

Reimagining IT Governance: The ASU-Agile Way

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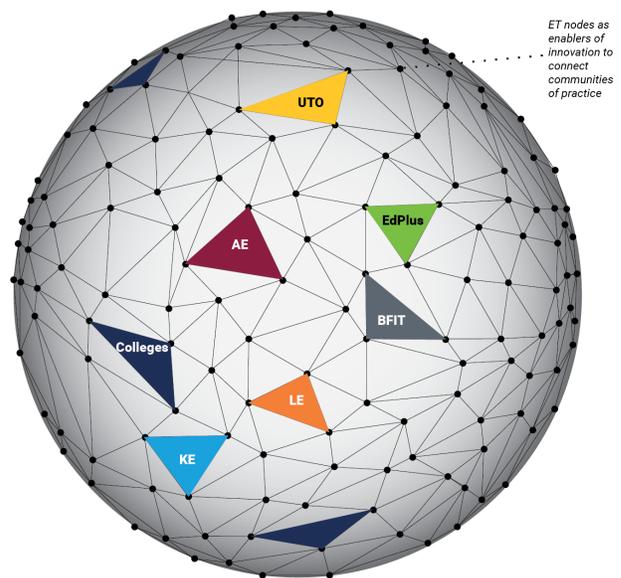
Overview

During the first three quarters of FY21, the ASU University Technology Office committed to an evaluation and re-imagining of the [ASU IT governance approach](#), both in principles and practice. This initiative coincided with the deployment of a new agile organizational model —UTO 2.1 — designed in response to insatiable demand for innovation from the enterprise, and in service to UTO’s role as both catalyst and enabler for enterprise digital transformation. In conversation and co-creation with stakeholders and enterprise partners, UTO realized the opportunity to design a more effective approach to IT governance and better align the work of the technology, academic and business enterprises. Our approach reflects the culture of empowered collaboration at UTO.

Purposefully light-touch and iterative in nature, our approach to IT governance enables visibility, collaboration and community in a distributed IT environment, strengthens our community of practice, and through refined policy, creates the guide rails within which individuals and teams innovate with greater efficiency and velocity. It accelerates the deployment of tools to improve distributed IT compliance reporting and drives continual improvement through supportive, repeatable processes. Committing to the UTO 2.1 hybrid agile organizational model and adopting principles from the adaptive governance framework, we pivoted from an IT governance structure rooted in functional areas to one designed for advisory, co-creation, early involvement and representation from across the institution, and a model that intentionally embeds culture at every level.

The Context: Enterprise Technology

In 2020, a team of technology and other executive leaders across ASU convened to conceive a new and better model for serving the university community and beyond. Known as the Enterprise Technology Design Team, representatives from the Office of the University Provost, the Knowledge Enterprise, Business and Finance, EdPlus and UTO developed a constellations blueprint (pictured) that ensures that ASU’s enterprises and units are supported by enterprise technology and services while fostering cross-university communities of practice that advance the enterprise in service delivery, engineering, research, products, projects, data and analysis—and governance.



With governance as the guide, ET operationalizes both scale and personalization—supporting the ASU community with enterprise IT services and empowering departments to implement solutions that meet their unique and evolving goals.

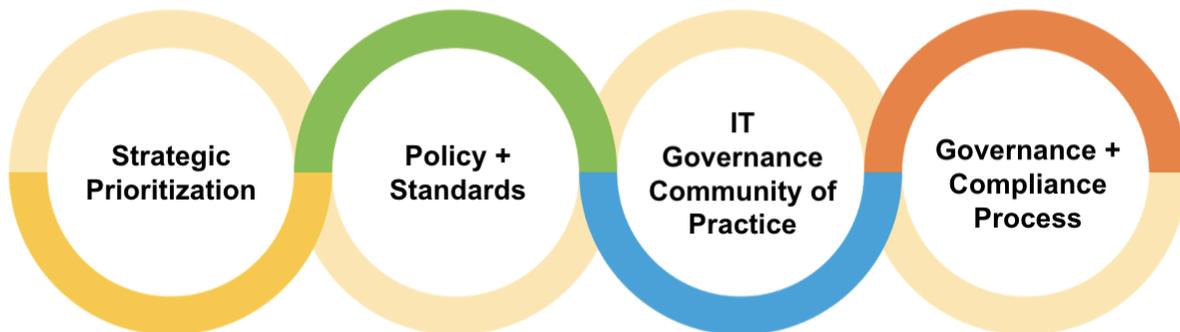
ASU UTO IT Governance

ASU is the New American University and serves over 120,000 students and over 6,000 faculty members across 17 colleges. At that scale, it employs an additional 16 business units to support and administrate the vital process of teaching and learning.

