



# Modernizing the Mission

The 3 Biggest Data Challenges Facing State  
and Local Government Today

**With more information at their fingertips, state and local government leaders are itching to use data to make their jobs easier and help the citizens they serve. At a recent roundtable, agency and IT leaders from across the United States came together to share best practices on how to prioritize data transformation.**

Every community in the U.S. faces its own set of challenges. For example, a small town in middle America might be more focused on improving rural broadband access than a large town or city. Meanwhile, a city or state that has witnessed an uptick in COVID-19 cases might put increased emphasis on allocating resources toward testing or vaccination sites.

Despite their diverse challenges, most city and state governments share a common pain point: data. With more information at their fingertips than ever before, state and local government leaders are itching to use this data more effectively — not only to make their jobs easier but also to optimize the ways they serve citizens.

Of course, that's easier said than done.

"With all the time and the money and the effort spent on these next-generation digital systems, there still seems to be a significant challenge associated with unifying data from these efforts," said Matt Walk, State and Local government lead at Snowflake. "And so this data silo problem persists."

At a recent roundtable, hosted by Route Fifty and sponsored by Snowflake, Walk joined agency IT leaders from across the United States to discuss best practices on how to prioritize data transformation. Below are a few key takeaways from the discussion.



### **1. Data Is an Operational Problem, Not a Technological One**

A common misconception among government employees is that many data challenges can be easily improved by investing in better technology. And in many cases, faster and more integrated technology can drive efficiencies and free up resources. But roundtable participants agreed that the problem is not the technology itself, it's more often the processes in place that make it difficult for agency staff to use this technology effectively.

"We really want to see data as an operational asset first," said

Rachel Stone, chief data officer for the Utah Governor's Office of Management and Budget.

Stone recognizes that data is also a technological asset, but by looking at it through a more operational lens, she and her team can ask more strategic questions.

"What's your goal? What are your targets? Where are you aiming for? How does that align with the governor's roadmap? How does the data follow?" The positioning here is strategic so that we can align the governor's priorities and how operations should change," she said.

Paul Jurasin is also familiar with these challenges. As the director of the California Polytechnic State University Digital Transformation Hub, his research focuses on how governments, non-profit organizations and educational institutions are using data.

"A lot of times people, especially in IT, people ... create a solution that they think is the right solution for a problem without asking the customer what the problem is," Jurasin said at the roundtable.

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*Zach Oxman, SLED West District Manager, Snowflake*

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It can, of course, be tempting to want to invest in whatever new technology is on the market, whether that's AI, Blockchain or any other platforms that have evolved over the last several years. But Zach Oxman, SLED West district manager at Snowflake, a secure data cloud company, warned that this type of thinking can lead agencies down a slippery slope.

"We always ask the question: What problem are we solving? And I know for myself and my team, if we ever leave an interaction with any of our customers ... and we can't answer that question, then by nature we are failing," he said. "And I've seen so much in my career that technologies are adopted because they happen to be cool or interesting ... [but] at the end of the day, it's outcomes-driven. Let's identify an outcome: homelessness in California, COVID response, emergency response for security and threat posture."

Oxman added that he is increasingly seeing his peers connect the dots between how this technology can actually solve their problems.

Mike Mayta, chief information officer of Wichita, Kansas, is one local leader spearheading this approach at his own organization. "Regardless of whether you're in IT, on the data side, or on the management side, it comes down to: What are you trying to fix?" he said. "It's ... that whole fail fast [mindset]. Because the more

