


# Building Trust With Tech

## In State and Local Government

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# Introduction

Over the last several years, state and local agencies have made a big push to invest in technology that improves operations and service delivery. However, technology is more than a matter of making operations more cost-effective and services more convenient. It's about building trust with constituents.

Constituents want to live in equitable, functional communities where they can rely on service delivery mechanisms and see that actions and policies are based on real information. To deliver the best possible service and to be trustworthy, state and local agencies need to operate in ways that are secure, data-based and innovative. That work calls for collaboration among agencies — federal, state and local — as well as good use of data to inform initiatives and policymaking.

In this guide, the first of two state and local guides in 2024, we've considered three key areas in which state and local agencies are leveraging technology to instill public confidence:

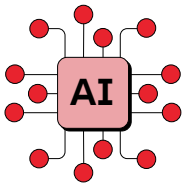
- Strengthening security through state and local collaboration
- Collecting and analyzing data to ensure equity in their services
- Leveraging AI to improve the constituent experience

We've invited government and subject matter experts to weigh in on how state and local governments can pursue growth in each of these areas, and come out ahead in all three.

# What's Going on in State & Local?

## Priorities for States

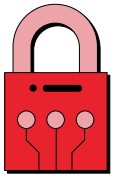
Each year, the National Association of State Chief Information Officers (NASCIO) publishes federal advocacy priorities that represent areas of focus for the upcoming year and how states can collaborate with federal agencies, Congress, the White House and strategic partners. **2024 priorities include:**




**AI: States Lead the Way**




**Continue Adoption of DotGov Domain**



**Ensure Responsible Implementation of the State and Local Cybersecurity Grant Program**

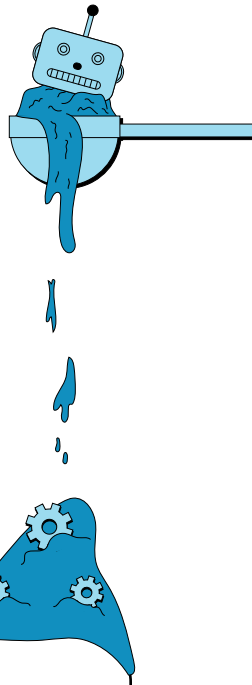


**Expand and Strengthen the State Cyber Workforce**



**Harmonize Disparate Federal Cybersecurity Regulations**

## The Scoop on AI



AI is already at work in some state and local governments, whereas in others, it's just beginning to take root. Agencies are learning from each other as they create guidelines and explore how AI can help them improve processes. **For instance:**

- States such as Rhode Island, Vermont, Oklahoma, California, Illinois, Florida, Kentucky and Minnesota have created AI task forces, coalitions, and similar entities. They make recommendations for using AI safely and productively.
- Cities such as Boston, Seattle, San Jose and New York have crafted policies and guidance concerning AI.
- NASCIO provided Your AI Blueprint: 12 Key Considerations as States Develop Their Artificial Intelligence Roadmaps.

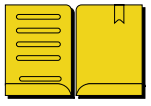
## Grappling With Polarities

We're living in a turbulent, divisive time, and governors are aware of it. At the 2024 National Governors Association Winter Meeting, governors spoke about the Disagree Better Initiative, which seeks to decrease toxic polarization and increase positive, healthy debate in working through policy disagreements.

Disagree Better includes customizable intervention techniques for governors and states, and a variety of ideas and tools for working with the public to manage polarity. **The website offers:**



