



# **Findings and Recommendations Report**

Prime Digital Academy  
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This report examines the current service delivery design and makes service design recommendations. In addition, this report details tools for empathy exercises, resources to address compassion fatigue, an employee pulse survey to measure employee engagement, and a citizen interview script so that MNIT and DHS can gather feedback and generate research from persons receiving public services. Implementing these tools, along with the existing work MNIT has done in accessibility and persona development, will help DHS advance towards a fully implemented person-centered practice.

Our Findings and Recommendations Report addressed three goals:

- Understanding the Citizen experience
- Documenting and communicating empathy to citizens
- Proposing service improvements toward person-centered practice

## PROGRAM OVERVIEW

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Minnesota IT Services (MNIT) is the central IT organization for the state of Minnesota bringing together IT professionals from all varieties of state departments including the Department of Human Services (DHS). MNIT is responsible for managing the multitudes of processes and business lines that create programs which provide critical services such as food benefits, foster care, and mental health and substance abuse resources to state citizens.

DHS, one of the largest consumers of state technology services in Minnesota, has made “improving the user experience” an explicit component of their 2018-2020 strategic plan for modernization. Internal leaders at MNIT and DHS are looking to communicate and demonstrate to DHS employees and partners what it means to be “person-centered” in order to integrate and simplify existing programs and technologies.

To better meet the needs of all Minnesotans, it is necessary to create an environment that allows citizens to access services in the way they want and empower them to make informed choices, meet their needs, and achieve their goals. To accomplish this future state, this report will propose tools for DHS, county agency, and service organization staff to improve touch points in the citizen experience in the short term while proposing a broader strategy to implement person-centered practice more fully.

Note: This report refers to primary users of DHS services as “citizens.” Internally, primary users are also referred to as clients, customers, participants, individuals, and recipients. The term “citizen” refers to anyone who interfaces with DHS, county agency, or service organization on their own behalf or as a caregiver for another receiving services. The term “citizen” is not intended to denote lawful residency status. We recommend choosing a strengths-based, neutral term that all of DHS can use moving forward.

# METHODOLOGY

The design team conducted interviews with DHS staff and partners in various roles to learn more about employee engagement, Perceived citizen experienced, assessment and eligibility processes, and service delivery timelines to gain insight into their role in the delivery of a person-centered practice.

We interviewed individuals in the following areas:

- DHS Disability Services Division
- Disability Hub
- Hennepin County Health and Human Services
- MnChoices
- DHS Business Integration

The design team created an interview script for direct service providers and a variation that was created for decision makers. A separate citizen interview script was created, however the Internal Review Board approval process exceeded the project timeline, so the design team was unable to engage with citizens directly. Therefore, our recommendations involving citizen engagement is supported through secondary research. Sample questions included in the employee interviews were:

- What does empathy in the workplace look like?
- What kind of empathy training tools does the DHS currently utilize?
- What is your definition of and understanding of a “person-centered” service model?
- What is the current state of a person-centered approach at DHS?
- What do you see as the future of the person-centered model implementation at DHS?
- What barriers or institutional blockers at DHS exist that may prevent further adoption of a person-centered service model?
- What kind of resources are available to you to reduce compassion fatigue?
- What is your perception of the efficiency of current DHS services for clients?
- How do you currently measure citizen satisfaction?
- What is most important to you when considering the implementation of a person-centered service focus?

In addition, the team conducted secondary research consisting of government documentation around fostering the citizen experience and case studies centered around the implementation of person-centered practice. Secondary research informs how similar problems were addressed and offers possibilities on how we can apply solutions to our circumstances.

Through affinity diagramming, findings from the interviews and secondary research revealed common themes and areas of opportunity to improve the citizen experience for Minnesotans and further support person-centered practices in DHS.

## FINDINGS

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The design team interviews with DHS staff and partners revealed common themes where our recommendations can offer tools to support person-centered practice and improve the citizen experience.

