



work ways

building an
inclusive
creative economy
from a worker's perspective



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table of contents

02

preface
my lived experience
my values . context

05

stakeholder map . research
questions . key learnings.
journey map.

17

scoping the problem
thesis statement
partnership

24

early prototypes
prototype 01 . prototype 02
prototype 03

36

design criteria
workways intervention
how it works. goals

42

next steps

Preface

My lived experience

I am an immigrant. My mother is an immigrant and so is her mother. We all immigrated to this country separately within a span of 10 years. Like many immigrants, my mother came seeking better work opportunities. She got a job as a textile worker in a factory in the mid 1980's and witnessed the steady decline in the manufacturing industry.

This project allowed me to draw from my own lived experience and identity as an immigrant coming from a low income background entering into the creative field. I've been predominantly surrounded by white and upper class privilege as the dominant norm in my educational and professional settings. Carrying several marginalized identities myself, I felt like I was unable to bring my whole self into these creative environments. I have often felt inferior and less than.

For a long time, I was never comfortable with the responsibility of reminding others that we all do not share the same experiences, access to the same resources or support systems. It's uncomfortable for people to evaluate their own privilege. But I now know that it is my duty to address these issues in order to create equitable conditions.

If I place my lived experience at the forefront of my design practice, then all of my given identities can help me lead authentically and compassionately for individuals from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds with whom I share a common lived experience.

A vast number of people do not have the same opportunities as more privileged people. But that does not mean they should be left out. This is the issue I want to continue exploring in my practice in order to help create an economy that benefits marginalized communities and ultimately address the underlying issues of economic disparity, which in the end, contributes to the lack of diversity in the workplace and beyond.

My purpose in life is to fight for the underdogs. Always.

My values

This journey would have been impossible without defining and interrogating my personal values throughout the design process.

Autonomy

I believe all individuals are entitled to act upon their own values and interests without rigid social hierarchies being enforced on them. When an individual is presented with meaningful choices it allows for one to realize one's true self.

Creativity . Self Expression. Spirituality
Intuition . Abundance . Interdependence

Integrity

I rely heavily on my moral and ethical convictions. Integrity requires brutal honesty and humility, always holding oneself accountable for one's actions, and living congruently.

Authenticity . Ethical
Equity . Inclusion

Context

“I called in with a fever and couldn't go to work and they said okay you can have the day off, but we will have to take the pay from yesterday as a penalty.”

- Anonymous, Undocumented worker



Inequality faced by NYC immigrant population

New York City prides itself on being the most diverse city in the world and as the “creative” capital of the country. In New York City, it's clear that immigrants are drivers not just of the economy but shape the social fabric of NYC culture itself.

Immigrants make up 40% of NYC's total population and yet despite their high participation in the labour market, they are more likely to be in poverty than other New Yorkers - with a poverty rate of 25.2% in the City in 2017. Immigrants participate in the labor force at higher rates (66 percent) than their native-born counterparts (61 percent), with undocumented immigrants working at even higher rates.

NYC's immigrant workforce

From 2009 to 2015, 57 percent of all new jobs created in New York City were in low. Naturally, I was curious to find out what occupations immigrants hold in NYC. While immigrants form a large part of the city's workforce, they are clustered in a relatively small number of occupations, dominating jobs that offer low to moderate wages in priority sectors such as food service, construction, health care, manufacturing, and retail. Lacking opportunity for advancement, many immigrant workers end up trapped in these lower wage jobs.

Service industry

The service industry, such as hospitality & food service, is accessible to immigrants in part because it often does not require a higher education. Someone with limited english proficiency can still get a job. While it may be an appealing option, it funnels an entire class of people into jobs that offer less than a living wage, little job security and very few, if any, health or retirement benefits.

Manufacturing industry

Surprisingly, an overwhelmingly high percentage of immigrant workers, most of whom are women, are in the manufacturing garment sector. The top ten occupations highest share of immigrant workers include pressers, textile, garment workers & sewing machine operators.

Research



“Who is saying they want to invest in low skilled people?

Why are we building hotels and service jobs if manufacturing jobs pay more and we have the capacity to manufacture in nyc.

- Ngozi Okaro, Executive Director, Custom Collaborative

Mapping NYC's manufacturing ecosystem

I wanted to understand how agencies, organizations, & creative hubs were supporting local manufacturing in the city. Were any of these stakeholders advocating and working towards accessibility specifically focused on immigrant workers needs?

I began by mapping NYC's manufacturing ecosystem. It was definitely fragmented but after conducting several semi-structured interviews with stakeholders and following up with secondary research this is what I learned. I've shared my key learnings on the following page.

Key Learnings

from Local Manufacturing Stakeholders

research question

What are the gaps and challenges organizations have identified in advancing local manufacturing efforts in NYC?

There are many efforts and organizations, but they are fragmented.

The scope is either broad, such as “general workforce needs”, or is not focused on the creative industries such as design or manufacturing. Even less are dedicated to the needs of immigrants making up the garment industry in NYC. There is a gap.

In fact, I spoke to several stakeholders who commented that the city hasn’t been super helpful. City structured initiatives have not met the demographics identified by these stakeholders. And yet, the city has access to so many who could benefit.

Their resources are more geared towards college educated individuals. There is a gap. Some initiatives have disbursed a few million dollars but it hasn’t reached any of these populations and it’s not clear how the funding decisions are being made.

There is a Labor & Skills Gap in the industry.

Companies are having a hard-time finding people that want garment manufacturing jobs - even if the jobs are well-paying with good benefits and don’t require a higher education. Younger people don’t want to work in manufacturing because there is a stigma. The perception is that it is an assembly line. One person I spoke with suggested that the industry is not perceived as having as much value as other industries, i.e Design.

It has been a struggle for some companies to find the skilled workers they need. Challenges such as an ageing workforce, while some jobs require expertise and experiences to carry out the work. For example a specialized job such as senior pattern maker.

Pricing structure is broken and needs to be relooked. In local industry, too often very little investment is allocated for the worker.

Value in creating Entrepreneurial & Coop pathways.

The Program director of Made in NYC noted they have seen a drastic increase in the number of minority and women owned manufacturing businesses in their membership. Although manufacturing does remain a good avenue in creating jobs for those who don’t have a college education, entrepreneurship should also be considered.

The Cooperative business model structure is an opportunity for a community of new entrepreneurs to learn and scale their businesses, rather than just having one person do all the marketing, purchasing, etc. A community of owners working together, each carrying different roles, making sure all workers are paid fairly. This is particularly important when dealing with immigrant and undocumented women who are more vulnerable to exploitation and unjust working conditions.

Investment in technology is needed for NYC’s fashion garment industry to thrive.

New York is particularly behind, although Brooklyn is starting to see some more advanced approaches to manufacturing, assisted by technology. Several individuals were comparing NY to places like LA & Detroit, noting that LA & Detroit had much more modern equipment. The industry itself is identifying that they need investment from the city not only in equipment but in Digital literacy training which is a straight line to technical design positions.

Private Sector Partnerships are needed.

Many stated that buy in from private industry is necessary. It’s clear that for local manufacturing purchase orders with smaller makers and fabricators would be needed. Many organizations mentioned their success with the private sector. Issues of nearshoring models seem more viable in regards to costs and wastage.

Land use and industrial spaces is key to building local economies.

Maintaining accessible industrial spaces is critical and is interconnected to job growth and entrepreneurship. Spaces that could be used for manufacturing are instead repurposed as hotels or residential, furthering the gentrification of neighborhoods across the boroughs.

Flipping the Narrative on Digital Literacy for the workforce

Now suddenly you’re flipping the narrative and now you’re taking them out of an industry that has been impoverished situation to making them the masters of advanced manufacturing.

Now, they’re big, and they’re in demand because of their high advanced skills.

-Jennifer Guarino, President of The Industrial Sewing and Innovation Center, ISAIC, a non-profit, Detroit-based, industrial training institute and factory that aims to transform the apparel manufacturing industry by providing solutions centered around people, education, advanced manufacturing and upward mobility for workers.

Increase in Minority Women Owned Creative Businesses

What we have been seeing in our membership is a drastic increase in the number of minority and women owned businesses - and overwhelming increase.

-Joanna Reynolds, Program Director of Made in NYC, an initiative of the Pratt Center for Community Development, supporting NYC manufacturers and local entrepreneurial efforts and provides training in branding, marketing, sourcing, and other business developments.

Equitable Pathways into the middle class

Manufacturing and Industrial careers are still providing job opportunities in NYC. It is an important equitable pathway for people in NYC.

-Tanu Kumar, Senior Fellow at Pratt Centre for Community Development Equitable Innovation Economies (EIE) Equitable Innovation Economies project is focused on creating equitable growth in NYC’s urban manufacturing seeking to keep and protect affordable spaces in the city.

research question

What are the current opportunities for immigrant women without a higher education to enter into the fashion industry?

The number of Manufacturing jobs have been declining drastically in NYC.

Manufacturing jobs are, for the most part, good working-class jobs in New York City. Historically, manufacturing jobs have lifted the working class into the middle class but Manufacturing sector has lost the greatest share of jobs among all industries citywide (a 40 percent decline between 2003 and 2013) According to the Garment District Alliance, it is estimated that only 5,000 garment manufacturing workers remain in Manhattan's Garment Center.

To make matters even worse, the Garment Center is in the process of being redistricted. The plan is to preserve and place the remaining shrinking design and manufacturing businesses into a building with a smaller footprint. Next year, the city plans to open Made In NY Campus in Brooklyn's rapidly gentrifying Sunset Park, using the city-owned Bush Terminal. Ironically, from 2012 to 2018, the number of garment factories declined by nearly half with the greatest loss in Industry City, where garment contractors were reduced by 71% from 42 to only 12 businesses.

