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MFA Media Design Practices 19'**

Designmatters Fellowship Summer 2019

i-team, Mayor's Office of Budget & Innovation,

City of Los Angeles

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Context

During my thesis year in ArtCenter's Media Design Practices program, I began a year-long inquiry into understanding how emerging technologies like Augmented Reality could change current community engagement practices in urban development. What I realized after several experiments working with grassroots organizations and individual residents was that my work was not scaling to the neighborhood level, and ultimately I had a huge gap in knowledge in why socioeconomic processes in the urban domain operate the way they do. When I was selected to work on a Mayor's Challenge: Accessory Dwelling Unit project with the i-team at the City of Los Angeles, I knew I'd learn a thing or two about makes innovation scale.

With interests in developing a career in civic design, my questions at the start of the fellowship began quite generally:

- What are the organizational structures of LA's city operations?
- At what points are citizens engaged in providing feedback on city services?
- What is human-centered-design in practice within a government context?
- What is 'innovation' and how do we measure that as a department?


Some of my thesis work

LA ADU Accelerator Program

Timeline: 2 months
Role: Content Designer, Project Manager, Prototyper

It is expensive to live in Los Angeles and like most cities in America, residents spend a lot of money on housing. In Los Angeles, 30% of residents spend more than half of their income on rent. At the same time, as cities like Los Angeles attract more residents, the cost of living continues to go up and the supply of housing continues to be constrained. To help combat these challenges, the City launched the LA ADU Accelerator Program to provide financial incentives to homeowners who build an ADU on their property and rent them to residents in need.

