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Smart Spaces:

5 Areas of Focus for Building
Connected Communities


Introduction

There's no doubt that the last few years have accelerated digital implementation in government and brought innovation to the forefront. During the COVID-19 pandemic, shifts in work structures and the need to rapidly modernize IT functions to serve both employees and constituents remotely sparked a renaissance in government technology adoption. But as state and local governments look to build on this technological framework, they are still facing several challenges. These include how best to serve constituents  are becoming more digitally savvy, how to improve citizen experiences in line with the recent [CX Executive Order](#) and how to improve equity and operations. Additionally, agencies need to consider how small IT teams can manage IT infrastructures that still have a mix of new and antiquated technologies.

Connected communities rely on smart spaces to answer many of the challenges related to operational efficiency. Indeed, by building smart spaces that make use of Internet of Things technologies like sensors that can collect data in conjunction with cloud-based networking, governments can inject greater visibility into operations. They can also tap into tools like artificial intelligence to glean insights that enable them to improve experiences for both citizens and government employees alike.



"It is incredibly important for all organizations to have the data available to make better decisions around the future of their spaces," says Collin Averill, Solutions Marketing Manager at [Cisco Meraki](#), switching, security, and enterprise mobility management solutions.

"For a smart space, we see the importance of a network at the base of it that creates really rich and useful data  governments can use to make better decisions for employees and citizens."

Today's smart spaces tap into IoT technology to safely and securely gather information about parks, streets, community buildings and more to

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help governments better maintain and manage those spaces.

For example, if a government is working to improve citizen safety, “using smart camera technology a city can monitor busy intersection traffic, pedestrian crosswalk usage, bike lane utilization, accident and close-call situations, etc.,” says Christopher Allen, Government Audience Marketing Manager at Cisco Meraki. “They can then use that data to add traffic lights/signs, install additional lanes, or move pedestrian pathways.”

Ultimately, the smart technology isn’t just camera monetization, it can provide improved citizen safety and give cities opportunities to use real life data to plan for the future.”

The time is ripe for state and local governments looking to pursue this technology as key federal grants, like the [American Rescue Plan Act \(Public Law 117-2\)](#) and the forthcoming [Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act \(Public Law 117-58\)](#), provide an opportunity for state and local governments to tap funding to further connected infrastructure. The IIJA, in particular, allocates \$100 million over five years for projects that aim to increase connectivity across the country, including expanding network connectivity and tapping into IoT, sensor-based infrastructure, and more.

1. Above All, Enable Connectivity

Connectivity is the lifeblood of a smart space. As the world becomes more digital and people begin to expect digital options for services once only offered in person, government organizations should ensure they have both the wired and wireless

technologies necessary to connect workers, constituents, and devices. While it may seem simple, the last few years have brought the widespread need for equitable connectivity across the country.

“We know that in any city or state there is a need for reliable wireless connectivity in strategic locations,” says Averill. “The pandemic has really highlighted how internet instability can disproportionately impact certain groups or communities.”

When pursuing smart spaces, state and local governments should partner with community organizations to prioritize rolling out fast, reliable connectivity to all constituents.

2. Keep IoT Devices Top-of-Mind

With reliable and secure connectivity underlying IoT devices like smart cameras and sensors, state and local governments can tap into the network of devices to glean greater visibility and insights



that can be used to improve operations like maintenance and management.

“It’s about the convergence of the digital with the real world,” Allen says. “In the past, we would have CCTVs monitoring public spaces and government offices, but today, we can connect IoT devices and sensors to our Wi-Fi technology and use AI and ML to deliver data analytics that help governments understand the big picture.”

Smart cameras, for example, can provide security and offer insight into availability, spatial occupancy, and desk availability for workers. Sensors, which offer insight into temperature, air quality, and more, can also help to monitor and manage a space, tracking key data points and adjusting them as necessary to improve comfort and efficiency. This, in turn, can help organizations improve sustainability and meet environmental goals.

3. Empower Data-Driven Insights

IoT devices can offer valuable data for government organizations, but data in a vacuum is of inferior worth. What makes data truly valuable is when it’s analyzed to provide insight and made easily accessible to decision-makers when they need it.



For this reason, agencies should be sure to pair data collection with technologies like AI/ML that can help to transform vast volumes of data into insights.

“AI/ML can help agencies identify trends, how best to look out for customers, and how they can improve experiences for them,” says Averill. “It can help to solve business challenges.”

Allen says, “Our goal is to find ways to help government agencies serve all citizens and provide more effective services.”

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4. Build In Security from the Start

Securing government and citizen data is a priority for all government organizations today. As many have learned the hard way, new technologies offer major benefits, but they must also be balanced with security. That security can't be an afterthought, it needs to be built from the ground up and continuously monitored by everyone who touches the technology.

Smart space technology, in particular, needs to include edge protection and cloud application security, something that Cisco Meraki is passionate about.

"We shine in the security story because we have millions of connected devices, we have an understanding of what's happening globally to different networks," says Averill.

5. Manage through the Cloud

Navigating the device connections, data analysis, troubleshooting, and management necessary to ensure the information gleaned from connected spaces is used efficiently and effectively is no easy task, however.

To simplify the task, the Meraki platform brings together connectivity, hardware visibility, AI/ML, and an ecosystem of application partners to provide IT the support needed to make business decisions. This ensures that IT teams have the tools and support necessary to deploy these technologies faster, manage them from any location, and make the most of their smart spaces without overwhelming small teams.

"We want to show the government that rather than adding complexity, IT can really make their lives easier," Allen says. "Our goal is to find ways to help government agencies serve the citizens and provide more effective services."

Learn how Cisco Meraki can help your state or local government make the most of smart spaces.

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