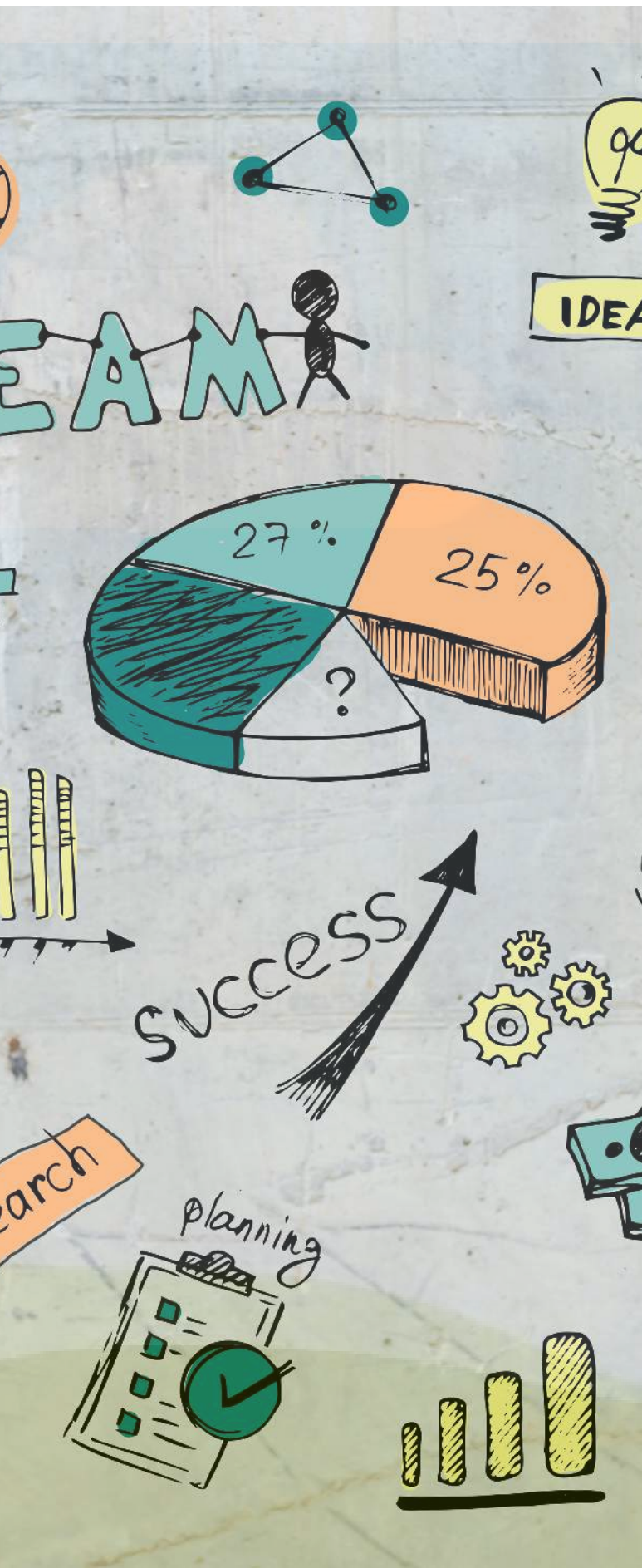




# THE PATH TO CREATING A CHIEF DATA OFFICER ROLE IN STATES

Tips For Crafting an Effective CDO Position





## WHAT IS A CHIEF DATA OFFICER (CDO)?

CDOs manage a state's data as a strategic asset to support decision making, enhance policies, and deliver services in a way that the public expects. This means ensuring that data are properly accounted for, designed and maintained for reuse, and put to their highest and best use. [The Evolving Role of a State CDO: A Framework for Today](#) provides a broad framework for what the CDO role should encompass and states should use this as a long term guide for the role. However, as states are nuanced, creating an effective CDO position requires decision-makers to address the following specific considerations to ensure it's set up for success at the outset.

# Seven Steps to Establishing a CDO

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## 1. UNDERSTAND THE NEED FOR A CDO.

As the CDO role grows in state governments, establishing one just because it's the trend is unlikely to position the role for success. State leaders should have a clear understanding and clear priorities for how they wish to leverage data. CDOs who step into the role with clearly defined priorities associated with policy areas such as the opioid epidemic, criminal justice, or housing affordability tend to be able to focus their efforts and generate early success that can be built off of moving forward.

Alternatively, a focus on establishing open data programs, or secure data sharing platforms, allow CDOs to focus their efforts on technical solutions. Still, these efforts should have a focus on policy or service delivery to allow CDOs to narrow their focus and hit the ground running.

Establishing these priorities should be done through broader stakeholder engagement. State leaders should consult with department heads, policy advisers, and external stakeholders to better understand the issues they face in leveraging and sharing data, and seek to determine how a CDO can best support their efforts.

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## 2. ENSURE THERE'S STRONG SUPPORT.

Simply appointing a CDO won't solve all of the state's data challenges, and many of the most difficult challenges are not technical. Legal and cultural issues are often the most significant challenges states face. Leadership should make clear to agency staff that 1) they should be working with the CDO to find ways to share and leverage data and 2) there won't be consequences down the road as a result of cooperation. Leadership must be ready to step in when necessary to course correct or resolve issues of disagreement as they arise. This requires clear and open lines of communication with both the agency head as well as the governor's office.

