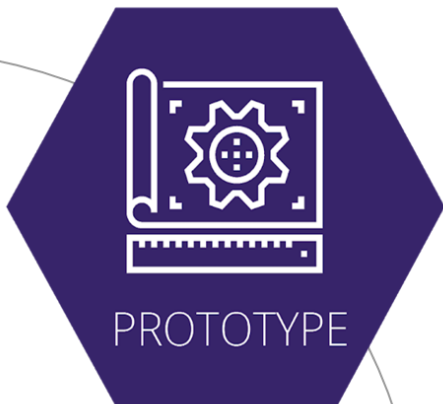


# REIMAGINING THE EDB'S 2021-25 WORK PROGRAM

Through Human  
Centered Design



## PREPARED BY:

**DR. DIVYA MCMILLIN**  
ASSOCIATE VICE CHANCELLOR  
INNOVATION AND GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT

**KRISSY KIMURA**  
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

**LAN ALLISON**  
PROGRAM SPECIALIST

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Citation: McMillin, D., Kimura, K., and Allison, L. (2022). "Reimagining the 2021-25 EDB Work Program Through Human Centered Design." Economic Development Board of Tacoma-Pierce County Core Design Team Project Report.  
Please contact [globalid@uw.edu/253.692.4590](mailto:globalid@uw.edu/253.692.4590) for any questions.



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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## PURPOSE

The Economic Development Board (EDB) of Tacoma-Pierce County completed its 2021-25 Work Program in February 2020, right before COVID-19 hit in March 2020. The Board's commitment to "focused and nimble economic development resources" (Work Program, p. 2) took on a new urgency, as the pandemic laid bare stark inequities in access to resources faced by particularly minority and women owned businesses. Antiracist activism in the summer months of 2020 across the globe, strengthened the focus on equity and inclusion. The EDB's quick response to pandemic challenges required an accompanying redesign of its 2021-25 Work Program, to sustain its efforts for the long term.

Partnering with the University of Washington Tacoma's Global Innovation and Design (GID) Lab, the EDB engaged in a design sprint to address the question: **"How might the EDB's Work Program be more responsive to local business needs in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and systemic inequities?"** The GID Lab's *INNOVATE TACOMA* series created in June 2020, uses human centered design to specifically assist organizations to meet the interrelated challenges of the pandemic, systemic racism, and economic hardship. The GID Lab team facilitated two workshops for the EDB, to address refined iterations of the initial question:

- *How might we elevate a more diverse workforce/talent pipeline to support businesses coming out of the pandemic?*
- *How might we learn more about the communities we serve?*

## METHODOLOGY IN BRIEF

- Consultation and Pre-work [September-October 2021]: Meetings with EDB executive team as well as surveys, focus group and individual interviews with EDB investors and community partners
- Workshop 1 [November 2, 2021]: Need Finding and Project Definition Workshop with eight EDB core design team members
- Facilitator Training: November 22 and 30, 2021
- Workshop 2 [December 8, 2021]: Ideation and Prototyping at EDB Mini Retreat with 50+ participants
- Report [December 2021-January 2022]: Affinity mapping, summary, collation, and presentation at January 21, 2022 Board meeting

## PEOPLE

- GID LAB: Dr. Divya McMillin, Associate Vice Chancellor for Innovation and Global Engagement | Krissy Kimura, Assistant Director | Lan Allison, Program Specialist | Autumn Diaz, Program Coordinator | Amy Newcomb, Community Relations Liaison
- EDB: Bruce Kendall, President & CEO | Herb Simon, Board Chair | Brian Marlow, Incoming Board Chair and Head of Investment and Fiduciary Management (KeyBank) | Sarah Bonds, Vice President, Business Recruitment | Maddie Merton, Vice President, Business Retention and Expansion | Deborah Kelly, Director of Operations | Jackie Flowers, Director (Tacoma Public Utilities) | 50+ EDB investors, community partners, and staff at the Board Mini Retreat

## RESULTS

From **eight initial ideas**, the 50+ EDB Mini Retreat participants defined **four design challenges**, resulting in **56 new ideas** and **23 prototypes** of solutions, which all converged on the *value of inclusivity* across three levels: business community membership, talent pipeline, and EDB outreach strategy. This report details the process and presents a few considerations to design forward.

# DESIGN THINKING and the EDB Work Program

The EDB's question, "How might the 2021-25 Work Program be more responsive to local business needs in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and systemic inequities?" focuses on value, making it exactly the right challenge to put through the design thinking process.

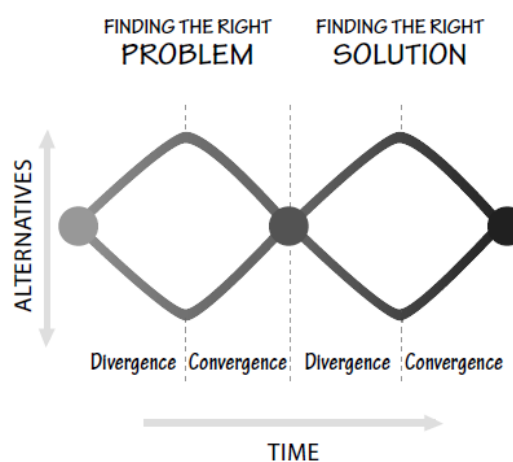
The bold step of beginning with *value*, marks the difference between design thinking and conventional problem-solving. Almost half a century old, the iterative and empathy driven process, most popularized by [Stanford University's d.School](#), is an integral methodology of human centered design (HCD). Typical approaches to problem-solving begin with the elements or resources at hand, with a view to keeping costs down. At the core of design thinking, explains [Kees Dorst](#) (2011), is abductive reasoning that first asks what *value* the team or organization is trying to achieve. It then moves on to address the working principles (the how) and only then, the elements (the what) needed to achieve that value.

