Navigating Community Resources: User Research Findings & Design Recommendations

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Executive Summary

This report synthesizes qualitative data from three community-worker interviews regarding the challenges of navigating community resources, conducted as part of the Mintify team's work with Florida Community Innovation (FCI) on the Florida Resource Map (FRM). The findings highlight significant barriers in geographic access, information comprehensibility, and the time-intensive nature of resource discovery. There is a demand for artificial intelligence (AI)-driven efficiency, provided the interface remains simple and the data remains high-quality. In response, this report offers design recommendations and conceptual wireframes for the FRM that prioritize guided search, clearer categorization, and a simplified interface.

Background and Problem Statement

Community-based organizations across Florida play an important role in connecting residents with essential services. Organizations such as Eight Waves support families with needs ranging from tutoring and medical transportation to food assistance, hygiene supplies, and mental health services. However, the tools available to help case managers and outreach workers locate and verify resources have not yet matched the pace and demands of casework. Case managers and outreach workers often rely on PDF resource lists, phone calls, and personal networks because online resources contain outdated information, are too difficult to navigate, or return too many irrelevant results to be useful when time is limited.

Civic-technology nonprofit Florida Community Innovation's flagship project, the Florida Resource Map (FRM), was developed to address these challenges. The FRM platform uses a retrieval-augmented generation (RAG) pipeline, combined with social-media monitoring and natural language processing, to collect and organize information from partner organizations. Rather than serving as a static directory, the FRM's goal is to provide resource navigators like social workers with more current and relevant information while supporting, rather than replacing, their professional judgment calls. However, the maintenance of accurate, adequate, and up-to-date information in the resource directory is a challenge. Automation is one apparent solution for maintaining a directory, but one which introduces risks around trust. This report sets out to understand how resource-directory navigators currently find, verify, and share community resources; the roles of trust and accuracy in that process; and how users experience the FRM itself, including their expectations around artificial-intelligence (AI)-assisted and real-time updates. Those insights are meant to inform concrete design decisions for the FRM going forward.

Methodology

This study used semi-structured interviews with community-serving nonprofit staff in central Florida to understand how they locate, verify, and share information on behalf of the clients they support. Three participants were interviewed, each in a video-recorded session between 30 and 60 minutes in length. Participants' roles spanned community outreach and direct family case management serving at-risk students, low-income families, and under-resourced communities in central Florida. All participants provided informed consent for recording and use of anonymized quotes in project

documentation; identifying details have been removed. Interview questions covered various areas: current resource-search workflows and tools, challenges with information accuracy and currency, experience using the Florida Resource Map, and attitudes toward AI-assisted search features. The layout of interviews therefore followed this structure:

1. **Opening and context** about the interviewees' role, which clients they serve, prior knowledge of resource directories and FCI, and how they currently search for resources
2. **Current challenges and the question of accuracy,** including their difficulties finding accurate, current, and verified information and their past experience with the consequences of missing/outdated information
3. **Emergency and real-time needs**, including what factors slow them down in urgent situations and which information matters most when identifying resources
4. **Findability, corrections, and transparency,** including how they might want to flag bad/incorrect information, whether "last updated" or verification dashboards might help, and their preferences for standardization and filtering of listings
5. **AI expectations and trust,** including reactions to and preferences on real-time auto-updates and data-source transparency

This study is therefore based on analysis and qualitative insights gathered from participant feedback through interviews. Responses were analyzed and grouped into categories using affinity mapping. These themes reflect patterns in user frustrations, needs, and expectations, and these themes were subsequently translated into a set of conceptual wireframes presented later in this report.

Insights & Evidence

From analysis of the interviews, five themes emerged: physical access to services; language, categorization, and searchability; the time cost of finding resources; trust that a listing is real and current; and whether to hand any of this to AI.

Geographic & Accessibility Barriers

Users consistently described facing significant transportation barriers. Essential services could be located far away, sometimes requiring commutes over 45 minutes. At the same time, the process of identifying nearby options felt unreliable. Search engines frequently return results outside of specified distance ranges, making it difficult for users to trust and effectively use them. Even when relevant resources existed, accessing them at times required that interviewees navigate the logistics including arranging transportation, traveling beyond a reasonable radius, or coordinating appointments. These challenges limited access, especially for individuals with limited mobility, time, or financial resources.

> "I put in biking distance up to 3 miles, and I'm still getting more than 30 results—some of them are literally **25 miles away** from me."

> "There is a full **gap in transportation** to medical doctors' appointments ... the student needs to be seen by an orthopedic doctor 45 minutes away."

