
Team Up With Automation for a Better Citizen Experience

RESEARCH BRIEF



Executive Summary

Chatbots, voice assistance, artificial intelligence (AI) and other automation technologies have been deployed widely and rapidly in the private sector. As a result, people are growing accustomed to the efficiency automation provides and raising their expectations about service quality from the public sector as a result.

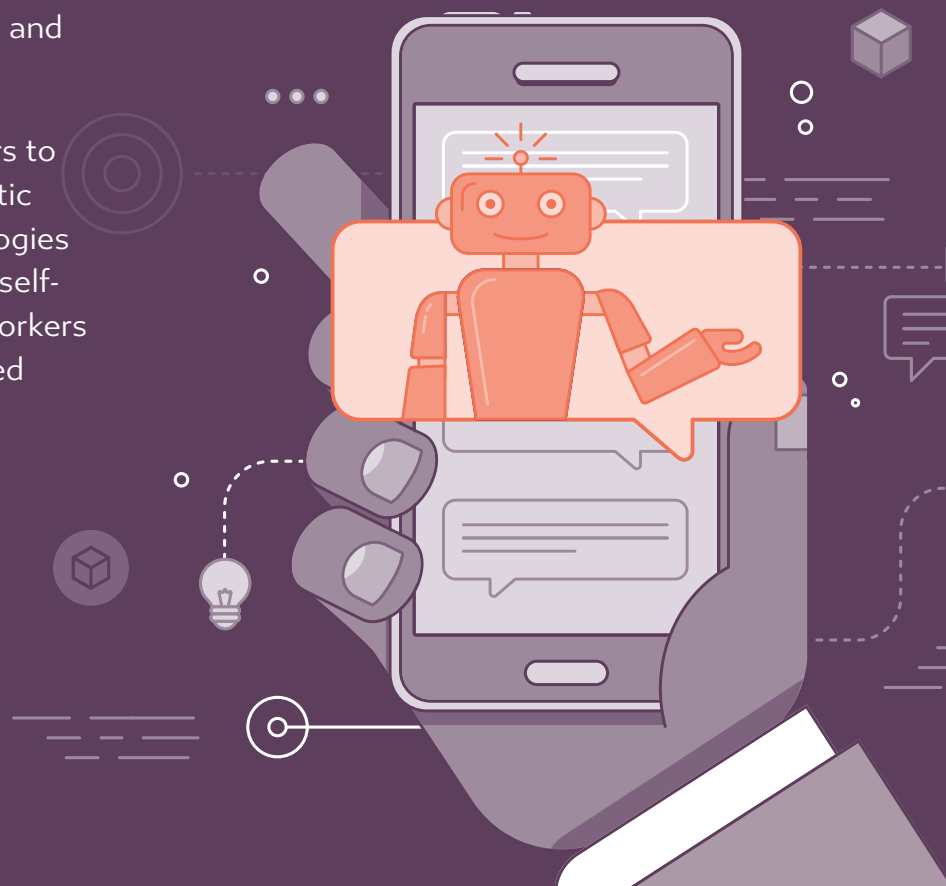
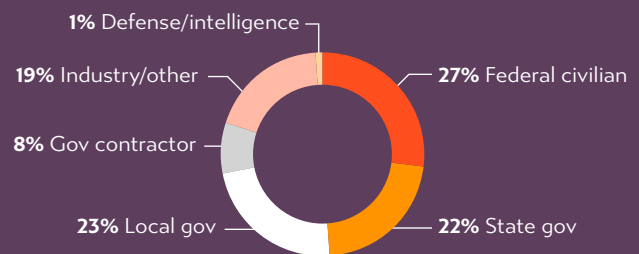
Yet many government agencies have been slow to adopt automation, frustrating the public and employees alike. In response to increasing demand and dwindling resources, agencies can struggle to deliver services without automation's time- and labor-saving benefits.

To learn more about current trends and challenges in adopting automation technologies, GovLoop partnered with Genesys to survey 120 federal, state and local government professionals with knowledge of citizen experience (CX) and automation technologies.

