GRANICUS

Four Stages of Communications for a

Successful Government Customer Experience

Government has rapidly accelerated its digital modernization efforts. However, there is a growing need for government to take a more strategic, multi-channel approach to the way it interacts with the public as well as internal workforces in order to ensure these web and online services provide a user-friendly experience the public expects.

Dedicated executive orders and policies emphasizing the need for government to increase accessibility, ease-of-use, and equity in service delivery have put the onus on agencies to provide enhanced digital government experiences.

These directives are having a positive impact on governments' reputation among customers but technological and procedural gaps persist. While the *2022 American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI)* trends indicate higher citizen satisfaction scores with government than in 2021, "aggregate citizen satisfaction with the federal government remains below pre-COVID-19 levels."

Part of alleviating customer burden and improving satisfaction lies in how well government communicates services and offerings to the public. Human-centered communications can simplify complexities and alleviate anxieties around identifying and using critical government services.

By aligning digital communications to the customer's journey, government can better manage expectations, guide progress, increase awareness, drive adoption, and measure outcomes.

"*Our long-term partnership with CMS has resulted in one of the most sophisticated public engagement programs in government – one that leverages modern experience technologies and data science to help inform, qualify, and guide individuals as they navigate one of their most important life choices. Informed by billions of data points across millions of digital journeys, Granicus and CMS deliver better individual outcomes, at higher levels of satisfaction, and at significantly lower costs per enrollment. We are pleased to leverage these principles and capabilities to now support several states with their Medicaid Unwinding enrollment changes at higher levels of efficacy.*"

– Mark Hynes, Chief Executive Officer at Granicus

Improvements in this area enable governments to drive more successful outcomes in critical areas of need, including:
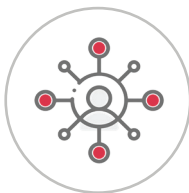
**Outreach** programs that drive deeper customer engagement

Increased **enrollment** in government programs that drive positive societal impacts

Recruitment and retention of employees to build the government **workforce** of the future

Based on Granicus Experience Group's decade of experience working with governments, we've identified four critical communication stages that best enable government to communicate with customers and accelerate progress toward these objectives. These stages represent a thoughtful, targeted way to meet customers where they are to ensure successful government service delivery and mission success.

The four stages include:

1 Awareness & Opt-In

2 Trust & Consideration

3 Decision & Action

4 Management & Engagement
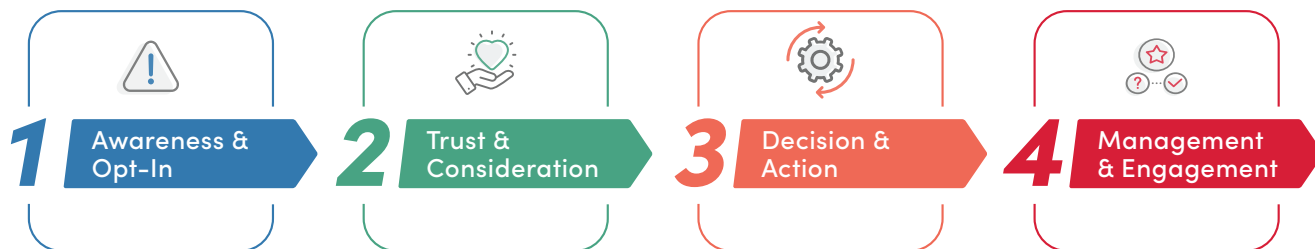
STAGE 01

Awareness

Awareness is at the foundation of action. When action is needed, individuals rely on government to be a source of trustworthy, reliable guidance. For a group of people—or an audience—to act with confidence, they need to have visibility into the available resources and information. The awareness stage of communications aims to grow the audience to whom you provide that guidance, educating them about your program or campaign.

OUTREACH CHALLENGE:

When seeking to increase awareness of programs or offerings, identifying and reaching the right audience is a common challenge. These issues arise whether the government needs to reach a new or existing audience. For example:

> There is a new program that could have a restriction on time and quantity.

