


Artificial intelligence isn't slowing its forward march as a sought-after technology with a reputation for making the workforce more efficient and satisfied. Although adoption of it has happened more swiftly in the private sector, government agencies are slowly but surely applying it, too, just with more caution — a necessity to ensure the data that feeds the algorithms adheres to federal, state and other laws.

During a recent GovLoop virtual event, thought leaders from government and industry shared insights on how to proceed carefully but successfully. Here are some highlights of those discussions.

## Speakers

**Dru Rai**
*Chief Information Officer and Director of Information Technology Services, New York*

**Matt Mandrgoc**
*Head of U.S. Public Sector, Zoom*

## 1 Make AI Adoption Secure and Deliberate

As the country's largest consolidated IT organization, New York's ITS serves client agencies and state residents. "Everything we do, including AI, has to be no less than perfect, because we can't afford a mistake," said CIO Dru Rai.

But AI is an imperfect technology by virtue of its newness. Recognizing its potential, Rai said the best way to balance AI use and compliance with federal and state laws around, for instance, data privacy and protection is to test AI in a controlled, secure environment before scaling it.

- → **First, create a parameter environment.** "You need test data to work on the model, so the model gets better, and then you need to put it on the real data, so you get the better results," Rai said.
- → **Second, train workers.** The quality of the data and the model require skilled workers to build, manipulate and test.

"You want innovation, but you also don't want dangerous and irresponsible experimentation and leakage of data and privacy and so on," Rai said. "That's why this is very delicate. We have to take a look at the technology. We take a use case, test it internally and if it has promises, then take it beyond it."

## 2 Use AI to Drive Internal Efficiency

ITS has seen success by following that path. Areas in which the agency has seen productivity increases are in using generative AI to summarize policy and standards documents, analyze incident reports from each of the state's 62 counties and hundreds of municipalities, and understand documents in multiple languages.

"You want to read those things in a quick fashion, summarize them, get the gist out of it," Rai said. "But at this point of time, we have a parameter around it before we let everybody loose. We are still in a science experiment [phase], if you want to call it that, because it has to be highly secure."

He notes that although the goal is perfection, sometimes it's better to choose speed. "It may be that imperfect faster service is better than a perfect slow service," he said. "You have to pick and choose depending on the context.... There are certain things which we just can't cross. We have to follow privacy law, we have to follow federal law, we have to follow state law."

## 3 Make Your Agency More Agile

State and local agencies have an advantage when it comes to how they apply AI because they are the domain experts. "We are the ones who know how the Department of Transportation works, how the [Department of Motor Vehicles] works, how the taxes are done," Rai said. "That domain knowledge, combined with a variety of platforms...is going to be key."

But it doesn't mean one agency has to have all the expertise. About a year ago, ITS began shifting to an internal structure that embraces small teams. The idea is to keep business process knowledge with the teams that have it while responsibly providing the latest technologies.

"Now we have dedicated teams just serving that particular client agency, and then we have a shared services team," he said. For example, "we don't need 20 teams to provision a cloud. We can provision centrally...but we do need specific agency [teams], because my [Department of Labor] team knows how to work the unemployment insurance project."

## 4 Take Care of the Basics

AI holds promise for improving productivity and service delivery, but it must be applied thoughtfully, with an understanding that not all problems require or benefit from the technology. Rai pointed to historical contexts to make this point.

"Fifty years ago, mainframe and COBOL was sexy. Now, it's not," he said. And so ITS has pivoted, testing whether Google Gemini can reverse engineer the code for use in today's modern environment.

Ultimately, the challenges agencies face in applying AI are no different than the ones they faced with the advent of the web, Rai said. In "the late '90s and early 2000s, you really needed a good connectivity because otherwise, web applications don't work. Just like this, you really need good data [to make AI work for your agency].

## Conclusion

Government agencies are right to move slowly with AI, but they should feel confident about making progress with the right parameters and training in place. As with any new technology, AI comes with a learning curve — but it's one that's proving well worth the effort.

**INDUSTRY SPOTLIGHT**

# Digital Comms and Collaboration: Case Studies in Transformation




As agencies look to transform their operations and services, their legacy digital communications and collaboration solutions have become a sticking point. Those solutions, many of which were patched together during remote work, lack the flexibility to adapt to emerging work processes or to enable automation for operational efficiencies. And the security simply doesn't measure up. While legacy technology might have sufficed (barely) at one point, it offers no path forward.

"Digital transformation is really about workflow alignment", said Matt Mandrgoc, Head of U.S. Public Sector at Zoom. "At this point, that workflow needs to be seamless, no matter when or where employees are working or constituents are accessing services."

In this video interview, Mandrgoc discusses how modern digital communication and collaboration services can help agencies accelerate their digital transformation efforts. Topics include:

- → Improving large-scale constituent engagements, such as public hearings
- → Reducing the cost and improving safety associated with courtroom appearances by incarcerated individuals
- → Conducting remote interviews with travelers entering the U.S.

*"You want to provide a customer or employee experience that is rich and immersive — that allows you to get that message across or get that training done — and not an experience that's just 'good enough.'"*

- Matt Mandrgoc, Zoom

## About Zoom

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