Transforming Government to a Post COVID-19 World
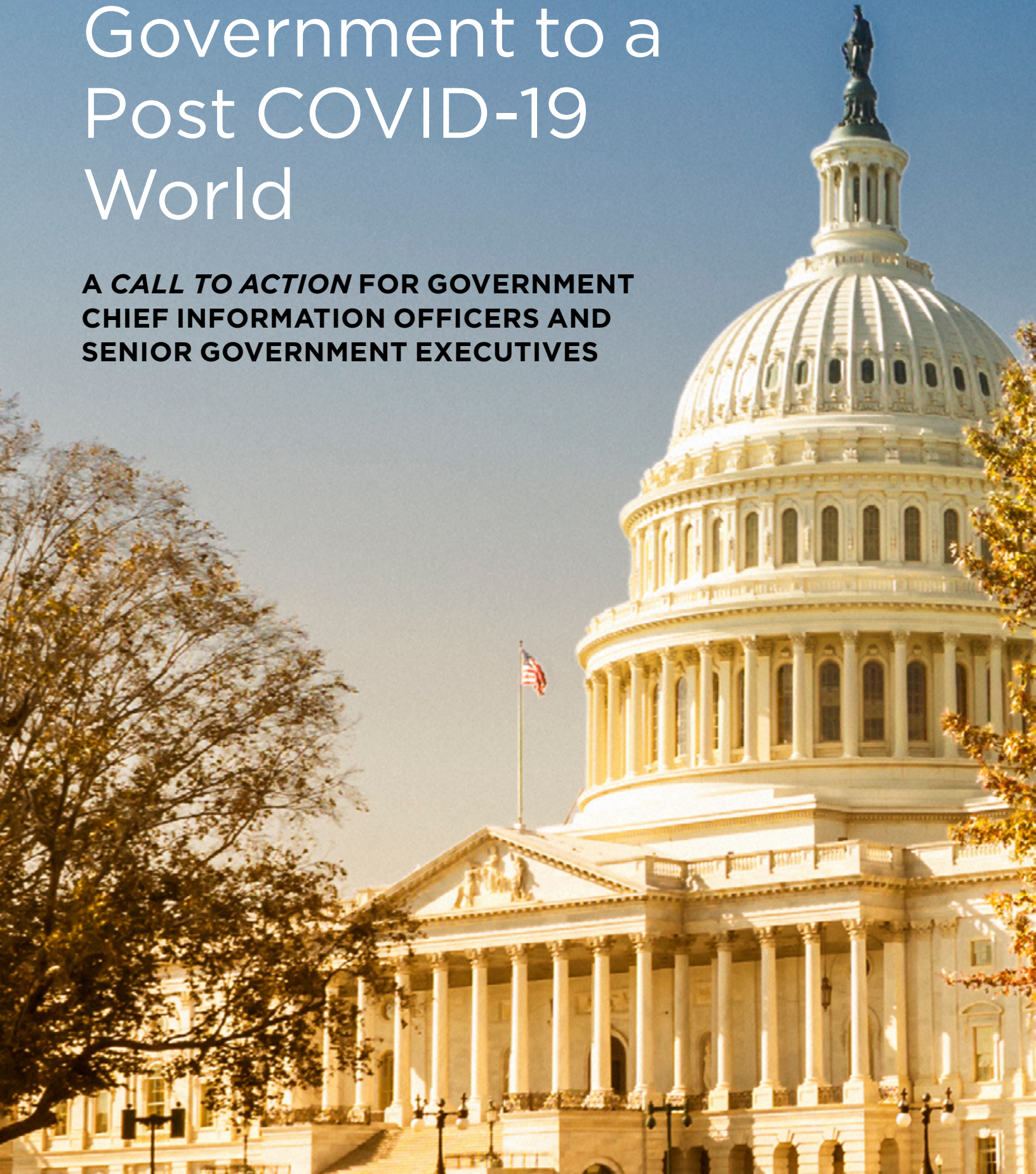
A *CALL TO ACTION* FOR GOVERNMENT CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICERS AND SENIOR GOVERNMENT EXECUTIVES

ABSTRACT

This paper identifies actions that government Chief Information Officers and Senior Executives should embrace to provide improved government operations and services in a Post COVID-19 world.

