



Government CIO Playbook

Urgent needs, new funding and higher expectations create a perfect opportunity for government innovation.



First in a series

Government Innovators Map a New Path Forward

CIO roundtable tackles critical issues and technologies.



Disruption triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic has transformed the role of public sector technology leaders. As key drivers of better government, today's CIOs and other IT officials are being asked to enhance how constituents experience government services, improve digital equity and inclusion, leverage data for better decision-making and optimize technology budgets.

"Urgent technology needs, new funding streams and other factors are converging to create this perfect storm of innovation around the public sector," said Dustin Haisler, chief innovation officer for the Center for Digital Government (CDG), kicking off an invitation-only roundtable for top state and local IT and innovation leaders convened by CDG, Accela and Microsoft in October 2021.

Modern technology platforms and enterprise approaches to data management provide avenues to meet these critical objectives. But first, government leaders must address a wide range of technical and organizational issues. This playbook — which is based on the roundtable conversation — identifies critical technology trends and offers an actionable plan to move government forward.

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Step One: Understand The New Landscape

Thanks to federal COVID-19 relief programs and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, CIOs have unprecedented funding opportunities to support modernization efforts. To move forward, they must focus on key needs across a range of critical technology and policy investment areas.

Identify and refine priorities. Many current priorities existed before the pandemic — but now they have been reinforced, magnified or repositioned.

Connectivity, for example, has long been an important goal for jurisdictions. But public health lockdowns of government offices, schools and businesses made closing broadband gaps more urgent. Now connectivity remains essential as

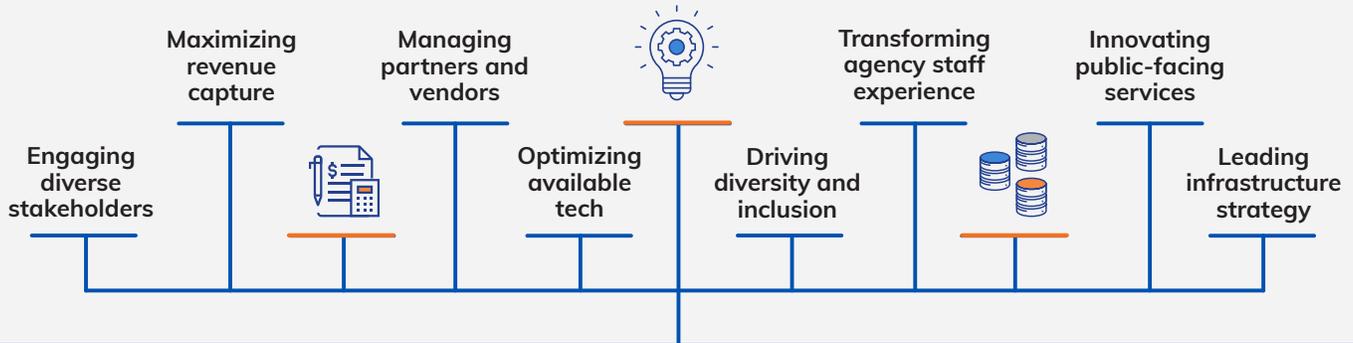
hybrid workplaces and classrooms become the permanent norm. Infrastructure and process modernization also took on new importance to support expanded digital service delivery. CIOs need to identify, prioritize and accelerate modernization efforts to meet permanently heightened constituent expectations.

Take the long view. During the height of the COVID crisis, CIOs focused on speed and impact as they deployed critical services, said Tom Nieto, Accela's chief operating officer. Now, governments need longer-term technology modernization roadmaps that define strategy around enterprise platforms, integration and security.

"We're in many cases still dealing with assembling functioning remote systems out of baling wire and chewing gum, and now we have to make these permanent," said interim Seattle CTO Jim Loter.

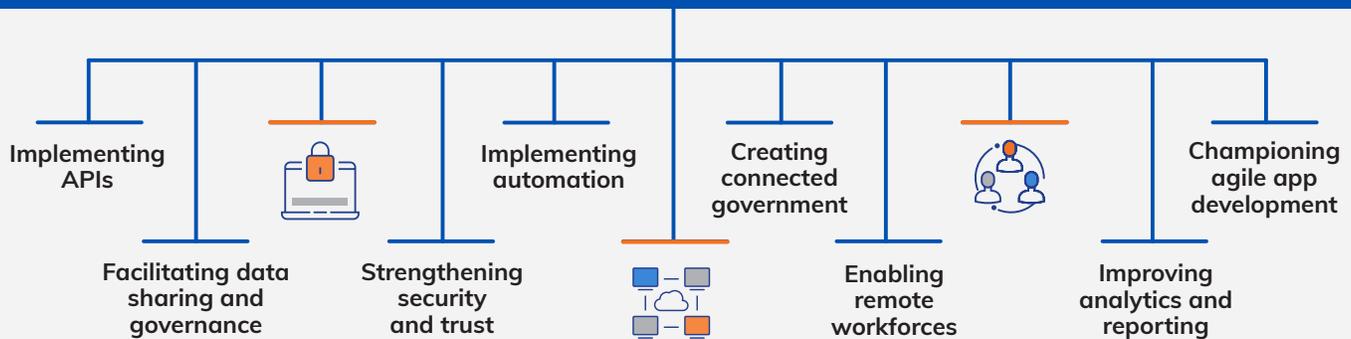
Roundtable participants stressed the importance of identifying desired community outcomes before creating

