Status Report (11/08/2017)

18F

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Overview

Last week our team focused on conducting interviews with agency staff and external stakeholders, including researchers and academics. You can keep track of the interviews on this spreadsheet. Here's a summary of the numbers so far:

- 16 interviews completed
- 8 confirmed / scheduled
- 13 waiting for response
- 1 agency group is in conversation with us about consent form
- 1 agency is okay with consent form but is struggling with scheduling a date before the 27th
- 8 waiting to be scheduled

We are more than halfway through this engagement and are now ready to define a problem statement based on what we've learned.

The interviews have been very insightful so far and have shifted our thinking considerably. We began this engagement asking a very basic question: what is performance data? From this initial question, we believed the challenge was primarily around data. But as our interviews began, a different theme emerged: the data existed, but the primary challenges were managing content, workflows and storytelling.

We're now finding that the problem is much more nuanced and complex, which is common in these types of engagements. There isn't just a data or storytelling problem, but a problem of telling the *right* stories with data. The toughest challenge is finding a balance between presenting data and telling the right story in a manner is meaningful to our most important users.

In upcoming interviews, we will be meeting with data journalists and academics who've worked extensively with communicating government data to broad audiences.

The following **report will be updated and emailed to the team every Wednesday**. We will also have a recurring a conference call every **Wednesday at 4:30pm ET** to discuss this report in more detail and address any questions or concerns you might have.

Project Approach

Below is a high-level timeline of the project approach and key milestones. **The project approach consists of four phases, each approximately 2 weeks in length**. Since the goal for this engagement is to reduce uncertainty and recommend next steps, we will prioritize our activities around the highest value learning opportunities given the timeline and budget available.
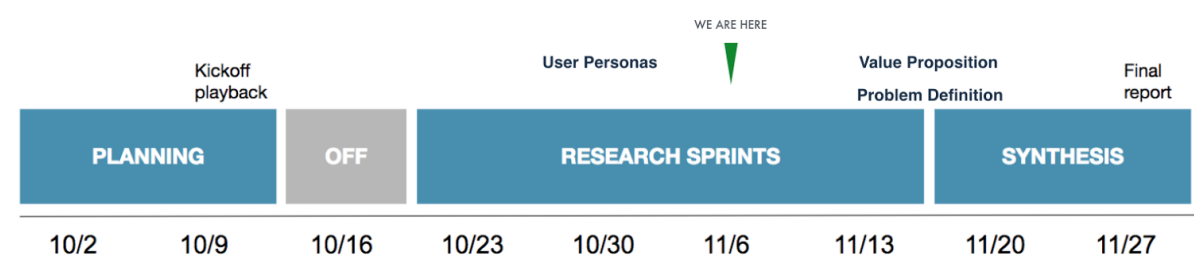

Note: This proposed timeline is based on our budget and will be revised as needed.

We're currently in the **formative research** phase**.** In this phase we will conduct interviews with a wide range of stakeholders to better understand current state needs, opportunities, and limitations.

Given the delays in scheduling, we will wrap up interviews the week of the the 13th, instead of the 6th. We've also moved the development of the *problem statement* and *value proposition* after we've concluded the interviews.

To understand the importance of user personas and in understanding their problems, consider this diagram:
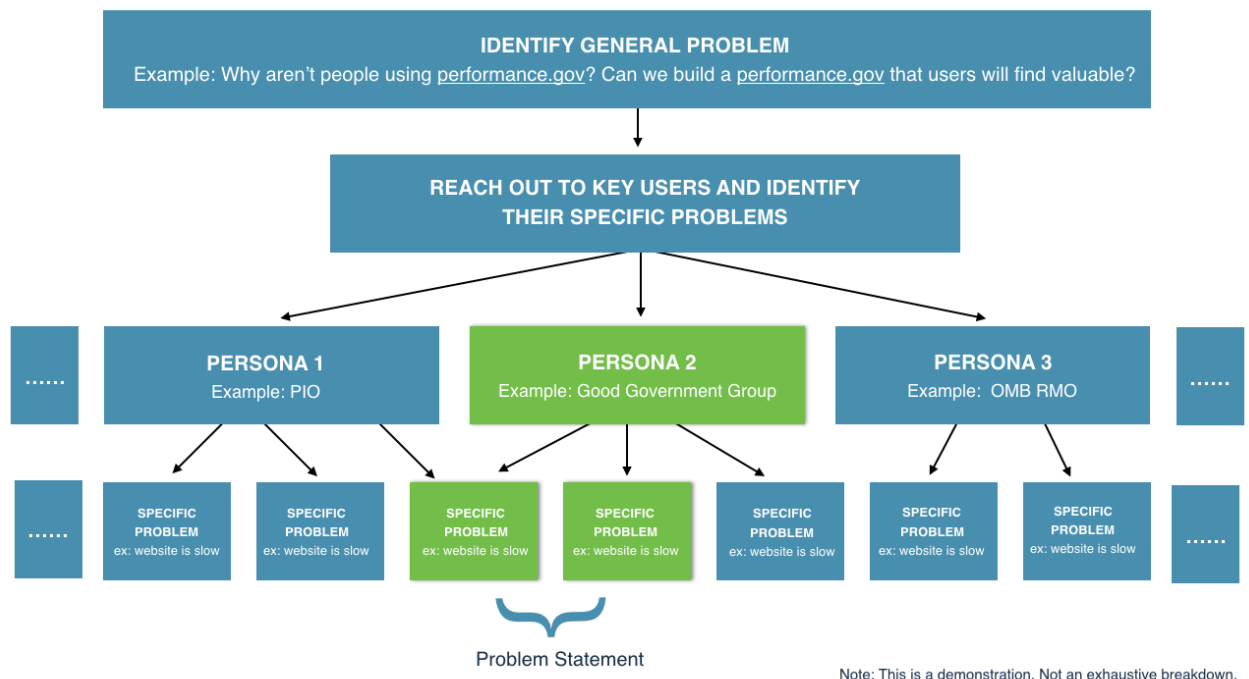
With every interview, we learn about the challenges different users experience. As we develop clear personas and understand their specific problems, we can better define a clear *problem statement*. This problem statement will shape the direction of this project going forward into the *Discovery Phase*.

