

2025
IMPACT
REPORT

Building government for all.

COMMUNITY

RESEARCH

TRAINING

A note from our executive director

The past year tested our public institutions and the people who rely on them in profound ways. In 2025, state and local communities faced immense hurdles: federal policy change, fiscal uncertainty, workforce shortages, rapid technological change, and growing pressure to deliver better outcomes with fewer resources. We hear these challenges from our government partners every day.

2025 also marked a new chapter for the Beeck Center's strategy — one that sharpens how we show up for public servants and partners. We are laser-focused on what we do best: convening our network and trusted communities of practice, producing practical and timely research, and delivering training and technical assistance that helps public servants move from ideas to implementation. Across all three offerings, our approach centers on deep listening, responsive problem-solving, and building capacity that lasts.

State and local governments are where most people interact with public services, and where gaps in delivery are felt acutely. The Beeck Center is building the capacity that public servants need to deliver for people, with the right tools, research, and networks. This is not peripheral work. It is bridging the gap between policy, practice, and real outcomes for people's real needs. And for more than a decade, we have built the expertise, trust, and relationships to support it. At a time when AI is being deployed rapidly, when benefits still aren't reaching the people who need them, and when government teams are stretched thin, this work has never been more important.

We are equally proud of the next generation shaping this work alongside us. Beeck's experiential learning program brings together students from diverse backgrounds — military service members, community college transfers, first-generation students — and across Georgetown schools and programs. These students are vital contributors to our work, gaining practical skills while helping tackle real public challenges.

We invite you to explore this report highlighting the people, partnerships, and progress behind our work.



Lynn Overmann

Lynn Overmann
Executive Director

EXPLORE BY SECTION

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By the Numbers

43%

growth

in state and local government participation, bringing total network membership to nearly 8,000

167K

annual users

of our open tools and resource libraries

80

media mentions

including coverage in *The New York Times*, *Forbes*, *ABC News*, and *The Washington Post*

12K

student hours

contributed through experiential learning



EXPLORE WEB VERSION

Our People

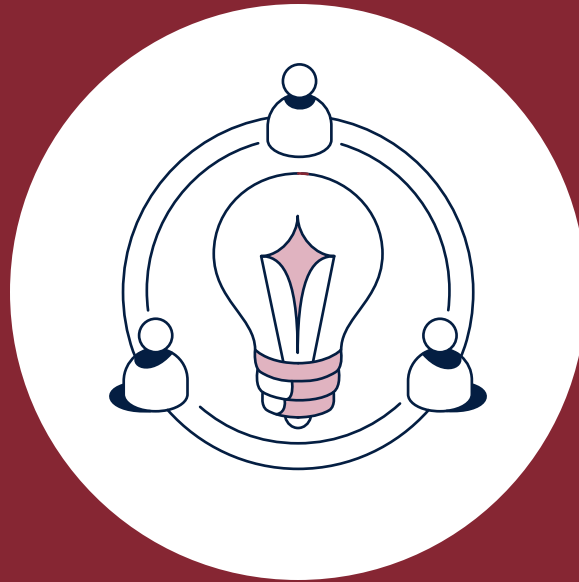
MEET OUR TEAM



Our Partners

PARTNER WITH US

- [Alberto & Olga Maria Beeck](#)
- [The Annie E. Casey Foundation](#)
- [American Public Human Services Association](#)
- [Arnold Ventures](#)
- [Aspen Institute Financial Security Program](#)
- [Ballmer Group](#)
- [Better Government Lab](#)
- [Center for Civic Futures](#)
- [Center for Democracy and Technology](#)
- [Center for Security and Emerging Technology](#)
- [Center on Budget and Policy Priorities](#)
- [Civilla](#)
- [Code for America](#)
- [Erica Pincus Arabesque Foundation](#)
- [Federation of American Scientists](#)
- [Gates Foundation](#)
- [InnovateUS](#)
- [Georgetown Institute for Technology Law & Policy](#)
- [Knight Foundation](#)
- [Massive Data Institute](#)
- [New America](#)
- [Public Policy Lab](#)
- [Georgetown Tech & Society](#)
- [Tech Talent Project](#)
- [U.S. Digital Response](#)



Community

Our network and communities of practice connect public, private, and nonprofit leaders across the country to surface common challenges, learn from one another, and share what works — so progress can happen faster.

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Building Government Services is a Team Sport

A national network helps public servants solve shared digital challenges across state lines.



Elham Ali
Senior Manager, Research + Engagement



Marcy Jacobs speaks with fellow state leaders at a 2024 convening for Chief Digital Service Officers, a community of practice of the Beeck Center's Digital Government Network. *Photo by Jessica Latos for the Beeck Center for Social Impact + Innovation.*

One of the most memorable lessons Marcy Jacobs absorbed about designing government services did not come from a statehouse or federal office. It came from the command posts of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).

In the early 2000s, Jacobs worked alongside federal agents and local law enforcement officers in high-pressure command centers. Information had to land on the first pass, or it turned into dead weight. Nobody had time to reread or click links twice. People were making decisions under duress, sometimes with lives hanging in the balance.

Design that slowed them down failed them.

“Understanding the context [that] people receiving the information are living in matters,” Jacobs said. “We are designing for people at different moments of criticality, urgency, and emotion.”

When Jacobs described this period of her life, she smiled, recognizing a throughline in her career rather than a chapter left behind. She described the experience as “visceral” that revealed who she was building for and with.

“They don’t want to sit in a command post,” she said. “They want to be out on the street running down leads. How do we meet them where they are?”

...

Two decades later, Jacobs still designs for those moments. Only now, the people are millions of Maryland residents navigating public benefits and essential services — often between work shifts, child care pickups, and everything else life demands.

As deputy secretary and the state’s first chief digital experience officer, leading the Maryland Digital Service, Jacobs knows she cannot do this work alone. The problems are complex and interconnected: how to hire and retain digital talent, where to invest limited resources, and how to structure teams and design services that work under real-world constraints.

Jacobs is part of the Beeck Center’s [Digital Government Network](#) (DGN), a national network that brings together 8,000 public servants and civic technology partners grappling with the same challenges. The network unifies the Beeck Center’s Digital Benefits Network (DBN), Digital Service Network (DSN), and State Chief Data Officers Network (CDO), which merged in early 2026.

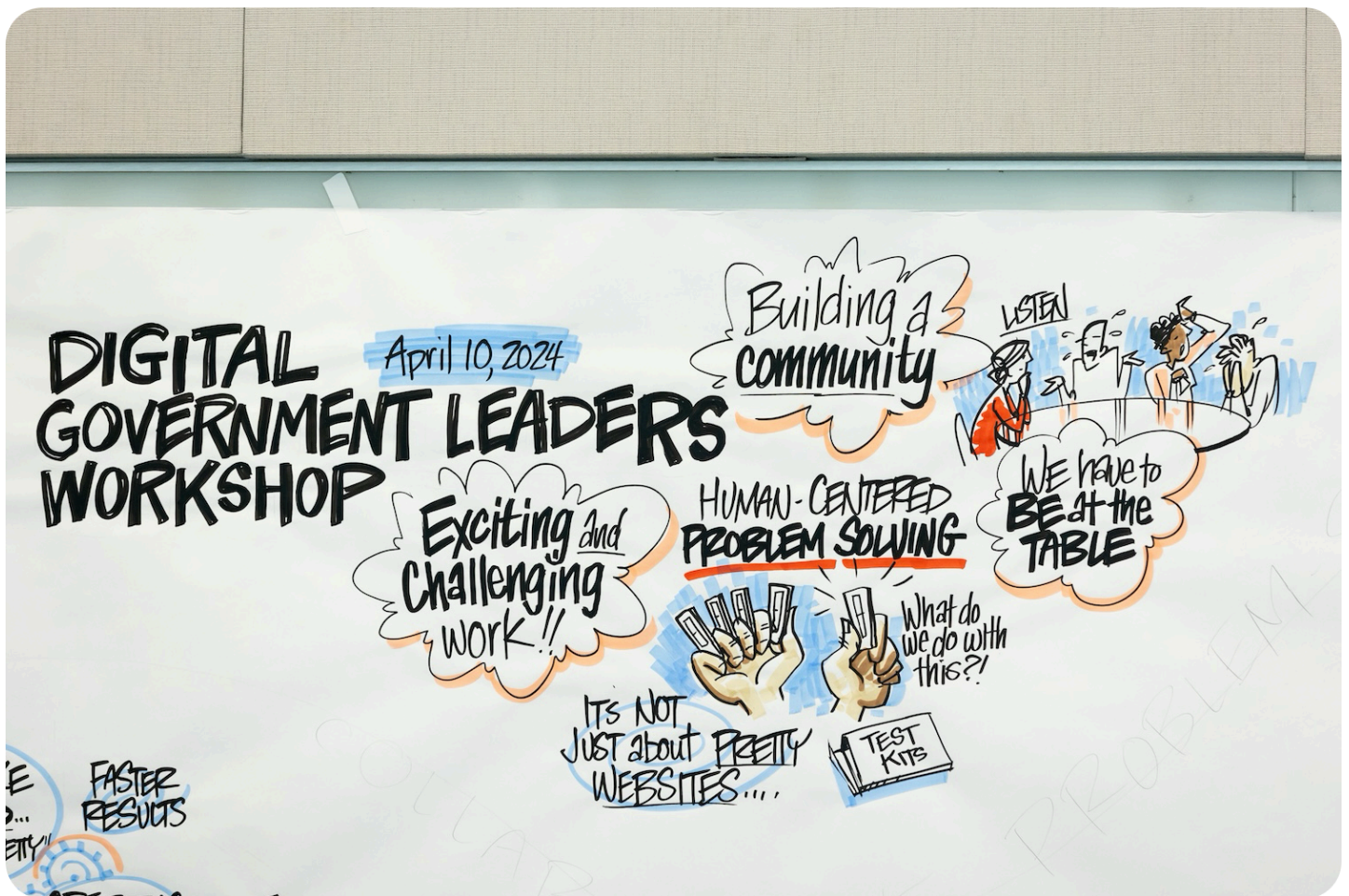
For Jacobs, knowing what has worked elsewhere and where peers are experimenting helps her make better decisions.

