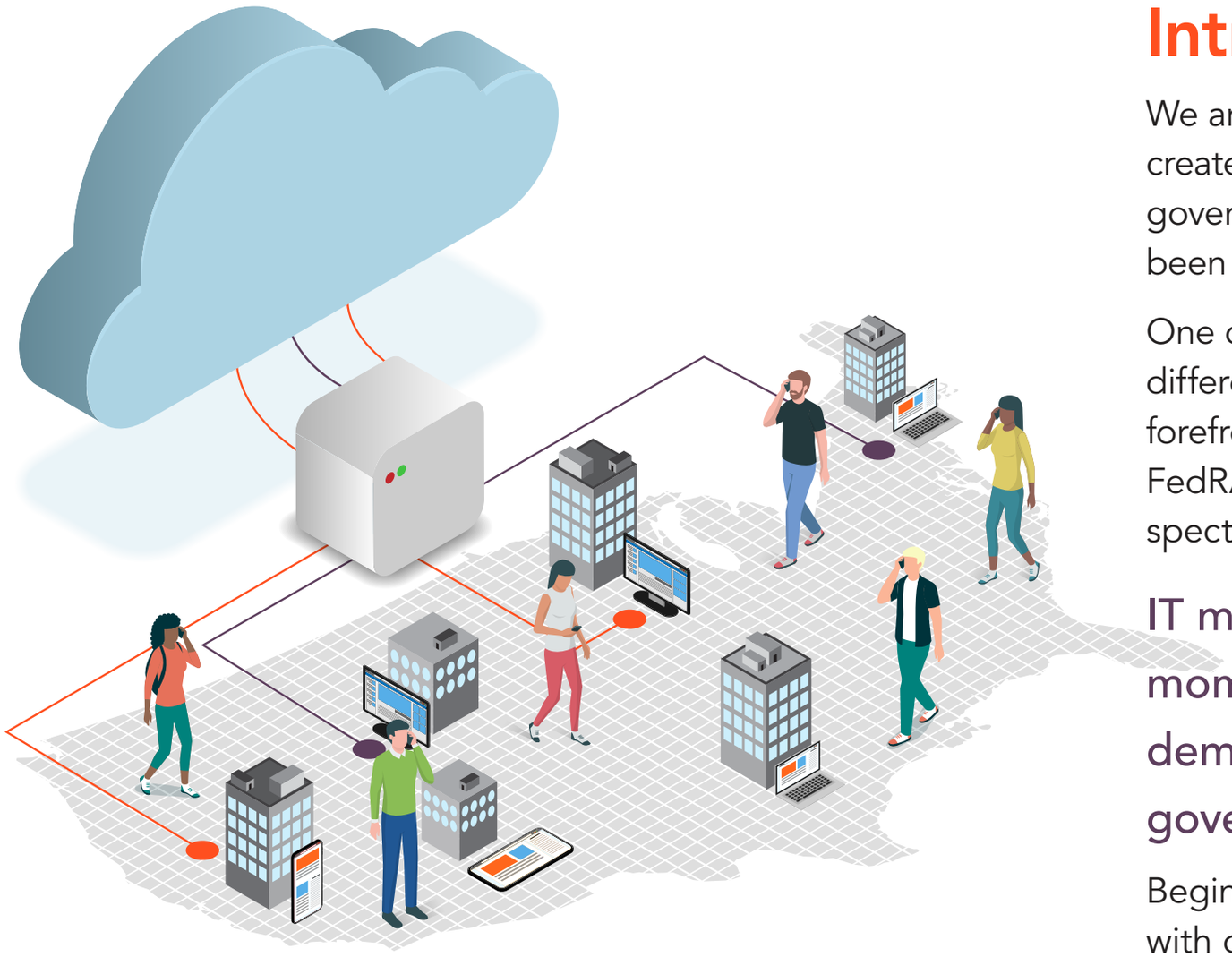
MAXIMUS | GENESYS
Engagement Platform

From Why to How: Government Leaders Use FedRAMP to Spark IT Modernization



Governments were inundated with citizen service requests as a result of the pandemic

Intro

We are closing in on a decade since FedRAMP was officially created in the summer of 2012 and IT modernization for the government at the federal, state, and local level has never been the same.

