Matching Diaspora Resources to Armenia's Needs

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Abstract

Over the years, the Diaspora-Armenia collaboration has suffered from inefficient utilization of resources. Sponsored by the AGBU, we proposed a platform that facilitates collaboration between the Diaspora and homeland projects by connecting Diaspora resources to Armenia directly. Our results were founded on survey findings, interview responses, and research. From these results, we have recommended features, interface design, and a marketing strategy that give Armenians a platform to connect with each other and rediscover their identity while building Armenia's prosperous future.

Acknowledgments

Authorship

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Executive Summary

Project Goals

Over the years, the Diaspora-Armenia collaboration has suffered from inefficient utilization of resources and has participated in Armenia-centric initiatives through a scattered network of organizations, local community projects, and small-scale and isolated programs. This decentralized approach does not utilize all of the resources in Diaspora, does not employ its full potential, support, and expertise for Armenia's sustainable development, and does not effectively unite the Diaspora for national identity preservation away from their homeland.

Our project, which is sponsored by the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU), models a collaboration platform between the Diaspora and homeland projects, and will increase engagement in Armenia's development while efficiently matching resources to Armenian initiatives. We identified the following objectives to achieve this goal:

1. Define the target audience and identify their needs
2. Identify best practices of other platforms
3. Determine the best functionality and features
4. Recommend an engaging user interface design
5. Determine a content marketing strategy

Methodology

For objective one, we defined the target audience and their needs in a collaboration platform by first conducting an online survey (IQP), which was distributed to various contacts in the Diaspora. In our survey, we asked questions to identify barriers to contribution, how to increase diasporic engagement, what type of platform would be preferred, and more. Additionally, we identified three other surveys to analyze: The AGBU Gala Survey (AGBU Gala) conducted by our mentor Mariam Hambarchyan, the Armenian Diaspora Online Survey (ADOS) conducted by Dr. Aleksandr V. Gevorkyan, and the Armenian Diaspora Survey (ADS) by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and the Armenian Institute in London. All these surveys, including our own, were analyzed to determine the needs of our target audience, as well as ways to increase Diaspora engagement in Armenia through our platform.

Objective two was completed by investigating the features that other large diasporas and collaboration platforms use to utilize resources of their diaspora communities. We collected descriptions of the features from the 14 selected platforms and identified those that were overlapping. They were then combined with the features originally requested by our sponsor and presented to Mariam Hambarchyan for the third objective. Ms. Hambarchyan worked with our team to finalize the features that were included in the final feature proposal.

Objective four was completed by working off of the finalized feature list from objective three, we identified the eight most essential features to create mockups for an interesting and engaging

platform. Those mockups were then wired into a basic prototype, which was tested in three user-interface interviews. After each interview, feedback on design, layout, and functionality were discussed amongst the team, and the necessary adjustments were made.

As mentioned above, we have designed this platform to be engaging and habit-forming. Therefore, for objective five we focused on the 'content' part of the platform, which is the periodic information flow that will keep users returning to the platform. To complete this, we researched the best content practices of other platforms, examined results from all four surveys, and inspected various Diaspora Facebook pages to identify desired content using the Popsters tool.

Results

In our survey, 90% of the respondents have contributed to Armenia in the past. The most common methods of contribution, in order of most to least popular, was monetary donation, volunteering their time, and sharing their expertise (Fig. 1). However, when the respondents were asked about their preference for future contributions, this order was reversed (Fig. 2). Both trends were supported by data from two supplementary surveys, and respondents of the ADOS and AGBU Gala surveys particularly showed a strong interest in non-monetary contribution methods over donation.

While the majority of respondents to our survey with past contribution experience expressed that they had no issues with past collaboration, language barriers, unclear expectations, and project management issues were each cited by 10% of respondents. An additional 40% chose poor matches between their skills and project needs, a lack of time to dedicate to the project, a struggle to find time to virtually meet, unclear expectations or a lack of communication from project participants, and concerns of corruption. We also found that about 40% of respondents have a challenging time contributing because they don't know what tools to use, didn't know where to start (33%), didn't know what they needed to contribute (31%) or hadn't heard of projects to contribute to Armenia (23%), with similar figures reported in the AGBU Gala survey responses.
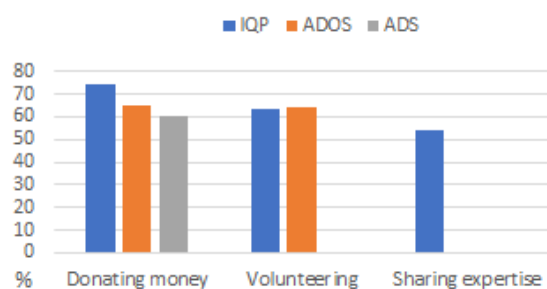
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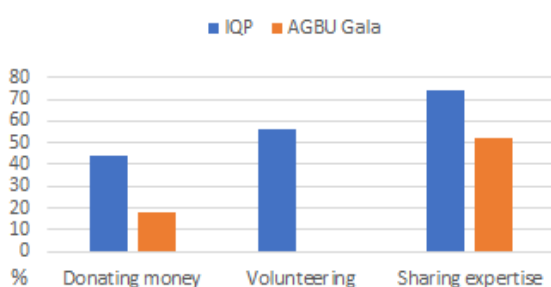
Figure 2. Preference for future collaboration

Of all the survey respondents, the clear majority gave an affirmative response to the idea of having a centralized platform to collaborate on Armenian volunteer projects, while the rest prefer to do so through the use of whichever platform (e.g. email, Facebook Messenger, Slack, WhatsApp) that they already use (Fig. 3). The respondents were also asked to check the features that would best fit their needs: The majority of them included the chat feature, while about half included the meeting
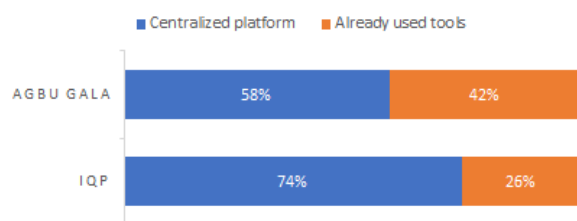
Figure 3. Platform preference

scheduling feature and the document uploading feature.

After researching 14 diaspora and collaboration platforms, we identified the most common and impactful features that were relevant to our project. Some of those features were: General information page, event calendar, among others. The finalized list of platform features was based on the initial list of requirements provided by the AGBU, along with subsequent requests from further communications with our mentor. The list was revised based on other diaspora platform's investigation, as well as Diaspora surveys' analysis. The final result was a list of 30 features, with user stories and element details for each. The most essential features were: Project page, expert/volunteer profiles, newsfeed content page, donation portal, event management, project directory, expert/volunteer directory, user account, work page, match page, project application page, chat functionality, calendar, gamification of collaboration experience with points/levels, user workspace.

Given the list of features found from the previous objective, we immediately started to work on user interface (UI) mockups. These features were mocked up using Adobe XD and contained elements that were practical as well as engaging. Our team then critiqued the mockups in order to make the design more capturing, the layout more practical, and the functionality more obvious. Since we had a preconceived bias on how the platform was to operate, we needed to employ external user testing. We had three users go through guided testing of our prototype and recorded every inconvenience or design flaw. Based on these notes, we were able to make a final revision of the prototype and supply it as a deliverable to be built upon by AGBU.

Content marketing is the strategy of consistently creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and engrossing content to retain and increase an audience, ultimately profiting off of their continuous engagement. Through analysis of Armenian social media pages, investigation of other diaspora platforms, and the results of various surveys, we have identified the best formats, topics, and methods for engaging the Diaspora through content. In general, the most effective content formats for non-profit organizations are illustrations and photos, e-newsletters, and videos (Ironpaper, 2017). Having interactive content and diversifying the targeting of the audience's emotions has also proven to be most effective. For online communities, the highest activity levels were recorded for video content, and most effective text was of 160 to 1,000 words in length. The surveys showed that the primary source of information within the Diaspora is through word of mouth, social media, and news. Diaspora platforms all had news feeds with regular posts, articles both about the organization itself and about the nation overall, and a section for events.

The most common liked and shared content within online communities was, unsurprisingly, about the Armenian Genocide and its recognition. Current events in Armenia were another commonly shared content topic, as well as notable events and success stories within the Armenian community and content focused on promotion of Armenian culture, identity, and arts. Pages with many beneficiaries in Armenia successfully informed their audience through sharing testimonials of project stakeholders or volunteers (story-oriented content with professional visual elements). In

other platforms, short stories about success cases and updates on project-related events were commonly used, as they demonstrated the impact the activity of the organization made and had uplifting, inspiring storylines. Surveys showed that people within the Diaspora community define their cultural identity mainly through the Armenian language, as well as Armenian food, dance and music.

Recommendations

In order to create a more complete picture of Diaspora opinions, we recommend that periodic surveys be conducted. These surveys should be in multiple languages and distributed so that responses will accurately represent the diverse Diaspora. To break down current barriers the Diaspora faces when contributing, we recommend that AGBU enacts a highly transparent donation process to alleviate donor fears of corruption, as well provide recurring project management workshops to improve team leadership and productivity. To increase engagement, we strongly recommend a greater effort be made to create and promote non-monetary contributions, as well as more project advertisements and significant promotion of this platform. Further recommendations we have are encouraging more local events, gamification for monetary donations (as described in the next paragraph), and better advertisement of the Armenian Virtual College program to learn the Armenian language.

For the platform features, we recommend the implementation of the feature list as described in the results of Objective Three. Furthermore, we suggest employing a team for platform oversight and maintenance. For content creation and management, content posting should be scheduled consistently, where approved and relevant content would be posted, and all posts should be monitored for engagement levels from the users. To ensure professional communication between platform users, we recommend implementing a system of reminders, notifications, and tips during all stages of communication. Notifications and updates should also be used for new events and projects to keep users engaged. From survey responses it was evident that many Diaspora representatives have valuable insight: We therefore recommend having an integrated place for people to voice their concerns and suggestions for the platform. Finally, it was evident from our research that giving Diaspora representatives an incentive for engagement is very important. We suggest implementing a well-designed system of rewards for various types of engagement through the platform to give a sense of accomplishment to experts and volunteers and introduce a quantitative representation of their engagement experience. There could be both point- and badge-based gamification, as well as a set of possible tangible incentives, such as recommendation letters, public appreciation posts, or trips to Armenia.

To provide an engaging user experience, our recommendation is to have this platform be hosted in both a web environment as well as a dedicated mobile application, for accessibility purposes. We then suggest expanding on our prototype to include every feature and tailoring the mockups to the medium on which the platform will be hosted. It is important to take advantage of our style guide, which provides recommendations for the color scheme, typography, shaping, tone of writing, and themes that help ensure that the platform is engaging, visually pleasing and fully functional. We suggest wireframing the new prototypes and conducting extensive rounds of user testing on prospective users of this platform within the Armenian Diaspora community.

We found out that the target audience of the Diaspora collaboration platform requires more content than currently available in order to remain informed and connected to their homeland. We therefore recommend having content managers to identify, create, and publish the content on a regular basis, as well as design an in-depth marketing plan that outlines formats, topics, and goals. For content formats, we recommend focusing on videos, images, event promotions, interactive content, and social media integration. We also suggest filling content with topics of interest to the Diaspora, such as the Armenian Genocide and its remembrance, current events both within and as they relate to Armenia, success stories and events in the Armenian community, personal stories of the impact of Armenia, and Armenian culture. We also recommend employing an authentic cause-based storytelling approach: or the telling of personal narratives rooted in a rallying and inspiring cause. Finally, we recommend repurposing and curating content, and taking special care to ensure content is always professional, polished, and published consistently.

Conclusion

We have recommended a platform model to address the issue of Armenian Diaspora having no centralized platform for collaboration with Armenian projects. This platform will enable project managers to quickly build teams of expert volunteers and give the Diaspora opportunities to become engaged with their homeland.

Beyond the benefits of increased productivity, this platform will have a positive effect on the lives of all project participants as well as Armenia as a whole, allowing for authentic and impactful connections that enrich the lives of all involved. It will create a professional and personal community for the Diaspora that will enhance their Armenian identity and make Armenian culture a daily part of their lives. Meanwhile, the local beneficiaries will reap the rewards of their projects with the support of experts and volunteers in the Diaspora. Through the support of Diaspora, they will contribute to Armenia's sustainable economic and social growth, giving Armenians on both ends the opportunity to engage, innovate and grow together. With this platform, Armenians the world over will have the opportunity to connect with each other, rediscover their identity, all while working on Armenia for generations to come, giving her an opportunity to be propelled forward in the modern world.

Introduction

Over the years, the Diaspora-Armenia collaboration has suffered from inefficient utilization of resources, which has created the need to connect diasporic resources to Armenia directly. Our project, which is sponsored by the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU), was to model a collaboration platform between the Diaspora and homeland projects, which will increase engagement in Armenia's development while efficiently matching resources to local initiatives.

Specifically, our project aimed to address the issue of the Armenian Diaspora having no centralized platform for engagement in local Armenian projects. (In this report, "Diaspora" will be used to refer to the Armenian Diaspora, while "diaspora" will refer to the generalized concept.) Over the years, the Armenian Diaspora has been engaged in Armenia-centric initiatives through a scattered network of organizations, local community projects, and small-scale isolated programs. This decentralized approach does not manage to utilize all of the resources in the Diaspora, does not employ its full potential, support, and expertise for Armenia's sustainable development, and does not effectively unite the Diaspora for national identity preservation away from their homeland.

Our main goal was to outline a platform to connect the global Diaspora and Armenia. The idea of connecting Armenians socially and professionally in a collaboration-based manner has been of interest for quite some time. The prospect of centralizing the resources and making the process of matching Diaspora resources to Armenia's needs more efficient anticipates attracting significant investments into Armenia, as well as contributing to its sustainable development.

There are platforms that have tried to tackle this problem in the past, such as Together4Armenia, but they fell short in terms of their level of engagement. Particularly, they lacked communication oversight and a user-centric design that encouraged easy, everyday use, and they did not fully address all the characteristics of the complex nature of the relationship between local Armenians and Diasporic communities. Our platform was specifically modeled to have a high level of engagement by offering a variety of content on AGBU projects and Armenian culture, as well as various methods of collaboration and an extensively tested user-experience design. In essence, our platform engages Armenian Diaspora more effectively than existing and failed platforms due to its consideration of the complexity of the Diaspora, today's Armenia, the relationship between them, and the value they offer each other. To that end, we identified the target audience and its needs through researching its historical origin, surveying Diaspora representatives, and analyzing existing communication channels.

