



seamless gov

10 Best Practices for Driving Constituent Engagement through Digital Services

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Introduction

The public sector is undergoing a paradigm shift. Local, state, and federal agencies are realizing that there is a common solution to the problems of cost overruns, low performance, and employee turnover.

Just as leading companies in the private sector have improved the customer experience, governments can shake off their biggest burdens and focus on accomplishing their public service missions by improving the constituent experience.

Why constituent experience matters.

No matter how your agency or department calculates success, your KPIs can be improved by focusing on the constituent experience.

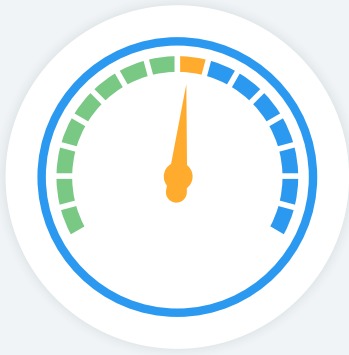
For groups that rely (at least in part) on revenue, like recreation departments, the benefits of an improved constituent experience are obvious. Satisfied constituents will be more likely to use your services, more likely to come back for more, and more likely to recommend the process to friends.



Charges for services accounted for 7% of the total revenue of New York local governments in 2016. Boosting revenue from this channel could make a huge difference for municipalities.

Source: [NY State Comptroller](#)

Improvements to the constituent experience can do more than boost revenue. One other major benefit is increased employee engagement. Research suggests a direct link between customer experience and employee engagement. An improved customer experience leads to more engaged employees, leading to an even better customer experience...and the cycle continues.



A little goes a long way.

Federal agencies have an average score of 59 out of 100 on [Forrester's Customer Experience Index](#) (for comparison, private sector businesses average at 69).

For each one-point gain in an agency's score, 3% more constituents are willing to sign up for non-mandatory benefits and services.

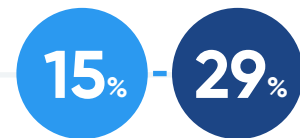
Source: [Forrester Blog, Rick Parrish, Principal Analyst, May 31 2018](#)

Can you afford it?

Improving government-constituent interactions has never been more affordable. Often, software companies offer customizable pricing that allows an agency to invest a small amount up front in order to improve a process with a high projected return on investment. Transforming even one process can save thousands of dollars previously spent on manual labor and processing costs.

An upfront investment can dramatically reduce costs in just a few years. By starting with the constituent experience and moving the focus outward from there, government groups have an opportunity to identify and eliminate cumbersome processes that hinder more than they help.

Investing in a positive constituent experience results in a more streamlined program with faster operations, happier constituents, and satisfied employees who are more engaged with their work.



Typical savings associated with successful customer experience projects over 2-3 years.

Source: [McKinsey & Company](#)

But how?

Implementing digital services is the simplest, most effective way to improve constituent experiences. It's easier than ever to take manual processes online, and doing so has profound benefits for agencies and departments that take the leap. According to McKinsey, "Agencies can realize significant improvements in citizen experience by digitizing the processes behind the most important journeys."

At SeamlessGov, we have the privilege of working with governments who are passionate about digital problem-solving. We've helped hundreds of governments automate their paper-based processes, and along the way we've learned a lot about the challenges that governments face.

In this ebook, we draw from over six years of learning and insights from our government partners to recommend ten best practices for implementing digital services in the public sector.

Best Practices

1

Maintain Consistent Design

Beautiful design is an overlooked aspect of creating an effective digital government experience. By focusing on function over form, governments tend to forget that in digital design, the two are inextricably linked. Without good form, there will be no function.

Creating visual guidelines and standardizing the design of digital services enables constituents to be confident in the applications they're using. People are more likely to trust a site with a universal style and recognizable design models. In the absence of appropriate style and design, it can be unsettling for a person to enter sensitive information, such as payment card info, into an application.

Where should governments look for the best web design and UX inspiration? To the private sector websites where constituents spend most of their time. Private companies set the standard for beautiful and frictionless UX and digital applications, and constituents expect similar experiences throughout their public sector journeys.

2

Make Everything Mobile Responsive

Constituents are increasingly accessing municipal websites from their phones and tablets, and municipal digital services must be optimized for these new channels. Every application that a municipality develops should be mobile-responsive, from the homepage all the way down to registration forms for recreation programs.

Nearly every municipal partner we work with receives over 50% of their web traffic from mobile devices. If governments create a digital experience that isn't mobile responsive, they will lose considerable traffic, resulting in more phone calls from citizens inquiring about information that could have easily been found on the website.



ProTip

Don't forget about web browser compatibility. Is your service compatible with IE 10? A surprising number of constituents still rely on this browser.

3

Design For Accessibility

Platform accessibility goes hand in hand with ADA, 508, and WCAG 2.1 compliance. Over the past few years, accessibility has become a vital consideration in the realm of government innovation. While federal agencies are now required to make their websites accessible to users with disabilities, state and local governments are increasingly expected to adhere to Section 508 and WCAG standards.

