



An integrated website for improving housing & roommate finding experience for students

Information Architecture
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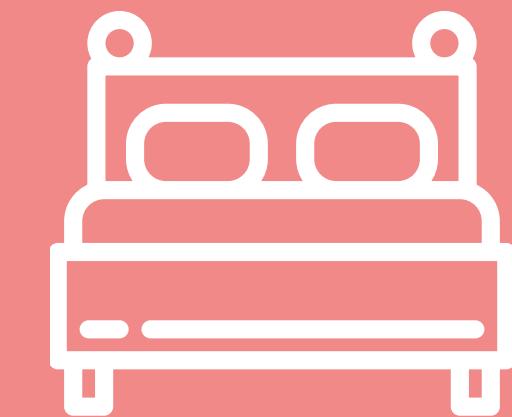
As a newcomer, looking for housing and roommate is a distressing experience. How do we streamline it to make it more enjoyable and alleviate the users' pain?

Our Solution

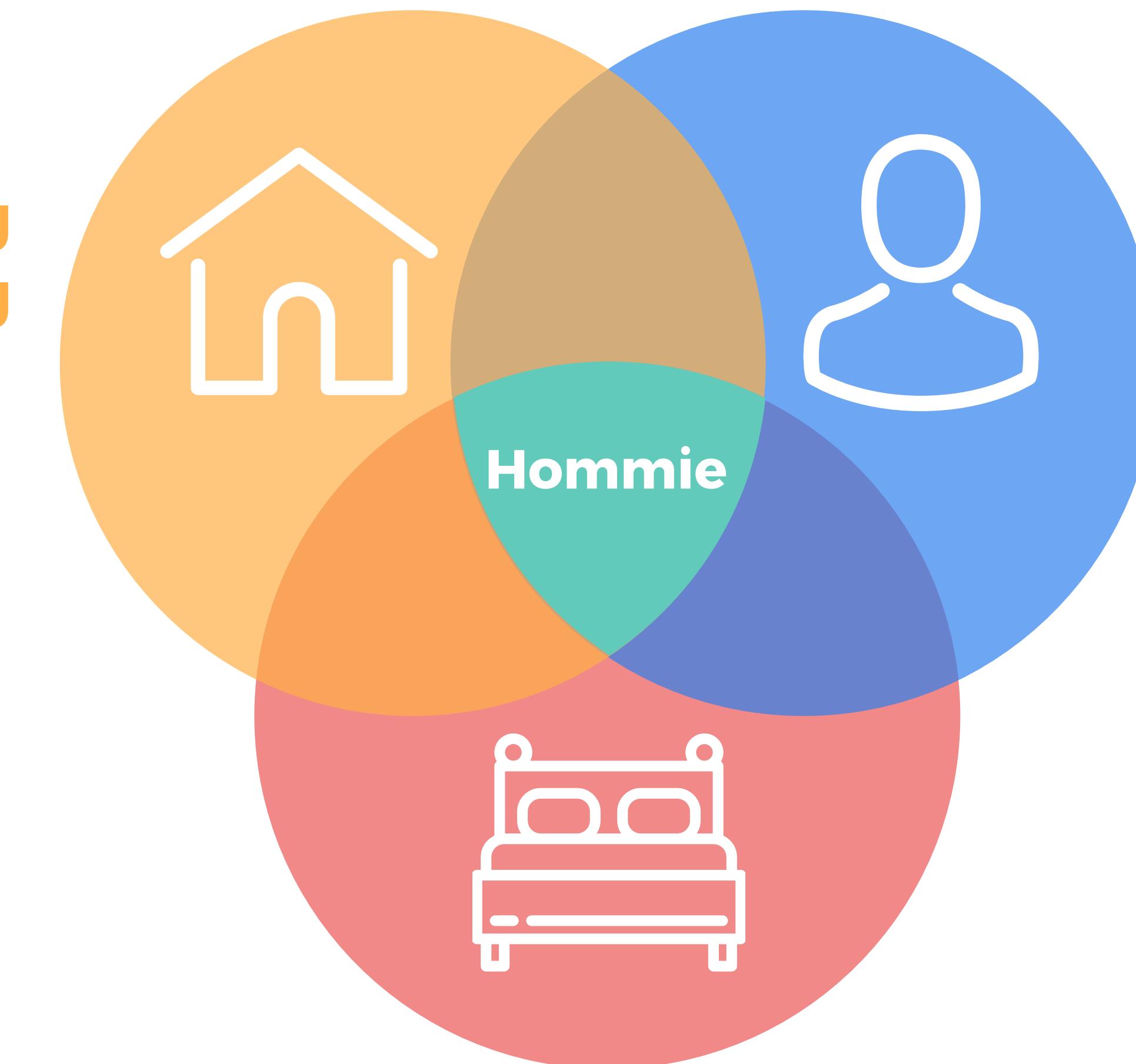
Housing
Finding

Roommate
Finding

Hommie

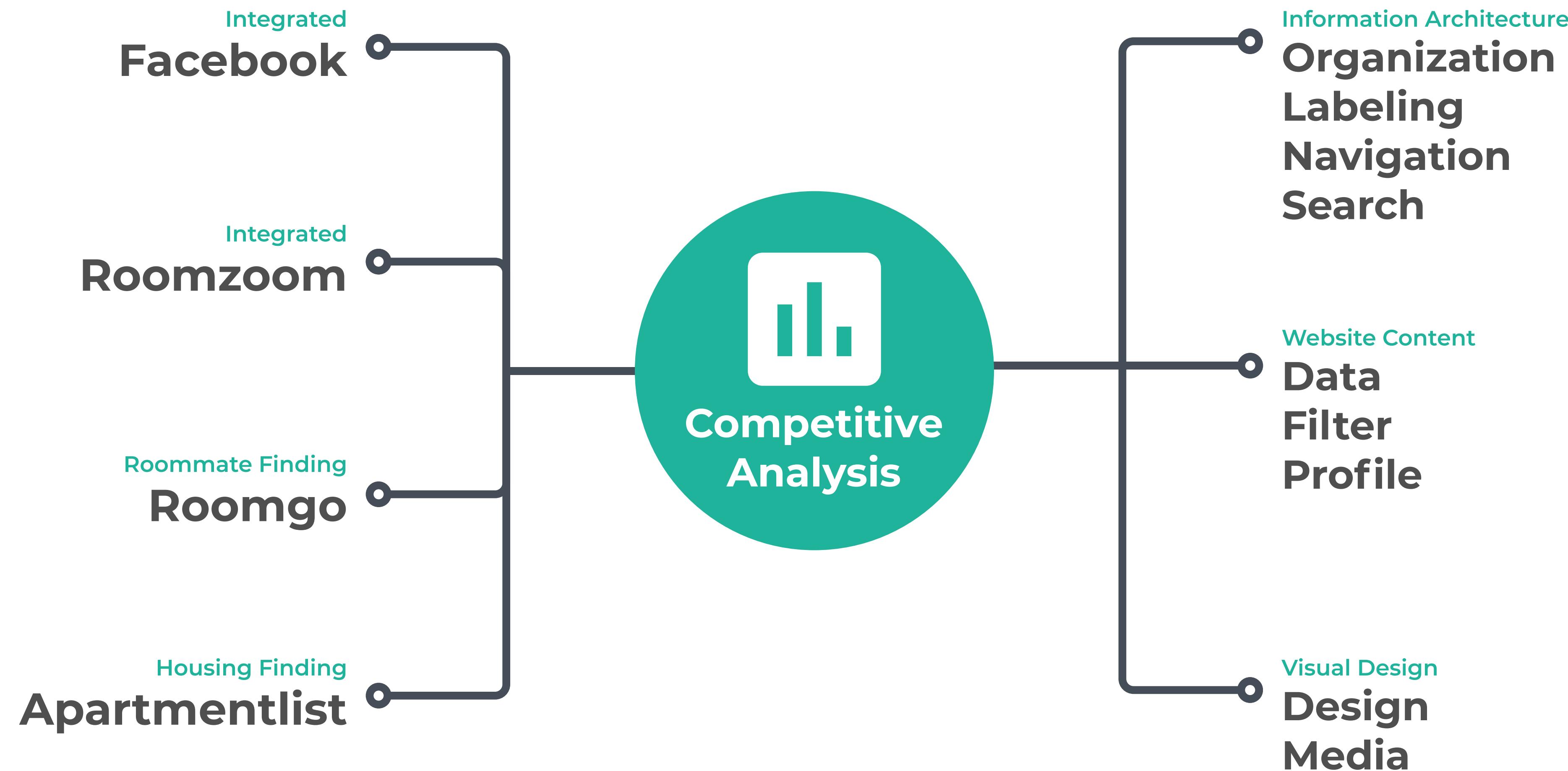


Subleasing



Competitive Analysis

To learn products in the market...



Main Findings from our Competitive Analysis

Not sorted by price

Even though users prioritize cost, the websites did not show the results based on the price.

Hommie should apply numerical organization



Ambiguous Organization

All housing/roommates websites use ambiguous organization over exact organization.

Hommie should clarify search criteria and transparency



Feeling of lack of control

The ambiguous organization makes users feel lack of control over contents.
e.g. adjusting search results

Organization that helps users control the results is needed



Search transparency

Search transparency needs to be improved and search criteria need to be well defined.



User Interviews

INTERVIEWS

Overview

Participants

- 8 in total
- Students
- 1st and 2nd year

Questions

Demographics and background

- Age, profession, etc
- Mobile/desktop preference

Searching Experience

- The current pain points
- Likes and dislikes
- Preference for website content

Affinity Diagram

Notes



Grouping



Themes



Insights

INTERVIEWS

Findings



HOUSING SEARCHING

- Distance to school
- Distance to grocery store
- Shuttle schedule
- Recommendations from friends
- Property management
- Online Rating System
- Time limits
- Overwhelming options
- Community



ROOMMATE SEARCHING

- Communicating on Facebook
- Join WeChat group
- Find roommate with similar habits
- Social and hygiene habits
- Concerned about roommate matching system
- Unauthentic online profile
- Not informed enough

Persona

Persona

Defining our target user



AGE	19
JOB TITLE	Biology Student
STATUS	Single
BUDGET	9k ~10k
LOCATION	Austin, TX

CURRENT CONTEXT

- Outside of the U.S
- Actively looking for housing
- Signing the lease before departure

CURRENT FEELINGS

Stressed Concerned Busy

Junheng

ABOUT

Junheng is an upcoming first year UT student from China. His major is Biology. He is very excited about the new environment and new friends. He lives with his family before coming to the U.S. He is not going to purchase a car at the first year. He started to use Wechat group to ask if any student coming the same semester looking for housing and roommate as well.

