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Memos for a Tech Transition

Building State Digital Capacity in the First 100 Days

Tech Talent Project

In collaboration with New America, Beeck Center for Social Impact + Innovation, and
American Enterprise Institute

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About this project

Tech Talent Project in collaboration with American Enterprise Institute, the Beeck Center for Social Impact + Innovation at Georgetown University and New America are proud to present the 2026 edition of tech transition memos. These memos were compiled with guidance from over 150 non-profit, government, and technical leaders across the country. They lay the groundwork for the initial steps states can take to improve service delivery and build digital capacity.

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Introduction

In 2026, 36 states will hold gubernatorial elections, with at least 18 new governors taking office in 2027. During transition and in the first 100 days, these new administrations will set the people, priorities, and systems that determine what governors can deliver for state residents.

Tech already underpins nearly every interaction constituents have with their governments. The beginning of a new governor's term presents unique opportunities to leverage all tech has to offer and shape it to best serve constituents.

Governors will take office as budgets continue to tighten, federal funding shifts, and AI creates both opportunities and risks administrations must manage, all at a pace faster than most can absorb. Getting the state's operations, tech strategies and capacity right can drive what's possible, avoid costly mistakes, expand what already works, and ensure it endures.

Tech Talent Project has partnered with the American Enterprise Institute, the Beeck Center for Social Impact + Innovation at Georgetown University, and New America to create a rich set of best practices and expertise that administrations can use as a roadmap for achieving success and avoiding unnecessary failures. This project brought together nearly 150 government, industry, and nonprofit leaders around the tech opportunities ahead of states in 2027. Together, we've written nine memos capturing best practices and concrete first 100 day actions for transition and administration teams.

Four memos cover the foundational tools that make everything else possible: Tech Talent, Data, Procurement, and Customer Experience (CX). These are strategies that cut across nearly all government programs and priorities. The fifth memo covers AI, discussing best practices in how to lead, govern, and procure AI as well as how to use it to responsibly and effectively supercharge the governor's priorities. The final four memos cover critical program areas where these best practices can be implemented: Benefits, Permitting, Emergency Response and Recovery, and Child Welfare.

The Playbooks for Getting Results in Tight Budgets			
Topical Memos — Program-Specific Application			
Benefits	Permitting	Emergency Response & Recovery	Child Welfare
AI			
Foundational Memos — Making it all possible			
Tech Talent	Data	Procurement	Customer Experience

Three early decisions drive everything else. The most effective administrations first set a small number of clear priorities. Second, they put the right tech-savvy executives in place to help deliver on them, and finally, they build in accountability from Day 1.

Hiring tech talent and tech-fluent leadership is one of the most critical actions. The right tech leaders, given authority, largely determine what the rest of an administration's agenda can achieve. Tech capacity includes tech experts in key roles and tech-fluent leaders across roles. Capacity plus practical experience in change management across systems and operations, drives successful service improvements for residents. Without both, even strong programs have stalled quietly and become public failures. AI follows the same logic on a faster clock. A strong leader who understands AI, paired with a governance structure put in place early, helps teams move quickly and safely; waiting means moving without the capacity to take into account tradeoffs and implications of tech decisions.

Accountability, set early, tends to stick. Administrations that set clear metrics in the first months, tied directly to budget and campaign priorities, are far better positioned to show results quickly. Strong data provide the numbers; technology investments accelerate the change.

And funding underlies it all. Every administration inherits a budget it didn't write, often organized around spending categories rather than outcomes, with exposure to shifts in federal funding for programs like Medicaid, SNAP, and emergency response. Finding flexibility in that budget early can help pay for the tech and service delivery to achieve the governor's agenda. Hiring experienced tech leaders can help find ways to fund internal tech capacity and drive priorities.

These memos focus on critical hires and key questions for the transition period and on actions for the first 100 days that establish tech strategies and practices that directly impact residents across the states. This critical window of time is when administrations build the scaffolding they need to improve service delivery. But, of course, the work doesn't end at the 100 day mark.

After 100 days, administrations turn this early work into durable capacity and initiate deeper transformations, harnessing tech to provide quick wins and long-term improvements for constituents and avoid costly mistakes.

Tech Talent



Tech Talent

Getting the right technology leaders in place — with real authority — before critical decisions are made

The first 100 days decide whether the governor's agenda delivers or stalls. Tech isn't a back-office line item anymore. It underpins every promise administrations make and every service they deliver to residents, from permitting to benefits to emergency response. Placing the right tech leaders with real authority in the first 100 days is the single highest-leverage action an incoming administration can take.

Key Opportunities · First 100 Days

☐ Assess the state's tech readiness to deliver on Day 1 executive priorities

☐ Assess the state's tech readiness using three critical questions:

- Who's accountable for tech delivery, and do they have a real seat at the table?
- Who's responsible for the state's five largest active tech or tech-enabled contracts?
- What does the state's tech hiring process actually look like?

☐ Appoint and empower leaders with modern tech expertise who can deliver

- ☐ Assess and hire key C-Suite roles
- ☐ Start planning for additional critical roles

☐ Leverage best practices for successful surge hiring within weeks

- ☐ Determine talent approach and options
- ☐ Utilize subject matter expertise in the hiring process
- ☐ Empower the Chief People Officer to evaluate and amend hiring processes

Top Questions to Ask Your Leaders

- 1 Who's accountable for tech delivery, and what decisions are they tasked with?
- 2 Who's responsible for overseeing the state's largest active tech contracts?
- 3 What is the typical process for hiring tech roles and who owns which portion of that process?
- 4 Are there flexibilities that can be taken advantage of to aid the process for highly competitive talent?
- 5 How are subject matter experts being integrated into the hiring process, if at all?
- 6 What roles have been difficult to fill in the past and why? How long does it normally take to fill a vacancy?

Key Roles to Fill

- **Chief Information Officer (CIO)** — Reports to the governor with authority to set technology direction, participate in policy decisions, and coordinate across agencies; a buried CIO is a red flag
- **Chief Data Officer** — Empowered to unlock data, benefits, licensing, workforce, and education, so agency leaders can make real-time decisions and actually track whether programs are working.

State Spotlight

Colorado — Product Delivery Model

Colorado restructured its central IT office to pair technology teams directly with agencies, using a product delivery model that put engineers alongside program staff.

- Energy Savings Navigator delivered one million dollars under budget and six months ahead of schedule
- Restructured IT model became the basis for ongoing delivery improvements across agencies

“

“Tech leaders set the tone for their agencies. Quickly placing the right people — and trusting their advice — puts an administration in position to deliver on its agenda. Without them, tech failures land on the Governor's desk.”

— 2026 State Memos for a Tech Transition, Tech Talent Memo

What to Read

→ [Tech Talent for 21st Century Government — Tech Talent Project and Partnership for Public Service](#)

→ [Digital Service Toolkit — U.S. Digital Response](#)

→ [Hiring, Retaining, and Upskilling Digital Service Talent in Government — Beeck Center for Social Impact + Innovation at Georgetown University](#)

→ [The Tech Talent Toolkit: How to Attract and Nurture a Digital Team in Government — U.S. Digital Response and Verge Talent Partners](#)

TECH TALENT

Overview

Staff appointments made in the first 100 days will drive policy, budget, and operational decisions for the next four years. Administrations that seek out effective tech talent as a Day 1 priority, along with tech-fluent leadership across the cabinet, have more often turned promises into results the governor can point to by the next State of the State.

Many incoming administrations will inherit less than ideal hiring parameters. Most states still operate using civil service classifications, salary bands, and hiring timelines built for clerical work, rather than for people with expert-level tech and innovation credentials. But those skills are essential for delivering government services.

Tech isn't a back-office line item anymore. It underpins every promise administrations make and every service they deliver to residents. Every day, state systems are key to deciding whether a business gets its permit, a family gets food assistance, or an emergency call gets answered in time. When those systems work well, governors get credit. When they fail, governors get blamed, usually publicly.

The costs of getting this wrong have played out publicly:

- » Administrative failure: When COVID unemployment claims surged in 2020, states without in-house tech capacity couldn't adapt their legacy code fast enough. California's backlog peaked at 1.6 million unprocessed claims, forcing a two-week freeze on new applications, and at least 1 million eligible residents had their benefits improperly denied.¹ Much of this ran on unemployment systems built on tech from 1959.²
- » Talent bottleneck: A 2024 survey of 49 state CIOs found that 93% named recruiting and retaining qualified staff a top workforce priority for the year ahead, even as demands on their teams keep growing.³
- » Cybersecurity threat: Older systems with legacy code, outdated infrastructure, and thin tech oversight are vulnerable to cyberattacks and breaches. In December 2024, a ransomware attack on Rhode Island's RIBridges system took the state's benefits portal offline for weeks and exposed sensitive data for roughly 650,000 residents.⁴

Build a leadership team that can deliver

This playbook makes the case for a different starting point: build the state's capacity to deliver on the governor's vision, rather than allowing compliance exercises to determine the tech strategy. This

memo provides a playbook for (1) analyzing the state of tech readiness of the executive office; (2) prioritizing the hiring of key tech and tech-fluent leaders at the cabinet, deputy, and agency levels; and (3) embracing best practices for public interest tech hiring that have been amassed over a series of years and efforts, but aren't always the default posture of government appointments and hiring.

Talent opportunities for the first 100 days of 2027

What follows is a framework built on what's actually worked in other states in the first 100 days and beyond:

1. Assess the state's tech readiness to deliver on Day 1 executive priorities
2. Appoint and empower leaders with modern tech expertise who can deliver
3. Leverage best practices for successful surge hiring within weeks

Assess the state's tech readiness to deliver on Day 1 executive priorities

A transition team doesn't have to wait on a permanent Chief Information Officer (CIO) to assess the state's tech capacity. A fast, 30-day diagnostic, run by the transition team's tech lead with modern tech skills, can surface problems before the administration's first policy launches fall victim to them. Note: A modern tech leader treats technology as a constantly improving practice, not a project to finish, staying fluent in data, cloud, and agile approaches while putting public service and user outcomes ahead of quick technical wins.

Assess the state's tech readiness using three critical questions

Three questions worth addressing over the course of the transition period are:

1. **Who's accountable for tech delivery, and do they have a real seat at the table?**
 - » What to look for: A senior tech leader who reports to the governor and has a vision for improving the state's tech strategy, the authority to participate in policy and budget conversations on a regular basis as a governing partner, and the resources to be able to deliver.
 - » Red flag: A CIO buried inside the organization without direct access to the governor, the COO, or other key senior leaders, with a role focused primarily on IT policies, budgets, systems, hardware, and compliance checklists rather than on using technology to deliver administration priorities. If that's the arrangement, no one is accountable for whether tech actually works for residents, and it shows.

2. Who's responsible for the state's five largest active tech or tech-enabled contracts?

Every new governor will inherit tech contracts from their predecessor. Regardless of their origin, if those projects fail, the current administration will be responsible.

- » What to look for: A named state employee (not the vendor's project manager) who can explain what's being built, sits in on vendor reviews, has verified that the vendor is delivering is of acceptable quality, and will flag a failing project before it becomes a crisis. This leader, with an understanding of tech, would be responsible for checking vendor claims, auditing data quality, and enforcing data rights in AI contracts. (See Procurement Memo.)
- » Red flag: Some version of "the vendor handles that" or a state contact who is a program staff member without tech expertise, even if that person is a government employee. Either answer means the state cannot independently assess whether it's getting what it's paying for.

3. What does the state's tech hiring process actually look like?

- » What to look for: Meaningful data on average candidate experience and clear information about who owns which parts of the hiring process, including if tech subject matter experts play any role in tech candidate selection.
- » Red flag: Best-in-class tech hiring runs 30 to 60 calendar days from first interest to offer.⁵ Past 90 days, the good candidates may have already taken another job. Additionally, if HR exclusively runs the process or only engages subject matter experts (SMEs) very late in the process, then the right people will fall out of the process.

STATE SPOTLIGHT: New Jersey Innovation Authority

New Jersey's Innovation Authority pairs clearly defined tech and innovation goals with public transparency about impact and direction, and a streamlined approach to hiring and procurement.⁶

Appoint and empower leaders with modern tech expertise who can deliver

Transition teams must fill many leadership roles to begin a new administration, and a select number of critical roles will ideally be announced on Day 1. These positions are essential for setting the tech strategy and must be in place to build the rest of the teams needed to deliver on the governor's agenda. Because of this, the strongest transitions begin recruitment early and prioritize the leaders upon whom many others will depend. During New Jersey's recent gubernatorial changeover, the transition team was able to announce key tech leadership appointments within the first few weeks of the administration, demonstrating to New Jerseyans the state's commitment to improving service delivery.⁷

Below are the most critical tech leadership roles for transition teams to prioritize. Different states may have different titles or governance structures that guide whether a leader is a new hire or a

career public servant and where the role is placed on the organizational chart. What's important is the work these leaders perform, the expertise they hold, and the authority they are given.

Assess and hire key C-Suite roles

These are the people directly on the hook for the state's highest-stakes programs. They build the shared data, platforms, and practices that all other agency leaders depend on to actually get their work done.

The State Chief Information Officer (CIO)

If bandwidth or budget means only one senior tech hire can happen quickly, successful states start with a CIO tasked with leading cross-government tech strategy. The CIO's job is to lead overall tech strategy and build the foundation everyone else depends on, including cloud infrastructure, enterprise standards, and shared platforms. With these building blocks, agencies can move fast without waiting on IT for permission. Without them, agencies can struggle to deliver on a governor's priorities.

CIO authority will differ from state to state. In some states, the CIO reports directly to the governor with budget visibility and standard-setting authority across agencies, which means tech risks can be discussed early, before they become expensive surprises. In other states, the CIO sits inside a general administration department and spends most of their job on servers and compliance, while agency-level CIOs partner with program teams for delivery. This spectrum of CIO placement doesn't need to determine your outcomes, but there are elements of successful tech leadership to look for:

- » A direct reporting line to the governor or a high-level leader
- » Authority to build a team that can execute on administration priorities
- » Authority over key cross-agency tech decisions, like cybersecurity posture and vendor evaluation
- » Authority to review and change the state's largest active vendor contracts
- » A mandate covering security, AI risk, and service delivery, not just the plumbing work of cloud and data integration

The Chief Data Officer (CDO)

The CDO's job is to unlock the state's data, benefits, licensing, workforce, and education, so agency leaders can make real-time decisions and actually track whether programs are working. The CDO needs the purview and authority to reach across agencies. The strongest setups to date put the CDO on the leadership team itself, reporting to or alongside the governor's office, rather than as a direct report under the CIO.

The Chief Technology Officer (CTO)

The CTO's value is cutting duplication, informing strategy, and fostering innovation. Instead of every department buying its own customized platform, the CTO can build shared services (e.g., single sign-on, notifications, payment gateways) and ensure uniform quality of services across different siloes. This leader can also be responsible for which platforms states use, which coding languages are supported, which competencies the state hires for, and whether individual agencies can deviate

and go their own way for each shared service. In some states, the CTO is focused on customer-facing programs.

The Chief People Officer / Senior HR Lead

While not exclusive to tech, a Chief People Officer can help forge the strategy needed to build the corps of tech talent that teams need to succeed, while navigating the demands of government HR. This leader needs to know how to recruit tech talent using best practices that work and know civil service rules well enough to find and clear the barriers blocking the state from hiring effectively. Boston built a unified People Operations Cabinet under its Chief People Officer and used that structure to deliver parental leave, hybrid work, and visa sponsorship for hard-to-fill specialized roles.⁸

Start planning for additional critical roles

These roles exist to plan for the future and prevent failures that could otherwise blindsides the state: bad vendor deals, outdated bureaucracy, privacy exposure, and security breaches. If the transition team's capacity allows, having these roles in the room early on can help set the incoming administration up for quick wins.

1. The AI and Emerging Technology Lead

If this leader is not already within the executive office, this role would be responsible for establishing the state's internal AI strategy, leading cross-agency coordination on responsible AI, owning internal governance and risk-tiering for use cases, being responsible for labor force fluency and capacity, and speaking publicly on the state's implementation of AI. This person can work with agency leaders to evaluate what vendors are selling, assess model risk, and figure out where automation helps. (See AI Memo.)

2. The Chief Privacy Officer (CPO)

The Chief Privacy Officer would report to the CDO and work alongside the Chief Information Security Officer to build the legal and privacy frameworks that make cross-agency data sharing safe. This role is not only a compliance leader, but also represents constituents' interests on evolving matters of privacy and ethical data use. Utah made the CPO a Senate-approved executive position, and that standing is part of what makes residents and legislators trust the state's cross-agency data work.⁹

3. Chief Transformation Officer

Governors who want to prioritize government reform and innovation will want to consider a Chief Transformation Officer, reporting directly to the executive office, with a mandate that cuts across agency lines. Working outside the traditional silos, this person drives the governor's vision across agencies and coordinates with the CIO, CDO, and Chief People Officer to line up budget, personnel, and procurement behind the governor's highest-priority, multi-agency goals. They can also identify and strategize changes that will persist well past the first 100 days.

4. The Chief Information Security Officer (CISO)

A CISO with real authority sets security expectations early, before procurement and identity decisions are locked in. They work with other C-level roles to understand and make tradeoffs. Bringing security in late could slow projects down, cost more, and leave the state more exposed. Late security is expensive security.

STATE SPOTLIGHT: Arkansas Talent

Arkansas's Chief Data Officer and Chief Privacy Officer, backed by a standing data governance panel, built the in-house capacity and partnerships behind nearly a decade of the state's data initiatives.¹⁰

Leverage best practices for successful surge hiring within weeks

Determine talent approach and options

The best approach for building tech capacity quickly within a state depends on executive priorities, the existing level of tech maturity, and governance structures. One approach may be to begin by launching a highly empowered digital service team that reports directly to the governor and operates as a Skunkworks-style team, leveraging modern product and customer experience (CX) skillsets.¹¹ Most digital service teams are stand-alone teams assigned to deliver a specific set of tasks, often embedded in the CIO or agency head's office, and they build important proofs of concept for how the state can deliver modern, user-centered services.

If a state already has an established digital services team or is poised to expand its footprint of modern product and design capacity, there are other teaming structures to consider. For example, a "product operating model" is a broader organizational approach involving a mix of engineers, designers, and product managers in addition to the traditional program and policy staff who are jointly responsible for the overall outcomes of a service, rather than just executing one segment. Organizing tech hiring around the shared outcome of a service instead of a functional or organizational boundary allows a team to be more enduring.¹²

STATE SPOTLIGHT: Colorado Product Delivery Model

Colorado used results from a product delivery model to restructure its central IT office, pairing tech teams directly with agencies, after the Colorado Energy Savings Navigator came in one million under budget and six months ahead of schedule.¹³

Getting experienced people into agencies within weeks doesn't require waiting on a civil service overhaul. There are likely a variety of pathways that can assist with initial hiring. Political appointments, fellowships like Coding It Forward, term-limited appointments, and direct-hire pathways can all put tech talent directly into priority agencies right now, no new law required. During the transition, teams can work with career leaders to identify options for surge hiring that work within a given budget and headcount constraints to start charting a plan for early hires.

Utilize subject matter expertise in the hiring process

Government HR generalists already have a very full plate and may routinely screen out strong tech candidates because a resume uses unfamiliar terminology, not because the candidate can't do the job. Additionally, outdated IT job titles and descriptions enshrined in difficult-to-change statutes and regulations mean that strong candidates can easily miss postings that don't sound like the job they know. Rigid degree or years-of-experience requirements compound the problem.

Involving tech subject matter experts in the hiring process to inform the job description, resume review criteria, and skills assessments can increase the odds of success. Efforts at the federal level through the Subject Matter Expert Qualification Assessment (SMEQA) model demonstrated that a small panel of government-employed tech experts, who have generally performed the jobs they are screening for, can deliver better results and more qualified talent for a hiring manager's consideration.¹⁴

Empower the Chief People Officer to evaluate and amend hiring processes

Inevitably, the transition team will encounter initial bottlenecks or challenges as it works to appoint leaders who understand delivery, with additional constraints emerging after inauguration because of existing government structures. Empower the transition lead to apply hiring best practices during the appointments process. Upon inauguration, the Chief People Officer should evaluate these blockers, develop a hiring strategy, and begin acting on the findings on Day 1 of the administration. This allows government leaders to build stronger teams faster and can also greatly improve the experience for constituents interested in joining the administration.

Beyond 100 days

In the first 100 days, states can focus on appointing the critical leadership needed to support government operations, and the work will continue well beyond 100 days to cultivate a permanent, tech-fluent workforce capable of sustaining the governor's agenda.

Supplemental information

What to ask

- Ask career tech leaders: Who's accountable for tech delivery, and what decisions are they tasked with?
- Ask the top career administrative leader: Who's responsible for overseeing the state's largest active tech contracts?
- Ask HR leaders: What is the typical process for hiring tech roles, and who owns which portion of that process?
- Ask HR leaders: Are there flexibilities that can be taken advantage of to aid the process for highly competitive talent?
- Ask HR and tech leaders: How are subject matter experts being integrated into the hiring process, if at all?

- Ask HR and tech leaders: What roles have been difficult to fill in the past, and why? How long does it normally take to fill a vacancy?

What to read

- » [Tech Talent for 21st Century Government — Tech Talent Project, Partnership for Public Service](#)
- » [Hiring, Retaining, and Upskilling Digital Service Talent in Government: Stories and Strategies from State and Local Leaders — Beeck Center Digital Service Network](#)
- » [The Tech Talent Toolkit: How to Attract and Nurture a Digital Team in Government — U.S. Digital Response, Verge Talent Partners](#)
- » [Digital Service Toolkit — U.S. Digital Response](#)

Getting help in the first 100 days

Whether a state is considering how to secure tech, data, or AI expertise to support a transition, fill critical leadership positions, or strengthen its workforce, a growing set of organizations can connect a state with experienced technologists quickly, placing fellows and volunteers in tours of service that bring senior talent into government for defined periods. The Tech Talent Project matches senior tech and data leaders with state government roles, drawing on a network of more than 11,000 technologists. We have placed leaders or provided other support in 30 states, including Maryland, Nebraska, New York, Pennsylvania, and Wyoming with documented impact on benefits delivery, resident services, and tech infrastructure. Tech Talent Project provides recruiting, matching, and transition support for states standing up new tech leadership. (Available at: <https://www.techtalentproject.org.>)

Tech Talent Project has provided the below links to third-party resources and websites solely for convenience. By linking to these third-party materials, Tech Talent Project is not responsible for any of the content, including any political or candidate election campaign or legislative lobbying materials or messages, commercial services, or privacy or security policies that may be found on these websites or in these materials.

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State Spotlight

New Jersey Innovation Authority

New Jersey's Innovation Authority pairs clearly defined tech and innovation goals with public transparency about impact and direction, and a streamlined approach to hiring and procurement.

Challenge

New administrations often stand up central tech or innovation teams without a clear operating model to guide them. Without guidance, teams drift toward things that are urgent and not necessarily strategic.

Approach

New Jersey's Innovation Authority organized its work around four initiatives: resident experience, business experience, communications and engagement, and data and policy. It measures every initiative against three defined goal areas: time savings and service quality for residents, government efficiency, and cost savings for the state. It reports results publicly each year. The authority hired cross-functional talent, including product managers and a dedicated procurement and acquisition specialist. It also created a streamlined process for procuring agile-services vendors rather than relying solely on standard agency contracting. The team designs and deploys services in partnership with state agencies and the public.

Outcomes

65,000+

Businesses launched through Business.NJ.gov, driving \$168 million into New Jersey's economy in 2024

100,000

Additional eligible children enrolled in the Summer EBT program to access nutritious food

20,000+

State employees using New Jersey's AI Assistant, generating more than 1 million prompts at roughly \$1 per user per month

Lessons Learned

- » Recruit specialized roles, such as product managers and procurement specialists, directly onto the innovation team.
- » Set a small number of concrete measurement goals before launching projects, so progress can be judged consistently across different initiatives.
- » Design and deploy services in partnership with state agencies and the public.

Read More

[About Us, New Jersey Innovation Authority](#)

[AI Assistant, New Jersey Innovation Authority](#)

[2025 Impact Report, New Jersey Innovation Authority](#)



State Spotlight

Arkansas Talent

Arkansas's Chief Data Officer and Chief Privacy Officer, backed by a standing data governance panel, built the in-house capacity and partnerships behind nearly a decade of the state's data initiatives.

Challenge

Arkansas agencies stored valuable data in various systems throughout the state that lacked coordinated governance or privacy standards. Without a way to make statewide data decisions, agencies had to create ad hoc agreements to share data, a process that slowed service delivery.

Approach

Creating the Chief Data Officer (CDO) and Chief Privacy Officer (CPO) roles, and establishing a Data and Transparency Panel chaired by the CDO, gave these positions direct authority over statewide data decisions. The Panel became a standing governance body that has overseen multiple projects across administrations.

Outcomes

25 states

Participants in Arkansas's Evaluating Enrollment to Employment Pathways program

1st

State to deploy Google.org's CiviForm platform statewide

Data Hub

Established as Arkansas's central platform for cross-agency data integration and sharing

Lessons Learned

- » Positions with statewide authority allowed Arkansas to sustain data initiatives across agencies and administrations.
- » Standardizing a data-sharing agreement template made it easier for agencies to share data.
- » The CDO's office built in-house analytics capacity rather than relying on outside contractors, which allowed the state to lead and sustain projects like the Statewide Longitudinal Data System and the Data Hub.

Read More

[Arkansas Data and Transparency Panel, background and history](#)
[Arkansas Data and Transparency Panel, program overview and multi-state adoption](#)
[Governor Sanders Announces Arkansas LAUNCH \(CiviForm statewide deployment\)](#)



State Spotlight

Colorado Product Delivery Model

Colorado used results from a product delivery model to restructure its central IT office, pairing tech teams directly with agencies, after the Colorado Energy Savings Navigator came in \$1 million under budget and six months ahead of schedule.

Challenge

Colorado's Office of Information Technology (OIT) supports technology services used across state government. The office had low customer satisfaction scores and faced criticism from the state auditor and legislative oversight bodies, prompting leaders to conclude that incremental improvement was insufficient.

Approach

After several years of success building the Colorado Digital Service, OIT restructured in 2026 around a human-centered product delivery model. OIT cut some internal management and coordination layers to focus resources on technical and delivery staff, and paired tech teams directly with agencies on the services residents use most. Under the model, tech teams working directly with state agencies and service users, combine product management, user research, design and iterative development to improve digital services. The Colorado Energy Savings Navigator illustrates the approach. The team combined hundreds of energy-savings programs into one service and delivered it \$1 million under budget and six months early.

Outcomes

\$1M

Under budget for the Colorado Energy Savings Navigator

6 Months

Ahead of schedule for delivery of the Navigator

2M+

Registered myColorado users, another service developed using the product delivery model

Lessons Learned

- » Align roles and team structure to the delivery model so accountability for service outcomes is built into the organization.
- » Prove a new operating model on one service before scaling it across the organization.
- » Use customer feedback to help prioritize service improvements.

Read More

[OIT announces strategic realignment to better serve Coloradans, Colorado OIT](#)

[Colorado overhauls state IT office, The Colorado Sun](#)

[Colorado Digital Service, first five years, Colorado OIT](#)

Procurement



Procurement

Keeping procurement in the conversation — reviewing what's at risk and building disciplines that prevent future failures

Almost everything a modern state does for its residents relies on software, and almost all of that software is purchased rather than built in-house. Hundreds of millions of dollars in projects may already be underway when a new governor takes office, and the administration will be accountable for the results. The good news is that most of what's needed to improve technology procurement is available on day one.

Key Opportunities · First 100 Days

- ☐ **Require real-time, mission-driven outcomes and reports**
 - ☐ Prioritize real-time, outcomes-focused requirements and metrics
 - ☐ Use the DORA framework to assess all software systems
 - ☐ Insist on early demonstrations of working software
- ☐ **Review ongoing and upcoming software procurements**
 - ☐ Start with the high-dollar, high-priority, and most-at-risk procurements
 - ☐ Take a hard look at contracts up for extension or renewal
- ☐ **Improve the processes for procuring software now**
 - ☐ Understand what a good procurement looks like
 - ☐ Assign a product owner to every system
 - ☐ Map the existing tech procurement process to find improvements
 - ☐ Ensure procurements have sufficient support and shared accountability with the agency owner
 - ☐ Provide budget flexibility where possible
 - ☐ Coordinate common procurements
 - ☐ Leverage and protect against AI in procurement processes
 - ☐ Avoid common traps
- ☐ **Focus on three to five top missions**

Top Questions to Ask Your Leaders

- 1 Can we use modular, gated milestones for our IT procurements?
- 2 How can our procurement processes support strong collaboration between agencies, tech teams, procurement, legal, and policy stakeholders?
- 3 How do we guard against vendor lock-in and ensure that contracts include clear exit strategies and data portability?
- 4 What AI protections do we need in place to clarify data rights, intellectual property ownership, and the handling of sensitive information?
- 5 What five largest procurements are due in the next six months? Which of these have vendor lock-in? Where do procurement terms or budget constraints limit state access to state data, metadata, documentation, reporting logic, APIs, or system outputs?

Key Roles to Fill

- **Chief Procurement Officer** — Senior leader with authority over technology procurement processes, contract standards, and vendor accountability; a CPO who understands modern software delivery is essential
- **Product Owner (per major system)** — Named state employee assigned to every significant technology system; accountable for outcomes, empowered to make decisions, and present throughout the vendor relationship

State Spotlight

Minnesota — Medicaid Eligibility System Modernization Bake-Off

Minnesota split its Medicaid Enrollment System modernization into two: software vendors made products available at near-zero cost for experimentation, and delivery vendors competed to build end-to-end slices.

- Contracts awarded were short, reversible, and tied to outcome metrics — avoiding vendor lock-in
- Demonstrated a replicable model for modular, competitive procurement on large benefit-system modernizations

“

“You don't win an election because of procurement, but you might lose one because of it.”

— Kathrin Frauscher, Deputy Executive Director, Open Contracting Partnership

What to Read

- [Buying AI — Open Contracting Partnership](#)
- [De-Risking Guide — 18F](#)
- [Vendor Capture and the Limits of Fast Government Reform — Niskanen Center](#)
- [Reconceptualizing Public Procurement to Strengthen State Benefits Delivery — New America](#)
- [From Principles to Pavement: How to Inscribe Responsible AI Into Your Organization — Untangled](#)
- [Stafford Beer's “Resource Bargain” — Back of Mind](#)

PROCUREMENT

Overview

A governor's ability to deliver on priorities depends heavily on tech procurement. Almost everything a modern state does for its residents relies on software, most of which is purchased rather than built in-house. Few procurements today are untouched by tech, yet acquiring it remains an onerous process that is not always well understood. Complex procurement rules, combined with the difficulty of defining what a system must do and how it should be delivered, can lead large projects to miss intended outcomes, schedules, or budgets. Problems may take years to surface and remedy. Hundreds of millions of dollars in projects may already be underway when a new governor takes office, and the administration will be accountable for the results.

The good news is that most of what's needed to improve tech procurement is available on Day 1. The work of the first 100 days is to keep procurement in the conversation, ask the right questions, use existing procurement and budget flexibility to quickly improve outcomes, review the procurements for which the stakes and costs are both high, and focus on ensuring the highest-priority projects are well-positioned. The goal is to move toward better solicitations, stronger contract oversight, and shared accountability across budget, procurement, tech, and agency leadership.¹

Procurement opportunities for the first 100 days of 2027

Below are four ways to strengthen tech procurement to make government more effective:

1. Require real-time, mission-driven outcomes and reports
2. Review ongoing and upcoming software procurements
3. Improve the processes for procuring software services now
4. Focus on three to five top missions

Require real-time, mission-driven outcomes and reports

Prioritize real-time, outcomes-focused requirements and metrics

Governors will need to understand the measurable benefits a program delivers for the state and the public. Yet procurements often do not define or measure those outcomes clearly. Describing the intended outcomes up front helps agencies and vendors work toward the same goals.

For example, a state might set north star goals that allow constituents seeking benefits to apply in 20 minutes, enroll within 24 hours, provide their information only once across multiple programs, and receive benefits within a week, with customer satisfaction above 90%. More ambitious goals could include automatic enrollment or cross-enrollment when eligibility is already known. Procurements supporting these goals should focus vendors on the intended outcomes rather than narrow system requirements that may need to change over time.

Metrics that don't align with intended outcomes can lead to contradictory incentives. For example, tracking the number of tickets closed has led to tickets being closed without actually being solved; similarly, measuring lines of code written produces software bloat rather than a better customer experience..

