



Improving hiring outcomes

VERSION 2.7:

PUBLISHED FEBRUARY 15, 2019

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Context

The Lab has reached a point in our partnership with the USAJOBS Program Office where many of the problems that plague the Federal hiring process have been identified. These problems impact job seekers, both new to government and those moving within government, as well as those working to recruit: HR Specialists and hiring managers.

Together The Lab and the Program Office have spent the last 4 years working towards solving the highest return on investment problems that fell under the purview of the Program Office. While all of those problems have not been solved we have made progress.

However, the remaining problems are systemic and span not only the Federal Staffing Center and HRS but OPM itself. In addition, some of the more difficult problems to address will require a coordinated effort between OPM offices to influence the behavior of job seekers and agencies alike. To make an impact on these systemic problems will require additional research across OPM and with our agency partners in order to imagine an improved service offering.

This report captures what has been done to date, what remains to be done, and where we might go next.

Contributions

Contributions to this document were made by:

- Additional members of The Lab
- The USAJOBS Program Office
- Members of the Federal Staffing Center

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Framing the problem

Problem statement

How might we provide the USAJOBS Program Office, and more broadly the Federal Staffing Center, with a “north star” vision articulation so that we might galvanize the team around a shared vision and iterate towards that future?

What the need is

There are many shared desires across the USAJOBS products, as well as FSC products, in terms of servicing job seekers as well as hiring managers & HR professionals across government. However, there has not been a shared vision to facilitate action towards specific goals. A shared vision would help the organization galvanize around a vision, or at the very least have something to react to, in order to further refine or scope various ongoing or proposed projects.

This is also an opportunity to develop the storyline for USAJOBS' value proposition given Civil Service modernization efforts.

Outcome

We hope to provide a shared vision that allows the FSC leadership and teams to react to and further enhance. This will take the form of service blueprints, prototypes, and written documents.

Who we spoke with

What we did (2014-2015): Focus Groups

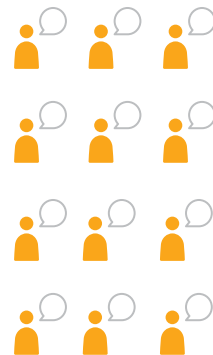
USAJOBS partnered with The Lab at OPM to use a Human-Centered Design (HCD) approach to re-imagine the user experience on the website. In the fall of 2014, the integrated design team began to collect meaningful data from job seekers, hiring managers, Human resource (HR) specialists, and agency Chief Human Capital Officers (CHCO) through a series of qualitative interviews, behavioral observations, and analogous empathy experiences.

Round One: Focus Groups

The team conducted **12** focus groups, with **over 130 people** across the country to capture a diverse user population.

Focus groups included

- Students at the University of Michigan
- CHCOs
- Federal employees
- Veterans
- Non-Feds



What we did (2014-2015): Interviews

Round Two: 1:1 Interviews

The team spoke with **over 80 users individually** to discuss their experiences, needs and pain points with USAJOBS.

Every interview was recorded and transcribed so they could be examined further.



What we did (2014-2015): Analysis

Over **2,400** pieces of data were transcribed and visualized down in the LAB at OPM.

The joint team spent over two months synthesizing the data to identify **6** design pillars and **17** high level recommendations.

The total user research phase took **6** months and laid the foundation for the USAJOBS redesign.



What we did (2016-2018): Co-design

A key component of Human-Centered Design (HCD) is co-designing with those who interact with the product and/or services that you are changing. To that end The Lab and USAJOBS have conducted many co-design sessions in The Lab with HR Specialists, Hiring Managers, and job seekers.

Co-Design Sessions

The team conducted **9** co-design sessions in 2017 and 2018 with the following types of users:

- HR Specialists
- CHCOs
- Federal employees
- Veterans
- Hiring Managers
- Non-Feds



What we did (2016-2018): Design, test, iterate

Since that initial research USAJOBS has shipped **20** releases to production. Each release has consisted of:

- Design sprints led by The Lab
- USAJOBS Program Office participation & review
- Usability testing
- Development
- QA testing

Usability testing

The team conducted **16** tests in 2017 and **13** in 2018.

In 2017 we talked to **143** people via those tests.

While usability tests focus on functionality, they also provide an opportunity to :

- Learn what users are trying to accomplish.
- What they expect from not only USAJOBS but OPM and the Federal Government.
- Where services and organizations are failing to meet their expectations.



What we learned

What we learned from job seekers

What we have learned from job seekers can essentially be boiled down to three expectations.

Regardless of the changes made to USAJOBS, Talent Acquisition Systems or federal hiring **these expectations are likely to remain constant.**

A. Guide me to the right job and then through the process

1. USAJOBS falls short of applicant expectations because it presents itself as a one-stop shop for federal hiring, but in reality it is laid on top of a disjointed process spread among 129 agencies, which disorients, frustrates, and misleads users.
2. Users are overwhelmed by irrelevant and confusing hiring information on USAJOBS, opm.gov, and other systems which reflects the complicated processes applicants must traverse. This leads to doubt and frustrations that causes them to either over apply for jobs they aren't qualified for or abandon the application process all together.
3. Applying for a government job is a long and arduous process. It is made even worse because the government doesn't set user expectations up front about what they need to apply and how long it will take them.

B. Explain the job clearly

4. OPM does not communicate eligibility and qualifications in a meaningful way. Applicants do not understand that there are prerequisites to being considered for a job. They apply to jobs they can't get resulting in increased applications, workload for the government, and frustration for multiple users in the system.
5. USAJOBS isn't giving anyone everything they need so applicants, agencies, and the USAJOBS Program rely on other websites and people to find jobs, get and give answers and post job information because they are more successful avenues. This further exacerbates the already fractured hiring process. While delegated examining makes this difficult, OPM currently owns the responsibility of managing job announcements.

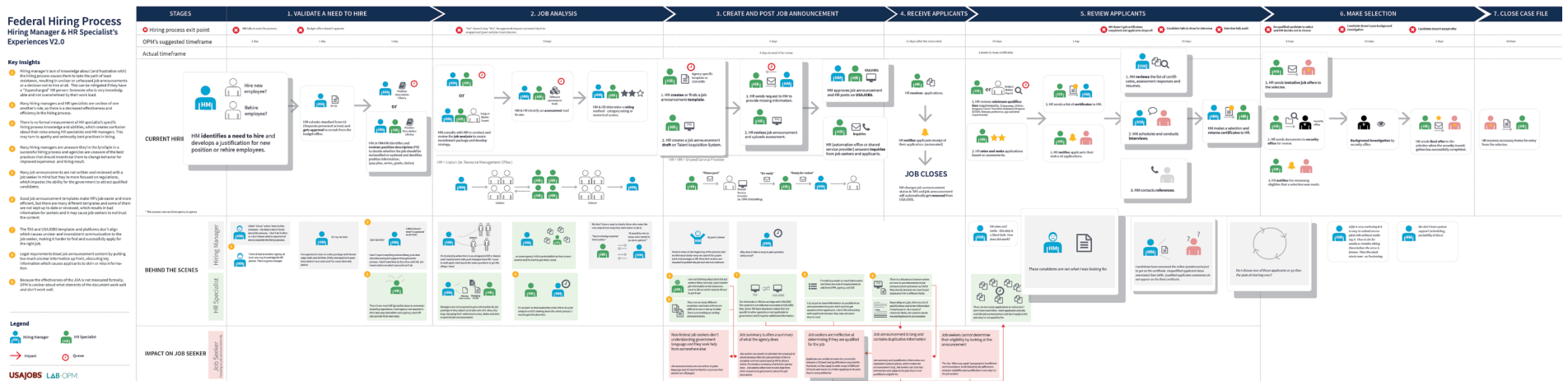
C. Don't be a black hole

6. Notifications from USAJOBS and letters from agencies are not in plain language. This results in confused applicants calling HR offices. HR Specialists become frustrated and avoid communications with unselected candidates.
7. Applicants do not receive notifications in a timely manner. By the time an applicant receives notification they may no longer find it useful or applicable to their job search. This diminishes trust and reliability of the system.
8. The Talent Acquisition Systems and USAJOBS operate almost entirely independently and issue multiple, separate notifications at different points in the process, if at all. This is confusing to applicants.
9. HR Specialists need the hiring manager to decide who is moving on before notifications can be sent which causes delays.

What we learned from HR specialists

- Many hiring managers and HR specialists are unclear of one another's role, so there is a decreased effectiveness and efficiency in the hiring process.
- Many job announcements are not written and reviewed with a job seeker in mind but instead are more focused on legal regulations, which impedes the ability for the government to attract qualified candidates.
- Good job announcement templates make HR's job easier and more efficient, but there are many different templates and many are not kept up to date or reviewed.
- Hiring manager's lack of knowledge about (and frustration with) the hiring process causes them to take the path of least resistance, resulting in unclear communication with HR specialists and thus unfocused job announcements or a decision not to hire at all.
- Because the effectiveness of the JOA is not measured formally, OPM & agencies are unclear about what elements of the document work and don't work well. Thus HR specialists may be misdirecting

Most of what was captured from HR specialists was a better understanding of the federal hiring process itself which is best represented in our Federal Hiring Process Experience Map.



What we learned from hiring managers

Managers have a narrow view of the process. They know what's been made available to them, but don't know the entire process

- While some understand the full process well, others only engage when directly called upon and are not familiar with each step of the hiring process.

The process is opaque to all parties

- Managers have no visibility into the status of their request.
- HR specialists can't get a view of all requests that may be coming in for the year. They do have a dashboard in USA Staffing, but not one that shows volume headed their way. CFPB's dashboard demo showed us the utility of the high level view and the benefit of planning.
- Applicants complain of the process being a black hole (see USAJOBS research). The most common application status is "Unavailable".

