

INNOVATION IN GOVERNMENT®

The Best of What's New in Government Customer Experience

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*Experience is everything
as governments transform
service delivery*

What Experience Means Now

Governments confront intertwined issues of access, usability and equity

State and local governments faced a perfect storm of challenges at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Public offices closed to slow the spread of the virus and public employees went to work from home, often making it impossible to deliver services or hold meetings in person.

Agencies responded to the crisis the only way they could: They shifted services and public events to digital channels at a break-neck pace. But as governments scrambled to put important transactions and eligibility forms online, they surfaced other issues.

In too many parts of the nation, broadband internet coverage was spotty or even non-existent. Constituents who needed help the most often lacked desktop or laptop computers, as well as the technology skills needed to access digital services. Many people had smartphones, but clunky processes and bloated government forms didn't translate well to five-inch screens.

All of this is now driving a more serious commitment to usability, accessibility and equity of government digital services. City and county officials ranked improving constituent experience and engagement as a top priority, trailing only cybersecurity, in the Center for Digital Government's (CDG) 2021

Digital Cities and Counties surveys. And states ranked expanding and improving access to services as their top priority in CDG's most recent Digital States Survey conducted in late 2020.

"In response to the pandemic, everyone hit the gas on digital services because they had to," says Phil Bertolini, CDG vice president and former deputy county executive and CIO for Oakland County, Mich. "Now we're seeing governments confront the question of which services should remain digital and what should this new constituent experience look like. They're asking themselves, 'How do we package this the right way and do it methodically so that we know we're getting the right services to the right people at the right time?'"

Expansion of Experience

One impact of the pandemic has been to broaden the definition of experience. Before COVID, the term commonly equated to convenience. But now it encompasses more fundamental concepts such as digital access and equity.

Multiple jurisdictions — often backed by big new federal government funding streams for broadband improvements — are addressing connectivity gaps that became magnified

when government offices, schools and other public facilities were shuttered.

Delaware's New Castle County, for example, expanded public WiFi connectivity in parking lots of libraries and other public buildings during the pandemic, giving residents a vital link to online services.

"With support from Verizon and others, we rolled out 22 sites in eight business days. And we stood up a website so people would know where to go for access," county CTO Michael Hojnicky told *Government Technology* in September. "Anyone who needed to get online for school, for work, they could come and sit outside of any of our public buildings."

The county won a 2021 Government Experience Award from CDG for its efforts to connect residents to the internet and rapidly deploy a new digital platform to support community-wide COVID testing.

Another award winner, the city of Mesa, Ariz., used federal COVID relief funds to create a private cellular network to improve internet access in underserved areas. The city worked with Mesa Public Schools, Arizona's largest public school system, to analyze census tract data and identify locations to deploy new equipment.

"We were going up on poles and putting up cellular antenna arrays," Mesa CIO Travis Cutright told *Government Technology*. "The folks in these communities can



apply for internet connectivity, and we give them a hot spot to access internet off of our private cellular network.”

An Omnichannel Future

Connectivity is just part of the equation, however. Jurisdictions are also moving toward omnichannel strategies that provide equal access to services — and an equally good experience — to constituents regardless of whether they’re contacting agencies using a traditional voice call, accessing services from a desktop computer or mobile device, or visiting a government office in person. These efforts include more options for unbanked residents, too, such as kiosks located in government buildings and retail locations that enable users to complete digital transactions using cash payments. In addition, agencies are expanding their use of artificial intelligence (AI) to power user-friendly web and app-based self-service capabilities and augment human call center agents.

This shift is pushing governments to address technical debt. A growing number of jurisdictions are looking to replace old systems that often struggle to deliver services in these new ways.

In Michigan state government, for example, these pressures helped drive a series of initiatives meant to simplify

and streamline government interactions for constituents. Those efforts included moving to a new SaaS-based identity and access management platform that standardized log-in processes for constituent services across state agencies. The state is also migrating its Michigan.gov web portal off 20-year-old legacy infrastructure to a modern web content management system and implementing a digital design framework to ensure usability and uniformity across state government applications, websites and social media platforms.

“It should feel very seamless to people as they traverse our digital environment,” eMichigan Director Suzanne Pauley told *Government Technology*, adding the framework embraces a range of design elements including color palette, typography, iconography — and especially accessibility. “We have put a huge focus on making sure that our services can be used by everyone.”

