Sprints and Superheroes: How Agile Has Transformed the Way We Work
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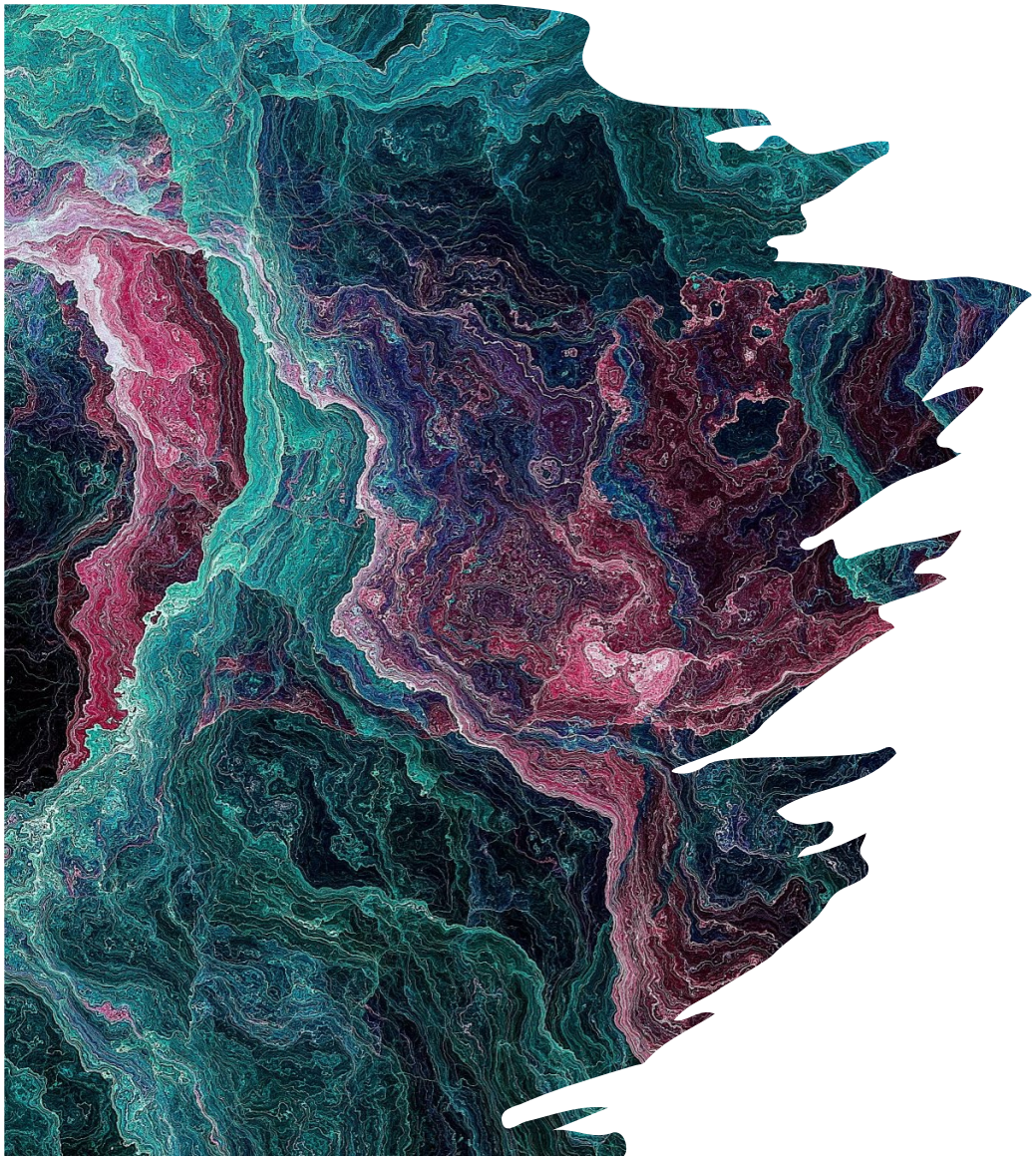
Manager Web Services



Who We Are: Web Services

- Who we are:
  - Enterprise Web Services Department within ITS
  - 6 Developers, 3 Client/Communications experts, 2 co-ops, one contractor, Me
- What we manage:
  - 650 WordPress websites in two main WordPress templates (CMS and Framework)
  - 12 custom websites (homepage, events calendar, intranet, AND MORE!)
  - 7 websites in our new WordPress pilot theme (cuTheme v1.0)
  - Client support, ITS Communications, e-commerce, accessibility training, website training and workshops
  - New projects (Design System, React apps, cuTheme v2.0)

What We Do: Two Types of Work

Client Requests

Come in from clients through ITS Service Desk

Jira Tickets created, dashboard to view tickets

Handled by client team, assigned to Super Hero

On average 100 requests a month

Project Work

Team manages user stories and tasks

Lead for each project

Managed in Jira sprint boards

On average 70 tasks in each 3 week sprint

Some questions we had…

- How can we break down big projects into smaller deliverables?
- How can we do a better job of knowledge transfer on projects?
- How do we balance client support tickets and project work?
- How do we make sure that blockers are worked through quickly?
- How do we better manage client requests/changes/deadlines?
- How do we increase collaboration amongst the team?
- How do we make sure we are prioritizing the important things?
- How can we make sure we are continuously improving?
- How can we make sure we are delivering quality products that have undergone QA and testing?
- How do we do more with limited resources?
- How do we created an engaged, enthusiastic workplace where people feel heard, valued and appreciated?

We Needed a Plan

- Three key areas: Products and Services, Client Support, The Way We Work
- I wrote key objectives within each of these areas eg: establishing positive relationships with stakeholders, leaders in digital accessibility, work in an updated and modern environment, foster environment of continuous improvement, work in a healthy environment
- Held a workshop with the team and each person came up with initiatives to pursue within each of these objectives – so many brilliant ideas came out of this
- I prioritized the initiatives, wrote goals, and established deliverables

How do we roll out the plan? AGILE!

