SLO CORE Website

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Liberal Arts & Engineering Studies
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The way that aid and resources are delivered to their recipients is generally considered a humanistic problem, and I believe that delivering information to people is a primarily technical problem. These two problems can be

jointly addressed with a website, which requires humanistic and technical skills and knowledge derived from studies in both liberal arts and engineering. 27
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Introduction

SLO Country and COVID-19

The community I've decided to focus on is the SLO County at large, with a strong focus on vulnerable populations and those that have been affected by COVID-19. That includes the houseless, undocumented, and incarcerated, as well as senior citizens, healthcare workers, and other essential workers.

There have been a lot of responses to this crisis, and a lot of organizations are working in conjunction with the county, ECHO, and CapSLO to help the community, including the following:

- YIMBY
- HelpSLO
- Promotores
- Bend the Arc
- Cal Poly SQE
- Hopes Village
- Women's March
- Food Not Bombs
- Service for SLO
- SLO Progressives
- Sunrise Movement
- Cal Poly Democrats
- Extinction Rebellion
- SLO Climate Coalition
- Latino Outreach
- Council
- Gay and Lesbian Alliance
- 5 Cities Homeless Coalition
- Center for Family Strengthening
- Democratic Socialists of America SLO

Some members of these organizations realized that they could gather resources and volunteers more effectively if they worked together, so, representatives from the aforementioned organizations joined together to create the SLO COVID-19 Response Coalition.

SLO CORE

However, members of the Coalition decided to drop the "COVID-19" from the name since they wished to continue post-pandemic, and they wanted to consider alternative names that were a bit more approachable than the "SLO Response Coalition." The final choice for name was the SLO CORE (Collective of Organizations and Relief Efforts) and the name changing process will be discussed more thoroughly later in this paper.

The tentative mission statement of the Coalition is: "A group of organizations come together to build a strong, trustworthy link between our county's citizens and the government agencies and nonprofits trying to help them."

I'm coordinating with other members and organizers to refine both a mission statement and SLO so that the polished mission statement and slogan can be put on the site.

Amplifying SLO CORE

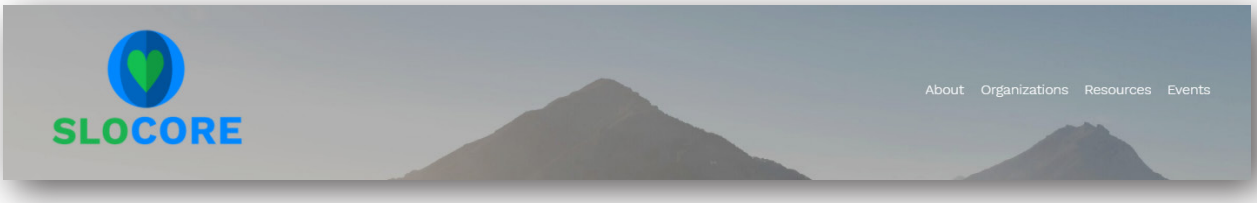
While the SLO CORE and affiliates have already provided a lot of relief to the community, there is room for improvement regarding the accessibility of information and resources. This is an issue I felt I could help solve by creating a website dedicated to SLO CORE, which would make it easier to find information about the SLO CORE itself, offer more information about the organizations involved with the CORE, and make it easier for the public to both contribute and access resources.

Currently, information about the organization is largely limited to Slack workspace, Facebook pages, Google Forms, and Zoom calls, all of which require an invite from someone already involved. A website will maximize the benefits of SLO CORE's hard work and make their resources more readily available by providing information to the user at their convenience.

Product

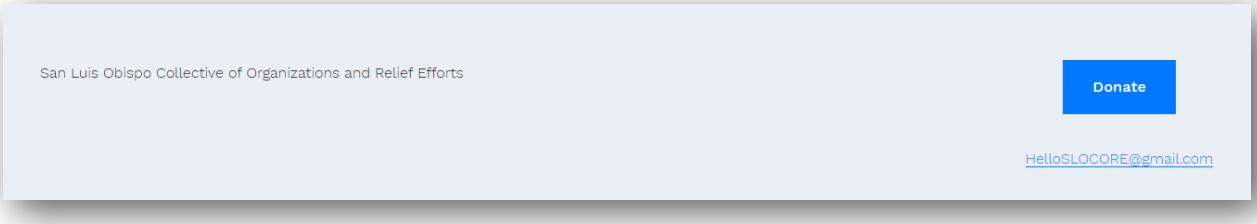
Overview

My product is a website and is hopefully fairly intuitive to use for people who have previous experience surfing the web. I attempted to follow a somewhat predictable website layout to make the user experience easier. Additionally, the hero on every page is a picture taken from Unsplash from different areas around SLO County.



For example, the picture above shows what the website header looks like. Just as many other websites do, the logo in the top left links to the home page, the four options on the right are the four most important pages, and this header is visible and accessible on every page throughout the site.

Similarly, the footer in the image below is also on every page of the website. On the left, the full name of SLO CORE is written our, and on the right, a donate button takes the viewer to the “Donate” section of the “Resources” page. Lastly, the bottom right has the email address for those who want to get in contact with SLO CORE.



Home Page

For the homepage, I thought it was important to immediately explain the name by writing out the acronym, simply explain the goals of the organization, and include the tentative mission statement prominently.

The “Get Involved” button takes the viewer to the “Events” page where they can subscribe to the Central Coast Community Calendar.

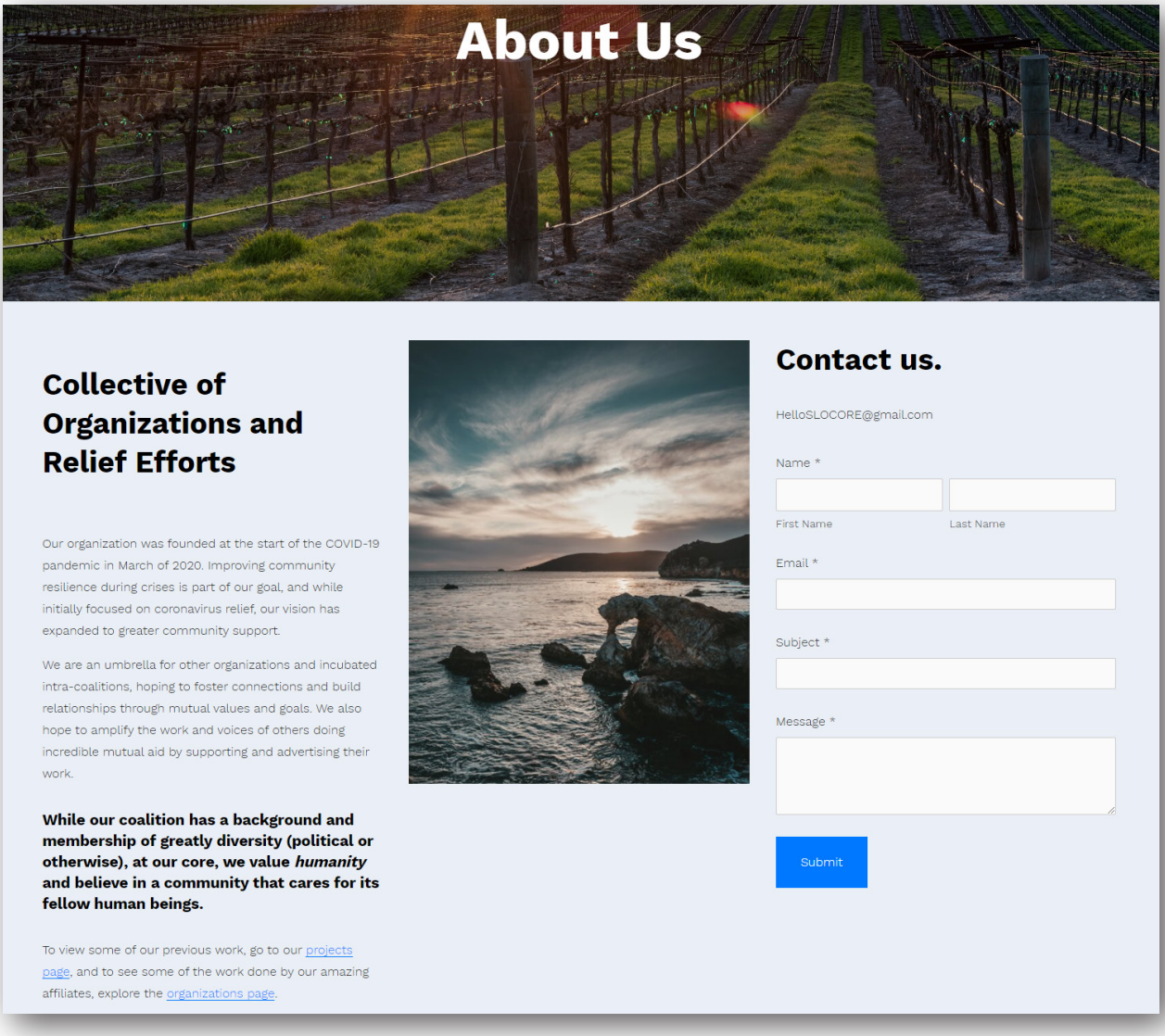
The image below shows the SLO CORE home page:



About Page

For the “About” page, I included a background on the formation of SLO CORE as well as how SLO CORE’s goals have expanded and shifted. I also decided that the “Contact us” section was too small to warrant its own page, so I included it in the “About” page because it made sense to me.

