



These personas are intended to identify the Resident Portal user groups, their needs, goals, and how they speak about interactions with WA State government. A single resident may even be represented by multiple personas in a single day. They could be a Salaried Advocate during their work hours, and an Occasional Engager in their personal life. Or, a resident can experience a life event that causes them to move from one group to another. For example experiencing a sudden loss of income can move them towards being a Public Benefits Recipient; or becoming an Informal Supporter by helping a family member who is unexpectedly experiencing a mental health crisis. These personas are meant to represent all WA State residents and capture the different ways they interact with WA State government.

Purpose

What are personas? Personas are a powerful method for building empathy and looking at a website through multiple perspectives. They help drive project decisions because they are grounded in the real needs and barriers of current and potential users.

Data sources

Where did we get the information that informed these personas? Personas included in this document were derived from user research conducted by Anthro-Tech between February 15, 2024 and June 17, 2024.

Survey and interview details

We administered an online 35 question survey on the WA.gov website and via other government agency partners through their websites, email distribution lists, social networks, and flyers posted within offices and on ferries. In total, 1,393 people completed the survey and we recruited 20 people representative of emerging user groups to provide feedback in 1:1 interviews.

Main findings

From the user research, 5 persona user groups were identified. These include:

- 1. **Public Benefits Recipients** (for example, unemployed, unhoused, unstable)
- 2. **Informal Supporters** (for example, friends and family)
- 3. **Salaried Advocates** (for example, case worker, non-profit organization)
- 4. **Complying Professionals** (for example, therapist, paramedic, business owner)
- 5. **Occasional Engagers** (for example, motorist, voter, camper)

Global themes

Across user groups, communication interaction preferences and strategies seem to be similar.

- Online-first interactions; using things like Google searches and government websites to accomplish as much as they can remotely and flexibly, at any time of day.
- Then, escalating to a phone call or going in person to get answers about technicalities or circumstances not addressed by general information provided online.



We regularly interact with the government to receive basic living assistance because we often don't have a stable income or financial security. This government assistance can be the life preserver keeping us afloat, but sometimes it's just not enough... We want to escape the cycle of poverty, but we frequently have to juggle maintaining our benefits, staying on top of uncertain housing situations, and working multiple jobs to make ends meet. It can all feel like too much.

Our stories

Artist with unreliable income

Government usually wants you to do things by phone, or mail, or sometimes in-person which isn't convenient for me. Like, the landlord forced me to move out of my apartment and so I had to beg my old roommates not to change the door code because I knew there were letters there waiting for me. In another case, my food assistance was cut because they counted some things as income which I didn't expect. I was constantly on the phone trying to sort that out. It's also hard to use some financial benefits because I'm never sure where that money will actually be accepted. I spent half a day driving around wasting gas, only to find out I couldn't use the money where I really needed it. Being poor is a full-time job.

Misdirected claimant

When I talk to the government, I just want to know what to expect. One time I was trying to get help with paying medical bills and the woman on the phone told me up front that they were behind. She said it might be 6 to 8 weeks before they get back to me and that I probably wouldn't get approved. So even though it wasn't good news, I appreciated that she was honest with me. But another time, I reached out to an agency about an issue and they took forever to answer me. They made me feel ignored, like my problem didn't matter. And in the end, it was just a big waste of time! Their website made it seem like they could help with my situation, but they couldn't do anything for me. I felt like a victim with no rights.

Timely assistance seeker

I've asked local nonprofits and community groups about food banks or pantries, but I never really thought to reach out to government organizations for things like that. I know I can visit the Department of Social & Health Services website for long lists of links or referrals to resources, but I haven't gone that route. Food and housing are things I need to take care of immediately. If I have to wait, I won't have a bed to sleep in tonight or something to eat today.

