# Rebuilding Trust
in Government:
One Action at a Time

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"Trust is earned when actions meet words." – Chris Butler, SIF Foundation

In public service, trust represents constituents' confidence in government to "do what is right and perceived fair," according to scholar David Easton[1]. People in all organizations work to make and keep commitments, both internally and to those they serve. As noted in Harvard's Ethics research, an organization's capability to make and keep promises is directly related to trustworthiness. Unfortunately, trust in the government is at a low. In a recent survey, only about one-quarter of Americans say they can trust the government in Washington to do what is right "just about always" (2%) or "most of the time" (22%). Lack of trust is not a recent development, since 2007 the poll respondents stating they can trust the government always or most of the time has not surpassed 30%[2].
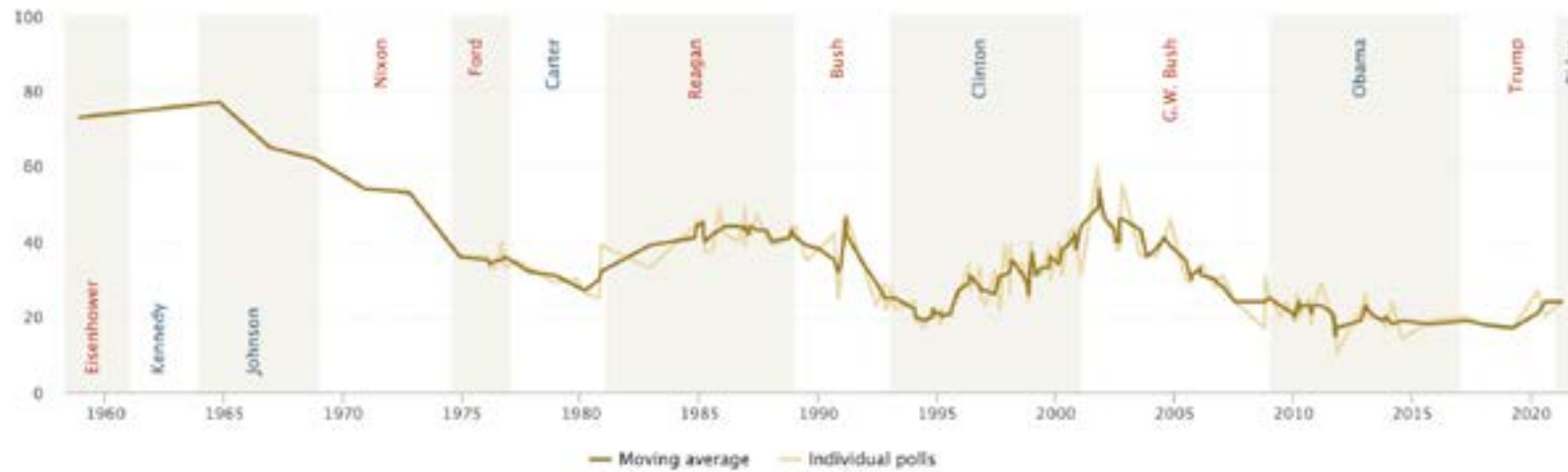
Without trust, it isn't easy to come to agreements, share information, and resolve challenges. With all the challenges we face as a country, i.e., hesitation to be vaccinated, questions around election results, rising crime rates, a general distrust of others, this is the time to build trust in the government and bring the nation together.

The government can regain trust. Rebuilding trust requires work and investment. The good news is that some tools and strategies will make it easier to trust the government once again. The two critical elements to make this happen are customer and employee experience. Trust is earned one transaction — and relationship — at a time. It takes effective, easy, and emotionally resonant experiences, which lead to consistent positive experiences. This report will share the best practices to get Customer and Employee Experience right.

[1] https://www.govloop.com/resources/humanizing-mission-delivery-to-build-trust/

[2] https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2021/05/17/public-trust-in-government-1958-2021/

Establishing a Customer Experience Culture is a Journey

Top Government leaders know that providing excellent Customer Experience (CX) is crucial to regaining trust with taxpayers across the nation. Growing a customer-centered culture takes time, and there's no single solution or a one-size-fits-all approach. Customer experience in government agencies often involves an internal journey and culture change experience, from frontlines to headquarters. Bringing diverse stakeholders together to align priorities and coordinate high-impact action to satisfy public customer needs is paramount. As public leaders build momentum to stand up their CX cultures, it's essential to think about this transformation process as a journey.

