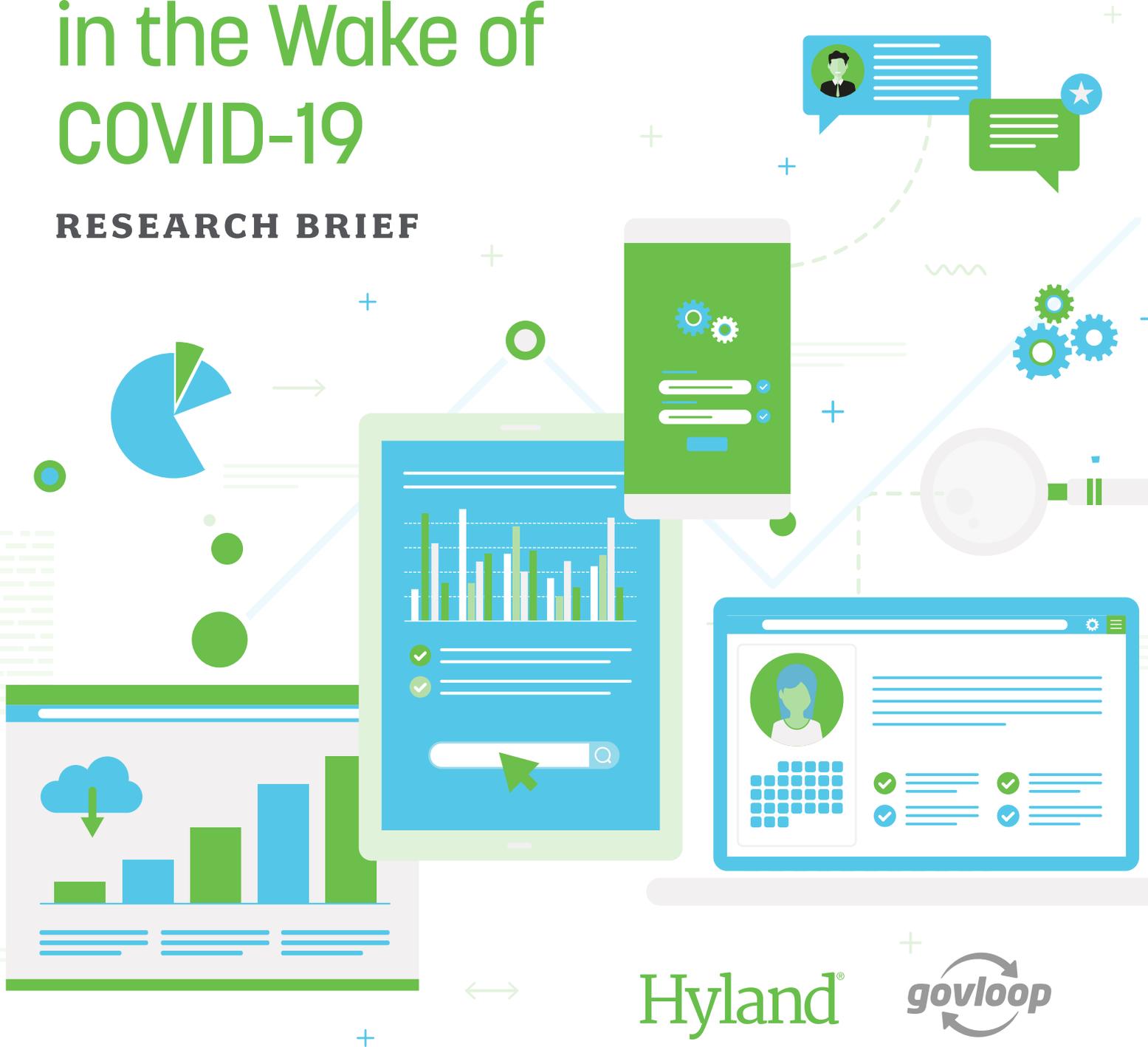


LESSONS LEARNED: Future-Proofing Government Agencies in the Wake of COVID-19

RESEARCH BRIEF



Hyland®

govloop

Introduction

Despite continual advances in IT, many government agencies still rely on manual, paper-based processes to serve constituents and achieve their mission. While many agencies and departments have strived to modernize their processes over the years, budget constraints, legacy systems and heavy workloads have often hindered efforts to fully digitize operations and service delivery.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shined a bright light on how these outdated practices further create operating challenges when office locations are closed and employees work remotely without access to physical files. For example, many state and local agencies have seen a dramatic surge in unemployment requests due to COVID-19, but lack the online tools that would enable them to quickly respond and efficiently process applications to meet citizen needs.

