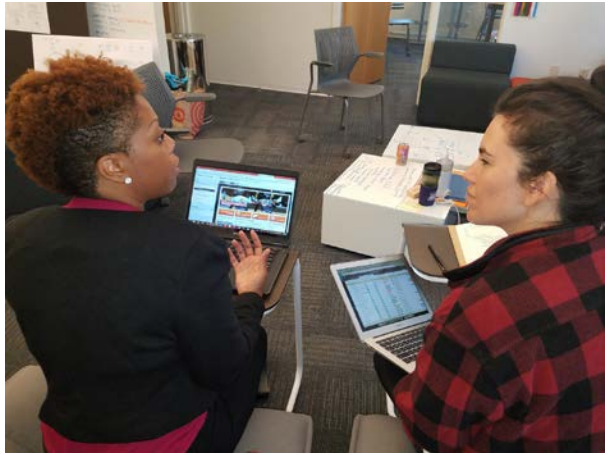
Transforming Austin's Digital Services

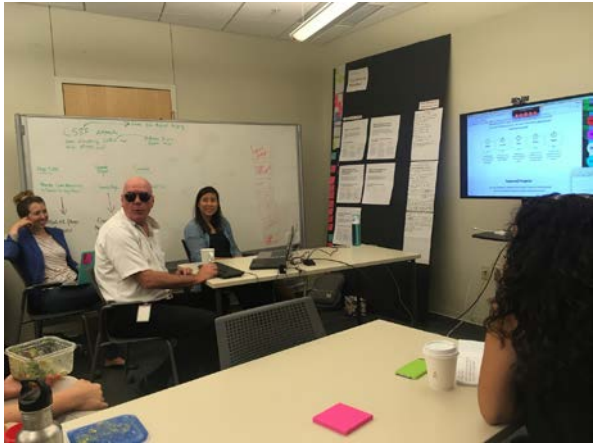
Community Technology & Telecommunications Commission
January 10, 2018

Today

- Putting Residents First
- Transforming Austin’s Digital Front Door
- Our Approach to Tech

Hello!





Government that Works

*If you **want** to come to City Hall to do business with us, we'll be here for you. But if you **have** to come to City Hall to do business with us, then we're not doing our job.*

Jascha Franklin-Hodge,
City of Boston

Build living digital services that grow, adapt, and improve with user needs.

2

Putting residents first

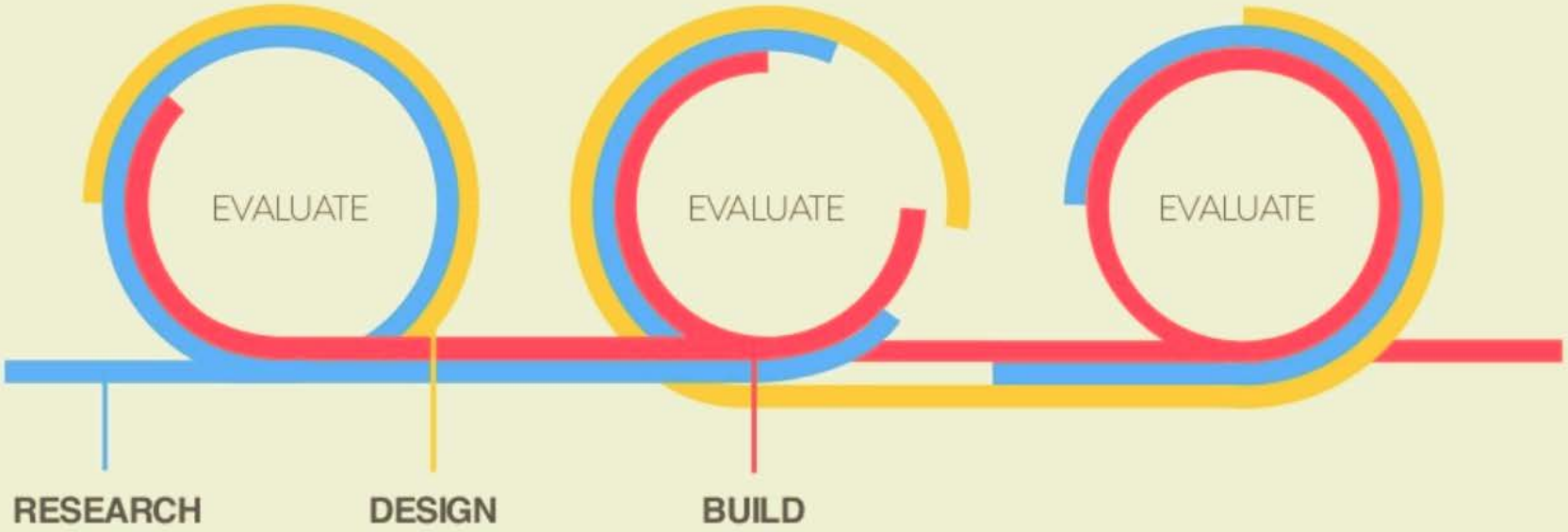
Putting residents first works well with an iterative approach

Digital Service Values

TRADITIONAL PROCESS

LINEAR AND ATOMIZED

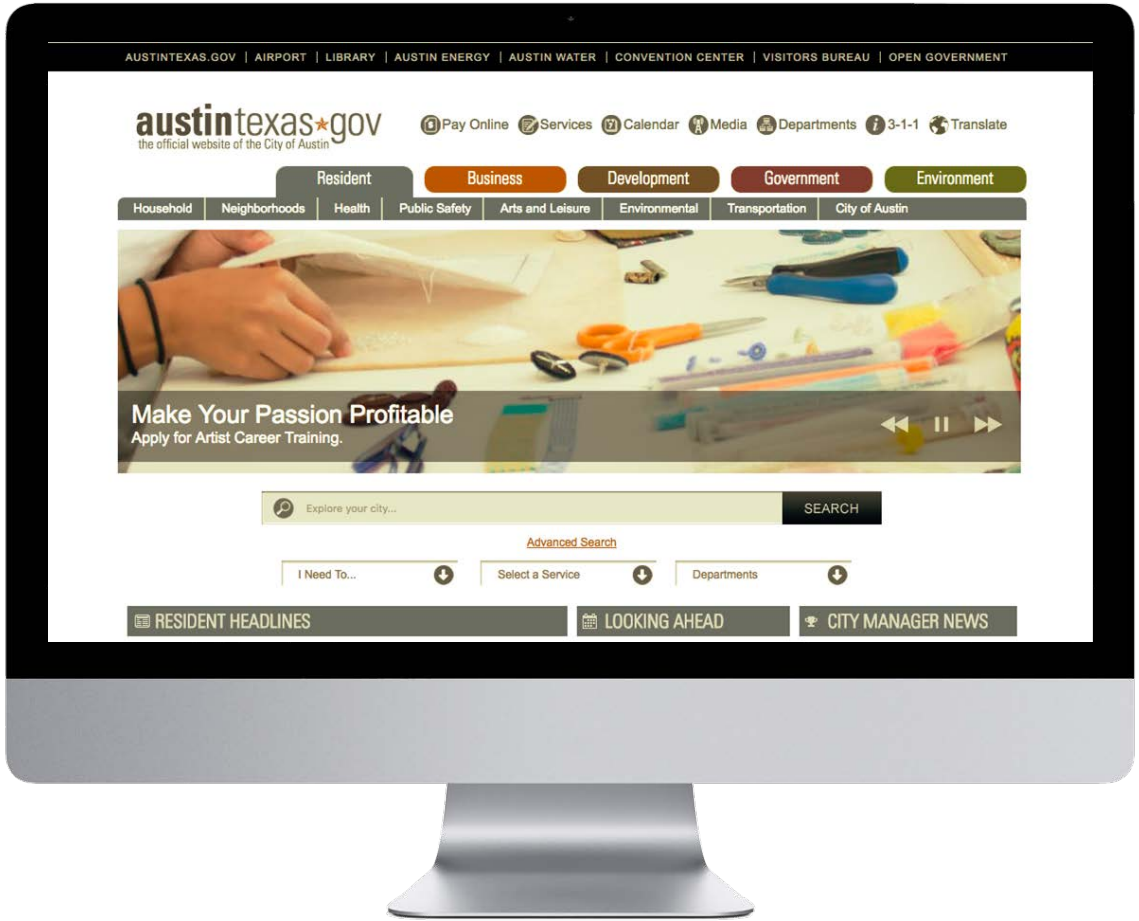
UX Research within an Agile Design and Development Sprint Cycle, from UXPA


EVALUATE
EVALUATE
EVALUATE
RESEARCH
DESIGN
BUILD

Why we are going iterative and not taking the traditional approach

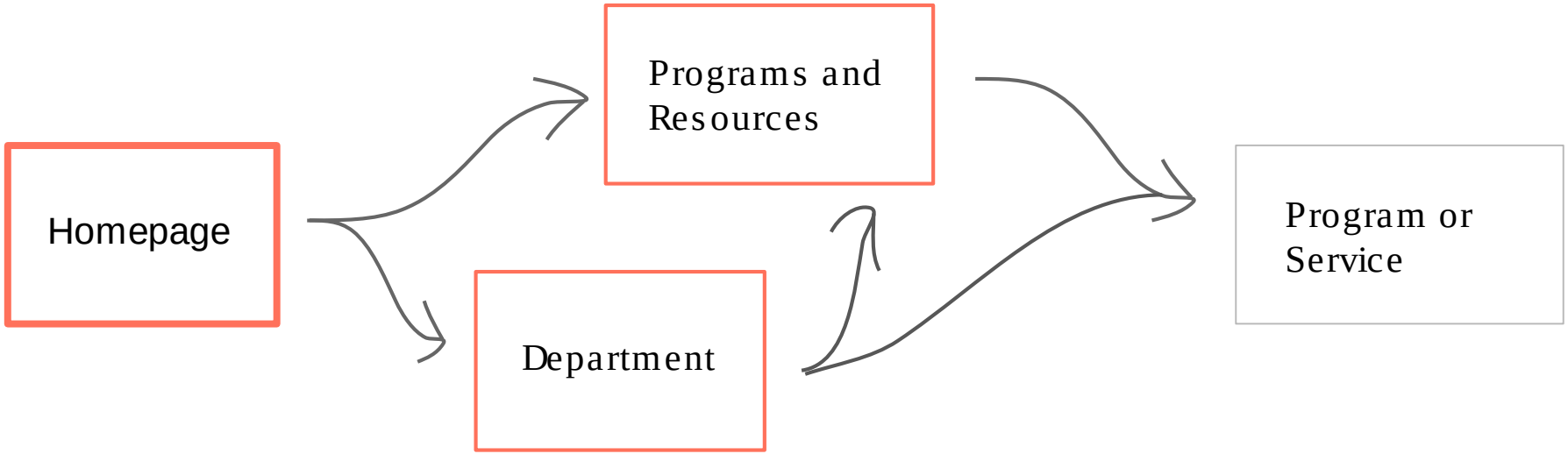
- Research helps us to stay focused on user needs so it should be a continuous part of our work
- Implementers aren’t brought in early enough or made part of the process which builds empathy of user needs
- Expert decisions are made with expert voices

