These user interviews were completed in May of 2023 by Tatyana (X @UseZcash) at Electric Coin Company.

1st Round of Interviews:

- Total interviews scheduled: 106
- Interviews completed: 62 (USA majority)
- No-shows: 44 (non-USA majority)
- Most participants joined the interviews after seeing the email we sent out
    - Email list: ~80% of respondents
    - Misc: ~12% of participants
    - Twitter: ~8% or respondents

Hypotheses

- The majority of early Zcash adopters are ready to use ZEC for payments. Focusing the conversation on private payments encourages early adopters to contemplate, look for, and create/advocate for new ways to use ZEC
- Confusing UX and messaging, that doesn't focus exclusively on user experiences/use cases, are a barrier preventing early adopters from using ZEC and advocating for Zcash.
- Early Zcash adopters want more ways to get involved and support the ecosystem

Goals

- Introductions, relationship building, sentiment gathering
- Testing initial hypotheses
- Identifying patterns that require further attention

Main Questions and Topics

- Participants' initial intro to Zcash: when, how, why
- General background and role in the community
- ZEC and crypto usage
- Motivators (existing, potential) to transact in ZEC
- Motivators (existing, potential) to advocate for Zcash and be more involved
- Privacy vs. financial privacy vs. private payments
- NPS, user experience
- Thoughts on POS/POW
- General feedback

Observations

- The community that's forming around Zcash is an incredible resource, and every 1st Round participant was a perfect example of that. End users, entrepreneurs, and developers resonate deeply with the ethos of Zcash, want more ways to get involved and contribute to the movement, and are willing to go the extra mile to support it. Much more can be done to activate and engage them (documentation, collaboration opportunities, cross-promotion, user-friendly comms, etc). Initial positive feedback from all of the participants on the user research process itself and readiness to collaborate further signal our community's readiness to help Zcash get where we all believe it belongs.
- Everyone is in agreement on one thing: you cannot have a free society without privacy. As one user put it, "someday privacy will be all that matters." The world-wide attack on cash is a concern for many. Government censorship is perceived as a growing threat. A common thread is the concern that transactions/behaviors that are ok today, will not be ok in the future, hence the need for financial privacy today. However, despite these concerns and beliefs, ZEC user behavior indicates that private transactions are still not viewed as an urgent necessity **today**, but as something that will become important **someday**. This disconnect and the lack of sense of urgency should be explored and can be resolved through messaging and further community-wide discussion.
- The good news is there is a strong demand for private ZEC payments. The overwhelming majority cite "more places to spend ZEC/more ways to use ZEC" as the key factor that would motivate them to use ZEC more. This is consistent with the findings of earlier Zcash community surveys.
- During user interviews, even adamant hodlers of ZEC, who said they are not ready to spend it and think of it as an investment, began to reconsider their position in response to information about legitimate use cases for ZEC. Focusing the conversation on transactions law-abiding citizens might want to keep private (mental health, support for independent journalism, political contributions, peer-to-peer payments, etc), triggered light bulb moments and added new energy to the conversation every time. By the end of each interview, regardless of their initial opinion, each participant was interested in legitimate use cases and open to considering new ways to use ZEC. My hypothesis is that participants don't think of Zcash as a user-facing app in part due to messaging. Shifting the conversation around Zcash from high-level themes like privacy and technology (vague concepts and highly technical vocabulary) to practical real-world applications and use cases around private payments (daily scenarios and simple language everyone understands and relates to) focuses attention on practical steps towards adoption.
- Every single participant was initially drawn to Zcash because of its privacy features. The interviews began with, "what attracted you to Zcash?" and the answer was "privacy" 100% of the time. Many choose Zcash over other cryptocurrencies for its superior privacy tech. Shying away from that word is to ignore ZEC's core value to its users. The second popular reason is Zcash's clean image and its "consent" value. While early adopters of Zcash value privacy, many of them don't want to be part of the dark web narrative.

