A2:
POVs, HMWs, and Solutions

Avey Etaghene, Candace Cang, Siya Goel, Tyler Abernethy

Team Members

Siya Goel
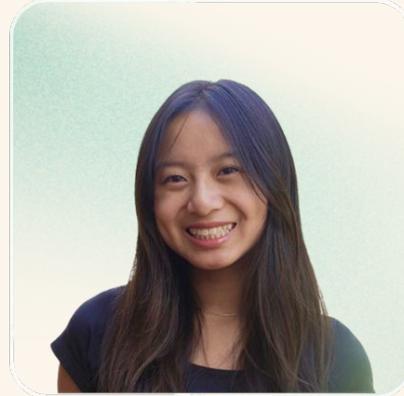*she/her*

CS (AI) + Econ '26
CS (HCI) '27

Avey Etaghene
she/her

Symsys '27
CS (HCI) '27

Candace Cang
she/her

Design '26
CS (HCI) ' 27

Tyler A

Symsys '26
CS (HCI) '27

Scope of Project

Intelligent Tools for Design

→

Intelligent Tools for Design

to Help Early Stage Founders

Previous Interviewees

Diversity in Experience and Startup Space

Extreme user: Youngest and most inexperienced founder

Sam
Recent College Grad
Technical
Legal Tech + YC
Seed Startup

Silus
8 years finance, consulting, and data science
Technical
Fintech + YC
Series A

Alex
20+ years of engineering
Technical
Dev Tools
Pre Seed Startup

Steven
2x Ex-Founder
Nontechnical
Consumer
Seed Startups

Extreme user: Only woman, medical background, 2x Founder

Mike
10 years of finance
Nontechnical
Consumer
Series A

Samantha
PhD in Genetics + 2x Founder
Technical
Medtech
Seed Startups

Recap of Findings

Communication and Collaboration

Opinions of AI on Creativity

Lack of Context

Customization

Recap of Findings

Communication and Collaboration

Working with designers is an **extensive process** of Figma comments, long meetings, and lots of waiting.

Customization

Current design tools are difficult to use, so they rely on designers when they want more **customization.**

Lack of Context

Chats are not infinite so GenAI tools are limited and can not match founder's tastes. They need more **integration** between design tools, GenAI, and backend tools.

Opinions of AI on Creativity

Founders either hated AI or heavily relied on **AI for creativity** for either impactful or smaller visuals.

Additional Interviews

New Interviewees

Alan
2 years of Real Estate
Nontechnical
Consumer
Pre Seed Startup

Dave
2x Founder, Stanford PhD, 5+ years of engineering
Technical
Dev/Research Tools
Seed Startup

New Interviewees

Extreme user: Younger and one of the most **non-technical** founders

non-technical

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Empathy Map – Alan

🔊 Says

"My output is literally defined by how good the tools are."

He recognizes that his progress depends directly on AI capability.

"I didn't have a CS background, but I could still build something."

Explains preference for hands-on experimentation over reading documentation.

He notes how LLMs can now replace the need for formal coding knowledge in early stages.

"I started vibe-coding in Cursor for months."

He shares admiration for intuitive, minimal UI design.

He reiterates that every tool shares similar base models, just different wrappers.

"Lovable gets me something I can tweak."

"Traction first; pretty later (but I still care about pretty)."

"I like when I can visualize what AI produces nowadays. It makes the process easier."

💬 Thinks

Believes AI tools evolve so quickly that every model release expands what's possible.

Believes it's harder to design good prompts than to write code sometimes.

Believes that every startup founder must master a few tools deeply instead of chasing new ones.

Considers skill and prompting literacy more important than tool choice.

Wonders how to balance product beauty with functional reliability.

Thinks style consistency should be automated through design tokens or templates.

Thinks having more transparent model controls would improve precision and learning.

Sees generative models as collaborators that need direction, not replacements.

Sees fast prototyping as a competitive edge for early founders.

Feels that most "no-code" platforms look similar because they share underlying models.

✏️ Does

Rapid prototyping, and tosses lots of attempts.

He runs small demos early and ships imperfectly.

He shares repos with collaborators for architecture sanity checks.

Uses LLMs to draft PRDs, code scaffolds, and refactor logic.

He uses Cursor + Claude Code/Gemini for coding and reviews.

He saves "winning prompts" as reusable patterns.

Communicates constantly with engineers or peers for validation.

Mixes tools (Figma, Lovable, Framer) for hybrid design-to-code workflows.

He talks to agents/ startups and gathers traction stories.

Keeps project folders organized but often changes file structures mid-build.

🤍 Feels

Proud when UI looks intentional and cohesive.

Discouraged when tool outputs fail repeatedly or crash.

Motivated by seeing small wins accumulate into working prototypes.

Intrigued by how AI can shape creative expression.

Skeptical of hype and trusts what ships.

Relieved when a messy repo is rebuilt cleanly.

Overwhelmed by the number of available creative tools.

Inspired by how much potential AI has, especially in the field of design.

Satisfied when style tokens propagate correctly.

Hopeful about AI as a co-designer, not a replacement.

Isolated at times as a solo founder learning everything alone.

Feels like he cares more about design then some other founders because he is nontechnical.

non-technical

Says

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Explains preference for hands-on experimentation, reading documentation.

He notes how LLMs can now replace the need for formal coding knowledge in early stages.

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Analysis – Alan

Surprise: Alan "has never written a single line of code" → he consistently relies on AI tools to do this for him

Insight: Non–technical founders know their backgrounds put them "behind," but they feel **empowered by AI tools**. However, they **rely on AI** so much, when AI tools fail, they lost confidence in building, almost as if their work is determined by the quality of tools they use.

Need: A way to learn from about the best tools that align with their goals.

non-technical

"Has never written a single line of code"

→

Builds full products and interfaces

New Insight: AI tools aren't just assistants, they represent creative and technical identities to non-tech founders

non-technical

Empathy Map – Dave

🔊 Says

"AI tools are good as a starting point but not good if I want to customize"

"I have more freedom to explore because I can prompt AI about specific designs I want"

"Can AI learn more about my styles and company to have more design customization?"

"Would be cool if AI tools could be integrated with design tools to give more context about my preferences"

"Detailed prompting is the only way I can get customization using design tools. It is hard"

"AI is regimented but if it learns your preferences it has the ability to become more personalized to your design style"

"I prefer internal designers over external designers because they can more accurately translate my visions. This is because internal designers know more about my business and preferences"

"Design is integral for frontend. It would be great if design can be incorporated into frontend tools more"

"If I see options regarding design I think I know what I want"

"AI is good for brainstorming and coming up with new things to do"

💬 Thinks

Current AI startups do not do the best when it comes to customization of design

GenAI is really good at generation but current design tools don't use GenAI accurately and to its full potential

Designers are pretty busy and that it delays his design process

Takes a long time to take the design from designers and ensure that it matches the frontend

It would be great if tools could create new charts, images, and graphs based on a sample design

AI is good for structuring, summarization, and automation

Its hard for external designers to learn the vision of the product and understand what designs you want

Quality of data and interactions can help with customization of GenAI tools

Design tools do not currently have many differences in fonts. They are pretty regimented.