Understanding value requires a critical first step: deep empathy for the people experiencing the problem.

The [British Design Council](#) developed a most useful double-diamond model in 2003 (right), to represent the problem space where we clarify need and value, and the solution space, where we define what works. As its creators note, the "beauty is in its simplicity."

The University of Washington Tacoma's Global Innovation and Design (GID) Lab launched in April 2018, brings HCD and design thinking to the South Sound, in ways uniquely responsive to the needs of our region. Facilitators are trained in global participatory design and user research from top academic institutions as well as through Stanford's Innovation Masters Series and General Assembly.

The GID Lab's *INNOVATE TACOMA* series was launched in June 2020 to help area organizations problem-solve through the enormous challenges of the pandemic. The EDB's 2021-25 Work Program assessment and redesign was facilitated by the Lab, in an exciting sprint spanning October-December 2021.



The project moved through the double diamond process, with the iterative design thinking steps of empathy, ideation, prototyping and testing informing the divergence and convergence dynamic of the model. This report presents our work.



# I. NEED FINDING AND USER RESEARCH

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The opening invitational question from EDB President and CEO Bruce Kendall, *How might we revise the EDB's 2021-25 Work Program through human centered design?* was all the GID Lab team needed to plan a full schedule of design thinking activities. Led by Dr. Divya McMillin, UW Tacoma's Associate Vice Chancellor for Innovation and Global Engagement, the team organized two mini consultations to refine that initial question into one that brought the value of this revision to the forefront:

*How might the EDB's 2021-25 Work Program be more **responsive to local business needs** in light of the outbreak of the **COVID-19 pandemic** and heightened awareness of **systemic inequities**?*

An important first step in any design project is to assess whether we are solving the right problem. Need finding becomes a critical component and we typically engage a core design team in identifying the root cause or the heart of need, that the question attempts to address. The *Five Whys* is an iterative interrogative technique used to explore the correlational relationships underlying a particular challenge. The primary goal of the technique is to determine the root cause of an issue or problem by repeating the question “Why?”

The EDB constituted its core design team comprising Kendall, Herb Simon (Board Chair), Sarah Bonds (Vice President, Business Recruitment), Deborah Kelly (Director of

Operations), Maddie Merton (Vice President, Business Retention and Expansion), Brian Marlow (incoming Board Chair and KeyBank National Head of Investment and Fiduciary Management), and Jackie Flowers (Tacoma Public Utilities Director). During the week of October 25, team members were provided with a workbook that oriented them to the design thinking process and the beginner's mindset (think childlike wonder) essential for discovery and unconventional ideas. Through worksheets, the team was prompted through the Five Whys exercise to create a problem statement from the HMW question (left) and drill down to the root cause/s of the problem. Each person used their root cause to create a *new* HMW question to identify specific design challenges for the EDB's Work Program (see next page).



**Pic. 1: GID Lab Pre-Work flipbook**

## NEED FINDING

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EDB Core Design team members had an opportunity to review the 2021-25 Work Program and its strategic imperatives (below), before embarking on the Five Whys process. Their final design challenges were remarkable, with each connecting to the [national workforce reports](#) on the need for greater flexibility, cohesiveness through effective storytelling, diversity in business membership and inclusive and equitable access to services and capital. Snapshots of their work follow:

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### EDB Strategic Imperatives

**Imperative 1:** Proactive Business Retention and Expansion Program: Homegrown Jobs

**Imperative 2:** Proactive Business Recruitment Program: Boosting New Investment

**Imperative 3:** Communications and Strategic Engagement: Promoting Tacoma-Pierce County to the World

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Five Whys Key:

**Initial problem statement in bold, black**

**Design challenge in red**

### BRIAN MARLOW

**Business community needs to be innovative and nimble to respond to the demands of the modern economy in order for businesses to remain competitive and for the economy to stay strong and citizens to find high paying jobs.**



**How might we better tell the story of the Puget Sound business environment to attract our targeted industries in order to bring more of them to Tacoma?**

## NEED FINDING CONTD.

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### MADDIE MERTON

**How might the EDB be more strategic in business retention & expansion activities in light of increased demand for services?**

- 1  
Increased need from the business community for resources and information.
- 2  
Competing priorities for time.
- 3  
Small team with multiple responsibilities.
- 4  
Clearer distinction on what services matter most which benefit community.
- 5  
Businesses are facing a myriad of concerns. Staying a top resources is a challenging in itself. Partners are facing volume increase with same amount of staff to execute.

How might we better deliver on services for the business community in order to meet the increased volume of needs?

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### DEBORAH KELLY

**The EDB has limited resources and not enough bandwidth to effectively make a significant systemic inequity shift in the community.**

- 1  
Larger problem than a small organization can change alone.
- 2  
Would need more staff and business support.
- 3  
Businesses across the board need to engage in the same process.
- 4  
More staff to lead the effort to get more business/community engagement.
- 5  
More investor support dollars to hire professionals to run that lead.

How might we find additional dollars to hire appropriate staff or support team to lead the charge for business involvement in order to address systemic inequities?

## NEED FINDING CONTD.

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### BRUCE KENDALL

**BIPOC businesses in Pierce County do not have access to the capital they need to grow.**



How might we change ingrained thinking that allow biased policies to persist?

