

Public service experience through a new lens

Reframing experience in
the changing context of
Canadians' lives



Executive Summary

The results of our global survey point to a fresh approach to public service experiences. **Public service organizations that combine digital technology and human ingenuity can deliver the fundamentals that people expect—simplicity, humanity and security.** That's how they can ensure that people get the services they need and are eligible to receive while building confidence in their government.

What our research found

It makes sense that people would expect to connect with government organizations in the same ways they interact with consumer brands. But our research finds that while that may be the case in some situations, people want to experience government services within their personal contexts. Everyone has their own unique needs and preferences. However, in basic terms, people want simplicity, humanity and security above all else:



Simplicity - Make it easy for people to get the help and outcomes they need



Humanity - Strike the right balance between digital and human interactions, serving with empathy



Security - Strengthen security practices to grow confidence in government as a service provider and employer

How to deliver the experiences people want

Canadian public service organizations can deliver on people's expectations for simplicity, humanity and security with a strategy that includes both quick wins and long-game actions across five fundamentals:

- 1. Deploy digital tools with intention** - Make strategic and situational choices in how your government organization uses digital tools to serve people and improve the employee experience.
- 2. Bring the public into the design process** - Invite input from people to develop public service experiences that are based on understanding, not assumptions.
- 3. Instill confidence in the workforce** - Prepare the workforce with the skills they need to work in new ways, while growing their confidence and engagement.
- 4. Develop strong partnerships** - Bring a whole of government approach to service delivery grounded in "how people live" rather than "how government is structured."
- 5. Communicate to cut complexity** - Build people's confidence, awareness and understanding of what programs are available—and what they need to do to receive them, while focusing on equitable access and reach.

There's never been a better time for fresh approaches to make experiences more simple, human and secure.

When it comes to public service experiences, governments don't need to chase digital giants

Private sector companies often deliver experiences so seamless that they're part of the fabric of our lives. They seem to happen without us even thinking about them. Our packages show up at the door. Our entertainment recommendations are always binge-worthy. Our lattes are waiting at the counter. It's only natural that these experiences shape how we expect to connect with government.

So it makes sense that governments look to emulate them.

Yet insights from our 2022 survey of 5,500 clients and 3,000 public service workers in ten countries, including Canada, highlight the unique experience requirements needed to deliver public services today.¹

What's so unique about the public service experience?

Naturally, most government organizations focus on compliance and outcomes, not on attraction and retention. They have the added challenge of delivering vital services equitably to diverse populations, often at times when people are in great need. Approaches that might work in the private sector won't necessarily work in government and can limit vulnerable groups' access to core services.

Nearly half of Canadians we surveyed find it frustrating to access public services—that, coupled with the current emphasis on experience in daily life and momentum organizations gained during the pandemic, means—it's time to tackle the issue with a fresh perspective. After all, meeting mission priorities can hinge on the experiences organizations deliver.

49%

of Canadians we surveyed find it frustrating to access public services.

vs 53% global average

Government organizations can combine digital technology and human ingenuity, using digital services strategically to serve Canadians in the changing context of their lives. The goal? Making experiences simple, human and secure to help build confidence in government.

Zooming in on public service experiences today

The broad scope of services is one of the most distinguishing things about government. No other service provider does so much for so many people—from distributing social services and facilitating travel and trade to protecting the public and providing education.

Serving a diverse population with varying needs makes it difficult for governments to fully understand people’s preferred interaction channels. However, our research uncovers *when* and *how* people access services, which can help set the stage for advancing the public service experience.

The first experience matters the most

Most Canadians we surveyed use government services infrequently (once or twice a year). This infrequency of interactions should not deter governments to invest in experiences. Instead, it reinforces the importance of providing intuitive and simple processes so constituents can more easily and accurately get what they need.

With infrequent interactions, there aren’t chances to “practice” getting comfortable with interfaces or processes, so experiences should be intuitive to resolve issues the first time. Otherwise, people keep trying until they get what they need, which adds frustration for them and expense for organizations. This dynamic can also affect people’s confidence in government services.

88%

of Canadians interact with government services zero to two times a year.

And here’s something to consider. Add up all these infrequent interactions, and the volume of public service transactions is enormous. For example, if every adult in Canada interacted with a government service just once this year, that would be over 31.2 million transactions.² This puts a fine point on a primary challenge of government service: delivering first-time resolution at scale.

