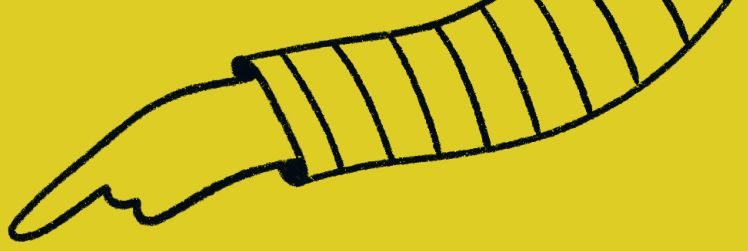
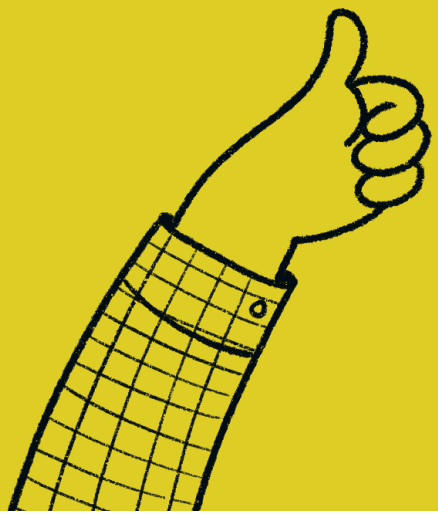


Build a better _____:

Strategies for user-informed legal design

Michigan Advocacy Program
Graphic Advocacy Project

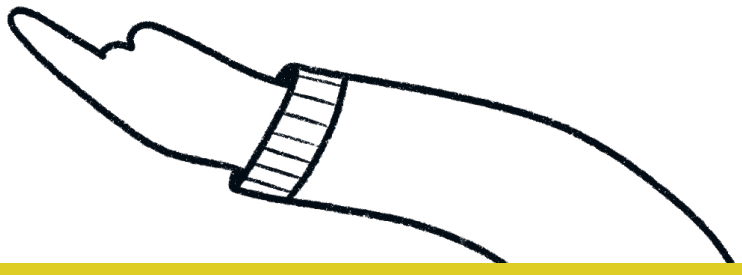


MAP

Graphic advocacy project

LSC America's Partner for Equal Justice
LEGAL SERVICES CORPORATION

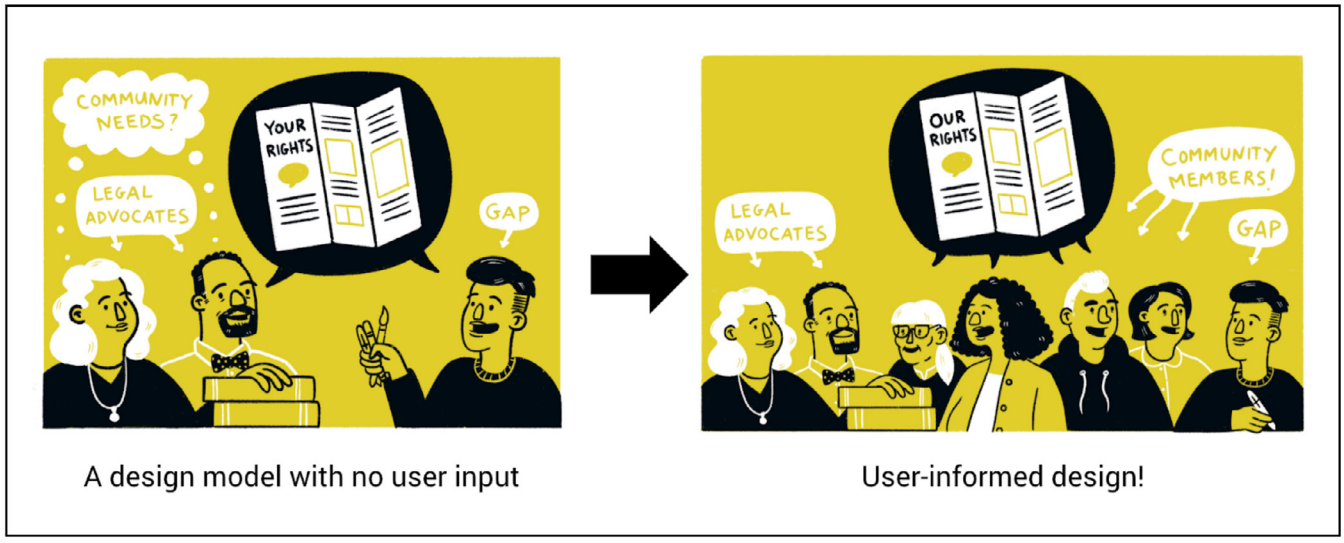
Contents



Introduction

What is UX design? When we talk about user experience—or "UX"—design, we're talking about designing the entire experience of *using* a thing, not just designing the thing itself. You could make a functioning tool all by yourself, but if the people you made it for have trouble using it, or don't want to use it, or can't even find it in the first place, is it "useful" in any meaningful sense? Making something useful means making something that actually meets people's needs, and that requires learning from users throughout the design process.

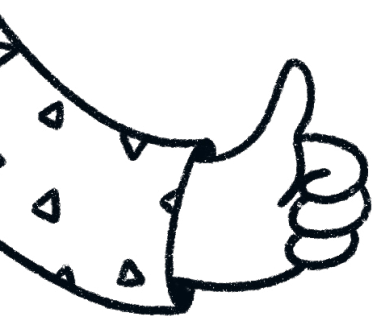
Why should the justice community care about UX design? Lawyers and legal professionals undergo specialized training in order to understand the law and hone our advocacy skills. While this expert mindset can be useful, it can also make it difficult for us to recognize, seek out, and value less institutionalized forms of expertise, like the lived experiences of the communities we work with. If we want to design tools that actually help people understand and navigate legal problems, we will need to start treating our clients as collaborators. User-informed design processes can help us move beyond the traditional expert-client relationship and facilitate meaningful exchanges of knowledge that flow in both directions.



The evolution of GAP's design model

So, how might the justice community (legal service providers, courts, law libraries, and everyone in between) become more familiar with user-informed design principles and more capable and committed to applying them to the creation of legal resources? This report describes and furthers the Michigan Advocacy Program's efforts—funded by the Legal Services Corporation and executed in partnership with the Graphic Advocacy Project—to explore this question. The report has four parts. Part I describes our LSC-funded project and reviews its primary components: our UX design and usability training courses, our usability audits of existing access-to-justice technology tools, and our efforts to share user-informed design insights and resources with the broader justice community (including this report). Part II provides guidance for engaging in user-informed legal design, including key concepts, practical methods, and best practices. Part III details expert recommendations—based on industry standards and insights from our audits of fourteen legal technology tools—for designing usable and accessible legal tools. Part IV provides additional resources, including templates, for anyone interested in applying user-informed design methods to their own work.

By using plain language and visual design, providing concrete examples, and anchoring UX design concepts in the access-to-justice context, we hope to create an accessible resource that will both persuade the broader justice community of the importance of undertaking user-informed design and arm them with the tools to do so.



"I've spent most of my legal career asking people to check their emotions at the door... But you can actually use those emotions and how people respond in terms of creating an effective solution."

Fall course participant

I. Project overview

Project goals and objectives

In 2019, the Michigan Advocacy Program (MAP) received a Technology Initiative Grant (TIG) from the Legal Services Corporation (LSC) to bring UX design and usability testing training to the justice community. After having struggled with these topics in the early days of Michigan Legal Help, and then learning how important they are, MAP wanted to help others in the community understand the basics of UX design and learn how easy usability testing can be. The goal of this TIG was to work with consultants to provide unique and accessible training opportunities and resources that would improve the usability of tools created by the justice community. After requesting and reviewing proposals, MAP hired the Graphic Advocacy Project (GAP), a nonprofit dedicated to designing legal resources through community-informed processes. Together, MAP and GAP sought to achieve four primary project objectives:

Objective 1: Create and deliver to a group of 8-12 justice community partners a ten-week training module on UX design and usability testing for online tools to improve the usability of future tools and increase UX design and usability testing expertise within the justice community.

Objective 2: Provide expert UX review of online tools designed/created by 8-12 justice community partners to improve the usability of existing tools and increase UX design expertise within the justice community.

Objective 3: Host a day-long usability testing event where 8-12 justice community partners, under the supervision and direction of UX experts, engage in usability testing of their online tools and analyze their findings.

Objective 4: Compile educational materials and learnings from all stages of the project into a best practices report and participate in at least one national training webinar or conference panel.

As of this report, MAP and GAP have executed Objectives 1, 2, and 4. Objectives 1 and 2—the training classes and the usability audits—are detailed below. We postponed Objective 3 because of COVID-19, but plan to host a usability testing event at LSC's Innovations in Technology Conference in 2022.