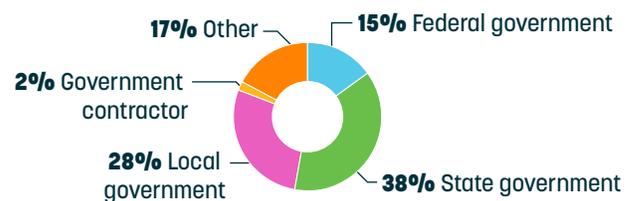
As a result, there has never been a more critical time for agencies to transform the way they work so they can deliver digital services and avoid disruption. **Digital transformation happens when government agencies reform their processes to leverage modern technology for delivering public services.** Agencies that don't evolve and future-proof their infrastructure to withstand any crisis are at risk for ongoing operational challenges.

To better understand how agencies are responding to COVID-19 and the need to deliver digital services, GovLoop partnered with Hyland Software on this research brief. In the following pages, we share results from a community survey of 117 federal, state and local government employees and contractors knowledgeable about digital services and their views on the topic (See Figure 1). 58% of respondents said they are working remotely, 23% said they are sometimes working remotely and sometimes in the office, and 20% said they are not working remotely. We also interviewed Kevin Albrecht, Senior Customer Advisor - Government at Hyland, on how agencies can modernize to improve efficiencies and deliver better service.

**Please note that not all charts equal 100% due to rounding certain percentages.*

FIGURE 1

I work for...



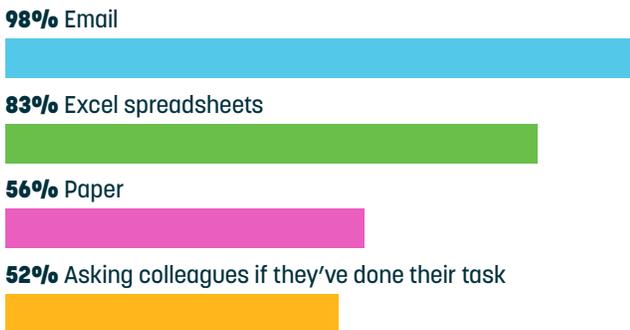
COVID-19 and Cracks in the System

Across all levels of government, COVID-19 has brought to light the extent to which agencies depend on manual processes and cumbersome technology.

GovLoop’s survey found that 56% of respondents reported their agency still relies on paper-based processes. Ninety-eight percent said the same of email, while 83% said their agency is dependent on Excel spreadsheets (See Figure 2). Although employees can share emails and spreadsheets digitally, it often creates inefficiencies or confusion. Many agencies, for instance, struggle to identify who owns which file during workflows.

FIGURE 2

Which of the following manual tools does your agency rely upon? Select all that apply.



Email or Excel spreadsheet approaches are also not viable long-term solutions as they can be slow, inefficient and prone to human error and security risks. For example, think of the scenario of an agency employee working in an office and a coworker at another location requesting a document. After printing the materials, they are signed, walked to a scanner, copied and emailed. From start to finish, this sequence has many hands-on steps that take up valuable time and risk potentially exposing confidential information.

“These are incredibly inefficient and time-consuming processes,” Albrecht said of manual activities. “They lead to frustration from employees and constituents.”

And, with the remote workforce, they become more difficult. COVID-19 has compounded all these things.”

Manual processes are not the only roadblock between agencies and digital services. While 45% of respondents cited paper-based approaches as an obstacle, even more (49%) said outdated applications and systems are their agency’s biggest challenges to delivering digital services. Respondents additionally listed siloed data and subpar mobile access for their applications and systems. Each of these scenarios creates more workflow processing and operating issues for agencies. (See Figure 3).

