Why is agility so difficult for governments to achieve?
Part of it is societal: Interactions used to take days or maybe even weeks. Now we are in a society of instant gratification; people expect a response in near-real time. Government agencies have struggled to keep up with the technology infrastructure changes that promote speed of interaction. At the same time, enterprise systems have become inordinately more complex, which presents a challenge to delivering at speed. The pandemic showed how hard it can be to make changes overnight.

In government, culture can also make it hard to achieve agility. When I was in government, I often heard, “This is the way we’ve always done it.” Government also is constrained by policy concerns around security and privacy. It is going to take a new mindset to achieve agility, and it will require new tools.

What do agile tools look like?
In general, the tools that support agility will themselves be agile. They’ll be tools that enable you to adopt or combine whatever methodologies you need to be successful. They’ll be able to scale with you and tightly integrate with whatever you are using now and in the future.

For example, it’s very hard to do an agile development methodology like DevSecOps if your tool is too rigid or if it takes six months for a software developer to change a simple workflow. How will you be agile if every time you identify a change, you need to wait six months for your tool to catch up?

How does Atlassian’s Jira fit into this?
Jira is an agile workflow tracking tool. In order to be agile, you have to formalize your process. When you can do that, instead of spending six months changing a workflow, you can spend 60 seconds. You literally drag a line from one box to another and you’re done.

Jira also integrates with purpose-built tools like Bitbucket, which is where we host our source code, or even GitLab or Bamboo or Jenkins — all software-development specific tools. That integration piece is important when you need to track work. When you deploy code that knowledge comes right back into Jira. Then you’re able to move your ticket automatically to track that the work is done and deployed into production.

So Jira acts like a central source of truth?
Exactly. It’s not a document repository, though I should point out that Confluence is a great place to put your knowledge in a collaborative workspace. Jira is a single pane of glass that improves workflows, planning and budgeting. All of that helps you refine your processes and ultimately be more agile. And if it’s a bit much for your non-tech teams, you can always do the same with Trello and get started in minutes.

What does that look like in action?
We recently supported NASA’s latest mission to Mars. With Atlassian, the code they write on Monday is literally driving the Perseverance Rover on Mars on Tuesday.

How can government agencies begin to pivot toward agile development processes?
Don’t wait to get it perfect. Aim for small iterative improvements. If you’re spinning up a completely new project, that can be an opportunity to try out a new methodology without impacting any of your current work.

Delivering at Speed: Driving Agile Processes in the Public Sector

The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the need for greater agility in government, as agencies scrambled to adopt new processes in the face of disruption.
Government needs new development workflows to break down silos and support cross-functional and multidisciplinary teams. In this Q and A, Atlassian Public Sector Evangelist Ken Urban describes how new tools can help drive agile development processes across the public sector.