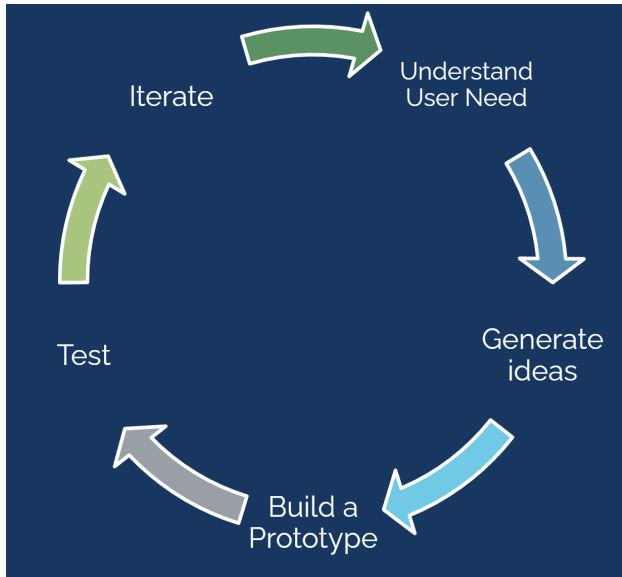# Co/Act: Human Centered Design for Activists

Participant Guide

NDI

Co/Act: Human Centered Design for Activists

HCD is a cyclical process

What is human-centered design? How can it help activists be more effective?

Today, technology products and services surround us–in our pockets, homes, kitchens, workplaces and public spaces. Human-centered design is the approach that ensures these products and services are accessible, intuitive, and easy to use. It is an approach focused on solving complex problems using empathy and other techniques that understand user needs to design digital products that both look nice AND are easy to use by all different communities Activists who are trying to affect social change will benefit from adopting a human-centered design framework: how can your message reach the right group of people in the modern marketplace using the tools they interact with every day?

Human-centered design is a cyclical and iterative process that starts with a few key questions: who a digital product, service, or campaign is meant for, what are that audience's needs and wants, how can this project support those needs and how can you reach them? These user insights generate new ideas, which are quickly built into a prototype (or simple, first iteration) and put in the hands of users to gather feedback, iterating based on that feedback.This framework helps teams create products, services, and campaigns that meet people where they are and speak to them in words they can understand. Human-centered products are more accessible and usable, and as a result more likely to have a greater impact in the world, especially related to software and technology. Whether you're studying the role of social media and hate speech in India, fighting internet shutdowns in Cameroon, or building advocacy campaigns for marginalized groups in Colombia, understanding what makes products and services successful can be transformative.

So even if you are not a designer by trade, you can use the lessons of human-centered design in your writing, research and advocacy work- it's applicable in so many practices! The activities outlined in this Co/Act toolkit blend human-centered design with principles of inclusion, activism, and community organizing. Co/Act will help you design more powerful products, services, and campaigns by centering them on your community, stakeholders, and colleagues - ensuring that the end result is more inclusive and therefore democratic.

Ready to get started? If you are facilitating your team's human-centered design experience, begin your journey with our facilitator's guide. If you are a participant, take a look at our participant guide.

How to Use Co/Act

So you are ready to design your next product, service, or campaign. How do you get started with Co/Act?

Toolkit Guidance

The Co/Act Toolkit consists of seven modules, and each Co/Act module includes key concepts and terms, an activity (or activities), and tips and tricks that are key in developing user-centered products, services, or campaigns. Modules can be done over the course of a few days or over a period of months. While Co/Act gives you the flexibility to pick and choose your modules, later modules build on the insights from previous ones. You should engage with *all* modules in the following order for the most holistic experience:

1. Ecosystem Mapping
2. Identifying a Target Audience
3. User Research & User Personas
4. Revisiting the Question: Assumption Testing
5. Brainstorming & Ideation
6. Rapid Prototyping & Usability Testing
7. Sustainably Building your Product, Service or Campaign

The toolkit is divided into a facilitator's guide and a participant guide. The participant guide includes key concepts and terms, information on each module, and tips for participants as they complete the activity. The facilitator's guide includes more information on how to run each activity and tips for facilitation.

Your Fellow Participants

For human-centered design approaches to be inclusive and their products to work for a wide audience, it is essential that they bring unique and different voices into conversation with one another. The most successful use of Co/Act will include 4-6 (no more than 8) individuals with different perspectives and expertise. Your participant group needs to be gender-balanced and include individuals of different sexual orientations and gender identities, races, age, disabilities, and ethnicities. Your Co/Act participants may include your IT expert, your community outreach and gender or inclusion expert, and the program manager expected to implement your idea. You can also decide the inclusion of organizational leadership and other higher-level stakeholders (such as donors) as core participants based on buy-in, organizational culture, or other relevant factors. Remember, as all modules build on previous work, you want to try to have the same group of people involved in all activities for this process.

Image of group discussion

Do No Harm

As you move through the Co/Act toolkit, remember the principle of Do No Harm (DNH). DNH is an analytical and practical approach that helps minimize risk and avoid unintended consequences. DNH does not remove risk, but rather helps identify any potential adverse effects.