77% of Canadians used basic digital channels³ when accessing a government service in the past two years.

Digital does not always deliver

Much like the private sector, public sector organizations are increasingly turning to digital channels to provide services. However, digital doesn't always deliver. For one, access is an issue—10% of Canadians we surveyed don't have high-speed internet access at home.⁴ Also, people who infrequently use government services are more likely to prefer connecting through human-to-human channels. Just 39% want to increase digital interaction with government in the next year compared to 70% of those who use government services more frequently.*

Canadians' preferences for one-on-one service experiences don't appear to be connected to discomfort with digital technology. Some 87% say they are very or quite comfortable using it. And yet, 36% still say that "in-person" is one of their preferred ways to access information from the government.

*Global results





The takeaway? **As “digital” as society is, some people who could interact with government through digital channels still prefer human-to-human service.** Of course, people’s situations influence their channel preferences. For example, someone renewing their driver’s license might be comfortable doing so online, while someone reporting a stolen car is likely to want to talk to the police in person. Equally important, governments have always had to ensure equity and access, addressing barriers of the digital divide. This will continue to be critical.

“

...It’s about the whole service. It’s about how does an in-person service complement a telephone service, complement a digital service?...”⁵

—Aaron Jaffery, Director General of Digital Experience & Client Data, Service Canada

What people want from public service experiences

Most importantly, our research also uncovered insights into what people want from public service delivery experiences. Everyone has their own unique needs and preferences. However, in basic terms, people want simplicity, humanity and security above all else. These aren't the "fancy" digital bells and whistles of cutting-edge private sector experiences. They are the fundamentals of good experiences.



Simplicity

Make it easy for people to get the help and outcomes they need



Humanity

Strike the right balance between digital and human interactions, serving with empathy



Security

Strengthen security practices to grow confidence in government as a service provider and employer

Simplicity

Make it easy for people to get the help and outcomes they need

Lengthy and confusing processes are people's top complaints in describing public services. Some say they don't know what materials they need or where to start. Public service employees see process challenges too. They point to inefficient or frequently changing processes as the biggest barriers to providing great service to clients.



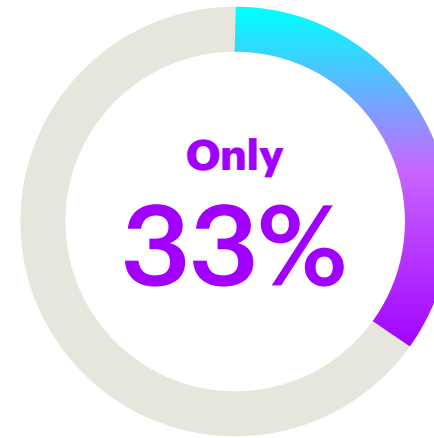
Simplicity

We often find that government services are more aligned with operational structures and procedures than with “how people want to be served” and “how employees want to work.” **Just 33% of Canadians (vs 36% global average) say government organization processes and interactions are intuitive.** Only 6% (vs 5% global average) feel they can always start a public service process using one channel—online, on a device or in person—and then complete it using another channel without starting over.

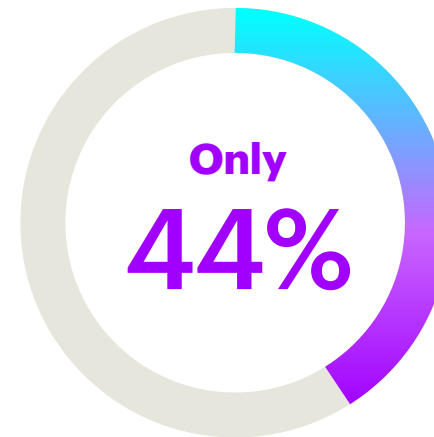
A maze of processes makes it harder for people to resolve issues the first time they contact a government organization. As such, they may never get the outcomes they need or may be unable to comply with requirements. At the same time, employees end up with more stress. This is why simple processes are so critical. **In fact, at least 42% of Canadians (vs 46% global average) say they would be more likely to use digital technology to access government services if the technology was easier to use.**



As one public service executive told us, “Public services need to be designed in a way so they are easily available, can be accessed effortlessly and in a timely manner by citizens.”⁶



of Canadians say government organization processes and interactions are intuitive.



of Canadians agree or strongly agree that government processes are clear and understandable.

vs 41% global average

Simplicity

No organization sets out to make overly complex experiences. Complexity comes from many factors that typically end up compounding the problem. Addressing complexity requires large-scale transformation that takes time and money. However, there are quicker and more affordable fixes that can make a tremendous difference. These are things like redesigning interactive voice response (IVR) flows, providing targeted employee training or revising service messaging for target audiences.

