

# HOMELESS HELP CARD

## HEURISTIC EVALUATION REPORT



### WEBSITE

[www.hhcard.org](http://www.hhcard.org)

### EVALUATORS

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## PRODUCT

This report documents a heuristic evaluation of Homeless Help Card, an organization that helps you save money at local businesses by providing coupons through its website and mobile application, while also funding charities within various communities. This evaluation was solely focused on the website application.

## GOALS

This evaluation was part of a project done by the University of Georgia chapter of the Enactus organization, an international organization that connects student leaders through entrepreneurial-based projects. The goals of this heuristic evaluation were to assess the usability of the Homeless Help Card website in hopes of identifying flaws in the end-to-end user experience.

## TARGET POPULATION & PERSONAS

The target population of this application includes varied consumers interested in local restaurant, fitness, health, and beauty deals. Using this information gathered from existing demographic data, we created personas in order to avoid bias throughout the evaluation.



## METHODS

For this evaluation we utilized a predefined set of usability heuristics provided by Jakob Nielsen. We compared these principles to the web application by navigating through the site and assuming tasks defined by our personas. Below is a list of the ten heuristics:

1. Provide Appropriate Feedback
2. Use Simple and Common Language
3. Provide Clear Exits
4. Be Consistent
5. Provide Good Error Prevention
6. Minimize User Thinking & Recall
7. Use Aesthetic and Minimalist Design
8. Ensure Flexibility and Efficiency of Use
9. Help Users Recover From Errors
10. Provide Help Documentation

## FINDINGS

In this report, after identifying the issues, we summarized and prioritized them based on their severities. Of the eleven usability problems found, below are **six** issues that ranked with the highest severities:

1. Lack of information or guides on homepage.
2. Users are able to submit forms by inputting erroneous data.
3. Incomplete statements and thoughts in the sentences throughout the site.
4. Nonuniform and misleading links.
5. There are buttons that a user may not know are clickable.
6. Inconsistent hierarchy of font sizes and weight.

# INTRODUCTION

This report describes the methodology and findings of the analysis performed on the Homeless Help Card website application. It begins by describing the platform and its target population, and continues with an overview of the specific methods used, their goals, as well as a list of heuristics and rankings used. Next, we summarize the major issues identified in the heuristic evaluation and dive into the findings by discussing their severities, impacts on user experience, as well as our recommendations. This report then concludes by providing a summary of the evaluation, presenting a mockup design, as well as listing the resources used throughout this document.

## PRODUCT INFORMATION

### DESCRIPTION

Homeless Help Card is a non-profit organization that helps you save money at local businesses, while funding charities in the community. Their mission is to help local organizations fight unique problems in their area such drug and alcohol addiction, lack of access to medical coverage, sex trafficking, as well as homelessness and poverty. By using their mobile application or website, the earnings from the in-app advertisements fund local charities and well as company operations and expansion into new areas. Homeless Help Card prides themselves on the amount of simplicity involved in using the application to make a community wide difference.

### TARGET POPULATION & PERSONAS



The organization was founded in Athens, Georgia, where it first targeted the city's large population of college students. As it expanded to several counties in Georgia, its target population also expanded and is now composed of varied consumers interested in local restaurant, fitness, health, and beauty deals. Using existing demographic data of these counties, we created the following personas:

Persona	Characteristics	User Motivations
Adam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 19</li><li>• Male; Single</li><li>• Current college sophomore</li><li>• Vegetarian; Interested in music, art, and theater.</li><li>• Volunteers at local homeless shelters.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Looking for coupons at local vegetarian restaurants.</li><li>• Motivated by the desire to eat a healthy diet.</li></ul>
Gina	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 35</li><li>• Female; Divorced</li><li>• Licensed cosmetologist; College graduate</li><li>• Works at a local salon; Interested in fitness, health, and beauty.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Searching for coupons at local fitness centers.</li><li>• Motivated by the desire to join a gym within the month.</li></ul>
Mariam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 65</li><li>• Female; Married with children and grandkids.</li><li>• Retired; Avid collector of antique books.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Looking to donate books to local charities.</li><li>• Motivated by the desire to give back.</li></ul>

# METHODOLOGY

## OVERVIEW OF TECHNIQUE/GOALS

As a team, we chose to utilize Nielsen’s ten usability heuristics to evaluate the Homeless Help Card website. This method, also referred to as a “discount” usability technique (Nielsen, 1993, p. 160), allowed us to identify usability problems during a walkthrough of the application. Our primary goal was to identify and address issues that prevented a seamless experience on the web application.



