Best Practices for Creating
LEGAL SELF-HELP MATERIALS

A Toolkit for Courts and Legal Service Agencies

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NCSC
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Overview

Self-help materials can be an invaluable tool for helping litigants navigate the legal system. Notably, they can provide accurate and reputable information about a broad range of legal topics that litigants may encounter. These materials can be particularly useful in helping litigants without counsel (self-represented litigants, or SRLs) understand legal concepts and navigate legal processes.

Court forms, court form instructions, process maps, subject-matter and resource guides, and websites are all effective tools for providing litigants with the information they need to make informed decisions. These materials not only help individuals understand their legal rights and responsibilities, but also provide them with the knowledge and confidence to navigate the court system successfully.

For self-help materials to be effective, they must be clear, concise, and practical. They should provide actionable information that litigants need most, including on substantive issues (e.g., housing, eviction, public benefits, and family matters) as well as procedural topics (e.g., how to start a court case and service of process). They should answer questions that litigants are likely to have as they navigate court processes. Additionally, they should be transparent and consistent to help SRLs understand and participate successfully in court processes.

This guide highlights best practices for creating and assessing self-help materials. Specifically, it addresses:

- substantive and procedural areas that materials might cover,
- plain language considerations,
- information about linguistic and ADA accessibility of materials,
- formatting and placement of materials, and
- questions related to user testing.

This guide is designed to cover a wide range of self-help materials as indicated above. It also presents examples along the way. Finally, the global checklist at the end of the document consolidates the guidance in a tool that can be used to assess individual resources.

Statement of Principles

There are common core principles that courts and agencies should consider when they develop and assess self-help materials. It is important to discuss these principles with stakeholders to ensure that everyone participating in self-help material creation and review shares a consistent vision. This will help to ensure that all principles that are important to your court users and community are incorporated into the materials. Core principles include:

- **Accuracy:** Self-help materials should provide users with accurate and up-to-date information about the legal topic or process.
- **Simplicity:** Self-help materials should be easy-to-understand for all users.
- **Clarity:** The materials should tell users what they need to do or know to minimize user error.
- **Procedural Fairness:** Materials should contain clear, readily available information that will help court users access and understand court processes and how to participate in them.
- **User-Centered:** Materials created in collaboration with stakeholders will provide information court users need in ways that court users understand. Being user-centered includes working with stakeholders to identify and design resources, as well as engaging in user testing and soliciting feedback to improve resources. It also reinforces the idea of courts as public resources and collaborators.

Materials developers should ask if materials and resources can be better designed, promoted, and shared at all stages of development and revision.

Applying Best Practices

When designing and assessing self-help materials, use the following questions to help ensure they follow best practices.

01 Do existing materials provide information about important substantive and procedural areas?

Below is a list of substantive and procedural areas that people who represent themselves frequently encounter. Consider the following questions for each category:

1. Do materials exist for each of the categories? If not, should materials be created?
2. What is the purpose of the existing materials? Forms? Instructions?
3. Are additional context or materials needed to help users understand the subject? If yes, and the materials do not exist, decide if materials should be created, who will create them, and who will host and maintain materials.

Substantive Areas

Do materials exist to addressing the following substantive areas and other substantive areas that are important to court users in your communities?

- **Civil Rights** (discrimination; sexual harassment)
- **Disability** (benefits including SSI/SSDI, Medicaid/Medicare, and ABLE accounts; special education/504 plans; ADA accommodation/discrimination; powers of attorney, guardianship, and supported decision-making)
- **Education** (special education/504 plans; suspension/expulsion defense; students experiencing homelessness; Title IX)
- **Expungement**
- **Family Law** (child support; divorce; paternity; child custody; guardianship)
- **Housing** (eviction and landlord-tenant; foreclosure; subsidized housing; housing discrimination; housing conditions; homelessness/shelter)

- **Immigration** (U.S. citizenship; DACA; SIJS; work authorization; asylum/TPS; family-based immigration; detention; removal; immigration relief for victims of crime; immigration consequences related to expungement of criminal records)
- **Military and Veterans** (veterans benefits; discharge upgrades; healthcare for servicemembers; Servicemembers Civil Relief Act; child custody; housing)
- **Money and Debt** (debt collection/garnishment; small claims; installment payment plans; bankruptcy, ID theft; scams and consumer fraud; ABLE accounts)
- **Name and Gender Marker Changes** (name change; gender marker change)
- **Personal Safety** (domestic violence protection orders; child abuse/neglect; adult abuse/neglect)
- **Public Benefits** (means-tested benefits including Medicaid, TANF, SNAP, WIC; Medicare; subsidized housing; unemployment; SSI/SSDI)
- **Seniors** (wills, probate, and estate planning; Medicare; kinship care; powers of attorney, living wills, and advance directives; scams and consumer fraud)
- **Taxes** (Earned Income Tax Credit; Child Tax Credit; tax refund garnishment)
- **Traffic/Criminal** (driver's license reinstatement; traffic tickets; expungement; policing; public defender appointment; victim's resources)
- **Wills and Life Planning** (wills and probate; powers of attorney, living wills, and advance directives)
- **Work and Jobs** (discrimination; wage theft; worker's compensation; unemployment)
- **Other** (Use the information in the user feedback and testing section of this guide and your expertise to identify other common areas of need.)

