

Reimagining PA.gov

Transforming the Commonwealth's Digital Front Door



Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Office of Digital Experience

State: Pennsylvania

Agency: Commonwealth Office of Digital Experience (CODEPA)

Award Category: Digital Experience: Enterprise Solutions

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Executive Summary

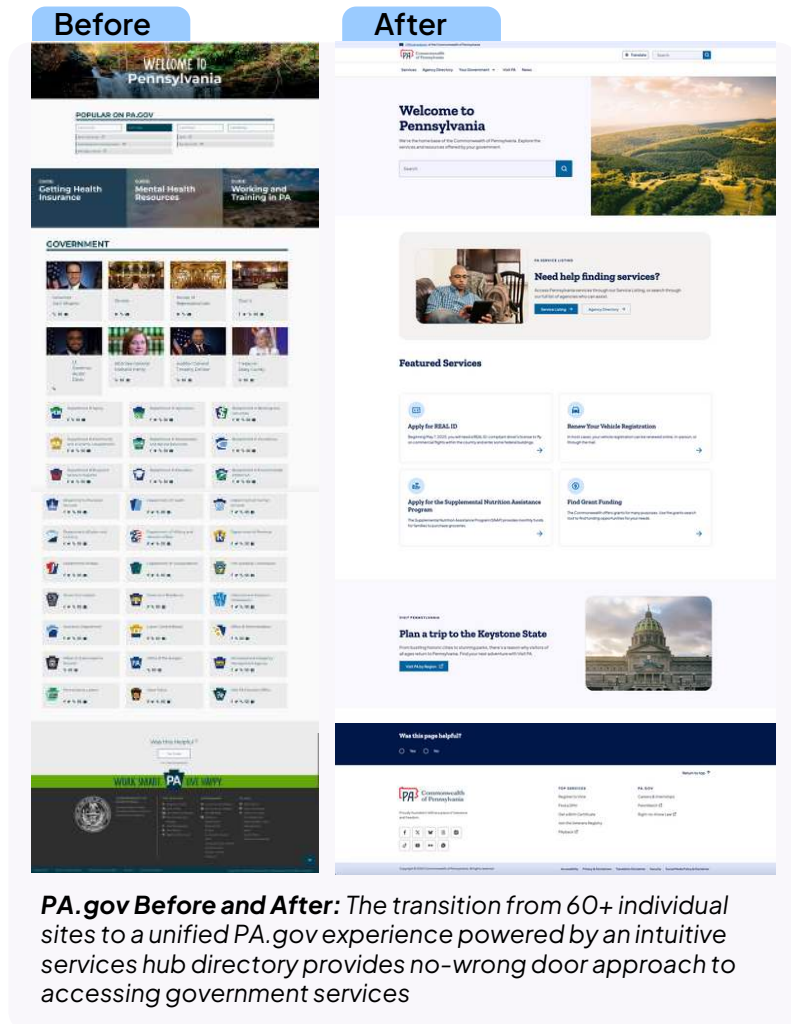
The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania undertook a major digital transformation to address the fragmented and inconsistent user experience across more than 60 separate agency websites. With millions of residents relying on PA.gov, the Shapiro Administration identified an opportunity to unify and modernize the state's digital presence, aiming to provide simpler, faster, and more accessible government services. Prior to this overhaul, residents faced difficulties due to outdated navigation, inconsistent content, and limited accessibility, prompting the need for a streamlined, user-focused platform.

The redesigned PA.gov consolidates multiple agency sites into a single, cohesive platform, guided by a “no wrong door” philosophy that allows residents to easily search and browse nearly 1,000 services by life event, need, or keyword. The project emphasized deep user engagement, accessibility compliance, and collaboration across government agencies, with over 300 residents contributing through interviews and focus groups. Since its phased launch in mid-2024, the platform has seen substantial usage growth, with nearly 9 million visits and 72 million page views recorded in December 2024 alone, reflecting improved user satisfaction and engagement.

