

Front-End Tool

What is the 'front-end'

The 'front end' is the fundamental thinking and logic that gives a concept, project or event clarity. A good 'front-end' clarifies thinking by describing the intention, context, needs, focus, target outcomes, and relevant values, principles and assumptions, in a simple, concise and logical way. A good front-end also establishes a shared language by clarifying and defining key terms.

Whether we are developing a new concept or sharing our thinking with others, we need to have these essential elements that together, create a clear, shared mental picture.

As individuals, our thinking is based on our personal beliefs, perceptions and knowledge and we know that different people with different experiences and perspectives see things differently to us. Without a clear 'front-end' we can think we have a common mental picture, but in all likelihood we will each have somewhat different mental pictures. If we are to work together effectively and avoid confusion and frustration, developing a shared 'front-end' is essential.

The 'front-end' is the most important part of any design, planning or communication process because it enables us as individuals and groups, to formulate a clear, and shared 'picture' which supports more effective and efficient action.

Once you have a 'front end' you have a solid basis of thinking and shared understanding from which to move into detailed design and implementation. You also have a concise description of purpose and targets to use in marketing your concept or project, and for measuring and managing performance.

The steps to follow when using the Front-End tools

1. Describe and write down (on a whiteboard or butchers paper if working as a team) the intention/motivation, context, boundaries and needs of the situation that have given rise to the concept, project or event. Consider and document any values and assumptions that are underpinning the thinking about the intention, context and needs.
2. Draft a 'Focus' statement. The 'Focus' states concisely what must be achieved to meet the needs and the intention. Also think about and document any values and principles that underpin the Focus. (The SMARTT Focus Tool is useful here).
3. List the key target outcomes that will need to be achieved in order for the Focus to be realised. In most situations there are usually 3 to 6 key target outcomes for a Focus.
4. List the target outputs that will be produced in achieving the outcomes.
5. Check the logic of the 'Front End' by asking: "If we achieve the target outcomes and outputs will we achieve our focus and meet the needs?" Make any improvements that are needed to ensure a logical and shared mental picture.
6. At every stage check to see what key terms/language you are using, and make sure you have shared definitions for these.

It is important to deal with each step in enough detail to get it 'good enough' before moving on to the next. Having each component described 'enough' allows an adequate understanding for checking logic and clarity, without going into details which are best determined after a shared mental picture has been established. It is OK to be backwards and forwards between steps.

A worksheet for the Front End tool is provided on the next page.

Front-End Tool

Name:

Date:

Context, Boundaries and Needs

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Draft Focus

(A Role Focus should clearly state what you need to achieve; indicate the boundaries and scale of role.)

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Could the Focus be made SMARTTer?

Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Targeted, Timelined

Target Outcomes Key outcomes needed to achieve the Focus	Target Outputs Outputs that will be produced by achieving the outcomes

Key values, principles, assumptions and intent:

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Definitions of key terms:

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Check the logical connections between the context, needs, focus, target outcomes, values/principles, assumptions and intent. Continuously improve, innovate and simplify.