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Overview

This is the City of San Diego's first-of-its-kind Customer Experience (CX) strategy, which comprehensively guides the design of City services so they consistently exceed people's expectations.

This document lays out a vision for customer service in three distinct sections:

- **Core Values:** Universal themes in our strategy.
- ➤ **Guiding Principles:** Our code to follow when designing or updating public services.
- ▶ Recommendations: Specific actions we can take to make this strategy a reality.

"Customer Experience" is a widely-used term in the customer service realm. We use the word "customer" to broadly represent all people the City serves, including residents, visitors and business owners. To make sure we've built a vision that reflects people's needs, this plan has been shaped by you — the people of San Diego. Feedback from listening sessions held across the city, as well as our Spanish and English surveys, directly contributed to content in every section.

While San Diego has made great strides to better CX, we have room to build on this growth, improving overall customer satisfaction and saving taxpayer dollars.

This vision of customer service is achievable, and this strategy is the roadmap for how we will get there.

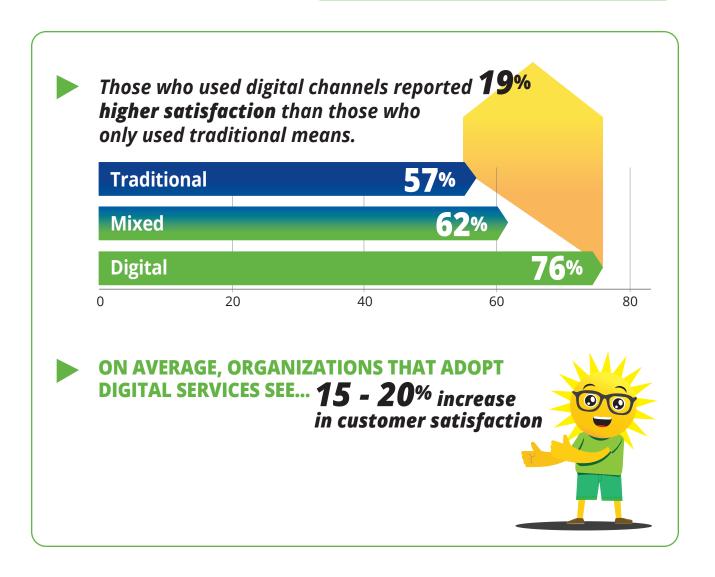
Why We're Here

The goal of this strategy is to prioritize the customer experience for all City interactions. The needs of all people must be considered, so that no one is left behind.

Meeting people where they are is more than just an issue of consideration, it's an issue of equity. **No one** *wants* **to wait on hold for hours and some people** *can't***.** Complicated paperwork that

must be completed in person or electronic systems that require special technology can create barriers for people. Implementing well-designed services lets people accomplish tasks quickly and easily, while respecting their valuable time.

This strategy is the spark that ignites our path forward and opens possibilities to better serve people.



Section 1: Core Values

For our services to be used by all people, they must be approachable, inviting, clear and intuitive. Digital services should be simple and easy for everyone to use.



Accessible

Making services **accessible** is the first step in engaging with all people in San Diego. Accessible services are easy to locate and approachable for everyone. No matter who you are or what you know about how the City is organized, information is clear, described using simple terms and offered in many languages. Accessible services are available through many different ways, so people can choose the best way to engage with the City.



Reliable

Reliable services are essential for earning and building the trust of our customers. Whether someone is connecting with the City through a mobile app, in person or on a phone, the same high standard of service is expected and should be delivered.

Reliable just works.

Gratifying

good great.

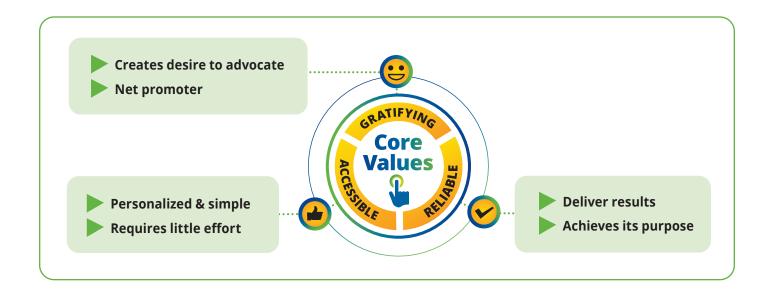
makes

Reliable services are the product of all the behind-the-scenes channels, functions and departments working together seamlessly. Reliable services also require accurate, valid and up-to-date information offered to the customer before they have to speak to a person or request an action.