Communication between all parties is not happening

- Managers make a request and then have no information until the certification comes back to them. Or they spend time tracking down the status of that request.
- HR specialists & hiring managers are only communicating at certain touch points (see experience map). They also fail to coordinate their communication with applicants.

Hiring managers have not been the focus of research around their ecosystem of tools

- Some managers expressed wanting to "see what HR sees".
- HR specialists have been the key users of USA Staffing. Not all hiring managers are using this tool effectively.

Those who have checklists use them, but only a few have them

- Only a few managers reported already having access to checklists to ensure they get the right data to HR specialists.

Most managers are not aware of the flexibilities & tools available to them

- SME panels pre-certification and recruitment are believed by some to be unlawful.
- Structured interviews are working for some.
- SME panels have worked for some but most were unaware of them or struggled to convince their agency of their lawfulness.
- HR staff and hiring managers would ideally be educated on the proper use of pre-certification SME review.
- Resume mining was used by only one person. He found it the most useful tool available to him for hiring.

There is an interest in sharing classification across agencies

- If classification HR personnel were certified to classify a position description and share that with other agencies it may allow the work force to scale.

What we learned from Federal employees

In collaboration with GSA and the Open Opportunities team, The Lab conducted qualitative interviews, benchmarking, synthesis, and concept development to inform the further design and development of a professional development module on Open Opportunities.

We spoke to 12 senior federal government leaders representing 8 agencies. Many have started or led programs around increasing innovation and collaboration within the government. While more research needs to be done with lower level, more diverse employees, we established a foundation on what Federal employees want out of a mentoring and career development platform.

Build a platform based on skills and interest

- By facilitating connections based on topic areas, the platform can encourage mutually beneficial connections. Fostering connections based on a specific purpose helps users learn and grow with others without the formality of mentoring. A skills focus helps users understand how opportunities and skills fit into their career path.

Set clear expectations

- The platform should be clear about the time commitment involved with engaging in the service. Users should be clear about their needs, intentions, and the level of engagement they are asking for from a connection. Recognition and celebration of contributions could help increase user engagement.

Build on Open Opportunities core functionality

- Interviewees were eager for small ways for people to learn, and connect to a network of government change-makers. Furthermore, Open Opportunities provides users a way to get beyond conversation, and find ways to get hands-on experience in areas of their choosing.

Utilize consistent terminology across the site

- Connecting users based on skills and interest, and competency is complicated by the fact that terms and vocabulary vary. Developing pre-set categories and clarifying definitions will ensure users speak the same language. Analytics could signal changes in terminology and employment trends.

Help users get beyond the profile

- Interviewees were very open to sharing personal information commonly found on job boards and social media. However, they also want some level of control over what is shared. Many interviewees mentioned a desire to learn more than what is on a person's resume to aid in connecting with others on a personal level.

Do not focus on mentoring

- There are a plethora of great mentoring programs available across the federal government. Programs range in scale and intensity, but each demands leadership buy-in as well as dedicated staffing and resources. Mentorship implies a hierarchy, structure, expertise, and level of commitment that may prevent people from engaging.

Do not start from scratch

- Whenever possible, don't make users recreate or reenter data. Open Opportunities also shouldn't attempt to recreate LinkedIn, USAJOBS or DigitalGov's functionality. Rather, the platform should integrate data strategically

and direct users to other resources to build a strong network, and reduce the users' burden.

Do not expand the system beyond federal employees

- Interviewees stated that they feel more comfortable connecting and working with people on a government platform. This is in keeping with Open Opportunities current settings. A few interviewees cautioned furthering a divide between public and private sector, but there are many alternative platforms for collaboration

Do not use an algorithm to match people

- Ultimately, users should have control over who they connect with. However, an algorithm could be useful to help narrow selections. Most participants also stated they would opt in to receive peer recommendations of people to connect with.

What we've done

Design principles

These principles guide our work towards the goals of the project. Goals are the destination and these principles are the map to that destination.

"Principles are rules that help designers evaluate their decisions about the design. They provide guidance in the form of absolute statements about what the design should or should not do."

--Dan Brown, Practical Design Discovery.

1. Clearly guide applicants to the information they need to make confident job search and application decisions.
2. Set clear application expectations and present a unified and simplified application process.
3. Provide opportunities for applicants to showcase their unique qualities.
4. Convey information in a language that every applicant, hiring manager, and HR specialist can understand.
5. Serve as the most trusted resource for federal hiring.
6. Reveal the depth and breadth that government has to offer.
7. Maximize visibility and transparency throughout the system so that all parties know the status of a hiring action.

Concept: American Discovery Trail

Armed with those principles we set about to create a concept to guide our work. We came up with the American Discovery Trail, modeled after the actual ADT.

Create an optimized path, a trail, that directs users to relevant jobs.

The trail will create a new landing & home page, update profile, and revise search.

Goals

- Start to change the perception of the hiring process to increase engagement.
- Improve confidence in the federal hiring process by guiding users to relevant jobs.
- Reduce the number of ineligible applicants to lower the workload of HR and improve the system.
- Identify policies that complicate the hiring process and practices for future improvements.

This document augments this concept, specifically with the section *Vision: Meeting the challenges of the "future of work"*



JOB SEEKER EXPECTATION

Guide me to the right job and then through the process

What we've done

Clarified eligibility

- We've brought some consistency to how we explain eligibility and standardized how USAJOBS and the Talent Acquisition Systems (TASs) USAJOBS interfaces with to handle hiring authorities through the creation of hiring paths. Hiring paths use consistent language and iconography throughout the core site and our other products (Agency Talent Portal and Open Opportunities) to identify when a job is open to a specific group (Federal employees, Veterans, Students, etc.).
- Engaged OPM Policy to create hiring path pages written in plain language which connect users to valuable resources.

Problems targeted

- Users don't understand the difference between eligibility and qualification.
- Users don't understand or accurately claim the preferences they have.

Improved keyword search

- Improved the relevance and precision of search results by switching to the Elasticsearch engine.
- Provided a way to leverage your profile to add filters.
- Search success rate up to 62% when filters are applied as of 6/2017.
- Keyword auto-complete against job titles, occupations, series, departments, and agencies.
- Dept. of Labor Standard Occupation Classification (SOC) to OPM Series mapping to support occupation auto-complete.

Problems targeted

- Going directly to search results is a poor initial experience.
- Search results include jobs the applicant is not eligible or qualified to apply for.
- Search results include language users don't understand.

Integrated with login.gov

- Reduced customer support tickets by 47%, a new all-time low.
- 2-factor authentication to increase security.
- Removed inactivity lockouts.
- Improved password reset process.
- Increased the active user population by 43%.

Problems targeted

- An overwhelming majority of help desk tickets were related to authentication and account problems.

JOB SEEKER EXPECTATION

Guide me to the right job and then through the process cont.

What we've done

Guided users through the initial steps of the application process

- Reduced process to 5 steps.
- Reduced the number of incomplete applications submitted to agencies
- Improve transparency about the contents of an application package.

Problems targeted

- Reduced exit rate from application guide from 7.3% to 2.7% as of 8/2016.

Created a Help Center

- Replaced a forlorn mediawiki with a structured Help Center rewritten in plain language.
- Drive users to help content instead of depending on reacting to help desk support requests.

Problems targeted

- Users don't understand the entire federal hiring process.
- Help content uses jargon that users do not understand.

Created a home for job seekers

- New landing page content created clear calls-to-action to sign-in, create a profile, or begin a search as well as provides an overview of the federal hiring process.
- Created a dashboard that provides an overview of applications that you have submitted and makes it easy to pick up where you last left off.

Problems targeted

- Applicants wanted a "home base" that grounds them in the ongoing process.
- "Direct-to-search" traffic, those who come to the site and immediately begin perform a search, decreased by 16%

JOB SEEKER EXPECTATION

Explain the job clearly

What we've done

Revised the job announcement twice

- Clarified eligibility by working with Talent Acquisition System (TAS) vendors to convert the free-form text of "Who may apply" into a normalized data set which HR Specialists now select from when creating an announcement.
- Improved USAJOBS conversion rate to 9% (as of 5/2017) from 7%. Conversion happens when a seeker who searches for a job, visits an announcement, and clicks apply.

Problems targeted

- Job seekers cannot determine their eligibility by looking at the announcement.
- Job announcement contains duplicative information.
- Legal requirements bloat job announcement content by putting too much unclear information up front, obscuring key information which causes applicants to skim or miss information.

Created a Job announcement Playbook

- The playbook provides best practices to HR Specialists for creating job announcements.
- The playbook also provides a digital resource we can use to communicate best practices.

Problems targeted

- Many job announcements are not written and reviewed with a job seeker in mind but instead are more focused on regulations, which impedes the ability for the government to attract qualified candidates.
- Non-federal job seekers need help understanding government language.
- The Delegated Examining Operations Handbook that HR specialists must be familiar with is 351 pages long and has not been significantly updated since 2007.

Co-designed and prototyped the Hiring Manager Advisor tool

- Grounds hiring managers in the process and intelligently collects the data the HR Specialist needs to create a job announcement.
- Shows empathy for the user and the tasks they need to complete.
- Facilitates the initial conversation between managers and HR Specialists.

Problems targeted

- Many hiring managers are unaware they're the lynch-pin in a successful hiring process and agencies are unaware of the best practices that would help them improve hiring outcomes.

