Framework of Implementation Excellence

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PARTNERSHIP
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Introduction

Periodically, to address national crises or advance significant goals, Congress enacts and the president signs major pieces of legislation intended to invest large amounts of funding into states, localities, organizations and communities across the country. From the New Deal in the 1930s to the recovery from the 2008 financial crisis to legislation such as the CARES Act and American Rescue Plan Act that addressed the economic and health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, these major investments require federal agencies to operate effectively to implement programs and distribute large amounts of funding.

It is vital that agencies carry out the work of these programs effectively to ensure that taxpayer money is administered responsibly and to deliver on the programs' goals. Successful implementation of major investment programs can help build trust in the federal government by demonstrating that agencies can deliver on their commitments. Although these types of investments have occurred previously, government has not consistently captured the lessons learned for the next iteration of similar programs, missing opportunities to institutionalize promising practices and leaving those taking on responsibility for implementing major investments without a playbook for how to approach their work.

Recognizing the need for robust knowledge management of lessons learned and best practices to support current and future leaders of major federal investments, the Partnership for Public Service is developing a learning system—an ongoing source of knowledge and expertise for implementing large-scale investment programs. Over the past year, we have published four resources for leaders on elements of major investment implementation, such as technical assistance programs and collaboration between the federal government and state, local, tribal and territorial governments. Building on these resources and the insights we have gathered from conversations with leaders of current and past major investments, we developed a Framework of Implementation Excellence, the first iteration of a consolidated knowledge base for federal agency implementation of these types of initiatives.

This framework lays out the elements crucial to major investment implementation, as well as the insights we have gathered so far through our conversations with more than 30 government leaders and experts and the input of our Major Investments Community. This October 2024 version of the framework is intended to be only the first iteration—we plan to continue our research and further develop the framework as we learn more.

This framework identifies seven building blocks of successful major investment implementation and begins laying out important subtopics within each building block. For each building block, we summarize our research so far and offer insights that leaders can use to build promising practices into future policy design and begin thinking about how to approach these elements in their own programs. Additionally, we note challenges that require additional policy interventions to enable more effective implementation, such as reforms to the federal hiring process and the ability to collect user feedback. Recognizing that this is only the first iteration of the framework, we also outline areas for further exploration that we hope to address as we add additional insights over time.

Not every element of this framework will be relevant for every major investment program, but we invite leaders to draw upon what is useful to their situations as they carry out the design, coordination and implementation of these significant federal programs.

Ways to Use the Framework

The Framework of Implementation Excellence was developed to identify the building blocks that are essential to effective implementation of major investment programs. This framework is intended to serve program and implementation directors who are standing up new major investment initiatives or expanding existing programs, as well as agency and Executive Office of the President leadership who seek to accelerate effective and innovative approaches for delivering federal funds to states and communities. Leaders may find it helpful to draw on the framework at several different points during the implementation of these initiatives or in relation to federal program management more broadly:

- **New Programs:** Some major investments require the creation of brand-new programs that must be stood up from scratch. This framework can provide a structured approach to launching new initiatives, helping leaders to set new programs up for success.

- **Changes in Leadership:** New leaders coming in to manage any program must quickly get up to speed to understand the specifics of the program and the tools at their disposal. This framework can help facilitate smooth transitions and knowledge transfer during leadership changes.

- **Presidential Transition:** New or second-term presidential administrations must quickly get up to speed to manage the complex and important work of government. This framework can help support transitions between administrations by offering information to incoming political appointees.

- **Existing Programs:** Although this framework is primarily intended to address new or expanded programs that are part of major investment initiatives, the insights and recommendations are broadly applicable across government programs. This framework can help enhance and modernize existing programs with best practices and innovative strategies.

Program Design

A well-executed design is the foundation for the successful implementation of any program, and it is all the more important for major investment programs that operate at a large scale and fast pace. The more clarity that is established and communicated between vision, strategy and tactics in the beginning, the more programs will be set up to achieve their goals.

Federal program design is influenced by several factors such as legislative constraints, agency structures, administrative budgets, staff capacity and program goals. Some agencies set up entirely new offices and programs to support cross-governmental and internal coordination and implementation of major investments, while others distribute major investment funding through existing program structures. Upfront, agencies should devote attention to program design—understanding which other agencies have responsibility for delivering on specific pieces of the legislation, establishing organizational structures that support efficient coordination and execution, and designing new or expanded teams whose skillsets match mission needs so that the program is well prepared to meet its goals.

"Let's be thoughtful about how we design the programs and the investments. And so I think, start with the end in mind: what do you want to be able to say a year from now, two years from now?"

–Asma Mirza, former deputy for implementation management, White House Infrastructure Implementation team

Insights

- **Clearly define timelines, roles and responsibilities.** Before beginning program implementation, program leaders should parse out at what levels certain decisions should be made and who specifically will have the final sign-off on program communications, funding awards and other decisions. They should also clearly define who will provide input or review on various decisions and set and communicate timelines upfront with these stakeholders.

- **Engage early with agency legal and oversight teams.** To build productive relationships, program leaders should—as appropriate—make sure they establish open channels of communication with agency legal and oversight teams early on to ensure all parties are working together to further effective program im-

plementation, and that programs are set up to meet their oversight and audit obligations.

