



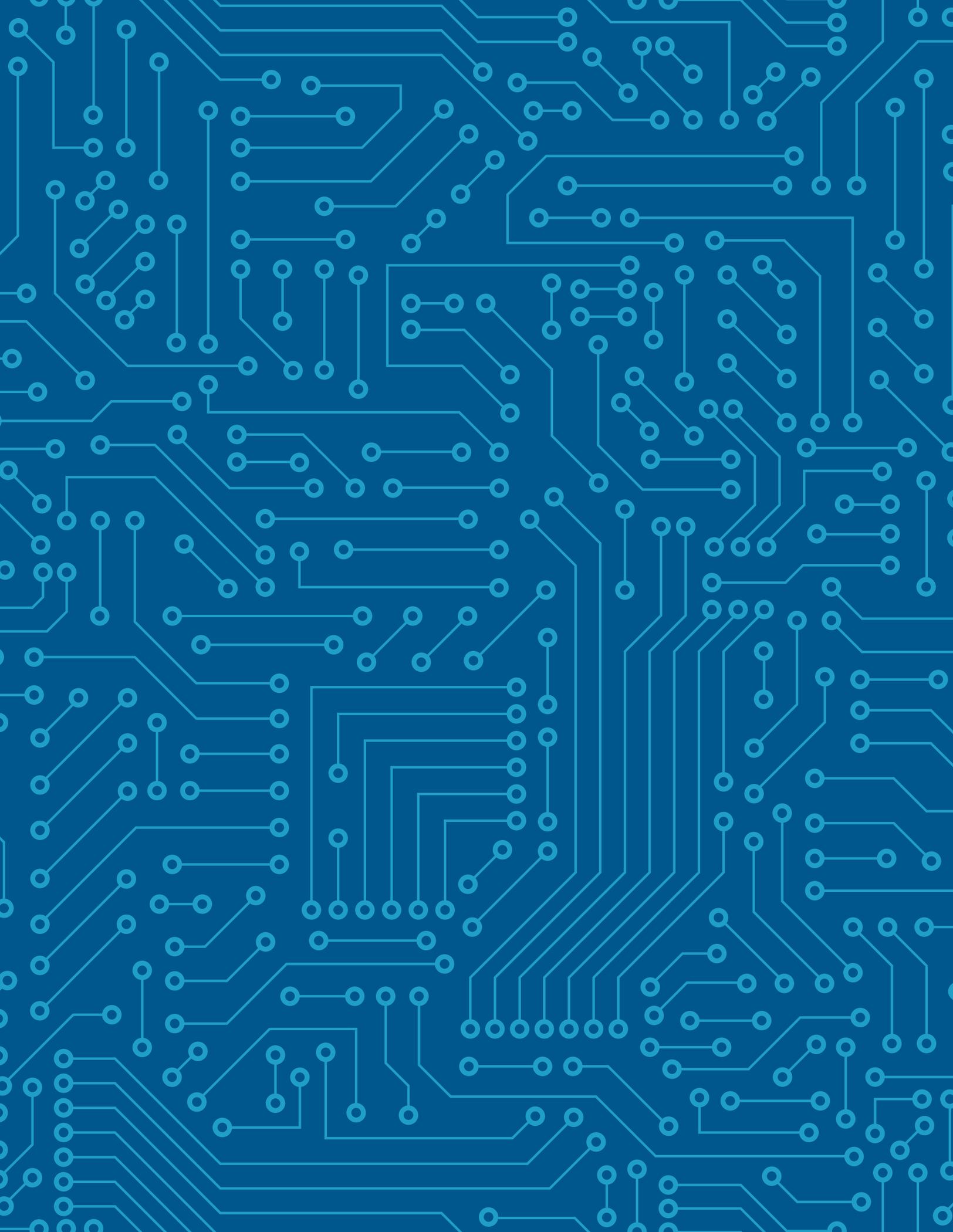
BUILDING A WINNING TECHNOLOGY TEAM

Driving results through effective partnerships



PARTNERSHIP FOR PUBLIC SERVICE

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Technology drives almost every aspect of the federal government's operations, from missile defense systems, to medical advancements that support injured veterans, to systems that collect and manage tax payments.

