Service Design Standard for the Digital Public Services Policy

Last reviewed: Jan 2024
Next review: Jan 2025

Digital Citizen Experience, Ministry of SaskBuilds and Procurement
This document outlines the Service Design Standard as a component of the Digital Public Services Policy. These standards inform Government of Saskatchewan service design for public-facing digital services.

Background

The Government of Saskatchewan believes everyone benefits from a consistent approach to making our services better, more user-friendly, accessible and trustworthy, across all government digital services.

Government of Saskatchewan digital services are defined as:

- public facing;
- Executive government services that are offered to the public;
- non-Executive government services that are offered on Saskatchewan.ca and possibly through Saskatchewan Account owned by Government of Saskatchewan;
- new informational services;
    - typically, websites or mobile applications that provide information to the public
- new transactional services;
    - any service that leads to a change in the records held by government, such as, an exchange of information, money, licenses or goods: applying for a permit/license/lease; submitting a claim; applying for a grant; updating contact details; and requesting government assistance
- existing transactional services; and
- undertaken by third parties on behalf of government agencies.

Defining Service Design

Service design is a process that involves:

- conducting user research to better understand and build empathy for users;
- building prototypes to act as the first models of a service; and
- testing a service regularly with the people who will use it.

Understanding the people who will use a service helps to create solutions that work for them. Service design engages users throughout the design process so that decisions are made using observations and evidence, not assumptions.

Public Service + Design

A service is any activity that helps someone complete a task. With that in mind, all public servants – whether they work in digital, communications, policy or operations – are involved in service design.

Designing and delivering **great** service is at the core of **public** service. Using service design methods ensures that good ideas are implemented properly the first time.

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Service Design Realities

- Service design replaces assumptions with observation and evidence from real users eliminating assumptions about the service made by designers, developers and content specialists.
- Service design doesn't have to be expensive. User interviews, usability testing, prototyping and many other activities can be done for little-to-no cost.
- Service design excels when the problem is unknown, or the path forward is unclear. The more complicated, unclear and unique a situation, the more valuable service design is.
- Talking to users adds significant value for every hour spent. Feedback from users will validate or correct assumptions, leading to better decision-making during the project and avoiding expensive fixes after the service launches.

Standard Framework

The purpose of the standard is to ensure Design Thinking is embedded into government services, regardless of who provides them. In doing so, the standards ask government to move away from services that are siloed, and agency- or system-centric to outcome-based services that have community input, and are more open, inclusive, and co-designed.

It's a shift from system-based delivery that requires an entire system be built to deliver a suite of services to service-based delivery that prioritizes time to market per service and can be delivered incrementally through a system if that's the best value path.

This shift supports the government to provide public services that:

- put users at the forefront;
- are easily accessible to all users;
- are integrated and inclusive;
- reduce the effort and complexity of dealing with government; and
- ultimately build public trust.

Reduce Risk

A user-centred approach reduces project risk. By proactively seeking user feedback quickly and continuously, the project team can check that a service works well for the people who will be using it.

Save Time and Money

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By making small adjustments throughout a project (paired with Agile) instead of big changes later, costly changes are avoided and risk of bug fixes/issues or added change releases is reduced.

Solve the Right Problems

Talking to public users, external government stakeholders and internal government staff and investigating underlying issues before building a solution focuses efforts on designing a service that meets people's needs, as well as policy goals.

Standard Process Steps

1. Discovery and Planning

Discovery helps define a service's potential users and how their needs can be met. It can be tempting to skip discovery and design a solution based on similar services or brainstorm potential options immediately. These are solution-orientated design processes, that prioritize the technology needed to deliver the service. However, our core purpose is service not technology. You can have the best technology in place but if staff and clients can't use it effectively the investment is at risk. In contrast, service design is a user-orientated design process that prioritizes the user who needs to use the service. All services are different, but most projects need 3 to 8 weeks for Discovery.

Planning will determine the scope of the project, detailed requirements and any technical, budget or process restraints found during the Discovery phase.

Discovery is about:

- LEARNING. Understand the users and the challenges they face.
- PROBLEMS. Ensuring the actual problem is defined before researching requirements and finding a solution.
- FLEXIBILITY. Use research even if it doesn't align with expected findings, to show how far a problem might extend.
- TALKING. Talk to users, observe them and learn what they need from the service and how they will use it.

During Discovery, the team needs the skills to:

- learn about the users of the service by conducting direct interviews, observations and testing. How users behave, their challenges and what they need are essential details.
- understand current policy, technology and business process environments.
- document and draw insights from information collected.

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- manage the design process and review lessons learned from previous projects.

By the end of Discovery, expect to have:

- a clear understanding of the problems that the service will address.
- a documented set of user needs and stories.
- a plan for what will be prototyped and tested in the Design and Validate phase.
- a list of what resources will be required to support project work.

By the end of Planning, expect to have:

- determined roles and team members on the project team.
- a clear understanding and documentation of business requirements.
- a clear understanding of the existing technology terrain and common tools available by working with ITD Strategic Architecture Branch.
- a vision on how the project will leverage the Saskatchewan.ca website and, if determined, Saskatchewan Account so that users have the single window experience they're becoming accustomed to.
- direction from the Government Portfolio Office on how to meet government IT Governance requirements.