Before you begin, consider an initial analysis or assessment to understand your context and any potential unintended harms. Think through how you might mitigate the risks, perhaps through alternative approaches, options, or partnerships. As you design and implement your product, service, or campaign, revisit and update your mitigation strategy to reflect emerging vulnerabilities and risks that may have not existed or were not as high risk initially. Work closely with the communities most impacted to ensure their needs and priorities are properly reflected in the final product and that the result does not cause additional harm or exacerbate existing vulnerabilities.

Don't forget!

Successful products, services and campaigns often take multiple attempts to get right. Human-centered design is grounded in the idea of iteration, constantly adapting and improving based on user feedback. So as you go through the Co/Act Toolkit, remember that the first attempt of your product, service, or campaign will require revision. That is to be expected and all part of the process! As your idea comes to life, completing additional cycles of the Co/Act Toolkit will help you further refine your product, service, or campaign.

A couple final tips before you start:

- Document, document, document! As you go through the exercises, remember to write down key discussions and insights. If you like, you can designate a person to take notes for each activity (remember, it doesn't have to be the same person every time)

- Creativity can be hard. Each Co/Act module has specific suggestions you can use if you get stuck, but also remember to take breaks (stretching, food, music, etc) to keep the energy flowing.

Ready to start? Turn to the "Ecosystem Mapping" module to start your Co/Act journey.

Module: Ecosystem Mapping

Module Goals

Post-it wall to understand issue

The first module that begins your HCD journey is Ecosystem Mapping.You and your team may already be familiar with ecosystem mapping; it's similar to a literature review, stakeholder analysis, or landscape analysis. Whether you have done many ecosystem maps previously or this is your first time, this module will help you and your team align on your project goals.

Ecosystem mapping is a great way to zoom out and see the entire landscape of the problem you're working on. It is helpful to do an ecosystem map at the start of every project, with partners, stakeholders, and your extended team, to ensure you are all on the same page, with the same knowledge and understanding of the project's goals, timelines, frameworks and focuses. In this module, knowledge sharing is key as you evaluate pre-existing policies and programming that impact your issue area and the actors present in this space.

Maybe you've already done something similar to ecosystem mapping for your issue area, or your project has already started and you've already looked at this problem deeply. Ecosystem mapping is still a helpful tool to ensure all team members have the same foundational knowledge. Based on your team's previous work, your facilitator will select a full or condensed version of Ecosystem mapping.

The Exercises

Depending on your team's previous work, your facilitator will lead a full or condensed version of ecosystem mapping. The full exercises contain three short activities. The first activity will help your group come to a consensus on the overarching social issue you are trying to address; the second activity will encourage you

KEY CONCEPTS AND TERMS

Theory of Change: A theory of change is a tool that you can use to clarify your product, service or campaign's overall strategy, articulate why you think it will work, how you will know if it is working, and what you will need to put it in place. Theories of change define how and why a desired change can come about in a particular context. While theories of change aren't commonly used as part of a traditional human-centered design process, they are a time-tested tool in fields like international development and social change activism. Using a theory of change in the design process can help cement what your goals are, why you are doing what you are doing, what you aim to achieve and how you will achieve it.

Ecosystem Mapping: An ecosystem map is a visual representation of a process, flow, or system that highlights relationships in a particular context. Ecosystem mapping can help identify the scope of the project and ensure feasibility of the chosen strategy.

to view the issue area through diverse perspectives, and the third activity will help you contextualize this topic within the different power and information dynamics in your context.

The condensed version of the exercises will assist the team in aligning on the project's goals, deliverables, timelines, and constraints. In the condensed version, you will further map out your project, problem statement and your focused user group.

Before you get started, remember that your product, service, or campaign is only going to be as accessible, inclusive and representative as the perspectives you integrate. Is your Co/Act team inclusive of different men, women, and diverse gender identities and sexual orientations, ages, disabilities, ethnicities, etc.? If not, think about how you can incorporate new voices into your participant group.

In Practice: Applying Ecosystem Mapping

To help illustrate how to use this module, read the short fictional case study below.

Meet Alex. Alex works for a local civil society organization in the fictional country of North Olania. The mission of the organization is promoting gender equality in politics, and as part of a new grant, they are looking to develop a new report and a complementary website.

Alex's team comes to their kick off meeting ready to do Ecosystem Mapping, and all the staff in attendance , like a lot of human rights organizations, already have a deep understanding of the context and problem area. Walking into the exercise , Alex thinks they should develop the report to address barriers for female, first time voters, but Alex's colleague Taylor thinks that the report and website should focus on the issues voters face. The majority of the group members think they should build a mobile app or website while writing the report but some team members, like Mel, think they should just focus on research and then build a potential technology product later because of constrained timelines. By understanding who everyone is centering or focusing on through the ecosystem map, the group can align on topics while fulfilling their grant obligations and ensuring their work has impact with their community. Their ecosystem mapping helped them see that both issues facing older voters and first time voters are considerable in their context and both groups are under-supported by civil society. In the next Co/Act exercise, Alex's team will start to narrow in on which group or groups they should prioritize in their project.

