

# How to Put New Ideas Into Practice



Small ideas can lead to big change, the kind that transforms how an agency operates, delivers on its mission and serves its constituents. But transformation is called “disruptive” for a reason: It can be really tough to implement.

During a recent GovLoop event, [How to Move Forward With New Ideas: Your Digital Transformation Playbook](#), leaders across government and industry offered how-to advice on transitioning from tired processes to state-of-the-art systems, and discussed:

- The realities of transformation
- How to think differently
- Ways to embrace uncertainty

Agencies don’t magically achieve their long-term goals, the speakers explained. Real change requires organizations and their employees to take small but significant steps toward a yearslong vision — and to understand that in advance.

Here is a roadmap for realizing your agency’s objectives.

# The Realities of Transformation

*Agencies undertake transformation with ambitious intentions. But getting there requires setting realistic goals along the way. That sometimes means hard compromises in the short term. Three experts in government innovation shared some practical considerations that can make your changes successful.*



**Adam Goldberg**, Business Transformation Expert, Bureau of Fiscal Service

## Modern, Seamless and Secure

Any transformation should be informed by customer expectations, Adam Goldberg, of the Bureau of Fiscal Service, advised. “We’re creating an experience for our customers and partners that’s modern, seamless and secure,” he said.

In fiscal services, that includes recognizing how people now handle transactions — for instance, that paper checks are rapidly becoming obsolete, Goldberg explained.

Users also expect to complete a transaction without having to jump from website to website or print something out to mail in. “Make that experience a simple one, and similar to what you’d get in the private sector,” he said.



**Christopher Sutton**, Federal Presales Solutions Architect, Dell Technologies

## Focus on Desired Outcomes

“When you’re implementing a digital transformation, you want to make sure that it’s the best value for your business and for your customers, both internal and external. And you also want to put in solutions that will attract the best talent,” said Christopher Sutton, from Dell.

He recommended agencies focus on those changes that will have the greatest impact on users, and choose metrics that will honestly reflect success in those changes.

In terms of data, Sutton advised launching use cases that analyze data “in every possible way,” and making a priority of data governance.

And according to Sutton, choosing the right technology will also help attract and retain employees, especially younger ones.



**Jason Dudash**, Principal Specialist Solution Architect, Red Hat

## Use What You’ve Got

Agencies know they need to change and change faster, but that sometimes means adapting existing systems to new needs. “Even though it’s simpler to build something new ... we can’t just leave the legacy behind and rebuild everything,” said Jason Dudash with Red Hat.

One way to coordinate the old and new, he said, is to abstract applications and data so existing systems can work with each other and take advantage of new cloud-based systems.

“Your main goal should be to use your existing functionality and data in new applications so you can derive new value from your old applications.”

# Think Differently

*Agencies often have an unhealthy attachment to old ways of doing and thinking. That limits what organizations can accomplish now, and it can tie their hands radically in years to come. Here, three experts explain what it means to have a fresh perspective.*



**Dorothy Aronson**, CIO/Chief Data Officer, National Science Foundation (NSF)

## Adapt to a Changing World

“The government is a living organism, just like the rest of us,” said Aronson, of NSF. “It’s always growing, always changing.” Agencies should decide where they want to be in five years, for instance, and then complete small projects that build to the five-year endpoint.

The smaller the project, the faster you can implement the solution, and the faster you can fail. “It’s very hard to allow yourself to be proud of failure,” Aronson acknowledged, but we succeed by learning from our mistakes. And besides, the old ways of doing things are not practical (or possible) anymore.

“We have to learn to be happy in an ever-changing world,” she said.



**Chris Townsend**, Vice President for Public Sector, Elastic

## Ditch the Data Silos

Government has access to lots of data, but often it’s spread between different environments and siloed off for separate reasons, such as cyber threat detection or a mission application, said Elastic’s Townsend.

And while some agencies have data platforms that give them powerful search capabilities — so they can search the same data using the same platform, for more than one objective — agencies often neglect those broad-based features. They create silos while using technology designed to eliminate silos.

According to Townsend, that is “creating operational inefficiency, it’s cost inefficiency,” and someone needs to ask agencies, ““hey, you’ve got all of this power and all of this capability, why not utilize it?””



**Andy Maclsaac**, Solutions Marketing Director for Public Sector, Alteryx

## Know Your Data

The public sector has a data problem: There’s too much of it for agencies to digest and use. They “really [are] not able to access it or really leverage it to gain insights,” and they don’t understand the quality of what they have, said Maclsaac, of Alteryx.

Technology exists — what might be called a “one-stop, unified analytics platform” — that allows agencies, regardless of their employees’ technical know-how, to quickly derive actionable insights from data, he explained.

This gives organizations, Maclsaac added, “the ability to kind of look around the corners ... and report on what did happen [and] start looking at what might happen....”

# Embrace Uncertainty

*New things require a culture shift. When change is underway, it isn't the time for an employee or leader to shrink into a corner. Instead, it's a time to get brave and embrace the uncertainty. Three change experts identified strategies you can use to move into the future — by staying nimble, data-focused and mission-driven.*



**Anthony Rodgers**, Director of Technology Transformation Services, Michigan DTMB

## Seize Opportunities to Start Over

Many times, a legacy system will be useful and necessary in government work.

But there are times when something should not be preserved but replaced.

Rodgers, with the Michigan Department of Technology Management and Budget (DTMB), said it's like working on an old house.

"At some point, that underlying structure needs to be repaired, and you have to strip everything off and begin again," he said.

When you find an opportunity to start over, take it. And keep looking for chances to begin again from scratch.

Worried that you'll go too far? Clear guardrails can help, said Rodgers. Boundaries help us awaken our creativity — they support "freedom of movement" — because we then know where to stop.



**Winston Chang**, Chief Technology Officer for Global Public Sector, Snowflake

## Evaluate the Data Culture

Data curation and hygiene are what drives the success (or failure) of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) in government work, according to Snowflake's Chang.

In his view, what matters is "the culture around data hygiene, the quality of the data, the way we collect it, how we keep it clean."

And by combining datasets, you can learn so much about your organization as a whole, before you even begin to incorporate your newest tools.

"Your data operations, your ML operations, your training of your people — those are the fundamentals of everything," he said. "Get your data governance set up. Do your hygiene. Don't even worry about the AI until you get the fundamentals right."



**Amy Haseltine**, Deputy Assistant Commissioner for IT Acquisitions, General Services Administration

## Empower Employees

Haseltine, of GSA, sees change as an opportunity to support and empower employees.

"Mission is our foundation, leveraging modernization is a means to make it happen," she said. "And adopting a cultural mindset to understand the risk associated with change, and to strengthen our risk appetite to embrace and grow with change, is vital."

She has a method for remembering the basics, and she calls it "STEAM Ahead."

**S** is for safe, secure, sustainable infrastructure. **T** is for tools, technology and transparency. **E** is for the business ecosystem. **A** is for accountability, and **M** is for mission, modernization and mind shift.

When leaders can help employees keep those concepts in mind, they are much better equipped to adapt to change and to grow with it, she said.

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