Thoughtful primary and secondary measures focused on outcomes for residents can incentivize behavior aligned with state priorities. Best-in-class procurements focus on measuring outcomes residents actually experience, and capture them automatically. Human-generated slide decks delivered with old data and manual charts (referred to as rear-view metrics) can hide problems until it's too late.²

Require each major system and related contract to connect to a problem statement, ideally one to two sentences written in plain language that includes the intended public outcome, affected users, and progress metrics. Even if problem statements can't be added to pre-existing procurements, they can be used for oversight reviews and renewal decisions. For new procurements, include the problem statement, intended outcomes, evaluation criteria, and performance plan in the contract.³

Build these performance measures into contracts with a regular cadence of reporting and collaboration to achieve the stated outcomes. Simply asking to see outcome-focused requirements and performance measures can shift behavior. (See the Data Memo).

Use the DORA framework to assess all software systems

The [DevOps Research and Assessment \(DORA\)](#) framework measures how well a team delivers software by looking at how often code is deployed, how long changes take to implement, how often deployments fail, and how quickly the team recovers from a production setback. These can be measured automatically by tools that the state may already own, which is preferable to manually generated reports. It is best practice to measure DORA across every state system. Typical challenges to adopting the DORA framework include mistaking metrics for the goal, creating silo'd teams, and comparing disparate systems against each other. ⁴

Insist on early demonstrations of working software

Years of experience across many jurisdictions support this rule of thumb. Do not accept that a system is unavailable for review until it's finished. Even the most complicated data migrations start with working prototypes and eventually move to end-to-end workflows powered by synthetic or old (but real) data. If a vendor cannot provide working software for the state to click through, that's a warning sign. This is an expectation successful teams set early on by requiring working prototypes and baking them into contracts.⁵

STATE SPOTLIGHT: Minnesota

In Minnesota, the Great Medicaid Enrollment System (MES) Modernization Bake-Off split procurement in two. Software vendors made their commercial products available at near-zero cost for hands-on experimentation in a non-production environment and delivery services vendors ("bakers") competed to build end-to-end "slices" using those tools. Contracts awarded in response to these experiments were short, reversible, and tied to outcome metrics.

Review ongoing and upcoming software procurements

Start with the high-dollar, high-priority, and most-at-risk procurements

Hundreds of millions of dollars of projects are already queued up when a new administration takes office, and the largest procurements carry the greatest risk.⁶ A new administration should be able to review them and make changes.

Best practice is to assign an executive, someone who deeply understands modern tech and has a track record in software delivery and negotiations, to review all large tech contracts. Begin with the five largest contracts. At a minimum, examine each system's intended outcomes, metrics and progress against them; the user needs the system addresses; the state's tech capability to evaluate deliverables, especially in light of AI; the contract cost and timeline, including long-term maintenance and operations; how frequently vendors demonstrate working software that staff can test; how quickly research and testing are incorporated into the product; and applicable DORA measures. The General Services Administration's de-risking guide provides a direct and practical question bank an executive could use to assess tech systems.⁷

This review will produce a list of at-risk procurements. Reevaluate each for modification or termination, in light of clearly articulated problem statements and success measures.⁸

Take a hard look at contracts up for extension or renewal

Leading procurement practitioners avoid the sunk cost fallacy and treat every extension or renewal as a decision point. Each extension or renewal is a chance to minimize or mitigate risk. While some contracts are multi-year, others have regular renewal periods. Only start or extend contracts that include provisions for continually updating software and address users' needs. Carefully documenting challenges throughout the life of a procurement can make it clear when an arrangement is no longer effective; a renewal should not be the first sign of a problem. When renewing a contract, require a renewal memo that documents actual value delivered, unresolved

service issues, available alternatives, data portability, exit rights, and a transition plan for changing vendors.

Improve the processes for procuring software now

Understand what a good procurement looks like

The most successful procurements share a few traits.⁹ They:

- » Break large, projects into multiple, smaller contract milestones to reduce risk and prevent large scale, high visibility failures
- » Have the flexibility to execute the best plan, but include provisions to allow pivots if user research reveals issues, or surfaces a better approach
- » Deliver working software within months and rarely have milestones over \$2 million
- Have a product owner who is ultimately accountable and resourced to achieve the intended outcomes¹⁰

Assign a product owner to every system

Ideally, the product owner oversees the delivery of an end-to-end service (e.g., enroll in SNAP), not simply one tech system. Initially, the product owner may serve as a point of contact. Over time, investments, responsibilities, and performance plan expectations shift to create an empowered, accountable product owner for each end-to-end service offering.

Map the existing tech procurement process to find improvements

There is generally considerable frustration with existing procurement processes. States can use that frustration to target immediate improvements. Leaders in the space have identified changes that can be made within existing authority and improvements that require longer-term planning such as laws or regulation changes. They also test informal assumptions and review perceived regulatory barriers, since many procurement improvements can begin with existing authority.

Build a shared picture by mapping roles and responsibilities (journey mapping) to reveal gaps where other team members, like a state CTO, can plug in. Best practice is to consider how staffing and structure impacts how well the state coordinates procurements in the first place. Some states have more fragmented coordination and less centralized oversight which can limit standardized governance and support.

States with digital services teams, like Georgia and New Jersey, can lean on these teams for assistance with building a journey map of the procurement process that prioritizes user outcomes and experience. States without those teams can contact groups like Code for America and United States Digital Response for help. There are also web-based tutorials like NYC Service Design Studio's guide to user journey mapping.¹¹

Strong tech projects are typically backed by rigorous user research, which includes interviewing state staff, external constituents, and end users about their experience engaging with a program or interacting with a system. The goal is to identify actual needs and pain points, and then prioritize changes that will solve identified problems and improve the user experience to better achieve the mission. This data informs the system requirements that make up a procurement.

Use internal resources like a digital services team or a contract for user research sprints to conduct this research if possible. States without this capacity can get help from nonprofits. Alternatively, they can contract with a vendor that meets the prior requirements and offers this service.

Ensure procurements have sufficient support and shared accountability with the agency owner

Even the very best software system will fail to deliver on a governor's priorities if it is built on a broken business process or provides a poor customer experience. The agency responsible for the mission needs to collaborate closely with the tech team. Leaders can ask what this collaboration looks like now and encourage (and later, perhaps require) the agency, tech, and procurement teams to share accountability and work side by side.

A regular cross-agency review process aligns budget, IT, procurement, and agency leaders around major tech procurements.¹²

Provide budget flexibility where possible

There is a critical shift in how tech is funded. Colorado is moving from large upfront capital expenditures to operational models with ongoing product development.¹³ Another key practice is to compare the overall budget with the amount allocated to in-house personnel on large projects. A \$100 million project with only \$1 million allocated to in-house personnel is a warning sign because the state may lack sufficient tech expertise to oversee the work.

Another best practice is to pay attention to the different colors of money (e.g., funds designated exclusively for maintenance, development, or IT) and the timing of money. Avoid tying investments to calendar or fiscal years or allowing funds to disappear if unspent by a certain date, which can create conflicting incentives and create a barrier to delivering on the governor's priorities. Further, focus investments on outcomes rather than requirements that may shift. Administrations may be able to provide these flexibilities immediately.

Coordinate common procurements

Across a state, many procurement innovations and practices can be optimized and shared for everyone's benefit:

- » Create and share contract vehicles that cross agencies and jurisdictions to reduce redundancies and improve oversight capacity
- » Adopt and procure standard statewide platforms for shared needs like authentication, identity proofing, notifications, and other enabling tech

- » Buy commodity IT only once across an agency instead of by office or project to reduce the likelihood of duplicate licenses and to take advantage of volume-discounted pricing. Hold the agency to a service level agreement (SLA) to ensure they negotiate the best price and deliver licenses to agencies in a timely manner. If the purchasing center falls below expectations, agencies can change vendors and aren't locked in.
- » Inventory HR, procurement, payroll, and other infrastructure systems in order to understand and streamline processes to allow a governor to deliver on priorities. Identify technical systems that are custom, outdated, or configured beyond recognition. There is usually no justification why state governments need unique back office processes that prevent adopting commercial software. It's worth investigating whether state processes can or should be changed and refined to enable a switch to widely available commercial offerings.
- » Work with other states and consortiums like the [Center for Civic Futures](#), [Open Contracting Partnership](#), or the Intergovernmental Software Collaborative (housed with the Council of State Governments National Center for Interstate Compacts) to learn from others.

Leverage and protect against AI in procurement processes

Responsibly using AI tooling can give resource-scarce teams capabilities they've never had before, such as the ability to rapidly mock up prototypes to validate requirements, generate automatic test code to ensure compatibility with even the most bespoke legacy systems, and evaluate third-party code for quality. While an AI-generated app is generally not production-ready, it can also dramatically lower the cost of experimentation and keep vendors from being able to obfuscate the level of difficulty of certain changes. To the extent a governmental entity is dealing with information asymmetry in terms of tech skills, AI can be a balancing force. To use this force for good, procurement teams need access to AI tools and the right to access vendor code.

At the same time, if procurement processes don't change to account for AI, it will derail them. While large companies have always had teams capable of writing slick proposals that make promises far beyond their capabilities, AI has taken this to the next level, making it possible for almost anyone to submit a seemingly impressive bid, even if they have no ability to deliver on it. Deceptively high-quality proposals aren't the only issue. A deluge of "AI slop" submissions can drown some teams in responses, adding cost and delay. If AI is then used to review the deluge, human judgment is lost.

To get ahead of AI slop, written responses to procurements alone are no longer appropriate. Instead, best practice is to use show-don't-tell solicitations and to be more creative in the selection process (e.g., requiring more demos, scenario-based interviews, detailed reviews of past work, and empowered and capable product owners). Ask state procurement teams how procurement processes have adapted to this new reality and seek out examples of governments that have done this effectively.

The workforce is using AI now, whether leaders ask for it or not. Bringing its use out in the open and adding clear guidelines and check-ins can mitigate risk and help build better procurements that compete to deliver outcomes.

Avoid common traps

In the first 100 days, experts advise it is especially important to be on the lookout for, mistakes to avoid:

- » Vendor lock-in: Software as a Service (SaaS) platforms can promise governments turnkey, easily configurable systems that remove the stress of maintaining the underlying infrastructure. But in practice, most end up customized beyond recognition, creating vendor lock-in and forcing states to pay for multiple licenses. Lifelong user licenses are an increasing and sometimes hidden part of services to beware of. To reduce vendor lock-in, states can hire internal staff with specific configuration expertise, allowing them to make routine changes, such as updating a drop-down menu, without requiring a contract modification. This is a high ROI place to grow internal capacity and a path for hiring new grads.
- » Unrealistic AI promises: AI cannot magically convert a legacy system overnight on its own. Legacy modernization still requires process redesign, user testing, security review, and staff who understand the system being changed.
- » Promises of automatic data cleansing: One cannot "clean" data, though certain data quality issues can be fixed. Modifying, guessing at, or carrying forward stale data creates numerous downstream risks, especially when you're trying to apply AI or automation to speed up eligibility criteria. Demand clear, evidence-based plans and demonstrations for any data conversion or merging efforts.
- » Rebuying what you could share: Buying open source code is not free. While the underlying lines of code may come at no cost, it's still real work to deploy it and integrate it with existing systems leading to a costly procurement with no net benefit. Instead, consider sharing reference implementations, form designs, eligibility criteria, and other practical components that can benefit from collaboration with other states.

STATE SPOTLIGHT: Portland, Oregon

Portland made the city's contract system more transparent by adopting an international benchmark known as the Open Contracting Data Standard.¹⁴ The project made the system more accessible, lowering costs, improving forecasting, and helping local businesses.

Focus on three to five top missions

Not everything can be fixed at once. Focusing people and attention on the three to five missions that matter most is a proven strategy. Start by defining the problem statements and success metrics for each one to set strong examples.

Make the first change small and visible. Run a low-dollar contract using a short, plain-language solicitation, with a measurable outcome, milestone-based payments, and a required working demo at each milestone. A modest contract to clarify confusing language on one state website gives the team a safer place to practice the new way of buying before taking on a core system rebid. Early, visible wins build the credibility and momentum that the harder multiyear procurements will require.

STATE SPOTLIGHT: Vermont Modular Procurement

After earlier “big bang” Integrated Eligibility and Enrollment efforts, Vermont shifted toward small, modular products to expand functionality over time. One of its first products, a Document Uploader allowing Vermonters to submit benefit paperwork online, launched in four weeks and scaled from a 50-person pilot to serving thousands a month.¹⁵

Beyond 100 days

In 100 days, states can improve outcomes for current or upcoming contracts, create small wins, and put best practices in place. Beyond 100 days, states can continue modernizing the state procurement apparatus to support future transformation.

Supplemental information

What to ask

1. Ask the head of procurement: What five largest procurements are due in the next six months? Which of these have vendor lock-in? Where do procurement terms or budget constraints limit state access to state data, metadata, documentation, reporting logic, APIs, or system outputs?
2. Ask the head of procurement: Can we use modular, gated milestones for our IT procurements?
3. Ask the head of procurement: How can our procurement processes support strong collaboration between agencies, tech teams, procurement, legal, and policy stakeholders?
4. Ask the head of procurement: How do we guard against vendor lock-in and ensure that contracts include clear exit strategies and data portability?
5. Ask the head of procurement: What AI protections do we need in place to clarify data rights, intellectual property ownership, and the handling of sensitive information?

What to read

- » [Buying AI — Open Contracting Partnership](#)
- » [De-Risking Guide — 18F](#)
- » [Vendor capture and the limits of fast government reform — Niskansen Center](#)
- » [Reconceptualizing Public Procurement to Strengthen State Benefits Delivery and Improve Outcomes — New America](#)
- » [Stafford Beer’s “Resource Bargain” — Back of Mind](#)
- » [From Principles to Pavement: How to Inscribe Responsible AI Into Your Organization — Untangled](#)

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 - 2 Anthony Downs, *Inside Bureaucracy*, 1967, Chapter 11.
 - 3 Code for America, "Five Questions to Ask When Evaluating Technical Products," December 4, 2025. Retrieved from <https://codeforamerica.org/news/five-questions-to-ask-when-evaluating-technical-products>
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 - 5 U.S. Digital Service, "Tech Challenge Playbook," March 2021. Retrieved from <https://techfarhub.usds.gov/resources/learning-center/field-guides/tech-challenge-playbook>; U.S. General Services Administration (GSA), "A Revised and Expanded Guide for De-Risking Government Technology Projects," September 11, 2024. Retrieved from <https://www.gsa.gov/blog/2024/09/11/a-revised-and-expanded-guide-for-derisking-government-technology-projects>
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DRAFT



State Spotlight

Minnesota

In Minnesota, the Great Medicaid Enrollment System (MES) Modernization Bake-Off got products at near-zero cost for hands-on experimentation and teams compete to build defined outcomes with these tools. Contracts awarded in response to these builds are short, reversible, and tied to outcome metrics.

Challenge

Minnesota's review of why Medicaid system modernizations fail identified recurring problems: scope that is too broad or fragmented, jumping to solutions before defining outcomes, long planning and procurement lead times that delay learning, neglected legacy systems, and risk-averse, compliance-driven organizations. Medicaid eligibility work still relies in part on the state's aging MAXIS mainframe.

Approach

In 2025, the Minnesota Department of Human Services released a request for information describing a "bake-off" strategy for modernizing its Medicaid Enterprise Systems, starting with eligibility and enrollment. Instead of a multiyear alternatives analysis and one large contract, delivery teams compete to build small, end-to-end "slices" that each deliver a defined outcome, beginning with applicants who are aged, blind, disabled, or enrolled in Medicare Savings Programs. Teams demonstrate working software each month to an accountable review team, which can scale strong performers and rotate out those that fall short.

Outcomes

2

Separate procurement tracks: software access for experimentation, and delivery of services judged on results

Near-zero

License cost for commercial software during the innovation phase

Monthly

Demonstrations of working software to an accountable review team

Lessons Learned

- » Judge vendors on working software in the state's own environment, not on proposals or sales demos.
- » Keep contracts short and reversible so the state can scale what works and exit what doesn't without penalty.

Read More

[Medicaid Enterprise Systems Modernization Strategy Summary, Minnesota Department of Human Services](#)
[Minnesota Medicaid Enterprise Systems RFI Videos, Digital Government Hub](#)



State Spotlight

Portland, Oregon

Portland made the city's contract system more transparent by adopting an international benchmark known as the Open Contracting Data Standard. The project made the system more accessible, lowering costs, improving forecasting, and helping local businesses.

Challenge

Portland's procurement data lived in three separate systems: BuySpeed for solicitations, SAP for purchasing, and B2G for contract compliance. This disconnected approach frustrated local business owners because the City requires them to register in multiple systems to win a contract.

Approach

Through the Open Contracting Partnership's Lift impact accelerator, Portland linked its procurement data from solicitation to payment and published it using the Open Contracting Data Standard (OCDS), the international open data standard for public procurement. They brought together experts. They asked vendors about their frustrations. They talked with the City's procurement teams that focus on design, personal services and goods and services. The city built dashboards to track progress against contracting targets. It also expanded market outreach and redesigned two key request-for-proposal templates to make requirements easier to understand.

Outcomes

1st

U.S. city to implement the Open Contracting Data Standard, linking data from solicitation to payment

45+

Companies attended market outreach for a single water meter project

Lessons Learned

- » Publishing contract data in a standard format lets residents and vendors see what the city buys, for how much, and from whom.
- » Pair open data with direct vendor outreach and simpler solicitations to build the trust that brings more bidders.

Read More

[How US cities are supporting local economies through open contracting, Open Contracting Partnership](#)
[Open Contracting Data Standard, City of Portland](#)
[Shining a flashlight on a billion-dollar behemoth, City of Portland](#)



State Spotlight

Vermont Modular Procurement

After earlier “big bang” Integrated Eligibility and Enrollment efforts, Vermont shifted toward small, modular products to expand functionality over time. One of its first products, a Document Uploader allowing Vermonters to submit benefit paperwork online, launched in four weeks and scaled from a 50-person pilot to serving thousands a month.

Challenge

Vermont had been trying to replace its legacy eligibility system for years, but traditional single-vendor contracts had not delivered significant results.

Approach

Vermont's Agency of Human Services and Agency of Digital Services reset the program's approach, shifting to a series of modular products that could each expand functionality and retire legacy components over time. The program set a goal of delivering three products per year, with each procurement kept under \$2 million, paired with user-centered design, iterative agile development, and dedicated business-focused process management. One of its first products, a Document Uploader letting Vermonters submit benefit paperwork online, went from development to launch in four weeks and scaled from a 50-person pilot to serving thousands of Vermonters a month.

Outcomes

4 wks

From development start to launch for the Document Uploader, one of the program's first modular products

37

Benefit programs the Document Uploader now supports statewide

98%

Of Document Uploader users said they'd use it again

Lessons Learned

- » Break large, risky procurements into small, modular contracts. Vermont capped procurements under \$2 million and built its first products quickly.
- » Build or expand a prequalified vendor pool to contract faster on smaller projects. Vermont's IT retainer pool, expanded specifically to support this program, is now a standing, statewide tool any Vermont agency can use.

Read More

[Modernizing Vermont's Eligibility and Enrollment System, Vermont Agency of Human Services](#)
[Act 42 Integrated Eligibility and Enrollment Progress Report \(September 2019\), Vermont Legislature](#)

Data



Data

Building the data infrastructure that makes every other priority possible

Data is the lifeblood of government delivery and accountability — and one of the most powerful management tools a governor has to improve services, manage costs, respond to crises, prevent fraud, and build AI. Yet most states inherit old systems, siloed in separate agencies that inhibit rather than support their goals. The first 100 days are the window to name the right data leadership, establish governance, and connect data strategy directly to the governor's top priorities.

Key Opportunities · First 100 Days

- ☐ **Build a team of data experts and give them a seat at the policy table**
 - ☐ Appoint a Chief Data Officer (CDO) and a Chief Privacy Officer (CPO)
 - ☐ Appoint a Geographic Information Officer (GIO), or explicitly give the CDO this role
 - ☐ Use partners wisely and make sure data is owned by the state
- ☐ **Define and strengthen statewide data governance**
 - ☐ Get the CDO, CIO, and legal counsel in a room before Day 30 on governance and legal framework
 - ☐ Conduct a data and systems audit for administration priorities
 - ☐ Standardize policy for collecting and sharing data, including requirements for demographic and other detailed data
 - ☐ Create clear accountability for data stewardship that enables cross-agency outcomes
- ☐ **Leverage data to supercharge the governor's priorities and inform decision-making**
 - ☐ Use key indicators to identify priority actions
 - ☐ Focus on early wins while committing to long-term data projects required for transformational tech efforts (including AI)
 - ☐ Implement responsible data sharing among agencies to deliver priorities
- ☐ **Prioritize data quality and protection**
 - ☐ Build cybersecurity into data management practices

“

“Governance before everything else.”

— Josh Martin, former Chief Data Officer, State of Indiana

Top Questions to Ask Your Leaders

- 1 Does the CDO have the explicit authority to convene agencies, resolve barriers, and support the governor's priorities via data
- 2 Where do procurement terms or budget constraints limit state access to state data, metadata, documentation, reporting logic, APIs, or system outputs? In the five largest state contracts, does the state own the data?
- 3 How can data expertise be embedded or uplifted across agencies, in addition to centrally, so the work reaches beyond a central office?
- 4 How is the state coordinating with local governments, neighboring states, and federal partners on shared data work?
- 5 What data drills or emergency exercises has the state run, and what gaps did they expose?

Key Roles to Fill

- **Chief Data Officer (CDO)** — Statewide mandate with direct access to senior leadership; sets and enforces data policy across agencies, leads the audit, and connects data strategy to the governor's priorities
- **Chief Privacy Officer (CPO)** — Legal and policy authority over how the state collects, uses, shares, and retains personal data; ensures data work earns and maintains public trust

State Spotlight

Arkansas — Data Hub

Arkansas built a statewide data fabric enabling real-time cross-agency data sharing while enforcing strong privacy and security standards, reducing the reporting burden for Medicaid recipients.

- Created CDO and CPO roles via Act 912 (2017), with a Data and Transparency Panel chaired by the CDO and given cross-agency authority
- Enabled real-time cross-agency data sharing while reducing reporting burden and strengthening privacy protections

What to Read

- [The Path to Creating a Chief Data Officer Role in States — Beeck Center for Social Impact + Innovation at Georgetown University](#)
- [Blueprint for Delivering Results in State Government: Leveraging Data — Results for America](#)
- [Finding a Way Forward: How to Create a Strong Legal Framework for Data Integration — Actionable Intelligence for Social Policy](#)
- [Introduction to Data Sharing and Integration — Actionable Intelligence for Social Policy](#)
- [Using Data & Evidence in the States — National Association of State Budget Officers](#)
- [Data Labs Playbook — Beeck Center + National Governors Association](#)

Overview

Accurate, reliable data is the lifeblood of government delivery and accountability. It is one of the most powerful management tools a governor has to improve services, manage costs, respond to crises, prevent fraud, support good decisions, and measure whether government programs are working.

Unfortunately, most governors inherit old systems, siloed in separate agencies, inhibiting rather than supporting their goals. The data remains underutilized, scattered across agencies, stored in aging systems, and controlled more tightly by vendors than by the state itself. While some siloing is purposeful and important for data security, much of it is a result of living with old tech, outdated assumptions about tech and policy limitations, or turf battles. AI that leverages poor data, state systems can fail in ways that are hard to detect or explain, and quickly erode public trust.

Unlocking this valuable resource, and protecting the public along the way, requires leaders at the cabinet level and in the governor's office, in non-technical roles, with the capacity to understand and use data to deliver on their mission. It requires data, privacy, and cybersecurity tech leaders with the expertise to guide that usage, provide strategic insight, and create the tech underpinnings for success. States that successfully leverage their data are empowered to access and orchestrate data use across agencies and given the resources and accountability for enabling the governor's top priorities.

States are growing increasingly sophisticated in their data aggregation and management. In Virginia, the new [Unified Readiness Framework](#) for disaster preparedness relies heavily on data aggregation to power predictive risk assessments and intelligence integration. This follows other Virginia programs, supported by the (Commonwealth) Office of Data Governance and Analytics, supporting critical gubernatorial priorities across governors and parties. These include [Operation Bold Blue Line](#), allocating law enforcement where data showed areas of higher crime, and the [Roadmap to End Hunger](#), tracked by the Department of Social Services and the public.¹

Data opportunities for the first 100 days of 2027

In the first 100 days, governors can set themselves up for success doing four things:

1. Build a team of data experts and give them a seat at the policy table
2. Define and strengthen statewide data governance
3. Leverage data to supercharge the governor's priorities and inform decision-making
4. Prioritize data quality and protection

Build a team of data experts and give them a seat at the policy table

The governor's first data appointments set the benchmark for every later initiative and the foundation for future AI work. Chief Data Officers (CDO) to date have been most effective with a direct line to the governor's office or Chief of Staff. A CDO working in isolation or only as directed by the Chief Information Officer (CIO), faces intense friction and roadblocks when driving cross-agency change.

CDO roles can be shaped differently depending on what the state needs and how it's organized. The Beeck Center's framework describes two types of CDOs: strategic CDOs who set policy, advise agencies, shape governance, and help leaders use data for decisions, and operational CDOs who build platforms, run analytics, and support program teams active in cross-agency data sharing.² Governors may benefit from a strategic CDO first, supported by operational capacity through agency data teams, nonprofit partners, and targeted contractor support. Data governance authority, granted immediately, allows the CDO to positively guide system, procurement, and data-sharing decisions made by both agencies and vendors.

Data ownership and privacy are two key concerns for the CDO, their team, and the public. States that own their own data, ensure that neither it nor the Application Programming Interfaces (API) that access it are controlled by vendors. Meanwhile, the stakes for privacy are rising, particularly with the growth of AI. Privacy is also critical when pursuing increased data sharing to improve service delivery. Therefore, a Chief Privacy Officer (CPO) is another key early hire. Administrations that appoint the right people, give them clear ownership and authority, and tie their work directly to the governor's priorities are better positioned to succeed. For example, Hawaii's first CDO, Rebecca Cai, has been using her private and public sector experience to chart a strategic path with agencies to help improve efficiency and deliver cost savings by effectively using data and AI.³

STATE SPOTLIGHT: Indiana Data Management Strategy

Indiana hired a Chief Data Officer and built an enterprise office to govern and share state data, reducing reliance on contractors and saving approximately \$1 million annually in

infrastructure maintenance and support costs. This office oversees the Management Performance Hub to power real-time actionable insights and public dashboards, including in areas such as tracking and improving education outcomes and reducing substance abuse.

Appoint a Chief Data Officer (CDO) and a Chief Privacy Officer (CPO)

As of September 2026, over 20% of states do not have a designated CDO.⁴ Appointing a CDO and CPO during the transition and giving both roles a clear statewide mandate, direct access to senior leadership, and the authority to shape major decisions beginning early in the administration's term are effective practices.⁵ CDOs can help deliver the governor's policy priorities by leading data strategy, convening leaders, and resolving cross-agency barriers. They work directly with legal counsel, budget officials, and program executives, as well as CIOs. CPOs that partner with the CDO from the start can build privacy, consent, lawful use, data minimization, and public trust into data-sharing, AI, and analytics.

Appoint a Geographic Information Officer (GIO), or explicitly give the CDO this role

Governors without a clear owner for geospatial data, adequate budget, statutory authority, and staffing will struggle to deliver when it counts. Location data supports numerous critical state functions, including emergency response and recovery, infrastructure planning, transportation, permitting, environmental management, public health, and equitable service mapping. While 93% of states have a GIO or equivalent, many lack staff and strategic plans,⁶ making it harder to align data, set standards, update models, and use location-based information for cross-agency priorities.

In Maryland, the GIO reports to the CDO, who owns GIS and open data responsibilities. If the state has a GIO, make that role part of the governor's data and operational strategy. If the state lacks a GIO, the governor can assign statewide geospatial responsibility to the CDO, supported by named senior staff. The [National States Geographic Information Council](#) (NSGIC) can help support the team. In the first 100 days, execute the following actions:

- » Ensure geospatial leadership has a direct line into emergency operations planning at a minimum, supporting critical programs such as Next Generation 911 (NG911).⁷
- » Audit current GIS capacity across agencies, including any datasets that are duplicated, contain contradictory data, or are out-of-date.
- » Have the CPO audit privacy measures for geospatial data shared between state agencies.

Use partners wisely and make sure data is owned by the state

Use partners for capacity the state cannot build. This typically includes system integration, data pipelines, analytics, privacy work, governance models, and staff training. But **the state must maintain ownership of its own data**. Many states discover mid-project that the vendor controls the database, owns the analytic outputs, or charges separately for routine data access. This can lead to huge cost overruns, severe delays at key moments, loss of privacy, and severe limitations that can cripple the ability of projects to achieve key outcomes.

- » Direct procurement and legal teams to review current contracts to highlight and renegotiate provisions that compromise state data stewardship.
- » Require every new major tech or data contract to specify that the state owns data, metadata, documentation, and system outputs during and after the contract term.
- » Build a short list of vetted nonprofit and academic partners the CDO and CPO can draw on, with terms negotiated upfront, as Indiana has done through its Indiana Data Partnership.⁸

Define and strengthen statewide data governance

“Governance before everything else” - Josh Martin, former Chief Data Officer of Indiana

Good data governance enables a governor and their team to effectively use data to deliver on their priorities and run the state. Without it, agencies operate with inconsistent rules, significant projects stall, and critical decisions are made based on legacy understanding or incomplete information. Set up or confirm strong data governance in the first 100 days by defining who stewards which data, under what circumstances it can be shared, how quality is measured, and how disputes are resolved.

Get the CDO, CIO, and legal counsel in a room before Day 30 on governance and legal framework

Before Day 30, bring the CDO, CIO, CPO, legal counsel, budget and procurement leaders, and priority agency heads together as an ongoing working group tied to the governor's priorities. Most data barriers are legal, governance, or procurement problems, not tech ones. Agencies need clear answers on who owns and stewards which data, when privacy review is required, and when disputes escalate to the governor's office.

In addition to creating its CDO and CPO roles, Arkansas established a Data and Transparency Panel chaired by the CDO and gave it authority over statewide data decisions.^{9,10} University of Pennsylvania's [Actionable Intelligence for Social Policy](#) (AISP) offers legal framework guidance that can help states define authority, privacy protections, governance roles, and written agreements before sensitive data moves across agencies.¹¹ This framework informs other steps that might be required to get data moving, such as a statutory change, a federal waiver, or renegotiation of a vendor contract. States face real limitations on federal funding for systems used across agencies, whereas data can be shared through agreements that have worked well in states such as California.

Conduct a data and systems audit for administration priorities

For the administration's highest priorities, the governor can direct the CDO to conduct a targeted audit of data systems, applications, and data assets. This audit is step one of a continuous inventory practice, not a one-time task. The steps for such an audit could include:

- » Select the three highest-priority policy areas or processes for the first audit.

- » Identify the core datasets, systems or applications, AI use cases, vendors, data stewards, and clear legal authorities for permissible access and use, and explain why they are essential for delivering on administration priorities.
- » Document where data is duplicated, outdated, incomplete, missing, difficult to access, or defined inconsistently and, conversely, where data is managed well so positive practices can be scaled.
- » Identify contracts that control access to data, metadata, reporting logic, system documentation, and exports. Note any instances where vendors, and not the state, own the data.
- » Create a short action list of barriers that require executive decision, legal review, funding, procurement changes, or legislation.

Standardize policies for collecting and sharing data, including requirements for demographic and other detailed data

Oregon's data strategy treats data as a strategic asset and critical infrastructure, and it uses statewide data governance to further transparency, accountability, ethical use, and equity.¹² This strong approach to setting the culture around data usage allows agency and data officials to drive statewide policy, data-sharing agreements, and vendor contracts.

Keep policy decisions, legal authority, and long-term operating capacity around critical data inside government. The [Coleridge Initiative](#), [AISP](#), and Georgetown University's [Beeck Center's Data Labs](#) program can help states build data capacity, design data-sharing agreements and governance models, and provide training.

The empowered CPO helps agencies balance useful data collection with privacy protection, including minimizing the personal information collected to what is needed. Benefits, workforce, housing, education, and health programs need enough detail to show who is being served and who is being missed, without collecting unnecessary information that may be lost in a data breach.