A notable case study within the project was the redesign of the Board of Pardons website, which improved comprehension by simplifying content and enhancing application processes. Although some traffic metrics declined slightly, this was attributed to attracting more targeted, qualified users, demonstrating more effective engagement.

Led by the Commonwealth Office of Digital Experience (CODE PA), the project followed agile methodologies, incorporating continuous research, stakeholder input, and technical refinements. The new platform utilizes a modern, modular content architecture with cloud-based infrastructure to ensure scalability and reliability.

This initiative not only improved usability and accessibility for millions of Pennsylvanians but also offers a replicable model for other states facing similar digital fragmentation challenges. Future plans focus on expanding the services directory, enhancing personalization, adding multilingual support, and strengthening governance and content strategy across agencies. The ongoing collaboration between CODE PA, the Governor's Office, and agency partners aims to sustain and evolve PA.gov into a more efficient, equitable, and user-centered digital government platform.



What problem or opportunity does the project address?

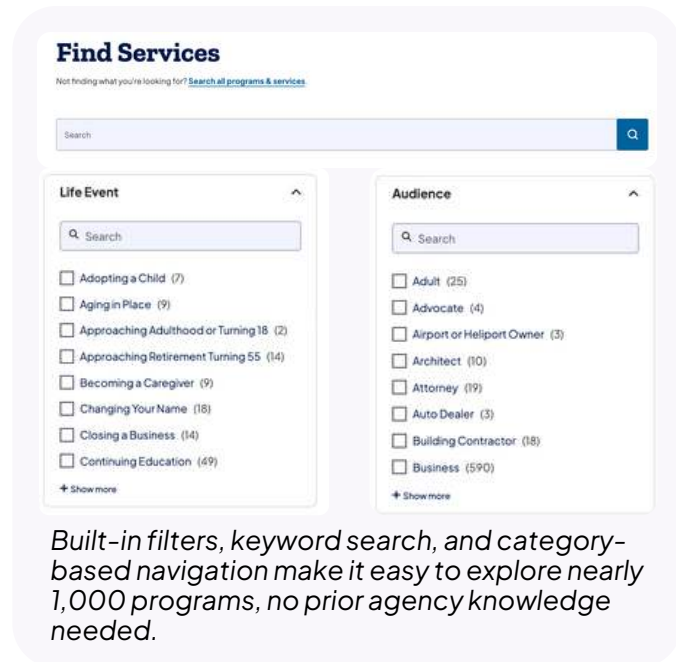
The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania faced a fragmented digital experience across more than 60 separate agency websites. This disjointed structure made it difficult for residents to find and access essential government services. With millions of residents relying on PA.gov each month, the Shapiro Administration saw a strategic opportunity to overhaul the state's digital front door to deliver simpler, faster, and more accessible online services.

Why does it matter?

Residents expect government services to be as intuitive as private sector experiences. Prior to the redesign, users struggled with outdated navigation, inconsistent content, and lack of accessibility across Commonwealth websites. In response, the Administration unified and streamlined the digital experience, ensuring accessibility, clarity, and service-first functionality. Since its phased launch in June 2024, key pages have drawn more than 250 million page views, underscoring the massive scale and impact of the transformation. In December 2024 alone, the new PA.gov received nearly 9 million visits and over 72 million page views.

What makes it different?

The PA.gov overhaul is distinguished by its deep user-centered design and whole-of-government collaboration. The project merged 64 agency websites into a single cohesive platform using a "no wrong door" philosophy. A new Services Directory enables residents to explore nearly 1,000 services based on life events, needs, or keywords. The design is fully compatible with assistive technology and accessible via keyboard navigation. More than 300 Pennsylvanians shaped the experience through over 370 hours of interviews, surveys, and focus groups including "Lori Listens" sessions hosted by First Lady Lori Shapiro.



What makes it universal?

States across the country face similar fragmentation and legacy digital platforms. This initiative addresses common priorities across NASCIO's CIO Top Ten list: Digital Government, Customer Relationship Management, Accessibility, and User Experience. Pennsylvania's approach is modular, scalable, and replicable, offering a roadmap for other states looking to modernize citizen interactions with government.