Similar to many institutions of higher education, ASU employs a federated IT model. UTO is positioned as the centralized technology office with responsibility to the CIO, and 30+ distributed technology units. UTO administers enterprise IT service offerings as well as unique technology operations, systems and services. Distributed units are responsible for alignment to enterprise IT policy and standards, the integrity of information security, and risk and compliance posture.

UTO IT governance includes strategic prioritization and the development of annual strategic goals for the organization, the enterprise IT Governance Community of Practice, and stewardship of IT policy and standards. In close partnership with our information security, risk and vulnerability management teams, we also design and support compliance reporting from distributed technology units providing visibility to our enterprise risk posture. These areas of initiative are co-created and actualized by teams across the organization, including UTO's core areas of Engineering, Products and Programs, Data and Analysis and Service Delivery, and focused scopes of Governance, Learning Futures, Enterprise Initiatives, Budget and Finance, Learning Experience, Digital Trust, Culture, Creative and Communications, and Partnerships.

Spheres of Influence for IT Governance:



Cross-functional strategic planning is a foundational element of UTO 2.1, an expression of our reframing in FY21 as a rapidly-reconfigurable and entrepreneurial organizational structure that prioritizes and executes projects to better meet the needs of our community. UTO's priority is to satisfy the customer through early and continuous delivery, maximizing the amount of work done, and with customers engaged in the work.

The centerpiece of UTO's focus on IT governance—the structure and processes of technology use—as a formal body of work is a strong community of practice among ASU technologists and governance practitioners that, in collaboration across the enterprise, render ASU's ambitious vision for the learner of today and tomorrow possible. ASU's IT governance program embraces an adaptive model that supports agile methodology, and activates a collaborative technology

community distributed across the university with transparency to and early involvement in strategy and initiatives.

Stewardship of a robust framework of policies, standards and continuously improved supporting processes, co-created with this community, creates a light-touch governance framework. This guides the work of teams rapidly delivering innovative technology solutions. Supporting processes ensure secure and privacy-focused solutions.

UTO IT Governance Principles

Primary for UTO in the evolution of our IT governance approach is our commitment to our customers and learners; building an inclusive, collaborative culture; agile ways of organizing and doing work; and trust in our partners, leaders and teams.

UTO IT Governance Principles actualize our commitment that effective governance is a collective intention to culture and principles, not a group of people enforcing standards. These Principles embody the UTO Core Values of belonging, and being relational, authentic, visionary and empowered. And they catalyze the UTO Leadership Principles of operating with an agile first mindset, being resourceful in support of transformational change, creating authentic partnerships, aligning talent with opportunities, leading with curiosity and creativity, trusting our teams, and building a culture of collaboration.

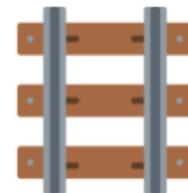
UTO IT Governance Principles



Embrace the **voice of the customer** and desired outcome across the business lifecycle.



Actualize an **agile approach** in order to respond to continual change and rapid reconfiguration.



Practice a **light-touch** approach and define *guide rails* to support balanced risk assessment and speed to innovation.



Support **informed decision making** as close as possible to the customer, where value is most realized.



Foster an ASU IT governance **community of practice** for diverse collaboration and strategic thinking.



Nurture a **culture of inclusion** with trust, transparency and support for experimentation.

The Challenge and Opportunities

The prior ASU IT governance model was grounded in the structure of strategic direction from ASU executive leadership, strategic analysis supported by an IT investment group and an advisory group with representation from some units across the enterprise, and knowledge areas represented by IT standards and core process teams. Since it was established, the governance community and structure evolved organically in response to changing business strategy and needs from the enterprise, and UTO's position matured from one of IT support to strategic partner and catalyst for innovation.