Best practice in data management policy includes disaggregating demographic and detailed program data where the law permits or requires. For benchmarking over time and geographic areas, use existing data standards where possible for defining common data elements across departments and services. Location is an important data element to disaggregate from personal information where possible. States can implement these best practices for data collection and sharing:

- » Issue a statewide data policy covering collection, documentation, retention, sharing, privacy review, and dissemination throughout the data lifecycle.
- » Align demographic and other data elements with existing standards such as the boundaries of rural areas, disability, and modernized federal race and ethnicity data standards from

2024,¹³ address standards (FGDC/NSDI or NENA), county codes (FIPS), and industry classifications (NAICS).

- » Establish a review process for high-risk data uses, including AI, cross-agency analytics, and geospatial data linked to demographic or program records.

STATE SPOTLIGHT: Georgia data analytics center

Georgia's Data Analytics Center (GDAC) replaced ad hoc, agency-by-agency data sharing with one standardized governed process, resulting in 85+ executive agency data-sharing agreements and ingesting 18.5 billion+ health records into a secure statewide analytics platform, all run by a team of four.

Create clear accountability for data stewardship that enables cross-agency outcomes

Leading practice includes assigning clear accountability by naming a steward for each dataset agencies rely on to deliver cross-agency results. The steward does not own policy outcomes, rather, they make sure the data is usable, documented, protected, and ready to support the governor's priorities.

If no one owns data definitions, such as the definition of a permit backlog, agencies could struggle to manage it consistently. If no one owns eligibility churn data, the state is unlikely to reduce it. If no one owns address data, then emergency response, broadband planning, and benefits delivery could suffer. Steps to improve data accountability include:

- » Identify or name a data steward for priority datasets tied to the governor's agenda
- » Require data stewards to maintain definitions, documentation, access rules, update cycles, and quality checks
- » Ask the CDO for a list of the state's top five priority datasets and whether each has a steward
- » Build data stewardship duties into job descriptions, agency directives, project charters, and data-sharing agreements
- » Require CPO review of sensitive, demographic, program, geospatial, or cross-agency data, initially and over time as updates happen
- » Give the CDO authority to elevate persistent issues to the governor's office, including data sharing challenges or datasets with high error rates

Leverage data to supercharge the governor's priorities and inform decision-making

Smart use of data is a game-changer in delivering on the governor's agenda. Data sharing enables reductions in manual verification and costs, while increasing speed across programs. Quality data, used to identify and address challenges in a regular management cadence, is tied to better

performance and more effective program delivery. In the first 100 days an administration can establish how effectively they will leverage its valuable data.

Begin by choosing a small number of high-value use cases to improve service delivery, reduce workload, lower costs, or speed up decisions within the first year. Ask the CDO and agency leaders to outline what quick wins data infrastructure can support now, while laying the groundwork and budget for the necessary data projects to support bigger wins in the future. If they disagree, have the debate.

This is also the path to AI delivery and readiness. Governors will face pressure to launch responsible AI tools quickly, but the highest-value and most thoughtful AI projects depend on clean, documented, connected, and governed data. State CIOs believe data quality will continue to grow in importance as AI agents rely on data accuracy and data sharing to complete workflows.¹⁴

New Jersey identified approximately 100,000 additional children who were eligible for the state's Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer program using AI to match records across multiple public assistance databases.¹⁵ While AI made matching a large volume of records possible, data quality, governance, and availability enabled the project to proceed responsibly.

Use key indicators to identify priority actions

Former Governors Charlie Baker of Massachusetts and Martin O'Malley of Maryland are both well known for their data-driven approach to achieving results.^{16 17} Data can help governors and their teams spot service bottlenecks, track priority outcomes, and identify where executive attention is needed. A regular review cadence with assigned actions keeps the flywheel turning. In the first 30-60 days, a new administration can adopt a focused performance management framework consisting of 8-12 metrics tied directly to the governor's policy priorities.

Under best practices across management frameworks, each indicator has a named owner at the agency level who has relevant responsibility for the service or product and is reviewed regularly by senior staff. The most compelling indicators measure outcomes residents experience and operations agency leaders can change. Application processing times, call center wait times, procedural denial rates, permit backlogs, recertification churn, inspection delays, and vacancy rates in critical service positions are examples of indicators a governor may ask to measure and track over time.

Several recent frameworks can help select which indicators to focus on. [Results for America's State Standard of Excellence](#) documents the best-in-class management practices that distinguish high-performing states across policy domains. The 2024 Code for America Safety Net Scorecard provides comparable cross-state metrics on benefits delivery, including time-to-decision and procedural denial rates.¹⁸ The key objective is to install a routine cycle of review, analysis, accountability, and corrective action as frequently as weekly or monthly to understand the current state of systems.

Focus on early wins while committing to long-term data projects required for transformational tech efforts (including AI)

Best practice is to pick one or two concrete problems, focus on data quality and governance in the key data sources needed, and deliver a visible result within months. Use that work to build the data

foundation for broader AI deployment, integrated service delivery, and federal reporting. Indiana initially created its Management Performance Hub to find ways to decrease infant mortality rates, later expanding it to address recidivism and fraud at the local level.¹⁹ AI makes iterative sequencing more important to ensure accuracy and efficacy. In 2024, the CIO of Alaska warned against the daunting prospect of managing “hundreds of different pockets of data [for AI],” advocating instead for a concerted effort to implement comprehensive data quality management, within a NASCIO survey on the topic.²⁰

Implement responsible data sharing among agencies to deliver priorities

Cross-agency data sharing is one of the highest-value moves a governor can make to improve service delivery and save money. Governors can highlight H.R. 1 requirements as an opportunity to build integrated data capacity across health, human services, workforce, and education to drive larger improvements.²¹ States need to implement H.R. 1 requirements in Medicaid and SNAP while delivering a broader range of benefits through administrative systems that serve overlapping populations. The National Academy of Public Administration’s 2024 field guide gives states practical options for financing integrated data systems as shared infrastructure across programs, while Actionable Intelligence for Social Policy’s 2025 Capacity Brief makes clear that durable data sharing depends on staff, relationships, resources, governance, legal agreements, and tech infrastructure.²²

In most states, setting up cross-agency data sharing requires at least one of the following: a new memorandum of understanding, a statutory change, a federal waiver, or a renegotiated vendor contract. Identify the legal or policy documentation required to help transition teams triage and sequence the work.²³ Administrations can take the following steps to facilitate data sharing:

- » Select one or two data-sharing arrangements tied to priority outcomes
- » Name the agencies, datasets, clear legal authorities for permissible access and use, and data stewards involved
- » Identify legal, tech, funding, staffing, and procurement barriers
- » Engage the legislature where statutory authority is needed
- » Set 6-month and 12-month milestones and check in regularly
- » Measure whether the project improves speed, accuracy, workload, cost, or resident experience, and check in regularly

STATE SPOTLIGHT: Arkansas Data Hub

Arkansas built a statewide data fabric that enables real-time cross-agency data sharing, enforces strong privacy and security standards, and reduces the reporting burden for Medicaid recipients.

Prioritize data quality and protection

Data quality and protection are at the center of successful state data work. Poorly documented data weakens decisions, while unclear access rules create privacy and security risks. Inappropriate sharing can undermine public trust and participation in key programs. These are all real challenges, but this does not mean that states need to avoid data sharing. They can establish strong governance and data protections to share data safely and efficiently and use accurate, reliable data to inform decisions and effectively deliver on the governors' priorities.

Weak cybersecurity practices expose sensitive information, disrupt services, and damage public trust. Unfortunately, cyber threats against government are growing. The December 2024 ransomware attack against Rhode Island's RIBridges health and human services portal exposed sensitive personal data for as many as 657,000 people and disrupted the state's SNAP, Medicaid, child care, and energy assistance operations for weeks.²⁴ Rhode Island is not alone, and states will face more of these attacks.

The first 100 days are the time to set standards, build privacy and security into routine operations, procurement, and emergency planning, and confirm that agencies can locate, protect, and restore critical data during an incident. States cannot completely avoid these attacks but they can prepare to manage them. This foundation will allow states to more safely expand AI, share data, open datasets, and integrate data across agencies.

Build cybersecurity into data management practices

Review priority data projects to ensure they meet baseline cybersecurity standards before sharing data, procuring new systems or services, or giving vendors access. Agencies need to know which systems contain sensitive data, who can access it, which vendors touch it, and how the state would recover if a system failed or was compromised. The CDO and CPO need to work with the Chief Information Officer (CISO) to set clear requirements for access controls, logging, vulnerability review, backup and recovery, incident response, and vendor security. [CISA's Secure by Demand](#) guidance outlines a list of security questions to ask during procurement.²⁵ NIST's 2024 Cybersecurity Framework 2.0 provides practices and controls to manage cybersecurity risks.²⁶ The following steps can help states embed cybersecurity into data management practices:

- » Require cybersecurity review up front for priority projects involving data sharing, AI, analytics, and modernization
- » Confirm that all systems use multi-factor authentication, access logging, endpoint detection, and backup and recovery plans
- » Review vendor access to sensitive or mission-critical data
- » Add cybersecurity terms to data-sharing agreements, tech contracts, and vendor renewals
- » Use available State and Local Cybersecurity Grant Program funds for cybersecurity planning, exercises, and core cybersecurity improvements²⁷

Beyond 100 days

The first 100 days set leadership, governance, and operating rhythm; the work beyond 100 days strengthens data-driven government and informed executive decision-making.

Supplemental information

What to ask

1. Ask the Chief of Staff or CIO: Does the CDO have the explicit authority to convene agencies, resolve barriers, and support the governor's priorities via data?
2. Ask the current CDO, data team, or head of procurement: Where do procurement terms or budget constraints limit state access to state data, metadata, documentation, reporting logic, APIs, or system outputs? In the five largest state contracts, does the state own the data?
3. Ask agency leads, CDO, data team, or CIO: How can data expertise be embedded or uplifted across agencies, in addition to centrally, so the work reaches beyond a central office?
4. Ask the CDO, data team, or CIO: How is the state coordinating with local governments, neighboring states, and federal partners on shared data work?
5. Ask the CDO, data team, or CIO: What data drills or emergency exercises has the state run, and what gaps did they expose?

What to read

- » [Business Case for Open Data: Six Reasons Why Making Your Agency's Data Open and Accessible Is a Good Business Decision — Data.gov](#)
- » [Blueprint for Delivering Results in State Government: Leveraging Data — Results for America](#)
- » [Data Labs Playbook — Beeck Center for Social Impact + Innovation at Georgetown University and National Governors Association](#)
- » [Using Data & Evidence in the States — National Association of State Budget Officers](#)
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- » [CISA Tabletop Exercise Packages — Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency](#)
- » [Artificial Intelligence Risk Management Framework: Generative Artificial Intelligence Profile — National Institute of Standards and Technology](#)
- » [Cyber Hygiene Services — Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency](#)

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State Spotlight

Indiana Data Management Strategy

Indiana hired a Chief Data Officer and built an enterprise office to govern and share state data, reducing reliance on contractors and saving approximately \$1 million annually in infrastructure maintenance and support costs. This office oversees the Management Performance Hub to power real-time actionable insights and public dashboards, including in areas such as tracking and improving education outcomes and reducing substance abuse.

Challenge

State agencies held valuable data in isolated systems with no common governance or shared structure, making it difficult to share data across agencies or measure whether programs were actually improving outcomes for Hoosiers. Without sufficient internal tech capacity, the state was reliant on expensive contractors.

Approach

The Chief Data Officer created internal capacity for its Management Performance Hub (MPH) office, creating a state data science team and a data governance team. Growing this internal bench reduced reliance on expensive contractors while expanding its delivery capacity, reducing infrastructure maintenance and support costs by approximately \$1 million annually. The centerpiece of the MPH is an integrated Education and Workforce Development database spanning 12 state agencies, including Higher Education, Education, Health, Corrections, Workforce Development, and Family and Social Services Administration, which underpins public tools like the Indiana Graduates Prepared to Succeed (GPS) dashboard. MPH has built similar integrated databases addressing opioids, Medicaid, fiscal transparency, and other areas.

Outcomes

100+

Secure, de-identified public datasets available to Hoosiers and researchers through the Indiana Data Hub

\$1M+

Annual costs avoided in infrastructure maintenance and support

92%

Of Indiana students statewide met their graduation requirements in 2025, over 5 percentage point increase since 2022 when the public GPS dashboard was implemented

Lessons Learned

- » An enterprise data office with internal tech capacity can develop governance standards, data-sharing agreements, and vendor contract improvements statewide.
- » Building an integrated data hub allowed Indiana to extend the same infrastructure to substance abuse, Medicaid, fiscal transparency, and other areas.

Read More

[2022 State Standard of Excellence, Data Use Criteria, Results for America](#)
[Indiana's Data Dashboard Tracks Post-Pandemic Student Success, Government Technology](#)
[State of Indiana Data Strategy 2024: Foundations for an AI-Ready Enterprise](#)



State Spotlight

Georgia Data Analytics Center

Georgia's Data Analytics Center (GDAC) replaced ad hoc, agency-by-agency data sharing with one standardized, governed process: growing to 85+ executive agency data-sharing agreements and ingesting 18.5 billion+ health records into a secure statewide analytics platform, all run by a team of four.

Challenge

Before centralized governance, Georgia's executive agencies negotiated data-sharing arrangements individually and inconsistently, with no common statewide standard for how demographic, health, or other sensitive data should be requested, documented, or protected. This slowed cross-agency projects and made it difficult for leadership to see what data existed, who was sharing it, and under what terms — particularly as agencies increasingly needed to combine datasets (health, veterans, workforce, education) to answer policy questions.

Approach

House Bill 197 (2019) created GDAC within the Office of Planning and Budget to build and maintain a secure, cloud-based analytics platform for the state. GDAC has explicit authority to standardize the statewide data-sharing agreement (DSA) process and facilitate data exchange across executive agencies. GDAC centralized that process, stood up a cross-agency Data Governance Committee (chaired by the State Accounting Office's CIO) that meets quarterly, and requires agencies to submit data inventories and use cases before onboarding. To standardize how sensitive data is handled, GDAC also codified a strict rule for personally identifiable information: PII is used only to match records across datasets and is walled off entirely from analytics products and purpose-built datasets.

Outcomes

85+

Executive agency data-sharing agreements under one statewide governance process

30+

State agencies and entities sharing data through GDAC's centralized platform — supported by a core team of just 4

18.5B+

Health records standardized and ingested into the Georgia All Payer Claims Database by Q1 2026, with data volume nearly tripling in a year

Lessons Learned

- » **Put standardization into policy, not just practice:** Executive Order 09.01.2023 gave GDAC the authority to require one statewide DSA process, turning inconsistent agency-by-agency negotiations into a single governed system that leadership and auditors can actually see.
- » **Centralize governance, not only infrastructure:** A cross-agency Data Governance Committee with a standing chair and a quarterly cadence keeps data-sharing standards current and holds agencies accountable, independent of any one platform or vendor.
- » **Draw a hard line on sensitive data:** Restricting personally identifiable information strictly to record-matching — and excluding it from analytics and purpose-built datasets — let GDAC standardize sharing of demographic and other detailed data without compromising privacy.
- » **Small teams can run big standardization efforts:** A four-person team supports governed data-sharing across 30+ agencies, showing that a clear statewide policy can scale governance further than headcount alone would suggest.

Read More

[FY 2026 Annual Report, Georgia Data Analytics Center](#)
[Public Data & Reports, Georgia All Payer Claims Database](#)
[About, Georgia Data Analytics Center](#)



State Spotlight

Arkansas Data Hub

Arkansas built a statewide data fabric that enables real-time cross-agency data sharing, enforces strong privacy and security standards, and reduces the reporting burden for Medicaid recipients.

Challenge

Arkansas state data was scattered across dozens of incompatible agency systems with no unified ways to share it in real time. This caused operational failures in the state, such as courts unknowingly issuing warrants for incarcerated defendants, corrections staff manually calling school districts to verify GED credentials, and Medicaid recipients manually reporting their work every month.

Approach

Mandated by legislation in 2023, Arkansas's Division of Information Systems built the Data Hub as a statewide "data fabric" anchored by three components: Data Virtualization, Master Data Management, and a Data Catalog. The system is hosted on site, secured by encryption and role-based access controls, allowing agencies to retain data stewardship while enabling governed, self-service sharing across the state. Arkansas is using this data hub to support Medicaid recipients in reporting work. Instead of requiring enrollees to log hours every month through a website, Arkansas is using data from other state and federal programs, including employment records, school enrollment systems, and disability databases, to determine compliance status automatically. This data matching effort reduces the burden on Medicaid recipients.

Outcomes

90+

Source connectors built into the platform for cross-agency flexibility.

3 Components

Data Virtualization, Master Data Management, Data Catalog, operating together.

Reduced Reporting Burden

Starting in July 2026, data-matching is reducing the reporting burden for Medicaid work requirements

Lessons Learned

- » Data Virtualization leaves data in source systems and exposes real-time views, reducing data duplication and preserving agency ownership.
- » Protection must be designed with intent, with clear answers to 'who controls what' before connecting the first data source.
- » Data matching between state agencies and with the federal government can reduce the reporting burden for residents.

Read More

[Arkansas Data Hub Presentation, Department of Shared Administrative Services \(September 2024\)](#)
[Arkansas Medicaid Work Requirements 2026: Lessons Learned, BenefitsUSA Blog](#)

Customer Experience



Customer Experience

Designing government services around the people who use them — not the bureaucracies that created them

People interact with government at the most important and stressful moments of their lives: enrolling a child in school, applying for benefits after a job loss, recovering from a disaster. Too often, they encounter systems designed around internal processes rather than the people they serve, resulting in unnecessary errors, abandoned applications, and eroded public trust. The first 100 days are the moment to define a resident-centered approach to service delivery: name a small experience delivery team with authority, choose a limited set of high-value services, publish honest baselines, and make resident feedback a regular input to senior decisions

Key Opportunities · First 100 Days

- ☐ **Build a small interdisciplinary team at the center of government**
 - ☐ Establish an interdisciplinary Customer Experience (CX) team of four to six people including a CX lead, focused on impact
- ☐ **Select three to five priority services to improve**
 - ☐ Conduct resident-facing outreach to surface priorities
 - ☐ Listen to residents
- ☐ **Create a public baseline before improvement work begins**
 - ☐ Define CX measures across experience, operations, and outcomes
- ☐ **Establish a High Impact Service Provider (HISP) accountability system**
 - ☐ Designate HISPs at the program level, not the department level
 - ☐ Issue lightweight Year 1 HISP requirements
 - ☐ Begin building HISP practice
- ☐ **Establish a formal Voice of Customer (VoC) program**
 - ☐ Build the VoC program in stages
 - ☐ Share usable feedback with the cabinet to close the feedback loop

Top Questions to Ask Your Leaders

- 1 What are the state's highest-volume services, the services that reach the largest percentage of the state's population, and the most critical services where the stakes are high for residents? What specific entities are responsible for delivering them?
- 2 What services are most salient to the people of our state? Where are there problems? How is this different from or similar to where state employees think there are problems?
- 3 Which service interactions generate the most complaints, repeat calls, abandoned applications, staff rework, procedural denials, or avoidable escalations?
- 4 What customer experience data does the governor's office have access to right now? What customer experience data are state agencies collecting? Who is accountable for these measures?
- 5 What north star measure (e.g., trust, confidence in the state's ability to deliver) is most important for the governor's priorities? What measure will the governor hold the senior cabinet to and make clear is a priority to all public servants and people of the state?

Key Roles to Fill

- **CX Team Lead** — Senior practitioner with cross-agency authority; leads the 4-6 person interdisciplinary team, owns priority service selection, and drives the baseline measurement process
- **Agency CX Lead (per HISP)** — Named owner of the resident experience for each high-impact service; accountable for metric reporting, improvement targets, and frontline feedback loops

State Spotlight

New York — Statewide Customer Experience Strategy

New York embedded customer experience and human-centered design across more than 100 state agencies, making public services more accessible and responsive to residents' needs.

- CX practices embedded across 100+ state agencies through a coordinated statewide strategy
- Published a public-facing CX strategy that set measurable standards for agency service delivery

“

“A resident who can't understand a notice may give up on a benefit they need. Technology can accelerate improved delivery — but only if it's designed around the people using it.”

— 2026 State Memos for a Tech Transition, Customer Experience Memo

What to Read

- [Governments Can Deliver Exceptional Customer Experiences. Here's How. — McKinsey & Company](#)
- [New York State Customer Experience Strategy — Digital Government Hub](#)
- [The Utah Model: Workforce Programs and Services Integration Toolkit — American Enterprise Institute](#)
- [High Impact Service Provider Customer Feedback Data — Performance.gov](#)
- [The Origins and Practice of Delivery — Stanford Social Innovation Review](#)
- [National Park Service 2023 HISP Customer Experience Action Plan — National Park Service](#)

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE (CX)

Overview

People interact with government at the most important and stressful moments of their lives: enrolling a child in school, applying for benefits after a job loss, recovering from a disaster. And, in the United States, many of these interactions are run by their state government. A dedicated Customer Experience (CX) approach gives governors a disciplined way to turn service interactions into top-tier public delivery by bringing resident feedback, operational data, frontline knowledge, and executive accountability into the same operating rhythm. Examples from Georgia,¹ Utah,² New York,³ and other states demonstrate the meaningful progress that can be made when a governor focuses rigorously on the way in which people experience their services. This focus can ultimately enable the administration to deliver on commitments to voters.

Too often, people experience government interactions that are confusing, slow, and designed around the bureaucracy that created them rather than the people they serve. This can result in a double cost: one for the resident navigating a broken process, and again for the taxpayer funding an inefficient one. Government must develop public services the same way the most successful private services are designed — in partnership with the people who use them and suited to the digital age.

Today, tech underpins every interaction the public has with their government and can accelerate improved delivery if done right. A resident who can't understand a notice may miss a deadline. A small business owner who calls repeatedly for a status update on their permit is showing the state exactly where its process is failing. When a resident waits months for the government to process benefits to which they are entitled, that lost time is a significant cost not only to that individual, but, in the aggregate, to the state as a whole. Streamlining those processes and deploying responsible AI and digital tools to move customers from costly paper forms to self-service channels, while reducing manual employee work, frees staff for higher-value tasks and gives business owners and families back time they can't afford to lose.

CX opportunities for the first 100 days of 2027

In the first 100 days, administrations can take five actions to define a resident-centered approach to service delivery:

1. Build a small interdisciplinary team at the center of government
2. Select three to five priority services to improve
3. Create a public baseline before improvement work begins
4. Establish a High Impact Service Provider (HISP) accountability system
5. Establish a formal Voice of Customer program

These actions can be established through an executive order, announcement in a State of the State or governing vision speech, or advanced through another executive mechanism that names this as a priority and empowers a team to act.

Build a small interdisciplinary team at the center of government

A small CX team near the governor gives service delivery a clear owner inside the administration. The team's proximity to leadership matters for focus and effectiveness. A team reporting to the governor, chief of staff, or another senior official with enterprise authority can convene agencies, identify barriers, and move decisions forward more effectively than a lower-level team could.

The most effective teams are small, interdisciplinary, and operational. Their objectives could include improving constituent services, building processes that agencies can reuse, empowering other teams to be creative and resident-focused, and cataloging service barriers that require executive action. By focusing on high-impact interventions to start, this team can deliver a few visible wins before taking on more.

The team needs a mix of political and career talent. Political appointees can connect the work to the governor's priorities and help galvanize senior leadership. Career public servants bring institutional knowledge, trust across state agencies, and knowledge of procurement, legal requirements, data systems, staffing realities, and frontline workflows. Sir Michael Barber's account of the UK Prime Minister's Delivery Unit remains useful because it treats delivery as a center-of-government discipline built on clear priorities from leadership, measurable progress, routine review, and practical problem-solving with departments.⁴

STATE SPOTLIGHT: New York - Collaboratively Centering Customer Experience

New York embedded customer experience and human-centered design across 100-plus state agencies to make public services more accessible and responsive to residents' needs, cutting the time to apply for Medicaid by 30 minutes and reducing medical billing dispute timelines by 92%. They also hired their first Chief Customer Experience Officer to help drive this work.

Establish an interdisciplinary Customer Experience (CX) team of four to six people including a CX lead, focused on impact

Plan to establish a small team in the first six to 12 months, led by a designated CX lead responsible for moving priority service improvements from diagnosis to real, measurable progress. Four to six people with product, design, and engineering backgrounds are enough to coordinate across a handful of agencies. Giving this team the ability to drive critical functions like HR, budget, and

procurement helps align those functions with the governor's priorities and government's mission while signaling that resident needs are central to service delivery.

- » Establish the team reporting directly to the governor or Chief of Staff, with authority to convene agencies and resolve cross-agency barriers to service delivery
- » Mix political appointees who bring energy and new perspectives with career civil servants who provide institutional knowledge and bureaucratic trust
- » Include individuals with policy, service design, data, product management, operations, social science, procurement, HR, legal, and communications capacity, and give the team a name that fits the state context, such as customer/client/resident experience, delivery team, service improvement team, or resident experience team

Give the team a public platform to publish progress on commitments, performance data, and wins. Public accountability creates an internal cadence for making progress and builds external support.

Performance.gov is a one-stop shop for agencies looking for information on High Impact Service Provider (HISP) improvement commitments, priority services, customer feedback and performance data, life experience efforts, and other CX resources.⁵ States can take the following steps to embed CX into their operations:

1. Launch a public-facing CX page within the first 100 days.
2. Publish priority services, agency owners, baseline measures, improvement commitments, and progress updates.
3. Create a clear vision outlining what better looks like in state government, and what residents can expect from their government.
4. Connect the accountability platform to cabinet reviews, budget discussions, and agency performance routines.⁶

STATE SPOTLIGHT: Ohio CX Transformation

Ohio transformed state-level customer experience (CX) by replacing a maze of separate agency logins and websites with one experience built on a shared data platform, which is now used by over eight million residents.

Select three to five priority services to improve

New administrations tend to announce new programs. However, residents feel keenly whether existing government services are being delivered well now. A faster DMV transaction, a clearer benefits application, timely access to essential services in a disaster, a shorter permitting wait, or the ability to check application status online can do more for public confidence than a large new program. They can also be exciting announcements.

Best practice is to select three to five service interactions to improve in the first year. Good candidates are services that already cause friction for residents, have measurable baseline performance, and offer agencies the opportunity to make visible progress within six to 12 months. Focus on specific interactions, such as checking application status online, reducing wait times from

six to two weeks, or streamlining a form from 12 pages down to three. Early wins build institutional confidence and public trust.

McKinsey's State of the States benchmark gives governors guidance for choosing where to begin CX work.⁷ The research examined 21 common state services and found wide variation across states, with a gap approaching 30 percentage points between the highest and lowest performers. The research also found that vehicle services, taxes, public transit, affordable housing assistance, and employment benefits are seen as the most important. These services drive over half of overall satisfaction, but fewer than 40% of residents say they are satisfied with their experiences interacting with them. These high-volume, high-friction interactions are good candidates for improvement because they can be measured, seen by residents, and connected to the governor's broader operating agenda.

STATE SPOTLIGHT: Seattle Services Application Platform

Seattle city government partnered with a tech for good organization to build CiviForm, a service and benefits application platform that allows staff to easily update forms without IT. The platform slashed average application time by 77%, from 30 minutes to seven.⁸

Conduct resident-facing outreach to surface priorities

Every administration can make smart decisions about what to fix by asking residents and frontline staff where service delivery breaks down. Resident input can reveal failures that internal scans often miss, including confusing instructions, repeated contact, abandoned applications, and process steps that take up staff time without improving outcomes. The answers often surprise staff and leaders, so it is best practice to avoid assumptions about what residents most want fixed. Here are actions states can take to initiate or improve resident input:

- » Conduct resident-facing outreach to get the public's perspective. A simple statewide survey,⁹ town halls, or feedback cards at agency offices can unearth important friction points. This does not need to be complicated or expensive
- » If the state has not yet implemented an easy-to-find mechanism for collecting feedback, frustrated residents will find an outlet elsewhere. Check online sources (such as Reddit forums, Threads, Facebook groups, and other social media) for benefits recipients or talk to frontline staff in the state's walk-in or call centers to understand the most common user issues and frustrations¹⁰
- » Cross-check resident input against high-volume, high-complaint, or near-completion service interactions for improvement. A value-to-resident, value-to-state employee, or cost, people, legal, or tech feasibility review can be simple and helpful
- » Identify three to five specific service improvements, not policies or programs, for the team to own, drive to completion, and track over time, such as moving a small service online, making notifications clearer and easier to take action on, or simplifying forms
- » Ensure at least a few items can show meaningful progress within the first six months to build credibility

Listen to residents

As part of prioritizing services, leading customer-centric organizations focus on the channels people actually use, including digital, phone, in-person, and paper, and their level of accessibility for all users, including people with disabilities or older adults. Services that work online may still fall short for people who rely on phone, paper, in-person help, translated notices, accessible forms, or other offline support. Some services work only partially online, causing confusion. Understanding where people interact with the service, where the process slows, and which access barriers current data may hide gives an administration a strong foundation for improvement.¹¹ The following steps guide this work:

- » Map priority services to see how they use digital, phone, in-person, mail, and paper channels
- » Identify who uses each channel and what barriers to completion they may encounter
- » Review forms, notices, websites, and call center scripts for plain language, accessibility, status clarity, and unnecessary repeat contact
- » Direct agency leaders to test their agency's highest-volume services and report back on their experience

Create a public baseline before improvement work begins

Measurement is where many service improvement efforts fall short. If agencies launch fixes before documenting their starting point, they won't know definitively whether the work improved the resident experience, reduced workload, lowered cost, or changed outcomes. The first 100 days are a good time to establish baselines before improvement work begins. Knowing the starting point helps leaders more easily tell the story of what they've delivered.

Baseline performance data may show unfavorable results. But the start of an administration offers the best window to document inherited challenges. The public and public servants already feel the pain of these interactions. Clear baselines help teams make evidence-based decisions on where to focus resources and ultimately demonstrate measurable improvement that builds trust over time.

This type of transparency can strengthen trust when it shows that government is working to solve real problems. Boston residents who interacted with a website visualizing both service requests (e.g., potholes and broken street lamps) and the city's work to resolve them became 14% more trusting and 12% more supportive of government.¹² Transparency works best when it demonstrates relevant and visible action.

Define CX measures across experience, operations, and outcomes

Each priority service can have a small set of measures that show how residents experience the service, how processes perform, and whether the service achieves its purpose. The best measures are useful enough for senior review and simple enough for agencies to update on a regular basis. The following are important measurement categories:

- » Experience measures that come directly from residents, such as ease, clarity, confidence, and whether public employees were helpful, can normalize feedback and ultimately increase trust
- » Operational measures from administrative data that demonstrate efficiency, such as processing time, cost per transaction, call abandonment, form completion rate, backlog volume, error rate, procedural denials, and first-contact resolution
- » Outcome measures, which often lag and require impact evaluation expertise, that show whether the service and the administration's improvements actually achieved the policy objective, such as increased small business revenue, improved maternal or child health, employment stability, and financial security.

For priority services, the CX team selects a few measures from each category above, records their current baseline value, and treats the baseline as the administration's starting point. If data quality is poor, the team can say so and be clear about the limits. Even limited data can give the governor a point of comparison for future reviews. Performance.gov's feedback data explainer gives states an adaptable model.¹³ Federal HISPs collect post-transaction feedback, report the data publicly, and use the results to prioritize service improvements.¹⁴ In addition, the administration could:

- » Publish baseline measurements on the public CX platform before launching improvement work
- » Identify an agency owner and senior sponsor for each measure
- » Set 90-day, six-month, and twelve-month milestones and use the same milestones in cabinet, budget, procurement, and agency performance conversations
- » Include evidence and impact measurement experts from the start (with one embedded on the CX team)¹⁵

Establish a High Impact Service Provider (HISP) accountability system

The three to five service improvements the CX team drives directly are only the start. Governors also need a way to meaningfully improve major programs that reach large numbers of residents or carry high stakes for the people who use them. A state High Impact Service Provider (HISP) system is a proven approach for doing that work across government.

At the start of the administration, build a HISP list focusing at the provider level (e.g., replace Department of Health and Human Services with Bureau of Vital Statistics), where residents experience the service and operational leaders can change the process. Each year, assess high-impact services, measure CX maturity, and identify actions to improve service delivery.¹⁶

Designate HISPs at the program level, not the department level

The governor can designate the first HISP cohort in the first 100 days. Best practice is to make the list small enough to manage and broad enough to test whether the approach works across different service types. For example, an administration might choose service interactions across benefits, licensing, revenue, parks, transportation, housing, or disaster assistance.

