

## ISSUES TO WATCH

**W**hen it comes to using data to enhance policy development and decision-making, few states can rival Indiana.

In 2014, then-Gov. Mike Pence released a ground-breaking executive order creating Indiana's Management and Performance Hub, a coordinated effort to provide centralized data sharing, correlation and analysis for the state in areas where multiple agencies must work together. When **Deward Neely** joined the state as CIO shortly after, he jumped at the opportunity to leverage data and analytics to tackle tough problems. The state's inaugural project — an effort to reduce the infant mortality rate (which had increased dramatically in recent years) — used data to better understand the problem and explore potential solutions. Next, Neely and team took a similar approach to better understand Indiana's opioid crisis. Under Neely's leadership, Indiana became a trailblazer in the use of data and analytics to address important issues. Though he's now moved on to a position with a nonprofit, Neely recently shared some of the lessons he learned while building a data-driven legacy in Indiana.

### **1 Find creative ways to generate leadership buy-in.**

Neely was fortunate that Indiana leaders supported a new, collaborative, data-driven approach to problem solving early on and made compliance mandatory. Unfortunately, getting buy-in for data projects is not always that easy.

"People generally support the idea of getting more out of data, but it can be hard to make it happen," he says. "We were lucky that the governor's executive order pushed his executive team, the Office of Management and Budget and our office to form a powerful alliance."

Resistance sometimes stems from fear that data will expose flaws or short-comings, so it's important to employ change management strategies and people skills to reassure state leaders and employees that the goal of data initiatives is to improve performance. Neely suggests starting with quick projects that demonstrate the power of data to change outcomes. Preferably, that project should



## Building a Data Legacy: 3 Tips to Get the Ball Rolling

also be high impact and meaningful. Indiana focused on infant mortality and the opioid epidemic — two significant problems that state leaders urgently wanted to address.

"Using data to focus on those types of problems was something everyone could get behind, and that helped justify the investment," says Neely. "Showing the success we had propelled us forward and made it easier to get support for later projects."

### **2 Trust in the technology.**

When Pence issued his executive order in 2014, analytics technology was much less mature than it is today. Now there are more solutions, including an abundance of niche technologies available to address specific pain points and growing reliance on flexible, cloud-based infrastructure.

"The success of data analytics over the years and the existence of more players in the market brought costs down and made the tools easier to use," says Neely. "You don't need a highly technical person anymore. That makes data-based projects much more palatable."

As technology tools become more user-friendly, people are more empowered to envision how data can be used to drive better outcomes. That in turn begins to change the culture. In addition, emerging technologies promise to make such projects even easier in the future.

"Technologies like artificial intelligence hold great potential for taking painstaking hours of work out of managing data sets and looking for trends," says Neely.

### **3 Understand the importance of clean, well-governed data.**

Perhaps the most important thing to remember is the outcomes of data initiatives are only as good as the data itself. That means it's critical to have strong data standards and data governance policies in place.

"As you start to pull data sets together you have to make sure the integrity is there and that you have experts available to clean up your data so you can get the most accurate results," says Neely. "Ultimately, if you can't trust the data, you can't trust the results."