

**Framing and prioritizing ways to go about filling the  
Roanoke Chapter of the American Advertising Federation  
Diversity Chair position**

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DSN 700 Advanced Design Studio III  
Project 3

## Problem Statement

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### **How might we go about filling the Roanoke Chapter of the American Advertising Federation Diversity Chair position?**

The Roanoke Chapter of the American Advertising Federation (AAF Roanoke) is Roanoke's only professional organization devoted entirely to the business of advertising. They offer professional development, provide public service to underserved communities, and educational enrichment opportunities for their members and the community. I have been a member of AAF Roanoke since 2008. I am also a member of Discovering Advertising Protégés (DAP), a local affiliate of AAF Roanoke, and have been serving on their committee for the past 4 years. DAP was created, specifically, to promote inclusion and support of diversity within the advertising industry targeting multicultural high school students. The DAP committee channels efforts into one over-arching project: AdScape, an educational and motivational day-long program funded through the support of generous sponsorships – offering advanced training in advertising to high school students interested in graphic design, media and marketing. This program is designed to cultivate advertising talent, at the high school level, and encourage students to view advertising as a viable career choice by providing professional guidance, leadership, and networking opportunities enhancing students' understanding of marketing communication. Putting together the AdScape event was bit of a challenge this year. It was also the first year we did not have an AAF Roanoke Diversity Chair serving on our committee. Recognizing this as an opportunity to better understand the issues surrounding the challenges faced this year and to practice the strategies focused on in this project, I contacted Jamal Millner, Founder of DAP, Past Diversity Chair of AAF Roanoke, and Past President of AAF Roanoke, for an interview to gain overall insight into DAP, AdScape, and its mission in AAF Roanoke.

Based on experience planning and presenting at AdScape, conversations I've had with a few members of the DAP committee, and observations I have made along the way, I thought I had an idea of what the challenges were and what we should focus implementing strategies on to help with planning and improving AdScape next year. However, the focus of the project shifted after my interview with Jamal. Despite having worked under Jamal's leadership in DAP for the past few years, I learned through the interview that there were several things I had not known or realized about AAF Roanoke, DAP and how AdScape came about.

Jamal Millner is the owner and creative director of M3:GRAFIX, a design and logic studio in Roanoke, VA. He began his career in advertising designing fliers, logos and audio covers while a student at William Fleming High School in Roanoke and has received numerous awards for his work. He is dedicated to helping young minorities break into advertising. I learned that when Jamal first joined AAF Roanoke there was no diversity program established, however, there was a diversity initiative in place to attract African American males to the advertising and marketing industry. African American males are the most underrepresented population in the advertising and marketing industry, making up only .5%-1%, based on an industry job survey conducted at that time.

When Jamal initially joined AAF Roanoke, the organization was attempting to attract African American males to the industry at the high school level by offering a yearly scholarship, which they believed would bring more awareness to the advertising field through the organization. Receipt of a scholarship was done through an essay competition asking students to write about why they liked advertising and marketing. This approach was not successful, and they were not recruiting or attracting their target audience, nor any person of color to enter the competition.

Jamal, being among the few African American males in the industry, said he realized the problem AAF Roanoke was facing and knew the way the organization was going about recruiting African American high school males was never going to work. During the interview, he spoke of his own struggles within the industry. When Jamal joined AAF Roanoke and accepted the Diversity Chair position, he sought ways to solve this problem. He reflected back on his own experiences and thought about what peaked his interest and attracted him to the field. He ultimately found it to be direct exposure from professionals within the field. Upon this realization, Jamal sought ways to recreate that experience and meet this initiative for AAF Roanoke. He formed the subcommittee, DAP, and eventually developed AdScape.

AdScape had its fifth annual conference in October of this year. The program received national recognition in 2015 when it was awarded the Mosaic Award for Best Multicultural Student Program by the American Advertising Federation. Over the past 3 years, AdScape has placed first in the American Advertising Federation's Diversity & Multicultural Initiatives in the division, beating other contending Advertising Federation clubs nationally and has given scholarships out to deserving students every year since.

