



PHL SERVICE DESIGN STUDIO

year two

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This report outlines what the PHL Service Design Studio (SDS) accomplished from **February 2021 to February 2022**.

The document is divided into the key areas of our work, which include service improvement projects, capacity-building efforts inside and outside of municipal government, and growth areas for the team.

If you're curious to learn more about the team, access our [website](#), visit us on [Twitter](#), or email us at service.design@phila.gov.

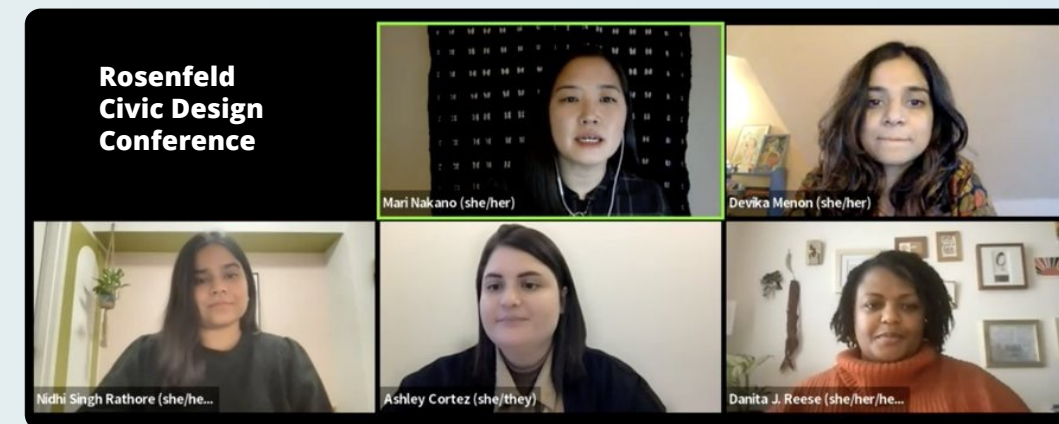
Access the [Good Services website](#) if you'd like to learn more about service design as a professional field and practice.

Highlights from year two

While our first year was met with COVID-19 lockdowns and shifting priorities due to the City's pandemic response, our second year was more focused.

Below are a several highlights:

- The Office of Civic Engagement and Volunteer Service and the PHL Service Design Studio won an Innovation Award from the Mayor's Fund for Philadelphia and an Operations Transformation Fund grant. We used the grant money to compensate community members for their participation in our Equitable Community Engagement Toolkit project and hire fellows to build capacity on the project team.
- We completed project work in two service areas new to the team, which are zoning operations and benefits access.
- We launched a social media account to keep supporters up to date on job openings, team musings, and important City information.
- Team members spoke at a variety of conferences, like Code for America and Rosenfeld Media Civic Design Conference — sharing lessons learned from our work in municipal government.



About the PHL Service Design Studio

About the PHL Service Design Studio

We believe we're closer to creating a more just city when residents and colleagues, who've been marginalized by government actions, can access and deliver government services with ease and agency.

To support this belief, we collaborate with residents and staff at all levels of government to *design accessible, equitable, and trauma-responsive services* that honor the diverse needs of Philadelphians.

What we do

The City of Philadelphia's Service Design Studio sits within the Office of the Chief Administrative Officer and supports service improvement efforts across municipal government. We operate as an internal-to-government strategic design consultancy. We work on service design projects that include qualitative research, strategy, implementation support, change management, and evaluation.

We collaborate with:

- **City agencies** to help them advance their service improvement efforts in partnership with frontline staff, those who access services, and leaders who manage service delivery.
- **Policymakers** to prototype and test policy ideas before on-the-ground implementation.
- **Program directors and administrators** to study their current-state service delivery —examining strengths that should be replicated and challenges that need to be addressed.
- **City colleagues** to coach and train them on how to use participatory service design methods in their work — building deeper relationships with communities.

About the PHL Service Design Studio

How we work

We believe that equitable processes are required for equitable outcomes, so we're intentional about how we work. As a result, our projects are highly collaborative. We focus on building trust with project stakeholders through shared decision-making, and we center the voices and experiences of those who are most disenfranchised by government actions throughout a design process.

Our service design projects are typically structured across four key phases of work described on the right.

PHASE 1

■ *scope and plan*

We collaboratively define a project's focus of work, goals, team structure, collaboration details, project-level evaluation, deliverables, and timing needs with project partners. *Deliverables include a signed scope of work and detailed project plans.*

PHASE 3

■ *design and test*

We partner with community members and City staff to design solutions that improve a service experience. Then, we test the effectiveness of our solutions before broad implementation. *Deliverables include a spectrum of outputs from redesigned application forms to enhanced workflows for frontline staff.*

PHASE 2

■ *understand and define*

We conduct research to understand the lived experiences of those most impacted by a service, the challenges and strengths of service delivery, and the opportunities for improvement. *Deliverables include findings and recommendations reports based on insights gathered from mixed methods like interviews, observational fieldwork, and workshops.*

PHASE 4

■ *embed and support*

We move alongside our colleagues throughout implementation by managing the short- and long-term changes required to embed service improvements in highly constrained environments. *Deliverables include change management plans, hands-on customized training, ongoing support, and evaluation outputs.*

About the PHL Service Design Studio

Team members

We're made up of researchers and designers whose perspectives are informed by a multitude of intersectional and dynamic identities and lived experiences — including those of first- and second-generation immigrants, queer and gender queer identities, women of color (e.g., Black, South Asian, and East Asian), and bilingual and multilingual identities (e.g., Hindi, Cantonese, and Marathi).



Andrea Ngan, Lead
Service Design Strategist



Danita J. Reese, Lead
Service Design Strategist



Devika Menon, Service
Design Strategist



Liana Dragoman, Director
of Strategic Design



Shebani Rao, Senior
Design Researcher



Veronica Yeung, Lead
Service Designer

Leading service improvement projects

Partnering with City agencies to improve service delivery is at the core of what we do at the City of Philadelphia. This section highlights service improvement projects we worked on from February 2021 to February 2022.

- **Project 1:** Transforming the Tax Review Board's service delivery
- **Project 2:** Building an equitable community engagement practice
- **Project 3:** Understanding the City's benefits-access landscape
- **Project 4:** Improving the Zoning Board of Adjustment's operations
- **Project 5:** Creating service design and delivery patterns

Project 1: Transforming the Tax Review Board's service delivery

When residents and businesses can't pay their tax bills, they can request hearings with an independent Tax Review Board (TRB).

This service is vital. When residents and businesses can't pay their overdue bills, they're at risk of losing utility access, their business licenses, and sometimes, their homes. At a TRB hearing, residents and businesses can explain their situation and enter into payment agreements with the City of Philadelphia based on income and need.

At the beginning of the City's response to COVID-19, the TRB had to pause all hearings. Staff members couldn't work remotely because they didn't have access to laptops, and existing processes relied on paper-based workflows and in-person interactions.

