

Summary

The user from the first to the *last mile* of public action: a question of efficiency and a democratic requirement

The *last mile* of public action

Public action, in the form of services or policies, whether from the State itself, local authorities or any other organisation, is always designed to reach those it is intended for – a specific audience or the population as a whole. But do public authorities actually succeed in reaching them? Does the public action taken by these bodies actually get through the “*last mile*”? This is the question the Conseil d'État set out to explore in its annual study.

The term “*last mile*” was coined in the world of logistics to describe an organisation’s ability to deliver a product or service to an “end customer”. When applied to public policy, it means assessing whether public action is actually reaching the target audience and achieving the objectives it set out to.

The Conseil d'État study focuses on the *last mile* of public action, in an attempt to reverse the usual approach of starting with the public bodies and working towards the users, and instead **start with the users**, in the broadest sense of the term – in other words, the people whom public action is designed to reach.

The study does not examine the content of a particular public action, nor its relevance; it simply asks whether it reaches the people it is intended for, and if it does, how it reaches them, and if it does not, why it does not reach them.

Study methodology

To meet this objective, the study drew on hearings, presentations, discussions with members of the French Economic, Social and Environmental Council, contributions from inspection bodies and meetings at grassroots level with users and those involved in public action. In addition, questionnaires were sent to four French missions abroad (Germany, Canada, Latvia and the Netherlands); an exhaustive analysis of the standard-setting output submitted to the Conseil d'État during the Covid-19 pandemic was carried out to identify simplification measures that could be made permanent; and a workshop was organised within the Conseil d'État’s Report and Studies Section to test, using very practical methods, certain forms and procedures (for example, making an appointment to renew identity documents). The Conseil d'État also strove to take a critical look at its own work and that of the administrative tribunals in general

as a public service, by sending questionnaires to administrative tribunal judges, barristers to the Council of State and Supreme Court, and the National Council of Bars.

This work resulted in a two-part analysis:

- The first part focused on the **widening gap** that has developed in recent decades between the expectations of users – who have themselves changed a great deal – and the action of public bodies – which have also undergone profound transformations – to the extent of creating a **crisis of confidence in public action**, which is fortunately becoming **more widely recognised**;
- The second part focused on the **proposals that the Conseil d'État has put forward** in response to this situation. These proposals are intended to be both modest – avoiding the need for new standards at all costs – and ambitious in terms of the impact they could have on the way public action operates.

Part 1 – The concept of the *last mile* reveals a widening gap between public action and users

1- The study is based on the observation that the way in which users interact with public authorities has changed, particularly over the last two decades. We have moved on from the largely standardised approach to public services inherited from the nineteenth century, in which citizens were seen as potentially interchangeable, to seeing them as an increasingly diverse and heterogeneous group of beneficiaries of public policies. Three factors explain this shift: the development of “benefit entitlement”; the “archipelisation” of our society; and the changes in consumption and communication patterns sparked by the growth of digital technology and the knock-on effect this has had on users’ demands for public services.

At the same time, administrative authorities have tried to take user expectations into account. There have been many initiatives over the years, from the “Administrative Authorities at Your Service” plan in 1982 to the publication of the French Code Governing the Relationship between Citizens and Administrative Authorities in 2015, and not forgetting the *Rocard* circular in 1989, the laws instituting users’ rights in the early 2000s and the Marianne Charter in 2003.

There are various ways of **gathering users’ expectations of public authorities**, including the use of user representatives and groups, public consultations (public enquiries, citizen participation, participatory democracy), and opinion polls and satisfaction surveys on public services, which highlight not only how attached users are to public services, but also how concerned they are about their deterioration. Analysing the disputes handled by the administrative tribunals is also a good indicator of the areas of public action where users experience the most difficulties. By contrast, certain user expectations are not always expressed. This is particularly true when it comes to the **failure to claim** certain benefits or services to which users are entitled. Some researchers estimate that 20% to 30% of certain benefits go unclaimed.

