

DESIGNING AND
COMMUNICATING



*How Nonprofits Can
Use Design To Better
Communicate Their
Trustworthiness*

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DESIGNING AND COMMUNICATING TRUST

*How Nonprofits Can Use Design
To Better Communicate Their
Trustworthiness*

Thesis document submitted to the School of Design,
Carnegie Mellon University for the degree of Masters in
Design in Design for Interactions

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Date

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Date

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INTRODUCTION

Nonprofit: a corporation or an association that conducts business for the benefit of the general public without shareholders and without a profit motive.

Nonprofit is "a corporation or an association that conducts business for the benefit of the general public without shareholders and without a profit motive". [1] To fulfill their promises, nonprofits need government grants or public donations. Thus, trust from the public is crucial for their survival.

The reason behind choosing this topic, Designing and Communicating Trust is, rooted deeply in the culture I grew up in and the experience I had.

I grew up in China. Trust towards nonprofits there has been absent since a series of outrageous scandals in 2011. A young and rich Internet celebrity was found associated with top figures in the Red Cross, which meant it was donations from ordinary people that gave her a luxury life. It was just the tip of the iceberg. People were furious finding how corrupt the organization was in the stories that followed. Donations to Chinese charities fell by more than 80 percent the next summer. [2] People didn't just refuse to donate to the Red Cross any more, they lost their trust in nonprofits in general.

I was able to talk to people from other countries, and I found it was a universal concern. But my personal experience told me that not all nonprofits were corrupt. There were good ones we should support.

I once worked for a nonprofit to design brochures for them. Working closely with the people, I was deeply touched. Without government support, they carried the mission to locate remaining war veterans, most of whom were never honored and lived in extreme poverty. It was heart breaking to learn about their stories, and I was so happy that the heroes got the respect and help they deserved before they left. Yet, this nonprofit was struggling to gain public support.

Why should these great nonprofits be the victims of public skepticism? Is there a way that they can differentiate themselves from the questionable ones and gain trust again? That was the question I hoped I could answer by the end of this research.

EXPLORATORY RESEARCH

What are the trust factors that influence peoples' behaviors?
What are the needs nonprofits have?

SCOPE

Trust lies at the heart of a nonprofit. As a social entity, a nonprofit needs to gain trust from various stakeholders: donors, volunteers, benefit receivers, government, community, society, media, even its own employees. However, this is too big a scope. To make the most use of this thesis research, I decided to focus mainly on donors' trust.

Even just for donors, it is not a simple problem space. If we look closely into a donor's mind, we can find two deciding moments that makes this person a donor: why she/he wants to donate to this cause, and why she/he decides to donate to this organization in particular.

There are all kinds of answers to the whys: a person might donate feeling compassion for those in need, a person might donate wanting to make a contribution to the community, a person might donate because of tax benefits [3], a person might donate under social pressure, a person might donate out of impulse after watching a documentary [4], etc.

However, no matter how different the motivations are, the gap between motivation and action always exists. In a skeptical society, people still feel the same way, but they stop and think before taking an action. The gap is too wide for even kindness to cross.

Thus, this research is not about how to engage people's feelings, it is more about how to provide sufficient information for people to take an action and become real donors. Two questions should be asked at this point: What are the trust factors that influence donor behaviors? And, what are the needs nonprofits have?

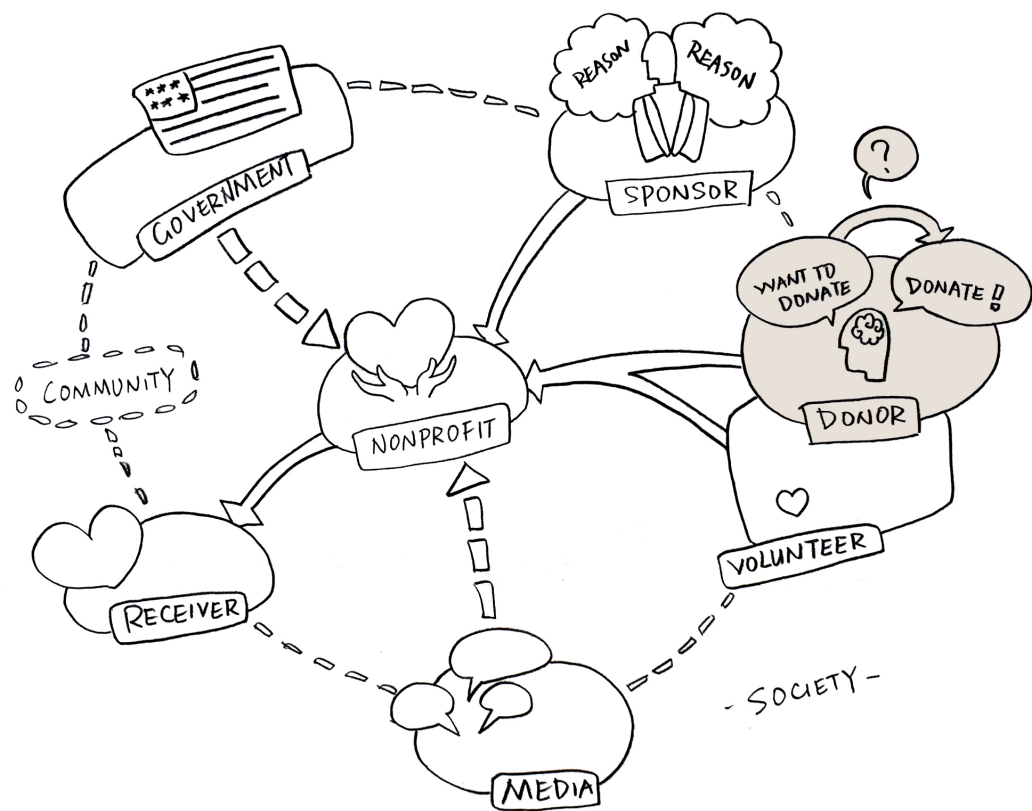


Figure 1. Territory Map

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research around nonprofits is abundant. A single search with the word nonprofit in Google Scholar will give you more than 2.7 million results. For this research, two areas are relatively important: psychology of trust and nonprofit communications.

PSYCHOLOGY OF TRUST

In the field of psychology, trust has many meanings. In this research, trust refers to whether people believe others will fulfill their promises and tell the truth. [5]

In this research, trust refers to whether people believe others will fulfill their promises and tell the truth.

As for why people trust, psychologists think there are two possible answers, a rational one and an emotional one. [6]

For the rational answer, psychologists think people's decisions about whether to trust are based on their estimates of the probability that others will reciprocate cooperation. Other psychologists argue that motivational and affective dimensions of trust also prompt people to engage in trust behaviors, like lending money to another person. [6]

Knowing trust can be both rational and emotional is inspirational. It suggests looking from multiple perspectives while searching for trust factors in the nonprofit context.

NONPROFIT COMMUNICATIONS

In nonprofit communications, we need to know what

to communicate and how to communicate. There are lots of important messages that nonprofits are already communicating, like their missions, how they work, how to engage, etc. However, is it enough?

A report on nonprofits showed that more transparency about funding use and performance tracking were needed. Donors were not satisfied with the quality of the information provided. [3]

The report also showed how donors would reject a donation request simply because they did not like the ways in which the requests were made. [3] This leads to the importance of better framing.

In framing theory, a simple wording adjustment would lead to dramatically different results. For example, people reacted a lot more positively if they were told 200 out of 600 people will be saved instead of being told 400 out of 600 people will die. [7]

For example, in a Wikipedia appeal test, people donated twice more to the appeal started with "A year ago I left Harvard, ..." than the appeal started with "Let's build something beautiful together". [8]

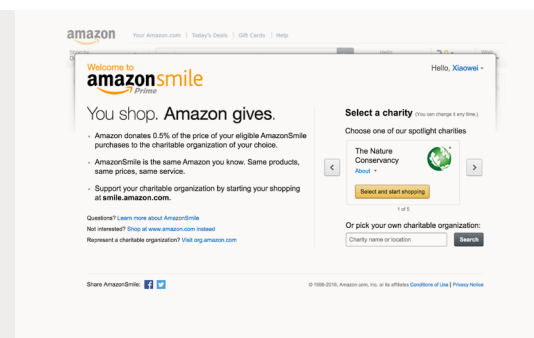
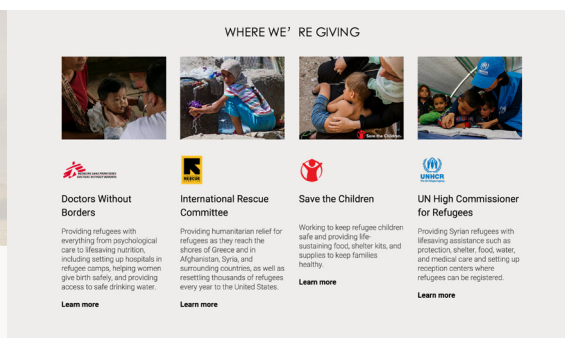
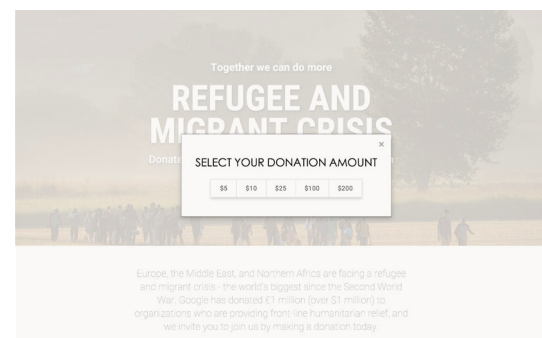
This example showed how personal stories could be more powerful than general ideas. Research on evaluating interventions on poverty victims showed that identifiable victims (story of an individual) will lead to more interventions than statistical victims (story about the group) or even identifiable victims with statistics. [9]

Just like words, visuals are also powerful in framing. It can simulate reality, can tell truth or lies, and can provide implied information. [10]

This research aims at investigating how design, and more specifically visual design, can help nonprofits better communicate their trustworthiness through relevant trust factors.

CASE STUDIES

If we take a closer look, we can find information about nonprofits everywhere, especially online. When you search how to get to the nearest grocery store with Google, you may find their donation match campaign for Syrian refugees. When you shop with Amazon, you may see them pushing their Amazon Smile service offering you the option to donate a portion of your purchase to nonprofits of your choice. When you browse Kickstarter hoping to find a great idea to support, you may see that you can support a nonprofit. There are countless ways for nonprofits to get to their potential donors. However, are the messages well designed and well communicated? Some are, while some are not. Analyzing existing efforts gives a better understanding of the problem space.



GOOGLE DONATION MATCH CAMPAIGN

Donation match means Google will donate the same amount as how much their users donate through their platform. It is a smart move for Google. It doesn't just help to raise more donations for refugees, but also improves Google's public image indirectly. There are two clever tricks on their campaign page: limited donation options and information about the nonprofits behind the scenes. The first reduces the cognitive load of making a decision, the second evokes trust. [13]

AMAZON SMILE

With Amazon Smile, you choose to allow Amazon to donate a certain amount of their profit from your purchase to a nonprofit of your choice. However, information around nonprofits is not enough. [14]

On this page, you will find specific information on how your donations will be used. This transparency seems trustworthy.

FAQs on how the campaign works is a responsible act.

KICKSTARTER

The UN Refugee Agency Campaign is Kickstarter's first philanthropic project. It raised 1,777,007 dollars from 27,669 backers in a week. According to Julien Schopp, director of humanitarian practice at InterAction, Kickstarter stepped in because nonprofits wanted to reach new generations, and traditional ways worked poorly in doing so. [11]

There are a couple of outstanding design decisions made for the web page of this online campaign. [15]

CHARITY WATER

Charity Water has been known as a very hipster nonprofit organization. Their rapid growth through both mainstream and social media platforms is a textbook approach. They also have a well-designed official website. Not every nonprofit has the resources to deliver such a good design, but there are a couple of things applicable to similar organizations. [16]

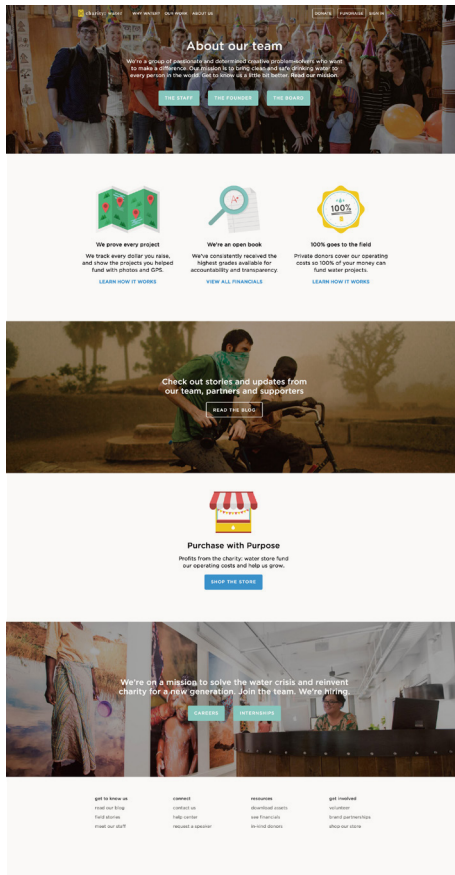


Prominent monthly donation request can be seen as a manipulative approach which can be effective, but should be used carefully.

Know what keeps donors questioning, and gives them answers straight to the point. In this case, the questions are about fund use and project liability.