“Framing virtual work as democratizing access ... completely negates the fact that there are ***so many people who cannot access basic needs*** because they don't have the right device, access, and skills. 25% of Philadelphians are being 100% left behind.”

■ Digital inclusion expert at the City

Partners and sponsors

- Main project partner: Tax Review Board (TRB) frontline staff and leaders
- Office of Innovation and Technology (OIT) Project Management Office
- Office of Innovation and Technology's Digital Services Unit
- Office of Innovation and Technology's Software Development Unit
- Executive sponsor: Office of the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO)

Goals

The project was divided into two parts:

- The first part of the project focused on helping TRB staff resume hearings — virtually. We collaboratively created workflows with TRB staff and leaders, using existing City technologies (e.g., Microsoft tools), so staff could schedule and facilitate virtual hearings from the safety of their homes.
- The second part focused on helping the TRB and OIT design and develop a new case management system. We collaboratively created a future vision for the new system. The vision mapped how staff could schedule in-person and remote hearings and communicate in paper-based and digital ways with petitioners, depending on their needs.

Stakeholder participation

We collaborated with:

- 10 TRB staff and leaders.
- Four community advocacy groups.
- 19 staff from City agencies that collaborate with the TRB.
- Four staff from City agencies who advised on digital literacy and access issues.

How we worked

Part 1: Facilitating virtual hearings using existing technology

We divided Part 1 into four key phases and each phase was built from the other.

- **Designing research:** We met regularly with TRB leaders to gather a baseline understanding of what the TRB does. With that information, we designed research protocol so we could conduct in-depth interviews with TRB staff.
- **Understanding the current state:** We interviewed TRB staff. This helped us learn about their roles, responsibilities, and workflows in detail.
- **Co-designing virtual operations:** Based on phase two insights, we designed digital workflows that relied on existing technology available at the City. During this phase, we collaborated with TRB staff and leaders through several workshops and review sessions.
- **Implementing:** There were two key parts to implementation: Training and the development of public-facing informational materials. For training, we authored a custom manual that showed staff the step-by-step actions they could take (per role) to manage virtual hearings, using existing technology. Once the manual was complete, we met with staff over the course of several weeks, so they could practice the digital workflows and tools before the pilot launch. Lastly, we developed public-facing informational materials, so petitioners knew of the virtual hearing option.

Part 2: Developing a new data management system

This part of the work is currently underway. Some stages were led by SDS, and others are being led by the City of Philadelphia's Office of Innovation and Technology (OIT).

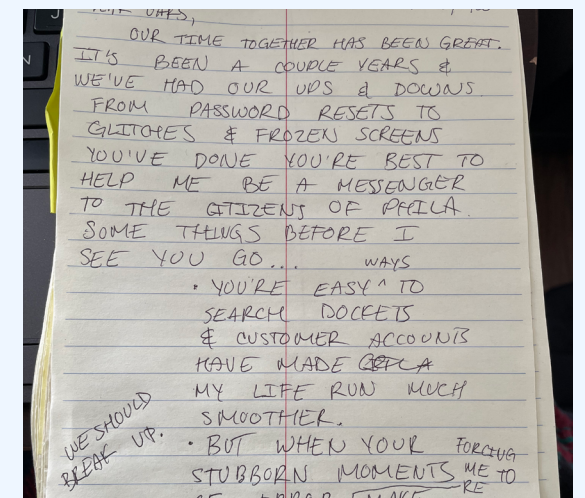
- **Envisioning an integrated digital and non-digital service:** We met with community organizations and City departments to document the best practices currently being used to address the digital divide. We also facilitated workshops and interviews with TRB staff and their partners in other City departments to collaboratively develop a future vision for the TRB service.
- **Developing a data management system:** Working collaboratively with ZBA staff, user experience designers have been using the insights uncovered during visioning to design the new data management system. Development is currently in progress.

This morning's agenda

Morning: Finalize our list of key challenges throughout the TRB process

1. Warm-up: "Breakup letter" to OARS
2. Review/add to previously shared challenges
3. Prioritize defined challenges

Afternoon: Brainstorm ideal ways to address these key challenges



Excerpt from a visioning workshop with TRB staff

What we did

We produced deliverables at each phase of the project to document our learnings. The deliverables were the outputs from our interviews, review sessions, and workshops with TRB staff and leaders.

Part 1: Facilitating virtual hearings using existing technology

- **Current state service blueprints:** For the first two stages of work, we created a 17-page deliverable that mapped the different TRB staff roles and responsibilities, the digital and analog tools and technology used by staff to support their work, and 9 process maps or service blueprints that visualized their work at different levels of granularity. This document provided the foundation for the new digital workflows.
- **Future state service blueprints:** As an output from stage three workshops, we generated a 14-page report that visualized the new digital workflows and how Microsoft tools would be used to enable them.
- **Training and change management:** To support the implementation and the piloting of the new digital workflows, we authored a 70-page training manual that guided TRB staff through the step-by-step process of setting up and managing virtual hearings and their case files — per staff role. Again, we met regularly with staff so they could practice the workflows and tools.
- **Informational materials for the public:** Lastly, we developed public-facing informational materials that clarified the virtual hearings for the public. Those materials included a digital petition form, an “about virtual hearings” one-pager, revised letters written in plain language that were sent to petitioners about their hearing, and updated language on the TRB’s phila.gov service page.

Part 2: Developing a new data management system

- **Digital inclusion report:** We created a 38-page deliverable that summarized the key challenges and recommendations offered by community organizations and City digital inclusion experts in anticipation of the TRB process becoming more digital.
- **Future state service blueprint:** We developed future state service blueprints which consolidate the key features requested by TRB staff, their colleagues in other City departments, and advocates at legal aid clinics.
- **Final report:** To provide context and facilitate the project’s transition to OIT, we released an 85-page summary document. It describes the purpose of the TRB, its stakeholders, and key challenges with the current process. It also summarized the key features requested by stakeholders. This was used by OIT project team members to create user stories and pursue further conversations with TRB staff.

Status of the project

The data management system is being designed and developed by OIT’s Software Engineering and Digital Services teams in collaboration with the Tax Review Board’s staff. A full replacement of the existing system will release in 2023.

Project 2: Building an equitable community engagement practice

Engagement is the foundational way government opens its doors to connect communities to programs and services, better understand community need, share decision-making, and work in solidarity with what's already occurring in neighborhoods.

However, many communities won't and can't interact with the City of Philadelphia (i.e., the City) because we've either broken their trust or haven't created the conditions for their engagement.

When community members don't have a way to shape government policies, programs, and services that impact them, their needs often go unmet. The Equitable Community Engagement Toolkit (i.e., the Toolkit) intends to create the conditions, so equitable forms of engagement can occur between the City and the communities we serve.

“We know not a lot of folks trust government, especially if you're in a marginalized community or if you're in a community that has [not] been treated well by institutions. ***There is a distrust.*** And we're aware of that and are working to change that.”

