

Disruptive change is well within reach for government agencies



This is the most optimal time for government agencies to reinvent themselves and the constituent experience. **Morgan Reed**, executive government advisor with Amazon Web Services (AWS) and former chief information officer with the state of Arizona, explains why in this Q&A.

Why is now the best time for government agencies to pursue disruptive change?

There are many converging forces that are challenging governments in ways they have never seen before. The pandemic gave us a once-in-a-generation opportunity with new federal funding to modernize legacy systems with technology that's flexible, scalable, and secure. A modern foundation in the cloud helps governments start faster, spend less money, and adapt in real time to the evolving needs of their employees and constituents, including inclusion, diversity, and equity goals and addressing workforce challenges. It's no longer about whether governments can afford to upgrade. It's about investments that get the best outcomes.

What can agencies achieve by pushing the envelope on modernization?

A few of my favorite stories from the pandemic:

- ✔ **West Virginia** stood up a virtual unemployment services call center in 72 hours that can take 60,000 calls a day, with 96% not needing an agent.
- ✔ **New York state** installed a health data lake in 11 days, allowing near-real-time, data-driven decisions on things like tracking COVID-19 hotspots and getting personal protection equipment to those in need.
- ✔ **Arizona** worked with cities and counties to create a mobile app that connects its homeless population to multiple programs they may be eligible for.

What are some best practices you've learned from these success stories?

We've found that effective projects have:

- ✔ **Strong leaders:** Rather than just talk about change, they secure the senior leadership team's conviction and alignment with their objectives.
- ✔ **Aggressive goals:** Leaders spell out what they aim to accomplish, by when, and how they will measure it.
- ✔ **Skills training:** Agencies invest in their people and bring them along for the AWS Cloud journey, teaching them how to do their jobs in new and better ways.
- ✔ **Prudent beginnings:** There's no need to do everything at first. Agencies can find lots of easy things to move to the AWS Cloud while developing a model for governance and security.

How did these projects' leaders overcome resistance to change?

Each one had a champion with a vision of what better government looked like. They rallied their teams to align with their vision and communicate to stakeholders when they had pushback. For those who don't buy in at first, you must meet them where they're at and understand their objections. Data and use cases can help you overcome interruptions and keep projects moving.

What does it mean to be a future-ready government?

We encourage agencies to focus on:

- ✔ **Workforce enablement and training:** Employees need relevant, modern skills and a culture that keeps them happy and continuously adapting to constituents' needs.
- ✔ **Constituent engagement:** Strive for Amazon-like interactions. Can your customers ask, "Alexa, how do I access this government service?"
- ✔ **Business continuity:** Can your residents access their critical services if your data center loses power? If not, you need to get moving on that.
- ✔ **Real-time data analytics:** We're seeing a wave of new chief data officer roles across government organizations. If you don't have one now, you will soon.
- ✔ **Processes and systems modernization:** Start with people, processes, and technology, in that order. Put the right folks with the right skills in the right roles. Don't try to shove paper- or mainframe-based processes into new technology solutions. Stop buying hardware, putting it in your basement and waiting years for systems to go live.

Any last words?

Think big. Start small. Go fast.

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