

User Research Synthesis Report

Improving the Usability of Government Program Reports

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Executive Summary



Federal funding for state-administered programs serves as a vital safety net for Americans. In order to receive these funds, States must produce reports often exceeding 300 pages. The sheer volume of information makes it difficult to ascertain the usefulness of the reports.. Consequently, government employees, policy analysts, and researchers face challenges in extracting data and insights to comprehensively understand the impact of government programs and services.



Discussions



Interviews



Personas

2000+

Federally Funded
Public Programs

~300

Pages in each
Program Report

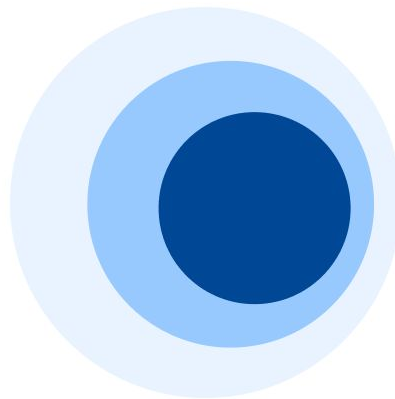
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States

"If a report doesn't help me make decisions, it's not serving it's purpose"

"How do I determine if this report worth reading?"

"I have my own little Google Doc with my hacks of navigating information"



Policy analysts spend a lot of time in looking for the key information in the sea of data (in this case 300-400 pages of govt. program reports)



Improving usability of govt.
program reports



Analyzing govt. program reports



Reducing time and uncertainty

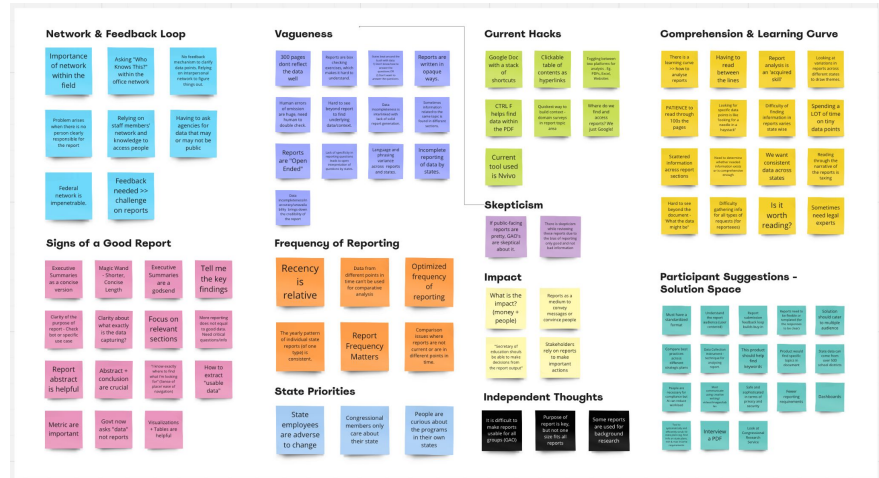
Affinity Clustering

We conducted an affinity clustering exercise to map emerging themes and patterns from our interview findings. We then digitized it into a Miro Board to keep a proper record of it.

[\(Link to Miro Board\)](#)

Some emerging themes were –

- The steep comprehension & learning curve associated with analyzing reports.
- Current ‘hacks’ that the users are employing to get the job done.
- Stakeholder network and feedback loops.
- Vagueness and scattered information.



Personas

Sarah Thompson



Age: 35 years
Policy Analyst

"One way to understand reports is to leverage relationships and talk to whoever wrote the report."

Bio:

With an extensive background in policy analysis, Sarah Thompson is a dedicated professional with over 10 years of experience in the public sector. She excels in managing federally funded state-run programs, meticulously overseeing their implementation and dissecting complex data for insightful reports. Sarah's expertise lies in crafting policies that not only adhere to federal guidelines but also address the nuanced needs of local communities.

Goals:

- Ensure accuracy and reliability of data in program reports for federally funded state-run initiatives.
- Analyze key performance indicators to assess program effectiveness.
- Collaborate with internal and external stakeholders to address concerns and gather insights.