GOALS

- Spend less than 1 month to settle down the housing before going to the U.S.
- Find a roommate who has similar habits, good personal hygiene, and good personalities
- Find an apartment with preferred facilities and events provided
- Find an apartment that is closed to the school and grocery stores, or have convenient transportation

PAIN POINTS

- There are too many options online for housing and very difficult to make decision in a short time
- The information online for roommates and housing is misleading which is not representing the real situation
- There is not enough information about distance to school and transportation options on the website
- It is very difficult to find a roommate is just as good as what they have in the profile online

HABITS

- Using Wechat groups and Facebook to look up latest information
- Very sensitive about time waste because he is very busy for school work
- Love walking, hiking, and outdoor activities

“Living in a comfortable place is what I valued the most

PERSONALITY

EASYGOING INDEPENDENT
SAVING HARD-WORKING
PASSIONATE MOTIVATIONAL
ACTIVE LOVING OPTIMISTIC

Journey Maps

Journey Map

Housing - IA Team 2

Finding Housing

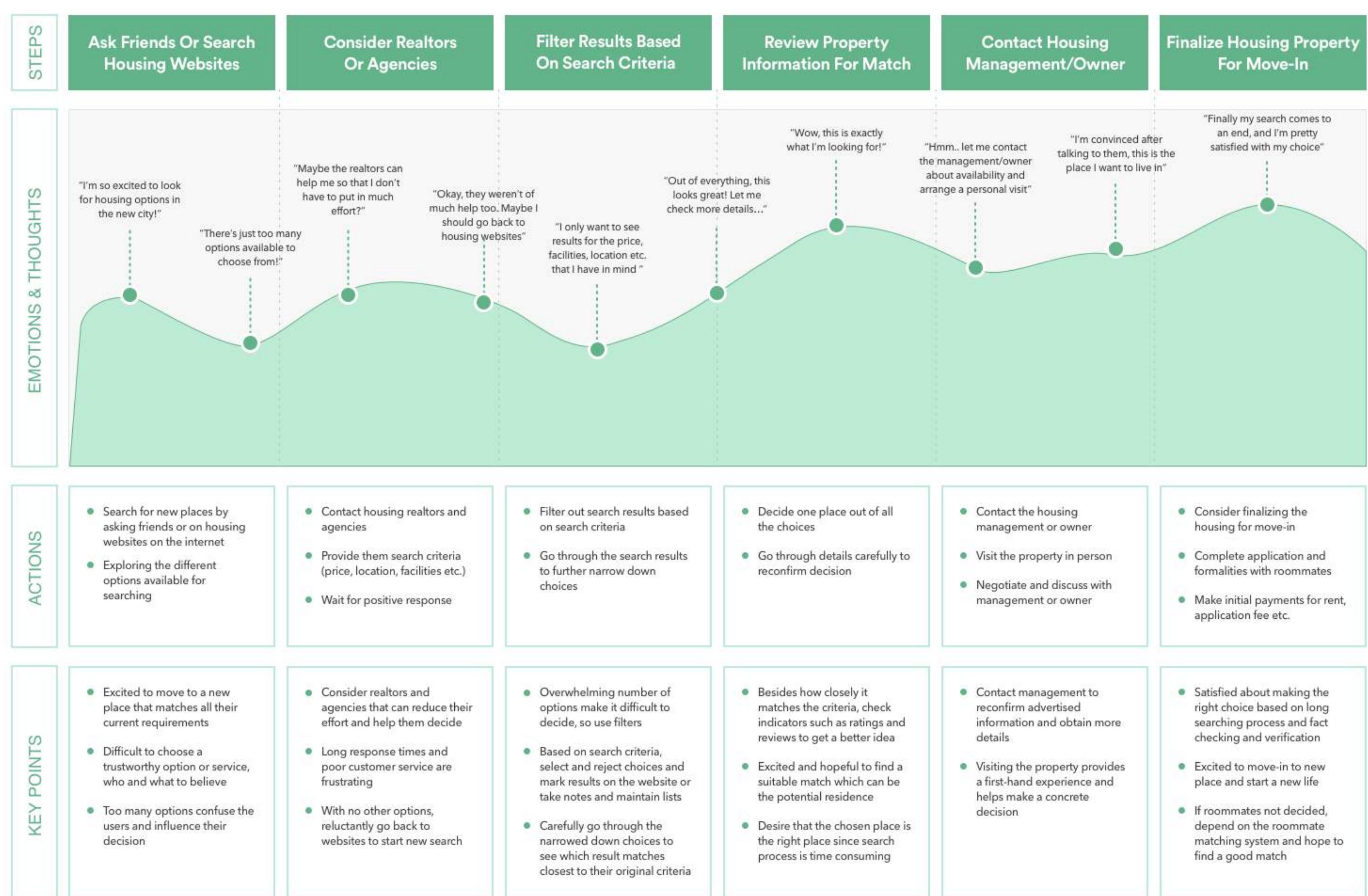
Housing Finding

Roommate Finding

Subleasing



Different websites show results with different critieria. Thus, users are constantly frustrated to compare and find the best one.



Housing Finding

Roommate Finding

Subleasing

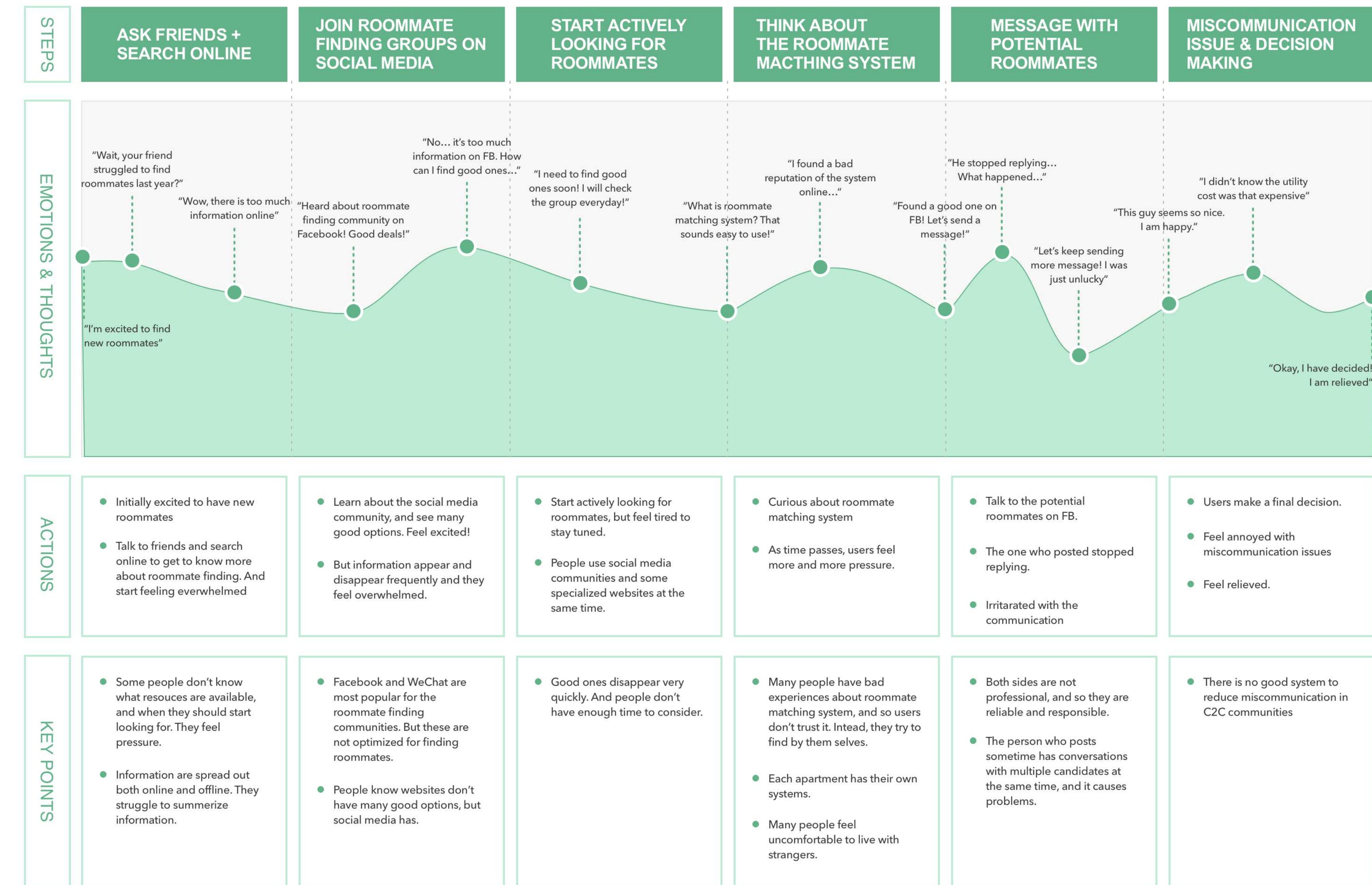


People tend to use social media, but Information appear and disappear quickly. They want to have search / sort functions.

Journey Map

Housing - IA team 2

Roommate Finding



○ Housing Finding

○ Roommate Finding

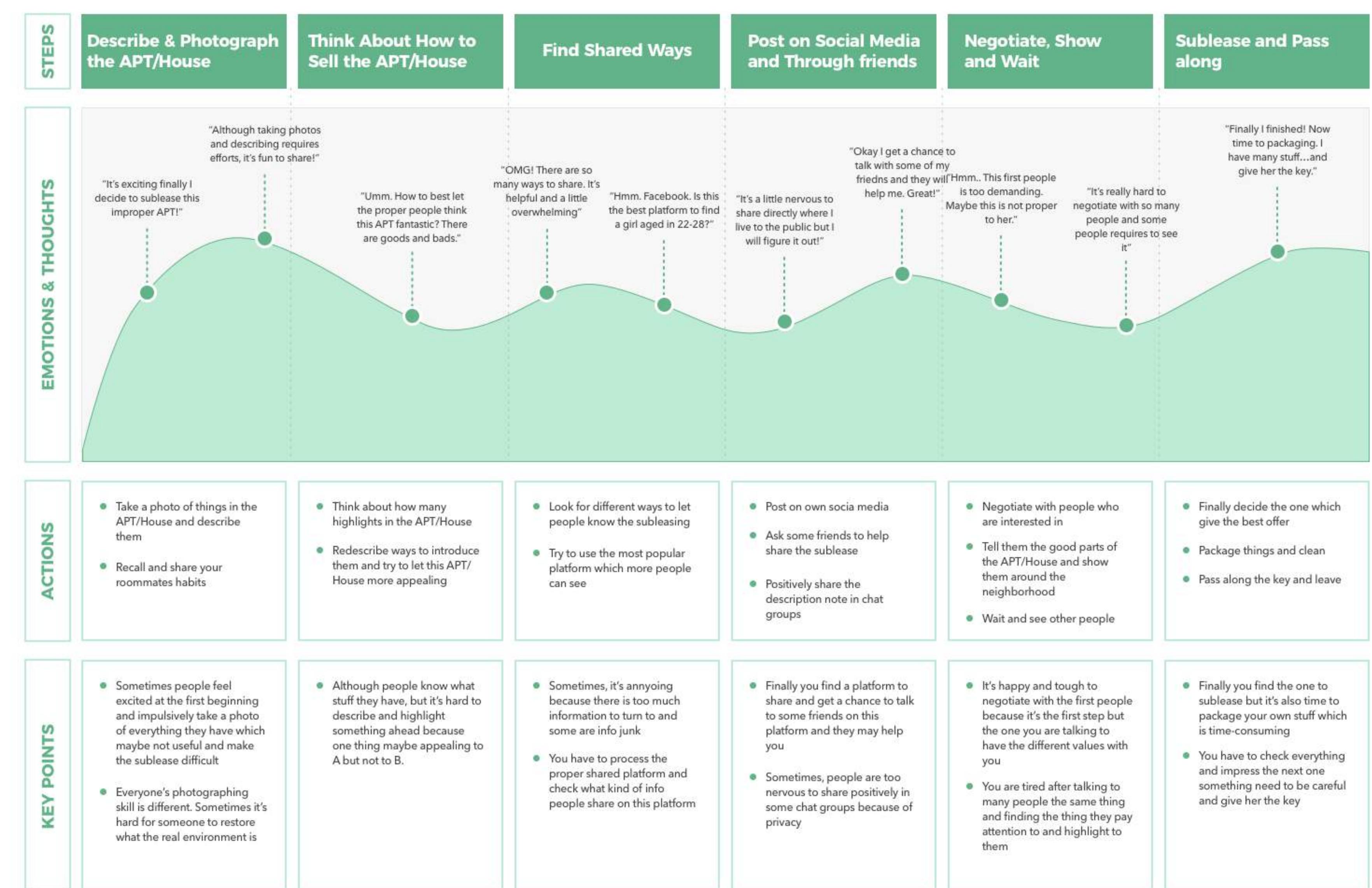
● Subleasing



Users tend to use social media to sublease, even though they feel frustrated with communication issues.