AI is constantly evolving and it takes a lot of time to do personalization correctly

It is impossible to build frontend without a designer

✏️ Does

Building AGI with a 10 person research lab

Team consists of many researchers that are ex Deepmind and ex Stanford

Use tools like Cursor, Slack, ChatGPT, and Notion for creative work

Communicates with both in house and external designers

Started another company that one of the first AI agent startups

Building an agent that can run on any device (phone, desktop, iPad, laptop, etc.)

Building many internal tools that are agent first for productivity and design

Uses a lot of AI powered startups for power point creation

Ex PhD and Masters at Stanford in computer science

Building agent that is really brilliant, doesn't hallucinate, and can be used in use cases like finance

🤍 Feels

Wants to create an experience so that agents are easy to use

Wishes design tools had more "find-grained access"

AI is good at doing free form and new styles but current design tools don't use features of GenAI well

Reliant on designers to refine and improve on his AI generated designs

Plenty of room to improve on AI powered design startups and they have not reached their full potential

AI can learn what type of aesthetic you like if you give it examples of what you like

Personalization is tricky as you do not want the agent to over customize and want some aspects to be general

Gap between AI coding and AI design tools. Specifically, there is a lack of consistency between the two types of tools

Wants a design tool where he can upload a mock; the tool can then easily customize the mock

GenAI is creative because you can brainstorm easily and faster instead of coming up with things yourself

It takes "time to get capacity" for external designers

Wishes he could give feedback to outputs of AI design tools more easily

technical

Says

"I prefer internal designers over external designers because they can more accurately translate my visions. This is because internal designers know more about my business and preferences"

Siya Goel

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technical

Analysis – Dave

Quote: "AI is regimented but if it learns your preferences it has the ability to become more personalized to your design style"

Insight: Founders want AI to "see" them by understanding what they want and and how they visual products. They want people and **tools that can translate their visions** and think AI can reach its full potential.

Need: An AI design tool that can accurately learn more about his preferences and aesthetic.

technical

New Insight: Founders want tools that translate their visions and understand exactly what they want

technical

POVs

Focused POVs

Communication and Collaboration With Designers

Founders want help with Customization and Creativity

Founders want a way for design tools to integrate tools from different workflows

POV: Alex

We met Alex, an engineer with 20+ years of engineering experience, founding his first preseed startup focused on development tools.

Communication and Collaboration With Designers

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We wonder if this means Alex dreads important meetings with designers and if it interrupts how he shows up for project needs.

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It would be game-changing to make communication with designers seamless and fun, creating an exciting and effortless communication experience.

Communication and Collaboration With Designers

Key HMWs for Alex

Change the status quo:
HMW reduce the need for frequent meetings?

Amp up the good:
HMW create collaborative spaces and tools where design decisions feel like co-creation rather than dependency?

Create an analogy:
HMW templatize the design experience and make it like a coloring book?

Explore the opposite:
HMW transform traditional verbal communication into a visual experience?

Remove the bad:
HMW reduce miscommunication between engineers and designers?

Identify unexpected resources:
HMW leverage engineers' existing tools and workflows to integrate design collaboration seamlessly?

POV: Dave

We met Dave, a 2x founder of research–based seed startups with a technical background.

Founders want help with Customization and Creativity

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We were surprised to notice that Dave believes AI design tools have a regimented aesthetic that can't adapt to what founders want, leading him to rely on designers to refine his vision.

We wonder if Dave would be more creatively engaged in the design process if he could see his unique aesthetics come to life through AI in a more visual and customized manner.

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We wonder if Dave would be more creatively engaged in the design process if he could see his unique aesthetics come to life through AI in a more visual and customized manner.

It would be game–changing to create a design tool that helps founders customize and evolve their visual styles and needs without complete reliance on designers, bridging the gap between creative and AI outputs.

Founders want help with Customization and Creativity

Key HMWs for Dave

HMW give founders tools to translate their creative intent into visuals, even without design expertise?

HMW capture the feeling and visions that founders want and translate imagination to tangible designs?

Explore the opposite:
HMW create design tools that adapt to Dave's creative process instead of forcing him to adapt to the tool?

HMW allow Dave to experiment and develop his aesthetic based on descriptions and examples?

Change the status quo:
HMW make design skills accessible so that any founder can achieve visual output regardless of design experience?

Unexpected resources:
HMW understand Dave's design choices through the websites and aesthetics he likes and interacts with daily?

POV: Samantha

We met Samantha, a woman and 2x startup founder with a PhD in Genetics who is building a medtech startup.

Founders want a way for design tools to integrate tools from different workflows

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We were surprised to find that Samantha actively combines multiple AI tools in her design process, using Chat GPT for outlining presentations and feeding it to Gamma AI to generate slides.

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We wonder if founders like Samantha feel that constantly switching between AI platforms turns creativity into extra work, suggesting that they're being held back not by the tools themselves, but by the fragmented nature of the AI ecosystem.

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We wonder if founders like Samantha feel that constantly switching between AI platforms turns creativity into extra work, suggesting that they're being held back not by the tools themselves, but by the fragmented nature of the AI ecosystem.

It would be game-changing to create a unified creative workspace that maintains persistent context about a founder's vision, brand identity, and preferences across all creative tasks, from initial brainstorming to final slide design.

Founders want a way for design tools to integrate tools from different workflows

Key HMWs for Samantha

HMW create an AI ecosystem that remembers Samantha's entire creative journey instead of treating each task as isolated?

HMW keep founders in a creative flow by simplifying how they choose and switch between tools?

Reduce the bad:
HMW communicate which tools are best for certain tasks to reduce the cognitive overload of decision-making?

Amp up the good:
HMW maintain the creative momentum founders have as they go from brainstorming to design to presentation creation?

Break into pieces:
HMW create a system that understands the relationship between pitch decks, brands, and product vision?

Change a status quo:
HMW make sure that founders like Samantha do not have to start from scratch when using a new design tool?

HMWs Chosen on:

1. **breadth**

could lead to many different solutions
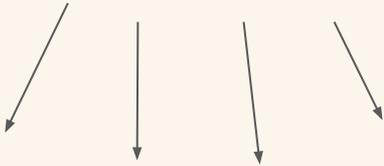
2. **tied to POV**

linked to these insights

3. **inspiring**

human-centered, aspirational

Top 3 HMWs

HMW create **collaborative spaces** and tools where design decisions feel like co-creation rather than dependency?

Alex's POV

HMW capture the feeling and visions that founders want and translate **imagination to tangible designs?**

Dave's POV

HMW keep founders in a creative flow by simplifying how they **choose and switch between tools**?

Samantha's POV

Solutions

Alex

How Might We
Create collaborative spaces and tools where design decisions feel like co-creation rather than dependency?

→ **A live visual playground that designers and founders can work on together while communicating in real time**

Assumption Mapping

Unknown

Being more integrated in the design processes and working with a designer so closely will make founders more creative and feel more inspired

Candace Cang

Collaborating more directly will teach the design vocabulary to help communicate better in work meetings with designers

Candace Cang

Founders are very hands on in the creative process
→
"is there a limit to how much founders want to be involved?"