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### SARAH BONDS

**How might the EDB attract new tech/office companies to Pierce County when companies are embracing a work-from-home strategy?**



How might we make working in the office more flexible for employees in order to allow them to spend more time with family?

The step-by-step process of crafting a problem statement connected to strategic imperatives and then drilling down to the root cause to then reformulate a design challenge, prepped the core design team to work with the wealth of user research conducted by the GID Lab team.

## USER RESEARCH

User research helps designers understand user behaviors, needs, and motivations. It covers a wide range of methods and should be conducted during all stages of a project to ensure alignment with user needs. The GID Lab team created a survey and interview questionnaire with support from the EDB to better understand the struggles and innovations of investors during the pandemic. Interview questions were used for both focus groups and individual interviews.

### Investor Survey

October 14 - 28

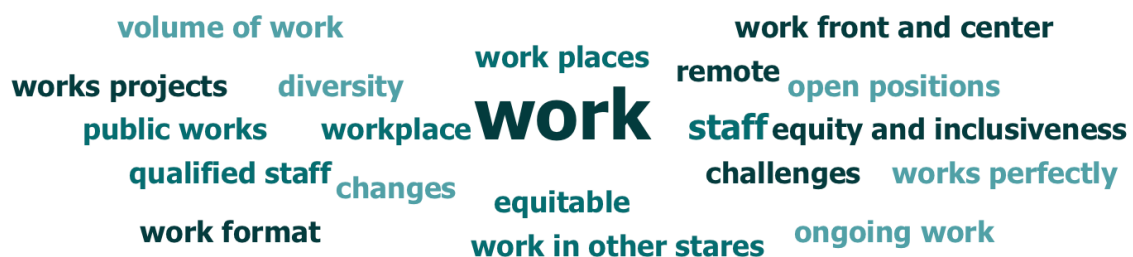
The survey (see Appendix II) received a 35.3% response rate (N=85, n=30). The survey asked participants about their top challenges to growth and top challenges to equity and inclusion over the past year and a half. Top challenges to growth were first and foremost, Covid-19, and constraints imposed in hiring and recruitment processes. Challenges to promoting equity and inclusion were sheer volume of work and the remote environment.

10 respondents (33%) answered **COVID** for this question.



Pic. 2: Challenges to growth in the past 18 months.

12 respondents (40%) answered **work** for this question.



Pic. 3: Challenges to equity and inclusion in the past 18 months.



## USER RESEARCH CONTD.

### Investor Focus Groups and Interview

October 26 - November 1

To delve deep into the user experience beyond the survey, the GID Lab team interviewed a small group of investors. Participants in this group were suggested by the EDB team and questions were developed in close collaboration between the GID Lab and EDB (see Appendix III). In total, the GID Lab team conducted five focus groups and one interview (n=11) with investors representing BIPOC and veteran-owned businesses and various industries (eg., manufacturing, aerospace, retail and hospitality, freight transport).

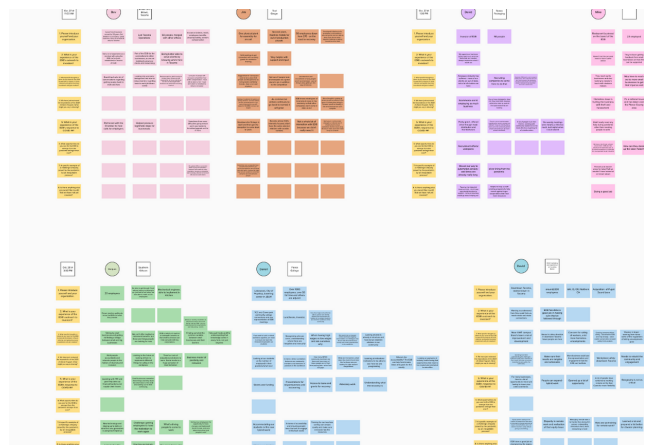
The following pains and gains were identified from the past 18 months:

#### Investor "Pains"

- Work Program (and website) does not support small business, retail or hospitality sectors
- Job retention and recruitment
  - No applicants, or applicants are "ghosting" for unemployment benefits
  - Loss of employees to larger businesses or places with better benefits
  - Lack of motivation to re-enter workforce
- Other cost of living (e.g. childcare, housing, transportation)
- Land costs prohibit expansion
- Concern for safety

A focus group participant captured the essence of these pains:

*"The [Work Program] did not scream out we want to support small businesses. It sounded like we want bigger businesses that will bring in more people...but aren't the vast amount of jobs created by small businesses? Shouldn't developing and supporting small businesses be part of their work?"*



Pic. 4: Focus groups/interview notes taken on Mural.

#### Investor "Gains"

- Weekly COVID-19 calls
- Grants and workforce training
- PPE distribution (i.e., masks, thermometers)
- Personal outreach
- Regular updates and information distribution
- Increased collaboration with other organizations

A participant said, *"In speaking with people in other counties, no one was doing what the EDB and Tacoma-Pierce County Chamber were doing in terms of weekly COVID-19 calls and updates. So if they can keep it up, they can stay ahead of the curve."*

## USER RESEARCH CONTD.

Participants also shared innovations or silver linings from the past 18 months and things they are most looking forward to in the next six months.

