

RSI

Designing a New Way to Communicate about ODR: Usability Testing Insights



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Executive Summary

Project Overview

RSI's ODR Party Engagement (OPEN) Project aims to reduce barriers to the use of text-based court online dispute resolution (ODR) programs, in particular for self-represented litigants (SRLs) who typically have low literacy and/or low digital literacy. During OPEN Phase 1, we conducted focus groups to understand the communication barriers people face when using court resources.

In OPEN Phase 2, we continued this work by addressing those barriers; we applied our findings to create new communication models for courts to use or adapt to educate SRLs about ODR more effectively. Our models are available on our dedicated [OPEN website](#) and include RSI's Model Notice to Defendant of Mandatory ODR, our Model ODR Explainer Video, and a website prototype that includes our ODR Home Page, our Model ODR Self-Help Guide for Defendants, and our Model Account Registration Webpages.

How We Designed the Models

We partnered with an inclusive designer and an accessibility evaluator to ensure the models were easy to use and understand and accessible to individuals with disabilities. To obtain feedback on the models from individuals similar to those most likely to use them, we conducted usability tests across the U.S. with a diverse set of participants whose backgrounds resembled those of SRLs with low literacy and low digital literacy. The final models, which are available for courts and others to use for free, reflect this collaborative approach among RSI, our design partner, an accessibility expert and 20 real users.

This report describes how we conducted usability testing and presents our insights from testing sessions. For an in-depth discussion of how the models work and recommendations for court staff to use or adapt them to fit their court's needs, please reference our [Toolkit for Making ODR Make Sense to the Public](#).

Key Findings

Overall, usability test participants found RSI’s OPEN Communication Models to be visually engaging, intuitive to navigate and, importantly, easy to read and understand. Participants demonstrated an accurate understanding of how ODR worked and what was required of them to proceed. They were also able to capably navigate from one model to the next without our assistance. These results provided evidence that our approach to scaffold the information along a single workflow was effective.

We asked participants to rate each of the models for how easy they were to understand; the final versions of the models received an average 4.8/5 rating.

Below are key findings from the usability testing sessions:

A mobile-first design is essential

We created both desktop and mobile (Figure 1) versions of each webpage prototype. While conducting our usability tests, we gave participants the option of choosing which version they wanted to test based on the device they typically use to access the internet.

Overwhelmingly, participants selected the smartphone option. This trend highlighted the importance of creating materials that are not just mobile-friendly but *mobile-first* in their design. This finding was further supported by participants’ enthusiasm for mobile-first features, such as the inclusion of a QR code on the Notice to simplify navigation to the website.



Figure 1. ODR Home Page (mobile version).

Testers’ confidence grew

We found that as participants successfully navigated each model, their expressed confidence, understanding of ODR and sense of ease grew. Participants also demonstrated an interest in learning more about ODR and did not express or show feelings of overwhelm, suggesting that our approach to scaffold information not only prevented information overload but also helped to boost participants’ engagement with the process.

“I felt like I was being helped along the way and given confidence and support. I didn't feel alone anymore.” –NM3

Data privacy and security are top of mind

Participants in both our Phase 1 focus groups and Phase 2 usability tests expressed deep concerns about their personal data being compromised on the internet. Through our usability tests, we found evidence that clear information about data security can help to alleviate such concerns. Usability test participants responded very positively to our dedicated data privacy and confidentiality section on the model ODR Home Page (Figure 2). We also included this information in the ODR Explainer Video, which participants also commended. Often unprompted by the researchers, testers expressed relief and satisfaction with the data security information provided and the direct manner in which it was presented. Providing concise and specific information about how ODR platforms address data privacy concerns can help alleviate users’ anxieties over these issues, even for those who are most hesitant about using the internet.

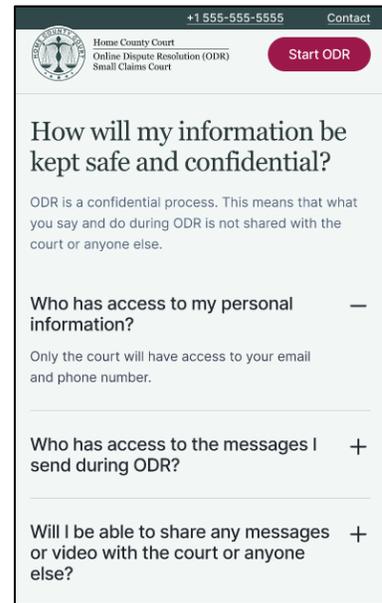


Figure 2. Data privacy and confidentiality section on the ODR Home Page (mobile version).

Simple materials enhance excitement for ODR

Most of our usability test participants did not have any prior knowledge about ODR and were learning about it for the first time through our models. To test whether participants retained the information provided in the models, we asked them to describe in their own terms how ODR works. Testers were not only able to accurately answer our questions about ODR, but also expressed their excitement for the prospect of ODR being available in their communities. They highlighted the online aspects, availability of mediation, potential time and cost savings, and ease of use as major benefits to ODR over typical court experiences. In short, describing ODR in simple, easy-to-understand terms lets its potential benefits shine.

“There are so many great benefits to this program that I can’t think of them all. This is something that I definitely would use.”

–MD1

Key Takeaways

Feedback from our usability testers demonstrates that simple, easy-to-understand communication materials can positively impact parties' understanding of and interest in ODR. Based on what we learned from usability testers and our work with an inclusive designer and an accessibility evaluator to design effective models, we recommend that courts ensure that communication materials do the following:

- Establish a clear workflow that directs the party from one resource to the next
- Scaffold information and instructions to make reading and acting on them easier
- Rephrase legal jargon or provide simple definitions when those terms are necessary
- Use consistent visual design to ensure parties understand how to navigate webpages
- Demonstrate the authenticity of the materials by featuring a court seal and court information
- Describe in concise and direct terms the ODR platform's security and confidentiality protections
- Offer multiple contact methods (especially a phone number) to request help from the court

We describe these recommendations for courts and other important design, language and navigational considerations for creating effective resources in further detail in [Communicating Effectively About ODR: A Guide for Courts](#) as well as in our [Toolkit for Making ODR Make Sense to the Public](#).

Overview

Our goal for Phase 2 of the ODR Party Engagement (OPEN) Project was to apply what we learned from OPEN Phase 1 focus groups about barriers that self-represented litigants (SRLs) face when using court resources, by developing new model materials to help courts improve their communication with parties about ODR. We designed the models with an inclusive design partner and an accessibility evaluator. The models include RSI’s Model Notice to Defendant of Mandatory ODR, our Model ODR Explainer Video, and a website prototype that includes our Model ODR Home Page, our Model ODR Self-Help Guide for Defendants, and our Model Account Registration Webpages.

We structured the models around a simple workflow that provides a clear path for parties to follow to learn about and prepare for ODR. Parties complete workflow tasks by moving from one model to the next in the sequence: They first read the Notice, then review information on the ODR Home Page, watch the ODR Explainer Video, complete the ODR Self-Help Guide and, finally, register for an account on the ODR platform. Importantly, we also scaffolded information about ODR across the models — we designed them to gradually introduce details about how ODR works, so parties do not feel overwhelmed. We also repeated important information to make sure it was understood and remembered.

A critical aspect of our work in OPEN Phase 2 was conducting usability tests on the models. We organized a series of tests across the country to obtain feedback from real users whose backgrounds resembled those of typical SRLs with low literacy and low digital literacy. These sessions helped us to confirm which aspects of the models were most effective and to identify issues that we needed to address with our design partner.

When we finished a first round of usability testing, we made major enhancements to the models based on testers’ feedback. At this point, we also worked with an accessibility evaluator to determine necessary changes to make the models accessible to individuals with disabilities. We then conducted a second round of testing to obtain final feedback on the revised models, which we then implemented with our design partner. The final models thus integrate the feedback of 20 usability test participants, insights from our Phase 1 focus groups, and the usability and accessibility expertise of our partners.