I'm Stuck...

Think about your day-to-day life and all the actors that you may interact with. You can also think about a friend or family member who is completely different, or even a celebrity's experience for inspiration! For each person, ask yourself how you go about your lives in different manners? How do you access information differently? What are your differing wants, hopes and daily tensions?

Don't forget!

Inclusion Tip: Remember, the 'users' of your project, researcher, service or campaign are diverse! Each potential target audience you are considering is inclusive of different men, women, and diverse gender identities and sexual orientations, ages, disabilities, ethnicities? As you move through the Co/Act modules, make sure you are considering all these diverse perspectives in your target audience - how can you make sure your product, service, or campaign meets the needs of all your target users.

What's next?

Your ecosystem map will be useful throughout this current project and beyond. For now, move on to the "identifying a target audience" module, but be sure to refer back to your ecosystem map after you develop your user persona and define your product, service, or campaign idea.

Module: Identifying a Target Audience

Module Goals

This module should be used to help define the group of individuals and communities who are the intended recipients of your product, service or campaign. Specifically knowing who our communities are and how best to focus on their needs is vital to focusing your project.

An effective product, service, campaign or specific type of research will need to cater to the needs of that community and users, but keep in mind, there will be many different kinds of users. For a product, service, or campaign to be successful it should be understandable and accessible for a variety of all different individuals, with different backgrounds, and experiences. Marginalization is especially important to keep in mind with this module to better understand how a group, because of its race, age, gender, religion, sexual orientation or gender identity, disability or other kind of identity can experience specific harm or generally be left out, from any kind of product, campaign or activist movement.

Co/Act Participants discuss potential user groups

The Exercise

In this exercise, you will identify which audience is the right audience for your overall goal by mapping power and influence of the actors you identified in your ecosystem map.

KEY CONCEPTS AND TERMS

Marginalization: Marginalization is when a group, a demographic, or selection of people are treated as inferior, insignificant or lesser because of their association or identification with that group. Marginalization results from persistent inequality and adversity resulting from discrimination, social stigma, and stereotypes.

Do No Harm: Do No Harm (DNH) is an analytical and practical approach that helps minimize risk and avoid unintended consequences. DNH does not remove risk, but rather helps identify any potential adverse effects of a program or intervention. DNH enables the ability to identify alternative programming options if necessary. DNH requires a strong and nuanced understanding of context and relationships and is an analysis that should be routinely revisited and updated.

In Practice: Applying Identifying a Target Audience

To help illustrate how to use this module, read the short fictional case study below.

Now that Alex's group has mapped the ecosystem on gender equality in politics in North Olania, they are ready to identify a target audience. The ecosystem map they developed highlighted issues faced by first time and older voters, but they want to narrow down and better understand this user group before proceeding.

Through this exercise, along with input from other external stakeholders, Alex's team begins to identify potential users of their project and potential communities to collaborate with. Sam, Alex's colleague, puts together a list that includes: college students, parents, government workers, elected representatives, and public service employees to name a few. Another colleagueMel leads a discussion on which groups have the ability to influence this selected topic and which may have limited power in the North Olania context. Through this discussion and the power and influence map they develop, they find that younger voters who identify as women are often ignored by other initiatives, but these voters make up a large percentage of all voters and can play an important role in influencing change. The team has tentatively selected young, female, first time voters to be their target audience, but realize they need to delve deeper and engage in user research to better understand their needs and lived experiences — only then will they be able to design an effective solution.

I'm stuck...

When thinking about your target audience, remember that they are not uniform. Embrace this diversity within and among your target audience and remember that your campaign, product, or service will cater to different individuals that come from different access to resources, information, networks, etc. As you discuss in your group, it can be helpful to think about this diversity (i.e. students include students with disabilities studying science).

Don't forget!

Inclusion Tip: What are the groups that are historically underrepresented within your issue area? And of those groups, are there those that face additional forms or marginalization (e.g. women with disabilities, young people from ethnic minority groups, transgender communities, etc.). Make sure to include those communities on your map and consider how your product would look different or be used differently by the diverse members that make up marginalized communities.

What's Next?

Once you have identified your target audience, use the findings from this module to move on to the "user research and user personas" module.

Module: User Research and User Personas

CO/ACT

Module Goals

This module helps you develop a richer picture of your target audience. This module is best used once you have identified your target audience and before coming up with product, service, or campaign ideas. In this module we have two related exercises: User Research and User Personas. We suggest starting with user research, which can be the foundation of the user personas.

The Exercises

User Research

By now, you have identified your target audience and are ready to understand them more deeply. However, before designing solutions, it is important for us to pause to try and identify our blind spots and confront our own perceptions and misconceptions: How do we know what we know? Is our knowledge based on assumptions and biases or evidence? This module will help you answer that question and ensure that you have the facts when deepening your understanding of user needs and pain points.

