



Snohomish County

2024-2027

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY STRATEGIC PLAN

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Introduction and CIO Message

I joined the county 5+ years ago as CIO, and at that time had the opportunity to lead the development of the prior strategic plan. Now, a few years later, it is helpful to be able to look back at this time as we define the strategies going forward, including the creation of a follow-up strategic plan in this document. The definition, planning, and execution of IT strategies and delivery of supporting projects does not happen rapidly in our public sector space – for good reasons. Therefore, having the ability to once again build a plan feels much more contextual than it did four years ago. At that time, we wrote in our planning document that **there is one common thread in our work, and that is people**. This continues to be true, and regardless of how technology evolves, people are at the heart of everything we do.



Viggo Forde, CIO &
Director of IT

We are also in a unique position this year compared to four years ago in that a **new entrant in the tech space is “Artificial Intelligence that works”**. There are many things that come and go in tech, but this feels like it is sticking. Not only that; artificial Intelligence will without doubt impact how we work and play in the future. As a matter of fact, we are already seeing this impact in our everyday life with solutions like ChatGPT and other Generative AI solutions. **It is incumbent upon us to determine how this will help our workforce and our residents in the future**. Whereas we did call out AI as an influencer in our prior plan, this time, it is rising to become highly relevant at a pace never before seen. Therefore, we will shortly be complementing this strategic plan with a supporting AI Whitepaper to outline the plans for AI implementation in Snohomish County.

This strategy is centered around four goals, as well as a set of supporting initiatives behind each. This is purposeful in that we elevated the conversation to be focused on these goals, which then also allows us **flexibility to update, complete, and add business impacting technology initiatives even as time moves**. In other words, this is a more flexible approach to IT planning, and implies a more regular revisit of the plans themselves versus the county-code required update every three years.

THE FOUR GOALS WE HAVE DEFINED ARE:

1. *Inclusive & Equitable Digital Government Experience*
2. *Workforce Empowerment*
3. *Innovate and Evolve*
4. *Enable Decision Making through Trusted Data*

These goals were created ensuring alignment with Executive Office mission and vision by IT leadership and complemented by industry research and multiple county department engagement sessions. This allowed us to start with a point of view, but also get **input from our internal and external advisory groups**. This is in alignment with our IT governance where we have a **balanced model to get guidance and input on our work from key partners**. You will note that the goals and supporting initiatives are left relatively high level. This is an intentional approach to avoid over investing in words and keeping a lighter and more agile planning model as the intent. In addition, we have also reflected on our mission and vision statements, as well as our guiding principles, making only small adjustments.

We look forward to hearing your feedback and input to this strategy document using this [link](#).

Retrospective and Looking Ahead

Four years ago, we stated the following: “How do we think about aligning IT services for residents and employees of Snohomish County? “

- *We need to provide a workplace and resident experience that recognizes the need for flexibly serving all residents and employees regardless of generation. +*
- *Long term and environmental impact of our technology decisions should shape our thinking.*
- *Leveraging innovation in the marketplace such as augmented reality, artificial intelligence / machine learning will drive improved employee and resident experiences.*
- *Data and information flow - and insight from this information – is critical to help increase operational efficiency as well as drive improved resident experiences and employee productivity.*
- *Physical and digital safety of employees and residents needs to be a factor in our decision making.*
- *Evolving legislative approaches to privacy will increase the demands of IT Operations.*
- *The need for the workforce to have mobility and paperless solutions has been magnified by our recent experience related to the COVID-19 pandemic and will continue to be expected.*



Regardless of how technology evolves, people are at the heart of everything we do



Looking retrospectively at the last 3-4 years we have executed well against the eight initiatives and associated projects. We will not dive into the specifics here but instead point to our completed strategic projects located [here](#) and our annual report [here](#)

As mentioned in the introduction, we are taking a step back and looking at broader goals supported by a set of initiatives aligned to each goal. We anticipate that the initiatives will ebb and flow as time goes by, and as we revisit the strategy document on an annual basis. The four goals are aspirational in nature and lets us build a set of supporting initiatives around the goals, AND to update and change these initiatives over time providing a more evergreen approach to planning.

As in our prior plan, our team aligns to a set of guiding principles. The IT Leadership Team has reflected on the guiding principles and made some updates. And finally, we have made a small adjustment to our mission statement as well.

Each of these will be outlined in the next pages before we share our goals and supporting initiatives.

