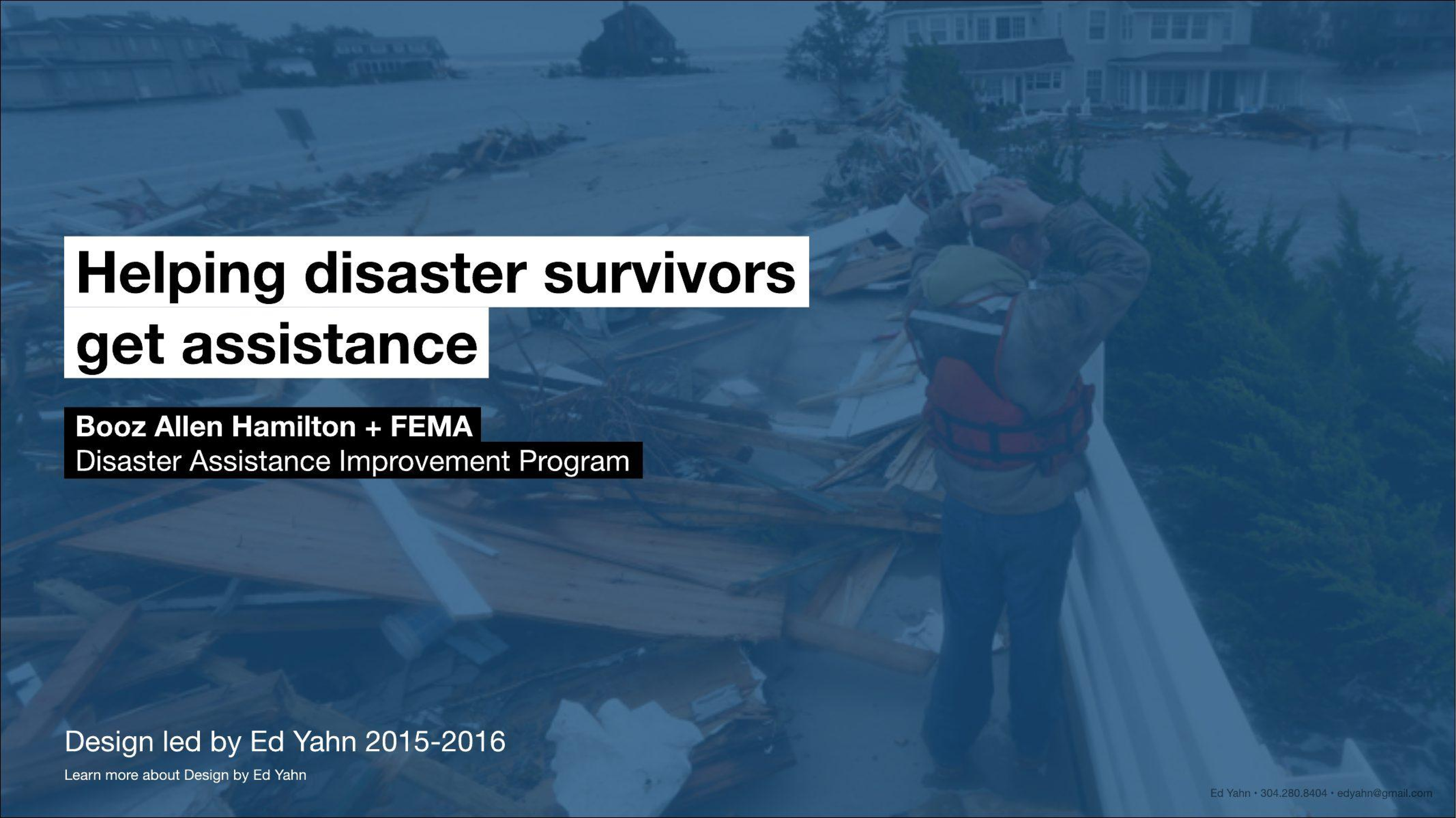

Helping disaster survivors get assistance

Booz Allen Hamilton + FEMA
Disaster Assistance Improvement Program

Design led by Ed Yahn 2015-2016

Learn more about Design by Ed Yahn

Ed Yahn • 304.280.8404 • edyahn@gmail.com

How do survivors find and receive disaster assistance?

Designing the future of disaster assistance starts with deeply understanding the underlying emotional and functional needs of the survivors.

Human-centered design is uniquely suited to create experiences that help them get back to normal life.

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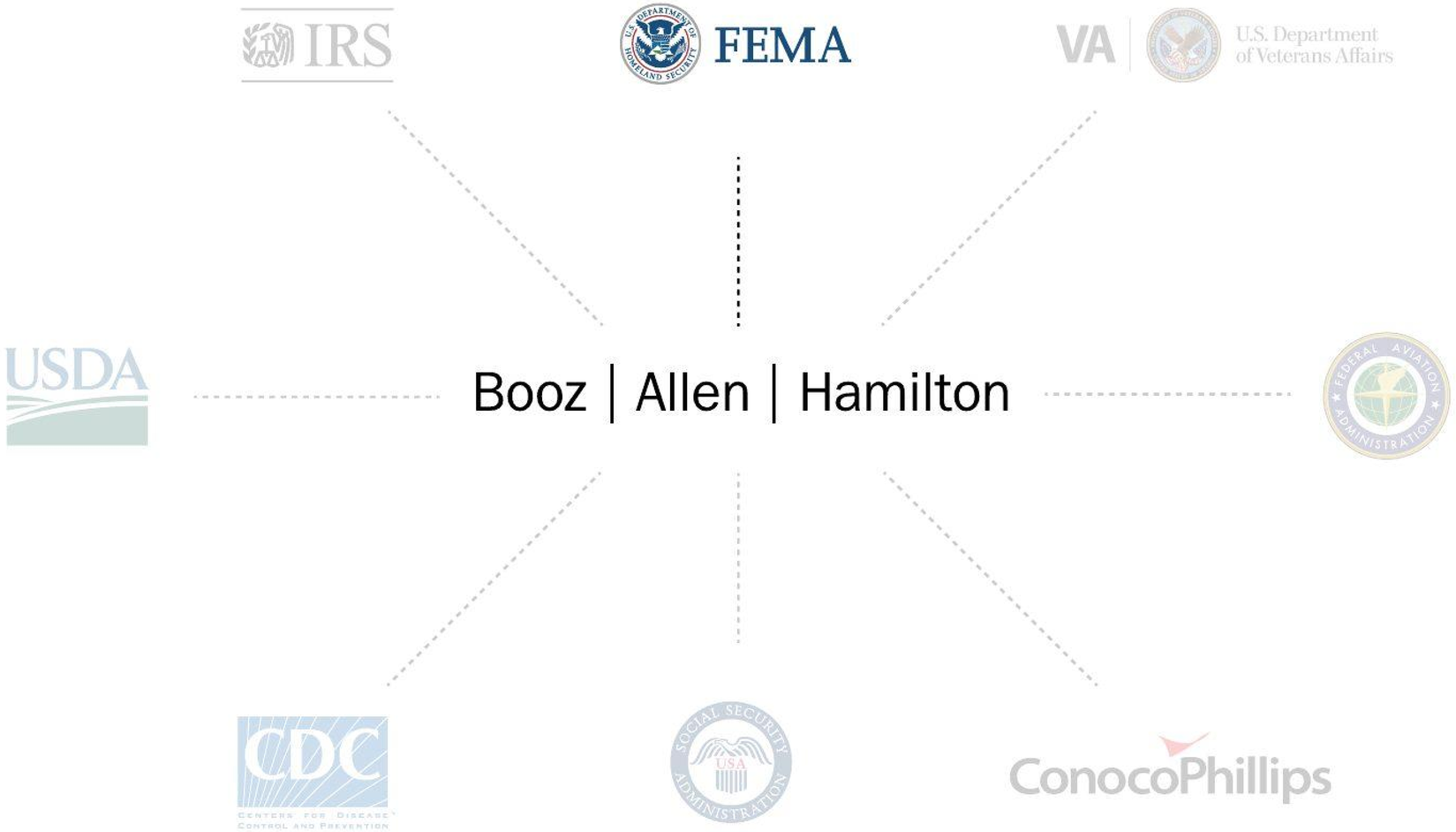
The Booz Allen and FEMA partnership

Booz Allen is a large global consulting firm who focuses heavily on helping the government adopt digital solutions and work more efficiently.

They gave me the opportunity to work with diverse, smart, and ambitious people to solve complex problems through technology and design experiences that affected millions of United States citizens.

Booz Allen had a contract with the U.S. Department of Labor and FEMA to improve self-serve products for disaster survivors when getting assistance.



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Booz Allen UX team

I partnered with the Booz Allen's Benefits.gov product team and FEMA stakeholders to introduce a new service design workstream that improved the experience of disaster survivors.

I created and pitched a plan to develop a design strategy that fit within our existing contract. Once approved by the client, I assembled a project team consisting of a user researcher and product designer to tackle the work.

As the team lead, I was responsible for drafting a plan and timelines, leading the execution, and communicating progress and results.



