

State + Local

Better Public Service Through Innovation

A GOVLOOP GUIDE



Introduction

State and local governments balance increased budget pressure with the need to provide more and better services to residents. They're responding to the challenge with innovative programs that improve efficiency, boost public engagement and streamline IT. In this guide, we'll share some of their strategies.

- Inspired by Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) efforts at the federal level, at least **26 states have launched their own mini-DOGE initiatives**, focused on uncovering waste, fraud and abuse while improving customer experience (CX).
- Programs that **invite constituents to genuinely participate in the decision-making process** lead to more engaged communities and more successful projects. State and local governments are using social media, digital tools and multichannel outreach to increase transparency and participation.
- In Nebraska, Chief Information Officer Matthew McCarville is **turning the state's budget deficit into an opportunity to modernize IT**. By reducing duplication, updating applications, and expanding and reskilling the tech workforce, he's finding savings for agencies throughout the state's government.

This is our second 2025 guide to state and local innovations. In the first, [State and Local: Ready for Anything](#), we shared how governments are responding to natural disasters, workforce limitations, advanced cyber threats and reduced funding. We hope both of them will inspire you.

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States Give DOGE Their Own Spin

In a February 2025 [post on X](#), Arkansas Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders called the federal government’s Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) initiative “a game changer,” adding: “Arkansas did the same thing and uncovered hundreds of millions of dollars in waste and inefficiencies.”

Sanders launched the state’s DOGE-like effort in March 2024, with a focus on providing better CX and improving the efficiency of the state’s operations and services. In the months after the Trump administration launched DOGE, numerous states followed suit. Here is a look at some of those efforts.

Arkansas Forward

Launched: [March 2024](#)

Overseen by: Department of Shared Administrative Services, Office of State Technology

Priorities:
([Updated June 2025](#))

- Centralize IT administration.
- Move to statewide project management.
- Centralize IT governance.
- Conduct comprehensive IT assessments.
- Develop a comprehensive IT consolidation plan.
- Create a central cybersecurity office.



Florida State DOGE

Launched: [February 2025](#)

Overseen by: Office of Policy and Budget

Select priorities:

- Use AI or other solutions to identify and eliminate unnecessary spending, programs or contracts within agencies.
- Identify any pending or funded federal grant awards inconsistent with state policies (and return those funds to the federal government).
- Recommend administrative or legislative reforms (including the use of IT) to promote efficiency, maximize productivity and eliminate waste in state and local governments.

Iowa DOGE Task Force

Launched: [February 2025](#)

Overseen by: Office of the Governor

Select priorities:

- Undertake governmentwide key performance indicator reviews.
- Review existing cross-agency agreements for services or facilities.
- Eliminate functions or services that are outside government’s core functions.
- Encourage the streamlining or consolidation of federal awards and grants.
- Identify opportunities to use AI, automation and related technology to improve government efficiency.

Louisiana Fiscal Responsibility Program (aka Louisiana DOGE)

Launched: December 2024

Overseen by: Office of the Governor (in collaboration with the Louisiana Legislative Auditor)

Priorities: Identify...

- Any efficiencies that reduce the burdens on taxpayers, including wait times for state services.
- Areas where technology can help expedite state services, especially if it can result in cost savings.
- The most modern and efficient ways to provide services to residents.
- Services residents no longer need.
- Services that can be provided to residents at a lower cost.
- Areas that may be regarded as possible government waste.
- Areas where state government can be more modern, efficient and less costly to taxpayers.

Oklahoma's DOGE-OK

Launched: February 2025

Overseen by: Office of Management and Enterprise Services

Select Priorities:

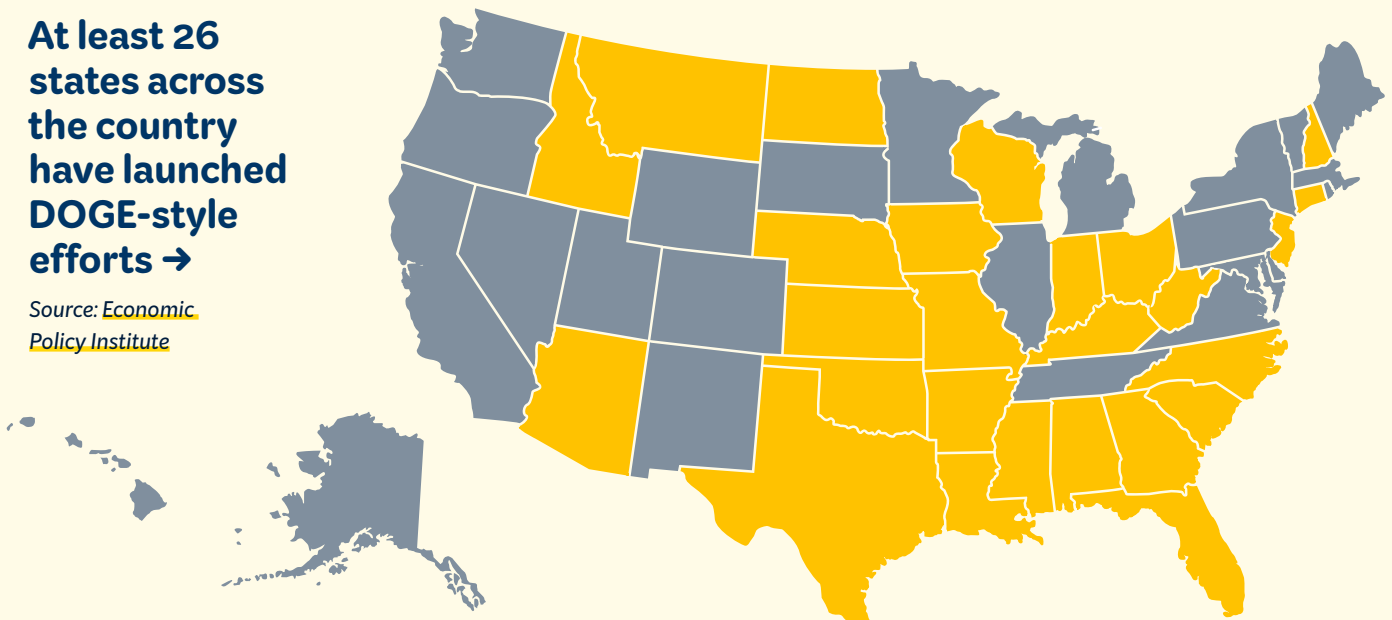
- Review and simplify processes.
- Promote interagency collaboration.
- Use performance metrics.
- Conduct comprehensive budget review.
- Streamline government operations.
- Leverage technology.
- Optimize workforce.
- Renegotiate contracts.
- Prevent fraud and waste.
- Encourage public-private partnerships.

“In Louisiana, we always strive to have a government that is of, by and for the people. A government that runs efficiently and effectively is a government that best serves her people.”

— Gov. Jeff Landry

At least 26 states across the country have launched DOGE-style efforts →

Source: [Economic Policy Institute](#)



Industry Spotlight

How to Deliver Secure Connectivity Without Compromising Service

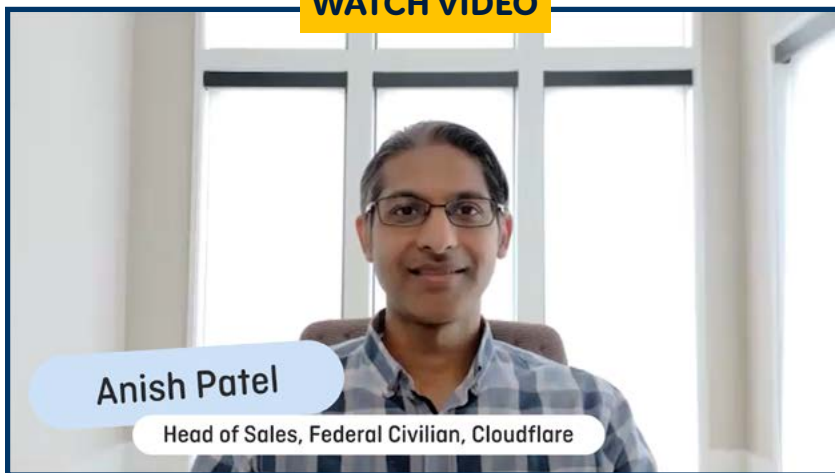
Internet connectivity is at the heart of most digital transformation efforts as agencies look to provide employees or constituents with quick access to applications or services. In the process, however, they end up with a growing web of connections that are increasingly difficult to track and secure.