Our reframing as UTO 2.1, an agile organizational model, spurred the re-imagining of our approach to IT governance. We pivoted from a traditional higher education IT support model to one flatter in nature and steeped in agile methodology. Employing matrixed, autonomous and rapidly-reconfigurable teams with representation from core technology areas of development, services, engineering, and data, we removed hierarchical work structures to support speed to innovation. Individuals and teams are empowered to make decisions close to the customer where value is most realized.

Additionally, at the start of our efforts to reimagine and mature our IT governance approach, ASU, like so many other institutions of higher learning, was considering appropriate pivots in response to the COVID-19 global pandemic, which at its core, meant supporting our learners with technology solutions that allowed them to continue their learning journey without interruption or loss of agency.

In conversation with the ASU community, technologists and governance partners, several IT governance challenges and opportunities emerged:



The interactions among UTO and governance groups had become **largely non-participatory** in nature. Technologists and governance partners felt strongly that the policy, security and service status updates communicated regularly across the enterprise IT governance community were valuable and necessary, but lacked nuanced consideration for the specific roles and responsibilities of individuals and teams. This made it difficult for stakeholders to identify their role in the work effort and decision-making process.



The management of IT policies and standards had become an **ineffective process** without involvement from a diverse group of subject matter experts. There was also an ad hoc understanding among distributed technology units of the interrelated body of policies and standards, and a lack of broad agreement on the direction forward for policy.



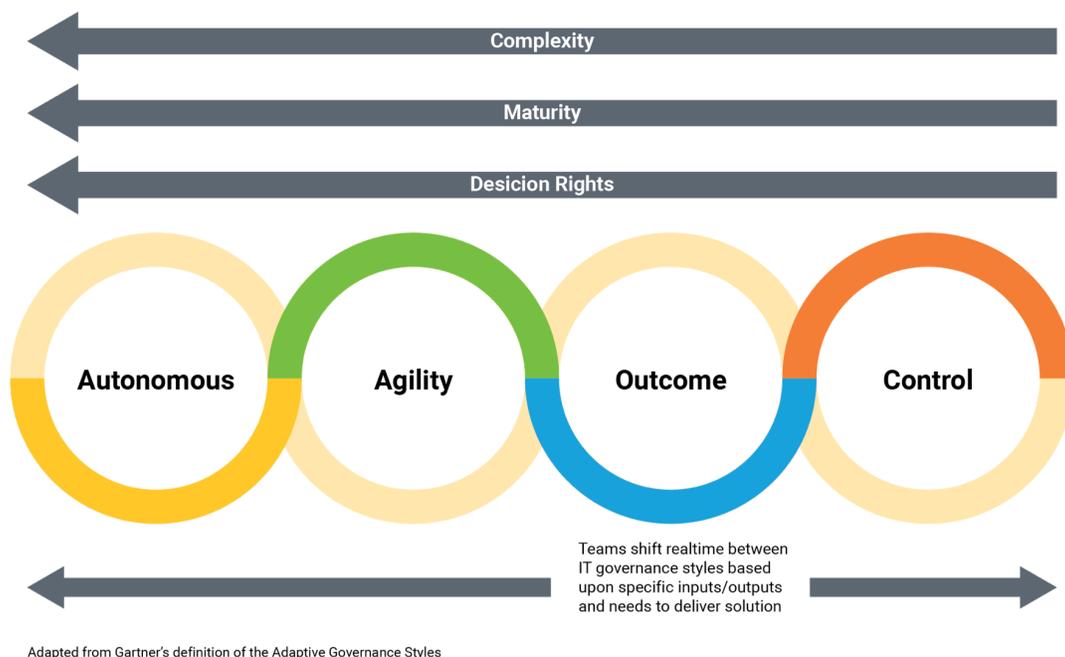
Opaque visibility to the IT risk posture across the enterprise hindered our line of sight to emerging threats, specifically at the unit and department level, in part

due to incomplete compliance reporting and accountability from distributed technology units, and lack of a centralized system of record to support this work.

