



A CENTER FOR DIGITAL GOVERNMENT RESEARCH REPORT | ZOOM

# Community Engagement: Government Experiences with a Personal Touch

# Introduction

The Center for Digital Government (CDG) recently conducted a national survey of constituents about their contact experiences with state and local government. The goal was to gain insight into their contact preferences, challenges and comfort with newer technologies.

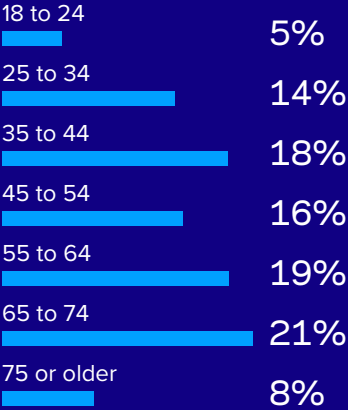
While most constituents are satisfied with their experiences, their openness to artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning (ML), virtual assistants and chatbots should encourage organizations to use these tools in their contact centers, email and other communication channels. Doing so would create better experiences while addressing staff shortages and the need for equitable access.



## About the Survey

The Center for Digital Government surveyed 2,009 constituents from across the United States in January 2024.

### Respondents' ages



Note: These numbers do not add up to 100% due to rounding.

# Key Findings

## Phone and email preferences highlight the need for omnichannel communications.

By far, the most preferred contact methods across all ages in the survey were phone (37%) and email (23%), followed by in person (13%) and online portal (12%).

People still want some engagement with another human. The challenge for state and local governments is to replicate that type of experience at scale despite staffing shortages, increased workloads and urgent constituent needs.

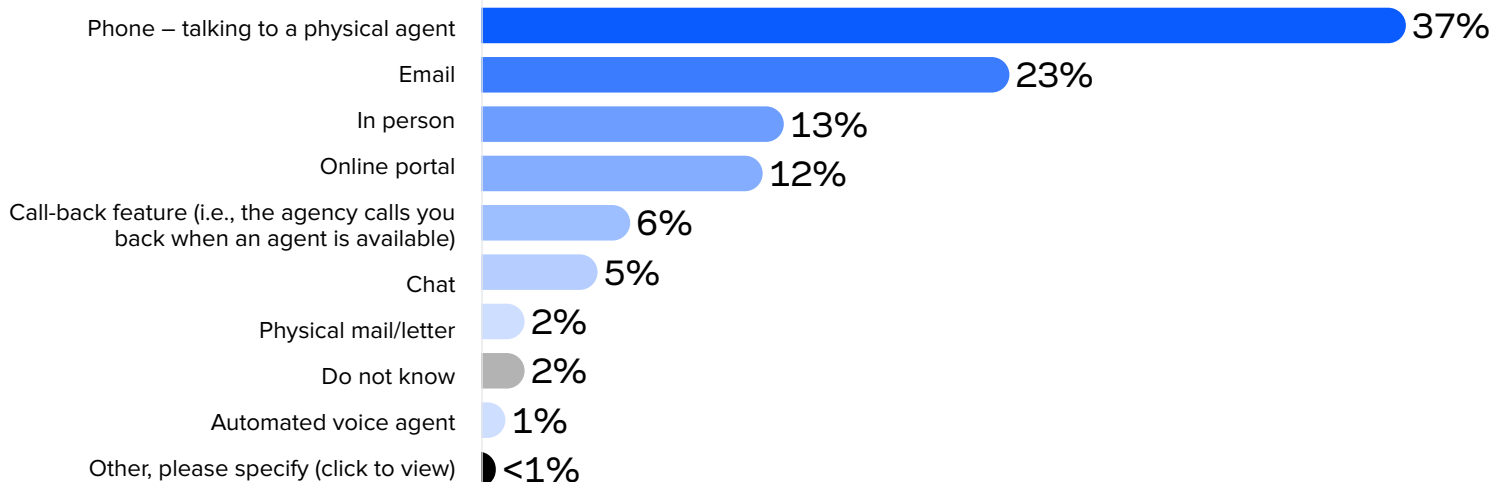
**Videoconferencing** is essential where in-person contact is impossible or inconvenient and the interaction requires multiple parties, nuanced communication or human connection — for example, in construction permit meetings, court hearings or family visits for incarcerated individuals. With features for document presentation, file transfer and live transcription, advanced video collaboration tools can increase attendance, improve equity, and enable staff and constituents to engage productively from anywhere.

