



# Submitting a Problem Statement

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## 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 12-week technology development sprints have catalyzed over 100 data-driven digital products including apps, websites, games, AI algorithms, satellite data tools, and more.

Our sprints have leveraged open data to address more than **30 problem statements** including disaster response, youth and veteran homelessness, the opioid crisis, expanding the innovation economy, and more, led by agencies including OMB, OSTP, ED, DOT, HUD, FEMA, Treasury, VA, HHS, Labor, USDA, and Census Bureau.

## What is a problem statement?

This proposal document is a template for federal agencies to submit ideas for 2020 sprint topics. Each year, our 14-week technology development sprints focus on key challenges such as the opioid crisis, disaster preparedness, STEM education, and



more – we call these “problem statements.” View all our past problem statements and learn more about the sprint process on [The Opportunity Project website](#).

This year, we’re holding an open call for problem statements representing new or perennial challenges to tackle in this year’s sprints. **We’re especially interested in topics related to the built and natural environments** (e.g. topics such as sustainable energy, disaster response or mitigation, the blue economy, environmental health, smart cities, plastic reduction, etc.), but you can submit any topic of interest to your agency.

Once we select the topics, companies and universities will sign on to prototype solutions to those challenges alongside our team and representatives from your agencies. In past sprints, tech teams have included IBM, Cisco, Citi Ventures, Mastercard Center for Inclusive Growth, Mapbox, Esri, Fitbit, Zillow, Redfin, Bloomberg, Airbnb, LinkedIn, as well as small businesses, startups, universities and more.

## What is required if my topic is selected?

This process does not require an MOU or funding from your agency, but we do ask each agency to identify a lead POC, and commit to participating in the full sprint, joining weekly huddles and serving as a direct and accessible resource to sprint participants.

NOTE: 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](mailto:census.opportunityproject@census.gov)!

### When do the sprints start?

- We will review problem statements on a rolling basis through mid-April.
- By the end of April, we will select and revise the problem statements, and identify tech teams, user advocates,

### 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 one main staff-level agency point of contact who has support and



product experts, and additional data sources for the sprints.

- Our first round of 2020 sprints will run from **June – September** (exact dates TBD). Our second round of 2020 sprints will run from **July – October** (exact dates TBD).
- End-of-year Demo Day will be held in Washington DC in December 2020.

bandwidth to work with us and participating teams on a weekly basis throughout the development and execution of the sprints. We do not require a specific hourly commitment.

### **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.

### **What does NOT make a good 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 problems should focus on issues facing members of the public – for example, families, communities, businesses, educators, or state and local governments. TOP is also not designed to prescribe specific solutions to the tech teams. Instead, we frame general challenges, and leave the tech teams outside of government 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 public by the time the sprints begin.



## How can I submit a topic?

To submit a topic, please download and fill out the document called “TOP Problem Statement Submission.docx” on [opportunity.census.gov/proposal](https://opportunity.census.gov/proposal), and submit your responses to [census.opportunityproject@census.gov](mailto:census.opportunityproject@census.gov) with subject line “Problem Statement Proposal”.

**Submissions are due by April 3rd, 2020.** We'll review submissions on a rolling basis.

Thanks and we look forward to working with you!

- The Opportunity Project Team

THE OPPORTUNITY  
PROJECT == \*\*

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