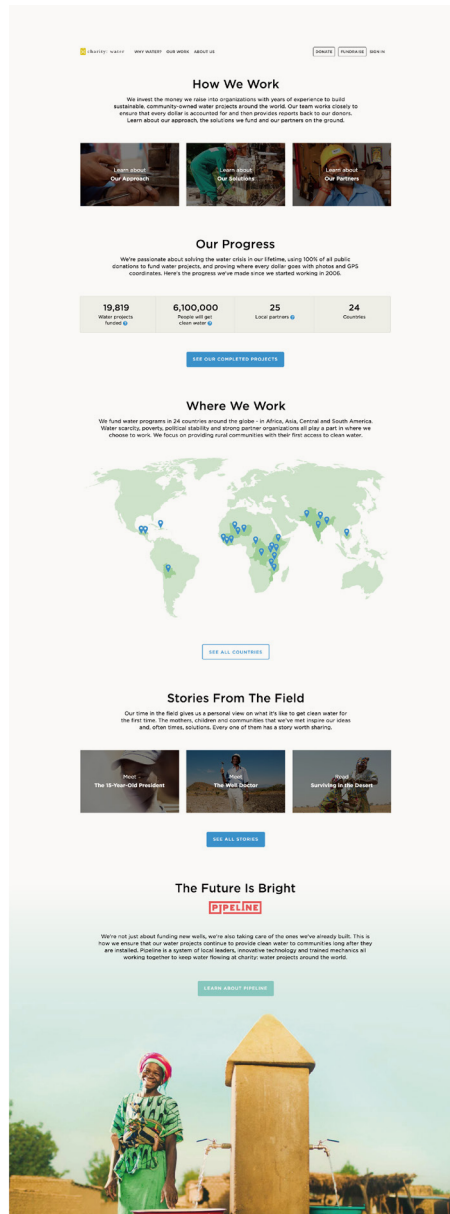
Allowing donors to sponsor an entire project is a great way to give donors a sense of accomplishment, and thus increases their passion.

Bigger pictures to evoke emotions



About Us page can tell more about the people. Their backgrounds, promises, stories are all useful information that makes it personal.

ABOUT PAGE



OUR WORK PAGE

Tracking progress can also be seen as tracking performance. Numbers provide comfort.

Showing where the help goes is important in creating understandable mental connection for international donors.

EVERLANE

Everlane is a clothing brand, not a nonprofit. They have established a great reputation by hiring local workers and treating them well.

Their 2015 Black Friday campaign was interesting. It offered no discount. But they promised that they would donate Black Friday profit to improve workers' lives. It was a brilliant idea. If you look closer, it was actually just a successful re-framing. They should improve the life of their workers anyway, but in this campaign, customers felt that they were actually the ones that helped those people who made their clothes. It made customers feel better about themselves and about the company. [17]

EVERLANE

Black Friday Fund

THE FACTORY THE PLAN CONTRIBUTE

THE LA FACTORY

Just outside of downtown LA, in a 45,000 sq. ft. building, 54 women and 32 men come to work every day to make our T-shirts. Today is for them.

This Black Friday we're donating our profits to create a wellness program at our LA tee factory.

THE FACTORY THE PLAN CONTRIBUTE

Meet the Factory

We started Everlane with an LA-made tee, but our initial production was spread across six vendors—a painful (and wasteful) process. When we found this factory 3 years ago, we felt lucky—they had great workmanship and a positive work environment. We've been partnering with them ever since.

Number of employees:	86
Total tees produced in a day:	1200
People involved in making our tee:	13
Average age of employee:	41

THE FACTORY THE PLAN CONTRIBUTE

From start to finish, 13 people touch our tees in the production process.

THE FACTORY THE PLAN CONTRIBUTE

Our Plan

We spoke to over 30 workers. Here's what they wanted.

Free On-Site Doctor & Vision Visits

We learned most people don't find time for doctor visits—or could find them simply unaffordable. So we're offering free onsite visits.

TOTAL COST: \$31,450

Grocery Delivery & Kitchen Upgrades

Most employees don't own kitchens, so we're providing free healthy groceries in partnership with Farm Market as well as a new refrigerator and appliances.

TOTAL COST: \$45,450

Onsite English Classes

English is a second language for almost all the employees. Many expressed a desire for classes to help them improve.

TOTAL COST: \$33,750

THE FACTORY THE PLAN CONTRIBUTE

Employee Spotlight

We met so many great people during our onsite visits and shared. Get to know a few of them here.

Maria, 30, is a sewing machine operator, who has lived in LA for 10 years and still knows it. At night she studies English before heading to work and back home. "I got straight from work, to English class, to practice, so when I get home I pretty much just go to sleep."

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THE FACTORY THE PLAN CONTRIBUTE

Help us raise \$110,650 for our LA tee factory.

SHOP WOMEN SHOP MEN

We're donating 50% of every purchase until we reach our goal.

Setting goals is a smart way to make donors feel responsible to participate as a member of the group.

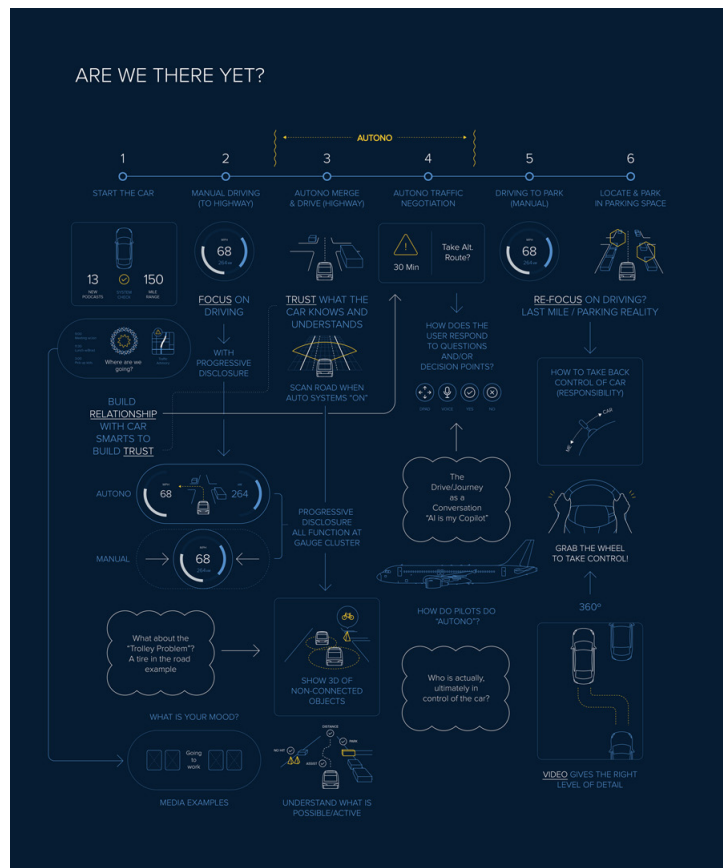
Numbers tell stories.

The plan was human-centered. It came from interviews with workers, which was a respectful act for the workers, as well as proof for project effectiveness.

Stories about identifiable individuals are a great way to get people emotional. Emotion is a powerful push in the decision making process.

Trust is not unique for nonprofits. All companies need customers to believe that they can deliver the service they promise. All products need users to believe that they can perform a certain task. Studying how trust is built in other fields can be inspirational.

Take autonomous cars as an example. How can people trust a system to take over a job that is so complicated and so important? A team of researchers from Hyundai and Artefact said the automobile industry would need to think long and hard about how design can be used to establish a trusting relationship between people and their cars. A solution suggested was that "cars need to provide enough transparency on their operations. The key element to establishing trust is feedback." People need to know how the machine works. This element of feedback is applicable for nonprofits. [12]



[18]

SURVEY

In order to understand how donors think and feel about nonprofits, I also needed direct input from donors themselves. Survey is a great method to get a bigger number of responses on simple questions.

After reading several existing nonprofit survey reports, I designed and conducted an online survey around nine main donation-related questions. Since it was conducted in the early stage of the research, most of the questions were designed to get basic behavioral information: Have you donated before? Do you donate regularly? Which kind of causes or organizations did you donate to? What do you usually donate? How did you know about the causes or the organizations? What method did you use to donate? What motivated you to donate? What do you think are crucial parts in choosing an organization? What organization/individual did you (or anyone in your household) donate to?

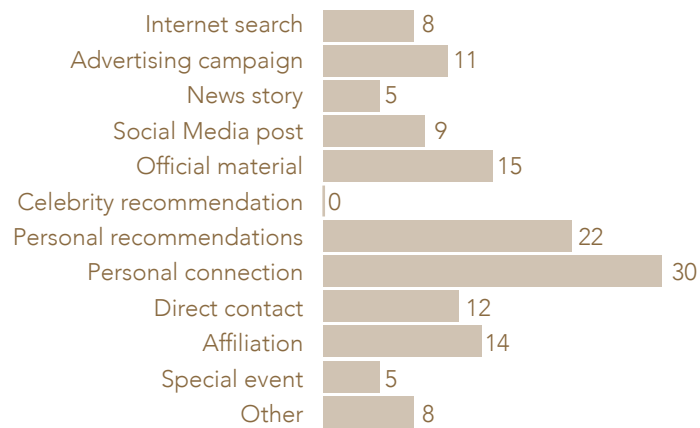
Fifty seven responses were collected. The age ranged from less than 24 to more than 75, and the yearly household income ranged from less than \$20,000 to more than \$200,000. There are several interesting findings. First, almost half of the participants donate regularly or donate both regularly and irregularly. This is interesting because trust could play a bigger role in regular donations. Second, 50 out of 57 participants claimed that they usually donate money, almost double the participants who donated time. Also, 39 out of 57 participants had donated online.

50 out of 57 participants claimed that they usually donate money.

39 out of 57 people had donated online.

For the bar charts on the right, two interesting findings emerged. The first was that personal recommendations and connections are important in spreading the word. The second was that donors did care a lot about the nonprofits' mission, management and donors' impact.

How did you know about the causes or organizations?



What do you think are crucial parts in choosing an organization?

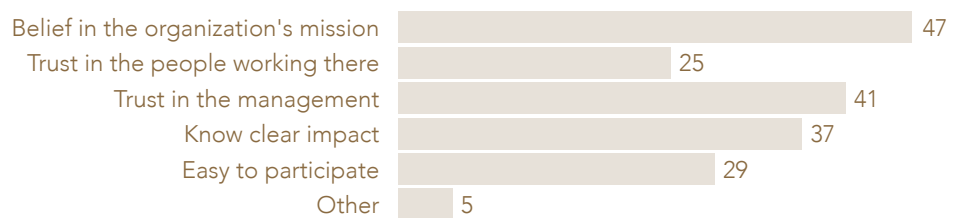


Figure 2. Survey Results

INTERVIEW

To get more in-depth information, I conducted ten interviews with donors and two with nonprofits. Many of the donors also had experience working in or with nonprofits as employees or long-term volunteers.

The donors were of both genders, different ages from early 20s to early 60s, different occupations, and various levels of nonprofit engagement. I also interviewed two nonprofits, a small local nonprofit who had only two founders, and a large nonprofit who received regular funds from the government and national foundations. To understand how design worked for nonprofits, I also contacted current and previous nonprofit design consultants and nonprofit communication managers.

The first finding confirmed the hypothesis of this research. When asked how trusting they were towards nonprofits, most participants said they were very picky in choosing nonprofits. One person said he was "not usually very trusting of people asking for money", and several participants mentioned that they would trust a nonprofit if their "overhead is low". Many of them also cared a lot about "how they use their money", and some would "look up online". Another interesting finding was that younger participants were more skeptical of nonprofits. There was a clear generation difference.

"I am not usually very trusting of people asking for money."

"I need to know how they use their money."

All kinds of evidence show that trustworthiness is no longer a default quality for nonprofits. It is something that nonprofits need to fight for, and it is crucial for their survival. When the participants were describing their methods in choosing nonprofits, they were actually giving tips to nonprofits. What they asked for was

transparent information like overhead and funding use. They also wanted the information to be accessible so that they could easily find what they needed, when they wanted.

The other interesting finding was how much participants trusted their relationships and personal connections. Almost all participants had donated to a nonprofit before when asked by their families, friends, or co-workers. One of the participants said she would not need to do any research on the nonprofit even if she was going to give a large donation. She said she fully trusted the person who recommended the nonprofit, and it wasn't because of social pressure, because she became a regular donor later. Many of the participants also donated to nonprofits where they volunteered or worked. They said they trusted the organization because of the people working there.

"I want the funds to go directly to the people in need in the community."

Social bond has been proved powerful in many areas. However, in the case of nonprofits, it works better for local and small nonprofits than large and global ones. One participant said she had to know that "the funds go directly to the people in need in the community". Actually, most participants preferred small and local nonprofits. It is understandable, but there are problems larger than the community level like environmental protection, global poverty, peace and development, etc. How could nonprofits behind these big causes gain trust if they cannot establish in-person connections?

For nonprofits, websites and social media caused their biggest headache. Both of the nonprofits I interviewed were thinking of updating their existing websites, but they either didn't have time or they didn't have the skills and resources. The communication manager of the larger nonprofit I interviewed said she hated updating social media everyday, it was time consuming and she didn't know whether she was doing it right. Though service has always been the core business of nonprofits, demands brought by high-speed technology have also become obstacles to success.

KEY FINDINGS

Two questions were asked when the scope was defined: What are the trust factors that influence donor behaviors? And, what are the needs nonprofits have? From the survey and the interviews, two trust factors and two nonprofit needs were found.

The two trust factors are relationship and transparency. Relationship evolves social thinking. People trust their families, friends and co-workers have enough judgment to make a good decision, and also these people won't lie to them. Transparency, on the other hand, is analytical thinking. People need to see and process the information by themselves. That is to say, for donors, it is either their families, friends and co-workers' judgment or their own judgment. Trust is not a default. It always comes from somewhere.

The two trust factors are relationship and transparency.

For nonprofits, the biggest two challenges they face are technology and scale-related problems. They need strategies to deal with these challenges. Technology stands mainly for new channels like websites, social media, emails, etc. These are not nonprofits' specialties; they need help. Different scales lead to different needs. Steps to take should be tailored to the scale of the nonprofit. The most urgent need for nonprofits now is still how to deal with all the digital platforms brought by technology.

The biggest challenge nonprofits face is technology, more specifically, communication in digital platforms. The opportunity of this research is to incorporate the trust factors - Relationship and Transparency, in the design of digital communications.