Characteristics

- Likely experienced a loss of income
- Likely looking for work or not employed
- Likely close to government services
- Likely to have less formal education

Services and benefits used

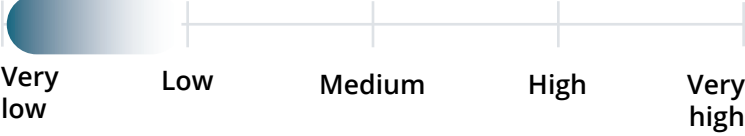
- Food assistance
- Housing assistance
- Medical bill or insurance assistance
- Unemployment benefits

Frequency between interactions

Interacts with moderate frequency.



Income



Goals

- Get what I need to survive
- Know how long it will take to get help
- Learn exactly what I will get from a service, along with how and where I can use it
- Discover resources that are relevant and available for me

Needs

- Referrals to other services and resources that might help me
- Less waiting on the phone, in line, or to hear about a decision
- Flexible ways to prove my identity
- Less stress around updating my personal information
- Opportunities to give feedback and feel seen and heard





Our stories

Mother of unemployed son

I didn't believe my son could be calling about his unemployment benefits every day for three months and not getting anywhere. So, I tried calling for him but got hung up on after being put on hold. When I called back, I chose the option for "overpayments" assuming I might reach someone more quickly. Amazingly, it took only 10 minutes for someone to answer. After being transferred to another person and waiting a couple of hours, they explained that they were waiting for a judge to review my son's claim and that they needed more information from him. None of the emails they sent my son said anything about this.

Husband of mentally distressed wife

My wife went through a really difficult period with her mental health because of her job. She couldn't work anymore, so I looked into ways to help her get benefits. The application forms asked for a specific start date, but I didn't know how to answer that because she had other benefits and this was an ongoing health issue. I think I contacted the Employment Security Department, but I'm not sure. The whole situation was very stressful and we both felt under duress, so I didn't really care which agency I was talking to. We just needed help.

Father of disabled adult son

I manage benefits for my adult son who has a disability and lives in a group home. They handle his day-to-day needs, but I still need to help with finances, disability payments, and other parts of his life. His group home and case managers couldn't get him a wheelchair for over a year because they keep changing staff members, so I'm now working with the Department of Social & Health Services. They said they would take care of it, but it's been a few months and I probably need to follow up.

We interact with government on behalf of our friends and family members to help them get the benefits they need. This could be because they're unable to interact themselves, or because we know what assistance is available and how to get it. Sometimes we interact only once for a specific issue. In other cases, we manage ongoing needs for multiple years.

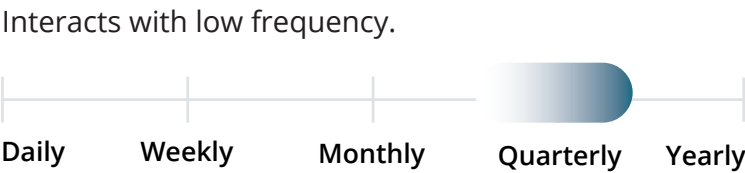
Characteristics

- Likely has loved ones suffering injury, disability or loss of income
- Likely employed full or working part-time
- May be Spanish speaking

Benefits and services used

- Food assistance
- Medical bill or insurance assistance
- Unemployment benefits

Frequency between interactions



Income



Goals

- Support my family member through a difficult time
- Help loved ones get benefits I know about
- Discover benefits unfamiliar to me that could help my loved ones
- Manage ongoing benefits for my relative with a disability

Needs

- Clear descriptions of new government services and improvement initiatives
- Staff who can flexibly communicate in a variety of remote ways
- Information that's easy to read and understand
- Designated access and control of another's account





We interact with government resources and regulators all the time on a paid-professional basis. For resources, we work with caseload individuals or families to get them on track through connections we research and coordinate for them. For regulated professionals, we work with business clients to keep them in compliance and to leverage our expertise, so they can just focus on running their business. Government rules and services are vast and complex. Without us, people would be lost and overwhelmed on their own as newcomers. It's also very important for us to stay on top of politics and to advocate for our group interests with legislators.

