

IT Centralization Review Among New Jersey Committee's Recommendations for New Governor

Theo Douglas | February 27, 2018



New Jersey's Government Technology and Innovation Transition Advisory Committee has laid out [15 recommendations](#) for new Gov. Phil Murphy.

The five committee co-chairs and 26 members suggested upgrading the government's technology infrastructure; improving e-government services; strengthening links between universities and innovators; attracting and keeping tech talent; and fostering tech hubs and innovators while expanding access to secure Internet.

But the group's Jan. 1 report also offered several suggested deadlines for Murphy's new administration, which has already listed "reigniting the innovation economy" as a plank of one of six [key initiatives](#).

The committee suggested evaluating IT systems and developing RFPs for "security and functionality" upgrades during the first six months. Its members wrote: "Although the state recently attempted to switch some applications to public cloud technology, many of its applications still use mainframe storage and processing."

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Members made no mention of the departure on [Jan. 15](#) of Chief Technology Officer Dave Weinstein, but recommended the state hire a service delivery director "immediately," to make the state's e-services "world-class."

Jay Bhatti, co-founder of company BrandProject and one of five committee co-chairs, said he had limited insight into Weinstein's replacement, but suggested the CTO position needs someone who has "played in both worlds" of mainframe and Web-based design to help the state to get off legacy systems.

"One of the things that we said was there should be no paper in the government," Bhatti said. "And that's aligned to Gov. Murphy's vision. He's very close to Al Gore on the environmental impact of government waste."

Bhatti said contributors were unanimous in believing the state is "poised for a technical revolution," and "growth in the technology sector," a viewpoint he said the new governor shares.

"So, he's really been looking at that, saying, 'I want recommendations that are bold, I want recommendations that would make us competitive with New York City as well as Silicon Valley,'" said Bhatti, whose company offers financial and operational resources to scale startups.

Daniel Bryan, Murphy's press secretary, noted that the report is, by definition, advisory.

"The governor does appreciate everyone's hard work and he's taking them under advisement," Bryan said of the recommendations.

On Weinstein's replacement, Bryan said: "We're going to make an announcement when it's appropriate."

Bhatti said his role in preparing the report wasn't all-encompassing. He didn't, for example, focus on recommendations that the state create a single, unified mobile app for residents; or that New Jersey convert its 800 numbers to NJ 211, the state's 24-hour service line.

The tech executive acknowledged the significance of calling on the state to evaluate its IT and forge RFPs for upgrades within six months — potentially a heavy lift — but highlighted the committee's recommendations around education-private sector collaborations; creating an annual innovation competition; and transforming empty government or educational facilities into tech incubators.

The committee recommended New Jersey stand up a central tech transfer office to promote university "intellectual property assets and assist with their commercial distribution," one potentially modeled after the [Massachusetts Technology Collaborative](#), which funds research and development, enables student internships at startups and unites representatives of government, business and education.

"That's an example where, if we just created, almost like a search engine for tech transfer for the state university and really promoted it hard to the entrepreneurs, I think it would get them interested in companies," Bhatti said.

Talent loss is another consistent issue for the state, the tech exec said, pointing out that New Jersey has the highest net negative migration of people with college degrees of any state.

Among the committee's recommendations: encourage public schools to expand computer science offerings; set up science, technology, engineering and math student loan forgiveness programs and create what it termed a capital tax and employee stock ownership plan to shield tech company founders and employees from state capital gains tax during an IPO or acquisition.

This strategy could draw firms from New York and Pennsylvania, the committee wrote, and "by creating an effective 'zero percent capital gains tax' for exits, we could become a highly desirable location for startups."

<http://www.govtech.com/data/IT-Centralization-Review-Among-New-Jersey-Committee-Recommendations-For-New-Governor.html>