How might we improve the prayer request process at Belmont Christian Church?

MODULE 1

Alternative Worlds
Schematic Diagramming
Concept Poster

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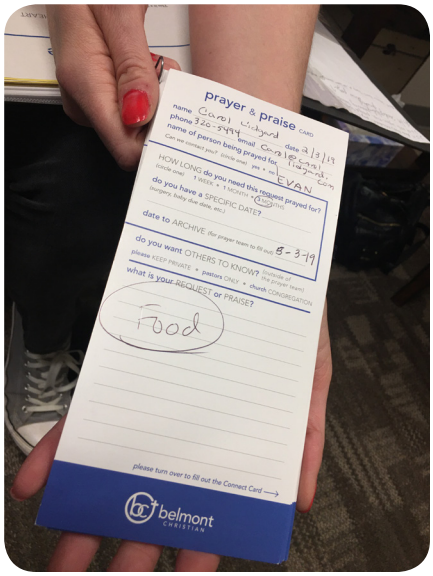
Problem Statement

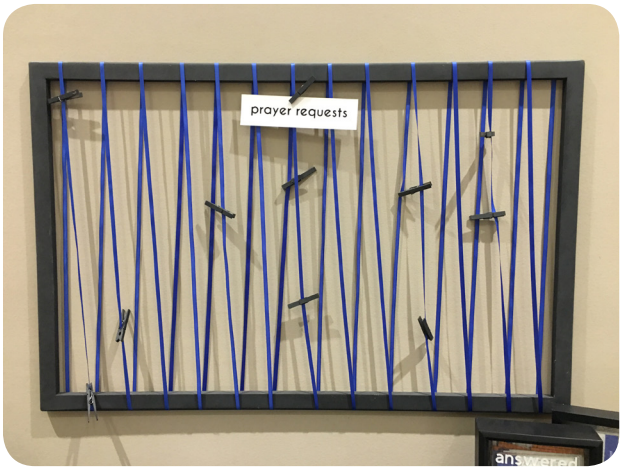
How might we improve the prayer request process at Belmont Christian Church?

Belmont Christian Church is a popular church in Christiansburg, VA with a fast-growing congregation. Robin Dowdy, a First Lady at the church, invited me there for a visit one Sunday where I had the opportunity to explore and experience one of their services. Robin is active in several ministries in the church, which keeps her very busy. I reached out to her to see if there was anything she was involved with that was in need of fresh ideas to be more efficient. She mentioned she was the leader of the prayer team and how cumbersome the prayer request process was. Seeing this as a topic to further explore, I scheduled an interview with Robin to learn more about the prayer request process.

During the interview with Robin, I learned that a prayer request is when someone, typically from the church congregation, wants something to be prayed for on their behalf, either by the church congregation, the prayer team or a pastor. Every Sunday church service, a pastor advertises a Prayer and Praise Card, where people are encouraged to provide a prayer request or share a praise they have received. Requesters fill out the card, which asks them to include their contact information, to indicate if they wish to be contacted, how long they need the request to be prayed for, who they want to know about the prayer request or praise, and what the prayer request or praise is. If the requester wants their prayer request to be prayed for by the congregation they hang it up on the prayer request wall, and if they want it to be kept private, they place it into the "private prayers" box. Prayer and Praise Cards marked private either go to a group called the prayer team or to the pastors to be prayed for, depending on what they indicate on the card. The church receives between 5-15 Prayer and Praise Cards each Sunday.



Prayer and Praise Card

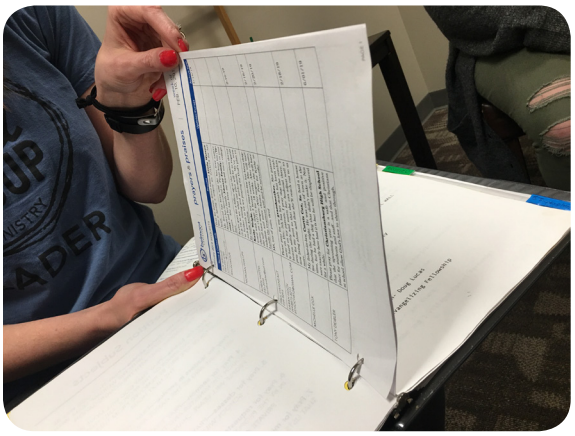


Prayer requests wall

Private prayers box

Robin described the prayer request process as time consuming and frustrating to manage. Dana Joyce, a prayer team member, was said to play a vital role in managing and communicating all prayer requests to Robin, the prayer team, and pastors. Dana is currently the only person helping Robin with the process. I asked Robin to walk me through the entire prayer request process which I identified to be 13-steps, detailed below:

1. Pastors advertise the Prayer and Praise Cards during each service.
2. People write their request on the cards.
3. Requesters hang the cards on the prayer request wall or place in the private prayers box.
4. Dana grabs all of the cards off of the prayer request wall.
5. Dana takes photos of the cards.
6. Dana sends the photos of the cards to Robin, which alerts her of immediate needs.
7. First 3 days of the week, Dana types up the requests and sends to Robin.
8. Robin has an InDesign file with a table for each month of prayers broken down in columns listing prayer requesters name, contact information, prayer request, updates received, and archive date.
9. Pray through the request.
   - Congregational prayer requests are announced every service.
   - Private prayer requests for the prayer team are printed and placed in the prayer team's binder to pray for every Sunday.
   - Private prayer requests for pastors are entered into a Google document and emailed out to them.
10. Follow-up on the prayer request.
    - Robin emails or calls the requester up to 3 times to follow-up on the request to see if the prayer had been answered or if they need more prayer.
11. Robin updates the prayer request in the InDesign document, indicating if needs are met or if they should continue to pray.
12. If there is a praise report or an answered prayer reported, cards are physically put in the "answered prayers" shadow box to provide visual representation of hope.
13. Robin archives or discards the cards depending on if the prayers were answered or if the prayer team needs to continue praying for the issue.



Prayer requests compiled inside the prayer team's binder.