Our stories

Certified peer counselor

I work with government agencies to help at-risk youth and formerly incarcerated people. I watch virtual resource center meetings, talk to my co-workers, and do research to learn about services they need, like getting a bus pass. I also help them understand their release order requirements, like paying child support or going to support group meetings. I walk people through applications, and answer questions. Sometimes I fill out their forms because I'm faster, but sometimes they need space to do it on their own. Once I gave someone information about joining the police. Six months later, I learned he had applied, trained, and passed all the physicals and tests without telling me. I'm proud to know that a little push helped him turn his life around.

Veterans Affairs case manager

As a case manager at one of Washington's Veterans Transitional Housing facilities, I work with our veteran residents so they can confidently return to living independently. All of our residents were previously unhoused, and a lot of the residents have a substance use disorder, PTSD, or other mental health challenges. The Transitional Housing Program gives residents a safe space and much-needed support. And it's not just housing and mental health services, we also provide assistance with veterans' benefits, and vocational rehabilitation opportunities. Even though this job can be hard, especially if a resident is struggling to abide by program rules, it's just really rewarding work. These veterans have given their lives to serve their country and we need to be giving back to them too.

H-2A solutions provider

My company navigates the difficult and time-consuming application processes for government agencies involved in the H-2A program, allowing farmers to hire migrant guest workers with temporary and seasonal work visas. We help our clients get a stable workforce at a competitive price and teach them about the changing requirements so they can avoid being shut down or paying legal fees. This means writing contracts months in advance and working with growers to post accurate job listings. It takes so long to get things done with the government, so I need to file requests for labor certifications and screen applicants at the same time. I also coordinate last minute transportation and housing options based on workers' needs and preferences.

Characteristics

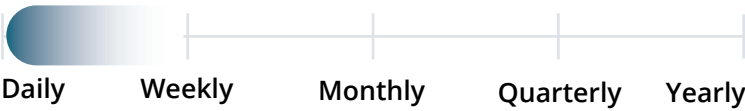
- Likely employed full time
- Likely in office & public administration, accounting, finance and/or health industry roles
- Likely has undergraduate or graduate college degree

Benefits and services used

- Food assistance
- Housing assistance
- Medical bill or insurance assistance
- Unemployment benefits
- Business taxes
- Business and Professional Licenses
- Labor recruitment, reporting and safety/health audits

Frequency between interactions

Interacts with very high frequency.



Income



Goals

- Connect people with resources to improve their lives
- File taxes for multiple businesses
- Teach clients about rules, resources, and reporting requirements

Needs

- Clear and manageable timelines with reminders
- Simple status information
- Historical records I can keep
- Designated access and control of another's account
- Forms that save my progress
- Networking between me and resource contacts for direct recipients
- Updates about politics and policies related to communities I work in





Our stories

Winery founder

I'm setting up my business in a very specific, uncommon way. As part of a routine review, the Liquor and Cannabis Board recently contacted me to make sure I met all the requirements for an alcohol license. Unfortunately, I did not. I had filed online and was approved conditionally, but they told me that I applied for the wrong license, it would be canceled, and I would be refunded. Even though their website is supposed to guide you to the correct license application, I guess I should have talked with someone before applying. In the end, I'm not upset. I'm glad they corrected me and put me on the right track to be ready before next year, when I'll have products to sell.

Paramedic

When I moved here from Turkey, it was stressful to figure out the requirements to transfer my paramedic license and college degrees. I was out of work for almost six months! It wasn't clear which coursework I needed to provide. I wasted a lot of time trying to contact my first college and get translated transcripts and syllabi because the titles didn't match. Also, it was hard coordinate because they needed to send the documents to the Department of Health instead of me. I can't be the first person to deal with this, I was shocked that they didn't have an interpreter to help. It was very disappointing and frustrating; we're all trained to do the same thing. It's too much to have to verify your identity, requirements, and past complaints or suspensions.

Freight service agent

I work for a trucking company and have decades of experience managing fleet licensing, registration, and taxes for commercial freight operators. I help my company comply with laws and rules by handling things like paperwork and filing returns. With dozens of operators and hundreds of vehicles on our books, I bulk order as many plates and stickers as I can, but end up going back and forth with the Department of Licensing weekly. I call or email them regularly to sort out appointments, payments, and missing or incorrect information. Their online system has made my job easier, but I wish I could upload data from our fleet management software instead of reentering it by hand. It's always hard to get drivers on the road to log in when there's bad reception or no nearby Wi-Fi.