Like the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, some agencies successfully navigate these challenges, while others remain further behind. Based on a recent survey of US-based professionals who collect and use customer feedback, Medallia identified three groups according to the results of their CX programs: leaders, followers, and laggards. By analyzing variations in the scope and mechanics of their CX initiatives, we uncovered three essential practices that most clearly differentiate the leaders from the rest of the pack:

- Leaders leverage digital listening channels and focus on the digital experience. Top-performing organizations use their websites, mobile apps, and social media to collect data on a wide range of digital and other interactions their customers have with them.

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- Leaders use customer feedback to spur action across the organization. Organizations that get the best results from their CX programs take various measures on their feedback, especially by preparing for new service offerings, policymaking, recognizing high-performing employees, and innovating within existing services.

- Important to note is that leaders delegate authority but not responsibility. Leading organizations have a collective mindset and use a centralized team of representatives across the agency for CX decision-making and outcomes. Leaders in each department are accountable for the quality of their customers' experiences. CX culture change often dovetails with digital transformation efforts as public agencies move away from "programs" and transition to product thinking to drive new ways of working and serving public customers.

By adopting these and a handful of other practices common to CX leaders, government agencies can join them in using customer experience as a strategic tool to uncover hidden needs, propel innovation and regain trust.

Linking Customer and Employee Experience

In 2015, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) ventured out on a journey to improve customer experiences for the Veterans, families, caregivers, survivors, and employees the agency serves, including creating the federal government's first customer service office — known as the Veterans Experience Office (VEO).

Their mission? To capture the voice of the Veteran and incorporate it into everything they did, from their policies, programs, processes, and practices.

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We believe the public's experience with the government should be easy, trusted, and reliable. And the only way to deliver that is to make sure we are listening to what our audience is telling us and responding quickly, effectively, and making sure we take what we're hearing into account as we make improvements to all of our products

Jess Milcetich
Director of Customer Experience General Services Administration

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Stakeholders were engaged and spent a lot of time providing comments to improve the foster care licensing process. This signaled they had faith they were going to be heard, and the changes would be made.

Marina Nitze
New America Public Interest Technology Fellow
Former Chief Technology Officer, Department of Veterans Affairs

What the team has achieved in the days since Medallia first envisioned what customer-centricity would look like at the VA has been more than impressive; it's been transformative. Those initial efforts helped drive the VA's trust score among Veterans to 80%, up from 55% in 2016, and since then, the organization has achieved even more gains, with VA trust now at an all-time high of 90%.

And what they've learned along the way is sure to be informative. To guide other federal agencies, the team has created two resources, "VA Customer Experience: Accomplishments Report" and "The CX Customer Experience Cookbook: A Collection of Key Ingredients & Recipes for Embedding Customer Experience in Federal Services" that share not only what the organization managed to achieve — but the exact steps they took, and how other agencies can follow suit.

The VA's excellent Customer Experience can be linked to their work to empower their employees. In September of 2020, Forbes ranked the VA as one of the best employers in 17 states.

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Frontline Personnel Hold The Key

Listening to your frontline employees also has the added value of cost savings. According to customers surveyed by the Medallia Institute, for every dollar spent on gathering employee feedback, hundreds of dollars are spent on customer feedback.

Agencies need to tap into firsthand, frontline talent. Building trust within the organization is foundational to building trust with constituents—a precursor to a successful customer experience, is understanding your customers. Employees are the touchpoints between the agency and the customer. They deliver the experience and have firsthand knowledge of customers' responses. For better or worse, these employees get genuine, unfiltered feedback, which may be tempered at a later date. They can also ask follow-up questions, hone in on the exact step in the process that is the source of frustration, and possibly apply a fix in the moment.

"Arguably, the employees are our most important customers," Lee Becker, Medallia, Vice President and Solutions Principal, said. "If the agency takes care of their employees, the employees will take care of the mission." Many employees' frustration is that they want to help improve things but feel like they're not listened to by leadership or are hindered by the nature of bureaucracy and red tape. Agencies have to start building trust by first listening to their employees and harnessing the talent and innovation they have to offer.

It is also crucial to encourage employees to act more authentically to achieve a better, more positive experience of the agency's brand overall.

