



GETTING CITIZENS INVOLVED:

How to encourage greater use of citizen engagement platforms

Recent research conducted by the Governing Institute found many people never contact their local governments to ask for services or information. And few government agencies have deployed technology to help engage citizens.

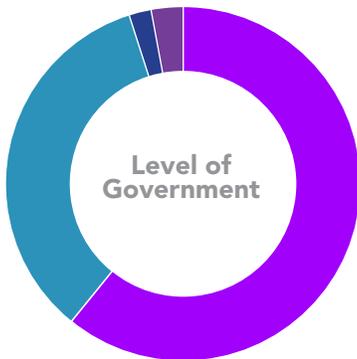
In places where governments have implemented 311 systems and related technology, often those initiatives don't make the desired impact: not many people use them.

In spring 2017, the Governing Institute surveyed 2,006 citizens and 125 local government officials to learn what factors might encourage more people to use citizen engagement platforms. The surveys explored the features that government officials think citizens want in these platforms, the features citizens actually want and how best to use technology to get more citizens involved.

RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

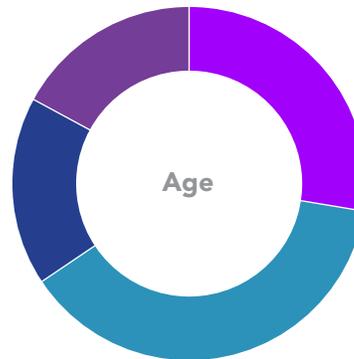
This report is based on two surveys — one with officials at all levels of local government, and one with a nationally representative group of citizens, ages 18 and older.

Government Demographics

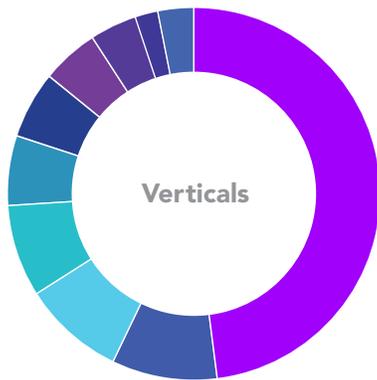


3% Other
2% Special District
34% County
61% City

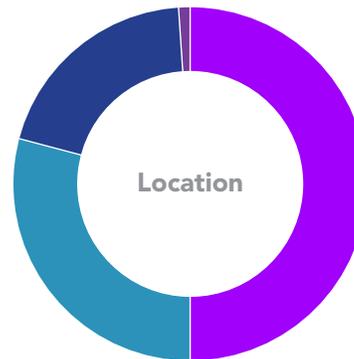
Citizen Demographics



17% 65 and older
17% 55-64
38% 35-54
27% 18-34



3% Other
2% Environmental/Energy
4% Transportation & Infrastructure
5% Agriculture/Parks & Recreation/Land Management
6% Public Safety & Emergency Management
6% City Planning
8% Information Technology
9% Public Works & Utilities
9% Health & Human Services
48% General Administration/Operations



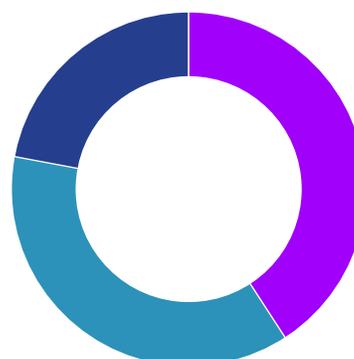
1% Other
20% Rural
29% Urban
50% Suburban

CITIZENS WANT BETTER SERVICE ...

The research revealed citizens do harbor the kinds of complaints about local conditions that could prompt them to ask for services. Only 36 percent of citizens said they are satisfied with the condition of their local public infrastructure.

