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Public sector digital transformation

A guide to modernization

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The public sector is embracing the power of transformative technology

America's public sector is facing rising demands, new challenges, and promising opportunities. However, to deliver on those demands, tackle those challenges, and seize those opportunities, the public sector must take advantage of new technologies. It's time for governments, educational institutions, and other public sector organizations to move forward with confidence and modernize their technology infrastructure.

In the following series of short articles, Plante Moran professionals discuss some of the issues facing the public sector as it grapples with the need to embrace the possibilities of current and emerging technologies. We explore why it's imperative that the public sector modernize; describe how organizations can set themselves up for analytics success; look at how risks are evolving, and how technology can help mitigate those risks. We share our thoughts on where to begin with emerging technologies from AI to blockchain. And we show how change management is at the heart of every IT modernization effort.

At Plante Moran, we believe in helping the country's public sector deploy technology to be the very best it can be. We hope these articles spark important conversations among you and your colleagues — and we're here to help.

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"At Plante Moran, **we believe in helping the country's public sector deploy technology to be the very best it can be, keeping America safe, strong, and prosperous.** We hope these articles spark important conversations among you and your colleagues — and we're here to help."

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Building a better public sector through IT modernization

Building a better public sector through cloud migration & IT modernization

It's time for many public sector entities to upgrade and modernize their IT infrastructure. Demands, expectations, and risks are rising, and the aging technology relied upon for decades is no longer up to the challenge. By embracing the cloud and other mainstream and leading-edge technologies, government and education can deliver better services, improve security, and realize new efficiencies and cost savings.

The modernization imperative

Multiple factors are driving the need for IT modernization among public sector agencies. The pandemic caught many organizations unprepared and unable to pivot swiftly to and capitalize on remote working, revealing a significant gap in the public sector's ability to maintain continuity in any conditions. In addition, ransomware attacks have highlighted legacy technology's cybersecurity vulnerabilities. Citizens, students, parents, staff, and other stakeholders — used to easily interacting digitally with private sector organizations when, where, and how they wish — want the same sort of digital experience when dealing with public sector agencies. The costs of maintaining legacy systems continues to rise, consuming more and more of IT departments' budgets and time. It's tough to recruit and retain fresh, new talent to work on systems that are outdated or discontinued. And even when governments and public education want to introduce new services or smart city innovations, they can't, because their old technology is unable to handle it.

Overcoming the "optics" hurdle

It can be difficult for public sector organizations to move forward on IT modernization because, generally speaking, the public sector isn't comfortable to be in the vanguard of innovation. Elected officials, sensitive to voters' views, may not understand the need for change — or the case for investing in initiatives that, at first glance, have no immediate, clear impact that citizens can see. Why risk it?

Because the real risk lies in inaction. Choosing to "make do" with legacy technology means local governments can't be as transparent, accessible, or responsive as citizens demand. It hinders informed, data-driven decision-making. It leaves governments and essential services vulnerable to disruption and cybersecurity threats.

On the education front, it makes it challenging for students and parents to effectively interact with education providers. Overall, it diminishes the local quality of life and makes it hard to compete with other communities.

" ... ransomware attacks have highlighted legacy technology's cybersecurity vulnerabilities."

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IT modernization means better public services

Modernizing IT infrastructure by leveraging modern cloud-based services significantly enhances the public sectors' ability to serve stakeholders and steer their communities and institutions toward the future.

Moving to the cloud enables public sectors to capitalize on the proven applications and quality infrastructure that America's private sector uses and relies on every day. Within governments, cloud services allow their agencies to provide citizens with the services they need while delivering a great user experience. Within education, they allow better accessibility and harnessing of student data. The cloud also enables the public sector to operate more efficiently, scale up or down in response to shifting demands, and address and manage cybersecurity and compliance.

Upgrading IT and embracing the cloud also transforms IT departments from a cost center to a value-adding partner to governments and other public sector organizations. Instead of constantly fighting technology "fires," CIOs and IT leaders can be more strategic and forward-thinking, and their IT teams can be more proactive identifying and deploying solutions to today's problems and tomorrow's. IT staff can be upskilled and realigned to more valuable work, such as managing vendor relationships and service-level agreements, optimizing internal processes, enhancing application performance, creating new services, and attracting a new generation of talent.

