



**Connecticut
Department of Administrative Services
Bureau of Enterprise Systems and Technology
Digital Service**

Business.CT.gov

CATEGORY:

Digital Services - Government to Business

PROJECT INITIATION:

January 28, 2020

PROJECT END DATE:

April 30, 2021

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On July 27, 2020, Governor Ned Lamont announced a drastic change in how entrepreneurs could work with the State of Connecticut.

“(HARTFORD, CT) – Governor Ned Lamont today announced the launch of Business.CT.gov...The online service will make it easier to do business in the state, support small business owners as a partner in their success, and improve citizens’ interactions with state government.”

The welcome announcement was neither the beginning nor the end of the story. Let’s roll the clock back two years. State government had heard resident’s struggles with the State’s complicated, bureaucratic system loud and clear. To respond, in his 2019 State-of-the-State address, Governor Lamont declared he would invest in the “first all-digital government” with “an entry point to Connecticut through its digital front door, a one-stop-shop for everything” and a future of government services “online, not in line.”

Holding true to the vision, the Digital Services team within the Department of Administrative Services (DAS-BEST) began to develop the first phase of the Governor’s promise of an all-digital government, starting with Connecticut’s entrepreneurs.

Fast forward to April 2021. New entrepreneurs are able to access start-up business resources, connect with mentors, and generate a personalized “New Business Checklist” to self-guide through all steps in the business formation process. Current business owners can discover avenues for ongoing business support, find new talent, and request financial assistance. Finally, an additional set of COVID-19 related research ensures the tool provides resources for business owners affected by the pandemic.

Business.CT.gov speaks directly to five of NASCIO’s State CIO Top Ten Policy and Technology Priorities for 2021 (Digital Government/Digital Services: Budget, Cost Control, Fiscal Management; Data Management and Analytics; Consolidation/Optimization; and Identity and Access Management). The project is also tangentially related to three additional Priorities: Cybersecurity and Risk Management; Cloud Services; and Customer Relationship Management.

IDEA

Entrepreneurs

Before the launch of Business.CT.gov, new business owners were required to follow an unclear path to register and open their doors. We knew the journey was confusing and difficult but needed to further define the exact pain points before scoping a project. At the start, the Digital Services team took a research-driven, human-centered approach towards leveraging existing data to understand the true needs of Connecticut’s business community, develop user stories, establish success criteria, and design a solution.

Through in-person meetings and an online survey, the Digital Services team within the Department of Administrative Services Bureau of Enterprise Systems and Technology (DAS-BEST) learned business owners expected the State to tailor services and language to their needs, connect and partner proactively, and grow with businesses’ changing needs. Based on our initial research, the plan was scoped to provide current and potential business owners with full-service personalized guidance on planning, starting, and operating a business in the state of Connecticut.

State Agencies

Like many states, Connecticut's federated system of agencies often develop siloed digital products without the benefit of enterprise strategy, extensibility, or scalability. Research with agency staff was necessary to consolidate government touchpoints, insights, and requirements affecting entrepreneurs' navigation of the challenging business lifecycle.

To define the State needs and challenges, the Digital Services team interviewed agency employees and external partners offering business registration, permit renewals, and business support services. The interviews helped define agency goals and pain points, and further informed the solution requirements and helped drive the roadmap development. During the process, we learned the State's disparate support models increased single points of failure, inequity of service and content consumption, and help desk volume. The resulting conclusion led our team to prioritize the development of a single, seamless, digital solution integrating business start-up services across CT agencies.

Enterprise System

Transforming the State of Connecticut's short-term siloed transactions to a personalized long-term interactional relationship would represent a significant shift for both residents and state government. The disparate ecosystem of services continues to grow broader and more diverse, making it increasingly difficult to standardize the user experience, realize cost savings between projects, and provide a set of holistic services. Distilling our research into action, we set an overarching enterprise vision to consolidate Connecticut's traditional ecosystem of portals, content management systems, and analytic tools into a single low-code platform with enterprise tools for any integrating agencies.

This platform would provide a personalized and highly integrated experience across government services for a variety of user personas. Furthermore, the proactive and attentive experience would be designed to meet user need by consolidating scattered government services into user-focused service categories. Authenticated and non-authenticated experiences on the platform would provide customers a consistent, user-friendly, and modern experience when engaging with government services. Management of identities through the portal would give the State a clearer understanding of user-need through access to new and extensible sets of data analytics. Lastly, the extension of enterprise services across all agencies would also lower agency overhead, reduce help desk's burden, and open the door to substantial cost savings.