### Innovation most proud of in the past 18 months:

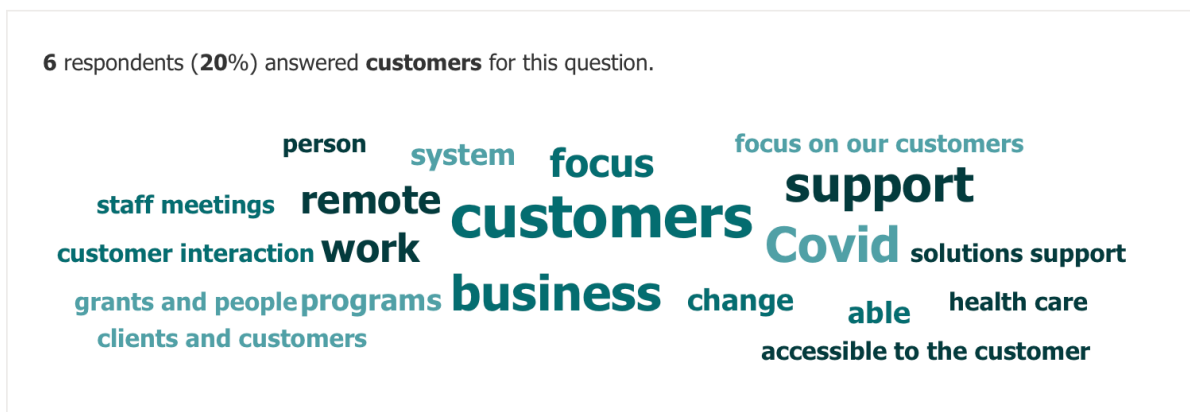
- Automated more tasks
- Used new software or equipment
- Created a better sense of community
- Connected better across teams
- Updated internet and IT structure
- Forced organization to get lean and combine job titles

### Most looking forward to in the next six months:

- Hosting virtual calls or panels (quarterly)
- Diversifying board representation
- Using multiple communication channels (e.g., phone calls, emails, Zoom calls, website)

- Thinking strategically about the types of industries to bring in
- Training new immigrants in skills that are needed in the region
- Fostering equity and inclusion with small and minority-owned businesses
- Collaborating/coalitions to share information
- Providing education on equity and inclusion
- Sharing vaccine information as a trusted community resource
- Tapping into industrial revenue bond with more organizations
- Creating programs to recruit against larger corporations

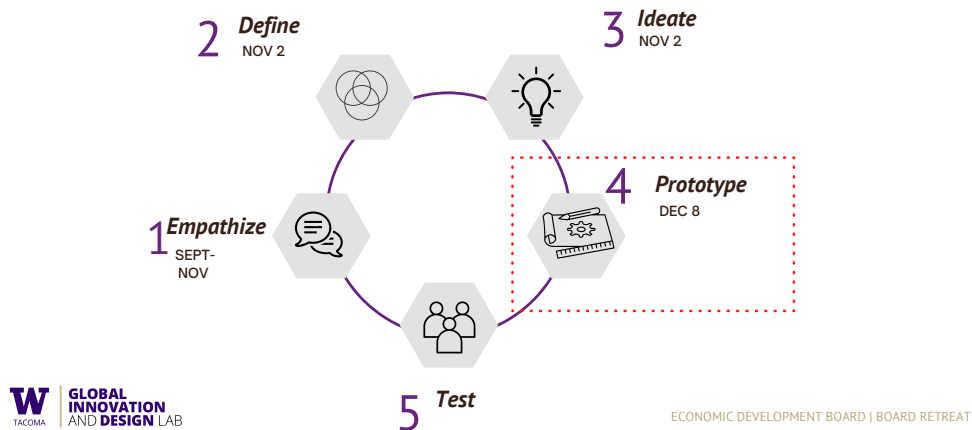
The results from the user research provided a contextually rich landscape for EDB team members to pin their own design challenges against. The first workshop focused on refining the challenges and beginning ideation of solutions.



Pic. 5: Innovations most proud of in the past 18 months.

## II. WORKSHOP 1: NEED FINDING & PROJECT DEFINITION

### THE TIMELINE



Pic 6: Project timeline

### WORKSHOP 1 | NEED FINDING & PROJECT DEFINITION [NOVEMBER 2 | 1:30 PM-3:30 PM]

With clarity on a primary design challenge or question through the Five Whys process presented by each member of the EDB core design team, and with the wealth of information on the user experience through the survey and focus group sessions, the GID Lab team was ready to launch the first workshop. The purpose of the first part of the workshop was to orient participants to the design thinking process, and share user research results. From this critical empathy-for-user stage, the workshop engaged the EDB core design team members in a need finding exercise to converge on the right problem to solve, and begin ideation.

In the first breakout session, the core design team split into two groups to review and discuss HMW questions. Each team had time to edit or modify as needed, then use a Bull's Eye diagram to prioritize their top HMW question. The top two questions identified were the following:

- Team A:** *How might we elevate a more diverse workforce/talent pipeline to support businesses coming out of the pandemic?*
- Team B:** *How might we learn more about the communities we serve?*

A quick brainstorming session followed with each team ideating initial solutions based on its refined HMW question.

