# PathPioneer: First-Gen Career Coaching Case Study

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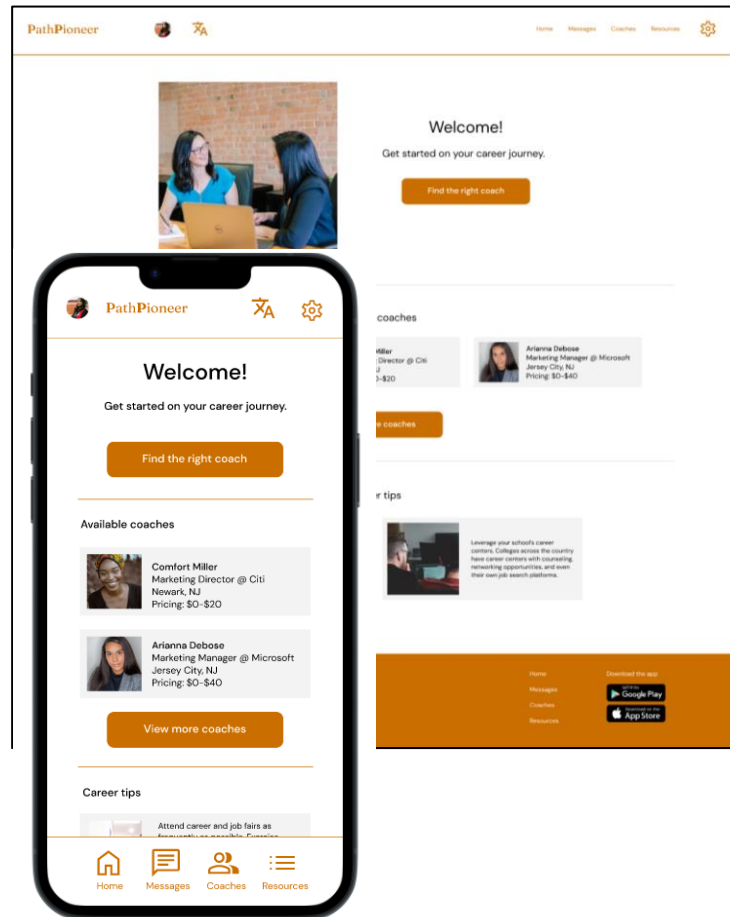
# Project overview

**The product:**

PathPioneer is a multi-platform career coaching service to help first-generation college students navigate the job market with tailored resources and the advice of professionals with similar lived experiences.

**Project duration:**

March 2023 – April 2023

# Project overview

## The problem:

One-third of all college students in the US are first-generation. This population feels pressure to succeed in the job market but without the same resources, connections, and tools as their counterparts.

## The goal:

Design a multi-platform career coaching service to help first-generation college students and recent graduates.

# Project overview

**My role:**

Lead UX designer and UX researcher

**Responsibilities:**

- Conduct research
- Create wireframes and prototypes
- Conduct usability studies

# Understanding the user

- User research
- Personas
- Problem statements
- User journey maps

# User research: summary

I started conducting my research by recruiting first-generation college students and recent graduates to interview. These first-gen students spanned from ages 18-26 and different demographics between gender and ethnic background. I held ~15 minutes interviews over the phone with permission to record the calls for notetaking.

Participants reported that they felt lost at one point in their college career, and that having some type of mentorship helped them to succeed. I wanted to make this mentorship more readily accessible.

# Persona: **Sal**

**Problem statement:**

Sal is a first-gen college senior who needs guidance on discovering his personality, interests, and career goals because they want to take the appropriate steps toward a fulfilling career after graduation.



**Sal**

**Age:** 22
**Education:** BS in Computer Science
**Hometown:** Brooklyn, NYC
**Family:** 2 younger siblings
**Occupation:** College Student

*"I'm hardworking, motivated, and determined to succeed. I'm looking for any opportunity to grow."*

**Goals**
- Find a fulfilling career that will allow him to support himself and his family
- Guidance on how to navigate the job market and what steps he needs to take to achieve his career goals

**Frustrations**
- Lacks the network and connections that many of his peers have
- Unsure of career path
- Cannot identify his strengths in the field

Sal is a first-generation college student who comes from a low-income family. He is currently a senior majoring in computer science and is anxious about his future career prospects. He knows that having a college degree is important, but he is unsure of how to navigate the job market and what career path he should pursue. He feels like he is at a disadvantage compared to his peers who have parents that can offer career advice and connections.

