One-size-fits-all doesn't work anymore: Drive action and optimize digital experiences with Engagement Cloud

75%	700%	275%	30%
engagement rate	growth in audience	increase in program adoption	reduction in outreach costs

Government organizations today face a complex reality: They must serve more varied, mobile, and digitally connected communities than ever before.

Traditional methods like in-person events, paid advertisements, flyers, workshops, static websites, and generic newsletters no longer suffice. These outdated tools lack the personalization, reach, flexibility, and effectiveness to engage people, gather meaningful feedback, and drive participation in critical programs and services.

As a result, agencies are left with fragmented communication, low turnout, and a limited understanding of who their constituents are and what they need.

Meanwhile, public expectations continue to evolve. Citizens are accustomed to seamless digital experiences in the private sector and expect the same responsiveness, clarity, and ease from their local and state governments.

Yet, too many agencies still rely on disconnected systems, siloed teams, and outdated technology. Without the ability to communicate across channels, understand their audience, or optimize outreach, governments risk missing opportunities to build trust, improve services, and fulfill their missions.

A smarter approach to engagement

Government organizations wanting to rise to this challenge must embrace a proactive, human-centered, data-driven engagement strategy. This means more than just sending out information — it requires a new level of audience insights to transform one-way communication into meaningful dialogue, laying the groundwork for transparency, responsiveness, and meaningful engagement. Agencies should aim to design digital engagement journeys that reflect the complexity of their communities while being simple and intuitive for citizens to navigate.

A survey of public sector employees highlighted these challenges:

✔ **Grow their network and maximize engagement** across every digital channel.

✔ **Build a dynamic, data-informed view** of their constituents to better understand needs and segment outreach.

✔ **Guide constituents** through tailored and streamlined digital journeys.

✔ **Leverage performance metrics and real-time data** to optimize their strategy.

This approach improves engagement outcomes, reduces communication costs, enhances trust, and streamlines team operations.

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Designing high-impact engagement journeys

Modern engagement requires understanding not just who needs to be reached but also how they prefer to be engaged. From onboarding new residents to informing the public about infrastructure projects or social programs, the most effective campaigns use segmentation, behavioral insights, and personalized content to increase relevance and response rates.

For example, instead of a one-time email about a public meeting, an engagement journey might include:

- ✔ **An initial text message** alerting residents to an upcoming project.

- ✔ **A follow-up email linking to a project page** with detailed information.

- ✔ **An online map** where residents can leave comments or suggestions.

- ✔ **A targeted reminder on social media** based on geographic proximity.

These coordinated touchpoints build awareness, foster transparency, and give residents multiple avenues to stay informed and involved. Importantly, agencies can use performance metrics at each stage to understand which channels are most effective and which topics resonate most with different community segments.

Real-world impact: Better outcomes across government sectors

In **Bellevue, Washington,** government leaders wanted to better understand what topics residents were most interested in and how website changes were being received. By capturing and analyzing audience behavior and feedback, they increased engagement and gave internal teams precise data to guide future communication strategies.

Bellevue sought to "take their engagement and communications to the next level" by making it easier for residents to stay informed about city projects and initiatives. Previously, there was no centralized way for residents to find out when new projects were launched without manually checking various webpages. With the implementation of a centralized digital engagement solution, Bellevue began using proactive, multichannel notifications to deliver timely updates to those who opted in.

As Claude Losso, Bellevue's digital communications coordinator, put it: "It was a way to connect with people interested in city projects but, short of regularly monitoring city web pages, had no way of knowing something new was happening. Since we launched [Engagement Cloud's communications capabilities] all those years ago, it's been a great tool."

The results were substantial: The city saw a 58% increase in engagement and more targeted promotion of city initiatives based on resident interests.

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San Juan County, Washington, faced the challenge of connecting with geographically dispersed populations across islands. By using digital engagement portals, they gathered actionable input and reduced dissatisfaction, demonstrating the power of digital tools in even the most logistically complex communities.

This county made up of numerous islands struggled to engage residents using traditional methods. The local public works department turned to digital engagement tools to bridge the physical gaps. By creating a centralized online engagement portal, the county was able to collect input from across its remote communities without requiring residents to travel or attend in-person meetings.

The portal enabled San Juan County to make more data-informed decisions and saw a noticeable reduction in resident dissatisfaction. The county's experience highlights how digital platforms can reach populations that are traditionally underserved due to geography.

These examples show how government organizations can reach more people, build trust, and improve program outcomes by understanding their audience and meeting them where they are.

