The Door to Digital Transformation in Connecticut
A Digital Service Network Spotlight

DSN Spotlights are short-form project profiles that feature exciting work happening across our network of digital government practitioners. Spotlights celebrate our members' stories, lift up actionable takeaways for other practitioners, and put the artifacts we host in the DSN Resource Library in context.

Background

In 2019, Connecticut's (CT) Governor Ned Lamont declared the state would "invest in an all-digital government," providing residents with a "one-stop-shop" for all government services "online, not in line."

To help realize this vision, the digital team within the Bureau of Information Technology Solutions (BITS)—the state's technology provider housed under the Department of Administrative Services—launched an effort to improve CT business owners' interactions with state government by creating Business.CT.gov: a "one-stop shop" for all businesses within the state. As part of its development strategy for Business.CT.gov, the state invested in its in-house digital-delivery capabilities, thereby expanding its potential to deliver high-quality transformation initiatives in the future.

The Beeck Center's Digital Services Network (DSN) spoke with Connecticut's digital program manager, Max Gigle, and Director of Digital Government and Operational Excellence David Labbadia, to learn more about the team's human-centered approach to developing Business.CT.gov as the first step on the path toward an "all-digital government."
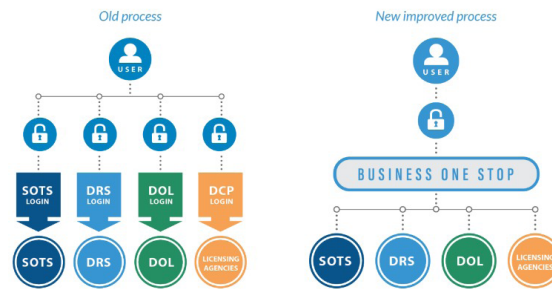
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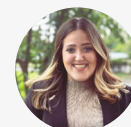
LIEL ZINO
Student Analyst,
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Building Connecticut's business one-stop

Business.CT.gov replaced the previous "multi-stop" process that required business owners to interact with several state agencies' systems.

Business.CT.gov was the result of widespread collaboration between BITS, multiple state agencies, the state's business community, and outside vendors. Building Business.CT.gov included extensive human-centered research, engaging multiple state agencies involved in business development and management, building internal capacity for digital delivery, and thoughtfully defining success.

Identifying service needs through human-centered research

To build Business.CT.gov, the digital team in BITS took a human-centered approach by conducting in-depth user research using surveys and interviews of both business owners and agency employees.

Key learnings from this research included understanding the varied needs of business owners across the lifecycle of starting and growing a business, and the importance of plain language in communicating about requirements that businesses must meet with the state to ensure that businesses and agencies were using similar terminology.

Bringing agencies on board

BITS played a key role in supporting interagency collaboration through the process of building Business.CT.gov. The team's human-centered approach was crucial to bringing agencies together effectively.

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>
> **MAX GIGLE**
> Digital Program Manager, State of Connecticut

"User research allowed us to understand which agencies should be included in the creation of the portal from the beginning. This helped us create an enterprise strategy for a full 'from idea to business' experience, and was extremely beneficial in encouraging agencies to join forces and participate," Gigle shared.

To cultivate strong interagency collaboration, BITS structured a project governance committee with representatives from six agencies: Office of the Governor, Secretary of State, Department of Consumer Protection, Department of Administrative Services, Department of Labor & Workforce Development, and Permanent Revenue Services. The governance committee was tasked with aligning cross-agency needs and expectations for Business.CT.gov and making decisions about resource allocation and capacity planning.

BITS also brought agencies into its ongoing human-centered design process for Business.CT.gov. "Each agency defined 'personas' of the users they served and identified similar and different characteristics across those personas. Building the governance committee and engaging them in the human-centered design process helped leadership create a unified vision for Business.CT.gov, which in turn created an easier and faster development process," Gigle recalled.

Measuring success

BITS' approach to measurement focuses on the "value-add" of Business.CT.gov across its multiple stakeholders—constituents, agencies, and the enterprise—enabling action-oriented iteration of the site.