Adaptive Governance and UTO 2.1

A survey of governance models supported the development of ASU's IT governance approach which we used to guide the development of solutions related to the community, policy and risk challenges. Our governance framework adopts many aspects of adaptive governance¹ and is integrated with UTO 2.1. It shifts the focus of technology efforts from project to product, and encourages co-creation among UTO and the ASU business and technology community. It orients portfolios to value streams through improved alignment of technology and business strategy for the efficient, agile delivery of enterprise outcomes.

Adaptive Governance Styles and UTO 2.1



Encouraging digital competency and distributed empowerment, technology teams operate within the guide rails of mature policy to assess risk and to deliver technology solutions that are responsive to the changing needs of stakeholders, the demands of digital business, and meet the challenge from ASU's champions of innovation. ASU's appetite for innovation is unrelenting. We're empowering our technologists and teams to balance risk and reward, and make decisions rapidly with our customers.

¹ Gartner, *How Moving From "Project" to "Product" Affects IT Governance*, October 23, 2019
Gartner, *Match I&T Risk Governance to the Speed of Digital Business*, May 27, 2020
Gartner, *Use Adaptive Governance Styles for Portfolio Management*, May 20, 2020

Alignment to adaptive governance offers four defined governance styles to model depending upon the situation: control-based, outcome-based, agility-based and autonomous. Complexity, maturity and decision rights increase as an organization progresses through the styles from control-based to autonomous.

In a control-based style, enterprise directives are implemented within the enterprise framework—the guide rails of policies, standards and regulatory compliance. This style is rigid and compliance oriented.

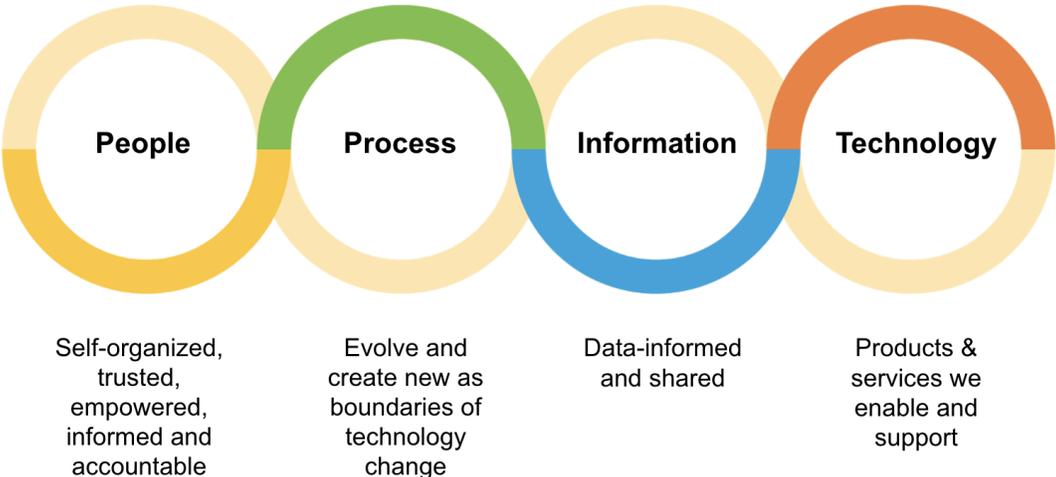
Operating within an outcome-based style, leaders balance risks and benefits, and make investment and product feature decisions within the enterprise framework.

The agility-based style of IT governance is the target for ASU UTO. Operating in this model, teams are empowered to balance risk and quality, and make informed product decisions within the enterprise framework. This style focuses teams on a values culture and competencies, and a goal of “better not perfect.”

Finally, the autonomous governance style requires high maturity and balances control- and outcome-based styles when dealing with automation/AI. Operating in this style, teams perform risk decisions and implementations on the spot. The autonomous style is aspirational for most organizations. At ASU, we see the autonomous style emerge in the areas of Digital Trust and Learning Futures, among others.

These adaptive governance styles simply present structures and approaches for our teams to apply depending upon the space they find themselves innovating within. A style is not meant to be fixed: teams flex between styles fluidly depending upon requirements, constraints and opportunities while balancing risk and reward.

