Transforming
state government
with the cloud

Cloud technology can forever change state and local government (SLG) operations and service delivery, but approach is everything. As part of its 2023 Imagine Conference, Amazon Web Services (AWS) recognized the following three entities as SLG Champions for their transformative statewide influence through the cloud: the Georgia Data Analytics Center, Washington Technology Solutions, and the Massachusetts Executive Office of Technology Services and Security. Here are their stories.

Georgia Data Analytics Center

In just two years, the Georgia Data Analytics Center (GDAC) has revolutionized how Georgia state government engages with data.

Established by the state legislature, GDAC serves as a central data repository for the state. With governed data access, the center answers critical questions for agencies, executive leaders, and legislators.

During the pandemic, the center provided a monitoring dashboard for COVID relief funds. When the governor wanted to give a raise to all frontline workers, GDAC quickly pulled employee counts for budget estimates. And when the department of human services needed to identify who should receive summer pandemic EBT cards, the center analyzed multiple datasets to assist with eligibility determination.

GDAC has become a go-to entity for data-driven decision making, says Kanti Chalasani, GDAC division director.

"Our plate is full because of what we have delivered," she says. "Agencies are coming to us and saying, 'We have been trying to do this for years. Can you help us solve this?'"

The rapid growth of GDAC's impact would not have been possible without the cloud, according to Chalasani. In mid-2021, the center started moving to an AWS production environment. By October 2021, the center had migrated to a fully secured cloud.

"With agency data that spans decades, the amount of compute and processing needed is tremendous," Chalasani says. "Cloud is the only reason we have covered so much ground in two years."

Agencies are gradually onboarding to the same cloud. Thanks to the directives of state leadership and GDAC's success, there is tremendous cloud momentum in Georgia, Chalasani says.

The key to such broad transformation is starting with small use cases and establishing a data governance committee, which should be made up of agency leaders. Chalasani says the data system should be implemented and expanded in multiple iterations.

"You fail fast, you learn fast, you get stronger, and for the next iteration, you get even better," she says.

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Washington Technology Solutions

In a state where each agency has its own IT team and CIO, Washington Technology Solutions (WaTech) must demonstrate the economic and practical value of their discretionary services to attract government customers.

WaTech's telephony section has used the AWS Cloud to push forward that value proposition.

In late 2022, the Washington State Department of Licensing (DOL) reached out for help with updating its interactive voice response system by the end of June 2023, says WaTech enterprise architect Ted Carroll. The organization partnered with a provider recommended by AWS to completely modernize DOL's call reporting capabilities.

"We were able to reduce what DOL was spending significantly, and they were able to take that money and put it into further modernization efforts," Carroll says.

With its new cloud-based system, DOL can now do more with less. WaTech envisions that DOL will be able to increase the self-service rate of constituents to 25% to 40% of calls, which will free up contact center agents and lead to better service for callers.

This success story has caught the attention of other agencies. DOL is one of the bigger state agencies, and with the completion of its project, it's clear WaTech can help any agency with similarly large initiatives.

This is especially important given that Washington has a cloud-first mandate.

"The DOL project shows the agencies that for very little expense they can move their applications from on-premises to the cloud and improve services," Carroll says.

In a state with a federated IT model, this type of movement to the cloud can only occur through strategic outreach. While WaTech's director talks to agency CIOs, the WaTech telephony team speaks to business people and boots on the ground.

The unified message goes like this: Moving to the cloud isn't as hard as it looks, and WaTech has the in-house knowledge to make it happen.

"We have over 40 customers who are looking to modernize in the next year or two," Carroll says.

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Massachusetts Executive Office of Technology Services and Security

Massachusetts started its cloud journey in the mid-2010s. Five closed data centers and hundreds of migrated applications later, the state is recognized as a national leader.

And Massachusetts still has more work to do, says Bill Cole, chief technology officer with the Executive Office of Technology Services and Security (EOTSS). More applications need to be moved, and there are opportunities to further modernize applications that are now in the AWS Cloud.

EOTSS has become remarkably quick at serving state agencies and constituents. Applications can be upgraded and deployed rapidly. During the pandemic, EOTSS created a secure environment for data sharing between state and private labs in four hours.

"Without the cloud, that's something that would have taken months and months of procurement and trying to decide what we would deploy," Cole says.

This agility has transformed the relationship between EOTSS and state business units.

"Before, business would sometimes think of IT after the fact," Cole says. "Now they see that we can deliver at a rapid pace, so they work with us much more closely."

For organizations starting their own cloud journey, recommends picking a project — preferably one that doesn't involve sensitive data — and getting started immediately. It's important to avoid analysis paralysis.

Selecting champions in the organization who are excited about the technology is also key. There can be a lot of pushback at the beginning of a cloud journey, so easing people's concerns and explaining how the technology can make their jobs better goes a long way.

Cole has personally relished the chance to silence some doubters.

"I once met with local respected IT people to review Massachusetts' plan to move to the cloud," he says. "I got a few chuckles from some of them. They said, 'You're never going to accomplish that in state government with all the processes you have in place.' But we did, and then some."

Massachusetts is recognized as a national leader in embracing the cloud. But it still has work to do.

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