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Linking Feedback Systems

A Medallia customer took the unusual but effective option of linking their employee and customer feedback systems to track differences between customers and employees. The coupled system consisted of two short surveys — one sent to employees and the other to customers — right after an interaction. The linked system allowed for more insight into customers; managers could use the information to coach employees, assess whether they had the right tools and resources, and identify people with innovative ideas and leadership potential. Companies rarely connect the two systems. But, connecting them can create powerful feedback loops that engage employees and help companies adapt to fast-changing customer expectations. Linking feedback systems allows companies to enlist frontline employees as agents of change. In our Medallia Institute survey, 56% of frontline employees said they have suggestions for

improving company practices, and 43% said their insights could reduce company costs. Yet, a third said they were surveyed once a year or less, and more than half said employers weren't asking the right questions.

Companies that want the insights from linked systems can navigate the organizational complexities with these six steps:

01 **Align feedback systems around high-level business objectives.** Which needle do you want to move? Do you want to build more authentic relationships with your customers? Allow the answer to drive everything from the questions you create to how the agency uses the data. Every journey begins with one step — pick something that aligns your stakeholders. Make a promise you know will count: prototype, learn. scale. (Something about don't boil the ocean?)

02 **Design your feedback system to aggregate data at key touchpoints.** Most companies build separate, often expensive systems within existing reporting hierarchies. Instead, work backward from the customer experiences you want to understand. For example, if your agency organizes customer feedback around touchpoints within departments, survey employees who interact with customers at those same touchpoints, such as a call center (or help desk) conversation or digital form interpretation. Companies often mistake organizing customer feedback systems around one structure — say, a simple function or department — and employee feedback systems around another — say geography or function.

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03   **Establish the right frequency and pacing for employee and customer surveys.** Many companies collect customer feedback continuously and distribute it in real-time). Most executives I interviewed said employees should be surveyed more than once a year but not more than once a month. Match the timing of your surveys to the pace at which you can act to demonstrate results. Surveying employees on a rolling basis and using quarantine rules (designated times when you won't ask for feedback) for customer surveys can minimize survey fatigue.

04   **Encourage honest feedback and protect employees who answer candidly.** Employees may worry their feedback will get them into trouble. Counter this perception by rewarding and honoring employees for raising complex issues. After successes become clear, give even more recognition to employees whose feedback helped move the company forward. It is vital to create time and space for employees to participate. Laud them in team meetings and agency town halls. Name a great idea after the employee who thought of it. Be creative; make it fun for all, and build employee trust simultaneously. Employees must first trust before they share honest feedback without fear of punishment.

05   **Let people speak in their own words and capture emotional cues.** As companies rely more on technology, relating many to customers emotionally and pinpointing what troubles them gets trickier. Open-ended questions, text analytics, and sentiment analysis capture interactions more vividly and compel leaders to act.

06   **Act on the most critical feedback, and communicate what you're doing and why.** In our interviews, we learned that a handful of companies are using feedback to create

specific action plans tied to companies' broader goals. At one company, executives used an internal website to post projects that grew out of employee feedback. Employees can see who's leading an effort, view timelines, and track progress. They can also share additional feedback or volunteer for projects.

In a world where big data algorithms and technology increasingly dictate the customer experience, linked feedback systems give companies at least two significant advantages. The connections help senior managers get a complete picture of customer-employee interactions, including the behaviors — and emotions — they generate. And, asking employees for their input, not through a pro forma annual survey but as part of the company's routine operations, sends a signal that employees have helpful insights and are valued.

Ultimately, well-designed feedback loops enable employees to be more empowered and agencies to be more responsive, creating the competitive edge companies need to adapt and thrive.

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Defining How Agencies Measure Successful Customer Experience

Leveraging data to build trust can be transformational. It can also sound overwhelming, but it doesn't have to be. Use these four best practices to begin measuring Customer Experience in your agency.

01 **Start with questions.**
First, ask questions to gauge your agency's customer experience capabilities. It could be as simple as picking one transaction your agency would like to understand more, whether it's processing grant applications or granting permits. Using the Office of Management and Budget's guidelines for federal agencies — Section 280 of Circular A-11 — could be a good start. It specifies drivers such as ease, efficiency, and equity when measuring CX.

02 **Show that you're listening.**
With whatever data you're able to gather, no matter how small, demonstrate to customers that you are listening by wielding insights into action. Trust develops when constituents can hear from their city manager or council member the steps taken based on residents' feedback, such as digitizing a form, updating a website, or prioritizing an issue based on constituent feedback.

03 **Use data to prioritize.**
One of the ways your agency can drive data into action is to use insights for prioritization. It can help agencies address the most urgent issues based on what constituents care about most. The priorities are now backed by financial numbers or internal capacity and by constituent voices.