Journey Map Housing - IA Team 2

Sublease



Information Architecture

Information Architecture Methods

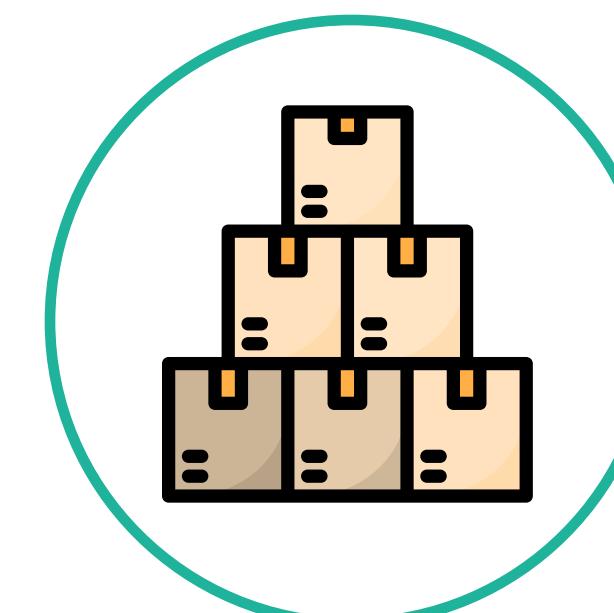
Overview

Challenges

- Lack of similar, already existing systems that we could use as reference and build upon
- Defining the scale of the project for an integrated system that would serve as a three-in-one solution
- Identify major overlaps between the three situations and disentangle them to have clear, independent flows

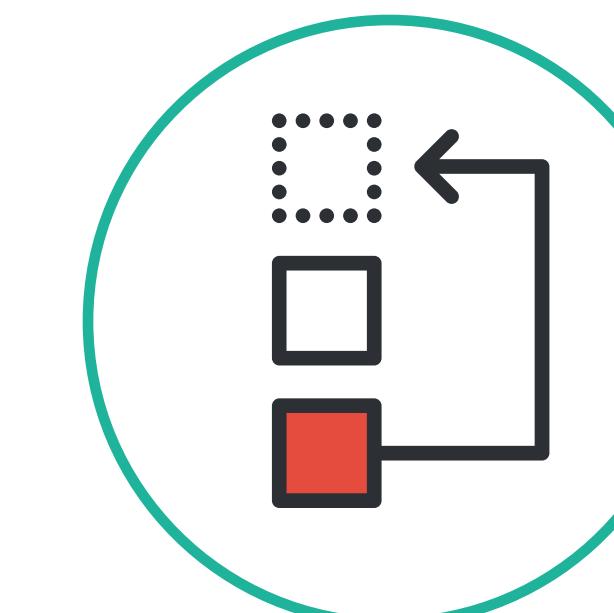
In order to tackle these challenges, we conducted these IA activities to create a highly **functional, robust** and **efficient** information architecture for our website *Hommie*

01.



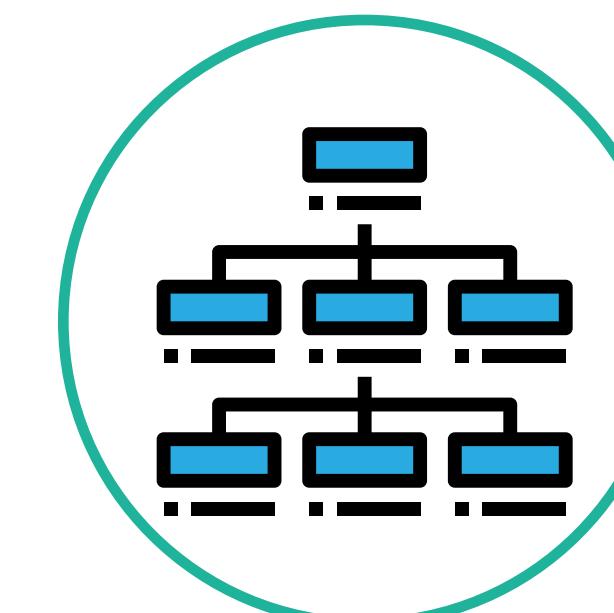
Content Inventory

02.

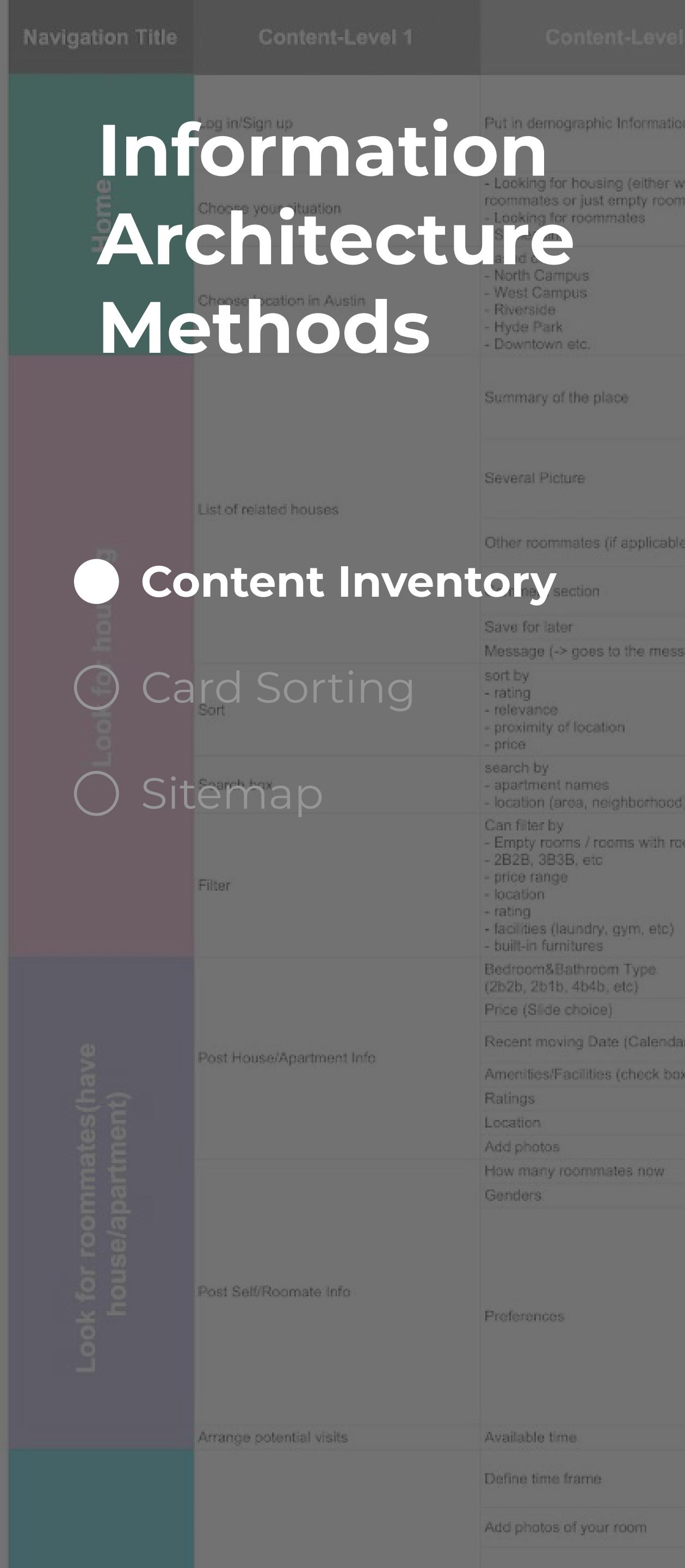


Card Sorting

03.