“Having people you can talk to, who are working on the same problems, matters,” Jacobs said. “It’s much harder to do this work on your own.”

...

The DGN engages practitioners through [communities of practice](#) and applied research. Across its topic- and role-based communities, 763 members — including nearly 500 state and local government practitioners — compare approaches, pressure-test ideas, and learn from one another’s successes and missteps.

Events like [FormFest](#), a free virtual gathering focused on governments improving online forms and service access, have drawn more than 2,000 global participants annually since 2023. The network’s [Digital Government Hub](#) extends that work beyond convenings. The searchable platform now serves more than 167,000 users annually with curated guidance, playbooks, and examples from across the field, including national research, such as “[Hiring, Retaining, and Upskilling Digital Service Talent in Government](#)” and “[The 2025 State Chief Data Officer Survey](#).”



A visual summary poster captures key themes from the 2024 Chief Digital Service Officers Convening, including community building and human-centered problem solving. *Photo by Jessica Latos for the Beeck Center for Social Impact + Innovation.*

When Jacobs stepped into her role in the Old Line State, there was no blueprint waiting for her.

She inherited a small team of eight people responsible for building websites, provisioning Microsoft SharePoint sites, and overseeing major IT development projects. The mandate was broad.

So, she started the way she often does: by listening. She met with agency leaders to pinpoint what worked and what did not. She sat with her staff, asking what energized them and where they felt stuck. In the first two years, the team expanded to more than 55 people. But those early conversations set the tone for how the work moved forward.

That instinct to listen carried into another space.

Jacobs remembered joining her first Chief Digital Service Officer (CDSO) Community of Practice Zoom

call and feeling “like the new kid,” she said. A dozen or so leaders were already on the line. Many knew one another.

She jumped in and asked peers: “What do you wish you had known when you started?” “What should leaders tackle first?” “What takes longer than you expect?”

“Having 30-plus like-minded people who are working on the same problems in different spaces gives a level of support that I didn’t have in the federal [government],” Jacobs said. “It felt very much like little pockets, because our organizations were all so different.”

The State of State Digital Transformation

Dive into our interactive map to explore executive orders advancing digital delivery, legislation shaping government use of AI, the role of digital service teams and chief data officers, how states are reporting impact, and where design systems are underpinning change. Click on a state/territory, or search to discover.

Executive Orders

AI Legislation

Digital Service Teams

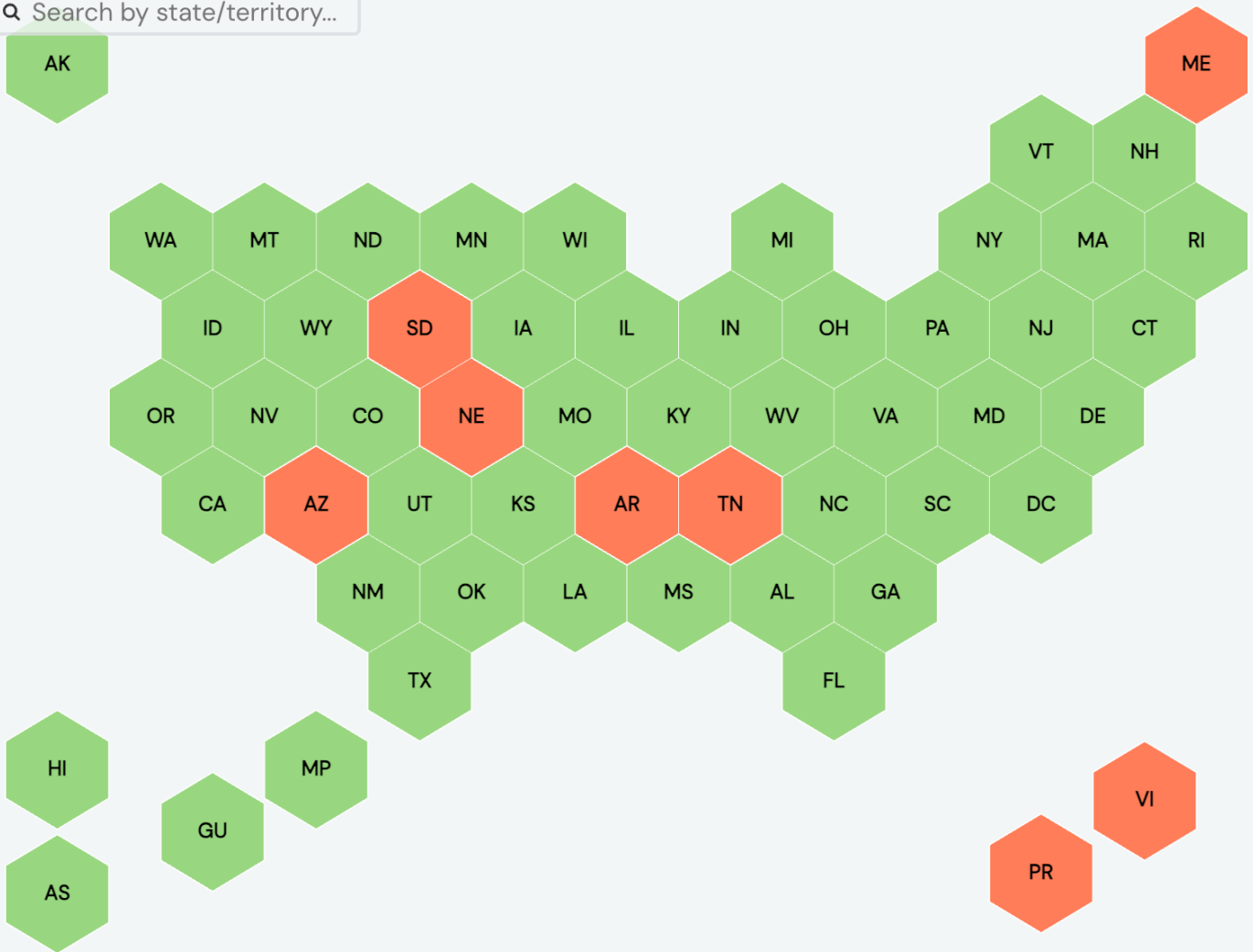
Digital Service Impact Reports

Chief Data Officers

Design Systems

Status ■ Yes ■ No

🔍 Search by state/territory...



Source: Digital Government Hub • See our methods and download the data. Last updated: 25 Feb 2026.
Credit: Elham Ali and Michaela Caudill / Beek Center for Social Impact and Innovation



EXPLORE INTERACTIVE VERSION



It quickly became clear that Maryland's challenges were common across state lines.

