



A CUSTOMER-CENTRIC UPGRADE FOR CALIFORNIA GOVERNMENT

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LITTLE HOOVER COMMISSION

*DEDICATED TO PROMOTING ECONOMY AND
EFFICIENCY IN CALIFORNIA STATE GOVERNMENT*

To Promote Economy and Efficiency

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The Little Hoover Commission, formally known as the Milton Marks "Little Hoover" Commission on California State Government Organization and Economy, is an independent state oversight agency.

By statute, the Commission is a bipartisan board composed of five public members appointed by the governor, four public members appointed by the Legislature, two senators and two assemblymembers.

In creating the Commission in 1962, the Legislature declared its purpose:

...to secure assistance for the Governor and itself in promoting economy, efficiency and improved services in the transaction of the public business in the various departments, agencies and instrumentalities of the executive branch of the state government, and in making the operation of all state departments, agencies and instrumentalities, and all expenditures of public funds, more directly responsive to the wishes of the people as expressed by their elected representatives...

The Commission fulfills this charge by listening to the public, consulting with the experts and conferring with the wise. In the course of its investigations, the Commission typically empanels advisory committees, conducts public hearings and visits government operations in action.

Its conclusions are submitted to the Governor and the Legislature for their consideration. Recommendations often take the form of legislation, which the Commission supports through the legislative process.

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LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

October 22, 2015



The Honorable Kevin de León
President pro Tempore of the Senate
and members of the Senate

The Honorable Jean Fuller
Senate Minority Leader

The Honorable Toni G. Atkins
Speaker of the Assembly
and members of the Assembly

The Honorable Kristin Olsen
Assembly Minority Leader

Dear Governor and Members of the Legislature:

Californians demand and deserve high-quality service. As home to Silicon Valley, California is synonymous worldwide with innovation. California companies have set the gold standard for customer service. But why when Californians interact with their government, is their experience so much different?

Why can't an aspiring business owner go to one website and fill out one form and open up shop? Why can't Californians set up one account and have all pertinent information available across every department they deal with? Why can't Californians, particularly those most vulnerable with the least amount of time to spare, use their smartphone to access services and then automatically enroll in a program – and not just one program, but every program for which they qualify?

California state government has fallen behind, embarrassingly behind, on providing its customers – Californians – excellent experiences in their interactions with government. Cities and other states have taken a lead in making it a priority to provide services that are more user-friendly, easy to find, understand and get. It's easy to say California is too big, it's too hard. Yet the federal government seems to get it. And the United Kingdom, with an economy and a population larger than California, has streamlined its services and is looked to worldwide as a model.

During the past year, the Commission has heard from other governments, from civic technologists, from user experience experts, from public servants and from Californians. We ask this question, what is holding us back?

The Commission found technology is an important part of the solution. But it isn't everything. It starts first with a customer-centric focus and a willingness to question the way things usually get done. It's not just turning a paper form into an online document (though California can and should look for these efficiencies). It's first asking do we really need all these questions, can the form be simplified and is it available in the multiple languages customers need? Moreover, what do our customers say would make it easier to access, and have we even asked for their input? The Commission believes California can excel at customer service. After all, we are civic servants - our job is to serve the public. We have the people, the skills and a can-do enthusiasm.

To this end, the Commission recommends a chief customer officer at the highest level of government, empowered and resourced to implement and be accountable for a statewide customer service strategy. Designated customer champions should permeate state government and lead customer-centric reforms across every program and service.

To help make these changes happen, California should copy what President Obama has done at the federal level and establish and empower a small team to work quickly and differently. This small team will take a budget allocation, but a similar team in the federal government has already shown it can save millions, if not hundreds of millions of dollars, particularly in digital innovation. The payoff for taxpayers is well worth the upfront investment. California simply cannot afford business as usual.

This report also includes a blueprint for cultivating a customer-centric culture across California state government. From empowering front-line public servants who already know what needs to be done, to unlocking and unleashing government data, and much more, these are recommendations that can and should be pursued immediately.

We encourage you to think big and think bold, but start small, test, correct and repeat – always with the customer in mind. Technologists and designers, including those who are currently among the state’s public servants, are eager and ready to make changes that will improve the lives of millions of Californians. The Commission respectfully submits its recommendations and stands ready to assist.



Pedro Nava
Chair, Little Hoover Commission

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DESIGNING A BETTER STATE GOVERNMENT

For Californians

Our daily experiences as consumers who shop online, track a flight from a desktop, hail a ride home with a mobile app or rate restaurant service on social media are teaching us that government, too, could be so convenient.

It's easy to imagine the possibilities for state government by the time Governor Brown leaves office at the end of 2018. What if leaders and agency heads were challenged to provide Californians the same fast and convenient services and interactions they're accustomed to in the rest of their lives? It's hardly unrealistic. Increasingly, California cities and counties, the federal government, other states and nations are already at the forefront.

Imagine if California made it a priority – the number one priority – to improve its services to the public, especially for those most vulnerable Californians with the least amount of free time to spare navigating the bureaucracy.

Imagine if after qualifying for one benefit program from the state, applicants are given the option to “opt-in” to the other programs for which they qualify. No extra paperwork, just consent and they can immediately enroll. For the low-income workers, the single parents juggling multiple jobs, the families struggling to make ends meet, this could mean time spent working rather than waiting unpaid in a government line.

And, imagine if Californians could sign up to receive text alerts or phone calls to let them know when their car registration renewal is due (and another that it's been received).

And rather than spending time on hold or in lines to track down important information, imagine if Californians could ask a question of government well beyond regular office hours. Moreover, what if they could expect to get a quick response to their question or the status of their request?

Imagine if Californians had one personalized log-in account to manage all their business with the state – from updating address information and voter registration to paying taxes and applying for and managing benefits. And they could do it all from a mobile device while taking the bus to soccer practice or at home after putting their children to bed for the night.

Imagine, too, if California made it easy for new businesses to establish roots in the state, and simple for existing establishments to conduct their business with government. Imagine if Californians could file all of the necessary paperwork to start and run a business online, in one place, in a matter of minutes. Done.

People often say California's problems are too big to solve in any meaningful way, that the state is too large, with too many rules that make change too difficult. This line of thinking serves to maintain the status quo and shy away from bold reform with the excuse: “It just won't work here.”

But, technology has the power to change this paradigm. In the digital age, reform is introduced successively through small, discrete changes that make incremental improvements to products or processes. And those proven usable easily can be adapted and reintroduced elsewhere.

Some forward-thinking government organizations – from the federal government to cities across the country – have shown these previously unimaginable reforms are possible. By paying attention to the needs, expectations, abilities and preferences of customers, and adopting modern technologies in innovative ways, government services can be delivered better, more efficiently and more responsively, in turn improving confidence and trust in government's ability to function. And these results can be achieved in a relatively short time with minimal investments.

With a population of 38 million and growing, California is so big that the potential impact of any such digital reform is itself nearly unimaginable. And, yet, it is not. As others have done, California too must embrace this new way of thinking about government programs and services that puts the end users – customers – up front and start creating better experiences for millions of Californians.

Creating Better Experiences to Address California's Trust Deficit

Californians have, and have had for some time, little trust in their state government to perform well or do what is right. Research from the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) demonstrates that most Californians believe state government is run by a few special interests looking out for their own benefit, rather than that of the people, and worse, that government is run inefficiently, wasting taxpayers' dollars.¹ In fact, a 2015 statewide survey found that two-thirds of respondents said state government can be trusted to do what is right only some of the time or never. Since August 2002, PPIC's statewide surveys reflect consistent findings with more than 60 percent of Californians expressing a high distrust in state government's effectiveness, responsiveness and efficiency.²

Steady reminders in the press about government's failures perpetuate distrust and a sense that government cannot function well, and reinforce low expectations for service. For example, a December 2014, story in The San Francisco Chronicle described difficulties that many California families who qualify for the state's food stamp program, CalFresh, have when attempting to enroll.³ A January 2015 story in The Sacramento Bee reported discrepancies in Covered California's enrollment system resulting in confusing, multiple and inaccurate healthcare eligibility and coverage notices to consumers. And a June 2015 story in The Sacramento Bee described how the state's Medi-Cal complaint line rejected up to 45,000 calls a month and of the calls that got through, staffers answered half or less.⁴

But consider: If you continuously received excellent service from government, would that inspire greater confidence in government's ability to perform?

The Obama Administration is betting it will and has created new digital service teams to modernize the federal government. In a July 2015 interview with Fast Company Magazine, President Obama said he hopes the teams will build "a culture of service" that transforms the federal government's relationship to citizens by improving and modernizing service delivery and helping government to be more efficient.⁵

And the Commission agrees. The Commission's study is based on the premise that by engaging with the public in a way that makes sense in the 21st Century and improving each Californian's cumulative experiences interacting with government, the state can rebuild public confidence in government's ability to perform and ultimately encourage greater trust in its institutions.

Adopting User Experience Lessons from the Private Sector and Others

This concept of creating trust through a better "user experience" is not new. In the private sector, companies compete to build and maintain their customer base. The most successful are adopting new technologies to provide services that are fast, convenient, easy to understand and personalized. Southwest Airlines offers pre-flight check-in and mobile boarding passes. Grocery store chains send personalized promotions to customers' smart phones; some offer home delivery services. Amazon offers its Prime members free, two-day shipping on nearly any product sold. Doctors and dentists send texts and emails to remind patients about upcoming appointments. And banks are continually making it easier for customers to manage their accounts remotely. This level of service has, in a sense, reset the bar so that consumers more often expect to receive services with ease and convenience.

While the pace of change in our larger society is fast and growing rapidly, government often is reluctant to embrace it and defaults to maintaining the status quo. Government has no profit motive to spur innovation and no internal demand for process improvement. And when change is embraced, initiatives are often incremental and slow to roll out. As the private sector continues to outpace government in delivering services when

and where people want them, the gap between the expectations for speed, ease and quality of private and public services will continually grow and become more frustrating to those who interact with government.

“We hold private sector companies accountable by voting with our feet and our dollars,” Cyd Harrell, senior director of product with Code for America, told Commission staff. But, she said, “We can’t go and interact with another government.”⁶ (Nonprofit Code for America partners with governments to improve use of technology and design, and make services simpler and easier to use).

Unlike private services they might receive, Californians can’t choose a different provider if a government agency is inconvenient, slow, confusing or overly complicated. To get a driver’s license, Californians must deal with the Department of Motor Vehicles. To receive unemployment insurance benefits, Californians must go to the Employment Development Department. To visit a friend or family member in prison, Californians must first receive approval from the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. To pay state taxes, Californians must file with the Franchise Tax Board. And to start a business, California’s entrepreneurs must interact with several state (and local) government entities, including the Franchise Tax Board, Board of Equalization, Employment Development Department and sometimes the Secretary of State. There are no alternatives. For these services, Californians are, for all intents and purposes, captured customers.

All of these direct interactions provide opportunities for the state to rethink how to make them more convenient and efficient and help improve Californians’ attitudes toward state government. The Commission believes a responsible government should respect the public’s means, abilities and time. It should make customer experiences easier and more accessible for all Californians, but particularly for the state’s economically vulnerable populations that most need to be protected by the state’s safety net and can least afford to spend time trying to overcome access barriers. A focus on improving services for this population inevitably will improve experiences for all.

Governments around the world are learning from the business sector and leveraging technology to improve how they deliver information and services. They are adopting new concepts, called “customer experience” or “user experience,” that put the government customer at the center of all decision-making. These ideas are about understanding and improving a customer’s journey to get the services they need – a far bigger vision than asking how quickly they got their phone call returned. They ask their customers: “How was your experience getting what you needed, from start to finish?” And they use the feedback to change program processes or policies to make services more convenient and share information that is readable and easy-to-find.

The expectation is high: There’s little reason signing up for government services can’t be as easy as shopping online or getting individualized help from government can’t be as easy as walking into any successful retail store.

“The challenge with government is that selling simple is hard. Government needs to understand the value of simplicity.”

Participant at Little Hoover Commission
Advisory Meeting⁷

The Commission believes California state government can live up to this expectation. To do so, it is imperative for California to modernize and think differently about how it can use technology to provide more competent and efficient services. Often people say California state government is too big and unwieldy to fix. But if other governments, including the federal government and the United Kingdom, can reorient service delivery around the wants and needs of customers, so can California. Positive work is already underway in California and will be discussed in the following chapters. But much more is possible given the state’s powerful advantages. As home to Silicon Valley, California more than any other state, is primed to tap innovators to be a part of this change. And to the extent California succeeds, its accomplishments can spur other public sector agencies to offer higher-quality government interactions.

The Commission's Study Process

The Commission began this study with a public hearing in January 2015 to introduce the problem – namely, that Californians generally have a strong and prolonged sense of distrust in state government's ability to perform. In January, the Commission heard about 1990s and subsequent efforts to “reinvent government” nationally and in particular, to improve service delivery at the federal level. The Commission also learned how technology is empowering a new generation of government officials to take up the “reinventing” mantle – becoming more customer-centric by incorporating user-experience principles.

At its second hearing, in March 2015, the Commission heard about some of the creative ways two other states – Maryland and Utah – use technology to improve the way they govern, as well as communicate and deliver services to their customers. The Commission also heard from labor representatives on ways to engage state employees in the process of improving operations and service delivery. Additionally, the Commission conducted a review to identify top state departments whose programs are both “high-touch,” meaning they interact with a great number of Californians, and “high-impact,” meaning their programs greatly affect the daily lives of those they serve. The Commission excluded from its review high-touch/high-impact programs, such as Medi-Cal, that, though administered by the state, are primarily managed by counties. As a result of this research, the Commission invited two departments, both of which annually interact with millions of Californians, to participate in its second hearing: the Franchise Tax Board, which processes over 17 million personal income tax returns and 1.7 million business returns annually, and the Department of Motor Vehicles, which has registered approximately 33 million vehicles in the state and licensed more than 24 million drivers.⁸ Both departments highlighted the innovative ways they are serving their customers.

The Commission's third and final hearing, in May 2015, provided an opportunity to demonstrate how the state might begin to put into practice customer experience principles and the types of questions state departments might consider when redesigning programs and services to benefit the end user. The Commission selected

for its review, the California Department of Parks and Recreation, a leading high-touch state system with an estimated 75.5 million annual visitors.⁹ Additionally, the Commission identified two programs that served much smaller segments of the population, but were of great importance to those served – the Department of Public Health's vital records program and the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation's inmate visitation program. The Commission also heard from the California Health and Human Services Agency about its open data portal.

The Commission's study process included an advisory committee meeting with key stakeholders – both inside and outside government – at the Code for America headquarters in San Francisco on July 16, 2015. Participants and Commissioners discussed strategies to improve state service delivery, expand its portfolio of digital services and better communicate information to meet Californians' needs and expectations.

Public hearing witnesses and advisory committee meeting participants are listed in the appendices.

During this study, Commission staff received valuable input through interviews, meetings and discussions with countless other researchers, civic technologists, current and former federal and state public servants, and representatives from organizations who are bridging the gap between the worlds of public policy and technology.

Commissioners and staff benefited from interviews with key elected officials and senior staff of the Secretary of State, State Controller, State Treasurer and Lieutenant Governor to better understand current efforts to improve Californians' experiences with government. Additionally, a July 2015 meeting with representatives from two of the federal government's new digital services teams, 18F and the U.S. Digital Service, helped the Commission learn about the federal government's efforts to develop and deploy digital services to better serve the American public.

Though the Commission greatly benefited from the contributions of all who shared their expertise, the findings and recommendations in this report are the Commission's own.

The Commission, as a state government organization, also looked for opportunities to apply lessons it learned internally. For the first time, Commission staff surveyed and met with two groups of college students interning in and around the Capitol as part of the study process. Their perspectives offered critical insight to some of the expectations of the state’s next generation of leaders. The Commission also began using Twitter as a way to share its work with the public (@CALittleHoover) and currently is exploring options to improve the design and information architecture of its website as well as how it publishes its reports. While these are incremental steps toward better serving our customers, the Commission is committed to continuously identifying new areas of improvement.

Recommendations for a Customer-Centric California Government

The chapters that follow detail more fully these valuable insights provided by experts and lessons learned from other governments. Two themes emerge: The power of a customer-centric orientation to meet customer needs and a focus on delivering services most efficiently and conveniently, often drawing on the best available technology. In theory, the approach is relatively simple, but it requires persistence, skill in practice, and above all, committed leadership.

The Commission recognizes that without a champion, any comprehensive effort to reform the state’s culture will most likely go the way of other well-intended transformation efforts: nowhere. Consequently, the most critical of the report’s recommendations are those to create leadership to drive customer-centric change.

Additionally, the Commission offers a blueprint of strategies to guide top policymakers, whose buy-in and support is essential, as well as managers, leaders and the public servants who work on the front lines of government programs. Ideally, the new customer service champions would oversee implementation of these strategies across state government. However, these strategies are not dependent on new roles being created. The blueprint offers practical, specific examples of how to make California state government the innovative, user-friendly entity it can and should be.

RECOMMENDATION 1: DESIGNATE AND EMPOWER CUSTOMER CHAMPIONS. California needs a designated leader both empowered and resourced to implement and be accountable for a statewide customer service strategy. Also, designated customer services champions throughout the state’s agencies and departments should lead customer-centric reforms.