> Existing customers need to become aware of upgrades or changes to their account.

> Programs are facing issues reaching a specific or broad segment of people who may be hard to reach.

> Agencies need to enroll or increase enrollment for general services they provide.

ENROLLMENT CHALLENGE:

Many government programs need to enroll users at a massive scale to enable delivery to the right audience.

> Messaging about enrollment without proper segmentation, analytics, and messaging expertise risks lower engagement.

> **Data point:** Outreach to **6,500 people only results in about 8 successful enrollments** to a multi-step program enrollment.

WORKFORCE CHALLENGE:

To expand diversity and equity in recruitment outreach, agencies must understand and overcome pitfalls within the hiring journey.

> Lack of transparency for employees causes difficulties enforcing trust and seamless change management experiences.

Solution/Opportunity

A multi-channel communications strategy that prioritizes digital outreach at scale will cultivate the awareness necessary for audiences to adopt digital services.

A comprehensive approach might include traditional print media, contact center communications, direct mail, community meetings, and a presence at in-person events. However, it's critical for agencies to integrate and optimize a digital communications approach that incorporates email, SMS, and social media. These channels enable governments to target and reach desired audience groups with greater frequency, efficiency, and relevance while capturing data to measure the impact of their investments.

Maximize the value of your communication capabilities

Governments are increasingly using email communications to reach individuals and drive awareness. In fact, more than 17 billion emails were sent by state, local, and federal governments in 2022. Similarly, governments are incorporating SMS as part of their outreach strategy.

> In 2022, government agencies sent 11% more SMS messages through govDelivery than in 2021. (Granicus Digital Communications Benchmark reports *2021*, *2022*).

While the frequency and increased use of these channels indicate a rise in governments' adoption of communications tools, it's critical to identify the right audience, cadence, and delivery to ensure message saturation.

Governments should leverage targeting and measurement tools built into these digital channels to grow audiences and track opt-in conversation rates.

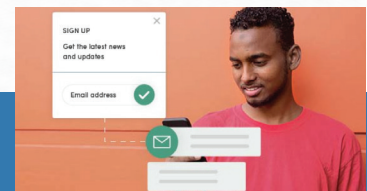## govDelivery features have been strategically used by government partners to help validate program awareness
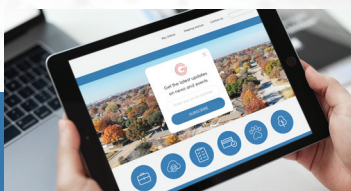
Overlay
Convert web traffic with branded overlays that significantly boost subscriptions to program information.
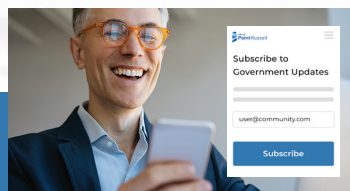
Text to Subscribe
Give customers the option to sign up for program updates with text messages provides better level of service.

Sign-up Builder
Create targeted sign-ups that empower customers to subscribe to receive the information they want most in minutes.

Michigan leverages digital communications to recruit foster parents

Through a three-phase email and interactive text campaign strategy, the *Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS)* increased its subscriber base by more than 20,000 people. The first interactive SMS campaign resulted in 90 informational phone calls with potential foster parents. The campaigns ultimately increased awareness about how to become a foster parent in Michigan and further opened the lines of communication between MDHHS and potential foster parents by leveraging more communication channels.

22,825
Subscribers

450
Social Shares

23%
SMS Response Rate

> " With each phase, it's been great to not only see campaign results, but also see the level of excitement and involvement from the Granicus team. I can tell they are truly vested in this project and care about finding homes for kids in foster care."

— *Erica Quealy, Marketing Specialist, Michigan Department of Health & Human Services*

STAGE 2

Trust & Consideration

The trust and consideration stage for government communications is an opportunity to build credibility between people and government. Trust involves a strategy focused on who, what, where, and how the message will be perceived.