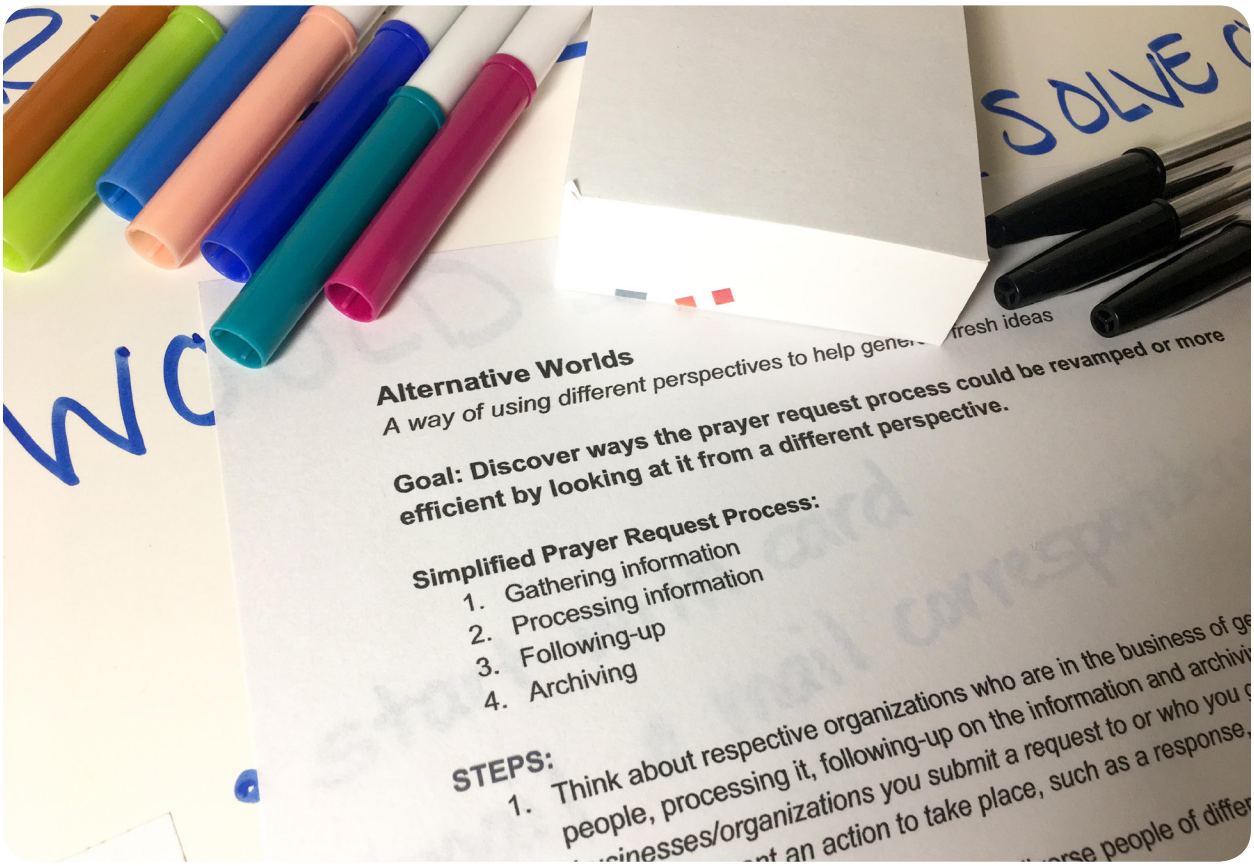
Answered prayers shadow box

Robin told me that she had been wondering if their prayer requests process could be more efficient. She mentioned how challenging it was to keep up with the current process and organize the cards itself. The number of cards received can also be overwhelming and some have illegible handwriting. At the end of the interview, we both agreed that the prayer request process was a worthy topic in need of fresh ideas. Therefore, I planned a design thinking workshop selecting strategies focused on in this course that would help provide different perspectives, a better understanding, and inspiration for the future.

Research Participants

Robin helped me identify stakeholders who were knowledgeable about the prayer request process and willing to participate in implementing the strategies. Research participants were Robin, Dana, and Kasey Blouse, a new member of the church and Belmont Prayer Team. I facilitated a design thinking workshop featuring Alternative Worlds, Schematic Diagramming, and Concept Poster to help generate fresh ideas for the prayer request process at Belmont Christian Church. I created instructional handouts to aid in facilitating the workshop and executing the strategies. The instructional handouts created predominately served as my guide to effectively explain and facilitate implementation of the methods to participants.

Research participants from left to right: Dana Joyce, Robin Dowdy and Kasey Blouse.



Alternative Worlds

The goal of the method was to discover ways the prayer request process could be revamped or more efficient by looking at it from a different perspective. Materials provided for participants to conduct the method were the Alternative Worlds instructional handout, sticky notes, pens, markers, and a poster board. I simplified the 13-step process into 4 major steps and encouraged participants to think of the process in that way in order to brainstorm and identify organizations who follow a similar process.

The instructional handout stated the following:

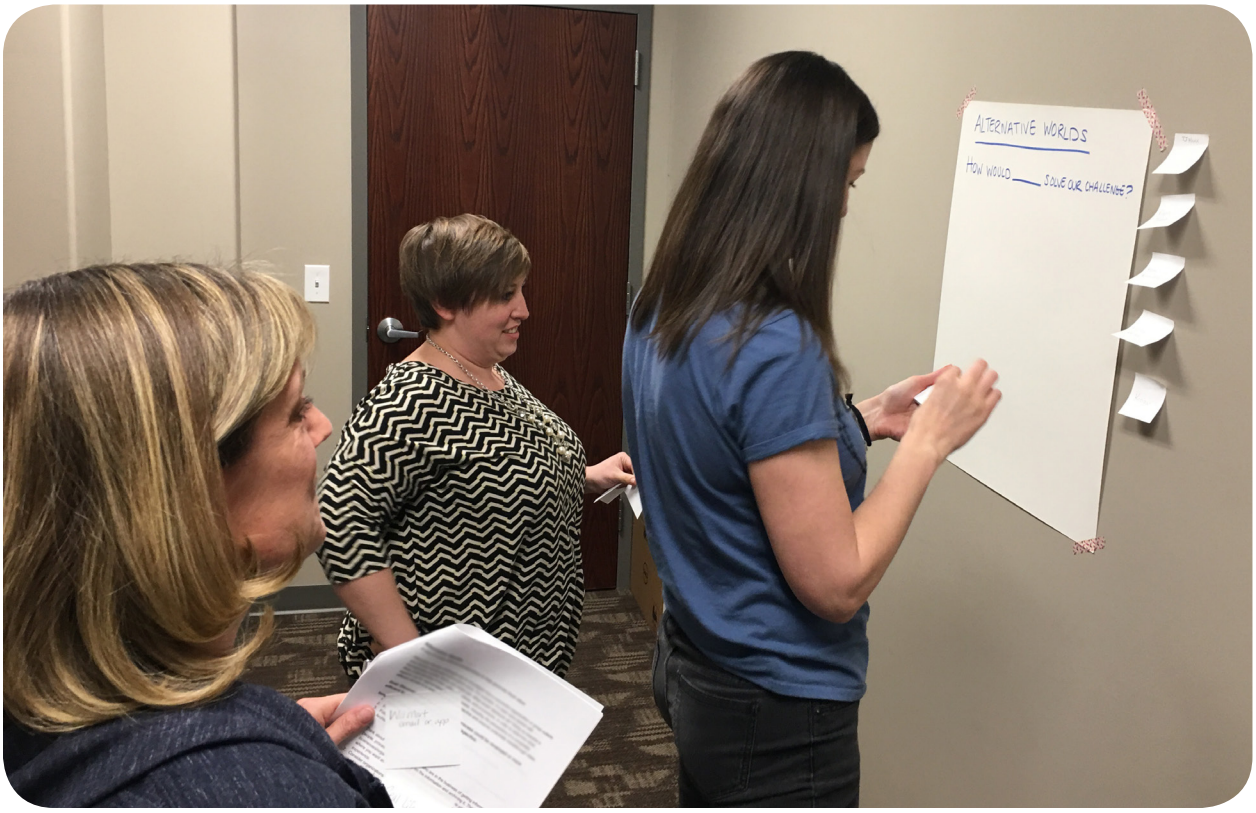
1. Think about respective organizations who are in the business of getting information from people, processing it, following-up on the information, and archiving it. Think of businesses/organizations you submit a request to or who you give your information to where you want an action to take place, such as a response, service or an improved experience.
2. Consider organizations that serve diverse people of different ages—similar to the make-up of the Belmont congregation.

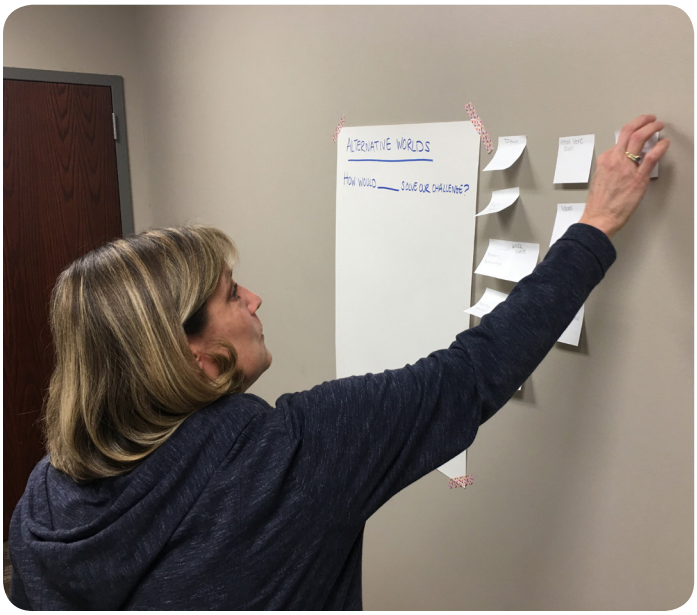
3. List out those organizations (one per sticky note).
4. Select a few alternative worlds to explore.
5. Discuss key attributes.
6. Ask: How would _____ solve our challenge?
7. Seek various ideas inspired by the new perspective.