**Video messages from governors**



**Research and resources**



**Opportunities to take action**



**Links to related meetings and events**

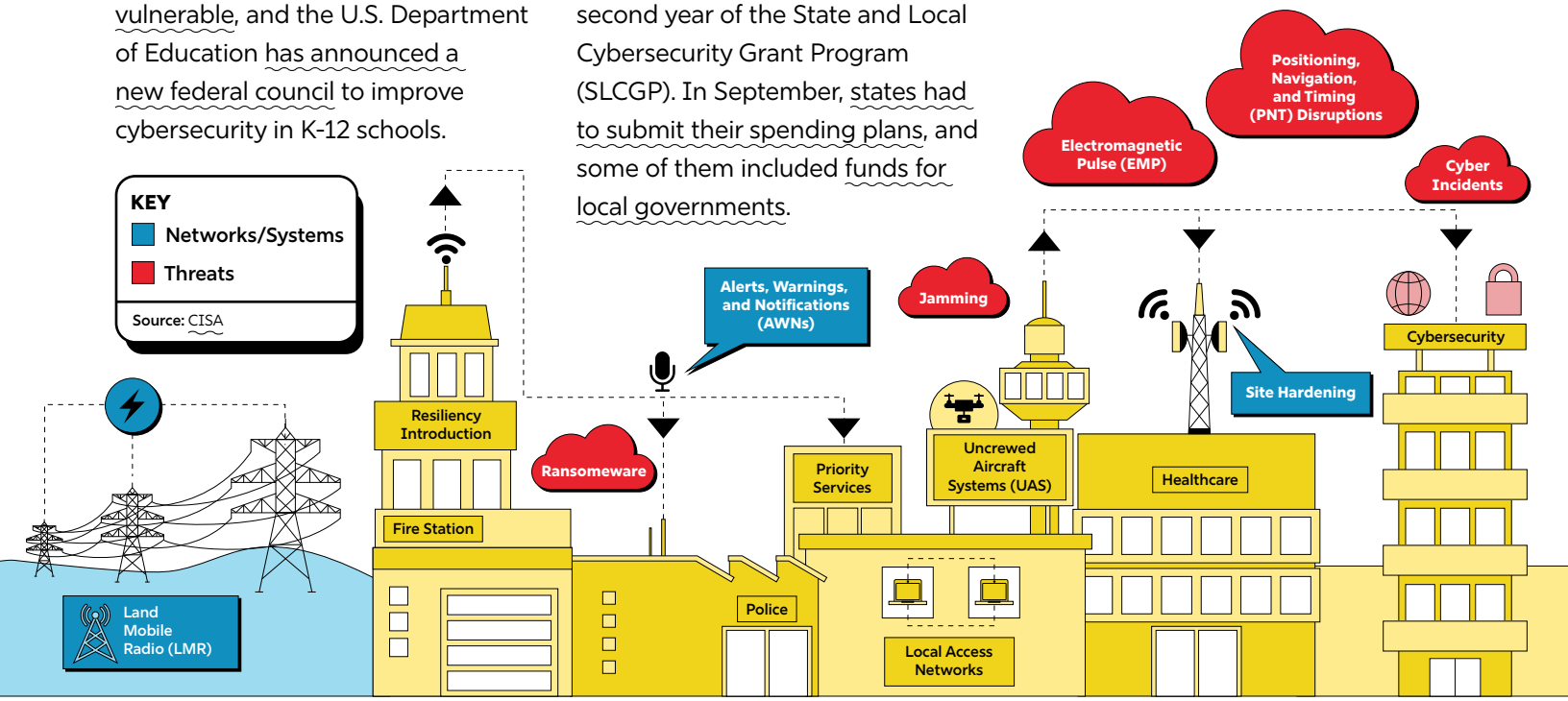
## Cyber News Feed

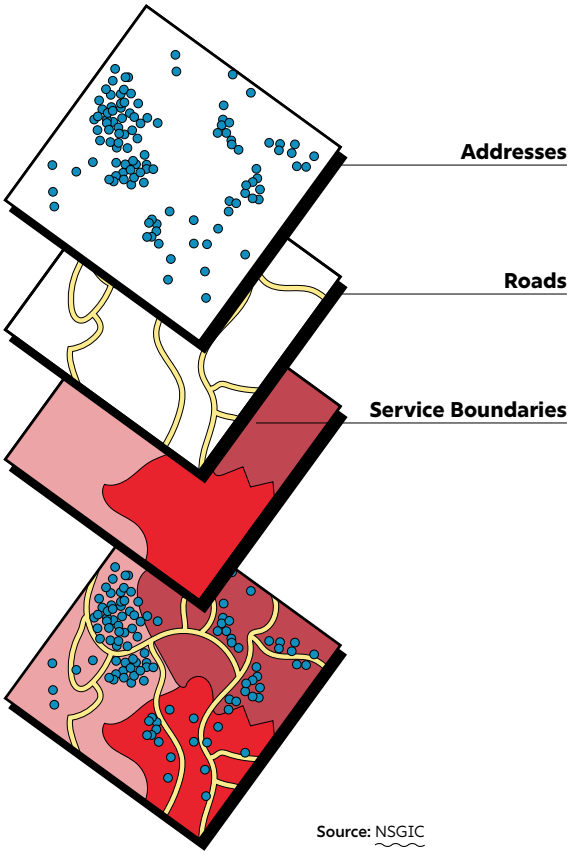
State and local agencies have made cybersecurity a top priority for 2024. Here's a look at recent developments.

**Local governments** are a big target for cyberattacks and often don't have the resources of federal agencies. Even schools are vulnerable, and the U.S. Department of Education has announced a new federal council to improve cybersecurity in K-12 schools.

**Last year,** the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) and FEMA announced an additional $375 million for the second year of the State and Local Cybersecurity Grant Program (SLCGP). In September, states had to submit their spending plans, and some of them included funds for local governments.

**CISA released** updates for its Public Safety Communications and Cyber Resiliency Toolkit and, with DHS, its Resiliency Fact Sheet.




Source: NSGIC

## Data and Constituent Interaction

**Contact is everything.** According to a Civic Plus survey, constituents who access their city's website more than once a month have almost five times the amount of trust in their city than those who access it infrequently.