This project will have significant impact, as a centralized platform anticipates not only increasing the engagement of Diaspora with Armenia, but also bringing all the Armenians of the world closer together. The authentic, direct collaborations between experts and local Armenian projects will contribute to the preservation of Armenian identity within the Diaspora, while making a tangible impact by stimulating sustainable economic growth in the homeland. This project-based platform will also function as a direct communication channel, providing a one-on-one experience that will be a tool for networking and building lasting relationships. The automation of matching expert resources to projects in need will also free the AGBU to spend its time and resources creating new projects to foster the Armenian identity and ensure the prosperity of all Armenians. All these

outcomes may have an enormous impact on the Diaspora, Armenia, and the complementary relationship between them.

Background

Armenian Diaspora

Diaspora Origins

Throughout history, migration patterns have set the foundation for the emergence of various ethnic communities around the world settled away from their ancestral homelands. Among such groups, the Armenian Diaspora stands out with its centuries of history, level of consolidation, continuous support, and nostalgia for their ancestry and homeland. Over Armenia's history of 3,000 years, massive migrations of Armenian people took place during different times and circumstances, which resulted in a scattered Armenian population of around ten million outside the current Republic of Armenia, which itself has a population of just under three million (Bolsajian, 2018). To analyze the interest of today's Diaspora in Armenia, investments in their homeland, and its sustainable development, one needs to understand the context of Diaspora origin, its history, and identity.

There are four main phases of the formation of Armenian Diaspora, each of which had its characteristics and effects on the essence of the Armenian Diaspora (Torosyan & Vardanyan, 2019). Displacements of Armenians under Sassanid (Neo-Persian), and later Byzantine Empire rule early in the third and fourth centuries had already set foundations for the formation of the Armenian Diaspora. However, a far more historically significant and centralized Diaspora community emerged with the establishment of the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia in the 11th century, serving as a center for the preservation of Armenian identity on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. After its collapse, Armenians moved predominantly to Syria, Cyprus, France, Italy, etc. By the 14th century, Armenian settlements could also be found in Kievan Rus', Crimea, Anatolia, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Mesopotamia (Torosyan & Vardanyan, 2019).

The second phase of the Diaspora formation process can be examined during the years under the rule of the Ottoman Empire. Mistreatment, repression, and the displacement of minorities such as the Christians of the Balkans, Greeks, and particularly Armenians were standard practices in the Ottoman Empire. Armenians were scattered around their homeland and deprived of their ancestral lands. Reforms promised by Ottoman leadership were never implemented, and the situation worsened, culminating in the massacres of 1894 – 1896 on the orders of Sultan Abdul Hamid II. Between 100,000 and 200,000 Armenians were killed, and tens of thousands immigrated to the United States, Canada, and South America, as well as Europe and Arab lands. The first Armenian communities in the United States settled in the Worcester, Boston, and Watertown areas of Massachusetts during this time (Boumoutian, 2006).

Political developments in the Ottoman Empire ended in the revolution of 1908, and the promise of a constitutional republic by the Young Turks gave hope for improvement. However, the situation instead culminated in 1915, when under the 'favorable' cover of World War I (WWI), the Armenian Genocide was planned by, and executed on the orders of, the Turkish leadership (Torosyan & Vardanyan, 2019). Of the estimated two million Armenians in the Ottoman Empire

on the eve of WWI, around 1.5 million Armenians were killed, and others were forcibly removed from the country (Suny, 2015). Thus, the Armenian Genocide became the most significant cause for the emergence of the Armenian Diaspora. Deprived of their homes, Armenian survivors settled around the world, building communities throughout North and South America and Europe, setting the foundation for Armenian Diaspora communities of today.

After the establishment of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic within the Soviet Union in 1922, and especially after the victory in WWII, there was an expectation for the return of lost Western Armenian lands and prosperity, and so massive repatriations took place that brought back thousands of Armenians from around the world. However, the political regime, social limitations, and totalitarian traditions were the roots of the disappointment of repatriate hopes. During Soviet times, a large number of Armenian intellectuals moved to Russia for better opportunities, and many workers immigrated to other socialist republics for better job prospects. After the collapse of the Soviet state in 1991, many of these groups never returned, and thus became part of the Armenian Diaspora in Russia and other post-Soviet countries (Torosyan & Vardanyan, 2019). At this time, the migration rate increased dramatically, reaching up to two million in subsequent years. Those mass migrations resulted in radical changes in the Armenian Diaspora communities worldwide. The destinations of resettlements were mostly Russia and the United States, which currently host the largest Armenian communities (Torosyan & Vardanyan, 2019).

Nature of the Diaspora's Relationship with the Homeland

The abovementioned phases of Diaspora formation and their causes have had a great influence on the nature of their collaboration with Armenia. Although it is a popular belief that the Armenian Diaspora is a mostly homogenous pool of Armenian people dispersed throughout the world, it is in fact more complex than that. Diasporas can be characterized by the widely accepted five categories: Victim diasporas, labor diasporas, trade diasporas, imperial diasporas and cultural diasporas. The descriptions of victim diasporas and labor diasporas best fit the global Armenian community today (Sheffer, 2003). These categories lead to each kind of community having different perceptions of Armenia, which in turn influences the way the Armenian Diaspora makes decisions pertaining to their homeland (Cohen, 2008).

Following the aforementioned classifications, the Armenian Diaspora in Russia, which has the highest population of Armenians, would be categorized as a labor diaspora resulting from the collapse of the Soviet Union. The United States has an Armenian Diaspora population that originally consisted of mainly victim diaspora status. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Armenian Diaspora within the United States has increased its number of labor diaspora. This difference in status influences the perception that each community has of their homeland and, as a result, created separate models for collaboration with Armenia (Torosyan & Vardanyan, 2019).
The model of Russian collaboration between Armenia and its Diaspora is rooted in the legacy left by the Soviet Union's rule. They in particular have a shared familiarity with the former Soviet Union and its values, which has significance when it comes to the nationalistic culture that echoes from the Soviet era. This shared familiarity has resurrected the idea of the "Friendship of the Peoples", an idea that all states in the Soviet Union are in the same "Soviet family".

The Republic of Armenia has been working to increase its collaboration with the Armenian Diaspora since shortly after World War I, when the Armenian Genocide took place. However, due

to the isolation and restrictions of Soviet countries, relations between the Western Diaspora and Armenia were somewhat estranged until the 1988 Spitak Earthquakes (Tsypylma, 2016). The consecutive 6.9 and 5.8 magnitude earthquakes killed between 25,000 and 60,000 and left nearly half a million homeless. This devastation triggered a massive emotional and humanitarian response from the Diaspora; the AGBU and the Armenian Relief Society raised approximately $10,000,000 each over the next three years to support earthquake victims (AGBU, 2018 and ARS, 2018). The fall of the USSR just a few years later led to an even greater shift in perception as the Diaspora began "…redeveloping the idea of the Republic of Armenia as a new ancestral homeland for all Diaspora Armenians" (Tsypylma, 2016). This was a time of support and redefinition for the Western Diaspora, who now felt connected to a new, independent state of their people.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and shift in Diaspora perceptions came a recommitment to engagement with the homeland, often demonstrated in the forms of monetary contributions from the Diaspora. Between 1988 and 1998, 14 Diasporic organizations raised $900 million for humanitarian relief as Armenia struggled to recover from the Spitak Earthquake, the ongoing military conflict in Artsakh, and the fall of the USSR (Manaseryan, 2004). This support, while hugely beneficial to the Armenian people, has been criticized in recent years for its lack of economic diversity. Armenia would have likely benefited more from investments in business and technology to stimulate its economy as it transitioned from socialism to the free market, as opposed to almost exclusively humanitarian aid. Given that the Diaspora was large, well-established, and well-organized, its lack of consistent support and economic diversity was a missed opportunity to propel Armenia as a leader in the world economy (Freinkman, 2000).

Modern Diaspora-Armenia Collaboration

Today, Diaspora projects have diversified, and organizations are committed to improving the lives of all Armenians through both monetary and service contributions. Donations are typically made by older generations of the Diaspora settled in Western countries; a list of donors of AGBU shows donations totaled over $15 million in 2018, the majority of which came from individuals and trusts in the United States (AGBU, 2018). Engaging in volunteer service to lend their expertise, professional skills, and time is another popular way for Diaspora to support their homeland. Second- and third-generation Diaspora from North America are becoming increasingly involved through volunteer programs and birthright trips, such as AGBU Young Professionals and Birthright Armenia, where their desire for adventure, professional development, global social change, and connection to their heritage are realized (Tsypylma, 2016). A number of Diaspora members also engage by lending their expert services to collaborate on Armenian-based projects. The two most prominent countries that are leading the collaboration movement are Russia and the United States, with France, England, Australia, and Greece also acting as active contributors (Samuelian, Hajian, Marirossian, & Hajian, 2003).

This expert collaboration can occur through small communities, such as churches, Armenian-centric clubs, and even Facebook groups, or through global organizations that focus on connecting Diaspora resources with their homeland of Armenia. One such global entity is the Armenian General Benevolent Union, an organization that was founded on the basis of national duty to Armenia. They stride toward this goal by managing over 69 worldwide chapters, 47 community centers, 25 schools, as well as many other global projects. AGBU's objective is to focus on the

emergence of the Diaspora to help shape a beneficial future for the Republic of Armenia and its identity, as well as serve all Armenians and preserve Armenia's identity. (AGBU, 2020).

In terms of AGBU's work towards diasporic collaboration, one of their biggest projects to date, in collaboration with UNICEF, is the Together4Armenia platform. This is a free intellectual volunteer platform that focuses on spotlighting projects in various Armenian communities, while also providing a means to invest knowledge into said projects (Sargsyan, 2017). Although the engagement level on Together4Armenia is not as high as anticipated, it has had a positive impact with projects with the primary goal of promoting Armenia and local projects within the Diaspora. Two such projects are "BRIDGE for CSOs" and "GOALS Armenia". "BRIDGE for CSOs" is an acronym for Bringing Real Impact with Diaspora and Global Engagement, and the project's goal is to utilize Diaspora expertise to benefit Armenian Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). BRIDGE for CSOs projects that their platform positively will impact the lives of 16,000 beneficiaries in Armenia and engage up to 400 Diaspora individuals (BRIDGE FOR CSOS, 2020). "GOALS Armenia" is an acronym for Girls of Armenia Leadership Soccer and has a mission to empower youth to become leaders through soccer opportunities both in Armenia and in the Diaspora community. To date, the organization has over 750 players and has directly impacted 72 communities with close to 20,000 beneficiaries (GOALS Armenia, 2015).

There are many other Armenian organizations that actively engage the Diaspora with Armenia through different development projects or fundraisers and have had a significant positive impact. Among them are the Hayastan All Armenia Fund (1,300 projects, $370 million of investment from 750,000 benefactors around the globe), Children of Armenia Fund (107,000 beneficiaries in Armenia), Fund for Armenian Relief ($350 million raised for 290 projects), Armenian Volunteer Corps (930 alumni from 54 countries), Armenia Tree Project, FAST and IDeA Foundations (Hayastan All Armenia Fund, 2020; COAF, 2020; FAR, 2020; AVC, 2020).

Armenia Today: Rebuilding the Prospects

The political climate of Armenia has always affected its relationship with the Diaspora. It is therefore important to understand the events of the last 30 years in order to appreciate the feelings the Diaspora may have had towards their homeland, or the political obstacles they may have faced in modern times. On September 21st, 1991, Armenia officially declared its independence from the Soviet Union. Levon Ter-Petrosyan, who led the movement for unification of Armenia and Armenian-populated Artsakh, was elected as the first president of the Republic of Armenia. In 1996, Armenia saw its first major protest; the crowd went against Levon Ter-Petrosyan, who was suspected of faking the elections in his favor to govern his second term.

In 1998 Levon Ter-Petrosyan was forced out and replaced by Robert Kocharyan – the second president of the Republic of Armenia. He governed two terms until 2008 – the year when the second large protests arose and ousted him. Kocharyan, though, fixed the elections to favor his friend Serzh Sargsyan, whose major opponent was Levon Ter-Petrosyan, also running for presidency (Lanskoy & Suthers, 2019). Despite his prior negative experience, Ter-Petrosyan had supporters among the youth, who had built hope around his promising speeches. After the election results declared Sargsyan's victory on February 14th, the movement escalated with the focal point being Republic Square in Yerevan.

The actions lasted until March 1ˢᵗ of that year, when authorities decided to employ excessive force and clear Republic Square. Levon Ter-Petrosyan was put under house arrest, and the police started to brutally scatter the protesters, even opening fire on the crowd that night. Many people died and even more were injured. The official numbers are eight dead citizens and two policemen. Numerous protesters were arrested, the others fled abroad or went into hiding, and martial law was declared (Lanskoy & Suthers, 2019).

One of the protesters was the current prime minister of Armenia, Nikol Pashinyan, who was hiding for a year after the protest and was imprisoned for three years after surrendering to the authorities. He was amnestied from prison in 2011 and joined the parliament with Levon Ter-Petrosyan's party. Later he broke out and formed his own party – the Civic Contract. After serving two terms, Sargsyan claimed that he was going to leave the post of the President and pass it to the next generation. However, in 2017, changes in the constitution resulted in a dramatic increase of the Prime Minister's power and decreased that of the President. Sargsyan then attempted to take office as the Prime Minister, which caused the dissatisfaction of the Armenians and became the breaking point from which actions elevated rapidly.

Pashinyan, who had now learned from the protests of 2008, started the "Take a Step" movement. Under his leadership, many people started walking protests in different parts of Yerevan in a decentralized manner, they were blocking the major routes and preventing natural traffic flow. On the other hand, Sargsyan's approach had always been waiting until protests cooled down, and he went for a risky strategy again: The Parliament elected Sargsyan as the new Prime Minister. The activism started to spread to different regions of Armenia and resulted in a two-week complete strike of Armenia. All the major routes were blocked, and the country nearly stopped functioning. On the second day of his governance as a Prime Minister, Serzh Sargsyan resigned.

The movement came to be termed as the "Velvet Revolution". The ideology behind the name lies in the peaceful nature of the event (Sargsyan & Cairns, 2019). After the resignation of Sargsyan, Pashinyan was elected Prime Minister. He then worked hard to call new parliamentary elections and gathered new parties, mostly composed of the youth. Pashinyan and his team then began an extensive fight against the previous corrupt government. Many ex-politicians and oligarchs were convicted, which was a major shock to the existing corrupt regime.