Gratifying

Experiences that are **gratifying** keep people engaged and spur a sense of accomplishment, leaving people satisfied. This value can be achieved by providing exemplary service, clear communication, transparent results and easy processes. When we deliver on all the marks, the outcome is a high-quality, delightful experience.

Ideally, when a customer interacts with the City, they should feel satisfied enough to share their positive experience with their community and become an advocate for the service.



Section 2: Guiding Principles

These three statements expand on the Core Values and are meant to guide our work. Everything we do should follow these principles.



PRINCIPLE #1:

Put people at the center of all we do.

What is it?

Human-centered design is the gold standard for developing services that prioritize people's needs and deliver as promised. This approach uses customers' input, behaviors and experiences to shape the solutions that meet their needs.

Why does the City need it?

Actively incorporating people's input **before** launching a new service lets us build processes around people, not the other way around. Involving the customer perspective early allows us to shape important requirements around people's needs, proactively designing the process with customer feedback at its core.

Creating simple, intuitive customer experiences results in fewer customer service escalations, more trust and transparency in the process, and less taxpayer dollars spent recovering from confusing or convoluted customer experiences.

Incorporating this principle means people are included in the design process.

New systems, processes, procedures, forms and content are created with guidance from the people who will be using them.

Needs are anticipated, time is respected, and people have access to useful solutions that solve problems and make life easier.



Human-Centered Design: The One Where Sunny Opens a Business



Sunny had to delay their grand opening due to disorganized webpages, long hold times, and an unclear sense of all the permits they needed to obtain.



When Sunny opened their business, a personalized, real-time checklist in their online portal made permitting a breeze and opening day an on-time success!



PRINCIPLE #2:

Enhance the customer experience at every step.

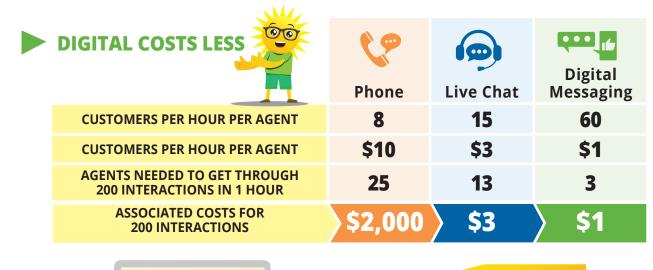
What is it?

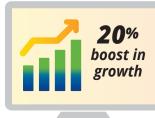
Every customer touch point is designed to make sure the customer is on the path to a successful journey. This means providing meaningful status updates for a service request, giving accurate time estimates for the next step, and communicating promptly and clearly when action is needed on their part. Breaking down customer experiences into specific interactions lets us examine each step under a magnifying glass to see how we can improve the overall experience — whether through technology or process upgrades.

Why does the City need it?

Enhancing services does not mean just adding a button to a website or creating a fancy new app — it involves examining how a process best works to determine what the design should be or the technology it should use. Building processes that are efficient, cohesive and easy to use at every step are needed to meet our customers' needs.

Embracing this principle means the City is providing services that keep customers informed at every step. By leveraging available technology to enhance processes we know work, we can provide a level of support that allows individuals to thrive.







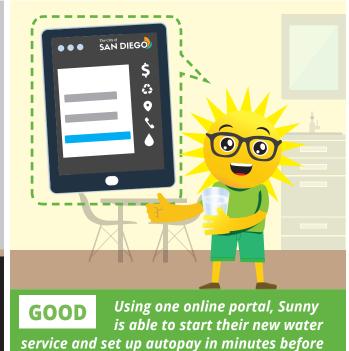
Digital Tools Enhancing Customer Experience: The One Where Sunny Moves



BAD

Because water services can only be started by an agent over the phone,

Sunny needed to wait until the next morning to start their service. Also, unknown to Sunny, the system did not save their autopay information, so months later they will be calling and waiting on hold again to dispute late fees.



getting overwhelmed on move-in day!



PRINCIPLE #3:

Services are smooth from start to finish.

What is it?

The best customer experiences offer a seamless start-to-finish journey. It's like a direct flight — a trip without stops between where you came from and where you're going.

