The **Discover phase** is the foundation of human-centered design. It begins not with solutions, but with a commitment to truly **understand the people we're designing for**. Three essential mindsets guide this phase: **Empathy, Seeking First to Understand,** and **Embracing Ambiguity.**



**Discover Mindsets**

Empathy and Understanding

**Empathy** means stepping into someone else’s world—seeing through their eyes, feeling what they feel, and understanding the challenges they face. It keeps people, not systems, at the heart of our work. When we lead with empathy, we move beyond assumptions and uncover meaningful insights that data alone can't provide.

**Seeking First to Understand** asks us to listen before acting. It’s about slowing down, asking good questions, and being present with what people share. This mindset helps us identify the real problems—not just the obvious ones—and lays the groundwork for more relevant and impactful solutions.

**Embracing Ambiguity** means being open to not having all the answers at the start. In human-centered design, this allows teams to explore the problem fully, listen deeply to user needs, and discover unexpected insights before jumping to solutions.

Together, these mindsets help us build trust, surface deeper insights, and set the stage for creative, inclusive design. The Discover phase is about **learning with humility and designing with heart**.

E



Seeking to Understand

(pdf resource)



Embrace Ambiguity

((pdf resource)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | |
| Person sitting with notebook  Leading with | |
| Empathy (PDF Resource)) |  |
|  |

Check out these quick reads on Discovery:

[*Getting Into the Discovery Mindset*](https://www.nngroup.com/articles/discovery-mindset/)[*7 Tips for Successful Discoveries*](https://www.nngroup.com/articles/7-tips-discovery/)

Understanding your customer is the essential starting point for designing services, policies, or solutions that truly meet their needs. Rather than assuming what people want or need, human-centered design begins by intentionally seeking to understand the real people involved—their goals, challenges, lived experiences, and context. This understanding allows us to shift from designing *for* people to designing *with* them, ensuring our work is relevant, respectful, and impactful.



**Understanding Your Customer**

Shifting for designing *for* people to designing *with* them

By taking the time to understand who your customers are and what matters to them, you lay the foundation for more equitable, empathetic, and effective outcomes. It also helps uncover gaps, assumptions, and potential barriers that might otherwise go unnoticed—especially for those whose voices are too often left out of decision-making processes.



**Equity Pause** Intentionally reflecting on who might be excluded or harmed

**Developing a Persona** Bringing typical

customer types to life

**Empathy Mapping** Exploring what people think, feel, say and do

**Influence Mapping** Identifying who is affected and who influences a project

# “To walk a mile in your customer’s shoes, you have to take your own shoes off first.”

Brad Smith, CEO Intuit

**Influence mapping helps you see the full picture of people connected to your work – those who are affected, involved, or have influence.** It encourages teams to step back and ask:

* Who cares about this issue?
* Who holds power or decision-making authority?
* Who’s often left out but needs to be included?

By visualizing these relationships early, you can align your team, uncover hidden dynamics, and design more inclusive, informed, and empathetic solutions.

 **BEST PRACTICES**

**Balance is key.** Include a wide range of people for diverse perspectives – but keep it focused and relevant.

**Name roles, not groups.** Don’t lump people together. Say “parent” or “small business owner” instead of “public.”

**Make it visual.** Use simple icons for roles, arrows for relationships, and short labels to explain connections.

**Give them a voice.** Add a quote or summary of what each person or group cares about to keep priorities clear.

**BASIC STEPS**

1. **Define your focus.** What problem, decision, or opportunity are you mapping? Set the scope early.



**Influence Mapping**

A tool to determine who is affected by, or influences, a project

1. **Gather a team.** Bring in people with different lived experiences, roles, and perspectives.
2. **List people and roles.** Ask: Who’s involved, impacted, or influential? Think about individuals, community groups, agencies, staff, etc.
3. **Map relationships.** Use arrows to show influence, reliance, or collaboration. Label the arrows – e.g. “funds”, “relies on,” “approves.”
4. **Cluster related roles.** Group similar roles or communities (e.g., “frontline staff” or “families with school-aged kids”) and label them.
5. **Spot gaps and plan for next steps.** Identify who’s missing, who to involve next, and how to engage them. Assign follow-up actions.

**BENEFITS**

* Surfaces diverse and often overlooked perspectives.
* Builds shared understanding across teams.
* Guides how and when to engage people.
* Focuses attention on people, not just processes or systems.

**WHY USE INFLUENCE MAPPING?**

We’re moving away from the term “stakeholder” in favor of more inclusive language. “Influence mapping” emphasizes human roles and relationships – not just formal authority – and better reflects our values of equity, empathy, and meaningful participation.