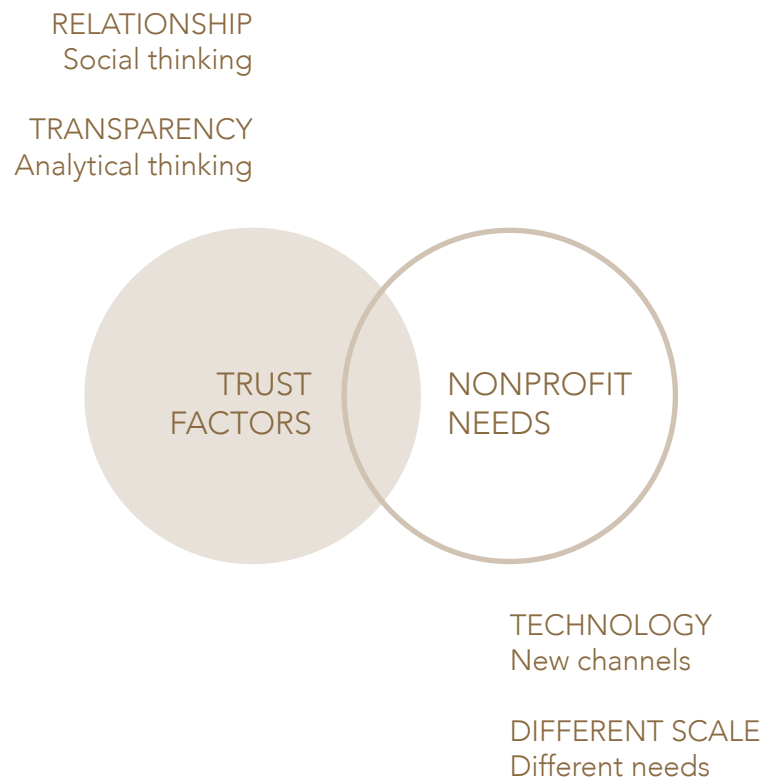


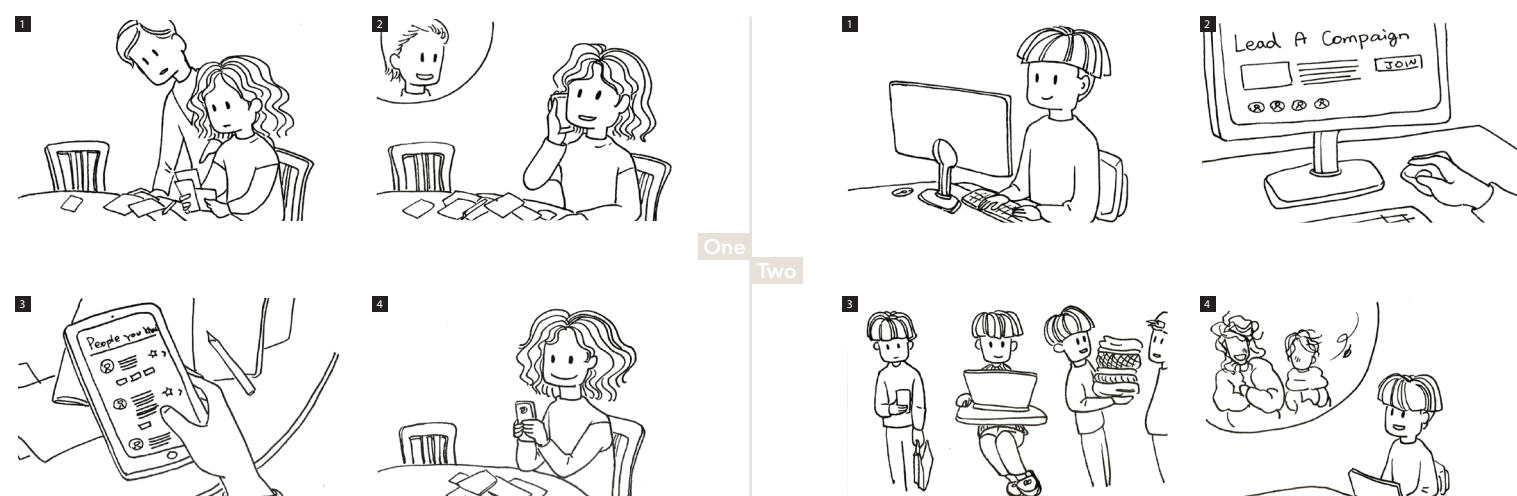
Figure 3. Trust factors & Nonprofit needs

EARLY CONCEPTS

Based on the two trust factors and the two nonprofit needs, four early concepts were developed aiming to communicate trust in digital platforms.

The first concept was called Social Network For Donors. In the scenario, when a family is making a donation plan, they can look at which nonprofits their families and friends have supported and how they feel about them. It is a platform for donors to browse and compare nonprofit information. Once they know who to talk to, they can call or meet the family or friend to get more information. The assumption is that this will increase the trustworthiness of strange nonprofits, and bring fun to donating behaviors.

The second concept was called Lead A Campaign. In this scenario, anyone interested can lead a campaign for the nonprofit. The leader owns the campaign from



planning to execution. All the efforts put in will make the person understand the nonprofit more and feel more responsibility. The assumption is that after experiencing the whole process, the person will most likely become a long-term donor for the nonprofit.

The third concept was called Mapping The System. Traditional nonprofit reports are filled with numbers and charts. These visuals are better than plain text, but they are not good enough for people to truly understand the organization. This concept suggests using a system map to show how the organization works. The assumption is that with this level of detail, donors could be more willing to donate.

The fourth concept was called Small In Big. It suggests to visually breaking a big nonprofit into small teams and projects. It is designed to increase the feeling of personal connection and system transparency between large scale nonprofits and their donors. In this way, donors can choose to donate to a specific team or a specific project within a large nonprofit. The assumption is that if a large organization can provide the level of personal connection and transparency that local nonprofits have, donors will trust and donate more.

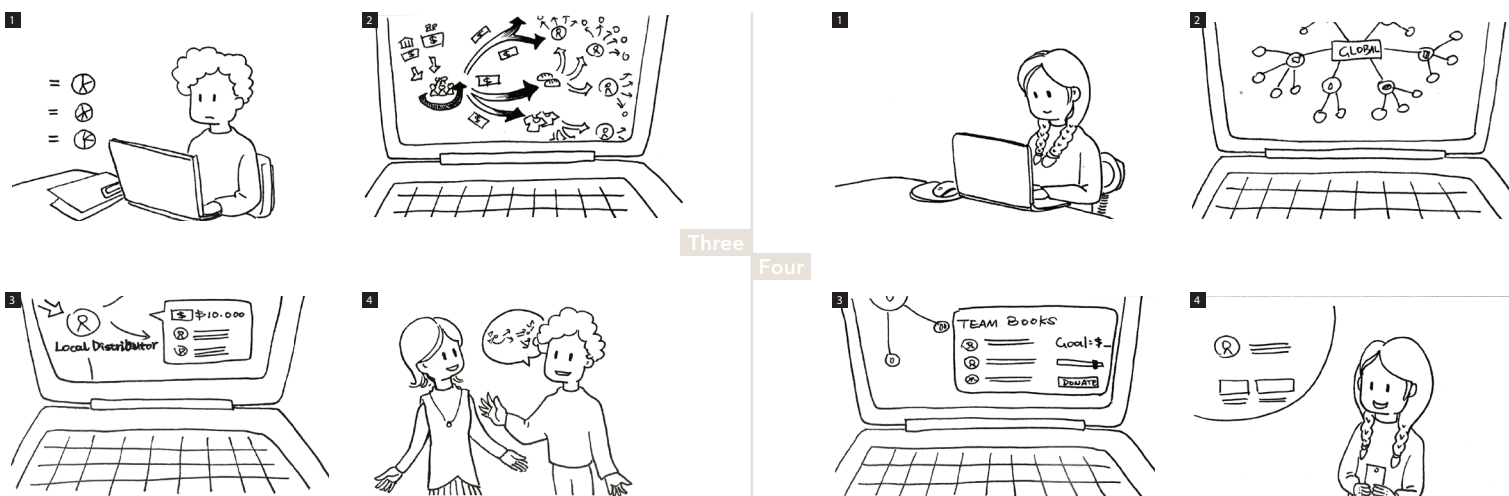


Figure 4. Story boards for early concepts

What content will help donors trust a nonprofit more?
What visual will increase the trustworthiness of a nonprofit?

RESEARCH FOCUS

WHAT

In a survey and several interviews with both donors and nonprofits, two trust-related factors emerged. They are Relationship and Transparency.

Relationship: To trust a nonprofit, donors sometimes need validation from people they know. It could be recommendations from their families and friends, or someone they personally know working in the nonprofit. In the latter scenario, volunteering plays a huge role in getting people to trust.

Transparency: In cases when donors don't have a relationship tied to the nonprofit, they need information to learn about the nonprofit and make a decision themselves. People choose to search online for this information. Transparency is what they value in this situation.

These two trust factors are not equally important all the time. One may over-weigh the other in a specific situation. The difference could come from different nonprofit scale, online or off-line communication, attracting or maintaining relationship, etc.

In the previous chapter, four early concepts were developed. Each led to a distinct opportunity. In several informal speed dating research sessions, the third concept, Mapping The System, stood out. For concept Social Network For Donors and Lead A Campaign, most people didn't want to engage so much in donating that they have to consult their social network or use their spare time. They also questioned the feasibility and necessity of breaking a large nonprofit into small

pieces. They liked Mapping The System because they could see themselves using it while making a donation decision.

If the motivations behind choosing the Mapping The System concept are being analyzed, we can see that it is transparency in digital platforms that really matters. Transparency is important because it cultivates trust. System maps are just one of the possible visual communications for that purpose. However, is transparency the only quality needed to gain trust? To learn more thoroughly about this problem space, this research needs to expand the focus from transparency to all qualities that lead to trust.

WHERE

To communicate trust in digital platforms, an official website is a logical place to start.

To communicate trust in digital platforms, an official website is a logical place to start. As the information center of a nonprofit, websites should be the place where people can find everything they need, including trust-related information. Interviews also showed that when donors are doing research about a nonprofit, the website is one of the most important information channels.

WHO

Millennials are the next generation of donors.

Millennials are the next generation of donors. As more and more millennials enter the work force, their influence should not be underestimated. However, they act very differently from their parents' generation. They are skeptics because they grew up in a world full of scandals. They are also technology creatures who will search anything online. Unlike mature donors who may have already developed a long-term relationship with certain nonprofits, a website can make a major difference in attracting this young generation.

HOW

To communicate trust, knowing what people think is trustworthy is the first step. I therefore conducted research on content, followed by visual research.

RESEARCH ON CONTENT

What content will make donors trust a nonprofit more? First, I needed to know what content should be presented in a website. After some research on several nonprofit websites, eleven content categories were extracted: who we are, our mission, our stories, how we work, ways to help, your impact, greater good, statistics, official docs, blogs and updates, and ratings.

To help participants talk more naturally, a card sorting exercise was designed. The eleven content categories along with descriptions and examples were designed into cards. The participants were asked to sort the cards twice based on two questions asked: what do you expect to know from a nonprofit website; and what do you think would make you trust the nonprofit?

Before the session started, participants were asked to identify their trust level towards nonprofits in general and talk a little bit about their past experience with nonprofits. This gave me background information to analyze the motivations behind their choices.

To understand how the participants actually perceived the information, they were later asked to use ten "time tokens" to show their estimated time spent on each content category.

In the end, they were asked to put the appropriate form cards next to the content cards to show how they wanted the information to be presented. Form cards included text, illustration, photo, infographic, video, form, animation, audio, and chart. Participants could also name forms that were not in the cards.

Eleven content categories were extracted: who we are, our mission, our stories, how we work, ways to help, your impact, greater good, statistics, official docs, blogs and updates, and ratings.

<div>Trust Level</div> <div><div>Skeptical</div><div>T</div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><d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Figure 5. Content Cards, Form Cards, and Time Tokens

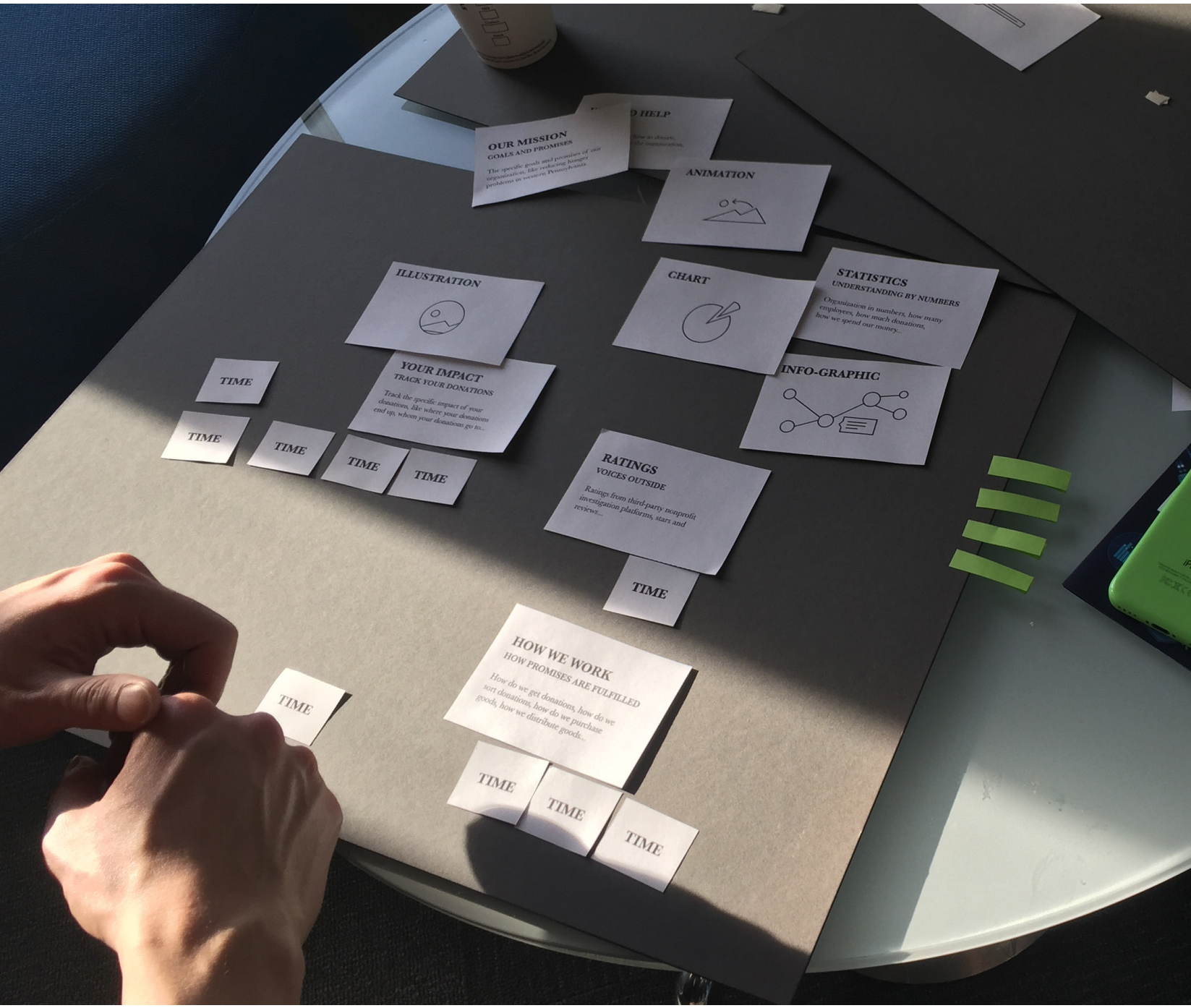




Figure 6. Once a participant was done with his card-sorting exercise, he mapped out his expectations for a nonprofit website with content cards, time tokens, and form cards.