- Wallets that don't inspire confidence are a major blocker for adoption and organic growth. While early adopters are willing to go the extra mile and figure things out, they are not willing to recommend that experience to others. This is especially limiting if Zcash is to be a private peer-to-peer payments tool. The overwhelming majority of participants said that they do not feel comfortable onboarding family and friends when the wallets look and feel unreliable/complicated/"ugly." Poor UI got brought up more than the syncing issues. However, we cannot downplay the negative effects of the syncing issues, which seem to be substantial but difficult to measure. Those who continue to stay with Zcash for its unique privacy features, are waiting for the issues to be fixed before they can start recommending Zcash again. This means we missed out on a year of conversations about Zcash. Once the wallets are back to normal, a massive ongoing multichannel comms campaign is needed to let everyone know that these problems are in the past.
- It is very common for participants to reflect on ZEC's usability through the eyes of their social circle, which, understandably, can be discouraging. While Zcash's usability issues are currently a barrier for ZEC, it is important to remember that the key to its adoption lies in the early adopters, who are willing to overlook UX flaws as long as they don't make ZEC completely unusable. Before we can figure out what can be done to make our family and friends use ZEC, we have to figure out what can be done to make **us** (early adopters) use ZEC. We are the first step in mass adoption, and this step cannot be skipped. That's why at this stage, user research focuses exclusively on the behaviors and attitudes of the early adopters (what will make ZEC usable for them?), without trying to address or solve mass adoption straight out of the gate.
- The Zcash community is a diverse group of individuals linked by common threads. One must be careful when making assumptions about what those threads are. Zcashers use various modes of communication and often hold opposing beliefs on what the future of Zcash should look like. Some interview participants have been holding ZEC for years, while others discovered Zcash in 2023. Some want to use ZEC to pay for everything, while others want to use it for very specific transactions. Some live on Twitter, and others stay away from social media. But underneath it all, there are concepts, keywords, and calls to action that Zcashers respond to, and if we are to evolve and grow as an ecosystem, they must be explored and understood.
- The lack of frequent, clear, user-focused communication came up as an issue many times. This includes comms about usability issues (e.g. emergency mode, Ledger's shielded ZEC problems) as well as general topics that could aid adoption (e.g. posts explaining Zcash projects, user-focused how-to guides and ecosystem updates)
- Confusion around taxes came up as a potential barrier to ZEC usage. The lack of clarity about the implications of certain ZEC transactions can be a major issue for ZEC users, unless explained.
- Mixed reactions to the POW/POS topic. This group of participants was ~evenly split on this subject, with strongest reactions coming from those who oppose the move to POS.

Personas

Zcashers tend to fall into one or more of the following categories:

End Users

- Holders, who don't want to transact in ZEC
  - Bet on privacy, but mostly see ZEC as an investment
  - Barriers to spending ZEC:
    - don't fully grasp how ZEC can be used in the real world for legitimate reasons; don't want to be the first to try, need to see others do it first
    - concerned about volatility and don't think refilling ZEC is easy
    - concerned about taxes
  - The purpose of ZEC is investment (may have tried ZEC payments out of curiosity)
  - Passive users; recommending Zcash = financial advice
- Holders, who want to transact in ZEC, but don't know how/where
  - Have been ready to spend ZEC, but no one accepts it; want to use ZEC, but haven't given it enough thought
  - The purpose of ZEC transactions is to "support the cause"
  - Want to be active users; recommending Zcash = privacy
- Holders, who have transacted in ZEC and want to do it more
  - Need more places to accept ZEC; don't always recognize opportunities for a ZEC transaction
  - Are not concerned with taxes or volatility because they're willing to pay for privacy
  - The purpose of ZEC transactions is to make private payments
  - Active users; recommending ZEC = private payments

Ecosystem Proponents (can also be End Users)

- Zcash hobbyists
  - Want to be part of something important and contribute to Zcash's success in some small way
  - Want user-friendly content and applications to share with others
- Ambassadors
  - Actively promote Zcash in various ways that need community recognition, attention and support
- Developers
  - Technical (various levels)
    - Need better documentation
  - Non-technical: entrepreneurs, biz dev
    - Want to collaborate with other Zcashers, participate in brainstorms and non-technical community calls focused on use cases
- Validators
- Miners

Legitimate Use Cases

End users are interested in using ZEC for the following payments:

- Paying employees (esp. overseas), contractors, gig workers
- Accepting ZEC as payment for goods and services
- Peer-to-peer payments
- Supporting nonprofits, causes
- Political contributions
- Supporting content creators, independent journalisms/podcasts
- Mental health, health
- Guns, hunting gear, controlled substances, gambling, gaming

Desired CTAs (calls to action)

Specific CTAs drive specific action:

- Use ZEC
- Spend ZEC
- Buy ZEC
- Make/receive private payments

Interview questions that focused on legitimate use cases generated the most amount of positive ideation and engagement. Shifting the conversation from complex, inaccessible concepts like privacy and Zcash tech to tangible use cases and practical real-world applications seems to make Zcash more relatable, especially for non-technical participants.

Desired Content

Ecosystem Proponents

- Better documentation for developers
- Ways to become more active in the ZEC community (end users, crypto hobbyists, developers (technical/non-technical)

End Users

- Simple and detailed how-to guides breaking down the complexities of the Zcash ecosystem and setting appropriate expectations
- Human-interest content

- Use of private payments
- Basics: what can I do with ZEC? (for those who got tipped in ZEC)
- Legitimate reasons why someone would want to keep some transactions private
- Benefits of using ZEC for payments; why is ZEC a better choice for private transactions
- How to use ZEC privately, best practices
- How to use private messages
- Why would someone want to use transparent ZEC
- How to buy/store ZEC
- How to accept ZEC payments; options for businesses
- How to pay employees in ZEC
- How to raise funds privately
- Risks associated with buying/holding ZEC, paying in ZEC, receiving ZEC payments
- Crypto transactions and taxes