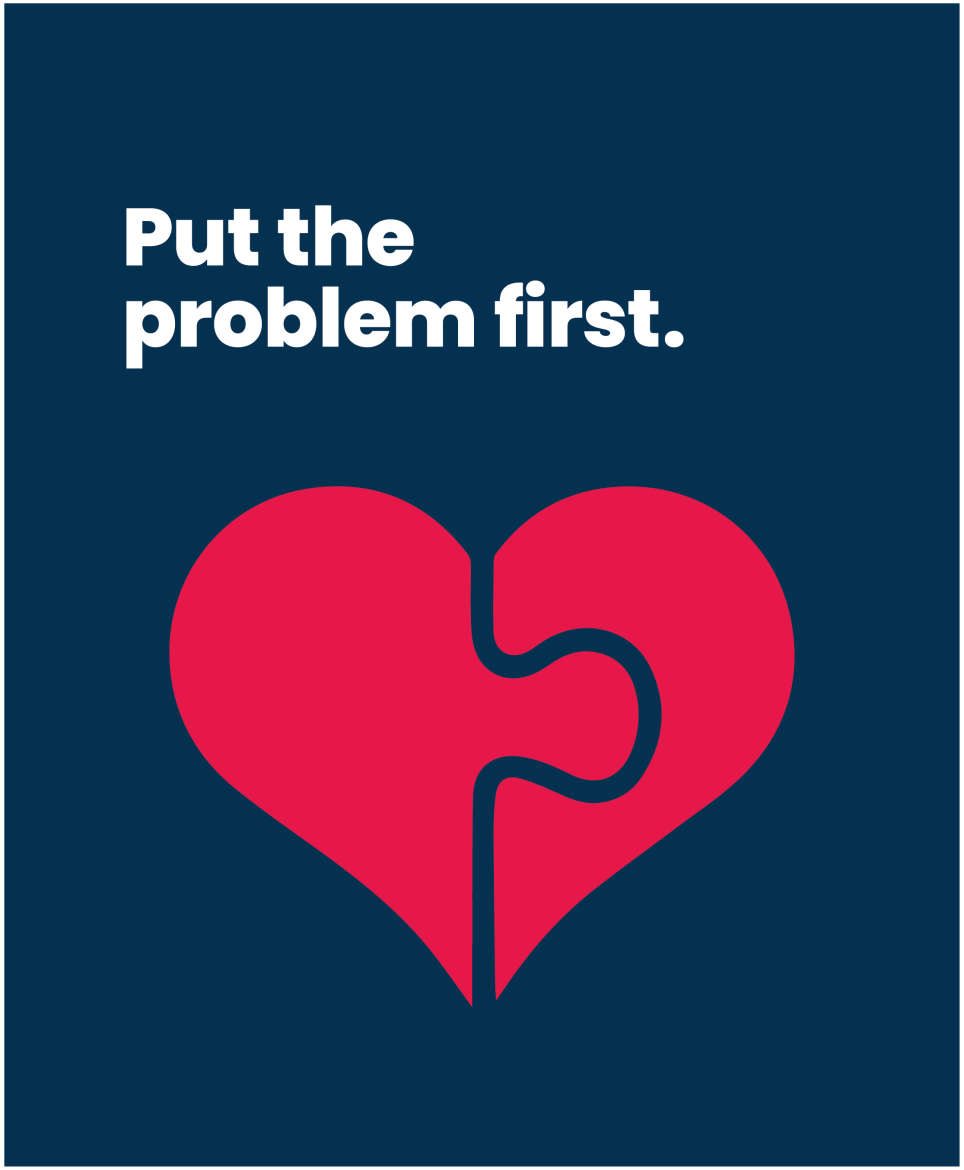
SPORT ENGLAND

Innovation & Digital

Best practices



Put the problem first.

Love the problem,
not the solution.

What it means

It often feels easier to visualise the solution ("let's create an app!"), but by starting with the problem, and asking questions to delve into why that problem exists, and what the needs are of your users, you can ensure you are solving the right problem for the right people or community.

Putting it into practice

- Explore the problem first, and from all angles, to challenge any assumptions you're holding.
- Be ready to have any pre-conceived ideas challenged and be willing to let go of these.
- Continually revisit and re-examine the problem & the context of the lives of the people who are experiencing the problem, as it is evolving all the time.

What it doesn't mean

Being pessimistic or negative about the potential to make a change.

Be people-centred.

Put real people's need at the heart of everything.

What it means

To effectively understand why inequalities exist and how they can be addressed, you need to hear from the people experiencing them. You need to truly understand barriers & their needs from their perspective. Involving people in the design & delivery of a solution means you can be sure that what you deliver is rooted in real needs.

