

REPORT | AARON SNOW AND EVE ELIE

Unemployment Insurance IT Modernization Grant Projects: *Insights Report*

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Provisional Entrepreneurship

After reading books
from screen

Executive Summary

This report outlines the evolving experiences and key insights from nine of the 19 states implementing projects supported by \$204 million from the U.S. Department of Labor's (USDOL) Unemployment Insurance (UI) Information Technology (IT) Modernization Grants. The findings reflect the grantees' learnings since receiving project approval and launching their five-year modernization efforts, providing a snapshot of both the successes and ongoing challenges faced during implementation.

The interviews, conducted in June and July 2024, revealed several common themes:

- + **Excitement and necessity:** Participants were enthusiastic about the opportunity to modernize foundational systems, recognizing the necessity of these improvements for long-term sustainability.
- + **Complexity and stress:** While progress is underway, the complexity of the projects, coupled with limited staff and competing priorities from other grant requirements, has created significant strain. Participants expressed concerns about balancing modernization work with day-to-day operations and other ongoing projects.
- + **Resource constraints:** Many states are struggling with insufficient staffing and bandwidth, exacerbated by high turnover rates and challenges in securing vendor support. Competing priorities from multiple grant programs often result in delays, particularly for long-term IT modernization goals.
- + **Interconnected systems:** UI systems are part of broader state infrastructures, and integrating these modernization efforts with other state systems adds to the complexity of the projects. The need for coordination across agencies and systems has been a key challenge.
- + **Pandemic impact:** The COVID-19 pandemic has left a lasting mark on UI operations, both in highlighting the need for technological advancements and in creating operational strain. Participants noted the ongoing difficulty of managing modernization projects while dealing with post-pandemic recovery and workforce challenges.

We conclude with several lessons learned and recommendations for future efforts, emphasizing the need for thorough project planning, openness to new solutions, and appropriate resource allocation. Additionally, participants highlighted the importance of continuous investment in UI systems beyond crisis periods, advocating for sustained support and reinvestment to avoid future system vulnerabilities.

Finally, the report captures the positive roles played by NASWA and USDOL in supporting state efforts, while also identifying areas for improvement in knowledge sharing, training, and strategic planning.

Background

Earlier this year—in the [Unemployment Insurance IT Modernization Grant Projects: Phase 1 Summary Report](#)—we described the events and circumstances culminating in US Department of Labor’s (USDOL) new Unemployment Insurance (UI) Information Technology (IT) modernization strategy, its UI Modernization Grants, and, in partnership with the National Association of State Workforce Agencies (NASWA), the launch of its Open UI Initiative. That report was based on interviews conducted between November 2023 and February 2024 with the states who had been notified that they would be receiving funding from the new UI Modernization Grants. It summarized the types of projects grantees are implementing with that funding, highlighted early challenges and areas of opportunity, and identified effective strategies for how state modernization efforts can be supported moving forward. At that time, only some of the grantees’ projects had been approved and most had not yet begun to receive their grant funding.

This Report

The purpose of this report is to reflect grantees’ experiences and evolving understandings now that their projects are funded and, in most cases, underway. We present findings regarding their sentiments about their respective projects, key insights, lessons learned, and future opportunities related to UI IT modernization. As is evident below, participants were eager to share a wide range of feedback.

Methodology

Through our partners at NASWA, we requested interviews with the 19 grantees’ implementing teams. Nine of those teams agreed, and in June and July 2024, we conducted 45-minute interviews with participants from each team. Of those, six reported that work specified in their Modernization Grant project plans had begun. Of those, four reported being on schedule with at least one project plan activity and two reported being behind schedule.

Interviewers asked questions about project implementation and progress, challenges and adaptability, future opportunities, lessons learned, gauging success and measuring improvement, understanding current state and readiness to deliver proposed solutions, and support needed. The interviewer’s discussion guide is included as Appendix A. We chose not to chase detailed progress reports vigorously, both to avoid making duplicative work for the states (they are already subject to federal progress reporting requirements) and in order to ensure their trust and candor during the interviews by preserving separation between our inquiries and their reporting accountabilities.

Sentiment Reflections

We started all nine interviews by asking what three adjectives participants would use to describe how their project had unfolded since the initial project plans were submitted/approved.