Where to begin your modernization journey

Public sector organizations should begin their IT modernization by assessing their current IT environment and establishing a plan for upgrading legacy systems. This includes:

Assessing the services IT provides today — and comparing that to the services they should be providing. Identify the core services that need to be managed in-house and those that would be better served managed by a third party.

Designing a cloud migration plan that starts with low-hanging fruit: those services and applications that can be easily moved to the cloud. This provides the quick wins that can demonstrate value, gain support for further modernization investments, and free resources for more critical initiatives down the road.

Getting leadership and stakeholder buy-in to validate the modernization effort's direction and getting commitment to the process — from allocating necessary resources to stewarding adoption. Identify ownership and accountability.

Upgrading, developing, and implementing IT governance that reflects the shift to cloud-based systems, updating or crafting relevant policies and procedures, and providing necessary training.

Reviewing cloud service providers cybersecurity and incidence response measures to ensure cloud systems are properly maintained and monitored. Roles and responsibilities should be clearly defined between the organization and vendor.

Rationalizing the public sector's application and technology portfolio to ensure consistency, eliminate redundancies, and minimize the complexity of integrating and supporting multiple systems and platforms.

"The cloud also enables the public sector to operate more efficiently, scale up or down in response to shifting demands..."

It's time to build more effective, more resilient public sector

Upgrading IT infrastructure is essential if public sector organizations are going to deliver on expectations and meet the challenges to come. Today's cloud-based technologies can play a vital role in making the public sector more effective and resilient.

Government CIOs prioritize for tomorrow

The 2023 CompTIA Public Technology Institute (PTI) State of City and County IT National Survey reveals top CIO priorities for the next two years. How do your priorities stack up?

97% Cybersecurity/ data loss prevention

62% Modernize outdated IT systems

52% Innovation

50% IT workforce retention/ attraction

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Managing change is the key to IT transformation success

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Managing change is the key to IT transformation success

Public sector IT departments face growing pressure to modernize, increase their agility, and become a true strategic partner to the governments and organizations they serve. Upgrading ERP systems and migrating those services to the cloud are key to this transformation effort, but there can be sizable obstacles in the way. How can CIOs and IT departments overcome these barriers and move forward?

IT modernization is gaining momentum

The push to modernize public sector IT infrastructure, particularly through adoption of cloud-based software-as-a-service (SaaS) solutions, has been gathering speed in recent years. These services enable public sector organizations to improve efficiencies, scale to meet fluctuating demands, and free themselves of the costs of operating and maintaining aging on-premises technology, among many other benefits. They also allow organizations to be more responsive to citizens and staff, who have grown increasingly frustrated with governments and agencies unable to deal with emerging needs and demands due to the limitations of legacy technologies.

These factors have provided public sector CIOs with the leverage they need to seize the opportunity and invest in the technologies that can help their organizations reimagine how they do business and serve their constituents. But first, they must overcome some all-too-common challenges.

The factors that impede progress — and the risks of inaction

Public sector organizations tend to be reluctant to change, and this can create obstacles for IT transformation efforts. Budgetary constraints can make it hard to persuade decision-makers to invest in new technology rather that projects with more obvious or immediate constituent appeal. Modernizing IT functions can mean new and quite different skill sets are needed, such as business analysis and relationship management, creating anxieties over job changes or losses. Misaligned visions for the outcomes of IT modernization can lead to unrealistic expectations and future disappointment. A lack of appropriate sponsorship or poor project management can slow the pace of change, leading to delays or cost overruns. And sometimes, people simply don't understand or believe there's a compelling case for change.

Unfortunately, public sector organizations that fail to modernize their IT functions leave themselves facing a host of risks. They may struggle to deal with emerging cybersecurity threats or deliver the services people demand. They may find it hard to compete for fresh talent with other public sector organizations using more modern systems. And they continue to devote scarce IT resources to "keeping the lights on," with little if anything left over for strategic support.

"Public sector organizations tend to be reluctant to change, and this can create obstacles for IT transformation efforts."