FINDINGS ON CONTENT

The eleven content categories were almost all necessary components in a nonprofit website, but among those, three were chosen as the top trust-related information by donors: statistics, how we work, and your impact.

Three categories were chosen as the top trust-related information by donors: statistics, how we work, and your impact.

STATISTICS

For Statistics, participants thought it was important because numbers would provide more details. Numbers would show the overhead, funding use, growth and performance of the nonprofit. Participants needed this information to make a judgment.

HOW WE WORK

For How We Work, participants thought knowing the system, the mechanics behind the numbers, was also crucial. Statistics alone wasn't enough. They needed to see if the nonprofit was working in an efficient way. After all, understanding is the first step forward trust.

YOUR IMPACT

For Your Impact, participants needed to know how exactly their donations would be used. If possible, they wanted to be able to track their donations and the progress of the projects. They did not like update emails with no clear personal appreciation.



Figure 7. A word cloud of what people expect to know from a website. Highlighted words are top trust-related information categories chosen by participants.

RESEARCH ON VISUALS

Knowing what content will make donors trust a nonprofit was not enough; I also needed to know what visual will increase the trustworthiness of a nonprofit. The underlying assumption of that question was that people would think differently about the same nonprofit based on different visuals and interactions, even if the nonprofit was providing the same information.

To test this assumption, I needed an example. The Greater Pittsburgh Food Bank was selected as the example, because lack of food is a universal cause that everyone could relate to. Also, their website provides enough information for prototyping.

The Greater Pittsburgh Food Bank was selected as the example, because lack of food is a universal cause that everyone could relate to.

Five design approaches were developed based on the same trust-related information around Statistics, How We Work and Your Impact, with content pulled from the Greater Pittsburgh Food Bank website .

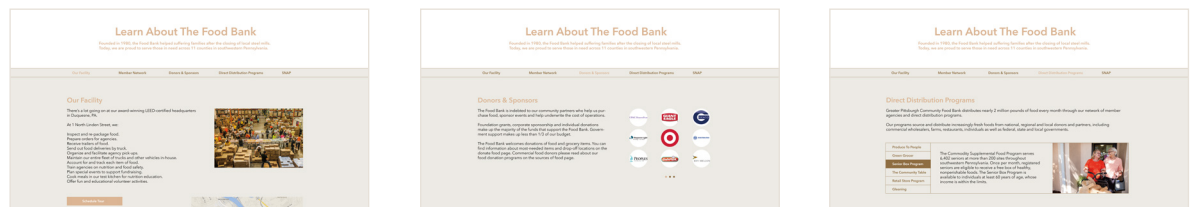
These approaches were possible parts of a website, not the entire design. Since they were designed just to evoke conversations, they were also not perfect in terms of photo quality, font size, wording and other similar design details.

The design used in these user testing sessions were interactive websites prototyped in Adobe Experience Design. Participants were asked to interact with the prototypes one by one first. They could choose to share their thoughts while interacting with the prototypes or talk about them later in the evaluation sessions.

The following pages show the five design approaches used in testing.

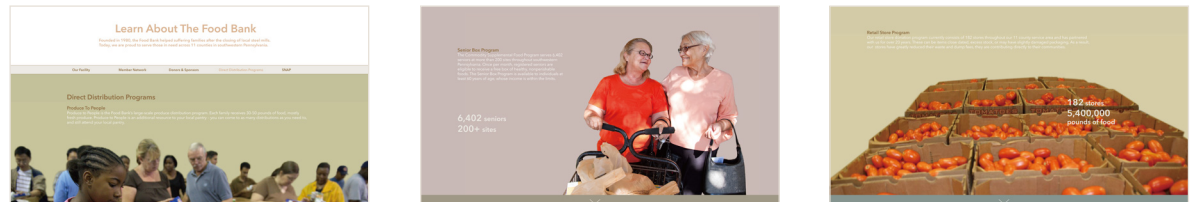
TEXT & SUPPORTING IMAGE

This approach communicates heavily through text and small images.



TEXT & SUPPORTING IMAGE

This approach uses eye-catching photos to tell stories of the nonprofit.



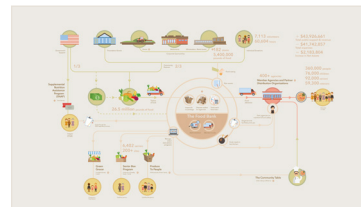
TEXT & SUPPORTING IMAGE

This approach uses small infographics to explain how the nonprofit works.



TEXT & SUPPORTING IMAGE

This approach allows viewers to interact with the infographic and explore by themselves.



TEXT & SUPPORTING IMAGE

This approach brings all the information into a simple flow chart.

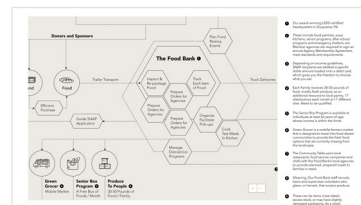
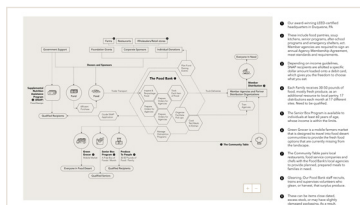




Figure 8. A participant interacting with prototypes in Adobe Experience Design

FINDINGS ON VISUALS

EVALUATION

Describing how you feel and what you think about visuals can be hard. To dig deeper into participants' thoughts, seven sets of opposite phrases, presented on the right page, were chosen to represent important qualities in evaluating a nonprofit website.

Between these seven sets of phrases were seven scales. Participants were asked to sort the five design approaches on these scales while sharing thoughts about the visuals and giving explanations about their rankings. These sets of phrases were presented one by one in a sequence from straightforward ones like whether they were visually appealing to abstract ones like whether they were authentic with the information, from general ones like whether they were easy to understand, to trust-related ones like how confident you were to trust. The assumption of this break-down evaluation is that people will associate different qualities to different visuals.

The assumption of this break-down evaluation is that people will associate different qualities to different visuals.

PARTICIPANTS

Fifteen potential donors came to share their thoughts on these visuals. They were people from all walks of life, including college students, a middle school teacher, a dentistry technician, a software engineer, and other working professionals. The age ranged from 19 years old to 37 years old. All the participants lived in Pittsburgh at the time this research was done.

Based on the feedback, a radar chart showing average votes and a distribution diagram showing each vote are presented on the following pages.



Visually unattractive	—————	Visually appealing
Visually distant cold & distant	—————	Visually friendly
Take time to understand	—————	Easy to understand
Inauthentic with the information	—————	Authentic with the information
Hesitate to trust	—————	Confident to trust
Hesitate to donate	—————	Confident to donate

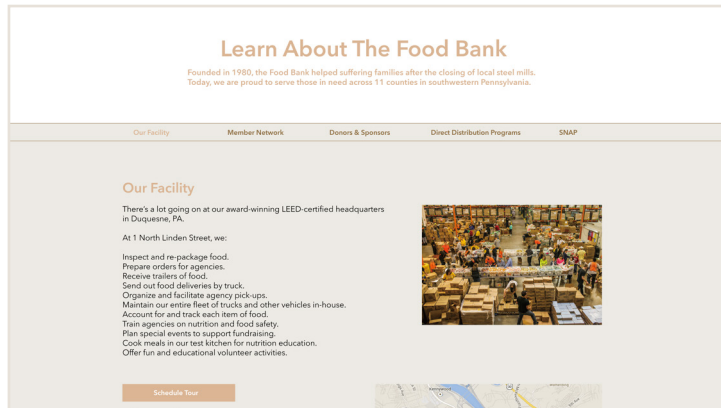
Figure 9. Seven sets of opposite phrases for evaluation





Figure 10. A participant evaluating the five design approaches. It was interesting to see how he felt so differently about the same design in different contexts.

TEXT & SUPPORTING IMAGE



To most participants, this design approach was not visually appealing, and also not very friendly, but it seemed authentic to them, and people may consider trusting or donating to nonprofits that look like this. They said "it is authentic because it is more stripped down, just about the info, without dressing it up", and "it is straightforward". However, in the distribution diagram, we can see that people reacted very differently when it came to donating. Half of the people felt confident, half wouldn't even consider donating.

For nonprofits, how simple the website looks should always be a situated decision. Donors' age, educational background, past experience with online services and many other factors may all influence their reactions to a specific design. More research should be done in this area.

Tips: Use this approach if you are a small and local nonprofit, but try to limit the intensity of the text; use bullet points, highlights and shorter paragraphs.

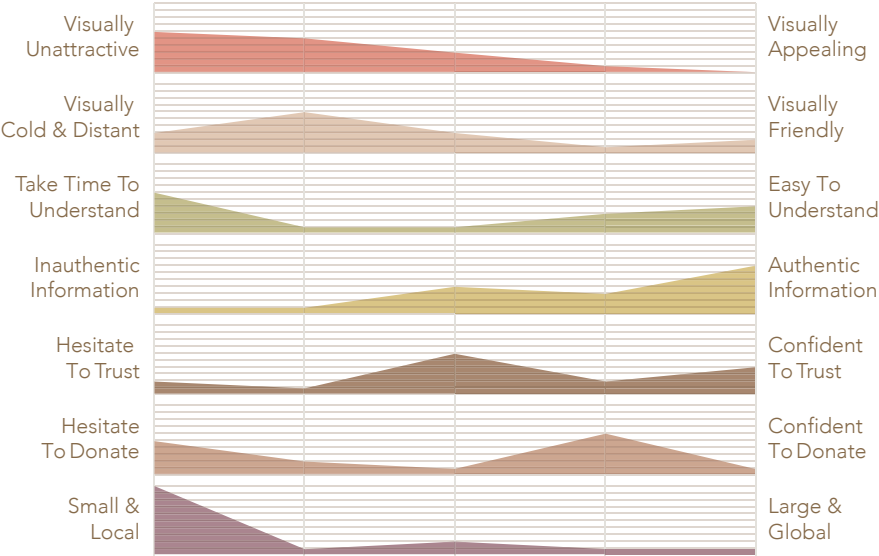
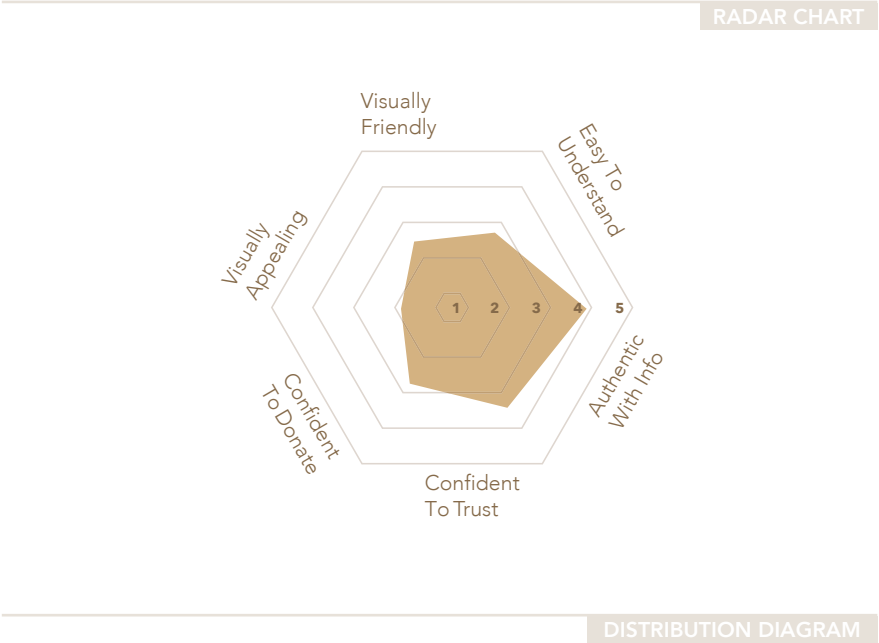
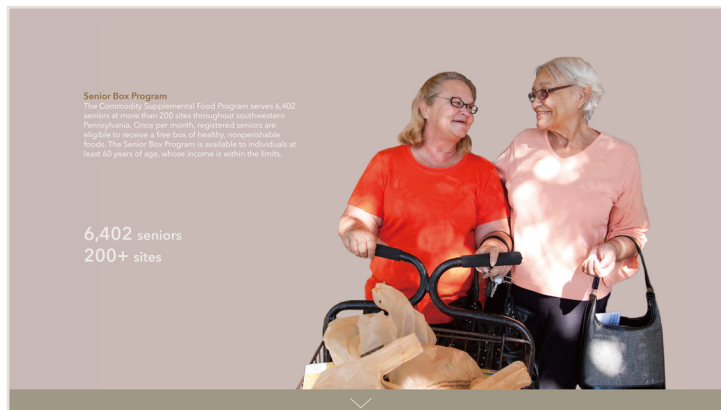


Figure 11. Evaluations for Text & Supporting Image Approach

PHOTO NARRATIVE

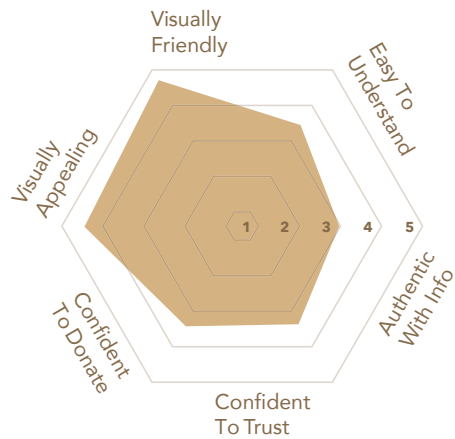


Unlike the text heavy approach, this photo narrative approach was very visually appealing and friendly to people. However, deviations also appeared when it came to trust, donation, and authenticity. People said "I am far more engaged with this one", "...emotionally involved...". However, "this one feels like a commercial, an ad."

