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Inaugural Federal CIO Research Finds Cyber, Workforce, and AI Top FY25 Priorities

Funding, Skills Gaps, and AI Anxieties Hinder Progress

Alexandria, Va., September 23, 2024 – Cybersecurity, workforce transformation, and artificial intelligence (AI) rank as the top technology priorities for Federal Chief Information Officers (CIOs) in the coming year, according to the newly released “Tech Tonic: FY25 Federal CIO Forecast” by [MeriTalk](#), government IT’s top digital platform. The inaugural study features a survey of 12 CFO Act agency CIOs – the “Digital Dozen” – followed by in-depth interviews to examine CIOs’ top technology priorities for FY25, identify specific goals by category, and uncover roadblocks to success. [The report](#) offers recommendations for Congressional and agency leadership.

Sixty-seven percent of Federal CIOs say cybersecurity and risk management is a top priority for the coming year, the highest consensus in the survey. Cybersecurity efforts also garner the most support from their agency’s leadership, according to CIOs. Participants shared their cyber goals include improving identity and risk management – a key component of priority No. 4, zero trust architectures – modernizing infrastructure, increasing automation, and balancing security efforts with a smooth user experience.

Workforce transformation will also continue to be a top focus area, as CIOs note the pace of cybersecurity advancements and emerging AI capabilities. As IT departments struggle with skills gaps, aging workforces, and the need to attract new talent, they’re investing in upskilling and reskilling programs, leadership development initiatives, and efforts to improve the overall employee experience through simplified technologies and streamlined workflows.

Third in the big three is AI, with 75 percent of CIOs expecting AI to have a significant impact on government operations over the next five years. Goals for FY25 include continuing to advance strategic frameworks, improving data readiness, identifying low-risk use cases, and investing in secure testbeds. CIOs are taking a strategic and measured approach to AI however, with just 17 percent saying they regularly use GenAI (such as ChatGPT, Gemini, etc.) for work.



When looking at the broader list of priorities, CIOs note that while categories like cloud computing, infrastructure modernization, and data management may have settled further down the list, they remain essential elements of an integrated and effective modern technology stack, particularly in supporting their cybersecurity and AI objectives.

“I welcome this report, which serves as a snapshot of Federal CIOs’ most important priorities,” said Congressman Gerry Connolly (D-Va.), the Ranking Member of the House Subcommittee on Cybersecurity, Information Technology, and Government Innovation. “As we empower CIOs with the resources and authorities they need to do their work on behalf of the American people, this feedback is incredibly helpful. It informs our oversight work and helps hold agency leadership accountable to address immediate IT challenges and risk.”

When asked about the biggest roadblocks to successfully implementing their FY25 technology priorities, Federal CIOs highlighted budget constraints, procurement processes, and staffing and skills gaps as the top hurdles. Consistent funding, they stress, is critical to maintain their current cybersecurity postures, especially as the cost to defend and detect continues to rise. Agencies need human and financial support – and that starts with prioritizing mission-critical investments in modernization and emerging technologies, legislation that enables flexible and agile acquisitions, and workforce development initiatives centered on recruiting and retaining top talent.

MeriTalk surveyed 12 CFO Act Agency CIOs and conducted six in-depth interviews with those CIOs between May and August 2024. The “Tech Tonic: FY25 Federal CIO Forecast” is underwritten by [Dell Technologies](#) and [Palo Alto Networks](#). To review the full findings, visit: <https://www.meritalk.com/study/federal-cio-forecast-2025/?campaign=pr>

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