Unfortunately without the city's protection or businesses committing to produce locally,

From 2012 to 2018
garment contractors
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42

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12

businesses

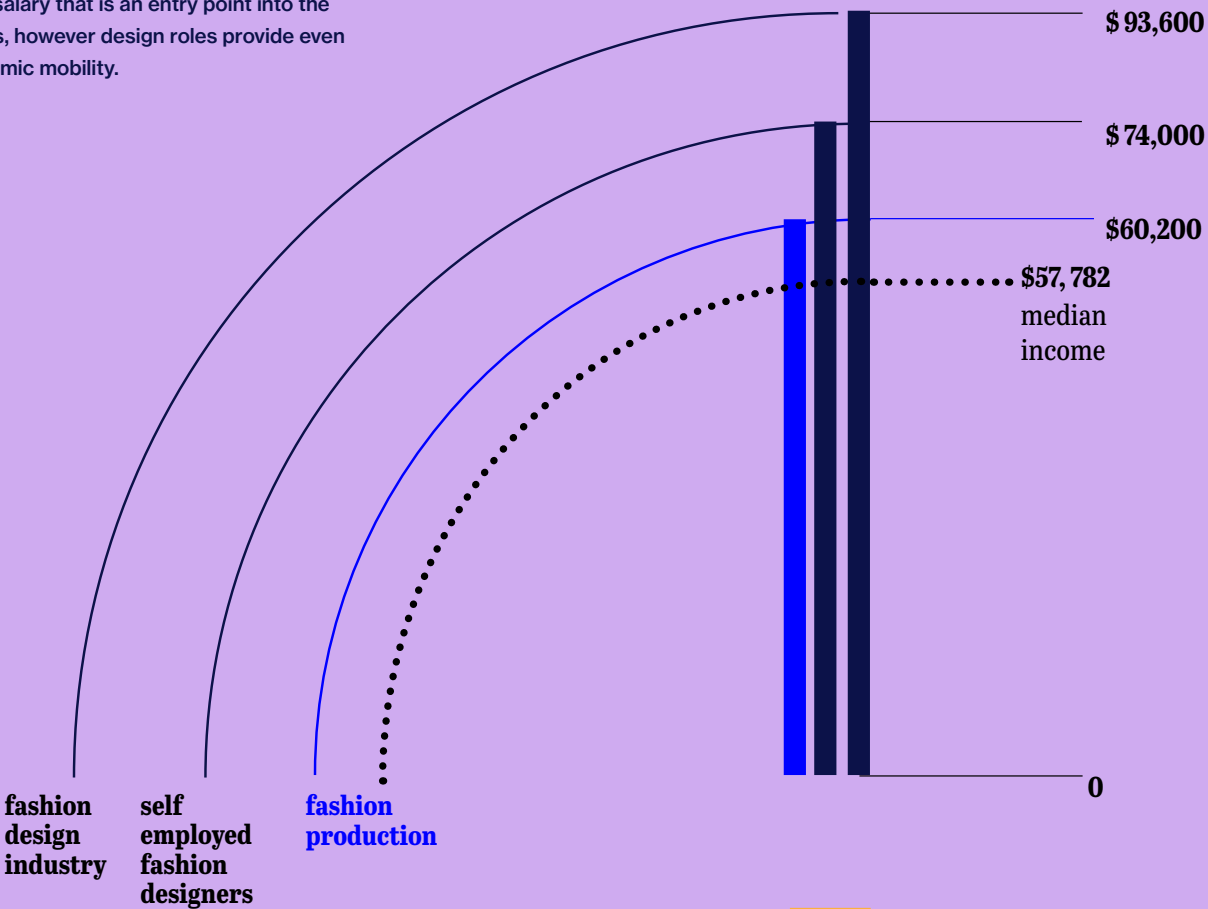
Income of Garment Workers vs. Designers

NYC remains one of the fashion capitals of the world. The Fashion Design Industry as a whole is a prominent and growing field that offers high wages in NYC.

The average wage for fashion design jobs increased to over \$93,600. Most of the job growth we have seen is from self employed fashion designers. These wages went up to \$74,000.

In the last decade, Fashion Production jobs have decreased overall in NYC, yet average wages in fashion production employment have

The urban fashion manufacturing sector plays an important economic role in the city's ecosystem, although all of these professions provide wages above the city's median income. Fashion production has the potential to employ large numbers of people without requiring high levels of formal education. This as an opportunity for more immigrant women to enter into the creative sector at a salary that is an entry point into the middle class, however design roles provide even more economic mobility.



2017

Fashion Design Industry vs. Fashion Production



research question

How are immigrant women without a higher education navigating into the fashion industry?

Journey Map

I wanted to hear from immigrant women themselves that were navigating into the creative field or/into fashion production in order to understand the challenges and barriers they came across. What prevented their creative pursuits and ultimately what resources did they need to do so.

It was difficult getting someone to talk to about their transition. Much of the workforce is undocumented and are fearful of retaliation when speaking about their experiences. Luckily, I was able to speak with a few people and through the use of journey mapping learned of many nuances about their challenges .

Through a one on one journey mapping activity, I was able to gain in-depth knowledge into this person's life. This is what they shared.

Her story reflects similar stories about being taken advantage of. These types of exploitative practices run rampant and are unfortunately fairly common experiences for NYC's immigrant.

KEY LEARNINGS

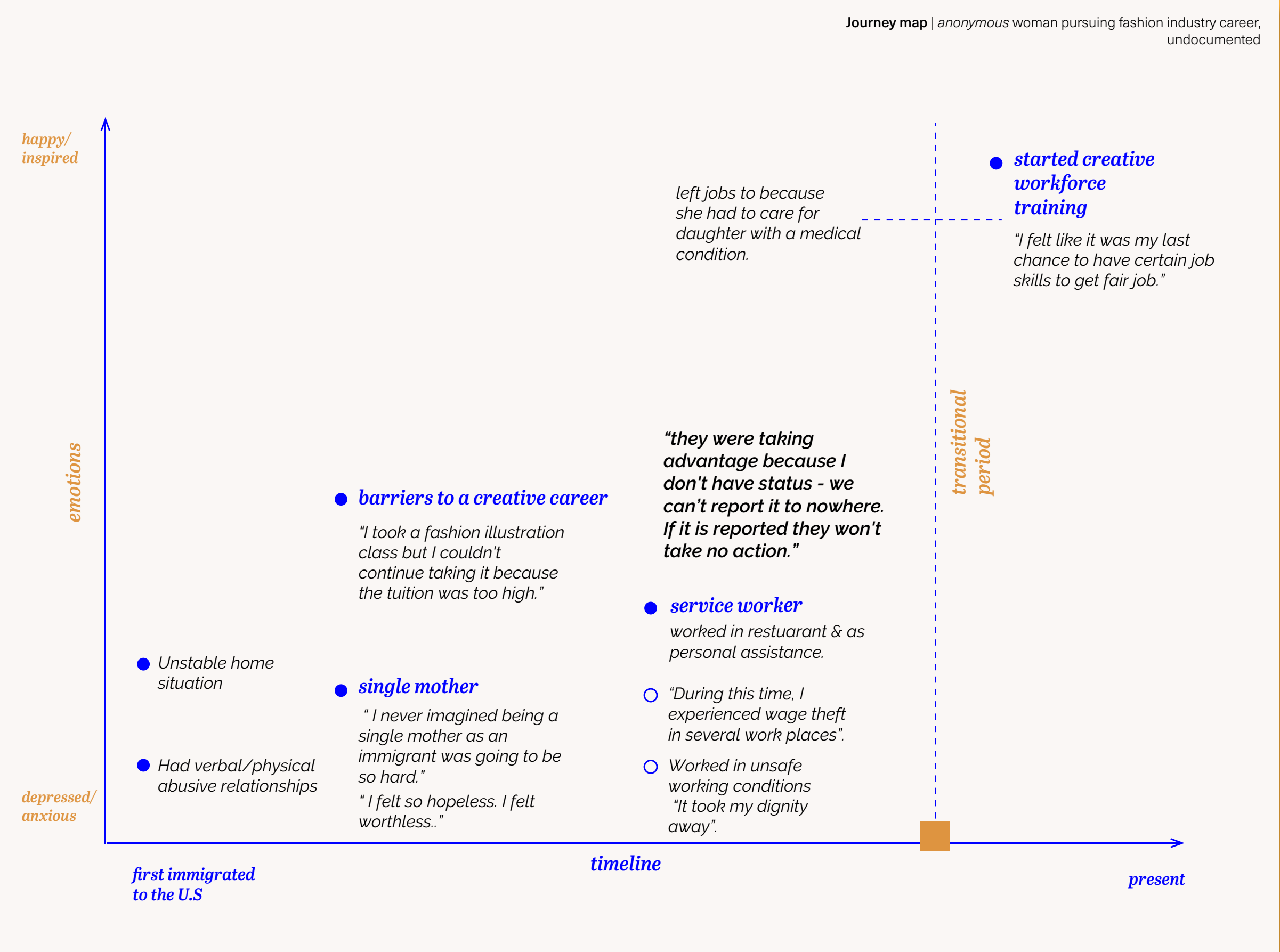
Safety in the workplace

Most of the women seeked safety and stability at their job. Many were not trusting of their current employer based on the difficulties and unfair experiences that they had in previous jobs.

Accessible Learning

All of the women I spoke to sought a career in fashion but because of socio economic reasons were not able to continue or pursue design studies. Regardless, some have a substantial amount of experience, even owning their own businesses in their country

Journey map | anonymous woman pursuing fashion industry career, undocumented



Scoping the problem

At this point I had learned:

The NYC Garment Manufacturing sector is at a crossroads.