It is a framework used predominantly in IT software delivery

It is a way of working that clarifies what needs to get done

It involves (and engages) the whole team

It focuses on output

It is a structure and it is a mindset.

The Delivery: Scrum

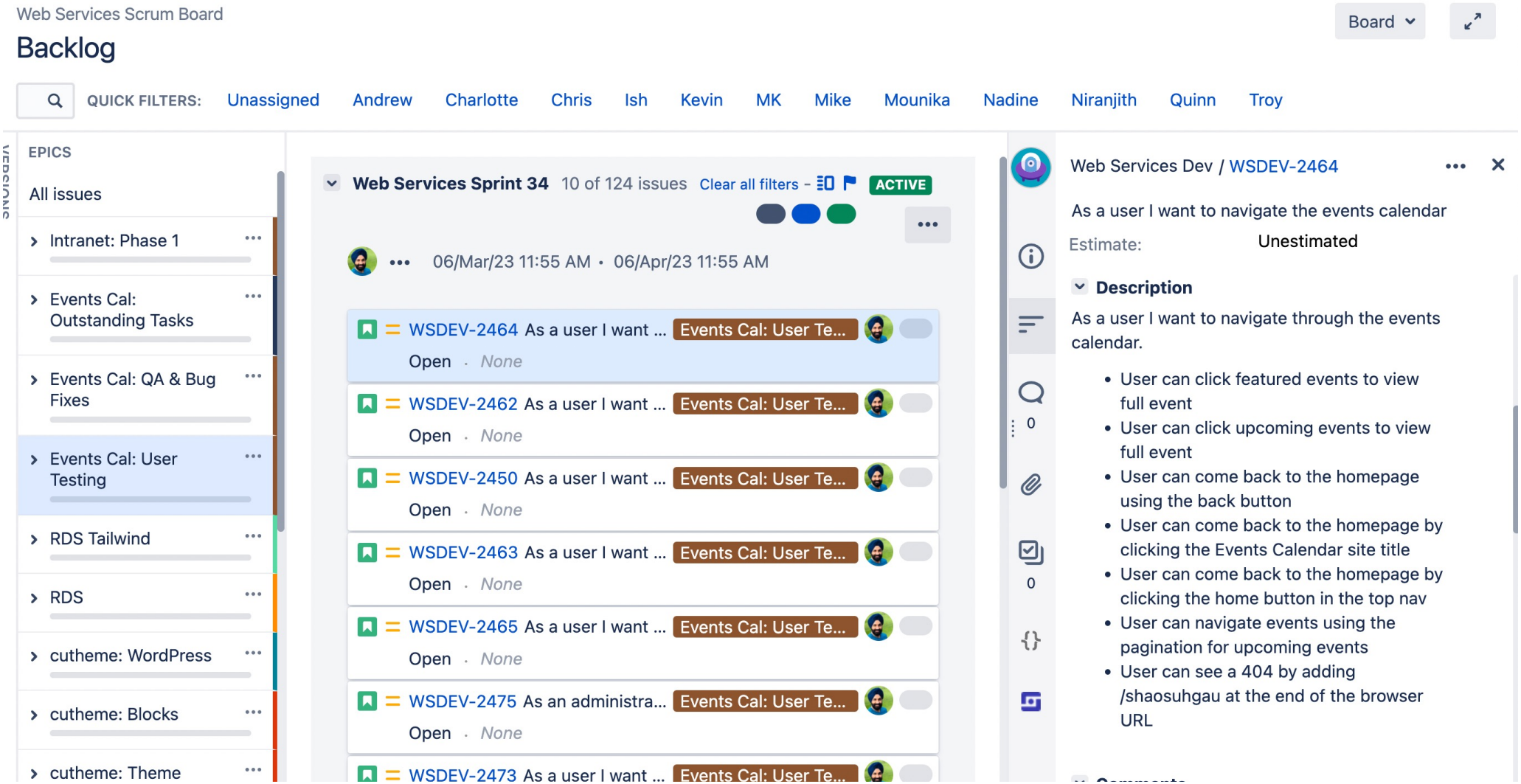
- Scrum is a PM framework that focuses on teamwork, accountability, incremental delivery, and continuous improvement
- Defined amount of time to get the work done called sprints
- Designated roles - Product Owner, Scrum Master/Superhero
- Work is defined in user stories and tasks and managed in Jira
- Four key types of meetings: Sprint planning meeting, Daily stand-ups, Demo, Retrospective.
- After the sprint we do one week of learning and development

Sprint Planning Meetings

When: 2 hour meeting at the end of learning and development week (Friday)

Tools: Jira and Teams

- Coming into the meeting, the product owner (me) will have a prioritized backlog.
- The team discusses what needs to get done, how much time it will take, and who the best lead is on the user story.
- Once all user stories are reviewed, we go through the list to make sure it's a reasonable plan for the next three weeks.
- At the end of the sprint planning meeting the sprint starts and the work begins.


Web Services Scrum Board
Backlog
Board
QUICK FILTERS:
Unassigned
Andrew
Charlotte
Chris
Ish
Kevin
MK
Mike
Mounika
Nadine
Niranjith
Quinn
Troy
EPICS
All issues
Intranet: Phase 1
Events Cal: Outstanding Tasks
Events Cal: QA & Bug Fixes
Events Cal: User Testing
RDS Tailwind
RDS
cutheme: WordPress
cutheme: Blocks
cutheme: Theme
Web Services Sprint 34
10 of 124 issues
Clear all filters
ACTIVE
06/Mar/23 11:55 AM • 06/Apr/23 11:55 AM
WSDEV-2464 As a user I want ... Events Cal: User Te...
Open · None
WSDEV-2462 As a user I want ... Events Cal: User Te...
Open · None
WSDEV-2450 As a user I want ... Events Cal: User Te...
Open · None
WSDEV-2463 As a user I want ... Events Cal: User Te...
Open · None
WSDEV-2465 As a user I want ... Events Cal: User Te...
Open · None
WSDEV-2475 As an administra... Events Cal: User Te...
Open · None
WSDEV-2473 As a user I want ... Events Cal: User Te...
Web Services Dev / WSDEV-2464
As a user I want to navigate the events calendar
Estimate:
Unestimated
Description
As a user I want to navigate through the events calendar.
User can click featured events to view full event
User can click upcoming events to view full event
User can come back to the homepage using the back button
User can come back to the homepage by clicking the Events Calendar site title
User can come back to the homepage by clicking the home button in the top nav
User can navigate events using the pagination for upcoming events
User can see a 404 by adding /shaosuhgau at the end of the browser URL
0
0