## TEAM A | IDEATIONS

### Team A

Participants: *Bruce Kendall, Sarah Bonds, Jackie Flowers, and Deborah Kelly*

Facilitator: *Lan Allison*

### DESIGN CHALLENGE

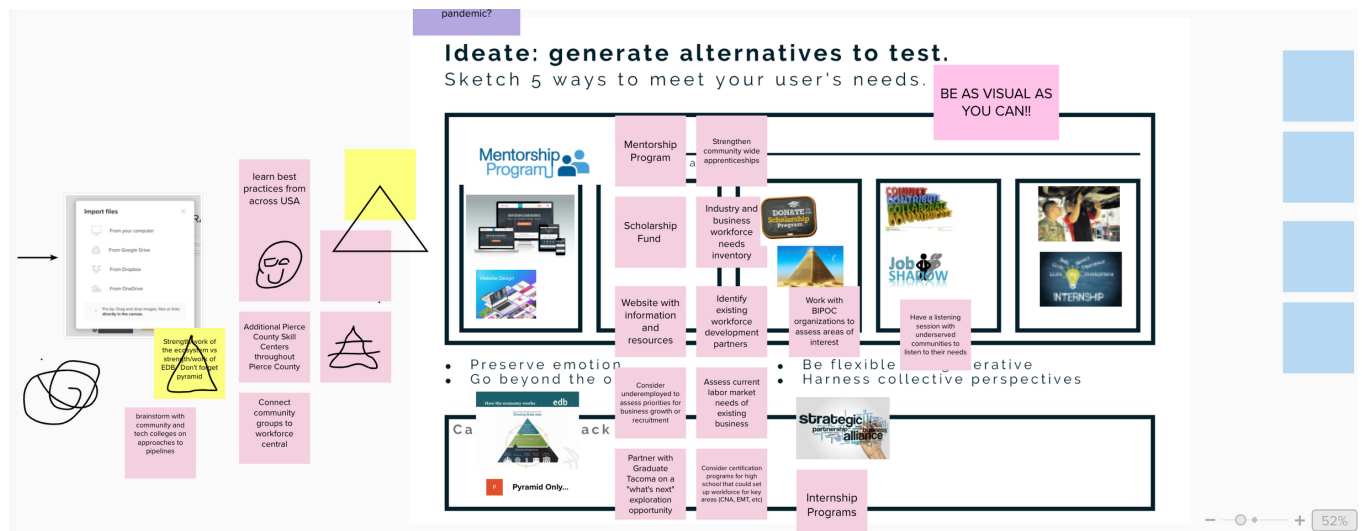
*How might we elevate a more diverse workforce/talent pipeline to support businesses coming out of the pandemic?*

### IDEATIONS

- Connect community groups to WorkForce Central
- Develop a mentorship program
- Share information and resources on the EDB website
- Consider underemployed to assess priorities for business growth or recruitment
- Partner with Graduate Tacoma on a “what’s next” exploration opportunity
- Work with BIPOC organizations to assess areas of interest



Pic 7: Team A's individual HMW Questions.



Pic 8: Team A's ideation board on Mural.

## TEAM B | IDEATIONS

### Team B

Participants: *Maddie Merton, Herb Simon, Brian Marlow*

Facilitator: *Krissy Kimura*

### DESIGN CHALLENGE

*How might we learn more about the communities we serve?*

### IDEATIONS

- Community listening sessions
  - How do we fill gaps? Does that change what we do?
  - Build a strong economic development ecosystem
  - Serve small and BIPOC-owned businesses
  - Define the community and tell the story of the Puget Sound business environment
- Inclusive (“all of us on the same ship”); with leadership more representative of Tacoma businesses

#### Maddie

How might we better deliver on services for the business community in order to meet the increased volume of needs?

#### Herb

As we pivot to a different board focused on DEI. What is the business community today vs. from a couple years ago?

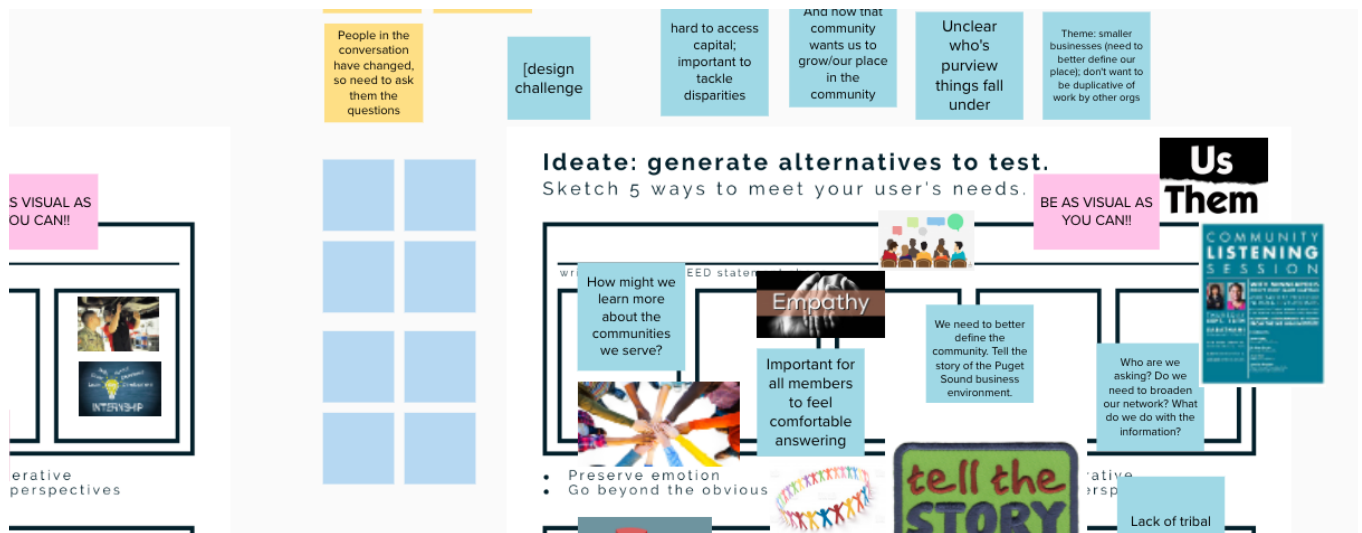
#### Brian

How might we better tell the story of the Puget Sound business environment to attract our targeted industries in order to bring more of them to Tacoma?

