Flippin

Flip Your Future

CS147 Autumn Fall
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Table of Contents

Project Name & Value Proposition

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Flippin

Value Proposition

Flip your future

Team members

Jenny
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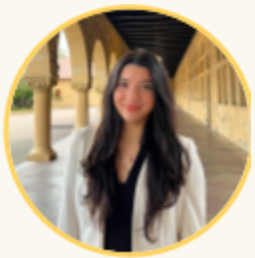


Viviana
Designer & Developer

Problem & Solution

Problem

What does it take to encourage others to flip their futures? Career change is scary when done alone and keeps job seekers from exploring new fields.

Solution

Peer connections and shadow opportunities that provide the support and reflection to confidently life-changing opportunities.

Needfinding

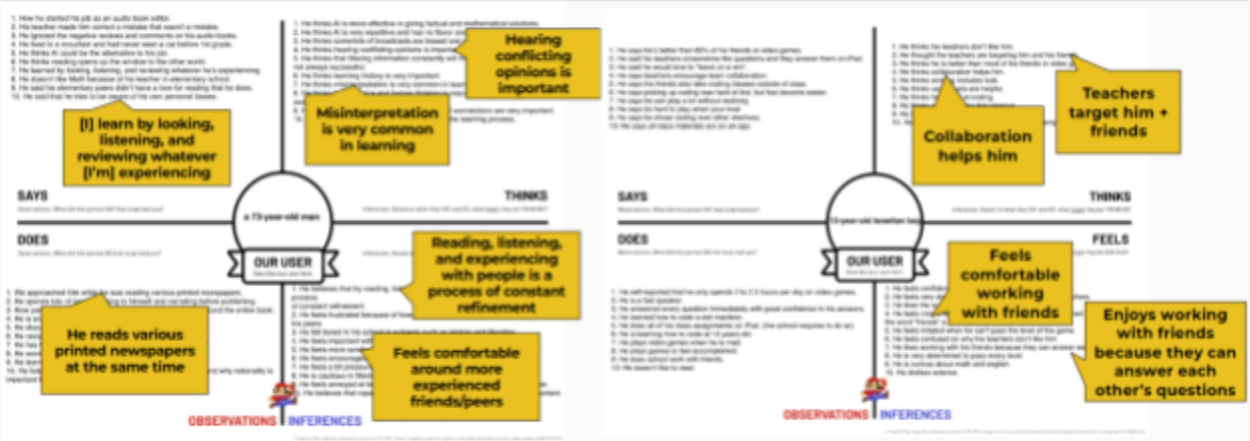
Who did we interview?

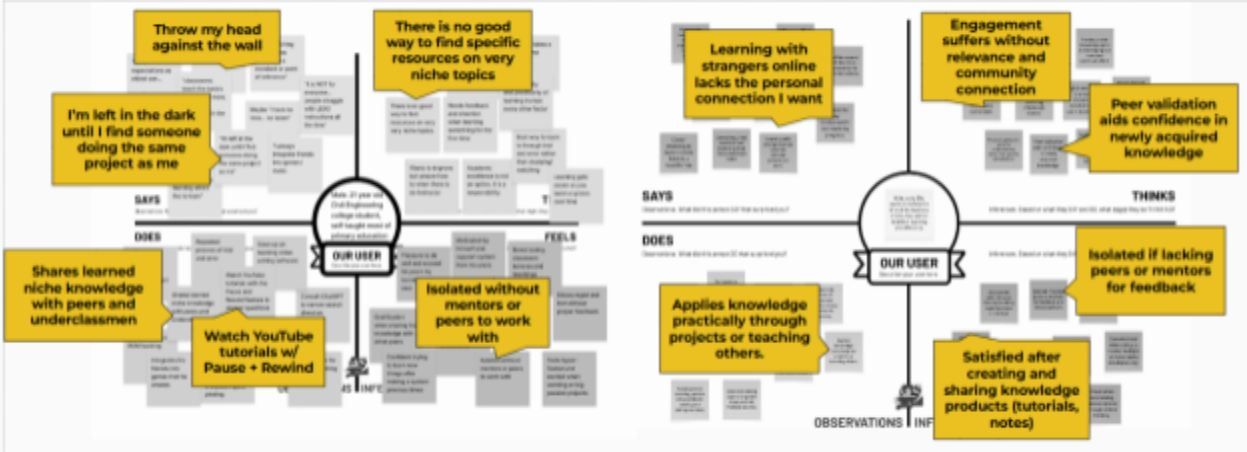
- "Gunter" - 73 y/o who records audiobooks.
- "Finn" - 12 y/o middle school student
- "Jake" - 21 y/o CivilEng college student
- "BMO" - 33 y/o who works at an AI company
- "James" - 30 y/o private chef
- "Jane" - 35 y/o entrepreneur
- "Aaron" - 55 y/o board executive

We interviewed seven participants by going to San Jose, SF, and coffee shops in downtown Palo Alto. They were not compensated. Jake, Aaron, Jane, and BMO were interviewed individually, while Gunter, Aaron, and Finn were interviewed by two people — one interviewer and one notetaker. All participants were randomly approached.

How did we synthesize?

To better understand our interviews, we created empathy maps for every interview we conducted to capture what participants said, did, thought, and felt. These maps helped us develop a deeper understanding of how our interviewees conceptualized friendship and allowed us to identify potential need areas for our project. Through this process, we uncovered several key insights that ultimately shaped the direction of the rest of our work.





The major takeaways from all of the interviews are that learning is social and iterative, guidance and access to resources are critical, sharing knowledge leads to more engagement and retention, and safe and supportive environments encourage participation. However, we recognized that our initial topic of self-learners was a bit too broad, so we narrowed down our scope to be career transitioners, specifically those who already had a career and are seeking to transition to a new one (not new grads).

POVs & Experience Prototypes

"Jane" - 35 y/o entrepreneur Interview:

- We met a mid-30s entrepreneur who transitioned from tech startups to real estate and is now returning to college.
- We were surprised that despite his strong skills and experience, he feels frustrated that recruiters don't ask the right questions and wishes for more personal, five-minute conversations.
- We wonder if this means he feels unseen and burdened by having to justify his employment gap rather than being valued for his experience.
- It would be game-changing if he could feel recognized and confident in his background, without anxiety about how others perceive his career transitions.

"Aaron" - 55 y/o board executive Interview:

- We met an early 50s year old well-accomplished board executive and lifelong learner who has worked in product management, aerospace sales, finance, and robotics.
- We were surprised to notice that many of her most meaningful career shifts began with spontaneous moments, like a single phone call, that she embraced without overanalyzing.
- We wonder if this means that career growth and self-fulfillment can come from serendipitous opportunities rather than a pre-planned trajectory.
- It would be game-changing if people felt seen and confident in trusting these moments of serendipity rather than uncertainty and empowered to recognize and respond to unexpected opportunities, without anxiety about deviating from a conventional career trajectory.

"James" - 30 y/o private chef Interview:

- We met a 30-year-old man who studied film & acting in college and is currently a private chef in Palo Alto.
- We were surprised to notice that he switched to a totally different career after college.
- We wondered if this means people are redefining "career success" not as sticking to one path, but as pursuing creativity across fields.

- It would be game-changing if we could celebrate and connect people with nonlinear career journeys.

HMW Statements:

- HMW make an employment gap feel like an asset and strength rather than a burden?
- HMW make him feel seen during the recruiting process?
- HMW create spaces for authentic conversations between candidates and recruiters?
- HMW encourage people to say YES to more opportunities out of their comfort zone?
- HMW help mid-career professionals translate their past work into new contexts?
- HMW use people's experiences to help others who are in the same situation?

Top 3 Solutions

1. Match users with peers who also want to take more risks. They hold each other accountable for saying yes to new things and share reflections afterward. Builds social reinforcement and reduces fear of failure. Framed as challenge event with friends that draw a "dare" and have to do it all together
2. Turn past experiences into podcast episodes. People record their personal life/work experiences and post it onto a feed for other strangers to listen to, respond or relate to, so they don't feel alone in their journey. AI can turn it into easily digestible podcast episodes that people can listen to on the move. (Fizz?)
3. Create a platform where people can shadow each other's days in their target field by offering in-person shadow session scheduling or virtually stepping into someone else's shoes.

Experience Prototypes

1. ***Asked someone to do something that they've always wanted to do but never did it.***
    a. **Assumption**: Social reinforcement and peer accountability effectively motivate individuals to take more risk.

b. **Prototype Setup**: Person A shared something she had always wanted to do but never had the courage to try alone. Person B listened, offered encouragement, and joined her in completing the challenge together. We used challenge cards with prompts (e.g., "go through the tunnel by the fountain at the roundabout next to gates to memorial church").

c. **Worked**: It was amazing to see how much of a difference a little support made. The participant, who had been hesitating for a long time, finally took the leap and ended up feeling proud, relieved, and energized. Doing it together turned the whole thing from something intimidating into something exciting, more like an adventure than a challenge. She also said that having someone there to cheer her on made the experience feel less about fear and more about possibility.



d. **Didn't work**: The problem was that the effect didn't last. Once the moment passed, it was hard to keep that momentum going, and there wasn't much structure to help her turn that one bold action into a pattern of behavior. Because the activity was so personal, it was also tricky to design something that would work the same way for other people.

e. **What we learned:** The real power of this experience came from the emotional support, not the action itself. The participant wasn't just motivated by finally doing the thing. She was motivated by knowing someone believed in her and had her back. That shared experience was what gave her the push she needed.

2. ***Have two strangers tell a story to another.***
    a. **Assumption**: Sharing stories in a social, supportive setting fosters connection, trust, and empathy, which motivates individuals to open up and engage more fully.

    b. **Prototype Setup:** Person A and Person B, complete strangers, each shared a personal story with each other, and then together told the combined story to Person C. This storytelling circle used prompt cards with engaging story starters (e.g., "Tell about a moment when you felt truly surprised").

(Clickable link)

    c. **Worked:** It was striking how quickly the strangers bonded through sharing stories. The act of listening and retelling created an emotional bridge that made everyone feel more connected and valued. Person C's role as the listener and receiver of the joint story added a sense of shared purpose and celebration. The experience turned strangers into collaborators, and the energy in the room shifted from awkwardness to warmth and curiosity.

