

IBM Center for The Business of Government

The Future of **AGILE GOVERNMENT**



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FOREWORD

On behalf of the Agile Government Center (AGC) of the National Academy of Public Administration and the IBM Center for The Business of Government, we are pleased to present *The Future of Agile Government*, a new report by Academy Fellow G. Edward (Ed) DeSeve, coordinator of the AGC and executive fellow with the IBM Center.

In software development, agile techniques feature small, cross-functional, self-organizing teams that include customers working quickly to deliver solutions in increments that immediately provide value. The development is customer-centric and collaborative networks are used for development and deployment. Agile developers use “scrums” and “sprints” as techniques to produce products quickly that have a high degree of customer acceptance and satisfaction. Agile principles continue to guide projects and programs involving software development today.

In this report, Ed DeSeve builds on his prior work as leader for the AGC to expand how agile principles can apply to the development and implementation of government policies, regulations, and programs. The author introduces the “Integrated Agile Framework for Action”, to guide government leaders and stakeholders in implementing agile strategies in their work to provide services to the public in a way that fosters public trust. DeSeve concludes with multiple recommendations for government leaders and agile innovators, including:

- **Agile leaders at all levels need an agile mindset.** This means a willingness to try new ideas and processes to achieve better results.
- **Government needs intentional leadership development strategies.** Equipping leaders at all levels via a common approach to agile principles drives successful transformation.
- **Integration is critical to execution.** The elements described in the framework are designed to work together.
- **Leaders at all levels need to analyze and understand trust in and across their organization.** Trust is key for populations including employees, the public, and partners.
- **Agile government must begin with understanding customers.** Analyzing the customer experience and journey starts with understanding who the customers are, how their journey with the organization flows, what constitutes “defining moments” in their experience, and continuous monitoring of customer views.
- **Public values must be respected and the public must be engaged.** These values include a focus on openness, integrity, and fairness, which can improve overall trust.



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- **Networks should form the default development and implementation pathway wherever possible.** Collaborative networks can be internal, external, international, or some combination of these, and should serve as a force multiplier for mission execution.
- **Cross-functional teams should drive integrated solutions to problems.** Cross-functional teams bring more perspectives and encourage diversity of thought in creating and executing new solutions, greatly enhancing the chances for success.
- **Appropriate speed and persistent iteration will enable the organization to shape and reshape successful approaches.** Setting aggressive deadlines to accomplish work and demonstrate continual achievement builds internal and external support.
- **Simultaneous execution of agile government actions is required.** Agile government is not a sequential process, but rather an integrated series of actions designed to increase organizational competence while respecting public values.

The report builds on the considerable body of work released through the AGC since its creation three years ago. The AGC serves as the hub of a network that brings together governments, nonprofits, foundations, academic institutions, and private sector partners to assist in developing and disseminating agile government principles and case studies of agile policies and programs. This global network provides support for those who want to adopt and implement agile principles to provide public goods and services that fully meet customer needs and build public trust, and to identify cases of effective agile government in practice. DeSeve outlines many such cases in this new report.

Prior relevant reports published by the IBM Center and the Academy's AGC include *Human Centricity in Digital Delivery: Enhancing Agile Governance*, by Ines Mergel; *Agile Learning: the Role of Public Affairs Education*, by Angela Evans; *Adopting Agile in State and Local Governments*, by Sukumar Gapanati; and Ed DeSeve's initial report, *The Road to Agile Government: Driving Change to Achieve Success*. In addition, the AGC has published *Building an Agile Federal Government*, released by the Academy with support from the Samuel Freeman Charitable Trust and the Project Management Institute.

We hope this report provides a path to further progress for government leaders and stakeholders on how agility can drive improved operations, service delivery, and public trust, in the U.S. and around the world.

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INTRODUCTION

Imagine if clear definitions of missions, wide reliance on evidence, and carefully crafted guiding metrics informed collaboration via small cross-functional teams, who involved both customers and the public in innovating quickly and iterating on solutions to solve major problems. This is the promise of agile government.

The rapid pace of social and technological change across the world drives the need for agile government. The World Economic Forum (WEF) has characterized this as the Fourth Industrial Revolution,¹ concluding that “ultimately, the ability of government systems and public authorities to adapt will determine their survival.”



We stand on the brink of a technological revolution that will fundamentally alter the way we live, work, and relate to one another. In its scale, scope, and complexity, the transformation will be unlike anything humankind has experienced before. We do not yet know just how it will unfold, but one thing is clear: the response to it must be integrated and comprehensive, involving all stakeholders of the global polity, from the public and private sectors to academia and civil society.

—World Economic Forum



Implementing key principles that frame agile government will allow agencies to improve their capacity for rapidly adapting to changing needs to create better policies, regulations, and programs. While agile does not reflect a roadmap for every government program, agile can help managers in many program areas.

The Agile Government Center (AGC) was created in 2019 by the National Academy of Public Administration in collaboration with the IBM Center for The Business of Government:



To serve as the hub of a network that will bring together governments, nonprofits, foundations, academic institutions, and private sector partners to assist in developing and disseminating agile government principles and case studies of agile policies and programs. This network will be a source of assistance to those who want to adopt and implement agile to provide public goods and services that fully meet customer needs and build public trust.

—Agile Government Center



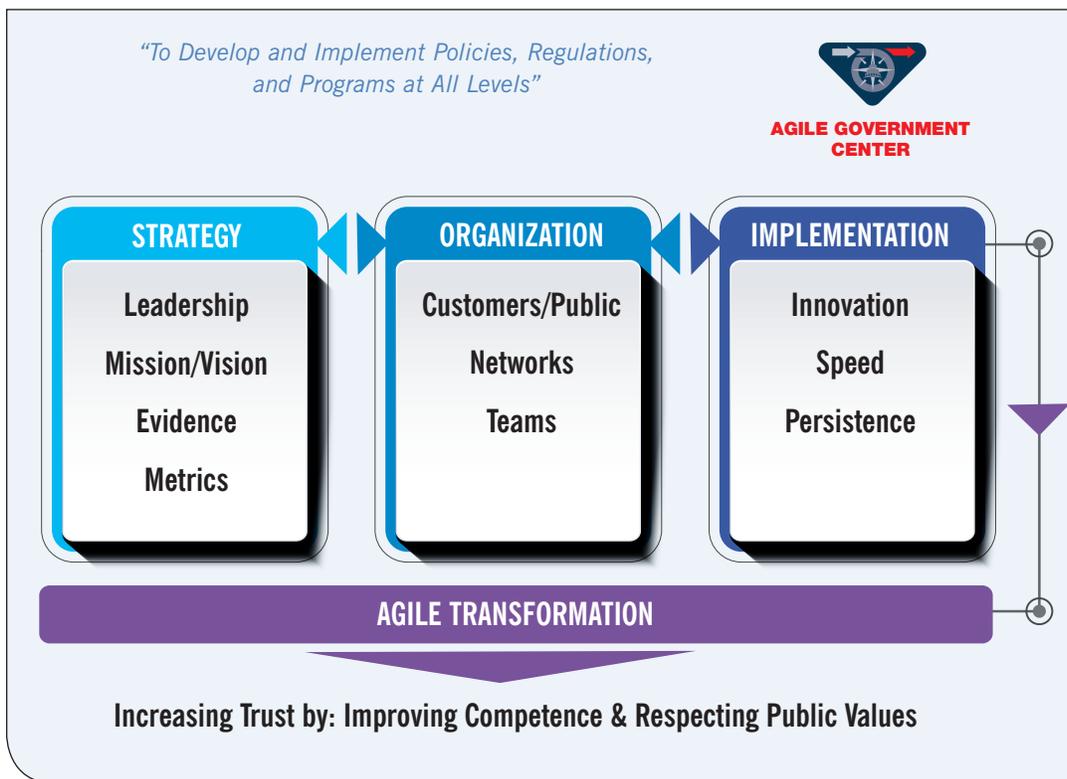
1. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/01/the-fourth-industrial-revolution-what-it-means-and-how-to-respond/>.

The AGC spent more than a year developing and refining the agile government principles presented in Figure 1. These principles led to the Integrated Framework for Action (“integrated framework” or just “framework”) in Figure 2—a roadmap to the future that constitutes the basis for this report, intended to serve as a guide for developing and implementing agile policies, regulations, and programs at all levels of government.

Figure 1: Agile Government Principles



Figure 2: Integrated Agile Framework for Action



Agile government built on this framework can improve public trust in government. Using the framework enables shifting from silos to networks, from top-down priority setting to consultation and inclusion, and from following well-worn paths to innovation.

These difficult shifts require an agile mindset, which drives considering solutions to difficult problems based on how best to achieve a well-established, clear mission with solid evidence and metrics to track progress. An agile mindset treats customers and the public as partners with government in developing effective policies, regulations, and programs, and supports working through networks and teams to improve competence. Innovation, speed, and persistence all promote agile government transformations.

All elements in the framework require integrated action, continuous feedback, and simultaneous execution of policies, regulations, and programs to achieve positive results while respecting public values.

Agile Government and Warp Speed

Agile government, using the principles described in Figure 1, provides a roadmap to successful managerial action. The case of "Operation Warp Speed," like other examples throughout this report, demonstrates successful outcomes achieved that reflect agile principles and the integrated framework.

When confronted with a clear and present threat, governments have demonstrated that they can be agile and effective. Operation Warp Speed was initiated with a collaboration of the public and private sectors to accelerate development and manufacture of vaccines to immunize against the COVID-19 virus.

The origin of the vaccine began as the National Institutes of Health (NIH) engaged in research to see how quickly an mRNA vaccine could be developed in the event of a pandemic. This exercise in strategic foresight began in 2017, when “the NIH partnered with Moderna to see how rapidly they could develop an mRNA vaccine if there were a pandemic; they accelerated the effort in mid-2019.”² When a series of viral pneumonia cases developed in Wuhan, China, Chinese researchers published the genomic sequence of a virus called SARS-COV-2.

Immediately, teams of researchers funded by the NIH and the German government accelerated their work and two companies, Moderna and Pfizer, achieved results demonstrating the effectiveness of their vaccines in less than four months (based on evidence from randomized control trials). This represented an unprecedented pace for the industry in developing vaccines with high efficacy and without serious side effects. “It is difficult to convey to those outside the field how extraordinary this achievement has been,” said Kathleen Neuzil, who co-leads the federal network that designs and oversees coronavirus vaccine trials. “The science and manufacturing allowed these vaccines to be developed in weeks, not years.”³

Commenting on the vaccine development and its distribution, authors Katherine Barrett and Richard Greene, and Donald F. Kettl noted that the vaccine effort embodied principles and associated action that address three critical imperatives for managing through the pandemic and preparing for the future:

- Building partnerships with key organizations in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors
- Managing networks needed to drive such partnerships to overcome challenges, through improving operations and service delivery
- Steering outcomes across networks that lead to well-understood and measurable improvements in the health and well-being of the public⁴

These are the kinds of “principles and associated actions” contained in the agile government principles and brought to life in the Integrated Agile Framework for Action. This report builds on the principles and the framework, giving practitioners and the public an understanding of how to develop and implement policies, regulations, and programs to improve performance and grow public service competence—while respecting public values and increasing trust in government.

Organization of the Report

This report is divided into sections that help the reader develop a deeper understanding about the value of following agile government principles, by stepping through the framework and understanding its connection of trust and agility. Section One presents recommendations that convey the imperative for leaders at all levels from using the integrated framework to accomplish their mission and achieve their vision.

As discussed in Section Two, trust is at historic lows around the world, as measured by several different tools. Agile government can lead to improved public sector competence that increases trust in government. While a variety of factors influence trust, improving competencies (including responsiveness and reliability) and respecting the public values of openness, integrity, and fairness can increase trust.

2. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/12/14/countdown-to-a-coronavirus-vaccine>.

3. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/12/14/countdown-to-a-coronavirus-vaccine>.

4. <https://www.businessofgovernment.org/report/managing-next-crisis>.

Section Three details the Integrated Agile Framework for Action, which contains the three modules mentioned above (Strategy, Organization, and Implementation). These modules operate in a continual feedback mode, with each informed by and informing the execution of the mission of government at all levels.

In implementing the framework, leaders who develop an agile mindset can create clear missions and visions based on evidence and metrics. Leaders must develop policies, regulations, and programs in a way that involves customers and the public, and uses networks and teams to achieve results. These results will require innovation, speed, and persistence to demonstrate increased competence, and foster public values in a way that reflects increased trust.

The final section of the report discusses the use of existing tools and the research needed to advance the future of agile government. An appendix contains a brief history of agile government.

Section One: Recommendations



Agile leaders at all levels need an agile mindset.

This means a willingness to try new ideas and processes to achieve better results. Including this new agile mindset in leadership development curricula is essential to grow this result.

All levels need intentional leadership development strategies.

Equipping leaders at all levels via a common approach to agile principles drives successful transformation. This can be achieved by using a comprehensive Agile Learning Program, as discussed briefly in Section 4.

Integration is critical to execution.

The elements described in the framework are designed to work together, and the impact of integrated agile practices increases if incorporated in strategic and performance plans.

Leaders at all levels need to analyze and understand trust in and across their organization.

Trust is key for populations including employees, the public, customers, and partners. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs offers an excellent model for continually measuring and externally reporting trust.⁵

Agile government must begin with understanding customers.

