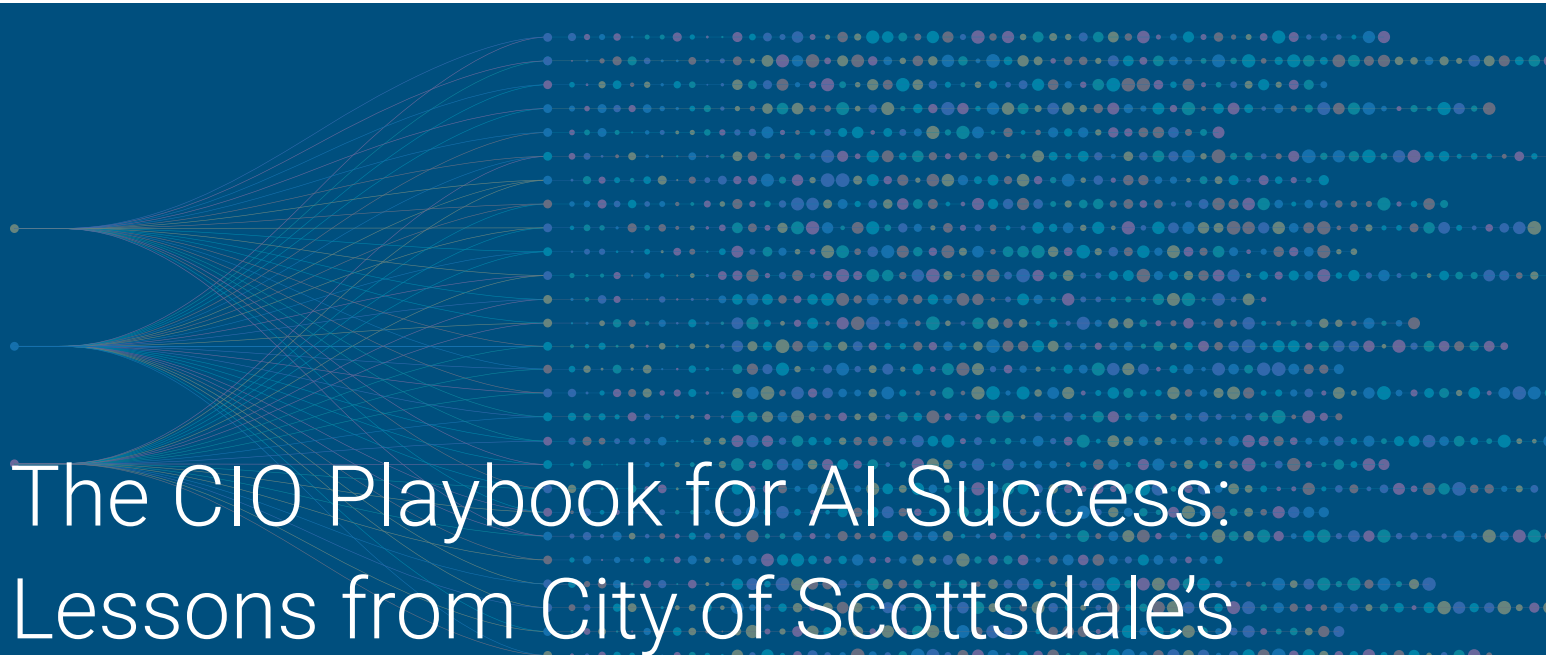
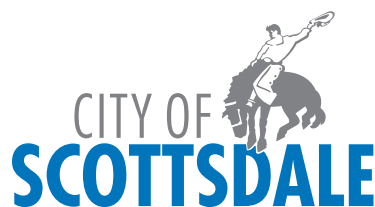




The CIO Playbook for AI Success: Lessons from City of Scottsdale's Modernization Program

A Scottsdale–Cloudwick & AWS Partnership Success Story





Executive Summary

The City of Scottsdale is pioneering the future of government modernization by aligning people, process, and technology to deliver intelligent automation at scale. What began as a recognition of outdated systems and mounting citizen expectations has evolved into one of the most forward-looking examples of how local government can embrace innovation without losing sight of its core mission: serving people.

