



TOOL | CRAFTING “HOW MIGHT WE” QUESTIONS

TIME REQUIRED: 10 MINUTES

Have you ever been asked to come up with new ideas to solve an old problem, or been stuck on how to get a group to approach a challenge in a different way? Sometimes, the best way to spark creativity is to think carefully about the question being asked.

USING THIS TOOL WILL HELP YOU:

- Foster new ideas in brainstorming questions
- Achieve clear definition on the challenge you face
- Generate multiple new perspectives on the challenge
- Make your assumptions and understanding of your challenge explicit

OVERVIEW

The questions we ask drive the answers we create. “How Might We... alleviate the symptoms of poverty?” leads to vastly different approaches and ideas than asking “How Might We... *reduce* poverty?” But, in the rush to get to ideas and solutions quickly, we often forget to pause and think about the best way to frame the questions we ask.

Taking the time to craft a series of “**How Might We...**” questions can result in critical shifts in the way you and your community approach a challenge. The words “How Might We” have a particular value, as described by Tim Brown, CEO of the innovation and design firm IDEO.

“The ‘how’ part assumes there are solutions out there – it provides creative confidence. ‘Might’ says we can put ideas out there that might work or might not – either way, it’s OK. And the ‘we’ part says we’re going to do it together and build on each other’s ideas.

-Tim Brown, CEO, IDEO¹



THE TOOL

Crafting a good “How Might We” question isn’t an exact science, but the process of reflecting on the right question to ask is just as valuable as the final questions you end up using. We’ve provided a simple tool that can help you come up with a few different options for “How Might We…” questions.

Step 1: Write the challenge you face in the box below.

OUR CHALLENGE IS...

Step 2: Capture your thoughts on the following questions.

WHAT ARE THE ROOT ISSUES CAUSING OUR CHALLENGE?

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-
-

WHAT ASSETS MIGHT WE BUILD ON?

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-
-

WHAT DO OUR STAKEHOLDERS WANT MORE GENERALLY (BEYOND OUR SPECIFIC INITIATIVE)?

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-
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Step 3: Take one (or more) of the above bullet points and experiment with framing a “How Might We” question around it.

- How Might We... _____
- How Might We... _____
- How Might We... _____
- How Might We... _____

Final Step: After you have generated about 10-15 different “How Might We’s,” select the most interesting and helpful frames to guide your work.

PRINCIPLES FOR USING THIS TOOL

- Take the time to experiment with many different frames on the same problem. Much of the value of this exercise is in trying on new ways of framing.
- Strive for a balance between breadth and specificity of a “How Might We” question.
- Make sure your “How Might We” statement reflects some aspect of how you understand the problem. Providing context for a starting point will help you generate many more ideas than a general and broad statement of the challenge.
- Always use more than a single “How Might We”!

THE TOOL IN PRACTICE

In this example we’ll use the case of a community Credit Union, seeking to identify ways to help their members save more money.³

OUR CHALLENGE IS...

Helping our members save more money

WHAT ARE THE ROOT ISSUES CAUSING OUR CHALLENGE?

- Members aren’t sure when they are able to save
- Members get derailed by unexpected expenses
- Members get overwhelmed by day-to-day expenses

WHAT ASSETS MIGHT WE BUILD ON?

- Members understand the importance of saving
- Members have goals and aspirations for their saving
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WHAT DO OUR STAKEHOLDERS WANT MORE GENERALLY (BEYOND OUR SPECIFIC INITIATIVE)?

- Not to have to worry about money
- Control over their finances
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- How Might We... allow members to save with the confidence that they will be able to access the money when they need it most?
- How Might We... help members prepare for the unexpected?
- How Might We... make day-to-day spending decisions easier?

DIVING DEEPER

If you would like to explore more ways to strengthen your “How Might We” questions, the resources below are fantastic places to start:

¹Read the Harvard Business Review article [The Secret Phrase Top Innovators Use](#)

²Learn about “How Might We” questions from [Stanford’s d.school](#)

³Explore the Bridgeable [Case Study](#) that inspired our example to get more insight into the solutions that emerged from this type of thinking.