

Common  
Jane





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## Preface

When the three of us started the program at DSI we bonded immediately over our shared passion to protect the environment. However, more than that, we connected over our commitment to design something measurable and long-lasting through our thesis work. What we had not anticipated though, was how this friendship would provide an additional level of learning around what good partnership looks like and that when teamwork is done right, everyone is elevated personally and professionally.

On day one, we wrote and committed to a relationship manifesto, knowing a key building block of successful relationships is setting expectations early. Our agreement included:

- Stay motivated by optimism
- Trust each other's intentions
- Always be straightforward and honest
- No triangulating, confront someone directly

Through the ups and downs, the confusion, stress, late nights, early mornings, frustration, and excitement, we held to these guidelines. Looking back, this led to a deep, solid foundation upon which we built our project, paving the way for our shared goals for the future.

When we began this thesis journey, we had no idea where we would end up. We were in the process of learning social design, of how to form relationships, how to leverage assets, how to work together toward an end goal. Little did we know, we would build a tool that empowers others to do the same. It's a little ironic, a little amazing, and a lot invigorating to realize when you embark on a journey to do good, whether that's creating a thesis project or protecting your community through civic engagement, it's about stepping out into the unknown with partners by your side and motivation in your spirit to see an impact. One step, one question, and one insight at a time you find the journey underneath you.

Between trains, planes, and car trips throughout the U.S. and beyond, hours of laughter, tough and teary heart-to-hearts, piles of snacks, stacks of post-its, and the near daily rollercoaster of navigating the frequent unknowns of social design, we have found lifelong friends.

Here's to forever growing and learning, and to remembering that when we raise up those around us, we are all elevated in the process.

With love,

*Corinne Keynote* *Danielle Shepard* *Mary Gimley*





## Foreward

We started with lofty goals: create an intervention that directly addresses sustainability and combats climate change. We quickly learned designing for the environment is one of the most complex, interwoven, wicked challenges of our time and possibly, of all time.

Within moments of starting our thesis process, our feelings of determination and excitement turned to confusion: What is environmental sustainability? Is it a process? A state of being? An entity? We felt we were circulating a nebulous, looming cloud, unsure how to dive in. After weeks of hovering, we realized our confusion stemmed from the reality that sustainability is an idea, a mindset. It doesn't exist on its own, it exists through tangible elements in the world. It's an adjective, not a noun.

This initial finding generated a pillar that supported our journey: designing for this space is complex, you have to choose an element of society through which sustainability can reveal itself. There's no such thing as designing for sustainability, but you can design within food systems, transportation, governments, or the like. We couldn't design for the system as a whole, but we had to choose one of its components.

This rang true when we met our partner, Rebecca Martin, and her incredible community of citizen heroes in Ulster County, New York. They put form to our ideas about citizens harnessing their individual power. From day one of working alongside Rebecca, Regis, Laura, Vicki, Tanya, and so many others, we were overwhelmed with hope: this is what shared leadership, collective responsibility, respect, trust, and love look like in action. There are many sectors we could have designed for, but by choosing local government, we were able to tap into a community of individuals who harness the power of their voice for good. They have taught us so much about what it means to be a team, to push forward with confidence, to treat others with respect, and to have fun while also, very literally, changing the world.

**“Unless we become an instrument of change, we're never going to see change.”**

Laura Hartmann,  
chairwoman of the  
advocacy group Town  
of Ulster Citizens

## Context



## Context

### REALITY

From the 10B tons of CO2 released into the atmosphere, the 115B tons of sea ice melted this year, or the fact that vertebrate species are disappearing 114 times faster than they should be, it's no overstatement that climate change is the biggest global threat of the 21st century.<sup>1</sup>

### LEADERSHIP

Despite endless scientific data, our current president believes that climate change is a hoax and has taken drastic measures to reduce America's efforts to protect the planet for future generations. In June 2017 Trump announced that the United States would exit the Paris Agreement, the global commitment to combat climate change. With the United States producing nearly one-fifth of all global emissions, withdrawal from the accord could undercut collective efforts to reduce carbon output, transition to renewable energy sources, and lock in future climate measures. Without the U.S.' participation, it's unlikely the rest of the globe will be able to meet the rigorous goals to stay under the necessary 1.5 degrees celsius threshold and mitigate global climate related risks.<sup>2</sup>

### INDIVIDUAL POWER

Amid this challenge, what is an individual to do? What kind of power do we, as citizens of this country, have to protect the planet and future generations? The most common suggestions consist of: using energy efficient appliances, biking or walking instead of using a car, switching to green energy alternatives, or recycling your plastic water bottles. Is this really the only power an individual has? Is our ability to positively affect the planet relegated to solutions that collectively only account for a couple hundred tons of carbon every year? Where is the upstream solution? How can an individual influence the system, instead of just the side effects?

### LOCAL GOVERNMENT

With our current federal leadership, environmental chaos, and environmental destruction, local governments have taken the lead, moving steadily forward with clean energy goals. Thirty-four states, led by New York, have undertaken their own ambitious carbon reduction plans. New York specifically, plans to reduce greenhouse gas emissions 40% below our 1990 levels by the year 2030, and 80% by the year 2050<sup>3</sup>. According to the The Yale Program on Climate Change Communication, "Successfully reaching the deep emissions reduction goals called for by scientists will require action at all levels of society. Local governments are uniquely situated to implement measures at the community level that impact everyone's ability to reduce their emissions in cost-effective ways."<sup>4</sup>

**“Successfully reaching the deep emissions reduction goals called for by scientists will require action at all levels of society. Local governments are uniquely situated to implement measures at the community level that impact everyone’s ability to reduce their emissions in cost-effective ways.”<sup>4</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Denchak, Melissa. "Are the Effects of Global Warming Really That Bad?" NRDC, 23 Apr. 2019, [www.nrdc.org](http://www.nrdc.org).

<sup>2</sup> "The Consequences of Leaving the Paris Agreement." Council on Foreign Relations, [www.cfr.org/backgroundunder/consequences-leaving-paris-agreement](http://www.cfr.org/backgroundunder/consequences-leaving-paris-agreement).

<sup>3</sup> "Here's What States Are Doing to Fight Climate Change." Los Angeles Times, Los Angeles Times, 15 Apr. 2017, [www.latimes.com/politics/la-pol-sac-state-climate-policies-20170415-htlstory.html](http://www.latimes.com/politics/la-pol-sac-state-climate-policies-20170415-htlstory.html).

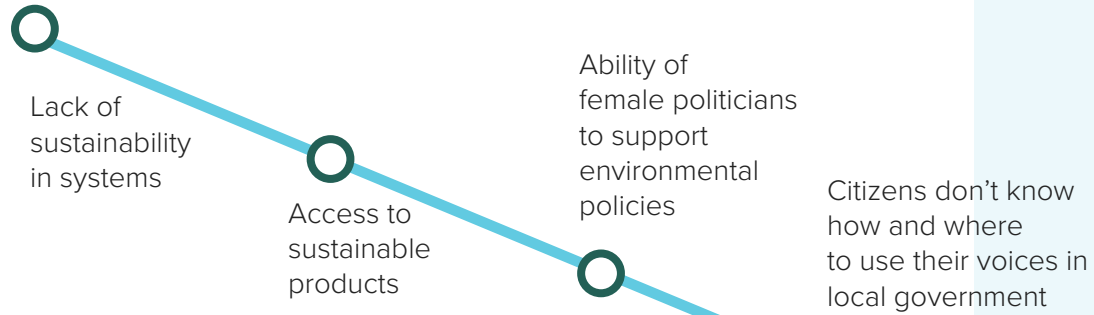
<sup>4</sup> "Citizen's Guide to Taking Action on Climate Change." Yale Program on Climate Change Communication, [climatecommunication.yale.edu/publications/citizens-guide-to-taking-action-on-climate-change/](http://climatecommunication.yale.edu/publications/citizens-guide-to-taking-action-on-climate-change/).

# Our Thesis Journey

APPROACH

Top-down  
↓

**Problem Framing**



**Partnerships**



**Co-creation**

SHARED GOAL  
Increase the success rate of local civic action projects

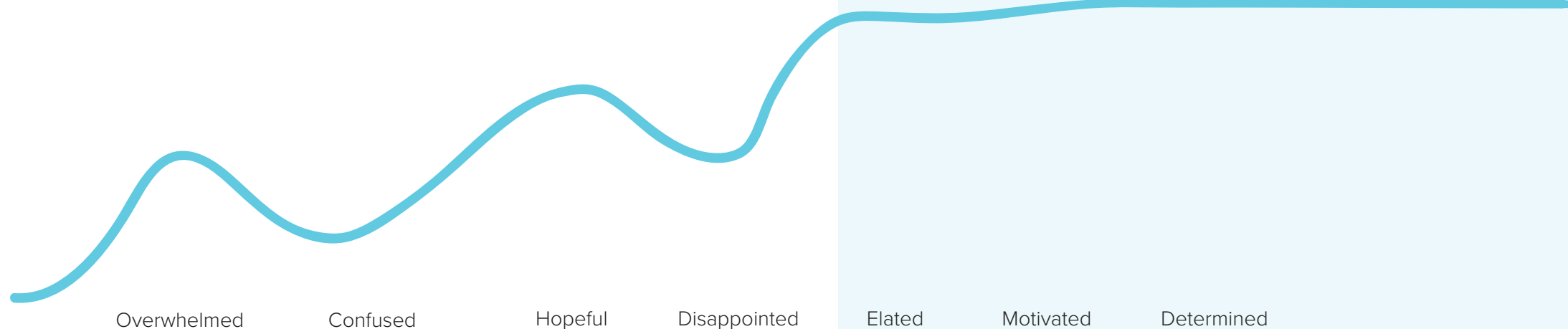
**Research**



↑  
Bottom-up

**This represents our initial research phase that led to forming our partnership with Rebecca Martin, at which point, our project took a needed turn toward true community-centered design.**

EMOTIONS





A wall covered in numerous yellow sticky notes, organized into several categories. The categories are labeled with orange sticky notes: 'LEVEL OF LOCAL ENGAGEMENT', 'INFO NEEDS', 'COMM CHANNEL', 'CULTURE', 'POLITICAL & CULTURE', and 'BARRIERS TO ENGAGE'. The notes contain various observations and suggestions related to community engagement and local politics. A hand is visible on the right side, pointing at one of the notes.