04 **Use data to celebrate.**
UK Government Deploys Medallia's Crowdsourcing Platform to Find New COVID-19 Testing Solutions and Help Achieve 100,000 Tests Per Day[3]. Agencies shouldn't miss out on the opportunities to use data to boost morale. Data that records an employee going above and beyond in their excellent care highlights points of celebration to broadcast to the community and workforce. In a world where the government is prone to bad publicity, using customer experience data to feature accomplishments can spotlight what should be celebrated.

[3] https://www.medallia.com/press-release/uk-government-deploys-medallias-crowdsourcing-platform/

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Begin by Listening and Cultivating a Primary Metric

Various CX practices and capabilities can help agencies deliver results. Still, with limited time and budget, executives want to know which investments and decisions will have the most significant impact on the outcomes that are important to them. Determining these decisions and investments means the agencies must begin by choosing a primary customer experience metric that they will use to measure performance.

Your primary metric helps build a common focus. As leaders grow and mature their agency CX practice, you can add more metrics. However, we advise leaders to prototype and scale over time. Begin with one metric, like The Department of Veterans Administration did with trust, and this will help you set a solid foundation. The primary customer experience metric you choose

is one of the most visible elements of your program, focusing everyone from executives to the frontline on a standard measure. Three elements define a primary metric:

1. Agency Customer Experience journey begins with questions. The kind of question asked of constituents, or public customers is vital. For example, do you ask your customers to rate their overall experience or report their expected future behaviors, such as the likelihood to recommend? Do you ask your public customers if they are getting what they need? Some of our top questions can be found here. CX questions are very relevant even if your agency is delivering resources to another agency, for example; a federal agency providing funds to the state health departments, you can ask similar questions to gain insight along the funding supply chain.

2. What kinds of answers — or data — are you looking for? Medallia helps Agencies build new CX data supply chains while linking existing data to new experiential datasets. Nothing is lost in translation. For structured data, you will need to select a rating scale (e.g., 0 to 10) and endpoint labels (e.g., "not at all satisfied" and "extremely satisfied") as part of your survey design. While it may be hard to imagine an analysis of unstructured data, Medallia AI and machine learning help agencies create more open-ended questions that are digested easier for more personalized action. Modern machine learning algorithms can make sense of a lot of free text and parse insights faster than traditional analysis. An open-ended, unstructured question could look like "what are other ways that we could help you get what you need" or "what else could we do to make this service easier for you?"

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3. The calculation. As trailblazers in CX, you get to decide how different CX and EX datasets will roll up to more significant performance metrics. The analysis will drive how you tell your story over time — take reasonable care to design the correct equation for your agency. Will you take an average of all responses, calculate the rate of high scores (e.g., Top-2 Box), or compare the percentage of high scores to the percentage of low scores as with Net Promoter®? Will you measure organizational values and map those to Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey results? Who will you engage in designing your calculation, and how does it map to Administration priorities?

Standard metrics used by Medallia customers include NPS® (the percentage of 9 and 10 ratings minus the rate of 0-6 ratings on the likelihood to recommend question), Top-2 Box Satisfaction (the ratio of 9 and 10 ratings on the question, "How would you rate your overall satisfaction?"),mean scores for overall satisfaction, and mean Likelihood to Recommend (the average likelihood to recommend question). For Federal agencies, the Section 280 A-11 Trust/Satisfaction metrics are often used along with the recommended drivers.'

KEY QUESTIONS

How will we know if our scores are good or not?

Many agencies prefer primary metrics that are widely adopted, such as NPS or Top-2 Box Satisfaction, because benchmark comparisons for these metrics are more readily available.

How do we assess differences in scores across units or over time?

Statistical tests can determine whether differences in performance across departments or time are significant or simply the result of random noise. However, it's important to note that these tests are less reliable when sample sizes are small, or response rates are low. Why? Because the distribution of responses from customers who choose to take the survey may be markedly different from the distribution of responses from those who choose not to take it. Also, with small numbers, scores tend to be more volatile.

How do cross-cultural differences affect scores?

Some agencies report seeing systematic differences in scores across countries or regions. Many factors may contribute to these differences:

- Customers may have truly different experiences
- Attitudes and/or behavior may differ systematically across cultures response rates may vary
- Response rates may vary

Because it's challenging to tease apart the reasons for these differences, agencies may choose to collect demographic information on customers and decide to track changes over time within a given demographic.