Start with four to eight offices, not departments. The first cohort does not need to capture every high-impact service in the state. Use it to create an operating routine for programs where service problems affect many residents or create serious consequences when the process fails. Lean on a coalition of the willing. Find offices that are ready and willing to make improvements and empower them to innovate.

Designate HISPs based on meeting at least one of three criteria:

- » High volume of annual transactions (e.g., Medicaid office or state parks)
- » Large percentage of the state's population served (e.g., DMV or revenue department)
- » Outsized impact on the lives of the people served (e.g., emergency housing assistance, disability career services)

This list can expand over time, but starting small and establishing effective routines has been shown to be a better approach than launching with 30 programs without the infrastructure to support them.

Issue lightweight Year 1 HISP requirements

Governors can use HISP designation to underline and focus stakeholders on their priorities. The management processes built around HISPs help determine how successful the providers will be. In the first year, successful efforts have kept requirements simple enough for agencies to adopt and specific enough to influence behavior and outcomes. Examples include resident feedback, public reporting, and action plans tied to budget and planning decisions. OMB Circular A-11 Section 280 provides a useful federal reference.¹⁷

High Impact Service Providers can do the following to increase successful outcomes:

- » Identify two priority services for improvement
- » Collect structured customer feedback across all service channels (digital, phone, in-person, paper) for comparison and benchmarking
- » Report performance data publicly and at regular intervals (e.g., weekly or monthly)
- » Submit a CX action plan alongside annual budget packages to align improvement efforts with strategic planning and budget requests

Begin building HISP practice

More than just a label, HISP designations can give agencies clearer operating structure to deliver on administrative priorities within state bureaucracies. An effective CX team will help HISP leaders compare baselines, create reusable feedback tools, share research, and identify common barriers that require support from the governor's office.

- » Build a community of practice across HISPs, using mechanisms such as awards programs, peer learning, and shared capacity, so that the designation functions as a resource, not a compliance obligation¹⁸
- » Plug HISP requirements into existing executive processes and priorities, including annual budget submissions, strategic plans, procurement reviews, and rulemaking reviews
- » Empower the CX team to operate a public-facing website with current baseline data on high-impact services, improvement commitments, progress updates, and ongoing feedback

Establish a formal Voice of Customer program

Governors constantly receive feedback on service delivery through constituent calls, agency reports, legislative complaints, ombuds offices, surveys, frontline staff, and public comment. What is often missing is a structured way to distill patterns from these inputs and connect those patterns to operating decisions that improve outcomes.

A Voice of Customer (VoC) program can give the governor's office a view into how their priorities are being delivered and where challenges are emerging. A VoC program would connect all feedback sources so senior leaders can see recurring problems, understand where issues are growing, and decide when and where to intervene with operational, policy, budget, or tech solutions.

New York's VoC provides a useful model of a state program. It offers a structured approach to collecting and analyzing feedback from surveys, service interactions, and digital channels, and translating those insights into improvements.¹⁹

Build the VoC program in stages

The first step is to understand the feedback agencies already collect. Most receive far more feedback than a governor's office sees. The information is often siloed in separate systems, formats, teams, and reports. The CX team can make existing feedback usable by taking the following steps:

1. Inventory agency surveys, web feedback, call center data, constituent correspondence, complaint systems, ombuds reports, office visits, and frontline staff feedback.
2. Use a single, simple feedback form for all HISP touchpoints, with two to four shared questions to help compare like services.²⁰
3. Build a simple triage system that tags resident feedback by agency, service, issue, channel, urgency, and resident journey step.

Share usable feedback with the cabinet to close the feedback loop

Using VoC findings, the governor's office can see recurring service problems across agencies, identify issues that require executive attention, and make resident feedback part of cabinet-level operating reviews. The administration can use VoC feedback to ensure that HISP's are delivering on the governor's priorities and support those that are struggling.

New York, again, provides a useful example. Using what New York calls a Critical State Service Provider approach, the state initially focused on CX improvements in the Department of Health, Department of Motor Vehicles, and Department of Labor. Its 2025 CX accomplishments report shows that its CX work reduced backlogs, shortened processing times, improved digital information, expanded feedback collection, improved search, and shared digital tools.²¹ To begin such an effort, a state can consider the following steps:

1. Include VoC as a standing agenda item in cabinet, operations, budget, and HISP review meetings for a lens into the actual delivery of related administration priorities.
2. Report publicly on what agencies hear from residents and staff, and what actions have been taken to address that feedback.
3. Use ombuds, complaint, constituent service, and frontline channels to identify systemic issues that require cross-agency or governor-level action.

STATE SPOTLIGHT: Utah Voice of Customer Program

Utah's statewide feedback program helps agencies act on resident concerns to improve services and save resources, increasing statewide customer satisfaction in 2025.

Beyond 100 days

In the first 100 days, states can establish high-impact service benchmarks and accountability; beyond 100 days, states can work toward building shared platforms and cross-agency delivery that more sustainably solves problems for constituents.

Supplemental information

What to ask

The Customer Experience team can best find or provide the answers to these questions, which will require working across state agencies and directly learning from the public:

1. What are the state's highest-volume services, the services that reach the largest percentage of the state's population, and the most critical services where the stakes are high for residents? What specific entities are responsible for delivering them?
2. What services are most salient to the people of our state? Where are there problems? How is this different from or similar to where state employees think there are problems?
3. Which service interactions generate the most complaints, repeat calls, abandoned applications, staff rework, procedural denials, or avoidable escalations?

4. What customer experience data does the governor's office have access to right now? What customer experience data are state agencies collecting? Who is accountable for these measures?
5. What north star measure (e.g., trust, confidence in the state's ability to deliver) is most important for the governor's priorities? What measure will the governor hold the senior cabinet to and make clear is a priority to all public servants and people of the state?

What to read

- » [Governments Can Deliver Exceptional Customer Experiences. Here's How. — McKinsey & Company](#)
- » [The Utah Model: Workforce Programs and Services Integration Toolkit — American Enterprise Institute](#)
- » [New York State Customer Experience Strategy — Digital Government Hub](#)
- » [National Park Service 2023 High Impact Service Provider Customer Experience Action Plan — National Park Service](#)
- » [High Impact Service Provider Customer Feedback Data — Performance.gov](#)
- » [The Origins and Practice of Delivery — Stanford Social Innovation Review](#)

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State Spotlight

New York - Collaboratively Centering Customer Experience

New York embedded customer experience and human-centered design across 100-plus state agencies to make public services more accessible and responsive to residents' needs, cutting the time to apply for Medicaid by 30 minutes and reducing medical billing dispute timelines by 92%. They also hired their first Chief Customer Experience Officer to help drive this work.

Challenge

New York serves nearly 20 million residents through more than 100 agencies, but many government services were difficult to navigate due to fragmented systems, complex forms, and lengthy processes. State leaders determined that improving access to benefits and services relied on designing services around residents' experiences.

Approach

In 2023, Governor Hochul established New York's first Chief Customer Experience Officer (CXO) to lead a statewide effort to improve how residents interacted with the government. The CXO works with the Human-Centered Design (HCD) team, which is embedded in the state's enterprise-wide IT shop and could capitalize on the existing cross-functional roles, relationships, and responsibilities, and with over 100 state agencies to identify weak points, test solutions, and continuously improve digital services. Early efforts included redesigning the WIC program website, simplifying content, and launching live-chat tools to gather real-time feedback. In 2025, agencies moved beyond standalone improvements and began integrating CX infrastructure into governance, staffing models, and core service delivery.

Outcomes

30 min

Cut from the time to apply for Medicaid in 2024, after the application was made more mobile-friendly and income verification was updated

92%

Reduction in medical billing dispute timelines at the Workers' Compensation Board in 2025 after digital changes

270%

Increase in statewide analytics capacity in 2025, giving agencies real-time insight into how customers interact with state websites

Lessons Learned

- » Executive leadership matters to signal for agencies to invest in resident-centered design.
- » Human-centered design works best when embedded in existing government operations, allowing for deeper partnerships.
- » Understanding how residents interact with services, and how agencies work together behind the scenes, helps identify opportunities to simplify and improve usability.

Read More

[Collaboratively Centering the "Customer Experience" in New York State](#), [Digital Government Hub](#)
[New York State Experience Accomplishments](#), [The State of New York](#)



State Spotlight

Ohio Statewide CX Transformation

Ohio transformed state-level customer experience by replacing a maze of separate agency logins and websites with one experience built on a shared data platform, which is now used by over 8 million residents.

Challenge

Ohio residents previously needed a separate login for each state agency website and often had to submit the same paperwork separately to each agency. Each agency also had siloed data, which slowed the state's ability to respond quickly to public health crises, identify duplicate spending, or simplify interactions such as starting a business or applying for benefits.

Approach

Ohio created InnovateOhio by executive order in 2019 and paired it with the Department of Administrative Services, giving the office authority to set digital standards across state agencies. The InnovateOhio Platform, the technological underpinning of the program, has three main pillars: user experience, digital identity and data analytics. Using the platform, the state built a handful of shared products for use by all state agencies. Ohio deployed the secure, cloud-based OH|ID platform as its primary digital identity service to simplify sign-in across agencies, created custom UX toolkits with built-in ADA compliance to modernize 48+ agency websites, and established the DataOhio Portal as a central repository enabling cross-agency data sharing and predictive health analytics.

Outcomes

8M

Residents accessing state services using single sign-on across hundreds of agency systems

48+

State agency websites rebuilt to provide cohesive, mobile-friendly, ADA-compliant service

\$2M

In duplicate payments recovered through data analytics on agency spending

Lessons Learned

- » Establishing an empowered center-of-government team (InnovateOhio) is essential to break down inter-agency barriers and data silos, and enforce statewide digital standards.
- » Universal digital identity (OH|ID) and shared data repositories (DataOhio) are foundational platforms that reduce agency overhead and simplify resident interactions across agencies.
- » As one example of how Ohio listens to the "Voice of the Customer," the Long-Term Care Quality Navigator, built on the InnovateOhio Platform, was updated in 2025 based on feedback from statewide listening sessions.

Read More

[Using technology to improve the lives of Ohioans, Ohio Dept. of Administrative Services](#)
[Data infrastructure, 2022 State Standard of Excellence, Results for America](#)
[Ohio's Long-Term Care Quality Navigator \(FAQ\), Ohio Dept. of Aging](#)
[Ohio CIO Katrina Flory expands and evolves digital services, Government Technology](#)



State Spotlight

Seattle Services Application Platform

Seattle city government partnered with a tech for good organization to build CiviForm, a service and benefits application platform that allows staff to easily update forms without IT. The platform slashed average application time by 77%, from 30 minutes to seven.

Challenge

Residents seeking public benefits had to navigate multiple agency websites and repeatedly enter personal information, a fragmented and redundant experience. Over the years, government agencies had built and bought one-off intake systems, making them dependent on IT or outside vendors every time a form needed to be changed.

Approach

Seattle built CiviForm as a shared, no-code platform where staff can create or update forms without needing to write code or wait on IT. The system allows residents to enter their information once and reuse it for any benefit they apply for. The city built in multi-language support (seven languages in addition to English), and brokered a cross-agency data-sharing agreement so proof of eligibility follows residents from program to program. As an open-source platform, CiviForm and its improvements are freely available to any government that wants to adopt them.

Outcomes

77%

Reduction in average application time
(30 minutes to 7 minutes)

50K+

Applications received across Seattle's
benefit and discount programs

3

Additional jurisdictions now running
CiviForm: Bloomington, IN; Charlotte,
NC; and Arkansas

Lessons Learned

- » Reduce redundancy by letting residents enter their information once and populating it across all relevant programs.
- » Cut processing time by leveraging data sharing agreements and cross-department infrastructure to log eligibility documents submitted by applicants.
- » Take advantage of open-source resources, which can be quickly adopted by any jurisdiction to improve delivery of government services.

Read More

[What is CiviForm?, CiviForm documentation](#)

[Seattle CiviForm programs, City of Seattle](#)

[Seattle's CiviForm Named One of Time's Best Inventions of 2025, Seattle Innovation Hub](#)



State Spotlight

Utah Voice of Customer Program

Utah's statewide feedback program helped agencies act on resident concerns to improve services and save resources, increasing statewide customer satisfaction in 2025.

Challenge

Initially, if state agencies gathered resident feedback, they would do so individually, using different tools and asking different questions. There was no consistent way to compare results across agencies, no requirement to report what was learned, and no reliable way to easily identify a problem and ensure it got fixed.

Approach

In 2018, Utah was the first state in the nation to adopt a statewide customer experience program focused on improving the experience of its residents. The program allows more in-house research, consolidates customer experience programs on a single platform, and helps the state provide better service while becoming more efficient. In 2020, the Legislature passed H.B. 304 to formalize the program in statute, requiring the Governor's Office of Planning and Budget to publish a public feedback report every year. Every agency uses the same four measures: Effort, Satisfaction, Empathy, and Reliability, so results can be compared across agencies. In 2025, the state added mandatory quarterly improvement tracking, requiring every agency to document the specific insight it learned from feedback and the action it took in response. In the last year, as of June 2026, the system generated 96,907 actionable responses, providing leadership with a heat map to show where state services are excelling and where they require intervention. Cumulative statewide scores and CX projects are posted on a public dashboard.

Outcomes

4.0

Statewide average satisfaction score (out of 5), an increase from 2024 to 2025 due to 98 completed improvement projects

30–60 min → <5 min

Drop in Dept. of Commerce phone hold times after consolidating divisions onto one shared switchboard based on resident feedback

\$110,000

In savings from Department of Public Safety's secure digital upload workflow for remote immigration credentialing, avoiding unnecessary in-person trips and manual processing

Lessons Learned

- » Shared questions and a shared tool make feedback comparable. Leadership can easily see where to prioritize improvements across agencies because every agency uses the same four metrics on the same platform.
- » Listening only pays off if agencies act on the feedback. Utah's 2025 requirement for every agency to document quarterly what it learned and what it changed ensures ongoing improvements.

Read More

[Customer Experience Initiative, Governor's Office of Planning and Budget](#)
[Customer Experience 2025 Report, Governor's Office of Planning and Budget](#)

Artificial Intelligence



Artificial Intelligence

Moving from AI activity to AI impact — building the strategy, leadership, and foundations to deliver measurable public value

Artificial intelligence will reshape, and potentially transform, how we live and work as it moves from novelty to infrastructure. State AI activity is already widespread — 90% of states have started generative AI pilots — but progress on operational scaling and measured public value has been far slower. The first 100 days are the window to name the right leader, launch a structured discovery sprint, and commit to pilots before the pace of AI change outstrips the state's capacity to respond.

Key Opportunities · First 100 Days

- ☐ **Select and empower a senior AI and emerging tech leader**
 - ☐ Align goals to administration priorities and give the AI leader broad authority
 - ☐ Ensure the AI leader has hiring authority and budget commensurate to the goals
- ☐ **Build a bold and responsible AI strategy and prioritize high-impact use cases**
 - ☐ Stand up a tiger team
 - ☐ Launch a 60-day discovery sprint across agencies
 - ☐ Create a one-year AI enablement strategy with specific goals for the first 100 days
 - ☐ Target three high-impact constituent journeys and launch small, fast-moving pilots
- ☐ **Strengthen tech and organizational foundations**
 - ☐ Develop AI fluency with training for all workers
 - ☐ Audit or build an AI inventory
 - ☐ Streamline AI governance and cybersecurity across tech silos
- ☐ **Update state procurement processes for AI**
 - ☐ Adapt to a changing environment
 - ☐ Optimize for interoperability and avoid vendor lock-in
 - ☐ Know when to build, when to buy, and when to consider open source

“

“The largest gap in state AI maturity is not governance — it is measurement. Most states can describe where AI is deployed but few have insights into what the pilots are actually achieving.”

— Code for America, 2026 Government AI Landscape Assessment

Top Questions to Ask Your Leaders

- 1 Who owns statewide AI implementation strategy, and do they have the necessary resources and authority to coordinate across agencies?
- 2 Which agencies have the data quality, tech staff, cybersecurity controls, and procurement capacity needed to launch pilots or move from pilot to production?
- 3 Which three constituent journeys could improve service or reduce staff burden within the first year?
- 4 How will the state measure whether each AI pilot improves outcomes, saves time, reduces burden, or increases risk?
- 5 Which procurement rules need updating so AI contracts enable AI procurement and protect data, portability, performance, and public accountability?

Key Roles to Fill

- **Chief AI Officer / Senior AI and Emerging Technology Leader** — Cross-agency authority with a direct line to the governor; owns the AI strategy, governance, risk-tiering, workforce fluency, and the state's public posture on AI
- **AI Tiger Team** — Small, technical, cross-functional group authorized to work across agencies; completes the 60-day discovery sprint, builds the inventory, identifies pilots, and develops the one-year strategy

State Spotlight

Texas — Department of Transportation AI Governance

Texas moved AI from pilots into operations using a human-led, AI-supported governance model that scaled tools across the agency while maintaining human decision authority.

- Redirects 22,000 staff hours annually to higher-value work
- Reduces invoice processing time by 75%

What to Read

- [The 2026 AI Index Report — Stanford University Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence](#)
- [Best Practices in Public-Sector AI Governance: A Practitioner's Playbook — UC Berkeley School of Information](#)
- [Beyond Generation: The Rise of Agentic AI in State Government — NASCIO](#)
- [Government AI Landscape Assessment — Code for America](#)
- [The Agentic State: Rethinking Government for the Era of Agentic AI — The Agentic State](#)
- [A Three Horizons Vision for Congress — Popvox Foundation and Recoding America Fund](#)

Overview

Artificial intelligence will reshape, and potentially transform, how we live and work as it moves from novelty to infrastructure. This transformation is expected to be at least as impactful as personal computers and the internet. Stanford's 2026 AI Index shows mass adoption faster than either, with generative AI reaching nearly 53% of Americans in under three years and organizational adoption at 88%.¹ AI is transforming knowledge work, software development – where the advances are the farthest along – and will impact every aspect of government from IT to procurement to cybersecurity. Some people are already shifting behaviors by using AI and AI agents that bypass traditional websites, paper forms, and mobile apps to accomplish tasks.

Government leaders need to be prepared for this transition. The next four years offer a generational opportunity to harness AI and re-envision how the public accesses services, how states strengthen their labor force and internal operations, and how government manages new and existing risks to safety and security.

State AI activity is already widespread. In its 2025 State CIO Survey, NASCIO found 90% of states had started generative AI pilots, 86% had implemented proof of concepts, and 82% of state CIOs said their employees were using generative AI in daily work.²

Many states have policies, task forces, and pilots, but fewer have considered how to integrate AI into daily processes and operations, or are using it to rebuild tech infrastructure with clear measurement of returns. Code for America's 2026 Government AI Landscape Assessment found that states are progressing quickly through governance and experimentation, while moving more slowly through operational scaling and measured public value such as cost savings, service improvements, or improved outcomes.³ Responsibly closing the gap between AI pilots and scaled service improvement requires leadership, strategy, improved data quality, procurement reform, labor force fluency, and understanding AI's current limits and dangers. Current capabilities are strongest for software development, customer service, and internal support such as drafting, summarization, document processing, and chatbots.⁴

AI's use in high-stakes, knowledge-based government work such as policy analysis, regulatory review, hiring, procurement, and cybersecurity is expected to grow significantly over the next two to three years. Gartner projects that by 2028, a third of enterprise software will include agentic AI and 15% of day-to-day work decisions will be made autonomously, up from near zero in 2024.⁵ AI agents (also referred to as Agentic AI) use large language models (LLMs) and software tools to perceive, think, and act autonomously. These systems are capable of reasoning through complex challenges and processes and acting with minimal human intervention to deliver outcomes.⁶ Eight states

already report agentic AI tools in production.⁷ “Agentic flooding,” defined as the surge in demand on government services when the public uses AI agents to interact with government, is already showing up across governments, which makes implementing resilience measures even more critical.

AI systems and AI agents (referred to collectively as AI in this memo) could touch nearly every function of government, from lawmaking to public safety to benefits delivery.⁸ A state that uses AI in its own operations will also build the tech capacity and judgment to engage with each of these issues more critically and more productively. The first 100 days offer an incoming governor the opportunity to define a new vision, establish a new operating discipline, and create a new approach for government services using AI.

In the United States, private AI investment reached \$344 billion in 2025. A new Brookings Institution analysis projects \$10.3 trillion in AI infrastructure investment from 2025 through 2032 at an average of 3.6% of GDP per year – an investment larger, relative to the economy, than past railroad, electrification, highway, and telecommunications booms.⁹ These large investments raise the stakes for economic stability, safety, and security if business returns fail to materialize. There is also significant and valid concern about the dangers posed by AI, especially as models become more capable and AI agents become more proficient at completing sophisticated tasks. It is critical that government develop a deliberate and well-thought out responsible AI strategy to leverage the benefits of this technology while minimizing risk and protecting against dangers to safety and security. Several externalities are outside the scope of this memo but states can be prepared by focusing on institutional resilience and adaptability. These include:

1. **Data Centers:** Data centers continue to raise separate and widely felt concerns about water, climate, land use, and electricity, consuming an estimated 4.4% of US electricity in 2023. The Department of Energy projects that share could reach 6.7 to 12% by 2028.¹⁰ Many states are affected by these concerns, and new administrations will need to be prepared to address these issues and sentiments if their states are affected.
2. **Cybersecurity:** Foreign state-sponsored attackers have used AI to run cyber operations. In November 2025, Anthropic disclosed the first reported AI-orchestrated cyber espionage campaign, attributed to a state-sponsored group, and only 22% of state CISOs say they are confident their state's information assets are protected.¹¹ Cybersecurity risks are expected to rise as models, especially open-weight models, become more capable.
3. **Agentic and Recursive Self-Improvement (RSI) AI:** As systems gain autonomy, governance and evaluation of AI models and deployed applications become even more critical.¹² RSI AI, a capability where AI meaningfully accelerates its own development, will further compress timelines for advanced capabilities from years to months and is considered plausible by 2028-2030 by forecasters.¹³ Rapidly increasing capabilities in these domains and recent events of “swarms” of AI agents hacking systems are driving calls for pacing the development of AI, stringent testing and evaluations of AI systems and regulating releases of more powerful models in proportion to the increase in their capabilities.
4. **Legislation:** The absence of comprehensive national AI legislation stands in contrast to more than 150 AI laws enacted by states since the start of 2025, creating regulatory seams and

conflicting requirements that will be negotiated in Congress and the courts over the next two to three years.¹⁴

AI opportunities for the first 100 days of 2027

States have been piloting, deploying, and establishing governance practices for AI for several years and are at different stages of technical maturity. For states that are just beginning, opportunities for the first 100 days provide a roadmap to strengthen responsible AI adoption and implementation. States that are further along will benefit from reviewing past decisions and strategies against this playbook to continue to build on foundations already established. Four specific opportunities for AI in the first 100 days include:

1. Select and empower a senior AI and emerging tech leader
2. Build a bold and responsible AI strategy and prioritizing high-impact uses
3. Strengthen tech and organizational foundations
4. Update state procurement processes for AI

Select and empower a senior AI and emerging tech leader

A critical step in the first 30 days is to designate and empower a senior AI and emerging tech leader who is public service focused and experienced in tech, product, and policy, and has implemented AI-based services and applications. The role is responsible for establishing the state's internal AI strategy in the public interest; leading cross-agency coordination on AI; owning internal governance and risk-tiering for use cases; labor force fluency and capacity; and speaking publicly on the state's implementation of AI.

The right leader is a systems thinker with the skills and judgment to drive change across government domains such as benefits, permitting, and health and human services as well as lead and resolve AI policy that affects internal implementations. The individual will be deeply engaged in the evolution of AI and its applications with the discipline to stay current in a field that changes month to month. They bring a national network to draw on, not just in government but also in industry, academia, and civil society, or can credibly commit to building one. They understand how to manage tradeoffs and deliver results within government, or leverage available networks such as the Center for Civic Futures (CCF), InnovateUS, the Tech Executive Leadership Initiative (TELI), and Recoding America, among others, to learn and lead change at scale. Whether an administration brings in a new leader or retains an existing one, this person will be most successful if given a clear mandate, visible backing, resources, and authority to resolve cross-agency barriers.

Align goals to administration priorities and give the AI leader broad authority

States have found different ways to structure their AI and emerging tech offices. Pennsylvania chose to empower its Commonwealth CIO through a Generative AI Governing Board, scaling a first-in-the-nation ChatGPT Enterprise pilot to more than 3,000 employees across 35 agencies.¹⁵ The AI leader's goals are to align strategies and resources to the administration's priorities and be empowered to take needed actions with authority. They are responsible for driving state adoption and implementation of AI across agencies and credibly making consequential decisions about risk, investment, and governance.

Incoming administrations will need to consider the long-term operating model for this role, beyond the first 100 days, and have a strategy and budget in place to support the work long term. Decide early on whether the AI leader for the first 100 days or first year is the right person to stay in the position beyond that timeframe. It is important to acknowledge tensions that may exist between a new overarching role and existing leadership such as the CIO and CTO and with IT, digital services, and innovation. While the structure varies, successful models are those where the AI leader has genuine cross-agency reach and explicit backing from the governor's office. Oklahoma created a combined Chief AI and Technology Officer in November 2025 to implement statewide AI strategy, guardrails, modernization, and responsible adoption across more than 125 agencies, boards, and commissions.¹⁶

Ensure the AI leader has hiring authority and budget commensurate to the goals

Ensure the AI leader has the strategic authority to hire a team with the needed expertise and qualifications or has access to internal resources accountable to them, and a budget sized to deliver outcomes for the public. Successful state efforts have given the state AI leader direct hiring authority for AI staff, multi-year operating budgets appropriate to the goals, the authority to redirect existing IT program teams toward AI initiatives, and permission to establish partnerships with external talent pipelines.¹⁷

Hiring talent to support early AI work can be a challenge. State digital service teams have successfully helped agencies bring tech talent into government. Colorado Digital Service uses limited tours of civic service for senior engineers, designers, product managers, and procurement specialists.¹⁸ Maryland created full-time state roles across engineering, design, product, web experience, and strategic investments.¹⁹ InnovateUS and U.S. Digital Response's [Google.org](https://www.google.org/fellows/) Fellows program can add external training and tech capacity where states need practical support.²⁰

AI's accelerating capabilities, sophistication, and complexity mean that administrations need to consider how to dedicate funding for AI within their overall tech budgets. These budgets will have a direct effect on the scale and impact of the administration's AI initiatives and on deploying the guardrails required to ensure successful and safe outcomes. Only 25% of states reported dedicated AI funding in NASCIO's 2025 State CIO Survey, which means many states are still supporting AI through existing IT budgets, redirected funds, or other available tech resources.²¹

STATE SPOTLIGHT: Maryland Senior AI Leader

Maryland empowered a Senior AI Leader to coordinate the state's AI strategy. As a result, the state released an executive order, "Catalyzing the Responsible and Productive Use of Artificial Intelligence in Maryland State Government," in 2024, followed by the AI Governance Act of 2024 (SB 818), and provided AI tools and literacy to the state labor force.

Build a bold and responsible AI strategy and prioritize high-impact use cases

An AI leader's focus for the first 100 days is on creating a bold, responsible AI strategy for the year, executing against it, and building momentum towards measurable goals. Specific actions include launching a 60-day discovery sprint, creating the AI strategy, identifying a small slate of high-impact constituent journeys tied to administration priorities, and determining which would benefit from new AI-based pilots and which existing pilots would scale to production.

After the initial strategy has been created and pilots launched, areas of focus shift to strengthening organizational foundations for safe, secure AI in the public interest, which include implementing labor force training, completing an inventory of existing systems and tools that use AI, and establishing the state's longer-term operating model for AI enablement and governance. An administration beginning in January 2027 has a unique opportunity to initiate deeper transformations enabled by AI and to envision how government operates and delivers services.

Stand up a tiger team

One of the first tasks for the AI leader is to stand up a tiger team. The team, led by the AI leader, is small, tech, cross-functional, and authorized by the governor's office to work across agencies and access information. The team's responsibilities include completing a discovery sprint within 60 days; developing the AI strategy for the first year based on findings from the sprint; and identifying high-impact constituent journeys and use cases for AI that align with the administration's priorities.

The tiger team is also responsible for reviewing current implementations of AI in IT systems and creating an inventory; talking to frontline agency leaders and staff about high-burden workflows to identify good candidates for AI; and auditing public-facing services for constituent journeys that are challenging or potentially exposed to AI-driven demand surges in the near future.²²

Candidate use cases can be evaluated on three factors: constituent and fiscal value, feasibility based on tested models in other states, and risk relative to data sensitivity and public exposure.²³ A key goal is to identify potential quick wins that could be prioritized, while initiating larger strategic projects in year one.

Launch a 60-day discovery sprint across agencies

The senior AI leader and the tiger team spend the first 60 days doing a structured discovery sprint across agencies responsible for tech, benefits, and high-impact digital services. The goal is to have a clear-eyed picture of current implementations of AI and tech and to understand the gaps most

likely to block AI pilots from being implemented or issues that may prevent existing AI pilots from scaling to production.

The sprint identifies the state of data quality, governance, and infrastructure; AI governance and enablement frameworks for both generative AI and agentic AI systems; privacy policies; cybersecurity posture including vulnerability to AI-generated attacks; enterprise platforms and sandboxes; contracts, procurement policies, and memos of understanding (MoUs); and AI fluency and capacity within the labor force and among external partners, contractors, or vendors. The sprint allows teams to evaluate whether existing AI initiatives are improving services, reducing harm, reducing staff burden, and/or strengthening operations. The findings from the sprint form the basis for the AI strategy and for a prioritized roadmap for year one.

Create a one-year responsible AI enablement strategy with specific goals for the first 100 days

Current best practice is to build a one-year responsible AI enablement strategy with clear milestones for the first 30, 60, and 100 days, a roadmap, and monthly reviews for the rest of the year. While strategies generally do not change significantly year over year, AI tools, risks, and vendor offerings are changing faster than normal state planning cycles, which means monthly reviews are critical to staying aligned with the tech and its potential impact in many areas of government.

By January of 2027, new AI implementations will heavily consist of AI agents that can plan steps, use tools, and take autonomous actions within defined boundaries. There are opportunities and risks in this new set of tools, and a strong strategy explicitly prepares for this eventuality. The Agentic State identifies six enablement layers a government must have in place before agents can operate safely, including governance frameworks for accountability and redress, data management and privacy, and tech infrastructure and interfaces.²⁴ NASCIO's guidance includes updating AI policies to address agentic risk, building partnerships across the organization with security, privacy, and data officers and the agencies that own the workflows, and expanding autonomy incrementally to build trust.²⁵ NASCIO documented eight states already running agentic AI in production in early 2026, while full enterprise deployment remains in the single digits across most business functions.²⁶ Virginia's July 2025 executive order authorized agentic AI for regulatory review; Tennessee is procuring a next-generation enterprise resource planning (ERP) system with agentic capabilities.²⁷ Patterns of success suggest that any use case that affects rights, benefits, eligibility, enforcement, safety, or public access benefits from clear escalation rules and requires accountable public officials.

Commit to three pilots from the discovery sprint, each with a clear hypothesis and a potential pathway to production once validated. Internal workflows, permitting and licensing, document processing, benefits navigation, and fraud detection are proven categories.²⁸ The section below, on high-impact constituent journeys, offers additional suggestions. The largest gap in state AI maturity is not governance, it is measurement. Most states can describe where AI is deployed, but few have insights into what the pilots are actually achieving.²⁹ The most useful pilots include specific and measurable metrics for success, clear delivery timelines, and validation through testing and evaluation to ensure that the pilots are delivering intended outcomes. Pilots also serve to identify areas of potential harm and cybersecurity risks and present opportunities to address these issues in a contained environment.

The strategy also defines the state's criteria for buying or licensing systems developed by vendors vs. building AI systems and tools in-house. The right in-house tech talent can help drive desired outcomes within build and buy scenarios. Only 16% of state CIOs reported using AI tools developed in-house in 2024.³⁰ That means many more are using outsourced AI tools, some of which are already facing questions about data ownership. When outsourcing to vendors, in-house capacity to understand data ownership becomes even more critical. Rapidly increasing capabilities of AI coding agents for software development and legacy code modernization present new opportunities for states to define their approach to developing and deploying software vs. procuring it.

