

Writing A Problem Statement

Directions: Working in teams, work through the boxes from top to bottom to craft a problem statement. This page is a description of each box. The next page contains a completed sample of the worksheet. A blank copy of the worksheet appears on the last page.

Original problem or focusing question	State the initial issue you are interested in exploring, or write a focusing question about that issue.
Stakeholders who are most affected by the problem	Who is most directly impacted by this problem? Alternately, who would benefit the most if this problem were resolved?
Type of problem	For example, skills, attitudes, knowledge, or resources. Some problems are about attitudes (people feel fatalistic about confronting the lifestyle issues that lead to Type 2 Diabetes. If we could only change hearts and minds, we could end that epidemic. Or, people do not have access to healthy food in neighborhoods that are most at risk for developing Type 2 Diabetes.)
Suspected cause of the problem	Based on interviews, research, data analysis and/or the root cause analysis, what do you think is/are the most significant cause(s) contributing to this problem? What, if addressed, would make the greatest impact on resolving the problem? (Include specific evidence - or a plan for getting specific evidence).
Goal for improvement and long-term impact	The wishes, dreams, and general vision describing how you envision your design to impact the problem. You will write a clearer, measurable goal statement later on in the process. For now, stay with your vision of what success could be.
Proposal for addressing the problem	Plan your strategy for addressing the problem. Use research, local knowledge, and local expertise to guide you. (Note sources if possible). This will become the basis for subsequent action planning.
Final problem statement	Tie the above statements into 3–5 coherent sentences that could be easily understood by a wide range of stakeholders.

Sample

Original problem or focusing question	Too many students in Cleveland are not reading at grade level by grade 3. Many studies have shown that if students are not at grade level by year 3, they will continue to struggle throughout their school years.
Stakeholders who are most affected by the problem	Third grade students, teachers, administrators, and parents in Cleveland.
Type of problem	We are proposing this is primarily a problems of resources: Without proper resources, training programs suffer. Schools are over crowded and record-keeping is not consistent. Without good information about where our kids are starting, we have no way of knowing if our goals may be unattainable.
Suspected cause of the problem	Teachers don't get sufficient training and support in our reading programs. Students' reading levels are not measured accurately in grades K-3.
Goal for improvement and long-term impact	We want all our third graders to read at grade level or above.
Proposal for addressing the problem	Start a teacher mentoring program in reading. Implement more rigorous reading assessments in grades K-3.
Final problem statement	<p>Many third grade students in Cleveland do not read at grade level.</p> <p>We believe that this is a result of teachers not having sufficient training in our reading program and not accurately measuring students' reading levels in grades K-3.</p> <p>We want all third graders in our schools to read at grade level or above.</p> <p>We will start a teacher mentoring program focused on reading and implement more rigorous reading assessments in the primary grades. At the same time, we will implement a system that will more accurately record and report student reading ability in K-3 throughout the system.</p>

Worksheet

Original problem or focusing question	
Stakeholders who are most affected by the problem	
Type of problem	
Suspected cause of the problem	
Goal for improvement and long-term impact	
Proposal for addressing the problem	
Final problem statement	