Since Armenia gained its independence from the Soviet Union, it has struggled to prosper under the weight of a corrupt government. However, with the destruction of the limiting political and economic barriers, Armenia has started to prosper on a larger scale, welcoming honest leadership, successful government programs, and increased investments from their Diaspora. As Shepard notices in his recent article on Forbes, "…suddenly, the little, insignificant country hidden deep in the centerfold of the world map was full of hope and looking forward to a future that seemed unusually bright" (2020).

Facing the Challenge of Decentralization

The years of Diaspora collaboration with the homeland resulted in formation of a scattered network of organizations and methods for Diaspora resource utilization. Subsequently, there emerged a need for a centralized platform for bridging the diasporic resources to Armenia directly. Our

project was "Matching Diaspora Resources to Armenia's Needs" and was sponsored by the AGBU. Our overall goal was to support the AGBU in its goals of engaging, strengthening, and increasing involvement between Armenia and the Diaspora by providing a collaboration and engagement platform. The AGBU has many current and potential projects that could benefit from the support of the Diaspora, but there was no centralized platform on which the AGBU could request resources, or the Diaspora could provide them.

The AGBU had a donation section on their website, but it only allowed for monetary donations to broad areas of AGBU, such as "AGBU Youth Programs in Armenia" or "Armenia Programs". There existed no area where Diaspora members were able to browse specific projects to offer their time, money, or professional expertise. When AGBU had a project that could benefit from additional resources, they had to dive into their vast network of Diaspora contacts: Reaching out to different AGBU branches, using word of mouth, and even searching Facebook. This method was ineffective, manual, and highly time-consuming; thus, the idea of a centralized platform emerged.

This idea is not new to AGBU; there had long been discussions of a need to optimize the communication between the Armenian local initiatives and the Diaspora, as well as within the AGBU chapters themselves. It has always been paramount for AGBU to make sure such a platform would manage to convey the depth and complexity of AGBU projects and operations.

An overall goal of the AGBU is to engage the Diaspora so that their Armenian identity becomes a part of their daily life. This was designed to be accomplished through the platform by providing created and curated Armenian content, as well as access to information about professional, social, and project-based events. Interesting content will draw users in and encourage habitual use of this platform, and location-based events will create communities between Diaspora volunteers, which could expand into global connections as the communities reach back to Armenia. Creating an engaging platform such as this encourages collaboration and significant connections between the Diaspora and Armenia, as well promotes Armenian culture and identity.

This project carries huge social implications for both Armenia and the Diaspora. Upon creation of this platform, it is expected that it will increase diasporic engagement, as well as stimulate meaningful connection between the Diaspora and Armenia. As the platform will show all AGBU projects, with their timelines for involvement, more targeted and informed collaborations will come to stage. This will also promote concrete interaction completely different from the experience of making a general donation to an obscure organization. Both parties benefit from this relationship: The Diaspora through rediscovery of Armenian culture, and the participants of the AGBU projects through provided resources and the personal connection to Diaspora members.

Finally, in the words of AGBU President Berge Setrakian, *"Armenians have always been a diasporic people, and it is imperative that AGBU looks forward and outward… It is imperative to work to find these individuals and engage them with their heritage"*.

Methodology

Project Goal and Objectives

The goal of our project was to support the AGBU in engaging, strengthening, and increasing involvement between Armenia and the Diaspora by modeling a platform for collaboration between diasporic communities and Armenian local initiatives, increasing Diaspora's overall engagement in Armenia's development. We had identified the following objectives to achieve this goal:

1. Define the target audience and identify their needs
2. Identify best practices of other platforms
3. Determine best functionality and features
4. Recommend an engaging user interface design
5. Determine a content marketing strategy

To meet these objectives, we conducted research using surveys and interviews, explored similar platforms, created a comprehensive user-interface design, and investigated types of content that would appeal to platform users. The final report was presented to AGBU alongside deliverables from each objective.

Objective One: Define the target audience

This platform is intended for use by the Armenian Diaspora, but this is an extremely large and diverse group, and we had to make sure that this appeals to various subgroups within the Diaspora. Therefore, it was essential to define the target audience of this project and identify its needs in an engagement and collaboration platform in order to design a product that will appeal to them and satisfy their needs.

We accomplished this objective two different ways: By conducting a survey of the Armenian Diaspora to identify their wants in a centralized collaboration platform, and by analyzing the data of three previous surveys of the Diaspora. In our case, a survey was the most effective way to collect the necessary data, as they allowed us to reach a large number of people quickly and generate much more data than if we were to use other methods, such as interviews or focus groups.

Our own survey had questions designed to capture the opinions of Diaspora on barriers to contribution and how to increase Diaspora engagement, as well as what the preferred type of platform would be, what content they would like in such a platform, and what features they would desire. The survey questions were sent out for feedback and revision to Mariam Hambarchyan, a behavioral scientist with the AGBU Silicon Valley chapter and our project mentor, before being given to any participants. WPI's "Impact in Armenia" event on February 28th, 2020 was a great opportunity to collect contact information of members of the Massachusetts Armenian Diaspora, which was accomplished through networking, as well as providing a link and QR code at the conclusion of our presentation. The survey was distributed shortly thereafter to the contacts made that night, as well as any Diaspora members those contacts saw fit to pass our survey along to.

Also included in the survey distribution was the Repat Armenia network and HyeTech communities, as well as various Facebook groups, Reddit forums, Armenian churches, and any personal contacts the Armenian members of our team had who have a large network in the Diaspora. While reaching out to people to whom to send surveys, we were directed to two large, previously completed surveys that were similar to ours: Armenian Institute's Armenian Diaspora Survey and Dr. Aleksandr V. Gevorkyan's Armenian Diaspora Online Survey.

Dr. Gevorkyan independently conducted his survey from December 2015 to April 2018, received 513 responses, and primarily targeted US-based Diaspora. Dr. Gevorkyan was investigating the roles of Diaspora in economic development of Armenia and concluded there was a need for a 'Diaspora-Portal' that would match the needs in Armenia to Diaspora contributions, a platform incredibly similar to ours.

The Armenian Diaspora Survey was conducted in Boston, Cairo, Marseille, and Pasadena among over 1,000 Armenians. The survey was led by a team of academics, researchers, and experts. This research, funded and implemented mainly by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and the Armenian Institute in London, was intended as a *"public opinion research in Armenian Diaspora communities to inform the public about the issues, attitudes and trends shaping the Armenian world in the 21st century"* (The Armenian Diaspora Project, 2019).

In addition to these surveys, Mariam Hambarchyan also provided data from a similar survey she conducted. Her 50-response survey was carried out at the AGBU Young Professionals' Connect at Gala Event on February 15, 2020, and focused on questions of Diaspora engagement, as well as logistics of Armenian platforms HyeConnect and Virtual Bridge.

We began analyzing our survey responses after we received 40 responses. We further analyzed our findings by comparing them with data from the above-mentioned surveys, all of which we compiled into a report. This deliverable influenced the subsequent objectives, as well as helped to make well-informed design, structural, and technical decisions regarding the platform as a whole.

Objective Two: Best practices of other platforms

A number of other populations with large diasporas have effectively utilized their diaspora communities to improve the homeland and investigating the tools they have used to accomplish this will help us build a successful platform. To identify the best practices of these platforms, we selected a few diasporas with well-established diasporas and researched the tools, methods, and platforms they use to effectively centralize the resources of their diasporas or provide networking opportunities. We then collected descriptions of the features of each platform and identified the features that were overlapping. Diasporas were chosen based on global prominence, as well as general level of involvement in their homeland or heritage. Although there were plenty of diasporas that fit this description, we decided to expand our research to include a few networking platforms to ensure our examination would yield diverse and useful features. This objective was accomplished simultaneously with the first objective.

At the conclusion of this objective, we identified best practices of other similar platforms, and produced a brief report detailing our findings, which was communicated to our sponsor, and was considered for the final feature list.

Objective Three: Best features and functionality

The Armenian Diaspora has a complex structure, involving communities and individuals with different characteristics. Therefore, when modeling an engagement and collaboration platform for the whole Diaspora community, we considered the differences of needs within the Diaspora and chose the functionality that best addressed them based on the data from our surveyed and researched diasporic communities. Our work was founded on the outline of the required functionality and necessary features provided by AGBU, and further developed through our research.

Due to the dynamic nature of the platform design and the potential alterations of platform's direction during the development process, we adopted an iterative approach for conducting our work through communication with the sponsor, analyzing their feedback, and making consequent revisions. We thus were able to continuously provide tangible results in small, consumable increments while building towards the final product. Expanding upon the initial feature requirements provided by AGBU, we investigated those features in detail. We adjusted the suggested functionality by analyzing their necessity and relevance based on our research of identifying the target audience's needs and studying the best-practice features of similar platforms. The product of each iteration was discussed with our mentor, and their feedback was examined and considered during the next iteration.

The deliverable for this objective is the report of the list and descriptions of all the features and tools within our platform. The report outlines the platform's functionality and opportunities it gives to the users for engagement and collaboration.

Objective Four: Engaging user interface design

User interface (UI), in the context of software engineering, can be defined as the overall ease and pleasure of using a computer program, whether it be a web interface, computer application, or mobile application. Our intention was to outline a habit-building platform, meaning that this will be a platform that users will find simple, appealing, and interesting enough to be used routinely rather than rarely. In order to create a habit-building platform for Armenian Diaspora, it is important to create an engaging UI.

We began by identifying the most essential features to mockup and getting them approved by Ms. Hambarchyan, our mentor. We then designed these features in the form of various UI mockups using Adobe XD, a free design and prototype tool. Using these mockups, we then wired them together to create a prototype that was used for our interview stage. Then, we conducted interviews on the usability of our prototype with various persons we had access to, in order to have a diverse set of users test our design.

The first three objectives needed to be completed before starting this objective. Objective one had to be completed because in order to build a UI that is specifically helpful to our target audience, we needed to make sure that the needs of the target audience were met. We had to also understand the best practices of other diaspora platforms in order to design a UI that is impactful. The third objective was also a prerequisite to this objective because it was essential that we understood the functionality of the platform prior to designing the experience on top of that functionality.

The data needed to complete this objective was primarily subjective, as we collected opinions on what UI mockups are the most engaging. These opinions were gathered through interviews with anonymous volunteers that took the time to critique our UI. These interviews were scripted prior to the actual interview sessions and were recorded and put aside for review. Once we had conducted all of the interviews, we recorded elements that were observed as user-friendly and refined those that are less user-friendly.

We conducted these interviews over a recorded Zoom conference call. A member of our team shared their screen with the prototype displayed and handed over control of their desktop to the user

As an end result, we provided mockups of the user interface for the platform as well as a report of UI guidelines and expectations. The latter deliverable will be used by the platform development team as a 'style guide' for how the user interface should be.

Objective Five: Content marketing strategy

As mentioned above, we modeled this platform to be engaging and habit-forming. To that end, we introduced the 'content' part of the platform, which is the periodic information flow that will keep users returning to the platform. We did the corresponding research to identify the type of content that would serve best for keeping the engagement, while not overshadowing the main project-oriented focus of the platform.

In order to identify such content, we first looked into the best practices of other platforms. We explored the content part of the other diaspora platforms mentioned in objective two to identify successful content formats and features, and map those onto the Armenian context to determine the ideal directions and practices.

Secondly, we used our survey results, as well as the findings from the past surveys, to get an idea of the required content. In our survey, we included questions about whether or not the respondents lack Armenian content, what their sources of getting that information were, and how they were staying connected. We also gave space to express their thoughts in a free manner in short answers or comments. We gathered all these data and compiled it into categories of content for our platform.

We also explored social media community pages targeted at the Armenian Diaspora, and analyzed the pages and groups with large Diaspora outreach and engagement. In social media groups, we examined the popularity of the piece of content via observing the count of points, whatever the unit of measurement is for that particular platform (e.g. 'likes' for Facebook). Identifying the

content that got the most engagement allowed us to spot the areas that are of utmost demand from the members of the Diaspora.

Having identified the characteristics of the platform's target audience, we considered different content creation strategies for different social groups among the Diaspora and recommended appropriate approaches for attracting their interest.

Results

Objective One: Define the target audience

Before presenting the results, we would like to acknowledge that our online survey reached a small number of people who were likely not sufficiently geographically or socially dispersed. Additionally, the people we reached are already likely to be somewhat engaged in the Diaspora, as they had the contacts to receive this survey, as well as the motivation to fill it out. The supplementary surveys that we used, despite having a much larger number of responses, are still limited and not fully representative of the whole Diaspora. Therefore, the following results are not meant to draw conclusions of the entire complex and diverse Diaspora, but rather provide a snapshot of opinion that can be supported by data from larger and more involved surveys.

Further, the following abbreviations are used:
- IQPS – Our survey for WPI's IQP: Matching Diaspora Resources to Armenia's Needs
- ADS - Armenian Diaspora Survey by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and Armenian Institute in London (The Armenian Diaspora Project, 2019)
- ADOS - Armenian Diaspora Online Survey by Dr. Aleksandr V. Gevorkyan (Gevorkyan, 2019)
- AGBU Gala Survey - Survey at AGBU Young Professionals' Connect at Gala Event by Mariam Hambarchyan

General Findings from Surveys

Through the IQPS, we asked several questions to determine past methods of Diaspora-Armenia collaboration, and how to improve future collaboration experiences. When asked if survey respondents have ever contributed to Armenia (with examples of contributions including time, expertise, and monetary donation), 90% answered affirmatively (Fig. 4). To further investigate this subset of responders, we asked several follow-up questions, such as which ways they have contributed in the past, what their channels of engagement are, and what hurdles they may have faced in past collaborations.