User research aims to understand the users who are the focus of your project, product, research or advocacy. User research can combine a variety of methods, like one-on-one interviews, group works, surveys, or even observing your users in a particular environment, like their home, or observing how they use a particular kind of product or software. While you may already be familiar with different user research techniques, the approach described in this module - non-directive interviewing - is hyper focused on your problem and technology usage to help surface different kinds of insights that will guide what you will make and how you will make it.

Non-directive interviewing is an essential tool when creating a human-centered product, service, or strategy because it creates space for you to listen to your target community. A good non-directive interview will almost always tell you things you didn't know and wouldn't have thought of yourself. In this set of activities, you will develop non-directive questions and meet with representatives of your target audience to gather additional insights on their preferences and behaviors.

KEY CONCEPTS AND TERMS

Non-directive Interviewing: Non-directive interviewing is a user research technique in which interviewers gather qualitative insights from individuals who are representative of potential users. In non-directive interviewing, the interviewer does not frame questions in terms of right or wrong answers or limited sets of options and avoids leading the interviewee to answer in particular ways or within particular value systems. Instead, the interviewer uses an open-ended approach to explore the interviewee's thoughts, attitudes, and beliefs. These questions can build on each other and from the user's answers.

User: In human-centered design terms, the person you are trying to reach is usually referred to as the "user" - as in the person using the website, accessing the service, or interacting with the product. But in activism your user might also be a person who is engaging with your organization, accessing your information or message, or participating in an event. When you see "user," just think "individual we are connecting with."

User Personas

A user persona is like a description a novelist would create of a character before writing them into the story. You create a persona that resembles someone you are actually trying to reach in order to help you understand how your product, service, or campaign would fit into their day-to-day life. The persona should include things like age, vocation (or lack of one), sexual orientation and gender identity, race, gender, disability, ethnicity, religion, geographic location, education level, and interests. These kinds of demographic information is helpful in creating a fuller picture of the user and to better understand their needs. It's also helpful for you in seeing how different kinds of groups can engage with your product, campaign or service.

It's important to make sure that your personas don't flatten the identity of users into a cardboard cut-out or single stereotype. In this exercise, you will adopt a human rights approach to developing your personas. You will consider what intersectional harms and human rights harms does your user group face based on their identity? What aspects of where they live and what they work on is related to your project? What are the actual limitations with technology, frictions, and hardships faced by the group? What are the material constraints that need to be considered → that could be web access, technology access, and threats faced to that group. All of this needs to be reflected in the user personas.

For this activity, you will be working in pairs to develop at least two user personas. The goal here is to be critical and helpful and reflect as much of the lived experiences of your users, along with technical constraints and any political, human rights harms they could be facing.
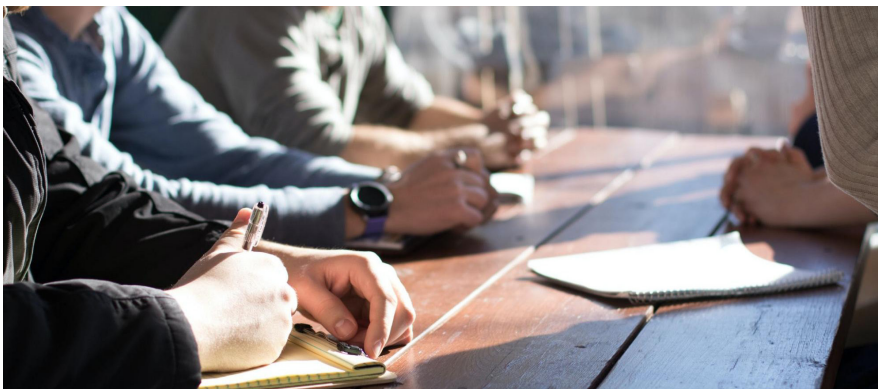
Group discussion

User persona: A user persona is a fictional representation of an individual that incorporates the needs, goals, and observed behavior patterns of your target audience.

User flow: The user flow takes the user persona and puts it in an everyday situation or scenario in engaging with a campaign or using a product or service. For example, a user flow could read "Maria, a forty year old mother and teacher, uses X when she does Y and Z." It helps situate and create real cases to help iron out details on building, iterating and creating user engagement.

Intersectionality:
Intersectionality is an analytical framework for understanding how aspects of a person's social and political identities combine and interact to create different modes of discrimination and privilege. While members of marginalized groups share common barriers, exclusion is rarely the result of any single identity factor. There are important variations in age, socio-economic status, gender, geography and other factors that impact individuals' experiences. At the same time, individuals exist within a context of interconnected power structures - such as laws, religious institutions, social norms - that shape to what degree their identities exclude them.

In Practice: Applying User Research and User Personas

To help illustrate how to use this module, read the short fictional case study below.

After developing their ecosystem and power and influence maps, Mel, Sam and Taylor decide to conduct user research to better understand the lived experiences and pain points of young, female first time voters. They start to write out the questions they have for their users, in a non-directive interview style. Many of these questions focus on the barriers young, first-time voters face to participate in civic discourse on gender equality issues, but also include questions on tech access and usage.

