

Collin College Technology Services (CC-TS)
Software Currency – Information Security Procedure (ISP):

PURPOSE

This ISP ensures that Collin College (hereafter referred to as “agency”). maintains an up-to-date software portfolio to reduce the cost and risk inherent in managing unsupported software products. The term unsupported refers to software for which there are no longer commercial or vendor support options or software that relies on other unsupported applications or components.

SCOPE

This ISP applies to all software and related systems owned or maintained by Collin College.

STATEMENT

Collin College is responsible for maintaining vendor-supported software across the agency to ensure the safety and security of software, systems, and data. Depending on the development lifecycles, all software eventually becomes out of support or unsupported. Continuing to use unsupported software constitutes a serious security risk.

ISP

To ensure the delivery of reliable, low-risk, cost-effective services, the agency will reduce and, where possible, eliminate instances of unsupported software. The agency bears the full burden of risk associated with running unsupported software.

These risks include:

- increased cost to maintain a software asset, often called “technical debt.”
- lack of agility resulting from its inability to align with changes in business requirements
- limited capacity to integrate with up-to-date and cost-competitive technologies (e.g., cloud)
- scarcity of skilled labor to maintain unsupported technologies
- increased mistakes and resulting costs from supporting the complexity of many versions across components

Risk Assessment

In compliance with Title I, TAC §202, the agency will conduct a high-level risk assessment of their software currency and either request necessary upgrades or replacement costs in their budget request or determine the tolerable risk based on system data, infrastructure, vulnerability, and business requirements. The assessment has a minimum three-year horizon and is updated at least once each fiscal year. Updates will be completed in time to include upgrade or replacement costs in the agency’s budget request.

If the agency chooses not to upgrade software prior to the end of support, the CIO/IRM must formally accept the risk of not doing so. End of support is when the vendor no longer provides automatic fixes, updates, or technical assistance. Without vendor support, the software will no longer automatically receive security updates without additional costs.

Replacement Schedule

The agency will plan to migrate off software designated by the vendor as the upcoming end of support at least 12 months before that date. The agency must retire or replace any commercial off-the-shelf (COTS) software with a high or medium business impact before it reaches the end of support.

Vendors commonly announce software products' end-of-support dates years in advance. Unlike the standard included mainstream support provided when a product is released and current, only security and reliability patches are typically available during the extended and end of support periods. No feature enhancements, architectural changes, or warranties, such as application backward compatibility or new device drivers, are offered once a product has gone out of mainstream standard support.

Replacement will be completed before the software is out of support. Out-of-support systems pose a significant liability and threat to the state. Out of Support software:

- no longer receives original manufacturer security updates that help protect State systems from all harmful viruses, spyware, and/or other malicious software that can harm or steal State data
- presents threats to interconnected State systems and data
- may not be compatible with current standard infrastructure

Versioning

In software currency versioning, the current release version is known as N, and the prior major version of the software is N-1. Older versions of the software are labeled as N-2, N-3, etc. For the purposes of the software currency ISP, N means the version of software designated and approved by the agency as the current standard for deployment. N-1 is one release before the above-described designated or approved software version. N-2 is two or more releases before the above-described software version. Conversely, N+1 is any version level released by a manufacturer (in production or beta state) after the above-described N version.

N-1 should have at least 12 months remaining before being designated end of support or unsupported. Software that becomes version N-2 or greater is eligible for refresh and should be updated, replaced, or discontinued within 12 months. If a refresh is not possible for technical or business reasons, an exception must be formally requested with statements that address the impacts on cost and security. Early adoption of the N+1 release requires an exception to ensure it can be managed by the agency.

Note: Typically, there is a gap between the latest vendor software release and its designation by the agency as version N. This time allows for additional software testing, stability, and preparedness by the agency for the upgrade.

DEFINITIONS

Software Currency – the practice of maintaining the latest software for the deployed solution.

End of Support – the vendor no longer provides automatic fixes, updates, or technical assistance. Without vendor support, the software will no longer receive security updates.

Extended Support – the period of time after the end of support when the vendor may or may not offer additional software maintenance support at a cost for a period of time, typically between one and five years.

Mainstream Standard Support - the period of time during which a vendor product is available for general release and receives warranty support, security, and non-security updates.

Out of Support Software – software that software vendors no longer support except through customized or ad hoc support on a critical need only basis and for a fee. Vendors typically provide three years or more of warning before the actual out-of-support date.

Refresh- agency mechanism of updating software for currency. It is triggered by moving the version N to the next release.

Unsupported Software – refers to software for which there are no longer commercial, vendor, or in-house support options or software that relies on other unsupported applications or components.

References

- Texas Administrative Code: 1 TAC §202
- 2016-2020 State Strategic Plan for Information Resources Management

Implementation Information

Review Frequency:	Annually
Responsible Person:	CIO/IRM
Approved By:	Abe Johnson, Ed. D.
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Revision History

Version:	Date:	Description:
1.0	3/19/2024	Initial document