1. Industry stakeholders are committed to local manufacturing efforts but there are a lot of unknowns within the sector. Manufacturing has been devalued and underinvested, from its infrastructure and technological advancement to its labor force. Meanwhile, the “maker movement” has continued to show growth. To prevent the manufacturing sector from fully disappearing from NYC’s thriving economy, it must adapt digital literacy skills and new training techniques. While it is no longer the strong, “traditional” sector it once was, manufacturing will always be the foundation that holds up NYC’s multi-billion dollar fashion design industry whether in NYC or the global south. If NYC manufacturing embraces new technology, it could also be considered part of the “creative innovation economy,” an economy with significant growth and high paying jobs. The NYC Garment Manufacturing sector is at a crossroads.

The way the system works comes at great cost to these immigrant women.

2. Immigration status is actually one of the main reasons why 97% of the garment industry is made up of immigrant women. Employers are able to take advantage of this by keeping wages low and using exploitative practices, because immigrant women have no safe way of reporting abuses. They risk being fired or deported.

Garment Manufacturing can provide an entry point into the middle class for many but it's just that, an entry point.

3. Garment Manufacturing can provide an entry point into the middle class for many but given the dwindling number of manufacturing firms and lack of support on a citywide level, it remains just that, an entry point. Fashion Design fields prove to be an opportunity for economic mobility. By preparing immigrant women to hone both skill sets within manufacturing and design, they are better equipped to access multiple creative career pathways.

I approached the scoping process in two ways:

Focusing on an immigrant neighborhood community
Sunset Park, Brooklyn

&

Focusing on an existing framework:
The Solidarity Economy

Sunset Park

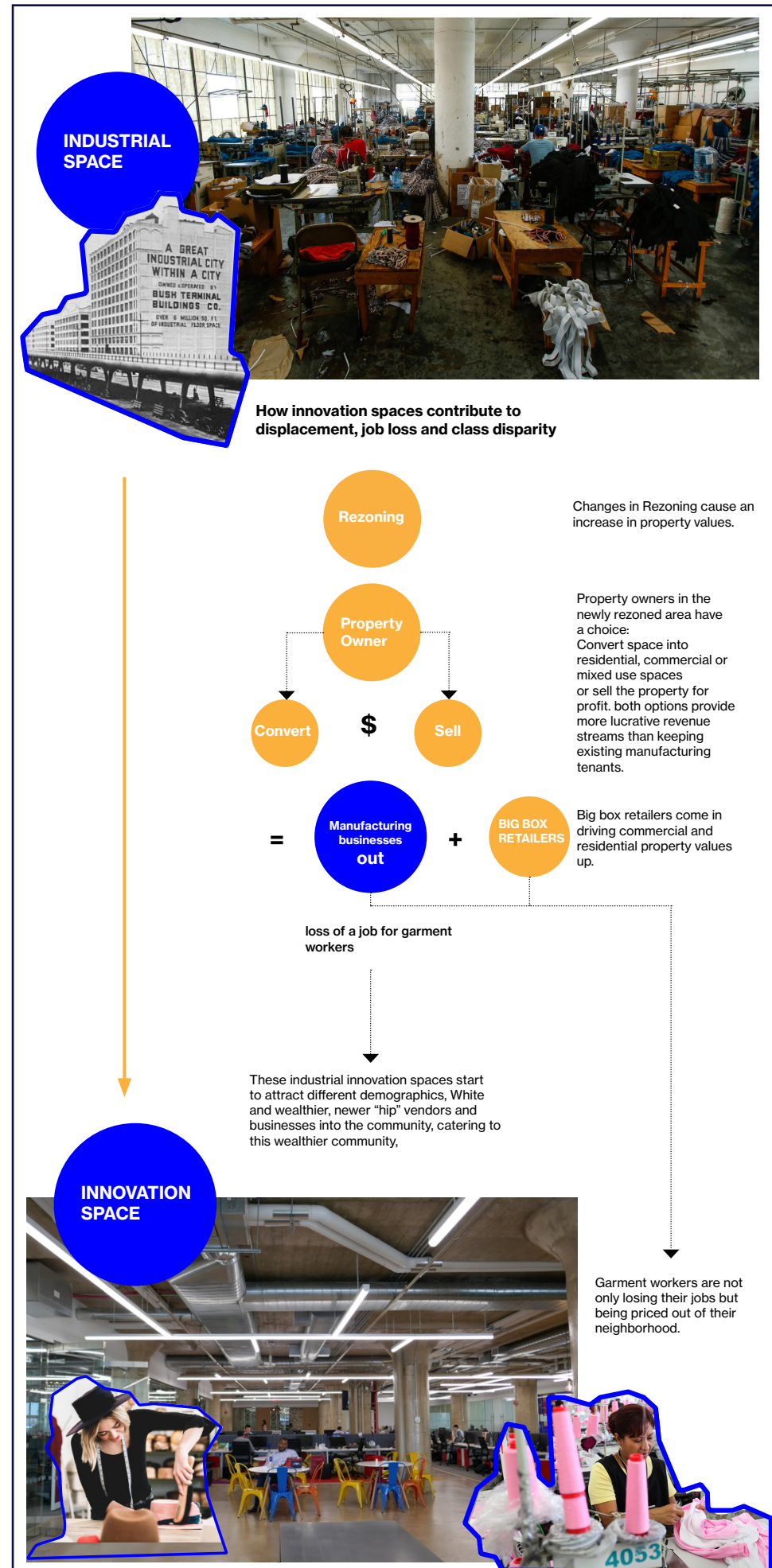
Initially I started to scope by focusing on a particular neighborhood choosing Sunset Park in Brooklyn because it's one of the top immigrant dense neighborhoods. I knew that it had a rich working class history that was being compromised by gentrification. I spoke to a few designers and makers that have lived in the area to get acquainted with the changing neighborhood. This led me to researching Industry City's makerspaces.

Development of industrial space into innovation hub

As these innovative industries continue to grow, clusters have emerged such as the creative industrial campus of Industry City in Sunset Park, which provides creative manufacturing to companies in tech and other creative industries. It is also the largest private facility situated on the waterfront. Industry City has promised to promote job growth since it's opening in 2016. The developer, Jamestown (*), has been pushing to rezone the neighborhood so it can build more luxury buildings, hotels and commercial structures. The latest version of the rezoning proposal is currently on hold.

These developments have caused a strong concern amongst Sunset Park residents regarding displacement. As heard in countless articles from Sunset Park's Community - "There is Nothing innovative about displacement!" Thankfully, there are citizens and community based organizations on the ground fighting hard for a just socio-economic system. They have raised questions about what kind of jobs are being created - and for whom? They do not feel this "growth" is for them. Thus far, there is no concrete data that Industry City has created job growth and opportunities for Sunset Park residents.

Although there are many social justice organizations and activists advocating against gentrification in Sunset Park, I couldn't seem to find with one that was catering to immigrant women in the creative sector specifically tackling these manufacturing issues. I knew my target participant: immigrant women creatives, but I faced a dilemma in my research: do I need to keep the manufacturing component? I decided to focus on manufacturing through the lens of economic justice, putting my efforts into supporting a community on the ground working toward alternative economic and labor models.



Solidarity economy is about systemic transformation

Solidarity Economy & Cooperative Business Models

I wanted to draw upon existing resilient frameworks such as Solidarity Economy. According to U.S Solidarity Economy Network , SEN, the solidarity economy is a framework that includes a wide array of economic and non-economic exchanges but they all share common values that differ from the dominant economy. We are in some way already participating in these types of exchanges. Capitalism has just dominated and prioritized monetary exchanges.

There has been a growing movement advocating for Cooperatives in NYC. New York launched its first ever city funded Worker cooperative business development initiative. Worker cooperatives offer an alternative economic model that shifts profit and economic growth to prioritizing people with a focus on well-being. It promotes democratic ownership and decision-making. It fundamentally dismantles top down approaches to a more horizontal structure that is just, and where power is shared. It builds on communities and cooperation.

Being that workers are themselves owners and each has one equal share, profits are spread evenly throughout the business. This allows for workers/ owners to set their wages, have stable income, have reliable schedules and be able to spend time with families. All of which are difficult for low income communities in New York City.

“

Our folks innovate all the time, but it isn’t considered innovation because it does not create profit for shareholders on Wall Street.

- *Cheyenna Weber, a long standing solidarity advocate and educator, and member of Solidarity NYC & Cooperative Economics Alliance of New York City (CEANYC)*

This gets me to my thesis statement

How might we support social enterprises working on manufacturing efforts to create more inclusive pathways into the creative economy for low-income immigrant women?

Partnership

Custom Collaborative

Throughout the research process I identified businesses that are pushing towards economic inclusion in underinvested communities, building equity and establishing new ways-of-working models to allow for a shift in power.

Fortunately I was able to partner with Custom Collaborative, a unique workforce development program, based in Harlem, championing low-income women immigrants as entrepreneurs and designers in the fashion industry.

