Seven Tips to Transform Government IT Services

Innovation Nation: IT Services

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Introduction

State and local government IT teams are working to modernize service delivery. This means delivering intuitive, efficient, and secure services to employees, so that employees can provide the same to citizens.

The challenge is that traditional work – piles of paperwork, exhaustive chains of approval, and disconnection between business services and the resources that provide them – often prevents teams from working together and enjoying the meaningful work of serving the people. And with more teams working remotely, this challenge is only magnified.

IT modernization not only presents the opportunity to update legacy platforms, but it is also the chance for government leaders to reimagine work within their agency, foster best practices, and develop a faster, better way to help their city, county, or state.

ServiceNow delivers cloud-based service management and operations solutions, built on the Now® Platform, allowing government agencies to optimize workflows. IT leaders improve efficiency, reduce frustration, and keep agency teams focused on their missions.

In this report, we’ll explore the Seven Steps that government IT leaders can take to implement digital workflows that transform service delivery.
Too often, IT teams are held back by a maze of departmental silos and undocumented workflows. But just because it has always been done this way doesn’t mean it’s too late to change. If your team is implementing IT service solutions, use this opportunity to map infrastructure, document business processes, rethink dated manual workflows, and reimagine the way your agency works.

While working as a county CIO, I led a team that created a one-stop portal to support agencies, improve service, and connect with citizens. The new portal helped the county save time and money with a single point of contact for IT services, as well as digitize many time-consuming manual processes. In one instance, we were able to cut a process from approximately five weeks down to less than a day.

In another example, North Carolina replaced legacy IT systems intending to create an integrated platform for all state agencies, as well as improve the speed of service and achieve economies of scale. The new system helps manage and mitigate issues faster, and the state has since implemented this system across nine state agencies. Each agency has a customized portal that meets their unique needs while providing enterprise-level views and analytics on a single platform. The best part? On the back end, the state’s Department of IT has only one platform to maintain and upgrade, saving significant time and resources.

Through my personal experience and ServiceNow’s work with state and local governments across the country, we’ve identified seven distinct steps to transform government IT services. We hope these steps will help provide a roadmap for your efforts to create more efficient, personalized, and responsive IT services in government.

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Step 1: Map Your Infrastructure

Digital transformation requires a clear organization. After all, how can you serve as a trusted advisor if you can’t get a handle on your network? Map your infrastructure and business services to identify relationships between the two.

Every service relies on interacting IT components – databases, servers, networks, and cloud services. With one system of record, teams can understand the topology and health of their environment, leading to better evaluation of service impacts and proactive solution implementation.

An infrastructure and business services map also allows teams to identify the user communities affected by new changes. Teams can send targeted alerts and updates to only the affected users, rather than global email blasts for every incident or planned outage.

Pro Tip

Map business services in your configuration management database (CMDB) so teams can better communicate and evaluate user impact.
Step 2: Establish a Common Framework

The team must have a common nomenclature and framework as the foundation for any implementation. Think of it as a shared language. The goal is to make sure all teams – IT or not – are on the same page.

One option is to use Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL) principles and develop a framework of defined core IT processes. This way, individuals across departments have standard definitions and processes to reference when discussing suggested changes and solutions.

For example, everyone needs to understand the difference between an incident and a request. ITIL provides the framework, and you and your team can create the processes and associated workflows for consistent user experience. An example outside of IT: if a new service catalog item is named “onboarding,” every team will have a shared understanding of what this means and what should be included.

Pro Tip

Agreeing to use ITIL nomenclature and creating a system of record in a CMDB can help standardize processes and make them consistent and repeatable.
Step 3: Document the Processes

After creating your foundational map, the initial focus of a service management solution should be to get IT on board with automating operations.

IT teams should standardize and enter information about infrastructure elements and services into the CMDB, so they can see the relationship between the two. The CMDB will be your system of record for configuration items (CIs) in your topology. From here, you can then codify service best practices into workflows associated with those infrastructure types.

Starting with routine processes (requests for system access, password and account lockout resets, and requests for equipment) will prompt IT staff to analyze and document existing procedures, define approval and activity flows, and identify where exceptions might apply.

The goal is to gain experience, create transparent, repeatable processes, and build capabilities that other departments can leverage, all while improving IT response time and setting the team up for success.