[Business.CT.gov](#) is the first service category built into the enterprise system and sets the stage for all future iterations and builds.

IMPLEMENTATION

Business.CT.gov's goal was to create sustainable, scalable, and flexible digital products enabling agencies to provide valuable information and services to their constituents through an intuitive and cohesive content and services ecosystem. The platform would be built to allow for low-code and common solutions that could be quickly implemented, reused, and expanded to meet agency and business needs. Once we established Business.CT.gov would focus on streamlining an entrepreneur's interaction with the State throughout the business lifecycle, we scoped and prepared for the project accordingly.

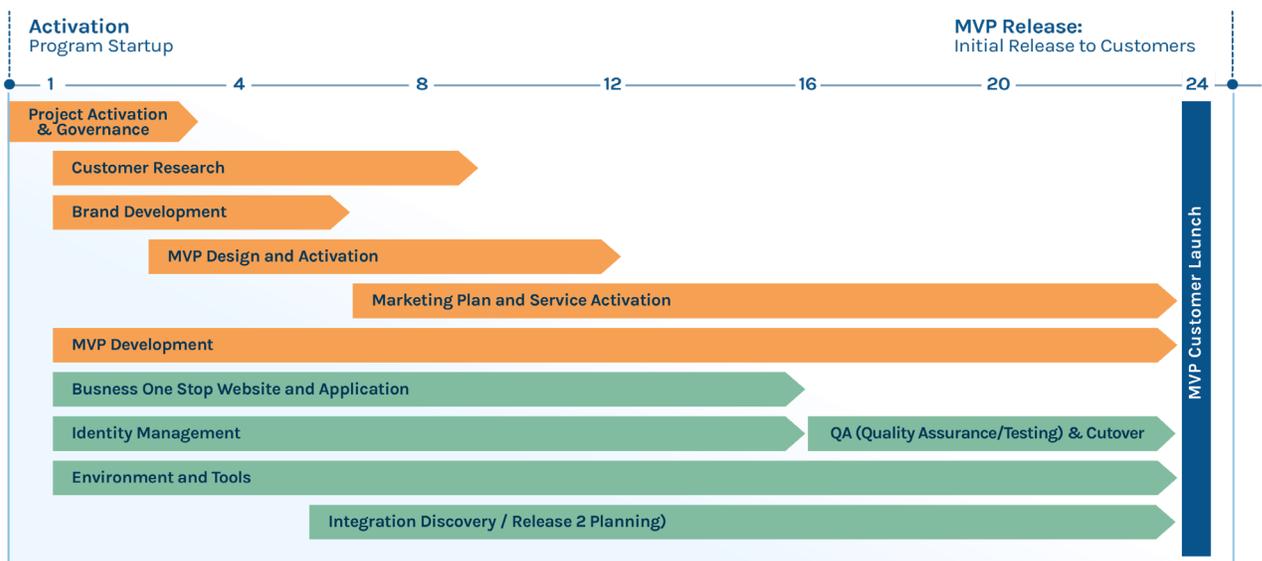
The success of the new Business.CT.gov portal would be measured by the value of the Business.CT.gov website to businesses and state employees. Key performance indicators included the customer's ease of doing business in Connecticut and user satisfaction with various aspects of the website, including accessibility and usability. Translating the voice of our users into the development of system components heavily contributed to scoping and resourcing the minimum viable product (MVP) and subsequent iterations.

Resourcing

This project leveraged Agile procurement and iterative project management principles, and the related contract introduced a more flexible procurement process to buying and managing technology and digital services. Over the course of the project, our team invested more than \$10,000,000 towards the research, design, and development of the enterprise Business.CT.gov, with additional funding for related agency projects and tools.

Collaboration

Business.CT.gov was built in collaboration with the DAS-BEST Digital Services team, multiple state agencies, three outside development vendors, and Connecticut's business community. Initially, five state agencies joined the project partnership, including the Secretary of the State (SOTS), Department of Consumer Protection (DCP), Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD), Department of Labor (DOL), and Department of Revenue Services (DRS) with more agencies to join as the tool was developed. Each partner agency invested staff time in each of the projects workstreams: project management, product, research, testing, design, branding, technology, security, and marketing.



