



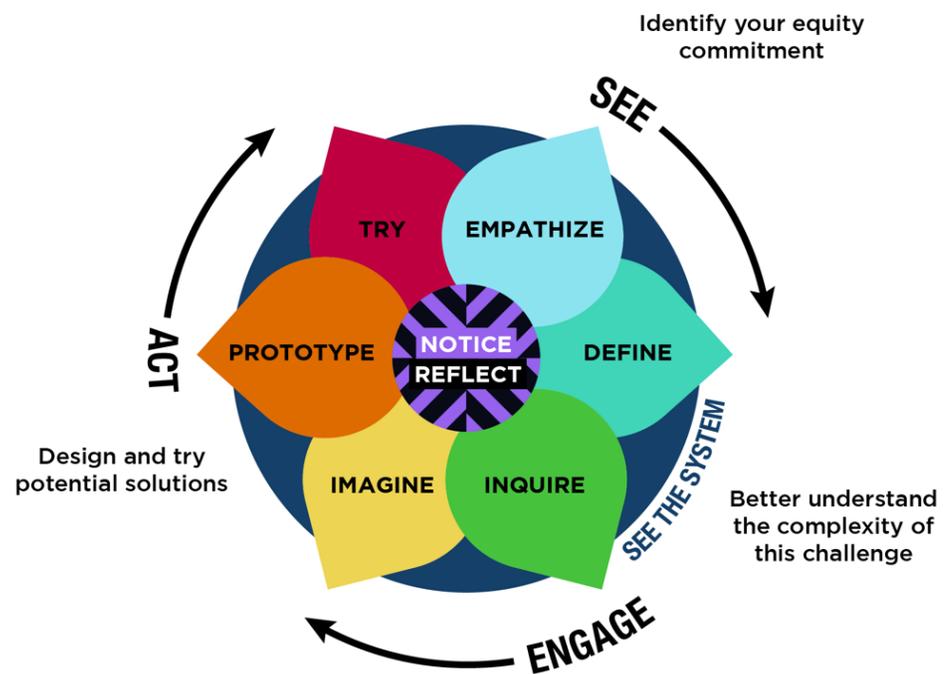
AMETHIST

## RESOURCE

### USING *LIBERATORY DESIGN* TO PROMOTE EQUITY IN PROJECTS

#### What is Liberatory Design?

Liberatory design is a problem-solving method and practice that centers equity when designing solutions. At its core, it pushes designers to engage in deep self-awareness practices that liberate them from habits that perpetuate inequity. It also shifts the power within design by centering the voices of those the solution is being designed for. The practice is broken into “mindsets” and “modes”.



*From: Liberatory Design for Equity Process*

AMETHIST@Penn:  
Achieving Maternal  
Empowerment  
and Transforming  
Health through  
Implementation  
Science and  
Training

# MINDSETS AND MODES

## *Mindsets*

**Mindsets** are meant to invoke the values designers will use to ground their equitable design practice, such as **building relational trust, seeking liberatory collaboration, and working to transform power**. The [liberatory design deck](#) outlines the importance of each mindset and provides examples of how they can be used in practice.

### **Build Relational Trust**

Invest in relationships with intention, especially across difference. Honor stories. Practice empathetic listening.

### **Practice Self-Awareness**

Who we are determines how we design. Looking in the “mirror” reveals what we see, how we relate, and how our perspectives impact our practice.

### **Recognize Oppression**

Learn to see how oppression, in its many forms, has shaped designs that lead to inequity.

### **Embrace Complexity**

Recognize that equity challenges are complex and messy. Stay open to possibility. Powerful design emerges from the mess, not from avoiding it.

### **Focus on Human Values**

Get to know the community we are designing with in as many different ways as possible. Anchor all of our decision-making in human values.

### **Seek Liberatory Collaboration**

Recognize differences in power and identity to design “with” instead of “for.” Design for belonging.

### **Work with Fear and Discomfort**

Fear and discomfort are anticipated parts of equity design work. Identifying the sources of such feelings offers us a context to work through them and continue to design.

### **Attend to Healing**

The effects of oppression are complex and often hinder our ability to take action. Integrate ongoing healing processes when designing for equity.

### **Work to Transform Power**

Explore structures and opportunities for interactions in which power is shared, not exercised.

### **Exercise Creative Courage**

Every human is creative. Creative courage allows us to push through self-doubt and creative fragility so we can design bravely against oppression.

### **Take Action to Learn**

The complexity of oppression must be addressed with courageous ongoing action. Experiment as a way to think and learn – without attachment to outcome.

### **Share, Don't Sell**

Practice transparency and non-attachment in sharing ideas with collaborators.

