

CX for Cities: Government Built for People

Alexander Samuel, Olamide Adekoya, Noah Kim

Good Services Lab – Harvard University Bloomberg Center for Cities



Introduction

9 billion hours

was the estimated¹ annual paperwork burden imposed by federal agencies on the public in 2021. Suffice it to say, government services have much to improve on in terms of their customer experience, defined² as “the public’s perceptions of and overall satisfaction” with government interactions. Starting in the Obama administration and continuing into Trump II, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) developed the Federal Customer Experience (CX) framework to combat this issue.

Federal CX success stories include:

- deploying 10,000 newborn supply kits to families across ten states³
- reducing 2 million hours of caseworker time in Medicaid renewal⁴
- improving trust in 27 of 49 Federal CX-adopting services for 75% of surveyed customers⁵

Overview of Work

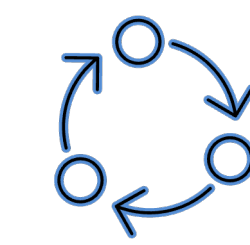
Federal CX’s bipartisan support alongside its proven track-record has led The Good Services Lab to develop its *CX for Cities* technical assistance program, an adaptation of Federal CX for the city level. The program entails an 8-month engagement wherein cities work through a 7-module service design sprint.

This summer, program material was created in collaboration with Amira Boland and Maya Mechenbier, fellows at the Good Services Lab with extensive service design work at the federal and state levels. It draws heavily from Human-Centered Design, “an interdisciplinary methodology of putting people...at the center of any process to solve challenging problems”.² To further tune the material, the Good Services Lab also conducted stakeholder interviews with former and current public servants at the federal (e.g. OMB, Domestic Policy Council, General Services Administration) and municipal level (e.g. Boston City Law Department).

Acknowledgements

The authors are deeply indebted to Dr. Kimberlyn Leary and Allison Baroni for their tireless investment in mentoring the GSL RAs in what it means to work with and build for leaders. The author also wishes to thank the Harvard College Office of Undergraduate Research and Fellowships for their summer award, without which this work would not have been possible.

Program Breakdown



City Design Sprint Process

1

Service Definition

Cities begin the sprint by defining the service they will improve: the need the service fills and how it fills it

2

Customer Segmentation

Cities identify the different customer groups interacting with their service, focusing further in on a priority group

3

Service Blueprinting

Cities break down the process of interacting with their service from a frontend and backend perspective

4

Pain Point Identification

Cities walk through their blueprint and use insights from interviews to identify points of friction and burden

5

Measure Definition

Cities brainstorm a list of metrics they can use to measure their progress in improving the service

