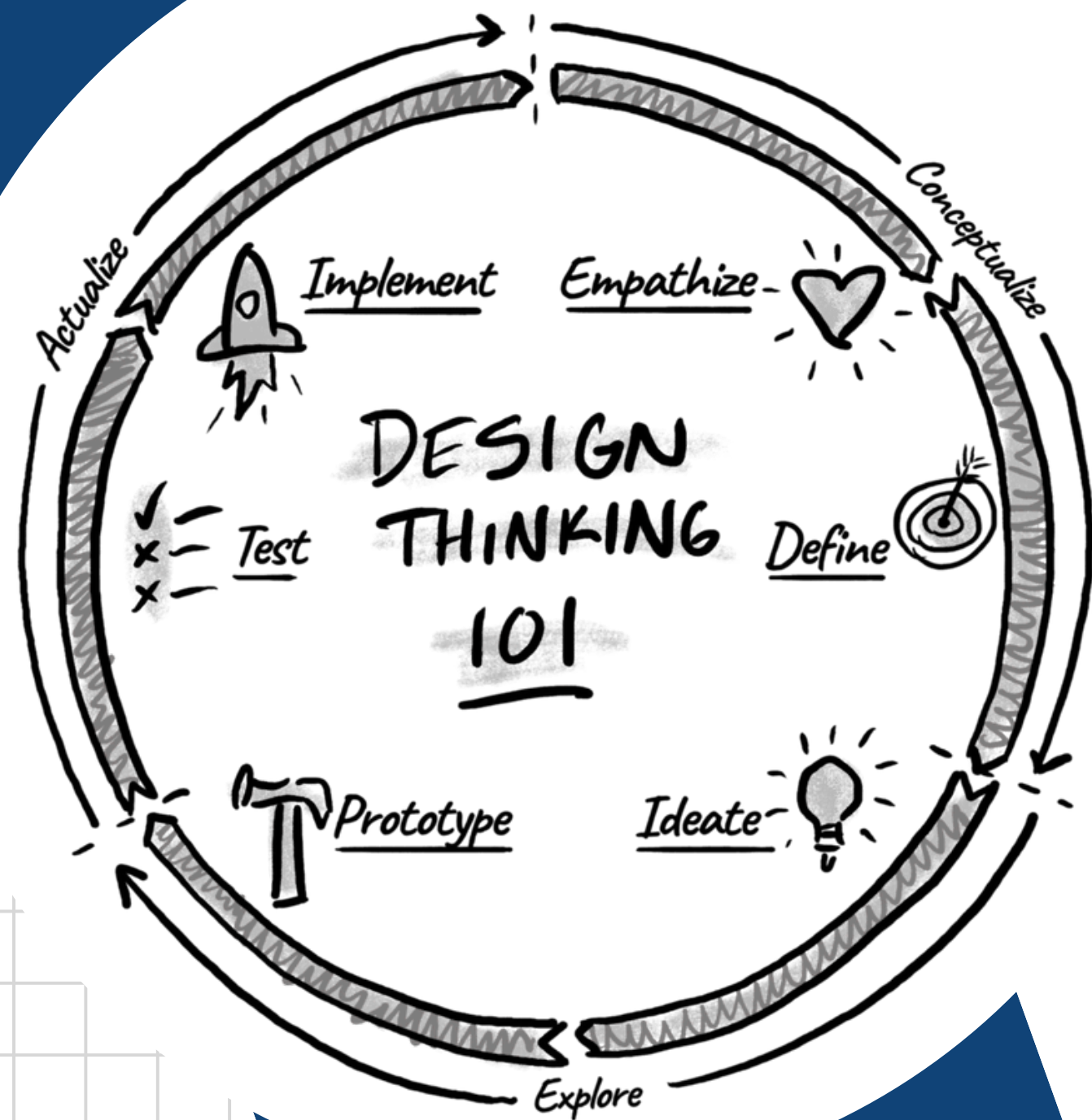




Design Thinking

For Civic Problem Solving

Helen Y. Glover

Insights from IDEO, Nielsen Norman Group, d.school, Designer Fund

TODAY

- Design Thinking x Civics
- The Five Stages
- How Might We Statements

Ask questions!

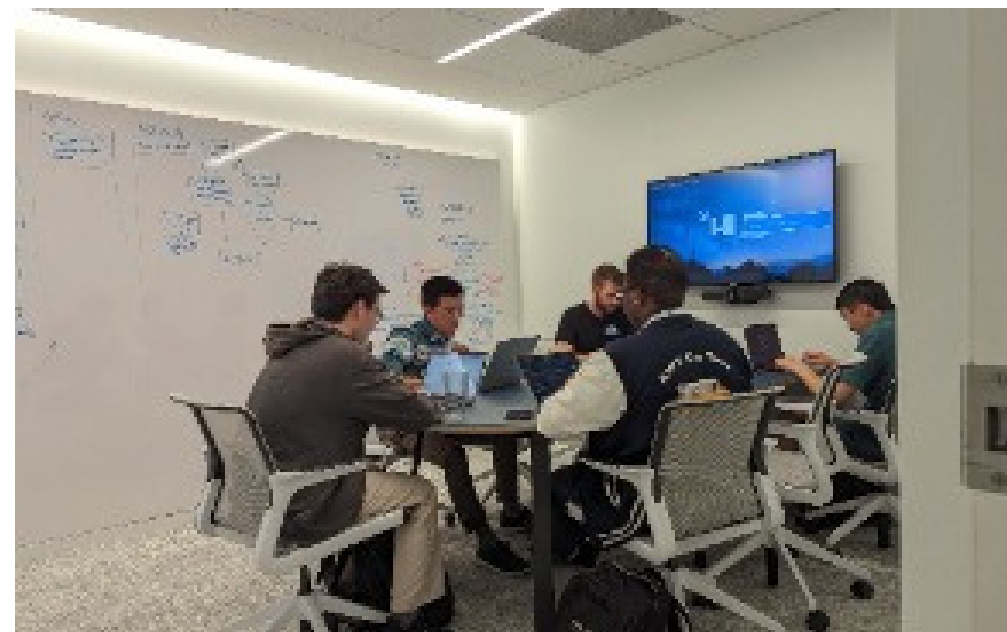


UCL
IDEATO
design

HELLO!



Executive Director at Civic Tech DC, Open source projects on local community issues



How do we make sure we are
solving the **right** problems
before we start building
solutions?



We should build an app.
We should use AI.
We should create a chatbot.



Whom are we designing for?
What challenge are they experiencing?
What do we need to learn before we act?

Think about a project,
product, program, or service
you've encountered that did
not work as intended.

WHAT IS DESIGN THINKING

Design thinking is a **human-centered approach** to solving complex problems.

