

South Sound Together: Civic Engagement Workshops

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ABSTRACT

Led by Associate Vice Chancellor for Innovation and Global Engagement, Dr. Divya McMillin and Program Administrator Krissy Kimura, the Global Innovation and Design (GID) Lab held a two-day workshop called the Next Leaders Initiative for South Sound Together (SST). This workshop brought together student participants from the University of Washington Tacoma, Tacoma Community College, and Bates Technical College along with SST leadership to answer, “*How might we increase the number of people who aspire to civic engagement in the South Sound?*”

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

Following the design thinking process, the group began with defining the problem outlined in the How Might We question. In order to answer this question, we had to ask what does civic engagement mean? Dr. McMillin explained that civic engagement is a community effort that works together to make differences by combining knowledge, skills, values and motivation to work towards the differences. Some barriers to civic engagement identified in the pre-work fell under the following themes: financial, lack of time, connections/networking, and other/miscellaneous. Participants voted on the top barriers, which are listed below:

- Imposter Syndrome (OTHER)
- Over-involved, knowing your limits, hard to navigate where to be effective (TIME)
- Caregiver commitments / civic events coincide with other life events (TIME)
- Lack of transportation and external costs (FINANCIAL)
- Feeling ostracized due to lack of inclusivity and biases (CONNECTIONS/NETWORKING)

The next stage in the design process is ideation. Ideation mode of the design process that aims to generate radical design alternatives. Participants were placed in their breakout rooms with their group to ideate alternative ideas to test that were specific to their barrier. After small group discussions, we all came back to have one person from each group share what their team came up with. Each participant then voted on their top two ideas from each team. Out of the five barriers, thirteen ideas emerged which will be carried through to the second part of the workshop so that participants can prototype their ideas.

- Brainstorming
- Exploring large quantity of ideas and diversity in those ideas
- What does it look like?
- Sticky notes, sketching, discussing with others, making things, etc.
- No constraints, wild ideas are generative
- Continually think about pathways that can breakthrough the barriers to civic engagement

FINAL PROTOTYPES

Prototyping means getting ideas and explorations out of your head and out into the world. It could be created in a physical form: sticky notes, role-playing activity, a space, an object, an interface, or a storyboard.

Prototyping is the most successful when people (design team, user and others) can experience and interact with them and drive deeper empathy and resolutions.

The teams had twenty minutes to brainstorm and prototype the top two ideas that were generated from the last workshop. After the given time, everyone came back as a group to present their prototypes and receive feedback in the form of comments such as, “I like, I wish, What If”.

Group 1: Feeling ostracized due to lack of inclusivity and biases.

Their prototype was favored by participants and they liked the idea of raising funding by collaborating with community partners as well as the inclusivity of the group. One piece of feedback was to explore the methods and themes of fundraising campaigns (grants, car wash, bake sale, etc.)

Group 2: Imposter Syndrome

Participants liked the idea of a wall for encouraging sticky notes. Using the walls and windows of the GID Lab in TPS 016 as spaces for community communication to help people feel connected is something that is very feasible. The idea of weekly inspirations of diverse designers, artists, professionals (i.e Frida Kahlo, Rosa Parks). One “what if” comment for the sticky note idea was a way to make it virtual through an application or a website in order for people to post and read notes from anywhere at any time. By creating a way to make people, especially newcomers and beginners, feel more confident and uplift them and making space to feel heard in ways they might not by just sitting at a meeting table can reduce the sense of imposter syndrome.

Group 3: Over-involved; hard to know where to be effective

Two of the prototypes from this groups’ barrier of overinvolvement were classroom visits from the mayor, the chancellor, city council and workshops for teachers to help incorporate civic engagement in the classroom.

Group 4: Caregiver commitments (civic events coincide with other life events)

This group came up with a prototype named “Small World” which is like a Google earth, but for ideas. In their images, the whale symbolizes a community project/problem and the birds symbolize community members. They connected community engagement with geocaching (helping neighbors/ community with projects) by having people coming together to accomplish tasks. One suggestion for the community engagement geocaching was to narrow and define the focus of “community” because there are many demographics and communities within communities.

Group 5: Lack of Transportation and external costs

This group expanded on the idea of having a Civic Engagement Bus that would be used for pop-up events, bringing people to events (carpool), providing transportation, etc.