Observe how residents use services


AUSTINTEXAS.GOV | AIRPORT | LIBRARY | AUSTIN ENERGY | AUSTIN WATER | CONVENTION CENTER | VISITORS BUREAU | OPEN GOVERNMENT
austintexas.gov
the official website of the City of Austin
Pay Online
Services
Calendar
Media
Departments
3-1-1
Translate
Resident
Business
Development
Government
Environment
Household
Neighborhoods
Health
Public Safety
Arts and Leisure
Environmental
Transportation
City of Austin
Make Your Passion Profitable
Apply for Artist Career Training.
Explore your city...
SEARCH
Advanced Search
I Need To...
Select a Service
Departments
RESIDENT HEADLINES
LOOKING AHEAD
CITY MANAGER NEWS

austintexas.gov
Resident
Business
Development
Government
Environment
SEARCH

Current AustinTexas.gov navigation goal



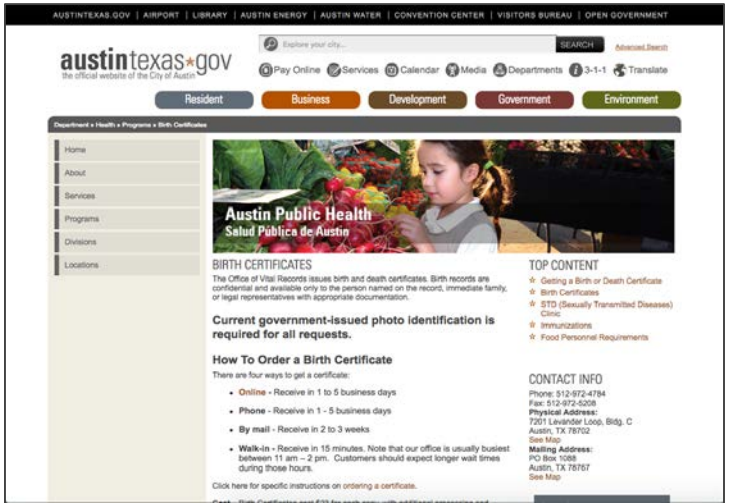
How Austin residents access Austintexas.gov

AustinTexas.gov

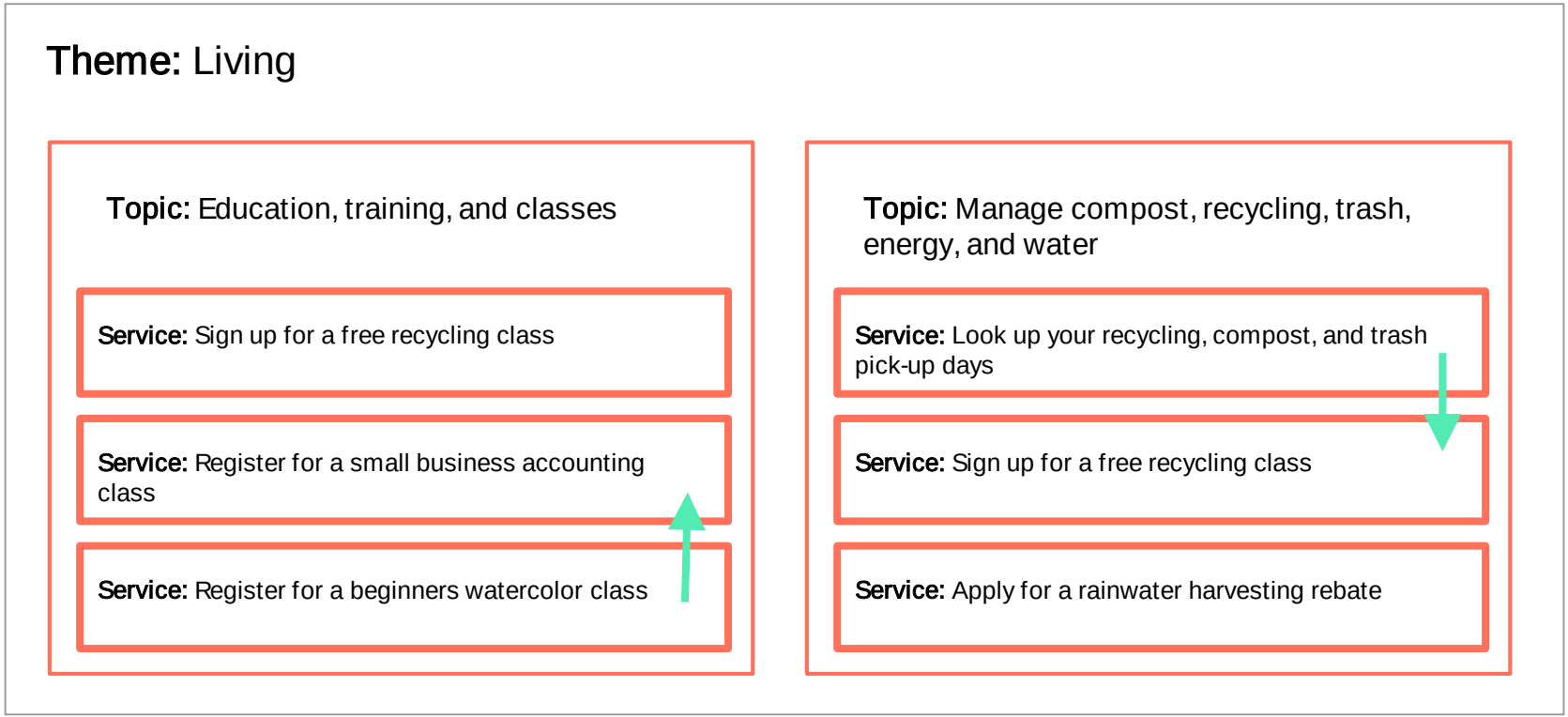
21%

61%

Google



Testing Austin digital services MVP content relationships



Help residents discover related services based on their needs and goals.

Using resident observations to change the user experience

Visit the Recycle and
Reuse Drop-off Center
Household Hazardous Waste

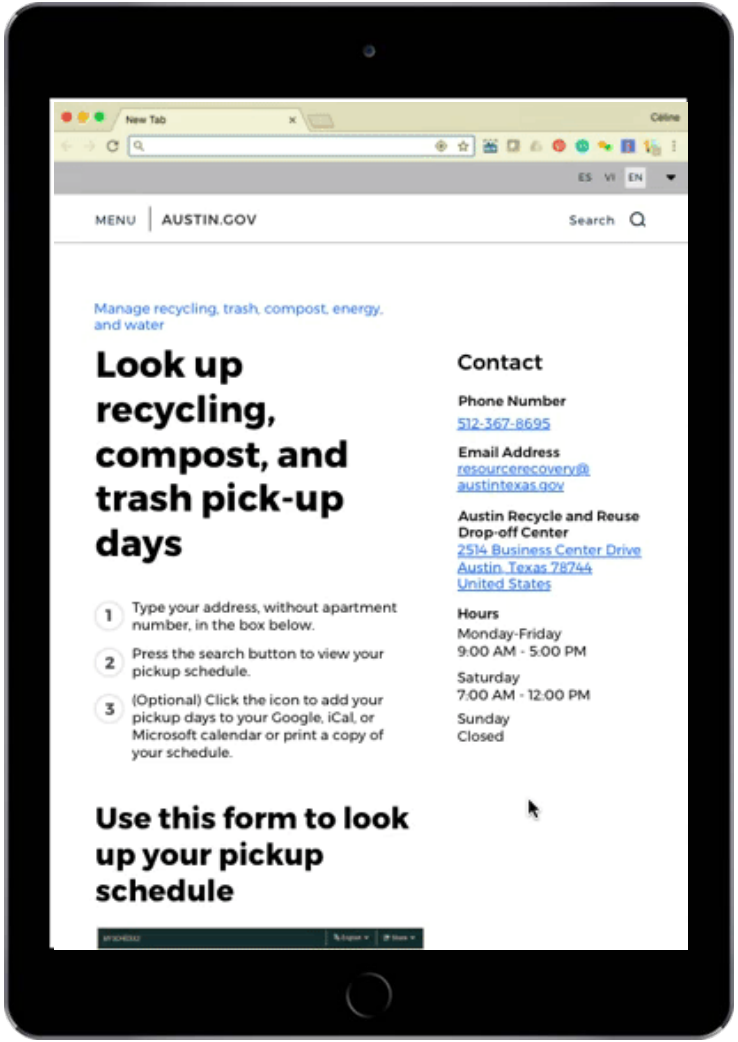
Our Double Shot
of
Espresso
Makes You feel like
Single again
NO SMOKING
This is a smoke-free establishment.

From A to B

The test site that Tiandra and James used has two paths to other services:

1. Use the blue text above the service title to navigate to a topic page with all related services
2. Use the ‘related services’ tiles in the grey section

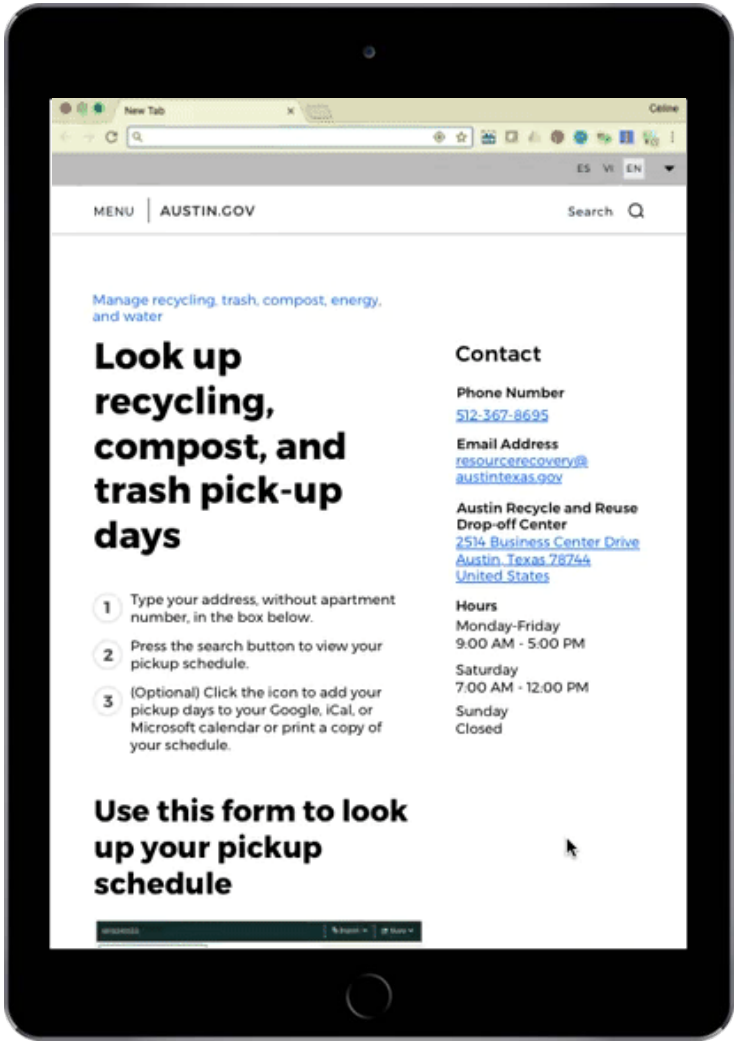
But, Tiandra never scrolled into the grey section on her tablet, and James said, “I’m trained to ignore [the footer]”.



From A to B

We observed from Tiandra and James that the gray sections feel unrelated and more like a footer.

1. We removed the gray section break
2. Updated the ‘related services’ title to be more of a prompt
3. Changed the attributes of the service tiles to focus the resident there and make it visible on white background



Was that the right path?

