

Defining user needs

This information is taken from the guides by the Government Digital Service (GDS):

- <https://www.gov.uk/service-manual/users/user-needs.html>
- <https://www.gov.uk/service-manual/agile/writing-user-stories.html>

Any thinking about a service, whether online or offline, must start with the question: What is the user need?

Defining a user need must be strict and honest. It's the need the user has of your council, not the need of your council to impart information to the user. That's an important distinction, because it means that you'll be able to more measure the success of your services and improve them to meet the needs of the people who will make use of them.

User stories

Expressing a user need mustn't imply the solution. The user need should be expressed as a user story, so you can discuss and explore possible solutions.

1. Define the user need
2. Write the user story (using story cards) from the perspective of the user
3. Define the acceptance criteria
4. Solution is explored and delivered by the service team

Writing story cards

A user story is represented through a story card that has a title and a few lines of text. Story cards follow a standard structure:

- title
- actor → As a
- narrative → I want to
- goal → So that I can

Eg:-

Title:	"Contact details"	
Actor:	As a...	journalist
Narrative:	I want to...	see contact information relating to the news article I am reading
Goal:	So that...	I can get directly in touch with the press office about it

When writing stories with your development team, always start by thinking about and discussing your users' goals:

- why do they want to use your service?
- what are they trying to achieve?
- what need has motivated them to seek out your service?
- in what context do they use it - at home/work/on a mobile phone/whilst caring for a child?
- how often do they use it?

Design principles

This is a paraphrased version of the full document, which includes GDS's design principles and some very helpful examples of how they've used them so far. You can see the full document, and examples, here: <https://www.gov.uk/designprinciples>

1. Start with needs

User needs, not government /council needs.

The design process must start with identifying and thinking about real user needs. We should design around those — not around the way the 'official process' is at the moment. We must understand those needs thoroughly — interrogating data, not just making assumptions — and we should remember that what users ask for is not always what they need.

Here's a blog post about how GDS identified user needs:

<http://digital.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/2011/09/19/introducing-the-needotron-working-out-the-shape-of-the-product/>

2. Do less

If someone else is doing it — link to it.

3. Design with data

Normally, we're not starting from scratch — users are already using our services. This means we can learn from real world behaviour.

4. Do the hard work to make it simple

Making something simple to use is hard — especially when the underlying systems are complex — but that's what we should be doing.

5. Iterate. Then iterate again.

The best way to build effective services is to start small and keep improving. Iteration reduces risk. It makes big failures unlikely and turns small failures into lessons.

6. Build for inclusion

Accessible design is good design. We should build a product that's as inclusive, legible and readable as possible. If we have to sacrifice elegance — so be it. We shouldn't be afraid of the obvious, shouldn't try to reinvent web design conventions and should set expectations clearly.

7. Understand context

We need to think hard about the context in which they're using our services. Are they in a library? Are they on a phone? Are they only really familiar with Facebook? Have they never used the web before?

8. Build digital services, not websites

Our service doesn't begin and end at our website. It might start with a search engine and end at the post office.

9. Be consistent, not uniform

Wherever possible we should use the same language and the same design patterns — this helps people get familiar with our services. But, when this isn't possible, we should make sure our underlying approach is consistent.

10. Make things open: it makes things better

We should share what we're doing whenever we can. With colleagues, with users, with the world. Share code, share designs, share ideas, share intentions, share failures. The more eyes there are on a service the better it gets — howlers get spotted, better alternatives get pointed out, the bar gets raised.

Style Guide

You can find the GDS Style Guide here: <https://www.gov.uk/designprinciples/styleguide>

Service Design Manual –

The Government Service Design Manual is a collection of best practice and advice from the GDS team.

It includes guides for:

- Agile
- Assisted digital
- Design and content
- Making software
- Measurement
- Technology
- Skills needed in a digital team

The Service Design Manual is here: <https://www.gov.uk/service-manual>

You can find a full list of the guides here: <https://www.gov.uk/service-manual/browse>