States that reach what Code for America calls "Established" share specific traits: formalized AI inventories, quantified impact metrics tied to budget or policy decisions, audit and monitoring mechanisms, and transparent publication of findings.³¹ Beyond the first 100 days and the pilots, two or three foundational investments from the discovery sprint, each with specific delivery milestones for the first year and a pre-agreed return on investment goal, are indicative of success.

STATE SPOTLIGHT: New Jersey AI Assistant

New Jersey launched its AI Assistant program in July 2024. In 18 months, it scaled to more than 20,000 state employees with over 1 million prompts, costing roughly \$1 per user per month.³²

Target three high-impact constituent journeys and launch small, fast-moving pilots

Thoughtful discovery sprints can reveal which high impact journeys will be best suited for pilots. Permitting and licensing are high-impact areas to explore. (See Permitting Memo). Virginia's agentic AI regulatory review pilot and Maryland's housing-permitting partnership show how states are beginning to test AI against complex administrative workflows.³³ Tennessee is procuring a next-generation enterprise resource planning system (ERP) with agentic capabilities to flag procurement bottlenecks and compliance risks.³⁴

Benefits eligibility is another high-impact use case. Maryland processes more than 150,000 documents per month manually for SNAP, Medicaid, temporary cash assistance, and WIC. The state's 2025 partnership with Anthropic, Percepta, and the Rockefeller Foundation includes a Claude-powered virtual assistant intended to help residents apply for SNAP, Medicaid, temporary cash assistance, and WIC and identify other programs they may qualify for.³⁵ Governors can expect AI to increase take-up rates and model the fiscal exposure ahead of time.³⁶

Accelerating casework in child welfare, adult protective services, housing assistance, and veterans services is another area to consider. AI-based internal workflow tools could support staff by handling time-consuming tasks like documentation, policy lookups, and routing work. Build multilingual access from launch, and measure equity outcomes alongside efficiency.³⁷

Consequential decisions involving privacy, health, safety, and security are best made by humans and accountable public officials, even as agentic AI challenges this over time. Experts support "human in the loop" final evaluations by experts. As agentic AI makes it more difficult to manually control AI and conduct human reviews, agentic AI oversight practices such as post-hoc auditing, real-time

monitoring, and steering become more critical to effectively conducting human review of AI outputs.³⁸

Best-in-class states follow modern software acquisition and development practices for the pilots by focusing on specific and measurable outcomes, not tech outputs. They structure goals around smaller procurements and sprints with timelines measured in months and weeks, not years; emphasize iterative, agile delivery; and review state policies on the use of AI for software development and coding. The pilots are led by the AI leader in partnership with state IT officers (CIO, CTO, CDO, CISO, and others), agency/department teams, and privacy and compliance teams.

STATE SPOTLIGHT: Tennessee AI-Powered Customer Service

Tennessee Dept. of Safety and Homeland Security deployed an agentic AI platform to improve customer service across voice, chat, and email, answering 70% more driver-service call-center questions each day and addressing 80% of driver-service chat inquiries.

Strengthen tech and organizational foundations

Most states are further behind than their pilot activity suggests. Code for America's 2026 maturity analysis rates every state on a four-stage rubric from Readiness to Impact. On Stage 3, Implementation, 26 states are still rated Early. On Stage 4, Impact, no state in the country is rated Advanced.³⁹ Typical state patterns are heavy on governance and light on measurement and proven impact. A new administration has to build the critical tech, data, and organizational foundations to support larger AI-enabled ambitions. Scaling AI depends on these foundations that many states are still building.

Strengthening tech and data foundations is an ongoing endeavor. And while AI creates the opportunity to reenvision government operations, services, and delivery, and do it more cost-effectively, AI capabilities have real limitations. The state needs to ensure it has the internal capacity and resources to execute more complex tech programs for the public. AI capabilities are expected to rapidly change in the next two to three years as agentic coding becomes more capable and autonomous, and recursive AI becomes a reality.

For the first 100 days, leading states prioritize updating foundations needed to support the pilots and covering gaps that need immediate attention, as revealed by the discovery sprint. These generally will include outdated infrastructure; a lack of quality or anonymized, structured data and governance; cybersecurity vulnerabilities; and outdated or nonexistent policies for AI use and compliance. Updating tech foundations beyond the one-year plan and initial pilots, including modernizing legacy code using AI, is an important part of an administration's longer-term planning.

Strengthening organizational foundations to responsibly use AI for the public includes developing labor force AI fluency; conducting an inventory of existing AI deployments and keeping it up to date; and streamlining AI governance across organizational silos. Identify gaps between what exists and what is required based on findings from the discovery sprint and additional deep dives with agencies, and then set targets to achieve desired outcomes.

Develop AI fluency with training for all workers

AI tools are easy to begin using. A simple chat interface can answer questions or summarize reports. True value in supporting more complex processes, such as writing policy, deploying AI for permitting or benefits processes, and using AI for software development and legacy modernization, requires training and learning how to use these tools safely and securely. AI fluency among the labor force is critical to developing capacity and fully realizing the potential AI enables.

STATE SPOTLIGHT: Pennsylvania AI training program

Pennsylvania requires completion of a state-administered training program before any employee can access its ChatGPT Enterprise pilot. 85% of participating employees had a positive experience using the pilot and estimated saving an average of 95 minutes per day.⁴⁰

The senior AI leader owns outcomes for AI fluency and capacity across the labor force. New York expanded AI training and provided a secure AI tool to more than 100,000 state employees across 50 agencies, calling it the largest state workforce AI deployment of its kind.⁴¹ InnovateUS has trained more than 200,000 public-sector learners through formal partnerships with governments throughout the country and is the most active partner in this space.⁴²

Training does not need to be custom-developed in-house or with a contractor. Many commercial and noncommercial organizations offer an extensive selection of free and fee-based AI training. Training will vary by role: broad awareness and familiarity with the tools for everyone; deeper tech skills for technologists including engineers developing software or updating existing code; specialized workflow-based training for people who may use AI for processes like permitting or benefits; and focused briefings for cabinet and agency leaders making decisions about AI tools and systems in their portfolios. Communities of practice maintain a connection to real use cases beyond training. The California Department of Technology runs a monthly statewide AI community attended by 200 to 400 people, surfacing use cases, sharing lessons, and pulling agencies forward together.⁴³

Audit or build an AI inventory

Build an AI inventory: a catalog of every AI tool, product, and service the state is using, organized by use case and classified by risk. Support active and continuous monitoring of the AI inventory to ensure it remains current as more software leverages AI functionality. Once created, categorize and group AI systems based on how and where they are used, not individual systems, as some IT systems will support or power multiple applications and may not, in fact, be separate systems. For example, a single facial recognition system can support a dozen distinct uses with very different risk profiles. Organize around the use, not the tool.⁴⁴ Make note of who can access the systems. State AI officers cite issues where outputs and data produced by AI are attached to individual user accounts, requiring officials to recreate them when a user leaves.

As AI becomes embedded in collaboration platforms, SaaS applications, cloud services, and development environments, agencies need visibility into more than standalone AI tools. Include models, datasets, APIs, agents, and services that may operate inside broader systems or vendor

platforms in the AI inventory. AI Bill of Materials (AIBOMs) practices are an emerging approach to that problem, and states may wish to treat them as a developing inventory and governance tool, not as a settled standard.⁴⁵ Services embedded in typical office products such as autocomplete, spelling, grammar, and search do not need to be included in an inventory unless these tools play a role in decisions or impact outcomes.

Maryland positioned the AI inventory as a tool for risk categorization through a senior-staff outreach tour to agencies; Georgia framed it as "If you have an idea, a problem, or a vendor knocking down your door, just fill out this form and talk to us."⁴⁶ For risk classification, Ohio's qualifier heat map and California's tiered GenAI Risk Assessment workflow are two practical state-built models.⁴⁷

If an inventory does not exist, launching one is a task for the first 100 days. If one does exist, audit it for completeness and compliance. Auditing an existing inventory or building a new one will likely take more than 100 days depending on the starting point but is achievable within six months.

Streamline AI governance and cybersecurity across tech silos

AI cuts across every existing compliance process: privacy, security, data, legal, product, and civil rights. Most states run these as separate siloed activities either as parallel or sequential efforts. The first task for the first 100 days is to consolidate and sequence review pipelines and, where possible, automate the process for future iterations.

Three patterns have proven effective to date:

- » Centralize AI governance even within otherwise federated IT structures. Indiana requires the CIO and Chief Data Officer to sign off before any agency deploys AI, with 30-day reviews of use. Michigan's centralized process catches every AI procurement and use case.⁴⁸
- » Calibrate governance and enablement to risk: light-touch self-review for low-risk uses, deeper assessment and senior approval for high-risk, with risk acceptance tied to non-tech business owners.⁴⁹
- » Ensuring strong cyber defenses is a critical component of AI implementations and requires more than a CISO review prior to implementation. Cybersecurity considerations, especially with the proliferation of powerful AI agents, are a necessary component of strategic planning, development, and active monitoring once deployed. Recent reports by Anthropic and OpenAI about systems being hacked by "swarms" of AI agents increase the stakes of AI deployments. Mitigating risk from these advanced agentic capabilities requires rigorous testing and evaluation protocols (which are still being developed) and consideration of suggestions from leaders in the field to slow the pace of development and manage capabilities and releases through regulation. Treat cybersecurity as dual-edged: the state is simultaneously building AI for cybersecurity and building cybersecurity for AI. NASCIO's March 2026 report adapts the Open Worldwide Application Security Project (OWASP) Top 10 for Agentic Applications as the operational baseline: limit access by design, require human approval for high-risk actions, secure execution environments, validate intent, and log and monitor continuously.⁵⁰

STATE SPOTLIGHT: Texas Department of Transportation AI Governance Strategy

The Texas Department of Transportation followed its Artificial Intelligence Strategic Plan to identify and transition successful AI pilots into ongoing operations, which allowed the agency to redirect 22,000 staff hours annually to higher-priority work and reduce invoice processing time by 75%.

Update state procurement processes for AI

Modern procurement practices are essential to successful AI initiatives. The state needs procurement vehicles that can move at the pace of the tech and market, that can evaluate vendors and models effectively, and operationalize responsible-use policies in contract language. NASCIO and NASPO's state AI procurement playbook gives state CIOs and chief procurement officers a shared starting point.⁵¹

Updating AI procurement in states means adapting to a changing environment and aggressively updating its procurement policies and practices; being wary of vendor lock-in, which can occur in multiple ways, seen and unseen; being highly rigorous in evaluations of AI-based systems; and carefully analyzing build vs. buy decisions.

Adapt to a changing environment

AI is transforming how software products are built. Agentic coding significantly reduces the time to build prototypes and production software. The most expensive part of a software procurement used to be engineering and development, but private sector users report these costs are trending lower due to the tech. However, this does not necessarily mean an overall reduction in cost. Agentic coded software still requires planning, architecture, data integration, security reviews, and integration with existing systems, some of which still run on legacy code such as COBOL, many of which add costs to the procurement.

If AI models are embedded in a product or service for chatbots, summarization and research applications, or productivity workflows, then the procurement must factor in the cost of “tokens” beyond standard seat licenses. Usage-based costs for AI can increase expenses significantly and exhaust annual budget allocations in months. State AI leaders are beginning to track these expenses closely and seek to limit them by setting predetermined caps.

Agentic coding also requires continuous cybersecurity checks both at the time of code creation and in alpha, beta, MVP, and production stages. Rigorously test and evaluate AI-generated code to ensure the product is delivering intended outcomes and minimizing harm due to implicit bias, limitations in capability, hallucinations, outright errors, and potentially malicious behavior by the agents themselves. Clearly specify in contracts where vendors and contractors may or may not use AI (yes for coding with guardrails, no to automated decisions and determinations). These requirements must be baked into procurement contracts and will require diligent updates to procurement policies, practices, and contractual language.

Seek contract terms that bar AI providers from using any government-furnished data to train or improve their models, systems, tools, or services, whether directly or indirectly (unless explicitly authorized by the state).

The existence of AI agents offered by frontier companies with increasing capabilities as well as open-source personal agents means that government systems need to be ready to accept interactions driven by these agents. These interactions may be through standard web interfaces but may also take place through agent-to-agent interactions using APIs and code.

Another concern is that vendors and contractors may embed AI in their products whether or not it is necessary, increasing the cost of the product or service. For SaaS products, these features may be unavoidable, but it is important to be aware they exist. Bespoke products offer customization and choices but almost always result in higher costs.

Three practices have proven effective for successful AI procurements:

- » Form a cross-functional acquisition, IT, cybersecurity, privacy, legal, civil rights procurement team before issuing a solicitation⁵²
- » Embed AI checks in state procurement, budget, and cybersecurity review pipelines so shadow AI cannot enter through informal channels⁵³
- » Capture lessons learned formally after each AI procurement above a defined threshold and share findings across state agencies through the senior AI leader's office⁵⁴

Optimize for interoperability and avoid vendor lock-in

The AI model and tool market is moving fast, and today's dominant vendors may not be tomorrow's. OMB offers three organizing principles for states to consider: ensure a competitive AI marketplace, track performance and manage risk, and promote cross-functional engagement.⁵⁵ Two additional operating principles further help ensure long-term success. First, prioritize data ownership in contract negotiations and treat algorithm IP as secondary.⁵⁶ Second, default to AI as a service rather than AI as a product. AI systems learn and drift, and service-based procurement aligns the burden of maintenance and vendor incentives correctly. Additional approaches to prevent vendor lock-in include ensuring complete project context, memory, and data transfer prior to contract closeout and maintaining code ownership, including software repositories, where applicable and feasible.

Pair the senior AI leader with the state chief procurement officer formally, use AI to prepare in advance for a procurement, and require joint sign-off on AI procurements above a defined threshold. Texas and Kansas already require vendors to disclose AI use. Michigan and Maryland use centralized intake forms that catch every AI procurement and feed into the AI inventory.⁵⁷

Know when to build, when to buy, and when to consider open source

Buy first for commodity AI needs, including secure access to large language models, productivity tools, and document processing tools. Build selectively for mission-specific, sensitive, or sovereignty-critical use cases such as benefits eligibility, child welfare, or public safety where sending sensitive data to a third-party model is not appropriate.

Include open-source LLMs and agentic frameworks in evaluations for sensitive use cases.⁵⁸ Open-source models, more accurately referred to as open-weight models, are LLMs whose weights are publicly released and available under a license that lets anyone download, use, modify, and redistribute them. Once released, these models are not controlled by the releasing organization. Open-source AI offers greater control over data, customization, auditability, and long-term vendor flexibility, but it also requires tech staff, infrastructure, security review, and ongoing maintenance. Data quality and limited tech talent and capacity could potentially be obstacles to implementing open-source/open-weight models.⁵⁹ Total cost of ownership often exceeds licensing fees of proprietary models as agencies can underestimate costs by overlooking data preparation, compliance, and infrastructure expenses.⁶⁰

Beyond 100 days

The first 100 days focus on a one-year AI strategy that supports the administration's priorities, launching pilots for high-impact constituent journeys. Longer term, states will focus on turning this foundational work into durable capacity and initiating deeper transformations that consistently deliver public value.

Supplemental information

What to ask

1. Ask the Chief Information Officer or the Chief AI Officer, if one exists: Who owns statewide AI implementation strategy, and do they have the necessary resources and authority to coordinate across agencies?
2. Ask the Chief Information Officer or the Chief Technology Officer: Which agencies have the data quality, tech staff, cybersecurity controls, and procurement capacity needed to launch pilots or move from pilot to production?
3. Ask Agency Leads: Which three constituent journeys could improve service or reduce staff burden within the first year?
4. Ask Senior AI Leader: How will the state measure whether each AI pilot improves outcomes, saves time, reduces burden, or increases risk?
5. Ask the Chief Procurement Officer, Chief Data Officer, and Chief Information Officer: Which procurement rules need updating so AI contracts enable AI procurement and protect data, portability, performance, and public accountability?

What to read

1. [Glossary — NIST AI Resource Center](#)
2. [The 2026 AI Index Report – Stanford University Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence](#)
3. [A Three Horizons Vision for Congress – Popvox Foundation and Recoding America Fund](#)

4. [Best Practices in Public-Sector AI Governance: A Practitioner's Playbook — UC Berkeley School of Information](#)
5. [The Agentic State: Rethinking Government for the Era of Agentic AI — The Agentic State](#)
6. [Beyond Generation: The Rise of Agentic AI in State Government — NASCIO](#)
7. [Government AI Landscape Assessment — Code for America](#)

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60 Scoop News Group, "New Report Highlights Agency Advantages of Using Smaller, Open-Source AI Models," April 22, 2026. Retrieved from <https://fedscoop.com/new-report-highlights-agency-advantages-of-using-smaller-open-source-ai-models/>



State Spotlight

Maryland Senior AI Leader

Maryland empowered a Senior AI Leader to coordinate the state's AI strategy. As a result, the state released an executive order, “Catalyzing the Responsible and Productive Use of Artificial Intelligence in Maryland State Government,” in 2024, followed by the AI Governance Act of 2024 (SB 818), and provided AI tools and literacy to the state labor force.

Challenge

In 2023, Maryland was aware of AI's potential but was taking scattered, unfocused action without a guiding strategy, coordination or accountability across agencies.

Approach

In August 2023, Maryland created a senior advisor for responsible AI, a role that reports to the state CIO and works closely with the governor's office and agencies statewide. This leader set a statewide AI agenda, built Maryland's AI strategy, established the governor's AI Subcabinet, and stood up a central AI Enablement team. They also built intake and governance processes, a statewide use-case inventory, and workforce tooling and literacy offerings, while collaborating with the legislature on AI policy. The state released an executive order, “Catalyzing the Responsible and Productive Use of Artificial Intelligence in Maryland State Government,” in 2024, followed by the AI Governance Act of 2024 (SB 818).

Outcomes

2024

AI Governance Act (SB 818) gave the role statutory authority and budget backing

6

Guiding principles anchoring every agency's AI use, from fairness to transparency

12

Critical domains studied for statewide AI risks and opportunities

Lessons Learned

- » Place the role at the intersection of policy, strategy and delivery, reporting to the CIO while working directly with the governor's office. That placement gave the position standing to set a statewide agenda and the technical authority to execute it.
- » The work of agenda setting, governance and hiring should precede scaled adoption.

Read More

[Maryland's AI Strategy, ai.maryland.gov](#)

[Senior Advisor for Responsible AI, Maryland DoIT Leadership](#)

[Maryland Submits AI Strategy, Guide to General Assembly, Government Technology](#)



State Spotlight

New Jersey AI Assistant

New Jersey launched its AI Assistant program in July 2024. In 18 months, it scaled to more than 20,000 state employees with over 1 million prompts, costing roughly \$1 per user per month.

Challenge

State employees needed a safe, sanctioned way to access generative AI to improve their abilities, but commercial tools risked exposing sensitive state data to third party training and could cost up to \$20 per user per month at scale. New Jersey needed a way to give thousands of workers AI access without the security risk while minimizing cost.

Approach

New Jersey's Office of Innovation (now the New Jersey Innovation Authority) partnered with the State Office of Information Technology to build an AI Assistant in-house on state infrastructure, ensuring the security of sensitive state data. The team launched the tool alongside a mandatory responsible AI training course for staff. As usage grew, the team surveyed users and ran in-depth interviews, then used the feedback for a stronger second version.

Outcomes

\$1/user/month

In operating costs

1M+

Prompts over 300K+ sessions

80%+

Employee satisfaction with the tool

Lessons Learned

- » Building in-house and on existing cloud infrastructure was less expensive than paying for an enterprise contract.
- » Pairing AI with mandatory training builds trust and safe usage.

Read More

[NJ AI Assistant, New Jersey Innovation Authority](#)
[2025 Impact Report, New Jersey Innovation Authority](#)
[New Jersey uses AI as a tool to boost resident and staff experiences, Route Fifty](#)



State Spotlight

Tennessee AI-Powered Customer Service

Tennessee Dept. of Safety and Homeland Security deployed an agentic AI platform to improve customer service across voice, chat, and email, answering 70% more driver-service call-center questions daily and addressing 80% of driver-service chat inquiries.

Challenge

About 95% of public inquiries to the Tennessee Department of Safety and Homeland Security (TDOS) are about driver services. The department receives 3,000 to 5,000 inquiries on a typical day but only has the staffing capacity to answer about 1,000. The agency's hiring constraints, combined with its existing chatbot that could only answer limited questions, made it difficult to answer the majority of public inquiries.

Approach

In December 2025, TDOS launched a suite of AI tools for chat, email, and voice using an agentic AI platform. Each of the tools was adapted to how customers communicate on that channel, but they draw on the same underlying information, the agency's public website. While the tools help the agency answer public inquiries, employees retain control over consequential transactions. In addition to improving customer service, the tools allow the agency to adapt to emerging situations, like severe weather closures, within minutes. With the agency's website serving as the single source of truth, chatbot errors also help identify areas for improving public information.

Outcomes**700**

Driver-service questions answered by the chatbot daily (roughly 25,000 per month), providing 24/7 support

80%

Of chat interactions resolved by AI chatbot or deflected, with only 20% requiring an employee to handle

30%

Of email inquiries answered by AI following the February 2026 email launch

Lessons Learned

- » Use one authoritative information source and use wrong answers to improve the underlying public content.
- » Design each channel around how people want to communicate, and give one owner responsibility for continuous refinement and rapid deployment of new use cases.
- » Keep consequential decisions with employees.

Read More

[Tennessee: AI-Powered Customer Service Across Chat, Email, and Voice, Apolitical Driver Services, Tennessee Department of Safety and Homeland Security](#)
[FY 2024-25 Annual Report, Tennessee Department of Safety and Homeland Security](#)



State Spotlight

Pennsylvania AI training program

Pennsylvania requires completion of a state-administered training program before any employee can access its ChatGPT Enterprise pilot. 85% of participating employees had a positive experience using the pilot and estimated saving an average of 95 minutes/day.

Challenge

Pennsylvania needed to know whether generative AI could actually help in government work before opening it up to the broader workforce. Nearly half of the interested employees had never used ChatGPT before, and leadership wanted evidence of its strengths and weaknesses, along with appropriate training and guardrails.

Approach

Following Governor Shapiro's 2023 Executive Order, the Office of Administration ran a 12-month controlled pilot of 175 employees across 14 agencies, paired with onboarding and OpenAI-led training. The pilot's findings led to a state-administered training program before any employee gets access, a Generative AI Governing Board to set guardrails, and a standing labor-management collaboration group to keep workers in the loop as access scaled from one pilot office to 35 agencies.

Outcomes

85%

Of pilot participants reported a positive experience using ChatGPT

95 mins/day

Average time savings reported by employees who used ChatGPT effectively

3,000+

Commonwealth employees now using approved generative AI tools

Lessons Learned

- » Run the pilot before you mandate the tool, which allows Pennsylvania to gather real evidence.
- » Training is essential: learning how to effectively use generative AI led to successful adoption and use.

Read More

[Generative AI Pilot Report \(2025\), Pennsylvania Office of Administration](#)



State Spotlight

Texas Department of Transportation AI Governance Strategy

Texas Department of Transportation followed its Artificial Intelligence Strategic Plan to identify and transition successful AI pilots into ongoing operations, which allowed the agency to redirect 22,000 staff hours annually to higher priority work and reduce invoice processing time by 75%.

Challenge

With more than 200 potential AI use cases, the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) needed a consistent way to prioritize investments and manage risk to transition successful pilots into agency operations. The state needed strong governance, reliable data, and employee oversight to keep up with new state requirements and advances in autonomous agentic AI.

Approach

In 2026, TxDOT's Artificial Intelligence Strategic Plan reflects a pivotal shift from experimental AI tools to AI serving as an integral component of the agency's operations. This transition underscores the necessity of recognizing AI as a strategic asset that will drive efficiency, enhance decision-making, and streamline workflows. TxDOT's governance philosophy requires employee validation of AI outputs before final action. The agency created a cross-functional AI Risk Management Workgroup that evaluates projects with a framework based on NIST guidance. TxDOT also built an Enterprise Data Platform to ensure AI applications use well-governed and secure data for analytics. Finally, a Readiness Scorecard ranks proposed AI use cases based on data availability, business sponsorship, technical feasibility, risk, impact, and operational value.

Outcomes

22,000+

Staff hours redirected annually to higher priority tasks through automated invoice processing in the Professional Engineering Procurement Services Division

75%

Reduction in processing time for the automated invoice workflow

940+

M365 Copilot licenses deployed to streamline document drafting and administrative functions

Lessons Learned

- » Prioritize AI use cases against operational value, readiness, and risk before committing resources.
- » Build the governed data foundation so successful tools can scale across the enterprise.
- » Require employee oversight and make risk review part of the standard intake process.

Read More

[Artificial Intelligence Strategic Plan, January 2026 Update, Texas Department of Transportation](#)
[TxDOT updates AI Strategic Plan, Texas Department of Transportation](#)
[Beyond Generation: The Rise of Agentic AI in State Government, NASCIO](#)

Benefits



Benefits

Protecting eligible residents and state budgets through accurate, data-driven benefits delivery

Benefits systems in most states are operating at or beyond their designed capacity, and H.R. 1 is creating new verification and compliance requirements for Medicaid, SNAP, and other programs before most states are fully ready. The stakes of accurate benefit delivery, both for state finances and vulnerable populations, have never been higher. H.R. 1 implementation will already be underway when new governors take office in January 2027. Actions taken in the first 100 days can set states up to navigate compliance while laying the foundations for a modern, data-driven safety net.

Key Opportunities · First 100 Days

- ☐ **Set data-driven goals and strategy**
 - ☐ Capture and automate key metrics
 - ☐ Identify and validate improvements with weekly reporting
 - ☐ Know and manage fiscal exposure around error rates
- ☐ **Evaluate and use data for eligibility decisions and smarter benefits delivery**
 - ☐ Strengthen data integration to reduce manual verification and improve accuracy
- ☐ **Improve communications**
 - ☐ Launch tested and timely messaging
 - ☐ Deploy text messaging for renewal and requirement updates
 - ☐ Proactively communicate about and automate enrollment in Summer EBT
- ☐ **Build in-house tech capacity**
 - ☐ Hire tech leadership for health and human services and require tech training for all program leaders
 - ☐ Appoint, uplift, and hire empowered, accountable tech leaders to the H.R. 1 mission
 - ☐ Fund tech staff to manage tech vendors effectively

“

“You can bring in thousands of people, and you'll still be behind if you're approaching it in an archaic way.”

— Expert contributor, 2026 Benefits Delivery Memo

Top Questions to Ask Your Leaders

- 1 What are our top H.R. 1 risks today, and what is the plan to address them with a clear timeline?
- 2 Which verification workflows, such as income, can be reused across Medicaid, SNAP, Child Nutrition, and workforce programs?
- 3 Which peer states have solved similar problems in data sharing, vendor management, renewal outreach, Summer EBT, or WIC modernization?
- 4 What is the status of SNAP EBT chip card adoption, given that skimming of SNAP benefits is the biggest source of fraud in SNAP?

Key Roles to Fill

- **HHS Technical Lead** — Statewide authority over benefits program technology; understands eligibility systems, data exchange, procurement, and user experience; builds the team that can evaluate vendors and enforce contract standards
- **H.R. 1 Technical Rollout Lead** — Owns implementation monitoring and escalation to the governor's office; maintains a weekly risk list covering systems, call centers, exemption processing, notice comprehension, and caseworker workload

State Spotlight

Maryland — SUN Bucks Enrollment

Maryland modernized summer nutrition benefits through interagency data sharing and automatic eligibility systems, dramatically expanding access without adding application burden.

- Expanded summer nutrition benefits access from 90,000 to over 630,000 children
- Achieved through automatic enrollment using data already held by partner agencies — no new applications required

What to Read

- [The Benefits Enrollment Field Guide — Code for America](#)
- [How Regional Health Hubs Can Improve Care for Medicaid Beneficiaries: Lessons from the Garden State — Milbank Memorial Fund](#)
- [Using OBBBA Requirements to Advance an Integrated, Data-Driven Safety Net — Yale Tobin Center for Economic Policy](#)
- [How Will We Know if States are Ready to Implement H.R. 1? — Georgetown University McCourt School](#)
- [Stranded by the Safety Net: How to Fix the Benefit Cliff Problem — American Enterprise Institute](#)
- [Data Source Integration for Work Requirements: A Prioritization Guide — 17A](#)

BENEFITS

Overview

Benefits systems and processes in most states are operating at or beyond their designed capacity, and rapidly changing policy environments are making that even harder. Benefits like Medicaid, SNAP, WIC, and child nutrition programs run on aging systems that can be hard to update and struggle to scale to meet high demand. Medicaid and SNAP carry the added burden of complex eligibility rules.

The stakes of accurate benefit delivery, both for state finances and vulnerable populations, have never been higher. H.R. 1,¹ referred to as the Working Families Tax Cut legislation or the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, increases the fiscal and human costs of struggling benefits systems. It adds more frequent verification, community engagement requirements (e.g., employment, education, volunteer service),² and stricter error-rate consequences for states,³ at a moment when many states lack updated processes, integrated data systems, and tech capacity. At the same time, this window to meet compliance requirements is an opportunity for states to build a more accurate, efficient safety net across the board.

H.R. 1 implementation will already be underway when new governors take office in January 2027, creating an immediate challenge of how to control program accuracy and protect state budgets while keeping eligible residents connected to benefits and using the crisis moment to create lasting transformational change. RAND estimates that failures to comply with new requirements could cost states \$665 billion in federal funding for Medicaid alone between 2025 and 2034,⁴ with the top drivers, insufficient documentation and missing administrative steps, largely avoidable with a well-designed system.⁵

Actions taken in the first 100 days can set states up to successfully navigate H.R. 1 compliance and lay the foundation for a modern, data-driven safety net for residents, work that will continue throughout the governor's term. An incoming administration can protect its residents and its budget by regularly measuring and making progress against goals and a baseline, empowering a strong team to make regular improvements on top issues, and better leveraging existing data sources.

Benefits opportunities for the first 100 days of 2027

Below are four ways to strengthen benefits delivery via H.R. 1 implementation:

1. Set data-driven goals and strategy
2. Evaluate and use data for eligibility decisions and smarter benefits delivery
3. Improve communications
4. Build in-house tech capacity

Set data-driven goals and strategy

H.R. 1's Medicaid and community engagement requirements begin January 1, 2027, unless a state implements sooner.⁶ The first 100 days will likely focus on monitoring, problem escalation and resolution, and course correction. A new administration needs to know which process and system changes have already been made and which are still pending, which systems (both computer and human) are stable vs. near a breaking point, where residents and staff are most likely to encounter failure, and the specific costs of making or not making specific changes. This knowledge can then inform the administration's strategy to maximize service delivery and federal compliance.

Capture and automate key metrics

A well-designed reporting system ensures the state knows about problems before the news does. A governor who accepts slow or manually generated reports risks being blindsided by issues, or being too late to fix errors that lead to a loss in benefits and funding.⁷ Best practice actions include:

- » **Validate baseline measures.** Understand which measures are evaluated by the federal government and ensure agency calculations are exactly aligned. For internal-only measures, seek broad input before finalizing any baselines. Remain open for a short period of time to revisions based on new information. Accurate baseline measures are critical for making and validating any improvements
- » **Capture holistic measures.** A comprehensive set of metrics provides the governor's office with insights into not only Medicaid and SNAP, but ultimately WIC, Child Nutrition, and other benefits lines, covering access, timeliness, retention, customer experience, and program integrity. The Code for America National Safety Net Scorecard offers a useful model, considering access, effective service, and integrity together across benefits programs⁸
- » **Break down measures across the benefits delivery journey.** This can begin as a drawing of the process with basic information at each step, and ultimately evolve into a more robust stock- and-flow diagram that the team can use to model the impact of proposed changes.

There are likely opportunities to reduce (or introduce!) errors at every step, so understanding how the process flows from start to finish is important to contextualize and improve metrics.

- » **Automate data reporting.** This can be accomplished even with the oldest legacy systems through nightly report generation and some light automation to combine or deduplicate data across systems. It's worth having many individuals review the underlying "math" and steps to ensure they match real-world understanding, and checking over time so that no unauthorized or unwarranted data changes are happening. Once the automated data pipeline is in place, humans can be discouraged from manually manipulating reports.
- » **Measure every step.** Even unopened mail can be tracked in pieces or pounds to indicate whether it is growing or shrinking over time. A sudden drop in response rate may indicate a communication breakdown or a broken process, as opposed to a surge in people who decided to unenroll.

