

The importance of user-centered design

- Importance of User-Centered Design in Government
- Systematic User-Centered Design Process
- How to Enable User-Centered Design Thinking
- Strategic Enablers to Improve User-Centered Design



JOINT COUNCILS' EXECUTIVE MONTHLY REPORT

Developed by the Research Committee

May 2022

1. Introduction

User-centered design (UCD) is a problem-solving method that puts clients at the center of problems and aims to design service solutions that address the needs of citizens.

In government, service delivery is bound by regulation and policy documents. It is easy to forget that the core of those documents is aimed at improving the lives of the public. Embracing user-centered design methods can help the government ensure that it can “see the forest beyond the trees” and find solutions that work for the citizens.

The philosophy and practice of user experience (UX) design— wherein a tool, service, or other solution (digital or non-digital) is designed around the needs of users and tested with them to make refinements before and even after the solution is brought into the world — has gained traction among governments seeking to move away from the pitfalls of overly bureaucratic design.

In the search to truly understand what users’ actual needs are, the framework of user-centered design has emerged as an effective and empathetic way to conduct user research, identify and frame problems, and prototype solutions.

Governments across the world are turning to user-centered design to solve some of their toughest challenges and drive quantifiable benefits for citizens and stakeholders. For instance, UCD can be used to understand problems and develop solutions with citizen groups impacted by COVID.

Many actors make big claims about connecting with users, but the reality often falls short. They might undertake a survey here or a community consultation there, but often the outcome is predetermined, and citizens feel they are not being heard.

Genuine UCD can give a suite of tools to engage users in a meaningful way so services reflect the lived experience and needs of users from all walks of life and accessibility needs.

Why Is This Report Important?

- Government agencies provide vital information and services that affect people’s daily lives. They have the responsibilities of responding to the needs of citizens, running as effectively and efficiently as possible, and being timely and accurate with its information. By putting people first and embracing a user-centric approach, agencies improve the quality of their information and services by making them more useful and usable and by saving money long-term through making iterative improvements.
- Users of government systems include both citizens seeking information and services as well as employees trying to conduct their jobs. Creating a user-centered culture means that government agencies hold themselves to a higher standard by making sure that users can access, understand, and use the information provided. It also means that users can accomplish their tasks, give input, and know that their feedback is taken into consideration and acted upon.

What is Covered in this Executive Report?

This report includes the following:

- Introduction
- Importance of User-Centered Design in Government
- Systematic User-Centered Design Process
- How to Enable User-Centered Design Thinking
- Strategic Enablers to Improve User-Centered Design

2.Importance of User-Centered Design in Government

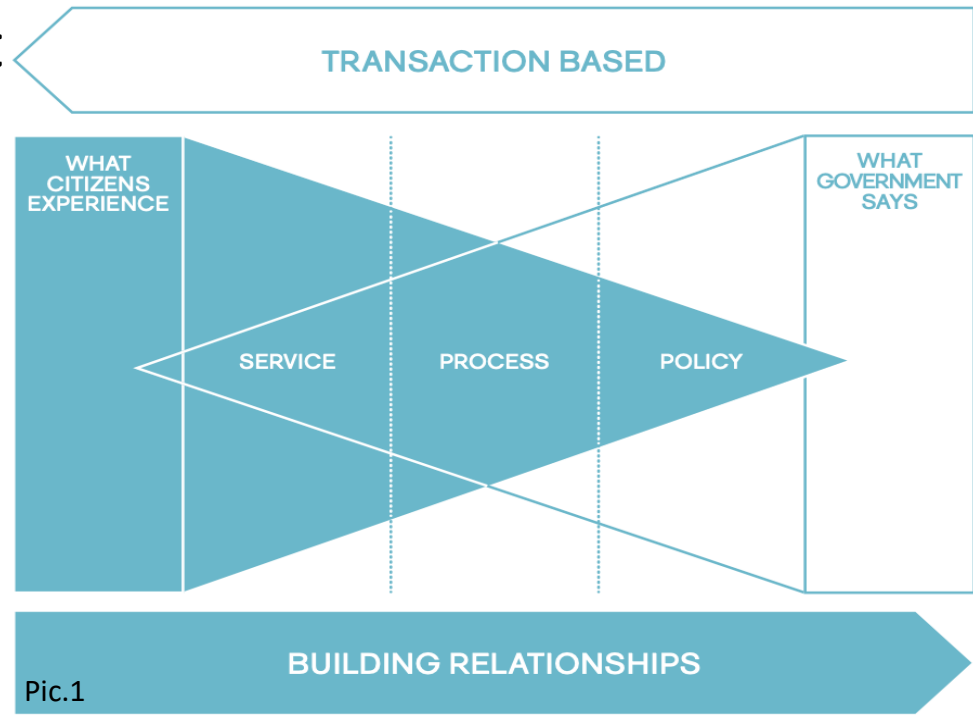
Traditional policy-making often operates at a high level of abstraction, whereas the client's experience of those policies is actually embodied in more concrete terms: of visits to websites, of filling out of forms, of calls to a call centre. All too often it can be a world marked by profound separation between those who make policies and those who deliver government services (pic.1). Design thinking is a human-centered approach, meaning that it starts with people’s needs (and considers both citizens and civil servants). **The nature of this approach puts people back in balance with what they’re doing at a time when both citizens and civil servants feel they are being led by processes and regulation, rather than enabled by them.**