## PROCESS OF EVALUATION

Using Nielsen’s ten heuristics (*Table 1*), as well as the motivations of the defined personas, we recorded usability issues and classified them based on the heuristics they violated, then rated them in terms of their severity. The rating system used for this method is shown in *Table 2*. Following the walkthrough, we discussed our findings, prioritized and grouped the usability issues together, as well as summarized our recommendations.

## HEURISTICS USED

Below is a summary of Jakob Nielsen’s ten usability heuristics (*How to conduct a heuristic evaluation*). These rules of thumb, tailored towards web interface evaluations, were taken into consideration as we analyzed the Homeless Help Card web application.

Number	Summary of Heuristic
1	Provide Appropriate Feedback
2	Use Simple & Common Language
3	Provide Clear Exits
4	Be Consistent
5	Provide Good Error Prevention
6	Minimize User Thinking & Recall
7	Use Aesthetic & Minimalist Design
8	Ensure Flexibility & Efficiency of Use
9	Help Users Recover From Errors
10	Provide Help Documentation

*Table 1*

## SEVERITY RANKINGS

In order to fully understand the impact of each usability problem, we used Nielsen's severity rankings when evaluating the web application. The table below shows the definitions of each severity. These severity ranks are based on those defined by Jakob Nielsen (*Severity ratings for usability problems*).

List of Severity Rankings	
Rating	Definition
0	I don't agree that this is a usability problem at all
1	Cosmetic problem only: need not be fixed unless extra time is available on project
2	Minor usability problem: fixing this should be given low priority
3	Major usability problem: important to fix, so should be given high priority
4	Usability catastrophe: imperative to fix this before product can be released

*Table 2*

# FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

## OVERVIEW

After walking through the Homeless Help Card website, we identified eleven usability issues that violated the ten heuristics mentioned earlier in this report. In the table below, these problems have been summarized and prioritized based on their severities. While there were eleven issues identified, the **six** most severe will be discussed in more detail.

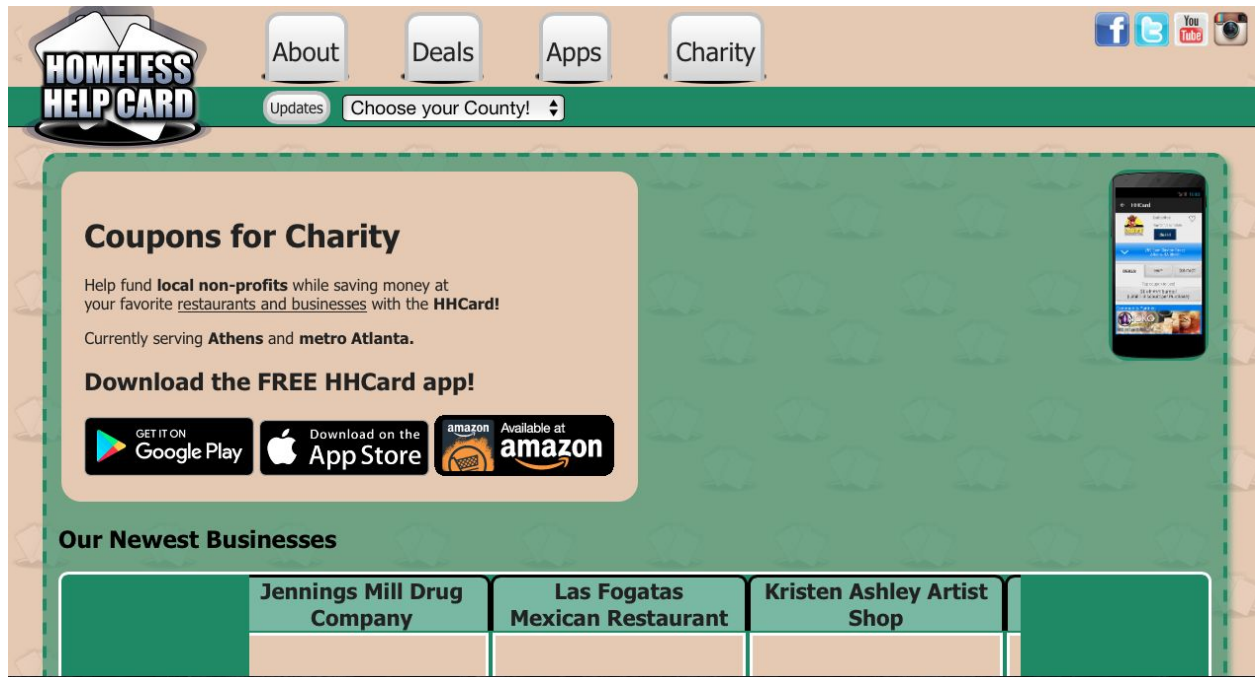
#	Issue	Severity Ranking	Heuristic(s) Violated	Summary of Heuristic
1	Lack of information or guides on homepage.	3	#6 #10	Minimize User Thinking & Recall Provide Help Documentation
2	Users are able to submit forms by inputting erroneous data.	3	#5 #9	Provide Good Error Prevention Help Users Recover From Errors
3	Incomplete statements and thoughts in sentences throughout the site.	2	#2	Use Simple & Common Language
4	Nonuniform and misleading links.	2	#4 #6	Be Consistent Minimize User Thinking & Recall
5	There are buttons that a user may not know are clickable.	2	#4 #6 #7	Be Consistent Minimize User Thinking & Recall Use Aesthetic & Minimalist Design
6	Inconsistent hierarchy of font sizes and weight.	2	#4 #7	Be Consistent Use Aesthetic & Minimalist Design
7	Duplicate site versions do not share the same look and feel.	1	#4 #7	Be Consistent Use Aesthetic & Minimalist Design
8	Inconsistent helper text for choosing a location.	1	#4 #6	Be Consistent Minimize User Thinking & Recall
9	Unclear navigation titles.	1	#2	Use Simple & Common Language
10	There is no indication of the current page status.	1	#1	Provide Appropriate Feedback
11	Lack of header congruency.	1	#4 #6	Be Consistent Minimize User Thinking & Recall