To understand the nature of their collaboration experience, in the IQPS we asked about the exact method of contributing to Armenia. Among the survey respondents who had contributed to Armenia in the past, the most common method engagement was monetary donation, while volunteering time was also common. Roughly half of the respondents mentioned having contributed through sharing their expertise (Fig. 5). Although some overlap between time and expertise volunteering exists, expertise specifically refers to offering one's unique professional and expert abilities in some capacity.
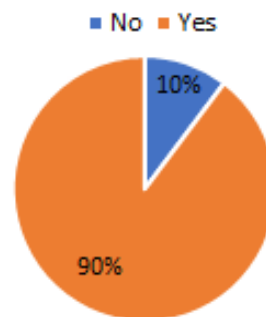

Figure 4. IQPS: Previous contribution experience

Furthermore, according to the ADS, 78% of respondents indicated having donated to charities or organizations, of which 84% indicated to have contributed to Armenian organizations as part of at least a small portion of their annual charity. Of all the respondents, 64% indicated to have often or sometimes volunteered for Armenian organizations, with only 23% never having done so. The predominantly monetary contribution experience is also shown in the results of the ADOS. Notably, of its participants, 83% expressed preference to donate directly to local Armenian organizations, although the majority indicated that they are not currently supporting any individuals or initiatives in Armenia.
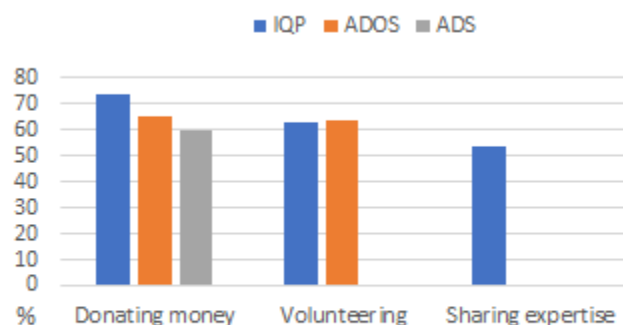

Figure 5. Types of past engagement

While most of the reported past contributions are monetary, it was evident that the actual preference among the majority of survey takers lies in contributing through sharing knowledge and expertise. ADOS respondents mentioned non-monetary contribution methods such as professional knowledge sharing, voluntary teaching and mentoring opportunities, research collaboration, or even voluntary medical services. Further interest in non-financial collaboration within the Diaspora is also supported by the findings of our survey. Among all of the respondents, the clear majority indicated willingness to volunteer through sharing their experience, while more than half were ready to volunteer their time, and fewer people were interested in donating money (Fig. 6). Some respondents took to comments to express enthusiasm at taking part in or organizing projects relevant to their expertise. The interest in expertise sharing is also evident in the responses of the AGBU Gala survey, with people indicating readiness to act as mentors and share their experience. Only 18% were interested in donating money, while others showed interest in volunteering by other means, such as physically going to Armenia to establish direct contact or volunteering their time by teaching English.

As our platform is aimed at centralizing the resources already in use and making a uniting medium for communication between the Diaspora and Armenia, we also investigated current methods of engagement, as well as past negative experiences through the IQPS. When the 90% of respondents with past contribution experience were asked what their channels of engagement were, roughly 70% chose both *"NGOs (e.g. AGBU etc.)"* and *"Communities (e.g. HyeTech, local cultural/religious organizations, etc.)"*, while half of the
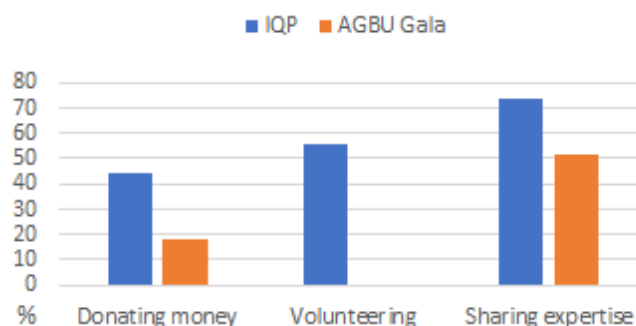

Figure 6. Preference for future collaboration

respondents chose *"Platforms (e.g. Social Media)"* (Fig. 7). Moreover, we were surprised to discover that a few of respondents mentioned financially supporting personal contacts in Armenia, which was not an option we had expected to be significant.

In the IQPS, the same 90% were asked to identify issues with their collaboration, if any had existed. While most responded *"I had no issues!"*, *"Project leads or participants weren't clear about what they needed from me"*, *"Project management issues like lack of alignment on deliverables, deadlines, goals"* and *"There was a language barrier"* were each chosen by 10% of respondents. An

Figure 7. IQPS: Channels of engagement for past contribution

additional 40% chose other various options, including poor matches between their skills and project needs, a lack of time to dedicate to the project, a struggle to find time to virtually meet, unclear expectations or a lack of communication from project participants, and concerns of corruption. These responses show that although the majority of participants have participated in some form of collaboration with Armenia, many also faced significant complications, predominantly due to various communication issues.

Through the IQPS, we found that 90% of all participants wanted more sources of Armenia-related content, with only 10% responding that they had no need for further sources of Armenian-related content. The ADS reported that for the frequency of Armenian content consumption, about half of respondents look fairly regularly, while about 30% report looking regularly, 20% look daily, and only 5% never look for Armenian related content. (Fig. 8). With these statistics, it is fair to assume that Armenian Diaspora could use a new source of content, and that the content will be consumed fairly regularly.

In our initial feedback from the IQPS, we found that about 40% of surveyed Diaspora members have a challenging time contributing because they don't know what tools to use in order to communicate and collaborate. This finding was contradicted by feedback from the AGBU Gala Survey, where only 6% of participants reported this response for the same question. The IQPS also found people struggled because they didn't know where to start (33%), didn't know what they needed to contribute (31%), or hadn't heard of projects to contribute to Armenia (23%), and similar figures were found within the AGBU Gala Survey responses. Finally, 5% said that they didn't have the time to contribute, with a similar response being reported by the results of the AGBU Gala Survey. Furthermore, we found that 44% of participants from the ADS stated that they had a hard
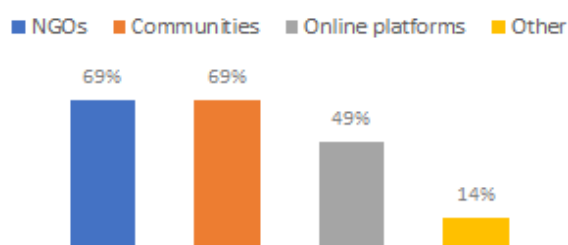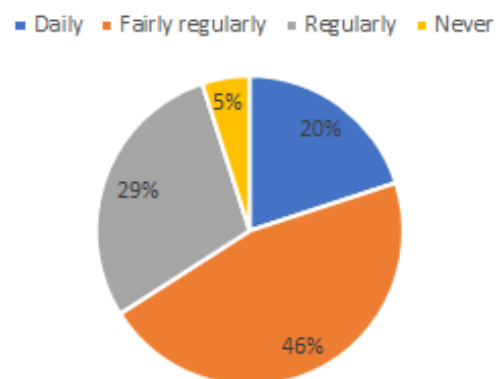

Figure 8. ADS: Frequency of looking through Armenian content

time contributing because they didn't have the time to do so, we believe this figure to be more representative due to the vast number of responses they had.

Another resource constraint that was found was monetary resources. Several responses from the ADOS indicated that a limiting factor of contribution to be financial stress. Dr. Gevorkyan, who conducted the ADOS, found indicators that mistrust towards involved institutions was also sometimes a limiting factor for Diaspora contributions. Since we were not given the raw data to the ADOS survey and were only given a synopsis of its findings, we cannot quantitatively determine the exact indicators to which Dr. Gevorkyan alludes. Given the results of the IQPS and supplementary data, it is fair to say that a portion of the Armenian Diaspora population is struggling with finding a place to start, determining what form of contribution is necessary, and are having difficulty finding projects that need meaningful contributions. Furthermore, trust in the projects is essential, as well as the individual's financial ability to contribute.

In the ADOS (Fig. 9), the participants were asked about their reasons for not being active in Armenian organizations; 44% of the respondents mentioned a lack of time, 31% said they were not interested in the event and/or organizations, and 22% pointed out some other reason. The other less common reasons (<16%) were being located far from the events/organizations and not feeling welcome in them.

In the IQPS, we asked the participants to suggest ways to engage the part of the Diaspora that is more disengaged and not involved with Armenia, and they gave us many helpful ideas. Roughly 71% of the respondents included *"social media outreach"* as a possible solution, and 66% included *"sharing content related to Armenia"*. The answers *"advertisements about projects"* and *"more local events"* were each chosen 40% of the time. Also, 29% of time people had ideas other from the ones mentioned above, which included the following: *"...[organize] events that are targeted towards specific age groups"*, *"...convince them to come to an event and make them feel comfortable [not judged for their language skills, level of patriotism] then they will be more involved"*, and *"...share content that connects common challenges in Armenia and US"*. One respondent noted that incentives are a very important part: In their words, *"people donate money to churches and Camp Nubar to get their names on stones"*.

In the ADS, 61% of the Armenians worldwide said that they think there is a way Armenia can support the Diaspora. Of those responses, 71% of which were youth, the Diaspora of the future. The youth are one of the groups most involved with Armenian community. These results indicate that there is a significant place for a collaboration platform to offer the help and support of the Republic of Armenia to the Diasporic Armenians, and the potential increases as we look further into the future. Moreover, in the
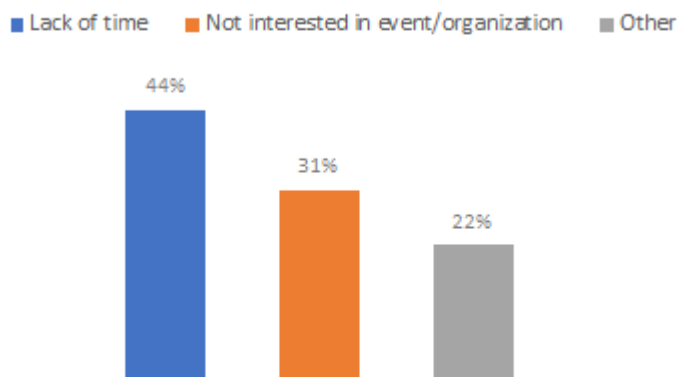

Figure 9. ADOS: Why not active in Armenian organizations

same survey, the respondents were asked to indicate the missing activities in their local communities, and the results showed a variety of diversity. The most significant ones were *"lectures and activities on Armenian history, language, art, music, cooking, dance, etc."*, *"Armenian schools"* and *"children's cultural activities, summer camps, scouts"*. These give some ideas of what the platform could offer to the Diaspora in return for their donated talent and resources; an anecdotal frustration that has been expressed to this group by in-person communications with the Diaspora.

Furthermore, subsequent questions showed that more than 86% of the respondents have learned or tried to learn the Armenian language, Armenian music and dances, or cooking Armenian food by participating in classes. This is also an indication of the eagerness of many in the Diaspora to preserve the Armenian identity, and our platform has the potential to support them in that.

When the respondents of the IQPS were asked to provide any general comments or suggestions in our survey, these were the most notable ideas:

- Incorporating Armenian language lessons and language-based projects.
- Keeping the platform focused (e.g. a section for volunteering opportunities in Armenia and/or Diaspora, and another section for professional/business collaboration).
- A respondent suggested that *"The platform can be like the yellow page of Armenian professionals and entrepreneurs globally + members can share ideas and contribute to the development of Armenia."*
- Many of the respondents expressed their encouragement to the team working on the idea.

By conducting the IQPS, we also intended to identify the predisposition of the surveyed Diaspora representatives towards a centralized platform for contribution and collaboration (Fig. 10). Of all the survey respondents, the clear majority gave an affirmative response to the idea of having a centralized platform to collaborate on Armenian volunteer projects, while the rest prefers to do so through the use of whichever platform (e.g. email, Facebook Messenger, Slack, WhatsApp) that they already use.

Figure 10. Platform preference

The respondents were also asked to check the features that would best fit their needs in order to collaborate with people in Armenia. The majority of them included the chat feature, while about half included the meeting scheduling feature and the document uploading feature (Fig. 11). 26% of people chose the *"Other"* option, mentioning features like *"video call opportunity"*, *"job/board*
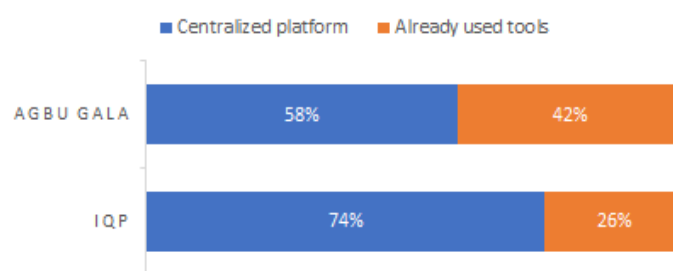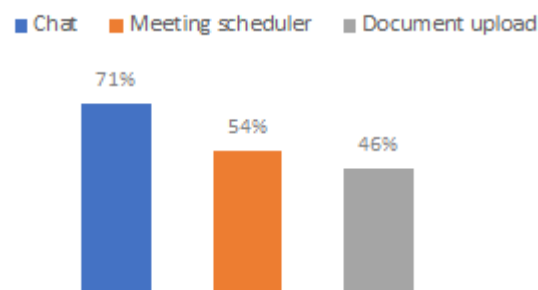
Figure 11. Desired features

listings", "surveys/polls", "ability to post projects (content should probably be moderated)", *"money going to contractors or workers directly instead of through an organization",* *"confirmation of completion",* and *"verified accounts for people known to get things done without corruption".* Throughout the survey, we noted common responses, such as concerns of corruption, and recommendations are made in the following section on the best ways to handle them.

Objective Two: Best practices of other platforms

Through the brainstorming of prominent diasporas and basic research, we identified 14 diaspora and collaboration platforms to analyze. These platforms were the websites of The Ireland Fund, Global Jewish Advocacy, the Jewish Agency, the World Jewish Congress, the Union for Reform Judaism, the Lithuania Foundation, the Taiwanese American Foundation, the Taiwanese United Fund, the Cuban American National Foundation, the Global Organization of People of Indian Origin, the Croatian Heritage Association, and Africans in the Diaspora, as well as the US Alumni App, and both ImpactHub's website and mobile applications. These platforms contained a wealth of interesting and potentially applicable features, all of which were identified. The most common and impactful features, along with their specific unique elements, are presented on the next page (Table 1). The table gives a brief overview of the feature and links to a detailed description for further reading. The features described below are ones we found to be relevant and considered during our feature list finalization.

Engaging Visual Page for General Information

Many of the platforms had engaging introductory pages that grab the user's attention and get them excited about further exploring the platform. It acts as a hook through masterful use of visual effects, images, videos, or interactive maps of past and present projects, as well as their events and participants. The page provides a general introduction of the platform's mission by introducing constantly updated content on past achievements, current work, testimonials of participants, and general quantitative data on organization's impact (e.g. amount of funds raised, number of projects, number of beneficiaries/benefactors).

Donation

The monetary donation feature was found in nearly all platforms, and it is also a top-priority request from AGBU for our platform. Additional elements of this feature include integrated PayPal for quick online donations, options for single or recurring donations, the ability to donate in memory of a loved one, gamification of donations, ability to organize fundraisers, and advanced membership options based on contributions. Also included were extended donation privileges, which are options for philanthropic donors to control where their funds are applied or contribute things like real estate and life insurance proceeds.