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### **Perceived Citizen Experience**

*“One client may see friends or family move through the assessment and service delivery process quicker than they do. The eligibility determination for each individual is unpredictable due to the unique set of circumstances each person brings. Sometimes the case manager has limited insight into why.”*

- Hennepin County Client Services Representative

Common themes in the perceived citizen experiences are those of confusion and frustration. Direct service staff work across a range of communication methods in an effort to be all things to all people, yet they still find it hard to impart information about benefit status in a way that is easily understood by the citizen. The inability to understand status and timeline leave citizens feeling a lack of self-sufficiency in meeting their own goals.

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## Understanding of Person-Centered Practice

*“Your best life, your way.”*

- Disability Hub Options Counselor

Though the concept of person-centered practice was understood by most of our interviewees, definitions of “person-centered practice” varied across interviews. Some indicated that person-centered practice involved listening, while others wondered if a person-centered practice was possible when existing requirements can limit choice. It was commonly understood that movement towards a person-centered model will take a lot of training and practice.

All interviewees noted that developing empathy towards the citizen was the most important factor in delivering services. Some cultivated empathy through listening. Others developed empathy because of their own personal experiences in applying for and receiving public services.

For those without direct contact with citizens, empathy seemed more abstract. Their stories existed in case notes and were sometimes passed on by direct service staff.

Although some departments track citizen satisfaction through surveys, results are not always shared within the department. Interviewees measured success based on how many services were successfully provided and how citizens responded. In some cases, departments contracted with independent consulting firms to deliver citizen surveys.

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## Compassion Fatigue

*“It’s very well a problem. It’s hard to address.”*

- Disability Hub Operations Counselor

Direct service staff also reported experiencing compassion fatigue, an acute inability to empathize with others as a result of stress. Prolonged compassion fatigue leads to a high risk of burnout, which leads to decreased empathy for the people they look to serve.

Most employees were unaware of support around combating compassion fatigue, though one recalled attending a training. One interviewee described compassion fatigue as a “very high burnout factor” with “no plan to address.”

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## Misunderstandings between Citizens and Direct Service Staff

*“Direct service staff are compensating for what the system can’t provide.”*

- Hennepin County Client Services Representative

Without citizens having direct access to own benefits and status, direct service staff often take extra burdens to alleviate confusion and conflict when responding to citizens. One citizen can be in contact with county agency case managers, nonprofit service coordinators, and DHS program staff, all of whom operate in different organizations and each take on the burdens of reducing the citizen’s confusion in their request for services. Case information is difficult for staff to find because of limited access to third party systems. Communication across agencies is also difficult with staff describing outside agencies as “hard to coordinate with.”

The combination of these difficulties leave citizens wondering what’s happening behind the scenes and whether Case Managers are giving them correct information. In response, Case Managers feel as though the accuracy of their information is under question which leads to feelings of disrespect.

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## **Inconsistent Training**

*“How do we catch someone up to speed?”*

- Disability Hub Operations Counselor

Organizations within DHS, county agencies, and service coordinators rely on training that is created internally, resulting in inconsistent training on procedure, empathy, and person-centered practices. Trainings are content heavy and not compatible with a range of learning styles. Trainings are also time consuming, with some new staff spending six weeks in training and existing staff are short-handed while training take place.

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## **Fear of a Digital Divide**

*“Client needs are the most important to me.”*

- Hennepin County Client Services Representative

While the State of Minnesota moves more toward simplifying their technology, there are concerns from direct service staff that the move itself could create a digital divide that will leave some citizens behind. Currently, direct service providers report that much of their connection to citizens is conducted by phone and in-person. In instances where Case Assessors need to meet with citizens in greater Minnesota, lack of internet access in those areas can hinder the citizen’s access to services. The staff we interviewed within their organizations all feel a need for departments to align and create standards for communication at all levels.