This paper was written by former Federal Chief Information Officers (CIOs), Alan Balutis, Mark Forman, John Gilligan, Dan Mintz, and Gloria Parker. The authors have extensive experience in government and industry regarding how government must evolve with technology trends.

The authors are also members of the Partnership for Public Service's Strategic Advisors to Government Executives (SAGE) community of Chief Information Officers.

The Partnership for Public Service is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that works to revitalize the federal government by inspiring a new generation to serve and by transforming the way government works. The Partnership teams up with federal agencies and other stakeholders to make our government more effective and efficient.

The Strategic Advisors to Government Executives network is a Partnership program comprised of more than 120 former political and career executives who continue their commitment to public service by supporting current government leaders. By sharing their extensive experience and expertise, SAGEs help senior executives create and manage a more effective and efficient government. Spread across five communities of practice—Chief Acquisition Officers, Chief Financial Officers, Chief Human Capital Officers, Chief Information Officers and Chief Operating Officers—SAGEs have deep expertise in many critical areas. They lend their knowledge and insights to help senior leaders navigate the complex federal environment and the political, management, legal and fiduciary demands of their positions.

THE NEW REALITY

A RARE OPPORTUNITY FOR MEANINGFUL CHANGE

The future has been changed for us—permanently. Government employees will not need nor want to sit in traffic for hours, commute for hours, or pay for transportation to and from work. They will quickly become accustomed to handling work and personal needs on their own schedule as long as they can complete their work and meet performance expectations. Citizens will expect that government services will be increasingly available to them online—anytime from anywhere.

Government executives will accelerate the shift to focusing on outcomes rather than what hours during the day their staffs work, as long as the tasks are completed by the due date at acceptable or above established standards. This requires a different way of thinking for many managers. Managers must focus on workloads, outcomes, cost savings, customer satisfaction, employee morale, skills, etc.—not on supervising adult daily activities.

Other benefits from the virtualization of workplaces resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic are diminished pollution, increased worker productivity, less employee time off from work, and reduced resource requirements including space, furniture, facilities, and other. These positive changes can be leveraged to improve government organization efficiency and the wellbeing of the public. But, this is not automatic. Government executives will need to understand and embrace these changes.

Government organizations must change to take advantage of the opportunities in the Post COVID-19 future. Most importantly, how government manages information and effectively leverages information technology will have a major impact on the ability of government organizations to emerge from the pandemic with improved services to citizens and a more motivated and engaged government workforce. The paragraphs below summarize a *Call to Action* for government Chief Information Officers (CIOs) and Senior Government Executives. The opportunity for rapid and meaningful change is now.

Government leaders must embrace the fact that the future will be very different than the past; it is not possible to go back to "normal". The near term need for many government employees to operate virtually, as well as the longer-term implications on how government work gets done, will result in lasting changes. This provides a unique opportunity to leverage information technology, not just to support current virtual operations, but to help effect fundamental changes in how government operates. CIOs and Senior Government Executives must take advantage of this unique opportunity to lead government organizations to the new and better future for government workers and the public.

Studies[1,2] have shown that as a result of the pandemic, organizations and employees are more flexible to change. This is particularly meaningful for government organizations where effecting change in large government bureaucracies has been especially difficult. Now that we have "broken" old patterns and practices, there is an opportunity to implement long overdue changes by rapidly leveraging technology to modernize government processes.