**Omnichannel communications** allow organizations to flexibly communicate with constituents based on their preferences and needs.

For example, someone who wants to enroll in a social services program may start by visiting a website on a phone or computer. If they have questions, they can send an email or use a text chat. If needed, they can move to a phone call or videoconference. Alternatively, a constituent may start with a phone call and use other channels to complete the enrollment.

An omnichannel communications platform lets contact centers bring together phone, video, email, website and SMS communications and provides tools to simplify, personalize and enhance the user experience.

## What is your preferred method to contact a state, city and/or county agency? Select only one.\*



## Constituents aged 35-44 are the most active users of tools and services. Catering to their needs doesn't have to come at the expense of other groups.

Constituents aged 35-44 and constituents aged 65-74 were most likely to reach out to government in the past three years. When asked about their communication methods, the 35-44 group made up the largest share in every category with the exception of “in-person,” where the 65-74 group made up a slightly larger share.

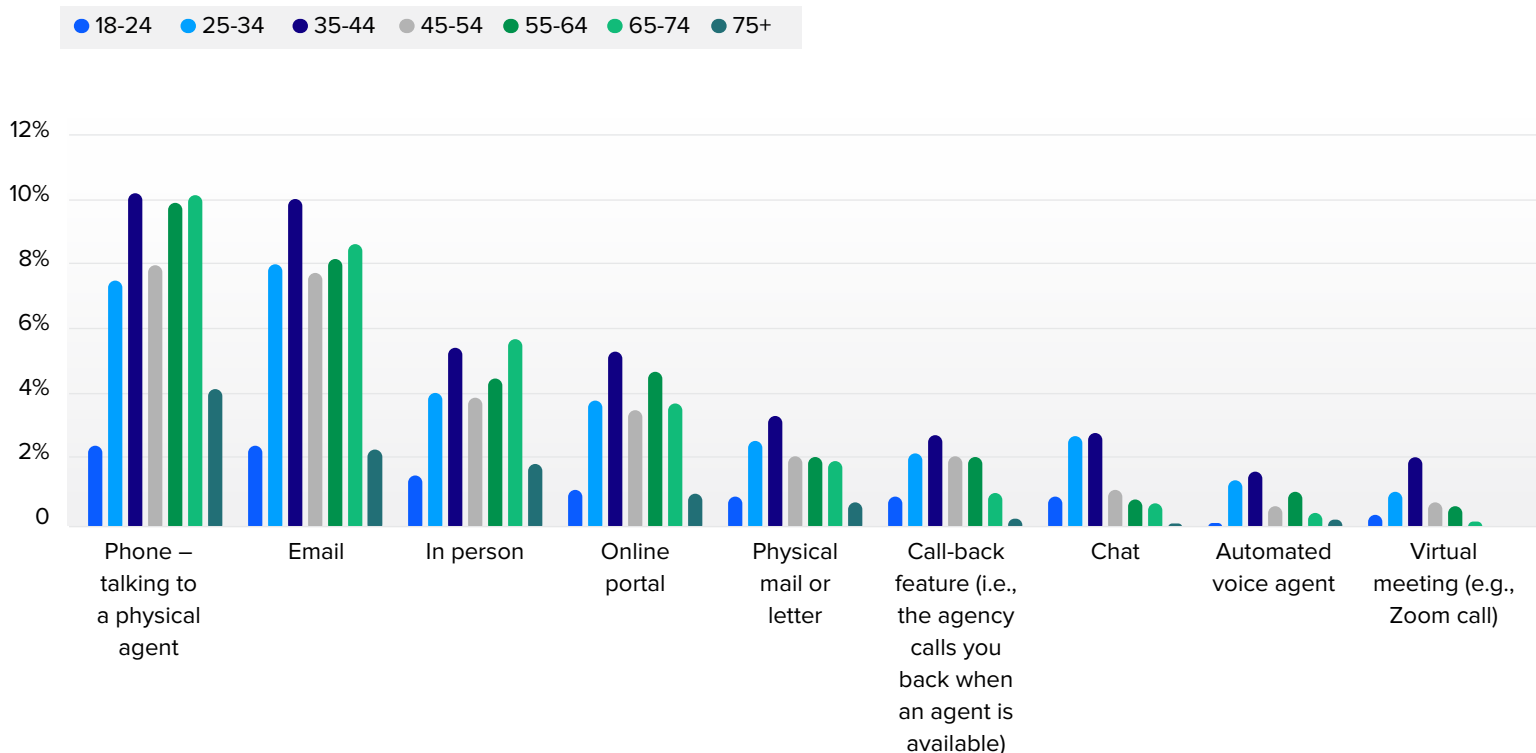
The 35-44 group also made up the predominant share in every category of reasons for reaching out to government (see page 5) — despite being the third smallest group out of seven age groups represented in the survey.

