

Understand What People Need

We must begin digital projects by exploring and pinpointing the needs of the people who will use the service, and the ways the service will fit into their lives. Whether the users are members of the public or government employees, policy makers must include real people in their design process from the beginning. The needs of people — not constraints of government structures or silos — should inform technical and design decisions. We need to continually test the products we build with real people to keep us honest about what is important.

Key Questions

1. Who are your primary users?
2. What user needs will this service address?
3. Why does the user want or need this service?
4. Which people will have the most difficulty with the service?
5. Which research methods were used?
6. What were the key findings?
7. How were the findings documented? Where can future team members access the documentation?
8. How often are you testing with real people?

Checklist

Early in the project, spend time with current and prospective users of the service

Use a range of qualitative and quantitative research methods to determine people's goals, needs, and behaviors; be thoughtful about the time spent

Test prototypes of solutions with real people, in the field if possible

Document the findings about user goals, needs, behaviors, and preferences

Share findings with the team and agency leadership

Create a prioritized list of tasks the user is trying to accomplish, also known as “user stories”

As the digital service is being built, regularly test it with potential users to ensure it meets people’s needs

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