Public & Collaborative: Designing Services for Housing

The New School
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USA
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Context.
Public & Collaborative represents an opportunity to explore the needs and perspectives of affordable housing stakeholders by talking to city residents and housing professionals about issues, developing possible solutions, then testing service concepts to see how, and if, they work.
The project.
In order to improve HPD’s customer-service interface and support community engagement, the project’s proposals recommend the enhancement of the application process for affordable housing by creating human-centered materials, encouraging hyper-local marketing, supporting community-based “housing ambassadors,” and forming an in-person street team.
The design process.
The primary research methods were qualitative and participatory in nature: interview sessions and co-design workshops. During and subsequent to these engagements, the project team developed a suite of pilot proposals and supplemental resources, going through multiple rounds of design research, creation, presentation, and revision.
The project’s ideas and proposals consist of a series of design and policy enhancements that more fully engage members of the public – as well as the front-line staff of HPD, housing developers, and community groups – in agency policy making, housing development processes, and other forms of public-service provision.
Activism and Civic Participation

The strategies of co-design and co-production of public spaces engage disparate stakeholders (members of the public, front-line service providers, agency leadership, etc.) in clarifying the users’ needs and motivations, and promote their alignment towards the development of policies and the improvement of service delivery.
By creating new affordable housing opportunities, the project is creating the conditions for new interactions, collaborations, and peer-to-peer (as opposed to provider-to-user) services to emerge between residents.
New affordable housing opportunities also intend to improve the wellbeing of residents (and by extension, their households, buildings, and communities) long after move-in. These policies reflect institutional investment in the long-term strength and stability of residents and the communities into which they move, and they suggest that affordable housing developments can provide space for new residents and neighbors to engage in new activities and collaborations in the city.
During the exploration phase of the project, concepts were developed by Parsons students in two courses held during the spring of 2012. They explored the co-production and co-design approach, where citizens can collaborate actively in the process of generating ideas for services.
Easy-to-understand communications materials, paired with simpler ways for staff and the public to provide feedback, improve information exchange during and after the process.