2- At the same time, the conditions for implementing the *last mile* of public action have changed radically. There are several reasons for this change: external factors, linked to changes in lifestyles since the 1970s and 1980s (the mass take-up of certain public services; the metropolisation and suburbanisation of the French population; changes in French people’s relationship with work), but also structural reforms such as decentralisation and the opening up of public services to competition, which have added complexity to the way in which administrative bodies are organised. Lastly, we have seen a fragmentation over the last few years of the bodies responsible for implementing the ***last mile* of public action** (an increase in the number of agencies; the use of private-sector businesses – tobaccoists, for example, where people can now pay certain bills, fines and taxes – and associations). This complex administrative environment, which can sometimes leave users confused as to “who does what”, is not necessarily a bad thing in itself:

those involved in the *last mile* are often very familiar with the local area and the public's expectations. However, the fact that they are so many of them means that a great deal of coordination is required.

As administrative authorities have modernised, through digitalisation and ongoing government reform, they have distanced themselves from certain users.

France has been moving towards digital government since the late 1990s. For most people, this move was expected and even considered necessary. The number of French people carrying out administrative procedures online has risen steadily over the past ten years (71% of adults in 2022 said they had carried out an online procedure in the past year, up from 33% in 2011). **Digitalisation has obvious benefits for many users** (greater availability of services, shorter processing times for certain administrative procedures, etc.) and offers potential for further expansion in the future. However, for a minority of users, it raises questions and even causes significant difficulties. This is particularly true of people who are digitally illiterate (estimated at 13 million by the Office of the Defender of Rights) or who have difficulty accessing digital services (mainly because coverage across France is still patchy). Some groups are also structurally disadvantaged by the development of digital technology.

Digitalisation could also be seen as a step backwards in the relationship between users and government, primarily because it has often not been accompanied by simultaneous efforts to simplify existing administrative procedures. **Some procedures have become real headaches for users,** not least the calculation of paid leave for childminders and the grant application form for the administrative life development fund. Some systems seem to be a “black box” or act as a “sorting station” for users (Parcoursup, for example). Furthermore, the digitalisation of administrative procedures often goes hand in hand with a **transfer of tasks from the authorities to users** (100% computerised procedures or procedures requiring information already held by the authorities, such as the job centre certificates required for an employee to qualify for unemployment benefit at the end of their contract) or some of the parties involved (producing secure identity documents, which the State has offloaded to certain local authorities). **Forced digitalisation can be another source of annoyance for users** (for example, the one-stop shop for businesses). Lastly, the difficulty that public officials appear to have in “breaking the deadlock” to cater for a user's particular situation when the “computer says no” is a further factor in the widening gap between administrative authorities and users.

The choice made over the last twenty years for the State, particularly at central level, to concentrate on its role as “strategist”, focusing on design and control tasks, with implementation tasks being delegated to other parties (local authorities, agencies, service providers), has its limits. There is no shortage of examples of **lack of foresight, leading to short-term decisions or, worse still, strategic errors** (errors in medical demography planning, for example). **The rationalisation of regional government from the 2010s onwards,** which over the last ten years has been accompanied by an ongoing reduction in staff numbers – seen by some as a “large-scale redundancy plan” – particularly at the level of the *départements*, the abolition from 2014 of the technical assistance that the State provided to local authorities and the State's focus on its control functions at the expense of its advisory functions, have radically changed how the State works on the ground: the prefectures and sub-prefectures are no longer the point of contact between the government and its citizens, the Directorate General of Public Finances has completely restructured its network, the social security offices (CAFs) have reduced their drop-in facilities and now generally operate by appointment only, and so on. Against this backdrop of restructuring of local services, however, three networks continue to exemplify, for many users, the last-mile links in public action across the country: schools, the fire service and the national police service (*gendarmerie*).

All too often, the complexity of administrative procedures is passed on to users. Despite the undeniable efforts made to control regulatory inflation, **the volume of standards has continued to grow** over the last two decades (13.2 million words in the Official Journal of the French Republic in 2021 compared with 5.8 million in 2002). There are several possible explanations for this surge in regulatory activity: the constant concern of government to adapt public policies to suit the diversity of audiences and situations (at the risk of falling into “acute criteritis”); Europe, which is often

criticised for “overlapping” the production of national standards; and above all, the strong demand for legal certainty from those working at grassroots level, who want to be protected by a clear standard that can be applied mechanically. Case law also sometimes plays a role in the feeling that standards are becoming more complex, with judges struggling to strike a balance between their desire to settle the particular case submitted to them and their desire to “set a legal precedent”.

