How To: Create an Office Hours Program to Share the Expertise Within Your City Agency

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The Service Design Studio's Office Hours program was the first official service we offered to City employees. The service is simple—our team sets aside four hours every week to share the Civic Service Design process with public sector colleagues in New York City. While the program is designed to offer free consulting to people interested in using design research to improve public services, Office Hours also enable our team to continuously learn about the various and nuanced types of design challenges that City agencies face.

Office Hours have been an incredible success. As soon as the program was launched, our team was booked with appointments two months out. In addition to advertising the opportunity at our October 2017 Studio launch event and via personal emails to colleagues, we also did a large Twitter campaign to get people to sign up for time with us. As a result, we've been able to hold Office Hours with government teams from 20 other cities and countries as far as Taiwan. In fact, our very first appointment was with a team from San Francisco looking to modernize their municipal hiring process. We celebrated our 100th

Office Hour this summer, and are looking forward to reaching 300 City employees served by this program later this month.

Our original Office Hour Twitter graphics

One outcome that we didn't expect is people's enthusiasm to set up Office Hours in their own agencies. We've consulted with a team from the United States Digital Service (USDS) to set up an Office Hours program to disseminate human centered digital design throughout the Department of Homeland Security. Closer to home, a team from the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs has worked with us to set up an Office Hours program to share best practices for language accessibility in City services. Ideas42, a behavioral design firm working with NYC Opportunity, has also worked with us to set up an Office Hour program to share behavioral design insights with City agencies.

We've found that there is a wealth of amazing knowledge held by public sector employees, and setting up an Office Hours program is a low-lift way to allow this knowledge to enrich other public services. Perhaps most importantly, if set up correctly, Office Hours achieve a high return in the form of team learning, cross-agency collaboration and problem solving while also being very easy to administrate. Our program essentially runs on autopilot now. We thought that we would share our tools and tricks to help other City agencies set up their own Office Hours program.

