Before designing solutions or interventions, you will need to establish a clear understanding of the scope and type of problem facing your organization or population of interest (i.e., end user). In the “Define” phase of the CABS Approach, you will follow three steps to craft a clear problem statement.

**STEP 1 BEGIN BY THINKING ABOUT THE FOLLOWING:**

- **What can you observe that tells you what is and is not happening in a program or process?**
- **Who is the population of interest, or the end user, facing this problem?**
- **What outcomes of interest is the organization or end user not achieving?**
- **Why does this problem matter to the organization and end user?**
- **How can you measure the scale of this problem?**

**STEP 2 AS YOU THINK ABOUT YOUR PROBLEM, CONSIDER HOW IT MEETS THE FOLLOWING:**

- **SPECIFIC & OBSERVABLE**
  - The problem statement should be clear about which people and what parts of the process are included.

- **NEUTRAL**
  - The problem statement should **NOT** speculate about the cause of the problem or its solution.

- **MEASURABLE**
  - The problem statement should describe a problem that is measurable and, if possible, state its scale.

Remaining neutral is a key to defining the problem because assumptions about the cause or solutions limit the range of ideas one might discover through diagnosis and design. For example:

**Clear Problem Statement:**

*Only 24% of first-time participants show up for orientation meetings at the assigned time.*

- **Possible solutions:** reminders, planning tools, motivational messaging, transportation vouchers, custom start times, improved accountability, etc.

**Ineffective Problem Statement:**

*Only 24% of first-time participants show up for orientation meetings because they lack accountability.*

- **Possible solutions:** improved accountability

**STEP 3 CRAFT A PROBLEM STATEMENT THAT DOES THE FOLLOWING:**

- **Clear Problem Statement:**
  - Only 24% of first-time participants show up for orientation meetings at the assigned time.
  - **Specific about the stage in the process.** (Orientation meetings)
  - **Measures and quantifies the scope.** (24%)
  - **Clear about who is encountering the problem.** (First-time participants)
  - **Neutral.** (Does not assume a cause or solution)

- **Ineffective Problem Statement:**
  - Participants don’t show up to meetings because they lack accountability.
  - **Missing quantification of the scope of the problem.**
  - **Attributes reasons or speculates as to causes of the problem (not a neutral description).**

This handout relates to the **Define** phase of the CABS approach.