

Navigating Transition and Change

2025 Survey of Federal
Chief Data Officers

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DATA
FOUNDATION

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	4
Introduction	7
Survey Results	8
CDOs in a Year of Transition	8
Progress in CDO Mission Achievement	12
CDO Community and Guidance	17
CDO Collaboration Drives AI Implementation	21
Conclusion	23
Key Insights	24
Recommendations and Next Steps	25
Appendix: Survey Methodology	27
References	28

Executive Summary

The Chief Data Officer role in the federal government has reached a pivotal moment. Six years after the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 (Evidence Act) established the CDO function, the 2025 Federal Chief Data Officer Survey captures a maturing data leadership community navigating unprecedented transition. The Data Foundation's sixth annual survey of federal Chief Data Officers, conducted in collaboration with Deloitte, includes department-, agency-, and bureau-level Chief Data Officers and Statistical Officials, documenting how CDOs are adapting to organizational change, workforce reductions, and the rapidly expanding intersection of data governance with artificial intelligence.

In 2025, federal CDOs operated against a complex backdrop: a new administration, government-wide workforce reductions, shifting reporting structures, and evolving responsibilities that increasingly integrate data and AI policy. Despite these challenges, the survey reveals continued progress in mission achievement and a growing recognition of the CDO's strategic value. The long-awaited publication of the Office of Management and Budget's implementation guidance for Title II of the Evidence Act provided essential clarity, though it simultaneously elevated new organization-specific implementation needs that will shape the CDO function in the years ahead.

Key findings from the 2025 Federal CDO Survey include:

- **AI integration has become central to the CDO mission.** AI use across federal organizations increased from 67% in 2024 to 78% in 2025, reflecting heightened federal prioritization of AI. In 2025, 30% of CDOs also serve as CAIOs and nearly all CDOs (96%) collaborate with AI leadership at least monthly, with 70% collaborating weekly. This close collaboration, combined with 64% of CDOs being "very" or "completely" involved in setting data governance policies for AI use, reflects both federal prioritization of AI and CDOs' central role in ensuring responsible implementation through data governance. However, as CDO, CIO, and CAIO responsibilities increasingly overlap, CDOs call for clearer guidance on authorities.
- **Critical challenges and needs have become more evenly distributed across multiple areas.** While financial and budgetary resources remain the top need for advancing CDO missions, the proportion of CDOs citing this constraint dropped from 88% in 2024 to 67% in 2025. This decline suggests that as the CDO function matures, challenges are becoming more evenly distributed across multiple areas (including data infrastructure) rather than being dominated by a single constraint. CDOs cited capacity constraints as their second most critical need for advancing their mission and some expressed concerns about meeting statutory requirements, including OPEN Government Data Act implementation. More than half (57%) of CDOs report they are now operating with five or fewer FTEs, up from 36% in 2024.

- **The Federal CDO Council grew in value.** The 2025 survey reveals the Council's increasing importance to the CDO community. More than half (56%) of CDOs found the Council's resources "very" or "completely" helpful, up from 47% in 2024 and 19% in 2023. CDOs particularly value the Council's knowledge-sharing function, with 30% specifically highlighting opportunities to learn from other CDOs' experiences.
- **External stakeholder engagement has declined.** The 2025 survey reveals decreased engagement with the private sector (from 72% to 57% reporting at least monthly collaboration) and the general public (from 40% to 28%). This decline in external stakeholder engagement contrasts with high levels of internal collaboration, particularly with AI leadership (96% collaborate at least monthly). The reduction in external engagement may reflect strategic prioritization of internal organizational needs given capacity constraints, but it raises concerns about CDOs' ability to fulfill statutory requirements for open data and public engagement. This also raises concerns about the government's ability to maintain knowledge about the rapidly changing technological capabilities of the private sector and capabilities the government may need to adopt in coming years.

Based on the findings from the 2025 survey of federal CDOs, the Data Foundation and Deloitte offer the following recommendations:

1. **Ensure adequate CDO capacity.** While CDOs have demonstrated continued progress on Evidence Act implementation, reported capacity constraints may limit their ability to effectively fulfill statutory requirements and meet growing demands. With implementation deadlines for OPEN Government Data Act requirements such as DCAT-US 3.0 in 2026, department and agency leaders must prioritize sustained resources (personnel and data infrastructure) for CDO offices to maintain and advance progress on quality data for trustworthy AI. CDOs should also be empowered to apply AI tools to their own operations as a way to improve efficiency in core data management functions.
2. **Harness AI potential by robust data governance.** Harnessing AI's full potential starts with robust data foundations and governance—clear data ownership, consistent definitions, high-quality pipelines, strong privacy/security controls, and traceable lineage—so AI outputs are accurate, compliant, and trusted. Chief Data Officers (CDOs) can lead the way by setting enterprise-wide standards, prioritizing high-value data products, and aligning stewards, risk, and technology teams around measurable data quality and accountability that enables responsible scaling of AI use cases.
3. **Provide clarity around the role of CDOs.** Organizational clarity about responsibilities and authorities becomes increasingly important as organizations adopt more sophisticated AI capabilities, including agentic AI systems that can operate with greater autonomy. Department and agency leaders should provide comprehensive guidance delineating the distinct yet complementary responsibilities of CDOs, CIOs, and CAIOs.

- 4. Provide sustained CDO Community support.** As AI innovation increases the need for interagency data interoperability, the CDO Council's coordinating function becomes even more important in ensuring that federal data management evolves cohesively rather than in fragmented agency-specific directions. Durable support and long-term predictability will allow the CDO Council to effectively serve the maturing CDO community. Further, by ensuring CDOs have the capacity to engage beyond their organizational boundaries, agencies can fulfill transparency requirements while maintaining awareness of innovations that may benefit government modernization. Public private partnerships can also be leveraged for providing support to the CDO community through future technological and organizational transitions.

CDOs have demonstrated remarkable adaptability and progress over six years of Evidence Act implementation. As the CDO function continues to mature and AI transforms federal operations, data leaders need sustained organizational commitment, clear authorities, and adequate capacity to fulfill their expanding mandates. By addressing the challenges documented in the 2025 Federal CDO Survey while building on demonstrated successes, the federal government can ensure that CDOs continue driving data-enabled transformation in an increasingly complex technological landscape.

Introduction

The 2025 Federal Chief Data Officer (CDO) Survey captures a pivotal moment for the federal data community as agencies navigate a period of profound transition. The Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 (Evidence Act) modernized the U.S. federal government’s approach to data management, and Title II of the Evidence Act—the OPEN Government Data Act—formally established the role of the Chief Data Officer to manage and leverage federal data in support of mission delivery and transparency.¹ Since the inaugural survey in 2020, the Data Foundation has surveyed department-, agency-, and bureau-level CDOs and Statistical Officials each year to understand how this evolving federal data leadership structure is developing in practice.^{2,3,4,5,6} This sixth iteration of the Federal CDO Survey continues the longitudinal perspective, documenting how the CDO community is adapting amid organizational change, resource constraints, and an expanding intersection with artificial intelligence.

In 2025, federal CDOs operated against the backdrop of a new administration, government-wide workforce reductions, and shifting responsibilities that increasingly integrate data governance with AI policy and execution. Despite these challenges, the survey reveals a maturing CDO function marked by increased mission success and evolving collaboration patterns, particularly alongside Chief Information Officers and Chief Artificial Intelligence Officers. The publication of the Office of Management and Budget’s long-awaited implementation guidance for Title II of the Evidence Act further shaped this year’s operational landscape, offering long-needed clarity while simultaneously elevating new organization-specific implementation needs.

The findings of the 2025 Survey are structured around key areas that reflect the changing demands placed on federal data leadership: current AI posture and efficiencies, cloud innovation, AI enabled data management, and the role of the CDO in the broader C-suite. Together, these findings illustrate both the resilience of federal CDOs and the ongoing need for targeted support, strengthened authorities, and additional capacity to ensure continued progress in a rapidly evolving data and technology environment.

