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DIGITAL COMMUNITIES

# Digital Counties Survey 2025: Overhauling IT, Putting AI to Work

The 52 counties honored in this year's awards from the Center for Digital Government are transforming local government with cutting-edge tech while focusing on resident services.

July 10, 2025 • Adam Stone

2025 Center for Digital Government Digital Counties Survey
All Winners

County Population Size   1 Million or More   150,000 to 249,999   250,000 to 499,999   500,000 to 999,999
Up to 150,000
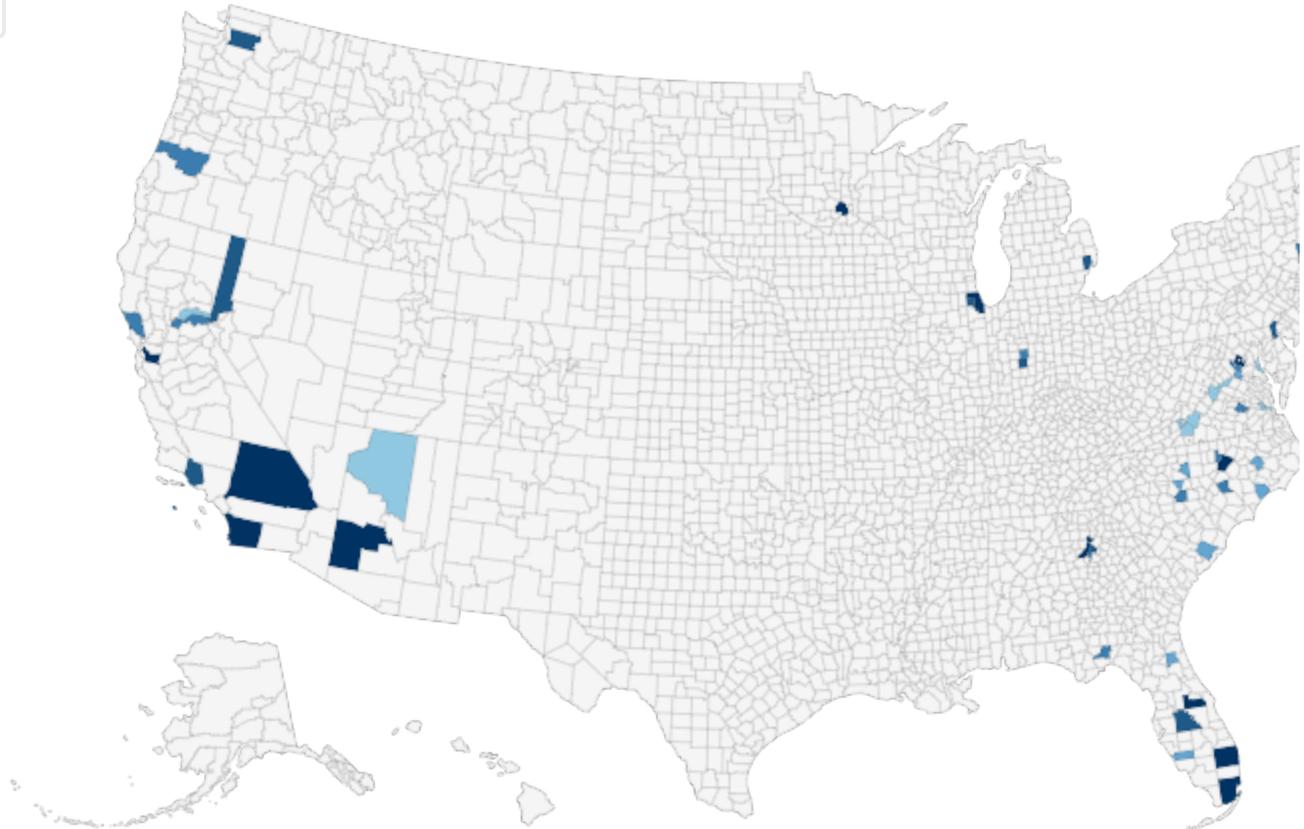
Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2021 boundaries • Created July 7, 2025. Visualization by Nikki Davidson

✳ **A Flourish map**

This year's winners of the Digital Counties Survey from the Center for Digital Government* distinguished themselves in a range of areas: They tackled cybersecurity, pushed forward on modernization, put AI to work and secured a contentious election cycle.

