

City Staff Show Strong and Sustained Satisfaction with Service Design Studio Offerings

Abt Associates' August 2020 report presents findings from an implementation study of NYC Opportunity's Service Design Studio. This research shows how the Studio is helping to transform the way government workers design public services.

Research for this study was conducted from mid-2018 to mid-2019 and focused on assessing three Studio offerings:

- Office Hours – one-hour work sessions for City staff with a Studio designer
- Workshops – trainings for City staff to learn the basics of service design
- Designing for Opportunity (DFO) projects –engagements to apply service design with a City agency over 6-18 months

Each of these is informed by the Studio's Tools+ Tactics – a guide to applying service design techniques to public services. The research team conducted observations of each of these offerings and completed interviews or surveys with participants over time. Across these methods, the overall study sample was selected to include a diverse set of about 80 people but is not representative of all Studio participants.

Key Findings

Respondents reported strong and sustained satisfaction with the Studio, with City staff both learning service design methods and independently applying them in their work:

- Office Hours participants reported high levels of satisfaction, learning and use of service design strategies, and integration of design thinking in their work;
- Participants in one of the DFO projects demonstrated deep learning of service design skills and reported that the Studio helped them to understand the perspectives of clients and refine services to better meet their needs.

What is the Service Design Studio?

The Service Design Studio launched in October 2017 with the ambitious mission to make public services more accessible to New Yorkers. The Studio is managed by the Design Team within the Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity (NYC Opportunity). The Studio's approach uniquely combines insights developed through a design process with findings from social policy and evaluation research to analyze, test, and build out effective program and product solutions that have been deeply informed by the people who use or administer public services. NYC Opportunity sees service design as a vehicle for advancing positive change. The team's approach begins by trying to understand the needs of people who use and oversee public services, and designing the service to meet those needs. With that knowledge, the Studio works with City agency partners to shape services that are effective, user-friendly, sustainable, and scalable.

By the time this study was completed, over 1,200 City staff had participated in Studio offerings – representing over 60 different City agencies¹

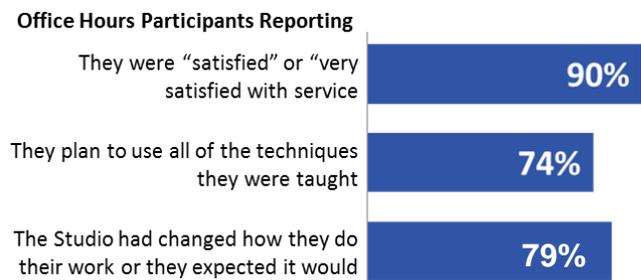


Chart reads: 90% of surveyed participants in Office Hours reported they were "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with service 3 months after their initial session.

¹ This also represents less than 1% of the City's total workforce of nearly 400,000 employees. See [NYC Government Workforce Profile Report, Fiscal Year 2017](#).

A Closer Look at How Service Design is Changing the Work of Government

Office Hours participants reporting:

The Studio **has changed how I conduct my work**
or **I expect it will**

44%

35%

I expect positive changes to internal operations
or **program outcomes**

75%

Among the 44% above who had already changed how they work, participants reporting:

Their work had become more user-centered

80%

Believed their work was better positioned to deliver
more positive outcomes

67%

Additional Findings

What and How Participants Learned

Studio participants reported learning a variety of service design methods – though some strategies were more commonly learned and used than others – and also reported learning additional skills like facilitation strategies. People learned best in more intensive offerings and when they participated alongside a team of close colleagues from their agency – both of which only some offerings were set up to do.

Barriers to Spreading Service Design

Perceived barriers to spreading the adoption of service design within government included lack of time, funding, buy-in from agency leadership, and knowledge of service design among colleagues. Perceived barriers generally lessened over time, and participants in one of the lengthier DFO projects were able to overcome some barriers in part by working together as a team to advance their goals.

Lessons for Replication

This evaluation also sought to identify lessons for other localities and levels of government interested or engaged in similar work. Key strengths of the Studio documented in this evaluation include its:

- Centralized, in-house team that partners with agencies to build design capacity
- Position within NYC Opportunity that facilitates combining design expertise with evaluation, data, and program management expertise
- Offerings with a range of intensities that provide potential participants with choice for how they want to engage

Other localities interested in spreading service design methods within government should consider their capacity in determining whether to focus design projects to address more challenging issue areas – as the Studio does with its focus on poverty – or strategically start somewhere easier first.

Looking Ahead

The Studio has used findings from this evaluation to strengthen its model and approach, including: training staff on trauma-informed research methods; redesigning the Tools+Tactics to emphasize methods that Studio participants cited as adding most value to their work; evolving the DFO project model to put agency partners in more of a leadership role in the researching and prototyping phase; creating a new workshop curriculum on how to research with communities that may mistrust public institutions; and, refining existing offerings to encourage participation from teams rather than individuals. NYC Opportunity will also continue to evaluate the effectiveness of the Studio model.

Further Reading:

◆ [2020 Abt Associates Evaluation Report](#) ◆ [Service Design Studio Tools+Tactics Website](#)