

# Tech for the Ages:

## How Does Your Agency Address Generational Differences?



RESEARCH BRIEF



# Introduction

Customer experience (CX), especially in the form of digital service delivery, is top of mind for government agencies at the federal, state, local and tribal levels. But to truly meet the public's needs, agencies must adapt their outreach to fit constituents' wide variety of ages. For instance, research shows that baby boomers are more likely to interact with the government by phone or in person, while younger groups prefer websites for information, apps for information and services, and social media for information and engagement.

The current COVID-19 environment has shown how these differences can be important. With offices closed to visitors and more services available online, people of all ages are discovering new ways to interact, likely setting the stage for a lasting change, rather than a quick fix. For instance, the Health and Human Services Department reported in July that 43.5% of Medicare primary care visits in April happened through telehealth, compared with less than 0.1% in February.

To learn more about how agencies are navigating this environment, GovLoop teamed with Tyler Technologies, which provides integrated software and technology services to the public sector, to survey 106 federal, state and local government workers about how generational differences shape agencies' interactions with constituents. (See Figure 1.)

In this report, we look at the findings, both overall and based on the generations that respondents are part of, to understand what forms of engagement they see constituents using, demanding and expecting more of in the future. More than half of respondents – 58% – said they are baby boomers, 29% said they belong to Generation X and 14% said they are millennials. Gen Zers, who are just entering the workforce, are not represented. (See Figure 2.)

Figure 1: I work for...

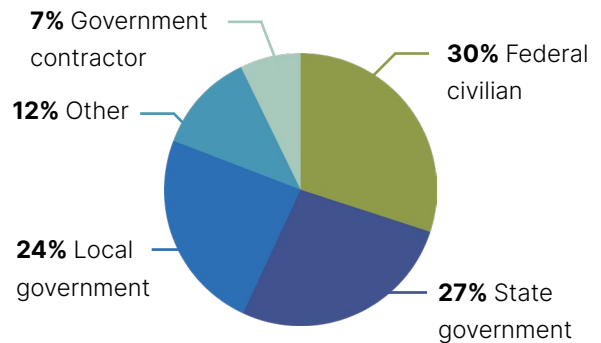
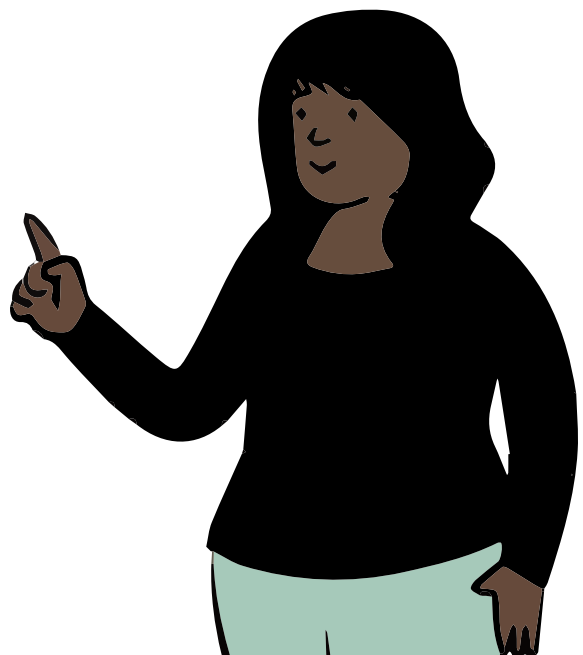
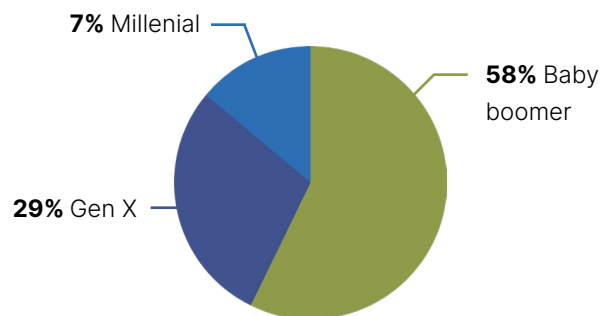


Figure 2: I am part of this generation:



# Generations Defined

## Baby boomer:

Born between 1946 and 1964

## Gen X:

Born between 1965 and 1976

## Millennial:

Born between 1977 and 1995

## Gen Z:

Born between 1996-2012



## By the Numbers

**25%** — amount of the federal workforce eligible to retire in less than five years

Source: OPM's 2019 "Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey"

**68%** — citizen satisfaction rating for the federal government in 2019, down 1.2% from 2018

Source: ACS's "Federal Government Report 2019"

**#2** — place on the National Association of State Chief Information Officers' "Top 10 Priorities List" for 2020 where Digital Government, including improving citizen experience, sits

Source: NASCIO

**24 million** — number of workers in military, public and national service at the federal, state and local levels

Source: Brookings

**16 million** — amount of the 24 million who work in state and local governments

Source: Brookings

## Age Matters:

How employees of different generations view engagement

A government focus on CX is relatively new, but the idea has quickly grown deep roots. "Improving Customer Experience with Federal Services" is a Cross-Agency Priority goal of the 2018 [President's Management Agenda](#) and specifies four strategies, including improving digital services and modernizing CX for high-impact programs. But to meet that goal, agencies must understand their customers.