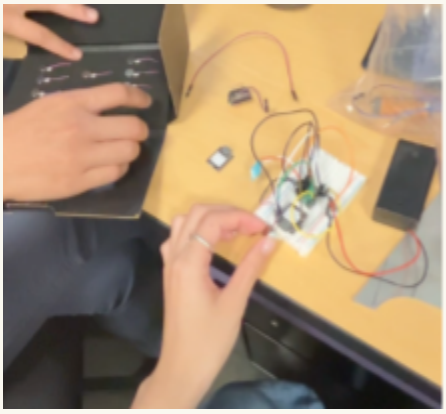
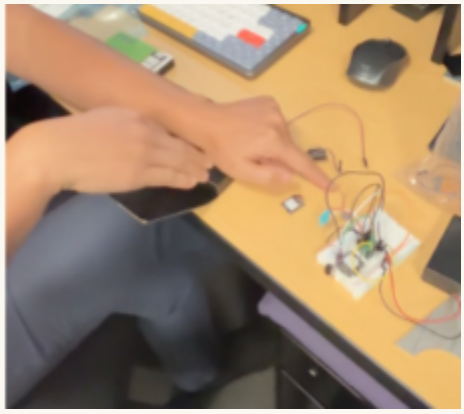
    d. **Didn't work**: Despite the initial spark, the deeper connection faded quickly once the activity ended. The strangers did not have a structured way to continue the interaction or develop the trust built in the moment. The storytelling prompts sometimes felt too generic for some participants, making it harder for them to fully engage or choose stories that truly resonated.

    e. **What we learned**: The core motivation came from the human connection created through mutual listening and joint storytelling. It wasn't just about the stories told but about the way being heard and witnessed made each person feel seen and supported. The social element of having both a co-storyteller and a shared audience amplified the impact, showing that connection and accountability are strongest in a shared experience rather than solitary actions. This method highlights the power of emotional

presence and shared vulnerability as motivators for openness and engagement.

3. ***Arranged a shadowing session within a research lab to allow a participant to directly observe a professional in their work setting and engage in an authentic exchange.***
    a. **Assumption**: Seeing someone do something in a different field/career is motivating.

    b. **Prototype Setup**: We ran a shadowing session inside an active Mechanical Engineering research lab and adjoining offices where an eager observer (Person A) paired with a host mentor (Person B) to test whether hands-on exposure and informal mentorship foster motivation, curiosity, and confidence in exploring new fields. The session began with a casual introduction and a guided lab tour, followed by a conversation about the mentor's career path, daily responsibilities, and current projects. We obtained consent and recorded the whole process.

    c. **Worked**: The shadowing experience successfully conveyed what a researcher's day-to-day work entails. The participant who had no prior background in that area was able to grasp the foundational tasks and mental models of the role through guided observation and a small assigned project. Although her full reflection wasn't recorded, she expressed genuine curiosity and excitement about trying something beyond her comfort zone. The presence of a mentor made the learning process more approachable; guidance in real time allowed her to progress with confidence rather than feeling lost in self-directed exploration. This hands-on facilitation

transformed what could have been an intimidating academic environment into one that felt accessible and personal.

d. **Didn't work**: The prototype was limited in duration, which meant the participant's exposure only skimmed the surface of what the role entailed. While the observation sparked curiosity, it didn't yet produce sustained motivation or deeper understanding of long-term research challenges. The experience still felt curated rather than fully immersive, which limited its authenticity as a full snapshot of professional life.

e. **What we learned**: We were surprised to learn that the motivation the participant gained did not come from the work's technical content itself, but from observing the researcher's approach to problem solving and admiring to become someone with that extensive knowledge on that object. This seems to suggest that the authentic behavior and attitude of the host / mentor seems to matter a lot, influencing how the participant would later view that subject. Even a small, low-stakes responsibility shifted her mindset from curiosity to investment.

Design Evolution

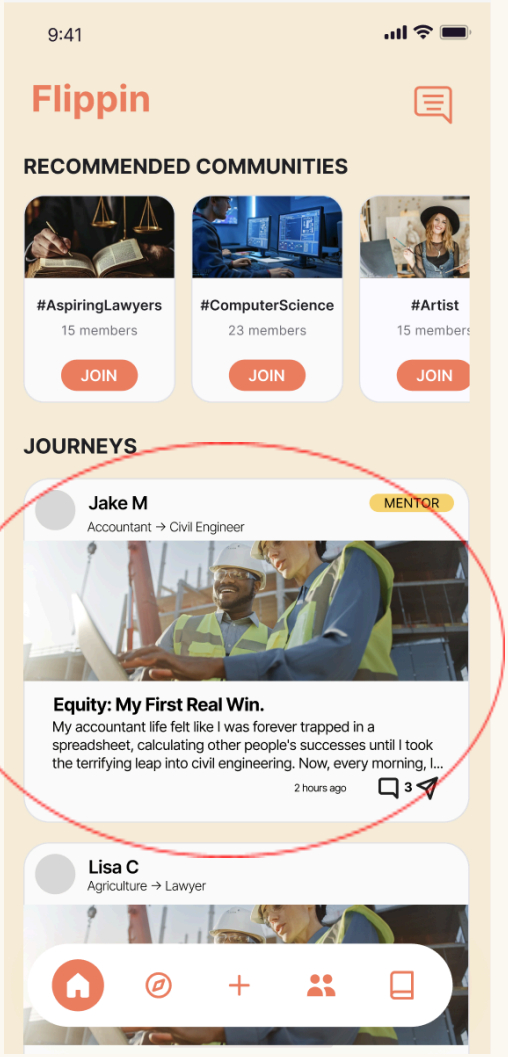
Final Solution

The solution we developed is a mobile app designed to ease the challenges people face during career transitions. Through our interviews, many participants shared that this phase was one of the lowest points in their lives, they were between jobs, without income, while their peers had already settled into stable careers. Many also struggled to find entry-level opportunities in their desired fields due to age or lack of relevant experience, making it difficult to present themselves competitively. They often felt isolated and disconnected. To address these issues, our app enables users to connect with others experiencing similar transitions, offering a sense of community and shared support. Users can explore stories from people transitioning between specific roles, helping them see what has or hasn't worked for others on similar paths. Additionally, the app provides job-shadowing opportunities so users can gain hands-on experience, learn essential skills, and better understand how professionals in their target roles approach their work.

Tasks

Simple: Read stories or reflections from others going through similar stages of career transitions

During our needfinding process, our interviewees shared a common sentiment that during career transitions, they all felt alone. There weren't a lot of resources to support them and they didn't know which community or individuals they could turn to because these career change stories aren't as transparent or visible in social media online. By having journeys as the first view on our platform, users will immediately be able to find people they can relate to or ask for advice, encouraging a tight-knit support network. This also takes pressure off the user to upload anything.

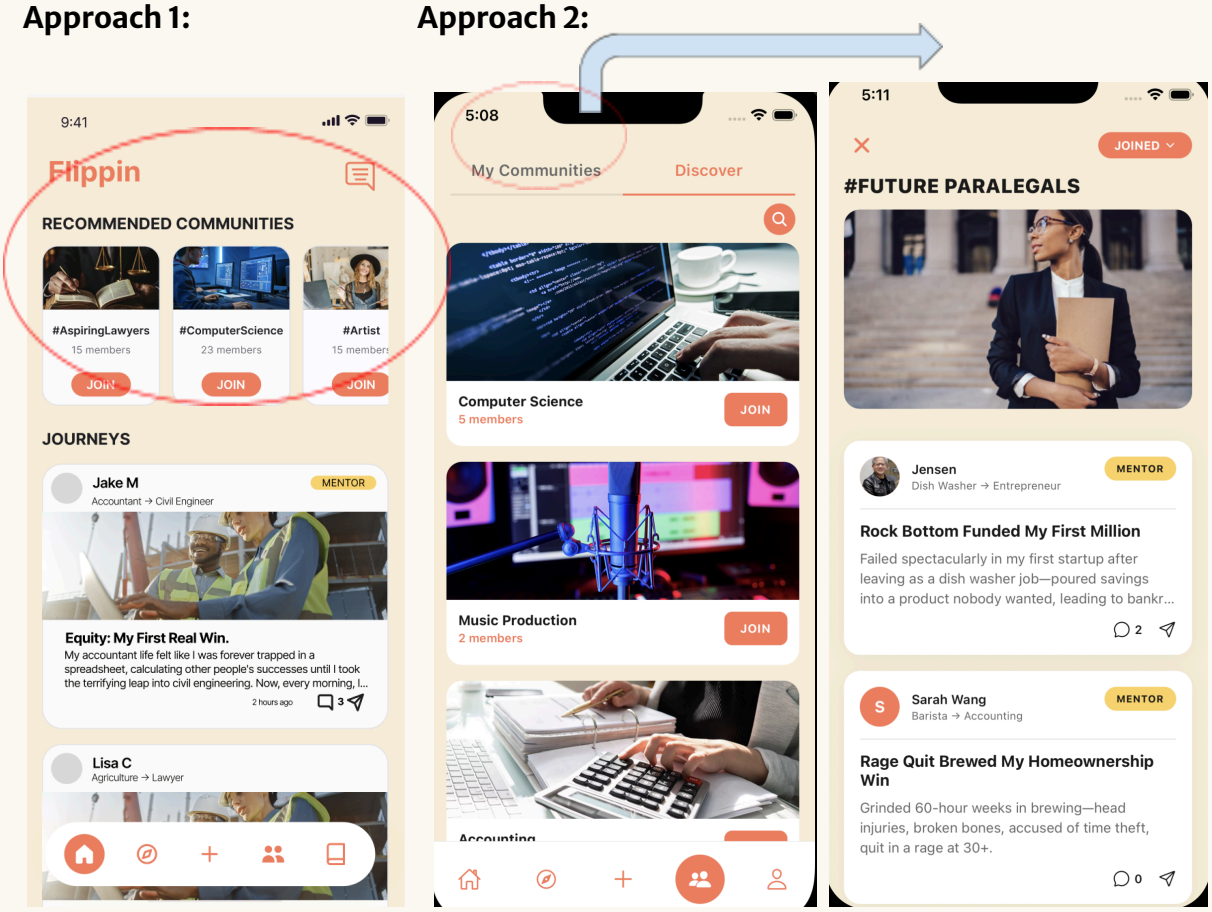


On the home page, scroll down to explore people's journeys and their trajectories. You can comment on their posts to share your thoughts, offer support, or start a conversation.

Simple: I want to join a group of people with similar career transition goals

Joining a group should be as easy as pressing a button. And to begin seeing relatable content, we expect that users would search for communities and be willing to press join at suggestion. Hence, this task is low-complexity and likely to occur.