Case in point: A US state human services agency relabeled a link in its website navigation from “apply for unemployment insurance” to “apply for unemployment payments.” The switch to everyday language made it easier for people to access the service and begin the process of getting help.

Making it easier to plan for the future

Planning for retirement shouldn't be stressful. That's why the [Central Provident Fund Board \(CPF Board\)](#), Singapore's social security organization, applied the perfect mix of technology and skilling to its online experience, making its digital services simple, more accessible and personalized. CPF Board modernized mainframe applications, migrating eServices to the cloud to lay the foundation for enhanced platforms and system interfaces. At the same time, the organization re-engineered business processes and focused on a comprehensive effort to train CPF Board officers to work in new ways. Now, everyone—whether they access their information via the web or a mobile device—can enjoy a personalized experience. The new system can handle significantly more user traffic and is easy to maintain and update, so it can age as gracefully as its users. User satisfaction ratings were consistently around 90% after the transformation.⁷

Humanity

Strike the right balance between digital and human interactions, serving with empathy

From assisting with routine services to helping in a crisis, serving and protecting people is at the heart of public service. Yet today, 23% of Canadians surveyed feel like their concerns aren't treated with sensitivity when they interact with the government - down from 27% in 2019.⁸ **Nearly one in four people still feel they are treated more like a number than a human.** This is a signal that governments could widen the aperture of how they see the people they serve. With a life-centric approach, governments can see clients as they see themselves: unique individuals doing their best to make their way through life.⁹



Humanity

There has been an increase in Canadians' interest in digital interactions with their government - 38% want more digital interactions today compared to 24% in 2019.¹⁰ Even so, people still value "human" channels where they can feel "known" and connect with another person. This is especially true when they are *accessing* information (Figure 1). For example, 49% rank "over the phone" as one of their top preferred channels for accessing government information, and 36% rank "in person" as a top channel. However, when *receiving* information from governments (Figure 2), Canadians prefer less "human" channels such as emails, letters and websites. Fewer are interested in getting updates over the phone (33%) or in person (22%). These affinities signal a chance for governments to determine which activities to digitize and which to direct to frontline staff.



Figure 1: How do you prefer to access information from the government?