A design-led approach connects citizens and civil servants, with both policy design and delivery being considered concurrently rather than sequentially, and quite a number of governments are now experimenting in this space.

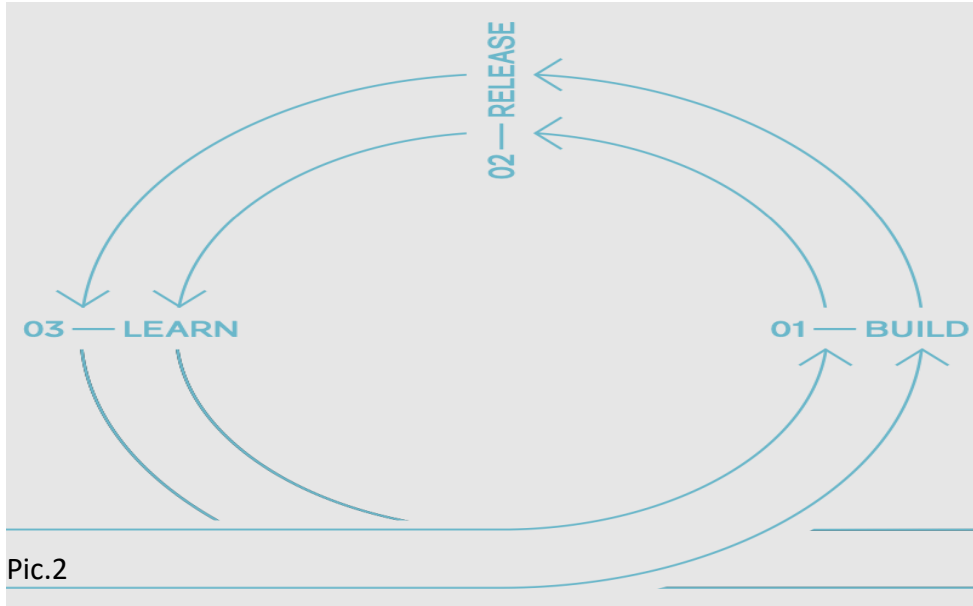
Using design approaches puts in balance the desired changes of a government with the desires of the citizens. It is ultimately about creating tangible and positive impact.

Working in the public sector, you may be familiar with other problem-solving approaches typical in government such as Lean Management, Six Sigma and Business Process Re-engineering. Design thinking is one of a new set of approaches that governments have been experimenting with more recently, along with Lean StartUp and Behavioural Economics.

- These three methodologies also share common attributes (pic.2):
- They are informed by quantitative data and inspired by qualitative data about citizens;
 - They are iterative, test-and-learn approaches;
 - They are most often deployed when innovation is the goal.



