



Putting People First

Improving the Customer Experience (CX)
of Government Services

WHITE PAPER

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Introduction

Changing how government works

A positive customer experience with a brand, product, or service has a significant impact on an organization's success. Successful companies have known since the early days of the Internet that focusing on customer experience (CX) to create inclusive, intuitive online experiences has a positive impact on the bottom line.

Government is catching up, with many agencies across the federal, state, and local levels making positive strides—applying innovative technologies and hiring chief experience officers to increase citizen trust and satisfaction at every touchpoint with the agency.

In fact, a December 2021 Executive Order, [*Transforming Federal Customer Experience and Service Delivery to Rebuild Trust in Government*](#), mandated that the federal government take a page from companies such as Amazon, Nike, and Apple to better invest in the customer experience. In many ways, the executive order marks a transformative shift in mindset. Agencies traditionally oriented toward serving the “American public” are now asked to understand that public as customers—customers who deserve and demand excellence in customer service.



But many agencies still fall short.

Following two years of steep drops, and four years of declines overall, citizen satisfaction in government rose in 2022 by 4.6% to a score of 66.3 (out of 100), according to the [American Customer Satisfaction Index's \(ACSI®\) Federal Government Report 2022](#). Though on the rise, the measure of satisfaction in government services lags the consumer sentiment across all industries, measured at 73.2% in 2022.

What can agencies do to deliver faster, better, more accessible and inclusive digital services that meet—and even exceed—citizen expectations?

In this white paper, we share insights from Forum One's digital strategy experts who have spent decades working with government agencies to improve customer experience and user experience.

We cover:

- Why putting people first improves digital experience
- What we can learn from successful agencies and CX projects
- How to implement CX approaches in government services

Questions, or something you'd like to discuss?

Reach out to us at inquiries@forumone.com



Why putting people first improves digital experience

Each day, millions of people interact with public departments and agency services. Digital government has taken center stage in recent years, ramping up exponentially during the COVID-19 pandemic. From filling out census data, registering to vote, applying for a small business loan, and filing taxes, Americans have become accustomed to going online for government services.

In addition, government employees are themselves a large and distinct “customer” base for digital services, as many rely on processes between agencies or departments to accomplish tasks or larger projects.

Either way, customers are more likely to be satisfied if they have trust in their interactions with the government department or agency, and if they know they will easily get to the information they are trying to find. Building trust yields significant benefits, which has an impact on all the interactions between the customer and the government, throughout the life of the customer relationship.

It is critical to identify and define important and vital services delivered to meet customers’ needs and expectations and incorporate feedback from each and every interaction. This will ensure that the delivery of services provides a positive customer experience.

Meeting customer expectations

It may feel counterintuitive given recent technological advances, but customer expectations have not significantly changed in the past few decades. Citizens want easy access to the information they need to complete the tasks at hand. What has changed is how citizens are accessing information. Customers interact with businesses not only through many channels, but also on many devices.

Rather than seeing each of these interactions as a separate experience, customers view all interactions with an organization as part of one larger user experience.

For this reason, organizations must create a cohesive ecosystem of business channels and touchpoints where each not only provides their own unique benefits, but also complements and seamlessly connects to the experience as a whole in order to develop and maintain a customer experience relationship.



What we can learn from successful agencies and projects

While the business case for improving customer experience in the private sector is well established, governments are still shaping an approach. For example, the federal government is working to translate these same benefits to 35 High Impact Service Providers that deliver large volumes of services, including the General Services Administration (GSA), the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), and the Social Security Administration (SSA).

As part of the federal Executive Order, these agencies commit to putting their customers at the center of everything they do. Key actions to implement this include digitizing and modernizing old systems and programs, reducing administrative burdens, piloting new online tools and technologies, and more. The order aims to create a sustained, trustworthy, cross-government delivery process that aligns to the moments that matter most in people's lives, including having a child, applying for a small business loan, retiring, and more.