- **Be prepared to be flexible and adapt as the program continues.** Even when program design decisions are made carefully, they are sometimes not sustainable over time. Where possible, agencies should establish regular checkpoints for reviewing whether and how the evolving organizational structure is supporting effective program delivery.

- **New programs should use the new OMB Guidance for Federal Financial Assistance to help shape plain language Notice of Funding Opportunities and reduce the burden for recipients.** When implementing major investment programs, federal agencies should design and communicate processes that enable recipients with varying levels of resources to access and deploy funding to meet their community's specific needs within the bounds of the program.

- **Incorporate stakeholder feedback into program design.** Agencies should consult stakeholders, community members and subject matter experts early on in program design when relevant. This input can help agencies catch potential obstacles, pit falls and opportunities they may be unaware of.

- **Plan for learning, evaluation and communication needs at the project outset.** It is critical for leaders to build capacity to capture and communicate successes and learning through the full lifecycle of program delivery. Integrating this capacity into new teams upfront also enables federal agencies to quickly share measurement and communication plans with stakeholders so they can incorporate them into their own work. Program leaders should proactively connect with their agency's public affairs team to create plans for communicating project progress and successes throughout the project lifecycle.

- **Consider equity at the outset.** Agencies should consider how they will ensure that all communities across the country have equitable access to major investment programs, and what program design and stakeholder engagement choices can help facilitate that access.

- **Account for new team members within the initial planning phase.** Major investment initiatives often involve bringing on a significant number of new hires, many of whom will be tasked to lead or support new programs with complex budgets delivering new services. During the initial planning phase, leaders should consider how existing capacity and authorities can be used to guide the hiring process and provide for the training and support new team members will need.

Resources on Program Design

- [**Micro Case Studies on Ensuring Equity in Major Investments:**](#) These case studies offer examples of how implementers across levels of government are incorporating equity into their program design and delivery.

- [**Conversation with Major Investment Leaders:**](#) In this resource, leaders of current and past major investment initiatives share how they approached program design and related challenges.

Topics for Further Exploration

- What program design challenges are most common across major investment programs? What successful solutions to these challenges have agencies found? How could these solutions be institutionalized across government?

- What elements should be incorporated into major investment legislation to streamline the process and facilitate successful program design upfront?

- What policy barriers hinder effective major investment program design and implementation? What reforms could best address those barriers?

Talent

Having the right people with the right skills and expertise in the right roles is necessary for the successful implementation of major investment initiatives. The sections below offer initial insights into how areas of talent such as leadership, recruiting, hiring, retention and change management must be addressed at the outset of major investment programs. We also share below general resources on federal talent that may be useful for major investment program leaders.

Resources on Talent

- **Rapid Reinforcements: Strategies for Federal Surge Hiring:** This report offers recommendations for conducting surge hiring efforts and includes a detailed list of available hiring authorities. The Partnership is also currently conducting research on the surge hiring efforts of the past few years related to major investments, and we will incorporate the insights gathered from that work into future iterations of the framework.

- **Hiring Authorities:** This list from the Office of Personnel Management contains information about the variety of available federal hiring authorities.

- **Public Service Leadership Model:** The standard for effective federal leadership, with information on key leadership competencies and values.

- **Leading with Experience:** This report offers recommendations for ensuring leaders are customer-focused—important given the large stakeholder engagement component of many major investments.

- **Improving the Federal Hiring Experience:** This recent memorandum from OMB and OPM details work underway and best practices for improving the federal hiring process.

- **Vision for a Better Government:** This vision from the Partnership's addresses important areas of government reform, including needed solutions to improve the federal hiring process.
    - This policy primer offers additional information about the hiring reforms noted in the overall agenda.

LEADERSHIP

Effective leadership is the cornerstone of organizational success, especially in large-scale initiatives like major investments. Leadership goes beyond individual brilliance—it's about building cohesive teams that can execute a shared mission. Strong leadership makes it easier to scale operations, hire talented people and execute complex initiatives.

Insights

- **Facilitate connections between policy and operational leaders.** Major investment initiatives involve complex policy, compliance and operational issues, and the decisions made in each realm must complement each other. When designating or hiring major investment leaders, agencies should ensure that leaders overseeing policy, compliance and operational processes have the skills and resources needed to work well together.

- **Empower leadership teams.** The significant scale and often-fast pace of major investment initiatives requires teams to move quickly and make decisions when necessary. As much as possible, agency leaders should ensure that program leadership teams, and the individual leaders within them, are empowered to make use of their expertise and make decisions to move program goals forward.

Topics for further exploration

- What are the long-term effects of rapid scaling on leadership effectiveness and team culture?

- How can agencies ensure that leadership teams remain agile throughout the lifecycle of major investment programs given their pace and scale?

- How can political and career leaders best work together to ensure the success of major investment programs? How can agencies best ensure continuity and smooth operations during leadership changes, including during presidential transitions?

- What are the best practices for sustaining leadership momentum after an initial burst of hiring and building as major investment programs are established? What resources do major investment programs need to ensure leadership success?