Contrary to our prior strategic plan, this document is shorter and more concise. The team has embraced the concepts outlined in the book “Smart Brevity¹” This is by design and is inspired by a need to DO A LOT MORE WITH A LOT LESS. The digital world creates an immense amount of information and data, and the digital clutter is difficult to manage. The intention of this document is to provide a summarized view of our strategies, reduce verbiage, and point to daily management solutions that helps us manage the portfolio of projects and operations supporting these goals outlined in this paper, followed by more frequent revisits to our goals and strategies.

¹ [Axios - Smart Brevity: The Power of Saying More with Less](#)

Mission and Vision

As a principle, we align to the Snohomish County Executive Office Mission and Vision statements as outlined here:

A graphic with a light blue and green geometric background. At the top left is the Snohomish County logo, which consists of three stylized arrows pointing up and to the right in red, blue, and green, followed by the text "Snohomish County" in blue. Below the logo is the "Mission" section, followed by "Vision" and "Values" sections. At the bottom is a concluding statement.

Snohomish County

Mission

Our mission is to meet opportunities and needs of Snohomish County’s residents efficiently, equitably, creatively, and collaboratively.

- As a provider, we are easy to work with and deliver efficient, quality services.
- As a collaborator, we work with regional partners to expand our effectiveness.
- As a steward, we support natural conservation and economic prosperity through innovation.

Vision

- Safe, prosperous, and resilient communities
- Economic sustainability through innovation
- Healthy and preserved natural areas, forests, and waters
- County government that is accessible and serves everyone equitably
- A model for communities everywhere

Values

- Excellent service
- Efficient, common-sense government
- Diversity, equity, and inclusion
- Innovative solutions
- Healthy forests, green spaces, agricultural lands, and waters

We do our work with honesty, transparency, respect, empathy, and teamwork.

The Snohomish County *IT VISION is to simplify the life of Snohomish County residents and employees through technology.*

This vision is supported by our *MISSION of Deliver value by providing inclusive and innovative solutions that align with customer and county needs.*

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Through the work described above we have defined a set of guiding principles that were used to align our core strategic technology areas to actionable plans. These principles are:



CUSTOMER FOCUSED

- Engage with our customers to understand their needs and provide solutions that meet business requirements
- Ensure that governance and control of IT work is customer focused and leadership engaged, and drive a consistent communication model
- Leverage feedback to improve how we work
- Drive customer value - we do not exist for the purpose of IT but for the purpose of serving our community and our customers
- Deliver on our commitments to customer



TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION FOCUSED

- As an IT organization we keenly care about good technical solutions
- Cloud smart not cloud only
- Accelerate the use of modern technologies to drive customer value and cost reduction
- Innovation- beyond IT – by being a leader in continuous improvement - both in IT Operations and Innovation
- Defining, building/acquiring, secure and resilient solutions is core to delivering quality



ACCOUNTABILITY & TRANSPARENCY

- Portfolio simplification to drive enterprise focus and reduce cost
- Drive consumption of our existing solutions: we have invested heavily in IT solutions, and we need to ensure we take full advantage of these investments
- Stewardship of taxpayer resources: Financial accountability, effective vendor management, and IT portfolio management
- Data driven: Use data science and analytics to go beyond large data sets with no insight to insights driven decision making
- Ensure we have first class data management and information protection processes and tools to ensure cyber security and Privacy is managed well



PEOPLE FOCUSED

- We are an organization with a philosophy of public service and giving back to our communities
- Collaboration internally and with our customers and stakeholders is foundational
- Building meaningful IT careers that enable our people to learn and grow
- Encourage innovation and creativity to solve customer problems

Goals

The following four goals reflect the core priorities of our department. These are flexible, open ended and allow us to define, deliver and adjust a set of initiatives supporting these goals. The initiatives are outlined in the next section along with a short description of each initiative. We anticipate that these will evolve over the duration of this strategic planning cycle of 2024-27. In addition, the departments, offices, and courts daily management system enable us to map new and ongoing projects to each of the initiatives to ensure alignment with department and county goals.



GOAL 1: Inclusive & Equitable Digital Government Experience

This goal has primarily an outward facing set of initiatives. Snohomish County IT has in the last couple of years supported projects that have a higher degree of external facing deliverables, such as managing the fiberoptic cable build out along HWY530.



Omni-channel experience for residents & businesses

Today’s customer has high expectations for digital experiences having been trained to expect highly customer focused “Amazon experiences”. This means integrated and end-to-end capabilities tailored to each resident across any platform and device – including the in-person experience. Omni-channel goes beyond the website and requires us to modernize resident service delivery across any platform or device and do so successfully. Enhanced omni-channel and self-serve capabilities across different channels, with a consistent and seamless customer experience is the expectation

Customer service that results in successful outcomes

Technical deliverables that support a digital customer experience is integral to customer service experiences across many departments. This includes a Constituent Relationship Management (CRM) solution, as well as other incident management solutions supporting resident engagements of many types, as well as internal operations.

