

Getting Clear on Transformation

We hear about “transformation” so often that the word can lose meaning. But revitalizing, revisoning and renewing the work of your agency is anything but dull. That was the focus of a recent GovLoop online event produced in collaboration with ServiceNow, [Defining Transformation and How Agencies Can Achieve It](#).

When we asked our experts to define transformation, they offered three key themes:

- Building a better government for the future
- Delivering better services
- Improving processes and workflows

They also emphasized that transformation isn’t just a one-time exercise — it’s a strategic change meant to be long-lasting and ongoing. Here are some of their recommendations for making your transformation successful.

Focus on the People You Serve

“Transformation is about the people that we serve and how we can deliver better government services,” said Glorimar Ripoll Balet, Director of Product, United States Digital Service, Executive Office of the President.

“The people we serve must be at the center of everything we do.”

That means referring to the agency’s mission when setting priorities. “Establishing priorities is one of the most important aspects of successful transformation,” Ripoll Balet said. “We prioritize for the greatest good for the greatest amount of people in the greatest need.”

To do that, USDS uses human-centered design to include the perspectives of underserved demographic groups. “Many organizations skip this step completely,” she said, “but it’s one of the most essential steps in the transformation process. This is the time to understand the problem, identify challenges and identify the needs of the people we serve.”

At the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), one transformation brought park permit requests online. “It’s been a really transformative change,” said Jonathan Alboum, Federal Chief Technology Officer at ServiceNow, an IT service management provider that helped implement the FWS program. “People can now interact with their government in a way that looks like the rest of their online life,” he said.

“The goal is to bring more and more permits online and make it so program areas don’t have to go through IT,” he continued. Low-code capabilities, templates, and other platform features make that possible.

The focus on mission also can be persuasive in securing project funding. “Getting funding sometimes can be difficult because it may not be an optimal priority for the organization,” explained Fredy Diaz, Deputy Chief Data Officer with the United States Department of Agriculture. But focusing on the end result, and how the project will advance the organization’s service goals, can make a successful case. “Paint a picture ... aligning to strategic plans of the agency or department,” he said.



Break Down Barriers

For transformation to work, it can't be isolated in traditional silos. "At USDA, getting an enterprise data platform was transformative," Diaz said. "Before that, all the various missions had to figure things out on their own." The platform gave them a common toolset, framework and language, and that, in turn, allowed the department to improve its data capabilities, he said.

"Transformation isn't something that will succeed if it's in a silo," said Susan Little, Director, Division of Records and Information Systems at the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services

(CMS). "The way to get things done is to understand who the stakeholders are and have partnerships [with them]."

That allows overlapping program areas to work together, adding value to all of them.

And communication is essential to that partnership. "The communications plan needs to tell everyone outside of our program what transformation has happened," Little said. "What does the change look like? What does it do? Where are we now? And what does it look like in the future?"

Set a Baseline, Measure, and Tell the Story

Showing results is important.

Metrics can tell you what your transformation has achieved and whether it's moving in the right direction. In order for your measurement to be effective, noted Alboum with ServiceNow, you need to begin with where you are. "That baseline is so important, because if you don't know what the baseline is, it's hard to know if things are better after you've transformed."

It's also important to choose metrics appropriate to your mission and the change you're implementing. "[The measure of] success will depend on the nature of the organization and the services offered," said Ripoll Balet. "But I suggest we will always have some metrics related to service delivery. This can be output outcomes or impact metrics. But you need to be intentional about measuring success in your particular transformation effort."

That doesn't always mean dry data. "There's a storytelling aspect, being able to show where you've made an impact," said Diaz. "That's where the anecdotal examples [come in], especially where you can highlight, 'we were not able to do this before.' Getting success stories can be even more powerful than data."

And that leads back to where we started: people. "Transformation is about the people," said Little. **"The people who are doing the work and the people we are providing services to. That's what transformation is. Many times, we use technical solutions or technology to provide that, but it's about the people."**