The Models

Below are brief descriptions of each of the models and links to access them. For more detailed information on how we developed the models and how courts can use them to enhance their communication resources, please reference our [Toolkit for Making ODR Make Sense to the Public](#). The Toolkit also contains resources for conducting usability testing and enhancing the accessibility of materials.



Notice to Defendant of Mandatory Online Dispute Resolution ([print](#) | [digital](#))

A document that accompanies the party's court summons. It provides basic information about ODR, steps the recipient needs to take to get started using ODR, and resources available to them.



ODR Home Page ([Desktop version](#) | [Mobile version](#))

The main landing webpage that explains how ODR works, how user data is protected, and contact information for help.



ODR Explainer Video ([Standard version](#) | [Accessible version](#))

A short explainer video that describes and illustrates how the ODR process works, as well as step-by-step instructions on how to register for ODR.



ODR Self-Help Guide for Defendants ([Desktop version](#) | [Mobile version](#))

An interactive webpage that includes seven steps for users to follow to prepare for ODR as a defendant.



ODR Account Registration Webpages ([Desktop version](#) | [Mobile version](#))

A series of short webpages that allows users to register for ODR using the information provided to them.

Usability Testing

Once we had initial working versions of the models, we planned a series of usability tests to obtain feedback from real users whose backgrounds resembled those of typical SRLs. Our goal for these tests was to understand which aspects of the models were effective and to identify issues related to language, content or navigation that we needed to address. Since the majority of our usability testers did not have prior knowledge of ODR, we were also able to observe whether our workflow was effective at helping them to develop an accurate understanding of how ODR works and what they needed to do to participate in it. Finally, through these sessions we also had the opportunity to ask participants direct questions about how they typically access and navigate the internet, which helped us to sharpen our mobile-first design approach.

Usability Test Recruitment and Participants

We recruited usability testers with the same criteria used for the focus groups; we sought individuals with no more than some college education and incomes less than \$50,000. We did not specifically screen for individuals who were reading English as a second language. Our testers were diverse in terms of age and race/ethnicity (Figure 3; see Appendix A for more information on the demographics of our testers). We provided

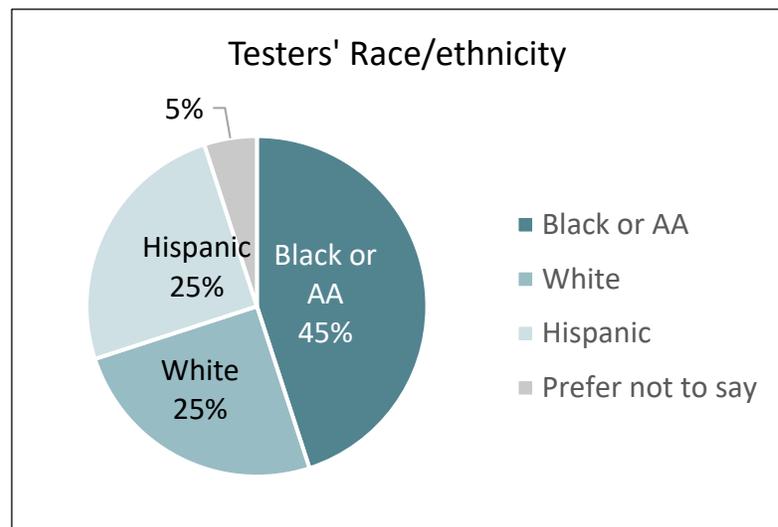


Figure 3. Usability test participants by race/ethnicity.

participants with \$150 gift cards for fully participating in our usability test sessions.

We organized the usability tests into two rounds. The first round of testers provided feedback on all of the initial working versions of the models. During this round, we conducted usability tests in two of our previous Phase 1 focus group sites — a former mill town in rural New Hampshire with a primarily White population, and Baltimore, Maryland, where we worked with Black participants — as well as a new site, the Santa Fe area of New Mexico, where we mostly worked with Hispanic/Latino participants.

Between first-round usability testing sites, we and our design partner implemented needed changes as identified through the usability testing. We then worked with the accessibility evaluator to identify and implement changes needed to comply with [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG 2.1\)](#) so the models would be accessible to individuals with disabilities.

Once we completed this major set of revisions, we retested the models. We conducted the second round of usability testing in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where we worked with Black and Hispanic/Latino participants to obtain any final feedback on the models.

How We Conducted the Usability Tests

Two members of the RSI research team were present at each usability test; one of us facilitated tasks with the participant and asked follow-up questions, while the other took observational notes on the participants' decisions and comments. Both also asked questions to clarify responses or explore testers' thoughts. We established a protocol to standardize the setup, tasks and follow-up questions for each test.

The purpose of the usability tests was to understand how participants navigated the materials; to determine what worked and did not work as designed; and to obtain general feedback on the design, content and features of the models. We developed a usability testing protocol with these goals in mind (See Appendix B for the protocol used in the usability tests). We selected testing tasks by first creating a goal funnel sheet, which we used to map the activities users needed to take to navigate the models (See Appendix C for the usability testing goal funnel).

The researchers only provided testers with general tasks to complete and did not offer additional guidance or answer their questions about how the models should be used, which helped us to determine whether the workflow we had established with the models was intuitive.

We conducted usability tests with individual testers; each test was scheduled for 90 minutes, although the timing ranged from about 50 minutes to over 2.5 hours. We asked testers to complete a series of tasks using the models as if they were real. To help put them in the shoes of a person who would actually use the materials, we provided them with a scenario in which Jane Roe, a defendant, is facing a small claims case filed by a former business partner, John Doe. To avoid participants becoming too focused on the details of the case in terms of fault or whether they would be willing to negotiate, we purposely made the scenario one in which it was hard to pin blame on either party. Assuming the role of Jane, testers learned that they were required by Home County Court to use ODR to try to settle the case with John. Once

testers understood the scenario, we provided them with the Notice and summons and asked them to begin completing the tasks.

During usability tests, we asked participants to complete the following general tasks:

- Review and follow the instructions included in the Notice of ODR to Defendants.
- Explore the ODR Home Page to learn about ODR.
- Watch the ODR Explainer Video.
- Look over the Self-Help Guide to prepare for ODR.
- Create an account on the ODR platform.

While participants completed tasks, the research facilitator asked follow-up questions to gauge their understanding of the information included in each model, such as what mediation is or what options they have for communicating on ODR. We also asked questions about testers' actions, such as their use of navigational features or why they lingered on or skipped specific sections of the webpages. These observational questions allowed us to obtain immediate insight into how the models would actually be understood and used in practice.

Once participants completed the final task, we asked them to fill out a survey rating the materials and their experience using them (See Appendix D for the survey used in the usability tests). We then conducted semi-structured interviews to ask about their understanding of ODR, what changes they would make to the models, which materials were most effective at helping them to understand ODR, and general questions about how they complete tasks on the internet. We also asked whether they would participate in ODR, should they find themselves in a situation like Jane's, and to reflect on what changes they would make, if any, to each of the models.

Usability Tests: Round 1 Findings

In general, participants in our first round of usability testing had positive reactions to the models and were able to successfully complete tasks. First-round testers gave the models an average 4.4/5 rating for how easy they were to understand. Participants highlighted the video as the most effective model at helping them to understand how ODR works, giving it an average 4.7/5 rating. Comments for the video were overwhelmingly positive, with participants' main concern being that the video lacked playback options.¹ The Account Registration Webpages

¹ Participants expressed a desire for the video to have playback controls, such as pause and rewind. However, those features were not available on Figma, which is where the video was hosted at the time of testing. The final versions of the videos have these functions.

received the next-highest rating (4.5/5) and positive comments from testers about how straightforward it was to sign up for ODR.

However, our first set of testers also identified several content, layout and navigation-related issues for us to address with our design partner. The ODR Home Page received the lowest initial average rating, at 4.1/5; testers provided a number of helpful comments to improve this model and the other webpages. By observing how participants navigated the webpages on their own, we were also able to identify ways in which information could be reorganized to further simplify our workflow.

