# A Practical Framework for Evaluating Case Management Systems

## Sections




*This product was developed by the VRTAC-QM, a project funded under #H264J200002 of the U.S. Department of Education. The information contained in this product does not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the Department and no official endorsement should be inferred.*

## Overview

The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Case Management System (CMS) is a State Vocational Rehabilitation Agency's (SVRA) primary means for documenting participant progress, tracking services, monitoring compliance, and reporting on performance. This technical assistance resource is intended to support SVRAs in navigating the intricacies of implementing a CMS in the VR program. Whether implementing a new system or modifying one, these tips will provide valuable guidance on key areas such as identifying a project team, developing business requirements, assessing the need for system change, and crafting an effective request for proposal (RFP). Understanding the rules and requirements of a specific SVRA is crucial before drafting an RFP.

**It is also important to plan timelines strategically, launching the new system at the start of a new performance year when possible to ensure data reporting aligns consistently. When drafting the RFP, focus on exploring new functionalities and expansion opportunities rather than simply restating the features of the current system.**

These guidelines provide a framework for a seamless and compliant implementation of the CMS.

### Tip #1: Evaluate the current system vs. a new system.

The first step in optimizing the CMS is to evaluate the current system vs. a new system. This helps to assess current and future needs as well as enhance knowledge of reporting requirements vs. system functionality, thereby strengthening overall understanding.

When evaluating the current system, consider the following steps to help determine if the current CMS can meet the SVRA's needs or if there is a need to explore new system options:

1. **Conduct a planning and analysis session.** Organize a session with key stakeholders. Refer to Tip #2: Identify the internal (SVRA) Project Team. For example, this should include subject-matter expert field staff and members of the data team who work with the system to identify specific needs not being met by the CMS. Is there other documentation or reporting that cannot currently be captured in the existing CMS that is now done in other systems? Does the current system interface with the State's financial management system? Is this an opportunity to explore, or are there State restrictions in doing this? This session will help uncover areas that require improvement, prioritize requirements, and serve as a basis for decision-making.
2. **Analyze the current system.** Evaluate the existing CMS to determine if any adaptations or configurations can be made to address the identified needs (e.g., dashboard or case management needs, reporting needs, less or more information on pages). Consider factors such as system limitations, user feedback, documentation that is duplicative or not currently happening, associated and ongoing costs, and areas for enhancement. Having a knowledgeable system administrator during this step is invaluable in identifying innovative options to meet business needs effectively. Additionally, consider requesting an adaptation review with the system provider to facilitate this process. An adaptation review involves

