NSF SBIR Kickoff Synthesis

Problems

- Low awareness
- Unclear about eligibility
- Takes too long
- Difficult to apply

Cumulatively, these negatively impact the ability to capture more high-quality applicants…

How do we improve deal flow?

Customer interviews

- Confirmed that submitting an application (FastLane) is a pain point. Confusing language and lack of clarity about expectations (what and when) were most cited as issues with the process.
- Services (webinars, I-Corps, roadshows) offered by NSF SBIR were valued by applicants but weren't easily discovered
- Similar to your survey findings, most participants discovered the grant through word of mouth, usually through universities.
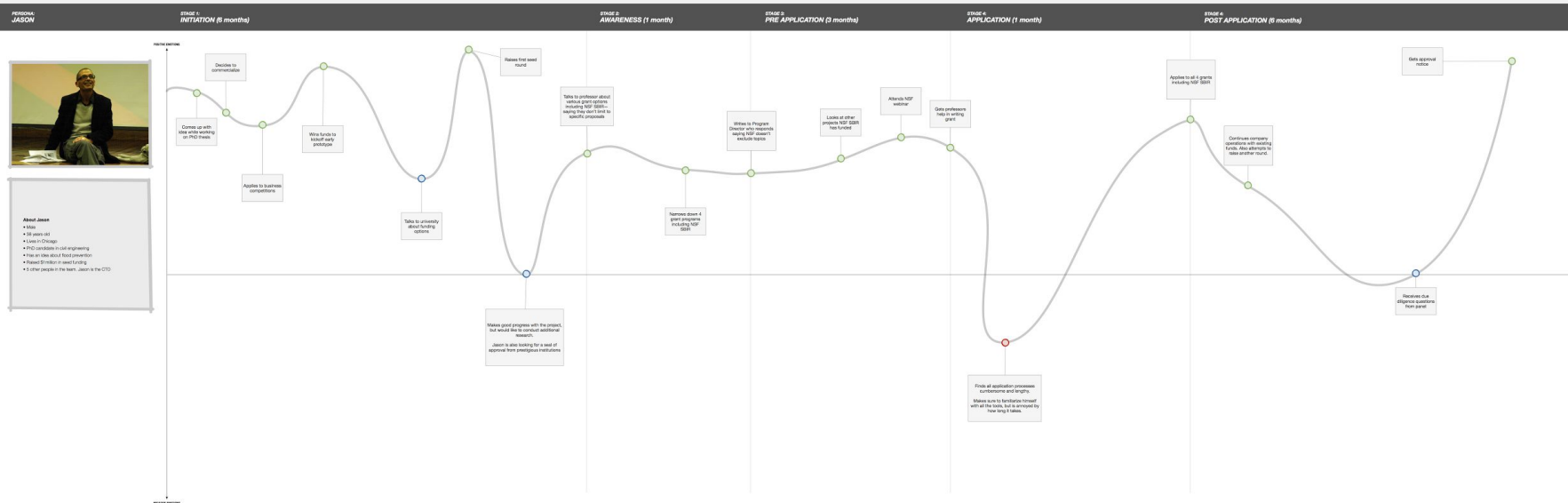
Customer journey: Kickoff
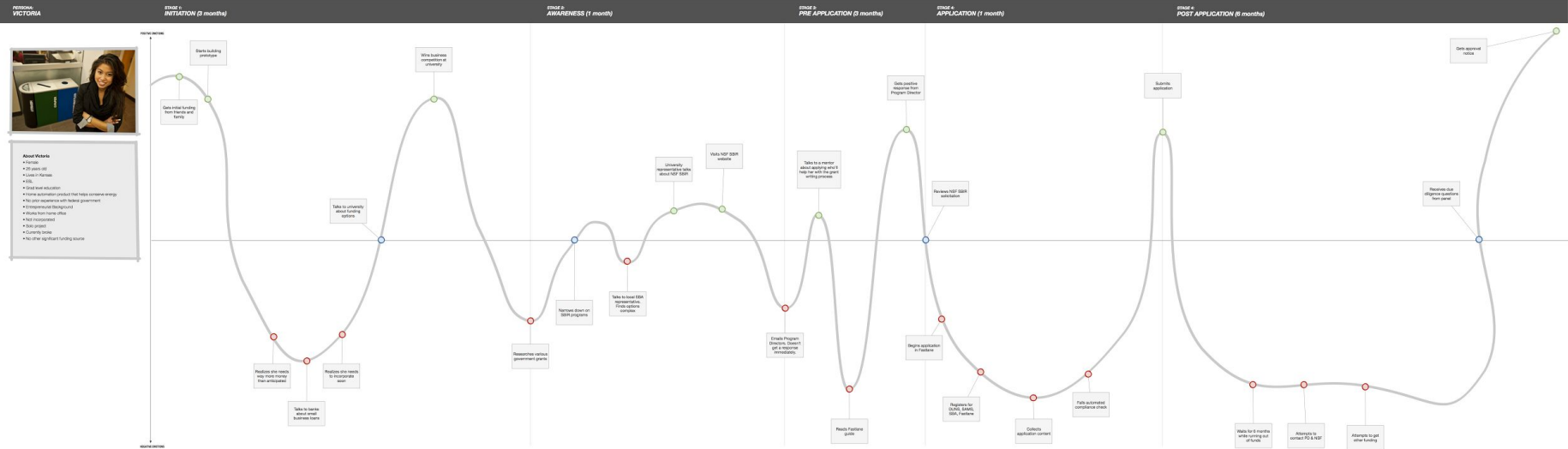
Customer journey: User research