Daily Stand-Up Meetings

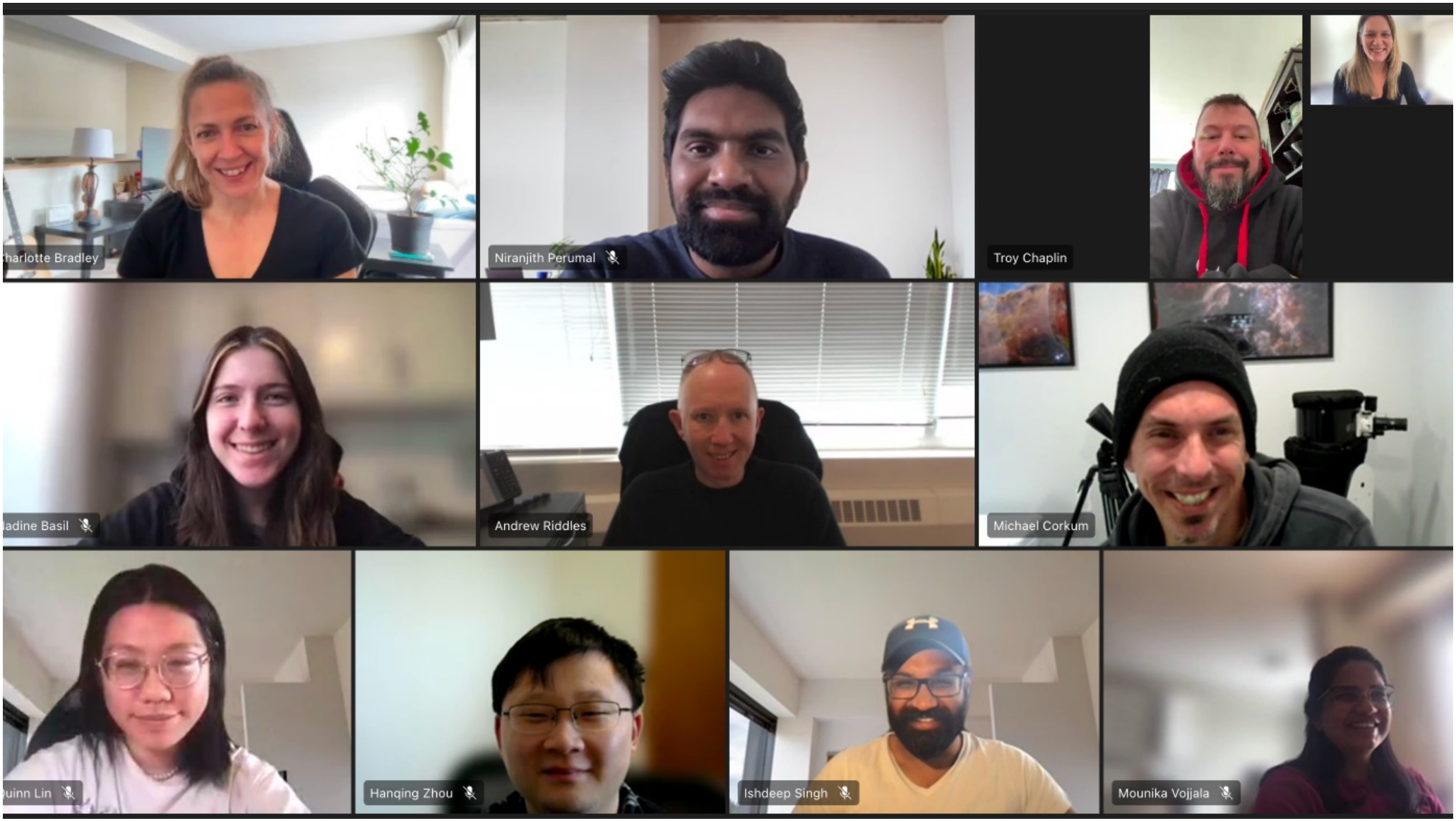
The goal of these meetings is to say hello and for everyone to share what they are working on and if they have any blockers to moving forward with sprint work.

