



# GOVERNMENT FOR THE PEOPLE

SERVING THE PUBLIC IN A NEW WORLD

OCTOBER 2020



PARTNERSHIP FOR PUBLIC SERVICE

**accenture**

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- Conducting outreach to college campuses and job seekers to promote public service.
- Identifying and celebrating government's successes so they can be replicated across government.
- Advocating for needed legislative and regulatory reforms to strengthen the civil service.
- Generating research on, and effective responses to, the workforce challenges facing our federal government.
- Enhancing public understanding of the valuable work civil servants perform.

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# Government for the People

## Serving the Public in a New World

Federal leaders are striving to transform the customer experience with government services. They recognize that a laser-like focus on customers can help their agencies meet rising expectations and accomplish their missions. Research also shows that meeting customer expectations can improve trust in government<sup>1</sup>, which now stands near an all-time low (see Figure 1).

The importance of providing a good experience is reaching new heights as the public continues to rely on vital government services during the coronavirus pandemic, and agencies have had to drastically reshape how they deliver those services.

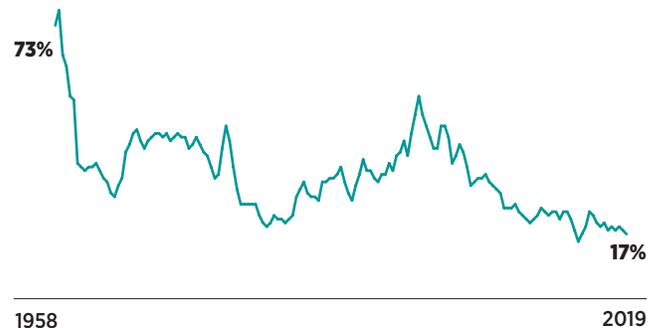
The pandemic changed how people interact with one another, shifted their expectations about what they can accomplish from home and altered the nature of work. The federal government is adapting accordingly. Whether agencies are delivering health care services for veterans, processing tax refunds or answering questions about Medicare benefits, one thing is clear: The old ways will not work anymore.

Federal agencies that deliver services to millions of people each year face enormous challenges during the pandemic. The coronavirus shuttered federal field offices, disrupted contact center operations, overwhelmed some online systems serving the public and moved many federal employees to full-time telework. Even as government offices began to reopen, they needed to rethink their operations to create a safer environment.

These changes are happening against a backdrop of two important trends: increasing demand for government's services and growing expectations related to the quality of those services. Many federal agencies were straining to meet increased demand before the pandemic, which required them to try new approaches to extend limited resources (see Figure 2). When the coronavirus struck, the additional challenge meant expanding or accelerating their efforts.

Expectations for government services continue to rise as innovations in other sectors provide people with modern, simple, intuitive interactions. In one survey, 85% of respondents said they expect government to meet or exceed commercial service standards.<sup>2</sup> Government

Figure 1: Public trust in government near historic lows



Source: [Pew Research Center](#)

### Features of this year's "Government for the People" report

- Added three new federal services
- Highlighted progress made on improving customer experience and ongoing challenges
- Updated customer experience data and identified new insights
- Conducted new assessments of the user experience with agency webpages, and how agencies interact with customers on social media
- Enhanced interactive digital features for each service profile

1 The Global Case for Customer Experience in Government. McKinsey and Company, 2019.

2 Accenture Public Service Citizen Pulse Survey. Accenture, 2016.

services that fail to meet these expectations further erode much needed trust and confidence in government.

Though the pandemic generated a shock to government, it only highlights the need for greater agility when engaging with the public. For government to meet current challenges and long-standing requirements, it needs to shift its service delivery approach in three ways. As the government defines its top management priorities going forward, these three service delivery principles offer a framework for advancing customer experience improvements and building on recent progress.

1. Agencies must understand and address customers’ changing needs far more quickly than they have in the past.
2. Employees must be able to deliver services from anywhere, to anywhere.
3. Agencies need to offer digital self-service options for more complex interactions, not just for simple transactions.