**LEVEL OF LOCAL ENGAGEMENT**

- People vote in general elections but not in local elections bc they don't feel informed (not of local issues - change)
- People don't vote in local elections bc they don't feel informed (not of local issues - change)
- People don't vote in local elections bc they don't feel informed (not of local issues - change)

**INFO NEEDS**

- Our solution needs to be modular to fit the style of engagement the person prefers
- CITIZENS WANT CLEARER USE ABOUT THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS THEY CAN DO TO SUPPORT THE ENV.
- CITIZENS WANT CLEARER USE ABOUT THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS THEY CAN DO TO SUPPORT THE ENV.

**COMM CHANNEL**

- Additional communication channels could help communities to get a message out that they're doing well
- Additional communication channels could help communities to get a message out that they're doing well

**CULTURE**

- Local council times - working - the environment is one of the most powerful ways to drive better change
- Local council times - working - the environment is one of the most powerful ways to drive better change

**POLITICAL & CULTURE**

- Candidates should have more of a connection with the community, and it's not just about the vote
- Candidates should have more of a connection with the community, and it's not just about the vote

**BARRIERS TO ENGAGE**

- Lack of money and time are two main barriers for citizens to be engaged and involved in the process
- Lack of money and time are two main barriers for citizens to be engaged and involved in the process

# Problem Framing



## Problem Framing

Throughout our initial research process, we identified three key themes that defined the course of our thesis work.

### 1. FEAR

Citizens across the country feel overwhelmed, afraid, and lost in the face of the catastrophe of climate change. Because the focus on climate change and sustainability comes from a global perspective, we learned individuals are paralyzed by the belief that their individual actions don't matter. Across the country, individuals are caught in the tension of wanting to make an impact, yet not sure where or how.

### 2. CITIZEN POWER

We learned repeatedly of the power and impact individual citizens have in their local government. Local government officials are more likely to implement policies, processes, and projects that emerge from a collective community voice. Local politicians lean heavily on their community's priorities to set their campaign strategy and subsequent priorities within office. In essence, citizens have a direct line into the heart of local government, helping set priorities and initiatives that have a tangible impact on their communities.

**"It's about coming together as a community...a small group of people meeting helps to put a face to an issue."**

Moir, NY resident and local government SME

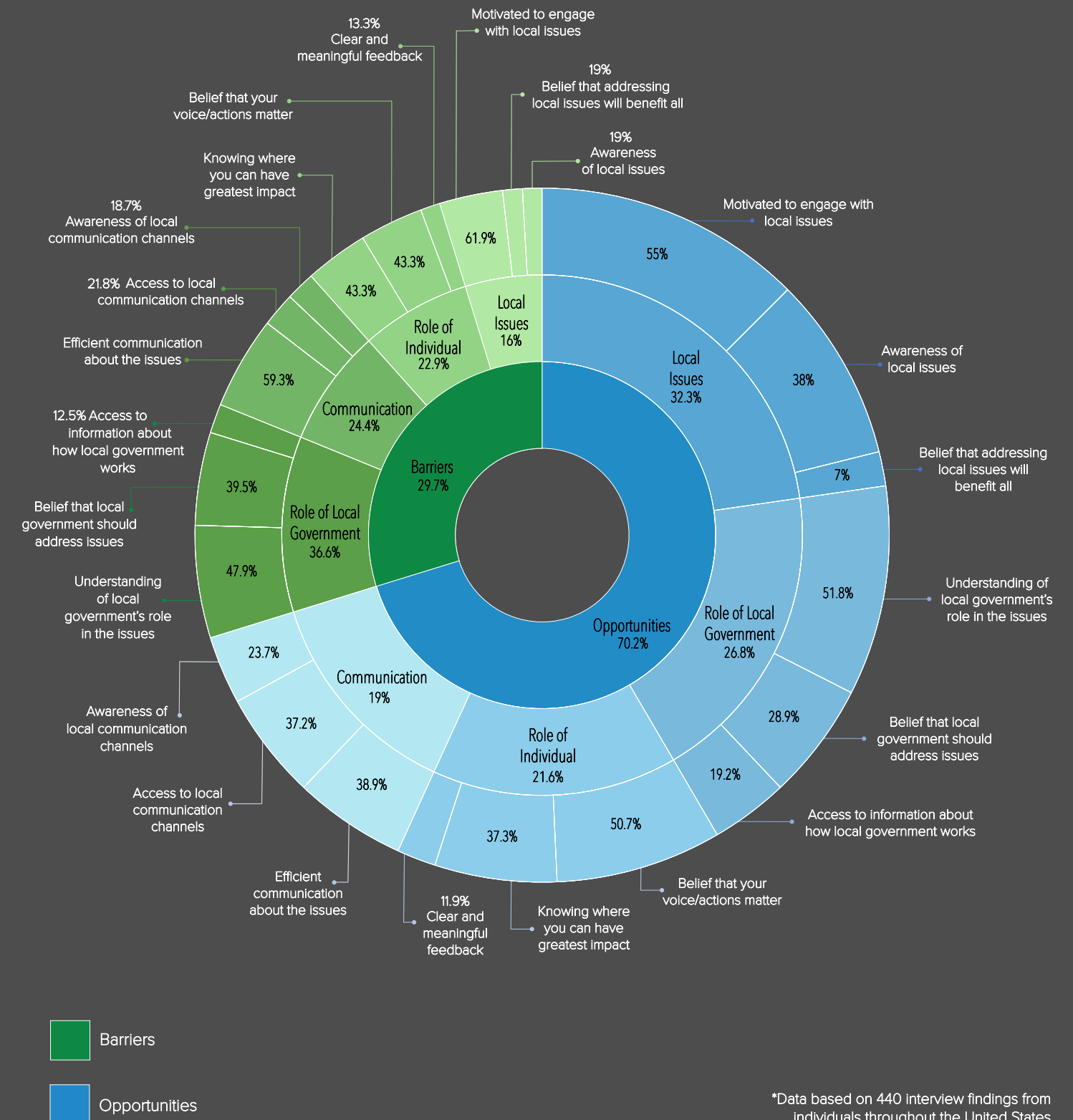
### 3. LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

Despite this reality, citizens have very little knowledge of how, when, or where to get involved. Across all levels, from federal to local, government is complex, often inefficient, and inconvenient. Civic engagement requires someone to have the time, variety of skills, and unlimited drive to do so successfully. This means, despite the potential, citizens rarely actualize their power.

**"But then part of me wonders how much of a difference that would actually make. Is that a battle I want to fight? I don't really know if me recycling is going to make a difference in the grand scheme of things."**

Mandy, Atlanta resident

A QUANTITATIVE BREAKDOWN OF THE BARRIER & OPPORTUNITY CATEGORIES THAT IMPACT A CITIZEN'S LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT WITH COMMUNITY ISSUES VIA LOCAL GOVERNMENT\*



\*Data based on 440 interview findings from individuals throughout the United States

Thesis Problem Statement

**Citizens do not know how to harness the power of their democratic voice in local government.**

**“I feel helpless and hopeless even when I make small changes. I worry about the amount of actual wide scale impact.”**

Kaylee, New York resident

**“Some people think they can’t make a difference, but local government is a place you can.”**

David Allen Hines, Director of Operations,  
City of Pittston, PA

**“I have a predetermined notion that the political machine is pretty big and powerful and that my input is just not going to be that big of a deal.”**

Steve, Atlanta Georgia resident

**“Citizens have substantial power to influence what government does on the local level.”**

Matthew, Government Relations & Advocacy



# Research









## Research

### BACKGROUND

At the beginning of this process, we did not know what form our intervention would take. Since climate change is a global threat, it impacts every sector of society, which meant we needed to narrow in and choose one vertical. Driven by a focus on impact and upstream solutions, we started with consumer purchasing, knowing that in our capitalist society, the dollar votes. We also recognized that because sustainable alternatives are more expensive, the ability to make decisions that align with your values is not equally accessible across all socioeconomic groups. This tension became our first leverage point.

Although this was our starting point, it was not the end. Rarely is social design linear, and as you'll see through our research, this was no exception. We began the process by asking the first question, then following the answer until we reached the next, embarking on a winding, often confusing, always rewarding curiosity quest.

## Stakeholders

### CITIZENS

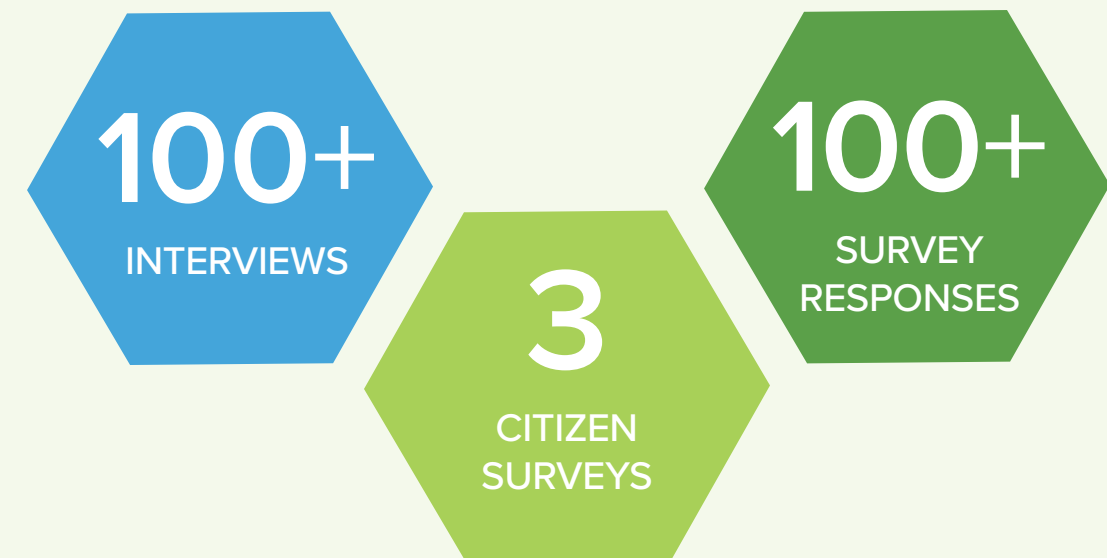
Individuals from across the U.S. with diverse political affiliation and ideological backgrounds.

### SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS

- Policy experts
- Elected officials
- Political candidates
- Lobbyists
- Political and civic educators
- Leaders of environmental advocacy organizations

### SECONDARY RESEARCH

- Sustainable Brands 2018
- Omega Institute, Project Drawdown
- Whitepapers
- Existing citizen action tools



## Research

### Process

#### PHASE ONE

##### Research Goal

Understand the barriers to sustainable purchasing options for lower socio-economic individuals.

##### Key Question

How might we increase access to sustainable purchasing options for lower socio-economic groups?

##### Activities

Interviews, secondary research, Sustainable Brands Conference, Omega Institute, Project Drawdown

#### LEARNINGS

**Key Learning 1:** Without government involvement, the private sector will be more focused on profit than the planet.

**Key Learning 2:** Women have historically taken more of a leadership role in protecting the environment compared to their male counterparts.

**Key Learning 3:** Our research and problem frame was biased, since it was not a problem authentically raised by a community. Instead, it was based on our assumptions, which was not backed-up by our research.

### Reframe

After discovering the challenges with our current problem frame and the opportunities within the space of women in politics, we decided to pivot. Our new focus: The intersection of government, female leadership, and sustainability.

**“Women are going to save the world.”**

Cheryl Heller, DSI Program Chair

**“Women in the Senate voted for the environment 71% of the time, compared with 48% of men.”**

**Women in the House of Representatives voted for the environment 69% compared to 45% of men.”**

Want Better Environmental Policies?  
Ask a Woman to Run for Office.”  
Sierra Club, May 11, 2017



## Research

### Process

#### PHASE TWO

##### Research Goal

Understand the gap between the environmental issues citizens care about and the actions female politicians take to address those issues.

##### Key Question

How might we close the gap between the environmental issues citizens want addressed and the issues female candidates support and push forward?

##### Activities

Interviews, surveys, volunteering

#### LEARNINGS

**Key Learning 1:** Citizen voices shape the political agenda, if they know how and where to speak up.

**Key Learning 2:** Elected officials with concerns about environmental issues are unable to address them if their constituents do not raise them as a priority.

**Key Learning 3:** Citizens are unclear about how their environmental concerns show up within local government.

### Reframe

After realizing the upstream leverage point was citizen participation in local government, we decided to shift our focus to better enable them to use their voices in local government.

**“Don't underestimate the power of your voice and your most valuable talents. There is no limitation to what an individual can do.”**

Paul Hawken,  
Environmentalist, Author,  
Activist

**“I feel a lack of knowledge about what's going on around me. I don't know what else I could be doing or what is needed of me.”**

Kaylee, NYC resident

**“Making those calls to politicians feels so unsatisfying and is it even making an impact?”**

Jaime, NYC resident

**“It's such an insider game. Most people don't know what the city handles, what the state handles and what the federal government handles.”**

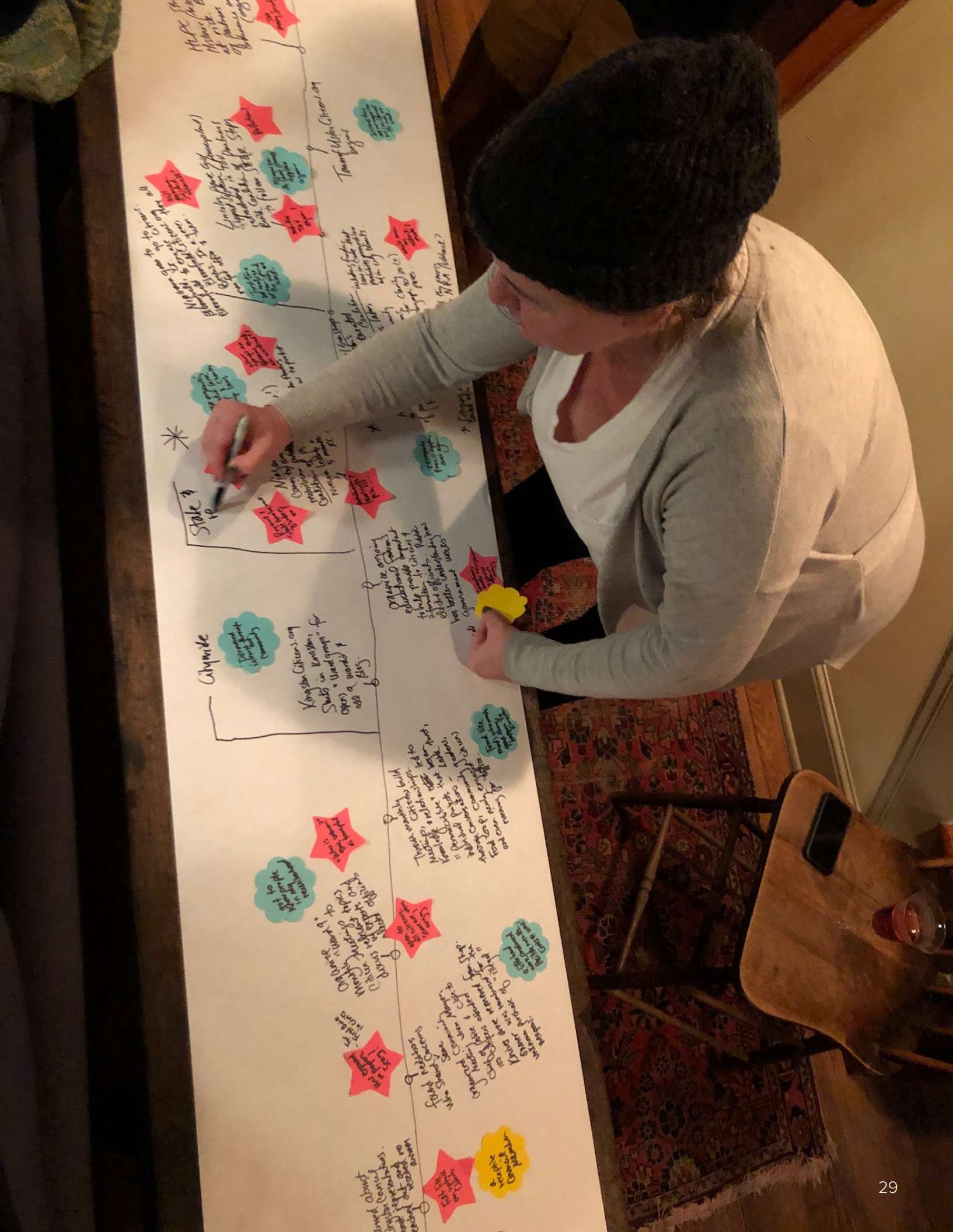
Moira, NY resident and local government SME

**“There's so much noise around global warming and contradictory data... I'd like to do my part and be informed but it becomes overwhelming. So I continue doing what I know... but does it even make a difference?”**

Jaimie, NYC resident



# Co-Creation





## Starting a Partnership

### Meeting Rebecca

In the midst of this focus shift, we met Rebecca Martin, legislative coordinator for Riverkeeper and Founder of Kingston Citizens.org. In addition to her focus on environmental protection, she has dedicated her life to civic education, empowering residents of her community, Ulster County, New York, to take action to create change. In the current environment of partisan, often contentious activism, her approach is unique: **Leverage the laws, processes, and relationships within local government. She is focused on peaceful, respectful, data-backed, education-based activism.**

This approach enabled her and the citizens in her community to stop a national bottling company from tapping a local water source, halt the development of a gun range in proximity to a local school, and turn a dirty power plant into a green energy facility, just to name a few of their recent civic wins.

Tapped into this national need for civic empowerment, Rebecca was beginning her own journey when we met: building a platform to share her knowledge and process of civic engagement with others. Immediately we recognized the overlap in our vision: civic engagement and sustainability.

Lacking training in design, she was searching for a partner to help create the platform. Lacking a community to create this alongside, we were searching for a partner to connect us to engaged individuals. This confluence of needs formed a mutually beneficial, trusting, and deeply meaningful partnership focused on creating a civic education platform that empowered citizens to take action within their local government.

Shortly after meeting, we moved from research to co-creation with the community of activists in Ulster County. Together we asked: how might we take Rebecca Martin's civic engagement process and enable others to take action within their local government?

**This confluence of needs formed a mutually beneficial, trusting, and deeply meaningful partnership focused on creating a civic education platform that empowered citizens to take action within their local government.**





**“We follow the local government process to create change. I wish more people knew that just by learning about and following local laws and procedures, they can have real success in their community”**

Rebecca Martin, Legislative Coordinator, Riverkeeper,  
Founder, Kingston Citizens.org





## Audience

Our research confirmed that there is a clear civic engagement spectrum. From small responsibilities to large – from building community gardens, to running for local office – civic engagement is a process that involves citizens across every level of society and is actualized in many different forms.

We recognized the opportunity to help move individuals along the engagement spectrum, turning interested citizens into those who take action, or those who take action into those who lead teams and start movements. Because of this, we worked with individuals across the spectrum and assembled three groups of citizens that represent these unique places along the journey:

### INNOVATORS

#### Ulster County Steering Committee

A group of highly engaged individuals who bring civic expertise and are currently leading efforts in their community. The Steering Committee provided information about the content, tools, and processes that led to success in their journeys, as well as what could have increased the effectiveness of their efforts. They helped us set direction and develop our initial concepts.

### EARLY ADOPTERS

#### Ulster County Task Force

A group of individuals engaged with civic work in their community, although not necessarily spearheading those efforts. The Task Force provided feedback on our concepts and prototypes. They painted the picture of how they would uniquely use the platform to take more effective action. They helped us test and refine our prototypes.