## DETAILED ISSUES

### 1. Lack of information on home page to guide you through the expected user flow.

1	Lack of information or guides on homepage.	3	#6 #10	Minimize User Thinking & Recall Provide Help Documentation
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**Problem:** The first entry-point into the website was the homepage. Due to a lack of information or guides on this page, we were unsure of its objective and could not make sense of the information we saw. The section “Coupons For Charity” provides no clarity of the actions available to us on this website. We were forced to play around with links, scrolling until we identified something that fulfilled our desires. This page failed to inform us of the main goals of the website, forcing us to think about our next steps (#6). We ranked this issue as a major problem because it has the potential to prevent new users from further exploring the site. Below is evidence of this issue:



**Recommendation:** While this was marked as a major issue, it would only require a somewhat simple fix. Creating a “how it works” section or even a short description of the objectives would be extremely valuable on the homepage and would give users a better understanding of the process involved with using the website. (#10)

## 2. Users are able to submit forms by inputting erroneous data.

2	Users are able to submit forms by inputting any type of erroneous data.	3	#5 #9	Provide Good Error Prevention Help Users Recover From Errors
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**Problem:** An issue we identified was the fact that the only two forms (contact, notifications) on the website did not include input validation. Therefore, we were able to submit the form using incomplete data. We rated this as a major issue because users are able to enter incorrect personal information (#5). This lack of validation can also lead to unwanted hackers, as well as spam submissions. Below is evidence of this issue:

The image shows two screenshots of a web form. The top screenshot is titled 'Contact Us' and contains the following text: 'Got questions, comments, or ways for us to improve? We'd love to hear from you! Fill out the form below, and we'll contact you as soon as we're able. Thanks!'. Below this text are three input fields: 'Your Name' with the value 'test', 'Your Email' with the value 'test', and 'Your Comments' with the value 'test'. A 'Send!' button is located at the bottom left of the form. The bottom screenshot shows a confirmation message: 'Thank you!' followed by 'We received your email! We'll respond as soon as we can!'.