- ***The Governor and Legislature should designate the Secretary of the Government Operations Agency as the California Chief Customer Officer, responsible for overseeing implementation of a statewide customer-centric strategy and ensure that the secretary is both empowered and resourced to drive change.*** Specifically, the Governor and Legislature must provide a budget allocation to enable the Government Operations Agency to lead the state’s customer service strategy.
- ***As the California Chief Customer Officer, the Secretary of the Government Operations Agency should be accountable for overseeing customer-centric strategies across the state’s departments and agencies.*** Additionally, the secretary should work with oversight agencies to develop strategies to build additional “checks” into processes common across state government to ensure that agencies have considered their customers’ needs. For example, every time the Department of Finance reviews a budget change proposal or the Department of Technology reviews a new technology project, analysts should consider whether and how the proposal will create a better customer experience.
- ***Additionally, the Governor and Legislature should direct each of California’s agencies and departments to designate a senior leader to serve as chief customer officer.*** This officer will represent the interests of the organization’s customers, oversee the organization’s customer service strategy and coordinate cross-agency efforts with colleagues. In large organizations, the chief customer officer could be supported by various designated employees in senior program positions.

RECOMMENDATION 2: EMPOWER A SMALL TEAM TO WORK QUICKLY, DIFFERENTLY. The state should establish an in-house digital services team to recruit top innovators into state service and make Sacramento an attractive environment for creative technologists, engineers and designers to engage in public service. Given room to unleash their talent, these hires will work with customer service champions to help agencies and departments redesign processes, encourage innovation and use technology creatively to improve customer service.

- ***The Governor and Legislature should create within the Government Operations Agency a digital services team to recruit top technologists, engineers and designers into public service for the state.*** Such talent could help build a stronger customer-centric culture within California government and help existing public servants remove roadblocks that have long stood in the way of creative reform.
- ***The new digital services team should coordinate with chief customer officers to identify a priority list of projects to improve program efficiency and customer experience.*** The team should work with partners outside of government to offer fellowship opportunities that would attract those with limited time to work on shorter-term projects, but also create an office out of which those with longer-term aspirations could operate. The agency should grant the team the flexibility to approach their work using human-centered designed techniques that allow for experimentation through small pilot projects.

RECOMMENDATION 3: CULTIVATE A CUSTOMER-CENTRIC CULTURE ACROSS CALIFORNIA STATE GOVERNMENT. California’s agencies and departments can and must focus on what their customers need and devise strategies to deliver on those needs. Although ideally policymakers should establish champions to drive customer-centric change, as indicated in Recommendation 1, there is no reason for agencies and departments to delay using the strategies included in the blueprint below and nothing to stop leaders from encouraging public servants to vigorously and relentlessly pursue a customer-centric orientation, whatever their responsibilities within the organization. Agencies and departments should immediately adopt the following customer-centric strategies into their operations:

REWARD A CUSTOMER-SERVICE CULTURE. California agencies and departments must make improving their customer experiences a strategic goal, develop measurable strategies to monitor progress and be rewarded when successful.

INVOLVE PUBLIC SERVANTS. California’s public servants should feel empowered to share ideas and suggestions about ways to improve processes inside their organizations, provide better customer service and communicate more effectively to their customers.

RESEARCH CUSTOMER EXPERIENCES FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT. Californians should be asked regularly about their experiences interacting with state agencies and departments and included in conversations about improving experiences – from start to finish. In turn, California’s agencies and departments should use this information to refine how they deliver services and ensure those services are accessible, convenient, easy to use and ultimately meet their customers’ needs.

PROVIDE POLITICAL COVER FOR EXPERIMENTATION. State leaders should support the new customer service champions and digital services team, granting them authority to work around traditional barriers to fast-track customer service improvements.

PILOT CHANGE TO TEST AND DEMONSTRATE THE VALUE OF WORKING DIFFERENTLY. To overcome a traditionally cautious, risk-averse culture, state agencies and departments should identify small, meaningful projects to test and demonstrate the value of customer-centric reforms and generate enthusiasm for working differently.

COMMUNICATE CLEARLY. All information from California's agencies and departments should be communicated in plain, straightforward language and shared in ways that make it easy for Californians to find and understand.

CREATE MULTIPLE SERVICE PATHWAYS. Californians should be able to access state government services in ways most comfortable and convenient for their individual needs and abilities.

MOVE BEYOND MOBILE APPS. In designing digital services, agencies and departments should offer maximum options for Californians to conveniently access government services – whatever the platform they choose to use.

SEEK OPPORTUNITIES FOR ORGANIZATIONAL IMPROVEMENT. Because a good customer experience is dependent on a well-functioning, modern organization, California must break its reliance on outmoded technology and processes that prevent it from meeting public expectations for high-quality, on-demand services.

UNLOCK THE PROMISE OF GOVERNMENT DATA. The state should continue to pursue an open data strategy, taking steps to make government data available for those in government, as well as outsiders to use. Doing so will allow the state to better manage its programs, inform policy and resource decisions, improve transparency and create new products and tools for the public's good.

LEVERAGE DATA RESOURCES TO BRING SERVICES TO CALIFORNIANS. Californians seeking government information or assistance might not know which department or program is responsible for what they need, but they probably know how to do a general online search. Because of this, state government leaders should make sure data is available in formats that can be leveraged by others to get information to Californians where they already go to seek it.

BRIDGE THE TECHNOLOGY INDUSTRY AND THE PUBLIC SECTOR. California should connect the state's technology sector with state government leaders and welcome innovators to help address some of the state's most pressing challenges.

THE CUSTOMER COMES FIRST

Improving the Government User Experience

People who interact with their governments universally want them to become simpler, faster and easier to navigate. A 2014 multi-state survey about satisfaction with state services revealed widespread citizen frustrations with “the complexity of processes, the slow speed of service, and the effort required to navigate through processes.” Government compares poorly to the rest of their consumer experiences, lagging badly with low levels of customer satisfaction.¹⁰

California state government suffers equally from this perception – that it is slow, needlessly complex and behind technologically – even as California revels in a history of ceaseless reinvention to become better and more efficient. Perhaps no state government has an opportunity so rich to match the best of its entrepreneurs. To the extent that state government once again reinvents itself – this time by delivering its thousands of everyday services in ways that Californians want them – it can go far to improve its reputation and close the state’s trust deficit.

California hardly has to go it alone in this endeavor. Already, it can adopt practices from the best of the best – from some of its own leading-edge state departments, from innovative local governments and other states showing the way. The federal government, too, is leaping ahead in service delivery, learning from national government advances around the globe. This chapter

will show how others are modernizing their connections to customers and lay out a vision for California state government to give its customers a better experience.

The Entrepreneurial Spirit of “Reinventing Government”

For decades, public administrators have experimented with strategies to improve the bureaucracy, create new and better forms of governance and fight the public’s general cynicism that its public sector always settles for “good enough.” In the early 1990s, David Osborne and Ted Gaebler’s *Reinventing Government: How the Entrepreneurial Spirit is Transforming the Public Sector*, both captured and reenergized that call for reform. The book, which showcased work by creative public sector entrepreneurs who were trying hard to make government more effective, popularized the term “reinventing government.” Public sector leaders across the country aspired to introduce reforms aligned with the book’s vision of a responsive, decentralized and entrepreneurial government.

President Bill Clinton and Vice President Al Gore visibly caught the spirit, introducing the National Partnership for Reinventing Government, originally the National Performance Review, to reform the federal government. The guiding principles: put people first, save taxpayer

DEFINING CALIFORNIA’S CUSTOMERS

Customers of California state government include both citizens and visitors to the state. They are the 17 million individuals and 1.7 million businesses who file taxes with the state.¹¹ The 25 million licensed drivers who commute on the state’s roads and highways.¹² They are the 75.5 million visitors who spend leisure time in one of California’s state parks¹³. They too are the 2.8 million professionals who are licensed or certified to practice in the state,¹⁴ as well as the three million who in hard times go to the state seeking help finding a job or to apply for unemployment and disability benefits.¹⁵ They are the 4.4 million who receive food assistance.¹⁶ And, they are the 24 million eligible to vote as well as the 17.7 million who are already registered.¹⁷

dollars, be visionary and innovative, be accountable and efficient, and be performance driven.¹⁸

Bob Stone, former project director of the National Performance Review, told Commissioners there was a formula for success during the performance reviews. He said the “magic touch” was to pair the front-line staff, the people who know what’s wrong and how to fix it, with the organization’s leadership, the people who are willing to listen and who have the power to change things.¹⁹

Lessons from those reforms still resonate today – put customers first, cut red tape and empower public servants to get results, and create space for experimentation. A closer look at these concepts:

Put customers first. Evaluating programs from the ground up, starting with the customer or client experience, and working up to larger issues like policymaking, was a basic tenet of the performance reviews, Mr. Stone’s colleague, Billy Hamilton, who also was involved in reinventing efforts in Texas and California, told Commissioners in January 2015. “We were not interested first and foremost in making the job easier for the government, but instead in making the service or responsibility as easy and straightforward as possible for the people being served.”²⁰

Mr. Hamilton described a variety of listening tools that performance reviewers used to collect data about a customer’s experience. Beyond interviews, observation, focus groups and short surveys, the reviewers used “mystery shoppers” who sought help from an agency, then evaluated the response, and monitored calls to identify trends in questions and to insure the quality of service. Regardless of the data collection tools, he said, the results were evaluated and followed up on.²¹

In one example of successful “reinvention,” the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) modernized some of its processes based on customer feedback.²³ In the early 1990s, while businesses started to move toward online transactions, many government services were still conducted in person or on paper. Former director of the National Partnership for Reinventing Government Morley Winograd told Commission staff that at the time, the IRS believed it had done a good job if, by January 2, it had delivered the

“...we tried to listen not just to administrators and legislators but to line employees and the people who are the beneficiaries — or at times victims — of what a particular agency or program does.”

Billy C. Hamilton, former deputy,
National Performance Review²²

paper Form 1040 to the right name at the right address with a letter notifying the taxpayer of the filing deadline. But through customer satisfaction surveys, the agency learned that “never talking to the IRS was the most desirable outcome” for its customers, he explained. After instituting a system for electronic filing, the agency’s customer satisfaction numbers improved.²⁴

Cut red tape and empower public servants to get results.

The performance reviewers also created customer service task forces at various agencies to bring together public servants from the front lines with mid-level managers and executives to review customer complaints, interview experts and employees and taxpayers and develop recommendations for change. Mr. Stone told Commissioners the IRS’ customer service task force produced a 65-page report with recommendations ranging from simplifying forms to improving telephone service to helping small businesses to radically reorganizing the agency.²⁵

“Line employees have to live with the consequences of our bad decisions,” Mr. Hamilton told Commissioners, “and once we started a flow of communication [with agency employees], we were able to identify ‘hot spots’ and then determine if there were ways to address them.”²⁶

Create space for experimentation. “Another way we applied the magic touch was to designate certain organizational elements as special, where workers and managers were allowed to do their work their own way, with the promise that top headquarters would waive rules or otherwise remove impediments,” Mr. Stone told the Commission. “The model installation program at

[the Department of] Defense and reinvention labs under NPR unleashed the enthusiasm of workers and managers while showing top management what rules needed to be changed for everyone.”²⁷

The “reinventing” project spurred numerous laws and presidential orders aimed at streamlining government operations, making the federal bureaucracy more responsive to citizens and less stifling to workers. By 2000, the effort had trimmed 426,000 federal jobs, eliminated 640,000 pages of internal regulations and saved more than \$136 billion.²⁸ It also made smaller, common-sense improvements, such as inviting citizens to use the Internet to buy stamps, look up census data or apply for a patent.²⁹

“When our reinvention effort began...these kinds of obvious, common-sense practices weren’t in place and now, in many cases, they are,” then-Vice President Al Gore told an Associated Press reporter in 2000. “Common sense can be quite uncommon.”³⁰

“Blow Up the Boxes:” California’s Reinventing Government Experience

When California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger gave his first State of the State address in January 2004, he said the state could no longer afford waste and fraud in any department or agency, and made a now famous call for bold reform: “Every governor proposes moving boxes around to reorganize government,” he said. “I don’t want to move the boxes around. I want to blow them up.” He promised a total review of state government and its performance, practices and cost and pledged to reorganize, consolidate, abolish or modernize as appropriate.³³ To complete the task, he created the California Performance Review (CPR), modeled after the Texas and federal performance review programs. The effort brought in 285 civil servants from across the state’s agencies who were knowledgeable about the state’s problems and had ideas to fix them. After nine months of work, they produced a massive yellow-covered report that identified over 1,200 recommendations and incorporated feedback from 10,000 Californians. Authors estimated the CPR would save the state \$32 billion over five years if its reforms were implemented.³⁴

Improving customer service became a central theme of the CPR. Reviewers found a number of critical issues: The state lacked statewide customer service standards, and customer service took a backseat to other issues facing the state. Services were not readily accessible because the state didn’t employ modern technologies. Programs were designed for the convenience of government, from a bureaucratic perspective, rather than for the convenience of Californians from a consumer perspective. And finally, the state did a poor job of collaborating with local partners.

Reviewers recommended customer-centric reforms – many which echoed over the course of this study and remain relevant today:

- **“Give customers of state government a voice – and a choice.** Set standards and listen to the people who use our services.
- **“Make access easier for Californians.** Providing better access starts with improving our services and particularly our use of modern technology.
- **“Focus on what the customer needs, not what the government needs.** Think in terms of the main places people come in contact with government and do our best to improve the experience.
- **“Work with local government.** To succeed, the state must forge a close relationship with local government in California. Communication is the place to begin this process.”³⁵

The CPR process brought new thinking into the state and generated thousands of great ideas. Unfortunately, implementation strategies – developed at the highest level of government – stalled in attempts to introduce too much at once and ultimately failed to bring about large-scale reform. Followed by the Great Recession, focus shifted to more pressing matters and left many of these great ideas gathering dust on government bookshelves.

“People look to California for innovation,” Billy Hamilton, one of the leaders of the CPR, told Commission staff. “You have the table set because we have gone through this period [of reinventing government] and now, to some degree, we’ve lost the way. We’ve dealt with the Great Recession and the state is set now to refocus on customer service.”³⁶

Today's Reinvention: Focus on the Customer

As the nation's economy continues to recover from the Great Recession, and more digital tools become available to improve government operations and services, more reformers are calling for a new round of customer-focused government reinvention. Government should again find new, more efficient and effective ways to deliver services, solve problems for people and create a positive impact on society.³⁷

Research from the McKinsey Center for Government suggests that governments face common obstacles in meeting rising public expectations for better, faster, simple service:

- Government agencies tend to focus on individual “touchpoints” in their interactions with the public, rather than the beginning-to-end “journey” through a process.
- Many government leaders lack data-driven insights about customer satisfaction. They do not know the specific services that dissatisfy customers, the extent of their dissatisfaction or the factors driving it. Nor do they know what is working well and how to replicate that across agencies.
- Designing new programs or adapting current practices can be difficult for governments that traditionally measure success in meeting budgets, complying with regulations and tallying the number of customers served, rather than the customers' experiences.³⁸

Yet governments around the globe are finding ways to overcome these obstacles. They are looking for ways to improve on what is already done, adapt proven ideas to new contexts and develop entirely new solutions.

Some of the most forward-thinking governments are adopting practices common in the private sector to make a customer's needs a focal point. Since the late 1990s, private-sector companies have refined a set of “service design” tools to help them offer customers a consistent positive experience across multiple channels of interaction – online, over the phone, in person and via social media, Cyd Harrell of Code for America

told Commissioners. “It would be very unusual for a consumer-facing company not to consider it a key component of product or service development,” she said.³⁹ Yet only a few government organizations have adopted the practices.

OPPORTUNITIES ABOUND FOR IMPROVED CUSTOMER EXPERIENCES

Improving the customer experience across the state's programs and services, from the critical to the nice-to-have, could be a powerful force for improving trust. Opportunities abound throughout the state, but the Commission has highlighted throughout the report several specific services that could made simpler and easier for customers:



ORDERING VITAL RECORDS

How it's done today:

Most Californians seeking certified birth, death, marriage and divorce records go to a county clerk or recorder's office – or order records online in 45 of California's 58 counties.³¹ Those in counties without online options or lacking transportation to their county seat must order records from the California Department of Public Health, which offers no online ordering options. The state requires a paper application with an ink signature accompanied by a notarized statement. The process is lengthy and accepts only checks and money orders.³²

An easier way:

The state moves the process online, evaluates whether a notary check is really necessary and takes electronic signatures and online payments.

AROUND THE WORLD OF CUSTOMER-CENTRIC SOLUTIONS

Throughout the world, governments are looking for ways to provide better public services, increase transparency and build trust. The following are examples of various customer-centric approaches that national governments have taken to design services around user needs and expectations.

FRANCE

TAILORING SERVICES TO LIFE'S PREDICTABLE EVENTS.

Public servants in France use customer “journey maps” to better understand how their customers receive government services. Staffers identify life events, customer needs and expectations during the journeys, and develop scenarios that create satisfaction or dissatisfaction with corresponding government services.⁴⁰



ESTONIA

VOTING THROUGH YOUR PHONE.

Estonians don't take time off work or travel to a polling station. Instead, they cast their votes from home, on their mobile phones or even while traveling abroad. Estonia introduced its Internet voting system in 2005 with mechanisms to protect voter identity, ensure voter integrity and prevent voter fraud.⁴¹

UNITED KINGDOM

EVERYTHING ON ONE WEBSITE. British citizens can access almost all government services through one streamlined Web portal, GOV.UK.⁴² To add a government

service to the portal, agencies must meet 18 standardized digital service criteria that emphasize plain language, ease of use and a plan for how to respond should the service be temporarily taken offline.



