How to get started in Public Interest Tech

Are you:

• a policy wonk who is disenchanted with bureaucracy?
• a designer or software engineer with a desire to use your technical skills for good?
• interested in the ability to make organizations work better, but don’t want to step into the trenches of management consulting?

Welcome to the world of Public Interest Technology and Government Digital Service Design.

Public interest technology is a field that emphasizes leveraging technology and the skills required to build products and design services for the common good.

The opportunity to use technical, design, and management skills for public good have grown as teams across the country have taken on issues ranging from helping eligible Californians register for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to upgrading software that helps NATO military advisors determine mission-readiness.

Whether you come with an interest in community organizing, management consulting, tech start-ups, or user experience design -- this might be the path for you.

Government: Know Before You Go

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<th>Data Scientists</th>
<th>Software Engineers &amp; Coders</th>
<th>Product/Project Manager</th>
<th>Content Strategists &amp; Storytellers</th>
<th>Policy Makers with an Interest in Tech &amp; User Research</th>
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<td>be respectful</td>
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main issues

- bureaucrat navigation
- agile project management limitations
- cross agency communication
- data security
- legality of user testing
- data ethics
- procurement

major themes

- design to scale
- experimental
- data-enabled
- human centered

Government: Know Before You Go
What this work might look like

Developing PR campaigns and communication strategies for government service roll-outs
- think US Department of Agriculture Smokey the Bear for Wildfire Prevention

Facilitating cross-agency communication

Improving the user interfaces of critical, public-facing digital services
- think Healthcare.gov

Measuring & increasing the effectiveness of existing government services
- think the World Bank Global GovTech Partnership

Advising Congress on how to regulate & legislate around new technology
- think anti-trust, data privacy, cryptocurrency, facial recognition

Make better use of government data & modernizing outdated software
- think enabling Medicare to integrate their health records with third-party applications

Common skills

Intangible skills
- problem solving
- collaborative
- respectful
- entrepreneurial
- experimental
- flexible
- attentive to details

Familiarity with DevOps & site reliability engineering
- ability to communicate technical concepts to non-technical stakeholders
- engineering management
- familiarity with web/app development full-stack engineering, legacy software reengineering

Machine learning
- knowledge of data mining
- natural language processing
- perform analysis on large sets of data
- knowledge of data security & ethics
- communicate data-driven insights and recommendations to non-technical stakeholders
- extract actionable insights to drive decisions

Familiarity with agile methodologies
- developing evaluation metrics
- technical recruiting and talent operations
- quality assurance testing of products
- technology procurement
- client engagement management

Design
- interest in using plain language to help members
- knowledge of government services interaction
- product/service/user experience/interaction design
- contribution to research synthesis
- visual/content design
- knowledge of design process
- prototyping

Engineering
- management
Where it happens

Designated digital service/data teams within the federal government

Agencies that are experimenting with innovative (digital/design/data/agile) practices

Nonprofits and startups

Management & strategic consulting groups

A sampling of states and cities that have dedicated digital service, research & development, or data teams

Potential pathways

Our Advice for Getting Started? AVOID career paths that will burn you out early and START somewhere where you can practice solving complex problems early on.

Private Sector OR NGO
OR Government Contractor
Hone your skills, Build your confidence,
Find good mentorship, Work with like-minded colleagues

Start in Govt. (Local, State, Federal)
Be an Advocate for Technology & Human-Centered Design Within your Department (OR join a digital services team)

Still in School OR Graduated
Fellowships & Internships

Tour of Civic Service
Presidential Innovation Fellows (18F)
U.S. Digital Service
Presidential Management Fellows (requires graduate degree)

Network your way to a job with existing Govt. Innovation Team

Go Back to the Private Sector/NGO/Contractor
Start Digital Service Team within Another Govt. Department
Grad School

1 to 4 years
3 to 5 years