OUT-OF-THE-BOX VERSUS CUSTOM:
Finding Value in Your Environment's Approach

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GovCollab
FedRAMP-Hosted Atlassian Solutions Provider

ATLASSIAN | Silver Solution Partner   ✖ Confluence   ◆ Jira Software

Out-of-the-Box Solutioning vs. Custom-Coded Environments; Which is Right for Your Federal Agency?

**Talk to an expert
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Atlassian offers a powerful suite of tools to manage software development, DevSecOps, data collection, workforce management, ITSM/ESM, data analytics, and more. Similar to most tools with widely applicable capability sets, agencies often face challenges in configuring these tools to create the value they need for their organization.

There are two paths for tailoring Commercial off the Shelf (COTS) software like Atlassian to fit an organization's specific requirements:

1. Out-of-the-Box Solutioning

2. Custom-Coded Environments

Agencies using Atlassian Server licenses will need to migrate to another hosting service in February 2024 because Atlassian is ending support for Server licenses. Now is an excellent time to think about the best way to tailor your Jira and Confluence instances because pricing for out-of-the-box plugins varies from different hosting providers and custom-coded environments can bring significant challenges to the migration process. (For more information, on the end of support for Server and evaluating migration options, read our White Paper — Atlassian Migration: Preparing for Server End of Life.)

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Out-of-the-Box Solutioning

Server End of Support

Atlassian will no longer offer

- technical support
- security updates
- or bug fixes for critical vulnerabilities

If you use Server for your Atlassian license, your options for a FedRAMP compliant option will be severely limited.

This approach provides users the functionality they need by adding third-party plugins, also called apps or add-ons, to Atlassian tools. These plugins address issues such as insufficient calendaring macros and widgets, limited group management capabilities, or difficulty formatting content within your Atlassian products. They can also add extra features such as expanded reporting options or connecting to external applications that agencies may need to access given their mission or compliance requirements.

Advantages

Plugins address problems recognized by the market and are easy to install and configure. Agencies simply need to acquire a license, download a .jar file, and install the application in their Atlassian instance. This is a fast process that can take as little as five minutes. Configuration time can vary depending on the complexity of the application, but each application comes with its own set of controls that expand your platform functionality across the board. Atlassian's marketplace has over 1,000 suppliers offering more than 3,000 plugins that will meet the majority of agency needs. For a complete list of plugin offerings and options visit the Atlassian Marketplace or speak with a GovCollab Certified Atlassian Professional at MyAtlassianMSP@govcollab.us.

These plugins and applications are approved and configured for Atlassian environments, and updates are maintained by the organizations that created them. This simplifies O&M for agencies and provides the assurances of respected and trusted marketplace vendors.

Plugins address problems recognized by the market and are easy to install and configure.

Disadvantages

Because plugins and other third-party apps solve problems recognized by the market, they may not address organization-specific issues. However, the breadth and scope of plugins on the Atlassian marketplace make this problem rather uncommon.

Another drawback is, of course, cost. Plugin licensing fees can add up quickly. However, in evaluating costs, agencies need to compare the costs of hiring extra developers to manage custom code and the risk of that approach versus the relatively small amount to maintain licenses annually.

To offset the potential issues with plugin cost some managed service providers, such as GovCollab, include plugin licenses in their pricing model. This lowers the cost for all the provider's partners. This is especially true for lesser-used but essential plugins; the shared platform offers the opportunity to distribute plugin costs beyond just your agency.

Pros and Cons of Out-of-the-Box Solutioning

Advantages	Disadvantages
Easy to Acquire	Upfront License costs
Updated and maintained by third-party	May not address highly specialized needs
Configured for Atlassian	
Large library of plugins	

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Custom-Coded Environments

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In this approach, developers make code changes to the out-of-the-box features present in the core software to give users and admins increased functionality. This requires a development team that understands Atlassian products and has intimate knowledge of the entire user base's needs.

Advantages

Custom coding allows agencies to fix specific problems with tailored software that may not have a solution on the marketplace and adds unique functionality that their organization needs. This is the primary advantage of custom coding, and depending on the size of your organization, Atlassian expertise available, and the requirements you're looking to address, this may be the best option.

Disadvantages

The biggest challenges with custom-coded environments are the development and O&M commitments required to maintain the functionality and security of the platform. Plugins and apps offered on the Atlassian marketplace work with the user community at large and a wide variety of stakeholders are focused on fixing common problems. When an organization decides to create custom solutions to their problems they are assuming all the risk with that solution including future technical debt, changes by Atlassian to the platform's core software that may have a harmful impact, or even potential security compliance problems that may present issues during a FedRAMP audit. The risks associated not only pose a problem for users who come to rely on the platform and its solution, but also for the product owners and managers who run the platform on

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a daily basis. The obligations of an organization to maintain customized solutions can create major cost and security hurdles that make custom solutions very difficult to sustain. Core hacking to achieve customizations is typically unrealistic for federal agencies unless nothing truly exists in the marketplace to address the business requirements platforms owners are trying to provide.

Pros and Cons of Custom-Coded Environments

Advantages	Disadvantages
Provide specific solutions to unique problems	Technical debt
	Difficult to maintain
	Requires expertise
	Security risks
	Greater cost over time

Summary

For most Federal agencies, out-of-the-box solutioning is the fastest, most reliable, and most secure route to Atlassian implementations. As stated earlier, Atlassian has a large library of in-house as well as third-party applications and plugins that can provide the functionality they need without customizations to the Atlassian software itself. GovCollab can help agencies achieve mission success through solutions that thread the needle between enhanced, tailored functionality and shared security and prosperity.

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Below are the most common apps used by Federal Agencies in the Atlassian Marketplace

App	Brief Description
Scriptrunner for Jira	Custom code solutions in Jira
Xray Test Management for Jira	Manage test cases in Jira
Gliffy Diagrams	Create drawings/pictures in Confluence
Tempo Timesheets	Manage workforce and personnel in Jira
Draw.io	Create drawings/pictures in Jira
Zephyr Squad	Manage test cases in Jira
Jira Misc Workflow Extensions	Include apps increasing functionality for workflows such as automation and no code creation of custom workflows
Zephyr Scale	Plan and manage tests in Jira
Table Filters and Charts	Increase table functionality
Big Picture	Include project management practices in your Jira projects such as AFe ARTs or LeSS Req. Areas

How GovCollab Manages and Provides Plugins

Plugins are a central focus of the GovCollab platform. When users start their journey with GovCollab they will find several out-of-the-box plugins included on both Jira and Confluence upfront. Some of the plugins we include are Scriptrunner for Jira, Gliffy Diagrams, and Jira Forms, but you can always find our full list of active plugins tracked here.

GovCollab is focused on providing the most functionality within our Atlassian environments and is more than willing to add new plugins as requested by Federal agencies. While each new plugin creates added shared costs for the platform, the benefit of a shared environment is that GovCollab can offset those new costs with new users joining every

day. Therefore, as GovCollab's user base grows, our costs decline which increases potential functionality and delivers a high-performing toolset for Federal agencies at a fraction of the cost of what they would pay on their own. Put simply, shared service environments are the most efficient use of taxpayer dollars and provide a community for federal agencies to collaborate to be as effective as possible given the cost, time, and other constraints facing all federal programs.

Additional Resources

Atlassian Migration: Preparing for Server End of Life

One-page Overview of GovCollab Service Offerings »

FAQs
govcollab.us/faq

Do you have questions about customization, plugins, or migration options?

Contact us by phone or email using the links to the right.

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