

Key:

Black = March 2022

Green = March 2023

Blue = April 2024

Studio mission & vision

[\(more context here\)](#)

Mission

To simplify the public experience of navigating government programs that help low-income individuals and families.

Vision

We'll do this by collaborating with people who use the programs, their advocates, and program staff to develop and support adoption of technology tools, improved policies, and human-centered practices that reduce burden for the public as they access, utilize, and renew their benefits.

Our initial strategy/theory of change

Our long-term goal is to set up lasting infrastructure (policy, tech, guidance, and practices) in collaboration with benefits agencies to enable more effective delivery of benefits *across programs* like nutrition assistance, healthcare, and child welfare services, to help *reduce as much burden as possible for the public*.

Informed by our positioning within TTS, the Benefits Studio believes our most effective avenue for achieving this goal is to operate as **a domain-focused accelerator** for shared products and services that are **intended for long-term TTS ownership**.

[figure out a way to make this all hang together in a logical way]:

1. We focus on accelerating concepts that have *already been tested*, but need federal support to *scale*.
2. We believe that solving problems for people who feel them most acutely first (usually people who interact w/ gov the most, such as those who rely on it to meet their basic needs) will scale across government
3. We only work on things that make sense for TTS to own long term. We recognize it takes time and nurturing to identify and test the impact of an intervention *at scale*.

4. As a new org, we are simultaneously trying to test/prove our assumptions about *the Studio's* effectiveness to *our* funders (TTS LT/OMB/Congress), *while also* trying to test/assess our assumptions around the effectiveness of any given *product/service* *bet* the Studio is making.

Problem we're targeting for the public:

Individuals that are eligible for one program are often eligible for other programs. Having vastly different experiences across programs makes accessing and utilizing benefits more confusing and burdensome for the public.

Problem we're targeting for benefits agencies:

In TTS and elsewhere, we've seen a long history of investing in solutions geared towards *individual* agencies or programs. While these customized solutions may meaningfully improve the experience for *individual* programs, they have proven difficult to scale *across* programs, thus limiting the breadth of impact they can have and contributing to more disparate experiences for the public.

We believe that the Studio has an opportunity to test a different approach to see if *designing for scale from the start* (even if only across *two* State, Local, Territorial, and Tribal [SLTT] agencies or programs at first) will result in more meaningful improvements for a higher number of beneficiaries in the long run.

With this approach, it may take longer to start seeing measurable beneficiary impact, but we think the initial time investment in creating scalable infrastructure from the start will be worth it, since it will massively increase the number of people we can ultimately serve.

Problem we're targeting for TTS:

The approach of one team tackling a problem space from multiple angles (policy, tech, guidance, and practices) is novel at TTS. Historically we've focused on offering technology products or consulting services relatively independently from each other.

We believe that tackling problem spaces with an eye toward *all* of the ways TTS can support or remove barriers will allow us to focus first on *impact* and *addressing the problem*, rather than the success metrics of a specific product. Depending on the problem space, the Studio might produce one or more products or policy/practice deliverables of varying size and scope. Expansion and iteration of Studio offerings will be based on feedback from our partners (collected via methods like piloting, interviews, or feature requests) and TTS budgeting/strategy considerations.

Ultimately, we believe that this approach will deliver more value to the public benefits ecosystem as TTS will create deliverables and relationships that are product agnostic and can live on even if a product is sunset.

Questions that we have about executing on this theory:

- How can we frame our scale focus for potential partners in a way that feels valuable to them and isn't alienating?
- What are some good/interesting governance examples that might help us talk about this more concretely?
- How should we organize our team structure to deliver on this?