Frustrations:

- **Incomplete Data Sources:** Dealing with incomplete or unreliable data sources that hinder the ability to provide accurate and comprehensive program assessments.
- **Limited Stakeholder Engagement:** Frustration with limited engagement from key stakeholders, making it challenging to gather necessary insights and address concerns effectively.
- **Resource Constraints:** Feeling constrained by limited resources, both in terms of time and budget, which can impact the depth and frequency of program report analysis.

Scenario:

Sarah grapples with the frustration of navigating extensive, unwieldy program reports. The sheer volume of data in these lengthy documents not only complicates her analysis but also adds a layer of difficulty in identifying crucial insights and addressing data gaps efficiently. This challenge further amplifies the pain points of bureaucratic hurdles, limited stakeholder engagement, and resource constraints, making her mission to enhance program efficiency notably demanding.

Suzie Ray



Age: 50 years
Chief Research Officer
(Non-Profit Advocacy)

"Looking for a specific data point is like looking for a needle in a hay stack."

Bio:

Suzie has spent over 20 years championing the cause of accessible and high-quality child care. Her expertise lies in translating research insights into impactful advocacy strategies, influencing policy changes that positively impact families nationwide. Suzie is known for her unwavering commitment to the well-being of children and her ability to bridge the gap between academic research and real-world policy solutions.

Goals:

- Drive evidence-based research for impactful child care policies.
- Collaborate with research institutions and policy makers to positively influence child care legislation.
- Promote accessible research findings for informed discussions and decisions in child care among the public, policymakers, and nonprofits.

Frustrations:

- **Report processing challenges:** Difficulty managing lengthy program reports, causing delays in extracting actionable insights efficiently.
- **Resource constraints:** Struggle with limited resources, both in terms of time and personnel, to conduct thorough analyses of extensive program reports and present comprehensive findings for effective child care advocacy.
- **Data discrepancies:** Frustrations with inaccuracies compromise research findings, impeding a compelling case for child care advocacy.

Scenario:

Suzie, the Chief Research Officer, faces the challenge of sifting through a vast array of comprehensive child care program reports. The extensive data within these reports creates a bottleneck, impeding the swift extraction of critical insights for evidence-based advocacy. Resource constraints intensify the frustration, hampering the organization's capacity to analyze these lengthy documents thoroughly, thereby affecting the timely advancement of impactful child care policies.

David Mitchell



Age: 43 years
Accountability Officer

"Transparency and accountability in these matters, demands rigorous testing, questioning, and a relentless pursuit of factual accuracy for meaningful impact."

Bio:

David Mitchell, an accomplished Accountability Officer at the Government Accountability Office (GAO), is dedicated to maintaining financial integrity and government accountability. Specializing in meticulous scrutiny of program reports, he navigates complex data to ensure transparency, effectiveness, and adherence to the highest standards of fiscal responsibility in public programs.

Goals:

- Verify and uphold the reliability of data in federally funded state-run program reports.
- Implement strategies to strengthen accountability in program assessments.
- Foster transparent reporting practices for federally funded initiatives.

Frustrations:

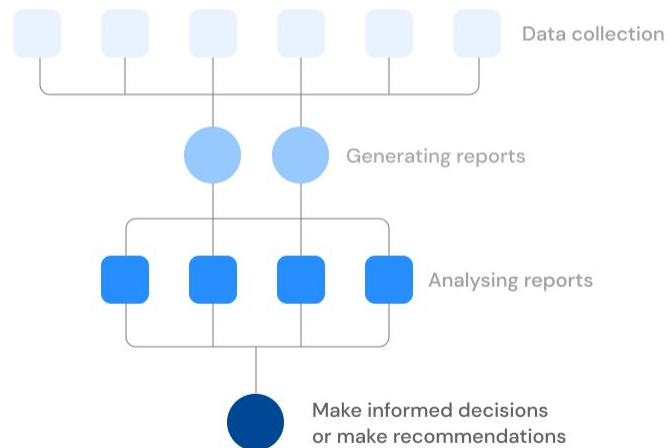
- **Data Inconsistencies:** Grapple with challenges related to inconsistent or unreliable data in program reports.
- **Accountability Obstacles:** Navigate obstacles hindering the seamless implementation of accountability measures in program assessments.
- **Transparency Challenges:** Experience difficulties in promoting and maintaining transparent reporting practices within federally funded state-run programs.

