

Service Designer Portfolio Artefact Pack

Redesigning the hardship support application journey

Portfolio case study summary

This pack gives you concrete service-design artefacts for a portfolio case study. The example service is a fictional hardship-support application journey, designed to show how you would work across research, service mapping, evidence synthesis, operating model thinking and prototype testing.

Service problem	What the artefact proves	Portfolio evidence
Applicants struggle to know whether they are eligible, what evidence is needed, and what happens after applying.	Ability to frame a messy service problem around user needs, organisational constraints and end-to-end journeys.	Problem statement, research plan and as-is journey map.
Support teams receive avoidable calls and incomplete applications because guidance is fragmented.	Ability to connect front-stage user experience with backstage processes, teams and systems.	Service blueprint, ecosystem review and opportunity map.
The team needs confidence before investing in a full digital service build.	Ability to define assumptions, create a low-fidelity prototype and test direction early.	Clickable HTML prototype, assumptions map and usability test plan.

Artefact 1: Research planning guide

Use this to show how you would partner with a user researcher to plan discovery research. In a real team, interviews would usually be run on Teams, phone or face to face. The spreadsheet captures the plan and notes; it is not what the user sees.

Research objective	User group	Example questions	What we hope to learn
Understand confidence before applying	First-time applicant	What made you look for support today? What would make you stop before applying?	Emotional barriers, eligibility uncertainty, trust issues.
Understand evidence burden	Applicant with limited documents	What documents would you expect to provide? Which would be hard to find?	Evidence gaps and language that creates anxiety.
Understand internal constraints	Caseworker or assessor	Where do applications usually fail? What causes rework?	Backstage pain points and operational bottlenecks.
Understand support routes	Helpline/support staff	What questions do people ask most often? What could have prevented the contact?	Content gaps and channel-switching problems.

Artefact 2: Insight synthesis and user needs

After sessions, the team groups observations into themes. The user researcher may facilitate synthesis, but service designers, content designers and product colleagues contribute. The service designer uses themes to identify systemic problems and opportunities.

Raw observation	Theme	User need	Service implication	Opportunity
"I would not know if this is for people like me."	Eligibility is unclear	I need to know whether I can apply before I spend time on the form.	More users abandon or contact support before starting.	Eligibility checker and plain-English criteria.
"I would be worried I would say the wrong thing."	The process feels exposing	I need the service to ask sensitive questions respectfully.	Tone and question order affect trust and completion.	Reframe questions and add reassurance.
"I hate not knowing when I will hear back."	No clear next step	I need to know what happens after I apply and when.	Avoidable follow-up calls and anxiety.	Confirmation page with timeline and status emails.

Artefact 3: As-is journey map

A journey map shows the experience from the user's point of view. It helps the team see where the service is confusing, repetitive or emotionally difficult.

Stage	User goal	User actions	Pain points	Emotion	Design opportunity
Find support	Know help exists	Search web, ask friend, phone charity	Different funds and unclear names	Anxious	Single starting point and plain-language routing.
Check eligibility	Know whether to continue	Read eligibility page	Internal policy language, too many exceptions	Uncertain	Eligibility checker and examples.
Prepare evidence	Know what to gather	Look for bank statements, redundancy letter, ID	Evidence list appears too late	Overwhelmed	Pre-application checklist.
Apply	Complete form accurately	Enter circumstances and upload documents	Sensitive questions feel judgemental	Exposed	Respectful wording and save-and-return.
Wait	Know what happens next	Check email, call support	No status updates	Worried	Confirmation page and progress updates.

Artefact 4: Service blueprint

A service blueprint connects what the user sees with what happens behind the scenes. This is the clearest service-designer artefact because it reveals operational, content and technology dependencies.

Layer / stage	Find support	Check eligibility	Prepare evidence	Apply	Decision and payment
User actions	Searches and lands on start page	Answers eligibility questions	Gathers documents	Completes form	Receives decision/payment
Front-stage touchpoints	Website, charity links, search result	Eligibility checker	Checklist, examples, support link	Form, upload, confirmation	Email, phone support, payment notice
Backstage actions	Content managed by policy/comms	Rules maintained by policy team	Support content updated by operations	Case created in CRM	Assessor reviews, finance processes payment
Systems/data	CMS, analytics	Eligibility rules, analytics	CMS, document guidance	Form platform, CRM, document store	CRM, finance system, email tool
Risks	Wrong users arrive	Users incorrectly self-exclude	Incomplete applications	Drop-off or duplicate applications	No updates creates support demand

Artefact 5: Assumptions and prototype test plan

Use this to show how you would turn service risks into testable assumptions before a team invests in a full build.

Assumption	Prototype artefact	Test task	Success signal	Decision
Users will understand which route applies to them.	Start page and eligibility checker.	Find out if you can apply after redundancy.	User selects correct route without help.	Keep, refine or change routing.
A checklist before the form reduces anxiety and incomplete applications.	Prepare evidence page.	Tell us what you would gather before applying.	User names correct documents and feels ready.	Add checklist to live service.
Clear next steps reduce avoidable contacts.	Confirmation page and email copy.	Explain what happens after applying.	User can state timeline and next action.	Refine confirmation content.

How to present this in your portfolio

- Start with the service problem and the users affected.
- Show the journey map and explain how it revealed friction across channels.
- Show the blueprint to demonstrate front-stage and backstage thinking.

- Show the assumptions map and prototype to prove you test direction early.
- Finish with what you would measure: completion rate, avoidable contacts, evidence errors, time to decision and user confidence.

Interview-ready summary

“This case study shows how I approach a service problem end to end. I start by understanding user needs and operational constraints, then map the as-is journey and backstage service. I use synthesis to identify themes, turn those into opportunities and test assumptions through low-fidelity prototypes before recommending a direction.”