

Mr. Ron Thornburgh

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I appreciate the question, Congressman Berg, and I have two answers for how I would get agencies to use technology more creatively to deliver value to constituents if I were king for a day.

The first answer is that agencies tend to think creatively and pursue unique solutions when they have an urgent business need of some kind and limited or no resources with which to deliver results, so I would recommend that more burning issues that required immediate solutions be created.

We have worked on thousands of projects with federal, state, and local government agencies that were compelled to seek ways to deploy a digital solution because a solution had to be implemented, time was of the essence, and both staff and dollars were in short supply. A recent example of this was in the U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration. FMCSA had a strong business need to build a solution that allowed motor carrier companies and individual drivers to quickly check driving and safety records as part of the hiring process. The offline alternative was paper-based and turnaround time often took weeks or months. FMCSA also did not have available personnel or money to build this service, so they engaged NIC to develop the service under the self-funded model I referenced previously. The end result is the very successful Pre-Employment Screening Program service that launched last July and delivers driver history reports in about one minute. More than 250,000 driver history report requests have been processed so far, the service has a 97% satisfaction rating, and the development of the application as well as ongoing maintenance, enhancements, and customer service have not cost FMCSA a penny.

My second answer is that there are a few important elements — incentives, if you will — that should be in place in order to encourage agencies to work together. Agencies should voluntarily participate, because mandates usually create internal resistance that could potentially derail or significantly slow down progress on any project. Presenting clear wins is a must, and these wins could take many forms — including financial models that show the projected cost savings of a project as well as efficiency projections that demonstrate how a new digital process will reduce personal touches to a point where employees can be redeployed to other high priority initiatives in the queue. And finally, it helps to have a neutral party bring agencies to the table so one group's agenda does not dominate. NIC frequently serves in this role, and I believe we have been successful at encouraging agencies to participate in shared technology projects because our only priority is to develop a great solution that makes each agency perform better. That's a hard position to oppose. So if I were king for a day, I would make participation voluntary, present a compelling business case that is relevant to each agency, and ensure that a neutral party is leading the process and helping to mediate any conflicts.