Tech Executive Leadership Initiative

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THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

City Relationship Manager Portal

Enabling a digital interagency small business directory

BACKGROUND

As part of their 10-week technology policy training program, the leaders of the Tech Executive Leadership Initiative spent 6 weeks working on real-world government challenges. Three teams tackled how cities can deliver better relief to small businesses that have suffered during COVID-19, tailoring their recommendations to a fictional "City of Foggyton." Each team narrowed its focus to a specific part of the problem, conducted research, and developed solutions. Below is an overview of one team's solution: a centralized data-enabled form for small business relief.

FOCUS

Many Foggyton agencies are involved in issuing operating permits, awarding grants, and otherwise delivering support for small businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic. Currently, each agency requires its own paperwork and maintains a separate database. The process of applying for city relief is cumbersome, slow, and confusing, ultimately deterring small business owners from applying for the grants they need. Moreover, the city maintains 210 websites for its various services and resources. The websites do not interface with each other, forcing small businesses to spend time browsing different sites for the service they need. There is also no common data format among city agencies, making it difficult for agencies to combine and share information.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Foggyton should develop a City Relationship Manager (CRM): a technology platform to manage all of the city's interactions with small businesses and community-based organizations. The platform's structure should model existing Customer Relationship Manager software offered by Salesforce, Emgage, Accela, and others for the private sector. With a CRM, the city will be able to organize vital details about the businesses it serves, and have dedicated tabs for all the city's divisions.

For small businesses, this platform would appear as a single webpage where they can update critical information about themselves. When a business fills out a form for any city agency, their entry should be automatically updated in the city's central dataset.

For the city agencies, pre-built web interfaces should enable tasks like data collection via forms, data aggregation, and process automation. Leveraging templates will not only result in faster workflows but will also ensure that agencies are collecting information in a uniform way and with broader language accessibility. This would in turn lessen the burden on small businesses; if a business has already provided certain information to one agency, it will not have to duplicate that effort each time it engages with another agency.

Crucially, the city would need to enforce database management rules and set privacy controls to protect sensitive data. With appropriate controls and buy-in from city agencies, a centralized system can improve small business engagement with the city long beyond COVID-19.
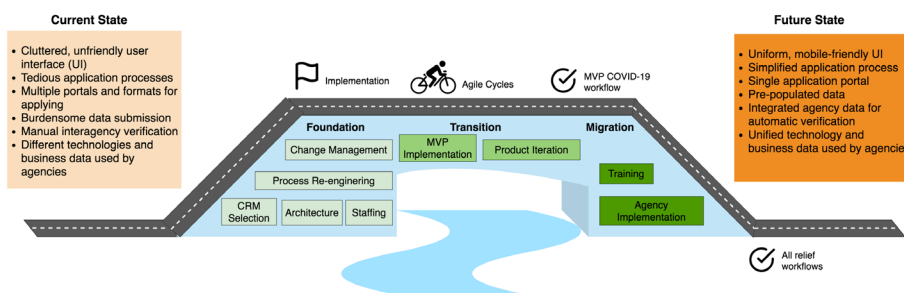
An overview of the multi-phase process to build and integrate the City Relationship Manager system