# Persona: **Gloria**

**Problem statement:**

Gloria is a first-gen college graduate who needs to develop their professional network because they lack the connections and experience needed to find a job that uses their skillset.

**Gloria**

**Age:** 25
**Education:** Marketing
**Hometown:** Atlanta, GA
**Family:** 1 sibling
**Occupation:** College graduate

*"I'm a creative problem solver and willing to take risks to achieve my goals."*

**Goals**
- Find a job that will allow her to use her skills to make a meaningful contribution
- Gain more experience in the field
- Develop her professional network

**Frustrations**
- Doesn't have connections
- Doesn't know how to network
- Lacks experience in the field

Gloria is a first-generation college graduate from a working-class, immigrant family. She recently graduated with a degree in marketing, but she is struggling to find a job in her field. She feels overwhelmed and discouraged because she does not have any connections in the industry, and she is not sure how to get her foot in the door.

# Competitive audit

I created an audit to research competitors and find gaps that PathPioneer could address and solve.
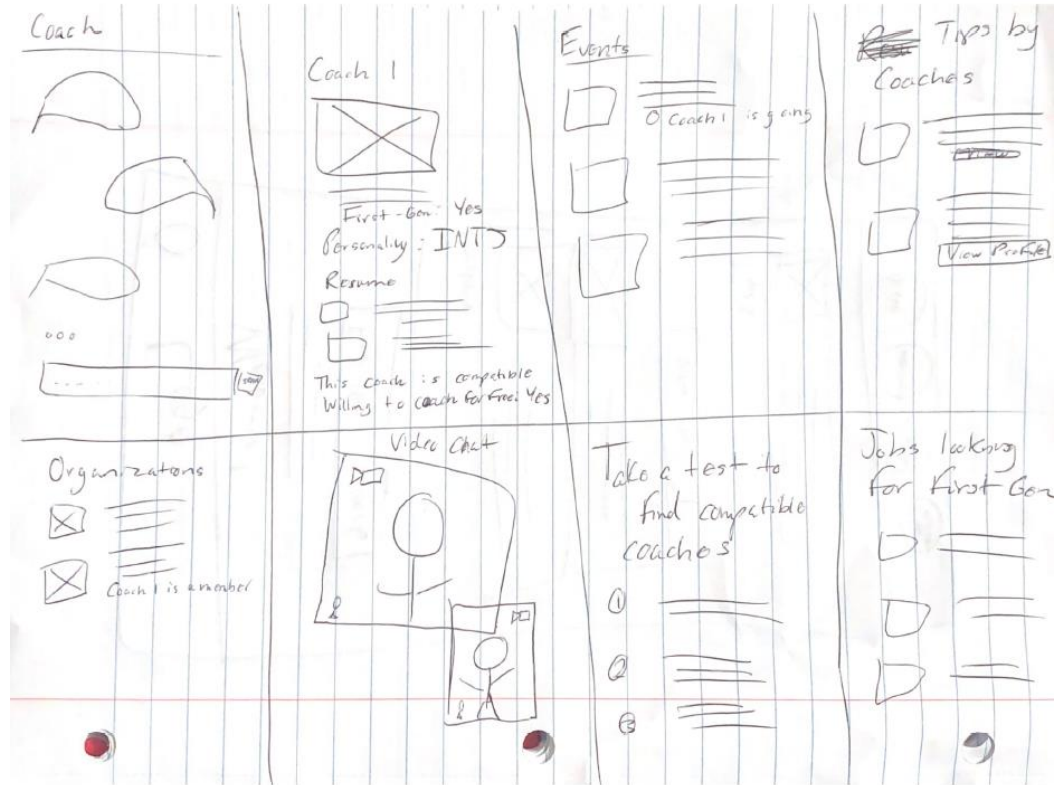
| | Competitor type (direct or indirect) | Location(s) | Product offering | Price ($ - $$$$) | Website (URL) | Business size (small, medium, large) | Target audience |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| LinkedIn | Indirect | Mountain View, CA | Social media for professionals | Free, varied cost depending services (premium, LinkedIn learning, etc.) | linkedin.com | Large | Current and future professionals |
| TheMuse | Indirect | New York City, NY | Job list, Career coaching and advice | Free, Varied cost depending on coach | https://www.themuse.com/ | Large | Employers and anyone looking for jobs |
| Rees | Indirect | Brooklyn, NY | Career coaching and advice | Free | No website | Small | Prospective professionals |