■ A City staff member

Partners and sponsors

- Main project partner: Office of Civic Engagement and Volunteer Service (OCEVS)
- Community engagement practitioners across City government
- Office of Innovation and Technology (OIT)
- Executive sponsor: Mayor’s Office of Public Engagement (OPE)
- Executive sponsor: Office of the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO)

Goals

This project aims to answer the following questions:

- **Vision:** What does equitable community engagement look like with historically underinvested communities?
- **Tactics:** How can we develop shared practices, tools, and training to support City staff in their equitable engagement efforts?
- **Operations:** How do we ensure input gathered from diverse communities informs government decision-making?
- **Accountability:** How do we know when we’re practicing equitable community engagement?

Stakeholder participation

150 stakeholders inside and outside of municipal government have participated in the work, including:

- 31 unique community-based engagement practitioners affiliated with over 25 organizations.
- 51 unique community residents.
- 68 engagement practitioners across 35 agencies, including 11 City leaders who serve as advisors.

“Equity isn’t just about who we impact, it’s also about who is at the table in making decisions on the type of the impact we want to have.”

A City staff member



SDS team member, Danita Reese, facilitating a discussion with community members

How we're working

This project is ongoing. We've worked across several phases.

1. **Understanding:** We've collaborated with City staff, community practitioners, and residents to better understand their engagement challenges, needs, and opportunities for improvement.
2. **Synthesizing:** After conducting 56 interviews, 12 focus groups, 20 co-design sessions, and 11 advisor meetings, we summarized our learnings into 45 summaries and three reports. We shared these documents with stakeholders for feedback.
3. **Strategizing:** We developed a foundational strategy for the Toolkit (e.g., vision and success metrics) and mapped what guidance, tools, and training we'll create.
4. **Designing and building:** With an Operations Transformation Fund grant, we hired two content strategy fellows, one user experience design strategy fellow, and one software developer to write, design, and build the digital Toolkit.

Our future work will involve creating a community advisory group to oversee the Toolkit's piloting with City agencies and communities. Also, we'll hire an equitable community engagement evaluation and training fellow who'll evaluate and develop Toolkit recommendations and trainings for City of Philadelphia engagement practitioners.

What we did



For the past year and a half, we've facilitated:

- 46 interviews with City engagement staff.
- 7 focus groups with City engagement staff.
- 6 focus groups with community practitioners.
- 10 interviews with community practitioners.
- 8 community practitioner advisor meetings.
- 20 community co-design sessions with residents.

These participatory sessions informed the following deliverables.

- **45 summaries and three synthesized reports:** The documents summarize how to improve digital, disability, and language access issues in community engagement.
- **A query-able database:** A repository of over 1,200 coded data points from City staff and community members that map engagement challenges, best practices, case examples, and recommendations for improving engagement at the City.
- **Foundational strategy:** A strategy that documents the revised vision for the Toolkit based on community feedback and how that vision will show up in Toolkit guidance, tools, and training.
- **Bi-monthly newsletter:** We've released several email newsletters to keep our stakeholders aware and involved in our process.
- **Operational Transformation Fund (OTF) grant:** We applied for and received ~\$550,000 grant to support the designing, building, and piloting of the Toolkit.
- **Ongoing coalition-building:** We've presented our work in a variety of City spaces to ensure employees are fully aware of the project. In addition, we meet regularly with our core project team and quarterly with a coalition of internal engagement practitioners and project advisors.
- **New fellow onboarding:** Over the past several months, we've hired and welcomed four new OTF-funded Toolkit team members.

Status of the project

We are in the process of hiring an equitable community engagement evaluation and training fellow who'll lead the pilot of the Toolkit with City staff and community members and cultivate a community of practice.

In preparation for piloting the Toolkit, we're incrementally releasing content as we build a publicly accessible website to house Toolkit resources. Simultaneously, we're establishing a community advisory committee that'll direct Toolkit pilots and offer feedback on Toolkit guidance.

Throughout the development and piloting process, we'll establish a governance plan so the Toolkit can remain responsive to community needs over time.

Project 3: Understanding the City's benefits access landscape

There isn't a unified process for residents to learn about and apply to the City's benefits programs. Residents must access each program through individual departments' websites and application processes. Barriers to access, like lack of awareness of programs, inconsistent eligibility requirements, and complex application processes contribute to low enrollment in City benefits programs.

To address these challenges, the Department of Planning and Development (DPD) partnered with the Office of the Chief Administrator (CAO) in 2018 to develop Discover Benefits, a tool to help residents understand the benefits they were eligible for. The tool was piloted at Neighborhood Advisory Councils in early 2020. With the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbating barriers to benefits access, the CAO team pivoted to a common application tool that would allow residents to apply to several benefits programs through one set of questions.

In 2021, the CAO team paused the project to rethink the purpose and direction of the common application tool to better align it with broader poverty alleviation initiatives at the City.

“If folks have tried and have been stopped at any point in the process...*they're not going to try again*. So, if there's a point at which it's become difficult or too challenging, they'll write it off. And...we've lost them.”

■ City staff member

Partners and sponsors

Office of the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) Strategic Transformation team

Goals

We worked with the CAO team to understand the role a tool like Discover Benefits could play in the delivery of the City's poverty alleviation programs and services.

This would allow the CAO to:

- Align their work within a broader City context and strategy.
- Develop a strategic direction for the tool.
- Cultivate necessary partnerships to implement the strategic direction.

Stakeholder participation

- 31 subject matter experts across 16 City agencies
- Representatives from four national organizations that use technology and design to improve access to government services

How we worked

The project spanned several phases of work:

1. **Planning:** We worked to understand the history of the Discover Benefits tool, conducted background research on welfare programs, and developed our research approach and interview protocol.
2. **Understanding:** Through interviews with subject-matter experts, we sought to understand the City's poverty alleviation ecosystem, similar digital tools, approaches to eligibility, and application process challenges. Also, we sought to identify how a benefits tool could address barriers to access. Through desk research, we contextualized our interviews within the historical and systemic context of welfare programs.
3. **Brainstorming solutions:** We collaboratively developed possible directions for how the CAO could pivot their work with the CAO team and colleagues who participated in our phase two interviews.
4. **Action planning:** To wrap up the work, we worked with the CAO team to decide how to act on research findings and the new project directions proposed by colleagues in phase three.

What we did

To inform the creation of deliverables, we conducted:

- 27 interviews with subject-matter experts.
- Nine workshops with 25 subject-matters experts who participated in interviews.
- Several background and strategy conversations with the CAO team.

We created the following deliverables throughout the project.

- **72-page insights deck** that documented insights gathered from our interviews with subject matter experts and desk research. The deck included illustrated maps to visualize the City's benefits-access landscape.
- **Two brainstorming decks for nine workshops** with subject matter experts that summarized project directions and synthesized participant input to help the CAO team strategically pivot the work.
- **31-page action plan** that mapped new project directions for the Discover Benefits work based on research and stakeholder input — including project statements of work, project plans, and implementation considerations.