**Data literacy needs work.** A NASCIO survey shows a data literacy problem among state workforces. Just 16% of state CIOs say their state has a formal data literacy or proficiency program for state employees.

**Geospatial technology is becoming more popular.** For example, a report by the National States Geographic Information Council shows states making great progress using the tech for "next-generation 911."

**Smart City technology is on the radar again,** as communities use data to improve services and the environment. A recent Forbes article described smart city benefits and challenges, and a 2024 podcast featured IT leaders from Normal, Illinois, who discussed how small cities may lead the smart city transformation.



# How State and Local Government Can Bolster Election Security

***An interview with Jim Richberg,*** *Head of Cyber Policy/Global Field Chief Information Security Officer, Fortinet*

Officials tasked with securing elections face a complex challenge. They need to build a voter registration database, secure the voting machines, and then tally votes accurately — all in the face of potential disruptions from malicious actors, foreign and domestic.

In an age of mis-, dis-, and mal-information, election officials also need the public to believe they're doing all this securely, because election integrity isn't just about accurately counting votes.

"It's also about perception," said Jim Richberg, with Fortinet. "If enough people think you have a problem, you have a problem."

## A Changing Landscape

The threat landscape around elections has evolved in recent years, with increasing risks to security and privacy. "Election officials and poll workers are now facing an unprecedented level of physical threats and intimidation," Richberg said. This comes on top of cyber risks from nation-states and malicious insiders.

Because there's no "do-over" on holding an election, officials need to focus first on avoiding unrecoverable errors, or activities that prevent citizens from voting. For instance, if a ransomware attack locks up the registration database in the months prior to election day, "not being able to get to it because the data's been encrypted will stop local jurisdictions from pulling the data they need to create ballots for the registered voters in each precinct," Richberg said.

Then there's disinformation: Suppose someone accessed a local government's social media account and directed voters to the wrong polling place hours before the polls closed. This risks large-scale disenfranchisement.

"Because so many people use social media in local government, for myriad purposes, those passwords are well-known and often not well-secured. So why don't we have a coordinated change of social media passwords in local government three days before the election?" he said. That would create a potential roadblock to that kind of attack.

## Technology to the Fore

In elections today, you must secure everything, from devices to databases, Richberg said. With unprecedented turnover among election officials and cyber teams stretched thin, state and local governments must rely on commercial solutions wherever possible.

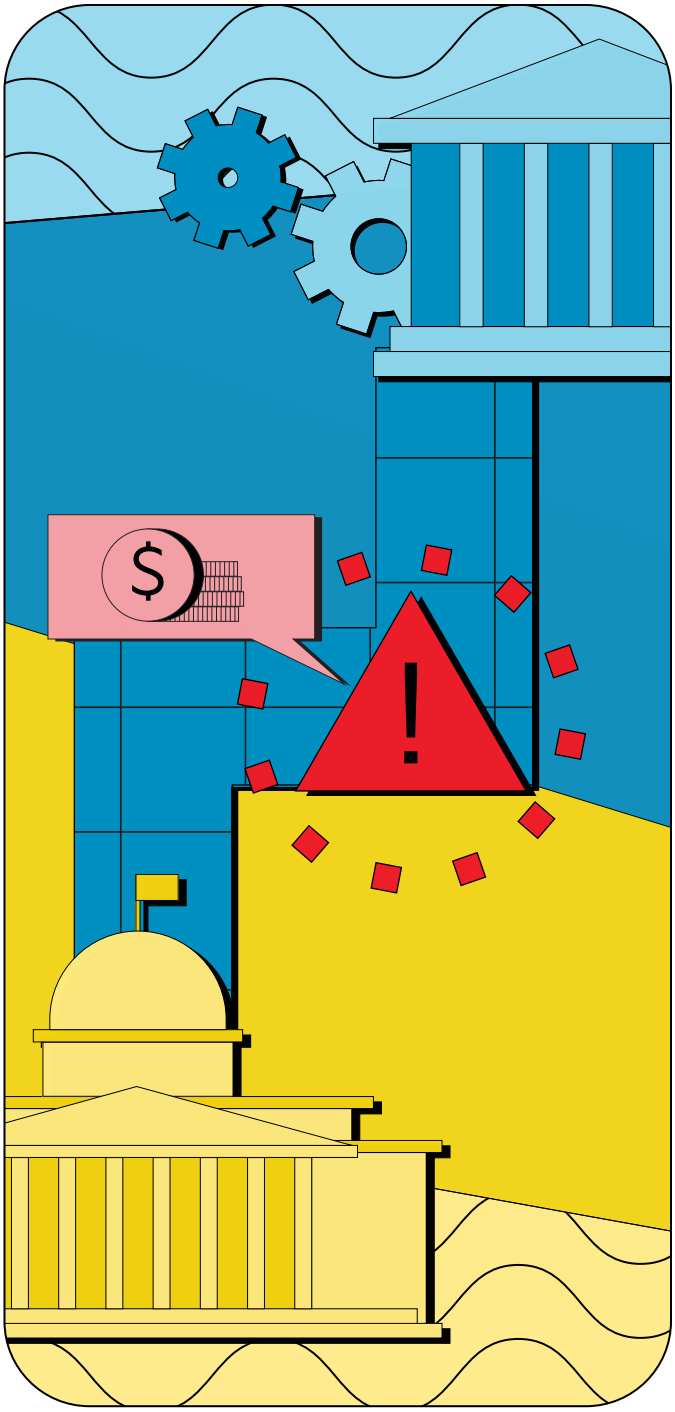
"Look for solutions that are automated...that leverage multiple sources of threat intelligence coming from different directions and that are interoperable," Richberg said. Fortinet, for example, produces more than half the firewalls used globally and offers a portfolio of more than 50 products and services. These integrated solutions share threat intelligence and collaborate automatically, he said.

