-term cuts in IT funding may seem prudent when budgets are on the chopping block, too often this leads to increased expenses for the school system in terms of computer down-time and end user time dealing with technology issues. Reframe budget challenges as an opportunity to rethink and strengthen technology investments, operations, programs, staffing plans, and results.

3 • Value of investment

The decision to approve or amend a specific technology project also deserves strategic thought. For investments focused on educationally critical, yet qualitative benefits, Value of Investment (VOI) is a helpful perspective when working to gain school board approval, articulating costs and benefits, comparing cost/benefit among competing projects, and determining if a project should be continued.

CoSN offers two helpful resources, the VOI Project Benefits Workbook and the VOI Project Cost Estimator Workbook to help school system leaders measure the quantitative and qualitative costs and benefits of proposed technology projects. The tools help you connect projected benefits to your school system's mission, goals, and mandates. This toolset can be found at cosn.org/voi.