NEW ZEALAND & AUSTRALIA

ONE-STOP GOVERNMENT SERVICES. The New Zealand Government Office provides a one-stop shop where people can go for all government services.⁴³ Customers can use self-serve kiosks or get face-to-face help from public

servants. Similarly, Australian Mobile Service Center vans travel regularly to remote areas to provide rural Australians access to government services.⁴⁴





NEW ZEALAND & AUSTRALIA

ONE NUMBER FOR ALL YOUR BUSINESS NEEDS.

New Zealand and Australia each created go-to government portals for businesses, providing advice on starting a business or hiring employees, tips on financial reporting and guidance on intellectual property protection.⁴⁵ Both governments also created unique 13-digit business numbers to serve as the sole identifier an individual business uses to interact with government agencies and more easily share information across all government agencies.⁴⁶

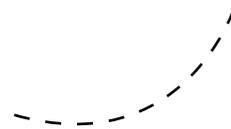


UNITED KINGDOM

CUTTING RED TAPE. The UK, through its Cutting Red Tape program, asks companies in key business sectors to identify burdensome regulations and bureaucratic barriers to productivity and growth.⁴⁹ Businesses offer comments on the Cutting Red Tape website, in emails or on Twitter. Through crowdsourcing, the government can quickly learn what is important to customers and act on their feedback to keep rules and regulations current with technology and digital capabilities.

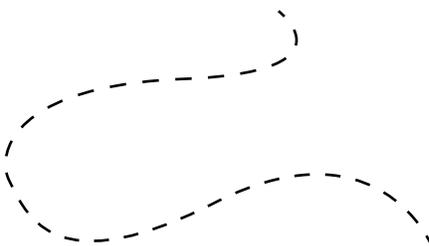
NEW ZEALAND & AUSTRALIA

MYGOVERNMENT. With a single username and password, Australians can access their myGov account, which functions like a single inbox for government messages. It also provides a quick way to update personal information across agencies.⁴⁷ New Zealand offers a similar application called RealMe.⁴⁸



ESTONIA

DIGITAL CITIZEN IDENTIFIERS. Rather than identifying Estonians through a social security number, taxpayer or driver's license number, Estonia's electronic identification system provides citizens unique numbers to access their information across public and private agencies, digitally sign documents and vote online.⁵⁰



SINGAPORE

APPS FOR COMPLAINTS. Singaporeans use the OneService mobile app to send feedback to their government on municipal issues. The app lets citizens select from several issues-based categories and fill in relevant information that goes automatically to relevant government agencies for response. The app allows users to add photos and geo-tag locations for more accurate reports.⁵¹





VISITING PEOPLE IN PRISON

How it's done today:

Inmates initiate a paper process by mailing a form to their prospective visitor. The visitor fills out the form and mails it to the inmate's facility. Reviews and approvals typically take a month, but errors or inaccuracies in the paper forms or others found during a background check often restart the entire process.¹⁶⁹

An easier way:

Visitors apply online to visit and inmates approve the request before state officials conduct a background check. The online application process eliminates common errors and inaccuracies at the start. Centralized review and processing of visitor applications saves the corrections department time and money.

Known as “human-centered design,” “user experience” or “design thinking,” these practices put user needs at the center of decisions. They encourage organizations to observe behavior, engage in conversations, watch and listen to understand why people do what they do, what they need, how they think and what they find meaningful.⁵² These practices intentionally reorient the focus of decisions to the needs of customers, and when appropriate, use technology to help. It's “reinvention” for the 21st Century.

“To create meaningful innovations, you need to know your users and care about their lives.”

Stanford University's Insitute of Design

Common elements of user experience and human-centered design applicable to government include:⁵³

- **Research user needs.** Projects begin with research to discover as much about customers as possible – what they want and need and what they like and dislike. Some approaches, like one taught at Stanford University, emphasize the need to “empathize,” to observe, interact and become immersed in the customers’ experiences. Other approaches, like one promoted by product-design and innovation firm IDEO, focus on “hearing” the needs of constituents in new ways. In this stage, researchers might interview customers directly to learn about their experiences and study customer experience indirectly, for example by using “secret shoppers.”
- **Generate creative solutions.** The next stage of activity involves taking the lessons from the user research and refining the focus. This stage includes thinking about both concrete and abstract solutions, but ultimately hones in on a specific area or group of customers that will be helped through the new design.
- **Develop and test prototypes.** In this stage, developers move toward a product that is ready for release and further testing. This stage creates an opportunity to learn more about users experience and interactions with the new solution and allows adjustments to be made to improve their experiences.
- **Deliver a product.** This stage involves additional testing of the previous research, design or product and using observation and feedback to learn more about the users’ needs and refine accordingly before delivering a solution. Ongoing evaluation is done based on user feedback, starting the cycle again.

The first step toward improved customer experiences, is to identify customers and study their unique needs. Human-centered design helps government agencies do this by thinking broadly and specifically about the service individuals receive, the products and processes customers touch and who they interact with to get a service.

Unlike many businesses that are designed to serve specific types of customers, government must serve everyone. But strategies to best meet the needs of one population group, might not work well for another. IDEO cautions governments against designing solutions for the “average” customer. There isn’t one. “While private sector businesses pick and choose the people for whom they design, governments can’t. They must design for everyone, not just the obvious or easy to reach people, IDEO’s Fred Dust and Hilary Hoerber contend. Rather than trying to design for a “typical” customer, they suggest that governments search out common behavior types to highlight opportunities for improved service for the maximum number of people.⁵⁵

Once customer groups are identified, experts suggest that governments begin by researching customers’ end-to-end journey through a process (obtaining a license), rather than their interaction at an individual “touchpoint” (receiving an application).⁵⁶ The U.S. General Services Administration, for example, recently conducted journey-mapping sessions to better understand customer experiences with the federal government’s online portal, USA.gov.⁵⁷ Through these exercises, governments can eliminate duplicative or unnecessary steps and generally make services more readily available, easier to use and accessible.⁵⁸

Additionally, this design process encourages testing and experimenting new strategies to deliver services. Participants at the Commission’s advisory meeting suggested public servants should be encouraged to use their own products, study them and tear them down before building again. One participant described how a Code for America fellow applied for and enrolled in CalFresh, the state’s food assistance program, to better understand how the program worked so he could redesign the process and make it easier for people to enroll or to check their financial balance with a text. During their research the Code for America team found that CalFresh applicants were asked to complete more than 50 screens of questions and when trying to contact program representatives on the phone encountered long wait times.⁵⁹ “Right now, the system for online applications is often down, phone interviews are done during work hours and documents have to be submitted

“Starting with users isn’t just how we should be making technology, it’s how we should be making government.”

Jennifer Pahlka, Executive Director,
Code for America⁵⁴

in person because the system to upload verification documents doesn’t work for the people who have to process the applications,” a participant from Code for America told Commissioners. He suggested enrollment could improve if the state addressed basic access issues and allowed people to enroll online.⁶⁰

Just Start!

The Little Hoover Commission fully recognizes the public’s poor opinion of state government’s ability to perform. But it also believes that a continuing series of small steps, initiatives and actions can handily create new impressions of government. In short, this is not the proverbial “rocket science.” The Californian who gets state business done quickly online, the business that discovers one-stop processing for documents, the person who learns that navigating the state bureaucracy is as easy as one-click shopping with a mobile phone begins to shed long-held or preconceived notions of government as a nightmare. Collectively, this accumulation of better impressions can then feed an upward spiral of trust and perhaps lead to a further self-reinforcing cycle of greater civic participation and confidence in public institutions. This starts, however, with getting started.

The Commission believes California can, and should, start to focus on what its customers need and how to best deliver on those needs. To begin, the state’s leaders must start to convey a message of “yes” to customer-centric change. And they must show that a new way of doing business in state government is not only possible, it’s necessary.

“Everyone who touches any part of it designs it. Government is a massive, continuous service design project.”

Dana Chisnell, Generalist Problem Solver,
United States Digital Service⁶⁴

“One interesting characteristic of human-centered design is that there is no real minimal level at which it must be practiced to be useful,” Ms. Harrell told Commissioners. Though she noted that change moves faster with support from the top levels of leadership, she said, “Individual employees, taking time to listen to their clients and document their needs, can begin to make user-centered implementation decisions on their own.” More important Ms. Harrell said, is the lesson that user-experience practitioners most often repeat to their clients. Simply put: “Just start.”⁶¹

State government leaders and public servants in California should feel *encouraged* to question the status quo and contribute ideas for improvement. They can start by talking with their customers and asking simple questions about how their agencies work, imagining how their service could be improved and then delivering some improvements. Among some relevant questions in the spirit of getting started:

1. Where are the “pain points?” Where do people get stuck in the process of receiving services?
2. What is the customer’s experience completing forms?
3. Does the language used to describe programs and services make sense to customers? Is it translated for non-English speakers, and if it is, does it also make sense when translated?
4. How do operating hours impact customers’ ability to get services? Do the service hours really meet customers’ needs?
5. Why don’t people comply with the process, such as paying park entrance fees or answering a question on a form? Is there a design flaw that could fix the problem?
6. How do people find out about an agency’s services? Can that be optimized?
7. What is the normal behavior of people when interacting with an agency? Are they alone or with family? If online, at home, in a coffee shop or at the library?
8. What assumptions are made in providing a particular service? Are they still valid with current stakeholders and modern behaviors?⁶³

THE CASE FOR GOVERNMENT REFORM

Billy Hamilton, who throughout his career has participated in reinvention efforts in the states of Texas and California as well as in the federal government, eloquently described the philosophical and practical underpinnings of the case for renewed reform:

“Government matters. It is not an afterthought or a drag on the economy. It provides useful services that are needed in a modern society.

“Even the best organizations accumulate bureaucratic ‘detritus’ over time and can become bogged down and unresponsive. The times change faster than state agencies normally do. Technologies can change, customer expectations can change and political realities can change. Modern government must be in a state of constant recreation to keep up with the change and to be successful. It must continually evaluate its own operations in terms of current realities.

“The effort to improve government is not a pointless exercise, as some critics suggest. Instead, the effort to improve the quality of service should be relentless. Government organizations can be better than they are. Most organizations – public or private – can be better than they are. It is just a matter of investing time and discipline into innovation and improvement.”⁴⁸

BUILDING A GOVERNMENT WORTHY

Of the California “Brand”

Millions globally identify California with the ceaseless innovation of its tech sector. It also is home to many of the leaders in the sharing economy. These and other innovation strengths consistently place California at the top among comparisons with other states, even other countries.⁶⁵ Computer and social media giants, startup companies and venture capital seeding the next big thing in Silicon Valley continually enhance the state’s enviable international brand. As success builds on success, California drives many of the great technological and economic advances of the 21st century.

Yet two hours inland from Silicon Valley, California’s state government has developed a reputation for technology blunders. The state’s mammoth IT projects run over budget, fall behind schedule and don’t work as advertised. Embarrassed leaders finger point, allocate more funding, start over or pull the plug. All of it makes the headlines.

This performance gap presents an enormous opportunity for state government to reinvent itself, merging California’s innovative culture with its government operations in Sacramento. California state government leaders sit on a trove of potential not readily available

elsewhere. Awaiting connection are many within the state’s tech sector who don’t fully understand how they can help solve government challenges. Also waiting are those within the government who know how a digital approach might modernize the public sector. Connecting both can build a state government worthy of the California brand.

Harnessing Technology to Meet Modern Expectations

Because modern society is technology-enabled, the public more and more expects that government, too, will be available online at any time. Technology offers opportunities for government to do better: better engage with customers, better inform them about the business of government, better communicate about government services and, ultimately, better deliver its services.

“Partly because the commercial Web is highly visible, citizens in 2015 know that excellent digital experiences are possible,” Cyd Harrell, Code for America’s senior director of product, told Commissioners in January 2015. “When they find less than excellent experiences,

BETTER SERVICES, BETTER TRUST

Research suggests linkages between digital government and public trust.⁶⁷ For example, a 2005 study of citizen satisfaction and trust in government found that individuals who are more satisfied with government websites and online services also trust the government more.⁶⁸

More recently, a 2014 survey of citizens in 15 states found that overall satisfaction with state government services correlates with satisfaction of online offerings. Survey participants indicated they wanted processes to be simpler, faster and easier to use. And, more than any other improvement, participants wanted to be able to complete processes online. The survey found that across states, the most satisfied motor vehicle department customers, for example, were those able to eliminate their upfront interactions with staff. Dissatisfied customers were those forced to interact through more channels, such as using call centers or walk-in centers.⁶⁹

CONNECTIVITY IN CALIFORNIA

High-speed broadband has become an integral channel for the public to access services, both from government and the private sector. It expands access to health care, education and an array of other services in remote locations where workforce shortages or transportation limitations can reduce options. It creates new options for businesses to expand their market reach well beyond geography. As California ramps up its digital services portfolio it will be critical also to take those last steps to ensure that all Californians have access to affordable, reliable broadband coverage. The ability to transfer information at high speeds can help generate greater civic participation and streamline government processes.

BROADBAND⁷⁰

- 6%** of Californians underserved.
- 94%** of Californians have broadband coverage.
- 99.7%** of Californians have access to mobile broadband service.



whether in the commercial, nonprofit, or government realm, they assume that this is a choice by the entity they are interacting with. When experiences interacting with government don't live up to the private sector baseline, let alone the best the private sector offers, people assume that government is making a choice not to prioritize citizen needs in these systems."

They may also assume the government is not trying to help them. "For economically vulnerable citizens who may not have fixed addresses, being able to communicate and access services from a basic smartphone (or even a non-Internet-enabled feature phone) is essential to participation in both services and civic life," Ms. Harrell told Commissioners.⁶⁶

Advancing a Digital Government Strategy

Like their private sector counterparts, many public agencies are experimenting with new ways to use technology to improve operations and customer service. Most often, government agencies use digital technology to share information about their programs or services online. People commonly visit government websites to find information about a program or service, fill out required forms or pay their taxes or other government fees without having to visit a government office.

But increasingly, government organizations are using modern technologies and new ways of thinking to change how they develop and deliver services to their citizens and customers. Many are using the Web to offer direct services to customers or using social media platforms such as Twitter or Facebook to engage in real-time dialogues with constituents. Some are experimenting with texting customers to alert them to appointments or using predictive analytic tools to target groups most at risk and in need of a service.

Taking a cue from the entrepreneurial culture of California's Silicon Valley and some of the nation's most successful businesses, these reformers are bringing new approaches to planning, developing and offering digital services to the public sector. These are not the mammoth-sized, over-budget, behind-schedule IT projects of yesterday. They are small, fast, agile, open

and customer-centric. And they’re demonstrating how government can reduce the cost and complexity of technology projects, while delivering better, more responsive services, in real-time, to customers.

These changes positively challenge traditional thinking about governance, as well as participatory and representative democracy, California’s Lieutenant Governor Gavin Newsom said in a February 2015 meeting with the study’s subcommittee chair and Commission staff. “This is not just a technological challenge. It’s a cultural challenge,” he said. “It’s about thinking about how to design everything for [citizen] participation. It’s about how to give people more choice and more voice.”⁷¹

Ironically, with notable exceptions in some of the state’s cities, the most transformative use of technology *within* government is happening largely outside California. The cases that follow are intended to provide both a road map and inspiration for California state government to do likewise.

Case Study: Designing Digital Government in the United Kingdom

Government in the United Kingdom offers a clear example of how public sector organizations are employing design thinking to improve delivery of public services online. Because the majority of the nation’s population is online, the public now expects services to meet a certain standard – digitized, mobile-accessible, clean and easy to use. The goal for government: make digital services so good that people prefer using them over the paper versions they replace.⁷²

Led by the Government Digital Service (GDS), established in 2011 as a centralized group of digital experts within the government, the U.K. has made groundbreaking advances in improving customer experiences with government digital services.⁷⁴

The approach begins with a seemingly simple directive: put users first. This strategy is atypical for many government service-delivery tools, which are built after long, costly processes that often result in monolithic, structured products.

Like many government organizations, the U.K. traditionally initiated information technology projects with a detailed policy, then attempted to digitize the existing process. “This is why so many of our digital services look like clunky, hard-to-use versions of our paper forms: because the process behind the paper version dictates the digital thinking,” Mike Bracken, director of the U.K.’s Government Digital Service, explained on his blog.⁷⁵ The problem with this approach is that user feedback, if it happens, is sought at the end of this process when it’s too late to react. “Because these services have been hard-wired, like the IT contract which supplied them, our services simply can’t react to the most valuable input: what users think and how they behave,” he explained.⁷⁶

Old Process	New Process
1. Policy	1. Users
2. Process	2. Service (re)design
3. Systems	3. System development
4. Users	4. Policy check
5. Stasis	5. Feedback
Source: Mike Bracken. Blog. January 6, 2013. “On Strategy: The strategy is delivery. Again.”	

“We are in a system that for 15 years the prevailing logic has been ‘it is technology, you don’t understand it, it costs a fortune, it takes years.’ At the same time we as digital consumers have been enjoying the output of a consumer society that says ‘it’s technology, it’s really cheap, it’s really quick and it provides step changes in great service.’ Only one of those arguments can be right.”