The project began in 2018 as a Mayor's Challenge project with Bloomberg Philanthropies funds. This initial funding helped kickstart the needs finding, ideation and initial proof of concept phase. Later it was awarded a $4 million grant to implement the pilot over the course of a couple of years.
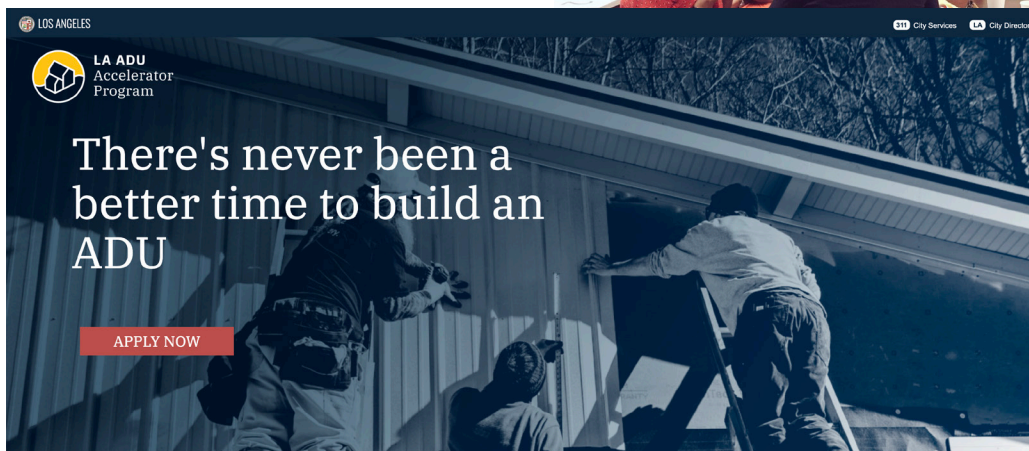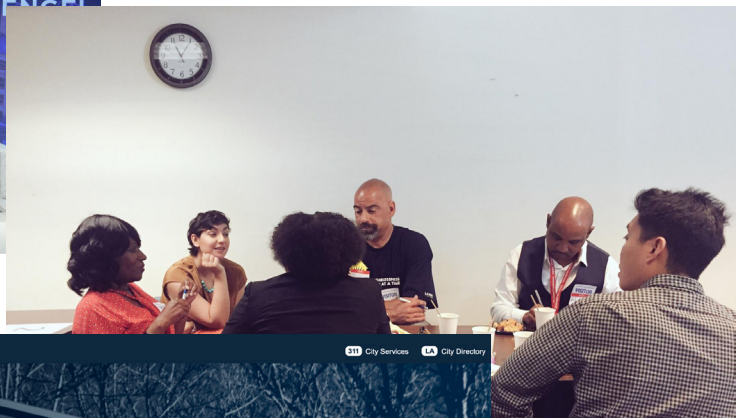
Homepage of the LA ADU Accelerator Program
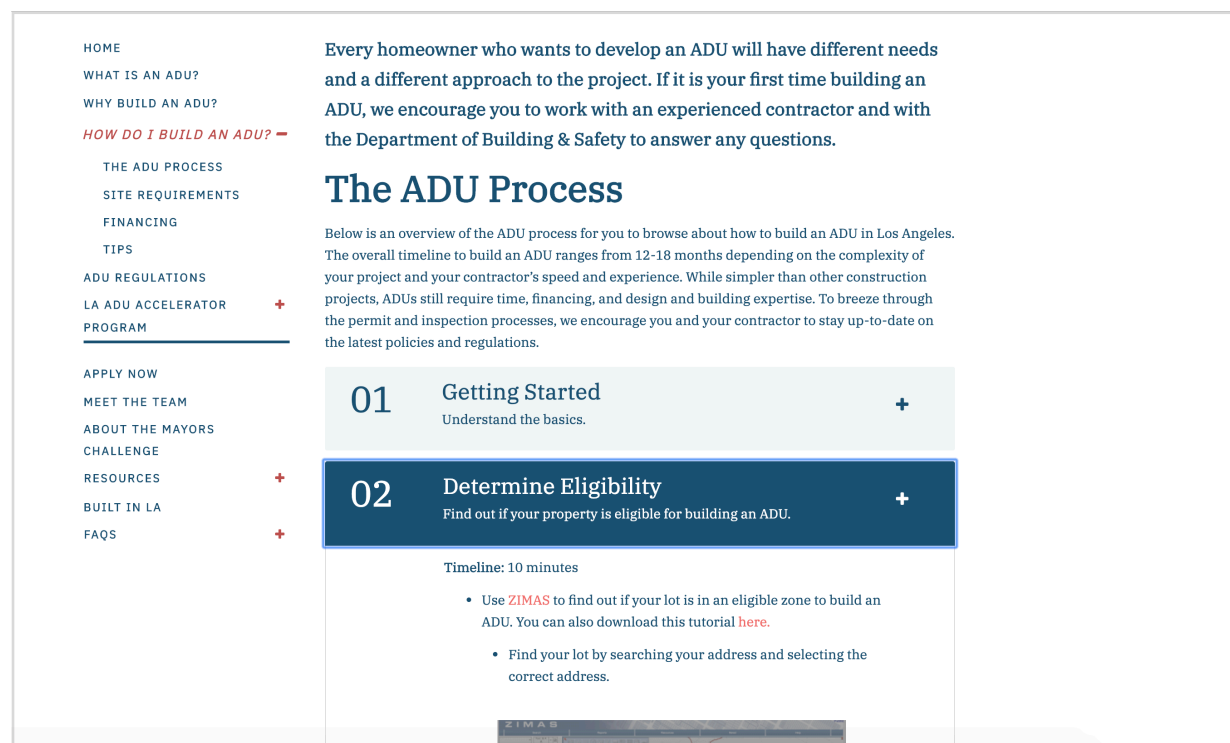
LA ADU Accelerator Program

The Problem:
With new regulations and interest from developers, architects, and the media in competing for over Accessory Dwelling Unit market opportunities, it was a known fact by multiple city departments that there was general confusion coming from homeowners interested in building an ADU. If the goal was to increase the number of successful ADUs as a solution to both the housing and homelessness crisis, user-friendly information had to be provided.

