

JENNIFER GARDNER

STRATEGY, PLANNING & DESIGN FOR IMPACT

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PROFILE

Jennifer Gardner is a senior leader in civic design, public policy, and urban planning with a 15-year record of delivering transformative results across government, nonprofit, and private sectors. She brings deep expertise in building and scaling programs from the ground up, especially at the intersection of design, data/technology, and public service. Jennifer has led multi-million-dollar, high-impact initiatives at the local and federal levels—modernizing digital services, driving policy change, and advancing equity. Known for navigating complexity and unlocking progress where others stall, she combines sharp strategic insight with practical execution. Jennifer is also a seasoned facilitator, public speaker, and published author with a proven ability to engage diverse stakeholders, build coalitions, and shape long-term institutional change.

CORE COMPETENCIES

- Design-Led Innovation Strategy
- Program Design & Management
- Strategic Planning & Foresight
- Service Design
- Cross-functional Teams
- Multi-Stakeholder Process Facilitation
- Evidence-Based Policy Implementation
- Learning Strategy Development
- Impact Measurement & Evaluation
- User Research & Testing
- Agile Project Management
- Project Documentation & Visual Artifacts

EDUCATION

Master of Science in City and Regional Planning, Pratt Institute

Brooklyn, New York | January 2010-January 2013

- Thesis: *Policy Drivers: Planning for Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure*
- Teaching Experience: Graduate Studio TA, Fall 2011 and Spring 2012

Bachelor of Arts in English Literature, Cornell University

Ithaca, New York | September 2000-May 2004

- Minor in Visual Studies (Contemporary Art and Media Studies)
- Honors: Degree with Distinction in All Subjects
- International study: Free University in Berlin, January-July 2003

Certifications & Training

- Stanford Engineering: Ethics, Technology + Public Policy for Practitioners (2024)
- Institute for The Future: Scenario Building (2024)
- Design Leadership Fundamentals, Design Dept. (2023)
- Human-Centered Design Certification, U.S. Office of Personnel Management (2020)
- CITI Program: Human Subjects Research Certification (2016)
- Coro Leadership New York (2015-2016)

EXPERIENCE

Presidential Innovation Fellow, Senior Advisor for Technology and Customer Experience, U.S. Small Business Administration

Washington, DC | March 2024-Present

- Lead strategic projects to strengthen enterprise customer experience (CX) strategy, service design, and delivery, integrating strategic vision with practical execution through organizational change management and digital service transformation
- As product owner for the [MySBA customer portal my.sba.gov](https://my.sba.gov), launched a new public website MVP in 4 months, collaborating with consultant designers and developers to prioritize and implement both daily design decisions and a long-range vision and roadmap; lead UX/UI design vision and content strategy and collaborate on data integration
- Supported strategy and launch of MySBA Customers platform, an industry-standard Salesforce CRM that replaced 5+ legacy systems and MySBA Account, an Okta single sign-on solution
- Developed agency-wide customer experience and digital transformation strategy, presenting recommendations directly to SBA Administrator, working closely with Deputy Chief of Staff
- Collaborated on SBA's four-year IT Strategic Plan, aligning customer service goals with business needs
- Delivered enterprise architecture and customer experience evaluation frameworks for IT governance
- Partner with program offices and SBA CX Community of Practice to introduce and implement design methodologies like problem framing, journey mapping, and user research interviews, leading to better project goals and service design improvements

Design Strategist & Team Lead, The Lab at OPM (Office of Personnel Management)

Newburgh, NY (Remote) | April 2020-March 2024

- Led complex, long-term consulting engagements and projects with timelines of 6-18 months using human-centered design to prioritize user needs and improve service design and delivery, customer experience, and public policy decision-making as project lead on contracts totaling nearly \$1 million over 4 years
- Provided consulting and executive education services to federal partners including National Park Service, Office of Management and Budget, General Services Administration, Centers for Disease Control, Department of Homeland Security, Department of Defense, Department of Veterans Affairs, and within the Office of Personnel Management to use design, research, and facilitation to solve for complex adaptive challenges related to customer experience, service design, and technology modernization
- Managed project teams of 2-6 staff and oversaw project plans and budgets to ensure the cost-effective delivery of high-quality work from cross-functional teams as project lead
- Led The Lab at OPM in measurement and evaluation efforts for contract engagements as well as for internal

program and CX evaluation for the Lab's learning and development program

- Directed 18-month, \$500k strategic partnership with National Park Service to modernize visitor center project design and delivery, working with a 20-member client and advisory group to conduct and analyze 50+ interviews and 10 case studies and deliver insights and process change recommendations to NPS senior leaders and to build and test 2 prototypes later deployed by NPS
- Co-led foundational research for the Army's Small Business Innovation Research programs, delivering knowledge management models, user stories, and requirements for a digital marketplace serving Army research labs and procurement teams
- Interviewed hundreds of citizens and Veterans to develop insights leading to important experience design and program change in critical policy areas including: [Opioid prescribing guidelines](#) (CDC); access to telehealth (VA); healthcare provider choice (VA); public land management (NPS); [Social Security Disability Insurance overpayments](#) (SSA); [public engagement](#) (OMB); equity and human rights (White House Commission on Native Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders); federal hiring and benefits (OPM); and participation in the defense innovation economy (Army).

