

DESIGN THINKING APPROACH FOR SUSTAINABILITY OF FREE MEAL PROGRAM AT AL-QUDS TRADITIONAL ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

The free meal initiative in Indonesia aims to combat malnutrition and stunting. Introduction: This study explores the implementation of the free meal program at Pondok Pesantren Al-Quds. Purpose of the Study: To identify challenges and propose solutions for sustainable meal management. Objective of the Paper: To analyze financial, logistical, and nutritional issues while developing targeted interventions. Research Methodology: Utilizing the Design Thinking approach, qualitative data were gathered through interviews and surveys with 27 participants from the boarding school community. General Findings: Key challenges included financial instability, inconsistent meal quality, and the need for standardized meal management systems. Proposed solutions, such as an Excel-based budgeting tool and financial literacy training, aim to enhance the program's sustainability and effectiveness. The findings highlight the importance of structured management practices and community involvement in successfully implementing the free meal initiative.

Keywords: free meal program, pondok pesantren, design thinking, management

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INTRODUCTION

Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming Raka's free lunch campaign has received worldwide attention for its potential to alter Indonesian children's health and educational results. The effort, which focuses on providing healthy meals to around 83 million people, including schoolchildren, toddlers, and pregnant women, takes on some of Indonesia's most important public health and socioeconomic challenges: Malnutrition, stunting, and Food Security. Malnutrition and stunting, in particular, are common in Indonesia and have long-term consequences for cognitive development, academic achievement, and overall well-being. Providing at least one healthy meal per day through this program might reduce these concerns, providing significant advantages to low-income families who may otherwise struggle to satisfy their children's nutritional needs. This guaranteed meal has the potential to reduce food poverty while also contributing to long-term economic growth and societal development through improved health and educational results. However, despite these anticipated benefits, implementing such a large-scale endeavor is not without its hurdles. Ensuring that these meals sustainably reach the intended beneficiaries involves extensive logistical and financial preparation, especially inside traditional Islamic boarding schools, or pondok pesantren, which frequently run with minimal resources. These schools serve as a key support system for low-income communities, but they must overcome various difficulties to create and sustain such a program without straining their already limited operational resources. (Lestari et al., 2024; Mustaqim & Atabik, 2024).

Pondok pesantren has significant hurdles in guaranteeing long-term funding, competent administration, and adherence to high nutritional requirements as part of this free meal effort. While the program's objectives are clear and its potential advantages are well acknowledged, practical challenges provide a significant hurdle. For example, shifting food prices can make it difficult for these schools to budget successfully, especially when they rely significantly on donations and support from local communities. Additionally, the need for timely distribution of meals, paired with effective resource management, adds another layer of complexity to the program's implementation (Charity Miyoba et al., 2024; Mustaqim & Atabik, 2024). Research on food management systems within Indonesian boarding schools, such as studies conducted on Pondok Pesantren Al-Fatah Singkawang and Hubulo Gorontalo, highlights similar issues. Many of these institutions lack defined standards for meal planning, procurement, storage, and distribution, which can lead to inconsistent food delivery and inadequate nourishment for students. Without a systematic mechanism in place, meal delivery might vary greatly in terms of both quality and quantity, weakening the program's efficacy. Thus, resolving these operational problems is vital to ensuring that the program achieves its intended aims. Overcoming these issues requires the implementation of a systematic food management system that involves detailed planning, competent oversight, and defined nutritional recommendations. Such systems might provide a uniform approach to food preparation and delivery, assisting in maintaining a consistent level of service and nutritional content throughout various boarding schools (Humaira et al., 2022; Taqhi, 2014).

This study highlights the importance of addressing several key questions that can support the implementation and management of free meal programs in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren). The first question focuses on the main challenges faced in managing free meal programs in these traditional institutions, including financial, logistical, and nutritional challenges. Financial challenges include the need to secure reliable funding sources and manage limited budgets effectively, while logistical challenges encompass issues such as timely procurement, storage, and distribution of food (Charity Miyoba et al., 2024). By exploring these challenges in depth, this study aims to understand the difficulties encountered by these institutions and the potential impact on the effectiveness and sustainability of free meal programs. A thorough understanding of the root causes of these challenges is necessary to design more targeted interventions. Furthermore, this study seeks to identify strategies that can be used to effectively address these challenges. In this regard, the research aims to find potential solutions and best practices that can support pesantren in managing free meal programs sustainably and efficiently. By evaluating these approaches, the study is expected to provide implementable recommendations to help pesantren overcome existing obstacles and ensure that the free meal program achieves its objectives.