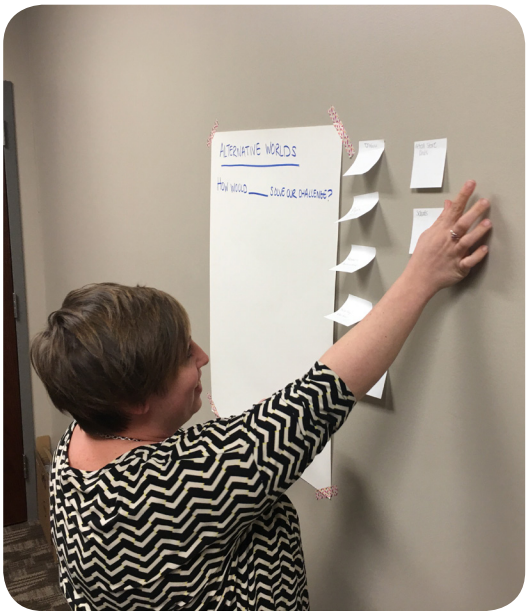
Participants discussing the simplified prayer request process presented in the instructional handout.

Participants, individually, listing all organizations they could think of on sticky notes.

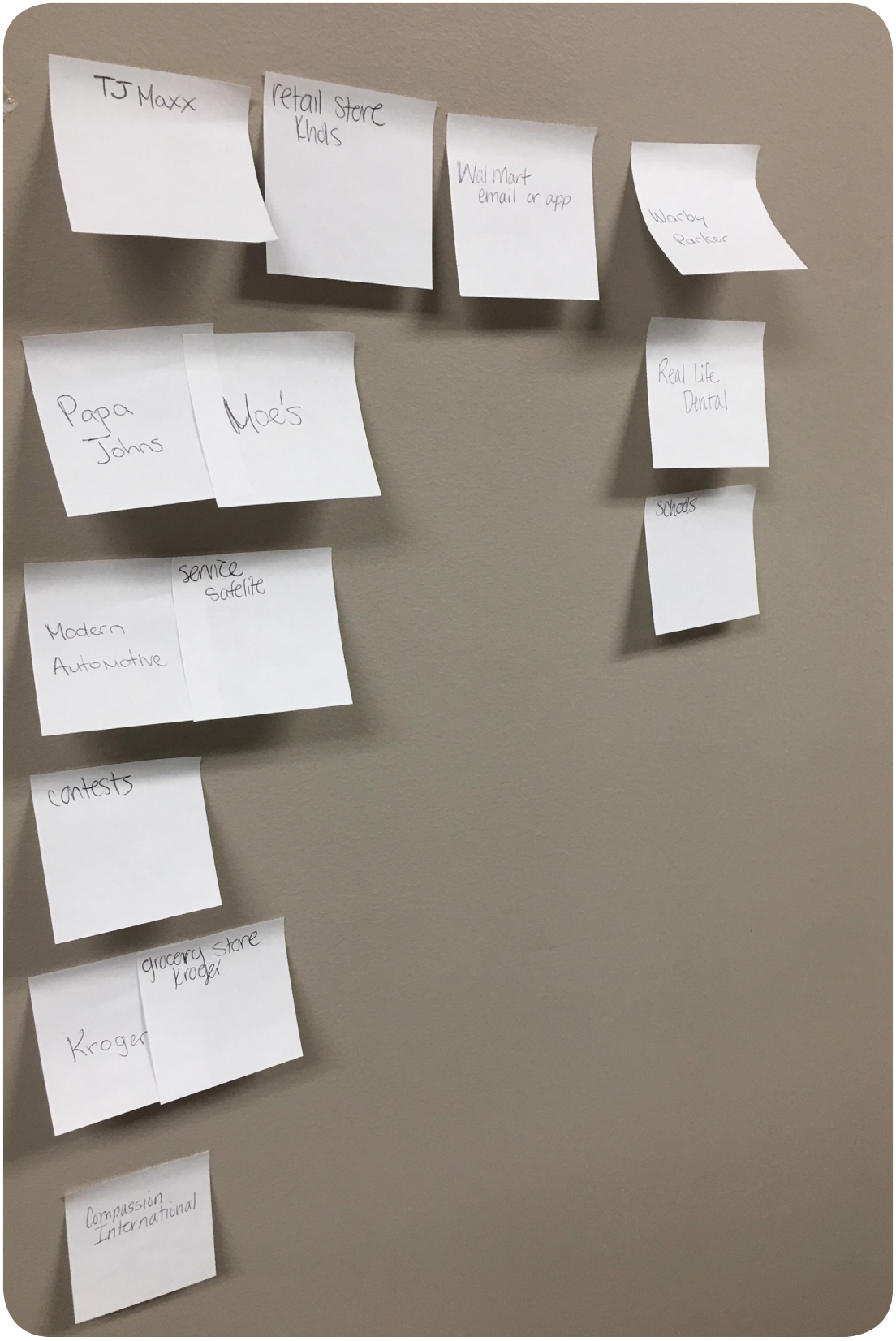
Participants were instructed to post sticky notes on the wall, so we could discuss the organizations everyone came up with.



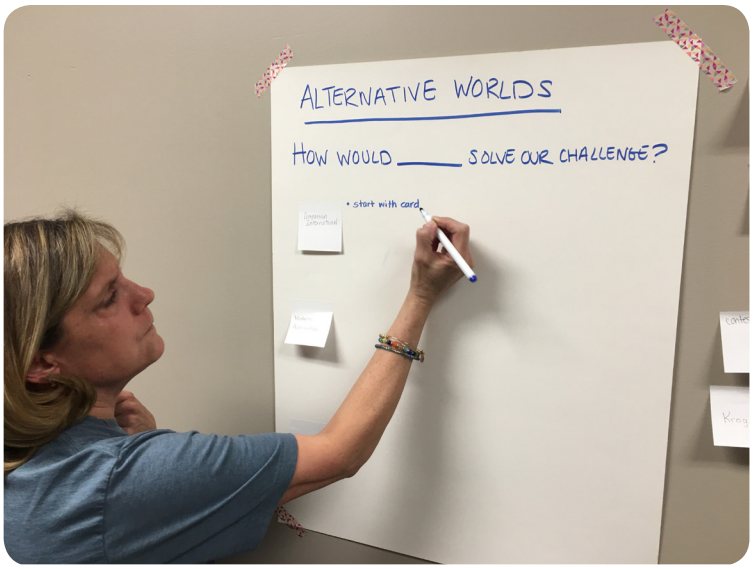


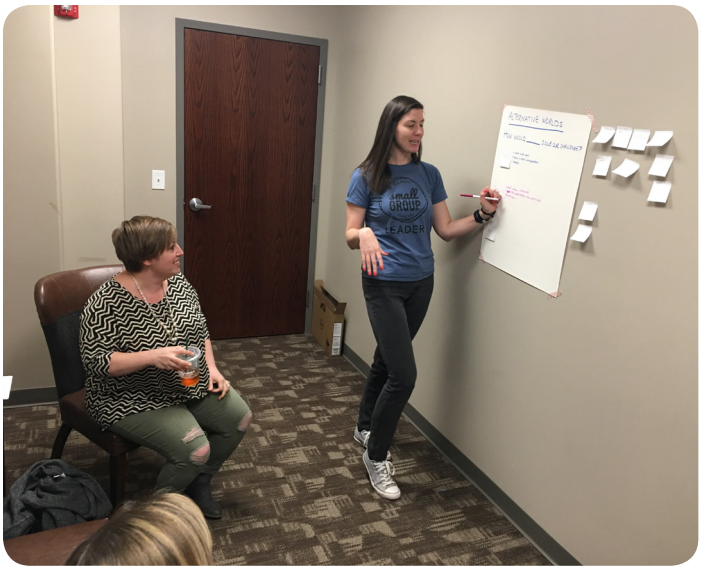


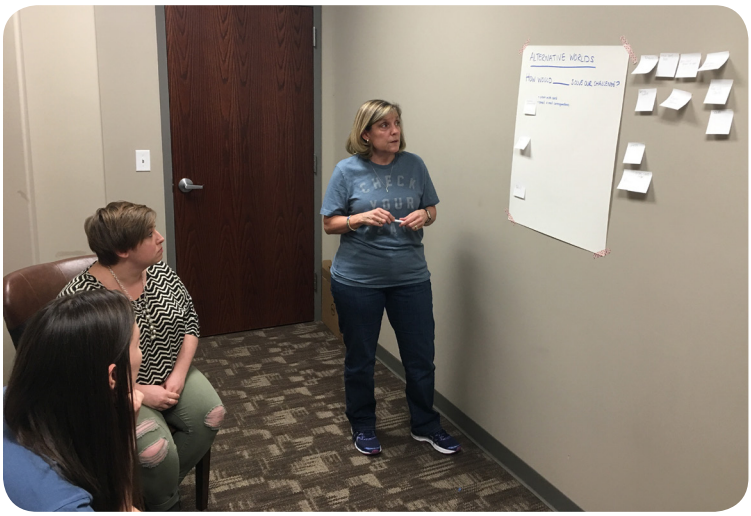
Organizations participants came up with, grouped together based on industry.

