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On "Putting People First: Building Trust in Government through Customer Experience"

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Good morning Chairman Peters, Ranking Member of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, and distinguished members of the subcommittee. Thank you for inviting me to testify today; it is a privilege to discuss how the federal government can improve the experience the American public has when interacting, engaging and transacting with them.

My name is Martha Dorris, and I am the Founder of Dorris Consulting International, a small business consultancy that helps government and industry transform government services through sharing best practices across agencies, connecting people, and recognizing and celebrating successes at all levels of government through the Service to the Citizen Awards. I have been in my current role for almost seven years. I previously served for 34 years with the U.S. General Services Administration, including twelve years as the Deputy Associate Administrator for the Office of Citizen Services. These experiences have made me acutely aware of the challenges and opportunities confronting federal agencies as they pursue improving citizen services.

Every day, millions upon millions of people are interacting with the U.S. government, in many different ways - whether it's seniors receiving monthly payments from Social Security; travelers going through TSA screening; survivors of national emergencies receiving resources to recover from floods, wildfires, etc; veterans who are interacting with the healthcare system or applying for their benefits; or people going to national parks. People depend on government information in their daily lives and some of these services are provided during the most critical moments in people's lives. It has been found that many people who are eligible for these services don't receive them due to the overly complex and cumbersome eligibility processes.

Democracy is built on a system of trust. The experience people have with their government when they need it the most is critical to building trust. Services that are difficult to use or having to navigate the organizational structures of the government impact the public's trust and vulnerability to emerging threats.

The public's experience over the past two plus years has increased their expectations in being able to access government information anytime, anywhere on any device. The public should be able to obtain consistent information and services online through a website via a computer or mobile device, via the phone, email, chat, or social media without having to start over each time. When someone needs information or a government service/benefit, it's normally at a vulnerable time in their life. That experience should be easy, transparent, secure, and timely.

Customer experience is a business discipline that can improve the delivery of services to the customer from the time someone has a need through the completion of a transaction. CX includes knowing who your customers are, understanding their expectations, listening to real-time feedback, designing services using human centered design techniques and making continual improvements through measures that matter. Creating a customer-focused culture is core to ensuring that customers' needs are met. Customers means the public, employees, businesses, and other agencies.

The public expects to access government information anytime, anywhere on any device. They should be able to obtain consistent information and services whether they are online through a website or mobile app, a call, email, chat, or social media. That experience should be easy, transparent, secure, and timely.

The Biden-Harris' Administration has focused on delivering excellent, equitable and secure federal services through their management agenda and Executive Order. A management agenda that specifically highlights CX signals to the political and career officials that improving government services is a priority. Together, they set the vision and roadmap for designing services during key life events by putting people first, identifying short-term commitments for agencies, and strategies for incorporating CX into the business of government.

Applying the principles and practices of customer experience is difficult in the private sector but has unique challenges in the government. The government serves a diverse population while most private sector companies can select the population they want to serve. In addition, CX in the private sector is driven by loyalty and revenue. The benefits of better service delivery in the government include increased efficiency, employee engagement, voluntary compliance of government mandates, simplifying lives of Americans and building trust in government. Meeting the needs of customers requires starting with the customer and working your way backwards.

Customer experience isn't about technology alone. The time is now to modernize government services. To transform digital experiences, we need to:

1. Modernize secure technology infrastructures including broadband, cloud, AI and collaborative technologies
2. Modernize government websites and contact centers to create a full end-to-end digital experiences
3. Ensure identity management is easy to use and secure

4. Understand their customers by listening to feedback, using data analytics and human centered design techniques
5. Hiring and reskilling to build the talent needed to transform these important services.

Websites and apps have become a critical way for the American public to interact with the government. According to analytics.usa.gov, there were over 4.98 billion visits to government websites in the last 90 days. People depend on government information and services to make important decisions every day and during the most critical times of their lives.

According to GSA's Digital.gov, when comparing the website traffic to federal websites from March 11, 2020, to March 10, 2021, against the year before it (from March 12, 2019 to March 10, 2020, because 2020 was a leap year), the overall visits to federal websites that participate in the U.S. General Services Administration's Digital Analytics Program (DAP) increased by 57%, from about 14.82 billion to about 23.33 billion.

GSA attributes this 8.51 billion visit increase to an incredible amount of new content created by government agencies as a result of COVID-19. DAP data shows that there were over 28,000 individual webpages that received 100 pageviews or more containing the words "COVID" or "Coronavirus" in the page title.

As of April 2021, from March 2020 to April 2021, mobile devices became the dominant technology used to access federal websites, by about a 55% to 43% ratio, and tablets dropped to nearly 3%. The mobile versions of the high impact services scored much higher than desktop in satisfaction (4.22 to 4.07), effectiveness (4.14 to 3.99), ease (4.11 to 3.94), efficiency (4.06 to 3.86) and transparency (4.38 to 4.14). The scores suggest that a well-designed mobile experience can raise experience scores.

While improving services has its challenges, the government has demonstrated many successes. A couple of notable accomplishments include:

1. The VA went from 2500 telehealth appointments per day in March 2020 to 45,000 per day in March 2021 and improved trust by 24% over the past five years.
2. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) created a contact center concierge service called ASKUSDA to reduce the burden on the public to navigate USDA's organizational structure.

3. The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) has released a Taxpayer Experience Strategy and established a Chief Taxpayer Experience Officer reporting to the Commissioner of IRS. The IRS has expanded the customer callback service. They are also reaching more people in other languages.

What can Congress do?

Congress has the opportunity to ensure that improving government services is a priority that's sustainable over time. A Federal Chief Customer Officer needs to be established that is responsible for establishing the vision and strategy for improving the end-to-end customer experience, coordinating and collaborating with Chief Customer Officers and HISP leads across the government to share best practices and oversee the continual improvement to the government's delivery of services to their customers.

Each Agency with high impact services needs an organization or executive in charge of customer-focused initiatives reporting to the head or deputy of the Agency/Department. Congress should closely monitor service level improvements and internal CX capabilities for all agencies through a CX Report Card based on a CX Maturity Model. The CX Maturity Model and Report Card should assess the Agency/Department's leadership and governance of customer-facing systems and services, customer-focused strategic priorities, implementation of digital services, performance management, understanding of their customers, use of human centered design techniques, multi and omni-channel service delivery, and culture. From a performance perspective, Agencies/Departments should be assessed on service level improvements, improvements in trust, overall experience and satisfaction and the delivery of equitable, inclusive products and services.

The government's role is to serve the people. Reimagining how the public interacts with the government will improve the lives of the American people, make the government more efficient, and increase the public's trust in government.