



Managing for Innovation in Government: How Government Leaders Pave the Way to Innovation

Often, the biggest obstacles to technological innovation in government are not bugs and glitches, but the less clear-cut challenges of opening hearts, minds and wallets. Champions of innovation need to convince leadership of the need for improvement, create a plan to test it and procure funding to get it off the ground. They also need to define success, be ready to change the definition if necessary and create a way to measure progress.

“You need the right people in the right place with the right mindset,” says Alan Shark, CEO of the Public Technology Institute.

During an upcoming webinar, Shark will interview a pair of government technology executives who have successfully met these challenges. David Shive, chief information officer of the General Services Administration, and Barbie Robinson, director of health services for Sonoma County, Calif., will discuss the implementation of innovations including AI, blockchain, IoT, the hybrid cloud and data analytics. Robinson recently led the development of an app to help Sonoma County employees screen themselves for COVID risk before going to the workplace.

“As the government leverages emerging technologies for both COVID and longer-term

transformations we wanted to initiate a discussion of what it takes for people to truly innovate. What stories can be told about successful leaders who are leveraging this emerging technology suite and taking their agencies forward, and how do those lessons translate across the government to others who want to follow in their footsteps?” says Daniel J. Chenok, executive director of the IBM Center for the Business of Government and an organizer of the session.

The Center has commissioned a report entitled “Innovation and Emerging Technologies in Government: Keys to Success,” to explore these issues and selected Shark to author it. He will offer a preview of the report at the event and offer a list of essential elements for any successful government technology venture that he developed over a series of more than 10 interviews with executives at local, state and six federal agencies.

The need for technology innovation is certainly there, Shark says. Government agencies face a significant challenge coping with the amount of data they and their constituents produce, and the need to make sense of it. Emerging tools are ready to help. There has also been increased pressure to improve the constituent experience as more functions and services take place online, which presents another major opportunity for innovation.

During his interviews, Shark learned about how several federal agencies, including the [General Services Administration](#), operate a technology investment program that works much like venture capital firms in the private sector, while others operate like innovation incubators as found at USAID and the Census Bureau. These programs allow innovators to start small, offering seed funding for pilot and demonstration projects with stage gating and other management techniques that test an idea’s viability before full planning and implementation and allow it to expand as it matures.

“There is this network of innovation going on; People don’t often think of government as a place for innovation and risk, but the opportunities are there.”

— Alan Shark,
CEO of the Public Technology Institute