METHOD

Data and Samples

The population examined in this study includes participants from traditional Islamic boarding schools (pondok pesantren) involved in free meal initiatives. The sample used for this research consists of selected individuals from Pondok Pesantren Al-Quds in Gunung Pancar, Bogor, including administrators, and donors. The sampling technique employed is purposeful sampling, as defined by Stratton (2024), which involves selecting participants based on specific characteristics relevant to the target population, allowing for an in-depth exploration of the studied issue or concept (Stratton, 2024). The criteria used in this study for selecting samples are as follows:

Participants must be directly involved in the free meal program at the pondok

pesantren.

Respondents should include individuals responsible for financial and logistical aspects of the program.

Participants should represent both administrative and operational perspectives on the free meal program.

Based on these criteria, a sample of 27 participants, comprising school administrators, donors, and heads of the school, was selected to provide comprehensive insights into the program's implementation and challenges.

The study is qualitative, and the data utilized are primarily qualitative in nature, consisting of interview transcripts, survey responses, and secondary research on food management in Indonesian boarding schools.

Data analysis

The analysis of data in this study was structured using the Design Thinking methodology, which consists of five stages: Empathize, Define, Ideate, Prototype, and Test as shown in *Figure 1*. This approach enabled a human-centered understanding of the challenges and potential solutions related (Amri et al., 2023; Rösch et al., 2023).

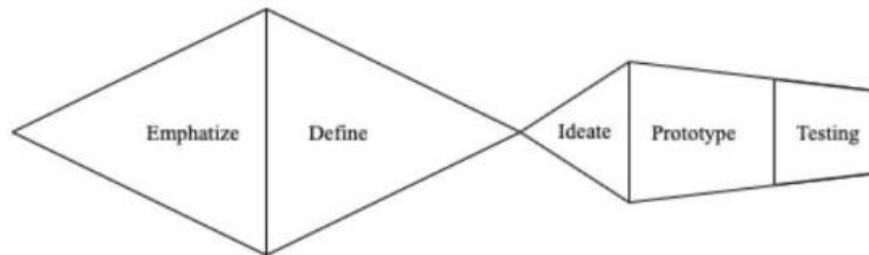


Figure 1 Double Diamond Diagram (Amri et al., 2023)

In the Empathize phase of the design process, the primary focus is on understanding the perspectives and experiences of stakeholders. This process involves gathering in-depth information about the needs, expectations, and challenges faced by the individuals involved (Kwon et al., 2021). In the context of boarding schools, this phase was targeted at school administrators, donors, and the head of the school. Through interviews and surveys, the team was able to gather insights into day-to-day operational challenges, particularly related to funding, preparation, and distribution of food. By engaging stakeholders directly, this phase allowed for the identification of key issues, such as financial instability and the impact of fluctuating donation levels on the quality and consistency of food. Additionally, empathy mapping further highlighted staff frustrations and aspirations, highlighting their desire for a reliable and efficient system to support the free food program.

In the Define stage, ideas from the Empathize phase were combined to identify key issues that needed to be addressed. In Design Thinking, the phrase Define refers to thinking about and digesting the requirements obtained during the empathy phase, as well as developing one's ideas on what the user requires. Defining the difficulties helped concentrate the research on particular goals, such as improving budget management and guaranteeing constant food quality. This step enabled the team to simplify complicated concerns into simple, actionable problem statements, which guided the development of focused solutions (Pande & Bharathi, 2020).