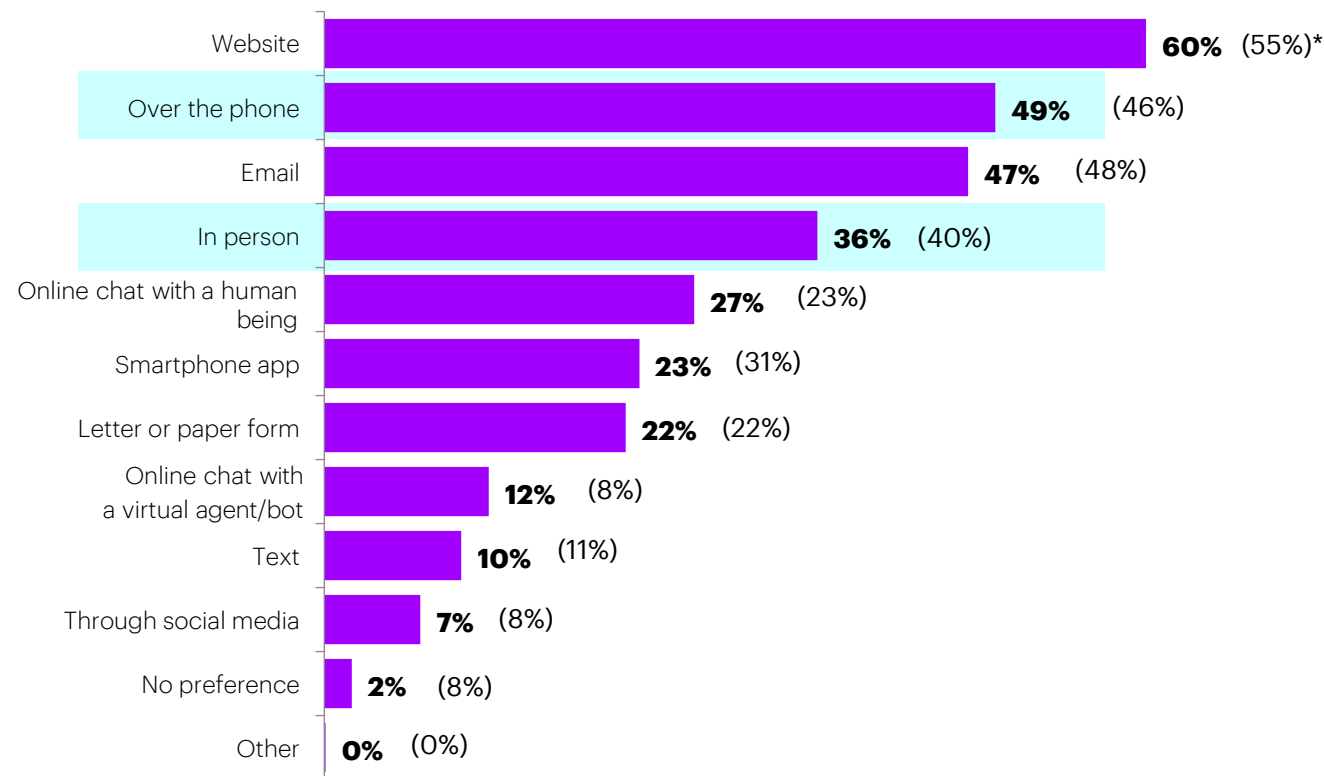
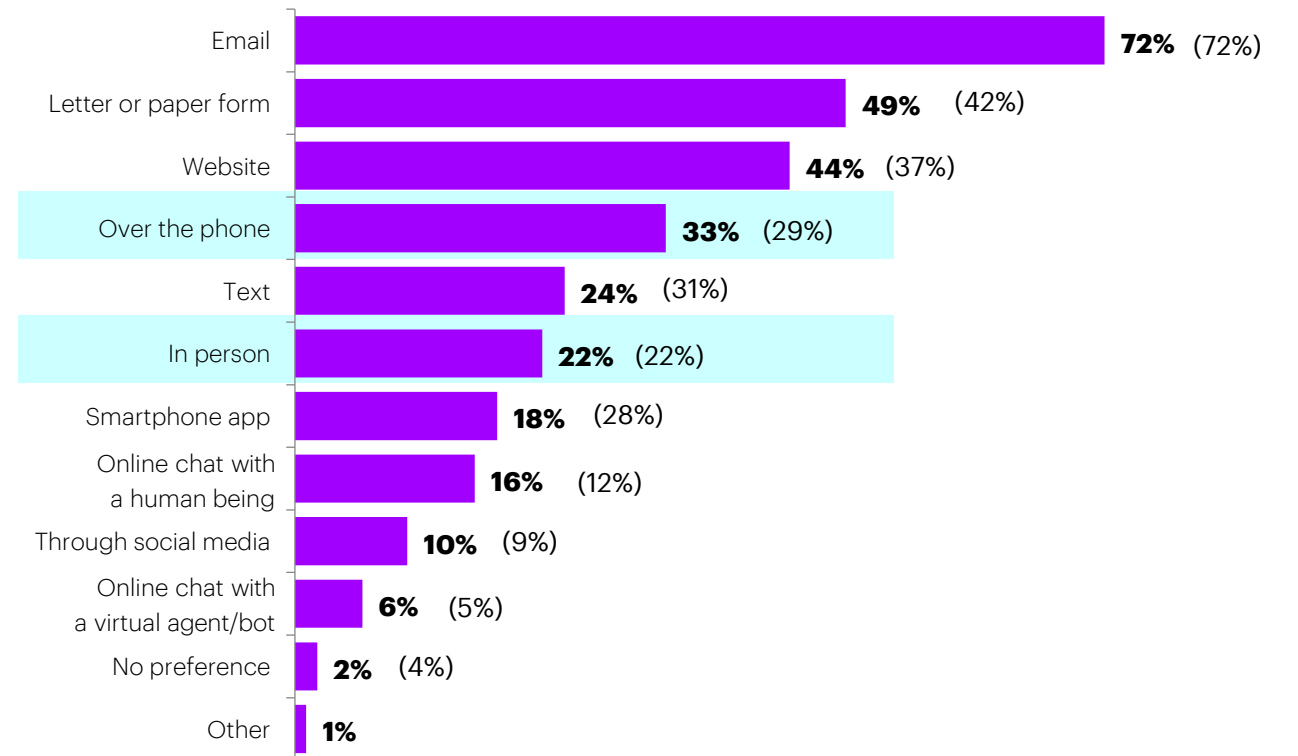


