

## PHASE 1 DEFINE

# Root Cause Analysis

Effort ●●●●●

### Objective

To use the data collected during the desk review and immersive research to identify a set of priority challenges that are the root of the problem.



### Time needed

3–4 hours



### Participants

Design and research team

### How to use this tool

A root cause analysis is a good way to help you sift through the data and to identify the primary source of a problem. Use this template to think through the problem you are trying to solve.

1. **Identify causal factors.** During the desk review, development of the intent statement, and immersive research, you collected a lot of information to better understand the situation. Use this template to help sort through the causal factors: issues that cause or contribute to the health problem. Identify as many causal factors as possible. Start with the problem and brainstorm causal factors for that problem by asking “why?”
2. **Identify the root cause.** To find root causes—the primary sources of the challenge—start with the causal factors identified above and continue to ask why. Root causes are seldom found in the most obvious causes. Dig deeper and continue to ask “why?” until nearly all responses have been exhausted or roots that seem important to address are reached.
3. **Prioritize the root causes.** Identify challenges from the root causes and rank in order, starting with the main cause. Consider the following:
  - a. The potential impact of addressing the challenge.
  - b. How difficult it will be to reach the audience associated with the challenge.
  - c. Resources available to address the challenge.
  - d. Whether you can identify a logical order in which to address the challenges.

PHASE 1: DEFINE

Root Cause Analysis

**APPARENT PROBLEM:** *What is the problem you are trying to solve?*

WHY? →

**CAUSAL FACTORS**  
*Start with the problem and brainstorm causal factors: things that cause or contribute to the problem. Identify as much as possible, by asking why. Connect them in a logical cause and effect order until arriving at the root of the problem.*

**SYMPTOMS OF THE PROBLEM**  
*Prioritize causal factors to dig deeper and continue to ask “why?” to get to possible root causes.*

WHY? →

**POSSIBLE ROOT CAUSES**

WHY? →

**ACTUAL ROOT CAUSES**

To get to the root cause, ask:

- What sequence of events leads to the problem?
- What conditions allow the problem to occur?  
*[E.g., traditional values and practices]*
- What problems co-exist with the central problem and might contribute to it?  
*[E.g., lack of health facilities]*

—————  
*Note: more than one causal factor can be linked to one root cause.*

CAUSES →

PHASE 1: DEFINE

Root Cause Analysis

**APPARENT PROBLEM:** *What is the problem you are trying to solve?*



**ACTUAL ROOT CAUSES**

**RANKED ROOT CAUSES**

**Root Cause #1**

**Root Cause #2**

**Root Cause #3**

**Root Cause #4**

Identify challenges from the root causes and rank in order, starting with the main cause. To determine rank, consider:

- The potential impact of addressing the challenge. The greater the potential impact, the more reason to address it.
- How difficult it will be to reach the audience associated with the challenge.
- Other resources available to address the challenge. Other partners may be working on that challenge or additional funding streams available.
- Whether you can identify a logical order in which to address the challenges.
- If more than one causal factor is linked to the root cause. When a root cause is the source of multiple causal factors, it indicates that addressing the root cause can have far-reaching effects.

## Citations

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Johns Hopkins Center for Communication Programs.(n.d.). *How to Conduct a Root Cause Analysis*. The Compass for SBC.  
<https://thecompassforsbc.org/how-to-guide/how-conduct-root-cause-analysis>