"If you look at government agencies, they've got a wide variety of constituents and there's an expectation that various government services are going to be available across a wide range of people," said Mike Teeters, Manager of Corporate Product Development at Tyler Technologies. "We need to be thinking about how different age groups will have different needs or expectations. And if we're not taking that into consideration, then there's the potential that we could be under-serving one or another group."

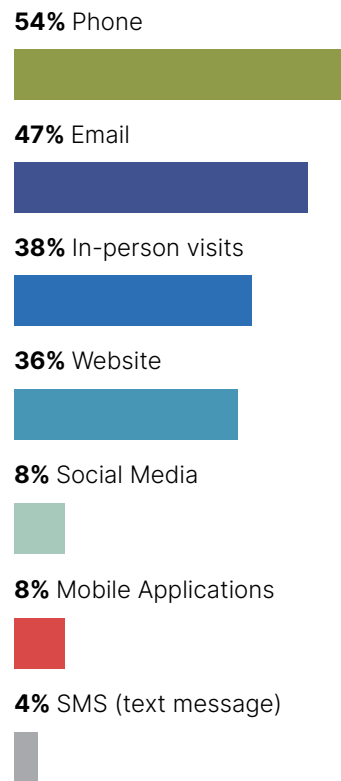
Despite today's tech-tethered population, almost 40% of respondents said that most customers engage with their agency through in-person visits. More than half – 54% – said a phone call is their customers' go-to method, while email came in second at 47%. About 36% of respondents said websites were the most-used medium. Text messages are the least used, based on the survey. (See Figure 3.)

Still, entry points may change. Of those channels, in-person visits have grown the least in the past two years (6%), respondents said, while website usage has grown the most (47%). Almost 32% of respondents said use of social media was on the rise, while email and mobile apps tied at 28%. (See Figure 4.)

Teeters draws a parallel between the CX push and accessibility: Both force new thinking about how people interact with different government access points.

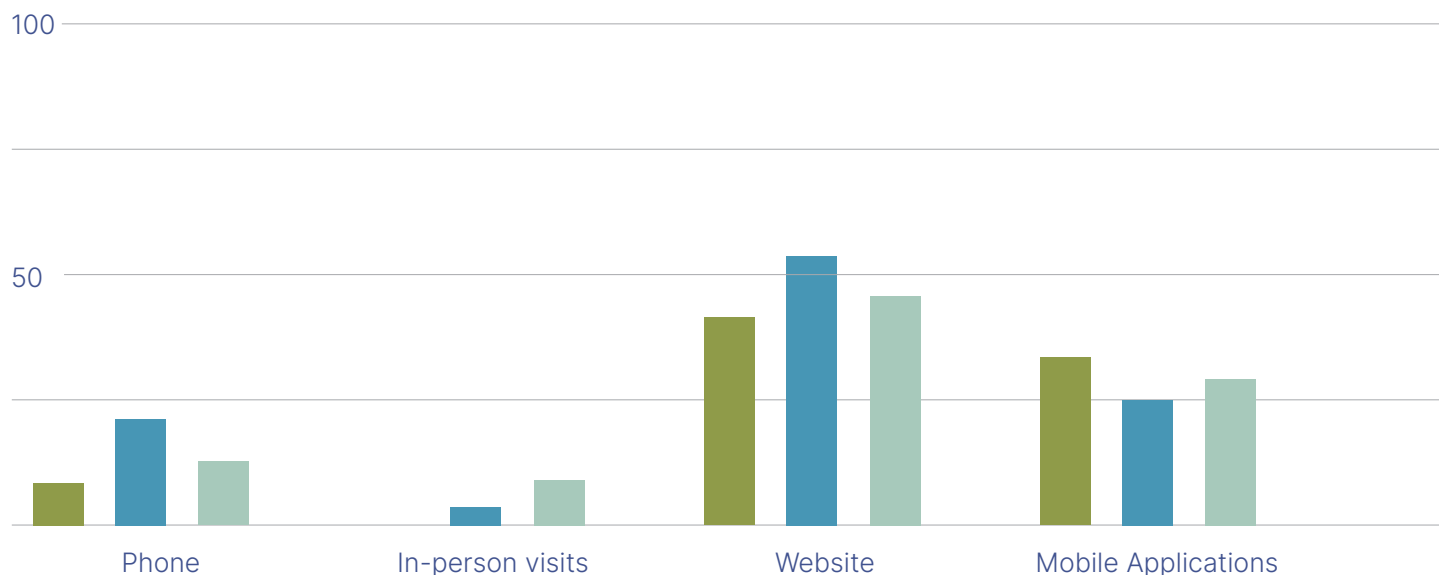
“You think about most government buildings, there’s a ramp in addition to stairs that you can use,” Teeters said. “In the same way that

**Figure 3: What are the main ways your customers engage with your agency? Choose up to two.**



**Figure 5: Looking across those channels, where have you seen the most growth in the past two years? Choose up to two.**