Her years of working in federal service, including in the Department of Veterans Affairs and the former U.S. Digital Service, taught Jacobs that no two agencies operate the same way. Many teams worked in silos. Missions and structures varied so widely that shared solutions rarely traveled across agencies.

However, at the state level, because many states deliver the same core services, she saw far more overlap.

One example is permitting and licensing.

"Permitting is not unique to Maryland," Jacobs said. "Everybody has that problem." And it is not one thing. "It's recreational, occupational, business, environmental, [and] construction."

States across the country are grappling with [outdated permitting processes](#) delaying critical infrastructure projects, raising costs, and creating uncertainty for families and businesses, according to a report from the Hutchins Center on Fiscal and Monetary Policy at the Brookings Institution. Slow and complex approval processes can stall projects across energy, transportation, and broadband, affecting how — and how quickly — essential services reach people. New transmission lines, for example, can take an average of [10 years](#) to complete, *The New York Times* reported — longer than it took to build the Panama Canal and [twice as long](#) as the Hoover Dam. Fixing these delays requires coordination across agencies and states — work that is difficult to do alone.

When Maryland began exploring digital accessibility tools, Jacobs reached out to peers after a DGN meeting. Two states were already using a tool Maryland was considering and having good experiences. Maryland was still deciding how much scope to put into a contract.

That kind of peer exchange is becoming more urgent as states prepare for the April 2026 Department of

Justice [deadline](#) requiring state and local governments to make web content and mobile applications accessible under Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act. DGN members are looking for practical ways to prepare. [AllyJam](#) (Accessibility Jam) grew out of that demand, bringing government teams together to share practical approaches for making digital services accessible.

"The network and the collaboration have been the most valuable piece of this," she said. "It's helpful to hear from others to really understand the ground truth, not just what we get from a market research conversation — because somebody has thought about it," Jacobs added.

• • •

Beeck Center researchers mapped that collective experience through rigorous landscape analyses, including "[The State of State Digital Transformation](#)," which examines how states are organizing digital service teams, chief data officer roles, design systems, and related policies across all 50 states and U.S. territories.

Impressed by how practical the map was, Jacobs took in the landscape of who was doing what, and Maryland's role within it. Patterns surfaced: States with chief data officers, for example, are 3.4 times more likely to have digital service teams.

"I thought the map was really cool," she said. "I like being able to click on a topic and see what lights up. It helps you understand who's doing what across the country." Jacobs is already envisioning what would come next.

She pointed to the Beeck Center as the connective force behind it.

"Beeck is kind of magic," she said. "They do the groundwork to pull us all together."

A Place to Land

How connecting the right people moves research into action on public benefits access.



Elham Ali
Senior Manager, Research + Engagement



Digital Doorways to Public Benefits research examines how people navigate digital identity systems in public benefits programs. Researchers and community participants engage in interviews and human-centered design activities during the project, a partnership between the Beeck Center for Social Impact + Innovation and the Public Policy Lab. *Photo courtesy of the Public Policy Lab.*

When Robert walked into a meeting room at the Just A Start nonprofit in Boston on a chilly Monday morning in March 2025, he was an hour early and newly employed again.*

Although he no longer needed unemployment benefits, he showed up anyway.

The room, lit by pale early spring light against its glass walls, was arranged for two kinds of work. At the center, a table and chairs for the interview. Off to the side, a second station: a physical collage displaying printed screenshots from Massachusetts' benefits portal, arranged in a sequence — the application's landing page, login page to the unemployment account setup, and the multi-step identity verification flow. A small camera stood ready to record. A note-taker hovered nearby, pen poised.

Robert — 61 years old and unpartnered, but with close ties to his extended family — did not consider himself relatively tech-savvy. After health issues left him unemployed for nearly a year, he spent weeks desperately trying to break through the unemployment system's front door. Nights creating accounts. Resetting passwords, again and again. Verifying his identity.

He was looking for a job for months — and that morning, he landed one.

Even though Robert no longer needed help himself, he stayed to explain what it took to get through, so others would not get stuck. The research space made room for that.

...

The Beeck Center's [Digital Government Network](#) (DGN) exists for moments like this: a national network that carves space for beneficiaries, state digital leaders, nonprofit partners, advocates, and

researchers to share their experiences, surface shared questions and challenges, and shape what comes next.

Robert's interview was part of "[Digital Doorways to Public Benefits: Beneficiary Experiences with Digital Identity](#)," a Beeck Center research effort in Arizona, New York, and Massachusetts investigating how people navigate the digital systems that control access to public benefits including unemployment insurance, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and Medicaid. The project connected state benefits agencies, community organizations, policymakers, and funders directly to the lived experiences of the people those systems are meant to serve. It focused on improving how people digitally access public benefits portals through account creation, authentication systems, and identity proofing.

In partnership with the [Public Policy Lab](#) (PPL), the research translated individual experiences like Robert's into shared evidence states can act on through a series of insights and recommendations.

Jaime Stock, senior consultant at PPL, remembered that moment like it was yesterday.

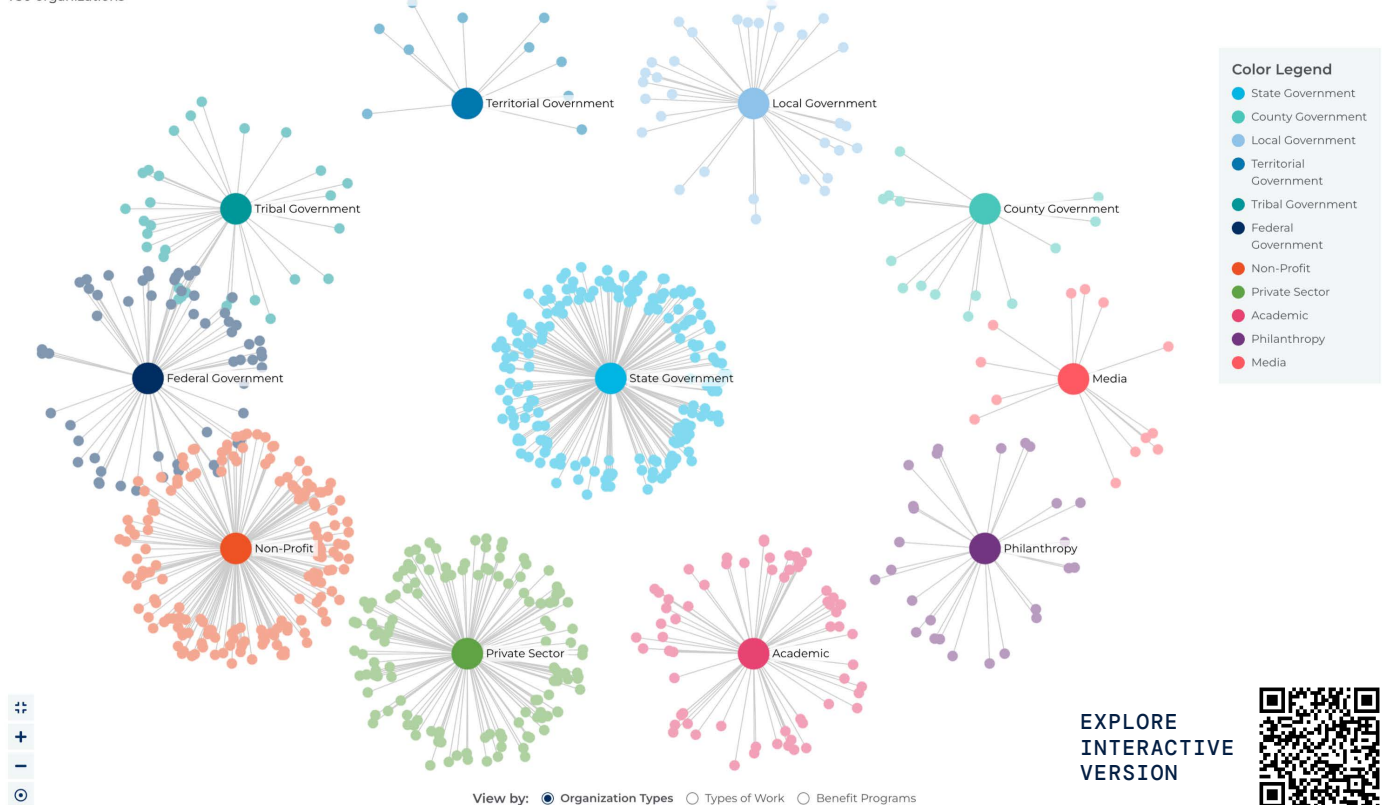
"He was so ready to speak with us," she said, her voice brightening through a Zoom call from her work office in New York. "No matter how much trouble somebody's had, they're always thinking about somebody who's had a little bit more trouble than they have."