This is where I came in:

I was tasked with implementing a website for the program that would give information about the incentive program, would link to an application, and would also have other informational resources about what the process of building an ADU in the city of Los Angeles entailed. I worked with a team consisting of a design researcher, research fellow, program manager, and development team (ITA) to:

- Research, gather, and work with different experts to curate the most pertinent and accurate information needed for homeowners
- Copy edit, review, and test content
- Project manage the website from design concept to go-live in 2 months

Example of the "How do I Build an ADU?" process page

LA ADU Accelerator Program

Content Design, Website Design, and Project Management:
Knowing that we would have to design for accessibility and feasibility in Drupal 7, I worked with a previous Designmatters Fellow to create clickable prototypes and visual design choices that I handed off to developers. Working in parallel were the various weeks of creating content, proofing, and getting a second read from departments, as our own program models, policies and digital links were changing. Lots of check-in calls, design tweaks, and meetings later, we went live!

Learnings from this experience:

- When trying to get clarity on a government service or process, nothing beats misinformation from multiple sources than doing field research and answering your questions by talking to actual employees.
- There is a workflow process that needs to be revised every time a new collaborator or stakeholder is added to the design process.
- Tools in government are not typically what's used in the private sector. Learn to adjust your working style with developer teams to speed up development time and confusion.

Spread of the Adobe XD prototype

LA ADU Accelerator Program

Designing the Homeowner Application

Designing an application was an interesting challenge for me, as it wasn't so much a visual experience, but a structural problem. As the designer, I juggled quantitative information from our scoring process, technical constraints of Google Forms, our imagined homeowners' competences, and our internal evaluation process (would we be printing this and sectioning off to different departments or all in one packet?) Even though I had designed a whole user interface for the Homeowner Application, a lack of time and development resources pivoted us towards creating a Google Forms application--in true bootstrapped fashion!

Developing a Homeowner Scoring Process

I had the opportunity to participate in a workshop by Delivery Associates, a company that helps coach governments to improve their innovation processes. After helping organize information during the session, I used my quick prototyping skills to digitize post-it notes from our whiteboard into a visual asset that the team could use to show their strategy to other stakeholders. Without knowing too much about the ideal candidates we were going after, we worked backwards to lay out a high-level elimination process.

Learnings from this experience:

As a strategically oriented person, my instinct was to reverse engineer from our ideal candidate. But with the shifting nature of program goals of this project, creating a persona came way way later in the game. As a designer, I should have advocated to bring this process earlier.
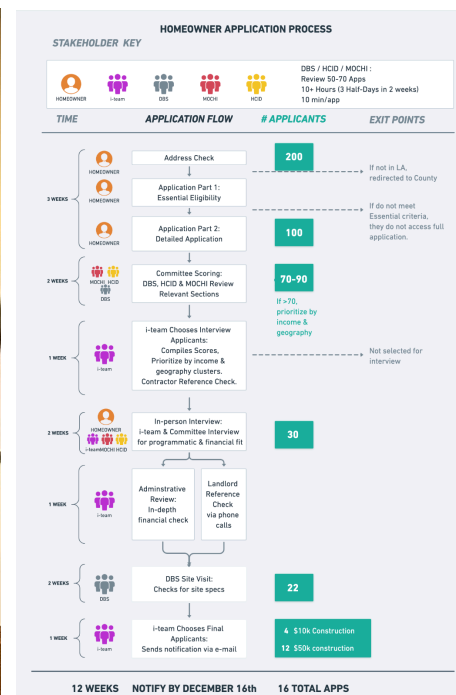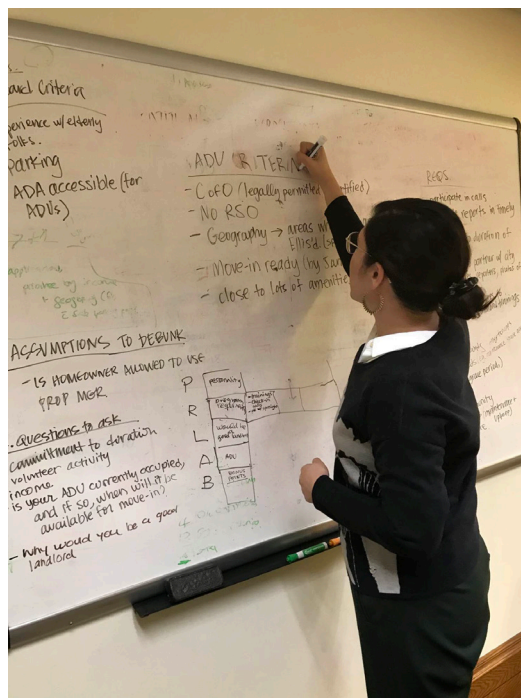
Homeowner Application I designed   *Me leading the scoring process brainstorm*   *Scoring Process Mockup*