UX design training courses

Overview of timeline and activities

Our first project objective was to create and deliver to a group of 8-12 justice community partners a ten-week training module on UX design and usability testing for online tools to improve the usability of future tools and increase UX design and usability testing expertise within the justice community. In preparation for this training course, GAP built a robust syllabus based on the user experience design process and developed a series of materials for each class meeting. These included weekly assignments, template resources for assignments, lecture slides, and supporting education resources like articles. Because GAP designed the UX course to reflect the user experience design process, the templates GAP created to support course assignments have applicability beyond the course as training materials for the broader justice community. These include templates to draft a project brief, form a research plan, conduct exploratory interviews and record notes, synthesize research findings, and conduct usability testing. All of these templates are available in Part IV of this

report and have been shared widely with the community as conference panel materials.

We designed the ten-week UX design course to mirror the process of designing a user-informed solution, from defining the problem and conducting exploratory research to testing and iterating on prototypes. The course met for 1.5 hours every week with a consistent structure: past week assignment review and open discussion (20 minutes), lecture on weekly topic (40 minutes), assignment review (15 minutes), and open work time with instructor support (15 minutes). The main topics for each week were:

Week 1:	Introductions and welcome!
Week 2:	Research methodologies
Week 3:	User recruitment
Week 4:	Facilitation and user interviews
Week 5:	Research synthesis and prioritization
Week 6:	Sketching/ideation
Week 7:	Prototyping and UX/UI (user interface) design patterns
Week 8:	Usability testing
Week 9:	UI Design 101
Week 10:	Final group presentations

All participants and groups were offered time every week to meet with instructors for "office hours" to review assignments or lecture topics in more depth. In addition to the weekly classes and assignments, GAP distributed surveys at the beginning, middle, and end of the course to gain insight into participants' needs, measure participants' self-assessed learning progress, and collect feedback about the course. A final survey was/will be distributed approximately six months after the end of each course to measure long-term impact of the training.

Although our initial objective was to facilitate a single 10-week course, we were ultimately able to offer two iterations of the course to two distinct sets of participants: one in the fall of 2020, and the second in the spring of 2021. We describe each iteration below.

"[By engaging with users] we got lots of good information that we definitely would not have come up with just ourselves just sitting around thinking about what we think people want."

Fall course participant

Fall 2020

Our fall UX design course met from October to December 2020. Thirty-seven people participated from these twelve organizations:

- Administrative Office of Illinois Courts, Access to Justice Division
- Alaska Legal Services Corp
- Colorado Legal Services
- Colorado State Court Administrator's Office
- Equal Justice Wyoming
- Fulton County State Court Self-Help Center
- Legal Services of North Florida
- Michigan Legal Help Program
- Northwest Justice Project
- Texas Legal Services Center/TexasLawHelp
- Texas RioGrande Legal Aid
- Utah Legal Services

Spring 2021

Our spring UX design course met from March to May 2021. Thirty people participated from these twelve organizations:

- Alaska Court System - Access to Justice
- Bay Area Legal Services
- Center for Elder Law & Justice
- Illinois Legal Aid Online
- International Refugee Assistance Project
- Iowa Legal Aid
- Legal Services of Northern California
- Legal Services of Northern Virginia
- Lone Star Legal Aid
- MA Appleseed Center for Law & Justice
- Massachusetts Law Reform Institute
- Utah State Law Library

This second course presented an opportunity to improve on our original course design. We facilitated more breakout groups and discussions so that participants could learn with and from one another, required periodic team check-ins with the instructors in order to provide individualized project support, and consistently referred to a real-world case study throughout the course to ground the material in reality and showcase its potential applications.

Our first class in fall 2020

Usability audits

Overview of timeline and activities

One of the key objectives of this project was to provide expert UX review of interactive tools designed/created by 8-12 justice community partners to improve the usability of existing tools and increase UX design expertise within the justice community.

Participating programs were:

- Inland Counties Legal Services (CA)
- Judiciary of Maryland
- Legal Services of Greater Miami
- Montana Legal Services Association
- Lone Star Legal Aid
- Indiana Legal Help
- Legal Services of Northern Virginia
- Legal Aid of the Bluegrass
- Atlanta Legal Aid Society
- South Carolina Legal Services
- Neighborhood Legal Services of LA County
- Massachusetts Law Reform Institute
- Judicial Council of California/Pro Bono Net/ Legal Aid Association of California
- Illinois Legal Aid Online

GAP began conducting these audits in fall 2020. Each audit consisted of three stages: 1) a kickoff call with the participating organization to define the focus of the audit (30 minutes), 2) a UX audit of the legal tool by GAP (4.5 hours), and 3) a review meeting with the organization to go over the audit findings and recommendations (1 hour).

Each UX audit consisted of a heuristics evaluation, a cognitive walkthrough, and an accessibility review. Based on these three components, GAP generated a series of recommendations for each tool, prepared a Findings & Recommendations presentation, and shared the presentation with each organization during their review meeting. All participants were provided the full details of the UX audit, including the notes, screen shots, recommendations presentation, and any other curated resources relevant to their audit. To conduct the UX audits, GAP prepared a template referencing design best practices and notable design resources. The audit template and resources are provided in Part IV of this report.

In the fourteen UX audits conducted, GAP reviewed a wide range of tools, including legal service organizations websites, self-represented litigant resources/guided interviews, intake forms for getting legal help, triage tools, video classrooms, and more. The common usability challenges GAP observed across these varied tools helped inform the expert recommendations in Part III of this report.

"We are in the process of implementing several of the suggestions we got during our audit, including making elements of our homepage easier to navigate, highlighting links in our articles, linking tabbed sections and making our About Us information more visible."

UX audit recipient

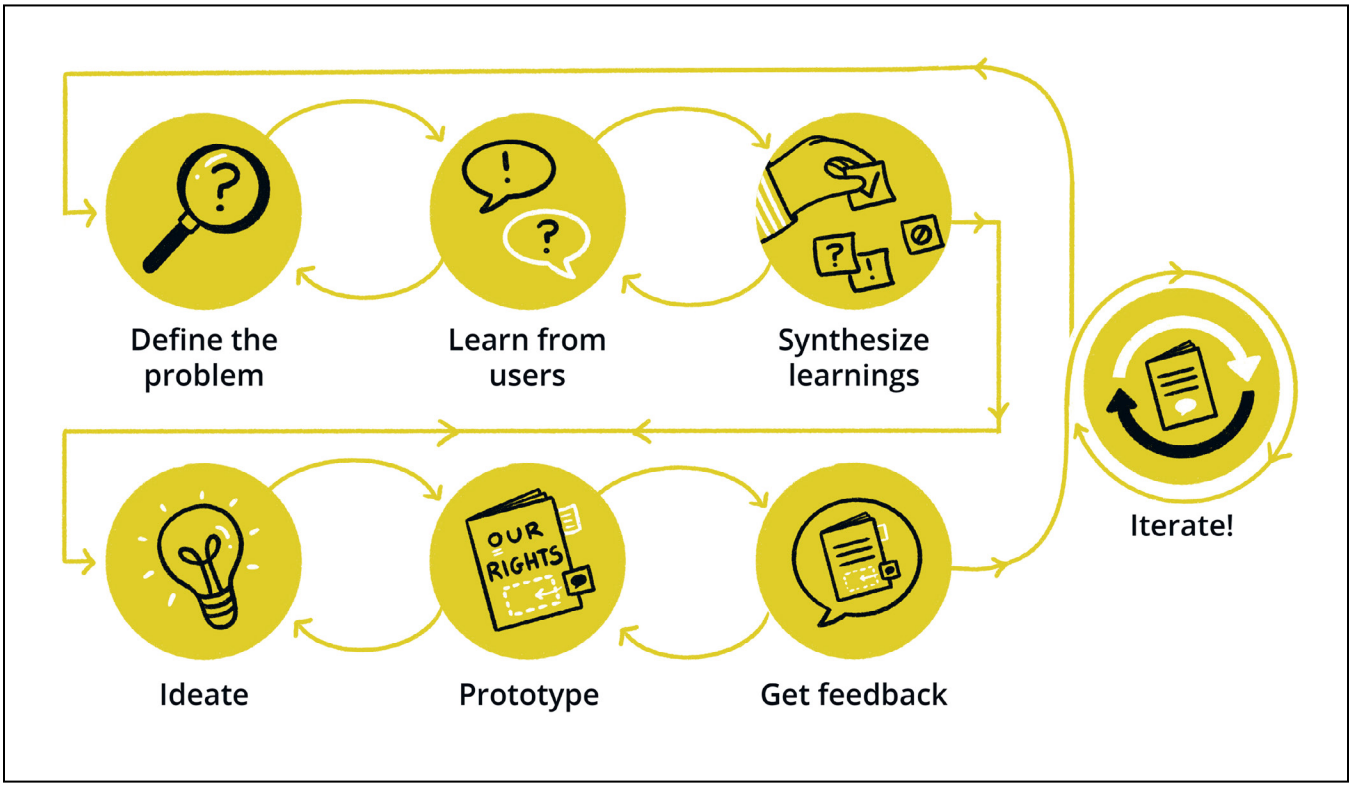
II. User-informed legal design: a practical guide

UX design process overview

User experience (UX) design, also known as human-centered design or user-informed design, is a problem-solving approach that brings the people you're designing for into the design process. Born from design thinking, it pulls principles and methodologies from spaces including sociology, psychology, and ergonomics, to name a few. The core principles of UX design make it applicable to many different spaces and issue areas, including how people interact with legal systems, processes, and information. Though the design process may vary from project to project, there are a few core principles that govern user-informed design:

- Focus on the people that are directly affected by the issues you are working on, and consider all of the people associated with those issues.
- Find the right problem: seek the fundamental root problems and not just the symptoms.
- Everything is part of a system: understand how things are interconnected.

