Prototyping Toolkit

Learning about your solution through making

The Early Childhood Innovation Prize

Why this toolkit?

Pro·to·typ·ing

Verb (used with object): to create an experimental model of.
Ex. To prototype a solar-power car.

Prototyping is an incredibly effective way to make ideas tangible, to learn through making, and to quickly get key feedback from the people you're designing for. Because prototypes are meant only to convey an idea—not to be perfect—you can quickly move through a variety of iterations, building on what you've learned from the people you're designing for. The key to prototyping is to build only enough to test your idea, so that you can get right back in there making it better once you've gotten the feedback you need.
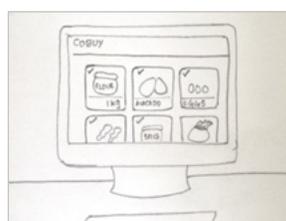
There are many different ways to prototype your solutions, such as storyboards, role plays, models and (digital) mock-ups.
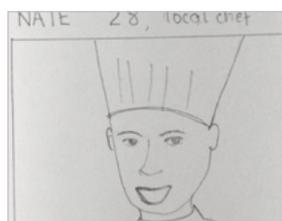

Friendly ATM role play
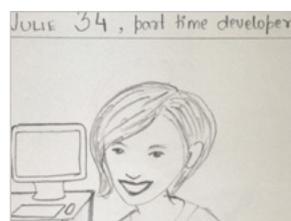
Cobuy storyboard

Determining What to Prototype

There are many ways to prototype your solution. Here's how to isolate what to test.

Your solution probably has a lot of testable components, whether it's a physical product, a service or maybe even a network. Before you start prototyping, make sure you're clear about what you need to learn, and which components will give you the necessary answers.

Prototyping isn't about being precious. Make simple, scrappy prototypes to not only save time, but to focus the testing on just the critical elements. You might be trying to learn something like, "How big should this be?" or "Do people understand where to click in the app?" You probably have many different questions like that. Prototyping is a great way to begin answering them.

Three steps to set you up for prototyping success:

Step 1: Defining Key Elements

Write down the key elements of your solution. Think practically about what needs to be tested and write down your primary questions for each component.

Step 2: Picking Questions to Answer

Now pick a few questions to answer. If you want to prototype an interaction, consider putting on a skit with your team. If you're testing a logo, print it out and stick it on a t-shirt to solicit feedback.

Step 3: Deciding on a Prototyping Method

Think through what kind of prototype makes the most sense to answer these questions. You might consider holding a Brainstorm now.

Remember, this process is about learning, not getting it right the first time. Better to test a miserable failure and learn from it, rather than take ages making a beautiful, highly refined prototype.

Start Prototyping

It's time to start making! Here are some of our favorite prototyping methods to help you find the best method to test your solution with your users.

Create a Model

Put together simple three-dimensional representations of your idea. Use paper, cardboard, pipe cleaners, fabric, and whatever else you can find. Keep it rough and at a low fidelity to start, and then evolve the resolution over time.

Create a Mock-Up

Build mock-ups of digital tools or websites with simple sketches of screens on paper. Paste the paper mock-up on an actual computer screen or mobile phone when demonstrating it.

Create a Role Play

Act out the experience of your idea. Try on the roles of the people that are part of the situation and uncover questions they might ask. Consider making simple uniforms and assembling simple props to help users experience your product or service as real. This activity can be done in-person as well as in a video conference in case you're not in the same location as your users.

Create a Diagram

Imagine you are going door-to-door and showing potential customers what your idea or potential service is. Map out the structure, journey, or process of your idea in a way that will be easy for a potential customer to understand. This prototyping method will have a lot in common with the storyboard you already created during this Class 4 Workshop.

Create a Story

Tell the story of your idea from the future. Describe what the experience would be like. Write a newspaper article reporting about your idea. Write a job description. The purpose is to have people experience your idea as if it were real and then respond to it.

Create an Advertisement

Create a fake advertisement that promotes the best parts of your idea. Have fun with it, and feel free to exaggerate shamelessly. Now change the tone of the advertisement to appeal to different types of person.

Be creative • Have fun • Design to get answers

Don't feel restricted by the methods listed in this toolkit, but do make sure you construct prototypes that will help you get real feedback from your users so that you can answer the most important questions that you've identified. Don't forget to document your prototyping process with photos to share in the Challenge. We can't wait to see what you come up with!

Good Luck!

Reflections + Thoughts

TRAINING
LANGUAGE
PARTNERS

STAFF
OPERATIONS

Key Risks

MINDSET
SHIFTS