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Managing change is the key to successful IT modernization

Public sector CIOs and their teams can achieve their IT modernization ambitions by approaching it as a change management project, not just a technology matter. Embracing cloud-based services and newer ERP solutions is disruptive, but it also creates opportunity. Helping those impacted by IT modernization — from decision-makers to staff to constituents — understand what the future state looks like and what it means to them is vital to launching the transformation. Strong project management, clear communication, and robust training will help keep it on track.

Here are a few other things to keep in mind:

Evaluate the current state of technology and skills. Assess and evaluate the technologies currently in use, including costs, capabilities, and associated risks. Conduct a skills inventory of current IT staff as well as end-users. This will be vital for both making the case for change and understanding the gap between the current and future states.

Get buy-in from the top. It's essential that CIOs get buy-in and support from leadership, whether it's the mayor's office, school district administrators, or agency directors. Help them understand the need for change and the risks of inaction.

Develop a shared vision. Too many IT projects fail because they take an IT-centric approach. CIOs and their teams need to engage with other groups — finance, operations, end-users, and others — to understand the issues and build a shared vision of what the future technology environment should look like.

Determine clear goals and define the strategy. Identify clear, agreed-upon business outcomes for IT modernization, and use these to shape the transition strategy.

Determine what moves to the cloud — and what that will look like. Identify the applications that will migrate to the cloud over the course of the transition — and understand how those new cloud versions of the applications will operate.

Define the roles, responsibilities, and skill sets required in a modernized IT function. Determine the roles and skills needed to reassign and recruit talent as appropriate. Support existing staff by providing the training they need to upskill/reskill and thrive in their new roles.

Communicate, communicate, communicate. Don't leave anyone in the dark about what IT transformation means and how it affects them. Clear, transparent communications are vital to building trust and maintaining momentum.

Approaching IT modernization from a change management perspective can be a powerful way to build a shared understanding of the need for transformation — and a common commitment to the success of the effort. It's time to start.

> "Embracing cloud-based services and newer ERP solutions is disruptive, but it also creates opportunity."

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Putting your people at the center of everything solution allows for greater adoption, overall satisfaction, increased engagement, and higher productivity. Here's three tips to help get it right:

1. Plan

Create a plan for all staff who are affected by the change and how you'll engage them in a way that their voices can be heard, and they feel a part of the process. Having a well-documented plan ensures alignment with strategic goals, overall vision, accountability, and adoption.

2. Research

Gather data on end-users and constituents through surveys, interviews, website or application analytics, and other quantitative research to completely understand needs, motivations, and pain points so you can map out user journeys to help drive effective transformation.

3. Transparency

Transparency is motivating. It creates a sense of fairness and when staff understand what's going on, why it's happening, and how it effects their day-to-day roles and future career growth. It's mutually beneficial when staff embrace change, remain loyal, and stay motivated to perform.

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Emerging technologies have much to offer the public sector

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Emerging technologies have much to offer the public sector

Emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and blockchain aren't just for the private sector. State and local governments, educational institutions, and other public sector agencies can also capitalize on these and other technologies to improve operations, achieve efficiencies, reduce costs, and enhance services. As the public sector comes under greater pressures to modernize its IT function, CIOs and other decision-makers need to give emerging technologies serious consideration.

Innovation goes mainstream

Governments and public sector organizations tend to shy away from adopting innovative technologies. They're perfectly content to let the private sector take the lead — and the risk — in experimenting with new tools that may or may not deliver meaningful value.

There's nothing wrong with the public sector being a follower in this regard — at least up to a point. Because eventually, some technologies that were once innovative and experimental become mainstream, proven tools used by organizations of all shapes and sizes. And these now-standard technologies offer enormous potential for public sector organizations.

For example:

Robotic process automation (RPA). RPA is a tool used to automate highly repetitive, often tedious tasks performed by workers as part of a business process. Automating some or all of these tasks increases efficiency, reduces costs, and frees staff for more value-added work. RPA can help any organization automate areas such as payroll and accounts payable, but it can also help public organizations with other processes such as court filings, permitting activities, and certifications.

Artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning. If RPA automates "doing" work, AI and machine learning can greatly accelerate "thinking" work, such as analyzing vast amounts of data and delivering insights that lead to better, more informed decisions. Over time, as the system learns, these analyses and insights become increasingly accurate and useful. There's a multitude of use cases where AI and machine learning applications can be effective. For example, they can help local governments identify where best to allocate street repair budgets, or assist universities in awarding scholarships based on the likelihood of applicants' graduation rather than need alone.