We don’t need to conduct a usability test for every change–but–the layout, interactions, and content are never done. They can always be improved based on resident-user observations and feedback.

Improving how we recruit for a diverse pool of test participants

Want a better City of Austin website?

Help the City of Austin by giving feedback on our new online services. We'll be providing HEB gift cards to all participants!

Sign up today: tinyurl.com/DecemberWebTest

Opportunities for recruiting Austin residents for usability testing

Help us with recruiting!

We would love to send it to the commission in the future and get advice on how to reach out to participants

3

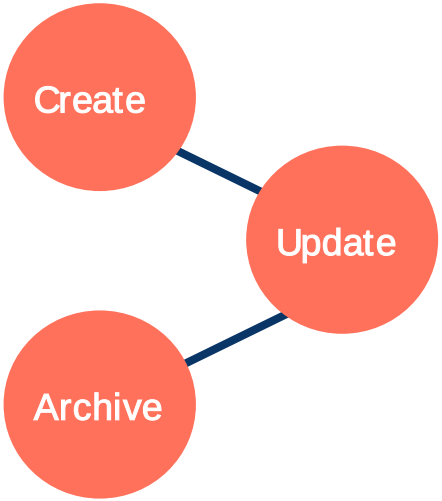
Content

A Website that Puts Residents First

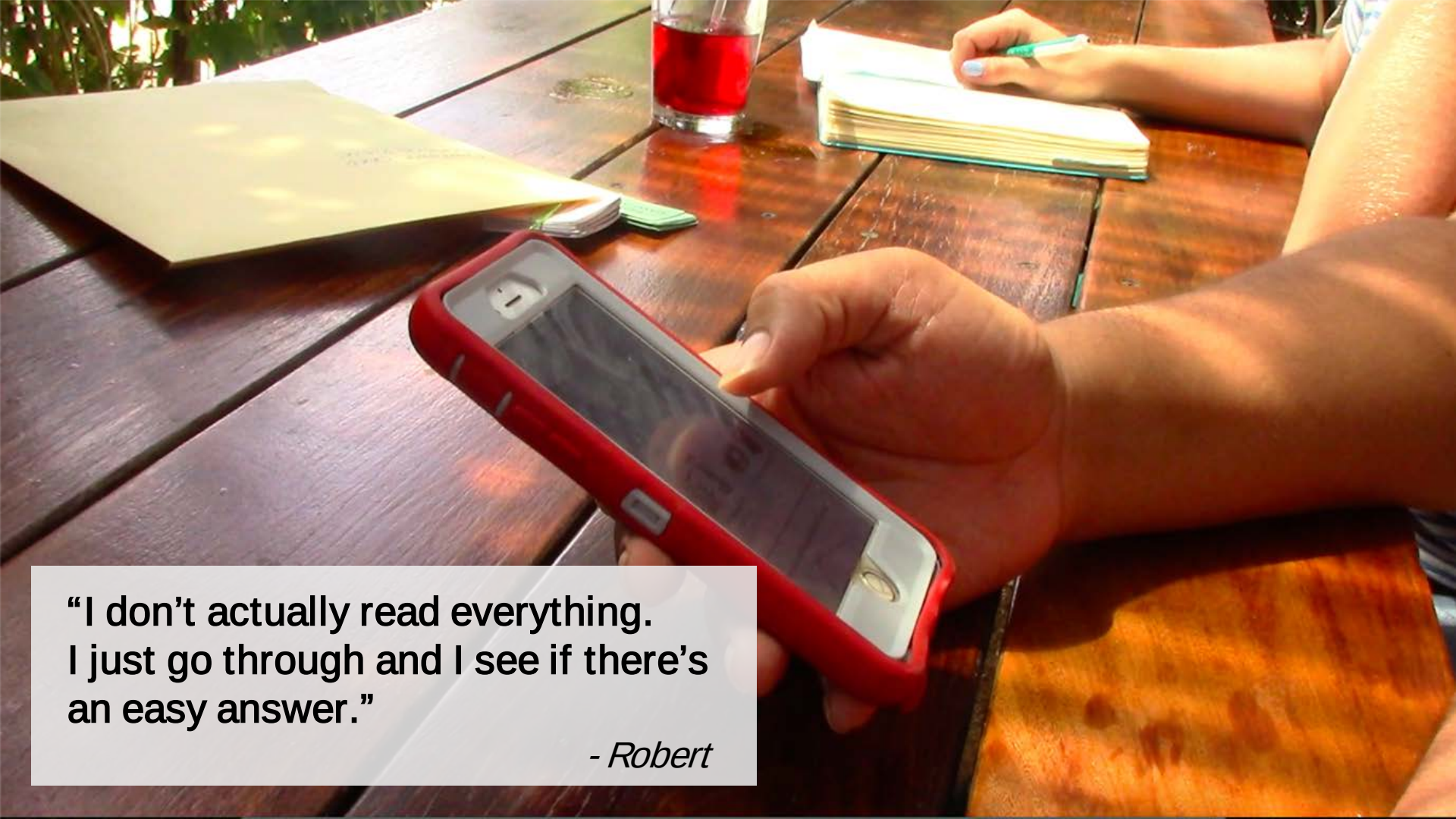
Content

People

Workflow

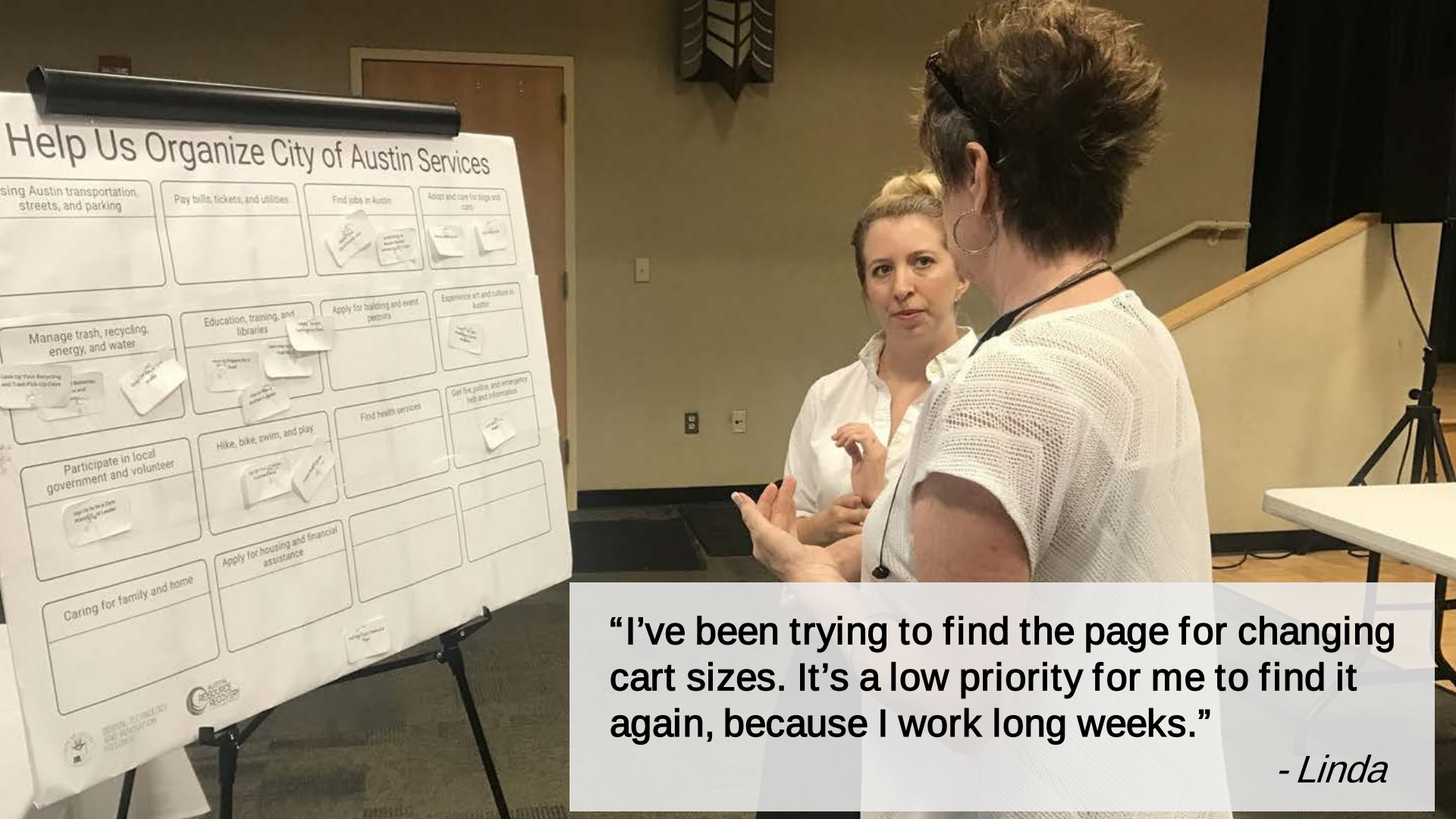


Residents find current content too lengthy and complex, and content is not accessible to all.



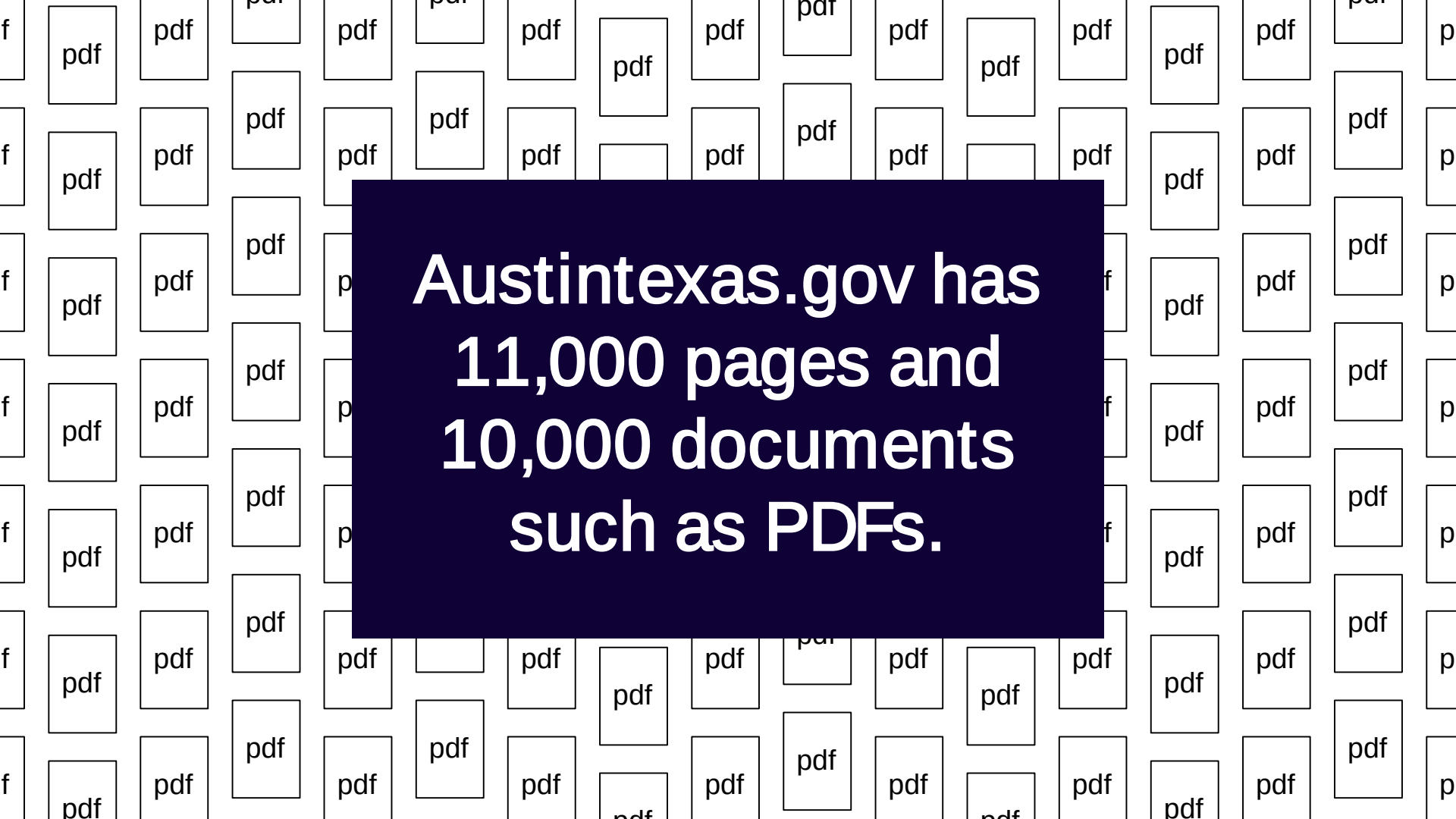
“I don’t actually read everything.
I just go through and I see if there’s
an easy answer.”