So how do you actually go about "doing" user-informed legal design?



An overview of the user-informed design process

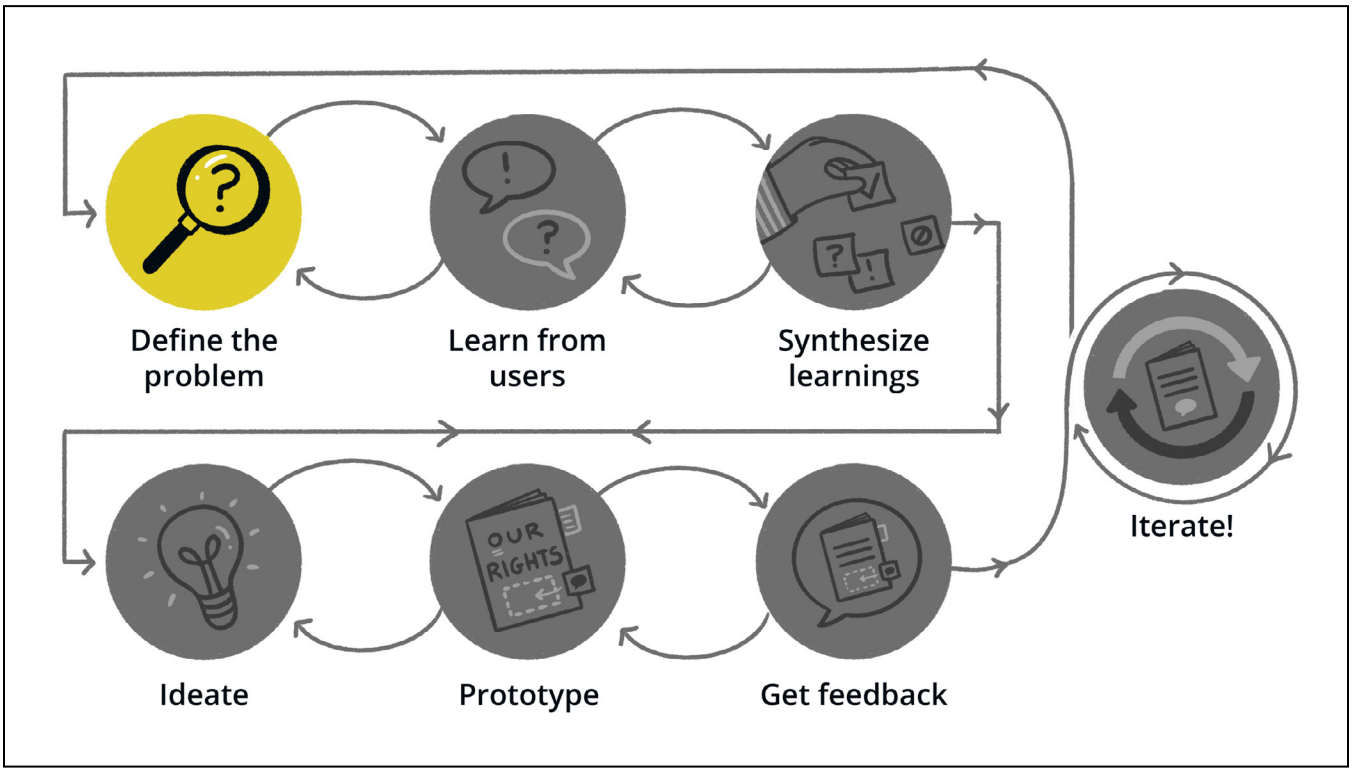
User-informed design is a set of methods and mindsets that facilitates user input throughout an iterative problem-solving process. Though user-informed design is often associated with technology solutions, it is not limited to tech. Solutions come in all shapes and sizes, depending on user insights—from updating a short pamphlet about tenants' legal rights, to creating a comprehensive statewide legal help website from scratch, to reimagining your organization's intake processes. Whether you're tackling something broad or honing in on something specific, creating something new or improving something old, you can leverage this process to ground solutions in your users' experiences and needs. And while the process will look a bit different for every project, the elements are the same.

At the heart of user-informed legal design is the intention to bring those who are most affected by a legal problem into the process of creating a solution to address it. This process begins with learning from individuals and communities about the challenges they face and their lived experiences. Such insights drive a deep understanding of the problem at hand, challenging our own singular assumptions and providing a basis to ideate solutions that directly address people's needs. As we move through the design process, we must continuously and intentionally create opportunities to connect with impacted individuals and communities in order to keep solutions rooted in their experiences of the problem. This process keeps the people who become users of the intended solution at the center of the problem-solving process to ensure solutions are accessible and meet their needs.

Let's take a closer look at each stage of the user-informed design process.

Define the problem

Approach problems by first determining and defining the problem space as you understand it.



Start by defining the problem

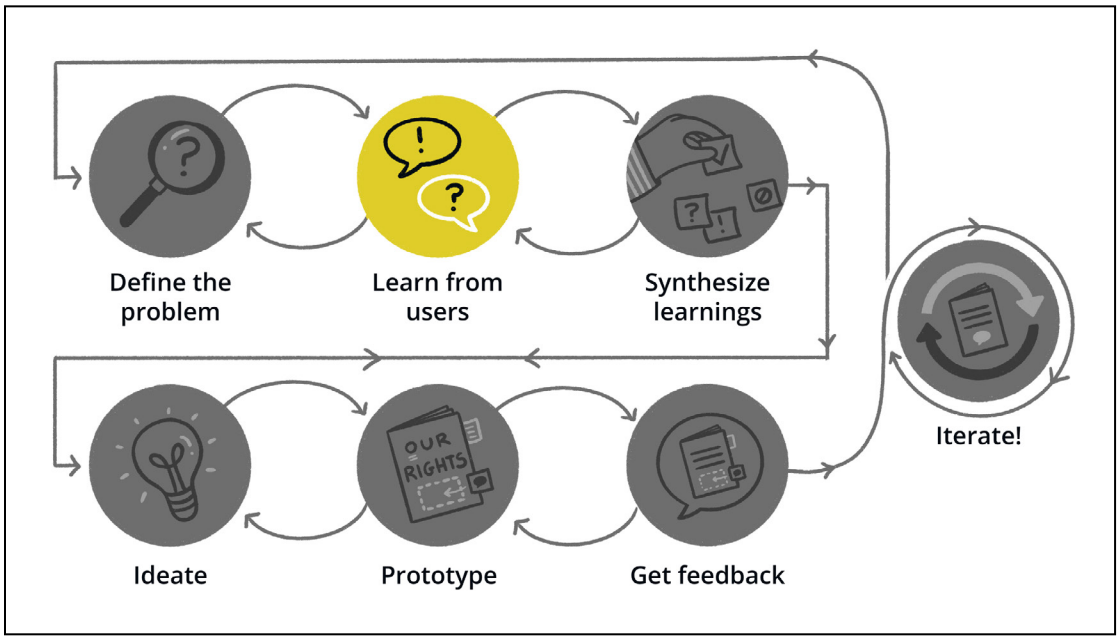
To start this process, we begin by first defining the problem space. This can be done by documenting what you already know about the problem, who it affects, existing solutions and assumptions, and what you still need to learn as a starting point for further discovery. While it's natural to jump to solutions and problem-solving, it is important to first start with understanding the problem so that solutions are not simply reactive, but will truly address the issues at hand. This upfront planning stage, often documented in an early-stage project brief, helps to gauge what information still needs to be gathered and learned from those most affected by the problem, your users, as well as considerations for future solutioning.

Best practices
Explore the problem before you jump to a solution (page 16).

Resources
Project brief template

Learn from users

Explore the problem space by learning from those who are affected by the problem (and those who might affect it).



Engage with users to learn more about the problem space

After defining the problem space and determining which research questions to explore, engage with those impacted by the problem to further discover and contextualize the problem space. You can use a variety of research methods and activities to learn more about users' processes, needs, and pain points, making space for users to participate in the design process. Start this process by first creating a research plan to catalog what it is you're hoping to learn and from whom, and to prepare for connecting with participants to gather information.

Remember to include all potential users in this stage—for example, agency staff assessing people's eligibility for a public benefit as well as individuals applying for that public benefit. This ensures that solutions will truly address all users' needs and not be biased by our own assumptions and perspectives.