Positive Responses

The Notice was easy to read and provided clear steps to follow

How do I get started?

You must register for Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) within 14 days of receiving this notice. Here's how to register:

- Step 1.** Go to odr.homecountycourt.gov
- Step 2.** Click on the **Start ODR** button
- Step 3.** Find your case number on the first page of the court summons. It should look like this: **24-SC-0001**
- Step 4.** Use your **case number** to create a new account



If you're not sure how to create your account, you can watch a video on how to register at odr.homecountycourt.gov.

Figure 4. Instructions to register for ODR on the Notice.

In general, participants liked how the Notice presented information about how ODR works and what was required of them to proceed. Many highlighted the step-by-step instructions as effective (Figure 4). As a participant in New Mexico put it, “[The Notice has] pretty straightforward directions ... basic steps of what you need to do” (NM4). A participant in New

Hampshire described the Notice as follows: “[It] explains that I have been summoned to court and how I can resolve my case. I can go on the website which gives step by step instructions on making an account” (NH4).

Participants also retained information about the requirements for participating in ODR and resources available to help them. For example, a participant in New Mexico remembered that they “need to register in 14 days” and could ask for a mediator (NM1). Another said, “The papers are easy to read again. They have everything. If you needed extra help or a question answered, the website is easily identifiable. The phone numbers are always there. They have the link like if you need legal aid or [have] disabilities. So again, everything is like right there, so you don't have to go searching around for it” (NH2). Others simply wanted to go to the website right away to either learn more about ODR or watch the ODR Explainer Video, demonstrating that the Notice successfully sent them in the right direction.

The ODR Home Page visual design and illustrations enhanced retention of information about ODR

Participants felt that the illustrations we included on the ODR Home Page helped them to visualize and thus better understand the information provided to them (Figure 5). For example, a participant in New Hampshire liked that the illustrations “shows what the text is saying” (NH3). A participant in New Mexico gave similar feedback, sharing that the illustrations helped them to understand legal terminology: “You get a good visual of like, you know, simple like, you know, you can speak to someone if you want to do it online, and do it as plaintiff and defendant. And so it shows that, it illustrates it” (NM4). Participants also felt that the illustrations struck a suitable tone for an official court website: “They’re nice. They feel appropriate for a court website” (NM2).

Participants also responded positively to the help box we included at the bottom of the ODR Home Page, indicating that it effectively conveyed information on contacting the court for assistance. They appreciated how visually prominent it was in the website’s banner. A participant in New Hampshire explained: “the maroon box in the bottom to tell you where you need to get help — that was a different color than everything else. So that stood out to me.” (NH3). A participant in New Mexico highlighted the presence of the court’s phone number in the help box as especially important to them (NM1).

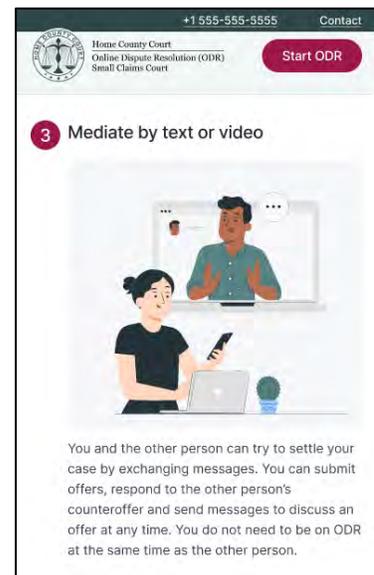


Figure 4. Illustration of information about ODR on the ODR Home Page (mobile version).

The ODR Explainer Video was clear and engaging

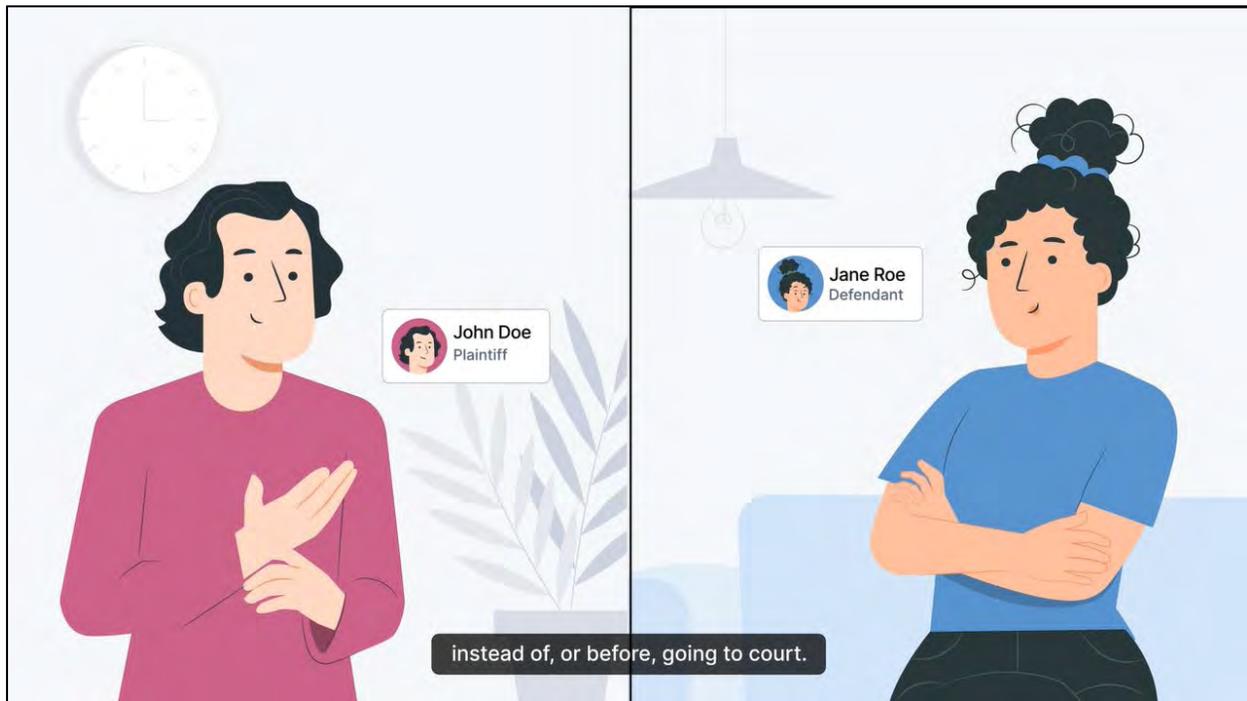


Figure 5. Still from the ODR Explainer Video depicting a plaintiff and defendant using ODR.

Our ODR Explainer Video (Figure 6) received significant approval among usability testers. When asked which of the models most helped them to understand how ODR works, participants overwhelmingly selected the video. As a participant in New Hampshire put it, “I think the video was very helpful. Helpful for people that don’t do well visually with reading or comprehending” (NH1). Other participants identified themselves as visual learners who prefer to receive information that way. For example, a different participant in New Hampshire said, “For me, it’s easier to retain the information [visually]. [The video] wasn’t like overly animated ... it was to the point and easy to follow” (NH2).

We also observed that all participants (15/15) watched the video attentively and completely. When asked how comfortable participants felt following the instructions in the video, all (15/15) responded positively. For example, a participant in Maryland said they would feel “real comfortable” and that they would “use the system as a plaintiff or defendant ... [the video] shows you everything step by step” (MD3). While participants each expressed comfort with the instructions, some shared that they would want to rewatch it before proceeding. A participant in New Mexico explained, “I would have to watch it multiple times. But I would be comfortable after that” (NM2). Others felt they could follow the instructions without watching the video but said they recognized that others might want to rewatch the video if they had questions later on (NH3).