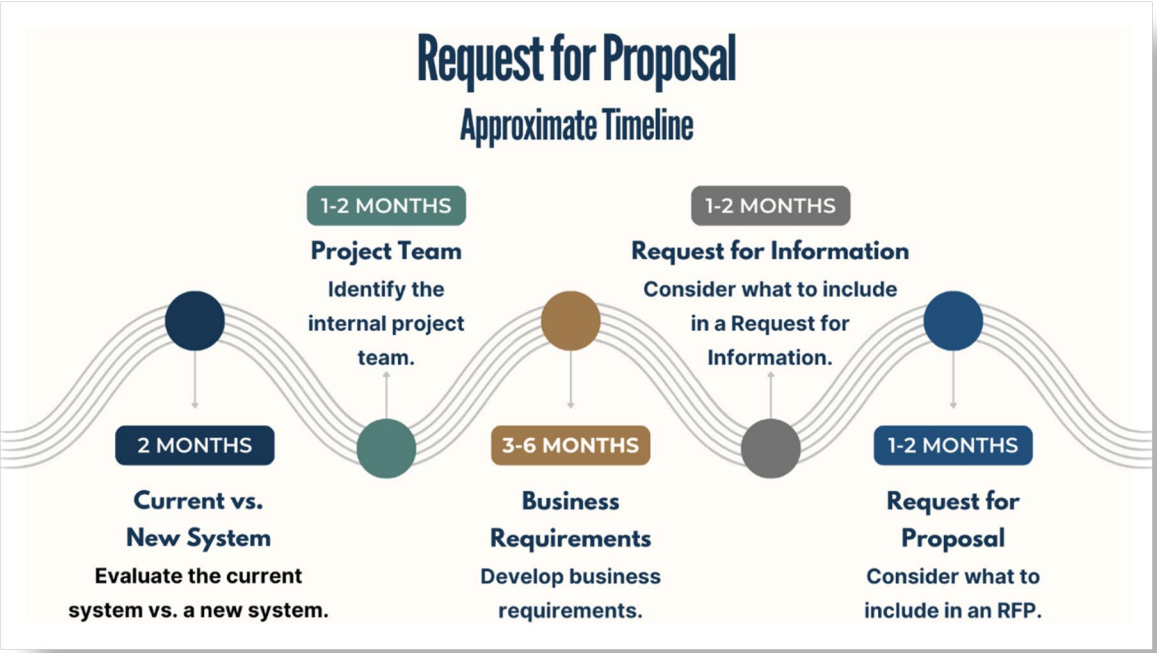
working closely with the system provider to assess and address any necessary modifications or adjustments needed to align the system with the SVRA's specific requirements and preferences. This review can help ensure the system is tailored to meet the SVRA's unique needs and optimize its functionality.

3. **Assess business processes.** It is essential to assess if the existing business processes can be fulfilled by the CMS in other ways. This assessment involves an examination of the workflows, procedures, and requirements to determine if alternative approaches can be employed to achieve the same business objectives. The goal is to identify opportunities for optimization and innovation, potentially leveraging the capabilities of the existing system to streamline processes, improve efficiency, and enhance overall performance.

   Additionally, it may be beneficial for the SVRA to assess the necessity of current business processes, especially those that are outdated, redundant, and/or no longer serve their intended purpose. This evaluation allows the SVRA to identify areas where process improvements or modifications can be made, ensuring the CMS aligns with current needs and priorities, and ensuring the CMS will enable the SVRA to accurately report all Federal reporting requirements. By considering the need for specific business processes, the SVRA can focus on streamlining and optimizing its operations, eliminating redundancies, identifying any internal controls that may need to be modified or created, and maximizing the benefits of the CMS implementation. Business processes will eventually be a major part of developing requirements (Tip #3 below); however, by doing this initial assessment, agencies can ensure that only requirements (and not outdated processes) are outlined in the business requirements.

4. **Assess system needs and evaluate customization potential.** Conduct a thorough analysis of the organization's evolving requirements and future goals. Determine if the current system can be streamlined or enhanced to accommodate these needs effectively. For system needs unable to be met by adaptation, assess the feasibility of customizing the current system to align with the SVRA's unique needs. Conduct an evaluation of potential system customization options, considering the addition or modification of specific modules or features, as well as a timeline with the existing system and timeline for the need. In doing this, it is important to determine the potential increase in costs, both initial costs and the costs over the system's lifespan. Customization may introduce additional complexities that could lead to higher ongoing maintenance and support expenses. Consider the long-term financial commitment and ensure that it aligns with the proposed budget and organizational resources.

   In addition, recognize the need for comprehensive testing and quality assurance when implementing system adaptations or configurations. Customization can introduce new functionalities or alter existing ones, requiring thorough testing to ensure the system's stability, security, and compliance. By considering both the short-term and long-term costs, as well as the additional testing requirements, an informed decision about the feasibility and sustainability of system customization can be made. This evaluation will help determine if customization is a viable solution and if it aligns with the organization's needs while remaining financially feasible and maintaining the system's integrity.