New Objectives



The Public Sector CIO: An Evolving Role with Unprecedented Opportunities

CIOs in state and local government are seeing their roles transform. Besides traditional IT domain expertise, today's CIOs are gaining new responsibilities that broaden their influence and impact.



New Tactics

technology strategies. Addressing community needs and ensuring the sustainability of government services may also require IT leaders to spearhead deeper operational or organizational shifts.

"We have an opportunity to not just reimagine how we deliver services, but also the organizations that deliver those services," Haisler said.

Step Two: Reimagine the Resident and Employee Experience

The pandemic shifted expectations among internal and external users — many of whom now consider digital services the norm. Meeting these expectations for access, convenience and personalization will require modern technology and new approaches.

Identify and address organizational barriers to services. Agencies must break down longstanding silos that make government difficult for constituents to navigate. Seattle's Loter urged roundtable participants to consider common resident

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interactions with government, such as reporting a damaged fire hydrant. "Would people think to call the water utility or the fire department? How are residents supposed to know that?" he asked. "They just know they have a problem with a fire hydrant."

"CIOs need to start thinking about how residents use government systems," Haisler added. "That involves understanding the larger holistic needs — as well as starting points — of all stakeholders."

Consider employees as constituents.

Employees' expectations of the government workplace have permanently changed, too. Surveys conducted by CDG and others consistently show public sector employees prefer hybrid work environments. This trend is



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forcing government officials to confront permanent decisions around workplace flexibility.

“We need to consider whether we are embracing hybrid work or fighting it,” Loter said.

Long-term adoption of hybrid work will drive the need for modern systems to support the new employment model.

“We’re trying to identify where we have technical debt which prevents us from providing access so employees can work remotely on a mobile device, smartphone or tablet,” said Charles Burton, IT director for Calcasieu Parish, Louisiana.

Step Three: Apply an Equity Lens

Equity and inclusion have become priorities across all areas of government. The shift to digital services, remote work and online learning during the pandemic magnified serious gaps in connectivity, usability and technology literacy. In response, communities are putting more effort into making sure all residents can access the services they need.

“As part of our annual budgeting exercises, one of the key questions is how does your project or program support equity and inclusion,” said Sarah Edgerton, CIO of Madison, Wisconsin.

Think beyond connectivity. Access issues exposed during the pandemic represent a starting point for government efforts to close the gap, but CIOs are focusing on more expansive strategies. Edgerton, for example, is developing “satellite city halls” in libraries to let residents engage in key government services without visiting an office downtown.

“It’s a pretty heavy lift for us to bring broadband to every household, but this is how we can help bring government to our residents rather than residents coming to government,” she said.

Leverage data to inform equity efforts.

Data is vital to fully understand service gaps and address them, according to Nieto. “When you get into topics like equity and transparency, data is foundational, and ensuring you can access the right data is going to be essential,” he said.

Step Four: Focus on Sustainable Operations

Although state and local governments are benefitting from a historic infusion of federal funds, the current landscape is familiar territory for veteran leaders. Short-term relief funding was also available during the Great Recession in 2008, but tight budgets returned when federal dollars stopped flowing. CIOs would be wise to prepare for a similar pattern today by investing in technologies and services that are sustainable over the long term.

Use modernization to cut IT costs and drive revenue. Adopting more efficient technology platforms will help jurisdictions avoid retrenchment once federal relief funding programs wind down. “If we do the types of modernizations that help

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us reduce the costs of running IT, it will solve the problem of the fiscal cliff,” said Michael Mattmiller, former CTO for the city of Seattle and now director of government affairs for Microsoft.

Giving residents and businesses convenient digital service options can also put more money in government coffers. During the pandemic, government digital services outperformed expectations. For example, Cupertino, California, saw permitting revenue increase by 22 percent during the pandemic, according to CTO Bill Mitchell. Expanding digital services can help jurisdictions improve revenue collection as they move forward.