- Robert

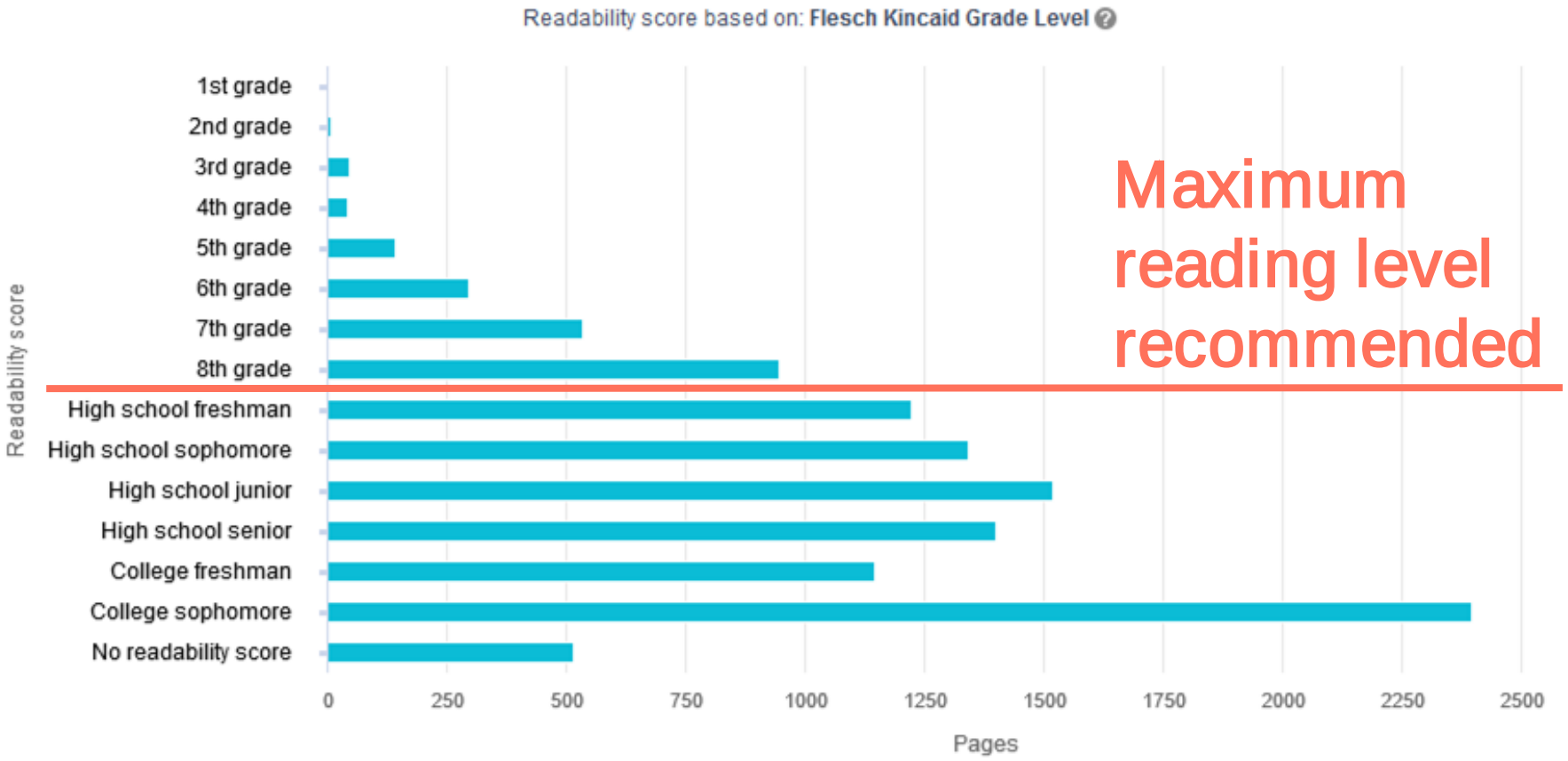


"I've been trying to find the page for changing cart sizes. It's a low priority for me to find it again, because I work long weeks."

- Linda


Austintexas.gov has 11,000 pages and 10,000 documents such as PDFs.

AustinTexas.gov Pages Reading Level



We are coaching authors and publishers to write service-oriented content.

Department-oriented vs Service-oriented

Service-oriented language is a way of addressing the services available to residents, instead of the departments providing the services.

Department-oriented language	Service-oriented language
Certification for MBE/WBE	Get Certification for Your Minority or Woman-Owned Business

Dive in to Digital Services

These digital services make it easier to get what you need. New services are added regularly.

my.indy.gov

Apply for a Mortgage Deduction

Lower your tax on mortgaged property

Learn more →

Request a Public Record

Take these steps to view or copy public information

Learn more →

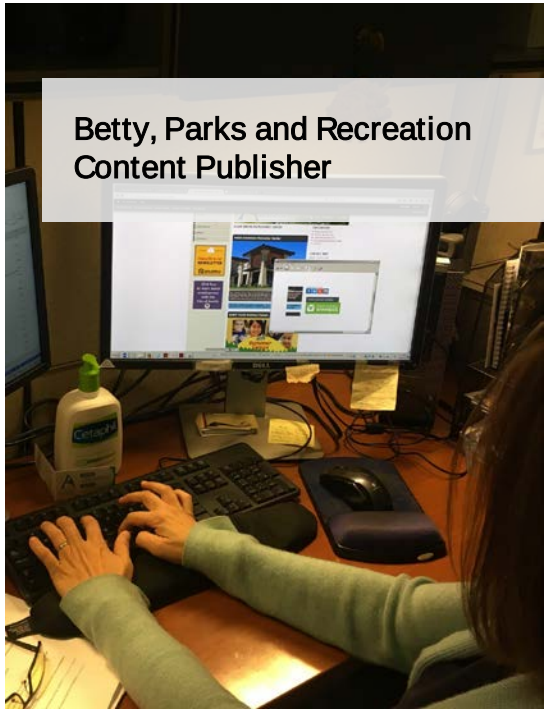
Find Bid Opportunities

Search open bids to find projects of interest to your company

Learn more →

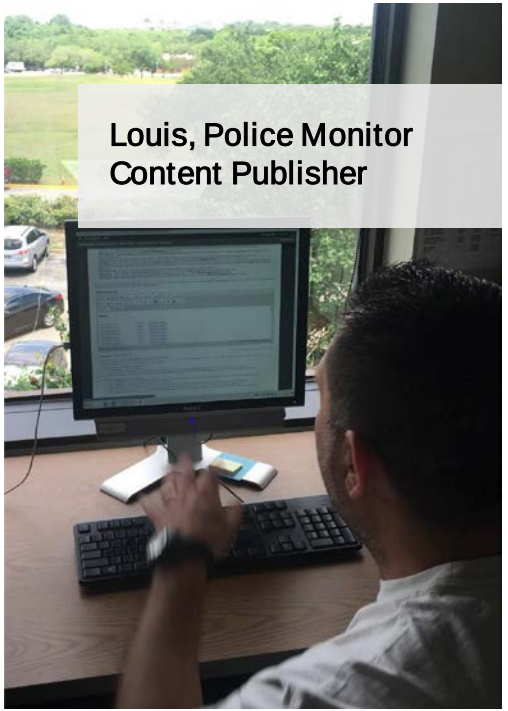
Residents find outdated content because it is difficult for staff to manage existing content.

