■ **BRIEF**

How New York's Customer Experience Office Helps Deliver People-Centered Services

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New York's Office of Customer Experience (CXO)—the first state-level office of its kind in the nation—was created in 2023 to ensure New York state government works better for the people it serves. Their work comes to life through projects with agencies and community partners that translate people-centered principles into tangible improvements to public benefits delivery. Whether redesigning Medicaid renewals, improving tools that help families access food assistance, or simplifying child care assistance, the CXO helps agencies see their work through the eyes of residents and redesign systems around their needs.

This case study explores how the CXO enables people-centered service delivery in New York and the structures, leadership, and community partnerships that make the work possible. The findings draw on interviews with CXO officials conducted between June and November 2025.

New York Puts People at the Center of Service Delivery

New York's CXO was created to champion a customer-centric culture across state government and to transform the way residents access public services and benefits. The office works both as a statewide leader—setting standards, publishing policies, and building common frameworks—and as a hands-on partner to agencies, assembling multidisciplinary teams to redesign services to work better for New Yorkers. Its work spans policy, technology, operations, and service design, all grounded in a commitment to making government easier to navigate.

At the heart of this mission is a clear philosophy: for New York's CXO, being *people-centered* means designing and delivering government services around the real needs, goals, and circumstances of New Yorkers, not around agency structures or program silos. This philosophy is operationalized in three statewide Customer Experience Pillars—Customer-Centric Design, Innovative Solutions, and a Commitment to Excellence—and measured through five shared goals that focus on making it faster and easier for New Yorkers to access services. This framework gives all agencies across the state a shared understanding of what "good service" looks like while allowing flexibility for context-specific solutions.

To put the philosophy into practice, the CXO works with agencies to understand how residents experience their services, including where people succeed, where they struggle, and what needs to change.

The approach includes:

- **User research** through interviews, focus groups, and surveys with residents and frontline staff to surface real barriers and lived experiences;
- **Journey mapping**—visual diagrams that trace each step a resident takes when interacting with a service—and **service blueprints** that connect external user experiences to the internal policies, processes, and systems that shape them;
- **Co-design and prototyping**, where residents and agency staff test ideas, react to early concepts, and validate solutions in real time;
- **Continuous improvement loops** using surveys, analytics, and usability testing to ensure services evolve continuously; and
- **Plain language and accessibility standards** that make digital and written materials clearer, more inclusive, and more mobile-friendly, reducing barriers across programs.

Together, these practices reframe service delivery as a two-way relationship between the state and its residents. Agencies learn from the people they serve, creating an ongoing feedback loop that strengthens trust, reduces administrative burden, and improves access.

This approach now shapes how New York designs and improves programs across public benefits programs.

New York Is Helping Redesign Public Benefits Programs

The CXO's model becomes especially clear in its work on New York's core public benefits programs. Through deep partnerships with agencies, and by grounding changes in resident insight, the state has made meaningful improvements to Medicaid, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), and child care assistance—programs that touch millions of lives. The examples below demonstrate that people-centered design in New York is moving from a philosophy to a system-wide practice.

NEW YORK MADE MEDICAID RENEWAL SIMPLER AND MORE ACCESSIBLE

New York has made significant, customer-focused improvements to the Medicaid application and renewal experiences by rethinking the process from the perspective of the people who rely on it. The online application used to be lengthy and not optimized for mobile use, and it required complex income verification steps that slowed processing. Call-center support also posed challenges, including limited language options and no call-back feature, creating substantial wait times for residents already managing work, caregiving, and health needs.

To address these barriers, the Customer Experience Office worked closely with the New York State of Health (NYSOH), the state Department of Health (DOH), and the U.S. Digital Service to apply human-centered design to every stage of the application and renewal journey. Residents and call-center staff participated in focus groups, co-design sessions, and usability testing to identify where people hesitated, what confused them, and how the state could reduce administrative burden. That research surfaced two core needs: clearer communication and simpler digital pathways.

The state responded with a series of interconnected improvements, including:

- Renewal envelopes were redesigned with a bold, red call to action message to make their importance unmistakable;
- Renewal letters were rewritten in plain language;
- The online application was redesigned to be mobile-friendly—a critical improvement for the 3.4 million New Yorkers who access Medicaid digitally—and key verification steps were streamlined; and
- The call center's interactive voice response system was overhauled with shorter menus, clearer instructions, expanded language access, and a new call-back feature, allowing people to receive help without waiting on hold.

These changes, along with improvements to how the state automatically renews coverage, produced measurable results. Coverage gaps fell by 20 percent year-over-year, and residents reported greater clarity and confidence when navigating the process. The redesigned application also cut completion time by roughly 30 minutes, helping millions of New Yorkers access or maintain coverage with less friction and uncertainty. Taken together, these changes show how human-centered design can strengthen administrative efficiency and make health care easier to access for New Yorkers.

NEW YORK REDESIGNED WIC AROUND HOW FAMILIES ACTUALLY SEEK HELP

New York has also applied a people-centered approach to redesigning the digital experience for mothers applying for WIC. Historically, WIC's online tools were difficult to navigate: the website was outdated, Wanda—a WIC eligibility and information chatbot designed to help families quickly understand whether they may qualify for the program and get answers to common questions—followed a single rigid path, and families had few ways to get timely support or check their eligibility.

To address these challenges, the CXO worked with the DOH as well as civic technology organizations, community partners, and local WIC offices to conduct a full human-centered redesign. The team began by listening. They ran usability tests on the WIC website and hosted listening sessions with Wanda users. DOH, in partnership with AdirA (a digital experience and marketing firm) conducted a 17-week live chat pilot to observe how real families asked questions and where they struggled. Code for America staff analyzed a large volume of chat transcripts to identify points of confusion, and shadowed WIC case workers to better understand how families move through the enrollment and recertification process.

