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Innovation Spotlight

Federal Agencies Embark on a Mission
to Modernize Aging IT Infrastructure



As the new administration gets to work, agencies and managers are continuing to prioritize innovation. At a recent event, NextGov's Aaron Boyd sat down (virtually) with deputy federal chief information officer for the Office of Management and Budget Maria Roat for an inside scoop on the federal government's modernization efforts.

Ever since President Biden took office in January, his administration has announced a number of new priorities. These new initiatives run the gamut, from infrastructure and clean energy to national security.

As the Biden administration gets to work, agency leaders are watching closely to determine how the new administration's initiatives will impact federal IT workers. At GEMG's recent event, [Road To Modernization](#), NextGov's Aaron Boyd sat down (virtually) with deputy federal chief information officer for the Office of Management and Budget Maria Roat for an inside scoop on how these priorities will impact the federal government's modernization efforts. In case you missed it, here are a few takeaways from the event.

1. Driving Cross-Agency Collaboration

In 2019, the Trump Administration [announced](#) a new initiative aimed at empowering the federal government to work together using a shared services model. The goal: reduce redundancies across agencies, mitigate silos and streamline workflows to drive efficiencies and cut costs.

As part of the initiative, the Office of Management and Budget designated Quality Service Management Offices (QSMOs) for a number of critical functions including cybersecurity services, core financial management, grants management, compensation management, work schedules and leave management services.

QSMOs are housed under specific agencies but offer and manage a marketplace of standardized capabilities and solutions for other agencies to leverage. However, despite the Biden Administration's new priorities, Roat doesn't see QSMOs going away anytime soon.

"We saw a lot of success with the QSMOs getting started through the last administration," she said during the event. "Whether we call it the QSMOs or something else, I see that work continuing because shared services [are] important to the federal government as we look at how we as an enterprise operate."

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Maria Roat

Deputy federal chief information officer,
Office of Management and Budget



2. Tapping an As-a-Service Cloud Infrastructure

Another one of Biden’s key priorities, of course, is helping Americans overcome the hardships of COVID-19. But from an IT modernization perspective, the pandemic wasn’t all bad. In fact, when the virus first began to spread in early 2020, CIOs took advantage of cloud services — including public, private and hybrid cloud — to efficiently and securely transition to telework. This transformation empowered agencies to serve constituents more effectively — at a time when citizen services were of the utmost importance.

“While the federal government flipped to telework, the CIOs were able to move a lot of projects from the right, all the way to the left and execute on a lot of things and take advantage of cloud services to really serve up the American public throughout the pandemic,” Roat said.

This shift came as Cloud Smart, the most recent iteration of the Federal Cloud Computing Strategy, directed agencies to tap into hybrid and multicloud environments. According to the strategy, “Industries that are leading in technology innovation have also demonstrated that hybrid and multi-cloud environments can be effective and efficient for managing workloads. As a result, the Cloud Smart Strategy encourages agencies to think of cloud as an array of solutions that offer many capabilities and management options to enhance mission and service delivery.”

But when it comes to the cloud, there’s no one-size-fits-all solution. Every agency has a unique set of requirements. Vion’s Infrastructure-as-a-Service offering, for instance, allows agencies to scale their hardware up or down depending on their needs.

By modernizing their existing Oracle infrastructure, this pay-as-you-go, infrastructure-as-a-service approach enables organizations to configure, control and manage their IT infrastructure, while outsourcing infrastructure ownership to a third-party vendor. Agencies can then design their infrastructure on their own terms, while retaining access to technical expertise when needed.

“We have found that customers can enjoy surprising efficiencies and value when they are able to abstract their on-premise — or hosted — infrastructure environment, which is frequently siloed. Taking a quantum approach and assessing the environment more holistically, and hence less parochially, can deliver surprising results quickly, by utilizing an ‘as-a-service’ model. Customers can then rationalize their applications and make valid strategic decisions as they move to the cloud ‘smartly,’” Sandy Krawchuk, vice president of public sector for Oracle Group, explains in a separate interview.

3. Increasing Efficiency Across the Federal Government

According to Roat, it's nearly impossible to talk about IT modernization without also discussing the workforce: "We need really good data people," she said.

But, too often, federal IT staff rely on manual, administrative processes to derive data from various sources. That's where a hybrid cloud approach can help: Processing big data in the public cloud reduces these manual processes, but securing data in the private cloud protects against risk. Moreover, by leveraging a hybrid cloud approach, organizations might place sensitive information in the private cloud, while running other, less critical applications in the public cloud.

"Continuing to educate agencies that there are many variations on cloud models is very important," says Rob Davies, chief operating officer at ViON, in a separate interview. "As agencies understand that this is the case, they become more comfortable exploring those additional models. We've seen a rapid increase in the number of on-premises technology-as-a-service acquisitions across the federal government in the last two years. These as-a-service models can be incredibly useful with mission critical applications, such as those running Oracle SPARC, allowing for modernization, optimization and budget predictability. After all, if one platform was the answer to all our technology problems, we'd all still be running on mainframes."

4. Increasing Funding for Federal IT Initiatives

Still, innovations in cloud infrastructure, data management and other emerging technologies like AI and machine learning can only happen with the proper funding. The [Technology Modernization Fund](#), established under the [Modernizing Government Technology Act of 2017](#), aims to provide that financial support.

President Biden wants to take TMF a step further: His team [has proposed](#) a \$9 billion dollar increased investment into the fund. According to Roat, this increased funding could take government innovation to the next level.

"The TMF has been hugely beneficial for the agencies that have taken part in it," she said. "And, as you look at the mission and the principles of the TMF, the foundation is there to continue and leverage that work. We've had a lot of success in the projects so far and, with the influx and funding, we're going to be able to do even more for the federal government and how we serve up our citizens."



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