TEAM VA

USER INSIGHTS

SECTION 1:
INTRODUCTION

KEITH CATON HKS '19 / SBS '19
NAVY VETERAN
BIZ/POLICY WHIZ

ATHENA KAN COL '19
SOFTWARE ENGINEER
VENTURE CAPITALIST

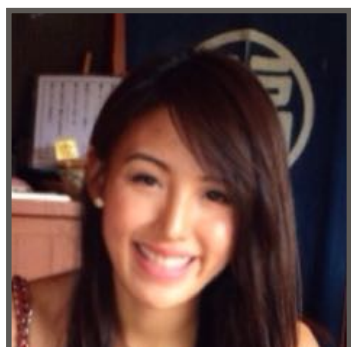**EMILY MIDDLETON** HKS '18
FORMER CONSULTANT
POLICY ENTREPRENEUR

DEVYN PAROS HKS '17
LOCAL GOVERNMENT GURU
PROBLEM SOLVING GENERALIST

YUKO TANAKA HLS '17
FORMER TEACHER
LEGAL MASTERMIND

The National Cemetery Administration (NCA) provides burial services and perpetual care to **3.5 million** gravesites

They **employ** **1700** people, **75%** of which are veterans

They **scored** **96** on the American Customer Satisfaction Index, the highest of any organization across the public and private sectors
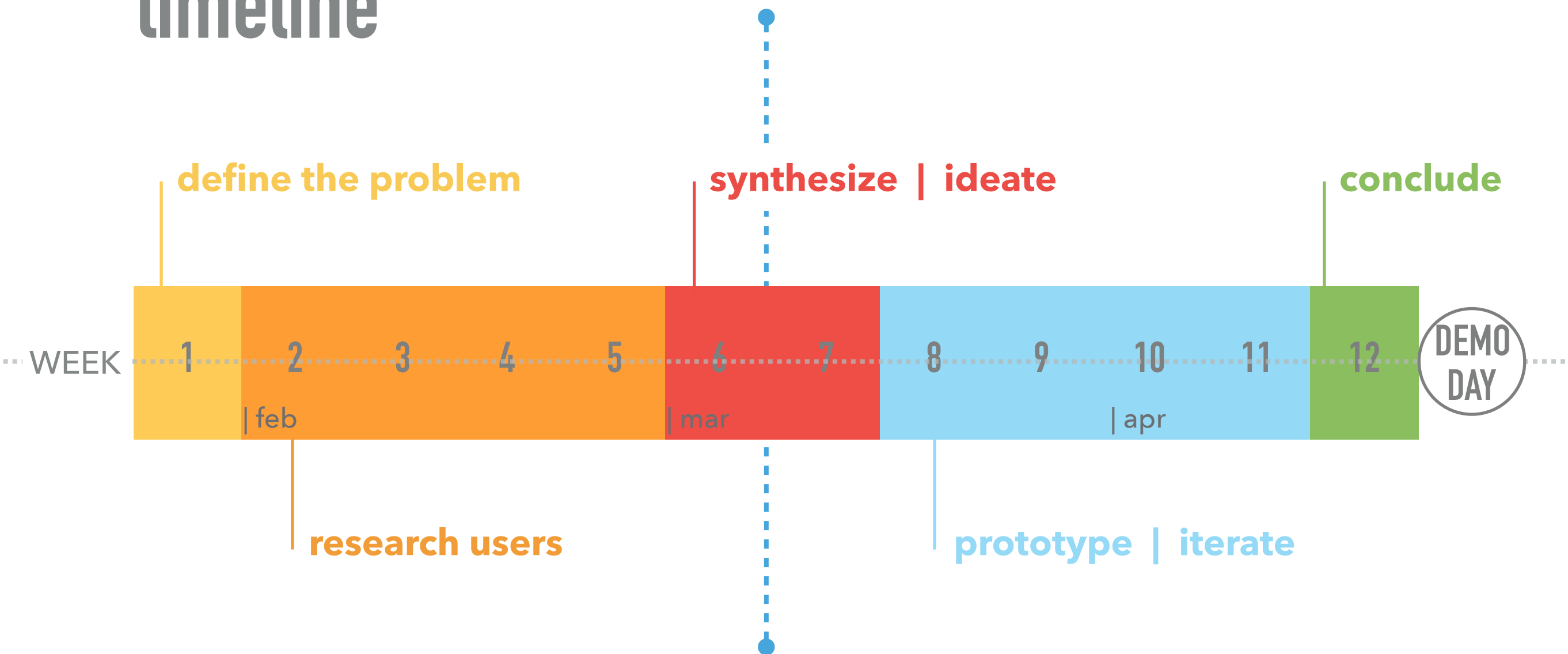
NCA **manages** 135 national cemeteries, 33 soldiers' lots and monument sites, and a national veterans' burial ground in 40 states and Puerto Rico

How might we **improve the process** for **discovering, locating, and visiting gravesites** at NCA cemeteries for all users regardless of age, technical literacy, and use case?