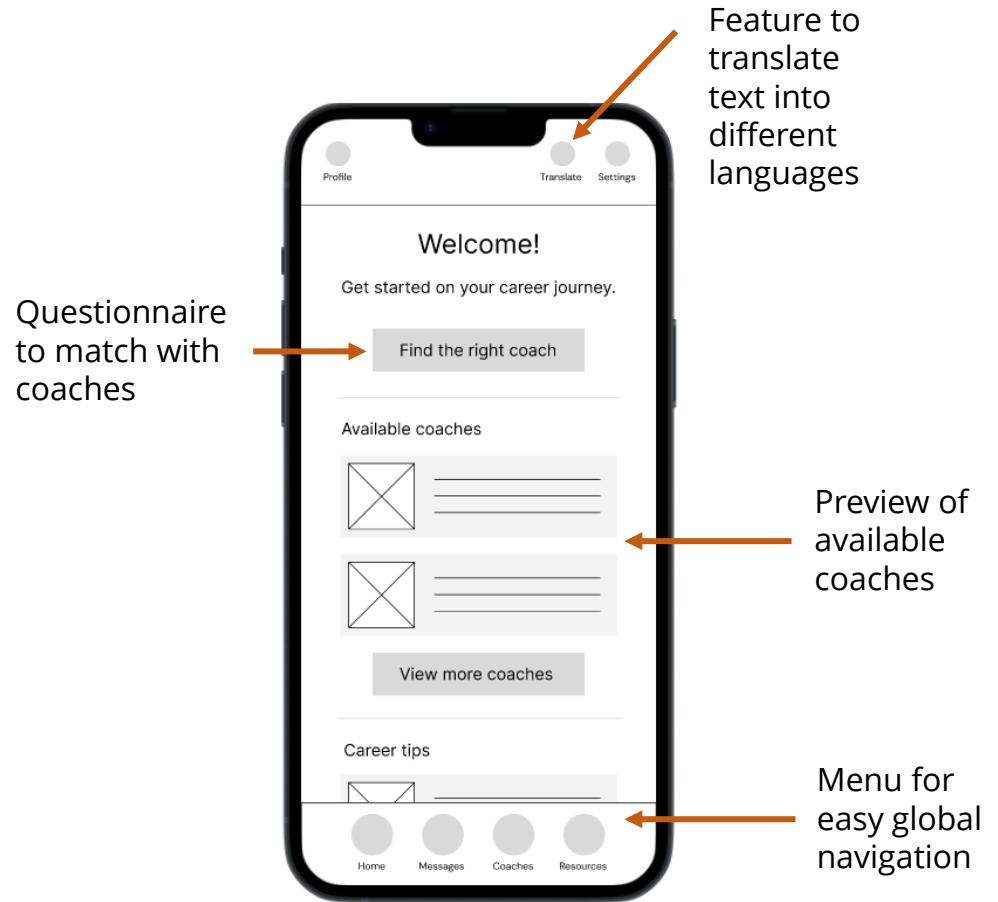| First impressions | | Features | Accessibility | Intera |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Desktop website experience | App or mobile website experience | | | |
| **Okay** <br> + all features are available <br> - can feel overloaded with information | **Okay** <br> + all features are available like the desktop version <br> - can feel overloaded with information | **Good** <br> - You can job search, seek tips, see people's posts, take courses, connect and message people, and view the news | **Okay** <br> + High contrast, big fonts, works with keyboard, large use of images, works with screen reader <br> - Information is sectioned off but very close together on desktop | |
| **Good** <br> + Shows unique value proposition and features available <br> - Allows you to perform all features | **Needs work** <br> - No app | **Good** <br> - You can book career coaching, gain advice, and job search | **Okay** <br> + high contrast, works with screen reader <br> - works with keyboard but focused link is not highlighted | |
| **Needs work** <br> - No desktop experience | **Okay** <br> + all features are available <br> + simple UI <br> - could have more detail | **Good** <br> + you can have conversations with coaches, get email and resume templates, and gain advice/tips | **Needs work** <br> - Color contrast and spacing could improve | |

[Click to see full Competitive Audit](#)

# Ideation

I performed a quick ideation exercise called Crazy 8s to address gaps found in the competitive audit. I focused on making features **specific to the needs of first-gen students and graduates**.

# Starting the design

- Paper wireframes
- Digital wireframes
- Low-fidelity prototype
- Usability studies

# Digital wireframes: Homepage

The purpose of the homepage is to give a preview of what the app provides. These designs help the user view all available features and access easy global navigation through the app.