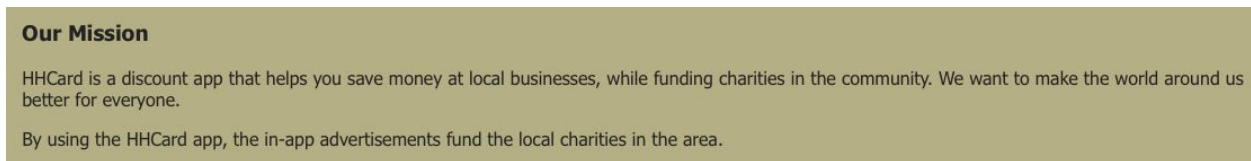
**Recommendation:** We recommend employing PHP form validation in order to sanitize and validate the form data. (#9)



### 3. Incomplete statements and thoughts in sentences throughout the site.

3	Incomplete statements and sporadic sentences throughout the site.	2	#2	Use Simple & Common Language
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**Problem:** During the walkthrough, we noticed that the verbiage on some pages included incomplete thoughts. While it is good practice to limit word count when not needed, it is equally as important to provide clarity through simple language (#2). On the first page shown below, the mission statement contains awkward semantics and switches frequently from first and third person. The sentences do not flow together, nor do they provide a strong clarity of the mission. On the second page, the “Coupons for Charity” heading provides little clarity of the text under it. For example: Is the HHCARD the same as a coupon? Are all the non-profits charities? Because we only found 2 instances of this issue, we rated this as a minor usability issue. Below is evidence of this issue:

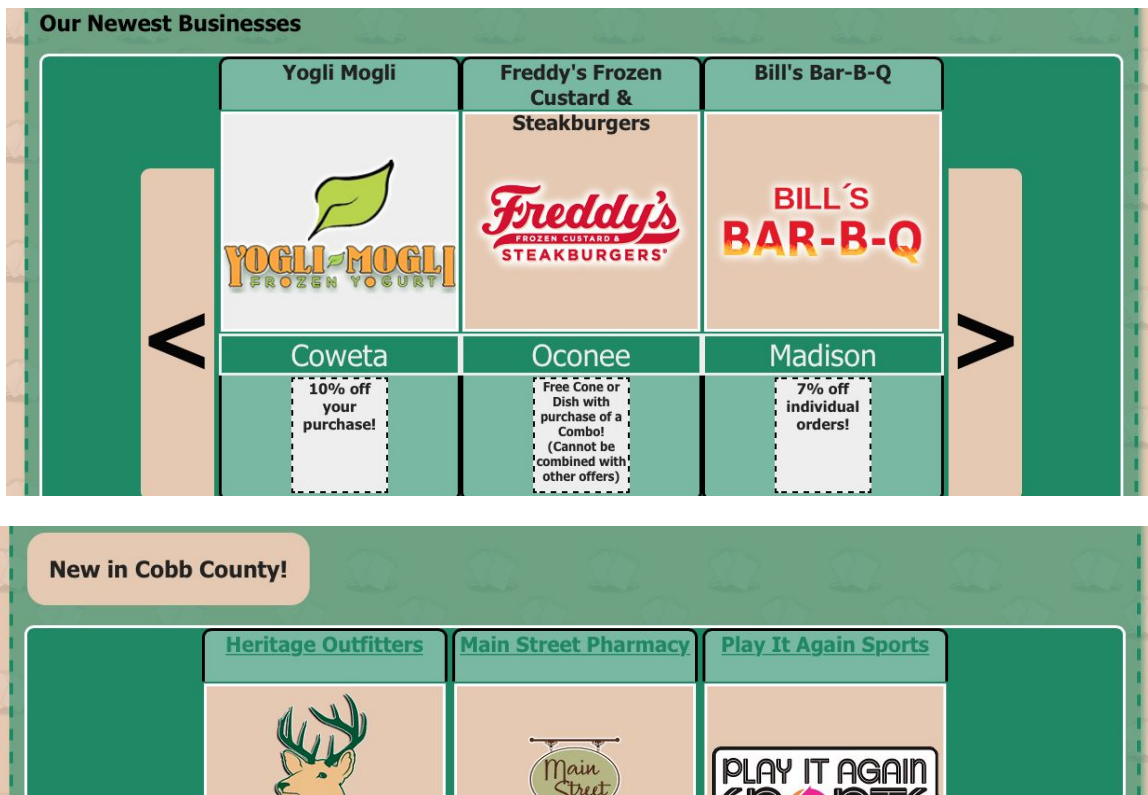


**Recommendations:** We suggest rephrasing these sentences in order to follow standard semantics. The effects that clear and simple language possess are extremely invaluable, especially on vital pages such as the homepage.