Mike Bracken, former Director, U.K. Government Digital Service⁷³

Instead, the Government Digital Service now champions a new model that puts user up front, then tests how the process works, seeking regular feedback from users and making revisions along the way. The GDS developed a set of design principles, included in the box, to help keep projects focused on the new strategy.⁷⁷

In an early, visible example of this new strategy, the U.K. redesigned its main website, GOV.UK, to improve the user experience for those seeking information and services through the domain. Mr. Bracken explained on his blog: The team first built an “alpha” version of the site based on what they knew about user needs, then quickly redesigned services based on user feedback from surveys, testing and social media input. They made over 100 changes to the website based on user feedback within the first 10 days of its release – all at a negligible cost.⁷⁸

The final result of this experiment was a transformed website named 2013’s Design of the Year by the London Design Museum. Judges said the design “[provides] vital services and information in the simplest, most logical way possible for everything from renewing a passport to understanding your rights as a disabled person” and likened the website to the digital equivalent of “grand public projects,” such as Harry Beck’s London Underground map and its New York counterpart.⁷⁹

GOVERNMENT DIGITAL SERVICES DESIGN PRINCIPLES

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| 1. Start with needs | 6. This is for everyone |
| 2. Do less | 7. Understand context |
| 3. Design with data | 8. Build digital services, not websites |
| 4. Do the hard work to make it simple | 9. Be consistent, not uniform |
| 5. Iterate. Then iterate again | 10. Make things open: it makes things better |

A more recent project, in its early stages in fall 2015, is looking to improve the way government keeps people updated when they’ve asked for something from government. The goal: find ways to reduce time people spend on the phone or in offices tracking down information (was an application received, a decision made, a license or form sent?) and accurately communicate when people can expect what they’re waiting for. The Government Digital Service is considering how status tracking or notification systems might get people the information they need faster and more accurately.⁸⁰

Case Study: A Technological “Insurgency” Within the Federal Government

In a modern take on “reinventing” government, President Barack Obama has made delivering effective, world-class customer service experiences to citizens and businesses a priority of his administration. The public deserves competent, efficient and responsive service from the federal government, he said in a 2011 executive order directing federal agencies to streamline service delivery and improve customer service.⁸¹ The president’s bid to build a “21st Century government” has renewed the call for governmental reform. Among his ambitious goals: improve key citizen- and business- facing transactions, deliver smarter information technology, enhance productivity to achieve cost savings and open data to spark innovation.⁸²

“You know, our private sector thrives because we historically have had a very effective government,” President Barack Obama said in a 2015 interview with *Fast Company Magazine*. “Now, over the last several years that has become more ossified and stuck. And it hasn’t kept pace with changes in technology. And part of what we’re doing here is to yank government – upgrade it, patch it, and ultimately transform it so that it is responsive and can interface with this new private sector in a much more efficient way.”⁸³

To help achieve the President’s vision of a better-designed, more efficient, innovative, technology-enabled government, the Obama administration created several new organizations to revamp the federal government via technology: the Presidential Innovation Fellowship,

18F and the U.S. Digital Service. Collectively, these organizations are recruiting top technologists from across the country – many of whom might not otherwise have considered a career in government – to sign up for a tour of duty. And, in part, they’re coming because they’re not asked to make a career pivot toward a permanent job with government. The programs are structured to be flexible so that people can sign up for just a few months to several years while still accommodating their careers. Recruitment is surprisingly simple and effective. In a nutshell: Come to D.C., work on challenging problems and do it for your country and the good of the American people.⁸⁴

Offered latitude by the President to operate outside the norm, these teams are working alongside partners in agencies throughout the administration to rethink the way the federal government buys, builds and delivers technology projects and customer services. Along the way they are reshaping the culture of the federal government. Some have described it as an “insurgency,” others as an important new way to serve their country.⁸⁶ Though different in their purpose, structure and approach, each offers lessons for California:

Presidential Innovation Fellows: Incubators of This Cultural Change. The Presidential Innovation Fellowship (PIF) was launched in 2012 to recruit entrepreneurs, startup founders and innovators to partner with top civil servants and collaborate on high-profile initiatives across the federal government. The fellows, or PIFs, were to parachute into the federal government for a short “tour of duty” – just six to 12 months. In that time, they were to leverage best practices from the private sector to help the federal government deliver better, more effective programs and policies, focusing on some of the nation’s biggest and most pressing challenges.⁸⁷

Recruitment took place at large tech conferences and other industry events, headed by senior officials including Todd Park, the second Chief Technology Officer of the United States. “He got on stage and told us ‘we are trying to disrupt federal government – come and help us do that,’” Hillary Hartley, a 2013 fellow who now serves as 18F’s Deputy Executive Director, recalled in a July 2015 meeting with Commissioners.

In the three years since, nearly 100 technologists and innovators from across the country – more than a quarter from California – have answered the call.⁸⁸ They act as a sort of “incubator” for cultural change within government, helping those within the administration see how they can deliver government services differently and testing change through small pilot projects, Ms. Hartley told Commissioners.⁸⁹ Many of the former fellows have remained within government, taking up leadership positions in various offices across the administration.⁹⁰ In August 2015, President Obama signed an executive order to make the program permanent.⁹¹

“People want an opportunity to build something that makes a difference.”

Hillary Hartley, Deputy Executive Director, 18F⁸⁵

18F: An In-House Digital Consultancy. When federal agencies need help with software or consult on a technology project, there’s now a new in-house organization they can hire for help. Named for its headquarters at 18th and F Streets, NW, in Washington, D.C., 18F operates as a digital consultancy for the U.S. government. It is housed within the General Services Administration (GSA). 18F works on projects at the request of “partner” agencies on a fee-for-service basis. Its mission: to work with federal agencies to rapidly build and deploy technology solutions and online services that are reusable, cut costs, and are easier for people and businesses to use.⁹²

18F operates like a lean startup, bringing together software developers, designers and project managers to tackle problems through an approach that emphasizes user-centered design. “At its core, user-centered design is about asking, ‘Should we write this this way or that,’ then getting user feedback and selecting the design,” Andrew McMahon, regional administrator of the GSA, told Commissioners. He said good research needs to be done up front to make sure the product that is built will deliver on the minimum things people will use to be viable.⁹⁴

Ms. Hartley told the Commission that 18F orients its work around several core principles to stay user-centric and which can be adopted by other organizations looking to transform the way they work:

- **“Be the change.** We intend to lead by example, by instruction, and with hands-on assistance.
- **“Think like a designer.** We believe that user-centered design can fundamentally change the experience the public has with government. We build only what people really need, nothing more. User needs are the driver for all decisions – not stakeholder or government needs.
- **“Data-driven.** We use metrics and analytics to augment our user research. We measure everything, including ourselves. 18F does more than make websites; we enable the discovery of information. Whenever possible, we think ‘API first’ and lead with data. [APIs, or application-programming interfaces, allow third parties to build software applications.]
- **“Agile practices.** Agile and lean methodologies drive our work. We believe in delivering early and often. We build something small; learn by validating with real people; and ‘rinse and repeat.’ Quick feedback loops with stakeholders mean big failures never happen.
- **“Open by default.** We are open by default – both what we make and how we work. We’re coding and designing in the open; we use and build open source code by default; and we’re evangelizing our methods and practices across the federal government.”⁹⁵

The organization’s approach to technology problems serves dual purposes: to deliver products and services, but also to demonstrate that ideas from the startup world can also work for government. “We favor experimentation, customer feedback and analytics, and iterative design over a sequential ‘waterfall’ model,” Ms. Hartley told Commissioners. “If startups and companies like General Electric can do it, why not the U.S. government? Our goal with this approach is twofold: Build user-centered digital services; and prove that building technology in an agile manner is possible in government at scale.”⁹⁶

So far, the most transformative aspect of this work is the knowledge transfer that occurs between 18F and its government partners throughout a project’s lifecycle. “The biggest impact we make on an organization isn’t in creating the best designs,” Mr. McMahon told Commissioners. “It’s that everyone has a user-experience component to their project, and everyone thinks about external stakeholders up front.” He explained 18F also generates value by teaching agencies how to adopt these skills so they are better after the project. “This is secret sauce to business success,” he said. Ms. Hartley agreed: “We teach our partners to reset the bar for how service should be delivered and help them so that when we leave, they are better at providing services.”⁹⁷

The United States Digital Service: Revamping High-Priority Citizen Services. The U.S. Digital Service (USDS) has its origins in the disastrous early performance of healthcare.gov that marred the launch of President Obama’s signature legislation, the Affordable Care Act, in October 2013. The Obama administration in August 2014 created the USDS within the White House’s Office of Management and Budget to replicate the success of fixing the healthcare.gov website elsewhere in government.⁹⁸ (To fix the website’s glitches and loading errors that were preventing millions of Americans from signing up for health insurance, the White House called in a small team of digital experts – many from California’s Silicon Valley.⁹⁹ In just weeks, the team doubled the site’s user capacity, eliminated many bugs and introduced features to make it more user-friendly.¹⁰⁰ The experience demonstrated what can happen when a small team of innovators is given the authority and responsibility to “reboot” government and fix problems *before* they turn into a crisis.

The U.S. Digital Service is similar to 18F in terms of the skill sets it recruits into government – software engineers, technical experts, product managers, procurement experts, visual designers and user experience experts – and the customer-centric approach it takes to solve government technology problems.¹⁰¹ But, unlike 18F, whose partner agencies are “clients,” the U.S. Digital Service, works with cabinet agencies to target issues that are a priority for the administration – veterans services, education, energy and the environment, healthcare, finance and student loans, immigration services, national security and defense, to name a few. It then mitigates

risks of technology projects, removes barriers and redesigns how agencies deliver public services.

The U.S. Digital Service concept embeds a tactical group of technologists directly into a federal agency for a “tour of duty” where it becomes deeply engaged in the organization to understand its problems and help permanent staff develop solutions. “It’s less about fast-tracking projects and more about helping people there [in the agencies] know what resources are available to them and helping them identify processes to make their work better and smarter,” Dana Chisnell, a consultant with the digital service, told Commission staff in February 2015.¹⁰²

In doing its work, the service challenges the federal government to approach problems in ways similar to some of the nation’s most successful businesses. “There’s kind of a default assumption [in industry] that if you’ve thought of something new and you want to try it... there’s a standing assumption that the company will help you try your new thing,” Mikey Dickerson, director of the U.S. Digital Service explained in a April 2015 interview with *Federal Times Magazine*. “There’s a little bit of an attitude in some agencies that’s a little more change-averse – more resistant to outside ideas.”¹⁰³

To communicate its methodology and guide agencies in its approach, the digital service in 2014 released two documents explaining its foundational principles: the U.S. Digital Services Playbook, to highlight key “plays” for building effective digital services drawn from successful practices from the private sector and government, and the TechFAR Handbook, to highlight the flexibilities in the Federal Acquisition Regulation that can help agencies implement the “plays.”¹⁰⁴ In September 2015, the USDS, in partnership with 18F, also released U.S. Web Design Standards as a shared set of tools all federal agencies could use to create consistent, easy-to-use websites.¹⁰⁵

The President’s 2016 budget included \$105 million to scale and institutionalize the digital services approach to technology. It added funding for about two dozen federal agencies to develop their own high-impact, tactical digital services teams, with assistance from the U.S. Digital Service. If approved, this funding would add about 500 staff to the nation’s digital services squad.¹⁰⁶

“We are user-centered. When there’s a choice between doing what government stakeholders want versus the users, we go with the users.”

Stephanie Rivera, Director of Business Strategy, 18F⁹³

U.S. DIGITAL SERVICES PLAYBOOK

1. Understand what people need
2. Address the whole experience, from start to finish
3. Make it simple and intuitive
4. Build the service using agile and iterative practices
5. Structure budgets and contracts to support delivery
6. Assign one leader and hold that person accountable
7. Bring in experienced teams
8. Choose a modern technology stack
9. Deploy in a flexible hosting environment
10. Automate testing and deployments
11. Manage security and privacy through reusable processes
12. Use data to drive decisions
13. Default to open

Case Study: Pioneering Digital Government in Utah

Utah embraced technology to transform government service delivery to its citizens and businesses in the mid-1990's when then Governor Michael Leavitt challenged the state to focus more on new technologies and less on traditional ways of doing business.¹⁰⁸ In the decades since, sustained commitment to this agenda has earned Utah more than 100 awards and national and international recognition. The most recent is an A grade and first-place recognition in citizen engagement and other categories in the 2014 Digital States Survey.¹⁰⁹

Today, the Utah.gov website connects citizens and businesses with more than 1,260 services – job searches, arts grants, hunting and fishing licenses, vehicle registration and license renewal, campground reservations and more.¹¹⁰ Additionally, Utahans can connect with their state government through more than 1,500 pathways on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Pinterest and LinkedIn – just to name a few – or monitor traffic, locate library books, check professional licensure status or report crimes using one of the state's 85 mobile applications.¹¹¹ In addition, individuals can access a growing number of publicly available, reusable data sets as part of the state's Utah Data initiative, access an archive of government finance reports through the state's Transparent Utah initiative, file public records requests through OpenRecords, the state's cross-agency portal or search the state's laws and regulations.¹¹² Together, these digital services have improved levels of customer service, won strong approval ratings from Utahans and businesses and helped the state save money.

Several organizational and policy features have helped Utah achieve success. Among the stand outs:

- **A consolidated IT infrastructure led by an empowered Chief Information Officer.** All of Utah's information technology resources and services operate under a single Department of Technology Services, led by the state chief information officer.¹¹³ This consolidation was initiated by the Legislature in 2005, downsizing 38 state-owned data centers to two, and saving the state more than \$127 million in IT costs. Additionally, the Legislature repositioned all IT

positions as non-merit or at-will and employees received a salary increase to help create an agile IT workforce and provide the state greater flexibility to attract workers with necessary IT skills.¹¹⁴ (The Little Hoover Commission in its 2008 report, *A New Legacy System: Using Technology to Drive Performance*, recommended the Legislature consolidate all of California's IT resources under an empowered state chief information officer to achieve similar positive results).

- **A self-funded, public-private partnership for IT services.** Utah's state agencies access an array of technology services through an open contract with Utah Interactive, a subsidiary of the National Information Consortium. In the past 10 years, the firm has developed more than 600 interactive government services, including off-the-shelf IT products (such as Utah GovPay, a tool that allows any state agency to take payments online) and customized solutions (such as website design, development and hosting or development of mobile applications).¹¹⁵ The state's partnership with Utah Interactive is self-funded through modest user fees applied to a select number of transactions that pay for the cost of developing and offering service. Because there is a financial incentive to design tools and services Utahans want and need, the contractor invests time and resources to understand what works best for end users.¹¹⁶ This arrangement has helped the state avoid spending approximately \$15 million each year.¹¹⁷

"Since 2002, Utah has made consistent annual progress towards its goal of providing high quality, high value digital government service," Dave Fletcher, Utah Chief Technology Officer told Commissioners. "With over half our population accessing [Utah.gov] on a monthly basis, we want to ensure the very best experience possible. Every year, we review the latest technologies, trying to ensure that we can incorporate new ideas that will improve the user experience," he said.¹¹⁸

Research from the University of Utah's Center for Public Policy and Administration suggests that returns from

the state’s digital service strategy include numerous quantifiable benefits. Among them:

Better Customer Service. Overall, Utahns are satisfied with the state’s main online portal, Utah.gov, and with the multitude of services available online, a 2014 survey of residents found. The research concluded that Utahns are both interested in online government services and desire more.



UTAHANS SAID...

87% the digital services that Utah.gov provides are valuable.

85% Utah.gov saves them time compared to offline methods.

82% using Utah.gov is less hassle when needing to interact with government.

80% they are satisfied with the Utah.gov website.

75% they expect the state to continue to improve the website by adding more online services and information datasets.¹¹⁹

Greater Approval From Businesses. Businesses have high expectations of online services, wanting a dependable system that is available when they need it and easy to use. Research from Utah suggests that perceptions of government improve when government digitizes necessary business transactions, saving businesses significant time compared to traditional methods. In a survey of Utah.gov business subscribers, researchers found that the majority of Utah businesses said that the services provided by Utah.gov have had a positive impact on their finances:



UTAH BUSINESS OWNERS SAID...

91% the the services provided by Utah.gov save them time.

85% Utah.gov’s services make it easier to conduct business in Utah.

82% the services provided by Utah.gov reinforce the perception that Utah is a business-friendly state.¹²⁰

Budget Savings. Utah research suggests that for most government services, moving from an offline method, such as mail, phone or in-person visit to an agency office, to an online format saves the state a significant amount of money. The University of Utah’s Center for Public Policy and Administration in 2012 reviewed the top 25 online services with the highest transaction totals to compare the cost of providing those services online or in more traditional formats. Researchers found that for most of these services, the state saved money by digitizing the service. On average, the study found that the state of Utah paid \$3.91 to provide these 25 services online, compared to \$17.11 offline – a savings of \$13.20 per transaction. Researchers estimated that digitizing more than 1,000 Utah state services saves the state approximately \$46 million each year.¹²¹

The research also found that a few of the top 25 online transactions created no real cost savings, but they still advantage consumers, a representative from the Center for Public Policy and Administration told Commission staff. For example, even when digitized, obtaining a copy of a birth or death certificate still requires state staffers to locate and pull a certificate out of a file, print and then mail a copy to the consumer. But for the consumer, requesting a copy of a certificate through an online form rather than driving to an office or printing and mailing in a form is far more convenient and less time-intensive.¹²²

“More than a million people a year come to the city website to get information. If we had a million people a year coming to our permit counters, we would certainly staff up to meet that need. And yet, for most city staff, that million people, they were invisible.”

Karen Boyd, Director of Communications,
City of Oakland¹⁸⁹

“Most people think about government like this: We write a policy, we implement it and then who knows. We usually don’t look back. We assume it works, even if it’s not working. But...a new model is emerging. Implementation is no longer a phase, but a process. Delivery is the continual process of understanding and meeting user needs.”

