

Customer Discovery Plan: Shared Fences Co

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Introduction

Shared Fences Co. is an early-stage venture developing a neighborhood group-buying platform for recurring residential home services in a \$520B US market, growing at 10.5% CAGR and projected to reach \$1.03T by 2030 (IBISWorld, 2025). The concept focuses on semi-repeatable services such as lawn care, pest control, pressure washing, gutter cleaning, and window washing by aggregating demand at the neighborhood level. Nearby homeowners pool purchasing power for common services, and providers bid on bundled, route-dense contracts rather than individual jobs. The intended outcome is a win-win: homeowners receive 15–30% savings through collective negotiation, while providers gain predictable volume, optimized routing, and significantly lower customer acquisition costs.

The purpose of this customer discovery plan is to outline the process, tools, and questions our team will use to validate the assumptions underlying this venture before investing in full product development. Customer discovery is about gaining deep insight into customers, partners, and the market (Giff Constable, *Talking to Humans*, 2014). Every new business idea is built upon a stack of assumptions, and it is better to challenge the riskiest assumptions early by getting out of the building and talking to real people. This plan describes how we will gather qualitative data from homeowners, home service providers, and other stakeholders to better understand the problem we are trying to solve and to reality-check our path toward a viable solution.

How Might We

How might we reduce the cost and cognitive burden of recurring home maintenance for suburban homeowners so that they can keep their homes well-maintained without overpaying or feeling overwhelmed?

Summary of Background Research

The home services market has a structural inefficiency. Homeowners purchase services one-by-one from providers who also operate job-by-job, creating friction and waste on both sides: higher costs, unreliable service experiences, and repeated coordination effort for homeowners, while providers struggle with scheduling efficiency and expensive customer acquisition. Five pain points define this problem.

Cost anxiety and price opacity: Cost uncertainty drives delay. 61% of homeowners have postponed necessary repairs due to cost, and 59% procrastinate calling a professional because of price anxiety (HomeServe, 2025b; American Home Shield, 2023). Quotes vary widely, pricing lacks transparency, and deferral often turns into costly emergencies—81% experienced at least one home repair emergency last year (HomeServe, 2025b; HomeServe, 2025a).

Scheduling failures: 74% of homeowners expect same-day or next-day service, but providers frequently miss that window (FieldBoss, 2025). Late arrivals and difficulty booking rank among top frustrations.

Communication breakdowns and trust deficit: 38% of homeowners report process issues (scheduling trouble, late arrivals, lack of updates, pressure sales) as their top frustration—nearly double the 21% who cite price (FieldBoss, 2025).

Maintenance overwhelm: Coordinating multiple services is exhausting. 68% of homeowners report feeling overwhelmed or stressed about maintenance, and 32% don't know where to start (Thumbtack, 2022). The unmet need is reducing the cognitive burden through a clear, reliable system for ongoing upkeep.

Provider-side pain: 75% of providers report difficulty filling positions (U.S. Chamber of Commerce, 2025), margins are often 5–15% (SCORE & U.S. Small Business Administration, 2024), and annual customer churn can reach 25–40% (PCT Magazine & National Pest Management Association, 2025). Many rely on per-lead platforms with ~29–41% take rates (Housecall Pro, 2025), increasing CAC and pushing prices higher.

No existing solution—marketplaces like Angi or Thumbtack, social referrals, HOA contracts, or similar ventures like Bulqit and OneNeighbor—is combining price confidence, booking reliability, proactive communication, and sustained trust over time. Homeowners tolerate the pain out of necessity or defer the service entirely.

Goals for Customer Discovery

Our customer discovery process is guided by the following five goals, each tied to a critical assumption that, if proven wrong, could cause the business to fail (Giff Constable, Talking to Humans, 2014).

1. **Validate the core pain point:** Confirm homeowners describe recurring home maintenance coordination as a significant source of stress, cost anxiety, or deferred action — not just a minor inconvenience.
2. **Willingness to collaborate with neighbors:** Determine whether homeowners are willing to coordinate home service purchases with their neighbors and under what conditions (e.g., opt-in flexibility, payment guarantees, anonymity).
3. **Matching signals and selection criteria:** Identify the signals and data points homeowners use when selecting a service provider (e.g., reviews, referrals, licensing, proximity) to inform how we design the matching and bidding experience.
4. **Provider-side pain points and trends:** Understand the biggest operational challenges home service providers face, especially around customer acquisition, scheduling, and route efficiency, and whether bundled neighborhood contracts are an attractive value proposition.
5. **Identify the early adopters (both sides):** Which homeowner segment and home service provider types feel these pains most acutely and would be willing to adopt. Identify strong momentum to existing solutions that accomplish similar goals.