We discussed how his vision of AdScape has evolved over the years. He spoke of the challenges and opportunities existing and ways to improve and expand the program. Actively listening, trying to figure out what problem we should focus on for the assignment, Jamal began to speak of the uncertainty he feels about the future of AdScape and AAF Roanoke diversity programs because of his desire to phase out of the organization. This was the first year Jamal had not served as the AAF Roanoke Diversity Chair, which he has held for the past 10 years. He said he is ready to explore other ventures. Jamal believes he has laid the foundation for AAF Roanoke diversity programs and believes AdScape needs another visionary to take over the program and bring it to another level. Jamal had hoped it would have happened this year, but instead the position remained vacant. He mentioned how he is the type of person who likes to start things from scratch, get it going, and turn it over to the next person to build upon and elevate to another level. Jamal said he believes there is room for the program to grow and it is in high demand based on the feedback and response from past AdScape attendees, students, and area high schools. After completing my interview with Jamal, talking with other AAF Roanoke and DAP members, and reflecting on my own experiences within the organization, I decided to focus the strategies highlighted in this assignment on filling the AAF Roanoke Diversity Chair position. This person plays a vital role in DAP and would help to ensure AdScape's continued success and makes sure diversity initiatives are being met by AAF Roanoke.



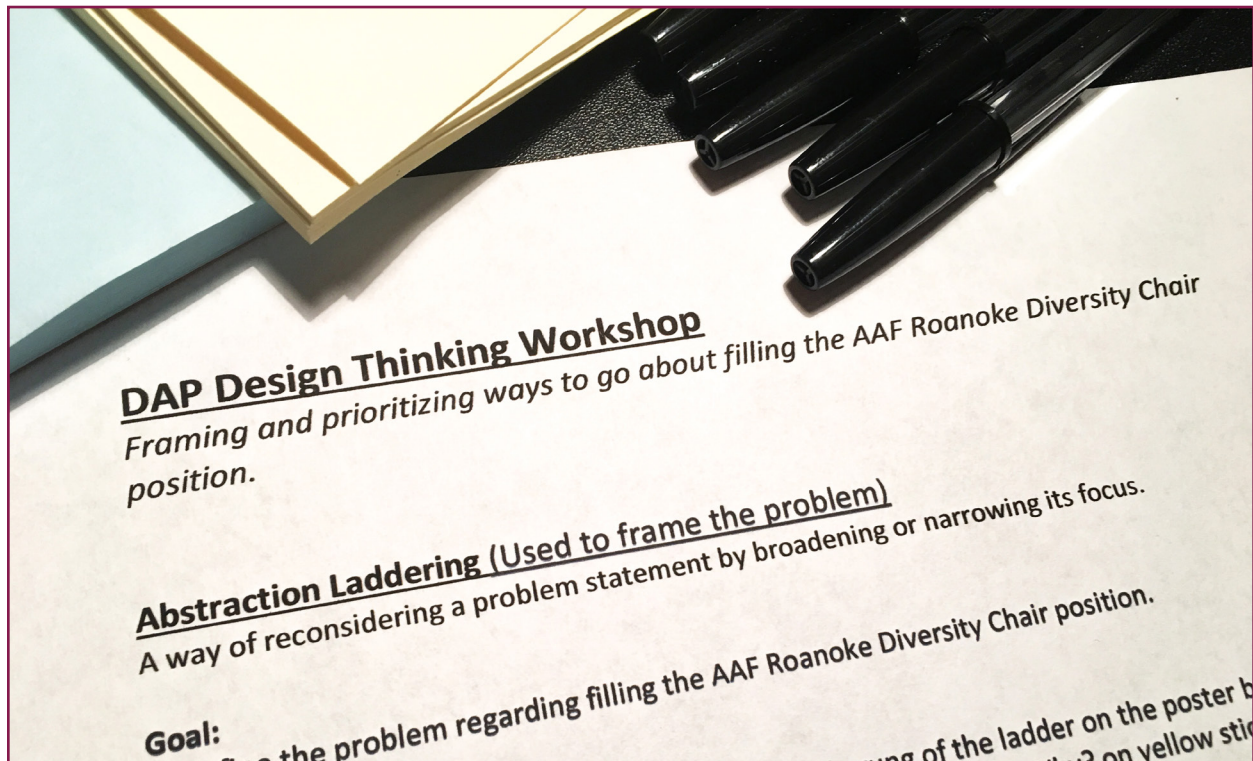