Responses reveal that, despite barriers to implementation, agencies are optimistic about the potential for these technologies to enhance CX by allowing people to self-service while freeing overburdened workers to focus on issues requiring specialized knowledge.

To identify strategies government agencies can use to get started with automation, GovLoop interviewed Tim Friebe, Innovation Sales Lead for Service Automation at Genesys. Genesys delivers CX platforms to more than 11,000 public and private organizations using cloud-based solutions that provide personalization at scale.

Our survey respondents work for...



Government Interest in Automation Technologies

When this report refers to automation technologies, the term encompasses a range of tools that allow process performance with minimal human involvement. These can be physical or digital tools, including AI, virtual agents such as text-based chatbots and voice assistants, customer self-service solutions, and robotic process automation (RPA).

GovLoop's survey results show a distinct interest in automation technologies at government agencies. Respondents are most interested in public-facing applications that help people resolve issues on their own. Nearly half — 47% — are already exploring ways to use automation to give people a way to self-service (Figure 1). Two-thirds are already using, working on or open to some type of virtual agent to help people navigate their way around agency channels (Figure 2). Respondents are generally less interested or not aware of their agency using automation to take over repetitive back-office tasks, with just 28% on board with the idea (Figure 3).

For agencies on the fence about these technologies, Friebel recommended a way to get started:

"It's important to demystify automation. Although we're talking about heady technologies, agencies are still solving the same problems as ever. How do we **support agents** to be more efficient? How do we make the **citizen experience** better? How do we more effectively **achieve our mission**? Then it's a matter of figuring out how these technologies can help."

Figure 1: Is your agency looking to automation processes that allow citizens to self-service?

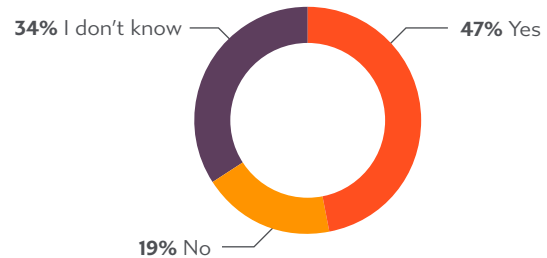


Figure 2: Is your agency already using or considering implementing virtual agents (ex. voice or chat) to help guide citizens through your channels?

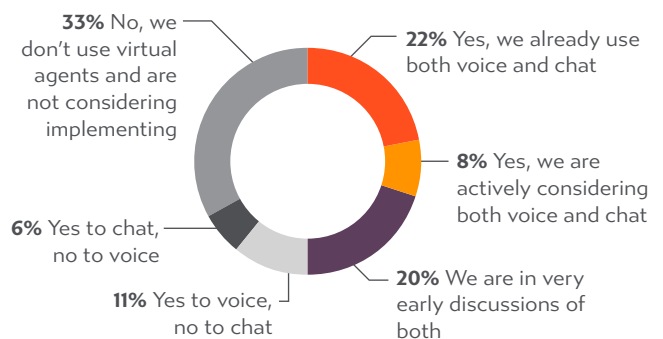
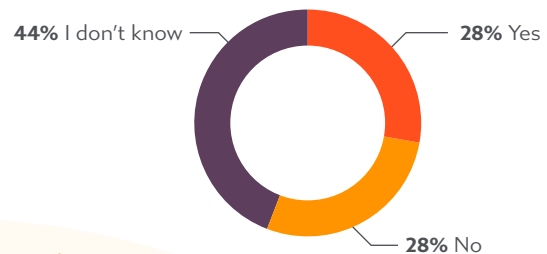


