

Companion Reading

For Public Sector CIOs and IT Leaders

A note from the author

No single book covers the full scope of leading IT in local government. *The Leading Local Government IT* book and field guide is a starting point, not the whole conversation. The works listed here are the ones I return to, recommend to new CIOs, and find useful when thinking through a hard problem on the job.

Some are recent. Some are decades old. The selection criterion is practical usefulness for the work, not novelty. I update this list quarterly as new books appear and as my own thinking shifts. If you have suggestions, send them to steve@stevemonaghan.com.

This list is intentionally short. Reading widely matters more than reading exhaustively. Pick three or four titles that match where you are in your career right now, work them carefully, then come back for more.

1. Foundations of Public Sector CIO Practice

Works and resources that define the public sector CIO role and the unique constraints of leading IT in government.

Shark, A. R. (2026). *CIO Leadership for Cities and Counties: Emerging Trends and Practices* (3rd ed.). Public Technology Institute.

The standard multi-author survey of the field. Thirty chapters from contributors across academia, practice, and the private sector cover the breadth of topics a public sector CIO encounters. Pairs naturally with HPG-IT's single-voice practitioner framework: read Shark for breadth across topics, work HPG-IT for an integrated approach to leading the function. Both belong on the public sector CIO's shelf.

Shark, A. R., et al. (2015). *Technology and Public Management* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

A foundational textbook for public administration programs. More academic in tone than the cities-and-counties volume, useful for building a vocabulary across the policy and management dimensions of government IT.

NACo Tech Xchange. National Association of Counties. naco.org

The peer community for county technology leaders. Resource library, webinars, and the annual Tech Xchange conference. The first place I send new county CIOs who are looking for the conversation about what other counties are doing.

NASCIO publications. National Association of State Chief Information Officers. nascio.org

State CIOs operate at a different scale, but the policy briefs, annual surveys, and benchmarking studies map cleanly onto county and city work. The annual State CIO Top Ten Priorities report is worth reading every year.

ICMA local government technology resources. International City/County Management Association. [icma.org](https://www.icma.org)

ICMA covers the management side of city and county government. Their technology content is the bridge between the IT shop and the city or county manager you report to. Useful for understanding how your work reads to a non-technical executive.

GMIS International. Government Management Information Sciences. [gmis.org](https://www.gmis.org)

The professional association for local government IT staff at every level, not just CIOs. The peer mentoring and the regional chapter networks are the strongest part of the value. A useful place to point your senior team members for their own professional growth.

2. Government Innovation and Modernization

Books and resources that examine how government work gets transformed (or fails to transform) by technology.

Pahlka, J. (2023). *Recoding America: Why Government Is Failing in the Digital Age and How We Can Do Better.* Metropolitan Books.

A clear, honest account of why government technology projects struggle and what changes when implementation is treated as a craft. The most important book on government delivery published in the last decade.

Eggers, W. D. (2016). *Delivering on Digital: The Innovators and Technologies That Are Transforming Government.* Deloitte University Press.

A consultant's-eye view of digital modernization in the public sector. Useful for the case studies and the pattern recognition across jurisdictions, even where the recommendations feel optimistic.

Code for America. codeforamerica.org

The leading nonprofit working on government technology delivery. Their case studies, playbooks, and the annual Code for America Summit content are practical resources. The Code for America Brigade network is where civic technology volunteers organize, often in coordination with local governments.

De-risking Government Technology Guide. 18F, U.S. General Services Administration. guides.18f.gov/derisking

A practical guide to procuring and managing custom software in the public sector. Written for federal, state, and local government practitioners. The 2024 update added a strong section on vendor management. Worth reading before the next major RFP.

Bloomberg Center for Government Excellence (GovEx). Johns Hopkins University.
govex.jhu.edu

Practical resources on data, performance management, and using analytics to improve government services. Their training programs and case studies focus on the jurisdiction-level work that county and city CIOs are often asked to support.

3. Leadership and Executive Effectiveness

General leadership works that translate cleanly to the public sector CIO role.

Drucker, P. F. *The Effective Executive* (revised ed.). Harper Business.

The shortest book on this list and the one I revisit most often. Drucker's discipline of managing time, focusing on contribution, and making decisions that matter remains the foundation.