Procedural Areas

Do materials exist to address the following procedural areas?

- **Stages of a Court Case** (steps of a case from start to finish, how to find information about a court case)
- **Self-Representation** (information about representing oneself generally)
- **Requesting an Interpreter**
- **Requesting an Accommodation**
- **Requesting a Filing Fee Waiver**

- **Starting a Case** (fee waivers, e-filing instructions, complaint or petition forms, other case-opening forms (e.g., summonses, information sheets))
- **Service of Process**
- **Responding to a Lawsuit** (response forms, e-filing instructions, instructions for serving responses/motions)
- **Requesting a Hearing** (request for hearing forms, other jurisdiction-specific requirements, guidance on which hearings are remote/in-person and how to request a change)
- **Preparing for a Hearing** (finding the courthouse, gathering documents, specific information for remote hearings)
- **Courtroom Etiquette and Procedure** (how to address the judge, conduct of hearings, remote hearing practices)
- **Introducing Evidence** (what evidence is permissible, subpoenaing witnesses, questioning witnesses, introducing documents)
- **Enforcing/Asking to Change a Court Order** (post-judgement forms)
- **Mediation/Alternative Dispute Resolution/Diversion Programs** (how to ask for mediation, guidance on mediation participation, available diversion programs)
- **Agency Practice and Enforcement** (applying/renewing benefits, correcting errors, requesting appeals from agency decisions)
- **Appeals** (administrative and non-administrative)

02 Are the materials accurate?

Do the materials provide accurate, up-to-date information about the topic? Laws, court rules, and practices frequently change, and it is important to check all materials for accuracy on a regular basis. Create a schedule to review and update materials. Use subject-matter experts to help review materials on a regular basis.

- Materials should contain a date stamp, so creators and users know when they were last updated.
- Materials should contain the name of the entity/person who created them.

- If materials have been translated, make sure the translated versions are updated with any changes.

03 Do the materials use basic plain language principles?

Use basic plain language principles when designing or revising materials. Plain language is language that a person can understand and use the first time they encounter it.[1] Using plain language reduces frustration, confusion, and user error and ensures that people who use self-help materials will be able to take the necessary steps to address their legal problems. When designing self-help materials and approaching plain language revisions, ask the following questions:

- Who is the resource for?
- How will people use this resource?
- What do people using the resource need to know?

NCSC resources about plain language can be found here. This resource also has some tips for writing self-help materials.

Some common plain language principles include the following:

- Use short sentences.
- Avoid jargon.
- Aim for a third to sixth grade reading level. Use free online tools[2] to check reading level. Most word processing programs also include this capability.[3]
- Find simple, clear ways to explain legal concepts. NCSC's plain language glossary has some suggestions to help with this.
- Put important information first.
- Use bullets, checkboxes, and lists. Avoid "walls" of text.
- Use text boxes to set off important information.

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[1] For more on plain language and why it is important, *see*, https://www.plainlanguage.gov/about/definitions/
[2] *See e.g.*, https://readabilityformulas.com/free-readability-formula-tests.php and https://hemingwayapp.com
[3] Note that these word processing program reading level assessments can give a baseline assessment of reading level, but they are not particularly accurate, so it is important to double check reading level with other tools before finalizing a resource.

- Use headings and white space to break up text.
- Use a font that is easy to read.
- Use at least 12-point font.
- Use graphics to catch the recipient's attention and help illustrate key pieces of information.

The next pages contain resources and examples to help assess plain language principles.

