



Former Federal CIO Gloria Parker Gives Advice for Measuring and Driving Value

Parker discusses ways CIOs can succeed in today's political and economic climate.

• managing director, Emerging Sun LLC, Mark Ball



As the first Chief Technology Officer and subsequently the first CIO of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Gloria Parker has become an executive champion in transforming the way government does business through the use of information technology.

Parker is now CEO and Senior Partner of Parker Group Consulting, based in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, where she works with federal government agencies on executive management issues such as open-government and e-government, as well as organizational excellence, strategic planning, capital planning, executive mentoring, and coaching and other disciplines.

Prior to her positions at HUD, Parker held two positions at the Department of Education — as the Director of Information Resources Management and later as Deputy Chief Information Officer. She has also held executive management positions at IBM, CSC and Apptis. She places strong emphasis on the need to improve the accessibility of information to all citizens and to make government a more efficient and effective operation.

In this edited and abridged transcript, Parker discusses ways CIOs can succeed in today's political and economic climate, and how CIOs can get the most out of their resources and human capital.

Many government CIOs are currently facing a difficult and uncertain time, both economically and politically. What advice do you have for government CIOs and IT executives to migrate through this challenging environment?

First they need to start focusing on ways to reduce costs. Most CIOs should increase their pursuit of shared services and working across agencies by leveraging tools and systems that one agency has already implemented and others can benefit from, rather than continuously reinventing the wheel for each initiative. Secondly, CIOs need to focus on performance management to figure out which programs they can consolidate or eliminate, because they are not performing or adding value toward what the agency is trying to accomplish. Third, rather than shying away from taking on new projects, CIOs should prioritize the projects that are truly going to save the agency money over some short period of time, and invest in those activities. Projects that are more costly and will not produce desired results in the short term should be put on hold. For example, Roger Baker, CIO of the Veterans Administration (VA), recently consolidated or eliminated many programs that did not produce significant benefit for the VA, and invested in activities that helped the organization reduce costs. He did this with a lot of resistance, but he was very successful because of this.

Another item that program managers and CIOs need to understand is that they are in that position to produce results, so they need to become results-oriented — not just “business as usual” and process oriented. They need to focus on activities that truly deliver the results that align with the agency’s priorities. And the results need to be measurable, because when Congress starts looking for areas to cut, if the CIO can demonstrate that what the IT organization is doing is truly justified and delivers major benefits to the citizens of the United States, Congress will listen. But if it’s just

business as usual, the organization could become a candidate for the chopping block. Congress will certainly start threatening to reduce budgets if they don't understand the value you are providing.

In terms of performance measurement and alignment with strategic goals, what types of metrics are most appropriate for CIOs to focus on?

CIOs have traditionally been focused on the wrong metrics — such as system utilization, uptime and other Service Level Agreements (SLAs). That's just operational stuff. In this environment, CIOs really need to be focused on metrics to enhance their own value to the organization, particularly metrics associated with programs and outcomes of those programs.

For example, at HUD, if one of their goals is to reduce homelessness, then some programs might include public housing vouchers, shelters, and activities to keep track of homeless people and help them with their issues. For the systems that support these programs, you shouldn't measure these systems simply by saying the systems were available 100 percent of the time. You measure them by understanding the definitive impact of the programs and how well they achieved their desired outcomes.

CIOs need to work with the program owners to define the metrics that best indicate how well the program is achieving its goals. That's where CIOs can really start to have a seat at the table and play an important role with the senior management team, to ensure that the agency is truly accomplishing its objectives and measuring the direct impact on the community. While it's true that CIOs still need to worry about operational metrics to run IT efficiently, CIOs also need to move more into the program arena and help measure the tangible impact that programs are delivering.

You mentioned the automation of performance management systems. Can you describe the key components of a well-structured performance management system? What CIOs should initiate are performance management systems that measure the impact of programs and projects. Those systems should include a value chain of everything from the goals and objectives of the organization, all the way through the programs and projects that are supporting those goals and objectives, and their performance in achieving those objectives. It's much like an enterprise architecture, which, when put together correctly, begins with the priorities of the business and clarifies the business areas that support those priorities. The next step down is defining what those business areas require from a technology perspective to accomplish their objectives. They need data and information. So you can map each

organization's needs to a particular set of data. Where does that data come from? It comes from specific applications, which are based on particular software programs, which sit on particular pieces of hardware. So if you take the enterprise architecture and insert appropriate metrics at each level, then you can determine whether you're going to achieve the desired outcomes. That's what many agencies and organizations don't know how to do — to take their enterprise architecture and turn it into a useful tool for measuring the programs and outcomes of the agency.

How can CIOs make sure they get the most out of their resources and human capital? How should IT executives make sure that people are aligned toward their desired goals, to get the most value out of their people?

What I like to do, and what I've seen work well in government, is to apply what are called "cascading goals." A CIO can take the goals of the organization and determine — again going down the enterprise architecture path — the business components that ensure that the goals and strategies are met, and the tools, programs and projects that support those business areas. So if I have a particular objective, I need to identify the programs and projects that sit underneath those objectives. Then I identify the people who manage those programs and are responsible for the outcomes. Then I understand what kind of skills they need to do their job.

With this information, I can conduct a skills gap analysis to clarify what gaps exist and how I can close those gaps using development planning, training and other mechanisms. I also need to know what degree of accountability my program managers have. With a properly defined performance management process, I can review the metrics that I've inserted into this process and determine what the particular individual needs to do to produce the desired result. And I hold that individual accountable by confirming those metrics are included in their performance plan. So now they need to achieve certain metrics, which are aligned with the organization's underlying goals and objectives. The other way they are held accountable is that in a well-designed performance management system, their names are associated with the programs that are being measured. So if a project is lighting up "yellow" on the performance management dashboard, you can quickly identify who is responsible, and either they are already in the process of addressing the issue because they see it too, or you as the supervisor can pick up the phone and find out what's going on. So the individual is held accountable because their information is visible across the organization. But you also need to close the skills gap, because if you're going to hold someone accountable for getting things done, you need to make

sure they have the proper skills to be successful.

Do you have any other advice for how CIOs can succeed in today's environment? I think one of the most important things a CIO can do, in addition to the things we've already discussed, is to have strong relationships across their department with several types of people. Specifically they need to have strong relationships with the CFO, because they need to make sure they have input into how money is spent properly. CIOs need to make sure that the CFO's office is only approving expenditures on initiatives that directly impact the agency's performance objectives. Additionally CIOs need to have strong relationships with the Chief Procurement Officer (CPO), because they need to make sure that the procurement office is not holding up progress for the agency. If it means that the procurement office needs business process reengineering and/or automation to become more efficient, then the CIO needs to work closely with the CPO to get that done. Furthermore, CIOs need to have close working relationships with the Chief Human Capital Officer, because they need to understand how to make people accountable, for example, by putting appropriate metrics into employees' performance plans. But CIOs need help from Human Resources to make sure this is not done in a vacuum. Finally, CIOs need to have close relationships with the Program Managers, because they are the people whose programs they are going to be supporting, with metrics and automation to achieve desired results. So in addition to understanding how performance management works and promoting it across the organization, CIOs need strong relationships with senior leaders across the organization that will help them get this done. Many CIOs view themselves simply as the technology gurus who fix technology issues and run IT operations. But CIOs who view themselves as an integral part of the management team will seek to drive value and improve results for the business operations, and will ultimately contribute much more to the organization.

Mark Ball is the Managing Director of Emerging Sun LLC, a Washington, DC based management consulting firm that offers an array of IT strategic services, enabling clients to reduce costs, improve performance, and make intelligent business and technology decisions.





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