Candace Cang

Founders feel comfortable presenting their design ideas to designers in real time

Candace Cang

Co-creation will feel more like a partnership than management

Candace Cang

Founders feel more heard when AI and Designers know exactly what they want and can output it fast

Candace Cang

Founders are empowered when they have real time collaboration

Candace Cang

Not vital for UX

vital for UX

Visual communication helps founders explain their ideas better

Candace Cang

Direct collaboration makes founders feel more excited about the product they are working on

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Founders want faster and iterative workflows without having to wait for designers to deliiver

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Collaboration improves outcomes of projects by letting both designers and founders execute their ideas together

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AI tools can reflect unique tastes and styles

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Co-c... like a... mana...

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Solution 1 Participant

Thomas

- Founder of myCollector, a fintech startup
- Stanford Senior majoring in computer science and public policy
- Technical seed stage founder

Experience Prototype #1
Collaborative Playground

Idea:
A live visual playground that designers and founders can work on together while communicating in real time
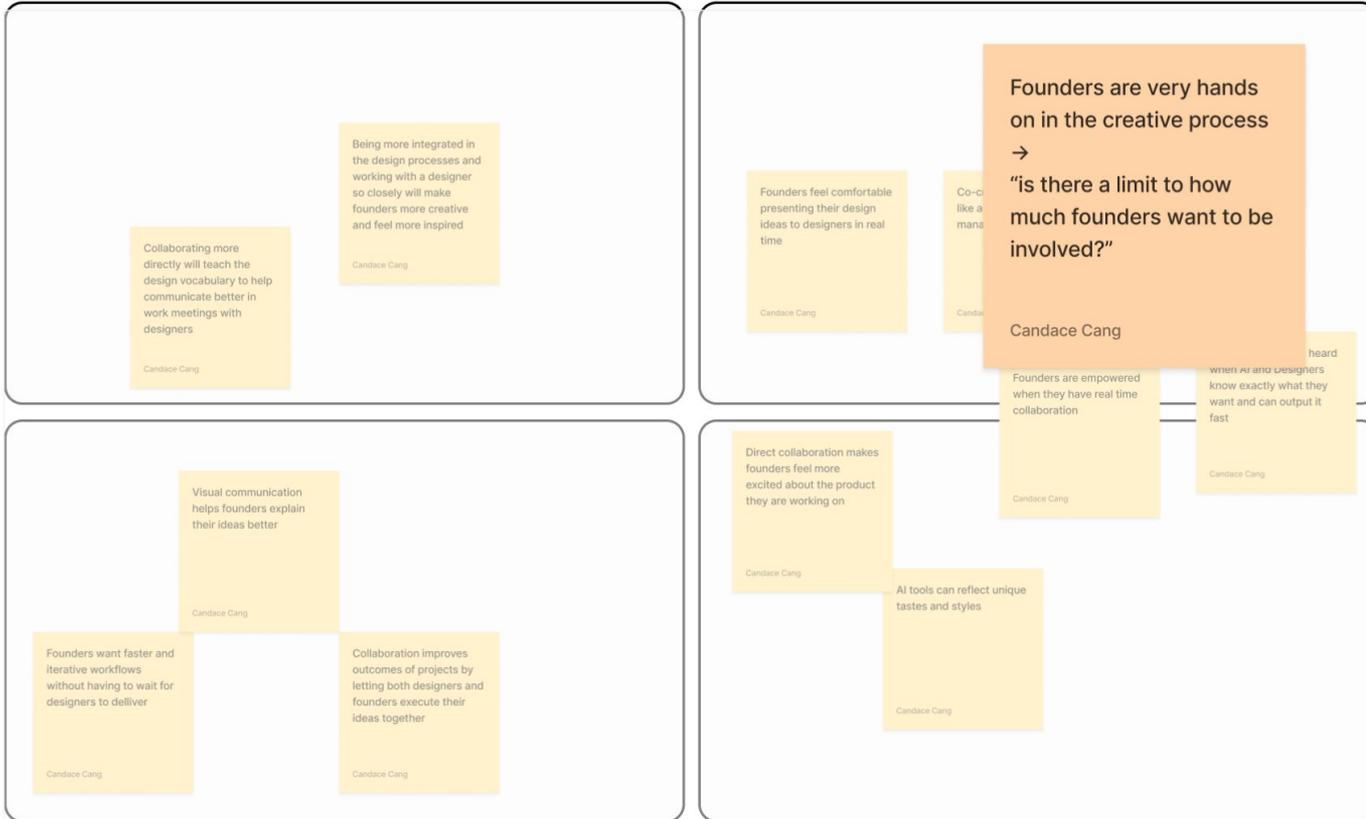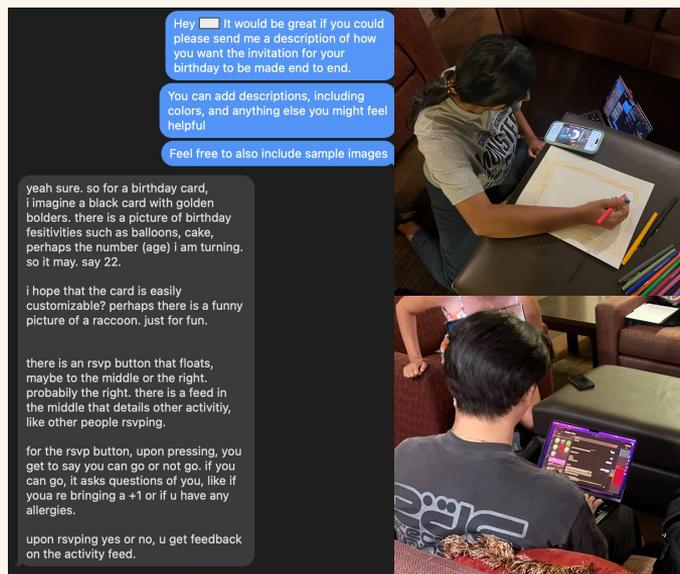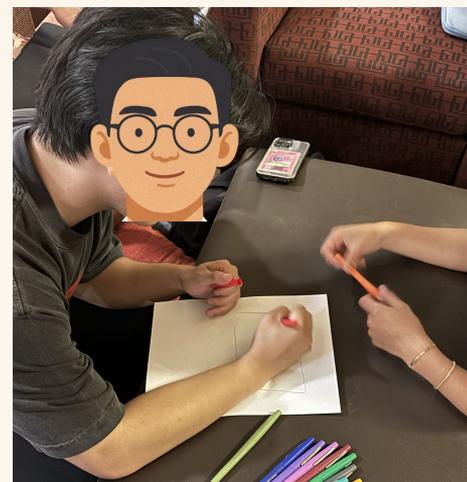
Task to user: Create a birthday invitation
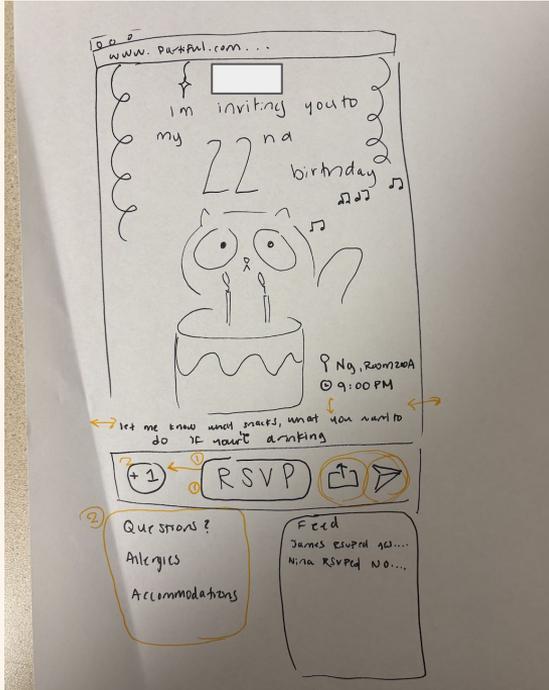
1. Voice Description

2. Text Description

Hey ▮ It would be great if you could please send me a description of how you want the invitation for your birthday to be made end to end.