Lencioni, P. (2002). *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*. Jossey-Bass.

Read this once for the model and again for the leadership team you actually have. The fable structure makes it easy to share with a department leadership team for a common vocabulary.

Lencioni, P. (2012). *The Advantage: Why Organizational Health Trumps Everything Else in Business*. Jossey-Bass.

The companion volume to Five Dysfunctions, written for executives. Organizational health as the source of sustained performance applies as cleanly in a county as in a Fortune 500.

Collins, J. (2001). *Good to Great*. HarperBusiness.

The Level 5 Leadership concept and the Hedgehog principle have held up well. Read with a critical eye for the survivorship bias in the case selection, but the core ideas are durable.

Goleman, D., Boyatzis, R., & McKee, A. (2013). *Primal Leadership: Unleashing the Power of Emotional Intelligence* (10th anniversary ed.). Harvard Business Review Press.

Goleman's foundational work on emotional intelligence, applied directly to leadership. The four EI domains and the six leadership styles give you a vocabulary for the relational side of the CIO job. Read this before any of his other titles.

Heifetz, R. A., Linsky, M., & Grashow, A. (2009). *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World*. Harvard Business Review Press.

The distinction between technical problems and adaptive challenges is the single most useful frame I have found for the work. Most CIO struggles are not technical; they are adaptive. This book gives you the language to see the difference and act accordingly.

4. Change, Strategy, and Decision Making

Books that sharpen the thinking required for the strategic side of the CIO role.

Kotter, J. P. *Leading Change*. Harvard Business Review Press.

Kotter's eight-stage model is the industry vocabulary for change initiatives. Read it not as a recipe but as a checklist for what tends to go wrong.

Heath, C., & Heath, D. (2010). *Switch: How to Change Things When Change Is Hard*. Broadway Books.

The Rider, Elephant, and Path framework is the most actionable change model I know for situations where the formal Kotter sequence is too heavy.

Christensen, C. M. *The Innovator's Dilemma*. Harvard Business Review Press.

Required reading for understanding why competent organizations fail at the most important decisions. The disruption framework needs care in public sector application but the underlying observation about organizational incentives transfers cleanly.

Kahneman, D. (2011). *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

The book that named System 1 and System 2 thinking. A long read but the chapters on cognitive bias, anchoring, and the planning fallacy are essential for anyone making consequential decisions under uncertainty. The summary sections at chapter ends are usable on their own.

Doerr, J. (2018). *Measure What Matters: How Google, Bono, and the Gates Foundation Rock the World with OKRs*. Portfolio.

The objectives and key results model with practical examples across sectors. Useful for any IT leader looking to connect strategic intent to team-level execution. The case studies from nonprofit and social-impact organizations translate well to public sector work.

5. Systems Thinking

Works that develop the habit of seeing organizations as systems, not collections of parts.

Kim, D. H. (1999). *Introduction to Systems Thinking*. Pegasus Communications.

The clearest short introduction to systems thinking I have found. Kim's iceberg model lays out four levels of perspective: events at the surface, patterns underneath, systemic structures below those, and mental models at the foundation. It is the single most useful diagnostic tool I use in CIO work. When something keeps going wrong, the iceberg tells you where to look. Forty pages. Read it twice.

Meadows, D. H. (2008). *Thinking in Systems: A Primer*. Chelsea Green Publishing.

The fuller treatment. Meadows works through stocks, flows, feedback loops, and the places to intervene in a system with examples that range from bathtubs to global commodity markets. Pairs naturally with Kim: read Kim first for the framing, then Meadows for the depth.

Senge, P. M. (2006). *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* (revised ed.). Doubleday.

The book that brought systems thinking into management practice. Long, sometimes dense, and worth the work. The systems archetypes chapter alone will change how you read your

organization. Senge is also where you will see “mental models” used in the way the term is now broadly understood.

6. Operational Excellence and Personal Discipline

Practical works on getting the work done, both at scale and at the desk.

Gawande, A. (2009). *The Checklist Manifesto*. Metropolitan Books.

A short book that has changed more operational practice than most entire programs. The argument for checklists in complex, expert-driven work applies directly to incident response, change management, and project closeout.

