



Policy Lab in a day

Not everyone has the time or money to run a full demonstrator project with Policy Lab. So we've created this guide to help you use our tools and techniques for when you need insight and ideas quickly.

It's designed to work for an individual or a large group and guides you through the processes and tools we recommend to understand a policy, the users and then create some great ideas.

If you have any questions, or feedback on this prototype tool, please contact us at policylab@cabinetoffice.gov.uk or @PolicyLabUK



The day

Sometimes it is necessary to develop policy ideas in a very short period of time. This is by no means ideal, but it happens. To help you with this common problem Policy Lab have created “Policy Lab in a day”, which helps you to quickly make sense of available evidence, focus on the user and generate creative solutions in a workshop setting or on your own.

You'll need to factor in time after the session to write up the outputs.

2. Understand the policy landscape

4. Generate and prioritise ideas

30-45 mins

60-90 mins

60-90 mins

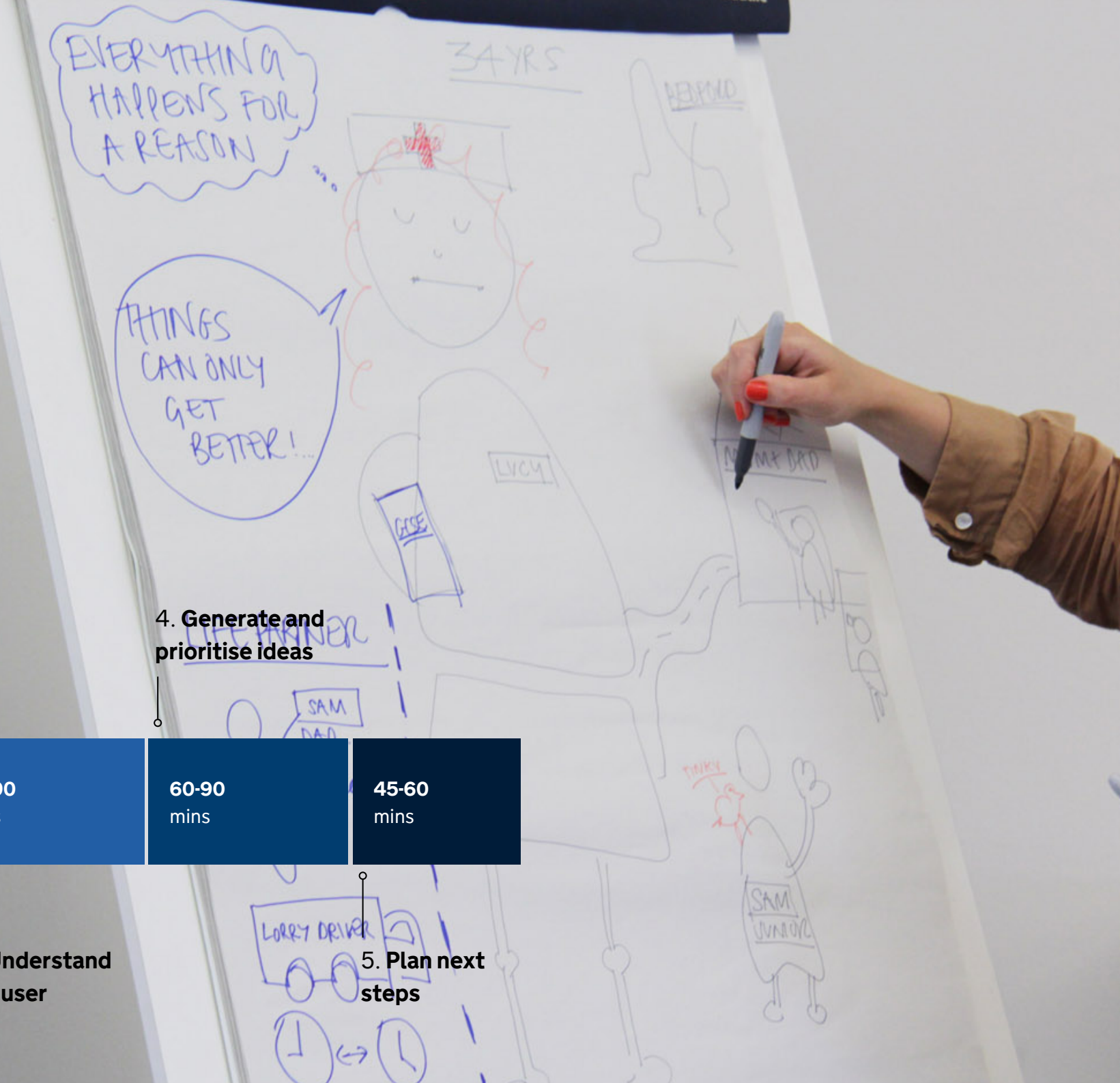
60-90 mins

45-60 mins

1. Set the challenge

3. Understand the user

5. Plan next steps



The tools

Needed

Optional

1. Setting the challenge

Hope and fear cards

Challenge cards

2. Understanding the policy landscape

No tools needed - just post-it notes and sharpies

3. Understanding your users

Personas

User Journeys

User segment sheet

4. Generating ideas

Change cards

Idea sheets

Speculative design sheet

Planning sheet

5. Next steps

Data tool cards

Develop sheets

The space

A space to work, think and create is important and should have some important key elements. But don't worry too much - contrary to popular belief, these tools work anywhere - it's the people that matter.

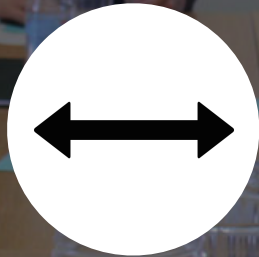
A space should have some key elements though. As shown below.



White board(s)



Empty walls
(to stick things on)



Space to move



Light
(rooms with bad lighting are harder to work in)

1. Set the challenge

30-60 mins

Time

Low

Effort

Before you start finding answers and generating policy ideas you need to define the problem you're trying to address.

This could be very clear or require some discussion to bottom it out.

If you're on your own, you can miss out the hopes & fears exercise and instead write your policy challenge on a challenge card. Use colleagues to test whether this is the right "exam question".

Hopes & fears

1. Take a good amount of hopes and fears cards (at least three per person) and scatter them across the table. Give everyone a sharpie.
2. Ask people to look at the pictures and pick one they feel helps explain a fear for the day, the project or the policy area. Then get them to write that fear in the white box on the card.
3. Ask people to share their fears with the group. Cluster them on the wall as they share them one by one.
4. Repeat for hopes.

Challenge setting

1. Give each person a challenge card and a sharpie.
