

Building Your Ideal Tacoma Through Empathy

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INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

Cartographic Gestures was a production conceived by MAP (Make Art with Purpose) conducted by three GID Lab interns in the Spring of 2024. It was proposed to encourage residents of Tacoma through design thinking aspects such as Empathy building, Ideation, and Prototyping to map out their routes without GPS and to think critically about how they would envision their ideal city through hands-on design.

DESIGN CHALLENGE

How might we empathize with students and residents of Tacoma and discover their current insights and experiences with the city?

PROPOSED SOLUTION/RECOMMENDATIONS

Using Empathy from the Design Thinking Process

We began design thinking by garnering empathy with residents and students of UW Tacoma as none of us are true residents of Tacoma. It was important to garner their insights because our workshop's main focus was reliant on what these residents would consider to be their ideal city. We decided to conduct a survey to allow the participants of the workshop to garner a brief reflection on what they already believe about Tacoma versus what they would like to change and see in the city. To prepare them for a broader and clearer brainstorm towards their ideal city ideation.

METHOD(S) & DISCUSSION

Along with aiding in the process and archival of the initial insights received, we created a Q+A survey that participants would complete alongside ourselves (workshop coordinators) to examine our biases and existing coinciding thoughts about Tacoma. Our process engaged them to empathize with other residents of Tacoma and prepare them for our final prototype phase of the workshop. We brainstormed questions for the survey as a team by using research and empathy on potential participants by coming up with open-ended and neutral-toned questions.

Results and Discussion

We received 23 responses total, we came up with a total of six questions ranging from, "What would you change to make Tacoma your ideal city?" To "What are some of your favorite places in Tacoma and why?" According to the Q+A, we discovered that many participants of our workshop already have a solid understanding of what they appreciate about Tacoma and a somewhat unified view of what to add to make the city ideal. Overall these results shared with us a greater understanding of the target users and the original views of Tacoma residents.

CONCLUSIONS

Cartographic Gestures was my introduction to workshop production and design. Keeping an open mindset was essential to cultivating design thinking and navigating unfamiliar workshop preparation and production. I wanted to bring this mindset to our workshop audience to aid them in the design thinking experience through empathy in envisioning their ideal city of Tacoma. The conduction and creation of the materials used, such as the flyers and empathy Q+A were the most difficult aspects of the workshop. I am a naturally soft-spoken person and found it difficult to stand up to a crowd and give them instructions but once everything was organized and we had a good flow of things the workshop turned out enjoyable. I learned to value the importance of preparation in design as not all design is spontaneous but can be molded into a clever and flexible structure to lead newcomers to discover the design thinking process naturally.

