

Case Study (Conceptual Work):

“ImpactLocal: A Civic Engagement App” – Designing an App for Increasing Civic Engagement Amongst Young People

Project Overview

Project: ImpactLocal – Civic Engagement Information for Young People

Roles: UX Designer & Research Lead

Timeline: 12 Weeks

Tools: Figma, Adobe Photoshop, Pen & Paper, Tablet

Summary: Many young people new to engaging with their communities often felt overwhelmed and unsure where to begin to make sure their voices were heard. To change that, I led the UX design of ImpactLocal, a mobile app designed to empower young people with clear, accessible information about community events and political opportunities. This case study explores how a foundation of empathy and looking beyond frustration helped to reveal a deeper need—resources that help young people take control of their own future. The resulting design values trust, simplicity, and accessibility to help young people gain the confidence they need to step forward and engage with the community in the ways that truly matter to them.

Problem Statement

User Pain Points:

- *Overwhelmed by lack of clear information*
- *Felt like student voices were not taken seriously at community events*
- *Difficulty keeping track of events, petitions, and meetings across multiple platforms*

Users found it challenging to balance their daily responsibilities with becoming involved with their local community. To support them, the mobile app had to provide one clear place for planning and accessing needed information to make it easier for users to decide how, when, and where they want to engage with others. The app is a tool designed to help support young people in confidently making their own choices and expressing their opinions in a meaningful way.

Why ImpactLocal Was Necessary:

Users new to civic participation often feel overwhelmed and disconnected, unsure where to begin or how to access resources that are available to them. To address these barriers, there was a need for a centralized, accessible platform that simplified the process of finding community events, understanding voting information, and connecting with local representatives. The app was designed to meet these needs by streamlining essential civic tools into one intuitive experience for young people.

Goals:

1. Create a Centralized Information Platform
2. Empower Users to Make Their Own Decisions
3. Accessibility

My Roles

Roles: UX Designer & Researcher

Contributions:

- Conducted user interviews and usability tests to identify unmet needs and uncover behavioral patterns
- Synthesized research findings through empathy mapping and journey mapping workshops to reveal key insights and opportunities
- Created and refined early design concepts, turning low-fidelity sketches into structured digital wireframes to explore user flows and layouts
- Developed interactive prototypes to validate design hypotheses and collect actionable user feedback
- Applied an iterative, evidence-driven design approach – continuously refining solutions based on research insights and usability testing outcomes

Process and Methods

Empathize

Sample User Persona:

Persona: Aaliyah

Problem statement:

Aaliyah is a college student who needs to balance her studies, help out at home, and have fun because she wants to explore all local political events while learning how to stay in contact with her representatives.



Aaliyah

Age: 19
Education: Enrolled in college, Political Science major
Hometown: San Antonio, TX
Family: Lives with mother, father, and one sibling
Occupation: Full time student

"I am interested in local politics, but there seems to be a very high barrier to entry into it"

Goals

- Wants simplified information about local politics that is more easily accessible
- Wants detailed instructions how to contact local representatives

Frustrations

- Finds city government website confusion and hard to navigate
- Feels unsure about how to make sure her voice is heard

Aaliyah is a first year college student majoring in Political Science at a community college. She is very comfortable with technology and wants to understand how to advocate for climate policy in her city.

I conducted user research with four participants, aged 18 to 25, and used their perspectives to inform empathy maps and personas that captured the challenges and priorities that shaped their daily lives. By attentively listening to what participants shared and observing nonverbal cues such as body language, I uncovered meaningful pain points with existing tools designed to foster civic engagement among young people. Initially, I assumed that involvement in local politics—particularly voting—would be a minor focus for most participants. However, the research revealed a more nuanced reality: while community and political engagement often takes a backseat for young people, it holds deep significance for others with issues that align with their values.

Key Insight: Many participants expressed that meeting basic personal and life needs often takes precedence; meaning civic participation tends to follow when causes feel directly relevant and impactful. Building on these findings, I created user journey maps for each persona to visualize their motivations, behaviors, and emotional responses when interacting with tools aimed at increasing community and political involvement.

Define

To define the problem, I used the insights I gained in the empathize phase from users to define the main problem statement.

Main Problem: Many young people--whether students, professionals, or caregivers—face the challenge of balancing everyday responsibilities and personal well-being while also trying to learn about and engage with their communities. They need accessible tools that make it easier to

stay informed about local events, voting opportunities, and political issues without adding extra stress, so they can focus on their lives while participating meaningfully when it matters to them.

Ideate

I prioritized consistency, neutral language, and accessibility in the design.

