Written Testimony of William D. Eggers

Executive Director, Deloitte Center for Government Insights, Deloitte Services LP

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Introduction

Chairman Peters, Ranking Member Portman and members of the Committee, I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I've been researching and writing about government reform for 35 years, and there have been few opportunities like today to radically improve how government delivers services to its citizens. I want to thank the committee for its attention to citizen experience at this crucial time.

My name is William Eggers. I'm the executive director of the [Deloitte Center for Government Insights](#), a research institute that publishes a large number of studies each year on a range of government topics including customer experience, trust in government, digital government, climate change and the future of work. I also serve as a fellow at the National Academy of Public Administration, a council member at the World Economic Forum, and advisory board member for What Works Cities. I've published numerous books on a range of topics from digital transformation to public-private partnerships.

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Serving the U.S. federal government is one of Deloitte's most significant initiatives. We have more than 25,000 individuals working alongside leaders from civilian and defense agencies to support their strategic initiatives through our expertise in human capital, customer experience, technology integration and program management.

From our research, we have gleaned four key lessons to improve customer experience (CX) in government:

- **Put citizens at the heart of service delivery:** Government efforts to improve CX often fall short of citizen expectations because they focus on improving operations from the viewpoint of *government*, not citizens. A CX focus places the citizen or business at the center of government services and asks how best to meet their needs.

- **Find new models for delivering services:** User-centricity can uncover new and transformational ways to deliver services, such as *life event-based service delivery*, which can cut costs, build trust and slash the "invisible tax" on citizens and businesses — the time and resources needed to deal with siloed government systems.

- **Make necessary changes to agency operations:** Such new models of government service, however, may require significant changes to current operations, changes that are possible only with sustained commitments of time, attention, resources and leadership.

- **Close budget and technology gaps for cross-agency CX initiatives**. To accelerate CX, consider creating a statutory foundation for existing efforts; provide additional funding authority for CX initiatives, both at high-impact service providers (HISPs) and on a cross-agency basis, and resolve structural barriers through actions such as broadening interagency transfer authority.

The current state of CX in government

Leading companies have found that putting customers at the heart of all activities can improve overall performance, and that realization is beginning to take root in government. The potential for a *triple value impact* — improved customer satisfaction, increased efficiency and enhanced mission effectiveness — is encouraging more and more government leaders to make the customer experience a core function. Advances in digital technologies, a new understanding of behavioral insights and new tools are helping governments worldwide pursue CX more rigorously.

Technology and executive orders have helped drive progress

CX isn't a new concept in government. As far back as 1993, the White House has issued executive orders and memos aimed at improving the customer experience at federal agencies. Since then, new technologies such as the internet, smartphones and social media have offered both new opportunities and new challenges. New sources of talent have been brought to bear on these issues through the U.S. Digital Service, 18F and other programs.

Most recently, the December 2021 Executive Order 14058, Transforming Federal Customer Experience and Service Delivery to Rebuild Trust in Government, emphasizes improving the customer experience for Americans by focusing on their life experiences. The EO calls for dedicated multi-disciplinary design and development teams to support priority services at 35 high-impact service providers (HISPs).[1] These services include food benefits for women and children, trademark applications, retirement and health benefits and federal student aid.[2]

As a follow-up to the EO, the President's Management Council identified five life experiences with which to begin:

- approaching retirement
- recovering from a disaster
- making the transition from military service to civilian life
- birth and early childhood for low-income women and their children
- facing a financial shock

Today, these five life events *all* require the public to interact with multiple agencies. For each life experience, cross-agency teams are researching users, understanding their pain points and devising action plans to improve their experiences.

Executive Order 14058 follows a series of executive orders, OMB circulars, toolkits and other initiatives developed in the past three decades across multiple administrations. These initiatives aimed not only to increase the focus on CX, but also to institutionalize it in government operations. Agencies have been directed to gather feedback, measure customer experiences, establish services standards and measure their performance against them. The orders also have directed agencies to develop plans to streamline services and improve the customer experience.