Plain Language Checklist	
☐	The resource has been checked for reading level.
The reading level of this document is: _____	
Strengths	
☐	Important information is located first.
☐	The resource uses headings and subtitles to organize information.
☐	The resource uses bullets, numbered lists, or checklists to break up text and explain key steps.
☐	The resource incorporates white space. The resource does not contain large blocks or "walls" of text.
☐	The resource uses graphics to highlight and explain concepts. (See the information about alt text descriptors for graphics in the accessibility section of this resource and in the accessibility checklist.)
☐	The resource uses text boxes.
Areas for Improvement	
☐	The resource uses all caps, bold, or italic fonts for extended periods.
If yes, how can the plain language/design principles above be used to help emphasize these concepts? (Can the bolded or all caps text be broken up into bullets or placed in a text box? Can all caps be reworked into a heading? Can a graphic (e.g., image of a warning sign) convey the importance of information?) _____ _____ _____ _____	

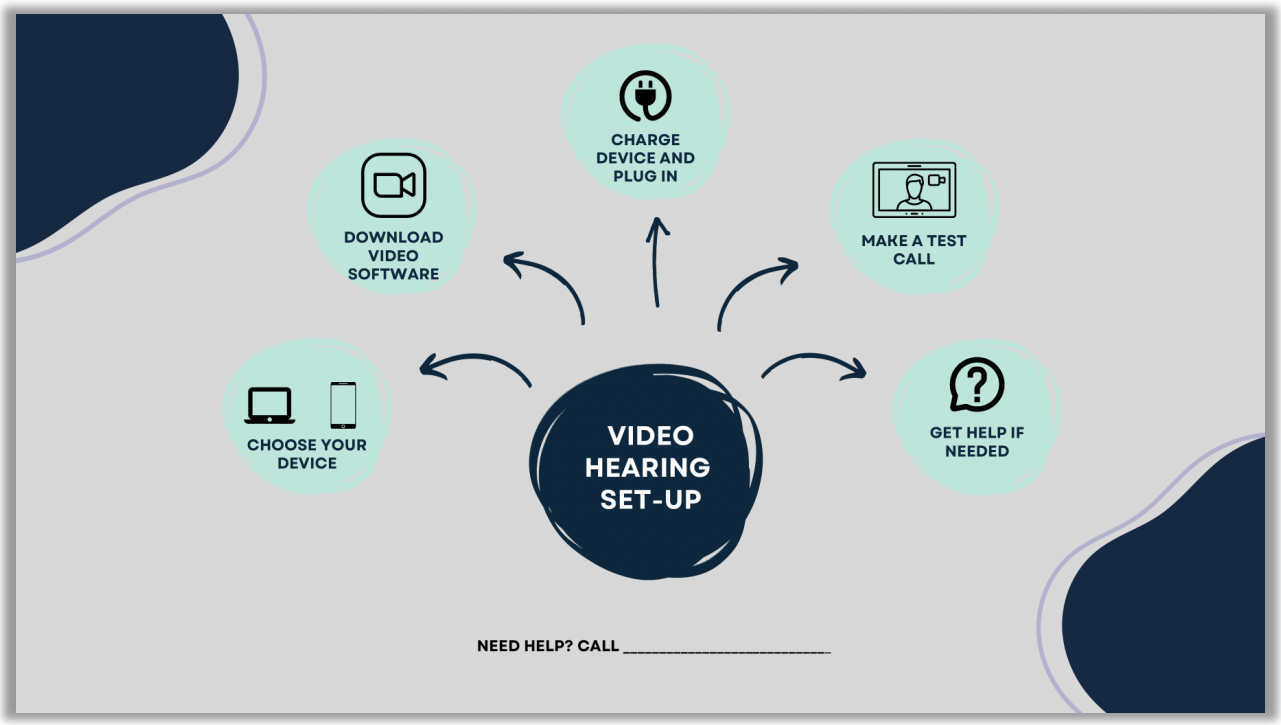
☐	The resource uses legalese or words that would be difficult to understand for a user who does not have experience with the court system.
If yes, how can these words be changed or explained? (See NCSC's plain language glossary for ideas.) _____ _____ _____ _____	

Sample Plain Language Materials

The materials on the following pages are sample templates created by NCSC and state website examples of how plain language principles look in practice.

Sample Infographic

The following sample infographic shows a user how to prepare for a remote hearing.



A PDF version of this resource is available here.

Summons Attachment

This summons attachment for eviction cases uses plain language and user design principles.

Eviction Help Information Sheet

Your landlord has sued you for eviction. Explore options to stay in your home, get resources, and make a plan.

Talk to a free lawyer

Legal aid lawyers can help you know your rights & prepare for court.

Call 888-783-8190 (Legal Aid of South Central Michigan)

Scan the QR code or visit www.michiganlegalhelp.org

Access resources

Get connected to eviction diversion resources.

Call Lansing's Eviction Diversion Facilitator 517-483-7608 or

Email Lansing's Eviction Diversion Facilitator, ulices.rosa@lansingmi.gov

Apply for rental assistance

Contact the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services for information on emergency rental assistance

Email at MDHHS-Ingham-EDP@Michigan.gov or

Call 517-887-9595.

Questions?

Come find free help

Eviction Diversion Facilitator Ulices Rosa

124 W Michigan Ave #54A, Lansing, MI 489335

The PDF version of this document is available here.