Millennial Gen X Baby Boomer

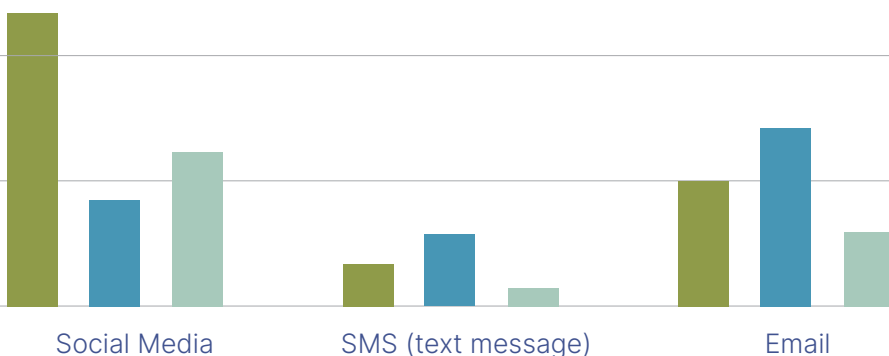
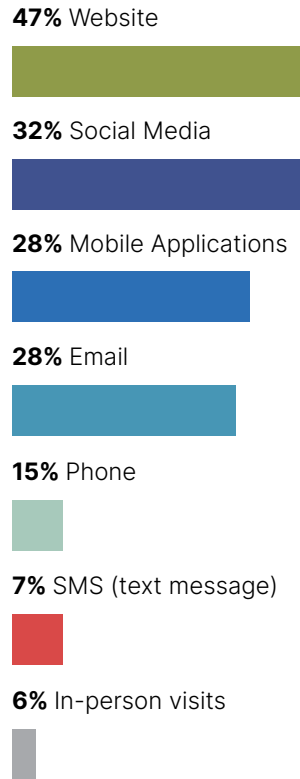


you've seen government champion things like accessibility, I think it's equally important that we think about how different age groups are going to be consuming government services as we move into the future."

Respondents' age may play a role in their judgment, however. Almost 60% of millennials said social media has had the most growth, while 31% of baby boomers and 21% of Gen Xers said the same. Growth in website use had less variability, a range of 42% to 54%, across the generations. (See Figure 5.)

"The use and growth of these digital channels for engagement isn't a big surprise to me," Teeters said. "We've certainly seen that in the applications that we sell — the growth of people using websites or dedicated mobile applications — and certainly third-party social media solutions. I think all of that is obviously not just something we see in the public sector but broadly across all different kinds of industries, and the fact that now those digital engagement channels are becoming first-in-line solutions doesn't really surprise me."

**Figure 4: Looking across those channels, where have you seen the most growth in the past two years? Choose up to two.**



# Priorities:

## Why age groups need to be on the list

Most respondents are confident that they reach members of all the generations they serve today. Asked to rank their confidence on a scale of 1 to 5 (1=not at all confident), more than 70% rank their confidence a 3 or 4, meaning pretty confident. But confidence levels shift based on the respondents' age, our survey found: Sixty percent of millennials ranked their confidence a 4, compared to only 40% of Gen X and only about 32% of baby boomers. (See Figure 8.)

Confidence may be a reflection of how much employees interact with the public, Teeters said. For instance, those who have day-to-day exchanges with the public, either face-to-face or via digital encounters, might feel a higher level of assuredness that they're serving the different age groups.

Some agencies are working to put more emphasis on understanding generational differences.

- Overall, 64% of respondents said that when planning for CX, their agency prioritizes generational differences a little or some.
- Only 21% said they're a major factor
- Almost 15% said they don't factor into CX decisions at all. (See Figure 9.)

Of those who said their agencies prioritize the emphasis somewhat, the biggest group – 41% – were baby boomers, and of those who said “a little,” almost half were Gen X. Millennials were about equal at 25% across the four categories. (See Figure 10.)

Figure 8: **How confident are you that you are reaching members of all generations with your information and/or services? (1=not confident at all, 5=very confident)**

Millennial Gen X Baby Boomer

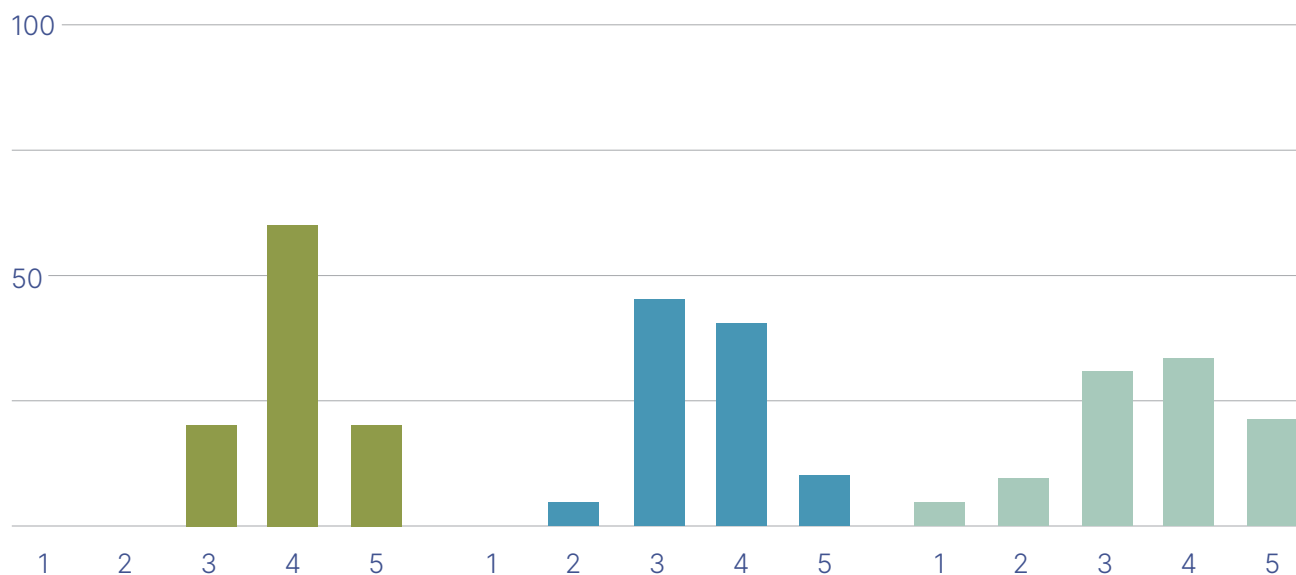
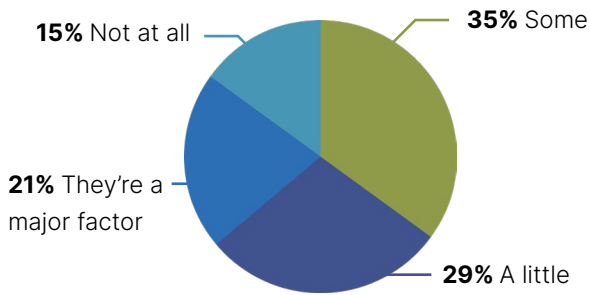