How We Are Successful

Following the principle of designing pass/fail tests for key assumptions (Giff Constable, Talking to Humans, 2014), we will consider our customer discovery successful when the following conditions are met:

- We identify a definable pain point that is consistent across different types of homeowners (e.g., across neighborhoods, income levels, and home ages).
- We confirm that pain points related to hiring & coordinating home services in a serious pain point and not a minor inconvenience.
- We identify the types of home services where pain points exist.
- Identify a pain point significant enough that home service providers would actively adopt a solution that also enables cost savings for homeowners
- At least a significant subset of homeowners interviewed demonstrate a willingness to coordinate service purchases with neighbors based on existing behaviors and aligning strongest pain points with a potential solution.

Overview of Qualitative Data Collection

Our data collection approach combines multiple human-centered design methods to build a full understanding of the problem space. We will use the following combination of qualitative techniques, informed by IDEO's Field Guide to Human-Centered Design (IDEO.org, 2015) and customer discovery best practices (Giff Constable, Talking to Humans, 2014).

Immersion Activity

Each one of our team members are homeowners and have dealt with these problems personally. For our immersion activity we're going to focus on the home service provider side of the relationship. Each team member will independently shadow a home service provider during a service call or a portion of their workday. Each team member will shadow a different service type (e.g., lawn care, pest control, pressure washing) so that we can compare observations across categories.

During the immersion, each team member will document reflections and observations using a structured field notes template that captures the following: date, service type, provider name, duration of observation, a narrative description of the service call from arrival to departure, specific pain points observed (scheduling, communication, routing, payment), interactions with the homeowner, and personal reflections on the emotional tone of the experience. Following each individual shadow session, the team will conduct a version of a *Download Your Learnings* session (IDEO.org, 2015). We will each write out these observations after our session. Once everyone has completed their "download," we will come together and compare notes.

Users Targeted and Research Methods

Primary users – Homeowners: Our primary interview subjects are suburban homeowners. We will intentionally recruit across different neighborhood types: dense subdivisions vs. spread-out rural-adjacent neighborhoods, established neighborhoods vs. starter-home developments, and varying HOA structures to ensure we capture a range of experiences.

Primary users – Home service providers: We will interview operators and owners of small to mid-sized home service businesses across multiple categories (lawn care, pest control, pressure washing, gutter cleaning, window washing, and others). We will seek providers at different stages of business maturity (solo operators, small crews, and companies with 5–20 employees) to understand how the value proposition of route-dense, bundled contracts may differ by scale.

Secondary users – Family and friends of homeowners: Rather than interviewing family and friends separately, we will address their influence during primary homeowner interviews by asking how homeowners are an influence or resource in the decisions of their friends and family.

Screening criteria: All interview subjects must either (a) currently own/rent a home and handle the coordination of home service, or (b) currently work for or operate a home service provider business. For homeowners, we will screen for those who have hired at least one home service in the past 12 months to ensure they have relevant experience to discuss.

Qualitative Techniques

We will employ the following combination of qualitative methods utilizing the IDEO's Design Kit:

- **Semi-structured interviews** (primary method): One-on-one or two-on-one, in-person interviews when possible, using a prepared interview guide. We will prioritize open-ended questions that

elicit stories about past behavior rather than speculation about future behavior (Giff Constable, *Talking to Humans*, 2014). Video conferencing or phone calls will serve as a secondary option.

- **Immersion/shadowing** (described above): Direct observation of home service providers during service calls to understand the provider experience firsthand.
- **Guided Tour**: Where feasible, we will ask homeowners to walk us through their home and point out deferred maintenance items, prior service work, or areas of concern. This reveals habits and values far better than a conversation alone.
- **The Five Whys**: When a homeowner or provider mentions a pain point, we will drill down through multiple layers of “why” to uncover root causes and deep motivations rather than surface-level complaints.

Stakeholder and Expert Interviews

In addition to primary user interviews, we plan to conduct the following stakeholder and expert interviews to shed light on this challenge from additional angles:

- **HOA board members (1–2 interviews)**: HOAs represent an existing structure for collective homeowner action. Understanding how HOAs currently contract home services, what works and what doesn’t, and how they might view a platform like Shared Fences Co. will help validate or challenge our go-to-market assumptions.
- **Property managers (1–2 interviews)**: Property managers coordinate maintenance across multiple units or homes and represent a potential early adopter or channel partner. Their perspective on vendor selection, cost negotiation, and scheduling logistics is directly relevant to the bundled-contract model.