6

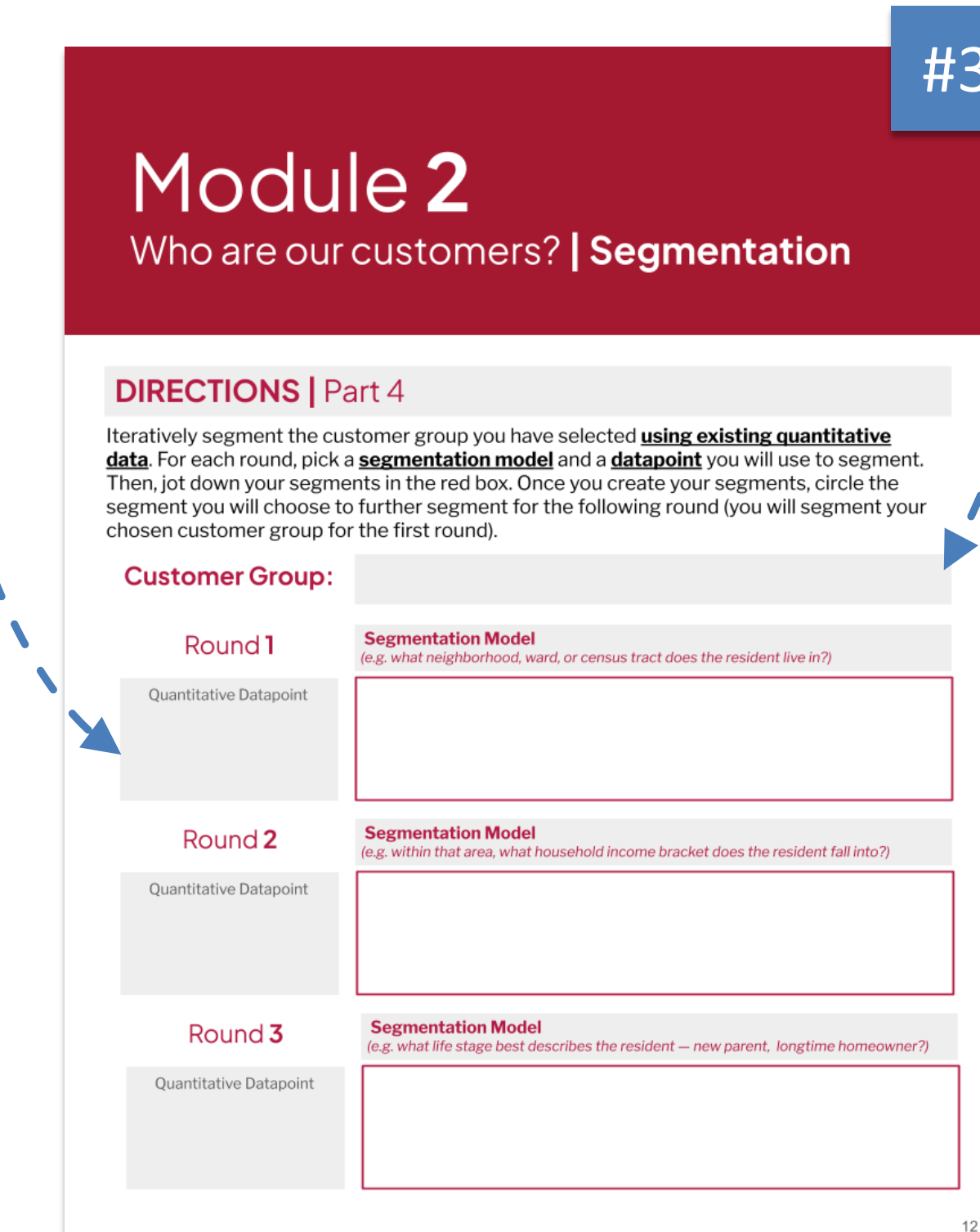
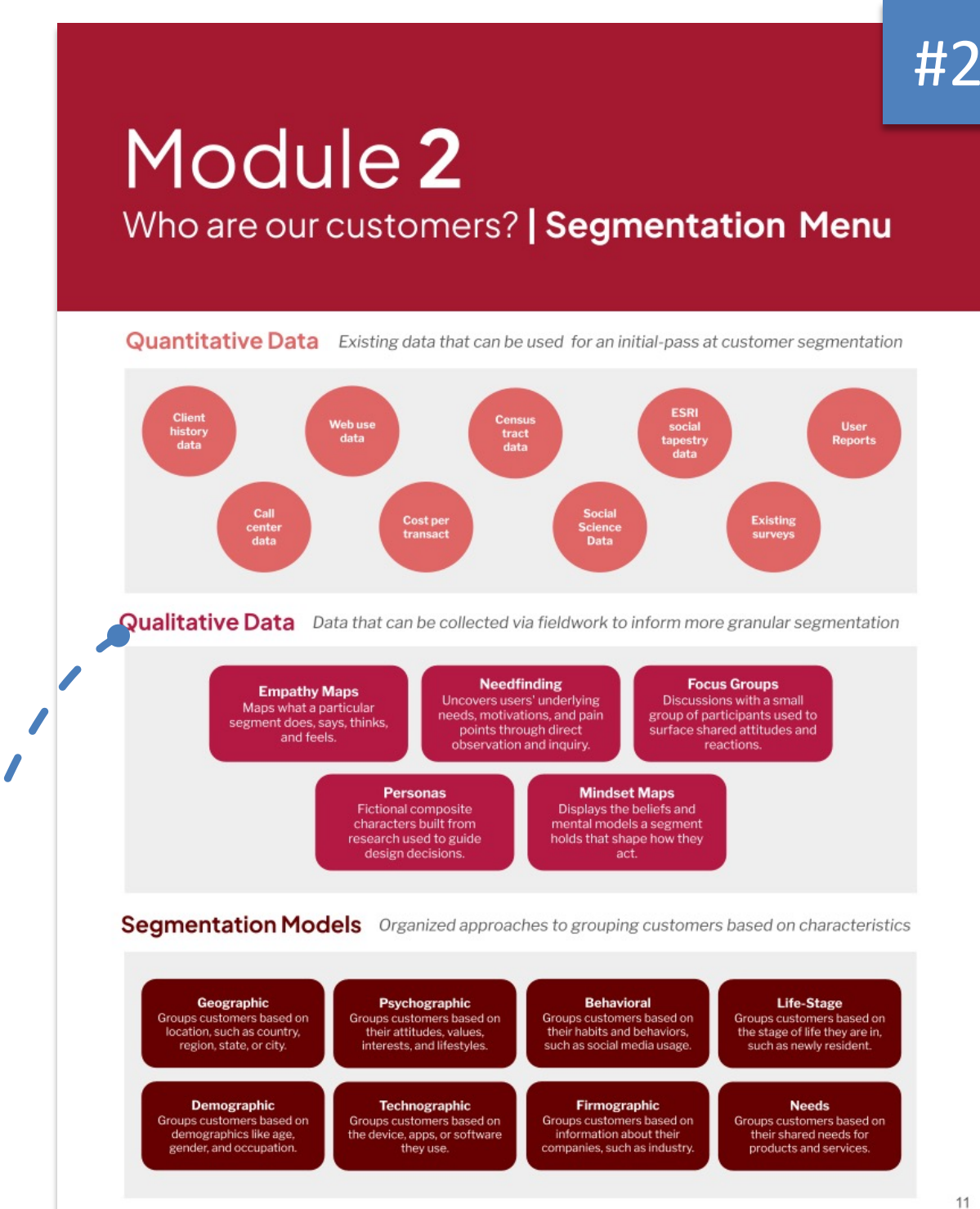