The power of multichannel communication

Multichannel communication isn't a luxury; it's a necessity. Residents engage through various channels based on age, accessibility, language, and preference. When public sector organizations coordinate email, text, web, and social media into a single campaign strategy, they can maximize reach without duplicating effort — and see real, measurable results.

Take the **Ada County Highway District (ACHD)** in Idaho. As the only countywide highway agency in the state, ACHD serves more than 500,000 residents — and recognized a growing need to engage the public more meaningfully around transportation projects. To better inform and involve its community, ACHD launched a centralized engagement hub, ACHD Engage, supported by integrated digital tools that allowed staff to promote public projects, gather feedback, and distribute updates across multiple channels. In less than a year, the district saw a 75.6% engagement rate and a 52% growth in subscribers. Visitors to the site provided over 11,000 pieces of feedback — from surveys and idea submissions to forum discussions — all accessible from a single platform. The effort not only boosted public input; it also created internal efficiencies by consolidating communication workflows, automating distribution, and eliminating silos between departments.

A different but equally powerful example comes from **Cabarrus County Schools in North Carolina**. While the district had long used social media to connect with parents, it struggled to engage other key community stakeholders — especially those without children in the school system, like taxpayers, civic leaders, and retirees. To broaden its reach, the district created an online engagement platform where residents could learn about budget proposals, school planning, and long-term facility needs. More importantly, the platform enabled open, fact-based dialogue about issues that often stir emotion, such as tax rates and district funding. Through email campaigns, social promotion, and direct links from the district's main website, the engagement hub attracted thousands of visitors who contributed ideas, posed questions, and participated in discussions. For district leaders, this transparent and inclusive communication channel became a vital tool for building trust and educating the public about key decisions.

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These examples demonstrate the power of consolidated, multichannel engagement strategies. When public organizations use a unified platform to manage outreach — across web, email, text, and social — they save time, eliminate redundancy, and reduce the risk of information gaps. Staff no longer need to juggle disconnected systems or manually compile feedback from different sources. Instead, they gain access to shared dashboards and real-time analytics that support better decision-making and smarter long-term planning.

This integrated approach has been shown to:

Reduce outreach costs by up to 30%.	Increase participation rates by 10x.	Decrease time spent on manual input and reporting by 20 hours per month.	Improve constituent satisfaction and retention.

These aren't just efficiency gains — they're strategic advantages. With the right tools and strategy, public sector organizations can do more with less while strengthening relationships with the people they serve.

Audience segmentation and personalization

Modern communities are diverse — not just in demographics, but in communication preferences, needs, and expectations. To reach residents meaningfully, public sector organizations must move beyond one-size-fits-all messaging and embrace strategies that segment audiences and personalize communication. When done well, this approach doesn't just increase engagement — it improves program participation, builds trust, and optimizes digital service delivery.

In **Silverthorne, Colorado**, a fast-growing mountain town, community leaders recognized that their traditional methods of outreach — primarily a single quarterly newsletter — were no longer sufficient for the variety of updates residents needed. From recreation center schedules and road closures to council meeting highlights and special events, the information coming out of town hall was broad and frequent.

To better meet community needs, Silverthorne expanded its use of digital tools to segment its audiences and deliver topic-specific updates. Residents could subscribe to only the topics that mattered most to them, like public works updates, parks and rec alerts, or town council summaries, rather than being overwhelmed by a catch-all newsletter.

The shift led to greater overall engagement, a stronger sense of community connectedness, and a more manageable workload for staff, who no longer had to manually sort communications across multiple departments. Importantly, this approach gave residents more control over how they engaged with their local government, increasing the likelihood they would open, read, and act on the messages they received.

In **Washington, D.C.**, local government leaders faced a more urgent challenge: reducing inappropriate use of emergency services. A growing number of non-emergency 911 calls were putting pressure on the city's Fire and Emergency Medical Services (FEMS) department, diverting resources from life-threatening emergencies.

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To address the issue, FEMS partnered with a digital engagement team to design a targeted communication strategy around the Nurse Triage Line (NTL), an alternative for non-critical medical calls. Through segmentation and personalized outreach, they delivered more than 1.3 million mobile messages to residents most likely to benefit from the service. The content was written to be clear, concise, and culturally relevant, and delivery was timed to coincide with patterns of high call volume.

The results were both immediate and long-lasting: non-emergency 911 calls dropped by 10%, and awareness of the triage line increased across the city. More than just an engagement campaign, this was a case of using smart, segmented messaging to change public behavior and optimize critical services.

The campaign not only alleviated pressure on emergency responders but also helped residents access the right care at the right time, underscoring how personalized communication can drive operational impact.