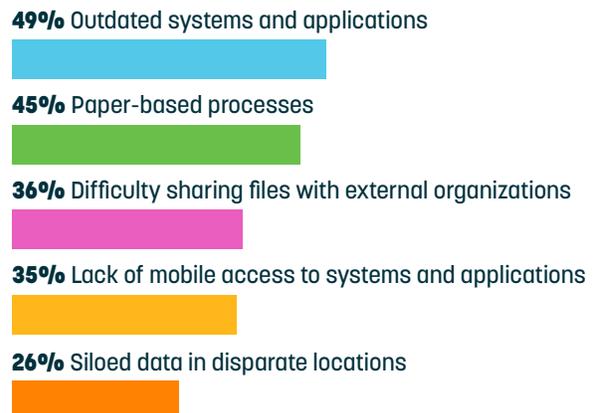
To improve their operations, agencies need digital processes with content – such as applications, forms and supporting documentation – managed online via a secure, centralized platform, accessible from wherever employees are located and from any device.

But how do agencies upgrade operations that have remained the same for generations? According to Albrecht, digital transformation is an incremental makeover that can unfold at the ideal pace for each agency.

“Pick the highest pain point for your employees and constituents and start there. Continue to expand digitization across your agency in stages that work for your resources and time availability,” he said.

FIGURE 3

What are the biggest challenges your agency faces with delivering services digitally? Select all that apply.

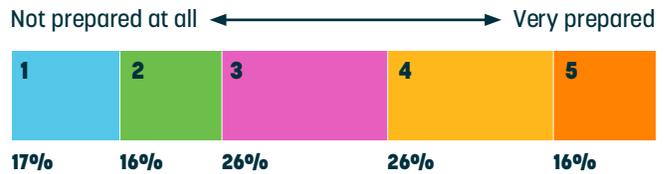


Weathering the COVID-19 Crisis

No agency wants to be caught off guard by a natural disaster, health crisis or other setback. GovLoop’s survey found 33% of respondents believed their agency was not fully capable of remote work when COVID-19 struck.

Participants ranked how prepared their agency was to work remotely during COVID-19 on a one to five scale, with five meaning “very prepared” and one denoting “not prepared at all.” All told, 33% of respondents said their agency was unprepared or very unprepared (See Figure 4). When catastrophe physically impacts an agency, any number of employees who believe they cannot work remotely might be too much.

FIGURE 4
How prepared was your agency to work remotely during COVID-19, on a scale of 1-5? (1 = not prepared at all, 5 = very prepared)



Next, respondents were asked how their agency adapted to the COVID-19 pandemic using digital services. Common answers included adjusting access, procedures and tools to fit these unusual circumstances. A snapshot of quotes from respondents reveals COVID-19 caused massive upheaval at agencies and prompted changes (See “Agency Voices” below).

Agency Voices: A Snapshot of the COVID-19 Era

“Digital services was already part of our agency. Since COVID-19, the digital services division is working on enhancing our existing platform. Unfortunately, I’m not part of that division but I’m aware that they are enhancing what they currently do.”

“Converted all public records requests to online and online scheduling for public fingerprinting services.”

“We had to rethink mail, including deliveries by UPS and FedEx. We rely heavily on timing of things, so scheduling and being available were hard to get going. Signatures on documents and letters was easy with PDFs and our LincPass, glad that was set up. Need more scanning / digitizing capability to turn all old hard copies to digital. I see that as the biggest hurdle.”

“City Hall has been closed to the public since mid-March and largely transitioned to digital services for customers and office workers.”

“Changed business practices to make employees and agencies deal with us electronically, communicate effusively and save everything.”



With agencies' staff often dispersed across multiple locations, Albrecht added that COVID-19 worsened their problems for operating efficiently.

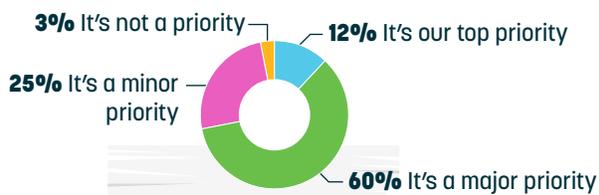
“There are all these manual processes which rely on collaboration that are falling apart right now,” he said. “It becomes even more difficult with the remote workforce — many people are at home or isolated.”