## *Modes*

**Modes** provide guidance for the overall liberatory design process. Similar to the [design thinking process](#), they provide a structure for how designers can problem-solve using a solution-based approach. A key difference between Liberatory Design modes and the design thinking process is the inclusion of steps for *noticing* and *reflecting*. These particular modes force designers to pause and reflect on actions that, while seemingly commonplace, may actually perpetuate existing inequities. Modes can follow any sequence and can be repeated as many times as needed throughout the project. The [liberatory design deck](#) provides examples on when these modes should be applied within a project and key questions teams can ask themselves to help act on these modes.

### **Notice**

Notice by practicing self-awareness, seeking context about the systems you design within, and exploring the history of oppression in those systems to develop an equity-based identity.

### **Reflect**

Reflect on team health, design intentions, and the impact our design process is having on us individually, interpersonally, institutionally, and systemically to support continual growth and healing.



### See the System

Seeing the System enables us to identify potential equity challenges, what about the system is producing these, and what we need to learn more about as we engage in empathy work.

### Empathize

Design opportunities to understand the experiences, emotions, and motivations of the person or community you are designing with. Empathize from a place of love, respect, and curiosity.

### Define

Develop a point of view about challenges and needs with the community. Together, look for patterns and insights in stories that reveal the deeper needs of the people closest to the challenge.

### Inquire

Inquire when the way ahead is not clear. Inquire to help you better understand and define the challenge and to provide a clearer direction for your prototyping.

### Imagine

Creating the time to brainstorm and imagine “what if?!” can unlock and unleash the creative courage that will lead to innovative approaches and solutions to equity challenges.

### Prototype

Build rough versions of what you’re working on to test key ideas. Designing for equity requires creative experimentation.

### Try

Gather authentic feedback about prototypes to check your assumptions and intentions. Feedback is a gift used to improve whatever is being designed and ensure that the design is attuned to stated equity goals.

*See pages 16-25 of the [Liberatory Design Deck](#)*

## WHY MIGHT IMPROVE INVESTIGATORS WANT TO LEVERAGE THIS TOOL?

In the [year one survey](#), most Centers of Excellence felt confident in their planned use of equity across their project. However, they also mentioned looking for support from AMETHIST on topics of **addressing structural inequalities, equity-focused data collection and analysis, and understanding local historical, social, and political influences on equity.**

The practice of liberatory design can provide IMPROVE investigators with useful guidance on how to increase their awareness of these greater influences on equity and help them respectfully utilize community voices to understand the greater landscape in which the project exists. For some IMPROVE investigators, it may provide a structure with which to align their existing process of equity engagement.

## HOW CAN THIS TOOL BE USED?

The practice recommends utilizing mindsets and modes in connection with each other by choosing **1-3 mindsets** designers feel are particularly important to the project and identifying how they plan to embody them throughout the project. Then, they can leverage the modes to outline how they will progress through the project. While liberatory design can be leveraged at all stages of a project, it’s best to align on the approach as early as possible to formalize how it will be integrated.

### Example

One early example used by an AMETHIST team member was to apply liberatory design to existing project equity guidelines. These guidelines included a list of questions for team members to reflect on at the start, predefined mid-points, and end of a project. The questions had teams reflect on who they were designing the solution for, how they might include them throughout the project, and how they’d work as a team to ensure equity extended to the working environment as well as the solutions.



Using liberatory design, the existing list of project questions and overall project planning guidelines were expanded to include mindset and mode-related components. New subsets of questions were also created for individuals to use based on the type of project they were working on (i.e. an exploratory project, an improvement project for an existing process or resource, etc.) This helped teams better align their specific project aims with the practice of liberatory design.

## WHAT IF AN INVESTIGATOR HAS ALREADY BEGUN THEIR PROJECT?

**When applying liberatory design at a later stage in a project, designers can:**

1. Align on the 1-3 mindsets they feel are particularly important to their project. Given that this step is happening after the project has already begun, designers can also leverage what they've learned from their project so far to help them pick the most relevant mindsets.
2. Take time to go over previous project activities to reflect on steps or decisions that may need to be revisited given the mindsets they've selected.
3. Align on how the remainder of the project will progress with the inclusion of the liberatory design tool.

**At any stage in a project, this tool helps to:**

- Push teams to reflect critically on their engagement practices with community members and how their own identities and positionality can impact their projects
- Provide teams with specific reflection questions they can utilize to pause and align on whether their solutions fit their equity values and will ultimately make the most genuine impact
- Ensure that teams can be responsive to the inevitable changes and discoveries that will occur during the project lifecycle while continuing to hold equity front and center through continuous reflection and community engagement

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### Credit

Liberatory Design (<http://www.liberatorydesign.com>) is the result of a collaboration between Tania Anaissie, David Clifford, Susie Wise, and the National Equity Project [Victor Cary and Tom Malarkey]