An Opportunity for IT Leaders

This new environment offers a huge opportunity for government IT and business leaders to remake the way agencies serve constituents.

Current federal COVID relief programs provide significant funding for broadband expansion, IT system modernization and other necessary upgrades — and more is

on the way through the recently signed Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. At the same time, there’s never been more executive attention on these issues and support for addressing them.

Tackling the intertwined issues of connectivity, access, equity and usability will be complex. It’s a long-term effort that demands perseverance from IT teams and sustained support from elected officials and business leaders. What’s more, the solutions implemented by states and localities to meet new experience goals must be sustainable long after temporary federal funding streams run dry.

But the results — giving more people easier and more meaningful access to government services and information they need — could be monumental.

Customer Experience Moves Up the Priority List

State Priorities

- 1. Expand, simplify and/or improve access to services available to residents and businesses**
2. Expand economic development opportunities for residents and businesses
3. Address or increase responsiveness to crises affecting residents and businesses

City Priorities

1. Cybersecurity
- 2. Customer engagement/experience**
3. Disaster recovery/continuity of operations

County Priorities

1. Cybersecurity
- 2. Customer engagement/experience**
3. Business process automation

Source: CDG 2021 Digital Cities and Counties Surveys; 2020 Digital States Survey

Empathy Is Key to Exceptional Experience



Contact centers have rapidly modernized the constituent experience in response to the pandemic. **Christina Angel**, senior solution consultant for U.S.

public sector at Genesys, discusses self-service, AI, and other trends and strategies to deliver empathetic service experiences with technology.

What trends are impacting state and local government contact centers?

Internet-savvy constituents are raising contact center expectations. They want more contact channels, self-service capabilities, texting and chats with agents, and better customer experiences overall. We also see state and local governments requiring FedRAMP- or StateRAMP-authorized cloud solutions. Security teams understand their agencies are a target for cybercriminals, and they want to mitigate risk by adopting these established best practices.

How can organizations provide better experiences for callers and agents?

Organizations need to focus on empathy — which really means understanding the situation of a resident who's reaching out for help or information and responding appropriately. We have to put ourselves in their shoes. Yes, contact centers should be efficient and effective. But without empathy they can't deliver exceptional customer experience. Empathy in digital government services is critical because human workers cannot scale to meet the increased demand for services during the pandemic.

How do you bring empathy into digital government services?

At Genesys, our vision is to deliver the power of empathy in every service experience. To do this, we focus on technology to enable four key actions: listening, understanding and predicting, acting, and learning. Our technology accesses and captures data from many sources in real time. We use AI to understand and predict the service need, and then respond with the right action on the right channel. Empathetic service does not always require human engagement. Sometimes a chatbot is the most empathetic option: Password resets are a great example. Agencies use insights derived from the data to proactively guide customer journeys, optimize self-service and chatbot capabilities, and help human agents focus on the most complex requests. The results are then fed back into the system to help drive continuous service improvement.

What IT capabilities enable the ideal customer experience and how can organizations achieve them as rapidly, scalably and cost-effectively as possible?

Key capabilities include a cloud-based customer experience platform for collecting and using customer experience data; AI tools for understanding the next-best action to take; and orchestration, chatbots and intelligent agents that can deliver automated responses in the right circumstances. The end goal should be that engagement between the agency and customer happens via the customer's preferred channel, with every channel allowing intuitive self-service and rapid escalation to an agent if needed. Low-code/no-code options are part of implementing this effectively.

AI-powered bots help organizations quickly scale services without adding headcount. Integrating these bots with contact center solutions allows for escalation to an agent — including the context of the conversation between the customer and the bot, so the customer doesn't have to repeat what they need.

What's your advice for effectively integrating AI and machine learning to modernize customer experience?

When organizations explore adding AI, they may initially try an FAQ — frequently answered question — style of bot. Agencies can deploy FAQ bots very quickly as they typically have no backend system integrations. However, we've seen much higher ROI when AI and ML are given secure backend integrations to help provide targeted capabilities.

How can organizations prepare for increased demand during crises without overspending on unnecessary capacity during more "normal" times?

Migrating to cloud-based solutions should be a priority for organizations that are still using on-premises systems. As we've seen during the pandemic, cloud-native services let organizations respond, support remote work, scale and add new capabilities much more quickly during crisis situations. Gone are the days of hoping the next emergency doesn't exceed your on-premises or hosted hardware's capacity.