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRANSFORMING THE CITIZEN EXPERIENCE

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A person-centered practice, as defined by DHS, is one that:

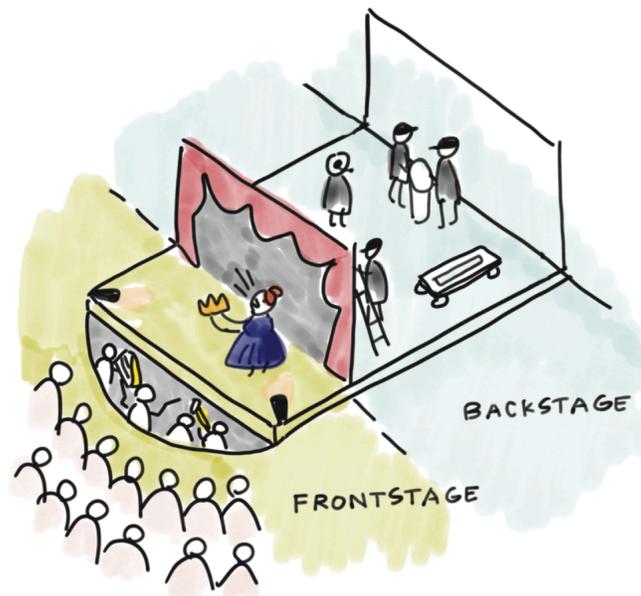
- Is inspired and driven by a citizen's own experience, values, and input,
- Has respect for a citizen's autonomy, and desires to access services in the way they want to,
- It empowers citizens to make informed choices, meet their needs and achieve their goals; and lastly,
- It supports equitable results for individuals, families and communities.

Through this practice, DHS strives to make sure everyone who receives services can live, learn, work, and enjoy life in the most integrated setting.

# SERVICE DESIGN

The design team looked at service design as a solution to the challenge of transitions toward person-centered practice. Service design is the act of organizing people, infrastructure, communication and other elements of a service in order to improve the interaction between service providers and citizens.

Similar to a theater stage, citizen interaction is up front, but much of the work is done behind the scenes with leadership, programs, and policies. When backstage inefficiencies exist such as coordinating care across numerous programs and case managers, there are front stage consequences: misunderstandings, unrealistic expectations, and loss of power over one's own choice. Streamlining backstage processes improves the employees' experience, which, in turn, allows them to create a better experience for citizens.



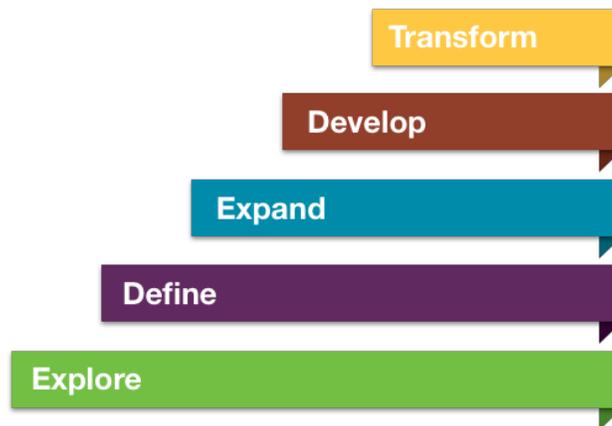
NNGROUP.COM NN/g

Image credit: Nielsen Norman Group [<https://www.nngroup.com/articles/service-design-101/>]

To address these challenges, we utilized service design methods that could improve the DHS service process for both employees and citizens.

# MULTI YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PHASES

MNIT has already taken significant steps in implementing a person-centered practice. An effort to raise awareness has begun and a business integration team is dedicated to improving processes from within. Cultural changes of this magnitude in large organizations take time. It's important to tackle these changes through multi-year phases in order to meet desired outcomes. The design team is providing short-term resources and long-term plans to support DHS employees as they transition toward a person-centered organization. These resources will give DHS a service framework that will keep them moving forward.



## Explore Phase

The Explore Phase raises awareness of a person-centered practice. Personas of employees have been created and citizen demographics are available for review. In addition, the design team is providing an example of a service design blueprint that should be created to better understand the mechanics of the current state of service design within each program. These elements lay a foundation for basic understanding which will be built upon in the following steps.