Sitemap



1

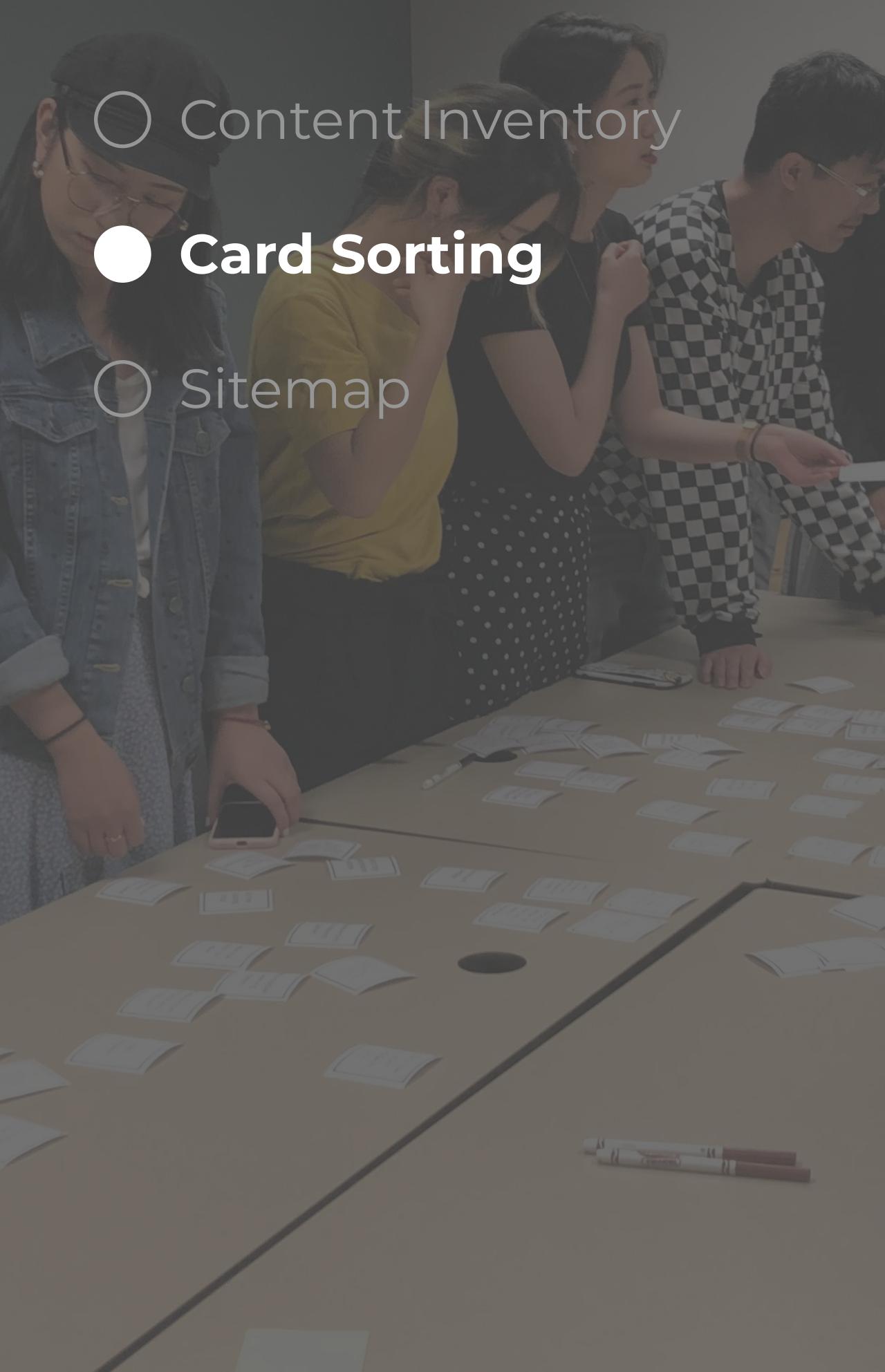
Content Inventory

Our first step towards defining an architecture was to give our project a backbone. Creating a content inventory helped us **build a solid foundation** for our project in terms of the **levels of navigation** we would aim for, the **contents on each level** and the overall **project hierarchy**.

Key points

- We defined **four levels of navigation** for the content and the initial structure of our website
- **Six global navigation** items - *Home, Look for housing, Look for Roommates (have house/apartment already), Look for Sublease, Profile and Messages*
- Global navigation items largely remained unchanged until the end
- Sub-levels changed significantly as our project continued to grow and evolve

Information Architecture Methods



2

Card Sorting

Hybrid card sort activity (open+closed)

What?

Provide participants a predetermined set of category cards, while also giving them the freedom to come up with their own categories if they felt like.

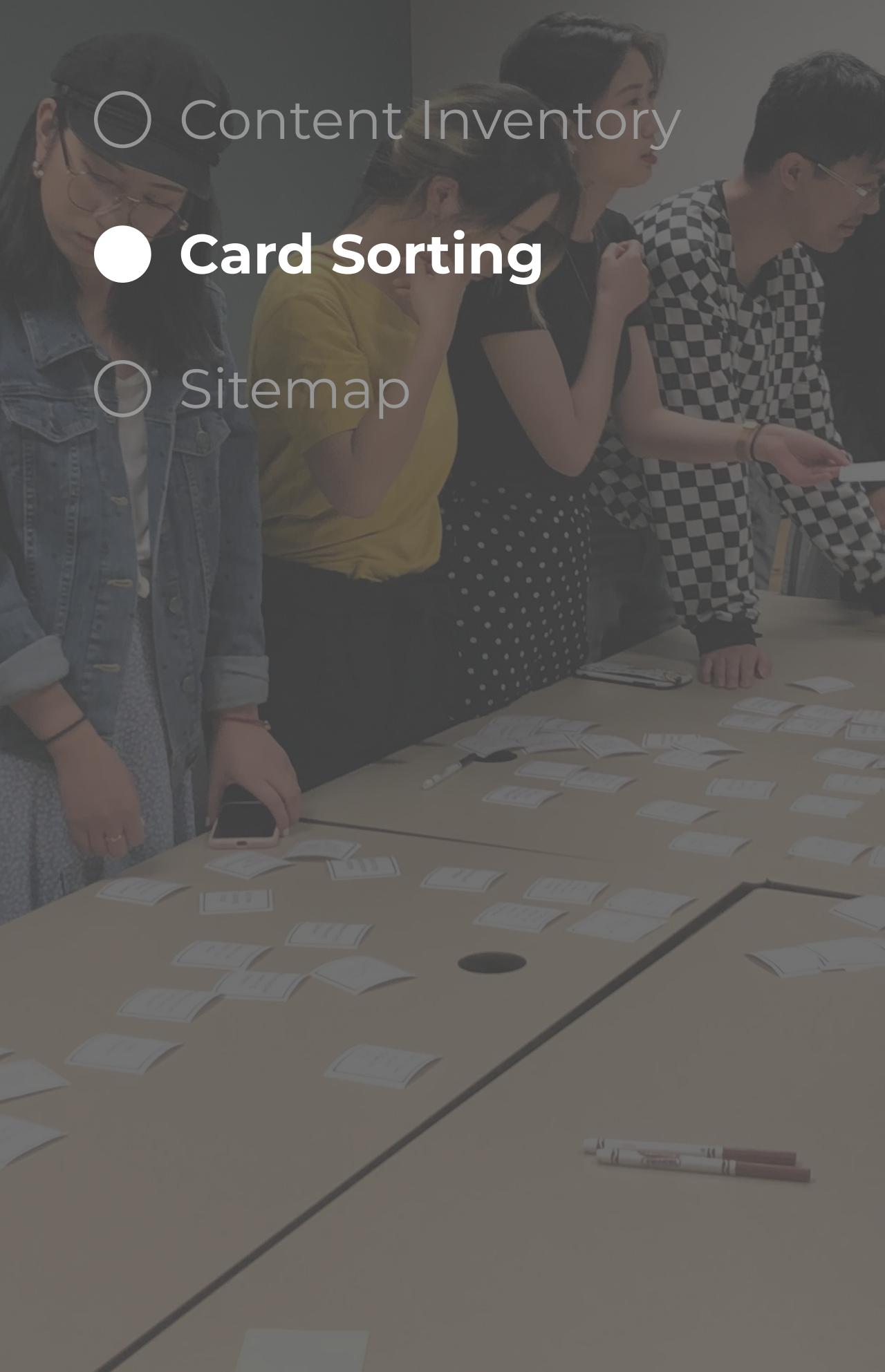
Why?

- Wide scope of the project
- Validate our hypotheses
- Participants could develop some understanding of the project
- New categories would help us think about any missed information

Session Details

- Total number of index cards: 86, including 6 global category cards
- No. of participants: 7 (4 females, 3 males)
- Duration: ~ 1 hour 15 minutes

Information Architecture Methods

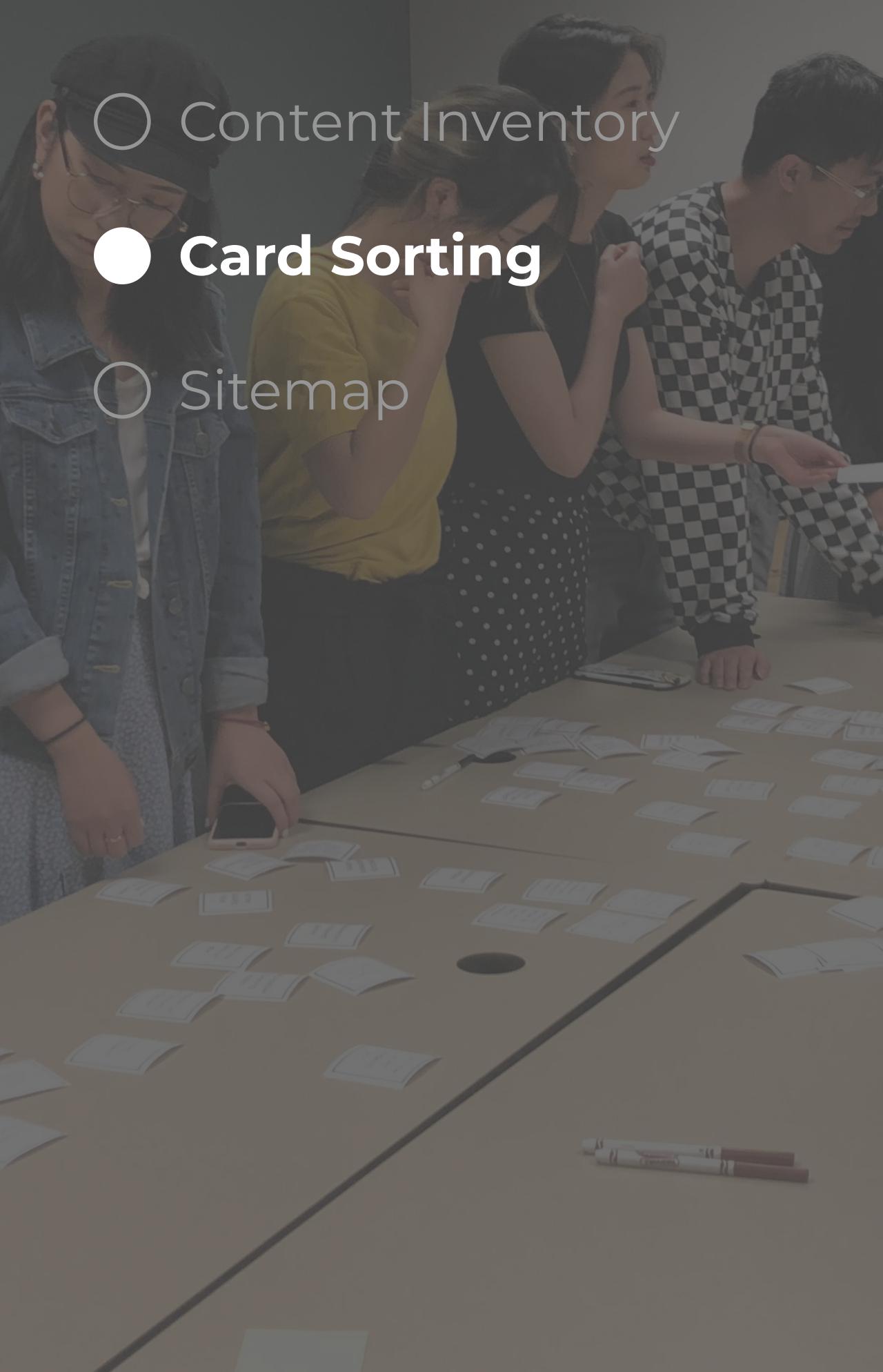


2 Card Sorting

Key Findings

- There were some cards such as *Search, Sort and Filter* which the participants found **difficult to fit under one category**
- Participants shared that searching for roommates and housing is a **non-linear** process, one doesn't necessarily have to follow another
- Some information should be accessible **anonymously**, without a user account
- Two(or more) people who wish to be roommates should be able to **contact each other mutually** and each person involved should hold **equal power** in selection or rejection
- People looking for either roommates or housing can **prioritize either of the two** based on their current situation

Information Architecture Methods



○ Content Inventory

● Card Sorting

○ Sitemap

2 Card Sorting

Design Decisions Taken

- Instead of having them search for roommates first and then for housing, the two functions would exist independently so users are free to pursue what and when they want to
- Renamed the Sublease feature to '**List My Place**' where users could post their sublet to eliminate confusion
- Sublet posts now would become part of posts under 'Look for Housing' but clearly **labeled as 'Sublease'** to differentiate them from regular housing posts
- Users can view basic information about housing and people as guests but to view more private details, need to register and fill **preference forms**

Information Architecture Methods

- Content Inventory
- Card Sorting
- Sitemap

3 Sitemap

Why?