Independent Strategy Consultant, Freelance

New York, New York | June 2019-March 2020

- Developed, scoped, planned, and executed on projects for diverse clients, offering transdisciplinary design services (urban planning, human factors research, human centered design, and strategy)
- Partnered with the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene to design and deliver an [evaluation strategy for measuring the impact of creative placemaking and urban design](#) interventions for a South Bronx, NY multi-stakeholder urban placemaking program, and delivered a toolkit including an evaluation framework with research-based indicators and metrics, recommendations for data collection and analysis, tools for public engagement, and data collection—including observational tools as well as pre- and post-intervention surveys
- Served in short-term capacity as Director of Cities, leading business development strategy and for Openbox Design, LLC, a boutique human-centered design consultancy where I generated over \$1M in project proposals and secured over 30 pitch opportunities over 3 months
- Translated academic research insights and created storytelling and engagement plan for North Carolina State University
- Designed user experience and public health surveys, report templates and other elements as a communications tool and prototype for a future dashboard for PlayCore, Inc., a playground equipment manufacturer

Program Manager, Gehl Institute

New York, New York | June 2017-April 2019

- Built and managed design and policy research programs and led Gehl Institute's global, foundation-funded work on civic innovation and public health
- Developed [The Inclusive Healthy Places Framework](#) for the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, leading an 18-month, \$500k multi-stakeholder collaborative learning program working with a cohort of SMEs; adoption of framework

demonstrated through the National Recreation and Park Association's [companion guide](#), implementation research by [Gehl Architects](#), and forthcoming chapter in the [8th Edition of the City Reader](#), published by Taylor & Francis

- Created a program centered on the [Public Life Data Protocol](#), an original open-source standard for data about human activity in the public realm, created in partnership with Gehl and the cities of Copenhagen, Seattle, and San Francisco; created a code of ethics and governance structure, facilitated monthly calls with stakeholders
- Built and facilitated [partnership with Alphabet's Sidewalk Labs](#) to build and test an open-source public life [data collection app](#), Common Space, developed over 10 months; tested app in Toronto with two community organizations leading to funding opportunities for our partners based on data collected; initial release of the app generated requests to test the tool from 45 cities
- Led major events engaging thousands of users and partners, including [30-participant, 2-day offsite product launch and SME workshop on health equity](#), a [3-day 115-participant civic data hackathon](#), two annual national conferences, international urban design master classes, and numerous training workshops serving an active, global network
- Managed between 1-3 direct reports, 1 FTE contractor, 1 intern, and 3 consultant contributors
- Contributed to organizational development, building cross-sector partnerships, directly raising \$120,000 in new project funds and \$250k renewals in 2018
- Created content for and delivered over 14 keynotes, workshops and public speaking engagements for global audiences over a 2-year period, and provided content to Gehl Institute's annual conference, webinars, master classes, and training curricula for design and planning professionals

Project Administrator & Senior Planner, NYC Parks

New York, NY | November 2013-June 2017

- Developed and implemented programs that secured and deployed over \$450M for NYC Parks' strategic planning initiatives and capital investment in just under four years
- Developed policy and research basis for, designed, and coordinated implementation of NYC Parks' signature park improvement program, the [Community Parks Initiative \(CPI\)](#), an initial [\\$285M capital investment](#) in park equity uniting policy, programming, engagement, and operations best practices, transforming 72 parks in high-need areas in collaboration with hundreds of cross-sector stakeholders; ongoing commitments to this initiative have funded CPI at a [total of nearly \\$1 billion that will redevelop 167 total parks by 2032](#); CPI received an [award from the American Planning Association in 2020](#)
- Successfully drove strategy and positioned funding campaign to City Hall that provided \$150 million in critical infrastructure improvements at five signature large parks, serving each NYC borough, and [launched the Anchor Parks program](#)
- Facilitated public partnerships and won grant awards channeling \$1.25M in state and federal planning and design funding to complete Harlem River Park, connecting East Harlem to 10 undeveloped acres of waterfront and greenway connections
- Developed agency's [first data-driven equity framework and policy](#)

- Led transformation of the agency's public engagement processes, reaching 2,300+ citizens
- Built \$3M research partnership with CUNY School of Public Health to implement [longitudinal research on community health](#) effects funded by NIH, and collaborated with physical activity researchers from North Carolina State University
- Led content strategy and program development for NYC Parks' first conference, the [Parks Without Borders Summit](#), held May 2016
- Managed 1 NYC Urban Fellow each year for 3 years