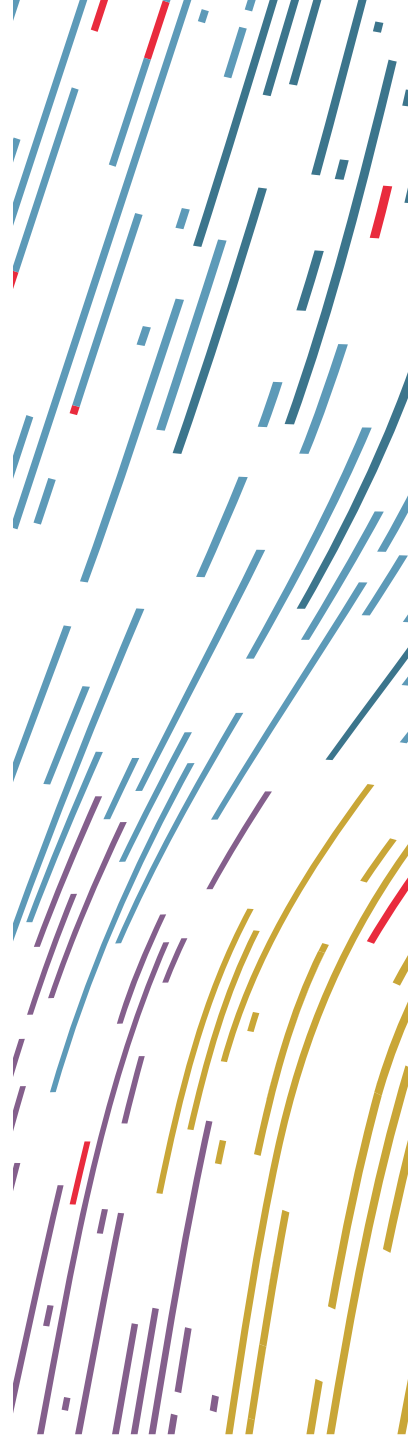
In support of the 2021 Executive Order, GSA and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) announced a Technology Modernization Fund in June 2022 as part of the American Rescue Plan, with \$100 million designated to improve CX with the federal government.

It's instructive to look at the fund's application process and early impacts to understand the goals and priorities that apply to CX. Funded projects are required to have measurable goals to ensure they address customer pain points and gaps in accessibility and equity and are supported by, "technology teams and systems that are capable of rapidly designing, prototyping, and deploying modern digital tools and services based on human-centered design."



We draw inspiration from recent government CX projects that Forum One has been supporting, including:

- *Department of the Interior (DOI) "My DOI Career"* connects Employee Experience (EX) to CX principles. The platform was created to address retention challenges, connect employees to development and growth opportunities within the Department, and recruit the next generation of DOI employees. Using Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML), the platform was designed and developed with clear and engaging pathways for both government and non-government visitors to learn about career possibilities through multiple lenses, including a "Find Your Path" interactive quiz driven by React technology that presents relevant resources based on an individual's career goals, experience, and skills.
- *Virginia's Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV)* is focusing on modernizing its approach to CX. The state agency is right now in the process of rebuilding its flagship website [DMV.Virginia.gov](https://www.dmv.virginia.gov) to create a positive CX experience that better supports its citizens directly from their website.
- *Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)* is working to use AI to enhance CX online. The Department of Justice (DOJ) is currently developing some very innovative AI and ML capabilities that make it easier for citizens to submit requests as well and find the information they seek.



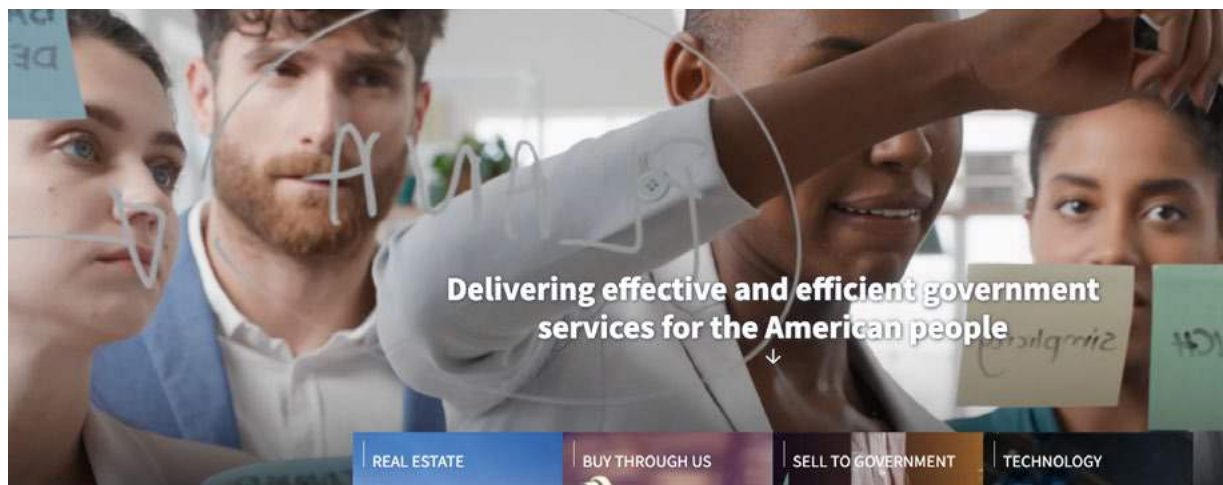
Digging deeper: GSA's commitment to CX

Forum One worked with GSA prior to the Executive Order to provide data analytics and usability testing support to GSA's Office of Strategic Communications (OSC) to identify, recommend, and support the implementation of clear, actionable, and data-driven improvements across the Agency's digital properties.

