USING NEXT GENERATION TECHNOLOGY SERVICES TO SOLVE IT BUDGET CHALLENGES

Many organizations face budget constraints, especially educational entities. In every case, however, prudent investment in advanced technology services can lessen the burden and help these organizations achieve their strategic goals.

The following chart summarizes major issues that affect educational institutions and how they are impacted:

	Educational Institutions	
Issue	K-12	Higher Education
Budget Cuts:	✔	✔
Technology Project Planning and Implementation Expertise:	✔	✔

All organizations face financial constraints, especially those in the education sector. Paying for employees' rising healthcare costs and pensions limit funding available for other projects.

In addition, state appropriations for higher education in FY2015 will likely not increase from the previous fiscal year. And the federal government's sequestration program forces cut backs on all spending, including IT procurements. This squeeze has compelled the federal government to do a more thorough job in technology procurement, resulting in a shift from CAPEX to more predictable OPEX.

However, financial pressures present opportunities to invest in technology for significant gains.

Every IT department must develop funding models that optimize the use of technology to sustain core services, support innovation, facilitate productivity, save money, and more.

The IT leader's responsibility is to demonstrate the value proposition derived from advanced technology services and how they can help the organization overcome challenges and achieve strategic goals.

IT leaders must use strategic project management to maximize technology investments. For successful project implementations, they must anticipate future needs, plan for unexpected costs, and manage change, despite dealing with differing needs, priorities and abilities.

Issue	Educational Institutions: K-12	Educational Institutions: Higher Education
Modernization of Aging IT Infrastructure:	✔	✔
IT Staffing:	✔	✔
Secure Data Storage & Disaster Recovery:	✔	✔

Modernization of Aging IT Infrastructure:

IT modernization is a particular challenge for educational institutions that may be carrying legacy systems and applications, and also face the wide-scale retirement of employees who maintain them. However, modernizing IT is necessary to:

- Become more flexible and efficient so IT can respond quickly to changing conditions and new opportunities
- Provide enhanced service levels to the public at a lower cost
- Transform disparate IT systems into a modern, flexible architecture that maximizes the use of limited resources
- Create new levels of transparency into local government
- Find the proper balance among agility, transparency and security
- Develop sound policies for new technology initiatives such as mobile, social, Bring Your Own Device (BYOD), digital security, Big Data analytics, cloud and more
- Update antiquated networks so they can handle bandwidth-intensive applications like online video streaming

IT Staffing:

Many education IT departments, especially the smaller ones, spend an inordinate amount of time providing user support and putting out metaphorical fires. They have limited time and staffing resources to plan future technology projects or keep up with emerging technologies.

Education IT departments must focus on becoming a proactive, strategic function within the organization. To accomplish this goal, IT needs to recruit, hire and retain a qualified staff. Regular updating of knowledge and skills related to new technologies is also a requirement.

Secure Data Storage & Disaster Recovery:

Protecting sensitive education data is a huge initiative since these organizations are often handling personal or sensitive information. However, many organizations do not truly understand their current vulnerabilities and potential threats, and have not undertaken a detailed risk assessment.

For example, some schools rely on a make-shift server room that is precariously located in an office closet or back room to store their data. However, in-house data centers are commonly associated with deficiencies in planning for power and cooling, and lack of proper staff to monitor and maintain the equipment. In addition, some organizations mistakenly view their data storage as a free solution, but the cost to maintain equipment keeps rising and lack of reliability and physical security can be costly.

Education entities must take proactive steps to identify risks in their data equipment and storage solution that could affect their operations, internal processes, financial performance, compliance and public confidence.

Issue	Educational Institutions	
	K-12	Higher Education
Energy Costs:	✔	✔

Energy demand and costs continue to rise for consumers, businesses and education entities, which is another reason why IT budgets are tight. A March 2015 report by ISO New England, which operates the New England power grid, showed the region's residents doubled their spending on energy during the 2014 winter, with total energy spending at $6.8 billion, up from $3.6 billion during the winter of 2013.

Energy costs become especially important when an organization is trying to maintain proper temperatures in an on-premise data center. Education entities that choose to outsource their data center to a trusted third party are less likely to be impacted by rising energy costs because their data center license includes the cost of electricity. Only under certain limited circumstances do third party data center providers consider passing those extra costs along to their customers.

Power Outages:	✔	✔

Facing a future where extreme weather events are more common, cities on the East Coast are building a resiliency to power outages. At-risk cities, especially those on the East Coast that haven't historically had to prepare for hurricane-induced problems, are trying to improve their infrastructure and emergency plans to prevent power outages that can have devastating effects on residents, businesses and education entities alike.

To maintain uninterrupted operations in the event of a power outage, education entities should consider whether their data center is configured with redundant Uninterrupted Power Supply (UPS), battery banks and generators. The generator can replace utility power for extended time periods. The data center should also house generator fuel on-site and have refueling contracts in place for extended outages. In addition, adequate physical security systems should be in place to minimize the risks to sensitive information and maintain service levels during a power outage. These concerns are driving education entities to consider licensing data center rack space from third parties that already have this covered.

Creating the Next-Gen Classroom:	✔	✔

To enroll, teach, support, counsel and graduate more students, educational institutions must turn to emerging technologies to leverage new initiatives like adaptive learning, blended learning, digital textbooks, connected educators, gamification, mobile and online learning, online assessments, open educational resources, high-speed video streaming, BYOD and more.

Capitalizing on technology for education has the potential to lower costs while serving an increasing number of students. However, several barriers exist, including limited funding. In response to decreasing state appropriations, many public institutions have to raise tuition just to keep services at the same levels. More often, educational institutions must creatively use technology and/or seek outside funding sources to maintain the required levels of technological sophistication. If they don't, they risk higher faculty turnover and declining enrollment as teachers, parents and students seek schools that use the latest classroom technology, including virtual classroom capabilities.

Educational Institutions

Issue

K-12 | Higher Education

Addressing Common Core Standards:

States and districts are preparing for the Common Core State Standards and related assessments. As a result, a need for aligned content and much more demand for formative data and data analysis exists.

Districts are beginning to switch from print to digital state assessments. In addition, student preparation requires a digital curriculum. Educational institutions must have the technology resources in place to properly support the Common Core initiatives.

For more information on how educational institutions are addressing these challenges, download FairPoint Communications' new white paper titled, "Using Next Generation Technology Services to Solve IT Budget Challenges," at www.fairpoint.com/solving-IT-budget-challenges. The white paper discusses how education institutions can leverage technology to create greater value for their organizations and the people they serve.

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