Figure 9: **How much does your agency prioritize generational differences when planning for customer experience?**

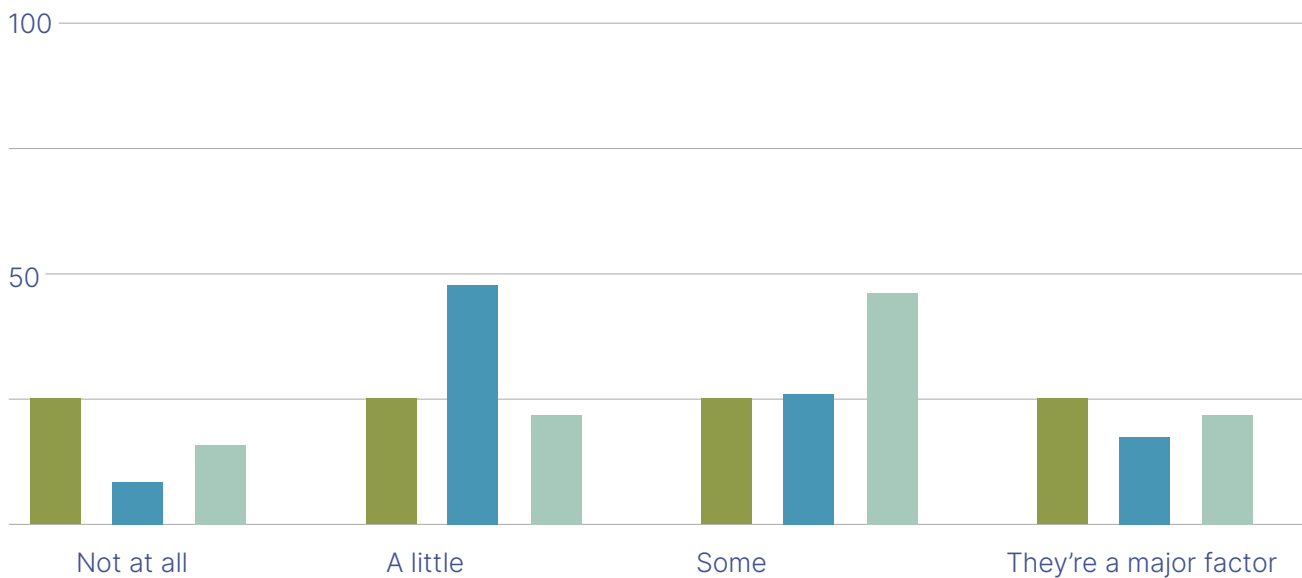


“One thing that really struck me is that there is a high level of acknowledgment across the different age groups that there’s differences, yet a lot of the respondents were obviously saying that their agency wasn’t necessarily doing anything or hadn’t started to prioritize things,” Teeters said. “It seems like there’s a little bit of a disconnect there.”

That might change, he added, especially with a third of the federal workforce eligible to retire within five years and more Gen Zers entering the workplace with their own expectations. Those drivers will likely lead to changes in prioritization.

Figure 10: **How much does your agency prioritize generational differences when planning for customer experience?**

Millennial Gen X Baby Boomer



“The lack of a priority may just be more of a timing issue than anything else,” Teeters said. “I think as we see that silver tsunami grow, there’s going to be more pressure to accommodate and support age groups differently than there might have been in the past. I would assume that they’re going to push to make what they feel is important become bigger priorities.”

Understanding generational differences might not be treated as a priority, but it is important,

respondents said. “Generational differences show up in all aspects of my job,” a respondent wrote. “It is very important to at least consider the generational differences when planning anything.”

Without that consideration, groups may get left out. “We are overcommunicating to millennials/ Gen X and ignoring [the] developmentally disabled, elderly, non-white populations,” a respondent wrote.

The specific opportunities that respondents said they see in understanding generational differences include:

- More meaningful engagement with customers (74%), especially among Gen Xers, 83% of whom cited that;
- Improved constituent service (71%), which was about level across the ages; and
- More engagement with customers overall (63%), particularly among millennials, 75% of whom cited it. (See Figures 11 and 12.)

Respondents saw potential in other areas, too, including a better understanding of where their agency needs to invest, a more informed constituency and a better understanding of staffing needs.