Programs

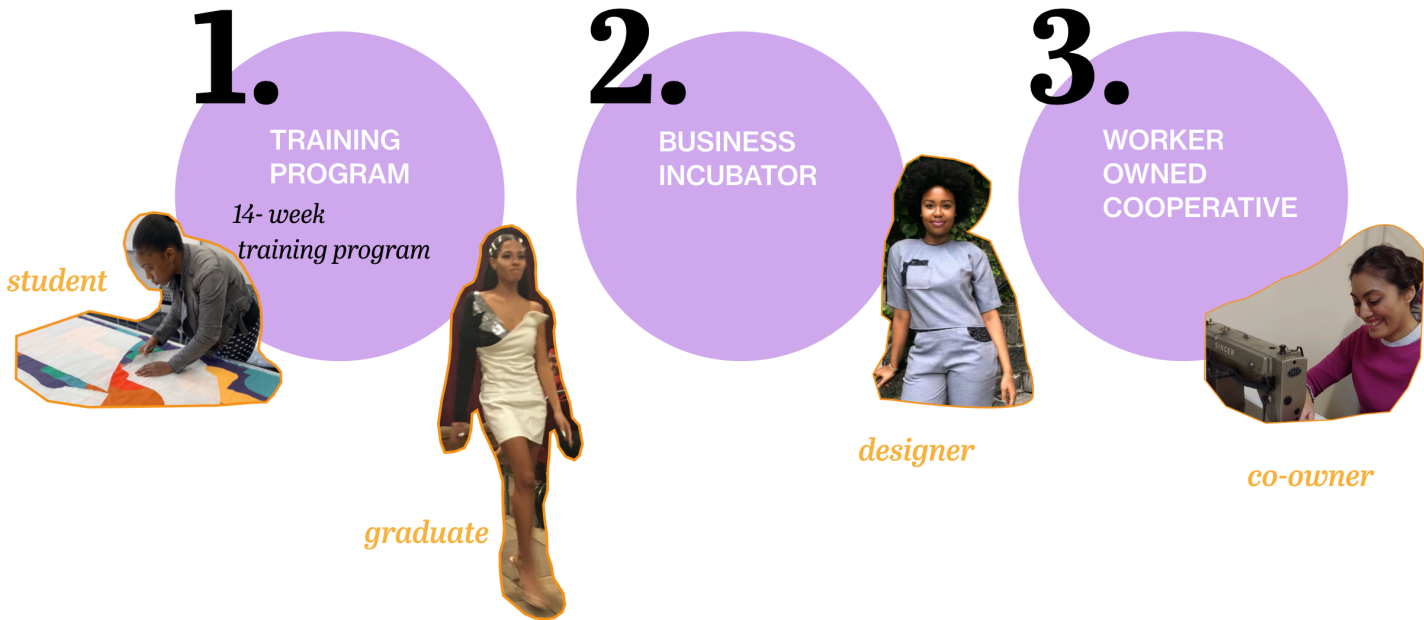
Their programming has 3 parts - a comprehensive 14-week training program that equips students with essential technical skills to enter the fashion industry. Graduates of the training program can then become part of the “Business Incubator ” which fosters personal growth and professional advancement for their entrepreneurship path. Most impactful, the opportunity to become the co-owner of a worker led manufacturing cooperative.



Custom Collaborative is often asked what is your traditional participant ?

It’s a range .We are not just trying to force people into one pathway, we are asking: what is it that they would like to do?”

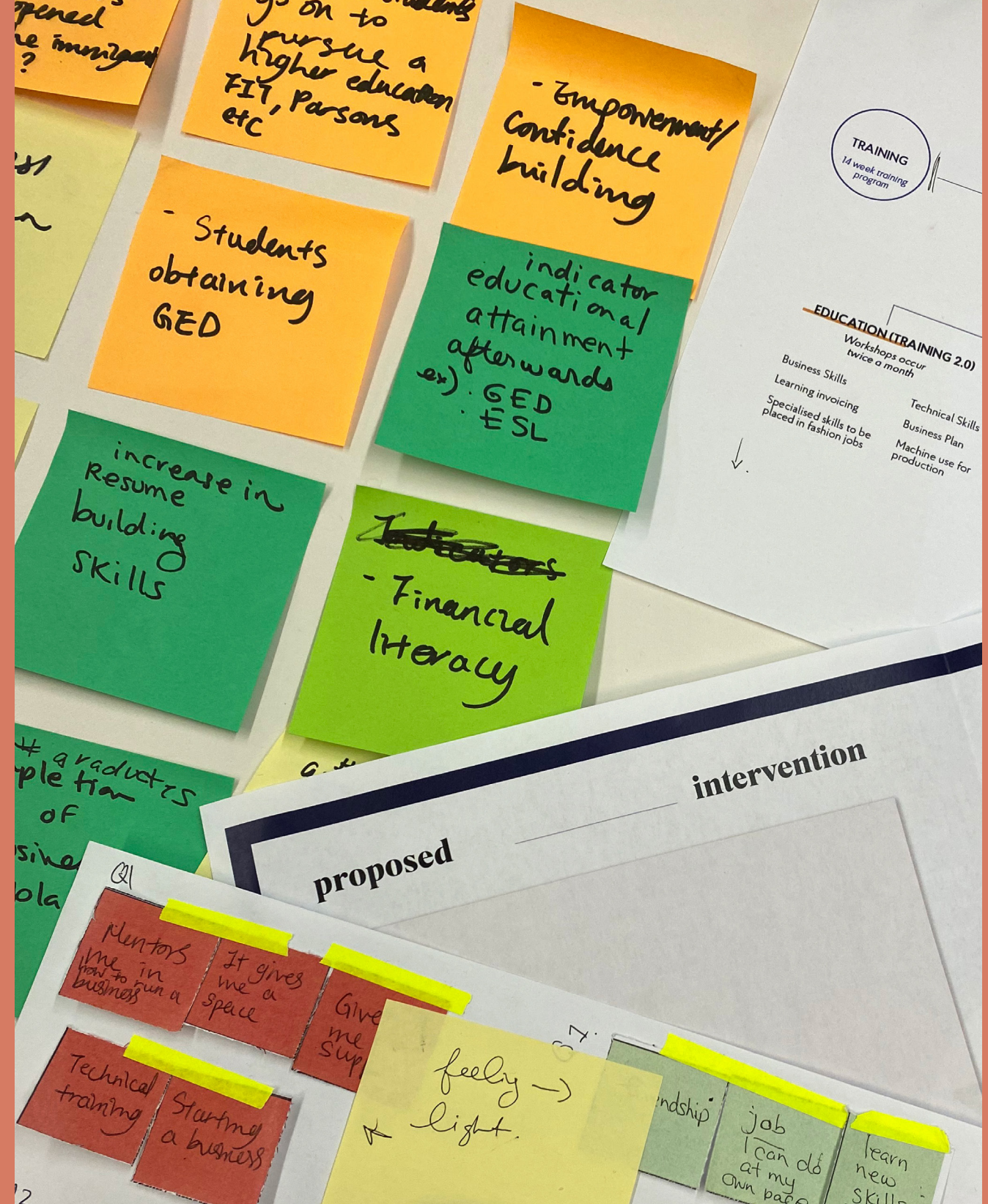
- Tessa Maffucci, Director of Stategy, Custom Collaborative



Proto typing

Approach

I approach prototyping as learning by making. Prototypes are tangible, physical representations of ideas. Personally, prototyping is a tool that helps move abstract concepts out of my head so I can fully “see” the process. The invisible is made visible. The most important aspect is the prototypes can create an invitation for others to collaborate and build on one idea - which then generates many more.



[illegible]

The diagram is a mind map with 'business' at the top center. It branches out into several categories, each represented by a colored sticky note:

- life goals + aspirations** (yellow)
- secure livelihood** (yellow)
- temporment** (yellow)
- Skillset** (yellow)
- educational** (yellow)
 - indicator educational attainment afterwards
 - a) GED
 - ESL
- career** (yellow)
 - motivation/ambition
- Indicators** (yellow)
 - Indicators graduates that have a sustaining job
- self esteem / confidence** (yellow)
- business** (yellow)
 - Technical skill set growth
- technical** (yellow)
 - Technical skill set growth
- career ~~needs~~ Skills** (yellow)
 - interview communication
- Indicators** (green)
 - Financial literacy
- Technical skill set growth** (green)
- increase in Resume building Skills** (green)
- growth of graduates business** (green)
 - growth of graduates business profits or units
- Leadership skills / traits?** (green)
- 4 graduates complete a business plan** (green)
- Fashion / technical language proficiency** (green)
- interview Skills / communication etiquette** (green)
- amt of years in business** (yellow)
- consistent employment** (yellow)
 - # months / years
- # apprenticeship + job placement** (yellow)
- Stable housing** (yellow)



OUTCOME

Ecosystem Map of Custom Collaborative's programming

Prototype 01

Skill Setting Workshop

HYPOTHESIS

From the initial prototype with Custom Collaborative's team, it was clear that time was an issue for all the graduates and coop members. In order to have a good level of participation, the data gathering had to be beneficial to the members as well. What type of narrative information would be useful to Custom Collaborative but also be beneficial for the graduates & coop members?

ACTIVITY

The founding coop members used a playful card sorting activity to assess their technical, soft skills and digital skills gained from the training program and incubator and their level of confidence. This activity also surfaces the skill sets they would like to learn to further their career goals.

GOAL

To gain an understanding of the graduates' current skill sets through self assessing and reflecting on what they themselves feel confident in.

LEARNINGS

Dual purpose

The workshop was well appreciated and had a dual purpose: gathering data for CC but also proved valuable for graduates by giving time and space to reflect on their paths and identify what their needs are. Self assessing one's skills and reflecting on them seemed like a good choice.