This proliferation of standards tends to make the legal framework excessively complex, to the point where it hinders the effectiveness of the *last mile*, for both public officials and users. Some standards contradict each other and give the impression of an administration riven by contradictions (in which conflicting positions are taken by the investigation services and environmental authority on certain development projects), while others give the impression of being “labyrinthine systems” that are impracticable or incomprehensible for those for whom they are intended (for example, the aid introduced in January 2023 to help small businesses cope with rising energy costs). Other standards slow down projects or, at worst, prevent them from reaching the *last mile*. For many locally elected representatives, “the France of procedures is killing the France of projects”, even though giving a voice to citizens and representatives of civil society seems essential. Some standards have powerful side effects, with harmful consequences for the very people they are designed to help (for example, the Active Solidarity Income, which is managed in such a way that recipients of this benefit become trapped in the system out of fear of becoming destitute). Others, despite their appearance, are “fake cures”. Finally, **there are the standards that are part of users’ daily lives, without them even realising how complex or important they are** (for example, the bus shelter standard – see Box 6).

Looking beyond standards and often wanting to do the right thing, particularly to reach only the people targeted by the public action in question, administrative authorities have tended to make the system more complex and pass on this complexity to users. As a result, and because they do not always understand “who does what” or for fear of making mistakes, users sometimes turn to the services of private intermediaries to take care of their administrative affairs, despite the potential risk of abuse. **Users also suffer from the “organisational silos” of administrative authorities**, which seem incapable of taking over from each other in certain situations. This is the case in the highly sensitive area of child protection, where shortcomings in identifying high-risk situations can have dramatic consequences. Similarly, users are sometimes exposed to **administrative boundaries** to which they have to adapt. Some administrative zoning can have even more worrying consequences (see, for example, the recent study on healthcare in rural areas, which highlights the edge effects and higher excess mortality at the borders of regional health agency zoning). Some **schemes are so complex that they discourage users from claiming their entitlements** (for example, energy cheques, which people fail to use in one in five cases because they do not understand how they work), particularly when the number of hoops to jump through grows or when they come into play at certain points in people’s lives (survivor’s pensions, for example, remain unclaimed in one in ten cases). **Complexity is often measured in terms of time lost for users** (in processing their requests, whether they are private individuals or businesses, waiting times at stations, etc.). **The increasing use of calls for projects, which have many adverse effects**, further illustrates the administrative complexity that places a burden, not on users this time, but on those involved in the *last mile*, and in particular on the last links in the chain: associations.

Lastly, the development of a performance-based approach in our country, particularly through the French Organic Law on Public Finances (LOLF), designed to improve the efficiency of public action, has been accompanied by a number of counter-productive effects (concentration of efforts on what is measured – the “reverberation effect”, screening of benefit claimants, an excessive number of meaningless indicators, etc.). Although the LOLF has made the State budget easier to understand and has given administrative authorities a welcome focus on results, it has not fulfilled all its promises: annual budgets are still the norm, rather than multi-year approaches; the promise of autonomy and flexibility made to managers has not materialised; the control of State personnel expenditure has had adverse effects (outsourcing of certain functions to the private sector, depriving administrative authorities of useful skills); and the

burden of reporting is sometimes too great for those working at grassroots level. The *last mile* of public action has suffered from some of these difficulties, as illustrated quite strikingly by the health sector.