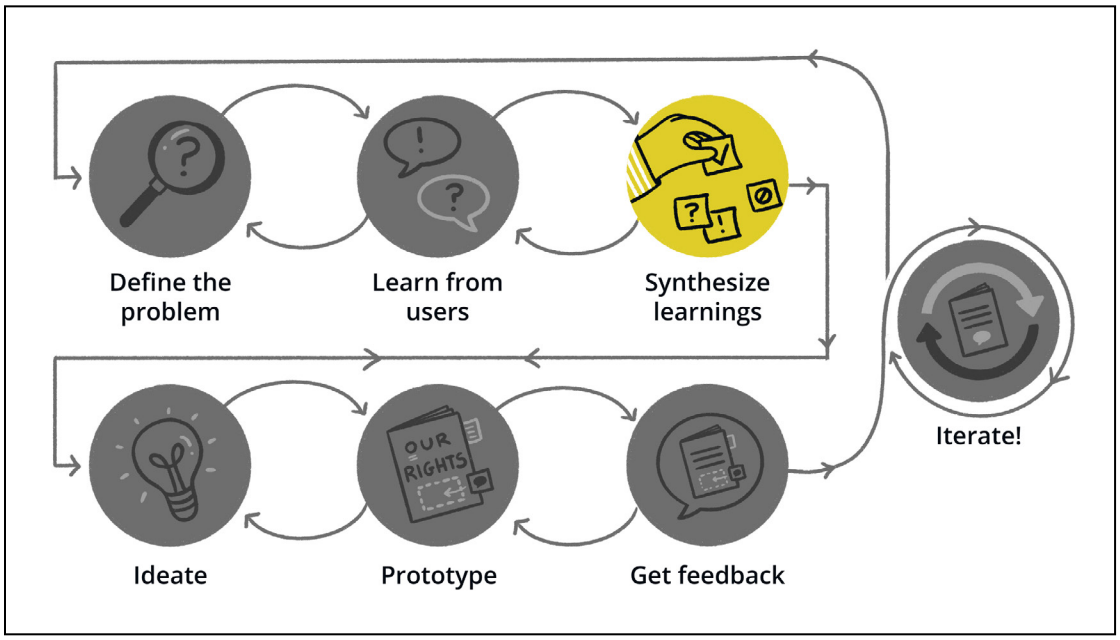
This early research opportunity to connect with those in the problem space is best achieved by utilizing exploratory research methods that allow for open-ended and ethnographic discovery and learning from users. A common method employed at this stage is semi-structured interviews that allow for participants to share their stories and for you to probe into areas of interest.

Best practices
Approach the problem holistically (page 17).

Resources
- Research plan template
- Interview guide template
- Interview notes template

Synthesize learnings into insights

Review learnings from research to discover patterns and themes that can be synthesized into high-level insights for informing solutions and next steps.



Synthesize learnings from users into insights to inform solutions

After conducting research and learning from users, it is important to take time to make sense of that information before jumping to solutioning. Synthesizing learnings from users into high-level insights can help better define the problem space (and what to do about it). This stage of the process can reveal the most frequently encountered, critical, and even surprising pain points and needs as well as provide a more thorough and holistic picture of the end-to-end user experience. Insights can then be used to create artifacts to help visualize and ground the problem in users' needs, values, and expectations and identify opportunity areas for potential solutions.

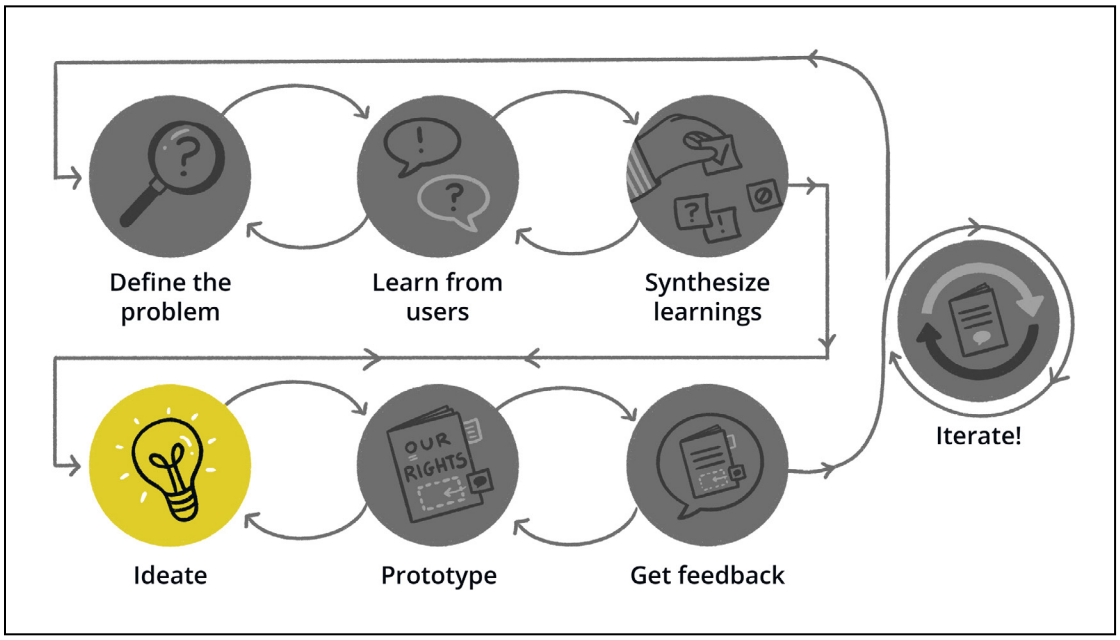
One way to make sense of data collected through user research is by grouping takeaways into patterns and themes, which will then become high-level insights. While there are many ways to do this, insights mapping is a common approach that uses sticky notes to facilitate easy grouping and naming of insights. You can create an insights map by yourself or collaboratively with your team, and you can use physical sticky notes or virtual ones in tools like MURAL. Start by writing takeaways from each interview, survey, or other research effort onto sticky notes—one takeaway per note. Next, move the sticky notes around to cluster related takeaways together. Finally, review each cluster of insights to determine its overarching theme. This exercise can help you identify patterns in your research, translating a range of user input and experiences into applicable insights.

Best practices
Leave your assumptions at the door (page 16).

Resources
Research synthesis MURAL template

Ideate

Brainstorm all possible ideas that address users' needs, then hone in on those that are both achievable and impactful.



Use insights to ideate and brainstorm potential solutions

Ideation is the process of turning research insights into potential solutions through brainstorming. Ideation can be daunting (but fun), which is why it's important to lean on what you've learned from your users to drive ideas and next steps. Review your research synthesis for insights that highlight current challenges or pain points, missed opportunities, and/or disconnected processes. Brainstorm all of the possible solutions that might address those insights. Start broadly to create space for creativity, then hone in on specific ideas. Focus on ideas that will have the highest impact, meet the real world context, and consider all given constraints: these ideas will not only keep users at the center of the solution, but will also have the best chance of success.

One way to evaluate potential solutions is by mapping them on a prioritization matrix, with one axis representing the potential impact of the solution and the other axis representing the feasibility of executing the solution. Assessing each solution on these two axes, as well as relative to each other, can help clarify where best to invest resources while also creating the best user experience.

Best practices

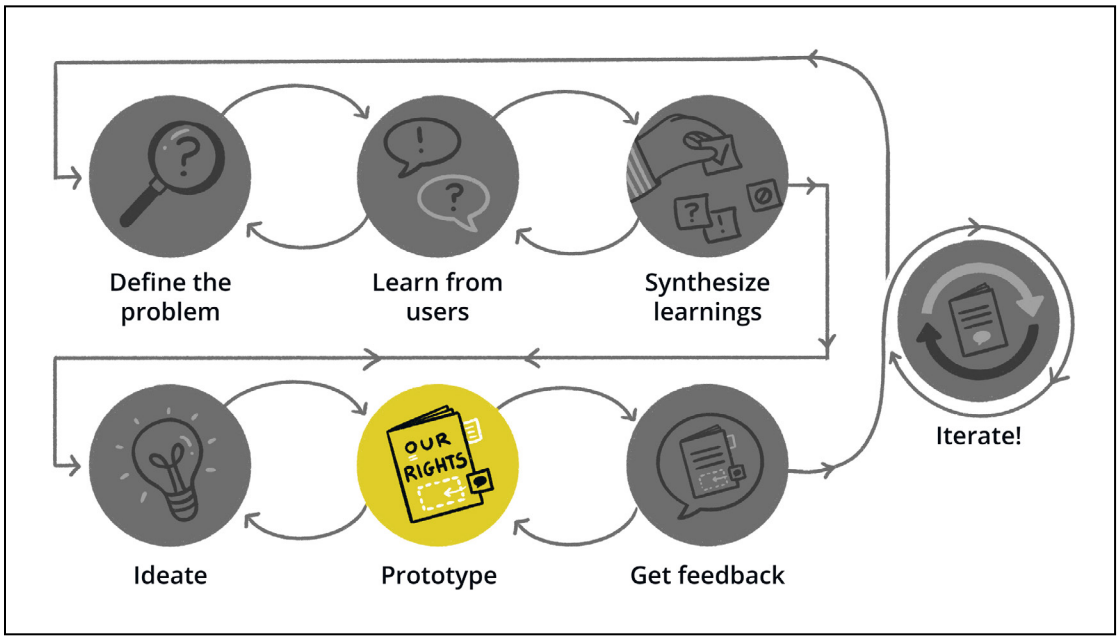
- UX is not just what the tool looks like (page 18).
- Solutions come in all shapes and sizes (forms, outreach strategy, collaborating with hotline centers to gather FAQs, guides, interviews) (page 18).