United States Digital Service

timeline

define the problem

synthesize | ideate

conclude

WEEK | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | DEMO DAY

| feb

| mar

| apr

research users

prototype | iterate

SECTION 2: METHODOLOGY

our process

define the problem

PROBLEM STATEMENT

synthesize

WEEK .... 1 ...... 2 .... 3 .... 4 .... 5 .... 6 .... →

| feb

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CLIENT MEETING

research users

SITE VISIT

USER INSIGHTS

synthesize

EXPERT INTERVIEWS

USER INTERVIEWS

refine
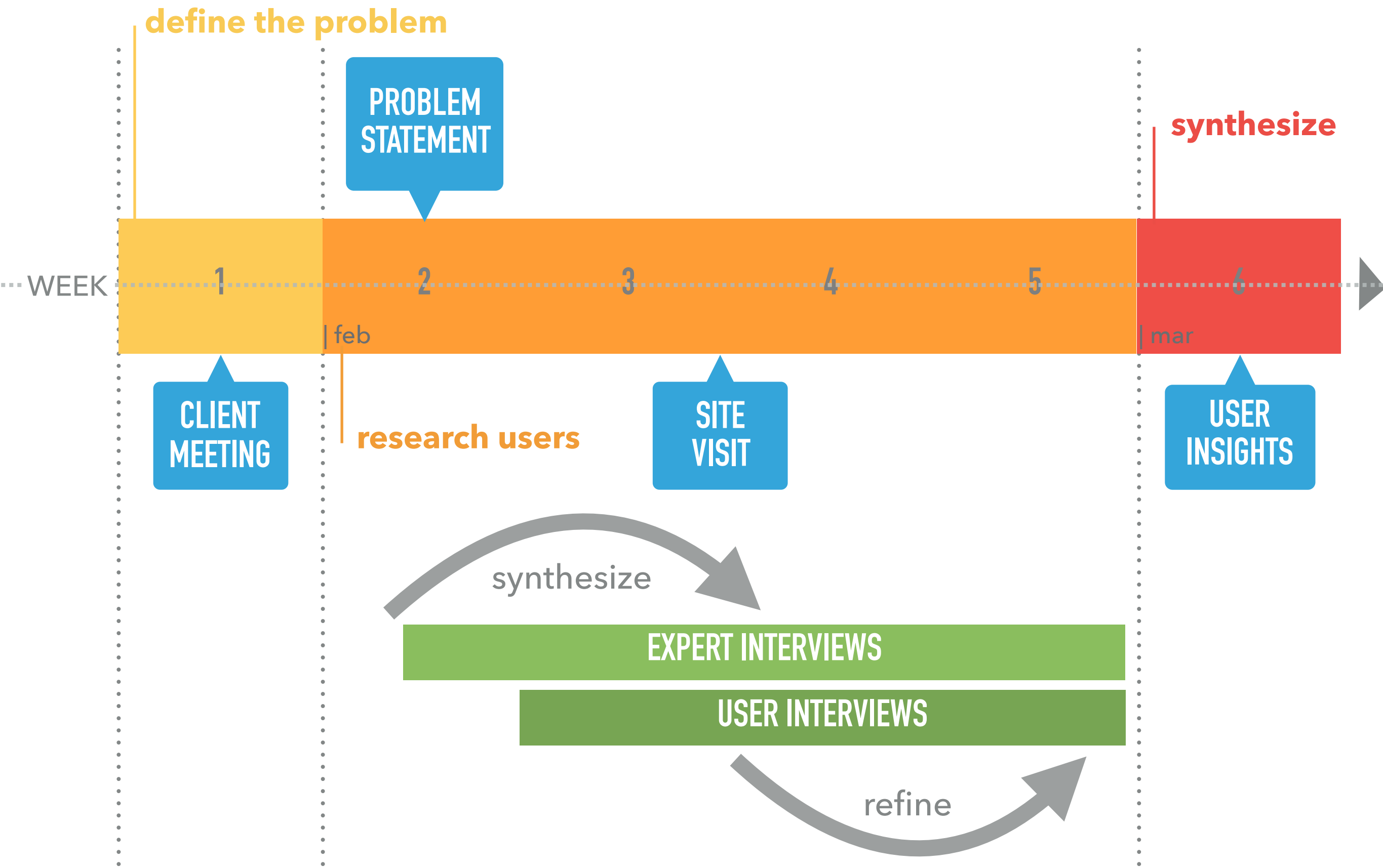
research methods: our five-step approach