One explanation for these patterns is that people in this demographic may have more experience with a range of communication technologies. In addition, they have multiple responsibilities that require government engagement — from registering vehicles, paying taxes and handling business licensing to planning for retirement and obtaining services for their children and aging parents.

Depending on your organization's mission, you may want to take these patterns into account as you plan hours of operation, staff skillsets, styles of communication, and use of tools such as chatbots and virtual assistants. Identifying which services and communication mediums are used most frequently — and by whom — allows you to allocate resources appropriately, efficiently serve as many people as possible and provide the best experience for every demographic.

At the same time, **government services must be accessible to everyone who needs them.** About 25% of adults in the United States have some form of cognitive or physical disability.<sup>1</sup> Americans with disabilities also have lower rates of adoption for desktop or laptop computers and smartphones than those without a disability.<sup>2</sup>

### What method(s) have you used to contact a state, city and/or county government agency within the last three years? Please select all that apply.





Did you reach out to your state, city and/or county government for any of the following reasons in the past three years?\*

● 18-24 ● 25-34 ● 35-44 ● 45-54 ● 55-64 ● 65-74 ● 75+

Questions about motor vehicle registration or licensing requirements



Questions about taxes



Questions about voting and/or elections



Enroll in health and/or social service programs



Report 311 requests (e.g., road repairs, noise complaints, etc.)



Address issues or concerns with a health or social program you are enrolled in



File and/or check status on permits



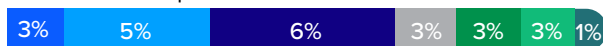
Report or inquire about environmental concerns



Questions about business licensing and/or registration



Questions about pension and/or retirement fund



\*Results will not add up to 100% because some respondents did not indicate they reached out to government within three years for a particular reason.

# The majority of people are satisfied overall with their government interactions. Now it's time to delight them.

Almost two-thirds of respondents said they were satisfied with the quality of service they received. Respondents who did experience challenges cited long wait times (25%) and having to explain things multiple times (22%) as top frustrations (see page 7).

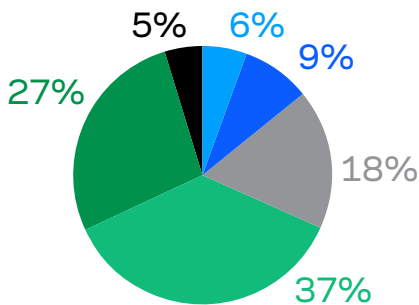
Still, with 33% of constituents either unenthusiastic or dissatisfied, agencies need to evolve their strategies to meet or even exceed expectations.

For example, agencies can use AI tools to offer constituents personalized information while they are on hold, like informing them of upcoming deadlines or service offerings they may not be aware of.

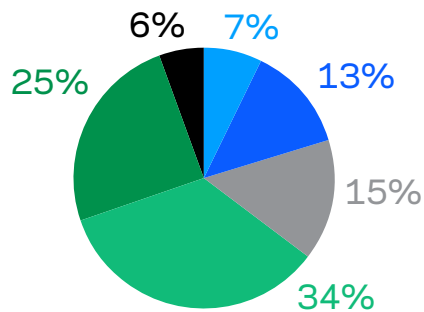
To ensure continuous improvement, identify key performance indicators and use tools to **measure satisfaction** and agent productivity. It's also important to monitor activity in real time for your queues, agents, interactions, active calls, duration and average hold time.