## Research Participants

I facilitated a design thinking workshop featuring Abstraction Laddering and Importance/Difficulty Matrix with members of AAF Roanoke and DAP. I reached out to all 7 members of the DAP committee to see if they would be interested in participating in a design thinking workshop to implement strategies focused on filling the AAF Roanoke Diversity Chair position. I had 4 members agree to participate, although only 3 showed up, as one had to cancel the day of due to an emergency. Participants were Jamal Milner; Leigh Anne Kelly, AAF Roanoke Vice President of Education and DAP Higher Education Outreach Chair; and Katherin Elam, DAP School System Outreach Chair. Although few in number, I had representation from both AAF Roanoke and DAP, which contributed diverse perspectives and great insight to the problem. Everyone participated in implementing both methods. I created instructional handouts to aid in facilitating the workshop and executing the strategies.



*Participants from left to right: Katherin Elam, Leigh Anne Kelly and Jamal Millner shown here with photo of missing participant, Matt Brown, AAF Roanoke Fundraising Chair and DAP Sponsorships Chair.*

## Documentation of Process & Final Method Implementations



### Abstraction Laddering

The goal of the method was to redefine the problem regarding filling the AAF Roanoke Diversity Chair position. Materials provided for participants to conduct the method were the Abstraction Laddering instructional handout, sticky notes, pens, and the Luma Institute Abstraction Laddering template. The instructional handout predominately served as my guide to effectively explain and facilitate implementation of the method to participants.

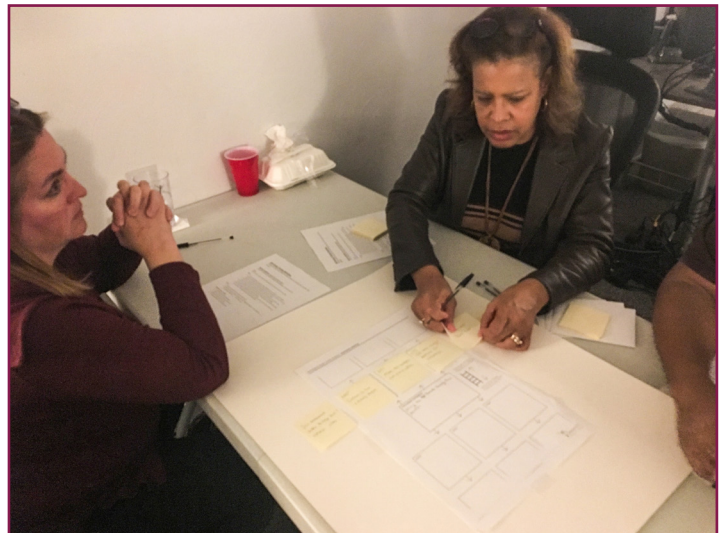
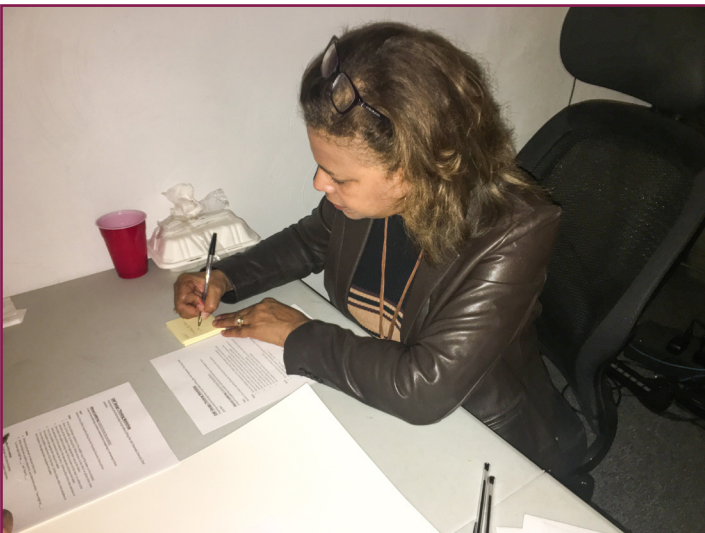
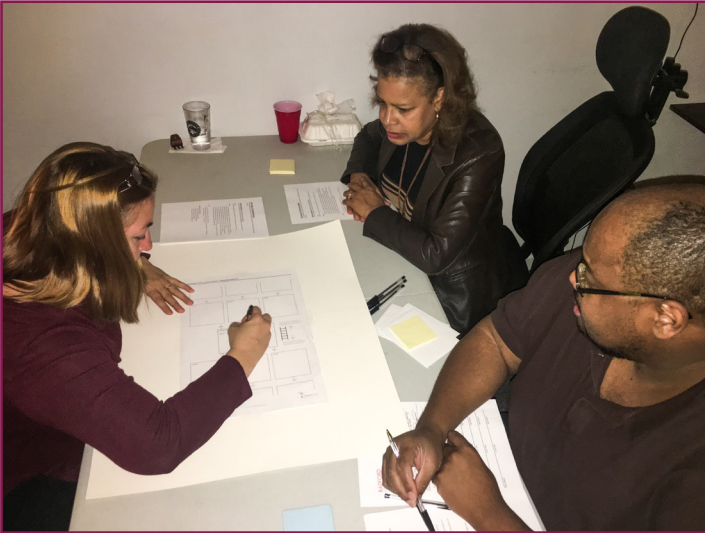
The instructional handout stated the following:

