

→ How was your experience? CX in government



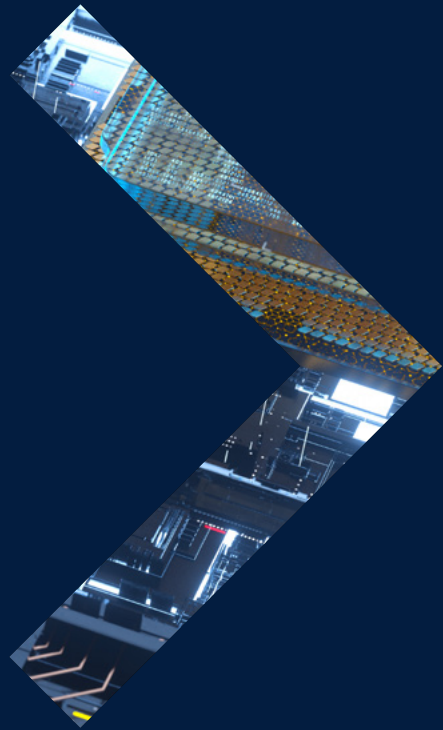
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Introduction

Digital government has taken center stage in the past year. From filling out census data and registering to vote to signing up for COVID-19 vaccines and filing their taxes, Americans are at home, online, and going digital with their government services.

Is .gov delivering the seamless customer experiences that citizens expect, or are agencies adding frustration to days that are already marked by struggle and loss?

There has never been a more critical time for federal, state, and local agencies to double down on customer experience. And many agencies are indeed making positive strides—applying best-of-breed technologies and hiring chief experience officers to boost citizen trust and satisfaction at every touchpoint.

But many still fall short. In 2020, citizen satisfaction with federal government services fell for the third year in a row, dropping 4.4% to 65.1% overall, according to the American Customer Satisfaction Index.¹

What can agencies do to reverse the downward trend and deliver faster, better digital services that meet—and even exceed—citizen expectations? In this eBook, we will share a collection of insights from ICF's digital strategy experts who have spent decades on the front lines of customer experience and user experience (CX/UX) in government agencies. Topics covered include:

- Voice of the Customer (VoC) and IT modernization
- The magic that happens when CX and UX teams collaborate
- How to jumpstart the CX improvement process
- The role of human-centered design in organizational transformation

We hope you enjoy this collection.

¹<https://www.theacsi.org/news-and-resources/customer-satisfaction-reports/reports-2020/acsi-federal-government-report-2020>

CX starts with the voice of the customer, extends to IT modernization

Customer feedback is the foundation of agency CX programs

Agencies and contractors are awaiting a new President’s Management Agenda and subsequent guidance on the future of customer experience (CX) under the Biden Administration. Certainly, CX isn’t going anywhere, so agencies should continue to lay the groundwork for successful CX programs. To work effectively, those programs need to have appropriate measurement frameworks and customer feedback

mechanisms in place. (When we say “customer” in this sense, it’s meant to be interpreted broadly, to include citizens, employees, and other people agencies serve.)

CX gained momentum in the federal government in the last decade, starting with Executive Order 13571 in 2011. Then, more recent policy guidance for high-impact service providers came out under the previous administration’s Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Circular A-11 Section 280, and we see more guidance on the horizon in the form of pending legislation like the Federal Agency Customer Experience (FACE) Act. In 2018, the 21st Century Integrated Digital Experience Act (IDEA) passed into



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Areas of expertise

- Customer experience
- Digital transformation
- Healthcare
- Marketing and engagement
- Public health

Publications

- “Government’s Content Strategy is the Linchpin of Citizen Experience.” UX Booth.
- “Is Your Government System One Human Error Away from Crisis?” NextGov.
- “5 Tips for Federal Managers Balancing Innovation and Execution.” Federal News Radio.
- “How to Create Thought Leadership Using Long-Form Posts on LinkedIn.” PRNews Pro.
- [More...](#)

Customer feedback	Synthesis activities	Outputs
Interviews	Statistical analysis	Improved processes for contact centers, content governance, service design, strategic initiatives investing, etc.
Surveys	Text analysis	Better web content
Live chats	Card sorting	Hiring, training, and employee enablement improvements
Social media	Content analysis/coding	New support mechanisms
Web analytics	Journey mapping	More efficient budgets
Transactional data	User path analysis	Customer-centric policy development
Online reviews	Design thinking workshops	Reformed procurement approaches
Emails	Dashboarding	Strategic communications and messaging frameworks
Phone logs		
Feedback forms		

How Voc program inputs become service design outputs

law, which dictates improvements to experiences with government digital products. At the same time, OMB has worked to streamline the Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) approval necessary for collecting customer feedback in order to improve experiences with agency information and services.