And unlike private-sector organizations, which often can accept greater risk in the interest of better service, federal agencies need to keep the public trust front and center, said Anish Patel, Head of Federal Civilian at Cloudflare. That means providing both good service and strong security — and doing so working within their budget constraints.

In this [video interview](#), Patel discusses how agencies can strike that balance. Topics include:

- The importance of simplifying the processes for protecting internet-facing applications and services
- The challenge of providing secure interoperability between different services
- Tips for improving security without impeding the constituent experience

WATCH VIDEO



"Everybody wants things to be more connected and modernized and to work securely on any type of device from anywhere in the world. But how do you account for all those factors when you want the best experience, but you don't have the budget or manpower?"

— **Anish Patel, Cloudflare**

About Cloudflare

Cloudflare is the leading connectivity cloud company on a mission to help build a better internet. It empowers government organizations to make their staff, employees, applications and networks faster and more secure everywhere, while reducing complexity and cost. Cloudflare's connectivity cloud delivers the most full-featured, unified platform of cloud-native products and developer tools, so any government organization can gain the control it needs to work, develop and accelerate their agency's mission.

→ [Learn more about Cloudflare](#)

4 Ways to Boost Public Engagement

AND MAKE GOVERNMENT BETTER

People often have lots to say about the government projects and services affecting them and look for meaningful opportunities to weigh in. But there's a larger benefit to public engagement than the success or failure of individual initiatives: Community feedback strengthens democracy overall.

The trouble is, government's go-to approach to public engagement — e.g., the official town meeting — is more than one hundred years old and wasn't designed for engagement anyway.

"It was a format invented to ensure transparency ... at a time when your main tools for transparency were a typewriter, the microphone and then the photocopier," said Matt Leighninger, Director of the National Civic League's [Center for Democracy Innovation](#). "We have better tools for transparency now."

And there are better ways to encourage genuine public engagement. To give individuals a real voice, state and local governments should provide options such as inviting people to speak in small groups, look at and analyze information together, and offer feedback however and whenever they can, Leighninger said. Tools and practices pioneered in the past

20 years — some digital, some not — should be used strategically.

Leighninger's team researches how people engage with and perceive individual agencies and governments, so those entities can work with residents more effectively. The center helps public-sector organizations develop more [useful formats for public meetings](#), abandoning the outdated "three minutes at a microphone" approach. And the group helps municipalities update their [charters](#) — essentially, their constitutions — to incorporate civic innovations.

"The desire for change is so strong," he said, "and when you show people, 'Hey, we could do this' or 'We could do that,' they generally are pretty positive and willing to try things."

In the following pages, we explore four ways to get the public more involved and, Leighninger believes, to strengthen democratic institutions in cities and states across the country.

1. **Understand How People Feel**
2. **Experiment With Different Processes**
3. **Be Intensely Collaborative**
4. **Measure What You're Doing**

"In this country in particular, we think of democracy as [a] tired old system ... as static and not something you can change or improve, and we're kind of resigned to that: 'Well, it's the best we can do.' And in fact, it can be improved. And in other countries, they're doing a lot more of that than we are."



Matt Leighninger
Director, Center for Democracy Innovation, National Civic League

1 Understand How People Feel

“One thing that comes across overwhelmingly, whether you’re talking about residents, staff or officials, is that no one likes public meetings the way they do them today.”

— Matt Leighninger

Tips:

To design more rewarding opportunities for public engagement, first understand the status quo and how people perceive and interact with the institutions around them. Interview community members, officials and local stakeholders, such as neighborhood groups, PTAs and faith-based organizations — the entities “on the ground floor of democracy that [may be] much more accessible to people and could be great allies,” Leighninger said.

There’s also much to learn from social media activity, news coverage and knowing where people get their information. Understand what relationships your community members trust and whom they listen to, he said.