RECRUITMENT AND HIRING

Recruitment and hiring in the federal sector is a complex but crucial process, especially when dealing with surge hiring to support new or expanded major investment initiatives. Effective hiring strategies must be agile, diverse and tailored to attract a range of talent from both inside and outside the government. Successful recruitment not only fills gaps in mission-critical roles, but also prepares agencies to face challenges such as workforce attrition and funding constraints.

Insights

- **Work with human capital teams to ensure access to hiring innovations.** Newer hiring innovations such as pooled hiring actions, shared certifications, and assessments for skills-based hiring can help agencies hire more efficiently. Major investment teams should work with their agency's human capital experts to ensure they are taking advantage of these tools.

- **Identify career staff invested in supporting your program's mission.** There are an enormous number of talented career employees within federal agencies who can be vital in supporting major investment initiatives. Program leaders should work with their agencies to identify career staff members who would be a good fit to work on these programs, and who can be brought on to work on major investment teams

through long-term details.

- **Make use of programs such as the Intergovernmental Personnel Act Mobility Program.** Programs like the IPA enable agencies to bring in experts from outside of government for defined periods of time to help with program design and implementation.

- **Consider potential attrition when creating recruiting and hiring plans.** Recruitment and hiring strategies for major investment programs should not only address immediate needs but also consider potential workforce attrition, so that agencies are not caught off-guard later in the program lifecycle. Agencies should develop talent plans to address potential loss of knowledge or capacity gaps in order to minimize the impact of staff turnover and attrition on program implementation.

Topics for further exploration

- How do federal hiring processes support or hinder the progress of major investment initiatives? What reforms could best address these challenges?

- What lessons learned from hiring for major investments could be applied to the federal hiring process more broadly?

- What are the most effective ways to retain top talent in the federal workforce, especially after surge hiring initiatives?

- How can agencies continuously innovate recruitment strategies to attract diverse and specialized talent, especially in emerging fields like clean energy and tech manufacturing?

MANAGING CHANGE

Agencies use varied organizational structures to implement large-scale federal programs. Some have established new offices while others have adapted existing structures with added coordinating functions. Regardless, major investment initiatives often require attention to managing change as agencies adapt to newly created programs, increased funding, interactions with new stakeholders and many other changes.

Insights

- **Include change management in implementation plans.** Whether programs are newly created or receiving an influx of funding, major investment initiatives often involve significant amounts of change as agencies adapt to a faster pace, interactions with new stakeholders, adjusted missions or any number of potential changes. Agencies should account for this potential upheaval in their implementation plans and incorporate change management strategies into their internal and external communications.

- **Clarify lines of responsibility.** To manage changing structures and ensure smooth integration of teams, agencies should prioritize leadership and value alignment, ensuring everyone is on the same page and documenting the roles and responsibilities of each team to help different components of the program team or office adapt to any changes and work together smoothly.

- **Create a plan for managing staff burnout.** The fast pace and large scale of major investment initiatives means that staff often face burnout as they work to meet ambitious program goals. Agencies should adopt strategies to mitigate staff burnout, while recognizing that high-demand periods may still tax employee capacity.

Topics for further exploration

- How can agencies better assess the long-term sustainability of the structures they've put in place?

- What resources do agencies need to be able to implement successful change management strategies during major investment initiatives?

- How can innovations developed as part of major investment programs be integrated into federal agencies more broadly?

- How can agencies ensure that innovations and knowledge developed during major investment initiatives are institutionalized? How can that process best be managed?

Operations

Major investment programs, like all federal programs, cannot succeed without effective operational processes in areas such as budget and financial management, acquisition, technology and security and risk management. These elements help ensure that programs run smoothly and securely and enable them to make progress towards their mission goals.

For many major investment programs, these operational processes are already well-established beyond the purview of individual programs at the office or agency level. Even in these circumstances, it is crucial for major investment program leaders to understand how these processes affect their programs and how to partner successfully with them. For programs created from scratch as part of major investment initiatives, they will need to set up these processes and build relationships with agency operational components concurrently with the design of program delivery.

To this end, we have included areas for consideration to provide major investment leaders with a starting point for thinking about these operational components as part of their work, and to encourage them to actively and immediately build effective working relationships with operational teams. As more specific insights and recommendations surface from our research in the future, we plan to expand the sections below.

Areas for consideration

1. What budget and financial management expertise will be needed for your program? Does that expertise and capacity already exist within your agency, or will you need to hire additional financial management staff? How will you coordinate financial reporting across multiple agencies or jurisdictions involved at the scale of major investment programs?

2. What core financial systems will be used to track funding? What mechanisms do you plan to put in place so there is capacity to proactively engage and respond to regular audits and oversight?

3. What contracting expertise and capacity will be needed for your program? How can you detail that expertise and capacity within your agency to support your program goals? Will you need to hire additional contracting staff?

4. What acquisitions or existing contract vehicles can be used to support initial program delivery? What is your anticipated timeline for getting those in place?

5. What technology tools are you planning to use to organize your work internally? For external communication? For program delivery? How can you work with public affairs and the Office of the Chief Information Officer to identify tools that are available to your program?