In our second annual “Government for the People” report, the Partnership for Public Service and Accenture Federal Services take an in-depth look at 11 key services the federal government delivers directly to the public, and have added three new services from last year’s report. We also reassessed the original eight services to see how they have progressed in their customer experience efforts, both before and after the coronavirus struck. Though the pandemic started in the latter part of our research effort, the challenges and innovations we identified highlight enduring customer experience needs.

For our research, we interviewed more than 40 leaders who oversee federal services and examined customer feedback data the government publishes. We also analyzed how easy it is to understand and navigate selected agency webpages, and reviewed actions agencies are taking to prioritize customer needs. In addition, we interviewed caseworkers from congressional offices who help constituents navigate federal services. Our work was informed by input from a quarterly customer experience roundtable we host with more than a dozen agencies, as well as by leading commercial practices.

**Figure 2:** Increasing use of key federal services (Fiscal 2009–Fiscal 2019)

| Service                                     | Percent Increase |
|---|------------------|
| People enrolled in Medicare                 | 35.3%            |
| U.S. passport applications                  | 32.3%            |
| Passengers and crew members screened by TSA | 27.6%*           |
| Patients under VA medical care              | 22%              |
| Beneficiaries of SSA programs               | 19.9%            |
| National park visits                        | 14.7%            |
| Tax returns processed by the IRS            | 7.0%             |

\*since 2012

**A Look Back: Key findings from the 2019 “Government for the People” report**

- **Misperceptions about government services:** The notion of the federal government as a poor provider of customer service does not tell the whole story. Many people who interact with federal agencies give their experiences high ratings.
- **Professional, knowledgeable and helpful staff:** Interactions with frontline staff are often the highest-rated part of the customer experience, agency surveys show.
- **Inconsistent experiences across federal websites:** People find clear, user-friendly information and easy access to digital services on some websites but struggle to get what they need on others.
- **Limited data and accountability:** An outdated law called the Paperwork Reduction Act hinders agencies from collecting feedback and making customer survey results public.
- **Harm from government shutdown:** The five-week government shutdown that began in mid-December 2018 hurt the public, causing delays in IRS services, long lines at TSA checkpoints, backlogs in Global Entry applications for travelers, and restricted access to national parks.

## Key Findings and Recommendations

### **The old ways won't work anymore.**

Faced with the challenge of delivering services during an unprecedented crisis, many agencies quickly adopted new strategies to meet changing customer needs. These enhancements should be embraced as the new normal for how government works, not just something it does during a crisis.

### **Three service delivery principles can help agencies improve customer experience during the pandemic and beyond.**

- Quickly understand changing customer needs and pivot accordingly.
- Empower employees to deliver services to anywhere, from anywhere.
- Accelerate self-service capabilities.

### **We found that the government made progress since last year in addressing feedback and improving the customer experience. Yet some practices that would help agencies meet customer needs should be adopted more widely, including:**

- Setting key performance measures based on customer feedback.
- Assigning a senior executive to lead on customer experience.
- Collecting, analyzing and sharing customer feedback publicly.
- Providing support and answering questions on social media.
- Focusing on the experience of people who help others navigate federal services.
- Managing customer experience as an enterprise-wide effort.

### **Customer experience should remain a centerpiece of the President's Management Agenda, using the following government-wide strategies to improve services.**

- Set an ambitious, government-wide goal to improve customer trust in government.
- Create a centralized team to manage customer experience efforts with a government-wide perspective.
- Establish a standardized position description for customer experience strategists in government.

# Overview of 11 Federal Services

This report examines customers' experiences with 11 federal services that are among those with the highest volume of direct contact with the public. Data below is for fiscal 2019.