Survey Results

The 2025 Federal CDO Survey reveals a maturing CDO function across the federal government, with CDOs reporting increased mission success.* The growing integration of data and AI responsibilities mark significant developments for the CDO community. However, this progress occurs against the backdrop of capacity constraints, as government-wide workforce reductions have significantly impacted CDO offices.⁷ The survey documents how CDOs are adapting to these challenges with evolving priorities that reflect the growing intersection of data governance and artificial intelligence responsibilities.

CDOs in a Year of Transition

The 2025 CDO Survey documents how the CDO community navigated a year of unprecedented change, including a new administration, unexpected workforce reductions, and evolving AI priorities, while continuing to mature as a function across the federal government.

Changes in Reporting Structure

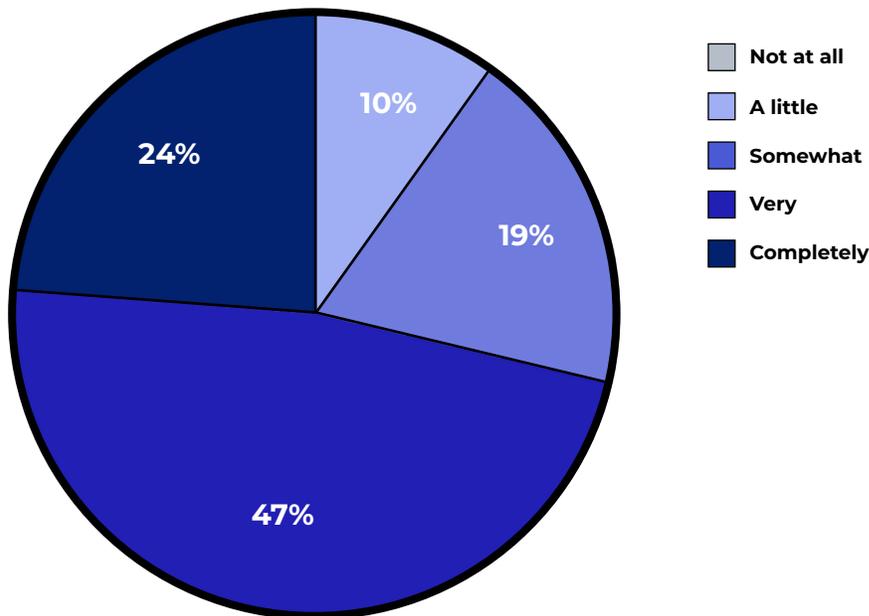
The 2025 CDO Survey shows significant organizational changes and restructuring across CDO offices over the past year. Nearly a quarter (24%) of CDOs indicate that their reporting structure changed in 2025. Reporting to the Chief Information Officer (CIO) has been the most common structure for CDOs in recent years, with approximately one third of CDOs reporting to CIOs in both 2023 (33%) and 2024 (36%). In 2025, this reporting structure has become more common, with more than half (52%) of CDOs reporting to their CIO. Conversely, the proportion of CDOs reporting to Chief Operating Officers (COOs) declined to 5%, down from 24% in 2024.

The increasing prevalence of the CDO-CIO reporting structure may have contributed to more favorable perceptions of this organizational relationship. **The proportion of CDOs who find the reporting structure challenging has declined from 56% in 2023 and 44% in 2024 to only 18% in 2025, representing a considerable shift in sentiment.** In 2025, 55% viewed the CDO-CIO reporting structure as neutral relative to alternative structures, while 27% of CDOs found it “beneficial” or “very beneficial.”

* In this report, we use “CDOs” to refer to the federal CDOs who participated in the survey. The 2025 CDO Survey results offer insights into the CDO landscape, but should be used cautiously to generalize to the entire CDO community. See the Appendix for more information on survey methodology and analysis.

Figure 1. CDO-CIO Relationship Seen as Complementary

To what degree do you think the CDO-CIO relationship in your organization is complementary to achieving your CDO mission?



CDOs also increasingly view the CDO-CIO relationship as complementary to achieving their mission. **While 52% of CDOs found the relationship “very” or “completely” complementary in 2024, this sentiment strengthened in 2025, with 71% indicating the relationship is “very” or “completely” complementary.** When asked to elaborate, CDOs noted that close collaboration with CIOs supports prioritization, authority, and budget allocation. For example, one CDO described the benefit as allowing to “change culture to be more data centric,” where data is considered before decisions on technology are made.

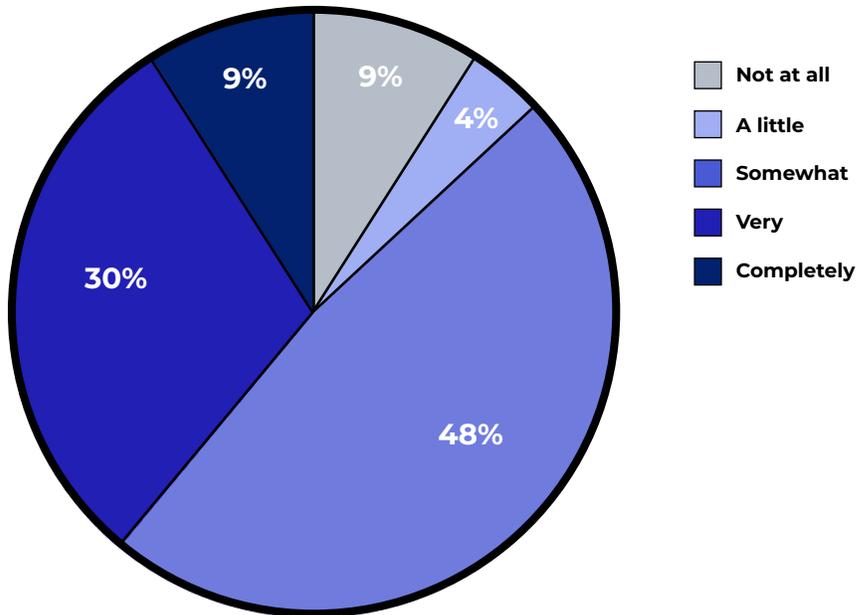
Evolving CDO Role and Responsibilities

The CDO role continues to evolve, with 43% of CDOs reporting changes to their role over the past year. When asked to describe these changes, CDOs frequently pointed to organizational restructuring and shifting organizational priorities. A common theme was the expanding intersection of data and artificial intelligence responsibilities, with one CDO elaborating that the role has become “more critical with the introduction of AI.”

The evolution is evident in the growing number of dual-hatted CDOs serving in multiple designated positions. **A majority (61%) of CDOs hold additional positions beyond their CDO role, with the most common combination being CDO and Chief Artificial Intelligence Officer (CAIO).** In 2025, 30% of CDOs also serve as CAIO or deputy CAIO, up from just 13% who held AI official roles in 2024.

Figure 2. Overall Clarity of CDO Responsibilities

How clear are your responsibilities as CDO within your organization?



Six years after passage of the Evidence Act, most CDOs (87%) find their responsibilities at least “somewhat” clear. Within that total, more than one third (39%) report their responsibilities are “very” or “completely” clear. This represents a slight improvement from 2024, when only 26% of CDOs reported “very” or “completely” clear responsibilities. Organizational restructuring and the release of OMB’s OPEN Government Data Act implementation guidance (M-25-05) in 2025 may explain this marked increase in clarity.

Despite modest improvements in overall role clarity, the expanding and overlapping nature of data and technology leadership roles create ongoing confusion. **When asked what additional support would help them succeed, 39% of CDOs called for more guidance from OMB on responsibilities and authorities, particularly regarding the delineation of roles between CDOs, CIOs, and CAIOs.** This finding reinforces concerns raised in the 2024 survey and in prior years of surveys, when CDOs similarly called for clarification of the CDO role in relation to other data and information officials.