6. What technological expertise will be needed to support your program operations? Is this expertise already available within your program or at the office, agency or department level?

7. Are there particular information security concerns that will require you to work with your management and budget office to be prepared for upfront?

8. What risks (including financial, programmatic, reputational and other risks) does your program face? How can you work with your office or agency's existing risk management team and processes to identify and address these risks within overall agency risk management plans?

Topics for further exploration

Effective operational components are necessary for successful functioning of any federal program, and major investment initiatives are no exception. As we continue our research to gather insights and recommendations related to operational elements of major investments, we plan to conduct interviews and tap the expertise of our Major Investments Community to gather best practices for the operational components of major investment implementation, and to understand how lessons learned from major investments can be used to improve operational effectiveness overall.
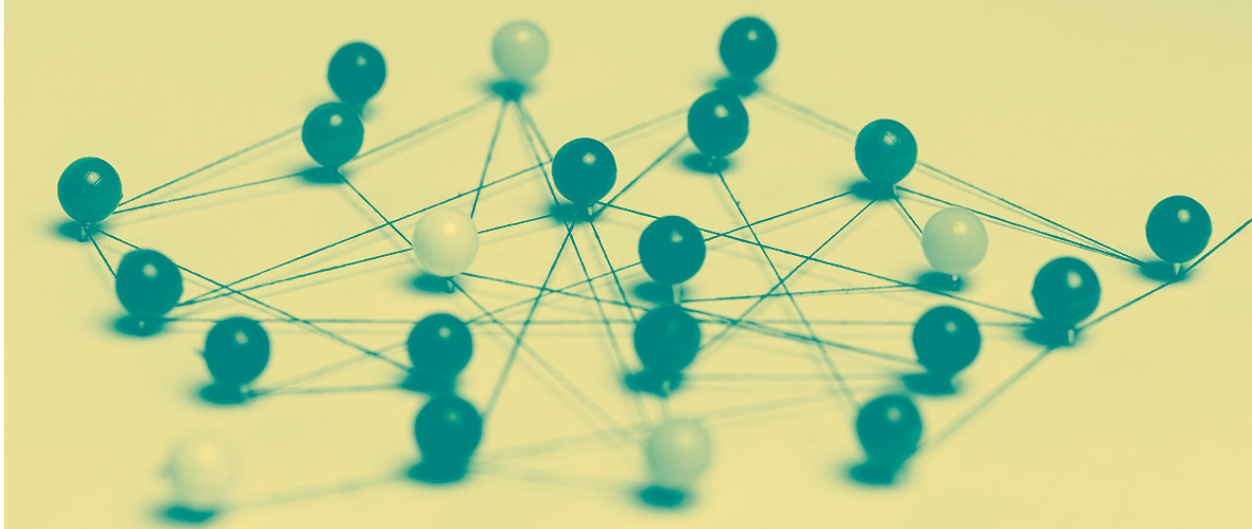
Stakeholder Engagement and Customer Outreach

The success of any major investment initiative requires communication and collaboration between numerous different stakeholders and customers—within and between agencies, between branches of government, between the federal government and partners in state, local, tribal and territorial governments. Implementation also requires engagement of stakeholders outside of government, including subject-matter experts, community organizations and members of the public. And all this engagement requires attention to creating a smooth customer experience for federal investment recipients—from grant applicants to technical assistance program participants.

The sections below lay out initial research and resources on a few specific elements of stakeholder engagement and customer outreach.

> "It's hugely important to build relationships with a broad set of key stakeholders and to develop channels of communication, credibility and trust."

–Mike Schmidt, director, CHIPS Program Office, Department of Commerce

INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

Effective and sustained federal engagement with state, local, tribal and territorial stakeholders is key to implementing major investment initiatives. While federal agencies design and fund the programs that invest billions of dollars in communities across the country, other levels of government and tribal organizations are responsible for much of their implementation. Major investments also require federal agencies to have productive working relationships with other agencies, the White House, oversight bodies and congressional stakeholders.

Most federal agencies already have robust legislative affairs and intergovernmental affairs offices that are responsible for building and tending to these relationships across all of an agency's initiatives. But it is also crucial for major investment program implementation leads to develop partnerships with those existing offices and integrate their expertise across the full lifecycle of these programs, from initial program design through final reporting.

Insights

- **Include stakeholder engagement leaders in program teams.** Major investment teams should include leaders with expertise and connections with relevant audiences directly in program teams to facilitate program-specific engagement. These experts can complement the work of agencies' existing legislative and intergovernmental affairs offices.

- **Share research and insights between agencies to understand stakeholder needs.** By gathering, consolidating and sharing feedback from intergovernmental partners, federal agencies can develop a more robust understanding of the needs of these intergovernmental partners and customers, which should then inform program design and implementation.

- **Identify opportunities to jointly advance shared objectives.** Multiple major federal investment programs often serve the same communities or work toward the same goals. Agencies should formally and informally identify opportunities to collaborate or combine their complementary expertise to better meet the needs of state, local and tribal governments in a specific program area.

