Breaking Down Equity-Centered Community Design

Inviting Diverse Co-Creators

Inviting diverse co-creators is about bringing together people with different perspectives, values, experiences, and expertise to a design scenario. Here, we critically examine who is invited to decision-making tables, and we make sure community members most impacted by the design scenario are not only invited, but included and heard.

WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE IN REAL LIFE?
- Research subjects vs paid team
- Pop-up event in community center vs town hall

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER
- Who is part of the decision-making table? Why?
- Who is missing from the decision-making table? Why?
- How can we make decision-making spaces more accessible to people who want and need to be involved?

Building Humility & Empathy

Building humility and empathy is the step in which we examine how our own identities, values, biases, assumptions, and relationships to power and privilege impact how we engage with ourselves, each others, and the communities we work with. It's not enough to build empathy - we also have to acknowledge what we know we don't know (and what we don't know, we don't know).

WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE IN REAL LIFE?
- Discussing race publicly (and within teams/projects)
- Noting personal assumptions, privilege, power, and identity when interviewing others

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER
- What assumptions and biases do I have about the people and communities impacted by this project?
- What assumptions have we built into metrics of success?

Defining & Assessing Topic and Community Needs

Work with community -- particularly those who are directly impacted by the scenario -- to learn about the specific needs, goals, values, and perspectives of those community members. Community members' insights -- even when defining the problem -- are crucial for understanding what their priorities and needs are (versus assuming what the community might want).

WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE IN REAL LIFE?
- Community members as project team members + include history of community efforts

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER
- What local issues matter most to community members? How is this integrated into the project?
- What do community members want to see as a result of this project?

Ideating Approaches

Ideation is the process of brainstorming ideas for potential approaches to the topic of focus, as determined in the previous steps. Ideation happens once we have a clear problem definition and target audience.

WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE IN REAL LIFE?
- Round robin ideation at team meeting
- Public community brainstorm

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER
- Does our ideation process include diverse stakeholders? If not, why not?
- How do ideas build on existing resources?
- How are we determining the viability of ideas? Is the process equitable?

Rapid Prototyping

Rapid prototyping is the process of bringing ideas (generated during the Ideation phase) to life. In prototyping, we make the ideas more concrete through tools like sketching, storyboarding, wireframing, and construction/building.

WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE IN REAL LIFE?
- Concept poster planning for program
- Writing a script and creating a storyboard for short video

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER
- Does our prototyping process include diverse stakeholders? If not, why not?
- How transparent is the prototyping process?
- How are we determining the success of prototypes?

Testing and Learning

Testing and learning is the process of having others evaluate the prototype, gathering their feedback, and using their feedback to make adjustments to the prototype. Testing is a critical step in learning whether (and how well) the prototype actually meets the goals and needs of the target audience. It's crucial to test with community members with different perspectives. Testing and learning should continue throughout the lifecycle of the project.

WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE IN REAL LIFE?
- Developing evaluation metrics for feedback + diversify places to receive feedback

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER
- How and where are we gathering feedback? Why?
- From whom are we gathering feedback? Why?
- How do we make sure that we genuinely incorporate the feedback we gather as we iterate?
- Whose input are we [still] missing?

History and Healing

The history of the project's topic, target community, and idea must be remembered, considered, and assessed. To understand the motives behind - and the potential impact - of the project, the personal history and trauma of each actor must be considered while integrating healing practices within the process.

WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE IN REAL LIFE?
- Hiring a unbiased counselor to provide regular check-ins for the project team
- Inviting previously involved living experts in problem solving process

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER
- How has the community been impacted by similar projects in the past? How do we know?
- Is the project healing for the people and communities impacted, or does it (re)create trauma? How do we know?

Acknowledging, Sharing, and Dismantling Power Constructs

In every situation and scenario, there are power dynamics. Although usually used in a negative connotation, power is a necessity for improved quality of life and liberation. During any project, power must be acknowledged, dismantled, and/or shared. The sharing of power is necessary from the members with traditional access. Accepting power is beneficial for the historically undersupported.

WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE IN REAL LIFE?
- Assessing one's permanent and temporary forms of power
- Giving up one's seat at the table (especially those with easy access)

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER
- Who should have power in this project? Why?
- Who actually has power in this project? Why?
- Does the distribution of power in the project reflect the community impacted by it? If not, why not?

Learn more about the Equity-Centered Community Design Process at www.creativereactionlab.com.