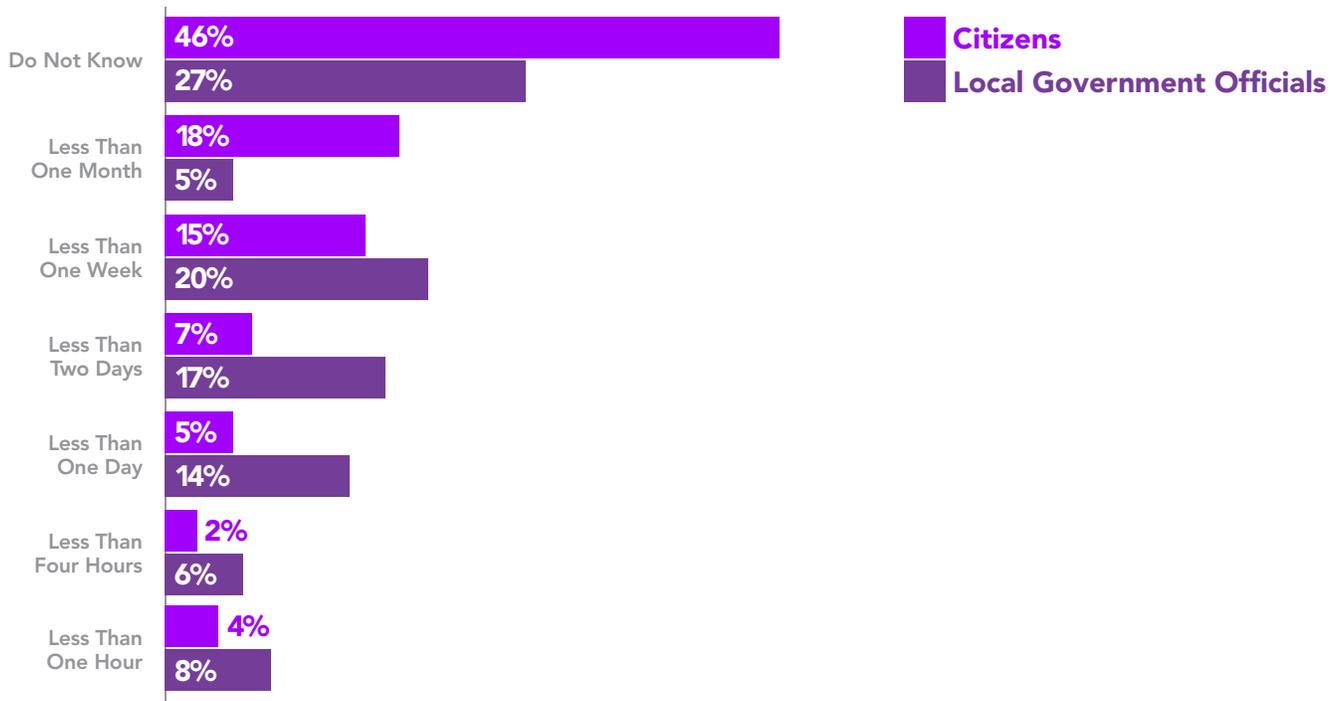
Citizens said that when they do request service from government agencies, the response is too slow. We asked both government officials and citizens how long it takes, on average, for the government to resolve a problem reported by a citizen. In general, citizens perceive a longer lag between complaint and solution than government officials report. Are citizens' perceptions accurate? Or do they simply not realize how quickly government agencies respond because the agencies don't let citizens know when they complete a job?

Are Service Requests Answered Promptly? (Citizen Perspective)



22% Yes
37% No
41% Do Not Know

In Your Best Estimate, What is the Average Time Between Putting in a Government Service Request and Resolution?



... BUT FEW OF THEM ARE MAKING REQUESTS

Although citizens are unhappy with local infrastructure, and therefore would like to see more corrective services, most of them — 74 percent — said they have never submitted a service request to a government agency. Of those who have submitted requests, 17 percent said they do so only rarely. Just 10 percent of citizens engage with government on a regular basis, submitting requests every few months or more.

Citizens Rarely Request Services from Government Agencies



Given the general dissatisfaction with local infrastructure, why do so few citizens ever ask for service? It could be because they find the process onerous. Forty-two percent of respondents reported that when they have tried to submit service requests, they have encountered barriers. The most common obstacle was not knowing which agency to contact. Some citizens reported problems filling out forms, or trouble dealing with 311 services or general phone lines.

Top 5 Barriers to Submitting Service Requests

1. 18% didn't know which agency to contact.
2. 8% knew someone else would take care of it eventually.
3. 7% said filling out a form takes too long.
4. 6% didn't want to submit private information.
5. 5% called a 311 or general line but it took too long/person was unhelpful.

LIMITED ACCESS TO ENGAGEMENT PLATFORMS

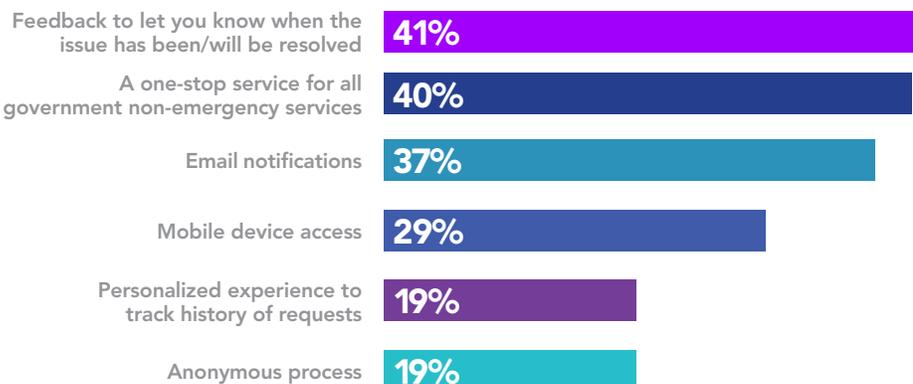
The marketplace today offers a variety of digital citizen engagement platforms that are designed to help citizens easily communicate with local officials. But only 36 percent of local government agencies have implemented this technology. And in communities that have implemented a civic engagement platform, the system seems to operate largely under the radar. When surveyed, 61 percent of citizens said they don't know whether their local jurisdiction has a citizen engagement platform.