3- These major changes in the way administrative authorities are organised and run have led to a gradual distancing between them and users that we could now describe as a gulf. This difficulty in reaching the *last mile* of public action has fuelled a **worrying crisis of confidence**, which is evident in how public officials, public-sector stakeholders and users perceive public action. **Three institutions to which French people are particularly attached are experiencing a deep crisis: public hospitals, schools and the justice system.** Despite their commitment and determination to do a good job, in these sectors as in others, **public-sector stakeholders are running out of steam.** On the ground, jobs involving contact with the public have lost their appeal: despite being essential to implementing the *last mile*, they have lost their meaning and are no longer attractive, and this is also affecting social support roles. People's irritation, aggressiveness and even violence to which reception staff at town halls, community social action centres, social security offices, prefecture counters and call centres are sometimes exposed are aggravating factors. At the other end of the *last mile* chain, central government departments are also under pressure, due in particular to a reduction in the time available to listen to those working at grassroots level, simulate the effects of a reform, carry out the necessary consultations and manage projects. The limits of interdepartmental work and the use of consultancy firms may also have contributed to their exhaustion.

From the users' point of view, the changes that have been taking place in the public sector over the last 20 years or so (perception that certain public services are being cut back or even disappearing; powerlessness of public action that fails to produce the expected results; feeling of not being valued by the public authorities) have profoundly **affected their confidence** in public action (according to an OECD survey, 28% of French people have confidence in their government, compared with an average of 41% in all OECD countries and 60% in Finland and Norway). This crisis of confidence is almost certainly behind the **decline in voter turnout over the last few decades.** Given this worrying situation for democracy and national cohesion, **there is an urgent need to restore confidence in public action and make the *last mile* a priority for all public-sector stakeholders.**

Fortunately, this need has already been recognised. The administrative authorities' efforts to simplify people's lives have been stepped up since the 2010s (introduction of the "right to make mistakes" and "tell us once"; launch of a project to simplify procedures and forms in 2019, etc.) and are gradually paying off: fewer than one French person in four currently thinks that administrative procedures are complex, but there is still significant room for improvement when it comes to those procedures regarded as the most complex (for French nationals abroad, procedures relating to disability and loss of independence). Steps have also been taken to address the sense of being marginalised in certain areas (medium-sized towns, mountain areas and overseas territories). In recent years, the very idea of the *last mile* has become a specific issue in transforming public action, particularly since the "yellow vests" crisis in 2018 and the ensuing wider national debate at the beginning of 2019 (creation of posts in the State's regional governments and more in-depth examination of certain approaches around the "ten moments of life"). Despite this, even though nearly three quarters of French people continue to have confidence in public services overall, their image is tending to be eroded. Against this backdrop, and given the democratic challenge that this issue of trust poses, there is an urgent need to act quickly to put users at the heart of public action.

Part 2 – The urgent need to put users at the heart of public action

The Conseil d'État has put forward 12 proposals designed to bridge the gap between users and public action. These 12 proposals are all **drawn from good practice gathered during hearings or observed in the field: the challenge is to shift into a higher gear.** These proposals are based on **three key principles** for implementing the *last mile* of public action: **the need for local presence, the need for pragmatism, and the need for trust (which is key).**

1- Local presence – The first four proposals aim to bring public action in general and public services in particular closer to users.

In response to the distances and difficulty that users sometimes face in accessing certain public services and facilities, **the first priority is to ensure that everyone has access to public policies and services (Proposal 1)**. To achieve this, it is important to **move away from an all-digital approach and retain other means of accessing public services**. To put it simply: **“we need people who can talk to people”**. In very practical terms, this means supplementing the digital channel not only with physical access (measurable in terms of journey time by car or public transport), but also, and crucially, with **telephone access** (a channel that has enjoyed a clear revival since Covid-19 but still needs to be improved significantly). Waiting times must be reasonable and clearly displayed, as some social security offices do, for example. The quality of the welcome and the service provided to users must be paramount, in particular to try to unblock situations where the “computer says no”. Many administrative authorities have adopted the welcome practice of making appointments for this purpose, which provides visibility and is useful for preparing for discussions, but it is important to provide time for drop-in visits to deal with emergencies.