JOB SEEKER EXPECTATION

Don't be a black hole

What we've done

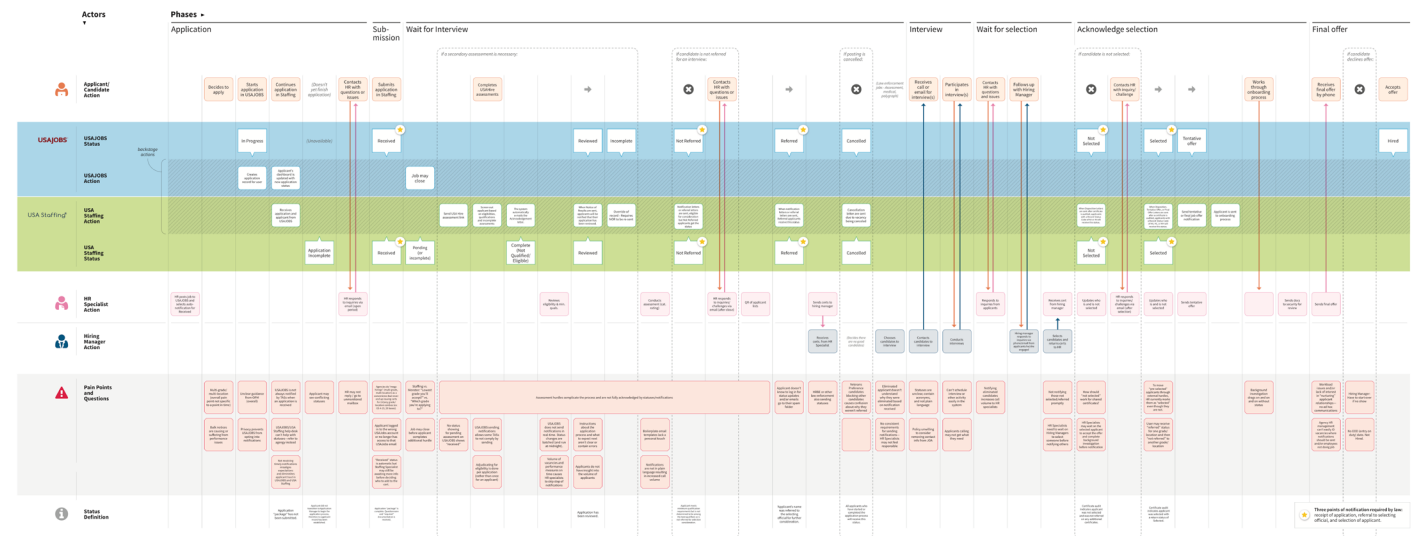
Co-created a service blueprint

- In the Summer of 2018 we started to focus on this problem in earnest. The USAJOBS and USA Staffing Program Offices, led by The Lab, co-created a service blueprint to gain a shared understanding of how application statuses are updated and when notifications are sent currently.
- This blueprint details when notifications and status changes happen so that we could understand pain points that job seekers, applicants, and HR specialists have across this process.

Problems targeted

- The Talent Acquisition Systems and USAJOBS operate almost entirely independently and issue multiple, separate notifications at different points in the process, if at all. This is confusing to applicants.

Blueprint: Application Status Notifications

LAB^{OPM}

https://github.com/USAJOBS/team-design/blob/master/projects/north_star/diagrams/blueprints/application-status-notifications.pdf

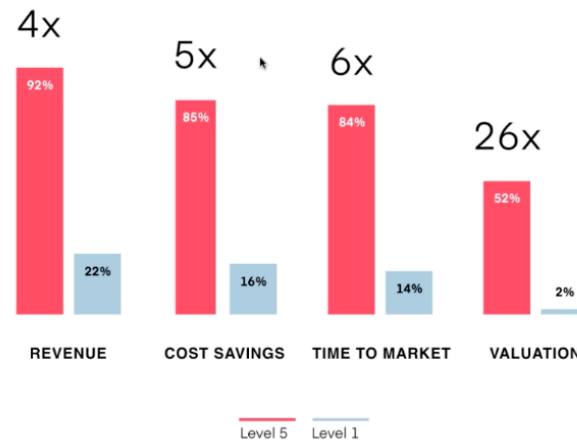
Measuring your service offering

Why design maturity matters

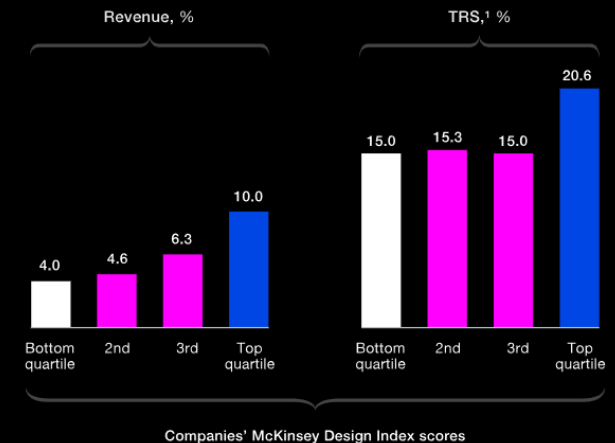
The Lab's mission is to build capacity for human-centered design within government. Thus our end-goal for this project is a design-infused USAJOBS Program Office and someday a design driven HRS.

Design maturity is important because organizations that are design mature outperform organizations that are not.

Leah Buley just published a report with InVision titled "[The New Design Frontier](#)": The widest-ranging report to date examining design's impact on business." In it she echoes the recent [McKinsey report](#) which detailed the profound impact design is having on businesses.



Higher McKinsey Design Index scores correlated with higher revenue growth and, for the top quartile, higher returns to shareholders.



¹Total returns to shareholders.

McKinsey&Company

Leah Buley is a veteran of the experience design industry and the author of the book "The User Experience Team of One", published by Rosenfeld Media. As a director of InVision's Design Education team, she researches, analyzes, and shares what makes design teams successful. Prior to joining InVision, Leah was a principal analyst at Forrester, where she studied design's role in business. She has also held roles at Intuit, one of the first companies to make design thinking a firm-wide competency, and at Adaptive Path, a pioneering user experience design consultancy.

Maturity is embodied in everyday practices

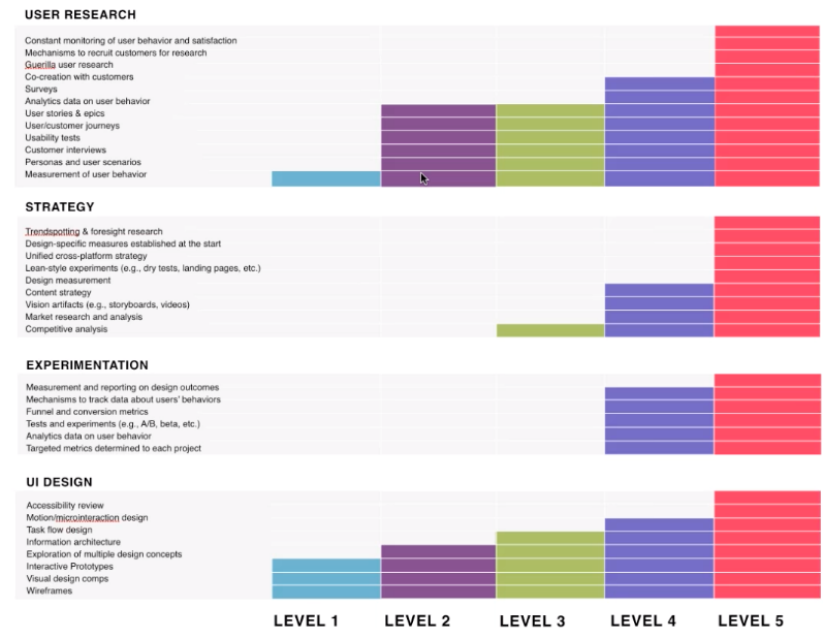
Buley defines 5 levels of design maturity:

1. **Level 1: 41% Producers**
Design is what happens on screens
2. **Level 2: 21% Connectors**
Design is what happens in a workshop
3. **Level 3: 21% Architects**
Design is a standardized scalable process
4. **Level 4: 12% Scientists**
Design is a hypothesis and an experiment
5. **Level 5: 5% Visionaries**
Design is business strategy

It is likely that the USAJOBS Design team being built within the Program Office will start out at level 1 producing the mock-ups and prototypes necessary to move day-to-day work forward. Depending on who fills the roles in that team they may quickly get to level 2 and use co-design and other HCD methodologies.

Getting to level 3 will require recognition that design is critical to planning and prioritization in order to drive customer satisfaction. In addition, it will require true integration of design into the scrum teams as design work, research in particular, is currently not recognized in user stories, epics, and the product backlogs. It may also require that product scrum teams improve their agile ceremonies to be more than formalities.

To reach level 4 will require a more mature analytics program that can support the efforts of the design team. Reaching level 5 will require C-level buy-in across the agency.



Scaling design maturity to the wider organization

For the wider organization design maturity can be measured in how well versed the organization is in the top problems facing the audiences we serve: Job seekers, applicants, federal employees, HR specialists, hiring managers, and CHCOs (just to name a few).

To get there we recommend immersive exposure and continuous learning.

Immersive Exposure

What's the experience we're currently delivering to our customers and users?

