

# Module: Ecosystem Mapping



## Key concepts and terms

**Theory of Change:** A theory of change is a tool that you can use to clarify your product, service or campaign's overall strategy, articulate why you think it will work, how you will know if it is working, and what you will need to put it in place. Theories of change define how and why a desired change can come about in a particular context. While theories of change aren't commonly used as part of a traditional human-centered design process, they are a time-tested tool in fields like international development and social change activism. Using a theory of change in the design process can help cement what your goals are, why you are doing what you are doing, what you aim to achieve and how you will achieve it.

**Ecosystem Mapping:** An ecosystem map is a visual representation of a process, flow, or system that highlights relationships in a particular context. Ecosystem mapping can help identify the scope of the project and ensure feasibility of the chosen strategy.

## When to use this module

This module should kick start your human-centered design process (or "design sprint"). Ecosystem mapping and principles of 'theory of change' should be guideposts for you, in this module and throughout the design process. This module can be helpful to return to if or when you get stuck in any of the other exercises.

Before you get started, remember that your product, service, or campaign is only going to be as accessible, inclusive and representative as the perspectives you integrate. Is your Co/Act team inclusive of different men, women, and diverse gender identities and sexual orientations, ages, disabilities, ethnicities, etc.? If not, think about how you can incorporate new voices into your participant group.

Ecosystem mapping is a great way to get a snapshot of the environment in which you are operating. Who else is working on your issue? What work are they doing? What are their successes, and what could be improved? Who (LGBTQI+, persons with disabilities, women, ethnic/religious minorities etc.) might be left out of existing solutions or products? Ecosystem mapping can help position your work, and identify ways to improve or differ from similar projects, groups, or movements. In the design world, a key step is noting what is being done both poorly and well, and to take those notes into account to strengthen your product, service, or campaign.

## How to use it

This module contains two activities. The first activity will help your group come to a consensus on the overarching social issue you are trying to address; the second activity will help you contextualize this topic within the different power and information dynamics in your context.

### What are you solving for? What is your problem statement?

This activity will help you focus on the overarching social issue that you wish to address through your product, service, or campaign.

- Time: ~ 1 hour
- Needs: different color markers, a poster size piece of paper
- Facilitator: Remember to track time!
  - (~10 minutes) Give each participant a marker and ask them to write down the problem they are interested in solving. Some examples include “Preventing internet censorship,” “Difficulty in registering to vote,” or “Lack of awareness about MPs and how to engage with them.” The facilitator should motivate participants to use the time to think deeply and get excited about the issues they wish to address. Don’t be afraid to bring in your personal perspectives and experiences to the table during this exercise.
  - Take a break.
  - Next, think about the following three individuals:
    - A 20-year old female college student who is blind
    - A 35-year old gay college student
    - A 65-year old man from an ethnic minority community who is retired
  - On the same butcher paper, write out in one bullet point how each issue would affect these people. Thinking about the issue from the lens of these different perspectives can highlight the nuances of each topic.
  - As a group, take the remaining 30 minutes to discuss the different issues. Think about how they relate to your organization’s mission and resources. Take this time to debate and persuade each other on the issue area you feel is most relevant. Use this discussion to identify one issue area that will be the focus of your product, service, or campaign. To focus the discussion, the facilitator can encourage the group to vote on the top three problem statements, excluding their own entries. A strong idea benefits from a variety of perspectives and healthy debate; the facilitator should actively encourage all participants to express themselves. Remember to take a look at the “I’m Stuck” section for assistance if necessary!

## Ecosystem Mapping - Who else is involved?

Once you have identified the issue that will be the focus of your product, service, or campaign, begin your ecosystem map. Your ecosystem map will outline the different power and information dynamics that may affect the feasibility and success of your project. The map will also identify potential partnerships and opportunities for collaboration.

- Time: ~ 1 hour
- Needs: different color markers, highlighter, post-it (sticky) notes, a single large butcher paper
- Facilitator: Remember to track time! Take a look at the sections below if you get stuck and need additional tips and tricks.
  - Give each participant a marker and ask them to write the actors that influence your issue on the post-it notes (one actor per post-it note). Remember, these can be individuals or groups. Add your post-it notes to the butcher paper. Some questions to consider are:
    - Who else cares about your problem?
    - Who has power and who doesn't? Who has access or control over resources and who doesn't? What is the extent of that control or access?
    - Who are the organizations working in the same space, both for and against the issue? What communities does the issue affect? Think about the individuals who are involved in providing a particular service (i.e. teachers) as well as beneficiaries (i.e. students).
    - Who might currently be missing from the conversation around your problem?
  - For each actor, how does it connect with other actors in this environment? Add bidirectional arrows between the post-it notes.
  - Identify what actors amplify information? In other words, who are the influencers in this space? Highlight those post-it notes.
  - Identify which actors you have access to currently. Mark those sticky notes with a star.

This map will be an important reference point for you to refer to as we go through the rest of the design sprint. Remember to take a picture of your ecosystem map as we will be reusing the post-it notes in the next activity.

## I'm stuck...

- If you're having a hard time selecting one issue area out of all the ones you've identified, consider coming up with a priority list. While your organization may want to ultimately focus on all those issue areas, pick one that would be the focus for this particular product, campaign, or service. Which issue needs to be addressed before the others? Which issue is time-sensitive or can have the biggest impact now? What problem would help the most people – or the people you care about – if solved? Remember to save the other ideas for the future.
- Think about your day-to-day life and all the actors that you may interact with. You can also think about a friend or family member who is completely different, or even a celebrity's experience for inspiration! For each person, ask yourself how you go about your lives in different manners? How do you access information differently? What are your differing wants, hopes and daily tensions?

### Don't forget!

diverse perspectives are participating in designing your product, service, or campaign. Is your Co/Act team inclusive of different men, women, and diverse gender identities and sexual orientations, ages, disabilities, ethnicities, etc.? If not, think about how you can incorporate new voices into your participant group.

Do the ecosystem mapping exercise in multiple rounds. After each round, give an opportunity for each participant to critique or add to the group's contributions. For example, you may find that your aunt accesses information through a different channel than the one currently mentioned. This provides richer data to your map!

Make multiple maps! Use this mapping exercise for all the relevant spheres of influence and engagement you are interested in for your tool. For example, you might be interested in using this module to develop a map of power dynamics between political actors, as well as a map to understand how information flows through the community.

### What's next?

Your ecosystem map will be useful throughout the sprint. For now, move on to the "identifying a target audience" module, but be sure to refer back to your ecosystem map after you develop your user persona and define your product, service, or campaign idea.