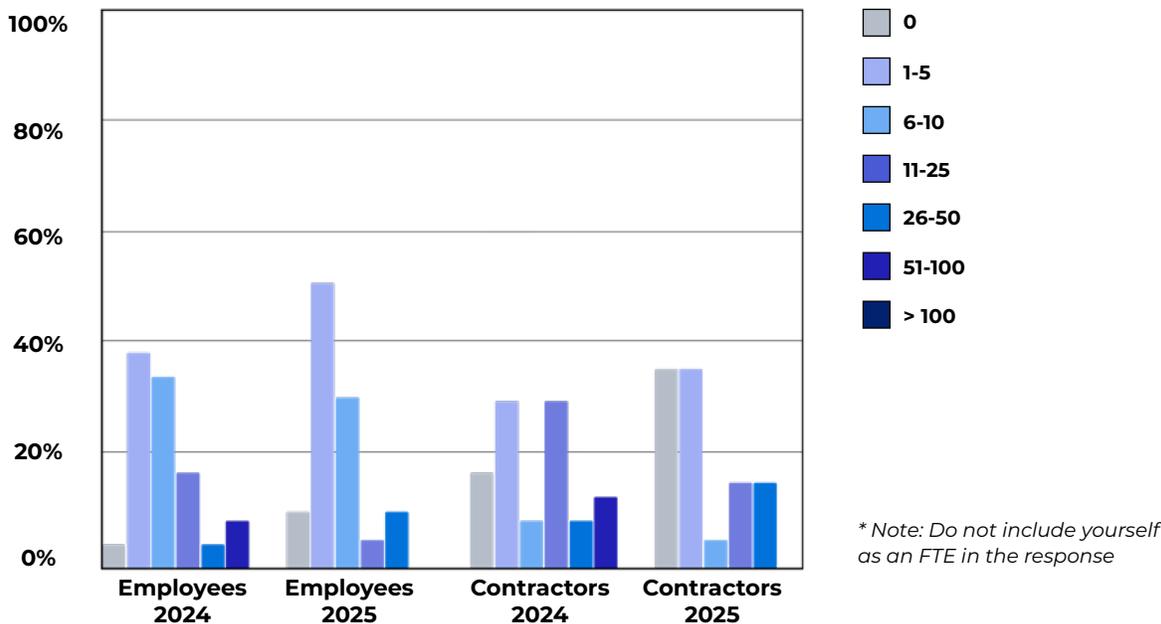
Workforce Reductions Impact CDO Mission Delivery

The year 2025 was marked by government-wide workforce reductions that had a significant impact on CDO offices across the federal government. CDO positions at multiple agencies were left vacant or filled by acting officials due to reductions in force, resignations, and retirements. The CDO Survey documents the extent to which these workforce changes have constrained CDO office capacity.

More than half (57%) of CDOs indicate having five or fewer Full Time Equivalent (FTEs) supporting their work, compared to 40% in 2024. On the other side of the spectrum, we see a decline in the proportion of CDOs with larger staff allocations. Only 14% of CDOs report having 11 or more FTEs in 2025, down from 28% in 2024.

Figure 3. Reduction in Employee and Contractor FTEs

*How many Full-Time Equivalent (FTEs) support you in your role as CDO?**



Similarly, contractor support has also declined. While 48% of CDOs indicated they were supported by 11 or more contractors in 2024, only 29% reported similar contractor support in the 2025 Survey. In 2025, there was also an increase in the proportion of CDOs without any contractor support. One third (33%) of CDOs reported having no contractor support, compared to 16% without contractor FTEs in 2024.

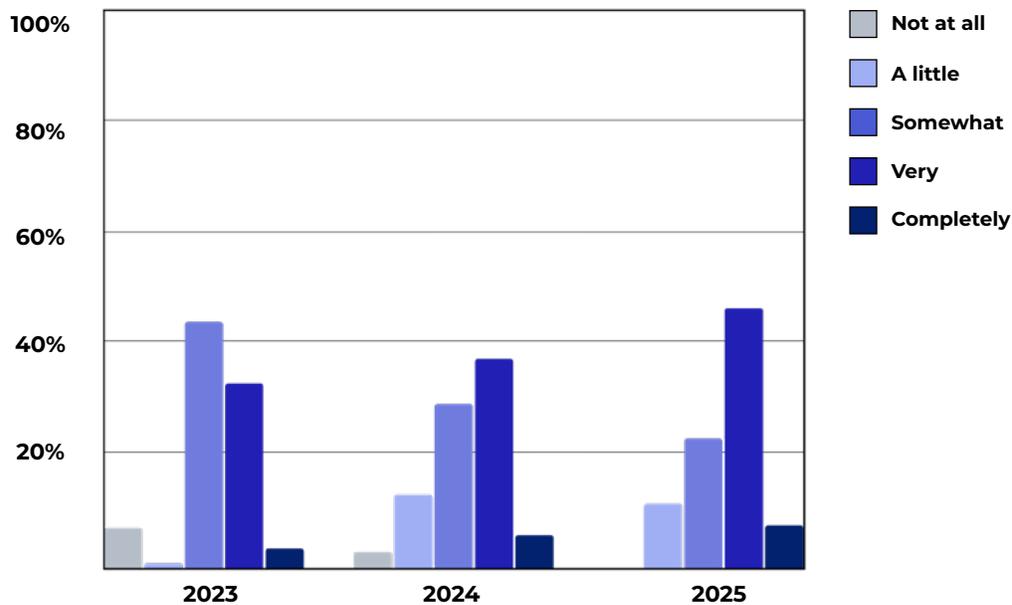
Two thirds (67%) of CDOs reported changes to their FTE support over the past year, with 38% experiencing reductions of six or more FTEs. Some CDOs expressed concerns about their ability to fulfill core mission requirements due to these capacity reductions and cited challenges meeting statutory requirements, including implementing provisions of the OPEN Government Data Act outlined in OMB Memorandum M-25-05.

Progress in CDO Mission Achievement

Despite reporting capacity challenges and reduced ability to deliver on certain responsibilities, CDOs expressed greater confidence in their overall mission achievement. In 2025, 61% of CDOs reported being “very” or “completely” successful in achieving their mission, up from 43% in 2024 and 37% in 2023. This upward trend suggests that CDOs continue to find ways to advance their missions even in the face of resource constraints.

Figure 4. Increasing Success in Achieving CDO Mission

Over the past year, to what degree do you think the CDO position and CDO office in your organization have been successful in achieving your CDO mission?