With the right technologies in place, election officials can then lean into proactive messaging.

"It's about saying, 'Here's what are we doing to secure your elections. We have ways of validating signatures on absentee ballots, we have these things called firewalls that will prevent intrusions, and our voting machines are not connected to the internet,'" Richberg said. Those measures and messaging can help preempt mis-, dis-, and mal-information about electoral integrity.

# 5 Ways to Improve Cross-Government Cyber Collaboration

An interview with Meredith Ward, Deputy Executive Director, National Association of State Chief Information Officers (NASCIO)



Whether they like it or not, state and local governments cannot afford to go it alone on cybersecurity. First, because so many of their systems and services are interconnected, an attack on one agency puts others at risk. Also, they can find strength in numbers, with the opportunity to share insights, information and even resources.

But historically, cross-government collaboration has been the exception, not the rule. Although most CIOs and chief information security officers (CISOs) see the value of collaboration, it can still feel awkward.

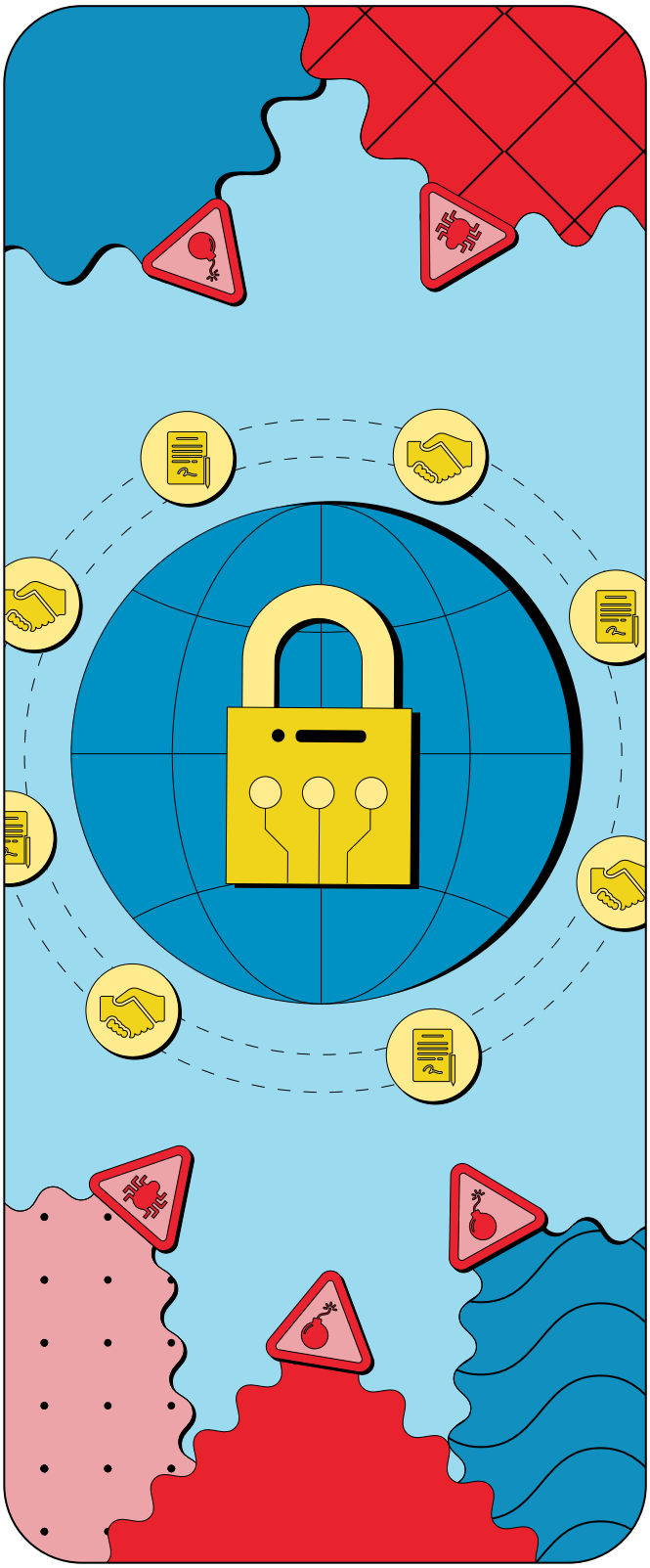
With that in mind, we asked Meredith Ward with NASCIO to share some best practices for building trust and working across boundaries. Here's what she said.