Constituent Value: BITS measures constituent value through users' perceived satisfaction, accessibility and usability, and ease of transactions of Business.CT.gov and uses web analytics and site-embedded surveys and forms to capture these metrics.

Agency Value: BITS measures agency value using metrics like the number of users served and the number of external inquiries received.

Enterprise Value: BITS measures the value of Business.CT.gov to the enterprise by capturing agencies' feedback on the system, including the cost savings generated since the portal's launch.

"Sometimes there is a disconnect between user experience improvement and service delivery improvement. We wanted to avoid that common disconnect by not only focusing on our users' experiences as a success metric, but also focusing on measuring the success of the backend so that we also focused our efforts on improving the experience of the people providing our services," Labbadia emphasized.

Strengthening in-house capabilities

Given the existing in-house digital delivery capacity at the time, BITS initially brought together a hybrid team of both internal and external staff to develop Business.CT.gov. In-house team members focused on product design and research, while external hires focused on development and maintenance. This approach allowed BITS to capitalize on the skills of existing staff while getting development off the ground quickly with external support.
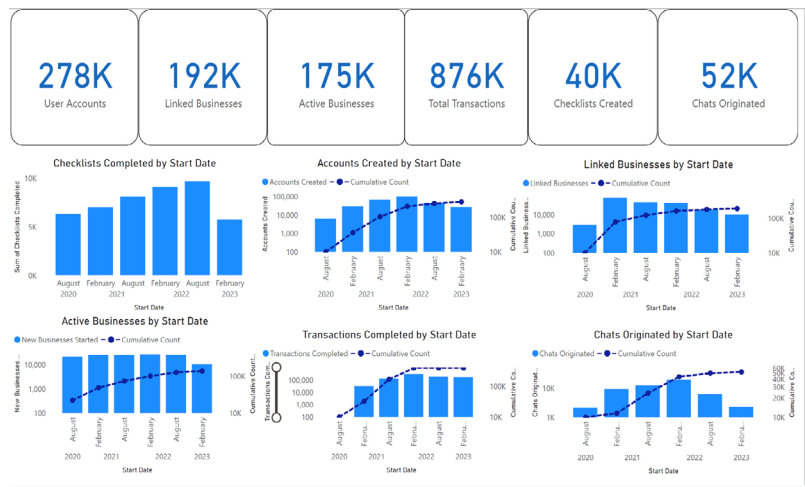
> We leveraged our current capabilities to get started, and later—as we understood the product better—identified the skills we needed to independently maintain and own the product in the long-run, and grew those skills in-house."

DAVID LABBADIA
Director of Digital Government and Operational Excellence, State of Connecticut

Labbadia stressed the value of this approach to staffing: "The hybrid staffing structure helped us bolster the disciplines that the state was deficient in at the time. We leveraged our current capabilities, and later — as we understood the product better — identified the internal skills we needed to independently maintain and own the product in the long-run, and set up positions accordingly to then grow those capabilities in-house."

After Business.CT.gov launched, BITS built out the state's internal capacity for developing and maintaining the site, including a small maintenance team and teammates responsible for product management.

Lessons learned

User research can bring agencies together for more unified service delivery. Exercises to develop common user personas allow practitioners across government agencies to build shared language and understand their disparate workstreams as serving the same end users. This can help generate essential buy-in for large, cross-agency initiatives and develop a more coherent view of users' needs and a shared responsibility for unified delivery.

Expand your organization's in-house digital capacity on the coattails of a successful digital delivery initiative. As governments look to expand their capacity for digital delivery, strategically using external staffing with an eye toward eventually replacing that support with permanent, internal roles can set the stage for expanding digital delivery work across other service areas. Exposure to external expertise can both normalize new ways of working—generating buy-in for new roles and responsibilities—as well as expose existing staff to best practices, bolstering the skills and capacities of practitioners already employed by a state.

Resources and artifacts

To see how this work was put into practice, explore the following assets in the DSN Resource Library:

+ Business.CT.gov whitepaper

+ Digital Portfolio Manager job description

+ Digital Accessibility Specialist job description

+ Business.CT.gov all time data report (as of June 2023)

+ Business.CT.gov platform impact analysis (as of June 2023)