Identify and validate improvements with weekly reporting

Automated, socialized, and trusted measures across the benefits delivery process will rapidly reveal the biggest pain points in the process. They can also help keep the whole team, including outside vendors and even community stakeholders, oriented towards the same goal. Some pain points can be addressed now with process or tech fixes, while others may be too expensive or risky to take on right away. Leaders have found that these actions increase success:

- » Track data to reach this bottom-line answer. How long are people waiting for an answer on their benefits case, and how many people are turned away purely for paperwork reasons? The key metrics are enrollment, processing time, procedural denials, churn (when eligible residents lose coverage only to re-enroll shortly after), automatic data matching and auto-renewals (ex parte), subpopulation enrollment trends, contact center volume, reasons for contacting support, and wait and response times.
- » Assign a team to quickly investigate anomalies. Flag week-over-week movement that signals enrollment problems or broader benefit performance issues. Is there a dip because Monday was a holiday or because a system was offline? The team looks for trends showing enrollment or integrity issues, call center breakdowns, an increase in errors or backlogs, or concentrated losses among specific populations.
- » Monitor year-over-year enrollment and participation trends so reduced access does not masquerade as improved accuracy.⁹ However, be aware that the new policy changes the landscape significantly. Stay curious about root causes.
- » Differentiate between good and bad changes. Error rates can improve on paper while eligible residents lose coverage or food assistance through procedural denials, missed notices, or incomplete documentation. When governors' offices track enrollment and participation alongside accuracy and integrity measures, leaders can see if the state is improving accuracy but unintentionally reducing enrollment. Look for ways to capture data about these unintended consequences that may not be visible.

- » Assign a dedicated and empowered team to propose, design, prioritize, and test improvements. Deploying too many changes at once can exhaust a team and risk conflating the impact of multiple changes made all at once. Prioritize efforts based on implementation costs, potential gains, and the cost of failing to fix the problem. Review and, as necessary, reset the state strategy and priorities.
- » Understand which parts of the process are automated and which require manual actions from workers, and what further automation is necessary and planned. Hawaii,¹⁰ Wyoming, and Maryland are investing in the approaches and people needed to improve ex parte renewal rates via improved user experience and automation.
- » Listen to caseworkers and enrollees. Kentucky used user-centered design for its Kynect self-service platform, focusing on the experiences of caseworkers and beneficiaries, as well as assisters and partners.¹¹ Testing with all user groups is a critical success factor. In the normal course of business, caseworkers regularly identify confusing notices, missing data, workarounds, and contact problems. Systematically capturing this feedback and including it in product roadmaps can head off SNAP errors, procedural denials, and contact center backlogs.

STATE SPOTLIGHT: California Food Benefits

Simplifying California's online application for food benefits based on feedback from applicants and caseworkers helped 6.2 million people access food benefits.

- » Process improvements across Medicaid and SNAP in service of H.R. 1 compliance can be the template for improvements to every state benefit delivery process. This window of rapid change can open the door to improvements that can be carried to other programs and are demonstrably better for state employees, taxpayers, and residents in the coming months and years.

Know and manage fiscal exposure around error rates

H.R. 1 penalties create budget uncertainty and leave states exposed to major losses of federal funding.

For SNAP, starting on October 1, 2027 (FFY 2028), states will face a tiered penalty structure based on the lower of their FFY 2025 or FFY 2026 error rates. Initial state efforts to monitor SNAP error rate indicators and whether new initiatives are reducing errors focus on documentation completeness, automatic data matching rates, and renewal outcomes.

Arizona is moving aggressively to implement process, staffing, tech, and data upgrades to lower its Payment Error Rate (PER) from around the national average of 10.62% to under H.R. 1's 6% threshold to avoid up to \$300 million in annual penalties.¹² Arizona included \$10.8 million in funding in its FY27 Budget to continue to improve SNAP error rates.

Unlike SNAP, Medicaid error rate findings from CMS run on a three-year cycle and focus retroactively on improper payments and denials. H.R. 1 increases fiscal exposure through clawbacks of federal

matching funds. This puts pressure on states to improve documentation practices, modernize eligibility systems, and strengthen billing oversight processes.¹³ For Medicaid error rates, it's critical to know exactly where the state stands before the next review and plan ahead for any financial consequences, rather than be surprised by findings and their commensurate costs.

It will pay to keep track of demonstrated progress in reducing error rates. Governors who can show consistent progress will have a stronger case to seek more time before H.R. 1 penalties take effect. Clear and regular metrics, specific change initiatives with named owners driving change, and leading indicators showing the state is improving accuracy while keeping eligible residents connected to benefits can all help support a case for a grace period or the need to request one altogether.

Evaluate and use data for eligibility decisions and smarter benefits delivery

Experience across states suggests evaluating whether agencies are using existing data to the greatest extent possible, including through cross-program interoperability and integration. Benefits agencies often request, procure, or verify the same facts across programs. Income, work status, household composition, and disability data sit in multiple separate systems, sometimes held by commercial vendors. The result is expensive for states, burdensome for caseworkers, and confusing for residents. In addition, the new H.R. 1 federal regulations embed an expectation of greater connection to verifiable data in 2028 and beyond.

In the first 100 days, an administration can establish the authority, sequence, governance, and budget mechanisms for cross-agency data use, starting with connections that reduce manual verification and support H.R.1 automation.

Strengthen data integration to reduce manual verification and improve accuracy

Implementation of H.R. 1 can be a catalyst for building data infrastructure the state can reuse across programs. Any new applicant/recipient verification workflows can support Medicaid, SNAP, Child Nutrition, workforce programs, and beyond rather than create one-time compliance processes. Successful efforts start with the data connections most likely to reduce manual verification of work and improve the automatic capture of exemptions from work requirements. States are taking specific actions in this area:

- » Increase state Unemployment Insurance agency data collection frequency to a per-paycheck basis. This helps verify Medicaid eligibility without resorting to costly third-party vendors. It will also help reduce benefits fraud. A number of business leaders, including the [Chamber of Commerce Foundation](#), have endorsed this approach. In the future, the U.S. Department of Labor may release grants to states to fund more frequent earnings reports. To learn more about such grants, please reach out to the [Institute for Responsive Government](#).
- » Look for additional ways to integrate existing labor and wage data. Income and work status drive the highest volume of eligibility decisions. If not already completed, add education enrollment data where student status affects an exemption. Arkansas has made progress

leveraging multiple government data sources for their 2026 soft launch of work requirements.¹⁴

- » Review all paid data sources for alternatives, such as using data the state already has, different data sources, or other negotiations like less frequent or less detailed data pulls.
- » Evaluate verification failure points to identify data sharing and automation opportunities. Why do cases fall out of the ex parte renewal process? Which verifications most frequently leave SNAP cases pending? What data sources or policy choices could reduce the need for additional paperwork while maintaining accuracy? Sequence the work by verification volume, caseworker burden, and system readiness.
- » Look for additional disability and health data sources where privacy rules, consent, and data quality could support more reliable exemption verification. Data on health and disabilities are held by a range of agencies and are subject to strict consent rules, making it more challenging to match these data to a Medicaid or SNAP case. But it is possible.
- » Federal rules now require states to use ex parte verification, data the state already has access to, to verify SNAP and TANF community engagement compliance and former foster youth status.¹⁵ This can reduce manual reproof and avoid one-time processes that add workload without improving long-term accuracy, while also reducing procedural denials. 22 states, including Alaska and Illinois, already use both TANF and SNAP data.
- » Identify peer states and partner organizations with agreement templates or implementation lessons the state can adapt. The [National Association of State Workforce Agencies](#) provides direct assistance to member states on tech challenges.
- » Establish a legal and governance framework for data sharing, including clear authority, permitted uses, access and retention rules, security controls, and the process for resolving disputes for each data connection. This process also needs to move quickly. Effective governance defines who can approve new uses and who is accountable for misuse. Data-use agreements, governance structures, privacy protections, and partner trust are core conditions for responsible data collaboration.¹⁶ Data is the fuel for today's tech and AI systems, and relevant legal and governance frameworks prevent that fuel from catching fire. Involving legal counsel early can help this go smoothly.

STATE SPOTLIGHT: New Jersey EBT Eligibility using AI and Integrated Data

The New Jersey Office of Innovation used AI to match public assistance data across state agencies to identify nearly 100,000 additional eligible children a year for the state's Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer program, now called SUN Bucks, and enrolled them automatically.

Improve communications

Updating communication language, visual design, schedules, and methods can be one of the fastest ways to make changes in a government system. Clear, accurate communications build trust, increase accuracy, and reduce rework and frustrating back and forth.

Launch tested and timely messaging

Test potential messages with users to ensure they are easily and accurately understood. Always state required actions and deadlines succinctly. Align messaging across mail, text messages, websites, call center scripts, and other agency materials to ensure consistency. Collaborate with partners, including health plans, schools, navigators, legal aid, and other community-based organizations, as Connecticut did with United Way 211¹⁷ on H.R. 1 changes beginning in 2025, so they are also using consistent messaging and so they can flag confusion or issues for quick resolution. Governors in shared media markets often coordinate messages across states, too.

Medicaid community engagement rollout will likely require new and bigger communication campaigns beyond sending notices or text messages. States can increase their reach by coordinating with news outlets, CBOs, and social media teams to get the word out.

Member notices are a particular area of opportunity. Governors, state CIOs, and Medicaid directors can create the expectation for communications staff, eligibility policy teams, and lawyers to work together to improve those notices in partnership with members, in part through joint accountability.

Proactive communication is one of the cheapest tools available, and enrollment churn is among the most expensive problems. About 8% of full-benefit Medicaid and CHIP beneficiaries disenrolled and reenrolled within a year (“churn”) in 2018, and the administrative cost in a state such as Illinois would be over \$100m/year.^{18,19,20} Program messages that reach eligible residents before deadlines are missed are more effective. For example, Arizona used its text messaging strategy to reach people at critical points in the renewal process with individually tailored information during the post-pandemic Medicaid unwinding.²¹

Deploy text messaging for renewal and requirement updates

Deploy text messaging for SNAP and Medicaid renewal reminders, as Mississippi has done,²² missing document notices, and requirement updates. Link only to official state channels in texts to establish trust. The Federal Communications Commission has confirmed that state Medicaid agencies and their partners may place calls and send texts when residents provide a telephone number on an application for Medicaid or another government health care program.²³

During Medicaid redetermination, New Jersey’s Regional Health Hubs used data and local outreach channels to identify households at risk of losing coverage, and the Camden Coalition used health information exchange data to support outreach to more than 100,000 households.²⁴

STATE SPOTLIGHT: Louisiana Text Messaging

Louisiana cut administrative churn with a simple, scalable text messaging service, increasing renewals among pilot participants by 67% for Medicaid and 37% for SNAP.

Proactively communicate about and automate enrollment in Summer EBT

Families need to know how to obtain and use EBT benefits over the summer before summer starts, not after their kids have already missed meals.²⁵ Best practice includes communicating Summer EBT (SUN Bucks) decisions and program details to eligible families when the state opts in and before summer begins. Communications ideally cover eligibility, timing, benefit amount, application rules, and support channels, including a clear explanation of which families will be automatically enrolled and which families must apply before benefits are issued.

Many eligible children can be automatically enrolled in SUN Bucks through SNAP, TANF, FDPIR, or other qualifying programs.²⁶

STATE SPOTLIGHT: Maryland SUN Bucks

Maryland expanded summer nutrition benefits access from 90,000 to over 630,000 by modernizing enrollment through interagency data sharing and automatic eligibility systems.

Build in-house tech capacity

States are heavily dependent on outside vendors for benefits systems, eligibility platforms, data exchanges, and other core tech. But states often have limited internal expertise to evaluate contracts, enforce standards or push back on bad ideas. Eligibility system contracts often include costly change orders that states have avoided with strong collaboration and in-house capability.

Without dedicated in-house tech staff, experience in many states shows that vendors shape both the solution and the state's understanding of whether it works. Agencies need staff who can validate vendor claims, define requirements, inspect data quality, manage data rights, tie contract terms to program outcomes, and be good and creative collaborators.

A state with empowered, accountable leaders will be well-positioned to deliver effective, timely benefits for H.R. 1 and beyond. As one expert noted, "You can bring [in] thousands of people, and you'll still be behind if you're approaching it in an archaic way." Tech is foundational to benefits delivery, and the decisions governors make about in-house capacity in the first 100 days set the trajectory for the full term. (See Talent Memo and Roles section).

Hire tech leadership for health and human services and require tech training for all program leaders

HHS tech leadership that has authority across benefits programs and understands eligibility systems, data exchange, security, procurement, product management, and user experience can

radically improve effectiveness. Program leaders who are policy and operations experts can build enough tech fluency to spot system constraints, question vendor assumptions, and manage decisions involving vendor selection, requirements, data sharing, error reporting, resident communication, system testing, and change management.

In Kentucky, its integrated kynect benefits system has been a successful model of state Medicaid and IT leadership partnering with an integrator.²⁷ In California, state HHS leaders integrated GetCalFresh, which was originally developed by Code for America, iteratively. The latter work highlights the value of building state-owned delivery capacity inside benefits agencies.²⁸

Appoint, uplift, and hire empowered, accountable tech leaders to the H.R. 1 mission

Start with these team members on Medicaid and SNAP, and then replicate their roles across other benefit lines. Program ownership typically remains in the agency or agencies for Medicaid, SNAP, WIC, and Child Nutrition, though ownership may be fragmented across agencies.

- » Designate a leader accountable for the end-to-end experience. New Jersey has the role of Chief Strategist on Customer Experience in its benefits organization. Assign one leader to manage the experience across caseworkers and enrollees, with feedback loops from frontline staff to program leadership. Their role starts by talking directly with caseworkers, observing their work, identifying call center themes, and mapping the journey from application through renewal, from the perspectives of both the public and caseworkers. The most effective maps show where eligible residents miss the next step and where staff use workarounds to keep cases moving. This leader is then accountable for identifying and implementing process improvements across the entire journey.
- » Designate a tech rollout lead who owns implementation monitoring, communications, and escalation to the governor's office. The lead brings frontline operations experience and understands systems, data, program rules, and resident communication, enabling them to maintain a weekly risk list covering systems performance, call center volume, exemption processing, notice comprehension, data match failures, vendor issues, and caseworker workload. Best in class states make sure that each major risk has an owner and decision path.

Fund tech staff to manage tech vendors effectively

Product, data, security, user research, and procurement roles can test vendor performance, enforce standards, and inspect reporting. States that lack this capacity are stuck with incumbent vendors, whether or not they are the best option, because no one inside the agency has the expertise or authority to renegotiate. An effective contract gives the state usable data, defined service levels, documented interfaces, and access to the information needed to evaluate vendor performance. Vendors gain too much leverage when they control the data used to judge their own work.

Actions taken in the first 100 days can set states up to successfully navigate H.R. 1 compliance and lay the foundations for modern, data-driven benefits for residents, work that will continue throughout the governor's term.

Supplemental information

What to ask

1. Ask the HHS director: What are our top H.R. 1 risks today, and what is the plan to address them with a clear timeline?
2. Ask the Chief Data Officer Or Chief technology Officer: Which verification workflows, such as income, can be reused across Medicaid, SNAP, Child Nutrition, and workforce programs?
3. Ask the HHS director: Which peer states have solved similar problems in data sharing, vendor management, renewal outreach, Summer EBT, or WIC modernization?
4. Ask the SNAP executive: What is the status of SNAP EBT chip card adoption, given that skimming of SNAP benefits is the biggest source of fraud in SNAP?

What to read

- » [How Regional Health Hubs Can Improve Care for Medicaid Beneficiaries: Lessons from the Garden State — Milbank Memorial Fund](#)
- » [Ex Parte Explained: The Mechanics of Medicaid Eligibility Automation — National Association of Medicaid Directors](#)
- » [Medicaid and CHIP Scorecard — Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services](#)
- » [The Benefits Enrollment Fieldguide – Code for America](#)
- » [Using OBBBA Requirements to Advance an Integrated, Data-Driven Safety Net — Yale Tobin Center for Economic Policy](#)
- » [Getting Ready for New Medicaid Enrollment Rules: Lessons from the Camden Coalition's Ongoing Redetermination Outreach Work and Rapid "A/B" Testing — Camden Coalition](#)
- » [How Will We Know if States are Ready to Implement HR 1 and Work Reporting Requirements? Follow the State Performance Metrics Here — Georgetown University McCourt School of Public Policy](#)
- » [Data Source Integration for Work Requirements: A Prioritization Guide for State Medicaid Programs — 17A](#)
- » [Stranded by the Safety Net: How to Fix the Benefit Cliff Problem — American Enterprise Institute](#)
- » [Modern Income Verification: High-Tech Integrity, Low-Cost Delivery — Institute for Responsive Government](#)

Tech Talent Project has provided the below links to third-party resources and websites solely for convenience. By linking to these third-party materials, Tech Talent Project is not responsible for any of the content, including any political or candidate election campaign or legislative lobbying materials or messages, commercial services, or privacy or security policies that may be found on these websites or in these materials.

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State Spotlight

California Food Benefits

Simplifying California's online application for food benefits based on feedback from applicants and caseworkers helped 6.2 million people access food benefits.

Challenge

Before 2014, Californians applying for CalFresh (the state's SNAP program) had to use one of three different online systems depending on their county, each pushing applicants through more than 100 screens of repetitive questions. Only 66% of eligible residents were enrolled.

Approach

California worked with Code for America to build GetCalFresh, a plain-language, mobile-first digital assistant that operated alongside the state's existing systems. GetCalFresh was piloted in a handful of counties before being scaled statewide. Code for America's team brought expertise in human-centered design, research, software engineering and product management and worked directly with state administrators, caseworkers and clients to refine the tool. They matched the GetCalFresh wording to the way applicants describe their households and income, included live chat support for people who got stuck, and built a secure document uploader to reduce back-and-forth. Lessons were shared with state and county partners, which helped shape the design of BenefitsCal, California's statewide multi-benefit portal.

Outcomes

6.2M

People helped to access food benefits from 2017-2025

81%

SNAP participation rate reached by 2022, up from 66% in 2014 when GetCalFresh launched

70%+

Share of online CalFresh applications submitted through GetCalFresh from 2019-2025

Lessons Learned

- » Listen before you build and keep listening. Plain-language wording, live chat and document upload features all came from direct research with applicants and caseworkers.
- » Start with a small pilot and quickly iterate changes.
- » A simplified, online experience for applicants also reduces the burden on caseworkers, cutting call volume and rework.

Read More

[Simplifying California's Online Application for Food Benefits, Code for America](#)

[Shoulder to Shoulder: Building Capacity for State-Owned Benefits Delivery Systems, Code for America](#)



State Spotlight

New Jersey EBT Eligibility using AI and Integrated Data

The New Jersey Office of Innovation used AI to match public assistance data across state agencies to identify nearly 100,000 additional eligible children a year for the state's Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer program, now called SUN Bucks, and enrolled them automatically.

Challenge

Children can qualify for New Jersey's Summer EBT, SUN Bucks, program several ways: through free or reduced-price school meals, or through enrollment in SNAP, TANF, income-eligible Medicaid, or foster care. However, those eligibility records were housed in separate agencies. Without a way to reconcile the data, some eligible children were going without the benefit each summer because staff could not easily find them.

Approach

The Department of Agriculture, which administers Summer EBT, worked with the state's Office of Innovation (OOI). Starting in 2024, OOI's data science team built and iteratively refined a machine-learning matching tool to cross-reference enrollment data across SNAP, TANF, Medicaid, and school-meal program records, flagging children who qualified through one program but had not yet received Summer EBT. Once flagged, those children were enrolled and issued benefits automatically, with no new application required. In 2025, OOI built on that foundation to run the matching earlier in the season, allowing benefits to go out in a single push rather than staggered rounds.

Outcomes

~100,000

Additional children identified and automatically enrolled annually in 2024 and 2025

Over \$20M

Additional Summer EBT benefits delivered to children in 2024 and 2025

Lessons Learned

» Securely sharing agency data allowed the state to provide the benefit with no added burden on families.

Read More

[Summer EBT project page, NJ Innovation Authority](#)

[N.J. Uses AI to Find Kids Eligible for Summer Food Benefit, Government Technology](#)



State Spotlight

Louisiana Text Messaging

Louisiana cut administrative churn with a simple, scalable text messaging service, increasing renewals among pilot participants by 67% for Medicaid and 37% for SNAP.

Challenge

In Louisiana, one in four SNAP recipients lost benefits annually not due to ineligibility but because they missed an administrative renewal step, a problem known as “churn.” Reprocessing these churn cases as new applications cost the state roughly \$80 per case, totaling about \$18 million a year for SNAP alone, while also straining case workers and processing centers.

Approach

Louisiana’s Department of Children and Family Services, Department of Health, Office of Technology Services, and the Governor’s Office partnered with Code for America to address churn through better client communication. A team spent three months in discovery, finding that clients had unstable mailing addresses and strongly preferred electronic communication over paper mail. The team built LA’MESSAGE, a one-way text communication service for WIC, Medicaid, SNAP, and TANF, starting with a small pilot program, which was then scaled to thousands of clients within months. Message content and tone were refined through interviews, A/B tests, and surveys.

Outcomes

50M+

Text message reminders sent to benefit-eligible Louisianans

67%

Increase in annual Medicaid renewals among pilot participants

37%

Increase in renewals for SNAP members

Lessons Learned

- » Understanding what is effective is essential. The team found through A/B testing that ‘professional’ message language outperformed ‘friendly’ language for Medicaid renewal completion.
- » Louisiana launched its first prototype with off-the-shelf tools and a few dozen WIC clients, investing in Twilio integration after the approach showed results, minimizing upfront risk before committing to infrastructure.

Read More

[Simplifying Communications to Help People Maintain Benefits in Louisiana, Code for America](#)



State Spotlight

Maryland SUN Bucks

Maryland expanded summer nutrition benefits access from 90,000 to over 630,000 by modernizing enrollment through interagency data sharing and automatic eligibility systems.

Challenge

Maryland faced barriers to delivering summer nutrition efficiently to eligible families. Manual enrollment and fragmented agency systems limited participation and created administrative burdens, leaving many eligible children without access to food assistance in the summer months. The State needed a scalable solution to improve benefit delivery and increase participation statewide.

Approach

Maryland streamlined SUN Bucks enrollment through interagency and school district data sharing to automatically enroll eligible children, allowing 99% of children to receive benefits without submitting separate applications. Maryland also partnered with Code for America and No Kid Hungry to launch an AI chatbot to help families navigate questions and systems.

Outcomes**630,000+**

Students received SUN Bucks benefits in 2025, up from 90,000+ in 2023

99%

Of eligible children automatically enrolled

\$75M

Distributed in grocery benefits to Maryland families in 2025

Lessons Learned

- » Automatic enrollment and integrated systems can greatly expand access to public benefits while reducing administrative burdens for families.
- » Cross-agency data sharing was critical to scaling the program efficiently.
- » Investing in digital support tools, such as AI, can improve accessibility and reduce strain on staff while helping consumers navigate programs more effectively.

Read More

[Maryland SUN Bucks Helped Feed a Record 630,000 Students in 2025, Office of Governor Wes Moore](#)

Permitting



Permitting

Faster, clearer decisions for housing, energy, infrastructure, and small business

Permitting is where a governor's economic growth agenda either moves or stalls. Housing developments, hospital expansions, energy projects, data centers, and small businesses depend on permitting approvals that can sit in separate agency queues for months or years — with no single owner accountable for the full applicant experience. The first 100 days are the window to build the leadership structure and human-centered approach that set up the administration for success before old workflows get cemented into tech purchases and staff return to business as usual.

Key Opportunities · First 100 Days

- ☐ **Establish leadership, cross-agency coordination and transparency**
 - ☐ Create formal governance structures across departments and jurisdictions
 - ☐ Implement a dashboard to create transparency (FAST-41 style)
- ☐ **Apply human-centered design to permitting workflows**
 - ☐ Redesign processes from the applicant perspective using journey mapping and usability testing
 - ☐ Aim toward a common service design across cities and counties
 - ☐ Measure the effect on the public, not just internal processes
- ☐ **Prioritize policy and process reform – include support for modernizing tech**
 - ☐ Include timing targets with consequences to speed up the process
- ☐ **Leverage AI and data responsibly for targeted improvements**
 - ☐ Build cross-agency, searchable data infrastructure
 - ☐ Look for opportunities to automate priority processes
 - ☐ Use AI to analyze regulations, historic decisions, and speed up decision making

“

“Construction permits ran 81% longer than statutory timelines on average in 2024 — costing applicants an average of \$157,300 per permit in unexpected expenses.”

— Washington State Department of Commerce, 2024 permitting baseline analysis

Top Questions to Ask Your Leaders

- 1 How do timelines for the 10 highest-volume or highest-impact permits compare with neighboring or benchmark states?
- 2 What tech and software are currently being used to manage high volume permits?
- 3 Who owns the full applicant experience when a project crosses agencies, local governments, utilities, or federal review?
- 4 What share of applications arrive incomplete, require resubmission, or wait on applicant action?
- 5 How many staffing vacancies are there on review teams for high-volume permits?

Key Roles to Fill

- **Senior Permitting Lead** — Named in the first 30 days with authority to convene agencies, elevate disputes, and a direct reporting line to the governor or chief of staff
- **Permitting Coordinator** — Serves as the lead contact for each major project type from submission through decision; manages the dashboard and local government help desk

State Spotlight

Pennsylvania — PAYback Program

Pennsylvania set public processing targets tied to fee refunds when deadlines are missed — creating direct accountability for every permit type across state agencies.

- Cut the initial corporate license wait from eight weeks to two days
- Reduced a Department of Environmental Protection permit backlog by more than 90%

What to Read

- [Is It a Permitting Problem or Your Application Form? — Environmental Policy Innovation Center](#)
- [Delivery-Driven Government — Code for America](#)
- [2026 Permitting Technology Landscape Report — Environmental Policy Innovation Center](#)
- [Recoding America — Metropolitan Books](#)
- [Permitting Policy Recommendations — Federation of American Scientists and Environmental Policy Innovation Center](#)
- [Efficient, Effective Federal Permitting Workforce — Federation of American Scientists](#)

PERMITTING

Overview

Permitting is where a governor's economic growth agenda either moves or stalls. Housing developments, hospital expansions, energy projects, and new business all need permitting approvals from one or more levels of government in order to progress. The right guardrails are critical to protect public health, safety, and environmental quality. They help uphold legal rights as well as create space for public input on decisions that shape communities. When a government permitting process balances protections with a clear, efficient, predictable path to a permitting decision, it has done its job well.

Unfortunately, applications can sit in separate agency queues for months or even years waiting for approval, rather than reaching a yes or no. Each office may manage its own work responsibly, but the full applicant experience is often slow, complicated, and nobody's job to fix.

The cost of permitting inefficiency is measurable. For 2024, the state of Washington found that, on average, construction permits ran 81% longer than statutory timelines, with delays costing applicants an average of \$157,300 per permit in unexpected expenses.¹ Energy and data infrastructure tell the same story at a larger scale, with more than 2,060 gigawatts of generation and storage capacity actively seeking grid connection at the end of 2025.² Every one of those projects needs state permits to move.

Permitting reform has bipartisan support and multiple states have working models. More than a dozen governors called for federal energy permitting reform in 2025, and Arkansas and Alaska's governors signed executive orders to speed permitting to achieve their priority objectives.^{3, 4} Inside state government, much of the work is operational vs. policy-related. Uneven local capacity, legacy forms, outdated tech, and weak accountability slow the applicant journey even on ultimately compliant projects.

The first 100 days provide the window to emphasize the priority of permitting improvements, build the leadership structure, and drive a human-centered approach before tech purchases lock in old workflows and staff go back to business as usual.

Permitting opportunities for the first 100 days of 2027

Below are four ways to strengthen permitting:

1. Establish leadership, cross-agency coordination and transparency
2. Apply human-centered design to permitting workflows
3. Prioritize policy and process reform – include support for modernizing tech
4. Leverage AI and data responsibly for targeted improvements

Establish leadership, cross-agency coordination and transparency

A governor can turn permitting from disconnected agency activities into a coordinated process with clear ownership and public transparency. In the first 30 days, name a senior permitting lead with authority to convene agencies and elevate disputes, and a direct reporting line into the governor's office.

Virginia DEQ Director Mike Rolband came to the role in Governor Youngkin's administration after decades on the applicant side of the table and used that experience to map agency processes end-to-end, build a leading digital permitting platform, and cut processing times by 65%.⁵ In Pennsylvania, Governor Shapiro brought in tech entrepreneur Ben Kirshner and immediately signed an executive order giving state agencies 90 days to document every type of permit, license, and certification they issue, more than 2,400 in all.⁶

These leaders understood the applicant experience firsthand, while others may bring human-centered design or process engineering skills to the table to wring out unnecessary delays. Central accountability, agency-level ownership, and transparency make reform move.

Washington Governor Bob Ferguson used an executive order in his first week to require every state agency to catalog its permits, publish processing timelines, and refund application fees when deadlines are missed.⁷

Add the city, county, utility, and federal steps that touch the state's highest-priority housing, energy, and infrastructure projects. The governor needs to see the full path from application to decision, not just the state's piece of it.

Create formal governance structures across departments and jurisdictions

Delaware created the [JobsFirst Permitting Accelerator](#), Idaho created the [SPEED Council](#), and California created the [Infrastructure Strike Team](#). The permitting coordination function can sit in the governor's office, a performance office, or a transformation office, but it needs a direct line to the

governor or chief of staff and a standing cadence with cabinet secretaries. Local governments play a major role in permitting, but aren't often considered in statewide permitting reform efforts. It is best practice for a new team to prioritize working with localities to understand and resolve common bottlenecks. The following are actions new administrations can take to establish leadership and governance:

- » Map the 10 project types with the highest volume of applicants or that reflect a major economic priority, and identify the permits required for each project
- » Issue an executive order in the first 30 days establishing a permitting coordination function with scope, authority, and reporting cadence
- » Designate a lead contact within the new permitting coordination team for each major project type from submission through decision
- » Require senior agency leadership or a short-term designee from the new permitting office to identify which requirements are statutory, regulatory, policy-based, contractual, or operational practice in order to understand what is actually required and what is flexible
- » Convene large cities and counties, as well as small and rural communities, in the first 60 days to identify shared barriers and offer state support through model standards, grants, staff capacity, best-practices working groups, or shared platforms
- » Review the state's model codes. Are these mostly state versions of national codes? If so, consider getting rid of any confusing translation layer or irrelevant codes
- » Create a local permitting help desk so cities and counties can get clear answers on state requirements and shared resources, such as the one in [Connecticut](#)

Implement a dashboard to create transparency ([FAST-41 style](#))

Virginia's Permitting Transparency System gives applicants and agency leaders a shared view of permit status and timelines and has inspired a dashboard playbook from Foundation for American Innovation.^{8, 9} Washington, Iowa, Arizona, and Pennsylvania are also using permit tracking systems to improve transparency.¹⁰ New Jersey just launched a pilot as well.¹¹ A governor can start with a lightweight version built from existing agency data that displays the permit, owner, target date, current status, next action, and source of delay.

A governor with a dashboard that turns permitting status into management information will be able to track improvements and challenges to improving the permitting process. FAST-41 is a federal operating model highlighting timetables, visible milestones, and downloadable project data for federal infrastructure projects.¹² States can adapt that structure for a priority state permit dashboard without placing those permits in the federal system.

STATE SPOTLIGHT: Pennsylvania Payback

Pennsylvania's PAYback program set public processing targets and tied missed deadlines to refunds. The initiative cut the initial corporate license wait from eight weeks to two days and reduced a Department of Environmental Protection backlog by more than 90%.¹³

Apply human-centered design to permitting workflows

Permitting processes reflect an accumulation of rules, forms, workarounds, and system constraints. Over time, agencies add bulk and try to adapt old systems to new policy requirements. Applicants encounter that accumulated history as complexity, forcing them to navigate the government's internal structure resulting in long delays and disappointing results.

Boston took an applicant-centered approach to its permitting redesign. When the city's Digital Service team tested the process of obtaining an electrical permit, it found the form asked for information applicants did not yet have. The team redesigned questions and improved sequencing to address the problem.¹⁴ Administrations can also improve permitting processes by requiring agencies to show that applicants understand the instructions, submit the right information, and track their application through the decision process.