Analyzing the customer experience and journey starts with understanding who the customers are, how their journey with the organization flows, and what constitutes “defining moments” in their experience. Continuous monitoring of customer views must inform organizational changes. The recent U.S. Executive Order, “Transforming Federal Customer Experience and Service Delivery to Rebuild Trust in Government,”⁶ also requires mapping the customer journey.

Public values must be respected and the public must be engaged.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) highlights public values that focus on openness, integrity, and fairness. Public engagement must be based on these principles, and developing new ways to monitor the public’s view, in addition to views of customers, can improve overall trust.

Networks should form the default development and implementation pathway wherever possible.

Networks can be internal, external, international, or some combination of these, and should serve as a force multiplier for mission execution. Many complex problems can only be solved with collaborative action.

5. <https://www.va.gov/initiatives/veteran-trust-in-va/>.

6. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/12/13/executive-order-on-transforming-federal-customer-experience-and-service-delivery-to-rebuild-trust-in-government/>.

Cross-functional teams should drive integrated solutions to problems.

Cross-functional teams bring more perspectives and encourage diversity of thought in creating and executing new solutions, greatly enhancing the chances for success.

Appropriate speed and persistent iteration will enable the organization to shape and reshape successful approaches.

Setting aggressive deadlines to accomplish defined modules of work and demonstrate continual achievement builds internal and external support. An approach that both delivers solutions quickly, and just as quickly modifies any solutions that do not work, will build a virtuous cycle of action.

Simultaneous execution of agile government actions is required.

Agile government is not a sequential process, but rather an integrated series of actions designed to increase organizational competence while respecting public values. This is true, as the framework notes, across the development and implementation of policies, regulations and programs at all levels—the core objective of agile government. It is especially true when working across multiple agencies, such as described in the implementation by the U.S. government of simultaneous execution for Cross Agency Priority Goals. The Integrated Agile Framework for Action described in detail in Section 3 shows how this should work.

Section Two: Trust



Trust has many definitions, and there are many ways to analyze and measure trust in government, including national and local governments, civil service, parliament, police, political parties, courts, legal systems, and intergovernmental organizations. The Agile Government Center has used the framework developed by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). As shown in Figure 3, the central elements of the framework are *Competencies* (Reliability and Responsiveness) and *Values* (Openness, Integrity, and Fairness).

Figure 3: OECD Framework on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions



This OECD framework was the basis for the measurement of trust in government presented in their July 2022 report “Building Trust to Reinforce Democracy.”⁷ OECD surveyed 22 countries and characterized the results as follows:

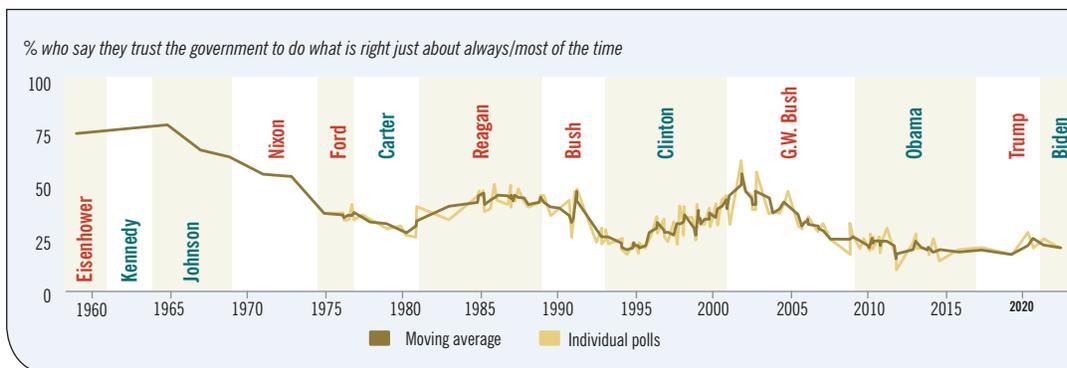
This report finds that most OECD governments are performing satisfactorily in public perceptions of government reliability, service provision, and data openness, although governments should still strive for better results in these areas. Governments are faring considerably less well, however, in perceptions of key features advanced democratic governance. Few people see their government as responsive to their wants and needs, and many see high-level political officials as easily corruptible. Disadvantaged groups—young people, women, people with lower incomes and those with less education—are less likely to trust their government and are often skeptical that their government listens to them.

Improved competence and respect for public values are not the only factors affecting trust. The OECD report also identifies cultural, economic, and political drivers, and the perception of government action on intergenerational and global challenges, as other factors that may affect trust in government. These factors relate to political and policy choices not susceptible to change through competence or respect for public values.

Measuring Public Trust

Trust in government has declined over some decades. The longest time series of data available for measuring trust in the United States comes from by the Pew Research Center’s survey of public trust in government.⁸ As Pew reports, “Public trust in government remains low, as it has for much of the twenty-first century. Only two-in-ten Americans say they trust the government in Washington to do what is right “just about always” (2 percent) or “most of the time” (19 percent). Trust in the government has declined somewhat since last year, when 24 percent said they could trust the government at least most of the time.”

Figure 4. Public Trust in Government 1958-2022



7. https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/governance/building-trust-to-reinforce-democracy_b407f99c-en.
 8. <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2022/06/06/public-trust-in-government-1958-2022/>.

This decline from 73 percent in 1958 stems from many factors, but has had a corrosive effect on the ability of public institutions to do their jobs. Despite the objective success noted above in developing the vaccine against COVID, the lack of trust in the process caused slow uptake in many areas. As Surgeon General Vivek Murthy noted:



Health misinformation is a serious threat to public health. It can cause confusion, sow mistrust, harm people's health, and undermine public health efforts. Limiting the spread of health misinformation is a moral and civic imperative that will require a whole-of-society effort.⁹



These findings are amplified by a report from the Partnership for Public Service in 2022, which found that:



A majority of the public is distrustful of the federal government as a whole. More people feel the federal government has a negative impact (53 percent) on the United States than a positive one (38 percent). More than half do not believe the government helps people like them, and two-thirds believe the government is not transparent or does not listen to the public.¹⁰



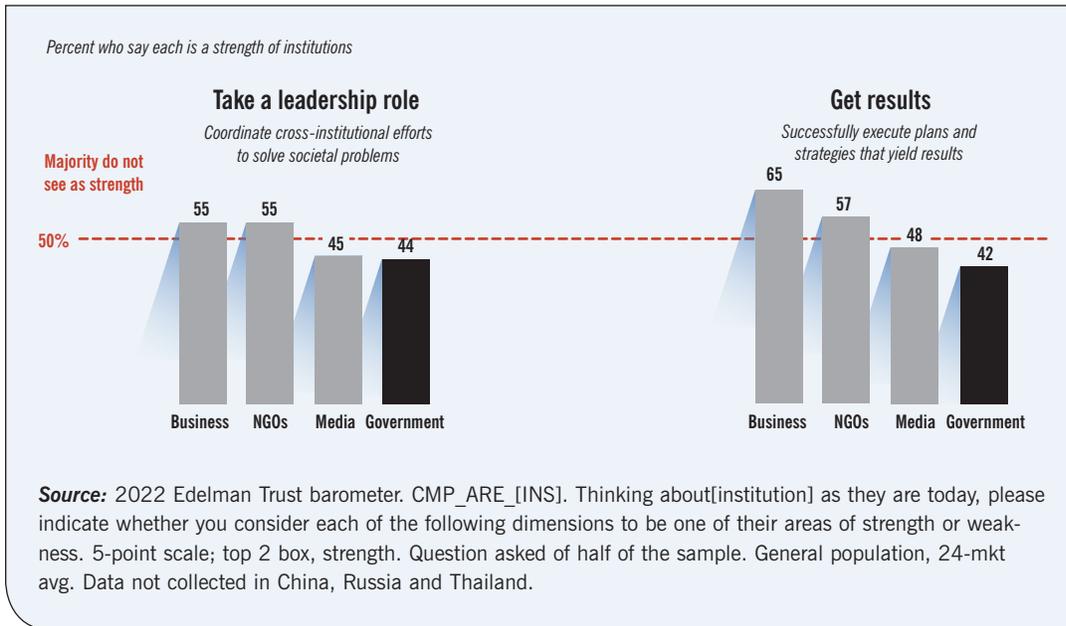
The lack of trust in government spans the globe.¹¹ The 2022 Edelman Trust Barometer, which covers 28 countries and had more than 36,000 respondents, found that only 44 percent believed that government could take a leadership role in solving and/or addressing public challenges, and 42 percent believed that government could get results. Businesses and NGOs (non-governmental organizations) are now often seen as much more able to solve societal problems than government.

9. <https://www.hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/priorities/health-misinformation/index.html>.

10. <https://ourpublicservice.org/publications/trust-in-government/>.

11. https://www.edelman.com/sites/g/files/aatuss191/files/2022-01/2022%20Edelman%20Trust%20Barometer%20FINAL_Jan25.pdf.

Figure 5: Government Not Seen as Able to Solve Societal Problems



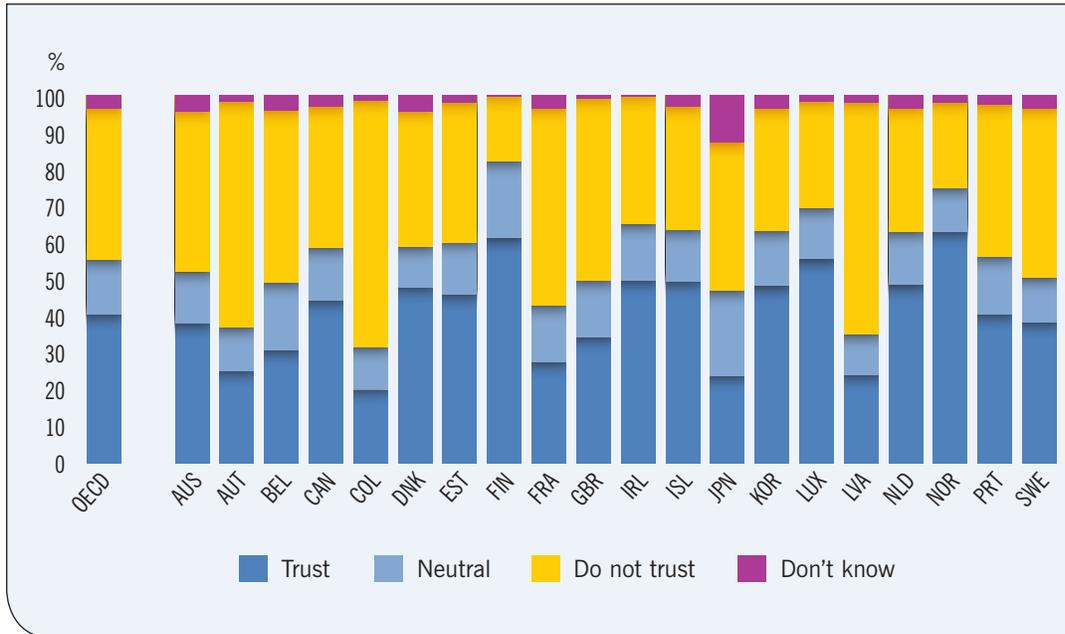
This finding is echoed by the findings of the July 2022 OECD report.¹² That study found that, on average, 40 percent of respondents trust their national government. Trust improved at the state and local level and for specific services like law enforcement. As the OECD 2021 Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions asks:

How can governments better connect with citizens and strengthen trust? A key factor distinguishing democracy from other forms of government is equal opportunities for representation in decision making. Many people in OECD countries see equal access to policymaking processes as falling short of their expectations. Results from the survey, for example, illustrate that governments could do better in responding to citizens' concerns. Just under four in ten respondents, on average across countries, say that their government would improve a poorly performing service, implement an innovative idea, or change a national policy in response to public demands. And when considering more overtly political processes, around a third of citizens say the political system in their country lets them have a say.¹³

OECD's findings on trust emphasize the need for a more responsive and competent government—and the above quote provides an important context for agile government. Service improvement, innovation, listening to the public, and giving the public a voice are all important outcomes of agile government's objective: to develop and implement policies, regulations, and programs at all levels to improve competence while respecting public values, thereby increasing trust.

12. <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/b407f99c-en/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/b407f99c-en>.
 13. <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/b407f99c-en/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/b407f99c-en>.

Figure 6: Share of respondents who indicate different levels of trust in their national government, 2021. (Just over four in ten people trust their national government.)



Authors Katherine Barrett and Richard Greene, and Don Kettl indicate that trust is critical to finding and implementing solutions to complex problems but that it is difficult to earn, especially if competence has not been demonstrated. In their IBM Center report, *Managing the Next Crisis*, they state:



Beyond battling misinformation, trust can be earned by convincing people that their governments—at all levels—take their responsibilities seriously and deliver them effectively. Unkept promises—whether about fixing roads, reducing crime, or even dispatching a pandemic—can easily lead to a lack of faith that makes it difficult to accomplish estimable goals.¹⁴



14. <https://www.businessofgovernment.org/report/managing-next-crisis>.

