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THE OPPORTUNITY PROJECT

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## 

What Makes a Good Problem Statement

THE OPPORTUNITY PROJECT [YEAR] SPRINTS

Guidelines for Submitting a

Problem Statement

### What is The Opportunity Project?

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### **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 technology development sprints have catalyzed over 200 data-driven products including apps, websites, games, AI algorithms, mapping tools, some non-digital solutions and more.

### Our sprints have leveraged open data to address more than **40 problem statements** on topics like disaster response, rural economic development, youth and veteran homelessness, the opioid crisis, COVID-19, expanding the innovation economy, and [more](https://go.usa.gov/x7mgA). Problem statements have been led by federal agencies including the U.S. Departments of Education, Labor, Agriculture, Veterans Affairs, Housing and Urban Development, Health and Human Services, Treasury, Commerce, EPA, nonprofits such as USA for UNHCR, and more.

### What is a problem statement?

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### A [Problem statement](https://go.usa.gov/x7mgA) provides the topic of the challenge that teams will focus on during the

### technology development sprints. It summarizes an issue that can be solved by using open

### data to build digital solutions.

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### A great problem statement focuses on a compelling problem that tells a human story. It should be reasonable enough in scope that digital tools could make an impact in it, but broad enough that there is room for tech teams to be creative and develop a diverse set of solutions. When developing your problem statement, keep in mind that agencies have the most success when there is open data available to address the problem.

### View all our past problem statements and learn more about the sprint process on [The Opportunity Project website](http://go.usa.gov/xHnKZ).

### What should I avoid in my problem statement?

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### 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 problem statements should focus on issues

### facing members of the public – for example, families, communities, businesses, educators, or state, local and tribal governments. Please avoid prescribing specific solutions to the tech teams. Instead, frame a general challenge, and leave the tech teams and communities 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) any key federal data sets need to be available to the public by the time your sprint begins.

Consult with the TOP Team at Census Open Innovation Labs (COIL)

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### If you are interested in consulting with the TOP team at COIL to develop and/or finalize your problem statement, please email [census.opportunityproject@census.gov](mailto:census.opportunityproject@census.gov) with subject line “Problem Statement Consultation”.

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### Thanks and we look forward to working with you!