WHAT	WHY	HOW
1 SECONDARY RESEARCH	‣ Understand existing resources ‣ Gain inspiration from comparable organizations	‣ Tried existing tools (eg gravesite locator) ‣ Competitor benchmarking
2 SITE VISIT	‣ Experience finding a gravesite first-hand ‣ Understand existing on-site resources and context of cemetery operations	‣ Visited Massachusetts National Cemetery, Bourne
3 STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS	‣ Collect different perspectives on current challenges and opportunities ‣ Tap into expertise of specialist staff	‣ **13** stakeholder interviews conducted of both HQ and onsite VA and NCA staff
4 VISITOR (USER) INTERVIEWS	‣ Understand current visitor journey – including feelings, actions, opportunities ‣ Collect users' ideas and feedback	‣ **15** user interviews: range of ages, geographies, military experience, veteran status
5 USABILITY TESTS	‣ Understand issues with existing tools through careful observation ‣ Understand users' thought process	‣ **4** usability tests of existing gravesite locator tool and competitor sites

site visit | One of our first research steps was visiting the Massachusetts National Cemetery and interviewing the Cemetery Director, Assistant Director and Head Foreman.

MASSACHUSETTS NATIONAL CEMETERY

Name:_____

Section:_____

Grave:_____

user prioritization

PRIMARY USERS

Veterans

Family & Friends

SECONDARY USERS

Researchers

Volunteers

Students

Tourists

Age

Recentness of Service Experience or Loss

Technical Literacy

"Job" at NCA Cemetery or Involving NCA

Ability to Visit a NCA Cemetery

Proximity to a NCA cemetery

interviews + usability testing

We interviewed 28 people, including 13 NCA staff and 15 members of the public. Our external research prioritized veterans and family or friends, which are not mutually exclusive groups.