Integrates the **needs** of people, the **possibilities** of technology, and the **requirements** for business success to generate innovative solutions.

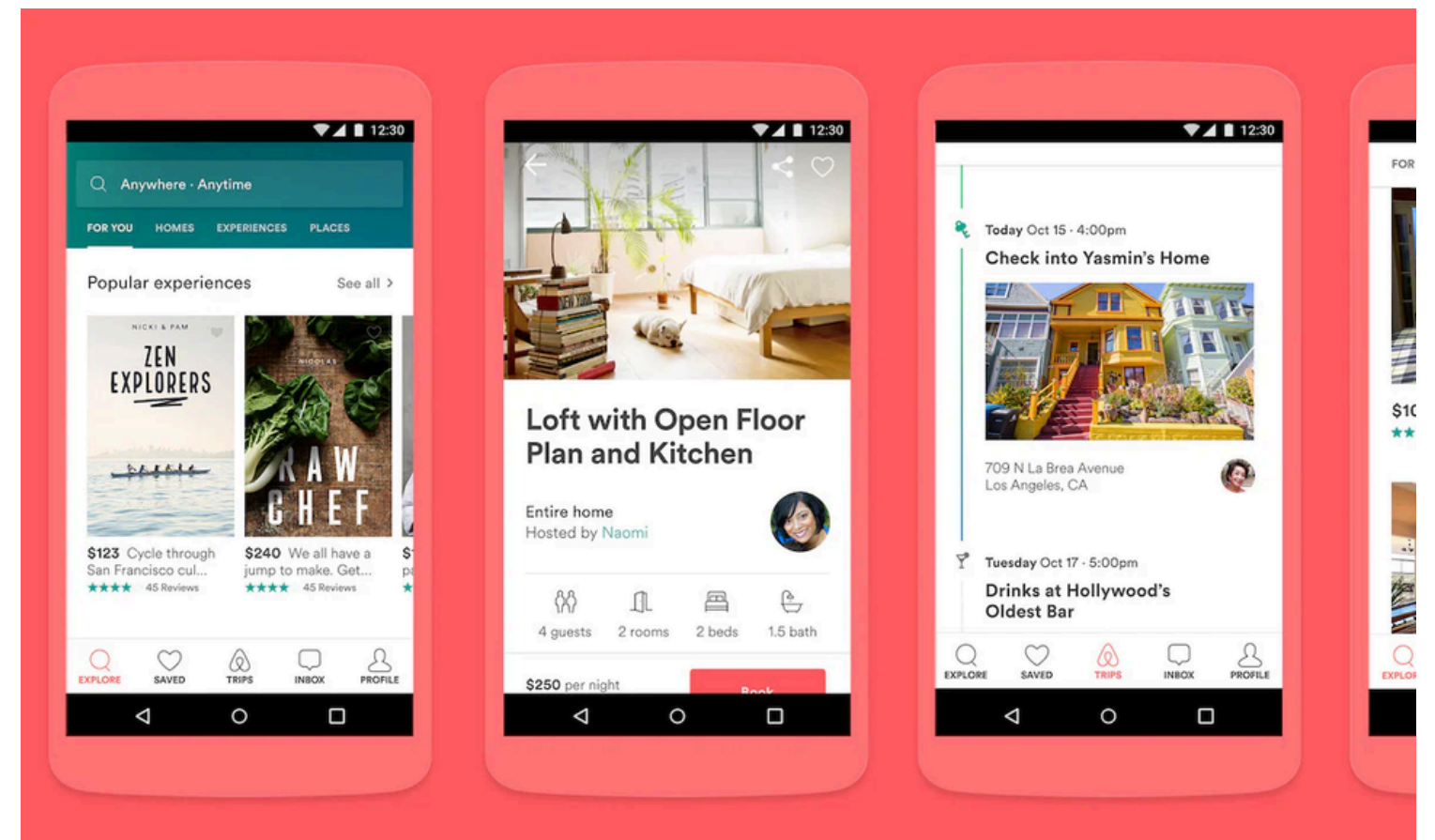


WHY DESIGN THINKING

Origin: “Designerly ways of knowing, thinking and acting”

Where: Everywhere! Tech, business, healthcare, social impact, education

Focus: Human-centered, teamwork, low risk



WHY CIVICS?

Civics and elections are the systems and information that make **democratic participation** work

- Election administration
- Voter access
- Civic tech and government services
- Public records
- Media literacy