Resources

Research synthesis MURAL template

Prototype

Prototypes help you think through a solution more thoroughly and facilitate gathering feedback from users to inform early iterations and improvements.



Bring ideas to life through prototyping lightweight solutions

A prototype is a preliminary model or simulation of a solution. Prototypes are a great way to bring ideas to life without expending a lot of resources. They are a lightweight way to help visualize and assess potential solutions and can be created in different levels of fidelity—from a hand-drawn paper prototype to a live demo of a website—depending on your capacity and goals. Prototypes simulate solutions in a way that does not require them to be completely developed, helping us think through user experience questions—like how the information flows from one page to the next, whether actions are accessible and visible to users, and whether the purpose of the solution addresses the identified challenges and opportunities from research synthesis. Most importantly, we can use prototypes to gather and implement feedback from our users.

There is no "right" way to create a prototype: it depends on your capabilities, resources, and needs. There are existing tools and approaches that can help you bring your ideas to life through prototyping, without needing to invest time and resources into learning additional skills.

Best practices

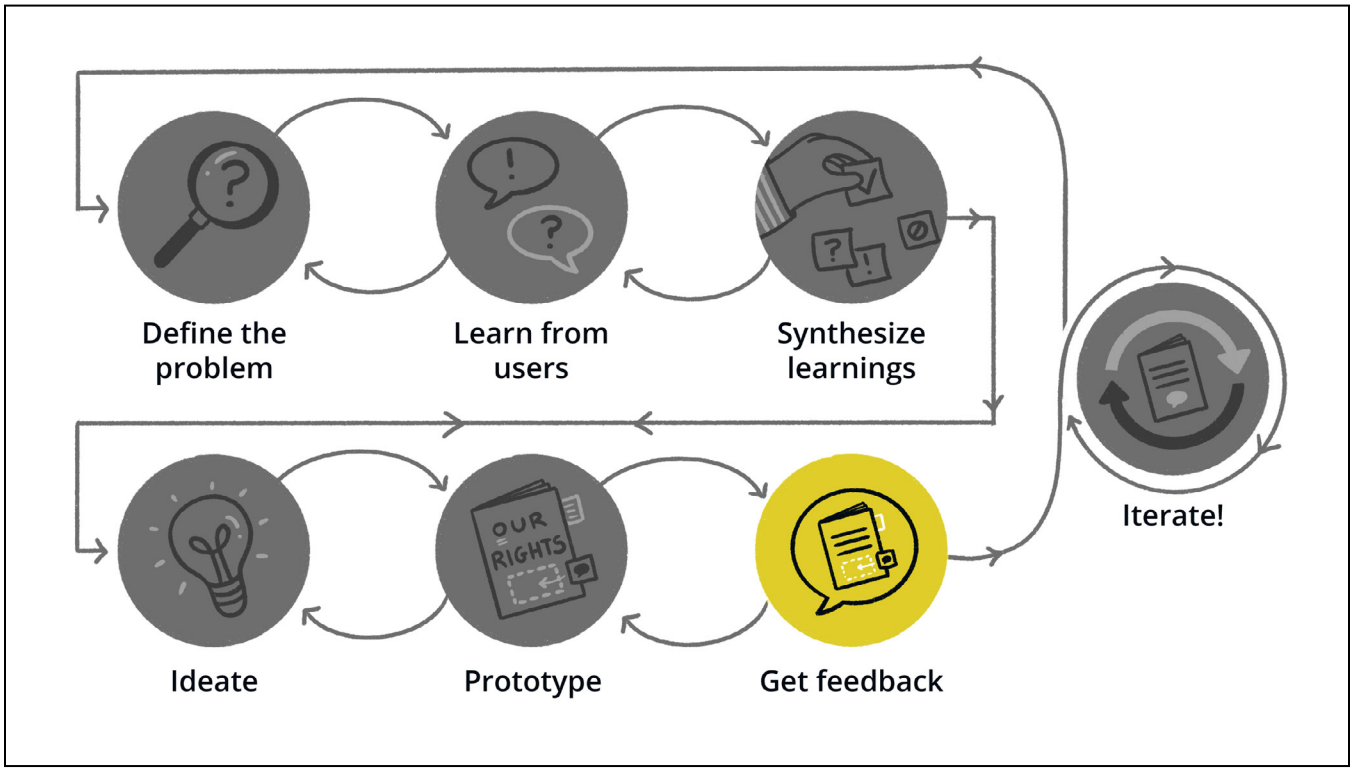
- Design with real content (page 17).
- Prototype before you build anything (page 18).
- Keep things simple and consistent (page 18).

Resources

Marvelapp prototyping tutorial

Get feedback/usability testing

Gather feedback from users on working prototypes to assess how well solutions meet users' needs and to inform future iterations and improvements.



Gather feedback from users on prototypes to validate and improve

Gathering feedback on initial prototypes and ideas is an important way to keep your users involved in the design process. By soliciting feedback early and often, you can quickly determine whether your solutions truly address the problem and identify areas for improvement. Feedback keeps your focus on the users and their needs to ensure solutions are effective, usable, and successful.

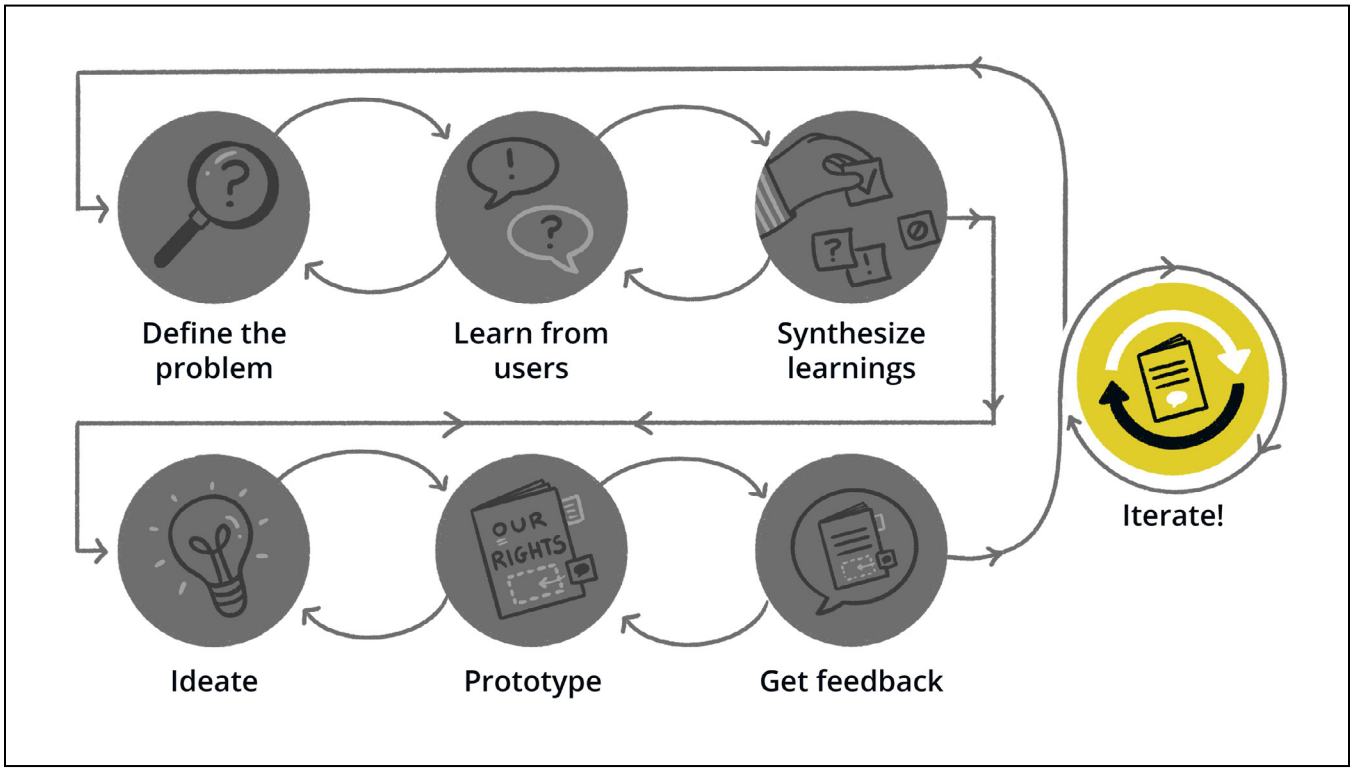
Usability testing is a research method to help get feedback on prototypes in order to test early assumptions and inform future iterations (and potential pivots). During usability testing, research participants interact with your prototype while you observe their experience and solicit their initial impressions. When facilitating this process, your role is not to explain your design decisions or "correct" the participant's use of your prototype, but to create space for the participant to explore the prototype as organically as possible and to give honest feedback.