Photos are powerful communication tools. They engage people in a deep emotional way. It is necessary to show real people giving and receiving help. It gives the nonprofit a human touch. But sometimes, they are not enough in communicating the trustworthiness of the nonprofit. With all the scandals, people also feel smiling faces can be fake. It is a thin line. It requires careful consideration when choosing the photos.

Tips: Use larger photos, but make sure the photos do not appear as stock photography. The photos need to be real and genuine. Try to use photos to tell stories. They are more powerful in narratives.

RADAR CHART



DISTRIBUTION DIAGRAM

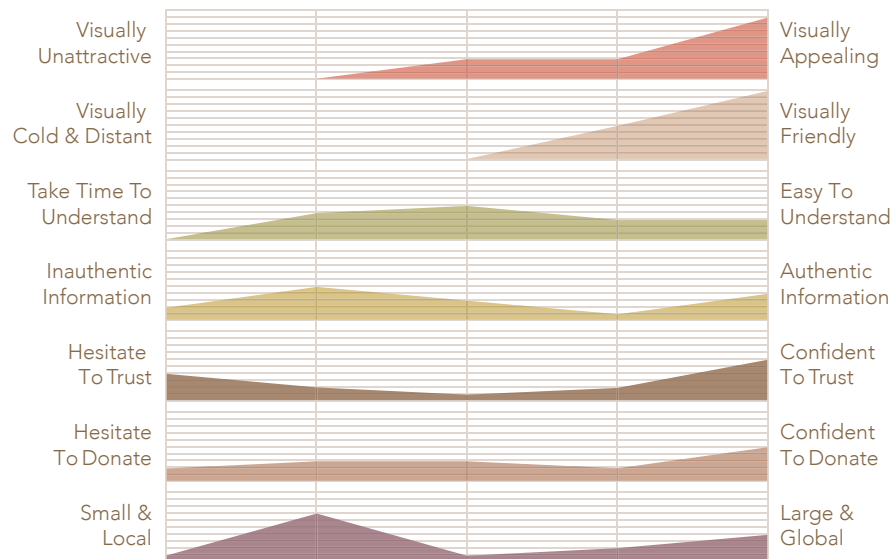


Figure 12. Evaluations for Photo Narrative Approach

TEXT & SUPPORTING INFOGRAPHIC

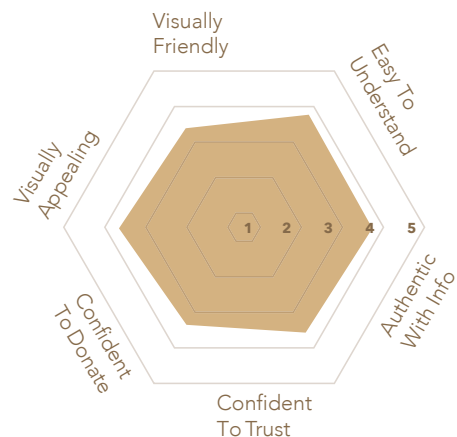


Infographics are not that commonly seen in nonprofit websites, but they have been useful communication tools in many other fields. When there is endless information on the Internet, people get more and more impatient when reading. They are used to, and they want to understand information as quickly as possible. That can only be achieved through visuals. The following three approaches were designed to see whether infographics can help people understand more, and thus trust more.

On average, people felt pretty positive about this design approach. It didn't stand out in a particular dimension, but people did associate it with authenticity and trust. Participants said "it is about transparency", "...need to come into play further into the process, when I decide to donate".

Tips: This approach should not be used alone. It should be used together with text and photos. Don't show this on the home page. It is too much for people who just want basic information about the nonprofit.

RADAR CHART



DISTRIBUTION DIAGRAM

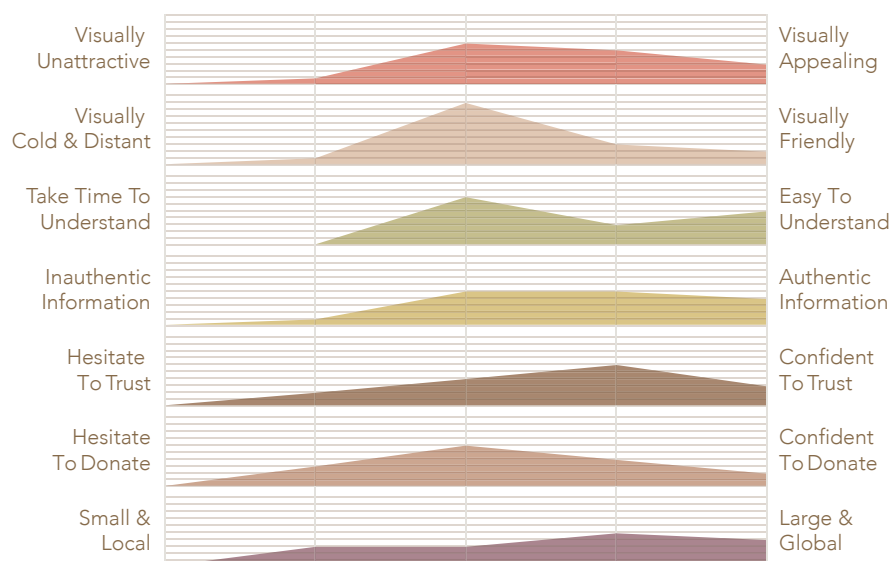
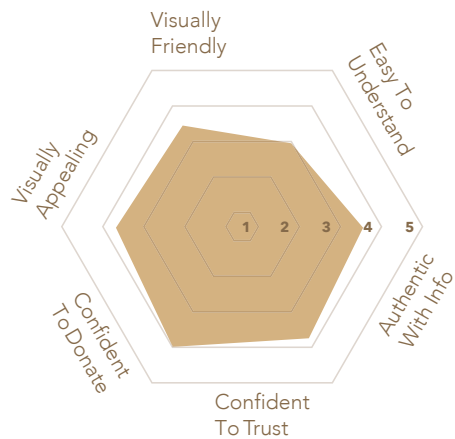


Figure 13. Evaluations for Text & Supporting Infographic Approach

RADAR CHART



DISTRIBUTION DIAGRAM

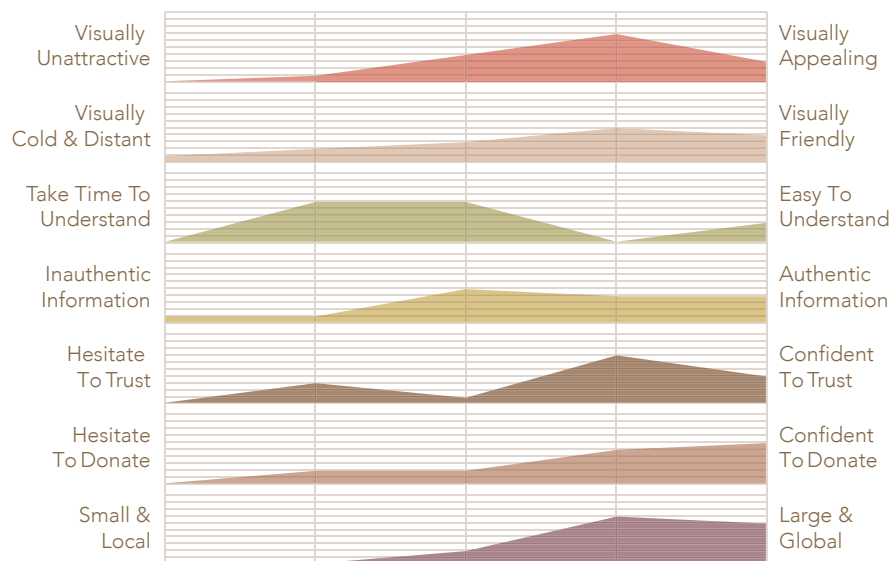
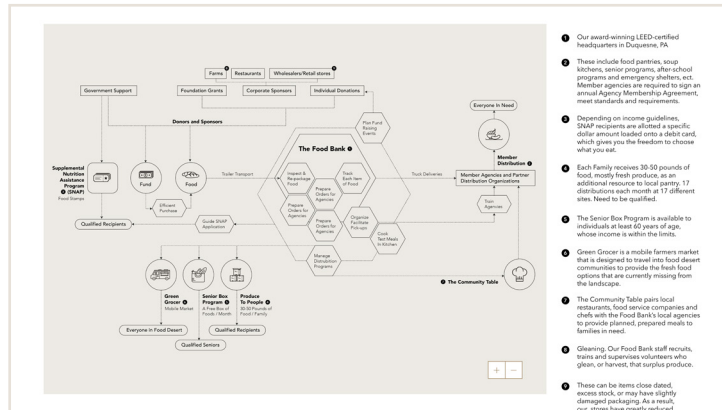


Figure 14. Evaluations for Interactive Infographic Approach

FLOW CHART



Infographics can be difficult to pull off for nonprofits with limited design resources. A flow chart is a much simpler approach. With basic boxes and lines, anyone can create a flow chart that communicates similar information as a nice looking infographic.

Results from the evaluation sessions were interesting. Though, most people thought it was unattractive, cold and distant, and hard to understand. They felt it was authentic, and they were confident to trust or donate to nonprofits with this kind of visual. They said "if you can tell so much detail, it is trustworthy. You can't make it up", and "it looks serious". It is interesting because we usually relate friendliness to trustworthy, but in this case, we can see that for nonprofits, trust can be completely disassociated with friendliness.

Tips: If you don't have enough resources to create a nice infographic, you can choose this simple flow chart instead. While humble-looking, the flow chart approach can be more effective than infographics in generating trust.

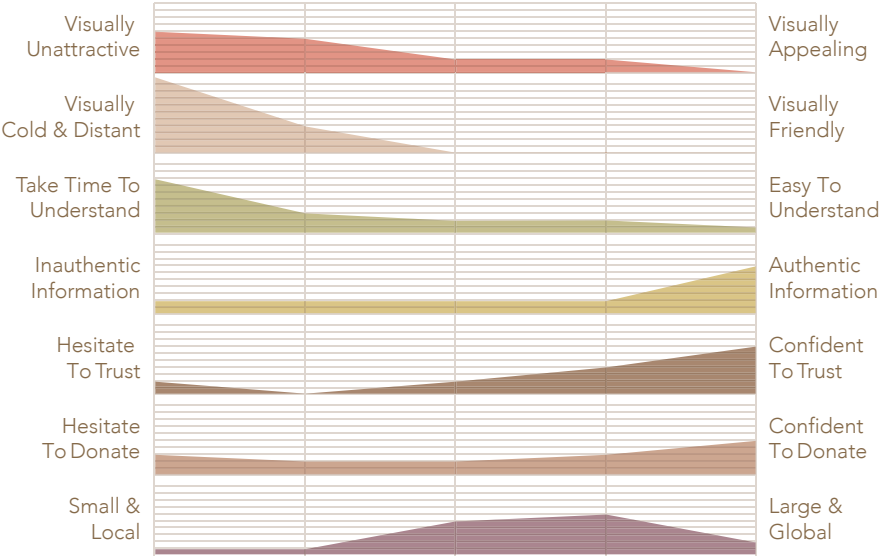
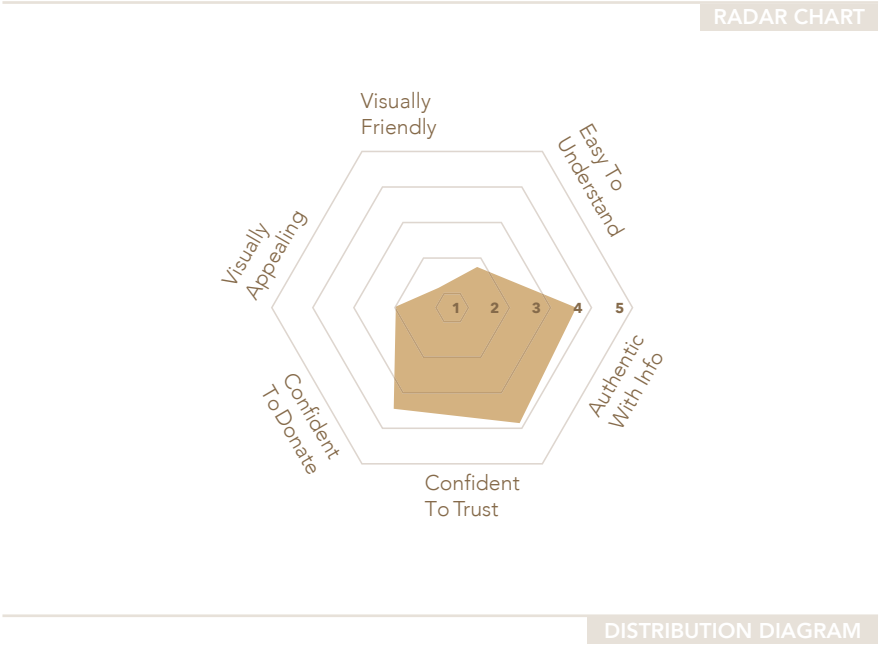


Figure 15. Evaluations for Flow Chart Approach

APPLICATION

EVALUATION

The five design approaches were designed for official websites, but I had an assumption that those visuals could be applicable to other digital platforms. To evaluate this, five common platforms, where donors might have interactions with nonprofits, were developed. The five platforms were official website, investigation website (like Charity Navigator), online articles, social media and personal emails. At the end of the evaluation sessions, participants were asked to put the five design approaches under applicable platforms.

The five platforms were official website, investigation website (like Charity Navigator), online articles, social media and personal emails.

RESULTS

The results showed that participants thought most of these visuals were applicable to other digital platforms. It was clear to see that in an investigation website, users preferred text, infographics and flow charts, while in social media and personal emails, they preferred photo narratives.

This difference illustrates how people expect to learn different information and feel different emotions from different channels. In the official website, however, all types of visuals should be found.