Feature to translate text into different languages

Questionnaire to match with coaches

Preview of available coaches

Menu for easy global navigation

Profile

Translate    Settings

Welcome!

Get started on your career journey.

Find the right coach

Available coaches

View more coaches

Career tips

Home    Messages    Coaches    Resources

# Digital wireframes: Coaches page

After ideation, the purpose of the "Available Coaches" page is to list out the coaches on this platform. The user can also search and filter out coaches based on their needs.

Ability to search and filter for desired coach
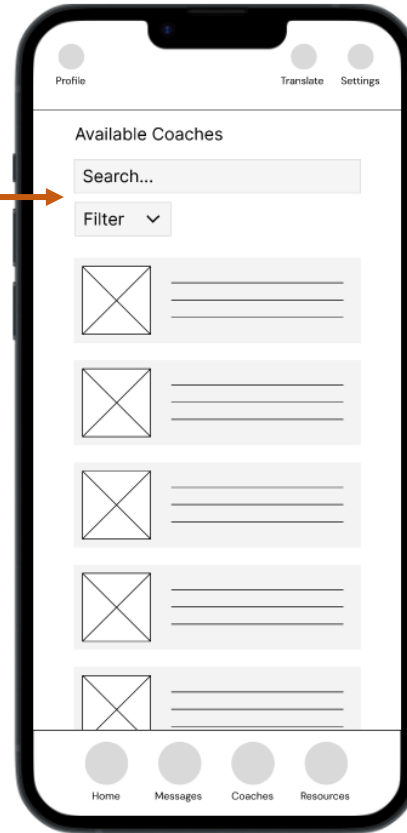
List of available coaches

# Digital wireframes: Coach Profile

The purpose of the "Coach Profile" page is for coaches to share their experience for users to make an informed decision on connecting with them via call or direct message.
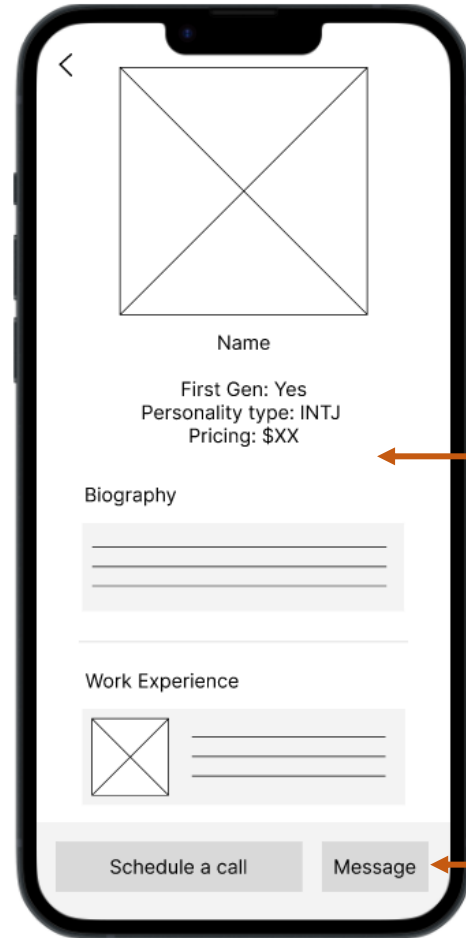


Information about the coach

Option to schedule a call or message coach

# Low-fidelity prototype

To prepare for usability prototype, I created a low-fidelity prototype so that participants can view the flow to schedule a call with a coach.