Later in this testimony, I focus on the "life event model" of CX to illustrate the concept, demonstrating the approaches different nations are using to radically improve the customer experience.

Fundamental challenges remain

For all of the improvements made by these efforts, government CX continues to lag behind that of the private sector. Citizens have grown used to relatively seamless and frictionless experiences from private companies, and expect — or hope for — similar experiences with government. Unfortunately, a significant gap remains between the services offered by governments and those of the private sector. According to Forrester's Customer Experience Index, the federal average is nearly 11 percentage points behind the private-sector average and lower than that of any other industry or sector surveyed.[3]

Furthermore, there's a mismatch between *government's* view of CX and those of its constituents**.** According to a Deloitte survey, 70% of federal managers indicated that their agencies deliver a customer experience that is "equal in quality" to private sector expectations.[4] But citizen surveys paint a very different picture. In the American Customer Satisfaction Index, a national cross-industry measure, the federal government ranks far below other industries in customer satisfaction (**Figure 1**).

Figure 1. Government leaders overestimate how well customers perceive their CX
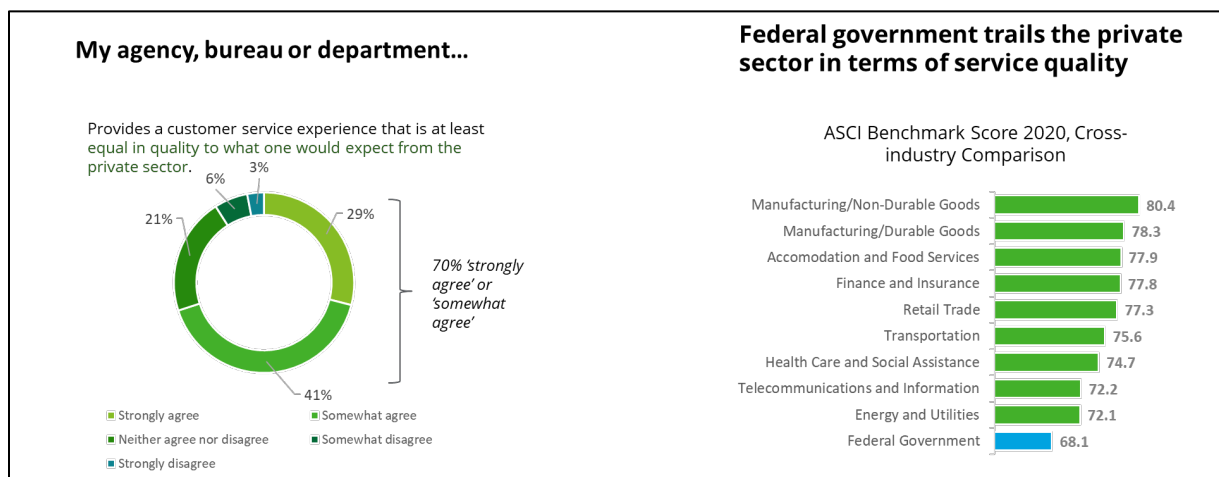
It appears that federal managers are following the letter of executive and congressional directives on CX but may be missing their spirit. They often view CX as a compliance task rather than as a fundamental shift in service delivery. This can lead managers to overestimate the quality of their CX: "We're in compliance, so we must be good." We need to acknowledge this optimism bias within government to make truly meaningful strides toward CX.
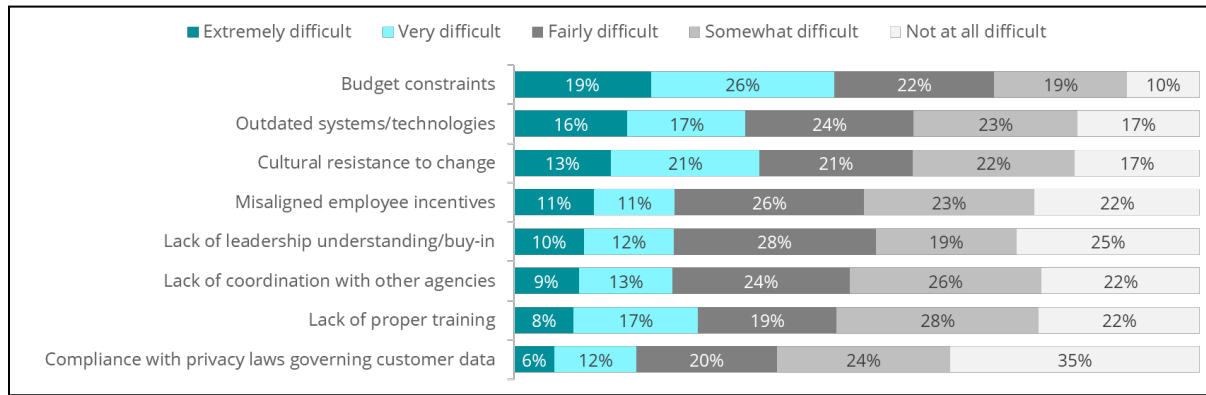
This gap in perceptions of the quality of customer experience can be connected to the much broader trend of declining trust in government. This isn't a recent phenomenon. With few exceptions, public trust in government has been declining for decades.[5]