JOURNEY MAP— USER RESEARCH

Context for product-market fit

- VCs and "Silicon Valley types" account for the bulk of the thought leadership on early-stage startups and consequently create market expectations for seed/early stage funding
- FastLane is a known pain point but is outside of the team's control.
- The bi-annual application schedule further shrinks the opportunity to capture the addressable market at the right time.
- The bulk of SBIR content is concentrated around the grant application

Customer engagement lifecycle

1
Awareness

2
Learn

3
Participate

4
Fundraise

5
Proselytize

Customer engagement lifecycle
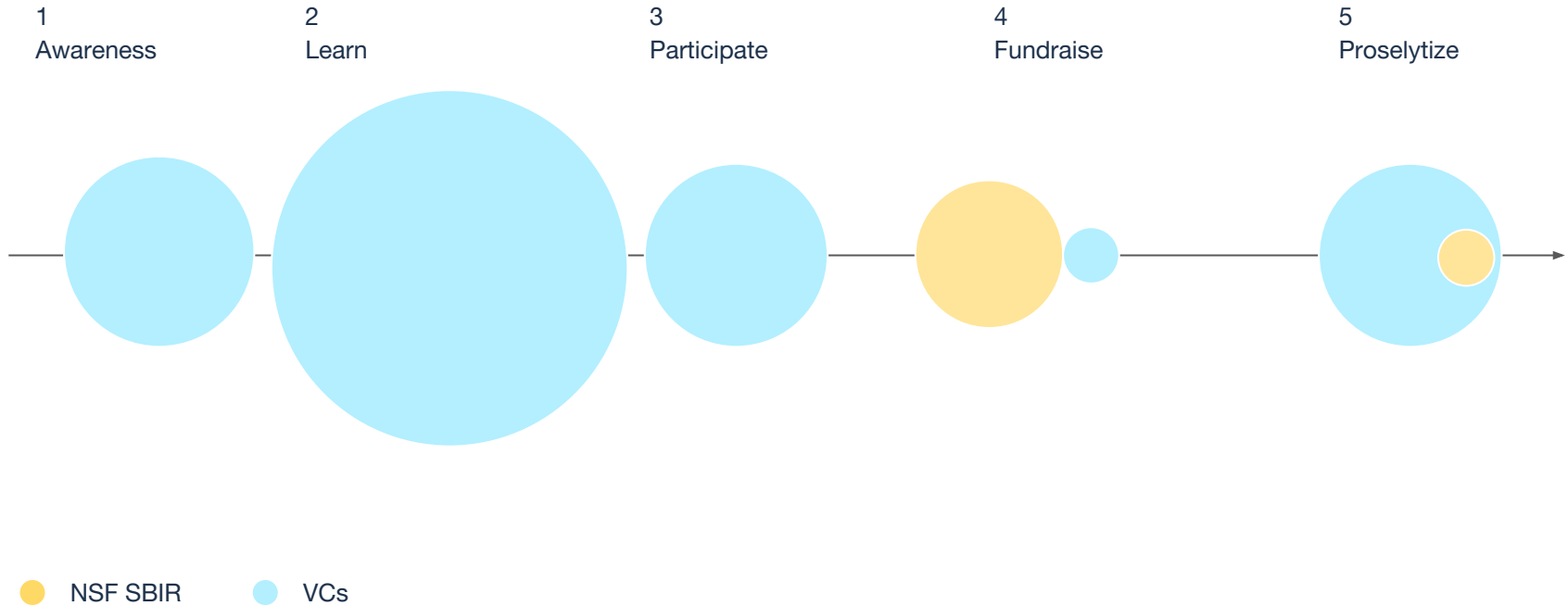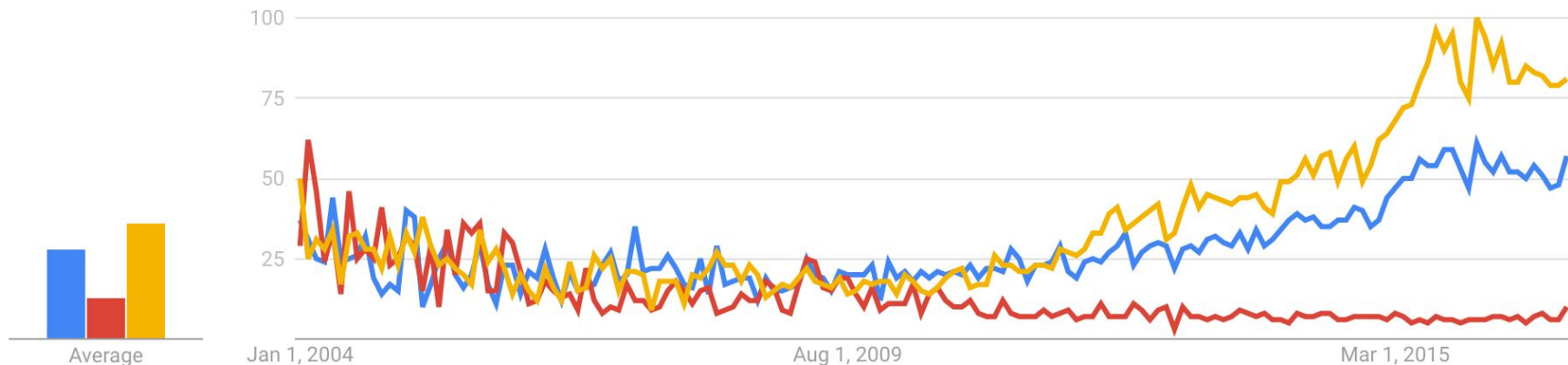
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● NSF SBIR