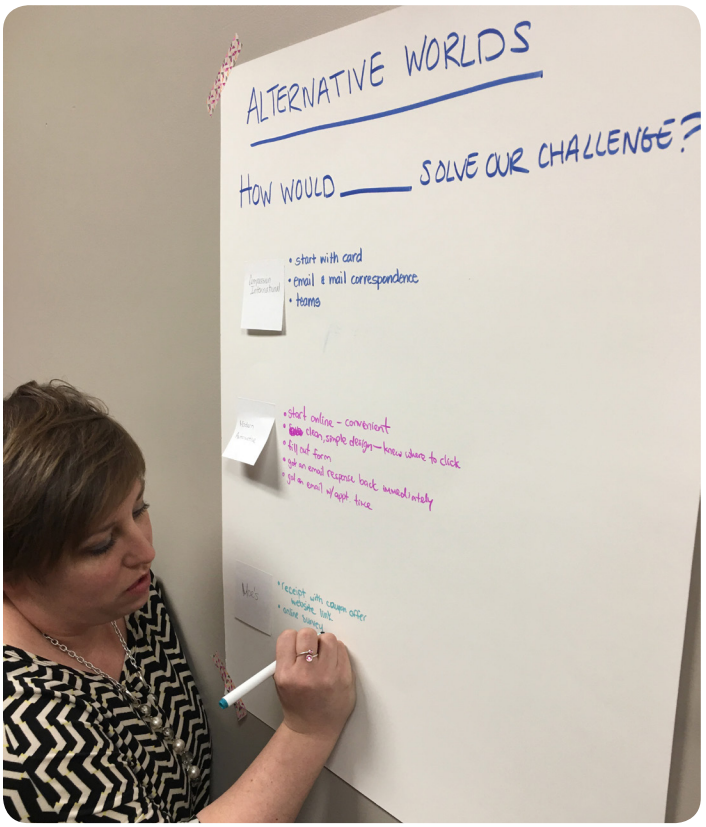


Participants were instructed to select their top organizations to explore from the list. Participants wrote and discussed key attributes of those organizations and how they think the organization would solve their challenge.

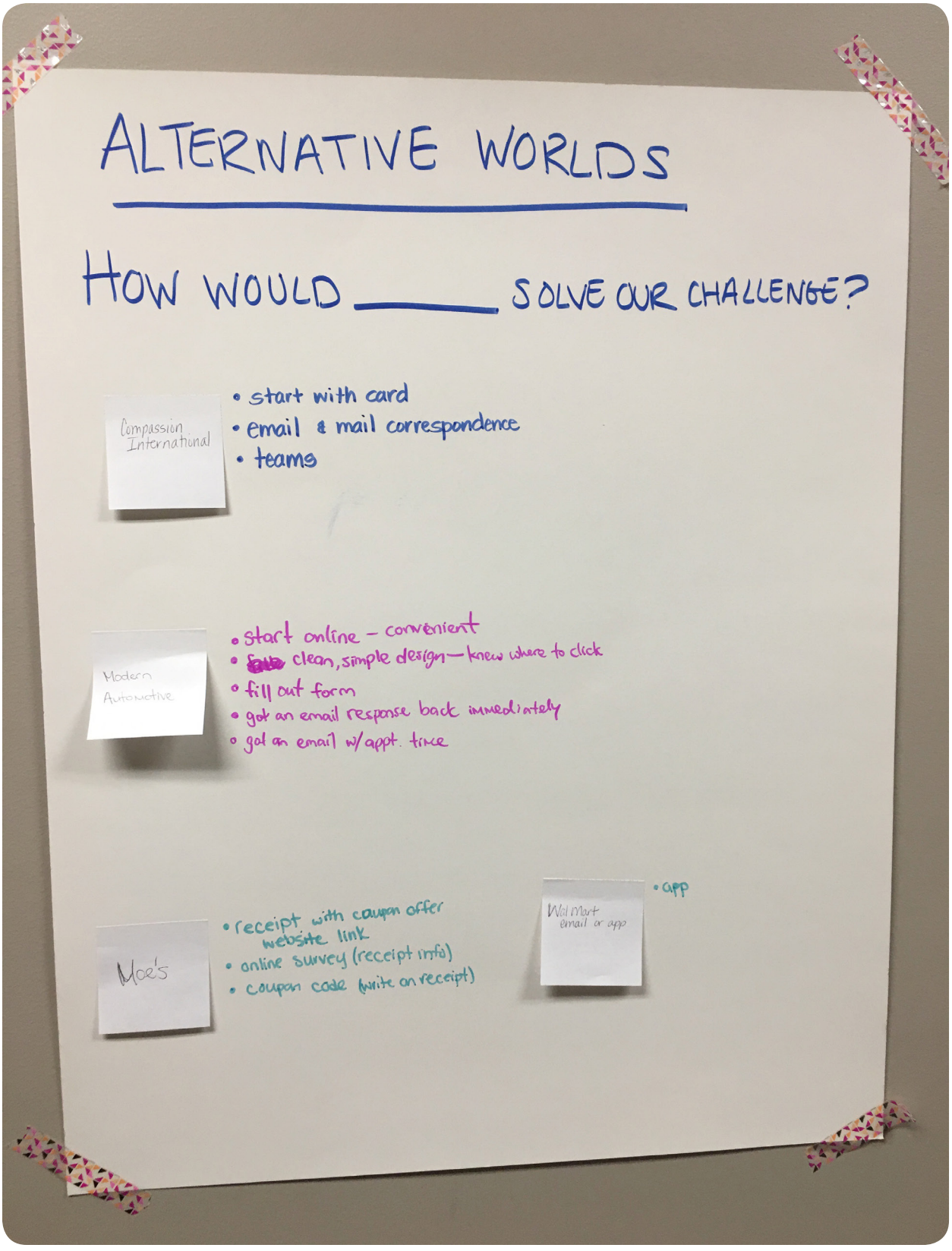








Final Alternative Worlds implementation.



Outcomes

After conducting the Alternative Worlds method, participants were able to see a different perspective for handling the prayer request process. All of the organizations the participants chose to explore solved the prayer request process through use of a website or mobile application. Prior to conducting the strategy, when participants were brainstorming organizations, they were quick to oppose the idea of having prayer requests submitted online. They were thinking and discussing all of the reasons it would not work and the opposition they would receive, but I urged them not to limit themselves in their thinking and to focus on how the organizations identified would fix their problem. At the end of the method, all participants came to a consensus that the prayer request process would work best if it were done through a website.

Participants discussing discoveries and insights of the Alternative Worlds method.

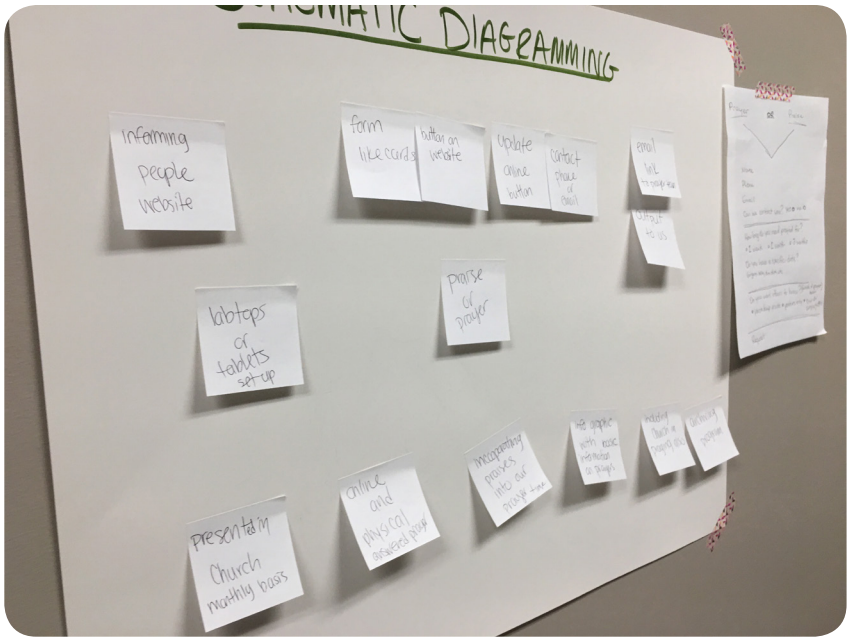
Schematic Diagramming

The goal of the method was initially established to outline the proposed prayer request process, then shifted to designing how the prayer request process could work if conducted on a mobile website. Materials provided for participants to conduct the method were the Schematic Diagramming instructional handout, scissors, pens, a pad of sketch paper, and a poster board.