Living in DC, the heart of democracy



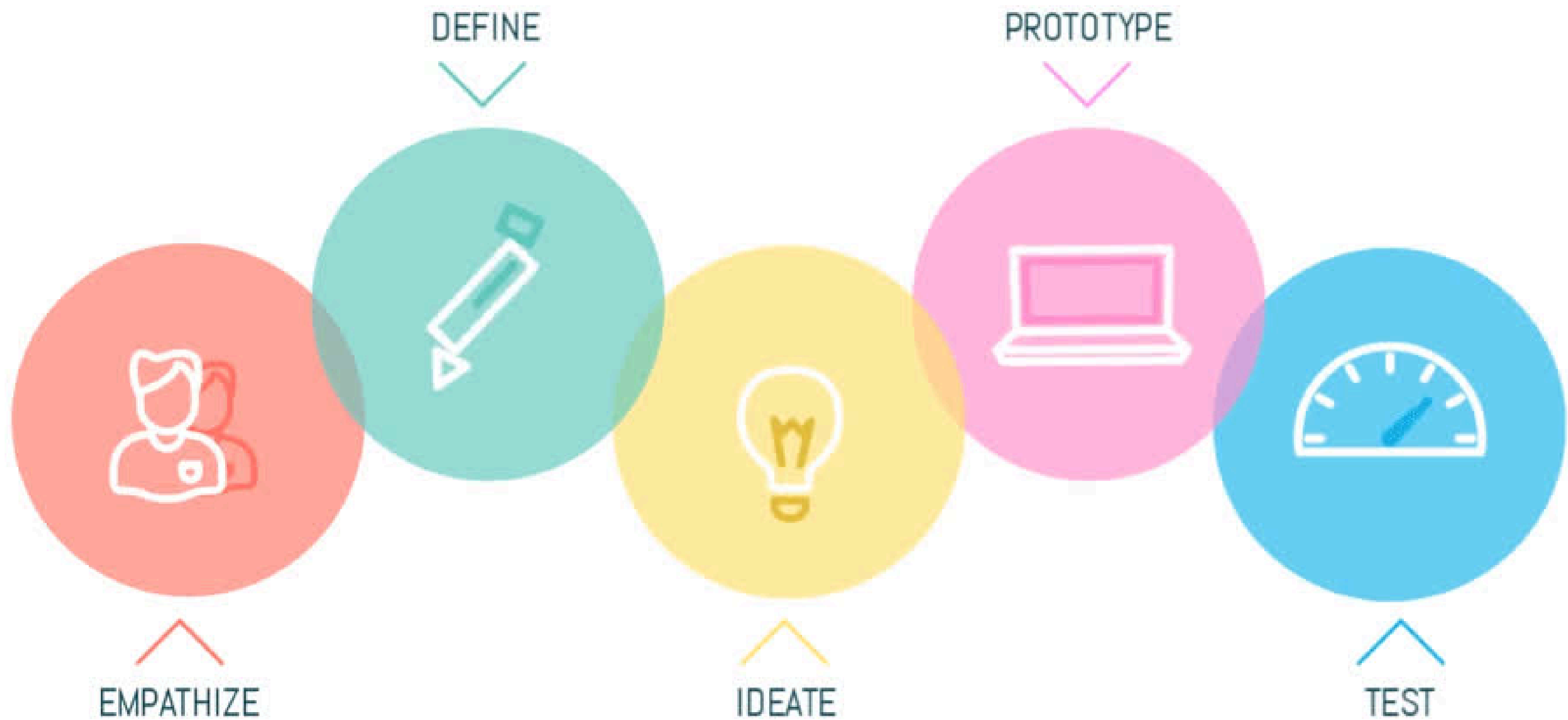
BRINGING IT TOGETHER

Civics asks: What challenges matter to our communities?

Design Thinking asks: How can we better understand and address those challenges?

Civic change starts with caring about a problem. Design thinking helps us turn that care into action.





Month 1 (Problem Discovery & Definition)	Month 2 (Exploration & Experimentation)	Month 3 (Prototype Building & Iterating)
You'll explore challenges and through community voting, the most compelling problems become "pods."	As your pod explores your problem spaces, you come up with proposed solutions to the challenges.	Projects turn experiments into working prototypes.

STAGES 1: EMPHASIZE

Emphasize = understanding the people you are designing for

- **Why** do they do what they do?
- **What** are their physical and emotional needs?
- **How** do they think about the world?
- **What** is meaningful for them?





↑ 1 🚆 Link

OBSERVE



ENGAGE



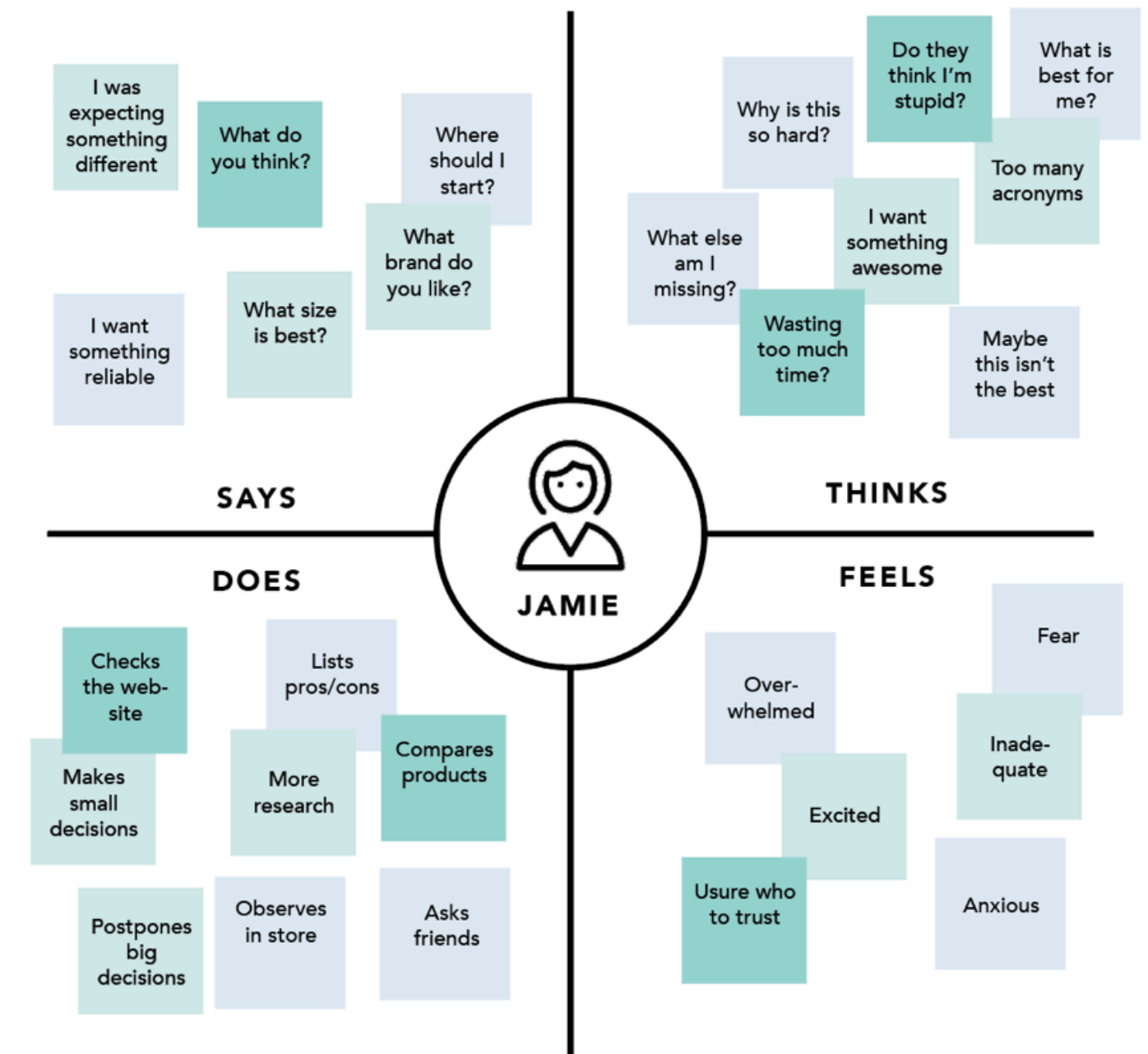
WATCH

AND LISTEN

HOW TO EMPHASIZE

- **Observe.** View users and their behavior in the context of their lives
- **Engage.** Ask questions (especially “why”), conduct = “informal interviews”
- **Watch and Listen.** Combine observation and engagement. Ask them to think out loud, watch their body movement, ask them to complete a task.

EMPATHY MAP *Example (Buying a TV)*



STAGES 2: DEFINE

Bringing clarity and focus to what you learned

Develop a point of view

The goal is to create a meaningful and actionable problem statement



Emphasize
“Doing”

HOW

The
possibilities!

