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Your Call Center Is a Bug Tracker: A Fixed-Fee CX Diagnostic Sprint for One High-Volume Service

CX Strategy Development: one journey mapped across every channel, the cost of failure demand in the agency's own numbers, and a roadmap the budget office can fund

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Executive Summary

Every high-volume federal service keeps a record of where it breaks. It is not in the issue tracker. It is in the contact center: the calls from people who could not finish online, the status inquiries nobody should have needed to make, the paper forms mailed in after a login failed. Each of those contacts is a defect report. Most agencies pay to answer them and never read them as one.

The reason is structural. A single customer journey routinely crosses several program offices, a contact center contractor and a legacy system, and nobody owns it end to end. Survey results arrive on a dashboard nobody is chartered to act on. Budgets fund systems, not journeys. When a modernization is finally funded, it often rebuilds the old process on new technology because nobody mapped the experience before writing the requirements.

This paper is for the program manager who owns a high-volume public or member-facing service and its budget, the CX lead or OMB Circular A-11 Section 280 owner who champions the work, the digital services director and contact center program manager who evaluate it, the CIO whose modernization needs grounded requirements, and the COR who buys it. It describes Avalon Technology Services' CX Strategy Development service, which starts with one engagement:

- **A fixed-fee, eight-week CX diagnostic sprint for one high-volume service.** One journey, up to 3 channels, the agency's existing data only, and no new information collection from the public. It ends with a current-state assessment, a journey map and service blueprint with editable source, a channel cost-to-serve and failure-demand model, a CX measurement framework, a prioritized backlog, an 18 to 36 month roadmap and an executive readout. The market band for a sprint of this kind is \$45,000 to \$95,000 firm fixed price.

The illustration later in this paper works through the effort model. The base case is 372 hours over eight weeks at a blended \$140 to \$185 an hour, or \$52,080 to \$68,820, with a \$60K planning fee, well under the \$350,000 simplified acquisition threshold.

Avalon researches and recommends. The sprint certifies nothing and moves no score by itself. Every submission, determination and decision about what to fund remains the agency's.

Why High-Volume Services Break Quietly

Any two of these phrases in one meeting usually mean the service has an experience problem nobody has costed.

What the program says	What it usually means
"Our call center is drowning."	A share of calls is failure demand: contacts caused by a broken step, not genuine need
"People call because the website doesn't work."	The digital channel fails at a specific point, and the phone line absorbs the cost
"We survey, but nobody does anything with it."	Measurement exists without an owner, a decision path or a backlog
"We don't know why people abandon the application."	Analytics, reason codes and complaints have never been read together
"We're about to modernize, and I don't trust the requirements."	The requirements describe the system, not the journey
"Every region does it differently."	The backstage process varies, so the front-stage experience does too

Four Misconceptions

- **CX means a survey.** A survey says something is wrong. It rarely says which step, which channel or what it costs.
- **CX means redesigning the website.** The website is one channel. Many failures start in policy, handoffs or a letter that arrives late.
- **The strategy will raise our scores.** A strategy points the agency at the right fixes. Scores move only when the fixes ship.
- **One big report will fix it.** A report nobody owns joins the last one. The sprint ends with owners, cost bands and metrics attached to every recommendation.

Routing keeps this service distinct from its neighbors. A named screen or form that needs redesign is Avalon's UI/UX Design service. Evidence on how users handle an existing product is User Testing & Feedback Analysis. Findability on a website is Information Architecture. Section 508 conformance is Accessibility Modernization. Each of those fixes or tests one product. This sprint maps one service across every channel and costs where it breaks.

The Authorities and Where the Sprint Fits

Authority	What it says	What it means for this sprint
21st Century IDEA Act (2018)	Agencies modernize websites and digital services to be user-centered, consistent and accessible, and digitize forms and services	The sprint supplies customer research, prioritization evidence and a measurement framework the agency can draw on
OMB Circular A-11, Section 280	Agencies manage customer experience and service delivery, with standardized post-transaction feedback measures	The measurement framework aligns its KPI dictionary to those measures and the agency's existing instruments
Paperwork Reduction Act (44 U.S.C. ch. 35; 5 CFR 1320)	OMB clearance for collecting information from 10 or more members of the public; agencies often use generic clearances	A dependency: the base sprint uses existing data; any public interviews need the agency's PRA clearance officer to confirm the pathway
Privacy Act	Governs records about individuals that the agency retrieves by name or identifier	Data pulls arrive de-identified where possible; the agency's privacy official reviews consent language and data handling
Section 508 (2017 refresh incorporates WCAG 2.0 Level AA)	Federal ICT must be accessible	Applies to the deliverables; the sprint flags accessibility barriers it sees but is not conformance testing

The accurate statement is narrow: this engagement provides the customer research, prioritization evidence and measurement framework that support the agency's obligations under the 21st Century IDEA Act and OMB Circular A-11 Section 280. It does not fulfil a reporting obligation, it is not an audit of either, and it is not part of any

assessment or authorization activity. Most sprints need no access to production systems beyond read-only analytics and data exports.

