



# BAYES IMPACT

## CITIZEN-LED PUBLIC SERVICES

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Published by



Co-ordinated by Simon Bernard  
Arno Pons  
Louis Magnes

# CITIZEN-LED PUBLIC SERVICES

“As soon as public service ceases to be the chief business of the citizens, and they would rather serve with their money than with their persons, the state is not far from its fall.”

Jean-Jacques Rousseau,  
*The Social Contract*

## **A HARMFUL RIFT BETWEEN PRIVATE INNOVATION AND PUBLIC SERVICES**

New technologies empower citizens to impact society on an unprecedented scale. Yet the technological innovation environment, in its current form, mainly brings in profits for private companies rather than society’s benefit. While promising social innovations exist, they struggle to reach a critical mass that can match the scale of society’s challenges.

Big technology companies excel at exploiting opportunities to deliver services that respond to society’s changing needs. But they also excel at extracting economic value using their disruptive prowess. With society’s challenges in the balance, digital technologies bring about fundamental changes that spread into areas that we used to think of as being exclusively the public sector’s domain. Yet recent scandals, such as how Facebook misuses user data, or how Intuit – the publisher of TurboTax, the USA’s main tax filing service – lobbies the US government to stop tax filing being made more simple, show that private companies are not always fully aligned with the public’s interest. **N**

Equally, public services are still built as if governments had a monopoly on providing people with the things they need. Public services are increasingly open to innovation: a good example is the concept, developed in recent years, of the Government as a Platform. But these approaches risk limiting themselves to a set of technical guidelines aiming to increase efficiency, whereas they could and should be the first sketches of a political vision of public services’ role in today’s society.

Because we don’t currently have this philosophical vision of what public services should be when we’re tackling today’s digital, ecological and societal changes, they are repeatedly challenged by competition from tech companies. The idea that private companies compete with public services may seem incongruous at first; but given tech companies’ increasing reach in many areas of our daily lives, whether in healthcare, employment, or even justice and security, the reality is that the lines between public and commercial services are getting increasingly blurred. These companies are more agile, more innovative, and often seem to be just as free to use as a public service. Why spend time developing CareerOneStop (in the US) or the JobCentre Plus (in the UK) when we have LinkedIn and Indeed?

Why? Because we can't always rely on private interests to work for the interests of all. This doesn't mean tech companies can't create tremendous social and economic value; merely that the role public services have historically played in providing strong guarantees for the pursuit of the common good should not be lost in translation. Simply put, there is a difference between providing for the needs of one's client base and the needs of everyone.

### **CITIZEN-LED PUBLIC SERVICES: THE EMERGENCE OF A NEW GENERATION OF PUBLIC SERVICES FOR THE DIGITAL AGE**

The rise of the tech for good movement shows there is an untapped pool of citizens who have the skills and will to innovate for the benefit of all. Unfortunately, we lack the framework that would enable us to make the most out of this energy and help the solutions that come out of it to truly scale. However exciting the tech for good space is at the moment, too few initiatives have gone beyond the stage of prototypes or local success stories. Social impact contracts, B-Corps, or hybrid economic models are promising steps in this direction. But social innovators still too often have to make compromises of scale or of impact in their strategy. In their attempts to align their work with public service values, they are often limited by their economic model. They also have a disadvantage at the get go because of an imbalance of power with commercial innovation, which benefits from more resources and fewer limitations of principle. To level the playing field, governments should be key allies in helping social innovations reach scale despite these disadvantages.

### **This is why we're proposing a new social contract.**

A contract that empowers citizens to lead the way in building a new generation of public services backed by the infrastructure and guarantees provided by governments. A contract that enables technological innovation to work for public interest with equal fervor as it currently does for private endeavor. In other words, it's a contract that gives citizens the tools to respond to society's needs whilst ensuring that the principles of public service — including equality of treatment, neutrality, transparency, and accountability — are safeguarded.

Wikipedia is a good example of what innovation initiated by a group of citizens can look like when working on a massive scale. Wikipedia brings together the strengths of millions of people to create content collaboratively, whilst upholding its editorial independence and neutrality by refusing to monetize its content with advertising. Though there is always room for further improvement, Wikipedia has created de facto a new form of public information service. The goal of the Citizen-Led Public Services framework is to empower citizens to create a hundred such successes. In other words, empowering them— us — to contribute to the emergence of a new generation of citizen-led public services.

## **THE CITIZEN-LED PUBLIC SERVICES PACT: AN UNPRECEDENTED ALLIANCE FOR THE COMMON GOOD**

We can achieve this only if we change how we think about public services and the role played by governments. With Citizen-led Public Services, the government becomes the guarantor of public service values, rather than its sole service provider. The framework we've designed to turn this vision into a reality is called the Citizen-led Public Services Pact.