2. Give everyone 10 minutes to write down what they think the challenge(s) or aims of the project are on challenge cards.
3. Ask people to share their challenges with the group by placing them on a wall. It can help helpful to place the cards on a scale from quick wins on the left to long term goals on the right.
4. Follow this up with a 15-20 minutes discussion making sure to write down any new challenges that pop up.
5. Get everyone to vote for their two favourite cards. The one with the most will be the challenge for the rest of the day, so place it in a prominent position.

2.

Understand the policy landscape

60-90 mins

Time

High

Effort

This exercise is about capturing your understanding of the policy landscape and ensuring clarity of vision.

This task works both if you're on your own and as a team. If you're working as a team, make sure you have a good amount of people with expert knowledge in the room.

Evidence exploration

Split into 3 groups, each taking on one of the below questions and capturing answers on post-it notes, spending 10-15 minutes on each

1. Data & evidence:

What do the data and wider evidence tell us about the issue? What is the most important/interesting/surprising point? Where are the evidence gaps?

2. Users/stakeholders:

What are your users i.e. the people who you are targeting with the policy? Who are the other key stakeholders (e.g. OGDs, special interest groups)?

3. Other policy:

What are the other policies/pieces of work in this area/aimed at addressing the same issue?

Spend the last 20+ minutes of the session discussing answers and adding to them, so you end up with a complete picture of the current policy landscape.

Optional

There are numerous open data tools available for you to find and explore new data, and different ways of visualising existing data to reveal new insight.

→ visual.ons.gov.uk/

→ [Information is beautiful](#)

→ [Voyant data tools](#)

→ [Data.London](#)

→ [GOV.UK data blog](#)

→ [UK data service](#)

3.

Understand the user

60-90 mins

Time

Medium

Effort

Policy Lab is all about designing policy and services with and for the user. This exercise helps to quickly build empathy with the user and understanding of their multiple and diverse needs.

It is important not to create stereotypes of users in this exercise, but to find archetypes and empathy towards their causes.

If you're on your own, go out and talk to some users, or try the service/policy yourself. If you don't have time, look for case studies, ask questions on an online user forum, or create fictional personas and journeys.

Personas

1. Hand out a blank persona sheet to each group (or if you're all one group hand out 3-4 persona sheets).
2. Have a group discussion about who the users of the service and policy are - or the users you want to focus on in particular.
3. Spend 20-30 minutes creating 3-4 personas. Be as in depth and realistic as possible. Remember that the aim is to create empathy.
4. Feedback your personas to the group.

