

Moving Modernization Forward in Spite of Disruption



*The disruptions of the past year have exacerbated the need to modernize legacy apps and infrastructure. While modernization helps organizations remain resilient, improve efficiency and deliver better user experiences, it is also a complex, far-reaching effort. In this Q&A, **Nancy Bohannon**, vice president of state and local government and education at Red Hat, discusses the strategies and technologies that can help government leaders simplify and accelerate modernization even amid the challenges of the pandemic.*

How has the pandemic impacted the concept of modernization?

The events from 2020 exposed the weaknesses and inflexibility of old systems and underscored the relationship between modernization and resilience. At the same time, the pandemic response gave many agencies their first experience with cloud-based solutions. It really proved that governments can embrace newer technologies quickly and get to the cloud.

How can open source technology help address the complexities of modernizing legacy apps and infrastructure?

A good deal of the complexity around modernization comes from culture and processes. Open source is based on a philosophy that champions simplicity, collaboration and transparency. For example, in the open source world, we take very large, complex tasks and break them into smaller, simpler tasks. In addition, many eyes are on development and the processes we put in place. Approaches like this enable work to be accomplished quickly and improved constantly in many small victories that turn into a modernization system.

What tools or strategies can help organizations expand the use of the cloud in legacy modernization?

You want a strategy that ensures workloads are portable and secure

between clouds, without the risk of vendor lock-in. Containerization is a primary way to achieve this. Containers let you package an agency's application and runtime dependency to ensure consistent deployment across any infrastructure. That is huge in our world and is taking IT development to the next level. We see containers being foundational to a more complex, comprehensive application modernization platform that features tooling to deploy, manage and maintain these types of applications across clouds. Containerization really is the future of IT. Automation is another key to government modernization efforts. It lets organizations maintain IT infrastructures consistently and create a very secure environment for their solutions.

What steps can state and local government leaders take to foster innovation and collaboration as they drive modernization?

We tend to focus on technology, but leaders need to focus on people and process changes, too. Most government technology leaders I speak with cite culture changes as their biggest impediment to modernization. Our view is to take an open organization approach, focusing on culture and process changes to foster modernization. Then the technology is there to implement successful solutions.

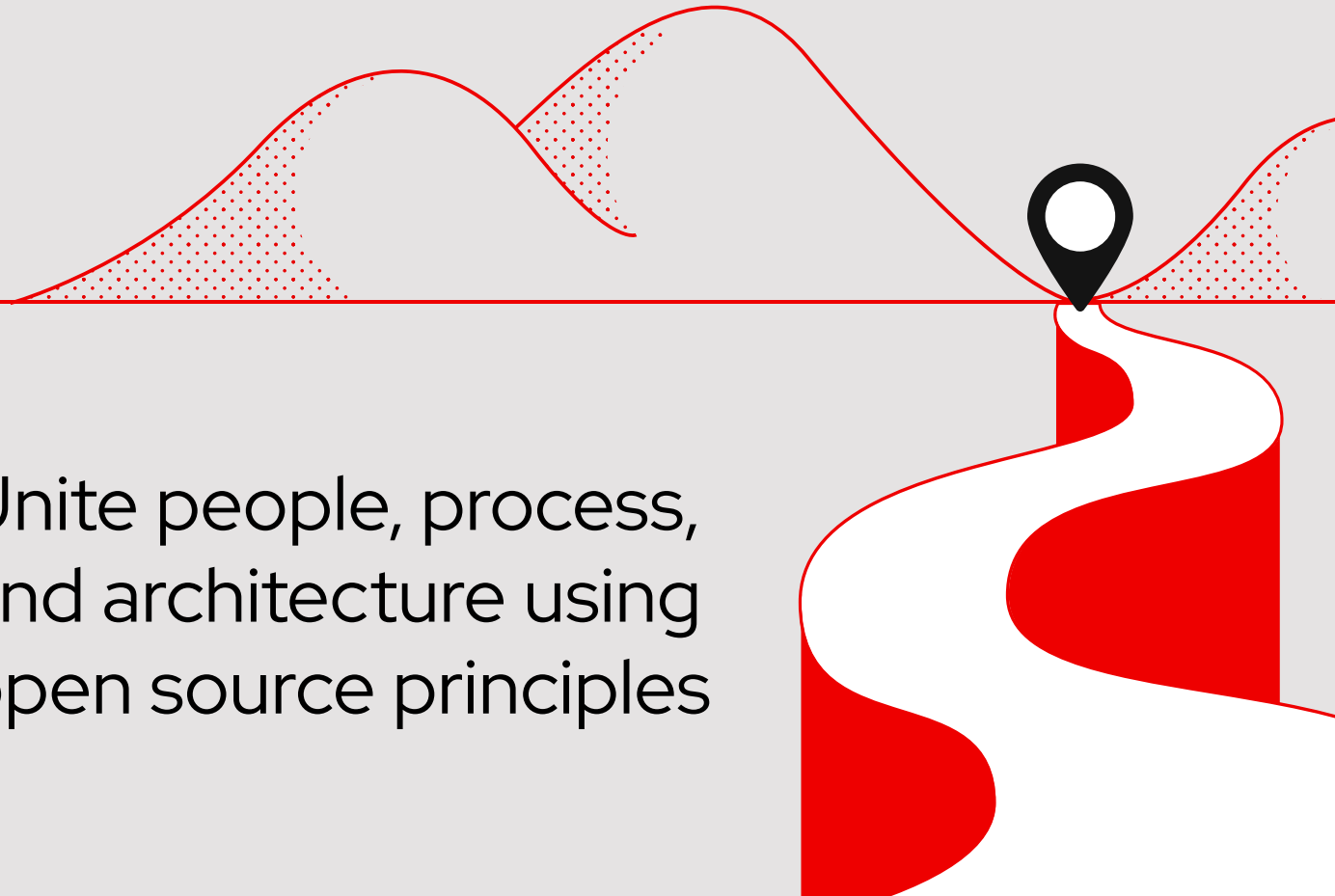
With revenues and budgets plummeting, how can organizations optimize modernization spending?

In light of these challenges, enterprise open source solutions are a great way to go. These solutions drive innovation, application development, operations and engineering at a fraction of the cost of traditional proprietary offerings. They also put new capabilities into the hands of citizens faster because open source communities leverage millions of developers to drive IT innovation more quickly and effectively than proprietary software development methodology.

What suggestions do you have for government leaders who are dealing with the challenges of the pandemic?

State and local CIOs are dealing with challenges that none of us ever thought they would have to face. The two most important things they can do are to drive automation and focus on hybrid cloud solutions. We all know the cloud is here to stay. We also know that legacy systems will take too long to migrate completely to the cloud. Embracing a hybrid cloud approach around modern solutions, where you can be partly on-prem as well as in the cloud, is going to help drive modernization and help systems become more effective more quickly. The second piece is automation. Automation has come a long way. It allows organizations to re-factor their workforce into their mission while automating simpler tasks. Artificial intelligence and machine learning are part of this and will become increasingly important as state and local leaders look to improve responsiveness and citizen engagement — both now and in the future.

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