

2019 Aspen ThinkXChange: Advancing Family Prosperity

Narratives and Numbers



*Reimagine HHS Aim for Independence Initiative:
Putting Families at the Center of ACF Programs through a
Human-Centered Design Approach*

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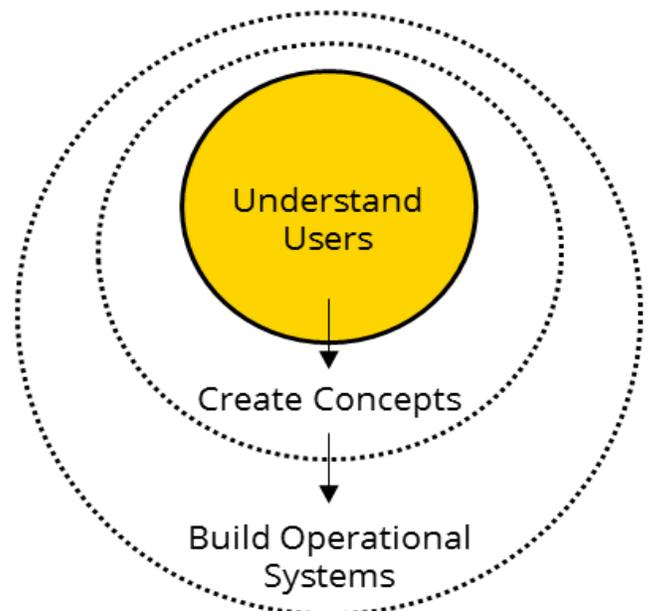
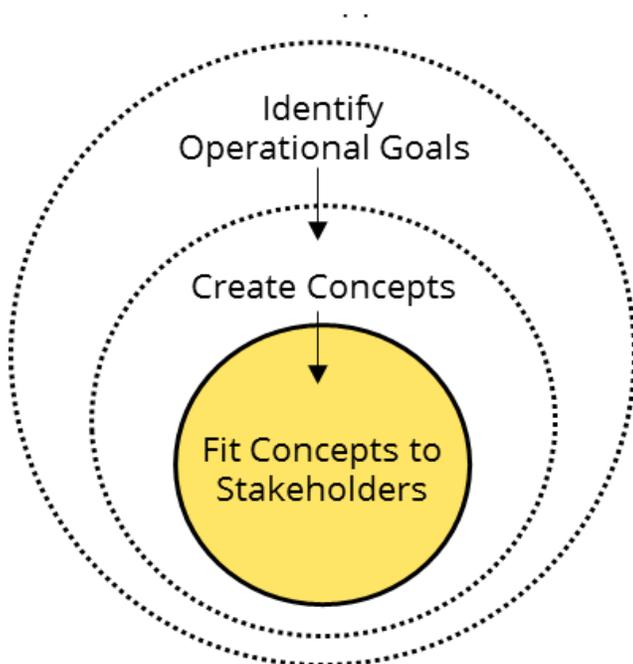
Research Point of View

Human-Centered Design drives towards solutions.

HCD is an approach used by business, government and social impact sectors that draws from the practices of ethnography, cognitive psychology, and the design professions to understand users' experiences with a product or service.

Traditional approaches look at problems from the perspective of how to achieve organizational goals and priorities.

Human-Centered design looks at problems by first developing a deep understanding of users and designing services to that.



Setting the Stage



CURRENT STATE ASSESSMENT

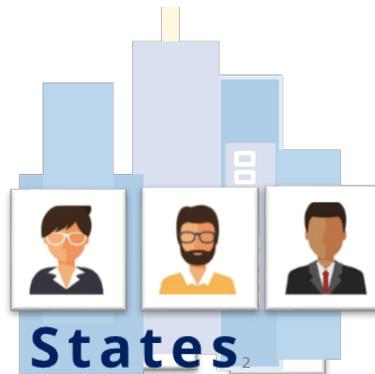
Shifting Our Focus: The User Perspective

The Aim for Independence (AFI) initiative has conducted extensive research to understand the customers of the public assistance programs, including: 1) families who interact with the system; and 2) the State and County commissioners who administer it. Here is sample of Federal, State, and user perspectives when administering and using public assistance programs.



"I'm training to be a bus driver, host, cleaner, event space helper. My hours are all over the place. By the time I get home, I still have to get my kids, clean, and make dinner. I'm tired all the time."

"I've been in your office the last two weeks and you all have all told me you cannot help me and my daughters because your grants are written specifically for single mothers."



"We wish we could measure Longitudinal data – what happens to families after they leave us? Are they any better off?"

"The Federal government should measure reduction of poverty and family well-being. We don't know where to go to see how we are doing."

"We are trying to solve complex social problems with antiquated programs that have not changed for 20 years"



"How can we better coordinate across programs and use different access points?"

"Head Start is comprehensive - health, mental health, food, etc. Can we leverage lessons learned and best practices from our own program?"

"How can we change the way the Federal level perceives the customers we serve?"