Jacob Solomon, Product Manager – Health, Code for America²⁴⁸

RESHAPING GOVERNMENT WITH DATA

As part of this review, the Commission met with Lieutenant Governor and former Mayor of San Francisco, Gavin Newsom, to learn about his leadership at the local level in making data open and usable for the people of San Francisco. As mayor, Lieutenant Governor Newsom in 2009 issued an open data executive directive requiring city departments to make all non-confidential datasets available on the city’s open data portal so third parties could use the resource to develop new services for the public. San Francisco soon became one of the first cities to establish an open data policy.

In his book, *Citizenville*, Lieutenant Governor Newsom makes the case that ordinary Americans can reshape their government through technology. Just as millions of people were cultivating farms in the popular Facebook game, Farmville, Newsom’s book suggests technology can be harnessed similarly to transform the way citizens interact with government. In 2013, he challenged cities across the nation to reinvent the user experience through technology.

He has continued to champion open government at the state. As chair of the State Lands Commission, he led an effort in 2015 to present the organization’s entire financial picture, including how the state generated nearly half billion in revenue annually from its leasing programs.

Reinvigorating California’s “Brand” as Innovator

New digital thinking in the U.K., the federal government and Utah shows what’s possible for the State of California. These forward-looking initiatives also reveal the positive, trust-building impacts of putting the customer’s needs first. California government often provides services and organizes information in a way that makes sense internally – that is, to bureaucrats or other stakeholders familiar with government’s processes. But it doesn’t make sense to customers. They often apply for services via time-consuming, paper-heavy processes or hunt for information buried deep within department websites. And they don’t understand why government is still using mail as a means of communication when it could be done online.¹²³

State leaders, pressed for time and mindful of previous poorly-run or failed technology projects, sometimes balk at digital improvements: If it works, it’s good enough for now. As the pace of technology quickens, this default will continue to move California state government further from the level of service Californians expect. Failing to live up to expectations will become increasingly risky, likely further eroding the public’s trust in government.

The State of California needs to embrace change and unleash the innovation of its workforce, currently throttled by rules created for an earlier time. Success will require new thinking and allowing a culture of customer service to flourish. It will require government to reexamine old habits – contracting processes, service design and program requirements – and focus on introducing change through small, user-centric projects. And it will require rethinking the use of technology to deliver government services whenever possible.

Some departments and agencies within the state have already started. They are seeking customer feedback and designing services to make it easier for Californians to conduct business with the state. And they are relying on the creativity and expertise of the existing workforce. At the California Department of Motor Vehicles, many reforms originated from one or two public servants who saw the potential of a new technology or envisioned a new way of delivering service. They also

were encouraged by the department’s leaders who are receptive to new ideas to enhance specific services.¹²⁴ But not all of the state’s leaders are so willing. And even if open to change, some may not know where to turn for help. California will need something more to build customer-centric change across the state and begin to restore the state’s brand as an innovator.

As the state works to bring this customer-centric change to scale, it is missing a key ingredient, Kish Rajan, Chief Evangelist, CALinnovates and former director of the Governor’s Office of Business and Economic Development, told Commission staff. He said California needs a central place – an office, a team – inside government to welcome technologists in and to help teach state agencies and departments how to transform government. “It needs to have the imprimatur of the Governor or be codified by the Legislature to mark it as a legitimate resource with a real mandate to do real things. And it needs talented people with the ability to make change who are resourced to execute,” he said.¹²⁵

Like the federal government has done, California too should *invite* the very best engineers, technologists and designers from the private sector to apply their creativity and ingenuity to help tackle some of the most challenging problems facing the state. And the Governor and Legislature must create a home within the administration to welcome them in. Teaming with the new chief customer officers and their program colleagues, who in many cases already know what’s needed to solve some of the state’s most painful organizational and customer service problems, they could champion a new path for the state to tackle problems through small, incremental, but meaningful improvements. And in doing so, begin to reinvigorate California’s pioneer spirit in the 21st century, using 21st century technology.

“It is possible for government websites to work as well or better than anything in the private sector, and this is an area where we need to do a better job of learning from the private sector,” Billy Hamilton told Commission staff in January 2015. “This is a place where the profit motive really does favor improvements in speed and usability, and as government administrators, we are fools if we don’t learn from that wellspring of knowledge and innovation.”¹²⁶

Finally, as reforms are made, the state must take the opportunity to celebrate its successes. To extent the state can promote customer-centric, digital services it can have a halo effect across the state, supporting similar efforts at local and regional levels. Together, this could be a powerful force for changing the culture of government within the state and ultimately, providing a public service worthy of the Golden State.

“...it’s no secret that many people feel alienated and distant from government. And I think the opportunities for us to think about how tech can empower citizens and make them feel ownership for their government is really important. Some of it is as simple as giving people quick, easy access to information about how taxpayer money is spent, or improving transparency, or being able to navigate a site easily. But eventually, what we should also be thinking about is, ‘How can technology enhance the experience of democracy? How can we make it easier to vote? How can we make it easier for like-minded citizens to petition their government in a way that is meaningful?’”

President Barack Obama¹⁰⁷

DIGITAL GOVERNMENT IN CALIFORNIA

Over the course of its review the Commission saw opportunities for the state to improve digital service delivery, particularly thinking first about how its end users actually access services and designing delivery around their needs and habits. But it also saw examples of creative ways individual agencies and departments are using technology to improve internal processes, share information and better serve Californians. Some bright spots:

Franchise Tax Board. The “MyFTB” program allows individual taxpayers, businesses and authorized tax representatives to set up online accounts to access their tax information. Recent upgrades for individual account holders allow users to do more online with access to CalFile (a site to file state tax returns), Web Pay (a site to make a payment) and Secure Chat (a live chat feature to ask account-specific questions).¹²⁷

Board of Equalization. The Open BOE data portal provides access to the department’s public data in easy-to-use formats.¹²⁸ (Received the 2015 Best of California Award for “best application serving the public” from the Center for Digital Government).¹²⁹

California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. The visitor processing appointment scheduling system (VPASS) allows inmate visitors to make appointments online through a Web-based application.¹³⁰ (Received the 2013 Best of California Award for “best application serving the public” from the Center for Digital Government).¹³¹

Department of Motor Vehicles. The automated multiple-choice knowledge testing system allows driver’s license applicants to take the written portion of their exam on touchscreen computer terminals located in the DMV field offices.¹³² (Received the 2013 Best of California Award for “best application serving the public” from the Center for Digital Government).¹³³

Secretary of State. The online voter registration system allows voters to register for the first time or amend their voter record online.¹³⁴ (Received the 2013 Best of California Award for “best application serving the public” from the Center for Digital Government).¹³⁵

Employment Development Department. Californians seeking unemployment insurance can now set up an online account to conveniently access claim information, certify benefits, manage claims, schedule appointments with program administrators and sign up for instant notifications and messages from the department. UI Online is available for smartphone and tablet users and provides information in both English and Spanish.¹³⁶

State Controller. The office’s online portal, bythenumbers.sco.ca.gov, allows visitors to track financial data including revenues, expenditures, liabilities, assets and fund balances reported by California’s 58 counties, more than 450 cities and more than 4,800 special districts. It also allows visitors to analyze data for each of the state’s 130 public pension plans.¹³⁷ (Received the 2015 Digital Government Achievement Award for “driving digital government” from the Center for Digital Government).¹³⁸

California Health and Human Services Agency. The agency’s open data portal improves access to public health, health care, human services and other publicly available data. As of September 2015, nine of the agency’s 12 departments had posted data on the portal. All departments are expected to publish open data by early 2016.¹³⁹

State Treasurer. The office’s latest transparency tool, “DebtWatch,” expected to launch in late 2015, will allow the public to see and analyze up-to-date data on more than \$1.5 trillion in bonds and other public debt issued by more than 6,000 state and local government entities in California.¹⁴⁰

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A CUSTOMER-CENTRIC

California Government

Over a year involving three hearings and numerous conversations with service-delivery innovators, tech entrepreneurs, government modernizers throughout California and other states, as well as customers of state services, the Commission began to hear common themes that drive organizational change and successful reinvention. Namely, creating a culture of government that pays attention to its consumers' needs and behaviors, and whenever possible, uses current technology to make transactions more efficient, simpler, faster and ultimately easier for its end users. The key is a singular focus on the user experience, as opposed to the perceived needs of the agency or department, or how things are traditionally done in state government.

Drawing on the expert input it received, the Commission began to envision how the state could draw from its own past reform efforts and from the experiences of other public sector innovators to reinvigorate the California "brand" and become more customer-centric. At its heart, the state must stimulate organizational culture change, identify the needs and desires of consumers and start with small successes that inspire larger successes in an upward spiral of customer satisfaction.

The Commission offers two major recommendations, followed by a blueprint for agencies and departments, to reignite a sense of innovation, curiosity and enthusiasm within California state government and make it the innovative, user-friendly entity it can and should be:

RECOMMENDATION 1: DESIGNATE AND EMPOWER CUSTOMER CHAMPIONS. California needs a designated leader both empowered and resourced to implement and be accountable for a statewide customer service strategy. Also, designated customer services champions throughout the state's agencies and departments should lead customer-centric reforms.

At an increasing number of companies, customers have a champion in the highest executive ranks designated to represent the interests of the customer. Known as chief customer officers, chief experience officers, chief client officers or some other variation, these executives are accountable for customers and drive customer strategy throughout their organization. A 2014 study found that 10 percent of Fortune 500 companies and 22 percent of Fortune 100 companies have hired these customer champions.¹⁴¹

Recently, four federal agencies created similar senior leadership positions: a chief customer officer at the General Services Administration, a chief veteran experience officer at the Department of Veterans Affairs, a chief customer experience officer at Federal Student Aid in the U.S. Department of Education and a vice president of customer experience at the Export-Import Bank of the United States.¹⁴²

The General Services Administration added a chief customer officer position to make it more efficient following a spending scandal in 2012. "It was about choosing a hypothesis...that a dedicated, empowered team around the customer could actually move the needle at GSA when it came to the way that customers think of the Agency," GSA's chief customer officer Phaedra Chrousos said in an August 2015 interview with *Federal Computer Week*. After months of extensive research on the GSA customer experience, the agency launched several projects, including a Yelp-like rating system for government contractors, call center consolidations and an app that allows government tenants to report non-emergency requests.¹⁴³ And, though not the primary goal, the work to improve customer experience also saved the agency money.¹⁴⁴

California's past government reform efforts offer cautionary lessons about creating sustained cultural change: specifically, that it requires persistent and deliberate commitment from the top to ensure customer service improvements are not treated as a fad.

"I have seen performance management efforts, total quality management efforts, zero-based budgeting efforts, activity-based costing efforts and a long string of other so-called management innovations flourish, then fall by the wayside once management becomes bored with their novelty and stops investing interest in them," Billy Hamilton told Commissioners. "Outstanding customer service is not a piece of software that can be installed and upgraded over time. It is something that management must demand, employees must embrace and which must be rethought on a regular basis."¹⁴⁵

In the 2012 Governor's Reorganization Plan creating the Government Operations Agency, Governor Brown specifically noted a goal to provide "better and more cost-effective service." The reorganization plan stated that the newly created Government Operations Agency would "foster state-wide perspectives, improve communication and information sharing, and change cultures that prioritize control over service."¹⁴⁶ Because of this mission and the Secretary of the Government Operations Agency's responsibilities to oversee the state's information technology, human resources and procurement functions, the position is ideally situated to serve as the state's executive-level customer service officer.

In addition to an executive-level customer service officer, California needs dedicated customer champions at the highest levels of state agencies and departments with the authority to drive change and foster a customer-centric culture, participants at the Commission's advisory meeting said.¹⁴⁷ These customer champions should evaluate the quality of customer experiences within their own organizations, but also work collectively across state government. Because some customers' needs cross over multiple departments, a statewide customer-centric focus will require departments and agencies to work together to better understand when and how they share customers and how best to work together to meet their needs. The focus should be on identifying opportunities to reorganize and redesign service delivery around

the customer journey rather than the various silos of government.¹⁴⁸ Advisory meeting participants suggested these customer champions could introduce changes on the front end of service delivery, such as creating a single portal to feed customer information to multiple departments or creating intra-agency agreements to make it easier to share customer information.

To ensure success, the customer champions should possess a unique skillset. First, they should be strong customer-experience advocates who are knowledgeable about how their organization operates and its function and be powerful communicators. They will need to be equally skilled at discussing program and policy issues as they are considering opportunities for technological solutions. Additionally, to understand if and how customer experiences are improving, they will need to know how to collect and use data, as well as be familiar with various methodologies to collect customer insight. Additionally, because their role will be to introduce change, they must be well respected by colleagues and able to communicate the voice of the customer to those within the organization, as well as communicate the organization's strategy back to the customer.

- ***The Governor and Legislature should designate the Secretary of the Government Operations Agency as the California Chief Customer Officer, responsible for overseeing implementation of a statewide customer-centric strategy and ensure that the secretary is both empowered and resourced to drive change.*** Specifically, the Governor and Legislature must provide a budget allocation to enable the Government Operations Agency to lead the state's customer service strategy.
- ***As the California Chief Customer Officer, the Secretary of the Government Operations Agency should be accountable for overseeing customer-centric strategies across the state's departments and agencies.*** Additionally, the secretary should work with oversight agencies to develop strategies to build additional "checks" into processes common across state government to ensure that agencies have considered their customers'

needs. For example, every time the Department of Finance reviews a budget change proposal or the Department of Technology reviews a new technology project, analysts should consider whether and how the proposal will create a better customer experience.

- **Additionally, the Governor and Legislature should direct each of California’s agencies and departments to designate a senior leader to serve as chief customer officer.** This officer will represent the interests of the organization’s customers, oversee the organization’s customer service strategy and coordinate cross-agency efforts with colleagues. In large organizations, the chief customer officer could be supported by various designated employees in senior program positions.

RECOMMENDATION 2: EMPOWER A SMALL TEAM TO WORK QUICKLY, DIFFERENTLY.

The state should establish an in-house digital services team to recruit top innovators into state service and make Sacramento an attractive environment for creative technologists, engineers and designers to engage in public service. Given room to unleash their talent, these hires will work with customer service champions to help agencies and departments redesign processes, encourage innovation and use technology creatively to improve customer service.

The federal government has created three programs to attract the nation’s most innovative thinkers – engineers, technologists and designers from Google, Amazon, Twitter and Facebook – to Washington to help solve some of government’s biggest social and operational problems. Similarly, cities and counties across the country and in California partner with organizations to bring in new talent – on a short-term basis – to rethink operations and better connect people to their governments. These examples have shown that the tech-to-government pipeline is strong, as talented, civically-minded individuals are drawn to government for the opportunity to make a difference through public service knowing their work will impact many.

California, too, must create a pipeline for talented people outside of government to come in for short stints and bring new ideas, skills and excitement. A couple of models already exist:

- **Fellowships.** Fellowships create time-limited work opportunities and ways to attract new talent into government without asking for permanent commitments. Some fellowships are administered directly by government, like the Presidential Innovation Fellowship which operates out of the General Services Administration. Others are run in partnership with nonprofit organizations, such as Code for America or FUSE Corps. These pair fellows with government partners to help develop digital approaches to delivering key public services, and address pressing strategic challenges.¹⁵⁰ If structured as prestigious, competitive placements, these programs are particularly attractive for those who might not otherwise consider a career with government. And because of the temporary nature of the commitment, these programs create soft transitions for mid-career executives and other government outsiders to come in while maintaining a foothold in industry, FUSE Corps CEO James Weinberg told Commission staff.¹⁵¹
- **In-house consultancy teams.** In-house teams of tactical staff allow government to look for creative ideas within, rather than turning outside to consultants for help. As described previously, the federal government established two new offices – 18F and U.S. Digital Service – that deploy tactical teams into the administration to work on high-profile issues and address “pain points” for employees and customers via technology solutions. 18F operates as an in-house contractor and charges fees-for-service of its client agencies, while the USDS is funded through the White House’s Office of Management and Budget. Both have successfully fast-tracked the federal government’s typically slow hiring process, bringing in recruits in a matter of weeks for limited-term contracts – two years with option to renew. The temporary nature of

the appointments is more amenable to the top designers, developers and product specialists they want to hire. The Presidential Innovation Fellowship and other fellowship programs, such as the one run by Code for America, have served as a pipeline for these teams.¹⁵²

The Government Operations Agency was given the authority to hire an innovation fellow, but the position required funding from outside of government. In the summer of 2015, the Health and Human Services Agency announced a partnership with FUSE Corps to establish a statewide health innovation office within the agency. The office will function as an in-house consultancy for the agency, leveraging outside talent to identify opportunities to use new people, tools, systems and processes to improve the agency's operations, as well as its departments'. Support from the California HealthCare Foundation made this partnership possible.¹⁵³ With additional funding, the state could scale up the fellowship program in other agencies and departments.¹⁵⁴

Recent Op-eds citing the federal government's success in recruiting Silicon Valley's best and the brightest to Washington, have called for California to launch its own digital service and similarly reinvigorate California state government.¹⁵⁵ The Commission agrees.

"If I fix the design of one small thing, I'm likely improving the lives of millions of New Yorkers."

Ariel Kennan, Director of Innovation and Design,
New York City Mayor's Office of Operations¹⁴⁹

■ ***The Governor and Legislature should create within the Government Operations Agency a digital services team to recruit top technologists, engineers and designers into public service for the state.*** Such talent could help build a stronger customer-centric culture within California government and help existing public servants remove roadblocks that have long stood in the way of creative reform.