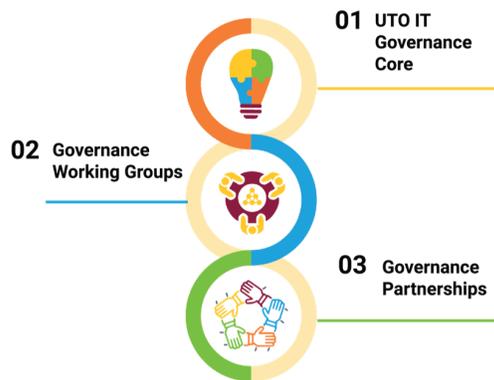
The following components are organized to create adaptive governance styles on a fit-by-need basis that enable outcomes:



ASU IT Governance Community of Practice

We approached the redesign of the ASU IT governance approach with a clear vision that the centerpiece of this formal body of work is a commitment to a strong community of practice among ASU technologists and governance partners, and a belief that co-creation and collaboration in a participatory and high-trust environment will render ASU's ambitious vision for the learner of today and tomorrow possible.

UTO IT governance and partnerships



Enterprise IT governance and advisory



Intentional culture is ingrained in the work of UTO, and we folded that into the IT governance efforts, placing inclusion, collaboration and early involvement at the forefront of our community building efforts. Today, the enterprise IT governance community includes executive management, cross-functional governance structures internal to UTO as well as in collaboration with enterprise governance partners, numerous chartered and self-organizing work group structures, and advisory and steering committees with representation from across the enterprise.

Primary to the design of the ASU IT governance approach is a keen focus on collaborative bodies advancing work. We recognized early on in modeling our approach that insatiable demand from the enterprise for innovative technology approaches and solutions would not be satisfied by non-participatory governance groups limited by simply an advisory mandate. IT governance groups at ASU are collaboratories—incubators of sharing, participation and co-creation where work is activated.

IT governance bodies internally facing to UTO and externally facing to the enterprise are designed to encourage technology alignment to business strategy across a complex educational enterprise, and early involvement in strategic priorities and initiatives. These governance structures represent executive leadership, the breadth of the enterprise academic, learning and research activity, enterprise governance partners, UTO governance-related functions, and the IT

community of practice. Additionally, persistent and ad hoc working groups that are highly collaborative, porous, participatory structures for co-creation, are aligned to emerging and current activity, where work gets done, and support strategic resourcing, policy lifecycle, compliance efforts, security, service offerings and budget.

Enterprise IT Governance Structure

Across the ASU enterprise, IT governance is represented by ASU Executive Management, Advisory Committees, the IT Community of Practice and UTO. ASU Executive Management committees, with representation from the President's management team and senior leaders, set strategic direction for the enterprise, IT governance and Enterprise Technology. Groups include the Executive Committee, IT Governance Executive Council, Enterprise Technology Management Council, Enterprise Technology Design Team, and Finance Working Group.