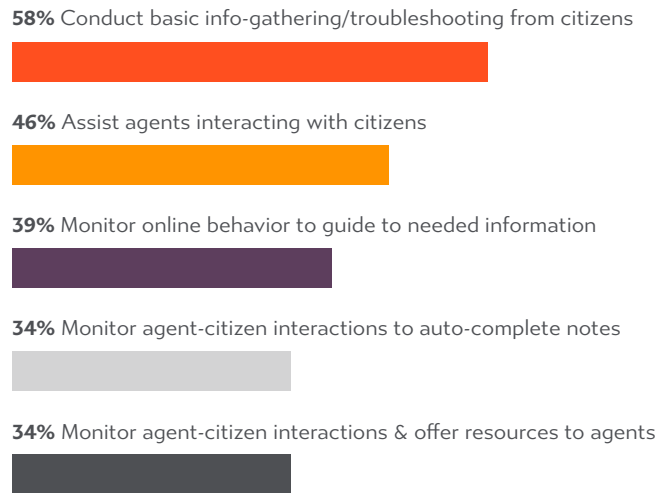
Figure 3: Is your agency looking to automate back-office processes (ex. using RPA to automate repetitive tasks)?



In light of this strategic value in establishing use cases, we asked respondents how virtual agents could provide value at their agency. They pointed to two use cases over others. Primarily, they would like to have virtual agents conduct basic information gathering or troubleshooting before sending people to a human agent for resolution. Secondly, respondents envision using virtual agents to assist human agents as they interact with the public (Figure 4).

There are many ways automation can be integrated into agency channels to transform the quality of people’s experiences with government. But are agencies ready to put these ideas into action?

Figure 4: Which of the following virtual agent use cases would be helpful to your agency? Check all that apply.



The Potential to Enhance the Citizen Experience With Automation

The citizen experience is the government equivalent of the private sector’s customer experience. It is a person’s perceptions of the quality and value of all their interactions with a government agency. CX happens not just at the level of a service or program, but with each agency and across government itself. Improving CX is about meeting public needs with minimal frustration and maximum efficiency.

Our survey reflects the importance of creating a better CX. The good news is that 89% percent of respondents said improving CX is on their agency’s priority list (Figure 5).

Although most agree that improving CX is needed, we wanted to understand whether they see a role for automation technology in that endeavor. According to the survey results, 48% of respondents believe the technology can help human agents deliver better CX (Figure 6).

At state agencies, the confidence in these tools is considerably higher, with 67% saying they see automation’s potential, compared to 44% at the local level and 40% at the federal level.

Figure 5: Is improving the citizen experience a priority at your agency?

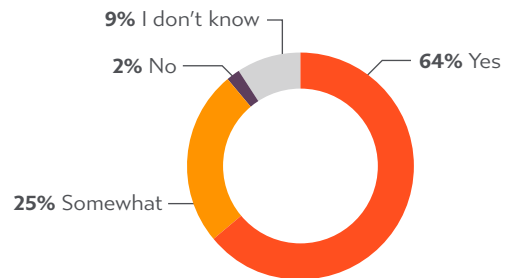
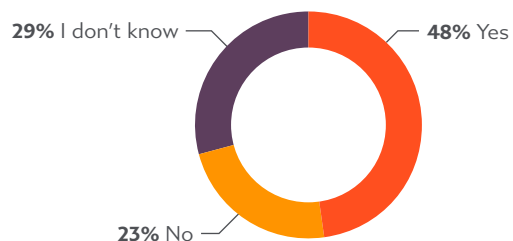


Figure 6: Do you believe that AI and virtual agents can help human agents deliver a better citizen experience?



The survey insight about state agencies being especially favorable toward automation aligns with what others have observed. The National Association of State Chief Information Officers' (NASCIO) [2019 State CIO Survey](#) found that 65% of CIOs view AI/RPA as the most impactful emerging technology in the next three to five years. It was the top choice by a wide margin.

Friebel had advice for those trying to advocate for automation at their agency. "Most decisions are driven by resources and where to allocate them," he said. "You have to find areas where automation can free up time and money while improving citizen experience. That business case is the first lever to pull."