“Understanding those generational differences helps to communicate a message effectively for desired outcomes,” a respondent wrote.

Figure 11: **What are the opportunities you see in understanding generational differences? Choose all that apply.**

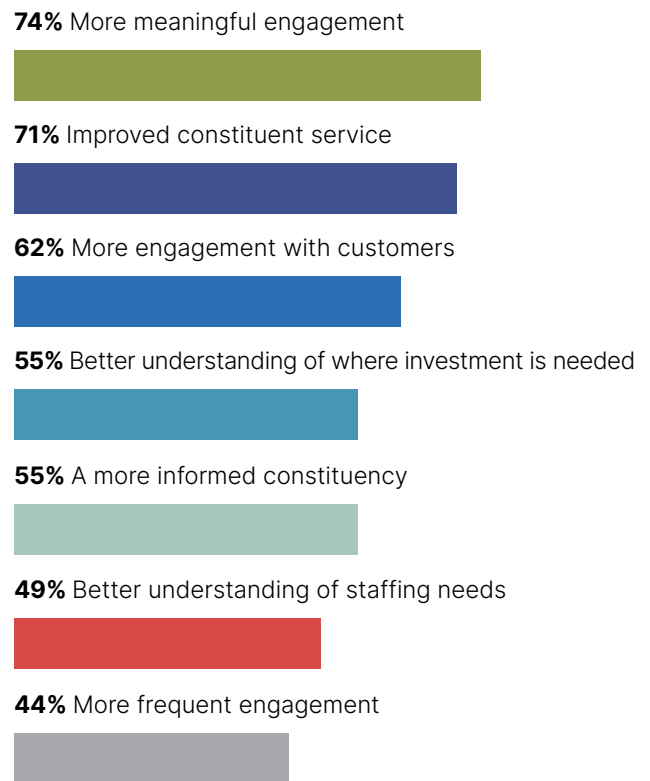
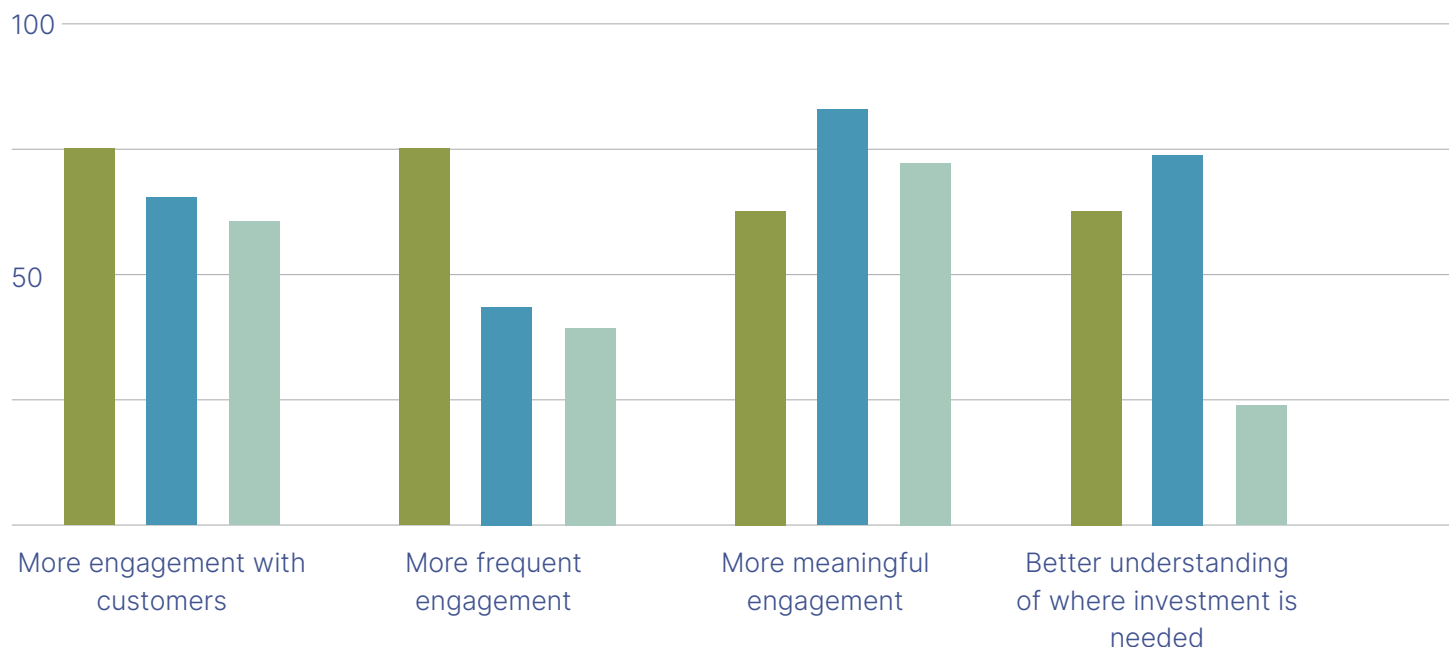


Figure 12: **What are the opportunities you see in understanding generational differences? Choose all that apply.**