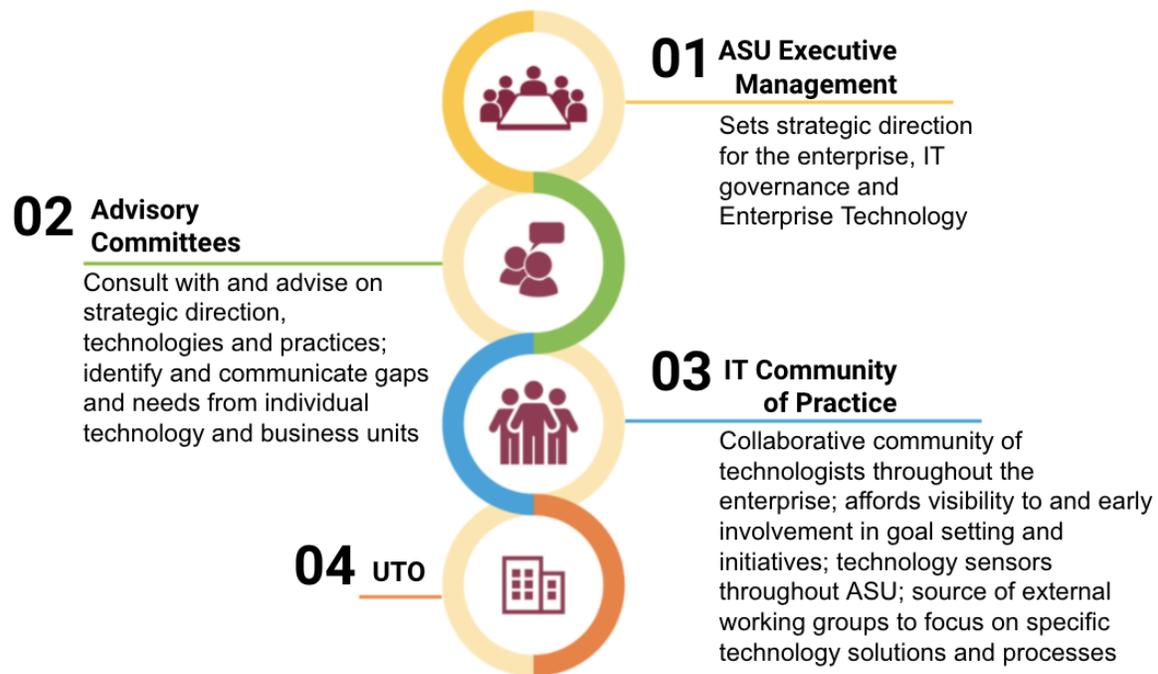
Governance Advisory Committees—with membership from across the enterprise and UTO—consult and advise on strategic direction, technologies and practices, and identify and communicate gaps and needs from individual technology and business units. Committees include representation from Deans across the enterprise for Senior Priority Setting, the Provost's Office, Research Enterprise, Learning Enterprise, Learning and Learning Futures, Information Security, Privacy and Digital Trust, as well as UTO participation in the ASU Faculty Senate and Student Government committees.

The [IT Community of Practice](#) is a collaborative community of technologists throughout the enterprise which affords visibility to and early involvement in goal setting and initiatives. Members act as technology sensors throughout ASU and they are a source of external working groups to focus on specific technology solutions and processes.

Part of the IT Community of Practice, the CIO-chartered Distributed Technology Working Group (WG-DT) is an example of a participatory body that collaboratively identifies strategic priorities, and defines and advances work. Work group members are invited by the CIO to serve in an advisory capacity, and numerous work streams are activated and integrated with the work of other teams throughout the enterprise. Members meet regularly with the CIO and the UTO senior leadership working group. Two currently active work streams include Emerging Technology, and Policy and Standards.

The CIO advisory team and associated work streams both define and activate cross-functional initiatives and improvement efforts across the technology enterprise. As part of our stakeholder inclusion model, these teams also inform our strategic prioritization lifecycle and the development and iteration of annual strategic priorities.

ASU IT Governance Structure



Also inherent in the design of the CIO advisory team is culture building. At conception, this team embarked upon a journey of strategic collaboration, identifying strengths and opportunities, different ways of working together, and designing a shared vision of the future state resulting from our co-creation and activation of technology talent across the enterprise.

Other structures within the ASU IT Community of Practice include Distributed Technology Leads (DT Leads) and the Information Technology Community (ITC). DT Leads are individuals from the distributed technology enterprise community responsible for the operations, security, and integrity of information technology for an ASU department and unit. One individual from each unit is designated by the Dean or department head and reviewed annually with the office of the CIO. This group of technology representatives meets regularly to spotlight innovations from units across the technology enterprise, and to communicate service offerings, policy direction, security practices, compliance obligations and collective contributions to the enterprise IT risk posture.