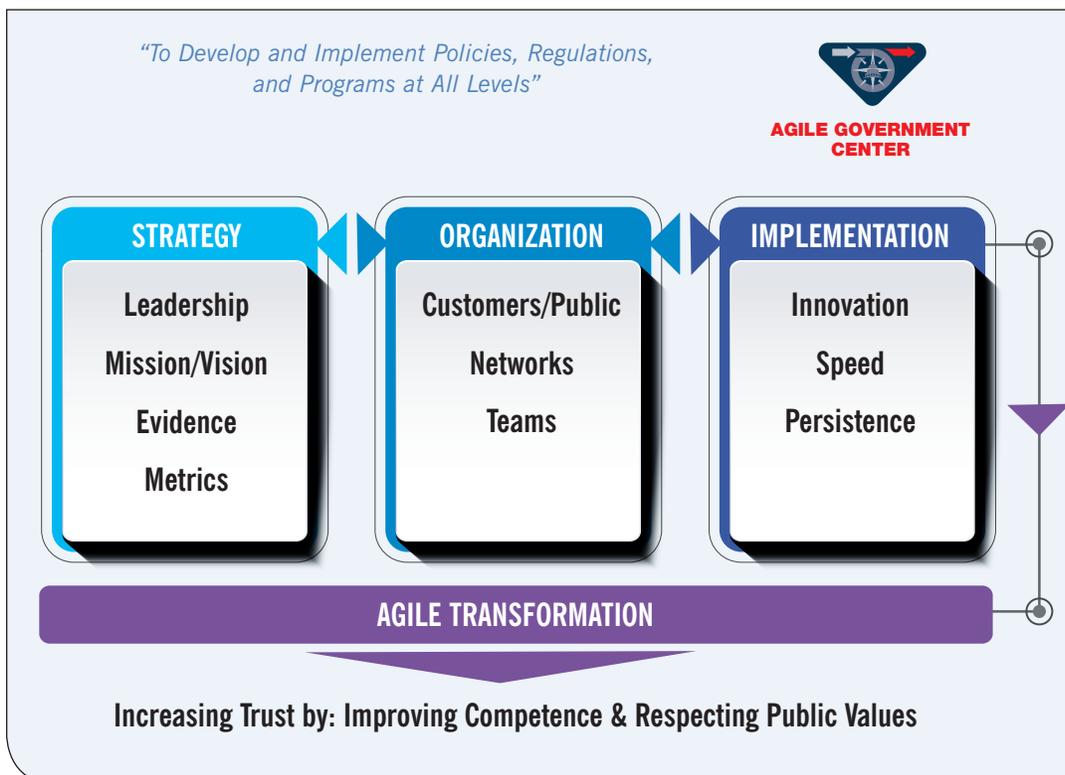
Section Three: The Integrated Agile Framework for Action



The agile government principles, provided in the introduction of this report, serve as a road map for implementing agile government. As governments and agencies begin to use them, the inter-relationship of the agile government principles emerges clearly—offering a unique and integrated framework to operationalize the principles.

The Integrated Agile Government Framework for Action, as presented again in Figure 7, contains three “modules” (Strategy, Organization, and Implementation). The framework emphasizes the use of the agile government principles to achieve transformation, so that governments become more competent while respecting public values when implementing better policies, regulations, and operations.

Figure 7: Integrated Agile Framework for Action



Several factors make the framework useful in moving toward action in implementing agile government:

- **Scope:** Includes all major activities of government—regulations, policies, and programs at all levels.
- **Clarity of purpose:** Agile government is intended to be transformational—radically improving competence and increasing public value and trust.
- **Strategic approach:** Strategy “links aspirations and capabilities” to improve competence and increase trust.
- **Principles-based:** Supported by ten underlying principles (shown in Figure 7) that evolve—in a truly agile fashion—as more useful information is developed and incorporated.
- **Tested using stories and cases:** The Agile Government Center has developed—and continues to seek—examples of governments using agile techniques to achieve mission results.

- **Evolving, not static:** Continues to evolve as the Agile Government Center receives comments on how to improve the framework. Some governments consciously use the agile principles, while others achieve their success without explicit reference to the principles.
- **Inclusive and Interactive:** Customers and the public engage in design of policies, regulations, and program development and execution.

Professor John Bryson, McKnight Presidential Professor Emeritus at the Hubert H. Humphrey School of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota, has commented on the uniqueness of the Integrated Agile Framework for Action:

“What strikes me as new about agile is the increased emphasis on the *alignment* of strategy, organization, and implementation—i.e., the principles. In other words, the elements are hardly new for the best-led and managed organizations, but their integration probably is for many, or even most, organizations.”

The concept of *alignment* aligns well with the definition of agile government:

Agile government is a principles-based integrated framework that involves interaction among teams and iteration with users and the public to develop and implement policies, regulations, and programs at all levels to transform governments and improve trust.

As leaders develop their organization’s mission and vision, they must test evidence and metrics with the public and customers to understand their potential for increasing perceptions of competence and respect for public values. Leaders can then deploy the mission and vision throughout the organization to make them the focus of work teams and networks, who rapidly innovate to enhance competence and deliver outcomes.

The following subsections present the three modules and ten elements of the framework.

Strategy

Various views of “Strategy”—and strategic planning—exist. Dwight Eisenhower said, “Plans are worthless but planning is everything.” This dictum aligns with an agile view of strategic planning. Plans may be developed and deployed in times of crisis such as the response to hurricanes or wildfire, or may be more mundane such as designing new technological approaches. Whatever the situations, consultation, networking, and other agile principles should be involved. The process of planning itself can contribute to the agility of the organization if designed to be flexible and responsive.

Management scholar Gary Hamel presents a compelling view of strategy creation in the twenty-first century: “In the future, top management won’t make strategy but will work to create the conditions in which new strategies can emerge and evolve.”¹⁵ Hamel rejects the idea that a single leader, or a small leadership group, can create a compelling and fulfilling direction to the entire organization. The AGC has found that “emerging and evolving” can take place in a structured way by following the agile principles and using the integrated framework.

15. <https://hbr.org/2009/02/moon-shots-for-management>.

Agile guru Stephen Denning adds an integrative dimension to strategy development. He suggests that this includes both leadership and management:



Rather than separating leadership from management, we need to integrate the two. We need to retire the obsolete notions that we may have about twentieth century management, and replace them with dynamic life-giving concepts of integrated leadership and management.¹⁶



Strategy based on ethical behavior, co-development, and a focus on delivering value to the public is precisely what agile government can achieve. Criticism of strategic planning often stems from the cumbersome planning—precisely what agile strategy is designed to avoid.

In 2019, the U.S. CFO Council created a task force to look at the future of the financial management work force. Their report, “The CFO of the Future Now,” used the agile principles to provide a guide to developing the key strategies that the Council would use. Their approach is described in the box below.

Highlight on the CFO Council’s Workforce Strategy for 2030: Identified Need for Long-Term Strategy

The Chief Financial Officers Council was established in 1990 by the CFO Act and was reconstituted in 1993 to include all of the chief financial officers as identified in legislation, their deputies, and senior officials at the Office of Management and Budget.

The Council was established to advise and coordinate the activities of the member agencies on matters, including:

- Consolidating and modernizing of financial systems
- Improving the quality of financial information
- Financial data and information standards
- Internal controls
- Legislation affecting financial operations and organizations
- Any other financial management matters

Using agile government principles including innovation, evidence-informed solutions, and metrics for success will help additional workgroups design actionable strategies, metrics, and measures to achieve the vision while still able to rapidly respond to high-impact events. Actions will be initiated concurrently at the CFOC’s discretion and upon recommendations from the workgroups to ensure that initiatives that require long lead times are prioritized efficiently. The CFOC will continue to prioritize and evaluate initiatives as necessary, remaining agile and adaptable to whatever the future might bring. The workgroup derived these goals from a series of four scenarios, which articulate four possible, envisioned futures for the federal financial workforce. These four scenarios are distinguished by the extent to which the federal government effectively leverages two primary drivers—data and technology—in its approach to day-to-day and strategic operation.

16. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/stevedenning/2020/10/25/reclaiming-leadership-in-the-age-of-agile>.

Agile Leadership

The study of leadership has deep and abiding pathways that belie rapid summary. Many students of leadership have been influenced by the seminal work of James MacGregor Burns. In his 1971 book, *Leadership*, Burns distinguished between *transactional* and *transformational* leadership. The first concerns the everyday task of guiding an organization in going about its assigned functions. This may include give and take, compromises, and finding solutions to roadblocks.



Burns distinguishes this from transformational leadership, which “cuts more profoundly . . . to cause a metamorphosis in form or structure.”¹⁷ To use an old analogy, transactional leadership may make the trains run on time, but transformational leadership was needed to complete the Intercontinental Railway—reducing the time to cross the nation from four months to four days.

In order to assume either a transactional or a transformational approach using the agile framework, organizational leaders need to begin by adopting an “agile mindset.”¹⁸ Author Stephen Denning has defined an agile mindset as follows:



Practitioners are thus said to have an agile mindset when they are preoccupied—and sometimes obsessed—with innovating and delivering steadily more customer value, with getting work done in small self-organizing teams, and with collaborating together in an interactive network. Such organizations have been shown to have the capacity to adapt rapidly to a quickly shifting marketplace.¹⁹



The Agile Government Center’s work reflects agreement with Denning, but goes farther to suggest that an agile mindset includes situational awareness of all elements of the framework, particularly the metrics built to measure trust. The agile mindset needs to be communicated throughout the organization, to network partners, and to the public to stimulate innovative and rapid action toward transformation.

The Leader’s Role in Agile Government

Organizational Leaders—Leaders should eliminate roadblocks, aggregate and assume risks, create networks, empower teams to make decisions, hold them accountable, and reward them.²⁰

-From Agile Government Principles

17. Burns, James MacGregor, *Transforming Leadership*, (2003) p. 24.

18. See the discussion below of the role of Robert MacDonald of bringing an agile mindset to the transformation of the Veterans Administration.

19. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/stevedenning/2019/08/13/understanding-the-agile-mindset/?sh=b5f1615c17f3>.

20. <https://napawash.org/grand-challenges-blog/summary-agile-government-principles>.

Roadblocks often result from old ways of thinking and acting. They present formal and informal barriers to innovation, often captured in the sentiment that “We have always done things that way and we have to stay within rules and guidelines.” These rules and guidelines can emerge from self-imposed structures, grown out of outdated procedures that once made sense but are now irrelevant.

Managing Risks

Risks typically involve failure to produce an outcome or instances of fraud in a process. The process of risk evaluation is a key job of an agile leader. The two major components of risk—likelihood and impact—must be continuously weighed throughout the organization, with potential problems and solutions brought to top management. As in all agile efforts, speed is essential. Agile leaders must be ready to weigh risks and make a decision about how best to proceed. For the federal government, this process is defined as follows:



In 2016, the OMB updated OMB Circular A-123 to require agencies to implement an Enterprise Risk Management (ERM) strategy so that they will have: Appropriate risk management processes and systems to identify challenges early, to bring them to the attention of agency leadership, and to develop solutions . . . to ensure federal managers are effectively managing risks an agency faces toward achieving its strategic objectives and arising from its activities and operations.²¹



The lack of such a process at the Environmental Protection Agency in 2021²² led the agency’s Inspector General to state: “The OCFO (Office of the Chief Financial Officer) cannot provide reasonable assurance that cross-cutting risks are identified and mitigated and that agency resources are directed to the most critical strategic needs.” This conclusion led to the risk of “increasing the risk of fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement.” The increased possibility of unacceptable fraud, waste and abuse—and the subsequent potential highlighting of this to the public—impacts the leadership of the agency as well as public trust. This is true in the agency and in the actions taken designed to protect the American people.

Agile Leadership in Time of Covid

In using the Integrated Framework for Action, leaders must work across the organization to assure simultaneous execution of all framework elements to achieve metrics that reflect organizational objectives, and continually communicate success and failure to the public. The example of payments by the U.S. Treasury Department illustrates this imperative.

21. https://www.epa.gov/system/files/documents/2021-12/_epaog_20211215-22-e-0011.pdf.

22. <https://www.epa.gov/office-inspector-general/report-epa-has-not-performed-agencywide-risk-assessments-increasing-risk>.

Speeding Up Economic Impact Payments at the Department of Fiscal Services

During the COVID pandemic, the U.S. Treasury was assigned the monumental task of quickly and efficiently distributing three rounds of economic impact payments to recipients across the country. With each round of payments, the Department of Fiscal Service improved their process, speeding up the distribution and increasing the number of payments made from 81 million payments within the first 15 days after the President's signature during the first round in March 2020 to 113 million payments made within three days of the President's signature in December of 2020. With the third round, paid out in 2021, the Department was able to convert many check payments to direct deposit, further speeding up the distribution process. In comparison, when similar payments were made in 2011, the first payments arrived 11 weeks after the legislation was signed. With each round of payments, the Department improved on their distribution process, and keeping the end customer firmly in mind, worked to improve distribution processes even while dealing simultaneously with the challenge of a fully remote workforce.

The Department of Fiscal Services' success in speeding up the Economic Distribution Payments relates closely to their adherence to agile government principles close at hand as they designed their processes. Specifically, they focused on the customer, ensuring that they talked directly with customers rather than making assumptions from an 'inside government' perspective. They also made innovation routine, encouraging the out of the box thinking that was crucial to dealing with pandemic related challenges. Breaking down silos, the Department recruited from across the organization to form small cross-cutting teams to resolve issues. They also increased their responsiveness, being flexible and allowing for rapid updates to policies, standards, and guidance as much as possible. The Department also recognized the value of collecting and using data to allow for expedited reporting, increasing transparency to customers and allowing leadership to make more informed decisions. Allowing for responsible risk (namely through developing minimally viable products and policies that can be tested and improved iteratively) was important, as was investing in their people and developing a learning culture that supports such responsible risk taking.