2. Design and Validate

While Discovery is about research, Design and Validate is about testing hypotheses and experimentation. The purpose of Design and Validate is to determine how to meet the user needs identified in discovery. It's an opportunity to quickly test many different approaches with users before developing a service.

Design and Validate is fast-paced and may go in many unexpected directions before defining what the final solution could look like. Try new approaches to solving problems and test them quickly, so that potential issues can be found and fixed before investing too much time and money into one design. In addition to the user needs, use the requirements and any technical, budget or process restraints identified in Planning, to help evaluate the different design ideas and identify a feasible option.

In Design and Validate:

- work directly with end users and stakeholders to co-create solutions;
- build multiple prototypes of the service;
- ensure mobile is considered first in all design and development layouts and functionality;
- continuously test prototypes with users; and
- identify existing processes or policies that will need to change to support the service.

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Design and Validate is a cyclical process of designing and testing potential solution options. Low-fi prototypes are built quickly, often together with users and stakeholders, and tested with real users. Feedback and testing results are used to improve the service. This process repeats itself until the prototype meets user needs and the first working version of the service is ready to be built.

All services are different, but most teams will need 8 to 12 weeks to complete the Design and Validate phase.

Design and Validate phase is about:

- HYPOTHESES. Which solution best meets the needs of users by prototyping and testing multiple concepts and hypotheses to identify and learn from potential issues while there is still time to make corrections.
- CONCEPTS. Create mock-ups and prototypes that address the problem being solved but don't solution. The technical experts should identify feasible solutions and help inform prototypes to test those solutions and select a path forward.
- AUDIENCE. Prototyping is a useful tool to turn ideas and plans into real objects that users can understand and interact with, but they are not presentation tools. The primary audience of a prototype needs to be the user.
- PERFORMANCE. Well-designed services extend far beyond what the user sees with underlying processes, customer support and technology impacting how well a service performs. The entire services must be designed end-to-end, not just the screens.

During the Design and Validation phase, teams will need the skills to:

- interpret user research, transforming helpful insights into design decisions.
- plan and facilitate co-creation sessions.
- construct and test prototypes of the service.
- understand what may be technically possible.

By the end of the Design and Validation phase, expect to have:

- a clear vision for the service that will be built.
- thoroughly tested prototypes that demonstrate the design of the service.
- a plan and prioritized list of features to be completed.
- a clear understanding of the technology that will be used to support the service.
- a business proposal to justify funding for the next phase of work.
- high-level architectural design.
- solution design document.

3. Build and Launch

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Build is when the service finally comes to life. The goal is to build a real service that works well for a larger group of people. The prototypes that were developed and tested during Design are used to build a service in a live, user-facing environment.

Build quickly and in small segments, taking the time to confirm that each segment of the service is on the right track. Launching a public service is the ultimate usability test, as it collects real data and user feedback used to refine the service, adding and adjusting features until the service is complete.

In Build:

- make a prioritized list of the user stories that have already been researched;
- continuously test the service with users to collect feedback and discover helpful insights;
- ensure mobile is considered first in all design and development layouts and functionality;
- test the design for accessibility and use assistive devices like screen readers;
- measure the service against key performance indicators; and
- resolve any remaining technical or process-related challenges.

What Build is about:

- PROGRESS. No service will ever be perfect. Services can and should be modified after launch, which is what makes continuous testing and improvement critical.

During Build, teams will need to:

- focus on developing and testing the first iterations of the service while building towards a live version.
- frequently revising the service and conducting usability testing while working in an agile way.

All services are different. Most teams need at least 4 to 6 months to complete the Build for a single service.

In Launch:

- the project plans a launch window with a warranty period;
- technical and design standards are once again validated and logged for any warranty fixes; and
- feedback is monitored closely during this period.

By the end of Build and Launch, expect to have:

- a fully functional version of the service that adequately meets user needs and all Government of Saskatchewan digital standards.
- a list of major bugs and usability issues that have been identified and fixed.
- a backlog of features to complete in order to improve the service.

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- launch a version of the service for public consumption.
- website analytics connected to capture user traffic.
- a monthly feedback survey report for the business to review for future enhancement discussions.

4. Sustain and Continuously Improve

The Sustain phase begins when the service has reached a point of maturity and all main features in the backlog have been built. While most people understand the purpose of sustaining a service, it's not always given the attention and resources it deserves.

Without proper resources devoted to the live service, services quickly become outdated and fail to meet both the Digital Public Services Policy and user needs.

Continuous improvement is one of the core principles of service design, and that's what Sustain is all about. The goal is to continuously monitor, research, test and iterate for as long as the service is active.

In Sustain and Continuously Improve:

- monitor and track the status of the service and key performance indicators
- conduct ongoing user research and usability testing every eight to twelve months
- continue building features from the backlog and releasing improvements to the service
- communicate and celebrate the successes of the service
- ensure the service continues to meet the Digital Public Services Policy
- Address platform changes such as depreciated functions
- Address operating system and browser changes that impact your service functions
- Shore up security vulnerabilities that become apparent over time

What Sustain and Continuously Improve is about:

- MONITOR. It's important to continually monitor the status of a service and make sure that it's maintained. Work on an active service should never be considered finished.
- ADAPT. User's needs and behaviours change over time, so services must adapt to keep pace. User research, testing and analytics should be used to make continuous improvements.