In partnership with Cloudwick and AWS, Scottsdale launched a modernization program designed not as a one-off project, but as a scalable, repeatable model. This program will improve citizen services, relieve staff from manual burdens, and create a framework for innovation that other cities can adopt. The story of Scottsdale is not about implementing AI for AI's sake, it is about designing a process that puts stakeholders first, defines challenges honestly, and uses automation as a targeted tool to unlock measurable outcomes.

At the heart of Scottsdale's approach is a simple but powerful idea: modernization is not just about technology. It is about people and processes. By listening to department leaders, engaging staff in workshops, and mapping existing workflows, Scottsdale ensures that every solution is rooted in real challenges. Intelligent automation, whether in the form of AI-Search, AI-Assistants, or AI-Applications, are applied to remove barriers, accelerate work, and free employees to focus on higher-value tasks.

This white paper captures that journey. It tells the story of how Scottsdale is defining its challenges, co-developing solutions with departments, delivering measurable outcomes, and creating a playbook that can be replicated nationwide. For government chief information officers, department leadership, and executive stakeholders, Scottsdale's success offers proof that with the right vision and partnerships, modernization is not only possible, it is transformative.

Situation: The AI Illusion

Across the public sector, there is tremendous enthusiasm for artificial intelligence. At conferences, in boardrooms, and around council tables, city leaders, agency directors, and staff alike are asking the same question: *How can AI solve our problems?* The promise of AI looms large, and the pressure to “do something with AI” is intense. Yet the reality is that AI alone is not the solution. It is a tool, not a strategy.

Without first addressing legacy technology debt, manual workflows, and outdated reporting processes, AI projects risk becoming expensive experiments that deliver little real value.

Scottsdale recognized this challenge early on. Rather than being swept up in the AI hype, the city’s leadership asked different questions:

- ▶ *What systems are slowing down staff?*
- ▶ *Which workflows are overly manual?*
- ▶ *Where are reporting gaps causing delays or errors?*

By starting with the problems that mattered most, rather than the technology, Scottsdale avoided the trap of innovation theater. This working-backwards approach unlocked the true value of intelligent automation and made AI a means to an end, not the end itself.

For Scottsdale, intelligent automation took on practical, usable forms that staff could understand and adopt immediately:

- ▶ **AI-Search** is empowering employees to quickly locate information buried in siloed systems, cutting hours of wasted time and reducing frustration.
- ▶ **AI-Assistants** guide staff through workflows, automating repetitive steps and ensuring processes are completed accurately and consistently.
- ▶ **AI-Applications** are providing end-to-end automation of complex processes, from permitting to HR reporting, delivering visible, tangible improvements in service delivery.

These solutions are not abstract concepts but concrete tools that make daily work easier for employees and services faster for residents. Instead of introducing “AI” as a mysterious technology, Dr. Bianca Lochner, CIO, City of Scottsdale, and her team have introduced automation as a practical answer to real problems. A permit clerk can see forms processed in days instead of weeks. An HR analyst can find compliance reports ready at the click of a button. A police officer can spend more time in the field and less on paperwork.

By grounding modernization in real-world pain points rather than chasing AI buzzwords, Scottsdale is building a program that delivered measurable outcomes and gained widespread adoption. For department leaders and executive stakeholders, this approach means confidence that investments in AI will pay off. For staff, it means relief from repetitive work. And for citizens, it means faster, more responsive government services.

The lesson for other government CIOs and leaders is clear: **Don’t start with AI. Start with your problems.** Work backwards from the obstacles that slow your staff and frustrate your citizens. Then apply AI in the form of intelligent automation to remove those barriers.

That is how Scottsdale turned the AI illusion into AI impact.

1. The CIO as a Change Agent

Government CIOs are no longer simply technology stewards. They are strategic leaders of organizational transformation. In Scottsdale, CIO Bianca Lochner embraces this evolving role and is reshaping what it means to lead technology in government. She understands that her position is not just about managing servers, networks, or applications; it is about guiding the city toward a new way of working. Her vision is to transform IT from a service provider into a trusted partner and catalyst for city-wide innovation.

