



Government CIO Playbook

Partnering to Unlock Digital Transformation

CIOs must transform their own organizations to work across the enterprise.



Volume 2



Introduction

As state and local governments chart their path forward, they face urgent needs to transform processes and modernize technologies. Priority lists for today's state and local CIOs include expanding digital services, replacing legacy systems, leveraging data for decision-making and securing these expansive new efforts.

But rethinking how governments operate internally and deliver services to the public can't be done by CIOs alone. This work will demand tighter partnerships between technologists and business leaders. This playbook — based on insights from an invitation-only roundtable of government technology experts, department directors and executive leaders convened by Accela and Microsoft — offers insights to move government forward through stronger partnerships that enable digital transformation.

"Digital transformation has accelerated, and business units are looking to us now because they understand how technology can be a force multiplier," said former Delaware CIO James Collins, who is now general manager of Microsoft Consulting Services.

Aligning IT and Business

A range of factors are driving demand for digital transformation, including the demonstrated impact of technology during the pandemic, heightened constituent expectations, permanent adoption of hybrid work, and growing attention on digital equity and inclusion. Fortunately, the continued growth of cloud solutions

This Government CIO Playbook, which focuses on building critical relationships between IT and business leaders, is volume two in a series of playbooks designed to help state and local government CIOs navigate evolving issues and meet new challenges. The first playbook, *Government Innovators Map a New Path Forward*, examines how the pandemic impacted public sector technology priorities and offers tactics CIOs can use to respond. You can download it [here](#).

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and technology-as-a-service models presents new opportunities for CIOs to address technical debt and enable greater automation and efficiency.

As governments leverage these tools to address new imperatives, they must align technology efforts with business-side priorities, said Tom Nieto, Accela's chief operating officer. "It's a different way of delivering results, especially when you think about that partnership with the business side," Nieto said.

For CIOs, that means rethinking their own roles and how they work with other parts of the enterprise. "The days of 'if you build it, they will come' are long gone," said David Whitham, CIO for Massachusetts Medicaid. "We need to make sure the business evolves along with us so they can take advantage of new technologies."

A Playbook for Successful Partnerships

Forging stronger partnerships requires IT departments and the business units they serve to rethink long-held assumptions about technology and its role in core government functions. "So often, we focus on IT as just a thing that exists on the side that we need to make things work, but it's really part of the business," said Carlos Felix, director of IT for Kentucky's Auditor of Public Accounts.

Among the steps CIOs and other technology leaders can take:

1 Rethink the CIO Mindset

Much has been written about the transition of the CIO from backroom knob-turner to broker and strategic partner. Stephen Hurm, licensing director for the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, likened the CIO's new role to that of Steve Jobs, who famously said technologists are tasked with figuring out what people want before

they realize they want it. In government, that translates to demonstrating to business units how technology can transform the work they do.

"It's incumbent on CIOs to sell to the business side," Hurm said. "Business leaders don't know the capabilities, but if you can take our workflow and improve it, that's the a-ha moment."

There's a catch, however. To provide that level of value, IT teams must be familiar enough with business units and their processes to identify solutions. That requires a shift in mindset for IT leaders.

"Modernization for the sake of modernization is not my priority," said Mark Sauer, CIO of the Oregon Department of Transportation. "To use data more efficiently and automate more things is the reason for modernization from my perspective."

2 Refocus the IT Organization

The shift in leadership mindset can then drive changes to the rest of the technology team and how staff members work with business partners. Begin by developing a deeper understanding of your organization's existing capabilities. "Figure out who your staff is, and what their skillsets and capabilities are," said Jared Snow, CIO of the California Military Department.

Virtually all government IT organizations are experiencing shifts in the type of skills and talent they need, which requires retraining existing employees and hiring for new roles. Given the competition for scarce technology talent, roundtable participants identified a range of strategies for recruiting and retaining employees, including offering internships and apprenticeships and streamlining government hiring processes. Some are also focusing

on recruiting from non-technical roles within their own jurisdiction.

Across all staff, it's important to foster a constituent-first mindset. "How do we stop thinking from the data center forward and think from the constituent backward?" Collins said.

This involves developing soft skills to help IT staff collaborate with the business side. "IT teams have great ideas, but they may not know how to communicate them," Snow said.

3 Connect With Business Units
CIOs may also need to redesign their own organizations to integrate IT staff with business units. "You need to be in the room where it happens, and you need to restructure your organization to be able to make that happen,"

said Samir Saini, Microsoft industry director for U.S. critical infrastructure.

Viggo Forde, CIO of Snohomish County, Washington, assigns business process analysts to all the county's 28 departments. At the same time, the IT department's leadership team meets regularly with its counterparts across government.

