

DESIGNING Inclusive Communities



Design Thinking

for a Better World

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What Is Design Thinking?

 Design thinking is a problem-solving process that inspires **collaboration** and **community** involvement.

Design thinking begins with empathy. Empathy is the ability to understand the feelings and perspectives of other people.

In design thinking, starting with empathy means that design thinkers try to understand the unique perspective of their user, or the person who is experiencing a problem, before designing a solution that will help them. The process aims to solve problems the

user experiences in a way that works best for the user, not the designer. Design thinking can be used to create objects such as tools or devices. It can also be used to create systems and processes, or ways of doing things.



Design thinking brings many minds together to create important solutions to problems in communities, such as improving the lives of people in need by helping a local shelter.

Failing Forward

Design thinkers test their solutions with the users to see how well it works for them. Sometimes, a design thinker's solution does not work the first time. Design thinkers then change and test their solution until it works well for their user. This is called **failing forward**. Failing forward is important in design thinking, because the design-thinking process is iterative. This means it is done over and over until designers find an idea that works. Each iteration, or loop, through the process helps design thinkers improve their ideas.

Why Design Thinking?

Design thinking is often used by businesses to help create products and services that meet customers' needs. But design thinking can also be used to help people in your community. Sometimes design thinking is known as public-interest design—it is useful for solving problems for the good of others. Design thinking works best in groups and teams.

Luke Anderson Stopped the Gap

When Luke Anderson was **paralyzed** in an accident and lost the use of his legs, he learned how hard everyday life is for people who use wheelchairs. He was frustrated because he was often unable to go into certain places, usually because buildings had steps and no wheelchair-accessible ramps. This frustration helped him develop empathy for other people with mobility challenges. He realized how people with different physical abilities were affected by the lack of access to certain buildings and places. He used this empathy to design the Stop Gap, a simple, portable ramp that can be easily placed at the entrance of any building that is not wheelchair-accessible.



Luke now runs an elementary school program that is available to any school that wants to use it. Students learn about the importance of accessibility and inclusion, and about using empathy to help make their communities even better places to live. The students look for non-accessible stores and restaurants in their community and write letters to the businesses offering to help them get a Stop Gap ramp.



Installing a Stop Gap ramp is a simple way to make buildings **accessible** to wheelchair users.

The Design-thinking Process

The design-thinking process is a set of steps that design thinkers can follow to support creative problem solving. The process helps design thinkers to tackle big problems and develop user-centered solutions. There are a few different versions of the process, but all of them start with empathy by putting the users' needs first. The design-thinking process we will use in this book has six steps:





Community Connections

A community is a group of people who live, work, and play together. Inclusive communities give all of its members a place and a voice. Achieving this goal requires people to problem solve to remove barriers that can exclude members of a community.

This book guides you through the design-thinking process step by step. Case studies

In an inclusive **community**, all members can participate. Participation is the act of being involved in something. Community participation can take many forms, including giving one's time and talent to benefit others or taking part in sports, youth groups, local celebrations, and other events.

expand your understanding of some of the barriers that can exclude and disconnect community members. You will apply the process to develop user-centered ways to connect all of the people in a community.



Mindset Tips

Be Positive

Have a positive attitude and be confident in your ability to create solutions that will improve situations.

Say Yes

There are no bad ideas. An idea may seem wild or "out there" at first, but it may lead you in new directions.

Be Brave

Don't let fear of failing stop you from being **innovative**.

Take a Break

It is helpful to look at a problem with fresh eyes.

Mix It Up!

Team up with people you don't usually work with. Different perspectives can energize a group.

Understanding Empathy

Empathy helps design thinkers understand the problem through the user's eyes. It is the first step in design thinking and the most important part of the process.

Design thinkers use empathy when listening to the perspective of a person who is affected by a problem. This is sometimes called need finding. A need is anything that a person or group

of people might require. Empathy is important because understanding a person's feelings, beliefs, and values helps us identify their needs and design solutions that will meet them.



Learning How to Empathize

The best way to empathize with your users is to *immerse* yourself in their lives, *engage* with them, and *observe* their lives in action. If you can, you should spend time with your users to see how they live, work, and play. Observing a community in real life is

best, but you can also read about it or watch a video to observe. You can also engage users in conversation—ask questions and listen closely to their responses. Take notes about what you see and hear. But don't just use written words—take pictures, make drawings and maps, and record your users' stories on audio or video.

Shanneil's Locker

When Shanneil Turner tried out for her high school basketball team in Vacaville, California, her borrowed shoes were falling apart. She thought she wouldn't be able to play, but then she got help from her Boys and Girls Club to buy her own basketball shoes. She had been a member of the club for 10 years, so she had a place to turn to when she wanted to keep playing.

Shanneil also knew that other kids like her didn't have access to help. Her experience helped her understand that some kids don't even consider playing sports because, without assistance, buying equipment isn't possible for them. Shanneil gained empathy for others in her community who wanted to play sports but didn't have the help they needed to participate.

To help solve this problem, she started Shanneil's Locker—a program that provides new athletic shoes to middle-school and high-school students who cannot afford to buy them. To begin the Locker program, she applied for a **grant** to pay for 100 pairs of shoes and then set up a system that would get the shoes in the hands of athletes who need them.

Playing sports can be expensive, which sometimes means not all people can participate. Shanneil's Locker helps kids get the equipment they need.



Engaging to Build Empathy

You can ask your users questions to help you gain empathy. Begin by writing down some open-ended questions. Then, write down your users' answers. Pay attention to how they respond and write using their own words.

- What problems have been caused by the challenge you are facing?
- In what ways do you try to overcome these problems now?

- Describe how experiencing this challenge makes you feel.

But remember that empathy is mainly about listening. Listen closely and ask follow-up questions based on their first answers:

- Can you tell me more?
- What do you do when that happens?
- How would you change things, if you could?



Become a change maker in your community through design thinking! Design thinkers are problem solvers who try to understand a problem from the perspective of the person experiencing it. This guiding principle leads to solutions that fit the user best, not the designer. The design-thinking process inspires empathy, collaboration, and innovative thinking. Each title in this unique series features case studies related to social change and engaging hands-on learning.

Designing Inclusive Communities

Communities need to give all their members a place and a voice by planning in an inclusive and collaborative way. This introduction to the design-thinking process shows how to create practices in your community that reduce the barriers that prevent some members, such as older people or those with disabilities, from participating. Finding ways to improve accessibility can also lead to solutions to big issues—such as helping refugees integrate into new communities.

TITLES IN THIS SERIES

