



# PLANNING FOR A SCALABLE FUTURE

While it's impossible to plan for a specific future when evaluating a fleet or asset management solution, agencies should consider a system that can be scaled up as technology or as the mission of the organization evolves.

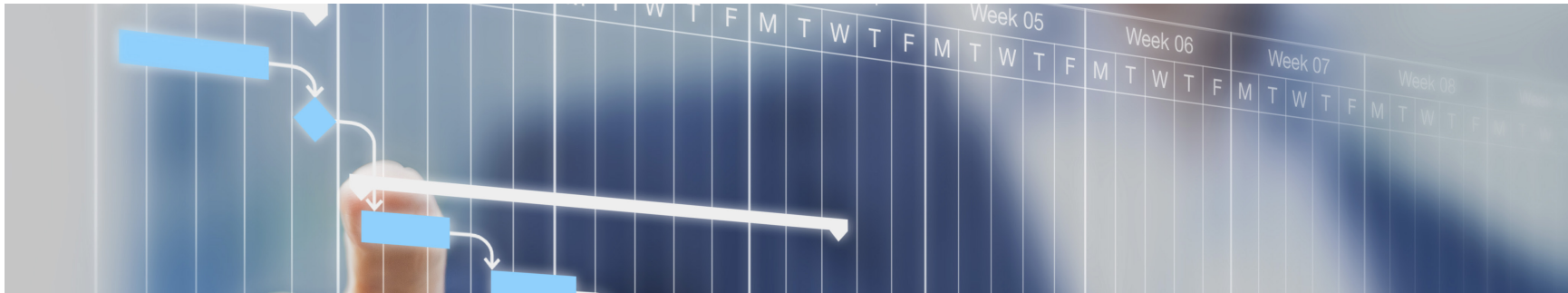




It's commonplace for agencies to focus on the near term. This is particularly the case when evaluating a fleet or asset management system, which is often implemented to meet a specific set of challenges that are occurring in that moment.

While it is important to solve a short-term need, agencies with fleets also need to look beyond the immediate and think ahead five or more years. A forward-looking approach is necessary for an agency to be prepared to meet new challenges brought on by evolving technology, or if the mission of the agency changes or expands. Being prepared to grow before it becomes critical will allow an agency to quickly scale to meet any new challenge and continue seamlessly serving its customers effectively and efficiently.

Of all the variables that fleet personnel and agency stakeholders need to consider, the most important is if the solution is future proof.



## PLANNING FOR THE UNKNOWN FUTURE

While planning for the future is vital for a company's longevity, it is impossible to plan for specifics, since there's no way you can be certain as to the particular challenges or needs that may face your agency.

When considering a fleet and asset management solution company partner, it's crucial that the provider give evidence that it is able to deliver a scalable, flexible, future-proofed solution. It can't be assumed that every provider has a scalable solution. In the past, it was common for fleet and asset management technology companies to develop solutions that were comprehensive, but — because of hard-coding practices — couldn't grow, change, or keep up with the needs of the customer.

Keep in mind it's not enough to have a provider that is able to deliver a solution that can scale up to meet the changes in the agency. To take full advantage of a scalable solution your agency has to have already developed — or develop in parallel — a culture open to change. If your agency has a history of strict adherence to legacy technologies or legacy behaviors, it can be nearly impossible to meet new growth demands and needs regardless of how adaptive the fleet or asset management solution.

The bottom line is that planning for scalability should be a never-ending process. It is the only way that your agency can effectively be prepared for any eventuality.



## ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

It almost goes without saying, but bears repeating: No two agencies are alike, and every agency has very specific needs it must solve. This is where asking the right questions when evaluating a fleet and asset management solution will identify not only the system that can address your immediate needs, but can expand with your organization as it changes and grows.

It is during the evaluation phase that you and your stakeholders need to ask very pointed and specific questions to the provider about the characteristics of its fleet or asset management solution, including:

- How has the system been able to adapt and grow in the past?
- Is it designed to grow?
- How is it designed to meet changing user interfaces or new ways of interacting with the device?
- What kind of customer service can we expect?
- Are there options for integration?
- What kind of reports can be generated? Can they be customized?
- Can we start small and scale up to the existing platform?

There may be numerous highly technical explanations to the questions above. It isn't necessary to have a full grasp of the technical underpinnings of the solution, but the answers to all of these questions should be understandable and logical to an average person. Clear, to-the-point, non-technical answers can also be an indication of the level of customer service you can expect from the provider.

Fundamental to all of the questions is the provider's ability to guarantee the solution is future proof. To ensure that a solution can expand with your needs, you and your stakeholders should ask for concrete, historical examples of the solution evolving as an agency grows. As part of this investigation, you should ask to speak to client agencies with a similar fleet or operational profile to learn about their experiences with the solution, from meeting a pressing need to how it has evolved over time.