Helping City Staff Manage Existing Content



Betty, Parks and Recreation
Content Publisher

Jorge, Resource Recovery
Content Publisher

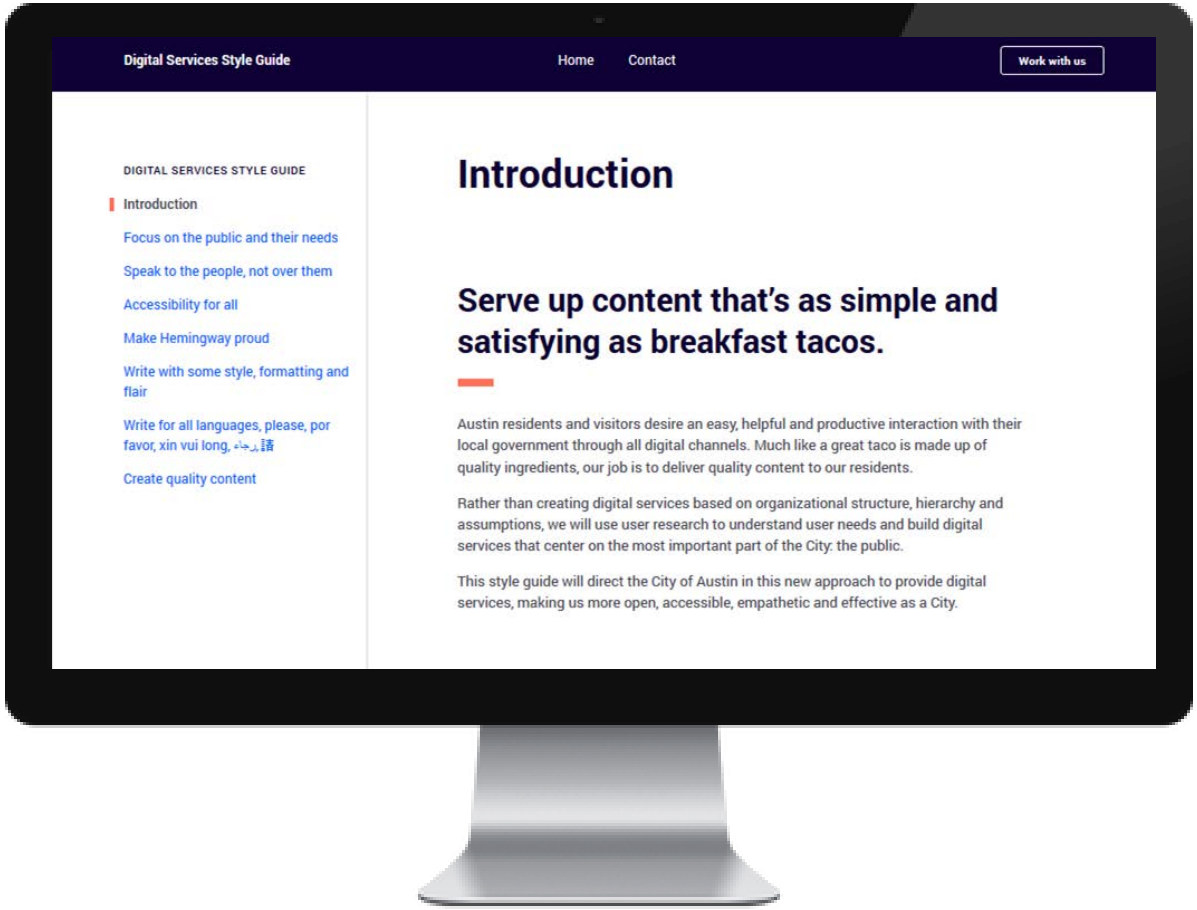


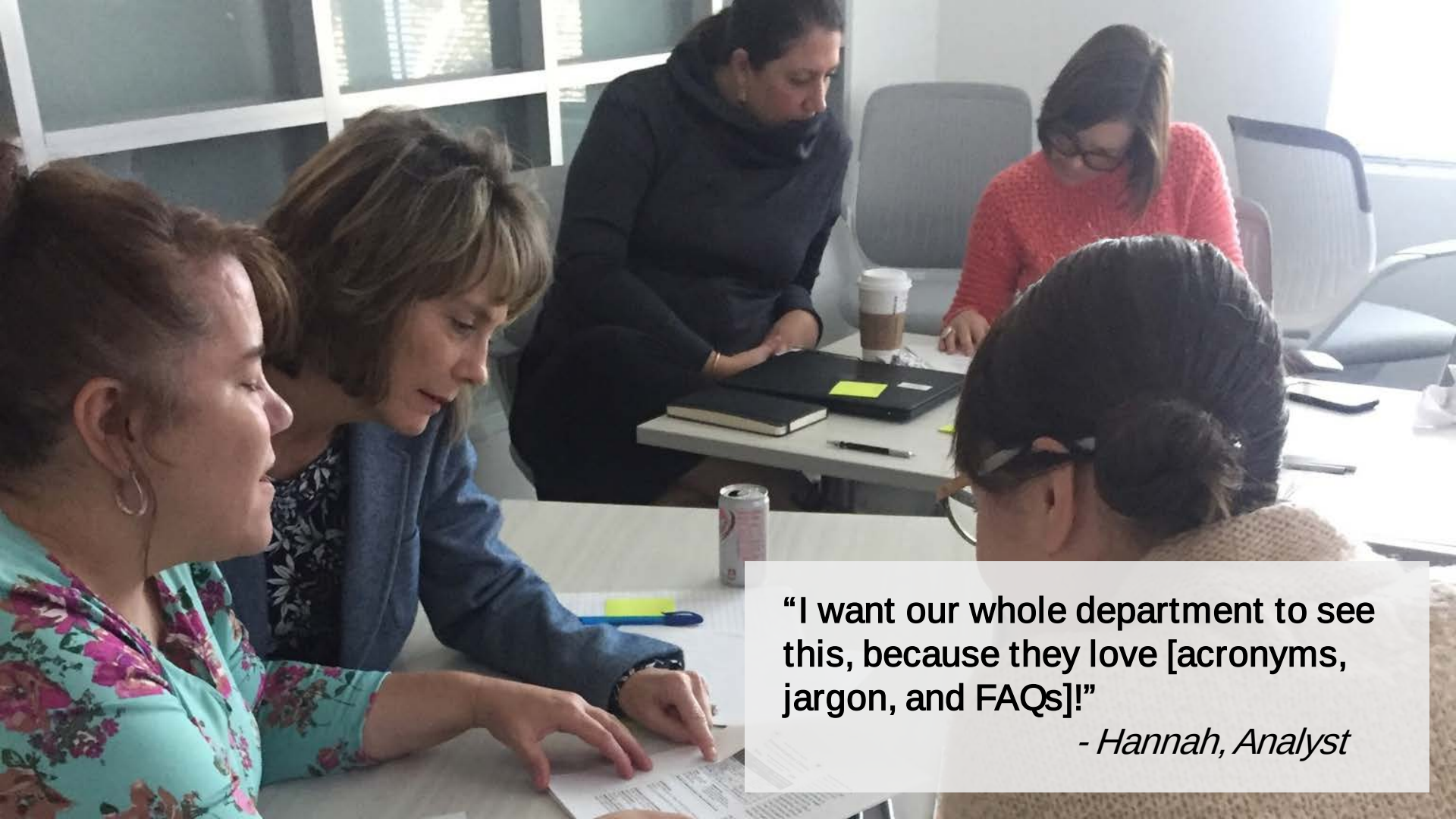
Louis, Police Monitor
Content Publisher

Staff want to provide better content, but they need more guidance, training and tools to do so.

We are making content writing easier by providing staff with the training and tools they need.

City of Austin Style Guide





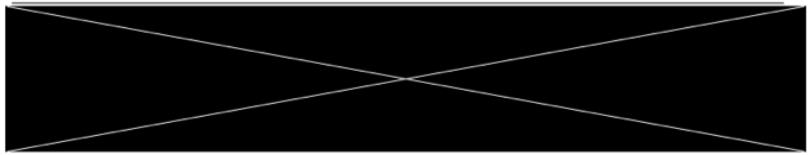
“I want our whole department to see this, because they love [acronyms, jargon, and FAQs]!”

- Hannah, Analyst

Just a sec. Let's check content quality from the resident's side.

MOBILE VIEW | DESKTOP VIEW

Image will be placed here after page is reviewed



Write an actionable title, starting with a verb

Example: Look Up Your Recycling and Trash Pickup Days

Write out the steps a resident needs to take to use the service

Example:
1. Look up your address
2. Add schedule to your Google, iCal, or Microsoft calendar or print a copy

Suggested Changes

0 acronyms can be written out for comprehension.
Spelling out acronyms make the information easier to read.

1 sentence is in passive voice. Change to active voice.
The active voice is more direct.

0 sentence is hard to read. Simplify, shorten, or split sentence.
Choosing a simpler word saves space and makes your content easy to read.

0 word or phrase has a simpler alternative.
Choosing a simpler word saves space and makes your content easy to read.

0 sentences have a reading level above 8th grade.
Let's keep it accessible, Austin!

Well done, Susanne!

You've crafted an awesome new service page and fixed all errors!

Your page has been submitted for review!

We'll let you know when it's live.

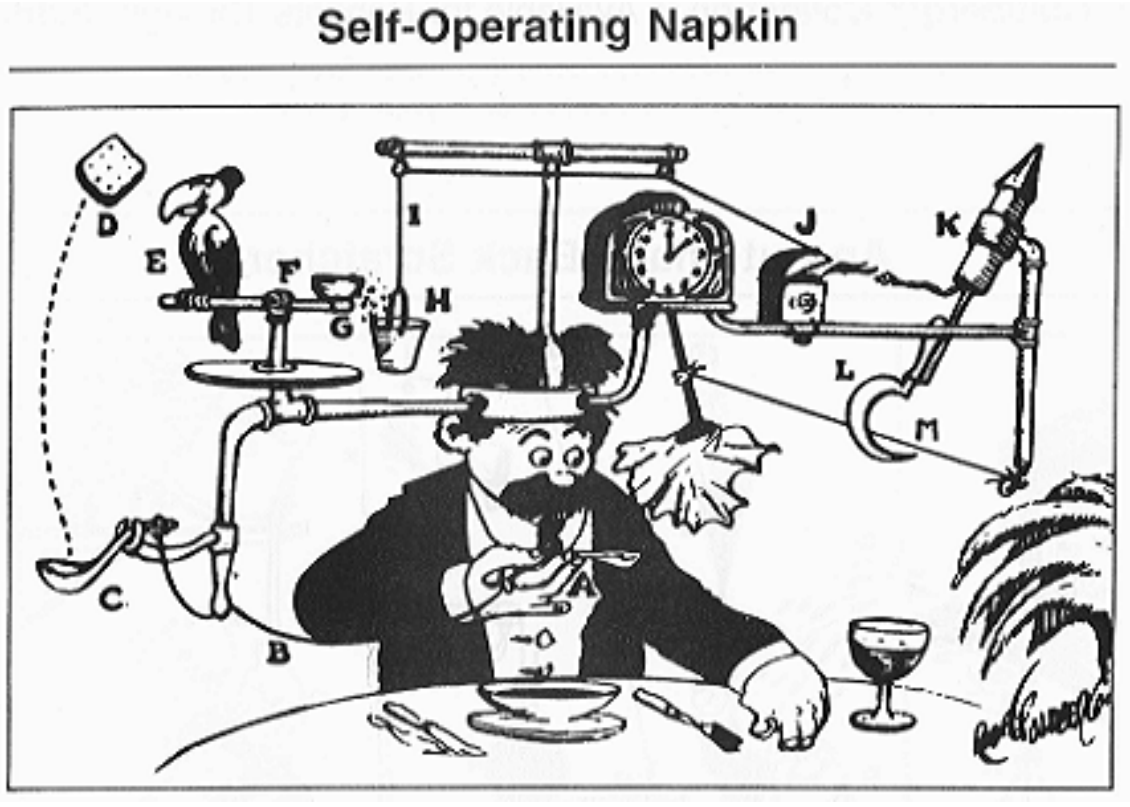
VIEW DASHBOARD CREATE ANOTHER PAGE

We can be the leader of how cities provide resident-focused content.