#### 4. Nonuniform and misleading links.

4	Nonuniform and misleading links.	2	#4 #6	Be Consistent Minimize User Thinking & Recall
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**Problem:** Another issue we discovered was the presence of nonuniform and misleading links throughout the site. On the homepage, there is a slideshow of “newest businesses” that is organized by county. The items in the slideshow consist of the name of the business, as well as a description of the current deal. While we expected to be directed to the deal after clicking on the coupon, we instead landed on a general page of coupons for that county. Due to this, we were forced to recall the name of the business in order to find the desired coupon (#6). We also noticed that there was no consistency in the appearance of links on a given page (#4). For example, in the second figure below, both “new in cobb county” and “heritage outfitters” are links. We grouped these issues together and rated them as a minor because they do not affect the functionality of the links. Below is the evidence of these issues:



**Recommendation:** Links are the ways that users navigate through a website. It is good practice to ensure that these entry points are clear, consistent, and easy to find. We recommend refraining from underlining select links, while leaving others with no text decoration. Having inconsistent link styles can cause users to be unaware of possible routes through the site. We also recommend preventing misleading links such as in the coupons under “newest businesses”. One approach to this issue could be to use the anchor link feature in HTML to guide the user to the desired coupon.

**5. There are buttons that a user may not know are clickable.**

5	There are buttons that a user may not know are clickable.	2	#4 #6 #7	Be Consistent Minimize User Thinking & Recall Use Aesthetic & Minimalist Design
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**Problem:** We found two buttons that we later discovered were links after the walkthrough. These buttons were the “Updates” button on the navigation bar, and the county headings on the deals page. Due to the lack of consistency in button appearance, these links were overlooked by each evaluator. We rated this as a minor issue because of the small number of links it affected. Below is evidence of this issue:

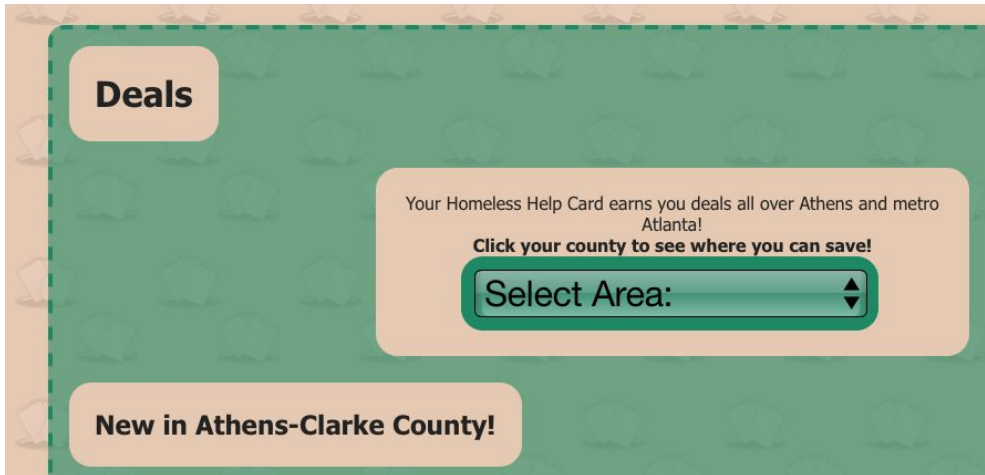


**Recommendation:** The principles of minimalist and consistent design are to ensure minimal user recall and thinking (#4,#6,#7). In this design, we recommend employing a consistent UI pattern throughout the website. When considering these patterns, it is important to pay attention to: color, style, borders, fonts, sizes, and effects.

## 6. Inconsistent hierarchy of font sizes and weight.

6	Inconsistent hierarchy of font sizes and weight.	2	#4 #7	Be Consistent Use Aesthetic & Minimalist Design
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**Problem:** Throughout the website, there are no patterns of font sizes or weights. This is true on all pages, as well on forms, links, and the navigation. This violates the heuristics of consistency and minimalistic design. Because of this issue, it was hard to distinguish main ideas from secondary ones. By consciously choosing which texts to bold and which to make larger, the application can help lead users to desired paths, as well as lessen the amount of eye movements required to take an action. We rated this issue as a minor usability issue because we were still able to carry out desired tasks. Below is evidence of this issue:



**Recommendation:** In the examples above, there is no consistency in the heading sizes, as well as the classification of bold text. As a general rule for good typography, we recommend maintaining a comfortable font size in order to improve the reading experience. While bolding text is a beneficial method to grab the user's attention, it is important to use the technique wisely to ensure consistency in the design.