A question that came up is, “What is meant by fully equipped? Did it mean fully accessible for individuals with disabilities or fully equipped with audio visual equipment?”, to which the group answered that they intend for both. Another question that came up was funding such as through state grants, community partners, fundraising. This prototype was also compared to The Peace Bus which was discussed for possible collaboration.

METHOD(S)

The South Sound Together workshops were all conducted online due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Some materials that were used for this event were:

- Zoom- for meeting and discussions, presenting ideas and prototypes.
- Mural- for collaborating and creating prototypes with team members

Methods that were used for these workshops:

- Design Thinking Process- Empathize, Define, Ideate, Prototype, Test, Iterate.
- Dot voting- Voting on which prototypes and ideas participants liked and voting on barriers

REFLECTION

Being a first time GID Award recipient, this workshop left a big impact on myself as a designer. I gained many skills as a designer, a facilitator, and a leader. These skills have lead me to become a better learner and I am learning to apply my experiences as a GID Awardee into my work in my Technical Communications major and my minor in Innovation and Design. I plan on bringing these skillsets with me on my journey of becoming a UX Designer/Researcher.

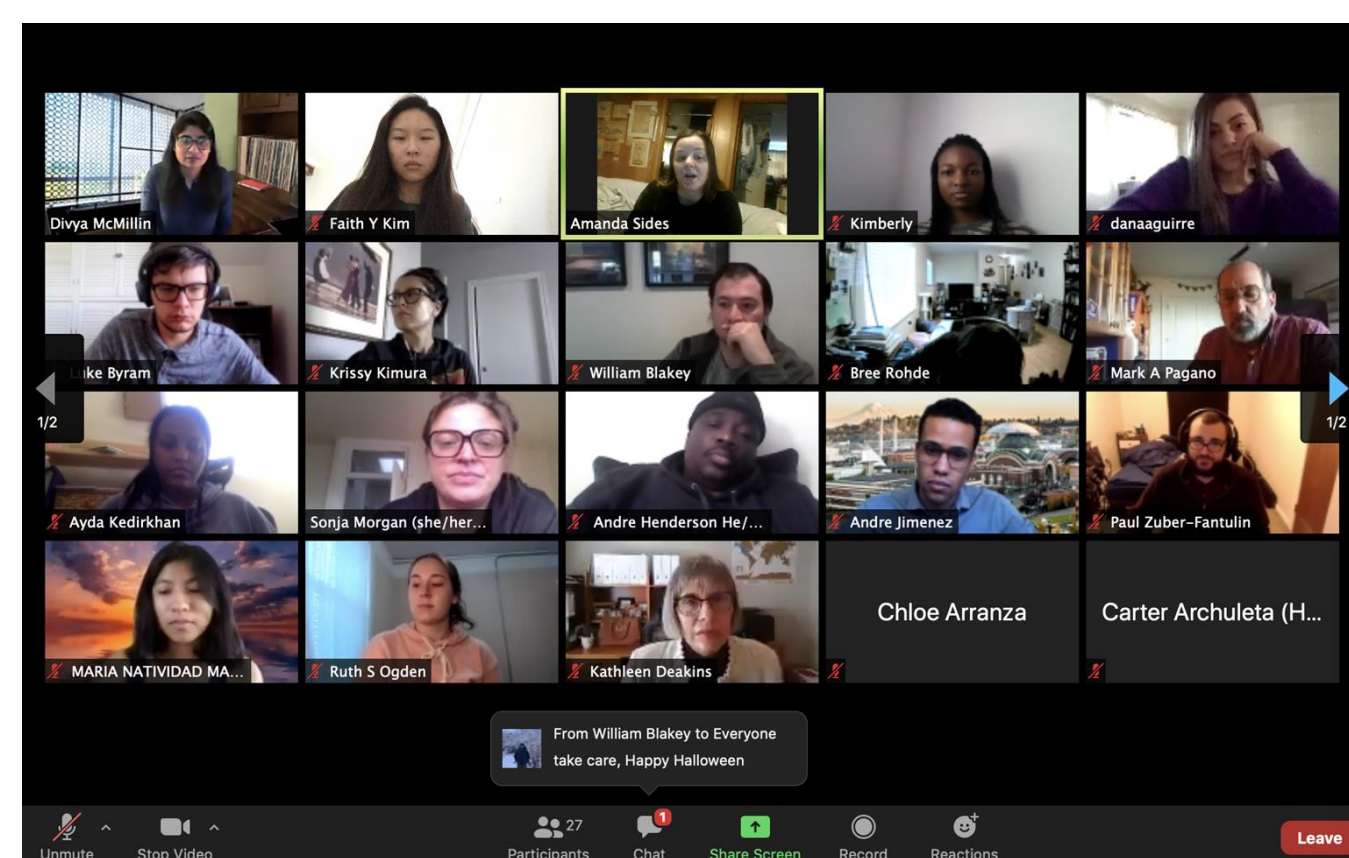
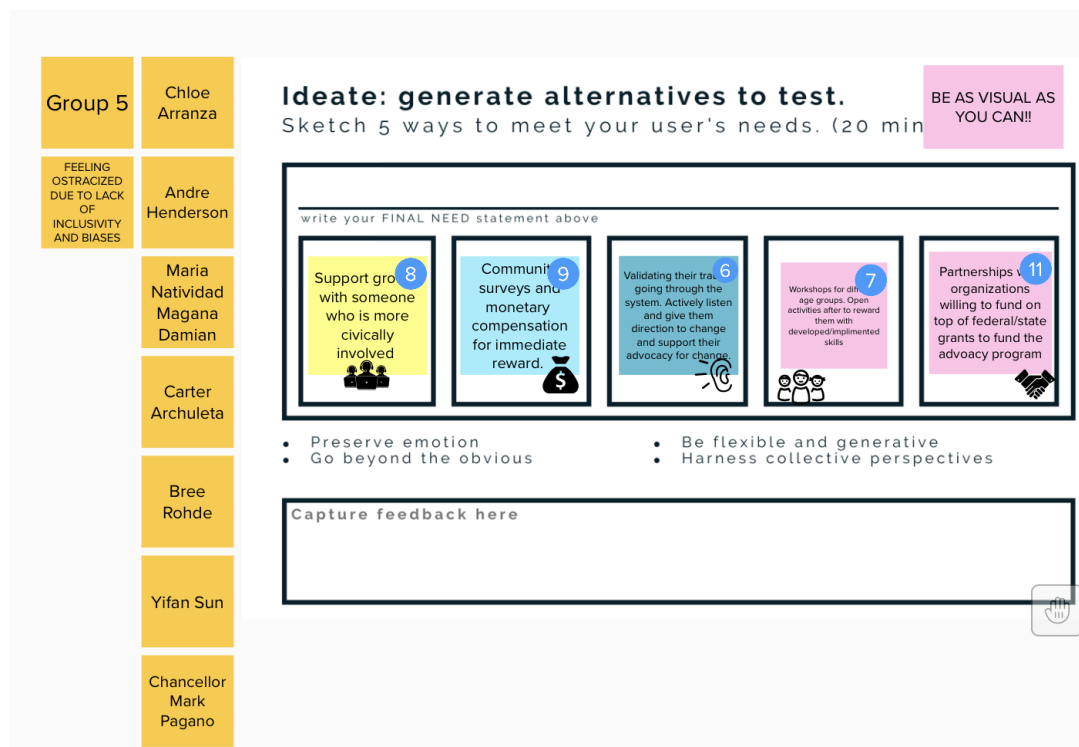
The Next Leaders Initiative Workshops were one of my first experiences facilitating design thinking workshops and seeing the process in action. It was an excited time as delve deeper into the world of user experience. It allowed me to break free of my fear of facilitation as well as helping me gain excellent note taking, listening and multi-tasking skills.

REFERENCES

[IDEATE News Bulletin - Global Innovation and Design Lab \(washington.edu\)](#)

[University of Washington Tacoma | Activity | Next Leaders Initiative: South Sound Together | Collaboratory \(cecollaboratory.com\)](#)

[Community Building: A Virtuous Circle | South Sound Proud](#)



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Next Leaders Initiative Workshop was invigorating and rumbling with many great ideas and prototypes. It reflects how many people are passionate about civic engagement, wanting to engage even more, and presented an image of the future leaders of South Sound Together. The workshops resulted in innovative prototypes of pathways and community-connected systems of support. The Forum announced a total of \$40,000 available to fund youth organizations in promoting leadership and civic engagement, for 2021-22.