The first-place counties leaned heavily on automation to improve service delivery and ease the burden on thin-stretched IT teams. All brought a pragmatic mindset to their efforts, aligning the powerful technologies of the day with the tangible needs of both county agencies and the constituents they support.

All five demonstrated prowess in managing through changing times, leveraging emerging technologies effectively while keep the focus on the real human impacts of their efforts.

YORK COUNTY, VA., 1ST PLACE, UP TO 150,000 POPULATION CATEGORY

For the York County, Va., technology team, the past year has been about service and security.

On the service side, the IT shop transitioned from SysAid to ManageEngine ServiceDesk, consolidating multiple ticketing systems in a single, standardized platform. The new system "has very robust reporting on all the ticketing systems," said Director of IT Timothy Wyatt. The net result: quicker resolution times and enhanced analytics.

Along with this, integrated customer surveys ensure service efforts are hitting the mark. "We can actually see how our technicians are doing," said Deputy Director of IT Paula Kohrt. "It's given us a lot more visibility into the actual tickets and the workload that our staff is dealing with."

In terms of security, the IT team made big advances on multifactor authentication (MFA). Previously, "we had multifactor for remote access to our VPNs and remote desktop applications," Wyatt said. With a move to Office 365, "we implemented this across the board."

MFA now covers a wide range of applications, including — and especially — email. "Email is a huge targeted vector, obviously, for cyber criminals," Wyatt said, and the added protection there has helped the county to uphold its zero-ransomware record.

At the same time, the IT shop adopted CrowdStrike antivirus protection. "That has a lot of remote features, and a greater reporting capability than our prior software," Kohrt said.

With an eye toward the fast-approaching future, county IT leaders took steps to address the rapid rise of artificial intelligence. "Obviously, AI is going to be implemented —

behind the scenes, or in cooperation with management. We wanted to embrace it," Wyatt said.

To that end, the county last year unveiled an AI road map. "We wanted to let people know that it's acceptable to use," Wyatt said. "We wanted it out in the open, and we wanted to advise them how to safely do it: What to share, what not to share, how to utilize it."

To roll out the road map, "we did extensive, multiple in-person presentations, as well as recordings that we shared internally with the staff," he said. At the same time, Kohrt led an effort to educate the general public, with presentations and online resources to help them make safe use of AI in their personal lives.

Also on the constituent outreach front, the IT team last year rolled out FlashVote engagement tools for quick, confidential, statistically valid surveying. "It goes a long way toward transparency, building the trust with the citizens and allowing them to give feedback," Wyatt said.

Looking ahead, the focus is on retaining and strengthening the IT team. "We really believe in development and leadership," Kohrt said. "We have about a 10 percent internal promotion rate. We work on a lot of in-house training, team building. Everybody that does something in our department has to rely on someone else in our department. So having that internal communication and collaboration, that excellent teamwork, really helps us support our citizens and our county."

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CABARRUS COUNTY, N.C., 1ST PLACE, 150,000-249,999 POPULATION CATEGORY

In the suburbs northeast of Charlotte, N.C., the IT team is resource-constrained. "We're local government, so it's always about doing more with less," said Cabarrus County CIO [Todd Shanley](#).

Despite the hurdles, county IT made strides last year, often by making best use of technologies already in hand. "Our portfolio is already huge," Shanley said. "Let's r

jump out and grab the new brightest shiny thing. Let's leverage what we have."

With that in mind, the team tackled elections. "We had three elections in 2024 and we wanted to make sure that they were supported," he said. To ensure timely access to the polls, "we created an app that you can pull up on your phone and know: 'I'll skip the armory and go on down to the arena, because there's no line at the arena.'"

The app was "a huge win" for voters, he said, "and it was a pretty easy lift from a technology side. We have a great dev team that was able to leverage information and use technology that we had on hand, giving out iPads at polling places, not having to go out and buy a bunch of new equipment."

