

# NASA's IT Portfolio Management Takes Off With Expert Choice

## case study: NASA

Challenge	Action	Results
Develop a collaborative process to prioritize IT investments and bring about trust and buy-in across the agency.	Implemented EC11.5 to structure and synthesize critical information about priorities and preferences in the organization.	Aligned priorities to resources and delivery solutions that helped the organization achieve objectives across all scenarios.

*“The process of doing this was even better than the result of doing it. It was such a great process and the conversations and the context and all of that kind of stuff that was worth the price of admission.”*

LINDA CURETON, CIO  
NASA / GODDARD SPACE FLIGHT  
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### Challenge:

NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center IT organization had numerous challenges to overcome in their yearly budgeting process:

- Demonstrate sound analysis and prioritization of IT projects before taxpayers' dollars are committed.
- Establish credibility within the Agency and clarify to staff how funding was allocated and what went into decisions.
- Improve morale within this new IT organization and overcome barriers of acceptance.

The new CIO understood it was important to establish a structured approach where none existed. This process needed to advance the Agency's research and development initiatives and technological leadership while meeting the requirements of the government's two budgeting offices: the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and Government Accounting Office (GAO).

### Action:

During the budget prioritization process, NASA's new CIO introduced Expert Choice software as a tool for collaborative decision making. The team went through several key steps in establishing a collaborative decision-making process:

- Assembled a team that represented all the Directorates served by IT. This became the brain trust for specifying criteria, requirements and priorities.
- Drew from requirements put forth by the OMB which provided the evaluation criteria. The criteria encompassed the evaluation of investments based on strategic direction and ROI.
- Incorporated IT's alignment with the enterprise architecture and performance factors.
- Weighed and plugged criteria into the software ahead of time.

The NASA Team went forward with the prioritization process using two key Expert Choice tools: EC11.5 for group collaboration and Comparion for online use. In this case, the team started the process as a group

and finished the process individually online – a testament to the functionality built into the process which supports collaboration among a physically dispersed team.

By working their way through the process, the NASA team was able to achieve their original goal of a prioritized portfolio of IT initiatives and investments. Even more importantly, the process enabled the team to have a healthy dialogue about priorities in a structured, yet fluid way. Everyone was able to express their opinions and provide facts about specific elements in the decision tree, and literally weigh in as individuals in order to generate a group decision with which all could agree.

*“We’re not looking for a piece of technology that miraculously gives us money where we don’t have it or leads to unnecessary decisions. Expert Choice helps us synthesize information together as a group. It uses our knowledge to derive the benefit of the tool. We need to understand what we are making decisions about. And we have to be knowledgeable, aware and engaged and willing to apply the tool in order to do that. It is us – not the tool – that is going to give us what we want.”*

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## Results:

The Expert Choice software and process delivered for NASA in key ways:

- Assisted the team in identifying priorities across its portfolio of investments.
- Ranked each priority by the maximum benefit provided. This kind of optimization is critical, especially in a government environment.
- Provided the capability to respond to budget changes or new funding within minutes rather than weeks.

For NASA, the entire process was completed in about a week. Dedication by the team and Expert Choice paved the way for fundamental change in how the management team made decisions about critical business opportunities. Not only were they able to meet the most immediate deadline for OMB and GAO, the Goddard team created a process for ongoing evaluation of its investments going forth. At the same time, the team was able to achieve buy-in across Goddard Center – another first for NASA and its IT leaders.

As importantly, NASA moved one step closer to full compliance with the GAO’s Capital Planning & Investment Control Process which governs planning and maturity in making decisions about investment dollars and IT.

NASA’s next steps are to expand the Expert Choice decision process to additional decision types: 1) manage the “Job Jar”, 2) synthesize project requirements, and 3) select vendors who will perform some of the work that the organization needs done.

*Expert Choice serves more than 100 of the Fortune 500 and 30 Federal Government agencies. Our software is also taught in over 100 universities and used in 60 countries worldwide. To join the leader in collaborative decision-making software, please contact us at [info@expertchoice.com](mailto:info@expertchoice.com).*

## Lessons Learned and Next Step:

### 1. Criteria need to be clear.

The NASA team recognized how critical it was to invest time in reviewing the criteria and ensuring everyone had a common understanding of what each element meant to them as an organization. By doing so, they were able to be explicit in their requirements and applicable and appropriate in their outcomes.

### 2. Trusting the process.

The NASA team had to learn to trust the process because when you are in the thick of it, it can be easy to revert to past habits and rely on one's instincts rather than compiling and synthesizing the data. The crux of Expert Choice, however, is the process itself and the inevitable power you gain from relying on the process to do the heavy lifting for you. As familiarity with the process increases, you gain efficiencies along the way and ultimately, improve your results.

### 3. "A fool with a tool is still a fool."

Even though Expert Choice provides decision-making tools, it's not the software that makes the decision. It's the people involved in the process and using the keypads that bring the right expertise, experience and perspective to the table.