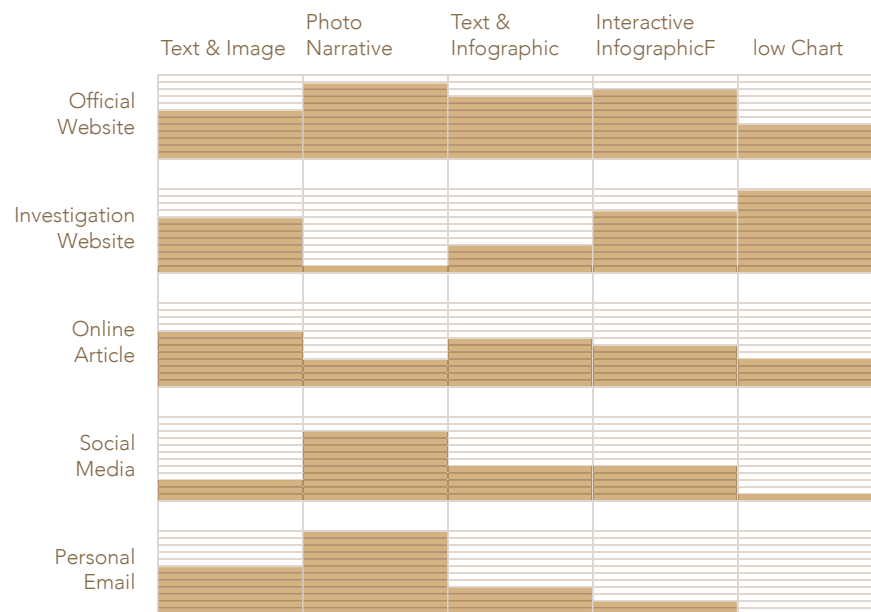


Figure 16. Application evaluations for digital platforms

RESEARCH DELIVERABLE

What content will help donors trust a nonprofit more?
What visual will increase the trustworthiness of a nonprofit?

OUTCOMES

There are three outcomes from this research: the two trust factors, the three trust-related content categories, and the evaluations on five design approaches.

TRUST FACTORS

Research shows that donors trust relationship and transparency. Small and local nonprofits should pay close attention to building a strong social network and maintaining close connections with their donors. All nonprofits should work hard to improve the level of transparency of their organizations, especially for those who aim to scale up or to reach younger generations.

TRUSTWORTHY CONTENT

How the organization works, its statistics, and donors' impact are the three major trust evoking elements nonprofits should carefully communicate in their digital platforms. Most nonprofits already have this information in their websites, but some bury them deep and others make them not straightforward. A good nonprofit that has nothing to hide should use this to their advantage.

TRUSTWORTHY VISUALS

Depending on nonprofits' different situations and needs, visuals should also be carefully chosen. An appealing and friendly visual might seem inauthentic, while a dry and boring visual might seem the opposite. This research provides break-down evaluations on five design approaches. Two are existing approaches, and three are potential approaches. A Nonprofit should use these evaluations as references when designing their communications for digital platforms.

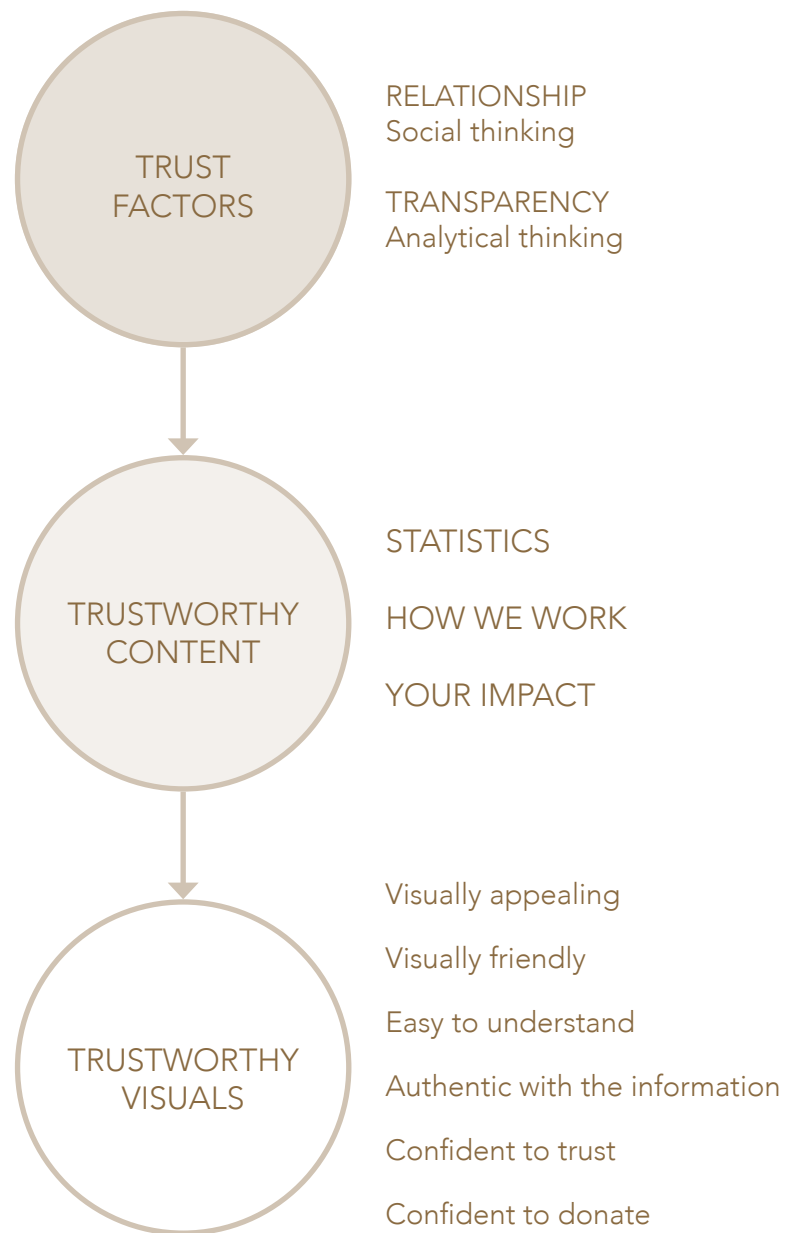


Figure 17. Three outcomes

DESIGN INTERVENTION

To make this research more meaningful, the outcomes needed to be well communicated to nonprofits. Thus, a simplified report based on this thesis documentation was then created.

Since the report would eventually be presented online, the format was designed to be horizontal, suitable for online reading. More background explanations on the project and information about the author were also provided. To be engaging, the report needed to be short and concise. Thus, outcomes from exploratory research were condensed into one page, to give enough space to the more important outcomes from generative and evaluative research.

The research report shares the same name as this thesis documentation: *Designing And Communicating Trust: How Design Can Help Nonprofits Better Communicate Their Trustworthiness*.

*The DESIGNING AND COMMUNICATING
TRUST: How Nonprofits Can Use Design To
Better Communicate Their Trustworthiness
report is attached in the Appendix.
The report can also be found online at
Academia.edu.*

REFERENCES & APPENDIX

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APPENDIX: SURVEY



Donation Experience Survey

Thank you for participating in this donation experience survey. As a part of my thesis project at CMU School of Design, the goal of this survey is to better understand the nature of charitable giving, and eventually bring better design for nonprofit organizations. It will take about 5 minutes to complete. Your help is very much appreciated.

START Section

Please navigate this survey based on your answer to the question in this START Section.

Have you donated before?

i.e. money, time, clothes, books, furniture...

- ☐ Yes (if yes, please complete both the YES Section and the END Section)
- ☐ No (if no, please complete both the NO Section and the END Section)

YES Section

If you answered yes in the previous question, please complete the questions in this section.

Do you donate regularly?

- ☐ Regularly (have a donation plan or routine)
- ☐ Irregularly (no donation plan or routine)
- ☐ Combination of both

Which of the following did you donate to?

- ☐ Religious causes or organization (i.e. Church)
- ☐ Educational organization (i.e. school, university)
- ☐ Health or medical causes
- ☐ Social cause (i.e. help people with basic needs)
- ☐ Youth group or organization (i.e. help children or teenagers)
- ☐ Arts or cultural group
- ☐ Environmental causes or organizations
- ☐ Animal-related charities or causes
- ☐ Disaster or emergency relief
- ☐ Community resources (i.e. library, zoo)
- ☐ Civil rights or political advocacy group
- ☐ Other:

What do you usually donate?

- ☐ Money
- ☐ Time (volunteer)
- ☐ Extra goods (i.e. clothes, furniture...)
- ☐ Purchased goods for specific causes (i.e. food for the homeless)
- ☐ Other:

How did you know about the causes or organizations?

- ☐ Internet search (i.e. highly rated)
- ☐ Advertising campaign (i.e. website, TV, radio)
- ☐ News story (i.e. website, TV, radio)
- ☐ Social Media post (i.e. Facebook, Twitter)
- ☐ Official material (i.e. website, brochures)
- ☐ Celebrity recommendation
- ☐ Recommendation from friends, families, or co-workers
- ☐ Personal connection (i.e. know someone from the organization)
- ☐ Direct contact (i.e. someone you don't know, mail, email)
- ☐ Affiliation (i.e. school attended)
- ☐ Special event
- ☐ Other:

What method did you use to donate?

- ☐ In-person donation
- ☐ Mail donation
- ☐ Text message
- ☐ Phone call
- ☐ Online donation
- ☐ Other:

What motivated you to donate?

- ☐ Religious beliefs
- ☐ Empathetic or resonant to the cause
- ☐ Organization helped or will help someone you know (including yourself)
- ☐ Want to contribute to society
- ☐ Personal influence from family, friends, co-workers
- ☐ Affiliation (i.e. university, neighborhood)
- ☐ Family tradition
- ☐ Tax benefits
- ☐ Volunteer experience (resume piece)
- ☐ Have extra stuff
- ☐ Impulse
- ☐ Other:

What do you think are crucial parts in choosing an organization?

- ☐ Belief in the organization's goal and mission
- ☐ Trust in the people (i.e. know someone in the organization)
- ☐ Trust in the management (i.e. how they use their money)
- ☐ Clear impact (i.e. helping a specific child, changes in the community)
- ☐ Easy to participate
- ☐ Other:

What organization/individual did you (or anyone in your household) donate to?

A story about HOW and WHY would be super appreciated.

NO Section

If you answered No in the first question, please complete the questions in this section.

If you didn't donate/volunteer before, what kept you away from doing it?

- ☐ Not enough money
- ☐ Not enough time
- ☐ No causes I strongly believe in
- ☐ No trust in the organizations
- ☐ Not sure how much impact I will have
- ☐ No one around me is passionate about this
- ☐ Don't know how to do it
- ☐ No specific reason
- ☐ Other:

Would you donate some time in the future?

1 2 3 4 5

Unlikely ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Definitely

END Section

Thank you so much for completing the above questions. This survey is completely anonymous. The following questions will only be used to analyze research results. Thank you for your time.

In which city (cities) do you live?

Are you male or female?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female

What is your age?

- ☐ 18-24 years old
- ☐ 25-34 years old
- ☐ 35-44 years old
- ☐ 45-54 years old
- ☐ 55-64 years old
- ☐ 65-74 years old
- ☐ 75 years or older

What is your yearly household income?

- ☐ Less than \$20,000
- ☐ \$20,000 to \$34,999
- ☐ \$35,000 to \$49,999
- ☐ \$50,000 to \$74,999
- ☐ \$75,000 to \$99,999
- ☐ \$100,000 to \$149,999
- ☐ \$150,000 to \$199,999
- ☐ \$200,000 or more

TRUST

DESIGNING AND
COMMUNICATING

How Nonprofits Can
Use Design To Better
Communicate Their
Trustworthiness
By Xiaowei Jiang

INTRODUCTION

This report is developed upon a thesis research for Master of Design degree at Carnegie Mellon University. The goal of this report is to deliver the key findings on designing and communicating trust to nonprofits, offering visual suggestions on how to cultivate trust in websites and other digital platforms.

WHY TRUST MATTERS

Nonprofits live on government grants or public donations. Trust from the public is crucial. However, nowadays, it is getting harder and harder for nonprofits to gain and maintain trust. Scandals have buried the seed of doubts. Technology has made this skepticism wide-spread.

But my own experience tells me that there are amazing nonprofits doing great work in changing the world bit by bit. Though there are some questionable nonprofits, the good ones shouldn't be victims of this public skepticism.

Situated in the above background, this research aims to find how design can help the trustworthy nonprofits better communicate their trustworthiness to their audiences, and thus gain the support they need.

TRUST FACTORS

Two questions were asked when the scope was defined: What are the trust factors that influence donor behaviors? And, what are the needs nonprofits have? From the survey and the interviews (see detailed information in RESEARCH DETAIL), two trust factors and two nonprofit needs were found.

The two trust factors are relationship and transparency. Relationship involves social thinking. People trust their families, friends and co-workers have enough judgment to make a good decision, and also

these people won't lie to them. Transparency, on the other hand, is analytical thinking. People need to see and process the information by themselves. That is to say, for donors, it is either their families, friends and co-workers' judgment or their own judgment. Trust is not a default. It always comes from somewhere.

For nonprofits, the biggest two challenges they face are technology and scale-related problems. They need strategies to deal with these challenges. Technology stands mainly for new channels like websites, social media, emails, etc. These are not nonprofits' specialties; they need help. Different scales lead to different needs. Steps to take should be tailored to the scale of the nonprofit. The most urgent need for nonprofits now is still how to deal with all the digital platforms brought by technology.

The biggest challenge nonprofits face is technology, more specifically, communication in digital platforms. The opportunity of this research is to incorporate the trust factors - Relationship and Transparency, in the design of digital communications.

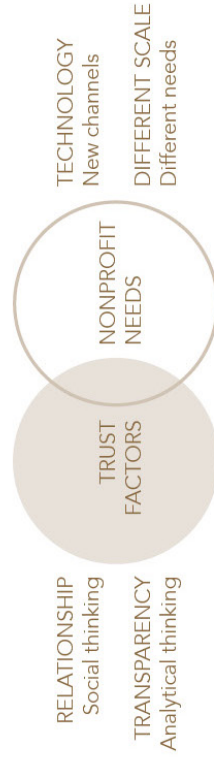


Figure 1. Trust factors & Nonprofit needs

RESEARCH SCOPE

WHAT

In a survey and several interviews with both donors and nonprofits, two trust-related factors emerged. They are Relationship and Transparency.

Relationship: To trust a nonprofit, donors sometimes need validation from people they know. It could be recommendations from their families and friends, or someone they personally know working in the nonprofit. In the latter scenario, volunteering plays a huge role in getting people to trust.