Summary of Activities:

Last week, the 18F team accomplished the following:

- Conducted interview at UMaryland, Grant Thornton, and IBM.
- Finished two different revised consent forms and sent to Treasury and DHS.
- Scheduled interview with the researcher, Shelley Metzenbaum.
- Scheduled interviews with Cornell Law School professor, Cynthia Farina, who's worked extensively on communicating complex legal language to broader public.
- Scheduled interview with two data journalist at Bloomberg and WNYC, respectively.
- Revised two new consent forms for Treasury and DHS; however, Treasury can only meet after the 27th so they won't be available for an interview in project timeline.
- Began identifying the team for the Discovery phase of this engagement. Front-End Engineer and Backend-Engineer have been assigned and we had our first check-in.

- Continued transcribing and coding interviews.
- Contacted everyone to whom we were introduced by PIC or OMB.

This coming week we will:

- Conduct our remaining interviews.
- Wrap up interviews and focus on synthesizing our findings.
- Transcribe interviews and coding interview transcripts.
- Continue refining personas that emerged from the research participants in full recognition that there are potential *proto-personas* that may be untapped.

Key Takeaways

We are observing a pattern that many agencies, nonprofits and researchers do not use performance.gov in their everyday work or to help them make decisions.

We are also finding that there are many external groups, like researchers, academics and those with a public voice (like journalists) that **would like** to use performance.gov in their work. Here are a few excepts we found interesting:

- "Performance.gov will always be difficult to understand because government does not have the talent to write a compelling narrative".
- One researcher explained that should be heavily dependent only performance.gov but can't find data they need.
- "It's very text heavy" and "It's not a data rich source"
- "It takes 11 clicks to get anything that's close to a number"
- "The trend data they display is not very user friendly"

Another interesting take away was on trust. We asked two of the researchers if they trusted the information that was presented on performance.gov, and on both occasions, they expressed skepticism. We will explore this issue further in incoming interviews.

Pending Issues:

☐ **18F/OMB/PIC**: To wrap up the *Foundation Engagement* and kick off the *Discovery* we are looking present our findings at our weekly check-in in person. We need to confirm that Nov 29th 2017 at 1pm works for the team.

☐ **OMB**: Last week OMB team volunteered to make introductions, but are still waiting to hear back from those introductions.

Pending Issues:

✅**18F/PIC**: As of now, none of the interviews to external stakeholder *on the OMB contact list* have agreed to be interviewed. We will need to expand the number of external stakeholders we reach out to.

Key Risks

Stakeholder Alignment: 18F is focused on learning the challenges of an agency and identifying a clear problem before we begin solutioning. This process has been effective on other 18F projects, but stakeholders need to be bought into the process to ensure project success.	Stable
Managing Expectations: PIC has expressed interest in focusing 18F's work on the presentation of information instead of reviewing the processes for agency staff. In order for 18F's approach to work effectively, we as for autonomy in our investigations and to allow the research to lead the process.	Stable
Agency Cooperation: Our initial assessment has revealed a complex interaction between PIC and the agencies they work with. Lack of cooperation by agency staff will put this engagement at risk.	Stable

Further Readings

Links the team may find valuable:

- https://www.blog.google/topics/journalism-news/data-journalism-2017/
- https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2564100