



Customer & Constituent Services Study: Pathways to Better Service in St. Paul

Photo Credit: Jeff Conrod



A Quality-improvement Study

Initiated by the City Council Audit Committee

Multiple Perspectives

Our team draws on experience in the nonprofit and government sectors, drawing on hard-won knowledge from complementary fields:

- Organizational Strategy & Development
- Quality Improvement
- Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion
- Education & Accessibility
- Community Engagement
- *Software Rollouts in Government

In addition, we bring our personal, intersectional wisdom as members of cultural- and neurodiversity communities,

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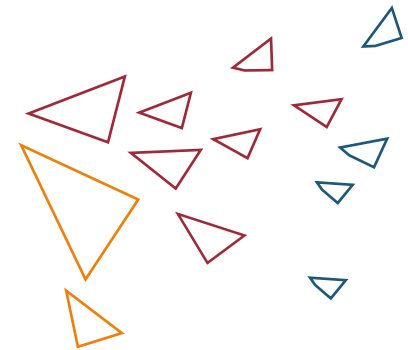


Lisa Meredith

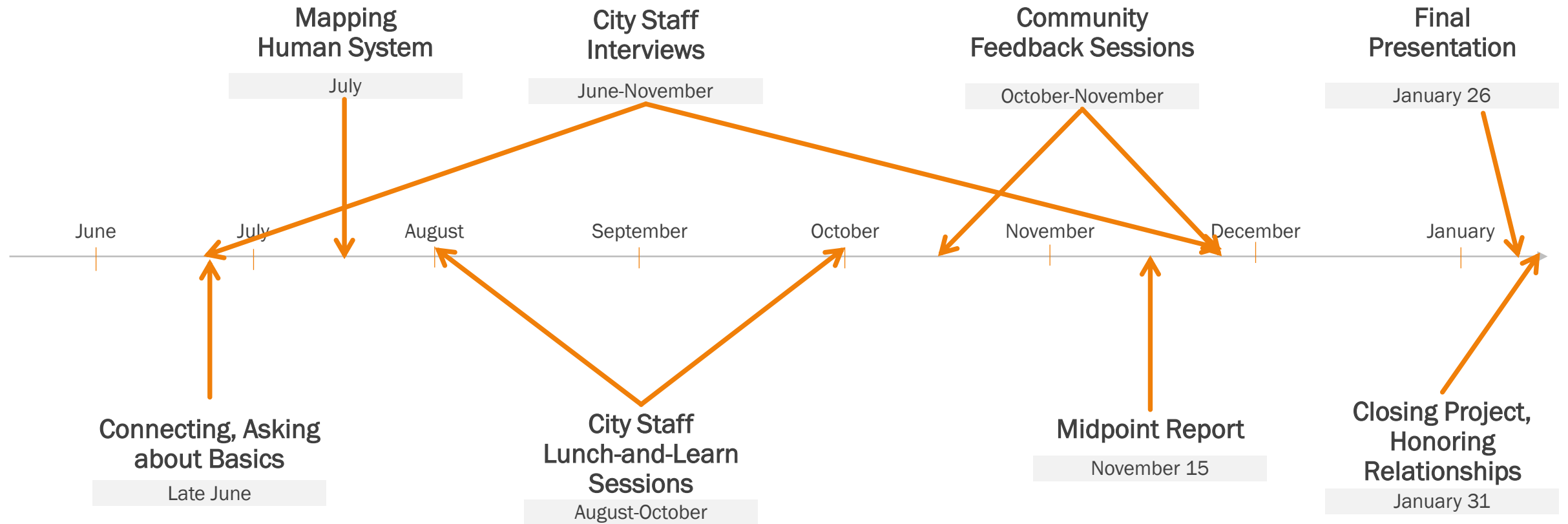


About Us

Our team of pathfinders are dedicated to finding multiple ways forward



Process Timeline





Quantitative Data

By the Numbers... Points of Service

Safety & Inspections

- 5-person call center
- 500-600 calls/day
- About 80,000 anonymized calls (2019)
- Since the pandemic, expecting that number to rise to 100,000/year
- AMANDA records 35-40,000 calls/year
- “Top 10” complaints tracked by month

Regional Water Services

- 10-person call center
- 650 calls/day; 281 answered by staff; 369 by self-serve Interactive Voice Response unit (IVR).
- 94,000 accounts, of which 72,000 are in St. Paul

Public Works

- 26 phone-number service directory
- Solid Waste answered 12,815 calls last year; 940 were complaints to haulers
- Public Works "touches" residents at least 15x/day

Parks & Recreation

- 3-person call center
- Parks and Rec receives at least 200 calls/day

Citywide

- 514 points of access across departments studied, via stpaul.gov
- 315 emails
- 139 phone numbers
- 21 online forms
- 14 socials
- 8 portals/applets
- 4 print/mail forms
- 2 walkups
- 6 broken or unresponsive access points



Qualitative Data

Narratives: Simple stories that govern individual and group behavior. In individuals, these stories may be internal and unconsciously held; in groups, these stories may be shared or in conflict, but often go unacknowledged.