But many federal agencies struggle to harness the full power of technology to support their missions. Some of government's most important IT systems are more than a half century old and are built on technology that is increasingly obsolete. For example, the nation's nuclear forces are coordinated on a 53-year-old system that relies on 8-inch floppy disks. The government's system for assessing tax payments and generating refunds is 56 years old, and is based on an outdated computer code that is difficult to write and maintain.¹

These outdated systems are pervasive. In fiscal 2017, the federal government plans to spend 77 percent of its IT funds on operations and maintenance of old systems, leaving very little money for modernization or building new systems, according to the Government Accountability Office.

President Trump has recognized this technology gap as a serious problem and on May 1, 2017 issued an executive order establishing the American Technology Council. The council, which falls under the purview of the new White House Office of American Innovation, will focus on helping the federal government "transform and modernize its information technology and how it uses and delivers digital services." The president also issued an executive order in May holding agency leaders accountable

for developing strategies to protect their IT systems from cyberattacks.

Executing these reforms will not only require the expertise of technology professionals, but the involvement of a wide range of agency leaders whose direct responsibilities do not center on IT. These individuals will have an important role in agency decision-making, and throughout the process will have to navigate a complex federal IT landscape of laws, regulations and stakeholders.

ABOUT THIS SERIES

This issue brief is the first in a series by the Partnership for Public Service and Accenture Federal Services designed to explain what new career and political leaders who are not technology experts need to know about federal IT to be successful. Our objective is to help federal leaders understand the basics of federal IT and assist them in harnessing the power of technology to accomplish their goals.

Throughout this year, we will interview federal technology experts, current and former C-suite executives, and private-sector innovators to capture their insights and recommendations.

Initial interviews touched on an important theme: Successful technology efforts in government require high levels of coordination, perhaps more so than in the private sector. There are myriad stakeholders, both within agencies, across government and in the private sector who need to be engaged and invested for efforts to be successful.

This issue brief highlights the critical stakeholders, discusses their roles and provides tips for forging partnerships and building teams needed to execute programs and policies that rely on technology.

¹ Government Accountability Office, written testimony of Information Technology and Management Issues, Director David A. Powner for the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform titled, "Federal Agencies Need to Address Aging Legacy Systems." May 25, 2016, <http://bit.ly/1TKY4bz> (accessed May 4, 2017).

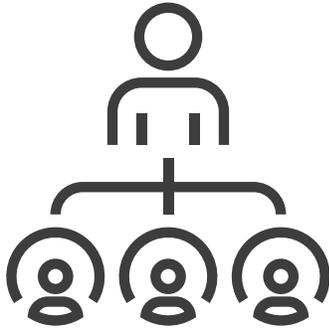
Key leaders and stakeholders

The Trump administration is exploring bold plans for modernizing government's technology. The president has gathered corporate CEOs to discuss solutions to IT challenges, launched the Office of American Innovation and the American Technology Council, and worked with Congress to introduce the Modernizing Government Technology Act. If passed, the law would allow agencies to create working capital funds to modernize their IT systems, and would create a separate central fund from which agencies could borrow to further modernization efforts.

Whatever reforms the administration and Congress choose, success will depend on leaders throughout government working together to implement these ideas effectively. Many of the experts we interviewed described the importance of establishing a shared vision and plan among leadership for how technology will support agency missions.

"Irrespective of what position you sit in, getting anything done in IT has to be highly collaborative," said Richard Spires, a former chief information officer at the Department of Homeland Security. "More so than in the private sector, you have to understand who the stakeholders are. You have to do stakeholder engagement and get them on board. You can ignore them, but you do so at your own peril."

The leaders we interviewed cited several key players—some obvious in executing IT efforts and some less often considered—and described their roles in effective technology implementation.



C-SUITE EXECUTIVES

Chief Information Officer

As the top IT official, the CIO is responsible for the agency's technology infrastructure and investments but, according to interviewees, also should participate in high-level strategic decisions about the mission. "There is sometimes a misunderstanding for new leaders that the CIO is responsible only for making sure the laptops and phones work," said Spires. "The CIO should help agency leadership figure out the best use of technology to accomplish the mission."

Chief Acquisition Officer

The agency's senior procurement executive oversees the acquisition of new technologies and ensures that the acquisition process complies with federal law and regulations. Procurement executives are "critical stakeholders for the success of technology leaders, and vice versa," said Terence Milholland, former CIO and chief technology officer of the Internal Revenue Service.