Consider:

What comes through no matter whom you interview or survey is that each side blames the other for the status quo, Leighninger explained. For example, government officials and staff reject ideas for new meeting formats because residents allegedly won’t support them. Community members say that local institutions won’t embrace change.

“There’s some inertia based on what they think the other side will tolerate,” he said, “and also a whole lot of resignation.”



CASE STUDY

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Spearheaded by the city’s planning department, which undertakes numerous large-scale projects, Pittsburgh wanted to better understand community values and concerns to more effectively engage residents in city decision-making. So, officials invited people to apply for membership in a Public Engagement Working Group, using various channels to encourage applications — city Facebook and Twitter accounts, Pittsburgh’s Nextdoor online community, all Carnegie libraries in the city, coffee shops and museums, and other venues, plus invitations to faith-based and other entities.

The working group, representing a broad cross-section of the population, helped create a guide and toolkit, which outlined 42 outreach options, including meetings-in-a-box that give community leaders a literal shoebox-size container filled with info for discussing city issues during neighborhood meetings. There’s also stakeholder mapping, in which people create **relationship diagrams of influential groups in their neighborhoods** to help the city plan future outreach. “Dialogue is more than one-way and one-time communication,” the engagement guide notes. “It is a two-way conversation that occurs over time.”

2 Experiment With Different Processes

“Oftentimes, the way we approach [engagement tools] is that one thing is going to make everything better, and that’s rarely the case. Each thing has its own purpose, its good parts and its limitations.”

— Matt Leighninger

Tips:

Offer people different levels of engagement depending on how much time they have and ensure that your various engagement tools work together. For instance, a brief digital survey of a large group of residents could provide data that guides a [citizen assembly](#) — a small group of community members that focus intensely, usually in person, on a project for several months.

Citizen assemblies are a “thick” engagement mechanism, Leighninger said. They deliver far greater benefits but are much harder to implement. In contrast, “thin” engagement tools are fast and convenient and better suited for many residents, including those with childcare challenges or for whom English is not their first language, he said.

Consider:

Think carefully about what level of engagement is most appropriate for a specific issue. If you’re asking residents to devote significant time to a project, officials must be prepared to do the same. If they’re not, you ultimately frustrate and disappoint constituents who volunteered in good faith.

That goes for all types of public engagement, said Leighninger. And consider it from a resident’s perspective. Would they go to a meeting on Tuesday when they should be helping their children with homework? Would you?



CASE STUDY

Petaluma, California

Once called the “Egg Basket of the World” because of its prolific egg industry, the city of Petaluma in California’s Sonoma County dates to the mid-1800s Gold Rush. The city is known for its thriving arts and farm-to-table culinary scenes. But by 2022, Petaluma’s 55 acres of beloved, centrally located fairgrounds faced an uncertain future. Rather than decide on a plan of action independently, city leaders engaged the public, choosing 36 community members — a veritable microcosm of the city — via a [democratic lottery](#).

The group spent **nearly 100 hours deliberating** over extensive research — using, among other techniques, wall-length sticky boards so participants could post ideas and get team feedback. In the end, the group provided the City Council with recommendations for future use of the fairgrounds. “Part of our job is to dream,” [said one of the participants](#) during the exercise, “and now we’re narrowing it down to how those dreams fit together.”

Cyber Risk Management? A Better Bet Is Danger Management

Risk management, a concept that originated in the financial sector, has not proven to be a good fit for cybersecurity, according to one industry thought leader.

John Kindervag, Chief Evangelist at Illumio, says the basic premise of risk management — that you can calculate the probability of a particular risk materializing — might be feasible in finance, where analysts work with finite datasets. But in cybersecurity, the number of variables involved, if not infinite, is simply unknowable, making it impossible to quantify risks in any meaningful way.

Kindervag, who is credited with defining the concept of zero-trust security in 2010 when he was a Principal Analyst at Forrester Research, recommends a new approach: danger management.

In this [video interview](#), Kindervag explains the concept of danger management and how it can help agencies bring greater urgency to their cybersecurity efforts.