## Tip #2: Identify the internal (SVRA) Project Team.

If the evaluation reveals a new system is recommended, SVRAs should begin the process toward an RFP by identifying a project team to meet project needs and ensure responsibilities are clearly defined in the RFP and able to be met in an efficient, effective, and timely manner. The project team should be composed of staff with relevant experience and/or subject-matter expertise who can perform the project duties. Consider the following project team roles:

1. **Project Sponsors:** Senior management with a stake in the project outcome; work closely with the project manager.

   **Responsibilities:** Making key business decisions about the project, approving any budget and/or schedule adjustments, regularly communicating with the project manager, resolving conflicts.

   **Examples:** Director, Associate Director, Field Operations Director, IT Director, Program Director

2. **Procurement Staff:** Assist with identifying the procurement process.

   **Responsibilities:** Assist in overseeing the procurement process and inform the SVRA of any special considerations during the process (i.e., specific rules or regulations that would prohibit a vendor from being allowed to respond).

   Examples: State procurement team

3. **IT Professional(s):** SVRA IT professionals who oversee the current CMS or assist in coordinating interfaces. This should also include IT professionals in the designated State unit (DSU) who oversee system hosting and security requirements, or those in the DSA or State if IT is an enterprise model.

   **Examples:** CMS Manager, Database Manager, Chief of Information Technology, Systems or Network Administrators, etc.

4. **Project Manager:** Oversees the deliverables, recruits, and leads the project team, assigns tasks, and communicates with senior management.

   **Responsibilities:** Monitoring risks and timelines, controlling the scope, maintaining documentation.

   **Examples:** Hired Project Management Professional (PMP), an existing program or project director who could reallocate their position, etc.

   ***Note**: For a project of this size and scope, this person would need a substantial amount of time allocated for the project.*

5. **Business Analyst:** Defines the business needs and recommends solutions, ensures project objectives are solving business problems and enhancing performance; would need to become familiar with the SVRA's business processes, needs, and goals.

   **Responsibilities**: Assisting with verifying deliverables, validating that objectives are met.

   **Examples:** Hired Business Analyst or an internal Business Specialist.

6. **Subject-Matter Experts:** Utilized in all phases of the project; would include specific aspects and roles (e.g., counselors, managers, support staff, fiscal, Pre-Employment Transition Services [Pre-ETS], Business Enterprise Program [BEP]) that are part of specific phases (e.g., customizations, testing, training).

   **Examples:** Program Managers, staff from various field staff roles (VR Counselors, Pre-ETS Counselors, supervisors, managers, field operations), administration, Fiscal Chief or Controller, BEP Manager.

7. **Project Stakeholders:** External and internal project stakeholders. Internal project stakeholders generally include those directly involved within the organization, often including the project team. External project stakeholders could be external interfacing systems, teams, clients, and others impacted by the project.

   **Examples**: Providers, interface system teams, CMS Managers.

Some SVRAs use contracted services to support projects of this size and scope, particularly when internal capacity or specific expertise is limited. Often, these services include project manager and/or business analyst roles, which assist in identifying and organizing the internal project team. The SVRA will want to ensure the CMS contract provides for any and all necessary controls and authority the SVRA needs in order to implement the CMS.

***Note:*** *It is important to consider the capacity of the project team and stakeholders. Frequently, capacity, or lack thereof, could create delays in a project, which could result in additional costs (e.g., pushing go-live date).*

## Tip #3: Develop business requirements.

Business requirements define a project's core needs and serve as a foundation for measuring its success in meeting those needs. The process of gathering business requirements involves identifying the business processes and the corresponding system requirements. Some SVRAs begin with a business process analysis to map workflows before moving to gathering requirements. Business requirements should be high-level—focused on what the system needs to accomplish rather than how the current CMS functions—to allow flexibility in system design. A critical, yet often overlooked, business requirement is ensuring that all necessary data elements can be accurately reported. It is imperative to not only focus on front-end features, but also the underlying system functions, data flow, and internal controls that support data integrity. Business requirements are typically in an Excel or Word format, detailing the requirement, describing the use case (i.e., how users employ this requirement), as well as the priority. **Some SVRAs separate business requirements into two categories, business and technical**, to differentiate the front-end (user interface) needs vs. system security requirements.