Putting it into practice

- Conduct research to gain a deep understanding of the situation, behaviours, attitudes and goals of the people experiencing the problem you wish to solve.
- Ask lots of questions to get to the heart of what people really need.
- Explore different methods of involving people in the work – from consultation to co-production - and learn which approach is most appropriate.
- Keep people involved throughout the whole journey and keep refreshing what you know and understand about them.

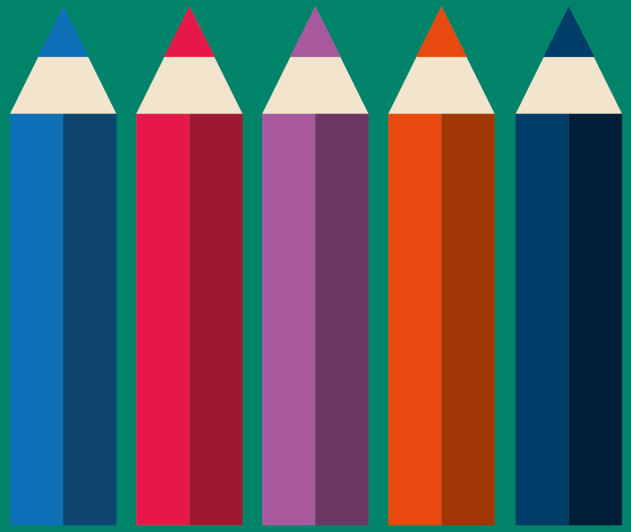
Extra considerations for Digital projects:

- Understand people's online accessibility needs and design to meet them.
- Involve users with low digital skills in the testing process.
- Consider non-digital alternatives alongside digital offers.

What it doesn't mean

Involving people in a tokenistic way or making assumptions too quickly about what is needed.

Value skills and experience.



Value skills and experience.

Assemble a diverse, multidisciplinary team.

What it means

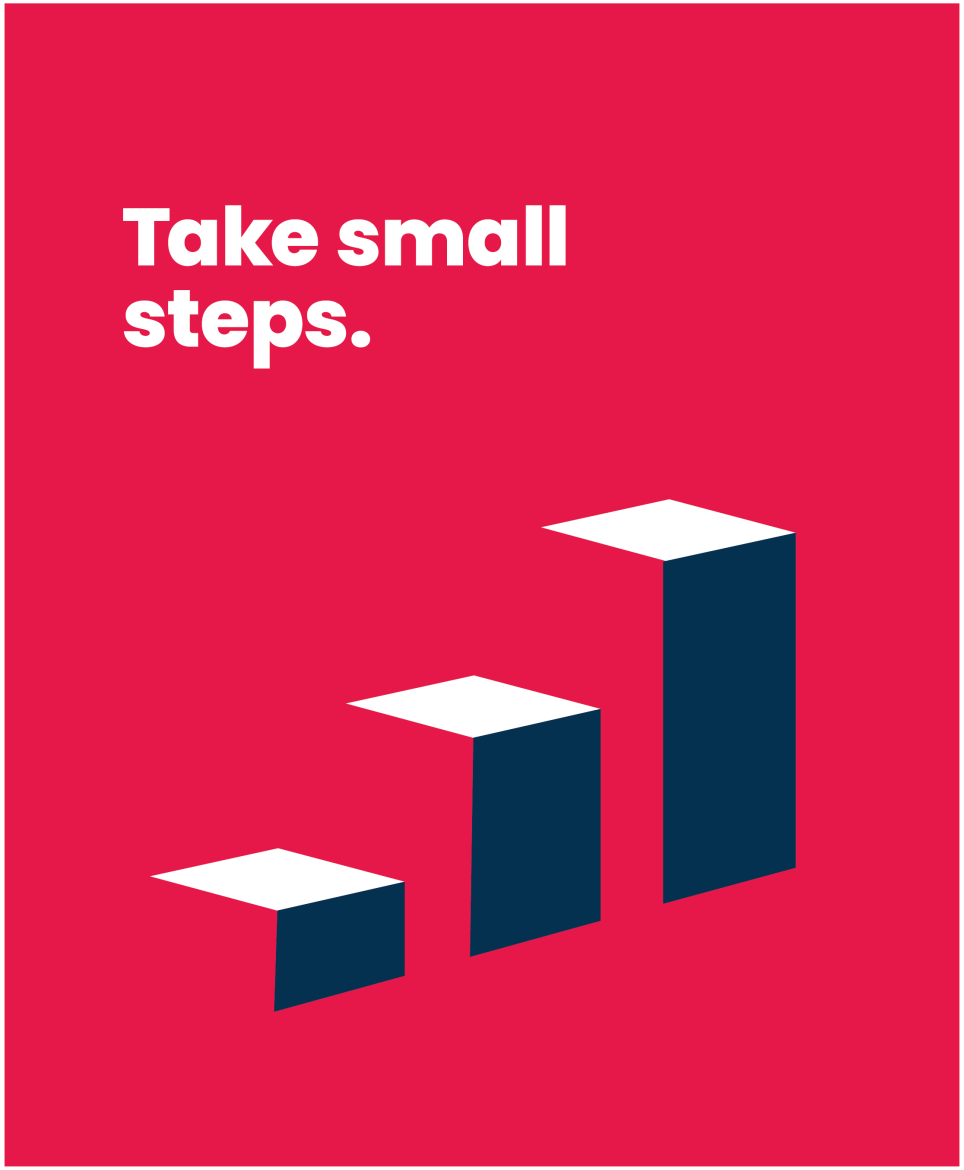
It's important to have the right mix of skills, expertise and experience working together as one team to solve the problem you're addressing. Partners, local organisations and end users should be part of the team where relevant. By having a balance of perspectives and creating the space to work as a collective, you can feel empowered to make decisions rapidly.