Participants appreciated the video’s relatively short length (2:48) and narration by an adult human voice. As one New Mexico participant said, “The video helped a lot because there’s a human voice behind it ... it felt like there was somebody there, kind of explaining” (NM4). Another participant said the length of the video felt right: “Yes, [the length was] perfect. Not too long, because then it gets like blah, blah, blah ... It was very distinct and to the point and quick; I liked it” (NM1).

The video was also effective at distilling the potential benefits of ODR to parties. In response to being asked what they learned through the video, one participant in Maryland said, “There’s so many great benefits to this program that I can’t think of them all. This is something that I definitely would use” (MD1). Another participant, in New Hampshire, thought it was good that the video repeated some of the information included in the Notice, such as the resources available to parties: “I like that it has the website or phone number for legal aid...the notice in video form” (NH2).

The ODR Self-Help Guide effectively broke down a lot of information

Participants appreciated the ODR Self-Help Guide’s step-by-step instruction and the way it broke down how they could participate in ODR and what the possible outcomes might be (Figure 7). A participant in New Hampshire felt it effectively built on what they had learned while also serving a different function than the video, saying, “I liked that in the guide, it gave you step by step, like, this is what you’re going to be doing. You know, this is what you need. It doesn't really give you that expectation in the video” (NH4). In New Mexico, a participant shared similar thoughts, “Jane Roe would feel more informed ... there’s a lot of information that is broken down simply. No hard terms or legal terms, and provides a way to get help. So it’s very informative” (NM4).

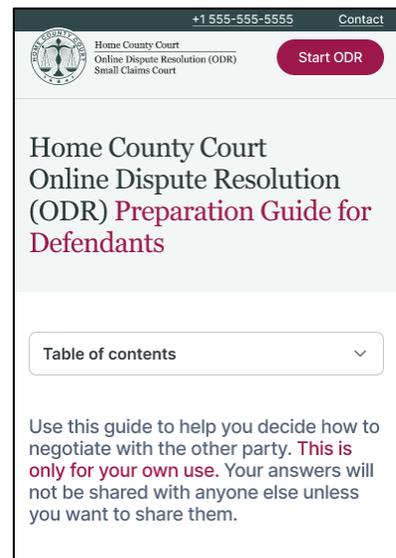


Figure 6. ODR Self-Help Guide webpage (mobile version).

The ODR Self-Help Guide was also effective at further helping participants to retain information about how ODR works. Once participants completed the Guide, we asked them to describe or recall information about mediation, payment options and how ODR could conclude. We found that nearly all could accurately describe the role of a mediator (14/15), most could recall the options for negotiating payment terms with the plaintiff in ODR (11/15), and most could also recall the ways in which ODR could possibly conclude (12/15).

Registering for an account was straightforward

Overall, participants demonstrated no confusion about or issues with registering for an account, finding the process simple and trustworthy. All participants (15/15) said they would feel comfortable helping a friend sign up using our account registration models. In the words of a participant in New Hampshire, “I think my 10-year-old can do this” (NH3). Another felt it was “one of the easiest things” they had signed up for, describing it as a “10/10” experience (NH4). In New Mexico, a participant expressed comfort with the prospect of entering their own information into the website, saying it “doesn’t ask for too much information and is quick” (NM3). In Maryland, participants shared similar thoughts, with some even expressing that they would recommend it to others: “I would feel comfortable using it, if it is linked to a court system ... I would encourage friends to use it” (MD3).

Participants appreciated the presence of a progress bar within these pages (Figure 8). A participant in New Mexico liked knowing where they were in the process and that they were “progressing” (NM1). At this point, participants also reflected on how “Jane” would be feeling at this point in the process. Most felt she would be more at ease, even if the situation ultimately remained unpleasant to her. As one participant put it, “Jane would be feeling still upset but progressing in her case — it’s easy to use, so she would be comforted by that” (NM2). In Maryland, a participant felt the same: “Jane would feel comfortable with this process ... would be happy not to go to court, because you can have personalized agreements” (MD2).

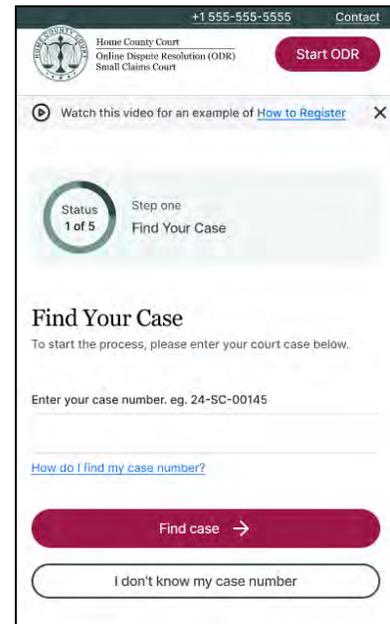


Figure 7. Account registration webpage with a circular progress bar (mobile version).

Participants expressed enthusiasm for ODR

“I would feel good about using ODR. I would actually prefer this step before going to court...I think if it can be handled, you know, I think sometimes if a conversation can be had and a mediation can be had, why not try it?” –PA4

During the interview portion of the session, we asked participants how they would feel about using ODR should they find themselves in a similar situation to Jane. Overall, we found that they were excited about ODR’s potential benefits and liked having it as an option to avoid going to court. A participant in New Mexico distilled this sentiment, saying, “The online [dispute] resolution that you have shown me today is the only one I ever seen. I’ve never seen anything like this before, so it’s very interesting to me, and I would really rather use that type of situation rather than going directly to court. I’ve never been offered, like, well, there’s a video court you can go to if you’d rather” (NM5). In New Hampshire, a participant shared, “Instead of taking the whole day off from work or burning a whole vacation day and having to keep going back to court, you know, with this document or that document, that gets pretty time consuming, gets pretty frustrating. You know, you have to drive there and find a place to park, and then, you know, you get in there and you have to wait for all the people ahead of you. And then if you don't have the right paperwork with you, then you have to go home and start over again. I mean, I think this alleviates a lot of that” (NH1).

Participants attributed their understanding of ODR and its potential benefits to the ease of their experience using the models overall. When asked to reflect on their time testing the models, participants offered positive feedback. For example, a participant in New Mexico said, “They were a breeze to go through. They were just so easy and actually very informative and helped me to understand [ODR] better, put me more at ease with the situation” (NM5). In New Hampshire, a participant shared, “I think [the materials] taught me everything that I would need to know to use it, if I ever had to. It’s very fair.” (NH2). A participant in Maryland who had also participated in our Phase 1 focus groups felt it enhanced their prior understanding of ODR: “[The experience of using the materials] was enlightening. Very enlightening. Yeah, I learned some stuff. It actually piggybacked on the last time I was here. Now I know a lot more ... Yeah, so I feel educated” (MD4).

Issues and How We Addressed Them

Although we received mostly positive feedback about the models, participants helped us to identify a number of issues related to their content, formatting and navigation. We prioritized issues that were repeated in multiple test sessions, drawing from both our observational data and interview transcripts. These issues and what we did to address them are described below.

Minor confusion about what “ODR” referenced

By the end of the test, we found that most participants were able to accurately demonstrate an understanding of ODR and how it works. However, we found that when first reviewing the Notice, some participants initially described ODR differently: as a program, a website, a platform or a company.

- *Revision: We rewrote information on the first page of the Notice, under “What is ODR?” to include a straightforward definition: “ODR is a free online program provided by Home County Court.”*

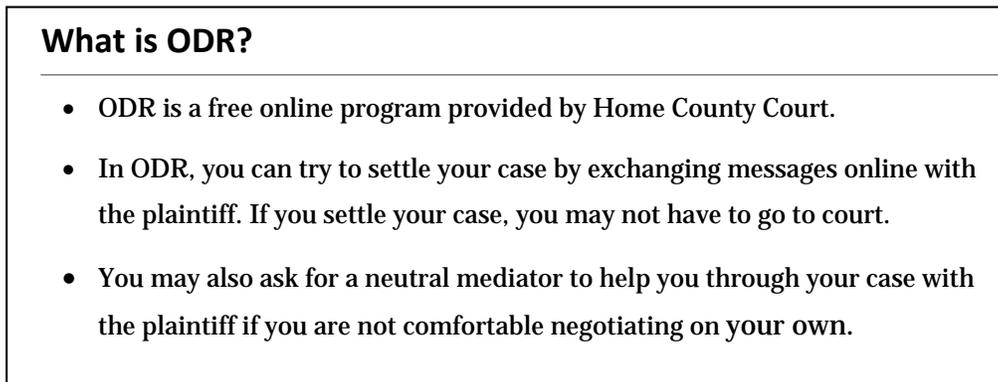


Figure 9. Simple definition of ODR on the first page of the Notice.