Recognising that 80% of people have no difficulty accessing government services, but that 20% have neither the access codes nor the ability to do so, we need to **support people as early as possible (Proposal 2)**. This relates to three groups of people: those who are most vulnerable and least digitally literate, small businesses and the most disadvantaged regions. The first step in the process is to **identify the people who need support as early as possible**. This is essential, for example, for women who are victims of violence and are not always aware of what support is available. **Once identified, support should be provided as early as possible and tailored to the individual’s needs**. This is what the social security office in Hérault, for example, has been doing since 2020 with its “revolving interviews”, which offer Active Solidarity Income benefit recipients an appointment in the first few days after their entitlement is granted, to identify rapidly the type of pathway they need and put them in touch with a pathway adviser. This support should also **help to make users as self-sufficient as possible**, by offering them digital support via the 4,000 or so digital advisers set up as part of the post-Covid-19 stimulus plan, for example.

The same type of approach applies to **small businesses**, detecting the early signs of business failure by cross-referencing data from several administrative authorities, providing them with support as early as possible (which is what the “Weak Signals” scheme does, for example) and guiding business owners through the maze of existing support schemes (which is what the “Role of Businesses” scheme rolled out in 2022 does, for example).

Similarly, **the most disadvantaged regions** should be given better support, including referring them to appropriate engineering services and putting an end to the systematic nature of national calls for projects.

The third way of addressing the need for local presence is to **deliver messages that everyone can understand (Proposal 3)**. This means **continuing efforts to simplify administrative language**, including more systematic use of the French National Agency Against Illiteracy. The field of taxation is an area ripe for improvement. The redesign of forms needs to continue.

At the same time, it is important to **communicate in a practical way, as close as possible to users, using the right tools at the right time**. For this reason, it would be better to inform people when the systems are ready rather than announcing projects that will take time to implement and may disappoint if they are not implemented quickly.

The fourth and final proposal for strengthening local presence is to develop the “outreach” approach (Proposal 4). Drawing on practices used in the logistics chain, where one of the challenges is to reduce the cost of the *last mile* by consolidating flows to a single logistics hub, there is scope for **developing efficient focal points**. This is the idea behind the France Services centres, which aim to provide first-level support for a range of procedures within 30 minutes of the home of every user living in rural areas and urban policy neighbourhoods. To fully satisfy users, two conditions must be met: ensuring the quality of the responses provided, by training staff and providing effective support from

the relevant administrative authorities that are partners in the scheme; and ensuring accessibility, given the obstacles to mobility that exist in certain neighbourhoods and rural areas, which tends to lead to the development of hybrid operating methods (for example, buses in the field of healthcare and social work and even dugout canoes that travel the Maroni River in French Guiana to reach users).

As well as focal points, the “outreach” approach tends to **bring services closer to where users live**. To continue with the analogy of *last mile* logistics, this means “delivering public action to the home”. The legitimacy of public services is traditionally based on the delivery of networks to French people’s homes. This is the *last mile* in the physical sense of the term. It is therefore important to **complete the country’s digital coverage**. It is also important to **encourage initiatives that reach out to isolated or disadvantaged people who rarely or never use public services**. The Occupational Health and Pensions Insurance Fund (CARSAT) in Lyon, for example, reaches out to the spouses of people who have just died to help them apply for a survivor’s pension. Lastly, we need to **promote initiatives that put public space back into the hands of residents** (for example, creating mobile gendarmerie brigades).

2- Pragmatism – The following four proposals relate to the method we need to follow to give ourselves the best chance of reaching the *last mile*. It is not enough to simply decide on a public policy to have it reach its target. We have to think about the *last mile* right from the outset. In practice, this is more difficult to implement than it is to put into words. We need to see things through the eyes of the user.

