



Guidelines for Submitting a Problem Statement

What is The Opportunity Project?

The Opportunity Project (TOP) brings together technologists, government, and communities to rapidly catalyze and prototype digital products that solve real-world problems for communities—powered by federal open data. 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**; with particular interest in problem statements related to the following themes:

1. Envisioning the world post-COVID: Society, Economy & Environment
2. Creative and inclusive 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 challenges internal to your organization. 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, state, or local government data sets need to be available to the public by the time the sprint begins.

When do the sprints take place?

- ↳ During **May – June**, tech teams, user advocates, product experts, and additional data sources will be identified for the sprints. Please see [roles description here](#).
- ↳ Most sprints run between **July – October** (exact dates TBD); we can make exceptions based on time constraints and the role of your organization in the sprints, or if you would like to run a sprint on your own using our [toolkits](#).
- ↳ End-of-year Demo Day will be held in December 2021. Please note, to be showcased at Demo Day, sprints must be completed by the end of October.

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 on average from up to 2-5 hours per week (varies depending on your [role](#) in the sprint). For any sprint, we ask organizations to identify a lead point of contact (POC) and to possibly consider other contributing team members.

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!

What to expect after I submit my proposal?

After reviewing your problem statement proposal:

- ↳ Your proposal could be integrated into a federal agency problem statement where there is available open data sets for addressing the problem space.
- ↳ We may pair your organization with a federal agency whose mission and policy priority aligns with your proposed topic/theme.
- ↳ You could consider leading a sprint yourself, which means running a self-facilitated process (TOPx) that adapts to your timeline, stakeholders and goals, by leveraging our [sprint facilitation](#) and [product development](#) toolkits.
- ↳ You could become a [User Advocate \(UA\)](#) for a similar problem statement aligned to your suggested theme/topic.

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