■ ***The new digital services team should coordinate with chief customer officers to identify a priority list of projects to improve program efficiency and customer experience.*** The team should work with partners outside of government to offer fellowship opportunities that would attract those with limited time to work on shorter-term projects, but also create an office out of which those with longer-term aspirations could operate. The agency should grant the team the flexibility to approach their work using human-centered designed techniques that allow for experimentation through small pilot projects.

RECOMMENDATION 3: CULTIVATE A CUSTOMER-CENTRIC CULTURE ACROSS CALIFORNIA STATE GOVERNMENT.

California's agencies and departments can and must focus on what their customers need and devise strategies to deliver on those needs. Although ideally policymakers should establish champions to drive customer-centric change, as indicated in Recommendation 1, there is no reason for agencies and departments to delay using the strategies included in the blueprint below and nothing to stop leaders from encouraging public servants to vigorously and relentlessly pursue a customer-centric orientation, whatever their responsibilities within the organization. Agencies and departments should immediately adopt the following customer-centric strategies into their operations:

Reward a customer-service culture. California agencies and departments must make improving their customer experiences a strategic goal, develop measurable strategies to monitor progress and be rewarded when successful.

California's Franchise Tax Board (FTB) offers one example of how to begin. FTB has worked more than two decades to develop a customer-centric culture by aligning strategic agency actions with customer needs and continually striving to find new ways to make it easier, simpler and more convenient for Californians to file their taxes. By law taxpayers *must* pay taxes and aren't, in the usual sense of the word, customers. But the FTB has found that a customer-centric approach – that is, providing its

“We’ve been this way for so long, we don’t even think of it as a big deal anymore, but at the time this shift was a big deal.”

Anne Miller, Filing Division Chief,
Franchise Tax Board¹⁶⁰

customers with information they need to comply with tax laws and continually seeking out ways to make the filing process simple and easy to understand – has helped to maximize taxpayer compliance.¹⁵⁹

In large part, FTB’s customer focus is attributed to the department’s strategic approach, which articulates providing taxpayer-centric service as the first goal in the department’s strategic plan.¹⁶¹ “All things align with strategic goals,” Carol Williams, chief of FTB’s Accounts Receivable Management Division, told Commission staff. “It’s part of our culture to always look for ways to improve.”¹⁶²

Beyond words on paper, the department has invested significant time and energy into implementing its strategic plan through a unique governance model that taps employees to serve on several action committees. The customer service action committee specifically addresses enterprise-wide policies and practices that affect how FTB serves its customers and manages the department’s annual customer service satisfaction survey.¹⁶³

As a result of these efforts, the FTB has experimented with ways to use new technologies to continually improve customer service options. In the early 1990s, the department created electronic payment options and interactive phone service to allow individual taxpayers to call to check on the status of their return. More recently, the department has added features to make it easier for taxpayers to file personal income taxes directly to the state at no cost for the service, check the status of their refund and chat online, in real time, with a department representative to get help answering questions about personal and business taxes.¹⁶⁴



A MASTER BUSINESS APPLICATION

How it’s done today:

To start and run a business in the state, entrepreneurs must navigate a complicated process to license and register their business and obtain appropriate permits, interacting with separate state entities along the way.

In July 2015, the Governor’s Office of Business and Economic Development launched a one-stop portal for business owners to get information and help from the state.¹⁵⁶ However, business owners still must file separate paperwork with each involved state agency. Previous efforts to build a one-stop business application failed, not due to technological issues, but because of difficulties getting multiple departments to work across silos, former California Chief Technology Officer P.K. Agarwal told Commission staff.¹⁵⁷

An easier way:

Businesses interact with the state through an online business portal, reducing and streamlining paperwork requirements, where they submit a master business application that communicates required information with all government agencies. Businesses are assigned a common business identifier recognized across all departments and agencies, making it easier for businesses to comply with the state’s rules, while streamlining work processes for the state. (The Commission recommended these reforms in its March 2015 report, *Level the Playing Field: Put California’s Underground Economy Out of Business*).¹⁵⁸

■ **Agency and department leaders should work with colleagues responsible for strategic planning and performance measurement to develop strategic organizational goals around their customers' needs, as well as metrics to monitor implementation.** Leaders should continually monitor customer service metrics to evaluate program performance, assess progress, identify best practices and inform future resource and policy decisions. Additionally, leaders should encourage creativity by celebrating successful projects and acknowledging the public servants involved.

Involve public servants. California's public servants should feel empowered to share ideas and suggestions about ways to improve processes inside their organizations, provide better customer service and communicate more effectively to their customers.

California's state employees, particularly those who regularly interact with the public and act as the face of state government, are essential to any customer-centric transformation effort.

The Franchise Tax Board offers one example of how departments might include civil servants in problem-solving efforts. Leaders at the FTB purposely seek and encourage employee feedback as part of the department's effort to continuously improve, Executive Officer Selvi Stanislaus told Commission staff.¹⁶⁵ In addition to collecting data on who calls the department or uses its online services, the FTB also encourages staff to look for processes that could be automated or otherwise simplified, and to take part in the process of making those improvements. "The department's culture invites and encourages employee feedback," Ms. Stanislaus explained. The department's employees have and use several channels to share ideas for improving services. They include idea boxes within their divisions, online forums where employees can ask questions and make suggestions related to any topic, as well as various employee workgroups and committees.¹⁶⁶

The Commission heard from labor representatives who emphasized the value of including employees in customer service improvement efforts. "State employees want to provide excellent services to Californians. They want to help the people who come to them – many who are struggling to make ends meet," Mario Guerrero, legislative affairs director with the Service Employees International Union Local 1000, told Commissioners. "There is nothing more frustrating for our members than to face the frustration and anger of Californians who have been trying to get through the phone system for assistance for days, or have problems with online interface and to hear the impact of these situations on their lives."¹⁶⁷

Public servants can be just as frustrated as customers and bear the brunt of systems that don't work well. "We often work under the assumption that we have a community of employees not ready. We have people who are eager to learn, but are faced with bad technology," a representative from the City of Oakland said during the Commission's advisory meeting. She observed that the pain points for external users are also the same for internal ones.¹⁶⁸ Part of developing a customer-centric culture across state government will entail addressing the technological limitations many employees face in their day-to-day environments and creating a technologically-enabled workplace that is as good as what employees experience at home.

■ **Agency and department leaders should ensure that both formal and informal communication channels are available for public servants to share ideas for improving program performance and providing better customer service with top executives.** In addition to regularly inviting employee feedback, agency and department leaders should communicate to employees how and when their feedback was used to introduce change within the organization.

Research customer experiences for continuous improvement. Californians should be asked about regularly their experiences interacting with state agencies and departments and included in conversations about improving experiences – from start to finish. In turn, California’s agencies and departments should use this information to refine how they deliver services and ensure those services are accessible, convenient, easy to use and ultimately meet their customers’ needs.

Learning about customers’ experiences is crucial to making government services accessible and relevant. The Commission heard from experts who suggested that agencies and departments should take special care to understand the needs of and improve experiences for the most vulnerable Californians. This group doesn’t often have a voice to represent its interests, they said, so government has to be conscious and deliberate about including it in decisions. Adjusting service delivery to better serve the hardest to serve will likely improve customer experiences for all Californians.¹⁷⁰

A laser focus on the most vulnerable likely will require departments to consider how their operational hours affect accessibility. Departments inevitably will find that some customers have more than one job, work during regular government operations hours or have limited transportation options requiring them to rearrange work schedules – or take a day unpaid – to get to an office or even to speak over the phone with a government representative.

Just one example: In anticipation of an increase in applicants following passage of legislation to allow undocumented immigrants in the state to apply for driver’s licenses, the Department of Motor Vehicles temporarily extended weekday office hours in selected field offices throughout the state and opened some offices on Saturdays.¹⁷¹ The department should review the success of this program to consider whether it could be expanded – either in additional office locations or on a continual basis – to better serve its regular customers.

The McKinsey Center for Government found in a 2014 citizen experience study that “best-in-class” organizations regularly measure citizen satisfaction to set priorities and monitor changes in satisfaction levels. It helps

them identify pain points, gather customer reactions to proposed changes and reinvigorate continuous improvement efforts. The report suggested that continuous monitoring allows organizations to respond to sudden decreases in satisfaction levels and quickly address emerging problems.¹⁷²

“The state should be asking – what can we do?”

Dan Parham, Co-Founder, Neighborland²⁴⁹

Government has at its disposal many tools for collecting customer feedback and listening to customer concerns, from traditional surveys to social media platforms. In August 2015, the federal government starting asking for reviews on Yelp, a Web and mobile-based user review platform that allows users to rate and review various categories of services from restaurants, hotels and travel organizations, professional services and religious organizations and now public services and government.¹⁷³ Additionally, some federal agencies are experimenting with regular office hours on Twitter. Both the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services and the Office of Federal Student Aid use Twitter to give customers another avenue for asking general questions and receiving real-time information from government officials.¹⁷⁴

But, rather than simply collecting feedback about services provided or analyzing customer complaints, government agencies should use human-centered design practices to research customer needs to figure out ways to better meet them. Some local governments, as well as California’s Franchise Tax Board offer examples:

The City of San Francisco’s Office of Economic and Workforce Development partnered with Neighborland to develop a revitalization plan for UN Plaza that includes responses from residents about the project. (Neighborland provides local leaders seeking immediate feedback about a pending decision a platform to engage with constituents.) Hundreds of residents participated in a public meeting to consider how to improve the UN Plaza and another 1,500 residents weighed in online on Neighborland. City officials vetted the ideas and selected

some to be tested, Neighborland co-founder Dan Parham told Commission staff. One idea to host weekly markets at the plaza is now a regularly-scheduled event featuring local food, craft vendors and live music, bringing renewed vibrancy to the plaza.¹⁷⁵ Mr. Parham said in the last two years, 160,000 Californians have used Neighborland to provide online feedback to local government and community leaders.¹⁷⁶

The City of South Bend, Indiana, partnered with Code for America to design CityVoice, a tool for residents to quickly and easily provide opinions on such geographic entities as vacant properties or city parks. Public servants place signs at specific locations for input. Neighbors call a phone number listed on the signs to give their feedback and information is published to a website where neighbors and government decision-makers can review it.¹⁷⁷

California's Franchise Tax Board has created several formal channels to receive customer input. The department offers a survey to customers after they file a return online. Taxpayers who phone one of the department's call centers are given an option to leave comments after their call. This information is used to improve processes and make it easier for people and businesses to pay their state taxes. Department representatives told Commission staff they introduced the department's "virtual hold" option after call center agents received customer feedback asking for the feature. Realizing that many callers contact the department online before picking up the phone, FTB Web staffers now occasionally sit with their call center colleagues to better understand what challenges users are having and get feedback on service improvements.¹⁷⁸

"We have a chance to build government services that put people first."

Jacob Solomon, Code for America¹⁸²

■ ***Agency and department leaders should regularly engage their customers, seeking feedback about their experiences in receiving information and services and asking for ideas about how to better meet their needs.*** Working with program partners, they should employ human-centered design practices to revise how services are delivered, then test strategies to create better experiences for their customers. Leaders should relentlessly monitor customer experiences, through surveys, social media platforms and other forms of customer communications, and use feedback to determine if and how information or services could be delivered more effectively.



PAYING IN-HOME CAREGIVERS

How it's done today:

Paper timesheets for In-Home Supportive Services Providers begin a typical 18-day process to get a state paycheck. Checks may be delayed due to processing problems with illegible hand writing or text corrected with white-out. Mail delivery timeframes also can be unpredictable.¹⁷⁹

An easier way:

Providers to submit timesheets electronically, either through email or a secure website, cutting processing costs and time and getting checks to providers faster. Payments to caregivers are expedited through a direct deposit feature.

Provide political cover for experimentation. State leaders should support the new customer service champions and digital services team, granting them authority to work around traditional barriers to fast-track customer service improvements.

Regardless of the model California uses to introduce new ideas into state government, it must support innovators as they experiment with new ways of doing business. In the United Kingdom, the call to change government’s approach to digital services was driven by a high-powered entrepreneur who had the ear of the Prime Minister and ministers who in turn had the political capital to launch the Government Digital Service. The call to change in the U.S. came from the White House and began with the Presidential Innovation Fellowship, one of 18F’s cofounders, Andrew McMahon, told Commissioners. “Political cover is crucial,” he said.¹⁸⁰

When introducing broad change, particularly on highly visible projects, support from powerful executives can overcome the risk-averse nature of bureaucracies. Several leaders of President Obama’s new digital services teams told the Commission that in Washington D.C., political appointees are more likely to take risks because, unlike bureaucrats, they know they will be moving on.

They also emphasized the importance of finding partners within the administration who are knowledgeable about laws and regulations, and also can keep projects on track. “You need someone to ask, ‘Hypothetically, if I want to do this thing, how can I do that and stay within the regulations and laws?’ This person will need to know the rules and laws to help you figure this out,” Mr. McMahon said.

High-level support for change is particularly important to combat government’s tendency to favor accountability over results, participants of the Commission’s advisory meeting said. “Accountability in government is about when something goes wrong there is a reaction. We build those reactions on top of each other and when there are problems, we build more on top of that,” one advisory meeting participant said. “We don’t operate in the same environment as the private sector. We can learn a lot from businesses, but the expectations for us are not the same.” Over time, this buildup of reactions constrains

government because the “reactions” infrequently are undone and government leaders must live with the cumulative rules and regulations that are created.

■ **For California to build a customer-centric culture and have a successful digital services strategy, the state must allow public servants latitude to question the status quo and experiment with ways to provide better customer service.** High-level sponsorship from the Governor and legislative leaders, as well as cover from administration appointees, will be critical to ensure customer service improvement projects are given priority and have sufficient support and resources to succeed.

“I think where [the new digital service teams are] having more of an impact is in their interactions with the agencies, and the IT teams at the VA, or at HUD, or some of these huge organizations that contain a lot of excellent people but have been so stifled sometimes by this rule, or this statute, or this traditional approach to how we do something. And so, part of the reason why we’ve been successful so far is I have essentially provided air cover for these teams because I can call up the secretary [of various agencies], and say, ‘I want this to happen. And I don’t want us to find a reason not to do it just because it hasn’t been done before. And I want us to bring together a team to be as creative as possible.’”

President Barack Obama¹⁸¹

Pilot change to test and demonstrate the value of working differently. To overcome a traditionally cautious, risk-averse culture, state agencies and departments should identify small, meaningful projects to test and demonstrate the value of customer-centric reforms and generate enthusiasm for working differently.

Too often government projects fail to get off the ground with plans that get too big by trying to solve all problems at once. Even the newest initiatives, especially those involving technology, often appear instantly outdated, clogged by questionable specifications, overly complicated contracts, cost overruns and unmet deadlines.

“...we realized that a lot of times agencies take two first steps that I wouldn’t suggest,” the U.S. General Services Administration’s first chief customer officer Phaedra Chrousos recalled in a June 2015 interview with *Government Technology* magazine. “The first one is to create a very long-winded strategy. Articulating strategy is important, but sometimes just taking action and proving you can make change on a small scale is equally important, and sometimes more so when it comes to changing the mindsets of people.”¹⁸³

Her colleagues suggested a different approach: start with small projects, case studies that focus on a “minimally viable project” – just the core features needed to be deployed. They told Commissioners that this approach has worked successfully for 18F, whose early projects have demonstrated that work can be done differently, while saving time and money. Some project examples:

- 18F revamped the Federal Business Opportunities Agency website to make it more navigable for vendors searching for contracting opportunities with the federal government. The new site helped to level the playing field and made it easier for potential contractors to search for opportunities, Mr. McMahon told Commissioners.¹⁸⁴
- 18F changed the blanket purchase agreements with which the federal government buys new technology. Ms. Hartley explained the change: “Our team has tried to create a micro marketplace by asking vendors to prove they can

build in an agile way. We told vendors ‘we want you to build something for us in two weeks and do the user research on it.’ So, now we have examples of their work and can look at their code and look at their user research. We curated this large list of approved vendors down to a subset of about 20 companies that have proved they can build in this way.”¹⁸⁵

- 18F also helped streamline and automate the acquisition process for purchase card holders – those designated to manage their agency’s purchasing requests. The team built a new email-based tool, Communicart, to serve as a uniform system for reviewing and approving purchases. The project cost 18F \$400,000 to develop, a number their clients said was “unbelievable” compared to typical costs of \$18 million to \$19 million, Ms. Hartley said. Over time, the project will generate additional cost savings as a result of the faster processing times. Leveraging further value from the work, the tool has been replicated for three other projects.¹⁸⁶

Team representatives and others who met with the Commission suggested that when designing services, California’s agencies and departments should allow administrators to invite customer testing and feedback and build in time for course corrections before arriving at a final product. Doing good research up front helps to make sure that whatever change is introduced will deliver on the minimum things people actually want and will use. Additionally, they said the approach allows for lower-risk experimentation before scaling reform across programs or departments. The idea is to start with small pilot projects to test an idea, then percolate out by bringing projects to scale either within one organization or across agencies.¹⁸⁷

“Pick one small narrow problem you want to solve and everything else is noise.”

Emily Wright Moore, Interaction Designer,
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs¹⁸⁸

Representatives from 18F told the Commission that successful pilot projects generate excitement and interest beyond the participating organization. “Never underestimate the power of your users to tell your story for you,” 18F’s director of business strategy, Stephanie Rivera, said. “You’d get converts. People would say, ‘You know what you need? You should get these guys in here.’”¹⁹⁰

■ **Agency and department leaders should identify small, meaningful pilot projects to demonstrate the value of human-centered design.** To generate enthusiasm for working differently, they should share lessons learned with other state administrators and publicly celebrate successful projects.

