TechCrunch

How Governments Will Change To Better Serve Citizens In 2016

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In 2015, civic technology investment and activity piqued the interest of investors, analysts and app developers as an industry growth segment ripe for disruption and opportunity. A couple of examples: Andreessen Horowitz invested $15 million in OpenGov, which later received an additional $25 million from other investors; Sapphire Ventures invested $30 million in Socrata; and JP Morgan Private Equity invested $143 million in Accela.

Not only have citizens become savvy to how services *should* be delivered, they are increasingly demanding a consistently convenient, openly transparent view into their local government. Innovators such as Amazon, Facebook and Uber have dramatically changed citizen expectations, and the leaders in government are turning to new civic technology to change the landscape.

As we look toward 2016, I see four major trends impacting how governments will modernize services, communicate more effectively with citizens and make engagement with civic processes easy.

Municipalities Will Shift From Reactive And Responsive To Proactive And Predictive

Governments of all sizes are embarking on a multi-year, and in some cases a multi-decade, push to modernize their IT infrastructure. IDC predicted that, by the end of 2015, U.S. and local government IT spending will topple $6.4 billion for civic tech. The final numbers aren't in yet, but I'd venture to say we got close. In 2015, we really saw dramatic shifts on governments' willingness to implement cloud technology. Cloud technology is not only saving budgets, it's also enabling governments to move faster and be more flexible.

Moving into 2016, we will continue to see transformational shifts in efficiency and effectiveness in which government agencies will introduce a cloud-based digital strategy and move away from their traditional towered approach to IT.

Investment in IT infrastructure and civic tech is showing no signs of slowing down, and the upward trajectory should continue in 2016 as citizen-facing software and services that connect citizens, tourists and businesses with government services continue to grow. A proactive government is able to react to citizens' life events without being prompted. This could be facilitated by the provision of data from third-parties or by proactively providing services based on available data.

The Open Data Movement Will Mature And Increase Government Transparency

We will see more government agencies push new engagement boundaries and embrace an entrepreneurial spirit instead of waiting for citizens to come to them. Conducting online surveys, interacting through social media, streaming video of public meetings on the Internet and publishing relevant documents or meeting minutes on an online portal are all ways cities will improve citizen trust and transparency, keeping citizens up to date and involved.

Only 11 percent of Americans believe governments effectively share data with the public.

Yelp, for example, does a great job of helping us find restaurants and share experiences with the menu. Governments also visit restaurants, ensuring that citizen expectation for food handling and sanitation are being met. Today, many health departments are providing feeds to Yelp and others so that citizens have these reports at their fingertips.

Currently, only 11 percent of Americans believe governments effectively share data with the public. However, 33 percent of government agencies have an open data policy enterprise-wide or for at least one department. In this

day and age, citizens feel all data concerning civic matters should be readily accessible and consumable, so these info-savvy individuals are pushing local governments to open their data ports and let them in.

Government Agencies Will Adopt Technology To Find New Value For Citizens

Throughout next year, government agencies will not only start exploring the possibilities of tech, but also will begin implementing initiatives to become a "connected government" that will have far-reaching impacts on both businesses and personal lives.

Competing to build innovative and sustainable smart cities, local governments will represent more than 25 percent of all government external spending to deploy, manage and realize the business value of the IoT by 2018. Smart-city plans in several jurisdictions aim at exploring the ability to process huge amounts of data coming from devices such as video cameras, parking sensors, air quality monitors and so forth to help local governments achieve goals in terms of increased public safety, improved environment and better quality of life.

The days of paper processes and standing in line for services on the way out.

The 1.7 trillion construction industry needs more visibility into municipal building and planning departments. It's fast paced, competitive and dependent on detailed coordination. By bringing on tech that connects architects, engineers and contractors to their municipalities, governments have the opportunity to move the needle on GDP in their regions.

Analysts believe this will generate massive new business for technology companies, with revenue for companies investing in smart-city technologies expected to jump to $27.5 billion by 2023 from $8.8 billion in 2014, according to Navigant Research.

Government agencies are ready to start tapping into the potential of IoT technology, and will begin by identifying specific automated actions that might help solve concrete problems. For example, by equipping street lights with sensors and connecting them to the network, cities can dim lights to save energy, only bringing them to full capacity when the sensors detect motion. This can reduce energy costs by 70-80 percent.

The Sharing Economy Will Infiltrate Local Governments Through Regionalization

Consolidation of government services is starting to emerge across the country as a means to provide services more efficiently and improve the quality and type of services that individual units of government may not be able to offer on their own; we will see this trend continue to grow. The potential value of the sharing economy will total $335 billion by 2025, according to PwC.

2016 will be a year of leaps forward in the civic technology industry.

Collaboration enables public agencies to move away from their traditional approach to IT and increasingly make use of shared and compostable services offered by a common — usually a virtualized, cloud-enabled — platform. This leads to more efficient use of development resources, platforms and IT support.

We are seeing examples of this already in a new service called MuniRent, which lets local municipalities rent equipment to one another, and may potentially bestow the same convenience and cost efficiencies realized by consumers of Uber, Lyft and Airbnb.

In addition, multiple state agencies are also starting to embrace the gov sharing economy, including Oregon, where the state created a voluntary, statewide ePermitting System on a single platform and is now sharing this platform with more than 20 separate jurisdictions.

As the year ahead unfolds, one thing is certain: 2016 will be a year of leaps forward in the civic technology industry, offering tremendous upside for governments and citizens alike. With the days of paper processes and standing in line for services on the way out, innovation and efficiency are being ushered in. Let's meet here again next year and see how we did.