Putting it into practice

- Take stock of what skills you already have, and where you may need to bring in others to provide the right expertise & experiences for the work.
- Welcome people in from beyond your known universe.
- Identify opportunities to build skills across the team through collaboration.
- Remain connected with the lived experience of people experiencing the problem you are solving.

What it doesn't mean

Only working with the 'usual suspects'. Only considering internal expertise - the team must connect with the lived experience of people experiencing the problem (see Be people-centred).



Take small steps.

Continually adapt.

What it means

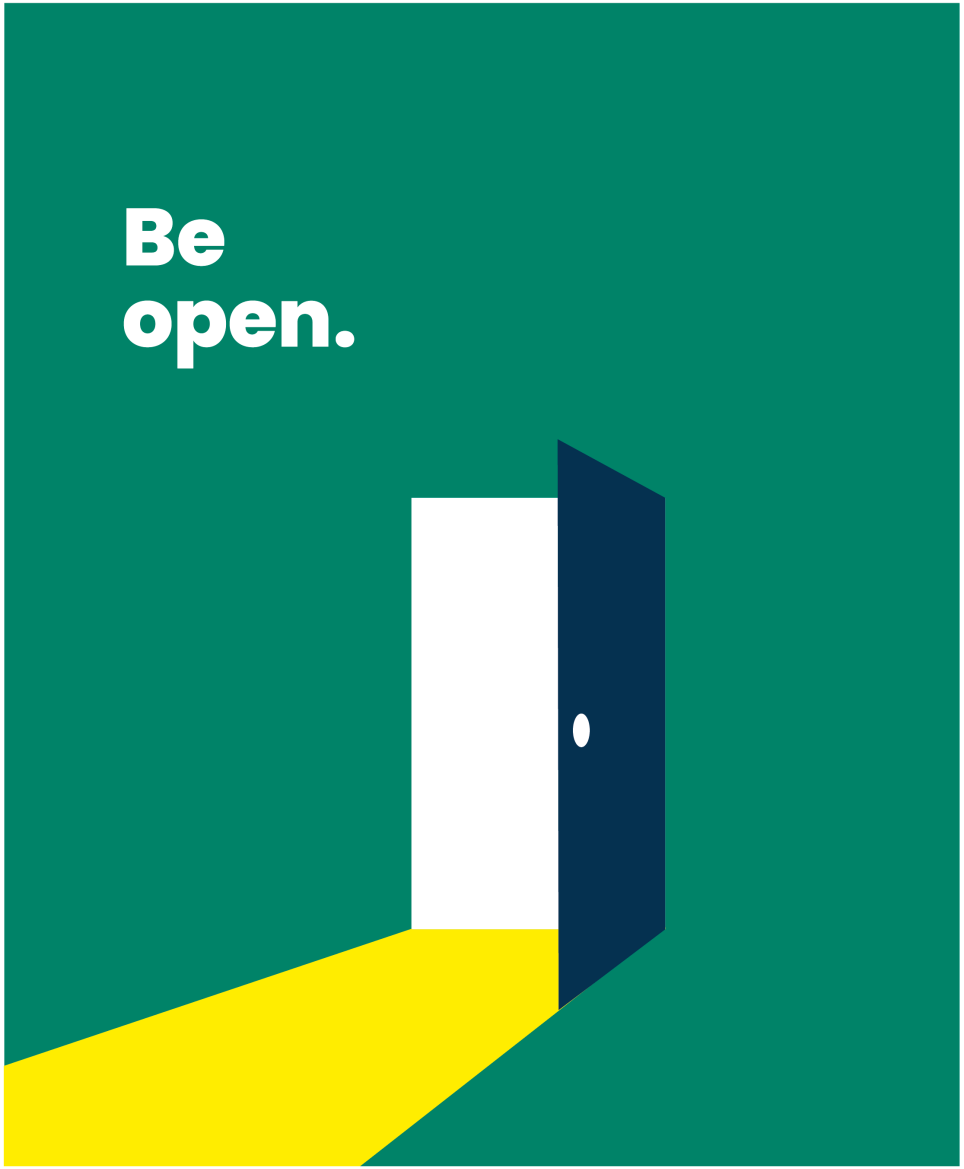
Nothing follows a linear process. Flexible methodologies can help you be clear in your purpose, but agile in approach, as well as creating space to fail in a controlled way. By working in an iterative way you can adapt as you go and make sure you're having the maximum impact on solving your problem.