English Language Skills

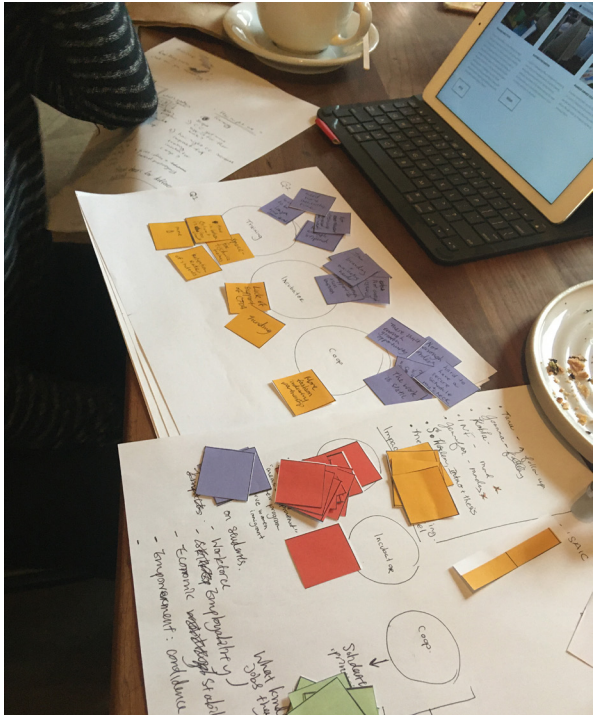
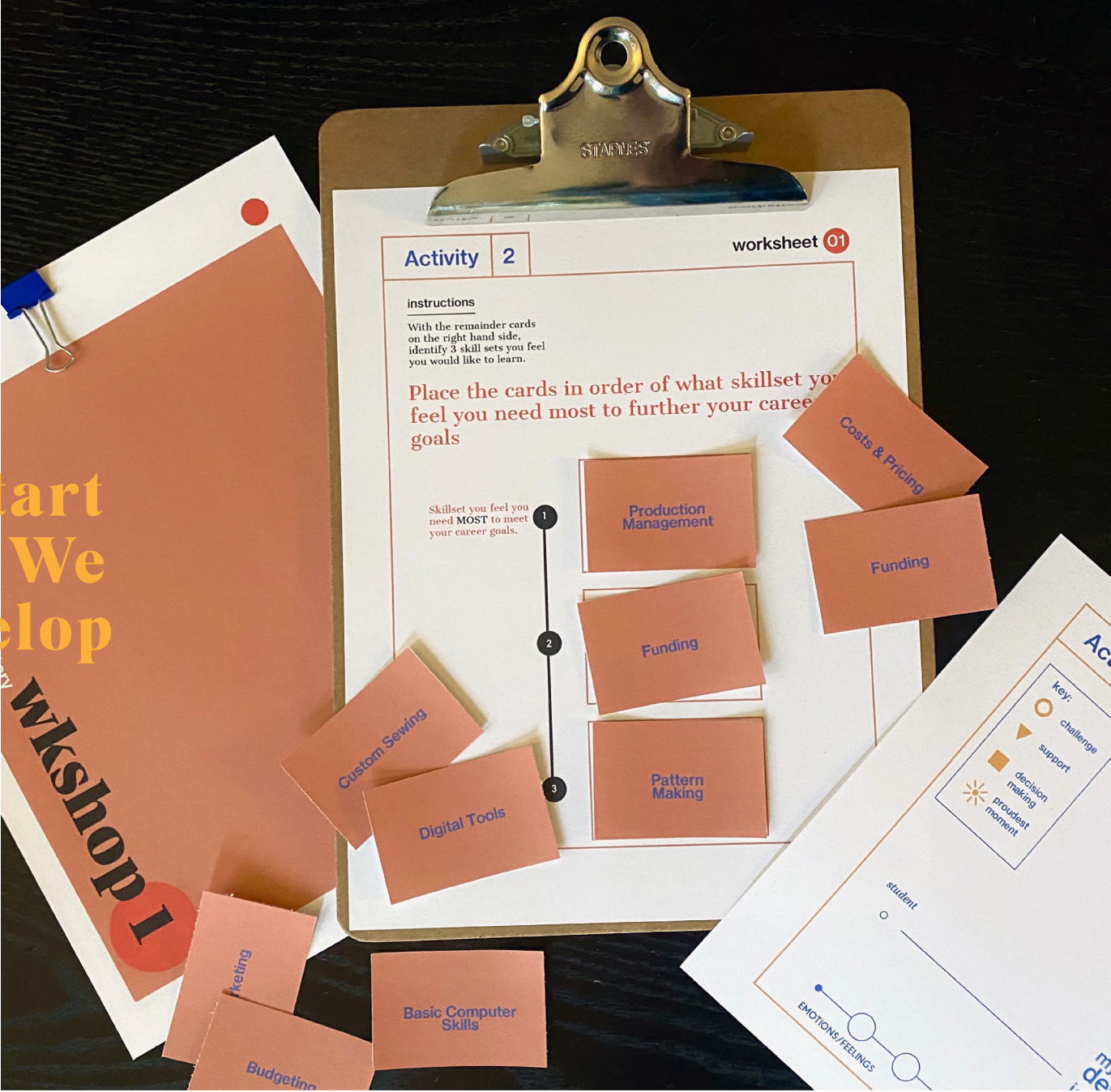
When determining their level of confidence, one prompt was framed as "Confident enough that you can teach a certain skill." Most of the women felt because they didn't have enough of a command on the english language to be able to teach."Teaching" was too strong of a word. This opened up conversations about their lack of confidence in english language skills and how it was a barrier for them.

“I don't feel confident enough to start production. We need to develop more skills

- New Coop Member, workshop participant

“I don't have enough confidence to teach none of the skills.

- New Coop Member, workshop participant



PRE WORKSHOP ACTIVITY

Brainstorming types of data that could be captured & prototyped with people other than the intended participants in order to test out delivery of prompts & and structure of the workshop.

Skill Setting Workshop| Second Iteration

MEETING
COMMUNITY
WHERE THEY
ARE AT

While I received affirmation that the workshop was beneficial held remotely, the answers and data could be captured digitally to make it easier to share with Custom Collaborative. For women on the go, the coop lead and I co-designed a digital version using existing platforms that are easily compatible with Slack & WatsApp. The responses were great and we had 100% participation, which the coop lead said they had difficulty getting previously.

The need for this workshop to be re-designed in 3 different formats, for live workshop use , remote workshop and digital is exactly where meeting the community where it's concept can be applied.

Data Collected

Types of skills members have gained from the training program & business incubator

Level of proficiency within each skill set

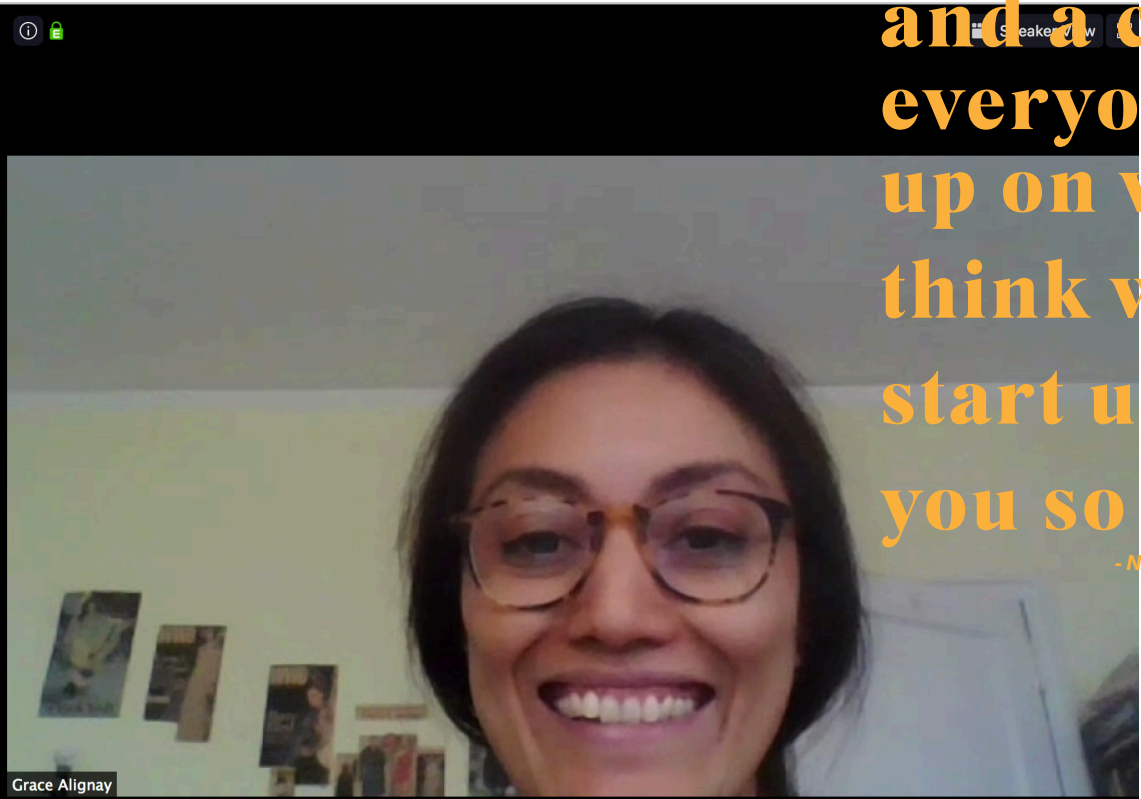
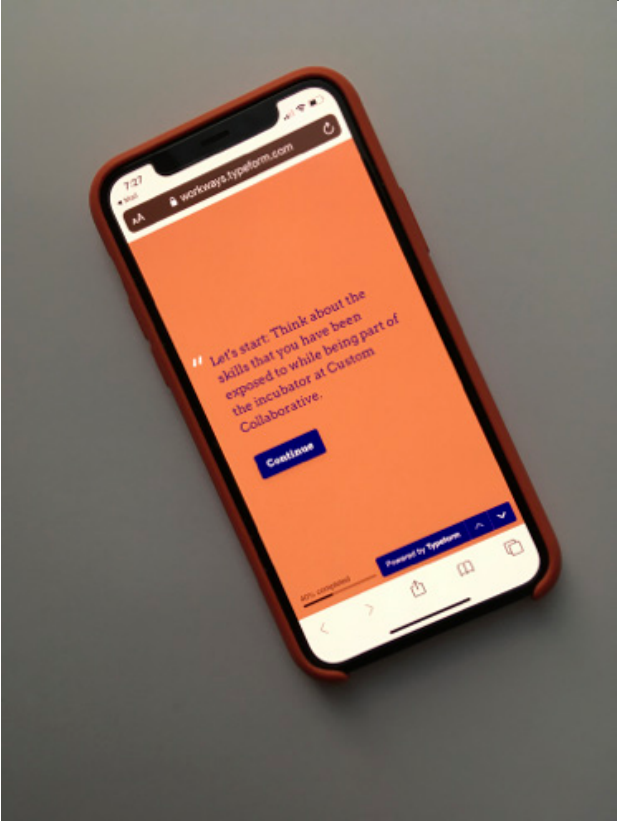
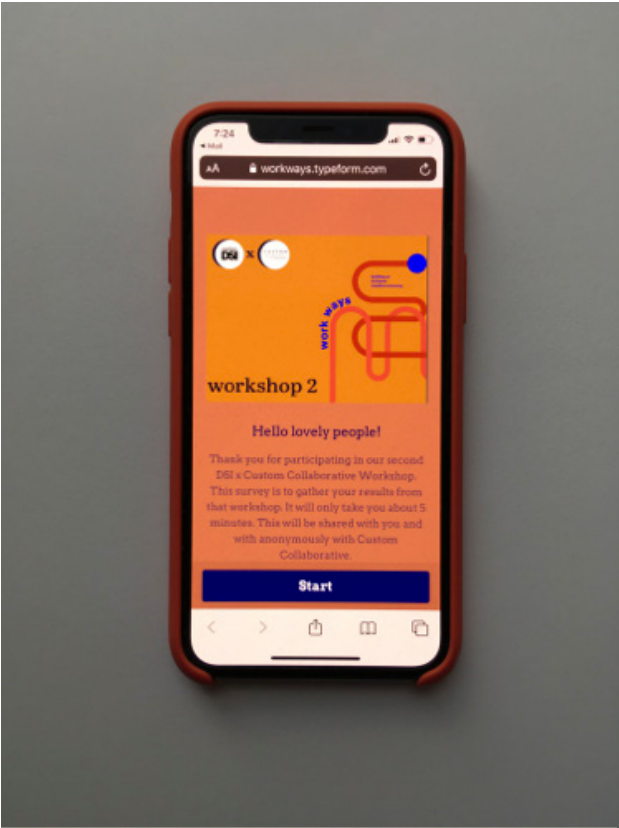
Level of comfort and confidence within each skillset