GovLoop's survey, conducted after six months of remote work, shows that every level of government sees the coronavirus as a tipping point for transformational shifts.

Among potential changes, 72% of respondents said reducing manual processes is their agency's top priority — or at least a major priority — in the wake of COVID-19. Twelve percent said it was their top priority, and 60% said it was a major priority (See Figure 5).

With over 70% stating that reducing manual processes is a top or major priority, we asked agencies to take inventory of what tools they have for transformation and what tools they need.

FIGURE 5
How much of a priority is reducing manual processes at your agency due to COVID-19?



Leveraging Digital Tools During COVID-19

While no two agencies have the same needs, there are several key digital tools that can be considered the building blocks for digital transformation.

Which of these tools did government agencies already have when the COVID-19 pandemic began? Participants ranked eight tools currently aiding their agencies:

1. Electronic forms appeared first, with 79% of respondents leveraging them. These online tools are crucial for remote work as workers can access them anywhere at any time. Even better, electronic forms are easy for agencies and workers to adopt and integrate into their processes.

2. Web portals placed at 65%. As a public-facing interface, a web portal can enhance citizen engagement and enable 24/7 communication. By collecting and processing documents in real-time agency-wide, web portals can also improve internal coordination and response times for responding to constituents.

3. Online case management took 44%. This capability allows agencies to run dynamic case workflows to enhance collaboration and security. Additionally, online case management can boost transparency by making documents more easily accessible to constituents and employees.

4. Cloud-ready content platforms grabbed 42%. By leveraging the cloud or a shared services model, agencies can reduce the time and cost associated with maintaining their technology infrastructure. Once operational, these platforms provide centralized, secure and cost-effective document management with anywhere, anytime access.

5. Enterprise file sharing rated at 41%. Agency files often contain sensitive data, so a secure platform for rapidly accessing and sharing them is vital. Enterprise file sharing can not only protect this information — it bridges any physical distance between employees and across agencies and departments for sharing information. Plus, enterprise file sharing can create an audit trail of activities that documents how agencies are addressing security risks and complying with security, accessibility and records retention regulations.

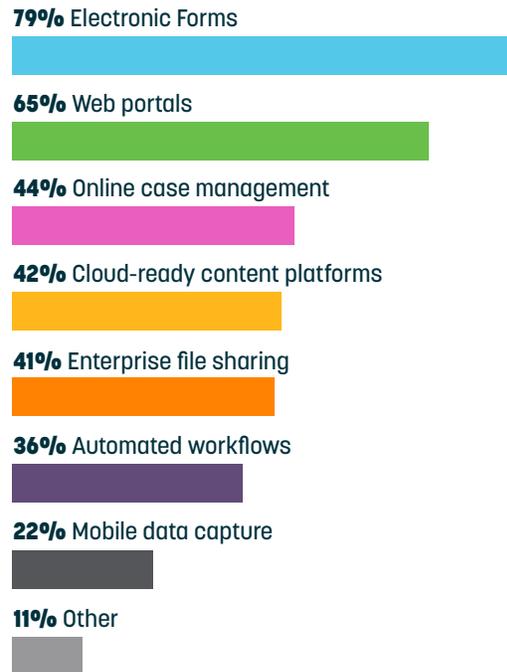
6. Automated workflows appeared next with 36%. Business process automation involves rules-based workflows for performing processes and procedures with little to no human intervention. Automated workflows can elevate efficiency by directing tasks to the appropriate staff while also performing load-balancing. In turn, this improves productivity and speeds reviews and approvals of constituent applications and requests.

7. Mobile data capture netted 22%. This tool allows employees to capture information from any mobile device. With mobile capture, staff can import documents, forms, photos and more and move them quickly into workflows from wherever they are working - in the office, at home or in the field.

8. Other digital tools emerged last with 11%. From social media applications to telehealth platforms, video conferencing to virtual chat rooms, respondents shared multiple ways of operating digitally. Collectively, these tools can assist agencies with operating smoothly in physical offices or remotely. (See Figure 6).