AI and ML use cases will vary by organization, but the end goal is those who are able to use self-service can do so easily, those who opt out or have more complex needs can reach a representative, and representatives have the context they need to engage and resolve issues with empathy.

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Digital Workflows That Empower Constituents



The pandemic redefined public-facing services, creating an urgent need for better digital experiences.

Tom Yeatts, global head of state, local and regional government solutions at ServiceNow, and **Chris Dilley**, CTO/ chief architect of state



and local government and higher education at ServiceNow, discuss how a unified service management platform helps organizations meet these new demands.

Why is a great workflow essential to a great customer experience?

Constituents are looking for a consumer-grade experience when they interact with their state and local governments. They expect government services to meet them where they are — meaning they want omnichannel 24/7 services in a seamless delivery format. They want answers in real time, as well as tools to help them find answers themselves. A great workflow allows rapid delivery of government services with intelligent case routing and automation. It reduces costs by enabling self-service, proactively answering common questions and providing automated service responses. Finally, it provides a single system of government engagement that supports digital transformation efforts to improve overall customer experience.

What common workflow challenges do state and local governments face?

Siloed systems and operations hinder many organizations. Efforts are often uncoordinated so residents must visit multiple websites, make numerous phone calls and drive to various

government offices to receive service. Proactive case resolution is almost non-existent; agencies are either reactive to situations or on recurring schedules only. Lack of cooperation and data sharing limits agencies' ability to use advanced analytics and glean valuable insights.

How can digital workflows take organizations beyond traditional CRM?

Agencies often use customer relationship management (CRM) systems to record case information. However, these systems don't typically offer the level of workflow management required to track and resolve complex cases. A service management platform can automate workflows; track progress; and engage everyone who needs to handle, approve or respond to a request. It offers governments an economical way to give employees and residents a common experience across departments and programs.

How does a unified service management platform help improve customer workflows?

These unified platforms help in multiple ways. For one, they enable an omnichannel customer service solution that delivers consumer-like experiences at each touchpoint. Residents can quickly find answers and complete simple tasks — for example, pulling permits or requesting an address change — in the way that is most convenient for them. By connecting people, systems and workflows on a single platform, agencies can break down silos and automate processes for efficient, end-to-end service operations. A single,

intuitive workspace allows everyone to work as one team, providing visibility into case history and cross-channel, interdepartmental communications, so organizations can solve problems fast; improve outcomes; and deliver efficient, seamless experiences. A unified platform also provides complete visibility into resources and enables dynamic scheduling so organizations can send the right people and equipment to complete work the first time and in the most efficient way possible.

How can AI, analytics and automation help agencies deliver a better customer experience?

Government agencies can leverage these capabilities to deliver reliable and satisfying experiences to their internal customers and constituents. Automation and predictive intelligence enable more personalized self-service and help customer service agents anticipate their customers' needs. They also help optimize resource usage, including cloud resources. These technologies let agencies identify usage trends and precisely predict where they're going to run into resource constraints. In the same way, they can assess when and where resources are underutilized and flexibly reallocate them as needed.

What practices will make organizations successful as they modernize their customer workflows?

Digital workflows are key to boosting efficiency. Automating repeatable, low-level tasks can free up employee time and resources for higher impact activities. And providing self-service options improves the experience constituents have when they interact with government. By customizing applications and workflows to provide better constituent experiences, agencies can lower administrative costs and proactively identify ways to improve existing services. It's also vital to implement resilient security operations. A unified platform lets agencies align security and operations teams, creating more visibility into their networks.



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Modernizing Document Workflows to Improve Service and Equity



Electronic document signing is one discrete task in a chain of events that occur within a modern contract life cycle.

Michael (MJ) Jackson,
vice president and global

head of industries for DocuSign, discusses how modernization improves user experience for residents and creates efficiencies and other tangible returns for government agencies.

How have electronic signatures and modern contract life cycle workflows improved government services since the pandemic began?

In the most basic way, they enabled government agencies to continue their mission-critical operations. The pandemic underscored how reliant many organizations were on manual, outdated, error-prone processes. Besides enabling virtual interactions, modern contract life cycle management includes automating, where possible, document generation and routing. It can also automate tasks that typically occur after document signing, such as payment collection or distribution of new employee packets.

What social barriers should agencies consider when optimizing document signing workflows?