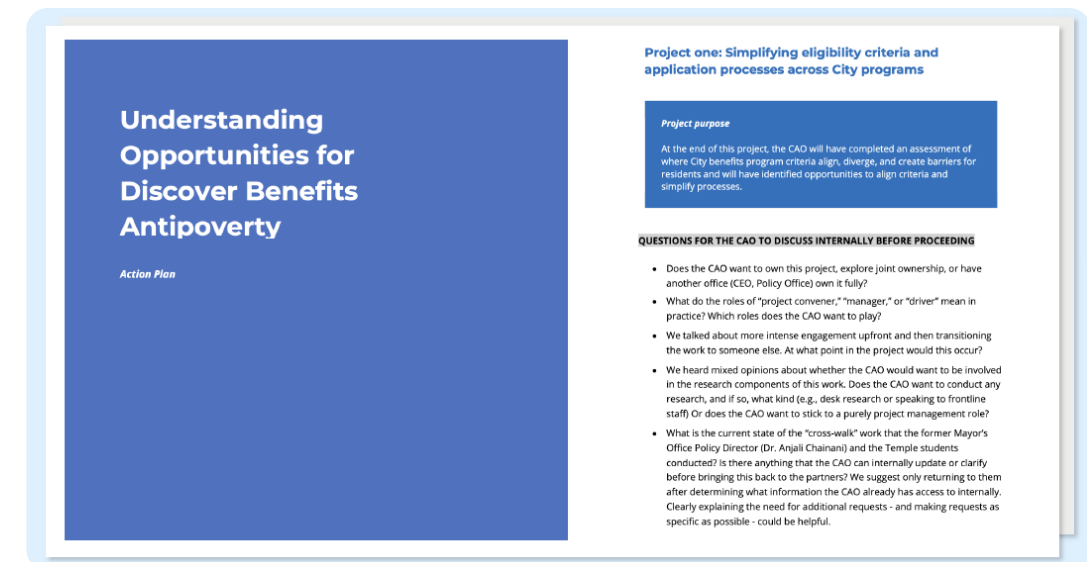
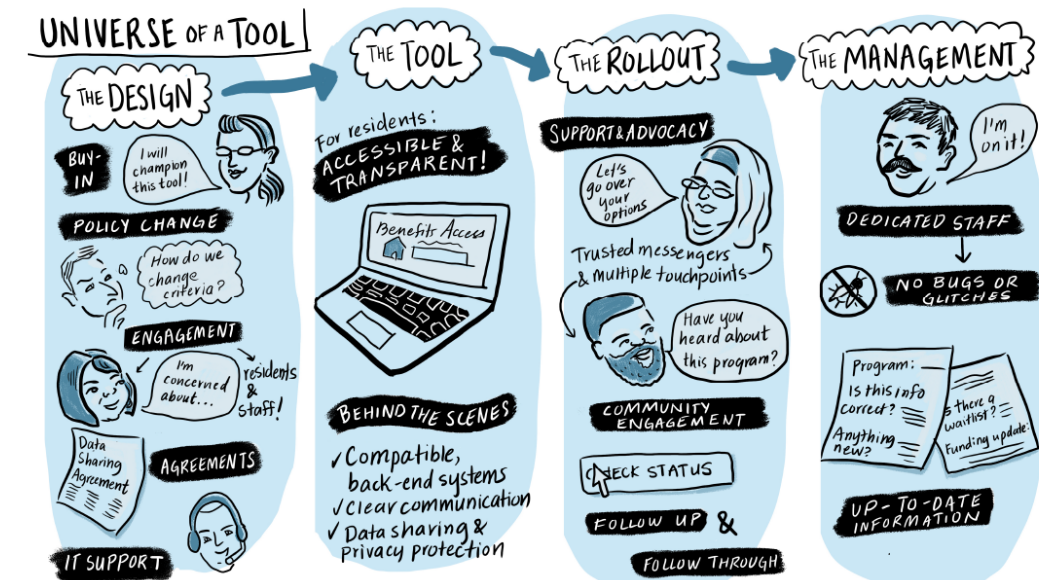


Illustration of the benefits access landscape and a page from the action plan deliverable

Project 4: Improving the Zoning Board of Adjustment's operations

The independent Zoning Board of Adjustment (ZBA) makes decisions on zoning-related appeals through public hearings. Property owners making modifications to their property that aren't allowed in the zoning code can file an appeal to the ZBA. Anyone who stands to be impacted by a specific case can offer testimony at hearings.

In some historically underinvested neighborhoods, recent development has caused dramatic changes in neighborhood make-up and character that impact Black, Brown, low-wealth, and long-time residents. Examples include an influx of middle- and upper-class residents, an increase in traffic, rising property values, and displacement. Like zoning ordinances and state laws, the ZBA Board's decisions shape what can be built in the city. As a result, the ZBA's work can be subject to intense scrutiny and mistrust from community members.

ZBA Board members are supported by a team of administrative staff. In addition to processing a high case volume, ZBA staff have had to manage the transition to virtual hearings (due to the realities of COVID-19) with limited capacity and resources.

“What we'd like is feedback, so we understand how they're making these decisions. [As RCOs, who host community meetings and report on them via letters to the ZBA,] we're in the middle, as volunteers. People lives are deeply impacted. Their entire life changes by one of these giant structures going up in their backyard and they come to us, frustrated, and ***there's nothing we can do to support them.***”

■ Registered Community Organization member

Partners and sponsors

- Main project partner: Zoning Board of Adjustment (ZBA) staff and leaders
- Department of Planning and Development (DPD) leaders
- Executive sponsor: Department of Planning and Development
- Executive sponsor: Office of the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO)

Goals

The goal of the project was to holistically understand and document the ZBA's operations, so DPD (that houses the ZBA administrative team) could:

- Improve ZBA staff and applicants' service experiences.
- Better manage the impact of ongoing legislative changes.
- Improve ZBA's communication with the public and collaborating organizations.

Stakeholder participation

In total, 55 stakeholders inside and outside City government participated in the work, including:

- Seven ZBA applicants unrepresented by an attorney.
- Eight attorneys and zoning experts.
- Eight ZBA frontline staff and leaders.
- Six Philadelphia City Planning Commission staff.
- Four Department of Licenses and Inspections (L&I) staff.
- Two Law Department staff.
- 10 City Council zoning representatives.
- 10 Registered Community Organization (RCO) members.

How we worked

The project spanned several phases of work:

1. **Understanding:** We conducted semi-structured interviews and secondary research to understand ZBA operations from multiple stakeholder viewpoints — ensuring staff, leaders, and communities' needs and lived experiences informed decision-making on what to improve.
2. **Summarizing learnings:** We analyzed what we heard from interviews to identify common frustrations, expectations, and perceptions of the ZBA and its processes.
3. **Identifying improvements:** We collected and organized ideas for improvement recommended by stakeholders who participated in phases one and two. The improvement ideas focused on different aspects of ZBA operations, like process, information, roles, expectations, tools, technology, and policies.
4. **Confirming action:** We revised and prioritized improvements with the project team to account for legal constraints, level of effort required for implementation, and resources needed to act.