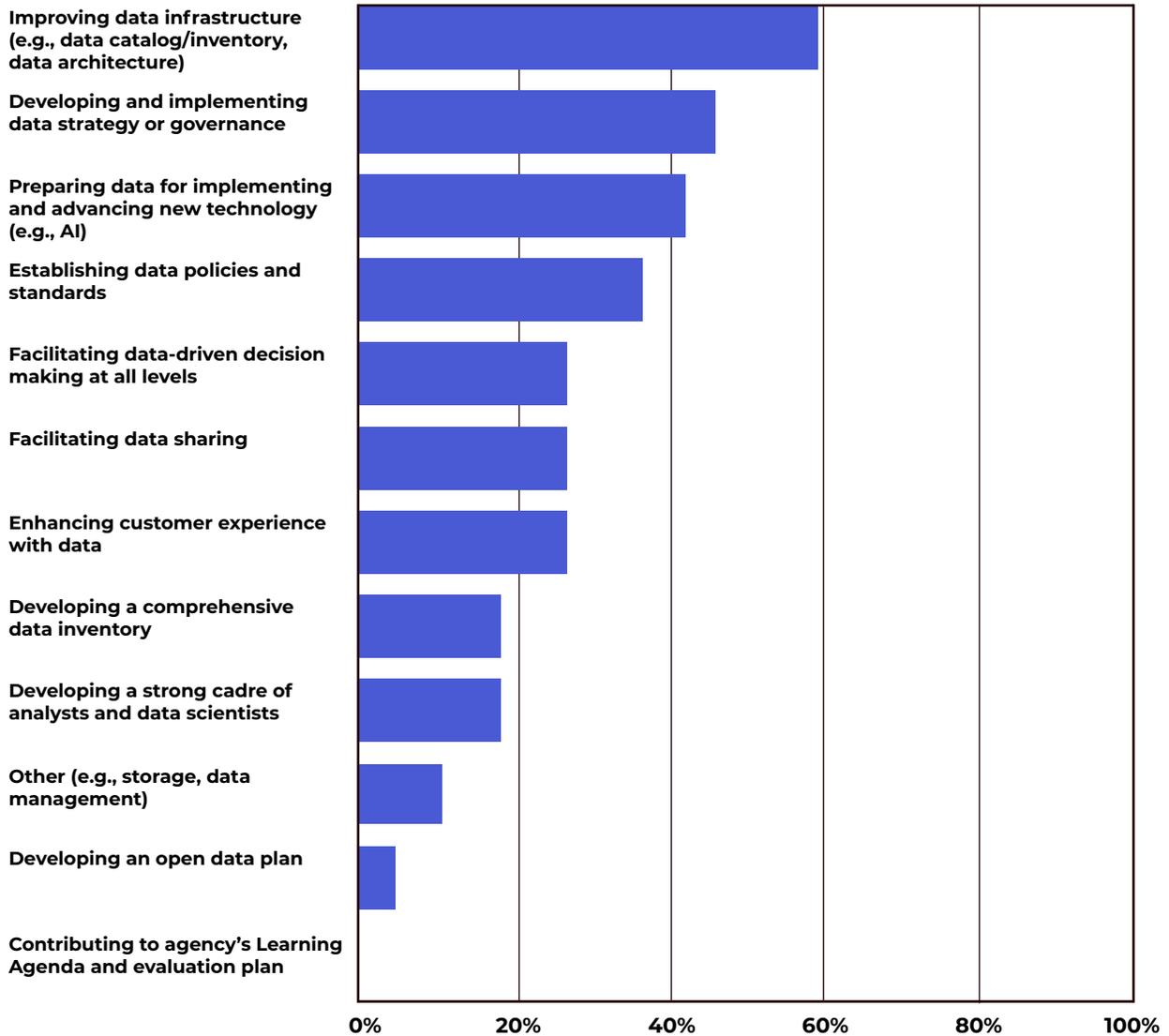


Shifting CDO Mission Priorities and Needs

Improving data infrastructure remains the top priority for CDOs, though the proportion citing it as a priority declined from 70% in 2024 to 57% in 2025. Developing and implementing data strategy or governance (43%) is the second highest priority, while preparing data for implementing and advancing new technology (AI) moved into the top 3 priorities (39%). Facilitating data sharing, number three in 2024, dropped out of the top three priorities, falling behind establishing data policies and standards to rank alongside facilitating data-driven decision making and enhancing customer experience with data (26%).

Figure 5. Improving Data Infrastructure Remains a Top Priority

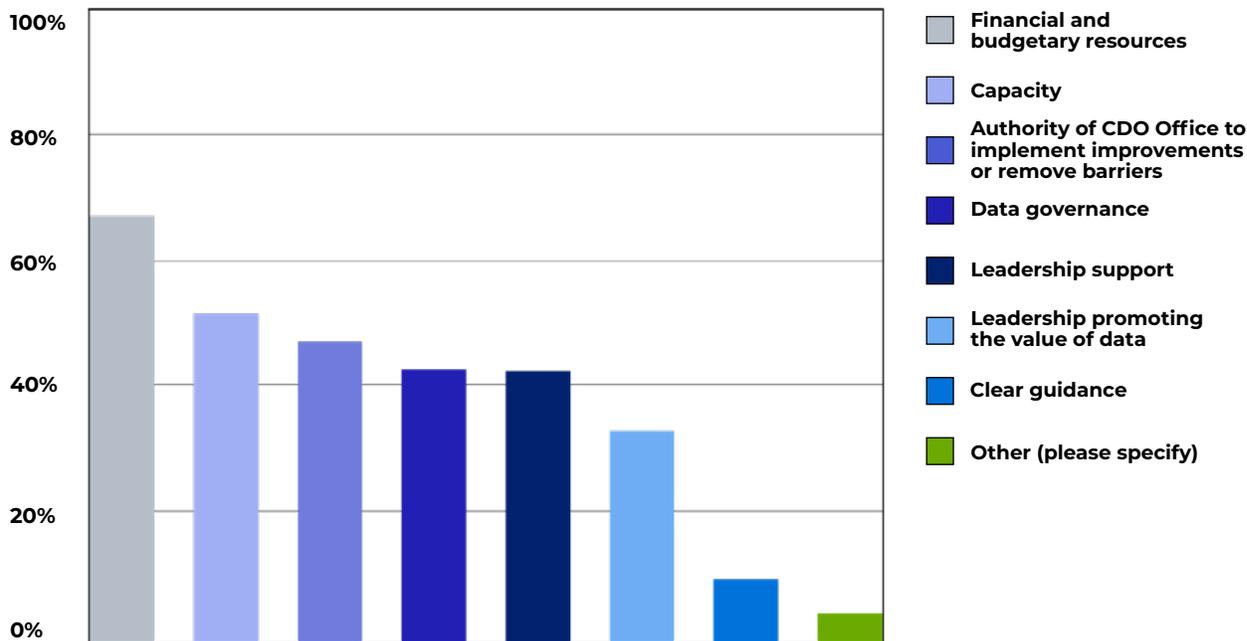
Select the top 3 areas that are the highest priority to achieving your CDO mission.



CDOs identified similar themes as in previous years when describing the most critical needs to advance their mission, with financial and budgetary resources remaining the top need. However, while financial and budgetary constraints continue as the primary challenge, the proportion of CDOs citing this need dropped from 88% in 2024 to 67% in 2025, suggesting that critical needs are becoming more distributed across multiple areas rather than dominated by a single constraint.

Figure 6. CDOs Add Capacity to Top 3 Needs

What are the 3 most critical needs to advance your CDO mission?



Capacity emerged as a new top three priority this year. CDOs identify staffing and personnel as the second most critical need, likely reflecting this year’s workforce changes and agency prioritization of data issues. The authority of the CDO office remains a challenge, still ranking in the top three, but is now closely followed by data governance support and leadership support (both at 43%) as critical needs for advancing the CDO mission.

Despite reported challenges, CDOs continued to celebrate successes over the past year. When asked to describe their most significant accomplishment, 24% specifically cited the publication of their organization’s Open Data Plan, a requirement of the OPEN Government Data Act, as a major milestone in 2025.

Building Data Maturity through Standards and Governance

Data maturity refers to the extent an organization leverages data for decision-making. The 2025 Survey showed similar levels of data maturity across federal agencies as in 2024. When asked to assess their organization’s data maturity, 30% of CDOs reported their organization is “very” or “completely” data mature, slightly down from 37% in 2024.

CDOs highlighted the importance of standards, policies, and processes for advancing organizational data maturity, with this strategy surpassing 2024’s top strategy “engagement with senior leadership.” In 2025, all CDOs identified establishing standards as critical to advancing data maturity. Engaging with senior leadership also remains important, with three quarters (76%) of CDOs indicating its significance for advancing data maturity.

Change in Formal Data Strategy Implementation Metrics

While data strategies continue to support CDO missions, CDO perceptions of their usefulness have become more nuanced. In 2025, 56% of CDOs who reported having a department-wide or agency-specific data strategy found their data strategies only “somewhat” or “a little” useful to achieving their mission, compared to 43% reporting similar levels of usefulness in 2024.

Though perceptions of organizational data strategies are more measured, CDOs report sustained high levels of implementation metric use, with 75% of CDOs now having some form of formal measurement standards for data strategy implementation, up from 70% in 2024. A slight majority (56%) focused on data governance metrics, including successful policy implementation, data accessibility, and security incident rates. Customer-focused metrics, such as user satisfaction, adoption rates, and usage statistics, play a substantially greater role than in previous years, with 44% of CDOs tracking these metrics compared to 26% in 2024.

