ED.gov Design Challenge
User Interviews Summary

Overview & Key Takeaways

As part of Ignyte's user-centric web redesign approach, we interviewed users of ED.gov to understand their needs and frustrations. These insights were integral to our prototype submission.

We conducted in-depth user interviews with three key personas:

Student
Pittsburgh, PA

Educator
Fairfax, VA

Local Official
Washington, DC

During these interviews, we explored users' objectives and goals, pain points, and how ED.gov impacts their educational journey. They also provided these key takeaways for the existing website:

1 **Users found it difficult to find the information they were looking for.**
Information on specific web pages was laid out in an unintuitive way that caused users to frequently skip over it entirely. Information was not prioritized and tailored to their unique needs.

2 **Navigating the website was confusing and frustrating.**
The existing website lacks breadcrumbs and links to related information, which made it difficult for users to backtrack, if they made a mistake in navigation. This resulted in multiple users dropping off the website altogether.

3 **The visual design and branding was inconsistent and distracting.**
Pages were not perceived to be parts of a larger, cohesive whole. Some pages seemed to be more dated than others, and users were not engaged by the few small images used.

Our Users

We conducted user interviews with several individuals whose work and day-to-day activities are impacted by the Department. Below are a few highlights about these individuals:

Student

Age: 24

Location: Pittsburgh, PA

Occupation: Graduate Student (MBA)

Objectives: Complete education on-time and within-budget, gain skills needed to pivot career, make meaningful peer connections

Interactions with ED.gov: Apply for financial aid, check interest rates and conditions, review COVID-19 impact on colleges and universities

Educator

Age: 42

Location: Fairfax, VA

Occupation: Elementary School Principal

Objectives: Create effective learning environment for students and staff, address special needs, understand school-level data

Interactions with ED.gov: Review and apply for grants, understand Nation's Report Card, read guidance on trending topics (e.g. COVID-19)

Local Official

Age: 56

Location: Washington, DC

Occupation: District Superintendent

Objectives: Monitor performance of schools, build processes for academic accountability, maximize learning outcomes
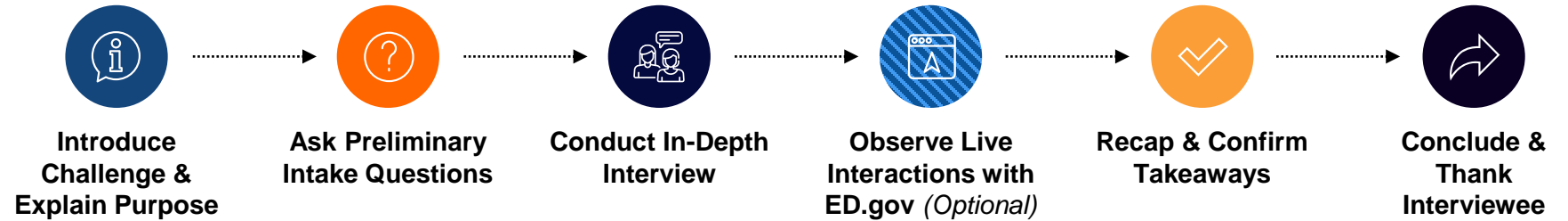
Interactions with ED.gov: Review district-level data and compare with relevant data sets, read up-to-date guidance and policy

ignyte

Our Interview Approach & Questions

We believe user interviews are a critical part of the design process and take care to leverage best practices when conducting them, while allowing flexibility to derive "off the beaten path" insights.

Introduce Challenge & Explain Purpose → **Ask Preliminary Intake Questions** → **Conduct In-Depth Interview** → **Observe Live Interactions with ED.gov** *(Optional)* → **Recap & Confirm Takeaways** → **Conclude & Thank Interviewee**

Ignyte understands that personas and interviews are unique, and our researchers were encouraged to deviate from the prepared questions to find insights. Below are examples of our questions:

1. Tell me about your role and day-to-day responsibilities.
2. What does your typical day look like?
3. What kinds of goals are important for you to achieve as a student?
4. Have you ever researched or applied for [loans/grants/other financial items]?
5. What is the process you go (or went) through for obtaining [loans/grants/other financial items]?
6. How do you interact with ED.gov?
7. What would compel you to look on ED.gov for information?
8. Based on the current website, how would you organize the resources on ED.gov?
9. Do you use any government agency websites or other online sources of information?
10. What haven't we asked you today that may be helpful to know?