Defining success on different timescales:

Short-term definition of success (March 2022-Feb 2023): **establishing the foundation to enable delivery**

- We've built a team:
 - It's small but cross functional! (I know this is table stakes but it would be failure if it wasn't)
 - Roles + responsibilities within the team are clear and acceptable to everybody
 - We've identified next staffing needs + strategies
- We've cultivated a partner network: Establishing relationships with partners and identifying who is ready/willing/able to work with us as we start on the first bet(s)
 - Validating that the first bet(s) align with cross-agency, cross-program, and beneficiary needs and identifying a shared use case to pilot/prototype
 - Identifying policy and non-technical blockers to scale
 - Establishing mechanisms to collect input on Studio priorities from the community
- We've landed on an approach for tackling an initial problem area: evaluating existing solutions to see what could be scaled or built upon vs. what may need to be developed from scratch

Medium-term definition of success (March 2023 - October 2024): **achieving scale across agencies and programs:**

- We've scaled our team:
 - We have identified additional skills needed + strategies for bringing them on that reflect and respect the reality of TTS's organizational constraints
- We've tested models for making decisions and investments across agencies/programs/community members:
 - Our first bet(s) are testing new (or non-traditional) decision making and funding models that involve and acknowledge the needs and constraints of multiple agencies/programs
- We've piloted our first bets:
 - Our pilots test different types of infrastructure (policy, tech, guidance (ex. toolkits), and practices)

- Our pilots give us an understanding of what is applicable and scalable across agencies and programs and what will need to be customized
- Our pilots lay the foundation + mechanisms for tracking public impact in the long term

Long-term definition of success (FY25 + beyond): by creating tools and services usable by multiple programs and agencies, we'll **meaningfully improve the beneficiary experience for as many people as possible.**

- We can measure our impact based on improvements like:
 - reduced # of duplicated actions across programs or % of duplicated data submitted across programs
 - reduced # of days to determination / receiving benefits
 - reduced # of administrative denials / terminations
 - reduced # of places the public needs to go to track / manage their benefits
 - reduced % enrollment gap across programs
- Our funding model(s) allow for financial sustainability for both TTS and for our partner agencies

Scratch - what do we optimize for, why, and what are the tradeoffs?

If around **scale across agencies + programs**:

- *Why* we'd focus here:
 - Scale across agencies has been a major blocker for other benefits tech solutions in the past, and will be a major blocker for TTS's vision overall of being a provider of mission-critical digital services (esp. public-facing ones) to other agencies unless we figure out how to crack this nut
- What we'd optimize for in our first year to prioritize this:
 - Building a robust, trusting network of partners from the start to build *with* us and steer us towards services they'd actually use
 - Making sure that whatever problem area we focus on first is a problem for multiple *programs*, even if our initial partners are all from one program
 - Ensuring design and development decisions enable scale across programs + agencies in the future
- What we'd deprioritize if this is the goal:
 - Speed of delivery (more important to get it *right* than get it *done ASAP*)?
 - Hyper-optimization around a use case unique to one agency
- How we'd measure this:
 - # of agencies (or programs) actively collaborating with us is greater than one
 - Market size (# of agencies or programs with a potential need for what we're working on) is greater than one

If around **improving the beneficiary experience**:

- *Why* we'd focus here:
 - Because this is who these programs are designed to serve in the first place, and the primary reason any technical improvements are sought in the first place
 - Because this is really the only measure that is truly *unique* to the Benefits Studio; the other success measures could be the domain of *other* teams within TTS if need be
- What we'd optimize for in our first year to prioritize this:
 - Deep research to understand and test solutions for beneficiary pain points. This would likely be most effective with one program.
- What we'd deprioritize if this is the goal:

- Working across programs might not be as critical in this case. Deep improvement for one program might be more meaningful/(achievable) than even shallow improvement across multiple programs...

If around **proving out alternative governance/financial models:**

- *Why we'd focus here:*
 - GSA or vendor-centered SaaS and custom development per agency seem to be the dominant models we see in the benefits tech space. Competing on price with vendors seems like a missed opportunity to leverage our unique position as a gov provider. It would be worth exploring whether there are different models of governance/financing shared tools that would take better advantage of our position as a gov agency/service provider
- What we'd optimize for in our first year to prioritize this:
 - Building a robust, trusting network of partners from the start to build *with* us and steer us towards services they'd be willing to invest in and co-own
 - Building mechanisms and infrastructure for collaborative decision making
 - Exploring cost-sharing models across agencies and potentially levels of government
 - Exploring different incentives other than just lower cost or better features to make a TTS solution the more attractive choice (eg, attaching to higher funding match or expedited approvals from the federal funding agency for states?)
- What we'd deprioritize if this is the goal:
 - Broad adoption outside of agencies that are part of the governance structure

What are other options for top success measures?

Staffing the theory of change