Deputy CIO Pushes for Long-Term Approach to IT Modernization

Cloud-based environments and capabilities have been a key part of Maria Roat's approach.

Melissa Harris
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Deputy Federal CIO Maria Roat is looking for continuous long-term modernization of government agencies in a way that leverages data, security and Agile processes effectively, and cloud capabilities are helping agencies achieve that goal.
Although the government has seen a variety of cloud-based strategies, from Cloud First to Cloud Smart, Roat highlighted during GovernmentCIO Media & Research’s Cloud Summit Thursday that the ongoing push for strategic cloud adoption is critical for the long run in supporting government modernization and mission.

Of all the benefits that cloud capabilities bring to agencies, Roat said that the scalability and iterative build-up of infrastructure that the cloud offers makes for effective modernization.

“As you’re modernizing your systems, moving to the cloud, using [software-as-a-service] solutions, maybe not building from the ground up, sitting there coding, building out using microservices and containers, so that you can very quickly modernize pieces and parts, or reuse capabilities,” Roat said. “When you’re talking about microservices, and I think this is where the cloud comes in, it allows you to do just that, and it really gives you a lot of benefits.”

Roat touted the Modernizing Government Technology Act, agencies’ development of IT working capital funds and the work around the Federal Data Strategy as some of the key components driving forward modernization initiatives. Cloud environments can help the government use the strategies and funding to unlock faster, better potential of data assets, data-sharing and overall speed of government service delivery.

“There’s been some really good proof points across the mission spaces, and how we can use data and technology in new ways and in better ways is we’re looking to sharing,” Roat added. “There’s still a need, I think, for a faster path to maturing data-sharing, especially where data’s frequently updated and incorporated into decision-making models. How do we leverage the cloud? How do we leverage the technology? ... How do we access the data where it lives, or if it’s in the cloud or wherever it’s in, to really help use that data to drive decision-making?”

For the Federal Data Strategy, Roat said that several agencies have done significant work in migrating data to their cloud and have been able to mature federal agencies’ management and usage of data as a result. In 2021, Roat intends to “continue bringing everybody up” in that maturity so that all agencies can effectively use data.
With long-term modernization being largely cloud dependent right now, Roat also touched upon the role of zero trust security moving forward, which will ensure safer usage of cloud assets as federal agencies continue moving to a more digital environment.

“We’re in a digital environment, and I think things like zero trust, as we migrate to the cloud, building out that zero trust — what is that path toward zero trust and that it’s through every layer of your stack?” Roat said. “It’s just not one thing, but building in security into everything we’re doing, I think, is critically important, and taking advantage of these capabilities really helps our employees and how we serve up the public as well.”

The breadth of efforts that Roat touched upon ultimately fuel her goal to break down barriers to modernization. While advances in data management, security and cloud capabilities comprise her vision, she emphasized that each contribute to a sustainable and long-term approach to IT transformation across the federal government.

“A lot of the barriers got out of the way, some of the bureaucracy and things like that,” Roat said. “I want to see that continue in 2021. I really want to see the modernization, that sustained, long-term modernization. I want to see all of those kinds of things continue.”

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data
Zero Trust
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