Insights obtained through this process led to major improvements. Wanda was rebuilt with multiple pathways that reflect what families actually seek: checking eligibility, finding shopping guidance, managing appointments, and understanding program rules. The website was rewritten in plain language with clearer navigation, allowing families to either find information on their own or through Wanda. Satisfaction ratings were added to every Wanda pathway, giving the state real-time insight into what works and what needs improvement.

The results have been strong. In September 2025, roughly 6,000 people initiated a Wanda chat, 82 percent of all visitors to the page. Most users (72 percent) sought to check their eligibility, while others looked for help shopping or preparing for appointments. About one-third of chats resulted in referrals to local WIC agencies, demonstrating that Wanda is a meaningful entry point into the program. Every local

WIC office has now tested the tool and continues to provide feedback that shapes ongoing updates. This redesign shows how a people-centered approach helped make it easier for families accessing WIC to get the support they need.

NEW YORK MODERNIZED THE CHILD CARE ASSISTANCE EXPERIENCE

New York has also begun modernizing the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) through a similar human-centered approach. Families previously had to navigate paper-based applications that varied by county, creating confusion, inconsistent experiences, and limited transparency into the status of applications.

The CXO, working with the state Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) and other partners across government, launched a statewide effort to simplify and modernize the application process. Parent focus groups surfaced confusing language, redundant questions, and unclear requirements. County social service staff participated in user-acceptance testing to ensure the digital experience aligned with real administrative workflows. From this research, OCFS introduced a pre-screening tool that helps families quickly understand whether they may be eligible before beginning a full application, reducing unnecessary paperwork and easing county workloads.

In July 2024, the state launched a new statewide digital application, replacing paper forms and standardizing access across counties. OCFS also created public, monthly CCAP dashboards that show statewide and county-level trends, giving families and administrators new visibility into program performance. CXO reports that these changes have already reduced confusion, improved accuracy, and streamlined both applicant and staff experiences.

Four Conditions Enable New York's People-Centered Approach

New York's CXO's success rests on five enabling conditions that together make people-centered government real and repeatable.

CENTERING CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE IN THE GOVERNOR'S OFFICE

The CXO is housed in the Governor's Chamber, giving it proximity to decision-making and a mandate to coordinate across more than 100 agencies. This placement gives the CXO formal convening power and direct access to executive levers when agencies face barriers, such as outdated policies, rigid procurement rules, or data silos. To support this cross-agency work, the state established the New York Experience (NYX) Task Force: a quarterly convening of senior agency leaders created to lay the foundation for making customer experience a core function of government. Through this forum, leaders align priorities, share lessons, and track progress toward statewide customer experience goals, ensuring that customer experience improvements remain part of the Governor's policy agenda rather than peripheral modernization projects.

MAKING COMMUNICATION A CORE PART OF SERVICE DELIVERY

New York has made communication with residents a core part of how services are delivered—not an afterthought once programs launch. The CXO helps agencies build consistent, two-way communication channels so residents can ask questions, share feedback, and see their input reflected in ongoing improvements. This includes leading the charge on standardizing Voice of Customer surveys across agency websites, call centers, and digital tools, giving agencies a shared, real-time picture of where residents struggle and what needs to improve. By treating communication as part of service delivery itself, the CXO enables agencies to identify pain points early, resolve issues faster, and refine programs continuously rather than episodically.

PARTNERING WITH COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS TO REACH RESIDENTS

The CXO extends its reach and legitimacy through partnerships with civic technology organizations like Code for America and the U.S. Digital Service, and community-based organizations like Hunger Solutions New York. These partners recruit residents for focus groups, usability testing, and co-design sessions, ensuring diverse and representative participation, especially among people who rely on public benefits. They also act as trusted messengers, helping translate government changes back to communities in culturally and linguistically relevant ways.

BUILDING A CLEAR, MEASURABLE FRAMEWORK FOR IMPROVEMENT

New York's Customer Experience Strategy establishes a statewide framework with clear, measurable goals that guide how agencies assess and improve service delivery. Rather than treating customer experience as an abstract aspiration, the state has defined five concrete measures that link service delivery to operational performance:

- Closing enrollment gaps;
- Reducing the "time tax" residents face;
- Enhancing operational efficiency;
- Improving the digital experience; and
- Increasing customer satisfaction.

These measures give agencies a shared outcomes framework. To reinforce this approach, agencies designated as Critical State Service Providers, including the Departments of Health, Labor, and Motor Vehicles, are required to report progress annually using consistent metrics and data standards. The CXO also publishes short-term (6-month) and medium-term (12-month) objectives, which provide agencies with a transparent roadmap for what is expected and how progress will be assessed.

Together, these structures help make customer experience a managed, trackable part of government operations, demonstrating how service improvements can produce measurable gains in access, speed, and satisfaction.

New York Offers Lessons for Other States

New York's CXO shows that people-centered service delivery is not only about technology—it is also about creating the conditions for listening, learning, and acting on the ideas and experiences of residents. A strong leadership mandate, communication infrastructure, deep community partnerships, and a clear framework for measuring success have made continuous improvement possible. By embedding feedback into policy, design, and operations, New York is building a model of government that is more adaptive, more efficient, and more trusted by the people it serves. **For other states, the lesson is clear: people-centered government begins with building the systems and structures that allow people to be heard, and ensuring those insights shape how public services work.**

About

Andrés Argüello is a Visiting Fellow at the Georgetown Center on Poverty & Inequality (GCPI). This is the third in a series of case studies within GCPI's People-Centered Digital Benefits Project. This case study is grounded in interviews and correspondence between the author and senior officials from New York's Customer Experience Office conducted between June and December 2025.