- To **define** a clear logic flow from one task to another
- To give **shape** to our **hierarchy** that we defined as part of the **content inventory**
- To use the hierarchy as a **guideline** for the upcoming design

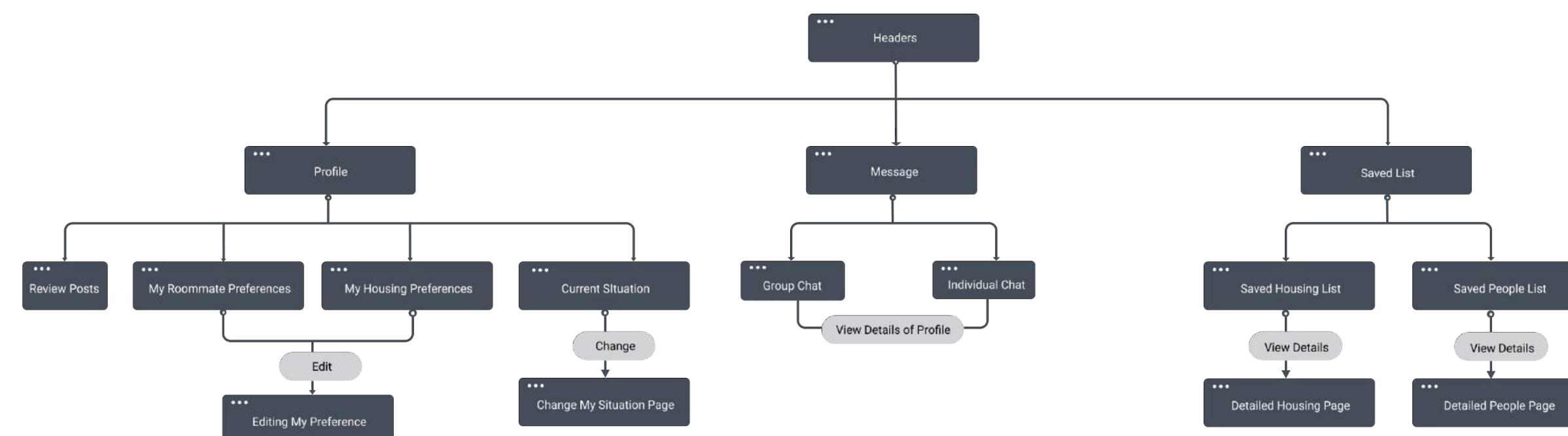
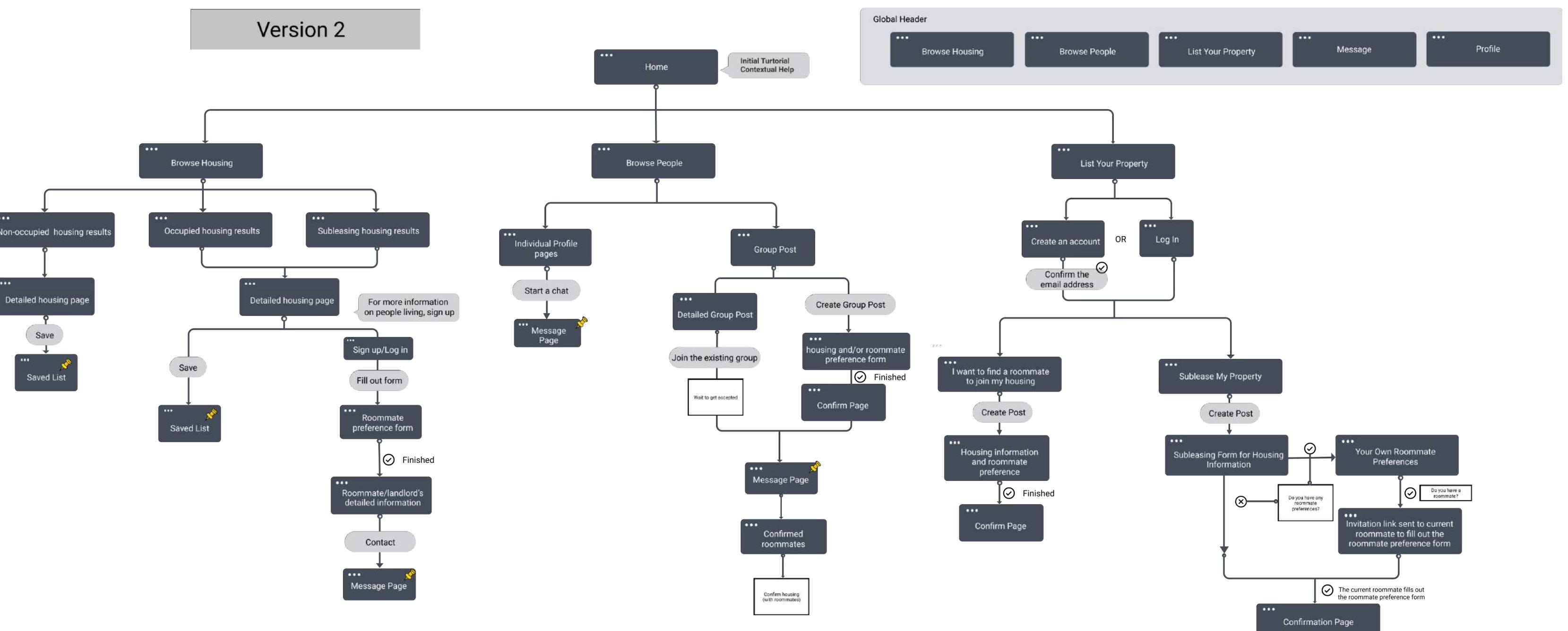
Challenges

- Huge **overlaps between three situations** made it difficult to clearly differentiate from one another
- Important to have **clearly defined user flows** for each of the three situations even when the overlaps existed
- How to make the whole searching process more **flexible** and how to **leverage the overlaps** to facilitate that?

