

THE PROCESS OF PROMOTION

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Human Centered Design and Our Mission

The process we used to complete this project is called Human Centered Design. It is a formula that uses principles of design thinking and human empathy to produce solutions to grand challenges that keep *people* at the forefront of the mind. It is a technique that embraces failure, questions often, is comfortable with change, and has a bias toward action. According to the IDEO's Design Kit website, the three basic methods of the human centered design process are Inspiration, Ideation, and Implementation ("Methods"). We worked through this process during our time in the Honors courses to solve the problem of the struggling arts community in Greenville. We began by conducting copious numbers of interviews on our topic. We found, in short, that there are artists in Greenville who want to practice their craft and that there is an interest in the community in both the performing and visual arts but there is a disconnect between these two groups. Therefore, our core mission is to connect artists with audiences for the purpose of enriching the arts scene in Greenville. We wanted to become promoters of the arts. Our original core mission was to connect the arts community on campus with the greater Greenville arts community. We later broadened our mission to allow for broader impact. We did a prototyping event and each time a version of our project failed, we pivoted to a new iteration of our product. Each time we did so, we were sure to re-center to our core mission to make sure that the people we were trying to help were continually in mind as we reshaped our plan. The idea is to have bias toward action, *doing* and evaluating the results.

To be honest, we did not follow this technique exactly as it is designed to be used but that is truly in the spirit of design thinking. We adapted and applied the principles and mindsets of Human Centered Design to our specific problem, time limitations, available resources, and personal skill sets. We also did not complete a task exactly. We did not come up with a great product or organization as a solution to our problem, rather we went through an iterative process that brought us closer to a solution. We aided some people, learned countless lessons and made some impact along the way. Hopefully what we did will help our partners move forward in creating something that will make an even larger impact in the future.

Iteration One: Talent Show

With our goal being to create events that give artists within Greenville an opportunity to showcase their talents, while simultaneously enlightening the public on what arts are available in their community, we believed that a talent show would be a great way to target this goal. A talent show would not only be a stage where artists could perform, but also a place where they can connect with other participants and hopefully gain a following from members of the audience. Furthermore, the audience would have had the opportunity to witness some of the talents for the first time, and perhaps find an artist that they would like to see again later. In addition to this, certain people may have felt more inclined to participate since they know that there will be other participants and audiences more likely to come to a show with multiple acts.

In order to set up this talent show, we teamed up with Noah Lee and Evin Flinchum of the ECU Honors College Student Council who were already working on a talent show for the Honors College. We contacted the central reservations office in order to find a venue, and were in the process of putting together a behind the stage crew that could handle all the technicalities involved with running a performance such as lighting, music or cues. As for the population we were seeking to involve, we decided to allow members of the Honors College to be performers and allow attendees to be anyone in the community. We had originally wanted to do this even on our own, but once the Honors College picked it up we decided to transform this talent show as an immersion experience for any events that we may host ourselves in the future. This talent show was also a good starting point as it was a small event that helped us get our foot in the door when it comes to running events such as these.

We intended to have a rehearsal for all the performances on March 16, 2019 where participants would perform thirty seconds of their act to ensure it was appropriate and streamlined. The actual talent show was set to be April 6, 2019 at 7 p.m. in the BlackBox Theatre with between sixteen and twenty acts. Our hosts were to be Noah Lee and Corey Winkler and included potential guest performances by an honors alumna who is a spoken word

poet/dancer, a local comedian, up to three Greenville drag queens, and two non-HC students. Trophies were to be awarded with judges being non-Honors College faculty or staff of ECU. This fit our mission pretty well as it involved students from across campus as well as community members

Flyers, word of mouth and online communication methods such as Instagram were used to inform potential performers of the upcoming talent show. A google form sign-up was produced and sent out to the entire Honors College. Unfortunately, when it came down to it, only one individual registered to participate in the talent show, so it had to be postponed to a later date. At this stage, our team decided to pivot to a new approach.