Millennial Gen X Baby Boomer



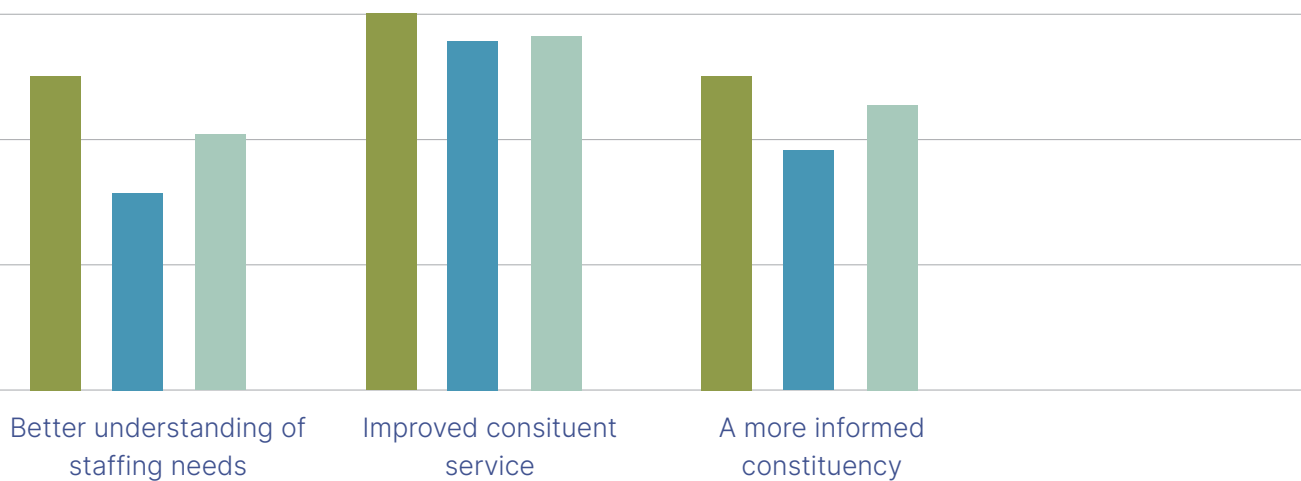
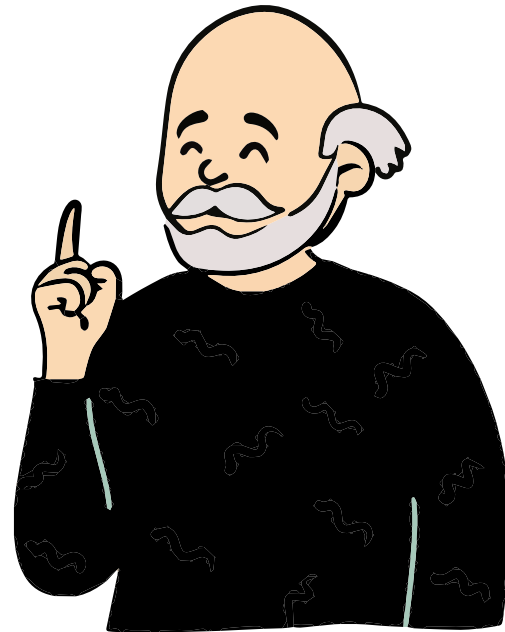


The survey results raise more questions, Teeters said, especially about the feedback around “more frequent” vs. “more meaningful” engagement. For example, a citizen might sign up to get text updates for an application process – submitting an application to an agency to do something. “Is it that they want to get updates as the application moves through the internal process, or do they just want to get an update at the end, when they know it’s been approved?” Teeters said.

He also wonders why Gen Xers indicate that they have a better understanding of staffing needs with less of an opportunity. “Is it because they feel like staffing today is sufficient? Do they think that there’s technology that has helped them leverage the resources they have?” Teeters said.

“Understanding those generational differences helps to communicate a message effectively for desired outcomes...”

- Survey Respondent



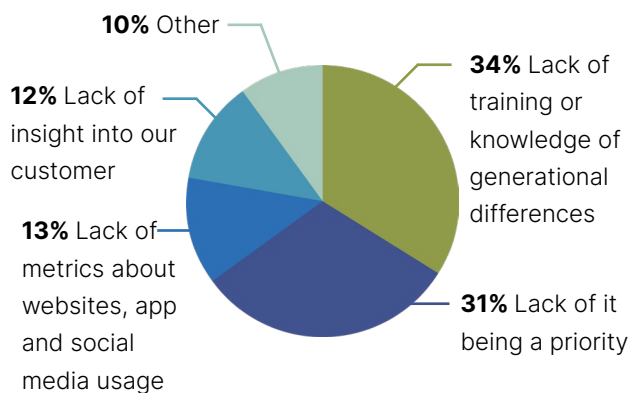
# Spanning Generations:

## How to include everyone

Despite the benefits that respondents see to making decisions based on knowledge about generational differences, gaining that expertise is easier said than done. To get it, government workers first need to overcome several challenges.

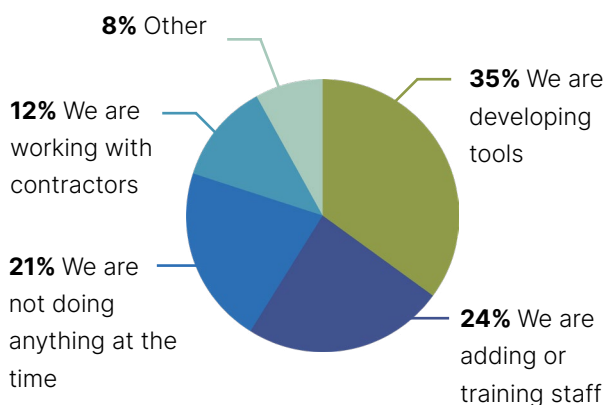
Specifically, 34% percent of respondents cited lack of training or knowledge about generational differences as the biggest barrier to understanding them. Other challenges include a lack of it being a priority (31%); a lack of metrics about constituents' website, app and social media usage (13%); and a lack of insight into the customer (12%). (See Figure 13.)