Regardless of the final CX guidance from the new administration, it's likely that satisfaction and trust will continue to be two big drivers behind measuring the positive impact agencies have. As more agencies establish chief experience officer (CXO) roles, programs will need to effectively collect feedback, synthesize quantitative and qualitative data, and report to leadership on their impact. Offices that haven't already done so will need to establish a Voice of the Customer (VoC) program or roll their data collection into an agency-wide program. VoC programs are the fundamental component of improving CX, as they help agencies determine what's working and what's not at multiple touchpoints along their customers' journeys by hearing directly from the users themselves.

You've probably seen VoC programs in action in your everyday life. For example, a "How was your visit?" survey you receive via text message after visiting an urgent care facility. The collection and synthesis of this type of customer sentiment and behavior data across different interactions—which can come not just from surveys but from other sources, including call center interactions, web analytics, online reviews, customer interviews, and social media—are all examples of VoC programs in action. Armed with VoC insights, government programs can more

efficiently and effectively disseminate data, make policy recommendations, develop guidelines, manage customer information, improve business processes, and produce communications.

Customer feedback should also drive IT modernization efforts

Government programs may find success in early VoC program adoption by integrating better customer feedback mechanisms, synthesis, and action planning for improving CX into their digital products. This may include public-facing websites, but also could include digital tools used by partners, contractor-run technical assistance (TA) teams, or agency employees to manage workflows, helpdesk tickets, or training programs. For example, agencies that have implemented commercial-off-the-shelf (COTS) platforms such as ServiceNow—or may soon do so to replace legacy technology—may need to integrate that system with a VoC platform like Medallia. This approach allows the agency to gather customer feedback at each touchpoint in the workflow managed through the IT system, analyze and synthesize that quantitative and qualitative data, and then share it with all parties involved in the customer's experience to generate action plans for improving upon pain points.

We're seeing agencies focus more on CX for digital products, as those touchpoints have become the primary way many of their target audiences interact with the agency to answer questions, obtain services, or complete applications. Starting this year, program offices within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services will be graded on their websites with a new customer experience (CX) score.

The nuts and bolts of a VoC program

- Inventory of touchpoints with customers (e.g., online applications)
- Feedback mechanisms for key touchpoints (e.g., surveys)
- Tracking software or documentation to compile and analyze data (e.g., a COTS product)
- Designated staff to manage program workstreams
- Designated staff to act on insights from data



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One of the goals of the requirement is to use information about sites that are working well to apply best practices to sites that receive more negative feedback from users. The plan is to roll out a standardized CX scorecard for program offices' web portfolios by summer of this year, using Google Trends and [Digital Analytics Program \(DAP\)](#) data to infer some of the scores. But HHS and other agencies should also consider the power of asking users directly for feedback in some cases, especially where transactions or support mechanisms are involved. Likewise, government programs will need help synthesizing findings as they implement VoC programs so they can inform action plans and create work backlogs for IT products to improve CX scores against the benchmark data over time.

To do all this, as agencies continue to build their internal CX teams and capacity, they will need private sector partners who understand the underlying IT systems, as well as the integrated CX platforms, to procure the right tools and skills for the job. Some tools come with pre-packaged, compliant forms and intercept solutions to gather feedback quickly from users, dashboard it, share it, and act on it. It's important to get feedback data about the entire customer journey out of silos and more visible to the people in the organization who can drive positive change. Just as agencies require the right technologists for this job, they will need seasoned CX professionals with human-centered design expertise to help guide journey mapping for their customers. The mapping process will capture which touchpoints exist to collect feedback for, and help to contextualize, interpret, and prioritize data reporting and work backlogs with the goal of improving customer pain points.

By incorporating VoC mechanisms and CX expertise into IT modernization, government will increase satisfaction and trust while saving taxpayers money through efficiencies in business process improvements and fewer failed IT projects.



Want to learn more about starting a VoC program?

[Find five steps for getting started in our whitepaper, "Using feedback to drive decisions."](#)



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To elevate the customer's experience, bring CX and UX together

What's the difference between CX and UX? It's the aperture. In general, CX pros work to understand the entire ecosystem of touchpoints that customers experience—potentially including multiple products. UX pros, on the other hand, focus more specifically on the design of the product experience. They likely sit in different parts of the organization and focus on different problems:

Problems CX pros solve	Problems UX pros solve
Understanding customers and their needs	Understanding users of products and their needs
Mapping complex journeys for customers	Understanding the product in context with the broader customer journey
Conducting research to understand customers	Conducting research to understand users of a product
Designing new product lines or services in response to customer needs	Designing new product features in response to customer needs
Working across departments or programs or product lines to solve customer problems	Working with a specific team or program to improve how a product meets user needs

Of course, it's never really that simple. In some organizations, a CX lead may be making product design decisions while in other organizations a UX lead may be making wide-ranging recommendations for how to transform the ecosystem of touchpoints.