Table 1. Brief overview of the best features identified from researched platforms

Feature	Description
Engaging visual page for general information	Attention-grabbing page providing general information about the organization and projects through videos, images and quotes.
Donation	Designated place to make an online monetary donation to the organization.
Event Calendar	A tool that displays organizational and personal events to encourage engagement and community among users.
Content (News & Blogs)	A content section of news articles and blog posts, focusing on topics of relevance to users to encourage interest in organization and culture.
Partners page	A list of partnering organizations.
Projects page	List with brief description and clickable names that take the user to the individual project page.
Social media integration for project profiles	A section of a project page devoted to automatically keeping up with the project's progress.
Interactive map	A tool that designates the location of organization offices around the globe. Provides ability to contact local offices and gain insight on the platform's global outreach.
Collaboration experience measure with points/levels	An incentive to contribute back to homeland through a series of levels, which unlock different perks that the organization has to offer.
User profile	User's personal account providing personal, professional, and collaboration information.
Chat	User-to-user or group chat with basic document and image upload functionality.

Event Calendar

The 'Event calendar' was a feature that stood out in six out of the 14 platforms and was also a key feature requested by AGBU. Some essential elements of an event calendar were the ability to search by event name or location, filter by event type, chapter, or society, a link to an extensive event details page, the presence of both upcoming and past events, a place to register for an event, and the option to submit your own event for consideration.

Content (News & Blogs)

A content feature is a staple of the most engaging platforms, which is why it has been a priority feature for the AGBU. However, there are many different approaches to this feature: Press releases and basic news feeds are the most prominent, followed by blogs, and finally, digital access to organizational publications. Additional elements of interest include organizing news pages by topics in which a user is interested, subscription to digital mailing service, the ability to like a post, or a 'More Like This' section under article pages. Nearly every variation of this content feature includes the ability to share the content on various social media platforms.

Partners Page

In all the platforms that have a 'Partners page', partners are listed in a simple way, usually with a single picture depicting each. A user can go to the individual web pages of the partnering organization for deeper information about the partner and their means of collaboration.

Projects Page

The 'Projects page' is a directory of the projects that are conducted by the organization. These pages usually had a style and layout similar to ones observed in websites providing newsletters or articles. In those examples, a significant amount of the description text was available after the name of each project and a picture depicting it, and further information could be found in the individual project pages, which were available by a click on the project name. In the individual pages there were articles and updates about the project, which are available as suggested readings after the main description. Most of the websites that we researched offer a subscription to the newsletter of the individual project for the users to keep up with particular projects they are interested in.

Social Media Integration for Project Profiles

Many of the platforms that we researched featured a social media section for all of their project pages. These simple implementations allow for a more engaging visual experience.

Interactive Map

Two of the platforms that we examined included choropleths, or interactive maps, of their regional offices and points of interest; this was a feature that was also requested by AGBU. One platform showed a map of the entire world, while the other only featured the United States. The purpose of these choropleths was to visualize their offices by displaying a map with markers of where their offices were, along with additional information when clicked.

Collaboration Experience with Points/Levels

This feature is a multi-level system based on the frequency of a user's collaboration. Each level features various perks, signifying prestige, and activeness within the organization. This sort of

system encourages increased collaboration and activity, and can be applied to time, expert, and monetary contributions.

User Profile

Platforms with large participant or alumni networks all featured a 'User profile' functionality. The account holds basic personal and biographical information (i.e. name, birthday, profile picture, location, contact information, as well as bio, educational/professional/volunteering experience). It also lets the user specify platform engagement preferences to show areas of interest, availability for mentoring or collaboration, current active status, or even user geo-location through the interactive map. A bar indicating the user's experience level in the platform is also present. Platforms allow sharing posts on the public news feed and reacting to posted content, connecting, and interacting with other users, and more.

Chat

The 'Chat' functionality was present in both of the investigated networking platforms, as they provide a direct way of communication between registered users. Along with basic user-to-user chat, some platforms also feature a very useful group chat option to be used by teams. Groups are created by a user, have a name, and members can be added and removed. The chat features provide basic write/reply functionality, as well as a document upload feature, which gives an opportunity to share project specific files. Users can see active users, as well as when the messages are sent, delivered or seen.

Objective Three: Best features and functionality

Below is a list of features that we identified to be most relevant and necessary for to be included in our platform (Table 2). It is a combination of the initial features list provided by our sponsor, relevant features from objective two, and our recommendations. After discussions with Mariam Hambarchyan, features were revised and adjusted to best fit the goals of this platform.

Table 2. Table of features and their descriptions for the platform

#	Feature	User story	Elements and notes
1	Project page	User can see info about projects: description, status, social media updates, impact statistics, donation campaign goals, what volunteers and experts are needed (feature to apply directly), current participant/volunteer/expert profiles, video and text testimonials and comments by participants/volunteers/experts, Q&A page, etc.	One of the most important pages of the platform, where all project information is displayed, and engagement inspired by demonstrating impact and others' involvement. There is also an option for newsletter subscription precisely for a certain project - developments, updates, confirmation of completion, social media content (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and possibly Youtube).
2	Volunteer & expert profiles	Users can create detailed profiles about themselves, listing their expertise. Users/project managers can invite experts/volunteers to collaborate on specific projects.	Profile submission form with links to LinkedIn, portfolios, etc. Includes personal information, short bio, status of availability and answered questions on preferred ways of cooperation, indicator of the level of experience on the platform (gamification).
3	Newsfeed content page	User's homepage, offering content that is curated and created by AGBU, as well as engaging dynamic updates on project progress and impact. This would act as the landing page	Facebook-like posts with an admin dashboard, user can personalize feed by subscribing to particular categories and projects, blogs (written by community members or organization leaders, original content and content originally published in other publications, suggests related posts), ability to like content.
4	Donation portal	User can submit a donation to AGBU as well as any specific project.	Payment system integration with multiple options per country availability, PayPal integration, single or recurring donations, donations in memory of a loved one, earn points or 'levels' for donations, ability to organize fundraisers, advanced memberships options.
5	Attending events	User can search local events, view detailed information about the event, and respond that they	Requires location permission (or manual location search). Events can be created by admins or

		want to attend. They will be able to see the number of people going and who is going, if that person is also on the platform.	scrapped from platforms like Facebook. Can be used by AGBU staff as a centralized place to post events in addition to existing means. User has ability to search by event name, type, date, chapter or society, as well as see events nearby, in a certain distance from themselves, or filter by location. Each event links to the individual event page.
6	Project directory	User can search a list of projects to get involved in, they can expand the projects they are interested in and check out the tags depicting the project area.	User can search by category, type of involvement needed (volunteer, expert, or donation). Projects that are posted are approved by AGBU. Each project has a set of tags describing its field, which helps in the searching and matching process. The users can also select the 'For YOU' button, which will automatically suggest the top instances of best-fitting projects for the particular user.
7	Volunteer & expert directory	Project leads, users can search through a directory of volunteers and experts to find a fit for their projects and connect with them through direct messaging.	Directory that resembles the one for projects. Filterable by area of expertise, location, etc.
8	Account	User registers for an account.	Email sign-up and authentication.
9	Work page	Where all the magic happens between the user and project teams, as they work on a project.	Group chat for direct connection and document sharing with other team members, activity status, scheduler, as well as member management functionality for admins.
10	Match page	Where communication about a potential match happens.	Chat format where the user and project lead can initiate the conversation.
11	Project application	User can apply to be a participant in a project after identifying it in the project directory.	Application submission form. Application status bar: 'received', 'in review', 'meeting scheduling', 'waitlist (in cases that the project is paused, or the aid will be needed in the future)'.

12	Regular chat	Users can communicate with each other through direct chat.	Simple chat format with document sharing functionality.
13	Sharing events	User shares or creates non-AGBU events, moderated by platform admins. This could also include some form of gamification	Requires an event submission option with event link from external site or manual entry; adding or sharing an event to the calendar must be submitted to the organization for consideration.
14	Calendar integration	User can see the calendar of platform events. Calendar events are categorized as general platform events, user interested events, as well as user's scheduled meetings.	Integration with Google, iCalendar, etc.
15	Collaboration experience measure with points/levels	Users have the opportunity to gain points and badges for various types of engagement within the platform.	An incentive to contribute back to Armenia through a series of levels and badges. These could unlock different perks that AGBU and the platform have to offer. Furthermore, users have the option to showcase feature levels and badges on their profile page.
16	User workspace	Personal workspace for individual users.	Contains list of projects, which links to the project's work page, and lists the user's personal/team chats
17	Event page	User can view detailed information about the event.	Extensive event details page view. Includes event description, locations, date and time, attendees, etc.
18	Event history	User can view all the events they have attended and hosted	History page also includes info on gamification.
19	Inviting friends	User can invite friends to the platform, specific events, and projects.	Platform invite feature in menu and share buttons on events/projects.
20	Membership	User can sign up for an AGBU membership.	Under AGBU page in menu.
21	Other AGBU platforms	User can view a list of, and navigate to, external pages of Armenian Virtual College, Young Professionals Corner, HyeConnect, etc.	Under AGBU page in menu.

22	Chapters	User can view a list and map of chapters.	Under AGBU page in menu - Provides a choropleth of the world with markers indicating the location of every AGBU chapter worldwide. Each chapter pin leads to a page with chapter information and contacts (possibly integrated social media).
23	Armenian places	User can view a list and map of community centers, churches, schools, embassies, etc.	Under a places' directory in the menu and on the interactive map.
24	AGBU info	User can learn about AGBU.	Under AGBU page in menu.
25	General information page	Attention-grabbing page providing general information about the platform and its projects through videos, images, and quotes.	Provides general info about the platform's idea through visual effects, images, videos and interactive maps of past and present projects, their events and participants, general quantitative data on organization's impact, etc.
26	Newsletter	User can sign up for an AGBU e-newsletter.	Under the AGBU page in the menu, sign up for a digital mailing list, have digital access to organizational publications and press releases.
27	Notifications	User receive notifications from platform admins, such as an upcoming event, collaboration invites, subscribed project updates, etc.	Banner and in-platform.
28	Partner directory	Users can learn about organizations partnering with AGBU.	Partners listed in a simple way, with a single picture describing each. The users can go to the individual pages of the particular partnering organization.
29	Partner profile	Users can learn about the individual partner through their page and see the list of projects that AGBU has conducted partnering with them.	Information about the partner and about their collaboration with AGBU. Link to the partner's website.
30	Contact us	User can contact AGBU as well as any chapter.	Contact us: integrated submission form.

Objective Four: Engaging user interface design

From the finalized feature list of objective three, we worked with Mariam Hambarchyan to identify the most essential features of the platform to represent in mockups. Ultimately, eight features were decided: the news feed content page, the project page, the project directory, the expert profile, the expert directory, the events page, the events directory, the work page, and the calendar. These features were designed in mockups, which were then used to create a prototype demonstrating the basic functionality and movement between pages, using Adobe XD software. Following rounds of edits and testing within our group, feedback from Mariam Hambarchyan and the three user interviews, we made a number of design and layout changes. The major edits included the addition of the menu, the reimagine of the chat functionality, the addition of calendar subscriptions within the calendar feature, and several color and button design changes. The finalized images of the mockups are below, and a tutorial video of the prototype has been uploaded as a supplementary document to this report.

Mockups for Selected Pages

Below are the mockups of the expert directory with the filtering option, and the expert profile with personal information, external links, preferences, and experience (Fig. 12).
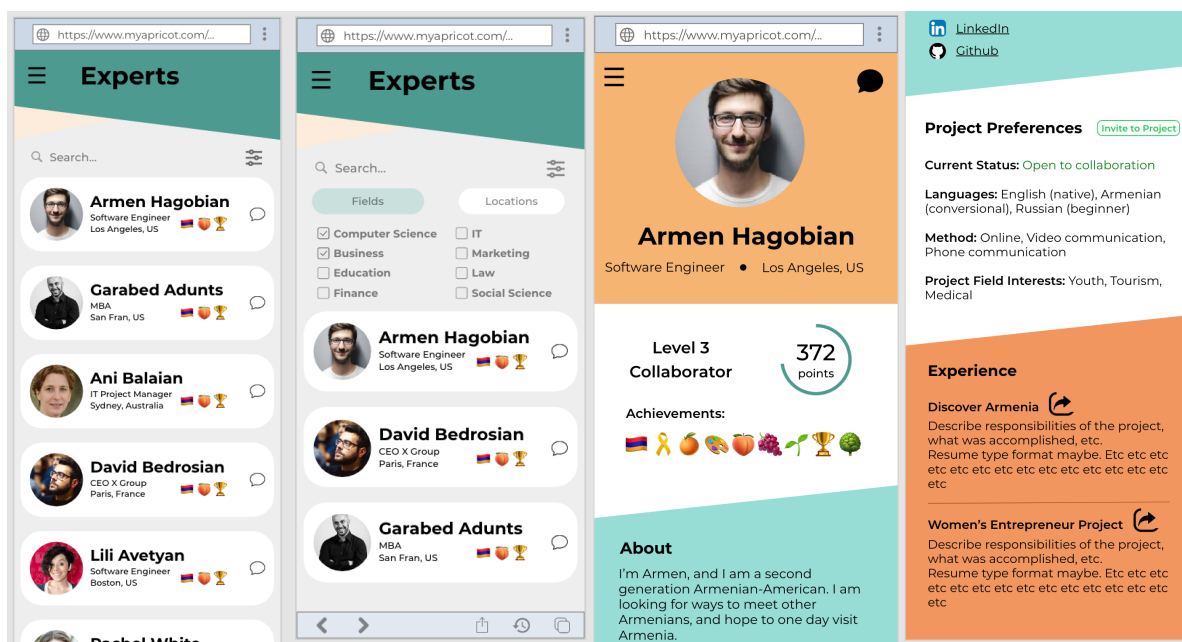
Figure 12. From left to right: Expert directory, filter by expertise field results, expert profile

User calendar with categorized event chackboxes, event details preview, as well as the user's personal working space are shown in Figure 13.