What the Sprint Does

The sprint covers one named journey, such as applying for a benefit and checking its status, across the channels people actually use. It works in the agency's own collaboration, storage and tracking tools.

Workstream	Activities
Alignment and discovery	Sponsor kickoff, research plan, PRA pathway check, inventory of prior studies, survey instruments and service levels; up to 12 staff and stakeholder interviews
Frontline listening	Listening sessions with contact center agents and field or processing staff, who hear the failures first
Data synthesis	Section 280 survey results and comments, contact center volumes and reason codes, complaint and congressional-inquiry logs, web analytics (including Digital Analytics Program data), completion and abandonment, processing times
Journey map and service blueprint	The journey across channels, paired with the backstage systems, handoffs, policies and staff actions behind each moment; pain points ranked by frequency and severity
Cost-to-serve and failure demand	Per-transaction cost by channel from agency inputs, and the share of contacts caused by process defects rather than genuine need
Measurement framework	A KPI dictionary aligned to the Section 280 post-transaction measures (satisfaction, trust, ease, efficiency, effectiveness, employee interaction), a listening-post map and dashboard requirements
Backlog and roadmap	An impact-versus-effort backlog and an 18 to 36 month roadmap with owners, rough cost bands, quick wins inside the fiscal year and budget-calendar alignment

Failure Demand, Defined

Value demand is a contact the service exists to handle: a question only a person can answer. Failure demand is a contact caused by the service failing to do something, or do it right, the first time: "where is my application," "the site won't take my document," "I got a letter I don't understand." Reason codes, call notes and complaint categories usually show which is which, once someone reads them against the journey map. The model states what failure demand costs today. It claims no reduction.

Deliverables

Deliverable	Format
Current-state experience assessment	Written report
Journey map and service blueprint	PDF plus editable source in the agency's tool
Channel cost-to-serve and failure-demand model	Spreadsheet with documented assumptions
CX measurement framework	KPI dictionary, listening-post map, dashboard requirements
Prioritized opportunity backlog	Spreadsheet, importable to the agency's tracker
CX strategy and roadmap	Narrative document plus briefing deck
Executive readout	Live briefing to the sponsor and leadership
Research materials	Interview guides, consent language, anonymization protocol

Every recommendation is mapped to an implementation owner, a cost band and a metric. Every deliverable is produced to conform with Section 508, and every one belongs to the agency. The roadmap specifies needs and outcomes, not products or proprietary specifications, so any qualified firm can bid the work it identifies.

Where the Sprint Stops

The sprint stops at the roadmap. It does not include product design or build, a usability study, Section 508 conformance work, website structure work such as a content inventory, card sort or tree test, survey platform setup or operation (Touchpoints, Qualtrics, Medallia or similar), contact center operations, staffing or scripting, communications campaigns, compliance audits, or license resale. Primary research with the public is not in the base sprint; up to nine public interviews are an optional add-on only where the agency's PRA clearance officer confirms the pathway.

How a Sprint Runs

Phase	Timing	What happens
0: Kickoff and plan	Weeks 1–2	Sponsor kickoff, research plan, PRA pathway check, data request list dated in writing
1: Discovery	Weeks 2–5	Staff and stakeholder interviews, frontline listening sessions, data pulls and analysis, first working session
2: Map and cost	Weeks 5–7	Journey map, service blueprint, pain-point ranking, cost-to-serve and failure-demand model, mid-point session
3: Strategy and readout	Weeks 7–8	Measurement framework, backlog, roadmap, final working session, executive readout and handoff

The delivery clock starts when the data request is answered, because contact center contractor exports routinely take weeks to arrive. A second journey, an added channel or an added customer segment is priced as a change order. The follow-on, when the agency wants primary research or more journeys, is the standard engagement described under pricing.

What the Agency Provides

- An executive sponsor at kickoff, one mid-point working session and the readout.
- Program subject matter experts for two to four hours a week during discovery.

