

INDUSTRY SPOTLIGHT

Executing on the Promise of Open Source in Government

An interview with Henry Sowell, Chief Information Security Officer, Hortonworks

Due to a confluence of challenges – including outdated infrastructure, disparate data and lack of data security – open source is more important than ever for government missions.

However, many government agencies miss out on all the benefits that open source has to offer. It's especially challenging to transition to the new and unfamiliar platforms open source requires when so much prior investment has gone into existing legacy systems. To navigate these challenges and help agencies understand how they can execute on the promise of open source, GovLoop sat down with Henry Sowell, Chief Information Security Officer at Hortonworks, an enterprise open source Hadoop solutions provider.

He explained that, too often, government tries to address its IT problems through disparate solutions. "Normally, individual agencies look to solve their own tech problems by hiring internal developers and using their own software," Sowell said. "These stovepipe solutions are hard to maintain because agencies have to use their own budget and internal manpower. Plus, these solutions don't integrate well with other solutions."

Open source lets agencies modernize their IT systems in a more innovative manner with the help of the expansive IT knowledge in tech communities. "Open source as a community is more effective and faster than any single one organization," Sowell said. "The innovation never stops. The open source community helps design solutions to different problems and is always working on a piece of technology."

The key to helping government fully harness the benefits of open source is modernizing to newer, improved technologies in a familiar pattern. That means agency personnel get the most of

IT modernization without having to relearn an overwhelming amount of new processes and systems.

Open source is clearly the way forward for government, but to help agencies keep pace with the speed of innovation that open source enables, it's important to seek the right technology partners and open source experts.

Agencies should strive to find technology partners committed to an open source approach that spurs innovation. When used correctly, open source enables enterprises to deploy, integrate and work with greater volumes of structured and unstructured data for more actionable intelligence. For example, agencies can use their data to better predict citizen needs and respond to inquiries accordingly. Additionally, agencies should be able to use software that fosters innovation without feeling locked in to a particular vendor.

Agencies can draw on open source experts to compile multiple projects into an integrated, implementable package while providing subject matter expertise, support and services. "Make sure that you're preparing your organization by helping everyone understand the focus on IT modernization," Sowell said. "You also have to partner with the right organization to help you do open source in the most cost-effective manner."

To identify the right technology partners in the open source community, it's imperative that agencies understand their business and mission needs. For example, is the mission focus on constituent communications? Open data and greater transparency? Or other objectives like improved cybersecurity? By knowing the impetus for the IT modernization project, agencies can form the right teams from the open source community that understand the business problem and can address it accordingly.

"At Hortonworks, we're concerned with tackling advanced technologies like Hadoop and working with government agencies to invest wisely," Sowell said. "We offer standard technologies that organizations can access in a familiar and secure way because we have a very wide partner base. When we can work with many of their existing technologies, it becomes far less daunting and faster to achieve the mission and comply with security regulations."

With the right expertise, agencies can execute their IT modernization efforts for open source in a more cost-effective manner as well.

"We want to help the public sector get better at executing on the promise of open source by providing 100 percent open source solutions that reduce cost while meeting security requirements," Sowell said. "We work to provide a solutions platform that can meet all technical skillsets while enabling a modern-day infrastructure."

Agencies across the federal government are deploying enterprise open source solutions on government networks to capture data-driven insights. "Hortonworks is a leading innovator in the enterprise-grade open source industry -- creating, distributing and supporting enterprise ready data platforms and modern data applications," Sowell said.

Ultimately, by using enterprise open source, government can tackle any one of its mission critical IT needs while achieving IT modernization in a more effective manner, at a lower cost. With the knowledge and expertise of tech communities, the right technology partners and sufficient preparation, government can fully execute on the promise of open source.