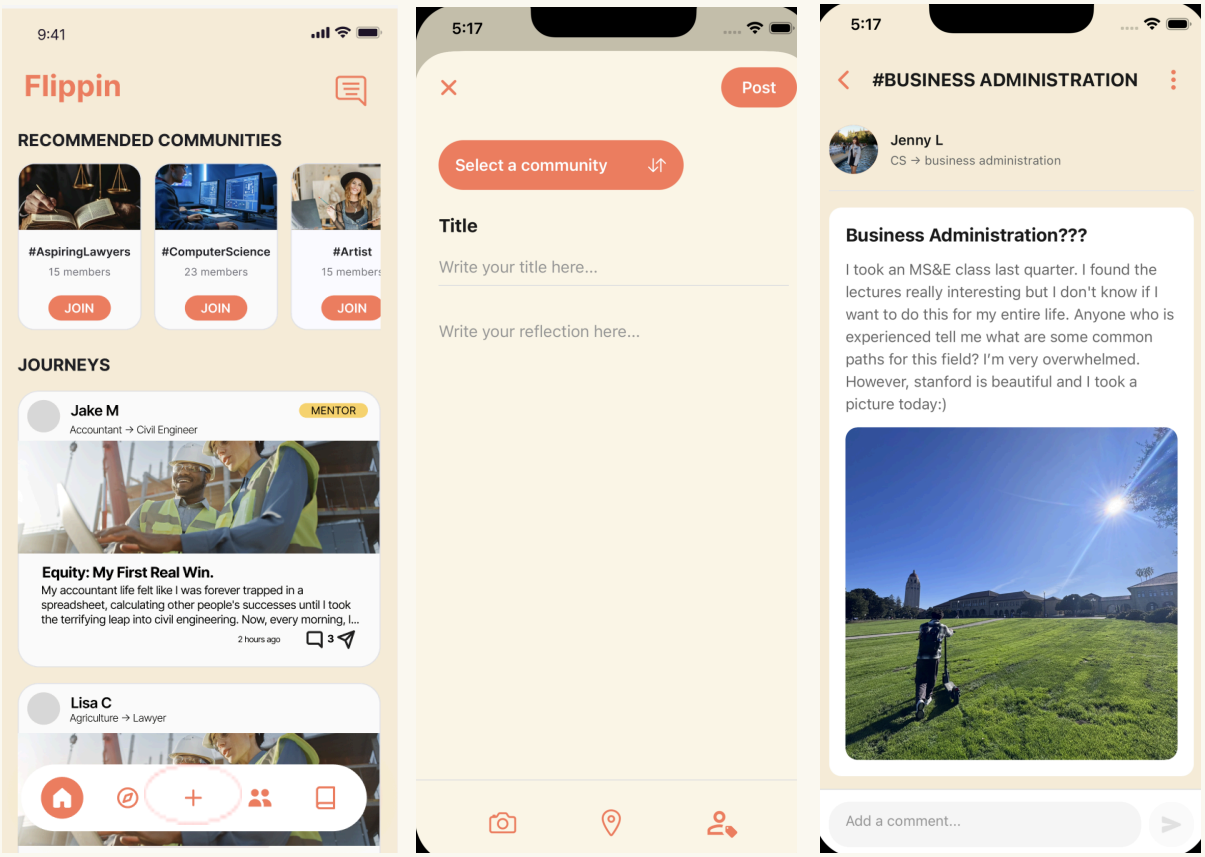
Approach 1: **Approach 2:**



There are two ways to join solutions: through the "Recommended Communities" section on the home page or via the Community tab. On the home page, you can join any community that interests you. In the Community tab, use the Discover feature to search for specific communities you want to join. After you click "Join," the community will automatically appear under "My Communities." Within the communities you've joined (fig.3), you'll be able to see people sharing posts about their experiences related to that path.

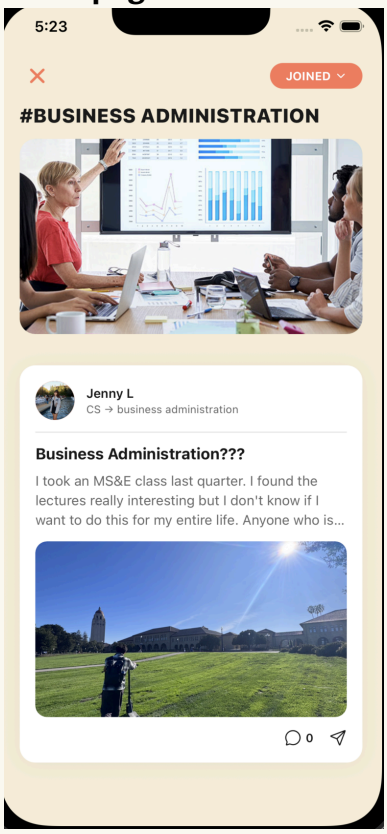
Moderate: I want to document my progress and get feedback from others making transitions

This feature allows users to have tangible ways to view their progress at any time, connect with their community, and ask for advice from mentors at any time. This also makes career switches less of a black box and creates more transparency to make this process much easier for the next generation of people to come.



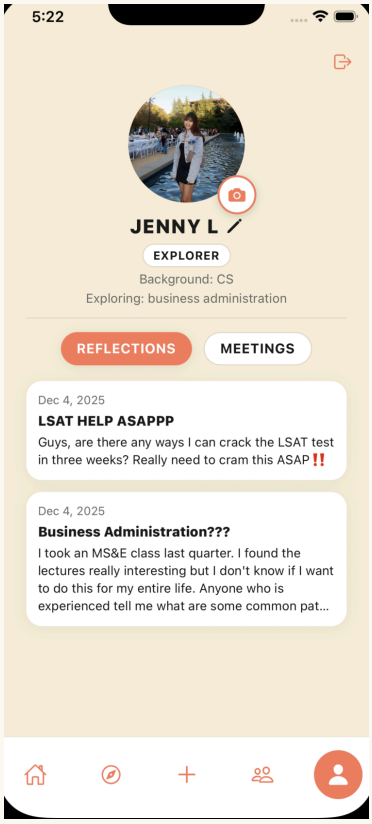
After clicking the "+" button, users are redirected to the posting page, where they can select one of the communities they've joined and start writing their post. They can attach photos, add a location, and tag other people. Once published, the post will appear on the home page as well as within the corresponding community's feed. Additionally, you can also view your post (aka reflection) under the "Me" tab (shown below).

Home page:



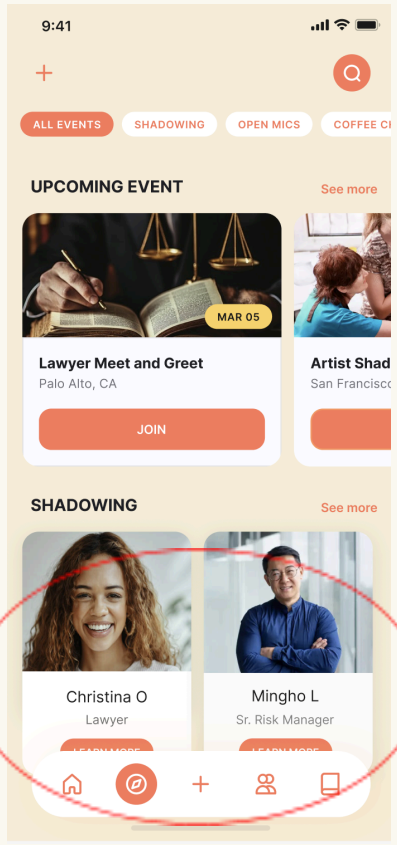
Community Page:

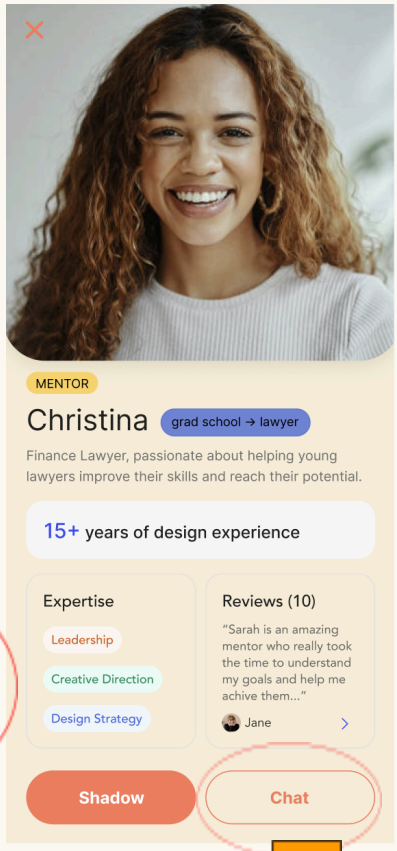
"Me" Tab:

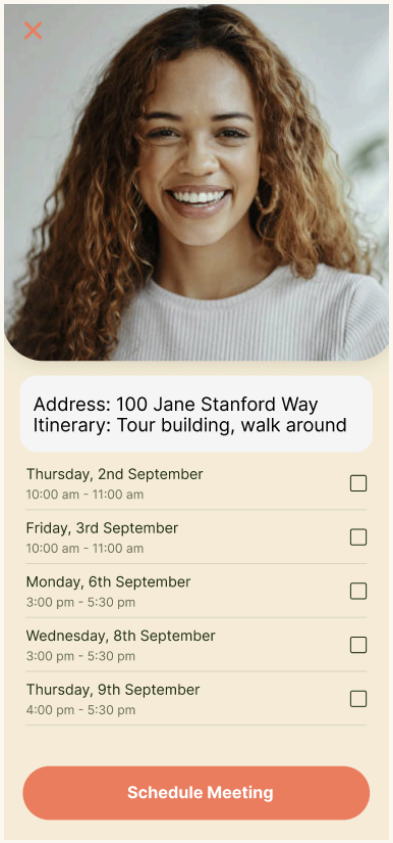


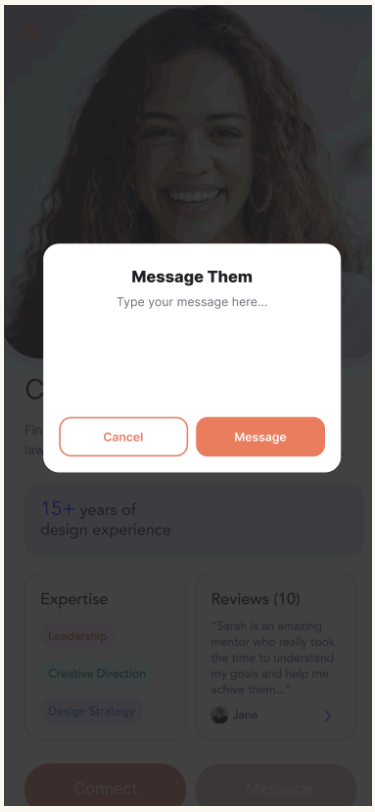
Complex: I want to discover opportunities to shadow someone in a different career in my area.

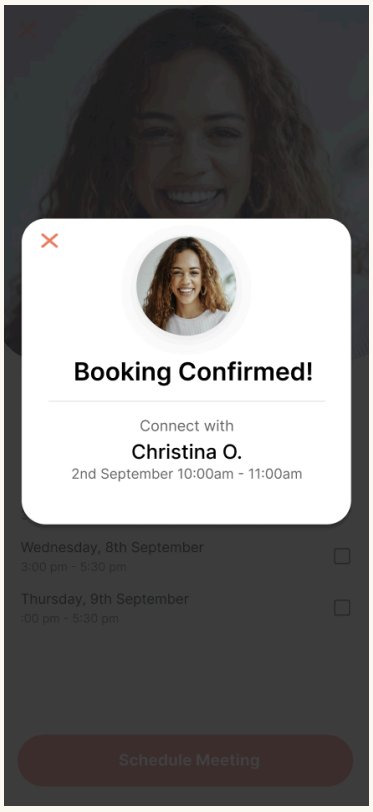
Finding and arranging a meaningful shadowing opportunity in a new career isn't simple. A common topic that popped up during needfinding interviews was that they needed experience to switch careers but it wasn't as easily accessible. Mentors are willing to donate their time but there is no centralized place to find them outside of specialized career or university programs. It requires discovering mentors who are both trustworthy and available, verifying that their background and experience match what the user hopes to explore. Even once a match is made, scheduling and coordinating a session can easily fall through due to time conflicts or last-minute changes. Doing this all in one platform should give more access and opportunities to everyone. Information leads to equity.