- **Consider state, local and tribal government structures and fiscal calendars.** Different intergovernmental partners each have their own processes and deadlines that may conflict with the requirements of major investment programs. Federal agencies should actively identify and consider these factors, when possible, as they design programs and reporting requirements.

- **Coordinate the timing of funding opportunities.** State, local and tribal governments must carefully weigh which of the many funding opportunities they should apply for in order to support a particular project or priority. To assist, federal agencies should explore ways to coordinate the timing of similar funding announcements as much as possible so that state, local and tribal governments have sufficient information to evaluate which opportunities to pursue.

- **Share information in easily accessible formats.** Agencies should explore as many ways as possible to communicate information about programs to ensure ease-of-access for stakeholders at all levels of government. Webinars, office hours and other formats can provide opportunities for stakeholders to learn about major investment programs and get questions answered upfront. Commonly asked questions can also be integrated into standalone FAQs as they are identified.

- **Provide forums for peer-to-peer learning and knowledge exchange.** Agencies can facilitate engagement and support customers by creating forums, such as communities of practice, for stakeholders at other levels of government to discuss similar challenges or circumstances they face in relation to a particular major investment program.

- **Provide opportunities for real-time feedback.** Creating opportunities for states, localities and tribes to share their ongoing experiences with major investment programs can help agencies understand successes and challenges in real time, enabling them to improve coordination and collaboration on a continuous basis.

- **Use existing agency expertise and streamline relationships between federal stakeholders.** Coordination and collaboration between agencies, departments and White House offices is crucial to ensure federal actors are working together toward the goals of major investment programs. Recognizing each agency or program's area of expertise, use staff details and coordination capabilities to expedite investment decisions and improve implementation. Clarifying and streamlining the relationships between federal stakeholders enables agencies to devote more attention towards relationships with program customers.

- **Identify key conferences and designate a travel budget for federal implementors to have "boots-on-the-ground" engagement with communities.** State and local government officials, tribal governments, private sector partners and interested community members often appreciate face-to-face interaction with agency teams. In-person meetings are important to build trust particularly in places such as rural areas and indigenous communities that have historically been excluded in federal investment.

Topics for Further Exploration

- What are additional specific tactics that agencies can use to engage with different stakeholder groups? Are different tactics better suited for particular intergovernmental partners?
- What internal structures and tools best equip agencies to do this work?
- Are there any elements that should be included in major investments legislation to facilitate productive working relationships between agencies, the White House, Congress, oversight bodies and stakeholders at different levels of government?

EXPERT AND NGO ENGAGEMENT

Major investment programs often involve engaging with additional stakeholders, such as outside experts and nongovernmental organizations, whether as program customers, subject-matter experts, technical assistance providers or trusted messengers. Given the important roles these organizations can play in advancing the goals of major investment programs, agencies must account for these types of organizations in designing their outreach and engagement strategies.

Insights

- **Make use of networks and umbrella organizations.** Nongovernmental organizations—such as the Big 7 organizations representing state and local governments—that serve groups of other major investment stakeholders can be valuable resources for federal agencies. They can provide expertise and aggregated feedback on customer needs, share federal information through their own established channels and identify the programs most of interest to particular audiences. Federal agencies should ensure they are connected to the organizations that work with their target recipients and explore how they can work together to advance program goals.
- **Facilitate connections between governmental and nongovernmental stakeholders.** Federal agencies can play a key role in helping different levels of government connect with the private sector and nonprofit organizations involved in major investment implementation. Facilitating these connections can help all stakeholders more fully understand the major investment landscape, and how organizations can combine their complementary resources to advance program goals.

Topics for Further Exploration

- How can federal agencies maintain connections with nongovernmental organizations and experts between major investment initiatives so that they do not have to build relationships from scratch each time?

- How can federal agencies coordinate their engagement with nongovernmental organizations to minimize duplicative outreach?

- How can federal agencies make use of nongovernmental organizations' expertise and community relationships without overburdening them?

- How can federal agencies best design program requirements that consider nongovernmental organizations' capacity constraints?

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

The federal government has been focused on improving the customer experience more broadly for several years so that individuals, organizations, state, local and tribal governments and others interacting with the government are able to seamlessly access services and have their needs and expectations effectively addressed. As with any federal program or service, a focus on the customer experience is crucial to successful implementation of major investment initiatives.

Insights

- **Whenever possible, agencies should create a "front door" that serves as a single entry point for multiple programs.** To reduce the burden on customers to find the right office or program they need, agencies should create a clear entry point that connects those stakeholders with the right programmatic office.

- **Identify and prepare for the full range of potential customers.** Major investment programs may require agencies to work with entirely new stakeholders or customer groups. Agencies should prepare for how they will reach these customers, including whether they need to set up new structures or work with existing organizations or partner agencies that already have relationships with these stakeholders.

- **Conduct research to understand customers' experiences and needs.** Agencies should work with their agency's Paperwork Reduction Act point-of-contact to identify how to conduct research with customers to understand their experiences, both positive and challenging, with programs and how the experience can be improved. Tools such as journey maps can then be used to aggregate that information so that it can be incorporated into program design and operations. The PRA can extend the timeline for conducting research and seeking customer feedback, and agencies must account for it in their plans.