Figure 13: **What is the biggest barrier to understanding generational differences?**



Many respondents said that efforts to train agency employees about generational differences and service delivery channels are afoot. About 35% said they are developing tools, 24% said they are adding or training staff, and 12% said they are working with contractors. Only 21% said they are not doing any of those right now. (See Figure 14.)

Figure 14: **How are you developing the expertise to support different audiences and channels?**



Of those that are developing such expertise, a quarter said they have partially implemented changes and another quarter said they have started to do so. Only 6% have fully implemented changes. (See Figure 15.)

Asked how their agencies are changing the way they communicate or adopt new technologies based on considerations about generational differences, words such as “mobile,” “reach” and “social media” kept coming up. But in written responses, the dichotomy Teeters saw in knowing what’s important vs. applying it showed up again.

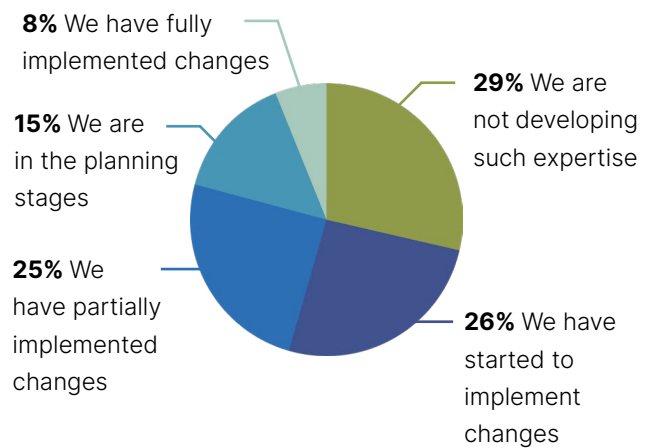
“We have made it easier for younger generations to communicate by developing a web portal for our constituents,” one respondent wrote. “We continue to develop new technologies to reach younger generations and more effectively communicate with them.”

Another is having a very different experience: “I would say that our target audience is heavily weighted to the ‘seasoned citizen.’ We seem to be focused on making it convenient for this population and as a result, continue to carry paper and labor-intensive processes from the prior century forward.”

To encourage a shift to considering generational needs, Teeters recommends a design-thinking approach. “Design-thinking, from a government perspective, would be focusing on what citizens are trying to do, what their goals are and why they’re utilizing government services, looking at ways that we can exploit technology in order to achieve those outcomes for citizens and tempering that with what makes sense in terms of budget or economic viability,” he said.

This puts agencies and workers in a position to identify new, creative and innovative ways to do the things they do today. Benefits of design thinking include encouraging collaboration between junior and senior employees to solve problems and the use of low- or no-code toolsets when they encounter challenges and opportunities.

Figure 15: **If you are developing such expertise, how far along are you in implementation?**



“It really allows them to take their business knowledge or process knowledge and quickly use these tools in order to create technology solutions,” Teeters said. “There are some options now that we might not have had a few years ago – leveraging tech in order to address some of these differences.”

## 4 Steps to Generational Consideration

### 1. Seek User Feedback

Agencies can use a multitude of channels — such as email, social media, text and phone calls — to survey users on how they’re delivering services and how well they’re supporting various age groups’ needs.

### 2. Leverage Existing Solutions

Be creative about using them to enable service delivery and ensure that people can be engaged. COVID-19 has revealed the realm of the possible with IT, and new methods put in place to respond to the pandemic are unlikely to go away when it does.

### 3. Keep Solutions at Hand

Whether they’re in an agency’s back pocket to pull out when funding becomes available or part of a continuity of operations plan, solutions should be within reach. A lesson learned from COVID-19 is that agencies must be ready to support workers and constituents of all ages in multiple formats.

### 4. Create a Roadmap

Once you’ve gotten feedback, reviewed solutions and have some in mind, create a road map and prioritize changes or additions. “There’s lots of different options that agencies can pursue, and so I think it’s going to then be important for them to lay out a road map and prioritize what they’re going to pursue in terms of technology solutions, introducing new channels and new ways to engage in government,” Teeters said.

# Pandemic Push:

## How COVID-19 may spur age awareness

Most government workers agree that the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the use of IT to provide public services. When thousands of employees shifted from onsite to online work in March 2020, IT managers quickly made sure they and the public could still access the information and systems they needed. In fact, reports estimate that three-quarters of federal workers are still remote, and some agencies have signaled that they are considering making telework a staple of their workforces.

Survey responses support this trend:

- “It was born out of necessity when we closed our doors in March and have yet to reopen them. We became a virtual organization overnight.”
- “All programming has become virtual. Social media use as a primary form of communication has grown.”
- “We have had to switch to virtual meeting, mobile devices and email as the primary means of communication. Working remotely is becoming more of the norm.”

