

Tip sheet: Define the Problem

What is defining the problem?

Clearly specifying a knowledge gap, defining your end-users, narrowing to a focused and feasible question, explaining what you're measuring, and using experience to develop a plan that allows systematic investigation.

Why is this step important?

- Team consensus and understanding are important when starting a project.
- Different ideas of what problem is being solved will cause delays.
- Defining roles on the team enhances efficiency.

What are the key goals of this step?

- Achieve a collective team understanding of the project and the roles of team members.
- Imagine “the thing” you are developing being used in actual practice.

Key Steps

1. Define the PROBLEM your team wants to solve.
2. Define WHO you're solving the problem for.
3. Define the SCOPE of your project.
4. Decide on your OUTCOMES.
5. Define WHERE you are. Review and build upon prior work by your team or by others.
6. Define ROLES of the team members.
7. Make a PLAN.

Pro Tips

- *Don't underestimate the importance of getting everyone on the same page.*
- *Don't reinvent the wheel. Building on the work of others can save time.*
- *Modify as you go. Details should change purposefully over time as you learn.*
- *Start small. It is okay to ideate, but focusing on a small scope will help you move faster.*

Common Pit Falls

1. Assuming that everyone is on the same page at the beginning.
2. Rushing this step – it may seem like obvious work but can save time later.
3. Not taking into account the resources available and the scope possible.
4. Trying to solve every problem and cover all the bases in the first version.

Actions to Avoid Them

1. Use a formal process to achieve team consensus.
2. Be detail oriented and methodical – focus on overall project goals.
3. Include all team members when scoping – define burden individually.
4. Be simple to start.