Another potential event we were considering was an Art Gallery where artists could show off their pieces and potentially sell them to interested attendees. We had considered having this tie in to the talent show potentially by having an art auction/gallery in the lobby of the talent show. People could look around at the art while they are waiting for doors to open for the show. In this area, we got in touch with McKenzie Shelton of the ECU Makers Residency in order to determine what would be the best plan of action, as well as to inform us about active art programs in Greenville. We also got in touch with Gerald Weckesser, a faculty member in the College of Fine Arts and Communication and the HNRS 3000 class. Weckesser, involved in craftsmanship, described how many of the art galleries he put on were repetitive and not growing in popularity. One key concern was that rarely anyone unaffiliated with the presenters or the College of Fine Arts and Communication attended the events. Furthermore, the events with nothing spectacular failed to attract new attendees even when food was provided.

Iteration Two: Creative Collective

We decided to abandon the idea of the talent show because when looking at the logistics of the show it didn't match our mission. Our group's mission was to establish events or functions that give artists within Greenville an opportunity to showcase talents, while

simultaneously enlightening the public on what arts are available in their community. The talent show did not match that mission because it lacked a strong community component and felt it would not have a lasting impact proportional to the amount of work we would have to put into it. So, we marked that as a failure and pivoted to our next idea.

Our new idea was the Creative Collective. With this new platform we wanted to be able to provide artists with a place to display their art. We decided it would be better to run monthly or bimonthly workshops and performances that people could attend to learn new skills in the arts and be exposed to new art forms, artists, genres of music, and musicians. The goal was to give the opportunity for members of the community to experience the many different forms of art that are studied and practiced at ECU, getting community patrons on campus. Equally, we wanted to get ECU students immersed in the arts culture of the community and following local musicians.

One example was having a community artist come on campus to give a workshop to which both students and community members were welcome. We wanted to alternate having performances and workshops and be sure to include a variety of visual arts and performing arts. At performance events we wanted to be sure that we had a program that included the performers social media, booking information, dates and locations of upcoming performances, and a short bio of the performer, as well as dates and locations of Creative Collective's upcoming performances. We thought this would maximize the likelihood that an audience member would go on to attend one of the performer's other shows, which is the true purpose of these events in the first place.

One aspect of this iteration was the Creative Collective instagram. This is what we wanted our main platform to be. Through this account we were going to keep people connected with all local art events in the community. First we would try to just find what was going on around town and post the flyers. Then we were planning on finding someone to go to the event and show our followers how the event went. We kept this on the back burner the whole time but didn't really keep up with it. We had a couple posts but it was mainly introducing the account. We also realized that this mainly just made us advertisers and not following our mission.

Since we were looking at many different options we had multiple key partners. Our main partners were Jeff Blinder, Bailey Steckbauer, Cameron Edwards, Dean White, and The Makers Residency. The Makers Residency helped so that we would have a club on campus that we could do our shows through and it would allow for it to be continued after our portion of the project was over. Dean white was needed so we could get projects funded and approved.

When we finally came up with our first prototype Bailey Steckbauer, Jeff Blinder and Cameron Edwards got involved. Our prototype event was called Guitars at the Galley. We wanted to put on a little show at the galley on College Hill to see how the East Carolina campus would respond. We acknowledge that it does not fit our mission to do an on campus event for mainly an on campus audience, but we wanted a smaller scale event for our first time planning such a performance. For this event we got in contact with Jeff Blinder because he had put on events similar to this except on a larger scale. He helped give us insight on what to do and help us with some equipment. Bailey Steckbauer was important to setting up the event because she

was in charge of events on College Hill, so she helped us get the location reserved. Lastly, Cameron Edwards was important because he was our singer, so without him we wouldn't have been able to put on the prototype.

The Guitars at the Galley event went better than we expected. Since we had a very popular location we had a bunch of people walk by and we were able to get some to stay for a little while and fill out our survey. We planned to use the survey results to inform our future events, keeping the opinions and needs of people central to our plan. The event, while it wasn't a complete disaster, it wasn't by any means without its issues. When trying to plan it we kept needing to jump through hoops. Weather was a main issue and it was close to exam time so we wanted to make sure we were not disturbing the students. This caused us to be putting it together very quickly so we weren't able to get all the advertising and supplies that we wanted. We did luck out and many fellow Honors College Students joined us and the coffee shop in the galley donated some goodies for us to enjoy. Even though things didn't go 100% as planned some things worked out in our favor.