[Low-fidelity prototype for PathPioneer career coaching app](#)
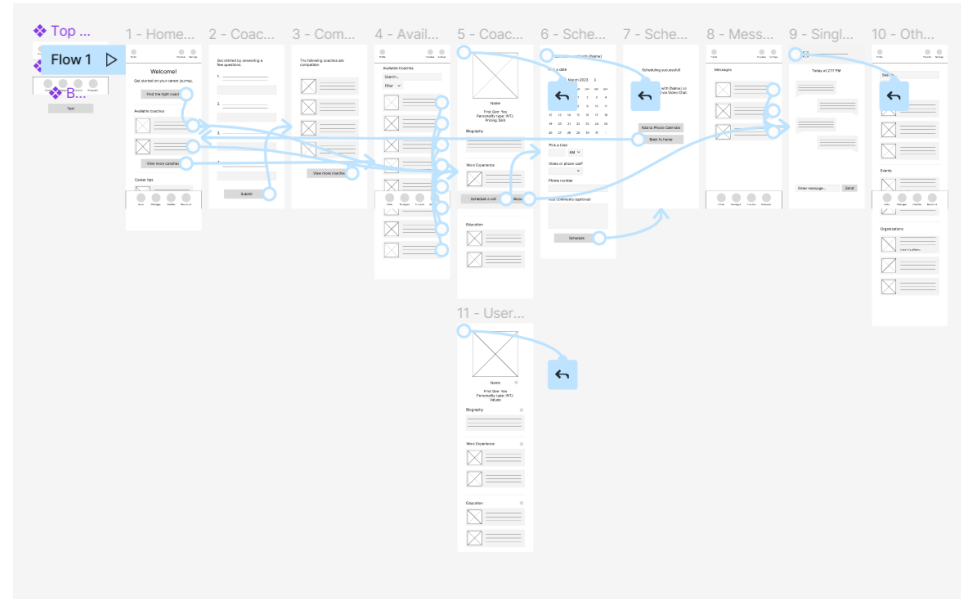
# Usability study: parameters

**Study type:** Moderated Usability Study

**Location:** United States (Remote)

**Participants:** 5

**Length:** 15-20 minutes

# Usability study: findings

These are the main findings from the usability study:

**1**

## Networking

Users want to know who's going to which events or affiliated with which organization.

**2**

## Input fields

Users need more specific answer formats for the questionnaire.

**3**

## Upcoming calls

Users need to save their scheduled calls somewhere on the app.

# Refining the design

- Mockups
- High-fidelity prototype
- Accessibility

# Mockups:

Based on the insights from the usability study, I edited the design of the input fields for the questionnaire. The user is now able to add multiple, separate answers for the first three questions and a range for the last two via dropdowns.

**Before the usability study**

Get started by answering a few questions.

1. _____
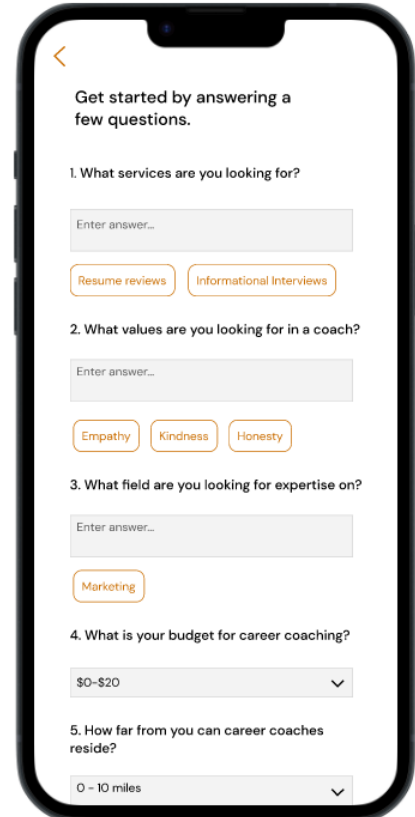
2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

Submit

**After the usability study**

Get started by answering a few questions.

1. What services are you looking for?

Enter answer...

Resume reviews    Informational Interviews

2. What values are you looking for in a coach?

Enter answer...

Empathy    Kindness    Honesty

3. What field are you looking for expertise on?

Enter answer...

Marketing

4. What is your budget for career coaching?

$0-$20

5. How far from you can career coaches reside?

0 – 10 miles

# Mockups (cont.):

Also based on the insights, I edited my design to show which coaches are going to events or are affiliated with any organizations featured on the "Resources" page.
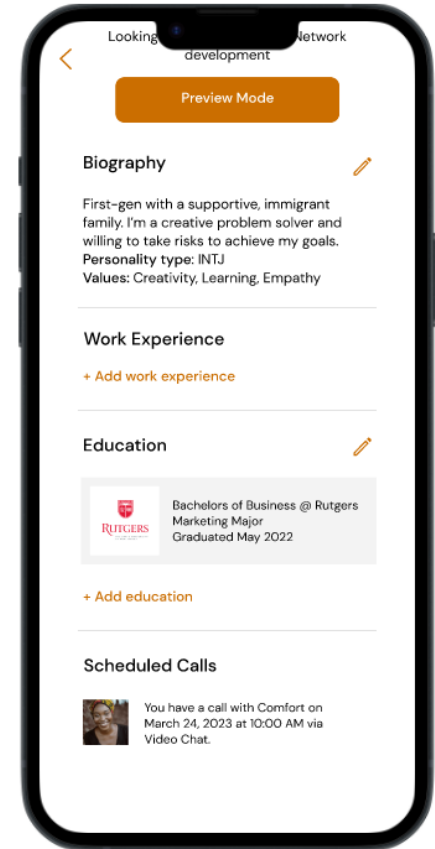
# Mockups (cont.):