Figure 2: How do you prefer to receive updates from the government?



* % in brackets: Global average result

Humanity

Governments that solicit feedback and co-create solutions with people have more insight into the best ways to deploy digital solutions. Yet as personalized as digital solutions can be, people still need an “escape hatch.” This is the option to bring a human into the experience if a chat bot, IVR tree, online application or another digital tool isn’t helping them. This need is aligned with the focus on care that’s come out of the pandemic period. Care is so essential to being human, and people are discussing the need for it more openly.¹¹

The human needs of employees should also be considered as governments explore service experiences. Many Canadian public servants chose a career in public service because they are inspired to do mission-driven work— 76% feel empowered by their work (vs 87% global average). But no one becomes a case worker because they love responding to emails. By automating repetitive tasks, governments can make jobs more rewarding and mission oriented.



As Karl Carisse, Director General of Strategic Directions at Service Canada explains,

“Tools provided to employees need to help reduce their cognitive load, not increase it, so they can focus on providing the best service possible to their client.”¹²

The good news is that public service employees are open to learning new tools if it means they can serve people better. Sixty-nine percent of Canadian public service employees (vs 74% global average) feel optimistic when new tools are introduced at work.

90%

of Canadian public service workers believe their work is meaningful.

vs 95% global average

Training people for the human side of social work

Government workers are often called on to support people when they are at their most vulnerable or in need. Take caseworkers, for example. It might fall on them to assess if a family or individual should receive financial assistance; or if a child requires care outside the home. To explore a better way to train caseworkers on the human side of social work, [San Diego County](#) turned to a virtual reality training approach. This voice-activated and hands-free training builds an immersive scenario in which trainees step into the metaverse to interview applicants, obtaining and validating information to make benefits decisions in a fully risk-free way. When trainees put the headset on, they find themselves in a county cubicle, with a family sitting across from them. Over 90% of local participants say the training improved their skills in engaging people and provided a realistic expectation of their new role. And 100% would recommend the experience to a coworker.¹³



“...Co-designing not just with and for the users but with and for employees as well. So that employees can focus on the things they’re most passionate about which, quite often, is about providing great service and getting people the help they really need.”¹⁴

—**Aaron Jaffery, Director General of Digital Experience & Client Data, Service Canada**

Security

Strengthen security practices to grow confidence in government as a service provider and employer

Predictably, Canadians' concerns about the security of their personal information influence their views of public service experiences—and their confidence in these interactions. Many Canadians are concerned about governments' ability to secure their personal information and use it appropriately. Only 56% are confident that governments are using their data for what they say (vs 49% globally).

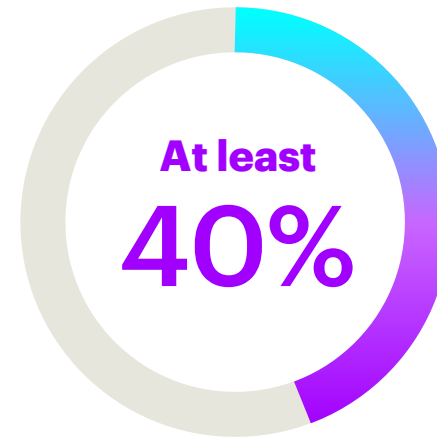


Security

This skepticism reveals a troubling confidence gap. It's fair to assume that most people intuitively understand there are very real threats to government assets, websites and infrastructure given the world we live in. Closing this confidence gap is key to making people feel more comfortable accessing public services. After all, "trust is the currency in public service,"¹⁵ as one public service executive reminded us. It's about giving people peace of mind that governments will protect their data and keep their service promises.