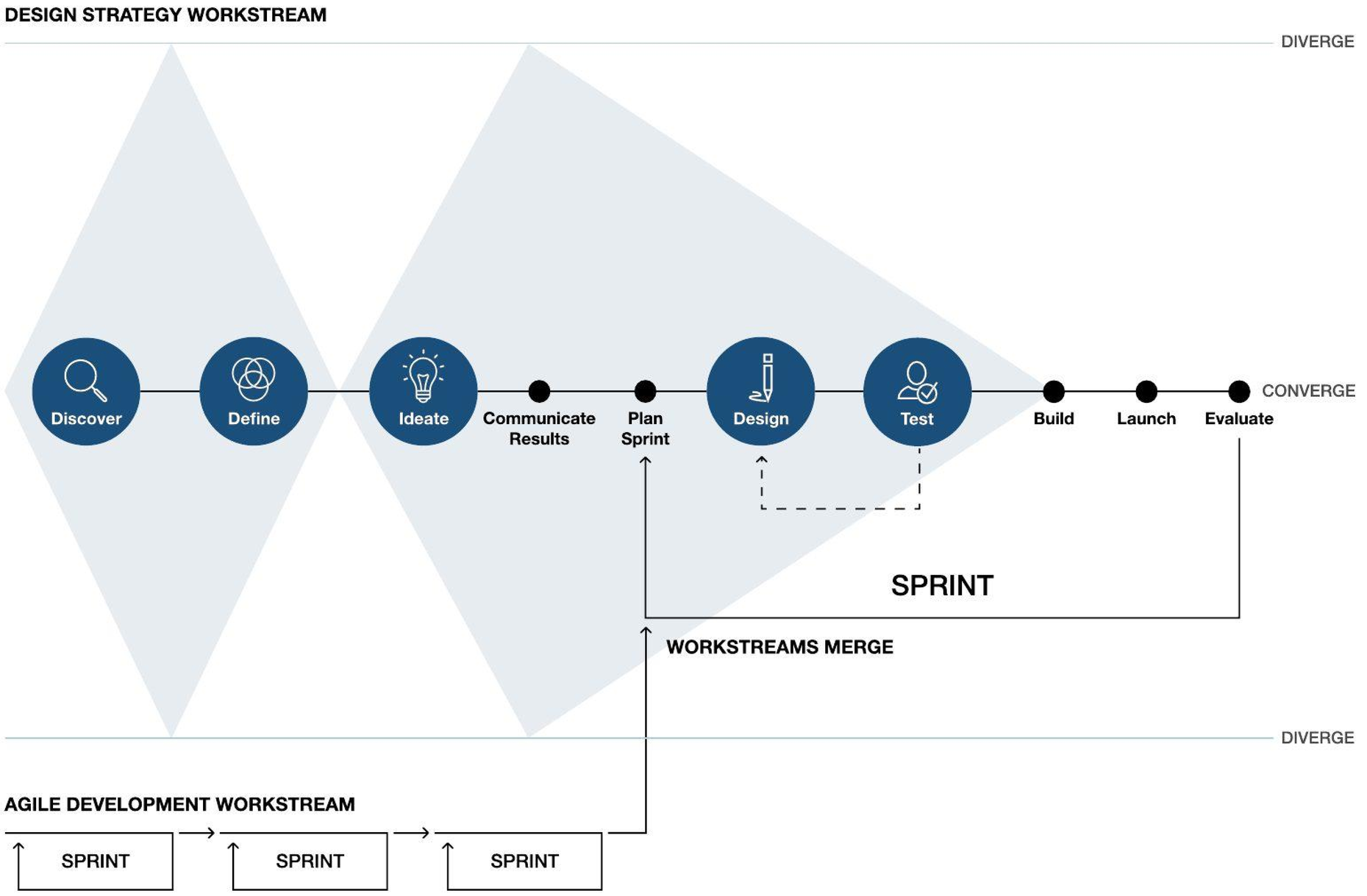
Design strategy meets agile development

Working with product managers and tech leads, I determined how to integrate the design strategy workstream into the current agile development process.

Research, synthesis, and ideation were front-loaded into a separate 3-4 month block of time, while the agile sprints continued to run on a backlog of requirements.

The product designer had to split his time between the two workstreams to make sure features were getting input from design during agile sprints.

Once complete, the results from design research and ideation were prioritized into multi-year product strategy with a roadmap of future requirements for sprints.



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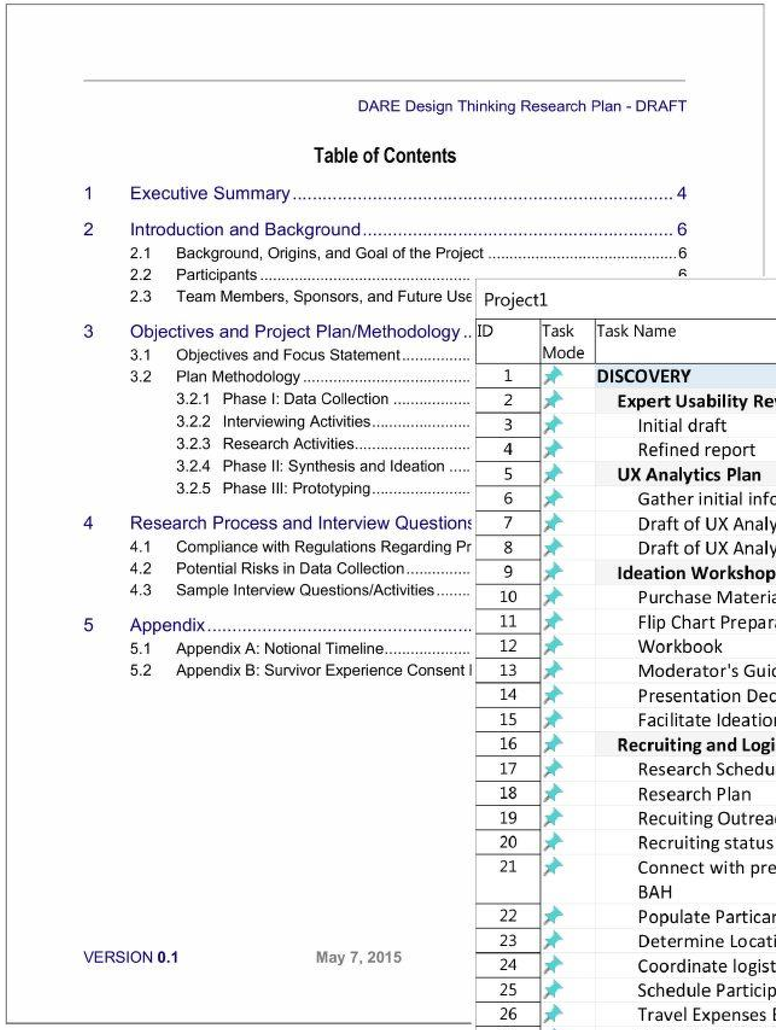
Project Planning

I drafted a design strategy project plan that explained our objectives, methodology, activities, timeline, and expenses for client approval.

I detailed our approach in a Work Breakdown Structure using Microsoft Project. Due to the large amount of discovery work and resulting data for synthesis, timeboxing activities helped keep the team on track and communicate status to the internal team and client.

Project Plan



DARE Design Thinking Research Plan - DRAFT

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VERSION **0.1** May 7, 2015

Project1

ID	Task Mode	Task Name	Duration	Start	Finish
1		**DISCOVERY**	**55 days**	**Wed 2/10/16**	**Tue 4/26/16**
2		**Expert Usability Review**	**58 days**	**Wed 2/10/16**	**Fri 4/29/16**
3		Initial draft	37 days	Wed 2/10/16	Thu 3/31/16
4		Refined report	21 days	Fri 4/1/16	Fri 4/29/16
5		**UX Analytics Plan**	**54 days**	**Wed 2/10/16**	**Mon 4/25/16**
6		Gather initial information	37 days	Wed 2/10/16	Thu 3/31/16
7		Draft of UX Analytics Measurement Plan	17 days	Fri 4/1/16	Mon 4/25/16
8		Draft of UX Analytics Report of Initial Data	17 days	Fri 4/1/16	Mon 4/25/16
9		**Ideation Workshop**	**3 days**	**Tue 3/22/16**	**Thu 3/24/16**
10		Purchase Materials	2 days	Tue 3/22/16	Wed 3/23/16
11		Flip Chart Preparation	8 days	Mon 3/14/16	Wed 3/23/16
12		Workbook	8 days	Mon 3/14/16	Wed 3/23/16
13		Moderator's Guide	8 days	Mon 3/14/16	Wed 3/23/16
14		Presentation Deck	8 days	Mon 3/14/16	Wed 3/23/16
15		Facilitate Ideation Workshop	1 day	Thu 3/24/16	Thu 3/24/16
16		**Recruiting and Logistics for Research Activities**	**26 days**	**Fri 4/1/16**	**Fri 5/6/16**
17		Research Schedule	1 day	Fri 4/1/16	Fri 4/1/16
18		Research Plan	1 day	Mon 4/4/16	Mon 4/4/16
19		Recuiting Outreach Language	3 days	Mon 4/4/16	Wed 4/6/16
20		Recruiting status updates with FEMA	15 days	Mon 4/4/16	Fri 4/22/16
21		Connect with previously confirmed participants and new leads at BAH	15 days	Mon 4/4/16	Fri 4/22/16
22		Populate Particant List	15 days	Mon 4/4/16	Fri 4/22/16
23		Determine Location(s)	5 days	Mon 4/25/16	Fri 4/29/16
24		Coordinate logistics with location facilities	5 days	Mon 4/25/16	Fri 4/29/16
25		Schedule Participants by filling up time slots	5 days	Mon 5/2/16	Fri 5/6/16
26		Travel Expenses Estimate	5 days	Mon 5/2/16	Fri 5/6/16
27		Book Travel	5 days	Mon 5/2/16	Fri 5/6/16
28		**Preparing for Research Activities**	**30 days**	**Mon 4/4/16**	**Fri 5/13/16**

Page 1

Work Breakdown Structure

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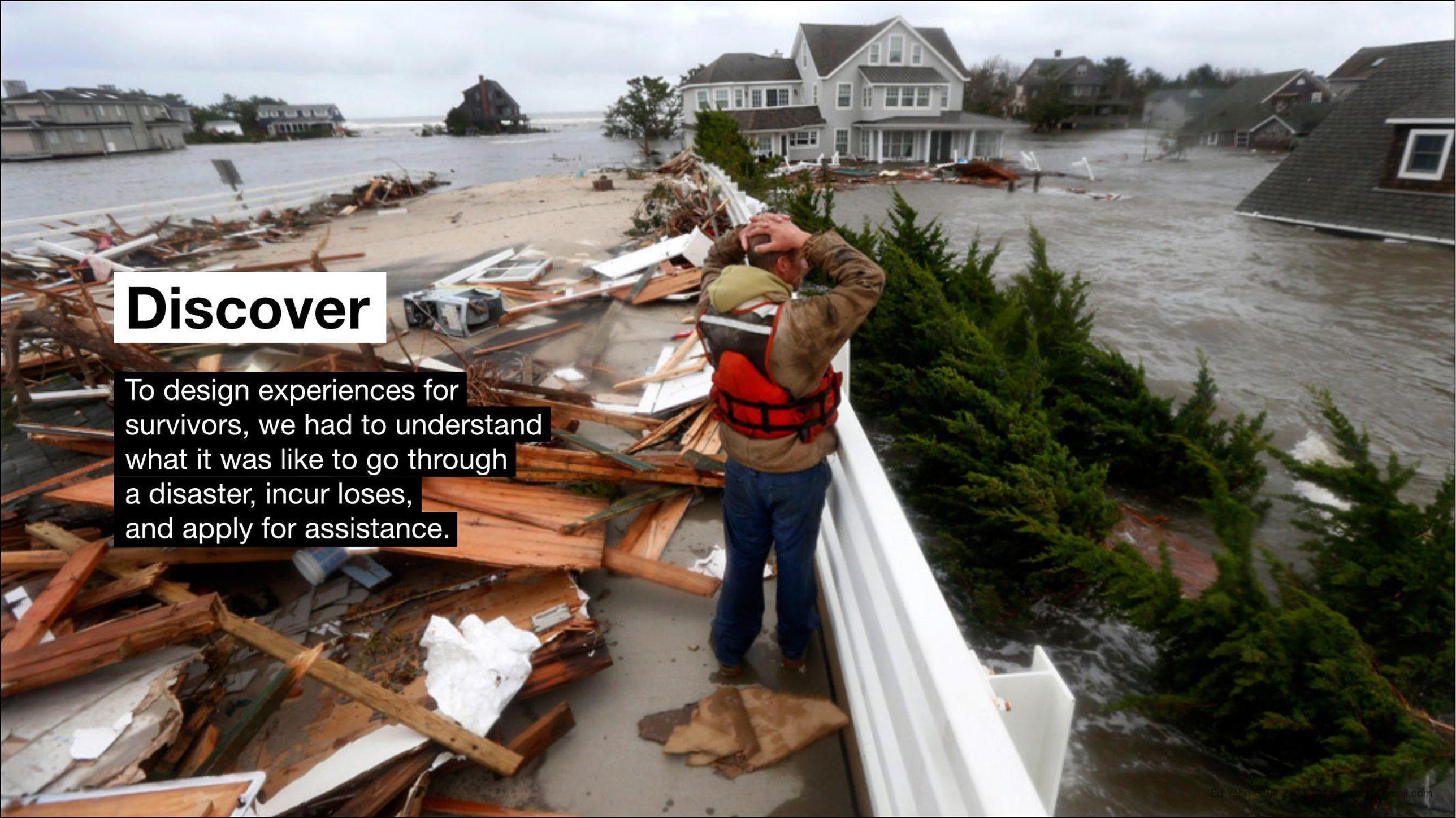


Discover

To design experiences for survivors, we had to understand what it was like to go through a disaster, incur loses, and apply for assistance.