Interestingly, data quality metrics (including completeness, accuracy, consistency, and reliability) were not among the top three most commonly used implementation metrics in 2025, despite ranking second after data governance metrics in 2024. Only one quarter (25%) of CDOs reported using data quality metrics to measure data strategy implementation goals in 2025. This change suggests that CDOs increasingly prioritize metrics related to data adoption and accessibility over quality measures.

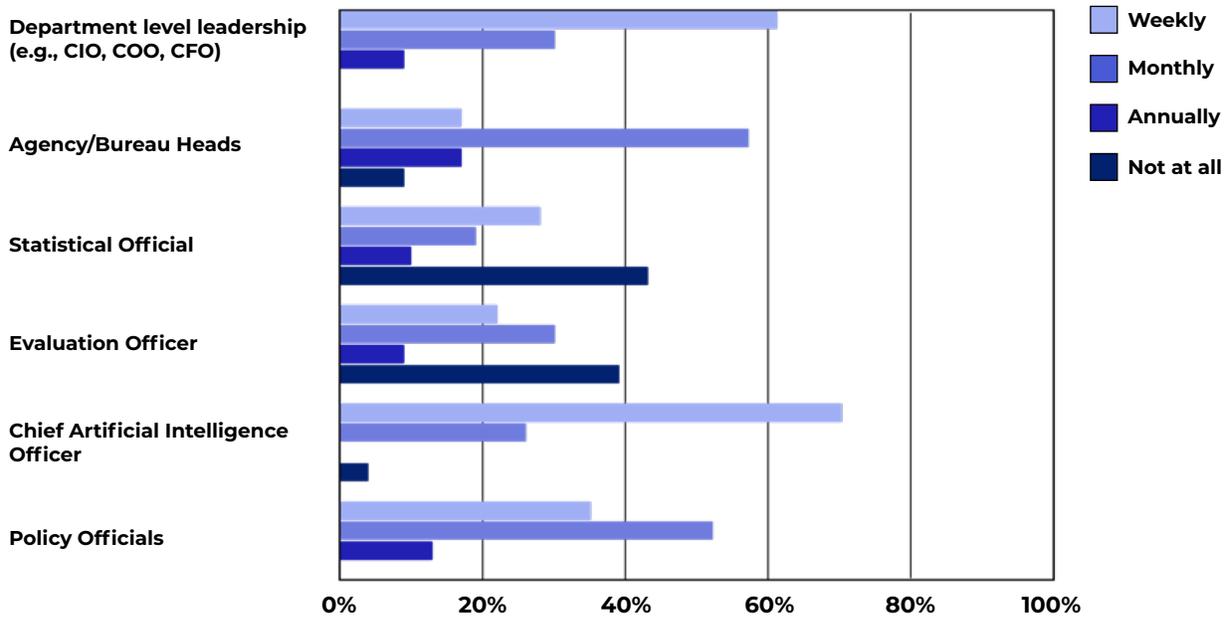
Reduced Private Sector Collaboration and Public Engagement

Similar to prior years, the 2025 CDO Survey found CDOs collaborate frequently across their organization’s functions. CDOs regularly collaborate with C-suite leadership, with 61% reporting collaboration on a weekly basis. Collaboration with AI leadership stands out as the most frequent cross-functional partnership. Nearly all CDOs (96%) collaborate at least monthly with the CAIO, and most (70%) collaborate weekly, more frequently than collaboration with other C-suite leaders. This frequent collaboration underscores the close integration of data and AI responsibilities.

All CDOs reported collaborating with policy officials with varying frequency, with about half (52%) collaborating monthly. However, collaboration with other Evidence Act officials remains limited. More than one third (39%) of CDOs indicated they do not collaborate with Statistical Officials or Evaluation Officers at all.

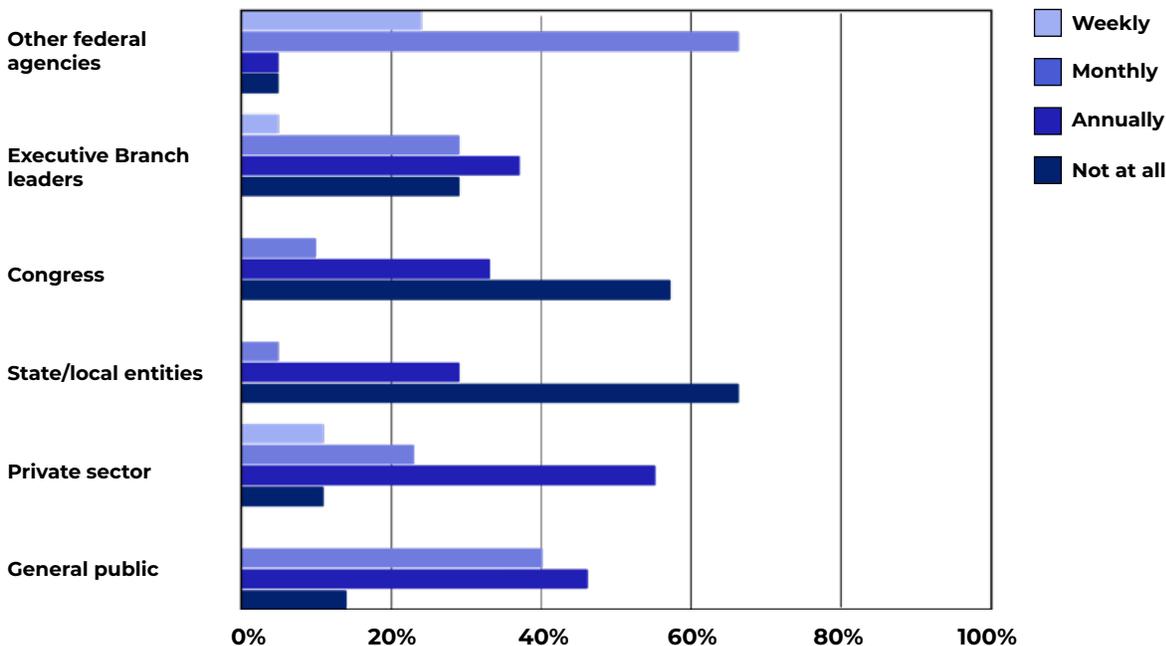
Figure 7. CDOs Collaborate Frequently with Other C-Suite Officials

How often do you collaborate with others in your organization?



CDOs work closely with other federal agencies, with 67% collaborating monthly and nearly a quarter (24%) collaborating weekly. This cross-agency collaboration supports knowledge sharing and coordination of data governance approaches across the federal government. In contrast, CDOs reported having minimal engagement directly with Congress and state and local governments. Approximately one third of CDOs collaborate with Congress (33%) or state and local governments (29%) on an annual basis, while more than half report no collaboration at all with Congress (57%) or state and local governments (67%).

Figure 8. Decreased Collaboration with the Private Sector and General Public



The 2025 CDO Survey also reveals decreased collaboration with the private sector and general public compared to previous years. While 72% of CDOs reported at least monthly collaboration with the private sector in 2024, this declined to 57% in 2025. Similarly, collaboration with the general public dropped from 40% reporting at least monthly engagement in 2024 to 29% in 2025. This decline in external stakeholder engagement may reflect capacity constraints and strategic goals requiring prioritization of internal organizational needs over external engagement activities.