The Ideate stage used brainstorming approaches to produce a variety of potential solutions to the identified challenges. Using the SCAMPER process (Substitute, Combine, Adapt, Modify, Put to Another Use, Eliminate, and Reverse), the team investigated numerous strategies to enhance program management (Boonpracha, 2023). Ideas included replacing manual financial recording with an automated Excel-based system, merging meal

tracking with budgeting tools for a more comprehensive approach, and changing food procurement techniques to work with local suppliers for a more reliable food supply. This creative brainstorming approach resulted in several viable options that might be applied in the pondok pesantren context.

Following ideation, the Prototype stage focused on developing a practical model for the proposed solutions. An Excel-based budgeting tool was prototyped, incorporating features that allow the staff to easily track daily expenses, monitor donations, and manage meal preparation costs. The tool was designed with simplicity and user-friendliness in mind, tailored to the limited technological skills of the pondok pesantren staff. Additionally, the prototype included meal inventory tracking functions to help the staff manage resources efficiently and reduce food waste. This stage enabled the team to translate conceptual ideas into a tangible tool that could directly address the program's operational needs.

Finally, in the testing phase, the prototype was piloted with staff at Al-Quds Islamic Boarding School, who provided feedback on its usability and effectiveness. This pilot was critical to see how the tool would function in a real-world context, and initial results were positive, with staff appreciating the tool's ability to streamline financial tracking and reduce reliance on manual record-keeping. However, feedback also identified areas for improvement, such as increasing the font size for better readability and the need for ongoing training sessions for staff to use the tool effectively. This testing phase was crucial in refining the prototype to meet the real-world needs of the Islamic boarding school, ensuring that the solution was practical and useful in supporting the free meal program (Dam & Yu, 2013).

By applying the Design Thinking methodology, this analysis provided a structured, empathetic, and iterative approach to understanding and addressing the challenges faced by Pondok Pesantren Al-Quds in implementing its free meal program. Each stage contributed to developing solutions that are grounded in the needs of the users, enhancing the program's sustainability and effectiveness.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of the free meal program at Pondok Pesantren Al-Quds was analyzed using the Design Thinking methodology, which provided a structured approach to understanding and addressing the challenges encountered. In the Reframed Problem phase, the focus shifted to identifying key factors that influence the cost of goods sold (COGS) for providing nutritious lunches while ensuring that nutritional quality was not compromised. According to Camila et al. (2023), the daily cost of dry food components varied from IDR 50,000 to IDR 100,000, while fresh food ingredients cost between IDR 80,000 and IDR 150,000. This reliance on contributions as the principal financing source creates a significant barrier to good budgeting (Camila et al., 2023).

Moreover, the initial interviews with the Mudir of the pondok, highlighted that the school provides three meals a day, managed by the kitchen division with occasional student assistance. The manual financial management system currently in place, due to limited resources, hampers effective oversight and transparency in budgeting and meal distribution. This lack of standardization in meal planning and distribution results in inconsistencies in food delivery and nutrition, thereby undermining the program's effectiveness.

Supporting data gathered through surveys revealed that while a majority of students expressed excitement about the free meal program, preferences for varied menus presented a financial challenge. Specifically, 88.9% of students preferred pocket money over a free lunch, indicating a potential disconnect between student preferences and the program's offerings. This highlighted the need for a more systematic approach to meal planning, allowing the school to balance nutritional needs with student satisfaction.

In the Empathize phase, qualitative data was collected through interviews involving 27 participants, including school administrators, donors, and staff members. An empathy map as shown in Figure 2 was created to better understand the perspectives of the boarding school community regarding the free meal program. This exercise revealed key concerns such as the need for consistent and balanced meals, equitable distribution, and sustainable funding. Stakeholders expressed fears about the potential decline in meal quality and the over-reliance on donations. Observations further validated these concerns, showcasing logistical challenges in managing food supplies.