MIGHT

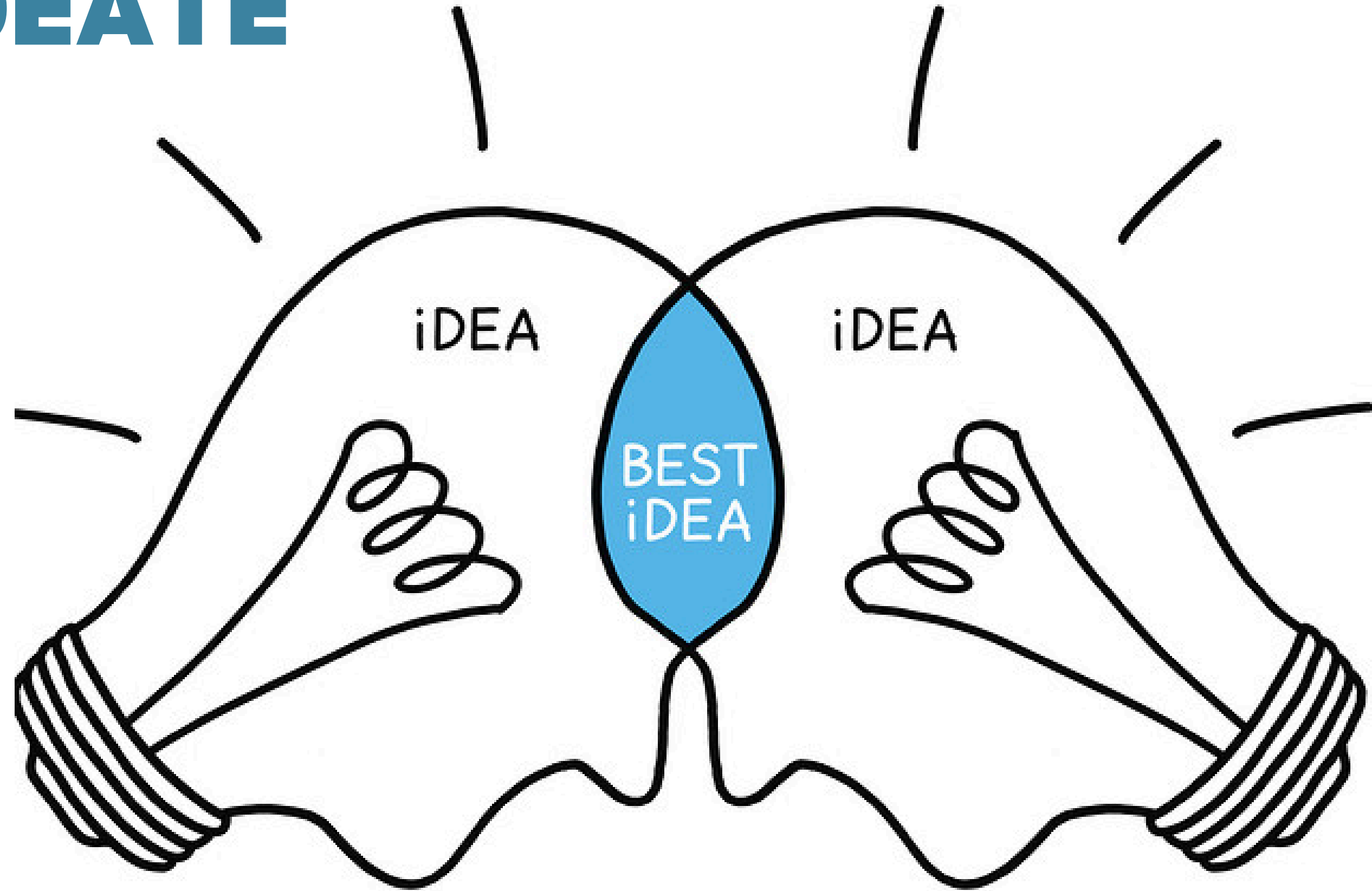
Collaboration

WE

STAGE 3: IDEATE

Not finding the
“right” idea but
the broadest
range of
possibilities

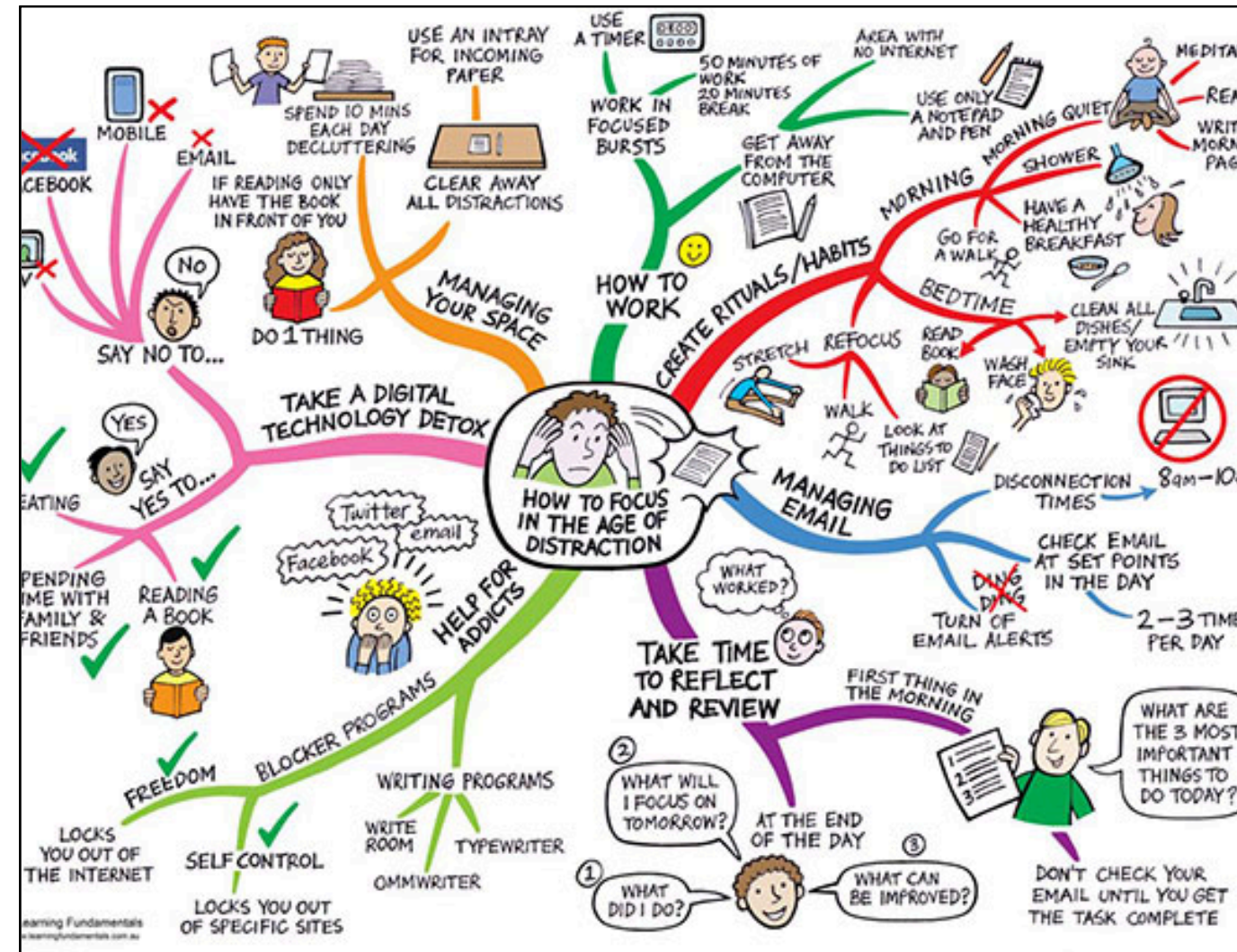
Blue Sky!