1. Write the challenge statement in the middle rung of the ladder on the template provided.
2. Move up the ladder by asking Why? Write answers to the why on yellow sticky notes and place on the template in the appropriate rung up the ladder.
3. Move down the ladder by asking How? Write answers to the how on yellow sticky notes and place on the template in the appropriate rung down the ladder.
4. Form new problem statements from the whys. Write on blue sticky notes and place above the idea on the ladder.
5. Form new problem statements from the hows. Write on blue sticky notes and place below the idea on the ladder.



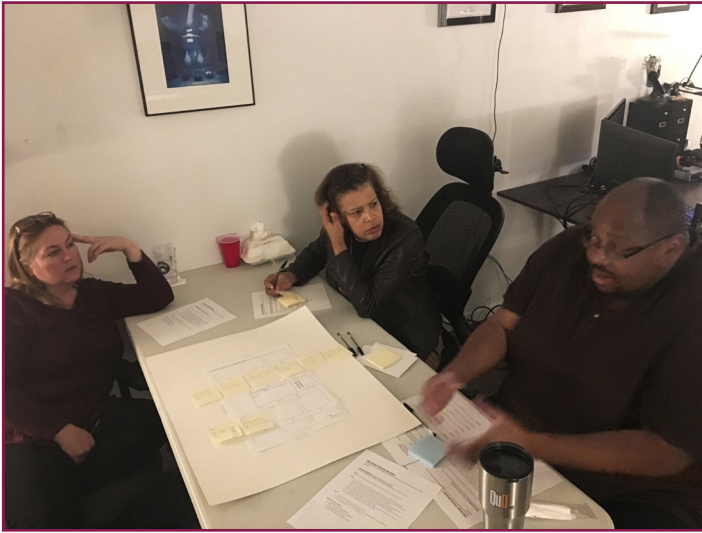
**Below are photos of participants implementing the Abstraction Laddering method:**

*Participants writing in the challenge statement on the Abstraction Laddering template, discussing and writing why the AAF Roanoke Diversity Chair position needs to be filled on yellow sticky notes and plotting on the template.*

