



Guidelines for Submitting a Problem Statement

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 technology development sprints have catalyzed over 130 data-driven digital products including apps, websites, games, AI algorithms, mapping tools, and more.

Our sprints have leveraged open data to address more than **30 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](#). Problem statements have been led by federal agencies including; 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?

[Problem statements](#) are the challenge topics that teams focus on in our technology development sprints. We created a template for federal agencies and nonprofits to submit ideas for 2021 sprint topics, allowing us to source ideas for pressing challenges from many diverse stakeholders. View all our past problem statements and learn more about the sprint process on [The Opportunity Project website](#).

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.

How can I propose a problem statement?

This year, we're holding an open call for problem statements through **May 17, 2021**. We're especially interested in problem statements related to the following themes:

1. Envisioning the world post-COVID: Environment, Society & Economy
2. Creative approaches to sharing 2020 census data & Increasing data literacy

However, federal agencies, state or local governments, and NGOs can submit problem statements on any topic of interest. Once the final problem statements are selected, companies, start-ups, universities and non-profits will sign on to prototype solutions to those challenges alongside representatives from federal agencies and The Opportunity Project team. In past sprints, tech teams have included companies and universities like IBM, SAS, Citi Ventures, Mastercard Center for Inclusive Growth, Mapbox, Esri, Redfin, Bloomberg, Airbnb, LinkedIn, as well as small businesses, startups, universities and more.

What should I avoid in my 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 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), and any key federal data sets need to be available to the public by the time your sprint begins.

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 2-3 staff-level agency points of contact who have support and bandwidth to work with us and participating teams on a weekly basis throughout the development and execution of the sprints. We also find agencies are most successful when they are open-minded about possible sprint outcomes, and willing to think creatively about solutions.

What is required if my topic is selected?

If your topic is selected, it will be the focus of a tech development sprint this year! A sprint can be completed with or without funding, but does require time and attention. The time commitment ranges up to 5-6 hours per week, and will depend on the amount of support you need from The Opportunity Project team at the Census Bureau. If your team will need a significant amount of assistance to facilitate the sprint, it may require a reimbursable interagency agreement. Please contact our team to discuss this further. For all sprints, we ask each agency to identify a lead point of contact and other contributing team members who will work on the sprint on a weekly basis, as well as an executive champion who provides air cover and may be asked to speak at a Demo Day launch event.

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!

When do the sprints take place?

- ↳ We will review problem statements on a rolling basis through May 17, 2021. By the end of May, we will select and revise the final 2021 problem statements.
- ↳ During May and June 2021, tech teams, user advocates, product experts, and additional data sources will be identified for the sprints.
- ↳ Most 2021 sprints should run between **July – October 2021** (exact dates TBD), but note we can make exceptions based on time constraints of each agency. To be showcased in our December 2021 Demo Day event, sprints must be completed by the end of October.
- ↳ End-of-year Demo Day will be held in December 2021.

How can I submit a topic?

To propose a topic, please download the [proposal template document](#) and submit to census.opportunityproject@census.gov with subject line "Problem Statement Proposal".

Submissions are due by May 17, 2021 and will be reviewed on a rolling basis.

Thanks and we look forward to working with you!

– The Opportunity Project Team