At the federal level, a mandate for automation exists. The 2018 [President's Management Agenda](#) set a cross-agency goal to "shift time, effort, and funding currently spent performing repetitive administrative tasks ... toward accomplishing mission outcomes," and specifically pointed to automation technologies as one way to achieve that goal. The White House also issued an [executive order](#) in 2019 to "promote and protect national AI technology and innovation," including in government services.

State and local governments often don't have a single overarching standard or mandate to adopt automation and AI solutions. However, momentum for them is growing. Some have launched initiatives to evaluate and make recommendations about agencies' use of these technologies and their regulation. These include:

- Vermont's [Artificial Intelligence Task Force](#)
- Washington state's [Future of Work Task Force](#)
- New York City's [Automated Decision Systems Task Force](#)
- Alabama's [Commission on AI and Associated Technologies](#).

There is also a [Massachusetts bill](#) that would establish a state commission to review the government's use of automation.

It's clear many agencies see the potential for automation to positively affect CX and those that don't may soon be compelled by policy to pilot these technologies.

Automation as a Means to Free Staff Time

During difficult times, government agencies can face hiring freezes and furloughs. During the best of times, agencies can have trouble filling their most important public-facing jobs, leaving many critical departments short-staffed. These conditions can cause service issues that diminish CX.

Even while experiencing staffing constraints or operational pressures, government still needs to serve the public. Leaders naturally look for ways to do more with less. Understandably, time and how agency staff spends it were dominant themes in our survey answers. When asked about the key to improving citizen services, 63% of respondents chose "reducing the time it takes to deliver information or services" (Figure 7), far more than any other option.

Figure 7: What does your agency see as key to improving citizen services?

63% Reducing the time it takes to deliver info or services



36% Better managing interactions across different channels



36% Providing more consistent quality of info and services



33% Providing more self-service options to citizens



26% Routing queries to the right department more efficiently



It's no surprise then that respondents were the most interested in the potential for automation to free up time. At the top (61%) of ideal benefits from an employee perspective was wanting to use the technologies to redirect staff time toward more complex services or problems. Roughly half — 49% — would like to reduce the time agents spend on services and problems, so they're able to field more calls (Figure 8).

A [2017 analysis](#) by the Deloitte Center for Government Insights estimated that AI could free up to 30% of workforce time in the public sector within five to seven years, depending on the investment agencies put into these technologies.

Automation can help agencies respond to staffing shortages and service surges while improving CX in several ways. Friebel highlighted three particular benefits of automation. He said it could:

- Give employees **time to focus** on the more complex calls that should be their priority by automating repetitive tasks before a call reaches employees.
- **Shorten the training cycle** and get new hires to work faster by training contact center agents in real time.
- Help staff quickly **get up to speed** to skillfully handle new, unexpected service scenarios.

Assistance, Not Replacement

As much as they see benefits in adopting automation, our survey shows that 43% of respondents are concerned that as these technologies free up time, they could lead to job loss (Figure 9). It is the community's top concern.

In the [2020 Global Human Capital Trends report](#), Erica Volini, Deloitte's U.S. Human Capital Leader, explained that automation does not need to replace humans. "Moving from a substitution mindset toward augmentation and collaboration will require reinvention at multiple levels, both by workers and by organizations," she said.

This is not to say that automation will leave the government workforce unaltered. Researchers predict automation in state and local workforces may [impede the public sector's progress](#) toward

diversity and equity. In a 2019 report, the Partnership for Public Service [estimated that](#) 130,000 federal employees work in occupations AI is likely to directly affect. It's worth noting that the projection is not jobs that could be lost, but rather transformed as responsibilities shift. Like their private-sector counterparts, government agencies will have to prepare employees for the automation-assisted jobs of the future.

In particular, agencies need to think about CX. The survey found that 39% of respondents were concerned that AI would increase the complexity of public interactions.

Figure 8: What are the top 3 benefits you want to achieve by using AI and chatbots to augment agent-driven service?