9:41
ALL EVENTS
SHADOWING
OPEN MICS
UPCOMING EVENT
See more
MAR 05
Lawyer Meet and Greet
Palo Alto, CA
JOIN
SHADOWING
See more
Christina O
Lawyer
Mingho L
Sr. Risk Manager


MENTOR
Christina
grad school → lawyer
Finance Lawyer, passionate about helping young lawyers improve their skills and reach their potential.
15+ years of design experience
Expertise
Leadership
Creative Direction
Design Strategy
Reviews (10)
"Sarah is an amazing mentor who really took the time to understand my goals and help me achive them..."
Jane
Shadow
Chat


Address: 100 Jane Stanford Way
Itinerary: Tour building, walk around
Thursday, 2nd September
10:00 am - 11:00 am
Friday, 3rd September
10:00 am - 11:00 am
Monday, 6th September
3:00 pm - 5:30 pm
Wednesday, 8th September
3:00 pm - 5:30 pm
Thursday, 9th September
4:00 pm - 5:30 pm
Schedule Meeting


Message Them
Type your message here...
Cancel
Message
15+ years of design experience
Expertise
Reviews (10)


Booking Confirmed!
Connect with
Christina O.
2nd September 10:00am - 11:00am
Wednesday, 8th September
Thursday, 9th September
Schedule Meeting

After clicking on the "Learn More" button of a specific mentor, users will be redirected to the mentor's basic information page, where they can choose to shadow the mentor or chat to learn more. After clicking the "Shadow" button, users will be able to choose a time slot to shadow. If users want to chat with mentors, simply click the "Chat" button. If succeeded, the confirmation message will be displayed.

Modalities

As part of our early design exploration, our team deliberately investigated multiple modalities (**mobile, tablet, and VR**) to understand how Flippin could best support career transitioners across different contexts of use. By sketching and prototyping across these platforms, we aimed to avoid prematurely narrowing our design space and instead allow our insights from needfinding and user scenarios to guide convergence toward the most suitable medium.

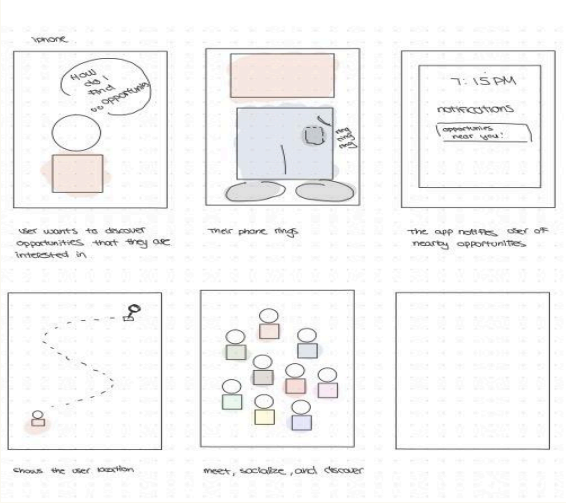
Mobile

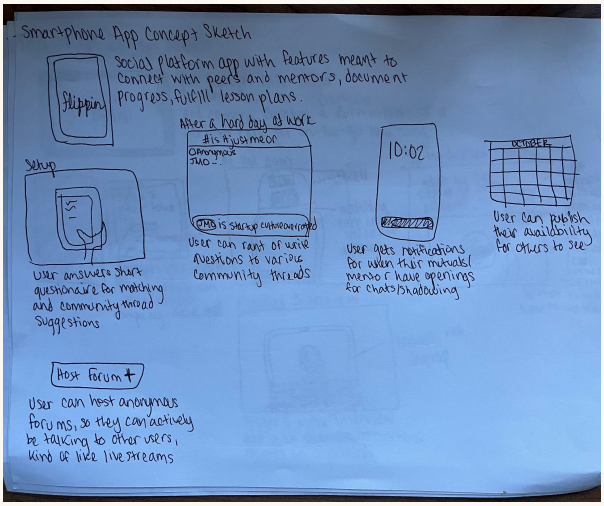
Mobile emerged as our most promising and intuitive modality early in the process. Throughout needfinding, participants frequently described interacting with career-related content during small pockets of time: on commutes, between tasks, or during moments of reflection at home. These behaviors strongly aligned with mobile usage patterns.

Our mobile sketches focused on lightweight, image-forward layouts that supported:

- Quick browsing of communities
- Streamlined access to shadowing opportunities
- Low-friction reflection posting
- Personal connection through mentor imagery

Because career transitioners often juggle uncertainty, limited time, and emotional vulnerability, designing for mobile allowed us to prioritize **accessibility, immediacy, and emotional warmth**. The portability of mobile also aligns with the spontaneous, exploratory nature of discovering new careers.





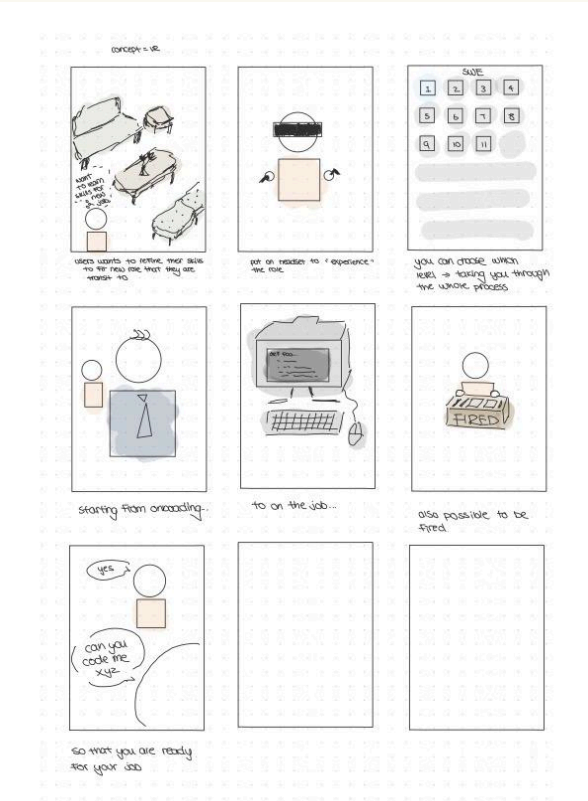
VR

Our VR explorations represented our most speculative and imaginative concepts. We envisioned immersive storytelling hubs, circular conversation spaces, and embodied learning environments that could make career exploration more experiential. These sketches helped us think beyond traditional screen-based interactions and consider how presence, environment, and spatial storytelling could influence personal growth.

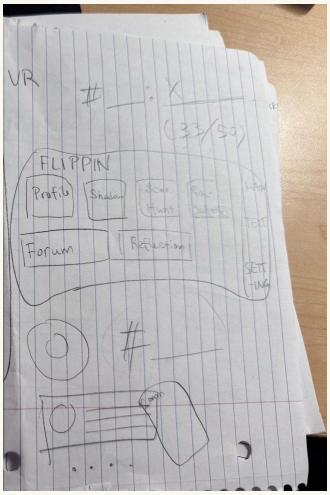
However, several constraints emerged:

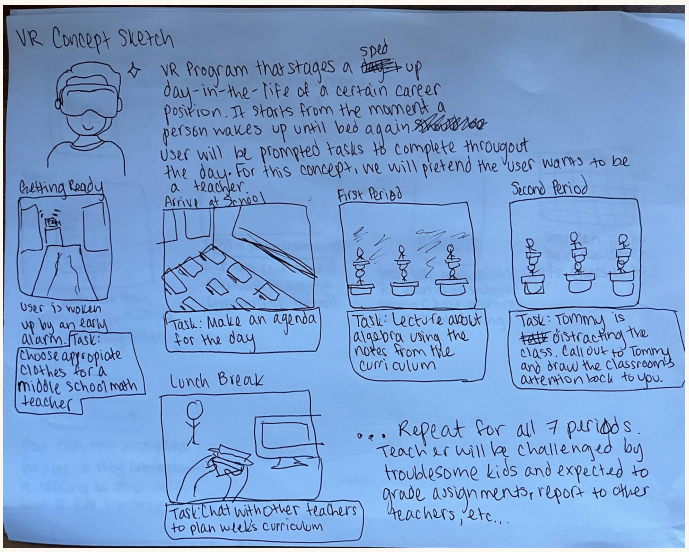
- VR headsets are not widely accessible among our target users.
- Interacting in VR requires uninterrupted physical and cognitive space—conditions that conflict with the busy, fragmented lives of career transitioners.
- The immersive format introduced complexity that detracted from our core goal of **reducing barriers to exploration**, not increasing them.

While VR remains an inspiring long-term avenue for experiential shadowing simulations, we ultimately aligned our MVP with users' everyday realities rather than aspirational technologies.


concept = VR
starting from onboarding...
to on the job...
also possible to be fired
can you code the xyz
so that you are ready for your job


VR headset
Follow footsteps
select people you want to shadow
hands-on and immersive
access to global experiences in home space


VR
FLIPPIN
Profile
Shadow
Forum
Reflection


VR Concept Sketch
VR Program that stages a sped up day-in-the-life of a certain career position. It starts from the moment a person wakes up until bed again. User will be prompted tasks to complete throughout the day. For this concept, we will pretend the user wants to be a teacher.
Getting Ready
User is woken up by an early alarm. Task: Choose appropriate clothes for a middle school math teacher
Arrive at School
Task: Make an agenda for the day
First Period
Task: Lecture about algebra using the notes from the curriculum
Second Period
Task: Tommy is distracting the class. Call out to Tommy and draw the classroom's attention back to you.
Lunch Break
Task: Chat with other teachers to plan week's curriculum
... Repeat for all 7 periods. Teacher will be challenged by troublesome kids and expected to grade assignments, report to other teachers, etc...

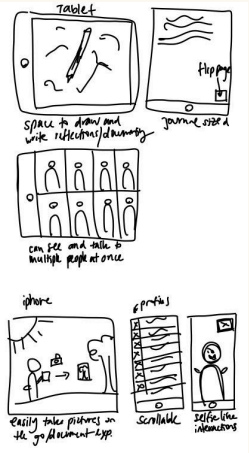
Tablet

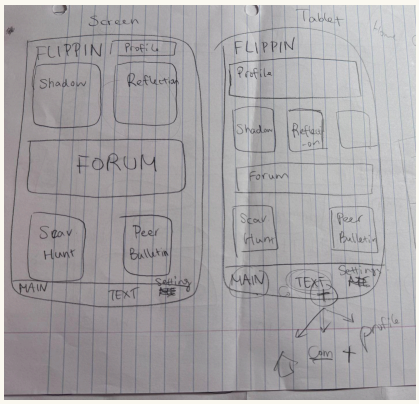
We explored tablet designs primarily to test whether a larger display could enhance comparison across communities, browsing mentor profiles, or engaging in reflection writing. The sketches revealed that while the increased screen real estate allowed for richer, multi-column layouts, it also introduced cognitive load that contradicted our users' needs.