Research Methods

Our goal for discovery was to get a 360-degree view of the disaster experience by learning from both survivors and FEMA stakeholders.

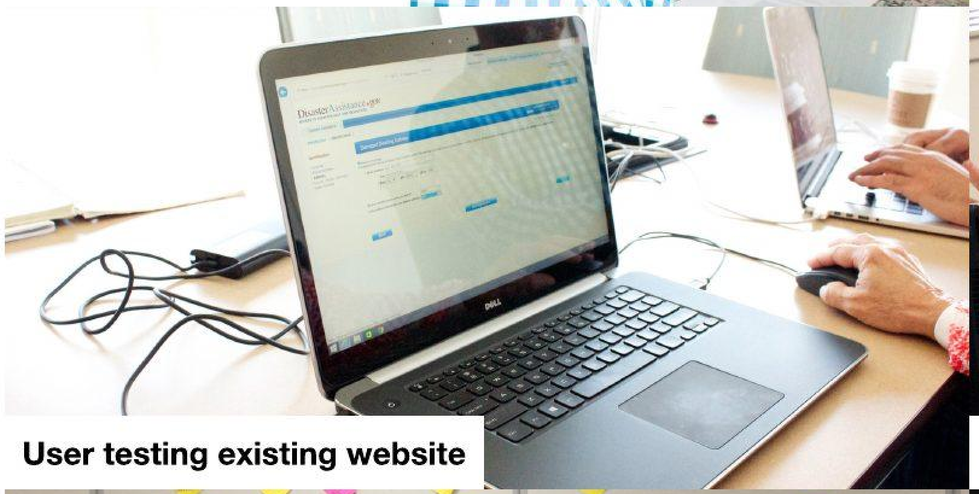
We planned a unique mix of research methods to fully understand existing processes, customer journeys, touchpoints, pain points, and opportunities for improvement.



Ethnographic interviews



Journey mapping with survivors



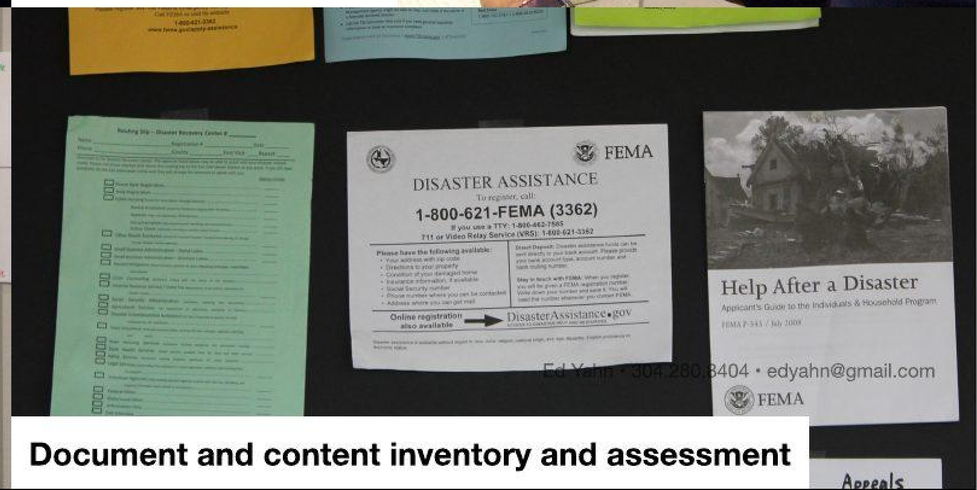
User testing existing website



Stakeholder interviews



Design workshop with client



Document and content inventory and assessment

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Participants

We met with survivors from Hurricane Sandy that went through the entire recovery process and survivors who just experienced flooding in Houston, TX just weeks prior. We also met with the many different FEMA stakeholders that helped survivors get back on their feet.

Houston, TX:
Active disaster site
- 3 disaster survivors
- FEMA Disaster Recovery Center
- FEMA Disaster Survivor Assistance teams

Red Bank, NJ:
Former site of Hurricane Sandy
- 4 disaster survivors

Washington, DC:
FEMA Headquarters
- Inspectors
- FEMA Corps

Winchester, VA:
FEMA Disaster Ops Center
- FEMA Disaster Assistance Improvement Program (Client)



Someone told me if you get money from FEMA, you have to pay it back in taxes.

Suzanne (Disaster Survivor)



FEMA needs to communicate better. We heard if you didn't apply now, you missed the window.

Tracy (Disaster Survivor)



FEMA tells you where to go. Power, water, shelter... Those are things people look for first.

Amanda (Disaster Survivor)



I wrote a scathing note to FEMA that said, 'Here is what I sent. Find it attached. It's the same thing I already submitted.'

Connie (Disaster Survivor)



We didn't know it was going to stop at a number. Once you hit that limit, they stop giving you help.

Joe (Disaster Survivor)



I used the website like a bible. It took a little longer to dig and understand. I had to weave my way around.

Jennifer (Disaster Survivor)



I would rather use the website. My FEMA contact changed 4 times. You have to go all the way through the history. Frustrating!

Jan (Disaster Survivor)



SMART app provides me with the local entity, phone number, hours, location, and offered assistance.

Disaster Survivor Assistance Teams



The website should better explain the steps for FEMA assistance so the process is clear.

FEMA Corps



What does 'declared' or 'Individual Assistance' mean? Survivors don't know what this means.

Disaster Recovery Centers



Inspectors should verify damages only, not home ownership and occupancy... Upload these.

Inspectors



Survivors get an overwhelming list of referrals.

Disaster Assistance Improvement Program

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Define & Ideate

After research, we synthesized the data into insights and guiding principles that helped us move from information to ideas and from stories to solutions.

Preparing Research Data

We started synthesis by identifying valuable bite-sized data points that we could isolate from our research. Once in text format, we coded each data point so we could trace it back to the original source. Preparation activities included:

- Transcribing audio recordings of interviews and passing it around the team to highlight important statements
- Pulling usability metrics, findings, and quotes from user testing
- Recording opportunities and ideas from our design workshop
- Streamlining research notes

EY-1 How long have you lived in Houston?

AM-1 We just moved here in November; however, I have lived in Houston from 2000 - 2009. We moved Houston in 2000 from Boston. And then in Q1 2009, we moved to to Fairfax in Northern Virg The end of 2012, we moved to Baton Rouge. We had 3 years in Baton Rouge. And then we moved b to Houston.

EY-2 Tell me about some of the disasters you have been through. What was the first one?

AM-2 The first one, and probably the worst, was the 1994 earthquake. It was in the San Franando valley. It was Martin Luther King Day. I think it was January of 1994. I think it was a 6 - 8 earthquake stuck on the wee hours of the morning... 4 or 5 am. It decimated the city. I was about 2 miles from t epicenter. It was in the valley. It knocked chimneys off houses through roofs. Ruptured gas lines. Po stations blew. It was my senior year in high school. They closed schools for a week. The parking gara and freeway overpasses collapsed. I actually noted as I was driving here today on I-10 on the beltwa still stopped if I can before a freeway overpass. It was one of those things that get engrained in you because people were stopped at a red light under a freeway overpass and it collapsed pancaking th cars. The refrigerator walked itself out into the middle of the kitchen. Luckily, I wasn't home becaus bookshelves collapsed onto my bed. They were attached into the wall. Everything came down onto pillow. I was sleeping at a friend's house and woke up when she landed on top of me because I was sleeping on the floor. She got bounced out of the bed. It was all those years of earthquake survival s they teach you in school to get under the table, get under the doorway kicked in. It luckily kicked in did that and kind of hunkered down.

EY-3 What was it like for you?

AM-3 It was terrifying. I grew up with earthquakes. It was wonderful as a senior in high school be they cancelled finals. So I didn't have to take them that week. I think I only passed my AP governme class because I did not have to take the finals. It was decimating. Everything you do hear about earthquakes... And yet to this day, I have now lived through hurricanes and tornados, and I will take earthquake of either one.

EY-4 You WOULD take an earthquake? What is the worst?

AM-4 Tornados terrify me. Absolutely terrify me. Even though you don't know that earthquakes a coming... I was in the Pentagon in Virginia in 2012. The one they felt all the way up to New York. I remember being there. My first thought was that someone just dropped an air conditioning unit through the ceiling because they were being worked on above us on the 5th floor. We have got to g out of here. It is amazing the things that go through your head. Then I thought, no it is not that. The thought, ok planes are crashing into the Pentagon again. In my head, I was thinking it was not an earthquake. We are in Virginia. Then I was out the door. The CIO, who I worked for was a retired Marine, and she was like: get your butt back in here. As soon as it was done, in the course of 30 sec I was in the doorway. The doorways in the Pentagon are like the doorways here. They are so insequential. They are not going to protect you from anything that is falling on your head. But it is t instinct again: that you need to get in a doorway because it is the most structurally stable area in a building. Once it was over, I sat down and started working again. Everyone else lost it. "We have to