Why does this matter?

To solve customer problems, organizations must work at both the macro and micro levels. This means that CXers and UXers must work collaboratively to achieve a shared vision. For example, CX pros working at a higher level can remove blockers and address underlying service design and process issues that can help UXers streamline the product experience. And UXers can identify areas where a product could benefit from that type of intervention.

Here are 4 ways your organization can help CX and UX work together more seamlessly.

1. Start with a shared CX vision and strategy for the entire organization.

CX pros can work with executive leadership to establish these high-level directives. And for UXers, who are often isolated on project teams focused on delivering product releases, this may be just the cover they need to wield more influence and prioritize customer-facing features.

2. Deliver customer journeys together

Frequently CXers and UXers have complementary customer research skills. We've found that having a UXer from the product team participate in customer research and journey mapping helps to give them context for the bigger picture, while helping the team more quickly identify product-related opportunities for improvement.



By **Lindy Dreyer, Wendy Harman, and Dara Pressley**

Customer experience (CX) and user experience (UX) professionals have similar goals and mindsets, but they are often tackling separate problems. Here's how they can work together.



What's the difference between CX and UX? It's the aperture.

3. Create and share customer feedback loops

The CX team needs to manage touchpoint and CX feedback across the organization, but that's frequently done in silos at the program or product level. For example, what if the UX team uncovers customer feedback on form design that applies to many products? Do the different product teams talk to each other? Sometimes yes, more often, no. CX pros can facilitate feedback loops across all the product teams. And the UXers can use that centralized feedback as a treasure trove of qualitative user data.

4. Solve big problems together

CX and UX pros can use the shared methods of [human-centered design](#) to address the really hairy challenges. Where the CXers might lead on generative research and problem definition, the UXers can be invaluable in brainstorming solution ideas and producing testable prototypes to guide investment. And they can work together to address the business challenges that innovation presents—from process innovation to workforce skill building and more.

Every touchpoint interaction shapes how a customer feels, and whether or not they will place their trust and loyalty in your organization. Both CX and UX pros have the mindset and the will to ensure those interactions are positive. When they work together and support one another—regardless of where they sit in the org structure—customers will benefit.



Better, faster customer experience starts with organizational change

Four reasons organizations struggle with customer experience (CX)—and four ways to jumpstart the CX improvement process.

Customers expect excellent experiences, and delivering on these high expectations makes good business sense—enabling organizations to gain and maintain trust, satisfaction, and loyalty.

But getting CX right is not easy. Why are so many organizations still slow to act even after they've gathered some information about customer pain points? Here are four reasons organizations can get stuck:

Analysis paralysis

It's a common situation: A group overanalyzes data or over-thinks a problem to the point where the group is unable to move forward. This often kills creativity, productivity, and progress. Paralysis happens at scale in large organizations with many cooks in the kitchen who each add spices to the experience that ends up on a customer's plate. With no master chef coordinating it all, teams can get stuck tweaking away at data points and revising PowerPoint decks while trying to sell stakeholders from each team on investing in better CX—when instead they could be testing ideas against organizational performance metrics. If the convincing takes too long, often the highest-level person just takes the action they wanted to take anyway, regardless of the customer feedback that's gathered.

A lack of CX leadership

Much of CX paralysis stems from the lack of a strong CX function, which is important to lead action

planning and implementation. Of course, how much this role can be centralized under a single leader depends on how large the organization is, and how siloed teams and resources really are. At a minimum, however, the organization must designate someone to be responsible for CX as a facilitator and support mechanism who has a seat at every table that impacts the customer. Product, sales, marketing, and other teams all play critically important roles, but they have distinct interests from the focus of CX. For example, salespeople are likely held more accountable for how many deals they make than for how the sales process impacted a customer's long-term loyalty to the brand. Regardless of who "owns" CX, the organization needs a customer-centered identity put into practice at an enterprise level. Every branch must support the other. Leadership can be a very effective lubricant, but the organizational culture must ensure that each cog with which a customer engages is built with a customer-focused mindset.