The Pact would work as follows: citizens building innovative services commit to respecting the values of public services, as defined by a common charter. In return, governments make their infrastructures, data, know-how, distribution network and funding available to citizen-led initiatives, providing guarantees and accountability while respecting their autonomy and independence.

This Pact provides the necessary conditions for citizen-led public services to reach a scale that could match the scale of our societies' challenges.

## **THE CITIZEN-LED PUBLIC SERVICE PACT: CITIZENS' COMMITMENTS**

This document does not aim to provide definite answers as to the format of such a pact. To start the conversation, however, we can present a set of high-level guidelines:

Citizens determine the societal mission they're aiming to solve, without having to specify the solution at the outset, thus leveraging their entrepreneurial freedom and the power of trial-and-error iterations. They are however

**IDENTIFYING THE  
RIGHT MISSION  
THAT WILL BENEFIT  
SOCIETY**

proscribed from using the benefits of the Pact for any use other than the agreed mission?

Depending on the goal they're pursuing, public interest innovators and governments must agree on the principles to be guaranteed in order to protect the public service aspect of their work, such as equal treatment, neutrality, and transparency. For example, governments could agree to open up higher education data for a student-advisory project only if they do not provide preferential treatment or access to paid customers.

**DETERMINING THE PRINCIPLES TO BE PROTECTED SO THAT THE MISSION IS CARRIED OUT AS A PUBLIC SERVICE**

As a corollary, citizens also commit to identifying the risks of bias in their service, and, when a bias is identified after a service has been launched, commit to reducing it.

These commitments should give rise to guarantees on governance. First, citizen-led public services should be required to implement an impact evaluation system. Secondly, their platforms should be required to remain a common good, in the economic sense of the term. Namely, that while allowing public interest innovators access to the resources they need to make a living from their work, citizen-led public services should remain part of the "Commons": they should not belong to any private shareholders, though they could be backed by other funding mechanisms as long as they do not involve private equity. Thirdly, they should be required to implement safeguards that guarantee transparency and auditability into the public service as it is developed.

**IMPLEMENTING EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE**

With this framework in place, innovators retain the independence and autonomy necessary for innovation, for example when conducting experiments during the project development phase. If the Pact's commitments are not abided by, it could be terminated and sanctions taken against the signatories.

## **BAYES IMPACT**

### **THE CITIZEN-LED PUBLIC SERVICE PACT: GOVERNMENTS' COMMITMENTS**

In addition to the data that governments are increasingly opening for public use, governments should promote public interest innovation by making some of its data available for specific citizen-led projects, provided that the citizen commits to the required guarantees.

**MAKING THE DATA REQUIRED FOR PUBLIC INTEREST INNOVATION AVAILABLE**

How citizens will access data will be decided according to the data's degree of sensitivity, the strength of the citizen's engagements within the Pact, and the expected scale of social impact.

6 Another way of facilitating public interest innovation is to build experimental spaces, for instance by creating user groups to test prototypes, or by encouraging experience sharing with industry experts. With this in mind, the Citizen-led Public Service framework must allow an innovation project to work as an ally to the public sector as a whole, and not as a competitor. The framework of this collaboration must remain flexible to promote experiments, failures and trial-and-error, which together make up the strength and agility of innovative projects.

**CREATING SPACE FOR EXPERIMENTATION FOR EVERY PROJECT**

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To encourage active collaboration with citizens, governments should also facilitate introductions between social innovators and the relevant agencies and contacts within the administration, to make such collaborations the norm rather than an exception requiring intensive lobbying.

Enabling innovative citizen-led public services to exist is only part of the equation. We also need to create mechanisms that allow them to reach a scale sufficient to match the problem they're tackling. Governments should help first and foremost by facilitating distribution, a powerful but often-overlooked lever for scaling up socially innovative projects'

**DISTRIBUTING CITIZEN-LED PUBLIC SERVICES THROUGH THE STATE'S INFRASTRUCTURE AND VIA TRADITIONAL PUBLIC SERVICES**

impact. Citizen-led public services should benefit from the governments' distribution infrastructure to reach as many fellow beneficiaries as possible – especially in the case of digital services, whose marginal costs are extremely low – and significantly strengthen public interest innovation.

The other key issue for scaling up citizen-led public services is the need to set up sustainable funding mechanisms. Beyond grants and subsidies – which are appropriate to fund projects at the seed stage – governments should further develop funding mechanisms that grow together with a citizen-led public service's impact, for example by encouraging the use of social impact contracts, or upgrading more traditional systems like public service delegations. In this way, governments could provide an answer to the question of how the commons are to be funded that is appropriate for the digital age, and unlock the emergence of a new generation of public services.