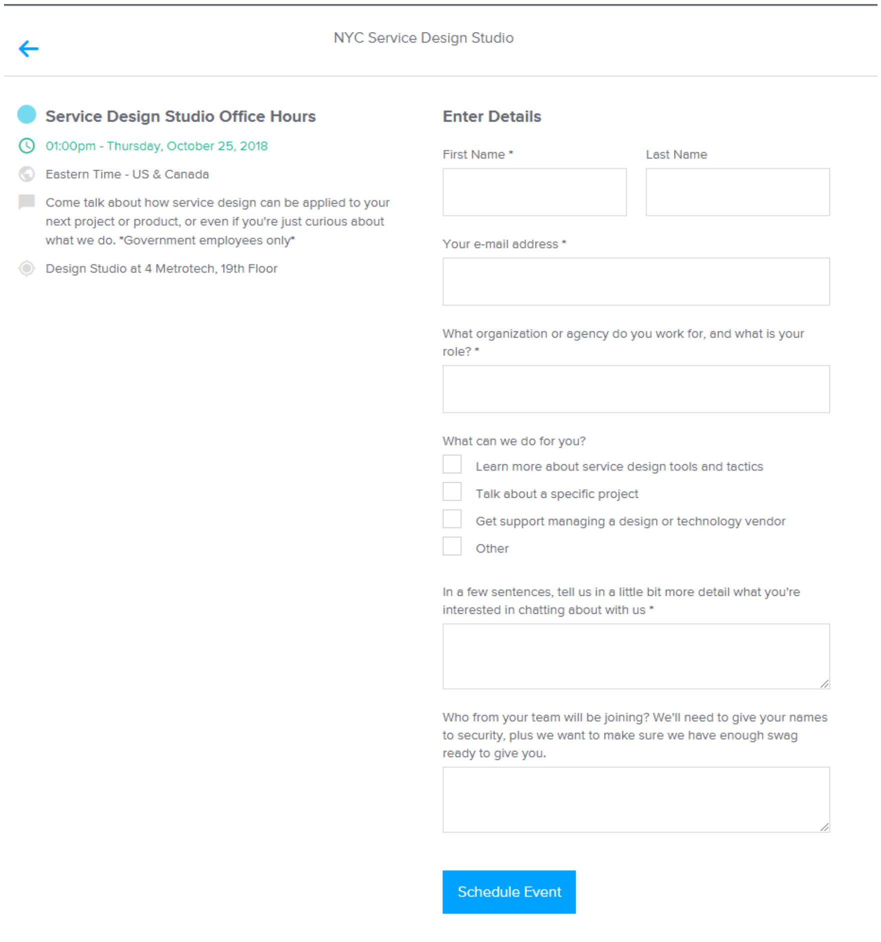
Step 1: Define a Purpose

Decide on the theme of your program- what knowledge does your team have to share that would benefit others? Maybe you've built successful digital projects, and know the ins and outs of how to build within the constraints of your organizations content management system. Or, maybe your team are subject matter experts on something as niche as animal bites reporting (yes, we had an Office Hour on that), and this expertise lends itself well to tackling other form-based challenges common to City government. Hold a couple visioning sessions with your team to settle on what you'd like to share and how it will enrich your own work, and write up an elevator pitch on how you will share this to others. For us, this is: **Talk with us about how service design can be applied to your next project or product, or even if you're just curious about what we do. *Government employees only.***

Step 2: Calendars!

After you have a purpose clearly defined, decide on some hours that your team can set aside for these appointments. Try to offer some morning and afternoon slots on different days of the week. For us, this is Tuesdays from 10 -11am and 11am-12pm, and Thursdays from 1 -2pm and 2 -3pm. Once you set them, set standing calendar invites that allow you to visually block off this time on people's calendars and reserve a room. This cuts back a large amount of administrative work- if everything is set in advance, then you can just sit back and wait for the appointments to roll in.

Once Outlook (or whatever calendaring platform your team uses) is squared away for your team, look into automated calendar services to help with scheduling with others. Our team uses Calendly which offers free plans (no procurement!), and allows you to share a single link that contains information about the program and times you've made yourself available. Most of these services also offer you the ability to ask questions of people signing up for appointments. This gives you a better idea of who you'll be seeing and what they'd like to speak with you about.



Our pre-appointment survey

We use this feature to also act like a bouncer and cancel appointments that are made by people outside of government agencies. Maybe that is not a priority for you- and that's okay! Check out our Calendly link for an example of our marketing language and sign up form.

Step 3: Designate Roles

Program Manager

Calendly offers integration with Outlook to automate putting these appointments on your calendars. However, we couldn't figure out how to get past the government firewall to do this. So, we created a manual system that ensures someone on our team is the overall manager of this program. For us, this person is our Studio Manager. Her role in this process is simple, but important to keep the program running with minimal snafus:

- Once an appointment comes in via Calendly, she pulls this information into the already established Outlook appointment. This allows the rest of the team to get an update to the standing calendar invite to know that someone has booked an appointment for that time and date.
- As soon as an appointment is booked, she sends an email confirming the Office Hour and providing detailed directions on how to get to our offices.

Host + Notetaker

Our team shares the role of host for these Office Hours. We are only four people, so it is easy for us to discuss on the spot who will take which appointment. This allows us to decide the day of who will host the appointment. As our Studio manager has a birds-eye view of all appointments, she is able to know if one person would be a good fit to host a particular Office Hour and flag this for the staff member in advance.

In each session, we have someone doing the talking, and someone taking detailed notes of each discussion. This allows us to have a good record of not only the types of challenges that people come to us with, but also what Tools + Tactics are most recommended. Occasionally, attendees ask for these notes, so it’s helpful to have these archived in case you need to pull them up again We also recommend that you take a photo of your attendees in case you want to share out to others or communicate your impact down the line.