Within the DGN, the [Digital Benefits Leadership Council](#) (DBLC), a group of nonprofit leaders working on public benefits delivery, helps set direction by raising shared questions and coordinating actions across the civic technology landscape. Its work has led not only to research partnerships like Digital Doorways, but to a growing body of practical work: cross-sectoral convenings such as [BenCamp](#), timely research and coordination on H.R. 1 impacts including "[Implementing Benefits Eligibility + Enrollment Systems: State Responses to H.R. 1](#)," and tools like the [Digital Benefits Ecosystem Directory and Map](#), which help practitioners see how their work connects to others' work.

Browsing by Organization Types

730 organizations

Search for an organization



Digital Benefits Ecosystem Map showing 730 organizations grouped by type representing sectors like government, nonprofit, private sector, academic, philanthropy, and media, type of work, and benefit programs. *Photo courtesy of the Beeck Center for Social Impact + Innovation.*

The DGN heard concerns from its members that state government teams were struggling to understand how people actually experience digital identity systems inside benefits portals. For many, the barriers in creating accounts and proving people’s identity remained opaque.

To investigate, the Beeck Center launched the Digital Doorways research effort and partnered with PPL.

Beeck provided “the knowledge and expertise around digital benefits and identity management,” Stock said, including [prior work](#) documenting digital authentication and identity proofing requirements across online public benefits applications. PPL paired that technical expertise with qualitative, human-centered field research.

Digital identity was new territory for PPL, Stock said. The organization had long focused on how people

navigate public benefits and where friction and barriers emerge.

“It ended up being really collaborative while we were in the field,” Stock said, without hesitation. “It was all hands on deck, and we were all learning from each other as we went.”

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That spirit of bringing the right people in the room at the right moment shapes how Beeck convenes its network.

For Chelsea Mauldin, executive director of PPL and a member of the DBLC, that dynamic came into focus at [BenCamp](#), a two-day convening hosted by the Beeck Center in June 2025 in Seattle, Washington. Nearly 60 digital services and benefits practitioners attended from state and local governments, nonprofits, academia, and philanthropy.

Participants gathered to share successes and challenges, compare state and local responses to federal changes, and map digital benefits access and service delivery capacity together in real time.

“What was nice is that they were all in one place at one time,” Mauldin said.



Chelsea Mauldin participates in a small-group discussion during BenCamp 2025 in Seattle, Washington, June 25–26, 2025. Bottom left: attendees review materials and share ideas during a breakout session focused on public benefits innovation. Bottom right: the BenCamp reflections of participants captured on colorful sticky notes. *Photo by Matt Villanueva for the Beeck Center for Social Impact + Innovation.*

Beyond convenience, she highlighted the shared credibility from being “selected to be part of a group of people who are all coming together to discuss these issues,” which mattered when subsequent partnership opportunities emerged on tight timeframes.

After BenCamp, PPL was looking for state government partners to join as partners a new proposal to the Center for Civic Futures’ Public Benefit Innovation Fund. Instead of starting from scratch, Mauldin already knew who to reach out to.

She contacted several states, but Oregon and New Mexico were the first to respond. After Mauldin met their leaders at BenCamp and built face-to-face rapport, the states provided letters of support and ultimately became pilot partners.

Without BenCamp, the process of finding state partners would have been much more challenging, Mauldin said. Cold emails would have taken weeks to reach the right leaders. Instead, PPL was able to reach out to state partners through personal relationships

established within the legitimacy of a convened and coordinated group.

PPL [secured the award](#), launching a new project with those states to improve how SNAP notices are written and delivered using AI tools. The goal is clearer language, so people understand what their state is asking and can access food without confusion or unnecessary administrative errors.

• • •

Back in Boston, Robert was still carrying the high of the job offer he received hours earlier.

“You guys are my lucky charm,” Stock remembered him saying, half-joking, half-serious.

He was back on his feet but remembered what it felt like not to be. He came to the interview room because someone once listened. Now, it was his turn.

* To protect their privacy, some individuals in this story are identified by a pseudonym.

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Building Community

How one student analyst is rethinking leadership, technology, and the power of being people-first.



Anna Opalsky
Student Analyst



Walter Hall moderates Civic Tech Live 2025, a Beeck Center event that brought together leaders in civic technology to discuss the future of data science and artificial intelligence. *Photo by Jessica Latos for the Beeck Center for Social Impact + Innovation.*

WATCH VIDEO SPOTLIGHT



After years in the army as a data engineer, Walter Hall thought leadership meant having the answers.

Then he started working with state chief data officers (CDOs) — people responsible for statewide data management, and increasingly AI — and heard something else entirely. The most effective leaders were not the most technical, they told him. They were the ones who knew how to connect people before systems broke down.

“They all say, ‘Try to be a good person and connection builder,’” Hall said.

This insight is meaningful to Hall’s work as a student analyst at the Beeck Center in two ways. First, it informed the content of the Beeck Center’s [2025 State Chief Data Officer Survey](#), a report in partnership with the National Association of State Chief Information Officers that details the evolving role of CDOs, the importance of effective data leadership, and common factors for success. Second, it shifted how Hall understood leadership — from strictly technical to problem-solving driven by community-building and collaboration.

“There are a lot of really smart people and a lot of really good resources out there,” Hall said, referring to his experience operating in the military. “But

communication tends to be siloed to where you’re currently stationed. Beeck showed me... there’s multiple ways to make things happen.”

Many other government departments and agencies operate in these silos, unable to access information that would enable them to better serve their community because it is outside of their system. Not only do systems not speak to one another, but often government practitioners only interact with their own teams. The Beeck Center’s Digital Government Network (DGN) offers a different approach, connecting public servants from across agencies and governments to learn from one another, create solutions, build partnerships, and “ask safe questions,” according to Hall.

“[The DGN] is a place for like-minded people who have a like-minded mission to collaborate,” Hall said. “If they do it on their own, they’re going to just fail.”

The concept of a network and communities of practice — integral to the Beeck Center’s approach — was new for Hall when he became a student analyst in his first semester at Georgetown. Now, it’s a practice he hopes to bring back to the army after he graduates in May.

“The Beeck Center showed me you can be a people-first person,” he said. “You don’t need to be overly technical. You just have to understand the wavelength of [technology], and...give back by being a good person.”

“This network is absolutely crucial for our state’s successful journey on accessibility compliance resources, tips, and state design systems.”

Elena Talanker

North Carolina Department of Information Technology



Research

Our research identifies and addresses the real problems that governments are facing today. We use evidence, lived experience, and emerging practice to give leaders the insights and tools they need to make better decisions and deliver results.

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Family Health, by Design

How interconnected public systems shape the well-being of young families — and how they could work better.



Elham Ali
Senior Manager, Research + Engagement



A wall displaying framed photographs of young parents and their children at Shine Together in Fresno, California. *Photo by the Beek Center for Social Impact + Innovation.*

At 5:30 a.m., before most of the East Bay hills wake, Luna is already in motion.*

She moves through her daily triangle of care in Northern California — traveling from her mother’s home to her father’s to her partner’s place — depending on whichever household can take care of her baby, so she can make it to class.

It is a self-taught choreography she knows by heart: getting her six-month-old ready, and preparing what she needs for class before dropping her off at her grandfather’s before heading to campus. From nine to three — and sometimes from seven to ten at night — she attends class, later checking in with her partner and deciding whether to return to her mother’s home or stay to co-parent. The rest of the day folds into childcare and homework. Outside of classes, the rhythm shifts to caregiving, stretching WIC benefits, planning meals, and making do with what she has.

By the time her classmates settle into their seats, Luna has already done the work of a small village.

