



# GSA tackles **CUSTOMER AND EMPLOYEE** experience



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GSA's CX leader discusses the agency's comprehensive approach to improving the customer and employee experience

### **How does GSA approach the customer experience when it has such a wide variety of customers?**

We focus a lot of time and energy on getting a better understanding of our customers. It may sound simplistic and obvious, but it's a critical thing to think about when focusing on improving the customer experience. GSA generally serves four types of customers: agencies that are buying from us or working with the buildings side of the house, suppliers that are selling to government, the public, and then the employees at GSA. Employee experience is a very big part of what we think about when it comes to customer experience. The two are inextricably linked.

My office is centrally housed and reports to the deputy administrator of the agency, so we have visibility across all our business lines. This allows us to synthesize data across organizational silos and identify opportunities to improve customer-facing issues at the enterprisewide level. The data that comes in through our Voice of the Customer program helps us depict our customer's end-to-end experience with the agency so that our program leaders can think more clearly about what their customers need. Then we use tools like journey maps and user personas, which are customer profiles, to further embed the customer into our business decisions.

We work to transform customer service beyond an individual transaction. We like to think about the broader customer experience or the sum of an individual's perceptions of his or her interactions with an organization. Whether it's quantitative data from feedback, qualitative data from interviews or operational data such as number of transactions or dollars or time

spent, we pull all that together to get the entire picture of what's happening with the customer and use that to continue to drive discussions and decisions.

One example is the federal marketplace initiative, where we're essentially revolutionizing the way that buying and selling happens in government. We're making it easy, modern and efficient because that's what our customers and our industry partners have told us they want. We're using data and principles like human-centered design throughout the initiative to help inform how we design the future with our customers in mind.

### **How has GSA tackled the cultural changes associated with a focus on customer experience?**

We don't do change management as a separate work stream. It's embedded in everything we do. And of course, it's all about the people. We want to connect employees with customers and with business decisions in a way that is innate to the organization and works with the people and the culture.

To reinforce customer-centricity across all levels of the agency, we issue a quarterly enterprisewide customer experience award to recognize outstanding employee behavior and actions that are inherently customer-centric. We run a monthly enterprisewide Customer Experience Community of Practice to bring together customer experience-minded professionals and have them educate one another on what they're doing on behalf of the customer and work across organizational silos.

Additionally, we facilitate human-centered design workshops across the



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agency and teach cross-functional teams how to solve a problem and design a solution with the end customer in mind. We teach them problem framing, stakeholder mapping and working iteratively in a way that puts the person at the end of the process at the core of the design.

Then on top of all that, we've started building customer-centric performance measures into our organizational quarterly performance reviews, our Senior Executive Service performance plans, our decision criteria and our Investment Review Board processes.

When the senior leadership team is reviewing investments, we ask that the executive business cases include a function that addresses what the program does to the customer experience. We've found that these efforts encourage and empower our employees. We all know that employees come to civil service because they care, so by saying customers are at the heart of what we do and showing how an employee's work directly aligns with it, we're able to get people excited about the transformation.

The data we collect through the Voice of the Customer program helps us know how we are doing. Are we being successful? Are we moving the needle? That qualitative/quantitative data helps align what we're doing with the operational side of the house and shows that customer experience results in operational efficiencies. In government, we're not traditionally interested in driving revenue, but we are interested in saving costs and making the most of taxpayer dollars. So we align that data to the change, which ends up being as natural and organic as possible.

## **What role does the employee experience play in those efforts?**

When we started as an office, the bulk of our work was focused on customers, but there were some small pieces of our portfolio focused on the employee experience. We started to balance that out a little more, knowing that our employees are often at the front lines of interacting with our customers. Our employees are also customers of our internal mission support services. Every GSA employee is a customer of IT and HR, and people are customers of my office, and so we've worked across the organization to fine-tune that experience for our employees.

My team facilitates an annual satisfaction survey that allows employees to provide feedback on their experiences with these mission-support functions. The mission support offices use that data for action planning, and we're held accountable for those plans. They're included in our KPIs and our organizational quarterly performance reviews as a success metric.

We didn't start off on Day One doing this. We've learned and iterated the approach, and we regularly ask employees how we might make our operations better. What's getting in the way? Where should we optimize or automate our efforts? The goal is to further involve them in this cross-functional approach that focuses on the employees while we're focused on the customers.

## **What can other agencies learn from GSA's approach?**

Through our work supporting the President's Management Agenda and its cross-agency priority goal for customer

experience, we're seeing the customer experience discipline take root across the federal government. We're seeing a lot of positive momentum and some commonalities of things that agencies should be working on if they're not already. For example, at GSA, having a C suite-level organization focused on customer experience has helped us connect across the organization, create a more holistic view of our customers and identify opportunities to drive transformation.

However, we don't want to give the impression of owning the entire customer experience because that's not the case. Everyone in the agency owns the customer experience. But as the central group, we're able to use data to help inform, prioritize and measure our improvement. My organization's centralized survey management effort has resulted in cost savings and increased agencywide compliance on things like the Paperwork Reduction Act and Section 508. We've also improved data analysis and measurement across the entire organization.

Throughout all this, we've learned to be transparent about what we're doing. It's easy to take the data and run with it, but continuing to tell your customers and your employees what you're doing with feedback is essential.

Lastly, I cannot stress enough how important it is to take a human-centered approach to the work that you're doing. Be humble, too. We want to make progress by trying things, getting 80% of the way there, showing people and getting feedback on how we're doing. We don't want to spend too much time and effort upfront without any feedback to know if we're headed in the right direction. ■