



## **Mayor Mamdani Must Fully Harness City Tech to Deliver for Everyday New Yorkers**

*Opportunities Abound to Better Align the City of New York's Massive Digital Infrastructure with the Mayor-Elect's Goals – Will Be Better Achieved Without a Tech Czar*

### **Executive Summary**

Digital technology tools are built into everything the City of New York does: the public services it provides, and the internal administration and management that keeps city workers on the job, vehicles moving, schools serviceable, and lights lit. Unfortunately, the City's internal technology systems function poorly and could be delivering far more given the billions in public funds invested. Fortunately, Mayor Mamdani can make enormous progress by being decisive and improving the City's management in five areas: (1) contracting and procurement, (2) hiring and retaining technologists, (3) service design, (4) data stewardship, and (5) restructuring technology offices across the City for better outcomes.

### **Recommendations for Management Restructuring: No Tech Kings**

- 1. The Deputy Mayor for Operations should oversee digital and data offices and the Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications (DoITT).**
- 2. Mayor Mamdani should not appoint a CIO/CTO at the Deputy Mayor level.**

Because NYC provides an incredibly diverse number of services – vastly more than any state or large corporation – and technology is integral to nearly all agency functions, it should remain part of overall agency management by the Office of Management and Budget, Deputy Mayors, and Commissioners. DoITT should be a shared service agency providing enterprise infrastructure and cybersecurity and along with separate digital services, data, open data, information privacy, and 311 should fall under the Deputy Mayor for Operations.

### **Five Policy Recommendations**

- 1. Reform the technology procurement and contracting process so City agencies have better options for designing, building, and delivering City**

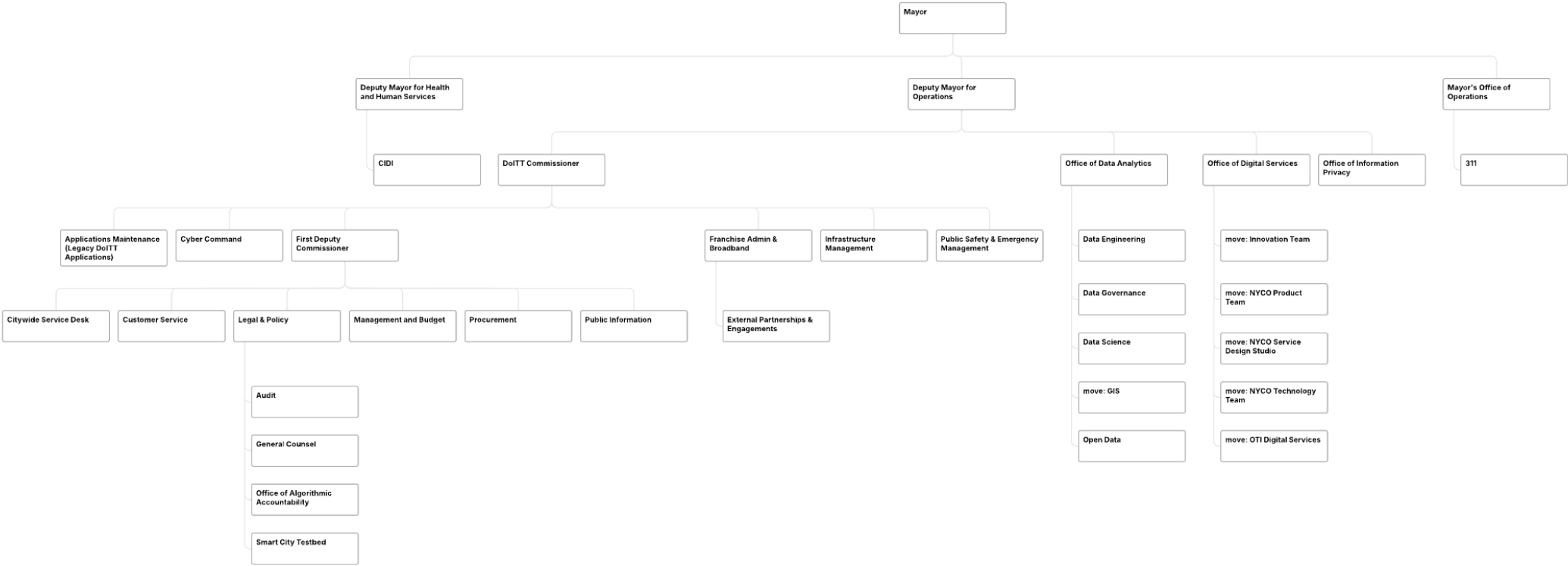
**services.**

- 2. Make it easier and faster to hire technologists in City agencies and support their work.**
- 3. Relentlessly focus on the quality of services that the City provides, understanding that technology is not the end goal, but plays a critical role in service delivery.**
- 4. Improve the quality, stewardship, and usefulness of the City's critical data resources – both public and private.**
- 5. Restructure the City's technology and data offices for collaboration and clear lines of accountability and reorient towards service.**