Bianca recognized early that the conversation around artificial intelligence could not be framed as a technology trend. For many, “AI” carried uncertainty; it is an abstract buzzword with little relevance to the day-to-day work of city employees.

If she led with the technology, Bianca risked losing her audience. Instead, she reframed the narrative. She speaks about **workflows becoming simpler, tasks being completed faster, and reports being more accurate**. She describes a future where employees spend less time re-entering data and more time serving residents. She connects technology to the outcomes that matter most: better services for citizens and less frustration for staff.

“I never want our employees to feel like their days are swallowed up by repetitive, manual work. Their time and energy should go toward helping people, answering questions, solving problems, and making Scottsdale a better place to live. With thoughtful implementation of AI, we can reduce those frustrating tasks so our public servants can have more space to be creative and focus on what really matters: our residents,” - Dr. Bianca Lochner, CIO, City of Scottsdale

This subtle but powerful shift in communication built trust across departments. Leaders in HR, Police, Fire, Finance, and Permits could see how modernization might relieve the very challenges that weighed them down. Staff began to view AI not as a threat, but as an opportunity to offload repetitive tasks. The message was clear: IT is there to make work easier, not harder.

Bianca also positioned herself as a **bridge-builder**. She created forums where IT and departmental leaders could meet as equals to discuss challenges and solutions. By listening deeply and validating departmental concerns, she elevated IT’s reputation from gatekeeper to collaborator. Departments now see IT not as the team that says “no,” but as the partner who can help them imagine and deliver new possibilities.

Through this leadership style, IT’s role in Scottsdale changed fundamentally. No longer was it a back-office support function. Under Bianca’s guidance, IT became a strategic partner in the city’s modernization journey; a team empowered to help every department achieve its mission more effectively.

This cultural transformation laid the groundwork for Scottsdale’s success with intelligent automation and positioned the city as a model for how CIOs can lead organizational change.

2. Defining the Challenge

Like many cities, Scottsdale faced a complex set of challenges that slowed its ability to meet citizen expectations and strained its workforce. Legacy systems had been implemented over decades, each solving a specific departmental need but creating silos that made data sharing difficult, if not impossible.

A permit application in Planning might require data from Finance or HR, but the systems were not designed to talk to one another. The result was a patchwork of disconnected tools that left staff bridging the gaps manually.

For employees, this meant hours spent re-entering data, hunting for information, and reconciling spreadsheets. Manual workflows consumed valuable time that could have been directed toward citizen service. Something as routine as processing a permit or onboarding a new employee became a laborious task involving multiple handoffs, redundant data entry, and long delays. These inefficiencies frustrated both staff and the public they served.

At the same time, citizen expectations were shifting dramatically. Residents were accustomed to the convenience of digital-first services in the private sector, applying for a mortgage online, tracking a package in real time, or receiving customer service instantly. When interacting with their local government, they expected the same level of responsiveness. Long waits, opaque processes, and paper-heavy procedures felt increasingly out of step with the times.

The gap between expectation and reality was growing wider.

Meanwhile, Scottsdale's IT staff was stretched thin. They carried the burden of maintaining legacy systems, responding to daily operational demands, and attempting to meet new requests from departments. With limited resources and expertise, they could not take on the complexity of integrating systems or building modern digital services from scratch. Adding more technology without addressing the underlying processes threatened to make the situation worse, not better.

These challenges represented more than operational inefficiencies. They were barriers to delivering the responsive, modern services that citizens expected and deserved. Bianca and her team understood that simply upgrading technology would not be enough. Buying new platforms or deploying more tools would only add to the city's technical debt if the fundamental processes remained broken.

What Scottsdale needed was a new model for how the city worked: one that would intelligently automate manual processes, free up staff for higher-value work, and enable faster, more accurate service delivery. The opportunity was not just to replace outdated systems but to **reimagine workflows and unlock the value of existing data**.

Intelligent automation offered a path forward, not as a silver bullet, but as a structured approach to modernizing government operations, improving employee productivity, and delivering the kind of citizen experiences people now expect.