A similar transformation occurred at the **New York State Higher Education Services Corporation (HESC)**, where the goal was to ensure that students across the state were receiving timely, relevant information about financial aid. HESC manages billions in aid each year, but in a landscape filled with noise and competing digital content, many eligible students missed out simply because they weren't getting the right information at the right time.

To address this, the agency launched a highly personalized communication initiative, creating over 30 tailored subscription topics for students, families, and educators. In 2023 alone, they sent out more than 2.3 million bulletins and 160,000 targeted text messages to more than 644,000 subscribers.

Messaging was adapted by audience segment — for instance, high school seniors received FAFSA deadlines and application checklists, while college students got reminders about grant eligibility and loan repayment.

The campaign achieved an engagement rate nearing 70%, a clear sign that well-targeted content drives results. More importantly, it gave students a reliable, trusted channel for navigating a complex financial process, empowering them to make informed decisions about their education.

> These examples underscore the value of investing in communication strategies that go beyond mass messaging. By segmenting audiences and personalizing outreach, public sector organizations can better serve their communities — whether it's reducing emergency response strain, increasing access to education, or simply helping residents stay connected to local initiatives. This approach not only improves engagement but also increases efficiency and improves outcomes.

From communication to collaboration

True engagement isn't just about sending messages — it's about creating opportunities for residents to collaborate in shaping the policies and programs that affect them. Two-way communication tools, such as conversational SMS, online discussion forums, Q&A boards, interactive project pages, and sentiment tracking, allow governments to move beyond outreach and into dialogue.

In **Eugene, Oregon**, city leaders recognized that traditional outreach methods weren't sufficient for fostering meaningful community involvement. By implementing a digital engagement platform, they provided residents with interactive tools to participate in city planning and decision-making processes. This approach led to more than 1,000 community-submitted ideas and a growing base of more than 7,800 registered users, significantly expanding their reach and ensuring that public input directly influenced city initiatives.

Similarly, the **Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board** in Ontario faced challenges with declining participation in traditional surveys. To address this, they launched a community engagement portal that offered diverse ways for parents, students, and community members to engage with the school district. This platform facilitated transparent communication and allowed stakeholders to see how their feedback was being utilized, thereby rebuilding trust and fostering a more collaborative environment.

In **Leamington, Ontario**, the municipality sought to revamp its underutilized public transit system. By actively involving residents through surveys and interactive forums on their engagement portal, they gathered valuable insights that led to the creation of an on-demand transit service. This collaborative approach resulted in a 275% increase in ridership within the first year, demonstrating the effectiveness of involving the community in service design.

> **This capability is especially critical for initiatives that require public buy-in, such as capital improvement projects, budget planning, or social services outreach. Residents who see that their input is valued and acted upon are more likely to participate again, tell others, and develop long-term trust in their local government.**

Agencies can also use engagement platforms to report back on what they heard and what actions were taken. This transparency completes the feedback loop and reinforces accountability — something that legacy engagement methods often overlook.

Support that makes the difference

Even the best engagement tools fall short without the right support behind them. Public sector organizations see the greatest results when their technology is paired with expert guidance, tailored training, and long-term strategy alignment. That support goes beyond technical onboarding — it includes helping design human-centered campaigns, optimizing audience journeys, and benchmarking success over time.

A standout is the **HIRE Vets Medallion Program** from the U.S. Department of Labor. With limited advertising resources and an urgent need to boost awareness and participation, the program turned to the Granicus Experience Group (GXG) for strategic support. GXG worked alongside the internal team to design a multiyear digital engagement strategy that included audience segmentation, performance benchmarking, and continuous optimization.

The GXG team helped refine messaging for key audience segments, align campaign timing with critical application milestones, and expand the reach through targeted email campaigns. The result? A 127% increase in accepted applications, a 58% increase in program revenue, and a subscriber base that grew from 450,000 to more than 3.6 million.

Just as important as the numbers was the program's ability to retain and deepen engagement with its audience. GXG's support enabled a 50% year-over-year increase in repeat applicants, with 232 employers applying multiple times and 58 applying three times. These outcomes weren't driven by software alone — they were the result of close, ongoing collaboration with experts who understood the goals, challenges, and audiences unique to the program.

The path to digital maturity

Building a modern engagement strategy is a journey, not a one-time implementation. Agencies must constantly evaluate how their communications perform, how residents respond, and where gaps still exist. The goal is to build internal capacity, reduce technology silos, and foster a culture of continuous improvement.

With the proper foundation in place, government organizations can evolve from essential communications to advanced engagement strategies that:

✔ **Enhance visibility and transparency.**

✔ **Support cross-departmental collaboration.**

✔ **Deliver measurable impact and cost savings.**

✔ **Strategic engagement is no longer optional; it's essential.**

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