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Figure 13. From left to right: User calendar, event detail preview, user workspace teams, chat

Mockups of project directory and specific project's preview in the directory are shown in Figure 14.
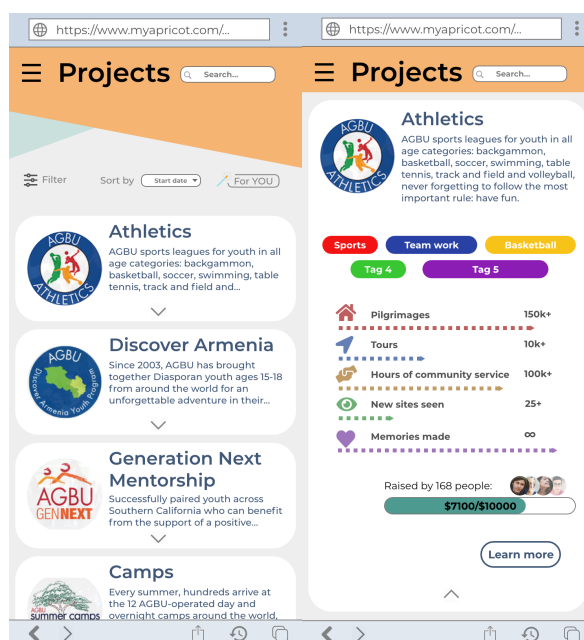
Figure 14. From left to right: Projects directory, project details preview

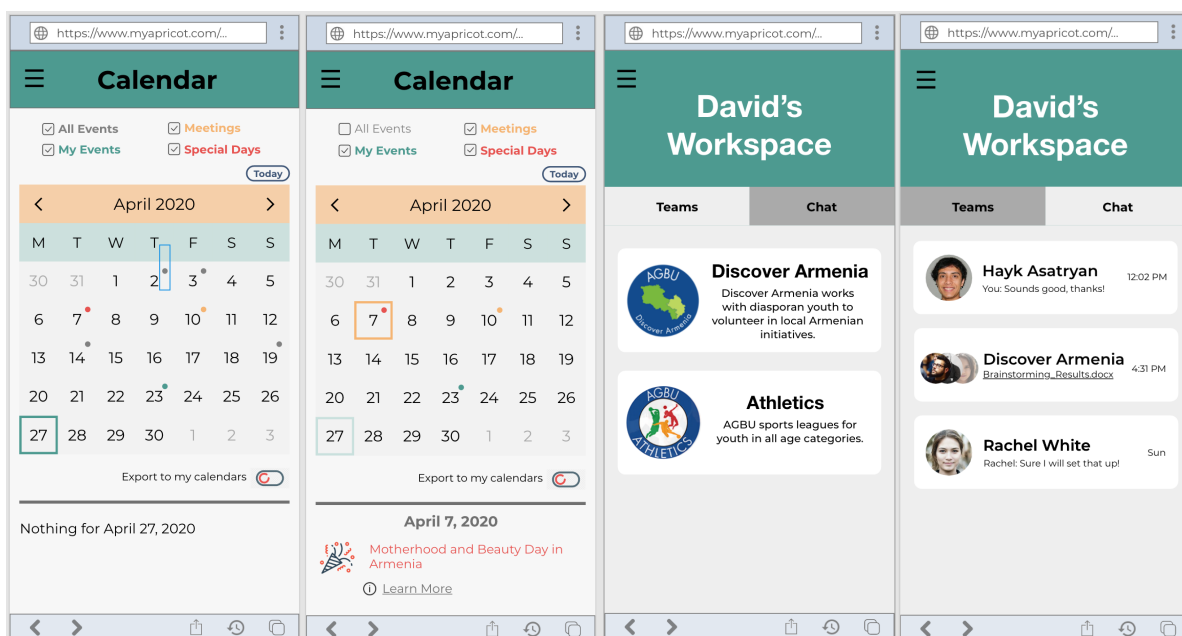Below is the project page with its description, updates with a timeline, impact statistics, list of the experts working on the project, as well as a section for contributing to the project (Fig. 15).
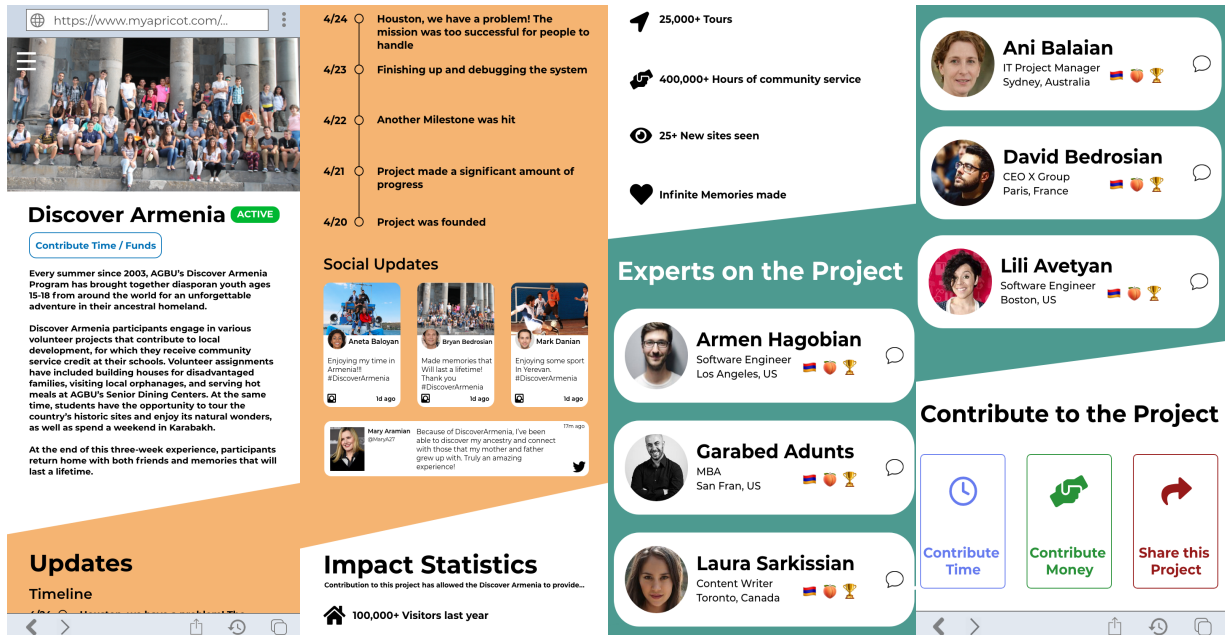
Figure 15. Project page

Figure 16 shows the layout of the project's team workspace. There is the members list for all experts and volunteers working on the project, a scheduler for team meetings and events, as well as a group chat functionality.
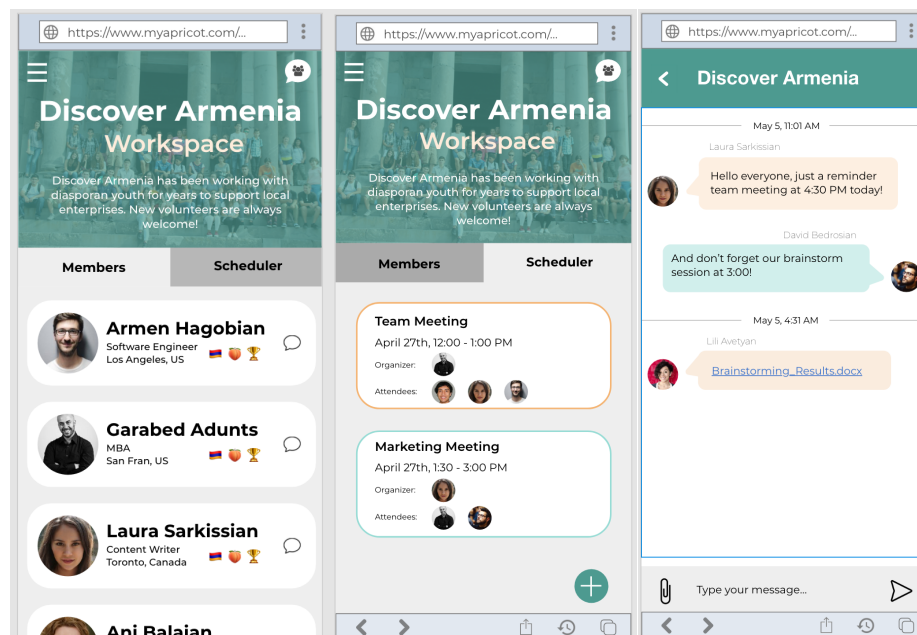
Figure 16. Project workspace. From left to right: Expert/volunteer list, team scheduler, group chat

Below is the platform's content page, featuring the news content section with subscribed project updates, other project updates by categories, and a separate section for news articles (Fig. 17).
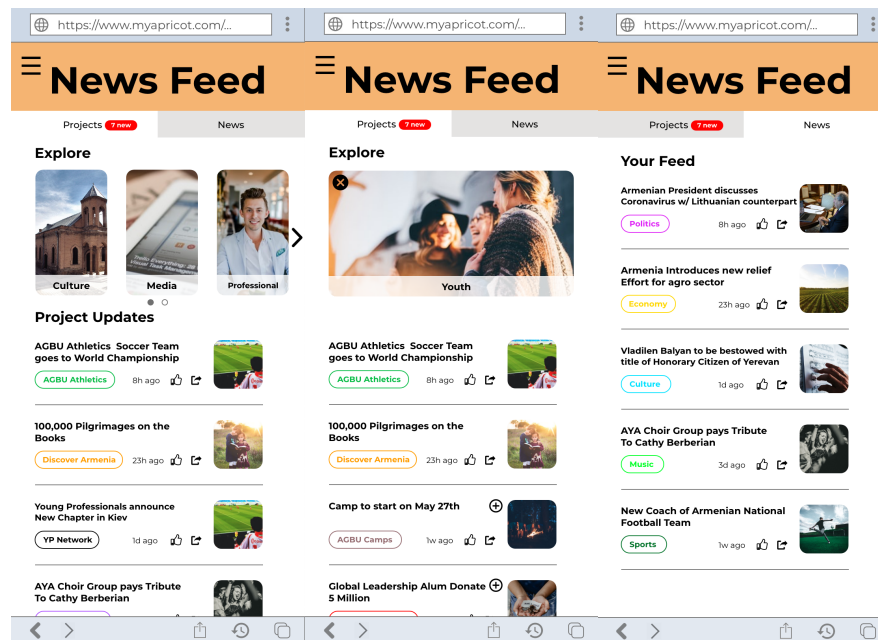
Figure 17. From left to right: Subscribed project updates, filter by category results, news section

The directory of events featured on the platform, and the event details page are shown in Figure 18. Users can filer the events by event type and location, find events near them, or sort by date.
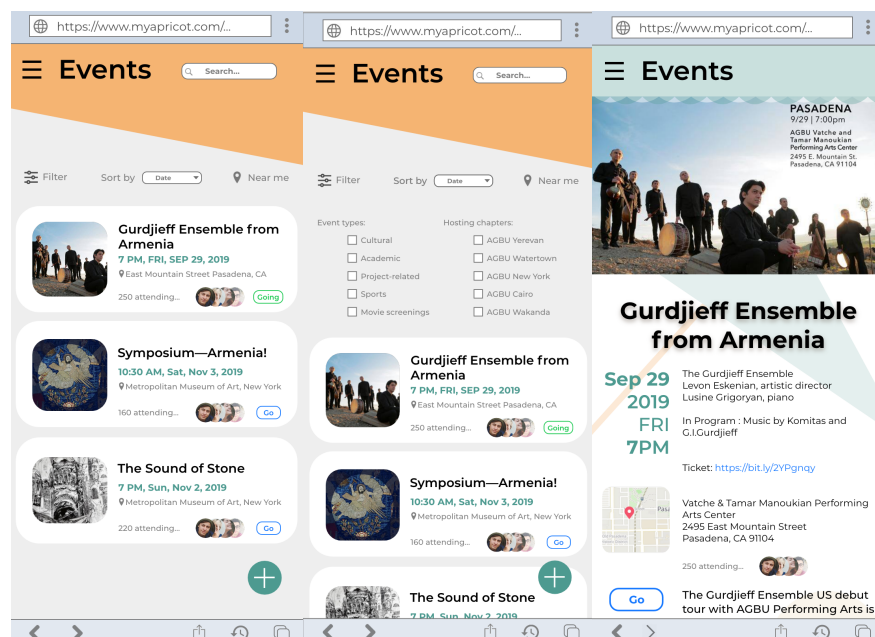
Figure 18. From left to right: Events directory, events filter, events page

Objective Five: Content marketing strategy

Content marketing is the strategy of consistently creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and engrossing content to retain and increase an audience, ultimately profiting off of their engagement. This practice is important to businesses and non-profit organizations because constant engagement creates "repeat customers" who are not only emotionally invested in the organization but are far more profitable than one-time donors. The average one-time donation to NGOs is only $128, while average monthly donations are $52, or $624 a year (Nonprofits Source, n.d.). This is supported by an Indiana University study, which found that boosting donor attrition rates by only ten percent can amount to a 200% increase in each donor's projected future contribution (Miller et al., 2017). Content marketing also raises awareness for a brand or issue and is extremely effective at recruiting volunteers. As AGBU is a large non-profit organization, donor acquisition and retention is extremely important. Further, this project focuses specifically on creating a habit-forming, engaging platform to increase the number of Diaspora volunteers, making content marketing the perfect hook.

While there are extensive options when it comes to the format of content, it must be carefully considered based on the information trying to be communicated, as well what is most effective. Excluding in-person events, the most effective content formats for non-profits are (in order) illustrations/photos, eNewsletters, and videos (Ironpaper, 2017). When it comes to direct communication with the target audience, the following methods of conveying information are the top preferred formats: Short, self-contained (meaning no links) emails, brief letters or articles (two to three paragraphs long), and short videos (less than two minutes) (Ironpaper, 2017). All of the above-mentioned formats are interesting and easy to consume, making them effective designs for content marketing. A final piece of effective content formatting is interactive content. Having various quizzes, contests, polls, or surveys increases engagement, and shows the audience that the organization is as invested in them as they are in it.

There are several things that are essential for the content to be effective when you are creating or curating it. For instance, the tone should be unique and comfortable. It is also important that the target audience is considered thoroughly; it can be useful to create content for subgroups within the audience, even identifying various interests using surveys or by analyzing past donations (Ironpaper, 2017). This kind of information can also be used to create personal campaigns for subgroups of audience members. To keep the audience engaged, it is essential that content appear professional, polished, and be published consistently (Digital Marketing Institute, 2019). A few articles also stressed that the most effective content is a cause-based storytelling approach (Warner 2018 and Ironpaper, 2017). An emotional narrative motivates content consumers to act, whether through volunteering their time and expertise, or through monetary donation. These stories should be high-impact and authentic for maximized engagement. Also suggested is that when telling emotional stories, to diversify the different feelings that are invoked by different posts, as people do not always have similar reactions, and to avoid emotional overdrawing the target audience (Decker, 2019). For example, it would be beneficial to provide content that evokes empathy and compassion for a cause, excitement to be part of a community, and fear of missing out on an opportunity or event, rather than just focusing on one of these emotions.