Interview transcripts

	A	C	D
23			
24	(10) Apply for disaster assistance (through FEMA) online.	Get assistance > Find assistance > Apply online > "They need to not have this here. The Exit Registration button. It's the primary button I want to click."; "I find it interesting that this is a different list than the one I saw before." This one is longer. Disaster section and Damage Type: Not allowing you to choose options that are showing up. "Invalid Incident"; "Undesignated County" AFTER FEMA said it was fine. You can still move forward after this message. "Is this your primary residence?" - YES Should be first. ; Home insurance: Checkbox for "Condo" is greyed out but selectable. First checkbox on the Emergency Needs page is also greyed out.; Income page: You cannot put in 1000 as an option. What if someone only makes that much money? "What if I want to receive correspondence via email?" Completed successfully.	Apply Online > "Text could be a little bigger. It's pretty small."; "Not reading the disclaimers." Fourth person to forget to click "Accept."; "My current phone is the same as my damaged phone." - Did not populate "I would have thought that would have populated." It also did not remove the option of adding the second phone.; Autocomplete is a positive; "Undesignated County"; Re: Disaster Related Losses: "Why were these picked for me?" - Bottom two questions are very confusing. Use information box instead of having all options available in the last question. ; Home Insurance - Did not realize they need the insurance company names. They still let her move forward.; Update Occupant: Friend/Relative vs. Coapplicant vs. Immediate Family (which one do I pick? What do these mean? Simplify); Could not come back to page to update form and add SS# during Sandy; Jenn likes the progress bar (functions) could be bigger; Whole site: Some things are left-justified and some are right-justified; Breadcrumbs are not very clear (sidebar and top); 2 (Wizard is "similar to IRS page, Checking account, etc.") - Make sure we have a routing number and account number that works. For financial information click "NO"; Correspondence page was langauge.
25	(11) Create an account.	Continue > ("Assumed that this took me to the homepage.") Create an account Completed successfully.	Remember to put "Not on file" for locations; 2 Completed successfully.
26	(12) Check your application status.	Clicks check status on homepage > Enters pin and credentials > Dashboard (Ideally there would be an anticipated date for a decision. There is also not enough information on the page.) Completed successfully.	Check Status > Enters PIN > Views status Completed successfully.
27	(13) Choose the way that you want FEMA to communicate with you about changes in your application status.	Application information > Edit phone numbers > Enter phone numbers > Clicks correspondence > Update sms notifications ("This is dumb. I don't like this." Makes you verify your phone number multiple times.) Change the langauge? (CORRESPONDENCE vs. COMMUNICATION) Completed with difficulty.	Correspondence > Edit > Changes email > Updates SMS / phone numbers - Edit could be a little better Completed successfully.
	(14) Upload a proof of insurance	Upload center >	Upload Center >

User testing notes

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Collaborative Synthesis

We printed the research data points on transparent floppy disk stickers and placed them on yellow sticky notes. They were then externalized on large boards, organized by the source, and placed in chronological order.

Once externalized, we invited the rest of the product team and client stakeholders to help us break apart the data sets and organize them in themes. Themes were combined and translated into insights.

Insights were then broken apart and themed again to inform design principles, which were used to inspire creative solutions for the redesign.



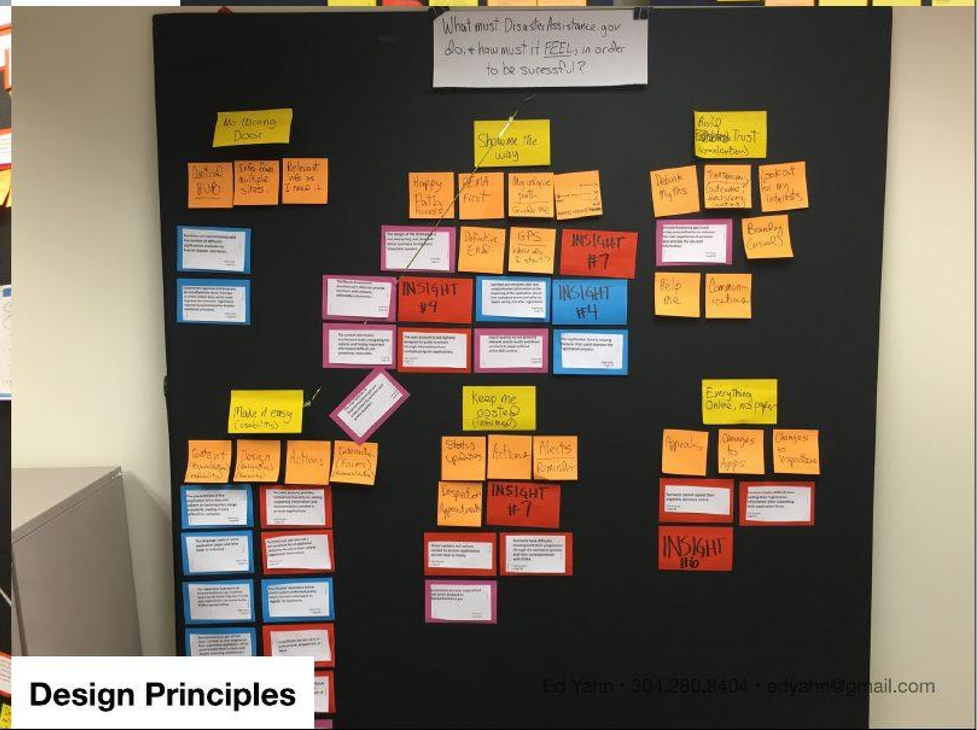
Externalizing research



Theming



Insights



Design Principles

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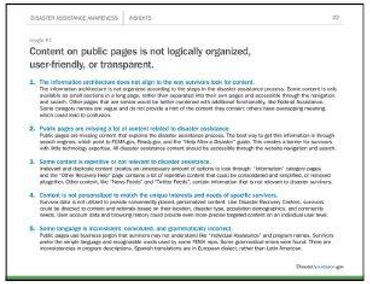
Insights

Insights were refined, drafted into a report for the client, and used to generate ideas to improve the design. They were categorized into three focus areas:

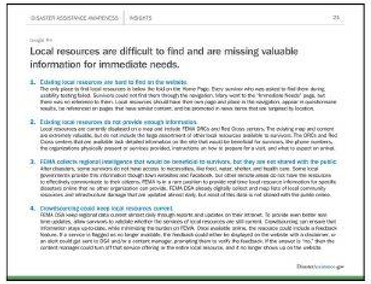
- **Assistance Awareness**: The way survivors find disaster assistance and understand how it works.
- **Registration Intake:** The way survivors apply for disaster assistance
- **Application Inquiry:** The way survivors track and manage disaster assistance

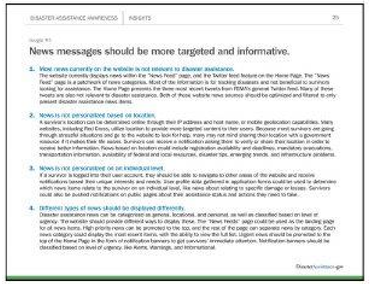
DISASTER ASSISTANCE AWARENESS



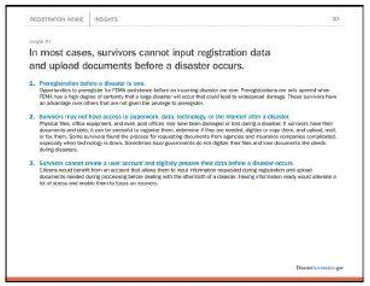


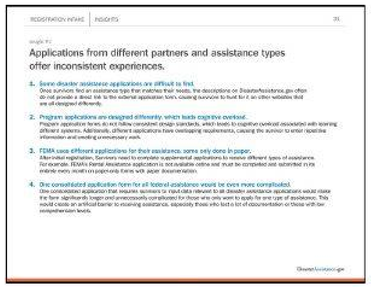


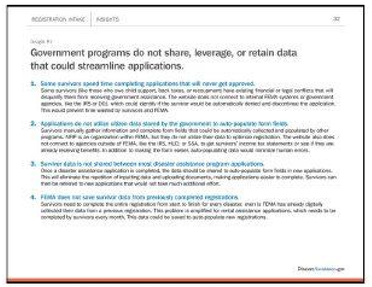


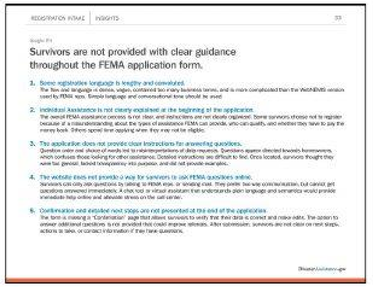


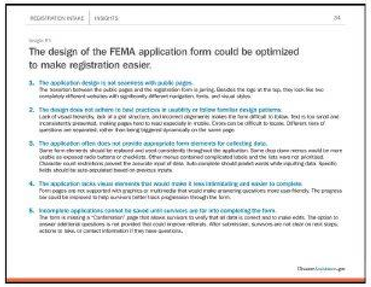
REGISTRATION INTAKE



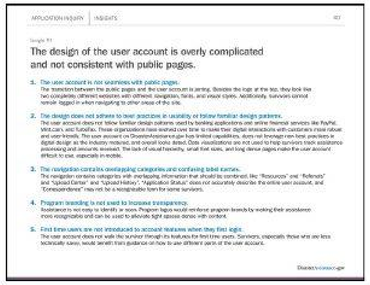


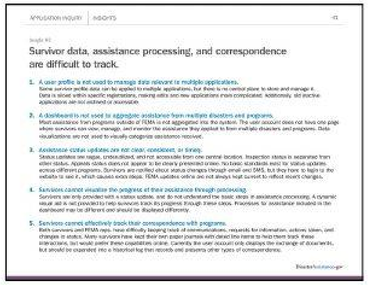


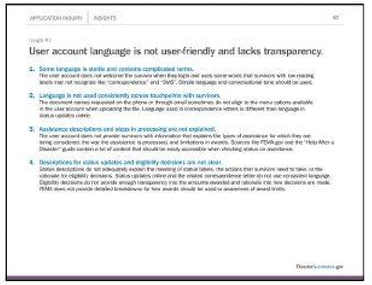


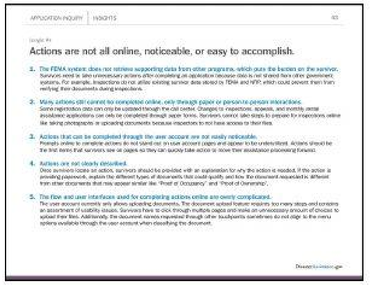


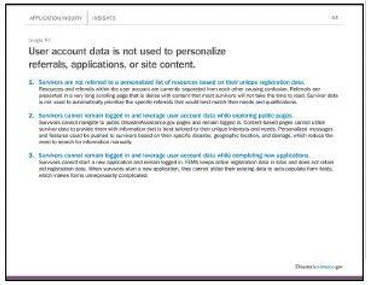
APPLICATION INQUIRY











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Design Principles

Informed by insights, we created design principles to inspire creative solutions that address user needs. These were used to build alignment between the us and the client on the themes of work we should be focusing on.

Build trust

Build a brand around trust and establish confidence that the government is looking out for the best interest of survivors.

Centralize disaster assistance

Create a central hub for all disaster assistance content and correspondence through information sharing across federal programs and a consistent user experience.

Provide direction

Guide survivors down a clear path to assistance and provide easy access to information based on their unique needs.

Keep survivors informed

Communicate time-sensitive information relating to the location of survivors and changes to the processing of their assistance.

Reduce paper, put everything online

Eliminate the burden of using paper when mail, printers, and fax machines are not available. Move all disaster assistance forms and correspondence online.

