

The Building Blocks of Customer-Centric Government

With new tools at their disposal, governments have the opportunity to create a golden age of citizen engagement. That could do a lot for trust in government.

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By the end of this decade, governments at all levels have an opportunity to dramatically change the nature of their interactions with citizens. The emergence of new tools, technologies and methods offers a unique chance to secure the bond between the public and those who serve them.

There is growing recognition that government can offer services attuned not to an alphabet soup of government bureaucracy but to the realities of life, with pathways for engagement around events such as the birth of a child or registering a new car. Equally important, the massive data collected by government can be made available openly to allow the private sector to create useful new products and applications, as it already has done with GPS technology.

Why are we so optimistic that this could be the golden age of citizen engagement? As members of [California's Little Hoover Commission](#), we have just finished a [nine-month study](#) of the exciting new customer-centric changes in government services underway in the United States and in other countries. While our study focused on California, we are firmly of the view that public officials and policymakers everywhere have an opportunity to advance a future of better government services. And through improved interactions between citizens and the governments set up to serve them, we believe that trust in government can be improved.

Across the globe, governments -- including ones without ready access to the talent and products of Silicon Valley -- are already offering the public a window into government with customer-centric technology that makes it easy for the public to report problems or lodge complaints. Australia's and New Zealand's governments provide online one-stop shops for business formation. The government of the United Kingdom, a clear leader in digital services, has also applied learning from the emerging field of behavioral economics. This approach included the creation of a "nudge" office that gently guides citizens toward availing themselves of services that they deserve and that will help them.

In the United States, Utah leads the way toward improved digital interaction between citizens and their governments. Iowa is among states offering driver's licenses that can be carried on a motorist's mobile phone. Other states make access to government records as easy as making an OpenTable reservation. Equally meaningful reforms are coming from cities and counties. When he was mayor of San Francisco, for example, California Lt. Gov. Gavin Newsom (author of the book *Citizenville*) pioneered measures to assure that neighborhood residents could be heard on vital services such as garbage pickup and pothole repairs.

Our federal government has been setting the pace as well. In part out of the initial chaos and failure of HealthCare.gov came a recognition that a new group of people focused on the human element of government interaction, coupled with those who understand coding as well as customer service, could turn around broken government interactions. The federal government now has two complementary strike-force units: the United States Digital Service, operating out of the White House, and the General Services Administration's digital-services agency known as 18F.

The former is a group of less than 200 employees who are deployed to specific agencies to work collaboratively with the existing civil-service workforce to tackle difficult government service-delivery problems. The latter group has small teams that are invited into agencies to help with digital redesigns based on making a government services more customer-centric.

In short, what we are seeing at all levels of government, here and abroad, is the beginning of a real revolution in the way public services can be delivered to the people and businesses that rely on them. To keep that ball rolling and build on what has already been done, we have some recommendations for public-sector leaders -- concepts to keep in mind, encourage and build upon:

- Build a customer-first culture of government service with customers as the primary focus of interactions. Consult meaningfully with citizens about their needs and experiences.
- Organize government to make its interactions simpler and easier by experimenting with new digital and other techniques and service-delivery tools. Make better use of open data and behavioral economics.
- Work proactively with current government employees while recruiting new workers who understand why customer-centric government is essential. Digital-savvy millennials are a rich source for this new

workforce.

In this emerging golden age of citizen engagement, government will improve by being open to experimentation and willing to embrace new tools such as crowdsourcing and public scorecards to measure the quality of its services. The results may be surprising: satisfied customers and renewed confidence in government.

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