This happens when people are guided toward their desired outcome, and when stops or transitions are invisible to the customer. When all touch points are aligned for the customer experience, people can confidently and efficiently accomplish what they set out to do.

Why does the City need it?

The behind-the-scenes process directly impacts the results a customer sees, as well as how efficiently the City can provide a service. Improving processes means breaking down departmental divides and examining the end-to-end "customer journey" necessary to complete a given task. A customer should be able to request any service without knowing which department is operationally responsible and have a consistent experience, regardless of with which department they interact.

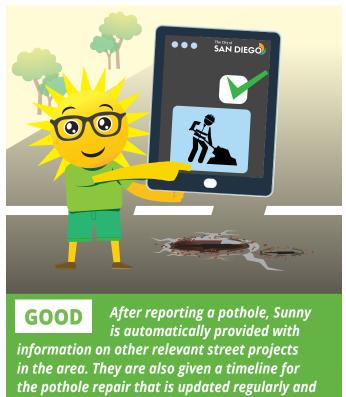
This principle ensures we're examining each and every step of a process for potential improvements. It also infuses innovation in our DNA as we're committing to exploring all means of making processes smoother — both with and without technology.



Efficient, Easy Processes: The One Where Sunny Encounters a Pothole



Sunny notices a pothole case they created has been closed without fixing the pothole. After calling and waiting on hold, they learn it was closed because it might be incorporated into an upcoming street project. Sunny is annoyed they had to call for this information and still have no clear timeline.



explanations for any delays.

Section 3: Recommendations

The City has many priorities competing for limited resources, which makes resource allocation challenging. Moving forward with these recommendations will yield a high return on investment, saving taxpayer time, frustration and money.



Overview of Recommendations

An investment in resources is needed to implement the recommendations outlined in this strategy. While all recommendations are ultimately essential to increase the City's digital maturity level, we recognize the need for prioritization in the current economic climate.

These recommendations are designed to build a "first line of defense" that starts to address the gap in tools needed for customers to successfully engage with the City and for employees to do their jobs.

				Rec #2B Content Strategy (large)
			Rec #2A Content Strategy (small)	
Cost -		Rec #4A Community Outreach	Rec #3A Feedback Loops	
	Rec #3B Feedback Analysts	Rec #1B Internal Service Directory	Rec #3C Performance Coaches	
	Rec #4B Digital Customer Feedback Bank	Rec #1A Public Service Directory		
		Impact		-



RECOMMENDATION #1:

Publish a public, searchable directory of City services.

From building permits to passport appointments, the City offers people a wide array of services. However, while the City may offer these options, people may not know what's offered or how to access it.

When this gap occurs, people become frustrated, leading them to become disengaged. This can result in them taking their business to other agencies or avoiding engaging with the City altogether, leading to preventable revenue and reputation losses.

This recommendation, available as a smaller and larger project, would provide a one-stop shop for people interested in engaging with the City but unsure where to go, how to do it, or for what exactly they're looking.



Public Service Directory

Building a public-facing service directory is the first tangible action in this strategy. This public directory will become a centerpiece of the City's website and include key information on how to access the service (e.g. the channels the service is offered on, where to start the process, hours of operation, etc.).



Internal Service Directory

In addition to the public version of the directory, we recommend collecting and maintaining a more extensive internal directory to help us prioritize projects that have the potential to make the most public impact for the least cost.

The employee impact: As public resources, customer service employees (including those working on the San Diego Police Department non-emergency line) will have a quick, easy and reliable resource to help customers get to where they need to be. The efficiencies gained from this new resource means more people helped, shorter response times, higher customer satisfaction and money saved!



RECOMMENDATION #2:

Update our content standards to ensure everything we publish is accurate, approachable, and up to date.

The City's digital front door, sandiego.gov, is well-used with around 30 million hits a year. The site is functionally and structurally sound, however, its design needs to be supported by solid content for it to effectively serve people.

Without a strategy to review, validate, archive and update content, people often encounter wrong information, missing details, broken links or outdated information. When information is correct and readily available, would-be calls are deflected and those that get through are handled quickly and accurately by agents with access to quality information.

If people do not trust us to publish correct information, how can we expect them to trust us to deliver essential services?

