

The CIO's office should identify key stakeholders. Even if the consolidation is mandated, they should try to work with the stakeholders to have them involved in setting the scope, in definitions or evaluations. If the customer is more invested in the outcome, then it's not being "done to them." If CIOs can start marketing before they have a service, it's just that much more likely to succeed. It's most difficult to reach the "long-timers" who built their systems and personnel over years of going through the budget process. They are the ones who have the hardest time letting go of the way they do things.

Provide an Internal Training Program

Any effective customer service strategy cannot be successful if CIOs don't first convince their internal staff of the business imperative of customer relations and that it should be demonstrated in their daily business activities. Developing or providing a strong internal training program on the front end that lays out your objectives and expectations is vital to a successful initiative. The customer service strategy is a joint effort that requires all central IT staff to be fully engaged and supportive.

For the New Jersey Office of Information Technology, customer service and employee engagement go hand in hand. They have developed a customer service week, which involves five days of activities promoting teamwork, team building, customer service, soft skills and gamification challenges. It is training made fun. They focus on soft skills like problem solving, emotional intelligence, being self-aware and having empathy as well as general customer service skills.

While most states will purchase training from vendor partners in the private sector, you can also add on some creative trainings to educate staff. North Carolina uses call recordings in training. They can score calls and use them as training for staff on what went well or what could be improved upon. As North Carolina's CCO said, "there's nothing like hearing the conversation of yourself with a customer. We can tell someone what they scored on a call, but when they hear themselves talking on a call—that has been the best tool for customer service."

Have a Communications Plan

CIOs can struggle to communicate to agency heads why participating in the state IT enterprise is a good thing, not only in the short term but also in the long term. Effective communication includes knowing your audience and speaking their language. Each agency has its own acronyms and terminology. However, the IT industry, and likely the central IT organization, tend to have many confusing terms, acronyms and product names, which can become a barrier because they don't translate well from customer-to-customer or agency-to-agency. Central IT should take the time to know their customers and consider using terminology and analogies that are easier for non-technical people to understand.

Many CIO offices do customer satisfaction surveys (over 60%) though less than half (45%) have put in place a formal communications plan according to 2019 State CIO Survey data. Several indicated that they hope to do something more formal soon or make communications part of their strategic plan.

Encourage Feedback & Establish Performance Metrics

For the offices that use surveys to get feedback from customers, it can be helpful in establishing metrics to ensure that areas that need improvement are moving in the right direction. Using surveys consistently is the one of the best ways to mark progress using available data and to identify areas that need improvement.

Some take things further. In North Carolina in addition to an annual customer satisfaction survey of the agency CIOs, state IT officials follow up on survey responses by scheduling on-site visits at the agency offices. They bring in the Chief Services Officer, Chief Risk Officer, Chief Solutions Officer and Chief Procurement Officer along with the Chief Customer Officer. As North Carolina's CCO stated, "We don't just take the information to take the information. We assign someone to it to ensure that whatever needs improving gets improved upon." It's important that the surveys don't exist without any follow up or action taken to improve upon results.

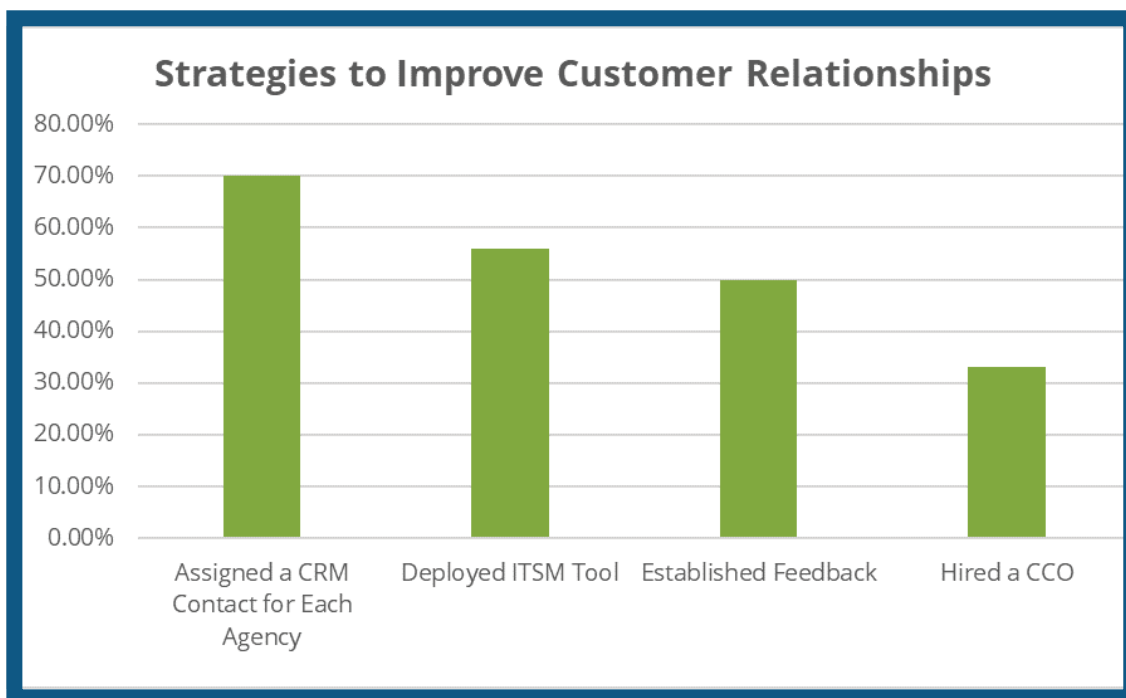


Another state IT office has recently created an IT User Group made of up executive directors of agencies (or one level down). They started with identifying and explaining who they are, discussing their rates and answering typical questions. Then they start identifying where they can improve and develop a prioritized list of areas to address and report back on. The CIO from this state said that people are afraid that if you get a group of IT users together it's going to be a "gripe fest." They further explained, "plan on the first one being a 'gripe fest.' Everyone needs to get everything off their chest and see us listening. But then we get into more of a statewide perspective. We want their agency perspective, but we also get to show them the statewide perspective—and they've never had that before."

"In-person meetings with representatives" was the most popular answer when NASCIO asked CIOs in the 2019 State CIO Survey how they measure the satisfaction of their agency customers. Over 80% of respondents said that these in-person meetings were the most valuable measure of satisfaction. A similar percentage said they use that feedback to create action plans and respond.

Focusing on Customer Relationships

CIOs know that managing customer relationships is important and many are doing some of the right things to improve them. The NASCIO 2019 State CIO Survey shows us that around 70% have assigned a CRM contact for each agency, over half have deployed an IT service management tool (ITSM) and about half have established a customer advisory board or other method for getting feedback from customers. That said, only about one-third have hired a chief customer officer (or similar position).



NASCIO 2019 State CIO Survey Preliminary Data

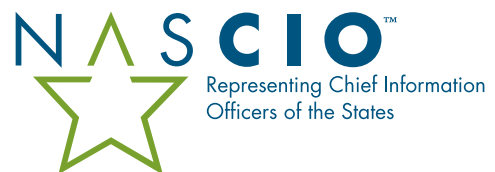
Most agencies would say even more needs to be done. Making CRM a priority starting with executive leadership, strategic planning, employee engagement and working to develop face-to-face relationships and a communications plan will set the IT office on the right track. CIOs should find effective methods to obtain feedback (and track feedback metrics) to help all parties have positive relationships that will result in a more efficient, better working government that ultimately results in better outcomes for citizens.

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