Moreover, a range of technology advancements including commercial 'as a service' offerings, cloud-based operations, improved information sharing and analysis tools, 5G networks, cybersecurity, and high speed connectivity to most homes provide the technological underpinnings at scale needed to rapidly implement fundamental changes in government processes and to provide the tools needed by government workers. The new environment provides flexibility of most government employees to work from anywhere they wish – not just in the dozen or so high cost of living areas of the current major federal government office buildings – opening up the ability to broaden government recruiting sources. In addition, reduced cost of fixed office space and the fact that most employees are more productive working from home will result in enormous efficiencies if managed effectively. In short, the next set of months makes this one of the most exciting opportunities in many generations for government mangers.

Employees like working from home, at least most of the time, and neither they nor the agencies where they work benefited from unproductive hours lost daily while commuting in the pre-pandemic era. Government managers should leverage the enthusiasm of government workers for this added flexibility and motivate employees to become excited and actively engage in helping to design and implement changes that the organization needs to be more efficient and provide better services to citizens.

1 COVID-19 and the future of business, IBM Institute for Business Value, October 2020, https://www.ibm.com/thought-leadership/institute-business-value/report/covid-19-future-business#
2 The Federal Agency Response to the War on COVID-19, SAIC, October 20, 2020, https://www.saic.com/sites/default/files/2020-10/21-0671-COVID19-Survey_whitepaper_v2.pdf

CHANGING MANAGEMENT PRIORITIES

A NEW RELATIONSHIP WITH THE GOVERNMENT WORKFORCE

Senior government managers have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to leverage the changes brought about by the pandemic to focus on enhancing service to citizens, program outcomes, cost savings, and organization productivity. Current management priorities and practices will need to change.

An essential near-term priority is to explain the new vision to the government workforce. Communications sessions with senior government managers must explain the new service and management models and obtain buy-in for the vision. This communication should also establish the necessary sense of urgency for the envisioned transformation. These initial sessions should be organized and led by members of the President's Management Council in conjunction with the various CXO Councils. Subsequent department and agency communications and training efforts should quickly follow.

A significant near-term cost savings can be achieved by re-assessing physical space requirements. Senior managers should quickly phase out physical space in conjunction with the transition to a new virtual work model and repurpose the resultant savings and cost avoidances. This should be true both of government-owned as well as leased space.

Conversely, government organizations will need to Increase budgets for the technology needed to transform operations, including equipment and software needed to support seamless and robust virtual operations, including cybersecurity protection capabilities. Government organizations should "mine" government best practices from the pandemic shut-down period as well as those from private sector firms that operate in a virtual environment and have dramatically enhanced online services.

Employees will need performance plans with goals and outcomes that can be measured and evaluated in the new operating environment. Managing is about communicating effectively with employees and ensuring that they understand the outcomes expected, both supervisors and employees will likely require updated training and guidance to succeed in this new work environment.

Policies on what jobs are conducive to telework should be re-evaluated based on the insights gained during the pandemic shutdown. Telework was dramatically expanded and even employees in the defense, security and intelligence areas were able to perform their duties remotely. Upgraded IT infrastructures and new privacy and security tools have demonstrated that telework can be expanded to more of the government workforce. Appendix B provides additional suggestions for revising workforce policies.

LEVERAGING INFORMATION AND IT

Government CIOs, working with other government executives, should identify areas where modern information technology can improve mission-related services. Specifically, government organizations will need to rapidly identify priorities for changing fundamental process as well as updates to existing systems or new IT systems that will improve service to citizens leveraging online delivery of services with primary emphasis on improving customer experience. The IDEA Act provides opportunity to focus on user experience first in developing IT solutions.

In parallel, CIOs should identify the infrastructure and technologies needed to support virtual delivery of products and services. A new way of thinking is required here. With organization employees working virtually from anywhere in the world and citizens and customers expecting intuitive and easy virtual access to almost all government-provided services, there will be a need to turn to radically different models for government IT infrastructures. Fortunately, many large corporations have already moved forward with solutions applicable to government organizations. The CIO Council should convene a session with such firms to capture their insights.