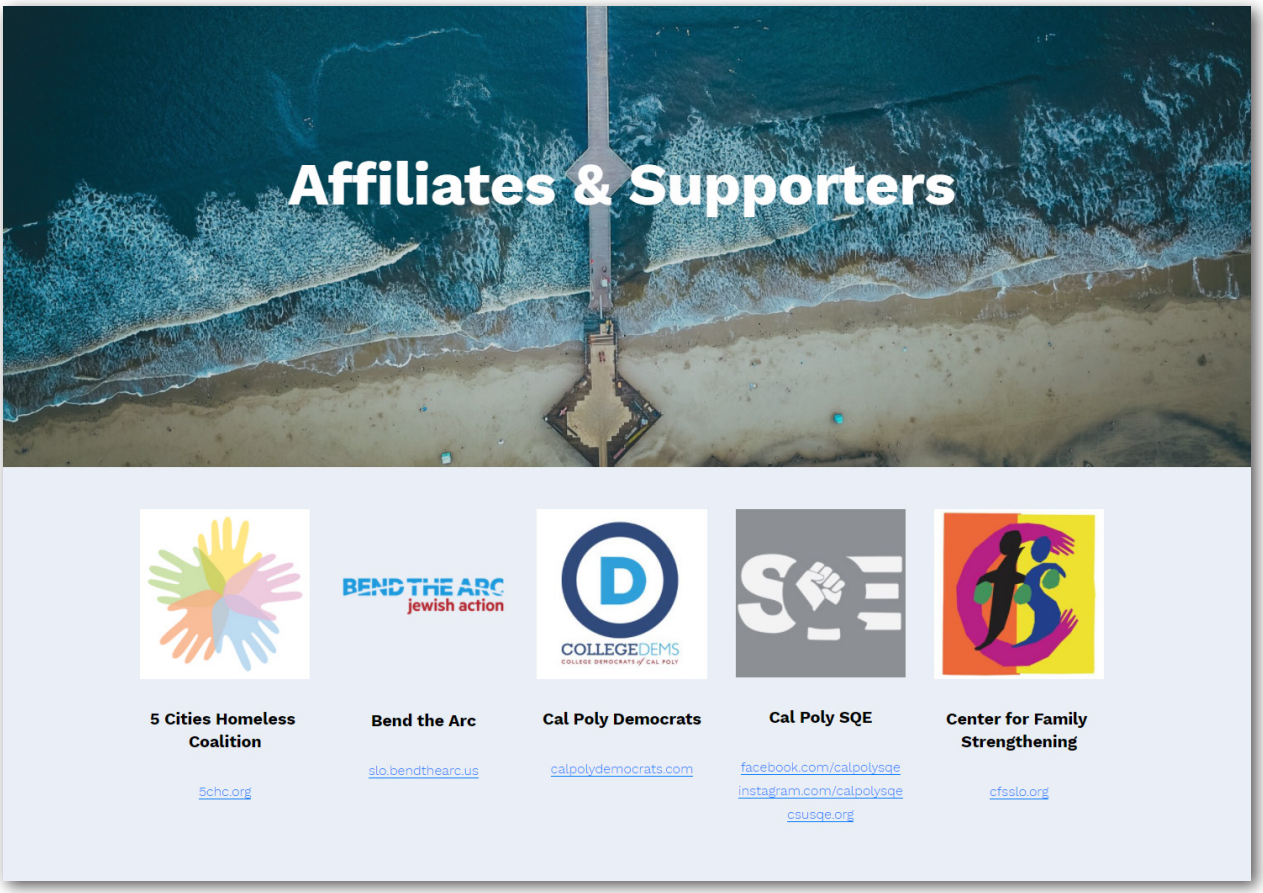
The following image showcases the “About” page:



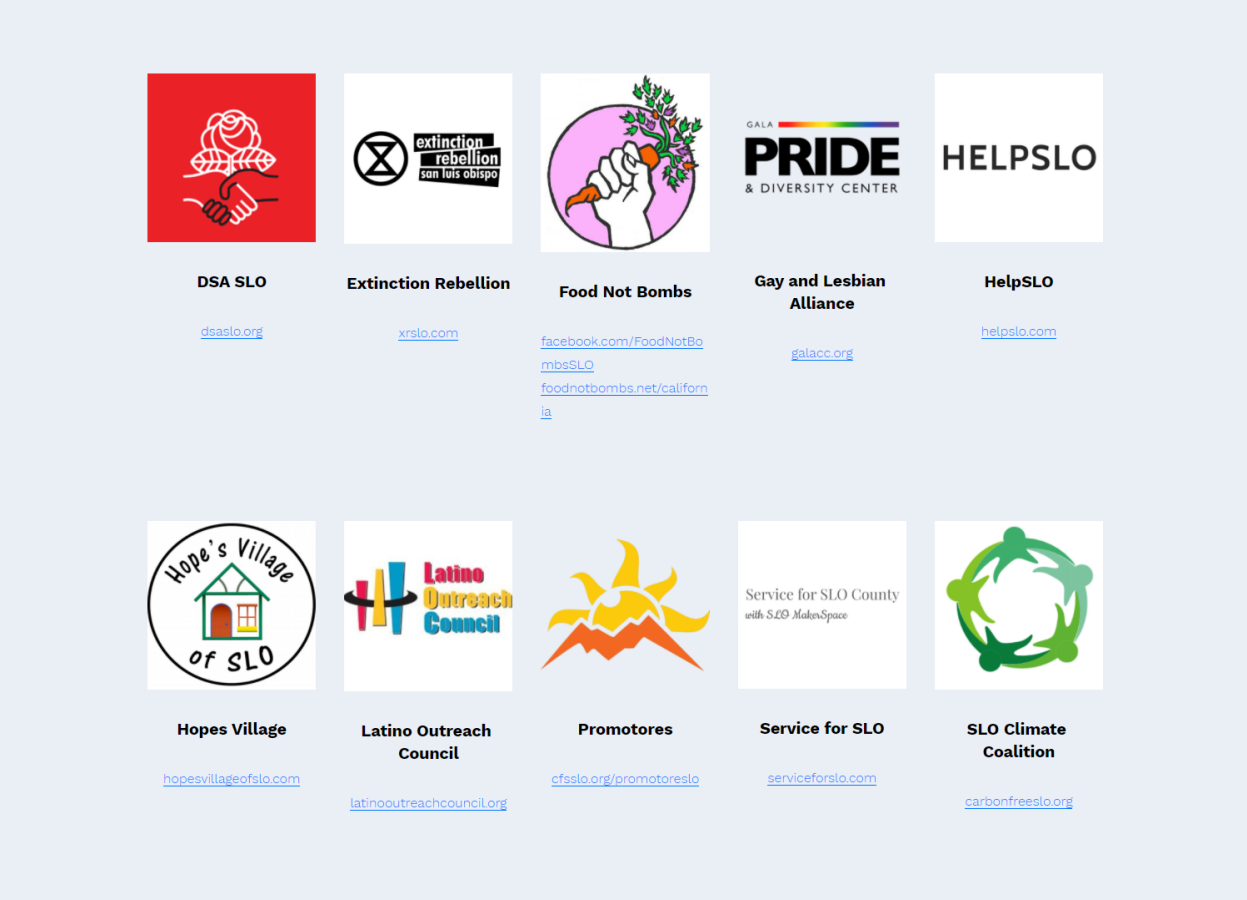
Organizations

The “Affiliates & Supporters” page contains the current list of organizations involved with SLO CORE. Each organization has the name, logo, and website featured, and the organizations are listed in alphabetical order.

