5 Principles for Effective Government Technology

Most businesses serve a well-defined group of people, who might make up 1 to 10 percent of the population as a whole. This is not the case in government.

As an institution, each local and state government must serve every person who visits, resides, or does business within it.

To build government technology that works for 100 percent of the population, that tech must be:

1. Accessible

Use plain, simple language and visual cues to support populations with vision impairments or low-literacy skills. Invest in translation services – sometimes machine translation doesn't cut it. Build mobile-friendly websites – more people will view your website online vs. downloading an app. Make sure your information works for the small screen.

2. Useful

Prioritize utility over entertainment. On a city or agency site, introducing unnecessary information can be a distraction to finding the services they need. Learn from user data to present information related to common searches.

3. Efficient

Make topics searchable by breaking information or processes into their smallest meaningful unit. For instance, a journalism student might be interested in the topic, "Read the Open Door Law," where a veteran reporter would just want to "Request a public record."

4. Relevant

Keep information relevant by using systems that present only necessary information, structured in building blocks that can be presented and discovered in infinite combinations—but which are written and updated in one place only.

5. Dynamic

Government websites should be living, evolving platforms. Create systems that respond to an individual—for example, providing me information and prompting me to request services based on my neighborhood and household profile.

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