The team also identifies who they want to interview. While they are primarily focused on young, female first-time voters who haven't voted yet, they also decide to speak with new voters who have voted in the past few years, voting rights experts in North Olania, and community organizers who help young people register to vote. In finding representatives of these communities, the team prioritizes diversity, across genders, faiths, location, etc.After doing a handful of interviews, the team comes back and reviews what they learned, specifically asking if there are additional questions they need to ask. After adding a few more questions, they continue interviews.

After completing their interviews, the team looks at all the data they have gathered to identify some themes: what are the similarities and differences in the experiences and needs of young, first time voters. For example, they have learned that this group of voters generally gets their information from texting and WhatsApp on Android devices. The team uses these groupings and differences to develop their user personas.

I'm stuck...

- Stuck on a location for your non-directive interviews? Public spaces (like public libraries, parks, or coffee shops) can be an easy place for you to interact with your target community. Just remember, public locations should be easy to access (geographically and financially) for your target audience and include any necessary accommodations for persons with disabilities.

- Use inspiration from your daily life, as well as the data from your user research, to inform the development of your user personas. The more real your personas are, the better!

Don't forget!

Inclusion Tip: Whether you are doing user research or developing user personas, think back to the intersectionality definition above. If you are trying to change the mind of that MP, who is that MP really? What are the other identities that person holds? How do these identities form this MP's sense of power and how does this direct or indirect influence and privilege impact the way they make decisions or do their job?

During the user research activities, remember to actively engage in the conversation - pause, nod, don't interrupt and be patient if the conversation seems to go "off topic." That's often when you learn something unexpected and important! Keep asking "why?", even if it feels repetitive, to get to the interviewee's beliefs and motivations. Remember, we want to understand our users' opinions and emotions, rather than focusing on fact-based responses. Make sure the interviewee feels listened to and always thank them for volunteering their time to support your effort. If consent is given, try to interview in pairs so that one person can record or take notes. These notes have the insights you've learned from your conversations and will be important as you begin brainstorming your product, service or campaign. Remember to hold a debrief session after each interview to discuss what both team members heard, what seemed interesting, insightful or odd. Think through how you can use each conversation to refine your persona.

When developing user personas, it is important not to simply generate personas based on your group's assumption. Be sure to explicitly note down the assumptions that came up during the user persona exercise. An important part of the persona development process is identifying assumptions and unknowns about our users and disarming stereotypes.

What's next?

With your user research and user personas done, it's time to move onto the "Assumption Testing: Revisiting Your Question" module.

Module: Revisiting Our Question - Assumption Testing

Module Goals

Before we jump into the 'creation' process of building concrete interventions to address our selected issue, it's important to pause and reflect on what you've found and done so far. In this module, we will **revisit the question** and **test assumptions** the team may have at this point in the process.

When starting ideation and validating your assumptions, ask yourself:

- Does it feel like anything is missing?

- Does anything need to be reconsidered, looked at again or seen from a new angle?

- Does there need to be more research or threat modeling?

- Are there additional stakeholders who need to be included?

It's common to continuously stop to identify gaps during the project or process. Fixing those gaps will ensure there aren't blindspots in the future or areas that will impact your desired outcomes.

The Exercises

Exercise 1: Pause and Review
Review the ecosystem map, the power and influence map, and the user personas you have developed. Your facilitator will lead a discussion to help identify any gaps.

Exercise 2 : Assumption Testing
After Exercise 1, you'll have identified additional assumptions that need to be validated. Those findings will become the basis of this exercise to clarify any outstanding assumptions you have. As a team, you may do more non-directive interviews and ultimately update your user personas accordingly.

Review of information

In Practice: Applying Assumption Testing

To help illustrate how to use this module, read the short fictional case study below.

At the beginning of this project, Alex's team had thought the initial barriers for young, female first time voters was apathy in the political process and lack of time to vote or register to vote. After engaging in user research and developing their user personas, the team realizes the need to pause and see if their user research has complicated any of these initial assumptions. After reviewing the insights they have gathered and through the assumption testing exercises, Alex's team realizes it's not just a lack of time, but a lack of clear and easy to find resources on how to register for voting that deeply affect young, first time voters Specifically, they realize that these users are having issues finding information online about early voting centers and centers that are open after the work day.

I'm stuck...

Refer back to your ecosystem map, power and influence map, and user personas. Review the notes from your user research. Think about some of the biggest themes you've seen or some of the more pressing urgent findings. Those are what will help guide and also constrain your work.

Don't forget!

Inclusion Tip: Remember everyone on your team might have different findings and takeaways based on who they spoke to during non-directive interviews. It's really important to ensure that the perspectives of all the different interviewees are acknowledged and incorporated into the design of your product, service, and campaign. Even if a finding seems small or unpopular, take the time to address it.

What's Next?

Now that everyone is aligned and our research questions and focuses have been re-validated, let's move into Brainstorming and Ideation!

# Module: Brainstorming and Ideation

Module Goals

By now in the design process, you should have an idea of who your users are, what their needs are, and what currently exists in the technology or product landscape. Ideally, you will also start thinking about what doesn't serve your users. This module expands on all this information you have already gathered.