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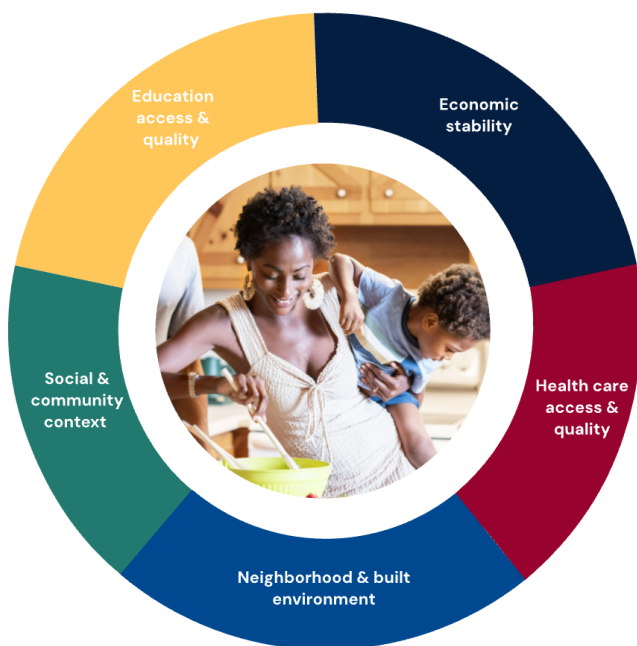
More than [three million](#) college students in the United States are also parents, balancing schoolwork with child care and navigating public benefits such as the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and Medicaid. These programs exist to support family health and stability, but they are not designed for everyone — especially not for families with complex caregiving and living arrangements.

New research from the Beeck Center’s [Family Benefits Lab](#) examined how public benefits and campus systems support family well-being. Conducted from June to October 2025, it included interviews and focus groups with 39 participants — young parents ages 13 to 24 and frontline staff from benefits agencies in California and community colleges and universities in Maryland.

Across both states, the research found that families do not experience education, health care, and food assistance as separate programs. They experience them as one web. When one strand breaks, families feel the strain immediately in their daily lives.

Family health depends on multiple, interconnected factors

Hear directly from families and frontline staff featured in research from the Beeck Center’s Family Benefits Lab on how public benefits and campus systems support family well-being.



EXPLORE
INTERACTIVE
VERSION



Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services • Adapted from “Social Determinants of Health – Healthy People 2030”. Photo: Land O’Lakes, Inc. on Unsplash. Credit: Elham Ali / Beeck Center for Social Impact + Innovation.

For Luna, that strain intensified when her baby turned six months old and her WIC benefits changed. Although baby formula and cereal were still covered, fruits and vegetables were not. Luna turned to CalFresh, California's food assistance program, to bridge the gap.

Since she had a child, Luna said her case manager told her she would need to submit child support documentation.

The requirement ignored how her family actually lived. Luna and her partner co-parent peacefully and never filed for custody. Submitting paperwork had the potential to strain that relationship. Not submitting it could mean losing food support.

"I did consider that if it meant being on good terms with my partner, maybe I wouldn't submit it," she said during an in-person interview.

For young families like Luna's, benefits rules not only determine access to groceries, they often fail to account for the lived realities of existing family relationships, health needs, and the fragile conditions families rely on to stay afloat. And for many, these benefits are not supplemental — as the name in SNAP suggests — they are the [primary source of income](#) for food and other basic necessities.

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Across California and Maryland, young parents described public benefits not as a destination, but as a bridge — something to rely on briefly while staying enrolled in school, caring for their children, and moving toward independence.

"Many Californians who could benefit from public programs live in dynamic and changing environments," said Sophia Chang, a former advisor on data exchange at the California Health and Human Services Agency. "It is hard [to] know when they become eligible for them and how the programs might work better together for clients."

Chang said Beeck's research arrived at a moment when state agencies were already looking for ways to deliver support more responsively and at the right time for families.

"One of the interests across all of the departments was we need to hear the consumer's voice. We need to hear the voice of these women," Chang said. When the Beeck Center began its research, she added, "We thought, 'Wow, this is an opportunity to bring the interest of the agency and Beeck's research interests together.'"

Families experience programs like Medi-Cal (California's Medicaid program), CalFresh (the state's SNAP program), and WIC as connected, Chang added — even when they're governed and funded separately. By grounding those overlaps in lived experience and "the consumer's voice," the research provided agency leaders with evidence to shape policy decisions during pregnancy, birth, and early childhood — when family health outcomes are most critical.

"I think what the Beeck Center research has done is [give] an additional boost," Chang said. "It's given those champions a bit more oomph in their armamentarium to make the case."

Roughly 30 percent of student parents [rely on SNAP](#) and many also [depend on Medicaid](#). In California, coordination varies widely by place. In some communities, health clinics and nutrition programs are housed together. In others, they operate in isolation.

"Sometimes, they're [other benefits organizations] down the hall," Chang said. "Other times, they don't even know who the CalFresh people are."

California's size adds another layer of complexity. Because health care and public benefits programs operate through different and vast systems and rules, even basic coordination — confirming eligibility or exchanging information about referrals to social services with consent — can be difficult. A pediatrician who wants to efficiently share information about parents and their children with WIC clinics, for example, may struggle to pass along that information. Families often end up repeating the same details across multiple portals and under different rules.

In California, that friction is compounded by how programs are administered locally. Each county runs its programs somewhat differently, Chang said, meaning families who move across county lines may have to start the process again.

For families already facing [time poverty](#), this process adds time and mental labor to households already stretched thin.

Luna felt that burden firsthand.

“They do ask for a lot of information,” she said. “‘Upload your identity... everybody who’s in your household IDs.’ And then, when I talked to the social worker, she didn’t even ask for the identities of other people. It felt excessive.”

The Beeck Center’s research suggests that improving family health and well-being starts with [practical design choices](#), including making families visible within systems that already exist.

When agencies share basic enrollment status, with consent, families could spend less time navigating paperwork and more time staying enrolled in school and caring for their children.

“Even confirming that someone is eligible and enrolled,” Chang said, “can make the state’s life easier, the program’s life easier, and the client’s life easier.”

Trust matters as much as efficiency. Young parents were more inclined to share personal information when the purpose was clear, the request was explained ahead of time, and when a trusted person — often a clinician or [campus staff member](#) — helped them understand why it mattered.

“I would be okay with the call,” Luna said, “especially if they mention, ‘Oh, we got your information from your health care [team].’ If they just come at me, it feels scammy.”

• • •

Improving connections between these systems can bring returns across generations.

“If we can get people the right services at the right time, we can avoid all kinds of higher-cost health care issues,” Chang said.

Access to SNAP is [associated](#) with improved health outcomes and lower long-term health care costs, according to data from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. Early access during pregnancy and early childhood improves birth outcomes and adult health years later.

Chang, however, said the stakes extend beyond health metrics. When systems are hard to navigate, she added, they can send a message that help is not meant for you — that the system is not built for, or may even work against you.

Luna knows that feeling. She also knows what she wants on the other side.

“I want to be self-reliant and independent,” she said. “And to get a job, so I don’t need these programs anymore.”

And perhaps, to reach a point where she no longer needs to ask.

*To protect their privacy, some individuals in this story are identified by a pseudonym.