Skill Sets members want to learn / feel they need to further their career

1+ Select the skill sets you feel **confident** enough that you could teach some else. If there are skills not listed - write your own in the button labeled other.*
Select as many that apply to you.

Choose as many as you like

<div><div></div><div>Business Finance</div></div>	<div><div></div><div>Budgeting</div></div>	<div><div></div><div>Business Plan</div></div>	<div><div></div><div>Invoicing</div></div>
<div><div></div><div>Leadership/Management</div></div>	<div><div></div><div>Handing</div></div>	<div><div></div><div>Marketing</div></div>	<div><div></div><div>Social Media</div></div>
<div><div></div><div>Ordering Material</div></div>	<div><div></div><div>Pricing Work</div></div>	<div><div></div><div>CAD computer assisted design tools</div></div>	<div><div></div><div>Digital/Photo manipulation</div></div>
<div><div></div><div>Making Tech</div></div>	<div><div></div><div>Sewing</div></div>	<div><div></div><div>Pattern</div></div>	<div><div></div><div>Alterations</div></div>



“It really was an amazing exercise and a chance for everyone to speak up on what they think we need to start up.Thank you so much!!

- New Coop Member, workshop participant

Probe Tool | Remote Workshop

HYPOTHESIS

Building upon the first prototype, Self identification can be used as a tool for empowerment. Self reflection and having a sense of how the members identify during this transitional period in their careers would be beneficial indicators to Custom Collaborativés programming. For members, this would aid in defining themselves creatively.

ACTIVITY

In this second workshop, the group was guided by a series of prompts in two different areas of self actualization: How they see themselves as creatives, and How they see themselves as business owners. This was held as a remote workshop but I wanted the activity to be more interactive in order to “share out” answers to create a lively discussion.

GOAL

To have an open discussion and practice active listening in an environment where members would be able to self identify and feel comfortable sharing with each other.

LEARNINGS

Self Reflection is appreciated

One of the women shared with me that this activity allowed her the space & time to be able to express herself. This time for self reflection was appreciated. The open discussion format allowed for an exploratory & lively atmosphere where even some of the more typically timid felt open to sharing.

Lack of Confidence

The group varied on how they themselves related to their own design identities based on their past experiences or what they perceive as what a “designer” is. For the majority of the group, the title of “designer” was seen as prestigious. All the coop members were not ready to consider themselves owners. Not feeling confident was the number one issue raised in being able to see oneself as an owner or as a designer.

Wow! I feel strongly as a fashion designer because this is my story. I create more than making. I use to have a sewing business back home and I use to pay someone to make them. Years ago I only create. I have more experience in design. But now here I make.

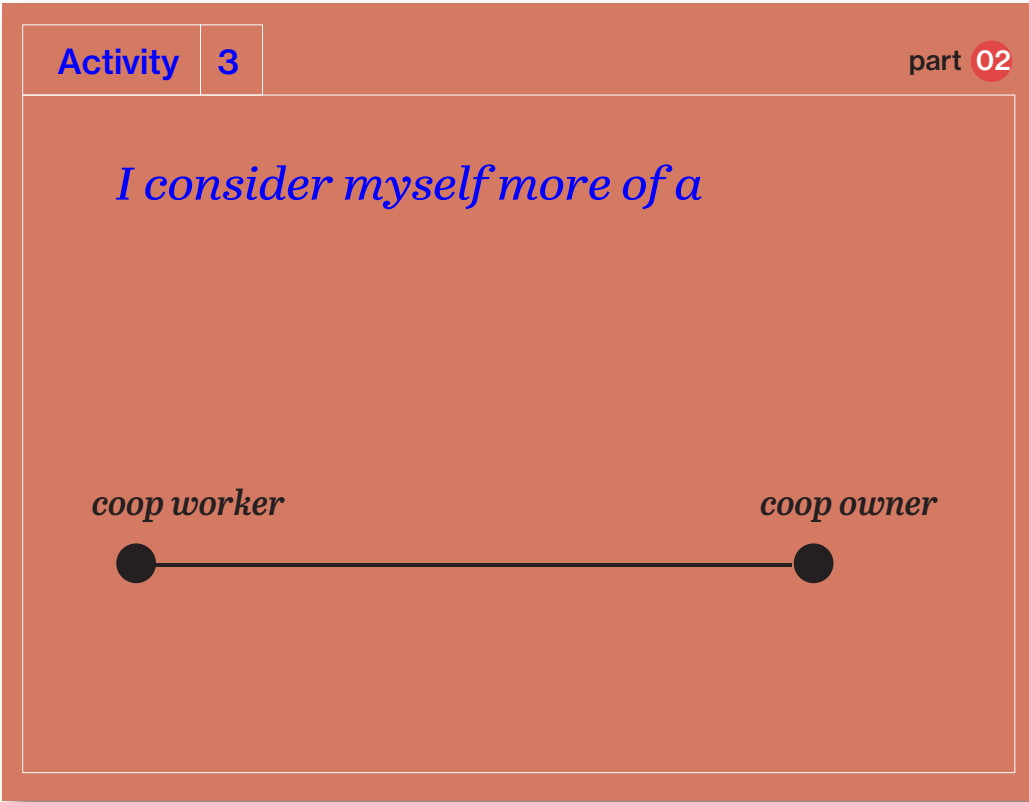
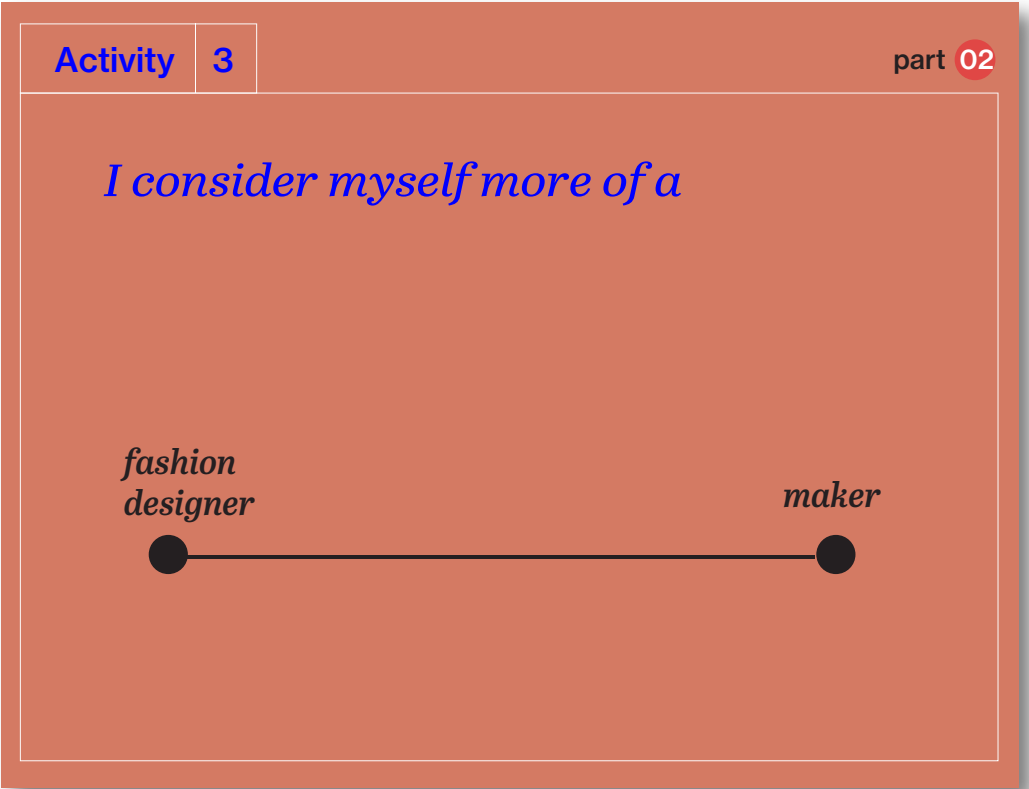
- New Coop Member, workshop participant

“I think for me I am a maker because to me a fashion designer is like a big word and you have to have a lot of experience and knowledge in calling yourself a fashion designer. So to me it just hard in that way.”

