

Interoperability a Major Goal in Data Strategies

The Department of Veterans Affairs describes data as a "superpower" unlocked by thoughtful data governance.

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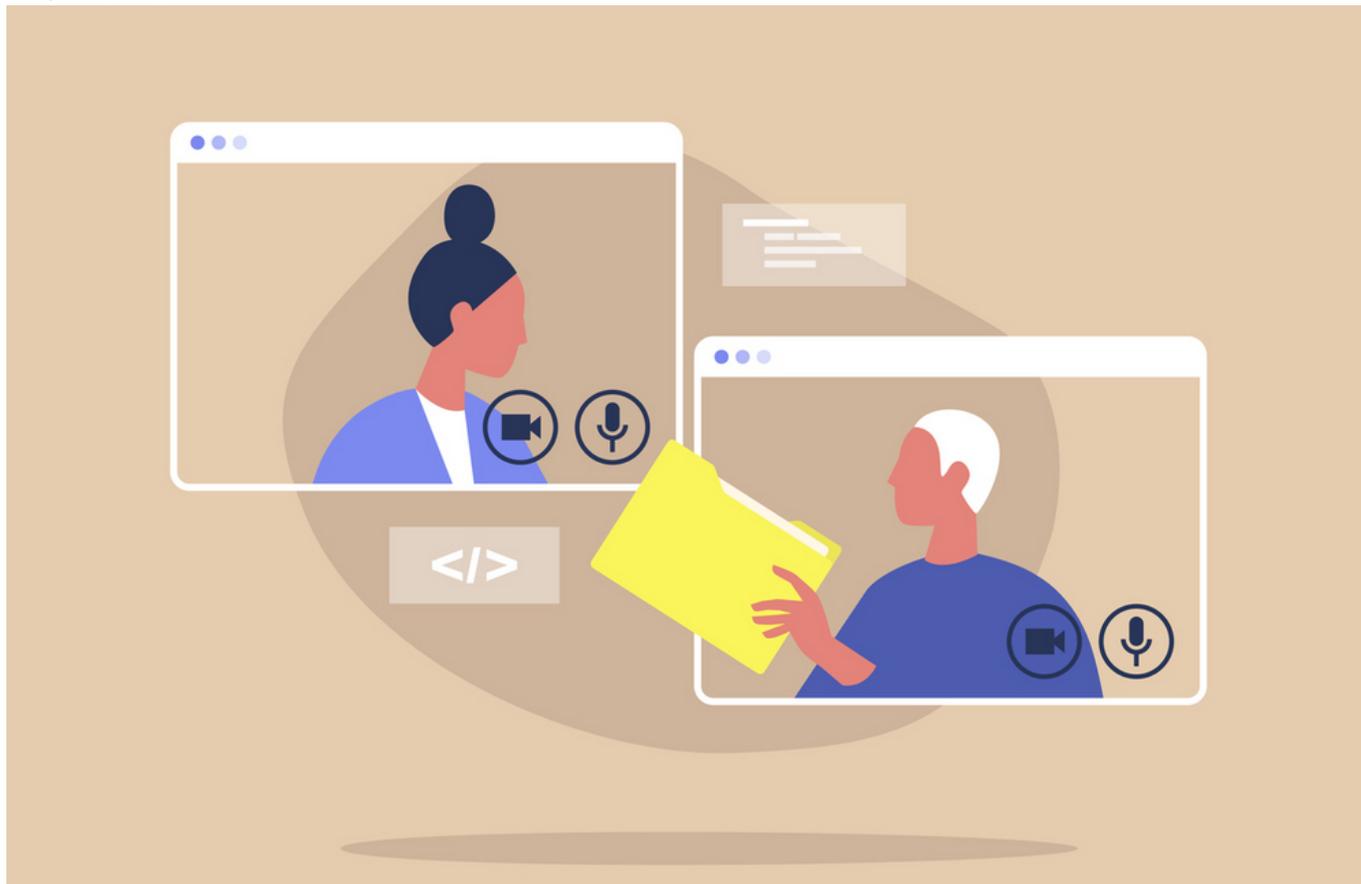


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Federal chief data officers are aiming for data interoperability as a major goal for their agencies' data strategies in 2021.

Interoperability is especially key for large agencies that have multiple sub agencies. Because the Department of Homeland Security collects so much data across its components, implementing a cohesive data governance model that eases data-sharing between the components is critical to fulfilling its mission.

“DHS has established a model that is more descriptive than prescriptive — meaning, this model is not forcing the CDOs of the components to implement actions around data management, but more a descriptive model where CDOs are sharing info about their initiatives that are impacting the mission,” DHS Acting CDO Carlene Iletto said during ACT-IAC’s Data Driven Forum last week.

DHS’ domain approach to data helps the agency ensure accuracy, quality and reliability. By dividing all its data into 10 domains, Iletto said, the agency facilitates interoperability and regulatory compliance. Some of these domains address immigration data, child trafficking, biometrics, cybersecurity and emergency preparedness management.

“I would say our biggest accomplishment is effective data governance and the many domains for data management,” Iletto said. “We are in the process of a policy that will help us to address external and internal efforts of making sure data is available or accessible for other domains. Data-sharing agreements are critical to the department's ability to provide data internally and externally.”

Ron Thompson, CDO and acting CIO for transformation and data at NASA, said the agency is focused on integrating data analytics and data platform service to ensure interoperability.

“We're bringing an anthology online so we can describe things in a common way. We're making sure we tag information,” he said during the forum. “It's really an interoperability layer where we have standards, not only standards on how we share it, how we define it, but also metadata standards. We do collect huge amounts of observation data, and we do need to put those into a catalog that's purpose built. [We need to] take that best-of-class, purpose-built enclaves and bring them up so we can link multiple data sets together to answer unknown questions [and offer] that accessibility across the agency internally.”

Lisette Montalvo, data manager and Data Governance Council secretariat at the Department of Veterans Affairs, described data as the VA’s “superpower” — but only if it’s usable.

“What good is data if we do not trust it or if it's not reliable or we can't use it?” she said during the forum. “Data is the VA's superpower. The data strategy is the tool we're using to unlock that power.”

Ileto went a step further: data governance and deploying a thoughtful data strategy not only boosts agency productivity, but also ensures the mission doesn't suffer for want of reliable data.

“Data governance is all about data quality and reliability,” she said. “It establishes rules and policies and procedures that ensure data accuracy and reliability, usability compliance. Effective data governance ensures that data is consistent and trustworthy and used appropriately.”

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