This is reflected in the way citizens *perceive* government services and programs. Many Americans today are so convinced that government programs are substandard and inefficient that they misidentify high-quality government services as private or just rate them as lower in quality more or less automatically.[6] This crisis of trust affects almost all aspects of government work today.

Our research also suggests that budget constraints and outdated technology are some of the largest barriers to improving CX within government (**Figure 2**). But cultural factors are another, often
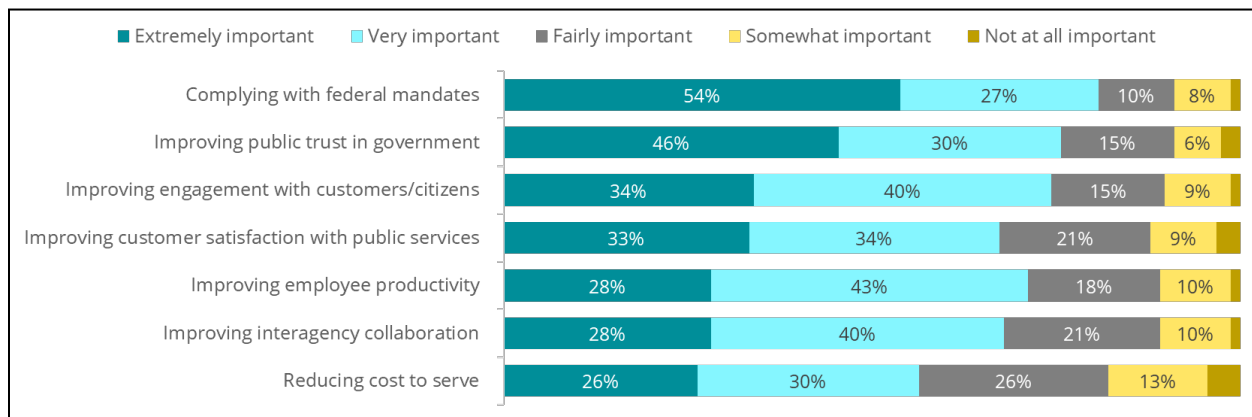
overlooked, factor. Changing culture and mindsets plays an important role in moving organizations incremental improvements to transformation.

Figure 2. Budget and outdated technology are perceived as significant barriers to better CX

	Extremely difficult	Very difficult	Fairly difficult	Somewhat difficult	Not at all difficult
Budget constraints	19%	26%	22%	19%	10%
Outdated systems/technologies	16%	17%	24%	23%	17%
Cultural resistance to change	13%	21%	21%	22%	17%
Misaligned employee incentives	11%	11%	26%	23%	22%
Lack of leadership understanding/buy-in	10%	12%	28%	19%	25%
Lack of coordination with other agencies	9%	13%	24%	26%	22%
Lack of proper training	8%	17%	19%	28%	22%
Compliance with privacy laws governing customer data	6%	12%	20%	24%	35%

All too often, government CX efforts are *driven by government, for government*. Fully 81% of leaders cited "complying with federal mandates" as an extremely/very important motivation for CX, but less than 53% said their agency consistently collects feedback on CX from constituents (**Figure 3**). This creates a troubling picture: federal managers view CX efforts as successful if they comply with federal orders and guidelines, and don't have enough input from their customers to be persuaded otherwise.