You can add descriptions, including colors, and anything else you might feel helpful

Feel free to also include sample images

yeah sure. so for a birthday card, i imagine a black card with golden bolders. there is a picture of birthday fesitivities such as balloons, cake, perhaps the number (age) i am turning. so it may. say 22.

i hope that the card is easily customizable? perhaps there is a funny picture of a raccoon. just for fun.

there is an rsvp button that floats, maybe to the middle or the right. probably the right. there is a feed in the middle that details other activitiy, like other people rsvping.

for the rsvp button, upon pressing, you get to say you can go or not go. if you can go, it asks questions of you, like if youa re bringing a +1 or if u have any allergies.

upon rsvping yes or no, u get feedback on the activity feed.

3. Collaborative Editing with voice ("Playground")
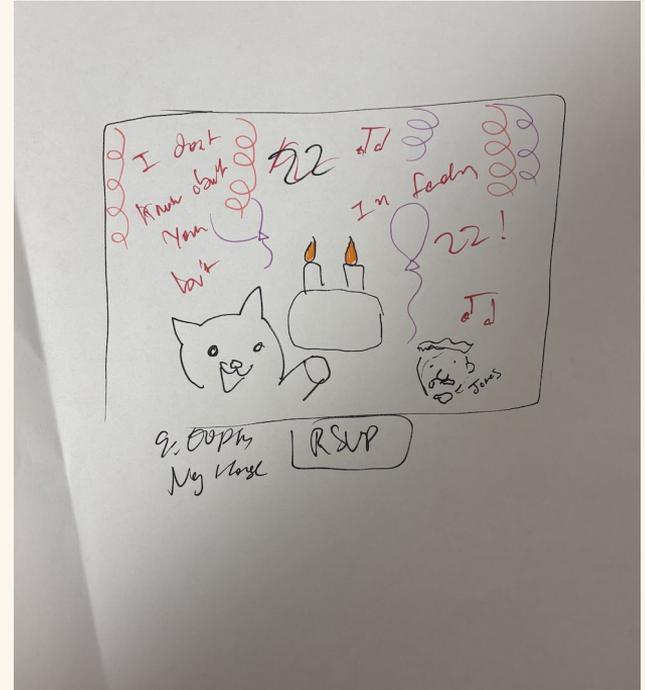
Solution 1 Creations

Voice Conversation

Text Conversation

Collaborative Editing

What Worked

1. Voice conversation
- All required features were drawn
- "I saw all the individual components I mentioned"
- Felt he was **"being heard"**

2. Text conversation
- Easier to organize thoughts

3. Collaborative editing
- Was **"fun"** and the participant **"loved it"**
- "I liked putting my ideas on paper with someone who can help me transform my idea"
- "There was a balance between me and the designer designing it. The **designer could help guide me** in artistic style."

What Didn't Work

1. Voice conversation
- Editing format was unclear: "I am not entirely sure what the annotations mean."
- "Everything is on there but not in the format I want."

2. Text conversation
- took too much time, was a pain
- "This would work better in a speak to text model"
- "I didn't want to give feedback to the picture just because of how **long it takes to type**"

3. Collaborative editing
- "Wish there was a **brainstorming session** before drawing."
- "Would have loved to give more annotations than drawing. I **trust the designer** to draw more as they have more expertise."
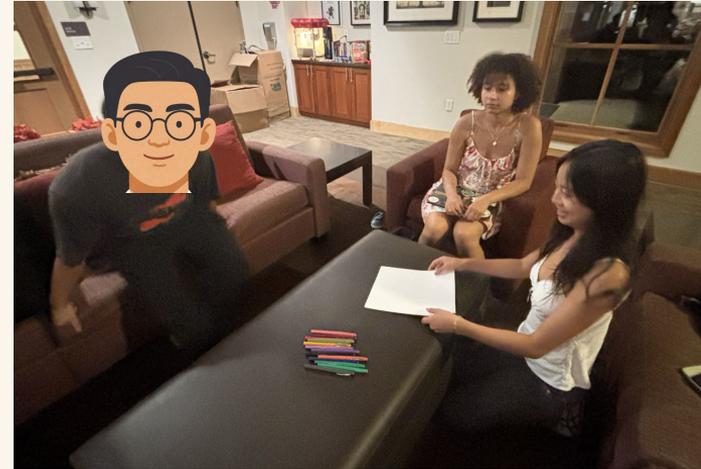
The setup

Solution 1 Testing & Insights

Assumption: Founders are very hands on in the creative process

Preferred Experience

1. collaborative editing
2. voice conversation
3. text conversation

Preferred Output

1. voice conversation
2. collaborative editing
3. text conversation

Our assumption was supported by participant preference

Tradeoffs observed

Time vs Organization (Text conversation)
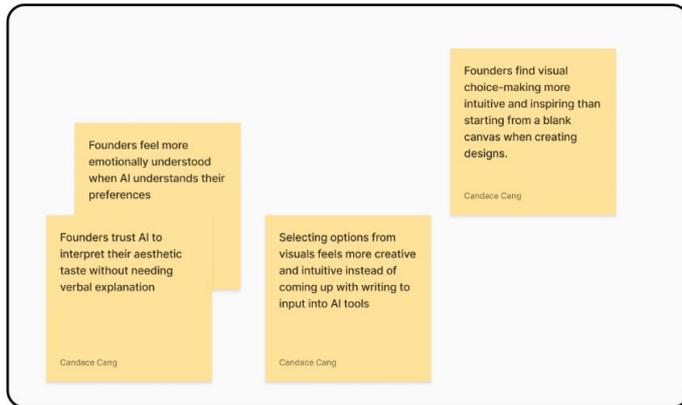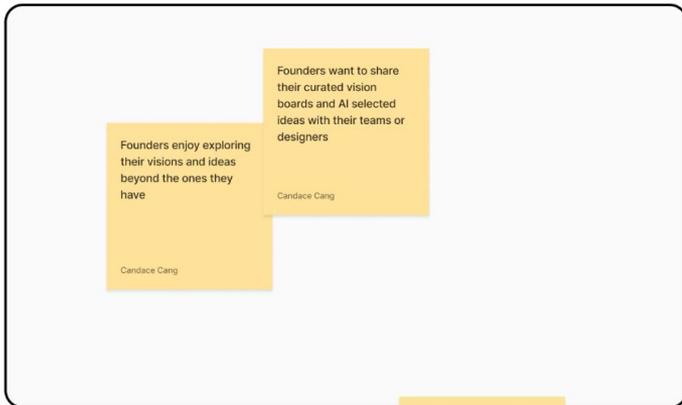**Quality of Output vs Involvement** (Voice conversation and collaborative editing)