Continual learning

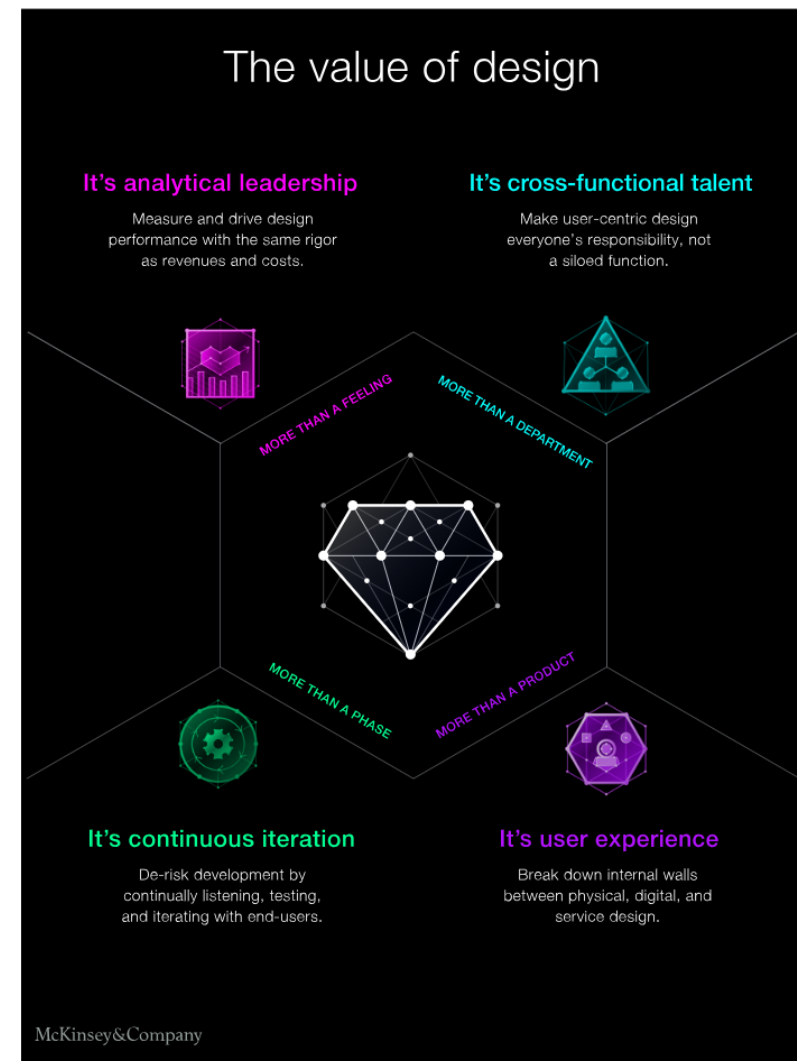
What does our organization need to learn to deliver great products and services in the future?

"Keeping users at the center of the discussion is essential for becoming design-infused. If everyone, including the most distant of influencers, are involved in those discussions, it's hard to avoid making a better user experience."

-- Jared Spool

Specifically, we recommend the following become standard practice:

- Embrace regular exposure to users
2 hours every 8 weeks for all teams members (e.g. watch two users participating in usability tests per release or video after the fact)
- Learn from mistakes
"Good judgment comes from experience and experience comes from bad judgments."
- Keep refining what we think we know
What do we know about our users?
What do we know about our products and services?
What do we know about the users' unsolved problems and challenges?



Designing good government services

In addition to design maturity there are some specific characteristics of good service design within a government context. The Government Digital Service (GDS) of the United Kingdom is the oldest and arguably the most design mature government organization in the world. The USDS is based on many of their principles and playbooks. GDS defines the following characteristics of good government services. The Lab feels that we'd be well served by defining and measuring ourselves against a similar list.

1. A user can do what they need to do, from start to finish

2. A user has to do as few things as possible

3. There are no dead ends

4. It's straightforward to get human assistance

5. Internal structures are not shown to users

6. The service is easy to find

7. What the service is for and what it involves is clear

8. How decisions are made is clear

9. The service is consistent

10. The service works in a familiar way

11. Everyone can use and understand the service

12. Users and their information are treated with care and respect

<https://www.gov.uk/service-manual/design/introduction-designing-government-services>

What remains to be done — Near term

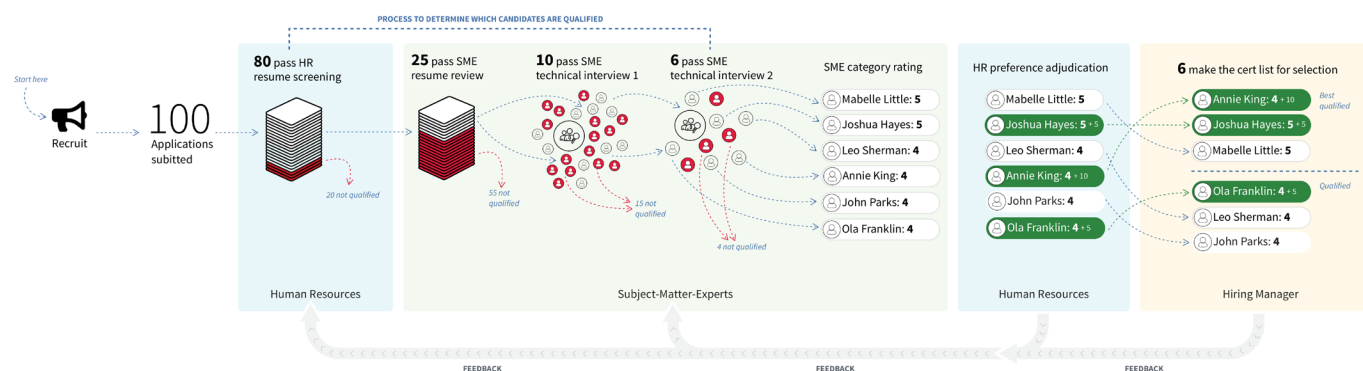
Adjusting post U.S. Digital Service (USDS) Sprint

In November 2018, the U.S. Digital Service (USDS) conducted a two week discovery sprint at the invitation of OPM to explore actions OPM could take to improve federal hiring. USDS found “that the competitive process can be executed in a way that presents hiring managers with a short list of truly qualified candidates.” They made 5 recommendations:

1. Ensure required qualifications accurately reflect the skills necessary for a job.
2. Subject Matter Experts should evaluate their peers’ technical abilities before preference is applied.
3. Build job announcements for applicants, not just for legal defensibility.
4. Re-structure HR to focus on strategic hiring.
5. Invest in data analytics.

Now that the USDS sprint has concluded and the pilot begun, we need to adjust our vision to support those findings and efforts. There are multiple ways we can support the USDS work. In addition, there are many areas of potential focus that are outside of the scope of the pilot.

The USDS pilot will attempt to prove that a clear job announcement and an assessment process with heavy involvement from subject matter experts will improve hiring outcomes for technical positions at high grade levels. If the pilot is successful, USDS will likely move on to determining how to scale the pilot.



Scaling the USDS pilot

Here are several areas The Lab feels would make sense to focus on in order to support the effort it will take to scale the pilot. This assumes that the pilot goes well but, given that we can't know what insights will be gleaned from the pilot we're basing these recommendations on what we've heard from HRS while working on this project.

These areas of focus cover 4 of the 5 USDS recommendations. Many of these ideas are explored in greater depth later in this document.

Provide data to agencies

Agencies will need to see the number of applicants they have by series so they can determine if the pilot process will work for them. OPM should be the source of truth for this data and should publish it in a way that helps agencies make this determination easily. This would also address recommendation #5 to invest in data analytics.

Improved applicant status and notifications

This has been noted as a risk by the USDS team and may get some attention during the pilot. Regardless we have an opportunity to commit to the work FSC agreed to do around improving notifications.

Improve Competency library

There is a need for an improved competency library that contains up-to-date competencies that have been reviewed by OPM. While there is a lack of funding for this effort there may be an opportunity to partner with future pilot participants in building this functionality.

Address the need for documents

Rather than trying to fix or streamline document upload and parsing, instead focus on replacing the need for documents by pulling the data required over APIs.

Improve the Subject-Matter-Expert (SME) user experience in USA Staffing

While USA Staffing was not the focus of our work, it has been a focus of the USDS pilot as it relates to supporting SMEs in their review of applicants. We've been end users of this system as well and would love to contribute to improving the experience for SMEs.

Unify the applicant experience

While the pilot improves the job announcement it was not able to tackle revisiting the application experience holistically. However, Office of General Counsel has approved breaking up the job announcement into smaller parts. This represents an opportunity to drastically improve the overall experience.

This should include supporting a multi-hurdle process that works for applicants that may need to take a USA Hire assessment, a physical, or other test in person.

Facilitate federal employee connections

Once new employees come in through the pilot we would ideally like to retain them. Further exploration of coaching and communities is needed.

Help agencies improve their recruiting efforts

The USDS pilot will not address the need for agencies to improve their recruiting efforts.

Improve applicant status and notifications

At the end of 2018 we agreed to a plan around improving application status and notifications by building one solution for each pain point category we identified in order to signal our intent to improve the ecosystem. Those solutions include the following:

1. Templates of plain language emails
2. Introduce “Educational friction” in the application guide of USAJOBS.
3. Automatic notifications for applicants 1 or 2 steps behind the current job status
4. Switch to a job status after the received state.
5. Create focused training on status/notification for HR.
6. Research impact of showing number of applicants to set expectations.
7. Generate a lightweight report for each USA Staffing customer, for their own consumption, that details use of application status, NOR codes, and notifications sent.

During this project we further refined our designs to add “educational friction”.

Educational friction

Eligibility is a key difference between public and private sector hiring and it is a stumbling block for applicants, confusing to hiring managers, and cumbersome for agency HR specialists.

By law we cannot prevent a job seeker from applying to a job for which they may not be eligible. However, we can slow them down and attempt to educate them on why we think they may not be eligible.

Problems targeted

- Profile information is used to evaluate applicants rather than improve their experience.
- Users don't understand the difference between eligibility and qualification
- Users don't understand or accurately claim the preferences they have.

