

**appian**

# **University of South Florida: Project Selection and Scoping**

An interview with Alice Wei.

**Executive Perspective**  
Education

## Summary.

The University of South Florida (USF) has been an Appian customer since 2015 and has three development teams across their organization. In this interview, USF's Senior Director of Digital Transformation and Innovation, Alice Wei, reflects on her Appian project experience and shares lessons learned from her team's Appian journey. This summary is based on conversations that occurred in the first quarter of 2022. Topic areas covered include:

- Where to start your first Appian project.
- Common pitfalls.
- How to identify potential projects.
- Working with sponsors on early projects.
- Using partners for your early projects.

## Where's a good place to start when thinking about your first Appian project?

"You'd be amazed how many organizations have parts of workflows that include manually tearing apart staples or sorting paper. Many organizations don't view that as a huge first win when creating a product, but it creates speed and value right away. It's also important to not make this about pointing fingers, it has to be about workflow improvement and removing bottlenecks."

## What are some of the most common project pitfalls you see?

"One mistake I see is business partners focusing on dashboards instead of how people work. For example, they'll want to integrate 7–10 different complex systems and have everything displayed neatly on a fully complete dashboard . . . and that's most of what they focus on when planning an application. If you only focus on the shiny dashboard and integrations, there's no path to value."

"In our first project, we took a narrow focus and had a few complex integrations, but wanted to emphasize delivering value. You have to be okay challenging [business partners] to accept less than perfection—it's okay to have blanks in your dashboard and then go back and fix them later on. Even further, the question that no one dares ask is 'are you actually going to use that data or is it just going to sit there and look pretty?' In the end, build something that's going to deliver value and make sure it's iterative . . . that's a challenge."

## How do you identify potential project areas?

"It depends on how tapped into organizational goals you are. In education, for example, IT is often removed from what the University at large is doing. Goals are set very high and we need to interpret those in order to find valuable project areas. When we started with Appian, we used the state of Florida's baseline metrics as a guidepost."



**Industry:**  
Education

**Headquarters:**  
Tampa, Florida

**Website:**  
usf.edu

**Total enrollment:**  
+50,000



**Alice Wei**  
Senior Director, Digital  
Transformation and Innovations

Alice's team utilizes the Appian platform and low-code development to create solutions that drive digital transformation for USF's administration, faculty, and staff.

"It's important to listen to people on the ground. We talk to our deans, for instance. There's a never-ending list of problems. So, we find a trusted business partner and work with them to pilot something in a safe space. For instance, we worked with the College of Medicine to automate several processes and prove value. They were working with a 16-person custom code shop that took at least six months to deliver value, but Appian was able to do the same work in just four weeks. Once we did that, we quickly got other investment requests from across the university."

**What characteristics do you look for in early project sponsors?  
How do you use initial wins to build momentum for future projects?**

"This can be really difficult as IT shops don't always have a 'seat at the table.' We've had to be proactive with stakeholders about potential projects and prove success over several years in order to even earn our way to the table. When you're first getting started, incremental success is okay . . . it naturally takes time to complete impactful projects.

"Something that new people often miss is assuming that the power structure of your business partners is directly aligned to an organizational hierarchy. For example, at USF the provost is someone with a lot of organizational power. But, it was actually the deans reporting to him who were responsible for specific institutional goals. They had the most influence (funding, resourcing, etc.) to work directly with us. We listened for problems and worked with our deans to build solutions that helped meet their goals."

**How did you use partners for your early projects?  
What lessons did you learn?**

"Picking the right partner, especially early on, is very important because not all partners are created equal. Some excel at implementation while others are better facilitators, which is particularly important if you're both building new systems and upgrading your business processes. I'd recommend interviewing the person or team of people who will be on the ground working with you. Don't be afraid to ask about their experience and workstyle to help inform how you'll best work together. Also, Appian certifications can serve as a good guide for if they are up to date on Appian's most current capabilities.

We've worked with a few different partners over the years but had a great experience with Appian Customer Success. For those early in their journeys, Appian provides a one-stop shop for not only development and delivery expertise but also facilitation of stakeholder meetings and ensuring the applications we build are clearly mapped to important university objectives."

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How has your organization approached Appian projects in early phases? Share your perspective at [bestpractices@appian.com](mailto:bestpractices@appian.com) to schedule a research call with our team.

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