"Smart" devices and the Internet of Things (IoT). Advances in mobile connectivity and data storage and processing enable organizations to collect and analyze sensor data from city vehicles and traffic sensors to video cameras and beyond. Harnessing IoT through connected, "smart" devices can enable cities to better manage traffic congestion, properly maintain vehicle fleets, direct police to areas at high risk of criminal activity, and more. It's also a vital part of achieving smart city ambitions.

"If RPA automates "doing" work, AI and machine learning can greatly accelerate "thinking" work."

"Emerging technologies can help recruit fresh talent."

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Blockchain. Not just for cryptocurrency, blockchain serves as a permanent, tamperproof distributed ledger in which every transaction is automatically validated and kept as part of a permanent record. The result is a permanent audit trail. While originally developed for tracking financial transactions, blockchain can be applied to healthcare records, identity management, land registration, and more. Its use in the public sector is limited but growing; the federal government and some states have blockchain initiatives underway, and even a few counties and cities are using the technology at a small scale.

Real benefits for the public sector

Over the past few years, these technologies have gone from the leading edge to daily use, and their effectiveness and value proven by businesses across America and around the world. They can do the same for the public sector. RPA, AI, and other emerging technologies can help public sector organizations reduce organizational costs, leverage data more effectively, improve stakeholder engagement and customer service, mitigate risk, and build trust. Emerging technologies can help recruit fresh talent and open the door to new platforms and partnerships. And that's just the start. It's time public sector CIOs and other decision-makers give serious consideration to the potential impact of emerging technologies.

Where to start

It can be daunting to know where to begin when it comes to adopting emerging technologies for use in local government or another public sector organization. However, it doesn't need to be.

RPA is a good place to start, because the benefits of automation — accelerated processes and cost reductions — are immediately apparent and mensurable. CIOs and their organizations should review all their business processes, identify those that are ripe for automation, and prioritize them for RPA implementation. An organization may choose to use RPA on its accounts payable process, for example, and then move on to recruitment matters. Achieving early wins using RPA can lay the groundwork for further adoption of other emerging technologies. CIOs should work with decision-makers across the organization to identify potential opportunities where emerging technologies could transform and improve how work gets done and services are delivered.

Your IT modernization efforts should include emerging technologies

More and more, local governments and public sector organizations are striving to upgrade and modernize their IT departments and migrate services to the cloud. They shouldn't stop there: as emerging technologies from RPA to blockchain go mainstream, public sector decision-makers should seize the opportunity to use them to deliver better services to citizens.

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RPA and the next generation of civil servants

Attract and retain top talent by giving millennials a sense of purpose and opportunity to grow.

- Implement RPA to allow staff to focus on more meaningful, strategic work.
- Increase job satisfaction by keeping staff challenged rather than doing work below their level of education and training.
- Boost morale by shifting to automated workflows freeing up staff to collaborate and innovate.

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The Analytics Center of Excellence:

Make better, faster, and more cost-effective decisions

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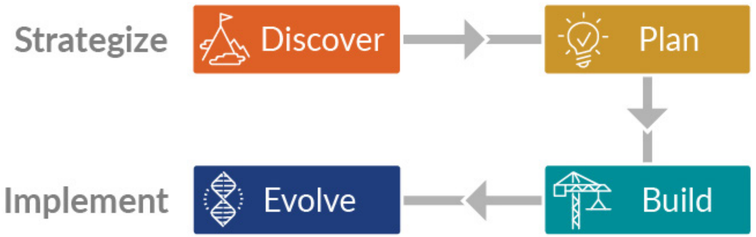
The Analytics Center of Excellence: Make better, faster, and more cost-effective decisions

Public sector organizations typically have access to an incredible wealth of data. However, they don't always have a way to transform that data into insights that can lead to better, more informed decisions. Building a successful analytics program takes more than purchasing an analytics tool and pushing out flashy reports, though. It takes a solid foundation that supports the organization's vision, scaling and adapting to changing needs: It takes an Analytics Center of Excellence.

What's an Analytics Center of Excellence?