Dominant City Narratives

There Are Strengths to Our System—Especially When We Work Together

We've Got Some Serious Problems with Customer Service

Our Systems Do Work...Just Not Always Efficiently or Fairly

We're the One Office That Does Service the Right Way

We Wish People Knew How Hard This Is

Dominant Community Narratives

- You Have to Leverage Relationships with the Right People to Get Attention
- Complaints Must Fit Neatly into Departments During Business Hours
- The City Makes Things Hard for Us and Easy for Them
- The City is Fast to Punish, Slow to Fix
- City Staff Can Be Corrupt, Abusive, or Ambivalent
- DSI Inspections Standards Are Unclear
- Engagement Is Needed but Not Followed Through On

The Community: *Who Are We to the City?*



A Customer



A Constituent



A Taxpayer



A Reporter



A Violator

City Staff: *What is Our Role within the City?*



A Concierge



An Educator



A Reformer



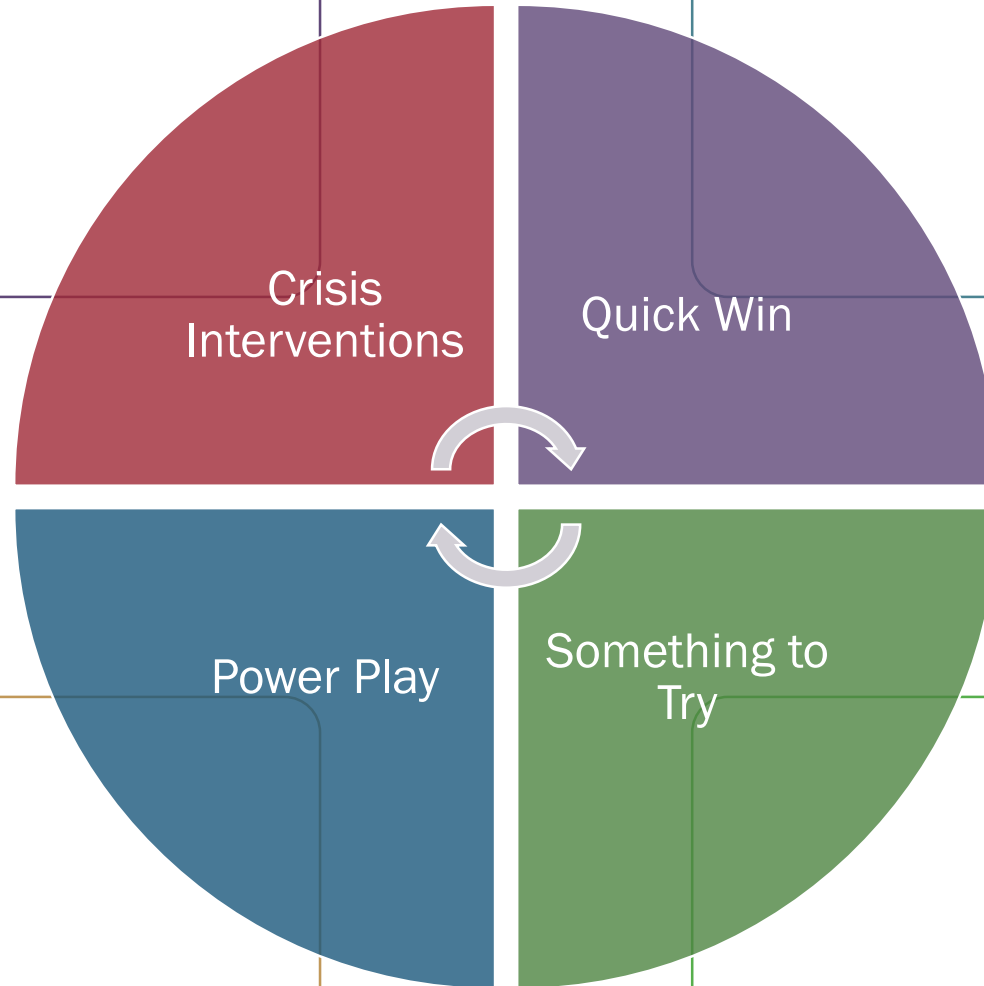
A Realist



An Advocate

A Leader's Framework for Decision-Making: *Cynefin*

- In High-Risk, Unpredictable Situations
- Do these things NOW.



- In Clear Situations
- Get it done ASAP to get everyone moving and motivated.