## **Recommended Structure of Mamdani Administration Technology Entities**

We recommend the Mamdani administration place offices and agencies dedicated to digital services and data under the Deputy Mayor for Operations. This Deputy Mayor is the senior manager most responsible for overall management practices, sharing best practices, and coordinating multi-agency service delivery. We believe it is a mistake to place technology efforts in a separate management silo from those designing and delivering services. Per the chart below ([click here to enlarge](#)), we propose two major changes from the structure used by the Adams administration:

1. Restore DoITT to its role as a shared service agency led by a Commissioner whose team provides enterprise wide technology infrastructure.
2. Have digital and data offices with citywide roles report directly to the office of the Deputy Mayor for Operations.



## **Mayor Mamdani Must Fully Harness City Tech to Deliver for New Yorkers**

### **Introduction**

Reinvent Albany published this report to highlight key information technology issues and opportunities for the incoming Mamdani administration. We thank Martha Norrick, former director of the NYC Mayor's Office of Data Analytics, for drafting the report and sharing her insights and distilling the thoughts of the former NYC government technology managers, data and digital leaders from other municipalities and states, and civic technologists she interviewed.

Since we launched in 2010, Reinvent Albany has advocated for using information technology to increase government transparency, accountability, and efficiency in New York City and New York State. We played a key role passing the NYC Open Data Law – the first in the world – and creating New York State's Open NY and the MTA's Open Data program. Since then we have been heavily involved in the state and city's modernization and expansion of their data and transparency platforms for spending, contracting, capital expenditures, campaign finance, lobbying, budgeting, and corporate subsidies.

### **Why This Matters**

New York City's digital infrastructure and technology practices **need fundamental reform**. Right now, the incentives for technology design and development in New York City are fundamentally misaligned to the goals of high-quality service delivery that works both for New Yorkers and the public servants delivering those services. Technology procurement remains opaque and slow. Digital services are inconsistent across agencies. And hiring talented technologists for meaningful work should be easier than it is.

This isn't about technology for technology's sake. It's about making government work better for real people—whether that's a small business owner trying to renew a permit, a parent applying for school programs, or a resident reporting a neighborhood issue. This paper will lay out recommendations and considerations in five areas: (1) contracting and procurement, (2) hiring, (3) service design, (4) creating better data, and (5) restructuring technology offices across the City for better outcomes. Great thanks to all the wise thinkers who contributed their thoughts and advice to this effort.

### **Overall Recommendation for Management Restructuring: No Tech Kings**

**The Deputy Mayor for Operations should oversee Data Offices and DoITT as separate entities.**

Because technology is so integral to most agency functions (internal and external) we believe

managing technology cannot be separated from the overall management of city agencies done by OMB, Deputy Mayors and Commissioners. We note that the City of New York, like other large cities, provides a vastly greater variety of services than even the most complex corporations or biggest states. (Cities, not states, provide far more direct services to the public, which is why city governments have much higher headcounts and budgets than states with a comparable population.) This means NYC government must make many more – and far more diverse – policy decisions involving investing in and using technology.

Because of this, **we strongly urge Mayor Mamdani NOT to appoint a Technology Czar (CIO or CTO) equivalent to a Deputy Mayor.** Instead we recommend that Mayor Mamdani restores DoITT to its function as a shared service agency in charge of enterprise wide infrastructure like cloud storage, internet service, maintaining vast legacy applications and overseeing enterprise wide cyber security – a demanding portfolio. As part of rationalizing management, we recommend that mayoral offices for digital services, data analysis and Open Data, and 311 be placed under the Deputy Mayor for Operations.

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## Procurement and Contracting Reform

### Expand and Leverage Master Agreements

*How can we increase the competitiveness and improve the quality of City technology procurement?*

DoITT is one of the few City agencies with the power to enter into master agreements, yet the City is not fully using this authority to create competitive options. The proposed Master Design Contract provides a useful model; it could have opened the door to a broader range of qualified vendors and created real competition. The City should also make public any Direct Orders and Task Orders against master agreements so the public can see how these vehicles are being used.

#### Key Opportunities:

- Expand the types and number of master agreements available – and make public any orders made against them.
- Make it easier for agencies to access pre-vetted, competitive options.
- Reduce dependence on the same incumbent vendors.