Knowing she needed an external partner to help her team scale and execute this pioneering vision, Bianca turned to **Cloudwick**, a trusted leader in intelligent automation and AI solutions for public agencies.

"Partnering with the city of Scottsdale has been such an honor. Leaders like Bianca are showing how intelligent automation can reimagine government work, not just modernize it. At Cloudwick, we bring both technical expertise and deep empathy for public agencies, because many of us come from government ourselves. Seeing Scottsdale's success proves what's possible when innovation meets purpose," said Mark Schreiber, VP of Intelligent Automation at Cloudwick.

3. Co-Developing the Solution

Bianca's success hinged on co-developing solutions with departments rather than imposing them from IT. She understood that lasting change would only take root if the departments themselves felt ownership of the solutions. Together with Cloudwick and AWS, Scottsdale is implementing a structured, inclusive approach that turns modernization from an abstract goal into a collaborative journey.

The journey began with a series of **discovery workshops** where department leaders from HR, Police, Fire, Finance, and Permits were invited to share their most pressing challenges. These sessions became safe spaces for candid conversations. Frontline staff spoke openly about the frustration of repetitive manual processes, such as re-keying data across multiple systems or waiting weeks for reports. Leadership highlighted how these inefficiencies created bottlenecks, slowed service delivery, and impacted citizen satisfaction. What made these workshops powerful was not just the problems uncovered, but the sense of validation they gave employees—that their daily struggles were finally being acknowledged and addressed.

Crucially, the workshops also reframed the role of IT. Instead of being perceived as gatekeepers of technology, Bianca and her team positioned themselves as **facilitators and problem-solvers**. They were there to listen, understand, and translate departmental pain points into meaningful outcomes. This shift in posture changed the relationship between IT and the departments, transforming skepticism into trust.

From these sessions, the team created **Product Requirement Documents (PRDs)**. These documents were not mere technical specifications; they were co-authored agreements that captured pain points, mapped desired outcomes, and set clear expectations for success. PRDs became the bridge between the voice of the departments and the engineering expertise of Cloudwick and AWS. They gave everyone a shared blueprint to work from, ensuring clarity and accountability at every stage.

The implementations follow a deliberate “crawl–walk–run” approach. The first automation project was intentionally small—a quick win chosen to demonstrate immediate value. Success came quickly, proving to departments that intelligent automation was not an experiment but a practical solution to real problems. With confidence established, the team then moves into the “walk” phase, expanding to multiple use cases across departments. By the time Scottsdale reaches the “run” phase, intelligent automation will become a citywide program with broad leadership support.

At every step, **governance and security** are built in. Leveraging Cloudwick's Amorphic platform and AWS services, the city ensures that automation complies with data privacy, security, and regulatory requirements. This proactive governance gives both leadership and staff confidence that innovation would not come at the expense of trust.

This collaborative model does more than deliver technical solutions, it fundamentally strengthens trust and alignment between IT and the departments. Departments feel heard and empowered, IT is recognized as a partner in problem-solving, and the city experiences a cultural shift that is essential for true modernization.

4. Program vs. Project Mindset

One of the most significant shifts Scottsdale made was to move away from thinking in terms of projects and instead adopt a true program mindset. This change in perspective is more than semantics. It is the foundation that allows the city to move from scattered improvements to systemic modernization.

In the past, like many cities, Scottsdale often approached technology needs one project at a time. A department might request an automated workflow, another might seek a new tool, and each initiative would be funded and delivered in isolation. While these projects sometimes solved immediate pain points, they rarely added up to long-term transformation. Each project existed in its own silo, with limited integration and little ability to build momentum across the organization.

Bianca and her team recognize that if Scottsdale wants to truly change how government works, how services are delivered to citizens and how employees experience their jobs, this piecemeal approach would never be enough. A programmatic approach is required: one unified strategy that brings departments together with a shared vision of intelligent automation.