Failure and Major Pivot

After our prototype with Guitars at the Galley, we left the spring semester of 2019 with the hopes that we would fulfill our mission statement in the upcoming year with the planning of events to showcase artists and their talents. Time flew by fast and when we arrived in the fall, the idea of planning events was now being questioned. Planning takes a lot of time and effort, especially if the goal is for the event to be successful. Some ideas for events included setting up galleries, having live music, and even having workshops for students to engage in the

arts. While these events all sound impactful and great, would they really be successful? Could Creative Collective put on a successful event with being efficient on time, materials, and money? We decided to pivot away from this idea because we were not getting anything productive done and a school year is short when using it to plan several successful events. We believed that our time and efforts could go to a more effective idea that would better support our mission statement.

As a team, we definitely started the fall semester in a slow manner. Our pivot was challenging as it took a while for us to figure out how to promote the arts in Greenville and give artists a platform. There were also communication issues that were prohibiting success and improvement. There was a lack of involvement in meetings, as only three of us at most were showing up to team meetings. This was a problem, as we could not brainstorm with only less than half of the members of the group being involved and collaborating. We addressed this to our mentor, Tim, that we were having problems communicating and finding times that would work for all of us. He decided that we would have more frequent meetings with him as a group so that there would be a formal and set time that we would meet. This was actually very effective and held everyone in Creative Collective to a standard.

After these meetings started to take off, our ideas for the future became more creative and possible. When thinking of new ideas, one of our biggest concerns was to include sustainability for either us or a new group that takes on this project in the future. With the help of our mentor, we started thinking of the legal issues and politics of Greenville, North Carolina. With more research and knowledge into our local community, we could help local artistic businesses gain business space and opportunities in our downtown district. With this, more

platforms for artists could arise. We could simply use our power as citizens and voice our concerns to important city meetings such as town halls where the local government is deciding on rules and laws. We thought this idea could definitely be sustainable and impactful, even if it is not a direct impact from us towards our art community. A lot of research would have to be done to give us the knowledge in actually voicing our opinion to the government and being effective at it.

As we began to research into this possible idea as a team, another opportunity came our way. The artists that we had play at our prototype event, Guitars at the Galley, were in the process of making an app called Showboost. Cameron Edwards and Nick Futral wanted to connect local artists, customers or fans, and venues or businesses to bring about more live entertainment into the area. This startup business had the intent of beginning with Greenville, and then making the app beneficial for nation wide use. The venues would have live musical acts to choose from, the artists could pick up gigs and shows and get themselves out there, and the customers could see what was happening locally and buy tickets to attend performances they would enjoy. This fit our mission statement as Creative Collective perfectly, as this business was trying to build a platform for local artists and bring more arts into the community. We met with them and became even more interested in their goal, and we decided from there that we wanted to help them achieve that goal. We became a team, the Creative Collective and Showboost. We gained the role of giving professional advice, reaching out to others for connections, and advertising and showcasing their business.

Iteration 3: Showboost

After finding the opportunity of working with the developers of Showboost we all began to fabricate a plan that would really accelerate this project to the next level. The plan was to prepare and present at the Pirate Entrepreneurship Challenge and advance through the competition to win the prize money which would be invested in the development of the app to get things off the ground. The Creative Collective and Showboost began having a lot of meetings with each other and a few with our project mentor. These meetings advanced our collaboration ability and enhanced our communication skills so that the group could work more cohesively.

The Creative Collective and Showboost then laid out a two phase plan to execute launch of the app and the ability to acquire funding. The Creative Collective was able to partner with Cameron and Nick and instruct them in the ways that we were qualified and they benefited us in ways that they were qualified. The Collective gave Showboost the ability to consolidate their information into a business model canvas, identify weak points within their pitch, and to help strengthen their revenue streams and customer segments. After many successful meetings and relentlessly direct feedback the Collective and Showboost had integrated their qualities and created a business model that was pretty good. The group, the brand, the graphics, information, and presentation had all been to impress the public as well as judges on what this idea had to offer. The Collective and Showboost team went on to present at the Pirate Challenge and marketed to people by word of mouth as well as a strong presentation and got

enough votes to win the first round and advance with other selected groups to the second round.