Figure 3. Compliance with mandates is the leading motive for government to improve CX

	Extremely important	Very important	Fairly important	Somewhat important	Not at all important
Complying with federal mandates	54%	27%	10%	8%	
Improving public trust in government	46%	30%	15%	6%	
Improving engagement with customers/citizens	34%	40%	15%	9%	
Improving customer satisfaction with public services	33%	34%	21%	9%	
Improving employee productivity	28%	43%	18%	10%	
Improving interagency collaboration	28%	40%	21%	10%	
Reducing cost to serve	26%	30%	26%	13%	

## The relationship between CX and trust in government

The mismatch between government and customer perceptions of CX points to an important issue: getting CX right *matters*. CX is ultimately a *perception* of how government agencies serve their customers. Without accurate and timely feedback about those perceptions, government can find itself spending more money for little in the way of effective results. Conversely, improving CX can improve customer satisfaction while increasing efficiency and enhancing mission effectiveness.

Citizens' digital experience with government is a strong predictor of their trust in government. This trust is *essential* — it affects public participation and engagement, compliance, customer satisfaction and recruitment, among other impacts. Many factors affect trust in government; it's easy to focus on higher-profile phenomena such as media coverage and political divides. But our research shows that trust is fundamentally related to citizen beliefs regarding government's competence and intent.

Those factors are strongly shaped by our individual interactions with government and what our peers tell us about their interactions. Each competent, human-centered, integrity-driven interaction contributes to increased general trust. CX thus either reinforces or undermines our belief in the competence and intentions of government.

A Deloitte survey on rebuilding trust in government found a strong link between satisfaction with online services and trust in government. Americans who said they were pleased with their state government's digital services also tended to rate the state highly on measures of overall trust (**Figure 4**). Those unhappy with digital services scored government *much* lower on trust; dissatisfaction essentially wiped out any inherent loyalty to government institutions.

Figure 4. Citizen experience with digital services are key influencers of overall trust

FIGURE 5

Citizen experience with digital services are key influencers of overall trust

■ Agree　　■ Neutral　　■ Disagree
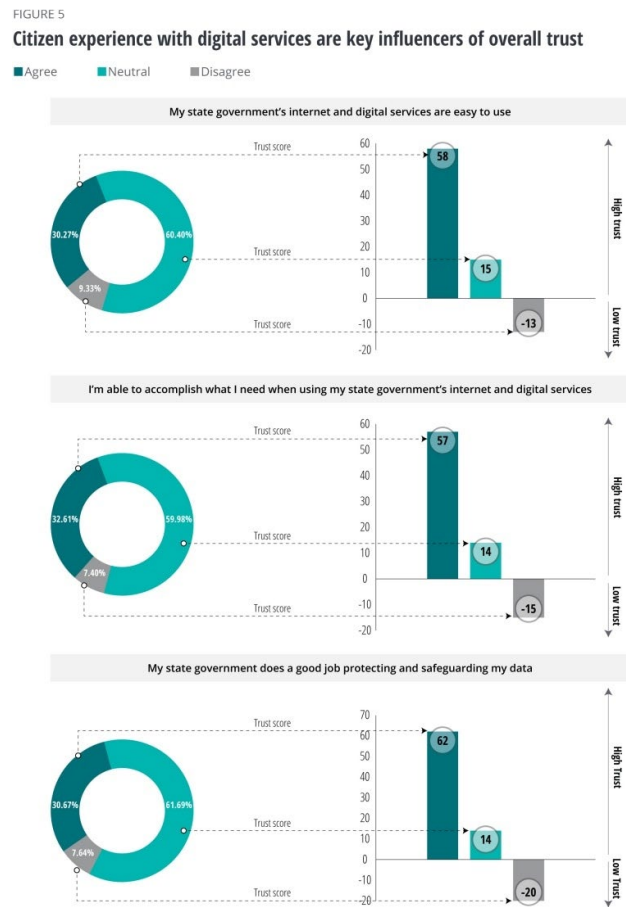
Source: Deloitte analysis.