#### Jacqueline

How might we obtain and utilize information from the community to grow our organization and build new programming in order to better support businesses

**Pic 9: Team B's individual HMW Questions.**



**Pic 10: Team B's ideation board on Mural.**

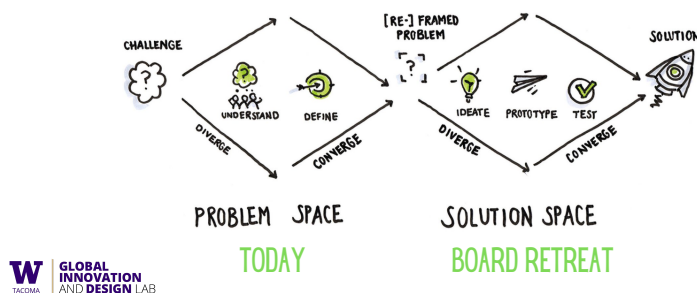


## SUMMARY

Connecting to Workforce Central, partnering with Graduate Tacoma, creating listening sessions and BIPOC specific services, building opportunities through compelling stories--these were some of the exciting results of the ideation session. The teams particularly valued working directly with user research. Team B posed a specific question that emerged from its small group session: whether the EDB would need to change what they do and who they serve to fill gaps that emerged in the user research. In response, Bruce Kendall provided clarification that the EDB is part of a larger economic development ecosystem of the South Sound; some of the pains and gains expressed were not under EDB's current purview. Together the group agreed it would be important to get feedback from the Board at large at the next workshop to address those questions and a path forward.



## THE PROCESS



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT BOARD: INNOVATION THROUGH DESIGN THINKING

**Pic 11: The Core Design Team ready to present ideations and create solutions with the Board at the mini-retreat!**

### III. WORKSHOP 2: IDEATION & PROTOTYPING

#### EDB ANNUAL MINI RETREAT | IDEATION & PROTOTYPING WORKSHOP [DECEMBER 8 | 12:00 PM - 2:30 PM]

On December 8, over 50 EDB investors, community partners, and staff came together for the annual EDB Mini Retreat. Prior to the meeting, each participant received a workbook that included light readings on the design thinking process, an overview of the user research, and a synopsis of the previous workshop. In addition, each participant received a GID Lab design kit that contained simple prototyping tools like Play-doh, pipe cleaners, markers, and colored paper, delivered by EDB Board Member Markiss Cooper through his courier service business iHaulDelivery.

EDB President & CEO Bruce Kendall and EDB Board Chair Herb Simon opened the meeting noting that 2021 was a year of learning and community. They welcomed the Global Innovation and Design (GID) Lab team led by Associate Vice Chancellor Dr. Divya McMillin, and provided context to the need to revisit the EDB 2021-25 Work Program.

McMillin delivered a brief orientation to design thinking and a synopsis of the previous workshop with the core design team. She emphasized that the purpose of the retreat workshop was to review the user research and initial ideations, improve on or create new ones, and then create simple prototypes of ways forward. Assistant Director Krissy Kimura and Program Specialist Lan Allison shared the results of the user research. GID Lab



**Pic 12: Full house at the EDB Mini Retreat.**

team members, Program Coordinator Autumn Diaz and Community Relations Liaison Amy Newcomb, and EDB staff, Sarah Bonds, Maddie Merton, and Deborah Kelly, joined McMillin, Kimura, and Allison as facilitators for the workshop for a total of seven groups.

Using the two refined How Might We questions, the first breakout session focused on ideation and participants were encouraged to “go wide” and brainstorm new ideas, or iterate on the initial ideations created in Workshop 1 (see following pages).

#### FOCUSED POINT OF ENTRY

How might the EDB's Work Program be more **responsive to local business needs** in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and systemic inequities?



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT BOARD | BOARD RETREAT

**Pic 13: Participants reviewed the focused point of entry before beginning their own ideations.**

## GROUP 1 | IDEATIONS

### Group 1

Facilitator: Krissy Kimura

#### Design Challenge 1:

*How might we elevate a more diverse workforce/talent pipeline to support businesses coming out of the pandemic?*

