



Government CIO Playbook

The Transformation Imperative

Three keys to moving forward



Volume 5



Introduction

State and local governments face growing pressure to transform the digital experience for constituents and employees — both to meet immediate needs and prepare for greater changes to come.

This handbook — the fifth in our series — is based on a Fall 2023 roundtable of government CIOs convened by the Center for Digital Government (CDG), Accela and Microsoft. It focuses on transforming government in three ways: modernizing IT systems, leveraging artificial intelligence (AI), and bridging staffing and resource constraints.

Accelerating Modernization

Modernization solves a long and growing list of IT challenges, including the need to secure systems and data by retiring technical debt and addressing shadow apps deployed

About the Series

This Government CIO Playbook is volume five in a series designed to help state and local government CIOs navigate evolving issues and meet new challenges. Previous playbooks focused on:

- [Simplifying technology environments to enable transformation](#)
- [Strengthening stakeholder relationships and trust](#)
- [Taking an enterprise approach to IT](#)
- [Understanding critical post-pandemic technology trends](#)

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— Paul Kresser, Deputy CIO, City and County of Denver

by individual departments during the pandemic. Modernization also helps agencies meet the expectations of residents and employees for better digital experiences, more personalization, and the use of AI to simplify internal and external workflows.

However, the typical incremental approach to IT planning and strategy development may not be bold enough to realize true digital transformation. “Just by the nature of our organizations, we don’t take risks, and as a result, we don’t modernize,” said Paul Kresser, deputy CIO of the city and county of Denver.

Here are five plays to accelerate modernization:

1 Change strategic plans to focus on business objectives and outcomes

Simplifying IT strategic plans and aligning them to business needs can win support for transformation. Clark County, Nevada, streamlined its IT strategic plan from 10 objectives to three pillars — public-facing services, department capabilities and the employee experience — and changed the plan’s focus

from IT strategy to technology needs. “We have capabilities, not tactics,” said CIO Bob Leek, which are used to identify gaps and develop project roadmaps.

2 Review plans more frequently

While strategic plans have historically been revised annually or biannually, it’s essential to assess changing business needs more often. “In Denver, we update our plan quarterly because the priorities are always changing,” Kresser said.

3 Involve residents and employees

Prioritize projects after collecting input from employees and the public. “One of the most successful engagements we’ve had is bringing the public closer to the work we’re doing,” Leek said. And while IT departments frequently receive feedback from agency and departmental management, engaging line workers yields additional insights about the greatest needs. In Denver, for example, an internal employee portal collects suggestions and lets staff rank them.

4 Modernize governance and procurement

While IT governance often focuses on policy and practices, it should also involve assessing if business objectives are being met. Procurement, which is still adapting to the shift from capital to operating expenditures in IT, must also embrace new contract language and funding sources to allow IT departments to experiment, fail and move forward quickly.

5 Leverage platforms and partnerships to move quickly

Work with vendors whose products embrace modern software architectures. Application platforms, for example, consolidate multiple software-as-a-service solutions, which are built on a flexible cloud foundation that automatically updates components to keep systems secure. "This creates a web of trust," Accela Chief Technology Officer Renato Mascardo said. "If you choose to go it alone, you're vulnerable."

Shared services agreements and partnerships with neighboring governments can also provide strength in numbers — particularly around shared

cybersecurity needs. "It's a logical place for jurisdictions to start because security policies should be universal," said Leek. Clark County is partnering with the city of Las Vegas and other municipalities to stand up a security operations center.

Unleashing the Power of AI

AI's ability to improve user experience, unlock data resources and provide access to unprecedented computing power has created "an amazing inflection point," Mascardo said. AI is already embedded in workforce applications like Microsoft Office 365, and more than half (54%) of state and local government employees have used generative AI, said Dustin Haisler, chief innovation and strategy officer for CDG, citing a survey from spring 2023.

"Government leaders can no longer ignore it," he said. "Regardless of policy, people are using it."

At the same time, residents expect governments to adopt generative AI to improve service delivery. "They're asking why they can't access government like ChatGPT," said Michael Mattmiller,

Microsoft's senior director of state and local government affairs.

Here are five plays to unleash the power of AI:

1 Find low-risk/high-value use cases

The goal of initial government AI use cases should be to build trust in the technology and address workforce gaps, according to Mattmiller. New York City, for example, launched an AI-powered small business portal as the first step in automating commonly asked questions in its 311 service.