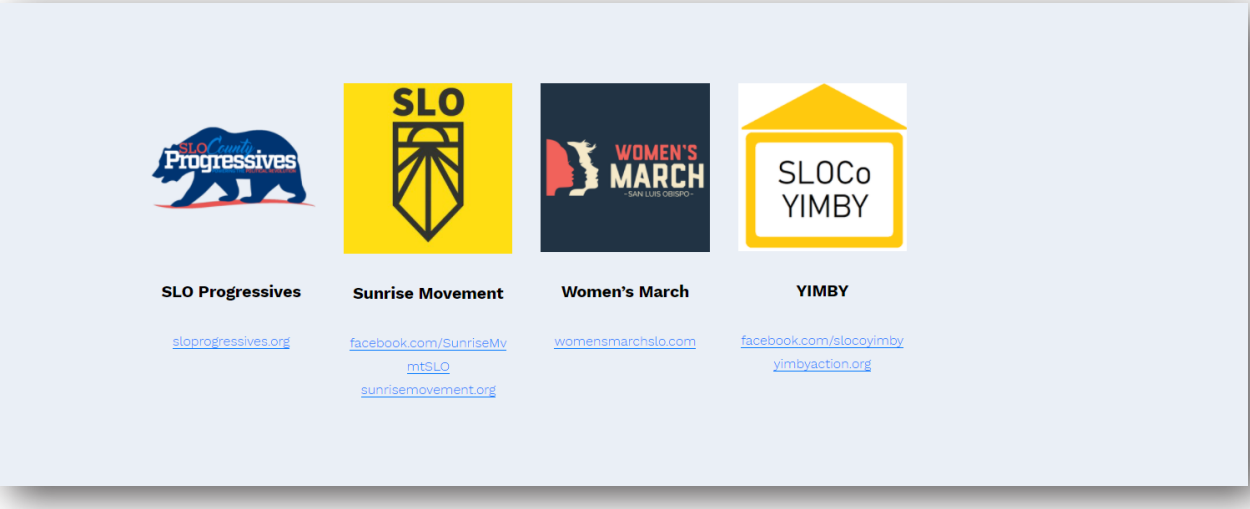
The following image shows the hero and first row of organizations:



The following image shows the second and third row of affiliated organizations:



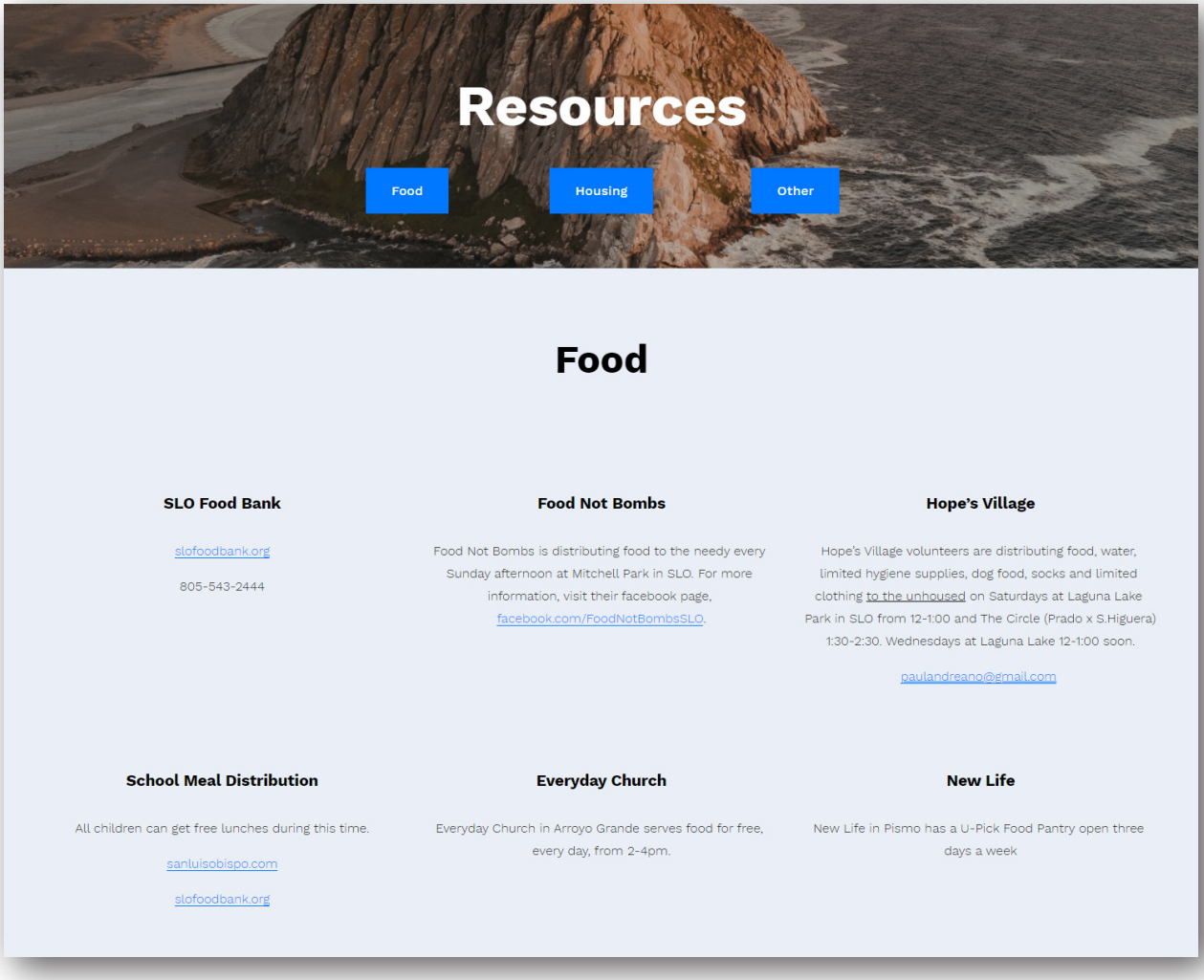
The following image shows the fourth row of affiliated organizations:



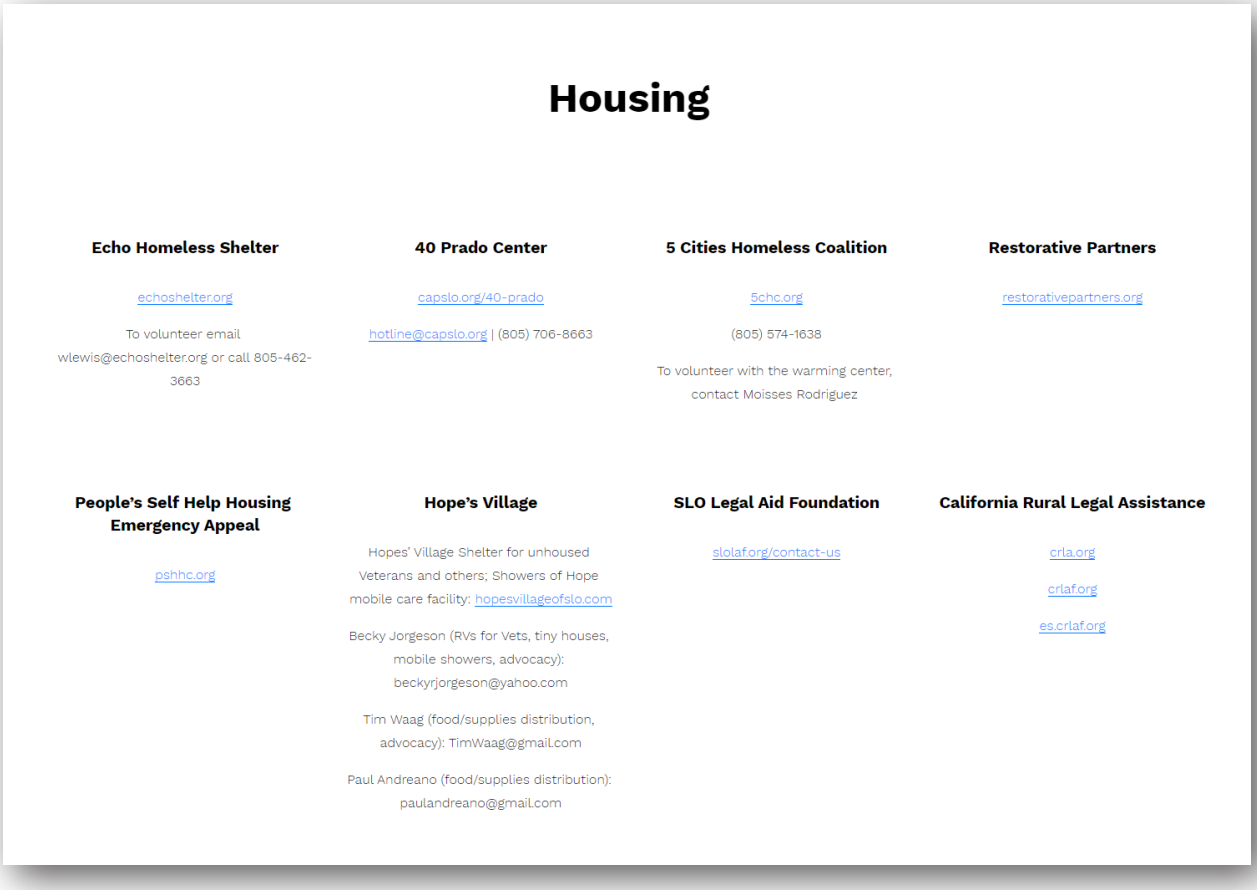
Resources

The “Resources” page is split into four primary sections, three of which are linked via buttons until the page title. The three linked sections are Food, Housing, and Other.