Trust underpins the government's ability to provide necessary services and individuals' confidence in using those services. According to the *Partnership for Public Service*, "Low trust is a barrier to our government's ability to meet today's urgent needs and provide modernized, equitable, and accessible services."

Trust in government is a growing concern as "only two-in-10 Americans say they trust the government in Washington to do what is right 'just about always' (2%) or 'most of the time' (19%)," *according to a 2023 Pew Research Center report*.

OUTREACH CHALLENGE:

The erosion of trust in government has wide ranging causes. However, it can be exacerbated by confusing, infrequent communication, or even too frequent or irrelevant communication. When a status is not clear or the right next step is hard to anticipate, feelings of anxiety can turn into mistrust. The customer may be thinking:

> "Does government have my best interest in mind?"

> "Do they understand my experience?"

> "Do they want me to succeed?"

> "Why do they make this hard for people like me?"

ENROLLMENT CHALLENGE:

Perceived disconnect or distrust in government can provide institutional challenges for program adoption and enrollment.

> Customers are wary to "take the first step" after becoming aware of a program or service.

> Customers are subscribed or have expressed interest but will not commit to starting an enrollment process.

> Customers are having a hard time navigating an outdated system or user experience interface on a platform.

> Customers are expressing a general lack of trust or skepticism in the program itself.

WORKFORCE CHALLENGE:

Reduced trust makes it harder to attract and retain good employees for government jobs.

> Failing to attract the right talent results in unfilled positions or underqualified hires, which feeds a vicious cycle that further degrades the customer's experience and deepens distrust.

Solution/Opportunity

Government organizations can strengthen trust by deepening their understanding of their audience based on how members interact with communications, the preferences they select, and how often they engage with content.

This level of attention can help customers understand the resources available to them so they can make relevant, informed decisions, tailored to their individual needs and circumstances. By adopting this data-driven, empathetic approach, audiences will feel respected and understood.

Governments can demonstrate their commitment to transparency and accountability by carefully considering every aspect of communication with the public—such as the channels used, audiences targeted, and message content.

In this critical trust and consideration phase—when your audience is assessing the source and credibility of the information to determine how to proceed—it's important to ensure communications are clear, relevant, and decisive.

Governments can build trust by educating on program benefits and processes with relevant, timely, and personalized information based on customer understanding. It's important to develop that understanding by asking in-context questions about demographics, geography, interests, or other preferences.

Key tactics to support trust and consideration in communications

Question-Answer Rate

Measure your audience's willingness to answer questions during the discovery process. This is an indicator of program trust.

Welcome Messages & Campaigns

Make a great first impression and confirm to subscribers that their subscription was successful. Introduce your mission and priority programs early on.

Segmentation Strategy

Ensure communications are tailored based on increased customer understanding. Topic sign-ups are an indicator of program consideration.

Account Creations & Logins

Some require accounts to enroll in a program or apply for benefits. Use communications at this stage to reduce barriers and explain the value.

43% open rates for welcome messages, compared to 36% for other message types.

30% engaged by GXG through personalized outreach will decide to start an application.

63% aware of the campaign will create an account (if it's required in the enrollment process).

National Center for PTSD
POSTTRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

"
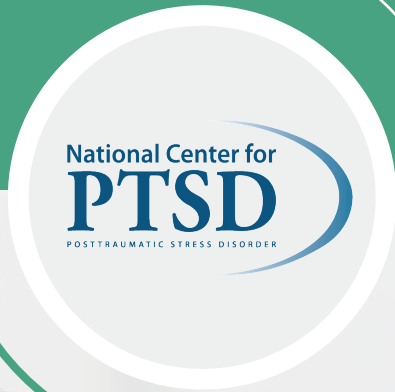
Our ultimate goal is to connect those who need help or support with all of the available resources, and drive them to the resources they need."