*Examples of business and technical requirements, shown in Word formatting, below—*

| Business Requirement | Category | Use Case | Priority |
|---|---|---|---|
| The system must capture application date in MM/DD/YYYY format and be able to capture multiple application dates per case. | Application | Staff will need to enter the date of application each time a recipient applies for the VR program. Participants will never have two VR cases open at one time; however, participants may apply, close a VR case, and reapply multiple times. | Critical: Required for Federal reporting |

| Technical Requirement | Category | Use Case | Priority |
|---|---|---|---|
| The proposed solution shall support Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA). | Security | Users attempt to log in outside of a State network and are required to use MFA to verify their identity. | Critical: Protected Personal Identifiable information (PII) exists in the system. |

Requirements can be developed 1) internally with an identified project manager, business analyst, and subject-matter experts or 2) subcontracted through a third party.

Requirements identified and included within the RFP are often used throughout the project cycle. These are frequently used as a Requirement Traceability Matrix (RTM), which allows the project team to evaluate the system during testing to confirm it meets the SVRA's requirements and to validate the final product.

## Tip #4: Consider a request for information.

To initiate the procurement process, certain agencies opt for an initial request for information (RFI). An RFI is a formal document used to gather information and details about a specific product, service, or system. This allows the SVRA to receive responses from CMS providers and gain access to system demonstrations. It serves as an opportunity for the SVRA to become acquainted with features that may be absent in their current system, gather valuable insights, and obtain information that can be used to build a well-structured RFP. The RFI stage helps the SVRA to evaluate different system capabilities and leverage this knowledge to develop a comprehensive RFP. Overall, an RFI serves as a valuable tool to streamline the decision-making process, ensuring that the selected system aligns with the organization's requirements and objectives. It is important to check with the procurement team for any restrictions in potential vendors responding to RFIs or doing demonstrations that may preclude them for future bidding on the project.

In addition to an RFI, or as an alternative to it, agencies may choose to communicate with peer agencies to gather information regarding their CMS. This approach can provide insights into the advantages and disadvantages of various systems. By reaching out to other agencies, organizations can learn from firsthand experiences and gain a deeper understanding of the practical implications of different systems. This knowledge exchange facilitates informed decision-making by providing valuable perspectives from agencies that have already implemented such systems.

## Tip #5: Consider what to include in a request for proposal.

The request for proposal (RFP) is a business document that serves to publicize a project, provide a description of the project, and solicit potential vendors to submit their bids. When developing an RFP for a new CMS, it is important to accompany it with clear and specific business requirements (see Tip #2) that clearly reflect the SVRA's specific needs. This helps ensure that potential vendors have a comprehensive understanding of the project and can submit proposals that meet the SVRA's and State's requirements.

The following presents a high-level outline of key components to include in an RFP. Subsequently, an example RFP template is provided, featuring language that can be customized for specific use.

## I. Scope and Objectives

### A. Provide an overview and background.

1. **Overview of SVRA's goals, purpose, objectives, services, etc.**

   **Example**: Information about the SVRA goals and purpose of serving individuals with disabilities

2. **Definitions**

   **Example**: Key definitions of language (relative to VR) that will be used in the proposal (e.g., referral, applicant, eligible individual, participant, student with a disability, exit and post-exit)

3. **Scope of Work**

   **Example**: A configurable statewide system to capture individual case information that provides flexibility to meet States' needs (e.g., fiscal interface capabilities, comprehensive rehabilitation centers, ability for system to be used with vendors, client assistance program) and all Federal reporting requirements.

4. **Current system and supported systems/technologies**

   **Example**: Agency operates on X case management system; however, a system that has the ability to create dashboards for performance analysis is required.