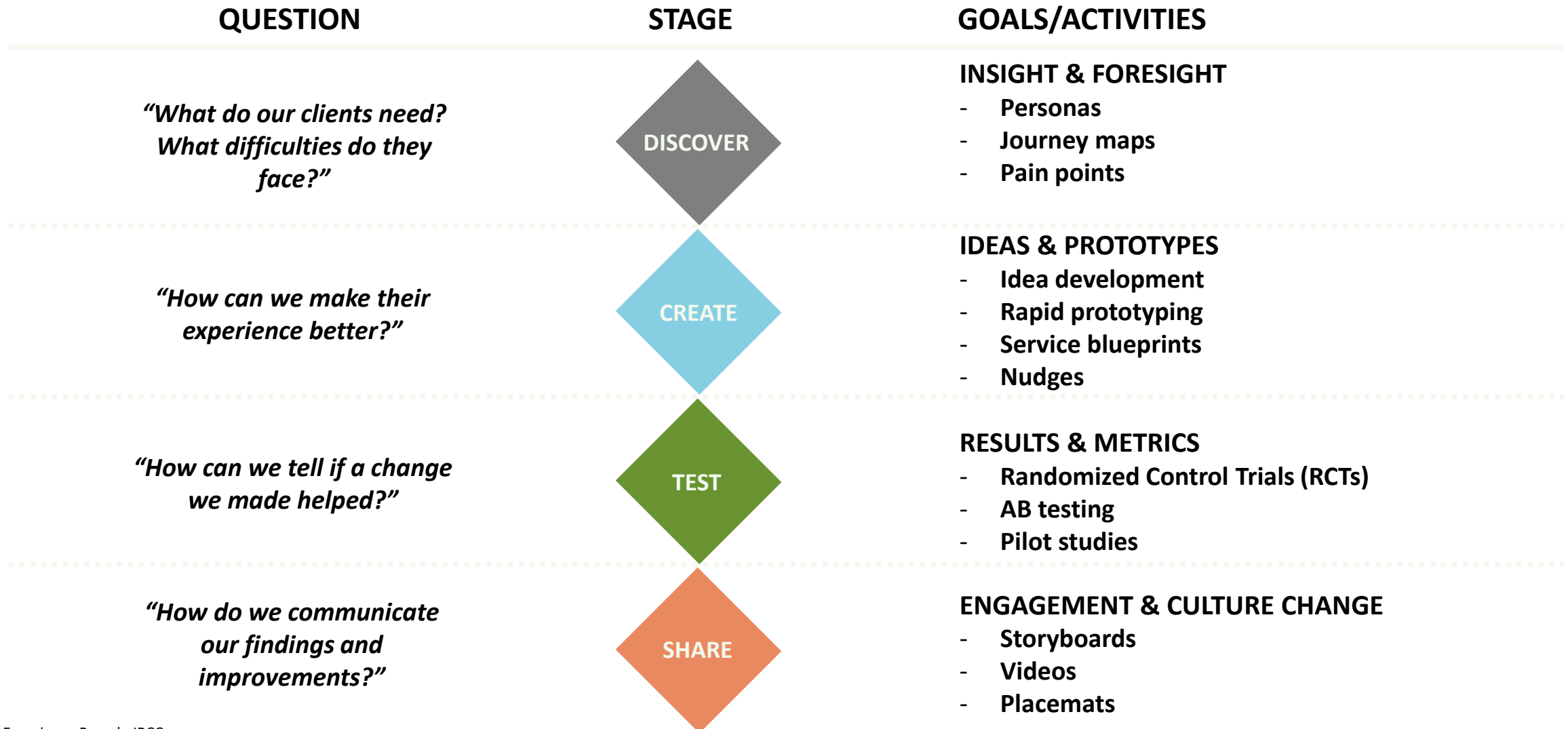
Pic.1



Pic.2

3. Systematic User-Centered Design Process

User-focused design-led approaches are more often deployed in service of innovation, when actors want to re-think what their policy is, or how it is delivered to citizens. Innovation requires inspiration and divergent thinking — meaning many different solutions are explored. The illustration below explains the logic that governs the design process.



4. How to Enable User-Centered Design Thinking

In various government departments, different practices are associated with user-centered design thinking. When an area needs to be significantly revised, the flow of the project will be a combination of divergent and convergent thinking. This could happen if a policy is simply not achieving the desired outcome, or there is significant negative citizen feedback on a service delivered. **A key way to address cooperation between government and user-centered design is to ensure that relationships are the central focus of design processes.**

Service design has long placed the relationship between organizations and customers at the centre of the process. The process of designing services should emphasize using two-way dialogue to build customized service offerings, counting on knowledge about the customer, shared by the customer, and shared for the customer.

SERVICE DESIGN & RESEARCH



- Discover context and insights on what clients need and what difficulties they face.
- Generate, co-design, and prototype human-centered solutions to improve the client experience.

BEHAVIOURAL INSIGHTS & EXPERIMENTATION



- Leverages behavioral science research methods to better understand client experiences and behaviors.
- Designs client service interventions that can help 'nudge' clients and the organization toward better outcomes.
- Tests and measures the impact of client service interventions using rigorous methods to know what works and what does not.

USABILITY SERVICES



- Conduct usability tests before, during and after a redesign to test the client experience and to ensure that the product meets their expectations.

5. Strategic Enablers to Improve User-Centered Design

Reducing form complexity and improving comprehensibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Ensure that all instructions and notices are written in plain language and translated into multiple languages;- Adopt principles of human-centered design (e.g., early and routine user interviews and usability testing to continually refine design and language);- Provide step-by-step examples of process involved in claiming benefits, accessing protections, or navigating a service.
Minimizing costly documentation requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Allow for respondent self- attestation or self-allegation in areas that currently require evidence or documentation;- Provide the option of shifting the burden involved in developing evidence or external documentation necessary to support an information collection from the applicant to agency personnel;- Provide navigators who can support the applicant across the experience of applying for the program, to include support with developing the necessary identity proofing.
Streamlining processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Ensure at least two equally accessible means of applying for the program (one of which should be a mobile-responsive web- based application);- Ensure consistent wait times (and callback option for greater than 5- minute wait times on the phone) for applicants when they call the agency or visit in-person;- Provide live agents who are available to support applicants outside of normal business hours.
Improving communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Deliver communications through a trusted source, and utilize outreach campaigns;- Provide timely reminders considering season, day of week, timing of day that is most relevant for the target audience;- Conduct specialized, proactive outreach to individuals who may be unlikely to respond to typical notices.