One big challenge is the digital divide. Not everybody has access to a laptop or desktop, but many people have access to a smartphone. With this in mind, organizations can build mobile-first solutions, understanding that many users will apply for benefits, find a job and validate eligibility through a five-inch screen. Organizations can then add

a layer of omnichannel experiences. Regardless of the screen size, connection speed or where somebody enters the engagement, organizations must deliver an equally intuitive and immersive experience across all channels. It's also important to prioritize accessibility so individuals with disabilities can access services. The third piece is sustainability and reducing the carbon footprint by transitioning to electronic workflows and legally binding digital signatures.

What are the main components of an empowering customer experience?

The resident experience has a number of components. The first is engagement. Experiences should be immersive and intuitive and on par with user experiences in private sector companies. The second element is efficiency. The experience on the backend should be as functional as it is beautiful, meaning it reduces errors, optimizes workflows, automates processes and quickly delivers tangible value for the agency. The third aspect is effectiveness. Agencies must be able to measure and evaluate, almost in real time, how effectively they are engaging users and realizing a return on investment, and then adjust accordingly. The final component is trust. Organizations must demonstrate that they can protect mission-critical workflows and satisfy rigorous government and industry standards.

How does modern contract/document life cycle management expedite processes and services once documents have been signed?

Besides providing a repository for millions of signed documents, modern solutions enable agencies to aggregate, analyze and pull insights from signed documents. For example, they can use artificial intelligence to identify trends, assess risks and manage obligations. One of our state government customers — a health authority in the Northwest — improved its contract processing time by 93 percent. That enabled Medicaid agency clients to receive potentially life-saving services more quickly.

What do organizations and residents need to better understand about digital signing?

Digital signing streamlines the document-signing experience and enables residents to do business online. Organizations and residents need to understand that it's secure, legally binding and proven. The E-Sign Act became law in 2000 and has been widely adopted by the public, government organizations and the private sector. Most residents have already encountered digital signing technology if they've recently gone through a home buying process.

What types of use cases are emerging to improve the resident experience?

There are many. One city in Southern California has established a digital city hall. The pandemic essentially forced the city hall as well as all external stakeholders who interacted with it to go fully digital, which enabled a level of resiliency that nobody expected. The city did a study and found that it saved 122,000 staff hours and \$3.5 million.



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Reinventing the Customer Journey



Delivering outstanding resident experiences is easier said than done. Jill Leyden, Qualtrics government industry advisor, discusses technologies, strategies

and key tenets for raising the bar on the resident experience in state and local government.

Tell us about your vision for the ideal resident experience or customer journey.

An ideal experience is equitable and fosters trust at every turn. It anticipates a resident's needs and provides a visible path to fulfilling them. Information is consistent across the entire customer journey, and residents don't need to become a navigator to get what they need. The information technology systems that residents use are intuitive and reliable. Government staff members are equipped with the right tools, information and resources to serve residents. Their employee experience is top notch, and they feel valued.

What stands in the way of delivering outstanding resident experiences and services?

Creating an experience of trust between an individual and their government is powerful, but it's difficult to do. Organizations without a resident-centered approach often stand in their own way when it comes to delivering outstanding experiences. Unless they bring residents or customers to the center of all they do, governments will inevitably fall short of serving them well. Government

organizations must listen to "see" experience beyond organizational boundaries and empathize with residents throughout an experience, not just at a point of service. Then, leaders must be equipped with the right tools to act on these insights. All too often, governments collect data but don't see trends clearly enough to tackle root causes and solve problems effectively. They need a system of action to help them focus on the right improvements, make the most of resources and see tangible results.

What is a typical pain point in the resident experience?

Residents often lack government information that is easy to find, understand and use. They can spend hours looking for the right service or program. It's frustrating to know the government provides something you need, but not be able to access it efficiently. Industry and government leaders cannot let complexity stand in the way of creating equitable experiences. Well-crafted communication and human-centered design at scale can help remove artificial barriers to entry that residents and customers face.

What technologies help agencies personalize, orchestrate and scale user experience?

It's critical to have a powerful, all-encompassing experience management platform that ties together operational and experience data to get a complete picture of the resident and employee experience. The right platform uncovers insights beyond the narrow view of individual

program/service touchpoints. Capitalizing on this perspective lets organizations better orchestrate resident experiences at scale.

What's the most important thing organizations should consider when personalizing customer experiences?