Make it user-friendly

Design the website based on contemporary best practices and the mental models, expectations, and behaviors of survivors to improve usability.

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Disaster Assistance Experience Map

A disaster assistance experience map was created to get all stakeholders aligned to the survivor journey and the outputs from discovery, synthesis, and ideation.

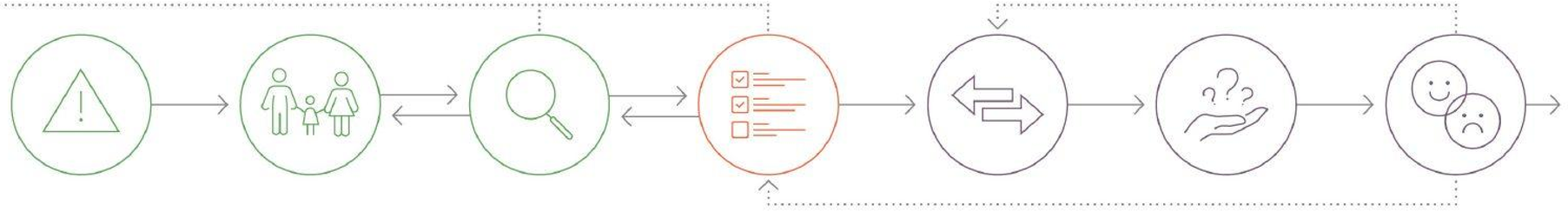
Journey map steps and associated information were color coded based on how they mapped to different parts of the disasterassitance.gov product.

The experience map was printed as a poster and placed in the internal product team office and the client office.

SURVIVOR JOURNEY

End pursuit of disaster assistance

Appeal eligibility decision



Apply for repeated assistance

Prepare	Survive	Seek	Apply	Correspond	Receive Decisions	React
Survivors learn about an approaching disaster, take steps to prepare, and sometimes are given the opportunity to preregister for FEMA assistance.	Survivors endure the disaster and deal with the aftermath. They take care of their immediate needs like health, food, water, shelter, and ability to communicate.	Survivors look for the types of assistance available to make their life normal again. They may search online for resources or meet with people in-person.	Survivors prepare information, file insurance claims, register for FEMA assistance, and may complete program additional applications.	Survivors track their status and interact with programs and insurance to process applications, which include inspections or supporting documents and info.	Survivors receive eligibility decisions for the assistance they applied for, which include determination, amounts, and rationale.	Survivors accept the assistance and begin recovery, complain about their decision, and/or officially appeal the decision.

CURRENT STATE OF DISASTER ASSISTANCE

Media channels push warning messages. Sites like Ready.gov and DA.gov provide info about preparedness. FEMA preregistration is activated for large disasters.	Local organizations provide immediate assistance. Governments plan recovery. FEMA gathers intelligence digitally. The media and sites like Ready.gov and DA.gov provide some post-disaster info.	The media, FEMA reps, FEMA.gov, DA.gov, and other online resources provide info about available assistance. Facebook allows online communication. DA.gov provides a questionnaire for assistance referrals.	DA.gov offers FEMA registration online. FEMA reps register survivors in-person or over the phone. SBA and other programs accept applications online or through paper. Insurance companies collect claims from survivors.	DA.gov provides FEMA and SBA status updates. Alerts are provided by email, SMS, and mail. Programs may request supporting info or documents. Home inspections may be conducted. Programs interact through their own channels.	FEMA provides assistance decisions that include the determination, amounts, and rationale for FEMA and SBA. FEMA sends decision through mail and DA.gov status. Other programs provide decisions through their own channels.	Programs may receive complaints about their decision, mostly through the call center. FEMA and most programs offer the option to appeal. Contractors and mitigation experts are hired for repairs.

PAIN POINTS OF SURVIVORS

Survivors may be unaware of the disaster or its severity, may not know how to prepare or next steps, have no place to go, can not afford to leave, or can not preregister with FEMA. Supplies may be sold out. Transportation may be difficult.	Survivors may have lost their house, possessions, important documents, power, cell service, and working technology to communicate and get info. Additionally, survivors may not know where to find local resources that provide immediate help, roads and bridges that are accessible, tips to stay safe, and the status of family and friends.	Survivors encounter long wait times with FEMA reps and false rumors deter registration. DA.gov is not user-friendly, public pages do not match the rest of the site, the process is not clear, it offers a lot of assistance with little prioritization, it is not clear how different assistance affects each other, info is not logically organized and is fragmented across multiple sites.	Survivors have a small window to register. Applications are all done differently and data is not saved or shared, which could make completion easier. Some like rental assistance are only paper. Design and instructions are sometimes confusing. Survivors cannot save progress until far into completion.	Survivors have a difficult time keeping track of applications from multiple programs and disasters. Survivors have difficulty editing application info and tracking steps in processing. Status updates are not clear and actions cannot be efficiently executed. Inspections are not easy to prepare for and require paper. Referrals are not personalized and prioritized.	Only FEMA awards can be presented in the user account; other programs cannot be displayed. Survivors are not given a clear explanation for how decisions and amounts were determined; some compare themselves to other people. Survivors are not clear how the money should be used. Some do not know about the award limits they can receive through FEMA.	Many survivors do not know they can appeal a decision. The appeals process is paper only and cannot be completed online. Appeals status and decisions are not timely or clear. They have trouble finding contractors to repair their home quickly, and difficulty getting permits to approve construction.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR DISASTERASSISTANCE.GOV (DA.GOV)

Disaster Assistance Awareness			Registration Intake	Application Inquiry		
Open preregistration for anticipated disaster counties or allow survivors to create an account and upload documents. Publish targeted messages based on location like warnings, preparation tips for the type of disaster, locational awareness, prompts to preregister, and steps to take after the disaster. Utilize info on FEMA.gov and Ready.gov.	Add infrastructure damage and local community resources (in addition to DRCs and Red Cross) already gathered by FEMA to the existing map. Publish targeted messages based on location like town websites and Facebook and tips to stay safe and steps to take after the disaster. Utilize info on FEMA.gov and Ready.gov. Optimize mobile designs to enhance usability.	Make the disaster assistance process clear and display above the fold on the Home Page. Reorganize the navigation to mirror the process. Aggregate info from FEMA.gov and Ready.gov into the new architecture. Improve the search to index relevant content from other sites. Better prioritize questionnaire recommendations. Provide deadlines and debunk myths. Improve the readability of content and the usability of the design.	Integrate all federal application forms, using consistent design standards. Share data across gov. agencies and old/new applications to streamline eligibility and data entry. Provide the ability to save incomplete applications early. Simplify language and designs to provide better interfaces, instructions, and traceability. Provide a way to ask questions online. At the end, add a confirmation page, next steps, and personalized referrals.	Improve login. Make design consistent with other site areas. Restructure organization and presentation of info. Create a dashboard that consolidates assistance from multiple disasters and sources. Create a user profile to display centralized survivor data. Improve application editing. Improve process transparency and ability to track assistance. Move all actions online and make easier. Prioritize referrals based on data.	Display application decisions from other disaster assistance programs. Be clear about the varying assistance limits for each of these programs. Consider providing a notification when survivors are getting close to that limit. Provide a clear explanation for how decisions and amounts are determined. Provide a detailed breakdown for how awards should be spent.	Make the option to appeal more visible. Explain the appeals process and instructions. Provide a form that allows survivors to complete and submit their appeals online. Ensure appeals decisions are clear and timely. Provide a resource to help survivors find licensed contractors either through local lists or links to external websites.

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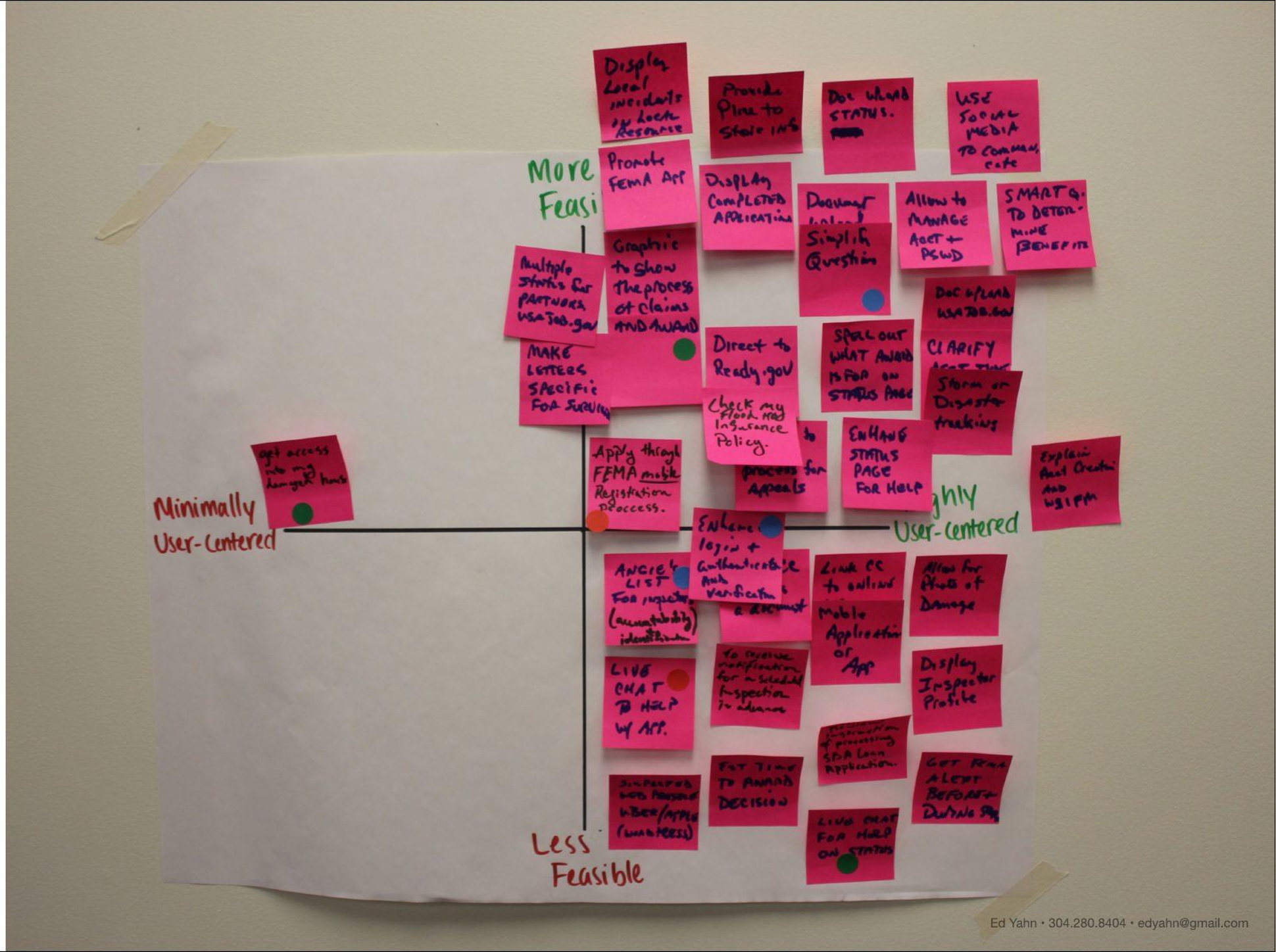
Ideation

The experience map, insights, and design principles were used to initiate ideation activities with the internal product team and client. Ideas were mapped to a 2x2 to determine level of feasibility and desirability, and then voted on to establish an initial sense of priority.