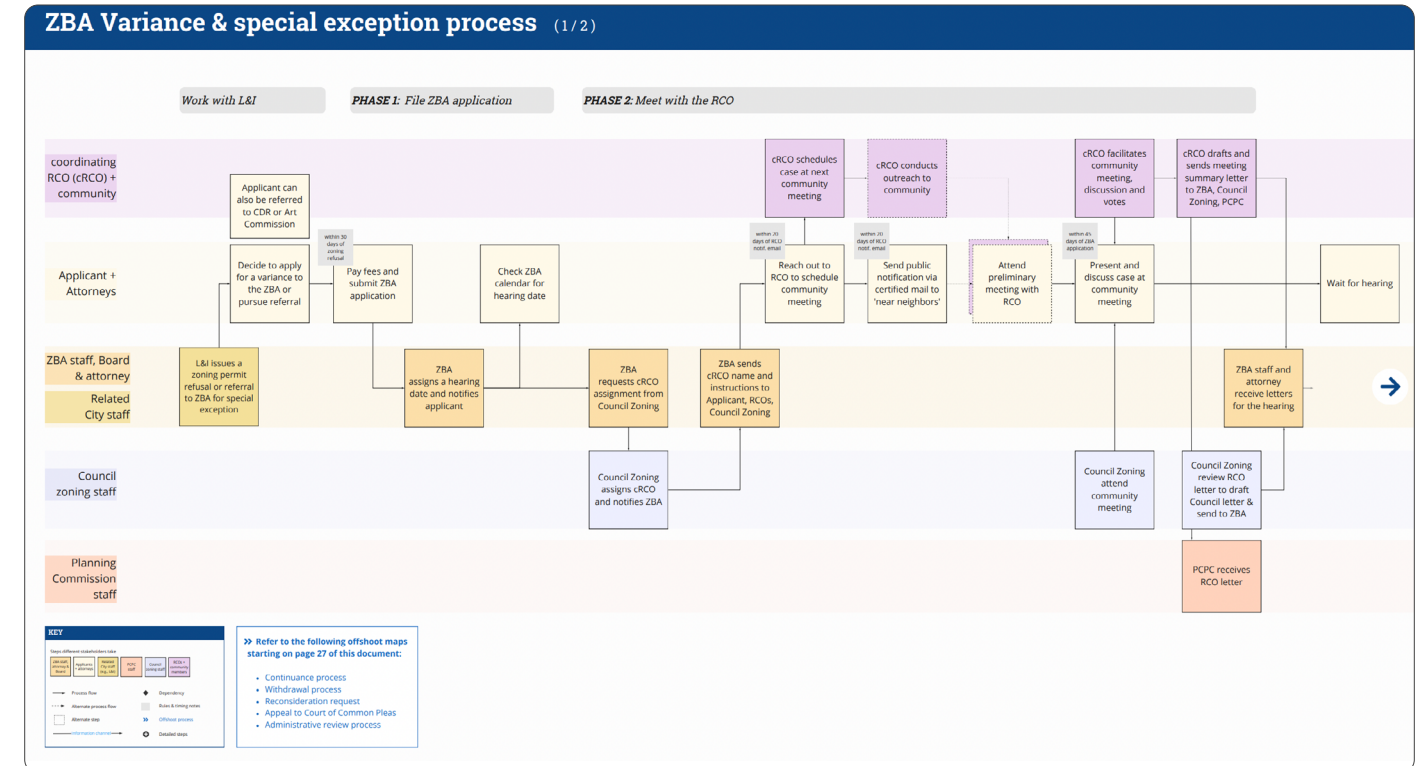
What we did

Research activities, review sessions, and discussions that informed deliverables included:

- Five introductory conversations with City stakeholder departments (e.g., Philadelphia City Planning Commission)
- 51 one-on-one and small-group interviews with key stakeholders.
- Secondary research of articles, reports, and analogous examples.
- 10 synthesis and review sessions with ZBA and DPD project team.
- Two action planning conversations with ZBA and DPD leaders.

We created the following deliverables throughout the project.

- **19 detailed process maps** that documented the ZBA process and staff operations.
- **100-page research and insights slide deck** that described stakeholder experiences with ZBA operations.
- **Several documents outlining improvement ideas** gathered from stakeholders, which we used with DPD to prioritize based on implementation needs and constraints.
- **130-page final report** that comprehensively documents the project. It details the ZBA operations, insights, and improvement ideas. The ZBA and DPD will use the report to make future decisions about improvement initiatives.



A process map describing the ZBA variance process

Project 5: Creating service design and delivery patterns

A core aspect of the studio's work at the City is to help departments make their service delivery more accessible, equitable, and trauma responsive.

Since starting our work at the City, we've led a variety of projects covering quasi-judicial programs, homelessness, voting, and youth justice, among other areas. We've collaboratively designed solutions with residents, direct service staff, advocates, and leaders as well as with professionals with expertise in trauma-informed practices, digital equity, racial equity, and disability justice. Across these projects, we've started to see and document themes, patterns, and differences. With this accumulated knowledge, we've begun the process of developing service design and delivery patterns for our team, project partners, and the City at large.

We use service patterns to document the generalizable learnings we uncover on each project. The patterns demonstrate what accessible, equitable, and trauma-responsive services could look like within Philadelphia and our municipal government. We'll use these learnings as a baseline for future projects when relevant. And we'll continue to build on them moving forward.

Goals

At this early phase of our service pattern work, we've sought to:

- Extract best practices from projects that addressed trauma-responsive and digitally inclusive service delivery.
- Develop a framework for organizing our service patterns.
- Identify ways the patterns could be continuously updated and maintained by our team.

How we worked

The work included four main tasks:

1. **Background research:** We reviewed relevant case studies describing the service pattern work of other organizations and examined our own learnings across projects.
2. **Extracting patterns:** We combed through final reports from our projects and extracted learnings related to the design and delivery of trauma-responsive and digitally inclusive services.
3. **Test and assess structure:** We tested different ways of organizing our service patterns. For example, we assessed if our pattern library was useful to project teams as they worked on projects in real-time.
4. **Brainstorm upkeep strategies:** We developed internal team processes to make sure we could document learnings across projects and transfer them to our service pattern library at the end of a project.

What we did

The outputs of our work include:

- **A database of service patterns:** The database documents and organizes best practices for how City service delivery can be more trauma-responsive and digitally inclusive. Over time, we'll expand our categories.
- **A plan for continued work on the service patterns:** The plan includes a series of questions for our team to consider as we test the patterns over the course of project work. It also includes an outline for a plan for how we can continue to add to the pattern library.

