

# Empowering citizens through platform investments



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**FUNDING FOR STATE** and local IT modernization has been one of the bright spots of the post-pandemic world. The American Rescue Plan Act, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, and the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act have delivered more than \$130 billion to state CIOs to bring their digital infrastructure into the 21st century.

The funds came at a critical moment for state and local government, as senior local government IT leaders named modernization, along with cybersecurity, as their top priority for expanding services, according to a [survey](#) released at the National Association of State CIOs conference last year.

The issue is not whether modernization is the way to go, but where to start. In the same survey, more than 48% of CIOs said at least half of their applications need to be modernized.

The problem cannot be understated and neither can the expectations of citizens who grew accustomed to digital-first services during the pandemic. The way forward lies in understanding the options so state and local leaders

can make informed decisions about transforming government.

## LESS TECHNOLOGY, NOT MORE

CIOs are facing the challenge of how to modernize by using platform technology. Most have moved into the cloud, but modernizing with a platform is a new way of thinking. It means deciding which platforms to adopt and which use cases to build onto these platforms.

**“We should take an agile approach to hiring that allows us to train the best and brightest quickly and begin transforming our organizations project by project.”**

When I talk to local officials who are unfamiliar with platform technology, I use the example of the smartphone. It is a platform with social media, email and calendar apps, to name just a few. Now imagine if you had to have a phone for each of those apps. State CIOs face the same dilemma: They want to modernize but not if it means supporting 50 platforms across their organizations.

Modernization means reducing the technology stack. When agencies choose the right platform, they benefit from the use cases that are already on it so they don't have to start from scratch.

## LEVERAGE THE PLATFORM

I offer a two-step strategy for state CIOs. First, I recommend focusing on quick wins that are aligned with key business processes. For one recent project, we did an initial proof of concept in a matter of weeks. Folks loved it. The next project went even better, and the next went even better than that. Meanwhile, leaders were saying, “Wow, look at what we're doing here. This is some amazing stuff!”

Second, and equally important, agencies must hire the right talent, which is a key concern among CIOs.

They want to know where they can find people with platform experience. My advice is: don't. When I was CIO of the Ohio Department of Development, I hired people right out of college and told them if they were still working for me in five years, I had hired the wrong people.

Just as we are adopting an agile approach to technology, we should take an agile approach to hiring that

Source: Unsplash



allows us to train the best and brightest quickly and begin transforming our organizations project by project.

The Wisconsin Department of Safety and Professional Services is a great example of this strategy. A team of talented professionals built a mobile-first platform that empowers citizens to apply for licenses in more

than 200 fields, from pharmacy to dental hygiene.

Chicago, Toronto and St. Louis are also doing great things. My point is that state and local governments everywhere are focused on modernization, and many of them are getting it right. ■

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