Redesign processes from the applicant perspective using journey mapping and usability testing

Create journey maps for a small number of priority projects and implement improvements before moving into statewide redesign. The team gains critical knowledge by following applicants and frontline staff through the entire process from searching for requirements through completion. Pay attention to places where there are bottlenecks or where stakeholder interests conflict. Here are four key steps:

- » Select two or three project types that affect many applicants or reflect a major economic priority
- » Test the current process with individual applicants, contractors, small business owners, developers, local officials, agency reviewers, and public commenters and record where applicants abandon the process, submit incorrect documents, miss required steps, or call for help, and where staff encounter challenges or bottlenecks
- » Rewrite the highest-friction instructions, form fields, and document requests to reduce confusion. Then test the rewrites, don't wait to procure or build a new platform to begin making improvements
- » Test applicants' ability to move through the system before agencies expand the redesigned workflow

Aim toward a common service design across cities and counties

The majority of routine permits are completed at the city and county level, often with additional state requirements and model codes for infrastructure, environmental, or heritage issues. Applicants may already be navigating a patchwork of codes and regulations across municipalities, depending on the state and their particular governance structure.¹⁵ Where localities develop separate processes and platforms for electronic permitting, these add further confusion and delay for applicants, and

costs for the cities and counties. The state can provide shared tools, common templates, and contract vehicles to help streamline permitting and reduce costs.

Oregon set up a common digital service for local permitting. State rules require jurisdictions to use Oregon ePermitting or a comparable electronic system that supports online applications, document upload, payments, plan review status, inspection scheduling, and electronic corrections and gives applicants a more consistent process across jurisdictions.¹⁶ Four key actions can set the state up for success:

- » Publish a permit intake template that local governments can copy
- » Set minimum digital service standards for status updates, document requests, online payments, plan review status, inspection scheduling, and electronic corrections
- » Offer a shared platform or integration path for jurisdictions with limited staff capacity, with the state using the platform directly and structuring procurements as multiple-award contracts to avoid vendor lock-in across municipalities.
- » Create a list of qualified vendors local governments can use when they need design, implementation, or integration support.

Measure the effect on the public, not just internal processes

States find success by tracking permitting measures that show how the process performs for applicants from first attempt through final decision. Internal processing metrics are valuable for highlighting backlogs and identifying where operational improvements are needed, but the goal is improving the public's experience with government. New Jersey has been tracking business permitting publicly through [BusinessNJ.gov](https://businessnj.gov), showing 65,000 businesses launched via that platform.¹⁷ The following metrics can help states track public impact:

- » Track application starts, completed submissions, abandonment, and incomplete submission rates to understand applicant issues
- » Measure time from the initial submission to the final decision, separating agency review time from applicant response time in order to understand what drives overall timeline
- » Compare outcomes by applicant type, permit category, and jurisdiction
- » Use applicant feedback in monthly performance reviews

Administrations have a significant opportunity to communicate the resulting public improvements that align with the governors' priorities, whether it is faster approval of new housing or a higher volume of quick denials that shielded state environmental laws, for example.

Prioritize policy and process reform – include support for modernizing tech

Focus on customer experience and redesign processes with constituents in mind. Tech selection follows after and supports the redesigned workflow, rather than imposing one. A new platform built on top of broken processes often results in a cleaner interface with the same delays. Administrations can make operational fixes immediately, while statutory changes become part of the often-longer legislative agenda. In Vermont, initial legislative action to increase housing availability early in the governor's first term and beyond has been paired with additional focus on permitting optimization via administrative means.¹⁸

States can begin by choosing a portfolio tied to gubernatorial priorities in the first 100 days, undertaking limited, but doable process reform. Start with permits that create the greatest applicant burden, staff workload, or economic consequence. Then identify changes that can be made under existing legal authority and meet the following core criteria: a named owner, legal clearance, a measurable applicant benefit, and a clear path to improvement. Look for opportunities to remove outdated rules and requirements, clean up outdated regulations, or remove manual decision gates that no longer serve their purpose. The following steps can help administrations decide on reform priorities:

- » Direct heads of agencies to identify and quantify the three largest bottlenecks as measured by impact on applicants and staff time
- » Collect complaints and feedback from applicants and compare that data to agency lists of bottlenecks
- » From that comparison, select an ambitious set of changes that reach across agencies
- » Consider putting tech procurements that are related to permitting on pause until priorities have been identified

Include timing targets with consequences to speed up the process

Multiple states include a realistic, substantive remedy for delay that incentivizes an agency to improve. Washington's Local Project Review Act sets default review periods, authorizing fee refunds up to 20% when deadlines are missed, with annual performance reporting by certain cities and counties.¹⁹ Low-risk administrative approvals may fit fee refunds or deemed-complete rules, under which the application is automatically approved after the deadline. A California rule allows a qualified third-party review on building permits if the local agency cannot meet the 30 day deadline.²⁰ Complex multi-agency permits may trigger required senior review when a milestone slips. These kinds of incentives can be effective in speeding up processes.

Identify what the consequences will be before announcing time-based deadlines. The deadlines work best when based on improved processes with systems that support and incentivize the streamlined timelines. Consider these steps:

- » Announce and publish processing time deadlines and the consequences to agencies for missing the deadline for each type of permit included in the first coordination initiative
- » Ensure that there is a single point of accountability for each deadline target and track agency review time separately from the time it takes applicants to respond
- » Design a clear and responsive escalation path that triggers when a delay crosses a defined threshold and approval is not automatic, as in New York, where published timeframes specify when a permit should be granted but require the applicant to notify the agency when the deadline has passed.²¹

STATE SPOTLIGHT: Washington State Permitting Reform

In Washington, slow permitting was pricing people out of homeownership. One industry estimate put the added cost at \$25,000 per home and priced out 55,000 buyers. To reduce these delays, Washington imposed hard permitting timelines for housing, fiscal penalties, and mandatory public reporting. In 2025, median permit review times improved by approximately 19% compared to 2024.

Leverage AI and data responsibly for targeted improvements

Permitting is one area with immediate opportunities for AI to transform government service delivery. These applications play to AI's strengths in taming high-volume, document-heavy, rules-based transactions, and AI tools can have a legitimate role in simplifying the constituent interface.

Use the 100 day window to build readiness and develop strategy, selecting use cases that target the biggest bottlenecks impacting state performance, and understanding what has been done to date. This groundwork includes kicking off user experience work and data governance if they have not already been completed, rather than jumping into AI unprepared.

Build cross-agency, searchable data infrastructure

To be safe and successful, AI projects need validated and verified data. So the governor's team or agency leader has to know who owns the records, where they are located, what legal limits apply, and which fields can support dashboards or AI-assisted review.

Most major permit categories draw on information scattered across case management systems, document repositories, GIS layers, email records, inspection notes, and local files. In the first 100 days, aim to produce an index of all permitting data sources and a short plan for making them searchable, if these do not already exist. (See Data Memo.) Actions to lay the data groundwork:

- » Make an inventory of permitting data; include which agency holds it, which system it is part of, the format, when it gets updated, and any legal restrictions on sharing it
- » Define standards for priority permits, application status, decision dates, applicant response time, completeness, withdrawal, and approval²²
- » Identify which local and federal datasets the state uses for high-priority projects

- » Design and agree on data governance before any AI pilot uses historical decisions or applicant information

Look for opportunities to automate priority processes

A starting point for a state could be piloting work that staff already repeatedly performs, where the state can compare AI output against current decisions. (See AI Memo). AI may be able to drastically improve both turnaround time and quality, assisting in application guidance, review support, public comment processing, site screening, and permit tracking.²³ For example, Minnesota is implementing a platform including public comment analysis and risk determination for environmental permitting.²⁴

Intake as an early pilot can offer wins the public sees. Hawaii and Virginia²⁵ have both begun implementing AI that analyzes local building codes and uses automated completeness checks to identify missing fields, inconsistent answers, incorrect document types, and likely routing issues before an application enters tech review. That kind of automation can reduce avoidable back-and-forth while leaving substantive determinations with accountable officials. These are important early actions states can use:

- » Identify the five process steps that consume the most staff time and cause the greatest customer frustration
- » Rank each step by rule clarity, data availability, error rate, and legal risk
- » Pilot automated completeness checks and mitigate risks before an application enters the review queue
- » Support “human-in-the-loop” final evaluations by experts using emerging agent oversight practices: post-hoc auditing, real-time monitoring, and steering as agentic AI makes it more difficult to effectively conduct human review of AI outputs.²⁶ (See AI Memo.)

STATE SPOTLIGHT: Hawaii (Honolulu) Permitting Modernization

Honolulu reduced new building permit wait times by 40% and cut pre-screening delays by 71% through policy and process reform and a centralized portal paired with AI-driven plan reviews.

Use AI to analyze regulations, historic decisions, and speed up decision-making

Begin with one high-impact permit category where reviewers spend substantial time interpreting rules or retrieving comparable decisions. Make a build vs. buy decision, as there is a growing number of commercial tools configured for compliance checking that can increase the quality of applications and speed reviews.²⁷ Watch for vendor lock-in and other challenges with commercial procurement. If building, gather a controlled body of permitting knowledge for reviews. (See Procurement Memo.)

Pacific Northwest National Laboratory's (PNNL) PermitAI project offers a useful federal model and tool for energy permitting, leveraging past environmental review documents.²⁸ PNNL's National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) [Text Corpus](#) is a public, machine-readable dataset drawn from environmental documents across federal databases, with an early release containing approximately 28 thousandK documents, 4.6 million pages, and more than 3.6 billion tokens from more than 100 agencies.²⁹

Whether building or buying, it is best practice to establish governance first. Leadership can work with legal counsel to determine which data and records may be used and assign program leadership and data stewards to protect data integrity and oversee the decisions and processes that rely on it. This includes documenting AI-assisted decisions while leaving final decision-making authority with expert, accountable public officials. Any pilot has to show measurable improvements in speed while preserving (or improving) review quality, with legal defensibility and public accountability intact.

- » Build or buy a searchable record set for one priority permit category using governing authorities, agency guidance, application materials, prior determinations, approval conditions, inspection records, and appeal outcomes
- » Use responsibly built and tested AI-assisted retrieval to help staff identify applicable requirements and comparable determinations
- » Analyze historic decisions for consistency across similar projects and flag outliers for supervisory review
- » For energy and infrastructure projects, use AI screening to identify conflicts early, including environmental constraints and likely interconnection issues

Beyond 100 days

These opportunities for the first 100 days can set the precedent for transparency, user-centricity, and coordinated leadership. Beyond 100 days, administrations can evolve and expand early wins to support improved permitting throughout all relevant processes and agencies.

Supplemental information

What to ask

1. Ask the relevant agency lead(s): How do timelines for the 10 highest-volume or highest-impact permits compare with neighboring or benchmark states?
2. What tech and software are currently being used to manage high volume permits?
3. Ask agency leadership with high permitting volume: Who owns the full applicant experience when a project crosses agencies, local governments, utilities, or federal review?

4. Ask relevant program leads: What share of applications arrive incomplete, require resubmission, or wait on applicant action?
5. How many staffing vacancies are there on review teams for high-volume permits?

What to read

- » [Recoding America — Metropolitan Books](#)
- » [Delivery-Driven Government — Code for America](#)
- » [2026 Permitting Technology Landscape Report — Environmental Policy Innovation Center](#)
- » [Is It a Permitting Problem or Your Application Form? — Environmental Policy Innovation Center](#)
- » [Permitting Policy Recommendations — Federation of American Scientists and Environmental Policy Innovation Center](#)
- » [Efficient, Effective Federal Permitting Workforce — Federation of American Scientists](#)

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State Spotlight

Pennsylvania PAYback Permitting

Pennsylvania's PAYback program set public processing targets and tied missed deadlines to refunds. The initiative cut the initial corporate license wait from eight weeks to two days and reduced a Department of Environmental Protection backlog by more than 90%.

Challenge

Pennsylvania's permitting systems were notorious for delays. With a 21,000-application backlog, businesses couldn't get straight answers on permit status, nurses waited three months for licenses during the pandemic-era staffing crisis, and companies took their businesses to other states. Pennsylvania's permitting systems were fundamentally fractured, with 2,400 types of permits across 22 agencies with no unified tracking or accountability processes.

Approach

Governor Josh Shapiro signed an executive order in 2023, giving agencies 90 days to catalog every permit, document processing times, and set public targets, with a money-back guarantee attached if they missed them. Execution of the order was driven by two new offices, the Office of Transformation and Opportunity (OTO), which served as the governor's operational arm inside agencies, and CODE PA, an in-house civic tech shop that built the digital infrastructure. OTO worked directly with staff to diagnose bottlenecks and coordinated across agencies to fix them. CODE PA built the PAYback refund portal and a business-facing dashboard using user-tested methods.

Outcomes**95%**

Faster time to receive an initial corporate business license (8 weeks → 2 days)

35,000+

Medicaid provider applications and renewals cleared in six months

90%+

Reduction in the backlog of applications at the Department of Environmental Protection

Lessons Learned

- » The PAYback money-back guarantee changed incentive structures within agencies more than arbitrary goal-setting.
- » The state needed a baseline of basic data on its permitting process before attempting to fix the issue.
- » Building PAYback through CODE PA in-house allowed the state to move faster, spend less, and retain the flexibility to iterate as the problem evolved.

Read More

[Pennsylvania Red Tape Reduction: A Case Study, Institute for Responsive Government](#)



State Spotlight

Washington State Permitting Reform

In Washington, slow permitting was pricing people out of homeownership. One industry estimate put the added cost at \$25,000 per home and priced out 55,000 buyers. To reduce these delays, Washington imposed hard permitting timelines for housing, fiscal penalties, and mandatory public reporting. In 2025, median permit review times improved by approximately 19% compared to 2024.

Challenge

Washington faced a growing housing shortage. Before 2023, local jurisdictions did not face consequences for slow permit processing, and builders had no way to predict how long a project would take. The Washington legislature concluded that the absence of predictable timelines reduced housing production.

Approach

The legislature passed Second Substitute Senate Bill 5290 in 2023, which established binding default review time periods, mandated fee refunds of up to 20% when jurisdictions missed the deadlines, and gave local governments a menu of 10 process-improvement measures to choose from based on size and capacity. This bill is based on a recommendation from a Department of Commerce funded task force. The Department of Commerce provided technical guidance, including a permit fee cost recovery guide and annual performance requirements for jurisdictions. It posts annual performance data to highlight improvements.

Outcomes

~19%

Approximate improvement in median permit review times in 2025 compared to 2024

27%

More jurisdictions met or exceeded statutory deadlines in 2025 (up from 33 jurisdictions in 2024 to 42 in 2025; 50 of 51 required jurisdictions reported)

13 days faster

Median permit processing time relative to statutory timelines in 2025, up from 17 days slower in 2024

Lessons Learned

- » Monetary penalties for missing the review timeframes provided local jurisdictions an incentive to streamline their processes.
- » The menu of 10 process improvement measures allows jurisdictions the flexibility to determine the approaches most suitable for their size and capacity.

Read More

[Local Project Review, Washington Department of Commerce](#)
[Annual Permitting Performance Data, Washington Department of Commerce](#)
[Open Data on Permitting, data.wa.gov](#)



State Spotlight

Hawaii (Honolulu) Permitting Modernization

Honolulu reduced new building permit wait times by 40% and cut pre-screening delays by 71% through policy and process reform and a centralized portal paired with AI-driven plan reviews.

Challenge

The backlogs in Honolulu's legacy permitting system meant builders waited more than a year to obtain basic permits, affecting local businesses, restricting housing supply, and reducing city tax revenues. Staffing shortages exacerbated the backlog. The city needed a strategy that combined policy and process reform with modern tech to clean up error-ridden applications, break down agency silos, and measure outcomes.

Approach

Targeting housing development as a critical priority, Honolulu overhauled its permitting workflows based on the applicant's experience. In August 2025, the city launched an online portal that centralizes submission, tracking, mapping, and payment into a single human-centered interface. To tackle front-end bottlenecks, the city integrated CivCheck, an AI-assisted Guided Plan Review tool that analyzes local building codes and pre-screens applications for errors and missing data before they are submitted. The system also provided an integrated data pipeline across municipal review teams.

Outcomes

40%

Reduction in median wait times for new building permits, dropping from about four months to 2.5 months

71%

Decrease in pre-screening delays for residential projects during the AI tool pilot

67%

Reduction in alteration permit delays, down from about three months to 40 days

Lessons Learned

- » Part of the bottleneck is application quality. Using AI tools like CivCheck to analyze regulations and guide applicants before submission reduces total review corrections by over 60%.
- » Prioritize process reform supported by tech, and redesign systems around the user's journey to improve processing times and clarity for applicants.
- » Tracking public outcomes (like time-to-permit) helps justify iterative investments.

Read More

[Honolulu Building Permits Moving Faster For Homes, Slower For Businesses, Honolulu Civil Beat](#)
[How Technology Sped Honolulu's Housing Permits, Route Fifty](#)
[Honolulu AI Permitting Pilot Case Study & Metrics, CivCheck](#)

Emergency Response & Recovery



Emergency Response & Recovery

Building the readiness, data infrastructure, and resilience that protect residents before a disaster strikes

Major emergencies arrive on every governor's watch. The first 100 days set the operating posture and determine how the state will hold together when a fire, hurricane, grid failure, or another cascading shock tests it. The state-level emergency portfolio keeps expanding while federal support has become less predictable: storms, floods, fires, cyberattacks, power failures, and public health crises all require the governor's direct authority and a tested command structure. States that invest in readiness before a disaster strikes protect residents, maintain public trust, and recover faster.

Key Opportunities · First 100 Days

- ☐ **Expand readiness in technology and data for a changing operating environment**
 - ☐ Ensure the head of emergency management has experience in the field
 - ☐ Get briefed on the full range of risks and vulnerabilities
 - ☐ Attend exercises to learn what happens before an emergency declaration request
 - ☐ Find out the communication plans for scenarios where primary tech or communications systems fail
 - ☐ Get briefed on the current statewide risk assessment for both response and recovery
- ☐ **Establish a unified readiness framework**
- ☐ **Invest in resilience and mitigation that pays off before a disaster strikes**
 - ☐ Invest in data infrastructure and capacity
 - ☐ Prioritize interoperable, authoritative datasets for emergency use
 - ☐ Enable data sharing through written agreements and shared platforms or data warehouses
- ☐ **Improve resilience through systems and processes that focus on the experience of survivors**

“

“Resilience depends on relationships and infrastructure built before the emergency hits. Nearly every event crosses jurisdictions, sectors, and levels of government — and those connections have to exist before the storm arrives.”

— 2026 State Memos for a Tech Transition, Emergency Response & Recovery Memo

Top Questions to Ask Your Leaders

- 1 When was the last time they convened cross-functional state agencies and the nonprofits that will carry the recovery workload? When is the next convening scheduled?
- 2 What maps or visualizations exist of the owners of systems, dependencies on vendors, and communication channels and pathways?
- 3 What did approval chains look like in the most recent emergency or disaster? What worked? What didn't? What is being done to mitigate issues in the next emergency?
- 4 Which data-sharing agreements exist with local governments, utilities, nonprofits, and federal partners, and which need to be signed before the next disaster?
- 5 How does a survivor actually experience the state's disaster assistance process in the field? Who falls through the gaps in federal programs?

Key Roles to Fill

- **Head of Emergency Management** — Experienced practitioner with field credibility; directly briefed by the governor and empowered to convene cross-agency and cross-sector partners before the next event
- **Chief Data Officer (for emergency readiness)** — Owns the data-sharing agreements, interoperable datasets, and real-time situational awareness infrastructure that make coordinated response possible

State Spotlight

North Carolina — Next Generation 911 Network

North Carolina's Next Generation 911 network kept emergency calls answered through one of the state's worst disasters, automatically rerouting calls when local infrastructure was destroyed.

- Automatically routed tens of thousands of calls when local communications infrastructure was destroyed
- Maintained continuity of emergency response during a catastrophic regional event with no service interruption

What to Read

- [National Emergency Management Association \(NEMA\) — nemaweb.org](https://nemaweb.org)
- [Emergency Management Assistance Compact \(EMAC\) — emacweb.org](https://emacweb.org)
- [Tabletop Exercise Packages — CISA](https://www.cisa.gov/tabletop-exercise-packages)
- [Stafford Act — FEMA](https://www.fema.gov/stafford-act)
- [National Risk Study — Deloitte and National Emergency Management Association](https://www.deloitte.com/us/topics/risk/national-risk-study)
- [Leveraging the PACE Plan for an Emergency Communications Ecosystem — CISA](https://www.cisa.gov/leveraging-the-pace-plan-for-an-emergency-communications-ecosystem)

EMERGENCY RESPONSE & RECOVERY

Overview

Major emergencies arrive on every governor's watch. The first 100 days set the operating posture and determine how the state will hold together when a fire, hurricane, grid failure, or another cascading shock tests it. Although cybersecurity breaches are not in the direct purview of most emergency managers, when cyberattacks target critical infrastructure like the water supply or the electrical grid, administrations will have to respond rapidly to limit the potential threat to public health and safety.

Emergency management has more to prepare for, and has more work on emergency and disaster recovery than ever before. The state-level emergency portfolio keeps expanding while federal support has become less available. Storms, floods, fires, cyberattacks, power failures, infrastructure outages, and disinformation campaigns may compound during the same timeframe. In many states and localities, emergency preparedness, mitigation, and resilience programs have been funded by federal grants. Those grants are smaller and harder to obtain. The ripple effects are real: responsibility for funding to ensure readiness and assist speedy recovery rests more with states than it has for decades. Tech and data infrastructure are key parts of emergency response and delivering emergency services today.

An emergency could happen at any moment. To be ready, the administration should be briefed on Day 1 about legal authorities, who is running point, and how communication flows.

In the first 100 days, a governor's office needs a clear view of operational readiness and the steps that precede a declaration request. This sets the scene for expanding and ensuring readiness in the state; investing in resilience, mitigation, data infrastructure, and capacity; and making sure services take into account the experiences of survivors.

Emergency Response & Recovery opportunities for the first 100 days of 2027

Here are four ways to strengthen emergency response and recovery systems:

1. Expand readiness in technology and data for a changing operating environment
2. Establish a unified readiness framework
3. Invest in resilience and mitigation that pay off before a disaster strikes
4. Improve resilience through systems and processes that focus on the experience of survivors

Expand readiness in technology and data for a new operating environment

Emergency response in the United States begins locally and escalates upward, with the federal government playing a supporting role under the Stafford Act.¹ A governor inherits the state's authority, fiscal exposure, public accountability, and coordination burden on Day 1. The top priority is to know what the governor's legal authorities are, what systems emergency response and recovery teams rely on, and how information is communicated and shared internally and externally.

Readiness begins by assessing state strengths, updating risk profiles and assumptions, and understanding local, regional, and nonprofit dependencies that can both serve the state well and create hidden risk. The role of the governor's office is to know who has what authority and what happens before a request for an emergency or disaster declaration reaches the governor's desk.

Resilience depends on relationships and infrastructure, including tech and data infrastructure, built before the emergency hits. Nearly every event crosses jurisdictional and agency boundaries. States that respond well are the ones whose agencies, local governments, utilities, and nonprofit partners know one another and already communicate effectively before the storm. The National Emergency Management Association (NEMA) has useful resources for peer learning and state practice.² NEMA is instrumental in professionalizing emergency management and has established the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC), a commitment among state governments to assist one another during emergencies and disasters. Relationships built in advance move faster and are far more effective than introductions made in the middle of a flood. State emergency management teams can strengthen readiness through active participation in EMAC and will be able to engage other states in times of stress and emergency.

North Carolina's membership in EMAC has been crucial to responding quickly and comprehensively to events. According to a former emergency manager for the state, no state has all the resources it needs for events like hurricanes and the flooding that follows. North Carolina had assistance from 44

other states for response and recovery during Hurricane Florence and from 39 states during Hurricane Helene. In turn, North Carolina had also deployed staff and resources like its “clinic in a box” to volcanic emergencies in Hawaii and during Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico.

STATE SPOTLIGHT: North Carolina 911 Board

North Carolina’s Next Generation 911 network kept emergency calls answered through one of the state’s worst disasters. Using a dedicated Emergency Services IP Network (ESInet), Next Generation 911 automatically rerouted tens of thousands of calls from places where local infrastructure was destroyed, which would not have been possible with older tech.

Ensure the head of emergency management has experience in the field

Emergency management is a highly professionalized field that demands more time and expertise as federal and state planning, audits, scenario planning, and preparation grow. Historically, the head of public safety or homeland security could also lead emergency management. This is now a broader scope and skillset. A former first responder or law enforcement professional might be great at responding to an event. A dedicated emergency manager builds the relationships, plans, data, tech, and frameworks for a truly prepared, resilient state. The most effective heads of emergency management are systems thinkers who have experience in all phases of emergency management and understand the value of useful tech and data shared across agencies and jurisdictions.

Get briefed on the full range of risks and vulnerabilities

It is likely that the state’s emergency management team regularly conducts and updates scenario plans that assess risks and vulnerabilities. This work means thinking in three dimensions, because emergencies cascade and intersect. For example, a hurricane can knock out the communications a cyber response depends on. Scenario planning covers natural hazards, infrastructure failures, ransomware, insider threats, supply chain disruptions, extended power outages, and disinformation that spreads fastest when official channels go quiet.

Ask for maps and visualizations of changes in federal capacity and where the state will fill the gaps. A briefing would cover personnel, data, declarations, reimbursement, tech assistance, field support, and communications capacity.

Attend exercises to learn what happens before an emergency declaration request

A tabletop exercise surfaces the holes in a plan before a real event does. The federal Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) offers ready-made packages a state can adapt to its own hazards, with scenarios that span ransomware, natural disasters, pandemics, civil disturbances, insider threats, phishing, and industrial control system compromise.³ An exercise needs all the right people in the room, including response leaders and recovery partners in areas such as housing and benefits that drive survivor outcomes after the initial response. Participation by the governor’s office enhances readiness and decision-making and develops trust among levels of government.

Response gets rehearsed far more often than recovery, where preparedness gaps may become more apparent. Practicing recovery through scenario planning and strategic investments, rather than relying on working-group discussion, forces a hard question about how the state allocates

resources and which groups coordinate after the immediate danger passes. Establishing and nurturing relationships among government agencies, community groups, and NGOs ahead of time through planning and exercises leads to a quicker, smoother response.

Then, as response winds down and recovery kicks in, different individuals and organizations need to be present. Recovery pulls in government agencies such as housing, benefits and social work, permitting, public engagement, workforce, small business support, and more. These agencies need to coordinate with insurance companies, companies that handle hazardous materials and waste, landlords, building contractors, and community organizations and nonprofits. Rehearsing recovery alongside response, largely through scenario planning, gives those groups a chance to meet one another and divide responsibilities before the gaps show up under pressure.

As a convener and coordinating body, an emergency management team that connects organizations and maps out the relationships ahead of time can quickly assess damage and comprehensively meet the needs of people affected. Running exercises also lets the governor's team observe how recovery decisions move across agencies, local governments, community organizations, and nonprofit partners. Community organizations and nonprofits are crucial to response and recovery. For example, in the wake of the Palisades Fire in California, dozens of organizations collaborated to address newly-displaced residents' needs. They ranged from faith-based organizations to local community foundations.

Find out the communications plans for scenarios where primary tech or communications systems fail

When the primary network goes down, the response cannot stop. CISA's PACE framework gives states a method for layering primary, alternate, contingency, and emergency communications plans for critical operations during unusual conditions.⁴ In Michigan, for example, if statewide internet communications go down, responders and emergency managers have access to a statewide radio system. Backup planning also guards against the disinformation that floods social channels during a disaster, when residents need accurate information and trusted sources most.

Get briefed on the current statewide risk assessment for both response and recovery

Every state maintains a risk assessment that ranks where the state is most exposed and which scenarios warrant attention, resources, and budget. Ask about geographic data, historical disaster records, public health data, utility data, local knowledge, nonprofit experience, and after-action reports. An effective risk assessment builds a picture detailed enough to guide budget choices.

Also ask about dependencies. A dependency layer shows where the state relies on federal personnel, data, or reimbursement; vendor platforms; local systems; and nonprofit capacity. Use that layer to identify shortfalls that require state investment or gaps that can be addressed with neighboring states informally or through the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC).⁵

Establish a unified readiness framework

In addition to natural disasters and emergencies caused by extreme weather, cyberattacks have become a routine hazard for some state emergency managers. A ransomware attack on a benefits

system or a hospital can produce a public health crisis on par with the scale of a physical disaster and can strike multiple systems at once. The governor's office needs a unified readiness and recovery framework⁶ that reaches across local governments, quasi-governmental entities, and critical service providers outside regular state security visibility. Small public power districts, water systems, hospitals, or local 911 centers all represent state vulnerabilities. A unified model aligns capabilities, resources, and leadership across the state.

Write an order to set the incident chain of command before the first alert. Direct departments participating in the unified framework to identify the decision-maker for IT, cybersecurity, public safety, and homeland security for containment, public notice, service shutdowns, vendor escalation, law enforcement coordination, local government support, and restoration of public-facing systems. Those organizations that are part of the unified readiness framework define which decisions sit with the CISO, CIO, emergency management director, affected agency head, legal counsel, communications director, and governor's office.

When emergencies and disasters happen, critical infrastructure, such as the electrical grid and the water system, is vulnerable to cyberattacks. When that occurs, even a relatively small event can cascade to a major public health and safety crisis. Include specific direction and protocols in the readiness framework for IT and cybersecurity teams to mitigate cyberattacks and collaborate with emergency management to assess and contain damage. Direct departments to use CISA's free open-source Cyber Security Evaluation Tool to establish a baseline, track progress, and identify agencies or local partners with material exposure.⁷ Include a requirement in the directive to conduct periodic assessments and exercises to test readiness, resilience, and recovery when critical infrastructure is compromised.

Invest in resilience and mitigation that pay off before a disaster strikes

It is well worth investing in preparedness and mitigation. For every \$1 spent on mitigation, a government can save as much as \$13 on recovery.⁸ Use the first budget cycle to move mitigation from aspiration to line items. The Deloitte-NEMA National Risk Study found that emergency managers would prefer to spend 44% of their time on mitigation, while they currently spend only 5%.⁹ Funding was identified by 64% as their most significant challenge. Ask the budget director and emergency management director to rank mitigation projects.

- » Fund mitigation projects that pair disaster benefits with everyday value, including improvements to traffic, public space, cooling capacity, drainage, housing, or shared infrastructure that attract broader support
- » Invest in affordable housing ahead of an event, since a shortage of stable units leaves people with nowhere to land after a disaster
- » Quantify and communicate the avoided risk that mitigation produces, because few constituencies credit governments for disasters that never happened

STATE SPOTLIGHT: California Wildfire Detection AI

California layered AI detection onto its statewide camera network, catching hundreds of fires before a 911 call came in.

Invest in data infrastructure and capacity

Data forms the backbone of modern emergency response and recovery, particularly geospatial data such as parcel and address information. Direct your emergency management team to produce a data inventory.

A data inventory that can be helpful in emergencies or disasters must show authoritative datasets, their owners, how often they are refreshed, and the systems that use them. It should also show who has access, including local partners, and whether there are legal, tech, or quality barriers that would prevent the datasets from being used in an emergency. Ideally, for a unified readiness framework, the datasets would be connected in a single, widely available data warehouse that feeds a real-time, common operating picture that is ready *before* an emergency strikes.

A Geospatial Information Officer (GIO) coordinates the rendering of typically siloed data into an actionable operating picture. Geospatial data connects roads, parcels, shelters, flood zones, wildfire risk, utility outages, 911 calls, mobile assets, environmental hazards, and vulnerable populations. The GIO works with the CIO, CDO, emergency management director, and relevant agency data leads, and these leaders may all come together in an Emergency Operations Center (EOC).

Prioritize interoperable, authoritative datasets for emergency use

Authoritative data carries the weight in an emergency. Use reliable data the government owns rather than buying data commercially, where possible, to drive damage and eligibility assessments and decisions about reimbursements or outreach. Require agencies to distinguish official public records from commercial, scraped, or stale datasets before those records are used in response or recovery.

Prioritizing open data first can benefit taxpayers as a whole before and after the emergency. If authoritative data is available, economic development opportunities also occur. For example, the same address is needed for package delivery or emergency response.

Enable data sharing through written agreements and shared platforms or data warehouses

One of the challenges of disaster response is scattered data sources at the county and municipal levels. It is common for local governments to hold their own datasets for parcels, addresses, and imagery with no common standard. Establishing data sharing agreements, at least, and consolidating data across district lines, at best, makes much more rapid and coordinated response and assessment possible.