Status of the project

Our service pattern database is a living library. For now, we've begun shaping patterns for trauma-responsive and digitally inclusive service delivery. But our learnings are more expansive than these two areas. As a result, we'll continue to expand and build out our service pattern library for ourselves as a team and for broader use at the City of Philadelphia.

Building capacity for service design at the City

Building capacity for service design at the City

A core aspect of what we do at the City of Philadelphia is to support our colleagues as they experiment with and embed participatory service design methods in their work.

For the past year, we focused our capacity-building efforts in several ways.

- **Project work:** When we work on projects, at least one colleague from a partnering agency is a core project team member. We use this opportunity to model the use of service design methods within the practice space of a project.
- **As-needed conversations:** About once a month we meet with agencies who are interested in how we approach our work, how we've tackled specific challenges, and lessons learned. During these conversations, we share deliverables and project plans, answer questions, and learn from our colleagues.
- **Advocacy:** The team presents our work at City-wide meetings every quarter, so colleagues and the City's administration can become more familiar with what we do.
- **Support, thought partnership, and consulting:** Through consulting, we may meet with an agency every other week to support a specific initiative and offer ongoing thought partnership.

The following are several examples of some of our consulting over the past year.

- **The Mayor's Policy Office** and the **Office of Community Empowerment and Opportunity** asked us to scope a service design project where they could better understand how families in Philadelphia were learning about and accessing the Child Tax Credit to improve service delivery. The **Public Policy Lab** (PPL), a design and innovation lab for government, was brought on to support this collaboration. PPL conducted interviews about claiming the Child Tax Credit with residents. And they talked to program staff and subject matter experts to identify opportunities to improve the service experience. This multi-agency collaboration yielded insights that the City of Philadelphia will apply to related services at the City.
- Our team is heavily involved in supporting the work of the **Office of the Chief Administrative Officer's Operations Transformation Fund**. The Fund is a 10-million-dollar grants program that supports transformative projects in City government that focus on providing services efficiently and equitably to benefit Philadelphia residents. We've worked with the Records Department to think through their public-facing research approach and other agencies who are grappling with resident compensation.
- The team facilitated a session on equity-centered service design as part of the LEAD Academy, which is organized by **Human Resources and Talent**. The LEAD Academy provides skill-building training for internal leaders in the City.
- The **Mayor's Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs** (MCAPAA) designed and facilitated a town hall with the Mayor, City leaders, and Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community leaders to shed light on the current conditions and challenges that Philadelphia AAPI communities are facing. Our team worked with the MCAPAA to plan the structure of the community conversation.

Supporting City-wide strategic initiatives

Supporting City-wide strategic initiatives

We participated in several City-wide initiatives, collaboratives, and committees that align with our commitment to dismantling white supremacy, enabling equity-centered practices, and providing more opportunities for Philadelphians to participate in government.

Examples include:

- **Budget Equity Committee**, led by the Budget Office, is working to make sure the budget process and related decision-making align with the City's broader racial equity goals and strategies.
- **Equitable Engagement Collaborative**, led by the Mayor's Office of Civic Engagement and Volunteer Service, is a convening of City engagement practitioners who share best practices in equitable community engagement.
- **GovLabPHL**, led by the Mayor's Policy Office, is a collective of colleagues who support evidence-based practices and evaluation in City government.
- **Operations Transformation Fund Committee**, led by the Office of the Chief Administrative Officer, supports transformative projects in City government that focus on providing services efficiently and equitably to benefit Philadelphia residents.
- **Participatory Budgeting**, led by the Budget Office and the Department of Planning and Development, works with the public to direct the City's use of one million dollars in capital funding.
- **Racial Equity Advisory Committee**, led by the Mayor's Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, and under Executive Order No. 1-20, is working to embed racial equity in how the City operates and functions.
- **Reimagine Philadelphia**, led by the Department of Planning and Development, works with the public to help the City develop inclusive and equitable processes to increase public input into City planning decisions.

Connecting with our design community

Connecting with our design community

We're a part of a broader community of service designers, policymakers, boundary-pushers, life-long learners, community activists, and students who are invested in public interest design.

Throughout year two, we connected with a wide range of practitioners and students to share work and exchange ideas. In addition, we held office hours with practitioners who were interested in transitioning into the field of service design and who were interested in our team's work.

We presented our work publicly at several conferences:

- Code for America Summit
- Rosenfeld Civic Design Conference
- Design TO Fest

We connected with students and scholars from the following institutions:

- Drexel University
- Parsons School of Design
- Temple University
- University of the Arts
- University of Pennsylvania

We met with public and private sector teams to share lessons learned:

- Beeck Center for Social Impact and Innovation
- Benefits Data Trust
- City of Calgary
- Code for America
- NYC Service Design Studio at the Mayor's Office of Economic Opportunity
- San Francisco Digital Services
- MITRE at the City of Bozeman, Montana
- Montgomery County Maryland Innovation team
- Multnomah Idea Lab at the Multnomah County's Department of Human Services, Oregon
- Government of British Columbia
- Greater Good Studio
- State of Service Design, Frog Design & Innovation
- The Lab at DC

Code for America Summit



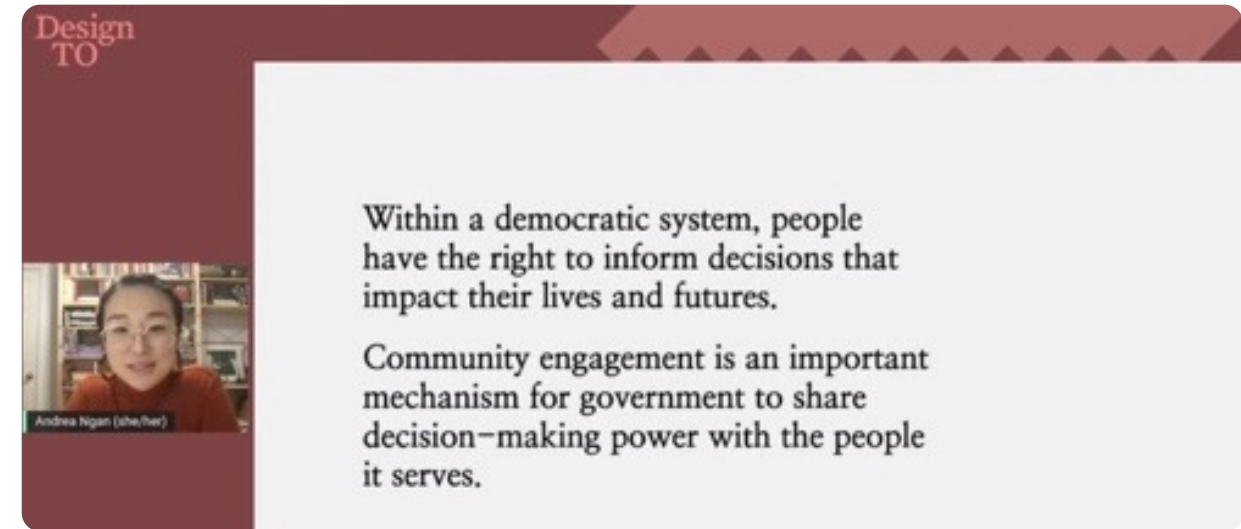
Conference title: Building a practice of equity-centered design across government

City presenters: Anthony Procik, Andrea Ngan, Danita Reese, and Devika Menon

Participating groups: PHL Service Design Studio, Ivy.ai (Abel Quintero), Technology Transformation Services & GSA (Maura Newell, Presidential Innovation Fellow), Optum (Maia Laing)

Description: During this three-part presentation, the City of Philadelphia shared how we’re collaborating with City employees, community-based organizations, and residents to co-design a Toolkit that envisions, guides, and strengthens the City of Philadelphia’s equitable community engagement practice.