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Joint LA County & City Website

Timeline: 1 month
Role: Branding, Content Designer, Project Manager, Prototyper

Months before I had come on board, the LA County and the i-team had a meeting where they decided the i-team would develop a joint website that would act as a clearinghouse for anyone in LA County to be directed to the most updated information about ADUs. Most of the 107 cities in Los Angeles County abide by state law, but as each city creates their own ordinance, residents of that city need to know.

I was given freedom to take lead on this whole project, but I began the process guided by a few constraints:

- The visual look must not look like any of the main competitors in the Accessory Dwelling Unit space, and specifically distinct from the LA ADU Accelerator branding
- It must be a simple website with the main feature being a search tool that would give visitors access to the proper links
- It should create space for an aggressive marketing campaign.
- All content and images would be provided by a team from the LA County's Homelessness Initiative

Alas, the project was not completed on my watch, but it is planned to go-live in January 2020 and I am excited to see the result!

Spread of Adobe XD prototype
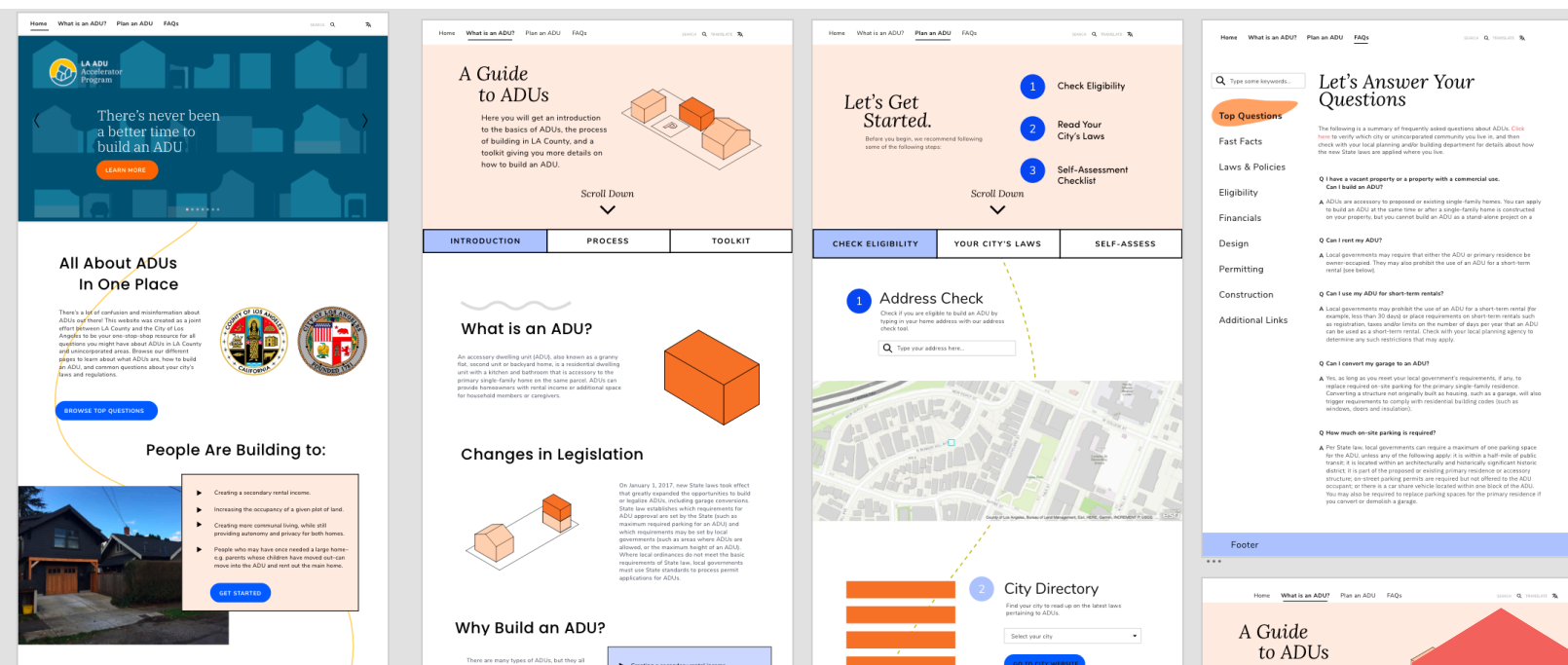
Other Moments in the Fellowship