Armenian Community Pages Investigation

The Armenian Diaspora is well established, and there are many impactful organizations and institutions in place that produce content on social media. We identified the most popular and in-demand content within those communities by analyzing their publications and Diaspora members' response to them. All the data presented about the investigated pages are as of May 4, 2020. We looked into ten Facebook public pages with significant outreach in Diaspora:

- AGBU - 74,747 followers
- AGBU Armenia - 58,259 followers
- Armenia Fund - 64,174 followers
- Armenian Assembly of America - 25,030 followers
- Armenian National Committee of America - 89,019 followers
- Armenian Volunteer Corps - 23,962 followers
- Children of Armenia Fund - 46,362 followers
- Fund for Armenian Relief - 11,795 followers
- Hayastan All Armenian Fund - 33,980 followers
- Repat Armenia - 33,228 followers

We investigated these communities based on the published content topics and type. We analyzed those pages with the help of Popsters, a social media content analytics tool that provides quantitative data about page's most popular posts, as well as compares user activity levels by content keywords, hashtags, length, type, etc.

While content topics and styles differed for each page based on their target audience, some Armenian content topics were in the highest demand among all or most of the pages' followers. Considering the Armenian Diaspora origins, it is not surprising that the most common liked and shared content was about the Armenian Genocide and its recognition. Commemorating posts, news about official statements and Genocide recognition by different states and public figures, coverage of remembrance events, and awareness initiatives were very popular. Historic content topics also included stories on Genocide survivors, features on survivors' descendants, their accomplishments, and worldwide impact. It is evident that the Armenian Genocide and historical topics are of high importance to many Diaspora members.

Current events in Armenia were another commonly shared content topic. Major events like the Velvet Revolution, the fight against COVID-19, as well as investments and promising initiatives by different agencies were quite popular. Considering the geopolitical situation in Armenia, content about Artsakh, negotiations with Azerbaijan, and situation at the border were also in high demand.

Armenian community notable events and success stories were among some of the most popular content topics. Successes of Armenians in academia, sports, business, as well as honoring community members with rich legacy were received very well by followers. On pages of organizations which offer different internships, grants or other activities, announcements of such opportunities were very well received and shared among community members.

Also, among the most well-received content were those focused on promotion of Armenian culture, identity, and stories through the arts. Announcements and updates for major films and art exhibits of Armenian focus were welcomed among the Diaspora. Music in particular also appeared to be an impactful subject, with the Diaspora sharing information about the Armenian Philharmonic Orchestra, AGBU's Musical Armenian Program, and more.

Using content as a marketing strategy was common in many of the pages. Pages with large social impact and many beneficiaries in Armenia often successfully informed their audience through sharing testimonials of project stakeholders or volunteers. Posts that were personal and were telling a story about an individual or a small group, while informing about the project as a whole were also very liked by the followers. Making content story-oriented was proven to be especially effective when educating on the impact of local Armenian initiatives, particularly when accompanied by high-quality and well-thought photo or video content. Sharing photos or videos of how donated money had been used and what real impact on people's lives it had was used not only as a page content strategy, but also as a motivating call for action and support on many of those pages.

We found out that pages with different audiences and missions successfully gained followers' attention through various strategies of content, targeted to achieve their specific goals. For example, when pages were seeking donation and involvement for charitable causes, many used content that was touching or emotionally moving, thus appealing to followers' emotions and empathy. When advertising small business initiatives in Armenia (e.g. agricultural, sustainable energy, tourism), the emphasis was often made on the project's impact and potential though sharing testimonials and quantitative data, while trying to attract support for more similar initiatives. The pages whose primary goal is recruiting people for volunteering or expertise sharing gained most outreach through advertising incentives of participation. Some popular examples were showcasing Armenia's rich culture, nature, and delicious food, as well as informing about professional benefits such as mentorship, recommendation letters, and experience in leading Armenian companies.

Investigation of follower activity levels depending on posts' content type or length also brought up insightful results. The highest activity levels were recorded for video content, although it was the least commonly posted content type on almost all of the pages. Pictures and links, while also engaging, show lower activity levels among followers. Activity levels also varied based on posts' text length. While some pages record higher activity for texts with over 1,000 symbols, most seem to do better with text length of 160 to 1,000 words. However, naturally, the engagement level heavily relies on actual content quality and material, rather than length alone.

Using the above-mentioned Popsters tool we also ran some text analysis on the posts of the most common Armenian community pages on Facebook and found some interesting tendencies.
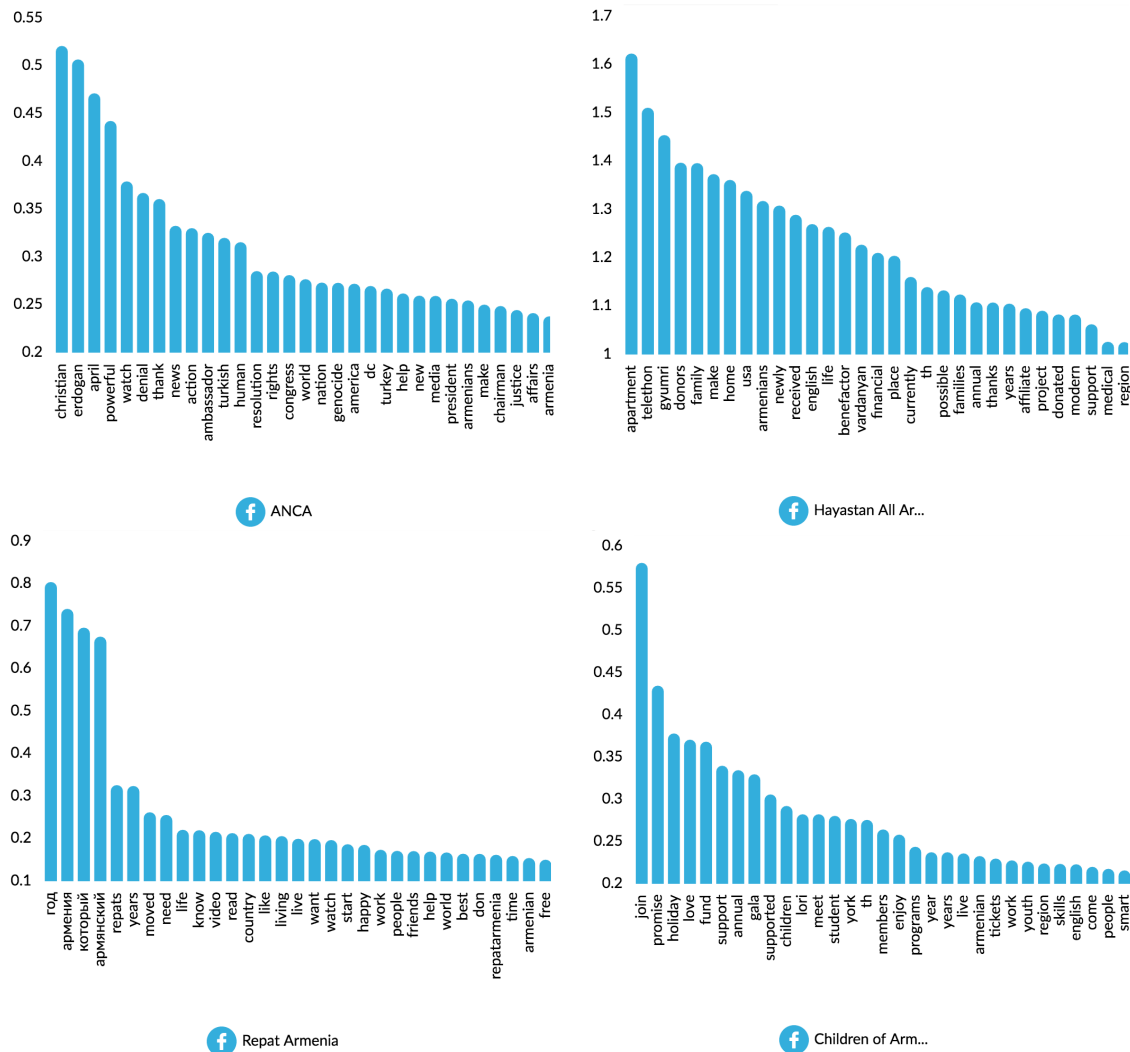
Figure 19. Words used in the posts and the corresponding Engagement Rates

All the words of all the posts of four Facebook pages were analyzed and for each word the corresponding engagement rates (ER) are shown in Figure 19. ER is a numerical evaluation for the frequency of engaging with a post via liking, commenting, sharing, or other available actions, the algorithm for which is provided by Popsters. Above are the words over their ERs for four of the platforms analyzed. Taking out the words with their ER being in the first one-third for the particular page, we can see the following words: *"Christian, Erdoğan, April, powerful, watch, denial, thank, news, action, apartment, telethon, Gyumri, donors, family, make, home, USA, Armenians, year (from Russian), Armenia (from Russian), which (from Russian), Armenian (from Russian), repats, years, moved, need, life, know, video, join, promise, holiday, love, fund, support, annual, gala, children"*

Although we can read only just words, an interesting atmosphere is formed which gives us an idea about which content gets the most engagement. Looking closely, we can notice that the words above form four major clusters: 'politics and genocide', 'charity and donations', 'reports', and 'empathy and call for action'.

Other Diaspora Platforms' Content

Content marketing was successfully implemented in the investigated platforms of the other nations' diasporas as well. The platforms were made engaging and intriguing with the help of responsive news articles, success stories and other types of content. All the platforms investigated had a news feed about their communities' latest developments, where most of the platforms posted at least once a week. The articles were both about the organization itself and about the nation overall. The content was self-created and curated from other sources with links to the original platforms. All of the platforms observed also had a section for events. In the majority of cases those were organization-related events with an interesting picture and brief description, linking to the full description page. From the user perspective, these events give the impression of constant and active involvement of the organization into the community development.

Aside from the major news and events sections that were present in all the platforms, each platform directed their content marketing in a unique engaging direction. Short stories about success cases were very common, those demonstrated the impact the activity of the organization made and had uplifting, inspiring storylines. Examples of such stories included the impact of a specific project, grant, or cultural activity, expressed by a personal essay, interview or a biography. Another common attribute was the presence of short videos, usually describing the activity of the organization or a specific project it has done. These videos were a very powerful way of impactful and emotional messages, particularly because visual content guided with background music was an effective way of delivering the emotional state the creator was seeking to achieve. Some less common but very engaging features were social media and blog post integrations. These also kept the platforms active and constantly updated.

The most common topics of content that we encountered were project-related events. The platforms gave short but useful information and updates about the project developments, which made them reachable and easily consumable for the user. These pieces are highly focused on the impact the project had. Topics about current events of that nation were very common as well. Relevant and interesting content was curated and presented in an inspiring way. In this content, the emphasis was strongly made on the cultural identity, as this is an attribute that connects all the visitors of every platform and opens up endless possibilities for marketing.

Survey Content

When analyzing all of the above-mentioned surveys, we found that two, the IQPS and the ADS, contained important opinions of the Diaspora on desired content. In order to answer the question of what will make for engaging content, it is important to understand what the desired sources of content are as well as the relevant content that those in the Armenian Diaspora community are looking for.

The sources of content that we found throughout our studies varied widely. The results of the IQPS showed that the primary source of information within the Diaspora is through word of mouth (11 responses). This was followed by social media (ten responses) and news (nine responses) by a slim margin. The results also seemed to show that although some get their content through the organization (six responses), project (five responses) and event (five responses) based mediums,

it was significantly less than those who got their content through word of mouth, news and social media (Fig. 20).
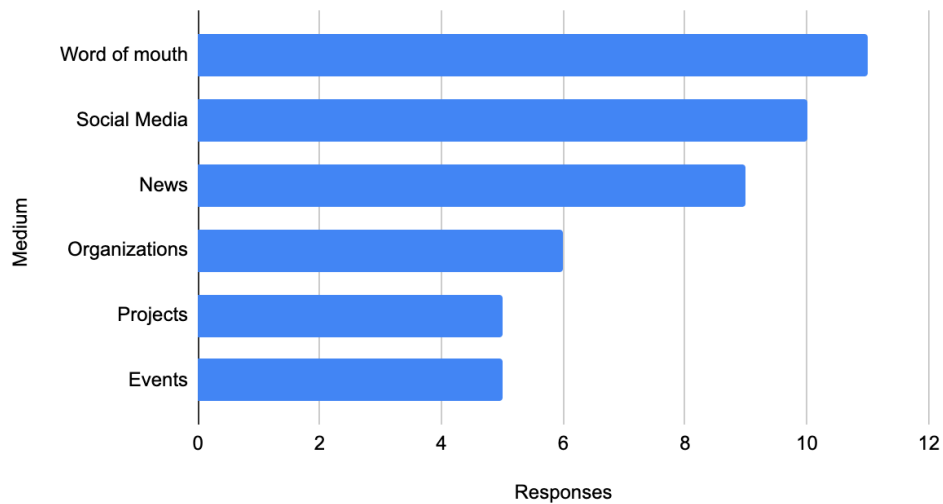
Figure 20: How content is sourced in the Diaspora community

Relevant content needs to reflect what the target audience wants and needs to reflect the interests of the Armenian Diaspora population. A key indicator to show where these interests lie can be sourced at how members of the Armenian Diaspora define their identity culturally. When examining the ADS, it is apparent that people within the Diaspora community define their cultural identity through the Armenian language (60% reported) as well as Armenian food, dance, and music (35% reported). Content related to the Diasporic identity has the power to form a personal connection to the platform. Furthermore, the ADS found that a significant portion of the Diaspora population had learned or tried to learn about cooking Armenian food, Armenian Dance, Armenian music, and Armenian Language (Fig. 21). Of those surveyed, 44% said that Armenian food is very
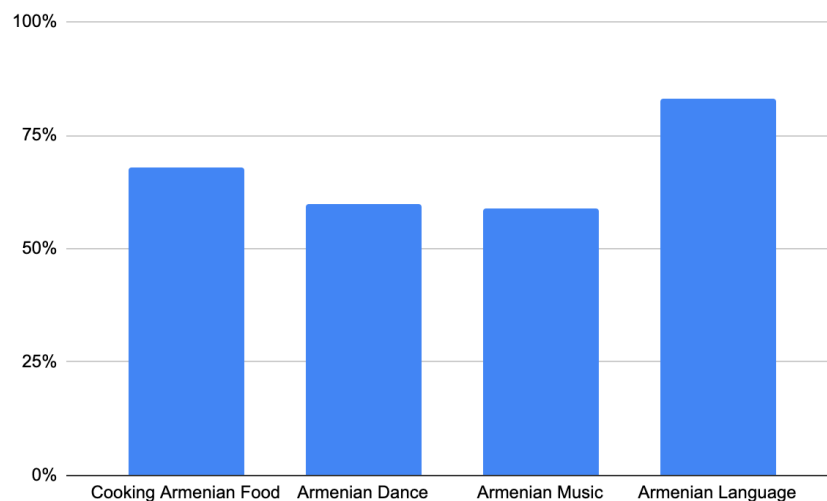
Figure 21: Learned or attempted to learn within Armenian Diaspora

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important to them and 37% said that it was fairly important. With regards to music listened to in the Diaspora community, 53% stated that they listen to Armenian music often, with 41% reporting only sometimes. It was found that 51% enjoyed Keftime music (music common during Armenian parties), 69% enjoyed traditional/folk music, and 48% preferred classical music. Having content related to what has been learned or enjoyed can give a sense of familiarity when browsing content within the platform, and the opportunity to explore cultural interests promises genuine engagement.

