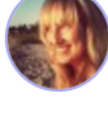



Guidance for U.S. government websites and social media

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Collaborate with the TTS Public Benefits Studio



Alex Pandel
GSA



Amy Ashida
GSA



Emily Herrick
GSA

Feb 7, 2023




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Amy Ashida is the Studio Lead, Alex Pandel is the Deputy Lead, and Emily Herrick is a Service Designer on the Public Benefits Studio team at the General Services Administration (GSA).

For a person experiencing challenging life circumstances, a confusing or overly complicated government experience can prevent access to vitally important services like healthcare, food assistance, and unemployment insurance. To directly address this challenge, the federal government has made a huge push over the past year to improve the public's experience of critical government services, as outlined in the [President's Management Agenda](#) and [Customer Experience Executive Order](#).

Over many years of work in this space, the Technology Transformation Services (TTS) at GSA has historically partnered with individual government benefits agencies to address one program at a time. However, since most people interacting with one benefits program are also interacting with many others, **TTS recently created a new Public Benefits Studio to focus on fostering a more cohesive, coordinated experience for the public, across programs.** To do this, our team is seeking to collaborate with benefits agencies to develop shared technology tools and best practices that can be used by multiple benefits programs simultaneously.

To ensure we are contributing to the ecosystem of solutions in the most effective way possible from our central position in the federal government, **we need your help!**

Are you part of a government agency, non-profit, or vendor team working to improve access to and delivery of programs that serve low-income families and underserved communities? If so, we would love to help unblock and learn from your work. Here's where we're at currently and how to get involved.


Our first bet: text and multi-channel notifications

There are many reasons why **it's advantageous for benefits agencies to offer multiple modes of communication to reach participants with critical program information** like application deadlines, interview reminders, etc. For example:

- Improving the quality and successful delivery of notifications to program participants [greatly reduces the incidence of "churn"](#) (people being unenrolled and then re-enrolling to programs within a few months), and [can help increase cross-program eligibility awareness and enrollment](#) (PDF, 468 KB, 37 pages).
- Given that 97% of U.S. adults with an income of less than \$30,000 have a cellphone ^[1], the [likelihood of successful delivery and follow-through](#) (PDF, 382 KB, 22 pages) greatly increases by offering text and email options in addition to postal mail.
- Multi-channel notifications are named specifically as an opportunity to minimize burden on the public in [OMB Memo M-22-10, Improving Access to Public Benefits Programs Through the Paperwork Reduction Act](#) (PDF, 616 KB, 18 pages).

Despite this, email and text notifications are currently underused by public benefits agencies. Barriers to adoption often include the high operational cost of procurement and limited in-house technical capacity necessary to use existing tools, as well as ambiguity around what constitutes legal consent to text or email participants. Even among agencies that are using text or email notifications, there's inconsistency in the clarity and quality of the messages.

As our first bet, **the Studio is exploring opportunities to close this gap in adoption of plain-language, multi-channel notifications. We're starting by piloting a digital notifications service, which we are currently calling Notify.gov** (formally known as U.S. Notify), designed to allow benefits program staff to start sending customized text messages to program participants at minimal cost. [Notify.gov's](#) easy, web-based interface requires no technical expertise to use and can be set up in as little as 10 minutes.

 An official website of the United States government. [Here's how you know](#) >

notify.gov

Using NotifyFeaturesTim LowdenPlatform adminSign outContact us

Federal Testing Service[Switch service](#)

Dashboard

Send messages

Team members

Usage

Settings

Messages Left Across Services5000

In the last seven days

250 text messages sent

No failures

This year

39,750 free text messages left

[See usage](#)

[Notify.gov](#) builds upon the success of open-source tools and service models from other government agencies (see: the United Kingdom's [GOV.UK Notify](#), Canada's [GC Notify](#), and the U.S. Veterans Affairs' [VANotify](#)) and past government pilots from organizations like the Benefits Data Trust ^[2] and Code for America ^[3] that demonstrate meaningful outcomes across benefit programs.

What's next?

We're also exploring opportunities to collaborate with benefits agencies to clarify policies around consent and text use, gather and publish best practices around content strategy, and measure impact.


Notifications are just the start. The Studio plans to explore other opportunity areas in the future.

Are there certain opportunity areas that especially resonate with you or are pressing to you that we should have on our radar? Email us at tts-benefits-studio@gsa.gov to let us know. Your input and experience will play a huge role in focusing and shaping our future work.

The Studio would love to collaborate!

If you'd like to learn more or have feedback to share, we're eager to hear from and collaborate with you! Here are a few ways to get involved:

- Request a Studio introduction and/or a Notify.gov demo:** Email us to request an introductory call to talk about our product, near-term goals, and ways to get involved.
- Provide feedback about Notify.gov:** If you're a potential Notify.gov user, email us to set up an individual session to provide feedback on design of the tool and talk through potential setup considerations from your vantage point.
- Pilot Notify.gov:** We're looking for benefits agency partners to join the next pilot program and try out [Notify.gov](#). Email us at tts-benefits-studio@gsa.gov and let us know if you think this might be the tool for you.
- Attend a collaborative working session:** Alongside the above activities, we are also convening cross-functional stakeholders in a series of workshops to connect people across contexts to learn from each other and provide input on what support the Studio could provide to government agencies interested in using notifications. Email us for more information.

 Note

[Email us](#) to request an introductory call, set up an individual feedback session, pilot the tool, or receive more information.




Links to non-government sources are for informational purposes only. They do not represent an endorsement of the organizations cited.

About the TTS Public Benefits Studio

The TTS Public Benefits Studio is a newly-established, cross-functional team of technologists within GSA's Technology Transformation Services with specialized experience supporting public benefits programs like Medicaid, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and unemployment insurance that serve low-income families and underserved communities. The Benefits Studio is focused on collaborating with benefits agencies to develop shared technology tools and best practices that support a more coordinated public experience across programs.

Stay tuned for more opportunities to participate in research and influence scope and features as we build out additional shared resources and services. We look forward to collaborating!

Footnotes

- Pew Research Center. 2021, April 7. Mobile Fact Sheet. <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/mobile/>. 
- Benefits Data Trust. 2019, May 9. Nudging benefits access in the right direction. <https://bdtrust.org/nudging-benefits-access-in-the-right-direction/>. 
- Code for America. 2019. LA'MESSAGE. <https://www.codeforamerica.org/features/louisiana-demo/>. 

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
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