



Spirit of the Bill

Explainer and Framework for Action

What is the “Spirit of the Bill”?

This artifact is used to help teams understand how legislative text translates to processes they can use to inform their tech decisions. This should be used to move the legislative text through a human-centered design and product strategy sprint.

It helps us to understand:

People

Who is involved and how is each person classified as?

Process

What processes are intended as part of providing this benefit?

Tech

What are the variables that are a part of providing each process?

Steps:

Intro: Reading Legislative Language for Newbies

Taking something that feels really tough and breaking it into parts.

From Policy to Technology

Breaking language categorically into elements until it makes sense

Bonus!

Applying this to Need Statements and User Stories



Intro: Reading Legislative Language for Newbies

Y'all! **This is hard and it can feel really overwhelming**, especially since everything is IN ALL CAPS IN TIMES NEW ROMAN. I totally understand and empathize with the immediate reaction of eyes glazing over.

Understanding at a base level how to get what you need from legislative text will be really helpful for any product team. This is because ultimately **this legislative text is what we are committed to do and are *legally obligated* to do**. What I want to help you do is to figure out how to get into something workable that we can use for human-centered design and product strategy.

I'm going to start with some basic understanding of the **sections** you'll be looking at in most bills you'll come across. They each follow this general pattern and there may or may not be more sections depending on the scope of the legislation.

Section	Description
Short Title	A short title
Legislative Declaration	A declaration by the general assembly that shares the reason for the program.
Definitions	A short glossary of terms you will see in bill sections.
Bill Sections	<p>Each bill has a series of sections, usually beginning with a reference number that used to reference this section in other legislation. These sections are in bold.</p> <p>Each section has a title that indicates at a high level what you will find in that section.</p> <p>It usually looks like this:</p> <p>123.23-04. Short Title - purpose - detail - detail - detail</p> <p><i>For example:</i></p> <p>26.5-204. Colorado Universal Preschool Program - created - eligibility - rules - workforce development plan</p>



Depending on the project, only some or maybe all of the legislation will be pertinent to your team. I suggest getting familiar with the doc, just scrolling, skimming to get an idea of the contents and what may or may not be relevant to you.

Cross-Referencing Legislation

Something that is interesting is how interconnected legislation is. Considering that things may change in each legislative cycle, I do recommend when you read to visit the referenced material.

For example, in this section I pulled out references another piece of legislation.

(3) "CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES" HAS THE SAME MEANING AS PROVIDED IN SECTION 22-20-103.

There a number of ways to find this information and I will always recommend the first stop being a simple Google search.

Resource	Pros	Cons
Google	Super easy	Results may not be up-to-date
General Assembly	Most official resource	If your bill hasn't been released, it may not be on here.
Justia	Justia provides free case law, codes, regulations and legal information for lawyers, business, students and consumers world wide.	Results may not be up-to-date



From Policy To Technology

There is no way to get around reading the legislation a few times over, but here's a technique to diagram what you're seeing. Let's look at this line:

(II) SUBJECT TO AVAILABLE APPROPRIATIONS, A CHILD WHO IS THREE YEARS OF AGE, IS NOT ELIGIBLE TO ENROLL IN KINDERGARTEN IN THE NEXT SCHOOL YEAR, AND IS IN A LOW-INCOME FAMILY OR MEETS AT LEAST ONE RISK FACTOR MAY RECEIVE THE NUMBER OF HOURS OF PRESCHOOL SERVICES ESTABLISHED BY DEPARTMENT RULE.

If we were to break this apart we can look at it like this:

Statement	Tells Us	Translation
SUBJECT TO AVAILABLE APPROPRIATIONS,	A conditional statement	If the money exists...
A CHILD WHO IS THREE YEARS OF AGE,	The user, with <i>their</i> conditional statements	...Children who are technically ineligible due to age with a risk factor or more..
IS NOT ELIGIBLE TO ENROLL IN KINDERGARTEN IN THE NEXT SCHOOL YEAR		
AND IS IN A LOW-INCOME FAMILY		
OR AT MEETS AT LEAST ONE RISK FACTOR		
MAY RECEIVE THE NUMBER OF HOURS OF PRESCHOOL SERVICE ESTABLISHED BY DEPARTMENT RULE	The outcome	...Can receive universal preschool funding from the state.

In the end you get this:

If the money exists, children who are technically ineligible due to age with a risk factor or more can receive universal preschool funding from the state.



This is a great first way to synthesize this information to be way more consumable. It also helps to begin to build a lens of business logic that will inform technology decisions and requirements.

The painful, terrible thing that I will actually recommend you do is to go LINE BY LINE (yes, you read that right) and write out statements for each. What you'll likely notice is that you'll begin to see trends.

Keep these questions in mind as you go through the document:

Questions	What you can get out of it
What people are being described over and over again?	You can begin to create your user groups here. Knowing the nuances of the user types and how they are defined helps us understand the way these users translate into identities in a system.
What processes are being supported?	Typically, you'll see a few processes in each bolded line. This is a great way to begin to detail the requirements of these processes out.
What data do these processes need?	Sometimes sections will include the specific information elements that the department is required to either store, receive, or share.
Who is in charge of the data and which way does it need to move?	If there is data that is involved in the process, we want to understand where that data lives (if it already lives at the state) and how it may need to be interoperable with other systems.

As I said earlier, this is REALLY HARD and you should give yourself kindness, grace, snacks, and breaks to do this.

I hope this framework is helpful.

I believe in you! You can do eet!



BONUS!

Need Statements + User Stories

I will always say computers are like toddlers - you're teaching them a language and you're teaching them how to use that language appropriately.

If the money exists, children who are technically ineligible due to age with a risk factor or more must receive preschool services at no additional cost.

Well, I learned that the purple part ("children...more") actually surfaced a LOT in the legislation. This means this is a category of user that is consistent. Thus, it created this user group:

Eligible Children Under 4: Children who are 3 years of age, not eligible to enroll in kindergarten in the next year, have at least one risk factor and/or are in a low-income family.

Need statements should always focus on the users. The interplay of Need Statements and User Stories is this:

Need Statement	User Stories
Need Statements should express what the users are looking to accomplish	User Stories should express the work we want to accomplish in relation to this need. Typically, these are intended to decompose the need statement and often these will encompass other users. By thinking through these other users, you can better make a whole experience.
<i>An eligible child under 4 needs to be able to enroll in additional services if there is funding available.</i>	<i>As an eligible child, I can enroll in additional services.</i> <i>As someone who controls the money, I can allocate funding to eligible children under 4 if there are additional funds that extend beyond the previously listed prioritized use of the funds.</i>

Questions?

Reach out to the [Colorado Digital Service](#) team for questions about this material.

