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Modernizing CX in State and Local Government

Leaders share how agencies are building secure, human-centered digital services and scaling improvements with data and AI.

State and local governments are under growing pressure to deliver services that meet the expectations of today's digitally savvy citizens, which includes experiences that are seamless, secure and intuitive. Yet many agencies are still navigating longstanding challenges, from legacy infrastructure and siloed data to accessibility, equity gaps and limited resources.

At FedInsider's recent **State and Local Government Digital Summit**, government and industry leaders shared strategies for improving customer experience while building trust. Across three panel discussions, the speakers explored how agencies can modernize technical foundations, design more human-centered experiences and leverage data, artificial intelligence and emerging technology to scale improvements.

Setting the Foundations for Fast and Secure Services

"Customer satisfaction, in some capacity, has always been a critical goal for anybody engaging with their customer," said James Pratt, the Head of CX in North America for Freshworks. But in recent years, organizations have had to rethink their approach to CX.

"The modern tools of the last five to ten years are very much focused on how to bring everything into one single workspace for the customer support team to really understand who is reaching out and why," Pratt said.

In Connecticut, user experience (UX) researchers and service designers work with technology experts to understand the needs of residents and staff, and how to bring those needs into the development process, according to Max Gigle, the Deputy Director of Digital Products with the Connecticut Department of Administrative Services.

"We started to understand that residents didn't use technology in the siloed manner which the agencies provided it," Gigle said. For example, a resident filing for unemployment and looking for a new job may also be interested in training resources and transportation options, which all reside in different agencies. To provide better CX, Gigle's team has worked to understand where the various touch points are and how to streamline those life experiences.

"We found that it is most useful to redesign the government experience so that we can play a bigger part in someone's success as a whole government," he said. And in Connecticut, they now do that by aligning the right people, technology, enterprise tools and budgets around a full-service experience.

Building that kind of a CX foundation doesn't happen overnight. Tiffany Blair, Senior Director and SLED Industry Advisor Leader with Salesforce, said that at the core of this process starts with a unified data profile, but that not all agencies have a data strategy in place before CX-based initiatives.

"Stepping back and focusing on how you really think about data strategically — so that your agency can do all of those exciting things for constituents — is critical," Blair said. "AI is exciting, but we will need... a single, unified picture to make it work." Putting a data strategy in place before agencies are too far down the path to modernizing citizen-facing services is crucial for creating a unified view of that data.

Human-Centered CX in Action with UX, Accessibility and Personalization

As agencies modernize, they are embedding human-centered design to better meet user needs.

Joe DeLaTorre, Contact Center Modernization Lead with the Office of the Chief Innovation Officer for the New Jersey Innovation Authority, described efforts to modernize contact centers across 14 agencies into a modern, omnichannel platform.

His team engaged with those agencies to identify pain points for residents, applied human-centered design to optimize the experience and fine-tuned industry tools to meet government needs. Thanks to citizen feedback, DeLaTorre said his team began putting together the full experience picture as an office, "going from what does human-centered design look like on the website, to how do people use the different channels to get the support they need?" he said.

In New York, similar work led to a statewide CX strategy called the New York Experience, shared Jessica Houle, Digital Service Director for the New York State Digital Service. It roadmaps how the state planned to transform the way residents accessed

Featured Experts:

- **Max Gigle**
  Deputy Director of Digital Product, Connecticut Department of Administrative Services
- **James Pratt**
  Head of Customer Experience, North America, Freshworks
- **Tiffany Blair**
  Senior Director, SLED Industry Advisor Leader, Salesforce
- **Kristin Coulter**
  Communications Director, Tennessee Emergency Management Agency
- **Joe DeLaTorre**
  Contact Center Modernization Lead, Office of the CIO, New Jersey Innovation Authority
- **Jessica Houle**
  Digital Service Director, New York State Digital Service
- **Malou Toft**
  Chief Revenue Officer, Queue-It
- **Josh Dolby**
  Public Sector Sales Leader, Zoom
- **Zarina Baber**
  Assistant Commissioner & CTrO, Minnesota IT Services
- **Michael Hanna-Butros Meyering**
  Chief Communication & Policy Officer, Nevada Governor's Technology Office
- **Erica Stivison**
  Head of Design, California Office of Data & Innovation
- **Terry Simpson**
  Manager, Solutions Engineering, Nintex
- **Danny Villars**
  Senior Consultant, Experience Strategy & Programs, Granicus

services and benefits via three key pillars: customer-centric design, innovative solutions and a commitment to excellence.

"The other big thing is adding human-centered design activities into our approach to benefits and services as we look at what the experience is like for people," Houle said. Oftentimes, improvements are made by changing the language on a website to be clearer, rather than major technology overhauls.