The first 100 days are a good time to direct emergency management teams to establish data-sharing agreements with local governments, federal agencies, utility companies, community groups, and nonprofits that are part of the response ecosystem. If there is a Next Generation 911

project underway, emergency management may be able to lean on those efforts. New York State consolidated its geospatial data into one authoritative platform so local and state emergency responders all work from one source of truth. Before the consolidation into a platform called ShareGIS, the state's geospatial data was scattered across dozens of state agencies as well as 62 counties. Now, all agencies and responders have a shared operating picture at the moment it matters most.

STATE SPOTLIGHT: New York Geospatial Data

New York consolidated the state's geospatial data into one authoritative platform, so agencies and emergency responders work from the same data source, using it as the backbone for the Next Generation 911 system.

Improve resilience through systems and processes that focus on the experience of survivors

The experience of surviving a disaster, responding to an emergency, or assisting others to recover can be traumatizing to individuals and communities. Government sometimes layers on significant bureaucratic hurdles for those requesting assistance, as well as reporting requirements for those who respond.

Survivors may have lost loved ones, housing, transportation, income, and more. An important shift is for agencies that respond to emergencies and disasters to commit to changes in culture, policies, and service delivery that center the experiences of survivors, taking into account the emotional, psychological, and physical impacts of what they're going through. "Recovering from a Disaster" life experience work, from FEMA, OMB, HUD, and others, offers a useful starting point for understanding survivor journeys, frontline staff needs, and effective practice.¹⁰

Lowering the burden on survivors as much as possible, while mitigating fraud and ensuring foundational tech and data systems, allows emergency responders to focus on caring for survivors and themselves rather than having to focus on the friction of government systems.

Oregon offers one example. Oregon's Department of Emergency Management partnered with the Oregon Health Authority's Behavioral Health Division to create a program that focuses on helping people get through emergencies and crises.¹¹ In addition, Oregon has created a network of community-based organizations to bring together groups that support specific cultures or communities of color that are disproportionately affected by disasters.¹²

Similarly, other states can work with community organizations to test the state's forms, notices, call scripts, document rules, appeal instructions, mobile application flow, language access, and disability support to make sure they serve the people who would use them in the wake of an emergency.

States can strengthen this work by requiring senior leaders to experience the survivor process themselves. From a mobile device, search for assistance, verify identity, check status, respond to a denial, file an appeal, and find local help. Have leaders track where the process fails for someone who has lost housing, documents, or connectivity.

Beyond 100 days

In 100 days, states can take steps to improve immediate readiness and cyber resilience; beyond the first 100 days, states can build on this work to create durable tech-empowered mitigation systems and survivor-centered services.

Supplemental information

What to ask

1. Ask the head of emergency management: When was the last time they convened cross-functional state agencies and the nonprofits that will carry the recovery workload? When is the next convening scheduled?
2. Ask the head of emergency management, head of administration, or the deputy or acting CIO: What maps or visualizations exist of the owners of systems, dependencies on vendors, and communication channels and pathways?
3. Ask career staff who have had key roles in disaster response and recovery: What did approval chains look like in the most recent emergency or disaster? What worked? What didn't? What is being done to mitigate issues in the next emergency?
4. Ask the acting CDO: Which data-sharing agreements exist with local governments, utilities, nonprofits, and federal partners, and which need to be signed before the next disaster?
5. Ask the constituent experience team: How does a survivor actually experience the state's disaster assistance process in the field? Who falls through the gaps in federal programs?
6. Ask the emergency management business manager: Which contingency funds can move quickly?

What to read

- » [National Emergency Management Association](#)
- » [Stafford Act — FEMA](#)
- » [Emergency Management Assistance Compact — Council of State Governments](#)
- » [CISA Tabletop Exercise Packages — Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency](#)
- » [Leveraging the PACE Plan for an Emergency Communications Ecosystem — Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency](#)
- » [National Risk Study — Deloitte and National Emergency Management Association](#)

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¹ Federal Emergency Management Agency, "Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act." Retrieved from <https://www.fema.gov/disaster/stafford-act>

² National Emergency Management Association, "National Emergency Management Association." Retrieved from <https://nemaweb.org>; See also Emergency Management Assistance Compact, "Emergency Management Assistance Compact." Retrieved from <https://www.emacweb.org/>

³ Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, "CISA Tabletop Exercise Packages." Retrieved from <https://www.cisa.gov/resources-tools/services/cisa-tabletop-exercise-packages>

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5 Emergency Management Assistance Compact, "The Nation's All Hazards Mutual Aid System." Retrieved from <https://www.emacweb.org/index.php>

6 Office of the Governor of Virginia, "Executive Order 19: Establishing the Commonwealth of Virginia Unified Readiness Framework," 2026. Retrieved from <https://www.governor.virginia.gov/media/governorviriniagov/governor-of-virginia/pdf/eo-19-establishing-the-commonwealth-of-virginia-unified-readiness-framework.pdf>

7 Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, "Cyber Security Evaluation Tool (CSET)." Retrieved from <https://www.cisa.gov/resources-tools/services/cyber-security-evaluation-tool-csetr>

8 Sydney Lewis, "Unpacking the ROI of Disaster Preparedness," September 27, 2024. Retrieved from <https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/disasters/unpacking-the-roi-of-disaster-preparedness>

9 Deloitte-NEMA National Risk Study 2025: Changing landscapes in state emergency management <https://www.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/industry/government-public-sector-services/emergency-management-preparedness-response.html>

10 Performance.gov, "Recovering from a Disaster." Retrieved from <https://www.performance.gov/cx/life-experiences/recovering-from-a-disaster/>

11 Oregon Department of Emergency Management, "Take Care of Yourself: Supporting Your Mental Health During a Disaster," April 28, 2025. Retrieved from <https://apps.oregon.gov/oregon-newsroom/OR/OEM/Posts/Post/mental-health-during-disasters>

12 Trauma Informed Oregon, "Disaster Resilience Learning Network (DRLN) 2024–2025 Annual Report," December 3, 2025. Retrieved from <https://traumainformedoregon.org/disaster-resilience-learning-network-drln/>

DRAFT



State Spotlight

North Carolina 911 Board

North Carolina's Next Generation 911 network kept emergency calls answered through one of the state's worst disasters. Using a dedicated Emergency Services IP Network (ESInet), Next Generation 911 automatically rerouted tens of thousands of calls from places where local infrastructure was destroyed, which would not have been possible with older tech.

Challenge

When Hurricane Helene struck North Carolina in 2024, it wiped out telecommunications networks throughout the state, leaving multiple 911 centers unable to receive calls. The state needed a way to ensure its residents could reach emergency services.

Approach

The NC 911 Board invested in a statewide Next Generation 911 network (ESInet) that allows 911 calls to be rerouted anywhere in the state when a local call center went down. In advance of the storm, Board staff worked with call center managers in the projected impact zone to add extra routing layers. A 24/7 Network Monitoring and Assistance Center (NMAC) tracked call delivery in real time and coordinated reroutes as conditions deteriorated.

Outcomes**~90,000**

911 calls handled across the state in the three days spanning the storm

586%

Single-day increase in 911 call volume handled without calls going unanswered.

19

Call centers rerouting calls to 23 partner centers across the state.

Lessons Learned

- » The Board's dual network connections at each call center eliminated single points of failure, and a FirstNet Wireless Redundant Solution ensured calls would go through.
- » NC 911 Board's Regional Coordinator model of staff embedded in four regions who know each call center's capabilities, ensured the success of the rerouting agreements.

Read More

[N.C. 911 Board Hurricane Helene After Action Report, NCDIT](#)



State Spotlight

California Wildfire Detection AI

California layered AI detection onto its statewide camera network, catching hundreds of fires before a 911 call came in.

Challenge

Faster warning gives fire crews more time to respond before a wildfire spreads. As California's wildfires have grown faster and more severe, the state saw an opportunity to detect fires earlier than traditional methods, which often depend on someone placing a 911 call.

Approach

In 2023, CAL FIRE partnered with UC San Diego's ALERTCalifornia program to layer AI-based anomaly detection onto a statewide network of more than 1,260 mountaintop cameras, spanning from the northern redwoods to the southern border. Trained on the petabytes of images the camera network recorded, the model distinguishes smoke from other airborne particles and pushes real-time alerts to trained staff in emergency command centers.

Outcomes

900+

Fires flagged by the AI network before a 911 call came in, as of July 2026

3,600

Wildfire incidents the platform helped CAL FIRE mitigate in 2025

Lessons Learned

- » AI-assisted detection significantly reduced detection times compared to prior methods.
- » An automated data solution, like ALERTCalifornia, can reduce the time it takes for public safety teams to coordinate the verification of a 911 report and send first responders to a scene.

Read More

[CAL FIRE and UC San Diego ALERTCalifornia AI Implementation Trial, alertcalifornia.org](#)
[What California has learned from an AI-enabled early wildfire detection system, Route Fifty](#)



State Spotlight

New York Geospatial Data

New York consolidated the state's geospatial data into one authoritative platform, so agencies and emergency responders work from the same data source, using it as the backbone for the Next Generation 911 system.

Challenge

Before consolidating to a central platform, New York's geospatial data was scattered across dozens of agencies and 62 counties, each maintaining its own parcel, address, and imagery datasets without a common standard. That made it hard for state agencies and emergency responders alike to work from a single, accurate operating picture.

Approach

New York's Geographic Information Officer leads Geospatial Services within the Office of Information Technology Services, which built ShareGIS as the state's enterprise GIS backbone. ShareGIS consolidates framework datasets, including statewide parcels, street and address points, orthoimagery, elevation, and civil boundaries, into one authoritative source available as web services. The state is migrating legacy web services to a new GeoHub environment through summer 2026.

Outcomes

Billions

Web service requests handled through ShareGIS's platform

62

Counties whose parcel data is available for statewide use

2026

Year New York migrates platform to modernized GeoHub

Lessons Learned

- » Build once, serve many. Consolidating parcels, addresses, and imagery into shared web services means every agency, from public safety to environmental protection, works off the same authoritative source.
- » Tie routine infrastructure to public-safety infrastructure. Address-point data doubles as the backbone of Next Generation 911.

Read More

[NYS Geospatial Services, Coordination Program, gis.ny.gov](#)
[Public Safety GIS Program, gis.ny.gov](#)
[ShareGIS, gis.ny.gov](#)

Child Welfare



Child Welfare

Placing more children with kin, strengthening foster home capacity, and preventing unnecessary system involvement

Child welfare is where the housing, behavioral health, education, and healthcare systems failures intersect. For a governor taking office in 2027, a meaningful capacity review of child welfare will look beyond the number of licensed placements to the match between children’s needs and available homes, including kin caregivers and local foster families, as well as the timely supports that help children stay connected to family, school, culture, and community. The first 100 days are the window to establish that vision and begin the operational work of moving toward it.

Key Opportunities · First 100 Days

- ☐ **Understand the state’s commitment to the A Home for Every Child initiative**
 - ☐ Track and improve Adverse Placement Scores
 - ☐ Prepare a Child and Family Services Review Pilot Program Improvement Plan
- ☐ **Improve supports for kin caregivers**
 - ☐ Adopt or affirm kin-specific licensing
 - ☐ Expand and align the definitions of “relative”
 - ☐ Confirm all foster children in the state can access Medicaid
 - ☐ Understand and enhance kin data
- ☐ **Improve the array of foster home placements**
 - ☐ Measure and improve the foster parent experience
 - ☐ Participate in ongoing efforts to improve non-kin foster home licensing
 - ☐ Confirm high-priority potential foster homes are fast-tracked
- ☐ **Streamline state background checks**
- ☐ **Avoid Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS) failure**
- ☐ **Safely prevent unnecessary child welfare involvement**
 - ☐ Complete the Family Strengthening Maturity Model assessment
 - ☐ Expand use of FFPSA

“

What families need to stay together safely is concrete support — delivered before a crisis, not a removal after one.”

— 2026 State Memos for a Tech Transition, Child Welfare Memo

Top Questions to Ask Your Leaders

- 1 What is the state’s “third horizon” (the future system the state is working towards) for child welfare? How is progress being measured?
- 2 What are we doing to reimagine ourselves as a child and family well-being system, not a child welfare system?
- 3 What is the community’s role in supporting our families?
- 4 What is the role of other state agencies in supporting our families?
- 5 How can we stabilize and grow our workforce?

Key Roles to Fill

- **Child Welfare Director** — Experienced leader with clear authority over the agency’s operating agenda; accountable for the Adverse Placement Score, kin licensing rate, and family strengthening strategy
- **HHS Technology Lead** — Owns the CCWIS implementation and data infrastructure; ensures case management systems support the agency’s equity and placement goals

State Spotlight

Maryland — Kin-Specific Licensing Reform

Maryland adopted kin-specific licensing standards in December 2025, creating a clear and accessible pathway for relative caregivers that dramatically increased the share of children placed with licensed kin.

- Kin placements increased by more than 33% following adoption of kin-specific licensing
- Licensed kin caregivers increased from 23% to 86% of all kin placements

What to Read

→ [Reimagining Your PIP with the Adverse Placement Score — Foster Insights](#)

→ [Kin-Specific Foster Home Approval Recommended Standards — Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network](#)

CHILD WELFARE

Overview

Child welfare is where the housing, behavioral health, education, and healthcare systems failures intersect. But because the levers to improve child welfare outcomes are largely operational, administrations can get meaningful results within a year by issuing policies and guidance that encourage and support changes in process. Many improvements don't have to wait for legislation or funding. Better outcomes for children and families is nonpartisan. Safely keeping children with their families is best for everyone. For example, placing children with a grandparent rather than a stranger can improve stability for the child and reduce cost for the state. Research shows that help with housing, food, child care, legal needs, benefits access, and flexible emergency funds can reduce child welfare involvement when delivered before a family reaches crisis.¹ Tech and data underpin these administrative levers for improvement.

For a governor taking office in 2027, a meaningful capacity review of child welfare will look beyond the number of licensed placements to the match between children's needs and available homes, including kin caregivers and local foster families, as well as the timely supports that help children stay connected to family, school, culture, and community.

Child Welfare opportunities for the first 100 days of 2027

Below are six ways to strengthen child welfare and make government more effective:

1. Understand the state's commitment to the A Home for Every Child initiative
2. Improve supports for kin caregivers
3. Improve the array of foster home placements
4. Streamline state background checks
5. Avoid Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS) failure
6. Safely prevent unnecessary child welfare involvement

Understand the state's commitment to the A Home for Every Child initiative

A Home for Every Child reorients a state's child welfare system around one measure: the ratio of available, appropriate foster homes to the number of children in foster care.² Available is the operative word here. On paper, many states show open beds yet children still sleep in offices and hotels because those beds are not an appropriate fit. The federal Administration for Children and Families (ACF) launched AH4EC in late 2025 to move states toward homes waiting for children, not children waiting for homes, and every state joined this effort.³

Closing this gap is a goal everyone can rally around, with several levers available, including more kin placements, strategic data-driven foster home recruitment and retention, and effective prevention services that keep children safely with their families of origin. The first 100 days establish the governor's dashboard and the state's first set of operating targets.

Track and improve Adverse Placement Scores

The Adverse Placement Score (APS) is the key indicator for achieving A Home for Every Child. APS tracks the percentage of children who are in an adverse placement setting, which means not with kin, and separated from their siblings, far from home, or in an institution. A lower APS means more children are placed with family, closer to school and community, and with better prospects for stability and permanency.⁴

APS gives the administration a real-time, geographically precise picture down to the school district of exactly where to direct recruitment, retention, kin engagement, and/or prevention efforts.⁵ It can also help child welfare programs focus on finding homes where children can stay in their home community, where siblings can be together, and that serve older youth and children with higher needs.

APS is already in use in more than 10 states, including Oklahoma, Michigan, and Washington.⁶ Many improvements identified through APS, like reuniting siblings or changing placement processes to prioritize closer homes first, can be acted on immediately.

- » Ask for an APS briefing. If the state is not yet using APS, ask the agency to identify what data is needed to calculate it, how often it can be refreshed, and which counties or regions would be targeted first
- » Require an APS dashboard showing kin placement, sibling separation, distance from home and school, congregate care use, and placement moves by region, age, race and ethnicity, disability, sibling group size, and Tribal affiliation where available
- » Use the first APS review to set immediate operating rules: no office, hotel, shelter, emergency, or institutional placement without daily senior review; no non-kin placements or sibling separation without documented review showing no viable alternative; and no distant placement unless closer family and community-based options have been exhausted

Prepare a Child and Family Services Review Pilot Program Improvement Plan

States respond to their federal Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) through a Program Improvement Plan (PIP). For 25 years, traditional PIPs have been lengthy, compliance-heavy documents tied to many measures, with limited value as day-to-day management tools. ACF now invites states to submit a new PIP focused on achieving the 1:1 home-to-child ratio goal in place of its current plan.⁷ 25 states have submitted PIPs so far. Because this is a pilot, there is still an opportunity to make improvements even if the state has already submitted its first PIP.

- » Ask whether the state has submitted the AH4EC PIP. If not, require a two-week decision memo identifying the proposed goal, accountable official, dashboard measures, and practice changes the agency would make because of the PIP. Don't start from scratch. Follow examples like Oklahoma's and Michigan's.
- » Prioritize updating state licensing tools to adopt kin-specific licensing and use the opportunity to measure the commensurate improvements to licensing, kin placement, placement stability, and retention from those updates. Best in class state PIPs will build in critical data and the systems, like these, to support that data.
- » Once approved, make the PIP an operating tool. Review its measures with the same discipline used for budget, staffing, and major tech work.

STATE SPOTLIGHT: Oklahoma Program Improvement Plan (PIP) Pilot

Oklahoma launched the first pilot PIP in April 2026, built on four pillars: safely preventing entries, reducing the Adverse Placement Score (APS), ensuring safe placements, and continually engaging kin and supporting foster families. Oklahoma's PIP is three pages and took just four weeks to build with the Foster Insights team.

Improve supports for kin caregivers

Kin caregivers are grandparents, other relatives, godparents, Tribal members, close family friends, and other adults who step up to raise children whose parents are unable to parent for an array of reasons, including substance use, severe mental illness, death, incarceration, or military deployment. At least 2.5 million children are raised by kin caregivers in America.⁸

About 329,000 children were in foster care at the end of FY 2024, and 39% were placed with relatives or kin.⁹ The foster care system relies heavily on kin caregivers, yet many kin families still receive less support than non-kin foster families. Grandfamilies.org reports that about 44% of children in foster care living with relatives or kin (56,665 children in 2025) were living with unlicensed caregivers, which generally means those caregivers were not receiving foster care maintenance payments.¹⁰ Research consistently finds that children in kin care have better stability, connection, and well-being outcomes than those in non-kin care when kin placements are supported.¹¹

Adopt or affirm kin-specific licensing

Children in foster care placed with licensed kin caregivers have access to Foster Care Maintenance Payments (FCMPs) to meet their daily needs. In 2023, the federal government gave Title IV-E agencies the option to adopt licensing or approval standards for kin or relative foster family homes that take into account the unique needs and circumstances compared with those of non-kin foster families.¹² ACF now maintains a public map of states and territories that have adopted those standards.¹³

For example, it may be reasonable to require that a child have their own sleeping space in the home of someone they don't know, but a child should not be denied the opportunity to live with their grandmother because they have to sleep on a couch. By streamlining licensing requirements for kin, states can ensure that children are able to live safely with the people who know and love them and that those caregivers receive ongoing support. The federal goal is to license every kin caregiver within seven days.¹⁴

- » Check the state's kin-specific licensing status on the ACF map. If the state has adopted standards for licensing kin, get a briefing on¹⁵ any remaining policy, form, training, tech, or workflow changes needed to approve every safe kin placement.¹⁶
- » If the state has not adopted standards for licensing kin, direct the appropriate department or agency to deliver a plan and timeline for implementation. There are national kin-specific standards, tools, templates, and guidelines available to speed implementation.¹⁷
- » Ask how long kin licensing currently takes. Require the agency to report the median number of days from placement to approval, applications pending by age, the share of applications completed digitally, the most common reasons for delay, and which steps can be completed at placement.¹⁸
- » Find out whether unlicensed kin caregivers receive financial support while approval is pending. If so, ask when support begins, how the amount compares with support for licensed non-kin foster parents, and how much federal reimbursement could be unlocked by approving safe kin caregivers more quickly.
- » For kin placements across state lines, ask which Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) corridors create the longest delays. Track ICPC timeliness by receiving state, county, and placement type, and pursue border-state agreements or shared procedures for the highest-volume corridors.¹⁹

STATE SPOTLIGHT: Maryland Kin-Specific Licensing

Since Maryland adopted kin-specific licensing, kin placements in Maryland went up over 33%, and licensed kin caregivers increased from 25% to 86%.

Expand and align the definitions of “relative”

Different definitions of “relative” across programs create confusion and eligibility breakdowns. States define “relative” for many purposes, including emergency foster care placement, kin-specific foster

home licensing, notifying when a child enters (or is at risk of entering) care, child-only TANF, calculation of the numerator of the penetration rate for Title IV-E federal financial participation, ICPC, guardianship or subsidized guardianship assistance, adoption or subsidized adoption assistance, and kinship navigator supports.

This recommended definition is intended to recognize a broad range of family relationships: “Individuals related to a child by blood, marriage, Tribal custom, or adoption, as well as others who have an emotionally significant relationship with the child, the child’s parents, or other family members, often referred to as fictive kin.”²⁰

- » States can ask for a breakdown of how definitions compare across the above programs, and against the above definition, to identify inconsistencies. Often, these definitions exist only in policy, making it relatively simple to align definitions.

Confirm all foster children in the state can access Medicaid

- » Confirm the state provides Medicaid for incoming ICPC placements. This can generally be found in the state Medicaid plan. Foster child placements across state lines through ICPC frequently do not occur when the receiving state does not provide continuing Medicaid coverage, as kin caregivers are reluctant to take a child with no healthcare.²¹
- » Confirm that children placed with kin caregivers, licensed or not, are enrolled in Medicaid immediately and maintain uninterrupted coverage.

Understand and enhance kin data

Best practice is to ask for key data related to the health of kin placement and caregiver support, including:

- » Kin placement rate (part of APS), broken down by county. What counties are highest? Lowest? What can they learn from one another, or from other states?
 - Set a state target for licensed kin placement. Ask for a crosswalk with the Kin Engagement Toolkit if the state has room to grow.²²
- » In addition to initial kin placement rates, ask for “percent of days in care with kin” as a secondary measure. Many states place children with kin initially, but fail to support those placements, so kin placement drops off precipitously over time without being detected.²³
- » In foster care, any placement move is generally considered negative. However, some moves are positive, like a move from an institution to kin. Encourage adjusting reporting to differentiate.

Improve the array of foster home placements

Improving a state’s foster home placement array is a data-driven process. The state’s APS and the data behind it indicate which kinds of homes are in short supply, and where to recruit and retain homes that can keep siblings together, keep children in their own schools and communities, and

support high-needs youth. These approaches allow kids to stay in the least restrictive setting possible, as federal law requires.²⁴

Measure and improve the foster parent experience

Following Oklahoma's lead,²⁵ measure and work to improve foster parents' experiences. Not all home closures are bad: a family that closes because they finalized an adoption is a success, while a family that closes after a bad experience is a preventable loss. Retention is as important as, but often much easier than, recruitment. This approach includes key actions:

- » Ask about the state's process for soliciting and acting on foster parent feedback. Seek out a wide array of representative feedback rather than reacting to the loudest anecdotes. Ask questions about how supported families felt in moments of need, about the availability and applicability of training, and how likely they are to encourage others to foster.
- » Ensure caregivers receive ongoing training, coaching, and behavioral health support to prevent placement disruptions and caregiver burnout. More than half of foster parents stop fostering within their first year, highlighting that retention depends as much on support as on recruitment.

Participate in ongoing efforts to improve non-kin foster home licensing

Updated model standards for licensing non-kin foster homes, built the same way as the kin-specific standards, are being co-designed with states and caregivers this year. Check the [Child Welfare Playbook](#) for progress.

- » Sign up to participate so that the state's needs shape the standards and templates. Email: foster-standards@bloomworks.digital

Confirm high-priority potential foster homes are fast-tracked

- » Prioritize licensing homes that can best serve the children in foster care. The May 2026 ACF Information Memorandum suggests fast-tracking kin caregivers converting to non-kin foster parents, licensed foster homes relocating from another state, and homes in communities where APS data shows acute need.²⁶
- » Confirm that the state offers therapeutic training and certification to interested and able kin caregivers. (See Kinship Treatment Foster Care Initiative Toolkit.)²⁷

Streamline state background checks

States have many background check needs beyond foster parent licensing, including fingerprinting for group home employees, daycare workers, social workers, and volunteers. Federal law separately requires background checks for prospective foster and adoptive parents and comprehensive background checks for child care staff, giving states multiple overlapping processes to administer.²⁸ Each process tends to have its own requirements, workflow, and IT system, all of which are overdue for modernization. Getting control of this problem and designing a holistic new approach can save

millions and improve state operations beyond child welfare. Here are some key actions states can engage in:

- » Charge a committee with mapping the background check needs within each agency, especially Child Care Development Fund lead agencies, and recommend a path forward that streamlines both process and tech. Geographic challenges notwithstanding, it's possible for states to collect and submit fingerprints more easily, receive results, and evaluate those results against a clear service standard. Arizona, with its statewide fingerprint card, and Louisiana, with its same-day background check evaluation team, are leaders here.²⁹
- » Solve for accessibility with fingerprinting machines in state offices that can be shared by multiple agencies, a small supply of mobile fingerprinting machines, or a statewide contract for community-based fingerprinting within a reasonable travel distance.
- » Check the state's status on The Child Welfare Playbook comparison page for any practices on fulfilling out-of-state child abuse and neglect registry check requests that are out of step with federal recommendations³⁰.
- » Request a review of the state's list of automatically disqualifying crimes compared with the federally required Adam Walsh disqualifying crimes, which are specific felonies in the federal law that bar an individual from becoming a licensed foster or adoptive parent.³¹ The [Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network](#) can help with this analysis pro bono.

Avoid Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS) failure

The Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS) was a 2016 attempt to modernize state child welfare IT systems with federal incentive dollars.³² After a decade and more than \$2.2 billion in combined federal and state spending, most projects are still incomplete.³³ Systems described as operational still fall far short of what modern tech could do for children, families, caseworkers, and agency leaders.³⁴ To reduce these risks, successful states:

- » Prioritize review of any CCWIS-related budgets or procurements. Pause major commitments where possible and get outside help before continuing. It's possible to build an excellent, on-time modular system that is focused on achieving outcomes for children and families and is easy for employees to use.³⁵
- » Do not assume other work, like FFPSA claiming, must pause for years until the CCWIS launches. Insist on a parallel plan.

Safely prevent unnecessary child welfare involvement

The best placement is the one that never has to happen. Often, families can stay together safely with concrete support such as help with rent, food, child care, and benefits navigation, delivered before a crisis rather than after a removal.³⁶

Complete the Family Strengthening Maturity Model assessment

The Family Strengthening Maturity Model³⁷ is a free assessment that scores how proactive an agency's approach is for keeping families together. It maps results to maturity levels and provides a set of recommendations that can be prioritized into a roadmap.

- » Run the survey across the whole agency, not just a prevention team. Use the scored results to inform policy, budget, and practice changes.

Expand use of FFPSA

Under the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA), a child must be a candidate for foster care before the state can claim federal prevention dollars on the child's behalf.³⁸ States often define candidacy far more narrowly than the law requires, which locks some families out of services.³⁹

- » Ask how the state defines candidacy. The [Doris Duke Foundation](#) is expected to publish a recommended guide in late 2026 that can be used to inform possible expansions or other changes.

Millions of FFPSA prevention dollars go unclaimed each year because state data and the infrastructure for claiming reimbursement from the federal government can't submit the required reports in the required formats.⁴⁰ Strengthening this infrastructure lets states draw down federal match for services they may already be providing and can quickly pay for itself tenfold.⁴¹

- » Request a briefing on FFPSA claiming from the child welfare agency, coordinating with the CFO and CIO offices, and what tech or data improvements the state would need to claim federal reimbursement for all eligible prevention spending.

Recent federal flexibility lets states cover Medications for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD) for parents as a Title IV-E prevention service, treating the substance use that could otherwise drive a removal.⁴²

- » Check whether the state's IV-E prevention plan already includes MOUD. If not, ask what it would take to add it. Adding it is a straightforward IV-E plan amendment.

Beyond 100 days

In 100 days, states can stabilize operations and prevent system failures. Beyond 100 days, states can leverage tech to support family-strengthening services and data-driven welfare infrastructure.

Supplemental information

What to ask

1. Ask the child welfare director: What is the state's "third horizon"⁴³ (the future system the state is working toward) for child welfare? How is progress being measured?

2. Ask the child welfare director: What are we doing to reimagine ourselves as a child and family well-being system, not a child welfare system?
3. Ask community leaders: What is the community's role in supporting our families?
4. Ask the child welfare director: What is our Adverse Placement Score today? What is our plan to reduce it by 10% for new (not existing) placements in the next six months?
5. Ask the cabinet: What is the role of other state agencies in supporting our families?
6. Ask the head of human resources: How can we stabilize and grow our workforce?

What to read

- » [Reimagining Your PIP with the Adverse Placement Score — Foster Insights](#)
- » [Kin-Specific Foster Home Approval Recommended Standards of National Organizations — Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network](#)

Tech Talent Project has provided the below links to third-party resources and websites solely for convenience. By linking to these third-party materials, Tech Talent Project is not responsible for any of the content, including any political or candidate election campaign or legislative lobbying materials or messages, commercial services, or privacy or security policies that may be found on these websites or in these materials.

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State Spotlight

Oklahoma Program Improvement Plan (PIP) Pilot

Oklahoma launched the first pilot Program Improvement Plan (PIP) in April 2026, built on four pillars: safely preventing entries, reducing the Adverse Placement Score (APS), ensuring safe placements, and continually engaging kin and supporting foster families. Oklahoma's PIP is three pages and took just four weeks to build with the Foster Insights team.

Challenge

Traditional federal PIPs often exceed 60 pages, take months of negotiation, and track up to 14 complex measures. States have operated under them almost continuously for 25 years, and none has fully met federal review standards.

Approach

Oklahoma opted into the federal pilot under Administration for Children and Families (ACF) Technical Bulletin #14, which organizes PIPs around one goal: a home for every child. Each pillar has lead measures the state tracks monthly.

Outcomes

1st

State with a new-style PIP approved by ACF

3 pages

Plan length, versus 60+ for many traditional PIPs

4 weeks

Time to develop the plan, versus months

Lessons Learned

- » One north-star metric focuses the plan. Tying every pillar to the foster home-to-child ratio, with lead measures such as the share of children in adverse placements and the net gain of foster homes, turns a compliance document into a management tool.

Read More

[Oklahoma PIP: A Home for Every Child Initiative \(ACF CFSR Portal\)](#)
[What Program Improvement Can Look Like \(The Imprint, April 2026\)](#)
[15 Jurisdictions Commit to ACF Effort to Close Foster Home Gap \(ACF\)](#)



State Spotlight

Maryland Kin-Specific Licensing

Since Maryland adopted kin-specific licensing, its kin placement rate went up 33%, and licensed kin caregivers increased from 25% to 86%.

Challenge

In 2021, 64% of emerging adults in Maryland aged out of out-of-home care without a permanent family, compared with 36% nationally. Kin caregivers also faced a financial gap: most were unlicensed, and licensed kin caregivers are eligible for more than double the monthly financial support.

Approach

Maryland passed a law prioritizing placement with kin, effective October 1, 2024. The Department of Human Services (DHS) then launched Family Matters, a kin-first initiative that updated policies, trained more than 1,500 staff, piloted kin-first practices in five jurisdictions, and streamlined kin-specific licensing so more kin caregivers could access financial support.

Outcomes

33%

Increase in the kin placement rate, September 2024 to December 2025

330+

More children living with kin than before the law took effect

86%

Kin caregivers licensed as of December 2025, up from 25% a year earlier

Lessons Learned

- » Because licensed kin caregivers qualify for more than double the monthly support, raising the licensing rate puts resources behind family placements.

Read More

[Connecting Foster Youth and Family, Governor's Office of Performance Improvement](#)
[Maryland Deploys New Technology to Connect More Children in Foster Care with Family, Maryland DHS](#)
[Kinship Care Licensing Standards Policy \(SSA 24-06\), Maryland DHS](#)

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