# SUMMARY

All in all, while the Homeless Help Card is fairly easy to use, a detailed heuristic evaluation based on Nielsen’s usability principles revealed a number of usability problems. Using the personas we created, we were able to identify these issues, group them into eleven problem areas, and rank them according to their severity. The majority of these problems revolved around the heuristics of consistency and minimizing user recall. It is important to note that since we only used three personas from the target population, it is possible that we omitted some usability issues. Also, since we only performed tasks based on the motivations of the personas, it is likely that there were other issues that were not assessed.

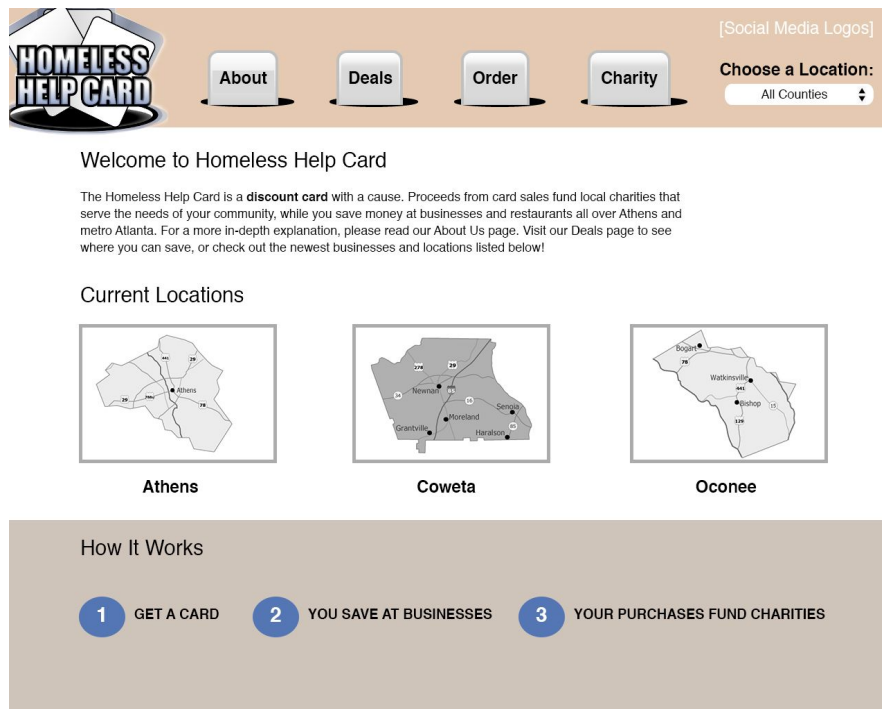
Below are the **six** most severe issues that were addressed in more detail in this report:

1. Lack of information or guides on homepage.
2. Users are able to submit forms by inputting erroneous data.
3. Incomplete statements and thoughts in the sentences throughout the site.
4. Nonuniform and misleading links.
5. There are buttons that a user may not know are clickable.
6. Inconsistent hierarchy of font sizes and weight.

The Homeless Help Card organization can investigate these usability issues in more depth to guide the redesign of the website application.

## MOCKUP DESIGN

In addition to providing information and examples of the issues, as well as recommendations, we also designed a mockup of a redesigned homepage. This mockup demonstrates possible solutions for select issues listed above. In the design, there is a “How it works” section that guides users through the expected happy path (#1). There is also a clear hierarchy of font sizes and weight (#6). Lastly, we removed any buttons that were inconsistent with the overall UI patterns (#5).



## RESOURCES

Nielsen, J. (1993). "Usability Heuristics." In *Usability Engineering*. San Diego, CA: Academic Press.

Nielsen, J. (n.d.). *How to Conduct a Heuristic Evaluation*.  
[http://www.useit.com/papers/heuristic/heuristic\\_evaluation.html](http://www.useit.com/papers/heuristic/heuristic_evaluation.html)

Nielsen, J. (n.d.). *Severity Rankings for Usability Problems*.  
<http://www.useit.com/papers/heuristic/severityrating.html>