Given the expanse of our digital content, we have developed both a smaller and larger scope recommendation:



Use Service Directory to Identify and Fix High-Volume, Low-Quality Content

The service directory developed in Recommendation 1B will provide us with a wealth of knowledge on the services and pages the public relies on us to maintain. Using this as a guide, the smaller-scope project would identify a few key areas to improve.

Ultimately, we would deliver validated content supported by a new structure that will allow us to review, refine and maintain future information.



Full-scale Content Management

A more robust effort would commit the City to reviewing and validating all of our individual webpages.

In addition to just reviewing the content, a larger holistic approach would allow us to examine the structure and design of the website itself (and eliminate pages that may not be necessary). With thousands of pages, the City's existing search function is not reliable, and customers often need to dig through layers of outdated pages with an overwhelming amount of information before either giving up or escalating. Additionally, because each individual department owns their own pages, there is no standard service level, leaving the customer with a disjointed, unreliable experience.

A larger effort would allow us to create one standard system and apply it evenly from the start.



RECOMMENDATION #3:

Use feedback to make improvements.

Every time a customer interacts with the City, they should have the opportunity to tell us how their experience was. After sharing their thoughts, it's on us to listen and identify how we can use that information to make improvements. This recommendation addresses how the City can better open our ears to customers, as well as how we can be better listeners to what they have to say.

Without feedback, the City would be blind to how people perceive our services. We wouldn't know how we're performing, or worse, we may be ignoring the voice of the people. Without a method to systematically improve services and act on feedback, people will be disenfranchised and dissatisfied.



Create Feedback Loops For All Services

A feedback loop is a way for customers using a service to share their experience with the people providing it. This is a standard practice in most industries, and we should adopt this model for all the City's public services and information centers.

Although some services already have feedback loops, there are many without one. As no formal expectations have been set, existing surveys may be collecting different metrics -- making it impossible to establish a universal service standard.

A formal feedback mechanism is crucial to accurately and comprehensively understand if our services are satisfying customers.



Start a CX Analysis Program

While the first step is to gather information, the second step is to analyze and identify trends, root causes and areas of improvement. This step turns raw data into something actionable. Currently, customer feedback is passed along directly to the departments that provide the services. Departments are not equipped to meaningfully review this data and cannot be expected to work on the business while working in it.

A team of CX analysts is necessary to own the data, systematically analyze it, discover insights, and highlight where we need improvement. High-achieving areas where we are performing well can be identified, and their success replicated elsewhere.



3C Use Performance Coaches to Drive Improvements

Departments need change agents to help drive improvements. The final step is to turn the CX analysis into action, making actual process changes and improving the overall experience in sustainable and repeatable ways.

By following the Lean Six Sigma DMAIC framework, the industry standard for change management and process improvement, performance coaches would work closely with departments to make improvements based on the insights learned from customer feedback by the CX analysts.



RECOMMENDATION #4:

Make space to hear from all voices - loud and soft.

To create solutions that serve people, it's critical to talk directly with people. This recommendation builds a foundation to:

- Reach out to meet people where they are.
- Collect customer input and thoughts.
- Organize people's feedback for analysts (Recommendation #3B) to make tangible improvements.

If we don't implement this recommendation, people will be left behind in a growing digital divide (where new technology is threatening) and will become disenfranchised when our services don't meet their needs or feedback.

To accomplish the goals above, we recommend starting with the following two programs:



Meet People Where They Are ... Literally

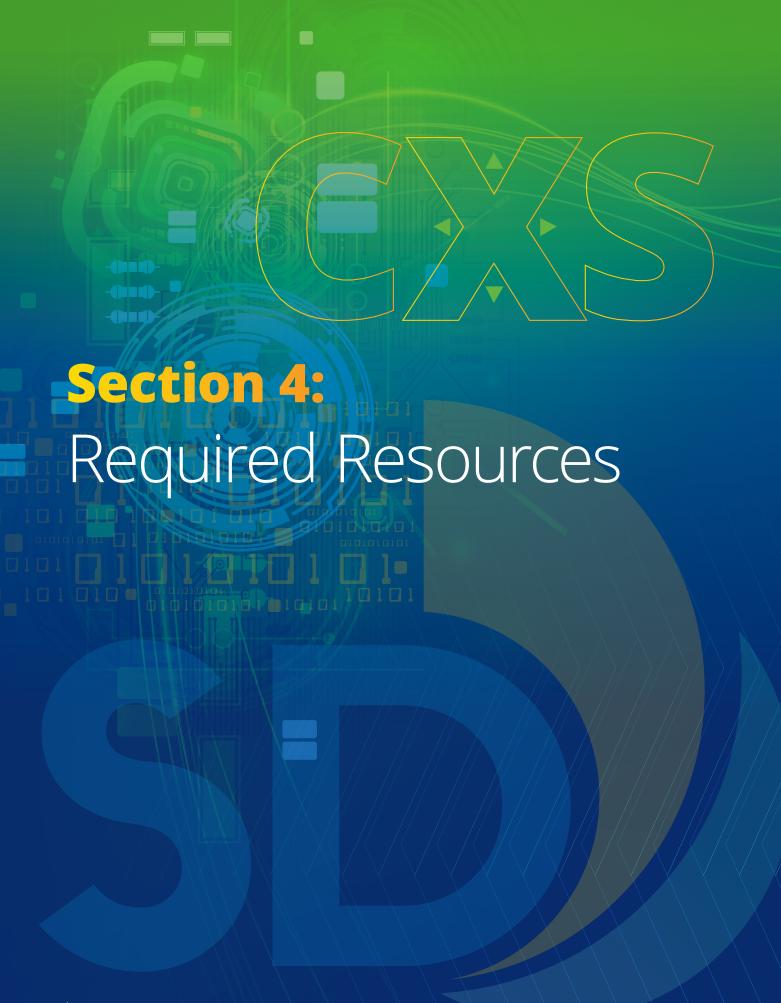
To raise awareness of all the City has to offer and ensure equitable service delivery, we need to form a team of City personnel to uplift the voices of our communities. As part of this effort, the team will attend and host local events, increasing our overall physical presence in the community. They'll work hand-in-hand with the community to educate people on the many digital resources the City offers and how to access them.



Create Ways for People to Engage and Provide Direct Feedback

Customers are eager to provide feedback about City services, forms and content. To harness this energy in our community, a program needs to be put in place to allow individuals to voluntarily participate in future surveys, user testing, focus groups or other feedback opportunities.

By building a bank of eager customers ready to let us know their thoughts, we will be better equipped to tweak and tailor digital services **before** they go live, reducing time spent recovering from failures that could have been easily prevented had we just asked.

