Local Government IT and ARPA Funding:

ELEVATING THE ROLE OF THE IT ORGANIZATION

It is crucial the IT executive is present at the decision-making table to ensure that the voice of IT is heard and considered as your organization begins planning for ARPA-funded projects.

The federal government's 2021 American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) provides $350 billion in funding to America's state and local governments. IT operational expenditures should see a positive impact as IT continues to implement and support cybersecurity, remote work, virtual citizen services, and projects or initiatives that have a tech component implemented by other agencies and departments.

While some local governments are well into the implementation stages of ARPA projects, many more are still in planning mode. (A separate federal law, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, will provide federal funding to support local government efforts to improve cybersecurity needs. Recommendations on how to manage the impact of that initiative on local government IT is presented in an upcoming best practice brief.)

In addition to providing new or enhanced services to the public, planning for and implementing ARPA-funded projects is also an opportunity for technology executives to elevate the importance of IT throughout the government organization and, indeed, the community. Consider projects funded through ARPA as a way to strengthen your organization's technology infrastructure.

City and county IT officials with the CompTIA Public Technology Institute, a national, non-profit organization that focuses on technology issues impacting local government, created the following brief for IT officials to consider as they build on the successes and avoid the mistakes of the past 18 months.

It is crucial the IT executive is present at the decision-making table to ensure that the voice of IT is heard and considered. Not being there for decisions that affect the implementation a tech-related program or purchase that involves technology could lead to project delays, compatibility issues, cybersecurity issues, and unfortunately, failure. The IT organization could be placed in a vulnerable position as it might be tasked with fixing a problem that could have been avoided.

Technology-related projects don't need to be led by IT, but IT needs to be involved.

ARPA funds can also be used to expand projects that were implemented in 2020 with CARES Act funding, and a year-end deadline for spending. Some of those projects were done "on the fly" because of the short funding timeline. In addition to new funding, ARPA provides for a much more realistic time frame to complete those earlier project loose ends.

Other considerations as recommended by leaders of the PTI City/County Tech Leaders Forum:

• Be proactive and don't wait for other departments to come to IT.

• Revisit your government-wide IT strategy. While there may be a rush to implement new projects or solutions because of available funding, your IT strategy was developed through a thoughtful process to provide a roadmap for your organization and should not be disregarded.

• Consider the sustainability of a project or initiative. If a longer-term initiative, how will it be funded and maintained 5 years from now?

• Security is paramount. Any tech-related initiative by any department has an impact on the entire organization's security posture.

• Many governments in 2020 were competing with other governments for access to vendor products or services and the need to spend by the end of the year. While there may not be the same time issues with the new funding available, there will still be competition.

• When working with the private sector, develop the attitude that you are entering into a partnership – not just a client and customer contract. Develop relationships with your vendor partners and be sure to understand and feel comfortable with their security posture.

• Manage expectations at the beginning of project consideration, planning and implementation.

• In 2020, many IT agencies were overwhelmed by new initiatives. For 2021 and beyond, develop a way to prioritize programs based on government priorities or pressing needs. Have a reason for "what happens when" that you can explain to elected officials and top management.

• Implement accepted standards of practice when it comes to project management. IT executives and your agencies may consider this as the norm, but the departments you work with may not.

Additional Resource:

U.S. Department of the Treasury: Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds

https://home.treasury.gov/policy-issues/coronavirus/assistance-for-state-local-and-tribal-governments/state-and-local-fiscal-recovery-funds

About the CompTIA Public Technology Institute

PTI merged into CompTIA in January 2019 yet remains a distinct and semi-autonomous membership and service delivery organization. Established in 1971 by the several major national associations representing state and local governments, PTI has been viewed as the focal point for thought leaders who have a passion for the furtherance and wise deployment of technology. PTI's initial funding was through a grant from the National Science Foundation. Today, PTI actively supports local government officials through research, education, professional development, executive-level consulting services, and national recognition programs. Visit www.pti.org