Driver Six: Engagement

Fostering a citizen-driven government through real-time interactive feedback to engage, co-create, and co-produce services and programs

Digital services, cognitive solutions, and open approaches to technology and data can open channels that bring citizens and governments closer together.

Citizens increasingly look for new opportunities to engage with governments on how to approach problems, develop policies and programs, receive services, and create collaborative online and in-person relationships. Digital services, cognitive solutions, and open approaches to technology and data can open channels that bring citizens and governments closer together. This fosters a "citizen-driven" government based on real-time, multi-party communications to develop programs, as well as personalized transactions in receiving services. As noted in *Using Mobile Apps in Government,* an IBM Center report by Sukumar Ganapat, the growth of mobile devices and apps presents new opportunities in the public sector. The report describes a mind shift in the mobile environment, in which a person expects that "I can get what I want in my immediate context and moments of need." Expanding this to how government delivers services, George Packer notes, "Government is not a vending machine, with bureaucrats dispensing services, but a platform—like Facebook, Twitter, and the iPhone—where citizens can build their own apps and interact with one another and come up with their own solutions."

Transforming How Government Engages

In the January 2017 *State of Federal IT* report issued by the U.S. Federal CIO Council, government CIOs acknowledge that the rapid transformation of how Americans interact with businesses, news, entertainment, and other services has radically raised expectations for how they interact with government. Citizens no longer accept lengthy paperwork, cumbersome processes, and organizations centered around procedures and tradition as the norm. Today, they expect the same level of service from government as they receive in the private sector—including increased transparency, new ways to approach problems, and more personalized interactions.

The advent of the internet and more recent social media platforms provides new opportunities for two-way communication between agencies and citizens. Government agencies, looking to harness these same tools to engage in dialogue, co-create, and ultimately improve services, have increased their focus on digital services, innovation, and new technology. Across all levels of government, agencies have sought to establish offices dedicated to exploring and leveraging innovation. For example, since 2010, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Center for Innovation (VACI) has worked to identify, test, and evaluate new approaches to meet the current and future needs of veterans efficiently and effectively through innovations rooted in data, design thinking, and agile development.

The rise of innovation labs in the federal government presents an opportunity for stake-holders across industries and disciplines to collaborate in solving complex challenges. Along with innovation labs, the creation of digital services teams, such as the USDS and the GSA's 18F, have helped federal agencies develop new ways to engage and deliver services to citizens. These new resources apply best practices in digital technol-ogy and design to improve the usability and reliability of government's most important services, transforming how government does business and delivers services.

Expanding Citizen Engagement

Collaboration and co-creation can expand citizen engagement. Many examples at vari-ous levels of government show citizens engaging with public organizations to improve the front-end experience as well as the governing process. Citizens can help identify important issues via crowdsourcing and co-creation platforms such as SeeClickFix, a mobile application where people report non-emergency issues in their cities which has led to fixing more than 3 million issues. And the website "We the People" allows users to create and/or sign petitions for the White House to act on issues. A petition gaining 100,000 signatures in 30 days went to the White House for consideration, and millions of Americans contributed to the site.

Citizens can play a direct role in developing solutions to those issues. As noted in the IBM Center report by Satish and Priya Nambisan, *Engaging Citizens in Co-Creation in Public Services,* a wide range of mechanisms foster citizen co-creation and engage-ment, including online contests and competitions, mobile apps, e-petitions, innovation jams, virtual design and prototyping tools, open-source databases, participatory design workshops, and online citizen communities. Examples of citizens co-delivering govern-ment services include MyTSA, an interactive mobile and web application that allows users to post security line wait times—keeping other travelers and transportation stake-holders informed and prepared, which improves the flow of traffic through security lines. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's *mPING* mobile application allows people to submit a weather observation directly to the National Severe Storms Laboratory database.

In addition, experts in and out of government can use these mechanisms to work together in solving complex issues. Citizen experts have enhanced hundreds of govern-ment services using their own experiences as a baseline from which to improve out-comes. For example, IRS's Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program recruits accounting students, who receive training from the IRS, to assist low-income citizens with prepar-ing their tax returns for free. During the 2015 tax season, more than 90,000 volunteers helped to prepare 3.7 million tax returns. The U.S. Patent and Trademark Office's "Peer to Patent" initiative has engaged outside experts in the patent application examination process to speed patent issuance. And the Library of Congress engages large groups of "citizen archivists" via crowdsourcing to classify and categorize content and facilitate appropriate information retrieval for all users.

Government organizations can create the environment, means, and awareness of how to engage the public. The Nambisan report also offers four strategies to assist government agencies in creating the broader innovation environment that promotes citizen engage-ment and co-creation:

• Fit the co-creation approach to the problem-solving context.

- Manage citizen expectations regarding their involvement.

- Link or connect the internal organization with the external partners.

- Embed the citizen engagement initiative in the larger context of the agency's core agenda.