Moving too quickly from the Notice

Overall, most participants (11/15) took their time reviewing the Notice in full. However, there were some participants who, upon reading the instructions on the first page, appeared anxious to move on to the website right away without carefully reading the rest of the information.

- *Revision: We moved the instructions to the second page so that the first page contained all of the most essential information about ODR, ensuring this information would not be missed.*

Concern over the Notice’s authenticity

While most participants felt the Notice appeared trustworthy, a few participants felt that the presentation of information about the court at the top of the page made it feel inauthentic and suggested it needed to be more prominent.

- *Revision: We included the court name and address in a larger font at the top of the Notice, to match how that information is presented on the ODR Home Page. We also added color to the court seal.*



Figure 8. Court seal and information at the top of the Notice.

Skipping important information on the ODR Home Page

Many participants did not fully interact with the “How Does ODR Work?” section on the ODR Home Page. This section includes three accordion-style items that explain how ODR works. However, participants did not realize that the information was expandable and thus missed the second and third items in the section, in which we describe mediation and how to communicate on the ODR platform. We asked participants how they know when a section is expandable and they said they look for plus signs.

- *Revision: We added visual markers (plus signs) to indicate that items in this section expand.*

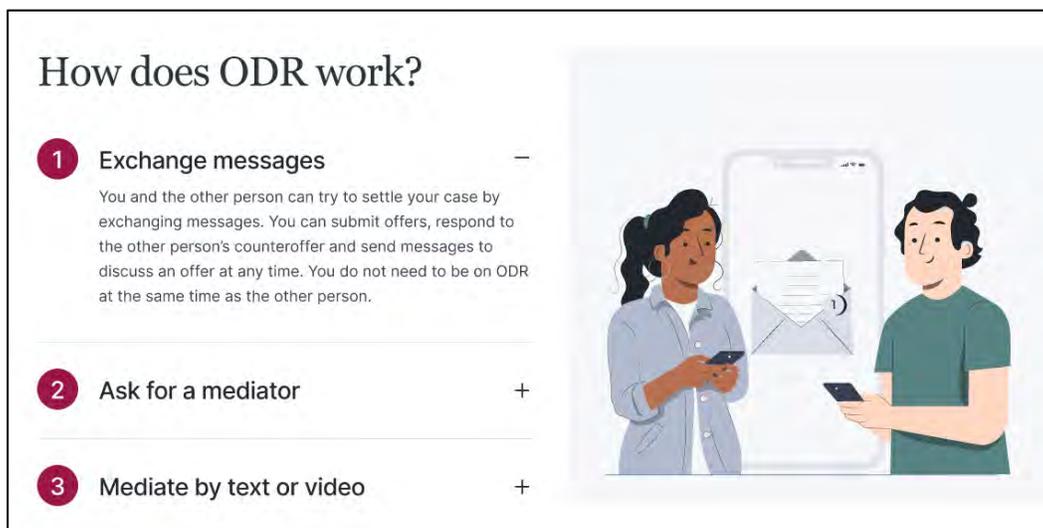


Figure 9. Information about how ODR works on the ODR Home Page (desktop version).

Missing the button to access the ODR Self-Help Guide

When asked to navigate to the ODR Self-Help Guide for Defendants, some participants (4/15) did not realize that the button to access it on the ODR Home Page was clickable. During interviews, we asked participants what visually signaled to them that an element on a webpage can be clicked or tapped. Most answered that they look for blue hyperlinks and/or color changes.

- *Revision: We changed the “Guide for Defendants” text to be a blue hyperlink and added a hover state that changed the color of the button.*

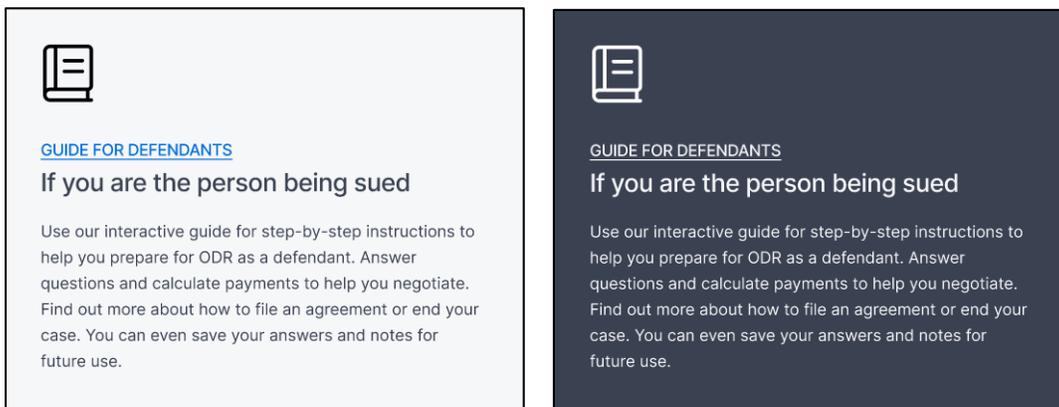


Figure 10. Guide for Defendants button on the ODR Home Page. Left: the default button; Right: the button with a hover state (desktop version).

Participants skipped an informational section

We originally had users navigate to a webpage when they clicked on the Guide for Defendants, rather than having them go directly to the Guide. This page contained information about the Guide as well as a separate section called “More Questions?” which provided additional information about ODR requirements and mediation. We found that only 7/15 participants interacted with the “More Questions?” section, with the rest simply navigating to the Guide.

- *Revision: We moved the information provided in “More Questions?” to the ODR Home Page and deleted this intermediary page altogether. This ensured the information was not missed and also streamlined navigation to the Guide by removing an extra step.*

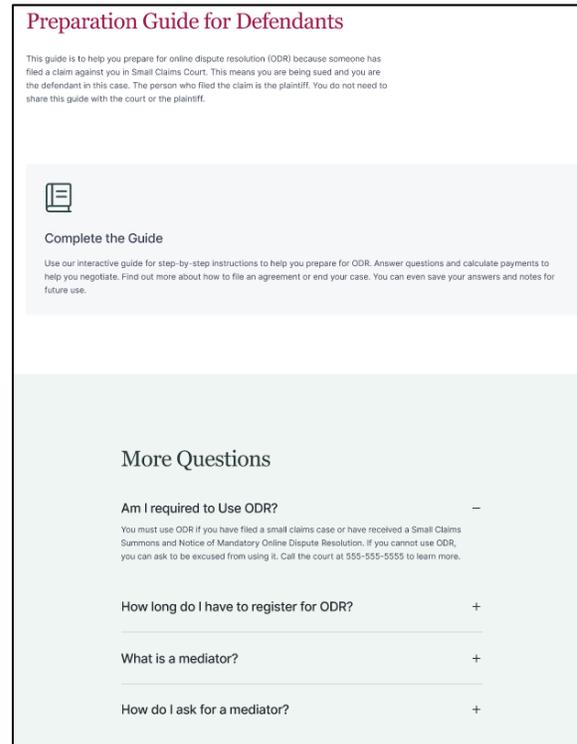


Figure 11. Former webpage between the ODR Home Page and ODR Self-Help Guide (desktop version).