### MOTIVATIONALLY ENGAGED

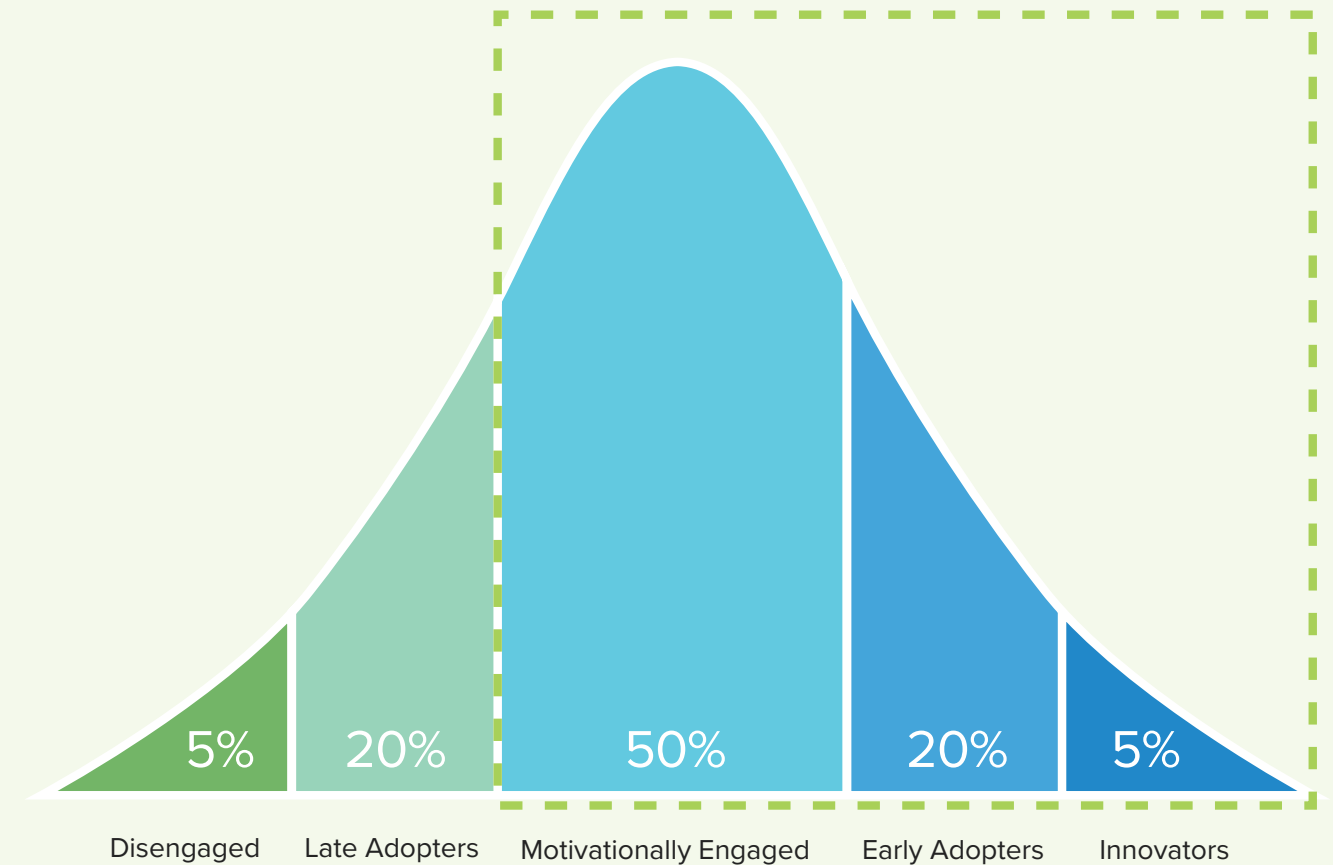
#### New York City Task Force

A group of interested citizens who are not currently engaged, but could be given the right tools and guidance. The Task Force provided insight into how this platform needs to motivate someone new to civic engagement, and helped us focus our initial concepting.

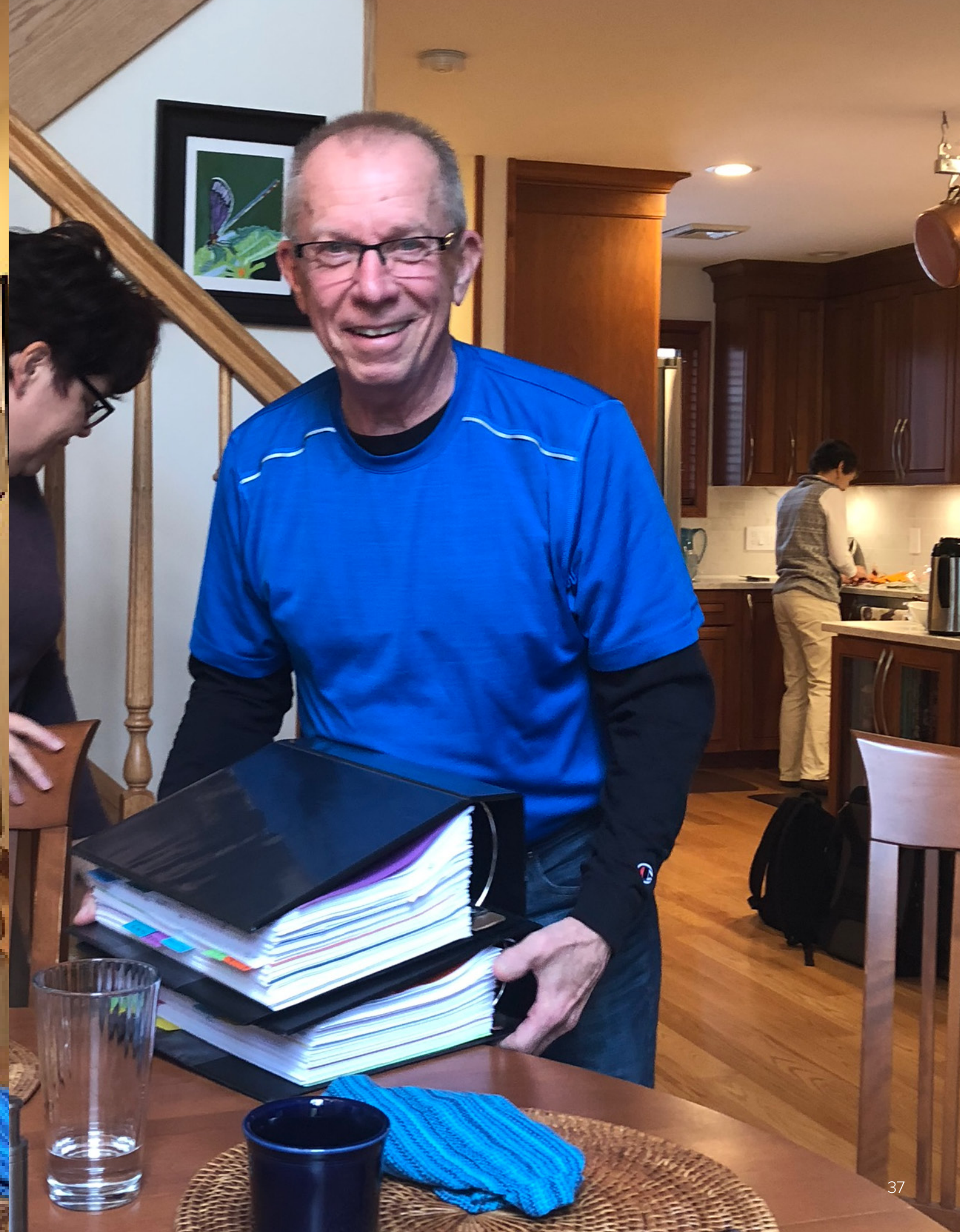
**“I don’t know how I would [get engaged in local politics around environmental issues], other than trying to vote for candidates that recognize that it’s an issue. I don’t know where or how I would do it. I would like to.”**