One of the true bipartisan issues in Washington over three different Presidents, IT modernization has been at the forefront for every agency leader for the past decade, with FedRAMP playing a key role as technologies across the spectrum move to the cloud.

IT modernization has gained significant momentum in the past year, driven by the demands placed on federal, state, and local governments by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Beginning in March 2020, governments were inundated with citizen service requests as a result, from contact tracing to testing to eventually vaccines, as well as secondary impacts of the pandemic, including stimulus payments and unemployment requests.

In parallel, the importance of securing content in the cloud — one of the main drivers behind FedRAMP — again rose to the national news spotlight with the SolarWinds hack, in which hackers gained access to emails from multiple federal agencies, including the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Treasury. The reliance on remote work during the pandemic, particularly for government functions never envisioned to be done off-site, added stress to already strained IT infrastructures. As we look to the future and determine what our "new normal" will look like post-COVID, IT modernization is again top of mind — perhaps more so than ever. The American Rescue Plan, for example, included a whopping **$1 billion** for the Technology Modernization Fund.

The fund, which had been created in 2017 as part of the Modernizing Government Technology (MGT) Act, had only received **$175 million** in total in the four years prior. It's a continuation of the IT modernization

push that began in earnest with the creation of FedRAMP, which now serves as the catalyst for implementing new technologies throughout government.

To properly gauge how government officials viewed FedRAMP, Maximus and its partner Genesys worked with Market Connections to gather responses from 500 government technology leaders across federal, state, and local agencies.

The survey asked respondents about their intentions to move more of their infrastructure and applications to the cloud, and their awareness and opinions of FedRAMP.

What we learned from these officials provides valuable insight into how IT modernization initiatives, driven and enabled by FedRAMP, will take place for the next several years.

The Evolution of FedRAMP

The first few years of FedRAMP were marked by slow adoption from federal agencies. A survey of 150 federal leaders in April 2016 found that the majority of respondents (79%) said they were frustrated with the system, while 59% said they would consider implementing a cloud service for their agency that was not FedRAMP compliant.

However, it could be argued that was the nadir for FedRAMP, as the program's leaders took to heart the concerns from contractors and agencies alike to make significant changes to ensure FedRAMP was easier and less costly to encourage more implementations.

By 2019, successful signs emerged. The Government Accountability Office conducted a survey of 24 agencies published in December 2019 that found FedRAMP authorizations nearly tripled from June 2017 and June 2019. FedRAMP officials still had ambitious goals ahead, but this was a sign that FedRAMP had finally become accepted as the standard, as opposed to the exception, for government IT leaders.

Our survey validates: agency leaders have overwhelming knowledge of FedRAMP and widespread agreement that it could help them reach their IT modernizations goals.

For example, 83% of federal government leaders and 92% of state and local government leaders are aware of FedRAMP, nearly half of each cohort describing themselves as an "expert" or "knowing quite a bit."

It's important to note that education is still needed to further close the gap on adoption, as 40% of federal respondents and 38% of state and local respondents admitting to knowing a "little" about FedRAMP. This presents a valuable opportunity to properly educate government IT leaders — many of whom may not have an understanding and appreciation of the benefits to adopting a FedRAMP solution to achieve IT modernization goals.

When it comes to the evolution of FedRAMP, the most pertinent data point is the number of government leaders that are considering FedRAMP authorization, keeping in mind that five years ago the strong majority were going in the opposite direction.

78%
frustrated with the system (2016)

59%
consider non-compliant solution (2016)

3x
FedRAMP authorizations (2019)

92%
aware of FedRAMP (2019)

In 2021, things have changed dramatically. Our survey found that 83% of federal government leaders and 81% of state and local government leaders said they are considering FedRAMP authorization.