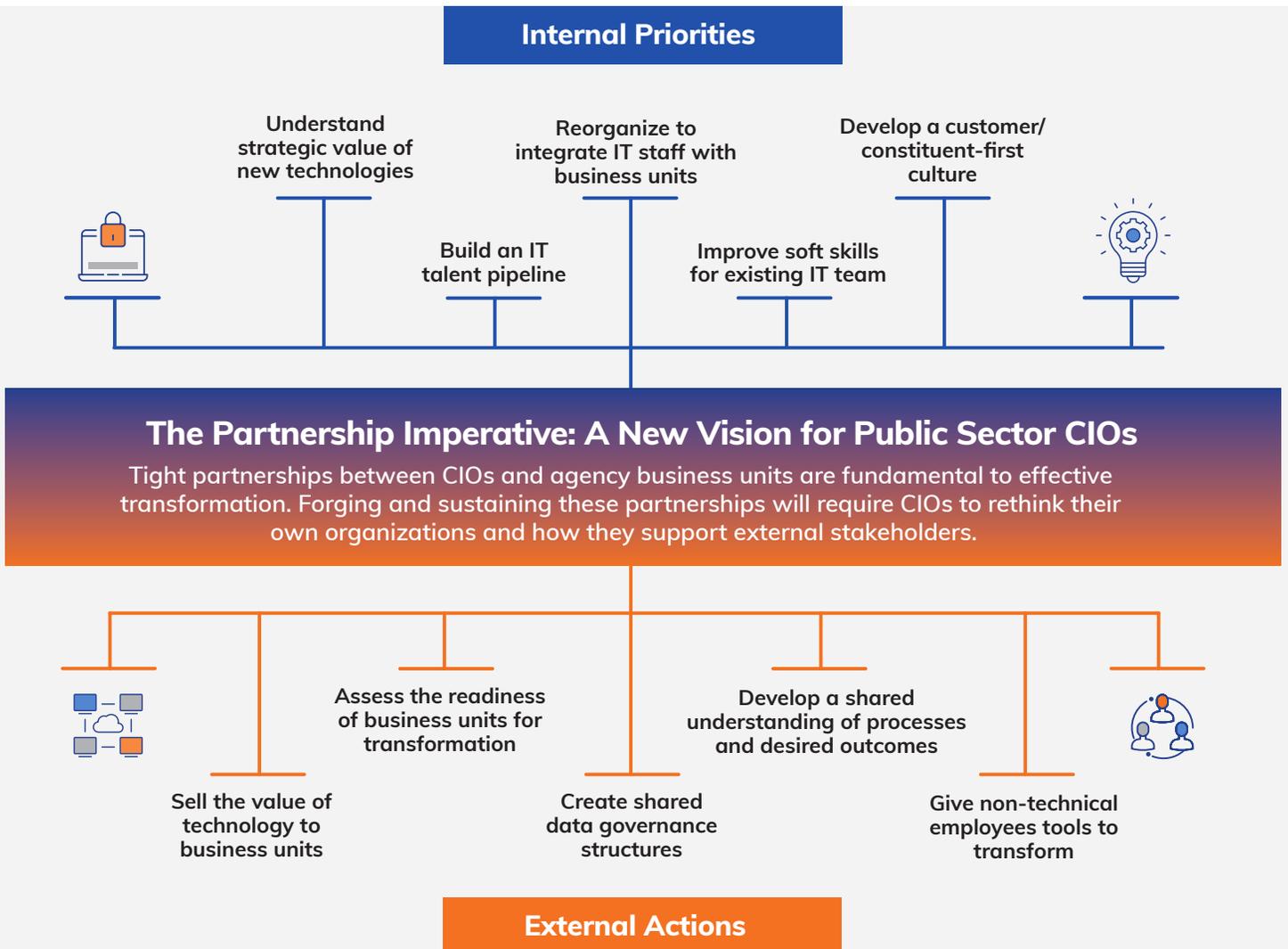
Technology leaders can also learn from how other liaison roles within government are structured. For example, Hurm recalled assigning attorneys to far-flung state trooper locations to

provide support, but also to ensure the kinds of personal relationships that lead to better decision-making. In technology, "we haven't done as good a job building those relationships," Hurm said.

In places where IT hasn't played a strong role in business-level decision-making, "don't be afraid to ask," urged Jim Walsh, director of technology for the Portage County (Ohio) Court of Common Pleas. "If we pose [our participation] as a question, business leaders can confirm it and that strengthens the perception that we need to be in there."

"We need to make sure the business evolves along with us so they can take advantage of new technologies."

— David Whitham, CIO, Massachusetts Medicaid



4 Assess Department/ Agency Readiness

As CIOs partner with business units, they must assess the readiness of these departments for digital transformation. Saini recommends viewing digital maturity across three levels:

- **Reactive digitization**, involving one-off projects largely done out of necessity
- **Digital experimentation**, characterized by pilots or implementations focused on key business processes
- **Digital transformation**, in which technology initiatives are embedded in — and enable — the organization's overall strategic plan

Cataloging and classifying existing systems across departments and agencies can also prevent agencies at earlier stages of maturity from pursuing redundant technology as they modernize. "Most departments, including mine, don't do that very well," said Rob Mancini, CIO for Prince William County, Virginia.

