

NYC MAYOR'S OFFICE OF DIGITAL STRATEGY

NEW YORKERS' DIGITAL SERVICE NEEDS

FINDINGS FROM DISCOVERY RESEARCH FOR THE NYC DIGITAL PLAYBOOK

NYC

BENNETTMIDLAND


BUREAUBLANK

**PUBLIC
POLICY
LAB**



The team met with dozens of New Yorkers, who told us about their service experiences and their digital lives.

PROJECT CREDITS

New Yorkers' Digital Service Needs documents a project undertaken by the NYC Mayor's Office of Digital Strategy, in collaboration with Bennett Midland, a consulting firm to the public sector; Bureau Blank, a design consultancy serving government, academia, infrastructure, and nonprofits; and the Public Policy Lab, a nonprofit innovation lab for government.

This project was only possible because of the generosity of the many New Yorkers and others who shared their experiences and insights with the Playbook team. We gratefully acknowledge their time. All our project participants took part as volunteers; in order to get their most candid advice, we asked that our participants speak with us anonymously. Photos of interviewees of this study were taken with permission of the interviewee.

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ABOUT THE NYC DIGITAL PLAYBOOK

The City of New York is dedicated to better serving and engaging with city residents, businesses, and visitors. In May 2016, the Mayor's Office of Digital Strategy supported this commitment by launching the NYC Digital Playbook. The Playbook outlines strategies and methods for improving the delivery of City services, embracing government transparency, generating genuine civic engagement, and making New York the most user-friendly and innovative city in the world.

PLAYBOOK DISCOVERY ACTIVITIES

The Playbook was developed using human-centered research and design. The project team met with dozens of New York City residents – from diverse backgrounds and from all five boroughs – in their homes and workplaces. We learned about their needs and aspirations for City services. We also spoke with civic and technology leaders, elected officials, and City agency leaders. And we looked beyond New York City to learn from best practices in other governments and in the private sector.

26 INTERVIEWS WITH CITY RESIDENTS

GENDER



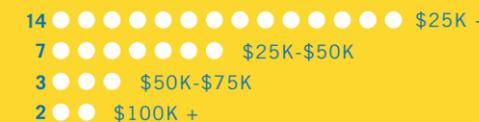
INTERVIEW LOCATIONS



RACE/ETHNICITY



ESTIMATED INCOME



23 INTERVIEWS WITH CITY EMPLOYEES

Including staff from the NYC Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications (DoITT), Department of Finance, Department of Law, Department of Records, Department of Transportation, Economic Development Corporation, Human Resources Administration, Mayor's Office of Emergency Management, Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, Mayor's Office of Operations, Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities, Mayor's Office of Technology and Innovation, and others

26 INTERVIEWS WITH CIVIC TECH EXPERTS

Including experts from 18F, 1776, Activate, BetaNYC, Blue State Digital, Brooklyn Public Library, Civic Hall, City of Boston, Coalition for Queens, Code for America, Columbia University, Do Something, Engine, Ford Foundation, Gilt GovDelivery, Makerbase, Meetup, New America, New York University, Sidewalk Labs, ThinkUp, TurboVote, Union Square Ventures, US Digital Services, Vizalytics Technology, and Woodrow Wilson School

USE THE DIGITAL PLAYBOOK ONLINE AT NYC.GOV/PLAYBOOK 3

GOOD SERVICES

WHAT WE HEARD

Conversations with residents, City staff, and experts generated hundreds of insights about New Yorkers' use of City services and, more broadly, of digital tools. The Playbook team synthesized these insights to create a body of top findings, divided into three categories: human experiences (findings about how New Yorkers live and feel), service experiences (findings about service delivery), and institutional experiences (findings about the City's operations).

WHAT WE HEARD

HUMAN EXPERIENCES

UNIVERSAL DESIGN PRECEDENTS

The city's **311 phone line and app** offers resident-centered service and embraces a 'customer focused' internal culture of service delivery that could be rolled out to other agencies.

The **IDNYC program** used existing open data to identify where to launch first to gain momentum and trust – a targeted model that could be extended to other service delivery.

COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

Libraries are information hubs for many New Yorkers, especially those who lack digital access at home.

Community organizations act as cultural and linguistic translators for many who do not want to or cannot effectively interact with City services.

Many **CBOs want to connect digitally** with their communities, but they're at capacity in terms of their outreach and don't have the time or money to expand their offerings.

LACK OF ACCESS, CONNECTIONS & TRUST

Unclear processes, clerical errors, and a lack of awareness of what's even available contribute to many New Yorkers being **disconnected** from useful City services.