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● NSF SBIR   ● VCs
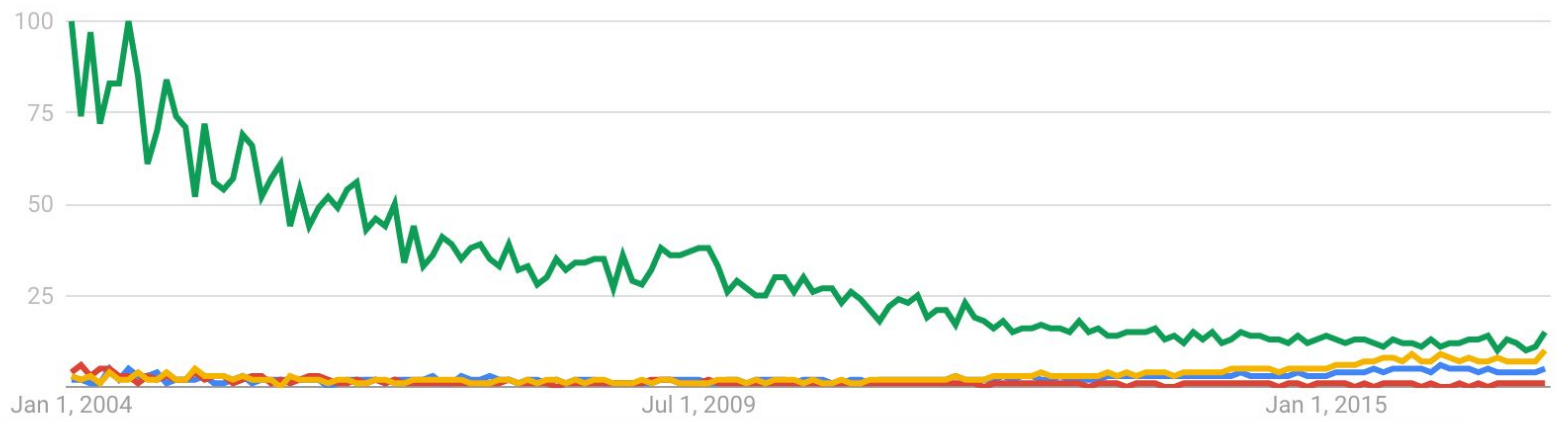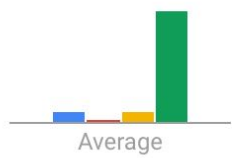
Now what?

Design principles

Be human
Shift from transactional to human-centric; Shift from "bureaucratic" jargon and "legalese" to plain language

Be inclusive
Accessible;
Recognize diversity

Connect
Build lines not dots;
Encourage "collisions", a "network"

Walk the walk
Show, don't just tell

Opportunity areas

- Brand development: "What are we?" (positioning) and "Who are we?" (identity)
- Customer development at the early stages of the engagement lifecycle
- Probe into value opportunities (Business Model Canvas)

Validate the riskiest assumptions first before optimizing.