“Ultimately, you’re looking at tools that enable dynamic case management of tasks and faster, error-free processing of work,” Albrecht said of digital services. **“Your goal is as little human intervention as possible. Then workers can focus on the more urgent and complicated tasks that require their attention.”**

FIGURE 6
What tools does your agency have to deliver services digitally? Select all that apply.

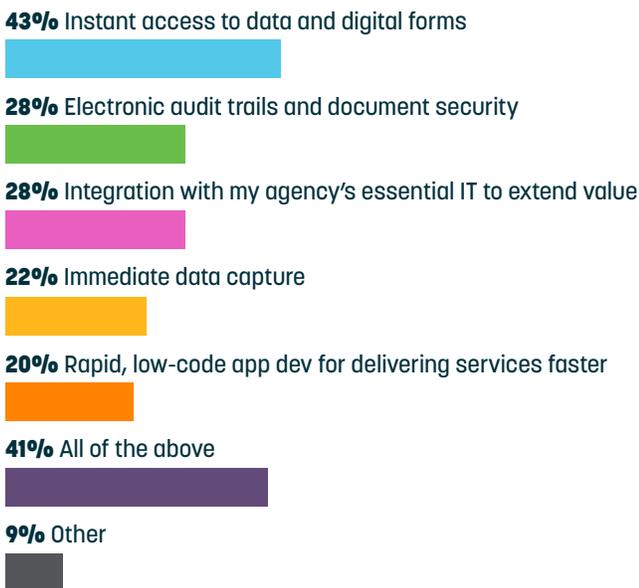


Embracing Digitization Post-COVID-19

GovLoop’s survey discovered that while many respondents have already implemented tools to enable delivery of digital services, participants said their agency needs additional capabilities to fully transform and operate at optimal effectiveness post-COVID-19.

Forty-three percent said their agency needs to deliver instant access to data and digital forms, while 28% said they should deliver on electronic audit trails and document security. Twenty-eight percent said integration with their agency’s essential IT is needed to extend its value. Twenty-two percent said immediate data capture, and 20% said rapid, low-code application development for delivering services faster. Forty-one percent said their agency needs to deliver all five options, followed by 9% who said other options. Alternatives included enhanced communications and tools addressing major budget issues (See Figure 7).

FIGURE 7
What attributes does your agency need to deliver digital services more effectively? Select all that apply.

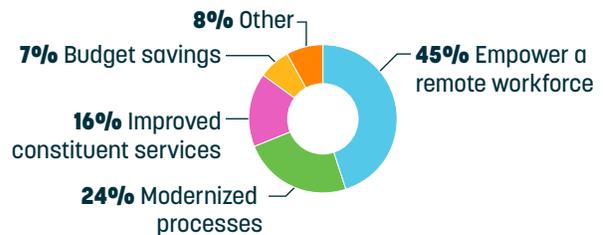


Due to these many components, digital transformation can seem intimidating to agencies. Albrecht acknowledged, however, agencies can learn to digitally crawl before they walk or run.

“You don’t have to transform your entire process or agency from head to toe all at once,” he said. “Use what we’ve learned from the COVID-19 pandemic to figure out what your employees and constituents need. Break down those lessons into manageable steps for process improvement.”

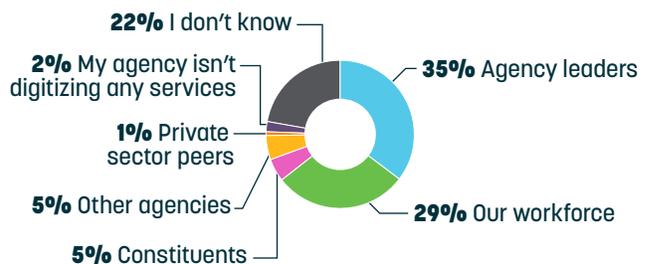
When it comes to advantages they’ve already realized from digitization, 45% said empowering a remote workforce was the biggest perk. Twenty-four percent said modernized processes, and 16% said improved constituent services. Seven percent said budget savings, and 8% said other benefits such as enhancing communications (See Figure 8).

FIGURE 8
What is the greatest benefit your agency has seen from digitization?