Laura, NYC resident

## The Engagement Curve







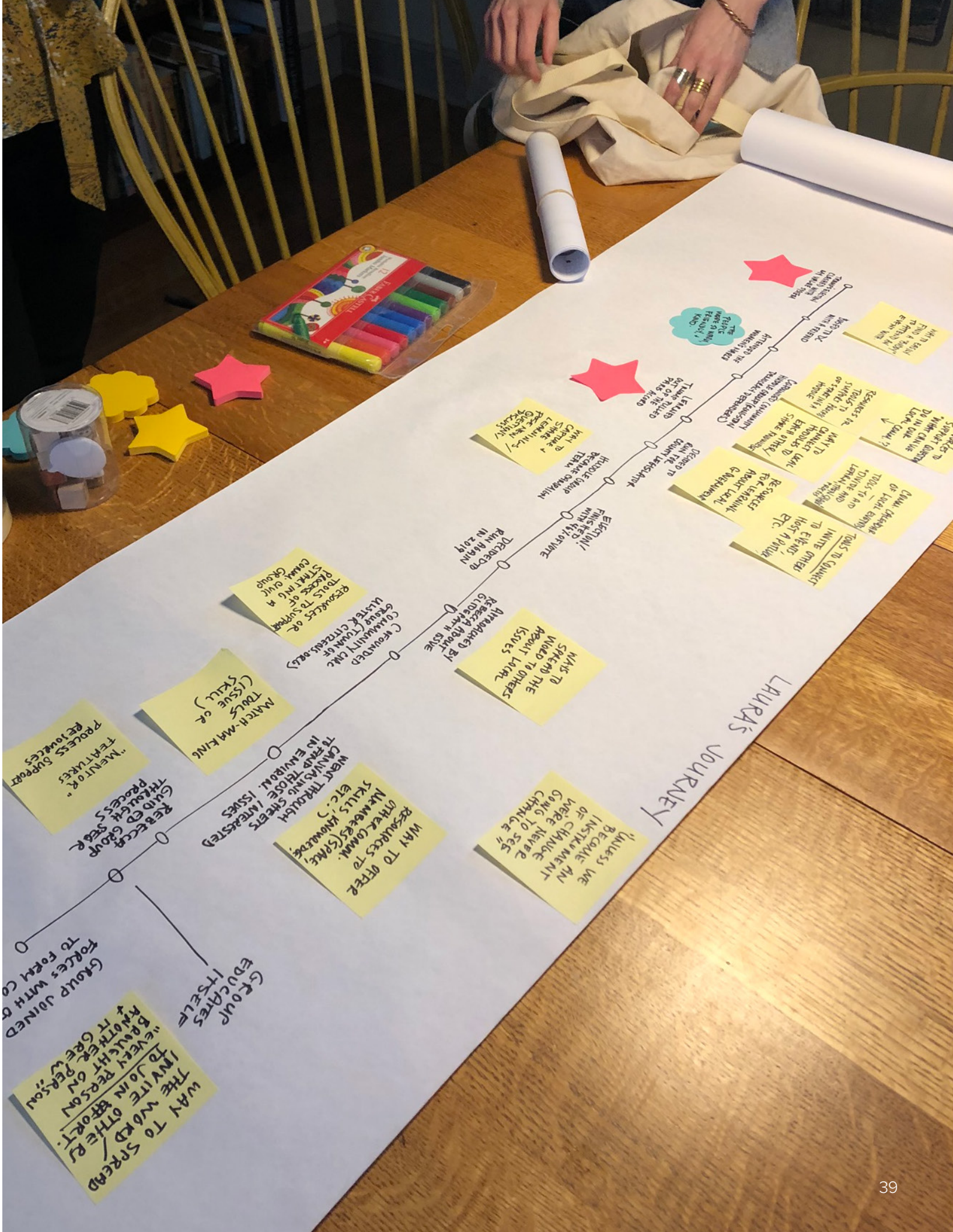


# Focus Groups

We started our co-creation process knowing our general goal: create a digital platform that harnesses the processes of successful activists and empowers civic engagement. We knew the intervention would take form online for three key reasons:

1. Our ultimate goal is to scale proven processes to individuals outside of Ulster County. The most efficient and tangible way to scale is through a digital presence that could be utilized by individuals regardless of location.
2. The process Rebecca and her team in Ulster County utilize leans heavily on online resources and digital content. An online platform would maintain their current workflow.
3. Prior to our partnership, Rebecca was already in the beginning stages of creating her own digital education platform, which meant she, and the community, were explicit that they wanted our final intervention to include an online presence.

Leaning into these three pillars, our conceptualizing activities revolved around the central theme of a digital hub.





# Ulster County Steering Committee

## Session #1, 5 Attendees

### GOAL

In order to make this goal specific and tangible while meeting the needs of our target audiences, we spent our initial session with the Ulster County Steering Committee understanding their individual and collective journeys. This included their pain points, areas of opportunity, and possible leverage points.

### ACTIVITIES

We first led our steering committee through a Vision Casting session, followed by a journey mapping exercise with their rose, bud, thorn moments and needs along the way.

### WHAT WE LEARNED

1. The most critical piece for successful civic empowerment is finding the group of people you can partner with because citizens have the most power to make local change if they are part of an organized group.
2. Grassroots groups can achieve the local change they want to see by following existing government processes, regardless of the issue.
3. The process of in-person relationship building is the most essential element of successful civic projects.

### SUMMARY

Backed by these findings, we began concepting and prototyping, knowing the core offerings of this platform are:

1. Connecting community members around shared interests.
2. Building offline, in-person relationships.
3. Providing online education and guidance around the civic engagement process.

**“People think they can just focus on getting a petition signed. It's not enough. It's important to find people who are like minded to join you on an issue. You're not going to achieve something alone, but you go in with 10 people that will back up what you say, and you're going to achieve something.”**

Laura Hartmann, Chairwoman,  
Town of Ulster Citizens





## New York City Task Force

### 10 Attendees

#### GOAL

Leaning on the insights from our initial steering committee session, we then held a research and concepting session with the New York City Task Force. We sought to understand the components that are critical to the design of our intervention to attract users at the beginning of the engagement spectrum.

#### ACTIVITIES

With the goal of rapid concepting, we collected 3 categories of suggestions:

1. Areas of interest
2. Opportunities for engagement
3. Needs to increase civic engagement with local government

Participants were then asked to take an idea from each category and design a concept based off those three elements.

#### WHAT WE LEARNED

1. Individuals are motivated most by community. They trust their social circle's suggestions above all others and are willing to engage in community work they wouldn't otherwise when someone they know is participating.
2. Knowledge sharing happens organically when groups connect in person.
3. Diverse knowledge and skills are critical to form effective teams, as each individual can contribute something unique.





# Ulster County Steering Committee

## Session #2, 4 Attendees

### GOALS

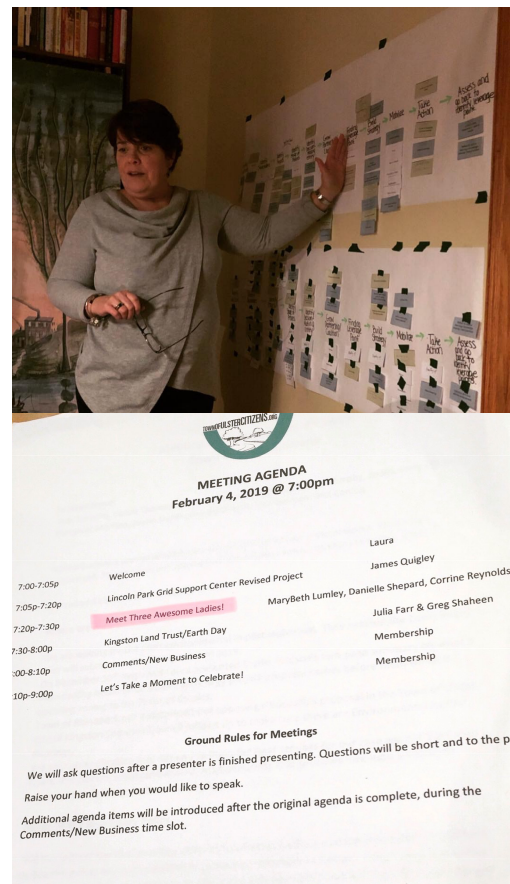
Understand what types of tools, content, and functionality an online platform must include in order to help citizen activists be effective while addressing issues in their community.

### ACTIVITIES

Drawing from the common journey discovered during our first mapping exercise, we led the steering committee through a Common Use Journey. Individually, each activist populated a timeline with the content, tools, or resources they utilized most when engaging with local government, what they wish they had, and what they used that was not efficient. We then created a shared journey and list of most common content and functionality needs that this platform must include.

### WHAT WE LEARNED

1. Finding the right people with the right skill sets for your project is the most essential, yet most challenging aspect of this work.
2. Successful engagement projects begin with a strategy session during which a few like-minded individuals and a subject matter expert discuss the issue at hand, set a goal, and generate a project strategy.
3. The education content that activists use to understand their local government already exists on municipal websites and other education platforms.
4. Civic engagement groups' success would be increased through project management, online content storage, and shared calendars.



# Design Principles

## Focus on action over education.

Through action, citizens learn.

## Build relationships.

Motivated by community, individuals will take action.

## Be minimal.

Include only the information and functionality that is necessary.

## Leverage existing assets.

Don't reinvent the wheel, leverage what exists.

## Design for offline experiences.

It's about getting people in the same room.

Based on our design principles we decided to prototype:

**A digital tool that enables offline experiences in order to replicate the process successful activists use with the goal of empowering others to have the same level of success.**

# Prototyping

## Create Profile

**Upload Image**

**Name**

**Location**  
 City of Kingston  
 Town of Ulster  
 Town of Springfield

○ ○ ● ○

### Select Your Interests

Beautification	Conservation	Green Energy	Policy	Transportation
Civil Rights/Equity	Economy	Immigration	Public Housing	Utilities
Composting	Education	Parks	Recycling	Water Issues

Need help? [Take an interests assessment](#)

Private  Public

**Next**

Beautification	Conservation	Green Energy	Policy	Transportation
Civil Rights/Equity	Economy	Immigration	Public Housing	Utilities
Composting				

Need help? [Take an](#)

Home Projects Members Discussion Events Education

## [Project Name]

### Request to Join Project

<h4>Availability/Commitment</h4> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 100px;"></div> <p><b>Sample Content...</b>              - Days              - Hours              - Time of day              - Activity specific</p>	<h4>Offers</h4> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 100px;"></div> <p><b>Sample Content...</b>              - Skill specific              - Project specific vs. general              - Value of currents available to earn              - Individual vs. group participation</p>
<p><b>Sample Content...</b>              - Days              - Hours              - Time of day              - Activity specific</p>	<p><b>Sample Content...</b>              - Meeting space              - Babysitting services              - Driver to events              - Notetaker at meetings</p>

Name, Location Projects Events About

## Build Your Team

Search for an individual, partner or mentor

Find by location (city, state or zipcode), interest, skill, or area of expertise  **Search**

Topics that may interest you: Kingston Ulster SEQR Process More

Name, Location Projects Events About

## Your Project is Here:

Project Phase: **Identify Step of Process**

Identify Issue or Goal <b>Learn More</b>	Identify Stakeholders <b>Learn More</b>	Identify Process <b>Learn More</b>	<b>Identify Step of Process</b> <b>Learn More</b>	Identify Decision-Makers <b>Learn More</b>
Grow Partnerships / Coalition <b>Learn More</b>	Find Leverage Point <b>Learn More</b>	Build Strategy <b>Learn More</b>	Mobilize <b>Learn More</b>	Take Action <b>Learn More</b>

- WHAT HAPPENS DURING THIS PHASE:**
- You now know the process you are using to navigate your issue and must get more clarity of where you are in that unique process.
- HOW:**
- Talk to your stakeholders that are experts on this process.
  - Identify who your friends and foes are on the issue.
  - Talk with your group about how to best engage both sides in a factual debate about the issue (not an emotional one).
- WHERE TO START:**
- Community conversations

### Additional Resources

[Case Studies](#)  
[Key Questions](#)  
[Document Templates](#)

Questions? [Ask the Community](#)











## Ulster County Task Force

### Session #1, 15 Attendees

#### GOALS

Share an early prototype of the wireframes for our tool and identify which features are viable, not viable, and why.