The resulting ideas were used to inform more tangible design prototypes.



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Design & Test

We created a vision for new ideas by designing and testing prototypes for digital experiences that improved the way disaster survivors get assistance.

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Optimizing FEMA's Individual Assistance registration

Although there are 17 different federal programs for disaster assistance, we focused on FEMA's Individual Assistance registration first to redefine how survivors apply for assistance online. Their registration form is the first one that survivors need to complete.

We documented and reviewed all of the inputs of the original online application. The form had too many steps and made users enter information that was not relevant to their unique situation.

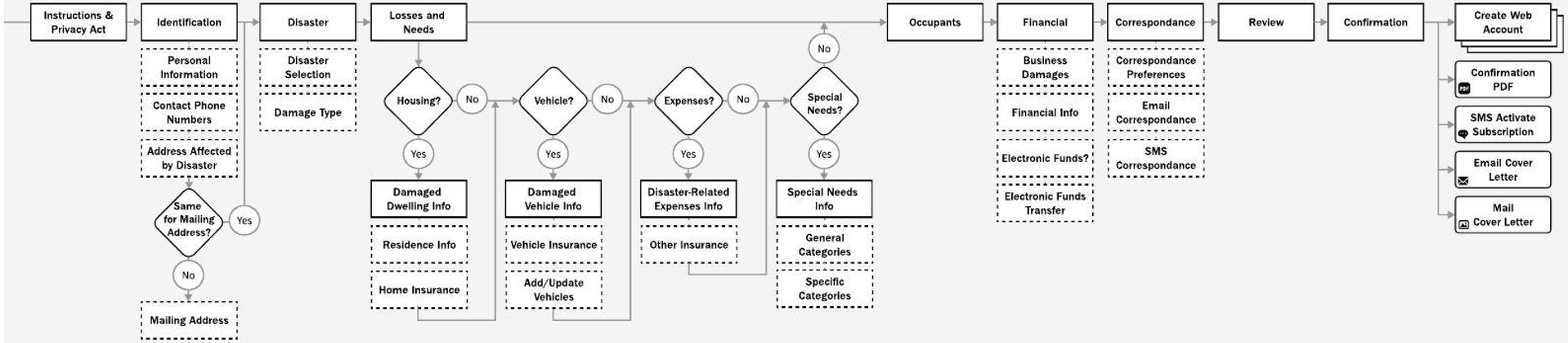
We reduced the number pages required in the application by combining similar inputs into new consolidated steps.

To reduce the number of inputs, we placed broader questions upfront to filter out questions later in the flow.

Streamlined primary steps



Dynamically generated flow



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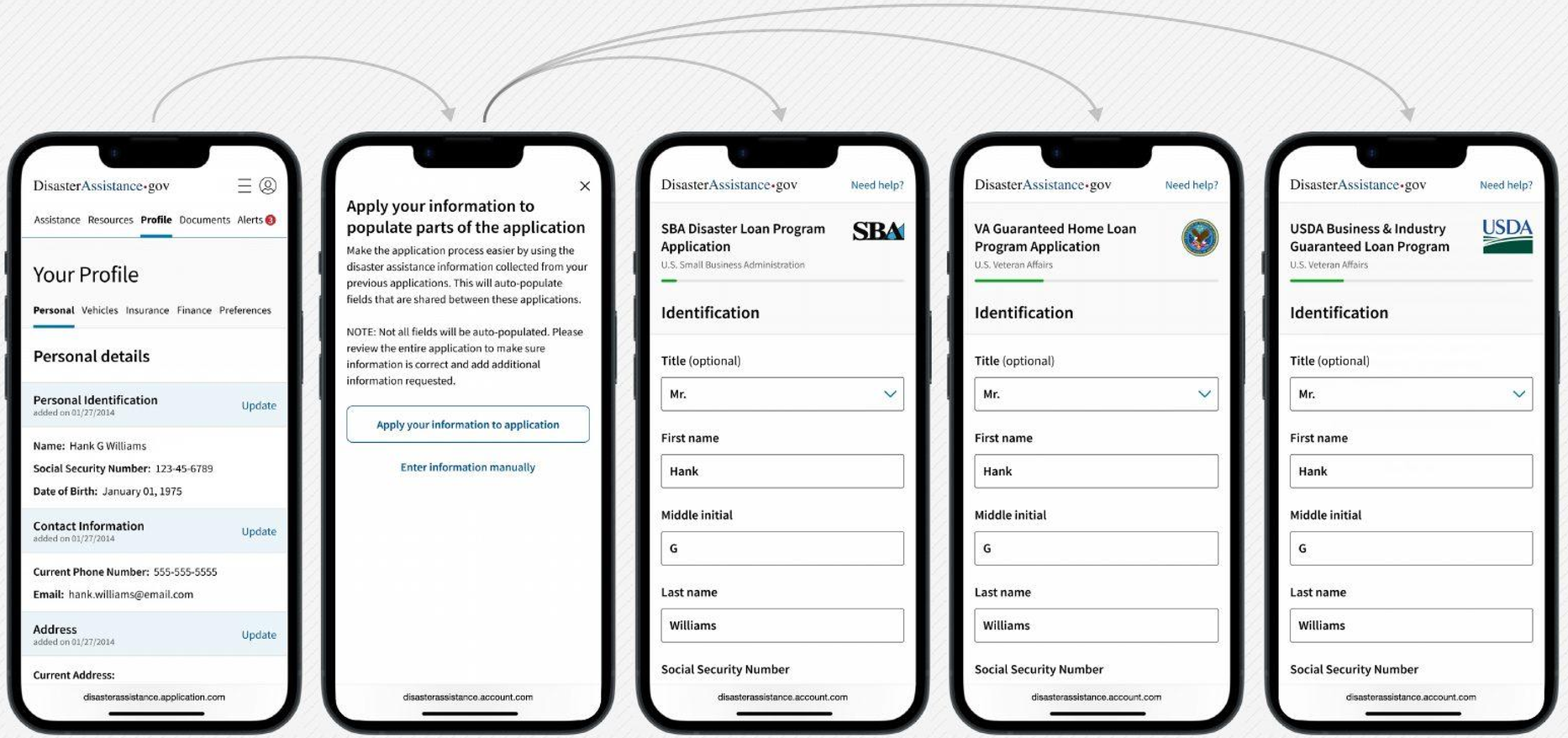
Unifying federal disaster assistance applications

We used FEMA's registration to set a new standard for other program applications.

Our goal was to consolidate all applications into a unified experience. Survivors could discover and initiate different applications from a centralized location. To improve the UX, each application utilized the same form design. Data was then pushed to related agencies for next steps.

We designed a modern mobile-friendly template that could be adapted to the brands and forms of other agencies.

We introduced the ability for users to store their information and documents under a profile so they could use it later to auto-populate applications that share inputs and document requirements. This was designed to simplify applications and alleviate stress, especially if users lost access to their paperwork and data after a disaster.



Information collected during FEMA Registration

Prompt to auto-populate other agency's application

SBA Disaster Loan Program Application

VA Guaranteed Home Loan Program Application

USDA Business & Industry Guaranteed Loan Program Application

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Improving usability and optimizing for mobile

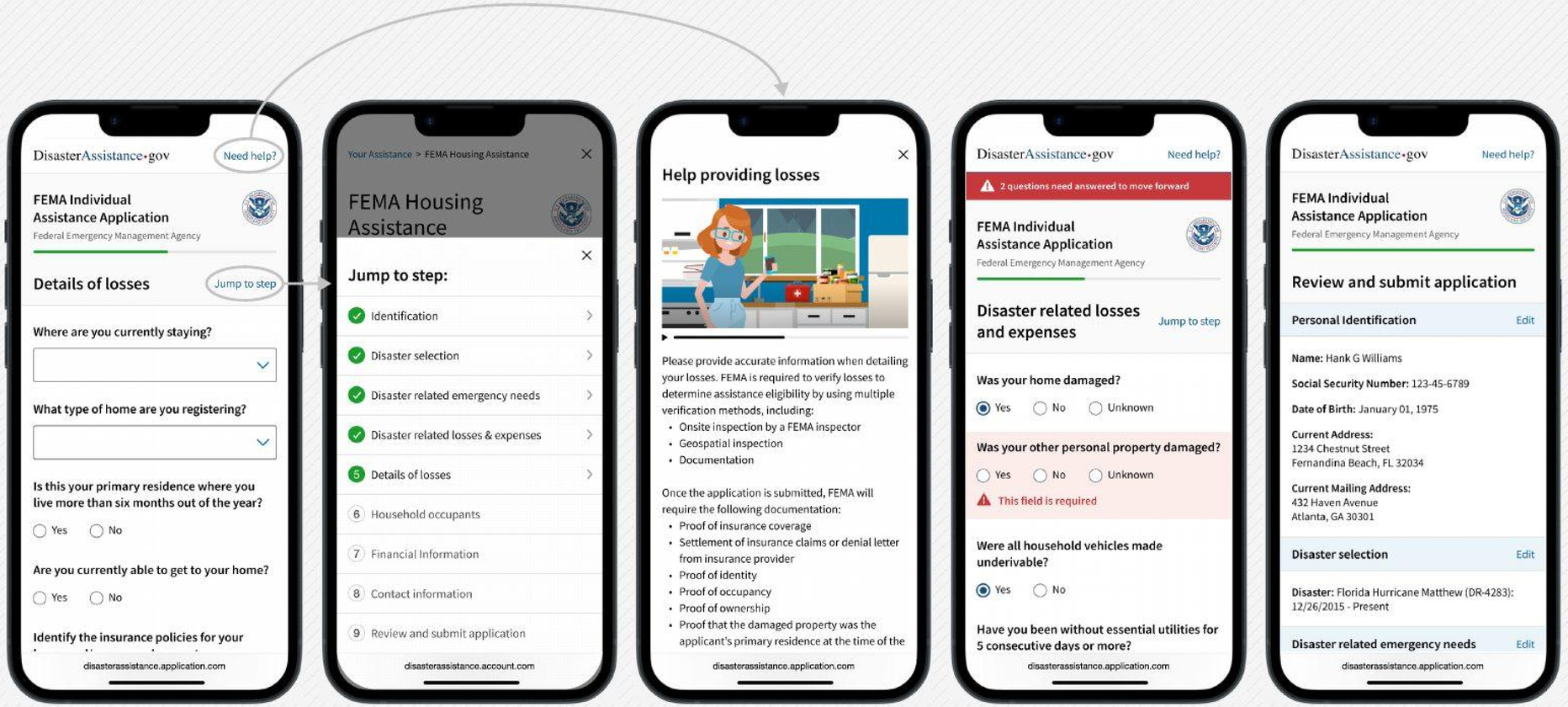
Due to most survivors only having access to mobile devices after a disaster, we took a mobile-first approach when designing new application form templates.