Almost everyone has a cell phone. **Text messages** may be a viable way to reach those who don't have (or don't want) a smartphone or computer.

TIME & MONEY SCARCITY

New Yorkers deal with a **scarcity of time**, and siloed City services can add an additional time burden that hits lower-income residents hardest.

Services that are difficult to understand or navigate make everyday life even more challenging and contribute to **cognitive overload**, causing some residents to give up due to confusion or frustration.

At-risk New Yorkers often have to make multiple in-person visits to City service locations, spending their limited funds to get there and increasing their **financial burdens**.

“I use Google Translate and the dictionary app with my children. I always run out of data with my \$60 Cricket plan, before the month is up.”

NYC RESIDENT
MOTHER OF 2, SPANISH SPEAKER, NOT LITERATE, BRONX

WHAT WE HEARD

SERVICE EXPERIENCES

ENGAGEMENT BARRIERS

Many New Yorkers are not fluent in English, and City services are not always available in translation, creating **language barriers**.

New Yorkers with physical disabilities struggle with a **lack of fully accessible services**.

Residents have **widely variable literacy levels**, both in terms of digital comfort and reading level.

GOOD TOOLS NOW

New Yorkers typically find City service information via search engines like Google, so **search optimization** and targeted ads may bring many more residents to City services.

Facebook, Twitter, and other similar networks are widely used by New Yorkers, creating **ready-made social media audiences** for City outreach and engagement.

New Yorkers **use text messaging**, even those without smartphones, and many prefer texting over in-person interactions.

 **“It’s not fair, we are being deprived of information that everyone else can access. And it’s such a struggle to gain that access. Being visually impaired, we have to adapt to a sighted world.”**

NYC RESIDENT
TEACHER OF BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED, UPPER EAST SIDE

INFORMATION COMPLEXITY

City websites may return different answers to the same question and use complex language or processes, creating **clarity and ease problems**.

Residents may need to interact with **multiple City services to address a single issue** – a complexity that’s often unacknowledged by any of the individual services.

City **sites don’t ‘recognize’ residents** when they return, causing New Yorkers to have to enter the same personal information over and over.

WHAT WE HEARD

INSTITUTIONAL EXPERIENCES

BROKEN BACK END

Incompatible back-end systems, processes, and protocols make interaction between agencies difficult (if not impossible).

Digital tools can make a bad problem worse if **new front-end interfaces deliver users to services that don’t function** properly or provide information that isn’t accurate.

PRIVACY

Residents want **both privacy and ease of use**; prototyping is critical for exploring how to deliver both.

Some residents see **government as untrustworthy** and believe private companies like Chase and Verizon would offer better security than the City of New York.

LEVERAGING HELP

New models for procurement and hiring could make recruiting the right people or partners for a digital job more timely and cost effective.

Improving the **internal digital capacity of staff** across multiple City agencies will generate more benefits that concentrating capacity narrowly.

Building **partnership opportunities and digital capacity for non-City entities** like CBOs will lessen the burden on City agencies and empower community members.

BROKEN PROCESS

Agencies often work in isolation, yielding an inconsistent, confusing, and ultimately less useful experience for residents.

Design standards are not shared or adhered to; brand guidelines do exist, but are not always used nor updated to reflect new changes.

Different agencies have different skill sets, capacities and resources on staff, which creates a **widely variant City digital experience**.

DATA/SYSTEM IMPROVEMENTS

Agencies can **share resources, templates, and style guides** to build solutions collaboratively.

Clean, open, and shareable data would allow agencies to offer more tailored and efficient services to the public.

Identifying hardware and software that doesn’t work – and having the **permission to decommission** it – can be as powerful as having resources to implement new things.



The team held research 'pin-up' sessions, where we shared findings from the ethnographic interviews with City leaders for feedback.

PRINCIPLES

Building on the findings from research, the Digital Playbook defines six core principles to inspire and orient all future digital service development by the City of New York. These principles underpin a broad commitment to creating a more equitable city.



WELCOME ALL NEW YORKERS

We serve and empower residents from diverse language, ability, geographic, and socio-economic backgrounds.



MAKE GOVERNMENT SIMPLE

We proactively identify the most urgent and persistent needs of New Yorkers, then we design engaging, easy-to-navigate services that meet residents' preferences and requirements.



BUILD COLLABORATION

We help others better serve New Yorkers. We develop and share data and platforms to improve all the services City residents use.



PROTECT NEW YORKERS' TRUST

We deliver services that are reliable and accountable; we keep New Yorkers' personal data secure; and we're transparent about how we use the information we collect.