Words participants variously used to describe their current modernization projects included:

- + **necessary**
- + **exciting**
- + **slow**
- + **complex**
- + **stressful**
- + **challenging**
- + **progressing**
- + **worrisome**
- + **busy**
- + **foundational**

Participants were uniformly excited about the opportunity to address foundational issues and modernize their systems. They also described the work as stressful, and were keenly aware of how complex the work is, of the large number of interlocking moving parts in their projects, and in particular, of significant strain on subject matter experts. Some expressed concerns about missing funding deadlines. All were nonetheless confident that they were making progress.

One participant who used the word “necessity” explained: “We don’t have the option of whether we need this modernized system. It’s absolutely necessary for us to be able to move forward and thrive and to be able to survive the next catastrophe.”

One participant who used the word “excitement” elaborated:

I think we are very excited about the changes because tax historically doesn't get funding in the same way that benefits does. While you can make changes and improve your tax side of your system to make wholesale rewrite changes, there's typically not funding for that. So the fact that we had these other grants that went on the benefit side and kind of handle what benefits needed allowed [us] to use this grant to make major changes to the tax side. Quality of life is going to be much better for the staff once we can get them implemented.

Another chose the adjective excitement because:

It is something new and we've got funding to shift our foundation and I think everybody gets that. This is gonna be a big lift for us. It is a point in time to get excited about it because we got the funding and we got to do it now.

Stress, Worry, Complexity

Participants who chose the words “stress,” “worry,” and “complexity” reported feeling overwhelmed by the sheer number of overlapping grants and deadlines, coupled with limited staff bandwidth, high turnover rates, and challenges in vendor staffing and onboarding. Procurement regulations and process burdens, and the transition to agile development as a methodology, have also been frustrating for some. One participant noted that the complexity of the consortium approach (in which they had participated with other states), while beneficial for creating a better product, had also slowed down requirements gathering. Nonetheless, participants reported remaining dedicated to ensuring success and cautiously optimistic about improvement in these areas.

Lessons Learned By States, For States

When asked to impart lessons they had learned in these first months of their UI Modernization grant work, participants offered the following:

Thorough Understanding of Systems, Technical Debt and Complexity, and Project Plans

A deep understanding of the existing system is a prerequisite to modernization. Underestimating technical debt or complexity in any environment can lead to significant resourcing and planning challenges. Allocating adequate time for project planning, data preparation, requirements gathering, procurement processes, staffing, and training on new frameworks and technologies is all vital to avoid unforeseen difficulties and ensure successful delivery. Comprehensive training on new frameworks is necessary for effective knowledge transfer to staff. Assessing the current state of systems, including understanding the extent of technical debt issues like [dead code](#), is necessary. Involving procurement and legal teams from the start is seen as critical for ensuring compliance with regulations.

Openness to New Solutions and Thinking Big

Some participants emphasized the importance of being open to new technologies and not getting locked into outdated plans and understandings. One cautioned against thinking small out of learned helplessness:

I have a vision. I need to make sure that they dream big enough because I think the issue with state government employees is that a lot of the time is that there isn't money to make improvements so they learn to function with workarounds. They are excited when you just fix the thing that's broken. They don't learn to dream big because they are just excited the system is working and not having to do a workaround. I don't want that. I want us to think big. I don't want to rewrite say for instance tax in another year. I want this to last us 10 years. You need to think big when we have a big bucket of money. I think that's hard for a lot of governmental staff.

Managing Staffing, Backfilling Staff Early, and Subject Matter Experts

Developing a broader understanding of processes enhances overall project effectiveness. In some programs, a lack of available subject matter experts SMEs who understand entire processes, rather than just specific tasks, highlights the need for better succession planning and cross-training. Bringing in backfill staff well before the project start date allows for the time needed to climb the learning curve and to complete the necessary knowledge transfer from existing SME staff. Delaying this step can overburden limited SMEs and hinder project progress.

User Involvement and External Perspectives

Involving a system's users from the beginning ensures project designs and plans are informed by those users' needs. Some participants reported that their initial development efforts lacked user input, leading to suboptimal experiences. They believed that prioritizing users' experiences and engaging them early on could rectify this issue.

Project Control

One participant said their agency is working with a vendor to modernize their system, but they have learned to maintain control and authority over the process and code changes through change management procedures and technical review boards led by agency staff. They are heavily involving agency staff in the project to ensure knowledge transfer and avoid abdicating authority to the vendor.