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Citizens tend to trust *proximate* government more than distant government. By design, digital services make distant services more proximate, creating a direct interaction. Because digital is now a common first point of interaction with government, a positive online experience and secure and user-friendly services are critical to enhancing overall trust.[7]

The primacy of digital also helps illuminate the infrastructure government needs to improve CX. Government services are concerned with real, physical human beings, but if its interaction with them take place online, traditional paper documents such as passports and Social Security cards won't work. Instead, government needs a form of identity that can work seamlessly across both physical and digital worlds. A form of physical-digital identity can improve the public's experience while improving government efficiency and reducing the chance for fraud.

Improve trust *and* CX by building networks of trust

But government digital services don't exist in a vacuum; agencies rarely provide every part of digital service. Generally, government agencies work with vendors, partners and private industry to provide digital services.

But if a government service is to be trusted, *every link in that chain* must live up to the same trustworthy standards. A failure, data breach or error by one player will reduce users' trust in government more broadly. This means that government must coordinate "networks of trust," working to ensure that entire ecosystems adhere to common standards of behavior.

Improve trust and CX by demonstrating empathy

Trust in government is a function of repeated successful interactions between constituents and a government agency. Again, CX plays a vital role in driving this trust, and can have a cascading effect on other government areas, both positive and negative.[8] We've seen this play out in the way individuals' experiences at departments of motor vehicles and passport services affect their broader perceptions of government services.

While capability and reliability are primary drivers of CX, our research suggests that governments also have to deliver CX with *empathy*.

Demonstrating empathy can go a long way toward improving trust. Our work with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) shows how this works. Through its VSignals program that collects feedback from veterans and dependents, the VA has evolved into an "empathetic" organization laser-focused on the veteran experience and well-being. Feedback data collected through the program allowed the VA to measure service attributes linked to trust signals, including transparency, empathy, effectiveness and ease of use. The resulting insights then were used to improve its customer experience.[9] The program proved especially useful for identifying veterans in crisis. The VA intervened in a total of 691 suicide crises, using AI-based tools that analyze comments in real time and route concerns to local VA offices and crisis hotlines.[10]

Each citizen interaction is a micro "moment of truth" for governments, and each has a wider impact on trust.

Improve CX and trust by increasing employee engagement

Our research also suggests a link between the customer experience and federal employee engagement. Employees often are the face of government for citizens. Focusing on *employee* life-cycle events such as recruitment, performance management, retention and employee experience can help governments create a highly engaged workforce. More engaged workers tend to work better and provide better services to citizens, improving CX and thereby increasing public trust.[11]

Our analysis, based on proprietary surveys and federal employee engagement survey data, found that an increase in employee engagement scores leads to improvements in customer experience and thereby in trust. We also found that aligning employee skills with the agency's mission has a major impact; for agencies that interact intensively with citizens, this would mean better aligning employee skills with the mission of providing better customer service.

Access to training and development opportunities is positively correlated with federal employee engagement. Agencies should provide employees the right CX training and tools, including customer segmentation, journey mapping, human-centered service design, personalization and "co-creation," which incorporates customer feedback in every part of service design.[12] These tools can improve the employee experience, while human-centered design in particular can show agencies what actually matters to their customers.[13]

The benefits to government from improving CX

Improving CX offers many agencies an opportunity to reduce costs. Co-creation and customer testing, often through prototypes or storyboards, help teams more clearly define their customers' needs and wants. Organizations then can avoid investing in features and tools their customers will never use, or messaging that misses the mark. Early testing of new features helps give organizations a better understanding of customer adoption and leads to more relevant programs and services.