Project Management & Product

Business.CT.gov was developed in a series of phases, with an initial MVP released in July 2020. The product workstream focused on identifying a limited set of features and solutions to be developed addressing the most common problem new businesses owners face when interacting with the State: identifying the correct process needed to get up and running. Six additional releases proceeded MVP, expanding the tool's functionality and usability with the addition of new technology and features.

Research & Testing

After week zero project planning activities concluded, the joint user research team interviewed various types of businesses across Connecticut to gauge businesses' prior experiences working with the State, pain points, and engagement preferences. State agencies and employees were surveyed to gain similar insights. The research workstream identified many useful business services, ranging from simple document management solutions to a robust business management environment to a legislative impact notification system. The research provided a foundation for the design, development, and implementation of Business.CT.gov. Furthermore, the same internal and external user communities were engaged during QA and testing of subsequent iterations of the product.

Design & Branding

The portal was structured to streamline and simplify user experience through the creation of a new service category website, complete with an extensible design system, reimagined process flow, new branding, and consistent user experience. The design workstream developed content and design standards to provide straightforward guidelines for producing high quality content on CT.gov. Following the launch of Business.CT.gov, the related standards and Style Guide were viewed as a success and are currently being used to modernize additional CT.gov web properties. Finally, the implementation of the Business.CT.gov chatbot *Robin* has delivered a personalized user experience by providing tailored answers addressing the entrepreneur's most common questions.

Tech & Security

The Business.CT.gov portal was architected to create a customer's shared identity across agencies, build connections across agency systems, and demonstrate the power of agency data to customers in one place. The portal laid the foundation for the future expansion of several enterprise technologies, including the use of Salesforce for transactional data, ForgeRock for managing the user's identity, MuleSoft to connect disparate systems, Sitecore for content and design management, and an Einstein chatbot for personalized user experience. The portal now provides a consistent user experience and customer-centric service design, as well as a low-code platform easily configurable by the State to avoid future laborious project changes.

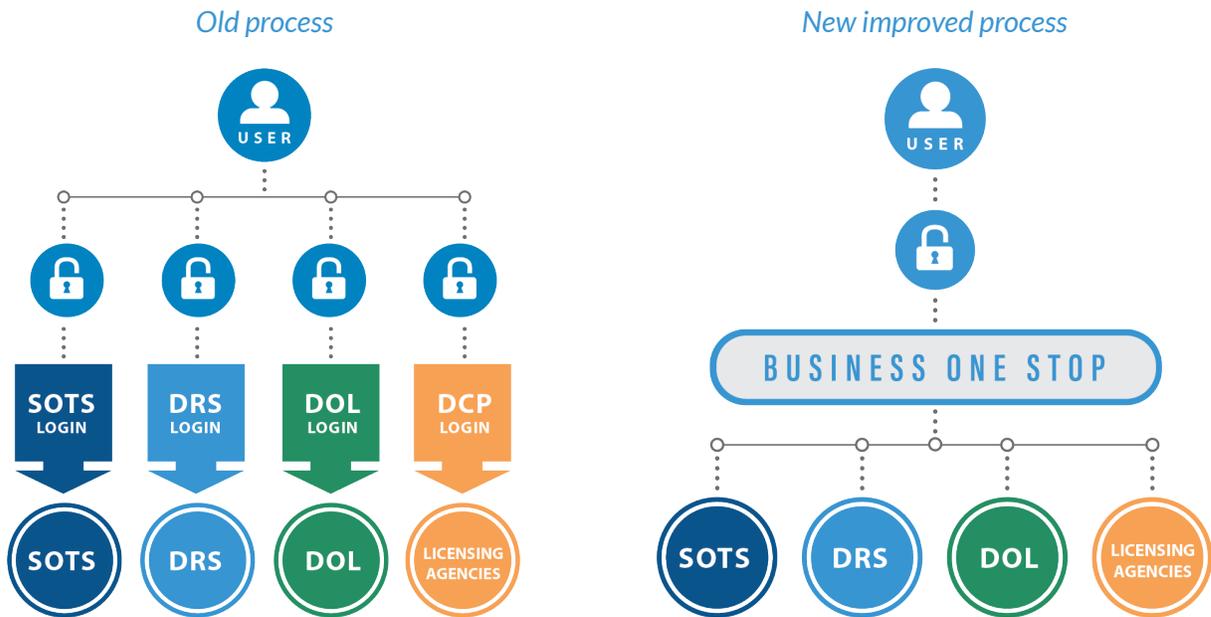
Marketing

The cross-agency collaboration not only improved the product's design and development, but also eventual uptake of the cross-agency tool. Furthermore, engaging all stakeholders early and often throughout the process helped bolster external system awareness and adoption. The communication teams from agency stakeholders leveraged existing outreach methods including email and social media to get the word out to target audiences during development efforts and after implementation.