## **Airport security screening and passenger support services**

Transportation Security Administration

*Screened more than 813 million passengers and crew members*



## **Medicare customer support services**

Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services

*64 million people enrolled in Medicare as of June 2020*



## **Citizenship and immigration applicant services**

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

*Processed more than 7.6 million applications and petitions for citizenship, permanent residence and other immigration benefits*



## **Passport services**

Bureau of Consular Affairs

*Issued more than 20 million passports*



## **Customs security and screening services**

Customs and Border Protection

*Screened more than 410 million people entering the United States*



## **NEW THIS YEAR**

## **Recreation reservations for federal lands**

Recreation.gov—a multiagency initiative

*Processed more than 4 million recreation reservations*



## **NEW THIS YEAR**

## **Farm loan and conservation services**

Department of Agriculture

*Delivered more than 32,000 farm loans and developed more than 98,000 conservation plans, serving more than 500,000 farmers\**

*\*Number of farmers receiving conservation services to date.*



## **NEW THIS YEAR**

## **Veterans education and training benefits**

Veterans Benefits Administration

*Processed 4 million education benefit claims*



## **Federal student aid services**

Office of Federal Student Aid

*Provided more than 10 million students with federal student aid grants, loans or work-study funds*



## **Veterans outpatient health care services**

Veterans Health Administration

*Provided medical and mental health services to more than 7 million veterans*



## **Individual taxpayer services**

Internal Revenue Service

*Processed an estimated 253 million tax returns and supplemental documents*

In choosing which services to assess, we examined available data on how many individuals are served by each of the [25 service providers](#) the Office of Management and Budget identified as having the highest impact on the public. We selected federal agencies and departments that, as a group, provide a diverse set of services.

# A Changing Approach to Delivering Federal Services

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**T**he coronavirus pandemic abruptly changed how customers access and the government provides services, while also radically shifting demand. Agencies had to pivot quickly, and in some cases, they adopted new service delivery strategies to meet changing customer needs. These enhancements, and the processes put in place to execute them quickly, should be embraced as the new normal for how government operates, not just something it does when facing a crisis.

Some agencies are relying more on virtual or, under the new pandemic lexicon, “contactless” services. For example, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and the Veterans Health Administration prioritized increased access to telehealth services.

Other organizations, such as the IRS and the Office of Federal Student Aid, provided support for people who were struggling financially due to the crisis—delivering millions of economic stimulus payments and helping people understand new options around student loan repayments. Other agencies also found ways to help customers keep important tasks moving despite new constraints, as people continued to seek immigration benefits, apply for farm loans, pass through airport security and customs, and reserve campsites on federal lands.

Some federal services adjusted successfully for this new world, with customers facing only limited hiccups. For other services, the challenges mounted and led to backlogs and delays, often because technology constraints and reliance on paper-based processes made shifting to remote work difficult.

Three key service-delivery principles can help agencies adapt to this current world. The coronavirus elevated the importance of these principles—for the current circumstances, but also for long into the future.

## **Principle No. 1**

Quickly understand changing customer needs and pivot accordingly

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Government agencies typically make measured, gradual changes to improve the customer experience. A common approach might involve crafting a customer survey, review by agency leadership, collecting data, analyzing results and developing recommendations. This process is generally slow and deliberate, and often does not yield rapid insights and actions.

The pandemic conditions compel agencies to move far more quickly. To do so, they need systems to capture, share and act on customer feedback in days, not months.

The Department of Veterans Affairs offers a helpful model. Over the past five years, the VA built a robust customer feedback system called VSignals. This system instantly pulls information from many sources into one place, including from surveys, veterans’ social media posts, open-ended comment cards and staff-led interviews and focus groups. When the coronavirus struck, the VA added virus-related tags and keywords into the system for an immediate sense of how veterans were affected, and how the department could help.

Importantly, veterans’ feedback does not stay with frontline and program staff but is systemically shared with the most senior VA leaders, who can help drive change. In the spring of 2020, the staff got calls from veterans getting education assistance who were concerned that, under the existing rules, the VA would reduce their housing allowances as their classes shifted online—and leave many of them unable to both pay rent and continue their studies. Staff members quickly notified VA leaders, who worked with Congress on the issue. Within two weeks, legislation passed that allows the VA to maintain current levels of housing payments during the crisis.