- Data exports dated in the statement of work: survey results, contact center volumes and reason codes (including pulls from the contact center contractor), complaint and inquiry logs, analytics and prior studies.
- Unit cost inputs per channel from the budget or finance office, or approval of documented estimates.
- Early engagement of the PRA clearance officer and privacy official, and approval of the collaboration tools used.

What Is Not Included

Included	Separate work
One journey, up to three channels	Added journeys, channels or segments, priced as change orders
Existing data and staff research	Public interviews beyond the optional add-on
Measurement framework and dashboard requirements	Building dashboards or operating a survey platform
Roadmap with owners and cost bands	Designing or building the fixes
Unclassified services	Classified or cleared environments

How Avalon Staffs It

Avalon takes one engagement at a time, works business hours, and works on unclassified services only. Avalon's founder leads the engagement, builds the cost-to-serve model and manages the project. A named senior UX researcher and service designer, under agreement before the proposal and listed in it with a résumé, runs interviews and listening sessions and builds the journey map and blueprint. Avalon has no past federal engagements under this service. FAR 15.305 says an offeror without a record of past performance may not be evaluated favorably or unfavorably on that factor; what protects the program is a named team, a fixed price, a single journey and deliverables the agency can inspect at each phase.

Requirement	How it is handled
Researcher and service designer	Named personnel whose experience and investigation level match the agency's requirements, listed in the proposal
Access to agency data	Public Trust investigation at the tier the agency requires, as a condition of the engagement; de-identified exports preferred
Tools	The agency's approved collaboration, storage and tracking tools; no licenses are needed or resold
Insurance and contract vehicles	Any coverage the solicitation requires is a condition of award; Avalon does not hold a GSA Schedule or a governmentwide contract today

Key personnel substitution requires CO approval. The proposal carries an organizational conflict of interest statement covering any later work the roadmap identifies.

Pricing and How to Buy

Engagement	Market-norm range	Avalon
Sprint: one journey, existing data only, core deliverables, 6–10 weeks	\$45K–\$95K	Firm fixed price; illustrative \$60K
Standard: one or two journeys, primary customer research, full deliverable set, 12–20 weeks	\$120K–\$300K	The follow-on, not the entry offer
Enterprise: multiple services and segments, 5–9 months	\$350K and up	Not offered by Avalon today

The sprint sits under the \$350,000 simplified acquisition threshold and can be bought as an open-market purchase, optionally milestone-gated at the end of each phase. CX work inside a larger digital services order can be subcontracted to Avalon by a prime. Avalon does not hold a GSA Schedule or a governmentwide contract today, and it does not resell software or licenses. Pricing is firm fixed price, not contingent on any outcome.

A diagnostic of a fielded service is usually funded from operations and maintenance money. October through December, when new-year plans are drafted, and August through September, when year-end funds are placed, are the natural windows. Prices are fixed against one named journey, capped channels, interviews and workshops, and a dated dependency schedule.

Illustration: One Journey, Three Channels, Eight Weeks

The figures below are a planning illustration for one representative unclassified service: a high-volume benefit application and status inquiry service reached online, by phone and on paper. They are not a quote and not a result from any engagement.

Labor Loading

Kickoff, the research plan and the PRA check take 8 lead and 12 researcher hours. Each of 12 staff interviews takes 1 lead and 2.5 researcher hours. Each of five data sources takes 8 lead hours, and coding existing verbatims takes 16 researcher hours. Listening sessions take 4 and 8. The journey map and blueprint take 8 and 56. The cost model takes 12 lead hours plus 6 per channel. The measurement framework takes 12 and 12, the backlog and roadmap 32 and 12, three workshops 6 hours each per role, and the readout 12 and 8. Project management is 3 lead hours a week.

Role	Rate band	Base hours	Loading
Engagement lead (strategy, cost analysis, PM)	\$140–\$185/hr	200	about 0.6 FTE
Senior UX researcher and service designer	\$140–\$185/hr	172	about 0.5 FTE
Total		372	

What the Sprint Costs

Scope	Hours	Rate-band range	Planning fee	Inside \$45K–\$95K
Base: one journey, 3 channels, 8 weeks	372	\$52.1K–\$68.8K	\$60K	Yes
A: plus 9 public interviews, 10 weeks	427.5	\$59.9K–\$79.1K	\$69K	Yes
B: 5 channels, 8 data sources, poor reason codes, 9 weeks	435	\$60.9K–\$80.5K	\$71K	Yes

The base case is 372 hours, or \$52,080 to \$68,820, with a \$60K planning fee at the midpoint. Adding nine public interviews where the PRA pathway allows takes the sprint to ten weeks and \$59,850 to \$79,088. Five channels, eight data sources and contact center data with unusable reason codes take it to nine weeks and \$60,900 to \$80,475. A slip in agency data pulls does not change the price; it moves the clock.