- **Be responsive to differing customer needs.** Different groups of program customers may have different needs—for example, an online grant reporting system may work best for some communities, while at the same time creating challenges for rural communities without reliable broadband access. Agencies should examine where customer needs may differ and how they can ensure programs best serve all customers.

- **Reduce administrative burdens for customers by simplifying requirements and communications where possible.** Many elements of major investment programs—from initial notices of funding to grant reporting requirements—are often complex and even confusing for customers. Although it is important for agencies to ensure that this significant funding is handled responsibly, they should also identify ways to simplify program requirements and reduce the administrative burden for customers. For example, the new edition of the Uniform Federal Guidance emphasizes accessibility and plain language in grant documents, including an effort to simplify Notices of Funding Opportunity to make them easier for customers to understand.

Resources on Customer Experience

- **Customer Experience:** The Partnership has a collection of customer experience research, including profiles of specific federal services and recommendations related to customer experience best practices.

- **Tribal Customer Experience Pilot for Post-Award Reporting:** This report details an effort to reduce the administrative burden of tribal grant recipients and discusses the customer research and pilot projects conducted as part of this effort.

- **Performance.gov CX Resources:** This page offers resources on government's overall customer experience initiatives.

- **GSA CX Center of Excellence Playbook:** This playbook provides an overview of practices agencies can adopt to improve the customer experience they provide.

Topics for Further Exploration

- Where have customers had positive customer experiences during the current set of major investment initiatives and where have they experienced challenges? Are there commonalities across programs that can be used to inform the design and implementation of similar efforts in the future?

- Building on the effort to simplify NOFOs, what other processes that are common across major investment programs can be redesigned to improve the customer experience? What are customers' needs and preferences for their experience with these processes? What could a redesign look like?

- What legislative or regulatory barriers hinder efforts to provide high-quality customer experiences? What reforms are needed to address those barriers?

- Given the scope of major investment initiatives, how can they be simplified to reduce the administrative burden for customers of tracking numerous programs at the same time while also making progress towards the initiatives' goals? What changes during the creation of the legislation or during the implementation process are needed to do so?

- How can the Paperwork Reduction Act and other policies best be reformed to enable agencies to easily collect customer feedback?

Communications and Public Affairs

Communications and public affairs are crucial to the success of major investment initiatives. Continued outreach, communication, storytelling and sharing successes are important so the public can understand the impact of major investment initiatives.

Insights

- **Use relevant communication tools and mechanisms to engage the public, solicit feedback and keep them up to date on project progress.** Set up listservs, new websites and similar public involvement tools where anybody interested can sign up. These can be used as a low-cost way for people to get involved and regularly receive information on projects.

- **Communicate "the why" upfront.** Often the goals of federal funding can be lost amidst the scale of major investment initiatives and as agencies jump into logistical planning. This can hinder trust building with communities if they are not sure whether an investment is for them or is going to be designed with them in mind. Storytelling about the goals and intended recipients behind specific investments can help build trust, drum up excitement and engage potential grantees.

- **Plan for storytelling throughout the timeline.** Often project timelines go over what is estimated for implementing major investments, which leads storytelling efforts to be dropped since they were planned for the project's conclusion. Agencies can circumvent this by creating a strategy that consistently communicates investment program activities and successes to show impact throughout the project lifecycle.

- **Support other stakeholders in their storytelling.** Storytelling about major investment programs does not just have to come from the federal level. Agencies should also find ways to support others, such as intergovernmental partners, in their own communication and storytelling efforts. For example, the Department of Transportation recently hosted a webinar series to help teams determine impact areas and shared step-by-step information and recommendations on how teams can best represent their work.

Questions for Further Exploration

- Are there best practices within certain agencies that can be shared across the federal government to improve communications and public affairs?

- What challenges most often hinder successful communication around major investment initiatives? Are there any solutions that have proven successful to addressing those challenges? If so, how could those solutions be institutionalized across government?

- How can agencies implement more opportunities to support other stakeholders in their storytelling?

- How can agencies best measure the impact of various communication approaches and incorporate those insights into their plans going forward?

- How can agencies partner with other organizations in the major investments space to share stories of success?

Federal Funding and Compliance

There are several funding mechanisms that can be employed as part of major investment initiatives, with the majority of funding delivered via federal grants, loans, vouchers and tax credits. These initiatives may include new programs created specifically as part of the investment initiative or long-standing programs that have received an influx of additional funding to distribute.

Federal financial assistance is a complex process governed by comprehensive guidelines, with many standardized processes. For those looking for overviews of the full cycle of federal funding delivery, we have included below several guides that outline the federal financial management process and important considerations.

Resources on Grants Management

- **Council on Federal Financial Assistance:** The Council on Federal Financial Assistance is a hub for resources and training on federal financial assistance.

- **Uniform Guidance:** Title 2 of the Code of Federal Regulations consists of administrative and audit requirements for federal awards. The most recent iteration of the Uniform Guidance went into effect on Oct. 1, 2024.

- **Performance Management Playbook for Federal Awarding Agencies:** This guide is intended to provide agencies with promising practices for increasing their emphasis on analyzing results from federal awards programs and awarded projects.