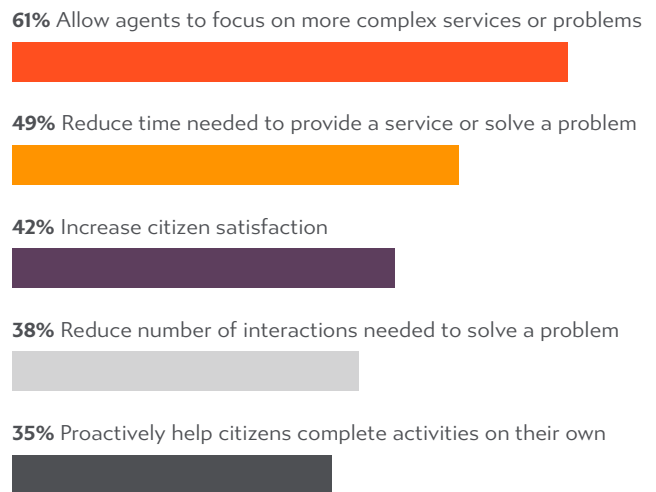
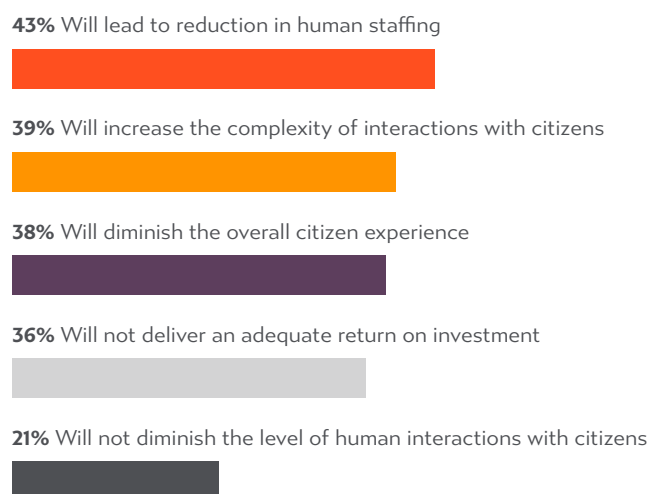


Figure 9: What do you see as the greatest concerns about the increased use of automation?



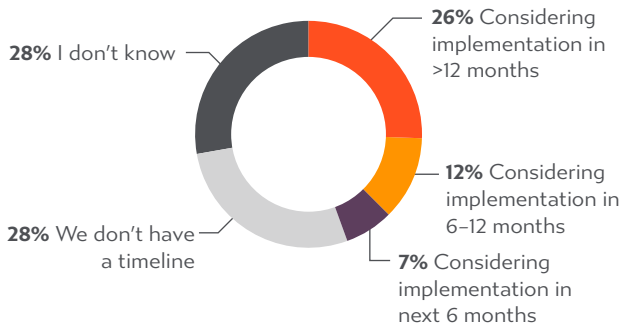
Reducing Barriers to Automation

Respondents reported several barriers to implementing automation technologies. Many project timelines are more than a year long or are simply unknown. Additionally, competing priorities, security concerns and scarce funding are holding back automation projects at government agencies. This section will look at opportunities to get past these obstacles.

Onerous timelines

Timeline troubles often mean a project scope is ill-defined or organizational silos inhibit effective execution. In GovLoop's survey, 56% of respondents said they don't have or don't know a timeline for launching virtual agents. Only 19% said they're considering kicking off virtual agents within the next year (Figure 10).

Figure 10: If your agency is considering implementing virtual agents, what is your timeline?



"Long or undefined timelines are a sign you've probably bitten off more than you can chew," Friebel said. "A cross-department or interagency team with representation from the different groups involved can be more agile when given the responsibility for optimizing the overall citizen experience and the leeway to build success incrementally."

The federal government has begun to embrace a collaborative approach. The General Services Administration (GSA) runs communities of practice for both [AI](#) and [RPA](#) to coordinate the use of these technologies across federal agencies.

For those that have not moved forward with virtual agents, three top reasons emerged for why these technologies haven't taken hold: competing priorities, security concerns and funding (Figure 11).