This initiative is a cross-departmental customer service effort that will involve digital solutions to support the county-wide customer service model.

Connected everywhere

An “always on” level of connectivity is today the expectation for those that live, work, and play in the county. The county’s digital infrastructure is strong and far reaching. This initiative will actively look at opportunities to provide connectivity where it does not exist today through a combination of county and private efforts.

This will also be a value-add for public safety purposes as well as for economic development opportunities.

Data protection & privacy

The county through its day-to-day operations collect and manages a large amount of information and data. Coupled with evolving rules both at the federal and state level, ensuring that we have proper policies and procedures, supported by technology, governance, and daily management of this data to protect our residents and employees is a core priority. This also ties into the work we do to support public records requests.

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) + accessibility

Our county employees represent our community as a whole. Ensuring that we build and buy solutions that are reflective of our diverse community and enables equal access is a key focus area for the department. We also need to ensure that our solutions are accessible for all users across a wide set of accessibility requirements.

Open data

As a government organization, we strive to make sure that our data and information is readily accessible to our residents and community members. Whereas data protection and privacy is key as discussed above, we also want to make sure that information that can help those that live, work, and play in our community is accessible and retrievable leveraging the omni-channel approach discussed above.

GOAL 2: Workforce Empowerment

This goal is an internal facing goal intended to ensure that the Snohomish County workforce is empowered to deliver on their commitments to our community through access to worldclass digital experiences that enable great support for our residents and constituents.



Buy and implement an Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) platform

Today's human capital, finance, and payroll solutions are not aligned in a platform environment creating supremely challenging operational and data management for employees who work in these systems every day.

In addition to operational inefficiencies, data protection and information flow, as well as integration requirements across solutions results in a highly inefficient environment. A modern cloud platform-based ERP solution is a county need to manage an organization of this size.

Enable employee success through secure & reliable technology

The protection of county digital assets in an ever-evolving cyber-attack environment is an ongoing challenge. Cyber security protection, proper tools and solutions, and a vigilant security team are all core priorities.

In addition, a first-class network supporting digital work within the county and with our external providers, as well as a properly sized data center to provide secure and reliable access to data and solutions in an on-prem and hybrid environment is a core part of the department's deliverables.

Data management excellence

The county instituted a formal data management program in 2022 after reorganizing the department with an additional division focused on setting up this program. After two plus years of laying the groundwork, the continued focus and maturing of this effort is the next steps. This will include taking a broader look at both operational improvements in digital transformation of county paper driven operations, but also leveraging technology solutions to support a data management center of excellence.

In addition, the privacy and data protection responsibilities fall under this initiative. This effort needs to be supported by strong policies and operating procedures.

Modernization of legacy systems & solutions

What we referred to as portfolio management is evolving to be a very focused effort on modernization of legacy systems. This can be achieved through simplification and reduction of solutions that have overlapping capabilities, but also modernizing current legacy point solutions that are technically outdated, but that are supporting specific business capability needs. The technical debt associated with our current portfolio continues to be a resource burden. Identifying and prioritizing improvements and funding strategies for the modernization efforts is an element of this initiative.

Enable employee success through consumption of productivity tools

As a county we invest millions of dollars in computer hardware and software solutions across a broad range of vertical solutions. We also have a very modern and up to date collaboration and productivity environment with our M365 solutions. Ensuring that our workforce is fully capable of benefiting from this solution set is a key priority for IT and finding ways to drive higher consumption and usage of these investments will be important.

In addition to our Microsoft tools, this also applies to other enterprise solutions we operate.

GOAL 3: Enable Decision Making through Trusted Data

This goal is an internal facing goal intended to ensure that the Snohomish County workforce has access to trusted and reliable data and information that is then delivered in an easily consumable manner to enable effective decision making across all departments. This goal also addresses our broader data and analytics function, including GIS.

Our Data Management program (which also includes Privacy) and our cyber security efforts are also strongly connected to this initiative, but as a discipline these are addressed in Goal 2. The concept of “bundling” these efforts is driven by the connectivity that exists between data (structured and unstructured), analytics, data management and governance, and privacy/HIPAA, AND ensuring that all this information used for decision making is also protected through strong cyber security practices.



Data driven IT communities

Because IT in Snohomish County is federated (meaning many IT operations exist within the business), the central Department of IT has taken an approach to build engagement and trust with business IT professionals through what we refer to as IT communities. These knowledge workers spread across the county in different roles and departments do many tasks that require secure data and information. This initiative continues to build support for the communities through providing access as well as training, knowledge, and engagement with the six IT communities and ensure that the data sources they need to conduct their work is accessible and trusted.

