

THE OPPORTUNITY PROJECT

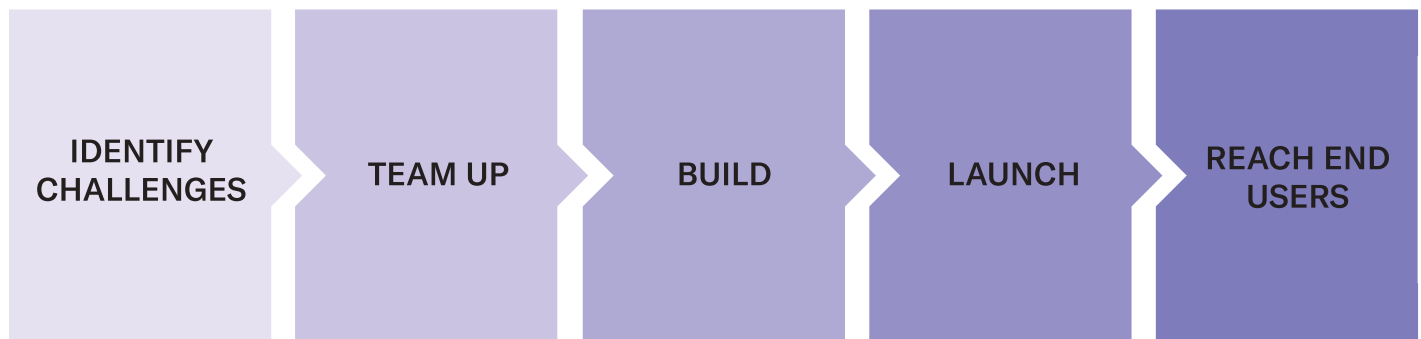
Participating as a User Advocate

What is The Opportunity Project?

The Opportunity Project is a process for collaboration between the tech industry, government, and communities to create data-driven digital products using federal open data to directly serve families, communities, and businesses nationwide. To date, 30 federal agencies and more than 100 external organizations have participated in sprints, resulting in 80 consumer-facing digital products that leverage open data. View them all at opportunity.census.gov.

How Does the Process Work?

The Opportunity Project (TOP) works through collaborative technology development sprints.



- **Identify challenges:** Federal agencies identify high-priority challenges facing the public, including the opioid crisis, promoting STEM education, using AI to connect veterans with apprenticeships, disaster response, and more.
- **Team up:** Tech teams like IBM, Cisco, Redfin, Fitbit, LinkedIn, Bloomberg, Mapbox, small businesses, startups, and universities, along with end users, government data and policy experts, and product strategists sign on to collaborate.
- **Build:** Teams build solutions during a 12-week virtual tech development sprint that includes user research, data exploration, and design/build milestones. Teams can join an optional in-person workshop at the start of the sprint.
- **Launch:** At the end of the sprint, digital products launch at our in-person Demo Day showcase. Past products include mapping tools, apps, website, games, AI algorithms, network visualizations, satellite data tools, and more.
- **Reach end users:** After the sprint, participants help to get the products to end users and move the needle on the target problems.

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Participating as a User Advocate

What is a User Advocate's role?

User Advocates (UAs) serve a critical role helping tech teams, federal agencies, and other partners understand the everyday people and communities the Opportunity Project seeks to empower. User Advocates communicate the needs, concerns, and realities of the communities they belong to or work with closely, ensuring that the perspective of end users drive how tech teams solve problems.

Why participate?

We've ask past user advocates why they joined TOP and what they gained from the process. Here are some of the benefits we hear consistently:



Relationships and partnerships

Build strategic relationships in government and develop partnerships with tech teams and other companies



Voice to shape solutions

Speak on behalf of your community to have a real impact on the development of products being created for your community



Knowledge sharing

Create mutually beneficial pathways of knowledge sharing between tech teams, end users, and federal agencies

Examples of User Advocate Contributions

A tech team is brainstorming about what their solution might look like and shares a few ideas. As **an expert on your community**, you are best able to promote the most promising ideas.

A tech team is grappling with a tough, widely misunderstood issue about your community. **You share expert knowledge about the problem**, leading to a breakthrough and avoiding a critical misunderstanding.

A tech team wants to get their prototype into the hands of real users. **You connect them with end users from your network**, helping them gather direct feedback on a potential solution.