It's listening to people and the frontline employees who serve them. Designers and CX professionals cannot always sit down with customers, but reviewing data through the right platform can make them feel like they are. You need the right technology – including "listening" tools, predictive intelligence, analytics and full closed-loop actioning capabilities – to gain a holistic understanding of your residents' experiences and take the right actions that drive meaningful impact.

Don't overlook employee experience. Engaged employees are 4.6 times more likely to be customer-centric compared to disengaged employees. Part of engagement is feeling heard and valued. Always-on collaboration tools, where employees can submit and comment on ideas and feedback related to the resident experience, put the people closest to residents at the heart of your CX program and help you build a more resident-centric culture.

How can state and local government agencies get started on improving the resident experience?

Resist the urge to take on everything at once. Keep the big picture in mind, but select a few key projects or priorities that, when accomplished, will provide case studies and tangible results that help build organizational momentum. Don't forget to showcase the value that focusing on residents has "inside the building." For example, did listening, understanding and acting on resident insights save employees time? Were you able to more efficiently allocate resources? Capture these insights with an advanced experience management platform to jumpstart progress and get a quick win under your belt.

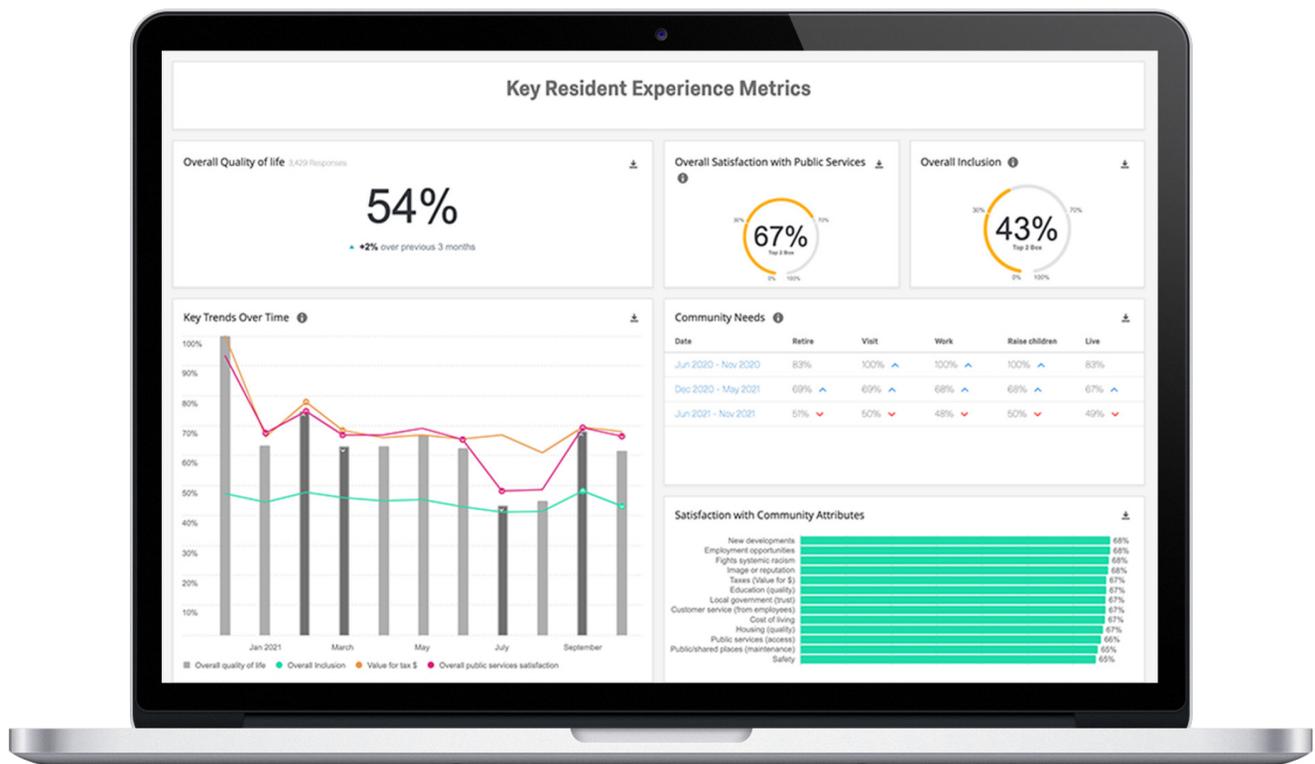
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Adapting to New Customer Behaviors and Expectations



The pandemic has created new needs and expectations around customer experience.