No formal, consolidated Voice of Customer program

Part of the analysis paralysis challenge also comes from jumping into CX data gathering without a plan in place for continually collecting, evaluating, sharing, and acting upon information. This means organizations place too much importance on small samples from exploratory research. For example, the organization may have done initial research to inform customer journey mapping and uncover pain points. But then it gets stuck and can't decide which pain points to fix first. The fear of starting—lack of boldness to act on sometimes-fuzzy details—happens because stakeholders too often think of initial data gathering as a one-and-done activity. Rather, the initial data should inform the piloting and testing of ideas, all of which



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results in more information about what does and doesn't work. Organizations need not worry so much about making a wrong decision with only one set of research to go on. As always, some things about the decision will work well and others may not. But without a structured program in place to help organizations see the light at the end of the tunnel—the ability to go ahead and test ideas and then improve more each time—it's tough to gain consensus on moving forward.

Customer Interaction	VoC Channel	Insight
Complete a form on the website	Web intercept survey	Was the form understandable and easy to find and use?
Discuss need at a field office	Automated text message after customer leaves office	Was the agency representative courteous and empathetic? Was the customer's need met?
Ask a question via 1-800 number	Interactive voice response survey before call disconnects.	Was the customer's question answered? Were they on hold an appropriate amount time?
Complain about a service received	Social media platforms (e.g., Twitter)	What concerns are customers voicing online regarding services provided?

An absence of agile culture

A willingness to test ideas and act on VoC data quickly and iteratively requires an agile culture. Essentially, that means the organizational culture is one that emphasizes cross-disciplinary collaboration and iterative responses to customer needs over excessive planning and siloed workstreams. [An agile organization might use a lean roadmap](#) (a high-level guide of what's to be done) to go out and rapidly test ideas; VoC data would tell them what's working and what's not. ([Yes, you can apply agile principles to CX!](#)) Unfortunately, many organizations spend too much time trying to use exploratory data to develop more and more detailed plans, many of which never become actions. Of course, customers prefer less talk, more action.

Your goal should be faster real-time insights

There's no silver bullet. However, to implement CX improvements faster, organizations must address the four areas above and start testing improvements in the field faster to get real-time insights and stop overanalyzing exploratory research. Focus on four organizational changes in order to move to CX implementation faster:

Research and test

Use exploratory research data to form hypotheses about which product, service, or process changes will make for a better experience. Then test those hypotheses immediately with a segment of customers as soon as you have prototyped the solution.

Define what CX means for your organization

Explicitly define the role of CX and its leader within the organization, then make sure each supporting team along the customer journey is engaged—and enabled—to support them. Sharing feedback data outside of departmental silos is a must.

Create a Voice of the Customer program

Create and maintain a formal Voice of the Customer program and corresponding CX metrics dashboards so all levels of the organization understand which sub-drivers along the customer journey impact satisfaction the most.

Embrace an agile approach to customer experience

Build lean roadmaps and agile workstreams targeted toward improving CX. Whether the work pertains to digital systems or back-end business processes, many journey touchpoints involve the intersection of several teams internally and will require fast-moving, high-collaboration operating environments.

Becoming more agile with CX isn't easy. It requires a strong, customer-centric culture and leadership that can wrangle many departments and stakeholders. And it requires change management at scale that generates employee buy-in and ambassadorship. But knowing that effective CX produces a return on investment that helps you better deliver on your mission and gain the trust of the citizens you serve is reason enough to invest in getting it right.



Why human-centered design is key to successful organizational transformation

To provide a better experience for both their employees and customers, organizations should turn to human-centered design.

The United States prides itself on its “government of the people, by the people, for the people.” However, in light of today’s climate, many government organizations are taking a closer look at how well they meet those standards—and cannot help but notice shortcomings. Many leaders in the public and private sector alike are wondering how to evolve their organizations to best serve all constituents and stakeholders.

The answer is organizational transformation. Specifically, it’s reshaping organizational structure to engage those who traditionally have had less of a voice. And it begins with the concept of [human-centered design \(HCD\)](#).

As it sounds, HCD puts the focus on the people themselves—in this case, vulnerable or less-represented populations—to examine how effectively an organization engages (internally and externally) with those populations. Through HCD techniques such as focus groups, expert interviews, and user testing and feedback, organizational leaders can refocus their internal strategy, structure, business process, and external interaction with grantees, partners, and the public.

The resulting empathetic, holistic, human approach [can mean a 60 percent improvement in project management](#)—which leads to more effective customer interactions.

So how do you get there?

Start with the strategy

Inclusive engagement starts on day one, when organizational leadership defines priorities. Using the principles of HCD, those not in positions of authority help shape the overall strategy. The resulting, and inherently inclusive, initiatives will lead to a more successful rollout.