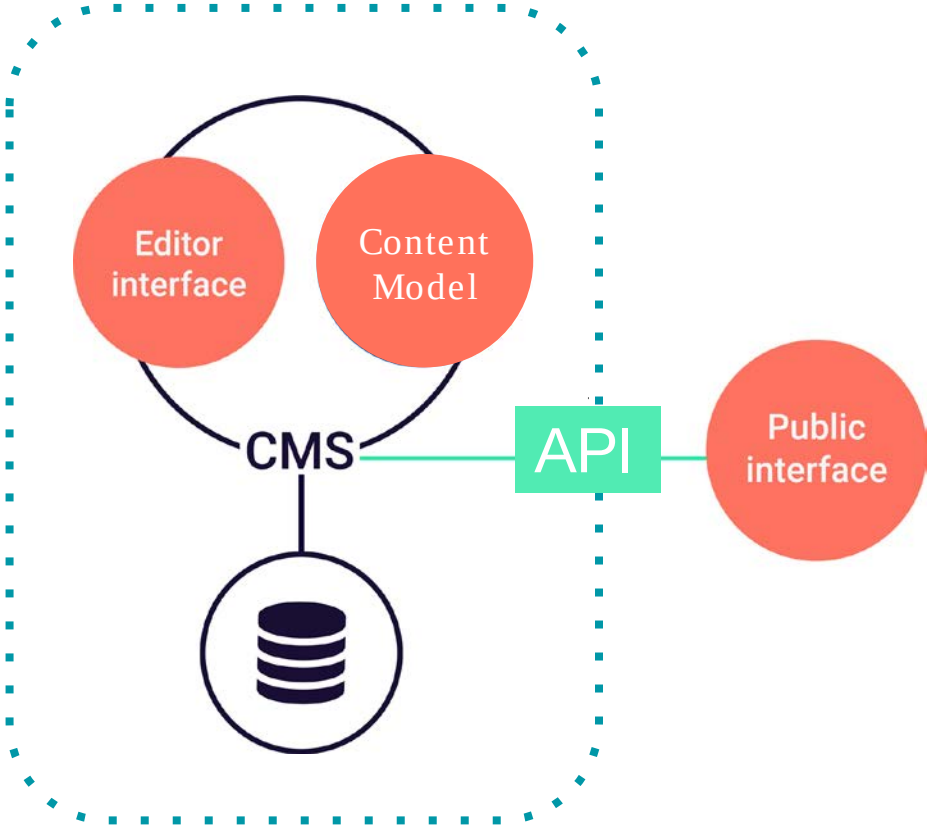
4

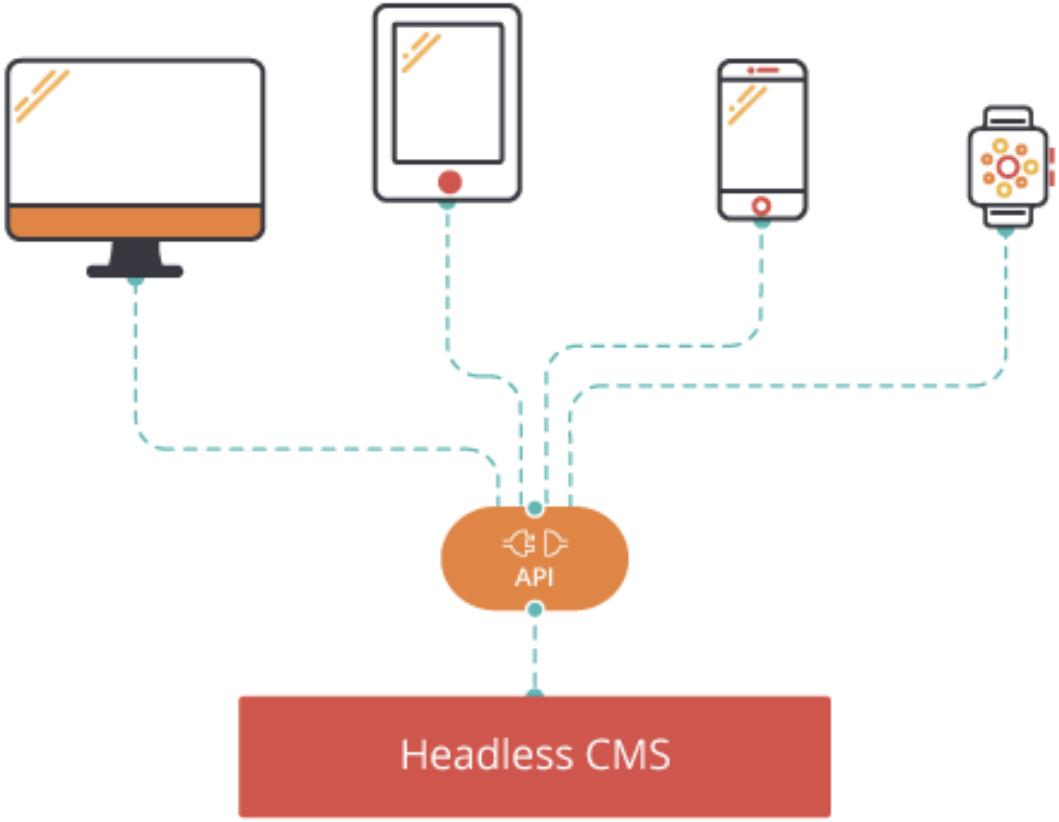
Open Source CMS

Apologies up front



medium.com/@mateoclarke/open-source-city-cms-part-1-607a58b32356


Editor interface
Content Model
CMS
API
Public interface


API
Headless CMS

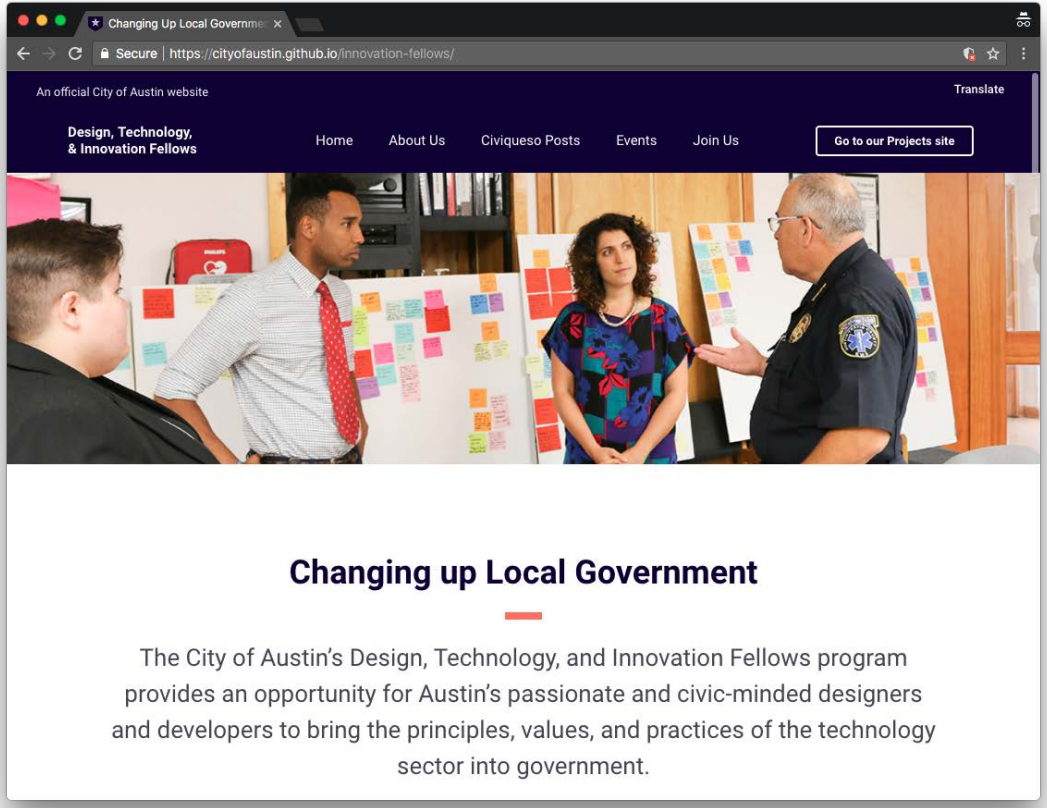
Technology trends and content management

Benefits of a Decoupled CMS

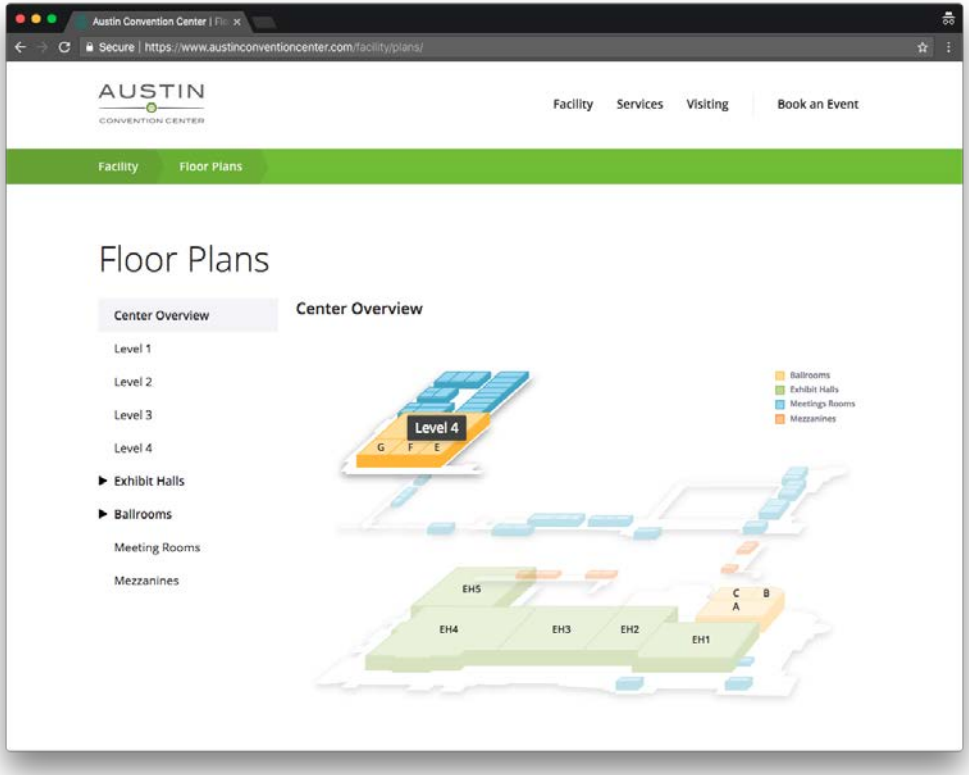
- **Scaling** is cheap with static assets
- **Security** exposure decreased
- **Reuse** content in different contexts
  - websites vs mobile apps
- **Integration** with external APIs

[Link to Jacob's Medium Article]

cityofaustin.github.io/innovation-fellows/



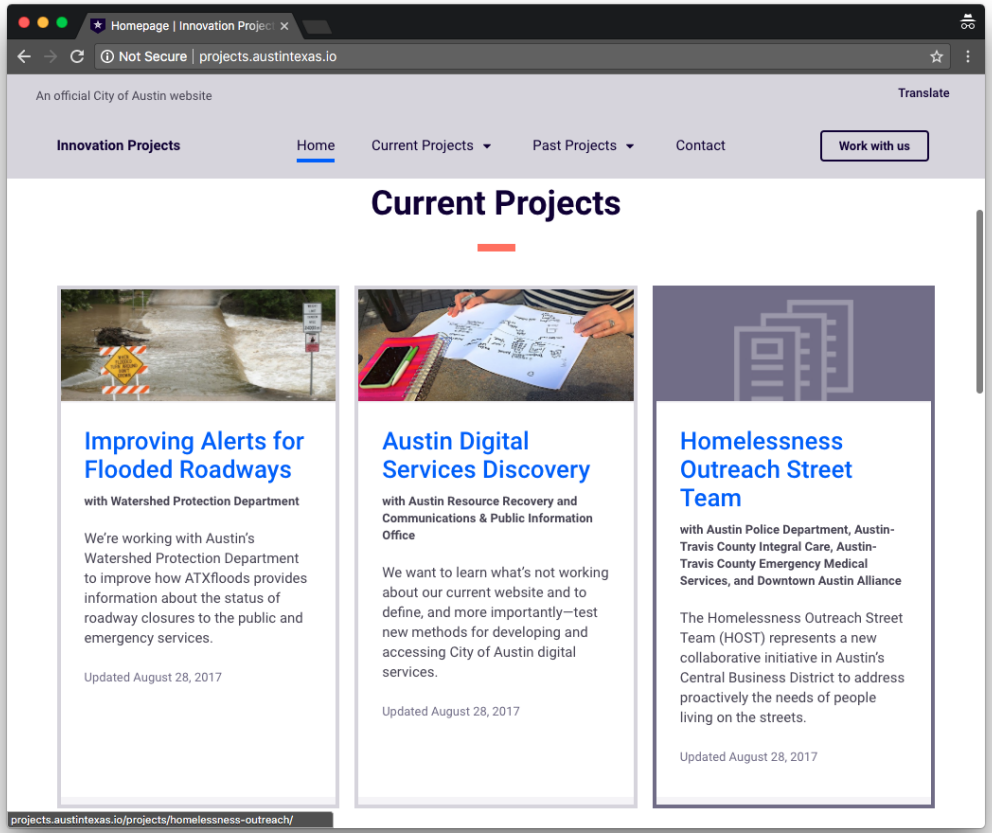
austinconventioncenter.com



contentful
future. friendly. content.