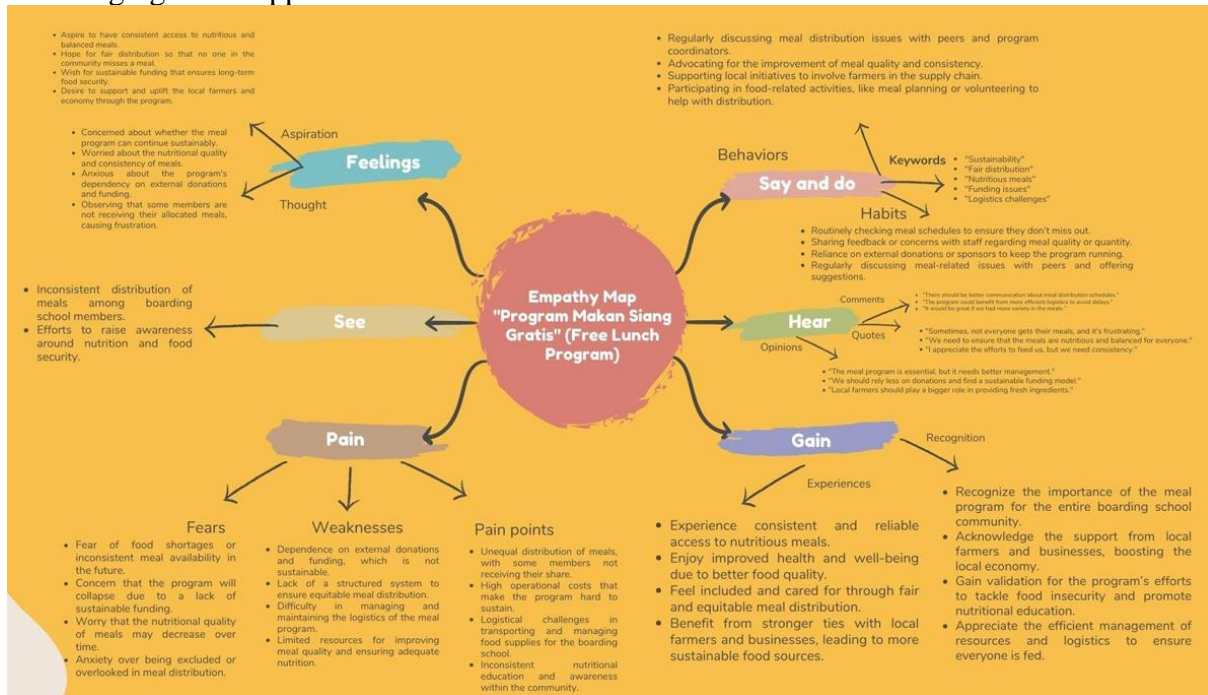


Figure 2 Empathy Map

In the Ideation phase, the team initially created three SCAMPER tables to brainstorm potential solutions for the identified challenges. These tables explored various aspects such as substituting manual tracking methods, combining budgeting with meal distribution systems, and adapting existing financial literacy resources. After evaluating the generated ideas, the team selected two key proposals for further development. The first key proposal as shown in Table 1 was the development of an Excel-based budgeting and distribution tool designed to optimize meal management for students and staff from low-income backgrounds. This prototype included features for budget allocation, meal distribution tracking, and nutritional quality monitoring. The system's user-friendly design aimed to accommodate individuals with limited technological expertise, ensuring ease of use within the boarding school community.

Table 1 Excel-based budgeting and distribution tool

Substitute	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current Approach: Manually tracking cash flow and meal budgets with pen and paper. • Idea: Substitute the manual tracking method with an Excel-based automated budget tracking system that calculates, allocates, and monitors food expenses.
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Combine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current Approach: Separate systems for food distribution and financial management. • Idea: Combine the meal distribution and financial management system in one Excel template. This allows for real-time budget and meal tracking, ensuring better alignment between funds and meal distribution.
Adapt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current Approach: Staff often struggles with manual recording, leading to inefficiencies. • Idea: Adapt existing user-friendly budgeting templates in Excel to suit the needs of the boarding school, making it simple enough for staff with limited technical skills.
Modify	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current Approach: Recording without any summary. • Idea: Modify with Excel with additional features like automatic warnings when budget limits are exceeded, helping the staff monitor finances more effectively.
Put to another use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current Approach: Excel only for recording. • Idea: Use Excel not only for budgeting but also for managing meal inventory and tracking donations, offering a more comprehensive solution for the meal program.
Eliminate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current Approach: Dependency on manual record-keeping leads to mistakes. • Idea: Eliminate manual recording errors by fully automating the system, allowing the program to operate with fewer mistakes and more efficiency.
Reverse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current Approach: Budgeting decisions are made after receiving donations. • SCAMPER Idea: Reverse the process by setting a budget beforehand and adjusting meal purchases based on projected expenses and donations.

