

Nesta...

Asking the right questions

Exploring opportunities and challenges

RESOURCE

What

Posing questions rather than making assertions, and keeping an open mind about your area of focus, are critical to this research phase. Expressing your opportunity or challenge as a question will help you to keep focused on exploring possibilities and developing your understanding rather than closing down too quickly.

Why

Spending time and effort in ‘framing’ your challenge or opportunity is critical to setting off on the right path to find a solution and will help prevent you from designing something that people may not really want or need, or that fails to address the underlying issues. So identifying the right question(s) to frame your challenge or opportunity is critical, but getting it right can be complicated.

How

Questions that begin with ‘how’ helpfully focus the mind on the active search for solutions. They anticipate a solution and encourage you to think about what it might be.

What is the current situation or way of working?

- Why is this insufficient or untenable?
- What needs to improve or what would be the benefits of change?

What work has been undertaken in the past?

- What alternative approaches have been tried?
- How successful have these been?
- What questions remain unanswered, what possibilities remain untested, and what issues and challenges remain unaddressed?

Where are the most promising examples of current practice?

- What emerging examples in this field, or related fields, might we want to pay attention to?

What policies or regulations are conditioning the way we work?

- What policy changes might influence work in this area?
- What other potential developments or wider trends could influence the way we work?