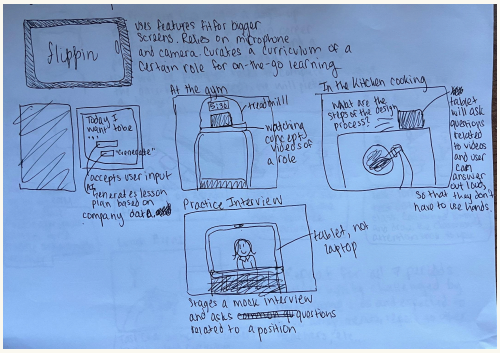
In particular:

- Tablet workflows encouraged longer sit-down sessions, which do not match the short-burst usage patterns of career transitioners.
- The density of information risked overwhelming first-time users seeking emotional reassurance rather than analysis-heavy interfaces.

Although the tablet modality offered interesting possibilities for future expansions (such as multi-pane reflection journals or more immersive community browsing), we determined it was not the most appropriate primary platform for our MVP.



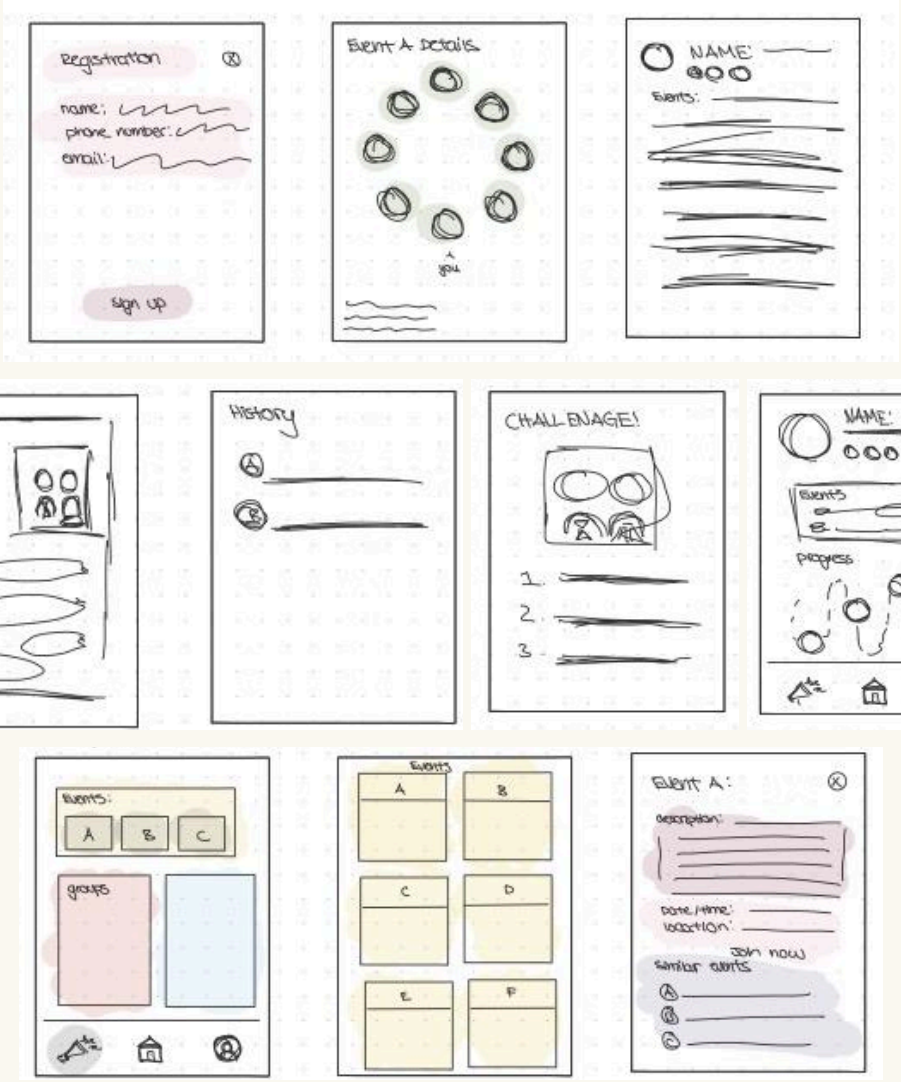




After removing Tablet, we deepened our exploration of **VR** and **Mobile**, producing the sketches shown in the report.

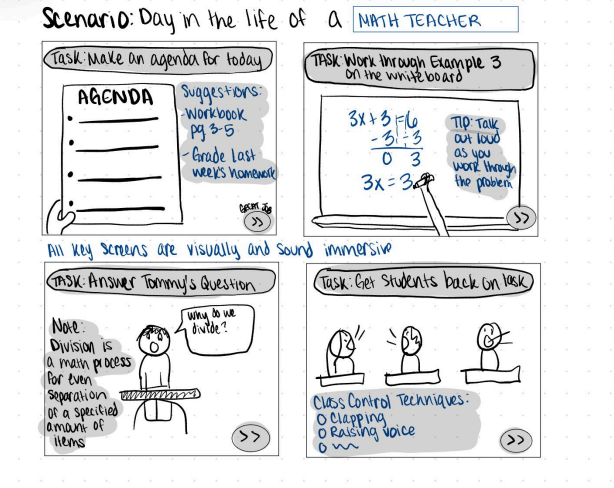
Mobile Expanded

Mobile consistently aligned with both user behavior and our design goals. Our sketches demonstrated how mobile could support quick browsing, low-pressure reflection, and simple scheduling, all within familiar, approachable patterns. Mobile also offered the emotional safety and immediacy that career transitioners emphasized in needfinding.



VR Expanded

VR allowed us to imagine more immersive, experiential forms of career exploration—such as story rooms, circular discussion spaces, and environment-based shadowing simulations. However, practical barriers soon emerged: limited accessibility, high cognitive load, and the need for uninterrupted physical space. While conceptually inspiring, VR did not align with the lightweight, everyday interactions our users needed.



After iterating across all three modalities, we narrowed from **three → two → one**, ultimately selecting **Mobile** as the primary platform. Our decision was grounded in three key insights:

1. **Career transitions are socially driven**, and mobile is the most effective medium for consistent, relational, community-centered engagement.
2. **Accessibility and inclusivity** are essential; mobile devices provide the widest adoption, the strongest assistive technology ecosystem, and the lowest barrier to entry.
3. **Our users rely on brief, intermittent interactions**, often while juggling other responsibilities. A mobile app fits naturally into these micro-moments, whereas VR and tablet would require more deliberate, uninterrupted usage.

Choosing mobile allowed our team to design for the widest audience while supporting our deeper mission: **empowering career transitioners through shared stories, reflection, and supportive social connection.**

Low-Fi Prototype

Our team created a low-fidelity prototype in Figma and exported it into printed paper prototypes for early testing. This prototype included:

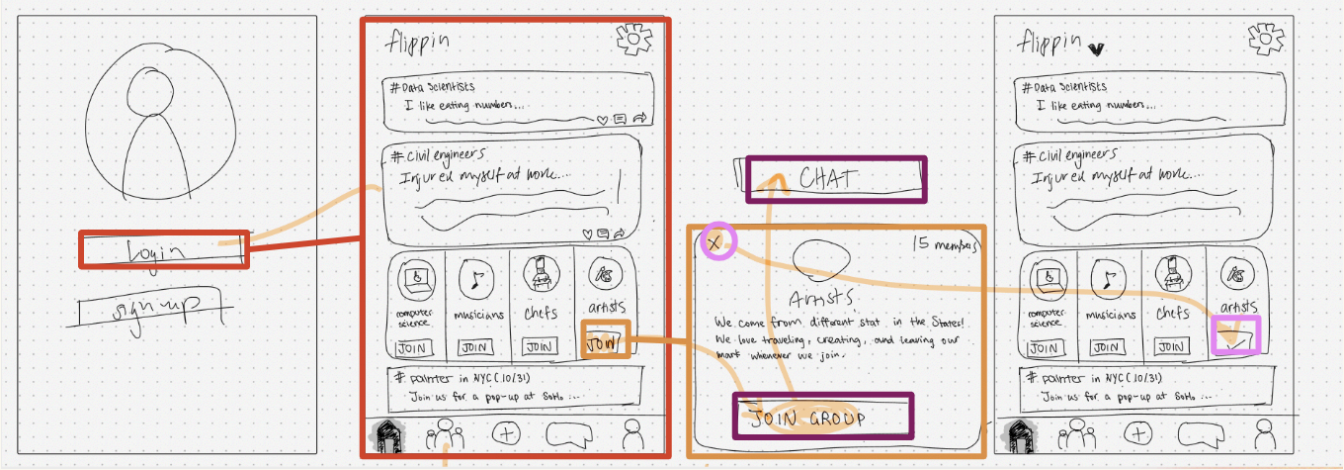
- Login page
- Home, Communities, Reflection, Chats, and Profile screens
- Pop-up modal simulations for reflections and shadowing flows

We selected paper prototyping because it enabled rapid iteration and made it easier for users to think aloud without assuming that elements were "final." This method successfully surfaced conceptual misunderstandings while minimizing design overhead.

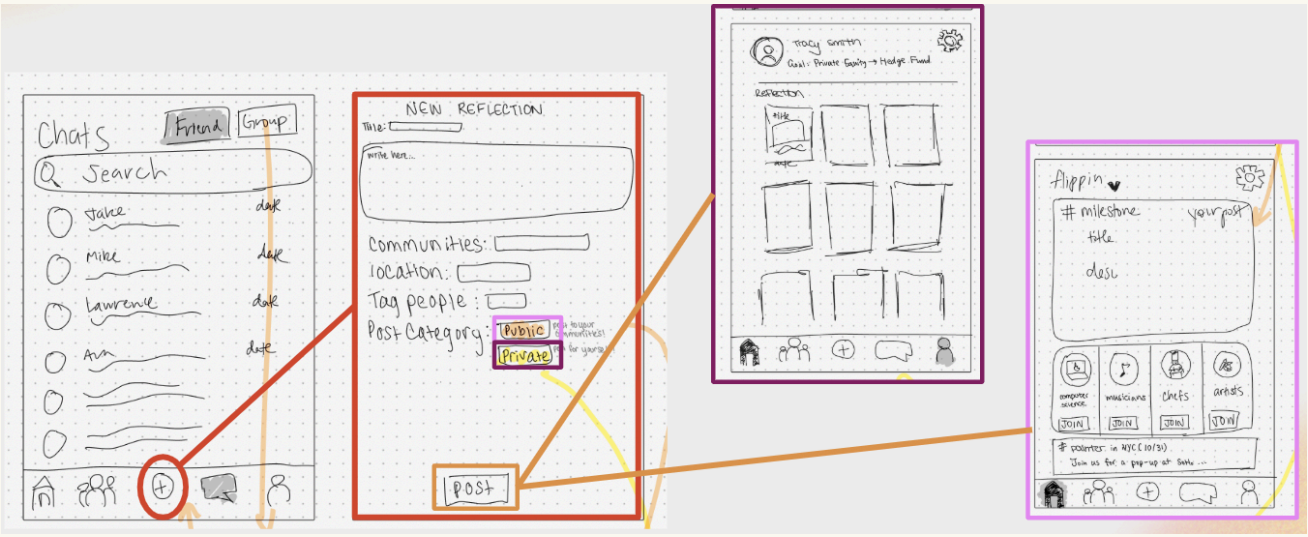
We designed three tasks to evaluate whether users understood Flippin's core value propositions:

1. **Joining a community group (e.g., artists).**
2. **Documenting progress through a reflection post.**
3. **Finding and scheduling a shadowing opportunity.**

These tasks map onto the three pillars of our product: *community*, *reflection*, and *exploration*.