Additional design changes include adding a section on the "User Profile" to show scheduled calls and a "Preview Mode" button to show the user how their profile will look to the coaches.
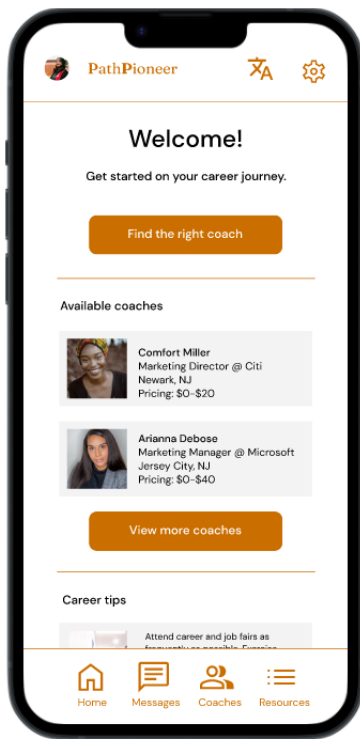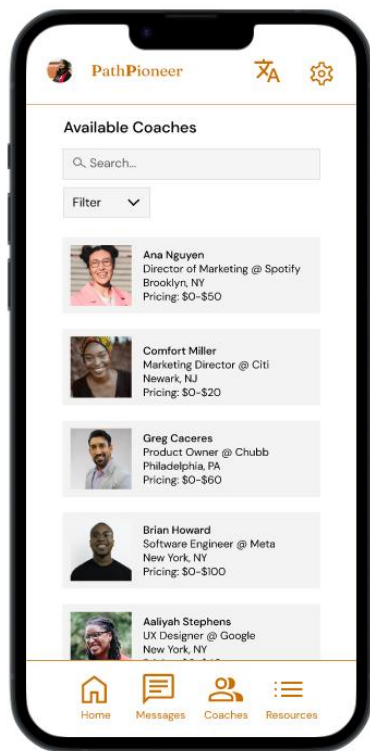
# Key Mockups