- New Coop Member, workshop participant

I am trying to get close to coop owner because I have been working as employee for years. So I tried to get rid of that kind of thought and try to think as owner of the coop. ”

- New Coop Member, workshop participant



Prototype 03

Town Hall Workshop| during a PANDEMIC

HYPOTHESIS

Given my earlier learnings on cooperative culture that everyone has a voice in democratic governance and that the coop is incubated with the support of Custom Collaborative, coop members need a data gathering mechanism that makes it easier to communicate and share their concerns and report back to Custom Collaborative in an anonymous way. How might this system be made replicable so someone other than myself could facilitate these workshops in the future?

ACTIVITY

The Town Hall format was used for members to gather and share their thoughts, emotions, suggestions, concerns or anything that was on their mind during critical times. The workshop was designed and facilitated by myself and another social designer. We led the conversation by using several prompts to inspire conversation, moments of share outs and emotional check ins. The learnings were then captured using the feedback report template. Other materials that were designed & tested for replicability during the process were :a facilitation guide, the design of a digital workshop & a digital

GOAL

My goal was to understand which materials & tools would be necessary to support the data gathering process mechanism so it would be useful and easily accessible by someone other than myself to facilitate.

LEARNINGS

Toolkit functionality

The materials must be easy to engage with and interchangeable with the facilitator’s needs. Google Slides proved to be the most manageable digital platform because of it’s shareability and easy to use. Feedback report was well received and easily digestible for my partner.

Data gathering during the remote workshop was difficult. The help of mobile apps or photos of artefacts would help make it easier to document.

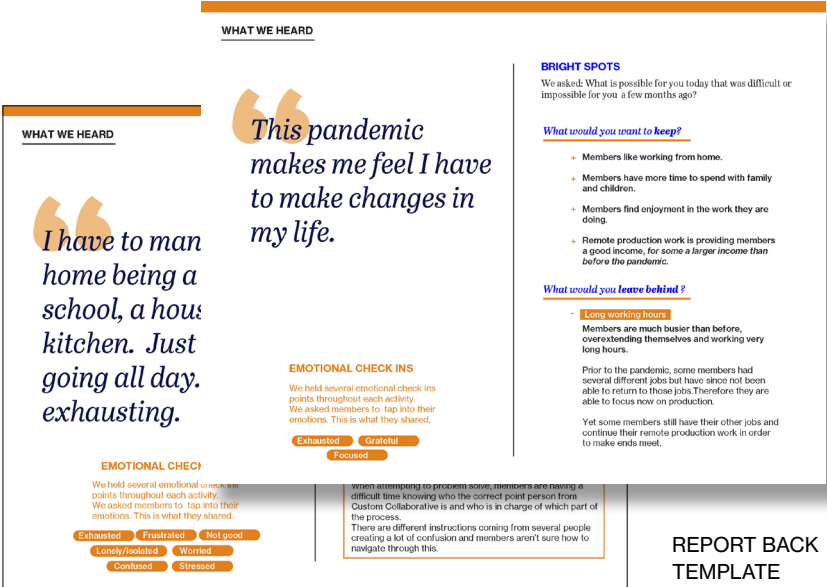
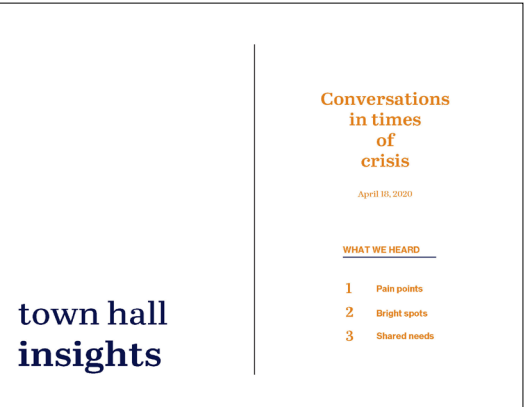
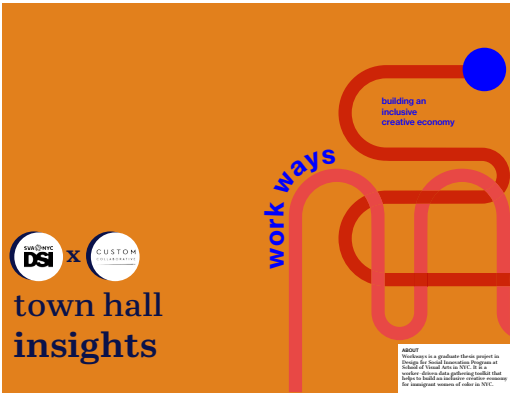
COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Covid-19 forced us all to work remotely, so there was a need to hold the workshop online.

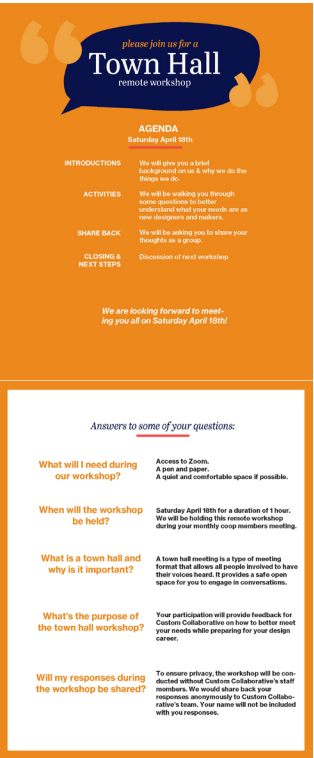
Initially I wanted to hold a live town hall format focused on design futuring activities but given the unprecedented crisis we were all facing, it was important to hold space for the members to discuss the drastic ways this event had affected their ability to work.



REMOTE WORKSHOP



REPORT BACK TEMPLATE



INVITE

Intervention

DESIGN CRITERIA

1. Be autonomous.

A bottom up approach feedback mechanism allows workers, or in this case, coop members' to define their needs while in transition.

2. Meet the community where they are at.

Bring the process to the workers. If they can't attend a live workshop facilitation, then there needs to be a remote option. The workshops will gather narrative information for cc but have to be beneficial to workers. Time is crucial for NYC immigrant single mothers that might have unstable homelife and several jobs.

3. Make the process not only flexible but replicable.

With the option for either remote or live workshop facilitation, the coop lead will be able to gather and host workshops for the next cohort.

Through the prototyping process with Custom Collaborative's team and Lead Coop member, I realized there was a gap in support for graduates transitioning to co-op owners and for Custom Collaborative in gathering those needs.

My intervention aims to bridge this gap in order to make more paths for immigrant women to access the creative industry.

Workways is a worker-centric data gathering toolkit built to amplify equity building models that provide direct pathways for immigrant women of color into NYC’s creative economy.

What are equity -building models?

I have identified 3 principles that make up equity building models

Self actualization

an increase in sense of empowerment, confidence and autonomy

Secure Livelihood

an increase in quality of living, stable income & housing

Career Advancement

Technical business & professional skills obtained

work ways

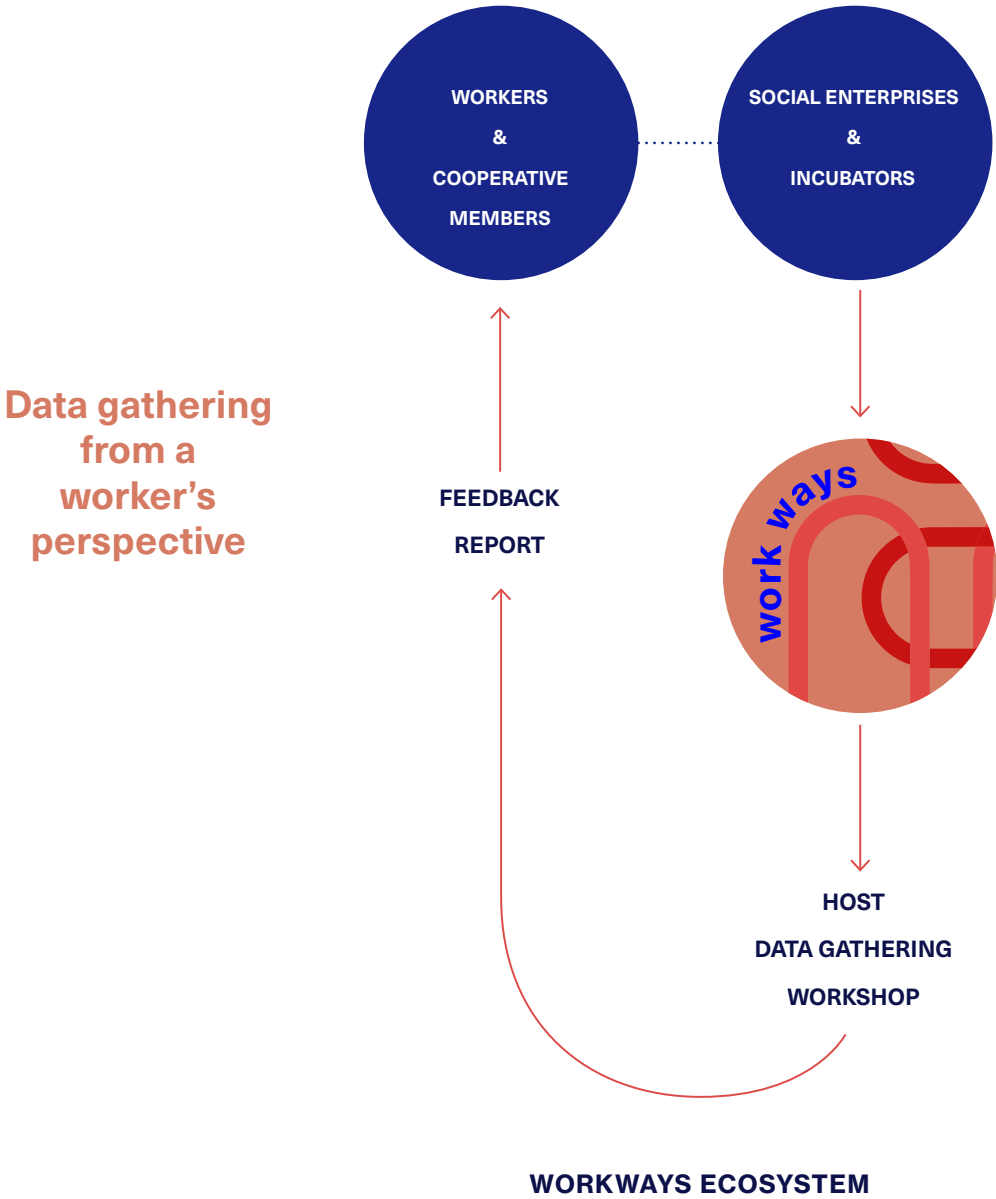
building an inclusive creative economy from a worker’s perspective