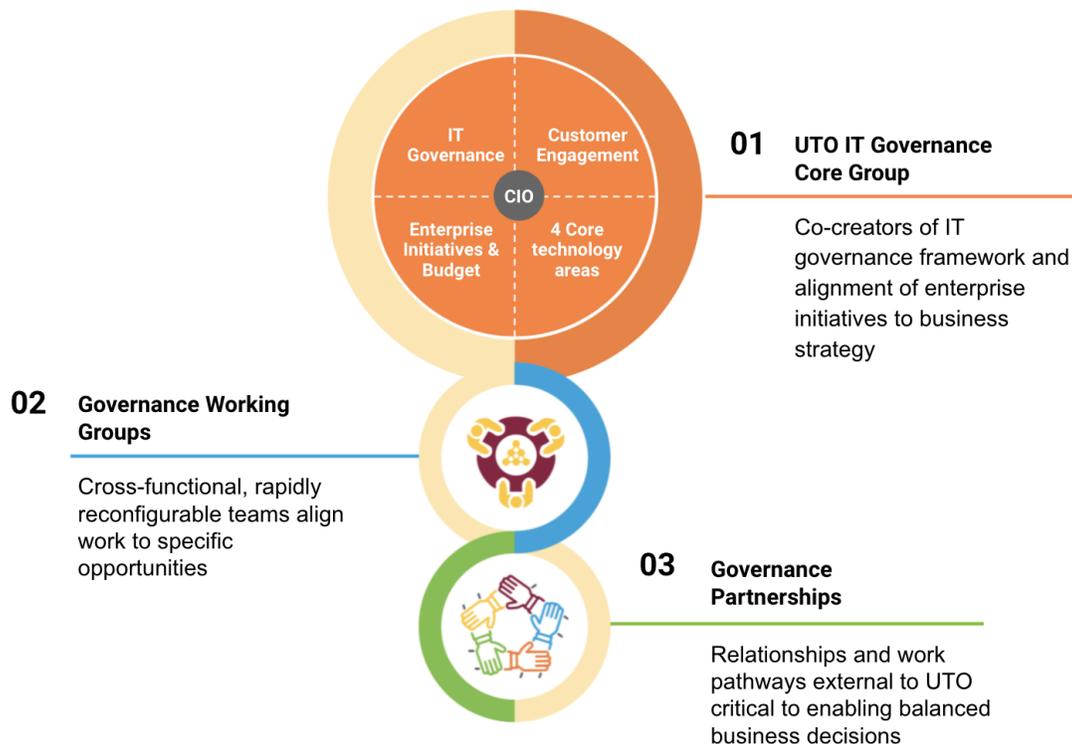
The ITC is an open community of technology professionals and enthusiasts from across the enterprise invited through UTO to participate in professional development and events, and is a community vehicle for communication of IT news and information. ITC participants collaborate with and inform the community of technology professionals regarding enterprise technology initiatives, share best practices, explore technology trends and advancements, and disseminate updates to enterprise services, policy and standards among the community and their departments and units. Meetings are community-organized with input from enterprise technologists and UTO.

Finally, the Tri-U Governance, Risk and Compliance collaborative of technology professionals from Arizona State University, the University of Arizona and Northern Arizona University share best practices and opportunities for optimization and alignment of our governance, security and risk efforts.

UTO IT Governance Structure and Enterprise Partnerships

Governance structures internal to UTO and collaborations with enterprise governance partners catalyze the co-creation of our IT governance approach and create a fabric of support for the enterprise.

UTO IT Governance Structure



UTO-specific governance bodies include our IT Governance Core Group, designers of IT governance framework, and includes leaders from Governance, Enterprise Initiatives, Budget, Service Delivery, Products and Projects, Data and Analysis, Engineering, and Customer Engagement. Work efforts include alignment of enterprise initiatives to business strategy and operationalizing UTO 2.1.

The Governance Working Group (WG-G) is a cross-functional body of stakeholders from across UTO 2.1 advising, supporting and activating governance work within UTO and the enterprise. This team and related work groups support the annual strategic prioritization process, policy and standards lifecycle, alignment of work visible through the Scrum-of-Scrum, and surface new guilds and other structures that advance work.

A specific Alignment and Prioritization team of UTO cross-functional leaders meets frequently to address immediate impediments requiring resolution, elevating issues for decision and action related to new enterprise initiatives, resourcing, and work in progress.

Numerous governance partnerships between UTO and others across the enterprise support the areas of privacy and regulatory compliance. Governance practitioners include general council, audit, procurement, risk and regulatory compliance teams.