Agencies that rely on multiple avenues of customer feedback enhance their ability to keep a close eye on evolving needs. Comments people leave on social media are a valuable, timely and often underused source of information. The team that manages Recreation.gov uses tools that examine and categorize what customers are saying online and how they feel about the website.

Using these tools, the team found Facebook comments about the challenges people faced when modifying their reservations—information they were able to share quickly with website developers who could address the problems.

## **Principle No. 2**

**Empower employees to deliver services from anywhere, to anywhere**

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The coronavirus pandemic upended the typical ways agencies deliver services. Thousands of service centers across the country had to close or operate at limited capacity. Employees who answer customer calls, process paperwork and design digital services had to move to remote work practically overnight. The good news is how well they overcame these challenges in many cases. The better news is that the difficult situation led agencies to develop new service delivery models that can benefit customers and employees for years to come.

### **Employees serving customers remotely**

In some cases, the pandemic is demonstrating that federal employees can continue to do high-quality work remotely. But equipping employees to serve customers from somewhere other than the office requires addressing both short- and long-term considerations. Short term, the pressing need is to supply staff members with the equipment and technology they need to work remotely.

Some agencies, such as U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, moved several years ago to remote work for contact center representatives. Those early telework investments paid off when the pandemic started, resulting in minimal disruptions for customers, since staff already had laptops, headphones and other equipment to answer calls from home, and software for securely accessing agency systems.

Other offices had less experience with telework, yet still managed to make swift changes. Within weeks of stay-at-home orders, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services transitioned about 2,000 of its Medicare contact center agents (who are government contractors) to full-time telework with minimal impact on customer service. This change might have taken an estimated six to eight months under normal circumstances, according to staff members.

Longer term, more agencies may embrace continued telework as a strategy to reduce costs and offer employees flexibility. Management culture will have to shift to accommodate such changes.

When CMS moved agents to telework, leaders adjusted several management practices, including adapting refresher training for agents as virtual sessions; establishing telework agreements to set clear work expectations; and modifying quality assurance processes so supervisors could continue to provide oversight and feedback to call center agents.

Agencies also need new strategies to enable and encourage collaboration across offices—something that is more difficult in a virtual environment, but essential for delivering a seamless customer experience. Customers typically interact with agencies in numerous ways, including through websites, contact centers and field offices, and each contact point often may be managed by a different team. Several organizations, including TSA and the Office of Federal Student Aid, have established customer experience working groups that strengthen coordination among offices on decisions that affect customers.

### **Expanding or providing new service delivery options**

With field offices and other in-person avenues unavailable, agencies are expanding other options to support customers. To do this successfully, agencies need to adopt new technologies and adjust rules and policies that dictate how staff members deliver services.

The Veterans Health Administration rapidly increased telehealth capabilities for both mental health and medical services so veterans could get treatment without risking exposure to the virus. In late August, staff members were conducting more than 169,000 weekly health care video visits with veterans, a more than 1,000% increase since the crisis began. The VA was well-positioned to ramp up telehealth because of a long-term commitment made by agency leadership—over the past decade, the agency has been expanding the infrastructure for remote health care and secure messaging between veterans and clinicians.

Even before the virus emerged, the department had pushed for changes to laws and regulations to help with its efforts. The VA MISSION Act of 2018, designed to improve VA services, codified the ability of VHA clinicians to provide telehealth services across state lines—a useful provision that became even more essential during the coronavirus.

## **Principle No. 3**

**Accelerate self-service capabilities**

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Despite government's progress in providing more and better online services, many times customers' options remain limited to phone calls, in-person visits or paper forms. Agency concerns about security, customers' ac-

cess to and comfort with online solutions, and technology constraints have limited the development of online services. But the coronavirus provided a push to adopt new digital solutions or scale up existing ones.

Although the Department of Agriculture had moved some parts of the farm loan process online prior to the pandemic, many farmers still drove to a USDA service center to discuss options, fill out paperwork and sign loan applications. The pandemic accelerated USDA's adoption of new digital tools for online file sharing of loan paperwork, electronic signatures and videoconferencing, enabling the staff to work on farm loan applications even if field offices were closed. Farmers are excited about these new digital options and may want to continue using them after the pandemic ends, according to agency staff members.