Topics include:

- Building a strategy around protecting high-value assets
- Thinking in terms of mitigating threats, rather than accepting risks
- Applying danger management within the zero-trust framework

WATCH VIDEO



“There's no way to say there's a 10% chance you're going to get hacked, or 0% or 100%. There's just no way to know that. And what it causes people to do is to accept risks that they shouldn't.”

— John Kindervag, Illumio

About Illumio

Illumio, the breach containment leader, stops breaches and ransomware from spreading across the hybrid attack surface. The Illumio Zero Trust Segmentation Platform visualizes how workloads and devices are communicating, creates granular segmentation policies which allow only necessary communication, and automatically isolates ransomware and breaches.

→ [Learn more about Illumio](#)



3 Be Intensely Collaborative

“It’s a real shame because in most cases, you’ve got these different institutions trying to work with their constituents and engage people, completely isolated from each other.”

— Matt Leighninger

Tips:

Public and private groups often work in parallel, duplicating efforts even when the groups operate side by side. Instead, they should leverage their combined networks as part of a long-term strategy. “We need to maintain, kind of, a whole map of the community,” explained Leighninger. It’s about maximizing the community’s **civic capital** — the formal and informal relationships, networks and capacities that encourage collaboration and problem solving.

Online neighborhood groups can be helpful, he noted. They often practice their own kind of self-governance — for instance, by informally agreeing to avoid certain topics — and become organic forums to share ideas, post announcements and build relationships. “It’s about making a [shared] space for engagement that everyone can help make good,” Leighninger said.

Consider:

Individuals have all kinds of basic community needs, such as seeking help finding a lost dog, learning when school lets out and identifying a local carpenter. Those community dialogues can be an entry point to request input on the city budget or other projects because residents already are participating and invested in local issues.

And if people from different backgrounds and institutions “agree up front about how they’re going to act toward each other, they’re much more likely to [succeed],” said Leighninger.



CASE STUDY

New York City

It is difficult to engage historically under-represented groups in a municipality as large and diverse as **New York City**. But through **NYCx Co-Labs** — a partnership of the Mayor’s Office of the Chief Technology Officer and the city’s economic development agency — community members in low-income and other areas **share their concerns** via workshops, town halls, individual conversations and other forums. Then, a Community Tech Board of city officials, community advocates, tech gurus and other stakeholders launches a challenge — that is, a call for an innovative IT approach — to address a **neighborhood concern that’s ripe for a tech solution**.

One Co-Labs project focused on improving mental health services in Spanish-language communities that often lack access to counselors and the insurance to pay for them. “You put all of those things together, and you realize that the systems that allow you to have excellent access to mental health services are fundamentally broken,” **said Oscar Romero**, CIO at the NYC Civic Engagement Commission and former NYCx Co-Labs Director. “And then here is the opportunity that technology can offer in terms of education, skills and understanding.”

4 Measure What You're Doing

“It’s largely a mirage ... government officials and staff saying, ‘Well, people aren’t banging on my door, so they probably are OK with what I’m doing.’ That usually is not true. They simply don’t know [how to weigh in].”

— Matt Leighninger

Tips:

One way to evaluate public engagement is to look at its official outcomes. For example, “people recommended X, Y and Z,” Leighninger said, “but what did the city council do? And then how did the council report back to the people on the [result] of their engagement?” Sending an email survey or running a newspaper article is ineffective because such unsolicited information gets lost in the other communications we receive, he said.

“We need to connect with people in an ongoing way,” said Leighninger. “Don’t do one-off surveys. Do survey events on issues [people] care about.” That creates a feedback loop. Residents sign up to offer an opinion on a specific topic, say, monthly, and the relationship grows and expands over time.

Consider:

Often, when change is truly warranted, people appreciate even minimal improvement. “Generally, in part because the [reforms] are so new and the bar is so low, in the sense that the current system is so frustrating to people, you will learn that yes, people actually like [the new approach],” Leighninger said.

Through the measurement process, you can offer community members ideas about how to make things even better going forward, he added.