As a cross-check, loading the sprint at 0.5 to 0.75 of a lead and 0.5 to 1.0 of a researcher and designer for eight weeks gives 320 to 560 hours, or \$44,800 to \$103,600. The base case sits in the lower middle. Full loading at the top rate breaks the \$95,000 ceiling, which is why the sprint holds to one journey and eight to nine weeks.

What the Agency Brings to the Readout

The model prices the sprint; it claims no saving. The cost of the status quo comes from the agency's own volumes and unit costs. The example inputs below are illustrative only.

Channel	Monthly volume	Unit cost	Annual cost
Online	40,000	\$2	\$960,000
Phone	12,000	\$12	\$1,728,000
Paper	3,000	\$20	\$720,000
In person	1,000	\$35	\$420,000
Total			\$3,828,000

If reason codes show 30 percent of phone contacts are failure demand, that is 43,200 calls a year costing \$518,400. At 15 percent it is \$259,200; at 45 percent and \$16 a call, \$1,036,800; at 30 percent and \$8 a call, \$345,600. A \$60K sprint costs the same as about 5,000 failure-demand calls at \$12. Those figures, not a vendor estimate, are what the program takes to the budget office.

Common Pitfalls

Pitfall	How to avoid it
Journey inflation	One journey by name in the SOW; added journeys by change order
Segment multiplication	No public segments in the base sprint; the add-on caps participants at nine
Sliding into design	The SOW states verbatim that the sprint does not include product design or build
Workshop proliferation	Three working sessions, fixed in the SOW
Late data	Contact center exports, PRA and privacy reviews dated as government-furnished items with a slip provision
Compliance overclaim	No claim that the sprint makes a service compliant, fulfils a reporting obligation or moves a score
Under-priced sprints	Primary research is standard-tier work, priced as such, never slipped into a sprint

Conclusion and Next Step

Most struggling services are not missing a new system. They are missing a map of where the journey breaks, a price on what those breaks cost, and an order in which to fix them that the budget office can fund.

The natural first step is the fixed-fee diagnostic sprint: one journey, about eight weeks, under the simplified acquisition threshold, ending in a journey map and blueprint, a failure-demand model in the agency's own numbers, a measurement framework and a roadmap with owners and cost bands. To discuss a service, contact Avalon Technology Services at contact@AvalonTechServices.com.

Appendices

Appendix A: Glossary

Customer journey

The sequence of steps a person takes to get something done with the agency, across every channel they use.

Service blueprint

A map that pairs each step of the journey with the backstage systems, handoffs, policies and staff actions behind it.

Failure demand

Contacts caused by the service failing to do something, or do it right, the first time.

Cost to serve

The cost of handling one transaction in a given channel, such as a call, a paper form or an online submission.

Listening post

Any source of customer signal: surveys, call reasons, complaints, analytics, frontline staff.

PRA

Paperwork Reduction Act: requires OMB clearance for information collections from 10 or more members of the public.

Appendix B: Illustration Assumptions

All values are planning assumptions for one representative unclassified service. None is drawn from a specific agency, a real service or a completed engagement.

Assumption	Value	Basis
Service	One benefit application and status journey; online, phone, paper	Planning assumption
Scope caps	1 journey, 3 channels, 5 data sources, 12 interviews, 3 workshops	Planning assumption
Effort	Lead 200 and researcher 172 hours over 8 weeks	KB delivery model; hours assumed
Rate	\$140–\$185 an hour blended; \$162.50 planning midpoint	Category blended band
Channel inputs	Volumes and unit costs in the readout table	Example inputs; the agency supplies real ones
Exclusions	Travel, participant compensation, tool licenses	Not priced
Price check	Base fee \$60K	Inside \$45K–\$95K; under the SAT

Appendix C: References

1. **U.S. Congress**, *21st Century Integrated Digital Experience Act (H.R. 5759, 115th Congress)*
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2. **Office of Management and Budget**, *Circular A-11, Preparation, Submission, and Execution of the Budget (Section 280)*
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3. **Office of the Law Revision Counsel**, *44 U.S.C. Chapter 35, Coordination of Federal Information Policy (Paperwork Reduction Act)*
<https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?path=/prelim@title44/chapter35&edition=prelim>

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