******INFLUENCE MAPPING RESOURCES**

**Our Recommended Resources**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| *\*Your Washington is adopting more inclusive language by moving away from the term 'stakeholder,' but some of the resources provided may still use this word.* | |
| *If you want step-by-step instructions* | **Results Washington CoP March 2024:** *Engaging Stakeholders: From Project to Embedded Workplace Culture.*   * [Video](https://youtu.be/mgtHxgNQ6Rg?si=dOn5q4Cy3YQkJZjd) * [Presentation](https://results.wa.gov/sites/default/files/03.19.24_StakeholderEngagement-FINAL.pdf) * [Systems Worksheet](https://results.wa.gov/sites/default/files/SupportSystemsWorksheet.docx) * [Systems Mapping Handout](https://results.wa.gov/sites/default/files/SystemsMapping.docx) |
| *If you want to try it yourself* | * **Your Washington:** Influence Mapping Template (coming soon) * **Your Washington:** Power/Impact Template (coming soon) |
| *If you want to see an example* | * Coming soon |
| *If you want an online collaboration tool* | * [**Miro:** Complete Stakeholder Mapping Guide](https://miro.com/blog/stakeholder-mapping/) * [**Mural:** Stakeholder Mapping Template and Guide](https://www.mural.co/templates/stakeholder-mapping) |

******INFLUENCE MAPPING RESOURCES**

**Additional Resources**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Resource** | **Type** | **Offerings** |
| [**18F:** Stakeholder Influence Mapping](https://guides.18f.org/methods/discover/stakeholder-influence-mapping/) | Online Guide | * What stakeholder influence mapping is * Why you would do it * Steps |
| [**IDEO Design Kit**: Power Mapping](https://www.designkit.org/methods/power-mapping.html) | Online Guide | * Description * Steps * Downloadable Worksheet |
| [**LUMA Institute:** Stakeholder Mapping](https://app.mural.co/template/51cbb9d4-d064-4500-b441-0e805d93ef88/a2f93596-1e04-41e9-b9bc-8342d1fccc25) | Online Guide | * Method overview * Benefits * Quick guide * Helpful Hints |
| [**NN/g**: Stakeholder Analysis for UX Projects](https://www.nngroup.com/articles/stakeholder-analysis/) | Template Online Guide | * [Who’s a Stakeholder?](https://www.nngroup.com/articles/stakeholder-analysis/#toc-whos-a-stakeholder-1) * [Stakeholder Analysis](https://www.nngroup.com/articles/stakeholder-analysis/#toc-stakeholder-analysis-2) * [Update Your Stakeholder Maps](https://www.nngroup.com/articles/stakeholder-analysis/#toc-update-your-stakeholder-maps-3) * [Adding Attitude](https://www.nngroup.com/articles/stakeholder-analysis/#toc-adding-additude-4) * [NN/g: Excel Stakeholder Mapping](https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fmedia.nngroup.com%2Fmedia%2Farticles%2Fattachments%2Fstakeholder-mapping-template.xlsx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK) [Template](https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fmedia.nngroup.com%2Fmedia%2Farticles%2Fattachments%2Fstakeholder-mapping-template.xlsx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK) |
| [**U of Washington Redesign Toolkit:** Stakeholder Mapping](https://redesigntoolkit.io/stakeholder-mapping/) | Online Guide | * Links to worksheets and templates * Links to other resources * Steps, considerations, and references |
| [**YouTube:** What is a Stakeholder Analysis](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PXCo92Iag3g) | Video | * Tutorial for completing a stakeholder analysis |
| [**YouTube:** Stakeholder Register & Power Interest Guide](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2QhvKlQhleQ) | Video | * Tutorial for completing a Stakeholder Register and Power Interest Gude. |

**Empathy mapping helps you understand the deeper experiences, needs, and emotions of the people you're designing for.** It guides your team to “step into someone else’s shoes” by organizing what they say, do, think, and feel.

This tool uncovers what matters most to users – beyond assumptions – so you can design with real human insight.

**BEST PRACTICES**

**Use real quotes.** Ground the map in actual words and behaviors – not assumptions.

**Work as a team.** Diverse perspectives help you find richer insights.

**Stay specific.** Include concrete examples, not vague generalizations.

**Look for gaps or contradictions.** These can reveal important needs or tensions.

Use empathy mapping early in your design process – especially after research – to turn raw insights into a clear, human- centered understanding. It’s especially helpful when you’re trying to align a team, uncover hidden needs, or prepare for ideation with a stronger grasp of your user’s world.

