Milestone #4: Initial Stakeholder Interview

By this point, you've been thinking a lot about your app. You probably have a fairly good idea as to what you want it to look like, the functionality you want it to have, and how you see it situated against a landscape of competitors. Now we introduce one of the most important tenets of design research: as you design a product, you must always remember that you are designing it for someone else, not for yourself.

For this milestone, your task is to find representatives of the stakeholders you identified in Milestone #2, and conduct interviews with them. Interviewing is a skill that takes practice to perfect; it depends on both a combination of being prepared, but also being flexible to adjust the interview based on the responses that you are getting. As such, you are expected to prepare questions ahead of time, but you need not feel obligated to ask all of them if your interview goes in interesting, unanticipated directions.

Your primary goal here is to learn about the situation of the stakeholder, and what their *actual* needs are--you may be surprised to learn that their situation has elements to it that you didn't realize were at play. Do your best to assume nothing about them, though clearly your speculation about their needs will undoubtedly shape the initial questions you ask.

At first, **focus your questions on them; learn about their needs, wants, and situation**. Towards the end of the interview, you are welcome to share your ideas for your app thus far and get some preliminary feedback from the stakeholder. Were there any immediate problems or warnings that your stakeholder identified? Were there features that seemed really exciting to you that seemed irrelevant to the stakeholder? These are *great* things to identify--it isn't "bad" in the slightest if your initial ideas don't perfectly line up with the needs of the stakeholder; instead, it is an excellent opportunity to find ways for your design to evolve.

Try to avoid asking simple "yes/no" questions; ideally each question you ask should spark conversation, and help elaborate your understanding of their needs. **Again, the bulk of the interview should *not* read like this:**

<u>**You: We were thinking of including feature X. Does that sound like a good idea to you?**</u>

<u>**Them: Yes/No.**</u>

<u>Maybe one or two</u> questions like that at the end is alright, but other than providing you a momentary ego boost, it tells you very little about the actual nature of the issue(s) they are facing, nor does it provide you with actionable information with which to better your design. Likewise, the interview should not solely be them designing your app for you! Although having them describe a dream tool can be a useful element of the interview, it should not be the primary focus or content.

Be respectful of their time. If the interview needs to be cut short for whatever reason, let them end it, and let me know in your submission.

If you identified stakeholders in milestone 2 that you don't know how to find, you may pick different, more easily accessible stakeholders. If you need help with this, come speak with me. If I encouraged you to broaden your stakeholder base in your feedback for Milestone 2, I hope that you take that into account for these interviews.

You may decide how to conduct these interviews as works best for your team. A one-on-one interview is fine. Having two team members present---one to focus on conducting the interview and another to silently take notes---can also be an effective strategy. You also may want to consider a dyadic interview, in which you have two stakeholders present. Such a setup enables the stakeholders to speak with one another throughout the process, and can often result in a more relaxed, casual dialogue.

Recording the interview in some fashion is encouraged, but *only* after receiving permission from the stakeholder(s) first. If they decline to be recorded, you'll just have to take extra good notes.

Clearly in light of our current pandemic circumstances you should only meet in person if you and your teammates and your stakeholders feel comfortable doing so. Be smart and be safe. A Zoom interview is completely fine (and much more easily recordable).

Each team will be expected to submit two things:

***The raw text of interviews with three different stakeholders**. This includes both the questions asked and the responses given. As mentioned above, you are encouraged to record the interview to make the transcription process easier. Just make sure you get permission from the person you are interviewing first!

***A 2-3 page "interview synthesis" report**, that identifies important insights and throughlines garnered through the interview process. These insights might be things that were important across all stakeholders, ideas that seemed important to specific individuals, or discoveries that you found particularly surprising or helpful. **This report should also include some discussion regarding how what you learned from conducting these interviews will change the direction of your app.**