## Considering your most recent interaction with a state, city and/or county government, please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement(s).

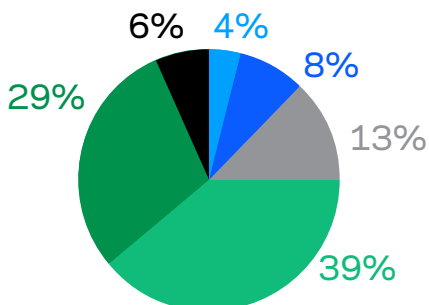
■ Strongly Disagree  
 ■ Disagree  
 ■ Neither  
 ■ Agree  
 ■ Strongly Agree  
 ■ No Recent Interaction



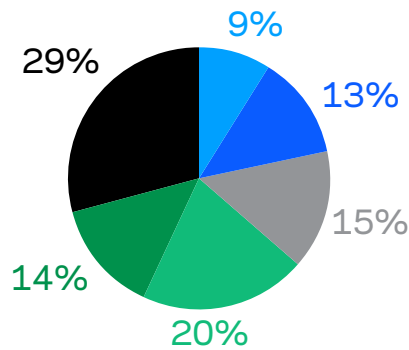
I was satisfied with the quality of service I received.



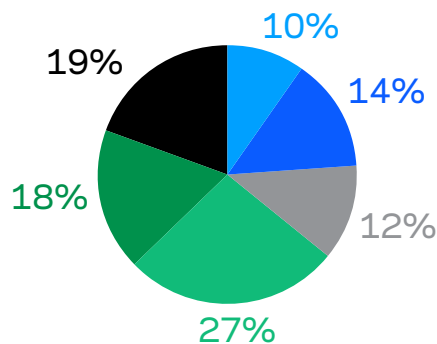
My questions or concerns were resolved during my first interaction.



I was able to quickly find the phone number, address, online information, etc. that I needed.



When I contacted my state, local or education agency by online portal or chat, my hold time for a chat agent was less than 2 minutes.



When I contacted my state, local or education agency by phone, I waited on hold less than 5 minutes.



Which of the following challenges have you experienced in your interactions with government in the past three years? Please select your top three challenges.

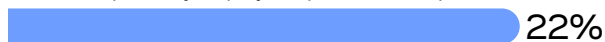
I have not experienced any challenges in the past three years.



I had to wait a long time before speaking or chatting with someone.



I had to explain my inquiry or question multiple times as I was transferred to different agents.



The only contact methods available were online, chat or email.



The process was complex and difficult; I had trouble understanding how or where to go to contact my state, city, and/or county government.



The operating hours did not fit my schedule; I was unable to call or visit the agency due to work schedules, travel or other commitments.



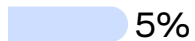
The only contact method available was via phone.



The only contact method was in person, with no options for phone, online or chat.



There was no agent available who spoke my native language (i.e., only English-speaking agents available).



Other



# Constituents show a strong level of comfort with virtual assistants and chatbots. These tools can help understaffed agencies.

Nearly half of constituents said they were comfortable or very comfortable using chatbots and virtual assistants.

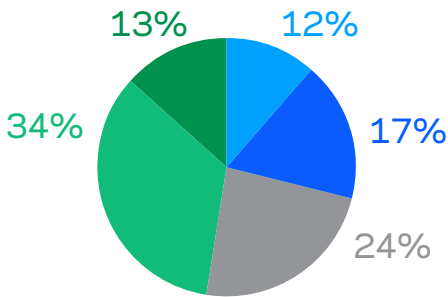
Text-based chats, live agent chatbots and virtual assistants can often **resolve frequently asked questions and common issues quickly, accurately and at scale.** For example, the top three reasons that constituents reach out to government involve motor vehicle registration or licensing requirements, taxes, and voting and/or elections (see page 5). Using chats and virtual

assistants could reduce or even eliminate the need for agent involvement in these areas.