The goal of this module is to go really wide with ideas. Don't be scared of coming up with the wrong idea. It's okay to come up with concepts you will ultimately discard. You want to work through all possible ideas (even ones that feel not very well thought out) to find the best few ideas for your users. Sometimes, the first idea a group or designer will have for a product may not be the BEST fit for their users, even if they know their users and communities really well.

The Exercises

In this module, there are a variety of exercises to use! **You do not have to do all of the exercises, just** select the ones that feel most relevant, applicable and fun. Work with your facilitator to identify which exercises you will do.
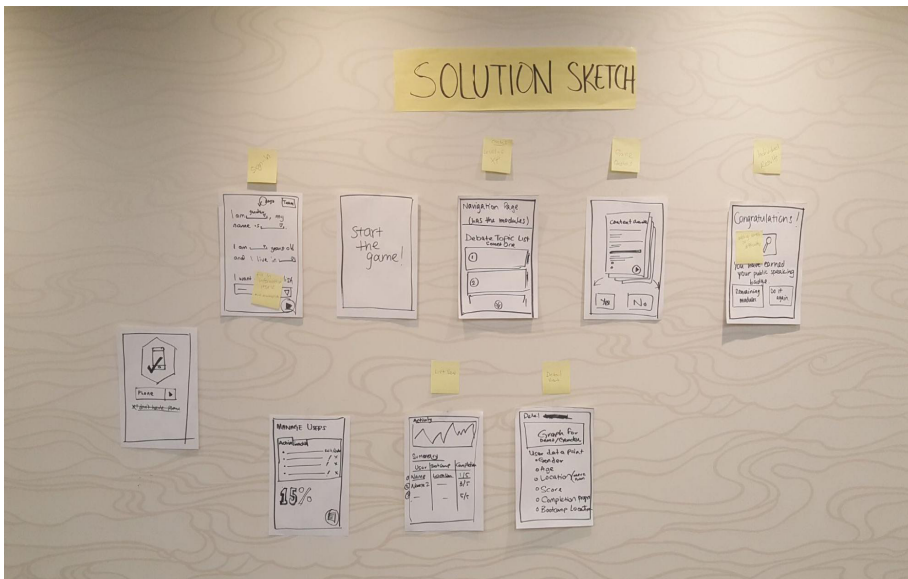
Participant drawings of potential

KEY CONCEPTS AND TERMS

Brainstorming: Brainstorming refers to a series of exercises to help see what currently exists, where there are gaps, and how those gaps reflect user needs. Brainstorming (sometimes referred to as product strategy or strategic thinking in the design world) is helpful in figuring out what your audience needs, what has resonated for them previously, or how there isn't a product, campaign, or movement that fits your audience.

Ideate: Ideation is a specific design and technology term that means to build on previously collected research, previous campaigns or movements or products, and push them in a brand new direction. Ideation is the human-centered design way to design with iteration.

In Practice: Applying Brainstorming and Ideation

To help illustrate how to use this module, read the short fictional case study below.

Now that the team has realized that easy to find resources and help getting to voting centers is key, the question remains: is it possible to solve for those barriers, and if so, how? Through the Brainstorming and Ideation exercises, the team starts to assemble their individual top five ideas or takeaways.

One of the users Sam interviewed wished there was a mobile friendly website that provided information on how and where to register to vote, and one of Mel's users wished there was a special bus service or group rideshare program that could assist in reaching after hour's voting centers. One of Taylor's users wished there was a map that showed all of the centers online. With each team member starting to list out findings, potential ideas, and focus areas, the team can see what is feasible for their organization given their expertise, time, budget and any other constraints.

After going through the exercises, the team coalesces around the idea that a mobile friendly website with downloadable maps, and bite-sized information on how to register to vote along with transportation suggestions to after hours voting centers can help alleviate a wide variety of user needs.

I'm Stuck...

Think through the following questions if you need a little inspiration:

1. Does this suggestion fit our users' needs?

2. Are we already imagining a finished product? If so, is this product clouding our judgment?

3. Is the product idea grounded in the user research? Am I listening to my users or making assumptions about their needs?

4. What are all of the users' needs, from the most benign to the most extreme?

5. (select a user need) how might we change this or improve it?

6. (take the same user need) what happens if one aspect of our product changes? What does it do to this user need?

7. (take the same user need) If a political situation changes in this user's home country, how does this change the context of them using our product?

8. What are 'edge cases' for our product? Are these edge cases called by a product or a lack of product?

9. Can we map edge cases into a user story?

Don't forget!

Inclusion Tip: As you are ideating, refer back to the intersectional user personas you developed. Remember that your target audience is not uniform. How is your idea going to cater to the needs of individuals with and without disabilities such as people who are blind or have low vision for example?

What's next!

Congratulations on coming up with some great ideas! Now that you've selected your top few, move on to the "Rapid Prototyping and Usability Testing" module.