Appendix A provides a brief playbook on how to leverage authorities and processes to fund technology-based improvements. OMB Circular A-11 as well as the Technology Modernization Fund review the technology budget for needed equipment to provide to teleworkers to enable them to perform the same work as if they were in a government office with similar technological and managements practices in place to insure data privacy and security. Appendix C contains additional suggestions on how to approach leveraging information and information technologies.

A VISION OF THE POST COVID-19 WORLD

The future state for government can and should be dramatically different than what we have experienced in the past. In this future, government employees are proactively engaged and highly motivated not only because of the unique and essential missions of government, but because of expanded development opportunities, a flexible work environment, clear performance objectives tied to mission objectives, and a sense of truly making the lives of citizens better. In this vision, government organizations will provide better and more cost effective services to citizens leveraging modern technologies, flexible service delivery models, and harvesting the cost efficiencies of a reduced physical footprint. Finally, government workers, like their counterparts in progressive companies, will have the benefit of modern information systems and information technology that takes advantage of commercially-driven advances in modern business applications and shared services, cloud computing, and secure computing as well technological advances provided by 5G, artificial intelligence, internet of things, and other technologies specific to individual government organizations.

In short, the vision for the Post COVID-19 world is a dramatically transformed government with real and significant benefits for citizens as well as government employees. The task of government leadership to guide government to this vision is not an easy one, but it is a necessary one. The time for transforming government operations has never been better or more necessary. The challenge before senior government executives in partnership with Chief Information Officers is to provide the leadership necessary to achieve this vision.

APPENDICES

Appendix A
Playbook on Funding Government Transformation

A. Authorities – A-11, 20th Century Integrated Digital Experience Act (IDEA) Act:
   a. OMB A-11 Guidance focuses on implementing policy and laws via budget decisions and requires agencies' funding request to focus on customer experience and outcomes
   b. 2021 A-11 contains unique guidance on laws and policies each requiring identification and funding of transformation initiatives, including:
      i. Agency strategic information resources management plans fully aligned with the current Agency Strategic Plan and Annual Performance Plan Reviews, required by the GPRA Modernization Act, to determine if there are any performance gaps or changes to mission needs, priorities, or goals
      ii. Agencies should identify where they are making investments and performing activities in support of FITARA, Evidence Based Policymaking, DATA Act
   c. Pathways to funding all tie to better outcomes:
      i. Understanding costs and potential savings using Technology Business Management
      ii. Traditional Ex. 300 business cases for Agency and Cross-Agency Priority Goals/President's Management Agenda, including Cloud Smart Strategy
      iii. Data Act and Data Action Plan
      iv. Evidence-based Policy Making Program-level "Learning Agenda" Initiatives
      v. User Experience and 21st Century Integrated Digital Experience Act (IDEA) Implementation
   d. Specific IDEA implementation considerations: ***CX and Service Delivery Improvement:***
      i. Describing the initiatives underway or planned to improve the program's service delivery. This should include how the agency is integrating CX activities with the 21st Century Integrated Digital Experience Act (IDEA) initiatives
      ii. When rationalizing, modernizing, or digitizing websites, forms, and services, High Impact Service Providers (HISP) take priority (specific programs/agencies are designated as HISPs at www. performance.gov

B. Making the Business Case-Capital Planning:
   a. Agencies receive funding for investments needed to achieve an Agency Priority Goal (APG):
      i. Successful APGs address a problem, have a set completion date, a target, and an indicator. The format of APG goal statements will generally include two sentences, and written in a narrative form: an impact statement that describes the broader outcome or problem/opportunity being addressed by the goal; and an achievement statement that clearly reflects what the agency wants to achieve. The achievement statement will start with "By September 30..." followed by a quantitative target
      ii. A quantitative target within a goal statement (e.g., how much of what by when, possibly narrowing by indicating where and/or for whom) is strongly encouraged in OMB A-11 to focus the organization on specific actions needed to achieve the goal. However, alternative form or qualitative goal statements may be appropriate in certain cases
   b. Mission focus of IT spending:
      i. An agency's IT investment management and reporting of IT investments ***must clearly demonstrate that each investment is needed to help meet the agency's strategic goals and mission*** and show how governance processes are used to plan, select, develop, implement, and operate those IT investments
      ii. Furthermore, each IT investment should demonstrate the ***enabling and improvement of mission and program performance by providing meaningful data.*** Agencies demonstrate the IT investment requirements and governance processes through Agency Major IT Business Cases, supporting documentation, strategic information resources management plans, and Agency IT Portfolio Summary submissions
      iii. ***The agency must further demonstrate how the investment supports a business line or enterprise service performance goal as documented in the agency's enterprise architecture or strategic plans***. In particular, investments should ***indicate when they include spending on geospatial-related costs***
      iv. Documents used to manage the planning, development, implementation, and operation of IT investments and documents that demonstrate the outcomes of agency, branch, and bureau governance decisions should be maintained and made readily available if requested by OMB
      v. Agency strategic planning should incorporate the requirement for regular software and product lifecycle refresh