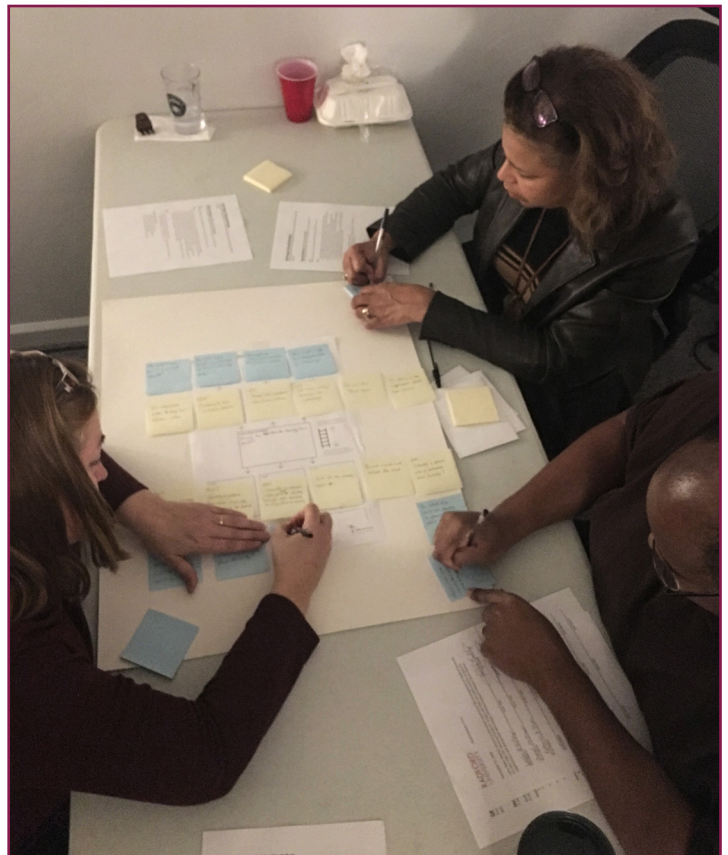
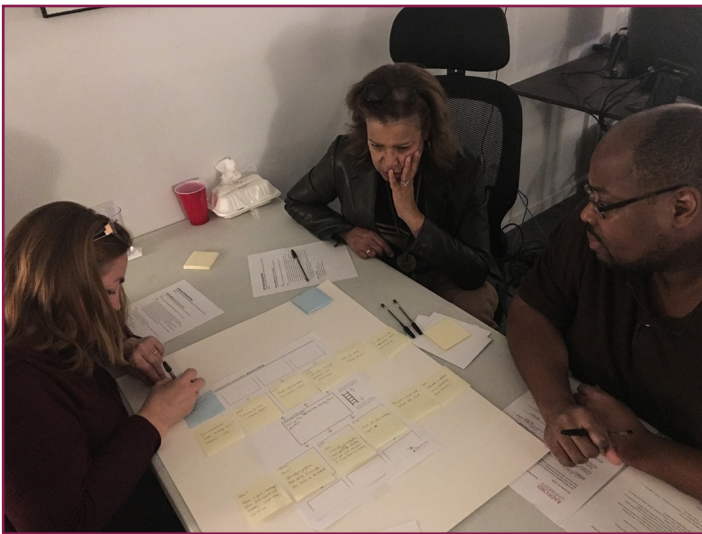




*Participants discussing and writing in how to go about filling the AAF Roanoke Diversity Chair position on yellow sticky notes and plotting on the template.*

