How to Get Real Impact From Digital Tools



These days, agencies can tap into a wide array of digital tools to help their employees and teams work more effectively and efficiently. The challenge is determining where to focus attention and investment to deliver real value — all while continuing to safeguard data and systems.

At a recent GovLoop event, experts from government and industry offered practical guidance for making the most of today's powerful solutions. Participants included:



Rayvn Manuel, Senior Application Developer/Architect, DevOps Engineer, Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of African American History & Culture



Joanie Newhart, Associate Administrator of Acquisition Workforce Programs, Office of Management and Budget



Egon Rinderer, Senior Vice President, Federal & Enterprise Growth, NinjaOne

Put AI to Work to Drive New Efficiencies

Agencies need to take the potential of AI powered solutions seriously, particularly their ability to elevate performance and outcomes. To realize that promise, however, agencies must be deliberate in how they adopt and apply these new capabilities.

Leverage AI for multitasking

AI powered processes can help agencies meet the push for greater efficiency, improving service delivery while raising the bar on constituent experience. At the individual level, these tools can also reduce workload pressure by helping employees manage multiple tasks more effectively.

In particular, government employees can look to AI to help manage the growing need to juggle multiple tasks at once. "You have 10 hours of work and eight hours to do it," says Rayvn Manuel of the Smithsonian Institution. That demands multitasking, and AI can play a key role in enabling this.

Customize your AI prompting

As with any technology, AI outputs are only as good as the inputs. More specific, well crafted questions lead to more relevant — and more accurate — responses. That makes it essential for agencies to invest in building employees' prompt engineering skills.

"Once you understand how the prompts work … then it can become a tool," Manuel said. To that end, IT teams need to develop clear guidance on effective prompting and ensure it is shared broadly across the workforce.

Line Up the Right Tools and Partners

As agencies explore AI powered solutions and other emerging IT capabilities, it's critical to be strategic about tool selection and to work with vendors that can serve as trusted partners.

Prioritize tools that can improve productivity and reduce risk

The value proposition of AI solutions is twofold. Solutions should accelerate mission outcomes — and do so without introducing vulnerabilities that endanger data or systems.

As agencies explore AI offerings, "you have to rank these things based on what are the improved outcomes … and then, is there a risk increase or decrease associated with that?" said NinjaOne's Egon Rinderer. "Look for those things that allow you to move more quickly, be more agile, but reduce risk at the same time."

Align with vendors that can demonstrate the gains

When selecting a partner to implement a new AI-driven solution, agencies can and should be choosy. "It comes down to the vendor putting their reputation where their claims are," Rinderer said. That means partnering with a vendor that can demonstrate tangible outcomes.

Whether the metrics of success are speed enhancements or efficiency gains, the right partner will be able to substantiate its claims and demonstrate how its solution reduces the overall IT footprint. "It should be able to displace legacy technology that preexists," he said.

Get Your Purchasing Processes in Order

Once you've found the right tools, it's easier than ever to buy them, but only if you do your homework.

Align with the new Federal Acquisition Regulation flexibilities

The U.S. Office of Management and Budget has been working to make the FAR more responsive in support of agencies' need to onboard cutting-edge solutions faster. Now the agencies need to make internal adjustments in order to take advantage of that.

"The FAR is changing to be more streamlined and to be skinnier," said OMB's Newhart. "We're asking them to look at their processes so that they can match up with the new FAR flexibilities and discretion."

Provide acquisition training and resources to frontline staff

As agencies adjust their processes to take advantage of the FAR changes, they will need to put a heavy emphasis on training, ensuring that those who purchase IT capabilities are prepared to move at the pace of mission.

In general, agency acquisitions professionals are "risk-averse and rule-bound," Newhart said. Going forward, they should be encouraged to be more nimble, using increased flexibility in the FAR to bring new solutions online faster than ever. To fully capitalize on AI and other emerging technologies, she added, "we need them to be flexible and innovative."

Click here to watch the full session on demand

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