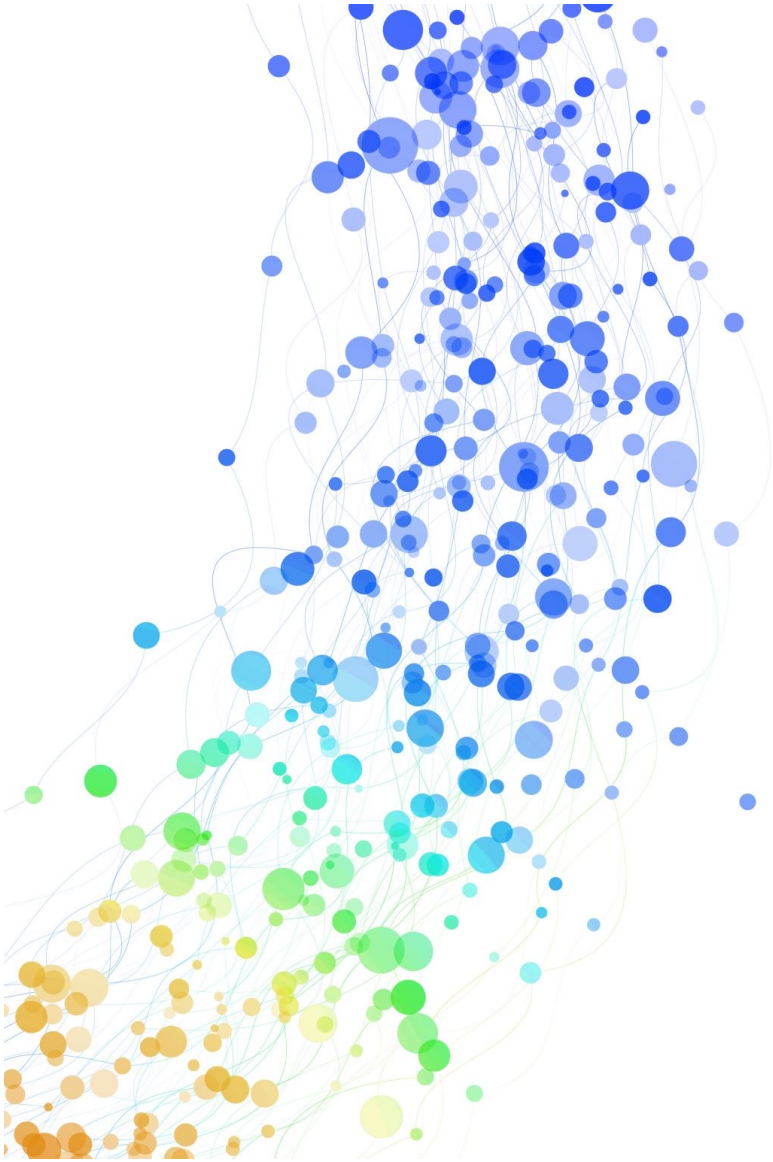
When: every day from 9-9:15

Tool: Microsoft Teams, Jira on Fridays

These meetings are run by the superhero and are short and to the point. Each person states:

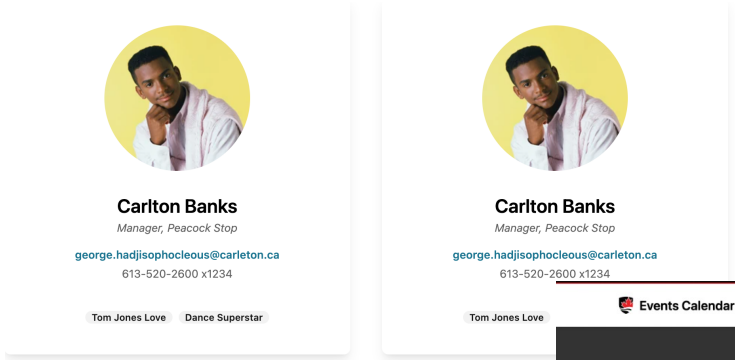
- What they did yesterday
- What they're working on today
- Any blockers


harlotte Bradley
Niranjith Perumal
Troy Chaplin
adine Basil
Andrew Riddles
Michael Corkum
uinn Lin
Hanqing Zhou
Ishdeep Singh
Mounika Vojjala



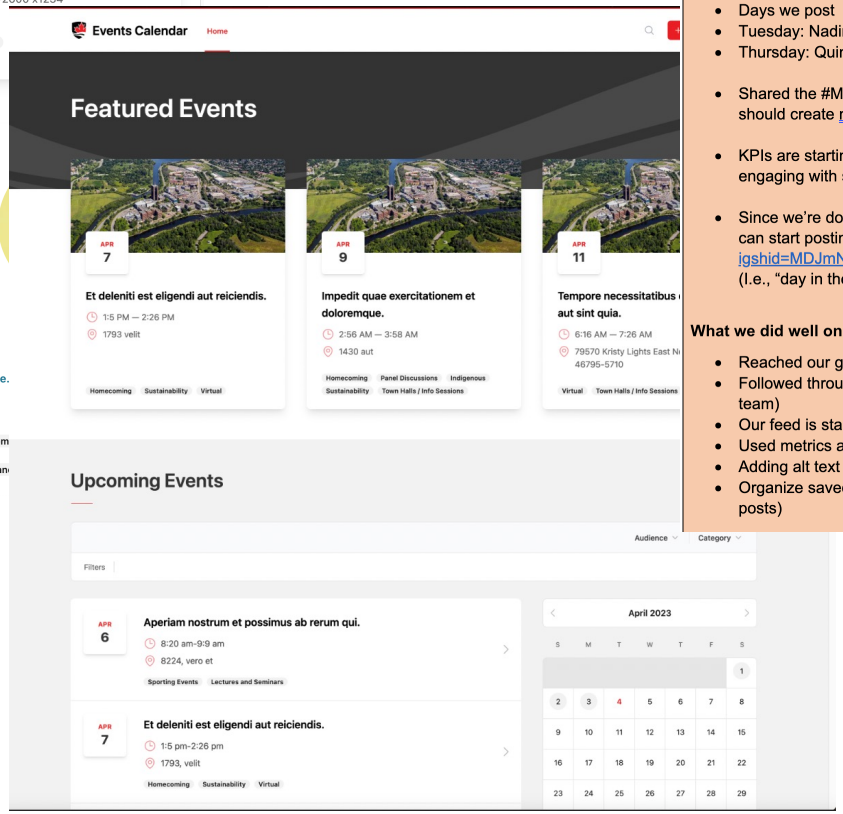
Demos

- At the end of the sprint we show off what we did to the customer
- Product Owner shows stats
- Developers lead
- Customer oohs and awws over all the work we did
- We get feedback



cuTheme

Events Calendar



Content Planning Reflection Notes (with reference to metrics)

Observations:

- According to our metrics, the best days to post are Thursdays (9am-12pm), Friday (12pm), and Wednesday (12pm). We want to rearrange our posting schedule to the following:
  - Monday: #MeetTheTeamMondays (Quinn)
  - Wednesday: Carousel (Alternate)
  - Friday: Platform Highlights (Nadine)
  - Thursdays: Any unplanned posts

- It's difficult to constantly refer to the content calendar when determining who's responsible for managing the Instagram account for the week. Instead:

- Days we post
- Tuesday: Nadine
- Thursday: Quinn

- Shared the #MeetOurTeam (Kevin) post with friends, algorithm boosted our post. Maybe we should create mini-engagement pod with our team members?