Source: "Becoming More Agile: Lessons Learned from the Pandemic" Dave Lebryk, Journal of Government Financial Management, Spring 2022, Vol. 71, No. 1, pg 62

Agile Government Leadership: Transactional and Transformational Single Organizational Leadership and Leading Strategy Management-at-Scale

A clear example of this distinction is provided by John Bryson. Bryson distinguishes between leadership for a single organization and leading strategy management-at-scale, meaning at the scale of the challenge to be addressed. The first, he says, involves "a fairly well-known set of tasks and often involves the development of a *strategic management system* to ensure direction, alignment, and commitment across the organization."²³ Bryson then describes leading strategy management-at-scale, which focuses on challenges where no one organization or group is wholly in charge. These include:

23. Bryson, et. al., *Leading Social Transformations: Creating Public Value and Advancing the Common Good*, 2021.



Such cross-boundary issues [as] the global COVID-19 pandemic, or U.S. domestic issues like homelessness, the lack of affordable housing, racial gaps in educational achievement, or the damage from adverse childhood experiences. Such issues occur within a shared-power, no-one wholly-in-charge environment and demand a response from multiple organizations.²⁴



The framework can support and enhance both single organizational leadership and strategy management-at-scale.

Individual Leadership Transformation

Adopting the framework will require a shift in focus for individual leaders. First, they need to adopt a new mindset that moves from reacting to problems and to embracing innovation and opportunity. The agile leader moves from implementing regulations to empowering teams to develop networks that can amplify the mission and vision of the organization.

As noted below, leaders must make the mission their guidepost, and can adjust the vision of the organization to reflect new realities associated with agile methods. General Stanley McChrystal faced a dilemma in leading the U.S. Army's Task Force in Iraq. He found that he needed to "scale trust and purpose without creating chaos." This was a significant departure from the normal role of reading and reviewing plans and action reports. "We needed to enable a team operating in an interdependent environment to understand the 'butterfly effect' ramifications of their work and make them aware of other teams with whom they would have to cooperate to achieve strategic-not just tactical-success."²⁵

Stephen Denning²⁶ reports the five things that McChrystal recounted as the means to his success in creating a "Team of Teams":

1. Common physical location that forced individuals from various teams to communicate
2. Common daily briefings where all levels of command could participate
3. Moving decision making down to the lowest level and requiring cooperative work on execution
4. Exchange of staff among teams to encourage communication and joint decision making
5. Unlearning his own tendencies and moving from "chess to gardening," which he refers to as "nurturing"

While McChrystal's methods may not work in all situations or for everyone, they demonstrate the ability to alter a mindset and use agile techniques to achieve a mission.

24. Op. cit

25. McChrystal, Stanley, *Team of Teams*, 2015 p.129-30.

26. Denning, Stephen, *The Age of Agile*, 2018 p.84.

The Veterans Affairs Transformation

In 2015, veterans' trust in the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) stood at 47 percent,²⁷ but by 2022 stood at 76 percent. What accounted for this impressive change? The mission of the VA did not change from President Lincoln's promise: "To care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan" by serving and honoring the men and women who are America's Veterans.

The execution of this mission is guided by:

- Core values
- Core characteristics
- Customer experience principles
- Ethical framework



All of these were memorialized in regulation²⁸ in May of 2019. This document reflects the strong commitment of VA leaders to these values. As VA Secretary Dennis McDonough stated, "We're going to focus on living our core VA I-CARE values in all our interactions. Integrity, commitment, advocacy, respect and excellence—these values will define who we are, our culture, and how we care for veterans and other VA colleagues."²⁹

The transformation of VA began in July of 2014 with the swearing in of Robert McDonald as VA Secretary. McDonald had been the highly successful CEO of Procter and Gamble, and came to VA with a new philosophy of management that was highly aligned with agile government principles. In fact, McDonald began by building a "principles-based organization" as described by Ryan Buell in the Harvard Business Review.³⁰ The new Secretary built a cross-functional leadership team that both focused on what was most important to the customer, and used metrics to ensure that customer experience drove change.

The quarterly report "Serving America's Veterans" includes not only statistics on agency activities impacting veterans (such as call center totals, visitors, insurance, and education benefits claims completed), but also includes an entire section on trust, highlighting the importance of trust in the agency to leadership.³¹ The trust scores are presented across areas such as "ease, effectiveness, emotion" and by gender, race, and ethnicity. VA's customer experience drivers such as employee helpfulness, equity and transparency, quality, satisfaction, simplicity, and speed are quite consistent with the OECD Trust Framework. The Department acknowledges the need for additional change, but believes that its current direction will bring this about.

27. <https://www.fedscoop.com/va-improved-public-trust-25-agencies-can/>.

28. <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-38/chapter-I/part-0>.

29. <https://news.va.gov/84509/>.

30. <https://hbr.org/2016/12/a-transformation-is-underway-at-u-s-veterans-affairs-we-got-an-inside-look>.

31. https://news.va.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2022/09/Serving-Americas-Veterans_VA-FY2022_Q3-S508C.pdf.

Mission and Vision

“Its mission is the organization’s indelible purpose and reason for being. Its vision is its aspiration for itself.”³² This pithy quote from a recent Harvard Business Review article encapsulates the relationship between mission and vision.

Nowhere is this better illustrated than at the Department of Veterans Affairs. The VA’s mission has not changed since its founding after the Civil War. However, the VA’s vision statement has been recently modified to add a reflection of current conditions:



To provide veterans the world-class benefits and services they have earned—and to do so by adhering to the highest standards of compassion, commitment, excellence, professionalism, integrity, accountability, and stewardship.



Adding the benchmark of “world-class benefits and services” acknowledges that there have been times in recent history when this standard was not met. Similarly, adding values from compassion to stewardship recognizes that veterans care about tangible services—rapid access to treatment and personal and caring caregivers.

In an agile organization, changes to the mission or vision must be developed by empowering teams who work with customers and the public in creating a structure for articulating what needs to be done (a plan of operations), and how this will be done (an overall strategy). Other agile principles such as the use of networks, speed, persistence, and innovation should all be brought into play with continuous feedback from customers as well as core providers of service.

The mission and vision of the organization needs to be continuously communicated throughout, so that each individual sees their own work advancing the performance of the entire organization.

Evidence and Metrics

The management of any organization requires data on what works and what does not. In deciding a course of action, leaders rely on evidence and metrics to develop policies, plans, and strategies. The close interrelationship of these two elements leads to their being treated together.

One definition of evidence comes from the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB): “The available body of facts or information indicating whether a belief or proposition is true or valid . . . [it] can be quantitative or qualitative and may come from a variety of sources, including foundational fact finding, performance measurement, policy analysis, and program evaluation.”³³



32. <https://hbr.org/2022/03/its-time-to-take-a-fresh-look-at-your-companys-values>.

33. Circular No. A-11: Preparation, Submission, and Execution of the Budget, U.S. Office of Management and Budget, August 2022. <https://bit.ly/2ZYYdiO>.

This is a broad strategy for gathering and using evidence. Typically, evidence is used *a priori* to decide whether and how to develop policies, programs, and regulations. Metrics are part of the chain of evidence used to manage the performance of the organization and communicate externally about agency status. These are measures of inputs, outputs, and outcomes taken from systems that develop and monitor programs. Performance measures can come from operational systems or program evaluations that demonstrate program challenges or impacts.

Using Evidence and Metrics

In their blog entitled, “Agile Government and the Five As,” National Academy of Public Administration Fellows Shelley Metzenbaum and Robert Shea provide a succinct analysis of how evidence and metrics are used by agile governments:



Agile governments ask questions and analyze data to answer those questions and uncover additional insights while refining questions as knowledge is gained. They apply those insights to amplify and accelerate progress on all kinds of policy outcomes. Agile governments also focus their efforts on improving the quality of government operations, because good management practices are critical to success. Finally, agile governments continually adjust their actions as experience and insights highlight areas on which to focus and improve.³⁴



Many government challenges require efforts from multiple agencies to accomplish individual agency missions and broader governmentwide visions. An example of this is the “Functional Zero” movement that focuses on veterans’ homelessness.³⁵ At the heart of this movement is the collection and continuous monitoring of baseline evidence to design and provide services that enable permanent exit from homelessness. The nonprofit Community Solutions, founder of the Functional Zero movement, defines their key measure as follows:



Every community has a functional zero threshold—the average number of people exiting homelessness in a month. When a community achieves functional zero for a population, it is keeping the number of people experiencing homelessness below this threshold. This means that the number of people experiencing homelessness at any time does not exceed the community’s proven record of housing at least that many people.³⁶



This is a radical example of the continual use of data at the individual level to drive efforts to achieve a mission. VA also has a similar goal of ending veterans’ homelessness.³⁷ To do this, the VA “collaborates with federal, state and local agencies; employers; housing providers, faith-based and community nonprofits; and others to expand employment and affordable housing options for Veterans exiting homelessness.” These efforts demonstrate that including data to inform operations continuously allows leaders to shift tactical plans in an agile way.

34. <https://napawash.org/articles-from-our-partners/the-5-as-of-agile-government-performance-and-tools-for-adoption>.

35. https://community.solutions/built-for-zero/functional-zero?_thumbnail_id=4034.

36. https://community.solutions/built-for-zero/functional-zero?_thumbnail_id=4034.

37. <https://news.va.gov/news-releases/va-outlines-new-goals-towards-ending-veteran-homelessness/>.

A range of tools support generating and collecting evidence. The Rand Corporation, a research and development entity, makes the case for randomized control trials in public policy areas as follows:



Randomized controlled trials (RCTs) help identify whether a change in policy, intervention, or practice results in changes in outcomes. RCTs randomly assign people into two groups: 'treatment' and 'control.' The intervention or change is applied to the treatment group but not the control group and the outcomes of both groups are observed.

Being able to isolate and test different policy decisions produces the best evidence for decision makers. Well-executed RCTs minimize the possibility that observed changes in outcomes are a result of different changes to the one tested. Often, policy changes are implemented without knowledge of their impact; RCTs allow us to understand 'what would have happened otherwise.'³⁸



In evaluating drugs and treatment options, RCTs are often considered the gold standard. However, in the broader field of public policy, RCTs are often too slow, subject to criticisms of their external validity, and called into question on the true nature of cause and effect. There may also be questions about RCT design, and potential ethical questions regarding who is in the control group. Despite these questions, RCT can be considered alongside other types of testing.

Similarly, cost-benefit analysis has traditionally been used to provide evidence of outcomes particularly in the regulatory area. However, additional factors beyond monetary costs and benefits must be taken into account. Cass Sunstein, Harvard professor and former director of OMB's Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, comments:



As you design, execute, and write your regulatory analysis, you should seek out the opinions of those who will be affected by the regulation as well as the views of those individuals and organizations who may not be affected but have special knowledge or insight into the regulatory issues. . . . You should not limit consultation to the final stages of your analytical efforts. You will find that you cannot conduct a good regulatory analysis according to a formula. Conducting high-quality analysis requires competent professional judgment. Different regulations may call for different emphases in the analysis, depending on the nature and complexity of the regulatory issues and the sensitivity of the benefit and cost estimates to the key assumptions.'³⁹



38. <https://www.rand.org/randeurope/methods/randomised-controlled-trials-rct.html>.

39. https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/legacy_drupal_files/omb/circulars/A4/a-4.pdf.

This description of “Regulatory Analysis” from OMB Circular A-4 is fully consistent with the agile government principles, and should serve as a model for policy, program, and regulatory design and implementation. In a recent speech, Sunstein adroitly summarized, “An agile government needs less sludge, an effective notice and comment process, continuous analysis, and robust testing.”⁴⁰

Metrics are of vital importance to agile government. From an operational standpoint, they provide situational awareness. The leader and each member of teams and colleagues across networks need awareness of what is happening. Issues such as available resources (i.e., funding and personnel), customer care, achievement of desired results, and timing of deliverables, all need continuous monitoring and communication throughout the institution.

General McChrystal describes the daily operation and intelligence briefing, which often had several thousand participants:



*Just as our individual teams benefitted from a shared sense of purpose that extended from the tactical situation on the ground to larger strategic goals, the elements of the Task Force would need to share both the up-to-the-minute awareness of the battlefield and a belief that they were all fighting the same war based on the same principles with the same objectives.*⁴¹



This sharing of performance information widely allowed dispersed teams and networks to function together against the common enemy.

The Performance Management System

Just as data is used internally, it must also be communicated externally. Demonstrating reliability and responsiveness—using the OECD definition of competence—requires that an organization periodically report achievement of preplanned objectives. This lay at the core of the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) of 1993, which requires federal agencies to prepare a strategic plan covering a multiyear period, and requires each agency to submit an annual performance plan and performance report.