Of that subset, there is an even more impressive finding about the state of FedRAMP — 52% of all government respondents are actively using or implementing a FedRAMP solution.

83% federal

81% state

considering FedRAMP authorization (2021)

The State of IT Modernization

As we review how government leaders view FedRAMP, it's important to consider why these views are so important to the larger goal of IT modernization. Put simply, FedRAMP-based and cloud-based services and solutions are the catalyst for IT modernization. They allow agencies to deploy proven and secure commercial cloud-based services, which in turn pushes them forward in what they're able to produce.

There are myriad examples, but one in particular from Maximus that has proven successful during the pandemic are Intelligent Virtual Assistants (IVAs) that assist callers with a highly effective self-service option with a significantly high volume of requests from citizens. Most recently, these IVAs have been used for COVID-related citizen services and already passed **1 million requests** handled through the first quarter of 2021. These IVAs are supported by FedRAMP-authorized, secure cloud-based services — something that was not possible in a pre-FedRAMP world.

The IT modernization push has coincided with a dramatic uptick in successful implementations of IT modernization projects — 89% of federal respondents and 96% of state and local respondents have a timeline in place for their IT modernization projects, leaving only a fraction with no timeline in place.

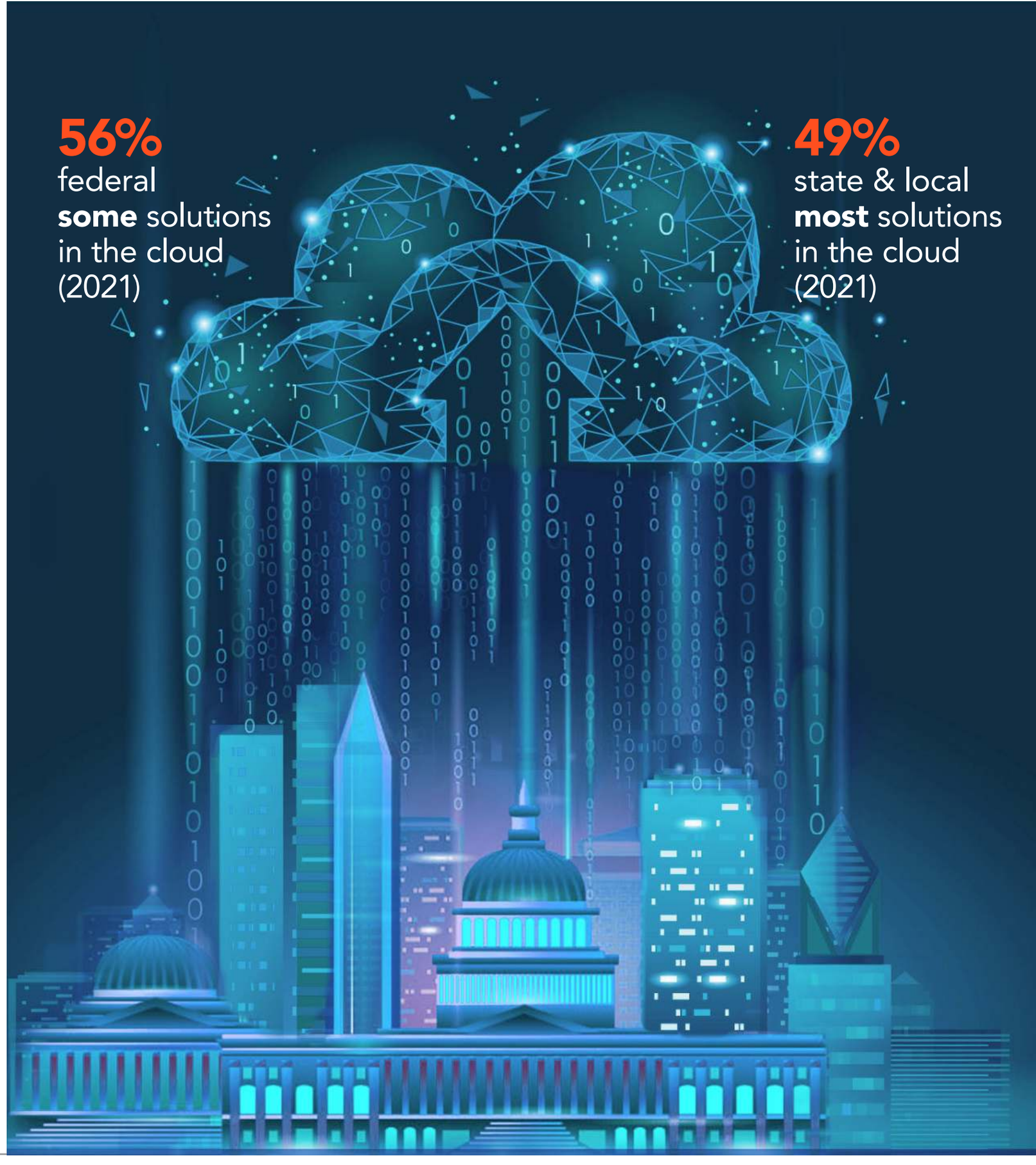
These timelines, as one would expect, vary based on the size and scope of these projects. On the state and local level, 20% said they would happen in the next six months, while that number drops to 11% for federal leaders. The big takeaway, though, is that the vast majority of leaders at every level of government are aiming to have IT modernization projects completed