- In Complicated Situations
- Respond strategically, in collaboration with experts.

- In Complex Situations
- Experiment from all points in the hierarchy.

Prioritize The Health, Hearts, And Minds Of Frontline Staff

- Provide on-demand mental-health support.
- Provide training on boundaries.



- Create a staff directory for internal use.

- Consider hiring more social workers.
- Increase mental health allowance.

- Provide customer service training and peer support.

Shift The City's Identity Narratives



- “We are SUBJECT to the system.” → “We ARE the system.”

- Incorporate user archetypes into training.
- Realign business processes around emerging behaviors.

- Encourage inter-department connections.
- Talk about self-concept.

Establish Universal Access To Service While Building Political Efficacy

- Consider equity in social media practices.



- Budget for staff time to define business processes, starting with “Top 10” service workflows.

- Strive for hospitality, not merely access; make business processes explicit.

- Establish a citywide FAQ as a first step in knowledge management.

Create Conditions To Share Tracking Between Departments and With The Public



- Identify blocks to sharing service requests internally, within divisions and departments.

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- Watch for alignment around software solutions that could work across departments.

- Remove one block to sharing and see what happens.
- Pilot customer-service tracking software within divisions, then departments.

Watch For Opportunities To Align Business Practices With High-Quality Customer-Service Technology



- Work across the City to align customer service tracking and terminology.

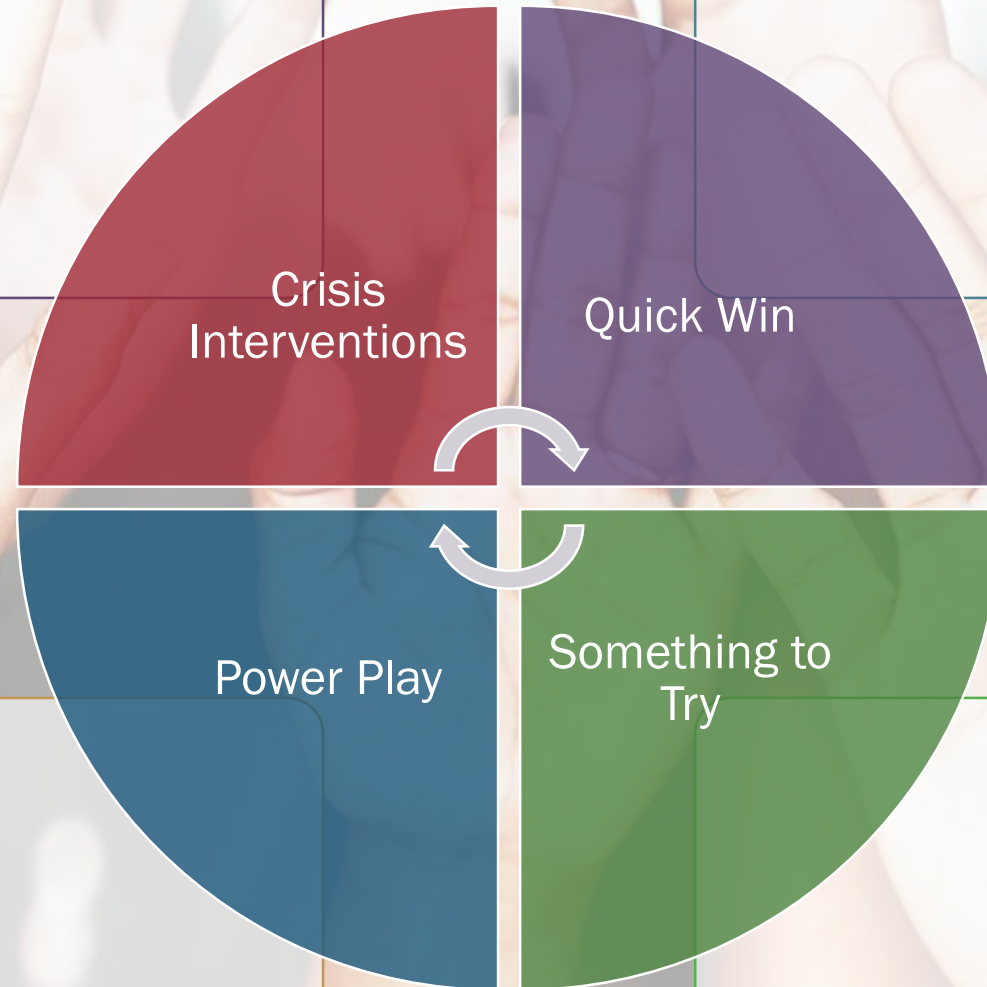
- Hunt down and remove dated web content.
- Update subpages.

- Tag all updated content for optimal searchability.
- Create a learning community around technologies that cater to context.

