Guidelines for Submitting a Problem Statement

What is The Opportunity Project?

The Opportunity Project (TOP) brings together technologists, government, and communities to rapidly prototype digital products — powered by federal open data — that solve real-world problems for people across the country. To date, TOP's technology development sprints have catalyzed over 200 data-driven digital products including apps, websites, games, AI algorithms, mapping tools, and even some non-digital solutions.

Our sprints have leveraged open data to address **50 problem statements** on topics like disaster response, rural economic development, youth and veteran homelessness, the opioid crisis, COVID-19, expanding the innovation economy, and more. Problem statements have been led by federal agencies including; including the U.S. Departments of Education, Labor, Agriculture, Veterans Affairs, Housing and Urban Development, Health and Human Services, Treasury, Commerce EPA, nonprofits such as USA for UNHCR, and more.

What is a problem statement?

Problem statements are the challenge topics that teams focus on in our technology development sprints. We created a template for federal agencies and nonprofits to submit ideas for 2023 sprint topics, allowing you to propose pressing challenges in need of cross-sector innovation. View all our past problem statements and learn more about the sprint process on The Opportunity Project website.

What makes a good problem statement?

A great problem statement focuses on a compelling problem that tells a human story, is reasonable enough in scope that digital tools could make a dent in it, but broad enough that there is room for tech teams to be creative and develop a diverse set of solutions. Agencies also have the most success when there is open data available to address the problem.

How can I propose a problem statement?

This year, we're holding an open call for problem statements through **April 30, 2023.** A few themes to consider are below:

➔ Financial inclusion
➔ Economic mobility
➔ Data transparency
➔ Or choose your own!

Federal agencies, state or local governments, and NGOs can submit problem statements on any topic of interest. Once the final problem statements are selected, companies, start-ups, universities and non-profits will sign on to prototype solutions to those challenges alongside representatives from federal agencies and The Opportunity Project team. In past sprints, tech teams have included companies like IBM, SAS, Citi Ventures, Mastercard Center for Inclusive Growth, Mapbox, Esri, Redfin, Bloomberg, Airbnb, LinkedIn, as well as small businesses, startups, universities and more.

What should I avoid in my problem statement?

TOP is not intended for topics that focus on internal federal agency challenges (e.g. federal IT) or federal employees as the primary end users. All problem statements should focus on issues facing members of the public – for example, families, communities, businesses, educators, or state, local and tribal governments. Please avoid prescribing specific solutions to the tech teams. Instead, frame a general challenge, and leave the tech teams and communities to apply their unique expertise to develop tech solutions which they will ultimately build, own, and maintain. Finally, we only work with open data (i.e., not with PII or restricted use data), and any key federal data sets need to be available to the public by the time your sprint begins.

What makes agencies successful in TOP sprints?

The agencies who have the best experience and outcomes in this process have identified a senior executive champion, as well as at least 2-3 staff-level agency points of contact who have support and bandwidth to work with us and participating teams on a weekly basis throughout the development and execution of the sprints. We also find agencies are most successful when they are open-minded about possible sprint outcomes, and willing to think creatively about solutions.

What is required if my topic is selected?

If your topic is selected, the TOP team at the Census Bureau will work with your agency to run a TOP tech development sprint this year. A sprint can be completed with or without funding, but *does require time and attention.* To get a sense of the time commitment, please refer to the TOPx Toolkit for Federal Agencies. If your team will need a significant amount of assistance to facilitate the sprint, it may require a reimbursable interagency agreement. Please contact our team to discuss this further. For all sprints, we ask each agency to identify a lead point of contact and other contributing team members who will work on the sprint on a weekly basis, as well as an executive champion who is aware and supportive of the sprint.

If you are not familiar with The Opportunity Project and how the process works, please visit our website for more information and/or contact us at census.opportunityproject@census.gov!

When do the sprints take place?

- We will review problem statements on a rolling basis through April 30, 2023. In May, we will select and revise the final 2023 problem statements.
- From April to July, tech teams, user advocates, product experts, and additional data sources will be identified for the sprints.
- Most 2023 sprints will take place between **July-November 2023,** but note we can make exceptions based on time constraints of each agency.

How can I submit a topic?

To propose a topic, please download the proposal template document and submit to census.opportunityproject@census.gov with subject line "Problem Statement Proposal".

Submissions are due by April 30, 2023 and will be reviewed on a rolling basis.

Thanks and we look forward to working with you!