8 VETERANS FROM ALL BRANCHES

4 ACTIVE DUTY MILITARY

3 NON-VETERAN FAMILY OR FRIENDS

5 POST-9/11

2 WOMEN

MOST HAVE VETERAN FAMILY MEMBERS

7 CEMETERY DIRECTORS & STAFF

MASSACHUSETTS

CALIFORNIA

MINNESOTA

4 USABILITY TESTS

6 NCA HQ STAFF
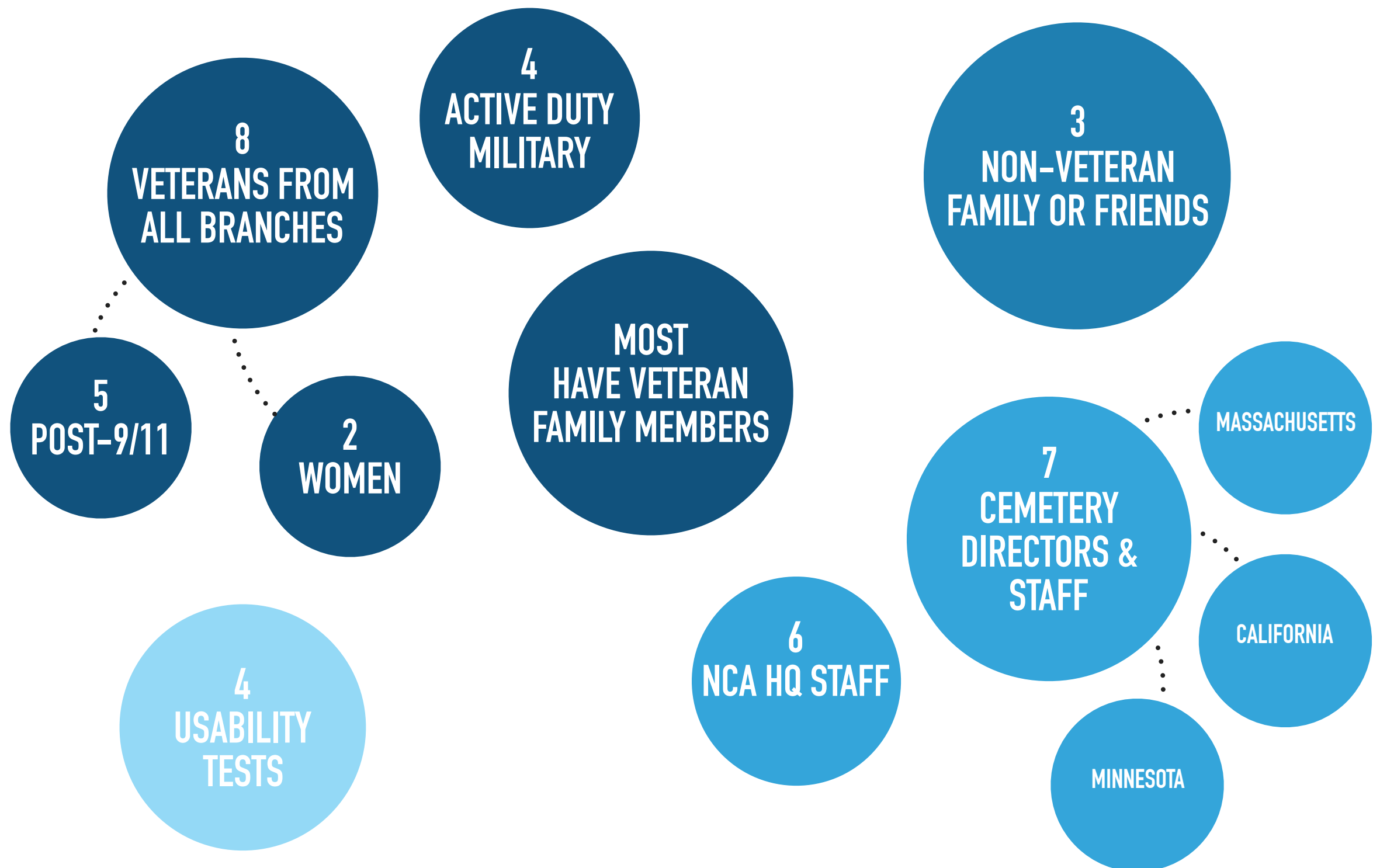
research synthesis

We held quick, quiet brainstorm sessions to identify the visitor journey and personas. We also used post-its to synthesize our observations and learnings from interviews.

Synthesizing observations

5-minute journey maps

SECTION 3: INSIGHTS

High-level journey map

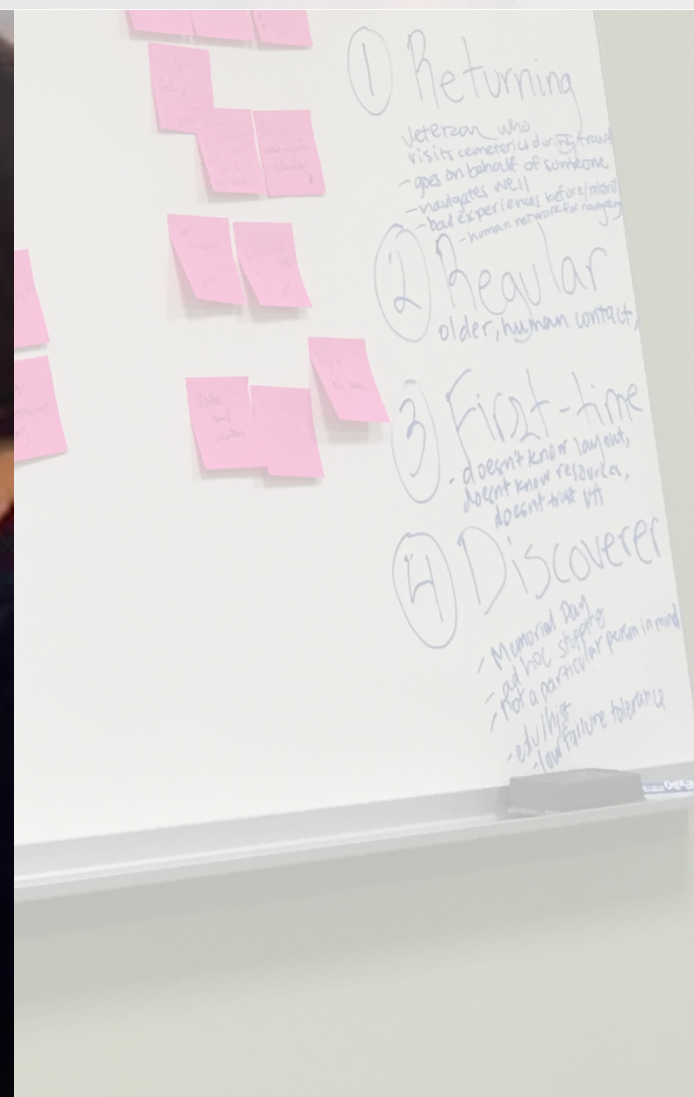Visitors visiting a specific friend, relative or colleague's gravesite