- KPIs are starting to bounce back from the previous two-week period. We need to continue engaging with similar accounts, and posting more videos to build up our momentum

- Since we're doing team highlights, and web developers make up a large part of our team, we can start posting more techy content (e.g., https://www.instagram.com/p/CqBMzlDy_PZ/?igshid=MDJmNzVkMjY=). As well, for those who are comfortable, it'd be cool to post a vlog (I.e., "day in the life of a web developer/communicator") for that week.

What we did well on:

- Reached our goal of 100 followers (access to audience insight)
- Followed through with our goal and created a story highlight (for focus group and meet our team)
- Our feed is starting to improve (The red creates a more unified aesthetic)
- Used metrics and sprint workflow to inform our content strategy
- Adding alt text to our posts
- Organize saved posts (categorized by content pillar so that we can draw inspiration for future posts)

Instagram Pilot

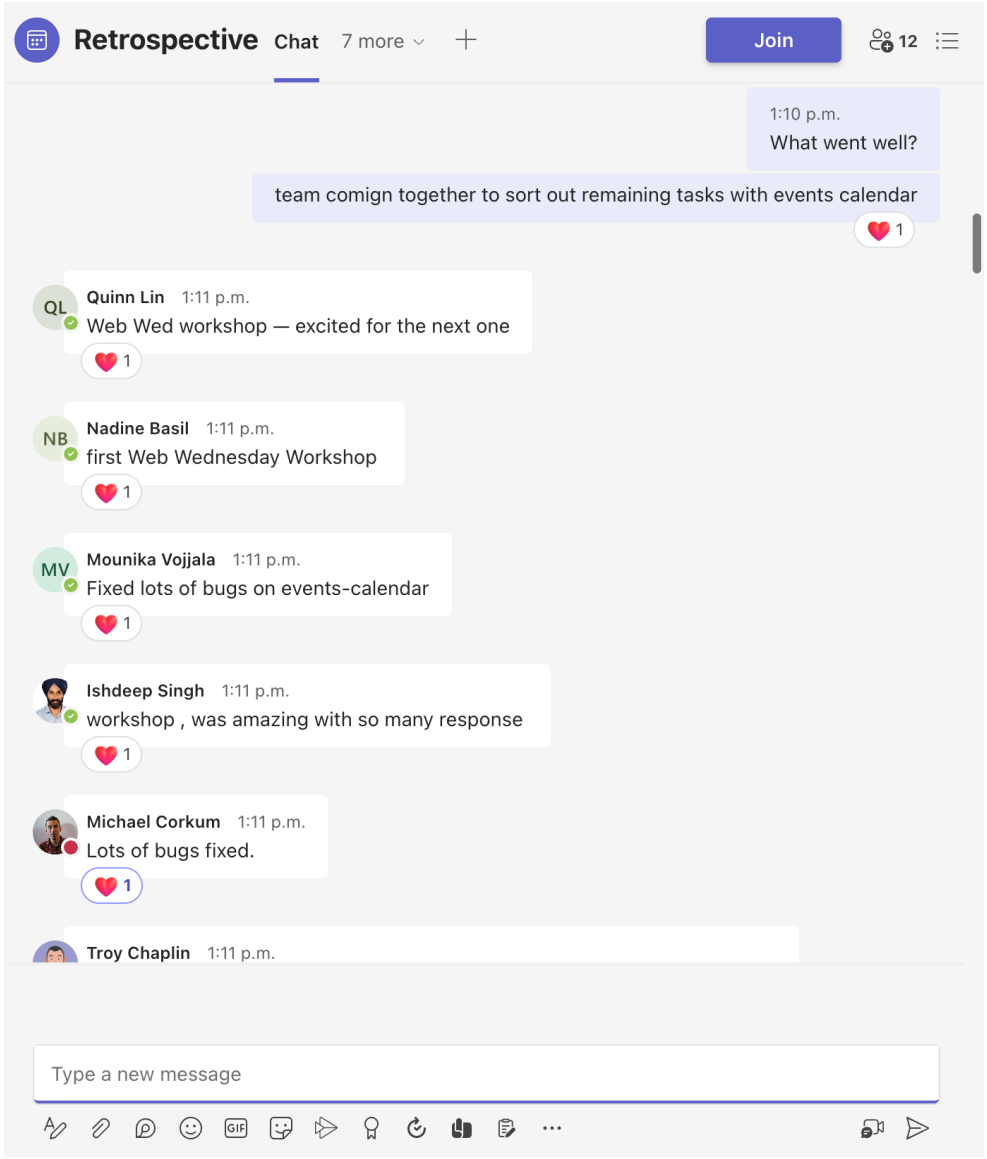
Retrospectives

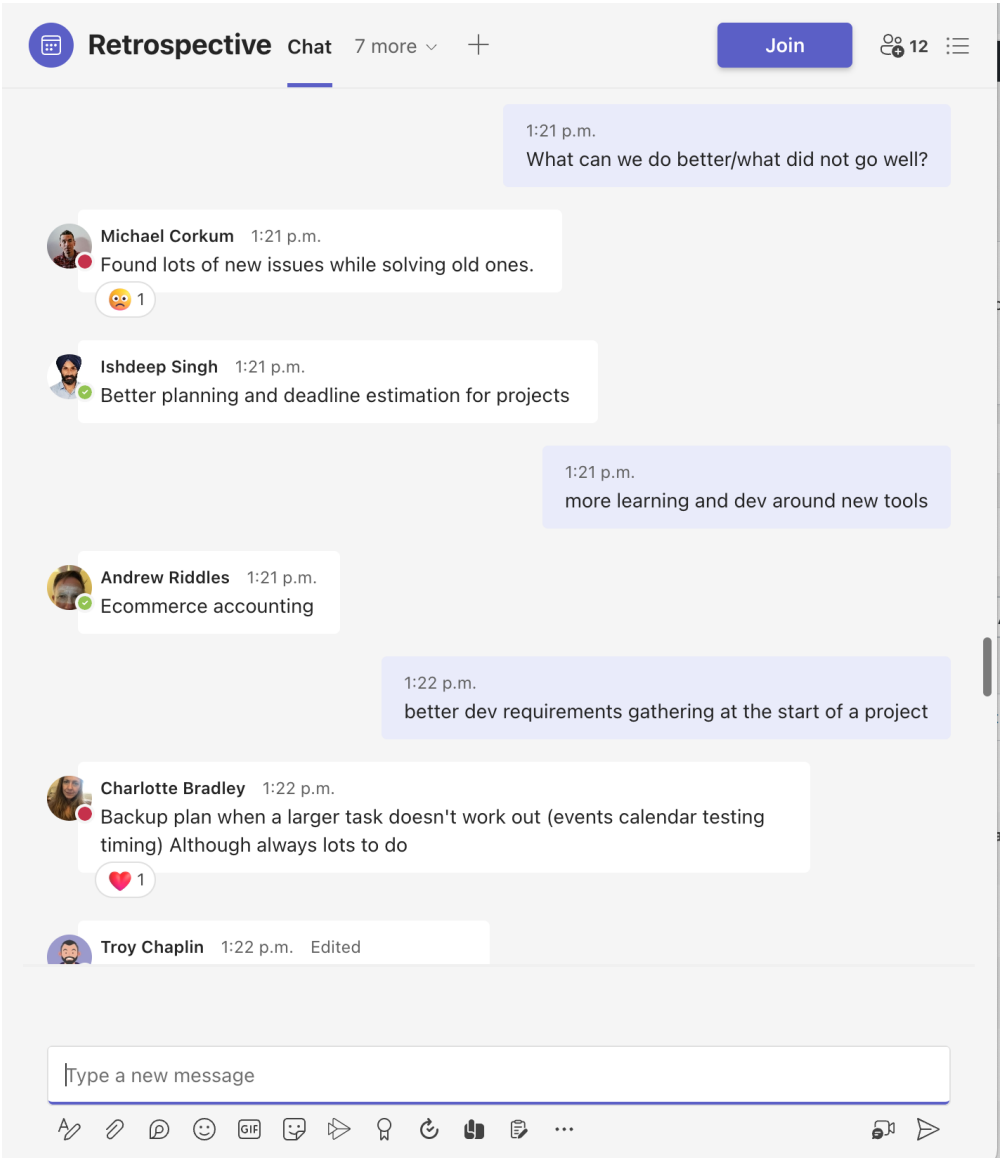
At the end of the sprint

Check in, what did not go well, what went well, action items