- **Federal Grants Management: Improving Outcomes:** This report from the IBM Center for the Business of Government offers recommendations for improving the federal grants management process.

- **HHS Has Taken Steps to Modernize Government-wide Grants Management:** This report from the Government Accountability Office describes the work done by the Grants Quality Services Management Office within HHS to improve the grants process across government.

Framework of Implementation Excellence

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Technical assistance programs are programs undertaken by agencies or other stakeholders to assist potential and current federal funding recipients in navigating the federal funding process, with the goal of strengthening recipients' capacity to evaluate, apply for and manage funding opportunities.

Depending on an agency's existing infrastructure and the goals of the new or expanded federal funding program, technical assistance may be direct—assistance designed and directed by federal staff to support the specific needs of individual recipients—or indirect—general information and resources intended to meet the needs of all potential grant applicants or recipients, or technical assistance provided by outside organizations contracted by federal agencies.

"Technical assistance is giving communities the capacity to reach up and receive those major investment dollars and then to implement them effectively."

–Matthew Tejada, former deputy assistant administrator for environmental justice, Environmental Protection Agency

Insights

- **Design a comprehensive stakeholder engagement process to gather input on capacity needs and publicize funding opportunities.** As with major investment programs overall, soliciting stakeholder feedback and gathering input is an essential starting point for the design of technical assistance programs. Feedback can help agencies understand the specific technical assistance needs of different stakeholders, and what forms of assistance would be most effective in helping them navigate the federal funding process.

- **Prioritize trusted groups.** Some federal agencies utilize cooperative agreements, grants, or contracted capacity to deliver technical assistance to potential and current recipients. When bringing onboard technical assistance groups outside of the federal government to deliver support, agencies must choose organizations or institutions that are trusted by the communities they want to reach.

- **Help make the match.** Stakeholders may need to navigate multiple federal funding opportunities to find the right stack of programs and resources most suited to their needs. Agencies should find ways to help customers identify their best technical assistance match. For instance, the Department of Transportation has created a search tool that allows people to find the match between their project and the technical support that is needed.

- **Join forces with other agencies.** Interagency coordination of technical assistance programs can help ensure that customers can receive support on several fronts, drawing on each agency's expertise without unnecessary duplication of efforts. For example, the Thriving Communities Network is working to coordinate technical assistance efforts across 11 agencies.

- **Create communities of practice and foster dialogue.** Some programs deliver technical assistance through community of practice models, so that grantees can learn together and share successful experiments with one another. Encouraging dialogue between technical assistance recipients can provide them with an additional source of knowledge and support during the funding process.

- **Keep pace with evolving needs through continuous process improvements.** Agencies should ensure that technical assistance is keeping pace with applicants' dynamic and evolving needs and questions, both throughout the funding lifecycle and as participants require different types of support.

- **Build future capacity.** Although technical assistance programs have historically targeted individual federal grant opportunities, they increasingly are designed to enhance recipients' overall ability to engage with the federal funding process. Agencies should explore ways to ensure that their technical assistance programs contribute to building the capacity of state and local governments and communities to apply for federal funding and manage federal awards in the future.

Framework of Implementation Excellence

Resources on Technical Assistance

- **Promising Practices in Delivering and Managing Technical Assistance:** This Partnership resource offers additional examples and promising practices in designing and delivering technical assistance programs for major investments.

- **Thriving Communities Network:** This network seeks to coordinate technical assistance offerings across 11 federal agencies.

- **Federal Grant Technical Assistance: Definition, Use and Considerations for Congress:** This report from the Congressional Research Service offers a basic overview of technical assistance and potential considerations for areas for improvement.

- **Agency Technical Assistance Resources:** These resources showcase the technical assistance programming of cross-agency initiatives and a few individual agencies. We include them here for leaders looking to better understand the work of their colleagues.
  - Interagency Working Group on Coal & Power Plant Communities & Economic Revitalization
  - Department of Transportation Navigator
  - Tribal Customer Experience Pilot for Post-Award Reporting

Topics for Further Exploration

- How can technical assistance needs be best accounted for in the initial development of major investment initiatives and legislation? Which, if any, elements of technical assistance programs should be addressed within major investment legislation itself?

- What resources and expertise do agencies need to build their own capacity to deliver technical assistance programs?

- How can the formal and informal technical assistance programs created for the current set of major investment initiatives be institutionalized to enhance the federal government's overall capacity to provide technical assistance?

- What does the ideal technical assistance landscape across the federal government look like? Should technical assistance be more consolidated or remain the purview of individual programs and agencies?

COMPLIANCE AND REPORTING

Compliance requirements and oversight are critical components in the implementation of major investment programs, ensuring funds are used responsibly and in alignment with program goals. Agencies should devote upfront attention to establishing the compliance and reporting requirements and processes for their major investment programs so that they can effectively monitor funds and document program achievements.

> "You have to make sure not just the application is easy, but [also the] compliance and reporting for the duration of the grant is doable for state and local governments."