PHASE

1. DISCOVER | 2. PLAN | 3. TRAVEL | 4. NAVIGATE TO SECTION | 5. FIND GRAVESITE

VISITOR ACTIONS

TRIGGER

- call
- ask a friend
- google
- cem.va. gov
- print map

walk or drive

ARRIVE

- ask staff at visitors' center
- use kiosk
- print map
- possibly staff escort
- walk or drive to section
- use locator on smartphone

find section

- call visitors' center
- find gravesite
- walk
- find nearby "notables"

PAIN POINTS

CAN'T FIND INFORMATION ONLINE

WEEKEND: NO ONE TO HELP

KIOSK NOT WORKING

MAP DIFFICULT TO READ

GET LOST

CAN'T FIND GRAVESITE

Icon credit: The Noun Project

Detailed journey map: feelings, experience, opportunities

PHASE	1. DISCOVER	2. PLAN	3. TRAVEL	4. NAVIGATE TO SECTION	5. FIND GRAVESITE

POSSIBLE FEELINGS

1. DISCOVER

UPSET
− *"I can't think straight, but I want to visit"*

CURIOUS, UNCERTAIN
− *"It's been a while…I'd like to pay my respects, but I've never visited the gravesite"*

2. PLAN

PLEASANTLY SURPRISED
+ *"I found the right information quite quickly"*

FRUSTRATED AND CONFUSED
− *"I don't know which cemetery she's buried in"*
"Why isn't my friend's name listed in this tool? Am I doing something wrong?"
"How will I find section 47, location 589 when I get there?"

3. TRAVEL

CALM, PURPOSEFUL
+ *"I know where I'm going"*

APPREHENSIVE
− *"I'm not sure how I'll feel or what I'll do when I arrive"*

4. NAVIGATE TO SECTION

APPRECIATIVE
+ *"I'm so grateful that staff member took the time to give such clear directions"*

FRUSTRATED
− *"Why isn't the kiosk working? Now what do I do?"*

CONFUSED
− *"I don't really understand this map, or how to get to the gravesite"*

5. FIND GRAVESITE

CONTENTED
+ *"I'm glad I came"*

CURIOUS
+ *"I wish I knew more about him, and the people around him"*

FRUSTRATED, DISAPPOINTED
− *"I'm in the right section, but how do I find the right gravesite?"*

CURRENT EXPERIENCE

Legend:
- 👤 VISITOR
- NCA — NCA
- ▲ THIRD-PARTY

1. DISCOVER
- Some visitors unable to attend funeral, so make a special trip later to pay their respects
- Or will be in the area and want to take opportunity to visit
- Or are asked to visit on someone else's behalf
- Or plan to visit an ancestor's gravesite

2. PLAN
- Some visitors use Google on their laptop or phone,; typically type the cemetery name or "find gravesite"
- ▲ May find the VA gravesite locator or a 3rd party site
- Phone a friend or family member for guidance
- NCA Some visitors phone the cemetery for information
- Some visitors go straight to cemetery

3. TRAVEL
- Visitors typically travel by car
- If cemetery is in a city or suburbs, might travel by foot or public transport

4. NAVIGATE TO SECTION
- NCA Ask for help at visitors' centre (if during the working week)
- NCA NCA staff or volunteer looks up info on own terminal, and draws route on map with a highlighter
- Or visitor enters name of deceased in 24/7 kiosk, which prints location and a standard black and white map
- May bypass the center, and use gravesite locator site on phone
- May use info found earlier (from online research or family/friend), or from memory, and go straight there

5. FIND GRAVESITE
- Use map print out and/or verbal instructions from staff member or friend to locate specific gravesite
- NCA If unable to locate, call visitors' centre – or walk back to center – if during working week
- After locating gravesite, may look at other nearby gravesites for interest