Appendix B
New Human Capital Management Policies

In the new normal, Human Resources, i.e., people, are key to the success. Entities including the government, as well as many corporations have been doing things a certain way for many years and change is difficult for most. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has forced change suddenly, and without much time to prepare upfront. Minds have to change and that is a very difficult thing for many people.

There are many areas that are impacted heavily. Human Resources and Technology are two areas of business that must seek new tools and techniques, as well as new policies and procedures in order to keep pace with the "disruptive" but permanent changes that are being forced on the world of business.

Let's examine some of the government policies that must be addressed in each.

Human Capital Management

- Performance plans should be outcome based with metrics that align with organization goals. In order for employees to work towards real measurable goals and objectives and to be evaluated objectively while not being visually supervised, performance plans must be written in a measurable format such that an employee knows exactly what they must achieve. Managers and supervisors have to get away from process-focused, subjective plans to outcome-based, objective plans. With outcome-based plans, an employee requires much less supervision and they can form their own hours to complete the work as long as it is completed on time and at a level satisfactory to the agreed upon plan

- Employee training must address performance planning methodologies for both managers and employees. Both managers and employees must be trained on how to develop and implement objective performance plans. This way of planning and implementing performance standards are new to most employees and managers. Success depends on clear communication and execution.

- All employees should have new development and training plans put in place that meet the new culture, new ways of development, new jobs, new technologies, and new aspirations in the new world. In addition to the performance planning changes, personnel development plans must also be reconsidered and re-developed. For example, some of the activities normally included in a development plan such as job-shadowing, details, and classroom training may have to be re-thought and other activities planned to achieve the same goals.

Data Management and Data Sharing

- Revise policies on data management to include how data created and used remotely must be managed and maintained. Policies exist today that stipulate how data can be used and created remotely, particularly in regard to security measures. Data classifications are critical in government because of classified versus unclassified data. In the current environment, careful consideration is given to securing information when an employee is creating or using it from home. We all remember the issues with government data being placed and created on personal servers and accessed on personal computers. These issues and policies will need to be reviewed and new policies put in place to ensure the safety of the data while allowing the flexibility of the work location.

- Introduce tools to support widespread collaboration and meetings; these must be easy to use, include security capabilities, and support teamwork remotely. While working remotely, employees will need to continue to meet with co-workers, colleagues, and their teams so collaboration tools will not only have to be made available, but because the collaborations will be across agencies, they will have to be interoperable and compatible with other technology tools in place.

- Establish security policies for sharing data at every level of classification. As mentioned above, new security policies will need to be put in place to address the sharing of data, tools being used, and location of data and people accessing and creating that data across the different classifications of data: classified versus unclassified.

- Determine how classified data will be used, shared, and maintained – SCIFs, remote office space strategically placed, highly secured networks, VPNs, direct secured lines, etc. In order to achieve the security requirements of the data, policies must be considered as to how data will be shared and maintained.

