

3 Things You Can Do Now to Rethink Innovation

An interview with Kevin Tunks, National Technology Adviser for State and Local Government, Red Hat

Innovation came in waves in the past 18 months. It started with agencies having to reinforce technology's critical role in their daily operations.

"I think the second wave of innovation is realizing the opportunity to work differently," said Kevin Tunks, National Technology Adviser for State and Local Government at Red Hat, a leader in enterprise open source software innovation.

Red Hat is a proponent of using human-centered design to shape positive employee interactions with technologies and impactful customer experiences with government services. **"I think this pandemic forced everybody to step off the treadmill collectively and rethink how we want to go forward,"** Tunks said.

But what does that look like in practice?

1 Be intentional about whom and how you serve.

The pandemic shifted the population of who's consuming government services. If new customers cannot easily and readily access services, it's time to rethink the experience, Tunks said.

That involves designing social support programs and services in a way that's intentional, transparent, responsive to urgent needs and a logical extension of how people expect to interact with their government.

There's also a greater recognition of historically underserved and underrepresented populations. "How do we consciously think about our services and make sure we are respecting everyone's individual rights and place as a human in society?" Tunks said.

2 Be intentional about curating what you want.

Agencies have an opportunity to co-create the future with trusted partners and vendors, Tunks

said. "You're not just hiring someone to do something for you, but you're actually intentionally doing something together."

Take Medicaid modernization. Red Hat is partnering with governments to make the critical — yet monolithic systems — that support this effort more modular and responsive to changing needs.

By breaking systems into smaller chunks, agencies can spur more competition and greater innovation across industry rather than relying on a single contractor, he said. "We've seen that across the Medicaid modernization piece and SNAP [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program], child welfare and the whole spectrum of health and human services."

3 Be intentional about desirability, feasibility and viability.

Red Hat partnered with a large agency to develop a cloud-based system within 30 days to support vaccinations, routine testing and exemption management. "We were able to build a modern solution for them leveraging their existing capabilities, including their AWS [Amazon Web Services] cloud environment, identity management and email systems. This is what we mean when we say hybrid cloud," Tunks said.

Design thinking strategy is key to charting an innovative path forward. Tunks recommends balancing desirability (how much something is wanted), feasibility (how reasonable it is to do) and viability.

"If you can balance those three components, you end up with a principle-based way that becomes repeatable," he said. "Keep scope narrow, specific and achievable. With a great foundation, you can incrementally add or modify to improve over time."



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