jekyll

projects.austintexas.io

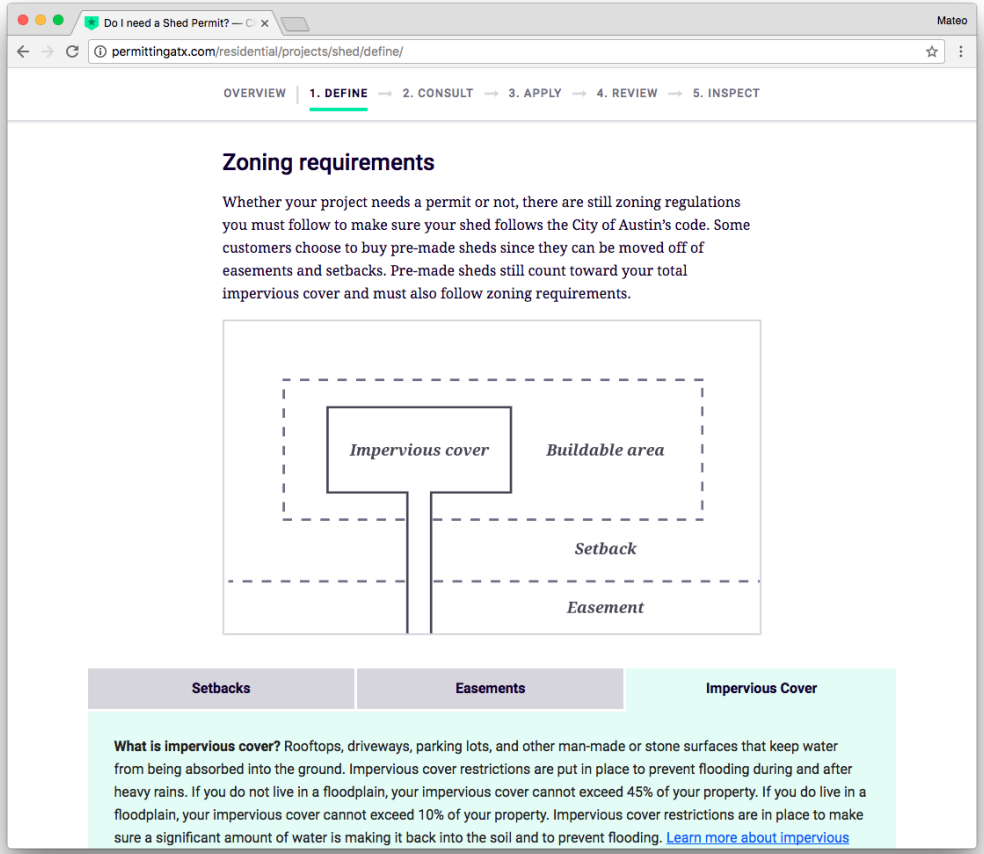


permittingatx.com

cloudcannon

algolia

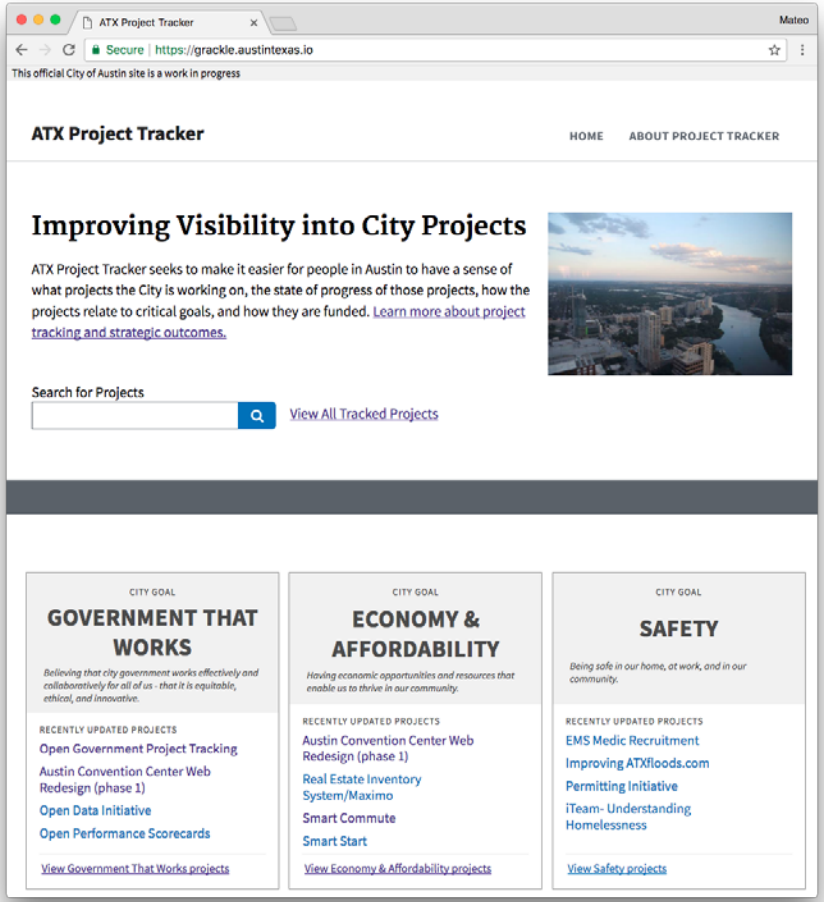
jekyll



grackle.austintexas.io

Airtable

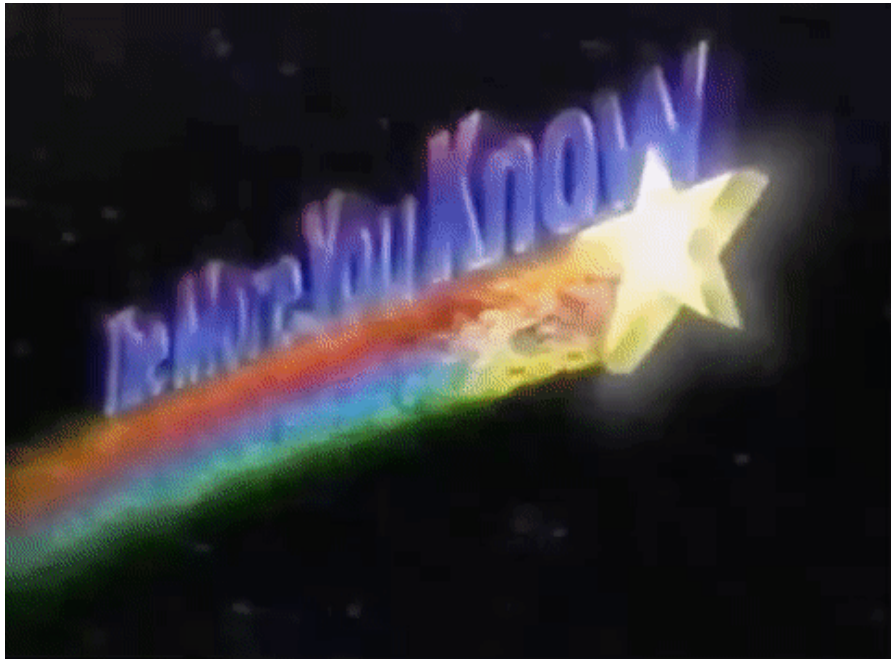
Gatsby



We’re becoming very familiar with content management systems

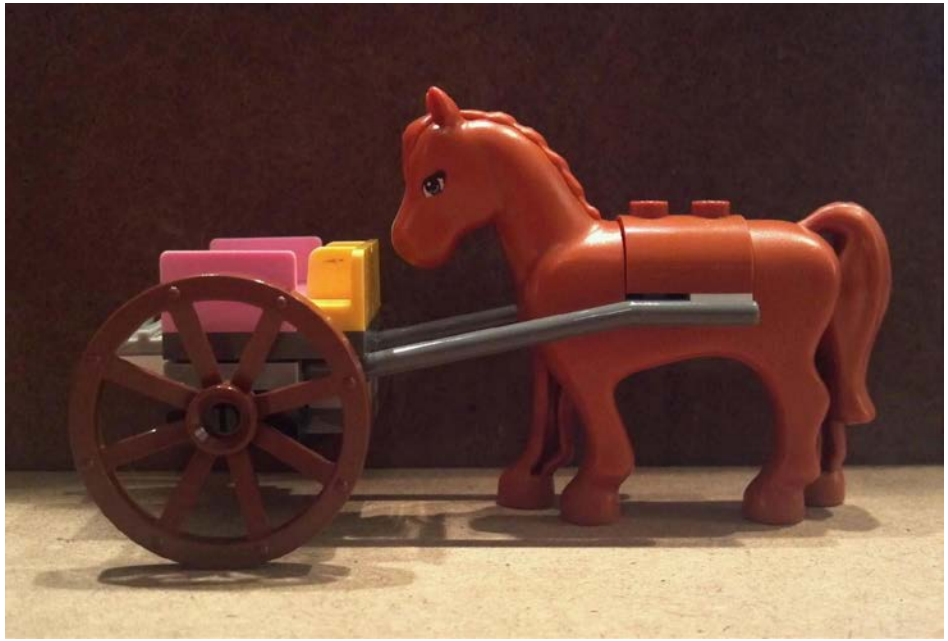
What did we learn?

- We can build sites that are customizable, complex, and **extendable** without a backend server.
- The **content management experience is hard** definitely not solved by moving content into YAML files or spreadsheets



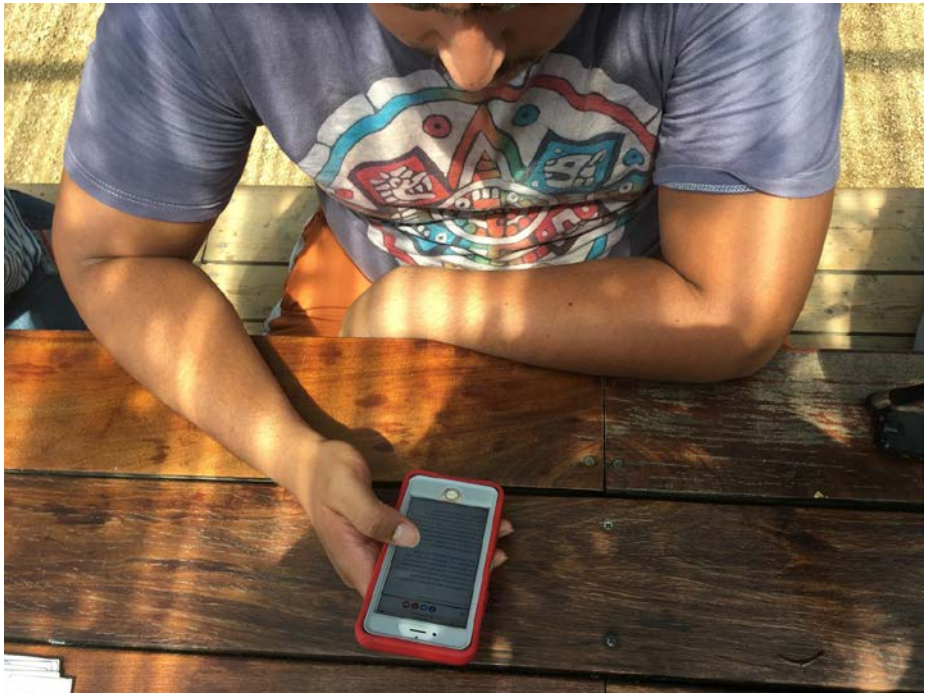
How could we improve?