CASE STUDY

Boulder, Colorado

Despite enthusiastic community groups and a core set of engaged residents, Boulder leaders knew that public participation should be broader and more meaningful. So, the city partnered with the Center for Democracy Innovation to conduct a **civic infrastructure scan** — a combination of semi-structured interviews of local stakeholders with research into city demographics and other details — and to develop an engagement **scorecard**, that is, a quick digital survey asking for people’s opinions of current City Council meetings.

Based on the **results**, Boulder piloted new “**Community and Council Forums**” in which, **among other reimaginings**, the **dais and microphone were replaced** by breakout tables where council members and residents sat down face-to-face to discuss issues before the council acted on them. According to one council member, the new format provided “the chance to listen to community members’ conversations, really listen. Not react or respond.”

Industry Spotlight

How Digital-First Communications Improve CX

Above all, government's mission is to serve and safeguard the public — with its different needs, preferences and resources — and agencies try hard to engage constituents in new and more effective ways. At one time, for instance, town criers shouted the news in village squares; eventually, agencies sent paper notices in the mail; and today, even small departments communicate via SMS message.

But effective outreach is about more than using modern technology. It requires a strategy — a “digital-first” approach that allows an agency to collect better constituent data and then tailor the agency's messages to the right people at the right times. Digital-first outreach motivates people to act without drowning them in useless communication. And digital-first ultimately improves the customer experience (CX) while making agency operations more efficient and cost-effective.

In this [video interview](#), Angy Peterson, Vice President for Experience Services at Granicus, explores the opportunities that a digital-first strategy offers. Topics include:

- What a “digital-first” approach entails
- The connection between digital-first communications and CX
- Best practices for implementing digital-first outreach



“For years now, government has really approached digital as something additive, like adding websites as a digital front door. But digital-first communication is not just additive. It's much more transformative. It's how government meets people where they are.”

— **Angy Peterson, Granicus**

About Granicus

The Granicus mission is to help better engage government and the people they serve. With more than 2,000 employees across the globe supporting more than 7,000 public-sector organizations, Granicus is a trusted partner for governments to make meaningful connections by enhancing customer experiences, engaging more communities, improving operations, prioritizing equitable reach, increasing trust and transparency, and simplifying compliance.

→ [Learn more about Granicus](#)



Coping With a Tighter Budget in Nebraska

Nebraska faces a \$1 billion budget deficit in the next two years. That might appear to threaten IT innovation, but state CIO Matthew McCarville sees it as an opportunity to drive efficiency across state government. That's because his office, known as OCIO, won't experience the cuts directly because it's paid internally for its services, and it is well-situated to help other agencies cope with their shortfalls.



Matthew McCarville
Chief Information Officer
Nebraska

“We’re trying hard to get ahead of that budget deficit’s [effect on] the agencies by being their partner to help them consolidate and save money but [still] achieve all the goals and strategic plans they had before,” McCarville said.

Combine Forces

OCIO identifies technology that’s underused, obsolete or duplicative. That effort uncovers possibilities for reducing redundant applications and hardware, sharing resources across agencies, and trying new, more cost-effective options.

“We meet with all the agency heads and say, ‘Here’s what we see you have as far as technology resources. You may not need all these physical servers anymore. Have you thought about modernizing your platform?’” he explained.

The evaluation includes staffing. In some departments, OCIO found that IT personnel sometimes had too much spare time, McCarville said. Centralization allows leadership to redeploy that talent. “We’re able to [serve] those agencies with people that know their agency, but also utilize the excess bandwidth for another agency that may need it,” he said.

Modernize With Care

When he became CIO last year, McCarville said, “I walked into a completely legacy state. We had no cybersecurity, we had no data department, we had no business intelligence tool and we had all mainframes and storage on premises.” Some important systems still use applications written in **COBOL**, and the court system runs on an **IBM AS/400**. The state wasn’t using software-as-a-service, and only one agency had used a cloud environment, which it discontinued after a single project.

With old-school tech so firmly embedded, modernization will take time. “I can’t pull the plug on a mainframe in two years,” McCarville said. Instead, he’s making incremental changes. For example, whereas OCIO routinely renewed vendor contracts without exploring alternatives, it now reviews them for updating opportunities as the contracts come due.