## Define Phase

The Define Phase seeks to understand the citizen journey. The journey and perceptions of the journey should be measured at all touch points to reveal opportunities for innovation. To this end, the design team has created an interview tool to begin to develop citizen personas and capture citizen experiences. Once these personas and scenarios are created, updating the citizen journey maps in all services will be beneficial.

### **Expand Phase**

The theme of the Expand Phase is employee engagement. Measuring employee engagement reveals areas of impact on the citizen experience. Typically, compassion fatigue and lack of engagement are areas of innovation. Gaining employee buy-in of a person-centered approach is essential for moving forward. The design team has provided an employee pulse survey, empathy training exercises, and compassion fatigue resources to address challenges during this phase.

### **Develop Phase**

In the Develop Phase, the BITs team should establish or update citizen experience metrics and key performance indicators. Units of measurement depend on the type of innovations that will be made. Standards of measurement should be published agency wide so goals, objectives, and strategy are clear and so everyone has a shared vision of success.

### **Transform Phase**

To establish and maintain a citizen-centered practice, it's important to dedicate a leadership team charged with monitoring innovation. This team will document improved citizen outcomes, increased employee engagement, and reduction in service delivery costs.

# UNDERSTANDING THE CITIZEN JOURNEY

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Citizens interact in many ways to inquire about service that might help them. Many request services by phone or in person and many go through county agencies. The scenario below is derived from interviews, but only represents one way in which citizens seek services.

A citizen interaction may happen as follows:

1. Client calls County Agency Call Center to request services.
2. Call Center schedules an in-home visit for a MnChoice intake assessment.
3. Call Center assigns the request to a Case Assessor.
4. Case Assessor visits with the Client at the scheduled time to conduct the interview.
5. Case Assessor loads MnChoices app on their notebook computer.
6. Case Assessor asks Client questions and enters responses in MnChoices app.
7. Case Assessor submits completed application to DHS services.
8. Case Assessor ends the visit and promises the Client will be contacted when eligibility has been determined.
9. Client is determined to be eligible for services and the case is assigned to a Case Manager.
10. Case Manager contact Client with eligibility determination and offers options and resources.
11. Client reaches Care Provider to receive services.

Tools such as a user journey map and service blueprint can help to understand users by visualizing their experiences.

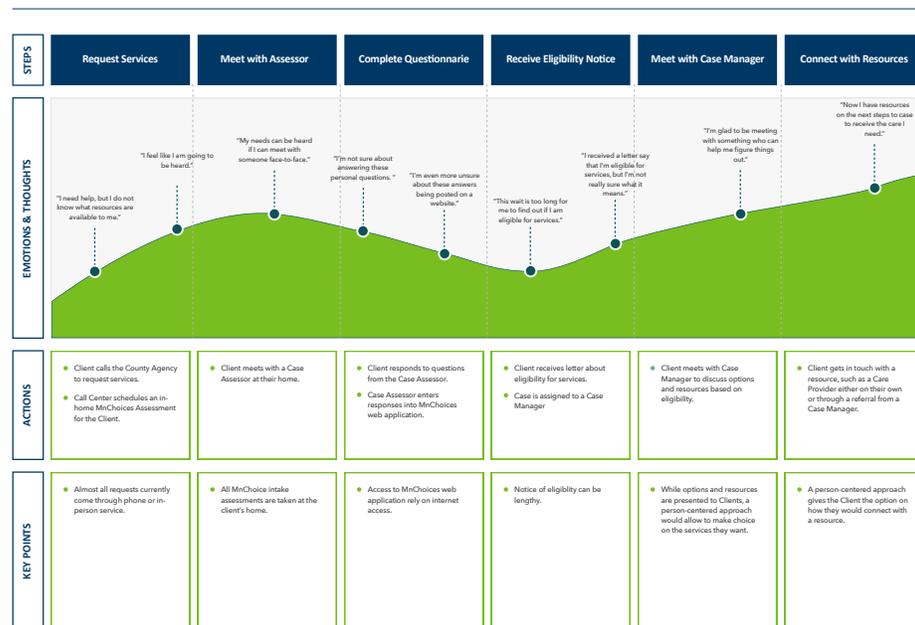
# USER JOURNEY MAP

A user journey map is a diagram that visually illustrates a citizen flow through a process. This starts with an initial contact and continues through the point of receiving services or reaching their goal.