**Know who's who.** Cyber officials at the state and local level should build relationships before an incident occurs. It's just human nature, Ward said. "In the event of a crisis, if you know someone already, it makes it a little bit easier to work together and deal with that crisis."

For local government, there's a more tactical benefit to making those connections: intelligence gathering. A lot of cyber-related intelligence flows from the federal government and state fusion centers to state cyber offices. An open line of communication can keep that information flowing.

**Don't let lack of funding be a roadblock.** Collaboration does not necessarily require a formal program with a dedicated budget. For example, state CISOs often connect with their local counterparts by speaking at conferences put on by universities or municipal associations. In short, they just make themselves visible and available.

At the very least, those kinds of gatherings make it easy for local officials to grab a business card, so they have contact information when they need it. "Because one of the biggest things that I've heard from local government is that the state's huge, I have no idea who to call, I don't even know where to start," Ward said.



**States, market your services to local governments.** In some states, local government has access to statewide contracts that cover many common products and services, including around cybersecurity. By using these contracts, they can avoid the time and money needed to run their own procurements.

States can negotiate better pricing because of the anticipated higher volume of business when they open these contracts to local government. That works in everyone's favor. "Nine times out of 10, you're going to see a huge cost savings," said Ward. But it works only if local agencies know such contracts exist and understand the value, she said.

**Local government, don't see the state as Big Brother.** All governments value their autonomy, so they often approach intergovernmental collaboration with some trepidation or even suspicion. But such concerns should not get in the way of collaboration, Ward said.

"I know it doesn't work perfectly in every state," she said, "but, bottom line, there is no CISO who has the time or money to try and control anything on the local government level. They just don't."

Meanwhile, there's no doubt about the upside of collaboration, especially for those smaller counties and towns that lack a cyber expert, she said.

**Remember, bad guys don't care about jurisdictional borders.** Historically, state and local governments have tended to be insular, Ward said, dealing with their own problems in their own way. But that mindset puts them at a disadvantage when it comes to dealing with cyber threats, she said.

Cyber criminals often will launch serial attacks, first against one state or city, then another and another. By sharing information, states and localities can help each other prepare for and respond to those attacks, and not be blindsided. The same rationale applies to public-private collaboration.

"Everyone is a target," Ward said. "We are all in this together, and cyber is everyone's responsibility."



# An Engaging Strategy for Audience Outreach

***An interview with Carolina Prieto,***
***Solution Advisor for Digital Communications, Granicus***

Improving public trust and engagement doesn't happen by chance. It requires a strategy, a clear metric for success — more than click and open rates — and data to benchmark against. And agencies should realize that their audiences are ever-changing, said Carolina Prieto with Granicus, a company that provides digital experiences to help agencies better serve their constituents.

"When people say, 'Oh, we just want to do better engagement and reach our audience,' there is no fixed 'audience,'" she explained. "It's an influx of people going in and out."

With a continuous flow of data, agencies can fine-tune outreach to their constituents and set realistic definitions of success, she said. If there are 200,000 people in your jurisdiction, should a 10% response rate be your goal? That means hearing from 20,000 people — but do you have resources for that?

## Data Delivers

One way to collect data that leads to effective programming, Prieto said, is through always-on engagement, in which you ask someone a real-time question relevant to a stage in their online user journey. For example, asking a website visitor, "How often do you text different providers in your area?" can provide vital information about constituent texting frequency that the agency can use when creating bulletin campaigns.

A/B testing and similar mechanisms also are critical because they help agencies adjust their messaging, she said. "We don't want to be guessing. We want to be collecting information and being super-strategic about what it means," Prieto said. "If an audience member doesn't feel like you are talking to them ... they're less likely to engage with you."

## Best Practices

Agencies can scale up slowly; baby steps are OK. "Give somebody a very specific project ... for one or two months and have it be really tight," she said. Be clear about your benchmarks — the metrics you're focusing on — and your rationale for doing so. And use multiple channels to reach your audience, advised Prieto.

That includes newsletters, an accessible website, online and in-person events, and SMS/text messaging — "we know that 80% of folks are on their phones," she noted. "We should be thinking about creative multimedia approaches," Prieto said, "especially with complex information the government needs to send."

