

**DemTools**  
by NDItech

# + Human-Centered Design



## Technology that makes real change starts with people, not code

**Human-centered design is a simple idea with powerful implications for technology: make sure the people for whom you're building are in the middle of the conversation, from initial design to final implementation. By listening to the real problems of the people you're trying to help, you can solve the right problems in ways that the users will want to use. With DemTools, NDI puts people in the center of the process when designing solutions to improve the capabilities and usability of technology for civic engagement and social impact. User needs encouraged NDI to include SMS messaging in FixMyCommunity, mobile responsiveness in DemGames, and a streamlined user interface in Civi.**



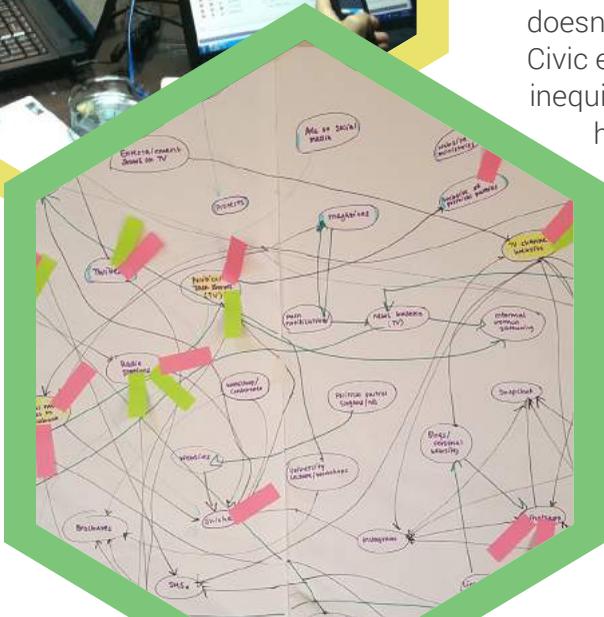
## Human-centered design meets people where they are

To empower people, technology has to meet them where they are, speaking to their experiences and using their words. Open data is just numbers on a page if the electorate doesn't understand how to interpret it. Civic engagement apps can magnify inequity if the disenfranchised don't have smartphones. You can't exercise your rights if they're explained to you in jargon you don't understand.

- critically - government to ensure that their products and services are intuitive and impactful. At its heart, human-centered design is the key insight that successful products and services start with by identifying who a product or service is for and then placing them, rather than the the team or organization attempting to solve the problem, at the center. As generations of industrial designers, technologists, and service architects can tell you, this is hard but essential work. As generations of rights and democracy activists can tell you, local need, local expertise, and local context are paramount. Human-centered design is at the heart of our approach to DemTools and our partnership with civic, political, and government groups around the world.

Human-centered design responds to this challenge. It is a methodology that is heavily used by technology companies and in a growing array of sectors including finance, healthcare, and

The typical human-centered design



process involves stopping the conversation as early in the strategic process as possible to ask, “who specifically are we building this for?” and “how would they describe their needs?” The design team puts away their keyboards and their code and spends time researching, interviewing, and brainstorming with members of the community. In the process the team deepens its understanding of what the community knows it needs, how that need is seen in their day to day lives, and begins to gauge what a solution might look like that feels natural, intuitive, and meaningful. In each project and context, our team seeks opportunities to deepen direct engagement with the community throughout the design process, *building with* rather than *building for* them.



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### Expanding the Design Toolkit

NDI takes core insights and techniques from traditional, commercial sector human-centered design practices and adapts them to the needs of the democracy community and our partner organizations. This means wrapping human-centered design in an interdisciplinary approach that includes key strategic tools from the worlds of organizing, governance, sustainable development, iterative software delivery, and participatory action research, among others. The resulting framework for collaboration to action, which we call Co/Act, informs how we select and deploy DemTools and provides a low-cost, high impact curriculum for our partners around the world. Using the Co/Act model, NDI has incorporated design sprints, usability testing, and iterative development in Lebanon and Moldova to create new civic tools designed to increase civic engagement and fight corruption.



### Human-Centered Design is for More than Tech

Human-centered design has broad implications for international development work with civic and political groups around the world. Programs are more effective and sustainable when they are developed together with the people who will be using them. To learn more, check out information from some of the original innovators in the world of user-centered design, IDEO: <https://www.ideo.org/>