While GPRA was an effective tool, in 2010 GPRA was modernized to create an overall performance framework for the federal government. This framework rests on the following principles codified by the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) Modernization Act:

- Engaging senior managers
- Defining success through strategic planning and priority goal setting
- Focusing on a limited number of priority goals
- Regular, data-driven performance reviews that incorporate a broad range of qualitative and quantitative indicators and evidence
- Strengthening agency management capabilities, collaboration, coordination, and knowledge for managing programs more effectively and efficiently⁴²

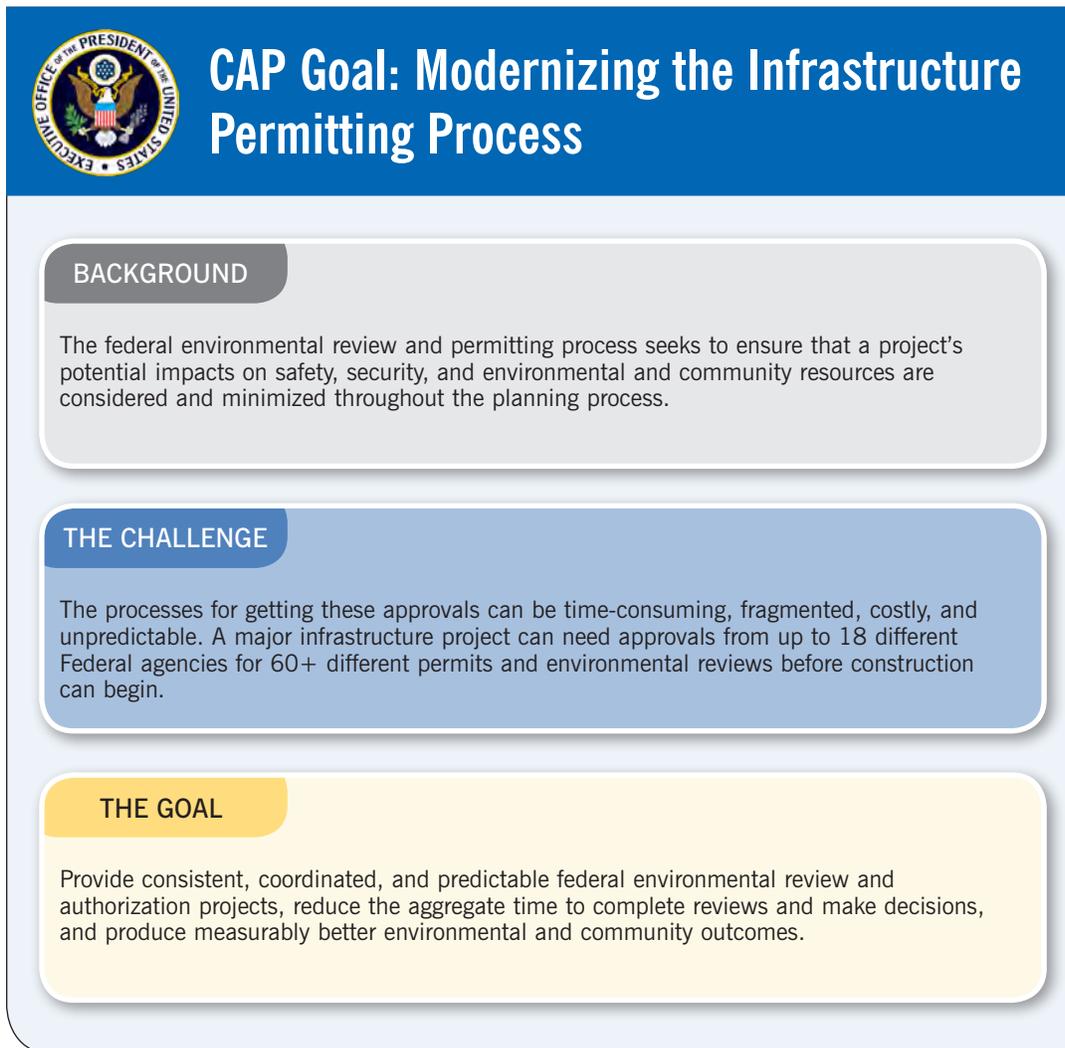
40. <https://regulatorystudies.columbian.gwu.edu/agile-governance>.

41. McChrystal, Stanley, *Team of Teams*, 2015.

42. <https://www.performance.gov/about/performance-framework/>.

In fact, the government's Performance.Gov website, from which the above quote is drawn, serves an integral role in the overall performance framework. The site provides detailed information on agency performance as well as the achievement of Cross Agency Priority Goals. These later goals reflect the agile government principles of using teams and networks to innovate and pursue increased competency. The CAP Goal for Modernizing the Infrastructure Permitting Process is presented in Figure 8.

Figure 8: Example of Cross Agency Priority Goal



The infographic features a blue header with the Presidential Seal on the left and the title 'CAP Goal: Modernizing the Infrastructure Permitting Process' in white text. Below the header are three rounded rectangular boxes: a grey 'BACKGROUND' box, a blue 'THE CHALLENGE' box, and a yellow 'THE GOAL' box.

BACKGROUND

The federal environmental review and permitting process seeks to ensure that a project's potential impacts on safety, security, and environmental and community resources are considered and minimized throughout the planning process.

THE CHALLENGE

The processes for getting these approvals can be time-consuming, fragmented, costly, and unpredictable. A major infrastructure project can need approvals from up to 18 different Federal agencies for 60+ different permits and environmental reviews before construction can begin.

THE GOAL

Provide consistent, coordinated, and predictable federal environmental review and authorization projects, reduce the aggregate time to complete reviews and make decisions, and produce measurably better environmental and community outcomes.

In implementing this goal, a strategy fully consistent with agile principles was developed. Highlighting the need for an agile leadership style, a steering council responsible for improving federal permitting with a presidentially appointed executive director was established. The Council standardized processes for interagency coordination, emphasizing the need for networks across agencies, and involving the public by making permitting timetables accessible via a permitting dashboard. Also established were a performance accountability system and quarterly agency scorecards. As a result of this agile approach to modernizing, the permitting process saw a 45 percent reduction in average completion time and a cost savings of over \$1 billion.

Organization

Sun Tzu, author of *The Art of War*, said, “Generally, management of many is the same of few. It is a matter of organization.”⁴³ The framework presents the “formations and signals” that Sun Tzu found as the keys to success. Three elements are included under “Organization”—involvement of customers and the public, networks, and cross-functional teams. These interrelate, as teams need to work through networks and must involve customers and the public continually and appropriately.

Customers and the Public

Executive Order 14508 states, “Strengthening the democratic process requires providing direct lines of feedback and mechanisms for engaging the American people in the design and improvement of federal government programs, processes, and services.”⁴⁴

The above quote from President Biden’s Executive Order on transforming the federal customer experience recognizes the broad task facing the federal government to include the American people both as customers and as members of the public participating in the “design and improvement of . . . programs, processes, and services.” This approach reflects the central objective of agile government. In all elements of the integrated framework, the development and implementation of “policies, regulations, and programs at all levels” can improve the competence of government, respect what the public values, and thereby improve trust.



The integrated framework includes a focus on customer experience and public involvement. A September 2022 session of the Agile Government Network addressed the relationship of these two processes and added the lens of “human-centered design”⁴⁵ as a means of improving customer experience and public involvement.

The City of Rockford and the Value of Knowing the Customer

The City of Rockford, Illinois, had a problem with veteran homelessness—with unhoused vets making up a significant portion of the unhoused population in the area. Standard measures of combatting the problem by individual agencies (police, emergency, social services, etc.) proved ineffective. Rockford, under the leadership of Mayor Larry Morrissey, needed a different solution. Joining the Build for Zero coalition, the city took a new approach, starting with the simple idea that to be effective, a program must clearly identify its customers. In this case, the unhoused veterans were the initial customer. Clearly knowing who the customer was, Rockford then began to identify the best way to best serve that population.

With that start, Rockford built a homelessness response system that compiled real-time, person-specific data for each veteran experiencing homelessness. A “collective impact team,” consisting of members from every agency interacting with homeless veterans, now meets weekly to understand where individuals are in the process of rehousing. As a veteran experiencing homelessness is identified by an entity (e.g., seeking space at a shelter, treatment at a hospital), that entity enters the data into a person-centric database, allowing easier identification of the veteran’s true needs—and how to move them successfully from unhoused to housed.

43. <https://www.azquotes.com/quote/1368053>.

44. Executive Order 14058 on Transforming Federal Customer Experience and Service Delivery to Rebuild Trust in Government, December 21, 2021.

45. For a more detailed discussion of Human Centered Design, see Section 4.5.

Eventually, this focus on the individual person has allowed Rockford to “change the focus from numbers of beds and meals and services to one single number: people who remain homeless.”⁴⁶ After successfully reaching functional zero for veteran homelessness in 2015, Rockford continued to apply this agile principle of customer driven behavior (as well as evidence-informed solutions, clear use of metrics, persistence, and clarity of mission) and reached functional zero for other chronically homeless populations.⁴⁷

The Principles of Customer Experience

For the federal government, Executive Order 14058 lays out a series of principles that can serve as a guide to governments at all levels.

- Be inclusive and consider individuals of all abilities
- Make appropriate use of technology
- Be simple, equitable, protective, transparent, and responsive
- Take into account lost time
- Promote efficiency
- Encompass human centered design
- Rely on measurement

The Process of Customer Experience

In its 2018 publication,⁴⁸ *Understanding the Customer Experience with Government*, McKinsey and Company identify three primary processes for governments to undertake in implementing programs for customer experience. These are:

- **Defining the Customer**—This involves carefully identifying who uses agency services, and may involve segmentation and development of personas. Segmentation involves analyzing the “traits, behaviors, needs, and beliefs of representative individuals within each broader group.” This will allow the agency to develop specific solutions to specific problems.
- **Understanding the Customer Journey**—This involves creating a visual representation or “journey map” that allows the agency to understand the relationship of a customer to processes within the agency.
- **Defining Moments**—The map of the customer journey pinpoints “defining moments”—good or bad—that lead to problems to be solved or opportunities to be emphasized.

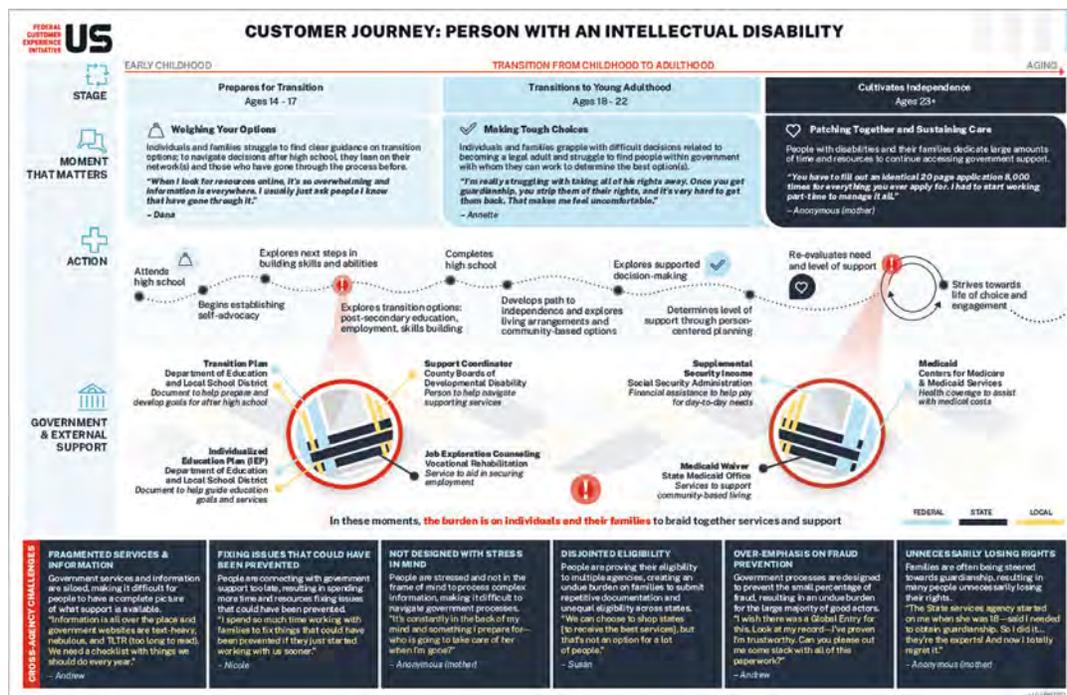
Journey maps have been used by a range of agencies. Figure 9 below shows an example from Performance.gov of a customer journey map.

46. User-Centered Policy Design, pg. 76.

47. <https://www.joinbuiltforzero.org/case-studies/case-study-rockford-illinois-reaches-and-sustains-functional-zero-for-veteran-and-chronic-homelessness/population> in 2017.

48. <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-and-social-sector/our-insights/understanding-the-customer-experience-with-government>.

Figure 9: Example of a Customer Journey Map



This map allows the team seeking to improve the customer experience to view the entire process from the eyes of the customer and make appropriate adjustments based on the “defining moments” identified. Agile approaches place customers at the center of all action.

Public Involvement

While the power of public involvement is well understood, the ability of the public to engage in shaping policies, regulations, and programs is seen by the public as severely limited. The 2022 Edelman Trust Barometer⁴⁹ found that 64 percent of those surveyed agreed with the statement: “People in this country lack the ability to have constructive and civil debates about issues they disagree on.” The view was widespread with a majority agreeing in 27 countries, signaling that public involvement is both limited and increasingly challenging.