The IT team also launched a new GIS service last year, Cabarrus Rewind, giving constituents access to visual records dating back to the 1930s. "You can basically run it like a timeline, zooming into a piece of property and showing how it progressed from the '30s to today," Shanley said.

That's a big value-add "when people start talking about growth, and trying to understand where we are growing and how things are changing in different spaces," he explained. It helps with land planning, tax re-evaluations and a range of other civic uses.

The team also modernized its fleet management, looking to private-sector models for best practices. Until recently, government workers had to check in with an actual person to get the keys to a vehicle. That's inefficient, and it led to people booking cars long before they were needed because they worried about vehicle availability. "We called it 'car hoarding' — you couldn't get a car because other people were worried they couldn't get a car," Shanley said.

Launched in support of social service workers, but aiming to eventually go governmentwide, a new app changes the game. With the self-service tool, users can check vehicle availability and simply retrieve the keys from a locker.

"We built the interface to look just like something people would expect to see if they were going to Hertz or Avis or U-Haul," Shanely said.

king ahead, Shanley sees retirement on the near horizon, and he's getting his s.

in order so that Deputy CIO Jason Reece can take over the reins. "I've been here almost 30 years now, and I want to make sure that, in the next decade, the team is prepped to be the high-performing team that they've been for the last decade," Shanley said.

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CHESTERFIELD COUNTY, VA., 1ST PLACE, 250,000 TO 499,999 POPULATION CATEGORY

Chesterfield County achieved a big win last year with an upgrade to its geospatial information systems, migrating Esri to the cloud.

Community development and land development are central issues for county government, "and at the core is our GIS platform," said CIO Scott Furman. "For years we had hosted a local instance of that and it was out of date. My predecessor had started an initiative to move elements of that into the cloud, and we re-energized it and completed that initiative last year."

In addition to improved reliability and scalability, the new system "also introduced more robust features for our end user base, both the professionals that use it on a day-to-day basis and also the constituents, whether they're trying to navigate planning and permitting or very simply wanting to take a look at geospatial information maps that might indicate what's happening in the county and the community," he said.

The IT team last year also overhauled the county website, replacing an award-winning site that had been running for five years. "With anything, after five years, there's an opportunity for improvement," Furman said.

To that end, "the team did a full re-engineering and re-architecture to take advantage of more modern capabilities. We introduced AI search capabilities to return more accurate information in a more timely way," he said. And with a big multilingual population, "the translation services that are available now allow us to better serve our constituency."

Overall, the site is a lot easier to navigate. "We had nearly 4,000 independent pages of information and that was reduced to less than 400 as part of this initiative," Furman

said. That was not a small lift. "It took a significant amount of both internal engagement with stakeholders, the folks that own the actual data that was being provisioned, and also community outreach. Our e-government services organization spent a significant amount of time just listening and learning."

The IT team also put in place a new electronic health records system, replacing one "that served its purpose but wasn't nearly as robust and capable as had been advertised," Furman said.

With improved functionality, "it's helping caseworkers, especially those folks that are highly mobile," he said. "It's getting that data into the hands of folks that are serving the end customer more directly."

On the cybersecurity front, the team began tapping AI-powered automation and deployed a new secure data storage platform. "This was about bolstering our cybersecurity capabilities with AI automation, some advanced threat detection capabilities," Furman said. "Having information more at our fingertips has helped us shorten duration of events, and it certainly has helped in the continuity of operations."

Looking ahead, Furman said the team is focused on continuing its infrastructure modernization efforts, while also managing a changing IT workforce.

"Like many local governments, we have an aging demographic within our organization," he said. "So we are doing workforce planning in such a way that the transitions that happen are effectively managed — as we continue to skill and re-skill our existing staff, as we bring new folks on. It's about doing all that in a much more organized fashion."

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WESTCHESTER COUNTY, N.Y., 1ST PLACE, 500,000-999,999 POPULATION CATEGORY

Westchester County CIO [Marguerite Beirne](#) said she views her IT organization not as a technology shop, but as a customer service enterprise. "We use technology," she said. "But our goal is to support all the county departments in delivering the services to the constituents and taxpayers at Westchester County. That's our job."

To that end, the county IT team delivered a number of big wins in 2024.

