



Using feedback to drive decisions within public health agencies

Collecting Voice of the Customer (VoC) data for smarter resource investment

By Josh DeLung, ICF

Why CX matters for government

- Alignment with Executive Branch priorities, such as the President's Management Agenda
- Compliance with OMB Circular A-11 (2019) Section 280 (especially for high-impact service providers)
- Adherence to the 21st Century Integrated Digital Experience Act (IDEA)
- Preparedness for upcoming legislation, such as the Federal Agency Customer Experience Act
- Improvements to metrics that matter to an agency's mission and the trust it builds with customers
- Better understanding of the public's health IQ and the needs of different segments
- Cost savings through more efficient, customer-focused processes

How do you decide where to invest limited resources as a federal agency? Are audience research, information technology, infrastructure, and service improvements the right moves to make? Leaders must balance competing priorities and budgets with the public good and effective stewardship of taxpayer dollars. So how can agencies gain clarity in the decision-making process while helping citizens, health professionals, and other stakeholders get the information and services they need most? The answer is a well-structured approach to collecting customer feedback.

Start with the voice of the customer

A foundational component to improving the results your agency delivers to its customers—whether citizens within particular segments of the general public, employees of internal departments, or state and local public health agencies—is by starting a formal, consolidated VoC program: a fundamental component of improving customer experience (CX).

What is a VoC program?

A VoC program is a systematic way of collecting qualitative and quantitative customer feedback at multiple touchpoints along the customer journey. The purpose of collecting feedback at each touchpoint is to identify

opportunities for specific improvements to the messages, interventions, services, and processes with which citizens and partners interact.

You've probably seen VoC programs in action in your everyday life, some more successful than others. Take, for example, the ambiguous (and potentially misleading) happy and sad face kiosks at an airport, or the "How was your visit?" survey you're asked to complete after visiting an urgent care facility. This type of customer sentiment and behavior data—which can come not just from surveys but from other sources, including call center data, web analytics, online reviews, and social media—are all examples of VoC programs in action. But VoC programs only work for an organization if the qualitative and quantitative data they collect are synthesized and shared in a fashion that improves CX decision making and the delivery of services.

Put simply, feedback from people who interact with an agency that's synthesized with a strategic lens allows government agencies to better serve the population. Armed with this information, they can more efficiently and effectively disseminate data, make policy recommendations, develop guidelines, manage health information, and produce emergency content through reports, articles, campaigns, social media platforms, and other channels.

The nuts and bolts of a VoC program

- Inventory of touchpoints with customers (e.g., online applications)
- Feedback mechanisms for key touchpoints (e.g., surveys)
- Tracking software or documentation to compile and analyze data (e.g., a COTS product)
- Designated staff to manage program workstreams
- Designated staff to act on insights from data

Why VoC programs now?

The last decade has seen a dramatic change in how the government approaches service delivery. CX gained momentum with the formation of a cross-agency customer service working group, followed by [Executive Order 13571](#), the government's first CX officer, and the establishment of organizations such as [18F](#) and the [U.S. Digital Service](#). This progress continues today under the guidance of the [President's Management Agenda](#), [OMB Circular A-11 \(2019\) Section 280](#), the [21st Century Integrated Digital Experience Act \(IDEA\)](#), and the pending [Federal Agency Customer Experience Act](#).

Today, [89% of private companies say they compete based on CX](#). Research has shown that customers who have a good experience are [3.5 times more likely to make additional purchases and five times more likely to recommend](#) an organization's services than those who don't. These lessons can apply to the government sector as well, helping to increase trust and engagement with constituents.

It's more than just a good strategic move for government agencies to improve how citizen services are delivered—it's now a formal requirement from the highest levels of the executive branch. Without a VoC program, an agency simply can't begin to meet those requirements, and they'll miss out on significant opportunities to increase trust with their customers. VoC program data also allow agencies to make more impactful investments through efficient customer journeys, faster decision making, more targeted content, and better technologies.