Module: Rapid Prototyping & Usability Testing

Module Goals

Congratulations! You have now completed the "Brainstorming & Ideation" module and selected a few interesting and effective ideas you are interested in pursuing! The activities in this module are designed to help quickly evaluate your top idea(s), gather feedback, and refine the concept that you would like to invest your resources in. Specifically, you will flesh out your concept by developing a prototype and testing this initial idea with users.

The Exercises

This is a two part activity. In the first part, you will work to bring to life the ideas you identified as most promising in the last module. In the second, you will undertake user testing to gather feedback on your prototype.

Usability, or user, testing is an important and diverse area of work with many organizations and individuals specializing specifically on this topic. While this activity does not capture the full scope or nuances of usability testing, it provides a lightweight start. If you are interested and able to pursue more in-depth usability testing, consider working with experts in your community. For more advanced usability testing guides, take a look at usability.gov's methods and tools on usability testing and/or these tips from the UX Collective.
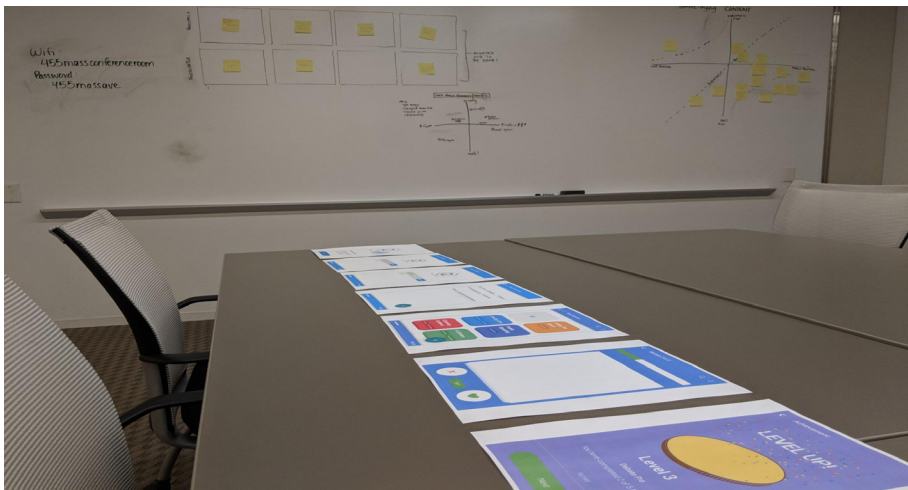
Example Wireframe

Prototype: A prototype is an early or initial version of a product, service, or campaign that is primarily used to gather feedback from potential users. A prototype allows you to quickly test and evaluate your solution before investing large amounts of time or money into one particular solution. Prototypes can take many different forms, they can be rough and dirty, or really well polished. For example, a prototype of a new ergonomic chair could be made from clay, a website can be a simple drawing of its home page on a piece of paper, or a campaign could be a mock roleplay simulation. What's great about prototypes is that they should convey your vision, but the vision doesn't have to be finalized. What's important is that you've articulated what you want to say, and now you can test it.

Usability Testing: Usability testing describes the process of gathering feedback from potential users on a product, service, or campaign. During a usability test, individuals representative of your target audience would be asked to complete tasks related to the purpose of your solution (for example, use the tool to send an email to your MP about issues in your local community) while interviewers observe, listen,

In Practice: Applying Rapid Prototyping & Usability Testing

To help illustrate how to use this module, read the short fictional case study below.

The team decides to start sketching out what their mobile friendly website could look like. Mel and Sam sketch out the website, imagining what the landing page looks like, and which information goes where. They decide to feature straightforward but minimal text on the landing page, describing different sections of the website which are: how to register, where to vote during the workday, where to vote after 5pm. Each section has downloadable maps with the exact locations, and phone numbers of the voting centers and registration centers. Each section has a pdf that can be emailed or texted to users, with relevant information and other how-to's. This way the users can find information on the go and save information when they have low bandwidth. Before beginning the full development of their website, however, the team wants to show these drawings to users to make sure that what they are designing is responding to the problems the users identified.

They test the home page with users and realize that the layout may not be very clear. For example, just one very short paragraph wasn't enough information for users who also wanted to know: who made this page, why it was made, etc. Without this information, the potential users didn't necessarily trust the information on the site. The team revises their prototype accordingly.

KEY CONCEPTS CONTINUED

and take notes. The information gathered during a usability test can be valuable in understanding how your proposed product, service, or campaign can be used in the real world.

Accessibility: A product that is accessible is one that can be used equally by people of all abilities and disabilities. Accessible tools work for a diverse range of users by addressing barriers and provide a variety of ways for people to engage. For digital tools, accessibility might include fonts that are easily readable, the use of alternate text, and ensure colors for text, graphics, and background have sufficient contrasts.

I'm Stuck...

- As you're designing your prototype, remember to refer back to your user personas for inspiration and don't forget intersectionality and accessibility! What types of support would individuals with differing and diverse identities and experiences need to use your product, service, or campaign effectively?

- If you can, consider involving your target users in creating a prototype with you. Co-creating with your intended audience can not only bring new ideas, but also help create buy-in and excitement around your tool! Co-creation also helps identify possible barriers to use and access while ensuring ideas are accessible, inclusive, and do not result in additional harm.