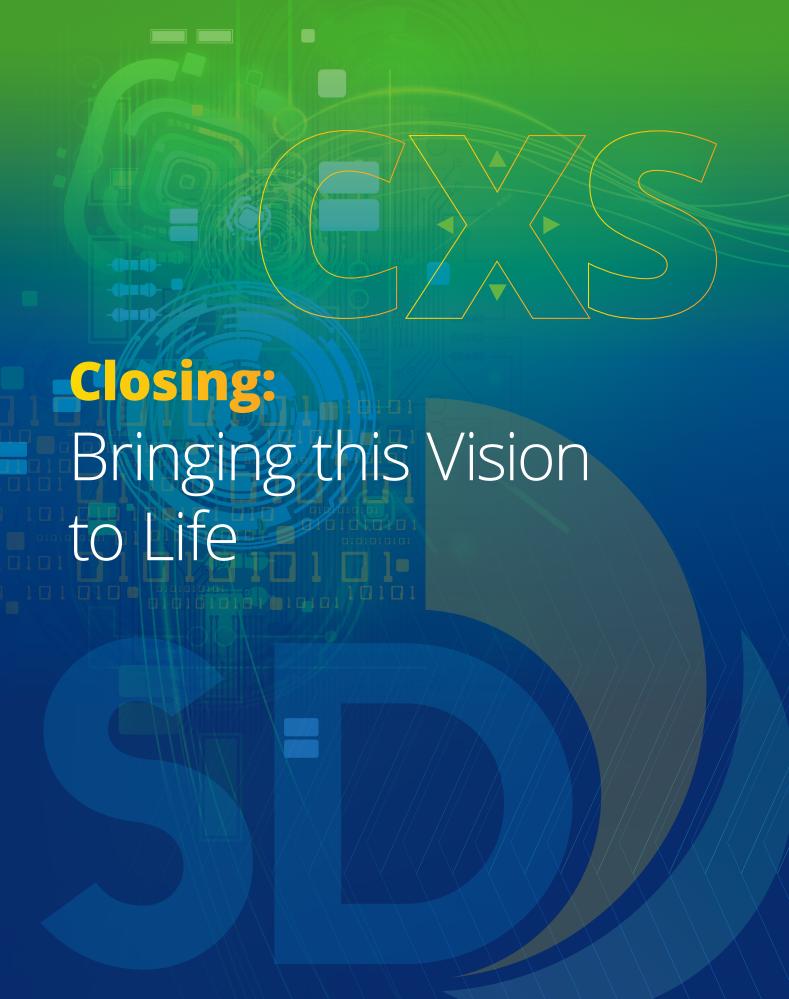




	1. Planning + Design	2. Implementation	3. Maintenance
Rec 1A/B	Personnel Design Project management	Personnel Project management IT / Developers	Personnel Project management IT / Developers
Rec 2A	Personnel Content development Project management Communications	Personnel Content development Project management IT Communications	Personnel Content development Project management Communications IT
Rec 2B	Personnel Design Project management IT Communications	Personnel Design Project management IT Communications Technology Software development Contracting	Personnel Design Project management IT Communications Technology Software development Contracting
Rec 3A	Personnel Project management CX design specialist	Personnel Project management CX design specialist Technology Software licensing	Personnel Project management CX design specialist Technology Software licensing
Rec 3B	Personnel CX analyst HR support	Personnel CX analyst HR support Technology Software licensing	Personnel CX analyst HR support Technology Software licensing
Rec 3C	Personnel Performance management	Personnel Performance management	Personnel Performance management
Rec 4A	Personnel Project management	Personnel Project management Team leads Interns Materials	Personnel Project management Team leads Interns Materials
		Space rentals Marketing/Communications	Space rentals Marketing/Communications
Rec 4B	Personnel Project management	Personnel Project management Tech leads UX research/designer Feedback facilitation	Personnel Project management Tech leads UX research/designer Feedback facilitation



Physical office space may also be required for personnel identified above. Personnel may be hired in-house or contracted out, depending on the need and duration.





This Customer Experience Strategy marks a pioneering initiative for the City of San Diego, charting a transformative path to reshape public service with the people of San Diego as our primary focus.

Using our core values as universal themes, guiding principles as the code supporting our approach to process design, and recommendations to take tangible actions, this plan stands as the foundation for elevating customer experiences across all City services.

Together, these elements pave the way for a future where the City of San Diego stands as a model of customer-centric public service, committed to enhancing the lives of all San Diegans.

Acknowledgements

This project would not be possible without thoughtful contributions from many individuals, departments and groups, including support and feedback from:

- Participants in the Digital Customer Experience Survey (English and Spanish)
- Participants in the Citywide Digital Customer Experience Overview Webinar
- Eastern Area Communities Planning Committee
- City Heights Community Planning Committee
- La Jolla Community Planning Association
- Listening Session (Council District 5)
- Ocean Beach Town Council
- San Ysidro Community Planning Group
- Tierrasanta Planning Group
- University City Planning Group
- Uptown Planners
- Mayor Todd Gloria
- Chief Operating Officer Eric Dargan
- Chief Financial Officer Matt Vespi
- Councilmember Joe LaCava
- Councilmember Jennifer Campbell
- Councilmember Stephen Whitburn
- Councilmember Henry Foster III
- Councilmember Marni von Wilpert

- Councilmember Kent Lee
- Councilmember Raul Campillo
- Councilmember Vivian Moreno
- Council President Sean Elo-Rivera
- Former Councilmember Monica Montgomery Steppe
- City Attorney Mara Elliott
- Independent Budget Analyst Charles Modica
- City Auditor Andy Hanau
- City Audit Committee
- Rules Committee
- City executive leadership
- Communications Department
- Amor F. Figuracion, Graphic Design
- ▶ Jennifer McBride, Public Information Officer
- Leslie Wolf Branscomb, Public Information Officer
- Ron Vazquez, Web Services Manager
- Kara Fitzpatrick, volunteer
- Moriah Gaynor, Performance & Analytics
- Marcus Lostracco, Performance & Analytics
- Angela Wells, Performance & Analytics



Message from the Performance & Analytics Department

Ultimately, City services must meet people where they are and serve their needs – whether digital or in person. By taking a human–centered approach as we design services, we can use technology to make our customers' and employees' lives easier.

