



4 Ways SLED Organizations Are Driving Efficiency



For state and local government and education (SLED) organizations, efficiency has long been a necessity rather than a slogan.

That reality has become more acute as federal funding declines and COVID-era relief dollars expire, forcing agencies to reassess how they sustain core programs. At the same time, public expectations for government and education services remain high, increasing pressure to deliver reliable outcomes with fewer resources.

“This moment is a catalyst,” says Teri Takai, chief programs officer for the Center for Digital Government (CDG). “It’s a chance for agencies to look at where they’ve been inefficient in the past and ask themselves how they might do things better moving forward.”

Ultimately, being more efficient means being more effective. “An efficient organization strategically directs its limited resources toward the areas of greatest need and highest impact,” says Joe Morris, chief innovation officer of e.Republic, the parent company of CDG.

1. Assess Current Processes and Tools

The first step toward improving efficiency is not implementing a new tool. It’s gaining a clear understanding of how work is currently done. Begin by examining your organization’s existing processes and tools. Use process mapping to visualize how tasks are completed and to identify bottlenecks, redundancies, and inefficiencies. Just as importantly, engage employees at all levels to understand their day-to-day work and the challenges they encounter.

For example, one state government identified major inefficiencies when leaders analyzed their license and permit renewal processes. They realized annual renewals were not necessary for every kind of permit and updated requirements. The result was significantly less paperwork for both constituents and staff.

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“Process mapping is a part of future proofing,” says Takai. “Organizations should look at how their processes work on a continual basis, and should be flexible and open to change for the sake of being more effective.”

Leaders also need to understand technology systems and what issues they cause for staff.

According to a CDG survey conducted in collaboration with Amazon Web Services (AWS), more than 50% of state and local governments and nearly 40% of education institutions said the need to modernize outdated systems was driving their efficiency efforts.

Often, outdated systems can exacerbate or cause inefficiencies. For example, legacy tools might not “speak” to one another, making it difficult for staff to collect or share data across systems. In addition, older technologies might not easily integrate with newer tools like AI, which limits an organization’s ability to modernize. Different teams may also be using overlapping tools, resulting in unnecessary duplication and added costs.

“At AWS, we see digital transformation as a mindset that prioritizes user experience (UX) over administrative structures,” says Tami Fillyaw, finance, tax, and administration leader for AWS. “We’re seeing government customers embrace self-service options, omnichannel communications, and digital front doors that enable citizens to login securely through a single entry point to access multiple services.”

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2. Use AI and Automation

AI is already being used by SLED organizations to extend staff capacity and improve output without proportional increases in cost.

Organizations can use automation to reduce the time spent on high-volume, repetitive tasks. In public safety, for example, officers often devote significant time to writing reports after each incident. AI can assist by generating initial report drafts and routine documentation, allowing officers to spend more time on frontline responsibilities.

In health and human services, some caseworkers are using AI-based tools to search for relevant case law before providing recommendations to a client. “That research was taking up a significant amount of time for caseworkers,” says Takai. “Now they can devote more time to providing direct support to constituents.”

Some agencies are applying AI chatbots to improve internal, back-end operations. For example, a state procurement office partnered with a local university to develop an AI agent that responds to routine procurement questions from agency staff. The same team built a separate AI tool to review vendor contracts and flag potential inconsistencies, significantly reducing the time the legal department spends on contract review.

Agencies are also folding AI into their existing technologies and processes to accelerate data collection and analysis. For example, public works teams can use AI-enhanced IoT devices to identify where garbage has not been picked up. One city’s planning department is using AI to analyze zoning data to proactively identify any issues when constituents apply for permits.

AI use cases are seemingly endless for SLED organizations, but the primary goal of AI and automation in operational processes remains the same: These technologies help staff focus on high-level tasks that are most important to their organizations.



3. Enhance Constituent Experience through Efficiency

According to the CDG survey, two of the top ways state and local governments hope to enhance the constituent experience are expanding digital or self-service options and improving communication with the public.