This is your chance to reimagine how work flows in your organization. Don’t just “lift and shift” paper-based processes to digital workflows. Stop and examine how work gets done, and then imagine how you’d perform that work if you were starting from scratch in a digital platform. Building flexibility for distributed or remote workflows will help make your organization more resilient, as well.
Step 4: Cultivate Executive Sponsorship

Plan to involve key executives from across the organization to help choose processes to automate. These leaders do not have to be from IT. They can be department team members, managers, or even those who primarily support the services. These sponsors can help identify which processes to digitize, and they can help test and confirm workflows in development.

It’s important to show what you’re doing and explain why. Branding and marketing matter. Consider using an outside creative firm to create a multi-channel marketing and communications plan for the launch of new solutions. Your sponsors and campaign can generate excitement for new changes and make for a more seamless implementation. Organizational change will be smoother with an inter-departmental team driving toward the same goal.

Pro Tip

The earlier you involve the team members who will use the system as trusted advisors, the smoother the implementation, and the more fans you will have!
Step 5: Start with High-Visibility Processes...

Working together with your executive sponsors, look for manual processes that have a high level of awareness and currently demand significant time and effort – the low-hanging fruit. Digitizing these processes will yield immediate results. To find these processes, IT teams might consider offering an open invitation for other departments to submit processes that hinder efficiency.

Consider paper-based processes that require multiple reviews and approvals in specific sequences. Automated workflows can cut the execution time for these processes significantly, simply by removing the time it takes to physically transport a document from person to person. Digitization has the power to transform processes like contract workflows, employee onboarding, transfers, and offboarding.

For example, the City of Minneapolis deployed IT Service Management, then expanded the effort to create an enterprise platform to improve productivity and collaboration throughout the City. They built a variety of applications, including a Public Works Solid Waste application to manage the pickup and removal of solid waste, a new portal for non-emergency 311 services, and an HR Service Center with 17 different case types and a Knowledge Base. Other departments have taken notice of the improvements and now come to the IT Director to find out how they can spark similar transformations with their processes.
Step 6: ...then Focus on Building Repeatable Workflows

Everything you do at work is a business process, so the idea is to take each business process out of institutional knowledge and backstory, codify it in a workflow, and make it consistent and repeatable.

Documentation ensures consistency of service delivery, and with associated service level agreements (SLAs), departments are accountable to a standard of performance. With common dashboards and performance metrics, your team can show their progress transparently.

Build workflows that can be easily adapted to handle similar cases. For example, every department and agency has HR functions – all with common processes: onboarding, offboarding, setting up payroll, activating security badges, ordering equipment, and processing related documents. A digital workflow for these processes can be repeated across approximately 80% of agencies and departments, eliminating the need to recreate a new process for each department. You can spend your time focusing on what makes each department’s process unique, tailoring the workflow to suit.

Pro Tip

Documenting business processes ensures you are taking the process beyond institutional knowledge, making it outlast any employee’s tenure. With so many key workers at or near retirement age, capturing this information is more important than ever.
Step 7: Understand Work Roles

IT services impact users inside and outside IT. Some processes require specific people to participate, while others require only a particular role. Whatever the case, all teams should be aware of who is responsible for what, and to whom they are accountable. It is helpful to have defined governance, including steering committees and user groups.

Many public safety processes require notification or approval by the person who is serving as commander for the current work shift. Processes should accommodate these variations in work roles and timing, to put concrete workflows in place that correctly delegate tasks and optimize results.

For workflows with long approval chains, such as purchase contract execution, the benefits can be tremendous. These contracts may have to pass from external vendors to purchase administrators, to various department heads, to the finance team, and even to the legal team.

Without tight controls, chains of approval can extend to almost no end. But with clear communication and established work roles, teams can collaborate and easily track status.

During the first year of its ServiceNow deployment, Washington State Department of Health defined governance roles, made nearly 600 improvements, achieved 100% faster service delivery, and increased customer satisfaction from 77% to 90%.

Imagine the improvements your organization can deliver by removing the time it takes to physically transport documents to various approvers. You will be helping to build a more agile and resilient organization in the process, as well. A true win-win!
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• Exceeding citizen expectations
• Enhancing staff productivity
• Mapping and managing key services

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