The image below shows the hero, page title with linked buttons, and Food section of the “Resources” page:



The image below shows the Housing section of the “Resources” page:



Housing

Echo Homeless Shelter

echoshelter.org

To volunteer email wlewis@echoshelter.org or call 805-462-3663

40 Prado Center

capslo.org/40-prado

hotline@capslo.org | (805) 706-8663

5 Cities Homeless Coalition

5chc.org

(805) 574-1638

To volunteer with the warming center, contact Moisses Rodriguez

Restorative Partners

restorativepartners.org

People’s Self Help Housing Emergency Appeal

pshhc.org

Hope’s Village

Hopes’ Village Shelter for unhoused Veterans and others; Showers of Hope mobile care facility: hopesvillageofslo.com

Becky Jorgeson (RVs for Vets, tiny houses, mobile showers, advocacy): beckyrjorgeson@yahoo.com

Tim Waag (food/supplies distribution, advocacy): TimWaag@gmail.com

Paul Andreano (food/supplies distribution): paulandreano@gmail.com

SLO Legal Aid Foundation

slolaf.org/contact-us

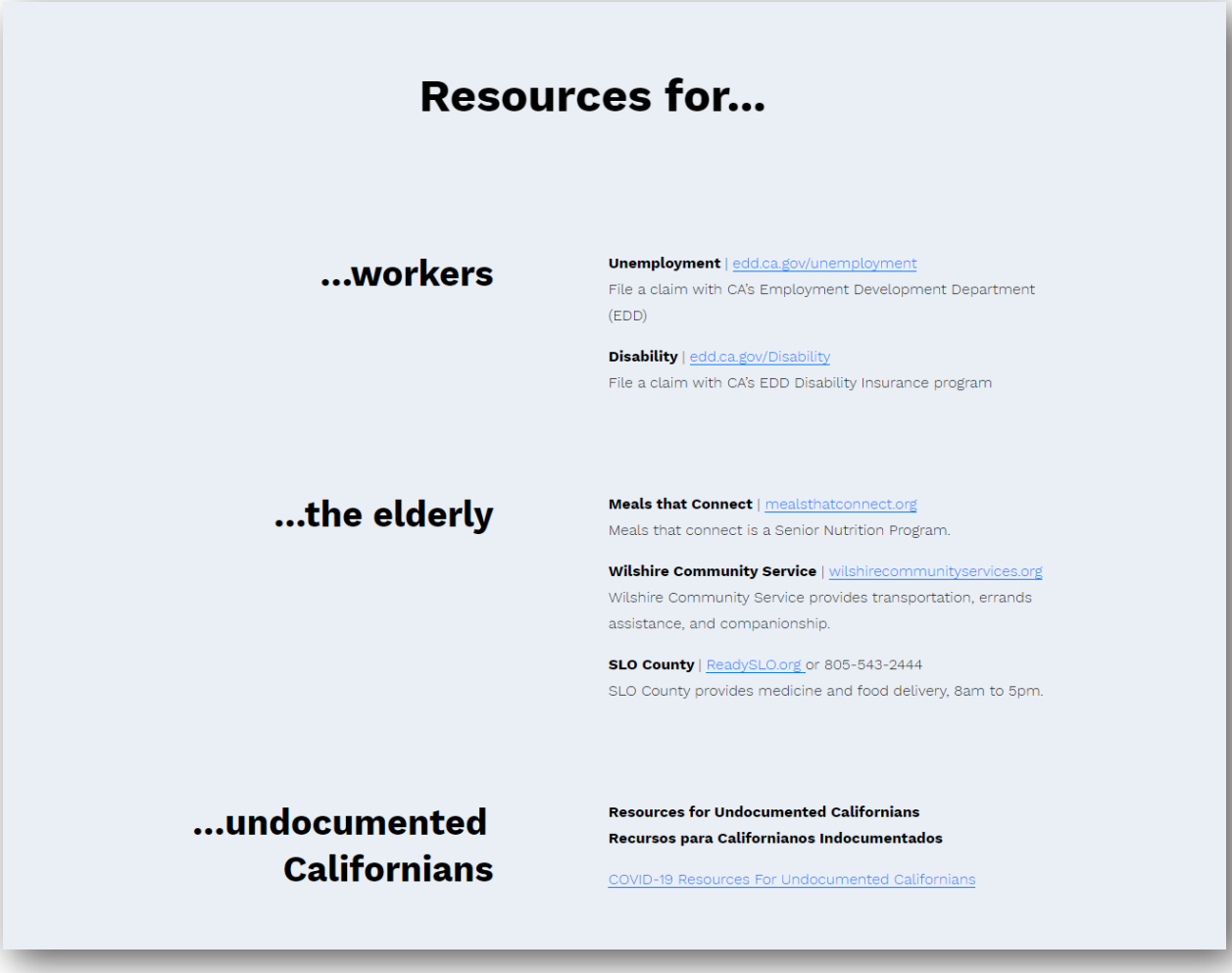
California Rural Legal Assistance

crla.org

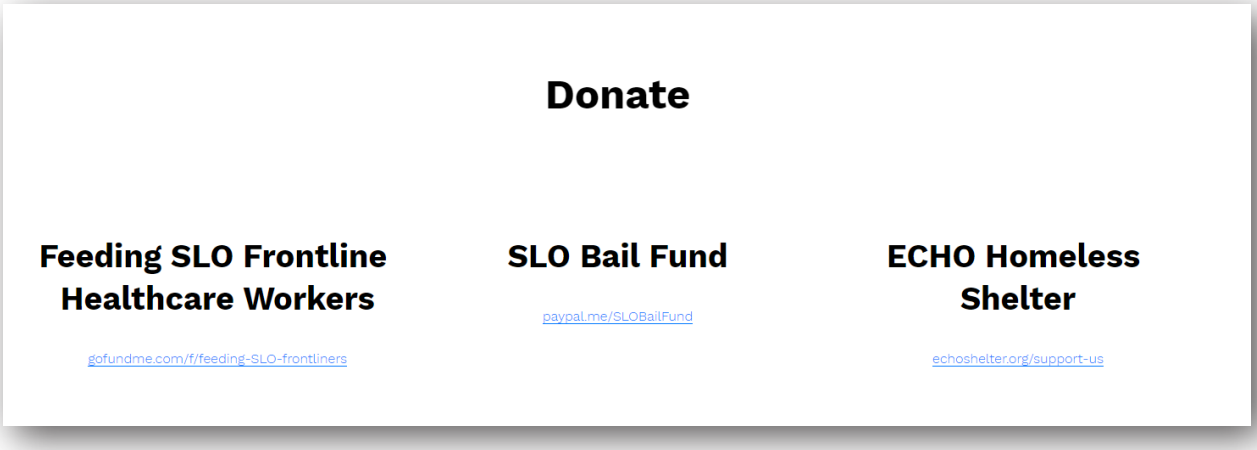
crlaf.org

es.crlaf.org

The image below shows the Other section of the “Resources” page:



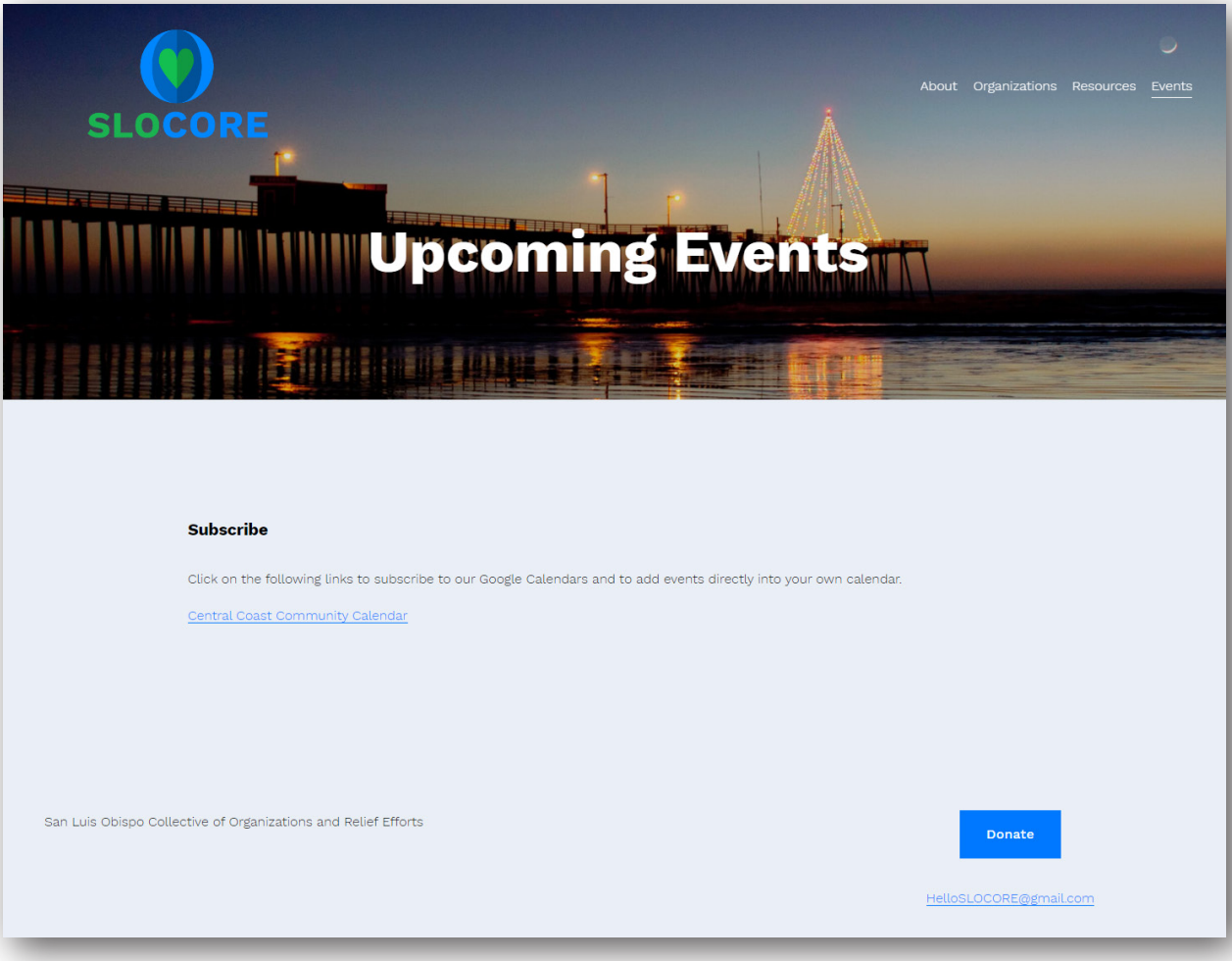
The last section on the Resources page is the section for giving resources: The Donate section, depicted in the image below.



Events Page

Lastly, the “Events” page features the link to the Central Coast Community Calendar, which viewers can subscribe to and add to their Google calendars. The original plan was to embed an iFrame of the Google calendar here, but the tier of Squarespace we subscribed to doesn’t include support for iFrames.

The image below shows the “Events” page:



Background

Website Building

I was originally planning on building the website from scratch in HTML and CSS because I figured the page could be static and fairly simple, and it seemed the most exciting and affordable. I quickly realized that using such a specific medium would significantly reduce the number of people with the technical experience to contribute to the website design, development, and maintenance.

We switched to a Squarespace subscription because, in addition to being a more accessible and inclusive method of building and maintaining the website, the hosting was not much more expensive than pure hosting services.

Website Content

Coming up with content required a lot of coordination between members of SLO CORE and also with members of other organizations, and a lot of thought was put into the way the information was organized. What good is a tool designed to make information more accessible if the website is confusing to navigate and doesn't properly prioritize and organize information?

Similarly, what good is a tool designed to make information more accessible if the website isn't accessible to everyone? Keeping accessibility in mind was an important part of this venture.

Implementation

Name Changing Process

A previously mentioned, the organization originated as the “SLO COVID-19 Response Coalition” but is now known as the SLO CORE.

First, the “COVID-19” was dropped from the name because the members all agreed that they wanted to continue community efforts and collaborations after COVID. Then, over the course of several calls, the group decided it might be a good idea to consider renaming the Coalition to something that sounded a little simpler and more approachable.

To jumpstart the name changing process, I created a list of words that came to mind when I thought of the Coalition and entered them into columns of a spreadsheet which I automated to concatenate the columns to auto-create name combinations.

I combed through the new name combinations with another Coalition member, and we ultimately decided the names weren’t enticing enough and didn’t make especially useful or memorable acronyms.

I changed my approach accordingly and made a new list of words that I associated with the Coalition and non-profits in general. Then, I arranged the spreadsheet so that the first letter of each word was extracted, and I plugged that list of letters in an online word generator. I noted all of the words that were short and memorable which could become snappy acronyms and used the list of words to expand the acronyms into phrases.

One of the words generated was CORE, whose letters corresponded to the phrase “Collective of Organizations and Relief Efforts.” I presented the name “SLO CORE” to the group, and it was widely agreed upon that the acronym was memorable, approachable, representative of the organization’s goals, thereby ending the name selection process.

Domain Name

When choosing a domain name, I knew I would need to choose something as close to the organization name as possible and run it past SLO CORE members. This process was immediately halted when the name of the organization was changed.

Right after the name change was finalized, I purchased the domain name slocore.org through Gandi. After signing up for the Squarespace account, I linked my Gandi domain name with the Squarespace account.

Going forward, I have the option of transferring the domain name over to the Squarespace account or continuing to pay for Gandi and keeping it linked. Currently, the latter option is more affordable but the decision will be made closer to the domain name renewal time frame based on price.

Site Hosting

Before settling on Squarespace, I looked into a variety of different options for web hosting and evaluated those options based on budget, quality of customer service, as well as what was actually included in the plan.

This became moot when switching to Squarespace as hosting and website building are part of the plan that was paid for.

Direction Change

When SLO CORE's work began, several projects were born directly out of the organization itself and were originally going to be featured on the website.

However, as the pandemic progressed, SLO CORE's members decided that it made more sense to use resources to amplify the work of SLO CORE's affiliated organizations and bring their own projects out of focus.

This change in direction inspired the creation of the Central Coast Community Calendar, the subscription link to which is currently featured on the events page, and also necessitated revisiting the information architecture.

Preparing content

When we were intending on showcasing SLO CORE's work on a "Projects" page, I planned out how the page could be organized and requested that each project select one photograph and write up 1–3 paragraphs including descriptions of the project goal, what's been accomplished so far, and upcoming plans.

This would ensure that there was enough content to justify dedicating a full webpage to the project, that there is some consistency across the pages, and that there is enough information for viewers to understand the projects and how those projects fit into SLO CORE.

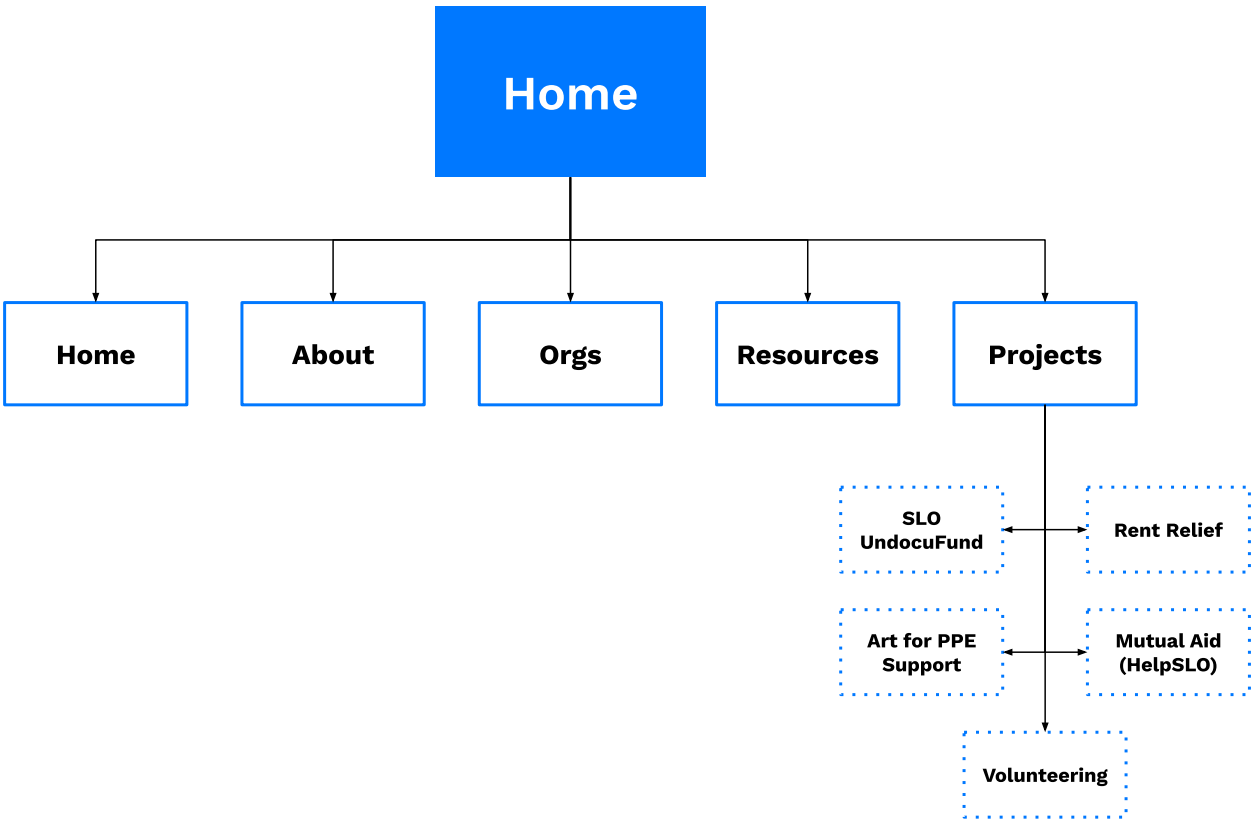
After the direction change, this seemed like less of a priority, and the focus was put on creating and organizing content for the Home, About, Organizations, Resources, and Events pages.