Transparency: In cases when donors don't have a relationship tied to the nonprofit, they need information to learn about the nonprofit and make a decision themselves. People choose to search online for this information. Transparency is what they value in this situation.

These two trust factors are not equally important all the time. One may over-weigh the other in a specific situation. The difference could come from different nonprofit scale, online or off-line communication, attracting or maintaining relationship, etc.

In the previous chapter, four early concepts were developed. Each led to a distinct opportunity. In several informal speed dating research sessions, the third concept, Mapping The System, stood out. For concept Social Network For Donors and Lead A Campaign, most people didn't want to engage so much in donating that they have to consult their social network or use their spare time. They also questioned the feasibility and necessity of breaking a large nonprofit into small pieces. They liked Mapping The System because they could see themselves using it while making a donation decision.

If the motivations behind choosing the Mapping The System concept are being analyzed, we can see that it is transparency in digital platforms that really matters. Transparency is important

because it cultivates trust. System maps are just one of the possible visual communications for that purpose. However, is transparency the only quality needed to gain trust? To learn more thoroughly about this problem space, this research needs to expand the focus from transparency to all qualities that lead to trust.

WHERE

To communicate trust in digital platforms, an official website is a logical place to start. As the information center of a nonprofit, websites should be the place where people can find everything they need, including trust-related information. Interviews also showed that when donors are doing research about a nonprofit, the website is one of the most important information channels.

WHO

Millennials are the next generation of donors. As more and more millennials enter the work force, their influence should not be underestimated. However, they act very differently from their parents' generation. They are skeptics because they grew up in a world full of scandals. They are also technology creatures who will search anything online. Unlike mature donors who may have already developed a long-term relationship with certain nonprofits, a website can make a major difference in attracting this young generation.

HOW

To communicate trust, knowing what people think is trustworthy is the first step. I therefore conducted research on content, followed by visual research.

TRUSTWORTHY CONTENT

What content will make donors trust a nonprofit more? First, I needed to know what content should be presented in a website. After some research on several nonprofit websites, eleven content categories were extracted: who we are, our mission, our stories, how we work, ways to help, your impact, greater good, statistics, official docs, blogs and updates, and ratings.

To help participants talk more naturally, a card sorting exercise was designed. The eleven content categories along with descriptions and examples were designed into cards. The participants were asked to sort the cards twice based on two questions asked: what do you expect to know from a nonprofit website; and what do you think would make you trust the nonprofit?

The eleven content categories were almost all necessary components in a nonprofit website, but among those, three were chosen as the top trust-related information by donors: statistics, how we work, and your impact.

STATISTICS

For Statistics, participants thought it was important because numbers would provide more details. Numbers would show the overhead, funding use, growth and performance of the nonprofit. Participants needed this information to make a judgment.

HOW WE WORK

For How We Work, participants thought knowing the system, the mechanics behind the numbers, was also crucial. Statistics alone wasn't enough. They needed to see if the nonprofit was working in an efficient way. After all, understanding is the first step forward trust.

YOUR IMPACT

For Your Impact, participants needed to know how exactly their donations would be used. If possible, they wanted to be able to track their donations and the progress of the projects. They did not like update emails with no clear personal appreciation.



Figure 2. A word cloud on what people expect to know from a website. Highlighted words are top trust-related information chosen by participants.

TRUSTWORTHY VISUALS

Knowing what content will make donors trust a nonprofit was not enough; I also needed to know what visual will increase the trustworthiness of a nonprofit. The underlying assumption of that question was that people would think differently about the same nonprofit based on different visuals and interactions, even if the nonprofit was providing the same information.

To test this assumption, I needed an example. The Greater Pittsburgh Food Bank was selected as the example, because lack of food is a universal cause that everyone could relate to. Also, their website provides enough information for prototyping.

Five design approaches were developed based on the same trust-related information around Statistics, How We Work and Your Impact, with content pulled from the Greater Pittsburgh Food Bank website.

These approaches were possible parts of a website, not the entire design. Since they were designed just to evoke conversations, they were also not perfect in terms of photo quality, font size, wording and other similar design details.

The design used in these user testing sessions were interactive websites prototyped in Adobe Experience Design. Participants were asked to interact with the prototypes one by one first.

TEXT & SUPPORTING IMAGE

This approach communicates heavily through text.



PHOTO NARRATIVE

This approach uses big photos to tell stories of the nonprofit.



TEXT & SUPPORTING INFOGRAPHIC

This approach uses infographics to explain the system.



INTERACTIVE INFOGRAPHIC

This approach allows viewers to interact with the infographic.



FLOW CHART

This approach brings all the information into a simple flow chart.



FINDINGS ON VISUALS

EVALUATION

Describing how you feel and what you think about visuals can be hard. To dig deeper into participants' thoughts, seven sets of opposite phrases, presented on the right page, were chosen to represent important qualities in evaluating a nonprofit website.

Between these seven sets of phrases were seven scales. Participants were asked to sort the five design approaches on these scales while sharing thoughts about the visuals and giving explanations about their rankings. These sets of phrases were presented one by one in a sequence from straightforward ones like whether they were visually appealing to abstract ones like whether they were authentic with the information, from general ones like whether they were easy to understand, to trust-related ones like how confident you were to trust. The assumption of this break-down evaluation is that people will associate different qualities to different visuals.

PARTICIPANTS

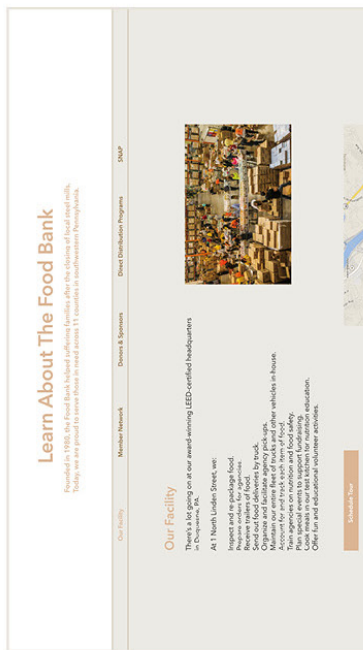
Fifteen potential donors came to share their thoughts on these visuals. They were people from all walks of life, including college students, a middle school teacher, a dentist/technician, a software engineer, and other working professionals. The age ranged from 19 years old to 37 years old. All the participants lived in Pittsburgh at the time this research was done.

Based on the feedback, a radar chart showing average votes and a distribution diagram showing each vote are presented on the following pages.



Figure 3. Seven sets of opposite phrases for evaluation

TEXT & SUPPORTING IMAGE



To most participants, this design approach was not visually appealing, and also not very friendly, but it seemed authentic to them, and people may consider trusting or donating to nonprofits that look like this. They said "it is authentic because it is more stripped down, just about the info, without dressing it up", and "it is straightforward". However, in the distribution diagram, we can see that people reacted very differently when it came to donating. Half of the people felt confident, half wouldn't even consider donating.

For nonprofits, how simple the website looks should always be a situated decision. Donors' age, educational background, past experience with online services and many other factors may all influence their reactions to a specific design. More research should be done in this area.

Tips: Use this approach if you are a small and local nonprofit, but try to limit the intensity of the text; use bullet points, highlights and shorter paragraphs.

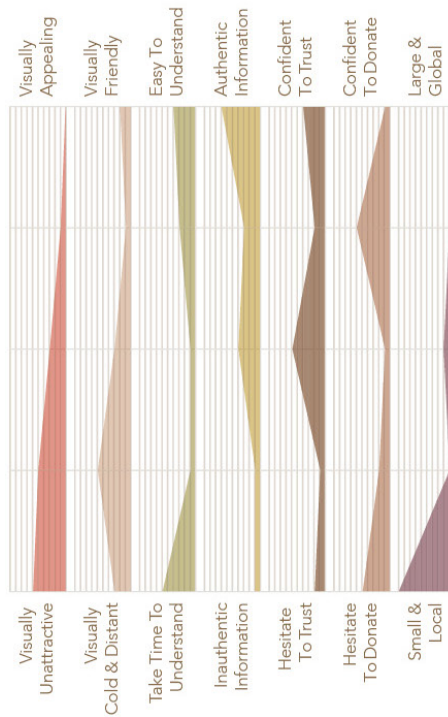
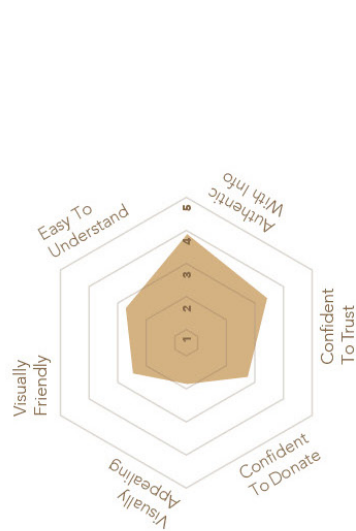


Figure 4. Evaluations for Text & Supporting Image Approach

TEXT & SUPPORTING IMAGE



Unlike the text heavy approach, this photo narrative approach was very visually appealing and friendly to people. However, deviations also appeared when it came to trust, donation, and authenticity. People said "I am far more engaged with this one", "...emotionally involved...". However, "this one feels like a commercial, an ad."

Photos are powerful communication tools. They engage people in a deep emotional way. It is necessary to show real people giving and receiving help. It gives the nonprofit a human touch. But sometimes, they are not enough in communicating the trustworthiness of the nonprofit. With all the scandals, people also feel smiling faces can be fake. It is a thin line. It requires careful consideration when choosing the photos.

Tips: Use larger photos, but make sure the photos do not appear as stock photography. The photos need to be real and genuine. Try to use photos to tell stories. They are more powerful in narratives.

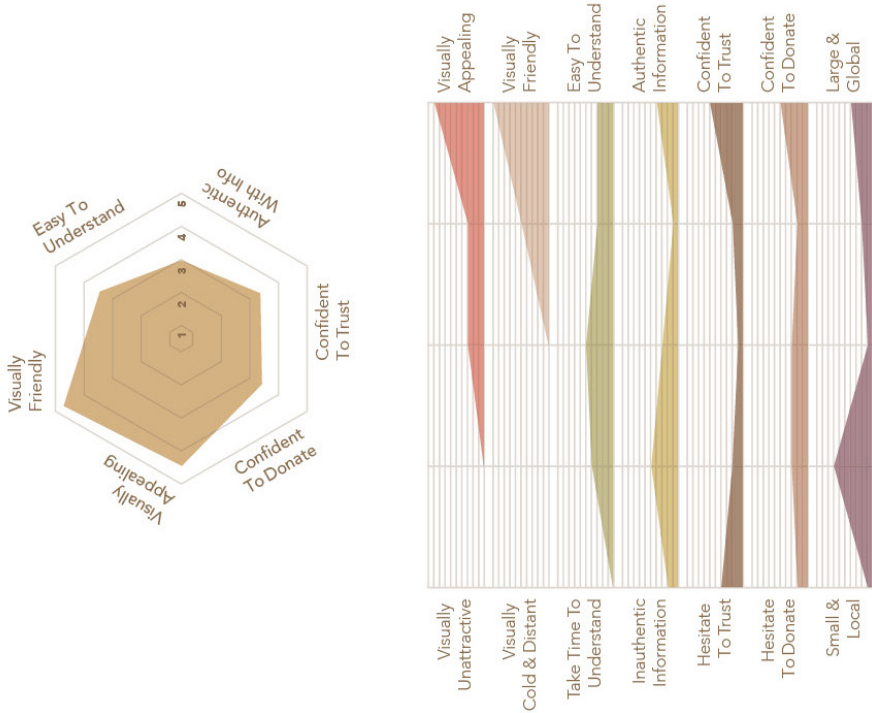
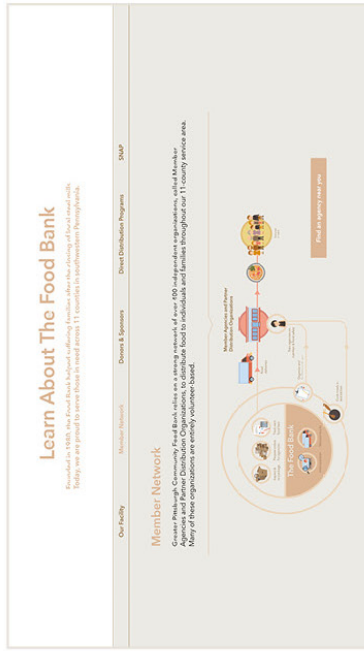


Figure 5. Evaluations for Text & Supporting Image Approach

TEXT & SUPPORTING IMAGE



Infographics are not that commonly seen in nonprofit websites, but they have been useful communication tools in many other fields. When there is endless information on the Internet, people get more and more impatient when reading. They are used to, and they want to understand information as quickly as possible. That can only be achieved through visuals. The following three approaches were designed to see whether infographics can help people understand more, and thus trust more.

On average, people felt pretty positive about this design approach. It didn't stand out in a particular dimension, but people did associate it with authenticity and trust. Participants said "it is about transparency", "...need to come into play further into the process, when I decide to donate".

Tips: This approach should not be used alone. It should be used together with text and photos. Don't show this on the home page. It is too much for people who just want basic information about the nonprofit.