Telework

- New policies have to reflect implementation considerations. For example, data protection, collaboration, KM approaches and policies should be integrated with policy and workflow engines in networking/cloud/mission support tools. Policies often are created because they seem valuable or address audit concerns, but they are of little value if they cannot be implemented or impede operations so much that people are doing workarounds. It seems that new workarounds resulting from employees/agencies adjusting to the COVID-19 environment should be reviewed and the best practices should be adopted via policy.

- Review policies that reflect telework as a privilege or reward; consider that telework is a way of working and is not a privilege to be awarded to a few. The first assumption should be that a position is eligible for telework unless

there are strong reasons not to, as opposed to the often-current approach of the reverse.

- ○ Determine which jobs (not which employees) are conducive to telework
- ○ If a job is conducive to telework, make it a permanent telework situation – not 2 or 3 days per week

- Make it a policy to have regularly scheduled team or unit meetings via videoconference to keep the team connected. Employees must always feel a connection to their co-workers so communication via videoconferencing, newsletters, regularly scheduled team meetings become extremely important since the hallway and desk or cafeteria meetings are no longer daily options. Social media also becomes very important for communicating with teams as well as other innovative measures and tools.

Appendix C
Identifying and Implementing IT Enabled Improvements

The impacts of COVID-19 on the Federal workplace have shown that it is possible to implement significant changes in areas that normally would not have been approved in a timely fashion, if at all. This provides momentum to consider and implement additional improvements if these are carefully considered and executed. While the recommendations below build on the opportunities that now present themselves, some of the steps described below also represent best practices for any project.

Identify potential organization-wide improvements

Your first step will be to select a small set of potential initiatives. Obtaining approval to move forward will be enhanced if senior management is able to quickly understand what is being proposed and can understand how it relates to organizational mission. For example, some initiatives may address policy requirements that OMB is focused on, and/or removal of barriers which are making it difficult for the organization to be successful.

Some more specific steps include identifying:

- The key missions/objectives of the organization – what is it that your organization does that makes it unique and valuable; place these missions/objectives in priority order. Examples could be the following:

  - ○ Specific citizen service(s)
  - ○ Specific essential government service(s)

- **What initiatives or potential initiatives that may or soon may be desired based on the most recent update of the A-11 Circular guidance. In general, being able to respond to multiple policy initiatives with a single effort makes it more likely to obtain senior leadership support.**

- Opportunities to remove obstacles and implement changes. Examples might include:

- ○ Reengineer or augment key systems
- ○ Transform or eliminate antiquated IT policies or processes
- ○ Embrace BYOD with appropriate security
- ○ Revamp or eliminate outdated processes (e.g., approval delegation rules)
- ○ Improve/reengineer workforce skills
- ○ Revamp information sharing protocols/processes (or perhaps reduce the need for or amount of sensitive/classified data)

Socialize and develop implementation plans

It is important to maximize support vertically tied to senior leadership, and horizontally, by setting up a governance structure that involves recognized representatives from stakeholders who may try to slow or prevent the changes implied by the proposed IT projects.

Engage appropriate organization leadership to gain approval, as appropriate, for implanting the planned efforts:

- Develop a high level implementation strategy for each high priority effort.

- Develop a "marketing plan" to explain ideas to senior management and ultimately to organization employees (answer the following questions: what will change, how will this benefit the organization and employees, what will it take)

It takes significant effort to identify and reach out to stakeholders that may be in a position to delay or prevent the implementation of IT projects that have at least nominally been approved. At a minimum, stakeholders want to feel that they issues were listened to and taken into account.

Incrementally roll out efforts building momentum over time

Projects that are either small enough in size to be able to understand, manage, and implement; or can be broken into small enough components to achieve the same goal are often more likely to be successful. The larger the project the more difficult keeping track of all of the moving parts.

By taking advantage of "quick wins" you will provide confidence and momentum for additional efforts.

In addition:

- Keep track of expected and actual benefits (better quality or responsiveness to customers, improved productivity, cost reduction, employee engagement)

- Be open to the need to modify the approach using agile techniques (monitor/assess incremental progress and adjust as needed)