It is important to design public policies with users and public-sector stakeholders. To succeed in the *last mile*, we first need to ensure that we are addressing the “right problems”, in other words, those problems that users are actually experiencing. **To achieve this, we need to start by listening to users and field workers**, which is not actually that simple (**Proposal 5**). Listening to users’ needs means, for example, admitting that we might need to introduce on-demand stops on rail lines, a practice that is common in the Swiss and Austrian alpine valleys, but which is only taking very tentative steps in France, or we might need to give users more power (as the culture pass does to young people). Listening also means **thinking about how we can identify common issues** and overcome individualistic attitudes by creating opportunities for shared debate. A good way of listening is to **gauge the views of users and field workers or their union representatives by making more frequent contact with them**. Lastly, taking users’ needs as a starting point **also means taking the time to analyse them, drawing in particular on research**. This is what is so interesting about tools that try to understand how the quality of care affects a patient’s state of health, for example. By contrast, the counterexamples provided by medical demography and the nuclear industry should prompt us to make greater use of research and prospective studies to anticipate and plan for the future, starting with the challenges of an ageing population over the next 10 to 15 years.

Once the difficulties and needs have been identified, the best way of covering the *last mile* is to encourage users and their representatives to take part in shaping public action (Proposal 6). This involves either using existing forums for dialogue or setting up user committees (as the Lyon Court of Justice did recently). We should also pay particular attention to those who are “invisible”, those people who are furthest removed from public services (at the national level, for example, by making more frequent use of the Fifth College of the National Council Against Exclusion, which extends beyond social action). There are many ways of encouraging users to take part in shaping public policy. They range from public policies that give users a say, such as security-related “holiday peace of mind” initiatives, to “implicative democracy” approaches, which involve leaving public meeting rooms behind and going out into the field with users to assess a development project, for example.

One of the keys to success in this area is to **involve the people responsible for implementing public policies in developing them**, moving away from the dichotomy created by the “strategic State”, which has, on one side, administrative authorities that design public policies and, on the other, stakeholders that implement them. **Bringing those people who implement the policies into the policymaking process gives you a much better chance of achieving your goal. This is particularly important for decentralised policies**, but still happens far too rarely, as the involvement

of local authorities often takes place at the consultation stage on projects that have already been approved by the State.

Administrative authorities must strive to simplify the lives of users, by putting themselves in their place and making their lives easier (Proposal 7), and do so in a variety of ways. Firstly, by **thinking about policies through the prism of the most vulnerable**. Secondly, by **extending the “tell us once” approach** to prevent people from not claiming benefits they are entitled to, by developing simplified forms and certificates wherever possible (e.g. the Active Solidarity Income form, which used to require users to tick the “Complementary Health Solidarity” box to receive benefits, something that few people did; this box is now ticked by default, which has significantly reduced non-take-up). Another way of simplifying life for users is to set up systems that **organise public action according to people’s stage of life and where they live**. The idea is to make it easier for people to navigate their way through the system by **providing, wherever possible, a single point of contact to coordinate the activities of the services in question**. It is also important to bring services closer to the places where users live or pass through (for example, in stations that 10 million travellers use every day, where consultation and biological analysis centres are being introduced, or even France Services centres).

As part of this drive to simplify life for users, there is a case for **capitalising on the simplifications introduced during the Covid-19 pandemic** and considering making them permanent. The study reports on an exercise to identify and analyse all the texts examined by the Conseil d’État during the pandemic. A distinction was made between simplification measures that were entirely temporary and those that could be made permanent, an exercise that the government must now continue at the interdepartmental level.

The Conseil d’État also felt it was important to “put its own house in order”. The administrative tribunals must therefore continue their efforts to simplify and improve accessibility by setting up a platform to complement the suggestion boxes provided in courts, based on the satisfaction questionnaires devised by the Council of Europe. More generally, and with regard to the Conseil d’État in particular, any difficulties that users encounter when dealing with its litigation, advisory or research activities must be brought to the attention of the administrative authorities concerned in a more systematic way.

The last proposal related to thinking about the *last mile* from the start is to **equip public policies with the appropriate resources and to consider stewardship issues from the outset (Proposal 8)**. Three key factors are involved: the allocation of proportionate resources and consideration of the logistics chain, time management, and the importance of maintenance issues.

