

# 18F-Design Principles

2 hours

18F

Design Principles are foundational statements that guide decision-making throughout product development. This 120-minute exercise helps teams articulate shared values in memorable, actionable imperatives like "Earn people's trust" or "Make complexity feel simple." Effective principles are specific enough to guide choices yet flexible enough to apply across situations. The exercise covers principle creation, testing against real scenarios, and prioritization for when principles conflict. Teams review their draft principles against past decisions to ensure alignment with actual values, not just aspirational ones. The resulting principles become a decision-making framework that maintains consistency across teams and time, reducing debates and accelerating alignment.

## H HOW TO RUN

1

**Using internal documents and kickoff activities, gather terms or concepts that seem significant to project goals and organizational culture.**

- 2. Using existing research, list terms or concepts that seem particularly important to customers or user groups.
- 3. Cluster similar terms and concepts together on a whiteboard or other writing space open to everyone in the project. Name the clusters.
- 4. Ask the team and stakeholders if they would like to add, change, or edit any concepts or groups.
- 5. From the groups on the board, create three to five final principles. Using evidence from partner or user research, write one to two sentences in support of each principle.
- 6. Share the principles in a place accessible to the team throughout the project, and refer to them often while making decisions.

## O OBJECTIVES

- > To give the team and the stakeholders a shared point of reference when negotiating next steps
- > Good design principles are specific to the project
- > not general truths
- > and should help teams say 'no' to otherwise interesting proposals or generate ideas when they're stuck

## M MATERIALS

- Examples of good/bad design
- Sticky notes
- Markers
- Principle templates

## P PARTICIPANTS

- Design leaders - UX designers - And product stakeholders (4-8 participants)

**REMEMBER**

- 18F Design Principles Guide
- Blog post: "Making more consistent decisions with design principles: A new 18F guide"
- Government Considerations: No PRA implications, no information collected from public.