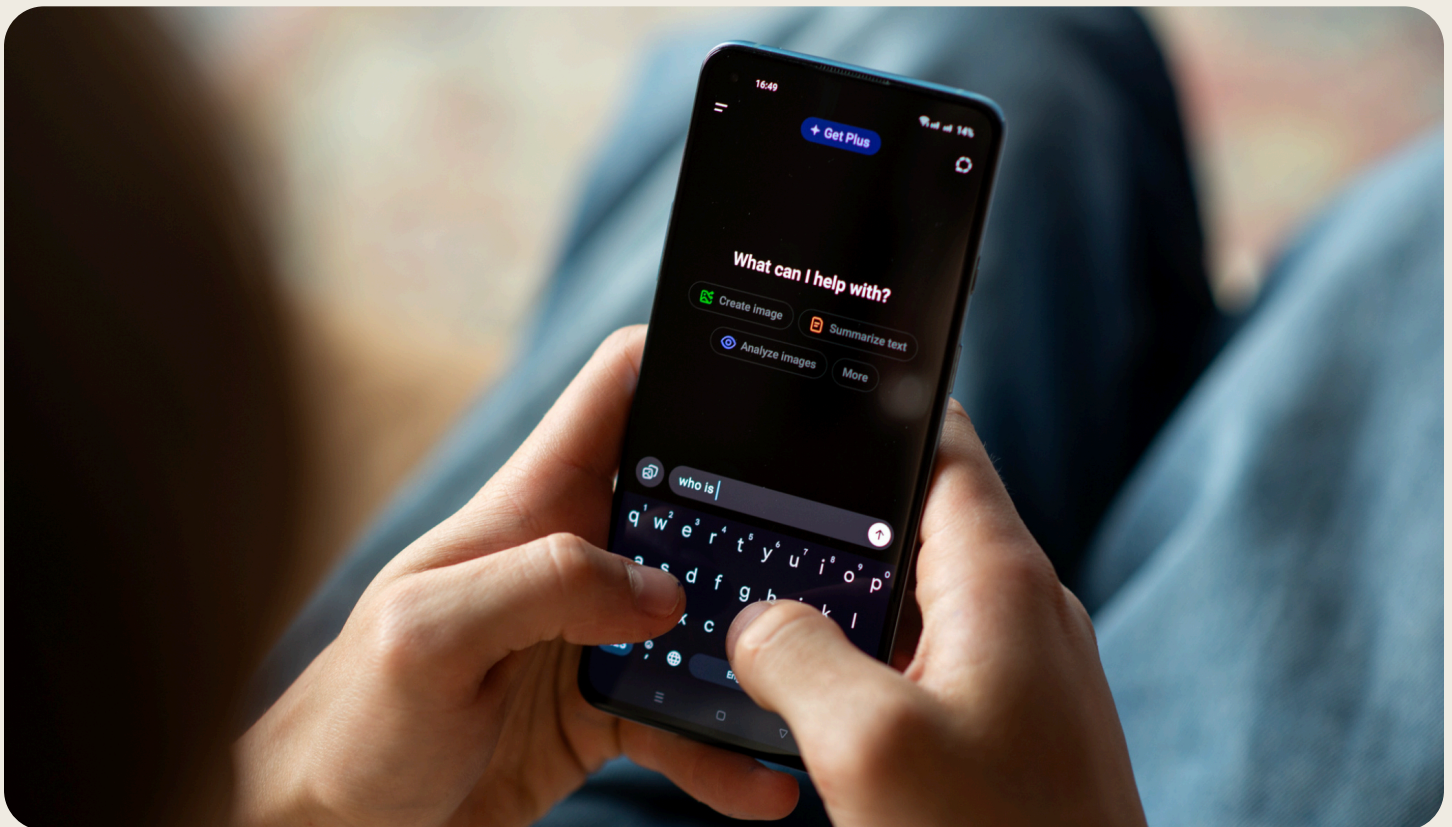
AI is the New Front Door to Government

People are asking GenAI about government services. If tools struggle to find official guidance, the internet fills in the gaps.



Andrew Merluzzi

Merluzzi is an AI innovation and incubation fellow at the Beeck Center for Social Impact + Innovation.



A person uses a smartphone to interact with an AI assistant. *Photo courtesy of Adobe Stock.*

Last year, more than [20 million people were laid off](#). They received the same abrupt message: You don't have a job anymore.

For many, the next step was a nerve-wracking web search. "Can I get unemployment?" "What about groceries?" "Health insurance?" "Where do I go?" "What do I need to bring?"

For years, people looking for help online clicked their way to an official government page, checking source after source until something looked legitimate. That habit, however, is fading.

Today, many answers about unemployment, food assistance, health care, or taxes arrive as confident paragraphs from a generative AI assistant. Whether governments planned for it or not, tools like OpenAI's ChatGPT, Google's Gemini, and Anthropic's Claude are becoming the front door to public services. Millions of Americans already use these tools [weekly](#), often treating them as [general-purpose advice engines](#).

But when official guidance is outdated, fragmented, or buried in formats machines can't easily read, AI systems default to retrieving information that's easiest to find. In an AI-first internet, the result can be a plausible answer that nudges someone in the wrong direction. That "small" nudge can be the difference between an accepted or rejected application, or meeting a deadline or missing it.

Even if government information is accurate, it needs to be published in the way people now look for it.

Over the last two decades, government websites evolved for humans clicking around. That produced familiar patterns: eligibility rules embedded in interactive calculators, policy guidance buried in PDFs, and dashboards that require clicking through multiple screens to reveal the next requirement.

For a person, that design is intuitive, if sometimes frustrating. For generative AI tools, the design can be functionally invisible. These tools summarize what they

can access—and will tend to favor sources that are [easy to extract and interpret](#).

With widespread use of AI assistants, governments need a new posture. Agencies shouldn't publish solely for humans using browsers. They should also publish for the AI systems that pull, gather, and summarize information the moment a person asks a question.

If the official answer is not findable, a substitute answer will be. So, what should change? And who is responsible?

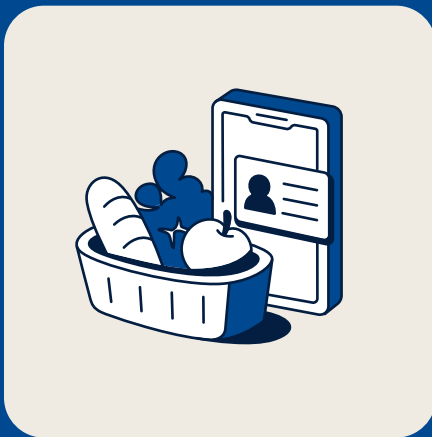
It starts with treating machine-accessible publishing as civic infrastructure. A few concrete steps will help governments get there: publishing [program rules](#), eligibility guidance, required documents, and deadlines on stable web pages — ideally *alongside* PDFs and interactive tools, not *inside* them. It also means adding visible "last updated" lines or notes on "what's changed" when new policies are put in place. This requires program teams who control the rules, digital teams who control publishing, and leaders who insist that official guidance is treated as mission-critical.

For governments that are already strapped, these tasks might feel burdensome. But the alternative is that public-facing policy becomes whatever an AI system can retrieve most easily — leading to missed deadlines, incorrect paperwork, and friction for people who can least afford it. If you have ever shown up with the wrong document, or missed a deadline you didn't know existed, you know how these small errors turn into real delays. That, in turn, results in more calls to understaffed help lines or more back-and-forth with caseworkers — all costs that land on the agency, not just the applicant.

At the Beeck Center, we're helping governments do this work in practical, repeatable ways. For example, in Marin County, California, we're assessing how often AI assistants cite official county sources versus secondary sites. We plan to translate these findings into replicable guidance for other jurisdictions — and share it through the Beeck Center's Digital Government Network, allowing governments to compare notes and avoid solving the same problem 50 different ways.

In an AI-first internet, governments cannot choose whether AI mediates public services — that's already underway. But they *can* improve the odds that the tools people use surface — and cite — the official guidance.

Explore our research



Digital Delivery

We're helping governments design and deliver simpler, more reliable public services and benefits. Explore our recent research on:

DIGITAL IDENTITY

BENEFITS ELIGIBILITY



Data and AI

We're helping governments use data and emerging technologies responsibly and for the public good. See our recent research on:

STATE DATA GOVERNANCE

AI IN BENEFITS POLICY



Government Capacity

We're helping governments build and sustain the teams and talent behind effective services. Dive into our recent research on:

DIGITAL TALENT

STATE TRANSFORMATION

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

From Concept to Code

How a chance encounter led to an exploration of AI-powered coding in public benefits delivery.



Anna Opalsky
Student Analyst



Alessandra Garcia Guevara (middle) speaks with guest speakers DJ Patil, former Chief Data Scientist of the U.S. Office of Science and Technology Policy (right), and Lisa Singh, the chair of the Department of Computer Science and director of the Massive Data Institute in the McCourt School of Public Policy at Georgetown University (left) at Civic Tech Live 2025, an event hosted by the Beeck Center for Social Impact + Innovation. *Photo by Jessica Latos for the Beeck Center for Social Impact + Innovation.*

WATCH VIDEO SPOTLIGHT



As the first in her family to attend university, Alessandra Garcia Guevara arrived at Georgetown from Germanna Community College with a goal of making the most of her two years on campus.

During her very first class at Georgetown, she asked the student sitting next to her about their navy blue tote bag that read “the Beeck Center” in white text.

Now, as she prepares to graduate this spring, Garcia has spent more than a year supporting the Beeck Center’s research team.

Garcia had applied on her classmate’s recommendation to Beeck’s student analyst program, hoping to use her computer science major “for the public good.” She spent the next 17 months researching how artificial intelligence (AI) could improve the systems that help millions of people apply for and receive public benefits, using a process known as [Rules as Code](#).