Table 2 Mini financial class

Substitute	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current Approach: No formal financial education is provided to the boarding school managers. • Idea: Substitute informal knowledge with structured financial literacy classes that teach budgeting, accounting, and financial management.
Combine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current Approach: Financial management training is often separated from the real-world application.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Idea: Combine practical tools (such as the Excel budget tracker) with financial literacy training to provide actionable knowledge that managers can apply immediately.
Adapt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current Approach: Traditional financial management training may be too advanced for some staff. • Idea: Adapt the curriculum to the knowledge level of the boarding school managers, offering simplified concepts tailored to their needs and real-world context.
Modify	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current Approach: Generic financial literacy programs often don't address specific needs. • Idea: Modify the financial classes to include case studies from the boarding school context, ensuring the lessons are relevant and directly applicable.
Put to another use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current Approach: Financial education is limited to in-house staff. • Idea: Use this financial literacy program to extend training to nearby schools and religious institutions, creating a broader impact in the local community.
Eliminate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current Approach: Rely on intuition for budgeting decisions. • Idea: Eliminate the guesswork by providing clear tools and methods for financial decision-making, ensuring accuracy and efficiency.
Reverse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current Approach: Managers try to manage finances reactively based on available funds. • Idea: Reverse this by teaching proactive financial planning, where budgets are set based on projected costs and then adjusted based on incoming donations and funds.

The second idea involved the establishment of a mini-financial literacy class for boarding school managers. This program was developed to improve financial management skills, enabling more effective budgeting and oversight of the meal program. Collaboration with the startup Santrichain was proposed to tailor class content to the specific needs of the boarding school managers, utilizing existing resources for practical financial education.

In the Prototyping phase, the Excel-based journal format was implemented to streamline financial management tasks. This tool simplifies processes by requiring the staff to input basic financial details, allowing for automatic calculations and generating budgeting outputs based on pre-set formulas. Training programs were designed to accompany the tool, focusing on teaching users how to operate the Excel tool effectively and manage financial records without requiring extensive accounting knowledge.

The Testing phase yielded encouraging results, with feedback from the staff at Al-Quds indicating that the Excel-based tool significantly simplified their financial tasks and improved transparency. Staff members expressed appreciation for the ease of use and the practical impact of the tool on their daily operations. However, some areas for improvement were identified, such as the need for larger font sizes for better readability and additional training sessions to enhance confidence in using the tool.

Overall, the implementation of the proposed solutions—including the Excel-based

budgeting tool and the financial literacy training program—holds promise for enhancing the sustainability and effectiveness of the free meal program at Pondok Pesantren Al-Quds. By addressing financial and logistical challenges, the program can better meet the nutritional needs of students while fostering community involvement and support.

CONCLUSION

This study identified significant hurdles within pondok pesantren, including the need for sustainable funding, effective management, and adherence to high nutritional standards. Financial challenges, such as fluctuating food costs and the reliance on donations, complicate effective budgeting and resource management. Additionally, the lack of standardized procedures for meal planning, procurement, and distribution leads to inconsistencies in food quality and delivery, undermining the program's effectiveness.

Through the application of Design Thinking, this research provided a structured, empathetic, and iterative approach to understanding and addressing these challenges. The empathy mapping and subsequent identification of core issues allowed for the development of targeted interventions, including an Excel-based budgeting tool and a mini-financial literacy program tailored for pondok pesantren managers. These solutions not only aim to improve financial management practices but also enhance the sustainability and effectiveness of the free meal program.

In conclusion, the findings of this study underscore the importance of structured management practices and community engagement in ensuring the successful implementation of the free meal initiative. Future research should further explore the long-term impacts of these interventions on student health outcomes and educational performance, contributing to the broader goal of improving public health and education in Indonesia. By overcoming the identified challenges, the free meal program can fulfill its potential to foster healthier, more educated generations, ultimately driving sustainable economic growth and societal development.