OECD has identified five drivers—economic, cultural, political, technological, and environmental—that seek to explain exclusion from public dialogue. As a solution, they recommend representative deliberation:

In times of complex change, current democratic and governance institutions are failing to deliver. Representative deliberative processes are one part of a bigger picture of the systemic change that is needed. When conducted effectively, they can enable policy makers to take hard decisions about the most challenging public policy problems and enhance trust between citizens and government.⁵⁰

49. https://www.edelman.com/sites/g/files/aatuss191/files/2022-01/2022%20Edelman%20Trust%20Barometer%20FINAL_Jan25.pdf.
 50. https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/339306da-en/1/3/1/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/339306da-en&_csp_ =07698b7c924c319d922a6500b563da&itemGO=oeed&itemContentType=book.

Similarly, in its 2020 report “Our Common Purpose: Reinventing American Democracy for the 21st Century,” the American Academy of Arts & Sciences stated:



A healthy constitutional democracy depends on a virtuous cycle in which responsive political institutions foster a healthy civic culture of participation and responsibility, while a healthy civic culture—a combination of values, norms, and narratives—keeps our political institutions responsive and inclusive.



The question emerges regarding how to motivate both “political institutions” and a “healthy civic culture” to participate in this “virtuous cycle.” The Academy recommended, “Adopt formats, processes, and technologies that are designed to encourage widespread participation by residents in official public hearings and meetings at local and state levels.”

OECD has taken this recommendation several steps further. They have recommended consideration of 12 specific models clustered in the following four areas:

- Informed citizen recommendations on policy questions
- Citizen opinion on policy questions
- Informed citizen evaluation of ballot measures
- Permanent representative deliberative models

Models like these have a long history in countries such as Australia, Canada, Ireland, Netherlands, Poland, and the United Kingdom. In the context of agile government, these assemblies could provide needed feedback in the “development and implementation of policies, regulations, and programs at all levels”—the core purpose of agile government. Similarly, these models should be designed to meet the core values of trust regarding “openness, fairness and integrity” that were previously discussed.

Teams and Networks

The myriad of laws and regulations governing the organization of governments is not likely to be radically changed or abolished any time soon. These laws and regulations perpetuate a largely hierarchical structure, and make the constructive use of teams and networks even more essential.

Teams and networks can be employed within hierarchies to deal with specific problems and enhance mission accomplishment through collaboration, while respecting existing laws and regulations. General McChrystal recognized this fact in creating his “Team of Teams.”⁵¹



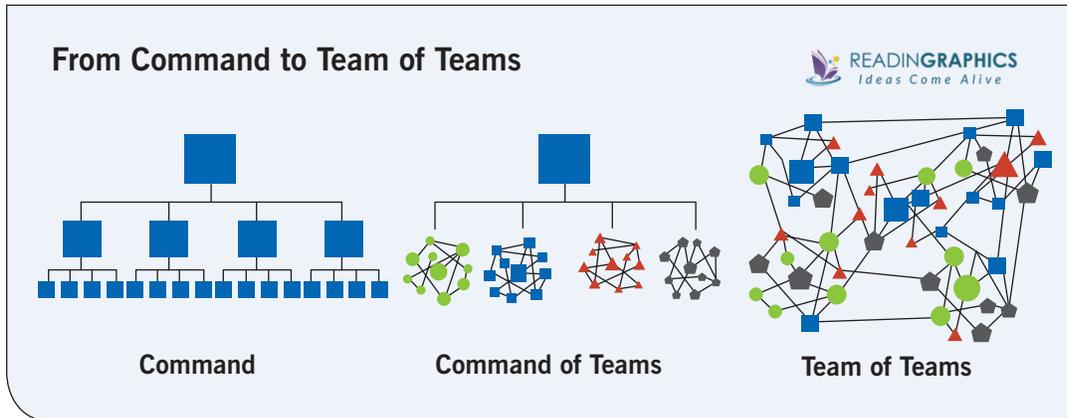
There are few more hierarchical organizations than the United States Army. Yet even within the Army, the General focused on creating functional teams assigned to very specific missions. They were cross-functional, combining Army Rangers, Navy Seals, and members of the intelligence community. These teams were skilled at achieving a narrow mission and able to shed

51. McChrystal, Stanley, *Team of Teams*, 2015.

insular siloed behavior. However, McChrystal found that “Unfortunately, many of the traits that made our teams so good also made it incredibly difficult to scale those traits across our organization.”⁵²

He concluded that what was required was a Team of Teams where the relationship among constituent teams resembled those among the individuals in single teams. He depicted the transition from command to Team of Teams as shown below in Figure 10. In essence, McChrystal built a network of teams to fuel collaboration and spur increased mission achievement.

Figure 10: Moving to a Team of Teams



There are many definitions of teams and networks. To simplify, this report takes the definition that Stephen Denning used in his book, *The Age of Agile*. Denning actually raises teams to a “law”:

“The law of the small team is simple. It’s a presumption that in a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) world, big and difficult problems should—to the extent possible—be disaggregated into small batches and performed by small cross-functional autonomous teams working iteratively in short cycles in a state of flow, with fast feedback from customers and end users.”⁵³

The definition of a *managed network* was defined above as follows: “An integrated system of relationships that is managed across formal and informal organizational barriers with recognized organizational principles and a clear definition of success.”⁵⁴ The “critical elements” can be summarized as shown in Figure 11.⁵⁵

52. Ibid p132.
 53. Denning, Stephen, *The Age of Agile*, p.29.
 54. Morse, Buss and Kinghorn, *Transforming Public Leadership for the 21st Century*, 2007 p.211.
 55. DeSeve, G. Edward, *Managing Recovery, An Insider’s View*, IBM Center for the Business of Government, 2011, p.20.

Figure 11: Network Management Principles

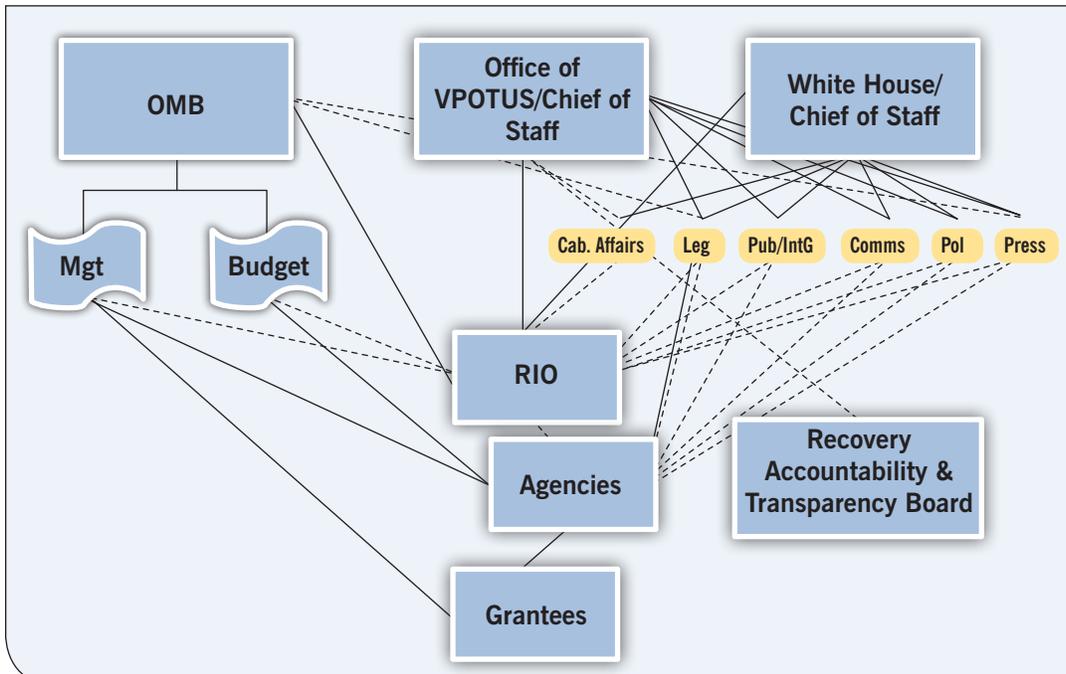


Teams and Networks

Just as the Team of Teams demonstrated the interrelationship between teams, the implementation of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) showed the interrelationship of small teams and broader networks. Teams should join with networks to leverage the ability to accomplish their mission.

I served as the White House implementation leader for ARRA, and convinced the vice president, who was placed in charge of the effort by the president, that he didn't need a CEO to run the operation. Rather, he needed a "coordinator" who would harmonize the efforts of 22 agencies, 50 states, and more than seventy thousand "grantees." To do this, we created a series of internal teams within the federal government. The first of these to be created was the Recovery Implementation Office (RIO), which I led. The RIO was staffed by no more than eight individuals drawn from various departments and offices of the federal government. Several of the individuals knew each other and had worked together before.

Figure 12: Networked Structure of the Recovery Implementation Office



RIO was lodged in the Executive Office of the President, reported to the vice president, and formally coordinated with the Office of Management and Budget. This “triple hatting” created an ability to work closely together with these offices as colleagues. As is often described in agile literature, there were daily standups with the White House and the vice president’s staff, as well as twice weekly calls with the 22 agencies involved in the more than 200 programs of the Recovery Act. Each agency was represented on the calls by a single responsible individual—typically the chief operating officer—who could speak for the agency and solve problems as they arose. This structure was continually tested, no more so than in the “Case of the Stupidest Thing Ever Done.”

The Case of the “Stupidest Thing Ever Done”

Note: This case is based on a real situation but is presented as a story.

It was a quiet afternoon when I received a call from the vice president’s executive assistant who asked me to hold for Vice President Biden. The call was unusual since we normally talked in person.

“Eddie, We’ve got a problem. Senator (Republican from a midwestern state) just said that the Recovery Act was doing the stupidest thing he ever saw. We were going to resurface a highway and then remediate a superfund site and run trucks over the new road and tear it up. You have 24 hours to fix this. Thanks.”

This meant getting the information out to two teams—Transportation (DOT) and Environmental Protection (EPA). As mentioned above, we had a single responsible individual (SRA) in each of these agencies. I called Deputy Secretary John Porcari (DOT) and Deputy Administrator Craig Hooks (EPA), and also the SRA in the governor’s office at the state level. Each responded that they would work with their counterparts at the state and solve the problem.

Later that afternoon, I received a conference call from Porcari and Hooks that the state agencies had agreed, under the auspices of the governor’s office, to reschedule the two projects and remediate the superfund site before they resurfaced the road. The governor’s representative also said that he would call the senator’s office.

The next day, the senator congratulated Vice President Biden for his swift and effective action and indicated that the problem had been resolved. This occurred because of developing teams at the agency and state levels and connecting them through a network.

The National Interagency Fire Center

A dramatic example of networks in action is the National Interagency Fire Center. NIFC coordinates through incident management teams (IMTs):

Mission: The National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC), located in Boise, Idaho, is the nation's support center for wildland firefighting. Eight different agencies and organizations are part of NIFC. Decisions are made using the interagency cooperation concept because NIFC has no single director or manager.



An incident management team is dispatched or mobilized during complex emergency incidents to provide a command and control infrastructure in order to manage the operational, logistical, informational, planning, fiscal, community, political, and safety issues associated with complex incidents. IMTs include people from federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial entities.



The IMTs have a team leader assigned to rapidly mobilize and deploy all resources including firefighters, air support, equipment, and supplies. At the same time, the leader liaisons with local governments, the press, and other involved federal agencies.

I watched an IMT in action during the Beaver Creek fire in Blaine County, Idaho. The leader of the IMT at that time was Beth Lund (now the assistant director of Wildfire Operations at the NIFC). Beth assembled more than 1,000 firefighters along with their support teams in a meadow below my house in Hailey, Idaho. In true agile fashion, she led a public briefing featuring reports from interagency team members including the county sheriff (in charge of evacuation notices), the state police (in charge of traffic control), and the county commissioners who hosted evacuees at the local high school. Highly accurate maps of the fire, which eventually grew to more than 100,000 acres, allowed the community to understand the dangers and what actions they might have to take.

The fire was contained with no loss of life and only one home burned—a beautiful cedar shake house with a cedar shake roof that was particularly vulnerable. The prepositioned network could act quickly, with highly trained fire crews and the IMT used to working together in emergencies.

As noted, the NIFC was created by a cooperative agreement among various agencies at all levels of government. The NIFC functions as a network without a formal single leader.

Agile Mindset, Teams, and Networks

As discussed above, at the heart of agile government is the mindset of leaders at all levels. This is particularly true in the decision to use teams and networks within hierarchies to take action. When a problem arises, the leader first looks to existing teams and determines fit with their mission and objectives. Then, the leader looks to see what networks can be invoked to assist with the problem. If no existing teams or networks exist, they must be rapidly created in an innovative way. Using teams and networks as the default response to problems can pay huge dividends in leveraging the mission and objectives of organizations.

Sometimes, participation in team activities or joining network events may seem to hinder getting work done. If the number of meetings is excessive, or the data and information presented seems irrelevant to the mission of the participating individual or organization, then a reevaluation of whether individuals or their agencies truly need to attend is necessary. However, this could also signal an opportunity to revitalize and redirect the network. Flexibility is key to ensuring agile teams remain targeted and functional.

Implementation

This section about “Implementation” describes the “how” of the Integrated Agile Framework for Action. Teams will work in networks and involve customers and the public. They must be innovative in their approaches, involved in the rapid development and production of policies and regulations that the public values, and continue to iterate in a persistent manner until greater competence is translated into increased trust.

