JENNIFER GARDNER

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PRINCIPAL STRATEGIST & SENIOR PROGRAM MANAGER

Jennifer Gardner is a leader in civic design, public policy, and urban planning with over 15 years of experience delivering transformative results across government, nonprofit, and private-sector environments. She specializes in building and scaling programs from the ground up, working at the intersection of design, data, technology, and public systems with experience at the local, state, and federal levels. Known for translating ambitious policy ideas into action, Jennifer applies a human-centered approach—whether managing digital products or designing large-scale infrastructure programs—partnering closely with stakeholders and communities to deliver outcomes that are meaningful and measurable.

Jennifer advances more effective government by designing for equity. In New York City, she architected the Community Parks Initiative, closing a $1B funding gap in underserved areas by catalyzing the transformation of 160+ parks by 2032 while embedding new approaches to capital planning and public engagement that continue to shape NYC Parks' work. As a strategist with The Lab at OPM and later a White House Presidential Innovation Fellow, she brought innovation practices to national programs, developing digital tools, using research to inform policy change, and advising senior federal leaders on how to improve service delivery for the public. Her work is driven by a belief that service design can simultaneously improve resident experience and strengthen the government's ability to serve.

EXPERIENCE

Product Manager, Department of Digital Government and Organizational Excellence
Connecticut Department of Administrative Services Bureau of Information Technology Solutions | Remote | Oct. 2025-Present

- **Lead a cross-functional team focused on driving the end-to-end product lifecycle** for features and products improving the state's online experience
- **Manage 0-1 design and development of notifications, scheduling, payments functions within a prototype enterprise service center** that will unify the public's experience of CT services and deliver Governor Lamont's vision of a digital-first state

Presidential Innovation Fellow, Senior Advisor for Technology
U.S. Small Business Administration | Washington, DC | March 2024-June 2025

- **Led enterprise CX transformation serving millions of small business owners**, integrating strategic vision with practical execution through organizational change management and digital service transformation, directly advising executive leadership
- **Product owner for MySBA customer portal** (my.sba.gov): Launched new public website MVP in 4 months, collaborating with design and development teams to drive UX/UI vision, design, content strategy, data integration, and long-term roadmap
- **Supported delivery of MySBA Customers Salesforce CRM,** replacing 5+ legacy systems, and an Okta SSO solution, improving access and security
- **Contributed to the agency's four-year IT Strategic Plan**, ensuring CX alignment with mission-critical business needs
- **Designed enterprise architecture and CX evaluation frameworks** to strengthen IT governance and performance
- **Co-led user journey research about disaster experience** to help the agency improve an online digital scheduling tool for SBA/FEMA disaster centers
- **Introduced design methodologies across program offices,** including journey mapping, problem framing, and user research, across SBA program offices and the agency's CX Community of Practice

Design Strategist & Team Lead, The Lab at OPM
U.S. Office of Personnel Management | Remote | April 2020-March 2024

- **Led $1M consulting portfolio across 10+ agencies** (i.e., CDC, DHS, DoD, GSA, OMB, OPM, and VA) using human-centered design to improve customer experience, build trust, and shape responsive policy decisions with measurable citizen impact
- **Managed cross-functional design teams** of 2-6 staff across overlapping 6–18-month timelines, overseeing budgets, delivering service design, digital

EDUCATION

Master of Science (M.S.), City and Regional Planning
Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, New York
Jan. 2010-Jan 2013
- Thesis: Policy Drivers: Planning for Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure

Bachelor of Arts (B.A.), English Literature
Cornell University, Ithaca, New York
Sept. 2000-May 2004
- Minor in Visual Studies (Contemporary Art and Media Studies)
- Honors: Distinction in All Subjects
- International study: Free University in Berlin, Jan.-July 2003

CERTIFICATIONS & TRAINING

Stanford Engineering: Ethics, Technology + Public Policy for Practitioners (2024)

Institute for The Future: Scenario Building (2024)

Design Dept.: Design Leadership Fundamentals (2023)

The Lab at OPM: Human-Centered Design Certification, U.S. Office of Personnel Management (2020)

CITI Program: Human Subjects Research Certification (2016)

Coro Leadership New York: LNY Cohort Member (2015-2016)

VOLUNTEERING

US Digital Response
Service designer, June 2025-Present (Remote)

Supporting state government CIO team to improve IT governance, project and risk assessment process with focus on GenAI and cloud technology tools.