Putting it into practice

- Adopt an agile approach to working to break down the work into smaller, more achievable sections.
- Reflect regularly to continue with what's working and adjust what's not.
- When you're ready to test something, build the smallest cheapest version you can test (a "minimum viable product" or MVP) and see how it works.
- Generate multiple solutions to a problem and test them with real people.
- Extra considerations for Digital projects:
- Try prototyping with wireframe mock-ups or low code products to check you are on the right track.

What it doesn't mean

Being overly cautious or timid.



Be open.

Share as you go.

What it means

Change can't happen in a vacuum; being open helps us learn about change by learning from those that have gone before us. By welcoming in inspiration and sharing as you go, you can also help improve collective practice and transparency across the sector. Working in the open is reciprocal - just as you benefit from others' work, they benefit from yours.

Putting it into practice

- Write up the process you're following and make this publicly available.
- Capture what you're learning as you go, sharing this and both successes and mistakes along the way.
- Share things early for input, when they're 'bad first drafts'.
- Extra considerations for Digital projects:
- Where relevant use open data such as OpenActive, Open Referral UK, Active Places or 360 Giving.
- Consider writing up a service recipe or making your work open licenced so that others can make use and build on it.

What it doesn't mean

Sharing everything all the time! This could create an information overload which is impossible to navigate.

Reframe failure.

Prioritise learning when things don't go to plan.

What it means

Solving problems involves trial and error to get to the best result. Every time something doesn't work is an opportunity to learn, adjust and try again, knowing that you'll get closer to solving the problem you set out to solve. Find comfort in failure – it means you're being brave!

Putting it into practice

- Normalise talking about failure in your day-to-day work and embed methods to regularly share both small and big #FAILs with your team.
- Share how you failed and what you learnt (see Be open).

What it doesn't mean

Taking risky gambles. Failing in the same way repeatedly without learning.

Look to the future.

Think long-term, prioritise all forms of sustainability.

What it means

Whilst it's important to take small steps, you also need to keep the longer-term goal in mind. Be fixed on your outcome, but flexible on how you get there. Consider questions about longer-term impact and sustainability, to ensure everything you do improves things in the future and minimises short-term thinking or unanticipated consequences.

Putting it into practice

- Check whether solutions exist before creating something new.
- Explore opportunities to re-use or build on others' work, rather than starting everything from scratch.
- Prioritise collaboration and partnering rather than competing.
- Assess how sustainable your solution is likely to be early in the design process – consider all forms - financial, ethical & environmental.
- Think realistically about the resources that will be required to maintain your solution, and build this into your planning.
- Acknowledge that what you create probably won't be around forever, so build in regular reviews to adapt or stop.
- Build a long-term plan collectively with stakeholders so everyone is clear on when key decisions around sustainability need to be made.

What it doesn't mean

Locking yourself into long-term, inflexible agreements.

Embrace the uncertainty.

Welcome new approaches.

What it means

The only certainty when trying to do things differently is uncertainty. This is something you'll need to get comfortable with. Seeking to solve entrenched problems means moving into new spaces, at the edge of our current understanding, without knowing exactly where you'll end up!

Putting it into practice

- Acknowledge the fears you hold around the future of the work and reflect on these regularly with your team.
- Connect early with others who have experience of addressing similar problems.
- Trust that if you follow the process, and embed these principles, it will lead you to the right result.
- Be fixed on the outcome you need to deliver and for who, but remain flexible in how you get there.

What it doesn't mean

Jumping into things without proper consideration or insight.