



30-45 MINUTES

For Whom are We Designing?

Authored by Bill Penuel

Activity Rationale and Aims

Aims

01. Identify stakeholders and envision their desires, interests, and needs
02. Identify common values and points of tension among team members

Rationale

When engaging in the design of a research study, curriculum, product, or process, it is critical to hold the intended audience at the center of the design process. The use of “design personas” can be a mechanism for designers to center the cultural, social and political aspects of design via imagining the users (Grudin & Pruitt, 2002).

Activity Summary

This activity centers the intended user or group in the design process. Co-design collaborators work in small groups to imagine a “design persona” of the type of person that the design could serve. Each “persona” will help the team envision salient desires, interests, challenges, and needs that the design should address.



crown
institute

The Renée Crown Wellness Institute
University of Colorado Boulder

In Person Steps

As a whole group:

1. Introduce the activity of creating a “design persona” by sharing an example persona created by the facilitator prior to the meeting.
 - a. To create the example, the facilitator should respond to the prompts below, developing a model that is specific to the project.
2. Review instructions:
 - a. Each team envisions a specific user of the designed product.
 - b. Who is this person? What are their specific lived realities, hopes, dreams, day-to-day activities? What are their histories, cultures, languages? Where do they live? What resources are available and not available to them?
 - c. What do we want to learn about the people for whom we are designing? Keep this in mind as you design your persona.
3. Discuss, when doing this activity:
 - a. How do we imagine hypothetical users from an asset-based perspective?
 - b. How can we identify our own biases and assumptions?
 - c. How do we imagine personas in detail without essentializing groups of people?

In pairs:

4. Create a “design persona,” addressing questions in step 2b & 2c.

As a whole group:

5. Have each group share out, providing time after each presentation to discuss.
6. Identify considerations that should be accounted for in the design process.

Modifications and Virtual Adaptations

- If conducting this activity in a virtual environment, if the group is larger, encourage comments to be shared via chat during the share-outs and discussion. When brainstorming considerations that should be accounted for in the design process, have collaborators contribute ideas to a shared digital document.



The Renée Crown Wellness Institute
University of Colorado Boulder

Facilitator Preparation

IN-PERSON AND DIGITAL MATERIALS

- Prepared “design persona” to share out
- Google drive or other place to share and track group work
- Pre-identify groups of 2 people

HANDOUTS

- “Design Persona” Handout with key questions pairs can ask to inform their persona creation (create either digital or hard copies)

Facilitation Tips

- The discussion questions in step 2 are important to provide an asset-based framing to this activity. It is important that facilitators prepare ahead of time to facilitate this conversation by drafting responses to the focal questions.
- When sharing out, provide a set amount of time for each dyad so that all dyads have similar time to share out.
- Have one person in the dyad be an assigned notetaker.

Example from the field

As part of a co-design effort to develop a program for mindfulness and well-being on the CU Boulder Campus (The Mindful Campus Program), early in the process, a group of students, staff, and researchers worked to develop design personas for people that the group imagined might benefit from a campus mindfulness initiative. The purpose was to help the team gain a sense also of what they wish they knew about people who might benefit from the program.

Collaborators worked in dyads to come up with a persona in 20 minutes. The personas created were composites of people they

knew, or made up completely. The personas included salient life experiences, such as experiences with meditation practices, and responded to questions about what might lead them to be seeking some connection to mindfulness, kindness, and compassion practices.

After completing their personas, the pairs shared their personas with others, and the group came together to discuss and summarize the diversity of concerns, goals, and experiences that they wanted to keep in mind when designing the program.



Commitments to Equity and Wellness

Participatory design is always “designing with,” but inevitably, most people who will engage with the work of a co-design team will not have been in the room. That being said, who is in the room when generating personas matters a great deal for being able to imagine the possible goals, concerns, and relevant life experiences of people for whom we are designing. In setting up this activity, make sure people in the room have connections to people whose experiences they know well who represent the range of possible collaborators in a program or users of a tool being designed. In addition, when creating personas, collaborators should consider their own positionality and strive to develop personas that reflect the assets and strengths of people they are representing, avoiding deficit-based views of others.

Personas that attend to wellness present people as whole beings, that is, as people with broad engagements and networks of relationships. It is easy to focus narrowly on a single context -- especially when developing a program or intervention for a specific context. But, people’s concerns and identities stretch across different engagements, and they draw support for their own well-being from multiple networks of people and from animal companions in their lives. Developing personas from this holistic perspective helps designers of wellness programs, because the personas consider how people cultivate and maintain their own well-being and that of their communities.



Additional Reading

Jurow, A. S., Teeters, L., Shea, M., & Van Steenis, E. (2016).

Extending the consequentiality of “invisible work” in the food justice movement. *Cognition and Instruction*, 34(3), 210-221.

Lundh, P., Cheng, B., Penuel, W. R., Joshi, A., & Lesk, H. (2010).

Design personas for teachable agents: *A qualitative tool for informing learning designs*. In K. Gomez, L. Lyons, & J. Radinsky (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 9th International Conference of the Learning Sciences* (Vol. 2, pp. 320-321).

Montagner, F., Stabellini, B., Di Salvo, A., Tamborrini, P. M., Marcen-

go, A., & Geymonat, M. (2017). *Data design for wellness and sustainability*. *International Conference on Universal Access in Human-Computer Interaction* (pp. 562-578).

Nieters, J. E., Ivaturi, S., & Ahmed, I. (2007). *Making personas*

memorable. *Proceedings of Computer-Human Interaction 2007 Conference* (pp. 1817-1824).



crown
institute

The Renée Crown Wellness Institute
University of Colorado Boulder

Works Cited

Grudin, J., & Pruitt, J. (2002). *Personas, participatory design and product development: An infrastructure for engagement*. Proceedings of Participatory Design Conference, Sweden (Vol. 2, pp. 144-152).



The Renée Crown Wellness Institute
University of Colorado Boulder