Accelerate the adoption of service design

Build Community to Connect Champions, Reduce Isolation, and Expose People to Service Design

There is a craving for community among people trying to do this work in public sector contexts. These hacks aim to help people to not feel isolated and alone, find opportunities to expose people to SD, connect champions, and share best practices.

"Every Friday we open the door to city staff to come in and meet us or share a problem."

Director, Civic Innovation Lab

Befriend Bureacracy Hackers to Work the System

Embedding policy people early on can smooth project bumps later. Government "insiders" who know how things work and how to work around them can help to move blockers, (e.g., working with privacy/security experts early).

"Find people who have been able to immerse themselves in the policy and bureaucracy and then come up with hacks and workarounds. Have those people embedded with your designer or research from the get-go."

Chief of Design, Federal Government

Find Your Allies and Build Strength in Numbers

Build alliances with allies, advocates and castaways. Ensure you honour the folks who have done this work before you came along. Learn from others before you.

"We hire castaways, people who are rejected by the formal system for being agitated, tired of how slow the system goes"

Lead, Provincial Government Design Lab

Show AND Tell to Build Buy In

Emphasising showing AND telling can be a way to alleviate fear, build executive support, work around steering committees, and demonstrate the value of what's possible with design approaches.

"Some of the partners are in much more formal contexts, so we try to negotiate compromises to avoid all of that to the extreme degree. There are usually a lot of steering committees; we try to avoid that and focus more of things like a show and tells."

Service Designer, Provincial Government

Build Relationships to Create Trust

Trust is a crucial ingredient for success, and it's natural for people to feel threatened when you're asking them to change: different is difficult.

"In one provincial department, the Chief Digital Officer and Deputy Minister is available on Slack."

Service Designer, Provincial Government

Hacks for Setting
the Conditions for Service Design

Embed service design in the work

Find Ways to Scaffold People's Thinking and Make Design Accessible

Public servants may want instruction manuals or steps. Providing playbooks or repositories to support people's approach and build confidence can help.

"The Alberta Health Services Lab created a workbook that has all the boxes you need to fill as part of a design sprint. You still need facilitation, but it's a nice takeaway."
Design Strategist, Provincial Government Ministry

Break Work into Manageable Chunks in Order to Enable Participation

Participation in design work might need to be "chunked up or down" in order to work in context. You might need to experiment to find the right chunk level.

"When we first started executive deep dives in Energy, we asked for a whole day session [...]. It was hard to get them to focus and meaningfully pay attention So we moved to half days. it immediately improved uptake. Then we went to 2 hours - they said this is great, we're going to scale it out to our Executive Directors."
Director of Design, Provincial Government

Adjust Designer's Expectations to Celebrate Small Wins

Change in government is slow, and it will be frustrating at times. Focus on progress over perfection.

Build in time for retrospectives where project partners articulate how the approach made them think differently
Senior Service Designer, Provincial Government

Use Workarounds for Research with Citizens

Research with users can be a challenge in government. Find ways to work within the limitations you face.

"User research has been embedded in internal templates in the Ontario Government since late 2018."
Design Team Manager, Federal Government

Enable Clear Expectations at Every Level of the Work

Alignment phases, clear engagement models, and granular expectation setting at the level of every session or meeting help to enable the work.

"We define a clear engagement model with our project partners – stages we go through, people, time commitment for every resource."
Senior Business Consultant, Provincial Government

Establish and enable the service design team

Model Collaborative, Vulnerable, and Flat Ways of Working in Order to Normalise Them

By modelling ways of working that are different from business as usual, you can normalise them. This means teams that are (more) flat, collaborative, and vulnerable. Doing this helps confront the inherent motivations and assumptions of everyone you are working with, from the tools you work with to the way you interact. It forces individuals to questions themselves and the way they work with others.

"It's helpful having a few people on the team that are more willing to be vulnerable than others. Standing up when you feel shitty, people who trust themselves to be vulnerable in front of group, normalizes it."
Employee Experience Lead, Provincial Government

Find the Right Partners to Help Move the Needle

Be selective about the type of projects and partnerships that are right for this type of work. Be clear about the right criteria for partners. Explore these through conversation/discussion.

"We use project scorecards. Criteria for a good project include access to data and an opportunity to prototype. We also have partner scorecards: we're looking for people who want change beyond status quo, and opportunities to engage with residents."
Director of a Civic Innovation Lab

Make Do with the Space You Have

While custom built collaborative/ design spaces can be fantastic, there are ways to work around less ideal situations.

"We didn't have a dedicated space and weren't able to tuck things away so we had a trolley with all the key tools and materials for everyone to use (e.g., markers, sticky notes, …)"
Policy Resident, Provincial Government

Use Signs and Signals to Break Out of Business as Usual

There are certain cues that indicate "new" ways of working, that can manifest in space, tools, external communication. All of these give people clues that this really is different. This can be joyful or scary.

"Showing up to a meeting with a Mac, covered in stickers is powerful. It makes people think: wow you really are different, and I want to be part of your team. Appearances do matter."
Chief of Design, Federal Government

Translate Between Government and Design in Order to Get the Job Done

Help translate government language for designers, and translate design language for folks in government.

"Have an external-facing job ad, then share the official job description once the hiring process is complete."
Executive design leader, Provincial Government

Hacks for Setting the Conditions for Service Design