### 3. CLEARLY DEFINE AND COMMUNICATE THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE ROLE.

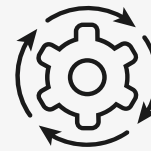
While CDO roles and organizational structures vary across states, the Beeck Center's [CDO Framework](#) can guide states in developing a statewide data program. Before even developing a job description, state leaders need to start by considering how they intend to implement the role. Is the role envisioned to be more strategic and include policy-making, educating, guiding, and consulting? Or, is it to be operational; involving more technical aspects such as building and supporting the technology platforms or providing data analytics services? See the chart below for definitions of the two types of CDO roles.

#### STRATEGIC CDO



Strategic CDOs are well suited for states that are 1) decentralized from an IT perspective and 2) lack robust data sharing infrastructure. Strategic CDOs will seek out opportunities to leverage data across agencies and work to develop strategies to implement use cases.

#### OPERATIONAL CDO



Operational CDOs are most effective in states with a heavily centralized IT organization with strong relationships with their partner agencies. Operational CDOs should be stepping into a situation where there are active efforts to leverage data across agencies that would benefit from a more centralized platform or approach.

Gaps in expectations lead to frustration for both the CDO and agency partners. In states where agency use of data is mature, those agencies may view the CDO as a threat to take over their work. Those agencies may, however, embrace a CDO that can aid them in working with other agencies to advance their goals.

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#### 4. ESTABLISH A PROPER REPORTING STRUCTURE.

CDOs whose responsibilities tend toward operational may be better situated in an IT organization. Those whose responsibilities are more strategic may be better situated outside an IT organization, such as within a budget or management agency. CDOs that sit within IT organizations report that they often have existing relationships with agency partners and deeper technical insights into various agency data systems. However, they're often disconnected from higher-level conversations on policy priorities within the governor's office. The result is that policy leaders may not consider including an IT agency in policy-level discussions or analysis, and thus lack the ability to understand how they might leverage data to inform policy. Regardless of which agency a CDO sits in, it must report directly to the head of that agency.

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#### 5. DEFINE THE LEVEL OF AUTHORITY AND INFLUENCE

What decisions is the CDO empowered to make? What dollars, if any, does the role control? In order to effectively do their job, a CDO must have the level of authority necessary. Depending on the state, CDOs may have influence or authority over:

- **Procurement:** CDOs could ensure tools and systems are being purchased and developed in a way that ensures they're consistent with the state's data strategy by having a role in procurement.
- **Dispute resolution:** CDOs can be empowered to settle interagency disputes related to data sharing or other issues. If the CDO is not empowered to settle disputes, leaders must develop mechanisms to ensure there is a clear dispute escalation and resolution process.
- **Directing vs advising:** Some states empower their CDO to establish and enforce standards, policies, and practices. Other states treat the role as more of an advisor or consultant on best practices and policies. Both can be effective, however this authority needs to be clear up front.
- **Data architecture:** A CDO who has a broad view of the state's existing data landscape can be a very effective resource to ensure that new data is introduced in a way that maximizes interoperability.

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## 6. CONSIDER STAFFING NEEDS

Based on which agency the CDO sits within, they may have different staffing needs. If the CDO is envisioned to sit within the IT organization, states should consider placing existing staff—including database administrators, GIS staff, business analysts, or other technologists—under the CDO role. These agencies may need to hire additional staff with experience in data science or analytics. For CDOs outside of an IT agency, it may be more challenging to reallocate staff with the requisite skills to support a CDO. These agencies may want to look to analysts and researchers to augment the capacity of the CDO or consider hiring individuals with skills in data such as data science, analytics, or GIS. The focus should be on individuals with experience collecting, synthesizing, and analyzing data to produce insights.

Regardless of which agency the CDO sits in, they must have legal support. States may consider hiring an attorney to support the CDO, or assigning existing legal staff to support the CDO's efforts in developing the data-sharing agreements necessary.

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## 7. PROVIDE FUNDING

Outside of staffing considerations, CDOs will need funding to support the long-term infrastructure of a data-driven government. States need to assess which resources, tools, and platforms already exist to support data sharing, integration, and analysis. Additional costs may include establishing open data platforms, data inventory and cataloging tools, and taking the time to maximize interoperability and create proper documentation. States may also want to support enhanced training opportunities for CDO staff. While states don't need to make major investments early on, they should plan to provide some baseline funding to get the role started and then consider how they might scale the state's data infrastructure and the CDOs capabilities through chargebacks, cost recovery, or, ideally, direct appropriations.

Decision-makers in state government should follow these seven steps to create a strong foundation for a CDO and a data-driven government. The State CDO Network has compiled lessons learned from the direct experiences of more than 30 CDOs and has developed these recommendations to help states save time and effort throughout the development of modern and effective data strategies. The CDO role is a keystone of a successful transition toward data-driven policy-making and public service delivery.

The Beeck Center and the State CDO Network can further assist states in establishing a CDO role. Contact Tyler Kleykamp at [tyler.kleykamp@georgetown.edu](mailto:tyler.kleykamp@georgetown.edu) for more information.