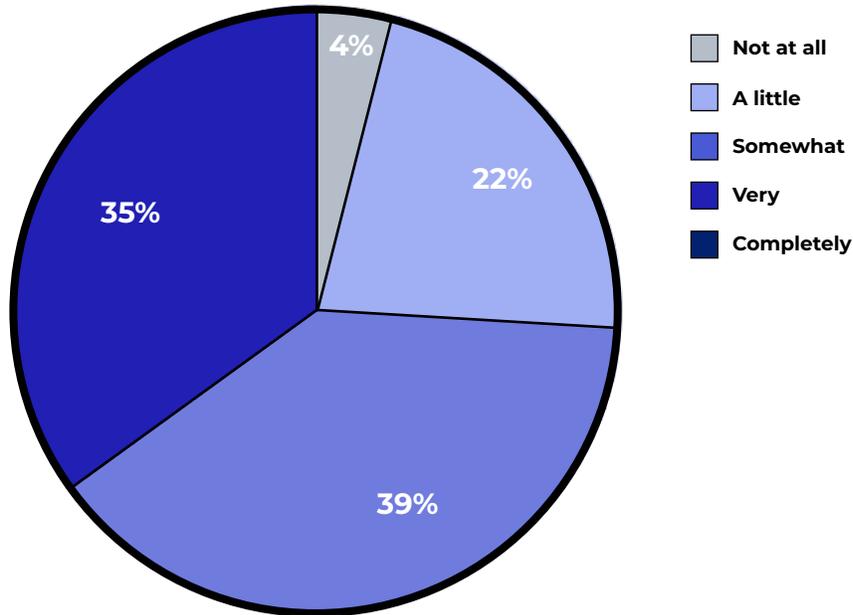
CDO Community and Guidance

An important gap that has been continuously identified by CDOs and stakeholders since passage of the Evidence Act was the Title II (OPEN Government Data Act) implementation guidance from OMB. Providing this guidance has been a major recommendation to support the CDO community in previous CDO surveys. The 2024 survey found that five years after the Evidence Act passed, 60% of CDOs still lacked adequate guidance from OMB to implement the OPEN Government Data Act effectively. In January 2025, OMB published Memorandum M-25-05, “Open Government Data Act Implementation Guidance,” addressing this longstanding need.⁷

The 2025 CDO Survey asked CDOs to what extent they have been able to act on the guidance since its release. The vast majority of CDOs (96%) reported taking some action on the OPEN Government Data Act guidance, though to varying degrees. Approximately one third (35%) responded “very” to describe their ability to act on the guidance.

Figure 9. CDOs Acting on Title II Guidance

To what extent have you been able to act on recent guidance from OMB (M-25-05) to implement the OPEN Government Data Act?



CDOs reported varying stages of M-25-05 implementation.⁸ When asked to describe their progress, 60% cited the publication of Open Data Plans as a key accomplishment. CDOs also frequently mentioned expanding their data inventories and preparing for DCAT-US 3.0 implementation, the standardized metadata schema for federal data catalogs required by the guidance.

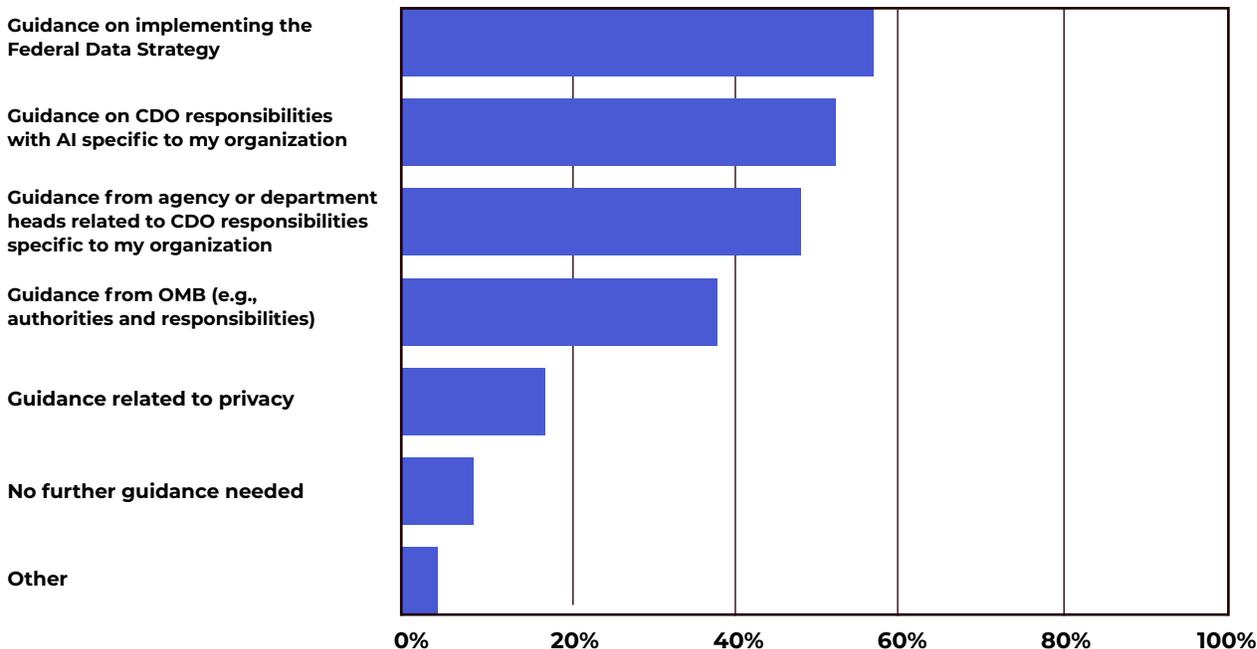
Reduced Private Sector Collaboration and Public Engagement

CDO guidance needs have shifted from government-wide policy to organization-specific implementation support. While guidance from OMB on CDO authorities and responsibilities was the top request in 2024 (cited by 67% of CDOs), the need for additional guidance dropped to 39% in 2025. CDOs who continue to seek guidance from OMB emphasized the need for clearer delineation of authorities, particularly regarding confusion between CDO, CIO, and CAIO roles. One CDO noted that “the CDO authorities seem to be eroding amid organizational restructuring.”

In 2025, the primary guidance needs moved toward implementation and organizational context. The most frequently cited need was guidance on Federal Data Strategy implementation (57%), followed closely by guidance on CDO responsibilities with AI specific to their organization (52%), and guidance from their own agency or department leadership (48%).⁹ This shift from government-wide to organization-specific guidance suggests that as the CDO role matures and the basic framework is established, CDOs increasingly need tailored support for implementing federal requirements within their unique organizational contexts.

Figure 10. CDOs Seek Organizational Guidance

What additional guidance would be helpful for you to be more successful in your role?



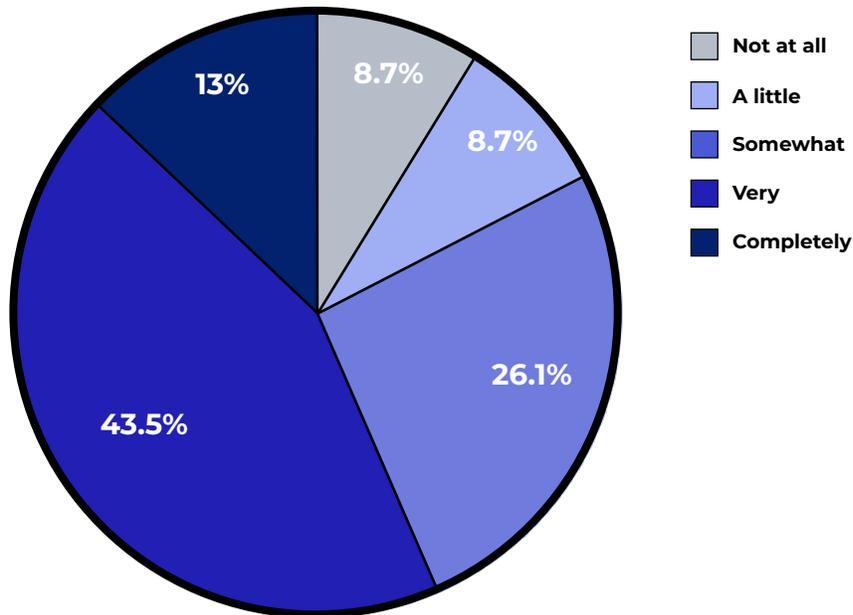
CDO Council Grows in Value Despite Statutory Uncertainty

The Federal CDO Council was originally established by statute in the Evidence Act as a temporary entity within OMB. The CDO Council faced uncertainty when its statutory authorization expired on December 15, 2024. However, on January 15, 2025, the Council was re-established administratively through OMB Memorandum M-25-06, "Re-establishing the Chief Data Officer Council."¹⁰

The 2025 CDO Survey reveals that the Council’s value to the CDO community keeps growing. More than half (57%) of CDOs found the Council’s resources, guidance, and support “very” or “completely” helpful, with 83% finding them at least “somewhat” helpful. This represents a continuous increase from 2024, when 47% found Council resources “very” or “completely” helpful and 70% found them at least “somewhat” helpful, and a considerable improvement from 2023, when only 19% found resources “very” or “completely” helpful and 37% found them at least “somewhat” helpful.