One approach is gamestorming, a strategic initiative design process ICF used for the CDC Management Information Systems Office (MISO). Unlike brainstorming, this HCD technique uses games to elicit participation, exploration, experimentation, and competition to define and prioritize strategic initiatives. In our work with the CDC, we used different styles of games to ensure representation of each persona—leaders, extroverts, introverts, risk takers, and guardians of the status quo. In a matter of weeks, employees and leadership co-created a common set of goals—and a sense of ownership—for strategic initiatives.

[Lightning Decision Jams](#) are another inclusive engagement method, and one we used to retool the [National Habitat Conservation Planning \(HCP\)](#) Coalition’s annual conference. Jam sessions use a structured set of activities to focus participants on a specific task or project. And each activity is designed to yield a diverse set of strong ideas, inspiring active engagement as participants collaborate to develop their concepts.

Build the structure to support the strategy

Once you have your strategy in place, it’s time to develop the structure. Keep in mind the inclusive nature driving the strategy. In this spirit, it’s



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Areas of expertise

- COVID-19 response and recovery
- Public health
- Public sector
- Research and evaluation
- U.S. federal government

Publications

- “Childhood obesity declines” project: An exploratory study of strategies identified in communities reporting declines. *Childhood Obesity*, 14(S1), S12–S21.
- “Childhood obesity declines project: An effort of the National Collaborative on Childhood Obesity Research to explore progress in four communities.” *Childhood Obesity*, 14(S1), S1–S4.
- “Early assessment of programs and policies to prevent childhood obesity: Initiatives in after-school and child-care settings.” *Health Behavior and Public Health*, 2(2), 27–34.
- [More...](#)

important to identify (and invite) stakeholders most likely impacted by any potential structural change, especially those not typically part of the decision-making processes. Giving them a voice will help them understand the motivation driving the change. It will also go a long way in helping those individuals feel supported and encouraged—guiding the initiative’s ultimate success.

In addition to managing the people side of change, you will need to make improvements to business processes—everything from financial management to human resources to programming. HCD principles in this context can involve inviting teams to share impediments to their work and better aligning project needs with clarified strategic goals.

Use data to strengthen the structure

While examining business process improvements, organizations often open the door to data transformation. Accessing, analyzing, and using data are critical aspects of decision-making in every field—and effective organizational transformation must be anchored in strong data that represents the voices of your many constituents. It may come from ongoing surveillance, intermittent surveys, performance monitoring of objectives, or program evaluations—and it will help you understand what worked, what didn’t, for whom, and why.

This is another opportunity to engage a diverse audience, as data are generally collected externally. That said, it’s important to weigh the needs and limitations of the data providers as well as those who use the data.

For example, to start a [Data Reporting for Evaluation and Monitoring](#) program for CDC’s Division of Diabetes

Translation—which ICF developed and designed—we invited end users to identify limitations and needs. Through those stakeholder interviews, we learned how someone might use the system, potential technology and resource constraints, and both concerns and aspirations for it. We then tested prototypes with those users to fine-tune the final product, which became a system that was constructive and well-received.

Ready the workforce

To maintain momentum, the workforce must be prepared to welcome the organizational transformation. Through HCD-inspired training and technical assistance, employees learn to adapt to the strategy and meet its objectives. Discussion groups work well here, to assess needs and confirm the most effective means for building capacity.

This is the approach ICF took with the Project Officer Work Study Assessment for the Health Resources and Services Administration. We interviewed senior leaders to determine their perspectives on challenges facing the organization. We conducted interviews and focus groups with supervisors to understand what practices were working well and which ones needed revision. These interviews—plus a workforce assessment survey—engaged every staff member in the Bureau. The resulting workforce plan was grounded in the experiences of the whole organization.

Bring customers and constituents into the process

But the workforce is only part of the equation. The end user—the grantees, partners, and public audiences an organization serves—also needs to understand and support the changes happening and the reasons behind them. And, again, this presents a perfect

opportunity for a diverse audience to help develop the best possible tool. To this end, organizations often identify a small group of end users to generate ideas for—and then test—an initial prototype.

For example, ICF turned to small and large business end users—as well as state health departments—to test the [Workplace Health Resource Center](#) for CDC’s Division of Population Health. These users provided insight regarding the practicality of such a resource, topics they wanted to see addressed, and features for searching and navigation. Thanks to their input, we developed [case study videos](#) and [topical briefs](#) that spoke to the key issues business owners found most important. We also developed an [organizational structure for keyword searches](#). And today, this robust resource center remains regularly used.

None of these successes would be possible without an inclusive and empathetic approach to organizational transformation—two qualities that are inherent to human-centered design. Organizations that adhere to these principles will be positioned to evolve their operations and transform their enterprises in a way that serves every constituent well, and leaves no one behind.



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