

Frame Your Design Challenge

Properly framing your design challenge is critical to your success. Here's how to do it just right.

Getting the right frame on your design challenge will get you off on the right foot, organize how you think about your solution, and at moments of ambiguity, help clarify where you should push your design. Framing your design challenge is more art than science, but there are a few key things to keep in mind. First, ask yourself: Does my challenge drive toward ultimate impact, allow for a variety of solutions, and take into account context? Dial those in, and then refine it until it's the challenge you're excited to tackle.

STEPS

TIME

90 minutes

DIFFICULTY

Hard

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

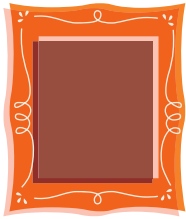
Pen, Frame Your Design Challenge worksheet p. 165

PARTICIPANTS

Design team

- 01** Start by taking a first stab at writing your design challenge. It should be short and easy to remember, a single sentence that conveys what you want to do. We often phrase these as questions which set you and your team up to be solution-oriented and to generate lots of ideas along the way.
- 02** Properly framed design challenges drive toward ultimate impact, allow for a variety of solutions, and take into account constraints and context. Now try articulating it again with those factors in mind.
- 03** Another common pitfall when scoping a design challenge is going either too narrow or too broad. A narrowly scoped challenge won't offer enough room to explore creative solutions. And a broadly scoped challenge won't give you any idea where to start.
- 04** Now that you've run your challenge through these filters, do it again. It may seem repetitive, but the right question is key to arriving at a good solution. A quick test we often run on a design challenge is to see if we can come up with five possible solutions in just a few minutes. If so, you're likely on the right track.

METHOD IN ACTION



Frame Your Design Challenge

It's rare that you'll Frame Your Design Challenge just right on the first try; at IDEO.org we often go through a number of revisions and lots of debate as we figure out precisely how to hone the problem we're looking to solve.

For the second challenge in our Amplify program, we knew that we wanted to focus on children's education, but needed to narrow the scope so that it would drive real impact, allow for a variety of solutions, and still give us enough context to get started. Challenge manager Chioma Ume described how she and her team sharpened the challenge.

"We knew we wanted to do something around kids, but of course we then have to ascertain which kids. Should it be all kids, just teens, young kids? Because of the tremendous importance of early childhood development, we settled on children, ages zero to five. But we certainly didn't start knowing that we'd focus just on them."

Even then, the challenge needed refinement. By eventually landing not on children, but their parents, the team and its partners at the UK's Department for International Development, crafted a brief that it thought would have the most impact.

"We chose to focus on the people closest to children, their parents," says Ume. But she stresses that though parents became the focus, the children remained the beneficiaries, a nuance that would keep the team from spinning off or focusing too

heavily on improving parents' lives. In the end, the team arrived at a well framed challenge, one that asks: How might parents in low-income communities ensure children thrive in their first five years?

Use the Frame Your Design Challenge worksheet on p. 165 and take multiple passes to make sure that your question drives at impact, gives you a starting place, but still is broad enough to allow for a great variety of creative answers.

Frame Your Design Challenge

What is the problem you're trying to solve?

Improving the lives of children.

1) Take a stab at framing it as a design question.

How might we improve the lives of children?

2) Now, state the ultimate impact you're trying to have.

We want very young children in low-income communities to thrive.

3) What are some possible solutions to your problem?

Think broadly. It's fine to start a project with a hunch or two, but make sure you allow for surprising outcomes.

Better nutrition, parents engaging with young kids to spur brain development, better education around parenting, early childhood education centers, better access to neonatal care and vaccines.

4) Finally, write down some of the context and constraints that you're facing.

They could be geographic, technological, time-based, or have to do with the population you're trying to reach.

Because children aren't in control of their circumstances, we wanted to address our solution to their parents.

We want a solution that could work across different regions.

5) Does your original question need a tweak? Try it again.

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