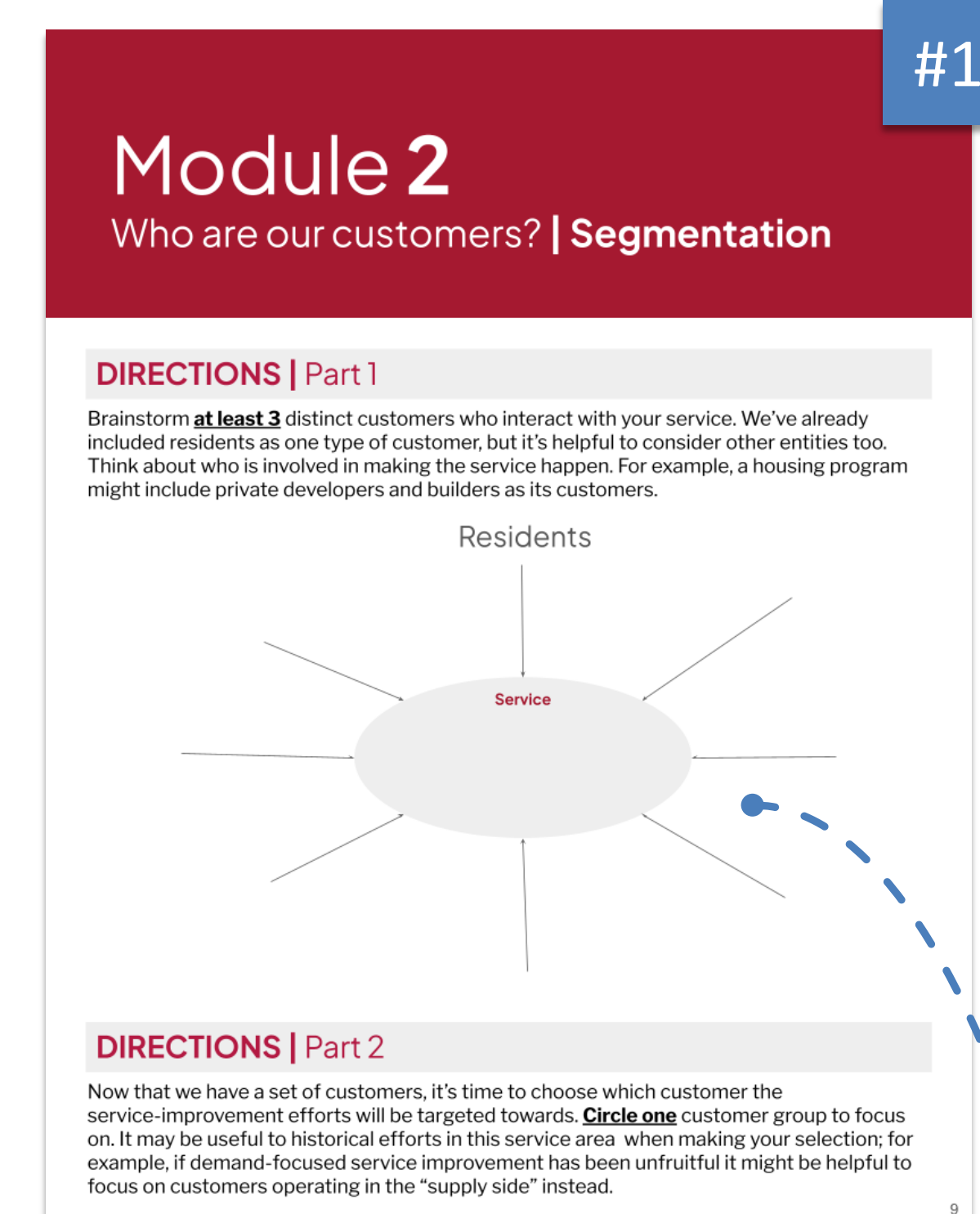
Rapid Prototyping

