



LEGAL HELP PORTALS

User Testing Report

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I. BACKGROUND

The Colorado Access to Justice Commission Online Portal Working Group (“Working Group”), in conjunction with the Commission’s Technology Committee, is in the process of planning development of a legal help portal for the state of Colorado . This portal will allow Coloradans to easily access civil legal self-help resources and information through one website. As part of this process, committee members decided it would be beneficial to test with potential users several legal aid portals in other jurisdictions in order to learn from their efforts.

Technology Committee members Molly French and Emo Overall secured funds through the Colorado Bar Foundation to support expenses incurred in connection with planning and conducting user testing.

The Portal User Testing Working Group (“Group”) then completed the following steps:

- Identified two physical locations to conduct in-person user testing
 - Offices at Colorado Legal Services (Denver location),
 - A room at the Ft. Morgan library
 - These locations had computers or other electronic devices, internet access, adequate parking, public restrooms, and an area to orient individuals to the testing process.
- Identified point people, testing facilitators, and the technologies available at each site;
- Developed recruitment materials to recruit testing subjects (see Appendix A);
- Drafted and finalized instructions for both facilitators and testing subjects (see Appendix B);
- Drafted and finalized a survey instrument to be administered to testing subjects (see Appendix C);
- Agreed upon and purchased incentives to help secure testing subject participation;
 - Incentives were \$50.00 gift cards to Target, Amazon or Walmart; individuals were able to choose their preferred gift card vendor.

- Finalized dates and times for user testing, as well as additional logistical details.

To help inform the development and design of this project, Technology Committee members reviewed portals in jurisdictions throughout the United States and identified five portals they thought provided users the best experience.

II. METHODOLOGY

Each testing subject [hereinafter, “user” or “users”] was given a two-page set of instructions to read before testing commenced.

In addition to explaining the testing process, the instructions prompted users to imagine that they were experiencing one of the following scenarios:

1. The heater at your house has not been working for weeks. Even though you have called your landlord and told him about the problem many times, he refuses to fix it.
2. You recently received an electric bill reminding you that you owed money you had forgotten to pay. You paid the bill, but two weeks later received a letter (that included a statement of claim and a summons) telling you that you were being sued in small claims court to collect the bill.
3. You were recently fired from your job and were never paid for the last two weeks that you worked.
4. You have a child who is being bullied at school. You have told the school about the problem many times, but the bullying continues to happen.

- Users were then directed to find information about their chosen scenario on two of the following five legal portal websites.
 1. Michigan Legal Help;
 2. Law Help MN;
 3. Massachusetts Legal Resource Finder;
 4. CT Law Help; and
 5. Vermont Legal Help

I.

- While exploring the websites, users were asked to “think out loud”, articulating any thoughts, questions, or opinions they had

while trying to use these sites to find answers to their hypothetical problem.

- Users' who appeared in person had their website searches observed by a facilitator. The facilitator noted users' comments and captured other observational data. Users' who were tested remotely on the Zoom platform. had their sessions recorded.
- Once users were finished testing the websites, they were asked to complete a brief survey about their experience.
- Upon completion of the testing, facilitators reviewed notes of any in-person observations and listened to any recordings.
- This data was then aggregated into a spreadsheet.
- The data and survey results were then synthesized to create this report.

Participation & Activity

1. Fourteen individuals participated in user testing efforts.
 - Six individuals in Ft. Morgan.
 - Eight individuals in Denver.
2. Each individual chose two legal portal sites they would explore as part of the exercise.
3. Thirteen participants completed the user survey.
 - One individual in Ft. Morgan did not complete the survey.
 - One individual did not complete ½ of another survey (#9), and one individual skipped several of the narrative answers in the survey.
 - Participants did not answer every question in the surveys, several times they skipped questions.
4. Two individuals reviewed the portals in their native language of Spanish.
 - Feedback reflecting this is noted below. The data was not robust enough to warrant separate analysis.

III. TEST RESULTS

Insights

A. Michigan Legal Help

Two users noted that the landing page for Michigan Legal help was confusing; it required users to either choose a legal category or click on the “Guide to Legal Help” which led to triage questions. Furthermore, multiple users struggled with the triage questions and ended up spending most of the allotted time answering them rather than browsing content.

One user (using the school bullying scenario) was not sure how to use the back arrow on the browser to go back; instead, they navigated through the site using the search field. This user went to the section entitled “personal safety,” scrolled through the options, said “this is really hard to find information on this site.” It took her about 10 minutes to find the information on bullying.