Take this and adjust and be even more awesome

Announce the Sprint Champion


Retrospective
Chat
7 more
Join
12
1:10 p.m.
What went well?
team comign together to sort out remaining tasks with events calendar
1
QL
Quinn Lin 1:11 p.m.
Web Wed workshop — excited for the next one
1
NB
Nadine Basil 1:11 p.m.
first Web Wednesday Workshop
1
MV
Mounika Vojjala 1:11 p.m.
Fixed lots of bugs on events-calendar
1
Ishdeep Singh 1:11 p.m.
workshop , was amazing with so many response
1
Michael Corkum 1:11 p.m.
Lots of bugs fixed.
1
Troy Chaplin 1:11 p.m.
Type a new message


Retrospective
Chat
7 more
Join
12
1:21 p.m.
What can we do better/what did not go well?
Michael Corkum 1:21 p.m.
Found lots of new issues while solving old ones.
1
Ishdeep Singh 1:21 p.m.
Better planning and deadline estimation for projects
1:21 p.m.
more learning and dev around new tools
Andrew Riddles 1:21 p.m.
Ecommerce accounting
1:22 p.m.
better dev requirements gathering at the start of a project
Charlotte Bradley 1:22 p.m.
Backup plan when a larger task doesn't work out (events calendar testing timing) Although always lots to do
1
Troy Chaplin 1:22 p.m. Edited
Type a new message