Finally, Governor Ned Lamont held a press conference to announce the launch of the new one-stop-shop for businesses and has since also announced subsequent releases. This press conference gave a platform for new and existing business owners to share challenges working with the State as well as their first impressions of the new portal. The reviews were strongly positive and have set the tone for additional marketing with the State of Connecticut's business community.

IMPACT

Business.CT.gov was created to better serve the State of Connecticut's business community and has provided a one-stop-shop useful to a range of business owners. Prior to Business.CT.gov, starting a business in Connecticut was confusing and burdensome. Businesses had to navigate the websites of up to 23 State agencies to determine the process of obtaining operational permits, navigate labor laws, and pay requisite fees. Once the entrepreneur determined which services were applicable to their business, the diverse user experience and log-in experiences between agency services often discouraged or even halted advancement through the process.



Today, Business.CT.gov offers businesses leaders a centralized location to get all the information needed to manage their business by integrating services across Connecticut agencies, making for a more seamless experience end-to-end. In a future iteration, Business.CT.gov will allow entrepreneurs to fully register and manage a business completely online in a seamless and modern eCommerce flow.

Business.CT.gov Service Category: By the Numbers*	
2,500+	Businesses registered after using Business.CT.gov
13%	% of total new registered businesses that started at Business.CT.gov
5,500	Total # of new business checklists
15,000	Estimated # hours saved by new business owners through use of Business.CT.gov
+77%	Business.CT.gov performance in total new users vs. national benchmark for small business sites
#1	Average position on Google search results page for Business.CT.gov for terms "Business in CT", "Connecticut business", and "CT businesses"
3 - 4	Current average business help desk minutes-per-call, improved by business portal
4	Number of agencies claiming Business.CT.gov has a positive impact on their support teams
78%	% of business owners surveyed who claimed business portal was a "satisfying experience"
\$875,000	Estimated financial impact / cost avoidance on CT entrepreneurs' time

*07/20 to 12/20 analytics

Since launch, Business.CT.gov has had a real impact on business owners, with 78% of tested individuals indicating the website was useful and user-friendly. The business checklist has become a favorite feature, as a powerful, customized checklist guides users through starting a new business. Additionally, Business.CT.gov offers the following:

- **Chatbot:** A self-service tool to match customers with simple, direct answers and guidance on business-related questions.
- **Resource Center:** A customizable page centralizing 170 different programs for businesses.
- **Business Dashboard:** A dynamic, content-rich page decreasing the time needed to find crucial business information.
- **COVID-19:** Latest updates on the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, right from the Dashboard.

Business.CT.gov provides value to businesses, but also saves government employees' time by reducing incoming phone calls and emails. The decreased call volume allows staff to refocus on new businesses owners with pressing and complex questions requiring agency assistance. In time, the system will also de-silo government data systems, improving service provision and uptake.

LESSONS FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

For all who may be developing a similar enterprise system, we would like to share the following lessons learned throughout the Business.CT.gov project so far.

Through research, we learned:

- The public expects services to be online and accessible
- Users get lost in agency program details
- Business owners feel disconnected and uninformed
- Entrepreneurs need and want digital services to start, grown, and expand their business

Through development, we learned:

- Agencies do not have skills or resources to make information accessible for the general public
- Connecticut's government must simplify our online presence across all websites
- We can benefit from reusing and sharing technology solutions across agencies
- Most agency projects are not grounded in user research

Through delivery, we learned:

- The public will use accessible online services designed to their needs
- Future systems' optimization can be informed by customer behavior
- Matching effort to the demonstrated need is a substantial undertaking

Overall, we learned:

- Cornerstone capabilities are required to drive reusability, but existing agency projects need incentives to:
 - o Integrate services and content into a standard digital experience
 - o Develop common digital identity across agencies
 - o Ground projects in user research
 - o Use metrics and success tracking to drive service and content decisions

Most importantly, we learned an investment in digital government creates positive outcomes for both constituents and State government. We encourage you to do the same, and welcome your input as we continue this journey of improving resident services through user-centered design, iterative product development, and cross-agency collaboration.