Get Buy-in from Leadership to Drive Culture Change

Many leaders hope to boost their agencies' trust rating and long-term success by improving the customer experience they deliver. What they don't always recognize is the importance of building leadership and organizational alignment. Without the buy-in of senior leaders across departments, creating a successful customer experience initiative can be incredibly challenging, and sustaining it can be virtually impossible. The burden is most significant on the senior executives tasked with spearheading customer experience initiatives.

How do you gain the buy-in among fellow senior executives to help drive a customer-centric culture?

We can learn from a successful Medallia customer who created a blueprint for gaining and maintaining executive alignment and support throughout an organization, applying that support to specific projects, and maintaining long-term buy-in.

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01 Engage hearts. Create an emotional connection that convinces key stakeholders that change is needed. The best way to do this is to connect executives—especially those without frequent customer interaction—with customers. Whether it's bringing senior leaders into call centers, inviting them to observe in-person transactions, or exposing them to transcripts of customer feedback, connecting top executives with customers helps get your agency's leadership emotionally engaged.

02 Engage minds. Executives want to know that their investments are going to yield strong returns. Demonstrate the value of your CX program by quantifying its potential financial impact as it relates to top political priorities. Showing the reduced costs of a streamlined transaction cycle or how positive responses can approve trust is optimal. Another approach is to create a "multilingual business case," convincing individual leaders that your program has value to them and their function. To do that, you need to understand their interests and speak their language—for example, demonstrating to your HR head that employee engagement experiences are tightly linked to customer trust.

03 Link it and brand it. Most agencies have a few high-profile initiatives that executives already view as critical to the agency's success—and that already have energy, mind share, and resources behind them. Figure out how customer insights and other aspects of your program can strengthen these different initiatives, making your program less likely to fade over time and more likely to receive the resources it needs to succeed. Create a communications plan based on a solid brand once you've tightened up your strategic business case. A CX program called "Customers Always" (CA's example) will be easier to remember than something generic like "The Customer Satisfaction Program." The brand should convey a concise, powerful message so its meaning will sink in quickly.

04 Target the heartbeat. Different agencies have different core processes that are important to meeting their mission. For the Department of Veterans Administration, it provides claimants who disagree with VA's decisions on benefits claims and appeals with timely reviews. Other agencies are enhancing rental assistance, grant program, or claim process. Make sure your CX programs are built into these processes, informing them and making them more effective. These processes can now help customer-centric change happen faster and more efficiently.

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05 Fuel the Movement from the Top-Down and Bottom-Up. Top-down support and the political top cover are oxygen for any significant initiative. To keep the oxygen flowing, give your executives updates and compelling content to communicate more broadly throughout the company. Executives love to hear and share how customer experience improvements affect the things they care about—whether the Office of the CFO is learning about the ROI of a customer-centric initiative or a Chief Operating Officer hearing how acting on feedback has boosted operational efficiency. Simultaneously, you'll want to build a coalition of the willing from the "grassroots" of the organization to help make your agency CX moonshot a moon landing. Create strategic meetings and hold space for top executive champions to connect with the boots-on-the-ground leaders who put the walk to the talk.

06 Get top leaders' to co-design and learn together. A robust governance system is vital for creating alignment and deciding how to allocate resources. One option is a two-tiered governance structure to keep executives involved in crucial decisions. At the operational level, managers focus on planning. It is recommended that the governance process keep executives engaged by involving them in real problem-solving, not just telling them what happened. Executives will lose interest if the only expectation is for them to simply rubber-stamp recommendations.

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Small Steps can drive profound change.

Creating a great CX program is a big task but a rewarding one. When senior executives are aligned and actively support your program, your probability of success increases. People pay more attention, resources become easier to secure, and resistance to change diminishes. Using these strategies, next-generation public sector leaders who infuse everything with a CX mindset will be far better equipped to create the executive alignment they need to accelerate and sustain successful CX initiatives with a significant impact.

Meet with a Medallia Expert →

About Medallia

Medallia is the pioneer and market leader in Experience Management. Medallia's award-winning SaaS platform, the Medallia Experience Cloud, leads the market in the understanding and management of experience for customers, employees and citizens. Medallia captures experience signals created on daily journeys in person, digital and IoT interactions and applies proprietary AI technology to reveal personalized and predictive insights that can drive action with tremendous business results. Using Medallia Experience Cloud, customers can reduce churn, turn detractors into promoters and buyers and create in-the-moment cross-sell and up-sell opportunities, providing clear and potent returns on investment. www.medallia.com

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