5. **Programs**

   **Examples**: VR, Older Individuals who are Blind (OIB), BEP

6. **Current staff overview and stakeholders**

   **Examples**: Number of users, area offices, administrators

7. **Glossary of acronyms being used**

   **Examples**: VR, Pre-ETS, OIB, BEP

## II. Project Phases

### A. Planning and Analysis

1. **Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK) methodology**: Consider if the SVRA prefers using the PMBOK methodology (a nationally recognized project management approach) for a project of this size and scope.
2. **Request for alignment with State's Office of Technology standards**: Include a link to these standards or an attachment for reference.
3. **If and how often you would like an onsite presence.**

   **Example**: Onsite presence during the planning, testing, and go-live phases; onsite presence should be X times per month.

4. **Needs for the following**:
   a. Project work plan: This should identify tasks, timelines, milestones, deliverables, and resources.

b. Risk management: This should include a detailed plan for identifying, assessing, mitigating, and monitoring risks.

c. System gap analysis: This should include identifying gaps between existing system and interfaces and assessing areas for improvement and integration.

d. Requirement development for customizations: This should include vendor documenting detailed requirements for customizations to the system.

e. Data conversion analysis: This should include the vendor's approach for data conversion and analysis of data integrity.

f. Data security: This should include data encryption, access controls, user authentication, audit trails, and compliance with regulations.

g. Adaptive technology/accessibility: This should include compliance with accessibility standards.

h. Overview of project meeting and reporting, change control processes, deliverable management, project coordination, etc.: This should include an overview of meeting and reporting frequency, process for changes and deliverable acceptance, and coordinating collaboration activities with the vendor and SVRA.

**B. Design, Development, and Customization**

1. **System requirements and desired functionality, technical architecture design, and customizations**: Design examples to consider system needs for the VR process (e.g., returning participants, potentially eligible students with disabilities, and VR applicants and exiters), fiscal needs (e.g., individual authorizations, group authorizations, bulk authorizations, account codes, period of performance, and ability to interface with the State accounting system), flexibility needs with IPE development, IPE amendments, system enforcements or checks for RSA-911 elements, ease of use, autosave features (e.g., case noting supporting documentation/electronic attachments), consistent terminology, system training, State-specific needs.
2. **Business requirements**: This should include core requirements (see Tip #2), integration requirements with existing interfaces if applicable, and reporting requirements.
3. **Federal reporting requirements**: This should include current and historical requirements for RSA reporting as well as ensuring accurate and timely information for submission, including RSA-911, ETA-9169, RSA-17, etc.

   Furthermore, the system should be regularly updated, as appropriate, to ensure alignment with RSA Federal reporting requirements and revisions.
4. **State reporting needs**: This should include reports, dashboards, and other data analysis tools to assist in extracting information for case management, performance indicators, and other data analysis needs.

C. **Testing**

1. **Test management plan**: This should include testing objectives, scope, schedule, resources, deliverables, executive approach, and risk assessment.
2. **Compatibility with assistive technology**: This should include specific testing with assistive technology systems (e.g., screen readers).
3. **User acceptance testing**: This should include test scenarios, a testing environment, test data, roles, workflows, data flows, report requirements, and interface requirement testing.
4. **Customization/Interface testing**
    a. Be sure to consider additional testing needs for interfacing systems (e.g., Unemployment Information [UI], fiscal systems, other core programs interfacing).
    b. Consider the need for electronic signatures and testing of this functionality.
    c. If appropriate in the business process, consider needs and testing plans for non-VR staff access. This could include the Client Assistance Program (CAP), vendors, or clients having limited access to the system.

D. **Data Migration, Implementation, and Training**

1. **Data Migration**
    a. This should include the time frame required to complete migration. Consider Federal and State retention requirements.
    b. Consider validation of data that has migrated. This should include a success percentage of back-end converted as well as front-end data validation to affirm it is correctly mapped (e.g., disability priority should calculate correctly from system to system with converted data).
2. **Implementation**: This should include a timeline for system deployment, including deliverables and dependencies.
3. **Training**: This should include expectations for training materials and who is responsible for developing training.