Information Relevance & Uncertainty

Users also reported significant challenges with irrelevant, excessive, and unclear information when searching for resources. Many times, they reported, they were directed to services that initially appeared helpful but did not actually meet their needs, leading to frustration and a sense of wasted effort. Organizations, users said, often provided too much background information, such as mission statements or organizational details, instead of focusing on the practical support users sought. Users also reported that resources were frequently misrepresented or loosely categorized, for example categorizing organizations with supplementary, sometimes-provided services which are mentioned in an organization's information but which are not a core or constant offering, making it difficult for users to determine what was truly available at a given time. This lack of clarity was further compounded by overwhelming or vague descriptions, which at times discouraged users from engaging with the resource altogether.

> "They're putting on their whole story and who their board is ... when you're in the **day-to-day function of case management**, you don't care who's on their board. You want to get … food."

> "If one is **too much information**, I'm not even gonna entertain it. If I'm looking for tutoring and it's using the word tutoring, then I'm like, okay, great—but maybe the other place was talking about mentorship and art, and then we get into tutoring."

> "With [Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program] people call for electricity assistance, but sometimes there's **no funding or no answer**. They're given numbers or websites, but no real help."

Time Cost of Finding Resources

Users further experienced significant time burdens when searching for and accessing resources. It was reported that the process often required several hours to locate even a single relevant service, making it inefficient and exhausting. Users also encountered frustration over long wait times and reliance on automated systems, which can be difficult to navigate without guidance. Service providers, users flagged, also face challenges, as coordinating resources requires repeated outreach and manual verification, further slowing the process. These delays are not just inconvenient but can have serious real-world consequences, especially when urgent needs are involved, such as access to food or essential care. Overall, the time cost associated with finding and securing resources established barriers that prevented users from securing timely support, highlighting the need for more efficient, streamlined systems.

> "I am patient and willing to wait, but residents often become frustrated. Many systems rely on automated menus, long hold times, or unanswered calls. Residents already feel **stressed due to limited resources**, so having someone walk through the process with them is important. Providing guidance and reassurance helps prevent them from feeling abandoned by automated systems."

> "It's really hard to **wait those five days** knowing that there's, you know, 3-year-old kids not having dinner."

> "I'm spending three to **four hours trying to find one resource** for this family, versus just being able to upload and say, 'This is what I'm looking for.'"

Technology & Trust

Users see strong potential for technology to improve access to resources, particularly through features like virtual appointments that can reduce barriers and create a more seamless experience. However, technology alone is not sufficient, as many users still require human support to navigate complex procedures, especially when they are already under stress. A major challenge lies in the accuracy and reliability of information, as outdated processes can lead to incorrect referrals, which in turn erode trust and credibility. Additionally, structural issues such as competition between organizations can limit collaboration and reduce the effectiveness of resource sharing. Participants also emphasized the importance of maintaining updated resources through consistent data input, such as completing surveys, to ensure information remains accurate. At the same time, there are important concerns around privacy and security, particularly for vulnerable populations who may be hesitant to share personal information. Overall, while technology presents opportunities to improve efficiency and accessibility, it must be paired with accurate data, collaboration, human support, and strong trust-building measures to be truly effective.

> "Having some sort of technology interface to have appointments virtually would **eliminate so many problems** for low-income families; it could actually have faster care and **be more dignified**."

> "What can happen is we make a referral, it's an inaccurate referral because that nonprofit is no longer either in business or offering the type of services that you're offering, and so then it **hurts our credibility**."

> "Unfortunately, people feel as if you're in competition with each other because there's only so many donors ... sometimes nonprofits **aren't wanting to really provide resources** unless that person's like a candidate."

> "We don't want to try to be all things to all people from a nonprofit perspective ... **the map will help us identify other resources** we can be referring our community partners to."

AI Efficiency

Users broadly recognized the strong potential of AI to improve efficiency, particularly in its ability to quickly gather, process, and present large amounts of information. This capability can help save time and make it easier to navigate complex resource networks. However, for AI to be effective, it was cautioned, it must be designed with simplicity in mind, using clear and structured interactions such as yes or no questions or checkbox-based inputs that reduce cognitive load. At the same time, users said, the way AI communicated information played a critical role in user trust and usability. Even when the information provided is accurate, unclear or awkward wording can make the system feel unreliable or difficult to engage with.

> "AI is a **huge unlocker of buying back time** ... you can assemble a much wider net of information more quickly and more easily digest a whole lot of information rapidly."

