

Define Activity 3: Needs Statement

Overview

In this activity, you will create a Needs Statement, a tool that helps designers narrow a large-scale challenge to a specific set of users.

By the end of this activity, you should have three complete Needs Statements to move forward with in the rest of the course.

Time

30 minutes

People and Materials

- Results of Download and Group and Empathy Map activities
- Sticky notes
- Marker or felt-tipped pen
- Whiteboard or empty wall space
- Printed Needs Statement Worksheet (or scrap paper) to take notes
- Pen or pencil

Instructions

By now you may be starting to notice some interesting trends within your findings. Or maybe you're not (that's okay, too). The purpose of creating a Needs Statement is to translate your results from the Download and Group and Empathy Map activities into an actionable statement that can be used in the next phase of the design process.

Note: I recommend doing all three of the Define activities in a row so the ideas are fresh in your mind and the sticky notes are available at your fingertips. If that's not possible, it's also okay to reference photos of your results from the first two Define activities to help create your Needs Statement.

As you'll recall from our Define phase lecture video, a Needs Statement is a simple formula that helps you reframe the broad challenge you're tackling as a narrow and actionable statement. That formula typically looks like this: [User] needs to [need] because [unique discovery]. This formula has three variables:

- User: a specific person, described in depth
- Need: an action-oriented need
- Unique discovery: a unique contradiction, pattern, or other insight

Note: For the need, it's important to remember that you'll want to be action-oriented, which is why we suggest using a verb here. For example, instead of saying, "A hungry person needs food" (noun), you might say, "A hungry person needs to learn how to procure food for his family" (verb). If you use a noun for the need, it can often come too close to a preloaded solution—and you're not quite there yet.

In this activity, you will create several Needs Statements based on your findings. Here's how:

1. Collect your materials (sticky notes and a marker) and find a place to work that has a large, flat surface like an empty wall, a table, or a whiteboard. On a whiteboard or large piece of paper, sketch three columns with the following titles: User, Need, and Unique Discovery.
2. Begin by thoroughly reviewing your completed Empathy Map and the end product of your Download and Group activity. If you have any new thoughts to add to either, you may do so at any time.
3. We're now going to work backwards within the Needs Statement formula, beginning with the Unique Discovery. Look at your findings from the previous Define activities to identify themes, patterns, contradictions, and surprises. Using one sticky note per a response, summarize each of these findings in a couple words as a "Unique Discovery." Try to write down at least one Unique Discovery for each group identified in your "Define and Group" activity, as well as several more from patterns and contradictions in your Empathy Map. Place these sticky notes in the "Unique Discovery" column of your work space.

4. Now we'll create a list of options for the "Needs" variable in the equation. Looking at your findings from these previous Define activities, make a list of as many action-oriented user needs as possible. (Remember to use verbs to avoid mistaking solutions for needs!) Once you've written down as many needs as possible off the top of your head, look at your list of Unique Discoveries. Make sure you have at least one action-oriented need for each. Now place your new sticky notes in the Needs column of your workspace.
5. Now you will look at the user. Like a fill-in-the-blank sentence, choose several different combinations of Needs and Unique Discoveries, and describe a specific type of user to complete each sentence. Be as descriptive as possible. You may wish to reference your User Map for this as well. Write short descriptions of these users, one person per sticky note, and add them to the User column of your workspace.

You should now have a number of options for each variable within the Needs Statement formula. Which combinations are most compelling to you? Which are most surprising? Which would you be excited to pursue? Think about these questions as you complete the Needs Statement Worksheet, identifying three solid Needs Statements you'd like to move forward with in this course.

NEEDS STATEMENT

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USER (be specific)

NEED (action verb)

needs to

UNIQUE DISCOVERY ABOUT USER

because

USER (be specific)

NEED (action verb)

needs to

UNIQUE DISCOVERY ABOUT USER

because

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