Scenario:


As the Accountability Officer at the GAO, David encounters frustrations dealing with inconsistent data in a lengthy program report, amplifying the challenge of ensuring data reliability. Navigating bureaucratic hurdles further complicates efforts to enhance accountability measures and maintain transparency, making the task of delivering comprehensive program assessments notably demanding.

Job to be done

Policy Analysts, Accountability Officers and Policy Researchers hire program reports to make decisions or recommendations based on factual data.



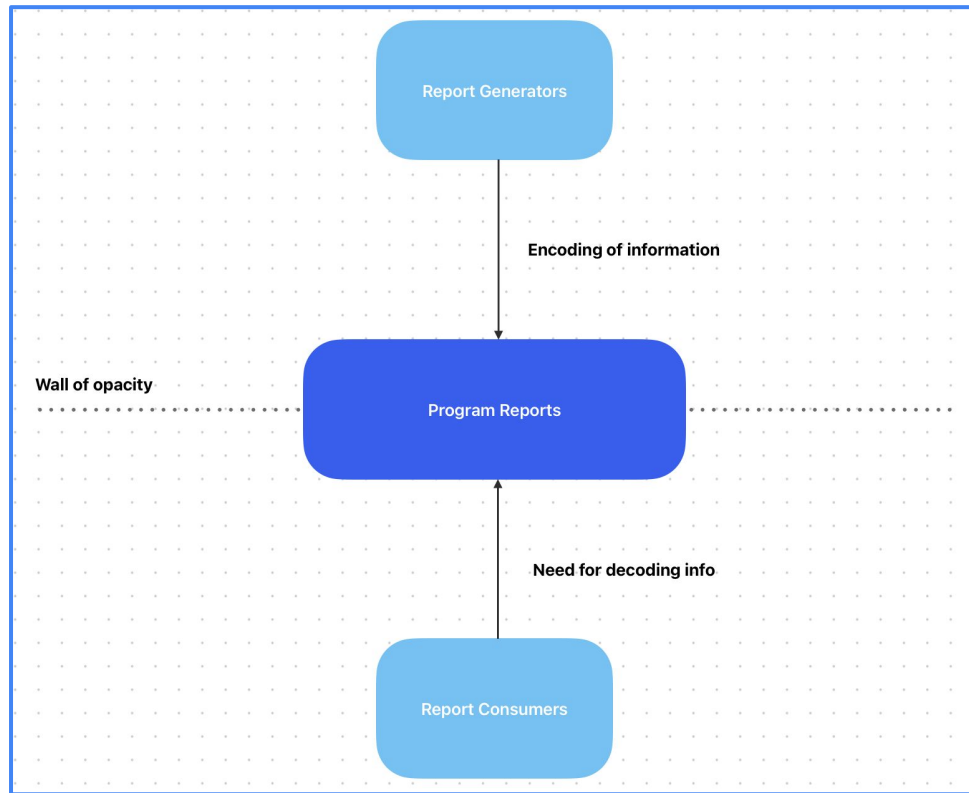
User Journey

 <p>Age: 43 years</p>	<p>David Mitchell Accountability Officer</p>	<p><i>"Transparency and accountability in these matters, demands rigorous testing, questioning, and a relentless pursuit of factual accuracy for meaningful impact."</i></p>			
	Getting an Overview	Stakeholder Collaboration	*KPI Analysis	Recommendation Report	
Rational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify key pages and subjects that provide crucial information. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connect and discuss with an expert responsible for report generation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To evaluate state run programs' performance using federal parameters. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To provide actionable objectives to congress and federal agencies. 	
Emotional Drivers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To optimize time and reduce unnecessary hours spent on reading irrelevant information. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To eliminate confusion and address concerns related to understanding specific aspects of reports. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To offer factual evidence supporting their recommendations. (get surety) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To instigate a positive change at the federal and state levels, enhancing transparency between the government and citizens. 	
Tangible Touchpoints	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PDFs, Word Documents, Computer, Browser. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emails, Phone Directories, Computer, Mobile Phones. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PDFs, Excel Sheets, Performance Dashboards, Rubric Sheet. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PDFs, Word Documents, Web Database. 	
Aspirations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hopes to get a one page summary of the entire program report. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hopes to be factually correct and avoid misinterpretations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hopes to quantify and measure programs impact and effectiveness. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hopes to build a strong case to drive change in government programs. 	
Pain Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spending a lot of time skimming through 300 pages of the report. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficulty in contacting people who generated reports. (lack of network) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficulty in analyzing data from different points in time 		
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How might we aid accountability officer to parse and summarize the report efficiently ? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How might we help accountability officer effectively connect and network with people who generate reports? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How might we help accountability officer effectively compare program reports? 		