Innovation

The OECD has stated, “For innovative capacity to flourish, we need to move away from innovation as a sporadic activity, fueled predominantly by crises, to systemically embedding innovation at the heart of policymaking and public administration.”⁵⁶ This is precisely what agile government and the integrated framework support.



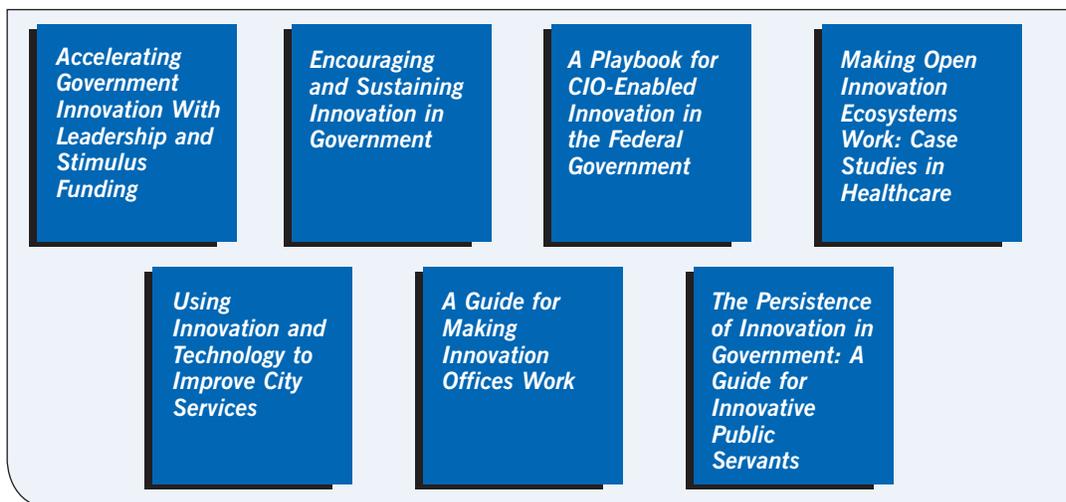
To implement innovation, OECD poses four questions:

- **Purpose:** What is driving the intent to innovate?
- **Potential:** What elements across the system influence whether innovative efforts are attempted?
- **Capacity:** What is needed to carry out innovative efforts?
- **Impact:** How is the impact of efforts understood and informing future practice?

Purpose is answered by referring to the mission and vision of the organization. *Potential* is best determined by referring to the evidence of what will work based on established metrics. *Capacity* is inherent in the work of the cross-functional teams and established or new networks. *Impact* is inherent in improving the competence of the organization and meeting public values to improve trust. In fact, the OECD cites “agility and improving” as “optimizing” factors in promoting innovations.⁵⁷

The IBM Center has a long history of reports focused on innovation.

Figure 13: IBM Center Reports on Innovation

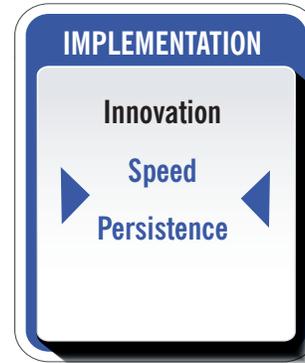


56. <https://oecd-opsi.org/publications/innovative-capacity-framework/>.

57. <https://oecd-opsi.org/publications/innovative-capacity-framework/>.

Speed

Speed is seen in the agile sprint described by Google Ventures: “The sprint is a five-day process for answering critical business questions through design, prototyping, and testing ideas with customers.”⁵⁸ In his book, Jake Knapp wrote, “It can replace the old office defaults with a smarter, more respectful, and more effective way of solving problems that brings out the best contributions of everyone on the team—and helps you spend your time on work that really matters.”



Persistence

Franklin Roosevelt gave perhaps the most perceptive summary of the need for persistence: “It is common sense to take a method and try it. If it fails, admit it frankly and try another. But above all, try something.”

Persistence is central to agile government because, as stated in the principles, achieving successful outcomes requires continual experimentation, evaluation, and improvement. In her IBM Center Report, *Accelerating Government Innovation with Leadership and Stimulus Funding*,⁵⁹ Jane Wiseman gives a set of action steps for managers and an illuminating case study of persistence. The steps of creating diverse teams, encouraging input from a wide swath, emphasizing persistence, and using project management approaches such as agile are all part of the integrated framework.

Innovation Acceleration Action Steps for Managers

- **Create teams with diverse perspectives** so a wide range of ideas are considered and many voices are heard. The larger the volume of ideas, the greater the chances of good ideas coming forward.
- **Innovate by combining and borrowing** from other disciplines, with an eye toward adjacent fields as well as those that are completely unrelated, where fresh ideas can address entrenched challenges.
- **Foster outsider thinking** and encourage input from a wide swath of the public, particularly historically excluded populations. Fresh perspectives and naive questions can generate productive ideas.
- **Allow for wonder, and wander** because in this state of relaxation, ideas can germinate in ways that can sometimes elude a focused brain.
- **Plan for persistence** because it often takes repeated trial and error to make an innovation successful. Iterative learning and patience are keys to success.
- **Continuously challenge the status quo** because relying on routine processes produces only routine results, and dynamic tension can hasten problem-solving.
- **Invest in project management skills** because otherwise even the best idea may stagnate or become stalled, as the skills required to develop an idea are not always the same ones that persistently push implementation forward to completion.

Source: Jane Wiseman, “Accelerating Government Innovation with Leadership and Stimulus Funding”

58. <http://www.gv.com/sprint/>.

59. <https://www.businessofgovernment.org/report/accelerating-government-innovation-leadership-and-stimulus-funding>.

The case for persistence is well documented in the “Air Louisville” case summarized below.⁶⁰

AIR Louisville—A Case Study in Persistence

Many major breakthroughs face obstacles or setbacks along the way. One of the landmark local government innovations of the past decade, a project called AIR Louisville, faced many setbacks. This program helped participants with asthma reduce their need for rescue inhaler use by 82 percent and doubled their symptom-free days. Geotagged asthma inhalers captured data on where and when the air quality triggered the need for medicine. This data provided focus for the city to devise ways to ameliorate those hotspots of poor air quality. This groundbreaking success only came about due to persistence after facing multiple dead ends. The original plan was to leverage existing air quality initiatives in the city.

Unfortunately, it turned out that each measured different air quality issues—and none of them measured the health events that individuals suffered because of poor air quality. Ted Smith, the city’s first Innovation Team director and the leader of the project, had an idea that air quality was not a binary outcome of good or bad, but rather that there were pockets of air quality at various levels across the city. After several false starts an undaunted Smith continued to iterate. He recruited residents to ask them how frequently they were using their asthma inhaler via passive data collection—a sensor attached to the inhaler recorded date and time and GPS coordinates each time the asthma inhalers were activated.

With philanthropic funding to scale from a small pilot to citywide, Smith was able to recruit enough of the population (1,400 participants) to get granular level data across the city. With this data the team mapped hotspots of poor air quality and could take action to change the microclimates. For example, one of the hotspots was near the airport, and that area now has 10,000 trees and bushes to help clean the air. Success came after repeatedly trying until the right solution was found, and not giving up at the various roadblocks. Reflecting on this, Grace Simrall, the city’s chief of Civic Innovation and Technology, noted, “If we pretend we don’t fail, we’ll only make things worse.”

Agile Regulation

In July 2022, the Academy and the Project Management Institute, with support from the Samuel Freeman Charitable Trust, published the report, “Agile Regulation: Gateway to the Future.”⁶¹ This report concluded that:

Social, cultural, economic, environmental, and technological developments are putting pressure on federal regulatory agencies as they seek to protect the public, advance social equity, protect the environment, and foster an innovative market economy. New complex technologies—drones, self-driving cars, genomics—are being developed at a rapid pace, and the public increasingly expects that federal agencies provide a user-friendly and responsive customer experience similar to leading private sector companies. To keep up with these demands, federal agencies can adopt agile practices to increase stakeholder satisfaction, allow for more iteration on outputs to learn lessons about what works best, empower staff members, and maximize team and network performance to meet critical public needs.

60. <https://airlouisville.com/results.html>.

61. <https://napawash.org/academy-studies/agile-regulation-framework>.

Further, they found:

[D]uring the COVID-19 pandemic, all federal agencies have gained considerable experience operating in a more agile way. For example, they have updated their modes of working, adopted new workforce models, developed new collaboration mechanisms, and modernized some regulatory guidance and requirements. Moving forward, we believe that federal agencies can leverage this experience by more systematically implementing agile tenets and practices as they serve the American public.

Table 1. Key Tenets of Agile Regulation

Category	Tenet
Public Need	1. Understand changing external conditions and evolving societal, economic, and environmental needs.
Regulatory Design	2. Think comprehensively about how to best meet the agency's regulatory goals. 3. Incorporate innovative methods that address economic, environmental, and societal needs. 4. Collaborate early and often during regulatory development.
Internal Processes	5. Construct small yet inclusive teams to manage the regulatory development process. 6. Make the agency's work and workflows visible as regulations are developed. 7. Automate processes and use modern technological tools. 8. Conduct parallel processing of activities.
Continuous Learning	9. Foster continuous learning about regulatory impacts and internal processes.

Key Tenets of Agile Regulation

As noted in the above table, agile regulation starts with a determination of what is needed to meet existing public needs, with public input on existing conditions and the overall regulatory environment. Comprehensive regulatory design includes the mission of the agency in meeting its regulatory goals. Collaboration is essential when an agency uses innovative methods to design regulations. Small inclusive teams can manage the regulatory process. The work of the agency should be transparent and allow continuous feedback from stakeholders. Execution should feature parallel processing to increase speed and employ all available technological tools. Finally, lessons learned should be incorporated into a cycle of revising regulations to meet evolving situations.

These tenets conform closely to the integrated framework and will supply needed new approaches to implementing regulatory reform.

Section Four: For the Future— Tools and Enablers



Several existing tools can enable the objectives of agile government, with three tools described below. Still, more research is needed on the role of tools and enablers that can assist with the implementation of agile government. During 2023, the AGC will convene a series of forums to explore the need for and potential sources of new tools and enablers.

Tools

This section briefly covers three tools: strategy mapping, human centered design, and strategic foresight. Future work will highlight the importance of each of these tools to the successful implementation of agile principles.

Strategy Mapping

This tool has been used for many years in the public and private sectors. As noted above, in a forthcoming IBM report, John Bryson provides new insights about “strategy mapping-at-scale,”⁶² which he defines as “a boundary-crossing process designed to create direction, alignment, and commitment among independent organizations *at the scale of the challenge or issue to be addressed.*” This recognizes that leadership needs to work in a networked fashion to accomplish agile transformation.

Bryson recognizes that:



Every community, region, and nation face boundary-crossing challenges, and so strategic leadership of collaborations, communities, and social movements is important and necessary. Challenges like the global COVID-19 pandemic, homelessness, and racial gaps in education are ones that can only be solved by multiple organizations working toward shared goals. When they are aligned and cooperating, multiple organizations can transform systems.

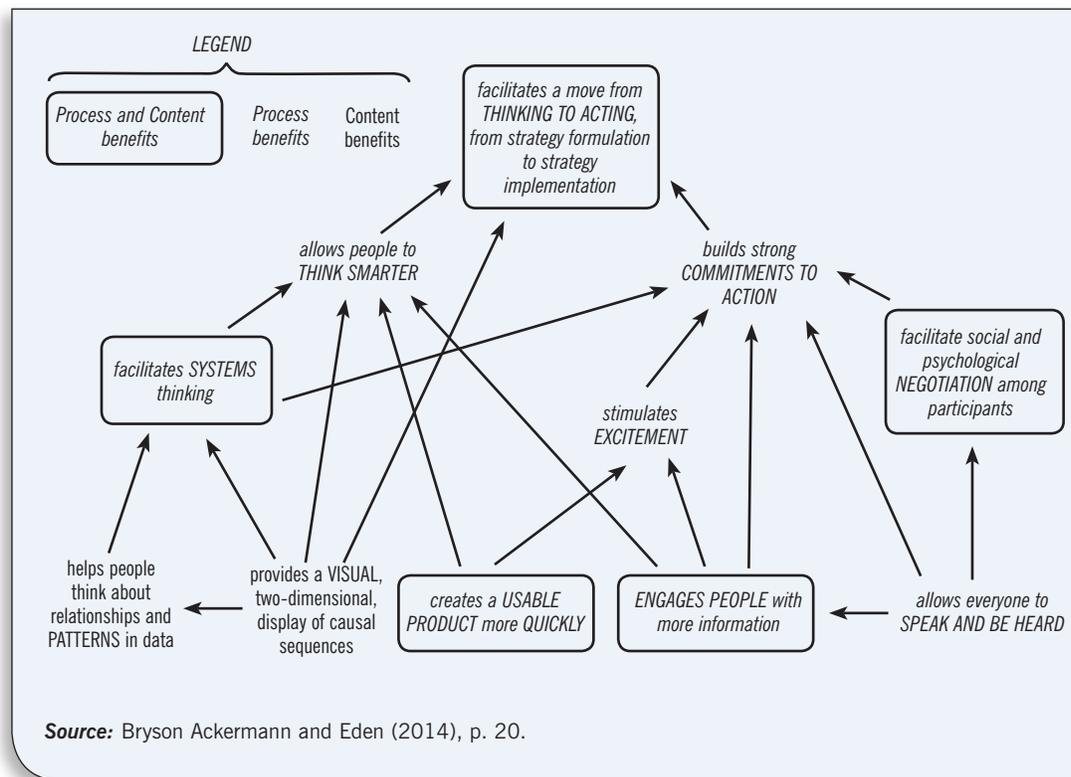


This is the heart of agile government. In fact, Bryson coined the term “integrated framework,” now the primary focus of this report.