Icon credit: The Noun Project

Jonathan Ginsberg

- 71 years old
- Widowed
- Lives near Massachusetts National Cemetery
- Retired

STORY
- Volunteers at the cemetery
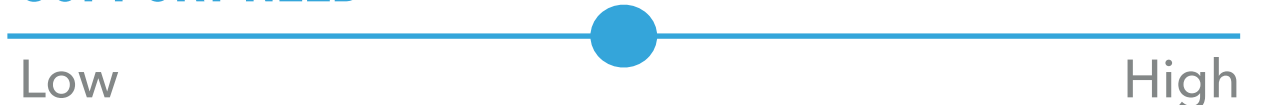- Wife is buried there
- Retired community member

NEEDS/ATTITUDES
- Navigation-savvy
- Service-driven; wants to feel helpful
- Flexible time
- Values personal interaction, community, and honoring veterans
- Values freedom and independence
- Knows staff members and NCA well

"I CAN'T REVERSE HISTORY, BUT I WANT TO HELP FAMILIES GRIEVING"

TECH SAVVY
Low   High

SUPPORT NEED
Low   High

VULNERABILITY LEVEL
Low   High

Jennifer Wallace

NEEDS
- Emotionally charged
- Disillusioned with VA
- Needs a process that's as easy as possible
- Tech-savvy, but any friction may trigger PTSD
- Low threshold for failure
- Very mission-driven

- 25 years old
- Veteran who just returned from service
- Currently in college

STORY
- Freshly grieving from a close friend killed in action
- Feels guilt
- First-time visitor to the grave

"IT'S SAD, BUT IT'S THE JOB"

TECH SAVVY
Low   High

SUPPORT NEED
Low   High

VULNERABILITY LEVEL
Low   High

William Turner

- 54 years old
- Veteran
- Small businessman

STORY
- Has visited NCA cemeteries before, but first time visiting this one
- Visiting since he's in the area
- First and second level connections to veterans
- Beginning to overcome trauma and recently became ready to visit a cemetery
- Heard about grave from a friend and asked where it is

NEEDS/ATTITUDES
- Mission-oriented but emotionally-charged
- Tech-savvy but not tech-native
- Values personal interaction but also alone time
- Honoring veterans is the most important
- Wants validation for his experiences in the military – still recovering
- Does not know much about the NCA, but has had some bad experiences with the VA

"IT'S A GOOD REMINDER OF HOW LUCKY WE ARE"

TECH SAVVY
Low   High

SUPPORT NEED
Low   High

VULNERABILITY LEVEL
Low   High

Anna Amin

- 28 years old
- Consultant and travels a lot
- From a military family

STORY
- Great-grandfather buried in a cemetery
- Really interested in history/educational component
- Traveling to same city great-grandfather is buried in for her job, but extra day off for Memorial Day
- Has never been to an NCA cemetery

NEEDS/ATTITUDES
- Wants as much information as possible about history of great-grandfather/others
- Loves speaking to experts (e.g. volunteers/directors of the cemetery)
- Very flexible and spontaneous
- Values stories highly, wants to connect veteran stories to a broader mission
- Appreciates efficiency and loves technology

"I'M A GENERALIST—HISTORY IS SO INTERESTING!"

TECH SAVVY
Low   High

SUPPORT NEED
Low   High

VULNERABILITY LEVEL
Low   High

insight 1: there is a lack of awareness and understanding about NCA & its services

‣ **Majority of users have not heard of the National Cemetery Association**
   ‣ Therefore do not visit the NCA homepage to locate a gravesite: instead search for cemetery name if known

‣ **Many users do not understand the distinction between NCA cemeteries, Arlington and private cemeteries**
   ‣ This adds to confusion when searching for information online, where distinction often is not clear

‣ **Some veterans' attitudes towards the VA extend to the NCA and its online tools**
   ‣ Some veterans' negative perceptions of the VA extend to NCA online tools: they "expect" the locator not to work, nor to be able to find helpful information online

insight 2: there are basic issues with existing gravesite locator resources

- **On-site kiosks are unreliable and insufficient**
  - Kiosks are unreliable: system sometimes goes down for 4 days at a time, or can run out of paper
  - Kiosk are not intuitive: some visitors struggle to find the right person
  - Kiosks are not always helpful: they print out a small map with a reference number, but no route or directions
  - Not enough kiosks: in large cemeteries, directors may set up work-arounds
  - Staff help is highly valued but limited: visitors appreciate the "human" help they receive from staff and volunteers, but human resources are limited. Staff are also unavailable during early morning, evenings and weekends
- **Online gravesite locator is not visible enough, unintuitive, and doesn't always work**
  - Many visitors do not realize they can use the locator even if they do not know the cemetery
  - Many visitors do not have the information needed to find the entry they are looking for, or narrow down the results. However, they do have other information (eg rank, service branch, conflict, hometown)
  - Many visitors feel stuck if the search returns no results after a few attempts. Might phone the cemetery or a friend