Task 1: Imagine you've just signed up for this platform and want to connect with other artists. How would you go about joining a group of artists



Task 2: Now imagine you've been part of this group for a few weeks. You want to document your progress by posting a reflection. Show me how you would do that.

Task 3: Imagine you want to explore shadowing opportunities.You're hoping to find someone nearby who's open to being shadowed. How would you find and sign up for one of these opportunities?

Testing Process

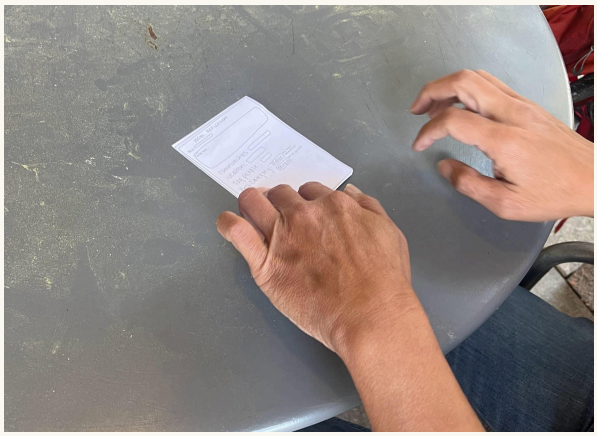
Our testing process was intentionally structured and purposeful:

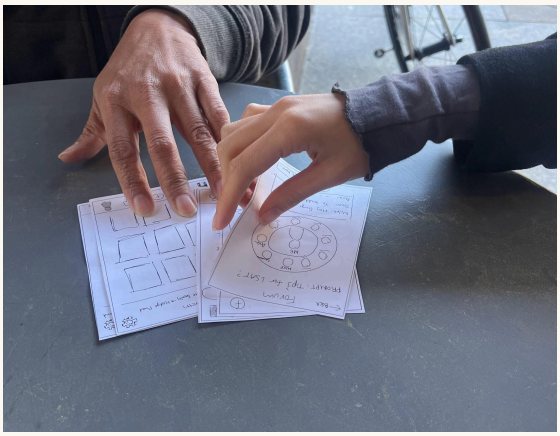
- We **sought participants who were current or former career transitioners**, preferably between **25–50 years old**, to align with the demographics surfaced during needfinding.
- We explicitly chose **not to interview Stanford students**, as most were not undergoing a career transition and would not represent our target population.
- Testing sessions were conducted across **various public campus locations**, where individuals were approachable and receptive.
- We primarily approached participants **seated at tables**, allowing for more comfortable, extended conversations.

During each session:

1. We introduced ourselves and provided a brief explanation of our project.
2. We walked participants through **prepared scenarios** from our task script.
3. We encouraged them to **think out loud**, articulating confusions, expectations, and emotional reactions.
4. After completing the tasks, we asked **three post-testing questions** to gather reflections on clarity, usability, and emotional resonance.

This structured process helped ensure consistency across sessions while giving us insight into both functional and emotional dimensions of the user experience.





Observations:

- Users struggled to distinguish **public vs. private posting**.
- The **"+" button** was universally, but incorrectly, associated only with posting.
- Shadowing opportunities were difficult to locate, indicating poor discoverability.
- Two users were unclear about the meaning of "communities."

- Reassuringly, users joined groups successfully without accidental misclicks.

These insights revealed disconnects between our mental model and user expectations, prompting a significant redesign of navigation structure and terminology.

Following our low-fidelity user testing sessions, our team synthesized key findings into four reflective categories: what surprised us, what we wondered, what excited us, and what implications these insights held for subsequent design iterations. This structured reflection helped us translate qualitative reactions into actionable design direction.

What Surprised Us

During testing, we were particularly struck by the level of hesitation users expressed when interacting with the prototype. Two testers were noticeably reluctant to press unfamiliar buttons for fear of "doing something wrong." This hesitation suggested that several elements of our interface lacked clear affordances or signifiers. Even though the prototype was low-fi, the uncertainty users felt indicated that our early designs were not yet communicating safety, reversibility, or predictability—critical emotional needs for career transitioners navigating unfamiliar digital spaces.

What We Wondered

The confusion surrounding the community forum interface led us to question whether our existing layout effectively supported users' mental models. Several participants struggled to interpret the circular forum structure, prompting us to consider whether we should redesign the layout entirely. The mismatch between our intentions and user expectations signaled that this feature required substantial rethinking rather than incremental adjustments.

What Excited Us

Despite usability challenges, we were encouraged by the emotional resonance of the shadowing feature. One tester reported that after participating in a free shadowing program (outside Flippin), they transitioned into photography, a clear testament to the transformative potential of exposure-based learning. This validated our core hypothesis: that providing accessible shadowing pathways can meaningfully support users in exploring new career identities. The enthusiastic response reinforced our commitment to refining and elevating shadowing as a central feature of the product.

Implications

From these observations, we identified several broader implications that shaped our next design iterations:

- **Shadowing was difficult to find** due to unintuitive layout and ambiguous navigation labels.
- **Circular shapes**, especially when unlabeled, led to incorrect interpretations and user confusion.
- The early system **lacked personalization complexity**, failing to account for factors like user location, interests, or experience level.
- Users expressed a desire for **small informational cues** or "nuggets" explaining features, suggesting that our design required more embedded guidance and onboarding support.

These implications highlighted the need to redesign not just isolated screens, but aspects of the overall information architecture and user onboarding strategy.

Resulting Design Changes

In response to the findings above, our team identified several targeted design changes to implement during subsequent iterations:

Login and Onboarding

- Introduce **Single Sign-On (SSO)** to streamline entry and reduce friction.
- Expand onboarding to include lightweight feature explanations, reducing user uncertainty.

Shadowing Discovery

- **Relabel and reframe** the communities tab to improve conceptual clarity and distinguish browsing from social interaction.
- Add **filters** for location, mentor rating, and interest areas to support easier, more relevant discovery.

Feedback and Progress Tracking

- Explore **AI-assisted summaries**, integrated journaling, and structured reflection prompts to help users document growth over time.

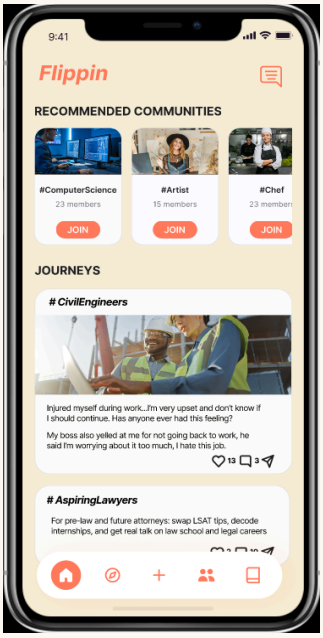
Forum Interaction

- Maintain live audio "open mic" interaction but introduce clearer **mic/camera status cues** and a designated **speaker/moderator** to improve structure and user confidence.

Help Icon Integration

- Add a **question-mark help icon** to ambiguous elements throughout the interface. This icon provides concise explanations or micro-tooltips to help users understand functionality without overwhelming them.

Med-fi Prototype



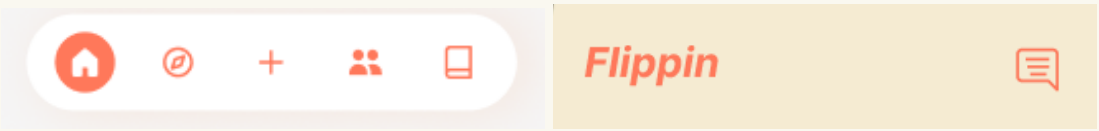
Major Change 1: Navigation & Discoverability Improvements

One of the major insights emerging from our low-fidelity testing was that our initial system architecture relied on **9 primary screens**, each carrying multiple responsibilities, which did not sufficiently support the discoverability of critical features, especially shadowing opportunities, community groups, and storytelling interactions. Users struggled to form a clear mental model of where actions were located, and several interface elements were misinterpreted entirely. This prompted a significant reorganization of our navigation structure, screen ecosystem, and visual hierarchy.

Key Changes

- Restructured the **taskbar** with clearer, more intuitive icons.
- Moved the central **"+" button** to avoid misassociation and improve balance.
- Relocated **Chat/Community Threads** to the top-right corner for conventional placement.
- Moved **Settings** into the Profile screen to reduce clutter.
- Elevated **Recommended Communities** to the top of the homepage.

- Introduced a **warmer color palette** to foster emotional comfort.



Rationale

The community icon confused users, failing to signal that shadowing opportunities were nested within it. This misalignment made it difficult for users to discover one of our core features.

To create space for a dedicated **Discover icon**, we **relocated the chat icon to the top-right corner**, a familiar pattern inspired by platforms like Instagram. This not only decluttered the taskbar but also increased affordance consistency.

Because **joining communities is one of the simplest and most essential flows**, we elevated it to the **top of the homepage**, ensuring users immediately encounter social connection pathways.

We shifted our homepage background from white to a **warm yellow**. While white felt sterile and clinical, the warmer tone aligned better with our goal of making users feel comfortable, welcomed, and emotionally safe.

Through feedback, we learned that career transitioners want reassurance that *they are not alone*. To support this emotional need, we **restructured the homepage to immediately surface user journeys and stories**, allowing individuals to see people from diverse backgrounds navigating similar transitions. This was a direct response to testers expressing that knowing others' stories provided comfort, representation, and motivation.

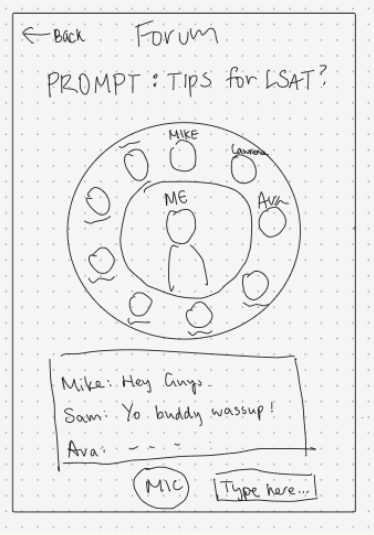
The new architecture allows us to:

- Provide **clear, single-purpose surfaces** that reinforce user confidence.
- Support more predictable pathways, reducing hesitation and uncertainty.
- Offer contextual cues and onboarding moments that explain features and reduce reliance on guesswork.
- Create a welcoming emotional tone through intentional visual hierarchy and color design.
- Highlight community stories early, reinforcing belonging and shared identity.

Collectively, these changes directly address the discoverability breakdowns surfaced in testing and align the system more closely with the emotional and functional needs of our target users.

Major change 2: Forums Transitioned to Open Mics

The second major feedback we got was that the original forum structure did not adequately support the emotional and narrative needs of our users. Although the interface allowed for discussion, users in our needfinding consistently expressed a desire to *hear stories*, *share journeys*, and *connect through lived experiences* rather than engage in debate-style exchanges. This insight became the foundation for a major redesign of the forum utility.