The figure on the next page shows a causal map of the process and benefits of strategy mapping, and illuminates how mapping assists in involving customers and the public in an organized manner. The case studies in Bryson’s report illustrate the development and use of evidence and metrics as elements of strategy mapping.

62. See also: John M. Bryson, Fran Ackermann, Colin Eden, and Charles B. Finn (2004) *Visible Thinking*, Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons; and John M. Bryson, Fran Ackermann, and Colin Eden (2014) *Visual Strategy*, Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons.

Figure 14. Process and Content Benefits of Strategy Mapping



Human Centered Design

The second group of elements in the integrated framework is “Organization.” This begins with a focus on customers and the public. The agile government principle related to this is: “Customers should be intimately involved in design and redesign of the program and a focus on the customer journey should be ingrained in the culture of the organization.”

Professor Ines Mergel has made this principle central to her new report, “Human-Centricity in Agile Governance.” She incorporates the agile government principle articulated above and wrote:

“This report provides an evidence-based overview of the core concept of user-centricity, and outlines how all members of digital transformation projects can move toward a user-centric mindset by applying the methods and tools of design thinking and agile governance.”⁶³

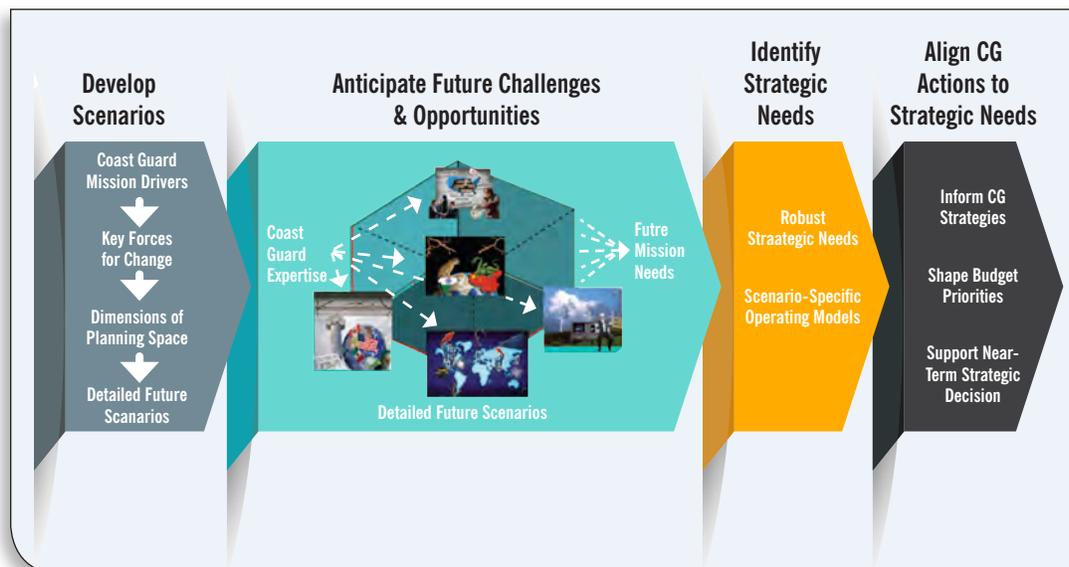
63. <https://www.businessofgovernment.org/report/human-centricity-digital-delivery-enhancing-agile-governance>.

The differences and similarities between agile governance and agile government have been reviewed by the AGC previously.⁶⁴

Strategic Foresight⁶⁵

The graphic below depicts the Coast Guard's process of strategic foresight. The process, called Project Evergreen, was accelerated after 9/11 to provide overall guidance to the execution of the Coast Guard's mission by using multiple scenarios to develop their strategic approach. This process broke with the short-term thinking that has guided many governments, and provides a successful example of strategic foresight. In developing and executing their strategy, leaders can involve customers and the public in "anticipating future challenges and opportunities" which drive the strategic needs of the organization.

Figure 15: Project Evergreen



Enablers

The three enablers are agile policy development, technology and communication, and agile learning. Each of these need further exploration and connection to agile government.

Agile Policy Development

Professor Larry A. Rosenthal, Goldman School of Public Policy, UC Berkeley, has supplied a thoughtful approach to agile policymaking which will serve as background for an Agile Government Network forum on the topic in 2023. Professor Rosenthal states:

64. <https://napawash.org/grand-challenges-blog/agile-government-and-agile-governance-we-need-both>.

65. <https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?tab=rm&ogbl#search/eric.popiel%40opm.gov/>

WhctKKXgpNzClKSmmmRKFvhRQBMvNRwbsbVChkCLhhWQVzdPKhjzSdBXbXpCCFhtFglwB?projector=1&messagePartId=0.4.

Like the practice of traditional policy analysis (“TPA”) ⁶⁶ that helps guide lawmakers’ judgment, agile policymaking would aim to be more objective, and evidenced-based, than politics usually is. Like TPA, agile policymaking might couple 1) applied social inquiry and leadership insight with 2) a desire to distinguish among more and less preferable proposals for collective action. And like TPA, agile policymaking would be undertaken by dedicated teams of hard-thinkers, rigorously pursuing problem solving in the public interest. Unlike TPA, however, agile policymaking ought to reorient conventional lawmaking and governance. ⁶⁷

The themes investigated during this Forum should produce a report similar to the report “Agile Regulation: Gateway to the Future,” released by the Agile Government Center in June 2022.

Technology and Communication

Recent advances in information and communication technology have greatly advanced the ability to improve customer experience, connect teams and networks, and speed innovation. Looking forward, advances such as artificial intelligence processes and the adoption of new communications tools can be built into agile government.

The IBM Center has developed a series of reports in this area that will be especially useful, some of which are shown below. Continued research will be done to determine how to use these enablers.



Agile Learning

In order for agile principles and the integrated framework to be understood and adopted, it will be necessary to adopt multiple approaches to agile learning. The Agile Government Center has developed an ongoing relationship with training providers such as the Federal Executive Institute, the Project Management Institute, and the General Services Administration to begin creating approaches and materials for agile learning. Expanding these relationships and formally examining a set of curricula for agile learning will be a priority for the Agile Government Center for 2023.

66. See, e.g., Bardach, E. & E. Patashnik, *A Practical Guide for Policy Analysis: The Eightfold Path to More Effective Problem Solving* (Sage/CQ Press, 2019 [6th ed.]); Meltzer, R. & A. Schwartz, *Policy Analysis as Problem Solving* (Routledge, 2018); Patton, C., D. Sawicki & J. Clark, *Basic Methods of Policy Analysis and Planning* (Pearson, 2013); and Rivlin, A., *Systematic Thinking for Social Action* (Brookings, 2015).

67. <https://napawash.org/the-agile-government-center/overview/content-from-our-partners>.

In her IBM Center Report, *“Agile Government: the Role of Public Affairs Education,”* Angela Evans, IBM Center Visiting Fellow and Dean Emeritus of the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs, presents a compelling case for the need to rethink how public affairs education both a pre-service and in service needs to change to reflect a more agile approach to government. This Report will continue to provide guidance as the Agile Government Center works to develop an overall curriculum on Agile Government that can be delivered across multi-platforms.

CONCLUSION

The future of agile government depends on the thoughtful development of an agile mindset among leaders at all levels. The focus on transformation to improve competence while respecting public values should improve trust. The framework provides a guide to transformation and future research into the role of tools and enablers. The Agile Government Center looks forward to continuing this research and will also continue to provide advice and counsel to those implementing the agile government principles.

APPENDIX: A SHORT HISTORY OF AGILE GOVERNMENT

The progression of “agile” started with a focus on failures in software development and has moved to examining entire organizations and their ability to transform. This is true in all sectors, with this report documenting what governments must do to transform the way they serve customers and provide value to the public.

In the private sector, agile began with the Agile Manifesto, which was promulgated in 2001 by a group of software developers on a ski holiday. The principles quickly grew in acceptance in government as well and by 2020, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) produced the “Agile Assessment Guide” focused on information technology stating: “The *Agile Assessment Guide* discusses best practices that can be used across the federal government for agile adoption, execution, and program monitoring and control. Use of these best practices should enable government programs to better transition to and manage their agile programs.”⁶⁸ This signaled to the federal IT and broader management community that agile software development was the standard by which GAO would judge success.

OECD did pioneering work in the broader application of agile to government in its 2015 report, “Achieving Public Sector Agility at Times of Fiscal Consolidation.”⁶⁹ Led by Stéphane Jacobzone, this report highlighted the need for governments to think differently about their strategic approach to providing a rapid response to emerging issues and dealing with “wicked problems.” While the analysis in this OECD paper is rooted in dealing with financial emergencies, its scope can be applied in broader contexts.

Author Stephen Denning documented the ability of “agile laws” to transform organizations in his seminal work, *The Age of Agile: How Smart Companies Are Transforming How Work Gets Done*. Denning identifies the laws of the customer, the network, and small team as essential to organizational transformation.

All of these works were prologue for the initial set of agile government principles presented in November 2020 and later revised. These principles reflected the underlying purpose of agile government to improve competence by respecting public values in developing and implementing policies, regulations, and programs at all levels of government.

In 2020, the Agile Government Center published two reports. The first, entitled *The Road to Agile Government: Driving Change to Achieve Success*, was done in conjunction with the IBM Center for the Business of Government.⁷⁰

The second report “Building an Agile Federal Government”⁷¹ was sponsored by The Samuel Freeman Trust and done in conjunction with the Project Management Institute. This report was cited in *Forbes Magazine* as “For those following trends in project management at the federal level, this growing interest might not be particularly surprising. The Biden administration report actually references a December 2020 report from the National Academy of Public

68. <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-20-590g>.

69. https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/governance/achieving-public-sector-agility-at-times-of-fiscal-consolidation_9789264206267-en#.

70. <https://www.businessofgovernment.org/report/road-agile-government-driving-change-achieve-success>.

71. <https://napawash.org/academy-studies/increasing-the-agility-of-the-federal-government>.

Administration and the Project Management Institute. . . . As an aside, this indicates the persuasiveness of policy documents in gaining political buy-in and support for federal workplace initiatives.”⁷²

In addition to research and policy papers, the Agile Government Center has developed learning programs advancing these principles and how to operationalize them. Building on these foundations and keen to start building a more agile mindset in practice, the Center presented its first course for federal executives in partnership with the Federal Executive Institute focusing on agile leadership in August 2021, with the second course in the series, focused on the *customer experience*, following a year later.

Much of the recent work of the AGC has centered around the Integrated Agile Framework for Action. In July, the report “Agile Regulation: Gateway to the Future” was released. This report was also sponsored by the Samuel Freeman Trust and done in conjunction with the Project Management Institute.⁷³

Currently, the AGC is working with the White House Leadership Development program to develop a master class for their alumni that focuses on how agile principles can be used to meet the challenges facing government. Two of these challenges—Modernizing Delivery of Social Services and Preparing Governments for Future Shocks Emergency Preparedness and Response⁷⁴—have a direct relationship with the AGC and will feature use of the Integrated Agile Framework for Action presented in Section Three. The subsequent sections of this report highlight how each of the elements of the framework and this report will be used as a guide for future work of the Center.

In addition to the work undertaken in the U.S., there is significant work continuing around the world in the area of agile government. Significant among these is publication of *Agile Government: Emerging Perspectives in Public Management* by the Mohammed Bin Rashid School of Government.⁷⁵ The Lead author and editor, Melodena Stephens, has shared her insights with the author and helped shape this report. NAPA Fellow Ines Mergel, professor at the University of Konstanz, summarized the importance of the book in an advance review: “It clarifies misunderstandings of what agile is and helps practitioners along the long path to transforming their organizations to respond quickly to changing needs of the societies they serve.” This is true regardless of the overarching form of government, either democratic or otherwise.

Mergel herself has just published the report, “Human-Centricity in Digital Delivery: Enhancing Agile Governance,” which provides excellent guidance for involving customers and the public in the design and implementation of policies.

72. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbestechcouncil/2022/08/31/what-agile-thinking-in-government-means-for-business/?sh=22689839ff21>.

73. <https://napawash.org/academy-studies/agile-regulation-framework>, <https://napawash.org/podcasts/agile-regulation-gateway-to-the-future-with-michael-fitzpatrick>.

74. As part of a joint NAPA/IBM Center for the Business of Government project.

75. Stephens, Melodena, Raed Amamich, and Fadi Salem (ed.), *Agile Government: Emerging Perspectives in Public Management*, 2022,. Scientific Publishing: Singapore.

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At the state and local levels, he was a special assistant to the Governor of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and director of finance for the City of Philadelphia. In the private sector, he was a managing director at Merrill Lynch Capital Markets and the founder and president of Public Financial Management, the nation's largest independent financial advisor to government.

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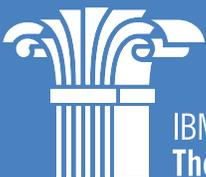
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