#### ACTIVITIES

Barriers and Assets: Each participant was asked to think of an issue/goal they have to improve or protect their community, the barriers they anticipate/experienced for addressing this issue, and the assets they could utilize/did utilize to address this issue. Participants were walked through how the tool would work and then given 1.5 hours to give feedback and ask questions.

#### WHAT WE LEARNED

We received close to 200 pieces of feedback about how our prototypes could be improved to meet the needs of this community. A few of the most prominent themes included:

1. Add a local currency incentive with the goal of bridging the accessibility gap and increasing motivation.
2. Restructure the platform to enable group formation around a specific issue in order to increase action and provide direction for group members.
3. Include the ability to clearly articulate the skills, tangible assets, and time you are able to contribute to projects.
4. Include case studies as a way to learn from past projects and community members.

#### MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION

**Prior** to being introduced to the tool, participants were asked to rate on a scale of one to ten, how confident they felt in their ability to create the change they want to see in their community. One being not confident and don't know where to start, and ten being very confident, know the process, and have the resources.

**After** the workshop, all participants were asked to rate again imagining they could use our tool to see if their confidence changed. All participants increased their confidence rating, with exception of two participants who rated very high before the workshop and kept the rating the same after.

**“Sometimes you need to just have a face-to-face connection and a lot of people don't know how to get those connections.”**

Lyn, Ulster County resident

**“Being able to see other projects like yours that were successful, and why, is extremely valuable.”**

Evelyn, Ulster County resident

**“It's great we're addressing the things that make it hard for people to donate their time, like child care and transportation.”**

Mike, Ulster County resident

**“This would help me find and recruit team members faster for my projects.”**

Liz, Ulster County resident







## Ulster County Task Force

### Session #2, 17 Attendees

#### GOALS

After gathering this feedback, we then iterated on our wireframe prototypes and returned to Ulster County to gather feedback.

#### ACTIVITIES

Participants were walked through how the tool would work and then given 1.5 hours to give feedback and ask questions.

1. What elements of this tool would address your needs?
2. Is there anything we're missing?
3. What could we remove that's unnecessary?

#### WHAT WE LEARNED

We received robust feedback on this second round of wireframes, specifically addressing the following changes:

1. Restructure the platform to focus on three essential elements: finding an issue, finding the correct people, hosting your first meeting.
2. Refine the language and content flow to be more inclusive of diverse skill sets and backgrounds.
3. Refine and narrow the education component to focus first on action.

#### MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION

**Prior** to viewing the new iteration of the tool, each participant was asked to think of an issue/goal they have to protect/improve their community, then write all the steps they would follow in order to start addressing this. Where would you start? Who would you contact? What resources would you need?

**After** the workshop, all participants indicated how they would utilize this platform to address the issue they identified for their community.

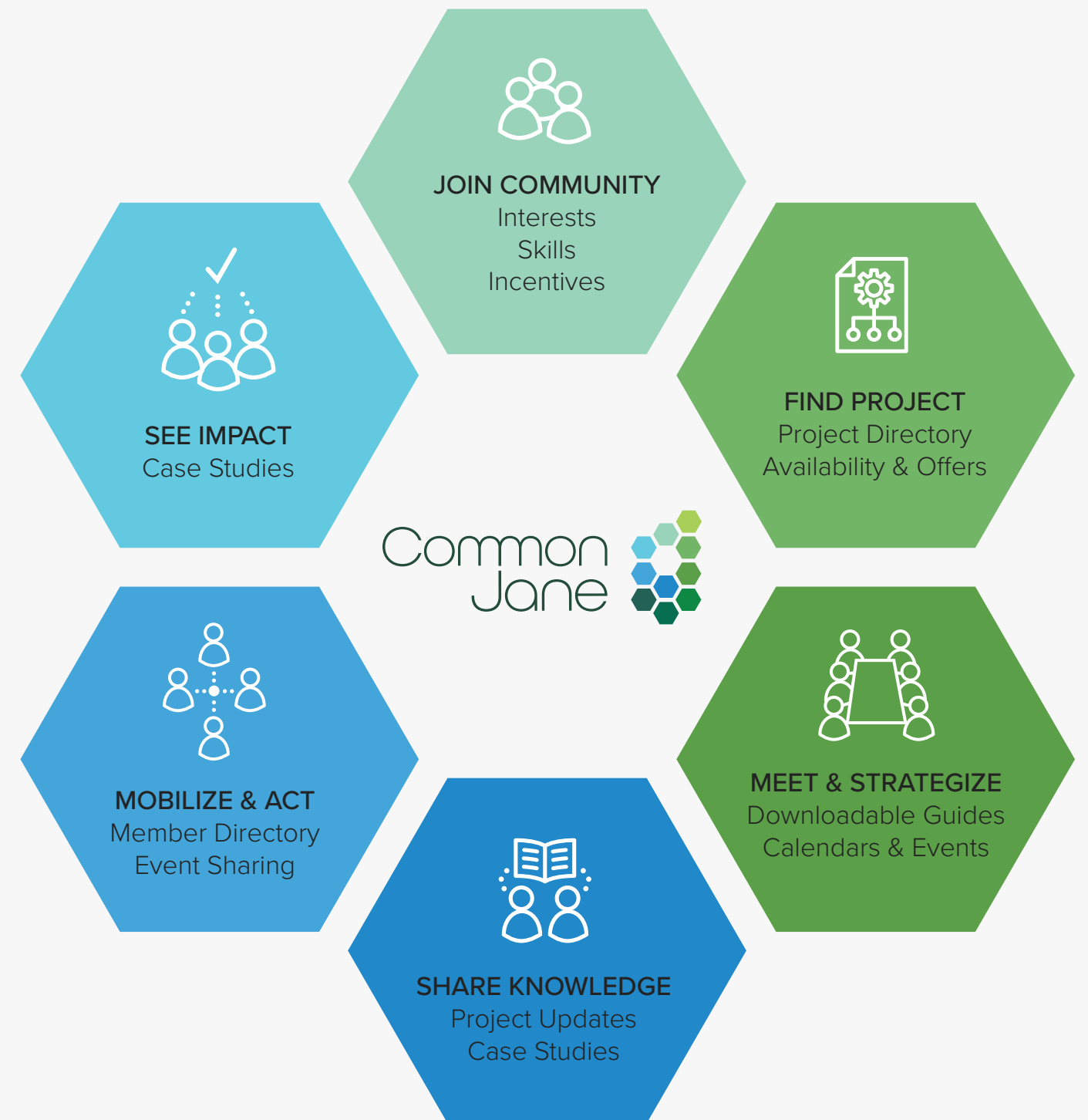
**“Being pragmatic about it, government doesn't solve everything. You need community groups.”**

Neil, Ulster County resident





# Introducing CommonJane





# CommonJane is a digital community organizer that equips citizens with the proven tools and expertise of professional activists – turning them into instruments of change.

**CommonJane redefines civic engagement work and is an invitation to every citizen to participate.**

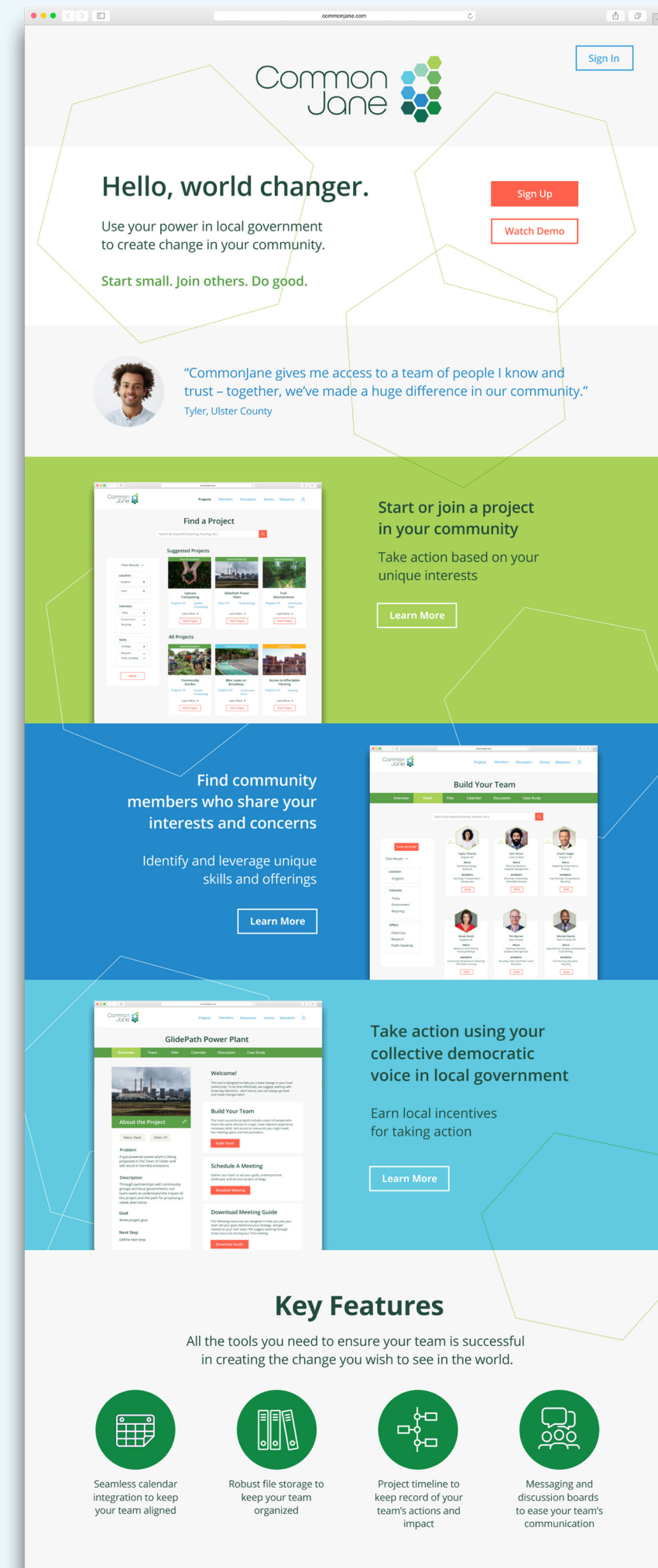
CommonJane connects people based on common interests, passions, and concerns. By maximizing each person’s contributions and providing a financial benefit, in the form of local currency, for completed actions, it opens the door to anyone interested in protecting or improving their community.