#### IDEATIONS

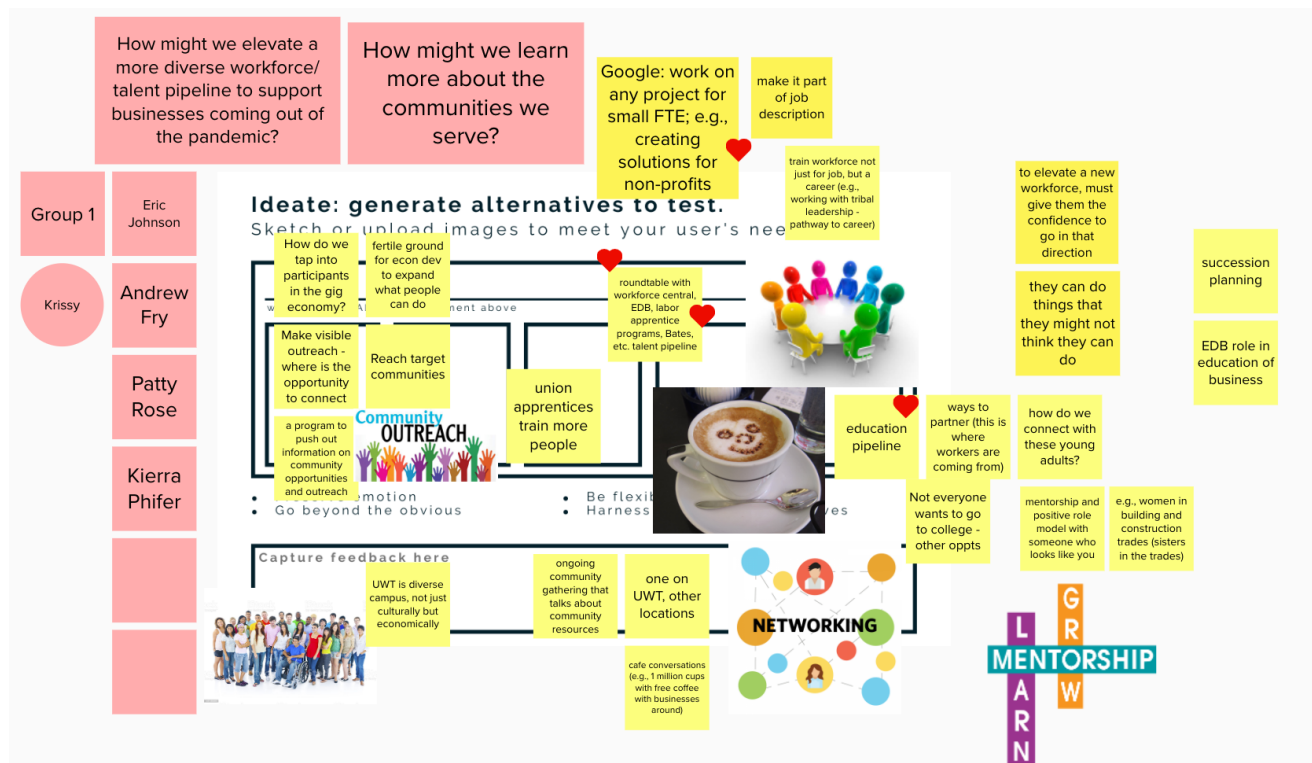
- Develop a program to **push out information** on community opportunities and outreach
- Host ongoing **community gathering** to share community resources (e.g., Cafe Conversations with free coffee and local businesses)
- Create a **roundtable** with WorkForce Central, EDB, labor apprentice programs, Bates, etc. to develop a **talent/education pipeline**

#### Design Challenge 2:

*How might we learn more about the communities we serve?*

#### IDEATIONS

- Make outreach **visible** (i.e. where is the opportunity to connect?)
- Reach **target** communities
- Develop **mentorships** and **positive role models** with someone who looks like you
- Train workforce not just for a job, but **a career** (e.g., working with tribal leadership as a pathway to a career)



Pic. 14: Group 1's ideation board on Mural.