**CREATING  
SUSTAINABLE  
FUNDING  
MECHANISMS FOR  
CITIZEN-LED PUBLIC  
SERVICES**

# CITIZEN-LED PUBLIC SERVICES IN FIVE KEY POINTS

This document is an invitation to help build a new generation of public-interest services: services that respond to the major challenges posed by today's social and ecological transitions.

## 1 / THE CURRENT SITUATION

Technological innovation empowers us to build services at a societal level. Technology currently serves private interests more easily than it benefits public interest. However, we believe the right framework would enable technology to be the catalyst for the emergence of a new generation of public services led by citizens.

## 2 / OUR SUGGESTED RESPONSE

We propose a framework that allows us to combine the innovative potential of citizen-led initiatives with the strengths and guarantees provided by governments through a Pact.

## 3 / CHALLENGES

Developing the current vision of public services and the role played by governments so that they evolve into a role as guarantor of values for Citizen-led Public Services rather than their sole producer or delegator, while restoring meaning to civil servants' professions.

## 4 & 5 / THE PACT BETWEEN CITIZENS AND GOVERNMENTS

**Securing the commitment of citizens** wishing to participate in building Citizen-led Public Services: starting with a public interest mission, determining the values that need to be protected so that these projects are carried out like a public service, and set up an appropriate governance system.

**The commitments of governments** and public institutions: insofar as a Citizen-led Public Service delivers on its commitments, they commit to promoting their creation and up-scaling. They would do this by providing the data needed for public interest innovation, by creating spaces for experimentation, distributing citizen-led public services through infrastructure and traditional public services, and by sustaining financial backing for citizen-led public services.

**Together, let's create a  
digital world that  
benefits everyone.**



## About Bayes Impact

Bayes Impact is an NGO founded in the Silicon Valley in 2014. Its mission is **to empower people at scale** by building citizen-led public services.

Bayes Impact has led multiple projects throughout the world, ranging from helping micro-finance institutions operating in Africa, to launching an online platform in partnership with the Department of Justice in California to collect police use-of-force data from more than 800 police agencies.

Bayes Impact was one of the first non-profits to be admitted to Y Combinator, the world's most prestigious technology incubator.

Today, it has offices in the United States and in France, and was the first NGO to be allowed access to the data from Pôle Emploi, the French national employment agency, to create **Bob, an AI employability coach**. Bob was launched in November 2016 and has helped 160 000 jobseekers to date.

Bayes Impact is supported by foundations such as Google.org, JP Morgan, La France S'Engage and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

## About Paul Duan

Paul Duan is a social entrepreneur using technology to empower people at scale. As the founder and president of Bayes Impact, he is one of the pioneers in using algorithms to create social impact, and has built impact-driven digital services in collaboration with governments and NGOs around the globe on issues such as healthcare, justice, and employment.

Prior to Bayes Impact, Paul was the first data scientist at Eventbrite, where he built industry-leading fraud detection algorithms. He studied a mixture of mathematics, economics and political science at Berkeley, the Sorbonne University, and Sciences Po, where he delivered the commencement speech in 2017.

Paul served as a member of Action Publique 2022, the French government reform group headed by Prime Minister Edouard Philippe. He was also helped initiate the French government's Public Interest Entrepreneurs fellowship program.

Paul is a Forbes 30 under 30 fellow, MIT Innovator Under 35 Europe 2018, and the youngest Ashoka Fellow in France.

## Citizen-led Public Services is supported by:

### **Gilles Babinet**

Digital Champion of France at the European Commission

### **Clément Bertholet**

Senior Civil Servant, Co-author of “Ubérisons L’Etat, Avant Que D’autres Ne S’en Chargent” (“Uberize the State, before others do it for us”)

### **Nathalie Collin**

Deputy Chief Executive Officer of the La Poste group

### **Jérôme Filippini**

Managing Director in the French civil service

### **Paula Forteza**

Secretary of State for French citizens abroad (Latin America and the Caribbean) in the Macron government

### **Laura Létourneau**

Head of the Open Internet Unit at the Arcep, co-author of “Ubérisons l’état avant que les autres ne s’en occupent », (« Uberize the State before others do it for us »)

### **Michel Lévy-Provencal**

Founding president of the Échappée Volée festival & of TEDXParis and co-founder of the Brightness agency

### **Romain Pigenel**

Co-founder of Futurs.io, former advisor to the President of France

### **Christophe Robert**

Sociologist and General Secretary of the Abbé Pierre Foundation

### **Sébastien Soriano**

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