Design TO Fest



Conference title: No such thing as normal

City presenter: Andrea Ngan

Description: What can designers learn from collective practices rooted in care and reciprocity? How can equity-centered design move beyond binary thinking as a means for personal, community, and systemic transformation? This presentation sought to answer these questions through lessons learned from organizing, teaching, and designing. Through three case examples, this talk reflected on embracing uncertainty and care through community organizing, fostering young leaders, and building a City-wide equitable community engagement toolkit.

Rosenfeld Civic design conference

Conference title: Shifting toward community-led innovation in local government

City presenters: Danita Reese and Devika Menon

Participating groups: PHL Service Design Studio, NYC Mayor’s Office of Economic Opportunity Service Design Studio, and Montgomery County Maryland Innovation team

Description: This panel discussion was about community-centered design in local government. The team talked about why it’s important to collaborate with communities, the conditions that are required to practice community-centered design, and what it looks like in action.

Civic Design by Rosenfeld
8 December 2021 #CD2021

THEME 1: Civic Design Today led by Charlotte Lee

Shifting Toward Community-Led Innovation in Local Government
RESIDENT/CITIZEN-CREATED SOLUTIONS
• WHERE BILLS BECOME ACTIONS & SERVICES
• BODY THAT REPRESENTS GOVERNMENT TO THE PEOPLE
• WHERE PEOPLE COME WITH GRIEVANCES

DANITA J. REESE Service Design Strategist
DEVIKA MENON Service Design Strategist
MARI NAKANO Director of Design
ASHLEY CORTEZ Design Lead
NIDHI SINGH RATHORE Civic Design Lead

PHL SERVICE DESIGN STUDIO We are a team of design researchers within the office of the Chief Administrative Officer. We collaborate with residents, frontline staff, and policy makers to design accessible, equitable, and trauma-informed services.
ESTABLISHED 2020 Service design since 2015
@DesignStudioPHL Toolkit Project NEWSLETTER available

NYC SERVICE DESIGN STUDIO We are a team of designers inside the NYC Mayor's Office of Economic Opportunity. Our goal is to make public services effective and accessible for all New Yorkers. We collaborate with City employees to build more resilient, accessible, dignified and responsive services with the people who use and deliver public services.
ESTABLISHED mid-2017 service design since mid-2014
@nycopportunity ONE-PAGER: bit.ly/sds-panel
MEDIUM @ Positionality · Service Design

MCG CIVIC DESIGN TEAM We are a branch of the Innovation Team that sits in the County Executive's Office in the Montgomery County (MD) Government. We serve as a resource and advocate for people and pursue creating a more liberating, just, and humane government.
ESTABLISHED 2021 MEDIUM
@innovation_mcg DESIGNX PEOPLE OPEN HOUSE January 2022 NEWSLETTER available

What do we mean by community-centered design?
What conditions are needed to do this work?
How have we practiced community-centered design on our projects?

CONDITIONS DESIRE, WILLINGNESS, TIME
Listening, Budget will to change
RESPONSIVENESS *
In Philadelphia we go through an evaluative phase to vet these conditions

TEAM CULTURE Sitting in and with, your own discomfort ENABLES BETTER OUTCOMES WITH OTHERS
Team debriefs are key

PLANNING IS SO KEY
DIGITAL ACCESS
EQUITY/INCLUSION
LANGUAGE NEEDS
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
FUNDING
PROTECTION

KNOWING WHEN TO BE RESPONSIVE, AGILE, and WHEN TO HOLD OURSELVES (and OTHERS) ACCOUNTABLE (balance)

PROJECTS RESIDENTS BECOME THE INNOVATION ARCHITECTS! "Design by People" YOUNG PROFI'S
Equitable Neighborhoods stable housing, jobs, spaces
WE ALSO TRAIN UP OTHER GOVERNMENT GROUPS... Mindshifts are so great!

Clear, honest
MEET PEOPLE WHERE THEY ARE this has been very emotionally satisfying work - more than private sector!
INTENTIONALITY → FEEDBACK LOOPS, TRANSPARENCY ← PROTECTION

SKETCH NOTES by @mjbroadbent

Sketch notes from the panel discussion by MJ Broadbent

Growing our practice and team

Over the past year, we've focused on three areas when developing our practice and team.

They are:

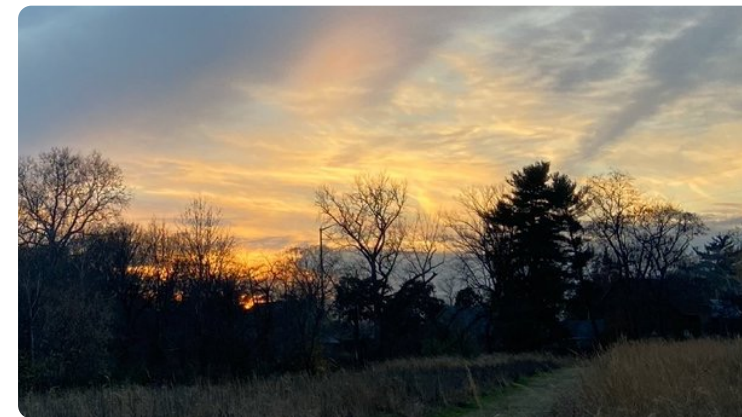
- Building the conditions to do our work well in government.
- Communicating about and celebrating our work — publicly.
- Supporting each other's continual growth.

Building the conditions to do our work well in government

Within our team and City-wide, there are many ways we're building the conditions for our work.

We highlight three:

1. **Resident compensation:** Finding equitable ways to compensate our resident and community collaborators while balancing the City's purchasing and procurement policies has been challenging. In collaboration with the Office of the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO), the Finance Office, and the Office of Procurement, we developed a compensation policy and internal protocol to allow for low-barrier resident compensation. The CAO continues to iterate on more equitable Citywide options and policies.
2. **Holistic performance reviews:** During our second year, we implemented a draft one performance review process that reflects our values and individual goals. Each team member received insights from project partners and colleagues and used that feedback to set realistic, future-oriented goals — supported by the collective.
3. **Ongoing conversations about our purpose and values:** The more experience we gain through our project work at the City, the more we reflect on our mission, vision, and values. During our second year, we engaged in several internal workshops where we grappled with the gap between what we aspire to do and what we can do within the constraints of working in the City. We'll continue to evolve our work to be responsive to our team's needs as well as those we collaborate with.