* Builds empathy and shared understanding across your team.
* Surfaces deeper needs, motivations, and frustrations.
* Aligns everyone around a real person’s experience.
* Inspires ideas that are rooted in lived reality.

**BASIC STEPS**

1. **Pick your person. .** Choose a real person or customer to focus on – someone your design will impact.



**Empathy Mapping**

A Tool For Understanding What People Think, Feel, Say, and Do

1. **Gather your data.** Use interviews, observations, or feedback to bring in authentic perspectives.
2. **Set up your empathy map layout.** Create four quadrants labeled:
   * **Says** – What are they saying out loud?
   * **Thinks** – What might they be thinking?
   * **Does** – What actions are they taking?
   * **Feels** – What emotions are they experiencing?
3. **Fill it in.** Add quotes, behaviors, and feelings from each section using sticky notes or a digital tool.
4. **Spot insights.** Look for patterns or tension. What are their unmet needs? What matters most?
5. **Check and use.** Share the map with teammates or community members for feedback. Use it to guide decisions.

**BENEFITS**

**WHEN TO USE**

******EMPATHY MAPPING RESOURCES**

**Our Recommended Resources**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| *If you want step-by-step instructions* | **Results Washington Lean Conference October 2022:** *Design Thinking A Human-Centered Approach – minute 7*   * [Video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x8Br3QhJjTs) * [Presentation](https://results.wa.gov/sites/default/files/Design%20Thinking_PRESENTATION.pdf) * [Handout](https://results.wa.gov/sites/default/files/Design%20Thinking_HANDOUTS.pdf) |
| *If you want to try it yourself* | * **Your Washington:** Empathy Mapping Template (coming soon) |
| *If you want to see an example* | * Coming soon |
| *If you want an online collaboration tool* | * **Miro:** [Empathy Map template & Guide](https://miro.com/blog/templates-understanding-customers/#h-3-nbsp-empathy-map) (Miro Users) * **Mural:** [Empathy Mapping template & guide](https://www.mural.co/templates/empathy-map) (Mural users) |

**Additional Resources**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Resource** | **Type** | **Offerings** |
| [**NN/g:** Empathy Mapping: The First Step in Design](https://www.nngroup.com/articles/empathy-mapping/) [Thinking](https://www.nngroup.com/articles/empathy-mapping/) | Online Guide | * [Format of an Empathy Map](https://www.nngroup.com/articles/empathy-mapping/#toc-format-of-an-empathy-map-1) * [One User vs. Multiple-Users Empathy Maps](https://www.nngroup.com/articles/empathy-mapping/#toc-one-user-vs-multiple-users-empathy-maps-2) * [Why Use Empathy Maps](https://www.nngroup.com/articles/empathy-mapping/#toc-why-use-empathy-maps-3) * [Process: How to Build an Empathy Map](https://www.nngroup.com/articles/empathy-mapping/#toc-process-how-to-build-an-empathy-map-4) |

**A persona is a fictional – but research based – profile of a key customer.** It represents real people’s needs, goals, behaviors, and describes them in a relatable, human-centered way.

Personas help teams stay grounded in user perspectives and make design choices that reflect actual experiences – not assumptions.

**BEST PRACTICES**

**Avoid assumptions.** Ground your persona in data, even if you think you know the audience well.

**Capture goals and barriers.** Focus on what the persona wants to achieve – and what’s in their way.

**Make it relatable.** Add a name, photo, and even a quote to bring the persona to life for your team.

**BASIC STEPS**

1. **Start with real data.** Use interviews, surveys, analytics, or feedback to capture real needs and challenges.



**Developing a Persona**

A tool for capturing key customer traits and needs to guide design decisions

1. **Find key patterns.** Look for common behaviors, frustrations, motivations, and goals across your data.
2. **Build the persona.** Include a name, photo, job or role, and a brief story that explains what they care about and what gets in their way.
3. **Put it to work.** Use the persona to guide your design decisions. Ask, “Would this help our persona?” when testing or prioritizing ideas.

**BENEFITS**

**WHEN TO USE**

* Humanizes your research. Translates data into real, relatable stories.
* Centers the user. Keeps focus on what customers need, not what’s easiest to build.
* Guides decisions. Helps teams prioritize based on user goals and pain points.
* Improves communication. Aligns staff and other interested persons, with a shared understanding of the people you serve.

Use personas when you need to summarize research findings in a way that’s easy to remember and apply. They’re especially useful early in the design process, when defining the problem, generating ideas, or prioritizing features and services. Personas keep teams aligned and focused on the real people behind the problem.