One of the biggest challenges in acquiring new technologies in government is that the complex, lengthy procurement process often results in agencies buying technology that is out-of-date or does not fully meet the original need.

To mitigate this problem, interviewees said procurement officials must be involved in initial conversations about the need for new technologies and how they will ultimately be used. "Help them to understand your end goal and educate them about your field so that they can make better purchasing decisions," said Frank Konieczny, the chief technology officer for the U.S. Air Force.

"If you bring them in early in developing the strategic vision, you will get good, practical advice. They will help you navigate the procurement landscape," said Soraya Correa, the chief procurement officer at the Department of Homeland Security.

Chief Financial Officer

The senior financial executive must be aligned with other agency leaders regarding what technologies to prioritize and invest in, according to interviewees. CFOs can help new leaders navigate the complex budgeting and appropriations processes in order to get the funding necessary to support new technologies.

"I basically lived with my CFO, who was essential in explaining the details of the appropriations process to me," said Roger Baker, former CIO at the Department of Veteran's Affairs.

Chief Human Capital Officer

The CHCO can work with new leaders to ensure the agency has the workforce it needs to make the best use of technology. Federal agencies often struggle to attract and retain top IT talent, and human capital officials are critical partners in addressing this problem.



BUSINESS OR PROGRAM LEADERS

There are key business or program officials in each agency who use technology to accomplish some aspect of the mission. It is critical that these stakeholders are involved in the design and maintenance of the systems that will support their work.

SELECT SENIOR EXECUTIVES WHO ARE KEY PARTNERS IN TECHNOLOGY

We identified six executive positions across government that are not traditionally filled by technology experts. The people in these jobs play critical roles in large IT investments and must work closely with their agency's technology team.

Internal Revenue Service Wage and Investment Commissioner	The commissioner is responsible for the support the IRS provides to taxpayers during the tax filing season, including processing tax returns and responding to taxpayer inquiries. This leader must work closely with the CIO to build and maintain IT systems used during the tax filing season.
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Director	This executive is responsible for overseeing lawful immigration into the U.S. The director manages USCIS's transformation initiative, an agencywide effort to move the processing of immigration benefits from paper to an electronic system. This is a multiyear investment that totaled \$175 million in fiscal 2016.
Department of Homeland Security Undersecretary for the National Protection and Programs Directorate	This executive leads DHS's efforts to strengthen the security and resiliency of the nation's critical infrastructure against physical and cyber risk. Among other responsibilities, the undersecretary partners with federal IT system leaders across government to help secure the country from cyberattacks.
Department of Veterans Affairs Undersecretary for Benefits	The undersecretary leads more than 20,000 employees who deliver disability benefits and other support to veterans. This individual typically works closely with the department's CIO to ensure that IT systems like the Veterans Benefits Management System can effectively manage veterans' disability claims, disperse benefits and reduce the backlog of claims.
NASA Associate Administrator of the Science and Mission Directorate	This executive directs and oversees the nation's space research program in Earth and space science. The associate administrator typically works closely with the agency's CIO on IT systems that provide data and information to support this research, such as the Earth Observing System Data and Information System, a \$157 million investment in fiscal 2016.
Federal Emergency Management Agency Deputy Administrator	The deputy administrator has historically taken an active role in overseeing the agency's IT investments, participating in the organization's IT governance board and ensuring that technology is used effectively to support the needs of disaster survivors.



EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

Congress

Congress provides funding for and high-level oversight of IT investments, so relationships with members and staff are essential.

The White House and the Office of Management and Budget

OMB staff and White House advisors can work with agencies to establish government-wide policies and standards that facilitate the ability of agencies to improve their information technology operations.

The White House also contains the U.S. Digital Service, which employs leading technologists who support agencies in improving digital services.

The General Services Administration

GSA provides support and services to help agencies improve their technology, through offices such as the Technology Transformation Service.

The Government Accountability Office and Inspectors General

GAO and inspectors general provide oversight on agency IT investments. They can help identify management weaknesses and provide recommendations for improvements. For example, aging IT infrastructure is currently one of the items on the GAO high-risk list.

Private Sector

Industry performs much of government's IT work through contracts. Federal leaders should ensure that these private-sector partners understand their agency's goals and can help them get there. They also should seek to learn about new innovations from their industry peers.