ODR Self-Help Guide had redundant information

In early versions of the Guide, we presented a list of the seven steps in a few ways. One approach was an infographic that displayed Guide steps. We also had a list of the steps with nonclickable blue text and a list of questions they would need to answer before starting the Guide. Testers felt that the infographic’s text was too small to read on the mobile version of the prototype. They also wanted to be able to click on the list of steps. The list of pre-Guide questions also appeared to testers to be clickable buttons.

- *Revision: We removed the infographic. We also reformatted the list of steps, shifting it to the left of the main Guide content and labeling it a “Table of Contents.”*

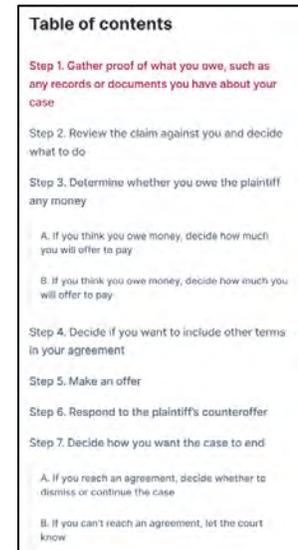


Figure 12. Table of contents on the ODR Self-Help Guide webpage (desktop version).

Guide instructions required reformatting

At the top of the Guide, we initially had a set of four questions for participants to answer while progressing through the steps in the Guide. We observed that the majority of participants attempted to click or tap these questions, mistaking them for buttons and assuming they would provide answers or navigate them elsewhere.

- *Revision: We changed the formatting of these items to be straightforward instructions in plain text.*

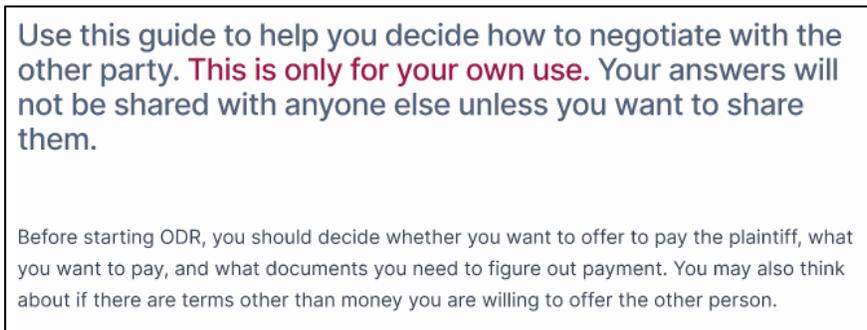


Figure 13. Instructions at the top of the ODR Self-Help Guide webpage (desktop version).

The Guide felt too geared toward payment offers

We learned from some usability testers that the questions included in the ODR Self-Help Guide felt geared too much in favor of defendants who would offer some form of payment to the plaintiff, as opposed to defendants who may not feel they owe the plaintiff any payment.

- *Revision: We added additional language so that if participants answer “No” to a question about whether they feel they owe payment to the plaintiff, they are directed to skip the step that helps calculate payment or a payment plan.*

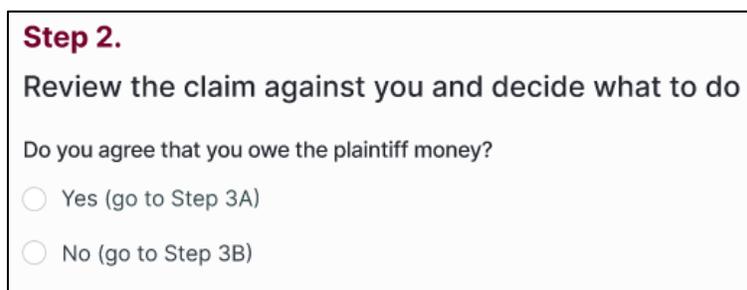


Figure 14. Step 2 of the ODR Self-Help Guide (desktop version).

Usability Tests: Round 2 Findings

Once we addressed all of the main issues raised during the first round of usability testing, we organized a second and final round of tests to obtain feedback on the revised models. We used the same protocol as used for the first round, with slight modifications to account for adjustments we made to the workflow. For example, the revised models included a streamlined navigation to the Guide for Defendants page, so we removed a task related to the previous process.

Substantial Improvements

Based on our survey results, the revisions we made to the models were highly effective at improving the overall experience of using them. Our second-round testers in Philadelphia gave the revised models an average 4.8 rating for how easy they were to understand, a marked improvement from the 4.4 average rating provided by first-round testers.² The ODR Home Page, which received the lowest average rating by first-round testers (4.1), received a much higher average score of 4.8/5 from the final test group. The Guide also benefited from our revisions, increasing from a 4.3/5 average rating from first-round testers to a 4.6/5 average rating from the final test group.

Second-round testers echoed much of the positive feedback we received from first-round testers, finding the Notice to be easy to read and follow and the ODR Explainer Video to be engaging. Participants also felt that the ODR Home Page and ODR Self-Help Guide provided helpful information and that the account registration process was simple. Participants expressed enthusiasm for ODR in general, finding it preferable to going to court. For example, when asked how they felt or what questions they still had after watching the ODR Explainer Video, a participant shared that they only “wished” they had ODR there [in Philadelphia] (PA3).

Participants expressed emphatically that using the models boosted their confidence in the situation. They attributed this confidence to the ease with which they were able to navigate the ODR process step by step with the help of the materials. For example, when asked about their overall experience with the materials, one participant said, “I think it’s pretty easy to understand. I felt pretty confident. Yeah, I feel pretty confident in using the paperwork to, like, navigate and, like, put in my case number and fill out information” (PA2). Another said that when they first looked at the materials they felt “slightly intimidated” but that “once I started

² The final models received a higher average rating from PA testers (4.8) compared with average ratings from testers at each of the first round sites, including NH (4.4), MD (4.4) and NM (4.32).

and I looked at the steps, this gave me my confidence ... Everything was self-explanatory. I started gaining my confidence as I increased into the program” (PA1).

Final Feedback Implementation

Our Pennsylvania participants helped us to identify only a few minor issues with the revised models. These issues and what we did to address them are described below.

Adding information about the Notice QR code

A participant thought the QR code on the Notice led straight to the video, rather than to the ODR Home Page. Through secondary research, we also learned that it is considered good practice to indicate where QR codes will navigate users.

- *Revision: We added plain text information above the QR code that reads: “Scan this QR code to go to odr.homecountycourt.gov”*



Figure 15. QR code on the first page of the Notice.

Simplifying the ODR Home Page registration link

On the top of the ODR Home Page, we include a block of text that introduces ODR and reminds the user how to register. The text block included, “Please follow this link to register now for ODR.” A participant was unsure how this differed from clicking the Start ODR button and assumed the text link was meant for those who had not yet registered, whereas the latter was meant for those who had registered.

- *Revision: We changed the language of the text to read “Please follow this link to start ODR” so that it matched the language of the button.*

Confusion over who had access to Guide answers

We designed the Guide to include a “Save & Download” button that allows users to save their responses on their computers or phones. However, we found that testers did not uniformly understand who had access to those answers, with some sharing that they thought the court or the other party could see them.

- *Revision: We highlighted instructional text at the top of the page to clarify that the guide is only for the participant’s use. We repeated this information just above the “Save & Download” button at the bottom of the Guide.*

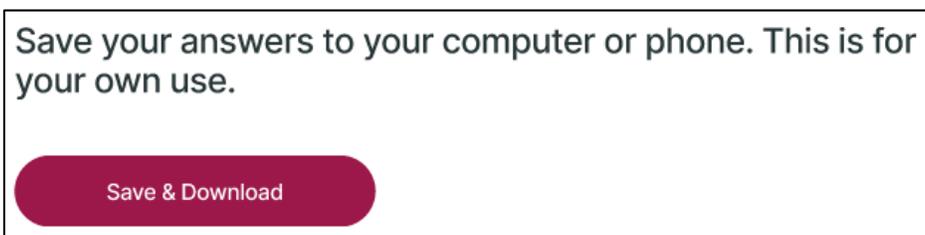


Figure 16. Instructions at the bottom of the ODR Self-Help Guide (desktop version).