within the next three years, which speaks to both the urgency of the projects and the momentum behind them.

Another interesting data point is the difference in self-selection from respondents about where they stand in their IT modernization journey. On the federal level, 56% of respondents said “some” systems and solutions are in the cloud, while nearly half (49%) of state and local respondents said “most” of their systems and solutions are in the cloud.

Overall, the data paints a very clear picture about the pattern, as nearly every government leader views themselves in the middle of their IT modernization journey, with some further along than others.

This presents a massive opportunity for the entire government technology community — vendors and agencies alike — to complete their journeys over the next 36 months, with FedRAMP acting as the catalyst to make it happen.



The Challenges

Despite the positive signs in the data, it's important to note that challenges still remain when it comes to FedRAMP authorization. Though the challenges are not as crippling to progress as they were five years ago, the Maximus Genesys survey found several hurdles that focused mostly on time and uncertainty that could serve as barriers to adoption if not addressed.

For federal agencies, there were two challenges that were mentioned by at least 40% of respondents — still less than a majority, but a number still worth paying attention to:

- **44% said** "Multiple solutions may need to be adopted since not all FedRAMP-authorized solutions provide a comprehensive set of functionalities"
- **41% said** "Internal personnel are needed to validate the FedRAMP security package for Authority to Operate (ATO) solutions"

What's notable about these challenges is that they come from the position of government leaders who are already on the path to using cloud-based, FedRAMP-authorized services — a marked change from recent history where the challenges focused on even using FedRAMP at all.

It's also noteworthy that the challenges cited by federal leaders focus on security and functionality, showing that their views on FedRAMP and IT modernization are more sophisticated than they would have been just a couple years ago. It's a sign that federal agency leadership now understands the importance of FedRAMP and how it can act as a catalyst, so their concerns are now on the implementation piece of the puzzle and ensure their IT modernization projects are successful.

For state and local leaders, those two concerns were shared, with one additional challenge unique to their purview:

- **44% said** that "Slow process in order to get a Joint Authorization Board (JAB) certification" was a top challenge.

This is intriguing for two reasons. One, a "slow process" was long the main concern for federal agencies but did not rate in this Maximus Genesys survey, a sign that the issue has been alleviated for them. Second, it's a sign that more state and local leaders are implementing FedRAMP-authorized solutions and that's slowing down the process.

From the perspective of a challenge, a "slow process" could actually be viewed as a positive in the bigger picture of IT modernization because it means that there is added motivation for the JAB certification process to be improved, as well as a higher number of authorizations that are taking place and will occur.