******PERSONA RESOURCES**

**Our Recommended Resources**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| *If you want step-by-step instructions* | **Results Washington Lean Conference October 2022**: *Design Thinking A Human-Centered Approach – minute 4*   * [Video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x8Br3QhJjTs) * [Presentation](https://results.wa.gov/sites/default/files/Design%20Thinking_PRESENTATION.pdf) * [Handout](https://results.wa.gov/sites/default/files/Design%20Thinking_HANDOUTS.pdf) |
| *If you want to try it yourself* | * **Your Washington:** Persona Example (coming soon) * **Your Washington:** Persona Template (coming soon) |
| *If you want to see an example* | * Coming soon |
| *If you want an online collaboration tool* | * **Miro:** [User Persona Template & Gude](https://miro.com/blog/templates-understanding-customers/#h-1-nbsp-user-personas) (Miro Users) * **Mural:** [Persona Template and Guide](https://www.mural.co/templates/personas) (Mural users) |

******PERSONA RESOURCES**

**Additional Resources**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Resource** | **Type** | **Offerings** |
| [**18F**: Personas](https://guides.18f.org/methods/decide/personas/) | Online Guide | * What persona’s are * When you would use them * Steps * [Example](https://github.com/18F/federalist-design/wiki/Personas) |
| [**Canva:** Persona Templates](https://www.canva.com/templates/s/user-persona/?msockid=0158693f2d766d9032077a482c366c6f) | Online Template | * Online template to create a persona |
| [**NN/g:** Antipersonas: What, How, Who, and Why](https://www.nngroup.com/articles/antipersonas-what-how/) | Online Guide | * [What Is an Antipersona?](https://www.nngroup.com/articles/antipersonas-what-how/#toc-what-is-an-antipersona-1) * [When Does It Make Sense to Create an Antipersona?](https://www.nngroup.com/articles/antipersonas-what-how/#toc-when-does-it-make-sense-to-create-an-antipersona-2) * [What Information Should Be Included in an Antipersona?](https://www.nngroup.com/articles/antipersonas-what-how/#toc-what-information-should-be-included-in-an-antipersona-3) * [Who Is Responsible for Creating Antipersonas?](https://www.nngroup.com/articles/antipersonas-what-how/#toc-who-is-responsible-for-creating-antipersonas-4) * [Method for Creating Antipersonas: Identify](https://www.nngroup.com/articles/antipersonas-what-how/#toc-method-for-creating-antipersonas-identify-threats-5) [Threats](https://www.nngroup.com/articles/antipersonas-what-how/#toc-method-for-creating-antipersonas-identify-threats-5) |
| [**Mural:** Personals Gallery](https://app.mural.co/template/155388cf-d433-41e9-a3af-c1c40cb682c2/cb0a0d4c-785e-486a-8e44-f98ae0c3588d) | Online Guide | * Template * Examples * Instructions |
| [**U of Washington Redesign Toolkit:** Personas and](https://redesigntoolkit.io/personas-and-user-groups/) [User Groups](https://redesigntoolkit.io/personas-and-user-groups/) | Online Guide | * Links to worksheets and templates * Links to other resources * Steps, considerations, and references |
| [**UXPressia**](https://uxpressia.com/personas-online-tool) | Online Template | * Online template to create a persona |

**An equity pause is a deliberate moment for teams to stop and reflect on how their work might impact different groups.** It helps uncover bias, check assumptions, and make sure diverse voices are included. By focusing on equity from the start, teams can design solutions that are fairer, more inclusive, and more effective for everyone.



**Equity Pause**

A tool for capturing key customer traits and needs to guide design decisions

**BEST PRACTICES**

* + **Engage diverse voices**. Involve a variety of people who represent a range of lived experiences.
  + **Create safe spaces**. Make it easy for people to speak up – especially those from underrepresented groups.
  + **Ensure accessibility**. Use formats and tools that work for everyone.
  + **Monitor and adapt**. Regularly check your progress for equity impacts and make changes as needed.

**WHEN TO USE**

**BASIC STEPS**

1. **Acknowledge the purpose**: Be clear about why you’re pausing – to check bias and center equity in your work.
2. **Include diverse perspectives**: Bring in voices from underrepresented groups, staff, or partners.
3. **Examine assumptions**: Ask what you are assuming about users and who might be left out.
4. **Review your data**: Check if your data reflects all groups. Identify gaps and decide if more research is needed.
5. **Spot barriers**: Look for things like language, access, or cost that could create inequity.
6. **Adjust your plans**: Make changes to address equity concerns.
7. **Keep checking in.** Revisit equity throughout the project – not just once.