Tips for new leaders to build partnerships and get results

Interviewees shared several tips for new leaders about how to build the partnerships needed to execute technology projects, and get results and quick wins.



Start by going on a listening tour

For most IT transformation efforts “there is a long history and subtext,” that new leaders must understand, said Renee Wynn, the CIO at NASA.

Baker, the former Veterans Affairs CIO, added, “If you have no understanding of that history, you will fail.”

Going into listening mode is a great way for new leaders to gain support of partners they will need to accomplish their goals. “I was the eighth CIO in 10 years. Who’s going to listen to me? They think I’m probably going to be gone in a year,” said Milholland. “Take the time to listen, figure out the challenges and show them that you understand what it’s like for them to get something done. Then, you can engage those people in what you want to do.”

Examples of stakeholders to engage include C-suite executives and their staff, business and program officials who will influence the IT project, frontline federal staff, and contractors or industry experts who support the work.

A listening tour also helps new leaders avoid the mistakes of their predecessors and come up with new solutions to tricky problems. “I’ve seen so many new political appointees come in and retry things that already have been tried and failed,” said Baker. “The career staff have already banged their heads against that brick wall, and it hurt!”



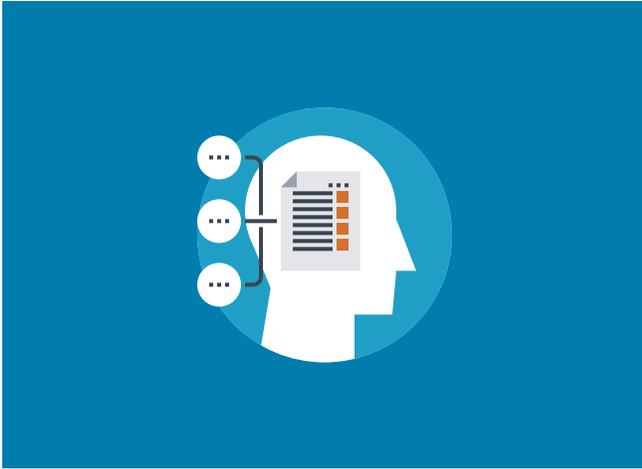
Engage the technology experts as strategic partners

New leaders who are not technology experts make a few common mistakes in working with CIOs and their staff, according to interviewees.

One mistake is to walk away from the oversight of IT projects and leave the work to the technology staff. Without the engagement of the mission-focused staff who will be the end users of an IT system, the technology is much less likely to support the agency’s mission.

Another mistake is to develop the full vision and strategy for an effort that will rely on technology without engaging the technology team. This may result in a plan that sounds great, but is difficult or impossible to implement from a technology standpoint.

Instead, new leaders should engage the technology team as a strategic partner early in the conversation. “IT organizations will respond well if they are brought into the new vision of the agency and given a platform to share their expertise,” said John Gilligan, former CIO of both the U.S. Air Force and the Department of Energy.



Plan a governance model

Leaders need to develop an effective governance model to provide a structure for gathering stakeholders and making informed decisions about IT, both at the organization level and for large IT projects. “In large organizations, the way in which you make decisions becomes critical,” said Spires, the former CIO at DHS. “Having a governance model that ensures the right individuals are involved in decisions, and proper data and analysis is provided, can greatly improve an agency’s decision-making capability,” he said.

Interviewees offered tips on effective technology governance models. Most essential is having the right people at the table. The governance team should include mission-focused staff rather than only IT officials. “If there are a bunch of IT people making IT decisions, you need to fix your governance. It’s about mission people making decisions with the support of IT,” said Robert Brese, former CIO at the Department of Energy. Especially for governance boards that require involvement of senior executives, interviewees suggested making attendance at meetings mandatory and not allowing substitutes.

Interviewees also recommended adaptable governance structures that are continuously reevaluated rather than set in stone. “We ask our members how well the governance process is working and get anonymous feedback in order to improve it,” said Wynn from NASA.



Take the big picture view

To improve technology in large federal departments, leaders often need to look beyond their own subcomponents and develop solutions that work for the entire enterprise. “A lot of government technology investments get into ‘what’s in it for me’ arguments,” said Lee Holcomb, former CIO at NASA and former chief technology officer the Department of Homeland Security. “Someone who can step away from that and see the bigger picture can be very effective.”