By contrast, at agencies where digital service options were unavailable, services stalled and backlogs grew. For example, people cannot apply for or renew passports online—only in person or through the mail. And employees cannot process passports remotely since they need to work with sensitive, hard copies of paperwork and print out passport documents. This led to substantial delays in processing—and a backlog of 1.6 million passport applications in June 2020. As of September, this backlog had been greatly reduced as more employees returned to work.

The IRS faced similar challenges in keeping paper-based services moving, creating delays in the processing of paper tax returns and responses to written correspondence from taxpayers. At the same time, the IRS launched new digital capabilities to improve the taxpayer experience, including an application that helps people check the status of their stimulus payments.

Agencies should consider several strategies as they expand self-service capabilities.

### **Design digital services with a “human touch”**

Human-centered design helps agencies deliver personalized, empathetic interactions.

Helping people understand federal student loan and repayment options is a good example. The Office

**Human-centered design** creates products and services around the needs, perspectives and experiences of people. It uses empathy and understanding to meet the needs of users, looking more at the nuances of individuals' behaviors and experiences than opinions. A core component of this approach is learning what customers need using qualitative research methods such as interviews, first-hand observation and focus groups.

of Federal Student Aid employed extensive user testing and research when building a digital tool that helps people explore loan options and understand their repayment commitments under different scenarios. They developed a loan simulator that supports users in a personalized and empathetic way while they make complicated decisions, according to our analysis.

The tool starts by asking users about their goals. One person may want to pay off a student loan as quickly as possible while another person would prefer to have the lowest monthly payments. Users enter personal and financial information, such as family size and income, and how their circumstances might affect their loans, and results are tailored to each individual. The site clearly defines difficult terms, which shows respect for users.

### **Supporting users in going digital**

Creating user-friendly digital services is only part of the battle. As agencies move more services online, they need to consider how they will make people aware of these tools and provide support to those who lack access to technology.

The IRS has focused for years on getting taxpayers to use online services instead of completing tasks in person or by phone, yet customers still called or visited offices to drop off payment checks or perform other tasks they could easily do online. So when customers called or visited, representatives walked them through the process of submitting an online payment. The practice has led to a steady decline in the number of people dropping off checks at taxpayer assistance centers.

Agencies also need to consider how to help people who lack technology or internet access. The VA is tackling this issue with its telehealth services. In 2019, the department launched a pilot program to provide a convenient option for veterans who do not have the technology or bandwidth for a video medical visit. In 10 places around the country, either a Walmart or a veterans service organization is hosting a facility to enable video visits between veterans and clinicians. These sites are often located within a reasonable drive for veterans who otherwise might have had to travel hours to a VA clinic.

Designing mobile-friendly digital services is critical for reaching people who access the internet only through their phone service—in fact, more than half the traffic on government websites is from mobile devices, according to data published on analytics.usa.gov. Yet many government websites are still not optimized for mobile use.

The Office of Federal Student Aid took the potentially daunting process of applying for a student loan by smartphone and made it easy. The customer satisfaction

score for people who apply for student aid on their phones was 88 out of 100, eight points higher than the score for people who apply on their desktops.

Similarly, Recreation.gov created an easy-to-use app for a task that people often do on the go—booking reservations for recreation on federal lands. As of September 2020, the mobile app had earned 4.8 out of 5 stars from among roughly 54,000 users.

### User-friendly, secure authentication

As agencies bring more interactions online, they need a strategy to protect personal information and ensure that people are who they say they are. Verifying identity is essential but often creates barriers for people trying to use digital services.

To minimize this obstacle, agencies should apply the same approaches they use to design digital services—such as user testing and human-centered design—to create a user-friendly login experience. And rather than starting from scratch, agencies should consider adopting tools and services that have proven successful elsewhere in government. For example, the General Services Administration provides Login.gov, a shared service that agencies could consider for their authentication needs.