The screenshot displays the USAJOBS application interface. At the top, it shows the user is applying for the position of 'Administrative Officer' at the 'National Park Service', with a closing date of '1/2/2019'. A progress bar indicates five steps: 1. Select Resume, 2. Select Documents, 3. Review Package, 4. Include Personal Info, and 5. Continue application with agency. Below this, a warning icon and the text 'Are you sure you're eligible to apply?' are shown, followed by a note: 'Based on your profile, you may not be eligible for this job.' The 'Who is eligible for this job' section lists four categories: Career transition (CTAP, ICTAP, RPL), Individuals with disabilities, Internal to agency: National Park Service, and Veterans. The 'Your eligibility' section states that the user's profile indicates they belong to one of these groups and lists the 'Federal Employees: Competitive Service' as a requirement. It includes a 'You should:' section with a link to 'Confirm your displacement from a federal agency before applying to this job.' and a 'Search' button. At the bottom, there is a 'What is eligibility?' section explaining that eligibility refers to being part of a particular group of people that an agency wants to hire, and a 'What happens if I'm not eligible?' section stating that the hiring agency will determine the user's eligibility. The bottom of the page features a 'Back to job announcement' button and an 'Apply' button.

Address the need for documents

Use APIs to replace required documents

The work we've done with Ad-Hoc, contracted by the VA to provide an Application Programming Interface (API) to Veteran data, should serve as a model for unlocking data that is currently trapped in paper forms and copied around the agencies of the Federal Government. The model works as follows:

1. The agency, or agencies, that is the "source of truth" for a piece of employee information is identified. For example, OPM may be identified as the owner of the data within the SF-50 form.
2. That agency is called upon to create an API to that data following the guidelines that the VA Digital Service team has provided: <https://department-of-veterans-affairs.github.io/vets-contrib/#/>
3. The API is tested and user interface changes are made to the Profile so that users can approve the use of their data.
4. Those changes are tested and deployed.

While a formal Federal Employee Digital Record is a worthwhile goal, the recently expanded USAJOBS Profile is the most concrete and functional collection of data about themselves that federal employees can easily access. It is essentially the MVP of a Digital Record and thus could evolve to:

- Become an independent service within the USA product suite.
- Allow users to control which information they share, how it appears, and with whom across all of the consumers of their data.

Precious little unique data is captured on many of the forms we ask a user to upload. Rather than focusing our efforts on document upload and parsing we should instead lead the charge on developing APIs that unlock this data.

Areas for improvement

- Required documents are often required based on your eligibility (hiring path) but that's not clear to applicants nor is it made clear in the job announcement.
- Agencies often require documents that won't be needed until after an applicant is hired. Their intent is to speed up the process however, it places an undue burden on applicants.
- Much like "Who May Apply" was in the past, the list of required documents in a job announcement is free form text that describes the same documents but in different ways from announcement to announcement.
- The majority of documents that are required are documents the government creates yet the onus is on the applicant to retrieve and upload them back to us.
- Once those documents are uploaded to us we copy them from USAJOBS to the TASS for each job application. Thus OPM has multiple copies of every required document, often containing sensitive PII, for every job application sitting on the same servers in our datacenter.

Problems targeted

- Profile information is used to evaluate applicants rather than improve their experience.
- The applicant experience is inconsistent, tedious, and off-putting.
- Applicants either don't attach a required document or upload the wrong document.

VA U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Authorize USAJobs

USAJobs would like **read-only access** to your DD-214 on your VA.gov account.

We'll grab the following military service information and add it to your USAJOBS profile:

- Date of entry
- Service Dates
- Department, component, and branch
- Character of service

[Learn more](#)

Once you authorize, you'll go back to **USAJOBS** to confirm and finish updating your profile.

[Authorize USAJobs](#)

Unify the applicant experience

Build a coherent & efficient applicant experience

USAJOBS hands off to 10 Talent Acquisition Systems of varying levels of quality:

1. Avue
2. DIA eZHR (People Soft)
3. EconSys
4. FAA - Swift
5. HQMC MCCS (PeopleSoft)
6. Monster
7. NASA - STaRs
8. NGA eRecruit (People Soft)
9. NTIS eRecruit (nga.net),
10. USA Staffing

One system should be designated as owner of the applicant experience from start to finish. That system should provide a coherent applicant experience that achieves the following:

- Creates a unified and consistent experience reducing applicant confusion.
- TAS' continue to own the backstage and they retain their current responsibilities but do not interface with the applicant OR they must own the entire application experience.

- All types of digital assessments could be handled in the same interface and would be transferred seamlessly from a user perspective.
- Set expectations for applicants up front and throughout the application process.

For this project we talked to the USDS team behind the U.S. Forms System.

"Inspired by Mozilla's react-jsonschema-form library, the US Forms System is specifically intended for consistently styled governmental web-based forms. This library enables you to describe form fields in a JSON Schema configuration file, which then renders the backing React components necessary to build your form. You'll build forms significantly faster than existing methods, and benefit from the US Web Design System's best practices in user experience and data collection, validation, and transmission."

We believe this could be used to create a unified applicant experience while still allowing TASs to control the questions they need asked and the data they need collected for their agency clients.

Areas for improvement

- While OPM's USA Staffing dominates the market, and the USAJOBS Program Office was recently moved within the same Federal Staffing Center group, the two systems do not share a cohesive design nor a team.
- Many of the TASs ask duplicative questions and don't leverage the data already gathered from the applicant and none have yet adopted the U.S. Web Design System.
- TASs currently are allowed 6 months to make changes requested by USAJOBS. Thus orchestrating changes across the 9 system involved is time consuming and difficult.
- In addition, USA Hire is a distinct tool that applicants have to use for online assessments which presents a third interface.
- In addition to USA Hire there are other assessment variables for those in specific occupations, such as law enforcement.

- 40% of questions a TAS asks are for data already gathered by USAJOBS that those systems either don't trust or just have not leveraged.
- Many of the remaining 60% of questions have just been added as part of our Profile update (07/2018).
- There is a lack of urgency among agencies to pressure their TASs to focus on the applicant experience.
- Due to PRA constraints many of the questions are not in plain language, are copied from policy or U.S.C., and have not been optimized.

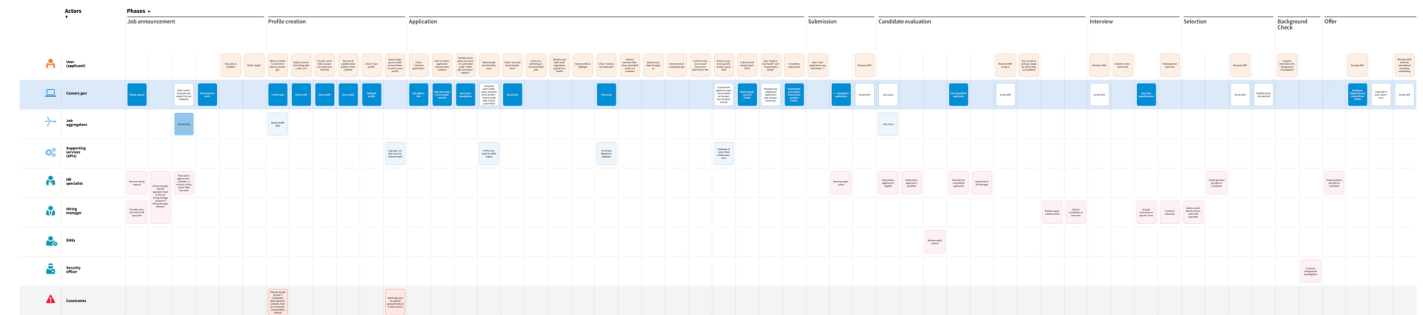
In short, the current ecosystem was not intentionally designed with job seekers and applicants as the central focus.

Partnership 2019:
Review our "Improve the job announcement and applicant experience" proposal.

Service blueprint (detail): Job seeker new to government

We've taken the first steps towards unifying the applicant experience and bridging the gap to a future vision with this service blueprint. This outlines a potential future state that is more concrete and immediate than the vision outlined starting on page 33. This collects many of the ideas and hopes of the USAJOBS Program Office which we've collected via impact mapping and more recent co-design sessions.

Blueprint: Job Seekers New to Government



[Detail of Service blueprint. The entire blueprint is available in PDF format.](#)

An alternative approach to unifying experiences

While we firmly believe that handing applicants off between two systems creates a fractured experience, there is an interim step we could take to unify the applicant experience: Create a design system for all USA Service products. This would benefit all products and allow OPM to start iterating towards a unified USA Service. The potential outcome would be a design system to achieve a unified suite of products that share a common visual style, components, and experience by 12/20/2019 in order to comply with the [21st Century Integrated Digital Experience Act \(IDEA\)](#).

**Partnership 2019:
Review our
“Create a USA products Design
System”
proposal.**

Facilitate Federal employee connections: Coaching and Communities

Build on prior coaching research

Following a research effort on mentoring and professional development interests among Federal employees undertaken by The Lab for GSA, we do have some prototype designs that are ready to be taken by the product SCRUM team to final design and implementation on Open Opportunities.

However, there is an opportunity for additional research and a pilot to be sure that both coaching and communities are sustainable efforts.

Our focus would be on the following design principles established as part of the effort:

1. Start with user/business needs
2. Build on what exists
3. Collaboration can't have boundaries
4. Guide the Journey
5. Start small then scale
6. Training is key

Explore Communities

- Design and build Community and Program pages in Open Opportunities. Allow users of these pages to easily see jobs open in their field. These pages will give a home to professional communities and help current federal employees grow and find new job prospects.
- Add components important to these new content templates to the Design System.