Communicate clearly. All information from California’s agencies and departments should be communicated in plain, straightforward language and shared in ways that make it easy for Californians to find and understand.

Government can perhaps most easily improve the customer experience by changing the way it communicates with the public: being succinct, clear, accurate, precise, as well as approachable, and easy to find and understand.

Government communications are often long and muddled with jargon and legalese, making it difficult for the public to find what they need, understand what they find and get the information or services they seek. The state’s website for obtaining certified copies of birth and death records, for example, is text-heavy and cluttered with notes, links and legal caveats.¹⁹¹ Another example: California’s Air Resources Board developed an online application to track air quality anywhere in the state. But rather than giving the app a catchy title reflecting its useful function for customers, it is named “Air Resourceskik Board.”¹⁹²

Non-native English speakers experience particularly formidable barriers accessing government information. Not all government information is available in multiple languages. Children of non-native English speakers may

be called on to help translate government information that they don’t fully understand themselves and cannot translate accurately. Trouble also may arise in trying to explain words that have very different meanings in English than in other languages.¹⁹³ Some programs use Google translator to make their websites more accessible to a wider audience, more representative of the state’s cultural diversity. On its face, this appears to be a valuable tool for increasing accessibility, but in this study the Commission did not assess the tool’s overall effectiveness.

California law already requires government agencies to “write each document it produces in plain, straightforward language, avoiding technical terms as much as possible, and using a coherent and easily readable style.”¹⁹⁴ Cyd Harrell, Code for America’s senior director of product, told Commissioners the state could be more customer-centric by enforcing its “plain language” statutes.¹⁹⁵

■ **In evaluating programs and services, agency and department leaders should develop strategies for better communicating information to the public in ways that are succinct, clear, accurate and easy to understand.** Leaders also should consider whether communications are offered via the state’s many common languages, and if not, take steps to ensure culturally competent translations are available to improve communication with non-native English speakers.

Create multiple service pathways. Californians should be able to access state government services in ways most comfortable and convenient for their individual needs and abilities.

Outside of their interactions with government, Californians increasingly expect to access services and communicate with institutions – be it a bank or retailer – wherever and whenever needed and however they prefer. Simply, customers expect customer service to be accessible anytime, anyplace, and by whatever means of communication they prefer – whether mail, email, telephone, fax, in person, online or on a mobile device.¹⁹⁶

Like the private sector, government, too, must deliver on these expectations. Government also must continuously evolve along with technology and deliver on new communication options and expectations. But, government must recognize that no single delivery mode will work equally well for everyone. Unlike businesses, government must offer a pool of services so that everyone, not just the easiest to reach, are served. “We should not lose the human aspect. We need to make those [in-person] interactions better,” one individual told Commission staff.¹⁹⁷

California’s Department of Motor Vehicles, popularly known as the DMV, demonstrates how a department can start to improve service and better meet customer expectations by offering its customers choices in their interactions with the state. Millions of Californians interact with the department each year to register or renew registration for their vehicle or driver’s license.¹⁹⁸

Not long ago, Californians had to visit a DMV field office to conduct their business, Stephanie Dougherty, DMV’s Chief of Enterprise Planning and Performance, told Commissioners. But, the department has invested substantial effort to increase access to its services and provide customers greater flexibility in how they complete their DMV transactions. Now, in addition to in-person visits, the department offers options – online, on mobile devices, by mail or phone, on self-service terminals or through visits to a DMV business partner or auto club.¹⁹⁹ Indeed, more than 20 DMV services are available online and some are now also mobile-friendly. The department also offers a “virtual hold” call-back feature for Californians who want to speak directly with a department representative. And a number of local DMV offices have self-service kiosks for customers to quickly and conveniently complete transactions – to name just a few recent improvements.²⁰⁰

“Providing alternative ways to complete DMV transactions benefits all of our customers,” Ms. Dougherty said. “Customers who use an alternative service channel are saved a trip to a DMV field office and are able to complete their DMV transaction in the time and manner most convenient to them. Redirecting customers to other service channels also helps to reduce field office traffic, which results in improved service levels for our field office customers.”²⁰¹

Collectively, these efforts have improved customer satisfaction over time. Public reviews of the department’s offices now rank fairly high on Yelp, an online service for the public to provide businesses feedback about the services they receive. In fact, most offices average a score of more than three out of five stars.²⁰² However, during the Commission’s hearing it was noted that wait times are not consistent across DMV field offices. Specifically, that wait times in some of the poorest areas of Los Angeles can be significantly longer than wait times in more affluent areas of the city. This discrepancy raises the question of whether the DMV is consciously thinking through how best to serve all its customers. By further applying some of the customer-centric design techniques described here to more fully understand their customers’ needs and experiences, the department could further refine its service particularly to address long lines in low-income neighborhoods.

■ ***Agency and department leaders should evaluate how customers access services, determine if existing channels are sufficient and consider ways to improve and expand accessibility, whether digital or in person.***

Move beyond mobile apps. In designing digital services, agencies and departments should offer maximum options for Californians to conveniently access government services – whatever the platform they choose to use.

Making government services accessible online is particularly important for making government more accessible to Californians who live in rural areas or otherwise have difficulty connecting with government. “For economically vulnerable citizens who may not have fixed addresses, being able to communicate and access services from a basic smartphone (or even a non-Internet-enabled feature phone) is essential to participation in both services and civic life,” Cyd Harrell told Commissioners.²⁰³

California’s Department of Technology, which leads the state’s technology initiatives and provides guidance to government decision-makers, has made building a “responsive, accessible and mobile government” the first goal in the state’s 2015 Information Technology Strategic Plan. It plans to achieve this, in part, by making more

government services, information, and transactions available online and accessible via mobile devices.²⁰⁴

But as California’s agencies and departments ramp up efforts to improve how the state delivers services to the public, some might be tempted to direct their focus on building mobile applications to better meet customer expectations. But the end goal should not be to build the most mobile apps. It should be to offer the most options for Californians to conveniently access government services whatever the platform they choose to use (including in-person and on paper).

The focus on building mobile is justified by research. Findings from a 2015 Pew Research Center study show that nearly two-thirds of Americans use a smartphone to go online, and some population groups (including younger adults, non-whites and those with low household incomes and levels of education) are dependent on these platforms to access the Internet.²⁰⁵ Moreover, research by IT research firm Gartner suggests that by 2018 more than half of users will go to a smartphone or tablet first for all online activities.²⁰⁶ And Americans are more frequently using these mobile devices to access federal government websites.²⁰⁷

However, research also suggests that consumers spend little time using “non-native apps,” that is, applications that do not come pre-installed on their mobile device.²⁰⁸ The implication is that the effort and cost to produce and maintain government-built apps for specific programs might not be worth the payout in terms of usage.

Experts suggested government think instead about building a responsive design – that is websites that work on any device and are usable on any size screen. “Designing a website that is only accessible to a certain percentage of the population is the same thing as providing service only in English or that doesn’t account for people with disabilities,” Andrew McMahon, Regional Administrator of the General Services Administration, told Commissioners in July 2015.²⁰⁹

Some services might make sense in a mobile app, but these are not the solution for all government services. Californians are not likely to download an app to file their once-a-year vehicle registration with the DMV, for example. But an app that allows visitors to state

parks to pay for parking on their smartphone or pull up a guided tour of the park may be of interest. Though government should have a role in promoting mobile apps, Hillary Hartley, 18F’s deputy executive director, told Commissioners, a more important focus is for government to pave the way for third parties to develop mobile services by putting out APIs and open data. The market can then decide what users need and others can build apps to meet those needs. “The things behind the scenes are more important than the apps,” she said.²¹⁰

■ **Agency and department leaders should work with program partners to review how services currently are offered and create new digital services or improve existing ones as appropriate.**

In addition, to better ensure a customer-centric focus across state websites – regardless of the platform on which they are accessed – leaders should review and revise Web standards and work with the new digital services teams to develop common tools that are consistent and easy-to-use. Whether creating new websites, service portals or mobile apps, they should be designed with the users’ needs in mind. In addition, digital services should be built around responsive designs with the flexibility to work on multiple platforms.



VISITING A STATE PARK

How it’s done today:

Visitors decide to make a trip and pay at the gate with cash or more often, a debit card. The only advance online ordering option at the Department of Parks and Recreation is an annual pass.²¹¹ Getting a hunting and fishing license involves another state department, the Department of Fish and Wildlife.

An easier way:

Visitors go to one online site, much like they do to buy airline tickets or movie passes, to order a daily pass. At the same site they can buy a hunting or fishing license if desired.

Seek opportunities for organizational improvement.

Because a good customer experience is dependent on a well-functioning, modern organization, California must break its reliance on outmoded technology and processes that prevent it from meeting public expectations for high-quality, on-demand services.

“Sometimes you have to fix the back end before you can fix the front end,” 18F’s director of business strategy, Stephanie Rivera, told Commissioners. “It’s the plumbing.”²¹²

In government, that “plumbing” can include time-intensive paper-based application and review processes, hiring processes, requirements for ink on paper signatures, restrictions on how customers pay for services, as well as outdated and multiple databases that might not allow data sharing across systems. Within the civic tech sector, new companies are popping up to address these and other process issues common across government.

Government can gain some efficiency by digitizing paper-based processes, which require extra work by public servants to review and process, more for handwritten applications. This also means longer timeframes for customers to get answers about the services or information they seek. But technology is making it easier for governments to streamline and consolidate forms so customers only fill out necessary information and can submit documents online. SeamlessDocs, for example, helps governments take paper-based forms and PDFs and put them online so they can be completed on any device and submitted with an electronic signature.²¹³

“What we’re seeing is a 19th Century institution often using 20th Century technology to respond to 21st Century problems. We need to change that.”

House Republican Conference Chair Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R-WA)²¹⁴

Forms reform is just the beginning. In part, modernizing government will require a look at internal processes and tools that public servants use to do their work. Indeed, some departments within the state have begun experimenting with ways to make internal processes more efficient for both internal and external stakeholders. Since 2014, participants from 17 departments have launched 36 projects through the state’s Lean 6-Sigma Program, offered through a partnership between the Governor’s Office of Business and Economic Development and the Government Operations Agency.²¹⁵ The Lean 6-Sigma training program teaches participants to use complex analytical and statistical tools that identify waste and inefficiencies in processes, then apply these tools to make improvements in their organizations. According to the Governor’s Office of Business and Economic Development, project outcomes included improved efficiency and operation of organizational processes, but also have a positive impact on governments’ interaction with the public.²¹⁶ These sorts of ongoing data-driven evaluations should be conducted throughout state government to help leaders make more informed decisions about how best to manage their organizations based on performance data.

**BECOMING A DENTI-CAL PROVIDER****How it’s done today:**

Dentists must find and download the 22-page Denti-Cal provider form. Then they have to fill out some fields electronically before printing and manually completing and signing the form, then mail it to the Denti-Cal program. They can wait up to six months to find out if the application is approved, incomplete, requires further review or is denied.²¹⁸

An easier way:

The Denti-Cal provider form is streamlined and modeled after commercial insurance provider applications, eliminating all fields that relate solely to Medi-Cal. Dentists complete and submit this simpler form online.

Modernization also will require a look at the often outmoded technological environment within which public servants work and the lengthy processes organizations use to procure technology. The technological environment public servants face in their day-to-day work environment doesn't usually match tools they use at home, such as Netflix and Amazon. Though public servants are comfortable using newer technologies and are eager to learn, at work they often use outdated technology and might be asked to double and triple enter into a DOS-based system. To update technology, the state will likely have to review procurement processes. The State Auditor said in a September 2015 interview with *TechLeader.tv* the current processes can take so long that the technology has changed before the process is complete.²¹⁷

■ **Agency and department leaders should identify those internal processes, procedures or systems that slow or complicate service delivery to customers.** In identifying small pilot projects, leaders should look for opportunities to improve agency and department operations.

Unlock the promise of government data. The state should continue to pursue an open data strategy, taking steps to make government data available for those in government, as well as outsiders to use. Doing so will allow the state to better manage its programs, inform policy and resource decisions, improve transparency and create new products and tools for the public's good.

California state government holds a valuable and largely untapped resource: an overwhelming volume of official and real-time datasets. Unlocking this existing information allows the state and interested parties to better address societal challenges, foster civil engagement and enhance government transparency, accountability and efficiency. To accelerate innovation both within and outside government, the state can capitalize on "opening" its raw data resources in downloadable and machine-readable formats that are easy to search, download and combine.

Two of California's agencies, including the State Controller and Health and Human Services Agency, already have embraced the open data movement by sharing public datasets through Web portals.²¹⁹ In addition to creating a data portal for all departments within the agency to share publicly available data, the Health and Human Services Agency also created an open data handbook which lays out processes, procedures and definitions for the agency's open data program – something which can be adopted and adapted to meet the requirements of other agencies.²²⁰ Other agencies, including the State Treasurer and Government Operations Agency were in the process of establishing open data portals as this report was being developed.²²¹

A representative from the health and human services agency told the Commission, "the biggest benefit I see is that open data establishes a beachhead that can bring in new ideas and make government more data savvy and ultimately, makes government more open to innovation and smarter."²²² Recent legislative interest to develop a statewide open data portal and chief data officer stalled.²²³ Despite these setbacks, the Government Operations Agency is moving forward with a pilot Statewide Open Data Portal, to be launched in late October 2015. The pilot will pull together data from multiple agencies, and arrange information by topics that make sense for those unfamiliar with the organizational structure of the state's agencies and departments.²²⁴

Though opening its data resources should not be the end goal for a customer-centric state, it is a necessary and critical step on the way toward reinventing the state's relationships with the public and with its partners.

■ **The Governor should issue an executive order encouraging agency efforts to allow Californians online access to the state's raw, publicly available data.** The ultimate goal should be to create a single online warehouse for the state's publicly available data, searchable by topic area. The Governor should encourage agencies to begin by developing a statewide open data policy and digital standards to guide departments as they evaluate existing data and organize it into formats that ultimately can be shared on a statewide platform.

UNLOCK THE PROMISE OF GOVERNMENT DATA

Data to inform government decisions. Some governments have built a culture of continuous improvement through data-driven decisions about resource investment and policy priorities. The State of Maryland in 2007 launched the nation’s first state open data portal and what has now become an award-winning government performance management program, StateStat. While many governments monitor their performance through annual budget reviews, StateStat requires most agencies to track and report performance. Cabinet officials regularly review agencies’ data reports and make immediate policy and resource decisions based on the results.

As departments became more comfortable with the StateStat process, and “internalizing data,” a shift occurred, recalled Chris Reith, Socrata’s GovStat program manager and former director of the Governor’s Office under Governor Martin O’Malley. Rather than using the program solely to improve government operations and service delivery, the state began to use it to address broad, cross-agency strategic goals.²²⁵

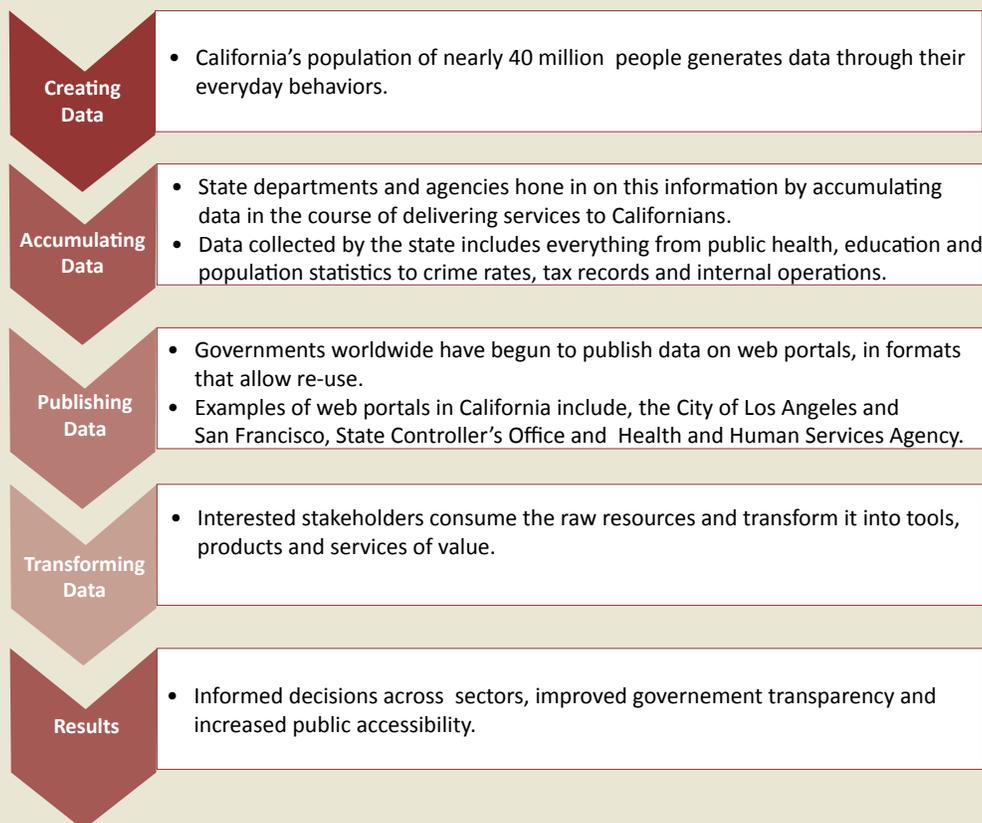
For Marylanders, StateStat’s performance management techniques have resulted in improved service delivery. Before the program, state administrators in the Motor Vehicle Administration (MVA) had no baseline data on their work, Beth Blauer, former StateStat director, told Commission staff. The perception was they were doing the best they could with the resources they had and performing at their maximum capacity. But when they started collecting data on work in other states and monitoring their own data they found there were areas for improvement. One simple finding: Office kiosks were not used as frequently as staffed counters. As the MVA made changes, it simultaneously collected data to measure how those changes impacted kiosk use and wait times. “We didn’t have to wait a year [to know if the changes were working],” Ms. Blauer explained. “Instead we knew in a month.” When the MVA identified practices that increased kiosk use and decreased wait times, it spread that practice across the state, creating a positive ripple effect across the agency’s operations.²²⁶

Cities and states across the country have followed Maryland’s lead and adopted the “stat” model of using data to improve public services and address issues important to citizens.

