Henry Post, COM 380

# Reflection

This project was conceived as a tool, a public service for other people to use. It wasn’t imagined with a specific educational goal in mind, or to teach people anything. However, that doesn’t mean that it carries no message or bias.

## My opinions on homelessness

I created this app because of my personal opinions on homelessness and how society should handle welfare of citizens. I have very strong opinions on how people should be treated by the state, society they live in, or entity which governs them.

The fact that homeless shelters exist or homelessness exists is a result of some sort of malfunction of the powers that be in respects to taking care of its citizens. Either through neglect, shifting blame, or willful blindness, people are on the streets. It is the U.S. government, and partially the long-standing culture of greed and indifference in the United States that helps cause this.

In other words, I believe homeless shelters are attempting to do the job that the state has failed to do. This applies to poor people as well. They are a result of a dysfunction in the distribution of resources in our society. Homelessness does not need to exist, and neither does poverty. They are symptoms of a disease. The simplest way for me to put it would be:

Homelessness is everyone’s problem but nobody wants to admit it’s theirs. The homeless aren’t the problem, but the attitude and actions towards them and their condition is.

And, further,

Homelessness is a problem because of the way we treat homeless people and how we view and interact with them.

## The origin of this app

In happier news, this project began as an idea that was wildly different from its current imagination: An application that would track the needs and locations of homeless people through a database and allow civilians to give them things they need to live, like food, clothing, toothpaste, etc.

This idea came from good intentions, but was too naive and put too much trust in its users to work. Many issues like abuse of features, homeless people not having phones, and how widely adopted a flawed application like that would get all forced me to re-imagine this project.

After having talked with my professor for COM 380, we discussed the act of donating things to homeless shelters and how it could be made easier for civilians. We thought, “If there were a way for donating to be painless, that would definitely encourage donations!”.

That is where the idea of **shelters coming to you** came from. If people could “donate while sitting on their butts”, i.e. with minimal or no effort, perhaps that would encourage donations!

The creation of an application like this also comes benefits, such as free organization, bookkeeping, tracking, centralization, standardization, and a framework for future applications similar to this that can be used, extended from, or simply looked at for reference.

I began the development process by choosing a framework for the web app to use, beginning to create the application, and then interviewing shelters for their input on the app. I have interviewed two shelters, one small and one large, about the app. I told them about the app and then asked them what they thought of my idea, what it lacked, and if it would benefit them.

From this, I gained valuable insight into the needs and limitations of homeless shelters. Not all have the same needs, and the needs vary by their type and size. Some contraints are space, the need for paperwork, the necessity of communicating unaccepted items to civilians, bookkeeping, and organization. I realized that the goods-donating part of their operations could greatly benefit from an automated tracking and donating system.

Using their suggestions and the notes I took from the meetings, I have a better understanding of what this app should do for shelters, and what their needs are.

## How COM 380 relates

I was, in part, inspired by the idea that people’s opinions, actions, and possibly even public policy can be shaped by social movements or the actions of others.

This is, in a way, a piece of interactive media that carries with it a message. Something like,

“I feel that the needs of my fellow citizens are not being met”

or more specifically,

“People are unnecessarily living in squalor, poverty, and suffering, which necessitates the creation of tools like these. This application is in response to the large amount of human suffering occurring.”

This idea of media created by ordinary citizens, like me, being able to shape the opinions of many and infuence large movements comes from “[Participatory Politics: Next-Generation Tactics to Remake Public Spheres](https://dmlhub.net/wp-content/uploads/files/9780262525770.pdf)”

According to [Elizabeth Soep](https://dmlhub.net/wp-content/uploads/files/9780262525770.pdf), this web application is more than ones and zeroes, but a piece of media that can shape people’s actions and ideas, and has the potential to change things in the ‘real world’, not just online.

I see many great possibilities that could come from this web application, if done correctly. It could also vanish into another dead, unmaintained school project/abandoned application if either done wrong or if no-one wants to use it.

Perhaps others would see what I am doing and adopt this app as a large, community-maintained project! Perhaps it could become a free community service nation-wide!

Another possibity is that it would be not widely adopted, and it is a personal project that ends up being discarded and forgotted. This could very reasonably happen, especially with respects to how much I, as its creator:

* Follow up with organizations
* Keep them (the orgs) updated
* Make sure I’m designing an app that meets **org requirements** and **org needs**, not ***my own potentially misguided ideas***
* Update and maintain it
* Ensure it meets UI/UX requirements and is reasonably easy to use

If this does happen, all hope is not lost. This is an open-source project unburdened by allegiance to a particular organization, but one that attempts to serve itself as a tool to be used to combat poverty and starvation of resources in, ideally, any context.

Because it ‘sells itself’ as such, it has the possiblity to either:

* Become a base framework from which new yet similar-in-spirit tools are developed, or
* Provoke the development of a similar solution or legislation which accomplishes a similar outcome