## GROUP 4 | IDEATIONS

### Group 4

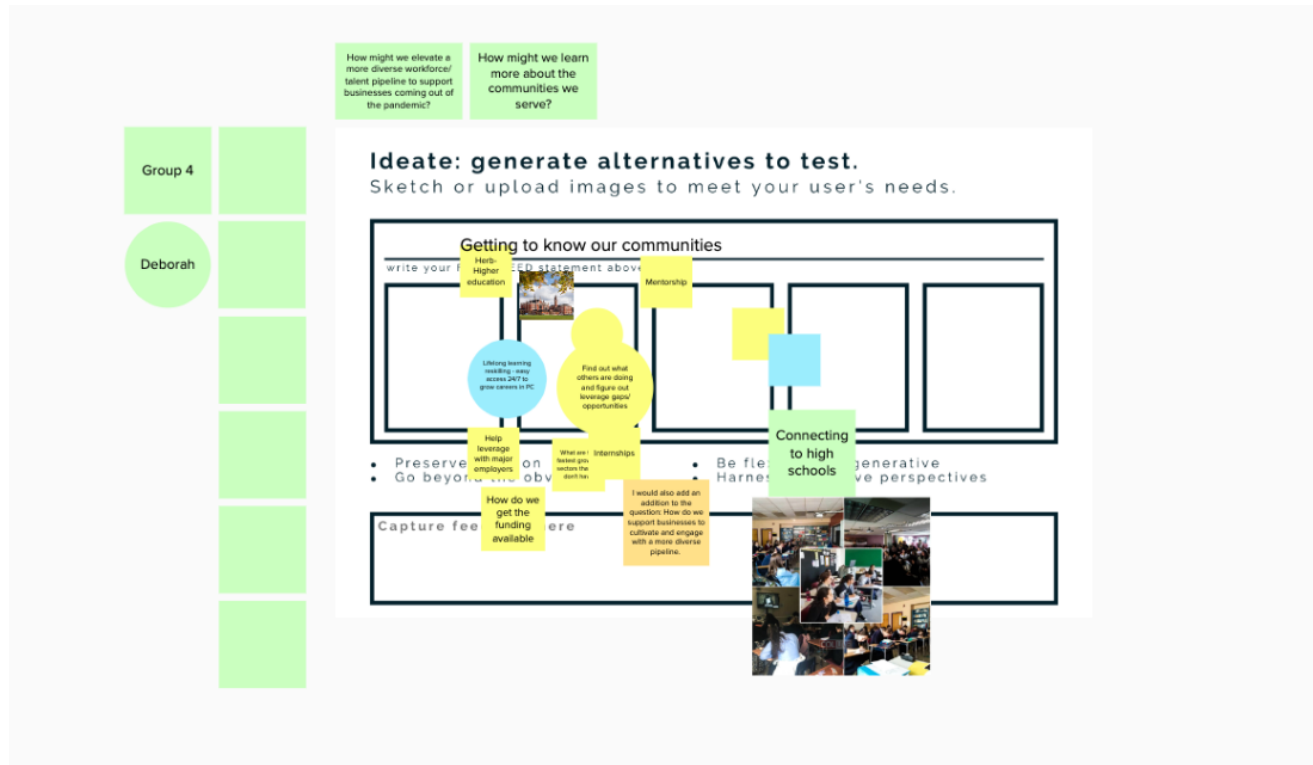
Facilitator: Deborah Kelly

### Design Challenge:

*How might we elevate a more diverse workforce/talent pipeline to support businesses coming out of the pandemic?*

### IDEATIONS

- Help leverage opportunities with **major employers**
- Connect to **high schools**
- Find out what others are doing and identify or **leverage gaps/opportunities**
- Create **mentorship** opportunities
- Train **lifelong learning skills** (i.e., easy access 24/7 to grow careers in Pierce County)
- Alleviate **barriers** to higher education
- **Identify** and **support** the fastest growing **sectors** missing from Pierce County
- Secure the **funding** needed to support businesses



Pic. 17: Group 4's ideation board on Mural.

## GROUP 5 | IDEATIONS

### Group 5

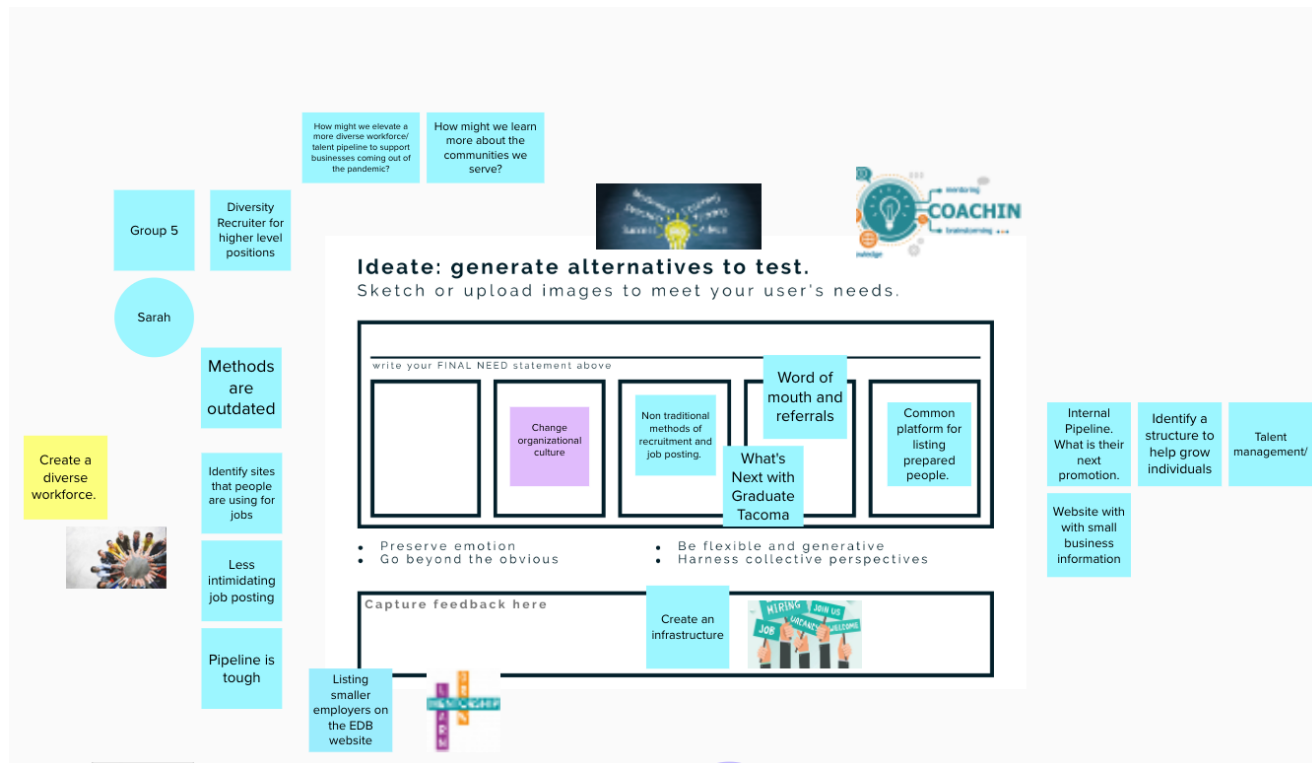
Facilitator: Sarah Bonds

### Design Challenge:

*How might we elevate a more diverse workforce/talent pipeline to support businesses coming out of the pandemic?*

### IDEATIONS

- List **smaller employers** on the EDB website
- Host a **common platform** for showcasing people who are qualified for the workforce
- Create an **internal pipeline**
- Identify a structure to help **grow individuals**
- Locate **sites** that people are using for job searches
- Foster **talent management**
- Hire a **diversity recruiter** for higher level positions
- Replace methods that are **outdated**
- Change **organizational culture**
- Utilize **non-traditional methods** of recruitment and job posting
- Promote **"word-of-mouth"** referrals



Pic. 18: Group 5's ideation board on Mural.