Dave

How Might We
Capture the feeling and visions that founders want and translate imagination to tangible designs?
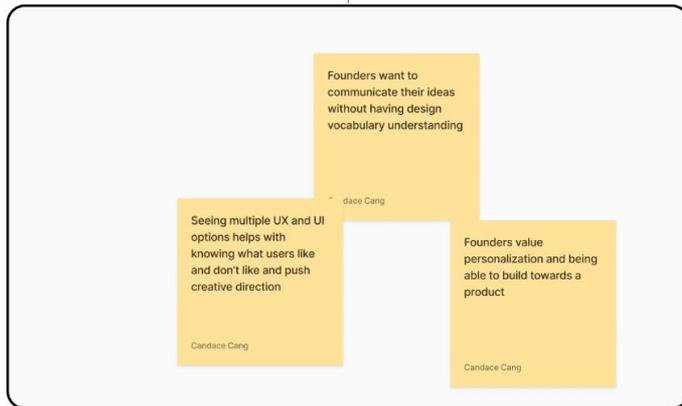
→

AI can present a bunch of images and inspirational visuals that users can choose between and it can guide the direction of designs – almost like providing a survey to provide product context
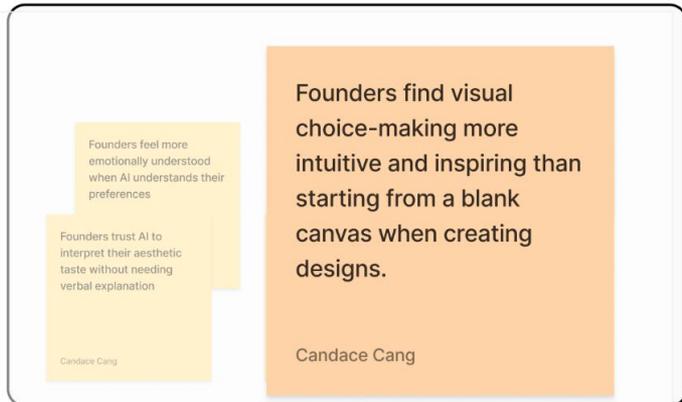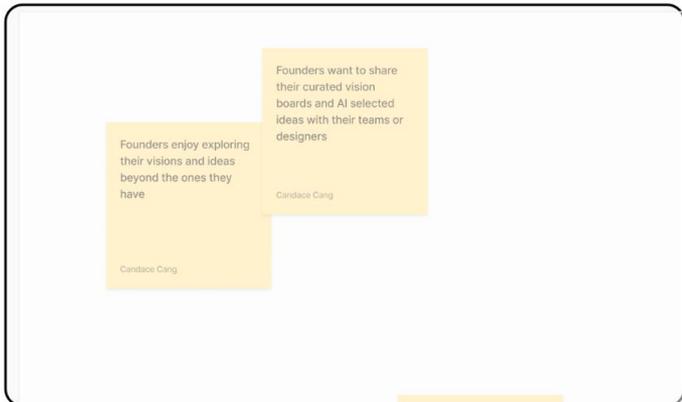
Assumption Mapping

Unknown

Not vital for UX

vital for UX

Founders enjoy exploring their visions and ideas beyond the ones they have

Candace Cang

Founders want to share their curated vision boards and AI selected ideas with their teams or designers

Candace Cang

Founders feel more emotionally understood when AI understands their preferences

Founders trust AI to interpret their aesthetic taste without needing verbal explanation

Candace Cang

Selecting options from visuals feels more creative and intuitive instead of coming up with writing to input into AI tools

Candace Cang

Founders find visual choice-making more intuitive and inspiring than starting from a blank canvas when creating designs.

Candace Cang

Founders find visual exploration more intuitive and align with creativity and exploration

Candace Cang

Founders already use inspiration-driven tools like Pinterest and Dribble

Candace Cang

Founders already have to curate inspiration boards and info before speaking with their designers

Candace Cang

Founders want to communicate their ideas without having design vocabulary understanding

dace Cang

Seeing multiple UX and UI options helps with knowing what users like and don't like and push creative direction

Candace Cang

Founders value personalization and being able to build towards a product

Candace Cang

Known

Assumption Mapping

Unknown

Not vital for UX

vital for UX

Founders want to share their curated vision boards and AI selected ideas with their teams or designers

Candace Cang

Founders enjoy exploring their visions and ideas beyond the ones they have

Candace Cang

Founders feel more emotionally understood when AI understands their preferences

Candace Cang

Founders trust AI to interpret their aesthetic taste without needing verbal explanation

Founders find visual choice-making more intuitive and inspiring than starting from a blank canvas when creating designs.

Candace Cang

Founders find visual exploration more intuitive and align with creativity and exploration

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Candace Cang

Known

Solution 2 Participant

James

- Founder of Glocal, a community engagement consumer platform
- **20+ years of founding experience**, previously founded a food sharing non profit
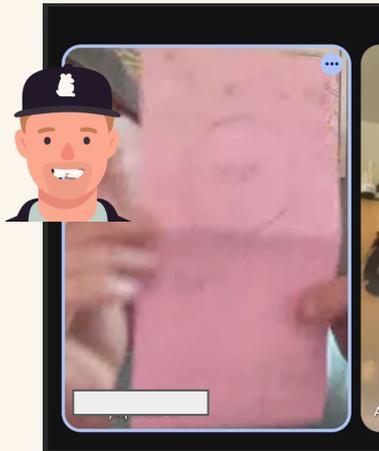- Nontechnical seed stage founder

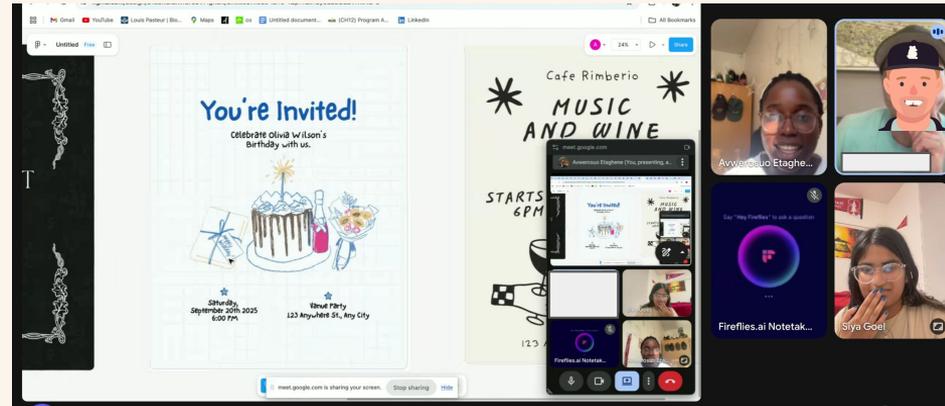**Experience Prototype #2**
Providing Design Options