In this case, we use the journey map to show a visual representation of key points in the citizen interaction of requesting services. We can hypothesize how citizens feel during each step of the process and examine where we can increase positive emotions as we move further towards a person-centered practice.

## Journey Map

## Client Interaction to Request Services

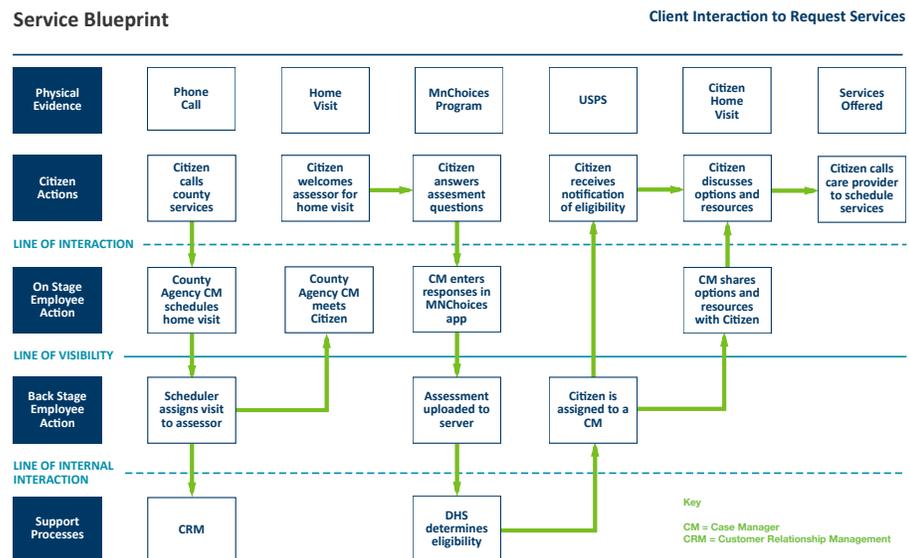


User Journey Map - included with assets

# SERVICE BLUEPRINT

A service blueprint is a diagram that visualizes the relationships between different service components — citizens, employees, physical evidence, and processes — that are directly tied to touch points in a specific user journey.

In this case, the service blueprint shows where citizens interact with employees as they seek to request services. Separating the front stage and back stage operations gives a design team to a visualization of where inefficiencies exist and allows them to create interactions with intentionality.



Service Blueprint - included with assets

# CITIZEN INTERVIEW SCRIPT

As noted, the timeline of this project was not compatible with conducting citizen interviews. The design team did, however, create a citizen interview script for future use. The script includes questions to gain insight into citizen journeys while accessing public services. Citizen stories can build empathy across the organization and further refine the way programs and services are delivered.

## Citizen Interview Script

Moderator: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Note Taker: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_  
Citizen Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Session Length: 30 minutes

### Interview Goal

Gain insights into the current experiences, key pain points, and future needs of citizens accessing DHS programs and services in order to create informed user personas.

### Materials

1. Discreet audio recording device (e.g. cell phone)
2. (2) clipboards for note taking
3. (1) Moderator scripts printed
4. (1) Notetaker scripts printed
5. (2) Pencils

Interview Begins

[Record start time: \_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_]

*Citizen Interview Script - included with assets*

# PERSON-CENTERED PRACTICE THROUGH EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

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Much of the work of improving service takes place with direct service staff behind the scenes. Tools provided in this report will help in supporting DHS staff and partners in their work in public service.

## **Empathy Training**

The goal of empathy training is to promote DHS employee discussions around what DHS clients could be feeling and, once personas have been crafted, their motivations and expectations around service. By the end of each training session, there should be a consistent understanding among employees regarding empathetic service and why it is important, how to provide it, and issues that may occur internally and externally because of it.

