



Empowering Local Leaders With New Skills in Tennessee

State leverages ARPA funds and partners with Pluralsight to offer free training on new technologies

INTRODUCTION

Technology leaders in Tennessee found an innovative approach to improve local government IT skills. They're using federal funding to pay for training in cybersecurity and other essential tech disciplines in counties and cities statewide.

As a result, city and county IT departments can upskill staff on the latest cyber threats and new technologies like generative AI — without spending a dime.

"They're getting professional development at no cost, which is not common even in the private sector," says Marla Adams, IT training and employee engagement leader with Tennessee's Strategic Technology Solutions (STS) division within the Department of Finance & Administration.

"It was a great surprise," says Chaz Morrow, the IT director for Lawrenceburg, a town with less than 12,000 residents about 80 miles southwest of Nashville. As the city's lone IT employee, Morrow needs broad-based training to support users and secure systems. The state's initiative is helping him build that knowledge base.

State IT leaders in Tennessee designed a way to upskill local-level technologists with free, on-demand courses.



THE CHALLENGE: Upskilling and retaining local IT staff

Outside of cities like Memphis and Nashville, Tennessee is largely rural. More than 60% of the state's counties have populations under 50,000.¹ Governments in less-populous areas often have the hardest time hiring IT staff and keeping their skills current. These employees aren't just vital to their own communities. They're also crucial to maintaining and protecting public services that are often coordinated at the state level.

"They're our partners in pretty much everything we do," says Vicky Hutchings, enterprise business solutions architect in the state's Department of Finance and Administration, which oversees STS. "There's a lot we can't do without them and vice versa. Providing them the ability to enhance their skillsets benefits us as well."

IT training is especially important in smaller towns and counties. "It's hard for one person to know everything," Morrow says. He alone supports technology for Lawrenceburg police, firefighters and maintenance crews. If a power outage takes servers down, Morrow has to work with a diesel generator operator to get things back online.

Tennessee's free training program was designed with local IT leaders like Morrow in mind. Adams and her team partnered with Pluralsight, an IT skills platform, to provide professional online development in a way that wouldn't disrupt IT leaders' duties.

"Most people have a dense work schedule," Adams says. "It's hard to attend a formal, live training class." The Pluralsight platform offers a multimodal learning experience, so people can fit it into their schedules at their convenience. "That was one of the main things that drew us to Pluralsight," she adds.



Each new user gets a free Pluralsight license granting access to more than 12,000 video-based lessons on any internet-connected device.

THE SOLUTION: **Free licenses for online training**

STS was already working with Pluralsight for state employee training when the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) made billions of dollars available to states. STS proposed several projects requesting use of ARPA funds to improve service delivery across the enterprise. Once the project for supporting local governments was approved by the state's internal governance committee, Adams and her team strategized with Pluralsight about using some of the funds to pay for training licenses for counties and cities. That set in motion the project to make Pluralsight's licenses available to IT staff statewide.

Using ARPA funds in this way was creative and innovative, says Pluralsight account executive Taylor Puffer. "I've never seen anything done like this before," he says. "We were proud to partner with Tennessee to help them deliver on their vision to upskill local IT teams."

Distributing Pluralsight's individual licenses meant STS could easily share the skills platform without having to maintain any hardware. But there were still plenty of intricacies in planning and implementing the program. Adams and her colleagues crafted needs assessments and started nurturing new relationships with people in cities and counties. They configured new processes for onboarding and communicating with users across the state. And they worked with Pluralsight to customize training offerings to align with specific state needs.

Each new user gets a free Pluralsight license granting access to more than 12,000 video-based lessons — plus sandboxes, hands-on labs and certification prep — via web browsers on any internet-connected device. Industry experts teach courses in areas like AI, cybersecurity and cloud. The interactive courses include routine skills assessments, custom learning paths and curated channels to guide learners toward gaining fresh skills.

THE RESULTS: **Improved IT skills across the state**

More than 400 government IT leaders in 22 counties have signed up for the courses. Building skills consistently across communities gives STS greater assurance that its local IT partners can help protect data, thwart cyberattacks, and support vital state services such as public health and unemployment benefits programs. "We're building stronger relationships our citizens will benefit from," Adams says.

It also helps retain skilled talent. "Anytime an employer can provide the means for you to improve, it's another reason to stay," Morrow says.

By partnering with Pluralsight and leveraging ARPA funding, Tennessee empowered IT teams with training at no cost. Ultimately, that benefits not only the state as a whole but also individual employees — and the constituents they serve.

1. https://www.ctas.tennessee.edu/counties_bypopulation

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We help build technology skills at scale with expert-authored courses on today's most important technologies, including cloud, cybersecurity, machine learning, data science, and more. Our platform includes tools to align skill development with agency objectives, virtual instructor-led training, hands-on labs, skill assessments and one-of-a-kind analytics.

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