Other users also noted that this website had broken links and too many pop-up windows.

B. Law Help MN

One user noted that although Law Help Minnesota contains an abundance of information, there is too much content on each page, making it overwhelming and difficult to locate specific information.

One user also expressed dislike for the landing page of this website, which required them to choose whether they wanted a lawyer, legal information, or both. Finally, a few users got stuck in a loop within this portal; they could not locate the information they wanted, and the website kept directing them back to resources they had already viewed.

C. Massachusetts Legal Resource Finder

Two users noted that Massachusetts Legal Resource Finder was not as helpful as [some of the other websites] in terms of directing individuals to issue-specific content. After answering the website's triage questions, users were given a list of other websites they could explore. However, users were not sure which one would have the content they were looking for.

One user made up additional facts about the bullying case in order to find helpful information on this site (he selected child being bullied was a DV survivor.) This user had three action items show up on the screen and did not realize you needed to scroll down to see more (his inclination was to select from the original three on the screen).

Another user had a hard time finding the “Next” button to continue. Furthermore, some users were frustrated at having to answer triage questions about their issue only to be directed to other resources in general rather than specific content pertaining to their scenario.

One user noted that he was impressed with the “flow” of the site. Another user said she would have gone to Google instead if he was trying to find his answer not in the context of user testing. She said the site needed to ensure that the correct options pop up if the user uses the website, rather than Google.

D. CT Law Help

Though many users found the Connecticut Law Help website helpful and easy to navigate, a few users noted that the information was too general and not helpful in answering specific legal questions.

One user tester found the answer to the utility’s scenario in about five minutes. Spanish speakers noted that the translation on the website was accurate and consistent.

E. Vermont Legal Help

In general, users agreed that the content on the Vermont Legal Help website was helpful but did not always agree as to whether the content was easily located. One user tried several ways to find answers to the question about utilities and said it was more difficult to find information on this site than the Connecticut site; he gave up looking for the information on this site in about ten minutes.

Another user, as he navigated through this site, was unclear whether he was still on the original site. He said he would like to be guided to “the front door” of where applicable help is available.

Some users felt overwhelmed by the amount of information on each page, while other users appreciated the organization.

IV. FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Key Takeaways

First, legal topics should be written in common, everyday language, with subheadings that clearly describe what each topic means, and perhaps providing examples of common problems that fall under each topic. Several users had difficulty determining which legal topic their scenario fell under. Most notably, multiple users did not realize that scenario number two, which involves being sued for an unpaid electric bill, would fall under the money/debt/consumer category.

Second, users made clear that legal help portals should not “dead-end” by failing to provide users with a means for continuing their search for information if they don’t find what they are looking for on a particular page. Embedding links for more information related to the topic in question is one way to prevent this from occurring.

Third, resources should be organized by legal topic and content rather than by the institution providing the resource. For example, instead of directing users to the Minnesota State Law Library, the portal should direct users to specific content within the Minnesota State Law Library website that applies to them based on their answers to the triage questions.

Fourth, legal help portals with a Spanish function should not default to English when the user navigates to a different page within the site. In several instances, users selected the Spanish language version of a portal, but as soon as they navigated to another page it reverted back to English.

B. Dos and Don'ts

The chart below summarizes additional insight from our user testing:

Users reacted <i>positively</i> to:	Users reacted <i>negatively</i> to:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Comprehension quizzes;• "Ask a lawyer" and "chat" functions;• A separate page dedicated to legal information for those age 60 or older;• Subheadings within each category listed in order of most common issues to least common issues;• Embedded links to more specific topics within each broader category;• A page containing the links for legal aid organizations by state.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Extra steps/buttons, such as a "see your results" button following the completion of triage questions;• "Quick Exit" buttons that were intrusively large, or did not work properly;• Too much information on one page;• Embedded videos that begin playing automatically;• Mutually exclusive and closed-ended triage questions that do not cover all possible scenarios;• Technical glitches and malfunctioning links;• Portals that require users to create an account, or that link to resources that require users to create an account;• Landing pages that force users to make a decision right away (e.g., Law Help MN);• Repetitive triage questions;• Website pop-ups asking if the user is finding everything ok.

C. Lessons Learned

Finally, we gained some insights into the user testing process. First, subjects should be tested in separate rooms, where they cannot hear one another or be influenced by each other's opinions. Unfortunately, the first day of testing was conducted at the Fort Morgan Public Library where only one room was available. Therefore, several of the users were tested right next to each other at the same time. This made it difficult to obtain individual feedback and hear each user's voice on the session recordings.