Interviews with case managers found that there is no DHS training specific to empathy and empathetic service delivery. Case managers do engage with citizens in empathetic ways, often relying on their own understanding of what that looks and feels like. The following are quotes from DHS employees:

“I try to be empathetic within reason.”

Empathy is “a lens” that helps one understand “that everyone is experiencing unknown stressors and challenges.”

“I have a lot of confidence that [our] case managers” are providing service “with empathy.”

Based on findings, it is recommended that the DHS provide standardized empathy training for employees. While every case and interaction with citizens is unique, having a uniformed understanding of how, when, and why they should engage empathetically will create a more consistent citizen experience.

## **Compassion Fatigue**

The Harvard Business Review describes Compassion Fatigue as " an acute inability to empathize that's driven by stress," that eventually leads to "burnout, a more gradual and chronic version of this phenomenon." It is most common in jobs where empathy is expected, and constant, from employees interacting with the general public.

Through interviews with DHS case managers and department managers, we were able to determine a lack of resources for recognizing and treating Compassion Fatigue. The following are quotes from DHS employees:

- "I'm not familiar with Compassion Fatigue, but I can infer what it means."
- "I don't think I've ever dealt with it, but I can see how others might."
- "When I feel like that, I usually talk to my supervisor."

## Employee Pulse Survey

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In order to properly track Compassion Fatigue symptoms among employees, we recommend creating an employee pulse survey. Pulse surveys are a short set of quantifiable and/or quantitative questions designed to provide specific insights. Leadership must be capable of recognizing Compassion Fatigue among service employees by analyzing survey responses and using them to assess overall employee morale.

The goal for a compassion fatigue survey is to understand what aspects of the employee's experience are causing them to feel unsupported or potentially overwhelmed. Due to the almost real-time nature of responses, pulse surveys allow management to accurately track employee engagement, while also allowing employees to feel heard and supported.

We recommend running a 5-10 question pulse survey no more than once a week, and no less than quarterly. This will keep employee engagement consistent without allowing the surveys to become overwhelming.

The majority of questions should be quantifiable using linear-scale choices, paired with an open question that allows employees to compound on their experiences if they desire to.

- **Scaled:** How supported do you feel at each step of completing your work?
- **Open:** How could we better support you?
- **Open:** What successes would you like to share?
- **Scaled:** How challenging has completing your work been?

**Open:** What's the biggest obstacle keeping you from doing your best work?

## DHS Employee Pulse Survey

The goal for a compassion fatigue survey is for management to understand what aspects of the employee's experience are causing them to feel unsupported or potentially overwhelmed.

**1. How supported did you feel while completing your work this week?**

*Mark only one oval.*

1    2    3    4    5

Very Unsupported                  Very Supported

**2. How could we better support you?**

*Enter response here*

**3. How stressful did you find your interactions with citizens this week?**

*Mark only one oval.*

1    2    3    4    5

Very Stressful                  Not Stressful At All

**4. Is there anything else you would like us to know?**

*Enter response here*

**5. Check all that apply.**

I would like to set up a check-in this upcoming week.

**Submit**

*Employee Pulse Survey - included with assets*

## ABOUT PRIME DIGITAL ACADEMY

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Working directly with local tech employers, Prime has programs that equip emerging engineers and designers with the skills they need to make immediate contributions. Prime students learn modern technologies, practical methodologies and critical behavioral skills through carefully crafted curriculum and hands-on work on real world projects. Prime's immersive programs empower learners from diverse backgrounds to begin their new careers in months, not years.

Prime's user experience curriculum provides students with practice in research, prototyping, and evaluation in order to design software that is usable and meaningful. The full stack engineering course arms students with the skills and hands-on experience to develop complex software to solve the real world businesses problems.

## ABOUT THE RESEARCH TEAM

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### **Tony Gillan**

Tony is a skilled and knowledgeable web designer with experience in UX and visual design

### **Patrick Little**

With a background in customer service, Patrick is a skilled UX/UI designer.

### **Beth Megas**

Beth is a UX researcher with a background in business strategy and project management.

### **Dionne Sims**

Dionne is a UX designer and skilled communicator who values clarity and quality in her work.

## Sources

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