The instructional handout stated the following:

1. Think about the ideas generated from the previous method regarding the prayer request process.
2. Determine the basic steps of the proposed prayer request process.
   - Write or draw out each step of the process.
   - Write each step on a sticky note.
3. Compose the steps in a clean and clear way.
4. Arrange in an overall diagram outlining the steps of the process. Draw arrows between each step to show sequence of steps.

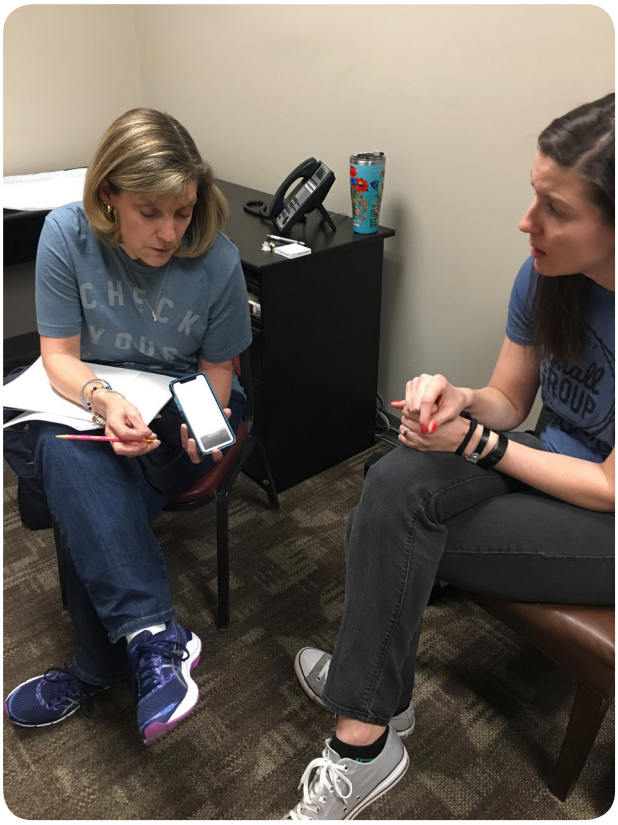
We initially brainstormed the process for moving the prayer request process online by writing each step of the process on a sticky note, which was plotted in order of sequence on the poster board. Soon into that process, I realized structuring the proposed solution in this way was not lending the results I was looking for in the most clear, concise way. I then shifted the goal of the method to outlining a mobile website navigation flow for the prayer request process, since this was a viable option they believed could solve their problem.



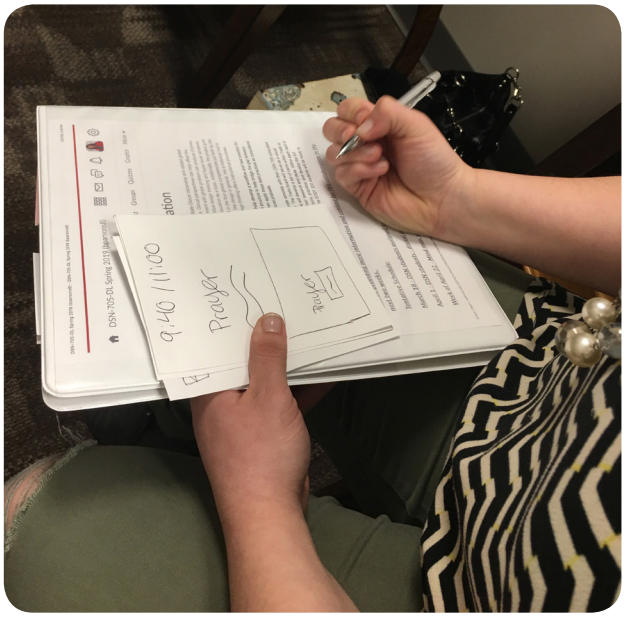
Initial outline of prayer request process done on sticky notes.

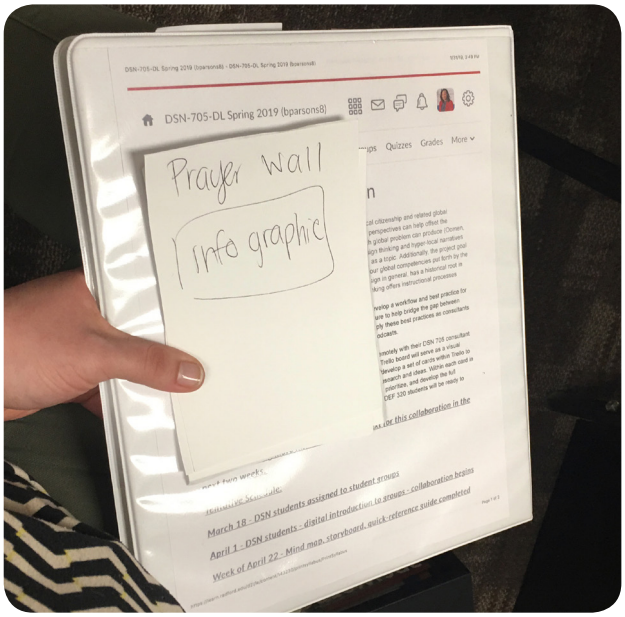
Participants looking at mobile sites for inspiration and discussing ideas for mobile web layouts.

Participants looking at Belmont Christian Church's mobile website and brainstorming how the prayer request process could be integrated in.