"If we treated intelligent automation as just a collection of one-off projects, we'd only be putting Band-Aids on very real problems. What we really needed was a long-term, sustainable *program* that connects the dots across departments. That's how you get true transformation. Every piece needs to build on the next so the whole city can row in the same direction," – Dr. Bianca Lochner, CIO, City of Scottsdale

By framing modernization as a program, Scottsdale was able to secure predictable multi-year funding in the range of \$3M–\$5M, compared to the fragmented \$300K allocations that typically characterized project-based efforts. This level of investment signals to leadership, council, and staff alike that the city is committed to building something bigger: a portfolio of intelligent automation solutions that will work together, reinforce one another's value, and evolve over time.

The program mindset also transformed how Scottsdale communicated about modernization. Instead of pitching isolated initiatives, Bianca could tell a broader story, a narrative about systemic change. She spoke not just of automating one process in HR or Finance, but of building a connected ecosystem of automation that would touch every department and elevate the entire city's performance. This shift in storytelling made it easier for leadership and council to see the bigger picture: not scattered fixes, but a comprehensive modernization strategy aimed at improving citizen services, empowering staff, and creating a government ready for the future.

The results speak for themselves. With a programmatic approach, Scottsdale created alignment across departments, built confidence with leadership, and laid the groundwork for sustainable innovation. Projects are building blocks, but the program provides vision, funding, and cohesion to ensure those blocks fit together into something transformative.

"Bianca's approach sets a new standard for city modernization. By thinking strategically and connecting initiatives across departments, Scottsdale has built a model other cities can follow. At Cloudwick, we're excited to use the tools and templates we've developed with Scottsdale to help other city governments achieve similar incredible results," – Mark Schreiber, VP of Intelligent Automation, Cloudwick

5. Program Proof Point: Intelligent Automation Applications and Outcomes

The true proof of Scottsdale's modernization journey lies in the breadth of intelligent automation applications (built by Cloudwick) that have moved from concept to reality. Each application addresses a concrete departmental pain point, while together they create a citywide portfolio that showcases how intelligent automation can deliver measurable outcomes. These applications demonstrate that modernization is not theoretical, it is operational, practical, and impactful.

1. Intelligent Knowledge Management

Departments across the city struggled with knowledge trapped in emails, PDFs, and scattered file systems. The Intelligent Knowledge Management solution centralizes information, applies AI to organize and retrieve content, and enables staff to find accurate answers in seconds. This reduced duplication of effort shortens response times for citizen inquiries and ensures that institutional knowledge is not lost when employees change roles or retire.

2. Intelligent Workforce Analytics

Scottsdale's HR department struggled with labor-intensive reporting on workforce trends, compliance, and training. The Workforce Analytics Assistant automates dashboards and compliance reports, giving HR staff actionable insights without the drudgery of manual compilation. The impact is twofold: employees receive more responsive support, and leadership gains data-driven visibility into workforce health and development.

3. Intelligent Fire & EMS Reporting

For Fire and EMS teams, compliance with state and federal reporting requirements was essential but burdensome. By automating EMS reporting, Scottsdale ensures compliance while returning valuable time to first responders. The assistant reduces delays, improves accuracy, and allows personnel to focus more on operations in the field, directly enhancing emergency response for citizens.

4. Intelligent Permitting and Planning Automation

Permitting and planning have long been a source of frustration for both residents and businesses due to lengthy turnaround times. Automation streamlines permit intake and compliance checks, cutting weeks off the process. Citizens experience faster approvals and greater transparency, while staff are relieved of repetitive administrative tasks.

Outcomes of the Program Portfolio

These applications are already proving to be valuable assets in Scottsdale's journey towards modernization:

- ▶ **For Citizens:** Faster services, reduced delays, greater transparency, and more responsive city departments. A permit that once took weeks may now take only days. Emergency responses are supported by more accurate and timely reporting. Residents and businesses alike benefit from a government that feels more agile and attentive.
- ▶ **For Employees:** Repetitive manual work is offloaded to automation, freeing staff to focus on higher-value responsibilities. HR can spend time on employee engagement instead of spreadsheets. Police officers and firefighters spend more time in the field. Finance staff focus on strategy rather than chasing errors.
- ▶ **For Operations:** Service level agreements (SLAs) improved across the board. Reports are delivered faster and with greater accuracy. Manual errors decrease as systems take on data-intensive tasks. Fiscal oversight improves through automated cross-validation, strengthening both compliance and accountability.