With work to ultimately improve efficiencies and CX on GSA web properties including gsa.gov, the IT Schedule 70 procurement system, the per diem mobile app, and the GSA InSite employee intranet, Forum One coordinated the user testing program, prepared test plans to target specific audiences and key performance indicators, analyzed the results, produced key findings reports, and helped develop optimization and implementation plans.

Our user-driven recommendations and tailored analytics reporting helped GSA make measurable progress toward its goals. Forum One's user experience team worked closely with GSA stakeholders to interpret user testing results, identify themes and trends, and recommend strategic opportunities to improve the user experience of the sites and apps being tested.

In addition to technology, a key part of CX improvement lies within cultural or organizational change, which often moves more slowly than technological change. One of Forum One's primary CX improvement strategies at GSA was to build internal agency buy-in around the importance of including usability testing from the ground up as part of any digital project.



How to implement CX approaches in government services

Success in digital services modernization is possible, but getting CX right is not easy. Delays can be a result of analysis paralysis, a lack of CX leadership, or an absence of agile culture.

Transformational service changes will realistically touch many departments, but understanding who will lead, and who will support and champion the process, are key to success.

To move to CX implementation more efficiently, focus on these areas:

- **Research and test.** Embark on a gap analysis to uncover current strategies, future plans, and changes required to achieve these goals. Consider timelines and budgets: are there key seasons that affect services? (The IRS can't launch new platforms in early April, any more than FEMA can roll out new processes in the middle of hurricane season). Use exploratory [audience research](#) data to form hypotheses about which product, service, or process changes will make for a better experience. Then test those hypotheses immediately with a segment of customers with prototyped solutions.
- **Adopt an [agile approach](#).** Build agile workstreams targeted toward improving CX. Becoming more agile with CX isn't easy. It requires a strong, customer-centric culture and leadership that can be a real challenge for many departments and stakeholders. And it requires change management at scale that generates employee buy-in and ambassadorship.
- **Define the role of CX** and its leader, then make sure each supporting team along the customer journey is engaged—and enabled—to support the team. Ensure that feedback data is consistently shared outside of departmental silos.



- **Create a Voice of the Customer (VoC) program** to gather user feedback and incorporate findings into program goals. VoC programs are the fundamental component of improving CX, as they help agencies determine what's working and what's not at multiple touchpoints by hearing directly from users themselves. A VoC program and corresponding CX metrics dashboards enable all departments to understand which touchpoints along the customer journey impact satisfaction the most.
- **Explore and implement transformation design in CX.** Transformation design is often referred to as the next wave of user-centered design movements and is a key component of effective CX strategy. Applying transformation design best practices can make a big impact for government agencies in their quest to improve the customer experience. At its core, transformation design is about applying design principles to non-design projects, resulting in transformed organizations, systems, roles, environments, and policies.
- **Emphasize collaboration between CX and UX teams.** Start with an understanding of their differences: CX experts approach the entire ecosystem of touchpoints that people experience. UX experts focus more specifically on the design of individual product experiences. They likely sit in different parts of the agency and focus on different problems, but using shared methods of human-centered design and alongside other cross-functional teams, they can address the business challenges that innovation presents.

The future of CX in government

While the means of interacting with customers will continue to grow and evolve, customer experience will always be key to the success of any organization.

Users increasingly expect a seamless mix of human and digital interaction. That's because many businesses use automation to amplify and enhance the experiences they *already* provide. Government agencies will need to continue to identify ways to use automation to shorten the route to valued human engagement, as well as explore ways to personalize digital experiences.

Accessibility will continue to be a key factor to good CX. Accessibility means providing experiences, tools and resources that meet the needs of people with differing physical capabilities, learning styles, and education levels, as well as providing touchpoints for those

without access to digital resources. Significant investments must be made to help ensure all users receive the same quality of experiences, regardless of device or internet speed.

As more government departments and agencies redesign digital services and place customers at the center of strategy and its execution, organizations will need to have ongoing conversations with their customers to keep on top of how citizens interact with digital services. As a result, customer service managers and teams should keep an ear to the ground for new and upcoming trends to get an edge over their competition and create a truly unforgettable customer experience.



Forum One amplifies the impact of mission-driven organizations and local, state, and federal government agencies through transformational digital solutions. We have long-standing partnerships with federal agencies such as DOI, DOJ, EPA, GSA, USAID, and USDA, as well as state and local agencies including the Virginia DMV, New York Department of Environmental Conservation, and the City of Alexandria.

If your agency is looking to strengthen how it designs and delivers an exceptional customer experience, we'd love to support you. Contact us at inquiries@forumone.com.



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