If time permits, you should implement a pilot of the solution or at least a comprehensive demo on a small number of the agency's vehicles and/or assets and discuss with the provider ways in which you can add variables or vehicles/assets that mimic large-scale growth to test the scalability.

On the flip side, if the solution offers options that are more extensive than your present needs, find out if you can start small and then add on reports and other functionality as your needs increase or your operation grows. For example, Collective Data's collectiveFleet® can be scaled according to the needs of the entire agency or individual stakeholders. Because of this ability to start small, collectiveFleet® can be quickly scaled up by enabling more functionality. This is perhaps a best case scenario of scalability: starting off small with a mature solution.

One of the advantages of implementing a mature solution, such as collectiveFleet®, is that the provider is typically committed to ongoing growth and development of the solution. Because of this, the solution won't become a static legacy system that becomes a liability to growth and efficiency.

You should be wary of a solution that doesn't allow you to start small — offering only an all-or-nothing menu of features. This may point to other issues related to scalability, specifically an inability to be flexible and meet specific agency needs or challenges. And more crucially, it could be a reflection of the provider's customer service — delivering only a cookie-cutter customer service experience and not one based on the individualized needs of your agency.

There are several other deep dives you should do while evaluating a fleet or asset management solution to ensure it delivers what you need now and in the future, including:

## DISPLAYS AND INTERFACE

It's not enough that a solution be future proof, it must also have the ability to interface and operate on new technologies. As the rise and ubiquity of portable and wearable devices has shown, solutions need to be flexible and adaptable to evolving hardware.

For example, solutions should be responsive to different display types, such as a smartphone. Does the information displayed on the screen scale in response to the device or does the user have to "pinch" the display screen to magnify text and images so they're readable? With new interface methods, such as voice, does the system understand different accents, intonations, and pronunciations?

There are plenty of examples of the evolution of portable and wearable devices. Because of this, request and receive concrete examples of how the solution was able to scale up to meet the challenges and demands put on it by new device types.

## CUSTOMER SERVICE

Often, a fleet or asset management solution is only as good as the customer service supporting it. Again, agencies should not take a provider at its word that it has "good" customer service; it should be a demonstrable hallmark of the solution. The reason is simple. The need for service doesn't end with implementation, and is an important part of scalability.

Customer service is crucial in helping to support and solve specific problems during periods of change and growth for an agency, and should be individualized to your agency's solution and the challenges you are experiencing. Customer service professionals can help identify opportunities for scalability within the organization and can help implement it.

## INTEGRATION

The days of having numerous platforms providing dispersed data streams are nearly over, because they run counter to the need for peak efficiency. To meet the growing demand for Big Data from every corner of the organization, a scalable solution needs to have the ability to integrate other solutions and data streams that your agency is using to manage its fleet and other assets. For example, Collective Data gives its clients the ability to integrate a number of fleet functions, including fuel cards and telematics.

Integration is one of the cascading effects of scalability. For example, fleet management and accounting functions can be integrated, eliminating dual entry of information — which can lead to errors and other inefficiencies — and giving the accounting team better insight into the actual cost of running the fleet.

This internal and external data integration may be an unintended benefit for many agencies. Thus, reporting across the board will become more comprehensive, transparent, and meaningful. Internal and external integration will allow your agency to provide the full picture of your fleet and its related functions to stakeholders. Integration also helps improve and inform short- and long-term decision making.



## SCALABILITY AND EFFICIENCY

Ultimately, scalability in and of itself is not solely about having a solution that grows with the agency. The real benefit of scalability comes from the levels of efficiency it can deliver. These benefits include:

- Organizations doing more in less time
- Work being more accurate and more precisely measured and reported

Whether it's a public agency or a large company, these benefits go directly to the bottom line of the organization. Scalability opens the gateway to improved efficiency.

However, these benefits can only be realized if your agency is flexible and the fleet or asset management solution is able to adapt to the specific needs of the organization. It is crucial to find a fleet and asset management solution that not only is future proof and will evolve with the growing needs of your organization, but a provider that will act as a partner through these ever-evolving times.

## ABOUT COLLECTIVE DATA

Collective Data provides high-end asset management software that has supported private companies and governmental agencies for over 20 years. Our signature products, collectiveFleet® and collective Quartermaster®, are used by hundreds of medium and large organizations that value intuitive and productive software. What sets Collective Data apart from more traditional products is that we have built our software with flexibility in mind and pride ourselves on our adaptability to meet client needs. [Collectivedata.com](http://Collectivedata.com).