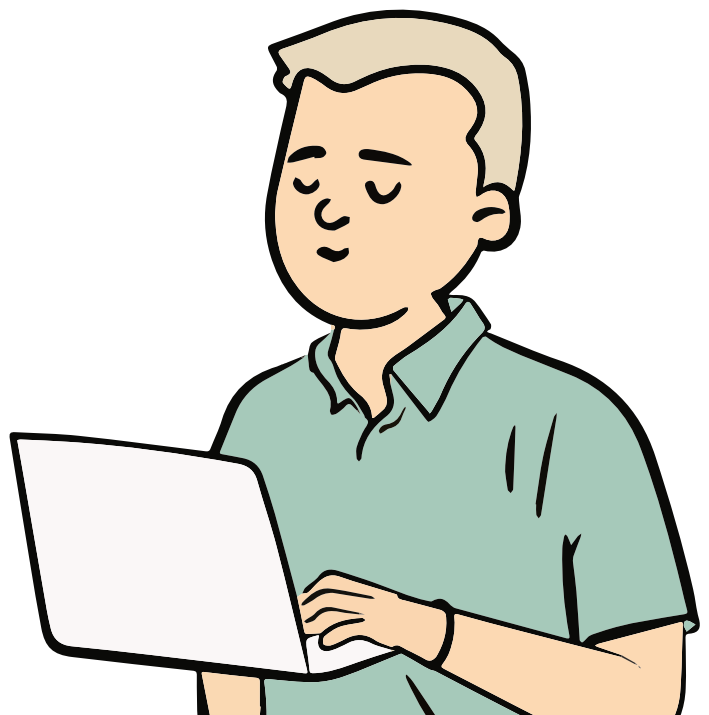
“If there’s a silver lining here with the pandemic, I think it’s encouraging us to be creative on how we’re able to work around constraints or limitations that have come about due to it”

- **Mike Teeters**, Manager of Corporate Product Development at Tyler Technologies

Those responses reflect one possible silver lining of the pandemic, Teeters said: People have gotten creative in working around various constraints and limitations that they have bumped up against.

“Where in the past you might have seen a slower adoption or a slower rollout of some of these new technologies – for example, mobile applications – I do think with the pandemic and COVID-19, we’ve really started to see some of that accelerate,” he said. “If we had people that were maybe a little reticent to try to use some of these new technology or digital alternatives, the reality is, in a way, they’re being driven to start considering that in large part because it really is, in many cases, one of the only viable alternatives.”

Getting out their crystal balls, 53% of all respondents – particularly baby boomers (59%) – said they expect to see the most growth in the next two years in mobile app usage. Only four respondents expect to see in-person visits grow.



# How Tyler Technologies Helps

Tyler provides integrated software and technology services to the public sector. Its end-to-end solutions empower local, state, tribal and federal government entities to operate more efficiently and connect more transparently with their constituents and with one another. By connecting data and processes across disparate systems, Tyler's solutions transform how clients gain actionable insights that solve problems in their communities.

To be effective, such strategies must reflect the generational differences among constituents that shape how they seek information, services and engagement. Tyler works with agencies to develop multi-channel models that address the whole community.

The through line of technology is what will drive more engagement in ways that are comfortable,

easy, and effective for each generation, particularly in the two facets to engagement: transparency and participation.

Open data solutions facilitate transparency and open the door to meaningful engagement through data analytics. Public-facing engagement tools allow citizens to make payments, report issues, respond to surveys, and more, in a customizable mobile experience. These digital service tools are best run in the cloud, which enhances security while providing real-time access to government data.

Tyler is collaborating with Amazon Web Services (AWS) to deliver cloud services in a way that helps public sector clients deliver better services and experiences to their communities, helping them to become fully connected.

## Conclusion

Agency employees at all levels of government are keenly aware of the broad importance of improving CX, but specifically using generational differences and preferences to do it requires more exploration, our survey shows.

Understanding those nuances can help government organizations more effectively and efficiently reach the right audience, the survey shows, but so far, training and tools to learn about them have not been a major priority. The pandemic, with its acceleration of digital services, could be the impetus agencies need to pay closer attention to the age groups they serve, as could a workforce turnover as senior workers retire and tech-savvy employees sign on.

Governments can maximize service delivery, enhance public participation, and foster partnerships necessary for tomorrow's solutions only by reaching, serving, and engaging citizens in ways that work across generations. Bridging the gap between expectations and reality across generations with modern technology improves service and contributes to more vibrant, successful communities.

Learn how governments can reach, serve, and engage generations from Gen Z to Boomers in Tyler's latest white paper, **Creating Full Community Connections.**



## About Tyler Technologies

Tyler Technologies provides integrated software and technology services to the public sector. Tyler's end-to-end solutions empower local, state, and federal government entities to operate more efficiently and connect more transparently with their constituents and with each other. With a strategic collaborative agreement with Amazon Web Services (AWS) for cloud services, Tyler connects data and processes across disparate systems, and transforms how clients gain actionable insights that solve problems in their communities. Tyler has more than 26,000 successful installations across more than 10,000 sites, with clients in all 50 states, Canada, the Caribbean, Australia, and other international locations. More information about Tyler Technologies can be found at [tylertech.com](http://tylertech.com).



## About GovLoop

GovLoop's mission is to inspire public sector professionals by serving as the knowledge network for government. GovLoop connects more than 300,000 members, fostering cross-government collaboration, solving common problems and advancing government careers. GovLoop is headquartered in Washington, D.C., with a team of dedicated professionals who share a commitment to the public sector.

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