A tech team is experimenting with the language on their website. **You offer guidance on which messages will resonate with your community** and the framing pitfalls to avoid.

In order to make these types of interactions feel lightweight, impactful, and a good use of your time, the TOP process will provide helpful structure and guidance when engaging partners.

Depending on your availability, you can expect to spend 1-3 hours per week assisting tech teams in shaping realistic and important use cases for their products. Use this opportunity to help build something amazing for your community!



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What is a User Advocate?

A User Advocate is a sprint participant who is a member of, or works closely with, the target audience of the tools being developed during the sprint (i.e. an “end user” of the products being built by the tech team). They can be service providers, community leaders, organizers, or people with direct lived experience of the problem being addressed.

Why is being a User Advocate important?

User advocates represent invaluable first-hand knowledge about the problem statements focused on during sprints in the Opportunity Project. This knowledge is invaluable because without understanding their end user’s real problems, tech teams cannot build meaningful solutions. Having collaborators with direct knowledge of their community’s pain points, perspectives, and experiences, allows tech teams to build products that solve real needs, rather than products that are only useful in concept.

Where do I fit into the process?

User Advocates have a role at every stage of the sprint process.

At the beginning of the process, you can provide much-needed context for the problem

statement to help tech teams better understand the central issues and narrow down their focus.

During the sprints, tech teams may ask you for more information to better understand your community by conducting interviews, focus groups, workshops, or online surveys. Tech teams may also ask you to connect them to other members of the community you represent to connect with a broader user research base. Throughout the sprint, you will have the opportunity to provide direct feedback on products in development via discussions on Slack and will join in celebrating all sprint milestones!

Once the tech teams have an initial prototype, User Advocates play a critical role in collecting reactions and feedback from their communities either on their own or by connecting tech teams with members of their community to conduct user testing. User testing allows tech teams to know first-hand how useful their product is, what works and doesn’t work, and most importantly, what to change for the next iteration.

What kind of feedback do I give to tech teams?

Anything you want to share will be helpful, but in particular, you may want to focus on your experiences or your community’s experiences with the problem statement. As a User Advocate, you have a valuable perspective on



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your community's struggles and experiences that the tech teams want to learn from. When reacting to a prototype, you can share whether you find it useful and why or why not, what works and doesn't work, what you like and why, what you'd change, etc. When interviewing you or asking for feedback, tech teams will prompt you with specific questions; however, any way you can represent your community's needs and experiences will be helpful.

How often should I interact with the tech teams?

We encourage User Advocates to check in with the tech teams regularly through Slack, email, or any other preferred channel of communication. Since user advocates have a pivotal role in shaping the usefulness of the product, more communication can only result in a better product.

Who do I contact if I have any more specific questions?

We are all here to help so please don't hesitate to reach out with any questions or feedback at any time.

What are the past outcomes of a sprint?

To date, 80 consumer-facing digital products that leverage open data have been created through TOP. All are available at [opportunity.census.gov](https://www.census.gov/opportunity). Thirty federal agencies and more than 100 external organizations have participated in sprints.

What is the time commitment to be a User Advocate?

Time commitment depends on the desired level of involvement. It can range from one to three hours per week. Many user advocates participate more or less during different phases of the sprint, but the more communication and involvement the better as user advocates have a valuable and pivotal role in shaping the effectiveness of the product.



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Join a 2019 Sprint

Sprint 1: Developing the Future Workforce

Timeline: June 24 - September 27, optional user engagement workshop in Chicago on July 2nd.

Sprint topics:

- Entrepreneurship (White House Office of Science and Technology Policy)
- Helping the American Workforce Leverage Multiple Pathways for Career Growth (U.S. Department of Education)
- Developing Regional Talent Discovery Pipelines (U.S. Economic Development Administration)
- Investment in Opportunity Zones (Council of Economic Advisors & US Department of Housing and Urban Development)

Contact: Drew Zachary at drew.a.zachary@census.gov

Sprint 2: Get Out the Count - Innovating for the 2020 Census

Timeline: July 29 - November 1, optional user engagement workshop in Washington DC in early August

Sprint topics:

- Leveraging technology for enumerator recruitment
- Using real time response data to inform community outreach efforts
- Addressing the digital divide
- Reaching hard to count communities such as families with children under 5, people experiencing homelessness, LGBTQ and rural populations.

Contact: Lorena Molina-Irizarry at lorena.molina-irizarry@census.gov