Best practices
Leave your assumptions at the door—yes, again! (page 16).

Resources
Usability testing script template

Iterate

The design process is ongoing as we continue to gather feedback and learn from users about where there are opportunities to improve.



Continue to iterate and improve on solutions (design is never "finished")

Each phase of the UX design process builds upon what came before it, but the process is not linear. Iteration reminds us that design is never "finished"—that we always have the opportunity to refine our solutions to ensure they meet user needs. Whether you are updating content, tweaking interactions, or incorporating new media or imagery, your iterations should be based on user feedback. Iteration is an opportunity to continuously assess and ensure that your solutions center the people who are most affected by the problems motivating your design.

Explore other UX design process models to see how they've made this iterative process their own:

- Service Design Vancouver: Double Diamond
- IDEO.org: Design Kit
- Nielsen Norman Group: Design Thinking

Best practices and mindsets

Based on GAP's experiences facilitating UX design training sessions with the justice community, as well as our broader participation in the field of legal design, we've identified a few best practices and mindsets for approaching user-informed design in the legal space:

- Leave your assumptions at the door (lawyers don't know everything!)
- Explore the problem before the solutions
- Approach the problem holistically
- Iterate! Leverage the design process.

Best practice 1: Leave your assumptions at the door.

Be mindful not to insert your biases at any stage of this process, including research, synthesis, and ideating. Recognize users as experts in their situations.

As legal professionals, we know how important it is to build trust with our clients. But traditional legal training teaches us to view these relationships as one-sided in terms of expertise: we know the law, and we just need to extract enough information from our clients to fit their situation into our preexisting legal analysis framework. User-informed design requires us to move away from this "lawyer as expert" mindset and recognize that our clients are experts in their own lived experiences. Our clients become our collaborators, sharing their knowledge with us just as we share ours with them.

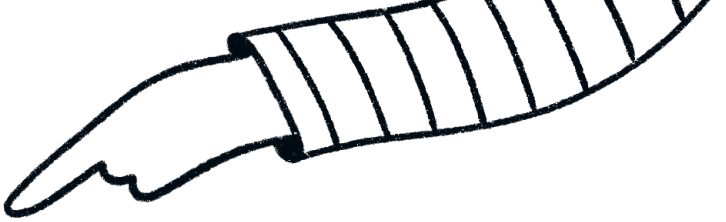
This best practice is crucial throughout the design process, but its value is particularly apparent at the research synthesis stage. Once we have gathered information about the problem from a variety of users and stakeholders, we face the challenge of distilling that information from disparate sources into cohesive takeaways that will inform our ideas for solutions. We've done the important work of seeking user input, but we will undo that work if, during synthesis, we try to cram our users' knowledge and experiences into our own preconceived perspectives of the problem. Instead of trying to fit our users' insights into our own pre-existing analytical frameworks, we must let the insights themselves reveal themes and patterns. Insights mapping, described above in the "Synthesize learnings" section (page 11), is a useful method for approaching research synthesis with openness.

Best practice 2: Explore the problem before you jump to a solution.

It is tempting to start thinking up solutions as soon as we identify a problem, but we can't solve a problem that we don't fully understand. Our own perspectives and assumptions can serve as hypotheses, but we must learn about the problem from people experiencing it before we can start to define the universe of potential solutions that will actually meet their needs.

Many of our course participants experienced the value of this practice firsthand. They began their projects with assumptions about what their solutions would be, but speaking with users revealed dimensions of the problem they hadn't considered. For example, one organization started with the expectation that their tenant advocacy tool would be tech-based, but after conducting exploratory research they learned that a one-page printed flyer might better serve their users' needs.

This best practice highlights the importance of understanding the different phases in the design process, particularly the different intentions between upfront exploratory user research and gathering feedback through usability testing. Exploratory research often focuses on building out the context of the problem space, learning about users' current



lived experiences related to a given issue or activity. Usability testing is a way to gather feedback about an existing solution (including prototypes), to identify areas of friction or confusion for users. It's important to bring both methods into the design process to ensure that the solution both addresses a need and is usable.

Best practice 3: Approach the problem holistically.

Only by understanding the problem space holistically can we begin to define a range of solutions. In order to do this, we need to bring different perspectives into the design process to gain an understanding of the root causes and entire ecosystem.

In the legal space, there is a tendency to fit a problem into a predefined solution. Lawyers are trained to issue-spot, to fit a client's experience into a pre-existing legal framework of what a "problem" looks like, to then utilize existing approaches to solve the problem. This approach might be useful for traditional legal representation, but it can hamper our efforts to design solutions that address how users actually experience a problem beyond the narrow legal conception of that problem.

Gathering research from a broad range of perspectives helps us gain a more comprehensive understanding of the problem, including its divergent impacts on (and by) different people, its interactions with other related problems, and its root causes. Approaching the problem holistically also helps us expand our universe of possible solutions, including solutions that arise before, after, or entirely outside of legal processes.

It's also important to consider where a solution may fall into an existing ecosystem. Understanding where and how people currently seek and interact with existing solutions is critical to making sure a new solution is discoverable and accessible. When we zoom out and think holistically about the ecosystems in which we are designing, we make space for opportunities like outreach partnerships and new ways of distributing information as potential solutions.

Best practice 4: Iterate! Leverage the design process.

You can leverage the user-informed design process at different and multiple phases of your project, depending on your needs and resources. Do you have an existing resource that you want to improve? Do you want to learn more about your potential users and how they are navigating and connecting with legal resources more broadly? Starting with a research plan or a project brief can help to clarify where to begin in the process.

The best part about the user-informed design process is that we never stop learning. Every opportunity we have to connect with people is an opportunity to learn more about their experiences and develop awareness and empathy. An iterative mindset helps you remain an active participant, invested in understanding how to continuously improve resources and evolve your understanding of those you intend to serve.

Additional best practices

- **Don't start from scratch—leverage existing research and knowledge!** For example, your organization may already offer a hotline or support center that is regularly gathering questions or concerns from your community. There is so much to learn from these existing touchpoints and interactions.
- **Design with real content.** When creating designs, try to avoid designing with lorem ipsum or placeholder text. Especially in the

legal space where information is critical, let the content inform the design. Think about the content that your user is coming to your tool to find. Answering these questions first can help to avoid visual design decisions that don't support the content.

- **UX is not just what the tool looks like.** As we've reiterated throughout the process, the user experience is not limited to what the "thing" looks like, but all the different ways that a user engages with the "thing" including how they discover, access, and use it.
- **Consider accessibility early on.** When you are designing a new solution, begin with accessibility in mind to inform your design decisions. An impactful and successful solution is one that works for all users, including those that may use assistive technology or simply require information to be conveyed in a different way. Part IV of this report includes resources for ensuring accessibility (page 26).
- **Prototype before you build anything!** Prototypes bring solutions to life early and with low effort, and aid in thinking through a proposed solution. Even low fidelity prototypes like paper prototypes can reveal gaps or opportunities for improvements and create space for iteration.
- **Solutions come in all shapes and sizes** (forms, outreach strategy, collaborating with hotline centers to gather FAQs, guides, interviews). As mentioned above, UX is not just the design of the "thing". To follow that same line of thinking, a solution might not be a "thing" at all. It could be a process or a practice rather than a physical object to help users accomplish their intended task.
- **Keep things simple and consistent.** You don't have to reinvent the wheel or over-design resources. Use interaction patterns that are common and familiar to users. Present information in a clear and clean way. Part IV includes design resources to help you achieve simplicity (page 26).

Challenges

During this project, GAP observed that justice community members repeatedly encountered certain challenges when applying user-informed design methods to their work. Here are some commonly-asked questions and our best attempts to answer them!

How do I recruit participants for user research and usability testing? When it comes to recruiting participants, remember that you're not starting from scratch: you probably interact with your users and other organizations that serve them on a daily basis! Start by defining user groups and participant criteria so you can aim for a representative sample of participants. Think about how different user groups might require different recruitment techniques. For example, a feedback field on your site might reach a user who's having a frustrating experience with your site, but it won't reach a potential user who doesn't even know about your site. Leverage existing relationships and partnerships to conduct new outreach online and on the ground. Whenever possible, reimburse people for the costs of participating and offer incentives in return for their time. Outreach can take time and cost money, but when possible, invest! The feedback you'll receive, the lessons you'll learn, and the relationships you'll build will be well worth it.

How do I conduct user research and usability testing when in-person interactions are impossible or highly limited? As COVID-19 has shown us, remote user research and usability testing may not be ideal, but it can be done! When recruiting participants, try using existing opportunities to connect, like remote workshops or social media engagements—people will be glad to be heard. There are many remote tools available for gathering research and feedback, but most of the time all you need is a phone.