**BENEFITS**

* + Builds trust. Shows people their needs and voices matter.
  + Encourages innovation. Diverse input leads to stronger, more creative solutions.
  + Creates long-term impact. Equity-focused designs are more sustainable and meaningful.
  + Reduces risk. Catching equity issues early helps prevent harm or exclusion later.

Use an equity pause any time you’re making decisions that affect people – especially during planning, design, or evaluation. It’s most effective when done early and often, helping you build equity into every stage of your process.

******EQUITY PAUSE RESOURCES**

**Our Recommended Resources**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| *If you want step-by-step instructions* | **Results Washington Lean Conference October 2022:** *Design Thinking A Human-Centered Approach – minute 16*   * [Video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x8Br3QhJjTs) * [Presentation](https://results.wa.gov/sites/default/files/Design%20Thinking_PRESENTATION.pdf) * [Handout](https://results.wa.gov/sites/default/files/Design%20Thinking_HANDOUTS.pdf) |
| *If you want to try it yourself* | * **Your Washington:** Equity Pause Quick Tips (coming soon) * **Virginia Mason Institute:** [Equity Pause Toolkit](https://equity.uwmedicine.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/VMI_Equity_Pause_Toolkit.pdf) |

In our work, there’s often pressure to have quick answers. Human-centered design asks us to slow down, stay curious, and explore the problem space with humility. When we let go of assumptions, we discover what truly matters.



**Research Methods**

Shifting to designing *for* people to designing *with* them

This can feel uncomfortable—like standing in fog without a clear path. But that uncertainty leads to insight. By hearing real voices through interviews, surveys, focus groups, and journey mapping, we see the problem from many angles. We uncover patterns, surface pain points, and challenge what we thought we knew. Most importantly, we begin to understand the problem as experienced by those we serve—not just as we imagine it.

There are many ways to gain customer insights. The methods below are some of the most universal. For more options, see NN/g’s [*A Guide to User-Experience Research Methods*](https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fmedia.nngroup.com%2Fmedia%2Farticles%2Fattachments%2FTemplate_Research_Plan.docx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK). These tools aren’t about data for data’s sake—they help us make meaning. By embracing ambiguity and staying rooted in empathy, we create grounded, innovative, human-centered solutions.

The tools in this section help us listen, observe, and reflect with intention.

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**Interviews** Gathering Personal Stories and Insights

**Focus Groups** Bringing People Together

**Surveys** Gathering Broad Input

**Customer Journey Mapping** Understanding the Customer Experience

# “Fall in love with the problem, not the solution.”

To learn more about the importance of gathering customer feedback check out:

**A survey is a fast, efficient way to hear from a large group of people.** It helps spot patterns, surface shared experiences, and highlight areas that need improvement.

Surveys work best when questions are clear, simple, and easy to answer – using formats like checkboxes, rating scales, or short text.

While they can’t capture everything, surveys are powerful for gathering board input and guiding smarter, more inclusive decisions.

**BEST PRACTICES**

**Put easier questions first.** People may drop off before reaching harder or more personal ones.

**Save demographic questions for the end**. **Make Questions:**

* Free of jargon
* Focused on one topic at a time
* Neutral and non-leading
* Specific and easy to understand.

**WHEN TO USE**

**STEPS**

Surveys are ideal when you need input from a broad group, especially to identify trends, measure change, or compare experiences. They’re useful when time or scale makes interviews or focus groups impractical and they can be good starting point for identifying deeper questions to explore later.

1. **Start with a brainstorm.** List the key things you want to learn. Look for proven questions from past surveys or research.



**Surveys**

Gathering Broad Input

1. **Think about how you'll use the answers.** Choose question types (ratings, checkboxes, open-ended) that match your goals.
2. **Keep it short.** Focus on only the most important questions. Aim for under 10 minutes to improve response rates.
3. **Choose the format.** Decide if it will be digital or paper, anonymous or identified.
4. **Test it.** Ask a few people to take the survey and explain what they think each question means. Revise as needed.
5. **Send it out.** Share it through the right channels to reach your audience.

**BENEFITS**

* Efficient and scalable. Reach lots of people quickly – across teams, regions, or the whole enterprise.
* Tracks change over time. Repeat questions to monitor trends or shifts in experience.
* Encourages honesty. Anonymity can lead to more candid feedback, especially on sensitive topics.
* Supports inclusion. When designed with equity in mind, surveys can reflect a wide range of voices.