Urban Planner, Manhattan Borough President's Office

New York, New York | December 2012–November 2013

- Led zoning, urban development, and real estate projects through New York City's public land use Uniform Land Use Review Process (ULURP)
- Evaluated land use proposals, delivered technical writing and public testimony to the NYC Planning Commission, fulfilling the Borough President's formal advisory role in the city's development process
- Built stakeholder relationships as liaison and technical resource for community members

Urban Planning Consultant, WXY Architecture + Urban Design

New York, New York | June–December 2012

- Researched and co-author the New York's earliest [policy](#), [design](#), and [implementation](#) guidance for electric vehicle charging infrastructure, providing technical and policy advice to state government and the public, supported by the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) and Georgetown Climate Center
- Co-created a multi-faceted toolkit based on qualitative, quantitative, and spatial research, including authoring 2 white papers and writing and content design for charging station siting and design guidelines; published in 2012, the guides remain among the state energy authority's best practices today

Program Assistant, Design Trust for Public Space

New York, New York | January–September 2011

- Supported operations and research teams for two Design Trust projects, including [Five Borough Farm](#) and [Made in Midtown](#), both in-depth, multi-stakeholder applied research projects examining urban policy and planning issues relevant to public space and economic development

SELECT PUBLICATIONS

Gardner J. "Designing Inclusive Healthy Places" (2025). In R.T. Legates, F. Stout & R. Caves (Eds.), [The City Reader \(8th ed.\)](#). [Taylor and Francis](#).

Gardner J., Lorah, K. ["The Post-Pandemic City is a City for Women: Two Ways to Move Towards a More Equitable City for Caregivers."](#) Urban Design Forum, Oct. 2020.

Gardner J., Begault L. ["How Better Urban Planning Can Improve Gender Equity."](#) Behavioral Scientist, April 9, 2019.

Gardner J. ["The Inclusive Healthy Places Framework: A New Tool for Social Resilience and Public Infrastructure."](#) Biophilic Cities Journal, March 2019.

Gardner J, Begault L., Marpillero-Colomina A. ["Inclusive Healthy Places: A Guide to Inclusion and Health in Public Space."](#) Gehl Institute, June 2018.

Contributing editor: NYC Parks ["Design and Planning for Flood Resiliency: Guidelines for NYC Parks."](#) November 2018.

Huang TT, Wyka KE, Ferris EB, Gardner J, Evenson KR, Tripathi D, Martinez Soto G, Cato M, Moon J, Dorn, JM, Catellier DJ, Thorpe LE. ["The Physical Activity and Redesigned Community Spaces \(PARCS\) Study: protocol of a natural experiment to investigate the impact of citywide park redesign and renovation."](#) BMC Public Health, November 2016.

Gardner J. ["Framework for an Equitable Future."](#) NYC Parks, October 2014.

Gardner J, Lubinsky A, Salama P. ["EV-Ready Codes for the Built Environment."](#) ["Creating EV-Ready Towns and Cities: A Guide to Planning and Policy Tools."](#) and ["Siting and Design Guidelines for Electric Vehicle Supply Equipment."](#) Georgetown Climate Center and the Transportation Climate Initiative, Nov 2012.

SELECT TALKS & WORKSHOPS

Facilitator and Course Designer, workshops including Human-Centered Design Fundamentals, Civic Design Studio, Problem Framing for Solution Finding, and Designing Accessible Communications, the Lab at OPM, 2020–2024

Panelist, "Public Space Design + Research: Gauging Gender + Sexuality Inequities." American Institute of Architects, New York. Remote workshop, April 2022

Speaker and session moderator, "Toward Health Equity," American Planning Association National Planning Conference, San Francisco, April 2019

Keynote speaker, "A People-First Approach to Healthy Cities through Design," Planning Our Urban Environments: From Research to Practice: ISGlobal Health Summit, Barcelona, November 2018

Workshop facilitator and panelist, "A People-First Approach to Social Change through Design," Placemaking Latinoamérica, Querétaro and Mexico City, November 2018

Keynote speaker, "Public Life Intersections: Change through Design," Seoul Second Annual Social Problem-Solving Design Forum, Seoul, September 2018

Workshop lead and panelist, "Healthy Cities," World Cities Summit, Singapore, July 2018

Workshop facilitator, "Sharing the City: Connecting Urban Design with Public Life," AIA 2018 National Conference, New York, June 2018

Workshop lead presenter, facilitator, and panelist, International Conference on Urban Health, Coimbra, Portugal, September 2017

Speaker, "Parks and Public Spaces in the Equitable City," Parks Without Borders Summit, New York, May 2016