The Analytics Centre of Excellence (ACE) describes a four-step process developed by Plante Moran that combines a range of analytics best-practice methodologies, including those of major analytics software vendors, into a single pathway.

There are four steps to the ACE pathway, enabling public sector organizations to develop a successful analytics strategy and successfully implement and iterate an analytics solution: **Discover, Plan, Build, and Evolve.**



Phase 1: Discover

If you don't know where you're coming from, how can you figure out which path will get you to your desired destination? That question is at the heart of the Discovery phase.

What does a day in the life of the organization's staff look like? How do they use data? How is data stored and maintained? Do staff and decision-makers trust the data they use, or do they question its accuracy and reliability? Do staff have the skill sets needed to work with and interpret data? The answers to these and similar questions provide a foundation of understanding that makes clear the current state, the future state, and any hurdles between them.

"If you don't know where you're coming from, how can you figure out which path will get you to your desired destination?"

" ... it's important for ACE leadership to hold themselves and their team accountable."

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Phase 2: Plan

In the Plan phase, the information gleaned in the previous phase is used to build an overall management structure for analytics, including responsibilities and accountabilities at micro and macro levels. Then it's time to look at the ACE's day-to-day functioning and establish a roadmap for the ACE's first three, six, and 12 months. Longer-range goals are broken down into manageable, measurable chunks with milestones and decision points as required.

During this phase, any software tools already available to the organization should be considered. If not, the functionality needs identified during the Discovery phase should be used in comparing and evaluating potential tools to determine the tool (or tools) best suited to the organization's needs.

Phase 3: Build

The Build phase is all about implementation, from data and reporting architecture to training initiatives and communication platforms. The ultimate goal of this phase is to establish reliable, repeatable best practices and to produce an initial set of analytics content and interactive dashboards. It's also important to set up a communication/information site to provide people with important resources and transparency about the operations of the ACE.

Phase 4: Evolve

Analytics isn't a "one-and-done" endeavor. It's an ongoing, iterative process of evolution, as requirements change over time. The ACE team needs to stay in touch with its stakeholders and customers, seeking feedback and adjusting deliver what's needed. The ACE framework is itself designed to enable the team to make agile decisions and adjust, pivot, and reprioritize as necessary.

Throughout this phase, it's important for ACE leadership to hold themselves and their team accountable. Stay connected with the team and the consumers of ACE-provided insights. Follow up with staff regularly using established processes to ensure they're meeting expectations and providing upskilling tactics to continue to deliver value through data analytics.

Good data governance is crucial to ACE success.

The public sector is shifting from a "don't share data" mindset to a "must-share data," imperative. We surveyed participants at our annual Tech Summit conference and learned that despite the growing need for data-driven innovation, there's room for improved policies, processes, and organizational structure to support data management.

Here's how leaders rated their organizations level of data governance:

45%
Our data governance efforts are evolving.

33%
We don't have a data governance program that I'm aware of.

14%
We have good processes and governance to successfully manage all aspects of the data journey.

8%
We have a data governance group, but I don't know what they do.

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ACE can deliver value in all kinds of public sector contexts

The analytics needs of different public sector organizations can vary greatly, but the ACE methodology can be applied across any industry, public or private.

For example:

K-12 and higher education. ACE can be used to deploy data and reporting processes that replace manual, redundant work, freeing staff for more value-adding work. It can also be used to make sense of a wide range of student data more efficiently, providing education professionals with the insights needed to have a greater impact on students' lives.

Transportation. ACE is built to evolve and adapt, allowing transportation agencies to stay on top of changing data standards and reporting requirement while providing the insights needed to help organizations operate efficiently and maintain business resilience at all times.

Public utilities. ACE can provide the processes and infrastructure to help public utilities derive actionable insights from their customer, facility, and fleet data. These insights can lead to smarter pricing strategies, better fleet management, and more effective business continuity planning.

An ACE in the public sector's hand

Analytics isn't just for private sector companies. Public sector organizations across the country, from county governments to state colleges, can also capitalize on these powerful tools to uncover insights that unlock efficiencies, cost savings, and new opportunities. With the ACE methodology, public sector organizations can achieve their analytics ambitions.

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New approaches for managing risk in the public sector

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New approaches for managing risk in the public sector

America's public sector — from state and local governments to schools, universities, and other organizations — faces a growing and increasingly complex world of risk. Understanding and managing these risks requires governments and other organizations to take a new approach to risk management — one that puts security and trust at the very foundation of everything they do.