insight 3: even with a map and location reference it can be challenging to locate the gravesite
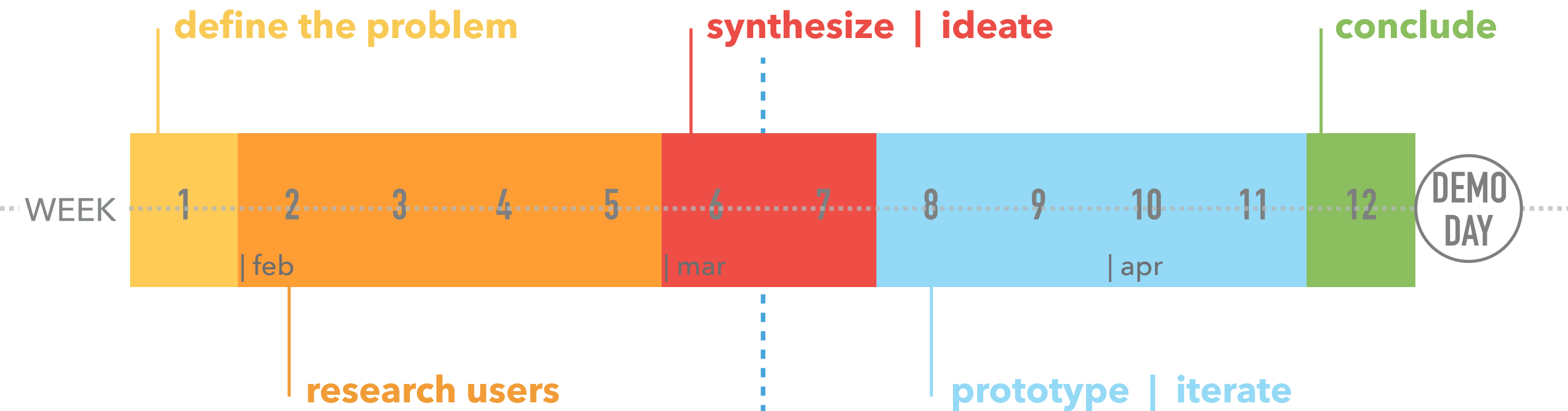
▸ **Environmental challenges of finding a gravesite**

  ▸ Uniform nature of grave markers can make navigation feel especially challenging, even overwhelming

  ▸ Poor weather conditions can make grave markers difficult to see (eg snow)

  ▸ Especially disorientating if visiting a site in an active section, where many more people may have been buried since last visit

▸ **Other challenges of finding a gravesite**

  ▸ Old cemeteries often have less intuitive layout

  ▸ First-time visitors to NCA cemeteries can find navigation particularly difficult, as unfamiliar with layout and help available at visitor centers