- **The real value of CX can be realized when the federal government uses it to drive meaningful change**. While 58% of federal managers indicate that their agency incorporates CX in decision-making, only 51% say their agency's overall strategy has a CX component. To elevate CX to the mission level, agencies need a leader who owns all the touchpoints across the customer journey. Based on our research, only 48% of agencies have a dedicated CX office or leader. This said, the growing emergence of a CX leadership role in the public sector is an encouraging sign.

- **Better data analytics can guide federal agencies on their CX journey, but many agencies don't even collect or analyze customer data**. Only 54% of federal managers surveyed said their agency consistently collects customer feedback data, and about the same share said they conduct ongoing research about their customers. Only 57% of respondents analyze customer feedback and only 46% publicly share customer feedback analysis.[14]

If you get CX right, the benefits follow

An agency's ability to achieve its mission is linked to its ability to deliver an effective customer experience. Several benefits flow from improving CX:

1. **Increased compliance**. As their trust in government increases, citizens and businesses are more likely to comply with rules and procedures.
2. **Improved effectiveness.** An enhanced experience often requires agencies to change their workflows, reimagine back-end processes, modernize systems and reimagine how they deliver services. This can lead to increased efficiency, the elimination of duplicative processes and systems and a more effective use of existing technologies and resources.
3. **Better employee engagement.** Positive citizen experiences and streamlined operations can lead to more engaged employees who take pride in working for the government.
4. **A reduced "invisible tax" on citizens and businesses** — that is, the time and resources needed to navigate government services and comply with regulations. Improving the experience for businesses also reduces compliance burdens, encourages innovation and spurs job creation.

A life-events focus

Whether they're registering a birth, founding a business or seeking aid after a natural disaster, people don't *care* how many agencies are involved or what forms are needed, they just want results. A life-event approach does two critical things: it can begin delivering services without the citizen's involvement, and provide multiple types of services in response to a single life event.

Life event-based services

Life event-based service delivery is one of the most important trends in government CX. Citizens regularly encounter life events that trigger interactions with multiple agencies. A marriage, for instance, can involve not just a marriage license but a change of address, a new legal name and changing eligibility for government benefits such as health insurance subsidies. The number of required transactions can be daunting — and providing the same information again and again is irritating at best.

Such an experience is twice as cruel if the life event is painful, such as a disabling injury, a job loss, a natural disaster or a death. Not long ago, United Kingdom citizens coping with the death of a loved one had to contact multiple national and local government departments up to 44 times to notify about the death.[15] To rectify this, the UK created a *"Tell Us Once" program* for interactions involving death and bereavement. With a single interaction, UK residents can trigger notifications to tax authorities, the passport office, local governments and benefits programs. Tell Us Once has been nominated for two technology leadership awards.[16] Between tech infrastructure improvements and other efficiencies, recent upgrades to the program are saving the UK government £20 million annually.[17]

In the U.S., the state of Connecticut's *one-stop business portal* organizes information and services around significant business events such as starting a new business, managing a business, paying taxes and relocating or expanding a business. The portal generates a customized checklist to guide prospective entrepreneurs through the process of setting up a business entity. More than 17,000 checklists have been created on the portal since it went live in summer 2020.[18] In neighboring New York, a central pillar of the state's digital strategy is delivering services around key life events.

Life event-based services require a realignment and integration of information and resources to understand and anticipate the cluster of needs a citizen may have — even when the person navigating a new life event isn't aware of all the services that may be available.

Challenges in implementing life-event services

The life-event model disrupts how government agencies traditionally have been organized. Again, many related tasks prompted by a life event are handled by totally separate entities. Consider how creating a new business can trigger the need for incorporation, sales tax permits, a Small Business Administration loan and more — all traditionally delivered by separate entities. Integrating such services, with the required technology, governance and funding, presents significant challenges:

1. **Siloed technology and data systems:** Life-event service delivery requires seamless data sharing. Unfortunately, siloed computer systems often hinder data sharing even *within* an agency, let alone among different parts of government. Moreover, seamless systems require common data standards, and many governments haven't defined such standards.