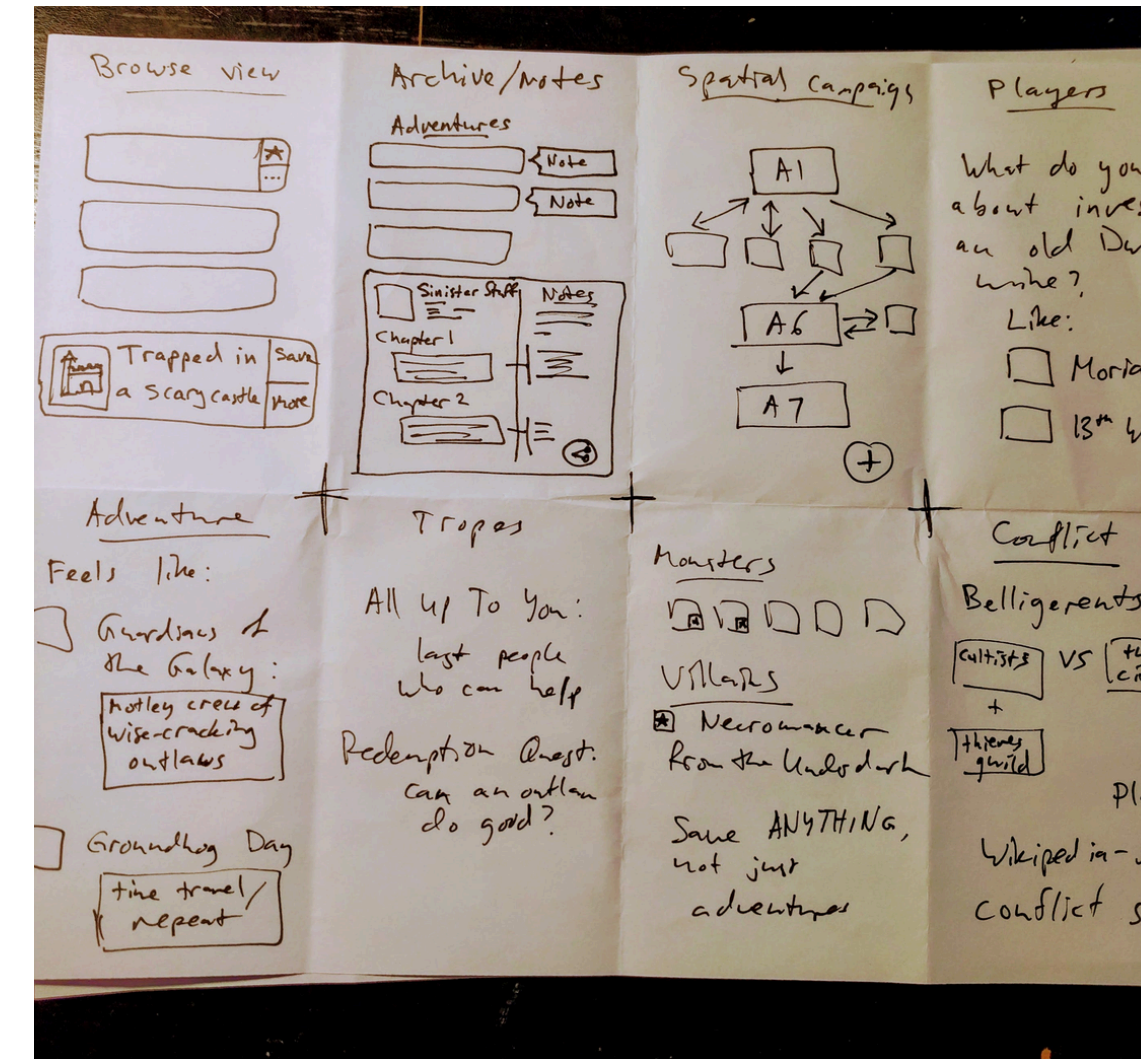
HOW TO IDEATE



BodyStorming



Mindmapping



Sketching

STAGE 4: PROTOTYPE

Build to think, test to learn.

A prototype can be anything that a user interacts with:

- An app/website
- A gadget
- A storyboard
- A role-playing exercise



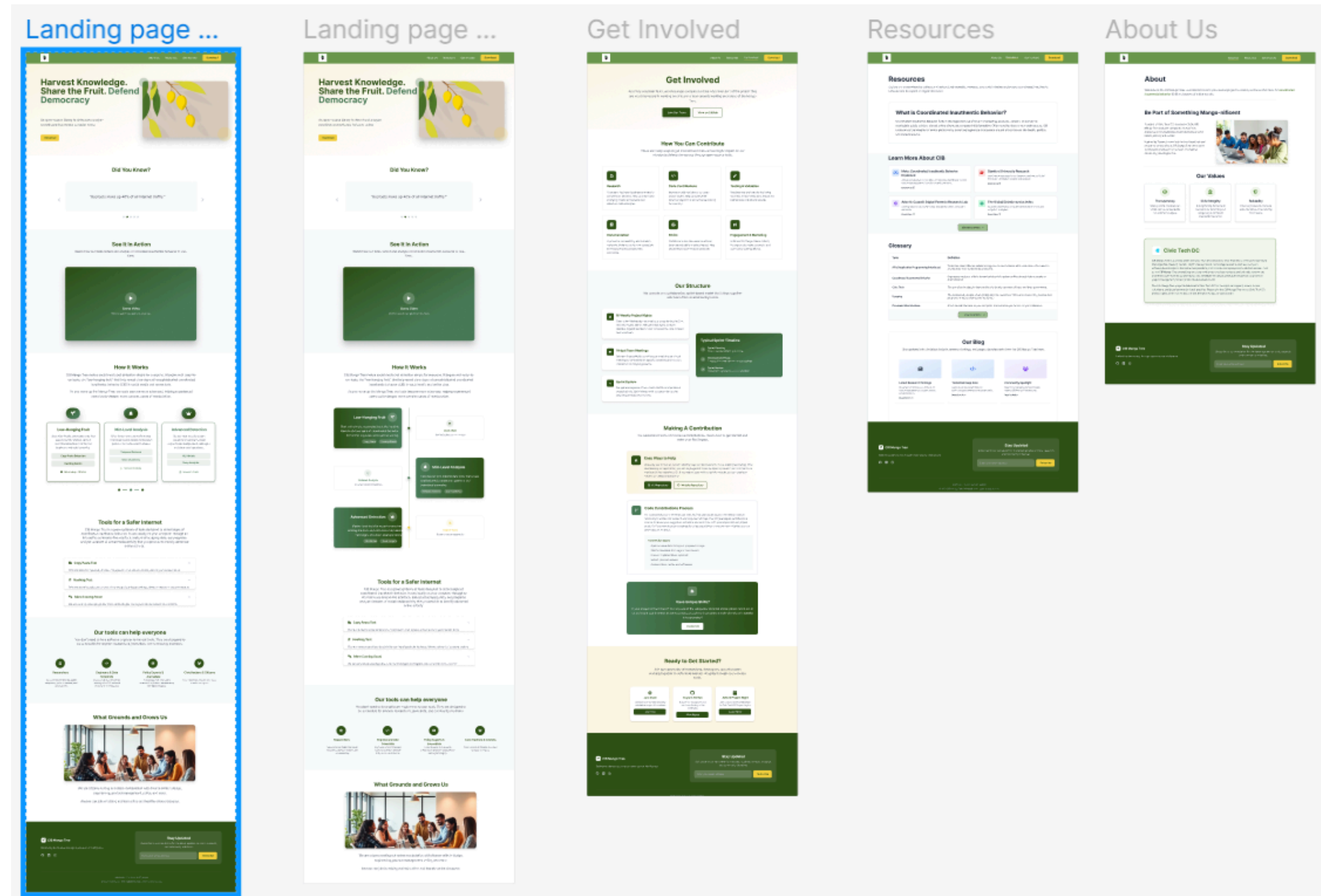
HOW TO PROTOTYPE

Early stage: Use a low-fidelity (lo-fi) prototypes

- Paper sketches
- Scrappy
- Easy to build

Later stage: Use high-fidelity (hi-fi) prototypes

- App wireframes
- AI prompts

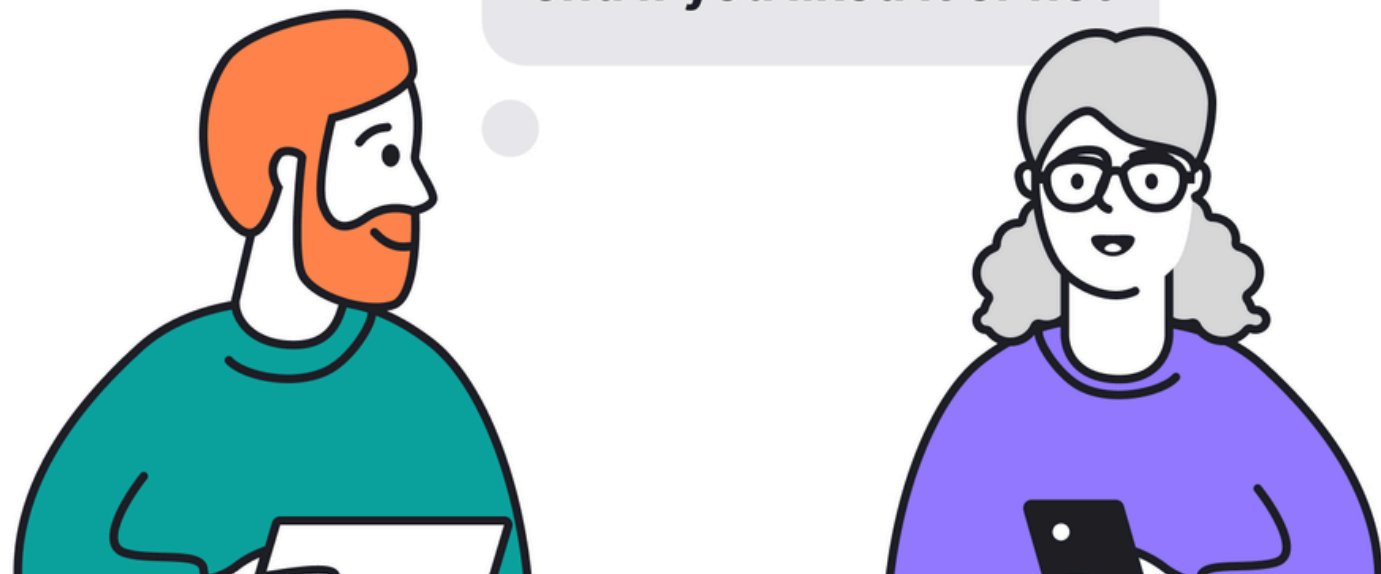


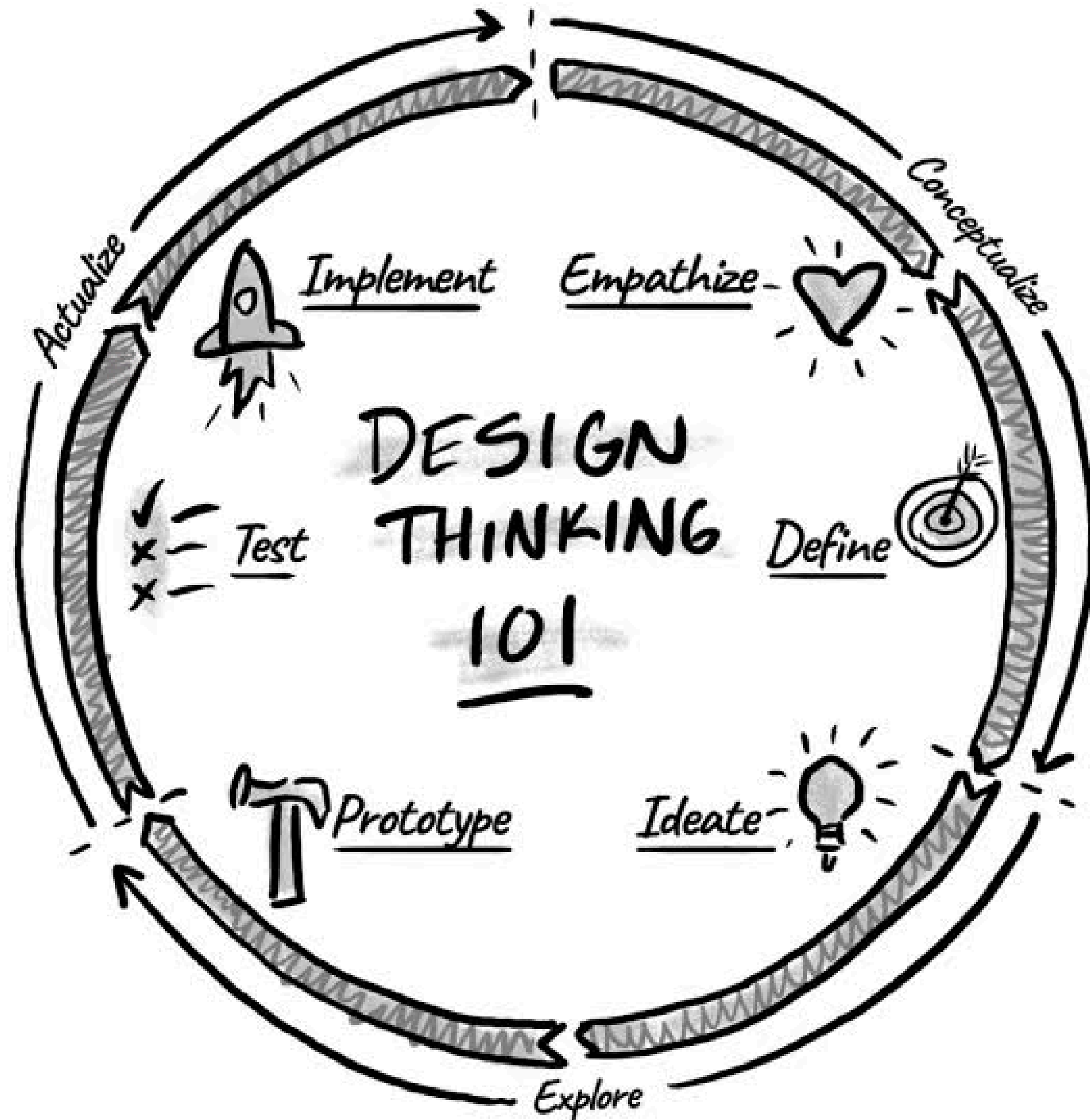
STAGE 5: TEST

Testing is an opportunity to learn about your solution and your user

Prototype as if you know you're right, but test as if you know you're wrong

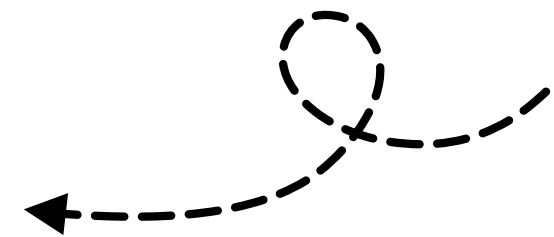
Explore this feature
and let me know at the
end if you liked it or not





WHY A CIRCLE?

How Might We?



Emphasize