Sprint Champion Nominations

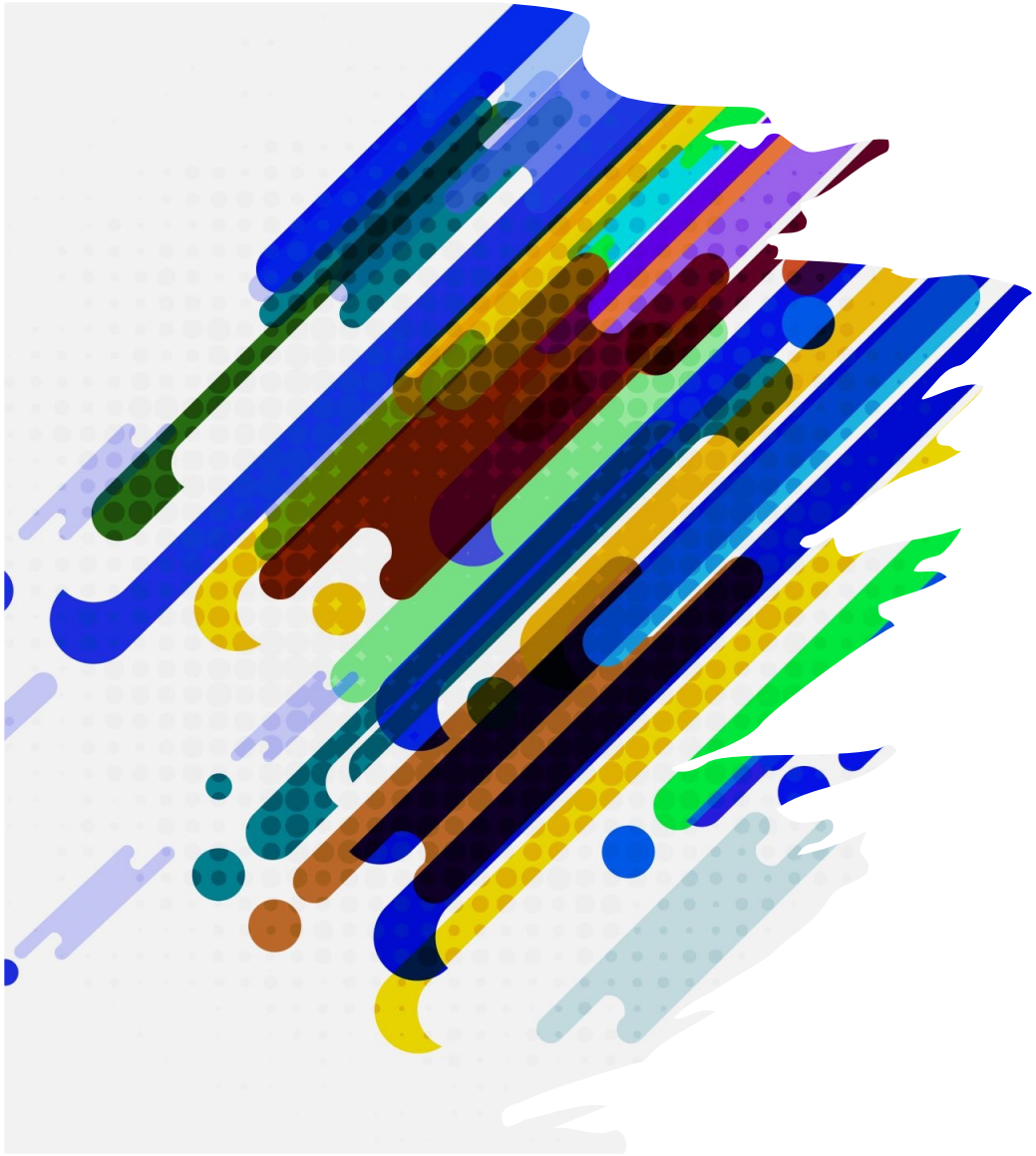
- They took on a large amount of responsibility during this past Sprint. Not only did she complete a large array of tasks she displayed a very impressive degree of professionalism and ability in co-facilitating the accessibility website focus groups. She is displaying some real initiative in creating content, including engaging students with disabilities for a news story, and training in graphics and animation. They did everything that was thrown at her or that she decided to take on with a great, positive and fun attitude.
- The amount of work done, refactoring RDS in the shortest time, and for crushing it as PM.
- For all the amazing behind the scenes work on launching and organizing our first Web Wednesday Workshop
- He took all my tedious tickets and did them without complaint, THEN he crushed ALL the events stuff thrown his way and was ALWAYS running out of stuff to do, meaning he was on point with all tasks
- Solved tons of tickets

Sprint Champion Nominations Cont…

- Great help monitoring, organizing and helping with ITS service desk tickets as the Superhero. Also awesome energy and enthusiasm around cuTheme - working on blocks and design, demoing things at the workshop and coming up with fun, new ideas to get info to clients (e.g., video teasers!)
- His contribution for events-calendar in fixing errors and development is amazing.
- He did an amazing job of working on RDS and Events calendar while we transition to Vite and even moved the stories.
- It's challenging to choose a particular team member since all of them are putting in tremendous effort. These two have been doing an excellent job of resolving problems related to the events calendar and RDS. They are always available for a call anytime to solve issues.
- Amazing work organizing and holding the first web Wednesday workout as well as an awesome job on the newsletters

Learning and Development Week

- One full week after each sprint
- The learning is tied directly to the work we're doing
- Time to wrap up outstanding tasks
- Time to document
- We do all the meetings (retrospectives, demos and sprint planning) during this time



Summary of Agile/Scrum

- Three week sprints - superhero is assigned for two weeks at a time, they handle client requests and run stand-ups
- Planning meetings – we use Jira, I set the priorities, talk about each task, add as many details to the ticket as we can, start it right after the meeting
- Standups – daily, quick, run by superhero
- Demos – developers show their work, great for morale
- Retrospectives – lessons learned, announce Sprint Champion
- Learning and Development week – learn, transfer knowledge and document

Your Turn

Sprint Planning Meeting – What You Can Do

Start with One Project:

- Create a list of all the tasks your team needs to get done to complete the project – this is your backlog
- Make the tasks as small as possible (ie: no task should take longer than the sprint)

Plan to plan:

- Start with a two week sprint
- Set a one hour meeting for the Monday at the start of the sprint – invite everyone involved in the project
- Have your backlog ready to discuss

Discuss the work:

- Prioritize the work based on what needs to get done/what people want to work on over the next two weeks – pull these out of the backlog into the sprint
- Discuss these items in detail – what information do you need, what is the expected outcome (acceptance criteria), who will be responsible for the task

Start the Sprint:

- Review what was discussed and determine what the focus will be for the next two weeks – be realistic. Better to under plan than over plan
- Make sure everyone is clear on what they need to do
- Get to work

APRIL						
S	M	T	W	Th	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30						

Categories/Project	
Events/Training	☐
How we Work	☑
WS Update	☑
People	☐
ITS	☐
Tips & How tos	☐
cuTheme	☑
Poll	☐
Accessibility	☐
E-commerce	☐

Owner	Task	Category	Status	Notes/blockers
MK	Web Wed Re-cap (Agile)	WS Update	Pending	
Char	Rubber Ducking	How we Work	Published	could put in next?
Andrew	cuTheme teaser video	cuTheme	Published	popular in last - 20% clicks
Chris	How we Structure our Work: Three	How we Work	Pending	MK writing
Nadine	Web Wed or Training in banner			anner
	Backlog			
	Mounika (bio)	People		Poke :)
	Niranjith (bio)	People		Poke :)
	Sprint re-cap	WS Update		
	Refund & Cancellation Policy	E-commerce	Pending	Andrew
	A Decade of this Awesomeness	E-commerce	Pending	Andrew
	On Site SEO	Tips (SEO)	Pending	Quinn
	5 W's content calendar	Tips (Content)	Pending	Quinn
	Tools/approaches devs use to ens	Accessibility		
	Interview re: screen reader experie	Accessibility		Quinn
	Types of testing we do re: accessibility (as we lead up to events equip)	Accessibility		

You can add details about the task in a comment or a note.