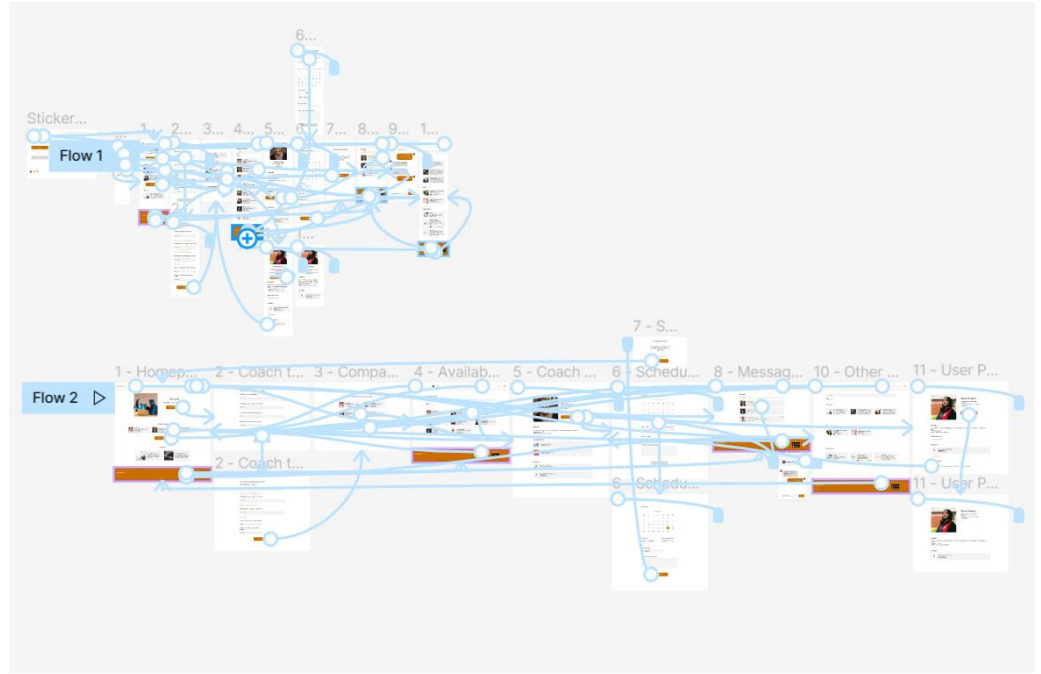Homepage



Coaches Page
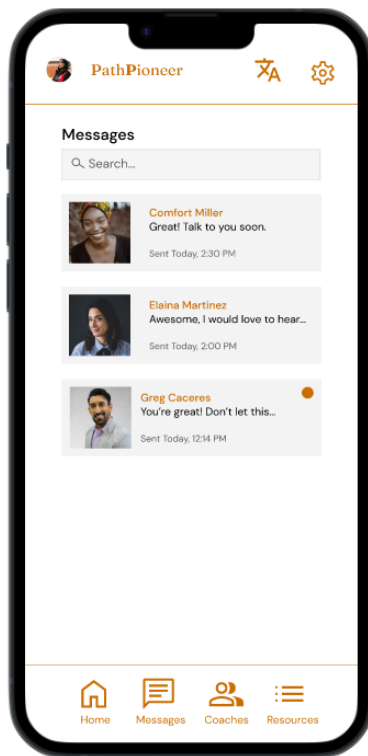


Messages
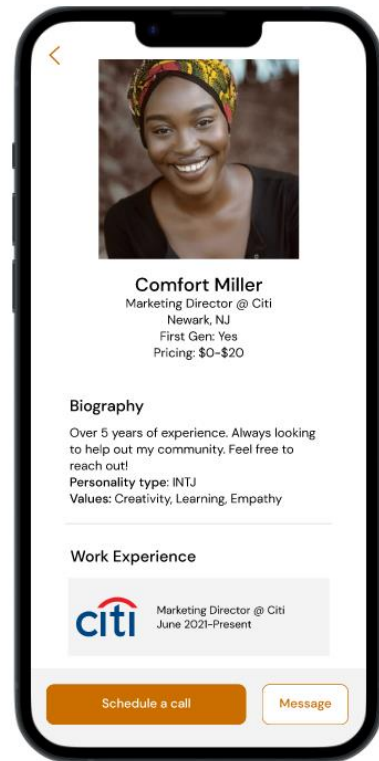


Coach Profile

# High-fidelity prototype

The high-fidelity prototype for PathPioneer has the same flows as the low-fidelity protype but with design refinements based on the usability study.

[High-fidelity prototype for PathPioneer career coaching app](#)

# Accessibility considerations

**1**

Translation

Users need to be able to translate text to their desired language.

**2**

Use of text

Users need clear labels wherever necessary to indicate their functionality, especially in the menu and in buttons.
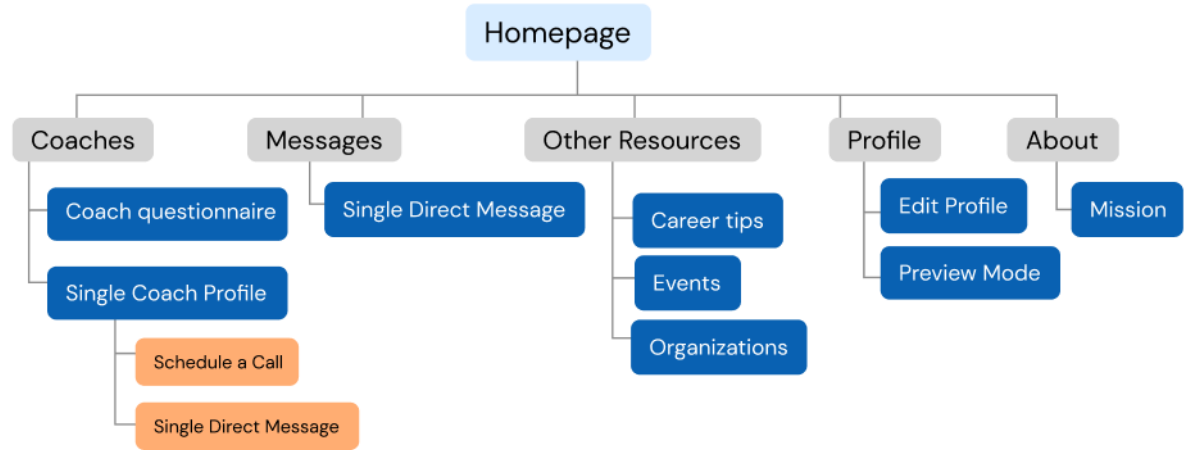
**3**

Screen reader compatibility

Users need the app to be compatible with screen readers. This includes focusing on text and layout heirarchy.