Other SLO CORE members and I had brainstormed a tentative mission statement, possible slogans, and other general written sentiments regarding the organization in a shared Google Doc.

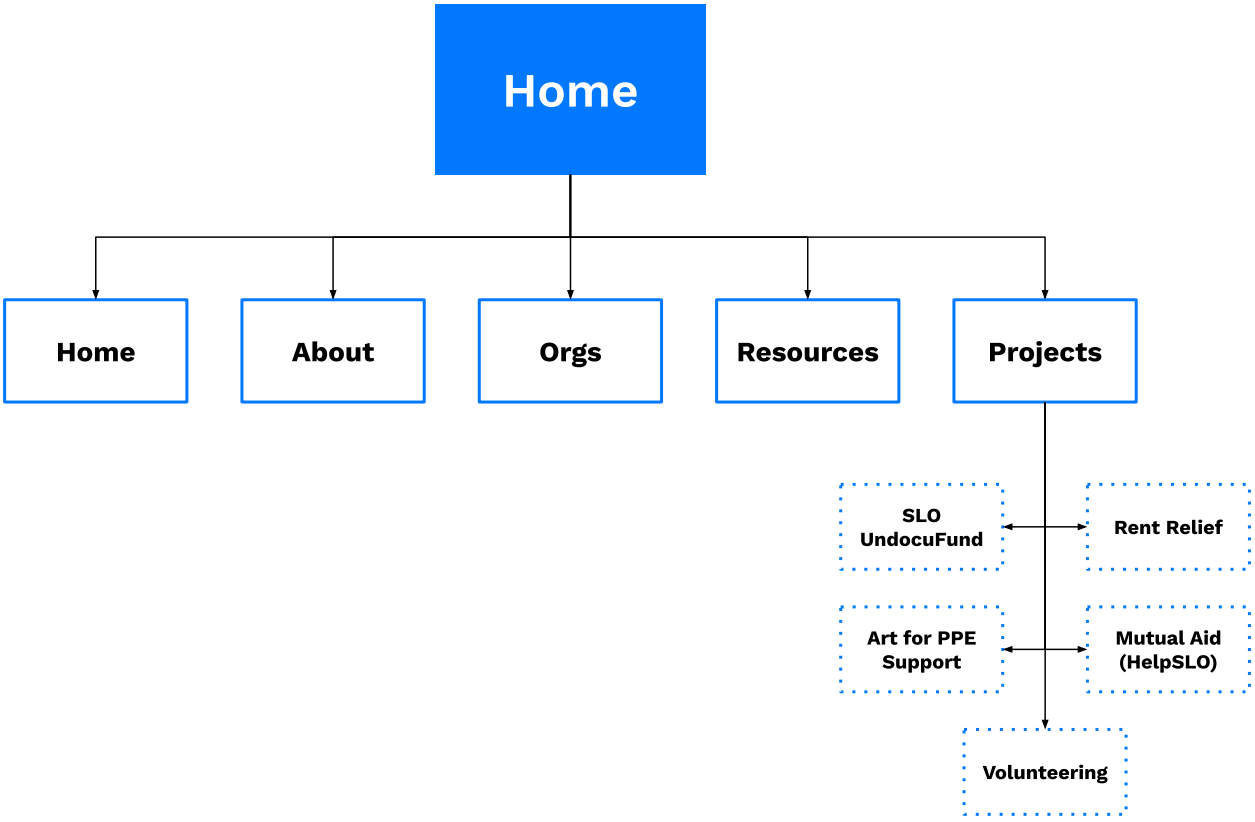
To come up with the content for the pages, I pulled content from the Google Doc, turn bullet points into sentences, and assigned information to the pages I felt they were best suited for.

Information Architecture

The following sitemap was created under the advisement of a SLO CORE member to ensure the proper content was prioritized while make the site navigation intuitive. The goal was to have the home page serve as a hub for the rest of the site and all of the other site information to be grouped into as broad of categories as possible in order to minimize clutter in the main navigation by reducing menu options to just Home, About, Organizations, Resources, and Projects.



After the change in direction and removal of focus on SLO CORE's own projects, a new site map was created to reflect the most updated version of the information architecture:

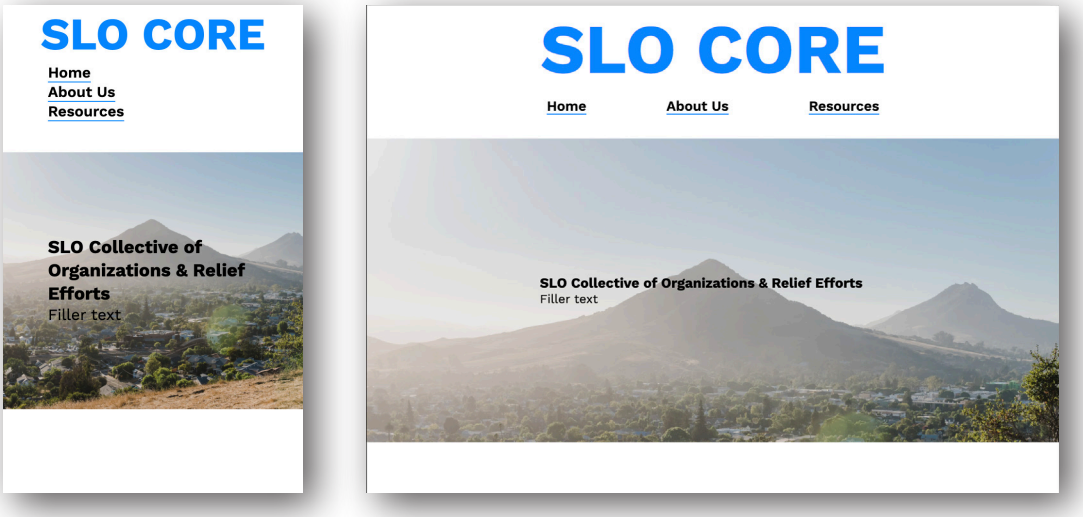


Original Template Design

When I was first planning the HTML/CSS pages, in order to maintain the focus of this project on getting content out ASAP, I limited the time spent on design. For the page layouts, I drew out sketches but generally tried to keep things as simple as possible, focusing on functionality above all else.

Furthermore, rather than making the desktop site first, I decided to make the mobile and desktop versions in tandem, because I realized it would be more efficient and probably better practice to design the mobile version first. It's much easier to make simple things complex than the other way around.

I planned to make templates in HTML and CSS that could be easily reused and manipulated to make layout variations for visual interest. Before I was able to use the templates I made, the decision was made to move to Squarespace, rendering my templates unnecessary.



The above images are screenshots of my first draft of coding the website. I wanted to create something simple to get the structure down that was mobile, tablet, and desktop friendly so that template creation could begin.

Again, these templates became obsolete after using a website builder and my sketches for website layout served only as mild inspiration since the website builder includes predesigned templates.

Branding (Color palettes and typography)

As I mentioned before, I didn't want to waste time on design work that was not functional. My very preliminary thought process in choosing the blue seen in this report is that blue often represents security, trust, and health. I also considered adding green to the logo because it often represents restoration and healing. For contrast colors, I planned to use black and white, as well as possibly blue's complementary color, orange.

For the consideration of typography, I looked for a typeface that was friendly and approachable, but also professional, clean, readable, and legible. Furthermore, I wanted a font that could be easily embedded into a webpage AND be used in documents and graphics. I settled on the sans serif typeface, "Work Sans," available through Google Fonts.

This shade of blue and the "Work Sans" typeface became the inspiration for the overall branding and aesthetic as well as the basis for the logo. In terms of a concept for the logo, I knew that I probably wanted to do something with the word "core," such as the core of the Earth and that I wanted to reflect the love and care given routinely by the members of the organization.