5 Create Shared Governance Structures

Governance is an essential component of change management. IT leaders should work with their business counterparts to put governance structures in place before major projects begin. "If you create those structures early, you're setting yourself up for success versus trying to retroactively go back downstream," Nieto said.

Paul Hopingardner, CIO of Travis County, Texas, recommended approaching governance from a risk-management perspective. "That seems to depersonalize some of the issues," he said.

Data should also be a focus of shared governance structures. "Data governance is the key to moving from siloed program data to thinking about data as an asset and using it to provide integrated services," said Stephanie Radtke, deputy director of community services for Dakota County, Minnesota.

6 Develop Shared Objectives, Desired Outcomes and KPIs

Closer working relationships between IT and business units can unearth the underlying business process changes



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— Stephanie Radtke, Deputy Director of Community Services, Dakota County, Minnesota

needed to make transformation projects successful. "If you try to layer software and technology on top of a broken process, you're going to end up with a bad outcome," Nieto said. "The more you can align on the process and enabling a better outcome for constituents, the better."

This shared understanding of process changes and desired outcomes also leads to the development of common key performance indicators (KPIs) for IT and business teams to follow as projects roll out. Some governments are building shared dashboards so IT and business staff can monitor progress.

7 Collaborate With Other Essential Players

In addition to the business units, it's vital to include other key stakeholders in modernization efforts. In particular, CIOs should forge relationships with budget directors and procurement officers. "Engaging them early, making them part of the conversation and educating them in the process is really key," said Dustin Haisler, chief innovation officer for the Center for Digital Government.

8 Empower Business Units

Business units should emerge from modernization projects with greater capacity to use new technologies. The advent of low- and no-code technologies provides opportunities for nontechnical employees to further automate workflows or manage changes based on evolving needs. Some IT departments are creating liaisons to train business unit staff to use these tools.

"It's about elevating people," said Dan Ault, assistant town manager and chief innovation officer for the town of Cary, North Carolina. "Technology is no longer about specialization. It's about elevating the capacity of all employees. If that doesn't happen, transformation won't be sustainable."

9 Widen the Aperture

With stronger relationships between business and IT, CIOs can focus on broader enterprise goals for digital transformation. Leaders across all agencies must "hear what our priorities are so we can widen our aperture and they can really understand the impact that we can drive," said Collins.

CIOs should focus on benefits for the ultimate end users — residents. "When we start talking about digital transformation, we need an integrated customer service strategy," said Mike Almvig, director of information services for Skagit County, Washington. "The constituent doesn't know the difference between the parks department and law enforcement, but we get hung up on business processes."

With a vision in place, CIOs can focus on how individual agencies fit into enterprise objectives. "Agencies can't transform unless they know where they're headed," Haisler said, stressing the importance of technology leaders communicating the big picture. "You need to reverse engineer your way to the next evolution of government services."

Creating that enterprise vision — and disrupting the silos that can stand in the way — begins at the top. "What I see

happening really well in private industry, but not necessarily in government, is getting the CIO and the other C-level executives in the same room as the business leaders," Felix said.

Conclusion

State and local agencies are in a new environment where modern business processes and technologies are fundamental to maintain internal operations and deliver vital public services. This reality is driving urgent digital transformation goals that will

require tighter partnerships between IT and business.

CIOs must re-examine their own roles and the structure of their organizations to fit this new paradigm. They'll need to leverage cloud platforms that enable governments to move faster and more flexibly on digital transformation, and they must develop staff skills to deploy and support these solutions. In addition, they'll need to prepare and empower business units to thrive with new technology tools.

All of this is a significant task. But CIOs will have important allies in these efforts: constituents who saw digital

experiences improve during the pandemic and will demand better, more integrated services from all areas of government.

"What's going to drive this is constituent expectations — they're going to ask why they're having a different experience across government services," Almvig said. "It's in the early phases, but I believe it's coming."

This piece was written and produced by the Center for Digital Government Content Studio, with information and input from Accela and Microsoft.

Contributors

- **Mike Almvig**, Director of Information Services, Skagit County, Washington
- **Dan Ault**, Assistant Town Manager and Chief Innovation Officer, Cary, North Carolina
- **James Collins**, General Manager, Microsoft Consulting Services
- **Carlos Felix**, Director of IT, Kentucky Auditor of Public Accounts
- **Viggo Forde**, CIO, Snohomish County, Washington
- **Dustin Haisler**, Chief Innovation Officer, Center for Digital Government
- **Paul Hopingardner**, CIO, Travis County, Texas
- **Stephen Hurm**, Licensing Director, Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
- **Rob Mancini**, CIO, Prince William County, Virginia
- **Tom Nieto**, Chief Operating Officer, Accela
- **Stephanie Radtke**, Deputy Director of Community Services, Dakota County, Minnesota
- **Samir Saini**, Industry Director for U.S. Critical Infrastructure, Microsoft
- **Mark Sauer**, CIO, Oregon Department of Transportation
- **Jared Snow**, CIO, California Military Department
- **Jim Walsh**, Director of Technology, Portage County (Ohio) Court of Common Pleas
- **David Whitham**, CIO, Massachusetts Medicaid

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