We designed a layout with clear visual hierarchy and alignment to the U.S. Web Design System.

We chose new UI for inputs, information, and error messages that improved usability and followed contemporary interaction patterns.

To improve the wayfinding and navigation of large forms, we added a progress bar, a menu that allowed users to jump between different steps, and a review screen that consolidated all provided information for verification.

Help information was also improved by consolidating external sources, making it easier to understand, and contextualizing it in the right place in the UI. This included video and graphics to better communicate information.



Application form design | **Application navigation** | **Help modal** | **Input errors** | **Summary**

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Prioritizing survivor emergency needs

During research, we discovered that FEMA geo-tagged local resources and damaged infrastructure in an iPad app. They provided this information to survivors in-person, but it was not for public use.

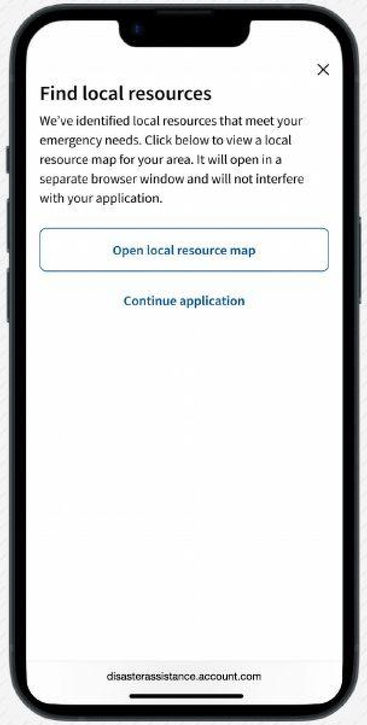
Life saving resources like food, water, shelter, and medical care are critical to survival and should be accessible. This takes priority over financial assistance.

During our prototyping, we introduced ways to get this in the hands of survivors. In FEMA's registration form, we moved emergency needs towards the beginning, and used the selections and damaged dwelling address to generate a local map with resources based on their immediate needs.

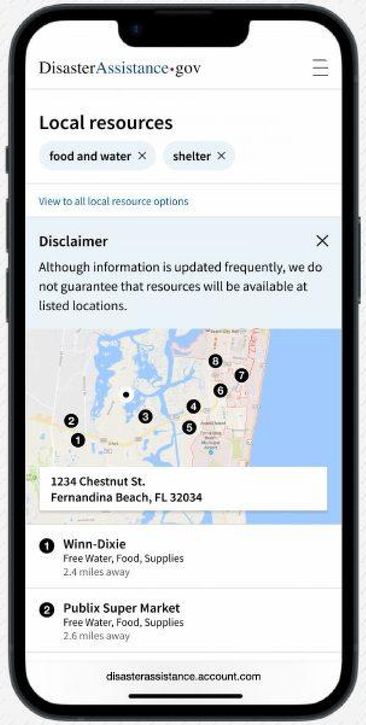
Survivors could open the map in a separate window without losing their place in the application. They could get directions to resources close to their location and provide FEMA with real time feedback about changes in resource availability.



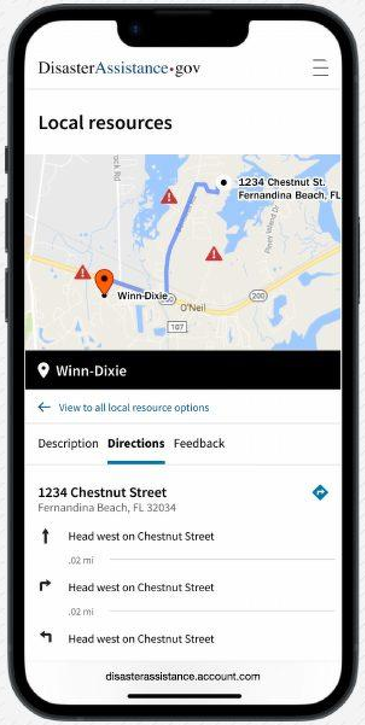
Collecting emergency needs upfront



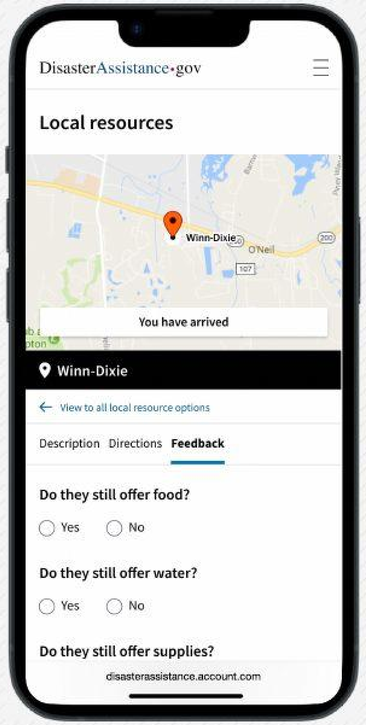
Providing immediate assistance without interfering with application



Making FEMA geo data available to survivors



Providing directions that avoid dangerous areas



Crowdsourcing availability of resources at locations

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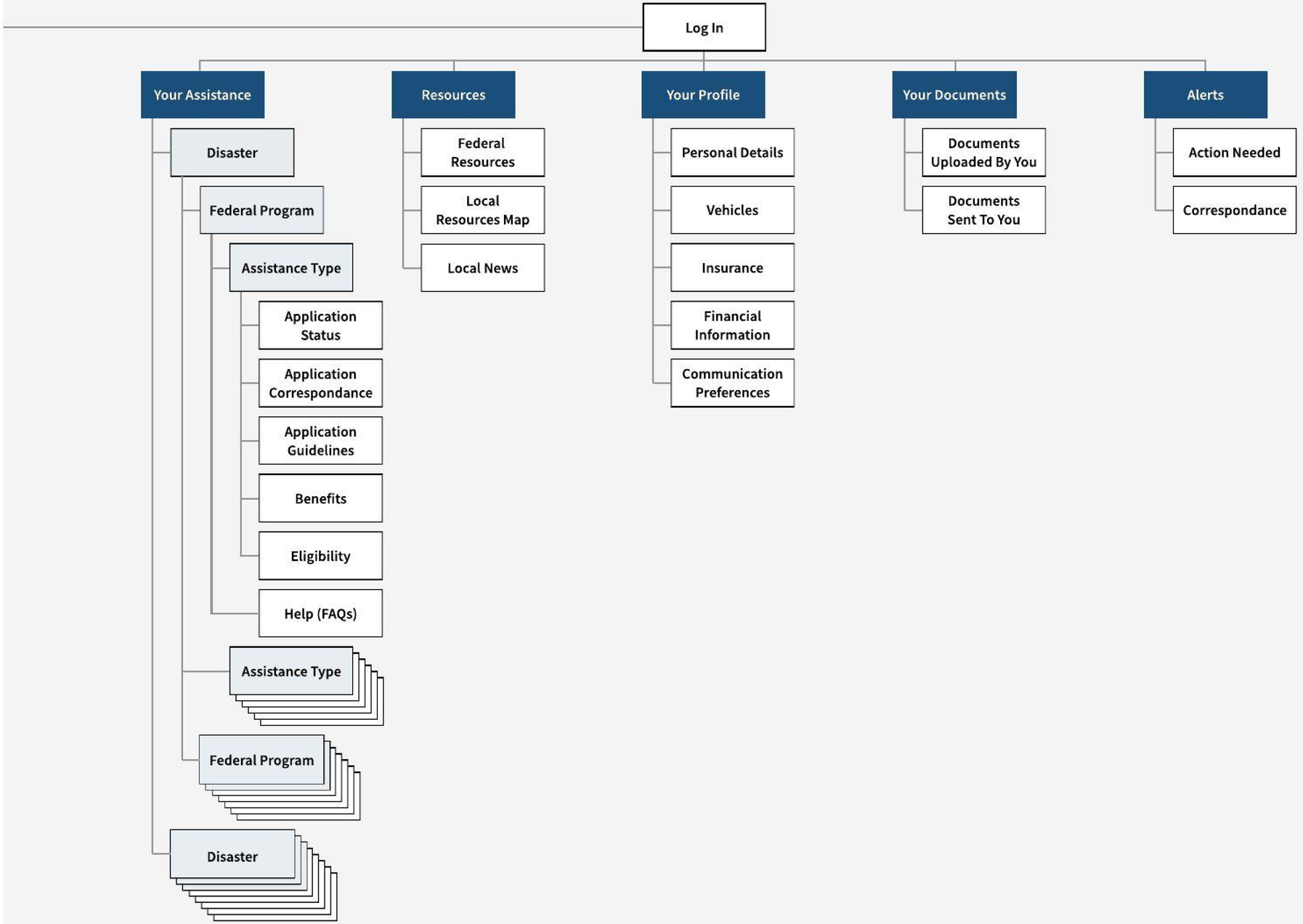
Expanding the Disaster Assistance Center

After FEMA registration, survivors are prompted to create a Disaster Assistance Center account where they could track their application status and view follow-up requests to take action on.

Our vision was to go beyond FEMA and expand it to become a single destination for disaster survivors to manage assistance across all programs and resources. We had to rethink the information architecture to account for multiple disasters, programs, and assistance types.

We added additional categories to the assistance dashboard like the ability to store and edit profile information and documents for applications and track communications across programs.

To address confusion uncovered during user testing, we simplified the existing navigation by consolidating overlapping categories and adopting plain language for labels.



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Disaster Assistance Center

The Disaster Assistance Center became a centralized location for managing all assistance.

After logging in, survivors used their Assistance dashboard to get a summary of their awards and applications with the ability to deep dive into specific assistance types.

The Resources section used survivor profiles to provide personalized recommendations of available federal and local resources that match their specific needs.

The Profile section allowed survivors to store and edit their personal information so they could reuse it to auto-populate future applications.

The Documents section was a repository of files sent by programs or uploaded by survivors. Files could be safely stored and sent to multiple programs to verify eligibility.

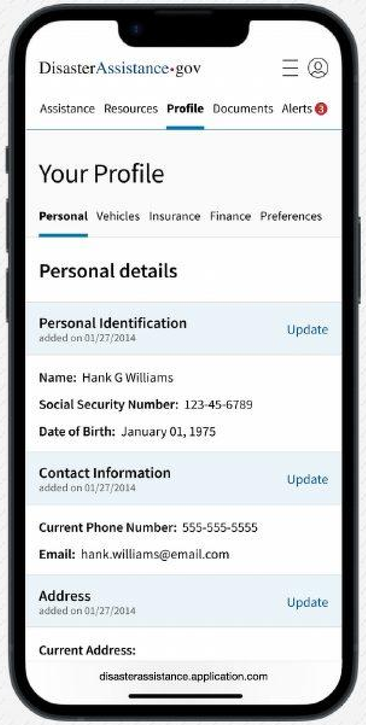
The Alerts section consolidated all correspondence and surfaced critical actions to complete online.