**Figure 3:** Website experience grades for selected agency webpages  
Click on each link for more details on each review and to see our full methodology.

| Web Pages  | Grade |
|--|-------|
| <a href="#">Farm Loans and Conservation Services</a><br>Farm loan options and help in improving soil   | A     |
| <a href="#">Medicare Customer Support Services</a><br>Covered tests and services, and the process for filing an appeal                                       | A     |
| <a href="#">Passport Services</a><br>Renewing a passport, and how to receive a passport quickly for emergency international travel                           | A     |
| <a href="#">Recreation Reservations</a><br>Finding tent camping sites and other nearby activities and experiences  | A     |
| <a href="#">Veterans' Education Benefits</a><br>Eligibility for benefits, and specific benefits that are available   | A-    |
| <a href="#">Individual Taxpayer Services</a><br>Understanding how much money to withhold from paychecks and timing for tax refunds                           | B+    |
| <a href="#">Federal Student Aid Services</a><br>Estimating eligibility for aid and understanding repayment plans   | B     |
| <a href="#">Citizenship Application and Support Service</a><br>Case processing times and what documents to submit with applications                          | C     |
| <a href="#">Veterans' Outpatient Health Care</a><br>Tests and services covered under VA health care and receiving care outside of the VA                     | C     |
| <a href="#">Airport Screening and Support Services</a><br>Real ID requirements and special procedures for travelers with disabilities and medical conditions | D     |
| <a href="#">Customs Security and Screening Services</a><br>Traveling to the U.S. without a visa, and what items are prohibited or need to be declared        | D     |

For each agency, we reviewed a set of webpages from the perspective of people trying to answer two commonly asked questions. Webpages that performed well had easy-to-scan information that was clearly structured around user needs. Pages that scored poorly were difficult to navigate, had too much information and used language that would be hard for users to understand.

# Looking to the Future: Next Steps for Building a More Customer-Centered Government

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**G**overnment can take ambitious steps to improve service delivery, even as it continues to adjust to the changes brought on by the coronavirus. And regardless of the outcome, the upcoming presidential election will provide an opportunity to accelerate efforts to make government even more customer-focused.

Government should continue to build on the progress it has made to improve the customer experience—a goal that has spanned prior presidential administrations and should continue as a key element of the next President’s Management Agenda. Themes from across the 11 federal services in our report reveal the next steps agencies can take to strengthen government services and better meet customer expectations.

## **Government-wide recommendations**

**Set an ambitious, government-wide goal to improve customer trust.** Government needs a customer experience “moonshot”—a bold target that, if achieved, would demonstrate that agencies can deliver modern services that meet customer expectations. This goal would mobilize leaders across agencies to help improve the historically low levels of trust in government.

The Office of Management and Budget has already directed the providers of the 25 high-impact federal services to use customer surveys to establish and make public a measure on trust. Using these surveys, OMB should require each service provider to establish a baseline measure of trust, which aggregates into a government-wide score, and set a target to increase this score. OMB should then provide support, including funding through the budget process, for each service provider to identify and measure the key drivers of customer trust and implement changes that will help them improve.

**Create a team to manage customer experience with a government-wide perspective.** The federal government will need centralized coordination to reach its customer experience moonshot. Customers often have inconsistent experiences in their interactions across federal agencies, sometimes receiving speedy services and other times experiencing lengthy delays, and government lacks a coordinated approach to manage demand across services, spur collaboration on issues that cross agency lines and disseminate best practices.

The Office of Management and Budget could create a centralized team to manage collaboration on cross-cutting issues, and ensure agencies have the policy guidance and funding they need to succeed. This team

could also spur coordination across agencies—for example, by expanding on the work being done under the customer experience cross-agency priority goal to map and streamline processes people go through that involve services from multiple federal agencies.

**Expand customer experience guidance to apply to more of government’s high-impact services.** In 2018, OMB published guidance for how government’s 25 highest-impact services should manage, measure and report on the customer experience. This guidance would be helpful in directing the efforts of additional government service providers, whether they interact directly with the public or provide internal mission-support services in government. OMB should collaborate with agencies to define an expanded list of the most important services government provides, using data about the volume of those services and their impact on the agencies’ missions. This would help create consistent standards across government for how the customer experience is managed, measured and reported.