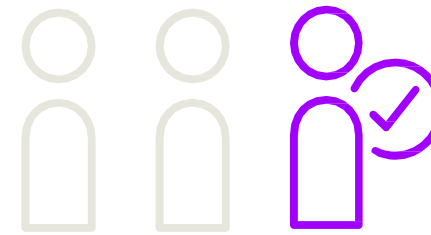
Addressing this data security issue goes beyond a technology fix. The solution is multi-layered. It involves making agency leaders security champions, breaking down organizational silos, prioritizing cultural changes and delivering transparent outreach campaigns to improve public awareness. Data security is also a critically important training issue for the government workforce. Only 28% of public servants surveyed in Canada report that they receive cyber and data security training, compared to 33% globally. Employee learning doesn't change public confidence, but it can help to prevent future breaches, which can further erode confidence.

Training approaches should go beyond checking regulatory boxes. Truly changing behavior starts with engaging content and human-centered learning models. Because human fallibility is every organization's biggest security risk.



of Canadians are more likely to use digital technologies to access government services if they had more confidence in data security and privacy.

vs 43% global average



Less than 1/3

of the Canadian public service workforce receives regular cyber and data security training.

Security

What's heartening is that despite the confidence gap and security-related concerns, **56% of Canadians (vs 53% globally) are comfortable sharing more data with government organizations if that means more convenient and efficient service delivery.** This finding highlights the critical relationship between service quality and confidence in government. It also reinforces how important it is for governments to have the right skills, technologies and governance to realize the full potential of data insights. Governments may also benefit from executive level oversight from a chief data officer.

Creating a culture of cybersecurity

Like most other organizations, Crédit Agricole—a French international banking group—faced a dramatic rise in cybercrime threats during the COVID-19 crisis. Information systems security teams in Crédit Agricole Consumer Finance knew that it was critical to respond by increasing employees' awareness of new cyber risks. The goal was to strengthen cybersecurity by reducing human risks. The team organized "cyber days," a series of tailor-made employee workshops. These workshops covered data confidentiality, workstation protection, password security, remote work, hacking techniques and phishing techniques. More than 340 employees attended the first two days of workshops, which were designed to make complex technical information more accessible. The team is using other tools, such as newsletters, web series and podcasts, to continue to bring "cyber days" messages to employees.

Where technology and human ingenuity meet

Governments are exploring innovative ways to use emerging technologies and uniquely human skills to make interactions more simple, human and secure. What they are doing today is laying the groundwork for an exciting future of experience.

Revenue agencies, are using artificial intelligence (AI) automated services and cutting-edge natural language processing to manage calls in new ways. AI-powered, conversational virtual agents can understand and answer callers' questions—talking the way people do. This is an example of the kind of intuitive services that don't just simplify experiences, they fit seamlessly into people's lives.¹⁶

Higher education institutions, are beginning to evolve experiences using the metaverse and virtual reality, creating digital replicas of the campus and classrooms. This makes it possible for prospective applicants to take college tours from their living rooms, for students to learn and collaborate no matter their physical location, and for faculty and staff to participate in training.¹⁹

Border service organizations are making the process of immigration more intuitive with electronic case management systems. Simple step-by-step structures make it possible for people to finish applications in one sitting without being overwhelmed by too much information all at once. Immigrants can fill out applications themselves, which means less processing work for agency staff.¹⁷

Social services agencies are using data and analytics in powerful new ways to shape interventions and provide timely benefits. By applying machine learning tools to case data, agencies can uncover factors that correlate with high risk of delays and predict which cases might be problematic. With these insights, agencies can proactively address issues so delays never happen.²⁰

Public safety agencies are creating digital case files where people can report incidents and include supporting evidence and digital witness statements. Offers are assigned to digital case files, and people can track progress and updates online and connect directly with the officer as needed. The self-service model makes it possible to redirect contact center staff to urgent and complex issues.¹⁸

Set your sights on 5 areas

How to deliver the experiences
people want

Canadian public service organizations can deliver on people's expectations for simplicity, humanity and security with a strategy that includes both quick wins and long-game actions across five fundamentals.