- Attending the opening of the Highland Park ADU pilot project and seeing Mayor Eric Garcetti for the first time record speech for KCRW
- The State of Women - Young Women's Assembly. Working as all-hands-on-deck staff to manage the Women's Expo at the Marriott in Downtown LA and escort inspiring Latinx entrepreneurs
- Attending the West Coast Convening and getting to other innovation leaders from Long Beach, San Francisco, Glendale, and Pasadena and learning about similar challenges and passions
- Contributing to the Mayor's All-staff meeting ice breaker - Powerpoint Karaoke - and my slide being in the backdrop as the Mayor announced his new role as Chair of C40
- Being able to watch really important LA stakeholders work together during an Ideation Session about housing solutions in the Mayor's press room

Ideation Session

Glendale IPA's card game

National Government Selfie Day

Powerpoint Karaoke at All-Staff Meeting

Conclusion

Having gotten a taste of the reality of human-centered design in local government, I feel that my initial questions are answered. At least in the i-team, I learned that half of innovation at a system scale lies in a high-performing team that is relentless in delivering results with new data-driven and human-centered design approaches. The other half is maintaining government practices: all the emails that are sent out to make the smallest pieces move, weekly status meetings, a sense of humor, office culture, extreme problem solving, and strategizing on how to play the politics game.

I feel grateful for being able to have contributed my product design skills to such an important project in Los Angeles, and to have had the privilege of spending 14 weeks with a team of very inspiring colleagues committed to social change in Los Angeles. I especially loved working with my manager and immediate LAADAUP team. There were days where my Designmatters mentor was invaluable and helped guide me during professional and personal development challenges.

What I'm left reflecting on most is how design thinking–nearing 2020– is still at its premature stages in being culturally adopted in local government, and how critical it is to have leadership that creates space and empower its designers to build capacity and awareness in other departments. Rather than leadership encouraging design fellows to be leaders, speakers, systems thinkers, strategists, and human experience advocates, design fellows continue to be used to fill in for graphic design resources for internal and external departments without the option to opt out. While some mentors who've been in this space longer than I have see this as 'just part of the job,' I think it's to the detriment of emerging designers who are preparing their critical and complex problem solving skills for "Industry 4.0." After this experience, however, I am motivated advocate for this culture shift in future work environments, and hope I can contribute to my profession in that regard.

Special thanks to colleagues: Becky Gross, Lena Tavitian, Nidhi Singh Rathore, Peter Rodriguez, Balmore Botero, Karli Stander, Amanda Daflos, Alex Pudlin, Brendan Bailey
And Designmatters Mentor: Maria del C Lamadrid

YOUR HOME

0.5 Mile

Public Transport

REAR OF PROPERTY

CONVERTED GARAGE

SIDE OF PROPERTY

P

SIDE OF PROPERTY

HOME

STREET