Second, we discovered that too many variables in the testing methodology makes it hard to compare the test results across sessions. Each user not only explored different websites, but also utilized different scenarios. This made it challenging to synthesize the data and identify trends.

Third, the legal scenarios provided to users should be simple; they should easily and clearly fit into one of the common legal self-help categories. Many users had trouble determining what general legal topic their scenario fell under, which added unnecessary complication to the testing and distracted from the users' ability to navigate the websites.

Finally, we discovered the importance of making clear to user testers that all comments -- including critical ones -- are welcome. It should be affirmatively stated that honest feedback is appreciated, whether it is constructively critical, or positive. One individual who was observed having a difficult time finding information on the two sites she selected said "I don't want to be too judgmental" when filling out the survey, and her survey feedback was much less critical than her verbal language as she went through the site.

Survey Responses by Website

For Full Survey results, see Appendix D.

A. Michigan Legal Help

1. Survey Data:

a. Individual Three:

- Age: 44-54
- City and County: Denver
- Race: Hispanic or Latino
- Gender: Female
- Income: 20-49K/annually
- Household: 2-4
- Scenario: 1 (heater not working)
- Found steps to deal w/ problem? Yes
- Easy or difficult? Neither
- Would you recommend the site? Very likely
- What was confusing or difficult? After submitting the application, it does not give a confirmation number or any indication that the application was submitted.
- What did you like or not like? The income entry portion, the calculator was very helpful

b. Individual Four:

- Age: 55-64
- City and County: Denver
- Race: Hispanic or Latino
- Gender: Male
- Household: 1
- Scenario: 4 (bullying)
- Found steps to deal w/ problem? Yes

- Easy or difficult? Difficult
- Would you recommend the site? Unlikely
- What was confusing or difficult? Pages were crowded with text and made them more intimidating.
- What did you like or not like? The site was congested with seemingly limited number of pages forced to carry a lot of info

c. Individual Five:

- Age: 25-34
- City and County: Denver
- Race: Hispanic or Latino
- Gender: Male
- Household income? 20-49K annually
- Household: 2-4
- Scenario: 2 (electric bill)
- Found steps to deal w/ problem? Yes
- Easy or difficult? Very Easy
- Would you recommend the site? Very likely
- What was confusing or difficult? Basically, didn't have any issues with navigation, the first website was very helpful on finding information
- What did you like or not like? The website was very nice, caught my attention and easy to navigate

d. Individual Six:

- Age: 65+
- City and County: Denver
- Race: Black or African American
- Gender: Female
- Household income? 20-49K annually
- Household: 2-4
- Scenario: 4 (bullying)
- Found steps to deal w/ problem? Yes

- Easy or difficult? Difficult
- Would you recommend the site? Unlikely
- What was confusing or difficult? Look for the site that helped me with what I needed, after reading it over and over finally I choose one
- What did you like or not like? Too hard to find actually what I was looking for

e. Individual Ten:

- Age: 65+
- City and County: Ft. Morgan
- Race: White or Caucasian
- Gender: Female
- Income: 20-49K/annually
- Household: 2-4
- Scenario: 1 (heater not working)
- Found steps to deal w/ problem? Yes
- Easy or difficult? Difficult
- Would you recommend the site? Unlikely
- What was confusing or difficult? I wasn't sure what category to go to. The site seemed cluttered with too much information on one page.
- What did you like or not like? You had to sign up to access information (didn't like).

f. Individual Twelve:

- Age: 44-54
- City and County: Ft. Morgan
- Race: Asian or Asian American
- Gender: Female
- Income: 10-19K/annually
- Household: 1
- Scenario: 2 (electric bill)
- Found steps to deal w/ problem? Yes
- Easy or difficult? Difficult

- Would you recommend the site? Neither likely nor unlikely
- What did you like or not like? Information was not specific enough to the problem, there was not enough to choose from, the website would be better for someone with more knowledge at navigating the computer

B. Law Help MN

1. Survey Data:

a. Individual Four:

- Age: 55-64
- City and County: Denver
- Race: Hispanic or Latino
- Gender: Male
- Household: 1
- Scenario: 4 (bullying)
- Found steps to deal w/ problem? Yes
- Easy or difficult? Very Easy
- Would you recommend the site? Very likely
- What was confusing or difficult? The provider page where I think too much is expected and asked of the user who is then left to self-direct
- What did you like or not like? I think the site and the information was inviting and allowed users to find help by directing them to resources based on answers they give to simple and unassuming questions
- Other feedback? I think this is a great process for states to share their site experiences, then adopt attributes that work while rejecting or modifying attributes that do not, achieving a best practice site