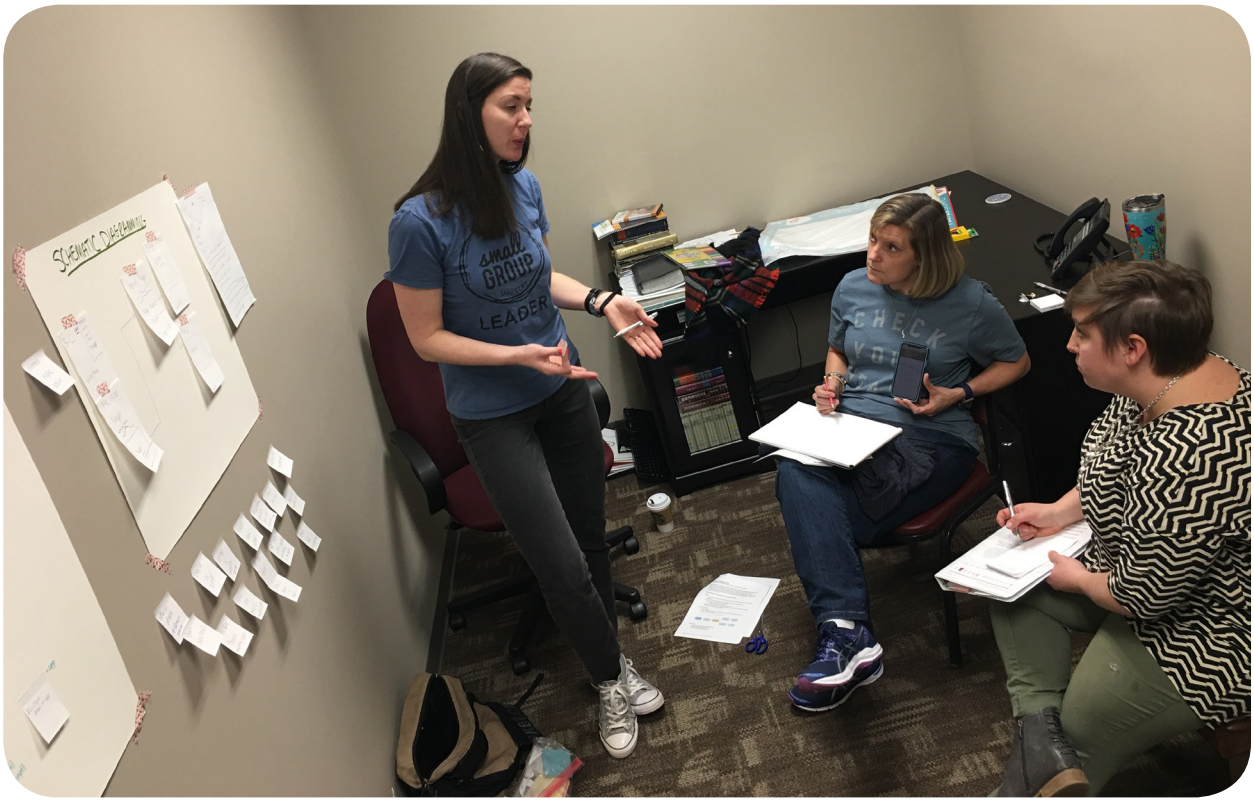


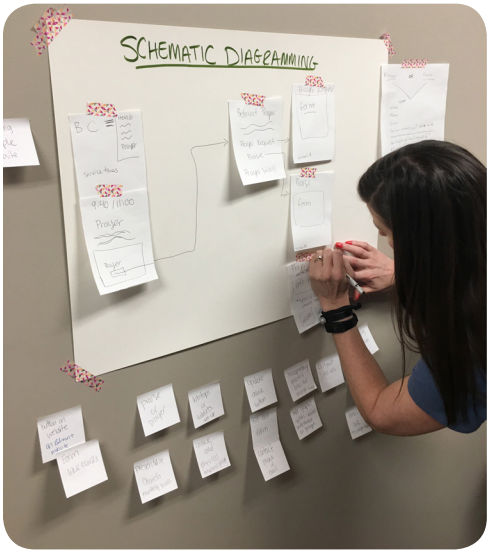
Kasey sketching screen layouts for the mobile website.

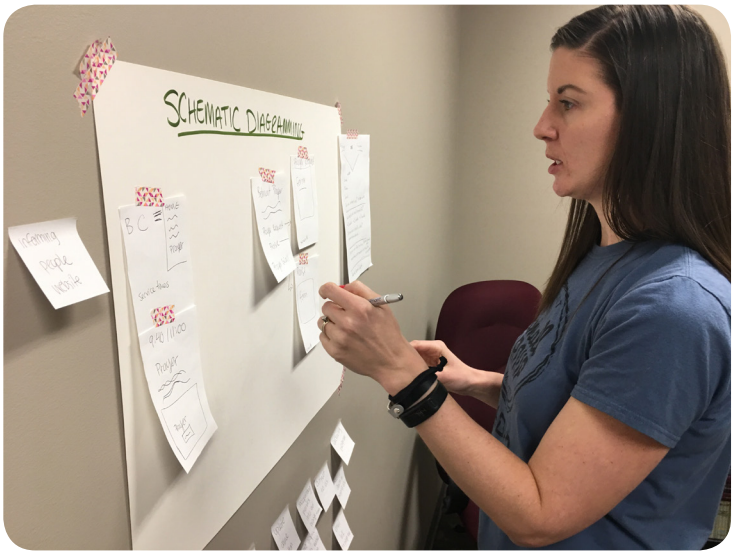




Participants discussing, drawing, and outlining the layout of the mobile site and navigation flow.

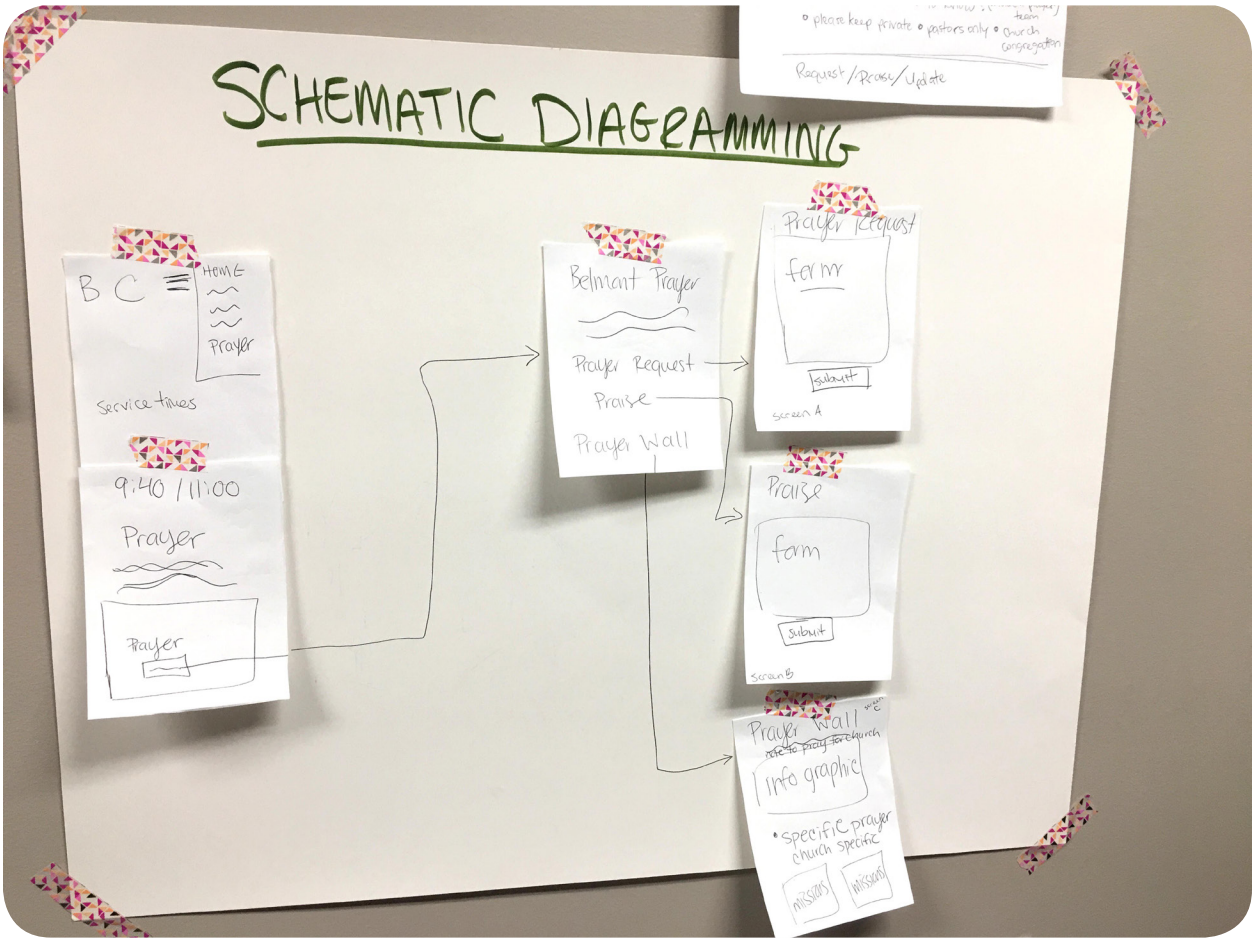






A video of participants talking through the process can be viewed at the following link:

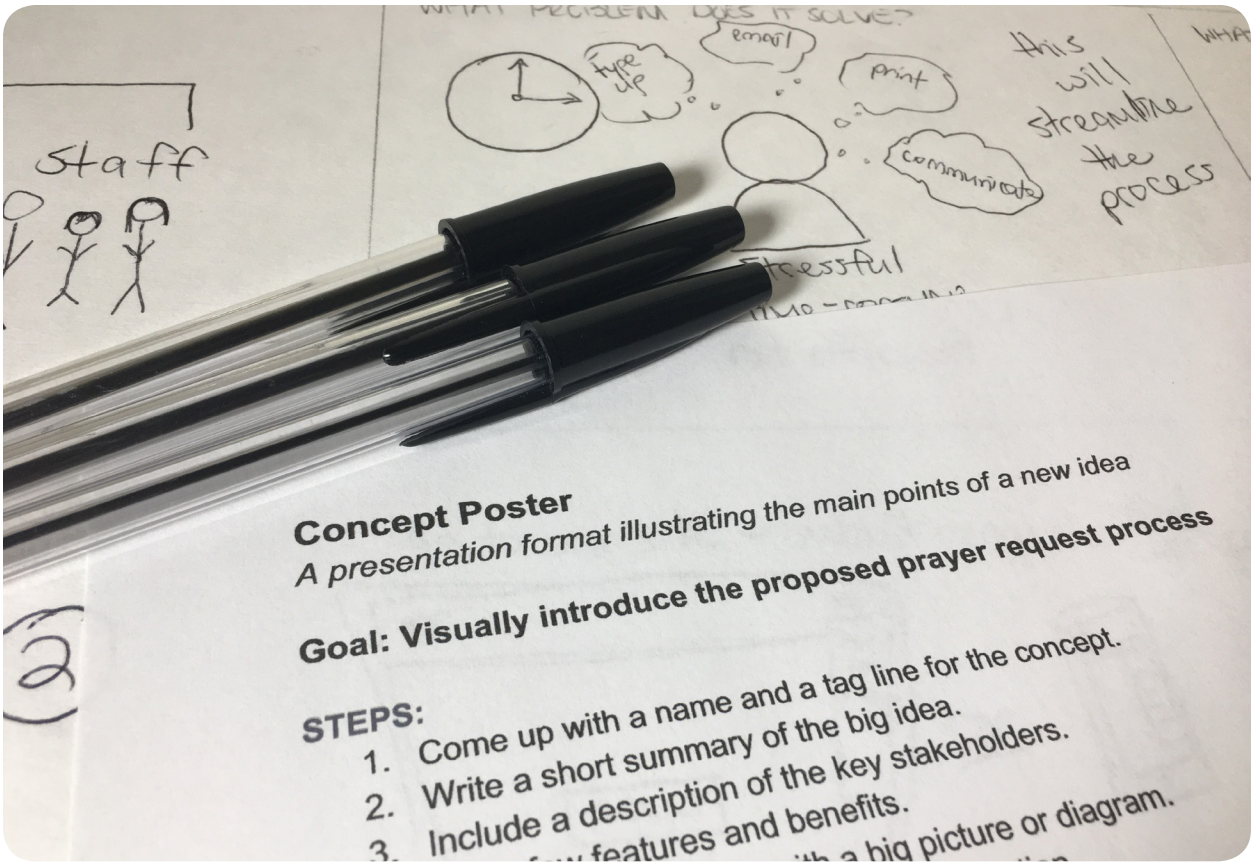
Final Schematic Diagramming implementation.



Outcomes

After conducting the Schematic Diagramming method, participants were able to see how integrating prayer request submissions on the Belmont Christian Church website could be conducted. They discovered that integrating prayer requests on the current website wouldn't require as much work to as they originally thought. Participants were able to work out functional details for submitting prayer requests through the website and see how it could be visually represented online. A shared understanding about how an online prayer request submission portal could work was established. Creative ideas and future possibilities were generated from executing this method.

A video of participants discussing the proposed navigation of the prayer request mobile site can be viewed at the following link:
https://photos.app.goo.gl/XefpK4bLHMBgQ59g9



Concept Poster

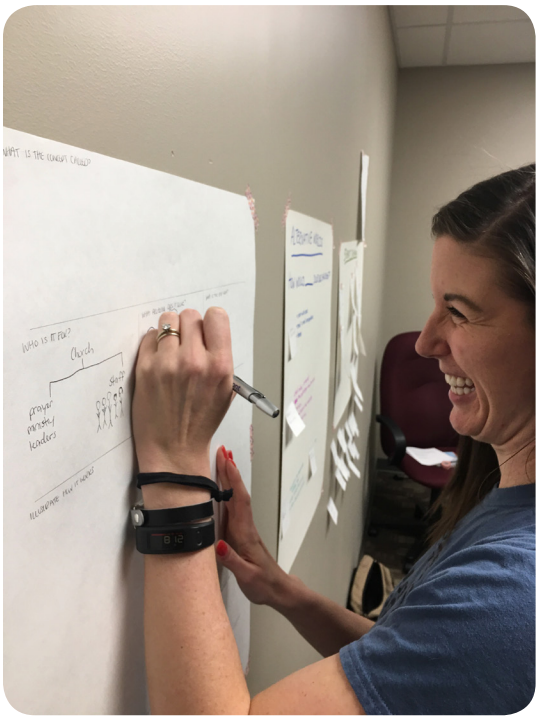
The goal of the method was to visually introduce the proposed prayer request process. Materials provided for participants to conduct the method were the Concept Poster instructional handout, pens, and the Luma Institute Concept Poster template drawn on a poster board.

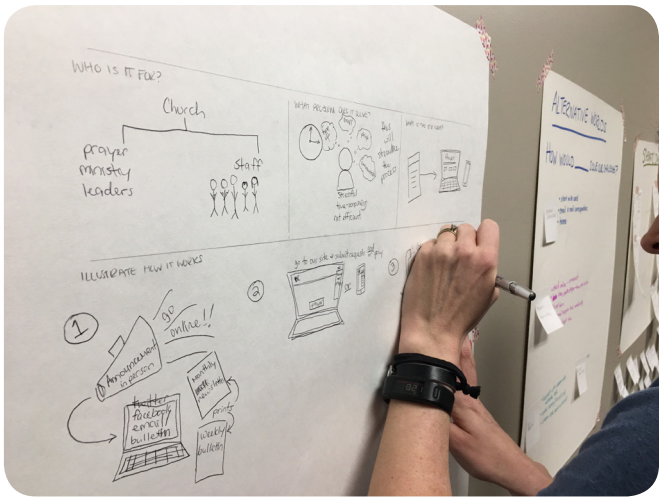
The instructional handout stated the following:

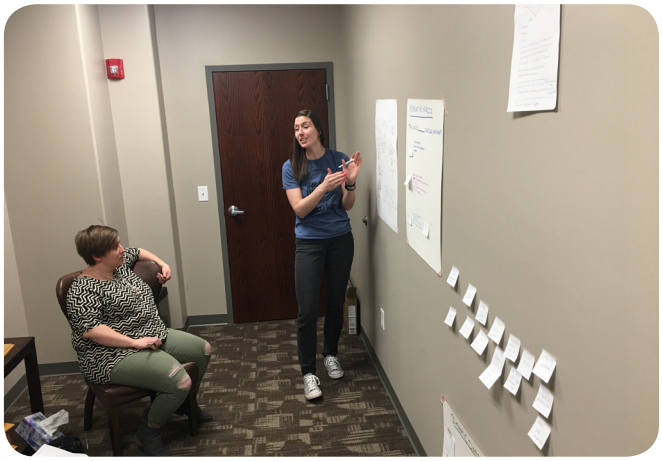
1. Come up with a name and a tag line for the concept.
2. Write a short summary of the big idea.
3. Include a description of the key stakeholders.
4. List a few features and benefits.
5. Illustrate the concept with a big picture or diagram.
6. Add a timeline for developing the solution.
7. Draft the layout and draw the final poster.

All participants were encouraged to illustrate the Concept Poster, but Robin volunteered to take the lead on doing so. Everyone contributed to the Concept Poster by providing input on what should be included on the poster and ways to go about visually representing it.

Participants discussing and drawing out the Concept Poster.

