



What is service design?

A QUICK GUIDE TO SERVICE DESIGN IN THE THIRD SECTOR

“Service design is the practice of designing services. It uses a holistic and highly collaborative approach to generate value for both the service user and the service provider throughout the service’s lifecycle.” – Service Design Network

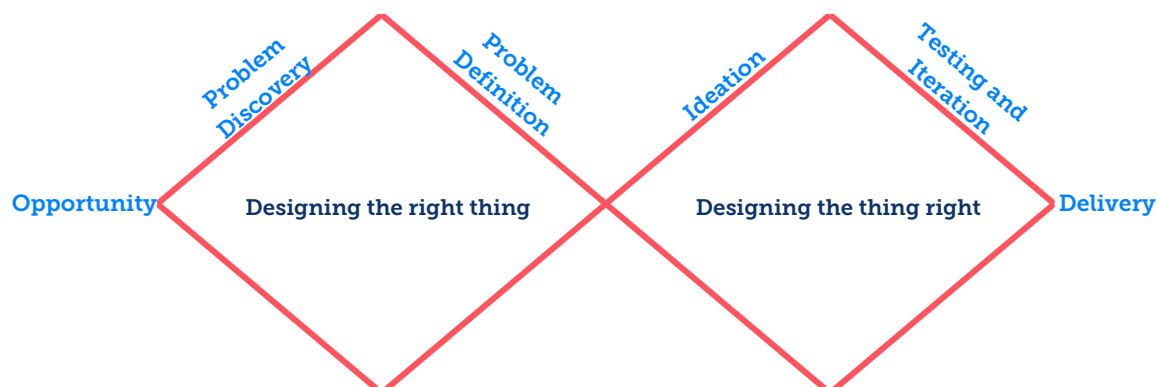
Service Design

Many services we interact with in our daily lives come about organically. Sometimes this can make them difficult for the service user to access and navigate, and burdensome to manage for the service provider. Service design is the process of approaching how we plan and deliver services with the same intention and consideration of good product design: starting with the users’ needs and what challenges they face before designing a product based on these needs, and testing and iterating the design using user input.

This process can be applied to services across all sectors, and while some focus their career around service design, becoming experienced service designers, anyone can implement these approaches in their work.

Double Diamond

The process of service design is captured in the double diamond framework.



Adapted from The Double Diamond by the Design Council (licensed under a CC BY 4.0 license)

Double Diamond

The double diamond illustrates how a combination of exploratory (divergent) and focus (convergent) phases is used to:

- 1 Build an in-depth understanding of the problem or need the service aims to address
- 2 Create a clear and defined focus for the work
- 3 Explore a range of ideas to address this focus
- 4 Refine ideas by testing them

Scottish Approach to Service Design

In Scotland, there is an ambition for public services to be designed and improved using the Scottish Approach to Service Design (SATSD):

"The vision for the Scottish Approach to Service Design is that the people of Scotland are supported and empowered to actively participate in the definition, design and delivery of their public services (from policy making to live service improvement)." – Scottish Government

To support and guide this work, 7 founding principles of the SATSD have been created. Whilst they have been written from the perspective of the public sector, we can see how they can be applied to service design work in all sectors.

- 1 We explore and define the problem before we design the solution.
- 2 We design service journeys around people and not around how the public sector is organised.
- 3 We seek citizen participation in our projects from day one.
- 4 We use inclusive and accessible research and design methods so citizens can participate fully and meaningfully.
- 5 We use the core set of tools and methods of the Scottish Approach to Service Design.
- 6 We share and reuse user research insights, service patterns, and components wherever possible.
- 7 We contribute to continually building the Scottish Approach to Service Design methods, tools, and community.

Participation

The Scottish Approach to Service Design places a particular focus on participation, emphasising that those with lived experience should be meaningfully involved at all stages of the process. It recognises that it is only through participation from people with lived experience that we can ensure the services being designed will effectively meet the needs of those who will use them.

There are many levels on which a service design process can invite participation. As a basis, The National Standards for Community Engagement are a good starting point for planning meaningful and inclusive participation. In recent years, we have also seen an increased uptake of approaches that empower participants to become an equal partner to professionals in the design process, such as Co-design or Co-production.

Impacts of service design

Implementing a participatory service design process can have many benefits:

- **Services are better able to meet people's needs:** by using lived experience as a starting point and building an understanding of what people need and the challenges, they face in meeting that need, we can create services that are effective and accessible
- **Reducing inequalities:** a good service design process creates space for a range of perspectives, including those from marginalised groups, to be heard and considered. Unlike processes where these voices are not heard, it addresses, rather than compounds, existing inequalities by reducing blind spots and challenging assumptions
- **More efficient delivery of services:** by investing time in a service design process, and making sure needs of service users are well understood from the start, organisations can save money and time down the line
- **Boosting skills and confidence:** participating in a service design process can boost the skills and confidence for both professionals as well as citizen participants

Resources

- [Find more resources on service design and participation on the GCVS website](#)
- [Browse our training offer](#)
- [This is service design doing: Applying Service Design Thinking in the real world](#) (free download)
- [Beyond sticky notes:](#) This book is packed full of useful tips, clear diagrams, and practical frameworks
- [Scottish Approach to Service Design](#)
- [Scottish Co-Production Network](#)
- [National Standards for community engagement](#)



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Want more guidance?

Support from service designers is available at GCVS. If you are considering service design or participation and would like to discuss your ideas, please get in touch by [filling out this form](#).