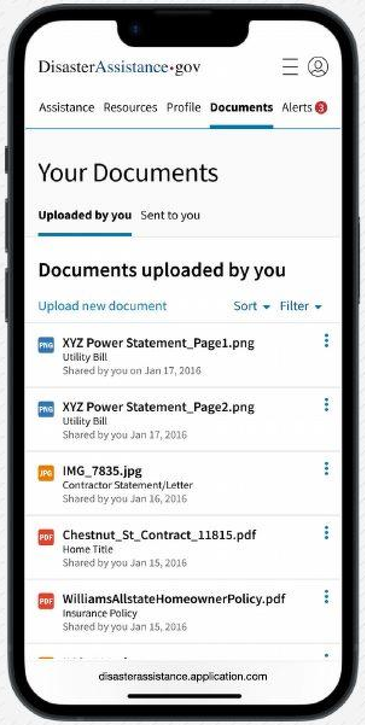
Dashboard for disaster assistance tracking



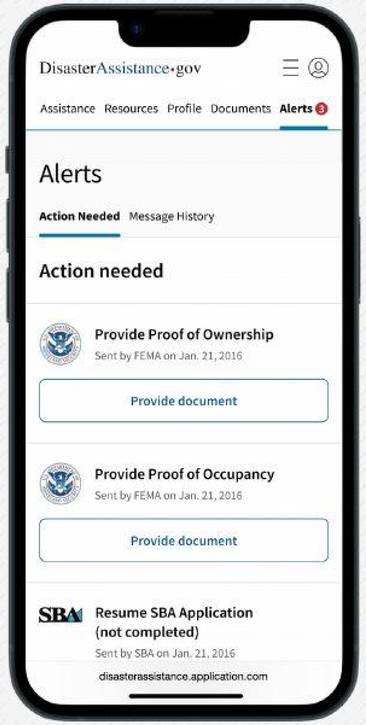
Personalized resource recommendations



Profile information sharable with applications



Document library for assistance documentation



Alerts for correspondence tracking and actions

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Application tracking and actions

The Disaster Assistance Center's most valuable capability was assistance tracking across all programs the survivor applied to.

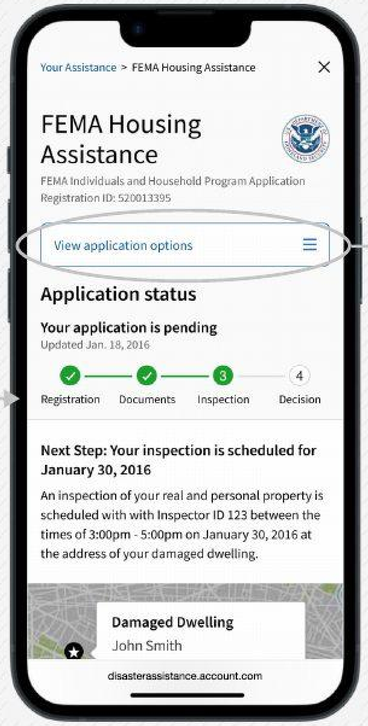
The Assistance dashboard detailed the survivor's assistance for each disaster they encountered. Each disaster provided a summary of total awards received, broken down into loans and grants. It also listed each program application the survivor submitted, which displayed the types of assistance offered and general approval status.

Survivors could click into a specific assistance type to get details of the program review process and the step they are on. Assistance pages also provided a history of correspondence with the program and helpful information about guidelines, benefits, eligibility, and FAQs.

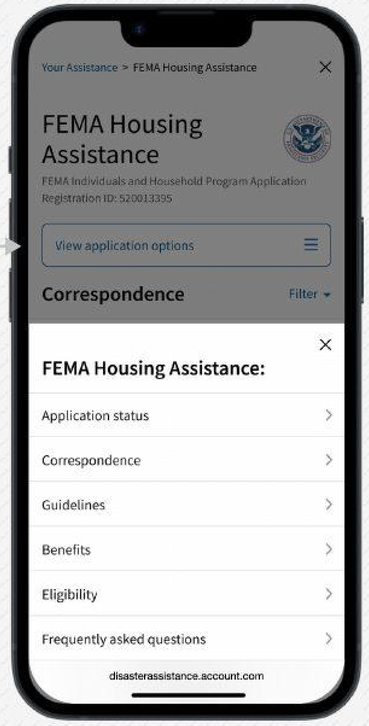
Survivors could take actions like uploading documents or changing inspection appointments.



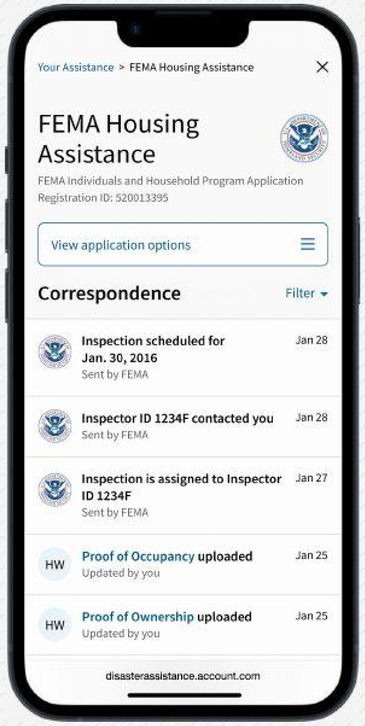
Assistance dashboard



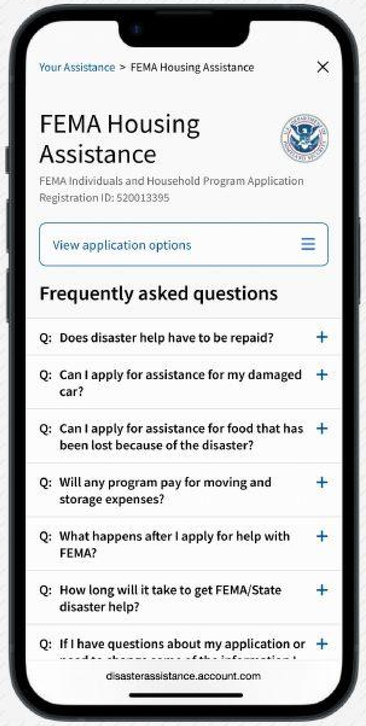
Application status



Application options



Correspondence



Frequently asked questions

Outcomes

- ✓ **FEMA approved the design strategy workstream under their existing contract.**
- ✓ **Including FEMA stakeholders in our design process built trust and generated excitement for change.**
- ✓ **Our team's contract was modified for an expanded scope of work and additional resources for building new features.**
- ✓ **We successfully shipped updates to FEMA's Individual Assistance registration and the Disaster Assistance Center.**

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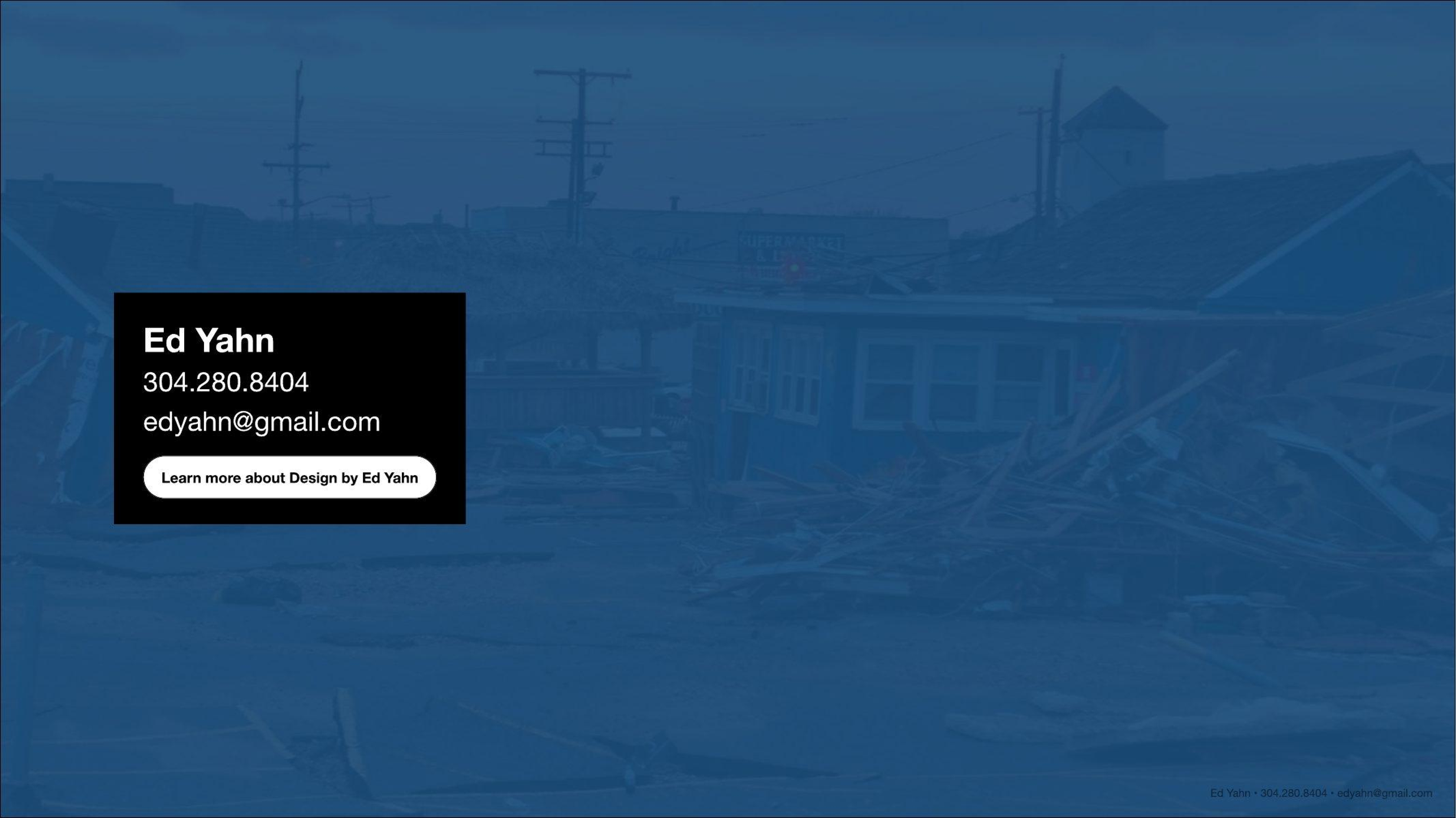

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Learn more about Design by Ed Yahn