Daily Stand-Up– What You Can Do

Check in every day. Put it in your calendar. 15 minutes to start your day.

Review:

- What you did yesterday
- What you're going to work on today
- Be honest about what is blocking you from getting the task done. What do you need to move forward? Ask for help!

The goals here are to:

- connect with the team
- identify blockers
- get the support you need to move forward.

Demos– What You Can Do

At the end of the sprint show someone your work.

The goals here are:

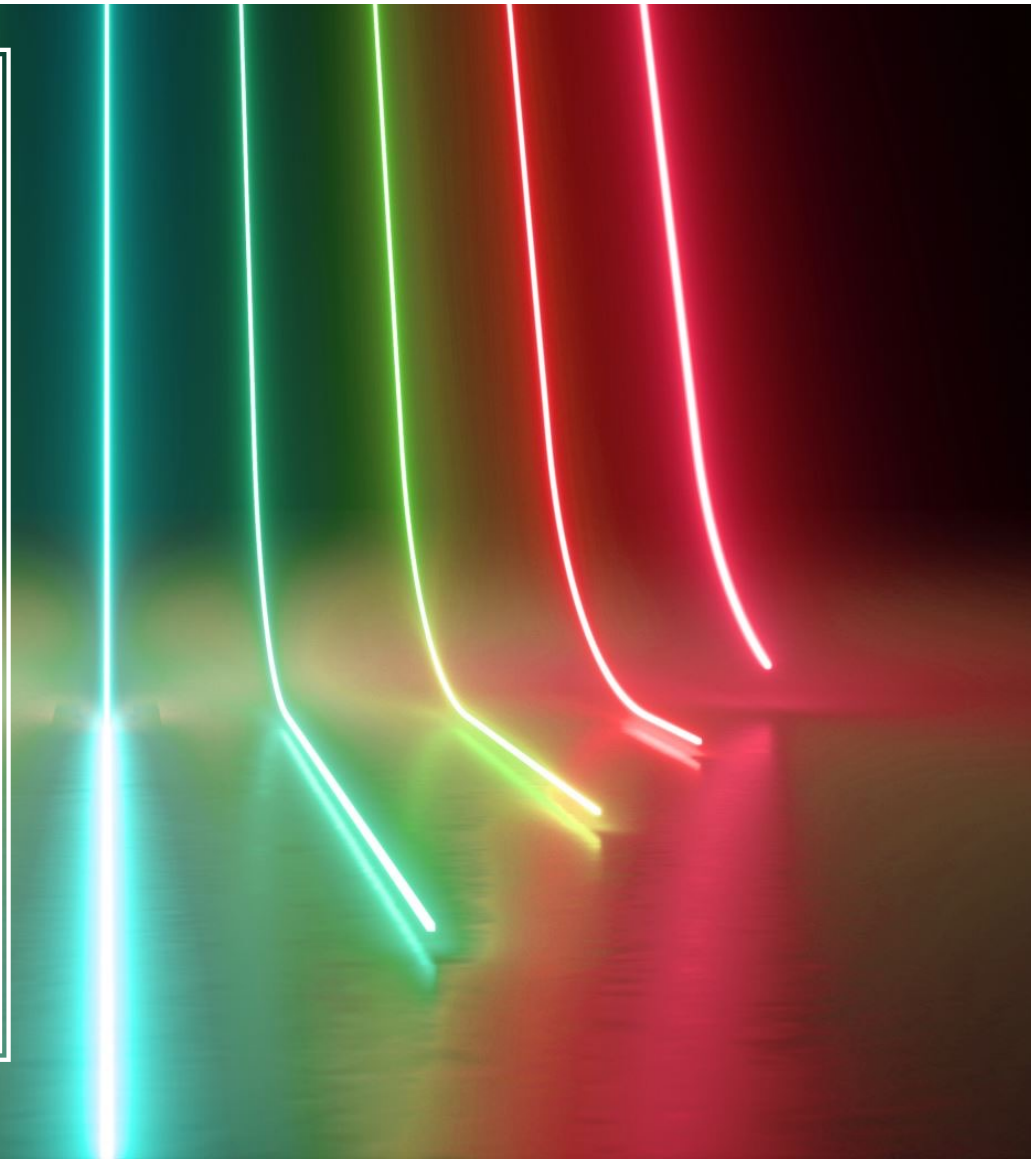
- to connect with the end user/community/client
- to get feedback
- to feel good about what you've accomplished!

Retrospectives– What You Can Do

- Ask: what did not go well?
- Ask: what went well?
- Create action items to bring into the next sprint
- Celebrate and show appreciation for the work done

The goals here are:

- to foster an environment where people feel heard, valued and appreciated
- to be more awesome next sprint

How Agile has transformed the way we work…

- Priorities are clear
- Everyone knows what everyone is working on
- Way more knowledge transfer happening
- Highly collaborative and the communication on our team is amazing
- People get to choose what they want to work on
- Developers get to show off their work
- Developers get to run meetings
- Blockers are handled immediately
- We have learned that the time we put in to plan, connect, reflect is very much worth it!