How do I conduct research and collect feedback as a neutral entity, like a court? If you represent the legal system, it may be especially difficult to build trust with participants and facilitate conditions under which they feel comfortable speaking with you. Be open and honest: acknowledge your institution's limitations. Emphasize that participating in user research is an opportunity to be heard—and potentially change things. If you keep at it, you'll become known as an organization that is open and responsive to feedback, and people will start telling you things you didn't even ask for!

How can I iterate on existing tools with limited resources? If you have the capacity to build a brand new tool through a robust user-informed design process, that's awesome! But for many members of the justice community, time and resources are in short supply, organizational buy-in is difficult to muster, and existing tools stick around despite their flaws because they're better than nothing. Luckily, existing tools don't just create constraints—they also present opportunities to iterate. Small changes can make a huge difference. Keep non-tech improvements in mind: changing up your outreach strategies or your content can transform a user's experience of a tool.

How can my organization embed user-informed design processes into our ongoing work? Adoption, mindset shifts, and buy-in are critical for creating space for user-informed design. You're probably already doing a lot of work that will lend itself naturally to user-informed design projects if you approach it with that intention. For example, you can leverage routine interactions with clients to gain exploratory insights into problems and solicit feedback. Try adding feedback surveys to your websites or asking for feedback in-person after a process is complete. It can be challenging to recruit users while they're in the middle of navigating complex legal processes; invite users to give feedback in the future and build a participant database. And continue to build partnerships with community organizations and nonprofits that work with the same communities as you; you can help each other reach users and disseminate information.

III. GAP's recommendations for designing usable tools

Using experts and industry standards

While there is no substitute for user input and the UX design process, there are industry and web standards that can be helpful for evaluating and improving upon existing resources. Justice community members may consider hiring UX experts who can employ various methods, including the ones we used in our UX audits, to assess the usefulness and usability of their resources. These reviews are done by the expert as a stand in for users, but not as a replacement. Recommendations from expert reviews can and should serve as a starting point for a user-informed design process.

GAP's key UX audit findings and recommendations

During our UX audits of fourteen tools as part of this TIG project, GAP delivered similar findings and recommendations to many organizations. We offer these findings here, along with recommendations for solutions to them, for consideration by all justice community partners interested in improving the usability of their tools.

Overall, the websites and tools we reviewed were content-rich, providing in-depth information and resources to help self-represented litigants understand legal processes and services, get legal help, and advocate for themselves. Because of the number of goals these resources are serving, organizations are utilizing many different types of tools and platforms to deliver the information and services, which can at times result in a disjointed experience.

While the content and features of the websites and tools are comprehensive and functional, we often found issues with the amount of content, navigation and organization of the content, and inconsistencies in language that can make it more difficult for users to find the information they need and take the necessary next steps.

In addition to inconsistent use of language and navigation, there were inconsistencies in the visual design of many of the websites and tools, both in not adhering to web standards/best practices (color, icons, etc.) and between the desktop and mobile experiences. Relatedly, many websites and tools did not follow accessibility best practices, such as providing alternative text for images and defining a proper tab order, making it more difficult for users who use assistive technology to navigate.

Finally, many of the organizations expressed interest in gathering feedback on their websites and tools. The websites and tools are set up in ways that provide many opportunities for embedding feedback mechanisms so that users can share what is and isn't working and help organizations improve upon the resources they are providing. These websites and tools are already immensely helpful; with some content review, navigation restructure, design updates, and ongoing feedback opportunities,

organizations can continue to deliver these critical resources in the best way possible. Below are some concrete examples of common findings and recommendations GAP shared during the UX audits.

Multiple platforms

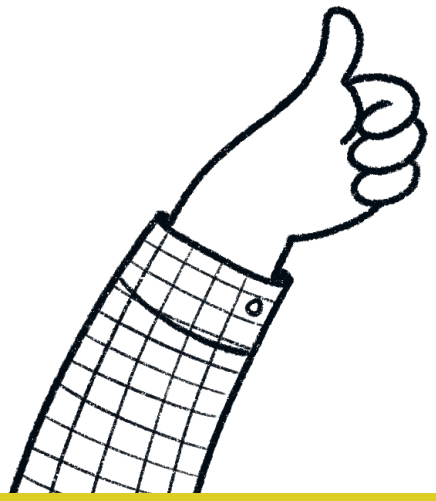
Most of the organizations leverage multiple tools in the context of their work. For example, many have an organizational website and link to Law Help Interactive or Legal Server interviews.

Findings

- Some organizations with multiple websites did not employ connected navigation between their sites, creating a disjointed experience.
- Many of the tools we reviewed incorporated online interviews and forms. GAP shared several resources around form best practices, which you can find in Part IV of this report (page 27).
- Many groups are leveraging template tools like Legal Server and Law Help Interactive.

Recommendations

- To create a cohesive experience, connect related websites and services. Help users navigate between related websites by providing ways to navigate back to the previous website.
- Provide clear navigation to both go to and return from connected services.



Content and communication

Content and language was a large focus across all of the audits as most of these resources are content heavy, and communicating complex information to users. There is a balance of explaining different types of legal issues, sharing resources for those issues, and creating opportunities to connect with a legal service provider or access help in other ways. There were many similarities across the different resources regarding content and overall site navigation, with opportunities for streamlining content areas and making content more consistent in both language and styling.

Findings

- Overwhelming content
  - These tools contain a lot of content! Many resources needed guidance around creating clear user pathways to access the right content and around finding the right amount of content to make available.
- Inconsistent language
  - Tools used inconsistent language and labels of categories across sections.
  - Tools used confusing jargon and technical terms.
- Need for more help text
  - In many cases, there is a lot of terminology that is new to the user, or action that requires further explanation. In many cases, eligibility criteria was buried within paragraph style content.
- Inconsistent content styles
  - In many cases, groups have resource pages on different topic areas that have similar content types, although each page has a different layout with different typography. For users looking across different topic areas, it can be disorienting to see inconsistencies in the content for each page as well as how that content is displayed.

- Need for user-driven content
    - There are different eligibility constraints and requirements for end users of these tools. Some resources do a better job than others at making those visible to potential clients and using screening tools to determine eligibility. There can be general improvements to clarify these eligibility guidelines for users.
    - Several resources noted needing to speak to several different user group audiences within a single tool (clients, lawyers, funders) and the challenges around that.
- Content creating/contributing to anxiety

Recommendations

- Overall, tools created by the justice community need more plain language, help text, and consistent labeling. Using the same terminology across your sites helps users confirm they are in the right place.
- Standardize content types and templatize resources. Define content styles for different types of content and use that consistently throughout the site or tool.
- Follow form design best practices including error validation, clear and organized content sections (from a user perspective), and navigation to move forward/back (resources shared in Part IV, page 27).

Information architecture and navigation

Because of the content-heavy nature of legal websites and tools, information architecture and navigation was also a common focus of the audits. A similar challenge that many of the websites and tools faced was how to organize information to help users in a "self help" approach. Other navigation-related issues surfaced that could prevent users from knowing where to go next and from finding what they are looking for.

Findings

- Confusing navigation and site information architecture was common.
    - For websites with a menu/top level navigation, there were certain overview pages that were not included in the menu, making information difficult to find and navigate.
    - For tools with steps to complete, there were inconsistencies in where steps were displayed and how they matched with the page that the user is on, causing confusion as to users' progress and how to navigate between steps.
    - For content heavy sections of websites, some were not categorized/grouped, putting the burden on users to sift through them all.
- There is typically a need for more navigation and connection between information.
    - Across the types of websites and tools, there was no way to navigate back to the main website, back to the home page, or back to the previous page.
    - For some content websites, there wasn't an (obvious) ability to search.
- Important information and calls to action were frequently buried.
    - For text heavy pages, in-line links were buried and hard to find.
    - For pages with tabs, secondary tabs

can be easily missed.
    - Pages with images or introductory text at the top, especially home pages, pushed more important calls to action below the fold.
- Lack of notifications is troublesome.
    - It can be disorienting to users when links take users to external sites without notice.

Recommendations

- Ensure all menus/navigation match your information architecture so that all pages are accessible.
- Label steps in forms to accurately represent order; for nested sections/steps, match labels for consistency and to help users know where they are going.
- Group similar content types and prioritize them by relevance.
- Provide navigation "breadcrumbs" to return to a main page because this can promote exploration and minimize error.
- Help users navigate to similar pages by obviously linking to a main starting point and related pages.
- Progressively show more categories at each step to help users choose where to go next.
- Direct users to information within the website, and make it clear with icons/ messaging when links will take them to outside resources.
- Provide clear next/back options and breadcrumbs to support movement throughout the site and avoid user error.
- Give users options to access information in the way that works best for them; reorganize layouts to optimize user choices.
- Consider standard locations for quick links for scannability.

Visual/web design

Many organizations were interested in improving the visual design and appeal of their websites and tools. GAP found similar issues across organization websites, including the need for visual consistency, improved readability, and indicators of different page states such as errors or loading.