“Doing”

HOW

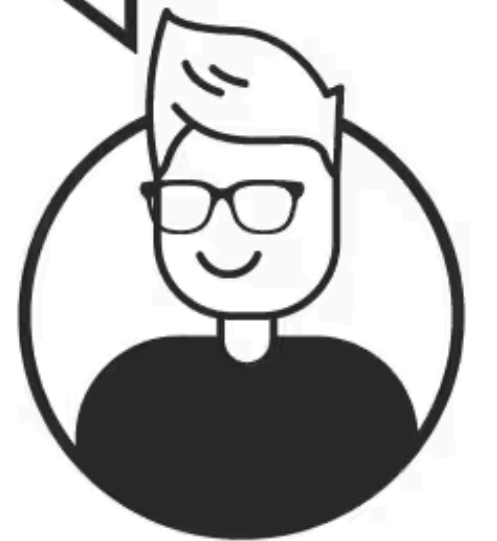
The
possibilities!

MIGHT

Collaboration

WE

How Might We + **Intended Action**
(as an action verb) + **For** + **Potential User**
(as the subject) + **So That** + **Desired Outcome**



How Might We + **Intended Action**
(as an action verb) + **For** + **Potential User**
(as the subject) + **So That** + **Desired Outcome**

For example:



How might we create an app to connect residents with government services?



How might we make it easier for residents to discover and access the services they need?

How might we create an app for attending city council meetings?



How might we help residents meaningfully participate in local government decisions?