The FedRAMP Solution

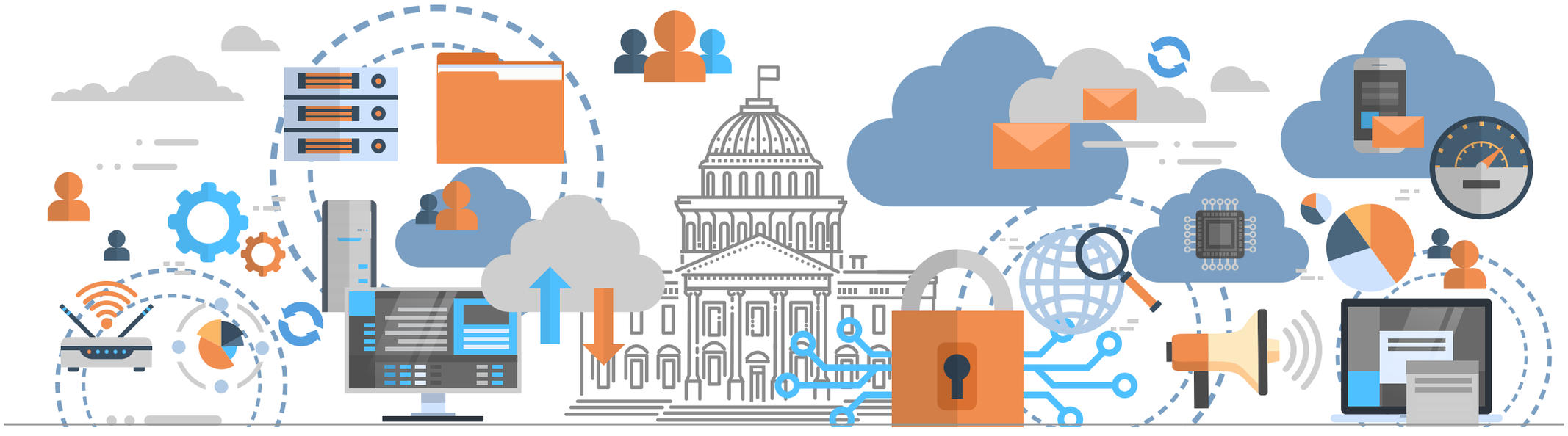
When it comes to the benefits of FedRAMP-based and cloud-based solutions, government leaders are keenly aware that there is much to be gained. On the federal level, the top benefits cited included long-term cost savings, adherence to NIST guidelines, and the implementation of solutions with continuous monitoring. For state and local leaders, they likewise cited savings and security, as well as a faster time to delivery.

Overall, there is little education needed today for leaders to understand the benefits of cloud-based solutions and how FedRAMP can help them more quickly implement them. The data of this Maximus Genesys survey provide ample evidence that we've reached a true "tipping point" when it comes to cloud and government technology, after so many years of that being discussed and debated.

It's why in 2020, the FedRAMP-authorized Maximus Genesys Engagement Platform was launched, an integrated, cloud-based omnichannel contact center solution for federal, state, and local agencies to adhere to government mandates while improving citizen experience.

From the incredible increase in knowledge about FedRAMP to the vast majority of agencies at every level in the process of cloud-focused IT modernization projects, the entire conversation around FedRAMP has changed.

In short, the question has changed from "**Why Should I?**" to "**How Do I?**" and that's only good news for IT modernization across all of government.



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Since 1975, Maximus has operated under its founding mission of Helping Government Serve the People®, enabling citizens around the globe to successfully engage with their governments at all levels and across a variety of health and human services programs. Maximus delivers innovative business process management and technology solutions that contribute to improved outcomes for citizens and higher levels of productivity, accuracy, accountability, and efficiency of government-sponsored programs.

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Market Connections is the leading government market research firm for insights that help companies and government agencies make informed, intelligent decisions and drive significant, measurable business improvements.