Secure data providing reliable decision making

Every day the county workforce creates, stores, accesses and updates both structured and unstructured data and information. This initiative covers the broader aspects of data and information storage, retrieval, and management, as well as data quality.

Connected data (e.g., data lakes/data share)

With 29 different departments, courts and offices supported by the IT Department, vast amounts of data and information is created and stored across a large number of platforms and applications. This initiative seeks to leverage innovative and modern solutions to connect disparate data sets through concepts such as data lakes. This will allow for better cross-county decision making by having access to information in a simplified and standardized way.

Data governance and control

As an extension to Data Management governance and control, strengthening of our data governance processes will help meet the goal of trusted and accessible data. The purpose of this initiative is to formalize our governance model to ensure we meet the requirements and expectations of managing using trusted data.

GOAL 4: Innovate and Evolve

Innovation is core to any IT organization. Innovation also takes many forms – not just technology solutions, but also how we think about policies, and supporting procedures and processes. We also want to ensure we are mindful of workforce development and build in innovative training and education opportunities for knowledge workers in addition to our own IT workforce. Naturally, a lot of the focus on innovation will be centered around technology – whether it be infrastructure, applications, or cloud services.



Cloud journey

We have had a “cloud first” focus for a number of years, and over the last couple of years we have shifted our conversation to be “cloud smart”. The benefits of the cloud are non-arguable. At the same time, we want to be thoughtful about which workloads and solutions may make sense to keep on-premises.¹ The *Cloud Journey*¹ initiative is intended to formalize our thinking around our cloud strategy and develop a decision-making framework that enables us to make smart decisions in this area, whilst recognizing that moving to the cloud will be the primary focus and intent for most areas.

Datacenter of the future

Related to the cloud journey, is the need to have a long-term strategy about not just our own data center, but also about our disaster recovery strategy (on prem or cloud). As a part of this initiative, we will not only need to build a solid inventory and understanding about what we have in our data center, but also lead conversations about what makes sense to shift towards cloud vs house in the Everett data center. It is important to recognize that we will be a hybrid cloud/DC organization for the unforeseeable future.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the workplace

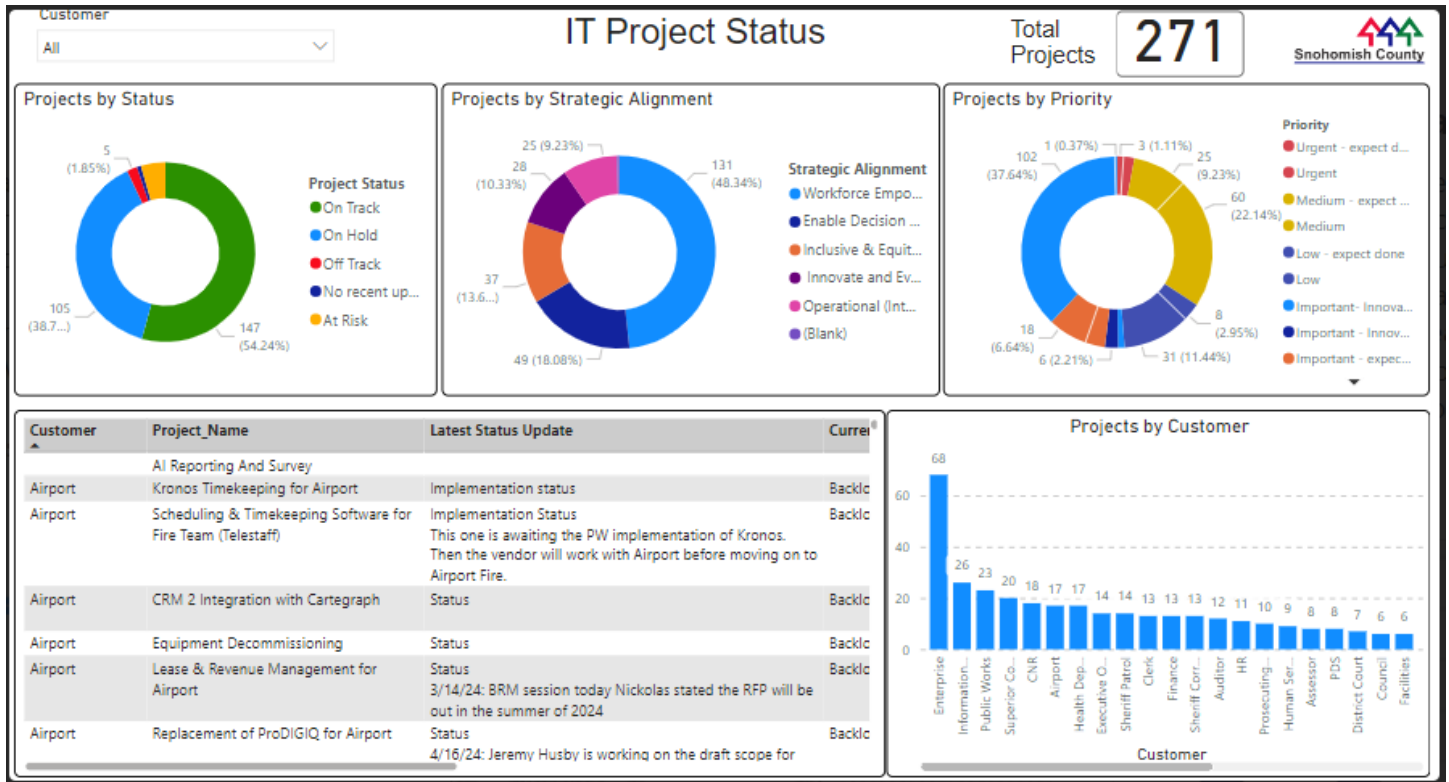
As articulated elsewhere in this document, AI is shifting how we work. Without a doubt, how we work and live will change as a result of AI implementations, and we are already seeing the energy related to generative AI in particular. We have taken the first step of releasing an interim policy and developed a healthy list of use cases across not just generative AI, but also predictive AI, and other general AI approaches. A critical part of this initiative includes workforce development and preparedness. The upcoming AI strategy define how we will plan for and roll out AI in Snohomish County.