Plan for the Unknown

One participant noted the importance of working to solve not just today's problems but also tomorrow's unknowables:

Most of the time we watch the weather to decide whether you need an umbrella. But when it comes to the unemployment world, we're not planning for what's coming. We're just kind of handling what's for you on this given day. What I would want us to do moving forward and we want our legacy to be is that we plan for the unknowns.

Common Themes

Competing Priorities for Limited Resources

In our last report we noted that “[s]everal interview participants described struggles in reconciling holistic plans that meet their program’s comprehensive, ongoing needs with meeting the priorities and requirements of the IT Modernization grant and the other available grants, including the Tiger Team and Integrity grants, all of which are one-time (if long-term).” This theme emerged prominently again in the interviews for this report. Participants noted that other grants’ shorter timelines—with most ending by the end of 2025 or earlier—dictated that their limited in-house resources and expertise focus on grant requirements attached to shorter-term funding horizons, at the cost of deprioritizing IT Modernization project work.

In addition to competing priorities for work required by the various federal grants, participants also noted the ongoing difficulty of trading off between achieving Modernization Grant project goals and meeting requirements stemming from state funding. Those requirements include, but are not limited to, delivering required or requested features to other business units, addressing technical debt, and contributing to their government's enterprise-wide initiatives.

State leaders reported attempting, not always successfully, to “shield” current and future teams that are or will be focused on Modernization Grant priorities from being pulled off of that work and onto other priorities. Participants expressed concerns about being able to maintain this separation of priorities once their other federal grants' two-year time horizons arrive. One participant reported juggling roughly 25 concurrent projects spanning unemployment insurance systems, Salesforce applications, labor relations, reemployment initiatives, public works systems, and data quality efforts. Another participant reported managing roughly 40 UI-related projects concurrently.

Participants described the problem of insufficient staff bandwidth and time to handle both day-to-day services and modernization initiatives simultaneously as the biggest challenge they faced. According to one:

Our biggest hurdles on any of the funding opportunities we get are bandwidth of staff and bandwidth of time to do the work.” Another said “We are constantly trying to maneuver our day to day services and also trying to move and make headway and improvements as efficiencies through all of these opportunities that we’re given.

One participant predicted that simultaneously maintaining existing systems while building new ones would continue to tax their limited personnel over the next two to three years.

Resource prioritization was not only reported as an implementation problem; participants also noted the cumulative effect of all the various reporting and oversight requirements—imposed by both their funding sources and their state governments—as a significant time cost.

Interconnectedness: UI Systems Don't Exist in a Vacuum

Several participants suggested that the wider context in which their UI Modernization work sits is an underappreciated element of complexity. Participants emphasized that their UI applications and systems do not exist in isolation, but are part of an enterprise supported by the state. Participants noted that in the course of modernizing their UI systems, they must consider integration points with other state and workforce agency systems, reusability, and the variegated status of modernizing (or not modernizing) all those interconnected systems. Participants further noted that this interconnectedness challenge extends beyond project work and planning: such work creates interconnected experiences for, and impacts on, all the various classes of users who are required to adapt to the changes being wrought by overlapping modernizations.

The Pandemic Continues to Impact UI Operations and Modernization

Participants had a lot to say about the impact of the pandemic on UI modernization. They variously noted:

- + The pandemic highlighted the need to improve UI systems nationally, but that focus seemed to fade once the crisis passed, despite the demonstrated need for, e.g., emerging technologies to defend against the online fraud that overwhelmed many states during the pandemic. Participants noted that funding for technology modernization is often a one-time windfall after crises (recessions, pandemic), but should be a constant investment to keep up with changing technology. As one put it, “It is feast or famine [in UI].”
- + UI staff experienced exhaustion after working around the clock during the pandemic, and now face the additional challenge of system modernization.
- + States did not receive any grace period or relaxation of performance measures and requirements during post-pandemic recovery. One participant elaborated:

The states didn't have the luxury of being able to do business as usual during the pandemic. The measures and the requirements that were on the states before the pandemic continued. For example, the performance measures and the standards, the timeliness measures, the separation requirement, non monetary quality, etc. There was no grace as we were trying to recover from that moment. We're now under the pressures of trying to rebound from that. That's not just from the federal level but that's within the states as well. Other state agencies hav[e] demands and requirements on the program that it just didn't have the capacity to meet.