Recommendations

Our work on this project led us to gain valuable insight into the current state of Armenia-Diaspora relationship, its challenges, as well as the immense potential for its development. With our modeled platform, we centralize the various resources within the Diaspora and provide a channel for direct communication between local Armenian initiatives and representatives of Diaspora. The optimization of resource utilization will not only benefit Armenian projects but will become a resource for both active and disengaged Diaspora members to rediscover their Armenian identity and connect with their ancestral community. Considering findings from our extensive research and data analysis, we introduce several recommendations for our sponsor, which will ensure the further success of this project.

Investigation of the target audience

The analysis of our survey, as well as the others, gave us insight into the attitudes of the Diaspora, including the barriers to contribution they face, and how they would like to be engaged. However, we recommend that to create a more complete picture of Diaspora opinions and to keep up to date with their needs and desires, extensive, diverse, and periodic surveys be conducted. Particularly, Eastern and European communities, first-generation Diaspora, and the young adult demographic were likely underrepresented in our survey and would provide a more complete representation of the target audience. We suggest when conducting these surveys to be mindful of choosing languages that would allow a large number of diverse participants. Any attempts to reach the unengaged Diaspora should be prioritized, as they are an entirely new group of contributors with their specific characteristics and challenges, which have not been investigated as a part of our project.

AGBU can take significant steps to break down current barriers the Diaspora faces when contributing. Several respondents voiced concerns about corruption that prevented them from making monetary donations. Although AGBU is one of the oldest, largest, and most respected Diaspora organizations, we recommend a highly transparent donation process to alleviate such fears, such as direct tracking of people's donations, as well as sending updates on programs their donations went to. Such actions would make a significant impact on donor worries and would likely increase donations when people are able to see the impact and recipients of their contributions. Another issue Diaspora has faced has been difficulty with communication, expectations, and alignment with project leaders when volunteering on projects. We recommend providing several recurring project management workshops that project leaders can attend to improve their leadership and management skills. These optional sessions would be likely to improve team collaboration, productivity, and projects as a whole.

The Diaspora had several suggestions that we agree have the potential to significantly increase engagement. Based on these suggestions, we first strongly recommend a greater effort be made to create and promote non-monetary contributions, such as teaching and mentoring opportunities, or voluntary medical services. Various surveys have found that not only does the Diaspora prefer to be non-monetarily engaged, but they would be excited to do so. The Diaspora has also suggested

increased advertisement for projects, which is something we are also recommending, in addition to significant promotion of this platform when the time comes. This is supported by survey data, which shows that things that stop people from contributing include not having heard of projects, not knowing what tools to use, and not knowing where to start. A larger presence of AGBU and its projects through the use of content marketing, elaborated on below, will take steps to resolve those issues. Further recommendations we have are encouraging more local events, gamification for monetary donations, and better advertisement of the Armenian Virtual College program to learn the Armenian language. The last recommendation was an unprompted suggestion from many survey respondents that they would like to learn the Armenian but had not apparently heard of the AGBU's Armenian Virtual College, which would allow them to do so.

Platform maintenance and oversight

We investigated the best features and functionality of other diaspora and networking platforms. For further analysis of best practices among other platforms, we recommend acquiring quantifiable data of engagement with the features within those platforms from the respective organizations, if possible. These data would be valuable to identify any correlation between functionality and engagement, but, unfortunately, was not accessible to us.

Based on our research through our and supplementary surveys, as well as other platforms' investigation, we recommend the implementation of the feature list as described in the results of objective three. Considering the engagement and project-centric focus of the platform, that list is presented in priority order.

Considering past experiences such as the Together4Armenia platform, as well as the opinions of Diaspora members, we recommend employing a dedicated team for platform oversight and maintenance.

Platform accessibility: Considering the fact that there are around 10 million Diaspora Armenians scattered around the globe, many of whom do not speak Armenian, we recommend having the platform available in several most common languages spoken by Diaspora. Based on our research we particularly recommend English, Eastern Armenian, Western Armenian, Russian, French, Spanish, Farsi, and Arabic.

Content creation and management: Only curated and approved content that is of relevance to the platform's mission and is of interest to the target audience should be posted, as detailed in the results of the work done under objective five. The published content should be scheduled and monitored for engagement levels from the users.

Project manager and expert/volunteer communication: To ensure smooth and professional communication between platform users, we recommend implementing a system of reminders, notifications, and tips during all stages of communication. Some of the essential examples of such oversight are:

- Notification system for project managers about incoming applications, as well as timely reminders in case of absence of application review and response.

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- Resources on the platform regarding professional communication rules, etiquette, common mistakes, and tips.
- Notifications and reminders for experts/volunteers on requests for collaboration pending approval or unanswered communications.

Relevant project and event notifications for users: To keep users engaged and informed about new events, projects, or updates to projects that could be potentially interesting to them, we recommend implementing a system of notifications and updates through the platform, user's attached email, or other appropriate means of communication.

Direct Diaspora feedback: From open-ended survey responses it was evident that many Diaspora representatives have valuable insight into the problems with Diaspora-Armenia communication, and may have good ideas about appropriate solutions. Thus, we recommend having an integrated place on the platform for people to voice their concerns with the platform, suggestions for improvements, or suggestions for desired functionality.

Gamification: It was evident from our research that giving Diaspora representatives an incentive for engagement is very important, as it was suggested many times by responders of different surveys, as well as has been shown to be an effective marketing and engagement strategy for similar platforms. In the scope of our platform, we suggest implementing a well-designed system of rewards for various types of engagement through the platform. The rewards will give a sense of accomplishment to experts and volunteers and introduce a quantitative representation of their engagement experience, thus motivating them to continue their journey with the platform. We suggest implementing a two-way system of gamification, point- and badge-based.

The point system can involve giving a predetermined number of points to the user for each engagement activity though the platform. We recommend making a dedicated list of such rewards, and distributing points according to impact of engagement. Among ways to gain points we suggest activities such as filling out detailed information about themselves for the expert page, donating money, applying as an expert or volunteer to projects, spending a considerable amount of time on the platform, coming back to the platform consistently for long periods of time, going to events announced on the platform, providing feedback to the platform, sharing the platform, or inviting new friends.

The badge system can provide a sense of achievement among various categories of engagement, such as donating money, expertise sharing, volunteering, content engaging, communicating, event attending, etc. Each category should have its respective icon system with several levels, as decided by the platform managers.

Apart from virtual achievement systems, we also recommend having a set of possible tangible incentives those points and badges could equate to. Those can be certificates of recognition shared on LinkedIn or other platforms, recommendation letters, public appreciation posts, invitations to exclusive AGBU or other Armenian community events, trips to Armenia, extended permissions within the platform to organize fundraisers, publish events or announcements, etc. The incentives should be planned and managed carefully by the platform management and updated based on feedback.

Providing an engaging user experience

Our recommendation is to have this platform be hosted in both a web environment as well as a dedicated mobile application, if resources permit. Having this duality ensures that the platform is accessible by a wide range of users, who will be able to use the platform in their own preferred manner. If resources are limited and only one location to host the platform is chosen, we suggest a web implementation since the data from our survey shows that the web is the preferred method of use for this platform.

Once the hosting platform is decided, we recommend building on our prototype. Our deliverable was a prototype for the minimum viable product (MVP) in the form of a web platform housed within a mobile device in order to give a good idea of what each would look like. The MVP prototype outlined the most important features based on our findings from objective three, and moving forward the best course of action would be to complete these mockups with the full range of features presented in objective three and append them to our prototype using Adobe XD. These mockups should reflect the dimensions of whichever host the platform will have, whether it be web, mobile or both.

It is important to take advantage of our style guide. This guide provides recommendations for the color scheme, typography, shaping, tone of writing, and themes that help ensure that the platform is engaging, visually pleasing and fully functional.

Once the designs are considered engaging, visually pleasing, and fully functional, we recommend that all designs be wire-framed together to create a prototype of the final platform. All of this should be done using the Adobe XD software, since the prototype is under the Adobe XD file format. To test if the criteria are met, we recommend a more extensive round of user testing on prospective users of this platform within the Armenian Diaspora community.

Our MVP prototype had a starting state as if the user already had a profile and the content was ready to be explored. In the final platform, this is not the case as a user will need to create an account and for that reason, our prototype jumps ahead in terms of workflow. To give a more realistic sense to the prototype, we recommend a mockup of the process to sign up for the platform as well as the process to apply to contribute to a project on the platform. These minor additions should provide a full end-to-end prototype of what the platform will look like and give a cohesive story of how the workflow and usage of the platform should be.

Finally, once the finalized prototype is complete, we recommend it be handed over to the third-party developer that is creating this platform. A detailed representation of the visuals and workflow will provide the developers what they need to make the front-end of the platform act exactly how it is specified in the prototype.

Marketing through content

Based on the results of our research, we found out that the target audience of the Diaspora collaboration platform requires more content than currently available in order to remain informed and connected to their homeland. We recommend that the platform provides not only news and

information about the projects, but also engaging content that the Diaspora would have a vested interest in. By the latter, we mean content that fuels Diaspora members' interest in Armenian activities, culture, and language.

We recommend having one or more content managers to identify, create, and publish the content on a regular basis, maintaining the 'giving back' part of the platform. It may also be useful if the platform launches with a substantial number of projects to give it some starting momentum. We strongly suggest designing a well-crafted and in-depth marketing plan that outlines things such as the frequency that content should be posted, various topics to focus on, content formatting, and more. Something helpful to a marketing plan would be to identify concrete goals (e.g. reach $10,000 in donations by the end of the year or increase volunteers by 30%) and design content accordingly. This document should be shared among the content team and be updated frequently to stay in touch with the wants of the target audience. Such a document will help to develop the preferences of the target audience and gradually smoothen the content to match the needs of the users. Below are recommendations of practices that the marketing plan should outline.

As shown from our research, the most effective content formats are videos, photos and illustrations, and event promotions. We recommend designing and curating content in all three formats: videos are very effective, as long as they are short (two to three minutes), purposeful, and impactful, and an intriguing image is also successful at catching the eye of the audience, and images will prompt them to learn more by reading the caption or clicking on the article. Promotions for events also do very well at engaging an audience, as people like to share and support occasions that relate to their passions, such as their culture. This format also has another tier of engagement, as the people who attend the events will be able to network, learn, and enjoy their culture outside a virtual environment. A final benefit of event content is that it gives the audience an impression of active involvement and dedication of the posting organization. However, content should not be limited to the above. Other effective formats include interactive forms, such as polls, surveys, or quizzes to encourage feedback and audience participation, and social media and blog post integrations keep the platforms active and constantly updated.

Regarding content material, we suggest mainly focusing on a project-impact promoting, story-oriented content. Personal stories of beneficiaries are a must for this platform. Testimonials, success stories, or any way that an Armenian organization, grant, or expert support had a profound impact on someone's life are of great interest to the audience. When it comes to concrete content topics, we found several that of particular importance to the Armenian Diaspora. We recommend distributing content relating current events of or as they relate to Armenia, notable success stories or events in the Armenian community, and features about acknowledgement and remembrance of The Armenian Genocide, as these are by far the most popular topics. Another major category of interest we recommend including is culture; in order of most to least interested, the Diaspora would like content on Armenian language, music (specifically traditional/folk, Keftime, and classical), food, dance, and art.

We recommend keeping the following tips in mind when conducting content marketing for this platform. The most effective format of engagement is a cause-based storytelling approach that is personal and authentic. Be sure to diversify the emotion you intend to invoke between content to have an impact on different people! We also recommend repurposing and curating content and

taking special care to ensure content is always professional, polished, published consistently. For highest engagement, the focus should be on impact: of volunteerism or donations to AGBU, on the recipients, of Armenian culture, and more. We suggest keeping content short and consumable, but of substance. Things that should be avoided are links, content that is out of context or off-brand, excessively lengthy text, and posting solely about AGBU.

Conclusion

We have recommended a concrete outline to address the issue of Armenian Diaspora having no centralized platform for collaboration with Armenian projects. This platform will enable project managers to quickly build teams of expert volunteers, give the Diaspora opportunities to become engaged with their homeland, and be used as a place of collaboration to encourage productive communication within project teams. Specifically, the dedicated in-platform workspace will promote the effectiveness and effortlessness of collaboration, while the user and project profiles will efficiently match Diaspora resources to project needs.

Beyond the benefits of productivity, this platform will have a positive effect on the lives of all project participants as well as Armenia as a whole. Not only will it enhance the experience of all involved by making collaboration easier and more accessible, but it will create a professional and personal community for the Diaspora that will enrich their Armenian identity, and make Armenian culture a daily part of their lives. Meanwhile, the local beneficiaries will reap the rewards of their projects with the support of experts and volunteers in the Diaspora. The inefficiency of predominantly monetary contributions from the Diaspora are evident and thus, by providing a curated and thoroughly modeled platform as ours, the Armenians on both ends will be given the opportunity to engage, innovate and grow together.

Finally, this project has implications on a global level as well. A community-promoting collaboration platform encourages authentic, impactful, and world-wide connections that enrich lives of all involved. Increased productivity of Diaspora engagement will have a direct impact on Armenians, and will contribute to its sustainable economic and social growth. With this platform, Armenians the world over will have the opportunity to connect with each other, rediscover their identity, all while working on Armenia for generations to come, giving her an opportunity to be propelled forward in the modern world.

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