Implementation

What was the roadmap?

The project began in May 2024 with the launch of new websites for PA.gov, the Governor's Office, the Lieutenant Governor's Office, and the Department of Human Services. The months following focused on content auditing, rewriting, and consolidating 60+ other agency sites. Led by the Commonwealth Office of Digital Experience (CODE PA), implementation followed agile methodologies and incorporated research cycles, stakeholder reviews, and technical iterations. Success is defined by ease of access, performance analytics, and user satisfaction.

In parallel with this effort, the CODE PA team began working with agencies on their content strategy to help improve the overall experience for users. The first content optimization pilot was with the Board of Pardons agency.

Who was involved?

The effort was led by the Commonwealth Office of Digital Experience (CODE PA) in partnership with:



Agency subject matter experts



Communications, digital, and legal teams



Information technology staff



Senior leadership and First Lady Lori Shapiro

Residents played a central role through usability testing and interviews. Each site was vetted for accuracy, accessibility, and clarity by a cross-functional team, and redesigns were validated with real users to ensure effectiveness.

How did you do it?

User Engagement

Over 300 residents provided feedback; staff across agencies contributed to audits, design reviews, and the creation of their web content.

Financial Resources

The project was accomplished with in-house strategic vision using CODE PA's digital team and an investment in an agency partner to execute the build on the updated technical stack.

Technical Architecture

The new PA.gov is built on a centralized, modular content platform using modern web frameworks and accessibility-first standards to ensure seamless user experience. The website also transitioned to a cloud-based infrastructure to allow for scalability and improved up-time.

Case Study: Improving the Board of Pardons Digital Experience

Background

The Board of Pardons (BoP) website serves a critical role in guiding individuals through the clemency application process. Prior to the redesign, the site was dense, jargon-heavy, and difficult to navigate. CODE PA led a comprehensive redesign to enhance usability, clarity, and access to services. By optimizing content in parallel with a user experience design overhaul, the end-to-end digital experience was enhanced.

Simplified Content for Better Comprehension

- Reading level reduced from Grade 11 to Grade 8, making content accessible to a broader audience — a 28% improvement.
- Pages reduced from 38 to 23 (↓40%) by consolidating redundant content.
- Despite fewer pages, the average word count per page increased (↑18%), focusing on meaningful, clarified instructions.
- The “Apply for Clemency” section saw a 44% reduction in word count and a 20% drop in reading level, improving scannability and focus