- + Moreover, filling UI job vacancies became difficult post-pandemic due to labor market challenges and budget constraints.
- + Nonetheless, the direction toward modernization is encouraging after the strain of the pandemic, providing hope for the future.
- + Lessons were learned about maintaining work-life balance for staff, many of whom often made sacrifices in their personal lives during the crisis.

Other Challenges

Participants variously highlighted additional challenges in their work:

- + **Communication and clarification** are constant needs, due to the variety of overlapping challenges faced during projects, including interpreting regulations, reporting requirements, and coordinating with various offices and agencies.
- + For some participants, **the procurement process** for hiring vendors like technical writers takes much longer than expected due to state requirements for approvals.
- + There also have been **delays caused by leadership changes** requiring re-approval of plans.
- + Notwithstanding the grants, funding remains a major issue, with insufficient base funding to hire permanent staff. Some participants reported **not being able to use the (temporary) UI Modernization Grant money to hire needed staff**. While staffing is an allowable expense under the grant, participants are reticent to support permanent staff positions with temporary funding. One described their situation this way:

We're roughly [number redacted] FTE. We're at about [80%] right now and that's because we don't have the budget from [USDOL]. You can't put grant money to FTE. You can buy technology and support technology, but you can't hire people off the street with grants. There's one-off occurrences where like [sic] you can hire a fraud investigator under an integrity grant, but it's a modified position. When that money runs out or if it runs out or the work abates that's not a full time position. It's not protected by the union. It lasts as long as the money's there. We don't have the budget to staff our FTE. We have legislatively approved FTE and budget, but most of that budget comes from the Feds. Since the pandemic, we are a skeleton crew around here. There's no backup, no bench if someone leaves, or wins the lottery. We're as operationally lean as I've ever seen this program.

- + Some participants reported that they lost funding sources that previously supported local offices, and that their legislatures were unwilling to allocate sufficient state funds. One said:

We had to lose [number redacted] staff members because our federal funding is shrinking back to pre pandemic times. [...] We asked our state legislatures to support [rehiring fewer than half of those] positions this past year and they did not fund us. That is nothing but a political game between parties. That is not about service to the citizens or service to the employers. What we have to do then is work smarter, more effective and more efficient with how we do those tools because it became a high look program without a meaningful understanding of how UI really works. When legislatures or other folks on the outside do not want to have a meaningful understanding and they don't want to understand the risk that the program has to have, we have to take these opportunities whenever we can get to do what we do.

- + For some, getting **leadership approval for new technologies like AI** was challenging due to lack of understanding.
- + The shift to cloud services and microservices architecture **requires extensive retraining** of existing technical staff accustomed to traditional systems.

The Future

Perceptions of NASWA's Role and Support in Modernization

NASWA received American Rescue Plan UI Modernization funding from USDOL to support states' modernization efforts under the grant and to support the Open UI Initiative. Participants who offered reflections on NASWA's role in their states' modernizations found NASWA's involvement helpful and trustworthy.

- + One reported a meeting where NASWA provided good solutions and tools to help with visuals and project tracking.
- + Another said NASWA assisted with writing business requirements for one project, acting as an extension and lending their expertise.
- + A third appreciated that "NASWA has come on site. They came in this week and they're helping us with our project planning on all of our grants."
- + For one participant, rewriting correspondence for plain language has been difficult, so they approached NASWA to potentially bring someone on to work on forms and correspondence.

- + Another reported that, for a plain language initiative, NASWA is helping to pull together a behavioral insights vendor and utilize AI to develop a model that can be applied across benefit systems, websites, and tax/employer communications.
- + Another appreciated being offered project management and procurement help by NASWA, even though the state's procurement requirements for accessing that help proved too difficult to navigate.
- + "I think the more you work hand in glove with NASWA, the easier, whether it's modernizing or just running a UI program," one participant said.

Generally, participants perceive that NASWA is ramping up their capacity to help states with training, technology, and working closely with them to modernize or run UI programs more effectively.

- + One noted that it has been "hugely beneficial" that federal partners attend regular NASWA board meetings to discuss movement of funding resources.
- + Another cited NASWA-facilitated conversations between states as helpful for learning what others are doing.

Perceptions of USDOL's Role and Support in Modernization

Participants who reflected on USDOL's role in their modernization reported feeling supported in their modernization efforts, with resources and guidance provided to facilitate positive change. One participant elaborated:

I feel really supported both by NASWA and by the Department of Labor, probably more so than at any other time in my career. I think NASWA because they finally have the resources where they can provide support. I think the Department of Labor has really made a change as well. They really appear to be interested in there being positive change and in working with States to make that happen. My conversations with them about the grants I'm saying, 'I'm looking at changing these and modifying them.' They absolutely want to work with me and want to see the best result as well. That's really encouraging.