Cities ideate several different service improvements, selecting one that maximizes feasibility and value

7

Testing and Learning

Cities develop a learning plan that specifies how they will implement their selected service improvement



Learnings

The interviews we conducted revealed that creating good public services in cities takes...

➤ Executive Sponsorship

Mayors explicitly designating service-improvement as a priority on their agenda mobilizes crucial attention, manpower, and resources from public agencies.

➤ Community Partners

Public agencies often don’t have the bandwidth or expertise to administer services on their own. Public-private partnerships drive service quality and expansion.

➤ Needs-based Ideation

Services should be designed according to how residents fulfill their needs; residents aren’t pondering ordinances and org charts when signing up for home visiting programs.

➤ Stakeholder Engagement

Public services have various stakeholders (e.g. residents, suppliers, employees). Understanding each stakeholder’s perspective is critical for creating efficient processes.

Next Steps

The preparatory work done this summer around the program material feeds directly into *CX for Cities*’ implementation. This fall, the inaugural program cohort will begin working through the modules that have been created. Currently, two cities have been selected, with an additional one to two to join later in the year.

I will be transitioning from a summer RA position to a part-time, fall position at The Good Services Lab. We plan to continue creating material to assist cities as they complete the modules and craft their novel service improvement. Additionally, I will potentially be exploring the creation of a study run by the Good Services Lab to measure the impact that the *CX for Cities* program has on family outcomes.

References

- ¹Executive Order No. 14058, *Transforming Federal Customer Experience and Service Delivery To Rebuild Trust in Government*, 86 Federal Register 71357 (Dec. 16, 2021).
- ²“Terms and Definitions,” Performance.gov, last updated August 2023, <https://www.performance.gov/cx/terms/>.
- ³Federal Customer Experience Initiative Team, “Having a Child and Early Childhood,” Performance.gov, updated December 2024, <https://www.performance.gov/cx/life-experiences/having-a-child-and-early-childhood/>.
- ⁴Federal Customer Experience Initiative Team, “Facing a Financial Shock,” Performance.gov, updated December 2024, <https://www.performance.gov/cx/life-experiences/facing-a-financial-shock/>.
- ⁵“Trust in Major Government Service Providers,” CX Customer Feedback Dashboard, Performance.gov, accessed July 28, 2026, <https://www.performance.gov/cx/data/>.

Contact Information

alexandersamuel@college.harvard.edu

Learn More

cities.harvard.edu/initiatives/good-services-lab/
newamerica.org/insights/steps-leaders-can-take-to-center-people/