— Peggy Willoughby, Director of Communications, Department of Veterans Affairs, National Center for PTSD

Connecting people who have experienced trauma to services and programs related to PTSD

The *National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)* supports all those who have experienced trauma or who suffer from PTSD. In just two years, the National Center for PTSD's audience increased from 100,000 subscribers to over 375,000. Through research and journey mapping, the team was able to identify clear priorities for improvement and create targeted messaging based on identified segments. With a new understanding of its growing audience, the Center's annual pledge support during PTSD awareness month increased by 400%.

375K
subscribers (up from 100,000)

71%
new subscribers since Spring 2019

75K
new subscribers since 2021

400%
increase in pledges of support from individuals and businesses

STAGE 3

Decision & Action

For successful program adoption, government needs to translate citizen awareness and trust to action in the form of a conversion: A registration, application, sign-up, attendance, or other measurable outcome.

Communications that are well-aligned to a customer's journey can help reduce the number of people calling into a call center or coming into the agency's offices. More importantly, communications can increase overall program adoption.

Government programs are designed with the public's interests in mind but still may face challenges in engaging their audiences. Some of these challenges are due to user interfaces while others pertain to communications. Common challenges include:

OUTREACH CHALLENGE:

> Customers are confused or unsure of instructions, processes, costs, where to begin, etc.

> Customers express interest and attempt to engage but drop out or forget about related deadlines.

ENROLLMENT CHALLENGE:

> Programs are experiencing slow completion, inadequate submissions, high bailout rates, or error-riddled responses.

> Customers hesitate to answer the questions out of fear, distrust, or lack of understanding.

> Programs have launched a new interface or enrollment plan but lack a rollout strategy to ensure adoption and enrollment.

WORKFORCE CHALLENGE:

> Agencies lack the personnel to support customer demand or the required skills and experience to address customer needs and concerns.

Solution/Opportunity

Communications must be clear about pertinent topics like how to start an application, what information or documentation is required, how long it will take to complete, and answer other frequently asked questions. It's important to address common obstacles like accessibility issues (e.g., implementing screen readers) and data submission validation.

By connecting a multi-channel messaging approach to the journey of your target audiences, you can measure the customer's experience and burdens. Understanding who is starting an application for your services—where, when, on what channels—allows you to identify where they drop off and re-engage them to complete a desired action.

Demonstrate empathy with your audience to build trust, adequately manage expectations, and guide them to action. The key to maximizing engagement at this step is to increase the conversion rate in the trust and consideration stage.

When stages one through three are executed with a thorough, thoughtful strategy, 40% of those who decide to start an application will submit a finalized application.

Effectively increase program or service adoption

Use advanced analytics tools and custom reporting to identify chokepoints in the enrollment submission process.

Analyze who is enrolling in the program to ensure the experience demonstrates the desired tenants of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility.

Implement relevant application UX process improvements based on that data.

King County, WA, keeps voters aware of mail-in ballots and encourages voting participation

King County Elections (KCE) looked to bring greater transparency and awareness to Washington's vote-by-mail ballot processing by sending updates to voters throughout the voting process. Using targeted messaging, the KCE team was able to send one-to-one notifications to voters who submitted their mail-in ballot. As a result, more than 80% of voters who opted into the alerts were able to get their ballots cured—or corrected—before the voting deadline, compared to a cure rate of 48% for other voters.

67%
greater cure rate among voters opted in for alerts

91%
greater turnout among opt-in voters in Special Election

1.4 M
registered voters in county

5
languages for ballot alerts

> "We noticed that there was really a need to be able to connect voters with real-time information about the status of their ballot. While we had tools available on our website, we realized that there were still voters who were getting their ballots challenged and not realizing it in time to be able to make a difference to cure their ballot."
>
> — *Jaclyn Adams, Project Manager, King County Elections, King County, WA*

STAGE 4

Management & Engagement

After a user takes action—whether through account creation, application submission, or otherwise—their journey isn't over. Continued communications are critical for advancing government service delivery. Ongoing communications and measurement of engagement are necessary for government to measure success and continuously evolve digital service delivery.