Optional

The Persona Segmentation sheet can be a good way to get a good spread of archetype personas. Choose two axis for your personas (e.g. an attitude they have or a experience of a service) and brainstorm personas within them, and get each group to choose a persona from each quadrant. Do this before creating personas.

Journey mapping

1. Hand out a journey map for each persona.
2. Map your persona's experience of the service or policy. This could be a day or a whole life. It is important to be as in depth as possible and capture everything from emotional experiences, policy experiences, back end work and even possible data created. This should take about 30-40 minutes.
3. Feedback your journeys to the group.
4. Have a group discussion about common themes and come up with some user needs. **User needs are common actions / things people want and need to do in a policy or service.** These will help you to focus on your policy problem and the needs of people.
5. Have a quick discussion about how these user needs might affect the way you approach your policy challenge.

4. Generating ideas

60-90 mins **Time**

Medium **Effort**

Only now can you begin coming up with ideas to solve your policy problem.

This stage is more creative and disruptive and requires a safe space where no idea is bad. Respect all the ideas and focus on quantity of ideas, rather than quality. This will help you to think outside the box and generate truly innovative policy.

If you're on your own, take a stack of change cards and use these as prompts for your own session of rapid idea generation. Cluster them by theme. Choose 1-2 to develop on idea sheets, with user needs in mind.

Change cards

1. Pre-select 10 appropriate change card question.
2. Hand out post-it notes and sharpies and tell people to work individually and in silence for about 3 minutes.
3. Ask people to write down as many ideas as possible in response to the user needs and project challenge.
4. Shout out the pre-selected questions and ask people to write down as many ideas that come to mind. Remember - this is about quantity, not quality. Give people a minute in between questions.
5. Ask everyone to spend 10 minutes sharing their ideas in their groups, clustering them by theme. What are your lead ideas that respond to the challenge question and the needs of your persona? Each group should choose their top three ideas to develop further using an idea sheet.

Idea sheets

1. When people have come up with their top three ideas ask them to develop the ideas further on idea sheets.
2. Hand out the idea sheets and ask people to draw their ideas. Drawing works better than writing as it enables more free thinking. Ideas should have as much depth as possible in the 20-30 minutes available.
Tip: Drawing a comic strip of the experience of an ideas is often a good way of sharing.
3. Develop a 5-minute pitch and feedback to the group.

Optional

Use the development sheets to plan your idea even further into the future.

5.

Next steps

45-60 mins

Time

Medium

Effort

Now is your chance to think about immediate next steps and future planning.

You should use this time to map out upcoming milestones, who needs to do what, and who will sign this all off.

If you're on your own, answer the questions on the right and create your own project plan.

Optional

- Use data tool cards to help you think about new tools you can use.
- Use the development sheet to plan ahead more visually.

Brainstorm

Spend 20 minutes capturing the answers / conversations that happen in response to the following questions:

1. What are the immediate next steps i.e. what do you need to do in the next 24-72 hours?
2. Who do you need to bring in/engage e.g. to refine/ challenge your ideas?
3. What immediate further work can you do to better understand the problem and/or user need?

Now spend 10-15 minutes looking beyond the next 72 hours:

What are the timescales and key milestones for this project?

Get your facilitator to use post-its to map out a project plan, with months (or weeks) across the top, and activities along the side.

1. What do you need to do?
2. Is there new insight you need to gather e.g. through data science?
3. How can you test your ideas in a low-cost way i.e. prototype?

Now think more widely than your project:

1. When is Parliament sitting?
2. When are relevant statistics being published?

Tap into all the knowledge in the room about what's happening and this final exercise will be surprisingly quick.



Resources

Policy design

[Open Policy Making toolkit](#) – this is where you'll find the tools mentioned here and a more detailed explanation of how to use them if you need it.

There are also other tools/approaches you may want to trial for yourself

[Policy Lab method bank](#) on Slideshare – a slide-pack that explains Lab approaches, like the toolkit but more visual

[Policy Lab blog](#) – read the latest thinking on using design, data and digital to develop better policy

Data

visual.ons.gov.uk/

[information is beautiful](#)

Inspiration

[EU Spider Design Project](#)

[Service design toolkit](#)

[DIY design toolkit](#)

[Design for Europe](#)

[GDS blog](#)

[GDS design blog](#)

[GDS data blog](#)

[Nesta blog](#)

[Design council](#)

And if you have any questions, or feedback on this prototype tool, contact us at policylab@cabinetoffice.gov.uk or [@PolicyLabUK](https://twitter.com/PolicyLabUK)