

Utah Courts & Judicial Innovation Fellowship Statement of Work

Summary

The Utah State Courts Self-Help Center wants to develop internal processes and guidelines that help them improve the usability and testing of tools and content to better assist self-represented litigants (SRLs). The JIF Fellow will assess existing court-created user interfaces, public-facing content, and internal processes to develop guidelines that staff can use to better assist the public. By the end of the fellowship, the Utah Courts' Self-Help Center will have guidelines that they can use to build better products and content for SRLs.

Problem Statement

Most people in Utah's civil courts represent themselves. To assist this population, the courts have deployed several online self-help tools. Nevertheless, people still struggle. In cases where plaintiffs are SRLs, there are high rates of dismissal (49% in protective orders and custody cases, and 36% in paternity cases). In cases where defendants are SRLs, there are high rates of default (74% in debt collection cases, 24% in eviction cases). Research and feedback indicate that the high rates of dismissals and defaults are due to parties being overwhelmed or confused by court processes. As extensive user testing has not yet occurred, it is unclear how usability of self-help tools can be improved to better assist SRLs through their court journey.

Project Tasks

Phase I: The fellow will begin their project with extensive research into court design and content practices related to processes and assistance for SRLs and their impacts, locally and nationally.

With the help of the Utah Courts, the fellow will undertake user testing, like focus groups, user interviews, and observation, to develop user profiles or personas of people using self-help services and the user's workflow. The fellow will analyze a cross-section of users based on demographic background and technical ability.

The fellow will research design and content practices deployed by other courts, access-to-justice organizations, and design organizations focused on marginalized communities. This should include identifying metrics to use when determining the value of design and content choices (ie. engagement, comprehensibility, etc.).

The fellow will familiarize themselves with current design and content practices, including the use of plain language, of the Utah Courts. When focusing on Utah, the fellow's research will include assessing

current public-facing tools and sites, such as the self-help landing page, and content produced by the Utah Courts with high volume use—like divorce, expungement, and answering a complaint—for usability and accessibility and identifying elements difficult for SRLs to navigate. This should include understanding SRL outcomes from the SRL, court, and clerk perspectives.

Phase II: The fellow will synthesize their research and begin testing potential recommendations.

With help and oversight of the Utah Courts, the fellow will test their initial design and content recommendations informed by their research. This may include a redesign of a specific tool, updating content under proposed standards, or testing a prototype with court patrons. This is also an opportunity to determine which metrics work well when testing new designs and content. The fellow will collect and incorporate feedback from patrons and court staff to iterate and refine potential recommendations and guidelines.

The fellow will work with Utah Courts staff on how best to use personas and other outputs created during the project to make the fellow’s outputs easy to use by court staff. The fellow will incorporate this feedback into their final products.

Phase III: Document personas, guidelines, and recommendations for future work and implementation. Provide handoff training to permanent court staff.

The fellow will document their research, findings, and recommendations and proposed guidelines. The user experience style guide should provide specific instructions for court staff, with examples where appropriate, regarding topics such as: user flow and registration, plain language, information architecture, best practices for navigation, and the number of options users can process on one screen. The style guide will also incorporate accessibility for both users with disabilities and limited internet access or technical expertise. Recommendations need to take into account the resource limitations of the court.

The guidelines should include metrics the court can use to assess whether certain changes are having an impact. As well, the document will explain how to evaluate the results of testing.

The fellow will also indicate other areas of needed research they uncovered but were not able to complete during their fellowship.

The fellow will present their work throughout the fellowship to Utah Courts staff and community partners. Topics may include their research and potential changes to court policies, practices, and technology aimed at improving the court user’s experience, as well as how best to use the guides developed during the fellowship.

Outputs

- A report or document that describes:
 - the result of the fellow’s work developing self-represented litigant personas,
 - Self-represented litigant personas,
 - metrics for determining design and content choices, and
 - the fellow’s specific recommendations and results of testing them out and implementing them.

- A UX style guide for court tools.

Resources

This section includes resources related to this project that can help get the fellow up to speed quickly.

- [Utah Courts Self-Help Resources](#)
- [List of court forms](#)
- [i4J UX research on court website](#)
- [i4J UX research on forms and ODR](#)
- MyCase test account access (requires court VPN)
- [OCAP](#) (anyone can create a test account for free)

Partners and Stakeholders

Below are a list of stakeholders and partners the fellow will interact with during the project. The Partner Court will help the Fellow understand who in each agency to speak with, and what level of engagement is needed.

- [Committee on Court Forms](#)
- [The Legal Aid Society of Salt Lake](#)
- [People's Legal Aid](#)
- [Timpanogos Legal Services](#)
- [Utah Legal Services](#)
- [Utah State Bar](#)
- [Disability Law Center](#)