WHAT CITIZENS WANT

Although few citizens have actual experience with a citizen engagement platform, they do have ideas about features that might persuade them to use one. The most important feature is feedback. Once a citizen makes a request, he or she wants to know when the agency expects to fix the problem, and then receive confirmation when the issue is resolved. Forty-one percent of respondents asked for these status updates, and 37 percent said they would like to receive their notifications by email.

Another feature that many citizens want is one-stop shopping. They don't want to have to figure out which agency can solve their problem, or travel from site to site to register different kinds of complaints. They want one number to call or one website to visit to ask for any non-emergency government service.

What Citizens Want in a Civic Engagement Platform

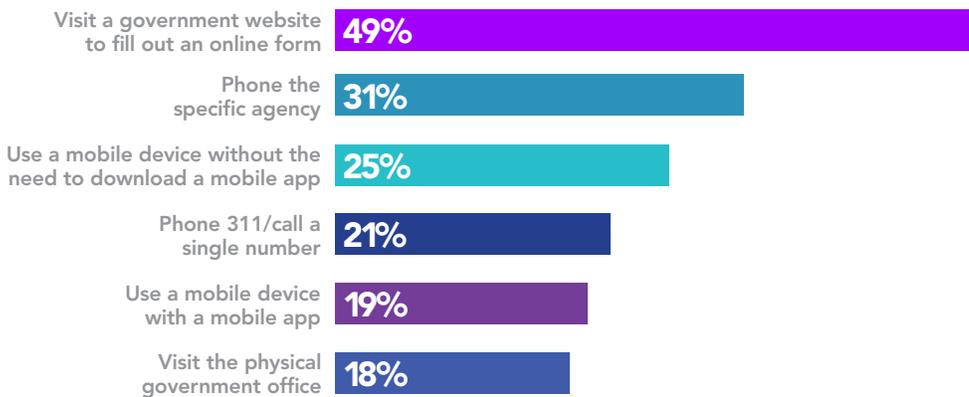


Citizens also have opinions about communications channels for service requests. The web is the most popular choice: Nearly half of survey respondents said they want to visit a government website and fill out a form. Although 40 percent of citizens said they want one-stop shopping, a significant number of respondents want just the opposite — they want to make a phone call to the government agency responsible for each kind of service.

Quite a few respondents also want to use their mobile phones to register service requests, but without making a voice call. Twenty-five percent prefer to use a mobile phone without the need to download a mobile app; that is, they want a government website that is optimized for mobile access. Another 19 percent want to use a mobile device with a mobile app.

Perhaps the most important lesson to draw from this list of channel preferences is that one channel does not fit all. To attract many participants, a citizen engagement platform should offer several options for requesting service and receiving status reports, so each citizen can use the channel he or she finds most convenient.

How Citizens Want to Submit Service Requests



GOVERNMENT MISPERCEPTIONS

When it comes to choosing the most attractive channel for citizen engagement, citizens and government officials don't always see eye to eye. For instance, government officials assume that a mobile device would be the top choice for making service requests, but many citizens prefer to use a standard website. Government officials also overestimate citizens' interest in using social media platforms to make service requests. As a whole, social media was the least popular access method for citizens. However, Millennials had the highest preference for submitting service requests via social media out of all age groups surveyed.

HOW TO MATCH THE SOLUTION TO THE NEED

More citizens would engage with government if it were easier. But not all citizens agree on what "easy" means. To accommodate as many users as possible, local governments should offer a variety of channels for submitting service requests. Government should also give citizens the option of receiving feedback on their service requests, including status change notices such as when the request is assigned, scheduled or completed. This will assure citizens that their participation matters.

An effective outreach campaign is important as well. Citizens need to know that the engagement platform exists and is easy to use. They also need to understand how to access it.

With these strategies in place, governments should be able to forge a closer working relationship with a wider spectrum of citizens.

Produced by:

GOVERNING I N S T I T U T E

The Governing Institute advances better government by focusing on improved outcomes through research, decision support and executive education to help public-sector leaders govern more effectively. With an emphasis on state and local government performance, innovation, leadership and citizen engagement, the Institute oversees Governing's research efforts, the Governing Public Official of the Year Program, and a wide range of events to further advance the goals of good governance.

www.governing.com

For:

Accenture is a leading global professional services company, providing a broad range of services and solutions in strategy, consulting, digital, technology and operations. Combining unmatched experience and specialized skills across more than 40 industries and all business functions — underpinned by the world's largest delivery network — Accenture works at the intersection of government and technology to help clients improve their performance and create sustainable value for their constituents. With more than 411,000 people serving clients in more than 120 countries, Accenture drives innovation to improve the way the world works and lives.

Visit us at www.accenture.com