Get It Done launched in 2016 and sparked enthusiasm for what's possible. Over the past eight years we've expanded and grown Get It Done, and it's time to move to the next level. This document lays the groundwork for what it will take to improve the customer experience for everyone.

Thank you to the many community members, employees and industry experts who helped shape this document.

As we continue to develop this vision, we will seek feedback from community members and City leadership to plan a future where **people** are empowered and engaged by the services the City offers.

With gratitude,

Kirby Brady

Chief Innovation Officer

Alex Herpton Alex Hempton

Interim Director, Performance & Analytics Department







APPENDIX A:

Case Study: The need to invest in digital.

Get It Done is the City's main customer-focused digital channel. Since its creation, this program has become an example for local governments, receiving national recognition for its success and public adoption.

Throughout the last seven years, Get It Done usage has grown by almost 75%, fielding nearly 500,000 requests per year. Despite this exponential growth, in that same timeframe, the team supporting Get It Done has only received funding to add one position — expanding just 20%.

This level of resourcing allows the team to "keep the lights on" and make minor enhancements, but it does not leave room for larger, more impactful improvements. As public demand grows and digital services become a more crucial element of basic City operations, a more intentional, comprehensive investment in digital services is needed.

Year	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Total FTE*	5	5	5	6	6	6
FTE Added Per Year	0	0	0	1	0	0

^{*}Members of the Technology & Innovation Division of Performance & Analytics Department

If we do not invest in these resources, the City will continue to fall behind modern expectations, causing both customers and employees to waste time and resources.



APPENDIX B:

Case Study: The impact of technology + self service.

When people are given more self-service options to engage with the City, the demand is more evenly distributed among the City's available resources.

Calls that might have gone to a customer service representative (CSR) can be deflected to a self-service option, freeing CSRs to handle more complex inquiries. This makes call volumes more manageable and allows for efficiency gains. In turn, this increases opportunities for CSRs to deliver a meaningful and fulfilling customer service.

This approach uses taxpayer dollars more efficiently, cutting cost and improving customer satisfaction.

APPENDIX C:

Methodology: How we got here.

In 2023, the Performance and Analytics Department (PandA) embarked on our journey to create a cohesive strategy that would uplift and standardize the customer experience (CX) across all City of San Diego services.

Prior to presenting our initial draft to the Audit Committee in June 2023, we relied heavily on secondary research to develop the foundation for our strategy. In this stage, we used prominent examples of intentional customer service strategies to inform our approach. This included England's NHS, VA.gov, as well as the City of San Francisco and State of Colorado for examples of best practices within governing bodies.

A core tenet of our strategy is to be responsive to the feedback of our customers. So, to "practice what we preach," the PandA team presented an outline of the proposed strategy at community meetings in each of the City's nine Council Districts to collect feedback on how to improve our first draft. Additionally, PandA hosted a citywide virtual session for those unable to attend the in-person Council District meetings, created an online survey, and presented to the City's unclassified workforce. The full draft (in English and Spanish) was also posted to sandiego.gov/digitalcx for feedback.

Through these efforts, we were able to present and receive input from over 620 individuals.



During this time, PandA staff also attended community events to distribute informational materials on the strategy and offered internal briefings to department heads and other members of the City's executive leadership team.

Following the conclusion of this formal outreach effort, which ran from October – December 2023, PandA incorporated the feedback and reshared the revised strategy with digital strategists and City officials for additional review (see Acknowledgements for a full list of contributors).

Council District Presentation Hosts

- **▶** D1: La Jolla Community Planning Association
- D2: Ocean Beach Town Council
- **▶** D3: Uptown Planners
- **▶** D4: Eastern Area Communities Planning Committee
- ▶ D5: Independently Hosted Listening Session
- D6: University City Planning Group
- D7: Tierrasanta Community Council/Planning Group
- D8: San Ysidro Planning Group
- D9: City Heights Planning Group

Survey Questions

1. Have you reviewed the Digital Customer Experience Strategy? (Yes/No)

Section 1: Core Values

- 2. Do the following elements of the Core Values section reflect your customer experience expectations at the city? (Y/N)
 - a. "Accessible" value
 - b. "Reliable" value
 - c. "Gratifying" value
 - d. Core Value section as a whole
- 3. If you indicated "no" in the previous selection, please elaborate. (free response)
- 4. Is there any other feedback you would like to share regarding the Core Values section? (free response)

