

# Memo

**To:** Dr. Derek Ross, Dr. Leigh Gruwell, Dr. Stewart Whittemore  
**From:** Carolina Bell  
**Re:** ADPH User Research Project Meta-Analysis  
**Date:** April 7, 2025

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This memo describes the goals, development, and design choices for the ADPH User Research Project.

## Introduction

My project partner was Mst Nur E Taj Tamanna. I served as the team leader and drove the direction of the research and document development. We designed and conducted a usability test on the Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH) website. This document is our final report with our research findings.

## Audience and Purpose

This document was produced for ENGL 7010: Technical and Professional Communication: Issues and Approaches with Dr. Stewart Whittemore. The purpose of the document was to communicate the findings of the user research project. The audience was Dr. Whittemore and ADPH.

## Significance

In the workplace, social justice may not be an explicit priority. User Experience (UX) and usability have increasing weight in industry. User research is an avenue for technical communication practitioners to increase equity. This project is an example of how scientific and medical communication is impacted by the design of information, which underscores my larger argument for technical communicators in science communication.

### *Social Justice Considerations in UX*

I chose the Alabama Department of Public Health website to test, given the greater implications it has. Alabama has the third worst overall life expectancy in the United States and has a variety of healthcare disparities in different populations (Alabama Department of Health, 2020). With nearly 1 out of 5 Alabamians live below the federal poverty line, there are many barriers and social determinants to health. The research project was not just about the pure usability of the website, but for considerations of marginalized populations.

Rose (2016) highlights how user-centered design can be used for advocacy and how marginalized populations must be considered as users. Bartolotta (2019) emphasizes that usability research itself cannot be ethical if acting under a larger oppressive system and calls on research to be immersed in the greater context and implications of their work.

## Goals and Testing Design

This topic shows how technical communicators can support access of information to the public. One of the main goals of the study was to understand how the design of the website either facilitated or prevented access to health information for users in Alabama. The process for this document included developing an initial research plan, conducting research, analyzing the data, and compiling the report.

### *Methodology*

We developed our testing methodology in accordance with testing design principles from Barnum (2011). We developed personas and test scenarios to create specified contexts of use. We made sure to define user profiles, create task-based scenarios, and use a think-aloud process as identified by Barnum for small studies.

We used marginalized personas to consider how the website functions for vulnerable population (Rose, 2016). Our first persona uninsured and low-income pregnant woman in Macon County, AL. Our second persona was also a low-income woman seeking breast cancer information.

### *Document Design*

For our final report, we compiled recommendations into a shorter abstract to create a short summary for those who cannot read the entire document. We also created a table of contents for easy navigation and appendices with more detailed testing information for reference.

## References

- Alabama Department of Public Health. (2020). *2020 Alabama State Health Assessment*.  
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- Barnum, C. M. (2020). *Usability testing essentials: Ready, set... test!*. Morgan Kaufmann.
- Bartolotta, J. (2019). Usability testing for oppression. *Communication Design Quarterly Review*, 7(3), 16-29.
- Rose, E. J. (2016). Design as advocacy: Using a human-centered approach to investigate the needs of vulnerable populations. *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication*, 46(4), 427-445.