We reframed the feature away from traditional forum discussions and toward a **live, open mic–style storytelling space**, where users could share personal career narratives in a supportive, structured environment. While discussion is still possible, the redesign shifted emphasis toward uplifting individual voices and creating a psychologically safe environment for reflection and storytelling.

Key Interface Changes

- **Removed the circular layout of participants**
  The circular arrangement—while visually interesting—created confusion during testing and made speaking order unclear.
- **Introduced a square, grid-based participant layout**

The square layout ensures each participant occupies equal visual space, reinforcing the idea that all voices are valued equally regardless of career stage, background, or confidence level.

- **Added a "Request to Speak" button**
  This interaction creates a queue of speakers, preventing overlapping dialogue and giving structure to live storytelling sessions. Users know when it is their turn, which reduces anxiety and supports a respectful, organized flow.

Rationale

Our early research showed that career transitioners are motivated not by abstract advice, but by **authentic, relatable** stories from individuals who have faced similar uncertainty. However, the initial forum design inadvertently encouraged debate-like exchanges rather than narrative sharing. Transitioning to an open mic format allowed us to align the feature more directly with user needs: connection, empathy, and shared human experience.

By shifting from a circle to a square layout, we symbolically and functionally positioned each participant on equal footing. No participant is centered, minimized, or visually privileged. This reinforces the emotional framing that **everyone's journey is worthy of being seen and heard**.

Structured Participation With "Request to Speak"

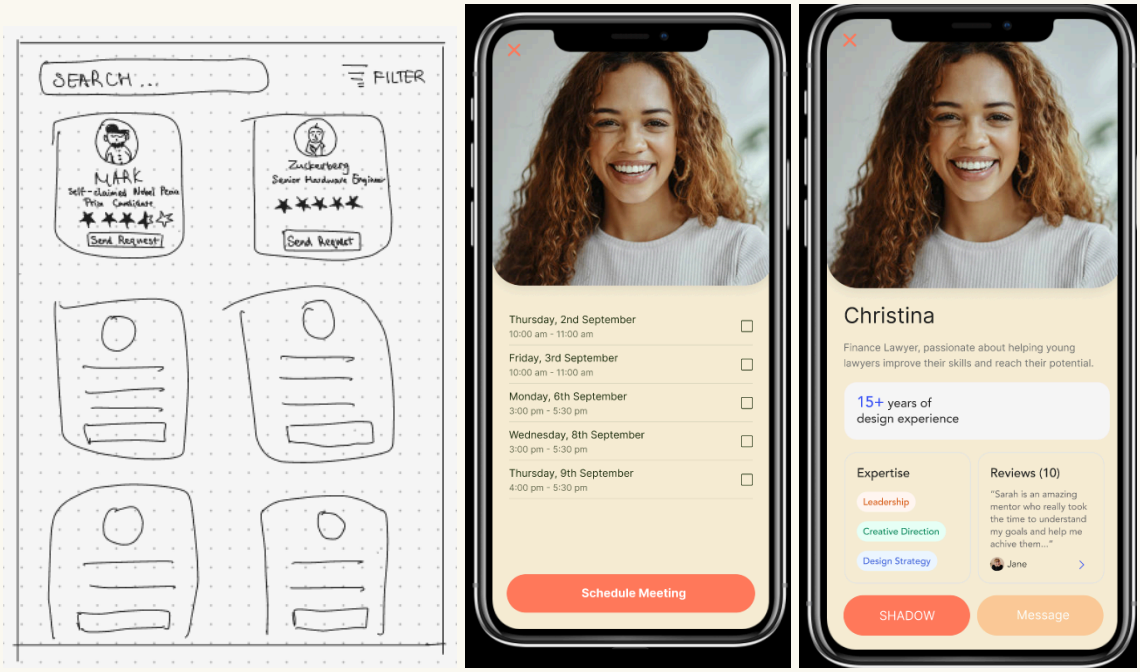
Users expressed concern about talking over others or not knowing when it was appropriate to speak. The queue system addresses these concerns by providing:

- A clear speaking order
- A reduction in accidental interruptions
- A calmer, more intentional pacing for storytelling

This structure also helps moderators manage larger groups and prevents chaotic or intimidating environments, which could discourage participation.

Major Change 3: Scheduling Shadowing

As we refined Flippin's core functionality, one of our central objectives was to create a low-friction, emotionally safe pathway for users to explore shadowing opportunities. The shadowing flow shown below represents one of our most significant iterative refinements.



Initially, we observed that users perceived reaching out to mentors as high-stakes, mirroring the social pressure of platforms like LinkedIn. Many feared "saying the wrong thing" or felt unqualified to initiate contact. In response, we restructured the interaction so that *shadowing* became the primary, action-oriented entry point, reducing the connotation of needing to "impress" a mentor.

Key Changes

- Renamed the CTA to **"Shadow"**, emphasizing action rather than messaging.
- Directly connected the button to appointment scheduling, bypassing any messaging requirement.

Rationale

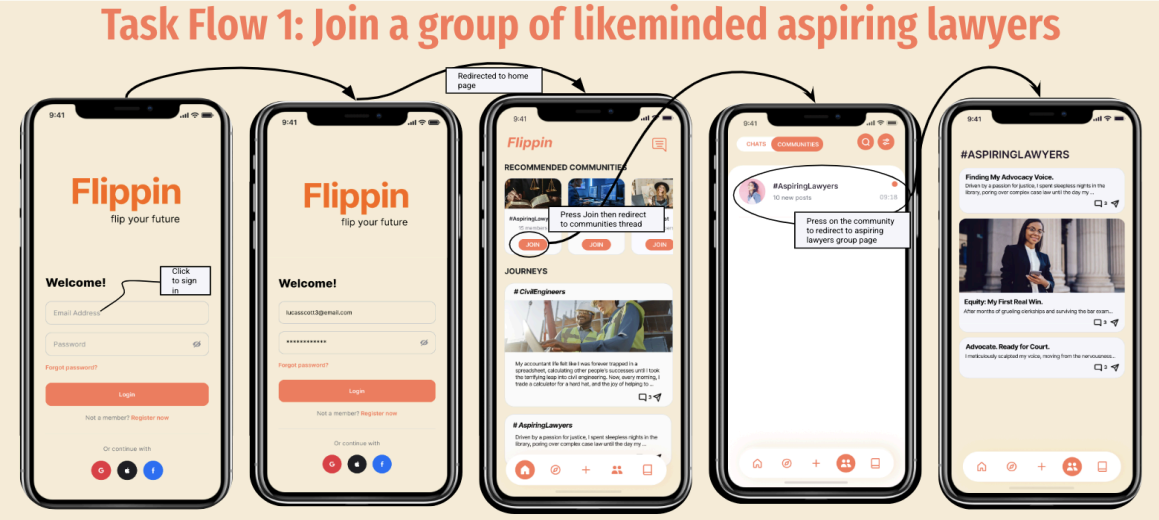
When users tap a mentor from the **Shadowing** section on the Home page, they are presented with a detailed **Mentor Profile**. Our team intentionally placed emphasis on large portrait photography and clearly structured, scannable information (expertise, years of experience, certifications, and location). This supported two goals: establishing trust through personal connection, and making the decision to shadow feel informed rather than risky.

The redesigned **"Shadow"** CTA leads directly into a simplified scheduling interface. We shifted from message-based initiation to appointment-based initiation after observing confusion and hesitation in early tests. The final flow concludes with a **Booking**

Confirmation modal, which we styled after familiar scheduling tools to increase user confidence.

Through this iteration, we learned that *emotional reassurance and clarity of next steps* significantly influence whether users follow through on mentorship opportunities.

Updated Task Flows:



Implementation Tool: Figma

For our mid-fidelity prototype, we used **Figma** as our primary implementation tool. Given Figma's constraints, our prototype functioned as a **static, front-end simulation** rather than an interactive, data-driven system. This meant that we were unable to implement any dynamic backend processes, real-time updates, or personalized content generation. All interactions relied on **hardcoded screens, predefined pathways, and Wizard-of-Oz logic** to emulate the intended experience.

Constraints of Figma

Because Figma is limited to front-end prototyping:

- We could not build a functioning backend or database, so it doesn't populate information in real time.
- No user-specific personalization was possible; all content remained static. Therefore, we wouldn't be able to collect reliable qualitative data that our tester would enjoy this app for themself.
- Interactions were constrained to transitions between predetermined frames.
- We relied on linear flows rather than conditional or adaptive behaviors.
- Users can't have real interactions with other people on the platform, including real comments/feedback/recommendations/responses, which means we also can't collect quantitative data on how successful our features would be in a real scenario

These constraints shaped how we represented core features such as community joining, reflections, and shadowing appointments.

Hardcoded & Wizard-of-Oz Features

To provide the illusion of a fully interactive app, we selectively **hardcoded** certain groups, mentors, and actions. Only these items were interactable within our prototype:

- **Aspiring Lawyers** (the only community joinable in the prototype)
- **Christina** (our designated mentor for demonstrating the shadowing flow)
- **Reflection post inputs**, which were simulated through static screens
- **Community Recommendations**, populated with preset groups

Additionally, all task flows relied on a Wizard-of-Oz assumption that **our user is exploring a transition into law**. This allowed us to streamline the prototype while still enabling meaningful user testing around the core pillars of the product: *community*, *reflection*, and *shadowing*.

What We Accomplished in Mid-Fidelity

Despite these constraints, the mid-fidelity prototype successfully accomplished our goals for this stage of development. Specifically, we were able to:

- Build fully navigable flows for our three core tasks (joining a community, posting a reflection, scheduling a shadowing session)
- Convey the intended information architecture and navigation hierarchy
- Test emotional tone, visual clarity, and user comprehension

- Evaluate the discoverability of features and the intuitiveness of key actions
- Collect formative feedback that directly informed our high-fidelity iteration

In summary, our mid-fi prototype served as a **robust experiential model** of Flippin, enabling us to validate core concepts and interaction patterns even before implementing full visual polish or backend logic.

Heuristics

Our four evaluators found 80 total heuristic violations, with 27 violations of severity 3 and 4. Mainly:

- H10: Help & Documentation
- H4: Consistency & Standards
- H5: Error Prevention

Our Takeaway: Our prototype had too many inconsistencies, unclear guidance, and missing safety checks created confusion, so we focused on making the experience clearer, more predictable, and more supportive.

Simple Task Violations

H1: Visibility of System Status — Severity 3

Issue: After joining **#AspiringLawyers**, the user is taken to the Communities tab, but the banner displays a placeholder image of an unrelated woman instead of the community's cover image.
Fix: Updated the banner to use a relevant community-specific image.

Issue: After joining **#AspiringLawyers**, the community still appears under *Recommended Communities* on the Home page.
Fix: Once joined, communities now disappear from the recommended list and appear under *My Communities*.

H3: User Control & Freedom — Severity 3

Issue: No way to undo or retract the decision to join a community.
Fix: Added a **Leave Community** option.