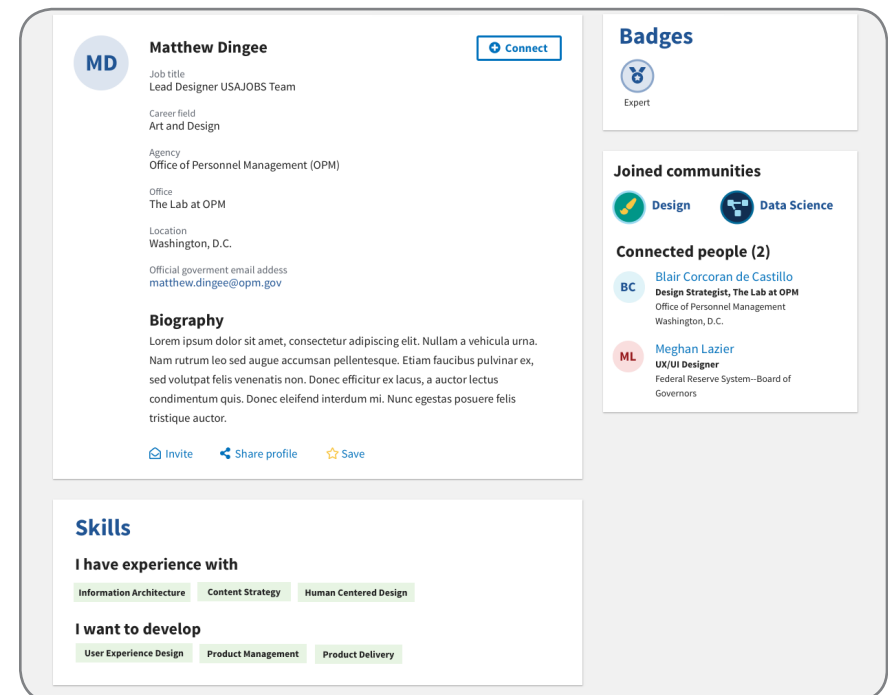
A barrier to this initiative is funding. OPM doesn't have funding for outreach and agencies have not made it a priority. This does raise the question of whether we should build this for the benefit of job seekers or only when there is a partner willing to fund our efforts. A pilot could mitigate the business risk and ensure that this

effort is sustainable.

Problems targeted

- Address federal employee needs for professional development in the federal space.

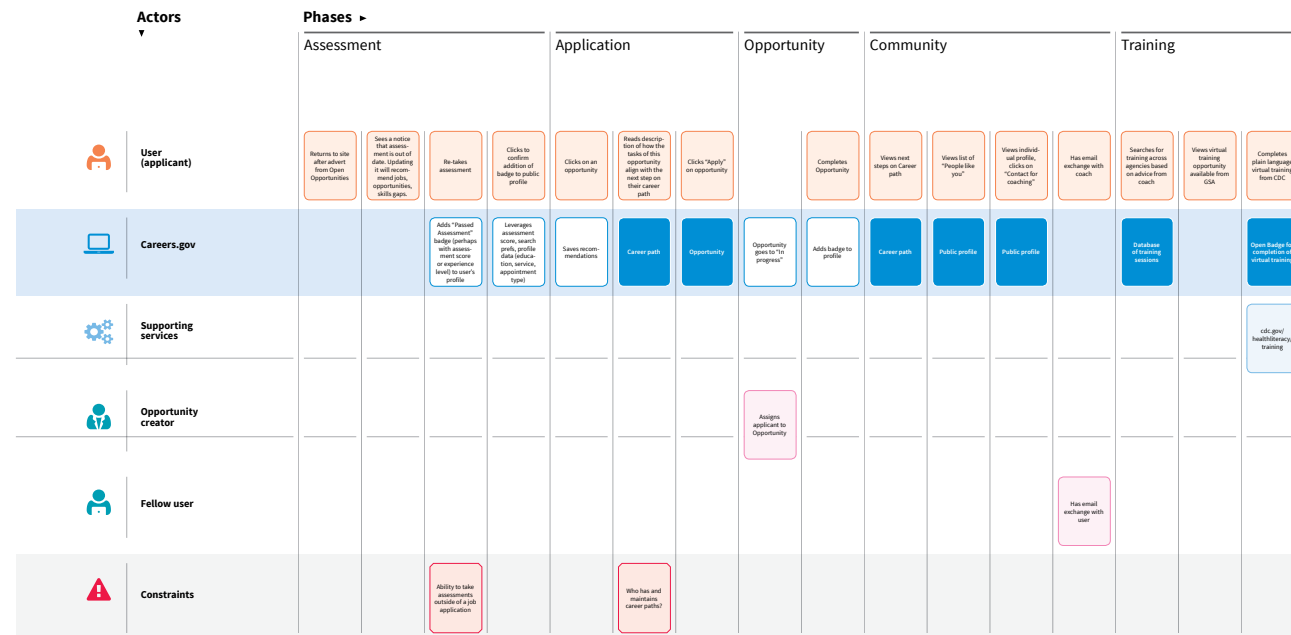
Partnership 2019:
Review our "Career Development Connections" proposal.



Service blueprint: Federal employee expanding their role

This service blueprint is at a higher level than the previous blueprint shown for those new to government. However, it again outlines a potential near-term future state. For this blueprint the focus is on helping job seekers already in government figure out their next step.

If we do decide to pursue the "Career development connections" proposal we would revisit this blueprint and generate a new version with greater detail.



https://github.com/USAJOBS/team-design/blob/master/projects/north_star/diagrams/blueprints/federal-employee-expanding-role.pdf

Recruitment by career field and occupation

The scope of the USDS sprint and pilot precluded a focus on recruitment. However, any discussion of federal hiring would be incomplete without tackling this issue. We feel there is more to understand and explore here, particularly around a sustainable business model. Much like coaching and communities, how the program office can sustain the creation and maintenance of additional content is not clear enough to recommend this investment without further research.

The intent of the “micro-site” concept was to explore whether building a distinct, stand-alone site that sensitized job seekers to a specific career field would help attract top talent. While the Data Science site we created did not prove this to be true, we largely believe that is because we did not have a partner driving job seekers to the site. In addition, we believe the need has not gone away.

However, creating entire sites for each potential career field we’d want to highlight isn’t entirely tenable. Some proposed career fields may not have obvious patrons nor a clear partner with whom you could build the content required.

Verify the micro-site hypothesis

- Identify a partner for a career field. This partner does not have to pay for the work up front but a good partner would be interested in patronizing the work should it prove beneficial to them. Other criteria would include an interest in helping create content and access to an audience of job seekers interested in the career field.
- Build a single page with this partner following the template we created for Data Science.
- Measure the results on hiring outcomes.
- Prove that job seekers can be driven to this content by a willing partner and document this in a case study before moving onto the next career field.

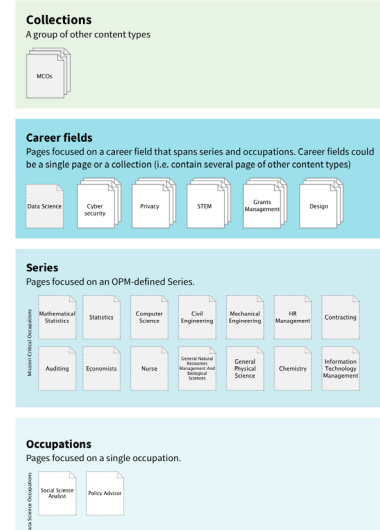
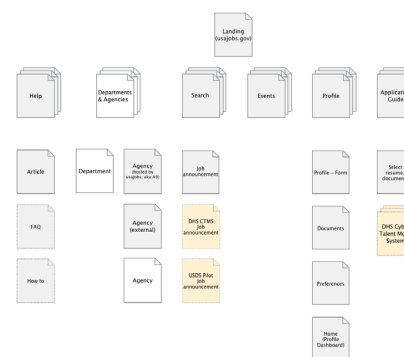
Explore pilots with private-sector partners

- LinkedIn proposed a partnership in 2016 that may be worth pursuing. “According to Comscore, 99% of LinkedIn users do not visit USAJobs. Our 128 million members represent the single largest pool of talent for OPM / USA Jobs to tap into.”

USAJOBS Content Model

Created by the USAJOBS design team
January 24, 2019
Version 1.4

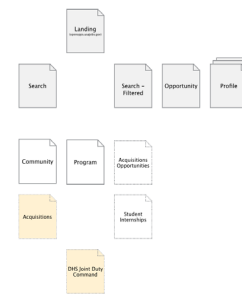
usajobs.gov



opm.gov



openopps.usajobs.gov



w.[agency].gov



Vision:
Meeting the challenges
of the “future of work”

Designing a better platform for mission critical hiring

The Lab team scoped our vision work to focus on designing a better platform for mission critical hiring. Our hypothesis is that if agencies are accurately identifying missing critical occupations in a timely fashion then there should be a focus on streamlining hiring into those occupations as it should result in the greatest relief to agencies.

Keep in mind this an unproven hypothesis. It is not clear whether or not agencies are identifying mission critical occupations accurately and the current 2 -year window of reporting these occupations does not seem adequate for OPM to stay ahead of agency needs.

Assessing the need for a different approach

There may be an opportunity to build a system akin to the Government of Canada's TalentCloud prototype (<https://github.com/GCTC-NTGC/TalentCloud>) or a minimum viable product of Deloitte's GovCloud proposal (<https://www2.deloitte.com/insights/us/en/industry/public-sector/the-future-of-the-federal-workforce.html>).

These systems attempt to respond to the growth of the "gig economy" and give government a way to offer job seekers:

- Flexibility in hours, the ability to work remotely, and use modern technology for communication.
- Term or project based work on interesting challenges that are communicated in advance.
- The chance to self-organize into teams.
- An opportunity to learn more about future colleagues.
- A portable way to capture knowledge and skills acquired via completing tasks or assessments and reflect that to future hiring managers.
- Help with plotting a career path catered to the employee's aspirations.
- A "host agency" that provides assistance to manage and coordinate benefits, time off, and that also provides help identifying the next project.

These efforts also attempt to give government strategies for:

- Pre-assessment of seekers.
- Workforce surges to meet demands in order to apply resources when and where they are needed.
- Increased knowledge flow across agencies and a new focus on broad, government-wide missions
- Taking advantage of those outside government, including citizens looking for extra part-time work, full-time contractors, and individual consultants.
- Leveraging shared services to deliver services like human resources, information technology, finance, and acquisitions government-wide.