> "I would say **checkboxes** [would be more helpful than open-ended natural language], making sure that [less-technology-comfortable users] understand that it's either yes or no."

> "It's not the lack of knowledge [that the AI]'s giving me. It's the **wording** of how it's giving it to me that kind of sometimes flags it... it's almost more comical than a flag."

Recommendations

Participants' feedback suggests that improving searchability requires a shift toward more intelligent and user-centered technology rather than relying on traditional keyword matching. A key opportunity lies in implementing synonym-aware search, where different terms for the same service are automatically recognized and grouped, allowing users to find relevant resources without needing to guess specific terminology. Additionally, introducing a structured tagging capability with both primary and secondary categories can improve clarity and prevent users from being directed to irrelevant results. A guided search experience, where users respond to simple prompts instead of entering open-ended queries, can further reduce confusion and cognitive load. Incorporating multilingual support ensures that diverse communities can effectively navigate resources, while relevance-based ranking can prioritize results that are nearby, available, and closely aligned with user needs.

> "What someone might call tutoring, someone else might say academic support ... **keyword flagging** some conversations so that it is findable [would be useful], because that is probably the most frustrating part of people's websites."

> "Maybe there's a primary tag and then there's like secondary tags that are utilized ... so the tagging doesn't lead me down a **path of wasting time**."

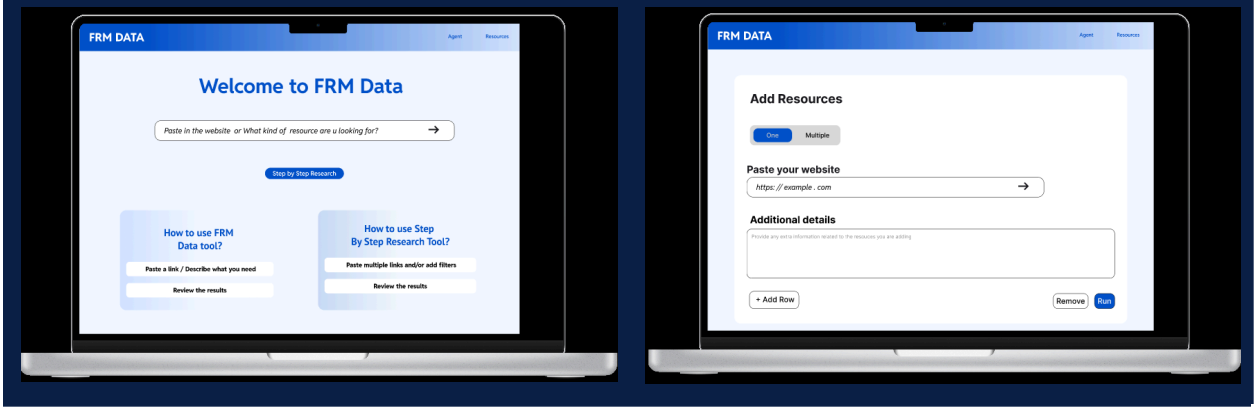
> "I definitely think you might think about **more language options** ... we have a pretty big Haitian community; there's a pretty big Brazilian community."

Wireframes

Following these insights and recommendations, the Mintify team translated key user needs into a set of design solutions aimed at improving searchability, clarity, and efficiency when accessing resources. The wireframes below represent a conceptual tool that incorporates guided search, structured information display, and workflows to reduce time, confusion, and effort.

Each screen is designed to address user pain points identified in the research, such as difficulty finding relevant resources, navigating complexities, and understanding key service information—and these wireframes can be accessed at this link.