## An Engagement Cloud

State and local agencies often lack the tools to build and implement an effective communications strategy. But the Granicus engagement cloud, Prieto said, helps organizations understand their audience, create an outreach plan, and then activate those campaigns. Through automation, data insights, and dashboarding, "you can create an ecosystem of engagement in your agency [and] have it run in a way that continues to feed itself," she said.

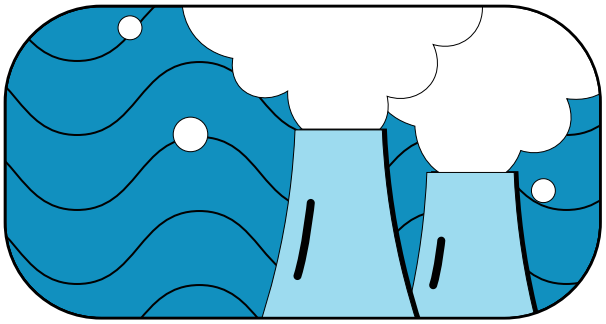
For example, the City of Bellevue, Washington, used Granicus digital solutions to connect with residents in new ways, including SMS messaging and an "Engaging Bellevue" website that encourages people to submit feedback on various local projects. The city now enjoys a 58% engagement rate.

GRANICUS

# How Communities Are Using Data to Address Inequities

The concept of evidence-based policymaking — the idea that policies should be developed and refined based on hard data, not just hunches — can play a critical role in helping state and local agencies identify and mitigate systemic issues that undermine government's ability to serve all constituents.

As agencies become more adept at collecting, managing and analyzing data, they are able to answer critical questions that previously proved elusive. Here are some examples of what can be done in key policy areas.



## Environmental

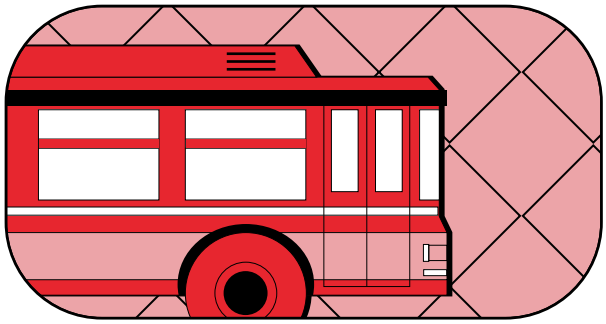
***Where do environmental hazards put public health at risk?***

### The Equity Issue

Air pollution, dirty waterways, industrial waste and other environmental concerns do not align neatly with any jurisdictional boundaries. Still, public policies around zoning, environmental cleanup and other community planning issues often lead to increased risks in communities where constituents lack a say in policy decisions. The result? Higher risk for disadvantaged communities.

### A Data Solution

Colorado has developed an online mapping program called Colorado EnviroScreen that combines population and environmental factors, so state and local policymakers can see where communities have been disproportionately impacted by environmental hazards. In addition to highlighting areas in need of assistance, the tool is intended to provide guidance about future decisions with public health consequences, such as permitting fracking and mining.



## Transportation

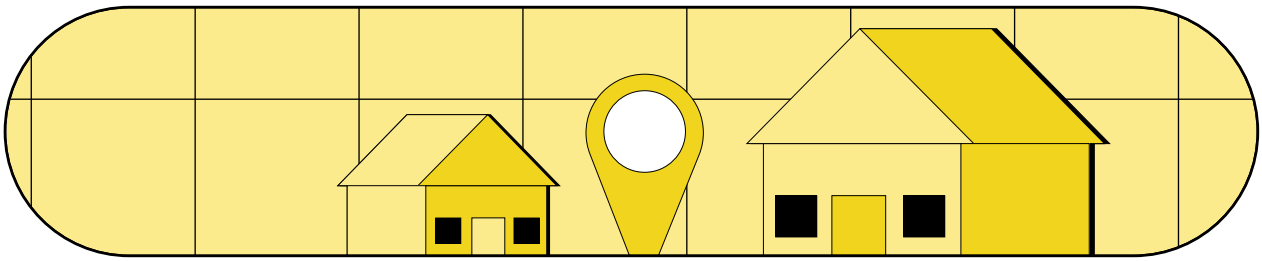
***Does public transit support parents seeking assistance?***

### The Equity Issue

Head Start centers provide federally funded services to parents with children ages five and under. In addition to daycare, the centers offer services and activities to support school readiness, child health and wellness, and family well-being. The challenge is that many parents or caregivers can't get to those centers. A recent study by the Civic Mapping Initiative found that only about 42% of the 164,000 centers are within 0.2 miles of public transit.

### A Data Solution

The National Head Start Association has teamed with the Civic Mapping Initiative to make transit agencies aware of these gaps. Initially, they are focused on centers that have a bus stop within a mile of their location. A mile is too long for an adult to walk with a toddler, but close enough that a stop can be added without a lot of fuss.



