

# Inclusive by Design: Key Questions To Ask When Designing Initiatives



## I design policies, programs or other initiatives

In your work, it's important that you pause to ask key questions to ensure that you haven't overlooked anything. Ideally, such active reflection is a regular part of how you work, not something that you simply "tack on" at the end.

### Develop a reflex for inclusiveness



You need to develop and exercise your "inclusion reflex" to consistently make inclusion and belonging a priority, even when the pressure is on. It's like learning to ride a bike. At first, you need to think about every step, from how to get on the bike, to how to hold the handlebars, to how to keep your balance when you first start to pedal. Once you build that muscle memory, you can do all those steps without even thinking, even when you're in a hurry. You need to develop a reflex for inclusiveness so that you apply all the necessary considerations, even when you're under pressure to deliver quickly.

### Design with users in mind



Human-centred design and Gender-based Analysis Plus (GBA Plus) go hand in hand. By focusing on people when you design, you consider the lived experiences of those who will be benefiting from a program or service. GBA Plus allows you to think through how factors of identity, such as gender, race, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, disability and so on, interact with one another and connect with structural and contextual factors.

By understanding how all of these factors come together and interact to form the experiences of your users, you can design your products and services in a much more intentional way. Because there are so many factors that impact a person's lived experience, it's difficult to group people together based on a single characteristic. Designing with the most impacted or most marginalized in mind is a good



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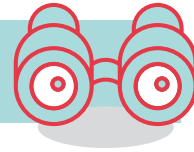
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strategy for increasing your understanding of the systemic challenges people face in using or accessing your initiative. Ideally, you co-create a product or service together with diverse people and users, in order to learn from those with lived experience. It's about putting into practice the adage that originated with the disability rights movement, "Nothing about us without us."

## Build in accessibility from the start



GBA Plus is a whole-person approach that can be useful in assessing how diverse groups of people may experience policies, programs and initiatives. Users with distinct requirements should be engaged from the outset to ensure that what is delivered will work for everyone.

For example, people who use screen readers to access a website require content and programming to ensure they have access. The [Accessibility Hub](#) (GCpedia link) and the [Digital Accessibility Toolkit](#) also have some clear guidance and tools to help you build in accessibility from the start.

## Be a good data steward



The quality of your inclusion analysis is only as good as the quality of the data. By collecting, assessing and sharing disaggregated data<sup>1</sup>, you can deepen your analysis by improving your understanding of the experiences of persons from different groups. It's important to examine how multiple and overlapping identity factors can create compounding forms of oppression. This is sometimes called intersectionality. Being a good data steward and using data responsibly will improve your analysis and help you be inclusive by design.

It's essential to be respectful of people's privacy and time while collecting the data. The Government of Canada collects incredibly personal data that represent real people and real lives; the public has placed their trust in the government to manage their data responsibly and ethically.

## Collaborate widely



No one person, team or department has all the answers. Being inclusive means incorporating a range of perspectives that reach across and beyond government. You need to be mindful when inviting this collaboration, however, recognizing that some people may not want to disclose whether they have a disability or divulge their cultural background. It can be painful, for example, for a stakeholder to review and give feedback on whether a product or service is racist or otherwise offensive. It's critical to establish and maintain trust with your partners.



<sup>1</sup> Disaggregated data refers to data broken down by age, race, ethnicity, income, education, etc. ([Women and Gender Equality Canada](#))

Include a diversity of perspectives in your engagements and consider that traditional design methods such as interviews or surveys, or other even more participatory methods, may not be adapted to the needs of certain participants. It's critical that designers understand how different stakeholders interact with each other, including the power dynamics at play, and how they can contribute to the design process. This is especially important when working together with others in co-design sessions.

There's a lot to consider, and it's easy for assumptions to slip through the cracks. You can mitigate this danger by inviting the perspectives of others and taking the time to ask some key questions. Remember that this is a task that's never complete. You're always going to miss something, and the world is ever-changing and evolving. Your goal should be ongoing excellence, not perfection, which is unattainable.

**Here are some key questions to get you started.**

## At the analysis stage



**What's the problem (for example, gap in service) you're trying to address?  
Place your answer in the space below.**

**Who has identified this as a problem? Place your answer in the space below.**

**Whose point of view is reflected in the problem definition? Place your answer in the space below.**

**What does the end user need and what do they need to know or be able to do to access your policy, program or initiative? Place your answer in the space below.**

Are you making assumptions about the uniformity of your end users? Place your answer in the space below.

Do you know the ethnocultural demographics of your users? Place your answer in the space below.

Have you selected a diverse team and are you building a culture of inclusion on your team? Place your answer in the space below.

Have you consulted with diverse people who would potentially be users of your initiative? Place your answer in the space below.

## At the design and development stage



Are certain groups potentially at a disadvantage because of how you're designing your product or service? Place your answer in the space below.

What are the structural issues that have contributed to inequality and disadvantage in past design work (for example, racism, colonialism, sexism, etc.)? Place your answer in the space below.

How can you acknowledge or address these points in your work as a designer? Place your answer in the space below.

Do the images and illustrations you're using reflect positively on the experiences of a diverse population? Place your answer in the space below.

Who have you consulted in developing your design and selecting images and illustrations? Place your answer in the space below.

Are you using inclusive examples, language and symbols that challenge stereotypes? Place your answer in the space below.

How does the language in your documents or promotional material affect (positively or negatively) racialized clients? Place your answer in the space below.

**Have you consulted with other employees, teams or community leaders?  
Are you over-surveying or over-consulting the same groups repeatedly?  
Place your answer in the space below.**

**Are you using culturally specific concepts or terms that should be explained  
or defined? Place your answer in the space below.**

**Is the product or service biased in favour of certain groups of people?  
Place your answer in the space below.**

**Is your communication inclusive and accessible to individuals and populations  
from diverse cultural backgrounds, considering the potential for misunderstanding  
or misinterpretation? Do visual communications and materials portray positive  
images that promote equity and break down stereotypes? Place your answer  
in the space below.**

## At the implementation and evaluation stage



Include a diverse group of sample end users in your testing. As much as possible, they should represent your actual end users. For example, if the website is for seniors, then your test group needs to include senior citizens.

**Has your product or service achieved its desired equality, fairness and inclusion-related outcomes? Place your answer in the space below.**

Ensure that you have gender- and diversity-disaggregated data to assess the success of your product or service. This will allow you to identify and analyze any trends that you can apply to improve the equality, diversity and inclusiveness of your design.

## Identify your learning gaps



**Has this job aid allowed you to identify any gaps in your own knowledge, skills or attitudes? Place your answer in the space below. Be specific, so that you can show this list to your manager to discuss your additional learning needs.**