Key Takeaways

Feedback from our usability testers demonstrates that simple, easy-to-understand communication materials can positively impact parties’ understanding of and interest in ODR. Based on what we learned from usability testers and our work with an inclusive designer and an accessibility evaluator to design effective models, we recommend that courts ensure that communication materials do the following:

- Establish a clear workflow that directs the party from one resource to the next
- Scaffold information and instructions to make reading and acting on them easier
- Rephrase legal jargon or provide simple definitions when those terms are necessary
- Use consistent visual design to ensure parties understand how to navigate webpages
- Demonstrate the authenticity of the materials by featuring a court seal and court information
- Describe in concise and direct terms the ODR platform’s security and confidentiality protections
- Offer multiple contact methods (especially a phone number) to request help from the court

We describe these recommendations for courts and other important design, language and navigational considerations for creating effective resources in further detail in [Communicating Effectively About ODR: A Guide for Courts](#) as well as in our [Toolkit for Making ODR Make Sense to the Public](#).

Conclusion

We designed our materials for users who would have the most trouble navigating court resources and have the least support in doing so. Most of our usability testers fit that description, some did not. But all benefitted from this approach. By designing an easily followed information flow and using plain language, we helped everyone to more readily comprehend and feel comfortable with the ODR process.

Our usability tests confirmed our approach. Usability test participants across all sites expressed enthusiasm for ODR and the prospect of it being available to them. We found that as they progressed through our models, their increased understanding of how ODR works resulted in an increased sense of confidence and trust in the process.

Testers also helped us to identify issues. Our experience demonstrates that even a few usability test sessions can help to understand and address discrepancies between the design intentions and actual use of court resources. Usability testing is thus an essential part of designing court resources that are accessible to SRLs.

By creating simple and easy-to-understand materials that follow an intuitive and usability-tested workflow, courts can more effectively educate parties about ODR and help them to more capably participate in ODR programs.

Appendix A: Participant Demographics

USABILITY TEST DEMOGRAPHICS (N=20)				
	New Hampshire (N=5)	Maryland (N=5)	New Mexico (N=5)	Pennsylvania (N=5)
Education				
High School Diploma or Less	5	4	1	5
Some College/Trade School	0	1	4	0
Income				
<\$25,500/year	4	3	4	4
\$25,000-50,000	1	2	1	1
Gender				
Female	5	3	3	3
Male	0	2	2	2
Age				
18-31	1	1	0	0
32-41	1	0	3	4
42-51	2	1	0	0
52-65	1	3	1	1
>65	0	0	1	0
Race/ethnicity				
Black or African American	0	5	0	4
Hispanic or Latino	0	0	4	1
White	5	0	0	0
Prefer not to say	0	0	1	0

Appendix B: Usability Test Protocol

Usability Testing Protocol

Introduction (10 mins)

1. **Welcome**

Thank you for coming and helping us with this project. We are so excited to get your valuable feedback today!

2. **Introduce ourselves**

I'm Stephen Sullivan, a researcher at Resolution Systems Institute, and this is Jasmine Henry, Research Associate/Jennifer Shack, Director of Research.

3. **Background**

We are here with Resolution Systems Institute, also known as RSI. RSI is a non-profit in Chicago. We focus on making sure everyone has equal access to court services.

4. **Project overview**

We are here today to look for ways to improve the experience of using online court systems. You will be testing new materials that we have created for a fictional court called Home County Court. Please note that we are not testing you. Your feedback helps everyone because if you find something difficult to use chances are that others will as well. Our session today will help us to discover any issues we need to address in our forms and website, which are still works in progress.

5. **Process**

Now that you have an idea of what we are doing, let's talk about how we're going to do it. This session will last 1.5 hours. For the first 10 minutes, we will go over instructions and sign the consent form. Then you will have up to an hour to test court materials, including a notice, website, video, and guide. I will give you some general guidance as you proceed through the materials. Finally, for the last 20-30 minutes you will complete a brief survey and answer some interview questions about your experience.

While testing these materials, please act like you are responding to a letter you received in the mail from Home County Court. I will give you background information, so that you can put yourself in the shoes of someone who will eventually use these materials.

Please voice your thoughts aloud as you go along. This helps us better understand why you are making certain choices. *Provide a brief example of what this might look*

like, narrating your use of an application on your phone to find information. Remark on the design, colors, information you are seeing.

Jen will take notes and I will also ask brief follow-up questions as you go through the materials. When you have finished testing the materials, I will have you complete a short survey about your experience using the materials. I will then ask you some additional questions so that you have an opportunity to give us more detailed feedback.

Do you have any questions at this point?

6. Consent Forms

Let's review the consent forms. First, we will give a summary of the forms, and at the end, let us know if you have any questions.

Paraphrase Consent Form:

We are required to go over this with you before we start.

For this study, we want to test the experience of using court documents, a website, and a video. We will ask you to use a computer or smartphone to complete tasks on a website we created for a fictional state court. We will ask you to share your perspectives, which we will use to make recommendations to improve these materials.

Being here is completely voluntary. It's your choice to participate in this research study today. The risks are very minimal. For example, we might ask you questions you're not comfortable answering, and you do not have to answer anything you don't want to. However, by signing this form you agree to participate to the best of your abilities and comfort level.

While you are participating voluntarily, if you stay until the end you will be paid a \$150 debit card. You're being paid as a research participant, not an employee of RSI.

As researchers, we will keep your information confidential. We will be audio-recording the interview, and when the recordings are written up, we will delete the audio files, and any personal information like your name or phone number will be deleted from our records. So anything you say will not be connected to you personally. We ask that, during the interview, you keep your phone on mute and go

outside if you need to answer a call. To agree to participate today, **including being audio-recorded**, please sign the second page of the consent form.

Device Choice

In general, if you need to use the internet, do you use your phone, a laptop, or tablet?

Provide the participant with the relevant device, if necessary, with the website already open.

Scenario

We have one last step before we start the test. I would like to put you in the shoes of someone who may use this website once it is completed. After I describe the scenario, you will follow the materials as if they are real. My role as the coordinator is to observe how you use the materials. I will mostly be watching and learning from you; Jennifer will take notes. I will offer general guidance to make sure we cover all materials, but I will let you take the lead on completing the tasks.

Please note that the website is still a work-in-progress; certain fields like name, email, and password will automatically fill, so you do not have to type those out when you get to those points.

Scenario You are Jane Roe and have received a letter in the mail from Home County Court that John Doe has filed a claim against you in small claims court. At the request of the court, you have to use their online system to try and settle your case with John. You now need to review the letter and use Home County Court's website to understand what to do next with the information provided to you.

This is the material I would like you to use: *Give the **NOTICE** to the participant.*

Okay, let's get started. Are you ready to go? Please try to do what you would normally do when receiving a letter like this in the mail, not what you think I want you to do.

Tasks (50-60 minutes)

- *While the participant is completing the tasks, observe them without disturbing them. Don't teach them how to use the material!*
- *Do not interrupt the user. Don't offer help; let the user attempt to perform the task themselves. If they ask for help reply with:*
 - *What do you think Jane would do?*
 - *What do you think that means?*
- *If the participant is not very talkative, here are a few questions that can get them to share:*
 - *What's going through your mind right now?*
 - *Is there anything on the page that stands out to you?*
 - *Are you looking for something that you're not finding?*
 - *(If they are surprised by something) What were you expecting to happen when you [did task]?*
- *If the participant gets stuck — doesn't find what they should be looking for and gives up — probe for what they would normally do in this situation*

Notice to Defendant of Mandatory Online Dispute Resolution (10 minutes)

Before starting: Ask whether they normally prefer to get information via video or text.

Tasks

1. You've received this letter in the mail from Home County Court. Please review it.

Follow-up questions:

- *At first glance, what is the purpose of this notice?*
- *How do you think Jane Roe would be feeling right now?*
- *What can you do to get more information about ODR?*
- *What is the next step you need to take according to the notice?*
- *How would you get to the website if you received this notice?*

-
2. Great. Now please follow the instructions to begin preparing for ODR on the website.

