



Lesson: Define & Refine a business idea

Exercise: Writing down a problem statement

Template: Directions for define a problem

Directions for define the problem

- *Define the problem.* With the information in front of you, you're ready to write down a "problem statement" - a comprehensive definition of the problem. Before you do, remember two general principles:
 - Define the problem in terms of needs, and not solutions. If you define the problem in terms of possible solutions, you're closing the door to other, possibly more effective solutions. "Violent crime in our neighborhood is unacceptably high," offers space for many more possible solutions than, "We need more police patrols," or, "More citizens should have guns to protect themselves."
 - Define the problem as one everyone shares; avoid assigning blame for the problem. This is particularly important if different people (or groups) with a history of bad relations need to be working together to solve the problem. Teachers may be frustrated with high truancy rates, but blaming students uniquely for problems at school is sure to alienate students from helping to solve the problem.
 - After you have defined the problem, ask your colleague/ friend to understand the terminology being used. Define the key terms of your problem statement, even if you think everyone understands them.

The Hispanic Health Coalition, has come up with the problem statement "Teen pregnancy is a problem in our community." That seems pretty clear, doesn't it? But let's examine the word "community" for a moment. You may have one person who defines community as "the city you live in," a second who defines it as, "this neighborhood" and a third who considers "our community" to mean Hispanics.