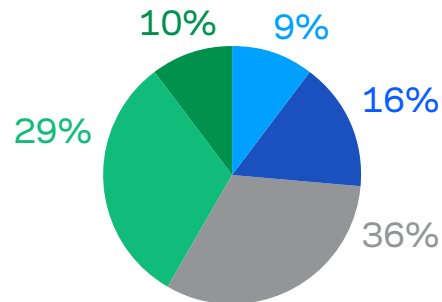
Where tools can't completely resolve issues, they can at least handle early stages of customer contact. Doing so cuts wait times and reduces staff stress. It frees up workers to address more complex inquiries and processes such as enrollment in a health and human services program or approval rounds for neighborhood development plans.

Please indicate your level of comfort using each of the following tools when contacting a state, city and/or county government.

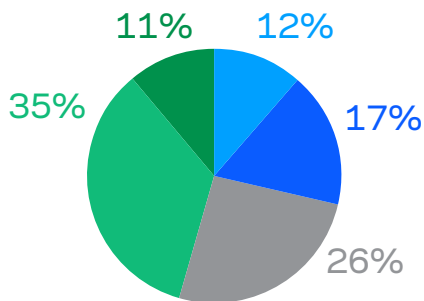
■ Very Uncomfortable 
 ■ Uncomfortable 
 ■ Neither 
 ■ Comfortable 
 ■ Very Comfortable



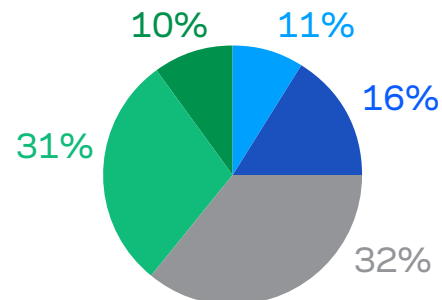
Chatbots that answer questions quickly without speaking to an agent



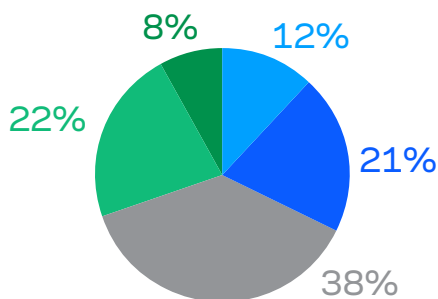
Predictive analytics that assist agents in identifying solutions more quickly



Virtual agents/assistants that provide instant answers using AI



Voice biometrics that speed up identity verification



Augmented reality/visual support options



# Recommendations

## 1 Expand access and meet unique needs.

An omnichannel solution lets everyone access services via their preferred channels. Look for an omnichannel platform that incorporates AI, ML, natural language processing and other tools that allow you to personalize experiences and accommodate user preferences, abilities and needs.

For example, you can easily integrate with closed-captioning software, customize the font size of chat and closed-captioning text, and deliver services across a range of channels in multiple languages. You can also customize processes and messages for unique segments of the population.

## 2 Enhance the user experience.

An AI- and ML-driven omnichannel platform elevates the constituent experience by ramping up efficiency. It reduces wait times and call volume by enabling intelligent self-services and using advanced language processing capabilities to determine a constituent's needs and route them accordingly. Constituents relay information once, and their chat history and documents are forwarded so staff can efficiently take over from chatbots or virtual assistants. Service representatives and case managers can use team chat features to easily collaborate with back-office experts during constituent engagements. Issues can often be resolved in a single contact.

## 3 Tap into live chat, chatbots and virtual assistants.

These tools allow staff to spend their time engaging more meaningfully and productively with people who need more attention or personalized help. Besides improving outcomes for constituents, such experiences may mean the difference between job satisfaction and burnout — especially in high-touch, high-stress services such as benefits enrollment, healthcare, public safety and criminal justice.



1. <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/infographic-disability-impacts-all.html>
2. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/07/24/8-facts-about-americans-with-disabilities/>

*This piece was written and produced by the Center for Digital Government Content Studio, with information and input from Zoom.*



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