Focus on mission, not just the bottom line. Modernization isn’t just about the money. The pandemic shifted the narrative around modern IT systems, which are now seen as critical to resilience and continuity of important government programs. Jurisdictions with cloud-based systems and mobile-friendly applications withstood pandemic-driven challenges better than those with older and less flexible technology.

“It’s not always all about ROI from a dollar perspective, but a mission perspective,” said former Illinois CIO Kirk Lonbom, who is now Microsoft’s director of justice and public safety.

Harness data to help make the case. Mitchell stressed the value of developing key performance indicators and dashboards to demonstrate the impact of technology projects. That’s particularly important to justify modernization projects in departments that don’t generate revenue but provide

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critical services. To that end, Michelle Taylor, CIO of Leon County, Florida, created a governance body of business users to provide oversight — and help make the case for funding.

Step Five: Create an Enterprise Strategy

Roundtable participants agreed on the importance of aligning their technology strategy with business objectives — and lamented that this task often falls squarely on the shoulders of CIOs.

“A lot of times, the business strategy hasn’t been set,” Nieto said. “That leaves us helping [business leaders] decide the key department focus areas so we can support them.”

As they assume their transformative role, CIOs should focus efforts in three key areas:

Implement modern IT platforms.

A modern, cloud-based technology platform helps address the key challenges governments face today, including simplifying digital service delivery, enabling remote work, providing common toolsets to reduce technology costs across multiple departments, and enabling data sharing to improve transparency and support more equitable decisions.

The platform approach represents a significant shift for many jurisdictions. In Seattle, for example, the IT team is assessing 1,500 different applications across city departments.

“The platform strategy is really a way to simplify at least one layer of the application stack,” Loter said. “You end up with more sustainable code; easier lifecycle management on your applications; and you can staff, hire, recruit and train specific sets of skills instead of needing to cover all technologies like we do today.”

Unlock and operationalize data.

Governments leveraged data from multiple departments and agencies to inform pandemic-related strategies, including COVID testing and vaccination. These efforts need to expand.

“We got a taste of what’s possible when you start to infuse data into policy,” Haisler said. “Now there’s a big focus on how to do that at scale.”

But moving toward a data-driven future faces a stubborn hurdle — breaking down data stores that are siloed by function or department. “Looking back at my time as a CIO, data still seems to be that untapped resource we’re just not able to exploit in the manner we want to,” Lonbom said. “We need to maintain our focus on that.”

IT modernization plays a critical role in connecting disparate data stores

through APIs, automation and user-friendly tools. In Cupertino, for example, a focus on “democratizing data” enables employees to build applications quickly and without outside support. Staffers recently built a return-to-work solution for COVID testing in two days.

Two other factors are critical to harnessing the full potential of data. First, data governance is key to breaking down institutional resistance to data sharing, according to Lonbom. “Getting behind a common goal opens the doors,” he said.

Second, stakeholders must believe sensitive data is secure. “Data is at the heart of security,” Nieto said. “Actual attacks become the compelling agents for change, but how do you get ahead of that?”

Leverage vendor partnerships. Vendor partnerships have gained importance throughout government, but they hold particular significance for IT leaders facing constrained budgets and new challenges going forward. “Using partners from a vendor management perspective takes a lot of the heavy lifting off the team so they can focus on the business they need to drive,” Nieto said.

Step Six: Keep Pushing Toward Your Full Potential

Government IT leaders can draw from their experiences during the pandemic

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- **Sarah Edgerton**, CIO, City of Madison, Wisconsin
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- **Jim Loter**, Chief Technology Officer, City of Seattle, Washington
- **Michael Mattmiller**, Director of Government Affairs, Microsoft
- **Bill Mitchell**, Chief Technology Officer, City of Cupertino, California
- **Tom Nieto**, Chief Operating Officer, Accele
- **Michelle Taylor**, CIO, Leon County, Florida

to chart a path forward. “We’ve all heard the term ‘the art of the possible’ — sometimes that’s overused,” Lonbom said. “What we’ve found during the pandemic is the art of our potential.”

To reach that potential, government leaders must sustain momentum. A key is to focus not just on technology adoption, but its intensity — “the capacity to roll it out across government,” Mattmiller said. Doing so requires IT to have a seat at the table as government leaders consider how to invest federal relief funds, he added.

“What we collectively have to do is keep technology top of mind and keep the transformation going while we have the resources to do so,” Mattmiller said.

CIOs play a critical role in educating non-technical stakeholders on the importance of technology investments.

“Leadership is the missing piece,” says Lonbom. “We could talk technology all day, but first it’s about a common goal and a common vision. We’ve found that we can provide better public services, more equity and more availability through technology. We’re not turning back.”

This piece was written and produced by the Center for Digital Government Content Studio based on an October 2021 CIO roundtable hosted by Accele and Microsoft.

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