### Create Common Solutions for Common Problems

*How can we make a menu of tools and products available to City agencies that are easy to navigate and use?*

Why is every agency reinventing the wheel? Agencies across the City are independently figuring out how to build forms, conduct and record outreach, and deliver basic digital services. We need to provide centralized, high-quality solutions to common problems and make them accessible to

everyone—including program staff who aren't technology experts. We don't force every agency to figure out their own solution to how to order paper, and we shouldn't be forcing every agency to figure out their own solution to how to build a CRM (almost all government systems are Customer Relationship Managers in an expensive trenchcoat).

This means building a shared technology stack with reusable components and clear documentation that staff in program offices can understand and implement. It also means providing a clear, accessible menu of licenses and products, pre-vetted by Cyber, that agencies can procure quickly and easily.

## **Raising the Floor of Agency Competence**

*How can we arm City employees with the knowledge, skills, and experience needed to be more skeptical and effective consumers of technology products and services?*

Technology product procurement, product management, and vendor accountability need to become real competencies across City government. This requires:

- Helping agencies implement modern technology practices, like product management, version control and replicable development.
- Building a genuine community of practice for technology projects and product management with dedicated resources.
- Requiring user research and design as a part of new product or service development.
- Implementing plain language standards both for public-facing and internal tools and products.
- Building templates, standards, and a library of good examples of technology RFPs and RFIs.

## **Fix Cybersecurity Processes**

*How can we make the process of keeping the City secure more easily navigable for technologists?*

Current cybersecurity approval processes feel arbitrary and punitive, especially toward open source development. We need consistent, transparent standards that protect the City without making it impossible to launch new applications or adopt modern development practices.

## **Strengthen OMB's Tech Knowledge – and Consider the Cost of Not Acting**

*How can we leverage central points of review to improve the quality of digital services and save the City money?*

The Office of Management and Budget needs the staff and knowledge to review and assess technology projects. OMB should play a more strategic role in contracting, creating feedback loops with agencies and technology leadership to continuously improve outcomes. OMB should also be considering the cost of NOT acting on service delivery and long-term technical debt.

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## Hiring Reform and Building In-House Capacity

### Modernize Civil Service Titles

*How can we make Civil Service titles reflect modern technology practices?*

Our civil service structure for technology, data, and engineering roles is outdated and makes it difficult to recruit and retain talent. We need titles that reflect how modern technology work actually happens.

### Bring Core Capabilities In-House

*How can we make sure every City digital product or service has a dedicated product team?*

The City has outsourced too much systems integration and customization work. We should be building internal product management capacity and treating City applications as products with dedicated teams. This doesn't mean building everything from scratch—we should absolutely use high-quality industry standard products where they exist. But we need the expertise to customize, integrate, and manage these tools effectively.

**The principle:** Procure products, not people.

### Make NYC a Place Developers Want to Work

*How can we attract and retain talented technologists to public service?*

Right now, talented technologists see City government as an appealing place to serve but barriers exist to attracting and retaining talent. When it takes more than a year from offer to OMB approval, we lose talented people and essential work goes undone. We need to change that culture and demonstrate that we value the hiring experience by hiring more quickly. And once technologists join the City, we need to demonstrate that we care about user experience, and give people the autonomy to do good work, including continuing hybrid work policies.

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## Service Design and Service Standards

### Define What Quality Looks Like

*How can we define quality and service level expectations in digital services?*

We need clear standards for what constitutes a quality digital service:

- What is the maximum amount of time it should take to stand up a new service?
- What does good user research look like?

- Are there plain language requirements?
- How do we ensure accessibility?

## **Test with Real People**

*How can we ensure that every product that the City creates has been thoroughly tested by the people who will ultimately use it (public and staff)?*

No one should launch a form or application without completing it themselves, soup to nuts. "Hide the sausage" of government complexity and test along the way with actual users, both public and City staff.

## **Use AI Thoughtfully**

*How can we make sure that any use of AI is thoughtful, considered, and never speaks on behalf of the City?*

There is no shortage of opinion about what the City should and shouldn't be doing with AI and what policies it should be setting. Our point of view is that AI should be considered normal technology. The City shouldn't use AI for the sake of using AI, but remain open to compelling use cases. The [State of Minnesota's approach](#) to translation services offers a good example—human in the loop enhancement of State employees that increases productivity without sacrificing quality or accountability. There are very few successful "chatbot" use cases in government and it's our position that AI should never speak or decide FOR the government, but it could be a tool for augmenting the work of City employees.