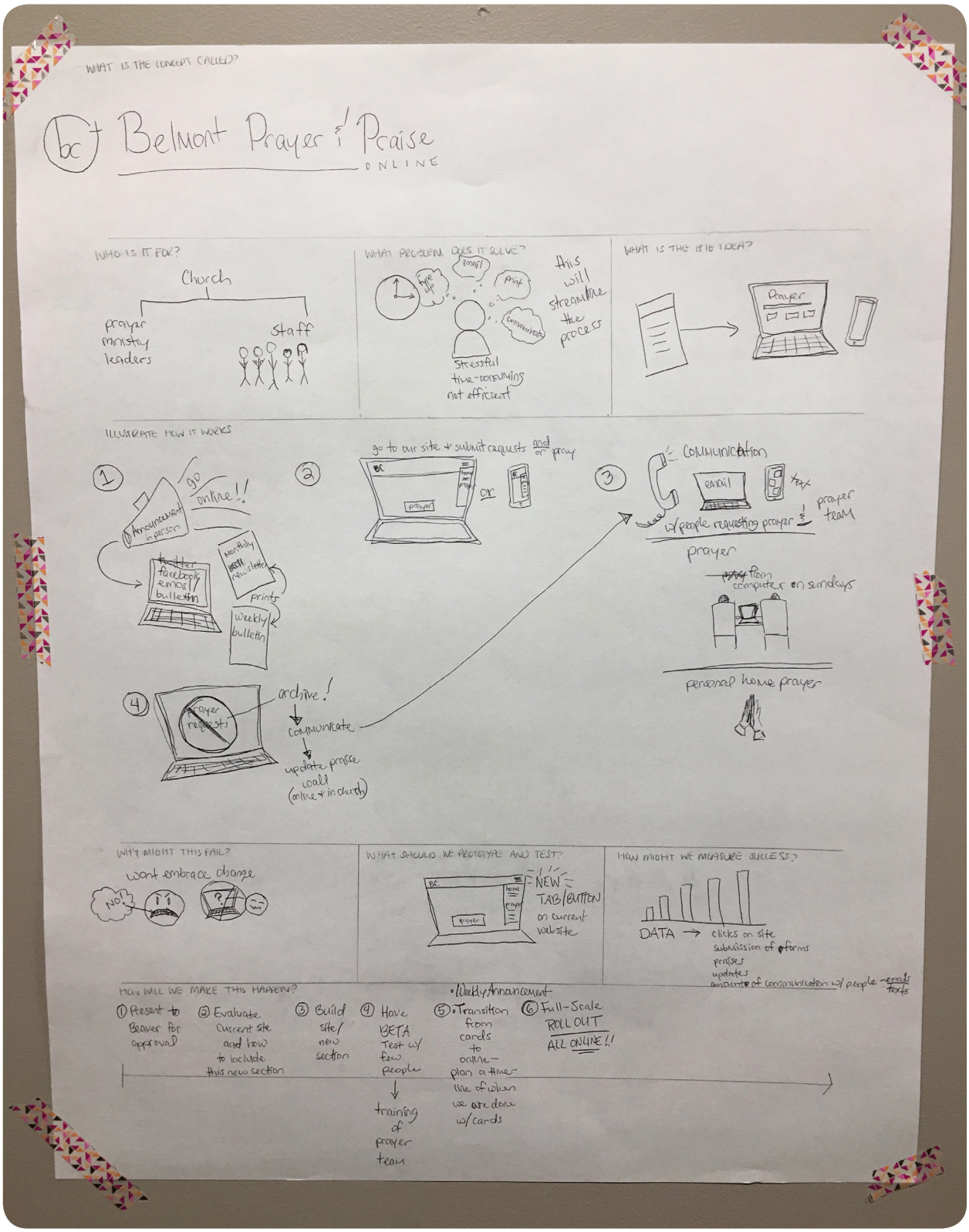






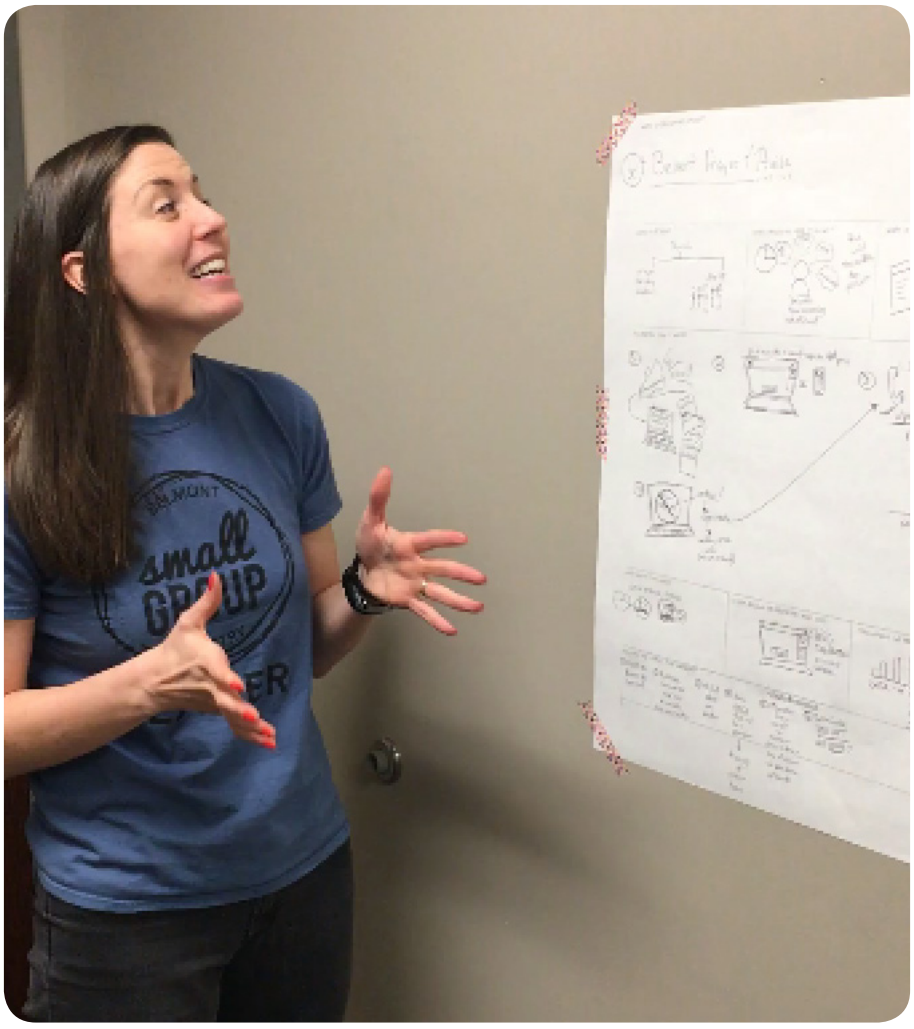
Videos of participants discussing and drafting the Concept Poster can be viewed at the following links:
https://photos.app.goo.gl/WS9t4riq3PoMR1Hb6
https://photos.app.goo.gl/ZhVkos5xSqNRQTCq8

Final draft of Concept Poster.



Outcomes

After conducting the Concept Poster method, participants were able to holistically see how the prayer request process could work. Participants answered all of the question prompts on the template, further refining the new idea, which addressed any doubts that may have been lingering about this proposed solution. The Concept Poster was able to provide participants a vision for the future and a case for support. Participants were inspired and encouraged about the possibility of moving the prayer request process online after completing this method. I refined and created the final Concept Poster based on the draft for participants to reference moving forward.



A video of Robin pitching the new prayer request process with the Concept Poster can be viewed at the following link: https://photos.app.goo.gl/mFEiBUgbctGqBGHy7

Final Concept Poster created for the prayer team.

A close-up version of the final Concept Poster can be seen at the following link:
https://drive.google.com/open?id=1wshT9z-ZdI7ImGuLhiNeUHl_GEfcC2_R

Conclusion

Prior to conducting the strategies, research participants never considered prayer requests could be done online. They recognized how cumbersome and overwhelming the process was, but had no idea how it could be fixed. They believed having prayer requests submitted through a website or mobile application would be too difficult to grasp for their senior members or those who are computer illiterate. They were concerned about dealing with church members who do not like change. Once I was able to get them out of that mindset, so they could fully immerse themselves in the methods conducted, they saw the possibilities. I believe breaking their 13-step process down to 4-steps was eye-opening for them. After implementing Alternative Worlds, participants started looking at how respective organizations would tackle the problem and were given a fresh perspective. Visually seeing how adding prayer requests to the website worked through Schematic Diagramming, brought greater understanding and belief that going online was a viable solution. Implementing the Concept Poster strategy gave them a vision for the future and courage to pursue the idea.

Overall, the design thinking workshop conducted with participants surpassed my expectations. Big ideas were voiced with each method that was implemented. Participants were very engaged with the strategies and process. Facilitating this workshop was particularly exciting for me, because I believe we came up with a solution that could actually become a reality. Participants left the workshop feeling hopeful and inspired. They told me that they plan to present this idea to their Senior Pastor.

One Month Follow-up

Upon sharing results from the ideas generated from the design thinking workshop with the Senior Pastor, the church approved to move the prayer request process online. They decided to utilize a free mobile application, available through the App Store and Google Play, designed to organize and facilitate prayers called Echo Prayer. The prayer team is currently Beta testing the app and all is working well. They plan to hold trainings to teach the congregation how to use it. All communications among the prayer team will take place through the app. Praises are also being recorded through the app as the requestor can mark when their prayer has been answered and comment on it as well. A launch date to roll the new prayer request process to the congregation is set for July 2019.