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# CX Funding Takes Creative Vision

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**T**he federal government is hoping to fuel development of digitized federal, state and local government services and improved customer experience (CX) capabilities through legislation, such as the American Rescue Plan and new infrastructure legislation. But knowing how to tap funding in these bills can take some creativity, according to a panel of CX experts speaking at a recent session at [Carahsoft's Government Customer Experience and Engagement Summit](#).

Budgets for CX have always been tight, so accessing any funding can help drive the effort forward.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) used funding from the infrastructure bill to help sharpen the customer interface with its grant management system, according to Corey Wagner, chief customer experience officer for the EPA's Office of Mission Support. Wagner's office provides IT services, human resources, contract and acquisition, grants, and facilities management. It has also used CX to improve internal IT operations for EPA employees.

### Highlight Successes

Wagner said his group constructs case studies of how and why the funding should be used for IT and CX projects. If they make a compelling story, case studies can be used to tap funding.

"Making good case studies shows how we can reduce costs [using IT]," he said. "We had one case study that showed how we saved \$400,000 using a help desk initiative. We said, 'we helped you do that, can you help us with funding to continue with these sorts of efforts?'" said Wagner.

Highlighting the benefits of what prime CX capabilities can do can lead to funding for more of it, according to Wagner. "One of the best things that a program like mine can do to get funding is to show the benefits. Really show what it is that we're doing has an impact and that positive customer experience feeds back in financial terms to the agency overall."

CX shines when everyday IT operations don't go as planned and users have to resolve those issues, according to Wagner. "That takes them out of their core familiar environment," he said. Having CX capabilities that allow easier resolution of those kinds of unexpected issues can drive positive feedback and responses, which can, in turn, further drive funding for more CX efforts, he said.

**"We all know there's a lot of funding out there for security and modernization."**

Phoebe Nerdahl, Sr. Director,  
U.S. Public Sector,  
LaunchDarkly

"We all know there's a lot of funding out there for security and modernization," said Phoebe Nerdahl, senior director of the U.S. Public Sector division of LaunchDarkly, noting the Biden administration has several executive orders supporting citizen services and citizen experience. "When it comes to acquiring those funds, having a modern and secure technology strategy and implementation will save agencies costs down the line."

### Build Use Cases

Vendors, Nerdahl said, can help by partnering closely with government customers to help develop the business cases that EPA's Wagner mentioned, by bringing a broad range of experiences to bear.

Data and analytics can help as well. "The amount of data that's out there for agencies to leverage, such

as the data on performance.gov, or analytics.usa.gov, can be used to build the case” for CX funding, she said.

“Champion using that data alongside solid partnerships, so that you’re not alone in the ask [for more funding],” said Nerdahl.

### Pilot Programs and Fail Fast

Taking a different approach to thinking about IT and security can also lead to novel capabilities and funding opportunities, according to Eddie Doyle, cyber strategist at Check Point, a cybersecurity capabilities provider. Using IT capabilities to not only save money, but generate a little on its own, as well, can help increase funding for applications, according to Doyle. He noted that a commercial customer learned how to monetize a new customer loyalty program, which brought in a revenue stream that helped support additional efforts. “If you’re able to generate money, money will find you,” he said.

Pilot programs allow agile approaches that can fail quickly and then be revised or augmented quickly, according to Doyle. Those programs can quickly show weaknesses and problems that can be taken care of in quick revisions, instead of having to replace entire already-installed systems down the road.

“Fail fast. Don’t put up barriers to your success trying to ensure your success when a program isn’t going your way. You’ll fail slowly, waste money, and won’t get any more funding,” he said.

Doyle suggested agencies take a page from the Silicon Valley playbook that Elon Musk uses. “He sends up rockets that he knows are going to blow up because he knows he’s going to benefit from the knowledge [that the failure produces],” he said.

Nerdahl agreed with the pilot program approach. While she acknowledges there are obvious cultural differences between the public sector environment and Silicon Valley companies, pilot programs allow agencies to test things before they are implemented, saving money and effort in the long run. The approach can head problems off before they happen on a wide scale within an agency.

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Eddie Doyle, Cyber Strategist, at Check Point

The EPA has used the ‘Fail Fast’ approach to develop CX capabilities, said Wagner. The agency’s former CIO who set up the agency’s CX program used ‘Fail Fast’ as a guidestone, and to use pilot program successes to help build a case to fund more CX, he said. The agency used the technique to build its IT help desk, he said. Using service level metrics, case-by-case, it took time to work. The CX approach took a look across months of case data, said Wagner. That view exposed the top issues the help desk faced and how to resolve those issues upstream of where they happened, he said. The new process allows users to go in and see where the status of their help request stands and where it is in the resolution process, said Wagner. “That alleviated a lot of the confusion,” he said.

### Look to Cloud, As-a-Service, and Agility

Tapping off-premises solutions like cloud, building software and infrastructure-as-a-

service models, as well as moving to more agile development and implementation of solutions can bolster customer comfort with modernization, according to Wagner.

Agile methodologies, said Nerdhal, are open-ended for continued development.

“They’re never done. Look at these projects as more of a journey of continual modernization,” instead of

tying them to specific budget line items with a set cost and deadline, she said. “Those days are behind us. Long-term strategies are what are going to get you to the next phase.”

Consumers, said Wagner, are getting used to having a much easier and more efficient experience with technology in the private sector. “They’re demanding those kinds of experiences in the public sector,” he said.



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