## Economics

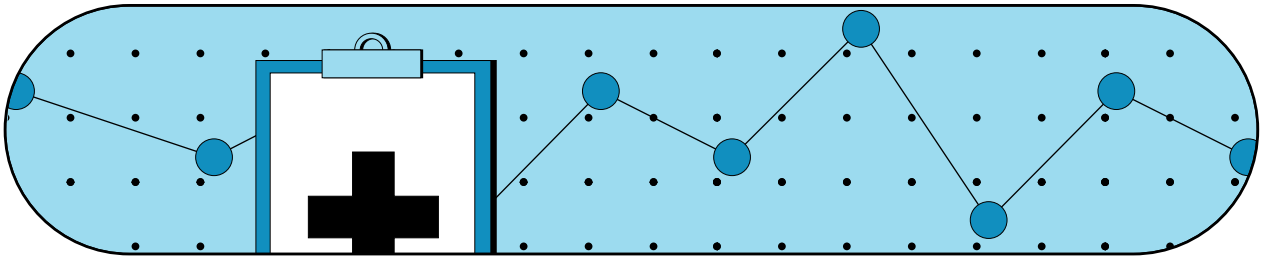
***Do zoning rules create unfair barriers to home ownership?***

### The Equity Issue

For local government, zoning regulations are one of the most powerful ways to give shape to a community — to spur growth in some areas and limit it in others. But such rules have the potential to harden divides along demographic and economic lines. That has become a concern with zoning rules that put hard limits on multifamily homes, which can serve as an entry point to home ownership for people with lower household incomes.

### A Data Solution

The Urban Institute, a nonprofit research organization, delved into this issue using the Connecticut Zoning Atlas, a data set that aligns zoning texts with digital maps across the state. By overlaying those maps with demographic and economic indicators at the neighborhood level, researchers found that people who lived in areas zoned primarily for single-family housing were more likely to be white, highly educated — and much more likely to own their homes than people living in areas permitting multifamily homes, according to its report.



## Public Health

***Are communities collecting the data needed to highlight public-health equity concerns?***

### The Equity Issue

During the first year of the Covid-19 pandemic, public health officials wanted to understand how the pandemic and response efforts were playing out among different demographics, such as race, ethnicity, age and gender. The problem was that in the early going, many communities were not consistently collecting demographic data, making it difficult to identify and address inequities.

### A Data Solution

Based on lessons learned from the pandemic, the CDC Foundation, a nonprofit that supports the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, developed some guiding principles that local communities can use to ensure they bring an equity lens to their data initiatives, from data collection and analysis to dissemination and decision-making. The principles draw on a report by the National Commission to Transform Public Health Data Systems.



# A New Type of Agency: Agile and Anticipatory

***An interview with Chris Dilley,*** *CTO State and Local Government, ServiceNow*

When constituents receive the same level of service and convenience from government as the private sector offers — whether dealing with garbage collection, fishing licenses or social services benefits — people tend to think well of government. It matters whether someone has a positive or negative experience transitioning from traditional, face-to-face interactions with agencies to more digital outreach, said ServiceNow's Chris Dilley, who helps organizations deliver experiences that constituents expect.

He observed that the more critical a service is to someone's life, the more anxious that person will feel, and choosing technology to facilitate smooth experiences is important.

"Technology has become oxygen," explained Dilley. "For every organization, it's just absolutely necessary. It's no longer optional."

## Planning Ahead

Agencies must anticipate what constituents may need next week or year, and how services provided today will influence lives in 10 to 15 years, he said. Looking forward means gauging impacts not only on individuals, Dilley said, but also on their communities and the agencies serving them. Technology that uses both real-time and historical data helps agencies act at the right moments.

"Through utilizing data, and now with the use of AI, we're going to be able to support governments … to drive a better experience, be more engaging and have more insights … before the need becomes really critical," Dilley said.

## An Agile Workforce

Staffing also plays a part, since employees must be able to weather change as their agencies work to improve constituent experiences, he said. Program areas that typically include generalist employees should anticipate when experts are needed, so there's a way to balance staffing, for instance.

"As we think about the specific needs that people have, especially from a digital interface perspective, we [must] look at our staffing levels," he explained.

By improving workforce balance, agencies build public trust, so when people seek assistance, they know that agencies have employees, as well as new technologies, to handle their needs.

## Service, Not Stampede

In recent years, Dilley has helped the State of Tennessee's Health and Human Services Department enhance its service delivery. Waiting-room space had been limited, but why should constituents have to wait for hours in a physical location, he asked. ServiceNow helped establish a registration and user-preferred communication system that alerted constituents 15 minutes before they would be served, Dilley said. The system also prioritized urgent needs, such as food and financial assistance for children and families.

"Tennessee worked to change that citizen experience to keep those constituents engaged and make that [experience] more digital, leveraging the ServiceNow platform," he said.