C. Massachusetts Legal Resource Finder

1. Survey Data:

a. Individual Two (Spanish-speaking):

- Age: 18-24
- City and County: Denver

- Race: Hispanic or Latino
- Gender: Female
- Income: 50-69K/annually
- Household: 2-4
- Scenario: 1 (heater not working)
- Found steps to deal w/ problem? No
- Easy or difficult? Very difficult
- Would you recommend the site? Unlikely
- What did you like or not like? That it only gave you places to go and did not give you and more information. I disliked that you had to answer multiple questions just to get other places to get more legal information.
- Other feedback: The 2nd website was the most helpful and useful website

b. Individual Three:

- Age: 44-54
- City and County: Denver
- Race: Hispanic or Latino
- Gender: Female
- Income: 20-49K/annually
- Household: 2-4
- Scenario: 1 (heater not working)
- Found steps to deal w/ problem? Yes
- Easy or difficult? Easy
- Would you recommend the site? Likely
- What was confusing or difficult? Did not take note on this one...
- What did you like or not like? The follow up question and answer was very nice and would put a person going through the situation a peace of mind knowing the information
- Other feedback? The income entry needs to be clearer, but what I like the most was the Q&A

c. Individual Five:

- Age: 25-34
- City and County: Denver
- Race: Hispanic or Latino
- Gender: Male
- Household income? 20-49K annually
- Household: 2-4
- Scenario: 2 (electric bill)
- Found steps to deal w/ problem? Yes
- Easy or difficult? Very Easy
- Would you recommend the site? Likely
- What was confusing or difficult? It was the same as the first, easy to navigate
- What did you like or not like? I liked how it had a lot of information, and it made it simple to access my problem

d. Individual Six:

- Age: 65+
- City and County: Denver
- Race: Black or African American
- Gender: Female
- Household income? 20-49K annually
- Household: 2-4
- Scenario: 4 (bullying)
- Found steps to deal w/ problem? No
- Easy or difficult? Difficult
- Would you recommend the site? Very unlikely
- What was confusing or difficult? Couldn't find information about my subject at all
- What did you like or not like? Did not like at all, no site helped me with my problem

- Other feedback: Please make it easier for people to search for their problems

e. Individual Seven:

- Age: 65+
- City and County: Denver
- Race: What or Caucasian
- Gender: Male
- Household income? Over 70K
- Household: 2-4
- Scenario: 4 (bullying)
- Found steps to deal w/ problem? Yes
- Easy or difficult? Easy
- Would you recommend the site? Very likely
- What was confusing or difficult? Did not have difficult, there was an abundance of organizational resources – fewer might be more helpful to an average user (all were well-described)
- What did you like or not like? Choices were simple and well displayed – the path to the answer was fairly intuitive

f. Individual Eleven:

- Age: 65+
- City and County: Ft. Morgan
- Race: White or Caucasian
- Gender: Female
- Income: 20-49K/annually
- Household: 2-4
- Scenario: 1 (heater not working)
- Found steps to deal w/ problem? No
- Easy or difficult? Neither Easy nor Difficult
- Would you recommend the site? Unlikely

g. Individual Twelve:

- Age: 44-54
- City and County: Ft. Morgan
- Race: Asian or Asian American
- Gender: Female
- Income: 10-19K/annually
- Household: 1
- Scenario: 2 (electric bill)
- Would you recommend the site? Neither likely nor unlikely
- What did you like or not like? It was a little better in navigating the explanation of solving the problem.
- Other feedback? Start with paperwork and learn steps to court – if need me advise from legal advisor or lawyer. Explanation outline would then be helpful.

D. CT Law Help

1. Survey Data:

a. Individual One (Spanish-speaking):

- Age: 65+
- City and County: Ft. Morgan
- Race: White or Caucasian
- Gender: Female
- Household: 1
- Scenario: 3 (fired from job)
- Found steps to deal w/ problem? Yes
- Easy or difficult? Neither
- Would you recommend the site? Yes
- What did you like or not like? Appeared well done.

b. Individual Two (Spanish-speaking):