Customer Discovery Materials

Immersion Activity Documentation

The details of this document are discussed in the “Immersion Activity” section above.

Interview Questions: Homeowners

Opening Questions

1. Tell me a little about your home—how long have you lived there, and what kind of neighborhood is it?
2. How do you approach home maintenance? (Handle most of it yourself? Hire out recurring work?)
3. Walk me through the last time you hired someone for a home service. How did you find them, and what was that experience like from start to finish?
4. What home services do you currently pay for on a recurring basis, and which ones have you been putting off?
5. When you think about a service you’ve been putting off, what’s been the biggest thing holding you back?
6. Tell me about a time a home service experience went really well. What made it work?
7. Tell me about a time it went poorly. What happened, and what did you do about it?

Provider Selection and Trust

8. How do you decide who to hire? What information matters most to you when choosing between providers?
9. Have you ever asked a neighbor, friend, or family member for a recommendation? How did that go?
10. What would make you trust a provider you've never used before?

Neighbor Coordination

11. Have you ever coordinated with neighbors on anything related to your homes — sharing a contractor, splitting a service, or buying something together? Tell me about that experience.
12. What would make you excited or hesitant about pooling a home service purchase with nearby neighbors to get a group discount?
13. If something like that existed, who in your neighborhood would probably be the first person to organize it? What makes them that person?

Cost and Value

14. Which home services feel expensive? Which home services feel like you're getting good value? Tell me about an experience that exhibited this feeling.
15. What would make a home service feel like it was worth the price? Tell me about an experience where this was the case.
16. Extra: Have you ever been surprised by the final cost of a service? What happened?

Closing

17. Is there anything about maintaining your home that we didn't ask you about but we should have?
18. Do you know a neighbor, friend, or coworker who owns a home who might be willing to chat with us about their experience?

Interview Questions: Home Service Providers

Warm-Up

1. Tell me about your business. What services do you offer, how long have you been operating, and how many people are on your team?
2. What are your biggest pain points when working with residential homeowners?

Customer Acquisition and Retention

3. Walk me through how you currently get new customers. What works best, and what's the most frustrating part?
4. How much do you spend to acquire a new customer? Is this a cost driver for your business?
5. What causes you to lose customers? Tell me about a recent example.

Operations and Routing

6. Describe a typical day for you or your crew. How much time is spent driving between jobs versus doing the actual work? (try and get a percentage)
7. Have you ever had a situation where you had multiple jobs in the same neighborhood on the same day? How did that happen, and did it change anything about your efficiency or costs?

8. If someone brought you a contract for, say, 10–15 homes on the same street for the same service, how would that change your pricing? What concerns would you have?

Payment

9. What challenges do you have regarding payment & paying your employees?

Closing

10. What's the single biggest thing that would make your business easier to run?
11. Do you know other service providers—in your field or a different one—who might be willing to talk with us?

Interview Questions: HOA Board Members

1. Tell me about your role on the HOA board and how your neighborhood currently handles common area and individual home maintenance.
2. Has your HOA ever contracted a service provider on behalf of individual homeowners? How did that work out?
3. What are the most common maintenance-related complaints or requests you hear from homeowners in your neighborhood?
4. Does your neighborhood have any current neighbors that coordinate their home services, or anything like that?
5. Has the HOA coordinated any services or endorsed any providers or would that be acceptable according to your current by-laws?

Interview Questions: Property Managers

1. How do you currently find and select home service providers for the properties you manage?
2. What are the biggest pain points you face coordinating maintenance across multiple properties?
3. Do you use any software or tools to manage these services across properties?
4. Have you ever negotiated group or volume discounts with a provider? What was that experience like?

Responsibilities and Timeline

Responsibilities

Each team member is responsible for a minimum of 5 interviews with homeowners initiated within their own network. Trent McKenzie will lead the team in identifying home service providers, HOAs, or property managers to interview. Each team member initiating the interview is responsible for ensuring the method in which notes are collected and that all notes are saved in the Teams Shared folders. Trent McKenzie will lead the process for summarizing & finalizing findings by creating initial drafts. Each team member is responsible for completing a thorough review with notes prior to submission.

Timeline

Our target cadence is 5 interviews per week across the team. The following timeline outlines key milestones:

Week	Interview Minimum	Comments
Week 1 (2/22-28)	3	1 interview each
Week 2 (3/1-3/7)	6	2 interviews each
Week 3 (3/8-3/14)	6	2 interviews each
Week 4 (3/15-3/21)	6	2 interviews each
Week 5 (3/22-3/28)	3	1 interview each, finalize documents & submit

Note on AI Usage: See additional document submission with details on usage of AI including prompts.

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