6 Steps to Bringing Innovation to Government

Artificial intelligence (AI) and automation tools promise game-changing outcomes in government. Agencies can use them to take the employee experience to a new level and to reshape their constituent interactions for the better. Many organizations are looking to bring forward modernized solutions in order to reduce routine work, engage an increasingly mobile workforce and elevate their constituent-service impacts.

The tools are ready, but the best ways to use them remain a challenge. How can agencies implement the innovation in order to better meet their varied missions? A culture change, data sophistication and ongoing rigor around security are required.

During a recent GovLoop virtual event, government and industry experts discussed strategies for making the most of innovation in general and AI specifically. Their recommendations included:

- Train for AI with a grassroots approach
- Be proactive in building trust
- Ensure security across the mobile ecosystem
- Focus on data competence
- Take a federated approach to data
- Leverage AI for process automation

Watch the event on demand:

Session One — <u>Innovate Your Operations</u>

Session Two — <u>Innovate Your Tools</u>

1

Train for AI With a Grassroots Approach

David Larrimore, Chief Technology Officer, U.S. Department of Homeland Security

With generative AI (GenAI) on the rise in the commercial sector, DHS CTO David Larrimore sees big potential for using it to improve a range of government processes. To do that, though, agencies will need to ensure that end users can interact effectively with this powerful technology.

"What's the keyword you use on generative AI that is not a mile long? What are those sensitive words that really help you interact with this?" Larrimore asked. People must build "muscle memory" around GenAI, an intuitive understanding of how to ask the AI questions that result in meaningful answers.

It's important to take a grassroots approach here to get AI-supported applications into the hands of potential users, so they can get comfortable with how they work, Larrimore said. In doing so, those end users will not only learn how to generate meaningful AI outputs, but also to evaluate those outputs to use effectively.

"AI is about as smart as an intern," he said. "It's not always going to have the perfect context. It's not necessarily going to understand everything you're talking about. You have to review it. You have to make sure that it's correct and accurate."

2

Be Proactive in Building Trust

Jim Richberg, Head of Cyber Policy and the Global Field Chief Information Security Officer, Fortinet

Across the federal space today, there's a risk of mis-, dis- and mal-information: false data used innocently, incorrect data shared maliciously, or accurate data used inaccurately on purpose, respectively.

Fortinet's Jim Richberg calls this "MDM information" for short. While he describes it as a significant risk to election processes, it's something any federal agency might encounter.

Bad actors have a host of incentives, from financial gain to political advantage, to undermine trust in federal government. As agencies innovate, they must work with trusted vendors and technology providers who ensure the highest security levels, Richberg said.

Then, agencies must reassure the public that the modernized systems are, in fact, safe and secure. In the face of MDM information, it's not enough to implement all necessary cybersecurity measures, he said. Agencies also must craft clear messaging around them.

"Sunshine is the best antidote to counter these things," Richberg said. "It's being able to say, 'We have a route of trust. We can validate that something did or did not happen.'"

This is especially important when faith in government is historically low and social polarization is intensifying. "You've got to do this," he said. "You really have to build this narrative."

3

Ensure Security Across the Mobile Ecosystem

Jim Coyle, U.S. Public Sector CTO, Lookout

When it comes to digital innovation, mobility is a key factor for many agencies. They're looking to empower a remote workforce and to deliver mobile apps that support effective constituent engagements.

To bring innovation to life, agencies need a secure mobile ecosystem. They must "start to look at how we defend what we call the modern endpoint," said Lookout's Jim Coyle.

Government must go beyond mobile device management and multifactor authentication because bad actors actively seek ways to get around those, he said. Forward-looking agencies have taken a more proactive approach to mobility, Coyle said: "They have started diving into adding a mobile threat defense capability."

Lookout supports that bigger-picture approach. "We've got over 215 million devices under our purview, and we're looking at anonymized telemetry data: who's attacking these devices, what are they attacking with," he said. With that information, defenders can begin to understand who's behind attacks in the mobile ecosystem and how those tactics are evolving.

This kind of holistic defense will be vital to ensuring mobile workers' digital security, Coyle said, and to hardening innovative constituent-facing applications accessed in the mobile ecosystem.

Focus on Data Competence

Frank Indiviglio, CTO, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

As agencies look to use AI to drive process improvements and gain efficiencies, they need data to feed the AI models. But what data will be most helpful in generating substantive agency improvements?

End users and other stakeholders will be well-positioned to understand what information should be informing AI-driven applications, said NOAA's Frank Indiviglio. Therefore, it's crucial to focus on building a level of data competency across the entire organization.

End users should learn how to ask the important questions. "You need to start having discussions about how your data looks, how it feels," he said. "This data can get us to answers faster." Workers should ask themselves, "What do I have to understand to make it work for me?"

IT teams driving innovation also must help people develop a skeptical eye toward the information they're feeding AI models. "Data has bias in it. If someone tells you there's no bias in this data, they don't know it that well," he said.

Overall, "data skills are going to be really important, even if you're not a technologist," Indiviglio said.

Take a Federated Approach to Data

Dave Erickson, Public Sector Distinguished Architect, Elastic

As agencies increase their innovative applications, they need ready access to data. Too often, though, data is stuck in silos.

With a federated approach to data, IT leaders will be better positioned to bring innovative AI solutions and other cutting-edge applications to the fore, Elastic's Dave Erickson said.

"Sometimes we have to run things like federated searches, cross-cluster searches," he said. To do that, agencies must embrace solutions that work in a hybrid cloud architecture, "something where you can take a technology and deploy it anywhere."

Elastic's approach brings that cross-platform data accessibility to life. "Some of our customers are getting beyond thinking, 'I have to centralize all of my data,'" Erickson said. Instead, they say, "Let's just build a big coalition of all the places where all the best data is, and let's make sure that users can get to it."

With this approach, it's possible to run queries not just across an entire federal agency, but across multiple agencies. For example, the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) is doing this to facilitate governmentwide cybersecurity efforts. With Elastic, CISA "can ask one question, and it shoots that question out to hundreds of agencies," explained Erickson. And this works regardless of where the data resides.

Leverage AI for Process Automation

Steve Ly, Federal Platform Architect, ServiceNow

Many people are looking to understand GenAI's potential benefits. ServiceNow is already demonstrating the art of the possible, with internal AI deployments of GenAI applications that streamline and enhance search functions and content generation, said Federal Platform Architect Steve Ly.

"An employee can go to the support portal, ask a question and get a synthesized summary based on the most relevant knowledge-based article," he explained. By delivering answers quickly and accurately, this approach has decreased by 54% the need to go beyond self-service and resulted in organizational cost savings of about $8,000 a week, he said.

Within the company's product line, "we've developed and deployed case and incident summarization, and resolution generation," Ly said. That's a potential boon for agencies with a constituent-service mission set.

When a problem must be handed off from one customer service agent to another, "we've cut that time in half by being able to generate a summary of what was already done," he said. "Now, the agent is not wasting the customer's time by trying to sift through all the notes."

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To learn more, watch the full sessions on-demand:

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