Joshua Smith, digital transformation leader for public sector at Acquia,

discusses tools and strategies for creating great content and personalizing constituents' digital interactions.

How have constituent expectations for customer experience changed since the pandemic?

One way our society has responded to the pandemic is by moving even more of our interactions online. This was a trend before the pandemic, but in the past two years it has gone into hyperdrive. Every organization in the commercial and public sphere has been forced to evaluate how to replace or supplement in-person activities with online interactions. As a result, constituents now expect their online government interactions to match consumer experiences more commonly found with big brands in the commercial sector.

Where should organizations focus to successfully shift their constituent experience strategies?

Responding to the pandemic was an all-hands-on-deck event, where a lot of new ideas were introduced and a lot of innovation was approved for implementation. As organizations envision a post-pandemic world, they will need to review the past two years of initiatives to determine which ones really worked and which ones may have been appropriate for the moment, but are not needed

long term. Tools with robust analytics and reporting can help organizations identify the important trends in their customer data. Organizations may be surprised by what their data and analysis tells them.

What is a digital experience platform and how can it improve constituent experience?

A digital experience platform is an integrated set of technologies that supports the composition, management, delivery and optimization of contextualized digital experiences. It supports modernization efforts by providing a broad set of solutions for engaging constituents online. The digital world offers many possible touchpoints for residents. Trying to independently solve for each desired touchpoint can lead to a scrambled web of conflicting technologies, but taking a tech-first monolithic approach will lead to disappointing engagement. A digital experience platform offers proven patterns for providing meaningful engagement, while also allowing flexibility to architect each touchpoint according to the organization's preferences.

How can organizations create content more efficiently?

Smart organizations understand constituents come for the content, not for the technology. However, technical tools can help maximize the reach and reuse of great content. In terms of pure efficiency, content syndication is the answer. Drupal as a content management system (CMS) is great at the publish once, use everywhere approach for a single website or application programming interface (API) endpoint. With the right tools

you can expand to syndicating content across many websites, API endpoints and transactional applications. You can manage your best content in one place, and automatically distribute updates across your entire digital ecosystem.

How can organizations employ personalization to deliver more engaging experiences?

Government agencies may not have click-through targets or shopping cart goals like online retailers, but personalization is an incredible tool to reduce friction and streamline the user experience. Employing meaningful personalization requires careful thought, but getting started is easy if you adopt a "crawl, walk, run" approach. A simple example is differentiation between first-time and repeat visitors to a section of a website. Bypassing irrelevant content reduces friction on the interaction and improves the experience. When applied at scale, small optimizations like this can build trust in government services.

What advice do you have for fostering trust and encouraging digital engagement among constituents?

Improving digital experiences is the best way to encourage digital engagement. Constituents aren't generally opposed to interacting online, they just want easy-to-use experiences. Government agencies wanting to improve their experiences have many examples to draw from the private sector, and companies like Acquia are ready and able to share tools and best practices to bring those experiences to life.

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Video Teleconferencing Puts Humans at the Center of Interactions



Video teleconferencing plays a vital role in helping organizations get closer to the communities and constituents they serve.

Jennifer Chang, head

of U.S. state and local government for Zoom, discusses how organizations can effectively bridge the gap between in-person and virtual engagements.

How has video teleconferencing changed due to the pandemic?

Video teleconferencing offers a new way for community members to contact and interact with their government. It has gone from a nice-to-have to a must-have. Government organizations are re-imagining how they leverage collaboration tools to deliver more efficiently on their mission, whether it's enabling remote or hybrid work, accelerating the delivery of services or increasing the equity of access for constituents at city council meetings and other functions.

What are the key tenets of a good teleconferencing experience? Human-centered design is important for bringing parity to in-person conversations and virtual engagement. It's all about creating an equitable, simple-to-join and simple-to-use human experience for everyone. Important features include an immersive view so meeting hosts can arrange participants into a single virtual background as if everyone is in the same room. Hosts should also be able to manage the meeting flow effectively and efficiently – for

example, by enabling nonverbal cues so attendees can exchange information without interrupting presentations. Another key capability is extensibility and integration into existing applications so organizations can share applications in real time. Finally, solutions should include options for live translation and closed captioning.