Small State/Large State Equity: Small states reported facing outsized challenges in staffing and funding their UI programs due to limited budgets, and one participant suggested that the funding mechanism for state unemployment insurance programs (outside the scope of IT Modernization Grants provided under ARPA) is outdated and needs to be revised to provide equitable funding for small states:

We don't want any more money than we need. We just want to be able to keep the lights on and do the work. A good example is a technology grant out there and if you were an extra large state you could get [large sum]. I don't remember the numbers but because the size of our state our cap was [smaller sum, redacted for anonymity]. The technology costs the same. It's just how many people do you have scaled [sic] running the program? Why does an extra large state get way more money for the same technology a small state has to buy?

Participants' Recommendations For Designing Future Support from USDOL and NASWA

When asked for recommendations as to how USDOL and NASWA could support states' UI modernizations in the future, participants reported the following:

Enhancing Sharing and Communication: Participants generally asked for more knowledge sharing mechanisms across states and better communication between the federal government and the states. Suggestions included NASWA and USDOL investing or increasing investment in modernization documentation, repositories, webinars, facilitated discussions, and coordination between state UI modernization efforts and federal systems and their modernization plans, to help avoid potential pitfalls, identify promising practices, and minimize disruptions.

Topics For Help: Several participants had suggestions about what types of help they would appreciate from USDOL and/or NASWA.

- + **How to determine staffing levels:** One participant talked about struggling to determine the right staffing levels after implementing new technology and processes, as staffing needs fluctuate based on the unemployment rate and are never static. “Match your processes to the technology because you have an entirely new tech stack and try to leverage as much efficiency out of it as possible. That’ll determine the right staff sizing in relation to the unemployment rate. Right size staffing is never static in a program. There are terrible access issues because of staffing levels.”
- + **How to retrain and upskill staff:** Another noted that retraining and upskilling staff is a challenge as states shift to new technologies like cloud platforms, microservices, and DevOps practices, requiring partnerships with training providers, universities, and community colleges.
- + **Broader IT considerations:** One participant suggested that advisory services often focus too narrowly on UI-specific aspects rather than broader IT considerations faced by CIOs, such as managing the shift to cloud-based systems owned and maintained by the state.
- + **How to encourage and achieve continuous improvement and reinvestment in UI systems:** One participant noted that funding for UI administrative costs tends to decrease during periods of low unemployment, leaving states understaffed and ill-prepared for sudden spikes in claims volume, as experienced during the pandemic:

I hate the word modernization because we’ve used it as a buzzword, but it’s been a buzzword to give us a momentum at the moment. It has to be about continuous improvement. [Name] was asked today specifically by one of our representatives, ‘Will you need funding from us down the road?’ Yes, we will, always. It is a continuous movement because if we make these efforts and changes today, it is good for today and today only. It has to be a continuous reinvestment into the system. I think the pandemic brought that to the forefront, whether or not we can keep legislatures understanding that will be all of our responsibility from the local, state, and the federal level to say you can’t do it in 2022 and not think you have to do it again in 2025, 2026, and so on. You must continually do that or you will put the states back at the same risk and the program back at the same risk in a future event. And it’s not if at a future event, it’s when is that future event?

Conclusion

The issues raised by participants in these interviews appear to validate recommendations made in our first report to: facilitate inter-state communities of practice; invest long-term in an Open UI Initiative run with, by, and for the states; and ensure meaningful iterative feedback between the federal government and the states’ UI programs. Participants’ specific recommendations, above, are excellent guides for informing those efforts.

Appendix A:

Research Plan Contents

- + What and Why
- + Organizational Goals
- + Research Goal
- + Anticipated Outcomes
- + Baseline Assumptions/Hypothesis
- + Approach
- + Appendix
- + Discussion Guides (2)
- + Recruitment Message

What and Why

OUII Phase I Summary Report summarized the:

- + types of projects states are implementing pursuant to the IT Modernization grants,
- + challenges,
- + areas of opportunity, and
- + strategies and recommendations for how state modernization efforts can be supported moving forward.

