

7

Ways to Bridge the Divide and Increase Constituent Engagement: Tips & Takeaways

In the wake of the pandemic, many government agencies are pursuing efforts to connect more effectively with constituents. Agencies are redesigning platforms, ecosystems and infrastructures as they seek to increase access to critical services.

To elevate constituent engagement, agencies need to address challenges around siloed and paper-based processes. They need to work within constrained budgets, while at the same time addressing growing cybersecurity risks in an ever more digitally connected world.

At a recent [GovLoop](#) online training, experts from government and industry discussed strategies for government agencies as they utilize technology to help foster digital equity and enhance constituent engagement.

#1 — Break down siloes

As Chief Customer Experience Officer for the Virginia IT Agency, Richard Matthews is looking for ways to get information flowing between agencies that have been traditionally siloed. He's encouraging disparate agencies to share pain points as well as best practices.

The state Department of Health, for example, has special skills around grant management, and so serves as a best practices center for other entities facing challenges in that area. "Instead of being hierarchical, we're using a matrix approach for all of these agencies to share this information," he said.

#2 — Elevate inclusion

Government's digital services need to work for everyone. With inclusivity in mind, the General Services Administration (GSA) has taken a number of practical steps, said Camille Tucker, Acting Chief Customer Officer.

GSA has a digital experience governance board to oversee the usability of its public-facing tools, and at the implementation level "we have the digital council which works across business lines to implement those coordinated improvements," Tucker said. The overall effort helps to ensure that content design, communications, and digital infrastructure all come together in support of a seamless experience for all users.

#3 — Look at security through a user lens

As government leans more heavily into providing services online, as well as empowering mobile workers, new vulnerabilities arise. "We basically open up a lot more doors and windows that we have to protect from a security perspective," said Chris Dilley, ServiceNow's Chief Technology Officer for state and local governments.

For online services in particular, emerging protections should be designed with the constituent experience in mind. "As we think about our older generation that may not be as tech savvy, how do we make sure from a design perspective that what they're engaging with is a trusted source?" Dilley asked. Design consistency and strong governance help ensure security even among less-sophisticated end users.



#4 — Test as the user

In order to build digital experiences that increase constituent engagement, government leaders should literally put themselves in the place of those constituents. They need to test-drive their online applications from the user's point of view.

"Anybody who works adjacent to a web property or digital service needs to walk through that digital service as though they were the customer," Tucker said. "They need to do that so they understand what are those very obvious pain points, where are the places they should invest in first."

#5 — Gather the stakeholders

Across various agencies, IT teams and business line leaders will be trying to address a similar set of issues as they stand up digital services. "They're all trying to solve identity, they're all trying to use data, they're all trying to drive a better experience," Dilley said. It makes sense to bring them all together and find a common set of solutions.

"Find those commonalities and address those with one nail that we hit that's going to affect and support five or 10 different services," he said. "We all have common interests. We're all trying to do the right thing."

#6 — Leverage the power of AI

Artificial intelligence (AI) has the power to free up individuals in government from doing repetitive or merely transactional tasks. "AI can be applied to really reduce the inefficiency that exists in bureaucratic systems," allowing staff to deliver a higher level of constituent service, Matthews said.

He cautions, though, that these same staffers must be trained to oversee AI outputs in order to keep constituent-facing processes on track. "We have to be able to reason through," he said. "When the AI produces something that's not accurate, [the staff member] can sit back and say, 'I want to drill down on that, because that's not right.' We have to have a human in that loop."

#7 — Look for the right tech platform

In order to craft processes that increase constituent engagement, agencies can look for a technology platform that takes them away from conventional spreadsheets, which too often lead to errors and an overall lack of transparency.

A digital platform can "bridge that divide not only between the constituents and the government services they need, but also government-to-government," Matthews said. It can enable agencies "to let go of some of the ownership. It used to be, 'this is my server, this is my application, this is my software.' [But] let's look at it as our applications," he said. "That's how we're going to continue to move forward."