Information Architecture Methods

- Content Inventory
- Card Sorting
- Sitemap

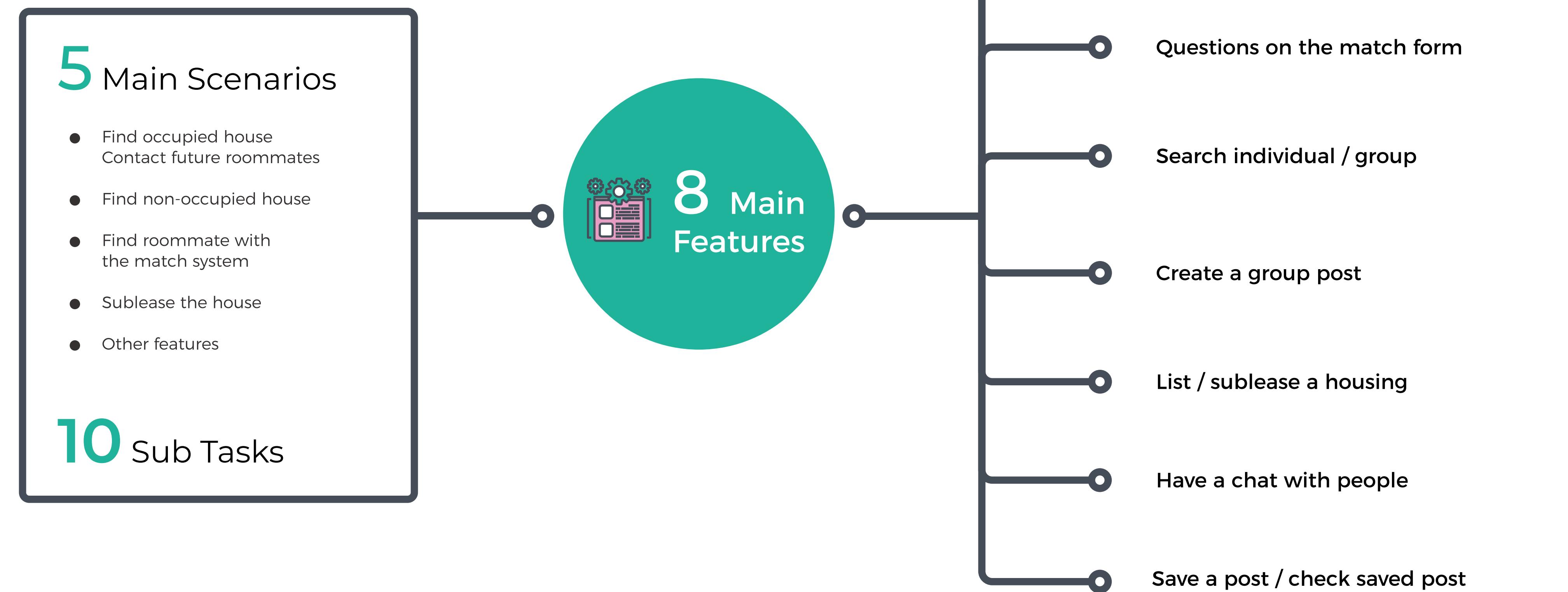
3 Sitemap



Usability Test

Usability Test

Overview



Key Findings

UI Elements

Color confusion

- Highlight vs Selected
- Repeated/Confusing icons

More default session

- Lack of info on the post

Content Design

Terminology

- People vs Roommate
- Search vs Looking for
- Per Unit vs Room

Overlapped filter items

Information Architecture

Filter Order

- Room people need
- Roommates people need
- Floorplan

Negotiate before Join

