

Putting people at the heart of government communication

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Sludge: the frictions that make it harder for people to achieve their goals and intentions



Where do we find sludge in government communication?



Information and forms that are hard to navigate and not written in plain English



Onerous and confusing compliance requirements



Excessive **wait times**



Complex **decision points**



Sludge also includes the psychological and systemic barriers that make it harder for people to engage

Embarrassment, anxiety, distrust, exclusion



What happens when instead of sludge, we put people at the heart?



24% increase in children attending child health checks



At least **1 hour saved** for customers applying for a Companion Card



1 hour saved in the process of applying to become a bus driver



What do people say about busting sludge?



"(you) don't want to fill out a 4 hour form for someone to tell you you're not eligible"



"they make it really hard, and that's deterring people... People have busy lives, especially families"



Busting 'sludge': tools from behavioural science that put people at the heart of govt. communications

Our Context

New South Wales Government (Australia) set an aspiration to be the 'world's most customer centric government':

- Positive experiences and effective service delivery builds trust
- Trust builds engagement and inclusion with services for better outcomes

Key elements of the *people centered approach* include:

- **Strategy and accountability:** Customer Strategy and [State of the Customer Report](#)
- **Service commitments** (or standards): 6 NSW [Customer Commitments](#) (e.g. act with empathy)
- **Voice of customer:** [Customer Experience Survey](#)
- **Workforce capability:** [CX Hub](#) and toolkit

The Behavioural Science contribution to 'people at the heart'

NSW Behavioural Insights Unit, working across NSW Government, and located in Department of Customer Service, provides:

- Behavioural interventions and experiments
- Rapid advice
- Behaviour Smart organisations (capability building)

Sludge Audit Method and Tool

A systematic approach to identify, quantify and eliminate sludge. A tool that operationalises the audit method, builds data and enables actions – all grounded in the NSW Customer Commitments

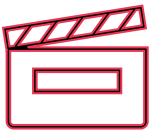
Sludge Toolkit and Guides

Evidence-based guides giving you practical advice on how to reduce sludge in 6 key customer communication channels

Sludge-a-thons, Sludge Academy and skills workshops

Support, guidance and capability building for public servants, with some focus on communications (eg. 'writing for customer' workshops)





Action: Five tips for sludge-free communication



1. Purpose and call-to-action

- Do you understand your audience and your purpose?
- Is there a clear 'call-to-action'?
- Is the purpose clear?



2. Design and structure

- Is the structure easy to navigate?
- Does the most important information stand out?



3. Language and content

- Is the letter or email personalised?
- Is the language easy to understand?
- Is the content limited to the key message?
- Have you highlighted what others are doing?
- Have you used an influential messenger?



4. Prompt action

- Are there clear directions on how to take the next steps?
- Are there planning prompts or checklists?
- Are there default options?
- Is it clear how much progress customers have made?
- Is any additional support provided to support customer follow through?



5. Measure and test

- **Identify measures (including outcomes)**
- **Test changes**
- **Communicate benefits**



Page views



Hyperlink clicks



Downloads



Wait times



Drop off



Access support

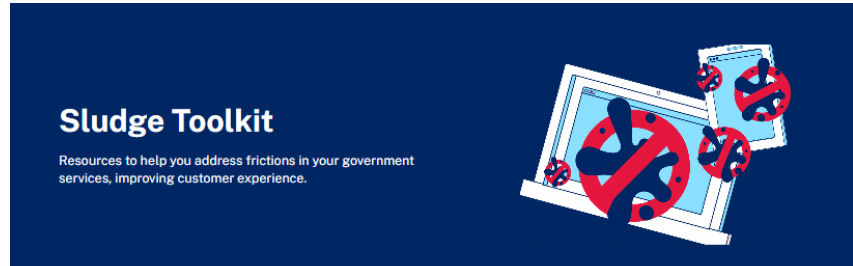


Complaints



Completion rate







Bonus: Are you interested in going further – try sludge audits!?



Support is available – see our toolkit!

<https://www.nsw.gov.au/behavioural-insights-unit>

Use these sludge guides (PDFs) to help you make service improvements

 <p>Reducing sludge on websites Make your websites accessible, clear and easy to use.</p> <p>→</p>	 <p>Reducing sludge in letters and emails Make your letters and emails purposeful, clear and designed with your customers' needs in mind.</p> <p>→</p>	 <p>Reducing sludge in forms Make your forms easy to find, understand, complete and submit.</p> <p>→</p>
 <p>Reducing sludge on the phone and face-to-face Make your phone and face-to-face interactions simple, easy and effective.</p> <p>→</p>	 <p>Reducing sludge in text messages Make your text messages clear, simple and credible.</p> <p>→</p>	 <p>Reducing sludge in apps Make your apps accessible, clear and easy to use.</p> <p>→</p>



What is a 'sludge audit'?

A sludge audit identifies and quantifies unnecessary frictions (i.e. sludge) in a government service, such as a complex, paper application form or a confusing website.

The audit findings guide solution development for process improvements based on behavioural science.