Layers of VoC program measures

- 1. Program measures.** Program-wide overall feedback that assists with tracking trends over time against program changes.
- 2. Journey measures.** Feedback at high-priority milestones in customer journeys that helps identify pain points within specific touchpoints.
- 3. Tactical measures.** Analytics and qualitative feedback that helps identify root cause issues with engagement tactics like conferences and web content.

All metrics can be tracked in interactive dashboards that allow for interdepartmental sharing and decision making.

VoC programs at public health agencies

Americans are safer when public health organizations implement VoC programs. Knowing which communications and service touchpoints work best enables agencies to move quickly to thwart problems—especially in times of crisis. There are massive national security and public health implications to knowing what’s happening on the ground. When minutes and hours matter to dispel myths, disseminate vital information, or make policy decisions, synthesized data from multiple listening posts are crucial to making the right choices.

There’s a lot of scrutiny on how the government spends taxpayer money—and significant consequences for failure. As such, it’s more important than ever to make sure agencies use their resources to develop the right content and services—and to deliver them through technology platforms best suited to achieve mission success and build customer trust.

This is especially true for public health organizations like the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). For example, preventing the widespread outbreak of disease is only possible if citizens trust the CDC and its content, and if citizens are made aware of that content through the channels they access in times of crisis.

How are VoC program data used?

There are many ways to use collected customer feedback. Teams will synthesize data in different ways to inform multiple types of outputs relevant to their department. That’s why it’s essential for agencies to do more than just collect customer feedback on their content and services; that feedback must be shared *outside of silos* to inform decision making at the mission-delivery level.

Thankfully, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) has worked to streamline the Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) approval for collecting customer feedback in order to improve experiences with agency information and services. The [CX MAX Community](#) page includes tools and templates for navigating the clearance process. [Digital.gov](#) also has a simple guide to the PRA that includes tips for deciding what requires clearance.

Feedback throughout the customer journey is critical to understanding a customer’s overall trust, sentiment, and future intent. This includes feedback about interactions with employees, web content, other digital systems, and even physical spaces and associated needs (such as parking at a facility). It must be shared with all relevant parties who support the journey; for example, if the person who receives feedback on the entire customer journey only manages the department responsible for the website, other issues may go unresolved. If the data are pulled into reports or dashboards that can be shared more widely, however, it’s possible that human resources, public affairs, information technology, and facilities departments could all contribute to improving the overall CX in quantifiable ways.

Consider a parent who’s concerned about the health of their child. They may hit many touchpoints: Google, the CDC, their primary care provider (PCP),



an urgent care center, the pharmacy, and again with their PCP. Data may be reported by providers to the county health department and, eventually, to the CDC. Throughout, there are many customers and stakeholders touching many systems and having many interactions—and all of them impact an agency’s reputation and ability to achieve its mission.

Customer feedback input	Synthesis activities	Outputs
Interviews	Statistical analysis	Improved processes for contact centers, content governance, service design, strategic initiatives investing, etc.
Surveys	Text analysis	
Live chats	Card sorting	
Social media	Content analysis/coding	Better web content
Web analytics	Journey mapping	Hiring, training, and employee enablement improvements
Transactional data	User path analysis	New support mechanisms
Online reviews	Design thinking workshops	More efficient budgets
Emails	Dashboarding	Customer-centric policy development
Phone logs		
Feedback forms		Reformed procurement approaches
		Strategic communications and messaging frameworks

How VoC program inputs become service design outputs

Five steps for getting started

Once an agency has decided to make CX a priority, a VoC program—along with journey mapping—is a key starting point to ensure that the agency has the right information to understand when, where, and how to act.

These five steps provide the necessary direction for upstart CX teams.

- 1. Outline your goals.** Define your intended experience for each customer segment. What measures must you achieve at each touchpoint to be successful and to effectively deliver on your mission? Think about these



measures at tactical, journey, and program layers. Document how you plan to use feedback and who's responsible for acting on it.