01 Deploy digital tools with intention

Make strategic and situational choices in how your government organization uses digital tools to serve people and improve the employee experience.

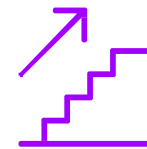


The quick wins

Conduct an experience assessment to understand how people are using channels to interact with your agency.

Begin to standardize an approach to digital identity in your branch of government.

Assess how your employees use digital tools and channels to do their jobs—what's working and what's not.



The long game

Track emerging concepts like the metaverse²¹ to identify breakthrough ways to humanize digital interactions and make the most of all available channels.

Collaborate with partner organizations to further develop digital identity applications, such as a portable digital wallet.

Empower in-person, hybrid and remote employees with omnichannel access to tools and information.

02 Bring the public into the design process

Invite input from people to develop public service experiences that are based on understanding, not assumptions.

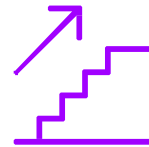


The quick wins

Develop service exit surveys to gather people's feedback on their experiences and make plans to act on their input.

Commit to human-centered design to improve experiences, seeking input from end users and frontline workers.

Explore more ways to solicit feedback from people, such as digital journaling, focus groups, task tracking and IVR tree testing.



The long game

Establish communication channels between the public and government organizations; use community-based organizations to expand outreach.

Embed human-centered design as a natural part of projects, improving results with ongoing employee training and funding.

Create a human-centered design studio with a cross-disciplinary team with expertise in everything from design and behavioural psychology to data analysis.

Shaping tomorrow's services together

Service Canada created the [Service Canada Lab](#) as a virtual space where clients and employees alike can experience, test and provide feedback on services, initiatives and programs before they're launched across Canada. Displaying Service Canada's work-in-progress early on and encouraging people of diverse background to participate in research allows the team to better shape the service, together. This approach provides the organization with low-risk opportunities to test new technologies with minimal investment and creates open dialogue through blogging, open code and early models to engage with the wider ecosystem.

Service Canada Lab initiatives include data and automation engagements, service enhancement projects as well as other opportunities to improve Canada's ever-evolving public services.

03 Instill confidence in the workforce

Prepare the workforce with the skills they need to work in new ways, while growing their confidence and engagement.

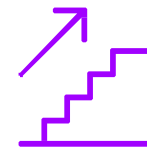


The quick wins

Complete a workforce skills assessment to understand the skills gaps in your workforce and pinpoint training needs.

Triage training needs for staff and leadership, offering immediate solutions for priority skills gaps.

Understand what your employees value about their jobs and determine how to help them do the work they love in a diverse and inclusive workplace.



The long game

Broaden access to training through partnerships with colleges and universities.

Evolve training experiences to make them more immersive with virtual reality, and ultimately, via training in the metaverse.

Create more opportunities for employees in your organization to work on purpose-driven and meaningful work by automating repetitive tasks.

04 Develop strong partnerships

Bring a whole of government approach to service delivery grounded in “how people live” rather than “how government is structured.”

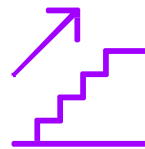


The quick wins

Identify the technology and policy barriers standing in the way of building key partnerships.

Explore and pilot non-traditional partnerships with private sector players to improve experiences.

Audit public information with partners to ensure messages reflect what people need from government, not how government is structured.



The long game

Work with key partners to develop a roadmap to successful cross-agency partnerships.

Streamline administrative operations where possible and codify ways of working with private sector partners.

Develop shared content practices and standards and centralize content development where possible to eliminate siloing of information within government organizations.

Helping entrepreneurs get down to business

The Finnish government wanted to unite a wider ecosystem of government organizations in a way that’s natural for people and predictive of their wants and needs. The result is [Starting up Smoothly](#), a world-class network of virtual assistants to help foreigners set up businesses in Finland. By using readily available, AI-powered technology, the Finnish government is providing relevant, personalized services from a single source so it can become the next top-talent hub for the world’s most forward-thinking businesses.²²

05 Communicate to cut complexity

Build people’s confidence, awareness and understanding of what programs are available—and what they need to do to receive them, while focusing on equitable access and reach.