Considering operational implementation issues from the design stage means **first ensuring that the resources allocated are proportionate to the objectives pursued from the outset**, even if it means adjusting the objectives to the reality of the resources available when resources are limited – especially when public finances are tight. **There is nothing worse than setting objectives without having the resources to achieve them, and then disappointing users**. This means learning from past successes and failures. Taking into account stewardship issues also means **ensuring that decisions are made in a way that considers feasibility issues from the outset**, including issues relating to information systems (interoperability, upgrades and changes, and complying with the GDPR when sharing data), human resources issues (recruitment plan, training, mobility) and the expected assessment methods for the reforms. It also means **testing the measures, as far as possible against practical cases**, as was successfully done for the withholding tax. To achieve this, we propose **significantly strengthening the feasibility aspect of the impact studies associated with draft legislation**, and **assessing feedback from the field and analysing the various possible options** (including the “zero option”). **Other types of standards would also benefit from these impact studies**, particularly legislative proposals, as suggested by the Speaker of the French National Assembly at the closing session of the cycle on the *last mile*.

Of course, all this takes time. **Time is crucial to the success of the *last mile*.** It is important to give ourselves time for public action, for example by relaxing the timetable for producing legislation, by setting realistic stages and milestones for implementing reforms, and by making provision for transitional measures.

Lastly, we need to **pay close attention to maintenance issues**, particularly when it comes to maintaining our networks. Administrative authorities often invest more energy in implementing new public policies than in keeping existing systems running. It is essential that we reverse this approach.

3- Trust – The final set of proposals aims to make trust the guiding principle of public action.

The first of these, which is central to the study, is to rely fully on public officials and those working at grassroots level to reach the *last mile* (Proposal 9).

There are a number of measures that could help achieve this objective. First, there is the **issue of training** (initial and ongoing) public officials in the challenges of the *last mile*, whatever their responsibilities or area of work. It is also important for **human resources management to promote on-the-job experience, bridging opportunities and alternating career paths. Particular attention should be paid to those jobs on reception or involving contact with the public**, which, as we have seen, are facing a crisis of confidence and declining interest. This requires not only **clearly recognising the importance of these roles**, but also **strengthening the ability to take action** by developing the complementary nature of reception and support services, by giving counter staff more tools for them to help users – those who come to the counter often have more complex needs than those who have found their answers on the internet – and **by protecting them from inappropriate behaviour by certain users**. Finally, there is an urgent need to **strengthen the expertise within administrative authorities** to meet the challenges facing France in the coming years (ecological transition, technological and demographic issues).

Given the increasing number of stakeholders and the silo effects that this often implies, implementing the *last mile* also requires being able to **rely on a network of stakeholders who can create a ripple effect across the entire administrative production chain and build a solid relationship with users**. These are the people we refer to as legitimate intermediaries: local elected representatives, starting with **mayors, associations** (which need support through tightening up the use of calls for projects in favour of calls for expressions of interest and multi-year agreements on goals and resources), **prefects and sub-prefects** (especially district sub-prefects, who have been much neglected even though they are the last, or rather the first, link in the *last mile* of State action on the ground). In addition to these stakeholders, who tend to be clearly identified, there are also **mediation services and peer users**, that is users who provide assistance to their peers (who tend to have fairly strong legitimacy and influence). Lastly, **intermediary bodies and civil society organisations obviously have a role to play in implementing the *last mile*.**

Building trust also means empowering everyone to drive change. This means **moving away from a culture of verticality to one of genuine subsidiarity (Proposal 10)**. Subsidiarity means **making clear choices, through the prioritisation of objectives**, to reduce or avoid contradicting demands. It means not hesitating to focus efforts where they are needed (for example, by concentrating State funding on particularly disadvantaged areas in Hauts-de-France or Seine-Saint-Denis). It also means **changing the way we develop standards, by focusing on the principles and effects we want to achieve and leaving room for local stakeholders to make adjustments**. This is the “negotiated standard” approach used in the French Labour Code, or the “compliance” approach used extensively in EU law (as demonstrated by the Digital Services Act in summer 2022). Writing standards in different ways also means not shying away from using visuals in standard-setting texts to make them easier to understand (see the examples in Appendix 7). Strengthening subsidiarity also means **supporting prefects in their role as coordinators of public action**, not only by promoting risk-taking and encouraging them to use the override authority recently granted to them, but also, more importantly, by continuing the trend towards devolving individual decisions that today are still the responsibility of central government. Developing subsidiarity also means **encouraging the use of experimentation** and practical experience in the field, **by striving to assess and share good practices, without necessarily trying to apply them across**

the board. Lastly, trust can be nurtured by building it based on **after-the-fact checks** (rather than before-the-fact), by making the most of research and **by putting the principle of the “right to make mistakes” into practice.**