Leveraging New Capabilities and Technology

Another IBM Center report, *Beyond Citizen Engagement: Involving the Public in Co-Delivering Government Services* by P.K. Kannan and Ai-Mei Chang, explains that technological innovations have a powerful impact on citizen co-delivery. Even if citizens are motivated only for themselves in providing input, technologies to co-produce and co-deliver services can leverage that input to benefit the whole community.

Today, advances in cognitive computing and blockchain (which is a type of distributed ledger that can be likened to bookkeeping, where transactions are recorded as "blocks" and any modifications or related transactions are also recorded and linked creating a connected "chain") can drive a new and better citizen experience. These technologies increase citizen interaction on digital channels, providing additional personalization for users while freeing up resources for agencies to tackle more complex problems. For example, a cognitive computing based help desk assistant can help answer questions and improve self-service—as demonstrated by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services' virtual assistant, Emma, who answers nearly 500,000 visitor inquiries every month. This allows agency staff to focus on more challenging cases and increases customer satisfaction across the board. The more capabilities an agency dedicates to create a personalized and improved user experience, the more citizens will engage with the agency.

Blockchain offers many possibilities, particularly in navigating and protecting the emerging IoT as it touches both government and industry. This technology enables managing data and digital assets in a secure and transparent fashion among users. It also creates an audit trail for reconciling records and transactions that will impact functions and services across government and industry. The potential public-sector applications of blockchain span improving the procurement process, maintenance of healthcare, employment, deeds, immigration records, Treasury Department transactions, and secure digital voting. For example, Estonia incorporates blockchain technology to track records, identify who accesses them, and what changes may have transpired. Blockchain can benefit any data exchange through verification and can also optimize supply chains for both defense and civilian agencies.

Scaling Innovation to Enhance Citizen Engagement

To keep pace with how citizens engage in their daily lives, government must expand the aperture through which it leverages innovation to achieve key missions and improve services. Agencies continue to grow formal processes for innovation, establishing Chief Innovation and Chief Technology Offices and agency labs like the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) IDEA Lab. Going forward, agencies face the challenge of how to scale innovation across the enterprise and how to leverage new ideas from unexpected sources.

The groundwork laid thus far can provide insight into how government can scale

engagement efforts, by assessing which pilot projects to expand and tackling barriers to scaling head on. For example, Challenge.gov, a central portal for federal prizes and competitions that allows citizens to submit solutions, has scaled to include more than 640 competitions, participants from every state, more than $220 million in awarded prizes, and participation from more than 80 agencies. However, reaching this level of success involved assessing and overcoming policy and technology barriers.

Part of the effort to scale will also require buy-in from other agencies and lawmakers, helping them understand the value of a citizen-driven, engaged government. The Georgetown University Beeck Center report *The Architecture of Innovation* identifies several areas federal agencies should consider when scaling citizen services, such as personnel, policy, partnerships, and structure. Institutionalizing and scaling innovation to improve the citizen experience can drive mission improvement across government, from front-line employees providing services to policy makers looking to improve overall government performance.

Valuing Data and Metrics

Organizations can leverage massive amounts of available data to better meet citizen needs. Data, in areas such as who stops using a service, which questions get asked most frequently, and when a site's traffic reaches its peak, can help identify opportunities for improvement and inform design to address citizen needs. With that aim, the Commission on Evidence-Based Policymaking introduced recommendations to better use existing data and improve how government programs operate, while still protecting privacy. This effort builds on data driven improvements across government, such as an evidence-based federal grant program that gave $89 million a year to 81 organizations across the U.S. to help drive record low teenage births. Similarly, the U.S. Department of Justice used data to inform decisions and create more objective techniques in their grant process, allowing them to review grants more frequently and in much less time.

Data can be used to measure results. For example, the U.S. Department of Education, 18F, and USDS launched the new College Scorecard tool to provide reliable data on college costs, graduation rates, debt, and post-college earnings. Within the first year, the College Scorecard had more than 10 times the users relative to a predecessor application. This kind of data helps organizations understand what's working and what's not—especially important for creating transparency with agency leaders, Congress, and end users. The open data movement and Data.gov have been instrumental in increasing transparency and collaboration to engage agencies, individuals, and the private sector.

Conclusion

Organizations in both private and public sectors face challenges in how best to harness the potential of citizen/customer engagement in services in a constantly evolving environment. There is a clear trend in both private firms and public institutions toward increased engagement of customers. With citizens increasingly getting this experience from the private sector, there is a growing gap between what citizens are expecting and getting from government.

To close this gap, agencies must look to transform the design of services, the model for allocation of resources, and measurement and accountability models. Moreover, government leaders must integrate user experience to guide all citizen interactions. Forrester's

latest Customer Experience Index highlights room for growth here, as government still falls at the bottom of the rankings. Mandates around citizen experience can drive improvement.

Engagement comes from more than simply making a mobile app or updating a website. It emerges from meeting the user needs in how they wish to interact with government. The end user must be at the forefront of all program design and execution, both within and across agencies.

Resources

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