

Editor's Note line:

The Communitech Academy User Research course helps people broaden their network of fellow innovators, upskill their user research capabilities, and take their newly learned skills to their office while prioritizing user-centred design. It's helping public servants build the skills to meet the [Digital Service Standard](#) and apply user research best practices.

Training Teams on User Research Methods

User-centred design is central to delivering useful and usable online products and services. In order to meet our [Digital Service Standard](#) and apply our [leadership principles](#), teams must embrace how to approach their work in a user-centred way. Often, this means adopting the right mindset, and cultivating the skills needed, to engage users effectively, delivering with their needs at the centre.

In November, we debuted a new course called **Understanding the User: Research Methods**, in partnership with [Communitech Academy](#) and Wilfrid Laurier University. This course focuses on helping people use data to make research-based decisions to design and build better services.

About the course



Davis Neable (UX Educator at Communittech Academy) goes over, "The New Design Frontier," with participants in our January session at the Ontario Digital Service.

The course is delivered as a roll-up-your-sleeves, hands-on workshop, where participants learn best practices in user research. Over four days, people are exposed to a blend of academic and applied practices to gather user requirements, conduct usability testing and translate insights from user experience (UX) research into future service and product development.

On the final day of the course, the instructor gives advice to participants, on the product or service they are working on, with the goal of improving the product or service for users. Both [Dr. Abby Goodrum](#) and [Davis Neable](#) have taught this course.

The course helps people from all parts of government understand how user research applies to their work, regardless of their particular domain area of expertise. It also provides new tools that can be added to their standard practice, or introduces new approaches that help complement their existing skills. So far, the

course has been delivered to people working in information technology (IT), policy, communications, and service design fields, just to name a few.

Takeaways and benefits for participants

The true value of the course is gained through its experiential learning format. After the 4-day intensive workshop, participants learn how to:

- get familiar web analytics of industry leaders
- learn how to create and develop user personas
- tell the story of a users experience through journey mapping
- conduct usability testing
- conduct heuristic evaluation

Learning from early versions of the course

Like everything we do in digital, gathering feedback from users is fundamental to our work. When surveyed, people who took the course told us that the style and delivery structure were very effective. Specifically, we learned that:

- people appreciated getting advice from the instructor and applying what they learned to current projects and people better understood the process behind creating products and services that provide meaningful and relevant user experiences
- people enjoyed deep diving into user research methods, rather than covering a lot of topics in a shallow way
- people also wanted the course to be tailored to government environments

Iterating on the course

In the spirit of continuous improvement, we are continuing to change the course content, based on participant feedback. The course now features elements tailored to government environments:

- [Shannah Segal](#), the Senior Manager, Experience Design at the Ontario Digital Service, now introduces the course and sets the context to help people understand how user research applies to government work. Shannah returns at the end of the course to answer questions, so that people can further understand how they can apply what they learned to their work.

- A team from the [Behavioural Insights Unit](#) speaks about how they can help enhance services through user research and behavioural science methodology.

Delivering the right training is important; but leadership buy-in is also essential to equipping our organization for the digital era. That's why we invited our Assistant Deputy Minister, [Mike Maddock](#), to stop into one of the sessions to share his experience taking the course as a senior leader, and how his deepened understanding enables him to better support the work of his teams. We would love to invite more senior leaders to take this course in the future.

Get in touch

If you have questions about Understanding the User: Research Methods, please reach out to digital.training@ontario.ca.



Dr. Abby Goodrum (Professor and Program Coordinator, User Experience Design at Wilfrid Laurier University) asks people in the December session to share their experience of taking the Understanding User Research Methods course.