Before realizing I needed to refocus my energy, I did some thumbnail sketches for logos, mocked up the best concepts from the thumbnails, and played around with the mockups' styles and color schemes. Here are a few of the drafts for what I came up with:



The bottom-most design is the latest version of the logo because delays resulting from the name change, direction change, and shift to a website builder have put a hold on design iterations. I've put further development of the logo on the back burner and have been focusing primarily on the development of the site and trying to get a useful site published ASAP. I have continued to use the blue I've been using with a simple aesthetic.

Accessibility

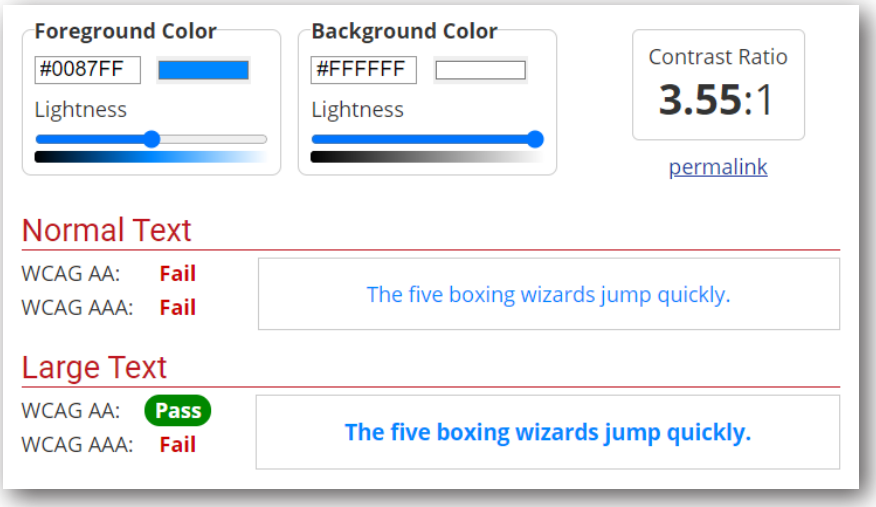
Given that this website is being created to ensure the accessibility of information and resources, the website itself must be fully accessible for essentially all possible audiences.

To ensure that this website has appropriate color contrast, alt text on all images and that all people will be able to navigate this website, I will be conducting tests using the WAVE Web Accessibility Evaluation Tool.

The first run-through of the test showed that there were quite a few issues to address, primarily in terms of alt text and text color contrast. The image below shows the WAVE tool in action, flagging issues on the page itself while providing more detailed explanations on the left.



I've also been using the WebAim color contrast checker and I used this tool when finding the right shades of colors. For example, the blue in this report is the color #0087FF, and has a contrast ratio of 3.55:1 with the color white, making the contrast just high enough for the blue to be used for large text. The image below is screenshot demonstrating this:



Analysis

Feedback During Demonstrations

At regular intervals through the Spring Quarter, summer, and Fall Quarter, SLO CORE would hold calls that allowed me to demonstrate my progress and solicit feedback. The feedback was exceptionally positive and encouraging, and discussions for changes had more to do with the goals of the website than whether or not my creations accomplished our goals.

These conversations were incredibly important and led to the adoption of the new organization name, the decision to change directions regarding website focus, the formal switch to Squarespace, and the creation of the Central Coast Community Calendar. However, I was hoping for some suggestions for improvement on the website as well specifically from other sets of eyes.

In order to receive more constructive criticism to provide an opportunity for iteration and improvement, I created a brief Google survey in the hopes that the protection of anonymity and structure of the questions would encourage viewers to look for weak spots.


SLO CORE Website Critique

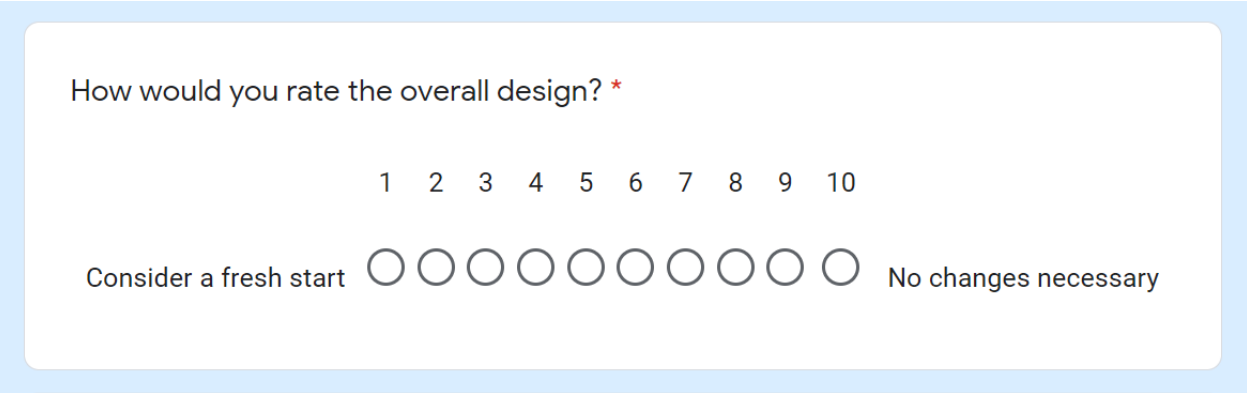
Please look through slocore.org and critique the quality of the website as honestly as possible.
Thank you for your time and energy!

* Required

Website Critique Survey

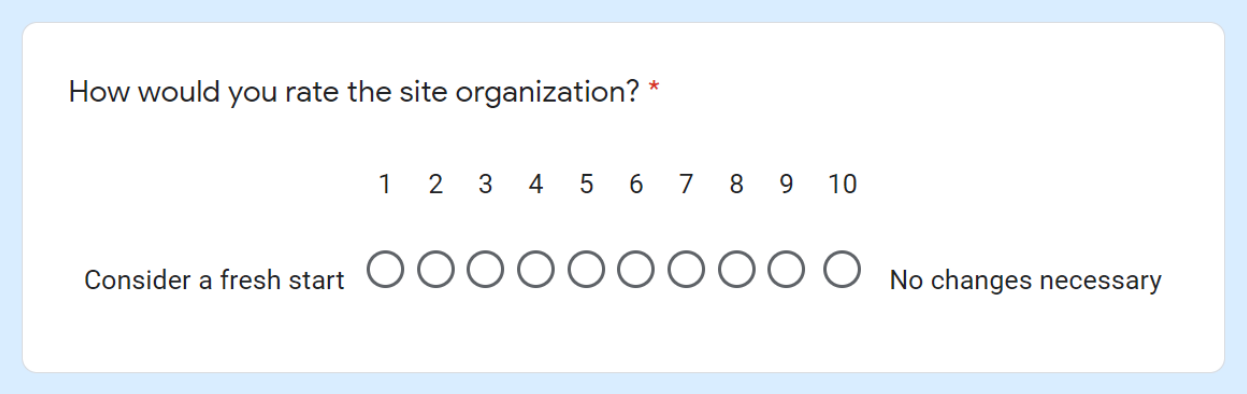
The Google Form I created primarily focused on two overarching aspects of the website: Design and Information Organization. The Survey contains two rating questions that ask the viewer to rate design and information organization on a numerical scale, two “check all that apply” questions which ask users to select the areas within design and information organization require attention, and finally, one open-ended question asking for general feedback. Only the rating questions were required questions.

I sent the survey out to everyone involved in SLO CORE and received generally positive and helpful feedback from nine total respondents.



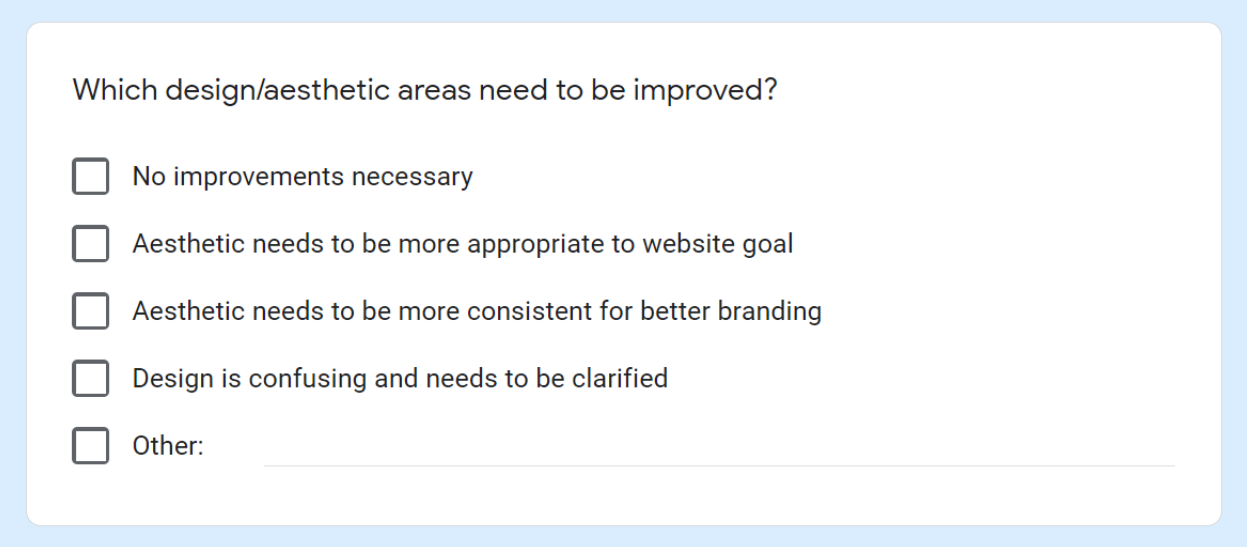
The above images show the first question and the responses, asking viewers to rate the overall design. The average response was 7.67 and the standard deviation was 2.18.