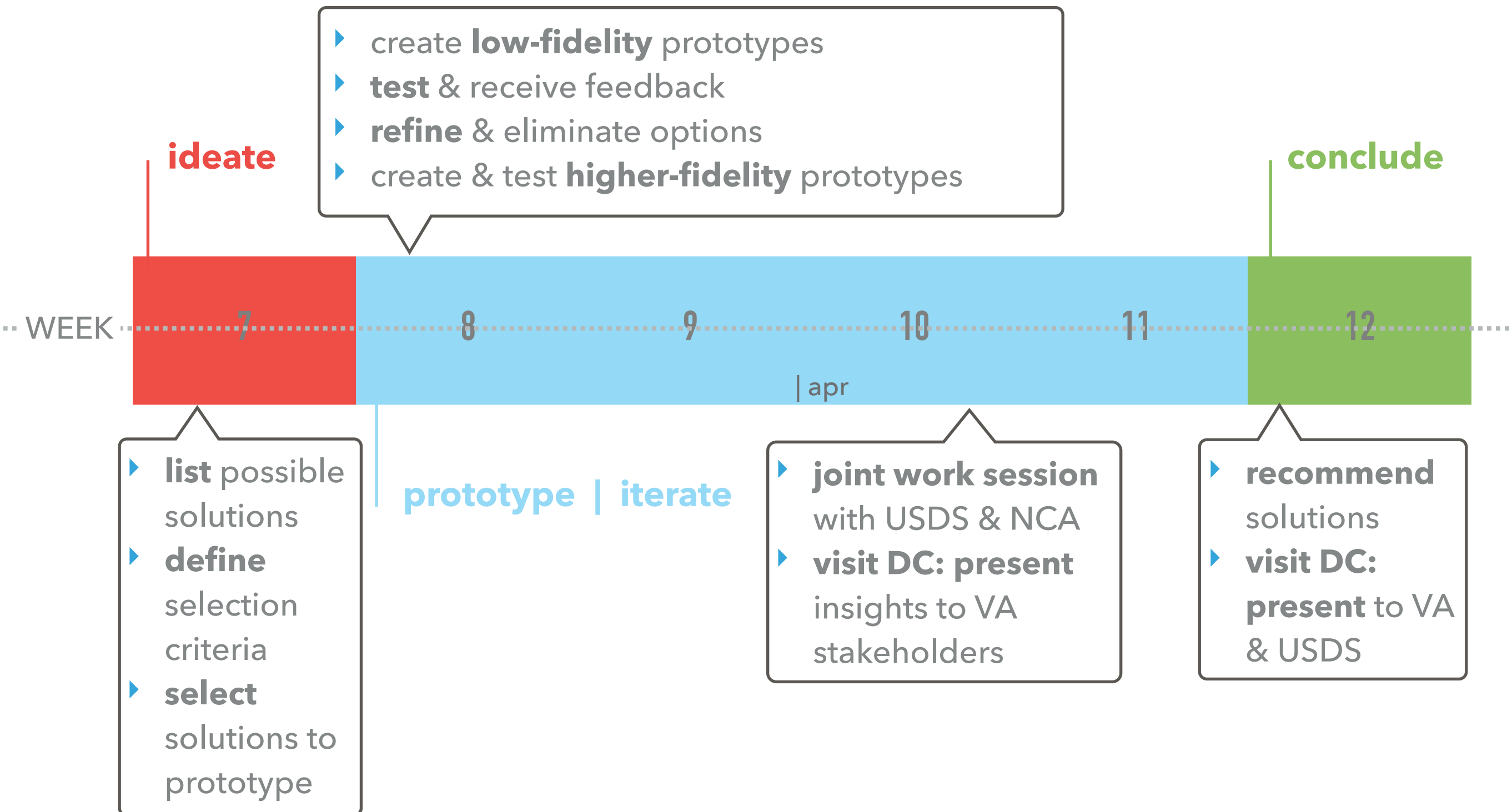# insight 4: there is a widespread desire to better memorialize veterans digitally

▸ **Many visitors feel the information available online (eg via the gravesite locator) is disappointing and even disrespectful**
  ▸ Would like a little more information, eg about conflicts/campaigns involved in, length of service, honors awarded
  ▸ However, most do not want "too much" information either, to maintain privacy and respect. Need to strike a balance
▸ **Visitors looking up veterans who they knew less well are particularly excited to find out more**
  ▸ Sometimes this gap is fulfilled by third-party sites such as "Find-A-Grave," which may provide more details about the deceased's service and life, link to relatives' gravesite records, and even include crowdsourced photos of the gravestone

define the problem

synthesize | ideate

conclude

WEEK | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | DEMO DAY

| feb

| mar

| apr

research users

prototype | iterate

SECTION 4:
NEXT STEPS

next steps

ideate

conclude

create **low-fidelity** prototypes
test & receive feedback
refine & eliminate options
create & test **higher-fidelity** prototypes

WEEK ⋯ 7 ⋯⋯⋯⋯ 8 ⋯⋯⋯ 9 ⋯⋯⋯ 10 ⋯⋯⋯ 11 ⋯⋯⋯ 12 ⋯

| apr

prototype | iterate

▸ **list** possible solutions
▸ **define** selection criteria
▸ **select** solutions to prototype

▸ **joint work session** with USDS & NCA
▸ **visit DC: present** insights to VA stakeholders

▸ **recommend** solutions
▸ **visit DC: present** to VA & USDS

opportunities + guiding questions

How can we improve veteran awareness of burial benefits?

How can we improve upon or expand existing resources to…

⋮

Facilitate discovery and planning

⋮

Support visitors at all hours

⋮

Guide visitors reliably to their destination

⋮

Provide respectful and dignified service

⋮