

# New Technology Requires a Cultural Change

When we talk about emerging technologies in 2024, one dominates all the rest: artificial intelligence (AI). But it's not the only new technology agencies are implementing. Others include geospatial analytics, hybrid cloud, edge computing, data visualization and platform as a service.

At a recent GovLoop online event, [5 Emerging Technologies You Need to Know](#), five experts from government and industry shared their thoughts on how best to approach technological change.

They emphasized that new tech doesn't work if people don't accept it. That means that cultural change is needed, too.

## THE PARTICIPANTS

**William Cahoe**, Director of Communications and Outreach for 10x, General Services Administration (GSA)

**Michael Lawrence Evans**, Director of Emerging Technologies, Mayor's Office, City of Boston

**Adam Leonard**, Chief Analytics Officer & Director, Information Innovation & Insight, Texas Workforce Commission

**Jacqueline Ponti-Lazaruk**, Chief Innovation Officer, USDA Rural Development (RD) Innovation Center

**Francisco Ramirez**, Chief Architect, State and Local Government, Red Hat

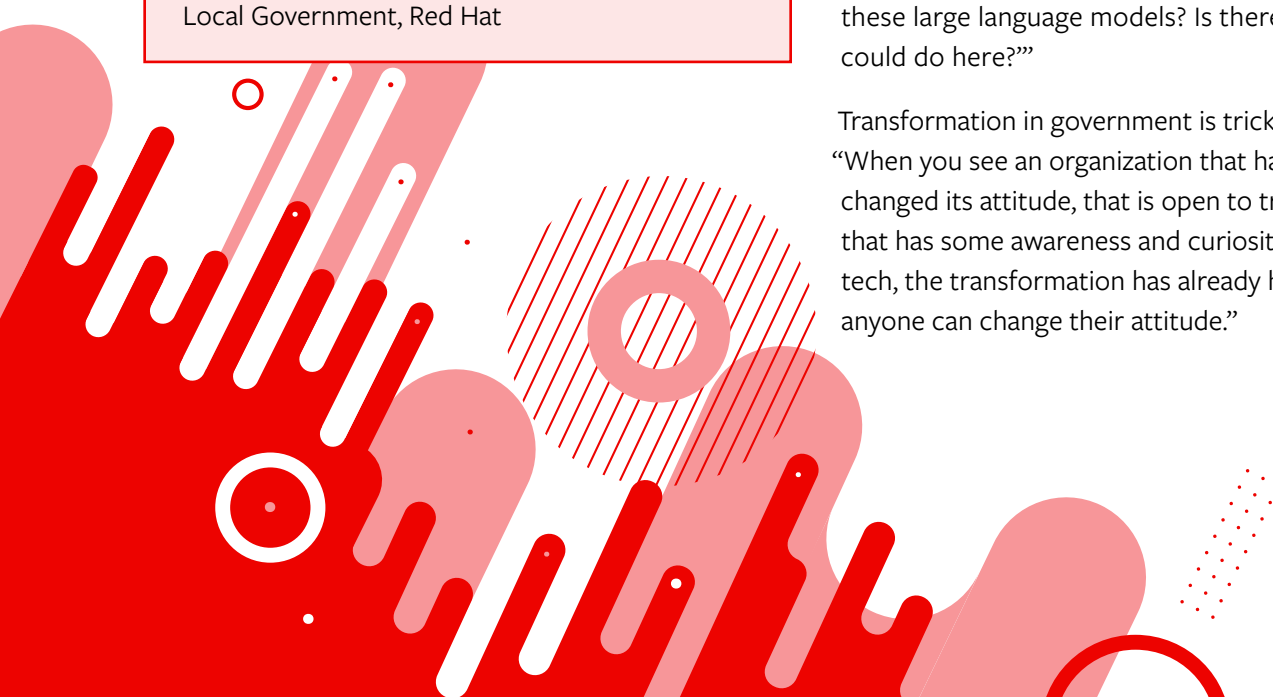
## EMBRACE THE ADVENTURE

Adopting new technology, including AI, requires an agency that's comfortable with change. "Several of the barriers that we face tend to be cultural," said Michael Lawrence Evans, with the city of Boston. "Is there even a basic willingness to try new technology?"

In government, he said, "you tend to be dealing with people who are risk-averse, and they're overseeing essential services. You need to show some respect for that."

But change can be easier to accept when it's tied to improving services, GSA's William Cahoe said. "Over time, you see people say, 'Hey, what's this human-centered design thing? I think we might be able to benefit our end users a little more.' Or 'What are these large language models? Is there something we could do here?'"

Transformation in government is tricky, he noted: "When you see an organization that has completely changed its attitude, that is open to trying new things, that has some awareness and curiosity about emerging tech, the transformation has already happened. And anyone can change their attitude."





## FIND COMPELLING USE CASES

Use cases that are relatively easy to implement and provide quick, observable results encourage buy-in. “When you’re looking at implementing some of these technologies, [think], ‘Where can I have some quick wins?’” advised Red Hat’s Francisco Ramirez.

The most persuasive use cases help the agency meet its mission using data and tools it already has on hand, he said.

Jacqueline Ponti-Lazaruk at USDA RD is using AI to organize information about more than 70 programs to make it easier for people to find the resources they need.

For instance, RD uses AI for preliminary evaluations of application and project eligibility, freeing time for employees to work directly with customers later in the process. “We have all kinds of customers across rural America, and while they can and do access government services online, they still want face-to-face interaction,” Ponti-Lazaruk said.

Adam Leonard of the Texas Workforce Division sees potential for AI in matching applicants to jobs. “One of the things you can do with this technology is help a person figure out whether they’re a good fit for a job,” Leonard said.

AI can compare a resume (with the personally identifiable info removed) to a job posting and determine how well a candidate meets the job qualifications, Leonard said.

## LISTEN TO USERS

To choose the right tech, you must consult end users. “There are a lot of exciting new tools, but I would encourage people to stay focused on listening to your colleagues, to the people you’re partnering with and to the people you serve,” Evans said.

At USDA, that means “a dialog between our staff and the community or business or citizens, and it provides the opportunity to understand their needs and challenges and match [them] to a program,” said Ponti-Lazaruk. “The best way to improve our federal programs is to listen to our customers.” The traditional government comment process often happens too late, she said.

## KEEP HUMANS IN CHARGE

AI offers many possibilities, but it’s a helper, not a replacement, Leonard said. “AI is a tool to support human decision-making by providing better information, so decisions can be better informed. There are real opportunities here to leverage computers for what they do best and humans for what they do best. But the idea is not to remove humans from the decision-making loop.”

People are also needed to ensure the accuracy of AI-generated information, Ramirez added. “You need people to look at the data because, essentially, you’re [the one] on the hook. You can’t remove the human [from] the process,” he said.