Workforce and IT skills development

Since 2021, our IT budget has grown significantly. In addition to healthy investments across both technology infrastructure, point solutions for the business, and cyber security, we have invested over \$4M in “enterprise solutions” – meaning technology that supports more than one line of business/department. We are also on the threshold of investing in an Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) solution which will be a multi-year investment. Our robust productivity suite with the Microsoft365 implementations we have delivered enablers for productivity, and we work to ensure our workforce has the right knowledge to use these tools. Buying and implementing solutions is easy. Taking full advantage of the benefits that we gain from these investments can be harder. This initiative is critical going forward in helping our workforce take better advantage of our already acquired solutions and technologies. This will be accomplished by a deep focus on training and skills development for our enterprise solutions, and asking tough questions about business capabilities when the business has a desire to implement new solutions. In support of our portfolio simplification work, we can partner with the Operational Excellence team and our business partners to identify business process improvement opportunities leveraging our existing portfolio instead of seeking more solutions that will further complicate our portfolio.

IT Project Overview

To ensure that all work is aligned to our goals and initiatives, the IT leadership team conducts weekly triaging of new requests, as well as monthly prioritization of already identified requests. This prioritization is review with internal customers to ensure we have clarity on the business perspective. Given that the project list is very dynamic and always changes, the view below is only included as a point of reference to inform about the breadth and depth of the project requests and is not intended to articulate project status or progress.



Artificial Intelligence (AI)

As mentioned, we will be following up with a dedicated AI Strategy Document the summer of 2024. However, because of the overall interest and focus on AI, it warrants mentioning in our strategic planning document.

The arrival of AI, and specifically Generative AI, on the scene has been a disruptive force over the last 18+ months. Recognizing that AI will fundamentally change how we work and live, the Department of IT has been leading an active engagement with both internal and external parties since September of 2023. The upcoming white paper/strategy document recommended approach for Snohomish County Government. An AI was release in June 2024, and we have stakeholders. We will be forming an summer of 2024 to ensure we have strong identify the optimal use cases for the use general.



will provide further insight about the implementation of AI within interim policy on the use of Generative solicited regular feedback from internal inclusive *AI Interest Group* in the connectivity to business needs to help of Generative AI specifically, but AI in

Conclusion:

This document is for all practical purposes a high-level look at our goals and initiatives. As aforementioned, this is intentional. Strategy documents have a tendency to become shelf ware, and we have been conscious of this in creating this document. Therefore, we set out to create a plan that is directional and explanatory, and not a full deep dive into all areas. Nor have we taken time to explain all projects, timelines and resources associated with the plan. That is the work of our daily management approach and our supporting governance model, and not for the strategy document. We hope our direction and approach comes across in this document sufficiently and we will enhance and clarify this document on a regular basis as we proceed through the next few years.

Below is an IT organizational chart that describes the roles that are empowered to deliver on these IT strategies.