2. **Governance and misaligned incentives:** Effective cross-departmental governance requires well-defined roles and an alignment of goals among separate agencies. Existing policy frameworks and legislation often hinder data sharing and restrict the scope of shared governance and accountability mechanisms.

3. **Siloed funding:** Government funding generally is tied to specific agency programs. It may be difficult to assign funding according to outcomes or to divide it among partnering agencies. Furthermore, government funding often requires estimates for the full funding requirement at the initial stage of a project, which can constrain agencies' ability to adapt to changing customer needs. As has been seen in software acquisition, more flexible funding and acquisition authorities can help break down silos and improve efficiency.[19]

4. **Privacy and data security concerns:** Consolidated information systems create data security challenges. If an update in one part of the system triggers automatic changes to other government records, it may open opportunities for identity theft. Vigilance is essential.

5. **Lack of trust:** Life-event service delivery requires two levels of trust. One is trust among agencies; if they don't trust one another to share data, resources and technology, they can't deliver a collaborative service. Second is trust from citizens. If they don't trust government agencies with their data, they'll be reluctant to consent to its use. Thus, relationships and tight protocols are needed to build strong partnerships.

6. **Inadequate coordination across levels of government:** The number of levels of government — federal, state, county, municipal and more — affected by some life events can make coordination difficult. Statutory, financial and even cultural differences between levels of government can make it difficult to create a streamlined, end-to-end experience for customers.

Examples in other nations

Life-event service delivery requires linking services and costs across multiple agencies and levels of government. It calls for reimagined governance models, shared funding and secure data-sharing technologies citizens can trust. Much can be learned from successful examples in other nations.

New Zealand's life-events program: Focusing on user centricity

SmartStart, one of New Zealand's life-event efforts, is an interagency program for birth and infant care that was born from extensive surveys and interviews. A multi-agency team conducted workshops,

interviewed parents and used journey mapping to understand the pain points parents faced in registering a baby and accessing early childhood services, and continued engaging with stakeholders throughout the project's lifecycle.[20]

Several lessons emerged through this process. First, start with user testing and continue it throughout the project to uncover users' biggest pain points. Second, prioritize the features most customers want. Based on customer feedback, the SmartStart team identified eight key features for a minimum viable product (MVP). Third, test and *use* the MVP; don't wait until the product roadmap is final to start development. And finally, be agile — respond to feedback and iterate quickly.[21]

Singapore's life-event app: Lessons in governance

Singapore's Life SG app assembles a wide variety of government programs through a single interface organized by life events. Citizens can search for programs they need and apply for them though the app. The bulk of work on LifeSG was driven by the Public Service Division (PSD) and the Ministry of Social and Family Development. Both organizations co-chaired an operations committee comprising senior leaders from 15 different agencies.[22] PSD's Innovation Lab established a program office made up of officers seconded from participating agencies to manage the project.[23] Singapore now offers more than 70 services through the app.[24]

New South Wales: Shared funding

To overworked federal staff, a cross-agency approach can feel like an added responsibility. As one government executive put it, "We're going to be measured on our own performance, and not on cross-agency performance."[25] Funding mechanisms for shared responsibilities, then, should provide appropriate incentives yet maintain flexibility. That's why in June 2020, Australia's New South Wales (NSW) state government announced a record investment of $1.6 billion in its Digital Restart Fund.[26] In June 2021, the fund was topped up with an additional $500 million, extending it to 2024.[27]

The Digital Restart Fund is designed to accelerate whole-of-government digital transformation and funds projects at multiple agencies including life-event projects, digital assets used by multiple agencies, modernization of legacy systems and by upskilling NSW government employees.[28]

Portugal: Frictionless, automated interactions

During the height of the pandemic, every time someone was reported as having COVID-19, Portugal's health ministry would contact the social security ministry to issue a "temporary leave permit" authorizing the individual's absence from work.[29] Companies then could submit these names for a refund on payroll taxes.

Portugal also has made registering a new company relatively quick and painless. For a fee of $500, the company is registered as a business and even issued a domain name.[30] Preapproved names and contracts supplied by the government further speed the process.