Additionally, respondents determined which groups are driving most of the digital transformation at their agencies. Thirty-five percent said their agency’s leaders, 29% said their agency’s workforce, 22% were unsure and 5% said the constituents (See Figure 9).

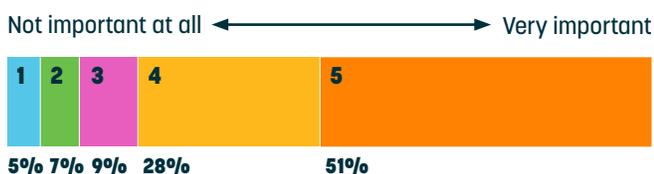
FIGURE 9
Who is most driving your agency’s efforts to digitize its processes and services?



Getting Agencies Tomorrow's Tools Today

Digital services loom large in the post-COVID-19 era. Looking ahead, 79% of respondents said that digital services would be important or very important. (See Figure 10).

FIGURE 10
How important will digital services be at your agency going forward, on a scale of 1-5? (1 = not important at all, 5 = very important)



Remote work in government, meanwhile, will most likely become more common nationwide. Albrecht said a single platform with a robust suite of digital capabilities and automation tools could emerge as the key to working successfully in a virtual environment.

How a Content Services Platform Can Help

While the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated why agencies need to be able to effectively work remotely and deliver services online, there can be seeming hurdles on the path to complete digital transformation. GovLoop's survey uncovered that many respondents are already seeing the benefits of digital services, but there may be perceived impediments to complete digitization. Often government agencies are so invested in legacy systems that they are hesitant to replace them with modern digital upgrades. Or, agencies may implement several disparate applications that further separate and isolate vital data and information.

"Legacy systems are embedded in most agency operations," Albrecht said. "That can be thought of as a major problem. But the agency doesn't necessarily have to get rid of them."

A content services platform allows agencies to transform their processes without the need to replace existing systems. This platform:

- **Centralizes** documents, forms and case management in an secure, online repository, reducing manual processes, automating workflow and enhancing service delivery.
- **Integrates** seamlessly with legacy technology and core systems, connecting all the important information agency personnel need to do their jobs quickly, accurately and efficiently.
- **Enables** employees to access documents with just a single click from the familiar interfaces they use every day to reduce time-consuming searching for information.

*"People aren't looking for that piece of paper. They're looking for the **content** on that piece of paper. When you have the information in a content services platform, no matter what you're doing, you can see the content **in the context you need for your job.**"*

Kevin Albrecht

Senior Customer Advisor - Government, Hyland

The flexibility does not stop there — agencies can leverage a suite of scalable, configurable tools to meet their unique requirements and specific use cases. Across all levels of government and agency missions, a modern content services platform can transform processes to enhance constituent engagement, reduce costs and empower a remote workforce.

"Think of this as a platform that can be leveraged at every agency and across every government program," Albrecht said.

Conclusion

There is no time like the present for digital transformation. COVID-19 has undeniably strained agencies, but it has also provided the impetus to deliver enhanced digital services and greater efficiencies.

The benefits of digitization will extend well past COVID-19 by instituting a future-proof agency that can respond to any global challenge. Agencies should look to continue on their path to modernization by focusing on one process or department at a time.

Ultimately, with a modern content services platform, agencies can reduce their reliance on manual, outdated methods that make it difficult to serve constituents in their time of greatest need. Digital tools such as rapid low-code application development, a web portal and mobile capture can reap significant time and cost savings while getting agencies a standing ovation from their constituents.



About Hyland Software

Hyland is a leading content services provider that enables thousands of organizations to deliver better experiences to the people they serve. Hyland solutions help each level of government meet today's challenges of automation, modernization and citizen engagement while laying the foundation for simplified, streamlined and digital government.

www.hyland.com/government



About GovLoop

GovLoop's mission is to "connect government to improve government." We aim to inspire public-sector professionals by serving as the knowledge network for government. GovLoop connects more than 300,000 members, fostering cross-government collaboration, solving common problems and advancing government careers. GovLoop is headquartered in Washington, D.C., with a team of dedicated professionals who share a commitment to connect and improve government.

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