In the past, it's been hard for indigent individuals in the county jail to contact their lawyers. "It wasn't easy for them to connect. They weren't getting timely access to their attorneys," Beirne said. The director of the county's Office of Assigned Counsel reached out for a solution, and the IT team delivered.

Leveraging a Cisco call manager, the team put into place a free phone service. "Now, the residents at the jail will pick up the phone and it calls our Office of Assigned Counsel," she said. They put their name into the phone tree system, "and the call will go directly to their attorney."

It took some behind-the-scenes work to make that happen. The system needed multi-language capabilities, along with the capacity to support callers with accents. In all this, "it was very important to have cooperation of the commissioner of our Department of Correction, because his officers needed to support the inmates and to know how the system worked," Beirne said.

In another significant effort, the IT team addressed the need for government transparency with a new electronic financial disclosure system.

The annual financial disclosure asks government employees things like: "Who are you doing business with? Do you have relatives working at the county? Do you have stocks in any companies that the county, that your department, does business with?" Beirne said.

A legacy system was inefficient, with multiple departments from HR to legal having to manually review and sign off on all disclosures. The IT team leveraged code made available by nearby Nassau County as a shared service, "and now instead of getting that paper form and having to fill it all out every year, it's all online," Beirne said.

In addition, the tech shop last year brought to bear the Granicus Boards and Commissions module as a means of automating board member recruitment, appointment tracking and term monitoring. Previously, multiple county boards were using a range of tools in this area, "and I'm very big into standardization," Beirne sa.

The new system is more consistent and more transparent.

Looking ahead, Beirne is wrapping up an ERP upgrade, expanding on a pilot project to unify the county's various police records management systems and working aggressively to adopt next-generation 911.

"We are never bored here," she said.

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ALAMEDA COUNTY, CALIF., 1ST PLACE, 1 MILLION OR MORE POPULATION CATEGORY

While elections took center stage in Alameda County's IT efforts last year, the team also attended to modernization and cybersecurity efforts.

The county ran six elections in 13 months, and was especially attuned to the rise of AI-generated deepfakes and misinformation. "From an IT standpoint, we put together a whole SWAT team with a 24-hour watch, especially as it got closer to the elections, to make sure that deepfakes weren't being used and misinformation wasn't being posted on social media," said Assistant CIO Sybil Gurney.

At the same time, "we also had to look at the physical security of the network, simple things like making sure people couldn't plug into any of our ports," said CIO Tim Dupuis.

Even as they tackled those challenges, the IT team pressed forward with modernization efforts. They partnered with the assessor, the treasurer and others to lead mission-critical systems upgrades. That meant, in part, outsourcing support for the county's decades-old mainframe. "It's getting harder and harder to recruit for that skill set. It's not trained in school any longer. So this was a way for us to maintain our mainframe environment while we modernize," Dupuis said.

Modernization means slowly shifting applications off that mainframe. The criminal justice system has been moved onto SQL Server, and the budget system "should be coming off the mainframe soon," Gurney said.

On the cyber front, the IT department stood up a security information and event management security operations center, "and the results have been fantastic," Gurney said.

The enhancements were needed to keep pace with an escalating threat. "We were seeing over 150,000 endpoint alerts in real time coming through," Dupuis said. Rather than rely on humans to review an unwieldly number of logs, the new system leverages AI to identify risk.

The automated solution "can look at those logs and figure out where our danger points are, whether it be on our endpoints, our servers or in how we use our systems," Gurney said.

Amid all this, the IT leaders in Alameda are maintaining a focus on supporting the workforce. In support of county hiring efforts, IT revamped the recruitment website, working "to make it people friendly, make it inviting, make it easy to find whatever you need and to start automating the forms," Gurney said.

With an eye toward the future, the IT team last year hosted an AI hackathon to help elevate promising use cases. Looking ahead, Dupuis is focused on change management. "We've had a change in our leadership at the board: Four of the five board members are fairly new. So we have new leadership, new thoughts coming to the forefront," he said. And the IT department has seen retirements, with new people coming into new roles.

With all this in mind, he said, the focus going forward will be on "getting those young leaders going, and then lining our initiatives up with what the new leadership at the top is asking for."

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