

Problem Definition Canvas

Clear problem definition is the foundation of effective strategy, innovation, and decision-making. This canvas helps teams clarify what the real problem is, why it matters, and what success looks like before rushing to solutions.

1. Purpose of This Tool

- ☐ Define problems clearly and objectively before proposing solutions.
- ☐ Align stakeholders around a shared understanding of the issue.
- ☐ Prevent wasted effort solving the wrong problem.
- ☐ Encourage critical thinking and evidence-based reasoning.
- ☐ Support creative, focused, and sustainable problem-solving.

Tip: A well-defined problem is halfway solved.

2. Problem Statement

Question

Notes / Responses

What is the problem we are trying to solve?

Why is this a problem now?

Who is affected by it?

What is the impact of not solving it?

What would success look like if the problem were solved?

- ☐ Keep the statement factual, not emotional.
- ☐ Define the problem, not the symptoms.

Tip: Focus on *what* is wrong, not *who* is to blame.

3. Background and Context

Area	Description
Historical background	How did this issue arise?
Current situation	What is happening now?
Contributing factors	What is making the problem worse?
Previous attempts	What has been tried before, and why did it fail or succeed?

- ☐ Gather data and evidence to understand root causes.
- ☐ Consider trends, customer feedback, or performance data.

Tip: Context prevents overreaction to isolated events.

4. Stakeholder Analysis

Stakeholder Role / Interest Impacted How? Influence Level (High / Medium / Low)

- ☐ Identify who experiences, causes, or can solve the problem.
- ☐ Include internal and external stakeholders.

Tip: Problems often exist because different groups see them differently.

5. Evidence and Data

Data Source	Key Findings Insights
-------------	-----------------------

Quantitative (metrics, surveys)

Qualitative (interviews, feedback)

Observations / Reports

- ☐ Use facts, not opinions, to define the scope and severity of the problem.
- ☐ Validate assumptions through data collection.

Tip: Decisions based on evidence avoid bias and guesswork.

6. Problem Scope

Aspect	Inside Scope	Outside Scope
--------	--------------	---------------

Processes

Teams / Departments

Timeframe

Geographic / Operational Areas

- ☐ Clearly define what is and is not part of the problem.
- ☐ Avoid scope creep by staying focused on what you can control.

Tip: Tight boundaries create clarity and achievable outcomes.

7. Root Cause Exploration

Symptom	Possible Cause	Evidence	Supporting Cause
---------	----------------	----------	------------------

- ☐ Ask “why” at least five times to get to the real issue.
- ☐ Avoid stopping at surface-level symptoms.

Tip: Fixing the symptom without addressing the cause guarantees the problem will return.

8. Success Criteria

Success Indicator	Measure	Target
-------------------	---------	--------

- ☐ Define how you will know the problem has been solved.
- ☐ Success should be measurable, not subjective.

Tip: Solving a problem is not success unless it achieves the intended outcome.

9. Risks and Assumptions

Assumption	Risk if Incorrect	Mitigation
------------	-------------------	------------

- ☐ Test assumptions early to avoid surprises.
- ☐ Identify where you lack information or clarity.

Tip: Most problem-solving errors come from untested assumptions.

10. Problem Definition Summary

Element	Key Points
---------	------------

Problem Statement	
-------------------	--

Root Cause	
------------	--

Stakeholders	
--------------	--

Impact	
--------	--

Success Criteria	
------------------	--

- ☐ Review and confirm agreement with all stakeholders.
- ☐ Use this summary to brief teams before moving into solution mode.

Tip: Agreement on the problem ensures alignment on the solution.

How to Use This Canvas

Use this canvas during project kick-offs, strategy workshops, or process improvement sessions. Encourage collaboration, evidence-based thinking, and curiosity. By clearly defining the problem, teams can design smarter solutions that deliver measurable, lasting impact.

Notes