To inform this work, we reviewed draft project plan submissions and related documents provided by the states. Between November 2023 and February 2024, we met via Zoom with representatives from 18 of the 19 jurisdictions awarded IT Modernization Grants. State participation in these meetings, and provision of documents for our review, was strictly voluntary. The meetings had the dual purpose of providing assistance to states in shaping their project plan submissions and providing us with an opportunity to learn more about those plans.

As of June 2024, states are six months into a five-year time horizon working with USDOL and NASWA to modernize their UI system. Based on subcontract deliverables and valuing continuous improvement on the program implementation, there is an opportunity to assess the progress and challenges of states in implementing their UI modernization projects, as outlined in the IT Modernization Grants.

Organizational Goals

Provide valuable insights and recommendations on a regular cadence for both USDOL and NASWA to support the successful implementation of UI modernization efforts by conducting feedback interviews. This work aligns with the broader objective of enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of state UI systems.

Research Goal

Identify key insights and lessons learned in the current state of UI modernization efforts among the 19 states. From the insights and lessons learned, we will share future opportunities related to operationalizing the Open UI Initiative and implementing components of the Open UI Framework.

Anticipated Outcomes

The production of a comprehensive report that informs areas of improvement for USDOL and NASWA in program implementation. The report will acknowledge the successes achieved thus far by states, identify current or impending blockers, and provide actionable recommendations for mitigating challenges and driving progress in UI modernization. Additionally, sharing our interview guide and additional materials will facilitate ongoing benchmarking of program implementation, enabling future assessments of progress and identification of areas for further improvement throughout this five-year initiative.

Baseline Assumptions/Hypotheses

- + Assume states have made varying degrees of progress in implementing their UI modernization projects, with some facing more challenges than others. Note that some states have not started yet.
- + Assume proactiveness since the onset of this initiative toward ongoing collaboration between states, federal agencies, and other stakeholders, as well as a willingness to adapt/pivot strategies based on evolving needs and lessons learned.
- + Assume in six months drafted plans that consider levels of readiness and capacity among states to adopt/improve agile development practices and human-centered design approaches, which could impact the pace and success of modernization efforts.

Approach

Method(s)	Feedback interviews (are to evaluate the effectiveness, satisfaction, and impact of project/program implementation. Capture what is working well and what needs improvement. Track the progress of the project, ensuring it stays on course and meets its objectives to provide timely information that can be used to make quick adjustments or improvements moving forward. They help engage stakeholders by incorporating their views and suggestions, ensuring that their needs and expectations are met.)
Study design	Moderated
Participants How many people do you want to connect with?	19 states
Incentives How (and how much) will you be compensating participants?	N/A
Length How long will your sessions be?	45 minutes
Stimuli Describe everything that will be tested (concept/ images, link to prototype or live site).	Project plans sent to Beeck as prep for interviews; project plans serve as guide to ask states specific questions
Recruitment Method	NASWA sending recruitment message

Appendix

Unemployment Insurance IT Modernization Grant Projects: Phase I Summary Report, July 2024

Discussion Guide

Objectives

- + Identify, if any, wins to date, areas where states are getting stuck or frustrated, and where they see opportunities for improvement in the current stage of modernizing their UI system six months into the five-year Open UI initiative.
- + Evaluate the effectiveness, satisfaction, and impact of project/program implementation.
- + Capture what is working well and what needs improvement.
- + Track the progress of the project, ensuring it stays on course and meets its objectives to provide timely information that can be used to make quick adjustments or improvements moving forward.

Introduction

[Introduce interviewer, notetaker/timekeeper, NASWA observer]

For context again, we are here to gather your successes, progress to date, areas where you may be getting stuck or frustrated, and where you see opportunities for improvement in the current stage of modernizing your UI system and the help available to you. Your perspectives will help us evaluate project/program implementation and highlight considerations where we can design support that meets your needs as we continue on.

Thank you again for sharing your perspectives.

Before we begin, I want to emphasize that your participation is highly valued and that your confidentiality is of utmost importance to us. Nothing you say will be directly attributable to you, ensuring your privacy. By participating, you consent to allow the Beeck Center to record your involvement in interviews and/or related activities for the purpose of this project. We encourage honesty and reflection as this helps us identify areas for improvement. Please note that the interview may be recorded for our records, but this is entirely optional; your consent is paramount. After the completion of the research activities, all recordings will be deleted.

With your permission again, we'd like to record this session for our research team's internal analysis. Do we have your permission to record?

Thank you.