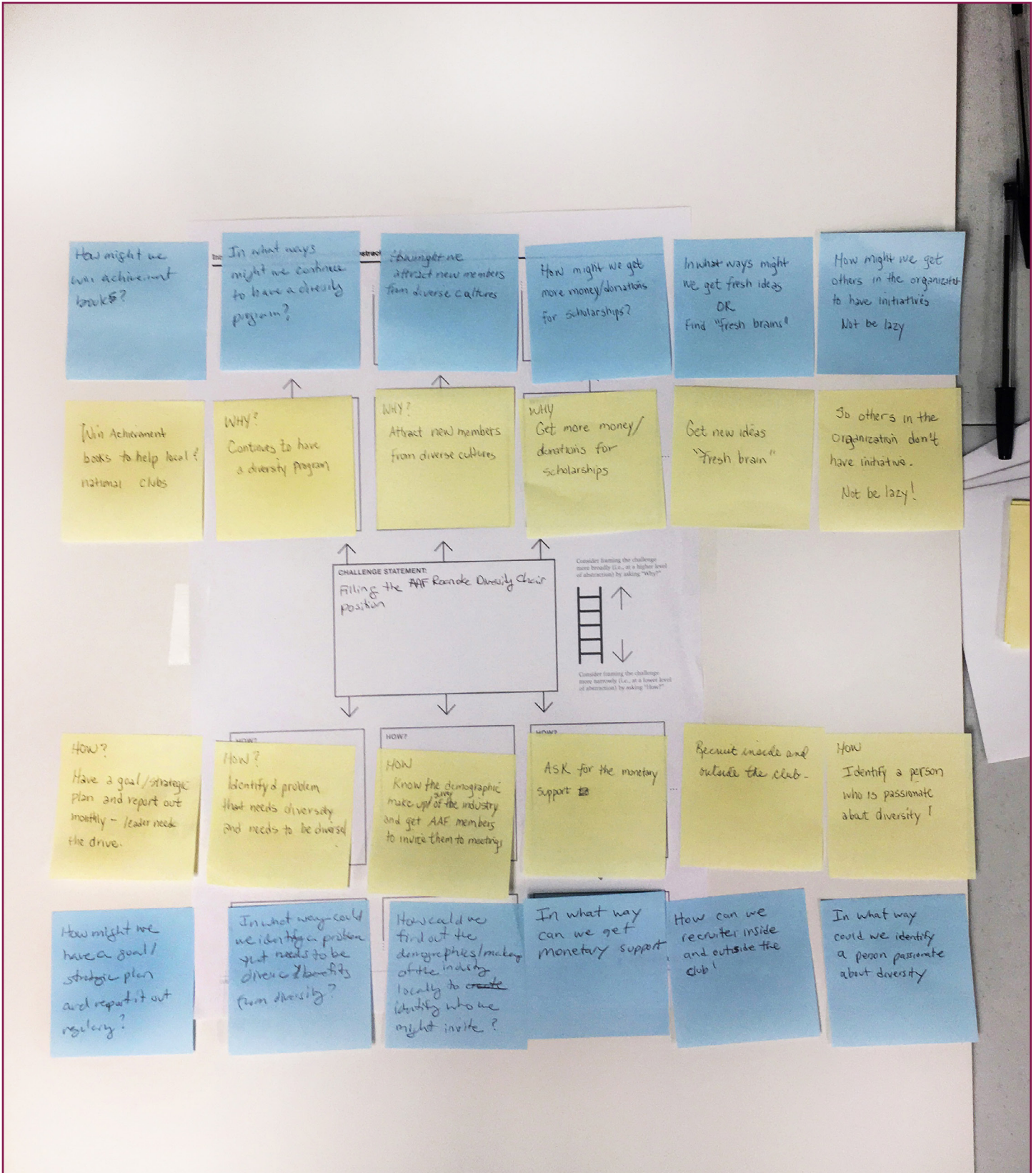


*Participants discussing and writing in problem statements to the ideas developed by asking why and how on blue sticky notes and plotting on the template.*