Giving everyone a say in this change also means moving away from the all-too-frequent tendency to “offload” problems onto the neighbouring department, and developing a culture of partnership, cooperation and teamwork. **Switching from an approach based on shifting responsibility to one based on cooperation (Proposal 11)** means **encouraging those working in the field to come to shared conclusions and come up with appropriate responses as a team.** This was the idea behind the “learning cities” rolled out in a number of neighbourhoods in 2018, which bring all the stakeholders in a neighbourhood together (teachers, parents, associations, local authorities, social workers, etc.). **By building a framework for joint analysis and solutions, local stakeholders are brought together and empowered.**

Overcoming this “shifting responsibility” model implies, for example, **opting for one-stop shops or integrated approaches to debates on governance.** This is what France Travail is aiming to do, within a clearer framework of responsibilities for the various stakeholders, by providing shared working tools (shared reception areas, information systems accessible to all and compatible with each other, common indicators, regular steering committees, etc.).

Along the same lines, and without waiting for any clarification of responsibilities, it is important to **adopt a partnership-based approach to decentralisation,** by again encouraging teamwork, giving prefects sufficient leeway to negotiate the content of contracts and the means to honour the commitments made.

Last but not least, the study proposes instilling confidence in new management methods to improve the service provided to users and highlights the importance of this (Proposal 12). The challenge of this type of approach, which **strives for continuous improvement in the service provided to users,** is encouraging managers to meet with staff in the field to gain a better understanding of the problems that actually arise and to discuss practical solutions with them. This means that **civil service managers must take ownership of the issues.** In some circumstances, it even means letting users themselves come up with solutions and take the initiative, with the support of the public authorities (for example, the “Doctors in Solidarity” group in the Creuse region, where volunteer doctors from other parts of the country come and work a shift every week).

Changing our practices also means **harnessing the creativity of the public sector,** through the use of design, innovation laboratories and State start-ups, in which volunteer public officials are given the task of solving a problem, with the support of a coach and developers). This is how the “1 Young Person, 1 Solution” platform and the Pix digital skills development scheme were developed. It is important to capitalise on these experiences. Lastly, **the development of hybrid facilities, in particular third places,** to provide services to users and fulfil a variety of needs, will also help to bridge the *last mile*.

It is also important to **adopt a results-oriented, user-focused culture.** The burden of reporting can be reduced by working with the staff and service providers concerned to develop a manageable number of indicators that focus on measuring the effectiveness and efficiency of public action. The many existing performance indicators, at both national and local level, would benefit from being aligned in an effort to balance the reporting effort, as suggested by the National Assembly’s LOLF fact-finding task force in 2019.

It will be much easier to reach the *last mile* if the **budgetary choices made at final decision time are informed by the expected impact on users.**

Similarly, it is essential to assess and adjust public policies on an ongoing basis, and to involve users in this process.

Finally, we must **be accountable to citizens** and ensure that laws and court rulings are enforced. To this end, the administrative tribunal will make a particular effort to improve the way in which its decisions are executed (for example, by ordering a public entity to pay a sum of money) and is prepared to report regularly to Parliament on how

its decisions have been enforced. As a general rule, it is important to ensure that there is a **“duty to follow up”** when users submit complaints to the administrative authorities or when citizens are consulted.

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These 12 proposals are **“modestly ambitious”**. Modestly because none of them are completely original, and ambitious because implementing them would require a concerted effort from all parties involved, including from the users themselves.

These 12 proposals aim to **re-establish a service culture, by making the stakeholders and users the driving force behind this change.**

They all have one thing in common: they take time to implement. As Suetonius famously said of Augustus’s ideals: *“That which has been done well has been done quickly enough.”*