Section 2: Guiding Principles

- 5. Do the following elements of the Guiding Principles section reflect your customer experience expectations at the city? (Y/N)
 - a. "Human Centric Design" principle
 - b. "Holistic Digital Innovation" principle
 - c. "Harmonized Service Delivery" principle
 - d. Guiding Principles section as a whole



- 6. Do the following "Sunny's Story" help depict scenarios related to the guiding principles? (Y/N)
 - a. Sunny's Story: Chapter 1 Opening a Surfboard and Burrito Shop (Human-Centric Design)
 - b. Sunny's Story: Chapter 2 Sunny Moves To A New House (Holistic Digital Innovation)
 - c. Sunny's Story: Chapter 3 Reporting A Pothole (Harmonized Service Delivery
 - d. Sunny Stories as a whole
- 7. If you indicated "no" in either of the previous selection, please elaborate. (free response)
- 8. Is there any other feedback you would like to share regarding the Guiding Principles section? (free response)

Section 3: Recommendations

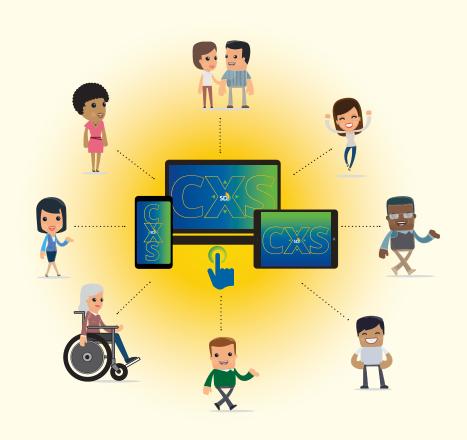
- Do the following elements of the Recommendations section reflect your customer experience expectations at the city? (Y/N)
 - a. Recommendation #1: Living CX Report Card
 - b. Recommendation #2: Build "No Wrong Front Door" Digital Assets
 - c. Recommendation #3: Use CX Feedback to Drive Process Improvements
 - d. Recommendation #4: Use Technology to Enhance Equity
 - e. Recommendations section as a whole
- 10. If you indicated "no" in the previous selection, please elaborate. (free response)
- 11. Is there any other feedback you would like to share regarding the Recommendations section? (free response)

Section 4: Resources

- 12. What is your preferred method of engagement with the City? Please rank from most likely to least.
 - a. Email
 - b. In person
 - c. Mobile app
 - d. Online website
 - e. Online chat
 - f. Phone call
 - g. Social media messaging
 - h. Text message
 - i. Traditional mail
 - j. Other (please specify in next question)
- 13. If you indicated "other" in the previous selection, please elaborate. (free response)
- 14. Is there any other feedback you would like to share regarding the Resources section? (free response)
- 15. Do you have any additional thoughts regarding the DCX Strategy? (free response)

Demographic Information

- 16. What is your zip code? (Your zip code helps City employees better understand and assess specific community needs.) (free response)
- 17. What is your age?
 - a. 25 or younger
 - b. 26 34
 - c. 35 44
 - d. 45 54
 - e. 55 64
 - f. 65+
 - g. Prefer not to answer
- 18. Which race category best describes you? Please select one.
 - a. Asian
 - b. Black or African American
 - c. Native American or Indigenous (the native peoples of the Americas such as Mayan, Quechua or Taino)
 - d. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - e. White
 - f. Two or more races
 - g. Prefer not to answer
- 19. Are you of Hispanic, Latinx, or Spanish ethnicity?
 - a. Yes, of Hispanic, Latinx, or Spanish ethnicity
 - b. No, not of Hispanic, Latinx, or Spanish ethnicity
 - c. Prefer not to answer
- 20. With which gender identity do you most identify with?
 - a. Female
 - b. Male
 - c. Transgender female
 - d. Transgender male
 - e. Gender non-conforming
 - f. Do not identify as female, male, or transgender
 - g. Prefer not to answer
 - h. Other







VISION:

A City that can confidently confront the complex and uncertain challenges of today and tomorrow.

MISSION:

We discover, innovate and optimize to help City employees better serve San Diegans.