We interact with government to establish ourselves as credentialed professionals and businesses. We want to grow and succeed as early as possible, but can sometimes feel held back by excessive red tape, such as lengthy application and verification processes. We could pay to have someone else handle our government affairs for us, but don't think that we should need to, and would rather do it ourselves instead of taking away from our bottom line.

Characteristics

- Likely employed full time
- May be Spanish speaking
- Likely to have an undergraduate or graduate college degree

Benefits and services used

- Business and Professional licenses
- Business taxes
- Employment experience and identity verification
- Unemployment benefits
- Medical bill or insurance assistance

Frequency between interactions

Interacts with somewhat low frequency.



Income



Goals

- Understand which credential option is the right one for me to pursue
- Get myself and my practice up and running
- Continually re-asses to validate I have what it takes to succeed in my business
- Find and establish networks of knowledge based on my professional needs

Needs

- Clearly defined and manageable timelines with reminders
- Career credentialing path and training guidance
- Relief recommendations while I am waiting on government approvals to start work
- Reliable government points of contact to build ongoing professional recognition and relationships





Our stories

Everyday motorist

I try to rely on myself as much as possible, so I only interact with the government when I have to, like when I renew my tabs every year and my driver’s license when it’s about to expire. They always mail me whenever I need to do those things. The only other time I’d interact with the government is if I got pulled over by the state patrol, but I try not to do that too frequently.

Savvy camper

Every year our family takes a camping trip to the same spot where we meet up with friends and relatives. I’ve figured out that the system lets us book earlier than others by extending our stay with dates we won’t use and will cancel later. Before figuring this out, I’d need to visit the website at 7 a.m. on the exact date nine months in advance like everyone else. Also, one time we were running late to check-in for our campsite reservation. We didn’t have an express lane pass and probably wouldn’t make it on time without one. Even knowing we wouldn’t use it often, we set up an account because it didn’t cost much and would save us a couple bucks if we ever did need it.

Contractor victim

I hired a contractor to do some work and looked him up with the state. There weren’t any problems with his license and he had a lot of good reviews. Unfortunately, it quickly went downhill from there. After many delays, I found out he used our money to improve his own home to flip it for a large profit. I contacted the state licensing board and was told they couldn’t do anything other than take note of it. They said I could get free legal help as a senior but gave me a list of lawyers who weren’t interested. Eventually I found one who would only talk to me for \$300 an hour plus another \$1,500 to explore my case. Contractor fraud is a big problem and I don’t understand why the state isn’t doing more to help.

We don't think that we interact with government very much. When we do interact, it's only because we have to, whether that means following the law, or getting specialized help for an unusual problem. We are open to learning about more services that could be relevant or available to us, but presume there isn't much worth the extra time and effort to look into.

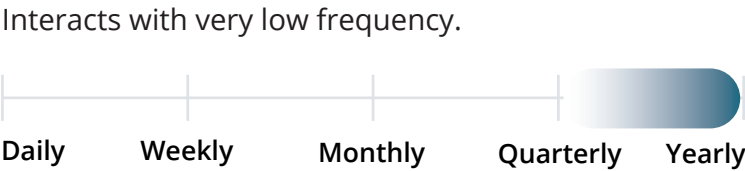
Characteristics

- Likely college educated
- Likely full time employed or retired

Benefits and services used

- ID card applications or renewal
- Motor vehicle registration or renewal

Frequency between interactions



Income



Goals

- Follow everyday citizen requirements
- Seek protections or compensation for being wronged
- Talk to someone who knows enough to help with my unusual case

Needs

- Services organized by what I need, not by agency names
- People who can help me instead of just saying “no” or redirecting me
- Ongoing state government presence and connections via my local community
- Timely aids to raise awareness and engagement in current/upcoming government incentives and/or public event programs