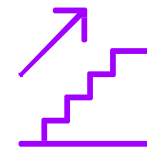


The quick wins

Assess your organization’s digital effectiveness with targeted usability studies.

Audit the way that digital content is produced as well as reporting processes in your organization.

Coordinate your communications strategy across multiple channels to improve access and consistency.



The long game

Use data insights and analytics to deliver highly relevant content to specific audiences across all channels.

Establish policies and approaches to centralize marketing, including content production and analytics.

Continually optimize content across channels for clarity and consistency and to address changes in audience needs and attitudes.

Refocus to see experiences in a new light

People can't switch government service providers like they can switch private sector companies. Profit isn't at risk from poor public service delivery experiences, something more profound is. Good or bad, these experiences shape people's perceptions of—and confidence in—government and their ability to access services they are entitled to when they need them.

It's no longer about what the digital giants are doing and feeling pressure to emulate them. It's an exciting time for governments to approach public service experience through a new lens.

By seeing experiences through the eyes of clients and employees, governments can seize opportunities to achieve more compliance and mission outcomes. There's never been a better time for fresh approaches to make experiences more simple, human and secure.

So ask yourself, where do you see the possibilities?

Contact us for more information about this research or to discuss how we can help you with strategies and solutions to reframe public service experiences for people's lives.

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Jenny leads a global public sector research team, where she is focused on understanding and exploring the problems facing governments. She is passionate about identifying trends and insights that can help government clients improve how they deliver services and create positive outcomes.

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About the research

In spring of 2022, Accenture Research conducted an electronic survey of 5,500 consumers (The 2022 Accenture Government Users Survey) and 3,000 public service workers (The 2022 Accenture Public Sector Employee Survey) across Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Singapore, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States.

The surveys were designed to collect consumers' and public service employees' perspectives on government service experiences. Consumer respondents reflect a balance of ages, genders and income levels. Employee respondents include workers in border services, government administration, higher education, postal services, public health, public safety, public transportation and infrastructure, social services and tax and revenue. Most have worked with government between 11 and 20 years.

In addition to conducting these surveys, Accenture researchers conducted four interviews with public sector executives to gain a more detailed understanding of how government leaders approach client experience today.

About Accenture

Accenture is a global professional services company with leading capabilities in digital, cloud and security. Combining unmatched experience and specialized skills across more than 40 industries, we offer Strategy and Consulting, Song, Technology and Operations services — all powered by the world’s largest network of Advanced Technology and Intelligent Operations centers. Our 721,000 people deliver on the promise of technology and human ingenuity every day, serving clients in more than 120 countries. We embrace the power of change to create value and shared success for our clients, people, shareholders, partners and communities. Visit us at [accenture.com](https://www.accenture.com).

About Accenture Research

Accenture Research shapes trends and creates data-driven insights about the most pressing issues global organizations face. Combining the power of innovative research techniques with a deep understanding of our clients’ industries, our team of 300 researchers and analysts spans 20 countries and publishes hundreds of reports, articles and points of view every year. Our thought-provoking research—supported by proprietary data and partnerships with leading organizations such as MIT and Harvard—guides our innovations and allows us to transform theories and fresh ideas into real-world solutions for our clients. Visit us at www.accenture.com/research

References

¹ See About the research for more information. All data is from Accenture’s 2022 consumer and public service worker surveys unless otherwise noted.

² World Population Review, “Canada Population 2022,” June 2022 at <https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/canada-population>

³ Basic digital channels include websites, dashboards and portals.

⁴ This survey was conducted online and therefore carries an inherent bias towards respondents who have access to the internet and are comfortable filling out digital forms.

⁵ Accenture Research executive interviews, July 2022

⁶ Accenture Research executive interviews, July 2022

⁷ Accenture, “Social Security: Securing Life Goals,” <https://www.accenture.com/us-en/case-studies/public-service/social-security-securing-life-goals>

⁸ Accenture, Accenture Citizen Experience Survey, 2019

⁹ Accenture, “The Human Paradox,” 2022 at <https://www.accenture.com/us-en/insights/song/human-paradox>

¹⁰ Accenture, Accenture Citizen Experience Survey, 2019

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¹² Accenture Research executive interviews, July 2022

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