**Let's Make Our Own “How
Might We”**

**CBS NEWS
CHICAGO**

Repeated Street Light Outages Leave Residents In Dark

 **Reuters**

Subscribe

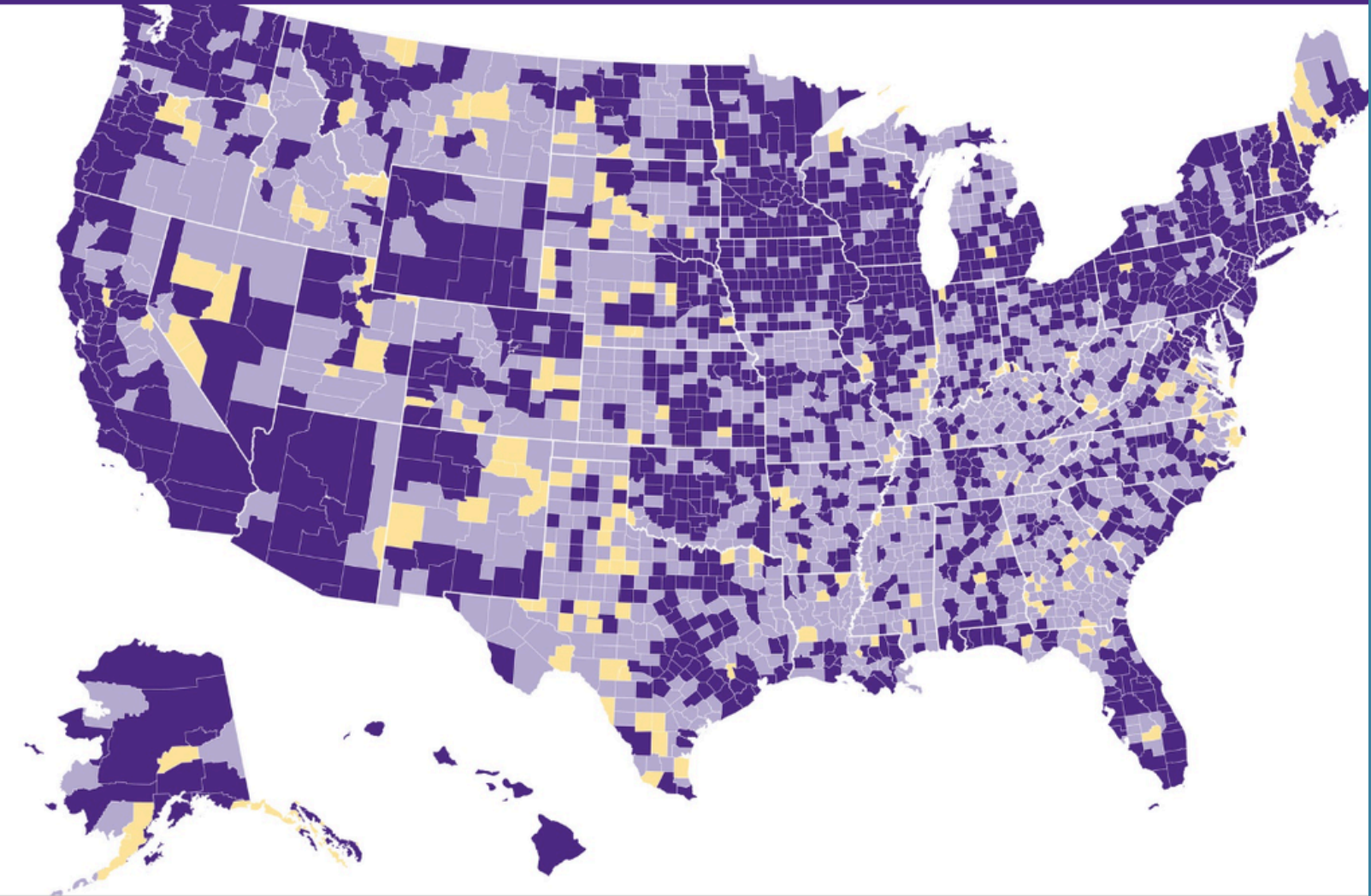


Fake 'Biden' robocall tells New Hampshire Democrats to stay home

Northwestern | MEDILL
Local News Initiative



The State of Local News 2025



The State of Local News 2025

Two Decades of Data, Deserts and Dynamic Change

Let's Ideate

Month 1 (Problem Discovery & Definition)	Month 2 (Exploration & Experimentation)	Month 3 (Prototype Building & Iterating)
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RESOURCES

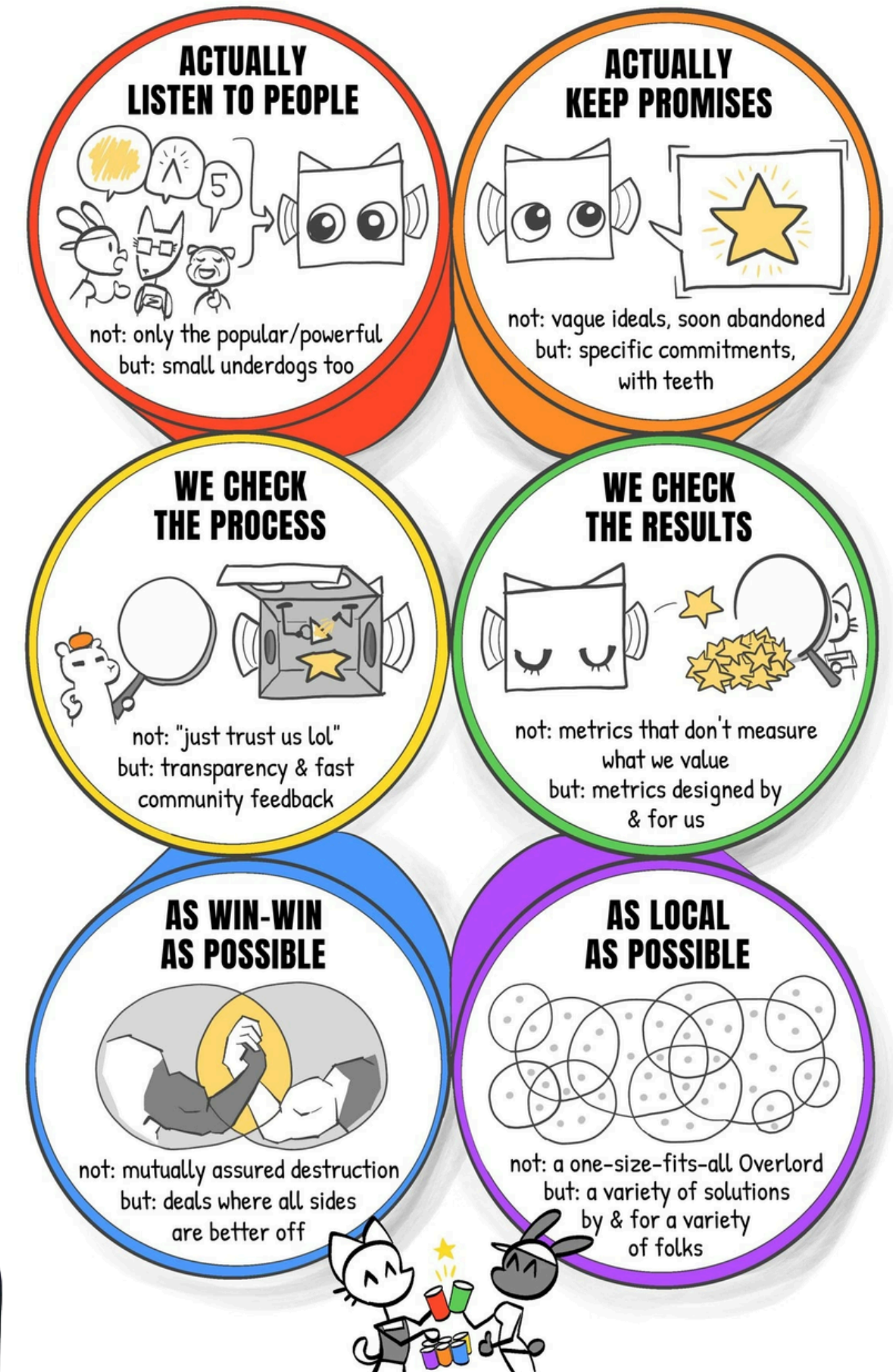
Design Thinking

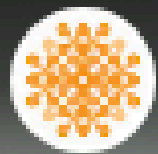
- IDEO
- Stanford d.school
- Nielsen Norman Group - UX Research

Civic Design / Public Interest

- The Lab @ DC
- Civic Tech Field Guide
- 18F / U.S. Digital Service

Civic AI!





Expert Insight Seminar - Civic AI with 6-Pack of Care, 5 November 2025

Institute for Ethics in AI Oxford



Watch on  YouTube