FIGURE 1. Wireframe captures: flexible search experience



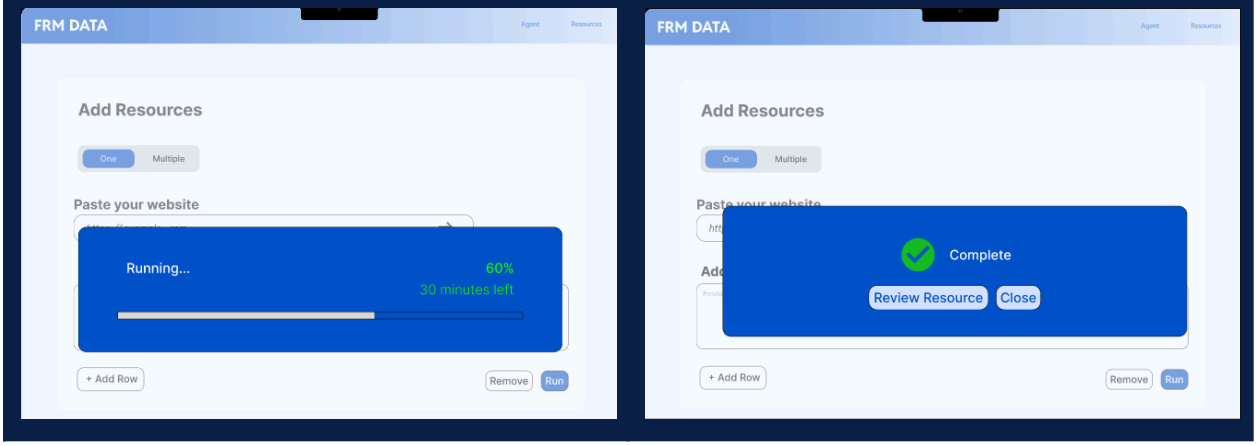
These screens introduce a flexible search experience that supports both open input and guided interaction. The homepage allows users to describe their needs in natural language, reducing the challenge of using specific or unfamiliar terminology. The “Step by Step Research” option provides a guided approach, helping users who may feel overwhelmed or unsure how to begin.

The “Add Resources” screen complements this by enabling structured data input, ensuring that resources are consistently organized and searchable. By standardizing how information is entered, the technology improves the accuracy and relevance of search results. The “Additional details” section allows users to include variations in terminology and context, addressing differences in how services are described and improving overall discoverability.

To that end, the screens in Figure 2 below provide clear feedback that helps reduce user frustration and uncertainty during longer processes. The progress indicator gives users

a sense of how much time the task will take, which helps manage expectations and reduces anxiety associated with waiting. By making the process visible, users feel more in control and are less likely to abandon the task.

FIGURE 2. Wireframee captures: frustration-reducing feedback



The completion screen clearly communicates that the process has finished and provides direct next steps, such as reviewing the resource or closing the action. This removes ambiguity about what to do next and supports a smooth transition in the user journey. Both screens are intentionally simplified, avoiding unnecessary information, which helps reduce cognitive load and prevents users from feeling overwhelmed.

FIGURE 3. Wireframes capture: display of essentials

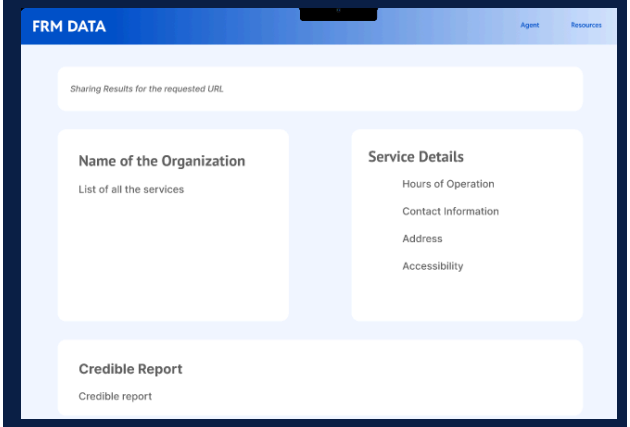


Figure 3's screen prioritizes the display of essential information needed for users to make informed decisions. Key details such as hours of operation, contact information, location, and accessibility are clearly organized under the "Service Details" section, allowing users to quickly assess whether a resource meets their needs. The layout is intentionally structured and minimal, separating information into clear categories such as organization name, services offered, and credibility for ease of use and understanding.

Conclusion

Overall, the interview findings highlight that users face significant barriers when navigating community resources, particularly due to unclear information, irrelevant search results, and the time-intensive nature of finding support. These challenges are not simply usability issues, but real obstacles that delay access to essential services and create frustration for users.

In response, the proposed design directly translates these insights into actionable solutions. Features such as guided search reduce the difficulty of knowing what to type, while synonym-aware input and structured tagging address inconsistencies in language and categorization identified by participants. The use of progress indicators and simplified workflows helps alleviate the time burden and uncertainty users described, while the structured presentation of key service details ensures that users can quickly evaluate whether a resource meets their needs.

By aligning design decisions with real user experiences, this design demonstrates how AI can improve efficiency without increasing complexity. Rather than overwhelming users with more information, the design prioritizes clarity, relevance, and accessibility, ultimately supporting faster, more confident decision-making. This approach shows how thoughtful, user-centered design can transform fragmented and frustrating resource systems into more intuitive and equitable tools for diverse communities.