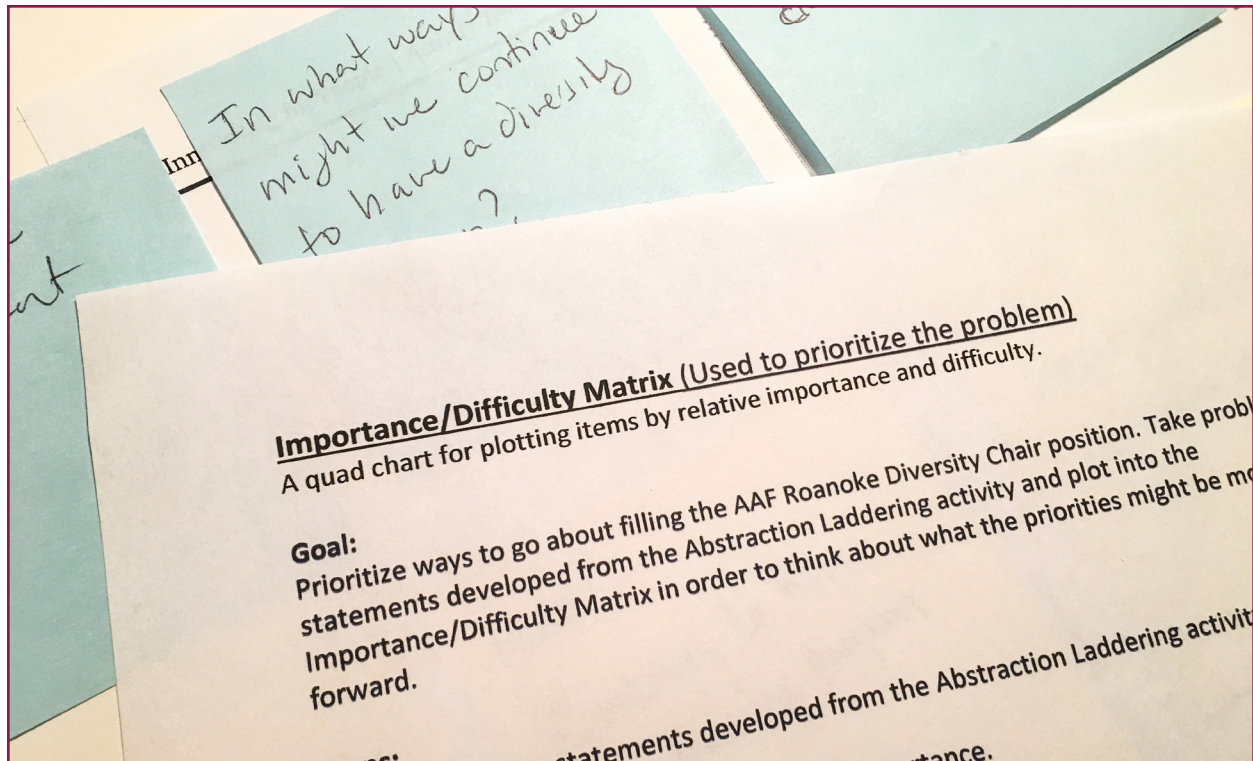




Final Abstraction Laddering implementation.







## Importance/Difficulty Matrix

The goal of the method was to prioritize ways to go about filling the AAF Roanoke Diversity Chair position. Materials provided for participants to conduct the method were the Importance/Difficulty Matrix instructional handout and a diagram of quad chart drawn on poster board. The instructional handout predominately served as my guide to effectively explain and facilitate implementation of the method to participants. Participants were instructed to take the blue sticky note problem statements developed from the Abstraction Laddering activity and plot into an Importance/Difficulty Matrix in order to think about what the priorities might be moving forward.

The instructional handout stated the following:

- Plot items horizontally by relative importance.
- Plot items vertically by relative difficulty.
- Consider the quadrants where items get placed.
- Look for related groupings and set priorities.

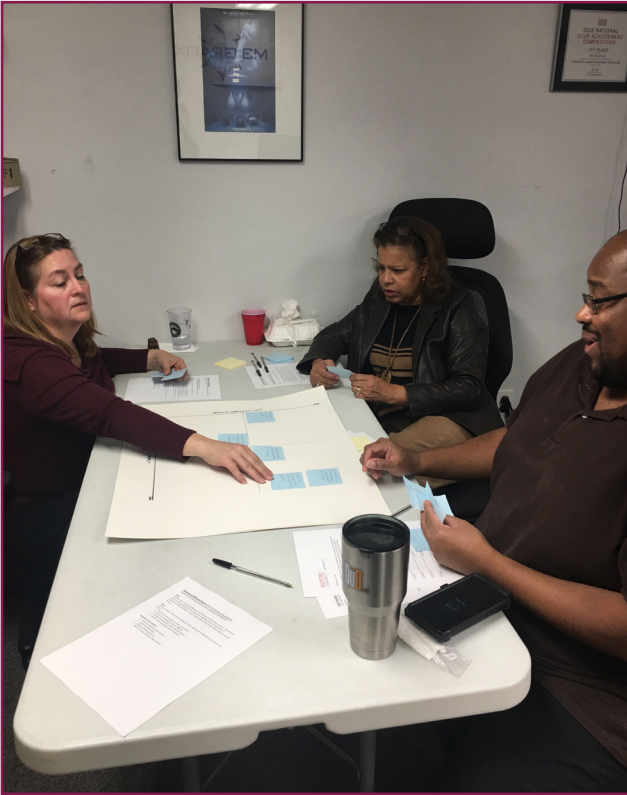
**Below are photos of participants implementing the Importance/Difficulty Matrix method:**

*Participants deliberating and plotting problem statements from the Abstraction Laddering method on the quad chart.*



