The Stakeholder-Centered Problem Reframing Tool

Welcome to the Stakeholder-Centered Problem Reframing Tool. As leaders in educational and nonprofit organizations, the problems you face are rarely straightforward and often involve multiple perspectives and stakeholders. This tool is designed to help you move beyond surface-level problem statements to uncover deeper insights that lead to more effective and sustainable solutions.

When we reframe problems through the lens of stakeholder needs and experiences, we shift from reactive problem-solving to proactive opportunity creation. This approach helps ensure that the solutions you develop will not only address immediate concerns but will also create meaningful impact for those you serve.

Goal

The goal of this tool is to help you transform initial problem statements into reframed opportunities that:

- Center on human needs and experiences
- Consider multiple stakeholder perspectives
- Move from deficit-focused thinking to possibility-oriented approaches
- Create space for innovative solutions

See the last two pages for examples of initial and reframed problem statements in both nonprofits and education.

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Advice

1. **Define Your Initial Problem Statement:** Start by writing down what you currently understand the problem to be. Don't worry about getting it perfect—this is your starting point.

2. **Identify Key Stakeholders:** List all individuals and groups who are affected by or have influence over this problem. Include those who might not typically have a voice in the process.

3. **Conduct Stakeholder Research:** Gather insights through:
   - One-on-one conversations
   - Focus groups
   - Surveys
   - Observation
   - Existing data review

4. **Extract Key Insights:** Document what you've learned about stakeholder needs, challenges, and aspirations related to the problem.

5. **Create Your Reframed Problem Statement:** Use the insights gathered to *reframe* the initial problem into an opportunity statement that:
   - Begins with "How might we..."
   - Centers stakeholder needs
   - Opens possibilities rather than narrows options
   - Avoids implying a specific solution

6. **Test Your Reframed Statement:** Share the reframed problem statement with key stakeholders to ensure it resonates with their experiences and needs.

7. **Iterate as Needed:** Refine your reframed statement based on feedback.

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Step 1: Problem Definition Worksheet

Complete this section as an initial, independent reflection and/or with your team members.

What is the initial problem as you see it?

_____

_____

What evidence do you have that this is a problem?

_____

_____

Who is most affected by this problem?

_____

_____

What have you already tried to address this problem?

_____

_____

What assumptions might you be making about this problem?

_____

_____

Step 2: Stakeholder Mapping

Work with your team to identify relevant stakeholders and articulate initial thoughts and observations about how they're impacted by the problem. *(See our Stakeholder Map Template)*

Stakeholder Group	How You Think They're Affected	Questions to Ask Them	Priority (High/ Medium/Low)

Step 3: Insight Collection

Visually organize team members' ideas about stakeholder experiences, especially as it pertains to the challenge at hand. Then summarize them here and complete the table. *See our Empathy Map Template.*

Stakeholder Group	Key Needs Identified	Key Challenges Identified	Aspirations/ Desired Outcomes

Step 4: Problem Reframing Worksheet

Once you've gathered all initial data from stakeholders, work with your team to reflect and respond to the following questions.

What deeper needs have you uncovered?

_____

_____

What patterns emerged across stakeholder groups?

_____

_____

Where is there energy for change?

_____

_____

What might be possible if this problem were solved?

_____

_____

Draft "How might we..." statements:

_____

_____

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Examples from Nonprofits

Initial Problem Statement	Stakeholder Insights	Reframed Problem Statement
"Volunteer retention rates have dropped significantly."	Volunteers feel their skills aren't well-utilized; training is inconsistent; they desire more feedback on their impact.	"How might we create a volunteer experience that honors individuals' skills, provides clear guidance, and connects volunteers meaningfully to our mission impact?"
"Staff burnout is affecting program quality."	Staff feel emotionally drained by complex client needs; administrative burdens take time from mission work; limited opportunity for reflection.	"How might we nurture a sustainable culture of wellbeing where staff can fully contribute their talents while having the support they need to thrive in challenging work?"
"Program participation is lower than projected."	Community members face transportation barriers; program times conflict with work schedules; messaging doesn't resonate with cultural values.	"How might we adapt our programs and outreach to better align with community needs, values, and practical realities while still advancing our mission?"

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Examples from Education

Initial Problem Statement	Stakeholder Insights	Reframed Problem Statement
"Student attendance is declining, especially in grades 9-10."	Students report feeling disconnected from curriculum and unsupported during transitions; parents struggle with communication systems; teachers feel overwhelmed by attendance follow-up.	"How might we create learning experiences and support systems that motivate students to engage, while making it easier for families and educators to collaborate on attendance challenges?"
"Teachers are resistant to implementing the new curriculum."	Teachers feel overwhelmed by constant changes and lack of support; they value collaborative planning but have limited time; they worry about meeting student needs.	"How might we honor teacher expertise while creating sustainable structures for collaborative curriculum adaptation that addresses diverse student needs?"
"Parent engagement is low at our school events."	Working parents struggle with timing of events; families with multiple languages feel unwelcome; parents want to support learning but don't know how.	"How might we reimagine family partnership opportunities that honor diverse family circumstances and create meaningful ways for all families to engage with their children's education?"