Figure 11: What is the primary reason your agency has not moved forward yet?

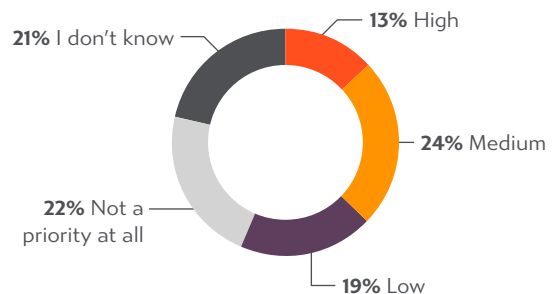


Let's examine those reasons in the context of how agencies can overcome these potential barriers to automation.

Competing priorities

Government agencies' belief in the value of automation for improving CX doesn't necessarily translate to what they prioritize. Not only were competing priorities the top reason agencies haven't moved forward with automation, but 37% of respondents said AI was a high or medium priority compared to other IT initiatives. The majority — 62% — said AI was a low priority, wasn't a priority or they didn't know if it was a priority (Figure 12).

Figure 12: How would you rate the priority of AI for customer/employee experience initiatives in comparison to other IT initiatives at your agency?



Friebel put how to get past competing priorities into sharp focus. "It all comes down to the mission. Look for tangible, specific ways to show how the business case for automation aligns with your mission," he said. "If you can pinpoint a way for automation solutions to improve the citizen experience by delivering mission-critical services more efficiently and effectively, then it is more likely to become a priority."

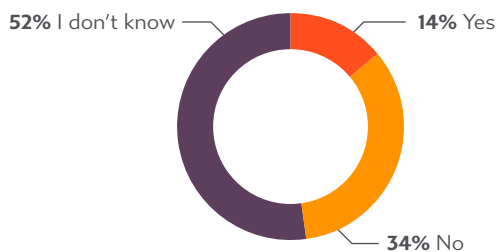
Security concerns

Government's use of any new technology raises rightful concerns about security. The United States [lacks a unified privacy protection framework](#), and about [half of Americans](#) don't trust the government to protect their data. As agencies put automation plans in place, they must be vigilant about data protection and privacy because without confidence in the security of government systems, CX suffers.

"Fortunately, concerns about automation product security are quickly changing as more standards are put in place," Friebel said. "Security is starting to become a box agencies are able to check off instead of a hurdle they can't cross."

An initiative that has gone a long way to improve matters is GSA's [Federal Risk and Authorization Management Program \(FedRAMP\)](#), which verifies the security practices of cloud service providers. Choosing automation products authorized by FedRAMP gives agencies a standard level of security assurance. FedRAMP is mandated for federal agencies, but state and local governments [may also use it](#).

Figure 13: Does your agency have funding for AI and virtual agents?



Scarce funding

In times of tranquility and crisis, people want the government to spend their tax dollars wisely. Quite reasonably, funding, or rather the lack thereof, was an area of concern for many survey respondents.

When we dug into the answers to this question, we found a striking divergence at the federal, state and local levels. Although 22% of federal agencies said funding exists, just 9% of state and 4% of local agencies were able to say money is available. Moreover, 26% of state and 58% of local agencies told us they have no budget for these projects, significantly more than the 15% of federal agencies who said the same (Figures 13a-c).

If money doesn't exist, agencies still have options, Friebel said. "Experiment with an open source product to gather evidence that a use case is compelling. Or, crunch the numbers on where automation can reduce other cost centers. For instance, using automation to reduce training time may provide an encouraging return on investment," he said.