Lower East Side Ecology Center
Board member, March 2020-Dec. 2021 (New York, NY)

Strategic planning and local government stakeholder engagement.

transformation, and strategy projects, scoping work, assigning resources, and ensuring cost-effective delivery of high-quality design solutions
- **Directed $500K strategic partnership with National Park Service:** Led 20-member advisory group through 18-month modernization initiative to improve visitor center experience and delivery process, conducting 50+ interviews and 10 case studies, delivering 2 tested prototypes that we later deployed agency-wide, influencing national park capital planning processes and standards
- **Designed user experience improvements to digital products,** including wireframes and content design for an OMB-funded government-wide public engagement toolkit, redesigned forms and notices for SSA public benefits, a GSA measurement guide, and requirements for an Army procurement marketplace
- **Led work on The Lab's measurement and evaluation strategy,** creating frameworks for internal CX and program impact assessment for The Lab's learning and development projects, and engaging with product and project teams as a measurement subject matter expert
- **Key research projects influenced national policy:**
  - **CDC Opioid Prescribing Guidelines:** Core team member for discovery sprint with 100+ user interviews with patients and medical providers, insights directly informed national CDC opioid guidelines
  - **OMB Administrative Burden Reduction:** Led $120K research project using journey mapping, rapid prototyping, and usability testing to redesign public benefits communications for SSA disability insurance overpayments
  - **VA Veterans Experience:** Multi-year partnership improving telehealth experience and healthcare provider choice through deep user research with veterans and service design

Independent Strategy Consultant
New York, NY | June 2019-March 2020

- **Generated $1M+ in project proposals** and secured 30+ pitch opportunities in 3 months as interim Director of Cities at Openbox Design
- **Designed evaluation strategy and framework** for NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's South Bronx placemaking initiative: Created research framework with evidence-based indicators and metrics for urban design interventions
- **Delivered user experience research** for PlayCore, Inc., designing surveys and communication tools for playground equipment manufacturer

Program Manager
Gehl Institute | New York, NY | June 2017-April 2019

- **Scaled global civic innovation initiatives,** managing multi-year, foundation-funded programs that influenced international urban planning policy and practice in the areas of civic innovation, public health, and equitable public infrastructure
- **Built and managed $500K research program** for Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, leading 18-month collaborative learning initiative with SME cohort, directing a team of 6 staff and consultants
- **Developed** *The Inclusive Healthy Places Framework*, a knowledge product establishing research basis and design standards for how social inclusion and equitable public space can promote health, now adopted by 10+ organizations
- **Launched and scaled the Public Life Data Protocol**, an open-source data standard, and designed governance structures, ethics protocols, and facilitated global stakeholder coordination
- **Co-developed Common Space platform** with Alphabet's Sidewalk Labs, creating an open-source public realm data collection app that generated 45+ pilot requests at launch; piloted app in Toronto with community organizations
- **Established global thought leadership platform** through 14+ keynote presentations, workshop facilitation, a 2-day place-based product launch, a 115-person civic data hackathon, two annual national conferences, and international master classes reaching thousands of design and planning professionals globally

Project Administrator & Senior Planner
NYC Department of Parks and Recreation | New York, NY | Nov. 2013-June 2017

- **Led equity program securing $450M+ in public investment** for underserved neighborhoods through data-driven site selection, community engagement, and research partnerships, increasing agency budget for programs within my portfolio by 460% through innovative program design, financing strategies, and stakeholder coalition-building across government

SELECTED 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, 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.

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.