******SURVEY RESOURCES**

**Our Recommended Resources**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| *If you want step-by-step instructions* | * **Your Washington:** Running an Effective Survey Guide (coming soon) |
| *If you want to create a survey* | * **Your Washington:** How to create a survey using Microsoft Forms (coming soon) |
| *If you want to see an example* | * **Your Washington:** Survey Example (coming soon) |
| *If you want to analyze your survey results* | * **Your Washington:** Synthesizing Qualitative Data (coming soon) |

**Additional Resources**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Resource** | **Type** | **Offerings** |
| [**Qualtrics:** How to create an effective survey in 15 simple](https://www.qualtrics.com/blog/how-to-create-a-survey/) [tips](https://www.qualtrics.com/blog/how-to-create-a-survey/) | Online Guide | * Tips for designing a survey |
| [**U of Washington: Redesign Toolkit**: Surveys](https://redesigntoolkit.io/surveys/) | Online Guide | * Steps, considerations, and references |

**A focus group brings a small group of people together to talk about their experiences, ideas, or challenges in real time.** It helps you hear what matters most to participants and dig into the “why” behind their feedback.

Focus groups can reveal emotion, tone, and group dynamics that surveys often miss. When done thoughtfully, they build empathy, surface hidden barriers, and shape solutions grounded in real-world needs.

**BEST PRACTICES**

**Create a respectful space.** Acknowledge power dynamics and invite open, honest sharing.

**Be patient.** Give people time to think and respond.

**Watch the clock.** Aim for 60-90 minutes to keep the energy up and discussion focused.

**WHEN TO USE**

**BASIC STEPS**

1. **Plan ahead.** Clarify you goals and write 3-5 topics for questions. Decide who to invite (3 to 6 people works well).



**Focus Groups**

Bringing People Together

1. **Pick the right time and place.** Remove barriers like language, tech, or scheduling conflicts.
2. **Build your team.** You’ll need a facilitator, a note-taker, and someone to manage time and logistics.
3. **Use plain talk.** Ask open-ended questions. Start with a warm-up so participants feel at ease.
4. **Stay focused.** The facilitator guides the group and keeps it focused. Record or take good notes (with permission).
5. **Reflect and act.** Look for patterns and insights. Share findings with your team and use them to inform next steps.

**BENEFITS**

* Reveals group dynamics. See how people influence each other and where there’s alignment or tension.
* Surfaces unspoken needs. Participants often spark ideas in each other that might not come up one-on-one.
* Test language and framing. Learn how people naturally talk about the topic.
* Supports rapid iteration. Great for getting quick, actionable feedback on early ideas or concepts.

Focus groups are helpful when you want to explore shared experiences, test ideas in a group setting, or understand how people influence each other’s thinking. They’re especially useful when refining early concepts, testing language, or uncovering needs that might not surface in surveys or individual interviews.

******FOCUS GROUP RESOURCES**

**Our Recommended Resources**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| *If you want step-by-step instructions* | * **Your Washington:** Running an Effective Focus Group Guide (coming soon) |
| *If you want an example* | **Results Washington CoP March 2024:** *Customer/Focus Group Feedback*   * [Recording](http://youtu.be/JoKc1vMZp1s) * [Presentation](https://results.wa.gov/sites/default/files/COP%20Presentation%20VOC.pdf) |
| *If you want to analyze your focus group results* | * **Your Washington:** Synthesizing Qualitative Data (coming soon) |

**Additional Resources**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Resource** | **Type** | **Offerings** |
| [**NN/g:** The Use and Misuse of Focus Groups](https://www.nngroup.com/articles/focus-groups/) | Online Guide | * Benefits * Getting focused * Considerations |
| [**QuestionPro:** Focus Group: What It Is, How to Conduct It](https://www.questionpro.com/blog/focus-group/) [& Examples](https://www.questionpro.com/blog/focus-group/) | Online Guide | * Types of focus groups * Focus group example * Focus group question examples |
| [**U of Washington Redesign Toolkit:** Focus Groups](https://redesigntoolkit.io/group-interviews/) | Online Guide | * Links to other resources * Steps, considerations, and references |

**Interviews are one-to-one conversations that help you hear personal stories, emotions, and insights in peoples own words.** They’re especially helpful for understanding complex experiences or learning from people with lived experience. Interviews can build trust, reveal things surveys miss, and offer rich context for better design decision.

**BEST PRACTICES**

**Keep the team small.** Just a facilitator and note taker.

**Ask for consent to record.** If granted, it enables a full transcript for detailed analysis.

**Use reflective listening** to build trust and gain deeper insights by:

* + Repeating key points for clarity.
  + Reflect emotions or experiences.
  + Notice underlying beliefs or values.