To these ends, many agencies are implementing chatbots and virtual assistants to provide 24/7, personalized service to constituents without overwhelming government staff.

“The public wants and expects a digital-first approach to communication,” Fillyaw says. “Meeting customers where they are, whether that’s online, text, email, or phone, is a great first step to ensuring services are more accessible.”

In education, IT leaders are using similar tools to improve student-facing processes. In higher education, chatbots can answer enrollment questions from college applicants. Across all levels of education, school leaders are implementing virtual tutors that can answer questions and help students identify their knowledge gaps.

Whether applied to internal operations or constituent-facing services, efficiency tools can reduce staff workload while improving how the public experiences government and education services.

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4. Future-Proof with the Cloud

AI and other efficiency-driving tools require staff to deal with high volumes of data. IoT sensors used in transportation, for example, are constantly gathering and processing real-time data. In education, tools like student information systems contain a wealth of critical student information used for everything from grading to progress tracking to billing.

Cloud-based technologies help SLED organizations better manage these overwhelming amounts of data. By storing information in the cloud, organizations no longer need to rely on and manage the hardware of on-premises servers.

Cloud storage offers organizations a way to securely back up their information. Organizations can easily set up parameters for who can access data, allowing staff to receive the information they need whether they work in the office or at home.

Cloud tools also give institutions and agencies an affordable way to prepare for any changes in demand. “You don’t have to over-provision and buy the most expensive version of a tool to meet peak demand,” Fillyaw says. “Instead, you can scale needed resources and only pay for what you use.”

State and local government saw the value of scalability during COVID, when offices like unemployment agencies saw huge spikes in constituent demand. Similarly, education institutions can benefit from scalable tools to meet fluctuations in enrollment.

Ultimately, cloud-based technologies help prepare organizations for the unexpected. “Cloud tools allow you to scale more intelligently, whether you’re dealing with population growth or an unknown future federal requirement or a budget shock that you didn’t anticipate,” Morris says.



Best Practices

› Clearly articulate your plan for leadership.

The CDG survey showed that budget constraints are the top barrier for implementing efficiency initiatives for state and local government and education. Securing funding requires clearly defining the current challenge, explaining how a proposed technology addresses it, and demonstrating how the expected outcomes align with the organization's strategic priorities.

› Pilot, iterate, and scale.

It is impossible to address every government or education challenge at once. Start with a pilot that addresses a specific challenge. Use that success to increase buy-in from leadership and staff. Once you've proven the impact of your first efficiency initiative, you can move toward enterprise adoption.

› Find a trusted partner.

Overworked staff might not have the capacity to spearhead a new efficiency initiative. Consider working with a managed services team that can provide extra capacity. Work with a trusted partner that can guide your team through implementation and beyond.

Provide an opportunity for staff at all levels to safely test out any new technology.

› Never stop training.

Provide an opportunity for staff at all levels to safely test out any new technology. If you are implementing an AI tool, provide AI literacy and data management training. Tools like AI evolve rapidly, so make sure your team feels continuously supported and informed.

› Embrace change management.

People may have anxiety about the idea of increasing efficiency. Some might fear their jobs are at stake. To combat these concerns, make sure staff feel involved in the process from day one. Include them in any process mapping, and develop an implementation and training plan with them. If there are any public-facing changes, be sure to constantly get feedback from the local community.

A New Era of Trust for SLED

A more efficient, effective government and education system can ultimately improve the relationship between the organization and the public.

"When government or education entities can say they are doing more with taxpayer dollars, constituents appreciate that level of transparency," Takai says. "It is important for agencies to show they are using their limited funds to better serve constituents."

This kind of transparency can create a powerful connection between an organization and the public. "If you can improve program outcomes, speed up service delivery, and remove friction from processes," says Morris, "you're going to have a public that trusts you more."

*This piece was written and produced by the Government Technology Content Studio,
with information and input from AWS.*



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