Shift “how it works” to Homepage

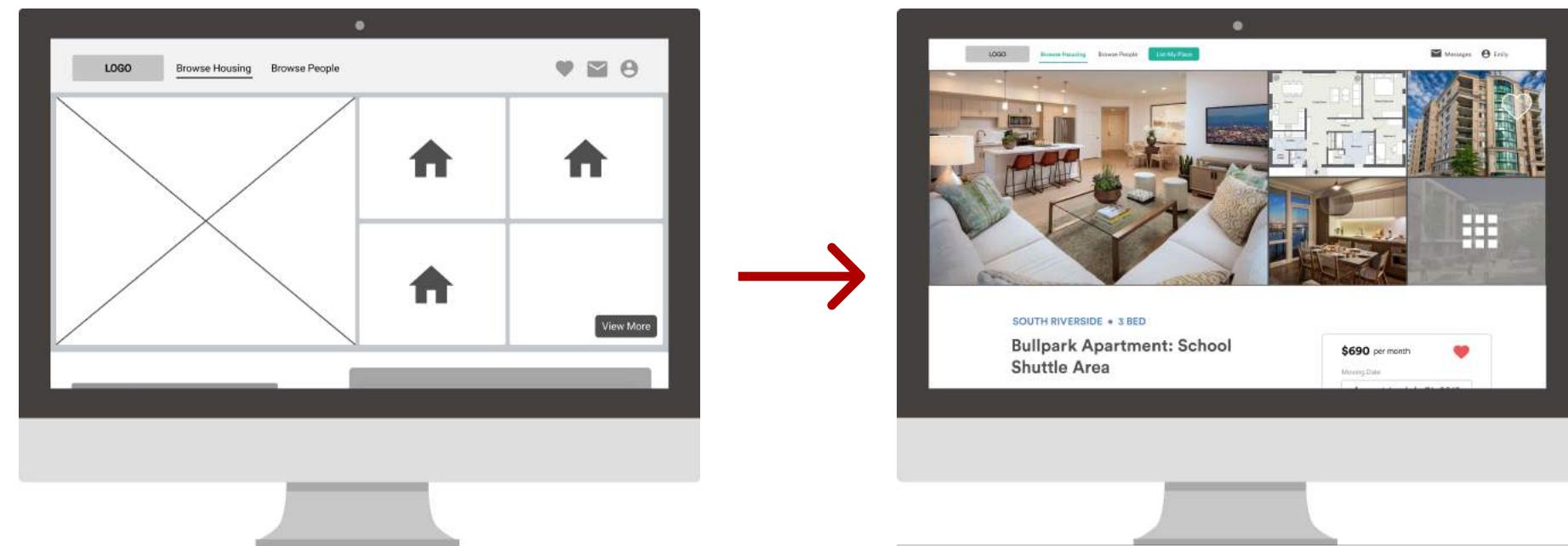
Prototype

From low to high

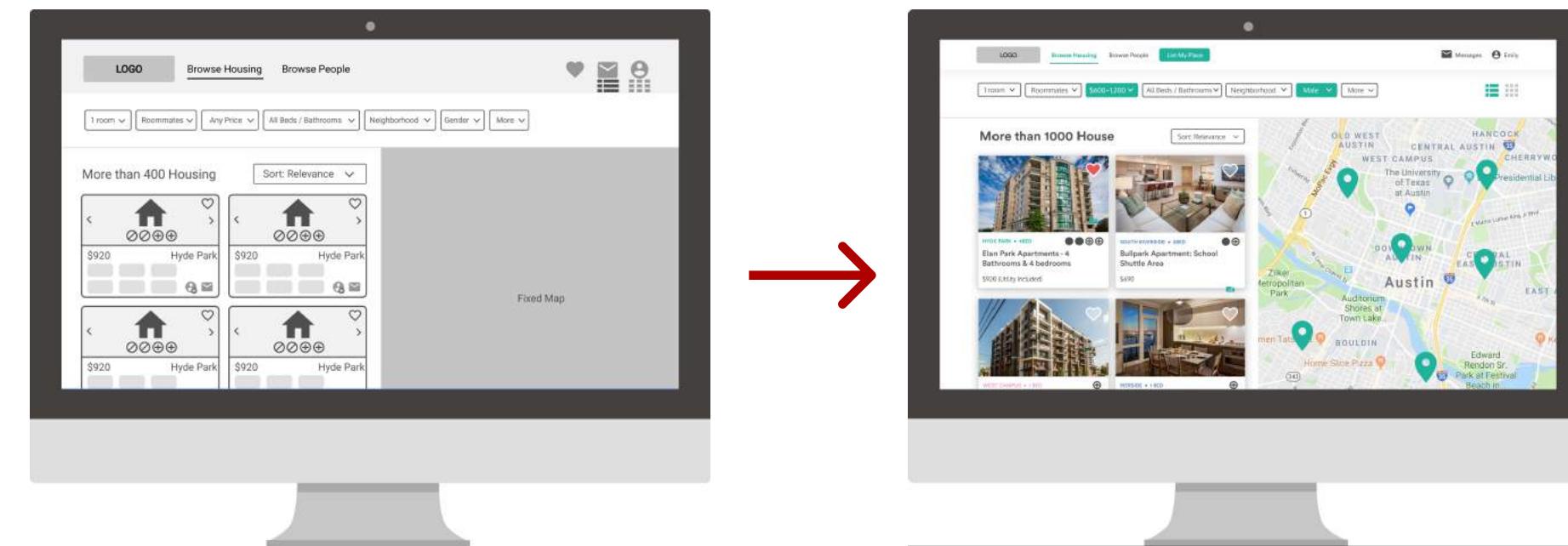
Home Page



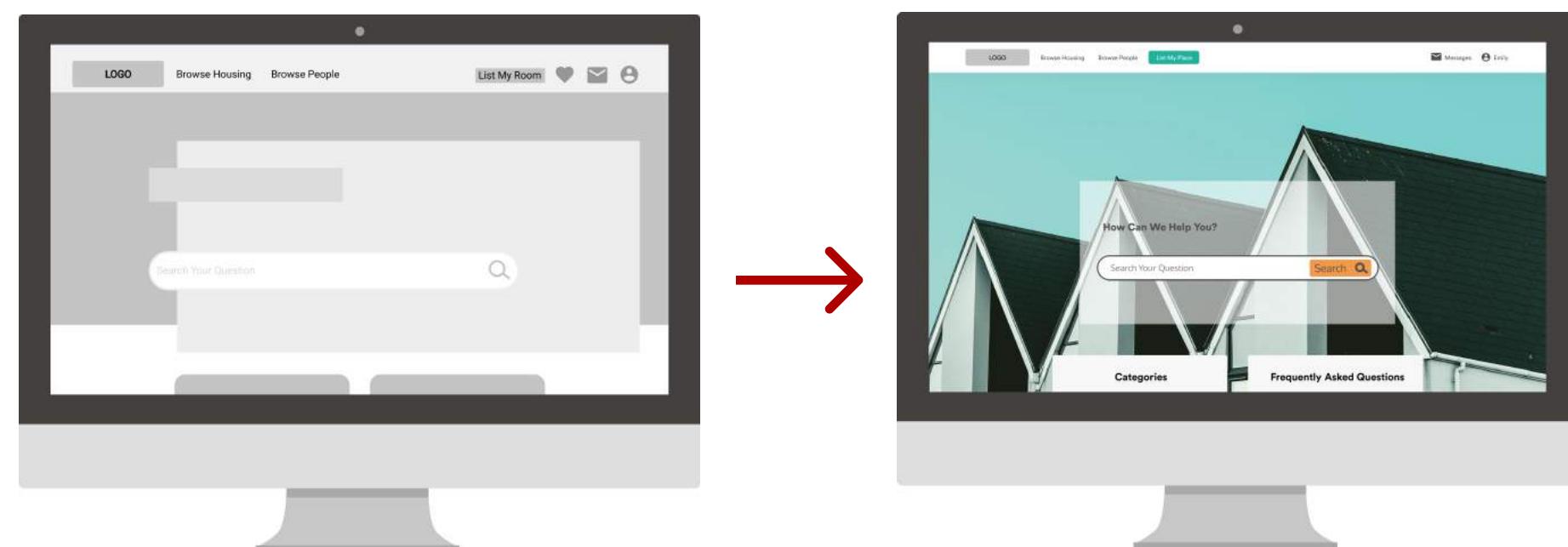
Detailed Housing Page



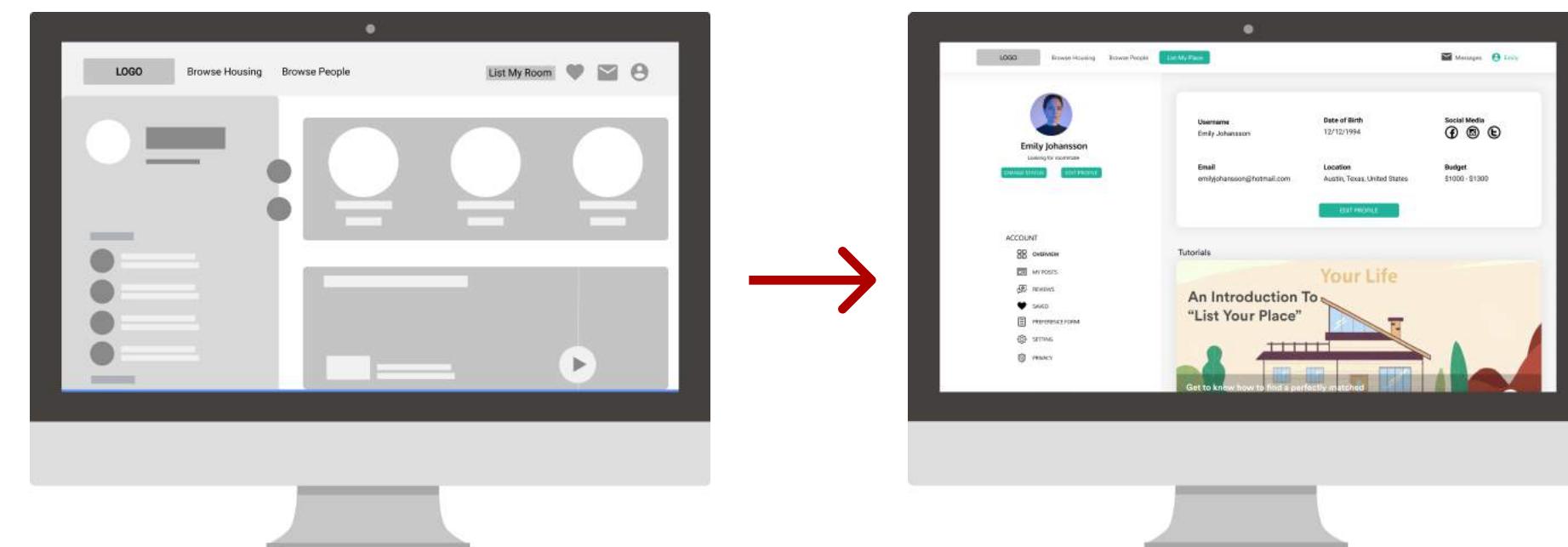
Housing Results Page



Help Center

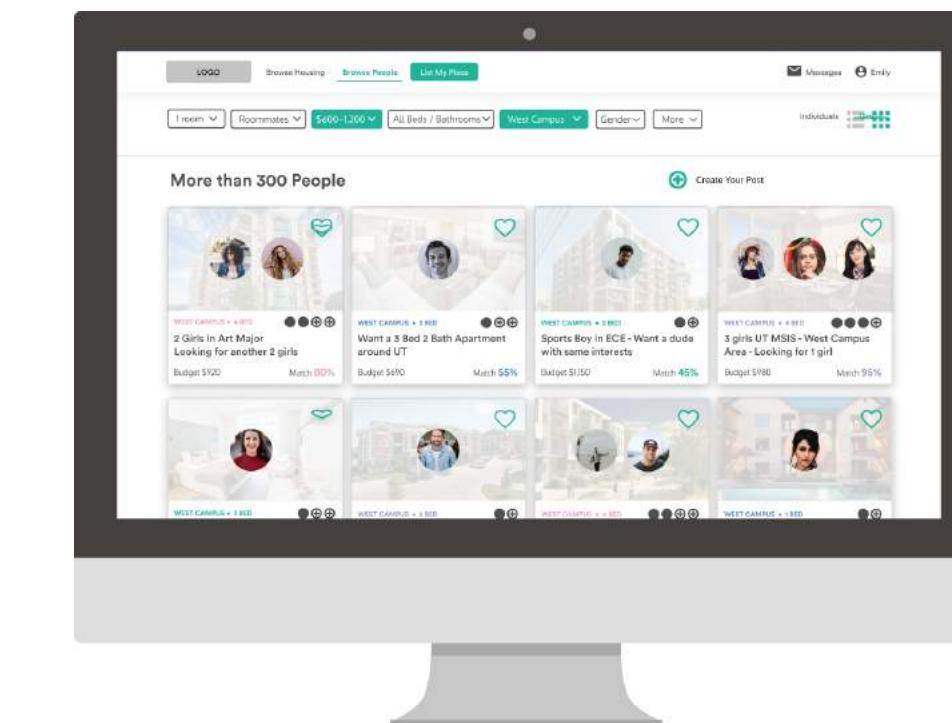
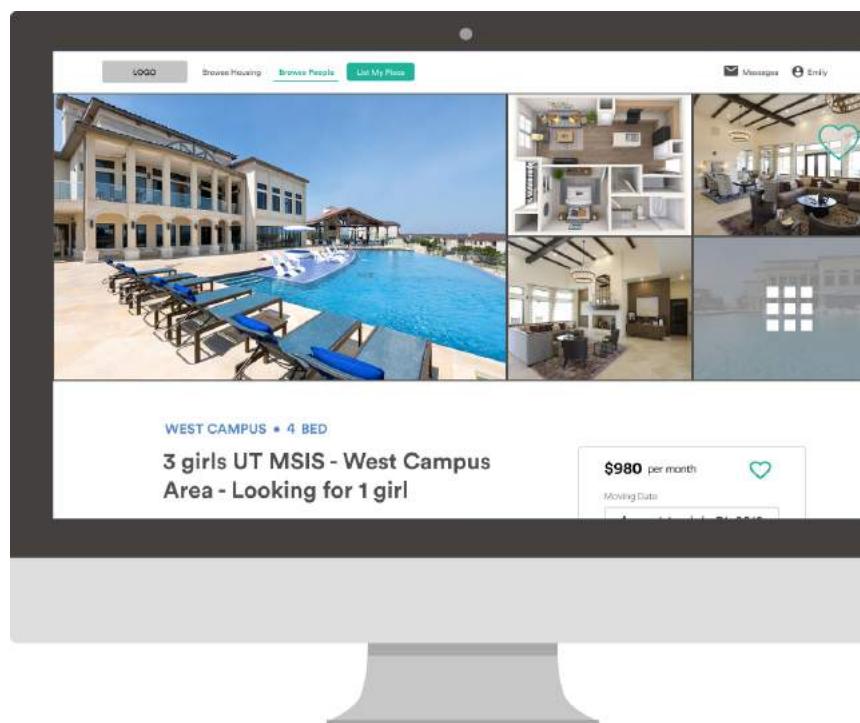
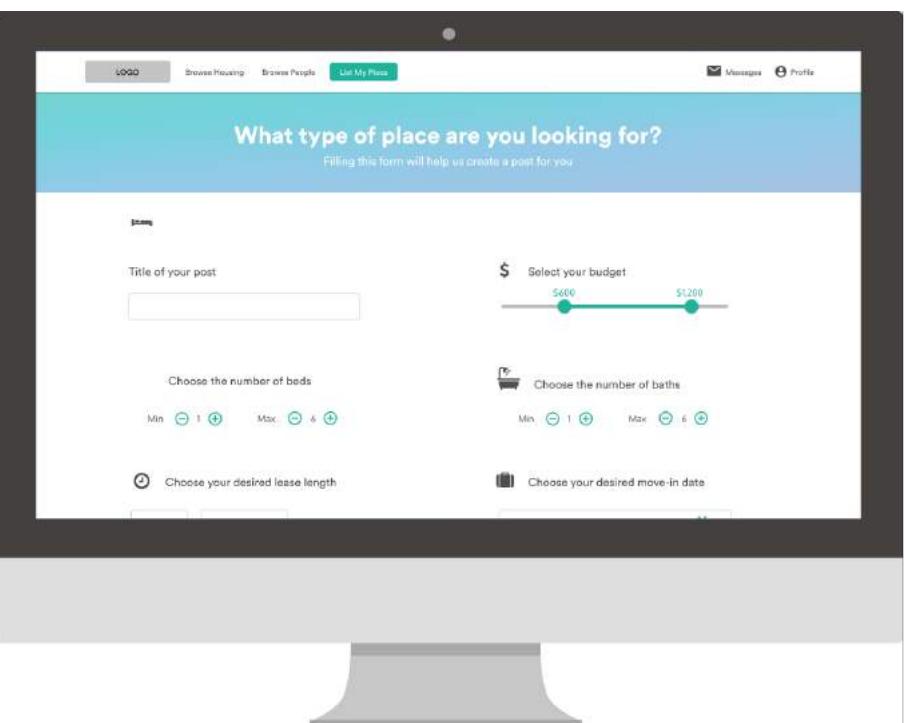
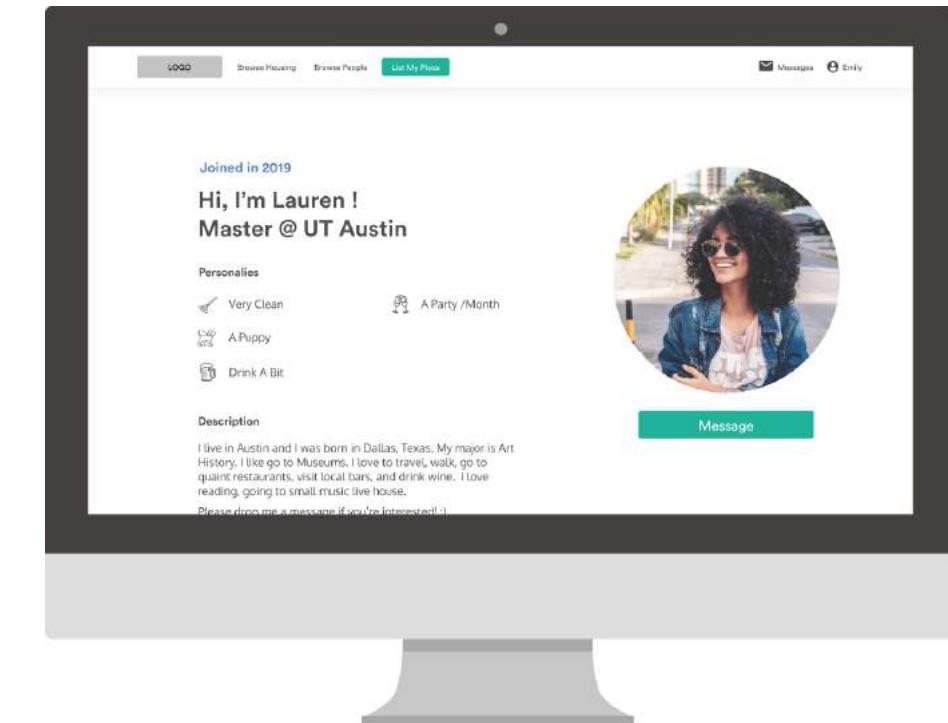
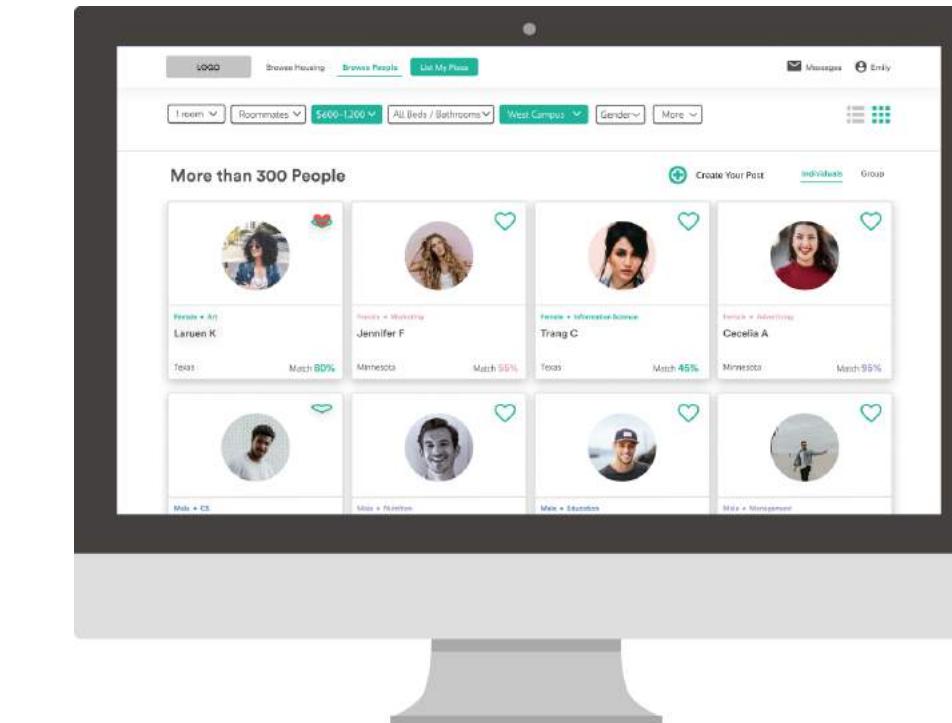
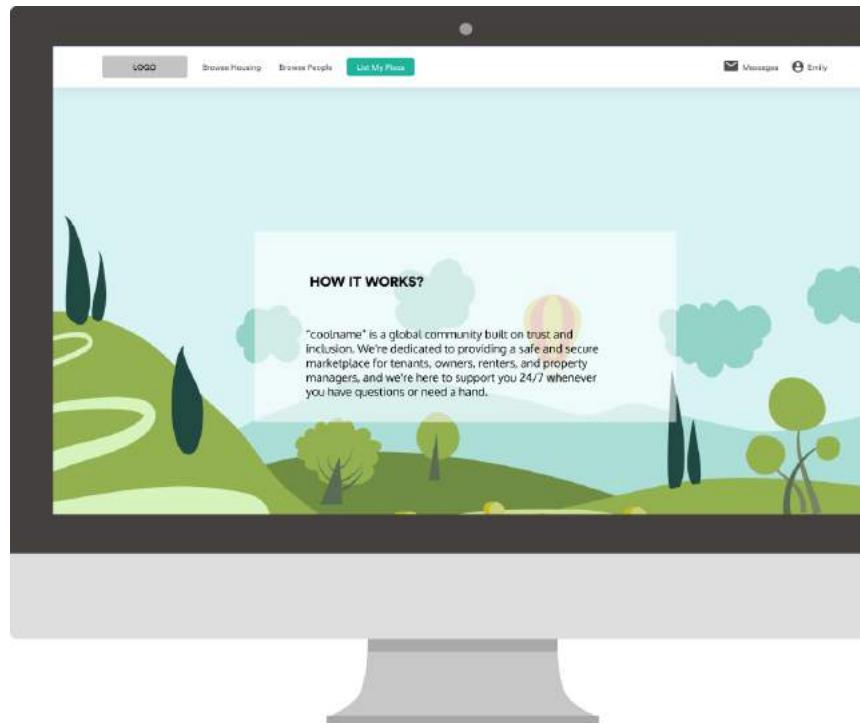
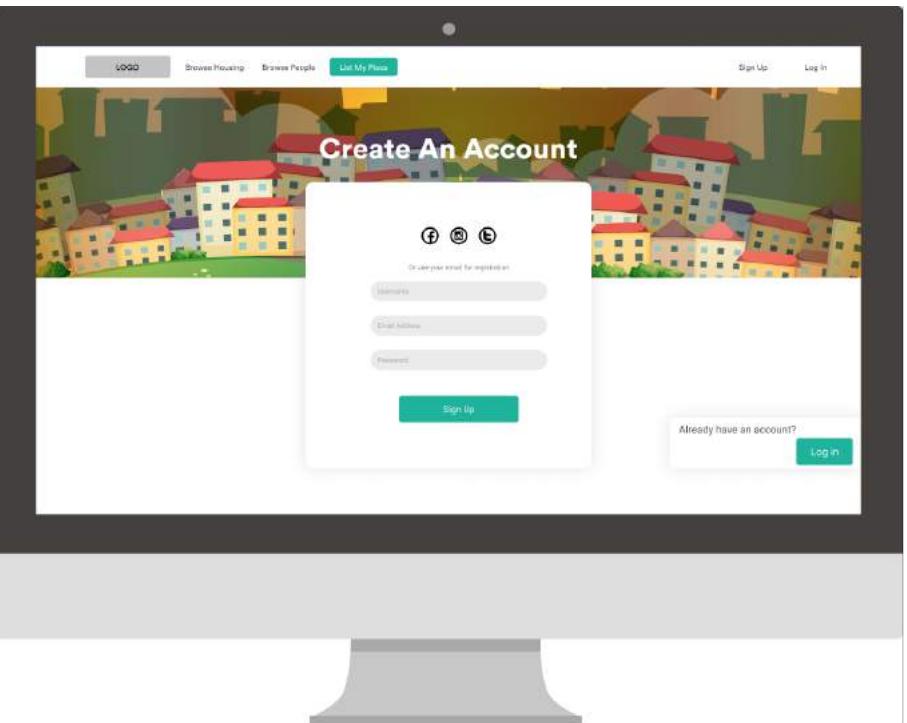