Every engagement with customers provides government with critical opportunities to establish deeper connections. It's also important to monitor data along the journey to provide guidance, inform or update, and help identify potential problems to troubleshoot. This helps to build long-term trust.

OUTREACH CHALLENGE:

> A recurring challenge across government is under-communication. The target audiences are not aware of service offerings or lack visibility into processes, benefits, and deadlines.

ENROLLMENT CHALLENGE:

> Government organizations are experiencing high call volume and workforce strain from simple requests or basic status updates.

> Increase in citizen complaints or frustration around lagging or missing status updates further strains workforce and resources.

WORKFORCE CHALLENGE:

> These issues can be amplified by government's persisting recruitment and retention problems, which reinforce the need for technology and services to help fill the gaps.

> In fact, "less than half (46%) of federal employees grade their agency's ability to deliver excellent, equitable, and secure citizen services an 'A,'" which they attribute to a lack of modern technology.

> Programs have not established multi-channel customer service like chatbots or updated platforms.

Solution/Opportunity

Learning from customers' experience, as well as identifying procedural pain points enables government to be proactive and agile in remedying issues. For the government workforce, this lends itself to a reduction in administrative burden by helping to offset call center volume, as well as improving reputational concerns. By delivering on service expectations, citizen-government relationships are nurtured, cultivating mutual understanding and respect.

Government's ability to tailor outreach methods and be agile based on continuous data-driven learning can increase citizen satisfaction. This is critical for program success as satisfied customers are 9x more likely to trust an agency.

Some opportunities for government to instill best practices in the management and engagement stage include:

Sending One-to-One Messages (based on event triggers) to manage enrollment expectations via email, SMS, and voice calls (e.g., sending a message confirming plan type, plan name, coverage effective date, etc.).

Provide Timely and Relevant Information about enrollment status. Successful execution during the enrollment management phase is the most likely to influence whether enrollees will reapply to future programs.

The HIRE Vets Medallion Program grew its program applications by 127%

The *HIRE Vets Medallion Award program within the U.S. Department of Labor* is dedicated to recognizing employers that recruit, employ, and retain veterans. Tasked with launching a new program, the team took a phased approach to build awareness, growing its number of recipients from 450,000 to 3.6 million. With that growth in awareness, combined with the use of audience insights and data to refine segmentation and personalization, the program experienced a 127% increase in applications in three years, with 232 repeat applicants.

127%
growth in accepted applications

58%
increase in program revenue

232
repeat applicants, 58 of which are 3x repeats

3.6M
recipients by third year

> When the new program started, it had no brand recognition or awareness among U.S. employers. It was our job to launch a program that was unknown to the world. The success of the HIRE Vets Medallion Program is a reflection of the mature outreach strategy that continues to lead to better and better results.
>
> — *Randall Smith, Director, HIRE Vets Medallion Program, U.S. Department of Labor*

Conclusion

Government needs to pay added attention to the customers' experience while keeping up with the rapid digital transformation happening across industries. Governments can build trust and improve CX through communications around program and service offerings, ensuring audiences who need those services are aware of, engage with, and adopt them.

A multi-channel communications strategy is a key part of a successful overarching plan incorporating user-friendly technology and inter-organizational collaboration. As Granicus' strategic consultancy, GXG partners with governments to develop custom outreach, workforce, and enrollment strategies using a four-stage communications strategy to reach the right audiences and maximize service delivery.

Get a 360-degree view of your CX and communications strategies

Whether you need some advice, a guiding hand, or are starting from scratch, reach out to a digital government experience expert at Granicus Experience Group (GXG) to craft engagement, enrollment, and workforce strategies that deliver results while keeping humans at the center.

Get in Touch