MIN-Corps:

Customer Discovery
Problem Interviews

• Develop and test your understanding:
  – What specifically is problem?
  – Who has pain?
  – What are alternatives?

• Requires you to formulate/test/refine hypotheses

• Develop insights – not asking customer to design product

• Talking to a LOT of people:
  – Continue until you hear recurring themes
Listening and learning, not pitching

• Set context, ask questions, observe, listen

• Open-ended questions:
  – Tell me about . . .
  – What happens when . . .
  – Why is that important . . .
  – Who else gets involved . . .
  – Is ____ a problem – why or why not . . .
  – How do you currently address the problem . . .

• Helping interviewee to improve:
  – Do not push your technology/solution
  – You do not need to have the answers!
Who to speak with?

• Who feels the most pain with status quo?
• Someone who can confirm/refute hypotheses
• Consider full range of customer/partner roles:
  – Patient, provider, physician, payer, regulatory
• Early adopters
• Company, function, level
I've been told I need to get candid, unbiased feedback on my startup idea.

We love this idea and we're so proud of you, son.
Where to start

• **Start with people you know:**
  - Friends, colleagues, contacts, LinkedIn, etc.
  - Personal referrals for warm introductions
  - Referrals from initial meetings

• **Cast broad net to get started, focus over time:**
  - Work through/up organizations to become informed

• **Expand creatively:**
  - Conferences, meetups, etc.
  - Call companies directly
  - Go to where the fish are
Making initial contact

- F2F individual meetings best, ideally in pairs
- Short introductory email seeking advice
- Schedule brief (30 minutes) time to meet
- Allow them to direct to better person
- Polite, but persistent

I’m a researcher at the University of Minnesota, I’d like to learn more about how you... and see if there are ways to improve
Preparation

• Develop an outline
• Set problem context – why believe important
• Gather data – what role/segment are they in?
• Ask questions, listen, take notes:
  – Explore what they do, frustrations
  – Explore implications
  – Explore alternatives
• Seek referrals and willingness to return to discuss potential solutions
Common hesitations

• It’s too early
• It won’t be statistically valid
• My idea will be stolen
• My intellectual property will be disclosed
I'm seeing a pattern here. We just need to talk to 1,385 more people before we're confident enough to make a decision.
Goals – Problem Interviews

- Identified must-have problem
- Identified early adopters
- Identified critical regulatory issues
- Mapped customer roles and pain points
- Understand customer alternatives
Continuing Customer Discovery

• As you develop insights on problem/customer, introduce discussion of potential solutions:
  – Always start with problem
  – Solution discussion may require second meeting

• Seek to measure potential value, ROI

• Develop simple prototype to share:
  – Sketches, concept, outline
  – Have customer contribute essential features

• Don’t ask WTP – get real purchase commitment