Profile



Prototype

The rest



Key Changes



WEST CAMPUS • 4 BED

3 girls UT MSIS - West Campus Area - Looking for 1 girl

MSIS
No Smoke
Sport Girls
Have 2 Cars
+

Study Hard

Clean

Kitchen Shared

A Puppy

Personailies

- Very Clean
- A Party /Month
- Study Hard
- A Puppy
- Drink A Bit
- No Smoke

\$980 per month Heart

Moving Date

August 1 ~ July 31, 2019

- Utility included
- Vacancy pending

Request to Join

You won't be charged now

Popular

Last week 200 people viewed

WEST CAMPUS • 4 BED 4 BATH

3 girls UT MSIS - West Campus Area - Looking for 1 girl

Group Habits

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Very Clean | <input type="checkbox"/> A Party /Month |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Study Hard | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> A Puppy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Drink A Bit | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No Smoke |

Description

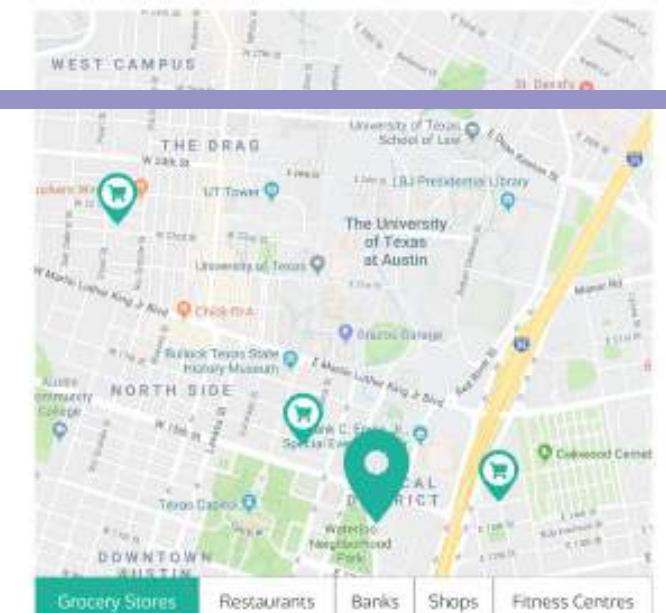
Hi we are a group of 3 graduate girl students at UT Austin, and looking for a person to join us! We all study hard and love tidy things so each of us clean our living room every week. The neighborhood is safe and convenient! Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions.

Preferred Area

We prefer West Campus but we still open to neighborhood near campus.

Preferred Amenities

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Free wifi | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> In-house laundry |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> School Shuttle | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Convenience Store |



Budget
\$980 - \$1,200 /room
Email
Heart

Preferred Lease Length

08/01/2018 - 07/31/2019

Female only

Vacancy pending

[Contact](#)

For more information from the group admin

Popular

Last week 200 people viewed

Gracie Chen Admin

23, Female
Information Studies
M.S., 1st year

Clean | Study Hard | Quiet
Night Owl

Andrea Garcia

25, Female
Mathematics
PhD, 3rd year

Morning Bird | Music | Sociable

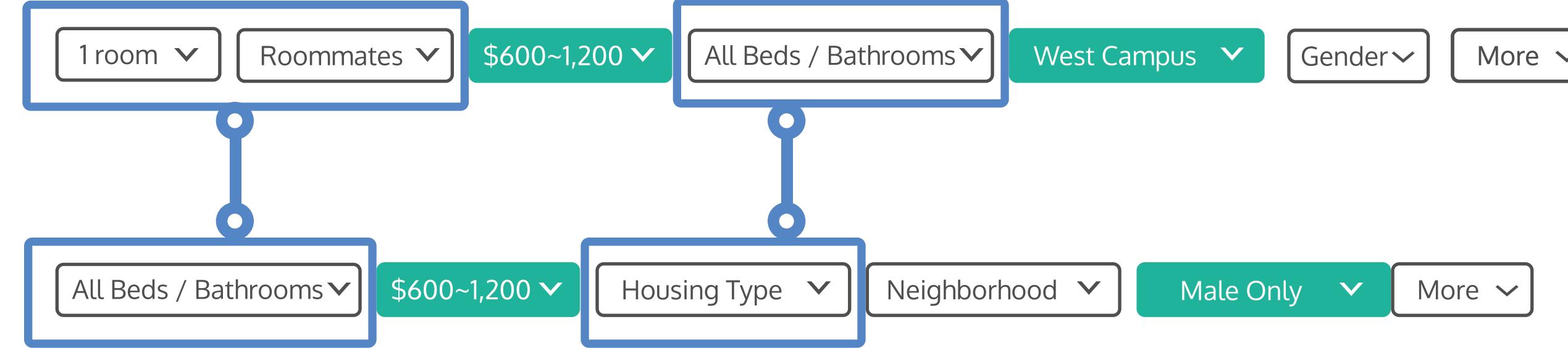
Jessica Rose

25, Female
Mathematics
PhD, 3rd year

Morning Bird | Music | Sociable

Are you interested?

Key Changes



Housing Type

Apartment Condo House
Townhouse Dormitory

Including you, how many people are looking for a place?

- 1 +

Post Type

Sublease Regular

Amenities

Free Wifi In-house laundry Free gym
Swimming pool Room Delivery Smoking Allowed

Facilities (Walking Distance)

School shuttle Public bus Supermarket
Convenience Store UT Campus Airport

Clear Apply

Housing Type

Empty Room 1 roommate 2 roommates
3 roommates 4+ roommates

Post Type

Sublease Non sublease Official

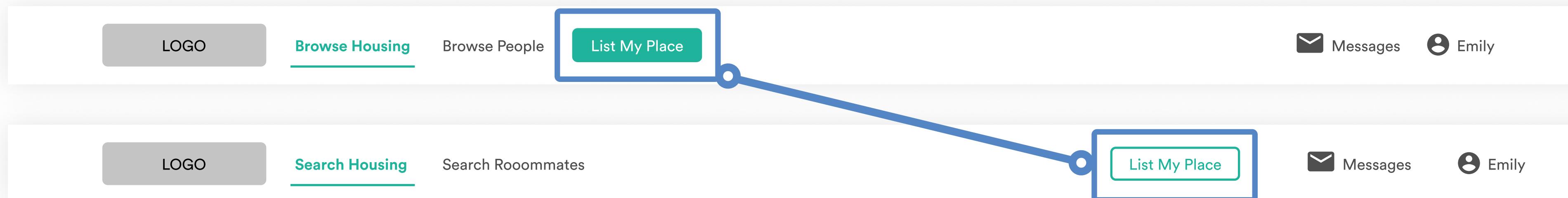
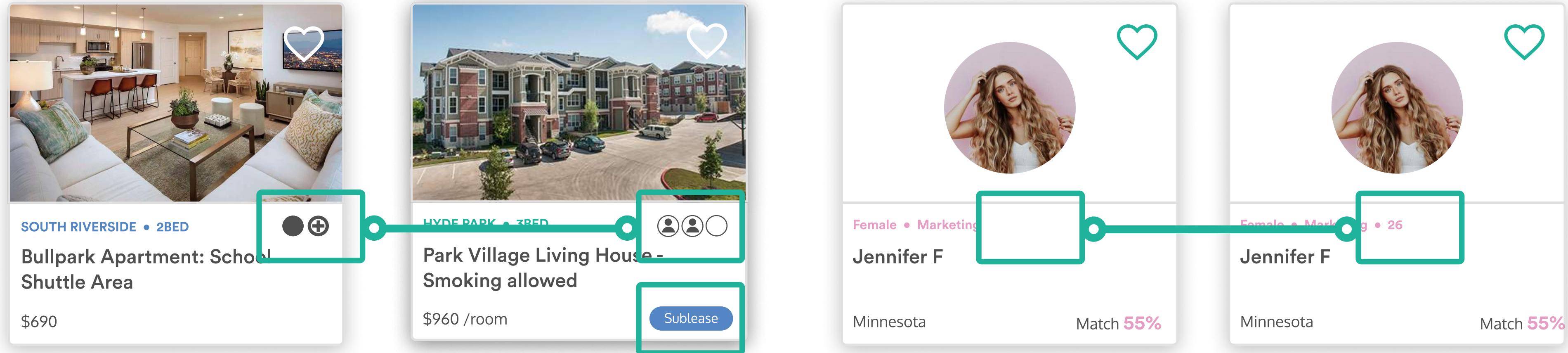
Housing Type

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Key Changes



Prototype on



<https://www.figma.com/proto/92Edbk6oAz1ZLaB21jpHRY/hi-fi-ver1?node-id=0%3A1&scaling=scale-down>