Through our research, we learned that **it is ultimately about getting the right people in the room to start asking the right questions.** The following is how CommonJane delivers that vision.

**WHO IS JANE?**

Jane is you, me, our neighbor - the everyday citizen who is ready to step up and become a leader. Those with hopes and dreams for their communities, but without knowledge of where and how to contribute. The common folk who, when given the right information and connections, realize the extraordinary power they have to create positive change.

CommonJane provides a roadmap for budding leaders to act on their sense of responsibility. It is an invitation for others to join them, so that more people see their values reflected in their communities and the impact of their contributions.





## The “Right” People

A robust **member directory**, including individuals and organizations, allows project leads to recruit team members with aligned interests and a diverse set of needed skills. It also helps project teams streamline the process of forming strategic partnerships, proven to be critical to the success of civic action projects.

“Right” is also about helping people determine which projects are best for them. When building a **user profile** in CommonJane, users can define their availability (e.g., I’m only available on the weekends) and surfacing the many ways they can contribute to projects (e.g., I have a living room I’d be happy to offer for team meetings).

Through these features, **CommonJane facilitates the process of matching the right people to the right projects.**

### Earning Opportunities

<b>50</b>	Update case study	<a href="#" style="border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 2px 5px;">CLAIM</a>
<b>130</b>	Take notes at community board meeting	<a href="#" style="border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 2px 5px;">CLAIM</a>
<b>75</b>	Host next Team meeting on 4/15	<a href="#" style="border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 2px 5px;">CLAIM</a>

Can't find what you're looking for?

[Start a Project](#)



## The “Room”

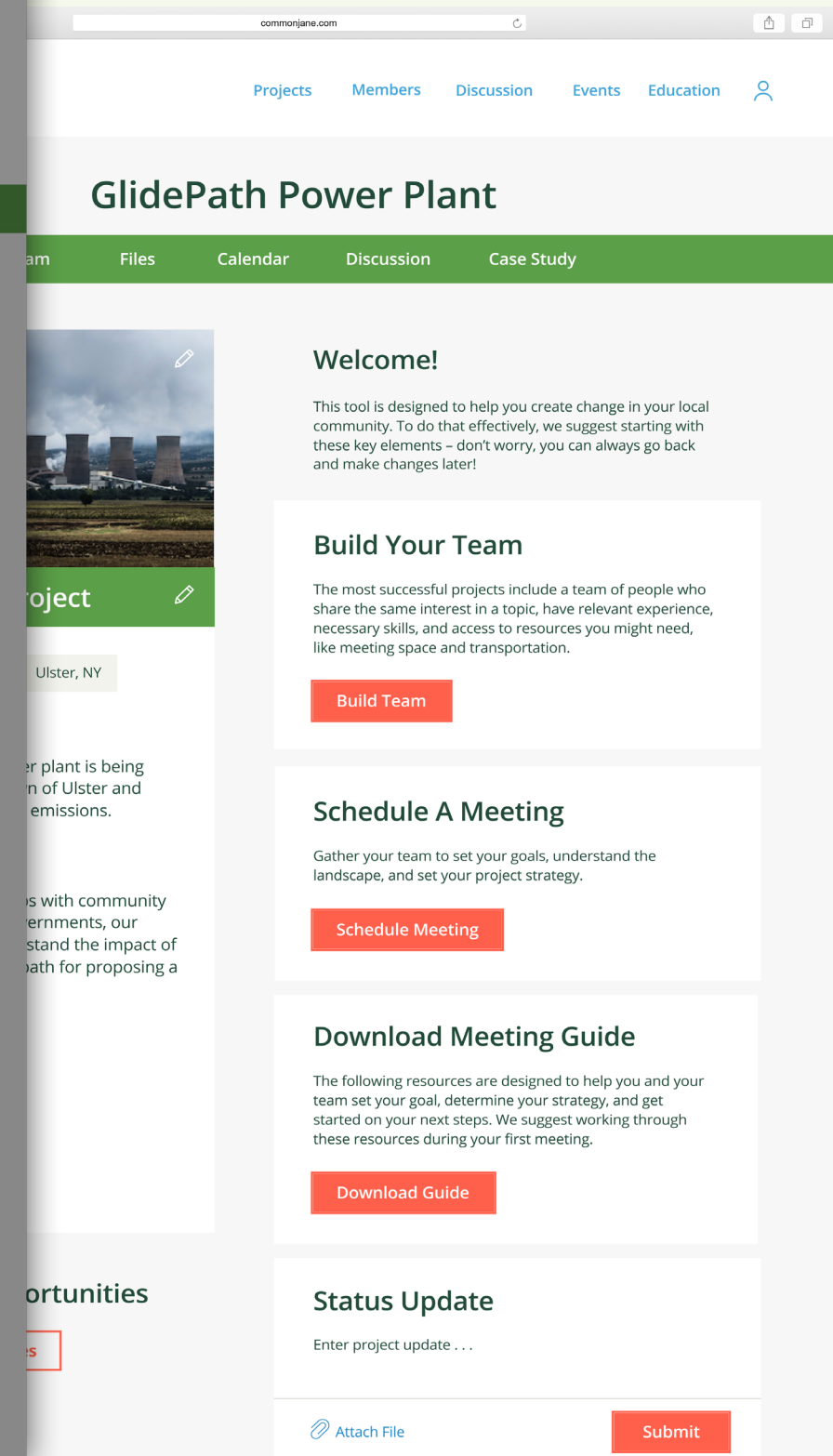
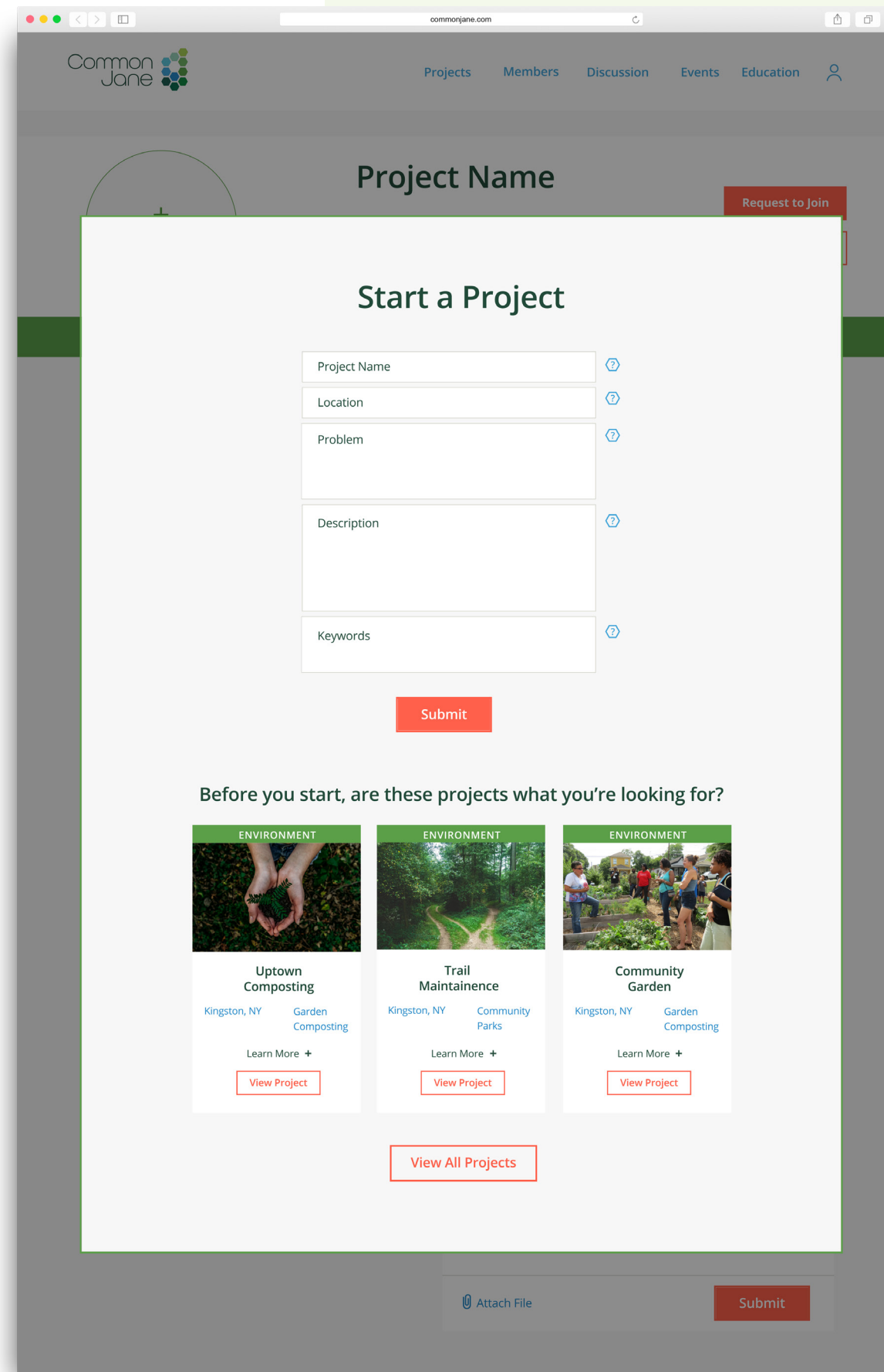
A project hub provides a virtual living room for team members to gather. Through research, our team gained clarity that the most important work happens in-person. It’s about the people, not the tool.