Figure 11. CDO Council Increasingly Beneficial to CDOs

To what extent has the federal CDO Council provided resources, guidance, or support to help you achieve your CDO mission over the past year?



When asked what additional resources and guidance would be useful, CDOs emphasized the Council's role in facilitating knowledge sharing across the CDO community. Among responding CDOs, 30% specifically highlighted the Council's convening function, which provides opportunities to learn from other CDOs' experiences. CDOs requested practical resources such as templates, demonstrations of new practices, and data inventory implementation examples.

Overall, CDOs reported that they view the Council as an essential resource for connecting with peers across government. For example, one CDO noted that the Council "has been great at keeping the community connected," while another called it "by far the best source of information and guidance for a CDO." These findings suggest that as the CDO Council continues to institutionalize and mature, it has become increasingly effective at providing the coordination, best practice sharing, and networking support envisioned by the Congress in the Evidence Act framework.

Given the Council's growing value and the recent uncertainty surrounding its authorization, one CDO suggested permanently re-authorizing the CDO Council in statute with equal standing to the CIO Council. This recommendation reflects the CDO community's view that the Council provides essential coordination and support functions that warrant stable authorization.

CDO Collaboration Drives AI Implementation

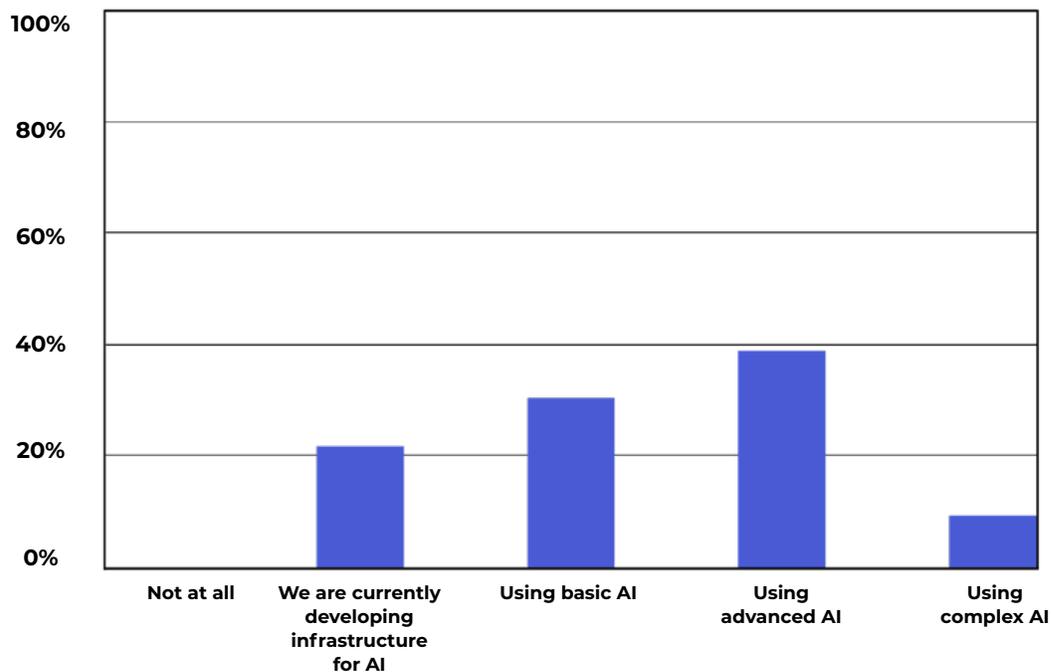
In 2025, the Administration issued six Executive Orders focused on AI, establishing the topic as a clear priority for the Executive Branch.^{11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16} In January 2025, the President signed Executive Order (EO) 14179: “Removing Barriers to American Leadership in Artificial Intelligence” directing the development of a federal AI Action Plan.¹⁷

The focus on AI has also largely directed the work of CDOs, who were widely involved in setting data governance policies for AI use, and increased collaboration with AI leadership. In 2025, a majority of CDOs (61%) indicate that their organization’s AI policies or AI strategy have explicit reference to data governance. Among these CDOs, 64% of CDOs were “a lot” or “completely” involved in setting data governance policies for AI use, with more than three quarters at least “somewhat” involved. Only 21% were only “a little” or “not at all” involved.

Most CDOs work closely with their CAIO counterparts, with almost all CDOs (96%) collaborating at least monthly, and most of them (70%) weekly. Increased collaboration with AI leadership may also have contributed to a more positive view on the CDO-CAIO relationship. In the 2025 CDO Survey, 65% of CDOs answered “very” or “completely” when asked how beneficial the CDO-CAIO relationship is to achieve their CDO mission, up from 50% in 2024.

Figure 12. CDOs Report Increased AI Use

To what extent is your organization currently using AI?



As expected given the focus on AI in 2025, this year's survey sees a continued increase in the use of AI. While 67% of CDOs report their organizations use at least basic AI in 2024, that figure rose to 78% in 2025. Moreover, well over one third of CDOs (39%) indicate they use advanced AI, compared to only 17% in 2024.

The Administration's July 2025 AI Action Plan directs federal agencies to accelerate AI implementation and remove regulatory barriers to AI. In the 2025 CDO Survey, CDOs described working on a variety of AI projects, with some still in the exploratory phase, and others actively working on procuring and implementing AI tools. Additional resources and use cases have been published since the field period of the survey to support these efforts. Survey responses also indicate a focus on AI training and resources for staff to develop the necessary skills to work with new AI tools.

Conclusion

The 2025 Federal CDO Survey highlights a year defined by significant structural, operational, and policy shifts for federal CDOs. Despite major workforce changes, evolving organizational reporting structures, and increasing responsibilities at the intersection of data governance and artificial intelligence, CDOs continued to advance their missions and adapt to emerging federal priorities. The release of the long-awaited implementation guidance for Title II of the Evidence Act marked a significant milestone, enabling most CDOs to take concrete steps toward meeting statutory requirements even as many reported limited capacities to implement fully.

The survey also reveals the continued evolution of CDO roles. Expanded AI-related responsibilities, growing collaboration with Chief Artificial Intelligence Officers, and shifting relationships with CIOs amid changing reporting structures are the key contributors to this evolution. These developments reflect a federal environment in which data and AI governance are becoming increasingly intertwined, with CDOs positioned as key leaders in shaping a responsible, mission-aligned implementation.

At the same time, external engagement markedly declined as CDOs prioritized internal demands under constrained staffing and contractor support, raising concerns about the capacity to sustain open data, public engagement, and necessary collaboration with external partners. Internal collaboration, particularly with AI leadership, remained strong, demonstrating the continued reliance on cross-functional partnerships to advance data-related initiatives.

The CDO Council emerged as an increasingly valuable resource, even amid statutory uncertainty, with CDOs citing its role in knowledge sharing, peer learning, and coordination across the CDO community. This growing reliance underscores the importance of stable, institutionalized support structures for the data community.

