

4 KEYS TO TRANSFORMING CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

OVER THE LAST several years, the field of digital services has emerged as an essential aspect of much-needed efforts to transform how agencies provide information and services to the public.

That need for transformation is being driven by public expectations. Digital citizens take it for granted that services will be available at any time, from any device, and through multiple channels. They expect those services to be user-centric, flexible and constantly evolving.

Ultimately, it's not about technology; it's about engagement. The challenge now is to build on that early work to develop a cohesive and sustainable approach to citizen engagement.

Here are some lessons learned during the last year that could help agencies shift their citizen engagement initiatives from experimentation to transformation.

1. Change the Procurement Culture

Citizen engagement requires a different mindset than traditional IT services. To move beyond those initial forays in digital services, agencies need to help their employees think in new ways about how they develop and deliver services—beginning with the procurement process.

The Defense Innovation Unit Experimental (DIUx) was launched to identify, procure and test innovative commercial technology. It's ultimately focused on resetting expectations for how long it takes to get contracts done. The mission of DIUx "is to do agile culture change," says Raj Shah, managing partner of DIUx, speaking earlier this year at the New America Foundation Future of War summit in Washington.

Tradition-bound contracting is a common obstacle, says David Wennergren, executive vice president for operations and technology at the Professional Services Council and former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense and Deputy CIO.

"Access to innovation is a top priority for federal tech leaders, yet speed and innovation rank low as priorities for federal contracting officials," Wennergren wrote in a recent column in FCW.

2. Ramp It Up

Most agencies have taken a measured approach to citizen engagement, developing proofs of concept and looking for small victories. No one can fault them for taking that

approach. But experts say to see real payoff, agencies need to deepen their investments.

IT modernization should be at the top of the agenda. Too often, agencies are unable to take advantage of emerging solutions because of their aging IT infrastructure. "Digital solutions will fundamentally change the way agencies deliver services, if those agencies can accelerate digitization efforts, move off outdated legacy infrastructure and embrace mobile solutions and applications," Wennergren writes.

Some agencies have found it helpful to assemble a central team to support citizen engagement initiatives across the organization. The White House led the way by creating the U.S. Digital Service in August 2014, followed by the Pentagon launching the Defense Digital Service in November 2015.

Individual agencies and services have been spinning off their own teams, including both the Army and Air Force during the last year.

3. Question Conventional Wisdom

Beyond the rules and regulations that shape how agencies buy, manage and use IT, there are conventions about how things are done. Rules and regulations require compliance; conventions do not. That's something a growing number of agencies are coming to realize as they undertake citizen engagement initiatives.

Case in point: the "Hack the Pentagon" program. During this program, the Defense Department invited members of the public to identify potential security vulnerabilities in the department's public-facing websites. The program, overseen by the Defense Digital Service, turned up 138 actionable bugs. The Army followed suit late last year, which helped to identify 118 vulnerabilities.

Citizen engagement is also spurring an interest in DevOps and Agile, as agencies look to accelerate new services delivery. The Department of Homeland Security put its stake in the ground late last year by awarding contracts to 13 vendors under the \$1.5 billion Flexible Agile Support for the Homeland (FLASH) program.

4. But Don't Forget the Basics

Although citizen engagement demands new ways of thinking, some conventional wisdom—and existing rules and regulations—still apply. Among other concerns is the e-records

management mandate. Agency tweets and Facebook posts might not resemble traditional electronic records, but they count just the same. The National Archives and Records Administration has provided agencies with guidelines on managing social media, making it clear agencies will be held accountable.

Likewise, although agencies would do well to develop new processes and methodologies for delivering services, they shouldn't lose sight of old-fashioned IT management

principles. Last September, the Government Accountability Office dinged the U.S. Digital Service and the General Services Administration's 18F for not developing adequate, outcome-oriented performance measures for their programs.

But such discussions of federal IT fundamentals should not be seen as obstacles intended to block progress. Instead, they are simply reminders that citizen engagement is a serious undertaking – one that is quickly becoming an essential aspect of government agency operations.

ENGAGE DIGITAL CITIZENS WITH DIGITAL SERVICES

Today's citizens have an entirely different set of expectations and demands from their interactions with government agencies than the previous generation. Being part of the digital age and being accustomed to instant seamless service from wherever they may be, on whatever device they choose, citizens must be engaged in today's digital world. That requires an arsenal of digital tools.



DIGITAL FORMS: Citizens' expectations have risen as their use of interactive technology has increased. No longer are static forms suitable for gathering information. Citizens are looking for interactive form templates that include prepopulated fields; while agency personnel are looking for digital templates that afford data analytics.



DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS: Agencies need to inform and engage their citizens through a variety of digital means. Managing data and communications via an integrated platform can help agencies engage citizens and meet their needs and expectations.



DATA VISUALIZATION: Data drives business activities in this digital age. Agencies need to better serve their citizens with interactive self-service technology. By accurately and efficiently gathering data in a usable open format, that data becomes that much more valuable to the agency.



DATA ANALYSIS: Gathering, viewing and sharing data is important. But truly deriving value from that data requires detailed analysis. Examining data and presenting the findings and correlations via a single data management dashboard can help agency executives use that data to engage their citizens.



DIGITAL ID: Citizens and agencies alike need simple, accurate ways of ensuring a citizen is indeed who they claim to be, whether that individual is inquiring about tax information or applying for a driver's license. Automating identity management can help ensure seamless security and efficiency.



COGNITIVE TECHNOLOGIES: Employing artificial intelligence (AI), digital assistants and other cognitive technologies is cutting edge, disruptive technology. At the leading edge of agency operations, cognitive technologies can automate manual processes to free up agency staff for higher level, more innovative operations.