Leverage Data and AI

McCarville said his staff jokes that their only interaction with Nebraska's data center was to make sure the indicator lights were flashing green. "No one ever looked at the data. Now we're opening up the hood," he said. The state recently hired its first chief data officer, Prabhakar Vijayarangam, to help unlock those insights. Vijayarangam is also working with vendors to implement AI pilot programs based on that data.

AI is an interesting application for the public sector, McCarville noted. "There's a lot more risk for doing things wrong," he said. Again, his strategy is incremental, testing one use case at a time. OCIO vets a project, then hands it off to a vendor for a 90-day pilot, after which OCIO reviews the operational impact.

For agencies facing drastic budget cuts and significant layoffs, AI can help by automating functions so that remaining employees can focus on higher-level tasks. "It's a great way to introduce AI and show the efficiency of automated programs," McCarville said.

They've learned that some decisions can't be delegated to AI, however. For instance, reviewing eligibility for programs such as Medicaid and Medicare needs a human touch. "You can't kick people off because an algorithm told you to. You have to have that human critical thinking in the loop," McCarville said.

Reskill and Reach Out

To manage its older infrastructure, Nebraska has maintained an IT staff with experience in those technologies — employees who tend to be older themselves. McCarville said 37% are beyond retirement age. Keeping their institutional knowledge while upgrading their skills is a delicate balance. "I've got to manage that as carefully and as empathetically as possible," he said.

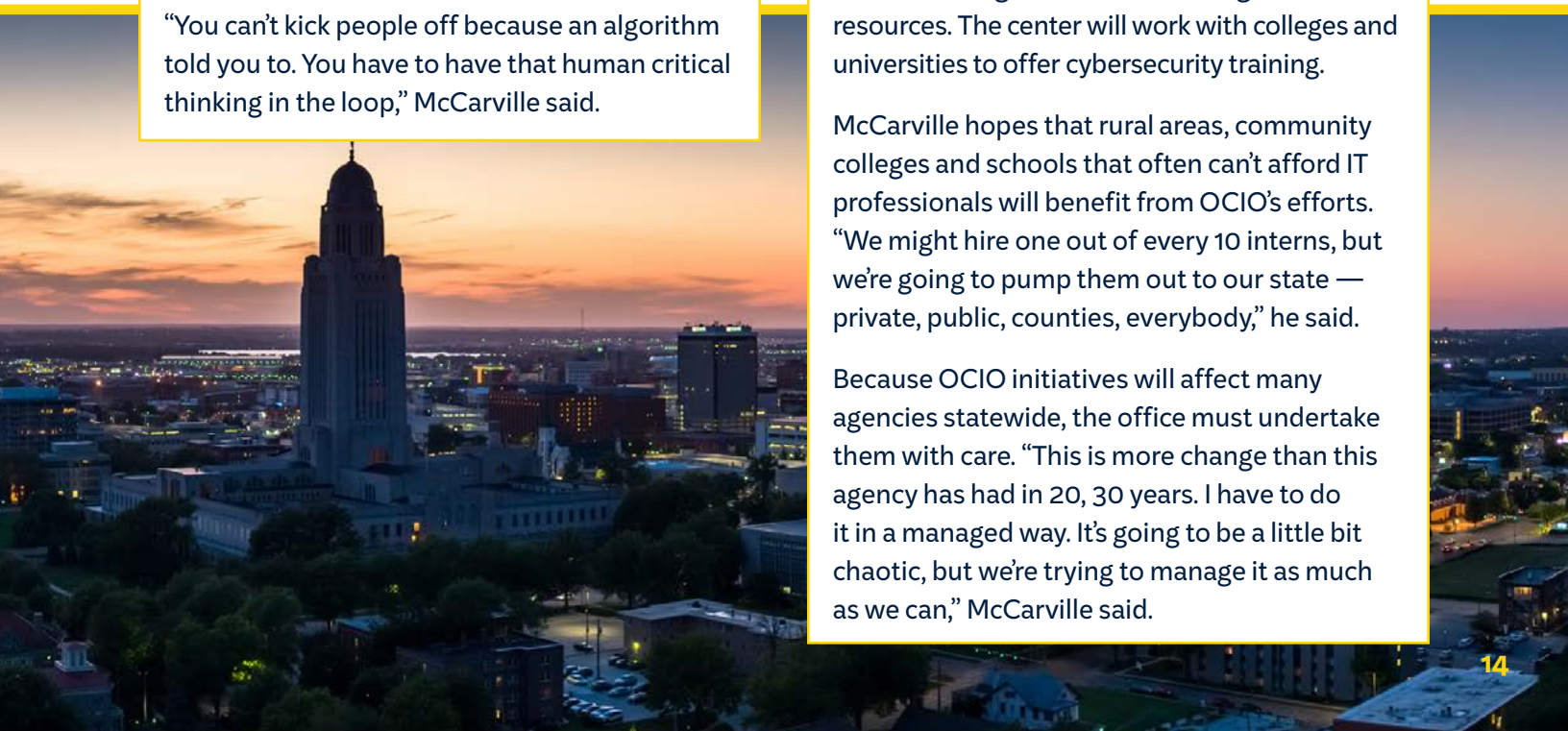
Although some workers want to stick with what they know, others are interested in learning. One budget-conscious strategy requires vendors to train workers on any new technology as part of the cost of doing business with the state.