Chatbots, document management and language translation are good AI starting points because they can save money and reduce staff workloads. Clark County used AI to translate the county's website into 11 languages. The task was complete in 90 days and did not require complex recoding, according to Leek.

2 Integrate AI with existing automation efforts

Many IT departments are already working with internal business units to automate workflows. AI can increase the impact of automation projects and help government workforces do more with less. In Denver, staff have long been trained in Lean and Six Sigma methodologies to encourage them to identify workflow improvements. "We see AI as the next phase of innovation," Kresser said.

3 Develop guidelines for AI use

IT leaders must stay abreast of rapidly changing regulations and guidelines involving AI use at the federal, state and local levels. But they also need to create their own guidelines to safeguard data. One CIO gave an example of how an internal experiment using AI to summarize an archive of 100,000 court records inadvertently included Social Security numbers and other sensitive data that would have been devastating if made public.

In addition, CIOs need to understand how vendors are building AI into products used by government and ensure disclosures become part of the procurement process. "The CIO plays a critical role in how AI is regulated at the local and state levels,



and they are not always part of the conversation,” Haisler said.

4 Train staff on AI’s role
Government employees need training on AI guidelines, appropriate use cases and how the technology fits into the jurisdiction’s objectives. In DuPage County, Illinois, IT leaders are developing training modules and videos for staff, said CIO Anthony McPhearson. It’s also important to assuage employee fears that AI will replace them. “We’re not laying anyone off,” Kresser said. “We don’t have enough employees as it is.”

5 Encourage experimentation
Staff at all levels should be engaged in identifying new AI use cases. CIOs can lead by example, according to Mascardo. “We all became CIOs because we like to tinker,” he said. “You have to play around with these things, experiment and see what use cases fit.”

Bridging Resource Gaps

Governments continue to struggle with resource and human capital constraints, which have become even more challenging due to changing workforce expectations. CIOs will need new strategies for attracting and retaining talent. They’ll also need to lobby policymakers for broader changes to obsolete HR and procurement policies.

Here are five plays for addressing these issues:

1 Use resource management planning to support employees
Understanding the time and human capital involved in performing different tasks helps departments allocate scarce resources. Resource management planning can also give employees clear priorities when they’re feeling overwhelmed. “You can definitely say this is what you’re supposed to be working on,” Kresser said.

2 Promote the unique strengths of public service
CIOs increasingly cite the public sector’s combination of mission and opportunities to innovate to attract new employees.



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“We have really cool tools and low barriers to entry,” Kresser said. They’re also offering policies that support work-life balance, including remote work, to offset the negative impact of public sector salaries, which often lag private sector pay. Enhanced training and development programs that help employees advance their careers are another effective approach. “We’re under an obligation to create a good place to work,” Leek said.

3 Identify opportunities to augment staff capacity
Workflow automation can help agencies address employee burnout by reducing tedious workloads and providing opportunities for staff to take on more interesting tasks. Managed services can also fill gaps where staff capacity is limited. “It’s about thinking differently about the problem space,” Mattmiller said. “If we don’t have enough internal capacity, we need to decide where to focus in-house resources and where to use managed services.”

Shared services models with other jurisdictions offer another opportunity

to fill high-demand positions and improve technology capabilities. In Westchester County, New York, only 10 of the county’s 48 municipalities have dedicated IT staff, according to Rosalind Cimino, director of the Village of Port Chester’s Department of Central and Information Services. To help fill the gap, Cimino’s department provides security tools and support to other jurisdictions in the county.

4 Enlist elected officials and policymakers
Addressing many barriers to attracting staff and maximizing limited resources — salary ranges, hiring practices, residency requirements for employment, outdated procurement policies and more — is beyond the scope of the CIO and other administrative leaders. It’s essential for CIOs to develop relationships with elected officials and policymakers to make sure they understand the impact of obsolete policies. “I got closer to politics,” Cimino said. “I get funding because they see progress is being made.”

Conclusion

A common thread runs through these strategic imperatives: People are the essential element in driving digital transformation. For CIOs, that means moving closer to constituents and stakeholders.

Meaningfully involving the public and employees in prioritizing and

implementing modernization projects, engaging agency workforces in safely leveraging the power of AI, partnering with decision-makers to address outdated policies — these approaches help CIOs move toward true transformation.

At the same time, cloud-based application platforms, software-as-a-service

applications and a growing array of service offerings give CIOs new tools to execute quickly and effectively on transformation plans.

“Old approaches to infrastructure and service modernization no longer work,” said Haisler. “Governments need to take a human-centric approach.”

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