Data to improve transparency. Much of government’s data is locked into siloed legacy systems and scattered throughout numerous agencies and departments. But liberating this data can increase transparency of government information to the public and also facilitate intra-agency information sharing among government programs. Participants at the Commission’s July 2015 advisory meeting said that for government, the real value of data is the insights it provides about how government is operating and its function as a mechanism for feedback between the community and government.²²⁷

During his tenure as State Controller, John Chiang’s administration made it a priority to make government financial data more transparent online, Collin Wong-Martinusen, who served as chief of staff to Chiang at the State Controller’s Office and who continues to serve at the State Controller’s Office, told Commission staff. “The lack of transparency and access [to government financial information] breeds corruption and mismanagement of taxpayer monies,” he quoted Mr. Chiang as saying in response to the string of high-profile local government corruption scandals, best epitomized by the City of Bell in 2010. As a counter to these types of scandals, he said one of Mr. Chiang’s goals as State Controller was to make the office become the go-to destination for reliable, no-nonsense information about the state’s finances. The effort resulted in three open data portals – ByTheNumbers,²²⁸ Government Compensation in California²²⁹ and Track Prop 30²³⁰ – which provide users a visual narrative to customize reports using desirable interface tools such as mapping and geographic information systems. Today, the current State Controller, Betty Yee, continues to offer readily-accessible government financial data to the public

LIBERATING GOVERNMENT DATA



that several years ago were only easily accessed through commercial resources at exorbitant costs.

Data to increase accessibility. Collecting information is at the heart of many government functions. Through government activities, state departments and agencies accumulate data in areas ranging from public health, education, and population statistics to crime rates, tax records and internal operations. With this information, the state has the opportunity to act as a data wholesaler and make government data available for those in government, as well as outsiders, to freely use to create and deliver new products and tools for the public's good.

Organizations, such as Code for America, promote use of data to improve access to public services. In West Sacramento, Code for America technologists are working with the city to advance the regional food system by transforming vacant lots into urban farms. By making it easier for people to find locally grown produce, this project also is expected to help address the city's "food desert" landscape. The City of Vallejo also has partnered with the organization to use technology to improve public safety and build trust between law enforcement and city residents.²³¹

Open data also creates opportunities for third parties to develop tools that cater to very specific subsets of the state's population. For example, by permitting access to data about the state park's reservation system, third parties could design services targeted to attract specific population groups, such as non-English speakers or urban dwellers, to state parks. And by making it easier for more people to visit parks, these third parties also could help further the state parks mission to remain relevant and accessible to all Californians and world-wide visitors.²³²

Leverage data resources to bring services to Californians. Californians seeking government information or assistance might not know which department or program is responsible for what they need, but they probably know how to do a general online search. Because of this, state government leaders should make sure data is available in formats that can be leveraged by others to get information to Californians where they already go to seek it.

In 2012 the City of San Francisco partnered with Yelp to import restaurant hygiene scores from the city on Yelp businesses pages. Because that data was available and shared, San Francisco Yelp users can now make more informed restaurant selections by clicking through and viewing restaurants' historical inspection scores.²³³ As of March 2015, seven cities and counties have partnered with Yelp to share these scores.²³⁴

As state government continues to open its data resources to third party developers, a new array of tools will inevitably become available to Californians to help them find and access government services. California's agencies and departments should look for opportunities to promote tools or services that help direct people to state services, just as the City and County of San Francisco promotes applications developed by private third parties using the city's public data on its mobile Web gallery, SFGov Mobile.²³⁵

Rather than endorsing third party tools, state agencies should consider how they, too, might promote them to further their missions. For example, the California Department of Parks and Recreation might consider how promoting the CaliParks app on its website or elsewhere could help park visitors find places to camp, walk their dogs, relax at a beach and check out photos taken by other visitors. The Web-based park finder app, available in English and Spanish, was built by the Parks Forward Commission and partners to encourage people to visit one of the state's 280 parks and beaches.²³⁶

Similarly, the California Department of Public Health might consider how it could promote WICit, a Web-based application that helps eligible Californians determine if they qualify for WIC, a federally-funded health and nutrition assistance program. If readily available, the

tool could make it easier for the more than 1.45 million WIC participants to use the program. The application was built by Code for Sacramento, a Code for America Brigade, using data from the California Department of Public Health's open data portal.²³⁷

The Commission heard that the state should be more proactive in revisiting and revising and potentially eliminating rules that limit access to the state's robust publicly-available data resources. For example, an advisory meeting participant told Commissioners the state should include in its contracts requirements to build in open data and application-programming interface, or APIs, into new contracts. (APIs are computer programming protocols for building software applications.) Third party developers can access the APIs to build tools, like WICit, for public consumption.

"This model of using APIs to help government be more consumer friendly is helpful," she said. "The example is government as a platform so others can build on it to help the many different populations of the state."²³⁸

■ **Agency and department leaders should review rules and internal policies to determine if any unnecessarily limit engagement with partners.** Further they should seek out and foster partnerships with outside organizations to move information to Californians and promote tools and services developed by third parties that further programs' missions.

Bridge the technology industry and the public sector.

California should connect the state’s technology sector with state government leaders and welcome innovators to help address some of the state’s most pressing challenges.

While other governments, mostly local, have successfully engaged civic tech innovators, for the most part, California state government is not yet on their radar.

Throughout this study, the Commission heard that outsiders find California state government large and confusing – a seemingly impenetrable bureaucracy. Some say California is unapproachable: too large to navigate the bureaucracy and too difficult to identify people within the system to target for partnerships.²³⁹ There’s a perception that the state is a “black box,” with no clear starting point, or “front door,” digital or otherwise to begin discussions. Most rely on experts familiar with government – those working with foundations or policy organizations – to tell them about the challenges facing government.²⁴⁰ Former state government officials who now work with venture capitalists and technology startups told Commission staff tech leaders in Silicon Valley perceive indifference from state government leaders in comparison to other governments that have much tighter integration with the technology industry.²⁴¹

“It would be helpful to know what problems exist within the various state agencies, as well as who government is trying to help and what the desired outcomes are for them,” Eric Liu, Bayes Impact founder, told Commission staff. Bayes Impact is a nonprofit that deploys teams of data scientists to build data-driven solutions to challenging social issues.

Experts also told the Commission that it is incumbent on the state to “build a bridge” to make it easier for outsiders to come in.²⁴²

At the same time, few in government are familiar with the state’s civic tech community. However, some of California’s agencies have made inroads. The Department of Social Services, for example, recently partnered with Code for America on several projects. One will help the department look at ways to improve enrollment rates for the state’s CalFresh program, which provides financial assistance to qualifying households and individuals to

“We [as government] have so outsourced our ability to do [technology] work, that we are really not able to be nimble, quick, flexible and as responsive as we should be. Instead, we’re really reliant on third party vendors and system integrators. And on our best days we’re project managers. ...Somehow we’re going to have to rebuild that within the public side.”

Will Lightbourne, Director,
California Department of Social Services²⁵⁰

help them meet their nutritional needs.²⁴³ California’s enrollment rate for the program is among the lowest in the nation, director Will Lightbourne told Commission staff. Like many social services programs, CalFresh is administered through counties, but overseen by the Department of Social Services. In 2013, Code for America fellowship teams worked successfully with the County of San Francisco to make it easier to sign up and participate in the program. Now, in an attempt to drive up statewide enrollment numbers, the department is working with Code for America to understand how people find out about the program online and how they eventually find their way to the program.

The partnership has helped trigger a different way of thinking within the department about its role, Mr. Lightbourne said. Rather than serving as a gatekeeper, focusing on how much cash is going out from the department, its thinking now is more customer-centric, focusing on how to communicate benefit opportunities to Californians, he said.²⁴⁴

Other agencies have hosted code-a-thon events to invite outsiders to use government data to address critical policy issues. In June 2015, the California HealthCare Foundation, in partnership with the California Health and Human Services Agency, hosted a civic hacking day event asking participants to use the agency’s health data in new and innovative ways. The aim: to help the public

better understand pressing health issues, inform health choices and help policymakers make more informed health policy decisions. Top prizes went to teams for apps to help Sacramento County residents find WIC services, to make it easier to track, discuss and share progress of the California Department of Public Health's *Let's Get Healthy California Initiative* and to visualize demographic and health data at a community-level.²⁴⁵ As part of the pilot innovation contests created by Assembly Bill 2138 in 2014, the California Government Operations Agency and Department of General Services also have scheduled a code-a-thon event in October 2015. The goal of the "Green Gov Challenge" is to invite new ideas for improving state government sustainability practices and engaging with the public.²⁴⁶

These competitions and other partnerships help overcome some of the cultural and linguistic differences between government and the technology sector. Mike Wilkening, undersecretary of the California Health and Human Services Agency, told Commissioners terms like "hack" and "open data" can sound threatening to bureaucrats, conjuring images of data breaches or lost records, without explanation of the intent – a more efficient, transparent organization.²⁴⁷ Additional benefits of these events include exposing technologists to the state's data sets and giving state government a "face" by connecting programmers, developers and entrepreneurs to program administrators. More events like these can help build bridges into the state's technology industry and tap into new ways of addressing problems.

■ ***After identifying the most pressing challenges for their organizations, agency and department leaders should work with industry partners equipped to help develop solutions.*** Leaders also should conduct targeted outreach to develop relationships with technologists and hold events to connect innovators with state administrators. Such events might include code-a-thons to quickly brainstorm solutions to issue specific challenges, startup days for leaders in the administration and Legislature to learn what's possible with technology, or conferences to showcase opportunities for outsiders to engage on state issues.

APPENDICES

Public Hearing Witnesses

January 22, 2015

Mark Baldassare, President and Chief Executive Officer, Public Policy Institute of California

Cyd Harrell, Senior Director of Product, Code for America

Billy Hamilton, Executive Vice Chancellor and Chief Financial Officer, The Texas A&M University System

Bob Stone, Performance Advisor to Deputy Mayor for Budget and Innovation, City of Los Angeles

March 26, 2015

Robbie Crockett, Chief of Budgets and Fiscal Analysis, California Department of Motor Vehicles

Anne Miller, Chief of the Filing Division, Franchise Tax Board

Stephanie Dougherty, Chief of Enterprise Planning and Performance, California Department of Motor Vehicles

Chris Rieth, GovStat Program Manager, Socrata; former Director, Office of Maryland Governor Martin O'Malley

David Fletcher, Chief Technology Officer, Utah Department of Technology Services

Theresa Taylor, President of District Labor Council 786, Service Employees International Union Local 1000

Mario Guerrero, Legislative Affairs Director, Service Employees International Union Local 1000

Carol D. Williams, Chief of the Accounts Receivable Management Division, Franchise Tax Board

May 28, 2015

Jim Greene, Deputy Director, Center for Health Statistics and Informatics, California Department of Public Health

Jay Virbel, Associate Director, Female Offender Programs and Services, Division of Adult Institutions, California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation

Hillary Hartley, Co-Founder and Deputy Executive Director, 18F

Michael Wilkening, Undersecretary, Program and Fiscal Affairs, California Health and Human Services Agency

Karl Knapp, Chief, Facilities Management Division, California Department of Parks and Recreation

Advisory Committee Meeting Participants

July 16, 2015, San Francisco, CA

Joy Bonaguro, Chief Data Officer, City & County of San Francisco

Caroline Bruister, Consultant, Innovate Your State

Stuart Drown, Deputy Secretary, Innovation & Accountability, California Government Operations Agency

Mai-Ling Garcia, Digital Engagement Manager, City of Oakland

Megan Garcia, Senior Fellow & Director of Growth, California, New America Foundation

Cyd Harrell, Senior Director of Product, Code for America

Alexandra Klun, Consultant, Innovate Your State

Peter Koht, Co-Founder, OpenCounter

Andy Krackov, Associate Director, External Engagement, California HealthCare Foundation

Eric Liu, Founder & Head of Operations, Bayes Impact

Tim Nguyen, Intern, California Government Operations Agency

Dan Parham, Co-founder & CEO, Neighborland

Angie Quirarte, Policy Analyst, California Government Operations Agency

Alyssa Ravasio, Founder & CEO, Hipcamp

Will Semmes, Associate Chair – Design MBA in Civil Innovation & Strategic Foresight, California College of the Arts

Jake Solomon, Product Manager – Health, Code for America

Tamara Srzentic, Outreach & Communications Director, California Department of Public Health

Mike Wilkening, Undersecretary, Program & Fiscal Affairs, California Health and Human Services Agency

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- 201 Stephanie Dougherty. Refer to endnote 8.
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Little Hoover Commission Members

CHAIRMAN PEDRO NAVA (*D-Santa Barbara*) Appointed to the Commission by Speaker of the Assembly John Pérez in April 2013. Advisor to telecommunications industry on environmental and regulatory issues and to nonprofit organizations. Former state Assemblymember. Former civil litigator, deputy district attorney and member of the state Coastal Commission. Elected chair of the Commission in March 2014.

VICE CHAIRMAN LOREN KAYE (*R-Sacramento*) Appointed to the Commission in March 2006 and reappointed in December 2010 by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger. President of the California Foundation for Commerce and Education. Former partner at KP Public Affairs. Served in senior policy positions for Governors Pete Wilson and George Deukmejian, including cabinet secretary to the Governor and undersecretary for the California Trade and Commerce Agency.

DAVID BEIER (*D-San Francisco*) Appointed to the Commission by Governor Edmund G. Brown Jr. in June 2014. Managing director of Bay City Capital. Former senior officer of Genetech and Amgen. Former counsel to the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on the Judiciary. Serves on the board of directors for the Constitution Project.

SENATOR ANTHONY CANNELLA (*R-Ceres*) Appointed to the Commission by the Senate Rules Committee in January 2014. Elected in November 2010 and re-elected in 2014 to the 12th Senate District. Represents Merced and San Benito counties and a portion of Fresno, Madera, Monterey and Stanislaus counties.

JACK FLANIGAN (*R-Granite Bay*) Appointed to the Commission by Governor Edmund G. Brown Jr. in April 2012. A member of the Flanigan Law Firm. Co-founded California Strategies, a public affairs consulting firm, in 1997.

ASSEMBLYMEMBER CHAD MAYES (*R-Yucca Valley*) Appointed to the Commission by Speaker of the Assembly Toni Atkins in September 2015. Elected in November 2014 to the 42nd Assembly District. Represents Beaumont, Hemet, La Quinta, Palm Desert, Palm Springs, San Jacinto, Twentynine Palms, Yucaipa, Yucca Valley and surrounding areas.

DON PERATA (*D-Orinda*) Appointed to the Commission in February 2014 and reappointed in January 2015 by the Senate Rules Committee. Political consultant. Former president pro tempore of the state Senate, from 2004 to 2008. Former Assemblymember, Alameda County supervisor and high school teacher.

ASSEMBLYMEMBER SEBASTIAN RIDLEY-THOMAS (*D-Los Angeles*) Appointed to the Commission by Speaker of the Assembly Toni Atkins in January 2015. Elected in December 2013 to represent the 54th Assembly District. Represents Century City, Culver City, Westwood, Mar Vista, Palms, Baldwin Hills, Windsor Hills, Ladera Heights, View Park, Crenshaw, Leimert Park, Mid City, and West Los Angeles.

SENATOR RICHARD ROTH (*D-Riverside*) Appointed to the Commission by the Senate Rules Committee in February 2013. Elected in November 2012 to the 31st Senate District. Represents Corona, Coronita, Eastvale, El Cerrito, Highgrove, Home Gardens, Jurupa Valley, March Air Reserve Base, Mead Valley, Moreno Valley, Norco, Perris and Riverside.

DAVID A. SCHWARZ (*R-Beverly Hills*) Appointed to the Commission in October 2007 and reappointed in December 2010 by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger. Partner in the Los Angeles office of Irell & Manella LLP and a member of the firm's litigation workgroup. Former U.S. delegate to the United Nations Human Rights Commission.

JONATHAN SHAPIRO (*D-Beverly Hills*) Appointed to the Commission in April 2010 and reappointed in January 2014 by the Senate Rules Committee. Writer and producer for FX, HBO and Warner Brothers. Of counsel to Kirkland & Ellis. Former chief of staff to Lt. Governor Cruz Bustamante, counsel for the law firm of O'Melveny & Myers, federal prosecutor for the U.S. Department of Justice Criminal Division in Washington, D.C., and the Central District of California.

SUMI SOUSA (*D-San Francisco*) Appointed to the Commission by Speaker of the Assembly John Pérez in April 2013. Officer of policy development for San Francisco Health Plan. Former advisor to Speaker Pérez. Former executive director of the California Health Facilities Financing Authority.

“Democracy itself is a process of change, and satisfaction and complacency are enemies of good government.”

*Governor Edmund G. “Pat” Brown,
addressing the inaugural meeting of the Little Hoover Commission,
April 24, 1962, Sacramento, California*