The next steps in phase one were to persistently strengthen the ShowBoost idea and have enough grit to make it past the second round. The group went on to the second round and unfortunately, did not advance again. This obstacle within phase one blindsided members of the ShowBoost and Collective team and we all dealt with it in our own ways. Losing the competition left us with no funds or promise to accelerate the app development process and it created another pivot that we had to work around. Both teams at this point became distant; there was less communication, less motivation, production of new ideas and advancement toward achieving other goals honestly came to a stop.

After a few weeks of non-communication we realized something had to be done and we could not let some competition define the production of the app and it being completed. Meetings had to be scheduled with our team mentor and the group and the problems had to be addressed. The team ideated and identified what the problems were, what needed to be done to fix them, and what the next steps were since the previous Phase one and Phase two plan had been cut short. Now there was a new aura in the group and progress was finally being made again. Responsibilities and accountability began falling on individuals within the group with a strict plan to get things done. An email was sent out in search of a programmer that would lead us into the direction we needed to go on the side of app development. There had been an unfortunate incident with a past programmer taking what little progress they had made on the app in the past so our main concern was getting development on the app complete.

On the opposing side of marketing and expansion we planned for ideas of an app launch party, acquiring users, and a form of communication between customers and the brand ShowBoost. An Instagram was made and a website to preview what we were all about and within a week we went from 10 followers to almost 200 followers. The customer segments and customer interaction was growing stronger. The group found a promising programmer that could complete the app in a good amount of time. Progress was being made and plans were running accordingly. The Group had overcome its second pivot and obstacle point and actual ground was being made. We were so close to having a final working product, a success where we helped impact an app developer with a business mindset and integrated out human centered design, lean launch pad, and business model canvas qualifications. Everything was working great then COVID-19 hit and everything came to a complete stop.

While we did not have a final product to show for all of our hard work, the process we went through to get to where we ended up displayed the value of Human Centered Design as well as the need for a product like Showboost. Although our time working on this project has come to an end, we hope that this crazy process we have taken to promoting artists has had some lasting impact. If Showboost goes live and gains users, we are confident that it will achieve our goal of connecting local artists with local audiences and enriching the Greenville arts community.

Personal Reflection

After reflecting on the last two years of being an honors student, I really understand now why we did the exercises and tasks we did our freshman year, in the Honors 2000 and 3000 courses. The Human Centered Design is truly an amazing outline for life and for starting a new business or task. We were in the state of learning all of this during our freshman year, but when taking the Honors 4500 class, we were put out into the real world. We had to figure out how to carry out our mission with no one holding our hands or telling us what to do. We had to rely on one another as a team, and used what we learned the prior year with the help of our mentor, Tim Christensen.

Creative Collective had a complex school year to say the least but I do believe our year was filled with life long lessons for every member of the team to hold and take with them to their future endeavors. Full participation and communication from group members, including the team that we partnered up with, Showboost, was complicated from the very beginning. I see this as our biggest problem throughout the whole year, and it did hold us back from being more efficient and bringing out more successes. This is real life though, you will never have everyone putting all their effort in like you might do. There will always be curves in the road when trying to accomplish something, but that does not mean that it cannot be done with a little extra effort if you are passionate enough about it.

We pivoted a lot this year, but I do think it was for the best. It seemed like wasted time in the moment but now looking back, it was just progress. Progress is an amazing thing and it helps you grow. At the end of this experience, I can confidently say that this project did give me a look into the real world and it showed me how to conquer it, despite any obstacles that get in the way. I believe my team and I still had success in this project, and we helped mentor Showboost to become a better and more effective business. I believe their future will be bright and Creative Collective deserves some of that credit for sure. I am proud of Creative Collective for our success, despite the many obstacles.

Works Cited

“Methods.” Design Kit, IDEO.org, www.designkit.org/methods#filter.