# Sitemap

After finalizing the app design, it was important that I create a sitemap to maintain consistency in the flow when transitioning to web platforms and designing responsively.
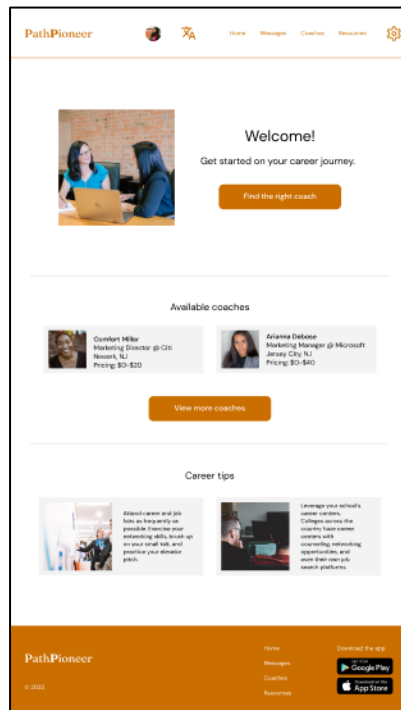
# Responsive designs

The designs for screen variation include mobile, tablet, and desktop. To best fit user needs across these platforms, I optimized the designs to include different menu style, element sizes, and focal points.
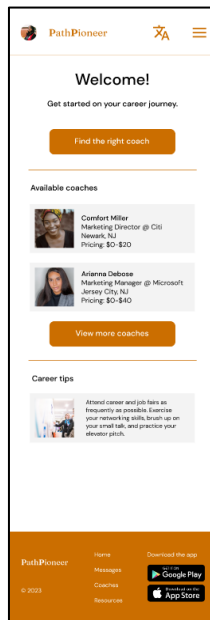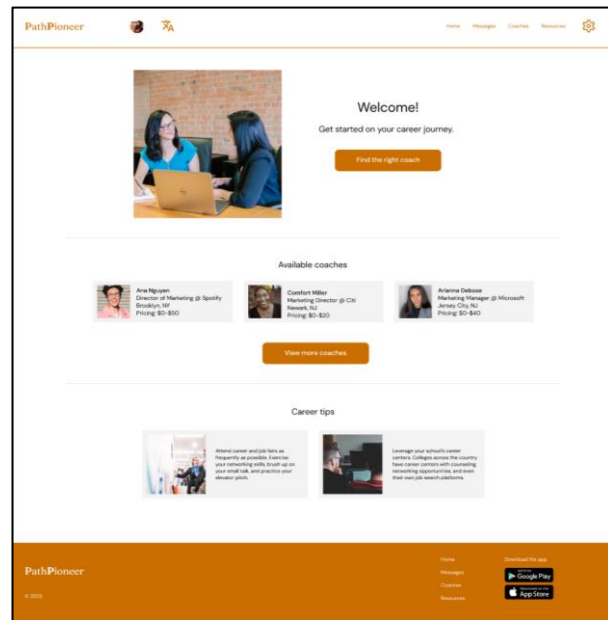
# Going forward

- Takeaways
- Next steps

# Takeaways

## Impact:

"I'm excited to use an app like this to create a professional bond with someone who knows what I'm going through and could help me build confidence in this job market." – Parcipant A

## What I learned:

I learned the importance of user centricity. Focusing on every possible end user and the platforms that they can access creates impactful design. Everyone deserves to be represented in all aspects of design and the product lifecycle.

# Next steps

**1**

## Adding a view for coaches

I would like to design a user experience for coaches on the app to see to edit their profile and see who wants to connect with them. Also, I would add a way for coaches to verify their experiences, so users know they're qualified.

**2**

## Revisit "Scheduled Calls" section

I would want to potentially create a new page that shows scheduled calls instead of a section on the "User Profile".

**3**

## Note-writing on the app

I would like to design a page on the app that is dedicated to notes that users take during their job search or college experience.

# Let's connect!

If you would like to chat about this idea, provide feedback, or collaborate, you can find me at the following links:

Website: https://sylviaboamah.com/
LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/in/sylvia-boamah/
Email: sylvianboamah@gmail.com

Thank you!