Knots & Flows: An Engagement Design Meet-Up

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Abstract

This meet-up invites researchers and practitioners to collaboratively surface challenges, strategies, and perspectives on designing for engagement. Engagement is a central yet fragmented concept, with approaches and insights often emerging in silos across HCI subfields. Our goal is to foster networking and cross-pollination among HCI domains, establishing continuous dialogue on engagement practices beyond CHI 2026. Participant will explore differences and commonalities while co-creating a network of ideas to address shared challenges. Attendees will leave with a broadened perspective on engagement design, practical insights of community members, and new connections across fields.

CCS Concepts

• **Human-centered computing** → **HCI theory, concepts and models**; **Interaction design**.

Keywords

Engagement, Design Strategies, User Experience

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1 Introduction

Engagement is a cornerstone theme within Human-Computer Interaction. Across domains, researchers and practitioners design technologies that seek not only to function, but to *engage*: to capture and sustain attention, motivate action, and support meaningful experiences [4, 8]. In digital health, engagement is tied to adherence, long-term behavior change, and ultimately improved health outcomes [9]. In education, it shapes learning trajectories and student success [5]. In games and entertainment, engagement is linked to immersion, flow, and enjoyment [3]. Engagement is thus both an essential outcome and a design goal across many HCI subfields.

Despite its centrality, engagement remains a contested and ambiguous concept. A systematic review identified one hundred and two definitions, ranging from cognitive and emotional framings to behavioral and social ones [4]. Some view engagement as a state of attention, others as a process that unfolds over time [1], and still others as a trait of users or systems [2]. While this diversity of perspectives offers a rich set of theories and methods, it may also create silos, with insights remaining bound within HCI subfields. Yet, these differences offer valuable lessons. For example, games research often surfaces tensions between flow and ethical nudging [10], insights that could guide engagement design in health or civic technologies. Education research shows how novelty can be leveraged to spark interest [6], insights that might inspire different onboarding strategies when designing health technologies. These examples illustrate opportunities for cross-pollination: where lessons could be exchanged across CHI's diverse domains. Without dialogue, we risk missing opportunities to learn from each other, to

see patterns and surface common challenges regarding engagement design.

This meet-up addresses calls for cross-disciplinary dialogue [4, 7] by embracing diversity in engagement design practices. We propose an Engagement Design Jam: an interactive format that brings together the HCI engagement design community to exchange knowledge and co-create a tangible map of design strategies and tensions. Rather than converging on a single definition, we highlight plurality and spark new conversations across disciplinary boundaries. By doing so, we will contribute to the field of Human-Computer Interaction in the following ways:

- **Make plurality of design practices for engagement within HCI community visible.** We will do so by creating a space where differences can be shared and reflected upon. Artifacts generated during the meet-up will be collected and with participants' consent synthesized into a shared resource (e.g., summary booklet) that will be distributed to the community.
- **Foster cross-disciplinary networking at CHI.** Participants of this meet-up will leave with a broadened understanding of engagement design, practical insights of community members, and new connections.

2 Meet-up format

The meet-up will be organized into two segments: **exploration** and **ideation**. In the first segment, we will use a prompt exercise to produce a shared overview of engagement practices and challenges across domains. In the second activity, the room will be transformed into a living network of ideas: using tangible materials (e.g., strings and cards), participants will connect challenges and solutions, making collective progress visible.

Exploration: surface engagement practices (30min): The session begins with participants responding to prompts such as, "*What strategies do you use to design for engagement?*" and "*What challenges or tensions do you face when designing for engagement?*". Responses are written on Post-Its and added to the corresponding prompt area. In the second step, participants collaboratively cluster these responses into themes.

Ideation: weaving connections (40min): Clustered themes will be distributed throughout the room; if the number of participants is high, they will instead be arranged along the walls. Attendees will move through the room and engage with themes that resonate with them. For each challenge, participants will brainstorm and write ideas, questions, or tensions on cards and clip them to strings. The strings will be attached to the corresponding challenges. As more ideas are contributed, the network will expand, revealing connections and overlaps. When an idea relates to multiple challenges, participants can stretch the s across the space, weaving an interconnected web that transforms the area into a dynamic visualization of collaborative progress.

Both segments function as continuously ongoing activities, enabling participation at different levels of involvement. While attendees joining from the start will move to the ideation segment after 30 minutes, people joining later can contribute with new practices and themes and join group discussions at any point. The organizing team will act as facilitators, distributing materials, time-keeping, guiding transitions and interactions, and ensuring the room remains accessible and easy to navigate.

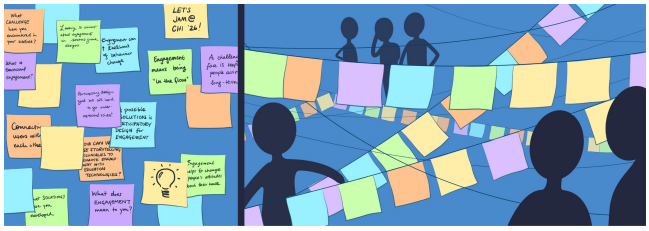

Figure 1: Illustration of the Engagement Design Meet-up format: Exploration and Ideation.

3 Expected Communities and Appeal

Our design jam complements the main CHI program by providing a *cross-domain, participant-led* space to share concrete *design strategies and tensions*. Because engagement is a timely and contested theme in HCI, critical to domains including (but not limited to) health, learning, games, visualization, and civic technologies, it is positioned to attract a wide and diverse audience. We expect the jam to appeal to people with a range of goals, including researchers and practitioners seeking to compare strategies and identify transferable cross-domain practices, to method-oriented participants who wish to surface insights that can inform future systems, and to students and early-career researchers looking for a low-barrier entry point into engagement design. By bringing together these overlapping groups, the jam fosters conversations and connections that would not typically emerge through paper sessions or panels. Attendees will leave with exposure to strategies beyond their own area, a map that externalizes challenges and solutions, and an opt-in contact list for follow-up exchange.

4 Organizer Bio

We are a collective of researchers with diverse research focuses (including health, education, and visualization), countries, and institutions, spanning multiple career stages. We bring experience in workshop organization and collaborative methods, enabling us to organize an event that fosters exchange, reflection, and learning within the HCI community.

Despite disciplinary and professional differences, we share a common interest: designing for meaningful engagement in different contexts. Our work spans health and care technologies, as well as daily life engagement with digital health and wellbeing interventions. We also design tools for understanding complex phenomena and develop theory to understand data processes to enhance audience engagement. We are interested in designing gamified and inclusive technologies for sensitive social issues, and development of intelligent and collaborative tools at the intersection of human and AI to advance social good. Finally, we develop tools that empower individuals to use personal data for personal and social objectives.

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