Figure 13a: Federal

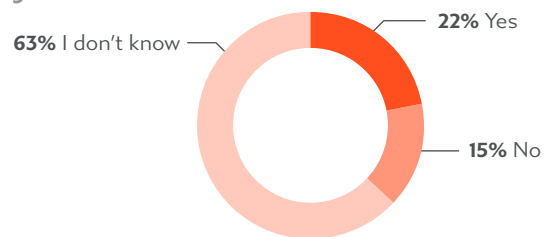


Figure 13b: State

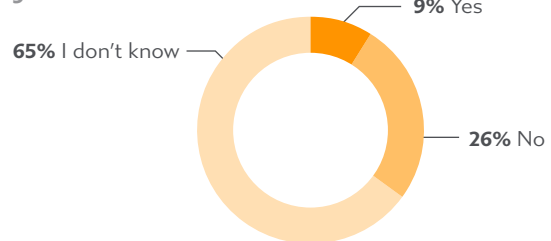
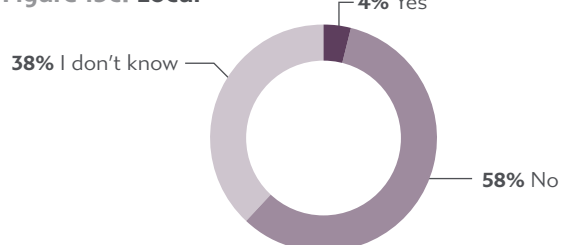
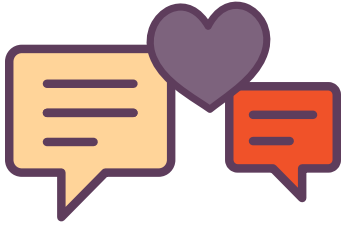


Figure 13c: Local



The Starting Point

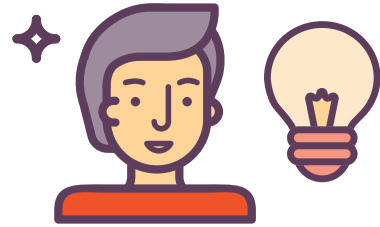
When you start thinking about how to use AI to improve CX, don't focus on AI. Focus on the workforce. You should approach automation as part of an omnichannel workforce planning strategy that should address three key objectives:



Improving overall CX by ensuring that customer interactions and tasks are going to the right resource and guaranteeing schedule adherence across all channels and work.



Lowering costs by planning, forecasting and scheduling your workforce more accurately, and by improving workload predictions and backlog handling.



Reducing employee turnover through improved agent satisfaction by enabling and engaging your staff and ensuring that the right person has the right work at the right time.

Read more [here](#).

How Genesys Helps

Genesys provides government agencies with hands-on support through every step of implementing automation technologies and modernizing the citizen engagement journey.

Genesys's cloud contact center, the [MAXIMUS Genesys Engagement Platform](#), is FedRAMP-authorized and designed with government in mind. Agencies can be confident their automation-enhanced CX meets federal privacy and security standards.

By partnering with Genesys, agencies can customize their citizen journey using the right combination of technologies at the appropriate scale to meet their specific needs. Solutions include call center software, email, chat and messaging. Chatbots and voice assistants can provide self-service options so the public can easily engage with the government whenever they need it most.

Conclusion

Automation technologies are poised to transform how government agencies provide services to the public. In addition to enhancing CX by meeting and potentially exceeding expectations, these technologies can reduce repetitive tasks for staff, making government jobs more rewarding.

Implementing automation technologies might be daunting, but the potential benefits are well worth the effort. By following strategies identified in this report, government agencies can realize a meaningful return on investment.

With the right automation technology, government agencies can worry less about how to meet increasing demands despite staff and budget constraints, and focus more resources on helping the public get everything they need from their government.



About Genesys

Genesys® powers 25 billion of the world's best customer experiences each year. Our success comes from connecting employee and customer conversations on any channel, every day. Over 10,000 companies in 100+ countries trust our #1 customer experience platform to drive great business outcomes and create lasting relationships. Combining the best of technology and human ingenuity, we build solutions that mirror natural communication and work the way you think. Our industry-leading solutions foster true omnichannel engagement, performing equally well across all channels, on-premise and in the cloud. Experience communication as it should be: fluid, instinctive and profoundly empowering.



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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