

How to Overcome the IT Talent Gap

State and local government agencies and educational institutions (SLED) are struggling to find and retain technology talent. But SLED agencies need specialized expertise, especially in areas such as network management, edge computing and cybersecurity.

With IT teams already stretched thin, SLED agencies can outsource managed and professional services to run their agency while achieving their strategic goals more effectively. Utilization of outside resources for guidance and support will allow SLED agencies to:

- Free up IT staff to focus on the most critical government functions in support of their key stakeholders
- Pursue innovation and digital modernization in support of a frictionless resident or student experience
- Better meet the needs of a large, diverse and complex workforce

This report, developed in collaboration with Lumen, describes how a managed services approach can help SLED agencies build momentum around modernization, empowering IT teams to meet the day's most pressing challenges.

govloop

LUMEN®

Challenge: Time and Talent Shortages

While many SLED agencies view digital modernization as the pathway to improvement, a number of stumbling blocks can impede their progress.

- **Complexity of IT systems:** IT teams are challenged to pursue their modernization efforts while also supporting increasingly complex technology deployments. On-premises systems and new cloud-based environments, siloed and heterogenous applications — all clamor for attention, and may demand specialized skills that go beyond what's readily available.
- **Time and effort spent supporting legacy systems:** Even as they look to the future, technologists must devote extensive time and effort to the daily care and feeding of legacy systems.
- **Talent acquisition for specialized roles:** There's intense competition for IT talent, especially at higher levels, where specific expertise in cybersecurity, network management and other key roles may be hard to come by.

"It's a challenging situation when you think about the complexity that state and local governments are facing today. Not only do they have to manage diverse systems, but they're also trying to manage all the data they are collecting, storing, accessing day-to-day."

Michelle Watson, Lumen



Solution: Managed and Professional Services

When agencies go it alone, the result is often a patchwork of siloed solutions that are not grounded in a foundational plan to innovate. Managed service providers can chart a more holistic approach to modernization, generating maximum impact from their limited budgets.

Managed and professional services can provide a variety of support options:

- **Advisory:** Services may include a deep dive into agency requirements using discovery and analysis tactics in support of a big-picture modernization strategy, assisting IT leaders to establish a thoughtful approach to digital transformation.
- **Project-based:** Agencies may also be looking for project-based support. That includes building and implementing technology solutions for modern, scalable applications based on your environment.
- **Ongoing management:** To ease the daily "care-and-feeding" burden, you can procure continuous monitoring and management of your end-to-end project services, as well as application, infrastructure and security management optimization.

Best Practices in Selecting a Partner

While offerings and approaches can vary widely among managed and professional services providers, a number of key differentiators can help SLED entities identify the ideal partner. Key considerations agencies should look for in a service provider include:



A Strong SLED Track Record

SLED is a specialized environment, with a range of unique budgetary, process and compliance requirements. In consideration of these highly specialized requirements, it is vital that agencies select a service provider with a proven, strong track record of success working with SLED.

"A provider has to be able to demonstrate that they understand how you meet your mission, how you serve constituents," said Michelle Watson, SLED Senior Director for National Technology Strategy and Business Development at Lumen. "Partners should demonstrate they are able to support modernization, collaboration and communication, especially in the present hybrid work environment."



A Sense of Shared Responsibility

An ideal managed service arrangement will be a true relationship, one in which the service provider isn't there just to fill a particular technical need, but rather to help government improve on its core mission outcomes.

"This is about having a true partnership arrangement, where the service provider is an extension of this government agency," Watson said. "You want a partner who understands that, and who also has the scale to share responsibility across a range of ongoing projects, both short- and long-term."



A Common Vocabulary

SLED entities need to partner with a provider that knows how to speak the sometimes-nuanced language of state and local government.

"For everyone to be in alignment and to deliver outcomes for the residents, you need to understand each other," Watson said. "Whether you're talking together about compliance or budgets or building up that resident experience, there needs to be a shared vocabulary around what all that means."

"In order to migrate to next-generation architectures, you need a roadmap that enables innovation."

Michelle Watson, Lumen



Case Study: How Managed and Professional Services Supported a Major IT Upgrade

In the case of one state, managed services helped drive success on a major communications-infrastructure modernization effort.

- **Challenge:** The state sought to upgrade its statewide communications infrastructure in support of its cloud-first initiatives, rising internet-of-things adoption, new mobile imperatives, bring-your-own-device policies and other emerging needs. But IT leaders lacked the full range of in-house talent and expertise needed to support the effort.
- **Solution:** A fully outsourced program enabled network transformation. Lumen provided IT managed services statewide for all agencies, boards and commissions, including managed voice and networking services. The state also tapped Lumen to help create a roadmap for and implement a technology refresh, with equipment upgrades paid for with operating expenses rather than through capital spending.
- **Outcome:** A fully outsourced managed voice solution enabled the state to migrate its call center and data infrastructure. With a roadmap in hand, IT leaders were able to pivot to the latest architecture in a financial model that aligned with their budgetary requirements.

"With managed services freeing up IT time and talent, they were able to go through a technology refresh, upgrading all their equipment and their infrastructure and delivering an improved citizen experience."

Michelle Watson, Lumen

How Lumen Helps

For nearly half a century, Lumen has delivered solutions and expertise in managed and professional services to the public sector, supporting the modernization efforts that help government agencies meet the mission and elevate the level of citizen service.

→ *Learn more*

govloop

LUMEN®