- In most cases, technical decision of selecting a content editing system were made before **understanding the needs of the content creator** or the nuances of the content model
- Most challenges in developing the sites were around the **rigidity of the content system** and limitations to adapt of content model



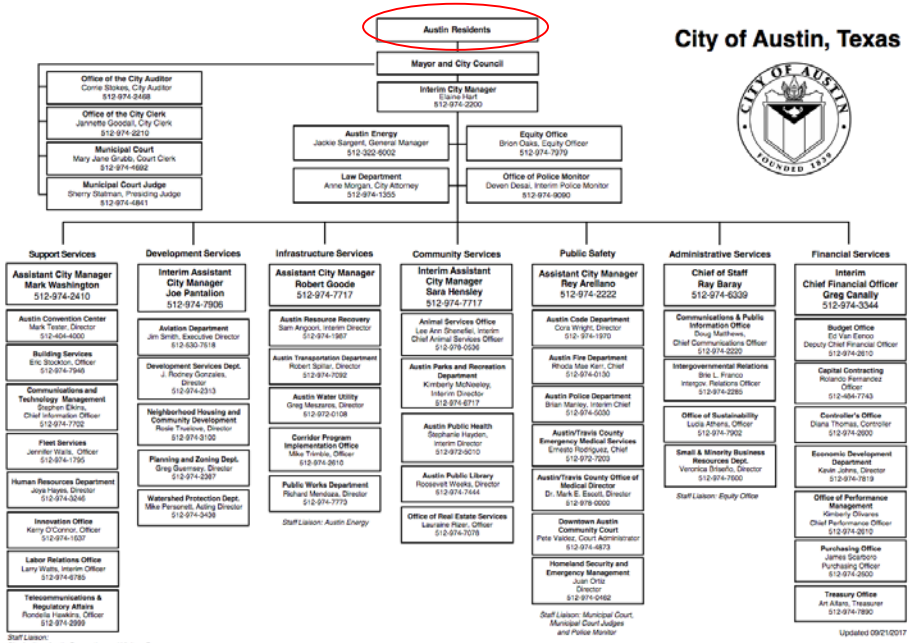
Content, not technology, is the hard part

- The real work is around making sure **residents have a great experience**.
- The way to do that is to support content authors.



“The People are at the top of the org chart.”

- **“Put Residents First”** is the 1st of our 6 Digital Service Values.
- This orients our priorities as a **service organization**.
- Our dev team is **making tools to serve** the user researchers, who serve the content editors, to serve the public.

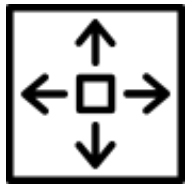


Narrowing down the most critical features for MVP

- Robust User Roles for Content Coaching
- Customizable Admin Interface
- Mobile First Content Preview
- Content Performance Dashboard
- Translation
- Forms

Building on an open source platform

Customizable



Expandable

Portable

Supported

Conversations with our peers

- We've had 2 conversations with cfpb folks about Wagtail
- We talked to Boston.gov & Mass.gov about Drupal 7 vs Drupal 8

cfpb
Consumer Financial Protection Bureau

CITY of BOSTON

Mass.gov

Wagtail ecosystem

- Developed in **Feb '14** by Torchbox, agency based in the UK.
- Torchbox managed big public sites with Drupal.
  - *"You don't get fired for choosing Drupal."*
- Made with Wagtail:
  - United Nations, Oxfam, NBC News, 18F, FEC, cfpb, UK Gov, NHS, NASA, Intel, Wharton, City of Helsinki, Municipality of Anchorage, Open Canada
- Our team is already contributing back to the Wagtail open-source project.

Django/Python ecosystem

- **Django** is the underlying MVC framework.
- **Python** community
  - Common language for CS 101
  - Widely used in GIS, Academic and Scientific communities

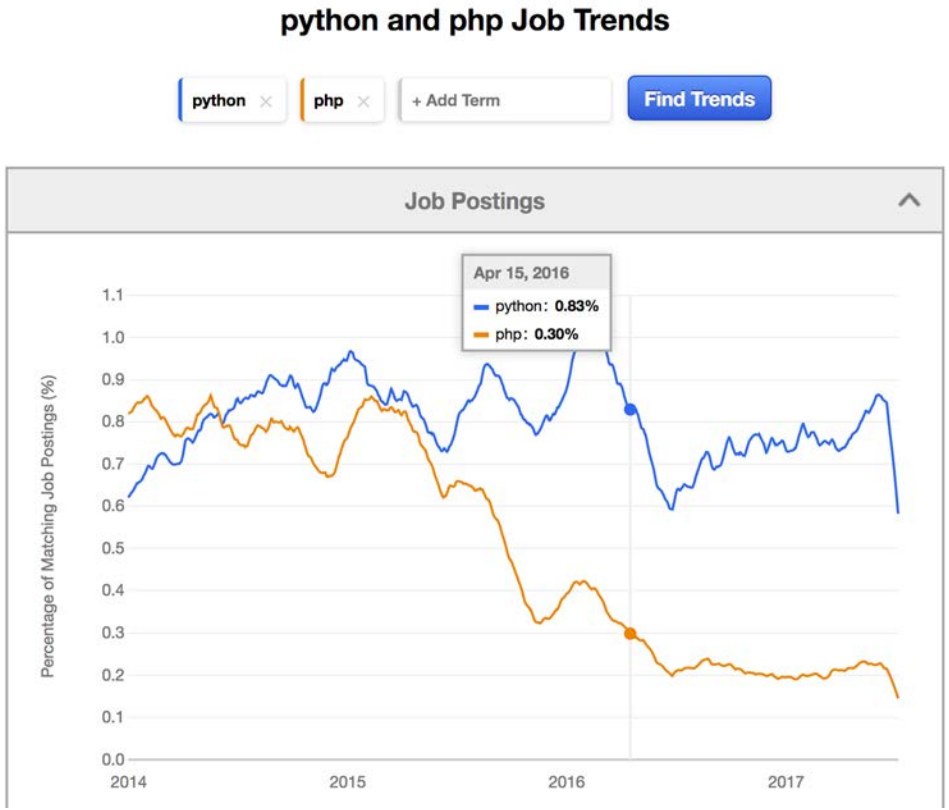
Recruiting the next gen of civic technologists

The fifteen most popular languages on GitHub

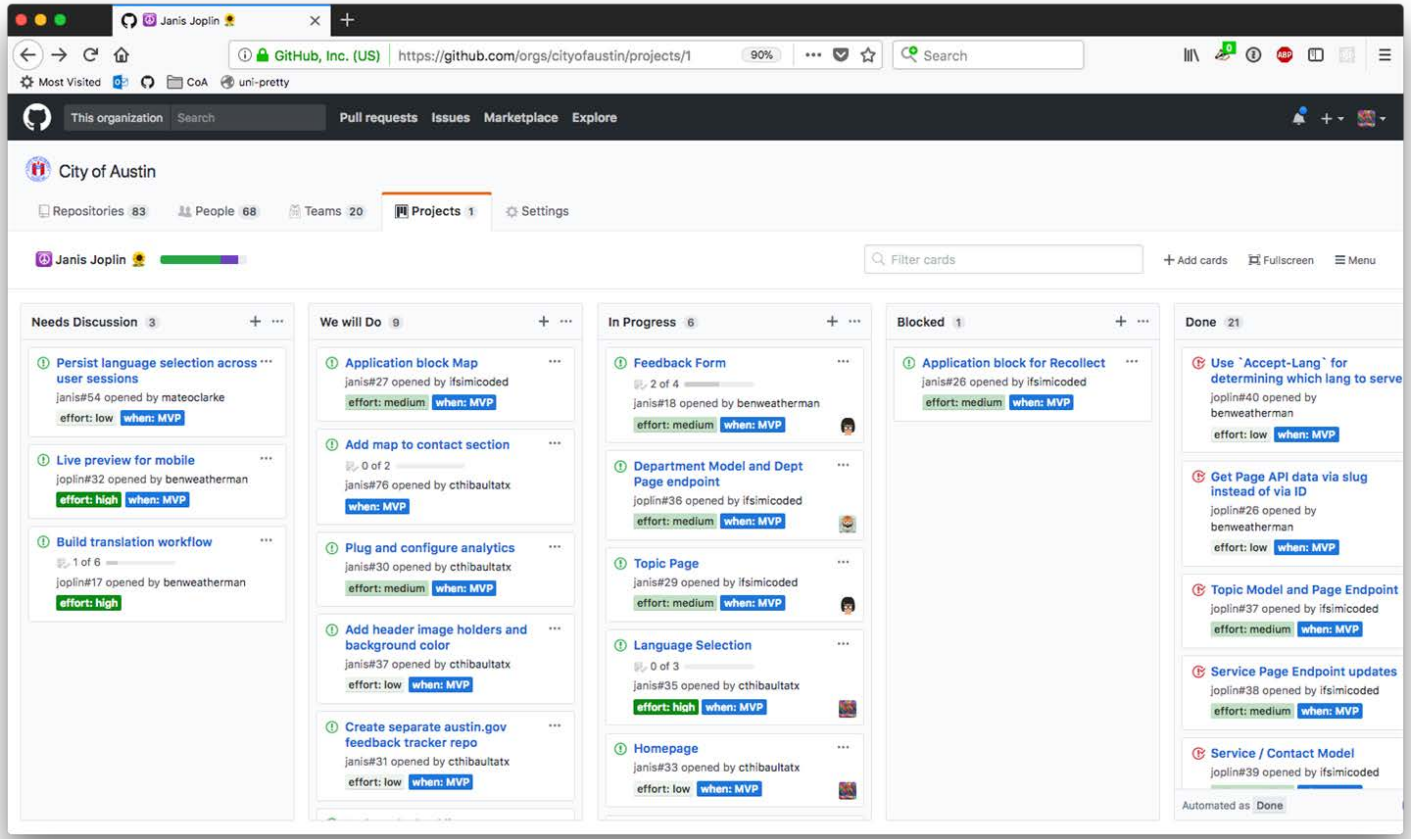
by opened pull request

GitHub is home to open source projects written in 337 unique programming languages—but especially JavaScript.

Recruiting the next gen of civic technologists



Working in the open



Alpha.austin.gov

- Initial release of alpha.austin.gov in February
  - Refining usability testing & recruiting
  - Prioritizing features and improvements
- Extend content model
  - Events Pages
  - Process (Step-by-step) Pages
- Adding content from more departments
  - EMS
  - ...more

Build living digital services that grow, adapt, and improve with user needs.