



Seeking a way to better deliver IT

Information technology is essential to serving and protecting our state's citizens; fully integrating these services has several potential benefits

by North Dakota Rep. Corey Mock (crmock@nd.gov)

As elected officials, we inherently understand that how services are provided is as important as what services are provided by government.

Myriad agencies oversee programs and initiatives designed to do everything from securely transmitting electronic health information, registering motor vehicles, and applying for hunting and fishing licenses to submitting workforce safety and insurance claims — along with dozens of other important functions.

Information technology underpins virtually every government service.

In the digital, highly connected world we live in, our ability to efficiently and effectively harness technology to serve the citizens we represent is arguably one of the most important factors in policymaking. And how we structure government to enable the use of technology is foundational to that.

With that in mind, North Dakota's Information Technology Department has proposed a unification effort to ensure that our state's technology platforms, system and processes, as well as our IT professionals, are aligned toward common goals and priorities.

This unification proposal involves integrating approximately 145 individuals across 17 cabinet agencies with 345 legacy IT staff.

Our North Dakota legislature is currently weighing the benefits and costs of several options, including the status quo, pilot projects of varying sizes, and full unification.

Reduce IT risks, optimize opportunities

There are many reasons to consider this significant realignment, and the growing cybersecurity threat is just one reason the North Dakota Legislature has put unified IT services on the table this legislative session.

The safety and protection of data is a top priority for our state and the citizens we serve. In today's world, security is critically necessary, calling for a uniform approach to ensure the most

The case for IT unification: Why North Dakota is considering this change

- ✓ Better address cybersecurity by having a single strategy (across all agencies and functions) to address the threat
- ✓ Standardize the state's various IT-related products and services — from websites to apps — while also creating a common culture of customer service
- ✓ Save state dollars over the long term; some estimates show potential savings of up to 22 percent
- ✓ Better leverage the opportunities provided by emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and machine learning

comprehensive coverage. Currently, more than 400 different entities across the state are each responsible for their own cybersecurity strategies — clearly a challenge that puts us in the crosshairs of would-be cybercriminals. Additionally, as demand for new systems, websites, applications and other technology services explodes, the need for common approaches and standardization is amplified.

Emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and machine learning also represent tremendous opportunities to enhance services.

Ensuring a consistent, efficient approach across the foundational IT realm can help meet growing demand while leveraging expertise.

Unifying the people, processes and priorities that affect us as policymakers and citizens is no small endeavor, but it is an important step to creating a 21st-century, citizen-centric government.

As legislators, we must weigh short-term costs against possible long-term benefits.

Estimates show that in four years, we may realize a 17 percent to 22 percent improvement in efficiency due to a smarter alignment of resources. But we must also consider growing pains that come with staff and process restructuring.

Creating a common culture of customer service is also an intentional aspect of this proposal. Rather than uprooting employees who serve individual

agencies, the intent is to better support business needs by better connecting agency leaders and decision-makers to help advise, collaborate and plan for IT investments.

Change is inevitably uncomfortable. If North Dakota moves forward with this ambitious endeavor, it will be because we decided any short-term discomfort is a modest price to pay for gains in efficiency, security and overall customer service.

View investments with 'tech-tinted lens'

Regardless of the actions we take this session, reviewing IT strategies, challenging assumptions and considering bold initiatives force us to view all capital and operational investments — at least in part — through a tech-tinted lens.

In my roles as a member of the House Appropriations Committee, chairman of the Information Technology Committee, and member of the State Information Technology Advisory Committee, as well as being a business owner, I understand that the services we provide have an impact on every citizen and business.

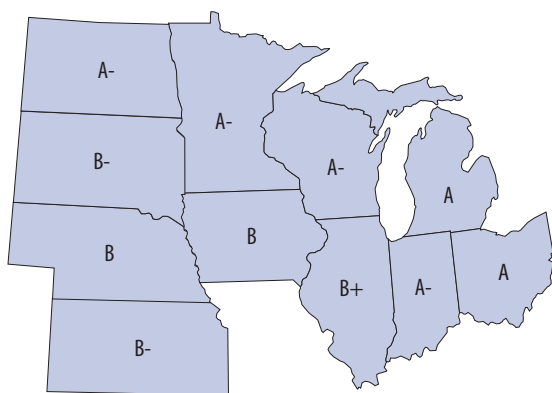
Recognizing the massive technological changes happening in virtually every industry means we also must find the best ways — policy-wise and organizationally — to meet changing needs and expectations now and in the future.

North Dakota Rep. Corey Mock was first elected to the House in 2008 and served as minority leader from 2015 to 2018. He is a 2011 graduate of CSG Midwest's Bowhay Institute for Legislative Leadership Development (BILLD).

Submissions welcome

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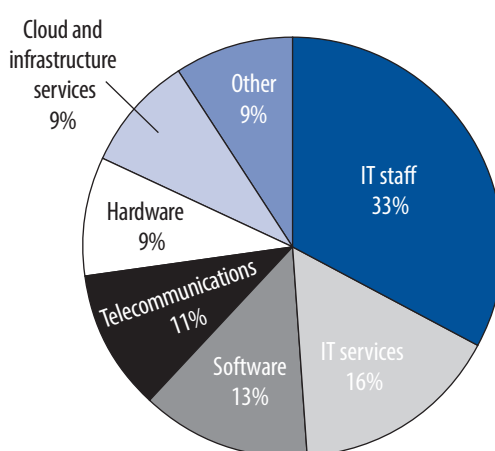
Midwestern states' grades from the 2018 "Digital States Survey"*



* Grades are based on an evaluation of states' use of technology to improve service delivery, increase capacity, streamline operations and reach policy goals. Michigan and Ohio were among the five U.S. states given "A" grades.

Source: Center for Digital Government

How U.S. states spend their information technology dollars



Source: Center for Digital Government