RESEARCH AND SYNTHESIS OVERVIEW

The

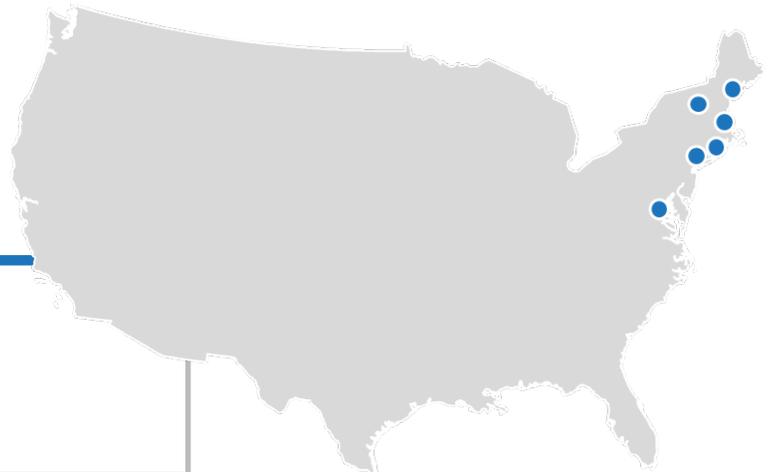
Methodology

AFI applied the **principles of Design Thinking** to analyze the experience of using social safety net programs from the parents' perspectives. It focuses on **looking at lived experiences from the human perspective** to rapidly identify pain points and uncover hidden insights about how to **address the unmet needs of a community**.

Completed Interviews

24

Parents



States

- Connecticut
- District of Columbia
- Maine
- Massachusetts
- Rhode Island
- Vermont

Social Safety Net Programs

- TANF
- Child Care
- Child Support
- SNAP
- Child Welfare
- Homelessness
- Medicaid

Demographics

- Single mother
- Single father
- Married mother
- Married father
- Formerly incarcerated parents
- Grandparents
- Mother of adopted children
- College educated
- Post benefits
- Survivor of domestic violence

OVERVIEW

Putting People at the Center WITH PERSONAS

Aim for independence (AFI) challenges us to think beyond programmatic silos and work in a unified manner to empower families to achieve economic independence.

Focusing on the families we serve is a unifying force, and human-centered design (hcd) gives us tools to do this. With HCD, we can:

- Empathize with families and see things from their point of view
- Understand meaningful and actionable differences in what our user families need from services
- Design programs and services to fit families, instead of the other way around

HUMAN-CENTERED DESIGN

HCD drives toward solutions based on the voices and needs of people who's lives you are trying to improve. It focuses effort and investments towards the most meaningful and necessary solutions. It is more than a simple formula for creative problem-solving. It produces real value by helping organizations produce designed products, services, spaces and systems that meet the needs of those who will use them and benefit from them. By approaching challenges through an HCD lens, HHS will be better equipped to make informed choices among solutions that are *desirable* (meets user / customer needs), *feasible* (meets technical needs), and *viable* (meets business needs).

Research Artifacts: Parent Personas

A persona is a composite character that represents a distinct group of parents according to their attitudes, frustrations, needs, and aspirations. It is a tool that helps synthesize observations and draw out insights while building empathy for the people for whom we are designing. **Use personas as a tool** - as a starting point - to develop new solutions and assess the impact of your efforts.

HOW TO READ A PERSONA

Distressed & Defeated

CHECK IN FORM

TELL US YOUR STORY.

I'm in over my head. I just moved into a subsidized apartment, and I'm working day and night to keep my family there.

Life is so hectic, and I feel like I'm on the edge. I spend all of my time juggling no-win decisions and ruthlessly prioritizing my responsibilities. I feel defeated and wish for a moment of relief.

WHAT BRINGS YOU IN TODAY?

I need immediate help to get my footing I'm ready to start investing in myself I'm one step away from being independent

"I'm training to be a bus driver, host, a cleaner, and a helper at an event space. My hours are all over the place. By the time I get home, I still have to get my kids, clean, and make dinner. I'm tired all the time."

HOW CAN WE HELP?

MY FRUSTRATIONS	MY NEEDS & ASPIRATIONS
» Feeling so short on time that I can't make good decisions	» A moment to get organized and tactics to help me do that
» Being unable to give my kids stability	» Peace of mind that I can cover the next few expenses
» Feeling exhausted from calculating and prioritizing immediate needs	» Flexible hours with work, school, and daycare

DATE: X 7/1/18 SIGNATURE: X *Distressed & Defeated*

Persona title, which describes the mindset of this group of parents

A narrative that captures the essence of a particular persona's situation or dilemma

The economic independence mindset of this persona

Direct quote from a parent interview

Common challenges, needs, and aspirations this persona faces

A sample profile of a parent in this persona group to provide context

HOW TO HEAR A PERSONA

Distressed & Defeated

RECORDING

Personas are accompanied by a recording that brings the persona to life. Click the link below and turn up the volume to hear first hand from our parents.



 **CLICK HERE TO VIEW & LISTEN TO PERSONAS** Direct Link: <https://youtu.be/Ndns7tTnCFs>

 **CLICK HERE TO DOWNLOAD THE PERSONAS**

Key Themes

Throughout the research process, several themes emerged across parent personas.



It's 'one and the same' Government to me

Parents may face challenges unique to each assistance program but they don't think in programs. To them, it's all simply the government.



There is no manual for this

Parents struggled to understand the rules and processes of government assistance and often turned to informal networks and community partners, or learned by trial and error



It's their way or the highway

Parents felt resigned when interacting with welfare offices, accepting unpleasant or unhelpful experiences



Employment is always top of mind

Parents' daily bargaining, prioritization, and planning revolves around finding or retaining employment



Emotional toll

The emotional health and outlook of parents emerged as a key factor influencing their ability to manage their situation, but the system doesn't recognize this



Crossing the transom

Parents who experienced a move across state lines faced significant changes, lag time, and turmoil due to moving



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