The team considered the following questions:

- How might we attract more private sector talent to mission critical occupations?
- How might we scale branding and messaging around mission critical occupations?
- How might we make the federal application process & federal employee experience more desirable?
- How might we both pre-assess applicants and let them stand out based on the specialized experience they have?

There will be a growing expectation by the public for a system that meets the demands of the "future of work". What follows is a possible blueprint that will help us iterate towards meeting those demands.



WHY IS GC TALENT CLOUD NECESSARY?

Predominantly, the government operating models we rely on were designed for earlier times. This is especially true in HR, where core models are structured to recruit deep expertise in lifetime positions, with a slow climb up the ladder over the course of many years.

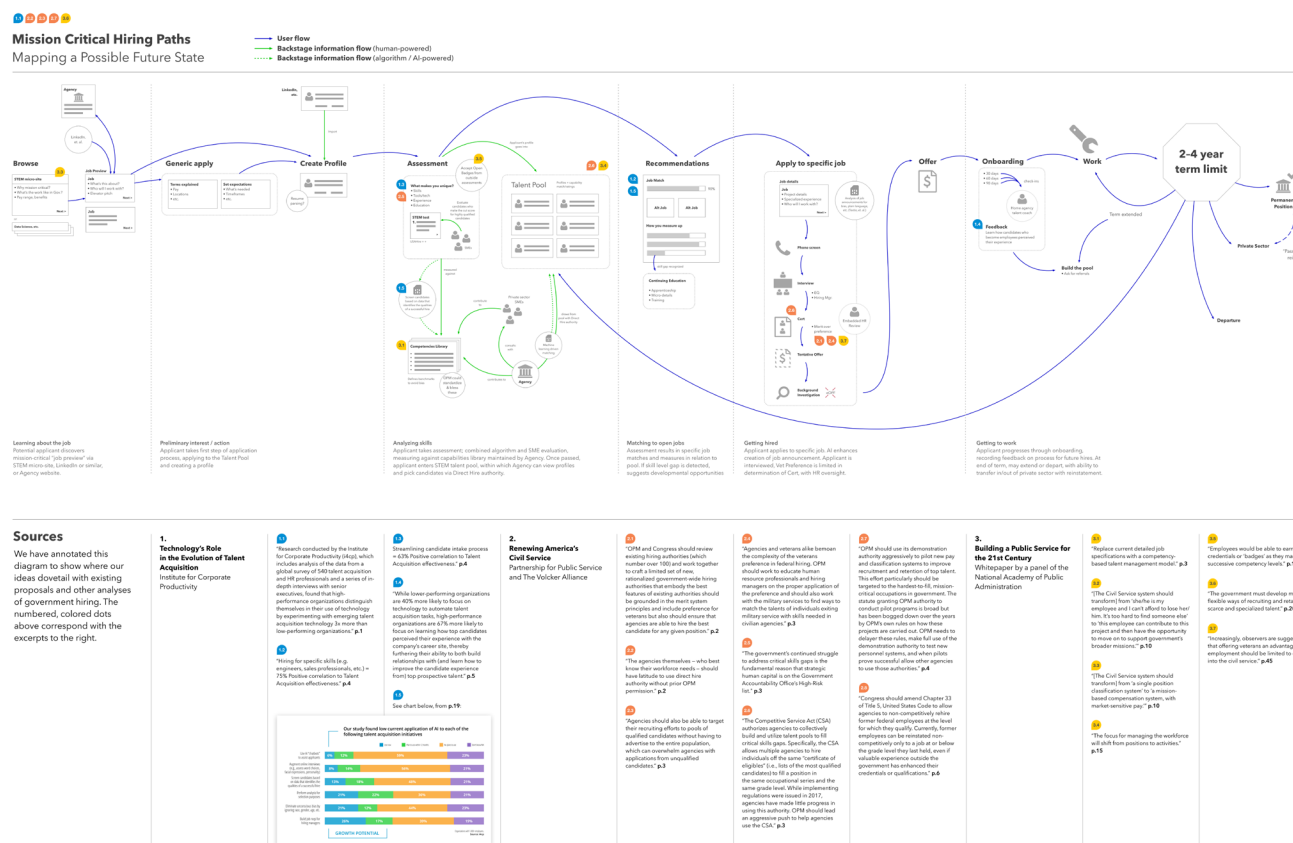
Today's technologies pose fundamental questions about the validity and viability of this model. Governments are grappling with what it means to "go digital". The pressures push HR experts to look at recruitment and retention with a new lens - one that prioritizes rapid, high quality matches for shorter periods of time, with a focus on emerging skills, adaptability, learning and resilience.

Government of Canada's explanation for why they are building a talent cloud

How might we build and leverage a talent pool?

This diagram depicts our recommendation for a potential future target state. It encapsulates all of our expertise gained while working on the entire USAJOBS project as well as our research into best practices. While only 3 documents are referenced in the diagram we surveyed roughly 30 white papers and research documents to reach these conclusions. In addition, we researched closely the aforementioned TalentCloud and GovCloud projects.

We started by re-framing the problem to focus on building a talent pool for mission critical occupations that could be regularly mined for talent. While we understand this lacks detail in key areas we do feel it gives a high-level vision that HRS could react to and revise.



https://github.com/USAJOBS/team-design/blob/master/projects/north_star/diagrams/mission-critical-hiring-paths.pdf

Job and Opportunity recommendations

In this vision of the future there is a channel for “Recommendations”. In the diagram we outline how assessments taken by applicants could be analyzed to provide the applicant with a sense of how they measure up to the rest of the applicant pool and potentially suggest alternative jobs or developmental opportunities.

While an assessment is an ideal piece set of data that could be used for these recommendations, it is still possible to use data provided by applicants as part of their profile. Given the recent changes to collect more profile information from job seekers, USAJOBS has an opportunity to use that data to guide applicants to relevant jobs without relying on the seeker's ability to keyword search.

We could recommend jobs based on a combination of:

1. Work experience
2. Hiring paths (eligibility)
3. Education
4. Search preferences
5. Skills

It is clear from Civis' exploration with Skillsengine that the most effective algorithm they offer would leverage duties captured in work experience. Given that duties is now a distinct list in our SIF (API), it should be possible to match duties found in job announcements to duties performed by a job seeker in the past. While more control could eventually be given to users to select which duties they want to use in this matching process, the initial offering could simply use any data the user has provided to present a simple list of 3 matching jobs.

Areas for improvement

- Determine how to keep competencies up-to-date without requiring lengthy job and career field analysis. How might we crowd source skills and competencies to stay current?
- Pull work activities from uploaded resume or user provided experience & match them to duties parsed from job announcements.
- Allow job seekers to tune their results, and eventually the system, by selecting “more like this” or “Ignore this job”.
- Either USAJOBS must become an aggregation point for all federal jobs posted anywhere or it must direct users to other sources of jobs when we don't have a relevant job to offer.
- Seize the opportunity to educate job seekers on their options, many of whom are current federal employees that could make use of continuing education options or micro-details (Open Opportunities).

Problems targeted

- Profile information is used to evaluate applicants rather than improve their experience.
- Applicants do not understand that there are prerequisites (eligibility) to being considered for a job.

Value Proposition

Business risk

Erika Hall of Mule Design defines the following five risks in her half-day workshop titled “Let’s do design research right”:

1. Target customers don’t value product
2. Customers need something else
3. Business model doesn’t support it
4. Organization can’t produce it
5. Someone else is doing it better

In this case Hall is outlining how design research can help avoid or mitigate these business risks. Yet despite all of the research The Lab and the Program Office have done together USAJOBS is arguably still at risk for all of the above. So how did we get here?

Our research has focused on the users of the system. It has taken for granted the existing business model. While we have investigated various frameworks for thinking through the invention of a new business model and cost structure, and tried one out, we’ve not invested resources in a focused way on determining the value proposition for each audience of our products.

What follows is an attempt to create a strategy and highlight different ways to think about creating value.

Breaking down the USAJOBS core offering

USAJOBS is made up of just two main sections: Search and Profile.

SEARCH

- Search engine and filtering
- Job announcements
- Saved jobs
- Saved searches
- Search preferences*
- Start of the application process*

PROFILE

- Profile creation & management
- Documents management
- Application status
- Resume builder
- Start of the application process*
- Search preferences*

* The start of the application process and search preferences could be seen as a sub-component of either Search or Profile. Regardless of how you view it these components exist in USAJOBS because Search and Profile combine there.

All other components of the site are subservient to those main 2 functions. USA Service, a concept of our tools as a unified service offering, is a multi-sided platform which subsidizes the cost of handling job seekers and applicants (segment A) by charging agencies (segment B) access to them.

While we add on additional services to handle incoming applications, for the most part, the value USAJOBS currently provides is access to the job seeking audience. However, the burden of the applicant cost (attracting, maintaining, retaining, and sharing them) isn't evenly distributed across the organization.

We've yet to demonstrate to a wide enough audience how well resume mining could work for them. In addition, we've yet to make a good case for why an agency should pay more for extended access to job seeker data.

What do agencies care about?

- Finding qualified and eligible applicants.
- Help with recruitment - Reaching their target audience and attracting new and top talent.
- Retaining their employees.

Potential areas of focus

Selling access to profile data insights

Charge agencies appropriately for the access to job seeker data.

- Focus on resume mining and demographic information on the backstage.
- Focus on resume builder and obtaining profile data on the front stage.