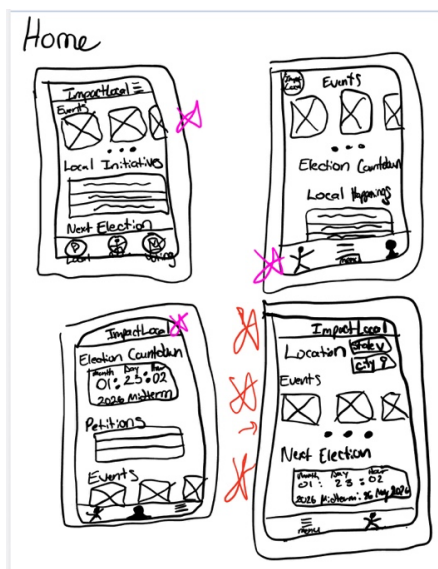
Key areas:

- **Color:** A simple, cohesive palette of black, green, and yellow were chosen to ensure consistency with ImpactLocal's brand identity across all screens, ensuring a clear and recognizable visual language.
- **Language Choices:** The wording used for explanations and buttons was intentionally written in neutral and inclusive language, aimed to appeal to a broad audience and avoids unintentionally triggering emotional responses, which is particularly important given the polarizing nature of politics.
- **Accessibility:** ImpactLocal offers customizable settings, including high-contrast mode, larger text options, and enlarged buttons to accommodate different user needs. Additionally, care was taken to cross-reference with WCAG accessibility guidelines with the major design decisions and to foster a more equitable, user-friendly experience for all.

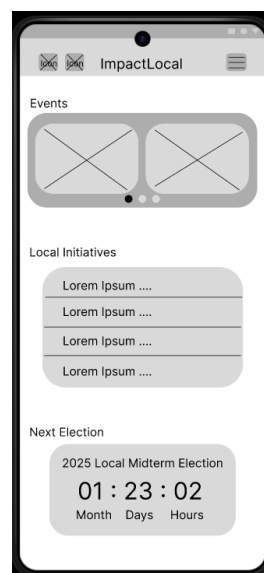
Mobile App Designs:

I started by designing for the mobile interface as I anticipated that optimizing for a smaller screen would present a more constrained design challenge, allowing for a smoother transition to a larger, more complex website layout later down the road.

Sample Mobile Design Wireframes:

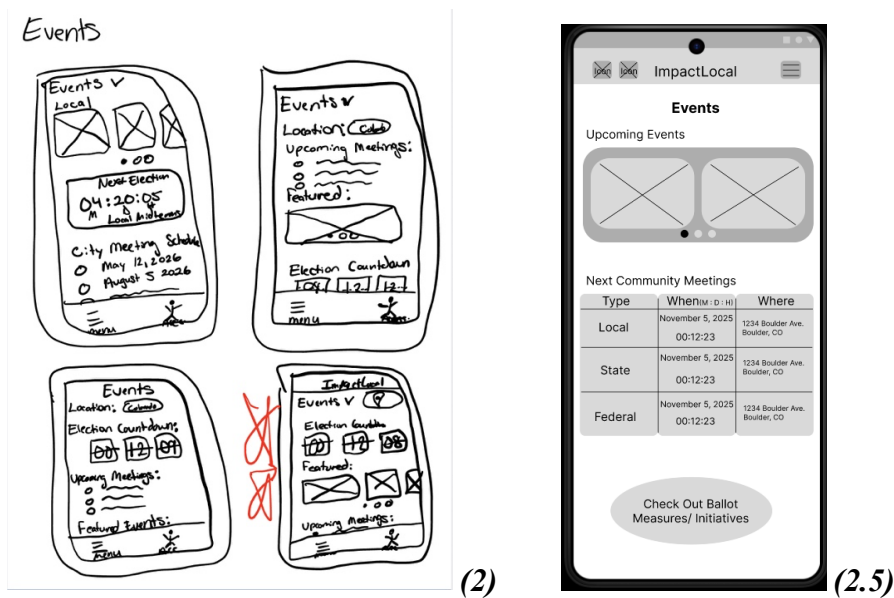


(1)



(1.5)

1. & 1.5 Home page paper wireframe samples and digital wireframe low-fidelity design



2. & 2.5 Events Page wireframe samples and final

Prototype

A link to the low-fidelity mobile prototype can be found [here](#).

The prototype was iteratively refined throughout usability testing sessions, with participant feedback guiding improvements in accessibility and minimizing friction around common pain points. After each session, key issues were addressed promptly to ensure the design evolved in direct response to user needs.

Common Issues and How They Were Addressed:

- **Test Icons Were Unclear:** The low-fidelity design had placeholder icons that were not descriptive enough to the function of the icon and this was fixed by utilizing Google's Material Design library to match the Android mobile prototype template chosen and utilizing icons for common and clear purpose. The icons used were the universally accepted accessibility menu icon and location icon in addition to a back arrow and hamburger menu.

- **Homepage Didn't Have All of the Necessary Basic Features:** The homepage was initially just the top main features, the events carousel, local initiatives, and the election countdown. There was another feature that this was determined to be needed by users, a way to get to the representatives' page (other than the hamburger menu). A button to take users directly to the representatives' page was added to the main page to fix the issue.

Test

I ran unmoderated usability tests with 6 people each time to gain user feedback and insight into the designs to iterate through the design process to improve upon the current designs.