The public sector faces an ever-evolving risk landscape

The risks faced by local governments and other public sector organizations are changing fast — and multiplying faster. Cybersecurity threats from both domestic and foreign actors are on the rise, including ransomware attacks that disrupt organizations' ability to serve the public. More and more potentially sensitive data is being collected, stored, and shared every day. New regulations and legislation are rolled out to protect citizens' data rights, creating a web of new requirements to navigate. The move to adopt new technologies such as cloud-based services can lead to unexpected risks related to controls and configurations.

Many public sector organizations are well aware of the changing risk landscape. They aspire to improve their governance, risk management, and internal controls in order to protect themselves and their constituents. But there are obstacles in their path. Budget constraints often force decision-makers to choose between proactive risk mitigation and investments that appeal to citizens and stakeholders. However, if done smartly, decision-makers can have practice risk mitigation and make technology investments. It's hard to compete with the private sector for the talent and expertise needed. And institutional resistance to change can make it difficult to embrace new processes and controls, even when adopting new technologies.

As a result, governments and education organizations are left vulnerable — not just to cyberattacks, fraud, and other frontline threats, but to the ongoing burden of waste and inefficiency that frustrates public sector decision-makers and their constituents alike.

Manage risk through careful planning — and leveraging new technologies

Public sector organizations can overcome the challenges they face and achieve their risk management goals. It takes careful planning and the ability to capitalize on the full features of modern technologies such as cloud-based services.

The first step is to conduct a thorough assessment of technology-related risk across the organization. Ask yourself probing questions, such as:

- *What technologies are in use? Are they up to date and properly configured?*
- *What policies and documented internal controls are in place to govern access and use? Are any missing?*
- *What risks are posed by vendors and other third parties — and what steps do they take to manage and mitigate their own risk?*

"The move to adopt new technologies such as cloud-based services can lead to unexpected risks related to controls and configurations."

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This assessment must extend beyond processes to people, as well. Does the organization have the right people in the right roles, performing the right tasks? At a minimum, local governments and other public sector organizations should conduct such an assessment annually. Larger entities — a big county or a large state college, for example — may wish to perform some aspects of the assessment more frequently, such as a network security test.

It's important to remember that this regular assessment simply captures a point in time and identifies risks requiring attention at that time; subsequent assessments should track how these prior risks have been remediated or resolved. Yet each assessment forms the basis for developing a risk mitigation action plan: organizations should define what actions they'll take and how and develop a plan to monitor performance and continuously improve. This doesn't mean resource-strapped public sector organizations need to do everything at once; realistically, risk mitigation planning involves prioritizing the gaps to be addressed, based on their severity and potential impact.

Organizations can also mitigate risks through the capabilities of new technologies themselves — as long as those features are understood and taken advantage of during implementation. For example, a cloud-based tool could replace multiple manual accounts payable processes with one best-practice process that streamlines and automates much of the work, from invoice processing to electronic payments. Adopting the cloud-based process not only improves efficiency, but it also reduces the risk of error of fraud.

Zero-based trust: A growing trend

Embracing cloud and other new technologies can also help public sector organizations take advantage of an emerging trend: zero-based trust.

Zero-based trust is an IT security model that requires strict identity verification for every person and device trying to access network resources, whether inside or outside the network perimeter. The model is designed to protect remote workers and secure data and infrastructure from end to end. Most prominent technology vendors are now including zero-based trust concepts and protocols in their architecture, which makes it easier for governments and organizations to adopt them. Zero-based trust can significantly reduce the risks of unauthorized access to systems and data.

Risk is changing — and with it, risk management

The public sector's risk landscape is evolving rapidly, but local governments and others in the public sector can adapt and take action now to understand, manage, and mitigate the risks they face.

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Managing risks while modernizing threatens mission-critical work

The Government Index for IT Modernization survey of government IT decision-makers put risk concerns front and center:

70%
are concerned about security risks when migrating to cloud platforms.

60%
think it's important to modernize IT infrastructure to improve efficiency and security.

40%
estimate it'll take longer than three years to implement zero-trust architecture and encrypt all data.

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