*KPI = Key Performance Indicators

Key Insights

- (From a Job To Be Done context) Users 'hire' program reports to make decisions.
- Users tend to look for specific data points while reading reports.
- There is a mismatch in the existing mental models of two user groups – ones who create reports and ones who consume them.
- At times the reports are generated at different points in time which makes recency of the report relative and hard to compare.
- Federal government is now focusing on data rather than reports.
- Users don't always know what they're looking for in a report.
- There is a wall of opacity between report generators and consumers which the consumers try to overcome by leveraging personal networks.

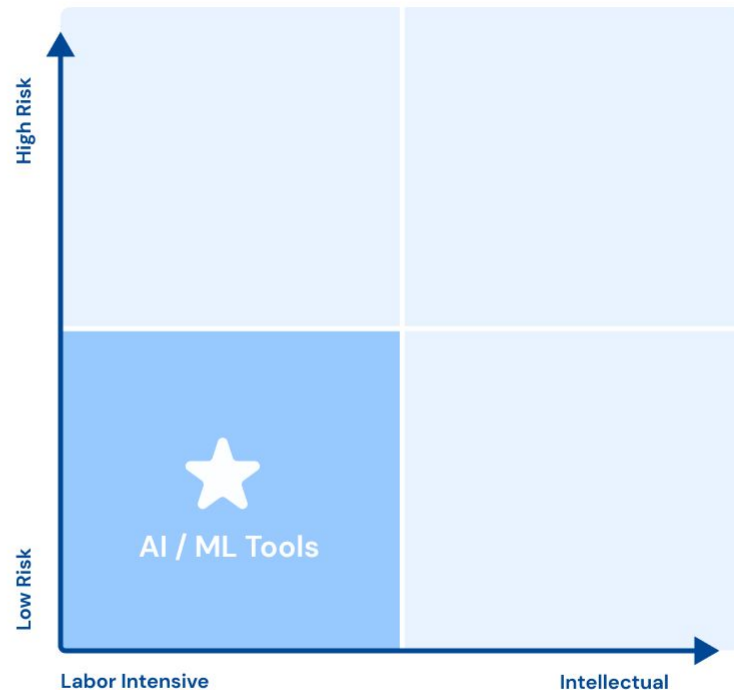


Aha! Moments

One key takeaway from all our interviews was that any tool that we develop, especially AI/ML based, has to be positioned such that it does the laborious heavy lifting work of finding and parsing data, while leaving the intellectual, high-risk analysis in the hands of a human. Although humans also make errors of omission, having a human cross check everything that the tool puts out is extremely crucial for our target users. We mapped this positioning into a 2x2 matrix.

Another 'aha' moment was learning about the importance of how much our interviewees relied on their internal network of stakeholders to 'figure out' what's going on in reports and ask clarifying questions.

One more key takeaway was when we learnt that there is a steep learning curve and significant friction in the comprehension of these reports. This is so pertinent that report analysis was actually characterized as an acquired skill.



Design Principles

Ease of Use – The solution should be intuitive to the target user group, with a minimal learning curve.

Secure & Sophisticated – The solution should not compromise on security and be sophisticated enough to handle the information load.

New-Age – The solution should use modern technology to streamline the process of analysis.

POGs

Federal policy analysts want to be able to quickly find specific data points within state program reports without spending a lot of time and effort.

Researchers want to access a high level summary of the report before fully diving into it to decide if it's worth spending time on.

Govt accountability officers want to extract succinct answers to their exact questions/prompts without any extra details.

Thank you