SERVE PEOPLE WHERE THEY ARE

We deliver services and information through channels that New Yorkers already use, and we build on existing resources in New York's diverse communities.



LISTEN AND RESPOND

We develop accurate, responsive services by engaging collaboratively with New Yorkers, seeking their insights, and responding to people when they interact with us.



STRATEGIES

The Digital Playbook identifies 12 specific strategies that City agencies can use to develop new or improved services that meet the City’s core principles for digital services.

1 MAKE SERVICES AVAILABLE TO NEW YORKERS OF ALL CAPABILITIES AND LANGUAGE PREFERENCES.

All residents need dignified access to City services, whatever their abilities or language preferences. Services should meet or exceed accessibility standards, should be offered in multiple languages, and should not feel burdensome to use.

2 COMMUNICATE SIMPLY AND CLEARLY IN ALL LANGUAGES USED.

Residents have an easier time understanding what the City offers and what services are relevant to them if all digital and non-digital services use simple and plain language.

3 REACH OUT TO NEW YORKERS AND INVITE THEM TO USE CITY SERVICES.

The City can reach out to individual residents, tailor information to specific needs, and make it easy to complete an enrollment or process in just a few steps. Services should recognize users and not make them start from scratch.

4 ENGAGE NEW YORKERS IN THE CREATION AND TESTING OF SERVICES.

The best way to create services that work well for New Yorkers is to involve them in deciding what to build and how to build it. Human-centered research, design, and evaluation are powerful tools for creating services that satisfy both residents and front-line service providers.

5 STRUCTURE SERVICES AROUND NEW YORKERS’ NEEDS RATHER THAN BY AGENCY NEEDS.

City government is enormous and complex—there are more than 340 unique nyc.gov websites. However, residents think about services based on their interests and preferences, not by government departments or political initiatives. When multiple agencies share responsibility and plan together, they can create seamless services that feel simple and intuitive.

6 BUILD THE CAPACITY OF CITY STAFF TO DELIVER BEST-IN-CLASS SERVICE

When City staff are empowered with the necessary tools, resources, training, and authority, they are better able to design and implement excellent, innovative services for New Yorkers.

7 BUILD ON EXISTING SERVICES THAT WORK.

Millions of residents have strong relationships with social media networks, search engines, and other third party sites and applications. City services should recognize what works well for New Yorkers and leverage the tools that residents already use and enjoy.

8 INTEGRATE DIGITAL SERVICES WITHIN NEIGHBORHOODS AND COMMUNITIES.

Successful services combine digital offerings with access points in the physical city. Services can empower diverse New Yorkers through neighborhood and community hubs, both online and “in real life,” and build stronger bonds between New Yorkers.

9 CREATE TECHNICAL, DATA, AND DESIGN STANDARDS FOR SERVICES.

City data and services should be equally recognizable across all agencies, channels, and platforms, and City data should be equally reliable everywhere. Clear standards regarding data sharing and collection can help agencies to design and implement key services with consistency.

10 DESIGN FOR MOBILE DEVICES FIRST.

Residents increasingly use mobile devices as their primary tool to access key services. The City can reach the greatest number of residents by prioritizing mobile online services and SMS communications.

11 COLLABORATE WITH CIVIC, DESIGN, AND TECHNOLOGY PARTNERS.

The City doesn’t have to do it all on its own, community and technology partners are ready to help with the development and implementation of effective services. Joining forces with public-minded partners can make service delivery more effective for New Yorkers and efficient for government.

12 MAKE ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY FUNDAMENTAL TO ALL SERVICE INTERACTIONS.

Residents are more willing to turn to the City and share their needs and information when they understand how their personal information will be used and what they stand to gain.



LET'S TRANSFORM THE DIGITAL EXPERIENCE FOR NEW YORKERS

The NYC Digital Playbook outlines how the City of New York intends to use digital strategies to improve municipal services, increase equity, and help all New Yorkers participate in the political, civic, and cultural life of the city.

PG 1 ABOUT THE NYC DIGITAL PLAYBOOK

Learn how the Digital Playbook team used human-centered research – and who took part in uncovering new insights into New Yorkers' service needs.

PG 2 WHAT WE HEARD

Explore a summary of the hundreds of experiences and ideas that residents, City staff, and civic experts shared with us during the research process.

PG 5 PRINCIPLES

See the six key principles that we developed in response to the research findings, outlining the core values that must anchor the City's efforts.

PG 8 STRATEGIES

Check out the 12 digital strategies that we identified as the most promising ways to move the City's services forward.

Then go online, to nyc.gov/playbook, to see an evolving set of methods that can help City staff – and other civic technologists – develop human-centered municipal services.

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