No longer than a day after each appointment, the Host sends a follow up email to share contacts and any information that he or she may have promised to send.

Step 4: Track Metrics (Optional, but Recommended)

We LOVE to talk about Office Hours, which is probably obvious at this point. We track detailed information about each session to help us talk about the positive outcomes of this program, and also help us improve the offering for future attendees. We developed a Google Sheet that tracks these metrics, and it is maintained by the Studio Manager but added to by the whole team.

1		Date	Time	Title	City Agency	Email	Reason 1	Reason 2	Needs / Quetions	Total number of attendees	How did you hear about us?	Tools + Tactics Recommended	Support	Follow Ups	Follow Up Office Hour?	Hours spent on prep or follow up	Total Staff Hours
12	103	8/8/18	10:00 AM				Talk about a specific project										
13	102	8/7/18	11:00 AM	Developer	DOT		Learn more about service design tools and tactics	Talk about a specific project			Medium Post, internal Slack	Talking with people one-on-one				0	0.5
14	101	7/31/18	10:00 AM	Co-Founder			Learn more about service design tools and tactics			1	Urban Design Fellowship	Mapping out the stakeholders				0	1
15	100	7/26/18	1:00 PM	Senior Policy Advisor	MORR		Talk about a specific project			0		Talking with people one-on-one	Stakeholder buy-in				1
16	99	7/24/18	Other	Senior Associate			Learn more about service design tools and tactics			0							0
17	98	7/24/18	10:00 AM	Assistant Director, External Affairs	MOCS		Learn more about service design tools and tactics	Talk about a specific project		4		Mapping out the stakeholders	Tactical feedback			0	1
18	97	7/19/18	1:00 PM	Graphic Artist	NYPD		Learn more about service design tools and tactics			0		Mapping out the stakeholders				0	1
19	96	7/17/18	11:00 AM	Director	DDC		Talk about a specific project	Other		1							
20	95	7/12/18	Other	Design Innovation Fellow	NYCHA		Learn more about service design tools and tactics	Talk about a specific project		0		Mapping out the stakeholders				1	3
21	94	7/10/18	10:00 AM	Senior Urban Designer	DCP		Learn more about service design tools and tactics			0	Caroline Bauer	Mapping out the stakeholders	Connecting to others				2
22	93	7/5/18	1:00 PM	Director of External Affairs, Young Men's Initaitve	City Hall		Learn more about service design tools and tactics			0	Cas Peters	Mapping out the stakeholders	Connecting to others				3
23	92	7/3/18	11:00 AM	Intern	MODA		Talk about a specific project			1	NYC Digital	Creating research and discussion guides				0	1
24	91	7/3/18	10:00 AM	Chief Strategy Officer	Operations		Learn more about service design tools and tactics	Talk about a specific project		0		Organizing an outreach plan	Connecting to others	Reviewing product		1	3
25	90	6/28/18	1:00 PM	Strategic Partnerships	DYCD		Learn more about service design tools and tactics	Other		0		Talking with people in groups				0	1
26	89	6/21/18	1:00 PM	Development Associate	DOHMH		Learn more about service design tools and tactics	Talk about a specific project		0		Talking with people in groups	Stakeholder buy-in	Connecting to others		0	1
27	88	6/14/18	1:00 PM	Planning Analyst	DOHMH		Learn more about service design tools and tactics			0		Mapping a user journey	Stakeholder buy-in				1
28	87	6/13/18	Other							0		Talking with people one-on-one	Workshop design				4

We track extensive metrics on our Office Hours program.

Step 5: Talk to People!

Now that you're set up to launch a successful Office Hours program, get out there and talk to people. Tell us about improvements made to the process that you discover along the way. Reach out to us with questions and coaching as needed!

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This post is a part of the Service Design Studio at the NYC Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity. The Studio works to make city services more accessible and effective for low-income New Yorkers. To learn more about our work, visit our website.

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