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Appendix

Problem Validation Interview Coding

- **Interview**

Location: Al-Quds Boarding School Gunung Pancar, Sentul, Bogor

Interviewed:

- ARD (Mudir/Head of the Boarding School)
- HFF (Teacher)
- MM (Donor)

Part 1: Introduction

Head of the Boarding School (ARD)

- Position: Mudir/Head of the Boarding School
- Job Description: Managing the educational system at the boarding school
- Satisfaction with the Job: Enjoyable
- Complaint: Lack of teaching staff due to the school being newly established

Teacher (HFF)

- Position: Asatizah (Teacher)
- Job Description: Teaching Arabic using the book Arabiyah Bayna Yadaik
- Satisfaction with the Job: Very happy as it aligns with personal interests
- Complaint: Feels less comfortable teaching female students, prefers teaching male students

Donor (MM)

- Position: Donor and Member of the Foundation
- Reason for Donating: To accumulate rewards for the afterlife and contribute to

religious causes

- Hope: To gain rewards and for the school to nurture a better generation

Part 2: Validation

Head of the Boarding School

- Lunch Program: No specific program; three meals are provided daily.
- Food Management: Handled by the kitchen division with student help.
- Financial Management: Overseen by the kitchen division and treasurer.
- Budget Impact: Meal costs are the largest expense, supported by donations.
- Financial Record Keeping: Done manually due to limited staff.
- Financial Reporting: Submitted every half-month to the foundation.
- Funding Sources: Foundation, donors, and NGOs.
- Student Fees: Some pay monthly tuition (SPP) to support operations.

Teacher

- View on Lunch Program: Not a priority; donations cover costs.
- Financial and Nutritional Focus: None yet; still in early development.
- Cost Efficiency: Essential due to reliance on donations.
- Impact on Learning: No major effect on education quality.

Donor

- Donations for Meals: Yes, mostly rice as meal costs are significant.
- Financial Management: Good, but still manual.
- Reports on Fund Usage: Provided through documents and photos.
- Accountability Reports: Shared from the school to donors via the foundation.
- Efficiency of Fund Usage: Very efficient, with clear cooperation.
- Specific Nutritional Donations: No, the school prioritizes needs.
- Importance of Nutrition: Critical for supporting student learning.
- Student Health: Key for reassuring parents about their children's well-being.

Testing Phase Interview

Question and Answer

Can you easily find where to enter data (e.g., money coming in or going out)?

ARD: "Yes, I can find it easily."

HFF: "Yes, it is straightforward."

Do you need help when first using this tool?

ARD: "No, I didn't need help."

HFF: "No, I managed fine."

Can you operate this tool well after trying it several times?

ARD: "Yes, I can operate it well after a few tries."

HFF: "I can operate it directly."

Do you find the appearance of this tool (Excel) confusing?

ARD: "No, it's not confusing at all."

HFF: "No, I find it clear."

Is every part of this tool clear (like expense, income, total money columns)?

ARD: "Yes, everything is clear to me."

HFF: "It's quite clear, I think."

Do you find it complicated to enter financial figures?

ARD: "Not at all, it's simple."

HFF: "No, it's easy for me."

After trying, do you think this tool will help manage the pond's money better?

ARD: "Definitely, it helps a lot."

HFF: "Yes, I agree, it's helpful."

Do you think this tool can replace the manual (handwritten) method you've used?

ARD: "Yes, I think it can replace it easily."

HFF: "Yes, I believe so too."

Does this tool help you see if the available money is enough to buy groceries?

ARD: "Absolutely, it helps me see that."

HFF: "Maybe, it gives a good idea."

How did you feel when you first used this tool?

ARD: "I felt comfortable using it."

HFF: "It was just okay for me."

Do you feel you need more training to use this tool properly?

ARD: "No, I don't think so."

HFF: "No, I'm fine without more training."

What part do you think is the hardest in using this tool?

ARD: "I didn't find anything difficult."

HFF: "Honestly, it was quite easy, nothing was tough."

What do you think we could do to make this tool easier to use?

ARD: "Just keep trying and experimenting with it."

HFF: "Maybe make the font size and column space larger for better visibility."

Surveys Infographic