**Establish a standardized position description for customer experience strategists in government.** In 2020, OMB and the Office of Personnel Management conducted a pilot project to bring customer experience expertise into government— hiring more than 15 experts through a government-wide approach in which they screened candidates centrally and placed them in agencies. OMB and OPM should expand on this pilot and establish a government-wide job description for customer experience strategists. This would help define what skills are needed for customer experience professionals and make it easier for agencies to hire for these positions.

## **Recommendations for agencies**

**Senior leaders should establish and model customer-centered leadership.** Either through a second-term or new presidential administration, new political leaders will be arriving in government next year. Support and vision from these leaders will be essential for guiding customer experience transformations. Senior leaders need to be knowledgeable about the feedback customers provide and make sure staff members stay focused on the organization's customers, mission and values.

While all senior leaders should be focused on their customers, agencies that interact with the public should designate a single executive who is responsible and accountable for driving customer experience improvements in their organization.

**Use customer insights and data as the foundation for improvements.** Efforts should start with a strong understanding of customers' needs and perceptions, based on research techniques that take advantage of customer input from a variety of sources, such as surveys, interviews, focus groups, direct observation and social media comments. Agencies should use that research to understand the steps customers take when getting services or information, and their experience, including their emotions and behaviors, and what moments or interactions matter most.

While the agencies we reviewed all collect some customer feedback, several do not consistently use techniques and real-time data sources that could give them a deeper understanding of their customers. And many agencies do not yet meet guidance and requirements first published by OMB in 2018 regarding how customer experience should be measured and reported.

**Create a strategy and roadmap for improving the customer experience, tied to the mission and based on research and data.** The strategy should define what a good customer experience looks like for the agency's high-impact services, both for services delivered to the public and internal mission-support services for employees. The strategy should also articulate why improving the experiences of customers will help the agency achieve its broader mission—for example, by making it easier for people to comply with regulations or by increasing use of a vital federal benefit or program.

Agency leaders then need to incorporate that strategy into the organization's DNA. For example, VA leaders modified the department's core values in regulations governing the VA's internal business practices. The regulations now include a customer experience vision of improving the ease and effectiveness of customer interactions and eliciting positive emotions—such as trust in the VA—among veterans.

**Adopt new management practices that can help agencies improve the customer experience.** While agencies have focused on improving individual services and points of contact, some have not adopted management practices to help them incorporate the customer experience into the day-to-day work of their organizations (see Figure 4). Examples of ways agencies can do this include:

- Assigning a senior executive to lead on customer experience—to ensure there is someone to look across the organization's silos and bring the customer voice to conversations among executives.
- Establishing performance measures based on customer feedback—to ensure the organization stays focused on what customers are saying and experiencing, not what the organization thinks is happening. These can include performance measures for the agency overall, including trust, as well as individual measures in the performance plans of members of the senior executive service.
- Sharing customer feedback publicly—to ensure the agency holds itself accountable and shows customers it is listening to feedback and acting on it.

**Manage customer experience as an enterprise-wide effort.** Instead of looking at the separate experiences and contacts people have with individual programs or offices, consider how customer journeys cross offices, and how staff members can work together to make things easier. This should involve sharing data and information across offices to speed processes for customers, such as determining eligibility for a benefit. This can also improve the employee experience by reducing duplication or eliminating unneeded steps.

**Identify service delivery changes and innovations that should continue after the coronavirus.** A crisis often spurs organizations to innovate out of necessity; government leaders can use this moment to test and evaluate bold improvements for their customers. The adjustments agencies made for the pandemic—for example, allowing digital signatures on applications or revising policies to permit virtual hearings on benefits—include new processes that are easier and more effective for both customers and employees. Leaders should review these new options, assess if they can deliver value in the long term, and take steps to scale and sustain them.