How to succeed in improving government CX

Many government agencies are stuck in traditional program-centric service delivery models that prioritize agency processes over citizen needs. Here's how federal agencies can accelerate their CX journey:

Understand your customers

- **Shift from a government-centric to a citizen-centric lens.** Tailor government standards and processes around citizen needs, not government silos. This requires ethnographic research, citizen interviews, focus group discussions and behavioral insight tools. But even more so, it requires congressional action to help reduce the budget and process restrictions that create silos. Cross-agency governance structures should give agencies the flexibility they need to move quickly to meet changing customer demand without compromising Congress' critical oversight role.

- **Use data to identify citizen needs** and tailor government processes to deliver a consistent experience. Coordinate within and among agencies to share citizen data and enable seamless services.[31]

- **Ensure changes are designed from the user's perspective.** Human-centered design examines problems from the user's point of view. While it promises better CX, it also can increase program buy-in, improve processes and efficiencies and lower errors and costs.

- **Invest in CX measurement platforms** that track individual experiences to prioritize improvements to the customer journey. Better data drives better design and better design drives citizen satisfaction.[32]

Tie the customer experience to a particular mission outcome.

- **Directly link mission outcomes with CX.** A common misconception about CX is that it's only about delivering a great customer experience; but it *also* can be used to advance mission outcomes. The Transportation Security Administration's (TSA) PreCheck program allows passengers who pass a background check to speed through airport security lines. Travelers voluntarily provide data that, when combined with other layers of security, allow TSA to direct more screening resources to higher-risk passengers and protect the nation's transportation systems more efficiently.[33]

- **Improve decision-making** by focusing on customer analytics to unlock a treasure trove of insights into customer behaviors, issues, needs, and pain points.

Create a roadmap for change

A unified vision for change starts with an assessment of the organization's current state and maturity with respect to customer experience.

- After defining the "as is" state, the organization can define the **future state**. The future state vision or blueprint begins with basic design principles — core statements of what the system and culture will do.

- **Designate a leader to own CX initiatives**. Since many government agencies operate in silos, it's often difficult for agencies to make changes to CX because no single person or business unit owns all the touchpoints in the customer journey. To rectify this, leading agencies are establishing a CX office that coordinates projects across an agency, prioritizes initiatives and influences budget decisions that affect citizens directly.

- **Adopt new governance and budget structures** to allow for better cross-agency collaboration. Designate dedicated funds for cross-agency CX initiatives. The Technology Modernization Fund's $100 million allocated to projects supporting the executive order on CX is an important start.[34]

Build infrastructure to deliver CX

Personalized and frictionless services require strong data-sharing mechanisms. Truly seamless services often are built on a digital platform and unique digital identities that enable a 360-degree view of citizen-consumers.

- **Build the customer-facing infrastructure.** Drive the adoption of digital identity for personalized service delivery. India's Aadhaar, a unique digital ID, has been used to disburse COVID-19 cash relief. The Aadhaar-enabled payment system disbursed 280 billion rupees (US $3.8 billion) to more than 300 million beneficiaries during the lockdown.[35]

- **Build the technical infrastructure.** Embracing new technologies can help lay the foundation for new customer experiences. For example, integrated data management systems can promote the "once-only" principle, so that citizens and businesses need to provide information just once to use multiple government services. With common data shared across agencies, organizations can then redesign service delivery processed to integrate emerging technologies such as AI. Estonia relies on AI and machine learning technology to profile job candidates and recommend jobs for which they may be best suited.[36]

- **Build the organizational infrastructure**. New technology won't improve CX unless it's accompanied by sustained leadership and governance. Cross-agency governance structures, whether at OMB or elsewhere, can help ensure that the focus on CX isn't lost, and that agencies continue to put the public at the center of their services.

Conclusion

Building trust in government is a continuous process. It will require challenging existing orthodoxies in government. Providing seamless and personalized service delivery through proactive models such as life events is an essential step in this direction. While shifting from a government-centric to a citizen-centric lens isn't always easy, the federal government's ability to rebuild trust in citizens depends on it.

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