How it works

WHO IS IT FOR? The tool establishes a system to capture feedback for :

Workers, in this case new Coop members, to identify their needs when incubating their new coop.

Partnering Incubators or Social enterprises, like my partner Custom Collaborative, to gather information so they can better support workers / Coop members.

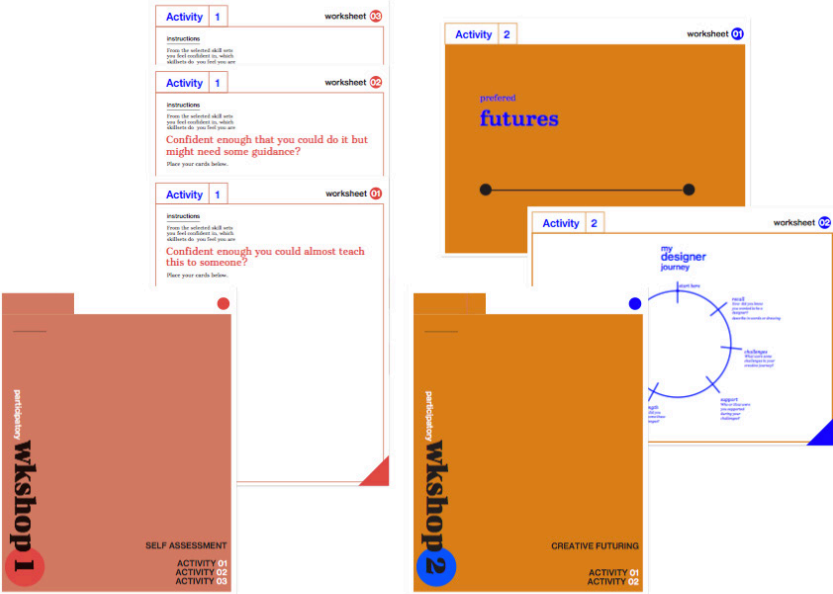


step

1. Participatory Data Gathering Workshops

Workers, or coop members benefit from participatory data gathering workshops which are facilitated by the worker coop lead or a designated member. The toolkit materials can be accessed through an online platform.

To meet the community where they are at, workshops can be either live or remote with some activities designed for existing mobile friendly digital devices. The designs of activities ranges from simple analog worksheets & do-it-yourself exercises to pre-designed digital presentations with a comprehensive facilitation guide.



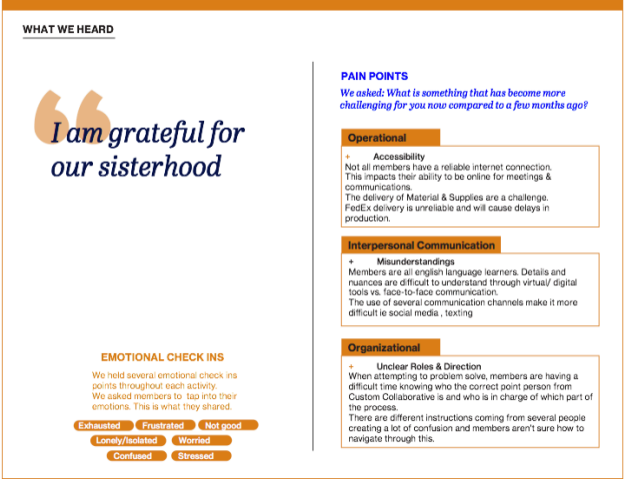
step

2. Anonymous Feedback Report

The designated facilitator uses the feedback template to report the outcomes anonymously back to their partnering social enterprise.

Gathering Tools include:

Workshop Activities Available In print or digital slide presentation
Facilitation guide with an agenda template.
A template for synthesizing feedback.



Intervention Goal

WORKWAY GOALS

For my Partner

Custom Collaborative is hoping to incubate more women owned coops. By using the experiences from its' first ever formed coop, who's members have completed the programming, Workways establishes a data gathering system that informs Custom Collaborative on what training or other services could be of use for future coop businesses.

For Incubators and other Social Enterprises

Workways can help other incubators or social enterprises that are supporting immigrant women into creative careers. There has been a rise in minority-owned coops in NYC. Incubators like the one fostered by my partner propell low income POC into co-owning their own creative businesses. It's proven that businesses led by or owned by POC will hire more POC. The same applies to immigrants. This ushers in more people of color from economically disadvantaged communities into the creative industry who have been traditionally left out. Ultimately breaking down barriers that create a class divide.

PILOT

Due to the Covid-19 Pandemic, I was not able to officially pilot Workways.

Workways would have been launched with by holding a series of workshops similiar to the last round of prototyping. The Coop Lead would host and facilitate the workshops with the coop members utilizing all the designed materials along with the feedback report.

As we know the pandemic has hit immigrant low income and peopole of color hardest. The coop memebbers' efforts and time are being used to work remotely producing masks to our front line responders. I will continue to work with my community to design the data collection more thoroughly .

Next Steps

Using equitable processes to amplify voices

Prior to Covid I was invited by ISIC, a Detroit based non profit reimagining the garment sector, to conduct a citywide assessment of the needs and of the future of NYC's garment industry.

I am hoping to adapt workways' human centered bottom up approach to data gathering specifically for this assessment. In a city with the most immigrants in the world, we need to make sure we use equitable processes in our methods of data collection gathering in order to better suit the most marginalized communities because they are the largest group of stakeholders and hold the key to revisioning the industry.

Using the cooperative model for workforce development

In January 2014, the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies (FPWA) published a report: A Vision for Addressing Income Inequality, suggesting the connection of workforce funding to worker cooperatives and awarding capital incubator start-up funds for cooperative businesses.

Since then, Center for Family Life , a non profit incubating worker owned cooperatives was given a grant from the city to provide a year of training and technical assistance to community groups to launch new co-ops, with the goal of establishing 28 new businesses and 234 new jobs, many of which are for immigrants.

Because of the newfound interest in funding cooperative models , Workways hopes to connect with NYCEDC to initiate a pipeline program , similar to NYC Tech Talent pipeline but specially for immigrant women to enter the high paying careers in the fashion and creative sector. The data collected by Workways for existing social enterprises and from their workers and coop members, provide insights on barriers and needs to be addressed. The advantage of workways is that the data itself comes from a workers perspective which centers the needs of underserved immigrant communities. Making sure their voice is heard and elevated will help bring more POC and immigrant owned creative businesses into the world.



What does our current pandemic crisis teach us?

We are seeing the fault lines in our economic and social systems that disadvantaged communities have always experienced. The people we rely on most are also the most vulnerable, essential low wage workers tasked with doing crucial work during a dangerous time without financial security, or health benefits.

In our manufacturing sector, local garment workers are rising to the challenge by manufacturing Personal Protection Equipment for frontline workers. This continued demand means that many U.S. factories remain open which puts workers at risk.

In this time of global pause, what exploitative and extractive models do we choose to leave behind? And what models do we put in place that are life giving and bring us into a just future?



gracias.

to
Custom Collaborative

Ngozi Okaro
Tessa Maffucci
for fighting for what's right

Grace Alignay
for being brilliant

**& all the amazing women of the
new women-owned coop, Fashion
that works**, chasing their dreams and
MAKING things happen on their terms.

to
Industrial Sewing &
Innovation Center

Deborah Vandermar
for your encouragement &
knowledge

Jennifer Guarino
for your courage in
leading change

to
DSI fam

Jeff Franklin
for pushing me along

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for fostering an open
& caring culture at DSI

Karen Proctor
for inspiring

Jaimie Cloud
for being bad ass

Lorena Estrella
for sharing your knowledge
& truly seeing me
&
my entire cohort for
challenging the status quo

to
fam fam

Mom
the OG maker

My partner, Jason
for making coffee every
single morning for the
past 2 years

Meg
my creative partner

work ways

building an
inclusive
creative economy