In emergency management, clarity and accessibility are critical. "Experience at its core has to be clear, fast, accessible and trustworthy," said Kristin Coulter, the Communications Director for the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency.

The agency coordinates between citizens (like via the MyTN mobile app), county emergency managers, first responders and local governments, while also partnering with nonprofits and councils to ensure accessibility, all in order to handle response and recovery more effectively.

"For us, accessibility and customer experience go hand-in-hand," Coulter added. "The goal is to make sure every single Tennessean, regardless of disability, communication need or language barriers, has a fair opportunity to prepare, stay informed and get through an emergency successfully."

Technology also plays a key role in improving service delivery. Josh Dolby, Public Sector Sales Leader for Zoom, said that a great example was when Zoom worked with an agency providing temporary assistance for needy families, refactoring how they took basic calls and dealt with people and desks across 16 locations in a rural state.

"We helped them put more of their agents to use for more constituents to get information in order to feed families," Dolby said. "The systems are now built so that information flows gracefully to the next person in line, even if the constituent talked to AI before that." This helps the agent see the details regarding what the person is looking for so that they can quickly be connected to the right services.

And during high-demand events, stability is critical. Malou Toft, Chief Revenue Officer for Queue-It said that during large-scale public registrations, "agencies tell us that simply keeping the digital experience stable and transparent dramatically reduces inbound calls and walk-ins."

It's that stable, transparent digital experience that creates consistency. "When everyone sees the same message online across web and mobile, they understand what is happening. That shared reality is what consistency actually looks like," Toft said.

Scaling CX with Data, AI and Workforce Optimization

As agencies expand CX efforts, scaling becomes the next challenge.

Zarina Baber, the Assistant Commissioner and Chief Technology Officer for Minnesota IT Services, said the state has embedded CX into a broader product operating model and launched new digital services — creating a complete, end-to-end lifecycle of a customer-centric operating model.

They've also created over 40 new or optimized digital self-service experiences and utilized several concepts of the customer experience model to create the governor's signature initiative, better and more universal paid family medical leave.

The elements of that key project required scaling, which Baber said started with launching pilots and designing early adopter programs. That in turn helped to "bring in agencies as well as our IT leaders to let them better understand the concepts and the value that customer experience brings."

Scaling, however, can bring its own challenges. "When you scale CX, you scale your attack surface, and the best mitigation is a strong identity," said Michael Hanna-Butros Meyering, the Chief Communication and Policy Officer for the Nevada Governor's Technology Office.

Upscaling CX can change the risk posture quickly, so he recommends agencies first look at identity and fraud, as well as ensuring that there are authenticated domains. It's also important to look at data exposure through integration. "CX gets better when systems talk to each other, but that also means APIs, logs and third-party tools can become new leak points," he said. Cover data with least-privilege data minimization and strong vendor controls to protect yourself.

The people aspect is another crucial factor when scaling CX. Erica Stivison, Head of Design for the California Office of Data and Innovation, said both state residents and those delivering state services should be considered customers for CX projects. Frontline staff are subject matter experts in the programs they deliver, so bring them along as co-designers and co-problem solvers to create buy-in and ownership.

"Internal collaboration through participatory practices has a much higher likelihood of project success," Stivison said.

According to Danny Villars, the Senior Consultant for Experience Strategy and Programs with Granicus, advanced technologies like generative or agentic AI also play a role in scaling CX.

"We are seeing generative AI open new doors," Villars said. "There are two sides of the coin to look at: what ongoing CX efforts can AI accelerate, and on the other side, what new capabilities are we unlocking to improve CX that we didn't have available before."

For example, Villars said that there are tools available that can measure and monitor interactions so that residents are always able to interface with their government agencies in a comfortable way. CX should be built into every tool, and multilingual support and 24/7 service should also be made available.

Yet leaders still recommend taking CX scaling one step at a time. It's not about building one gigantic system but creating a platform that lets agencies rapidly create and improve services over time.

"Scaling CX in government almost never works if you try to do everything at once," said Terry Simpson, Manager of Solutions Engineering at Nintex. "I think that the agencies which really succeed usually take a crawl, walk, run approach."

For example, Simpson said that the best plan is to first find an area within government that causes a lot of friction or frustration for residents. "Start with one or two high-impact services, like permit applications, a case intake, or internal approvals that slow down citizen services," he said. Adding CX to that program should be relatively straightforward if the pain points are well-known, and success will be easily noticed by both leadership and people interacting with those services. Then you can parlay that into many other areas.

Taken together, the discussion made clear that modernizing CX in state and local government is not just about making services more convenient. It's about building systems that are clearer, more accessible, more secure and better aligned with how people actually use government services. Whether agencies are rethinking data foundations, redesigning service journeys or carefully scaling new tools like AI, the goal is the same: to create digital experiences that strengthen trust and help government work better for everyone it serves.

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