Allen, D. *Getting Things Done* (revised ed.). Penguin.

The personal productivity system most senior leaders eventually adopt some version of. The two-minute rule and the weekly review alone justify the read.

Kim, G., Behr, K., & Spafford, G. (2018). *The Phoenix Project: A Novel About IT, DevOps, and Helping Your Business Win* (5th anniversary ed.). IT Revolution Press.

A business novel about an IT organization in trouble. Reads quickly. The Three Ways model and the four types of work are the most accessible introduction to DevOps thinking I have found, and the operational lessons translate cleanly to public sector IT.

7. Cybersecurity and Risk for Public Sector Leaders

This category moves quickly and is best served by primary sources rather than books, which tend to date. The list below is built around standards bodies and operational resources.

NIST Cybersecurity Framework (CSF) 2.0. National Institute of Standards and Technology.
nist.gov/cyberframework

The standard. Version 2.0 was released in February 2024 and added the Govern function alongside the original Identify, Protect, Detect, Respond, and Recover. The quick-start guides and community profiles are the practical entry points. Read the Govern function discussion first if you are senior enough to set program direction.

CISA Cybersecurity Performance Goals (CPGs). Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency. cisa.gov/cpg

A baseline set of practices designed for organizations that lack the maturity to operate against the full NIST framework. Especially useful for smaller jurisdictions and for setting realistic expectations with elected officials about where the program is starting from.

Multi-State Information Sharing and Analysis Center (MS-ISAC). Center for Internet Security.
cisecurity.org/ms-isac

Operational threat intelligence and incident response support for state, local, tribal, and territorial governments. Membership is free for eligible organizations. The monthly cybersecurity advisories and the Albert intrusion detection service are the most-used resources.

FBI Internet Crime Complaint Center (IC3) annual reports. Federal Bureau of Investigation. ic3.gov

The annual report is the public-facing summary of cybercrime trends affecting U.S. organizations. Useful for building the threat narrative when you are explaining risk to a board, council, or executive team.

NASCIO–Deloitte Cybersecurity Study. National Association of State CIOs. nascio.org

Published every two years. The most thorough public benchmarking of state government cyber maturity. The findings on workforce, funding, and governance map closely to challenges at the county and city level.

8. Workforce, Culture, and Organizational Design

Works that address the people side of the function, where most CIO work actually lives.

Edmondson, A. C. (2019). *The Fearless Organization: Creating Psychological Safety in the Workplace for Learning, Innovation, and Growth.* Wiley.

Edmondson's research on psychological safety is the foundation under almost every conversation about modern team culture. The book is the practical version of work she has been doing for two decades. Read it for the framework, then watch how it shows up in every team you join.

Forsgren, N., Humble, J., & Kim, G. (2018). *Accelerate: The Science of Lean Software and DevOps.* IT Revolution Press.

The research base for the DevOps Research and Assessment (DORA) program. The chapter that draws on Ron Westrum's typology of organizational cultures (pathological, bureaucratic, generative) is worth the read on its own as a tool for diagnosing your own shop. Short. Data-grounded. Useful.

Pink, D. H. (2009). *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us.* Riverhead Books.

Autonomy, mastery, and purpose as the three drivers of intrinsic motivation. A short read that gives you the vocabulary to talk about motivation with both your senior team and your front-line staff in ways that go beyond compensation and recognition programs.

Wiseman, L. (2017). *Multipliers: How the Best Leaders Make Everyone Smarter* (revised ed.). HarperBusiness.

The Multiplier vs. Diminisher contrast is one of the more useful mirrors I have held up to my own management practice. The five disciplines of the Multiplier are operationally specific in a way most leadership models are not.

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About the author

Steve Monaghan served as Chief Information Officer for a California county for over two decades. He is a recipient of the California Public CIO of the Year award, a named *Government Technology* Top 25 Doer, Dreamer, and Driver and holds the CGCIO, CGEIT, CRISC, and CISA certifications. He instructs at the CSAC Institute for Excellence in County Government and previously served in leadership roles with CCISDA and other professional associations. His book *Leading Local Government IT*, published in 2026 through LGOV LLC, presents the HPG-IT Framework drawn from his practitioner career.

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