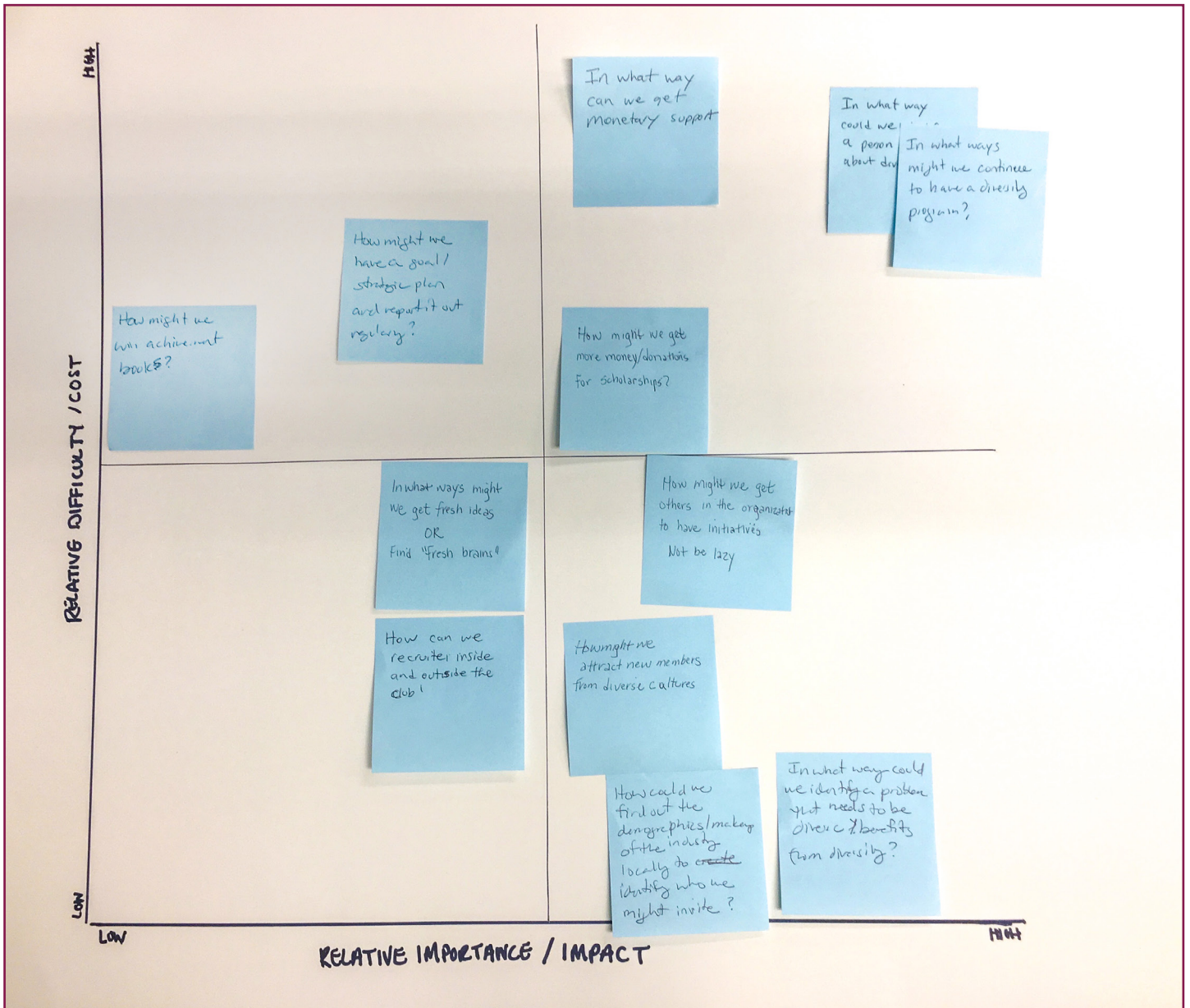


*Participants deliberating, plotting and clustering problem statements on the quad chart.*





Final Importance/Difficulty Matrix implementation.





## Closing Thoughts

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A better focus and direction was established on how to go about filling the AAF Roanoke Diversity Chair position after conducting the methods focused on in this assignment. By asking why and how in the Abstraction Laddering method, participants were forced to look at the problem in a broader and narrower way than originally stated. Participants approached this challenge by thinking about what the benefits are to have someone in that position and identified the desired qualities and traits the ideal person would need to have in order to grow diversity programs and the organization. The new problem statements that resulted in this method helped to better clarify who the organization would be looking for to fill the position and how they might go about recruiting them. The Importance/Difficulty Matrix method proved to be a quick way to go about prioritizing what was most important to focus on moving forward with the new problem statements created. Amid deliberations on where problem statements fell along the matrix, participants talked through differences of opinions, which resulted in shared understanding on what would be involved in executing a plan of action that everyone agreed upon.