Policy and Standards Co-creation and Lifecycle

Improving the body of ASU IT policies and standards and maturing the policy lifecycle is pivotal to our IT governance efforts. Our policies and standards, like our community of practice, is at the core of the collaborative, light-touch model that guides the innovative work of the technology enterprise. Effective policy defines the guide rails that teams innovate within and enables velocity. In combination with an adaptive governance approach—specifically the agile style that aligns to the UTO 2.1 organizational model—this allows teams to exercise their digital competency and practice distributed empowerment to make product and program decisions quickly and close to the customer where value is realized most.

Following evaluation of our governance program, we sunsetted legacy IT standards and core process teams, and designed new work groups aligned to groupings of related policies and standards. This reorganized a loose collaboration of teams aligned to technology silos and specific technologies to cross-functional working groups identified by policy area. These work groups include subject matter experts and practitioners from UTO and units across the enterprise. They manage the annual review cycle for policy and standards, and recommend changes, new policy and sunseting of policy when appropriate, all to be ratified by the enterprise Information Security Advisory Committee.

We're currently involved in the first annual review cycle employing these new working groups, and aligning this policy work with efforts from the CIO advisory body. Among other topics of focus, this advisory group is undertaking a policy gap analysis and evaluating the body of policy and standards through the lens of emergent technologies.

Enterprise Risk Posture and Compliance Reporting

Improved management of the IT policy and standards lifecycle through focused work groups maturing a cohesive body of policy supports and accelerates the innovative work of teams. And it lays the groundwork to further improve our governance infrastructure with centralized and automated compliance reporting. We are currently implementing the ServiceNow Governance, Risk and Compliance (GRC) module to automate three previously manual processes at the core of ASU IT compliance efforts: policy lifecycle management, centralized compliance reporting, and the annual IT risk assessment.

GRC Unique Value Proposition



In our updated model, the body of IT policies and standards resides within the ServiceNow GRC structure. This centralizes policy lifecycle management including the annual review of each policy and standard by work groups. It includes attestations from working group leads, and tracking of the policy review lifecycle.

This architecture also creates the infrastructure for compliance reporting from distributed technology units. Mapping our current body of policy and standards to security frameworks and controls was an early step in developing this compliance alignment process. Compliance reporting from units to these controls increases visibility to the enterprise risk posture and allows for a more granular approach to closing identified gaps. This centralized compliance reporting manages policy acknowledgements, compliance and non-compliance tracking, and handles evidence documentation.

Further, it allows for automation of the annual IT risk assessment, generating a unit's risk posture from compliance reporting to security, privacy and regulatory controls mapped to the body of policy. Paired with other indicators, this data is presented in an Executive Dashboard and reviewed in Senior Priority Setting advisory meetings between UTO leadership and Deans.

This GRC initiative also allows for differentiated compliance reporting for units that require alignment to specific regulatory requirements, such as ASU covered entities.

Automating the reporting of alignment by business units to enterprise IT policies and standards, security framework, and regulations, paired with continuous monitoring for non-compliant controls will vastly improve our ability to detect and respond to changes in enterprise risk posture, and provide actionable metrics and dashboards for visibility to the risk posture at business unit and enterprise levels.

Commitment to Iteration

ASU's IT governance framework has been iterated upon during the implementation of UTO 2.1—the actualization of our commitment to an agile and entrepreneurial organization—and the design and modeling of Enterprise Technology—a network of technologists that enables ubiquitous experiences across ASU Enterprises to operationalize both scale and personalization. This is an evolution in support of diverse technology initiatives and activities that span the academic, learning and research enterprises. We're re-assessing governance strategy and tactics in the context of unfolding business needs and requirements, and balancing risk and reward.

Related efforts in the governance space advance our efforts and commitment to participatory community, a strengthened body of policy that guides the work of the technology enterprise, and increased visibility to enterprise IT risk posture.

Maturing the design of our [strategic priorities](#) and process, and stakeholder inclusion model is another such initiative. Aligning strategic priorities to ASU and Enterprise Technology Design Aspirations, co-created with business and technology leaders across ASU, advances the breadth of enterprise technology innovation and allows everyone to see their work reflected in the trajectory of the New American University.

Ours is an intentional and evolving approach to governance. We remember that governance is based upon shared values, commitment to principles, it gains strength through collaboration, and is deeply rooted in the culture we create together.