“[The Beeck Center] prepared me in terms of collaborative research and [taught] me how to develop research from an idea,” Garcia said.

With practitioners struggling to translate public benefit eligibility rules from lengthy policy documents into benefit delivery systems, AI can be used to write policy as software code — an approach that offers a way to standardize and expedite this process, and guard against errors that occur when rules are interpreted manually.

“If there’s a small mistake, then that costs somebody not being able to get food,” Garcia said.

As some of the first organizations to extensively research Rules as Code in the U.S. public benefits system, Garcia worked with an interdisciplinary team from the Beeck Center and the [Massive Data Institute](#), running experiments and prototyping with large language models. After presenting early results to state leaders, technologists, advocates, and nonprofits at the [Policy2Code Demo Day](#), the team published [key findings and opportunities](#) for further experimentation in March 2025.

“Coming from mostly a technical background into interdisciplinary research, where there was a lot of reading on public benefits, [this project] allowed me to grow in so many ways,” Garcia said. “I always felt like I was part of a team and not necessarily just the intern.”

More than enabling her to pursue research experience, the Beeck Center introduced Garcia to a new environment that connected her to mentors, a group of passionate peers, and opportunities to explore her interests and direct the course of her education.

“I’m a first-generation student, so being able to be in those rooms and ... have supportive co-workers and supervisors ... has really changed my perspective,” Garcia said, referring to her professional and personal growth. “The Beeck Center changed the trajectory of my life.”

It has been two years since the blue tote bag caught Garcia’s attention. But, when her research was published, she picked up her phone to call the classmate who started it all.

“I have found the research and learnings from the Beeck Center to be really helpful. It is such a good way to learn about what other government agencies are doing and realizing that our challenges and solutions are not so different.”

Joony Moon

Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance



Training

Our training and technical assistance helps governments turn ideas into action. We help partners strengthen skills, navigate constraints, and develop tools and solutions that can be sustained over time.

COMMUNITY

RESEARCH

TRAINING

“It Takes a Village” *Counted, Connected, and Cared For*

Inside Arizona’s effort to link health and homelessness data.



Elham Ali
Senior Manager, Research + Engagement



Colorful adobe homes line a sunlit street in Tucson’s historic Barrio Viejo district. *Photo courtesy of Adobe Stock.*

At 15, she headed to a CVS store on Tucson’s east side with her friends to buy a pregnancy test. Back then, they traveled everywhere on foot. At that age, the unknown feels survivable when your friends are beside you.

Two weeks into her freshman year at Santa Rita High School, her test came back positive. Adria Tena bought prenatal vitamins and tucked them onto the nightstand beside her bed, underneath the ordinary clutter of a girlhood she hoped would cover for her.

Her mother found them anyway.

That was when Tena told her she was pregnant. And that was when her mother told her she could not live at home anymore.

That same night, Tena packed a backpack, grabbed a couple more totes with a few days’ worth of clothes and headed down her childhood street to a friend’s house. She never went back to get the rest of her things.

Fear barely registered. Instead, a resolve took hold that pointed her inner compass one way: forward, always forward.

“I didn’t necessarily feel scared,” Tena said. “I felt more like, ‘I’m gonna go and do my own thing and I don’t really need you.’”

What followed was a life bouncing around borrowed rooms in friends’ and family members’ homes. Someone always knew where to send her. Someone checked back. Someone filled a gap.

...

Years later, Tena still ensures one door leads to another. This time, she does it with the weight of Arizona’s public systems behind her.

As a program administrator at Solari, Inc., Tena oversees the [Data Warehouse Enterprise for Linkage Arizona](#), or DWEL-AZ. It is a statewide effort to connect health and homelessness data, so agencies can better coordinate care for people experiencing homelessness.

The project took shape during the fourth cohort of [Data Labs](#), an [award-winning](#) training and technical assistance program at the Beeck Center, in partnership with the [National Governors Association](#), working directly with state government teams to scope and launch data sharing projects that improve public services. Through a human-centered design curriculum and hands-on support, Data Labs helped [18 state teams](#) tackle policy challenges in areas like housing, education, workforce, and public benefits.

In the Grand Canyon State, health systems and homelessness systems often serve the same people, but rarely share data in ways that help them work together. The state’s Medicaid agency, the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System, may not know a person’s housing status. Homelessness service providers may not have a clear picture of a client’s health or behavioral health.

DWEL-AZ bridges that divide — linking records across Arizona’s Medicaid agency, Department of Housing, and homeless service providers, with privacy and security protections in place — so providers and policymakers can prioritize services, coordinate care, and understand needs at a system level.

...

The work has taken on urgency in recent years. In 2023, Arizona Governor Katie Hobbs issued an [executive order](#) revamping the state’s homelessness commission and calling for stronger coordination across agencies. At the same time, housing insecurity has [increased substantially](#) since the COVID-19 pandemic, according to the Arizona Center for Economic Progress.

Partnering with the Beeck Center, however, helped the Arizona team name what they were already experiencing: fragmented data that was making a growing crisis harder to address.

“The hardest part isn’t agreeing on the problem,” said Travis Done, a senior consultant in the State Data and Analytics Office at the Arizona Department of Administration. “It’s aligning consent, compliance, and trust across organizations that were never designed to work together,” Done said. Solving it required “stitching” across programs and institutions, he said.

That challenge — alignment across systems — was one Tena personally understood.

As a teenager, she attended Tucson’s Teenage Parent High School and graduated valedictorian. She went on

to Pima Community College with multiple scholarships. But she is quick to say none of it happened alone.

At 17, a youth program helped cover her apartment security deposit. Youth On Their Own linked her to mentorship and housing navigation. School staff and community organizations made referrals, filled gaps, and followed up. Each step depended on someone identifying and connecting her to resources.

“I used to think I had to do everything myself,” Tena said. “I was determined. I felt like I had something to prove.” Over time, that mindset shifted. “Now my motto is, “It takes a village.”



Adria Tena

From independence to interdependence

⌚ 1:58

LISTEN TO THE AUDIO



Since completing Data Labs, DWEL–AZ’s pilot has run for more than a year. The project’s team built governance structures and collaboration across the state’s Medicaid agency, its three Continuums of Care, and homelessness service providers. The pace has been slower than expected, but progress is steadily moving forward.

“What we didn’t fully anticipate was how much time governance would take,” Tena said.

Sharing data across health and homelessness systems [requires](#) navigating consent rules that vary by region, strict Medicaid compliance requirements, and [privacy protections](#) designed to prevent harm. For Medicaid, this meant developing [exclusionary checklists](#), so providers do not inadvertently commit fraud. For homelessness providers, it meant new agreements, new workflows, and new assurances about how client data could — and could not — be used.

“All that had to be built before anything could go live,” Tena said. “The security, the policy review, the governance. It’s the kind of work that’s invisible, but it’s also the work that makes this viable.”

This alignment demanded time, especially for a project funded largely through philanthropy. Without dedicated state line items, many partners contributed to DWEL–AZ on top of their day jobs. The benefit, Tena said, was deeper buy-in and shared ownership.

After the team presented to funders during Data Labs’ Demo Day, they secured \$930,000 in new funding from the Garcia Family Foundation, Tena said. The support provided runway to complete governance work funders recognized as essential.

...

For Done, sustained funding mattered less for speed than for durability. “If you don’t build the foundation right,” he said, “the system won’t last.”

DWEL-AZ is now within about 90 days of launch, Tena said. That milestone reflected not only resources or timing, but the process that helped the team get there. Data Labs mattered in part because the Arizona team arrived from different places. Done worked across agencies without formal authority over most of the people in the room. Tena was newly hired, managing day-to-day operations without a data background. Randy Hade, Solari's director of homeless initiatives, brought years of experience convening

homelessness coalitions but little time to rethink how those groups worked together.

Most cross-sector collaborations, Done said, are relationship-driven and time-starved. People solve urgent problems in real time, with little opportunity to step back and design a shared plan end-to-end. Beeck's technical assistance created that space.

"It gave us a way to work toward common ends," he said. "I've never seen such varied folks working together like that. It's inspiring."



Randy Hade

From workshops to working culture

⌚ 1:53

LISTEN TO THE AUDIO



Today, DWEL-AZ has its own implementation-focused working groups, reflecting what the team carried from Data Labs. This means approaching problems from policy, technical, human, and operational perspectives at the same time; using shared language to explain DWEL-AZ to new partners; and trusting that progress can happen even without formal authority.