Idea: AI provides images and inspirational visuals that users can choose between
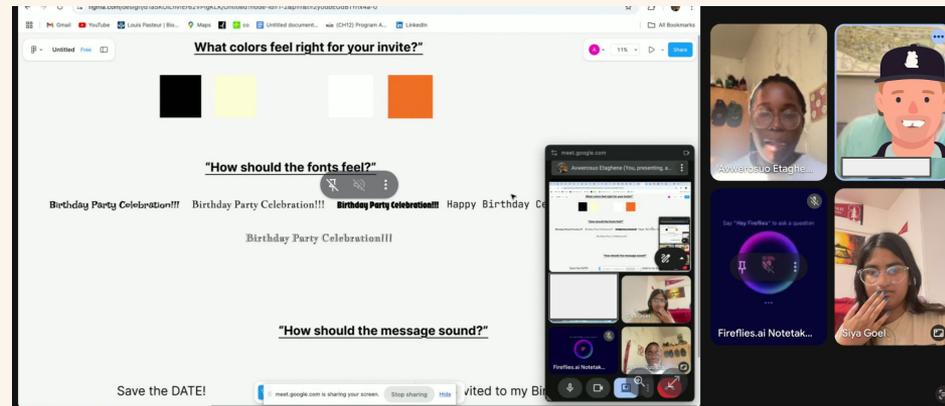
Task to user: Create a birthday invitation

1. Freehand Drawing (blank canvas)
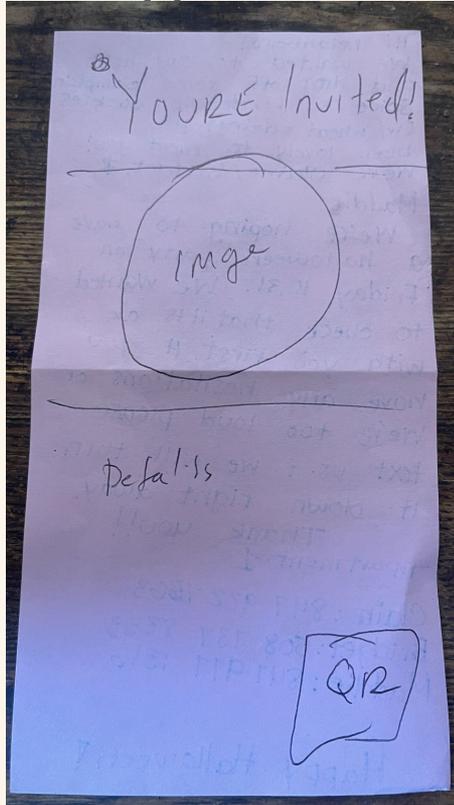

2. Selection of premade options

3. Multi-step construction

Solution 2 Artifacts

Approach 1

Approach 2

Approach 3

What Worked

Understood individual personalization:
"I would prefer to have control over elements so I would pick Approach 1"

Gathered information about options: "I liked the options for Approach 3, that was fine. I would have just liked the opportunity to grab things and design something"

Aesthetic appeal: "Even though I liked Approach 1, I think Approach 2 or 3 (with choices) would have looked better"

What Didn't Work

Different personalizations: "I wish Approach 2 and Approach 3 allowed me to import images and add components like QR codes"

Wanted more control: "Founders want control. Our default is control. So if that's get lost in translation then it won't work."

Solution 2 Testing & Insights

Preferred Method

Assumption: Founders find visual choice-making more intuitive and inspiring than starting from a blank canvas when creating designs.

1st: Liked the control

Prompt: Let's help you make a birthday party invitation!

3rd: "May have looked the best but no customization"

Our assumption was partially rejected

2nd: "Like a sandwich" and combination between Approach 1 and 2

"I would have liked approach 3 if I had the ability to import icons and **more customization"**
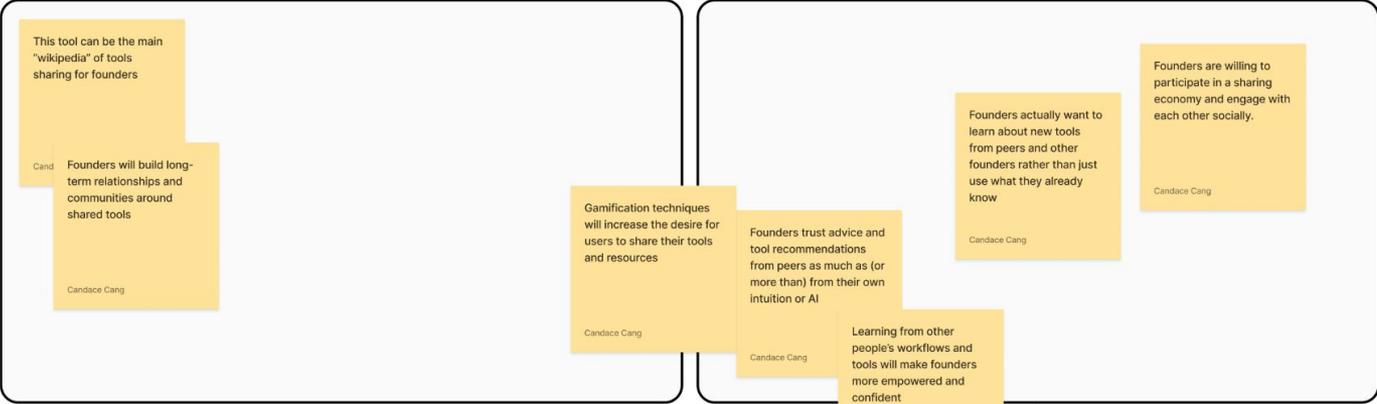
Solution for Samantha's HMW

How Might We
Keep founders in a creative flow by simplifying how they choose and switch between tools?