H4: Consistency & Standards — Severity 3

Issue: The *Discover* page mixes joined communities with suggested communities, conflicting with *Recommended Communities* on the Home page.
Fix: Moved community chat access into the Communities tab and refined taskbar organization.

H6: Recognition Over Recall — Severity 3

Issue: Navigation bar icons did not intuitively map to their destinations. For example, the compass icon (typically *Discover*) represented Events, and the friends icon represented the Discover page.
Fix: Replaced the book icon with a **person icon** to clarify the "Me" (Profile) page.

H10: Help & Documentation — Severity 3

Issue: Users attempted to read stories under *Journeys* but nothing was clickable.
Fix: In hi-fi, posts are now expandable with full content and comment options.

Issue: No explanation of the difference between *Journeys* and *Communities*.
Fix: Added clarification in onboarding.

Moderate Task Violations

H4: Consistency & Standards — Severity 3

Issue: Profile/Reflection page used a book icon instead of a person icon.
Fix: Switched back to the person icon.

H1: Visibility of System Status — Severity 3

Issue: No confirmation after posting a reflection.
Fix: Added a "Your reflection has been posted" popup.

H5: Error Prevention — Severity 3

Issue: No chat functionality (cannot search users, view profiles, or create chats).
Disagree: Chat is out of scope and not part of core task flows.

H3: User Control & Freedom — Severity 3

Issue: No way to delete or edit reflections after posting.
Fix: Added edit/delete options accessible from posts and from the Profile page.

Complex Task Violations

H3: User Control & Freedom — Severity 3

Issue: No way to cancel or reschedule shadowing appointments.
Fix: Added cancellation options under the Profile (Me) page.

Extra Violations

H1: Visibility of System Status — Severity 3

Issue: *Create Account* button leads into a 2FA flow, but 2FA screen uses "Continue."
Disagree: This follows a logical flow—create account → verify identity.

H4: Consistency & Standards — Severity 3

Issue: Host Event/Open Mic modal did not request location or meeting format.
Fix: Added fields for location and format (virtual, in-person, open mic, etc.).

H10: Help & Documentation — Severity 3

Issue: Unclear how events get added to *Your Events*. Only live events were clickable.
Fix: Removed *Your Events* to eliminate confusion.

H9: Help Users Recover From Errors — Severity 3

Issue: Clicking the Open Mic filter jumps directly to a single event.
Disagree: Hardcoded in prototype; not part of main flows.

Additional High-Severity Violations

Simple Task

H11: Accessible Design — Severity 4

Issue: Returning to Chats/Communities was inconsistent depending on navigation route; layout changed unexpectedly.
Fix: Added a *My Communities* tab and repurposed the Home-page chat icon for DMs only.

H3: User Control & Freedom — Severity 4

Issue: No way to retract joining a community.
Fix: Added a *Leave Community* option.

H6: Recognition Over Recall — Severity 4

Issue: Navigation icons did not match expected conventions.
Fix: Updated icons, including replacing the book icon with a person for Profile.

Moderate Task

H5: Error Prevention — Severity 4

Issue: No way to save reflection drafts.
Disagree: Posting is intentionally low-barrier; drafts add unnecessary complexity and undermine authenticity.

Complex Task

H4: Consistency & Standards — Severity 4

Issue: Searching for shadowing opportunities redirected users to communities instead.
Fix: Figma prototype redirection bug; hi-fi uses filter-based shadow discovery.

Additional Extra Violations – Severity 4

H3: User Control & Freedom — Severity 4

Issue: "Back" button on onboarding slides did not return to previous slide.
Fix: Redirection bug; hi-fi back button now functions correctly.

H4: Consistency & Standards — Severity 4

Issue: Unclear meaning of "Your Events" on Events page.
Fix: Removed *Your Events*. Shadowing now appears under Profile; Events page shows only *Upcoming Events*.

H5: Error Prevention — Severity 4

Issue: Back arrow on intro slides returned to verification page.
Disagree: This behavior is expected—going backward means account verification must restart.

Issue: Events under "Today" displayed incorrect dates not matching the calendar date.
Fix: Updated dates in the hi-fi prototype.

Issue: No confirmation when moving from Events to Open Mic.
Fix: Added a transition animation screen.

H7: Flexibility & Efficiency of Use — Severity 4

Issue: No option to select Mentor vs. User role.
Fix: Added role selection to onboarding.

H10: Help & Documentation — Severity 4

Issue: No indication that mentor/shadowing results are proximity-based.
Fix: Added a distance tag showing how far mentors are from the user.

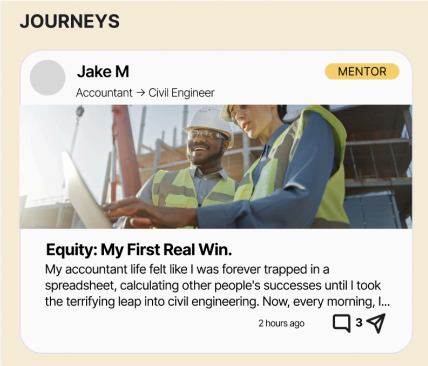
Values in Design

Value 1 – Community: Community is our most important value. Career explorers or transitioners want to connect with others who are going or went through similar career transitions. For that reason, we implemented the following:

Open mics: Users can host live spaces to discuss a prompt with other peers. Our goal for this was to provide a safe, vulnerable space for people to share their real experiences in a live storytelling format. This way, people can find mentors or other career explorers to relate to and realize that they aren't alone, while maintaining a level of anonymity if they choose not to participate.

Community groups: Categorizes groups by career fields, skills, or general support. We have a discover tab where people can scroll or search for a general interest community. In these communities, all reflections, stories, and contents will be hosted.

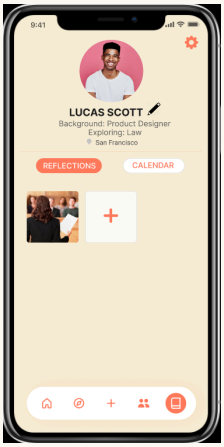
Journeys: To show people that there are many others going through the same process, we have journeys visible on the home page to show these impactful, meaningful stories right off the bat.



Tension – Imposter Syndrome and Unfair Comparisons

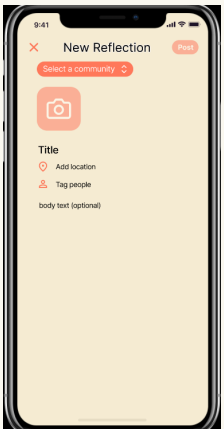
We did acknowledge that (like other social media apps) there is a chance that people could have imposter syndrome if the posts become too focused on showing career prestige or success in a way that flaunts rather than celebrates. We also didn't want to have power imbalances between mentors where people could advertise their company or positions (e.g. Senior PM @ Google) to have more credibility or mentees. To address these tensions, we removed the option to see people's exact career titles- changing it to show their general career path from where they started to where they are at now. We also removed the option to like posts so there isn't an option for comparison where some people's journeys receive more likes and praise than others.

Value 2 – Motivation: We found that our users want to feel motivated to continue in a career transition. For that reason, we implemented:



Personal progress: Users can easily access their reflections

Community Feedback: Users can hear from their peers and applaud each other's milestones

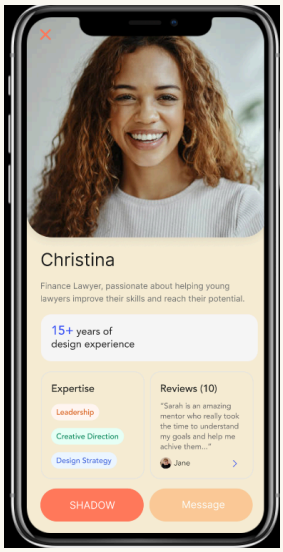


Reflection posts: Users can document their progress through reflection posts

Potential tension – Hateful Comments

To address the possibility of hateful comments on people's reflection posts, we removed the concept of Anonymity. This encourages people to be a bit more genuine and real, being able to attach a real person to each post and comment. This also means that people can't hide anonymity to post hate comments so that should reduce the amount of intake. Something we didn't get to but would love to use to address this issue is also having a report feature and moderators within communities to make sure that the space remains respectful and accessible to everyone.

Value 3 – Action: Our users don't want to see rejections, but real opportunities to work in another field. So, we implemented:



Mentor connections: Users can message with people who have reported themselves as available mentors

Shadowing opportunities: Users can schedule a shadowing appointment without an interview process

Tension – Shadowing Opportunity Scams

We have a user authentication process that would be robust enough to properly vet people and verify their identity and any information they are providing to ensure it's not a scam.

Final Prototype Implementation

We built our high-fidelity prototype with **React Native**, **Expo**, and **Supabase**. We used Apple's Xcode Simulator and our own mobile devices downloaded with the ExpoGo app to test the app as we developed it. The prototype was designed for mobile devices, optimized for the iPhone X (375 x 812 px) frame.

With React Native, we only needed to write the code once and deploy it on both iOS and Android platforms, significantly reducing development time. It also renders to native UI components, providing a UX that closely resembles fully native applications. However, some limitations include limiting access to native APIs, dependency on third-party libraries, and performance limitations (i.e., animations between screens).

Expo also provides a great cross-platform experience for developers, since the setup is fast and relatively easy. However, as the app gets more complex, the app size significantly increases, leading to higher binary storage and waiting times.

Supabase offers familiarity, power, and flexibility for structured data. It also auto-generates REST APIs and provides client libraries, speeding up backend creation. However, if a higher amount of third-party tools are to be implemented, it requires lots of extra work and time.

XCode simulator allows fast iterations and testing; it can also simulate across devices. However, it cannot accurately simulate all hardware-dependent features like camera, GPS, haptic feedback, or specific sensor data.

To emulate real behavior, the following **Wizard of Oz** methods were used:

- Pre-scripted chat replies simulate peer interaction.
- Fake shadowing confirmations mimic booking feedback.
- Community suggestions are shown based on static onboarding paths.
- Post interactions (pins, comments) are preset to appear dynamic but are non-functional.

In this project, there are several elements that are **hard-coded**:

- All user data, mentor profiles, and shadowing experiences are manually entered into placeholders.
- "Peer Stories" and "Trending Topics" are static text entries inspired by interview insights.

- Comment sections display pre-filled responses to simulate engagement.
- Navigation elements and notifications are non-interactive UI components.

In this project, we used Cursor and Copilot to assist us in rapid prototyping and implementing features of our app since it relies on multi-screens and interactions between users.

Reflection & Next Steps

People will always have conflicting perspectives, so it's up to us to determine which values and core features we want to prioritize. We intentionally chose a topic that isn't flashy or glamorous, but one that feels real and relatable – something everyone encounters at some point in their lives. You don't need a dramatic problem or an overly complex solution to create meaningful social impact.

Even though our theme centers on empowering learners with AI, we didn't force AI into the solution or design process. Instead, we focused on what genuinely served users.

Looking ahead, we're considering expanding our project. Many people we spoke with expressed interest in whether this platform could offer more guidance and experiences for younger students. We also see opportunities to enhance the ability to create and moderate communities, since this functionality is currently hard-coded. Additionally, we hope to expand the Open Mic feature to make it more visible and encourage more people to share their stories openly.