Questions for states that have launched modernization efforts

- + For the record, state your name
 - + Name
 - + Title
 - + State
- + How long have you been involved in your state's modernization initiative?
- + When were you approved? When were you funded?

Project Implementation and Progress:

- + In three adjectives, describe how your project has unfolded since the initial project plans were submitted/approved? Why those adjectives? (Listen for major milestones or any unexpected challenges along the way.)
- + Any changes to capacity? (Listen for staff changes, additional SME.)
 - + Tech, Service Design: UX/UI

Challenges and Adaptability:

- + You shared some potential challenges/mitigations in your project plan. Have those materialized? (Listen for how it was addressed/mitigated.)
- + Any unexpected hurdles you've faced in the project thus far? (Listen for shifts in priorities or approaches since the inception of the projects.)
 - + Note/discuss potential challenges and mitigations cited in the grantee's project plan.

Future Opportunities and Lessons Learned:

- + What key insights and lessons have you and the team learned from your modernization project thus far?
- + Do you see any emerging opportunities or areas for further exploration in state modernization efforts?
- + What advice would you give to other states that have not yet started their UI modernization efforts?

Gauging Success:

- + You shared success metrics in your project plan. Are they useful to you or are they mostly for reporting/compliance?
 - + Note/discuss potential challenges and mitigations cited in the grantee's project plan.

Improvement Measurement:

- + How are you tracking improvements in user experience as a result of your modernization efforts? (Listen for methods, who's responsible, who is mentioned as the user(s).)
- + Can you provide any specific examples or data that demonstrate these improvements? (Listen for agility, capture of feedback for future work.)

Questions for states that have not yet launched modernization efforts

- + For the record, state your name
 - + Name
 - + Title
 - + State
 - + How long have you been involved in your state's modernization initiative?

Understanding the Current State:

- + In three adjectives, how would you describe your existing system? Why those adjectives?
- + Any changes to capacity? [Listen for staff changes, additional SME]
- + When are you slated to begin your UI Mod efforts?
 - + [If they have a start date:] How confident are you in your projected start date?

Understanding Readiness to Deliver Proposed Solutions:

- + In the submitted project plan, you mentioned ...
 - + How prepared do you feel your state is to begin its UI modernization efforts in the near future? What has been explored to date to ensure readiness?
 - + What is yet to be explored?

Support Needed:

- + What additional information or support would help you feel more confident in kicking off your modernization project?

Future Opportunities and Lessons Learned:

- + What key insights and lessons have you and the team learned from preparing to launch your modernization project thus far?
- + Do you see any emerging opportunities or areas for further exploration in state modernization efforts?
- + What advice would you give to other states that have also not yet started their UI modernization efforts?

Improvement Measurement:

- + How are you tracking improvements in user experience as a result of your modernization efforts? (Listen for methods, who's responsible, who is mentioned as the user(s).)
- + Can you provide any specific examples or data that demonstrate these improvements? (Listen for agility, capture of feedback for future work.)

Final Thoughts

We have reached the end of our time together today. We appreciate you sharing your expertise and perspective. Is there anything we haven't touched on or that you'd like to discuss?

Follow Up and Next Steps

- + Explain the next steps.
- + Discuss what you will do with these interview findings.
- + If applicable, exchange contact details.
- + If applicable, ask if you can call again or if they know of others to interview (recruit further).
- + Explain what to do if they need to call you.

Recruitment Message

Subject: Follow-up Interview on UI Modernization Efforts

Dear state UI modernization leaders,

Seven months ago, your team met with us to review and discuss your UIPL II-23 project plans. NASWA-ITSC and our colleagues at Georgetown University's Beeck Center for Social Impact + Innovation continue to monitor and study UI modernization efforts nationwide. To that end, we're writing to request a **short follow-up Zoom conversation** to hear from you about your successes and progress to date, areas where you may be getting stuck or frustrated, and where you see opportunities for improvement in the current stage of modernizing your UI system and the help available to you. Your perspectives will help us evaluate project/program implementation and highlight considerations where we can design support that meets your needs as we continue on.

We are interested in talking to people on your team who can share insights from both the technical and programmatic perspectives. Additional notes on the feedback interviews will be included in the calendar invite. As with our previous conversations, your comments will be kept strictly anonymous.

Please choose an available time slot at [calendar link] or reply to this email and let us know when you're available to meet virtually with us for 45 minutes between [dates and times].

Thank you,

[name]

