

Taking Complexity Out of Service Delivery

How automation can help public servants focus on constituents

New technologies deployed by state and local governments over the past several years have often made the task of serving constituents even harder for public servants.

Agency employees must now log into multiple disparate systems, perform numerous manual steps, and follow complex and sometimes poorly documented procedures — all of which distracts them from actually helping people qualify for social services programs, renew driver's licenses, apply for building permits or obtain other vital government services.

Automation represents a huge opportunity to address this issue. Jurisdictions are beginning to use this technology to consolidate multiple systems into a single portal and automate manual steps to make life easier for the public servants who use these tools — and unleash big gains in efficiency and program performance.

It's an approach that can be used everywhere, from back-office functions like HR and finance; to employee-facing tasks like IT service management; to public-facing programs like licensing, permitting and social services. Gartner analysts predict 75% of governments will have at least three enterprise-wide automation initiatives underway by 2024.

"Automation is a business imperative and a mission imperative," says Todd Schroeder, vice president for the public sector at UiPath, a company that uses automation to create an "operating agility layer" that enhances existing technology investments instead of replacing them. The company's technology overlays convoluted government systems and workflows, using automation to eliminate complexity and orchestrate activities across multiple processes.

Ultimately, this makes technology more effective and user-friendly — for agency staff and the public — which results in better services. Families get critical benefits faster, people spend less time on hold with

government call centers, processing times shrink for permits and licenses, and case backlogs diminish.

"It transparently establishes citizens and employees as the priority with a relentless focus on how to provide a frictionless and efficient experience in every interaction," says Schroeder. "We can get more complex work done and have a profound effect on society."

For example, the New York State Department of Labor used this type of automation to rapidly reduce a backlog of unemployment insurance claims during the pandemic and flag billions of dollars in potentially fraudulent applications. The California Department of Motor Vehicles launched a virtual field office to provide digital access to a range of formerly in-person transactions. And other agencies have dramatically reduced application processing times for important services.

Automation at the Edge

Automation isn't new to governments. Robotic process automation (RPA) — which at its most basic level involves emulating keystrokes to perform repetitive tasks on legacy mainframe systems — has helped streamline individual processes. More recently, jurisdictions have used automation to consolidate workflows across multiple systems.

But the focus of automation initiatives must shift to the edge — simplifying processes for caseworkers and other employees who work directly with constituents. Using automation to create an operating agility layer lets agencies address this need.

First, artificial intelligence (AI) identifies processes that are a good fit for automation. Then, low-code/no-code tools let staff develop automation routines that fit those processes and manage changes as needed. Finally, automated governance helps ensure data is protected and used appropriately and that executive impact reporting is available.

These capabilities help governments orchestrate connected automation processes across multiple steps of a workflow to create a chain of impact that spans the full life cycle of government workflows — starting with back-office tasks that support the employees who ultimately deliver constituent services.

"The operating agility layer doesn't increase complexity — it organizes complexity around the delivery of outcomes," Schroeder says.

It also lets agencies achieve better results faster, because — unlike "rip and replace" technology upgrades — they can continue to use underlying systems.

"Lifting and shifting all processes to a singular digital platform has and will continue to fail," Schroeder says. "The value is automating the touch points between existing systems and employee processes so the workforce or stakeholder doesn't have to."

Consider the ripple effects of one back-office task ripe for automation: resetting passwords used by government employees to log into internal systems. When automation simplifies that process and allows front-line government employees to return to work faster, the constituent ultimately benefits. When that's combined with additional automation that delivers information to employees quicker or lets them focus on complex tasks, service delivery bottlenecks and backlogs begin to disappear.

The Automation-First Era

Governments must develop an automation-first mindset. That means considering automation an essential element of all transformational work — from rethinking business processes to modernizing technology.

"More often than not, automation becomes part of the discussion because there's a problem that can't be overcome," Schroeder says. Start instead by thinking about ways to connect entire workflows, not

Real-World Results

The pandemic served as a proof point for using automation to streamline and simplify processes. Multiple states used automation platforms to quickly respond to changing needs.

- **New York:** The state Department of Labor (DOL) used UiPath's operating agility layer technology to address backlogs in unemployment insurance applications, which grew to more than 2 million in early 2020. The UiPath platform helped the state address call center overload by aggregating data from seven different systems to speed response time. More than 200 automated robots processed 1.2 million applications in the first two weeks of operation and flagged another 800,000 for incomplete data that were addressed by claims staff. Overall, DOL saved more than 130,000 staff hours. In addition, automation saved an estimated \$12 billion by helping the department flag fraudulent entries.
- **California:** The state Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) used UiPath's platform to create the DMV Virtual Field Office, which provides 24/7 remote access to a wide range of common DMV transactions, allowing staff to focus on more complex tasks. The platform automated 4.8 million transactions across 28 different functions, saving the DMV \$5.4 million.
- **Georgia:** The state Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) faced major processing delays during the pandemic, delaying benefits for constituents and running the risk of fines to the state. UiPath's platform helped automate the SNAP application workflow, reducing the time to process applications from nearly an hour to approximately 15 minutes within three weeks — with a 0% error rate.
- **Florida:** As a result of the pandemic, the state Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO) faced a backlog of requests from residents to backdate unemployment benefits. UiPath's automation platform allowed DEO to automate 50 processes involved in validating eligible claims. Automation shortened the validation process from 11 minutes to under 1 minute, reducing backlogs and saving \$26 million.

just address discrete roadblocks. Doing so can reduce risk, save time and money for deployment, and improve sustainability.

It's also critical to focus on the ultimate mission of an agency — as operationalized by its highest-level outcomes and objectives. This approach reveals opportunities where automation can improve the full lifecycle of business processes, from the back office to the front line. "Every percentage of the process that's automated provides an exponential impact for decades and ultimately is at the root of evolving government's ability to meet today's needs," Schroeder says.

Understanding how different business processes come together to drive outcomes requires IT teams to work closely with departmental and business process leaders. Collaboration helps ensure investments in modernization and digital transformation will yield immediate benefits.

"We're recentering where transformation should have been pointed all along — at the employee and constituent, not the system or technology," Schroeder says. "Better platforms make every public servant more productive and have huge societal benefits."

Conclusion

Along with generating the ROI and value that jurisdictions have long expected — but often not realized — from technology investments, automation can fundamentally change how governments operate. Consider a contact center for human services, where caseloads represent the standard by which work is focused and measured.

"When all steps of the workflow are connected and automated and employees can focus fully on meeting more complex

constituent needs, we're no longer trying to process a case," Schroeder says. "We're providing a great experience to the person coming through the front door at one of the neediest times of their lives."

To move in this direction, government leaders must bridge the "chasm between IT and business," Schroeder says, by viewing automation as a key enabler of business transformation.

"Automation must be asked about as part of every plan," he says, "and recognized as a critical component of mission success and outcome."

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