Don't forget!

Inclusion Tip: Remember to include individuals from marginalized communities in your usability tests. In particular, asking underrepresented groups "what have I missed with this prototype?" can provide a wealth of additional improvement ideas. And for accessibility, disabled persons organizations are always a great option for testing.

There are a lot of resources available (for purchase or for free) that can help you elevate your prototype and make it look more sophisticated. For example, consider using wireframing tools for website or app development. Popular wireframing tools include: Google's Sketch, Balsamiq, Figma, Sketch, and Adobe Illustrator. If your product is a website or app, you can test for accessibility by using the WAVE Web Accessibility Evaluation Tool. There are also many options to evaluate website and app accessibility for mobile devices.

What's next?

With a concept for your product, service, or campaign, that has already been user-tested, you are ready to move on to the final Co/Act module — "Sustainably Building your Product, Service, or Campaign"

Module Goals

By now, through the Co/Act framework, you have:

- Thought about the social issue you wish to address and how it manifests in your community

- Identified your target audience, understood your users' intersecting identities, and developed user personas that strongly reflect your users needs, wants, and pain-points

- Brainstormed a number of creative ideas that you tested with users to select your top one

This module is focused on supporting the technical development of your product, service, or campaign.

The Exercises

Through these exercises, you will think critically about prioritizing their ideas, timelines, and budget and feasibility considerations. Due to resource, time, or other constraints, not all ideas can be acted on for the first iteration of the tool. This module will help you develop a MVP backlog to determine the most important features to focus on initially, while creating a guide for future development. You will also think critically about implementing their idea, considering what external expertise and support is required to make the concept a reality.

Iteration is key to sustainable development.

KEY CONCEPTS AND TERMS

MVP (Minimum Viable Product): Similar to a prototype, a minimum viable product is the simplest version of an idea that allows you to validate and evaluate your solution. While a prototype is the first draft of the idea and cannot be used as a complete solution to your social problem (for example, you cannot sit on a clay chair), the MVP is a more complete solution that can be used by your target users as is. It may not have all the functionalities that you would like (for example, the chair may not have wheels), but it still addresses the issue at hand (for example, you can sit on the chair). An important reminder- MVPs can also be sent out as the final product. MVPs can exist to be the most pared-down but feasible idea.

Iterative Development: Iterative development emphasizes the need to break your final product, service, or campaign into discrete bite-sized pieces. Particularly relevant for technology products, iteration- -or the idea of continuous building, feedback, and modification—is a cornerstone of human-centered design. When envisioning an advocacy workshop series that includes training on topics A to Z, iterative development would recommend

In Practice: Applying sustainably building your product, service, or campaign

To help illustrate how to use this module, read the short fictional case study below.

With the information gathered from user testing, the team meets again to discuss their prototype and finalize the features and functionality the first iteration of this site should have. In putting together this list, or backlog, the team reassess their research question and their proposed prototype: does this fulfill their question and their communities' needs? Can they build what they are imagining in the time and funding available? Sam invites a technical expert to consult and the team realizes that they won't be able to include all the features they want to include in the first product. For example, travel support information and connecting with volunteer drivers just won't be possible at this stage. The team notes features like these that they would want to include in the next version of their website and makes a plan to reevaluate the use and functionality of the website in 6 months. Finally, with the support of their external technical expert, the team begins identifying a vendor and bringing the website to life!

KEY CONCEPTS CONTINUED

building resources for trainings A and B, gathering feedback on them and improving them accordingly. The feedback would also help you decide whether training C and D are necessary or if training F needs to be done first. Iterative development allows you to sustainably grow your solution in the most impactful and cost-effective manner.

Backlog: A user experience (UX) or design backlog is a great way to 'stack' or list features. Think of it as an ordered list- what do you want, what do you need, and who should work on what? Does one feature need to be created to make other features?

I'm Stuck...

While this may seem extremely design focused, it's important to think about what the 'spirit' of these exercises are for. When planning a campaign, you may have a lot of ideas and points you want to get across. What's your big picture? What are the nuances of your idea? How do they fit together? Using these exercises can help organize and then focus your ideas to create a cohesive campaign.

If you're stuck, try taking some of the ideas, and saying them aloud or acting them out. Do they make sense? Does something feel missing? The goal here is to be succinct but see how the ideas fit together.

Don't forget!

Inclusion Tip: As you move into the implementation phase of your product, service, or campaign, think about how you will continue to engage marginalized communities in actually developing your idea. How will they co-create future iterations of your idea? Does it resonate with your community and potential audiences? Will it work? What will it look like? These are all important questions to answer.

What's next? Keep Iterating!

Human-centered design is a continuous cycle of learning and iteration. Next steps may be you're ready to start hiring or really building out your project. Maybe you need to hire technical support to do that. Maybe you have the technical talent in-house and are ready to start developing or maybe you're ready to launch! Whatever the case, as you continue to advance your product, service, or campaign, refer back to these modules to keep learning about your users and their new needs and wants and brainstorming unique solutions.

Acknowledgements

CO/ACT