Findings

- Many sites did not adhere to web best practices
    - Using non-standard colors for text, such as red or blue, can be difficult to read and distract from content.
    - Inconsistent styling of similar elements across pages and tools, such as buttons, makes it more difficult for users to recognize and perform the necessary actions.
- Many sites need to update their visual style
    - GAP found cluttered pages with multiple icons and text blocks, which are overwhelming and convey lack of polish.
    - Some sites used certain fonts and colors that are associated with types of websites and content that are misleading; this makes it more difficult to inspire users' trust.
- Many sites lacked indicators and key messaging
    - There is an expectation to show loading indicators when content or pages are being loaded; without loading indicators, users may be confused and leave the page.
    - Error messaging should be close to where the error happens; error messaging at the top or bottom of the page can be easily missed and cause confusion.

Recommendations

- Use standard (and compliant) colors and styling for familiar elements to help users more intuitively and quickly navigate and

consume content (e.g., using blue text for links).
- Increasing white space between elements and adding alignment (such as using a grid system) can create a cleaner and more modern look and feel.
- Using neutral colors and typography can help present a more welcoming and trustworthy tone.
- Display error messaging in-line with form fields to help users quickly resolve errors and move forward.
- For pages that do not load immediately, add an indicator to help users know what is happening (and to wait).

Design for different devices

When reviewing websites and tools on both desktop and mobile, GAP often found inconsistencies in layouts. There were also times when websites would not render in mobile at all, making it inaccessible to users who rely on their mobile devices for internet browsing.

Findings
- Some websites/tools were not responsive and thus did not display well on mobile; table-based designs in particular cause this issue.
- For some websites/tools, layouts between mobile and desktop were different; when desktop layouts had both a side and top navigation, one or the other was not displayed or elements were not incorporated on the mobile.

Recommendations
- Align desktop and mobile layouts to minimize page clutter; keep layouts consistent for easy recognition.
- Mobile responsive websites are critical.
- For a consistent experience with mobile, remove extra menus and stack elements in priority order.

Accessibility

When reviewing websites and tools with assistive technology and standard web checkers, there were issues with certain elements not being coded correctly for assistive technology, color contrast, and page load time.

Recommendations
- Add alt text to all images and remove images of text so that screen readers can properly announce them.
- Consider removing tabular fields to allow for more responsiveness.
- Ensure tab order is set to allow assistive tech to navigate to all menus.
- Make sure color combinations of text and background meet standards for colorblind or low vision users.
- Prepare images for best web performance load time, adding captions to help users' cognition.

Guidance for gathering feedback

Most groups were interested in gathering user feedback through surveys or usability testing. A few groups requested feedback/resources around how to incorporate more user input into their platforms.

Recommendations
- Include feedback surveys on websites; use specific questions to help users understand the type of feedback you are looking for.
- Invite former clients or users of your tools to join a usability testing participant list for future engagement.

Recommendations summary

Overall, GAP's UX audit recommendations centered around using consistent and clear language, navigation, visual elements, and functionality in order to help users quickly find what they are looking for and complete actions to meet their needs and goals. Because users are often coming to these websites and tools without much knowledge of what to do, it is important to create a streamlined, effective, and efficient way for them to use the websites and tools by utilizing web standards and best practices, as well as by gathering feedback from the users themselves to help drive resource creation.

Based on resource type

While there are recommendations that would be helpful regardless of the website or tool, there are some specific to certain resource types due to their different purposes.

For self-help websites:

- Use plain and consistent language.
- Standardize content formats and structure.
- Group similar content types and prioritize by relevance.
- Create hierarchy by defining high-level categories and sub-categories.
- Link related pages and forms.
- Reorganize layouts to allow for users to find information in multiple ways.
- Add navigation to allow users to go back and forth between pages.

For intake forms, triage guides, and guided interviews:

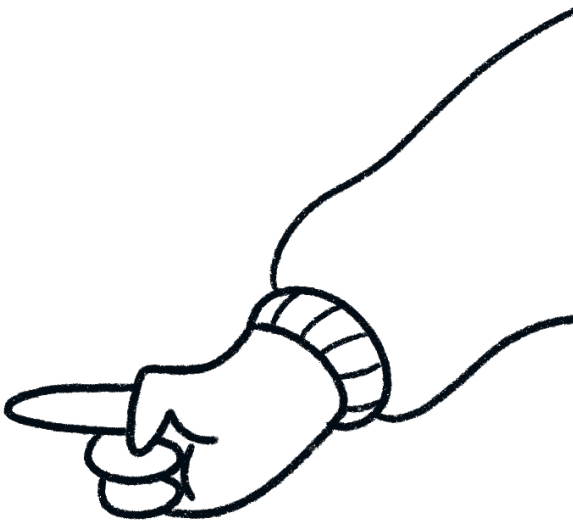
- Label steps to accurately represent order.
- For nested sections/steps, match labels for consistency.
- Display error messaging in-line with form fields to allow for quick error resolution.
- Add indicators to add visibility of progress (e.g., a progress bar, loading icon, etc.).

Across an organization's resources:

- Add navigation between websites and tools.
- Create a consistent look and feel across websites and tools.
- Use neutral typography and color to present a welcoming and trustworthy tone.

For all resources:

- Create a consistent and functional experience across devices.
- Follow web standards/best practices for color contrast, images, and content.



IV. Additional resources

Accessibility resources

Accessibility should not be an afterthought, but something that you take into account as you do research, create designs, and implement your solutions. Depending on the tools you use, there may be accessibility guidelines built in. Below are additional resources to review!

Accessibility resources for research
- Remember that how you set up your research and prototypes has an effect on who is able to participate.
- Accessible user research (Technica11y)
- Accessible user research project planning (dscout)

Accessibility resources for UX design
- General resources
  - Web Aim - Accessibility
  - General WCAG guidelines (W3)
  - Accessibility checklist (18F)
  - Accessibility for teams
- Screen reader best practices
  - Screen readers allow users who are visually or motor impaired to navigate websites by reading aloud the contents of the containers it finds on the page.
- Keyboard access best practices
  - Keyboard access allows users to navigate throughout your site by accessing links from their keyboard.
- Color use best practices:
  - Color should never be the only way to indicate something to the end user.
  - Color contrast checker (WebAIM)
  - Color recommendations (USWDS)
  - Accessible color combinations (Color Safe)
  - Color schemes (ColorBrewer)
  - Color blind filter (Toptal)

User research and usability testing resources

Usability testing
- Why you only need to usability test with 5 users
- Usability testing 101

A/B testing
- Steps for doing A/B testing

Surveys
- UX Surveys: a quick guide to get the most out of them
- Writing usable survey questions

Recruiting participants
- Recruiting tips

Design resources

Nielsen Norman Group

Typography
- 8 Rules for Perfect Typography in UI
- US Web Design System (USWDS) typography

Color theory
- Color choice
- Coolors color scheme generator

Icons
- Checklist for a useful icon
- Transcend legal icons
- Fontawesome
- Noun Project

UI design and component libraries
- Mobile-first design
- UI Patterns
- Bootflat / Bootstrap
- Grommet

Navigation patterns
- Wizards
- UXArchive
- Mobile pttrns

Design systems
- US Web Design System
- Shopify design system

Form design
- 13 Empirically Backed Best Practices
- Guidelines for awesome web form design
- 7 best practices for designing long online forms
- Best practices for form design
- The UX behind designing better forms

Framework resources

- Service Design Vancouver: Double Diamond
- IDEO.org: Human Centered Design Kit
- Nielsen Norman Group: Design Thinking
- Creative Reaction Lab: Equity Centered Community Design

Templates

GAP created these templates to support participants in our UX design courses, and now we're very pleased to share them with the entire justice community.

Project brief template: Articulate your initial understanding of the problem you are trying to solve and your hypotheses about potential solutions.

Research plan template: Draft a user research plan that lays out your research objectives and methods.

Interview guide template: Create a script that will serve as a guide during your user interviews, ensuring that you achieve your research objectives.

Interview notes template: Take clear and consistent notes during your user interviews.

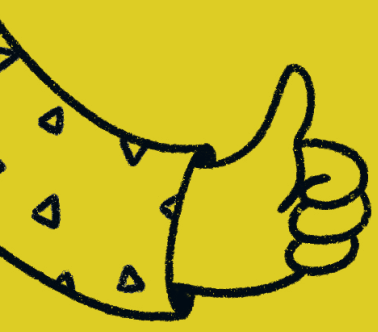
Research synthesis MURAL template: Use MURAL, a free online collaborative whiteboard tool, to map insights from your user research, generate ideas, and prioritize potential solutions.

Usability testing script template: Create a script to guide users through your prototype and gather feedback.

UX audit template: Work with a UX expert to review your tool for common usability issues and ensure conformance with industry standards and best practices. Remember: a UX audit can serve as a starting point for making sure your tool is usable, but it is not a substitute for feedback from your users!

Please give us feedback!

Since you just read this report, you know how crucial user feedback is for designing a useful resource. So, was this report helpful? Did you find the information you were looking for? Please let us know by taking our quick survey. We promise it is very short and very important! The LSC Technology Initiative Grant program's continued funding depends on our ability to measure the impact of projects like this one. Your feedback could help fund future access-to-justice technology projects! Thank you so much for your time.



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