Municipal websites should be presented in an easy-to-read manner and should be alterable for assistive technologies so that all constituents can interact with the site equally well. With the recent rise in ADA lawsuits and fines, it's now more critical than ever that governments embrace accessibility guidelines across all online services.

4

Understand What Users Need

One of the first steps toward implementing a digital solution for any organization is understanding user needs. Within government, this feat can prove to be difficult, due to the number of stakeholders involved in any process.

A good strategy for governments looking to understand constituent needs is to map the flow of information through any service. Take a simple form – what steps are required to achieve the constituent's desired outcome? How long does it take? Who else is involved? What are possible roadblocks to the constituent achieving their goals?

Because users often get attached to old ways of doing things, developers must design the new digital alternative in a way that instills confidence in the user. Only by understanding the way things are currently done can developers help improve interactions between governments and their constituents.

5

Keep It Simple And Intuitive

Simplicity is especially important for governments, as it's common for the employees and constituents who are accessing digital services to have minimal technical skills. For this reason, simplicity is one of the core elements of SeamlessGov, and all of our solutions seek to streamline and simplify complex processes and interactions.

Governments must look to designers, both internally and among their selected vendors, as simplicity consultants. "How are we making the lives of constituents and staff easier?" should be a key question for everyone on the project.





Implement Early, Iterate Often

With government technology initiatives, the pressure to provide a perfect service immediately often results in a reluctance to launch a preliminary version of a product. This in turn leads to endless delays and frustrations.

The simple way around this problem is to take an iterative approach to software development. By releasing a minimum viable product, governments can collect data on how users are interacting with the service, and improve the product to better suit user needs.

Iteration allows for software to be developed from a user-centric perspective. After all, the point of a digital service is to make a constituent's life easier. Combining real data from the preliminary release with insights from design-thinking exercises and constituent interviews is the best way to optimize a digital service.



ProTip

Don't have the resources to develop a digital service from scratch? Use templates. At SeamlessGov, our templates are based on the best working versions of digital services in partner cities. By leveraging them, your government can start much farther along in the development process.



Test Frequently And Solve For Edge Cases

A product is never complete without testing. One of the biggest challenges to proper testing is creating test environments that are as close as possible to the live version. All common browsers and devices need to be incorporated, and all user types must be accommodated.

In the public sector, this means handling users across all demographics. How will a staff member process an application if an older user comes in to access the service in person? What happens when a user without a credit card wants to access a service but pay via mail? In government, you can't just build for 80% – you have to make sure the service is accessible for all.

When you perform testing, test the service from end to end, in an environment that replicates the live version, involving all of the stakeholders who will be using the product.





Use Data To Drive Decisions

At SeamlessGov, we're fanatical about collecting data to measure progress, and we encourage our government partners to do the same. When a new digital process is created and spread through a municipality, KPIs should be determined to measure success.

Qualitative and quantitative data drives subsequent iterations and improvements to the product. For example, if you notice a lot of people are beginning a form but not completing it, you can work to identify at what point they dropped off, then A/B test to solve for the issue.

Common Municipal Digital Service KPIs

- Form logins
- Form submissions
- Form abandonment/bounce rate
- Year over year submissions
- Error reduction
- Time saved
- Revenue



Create A Public Dashboard To Measure Performance

Goals should be established at the beginning of a digital transformation, and the project's success should be determined against these goals.

For governments, there is no reason to keep these KPIs under wraps. At SeamlessGov, we recommend creating a public dashboard to showcase your progress toward your goals. Creating a public dashboard generates accountability within your organization and also engages constituents. Those who want to get involved will be able to see how well their tax dollars are working, and they'll also be able to take ownership over their city's digital transformation.



Encourage Adoption

You've done the work to create a beautiful digital service, but that's only half the battle. Educating users is equally important.

Popular marketing channels, including email and social media, should be leveraged to promote your new service. The service should be featured on your municipal website with a clear call to action. Non-digital services should be phased out to encourage adoption of the new streamlined process.

Phasing out non-digital services may take time, but it's necessary in order to promote a true digital transformation. The longer you hang onto old workflows, the slower your progress toward your goals will be.



ProTip

If you still receive in-person visits from constituents after phasing out a manual process, use a tablet to walk them through accessing the service digitally.

Conclusion

Your government, department, or agency should be focusing on improving constituent engagement. Doing so can limit cost overruns, increase employee engagement, and help you achieve your mission of public service.

The best way to improve the constituent experience is to replace outdated manual processes with digital ones. Doing so is less costly and less difficult than you might think. With an experienced vendor like SeamlessGov, you can offload a lot of the hard work and end up with a digital service that's appreciated by staff and constituents alike.



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Find out how you can leverage these best practices to digitize your manual services.

[Request a Demo](#)