Deemphasize Anonymity; Emphasize Accountability

- Create a way for residents to flag their own property for harassment watch.

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- Reevaluate the rewards of accountability against the risks of anonymity.
- Perform a legal risk assessment to the City re: anonymous reporting.

- Start closing customer requests via MS Forms, keeping track of results.

Empower Main Line Staff To Close Requests



- Keep Saint Paul's informal tone.

- Authorize staff to define and apply standards.
- Decrease intake hours or increase staffing.

- Initiate follow-up on customer-service requests.
- Experiment to lower the daily burden of intake.

Relocate Citywide Customer Service



- Invest in a DSI electronic phone directory.
- Empower Main Line and Community Helpdesk staff to cross-train.

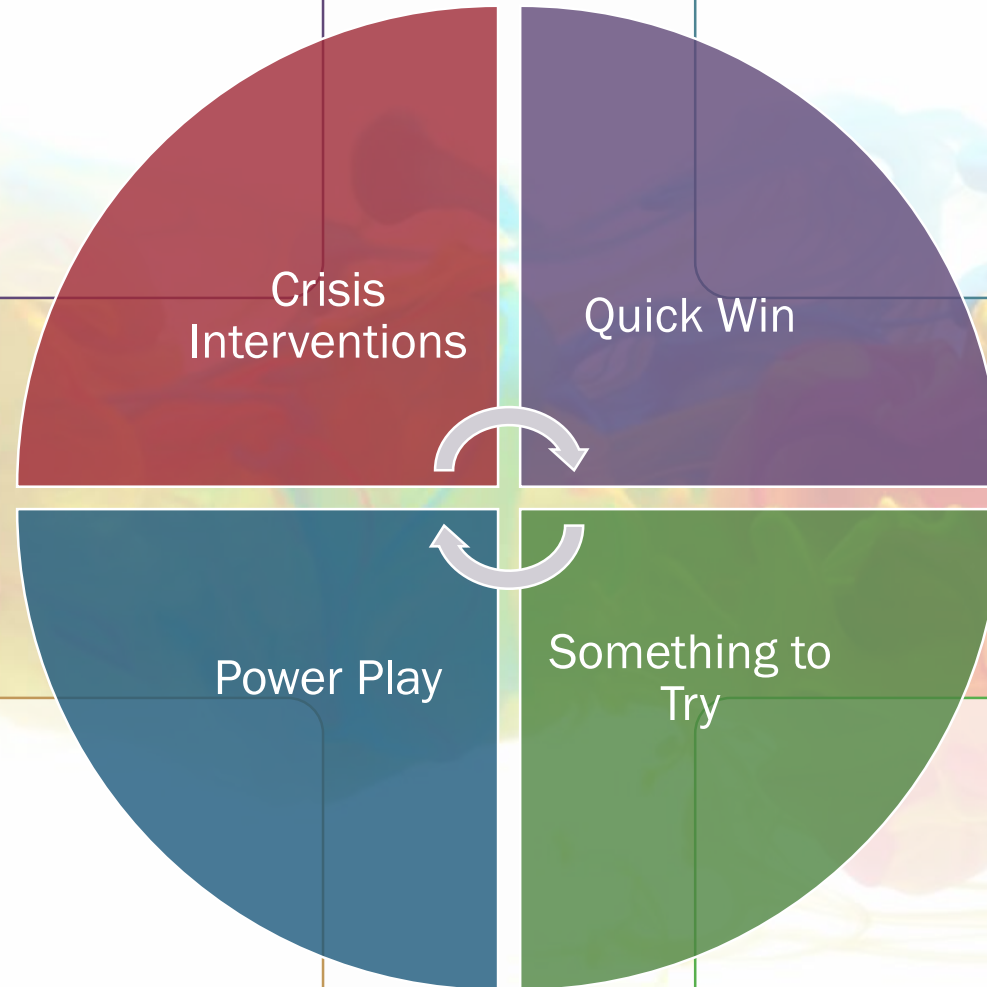
- Move the Main Line out of DSI.
- Study the equity of the City's property enforcement mechanisms.

- Explore an inter-departmental hub-and-spoke model for the Main Line.

Continue To Diversify Approaches To Customer Service

- Ensure the City's customer support system includes front-line staff who speak Hmong.

- Ensure the City's customer support system includes front-line staff who speak other high-demand languages.



- Promote different approaches to ordered and complex problems.
- Build adaptive capacity, counting the cost of understaffing, overwork.

- Emphasize emergent solutions over top-down strategy.
- Share approaches that improve customer service.

Reward Connectivity And Curiosity



- Add performance indicators that reward practical problem-solving and experimentation.

- Work with relational-network mapping software.
- Strengthen strategic connections.

- Add performance indicators that reward connectedness.
- Evaluate team alongside individual performance.

Thank You



Q&A

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