Coming from a behavioral health background, Tena was still learning the terrain as the first full-time staff member dedicated to administering DWEL-AZ.

"There were areas I wouldn't have thought about on my own," she said, including how to sequence data work over time, plan for governance milestones, and translate big ideas into manageable steps.

The tools introduced during Data Labs are still in use, including action plans, opportunity trees, and goal-setting frameworks. Tena now applies them to

DWEL-AZ and across Solari's analytics workgroups. "It helped me think forward in a way I didn't before," she said.

Hade described the outcome in terms of focus: "It helped us tighten our goals. We had a lot of loose, ambitious ideas," he said. Data Labs pushed him to look at the project from multiple angles. The process, he added, helped newcomers like him and Tena feel more confident about what they were trying to achieve, and hone ideas into clear objectives they still use to guide how they talk about DWEL-AZ.

For Tena, that clarity connects back to why she entered social work in the first place.

"When people know what they're eligible for, when systems talk to each other, that's power," she said. "Knowledge is power. And connection is how people get to the next step."

Centering Community in Digital Government

How Macon–Bibb County, Georgia is revitalizing neighborhoods through digital design.



Anna Opalsky
Student Analyst



The historic Capitol Theatre in downtown Macon, Georgia. *Photo courtesy of Adobe Stock.*

When Erin Keller thinks of downtown Macon, Georgia, she does not first picture the bustling main street she helped to revitalize, leaders cutting ribbons in front of new businesses, or visitors enjoying live music in the streets. What she pictures first is her community before dawn.

It is in those dark hours, with windows shuttered and doors locked, that Keller finds an integral part of Macon-Bibb County's recent development success. She thinks of Hospitality Ambassadors: residents who wash graffiti from business walls and clear trash from sidewalk curbs before the sun rises. "[These are] incredible people who take pride in doing all the unsavory things," she said. What Keller sees is her *whole* community, and she knew she had to help her government see that too.

Over two years, Keller served as a liaison between local government and the local business community for [The Opportunity Project for Cities](#) (TOPC), a Beeck Center technical assistance program that operated in seven municipalities nationwide in partnership with the Centre for Public Impact and Google.org. As Chief of Staff and Vice President for Development at NewTown Macon — a nonprofit overseeing the county's business improvement district — Keller worked with government partners to advance digital solutions through community engagement, interviews, focus groups, and user testing.

As a community leader, partnering with the Beeck Center changed Keller's relationship with county government — from merely working on the same issues to working *with* one another toward a common goal.

"[The county government] never knew who the end user actually was, so they were trying to solve problems with very little knowledge," she said. "[Beeck's technical assistance] really helped [the county government understand] ... the true pain points and obstacles that [community members] were facing."

...

In Macon-Bibb, the Beeck Center brought community members, government, and technologists together to address two local challenges. The first was blight, which is often [associated](#) with local disinvestment, population loss, and economic decline. This community priority had gone largely unaddressed in Macon-Bibb, leaving more than a quarter of properties vacant countywide and creating significant public safety and economic concerns. With the Beeck Center's support, Macon-Bibb designed an [application](#) for community members to report the location of blighted and abandoned properties to their government, improving its ability to effectively track and respond to blight.

Two years later, Macon-Bibb partnered with the Beeck Center again to address business permitting, a known [challenge](#) for many small and local business owners nationwide. With the Beeck Center's help, Macon-Bibb developed a [centralized portal](#) to streamline the county's business permitting process, which had previously been fragmented across multiple agencies and websites, presenting a burden for business owners, inefficiencies for county staff, and affecting local economic development.



Barbara Marlin (left) engages with residents of Macon-Bibb County during a Beeck-led activity — one of many concept testing and focus group discussions that helped shape community-led solutions to reduce blight. *Source: Macon-Bibb County (2022).*

While these [digital tools and prototypes](#) were one key result of Beeck’s support, a broader, system-level outcome was a change in practitioners’ skills and thinking.

...

“[Before partnering with the Beeck Center], we didn’t have a good feel [of the community],” said Barbara Marlin, GIS manager in Macon-Bibb’s IT department. “TOPC really paved the way for us to look at citizen engagement as a driving force, [rather] than an afterthought.”

This reflects the Beeck Center’s central approach of applying human-centered design (HCD) principles to ensure that digital tools and solutions align with the needs and experiences of their intended users. Whether an AI-enabled search feature on a government website or an interactive map, a tool cannot succeed if residents can’t understand or navigate it due to accessibility issues, digital literacy gaps, or limited internet connectivity. Without a pulse on community experiences, well-intentioned tools can fail.

This is what brought Marlin to a holiday event at a community center in December 2022 to unveil an early prototype of the blight-reporting tool.

Community members, many older residents, had come to test the county's proposed solution to a problem that affected them all. Many, however, struggled to use it.

"There were teaching moments in there that were really instructional, not just [to community members], but to us," Marlin said. "It made me look differently at how our digital solutions ... may — or may not be — useful."

• • •

After these insights, Macon-Bibb government technologists returned to designing and prototyping, eventually releasing a blight reporting tool [recognized](#) with a \$750,000 grant this year to revitalize the county's public spaces.

Marlin's experience with the Beeck Center is not unique. TOPC participants nationwide [reported](#) a significant increase in using human-centered design in their strategies, programs, and partnerships, with some uses more than doubling after the program.

In 2025, practitioners continued to put those lessons into practice.

Marlin spoke about the county's latest project, a new website content management system improving both internal organization and user experience. Before the Beeck partnership, only a general feedback form lacking project-specific details would be available to the public, "buried at the bottom of the webpage," according to Marlin. Now, Marlin's team has been employing human-centered design principles and community engagement from the outset, and looking at user feedback for the website "proactively, instead of reactively," she said.

"[Macon-Bibb is] really striving to be a data-driven community that responds to its constituency," Marlin said.

The county continues to root its work in seeing its whole community — from residents who show up to test a new application to those rising before dawn to keep downtown running.

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Policy in Practice

Inside a student analyst's experience working hand-in-hand with government practitioners.



Anna Opalsky
Student Analyst



Sandhya Soundararajan attends Civic Tech Live 2025, an event hosted by the Beeck Center that drew students and Georgetown community members together to hear from experts in civic technology and data science. *Photo by Jessica Latos for the Beeck Center for Social Impact + Innovation.*

WATCH VIDEO SPOTLIGHT



In her political economy classes, Sandhya Soundararajan used models and equations to understand government.

On her first day working with Hennepin County, Minnesota, she encountered a new side of government: a tight deadline, a legal risk, and no clear roadmap.

“They were so excited to work with me,” she said. “And I was excited too. I just had no idea what we were going to do.”

With an April 2026 deadline approaching to implement [new digital accessibility requirements](#), Hennepin County tasked Soundararajan to create a monitoring system to ensure government websites were up to standard. For three months, she worked alongside the Digital Accessibility and User Experience departments to improve digital delivery for the most populous county in Minnesota — an experience enabled by the Beeck Center’s student analyst program.

“At Beeck, I’m able to take a more hands-on approach,” Soundararajan said. “I don’t know any other place, at least on campus or even in D.C., that would give students the flexibility to take over a project and run it on their own.”

It is rare for students like Soundararajan to encounter these issues in a political economy textbook. On paper, governments have been required for more than 30 years to ensure their digital platforms are accessible; many users likely never consider how their experience on a government website would be impacted if they could not use a keyboard or see the page.

However, in Hennepin County, Soundararajan saw what her textbooks had missed about government — that even though federal standards have existed since the 1990s, local practitioners still work daily to keep platforms accessible. These public servants are the force behind stopping a design issue from becoming a forgotten small business application, undelivered food assistance, or lost lifesaving health care.

“In my classes, we put a lot of focus on the elected officials and their policy objectives,” Soundararajan said. “But we forget that there are hundreds of people working under them, who are actually creating solutions for constituents.”

When she returned to the classroom after her student analyst experience in Hennepin, Soundararajan had gained an understanding of government in practice — not merely in theory. By setting aside her textbooks and models, she not only saw the real way government operates firsthand, but also contributed to it.

“The expertise was indispensable in understanding our own blind spots; they enabled us to break outside our own tunnel vision. Without the Beeck and Georgetown reputations, the project [wouldn’t have] the necessary credibility to accomplish its task.”

Curt Clemons Mosby

Illinois Governor’s Office of Management and Budget

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