For Further Reading

- Salinas, Elizabeth, Rony Cueva, and Freddy Paz. "A systematic review of user-centered design techniques." In *International Conference on Human-Computer Interaction*, pp. 253-267. Springer, Cham, 2020.
- Junginger, Sabine. "Inquiring, inventing and integrating: Applying human-centered design to the challenges of future government." *JeDEM-eJournal of eDemocracy and Open Government* 10, no. 2 (2018): 23-32.
- Sasmito, Ginanjar Wiro, and M. Fikri Hidayattullah. "The Implementation of User Centered Design Methods on Public Service Mapping Websites." In *IOP Conference Series: Materials Science and Engineering*, vol. 1077, no. 1, p. 012022. IOP Publishing, 2021.
- Berg, Janne Álvarez, Alberto Rodríguez, Dana Chisnell, and Vivian Graubard. "User Centered Policy: Organization Assessment." (2020).

Other noteworthy articles:

- [Barriers to Government's Adoption of User-centered Design — And How To Address Them](#)
- [The tension between user-centered design and e-government services](#)
- [How human-centered design can transform government service delivery during COVID and beyond](#)
- [When to Use User-Centered Design for Public Policy](#)
- [Human-centered design helps government make better decisions](#)

Research Repository

Access the Citizen First [Research Repository](#).

Recent entries on the research repository:

[Quantum Computing 101 - Joint Councils' Executive Report April 2022](#)

This report includes the following: Introduction and Applicability; Unique Features of Quantum Computers; Benefits of Quantum in Government; Future Implications of Quantum Computing.



Trends in the Daily Newsletter



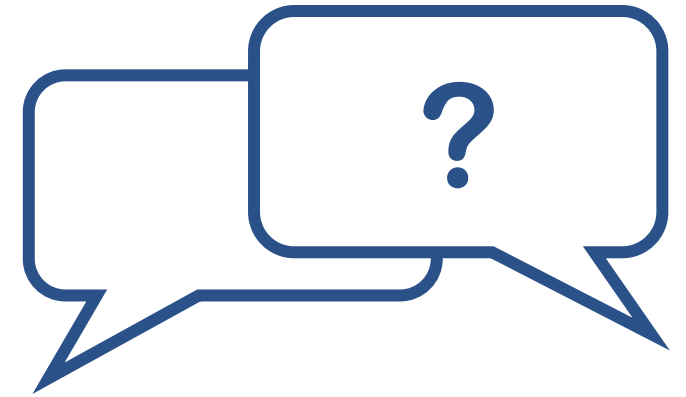
The war in Ukraine is not just a kinetic war, but also a digital one. Technology has been weaponised to create havoc in Ukraine through cyber-attacks, which have also threatened the service of the country's biggest internet service provider. Disinformation has been strategically deployed to cause panic among citizens in Ukraine and misrepresent the truth. In this context, other countries, [including Canada](#), can learn a few key lessons from Ukraine's version of "digital resilience" to better understand how a responsible and robust digital ecosystem can withstand external assault, if needed.



[Canada was second behind Britain](#) in number of reported victims of phishing, spoofing, extortion and other Internet-enabled frauds, according to an FBI report on Internet crimes in 2020. The most recent victim was the Canadian airline Sunwing. A cyberattack hit one of its suppliers, causing a breakdown of the airline's operations that left thousands stranded in vacation hotspots in the United States, Mexico and the Caribbean. Companies may be "caught off-guard and see their business activities considerably curtailed."



Society overall is digitising at a rapid pace. And since the pandemic, many countries, including Canada, have become increasingly dependent on digital infrastructure. Expectations are high. People want to be able to chat, stream and download endlessly and effortlessly. Companies and universities store their valuable knowledge in the cloud. While policy makers want their countries to be innovation leaders, to excel in data-intensive technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) and quantum computing, the digital fundament for those goals [is often lacking](#).



We would love to hear from you!

Do you know someone who may be interested in the Joint Councils Executive Report? Please share a copy of this report. If you are not already a subscriber, you can now subscribe to receive the [Executive Report](#) by signing up. Send your questions to info@iccs-isac.org.

Follow:  