Taken together, the 2025 findings illustrate a CDO community navigating rapid technological, organizational, and policy change with resilience and adaptability. As AI becomes more central to federal operations and CDO roles continue to expand, sustained capacity, clearer authorities, and strengthened organizational support will be essential for enabling CDOs to meet their mandates and drive data-enabled transformations.

Key Insights

The 2025 Federal CDO Survey demonstrates how CDOs are navigating a period of transition. The results and insights from the 2025 CDO Survey reveal progress in mission achievement alongside substantial challenges related to capacity constraints and evolving responsibilities. Key insights from 2025 include:

- **AI integration has become central to the CDO mission.** AI use across federal organizations increased from 67% in 2024 to 78% in 2025, reflecting heightened federal prioritization of AI. In 2025, 30% of CDOs also serve as CAIOs and nearly all CDOs (96%) collaborate with AI leadership at least monthly, with 70% collaborating weekly. This close collaboration, combined with 64% of CDOs being “very” or “completely” involved in setting data governance policies for AI use, reflects both federal prioritization of AI and CDOs’ central role in ensuring responsible implementation through data governance. However, as CDO, CIO, and CAIO responsibilities increasingly overlap, CDOs call for clearer guidance on authorities.
- **Critical challenges and needs have become more evenly distributed across multiple areas.** While financial and budgetary resources remain the top need for advancing CDO missions, the proportion of CDOs citing this constraint dropped from 88% in 2024 to 67% in 2025. This decline suggests that as the CDO function matures, challenges are becoming more evenly distributed across multiple areas (including data infrastructure) rather than being dominated by a single constraint. CDOs cited capacity constraints as their second most critical need for advancing their mission and some expressed concerns about meeting statutory requirements, including OPEN Government Data Act implementation. Nearly half (48%) of CDOs report they are now operating with five or fewer FTEs, up from 36% in 2024.
- **The Federal CDO Council grew in value.** The 2025 survey reveals the Council’s increasing importance to the CDO community. More than half (56%) of CDOs found the Council’s resources “very” or “completely” helpful, up from 47% in 2024 and 19% in 2023. CDOs particularly value the Council’s knowledge-sharing function, with 30% specifically highlighting opportunities to learn from other CDOs’ experiences.
- **External stakeholder engagement has declined.** The 2025 survey reveals decreased engagement with the private sector (from 72% to 57% reporting at least monthly collaboration) and the general public (from 40% to 28%). This decline in external stakeholder engagement contrasts with high levels of internal collaboration, particularly with AI leadership (96% collaborate at least monthly). The reduction in external engagement may reflect strategic prioritization of internal organizational needs given capacity constraints, but it raises concerns about CDOs’ ability to fulfill statutory requirements for open data and public engagement. This also raises concerns about the government’s ability to maintain knowledge about the rapidly changing technological capabilities of the private sector and capabilities the government may need to adopt in coming years.

Recommendations and Next Steps

The 2025 Federal CDO Survey provides insights into the federal data community's challenges and achievements in a transitional year. CDOs navigated organizational change and rapidly evolving AI responsibilities while continuing to mature as a function. The release of OMB's OPEN Government Data Act guidance marked a significant milestone, yet CDOs face new challenges as they work on organization-specific implementation. As AI becomes increasingly central to federal operations and the boundaries between data, technology, and AI leadership continue to blur, CDOs require sustained support, clear authorities, and adequate capacity to advance their missions.

To address the evolving needs of the CDO community and build on lessons learned from six years of the official CDO function in the federal government, the Data Foundation and Deloitte offer the following recommendations:

- 1. Ensure adequate CDO capacity.** While CDOs have demonstrated continued progress on Evidence Act implementation, reported capacity constraints may limit their ability to effectively fulfill statutory requirements and meet growing demands. With implementation deadlines for OPEN Government Data Act requirements such as DCAT-US 3.0 in 2026, department and agency leaders must prioritize sustained resources (personnel and data infrastructure) for CDO offices to maintain and advance progress on quality data for trustworthy AI. CDOs should also be empowered to apply AI tools to their own operations as a way to improve efficiency in core data management functions.
- 2. Harness AI potential by robust data governance.** Harnessing AI's full potential starts with robust data foundations and governance—clear data ownership, consistent definitions, high-quality pipelines, strong privacy/security controls, and traceable lineage—so AI outputs are accurate, compliant, and trusted. Chief Data Officers (CDOs) can lead the way by setting enterprise-wide standards, prioritizing high-value data products, and aligning stewards, risk, and technology teams around measurable data quality and accountability that enables responsible scaling of AI use cases.
- 3. Provide clarity around the role of CDOs.** Organizational clarity about responsibilities and authorities becomes increasingly important as organizations adopt more sophisticated AI capabilities, including agentic AI systems that can operate with greater autonomy. Department and agency leaders should provide comprehensive guidance delineating the distinct yet complementary responsibilities of CDOs, CIOs, and CAIOs.

- 4. Provide sustained CDO Community support.** As AI innovation increases the need for interagency data interoperability, the CDO Council's coordinating function becomes even more important in ensuring that federal data management evolves cohesively rather than in fragmented agency-specific directions. Durable support and long-term predictability will allow the CDO Council to effectively serve the maturing CDO community. Further, by ensuring CDOs have the capacity to engage beyond their organizational boundaries, agencies can fulfill transparency requirements while maintaining awareness of innovations that may benefit government modernization. Public private partnerships can also be leveraged for providing support to the CDO community through future technological and organizational transitions.

CDOs have demonstrated remarkable adaptability and progress over six years of Evidence Act implementation. As the CDO function continues to mature and AI transforms federal operations, data leaders need sustained organizational commitment, clear authorities, and adequate capacity to fulfill their expanding mandates. By addressing the challenges documented in the 2025 Federal CDO Survey while building on demonstrated successes, the federal government can ensure that CDOs continue driving data-enabled transformation in an increasingly complex technological landscape.

Appendix: Survey Methodology

The findings presented in this report are informed by the results of the Data Foundation's sixth annual survey of federal Chief Data Officers (CDO). The sample frame was determined based on role and authorities described in the OPEN Government Data Act – Title II of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 (Evidence Act), P.L.115-435, Sec. 3520(c). The Evidence Act required all agencies to designate a Chief Data Officer within each organization, and delegates the CDO functions to Statistical Officials (SOs) at 44 USC 3520(d). The sample frame includes all department-, agency-, bureau-level CDOs and data leadership roles. The data leaders identified in the sample were limited to two levels below the highest-level data officer based on agency organizational charts. To compile an inventory of known federal CDOs and SOs that fit within the scope of the identified sample frame, the Data Foundation primarily used Leadership Connect – a directory of federal employees – as well as agency websites, social media, and Data Foundation networks. The final sample frame consisted of 189 CDOs, SOs, and individuals performing duties similar to CDOs.

In prior surveys of federal CDOs, the Data Foundation found that SOs did not find many of the questions from the CDO survey as relevant to their role. To improve the relevance of the questions for the SOs and ensure integrity of the responses, the Data Foundation created a separate survey track for SOs to follow once the respondent identified as a SO with delegated data governance and management responsibilities at the beginning of the questionnaire. The 2025 SO Track of the CDO survey included 19 questions; the questions featured on the SO survey track were also on the full CDO survey. The SO responses were grouped with the CDO responses on questions that overlapped for the analysis of survey results.

Using the survey platform Qualtrics, the Data Foundation invited 189 identified CDOs, SOs, and CDO-like individuals to participate in a web-based survey through an anonymous link.

The initial invitation was sent to the identified sample September 22, 2025, followed by an initial reminder email sent from the Qualtrics platform. Outreach was paused during the October 1 - November 12 government shutdown, then resumed with a renewed invitation on December 1 and three subsequent reminders. In addition to email outreach from the survey platform, Data Foundation leadership sent further email reminders encouraging participation in non-response follow-up. The survey period closed on January 2, 2026 with 12% final response rate.

Additional insights and research conducted by report authors and Data Foundation staff supplemented the survey findings.

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