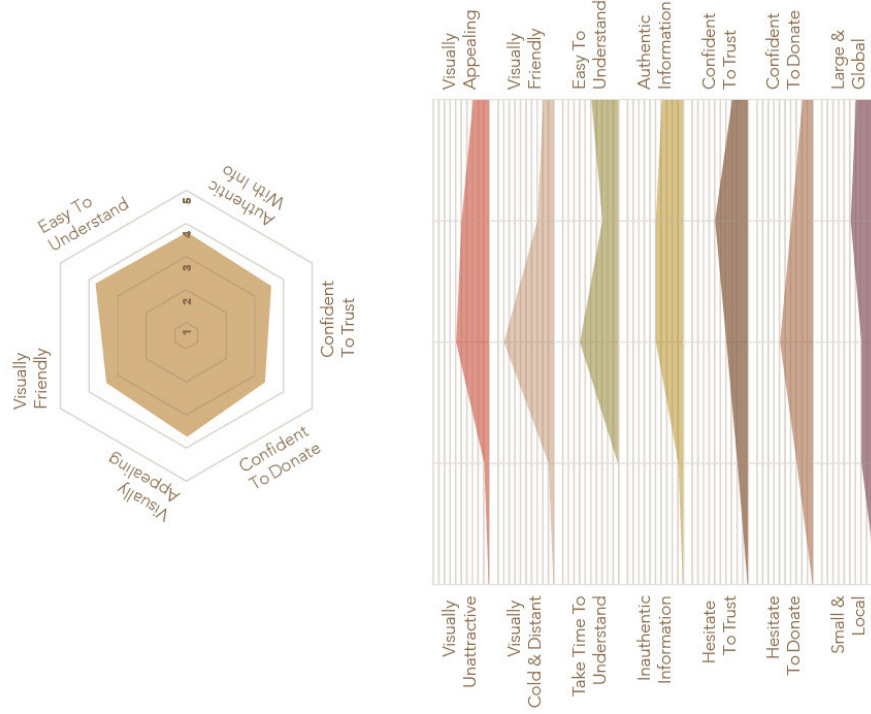
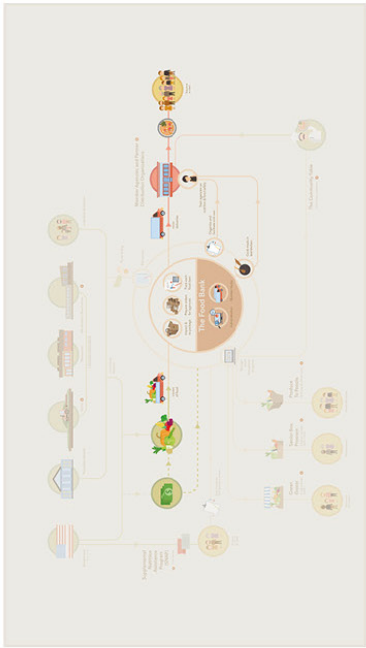


Figure 6. Evaluations for Text & Supporting Image Approach

TEXT & SUPPORTING IMAGE



Compared to the previous supporting infographic approach, this interactive infographic shows the entire inter-connected ecosystem, and allows viewers to explore the system by themselves. Viewers can click on different parts of the infographic to extract or reveal certain information. It is designed to be a fun experience.

From the evaluation session, participants felt “the levels of data that are given here lands itself to trust...it is a deeper dive...no question about the organization.”, but “it is a lot to take in”. As showed in the distribution diagram, most participants thought it was visually appealing and they would like to trust and donate to organizations with this kind of infographics. However, they did think it would take time to understand because it was an explorative experience.

Tips: Applying some basic interactions to the infographic can make the experience fun and enjoyable. It also helps with the understanding process. Try to limit the information on the default screen. It can be intimidating if all the information is presented at the same time.

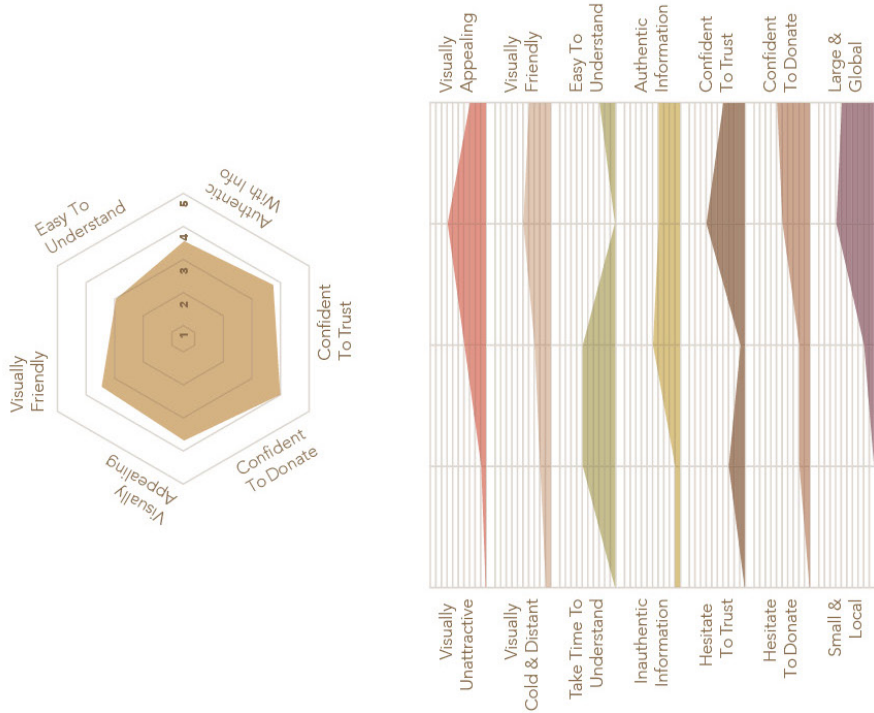
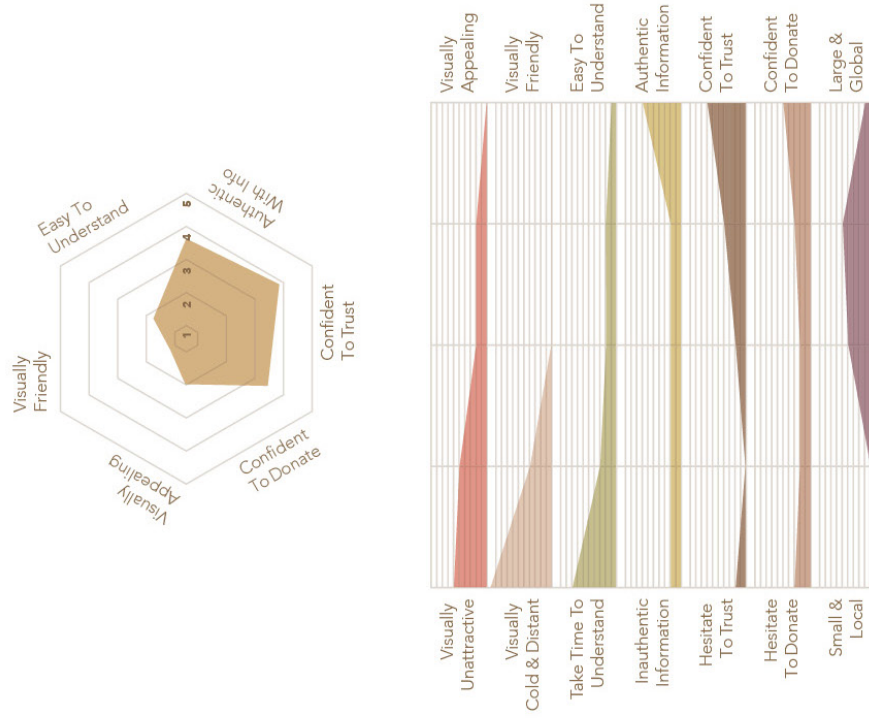


Figure 7. Evaluations for Text & Supporting Image Approach

[illegible]

Results from the evaluation sessions were interesting. Though, most people thought it was unattractive, cold and distant, and hard to understand. They felt it was authentic, and they were confident to trust or donate to nonprofits with this kind of visual. They said “if you can tell so much detail, it is trustworthy. You can’t make it up”, and “it looks serious”. It is interesting because we usually relate friendliness to trustworthy, but in this case, we can see that for nonprofits, trust can be completely dissociated with friendliness.

Figure 8. Evaluations for Text & Supporting Image Approach



APPLICATION

EVALUATION

The five design approaches were designed for official websites, but I had an assumption that those visuals could be applicable to other digital platforms. To evaluate this, five common platforms, where donors might have interactions with nonprofits, were developed. The five platforms were official website, investigation website (like Charity Navigator), online articles, social media and personal emails. At the end of the evaluation sessions, participants were asked to put the five design approaches under applicable platforms.

RESULTS

The results showed that participants thought most of these visuals were applicable to other digital platforms. It was clear to see that in an investigation website, users preferred text, infographics and flow charts, while in social media and personal emails, they preferred photo narratives.

This difference illustrates how people expect to learn different information and feel different emotions from different channels. In the official website, however, all types of visuals should be found.

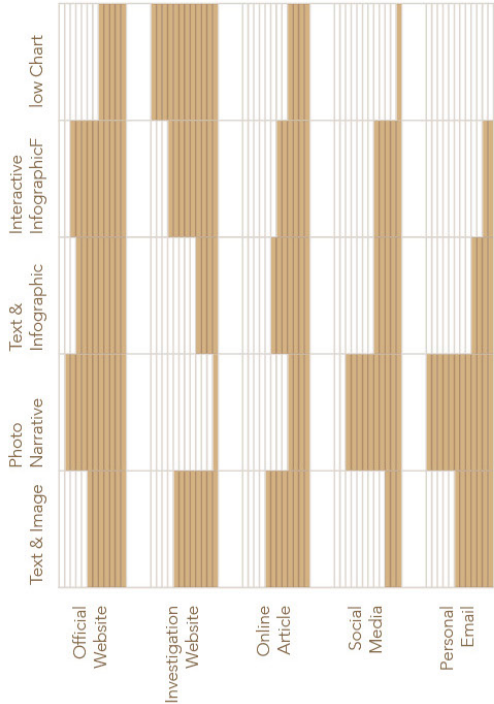


Figure 9. Application evaluations for digital platforms

CONCLUSION

There are three outcomes from this research: the two trust factors, the three trust-related content categories, and the evaluations on five design approaches.

TRUST FACTORS

Research shows that donors trust relationship and transparency. Small and local nonprofits should pay close attention to building a strong social network and maintaining close connections with their donors. All nonprofits should work hard to improve the level of transparency of their organizations, especially for those who aim to scale up or to reach younger generations.

TRUSTWORTHY CONTENT

How the organization works, its statistics, and donors' impact are the three major trust evoking elements nonprofits should carefully communicate in their digital platforms. Most nonprofits already have this information in their websites, but some bury them deep and others make them not straightforward. A good nonprofit that has nothing to hide should use this to their advantage.

TRUSTWORTHY VISUALS

Depending on nonprofits' different situations and needs, visuals should also be carefully chosen. An appealing and friendly visual might seem inauthentic, while a dry and boring visual might seem the opposite. This research provides breakdown evaluations on five design approaches. Two are existing approaches, and three are potential approaches. A Nonprofit should use these evaluations as references when designing their communications for digital platforms.

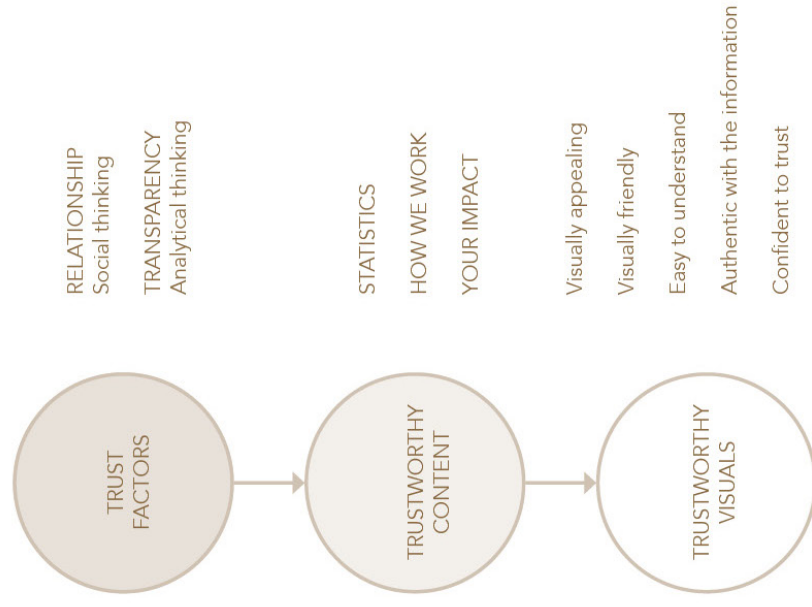


Figure 10. Three outcomes

RESEARCH DETAIL

SURVEY

Fifty seven responses were collected. The age ranged from less than 24 to more than 75, and the yearly household income ranged from less than \$20,000 to more than \$200,000. Two interesting findings emerged. The first was that personal recommendations and connections are important in spreading the word. The second was that donors did care a lot about the nonprofits' mission, management and donors' impact.

INTERVIEW

To get more in-depth information, I conducted ten interviews with donors and two with nonprofits. The donors were of both genders, different ages from early 20s to early 60s, different occupations, and various levels of nonprofit engagement. The two nonprofits were a small local nonprofit who had only two founders, and a large nonprofit who received regular funds from the government and national foundations. To understand how design worked for nonprofits, I also contacted current and previous nonprofit design consultants and nonprofit communication managers.

The first finding confirmed the hypothesis of this research. When asked how trusting they were towards nonprofits, most participants said they were very picky in choosing nonprofits. One person said he was "not usually very trusting of people asking for money", and several participants mentioned that they would trust a nonprofit if their "overhead is low". Many of them also cared a lot about "how they use their money", and some would "look up online". Another interesting finding was that younger participants were more skeptical of nonprofits. There was a clear generation difference.

The other interesting finding was how much participants trusted their relationships and personal connections. Almost all participants had donated to a nonprofit before when asked by their families, friends, or co-workers. One of the participants said she would not

need to do any research on the nonprofit even if she was going to give a large donation. Many of the participants also donated to nonprofits where they volunteered or worked. They said they trusted the organization because of the people working there.

RESEARCH ON CONTENT



Figure 11. Once a participant was done with his card-sorting exercise, he mapped out his expectations for a nonprofit website with content cards, time tokens, and form cards.

RESEARCH ON VISUALS

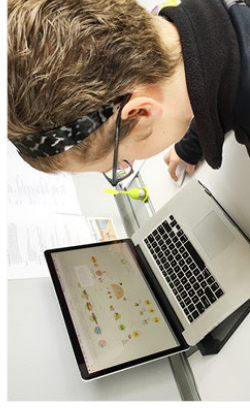


Figure 12. A participant interacting with prototypes in Adobe Experience Design

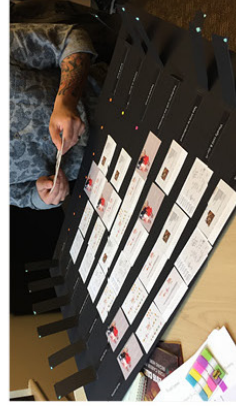


Figure 13. A participant evaluating the five design approaches. It was interesting to see how he felt so differently about the same design in different contexts.