–Emily Brock, director, Federal Liaison Center, Government Finance Officers Association

Insights

- **Consider both compliance needs and awardees' capacity.** When determining reporting requirements, agencies should work to balance the need to ensure oversight of spending with an understanding of how complicated reporting requirements may tax awardees' capacity or discourage them from applying. Agencies should look to OMB's Uniform Grants Guidance to streamline reporting requirements and reduce administrative burden.

- **Ensure reporting procedures work for a variety of award recipients.** Agencies should ensure that the processes used to report required information enable all awardees to meet their compliance obligations. For example, agencies should explore methods to ensure that grantees are able to provide reports even if they do not have a reliable internet connection or previous experience with federal award reporting.

- **Clearly communicate reporting requirements upfront.** To ensure awardees understand and are prepared to meet their reporting obligations, agencies must clearly communicate the requirements and expected schedule ahead of time. This information should be made available to potential awardees even before they apply, so that they can factor reporting requirements into their decisions about which programs to apply for.

- **Use both qualitative and quantitative reporting requirements.** Reporting requirements should provide monitoring on the use of federal funds and help agencies and awardees tell the story of their successes. Including qualitative reporting requirements can help ensure that progress is demonstrated, especially early in the award period when quantitative data about what has been achieved may not yet be available to report.

- **Make use of reported data.** Agencies should integrate policy and compliance teams early on and be extremely intentional in designing program reporting requirements with the end in mind. In addition to establishing an early understanding of how each piece of data will be utilized, agencies must understand how the reporting process will be used to track trends and adjust program delivery on an ongoing basis.

- **Engage early with oversight bodies.** To enhance accountability and build productive relationships, program leaders should—as appropriate—make sure they establish open channels of communication with oversight bodies such as the Government Accountability Office and agency inspectors general early on to ensure all parties are working together to further effective oversight.

Resources on Compliance and Reporting

- **Payment Integrity Center of Excellence:** This community of experts from the Bureau of the Fiscal Service provides assistance to agencies to help them reduce improper payments and improve government-wide payment integrity.

- **A Prepared Federal Government: Preventing Fraud and Improper Payments in Emergency Funding:** This report from the IBM Center for the Business of Government shares insights on how government can maintain payment integrity when responding to emergency situations, which many major investments are intended to address.

- **FY 2024 Revisions to 2 CFR: Federal Agency Implementation:** The Council of Federal Financial Assistance provides suggestions on how to address 2 CFR revisions that are intended to decrease undue burden on recipients from Notices of Funding Opportunities and federal awards.

Topics for Further Exploration

- Are there ways that oversight processes can be optimized to better detect and prevent fraud in large-scale programs? How can these efforts best be balanced with the need to not overburden award recipients with extensive reporting requirements?

- Building on work already underway, such as the NOFO simplification effort, are there ways that reporting requirements and processes could be further standardized and streamlined across programs to reduce administrative burden and ensure high-quality data? What might that standardization look like?

- How can the government further encourage use of tools such as Treasury's Do Not Pay service and other resources that enable more robust oversight and compliance?

- How can lessons learned from audits of past programs be more effectively integrated into the design of new major investment initiatives?

Data, Metrics and Evaluation

Data, metrics and evaluation play a crucial role in guiding and assessing the effectiveness of major investments and their programs. These elements are essential for ensuring that funds are directed to the communities most in need, ensuring progress is being properly tracked, and allowing for more informed decisions to maximize impact.

Insights

- **Partner with your agency's existing Strategic Planning and Performance Improvement team to identify learning agenda and evaluation opportunities.** Major investment program leaders should partner with evaluation experts within their agencies to identify opportunities for evaluation and learning through the program lifecycle and in the short-, medium- and long-term.

- **Support data partnerships and collaborations.** Agencies should promote tools, trainings and strategies to support federal, state, local and tribal government data sharing to improve major investment implementation. Agencies can work with their own chief data officers and the Federal CDO Council to explore ways to develop cross-agency data sharing agreements and make federal data more accessible so that stakeholders can use and learn from it.

- **Tailor metrics to specific program goals.** While some programs may have goals that can be straightforwardly measured, other program goals may be more complex or longer term. Agencies should make sure to tailor metrics to the specifics of each program, understanding that they may need to get creative to show progress towards complex goals. A mix of both qualitative and quantitative data can offer valuable insights into program impact.

Resources on Data, Metrics and Evaluation

- **Building the Foundation Needed to Achieve the Evidence Act's Potential for Transforming Federal Policymaking:** This overview from Evaluation.gov shares advice and resources for how agencies can build and strengthen their evaluation capabilities.

- **Uniform Grants Guidance 2024 Revision: Evaluation:** This portion of the revised Uniform Grants Guidance addresses evaluation opportunities within the grant lifecycle.

- **Federal Data and Digital Maturity Guide:** This report offers recommendations for how agencies can conduct data maturity assessments to understand their current data usage and how it can be improved.

Topics for Further Exploration

- What legislative, regulatory or operational changes are needed to facilitate increased data-sharing among agencies as it relates to major investment programs?

- How can we improve the integration of real-time data into funding decisions to enhance the responsiveness and impact of major investments?

- What are the best practices for balancing the collection of qualitative and quantitative data in program evaluations?

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