This strategy is particularly relevant for agencies and components that have traditionally developed their own customized technology solutions rather than adopting or developing shared solutions. Leaders who can guide their agencies toward adopting common solutions and shared services may be able to generate substantial savings and deliver on the mission more effectively.

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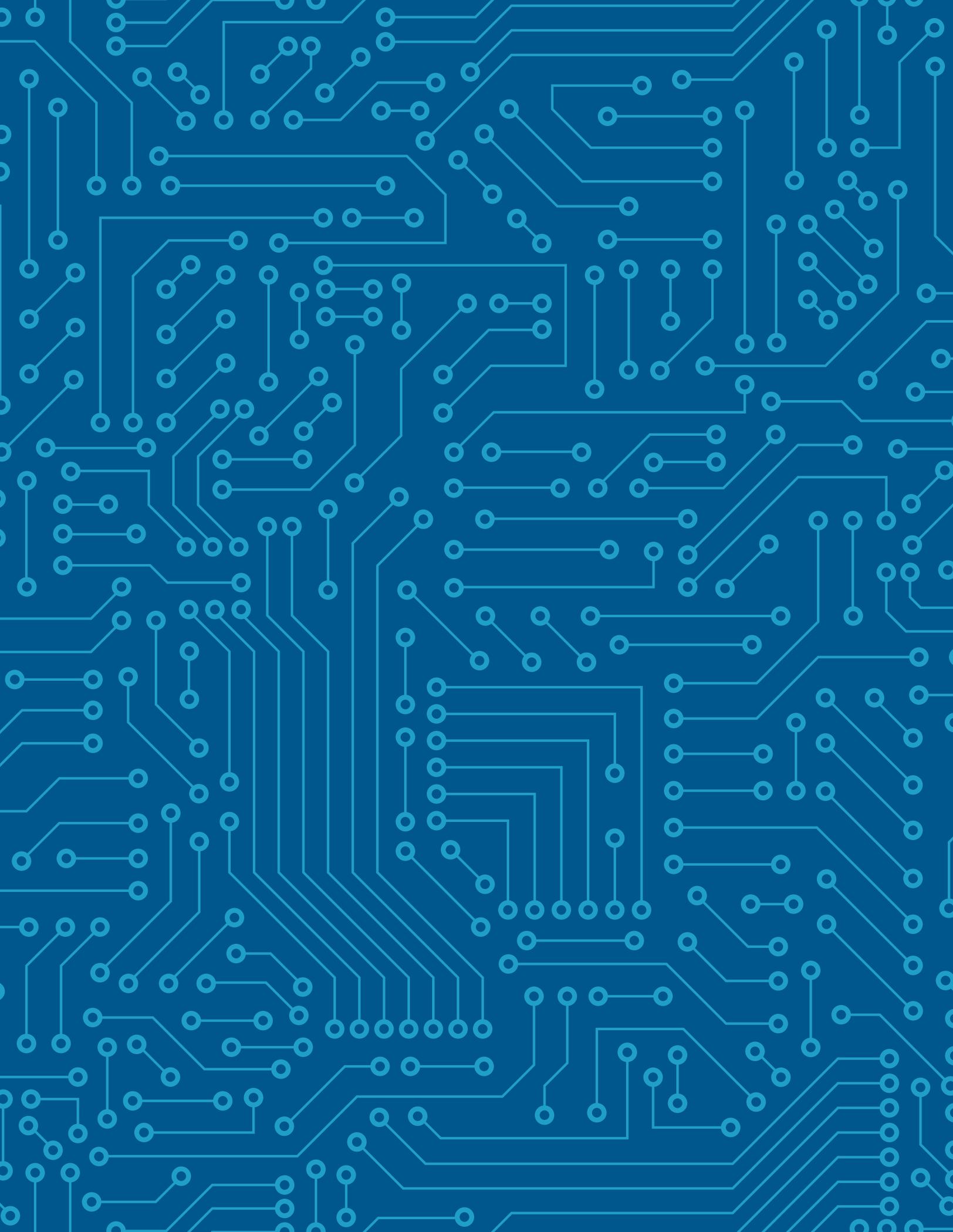
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