All responses were either an 8 or 9 except for one 2 which brought the average down and the standard deviation up. If this response is treated as an outlier and removed from the sample, the average score is 8.375 and the standard deviation is 0.52.

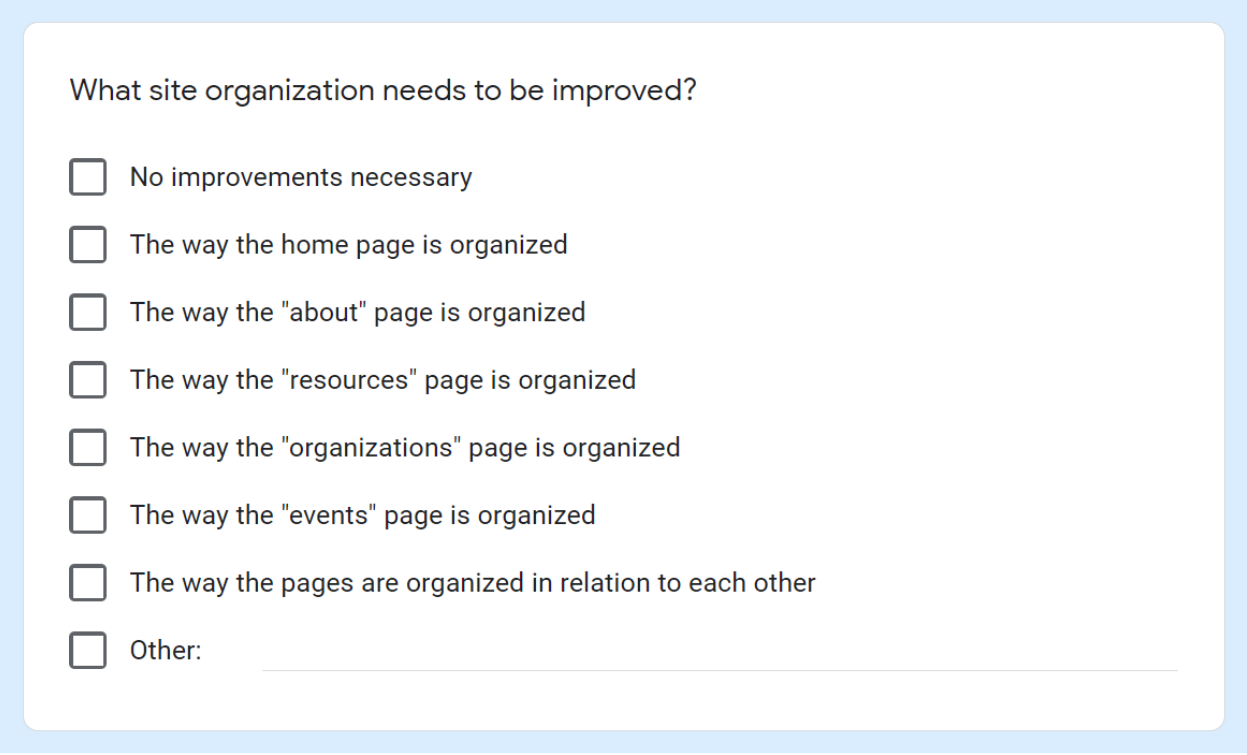


The above image shows the third question, asking viewers to rate the information organization. The average response was 6.78 and the standard deviation was 2.49. I found it interesting that this section induced a much greater variation in responses.

As for the “check all the apply” style questions, the results are a little bit more ambiguous, partially as a result of the fact that the lack a requirement slightly limited the responses, and partly because again there was a fair bit of variation in the answers.



The above image shows the third question, asking participants which aspect of the website design could use improvements. Of the prescribed options, the most selected answer was “Aesthetic needs to be more consistent for better branding” with four total tallies, just under half of all respondents.



The above image shows the fourth question, asking participants which aspect of the website organization could use improvements. Of the prescribed options, the most selected answer was “The way the ‘resources’ page is organized” with four total tallies, just under half of all respondents.

Future Analysis

In the future, I will continue to solicit feedback from my fellow SLO CORE members (or anyone else who is willing to critique my work), and I will continually reassess the accessibility by using the WAVE Tool after every website update.

Additionally, going forward we can measure the success of the website by asking ourselves the following questions:

- Do people subscribe to the calendar?
- Do people contact us?
- Do people visit the website?
- Do we make social media accounts and do they gain a following?

Interdisciplinary Connections

Humanistic & Technical Problem

The way that aid and resources are delivered to their recipients is generally considered a humanistic problem, and I believe that delivering information to people is a primarily technical problem. These two problems can be jointly addressed with a website, which requires humanistic and technical skills and knowledge derived from studies in both liberal arts and engineering.

Design and Branding

Every website requires a particular set of skills to design branding and create logos and aesthetics. I drew from many of my Liberal Arts courses, particularly my Graphic Communication classes, when I was designing the logo, choosing the typeface, and making all other design-related decisions.

UX/UI and Information Architecture

When I was designing the user experience for this website, I drew upon the knowledge and skills learned in classes I took from both liberal arts and engineering. In particular, I worked off of experiences in my Human-Computer Interaction, User Interface Design, Web Design & Development, and Web Content Management courses, which are all Computer Science and Graphic Communication classes.

HTML/CSS

When I used HTML and CSS to build the original templates and to make code blocks in Squarespace, I was drawing off of professional coding experience and experience coding in a variety of Computer Science and Graphic Communication classes.

Optimizing accessibility

Lastly, the majority of my knowledge and skills around optimizing accessibility come from a project I did in my Human-Computer Interaction class that was focused on accessibility. However, I also drew on experience from other Computer Science and Graphic Communication classes.

Related Work

Similar Websites

Two websites in particular are the most similar to the SLO CORE website from my perspective: The CAP SLO and Volunteer SLO websites.

While there is definitely overlap in the purposes and goals of all of our websites, there are three distinct differences.

Calendar of events

The Central Coast Community Calendar was created by a key member of SLO CORE and is not featured on any other website that I am aware of. I don't know of any easily accessible calendars with the same information, and this particular calendar is certainly not featured on any other websites.

More condensed & targeted

The SLO CORE website is significantly more condensed than both the CAP SLO and Volunteer SLO websites, and is also targeted in a different direction than each website.

SLO CORE Information

Lastly, and this one is a bit obvious, no other website features information about SLO CORE itself. As a young organization, publishing information about SLO CORE itself is vital, and something unsurprisingly unique to the SLO CORE website.

Future Work

Website Changes

There are two website changes in particular that I would like to see if the future brings the necessary resources.

For one, I think SLO CORE could have amazing social media accounts if someone were willing to run them. It would be a great way of connecting with the community, further advertising resources that are available or needed, and promoting SLO CORE's affiliated organizations and their work. Also, having social media icons would be a nice addition to the footer.

Additionally, I would like to have a proper calendar on the "Events" page. This would be possible by paying for a business account and adding an iFrame to embed the Google calendar, or by finding somebody willing to create every single event since Squarespace currently does not have an option to create recurring events.

Further Testing & Revisions

If I had had additional time and resources, I would have attempted further user testing with greater volume and depth. For one thing, I think the volunteer nature of the organization work meant that the feedback I received was not coming from as critical an eye as I would have liked.

Additionally, I wish could have had the opportunity to perform further revisions on the overall website and go through the same extensive, iterative design process that I went through when designing the branding and logo.

Conclusion

Roadblocks Overcome

I'm ultimately very pleased with the success of the process and outcome of this project. This past year will certainly go down in history as unusual and unusually stressful, and getting out a functional and hopefully helpful website in a short frame under the pressure of a national crisis was no easy feat.

Furthermore, multiple changes in direction were unexpected but I think I handled them well and I think each wrench in the plan ultimately worked out for the best.

Meeting Website Goals

I believe the website currently meets the goals I set out to meet when beginning this project, and more importantly, it meets the latest goals that were determined by the organization.

Additionally, I intend to stick around for the foreseeable future and am excited to continue working on this project and hopefully see through some of the goals listed in the "Future Work" section of this paper.