

Show Me Results

Now is the time to deliver meaningful results by embedding Automation/AI/ML into the standard operating environment of government.

When I was first engaged with agencies in conversations about *Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning in Government*, I often found people captivated by what we might do and paralyzed by the steps to get there.

Using a twist on a major brand theme, I'd find myself frequently stating "just get started". Many agencies did get started and there are many case studies about advances in both data and automated technologies which have been shared publicly, but it is time to move beyond pilots to operating at scale.



Suzette Kent

Federal Chief Information Officer
of the United States

Chief Executive Officer
Kent Advisory Services

Like many people, the beginning of a new year causes me to reflect. In writing this, it is thrilling to reflect and recognize that government agencies are far beyond "starting", but how do we move faster?

Agencies must deliver meaningful results-for mission, for citizens, for solving complex problems. There is no shortage of mission opportunity and complex problems. Although pilots and analysis are useful, results at scale should be the target. Meaningful mission results or clear citizen impacts accelerate the journey forward. Meaningful results garner agency priority, resource focus, and funding commitments.

Working with the Coleridge Initiative, we collaborated with researchers, publishers, technology solution providers and a group of agencies to sponsor a competition to use AI and Natural Language Processing (NLP) to identify how federal data are being used for research.

Redefining The Status Quo

The goal of the initiative was not about the technology, but about gaining deeper insights into how federal data are used in research.

These new capabilities enabled the community of researchers, publishers, and agencies to identify the most valuable datasets for research and engage in dialogues which are now propelling further research into weather events, equitable access to nutritious food and people initiatives to support diversity. Even when imperfect, results propel further conversations and improvements. Results motivate teams. Results accomplish missions.



MIAI

Some agencies who are delivering results talk about their journey in terms of pioneering new spaces, but in government, we have to move beyond embracing new, powerful tool sets to a place where operating in environments rich with automated capabilities is the prevalent mode.

Status quo should not be pushing paper, correcting data entry errors or manual updates to millions of records. The status quo should be agencies armed with well-defined objectives, high-quality data and evidence backed out-

comes with high performance compute resources and scalable platforms environments at the ready where capabilities like AI, ML, RPA, NLP, image, voice recognition and more can be brought to bear based on the mission purpose.

Year Over Year Investments Pay Off

AI isn't new; but delivering big results at visible scale is still emerging in public sector. The foundational components of technical capabilities, availability of quality data, scalable technical infrastructure (development tools, cloud environments, compute power, data security and resiliency) and a capable workforce are available inside government in many places and available commercially.

It is time to make year over year investments in those components part of the operating environment of every agency. Visionary agency leaders drive clarity on high-priority problems to be solved. Technology and data leaders are at that table to construct the solution-seeking environment through which those problems can be solved.

Pollyanna? Look at the activities that created COVID-19 vaccines and distribution processes. SBA and Treasury created new programs, at national scale, in weeks. IRS created an automated a process that completed in 72 hours but would have taken a year to complete manually.

NOAA has shared its progress in both data and use of AI. Multiple agencies have harnessed AI to support threat detection and intrusion prevention in cyber environments. Use of RPA inside government has reached nearly 1 million annualized hours saved. In each of these examples, if you peel back the details, you will see that automation, AI, machine learning, expanded compute capabilities and tactical use of data were underpinning the results delivered.

Agency leaders need to continue to make AI/ML advancement a priority in government use, enable private sector innovation and accelerate research.

At The Crossroads

Decades of research, investment and learning have brought us to a point today where all the key capabilities are available at scale. Today's government challenge is to marshal focus on common priorities and dedicate ALL the resources needed to create the operating environment where results can be delivered.

The more advanced the technology, the bigger the solutions, the broader the organizational impact; the more people and "capabilities" you need to include in the conversation to drive results at scale. All the pieces are ready.

Agency leaders need to continue to make AI/ML advancement a priority in government use, enable private sector innovation and accelerate research. Congressional leaders need to support funding and demand results. For our future, "Show me the results". ■

About The Author

Suzette Kent served as Federal Chief Information Officer of the United States from January 29, 2018 until July 2020. As CIO, Ms. Kent was responsible for setting federal IT policy and leading the Federal CIO Council, which is composed of CIOs from various federal government departments and agencies. Prior to her appointment as Federal CIO, she was a principal of the banking and capital markets advisory team at the Ernst & Young Financial Services Office in Dallas. Currently Ms. Kent is Chief Executive Officer of Kent Advisory Services