CommonJane’s goal is to offer as little technology as necessary to enable these in-person experiences.

The project hub includes a set of features to streamline each project team’s offline work, like the ability to invite team members to the project or specific events, define next steps, store files, and maintain a project calendar. Teams can publish status updates to inform the CommonJane community of their progress and next steps, which helps to grow teams and increase the chances of meeting projects’ goals.

**“I said, ‘Let’s have a potluck’, and I swear that’s what did it. It’s that community, that breaking of bread, it’s really very intimate. The relationship building aspect of this is key.”**

Laura Hartmann, Chairwoman, Town of Ulster Citizens





# Impact

## Theory of Change

Our theory of change paints a picture of the purpose and effect of our intervention as we work to achieve our ultimate goals.

The **inputs**, or components we will include to provide value to citizens and drive change, include citizen-provided information related to their skills, interests, knowledge, and availability for civic projects, as well as access to educational resources about how their local government works and proven strategies for successful engagement.

The **outputs**, the tangible elements of our intervention, center around informing and educating citizens about issues, their local government, fellow community members, and potential partner organizations.

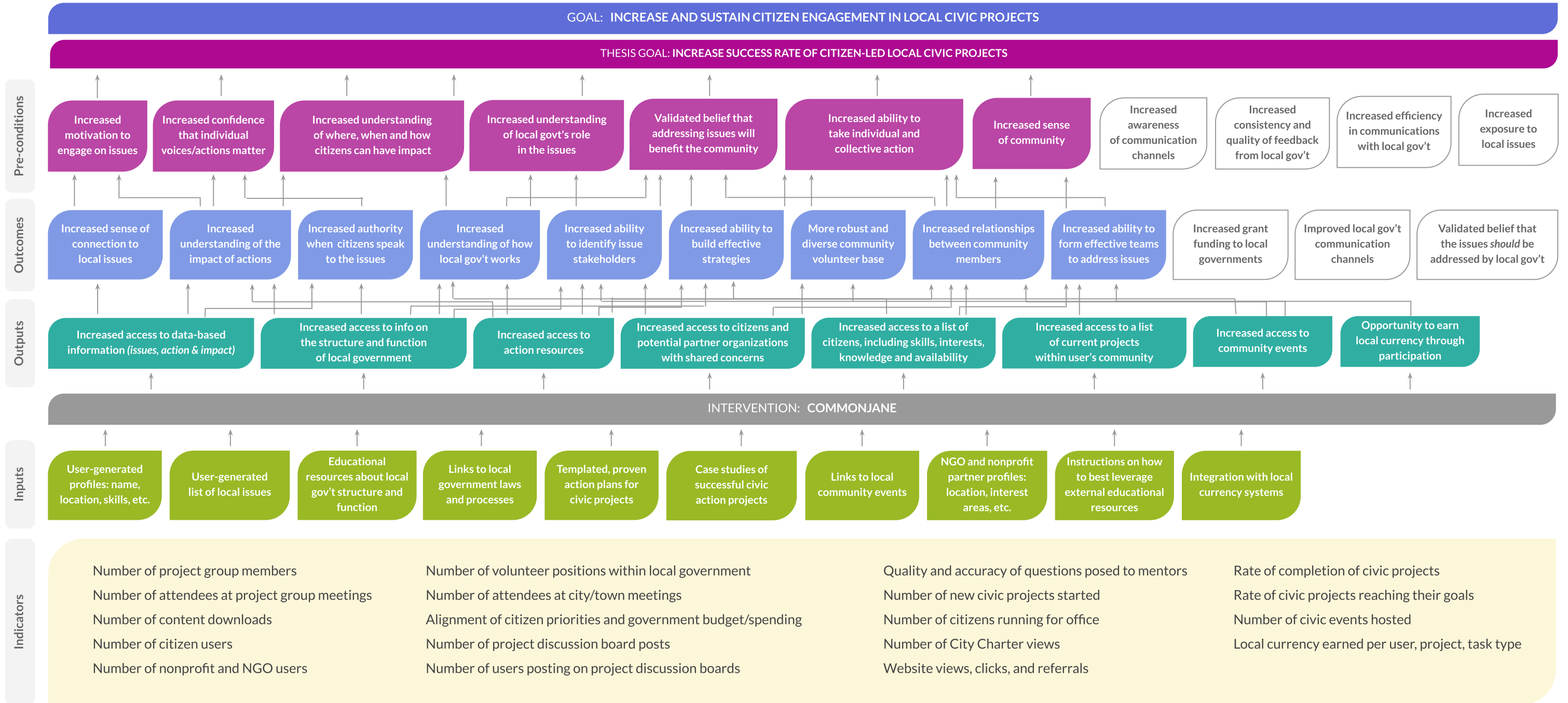
The **outcomes**, the effects of our audience engaging with the intervention, include the changes in citizens' levels of knowledge, agency, empowerment, and sense of community.

The **pre-conditions** summarize what must exist before our goals are achieved – specifically, what mindset, motivation, and knowledge the audience must achieve to engage with their fellow citizens and local government and successfully complete civic action projects.

Finally, the **indicators**, or data points we will establish to measure our intervention's effectiveness, will paint a clear picture of citizen engagement before and after our intervention is launched.



# Theory of Change



Danielle Shepard, Corinne Reynolds, Mary Beth Lumley | April, 2019



# Next Steps

## Looking Forward

This project resulted in a clear vision: A digital community organizer that empowers every day citizens to harness the expertise of activists. This vision casting was just the beginning. Moving forward, we are continuing our partnership with Rebecca and her team in Ulster County in order to turn this vision into a reality.

This summer, we are entering the next stage of development: looking for seed funding while continuing to test and refine the initial tool functionality. Over the next six months to one year, our goal is to work with backend developers while piloting the initial digital components with current active projects and initiatives in Ulster County. Looking beyond one year, our development plan includes slowly adding, testing, then refining additional components, eventually leading to a full, digital platform that includes all the functionality surfaced during this project phase.

Civic engagement, and social design, are processes that involve asking the first question, then following the answer until you reach the next question. This thesis project was us asking the first question. Now, we are walking forward, following this answer: **Start small. Think big. Join others.**





# Special Thanks

## Thank You.

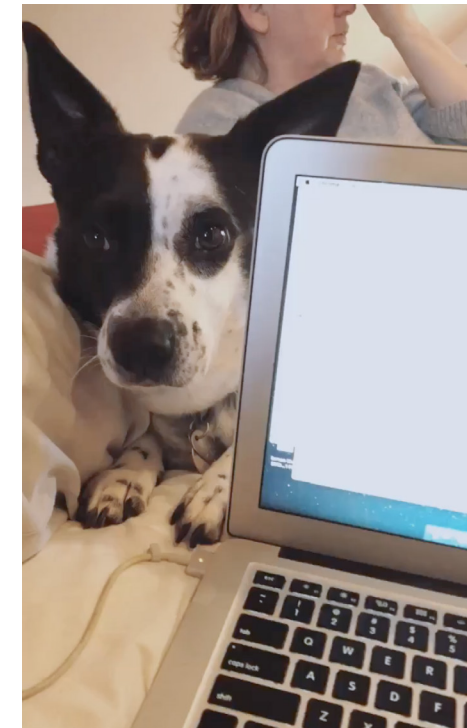
We want to say thank you to the following individuals for their support, guidance, assistance, and impact on our process and our lives.

### **Rebecca Martin (Charlie and Larry... and Cara Bella, of course)**

You're the perfect Venn diagram of heart, hospitality, and brilliance. You have taught us so much about what it means to mobilize whole communities for change. We are beyond grateful for your partnership and this is just the beginning.

### **Cheryl Heller, DSI Program Chair**

It's impossible to accurately express our deep gratitude for your never-ending wisdom. Your guidance, generosity, and thoughtful advisement has been at the heart of our graduate studies. From Communications class to Sustainable Brands, to Omega to thesis, you show us what it looks like when women change the world.



### **Our Thesis Advisors**

Thank you to all of our thesis advisors, especially our dedicated advisor, Archie Lee Coates IV. Archie. Man, what a ride. Thank you for your ideas, your guidance, your support, your humor, and your incredible Joaquin Phoenix videos. You saw us through eco-anxiety, our attempt to interview every person in New York, and the cumulation of all those crazy ups and downs. Thank you for your guidance that extended far beyond our thesis, you're best. Cool.

### **Ulster County Steering Committee: Laura, Regis, Vicki, and Tanya**

Thank you for sharing your lives, your experience, and your wisdom. You opened us up to what is possible when incredible people come together. We left every interaction inspired and hopeful. CommonJane is a reflection of who you are and what you do, and for that, we are forever grateful.

### **Ulster County Task Force**

Testing prototypes has never been so fun. Thank you to each of you who dedicated their time, perspective, encouragement, and knowledge to refining and building CommonJane. You inspired us every time we walked into the 721 Media Center. Thank you.



### **New York City Task Force**

Although we only worked together once, you showed us what happens when people come together, support each other, and find hope. This lesson crafted the DNA of CommonJane.

### **Our Research Participants across the U.S.**

To every person who answered our call, talked to us about the environment, politics, female empowerment, civic action, your lives, your fears, and your hopes for a sustainable planet, thank you. You built the foundation upon which CommonJane now stands.

### **Our Fast Track Advisors, Maggie Breslin and Asi Burak**

We are astounded by your ability to cut through our confusion and give us exactly the clarity we needed every week. Thank you for helping us to look at our work with a new lens, it was a critical perspective that allowing us to meaningfully elevate our work.

### **Kobla Asamoah**

Every week you dedicated your time to helping us walk through what the future of CommonJane could be. You consistently gave us encouragement, grace, and advisement. You were a safe place to land in this process. Thank you for your kindness and wisdom.

### **Rumi**

We are so grateful to you for lending your time and expertise to helping us get to “CommonJane”. The name honors both the citizens doing this important work every day, and our work with them. Thank you.

### **Daniel**

Thank you so much for taking the time to help us edit this giant book (and for generally being a really good human)!

### **Our Cohort**

There isn't a way to adequately say thank you. All we can say is we love you. To us, you are home.