What technology capabilities are essential to support video teleconferencing for constituents?

Government organizations must be able to scale large meetings while also maintaining security and control over the materials and the audience. Features such as live streaming, Q&A moderation and polling help expand reach and enhance control over how content is shared and viewed without interrupting the flow.

Security is a concern on collaboration platforms. What rules of thumb should organizations follow?

Education is absolutely critical. Organizations and individuals must understand how to properly leverage the features that protect information exchanged over a collaboration platform. Privacy and security tools should include capabilities to prevent participants from joining via multiple devices at the same time or from a different device after being removed from a meeting. Tools should also require all meeting participants to be authenticated; gather consent from meeting participants for when a host unmutes them; and dictate whether attendees can screen-share, change their name or use the chat function.

What types of video teleconferencing use cases are proving to be valuable?

We're seeing a lot of success with court applications. One great example is the Texas judiciary, which announced in February 2021 that more than 2,000 state judges had hosted a combined total of more than one million virtual hearings via Zoom since the pandemic began in March 2020. We anticipate courts and justice systems will continue to leverage videoconferencing in lieu of, or in combination with, in-person hearings due to the benefits it brings to witnesses, judges, jurors and other participants. In the social work realm, video teleconferencing helps increase access and care between in-person visits.

What's next for video collaboration and the user experience? How can organizations prepare?

The future of the government experience is hybrid. Organizations can prepare by reimagining what the hybrid workplace is going to look like and how they can leverage technology to create a future where both the organization and its constituents can thrive. When government organizations contemplate modernization goals, we encourage them to put the constituent at the heart of the process. We suggest they ask questions such as how they can drive parity between the in-person and online user and how they can use the same tools that constituents use in their personal life – text, chat and so on – to increase a constituent's confidence and engagement.



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Moving Toward a Better Experience

Phil Bertolini spent almost 15 years as deputy county executive and CIO for Oakland County, Mich., earning a reputation as one of the nation's most innovative local government IT leaders. He now advises state and local government officials as vice president of the Center for Digital Government.

In this Q&A, Bertolini shares his thoughts on potential roadblocks to improving government experience and offers insights on how public sector leaders

can move forward on transforming the way agencies interact with constituents.

What are the biggest challenges to transforming government experience?

I think the biggest challenge is the digital equity side of things. To truly transform into this new digital experience, governments have to manage the digital divide and digital equity issues. And part of that is also digital literacy. People may have access to digital services, but they also need the skills to use them.

Technical debt is a big issue, too. Governments have numerous old technologies that aren't easily updated and can't morph into this new model for service delivery. A related challenge is the lack of internal resources for technology modernization. Governments struggle to compete

with the private sector for the talent needed to run these projects, so they'll need help from industry partners. I think this is where you can make a good argument that industry partners need to step up their game.

What technologies are key to transforming government experience?

Experience certainly includes all the technologies that support e-commerce — the tools that enable you to do business through a portal instead of being there in person. Emerging technologies like AI are increasingly part of this discussion, too. During the pandemic, we've seen great examples of using chatbots, intelligent agents and other smart technologies to enhance government services. People used to worry that AI would take people's jobs, but now governments are struggling to find employees. If governments can't find enough people, they need to augment their staffs with technology. AI is going to be embedded in almost everything they do going forward.

Many newer technology platforms will have these capabilities built in. That's why I believe governments will need to move toward a platform approach as they modernize. Instead of cobbling together bits and pieces, they should be looking at an underlying platform that will help them implement new capabilities in a way that's more efficient and sustainable.

What's your advice to government IT leaders on the best way to move forward?

I believe now is the time to take both a retrospective and prospective look at service delivery and experience. Jurisdictions deployed multiple services over the past 20 months. To some extent, governments were throwing things out there to see what worked. You really need to inventory and assess all those things to see what constituents really found valuable. Then you need to start looking at how to pull those one-off services into sustainable and resilient programs going forward.

Sustainability and resilience will really be key. Right now federal money is flowing, but eventually that spigot will be shut off. Governments have to deploy these services in ways that can live beyond this infusion of money. The worst thing you can do is roll out this enhanced constituent experience and then shut it down because of budget reductions.

Finally, even though we've talked a lot about the challenges, I want to say all of this is doable. On the technology side, everything you'll need already exists — it's just a matter of applying the tools in the right way. There are, of course, people and change management issues, but we can overcome those, too.