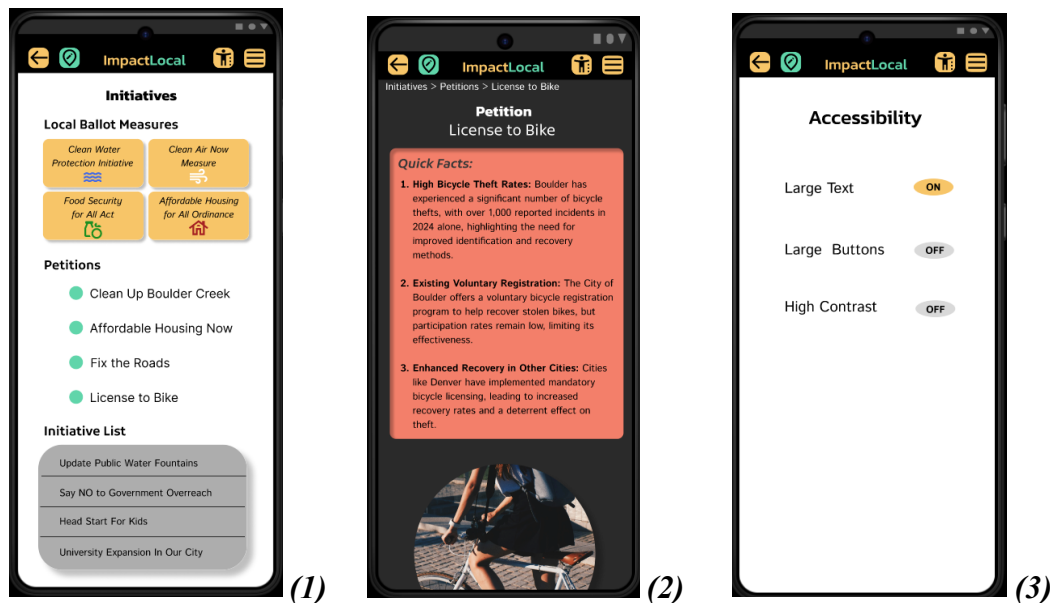
Big Takeaways From Testing:

- Users were generally moderately satisfied with the functionality and usability of the app.
- Having others review important features and animations is important to make sure designs are fluid and functional for testing.
- While it's unlikely that every user will be fully satisfied with the design, it's essential to prioritize common feedback to guide future improvements that can be expanded to meet the basic needs of all users.

Final Solution

A link to the full high-fidelity mobile prototype can be found [here](#).

Sample of Mobile Mockups:



1. Initiatives Page

2. Petition: License to Bike (High Contrast)

3. Accessibility Menu (Large Text)

Each feature was designed to simplify a user's decision fatigue, reduce stress, and create a more empowering experience for users beginning their journey to become more civically engaged.

Important Features:

- **Events Carousel:** A centralized hub that allows users to quickly navigate to an event they are interested in or shows them a range of events if they are just exploring and looking for events.
- **Representatives' Page:** A comprehensive guide to city, state, and federal representatives within the location selected helps users to learn more about each representative and how to contact them with concerns.
- **Accessibility Menu & Accessibility Overlays:** A basic, but effective and easily accessible menu with different options on how to make the user experience more customizable to meet the needs of different users. The overlays are hidden from the prototype but are accessible upon request to the design and are focused on key screens.

Results & Impact

Users were generally somewhat satisfied with the current functionality of the app with 80% of users giving a 3/5 for satisfaction when using the app. The usability of the app was generally considered good with 70% of users selecting 4/5 when using the app.

- User Quotes:

- o "The pages are easy to find and read." - Study Participant A
- o "I like that it's not hidden!" (when talking about the accessibility menu) – Study Participant B

Reflection

This project reminded me that UX can be challenging to balance out different perspectives and user needs. By leading with empathy, I was able to design solutions that were useful and not completely novel which helped to respond to a range of users' needs and wants in an app to get

young people involved in politics. Looking back, I would have prioritized involving more users overall earlier in the design process. With the resource limitations, I made the best of what I had, but there is room for improvement in incorporating a more diverse range of users in terms of ability level, race, gender, and so on and so forth. The users' feedback during testing offered valuable insights into accessibility considerations and what made sense to include for younger people in an app designed for them. It helped me see the product from different perspectives. Including more people from the beginning would have led to an even more inclusive and impactful design.

Next Steps:

1. **Expand accessibility options** within the settings page and with overlays (i.e. tab order, annotations, etc.) to allow for further customization, ensuring a more inclusive experience for users with diverse ranges of needs.
2. **Add a Bias Checker to help users be able to see which news sites lean politically** to improve critical thinking about information presented and give users the option to see that different news sources report on similar things, just differently.
2. **Ensure a smooth handoff to the development team** by labeling design components more clearly and creating annotations that align with common development frameworks, making the implementation process more efficient and less prone to errors due to lack of communication for developers.