- Age: 18-24
- City and County: Denver
- Race: Hispanic or Latino

- Gender: Female
- Income: 50-69K/annually
- Household: 2-4
- Scenario: 1 (heater not working)
- Found steps to deal w/ problem? Yes
- Easy or difficult? Very easy
- Would you recommend the site? Very likely
- What was confusing or difficult? Nothing confusing it was actually very easy to navigate.
- What did you like or not like? I like how it was able to give you more information and what you can do about your legal matter. I like how it was inclusive and had multiple languages to choose from.
- Other feedback: The 2nd website was the most helpful and useful website

c. Individual Eight:

- Age: 25-34
- City and County: Denver
- Race: Hispanic or Latino
- Gender: Male
- Household income? 50-69K
- Household: 1
- Scenario: 1 (heater)
- Found steps to deal w/ problem? Yes
- Easy or difficult? Very Easy
- Would you recommend the site? Very likely
- What was confusing or difficult? None – very easy to navigate
- What did you like or not like? I liked that the information was easy to locate. Very user friendly.

d. Individual Ten:

- Age: 65+
- City and County: Ft. Morgan

- Race: White or Caucasian
- Gender: Female
- Income: 20-49K/annually
- Household: 2-4
- Scenario: 1 (heater not working)
- Found steps to deal w/ problem? Yes
- Easy or difficult? Easy
- Would you recommend the site? Likely
- What was confusing or difficult? I didn't find the website difficult or confusing.

e. Individual Eleven:

- Age: 65+
- City and County: Ft. Morgan
- Race: White or Caucasian
- Gender: Female
- Income: 20-49K/annually
- Household: 2-4
- Scenario: 1 (heater not working)
- Found steps to deal w/ problem? Yes

f. Individual Thirteen:

- Age: 35-44
- City and County: skipped q
- Race: Hispanic or Latino
- Gender: Male
- Income: 0-9K/annually
- Household: 2-4
- Scenario: 1 (heater)
- Did you find information? Yes
- Easy or difficult to use? Very easy
- Would you recommend the site? Very likely

- What did you find confusing if anything? None
- What did you like or not like? I liked that it's very clear on explaining everything I need.
- Other feedback? I appreciate the opportunity to participate in this program.

E. Vermont Legal Help

1. Survey Data:

a. Individual One (Spanish-speaking):

- Age: 65+
- City and County: Ft. Morgan
- Race: White or Caucasian
- Gender: Female
- Household: 1
- Scenario: 3 (fired from job)
- Found steps to deal w/ problem? Yes
- Easy or difficult? Easy
- Would you recommend the site? Very likely
- What did you like or not like? I was amazed at the amount of information available in Spanish.
- Other feedback? I appreciate the availability of legal resources.

b. Individual Seven:

- Age: 65+
- City and County: Denver
- Race: White or Caucasian
- Gender: Male
- Household income? Over 70K
- Household: 2-4
- Scenario: 4 (bullying)
- Found steps to deal w/ problem? Yes
- Easy or difficult? Easy
- Would you recommend the site? Neither likely nor unlikely

- What was confusing or difficult? More steps to get to the intake page – but the steps were not difficult – however for a typical user, fewer steps are always better
- What did you like or not like? The path for the second site felt somewhat less direct, because education was not a designated choice (it was an “other matter” choice)
- Other feedback: Both sites get the job done, MA seemed more direct and for that reason somewhat better than Vermont

c. Individual Eight:

- Age: 25-34
- City and County: Denver
- Race: Hispanic or Latino
- Gender: Male
- Household income? 50-69K
- Household: 1
- Scenario: 1 (heater)
- Found steps to deal w/ problem? No
- Easy or difficult? Difficult
- Would you recommend the site? Unlikely
- What was confusing or difficult? I was not able to find information on how to fix the issue. The information was also difficult to locate.
- What did you like or not like? I did not like that the housing information was hard to locate in the initial page.

d. Individual Nine:

- Age: 65+
- City and County: Ft. Morgan
- Race: White or Caucasian
- Gender: Female
- Household income? Over 70K
- Household: 1

- Scenario: 2 (heater)
- Found steps to deal w/ problem? No
- Easy or difficult? Neither easy nor difficult
- Would you recommend the site? Unlikely
- What was confusing or difficult? Information not related to my issue
- What did you like or not like? Need to be more concise – too many options

e. Individual Twelve:

- Age: 35-44
- City and County: skipped q
- Race: Hispanic or Latino
- Gender: Male
- Income: 0-9K/annually
- Household: 2-4
- Scenario: 1 (heater)
- Did you find information? Yes
- Easy or difficult to use? Very easy
- Would you recommend the site? Very likely
- What did you find confusing if anything? None
- What did you like or not like? What I liked about the content is that it guides people step by step to connect to the sources they need to solve their issues.