Collectively, this portfolio of applications demonstrates Scottsdale's ability to transform modernization into a scalable program that improves government performance, enhances employee productivity, and elevates the citizen experience. The measurable outcomes validate the vision: Intelligent automation, applied thoughtfully, is a catalyst for lasting change in local government.

These measurable results build confidence across city leadership, showing that intelligent automation is not an experiment but a proven driver of value.

"The real measure of our modernization journey is how much easier it makes people's lives. Automation isn't just about cool technology. It's about giving our employees time to focus on the meaningful work that drew them to public service in the first place. It's a win-win for city government and our residents," – Dr. Bianca Lochner, CIO, City of Scottsdale

6. Creating a Scalable Model

Perhaps the most powerful aspect of Scottsdale's program is its scalability. The approach developed in Scottsdale can be applied to other cities and counties nationwide. Each automation use case, whether in HR, finance, or public safety, was designed by Cloudwick with reusability in mind, ensuring that 70% or more of the solution could be replicated in another department or municipality.

"Our goal is to help as many city and county governments as we can. Thanks to our partnership with Bianca and her incredible team in Scottsdale, we can ramp up similar solutions for other agencies even faster and smarter," - Mark Schreiber, VP Intelligent Automation, Cloudwick

By focusing on inclusion, Scottsdale ensured that every department felt ownership of the program. By framing funding at the program level, the city unlocked economies of scale. By embedding governance and security from the start, it created trust that automation would be both safe and sustainable.

In short, Scottsdale is not just modernizing its own operations, it is creating a playbook that other governments can follow.

7. Lessons Learned and Best Practices

Scottsdale's journey has revealed a series of powerful lessons that go beyond technology. These insights, drawn from real challenges and victories, now form the backbone of a best-practices framework for other government CIOs.

Start with Business Outcomes: In the early stages, many departments were hesitant when they heard the word "AI." By shifting the focus from technology to outcomes like faster permits, improved HR reporting, quicker public safety response, department leaders quickly understood the value. CIOs must learn to speak the language of outcomes, not acronyms.

Inclusion is Essential: Workshops proved to be more than just meetings. They were moments of collaboration where staff shared frustrations and leadership listened. These sessions not only surfaced process inefficiencies but also built trust that IT was there to help, not to dictate. Inclusion created buy-in, and buy-in accelerated adoption.

Think Programmatically: Early wins in Scottsdale could have remained isolated projects, but Bianca reframed them as building blocks of a larger program. By communicating the vision as a multi-year modernization journey, she secured greater investment and set expectations for systemic change. Thinking programmatically turns one-off experiments into lasting transformation.

Governance is Non-Negotiable: From day one, Scottsdale embedded security, compliance, and accountability into every solution. Departments gained confidence knowing that modernization would not compromise privacy or expose risks. CIOs must lead with governance to ensure that innovation strengthens, rather than undermines, trust.

Tell the Story of Success: Success alone is not enough, it must be communicated. Scottsdale showcased early wins to leadership, staff, and citizens, turning outcomes into narratives that justified further investment. By telling the story of success, CIOs can create momentum, inspire confidence, and unlock resources for the next phase.

Together, these lessons form a roadmap for government leaders. They demonstrate that modernization is not just about technology adoption, it is about framing, inclusion, governance, and storytelling. These best practices, proven in Scottsdale, can guide CIOs everywhere as they work to build smarter, more citizen-focused governments.

8. The CIO's Modernization Playbook

Scottsdale's journey toward modernization revealed a clear set of practices that other CIOs can adopt. What may look like a simple checklist tells the story of how transformation unfolds in government when led with vision and discipline.

Engage: It began with bringing city leaders and department heads into the same room. This engagement created a shared sense of ownership, ensuring modernization was not seen as an IT project but as a citywide initiative. CIOs must set the stage for collaboration by engaging diverse voices early and often.