LinkedIn has different tiers below their full-featured offering for large enterprises (which is similar to what USA Staffing charges: ~\$8,000 per seat):

- Business - \$47.99/month when billed annually
- Sales - \$64.99/month when billed annually
- Hiring - \$99.95/month when billed annually

Thus there may be room for pricing plans below the enterprise level. Alternatively, it may make more sense for this functionality to live within USA Staffing.

Retention

Charge for value provided around identifying skills gaps and providing career paths.

- Build on USA Performance and USA Hire capabilities.
- Identify career paths. Start with Mission critical occupations.
- Solves for picking up new skills and performing well enough to move up.

Community

- Make it easy to find those in your field.
- Create communities around the mission critical occupations/career fields.
- Allows for obtaining help from those in your field.

Focus on a highly-desirable market

Focus on STEM and other mission critical occupation candidates who clearly meet basic qualifications.

- Get them “pre-qualified” (USA Hire? Subsidize use of USA Hire by getting agencies to pay for this test if they select a candidate?)
- In other words, it may be as “simple” as hooking up USA Hire assessment scores to ATP resume mining.
- It may be possible to make job recommendations based upon an assessment test already taken by an applicant when they don't get or take the job for which they took the test.
- Solve for the needs of this audience explicitly and offer this specific, highly desirable market to agencies.

Focus on an under-served market

Focus on transitioning Veterans or Students

- Transitioning Veterans in particular would make sense for The Lab given our expertise in this area. We could turn portions of the Welcome Kit (or the whole thing) into a digital product that would be prominently featured somewhere in the USA Service offering.
- Solve for the needs of this audience explicitly and offer that specific market to agencies.

Unification strategy: Why?

The USAJOBS Program Office has been developing towards a greater focus on the products outside of the core product, specifically, Open Opportunities and the Agency Talent Portal. However, this is while keeping a Scrum team dedicated to the Core product.

Given limited resources we recommend that full focus be put on those non-core products and the functionality of the Core product should be partitioned into new micro or shared services that serve other USA products or merge with those other products.

Here are some reasons why.

Search is a dead end

Half of what USAJOBS offers is search yet:

- Agencies don't believe public notice benefits them and would rather avoid it. Thus they are unlikely to ever be interested in paying more for search or anything they see as attached to an unnecessary requirement.
- USAJOBS can't gain revenue from search. We can't show ads, alter results, etc.
- Half of the traffic to job announcements comes from Google and other search engines at present. Thus there is a strong argument to be made that many of our users are not reliant on our search engine.
- USAJOBS doesn't control the content that we search. Thus we can't have direct impact on improving search results by pushing for better content when it is created. We've had little success advocating for better content.

The brand of USAJOBS is tainted

- Agencies and applicants have a negative view of USAJOBS. By ending that brand and combining the FSC products under one umbrella we'd signal the intent of a suite of products while hopefully shedding some of that pre-existing negativity.
- It may also serve to unify the teams that work on the USA Service to move to a more integrated and holistic approach.
- Unifying the teams working towards a USA Service might make sense in the not too distant future. Teams could focus on specific pieces of functionality or specific audiences.

Owning a portion of the application process does not help the overall experience

- All of the TASs repeat the USAJOBS portion of the applicant experience. While data may be pre-populated, the forms that collect contact information, documents, and some eligibility information are repeated. Documents in particular are difficult for applicants to manage and provide.

Unification strategy: How?

Unifying in this instance refers to both the products and services we offer as well as the teams offering them. We strongly believe that the only way to arrive at a unified product offering, a USA Service, is to start iterating toward that offering now.

1. Focus the Core product Scrum team on applicant data

Specifically, focus on profile as a shared service and resume mining. This is functionality that can be explicitly charged for at a greater rate. Agencies, specifically hiring managers, have shown an interest in resume mining.

This team could focus on improving the data we collect about each applicant and our understanding of the experience, education, and skills those applicants have. In addition, they could improve how we mine that data and gain insights from it to help inform recruitment efforts. Finally, given that some that team has expertise in our search engine, Elastic search, they could improve upon our resume mining capability.

2. Handle public notice via API and delegation

Instead of hosting search as a mechanism to allow for public notice, require that all Talent Acquisition Systems (TASs) publish their job postings to a discoverable API that follows desired standards (e.g. schema.org).

Then leave it up to the TASs and agencies to determine where they post their jobs publicly. Audits could be automated to ensure that jobs are available to the public. Job announcement templates could be made available to TASs via the Design System.

3. Allow TASs to own the end-to-end applicant experience OR applicant experience becomes a shared service

Splitting the applicant experience across multiple products violates best practices of service and system design which causes multiple pain points.

There are two possible solutions here:

A. TASs could own the end-to-end applicant experience but be required to populate our profile service via API and allow applicants to leverage that service plus several others (notably LinkedIn, Indeed, and other prominent services).

B. The applicant experience could become a shared service offering by leveraging the US Forms initiative. This would allow the TASs to codify the questions they want gathered from applicants in a JSON schema format. That file is then sent to this new service to display to the user and collect the data. Once gathered the data is then sent back to the TAS.

4. Let go of the USAJOBS brand

Neither segment of the market has positive feelings about the brand, thus there is no reason to retain it. This would need to be combined with a unification of the applicant experience as well as an improved backstage experience in order to not fall prey to the same negative views and experiences that users have today. In other words, “re-branding” without

making some improvements is likely to end in damage to the “new brand”.

5. Focus a team on retention

There are a number of topics that fall under retention that could be addressed:

- Career development and paths
- Skills gaps
- Community

6. Eventually merge the data and analytics teams of USAJOBS and USA Staffing into a FSC Data Team. The same should be done for design.

Data and design need to be thought through holistically across the USA Service. It does the agency a disservice to have data stuck within products.

In addition, in order to create a cohesive suite of products that form a functioning service it will require designers working in a centralized partnership with product scrum teams. At the moment it is not clear how the organization hopes to realistically achieve a USA Service offering.

Roles for the future

Our current roles

The Lab has worked with the Program Office to define the following roles:

Scrum team

1. Product owner
2. UX designer
3. Scrum master
4. Developer (3)
5. Business analyst (2)
6. QA tester

Support team

- Product manager
- Lead designer
- Lead developer/architect
- QA Testing coordinator
- Lead researcher/recruiter
- Engagement manager
- Communications support
- Content strategist
- Data analyst

GDS roles

The Government Digital Service (GDS) in the UK defines the following roles:

Roles you must have:

- Product manager
- Service owner
- Delivery manager
- User researcher
- Content designer
- Designer
- Developer

Other roles you may need:

- Performance analyst
- Technical architect
- DevOps engineer
- Business analyst
- Quality assurers and testers

<https://www.gov.uk/service-manual/the-team/what-each-role-does-in-service-team>

VA Digital Service roles

The VA Digital Service, an installation of USDS, defines the following skill sets for their digital delivery teams:

- Product Management
- User Research
- User Experience Design
- Content Strategy/Writing
- Technical — architecture; development; quality assurance; testing; deployment
- Policy — relevant subject-matter expertise (and the desire to improve policy); this skillset may come from your internal team or from an external stakeholder
- Performance Evaluation — continuous measurement and analysis
- Project Management

<https://department-of-veterans-affairs.github.io/va-digital-service-handbook/resources/more/team-structure>

Points of distinction

- We rely on outside contractor help for a Delivery manager, but we may want to hire for this position permanently and have that person work across FSC product scrum teams. One key function: “helping your service team become better at autonomously organizing their own work”
- GDS’ Service owner and the VA DS Performance Evaluation are very similar to one another and a role we don’t currently account for. The focus for that role would be assessing and improving the service offering.
- Note the focus on Policy in the VA DS roles. The Lab maintains that a permanent role dedicated to understanding hiring policies and their impact on end users, both front-stage (job seekers & applicants) and back-stage (HR specialists & managers) is crucial for success. That holds not only for USAJOBS but, any team contributing to service offerings that support hiring.

Process recommendations

While The Lab has attempted to be a useful partner in developing and supporting design and development processes that result in delivery, there are a number of areas that could use attention. This is an attempt at outlining the most urgent changes we feel are necessary.

Don't do anything more until you can measure

Continuing to create hypotheses, even those backed up with qualitative research, without any quantitative measures is a recipe for disaster. At some point someone will ask for real data to justify the investment in exploring those hypotheses and we won't be able to prove their merit.

Even if it takes some time and full focus to reach proper measurement it is likely to be worth that investment.

Focus the Scrum teams on a common, measurable goal

Once measurement is possible and data is feeding back into the product Scrum teams it will be time to focus on shared goals.

"Understand that the job of anyone on a product team is not to ship a feature. Your job is not to write code, your job is to increase a business metric. We need to show that number on a big information dashboard so that everyone can see it.

If we're telling engineers, "Hey, your job is to knock off 6 tasks a day and hit this particular velocity and close this many issues," that's all you will get.

We need to tell the whole team "Hey, your job is to increase this number. Nothing is done until that number's where it needs to be (and these other numbers haven't suffered)."

For example, "Increase user activation from 15% to 20% without decreasing retention".

When you focus on a common goal like that, it also creates a stronger sense of "the product team" versus "the development team" and "the UX team". Companies need to reward their teams fairly based on those business goals, which is admittedly really hard to do."

-- Laura Klein, Principal at Users Know & Author of Lean UX for Startups

Insist on involving developers in the early stages of the process

Once the entire product team can see measurement and has a shared goal then it will be time to engage the development team earlier in the process. Focus should be less on sprint velocity and similar measures and instead on contribution to the overall effort and goals of the team. Once developers are building prototypes with designers and other members of the product team and then watching usability tests you'll know you have reached this goal.

Make design review a part of the release process

We've made some progress here, but designers on the product Scrum teams are still not consistently involved in reviewing work that comes out of the development team in a timely fashion. Often by the time design has feedback to give it is "too late" for the development team to address issues raised.