**Improve the experience for people who navigate federal services on behalf of others.** Caretakers, family members and professional staff members often help people navigate federal services and face challenges accessing account details or understanding information about agency policies. Examples include caregivers who help the elderly manage Medicare benefits, tax professionals who support people interacting with the IRS, and college officials who help veterans with VA education benefits. Agencies should focus on helping these third parties get easy, secure access to account information and status updates for the people they support.

## Recommendations for Congress

### Pass legislation to hold agencies accountable to their customers and make it easier to collect feedback.

Congress should pass the Federal Agency Customer Experience Act of 2019, which passed the Senate in July 2019. This law would require agencies to collect and publicly report customer feedback, greatly speeding OMB's work to make customer feedback available and ensuring that collection and reporting continues long term.

The law would revise provisions of the Paperwork Reduction Act that make it difficult for agencies to collect and publish feedback, pushing government to be more accountable to its customers. Partially because of restrictions imposed by the act, only two of 25 high-impact federal services meet the standards for publishing customer feedback that OMB established more than two years ago.

**Figure 4:** Agencies could implement management practices to improve the customer experience  
 Click on each link for more details on each service and to see our full methodology.  
 This table represents only a few of the indicators we assessed for each service.

|   | Includes customer experience in strategic goals | Specifies customer feedback as a key performance measure | Has a senior executive for customer experience | Shares customer feedback data with the public |
|---|---|--|--|---|
| <a href="#">Airport security screening and passenger support services</a> (TSA) | ✘ No  | ✘ No   | ✘ No   | ~ Partially                                   |
| <a href="#">Citizenship and immigration applicant services</a> (USCIS)          | ~ Partially                                     | ✓ Yes  | ✘ No   | ✓ Yes   |
| <a href="#">Customs security and screening services</a> (CBP)                   | ✓ Yes   | ✘ No   | ✘ No   | ✓ Yes   |
| <a href="#">Federal student aid applicant services</a> (FSA)                    | ✓ Yes   | ✓ Yes  | ✓ Yes  | ~ Partially                                   |
| <a href="#">Individual taxpayer services</a> (IRS)                              | ✓ Yes   | ✓ Yes  | ~ Partially                                    | ~ Partially                                   |
| <a href="#">Outpatient health care services for veterans</a> (VHA)              | ✓ Yes   | ✓ Yes  | ✓ Yes  | ✓ Yes   |
| <a href="#">Passport services</a> (Bureau of Consular Affairs)                  | ✘ No  | ✘ No   | ~ Partially                                    | ✓ Yes   |
| <a href="#">Education and training benefits for veterans</a> (VBA)              | ✓ Yes   | ✓ Yes  | ✓ Yes  | ✘ No  |
| <a href="#">Farm loan and conservation services</a> (USDA)                      | ✓ Yes   | ✘ No   | ✓ Yes  | ✘ No  |
| <a href="#">Outdoor recreation reservations</a> (multi-agency)                  | N/A Not Applicable                              | N/A Not Applicable                                       | N/A Not Applicable                             | ✓ Yes   |
| <a href="#">Medicare customer support services</a> (CMS)                        | ✓ Yes   | ✘ No   | ~ Partially                                    | ✘ No  |

# Conclusion

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**M**eeting customers' needs during the coronavirus pandemic and beyond has required government agencies to change how they work—and, in some cases, accelerate adoption of new ways of delivering services that have met resistance in the past. The good news is that many agencies rose to this challenge and continue to do so. They have come up with innovative ways to deliver services and responded to changing customer needs and expectations. These enhancements need to be embraced more widely across government.

This annual series of customer experience profiles provides detailed information and insights on how agencies delivering these federal services are addressing challenges, the progress they have made and next steps for meeting customer expectations. The Partnership and Accenture plan to continue building on these profiles each year, adding new data and insights, and more federal services.

# Appendix I

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# Appendix II

## Acknowledgments

The individuals listed below generously offered their input on this report. We greatly appreciate their time and counsel. However, the contents of this report do not necessarily reflect the views of those we interviewed. Additionally, the views of participating federal officials do not necessarily reflect positions or policies of the federal government or its agencies.

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