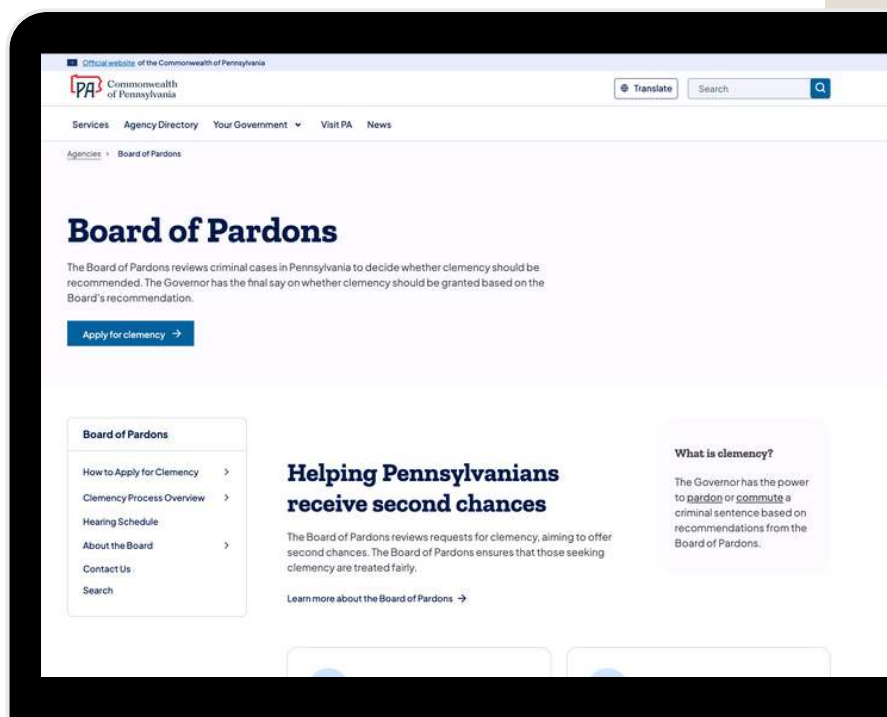
Smarter Application Design

A redesigned, digitally accessible PDF application launched on the BoP website in May 2025:

- Introductory narrative reduced from 2,170 to 865 words (↓60%).
- Overall word count decreased by 28%.
- Layout and whitespace improvements increased usability, even though page count rose from 17 to 24 (↑24%)

Conclusion

The Board of Pardons website overhaul led to a significantly more accessible, streamlined, and empathetic user experience. By simplifying content, improving visual design, and making the application process more intuitive, the Commonwealth has laid a foundation for long-term public benefit — especially for individuals navigating complex legal systems. Going forward, CODE PA is continuing to identify opportunities for optimizing the experience including the creation of a digital application and optimized processing for paper applications that are submitted.



What did the project make better?

The transformation improved how over 9 million monthly users interact with the Commonwealth. Residents no longer need to know which agency offers a service—they can search, filter, and browse through nearly 1,000 services by life event or need. The new unified experience reduces confusion, boosts accessibility, and saves time for residents and agency staff alike.

How do you know?

- Over 250 million page views on redesigned pages since June 2024
- Nearly 9 million visits and 72 million page views in December 2024 alone, representing a 20% post migration increase
- Our bounce rate has improved from 19% to 6%, meaning people are finding the information they want when they come to the site.
- Positive qualitative feedback from public sessions and a survey available on every page of PA.gov to monitor experience. From December 2024 to March 2025, we received over 53,000 responses to the survey that allowed us to target specific content for review and optimization based on actual user experience.

The screenshot shows a dark blue header with the question "Was this page helpful?". Below it are two radio buttons: "Yes" (selected) and "No". The main content area is light blue and contains the heading "We'd love your feedback". Below this is the question "What would you like to share about your experience?" followed by three radio button options: "I have a suggestion or idea", "Something is confusing", and "Something went wrong". Underneath is the heading "Tell us more about your experience." and a paragraph of instructions: "Please do not include personal information in your message. Any personal information provided will be deleted. If you have questions about Commonwealth services, please contact the Governor's Office." Below the text is a large white text input field with a small cursor icon at the bottom right. At the bottom right of the form is a blue "Submit" button.

In December of 2024, CODE PA launched a simple on-site survey on every page to help generate a user-informed optimization strategy. On average, the site get nearly 600 completed surveys ever day.

What Now?

The PA.gov foundation will continue to evolve. Future phases will expand the service directory, improve personalization, and add multilingual support. Feedback loops and analytics will guide ongoing refinements. With this new digital foundation, Pennsylvania is poised to deliver better, faster, and more equitable online services to all residents.

Key Areas of Focus Moving Forward



1. Content Strategy and Support

- Launching a content optimization pilot with 3 to 5 agencies starting mid-2025.
- Onboarding content strategists to help reduce content debt and improve usability and accessibility.

The goal: empower agencies with consistent, high-quality content strategies and guidance.



2. Agency Enablement

- Rolling out improved training, office hours, and a unified resource hub.
- Onboarding dedicated training specialists to strengthen contributor support.



3. Governance and Policy

- Formalizing governance structures and editorial/technical standards.
- Drafting a governance model and role definitions by July 2025.

In essence, the future of PA.gov focuses on **agency empowerment, sustainable operations, better governance, and improved service delivery**—with strong collaboration between CODE PA and the Governor's Office.