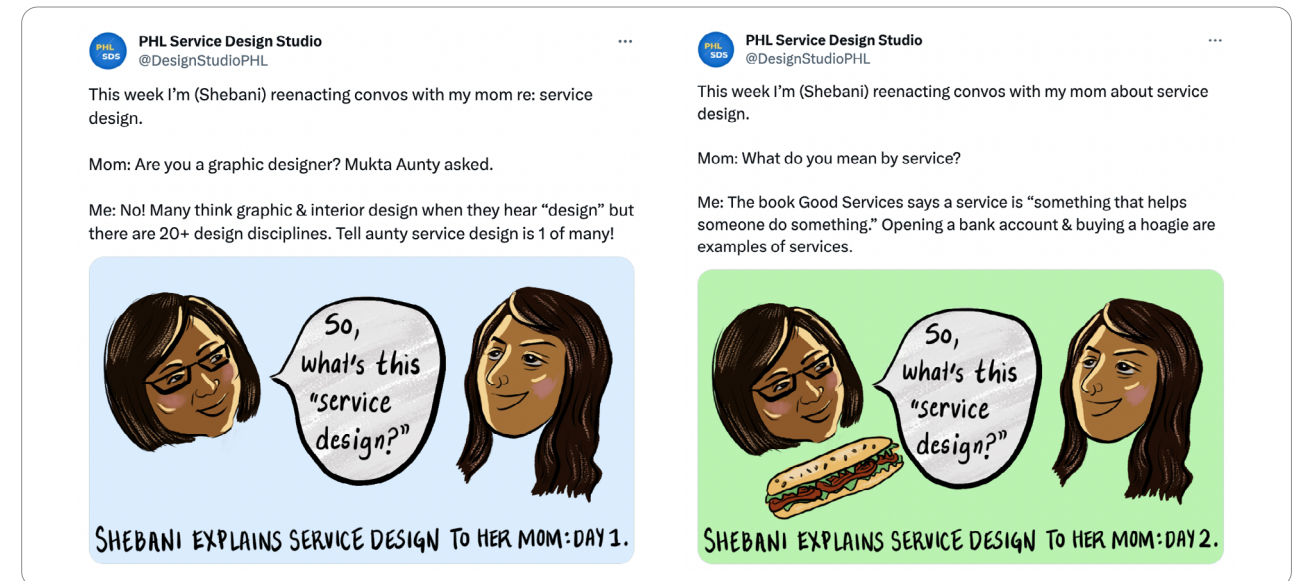
Sharing and celebrating our work publicly

This was a big year for our communication efforts.

- We created the [Equitable Community Engagement Toolkit quarterly e-newsletter](#) that we use to keep our broad ecosystem of stakeholders informed on the status of the project.
- We launched our Twitter account in August of 2021. Follow us [@DesignStudioPHL](#).
- We published several [project updates, announcements, and think-piece blogs on our site](#).



Featured tweets: Our favorite tweet series was written and illustrated by Shebani Rao, who’s a Senior Design Researcher on our team. In the series, she pretends to answer her mom’s questions about what she does as a service designer in government.



Featured blog posts: Each team member has been reflecting on and sharing key takeaways since starting their roles at the City. For year two, we published three posts from team members Danita Reese, Andrea Ngan, and Veronica Yeung.

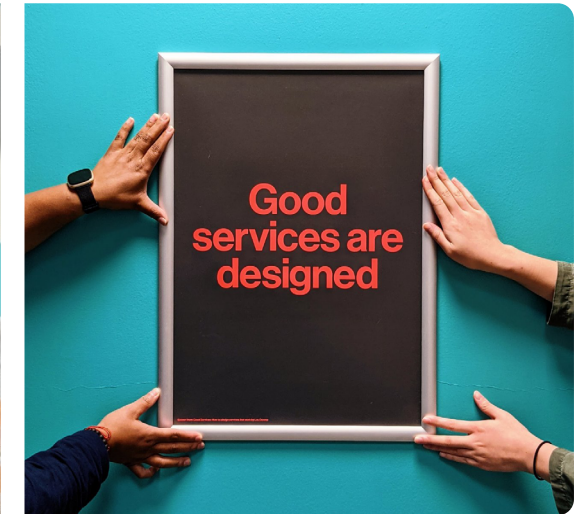
- [Danita wrote](#) about how we’re thinking about the humanness of our work in government — focusing on trust, joy, bravery, and love.
- [Andrea wrote](#) about how designers in government can foster more reciprocal relationships when we work with community members.
- [Veronica examined](#) our qualitative research practice — discussing some of the strategies we use to select participants for research.

Supporting each other's continual growth

Weekly, our team meets to offer feedback to each other on project work, reflect on lessons learned, navigate challenges, laugh, celebrate successes, and think together.

A few topics we've explored:

- The difference between an insight and an observation
- How to present findings that may be hard for partners to reflect on and hear
- Balancing strength-based findings with findings that center areas of improvement
- Internalized messages about work and burnout
- And we might have investigated our astrological signs to better understand team dynamics.



Thank you

Our work at the City (and beyond) is made possible due to the collective effort of our peers, colleagues, and leaders inside and outside of government. We're grateful for those who've offered us support, championed our work, inspired us, and shown us grace. Thank you to everyone.

Housed within the CAO cluster, we rely on many of our CAO colleagues to help us function as a team—from navigating procurement to hiring and thought partnership.

- Stephanie Tipton, Chief Administrative Officer
- Libby Peters, Former Chief of Staff
- Heather Fay, Executive Assistant
- Katrina Lewis, Administrative Manager
- Sherie Gardner, Conformance Manager
- Kayla Birch, Senior Human Resources Manager
- Tracey Bryant, Deputy Director of Talent Management

We're grateful for our project partners' collaboration, trust, and flexibility as we collectively navigate project complexities.

- Strategic Transformation Team, Office of the Chief Administrative Officer
- Zoning Board of Adjustment, Department of Planning and Development
- Tax Review Board, Office of Administrative Review
- Engagement Partnerships Team, Office of Civic Engagement and Volunteer Service
- Digital Services and Software Engineering Teams, Office of Innovation and Technology

The Equitable Community Engagement Toolkit Project was funded by an Innovation Award and Operations Transformation Fund grant. Many colleagues have worked with us to manage these funds.

- Aviva Tevah, Program Officer, Operations Transformation Fund, CAO
- Hannah Louie, Project Manager, Operations Transformation Fund, CAO
- Emily Gowen, Deputy Director, Fund for Philadelphia
- Trudi Wright, Finance Director, Fund for Philadelphia