**BASIC STEPS**

1. **Make a plan.** Define your goals, draft your questions, and decide how the session will run.



**Interviews**

Gathering personal stories and insights

1. **Choose participants.** Select people with relevant experiences or perspectives.
2. **Make it easy to join.** Offer options like interpreters, virtual access, or incentives.
3. **Write clear questions.** Keep questions short and use everyday language. Use open ended prompts.
4. **Facilitate the conversation.** One person guides the session; another can take notes or record (with permission).
5. **Review what you heard.** Look for key themes, patterns, and insights. Debrief with your team to check understanding.

**BENEFITS**

**WHEN TO USE**

* Builds trust and uncovers deeper, more personal insights.
* Captures tone, emotion, and body language that surveys miss.
* Let's you follow up in real time to clarify or dig deeper.
* Helps test early ideas and understand how people think through tasks or decisions.

Use interviews when you’re exploring complex or sensitive topics, especially with people who have lived experience. They’re valuable when surveys aren’t giving you the full picture or when you need deeper context. Interviews are also useful for getting early feedback on ideas or understanding how someone thinks through a process.

******INTERVIEW RESOURCES**

**Our Recommended Resources**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| *If you want step-by-step instructions* | * **YOUR WASHINGTON :** Running a Successful Interview guide (coming soon) |
| *If you want an example* | **Results Washington Lean Conference October 2022:** Gathering and Implementing Customer Feedback to Create Positive Change   * [Video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DUjdyXeG9Bo) |
| *If you want to analyze your interview results* | * **Your Washington:** Synthesizing Qualitative Data (coming soon) |

******INTERVIEW RESOURCES**

**Additional Resources**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Resource** | **Type** | **Offerings** |
| [**18F:** Stakeholder and User Interviews](https://guides.18f.org/methods/discover/stakeholder-and-user-interviews/) | Online Guide | * What a stakeholder and user interview is * Why you would do one * How to do it * Additional resources including templates, guides, and tips |
| [**IDEO Design Kit:** Interviews](https://www.designkit.org/methods/interview.html) | Online Guide | * Steps * Video |
| [**Luma Institute:** Interviewing](https://www.luma-institute.com/interviewing/) | Online Guide | * Method overview * Benefits * Quick guide * Helpful Hints |
| [**NN/g:** Free UX Templates and Guides](https://www.nngroup.com/articles/free-ux-templates/) | Online Guide | * [Research Plans: Organize, Document,](https://www.nngroup.com/articles/pm-research-plan/) [and Inform](https://www.nngroup.com/articles/pm-research-plan/) * [Research Plan Template](https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fmedia.nngroup.com%2Fmedia%2Farticles%2Fattachments%2FTemplate_Research_Plan.docx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK) * [Obtaining Consent for User Research](https://www.nngroup.com/articles/informed-consent/) * [Informed Consent Example](https://media.nngroup.com/media/articles/attachments/NNg_Example_Consent_Form.pdf) * [Research Plan Template](https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fmedia.nngroup.com%2Fmedia%2Farticles%2Fattachments%2FTemplate_Research_Plan.docx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK) * [Writing an Effective Guide for UX](https://www.nngroup.com/articles/interview-guide/) [Interview](https://www.nngroup.com/articles/interview-guide/) * [Example Guide for Semi structured](https://media.nngroup.com/media/articles/attachments/example_interview_guide.pdf) [Interview](https://media.nngroup.com/media/articles/attachments/example_interview_guide.pdf) |
| **NN/g:** Other Resources | Online Guide | * [NN/g: Expert Interviews](https://www.nngroup.com/articles/ux-expert-reviews/) * [NN/g: Stakeholder Interviews 101](https://www.nngroup.com/articles/stakeholder-interviews/) |
| [**U of Washington Redesign Toolkit:** Interviews](https://redesigntoolkit.io/interviews/) | Online Guide | * Links to other resources * Steps, considerations, and references |

**A customer journey map (also called an experience diagraming) shows your service from the user’s point of view.** It lays out the steps they take, what they’re trying to do, how they feel along the way, and where things go well – or don’t. It helps teams see the full experience, not just isolated moments, and find where to improve.

The best maps are grounded in real stories and user input. Customer journey maps are a strong tool for building empathy and improving services.

**BASIC STEPS**

1. **Choose whose experience to map.** Focus on a resident, patient, client, or customer you want to understand.



**Customer Journey Map/Experience Diagraming**

Understanding the Customer Experience (1.3.3)

1. **Define the scope.** Pick a key experience or task that matters or often causes issues.
2. **Use real data.** Base your map on interviews, observations, or usability tests.
3. **Map out the journey.** Show steps, interactions, people, and feelings – highlight what works and what doesn’t.
4. **Look for insights.** Use the map to find pain points and opportunities, then share it to guide improvements.