Dilley also shared how ServiceNow helped the State of Montana create a system to facilitate the licensing and permitting processes, specifically around ranching and branding processes. The solution provides more visibility and efficiency, helping Montana ranchers and one of the state's biggest industries, he said.

It's the kind of government service that makes a real-world difference, here and now.

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# AI Practices for Better CX

When AI implementation focuses on users, whether consumers or employees, it promotes trust and facilitates better agency services. In Vermont, the first state to establish a division dedicated to artificial intelligence ethics and implementation, Josiah Raiche, Chief Data and AI Officer, has been working to incorporate AI into both internal and external-facing processes. The goals are, through ethical practices, to improve services for citizens and help employees work with greater ease and efficiency. Raiche shared some tips from his experience using AI to ultimately improve customer experience, or CX.

## Lead With Honest, User-Centric Principles

Raiche said you can reduce friction surrounding the technology by building trust with constituents.

In his work, that means being honest and straightforward when his agency uses AI. Last year, Vermont released its Artificial Intelligence Code of Ethics, which provides operational guidance, standards for data-labeling in automated systems and citation standards when generative AI is used. One ethical practice: Let a user know when material has been created with more than 20% AI assistance.

"I think that people who are kind of just starting this journey should really think about the underlying principles, their values and how they're going to express the culture of their organization through the use of AI," said Raiche.

Vermont's Guidelines for Use of Content Generating AI includes an easy-to-read chart about how much and when to use AI in content generation and editing. Raiche said the chart (excerpted below) has been useful for Vermont agencies, and for agencies in other states.

| Breadth of Distribution | Proofreading, Grammar | Brainstorming, First Draft, <25% AI | Collaborative Writing, About 50% AI | Human Edited, >75% AI | 100% AI Content |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Press release, prepared remarks | ✓ | cite | X | X | X |
| Replies to public inquiry | ✓ | cite | X | X | X |
| Public facing web content | ✓ | cite | cite | X | X |
| Memos, broad internal communications | ✓ | cite | cite | X | X |
| Internal process docs | ✓ | ✓ | cite | X | X |
| Source code | ✓ | ✓ | cite | X | X |

## Give Employees Agency

"We need to use AI to make work better, not worse," said Raiche.

AI and automation should not control what we're doing. It should help us do it better.

"If you're using AI in ways that take away the creativity and the agency of the employees, you're really kind of turning them into kind of the living appendages of the machine in some way," Raiche said. "But we also have the opportunity to use AI to give people superpowers," he added.

Raiche advocates for developing AI so that it gives employees newfound abilities and expression — "so that the people are the boss, not the servants," he said.

## Teach Users to Use Context

AI technology is learning contexts, the many facts and circumstances that surround our data. Everyone who uses or designs AI should remember that we have spent our lives perceiving and applying contexts, and that some are unique. So, when AI answers questions, it may be unable to recognize the correct context if a user isn't explicit.

Raiche said that in Vermont, one big focus is developing context awareness among AI users. If they get in the habit of stating contexts, that could be a critical way to make AI processes more functional.

### Ways AI Has Been Helpful in Vermont

1. **Sorting through or translating "legalese"**
2. **Streamlining automated approval processes for renewals**
3. **Prefilling enrollment forms based on a previous year**
4. **Assembling information for long, routine reports**
5. **Writing job postings**

## You Can Catch Up

If you haven't been working with AI yet, you may feel that your AI education and adoption is lagging. But Raiche said you're not behind, and there is still time to build AI into your work.

"This is a thing that you can figure out. You don't have to be a super nerd to figure this out. And your employees are already using this," he said. "So, tap into that."

Raiche suggested crowdsourcing among employees for ideas about incorporating AI, because many will be familiar with it, even if it's outside their agency work.

As Raiche has talked with other states, he's found that more experience with AI means less fear and a greater sense of control and competency. Where there is fear, he suggests putting risk mitigation strategies in place and then experimenting with AI.

### Vermont's Phases of AI Adoption

**1. Groundwork**
- Foundational elements
- Build internal experience
- Build user experience

**2. Trust and Experience**
- Pilot programs
- Small-scale use cases
- Evaluation and learning

**3. CX Transformation**
- Easier-to-use services
- Constituents navigate with less friction
- Agencies build confidence

# Conclusion

State and local agencies impact residents in so many ways, and by taking advantage of new opportunities related to data, cybersecurity and the constituent experience, these organizations can make profound improvements in people's lives. This guide is the first of two 2024 guides devoted to state and local initiatives. Pre-register for the September installment here.

## About GovLoop

GovLoop's mission is to inspire public-sector professionals by serving as the knowledge network for government. GovLoop connects more than 300,000 members, fostering cross-government collaboration, solving common problems and advancing government careers. GovLoop is headquartered in Washington, D.C., with a team of dedicated professionals who share a commitment to the public sector.

For more information about this report, please reach out to info@govloop.com.


## Thank You

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