SELECTED TALKS

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

- **Developed the Community Parks Initiative (CPI)**: $285M data-driven, equity-focused capital program that transformed 72 high-need parks citywide; NYC parks expanded program to $1B total funding commitment for 167 parks by 2032 and recognized with an American Planning Association award (2020)
- **Created an original ROI model for parkland** and successfully positioned a $150M funding ask to City Hall, establishing the Anchor Parks program
- **Secured $1.25M in state and federal grants** for Harlem River Park development, connecting East Harlem residents to 10 acres of new waterfront access and greenway infrastructure, helping the city to complete Manhattan's waterfront greenway; strengthened agency relationship with local leaders and community
- **Designed agency's first data-driven equity framework** and policy foundation for equitable resource allocation across NYC's 30,000+ acres of parkland, influencing municipal park planning nationwide
- **Transformed Parks' engagement strategy**, reaching 3,400+ residents through redesigned community outreach processes for CPI and Anchor Parks programs alone; positioned agency to secure ongoing funding for outreach staff and modeled a scalable co-design strategy that became agency best practice
- **Built $3M CUNY School of Public Health research partnership** funded by NIH to conduct longitudinal community health impact studies, and collaborated with NC State University researchers to create evidence for park-health policy connections

Urban Planner
Manhattan Borough President's Office | New York, NY | Dec. 2012-Nov. 2013

- **Managed 10+ major development projects through NYC's Uniform Land Use Review Process** (ULURP), ensuring regulatory compliance with zoning while balancing community needs and development objectives
- **Delivered strategic policy, technical analysis, and public testimony** to NYC Planning Commission on high-stakes land use proposals, fulfilling Borough President's statutory advisory role in citywide development decisions affecting millions of residents
- **Built stakeholder coalitions** as primary liaison between Borough President's Office and community stakeholders, resolving conflicts and facilitating consensus on contested development initiatives

Urban Planning Consultant
WXY Architecture + Urban Design | New York, NY | June-Dec. 2012

- **Authored pioneering EV infrastructure policy** for New York State, co-creating the first comprehensive policy, design, and implementation guidance for electric vehicle charging infrastructure, funded by NYSERDA and Georgetown Climate Center, establishing statewide implementation standards
- **Co-produced influential policy and design toolkit,** including 2 white papers and design guidelines based on qualitative, quantitative, and spatial research; deliverables adopted as official state best practices and remain current policy guidance 12+ years later
- **Provided technical advisory services** to state government agency on emerging clean transportation infrastructure policy and implementation strategies

Program Assistant
Design Trust for Public Space | New York, NY | Jan.-Sept. 2011

- **Supported high-impact research initiatives** (Five Borough Farm and Made in Midtown), contributing to multi-stakeholder applied research that influenced NYC public space and economic development policy
- **Coordinated research operations** for two concurrent projects involving diverse stakeholders

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

The Lab at OPM: Facilitator and Course Designer for Human-Centered Design Fundamentals, Civic Design Studio, Problem Framing for Solution Finding, and Designing Accessible Communications (2020-2024)

Temple University: Associate Adjunct Professor, Tyler School of Art and Architecture, "Design, Behavior, and Culture" and "The History and Form of Cities" (2019)

Pratt Institute: Graduate Studio TA (2011-2012)

CORE EXPERTISE

Strategy & Innovation: Strategic Planning; Foresight; Visioning; Theories of Change; Change Management; Organizational-Level Product Strategy; Problem Framing and Alignment; Stakeholder Mapping; Creative Ideation; Prototyping

Service Design & User Research: User Experience Research; Mixed-Methods Research Design and Planning; Maps, Blueprints, Diagrams, and Models; User Interviews; Usability Testing; Observational Studies; Qualitative Research Synthesis; Translating Research to Insights

Product & Program Delivery: Facilitated Sprint Planning; Goal Setting (KPIs, Journey-Level Metrics); Agile Project Management and Prioritization; Product Vision and Strategy; Roadmaps; Client and Stakeholder Management; Lean Principles; Figma, Jira, Mural, Adobe CS

Policy & Engagement: Workshop Design; Workshop Facilitation; Public Engagement Process Design; Change Management; Capacity Building; Instruction Design; Voice of the Customer Programs and Data; Customer Experience; Communications and Storytelling; Budget Planning

Leadership & Management: Leading Cross-functional Teams; Managing Individual Contributors; Partnership Development; Budget Development; Stakeholder Management; Federal and Local Government Experience