    Training Considerations:

    a. End-user
    b. Train the trainer
    c. Super-users across the State
    d. Helpdesk
    e. System administrator
    f. System technical support
    g. Fiscal
    h. Accessibility and assistive technology within the system
    i. Consideration for ongoing training needs for system changes/updates

**E. Support, Maintenance, Modifications, Warranty, and Enhancements**

1. **Technical support and maintenance requirements**: This should include hours of operation and expected response and resolution time.
2. **Product releases and upgrades**: This should include frequency and process for installing releases and upgrades.
3. **Notification of system downtime requirements**: This should include notification in advance to avoid disruptions.
4. **Disaster recovery**: This should include a business continuity plan, vendor responsibilities, and procedures for disaster recovery.
5. **Optional**: A request for pool hours (i.e., additional hours budgeted into annual cost by the CMS vendor to allow for system changes needed. This could be added (e.g., 100 hours per year) to allow for necessary system changes and modifications.

## III. Project Management

**A. Resumés:** This should include a request for the project lead resumés from the vendor.

**B. Project Management Professional (PMP) certification:** For a project of this size and scope, it is recommended that the Project Manager hold this recognized certification (optional).

**C. Project work plan:** This should include the vendor's detailed project work plan.

**D. Timeline:** This should include the vendor's specific start and end dates for each phase of the project, milestones, and deliverables.

**E. Communication and reporting expectations:** This should include protocols for communication regarding processes, issues, risks, and approvals.

**F. Coordinating with other State contractors' needs:** This should include the need to coordinate with other State contractors or stakeholders.

## IV. Deliverables

**A. Overview by phase with timeline:** This should include clearly defined and measurable deliverables to be met.

**B. Expectations for approving deliverables:** This should include the process of approving deliverables.

## V. Payment Schedule

**A. Payment schedule:** This could be specific milestones (e.g., monthly, quarterly, annually) or noted to be defined later in the contracting process.

**B. Software costs and renewal costs:** This should include software costs and renewal costs for support and maintenance. Consider additional upfront costs to customize the system as well as ongoing costs to maintain customizations. As part of this process, consider the total cost of ownership (life of a system) from a cost perspective.

## VI. Contract Requirements

**A. Proof of concept:** Consider if SVRA wishes to mandate that the system is already developed (essentially purchasing an out of the box system), and if the SVRA desires a pre-contract demonstration of the system and its basic functionality.

**B. Insurance requirements:** Identify SVRA insurance requirements for a project of this size and scope.

**C. Contract obligations**

1. Consider adding contract language that defines failure to meet obligations (breach of contract) and what actions/consequences will occur (e.g., Vendor must resolve within X days or hire a subject-matter expert to resolve).
2. Consider needs and preference, as well as initial and ongoing costs for storage and archiving needs and requirements (e.g., cloud storage of data). Refer to Federal and State requirements for record retention.

## VII. Proposal Instructions, Timeline, and Evaluation Process

**A. Instructions for submitting proposals:** This should include submission instructions, type of file and submission, as well as any additional information needed.

**B. Timeline and key dates (including evaluation process and timeline, contract award timeline):** This should include dates for pre-proposal meeting (if applicable), deadline for questions, submission deadline, as well as other dates (e.g., evaluation process, clarification, and negotiation period, and finalizing contract).

**C. Proposal evaluation criteria and weighted score assigned to each evaluation criterion:** This should include an approach to weighing and evaluating proposal responses.

**D. Clarification and negotiation process (if applicable):** This should include a process for the next steps for shortlisted vendors.

***Additional tip:*** *Reach out and talk with other SVRAs to learn about additional unique features you may want to incorporate into the RFP.*