→

A how–to skill sharing platform for founders to share tips and tricks on which design tools to use
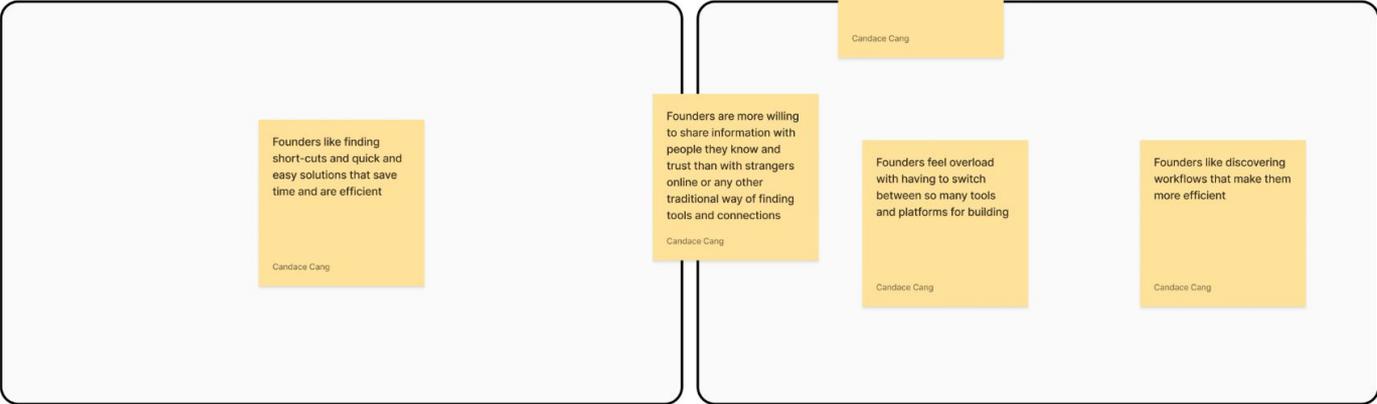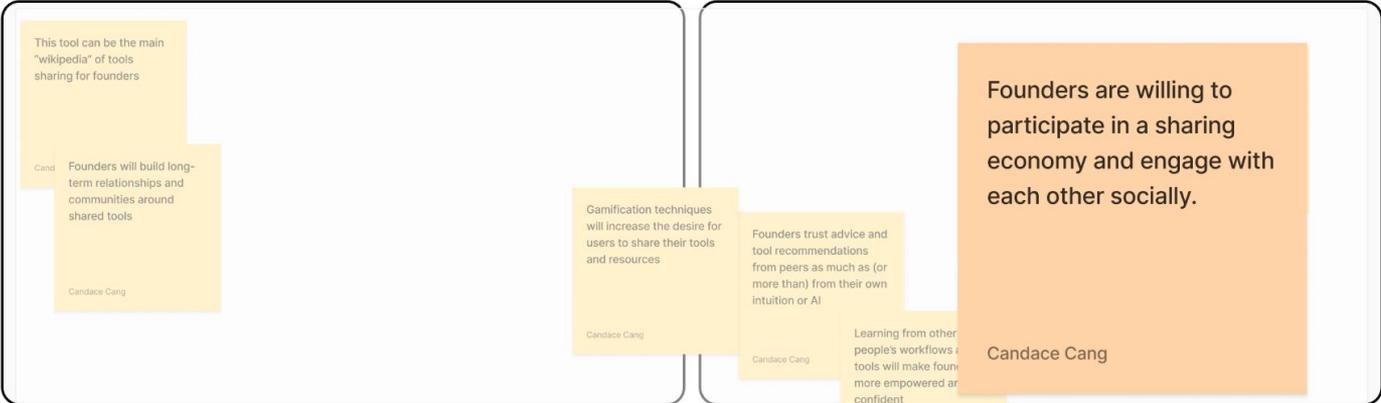
Assumption Mapping
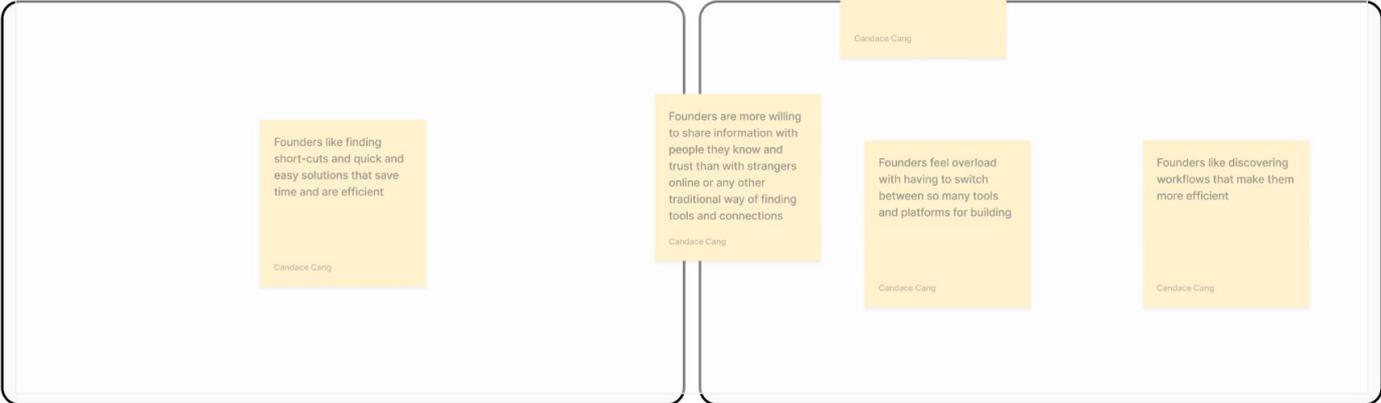
Unknown

Not vital for UX

vital for UX

Known

This tool can be the main "wikipedia" of tools sharing for founders

Cand

Founders will build long-term relationships and communities around shared tools

Candace Cang

Gamification techniques will increase the desire for users to share their tools and resources

Candace Cang

Founders trust advice and tool recommendations from peers as much as (or more than) from their own intuition or AI

Candace Cang

Founders actually want to learn about new tools from peers and other founders rather than just use what they already know

Candace Cang

Founders are willing to participate in a sharing economy and engage with each other socially.

Candace Cang

Learning from other people's workflows and tools will make founders more empowered and confident

Candace Cang

Founders like finding short-cuts and quick and easy solutions that save time and are efficient

Candace Cang

Founders are more willing to share information with people they know and trust than with strangers online or any other traditional way of finding tools and connections

Candace Cang

Founders feel overload with having to switch between so many tools and platforms for building

Candace Cang

Founders like discovering workflows that make them more efficient

Candace Cang

Assumption Mapping

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Founders like discovering workflows that make them more efficient

Candace Cang

Known

Solution 3 Participant

Antonio

- 2x Founder
- Currently founding Proxi, a medtech startup
- Stanford Junior majoring in computer science
- Technical seed stage founder

Samantha

- Founder of paybac, a fintech startup
- Stanford Senior majoring in computer science and public policy
- Technical seed stage founder

Experience Prototype #3
Give & Take Stimulation

Idea: A how-to skill sharing platform for founders to share tips and tricks on which design tools to use

Task: Give founders an opportunity to optionally share/request resources and observe whether they choose to do so.

- Tokens represent limited tokens

- Each turn, players can make a request, offer, or pass
  - Request: costs 2 tokens
  - Offer: costs 2 tokens
  - Offer Acceptance: perform 1 min action

- Game played twice with variation

Give and Take Simulation Game

General instructions
Take turns making an offer, making a request, or choosing to pass. We will play for 3 rounds, or 15 minutes, or until players run out of tokens, whichever comes first.

Tokens
Each player has 6 tokens for the game.
- Requests cost 2 tokens
- Offers cost 1 token (+ a 1 minute action if accepted)

Actions and Moves
On your turn you can:
1. Make a request
   a. Place 2 tokens in the center
   b. State your request
   c. See if anyone offers to help with your request (it may go unanswered if no one offers)
2. Make an offer
   a. Place 2 tokens in the center
   b. State your offer
   c. See if anyone accepts your offer
      i. If accepted, perform a 1 minute action to fulfill the offer
3. Pass
   a. State that you are passing
   b. This costs 0 tokens
   c. Feel free to pass if you do not have a request or offer that you wish to make

Response Moves
Once someone has made a request you can:
1. **Decide to help**. Signify this by putting forward your "respond" card when you have made a decision.
   a. You will perform a 1 minute action to "fulfill" your response

Solution 3 Artifacts

Antonio's Insights

Samantha's Insights

What Worked

- Participants felt that they were **knowledgeable enough to give advice** on which design tools to use and when
  - "I feel like I am **above average about giving advice** about when to use design tools"

- The exercise helped one of the participants think through real issues he was considering → **info/advice sharing is actually useful**, even in a simulation
  - "I actually wanted to follow up and ask you how I can do more system design"

- Coin flip variation **(introducing randomness)** raised stakes
  - "I felt **sad** when I was **rejected** twice. **I hate this game.**"

What Didn't Work

- **"token" system didn't feel meaningful** → hard to represent the cost of making an offer or request
  - "The candies **didn't change my incentives** or actions because I never ran low or had a chance of running low. It was only 3 rounds"

"I don't know if I am the best to give design specific advice but can give advice on how to raise VC funds"

Insights

- Getting **no responses to an ask/request *felt* bad**

- One participant asked more and one participant offered more → led to a **good balance**