Discover: In Scottsdale, discovery workshops uncovered pain points that were often invisible to leadership but painfully obvious to frontline staff. These sessions created empathy between IT and departments, helping everyone see where inefficiencies slowed citizen services and burdened employees. Discovery is not just data gathering, it is storytelling that surfaces the real human impact of broken processes.

Document: Capturing needs in clear Product Requirement Documents (PRDs) transform conversations into action. For Scottsdale, PRDs are a living record of commitments, expectations, and measurable outcomes. They ensure alignment across IT, departments, and partners, and keep the program grounded in solving real problems rather than chasing technology trends.

Deliver: Scottsdale started small, selecting use cases that could demonstrate quick wins. These early projects build credibility and confidence, showing skeptical stakeholders that intelligent automation can make an immediate difference. Delivery in the "crawl" phase established momentum that made the "walk" and "run" phases possible.

Scale: Once the first successes were visible, Scottsdale continues to build a portfolio of automation solutions spanning HR, Finance, Public Safety, and Permits. By framing this as a program and securing multi-year funding, the city avoids the trap of piecemeal projects. Scaling turns isolated wins into a coherent modernization strategy that improves performance across the city.

Sustain: Finally, governance and continuous improvement keep the program durable. Scottsdale embedded security, compliance, and accountability from the beginning, ensuring that innovation is balanced with responsibility. Regular reviews and feedback loops allow the city to refine processes, add new use cases, and sustain momentum.

Together, these steps form a replicable model for other cities seeking to modernize through intelligent automation. The Scottsdale playbook is more than a checklist; it is a story of how inclusive leadership, process-first thinking, and AI-powered automation can transform government services for both citizens and employees.

Conclusion

The city of Scottsdale, under the leadership of CIO Bianca Lochner and in partnership with Cloudwick, has established itself as a national leader in AI-powered government modernization. What makes this story truly powerful is not just the applications or technology, it is Bianca's **vision and playbook**. She proved that when a CIO reframes AI as intelligent automation, leads with inclusion, and builds a program around outcomes, real transformation is possible.

This playbook is not limited to Scottsdale. It provides a replicable model for government CIOs everywhere who are seeking to modernize their agencies. The message is clear: Do not start with AI as a buzzword, start with your legacy tech debt, manual workflows, and reporting challenges. Work backwards from the real problems and use AI in the form of AI-Search, AI-Assistants, and AI-Applications to unlock productivity, improve citizen services, and strengthen organizational performance.

"As CIO, my vision is to demonstrate that governments can be bold, citizen-centered innovators. By applying this playbook, CIOs can see firsthand how AI, when used thoughtfully, relieves staff from repetitive work, accelerates service delivery, and creates measurable value for residents," - Bianca Lochner, CIO, City of Scottsdale

"My experience in Scottsdale shows that with the right process, partnerships, and program mindset, intelligent automation is not just possible, it is repeatable. I invite fellow CIOs to take this playbook, adapt it to your own challenges, and leverage AI to build a more efficient, responsive, and citizen-focused government of the future."



About the Author:

Dr. Bianca Lochner is the Chief Information Officer for the City of Scottsdale, Arizona, where she has led a bold modernization journey powered by artificial intelligence and intelligent automation. Guided by six IT Strategic Goals, AI Enablement, Cybersecurity Resilience, Application Modernization, Communities & Workforce Engagement, Data Enablement, and Infrastructure Modernization—she has aligned technology investments directly to citizen needs and staff efficiency. These AI initiatives have relieved employees from repetitive tasks while giving citizens faster, more reliable, and more responsive services. Her vision demonstrates how AI can transform government into a more efficient, citizen-centered institution recognized nationally for innovation.

About Cloudwick:

Cloudwick

Cloudwick is a trusted leader in data, intelligent automation, and AI solutions for public sector and enterprise organizations. Through its flagship **Amorphic Data Platform** and tailored solutions, Cloudwick helps agencies modernize operations, unlock insights, and drive impact securely and efficiently. Learn more at www.cloudwick.com.