Court ODR Home Webpage (15 minutes)

Tasks

3. Please open the website and take a few minutes to explore the homepage.
4. Next, I'd like you to watch the informational video.

Follow-up questions:

- *I noticed you*
 - *What did you learn from watching the video that would be helpful if you were required to use ODR?*
 - *What do you still want to know?*
 - *How comfortable are you following the instructions from the video after watching it?*
5. Great. Now I'd like you to spend time exploring the rest of the website to learn about ODR.

Follow-up questions:

- *How do you think Jane Roe would be feeling right now?*
 - *Based on the information thus far, how does ODR work?*
 - *What options do you have for communicating with the other party in ODR?*
 - *Based on everything you've reviewed thus far, how would you describe the role of a mediator?*
 - *If you had more questions about ODR, how would you contact someone?*
6. Next, I'd like you to find the resource that will help you prepare for ODR as a defendant.

Guide for Defendants Webpage (20 minutes)

Tasks

7. Please look over the preparation guide to learn about the steps required to prepare for ODR.

Follow-up questions:

-
- *What options do you have for payment to the plaintiff using ODR?*
 - *What are possible ways that the ODR process could end?*
 - *How do you think Jane Roe would be feeling right now?*

8. Excellent. Next, please start using ODR by creating an account.

ODR Account Registration Webpages (15 minutes)

Tasks

9. I'd like you to create an account using the information provided. (Note that the information will automatically fill, so just click on the fields).
- a. ALT: I'd like for you to pretend you did not know your case number and needed to look it up.
 - i. If they don't find the "I don't have my case number" button, ask: What do you think would happen if you clicked on the left button?

Follow-up questions:

- *How comfortable would you feel entering your own information into this system?*
- *If a friend found themselves in a similar situation to Jane's, would you feel confident helping them to sign up for ODR using this website?*
- *How do you think Jane would be feeling right now?*
- *If you had a case like this, how would you feel about using ODR to try to resolve it?*

Post-Test Feedback

Thanks for going through all the materials. To conclude the study, please fill out this survey. When you are done, I will ask you a few follow-up questions to discuss any feedback you have in more detail. Your insights will help us to improve the materials.

[Survey]

Interview (15 minutes)

1. How would you describe your overall experience with the materials?
2. What did you like most about your experience and why?
3. What did you like least about your experience and why?
4. Which of the materials did you find to be the most helpful to you?
 - a. How did the order of the materials feel to you?
 - b. When completing tasks on the internet, do you find following written instructions or videos to be more helpful?
5. After going through these materials, what is your understanding of what Online Dispute Resolution is?
 - a. What would you still want to know?
6. Did the webpages have too much information, too little information, or just right?
7. How pleasant or unpleasant did you find the website visuals (illustrations, colors, layout)?
8. How do you know if something is clickable on a website? What do you look for?
9. If you could change anything about the Notice what would you change?
10. If you could change anything about website pages what would you change?
11. If you could change anything about the video what would you change?
12. What help do you think that other people might need in using this material?
13. If you had a case like this, how would you feel about using ODR to try to resolve it?
14. Any other comments?

Then wrap up the session by thanking the participant.

Appendix C: Usability Testing Goal Funnel

Goal Funnel

Series of interactions that lead to a goal such as a completed purchase, or a “conversion.” Each goal funnel consists of individual steps such as opening a shopping cart page or proceeding to a checkout page. ([REF](#))

Notice to Defendant of Mandatory Online Dispute Resolution

1. The user reads the full notice form.
2. The user opens the Court ODR Home webpage.
 - a. The user follows the steps to register for ODR [see below].

Conversion: The user understands what is being requested of them and successfully opens the court ODR home webpage.

Court ODR Home Webpage

1. The user reads the information under “What is ODR?”
2. The user watches the informational video about ODR.
3. The user navigates to the Guide for Defendants webpage [see below].
4. The user explores the “How does ODR work?” cards.
5. The user explores the ODR confidentiality drop-down items.
6. The user reaches the bottom of the homepage.
7. The user navigates back to the top of the homepage.
8. The user proceeds to the ODR registration webpage [see below].

Conversion: The user understands the basics of ODR, how to register for an account, what confidentiality protections are in place, and how to initiate the ODR registration process.

Guide for Defendants

1. The user reviews the basics of how ODR works.
2. The user reviews the steps to using ODR.
3. The user fills out the gathered documents field.
4. The user selects 'yes' or 'no' to the "Do you agree that you owe the plaintiff money?" question.
 - a. IF YES (3A): The user responds to "How much money do you think you owe?" field.
 - i. The user selects 'yes' or 'no' to the "Do you want to pay this amount all at once?" question.
 1. IF YES: The user responds to "When would you be able to pay the money?"
 - a. The user responds to "How will you pay the money?"
 2. IF NO: The user responds to "How much money are you offering to pay each week or each month?"
 - a. The user responds to "Starting on what date?"
 - b. The user responds to "How will you pay the money?"
 - c. The user responds to "How many payments will you need to make to reach the total amount offered?"
 - b. IF NO (3B): The user reads about two available ODR chat options.
5. The user fills out the "other terms" field.
6. The user follows the prompt to log on to ODR and submit an offer.
7. The user reads the information about responding to the plaintiff's counteroffer.
8. The user reads the information about reaching or not reaching an agreement.
9. The user reads the information about asking for a mediator.

-
10. The user reads the information about what happens if a plaintiff does not register for ODR.
 11. The user reads the information about ODR's safety.
 12. The user explores the options for getting help with ODR.

Conversion: The user understands how to calculate and make an offer, respond to a counteroffer, and complete the ODR process.

ODR Registration Webpage

1. The user enters their case number.
 - a. ALT: The user looks up their case number
 - i. The user fills out the First Name field.
 - ii. The user fills out the Last Name field.
 - iii. The user navigates to the next page.
 - iv. The user copies their case number.
 - v. The user submits their case number.
2. The user navigates to the Verify Identity page.
3. The user confirms their identity.
 - a. ALT: The user explores the definitions of plaintiff and/or defendant.
4. The user fills out the First Name field.
5. The user fills out the Last Name field.
6. The user fills out the Email field.
7. The user fills out the Password field.
8. The user fills out the Confirm Password field.
9. The user submits their information to create an account.

10. The user explores the ODR Consent form.

11. The user agrees to the ODR consent form.

Conversion: The user successfully creates an account to use the ODR platform.

Appendix D: Usability Testing Survey

Usability Testing Survey

Notice to Defendant (Letter)

1. How easy or hard was it for you to understand the purpose of the notice?

- Very hard Hard Neutral Easy Very easy

2. If you received this notice in the mail, how much would you trust it to be real?

- Not trust it at all Slightly trust it Somewhat trust it Mostly trust it Completely trust it

Webpages

3. How easy or hard was it to find the information you were looking for on the Home County Court website?

- Very hard to find information Hard to find information Neutral Easy to find information Very easy to find information

4. Is the website text easy or hard to read?

- Very hard to read Hard to read Neutral Easy to read Very easy to read

5. How helpful was the Guide for Defendants page in helping you to prepare for ODR?

- Not at all helpful Slightly helpful Somewhat helpful Very helpful Extremely helpful

6. How confident do you feel that you would be able to prepare for ODR using this website?

- Not confident at all
 Not very confident
 Somewhat confident
 Very confident
 Extremely confident

7. How easy or hard was it to understand each of the materials below? Please circle your response:

	Very hard to understand	Hard to understand	Neutral	Easy to understand	Very easy to understand
Notice to Defendant	1	2	3	4	5
Home County Court webpage	1	2	3	4	5
Video	1	2	3	4	5
Guide for Defendants webpage	1	2	3	4	5
Account registration webpages	1	2	3	4	5