- Self reported **"high risk tolerance"** led one participant to participate without reservation, he **didn't feel any scared** or feel there was a downside

- The participants discussed how more experienced participants founders would likely give more advice whereas newer founders are more likely to ask for advice
  - "Most successful young founders ask questions"
  - **"More experienced founders can give and are willing to give more advice"**

Our assumption was supported

Summary

Ethical Implications

	Solution 1: Playground for Communication	**Solution 2:** Choose Between Images for Customization	**Solution 3: How–To** Skill Sharing Platform for Design Tool Usage
Designs for	Early stage founders that work with designers internally or externally	Early stage founders using on AI for ideation and customization	Early stage founders seeking resources and network
Leaves out	Blind users and non–English speakers	Underrepresented cultural communities AI does not consider	Neurodivergent users or those with learning differences
Additional	Real time communication over a visual platform could **expose sensitive data**	May **reduce variability** in the field, especially if AI model is trained on a narrow dataset	Unverified information can spread **misinformation, especially for younger founders**
Additional	**Ambiguous authorship** as we won't know who the true owner is due to collaboration	Aesthetic may **copy existing designers without credit**	**Power imbalance:** Some voices may dominate the space deterring newcomers

Summary

1. Founders consistently wanted to **co-create and collaborating** rather than relying on AI or templates.

2. Real-time **communication drives connection** and makes founders feel "heard" because it's faster than waiting on delayed feedback.

3. Collaboration is most **motivating** when there is visible progress (drawing, building, etc).

Moving forward? Experience #1 expresses a high potential space for increasing creativity through collaboration.

Next Steps

virtual playground that designers and founders can work on together while communicating in real time

Novelty: Even though many virtual playgrounds exist for design, there is no **real time communication** and are hard for **founders to use**

UI: Communication is **often done on phones** so a mobile app is relevant and applicable

Impact: Throughout interview, we saw communication as one of the major pain points.
- Additionally, through our experiment, we saw that a virtual platform + real time communication was **the preferred method** by the participant

Key ethical considerations: Relatively less severe than other choices. Concerns are listed below:
- **Leaves out:** Blind users and non–English speakers
- Real time communication over a visual platform could **expose sensitive data**
- **Ambiguous authorship** as we won't know who the true owner is due to collaboration

Thank you!

Appendix

POV 4 – Honorable Mention

We met Silus, a founder of a YC–backed fintech startup with technical and consulting experience.

We were surprised to realize despite his technical background, Silus had fun playing around with creative GenAI tools and "[scratching] the designer itch [in him]."

We wonder if Silus wants opportunities to be more involved in the creative process, explore creativity, and play a greater role in shaping design, reducing reliance on designers.

It would be game-changing to help technical founders "scratch the designer itch" in them and get some intuition about/experience in design.

Founders want to explore creativity → similar to Dave's POV of customization and creativity.

Too specific and exploratory; not as "frustrating" or "unmet" as a need

Ethical Implications in depth

Solution 1: Playground for Communication

- **Designed for:** early stage founders
- **Leaves out:** Blind users and non–English speakers

- Real time communication over a visual platform could **expose sensitive data**

- **Ambiguous authorship** as we won't know who the true owner is due to collaboration

Solution 2: Choose Between Images for Customization

- **Designed for:** early stage founders
- **Leaves out:** Underrepresented cultural communities AI does not consider

- May **reduce variability** in the field, especially if AI model is trained on a narrow dataset
- Aesthetic may **copy existing designers without credit**

Solution 3: How–To Skill Sharing Platform for Design Tool Usage

- **Designed for:** early stage founders
- **Leaves out:** Neurodivergent users or those with learning differences

- Unverified information can spread **misinformation, especially for younger founders**
- **Power imbalance:** Some voices may dominate the space deterring newcomers

Relevant Links

[NEEDFINDING INTERVIEWS](#)

[PROTOTYPE INTERVIEWS](#)

[IMAGES/ARTIFACTS](#)

[BRAINSTORM IMAGES/SCRIPTS](#)

[BRAINSTORMING DOCUMENT](#)

[TEAM NORMS](#)

Solution 1 Overview

HMW create collaborative spaces and tools where design decisions feel like co-creation rather than dependency?

Reasoning:

Balancing Levels of Involvement
- founders feel creative vision is lost when they are not closely involved ←→ too much involvement can lead to fatigue
- testing what level of engagement improves outcomes

Flexibility
- virtual playground enables flexible, hands-on collaboration

Reduce the bad
- real-time collaboration reduces iteration

Solution 3 Overview

HMW keep founders in a creative flow by simplifying how they choose and switch between tools?

Reasoning:

Founders face similar learning curves with design tools and tool selection
- founders value learning from peers

Trust
- founders trust advice from other founders more and enjoy community-driven learning

Opportunity for Testing
- can a social, sharing-based platform encourage founders to exchange practical knowledge and build stronger engagement?

Solution 1 Methodology

Methodology

- Simulated different modes of communication to see which one the participant preferred

  - ## Voice Conversation

  - ## Text Conversation

  - ## Collaborative Editing

Roles: Siya took pictures and conducted some of the experiment, Tyler observed, and Candace conducted most of the experiment

Setup

and Forth Conversation (baseline with voice)

Task: Generating an invitation
1. Tell user they are going to generate a birthday invitation
2. Tell user to verbally describe they what they are imagining in terms of how it looks, feels, and what they see
3. Have the tester draw everything they are saying to the best of their ability
4. Give the user a drawing based on what they just voiced
5. Have user select a part of the drawing they want changed and voice how they want it to be changed
6. Have the tester create that change by drawing a new image with the change
7. Give the user the new drawing

Have a conversation over document/text message
1. Tell user they are going to generate a birthday invitation
2. Tell user to text the tester and describe everything are imagining in terms of how it looks, feels, and what they see
3. Have the tester draw everything they are texting to the best of their ability
4. Give the user a drawing based on what they just texted
5. Have user select a part of the drawing they want changed and text how they want it to be changed
6. Have the tester create that change by drawing a new image with the change
7. Give the user the new drawing

Making it more conversational + both users go in a make edits
1. Give both user and tester drawing tools
2. They will both be given the task of completing an invitation together
3. The user and the tester will both be working on the invitation
4. The user will be talking about what they imagine an invitation to look like
5. The tester will draw it out
6. The user will ask if they can draw directly on the drawing to make iterations
7. They will work together to create the next iteration

Solution 1 Overview

HMW capture the feeling and visions that founders want and translate imagination to tangible designs?

Reasoning:

A blank canvas is overwhelming
- founders struggle to start from scratch
- open-ended design tools are hard to navigate

Choices speed up decision making
- choosing between curated visuals clarified their aesthetic direction

Opportunity for Testing
- do structured visual choices make the design process more intuitive and inspiring?

Chosen Solutions

Alex's

A live visual playground that designers and founders can work on together while communicating in real time

Dave's

AI can present a bunch of images and inspirational visuals that users can choose between and it can guide the direction of designs – almost like providing a survey to provide product context

Samantha's

A how-to skill sharing platform for founders to share tips and tricks on which design tools to use

Solutions chosen because they are:

effective

user-centric

feasible

empathetic

emotion-driven

insight-driven

testable via assumptions

Prototypes