And because so many of the use cases for AI involve procurement, the City should keep the AI policy team close to the legal and procurement teams where they can recognize patterns in use cases. This will bring together communities of practice, and prevent City agencies from buying or deploying AI tools that harm or don't work.

## **Improve Data Collection for Better Decisions**

*How can we improve our understanding of the "ground truth" on important issues to augment data generated through reporting?*

The City makes major allocation decisions with surprisingly little objectively collected data. Much of the data the City uses are based on calls for service, which research has shown is not representative of the underlying phenomenon. Objective federal data the City relies on may not be available for the foreseeable future. And the City doesn't do nearly enough to understand whether or not City responses to calls for service are actually solving the problem.

### **Key Opportunities:**

- Conduct more regular, representative surveys.
- Deploy non-surveillant instrumentation (like [FloodNet NYC](#)) to collect actionable information.



- Improve program evaluation so we're not wasting money on things that don't work.
- Double down on efforts like the [Respondent Satisfaction Survey](#) data that close the loop and hold agencies accountable for the citizen experience.
- Explore data products and services from the private sector.
- Expand resources and staffing of the Open Data team.

The Open Data team needs more resources to ensure that publicly available datasets are automated and regularly updated at the appropriate cadences. They should expand data stewardship practices for all City data, both open and closed. Even if the row-level information is not releasable due to PII concerns, City systems and the types of data contained within should be documented and kept up to date.

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## Restructuring Technology Offices Across the City

### Remember the Goal

*How can we better integrate technology teams with the program and business units they serve?*

Technology is not the goal in and of itself. The goal is high-quality program delivery that leads to positive outcomes for New Yorkers. Technology is a tool that can help, but it needs to be embedded in everything we do, not treated as a separate domain.

### Create a Digital Services Office in the Mayor's Office

*How can we use the central coordinating and policy power of the Mayor's Office to raise the standard for digital services Citywide?*

This office would:

- Set standards and best practices citywide.
- Co-develop new or re-designed digital services together with agencies, program teams, and City Hall and ensure there is a long-term, sustainable product team for all City products.
- Provide common solutions to common problems.
- Facilitate a community of practice for technologists and design teams across the City.
- Conduct "secret shopping" to test services from the user perspective and prioritize City services for redesign or improvement.

This office could integrate the Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity Design studio, product teams, the I-Team, and the Digital Services team. This office should work closely with Deputy Mayors and their portfolios. It requires leadership from someone with high stamina, technical credibility, and the ability to build relationships across government—a "nerd charmer" who can translate between technical and program teams.

## Refocus DoITT on Core Mission

*How can we rebuild and refocus DoITT on what it does best? How do we decide what is a DoITT project versus an Agency project?*

DoITT should concentrate on its Charter responsibilities:

- Administering the City's telecommunications franchise
- Being a center of excellence in procurement, and rebuilding that muscle so the City can save money on resellers (third-party vendors for software)
- Service desk, hardware, and support for existing City applications
- Public safety telephonics and technology
- Cybersecurity

### Structural changes to consider:

- Minimize new application development within DoITT—new apps should come from agencies or the digital services office.
- Critically, appoint a strong ally to lead the procurement team to leverage DoITT's master agreement authority.
- Put someone in charge of DoITT with a service mindset who genuinely cares about supporting City employees in other agencies.
- Completely redesign the service catalog so that it's accessible, navigable, and clear.

## Reorganize OTI Offices

- **Add to the Office of Data Analytics:** Relocate GIS, some data engineering, and the Open Data team from DoITT to the Office of Data Analytics (ODA).
- **Elevate ODA:** Move ODA out of OTI to report to the Deputy Mayor for Operations.
- **Realign and restore MOIP:** Move the Mayor's Office of Information Privacy out of OTI and restore it to the mission of supporting major data integration projects across agencies. MOIP should report either to the Mayor's Office of Operations or directly to a Deputy Mayor.
- **Move 311:** 311 belongs in the Mayor's Office of Operations, where it can be closely tied to agency performance measurement and empowered to bring agencies together to improve integrations and service quality.

## Keep Cybersecurity Close but Make It Work Better

Cyber and DoITT should remain together, but the byzantine cybersecurity regulations need reform. Current processes are too rigid and slow, creating obstacles rather than enabling secure innovation.

## **Conclusion**

These reforms are ambitious but achievable. Other cities have successfully modernized their digital services, and there's no reason New York City can't lead the way. What's required is leadership commitment, willingness to challenge entrenched processes, and focus on what matters: serving New Yorkers better.

The incoming administration has an opportunity to make fundamental changes that will improve how millions of people interact with their government every day. What we need now is the organizational will to make it happen.