

Building Experience-Driven Networks in State and Local Government

Digital transformation efforts have accelerated dramatically in government in the past two years. Municipalities across the country are now embracing remote and hybrid work, finding new ways to deliver secure digital services, and increase constituent access and safety. Many of these changes materialized at warp speed during the pandemic, but they've laid a foundation — aided by billions of dollars in federal funding — governments can build on to deliver more connected experiences and cultivate connected communities.

As states and localities adjust to a new normal and demand for digital services increases, public sector organizations will need to sustain the same level of innovation going forward. They must take advantage of the current moment to invest in digital services, cloud migration, cybersecurity and initiatives that bridge the digital divide.

American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding is one powerful mechanism state and local governments can use to achieve these goals. ARPA, which was passed in March 2021, has made \$350 billion in funding available to state, local and tribal governments through the Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds.¹ Governments can capitalize on this funding not only to maintain business continuity during the ongoing public health emergency, but to make strategic investments that will serve them well for years to come.

Maximizing Federal Aid: ARPA Funding Opportunities for State and Local Governments

The Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds is the main funding stream available to state and local governments through ARPA.

Through these funds, Congress has allocated a total of \$350 billion — \$195 billion to states, \$65 billion to counties, nearly \$46 billion to cities, \$20 billion to tribal governments, \$4.5 billion to territorial governments and \$19.5 billion to certain types of local governments.² Recipients must obligate the funds by Dec. 31, 2024, but states and localities actually have until Dec. 31, 2026, to spend this aid.

Generally, state and local governments can use this funding for data and technology infrastructure improvements to improve cybersecurity, government service delivery, the design and execution of public health programs, and to administer and track the effectiveness of economic relief programs. Based on lessons learned early in the pandemic with prior rounds of stimulus aid, the federal government has intentionally left guidance broad for how state and local governments can use ARPA funding. Washington has given municipalities much wider latitude and greater local discretion about how to apply federal aid in a way that best meets their needs.

As part of their efforts to accelerate digital transformation, state and local governments should explore using this latest round of federal funding to bolster connectivity and network security. In particular, they should consider investing in intelligent cloud networking that will help them improve experiences for constituents and employees from anywhere — whether at home or in the office.

A cloud-first networking platform that converges IT, physical security and Internet of Things (IoT) devices can help state and local governments evolve into more modern and agile hybrid organizations.

Advancing Connectivity with ARPA Funding

State and local governments can use ARPA funding to adopt a cloud-based, data-driven network platform that helps them foster connected communities, secure their networks and prepare their organizations for the future of work.

A network platform provides a range of robust capabilities as these organizations evolve into hybrid governments with more nimble operations. First, this solution uses distributed wireless access points and API connections to create an ecosystem of data-driven applications and optimized network experiences, seamlessly connecting people, places and things, such as wireless networks, IoT, and cloud-enabled devices and applications.

By embracing a platform approach to network modernization, governments can access a comprehensive dashboard view that

increases their network visibility. They also can take advantage of embedded AI and machine learning capabilities that expand their IT capacity. This enables IT teams to more easily monitor their networks from anywhere, at any time. It also allows these organizations to effectively bridge the gap between lean IT staff and the challenge of keeping everyone securely connected.

With a single, integrated platform, state and local governments can quickly adapt as their business needs change. And they are able to do more with less as they face potential budget shortfalls in the coming years.³

Along with remote and hybrid work, some of the key areas in which a network platform can drive government transformation include digital equity, smart city infrastructure and public safety.

Remote and Hybrid Work

With a network platform, state and local governments can provide unified access for both wired and wireless users and take advantage of cellular WAN and SD-WAN connectivity to deliver resiliency, agility and better performance in line with internal governance policies.

With this advanced connectivity, government organizations can route mission-critical traffic more efficiently, improve network performance and employ a cloud-managed teleworker gateway to make remote and hybrid work more secure. Agencies can also leverage internet gateways with expedited deployment for off-site locations and various IT and OT initiatives, including capital improvement projects such as water reservoir projects and remote sensor deployment for smart city initiatives. That helps automate and streamline the work of public sector teams involved in these efforts.

Harnessing this solution will allow governments to gain more visibility into their networks; empower their workforce to be productive anywhere they choose to work; and enable supportive, secure and flexible work experiences at scale.

Digital Equity

A network platform can foster digital equity by improving network management for various municipal entities, including library systems, which some residents often rely on for digital access. This solution also enables state and local governments to provide safe and secure public WiFi access to residents — whether they're riding the city bus or suburban commuter rail or sitting in the town square.

The city of Opelika, Ala., for example, has harnessed a network platform to help close the digital divide among its residents. It has deployed wireless access points throughout public areas to provide public WiFi in city buildings and allow residents and workers to connect to the city's network. The city also plans to use these access points to expand public WiFi in

underserved areas to help small businesses provide necessary services, continued education for students and overall safety for residents.

Smart City Infrastructure and Public Safety

The secure, robust connectivity a network platform provides also helps municipalities create smart spaces and safer environments.

Advanced connectivity can help local governments enhance smart city development and better manage intelligent transportation and waste management systems, smart streetlights and other IoT-enabled devices. Those include connected sensors cities can install in public buildings, parks and libraries to aid with energy efficiency, air quality monitoring, real-time public message delivery and to better understand how constituents engage with government services.

A network platform can also support emergency communications and command centers during public emergencies. For example, with strong and reliable network connectivity, first responders can securely access data from computer-aided dispatch (CAD) systems from their smartwatch or deploy drones and robots in unsafe conditions to increase their situational awareness when they respond to calls for service.⁴ With more robust information-gathering capabilities buoyed by a cloud-first network platform, public safety agencies can accelerate response times, access insights that illuminate local crime and incident trends, and potentially improve public safety outcomes.

Conclusion

State and local governments must increase their agility, performance and resilience. Network modernization — supported by a modern, scalable network platform that converges IT, physical security and IoT — can help governments reduce IT complexity, increase IT visibility and strengthen security. Collectively, that enables public organizations to deliver seamless, connected hybrid experiences.

A network platform can help governments meet these new demands at a scale and speed they never would have thought possible, bringing them closer to achieving their mission and producing better outcomes for employees, businesses and, most importantly, constituents.

This piece was developed and written by the Government Technology Content Studio, with information and input from Cisco Meraki.

Endnotes

- <https://home.treasury.gov/policy-issues/coronavirus/assistance-for-state-local-and-tribal-governments/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>
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- https://meraki.cisco.com/lib/pdf/meraki_whitepaper_CDG_government_public_safety.pdf



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