- 2. Conduct a customer feedback inventory.** Identify all existing methods of collecting customer feedback and at which touchpoints along the customer journey they fall. Document gaps and determine the best methodologies for getting a holistic picture of what your customers need at the tactical, journey, and program layers.
- 3. Establish baseline CX metrics.** Use the data you currently have to set benchmarks and identify key performance indicators in need of improvement so you can measure progress over time. Good CX metrics look at customer perception (what a customer thinks or feels), customer description (what's happening to a customer), and customer outcomes (the end results for which your agency is held accountable).
- 4. Design collection methods for actionable feedback.** Ensure you ask customers about their overall experience using a mix of specific and open-ended questions. Offer the smallest number of rating options possible, prioritize what's most important to your mission, and ask customers to rate the relative importance of the topics about which you ask. To avoid customer survey fatigue, limit your surveys to the number of interactions a customer has with your agency on a regular basis, and use completion rates to help gauge how often to survey your target audiences.
- 5. Synthesize and triage.** Data collection is most valuable when it involves careful synthesis and deliberate action. It's easier (and more justifiable) to act on insights from real customers. Engage cross-functional teams in your data analysis and share the outputs with all teams involved with the customer touchpoints in question. Remember the final step of triaging customer feedback: letting the customer know you've heard them and that you've fixed the issue.

Customer Interaction	VoC Channel	Insight
Complete a form on the website	Web intercept survey	Was the form understandable and easy to find and use?
Discuss need at a field office	Automated text message after customer leaves office	Was the agency representative courteous and empathetic? Was the customer's need met?
Ask a question via 1-800 number	Interactive voice response survey before call disconnects	Was the customer's question answered? Were they on hold an appropriate amount time?
Complain about a service received	Social media platforms (e.g., Twitter)	What concerns are customers voicing online regarding services provided?

Sample cross-section VoC program inventory for a federal agency



Informing content operations with a VoC program

Many organizations start with a small VoC program and scale up to an agency-wide, consolidated program over time. Although it's important to work toward a united view of an agency's full impact on its customers, you can kick off the change with a single-use case.

Web content is a wonderfully appropriate area to begin because it touches tons of segments of users across many platforms and devices. And because so many different people produce web content in a variety of formats, customers may find and experience it in unique ways. A VoC program can lend deeper insights into these nuances than traditional web analytics, helping agencies target effective content and engagement upgrades. Most web analytics tools, for example, tell you what users do—but not why they do it. Qualitative VoC program data help contextualize intent and sentiment to clarify solutions.

Through web intercept surveys, analytics data, text analytics from search and chat interactions, synthesis of unstructured qualitative data from customer interviews, and other tactics, web teams can find ways to improve content operations and answer questions, such as:

- What content is most needed?
- How well do users understand content that the agency knows is important?
- Do users trust the content, and, if not, is the content or the medium the problem?
- In what ways are users finding, engaging with, and sharing content?
- What content is underutilized, and why?
- Is content optimized for the way customers discover it?
- Is content streamlined for the right devices and platforms?
- What other mechanisms for service delivery do people interact with before, during, and after coming to the agency's digital products?

VoC program data help agencies see more of the full picture and feel empowered to make content and service delivery decisions faster—and better.

Talk with an ICF Next CX strategist about how we can conduct a VoC inventory to kickstart your agency's customer feedback efforts. ICF Next Government helps agencies gather data along their customers' journeys to answer big questions and uncover what might impact agencies' abilities to achieve their goals. We're a trusted service provider for federal CX services, including VoC programs, based on our groundbreaking work with the GSA IT Modernization Centers of Excellence for CX at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). We've also supported VoC efforts at the National Cancer Institute and a Fortune 100 health insurance company.



About the Author



Josh DeLung is a senior digital strategist with more than 18 years of combined strategic communication experience. His career has focused on building and leading teams who design excellent experiences and engage people via digital touchpoints. He leads strategy for ICF's team of experts focused on content strategy, customer experience, and digital analytics. He serves as a strategist on multiple digital government and commercial projects, including many U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) offices, as well as institutes and centers within the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and projects with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).



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