**BEST PRACTICES BENEFITS**

**Get the full picture.** Don’t rely on just one source—use interviews, notes, and observations to cross-check what you learn.

* Builds shared understanding – Aligns teams around the customer’s real experience.
* Exposes experience gaps – Shows where service design and reality don’t match.
* Guides priorities – Helps focus improvements where they’ll have the most impact.
* Strengthens advocacy – Makes it easier to share user needs with stakeholders.

**Test your map.** Share it with real users to make sure it matches their experience.

**Aim for better, not just fixes.** Look beyond quick wins to improve the whole experience.

**WHEN TO USE**

Use this tool when you want to deeply understand a user’s experience over time – especially across multiple touchpoints, departments, or systems. It’s useful early in a project, when prioritizing improvements or when trying to align teams around the same goal.

******CUSTOMER JOURNEY MAPPING RESOURCES**

**Our Recommended Resources**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| *If you want step-by-step instructions* | * **Your Washington:** Conducting a Customer Journey Mapping guide (coming soon) |
| *If you want an example* | * Coming soon |
| *If you want to analyze your customer journey results* | * **Your Washington:** Synthesizing Qualitative Data Guide (coming soon) |
| *If you want an online collaboration tool* | * [**Miro:** Customer Journey Map Template](https://miro.com/blog/templates-understanding-customers/#h-2-nbsp-customer-journey-map) * **Mural:** [Customer Experience Journey Map Template](https://www.mural.co/templates/customer-journey-map) |

******CUSTOMER JOURNEY MAPPING RESOURCES**

**Additional Resources**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Resource** | **Type** | **Offerings** |
| [**18F:** Journey Mapping](https://guides.18f.org/methods/decide/journey-mapping/) | Online Guide | * What customer journey mapping is * Why you would do one * How to do it * Additional resources including a [3-part](https://coe.gsa.gov/2019/04/17/cx-update-9.html) [series on the what, why, and how of](https://coe.gsa.gov/2019/04/17/cx-update-9.html) [journey mapping](https://coe.gsa.gov/2019/04/17/cx-update-9.html) |
| [**IDEO Design Kit:** Journey Map](https://www.designkit.org/methods/interview.html) | Online Guide | * Steps |
| **GSA IT Modernization Centers of Excellence:** What is a customer Journey Map? | Online Guide | * [Research Plans: Organize, Document,](https://www.nngroup.com/articles/pm-research-plan/) [and Inform](https://www.nngroup.com/articles/pm-research-plan/) * [Research Plan Template](https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fmedia.nngroup.com%2Fmedia%2Farticles%2Fattachments%2FTemplate_Research_Plan.docx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK) * [Obtaining Consent for User Research](https://www.nngroup.com/articles/informed-consent/) * [Informed Consent Example](https://media.nngroup.com/media/articles/attachments/NNg_Example_Consent_Form.pdf) * [Research Plan Template](https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fmedia.nngroup.com%2Fmedia%2Farticles%2Fattachments%2FTemplate_Research_Plan.docx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK) * [Writing an Effective Guide for UX](https://www.nngroup.com/articles/interview-guide/) [Interview](https://www.nngroup.com/articles/interview-guide/) * [Example Guide for Semistructured](https://media.nngroup.com/media/articles/attachments/example_interview_guide.pdf) [Interview](https://media.nngroup.com/media/articles/attachments/example_interview_guide.pdf) |
| [**NN/g**: Journey Mapping 101](https://www.nngroup.com/articles/journey-mapping-101/) | Online Guide | * [Definition of a Journey Map](https://www.nngroup.com/articles/journey-mapping-101/#toc-definition-of-a-journey-map-1) * [Key Components of a Journey Map](https://www.nngroup.com/articles/journey-mapping-101/#toc-key-components-of-a-journey-map-2) * [Journey-Map Variations](https://www.nngroup.com/articles/journey-mapping-101/#toc-journey-map-variations-3) * [Why Use Journey Maps](https://www.nngroup.com/articles/journey-mapping-101/#toc-why-use-journey-maps-4) |
| [**NN/g:** Journey Mapping for Remote Teams](https://www.nngroup.com/articles/journey-map-digital-template/) | Online Guide Template | * [Excel Template](https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fmedia.nngroup.com%2Fmedia%2Farticles%2Fattachments%2FNNg_Customer_Journey_Mapping_Template.xlsx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK) |