At the same time, the state is building a pipeline of early-career IT professionals with skills in AI, cyber, analytics and cloud. A new office in Omaha will attract university students and younger workers who don't want to commute an hour each way to the state capital in Lincoln. McCarville hopes to extend outreach to high school students who might not otherwise pursue higher education, steering them into associate degrees in cybersecurity and other tech fields.

Nebraska has also set up a joint security operations center that helps county and local governments respond to cyber threats as the federal government is cutting those resources. The center will work with colleges and universities to offer cybersecurity training.

McCarville hopes that rural areas, community colleges and schools that often can't afford IT professionals will benefit from OCIO's efforts. "We might hire one out of every 10 interns, but we're going to pump them out to our state — private, public, counties, everybody," he said.

Because OCIO initiatives will affect many agencies statewide, the office must undertake them with care. "This is more change than this agency has had in 20, 30 years. I have to do it in a managed way. It's going to be a little bit chaotic, but we're trying to manage it as much as we can," McCarville said.



Industry Spotlight

How Agentic AI Helps State and Local Agencies Drive Greater Efficiencies

Given tight budgets and constrained staffing, state and local agencies know they must lean into automation. But in many cases, they've taken traditional rules-based automation as far as it can go. Artificial intelligence has brought important new capabilities, but that, too, can go only so far. Most AI tools are designed to automate individual tasks, making it difficult to accelerate larger workflows.

Agentic AI breaks those limitations. Working in collaboration with robots and people, AI agents can tackle complex processes. It plans and executes tasks based on goals rather than specific instructions and can tap into systems and datasets across the enterprise. These are still the early days of the agentic era, but big changes are coming, said Chris Radich, Public Sector CTO and Vice President for Customer Success at UiPath.

In this [video interview](#), Radich discusses how government agencies can prepare for the agentic era. Topics include:

- How AI agents augment the work of employees
- Top agentic AI use cases in state and local government
- How to jumpstart the transition to agentic automation



"Our vision is an agent or a digital worker for every knowledge worker in state and local government. That's 10 [million] to 12 million agents nationwide, helping these tireless public servants deliver the mission with ease as demands continue to increase."

— Chris Radich, UiPath

About UiPath

As the world moves into an agentic future, the UiPath Platform™ enables AI agents, robots, people, and models to work together harmoniously to revolutionize industries and enhance human potential in the Public Sector.

→ [Learn more about UiPath](#)

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Conclusion

For state and local governments, “efficiency” means deploying limited resources to meet expanding community needs. In this guide, we’ve shared how officials use innovation and ingenuity to achieve that balance.

→ ***You may also be interested in our previous 2025 guide, [State and Local: Ready for Anything.](#)***

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.

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Thank You

Thank you to Carahsoft, Cloudflare, Granicus, Illumio and UiPath for their support of this valuable resource for public-sector professionals.

Authors

John Monroe, Director of Content
Candace Thorson, Managing Editor
Lauren Walker, Senior Staff Writer

Designer

Kaitlyn Baker, Senior Creative Manager