Sample Website or Brochure Text

The following examples give more in-depth information about legal topics using plain language principles:

Maryland Court Help Website

Why We Chose It:

- This site uses graphics, headings, and bullets to help users navigate content.
- The different sized and colored fonts help break up text and create a visual representation of the layers of content.

I Owe Money/Dealing with Debt

I've been served with court papers relating to a debt. What should I do?

Cases in the District Court

Have you had a trial yet? *(select one for more information)*

No. I have not had my trial yet.	Yes. I had a trial within the last 30 days, but I do not agree with the outcome.	Yes, and my trial was more than 30 days ago.

Cases in the circuit courts

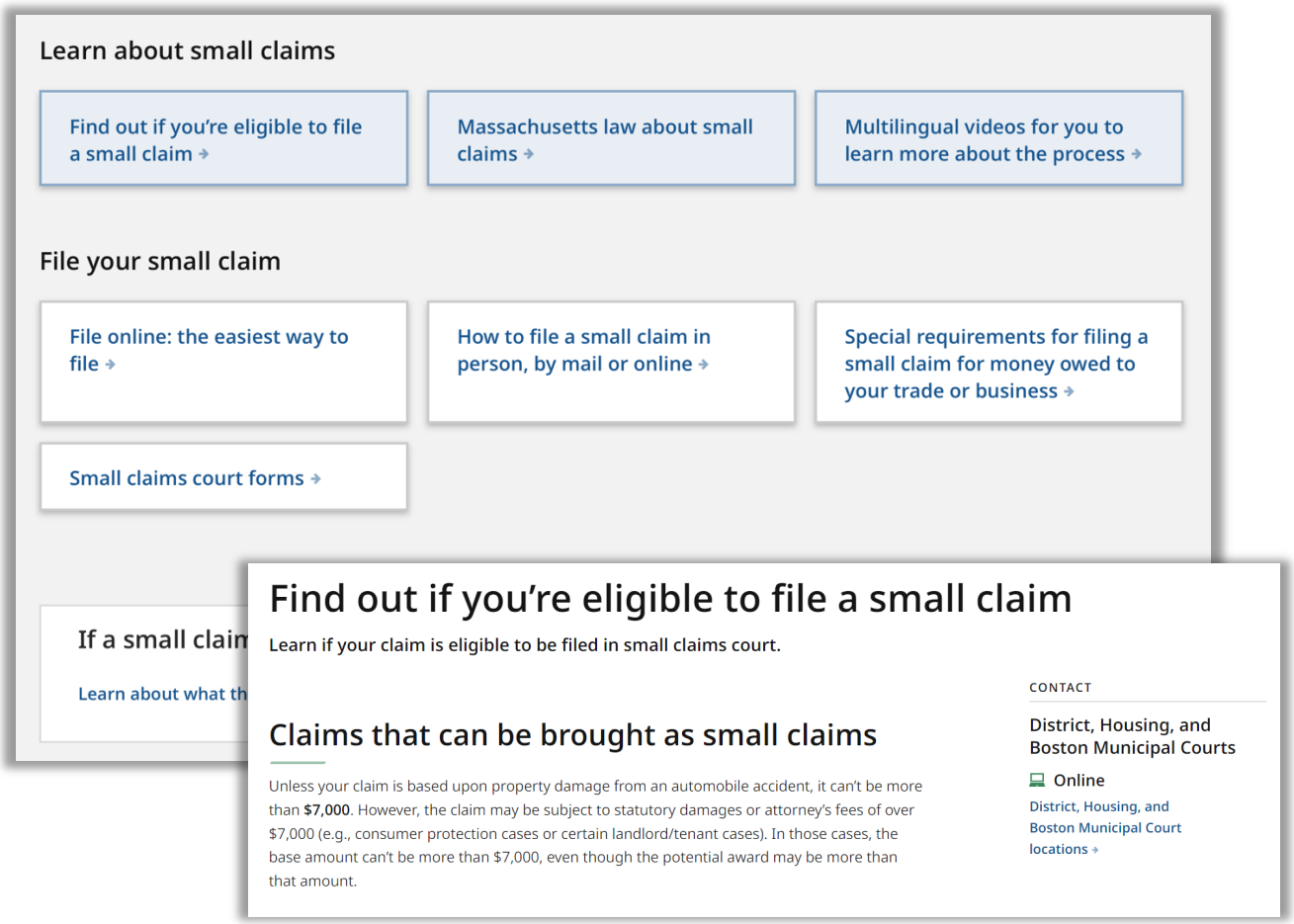
Cases before the circuit courts are very complex. Consider getting help from a lawyer. Information about finding legal help is available here. You can also get help from the Maryland Court Help Center.

See more at https://www.mdcourts.gov/legalhelp/moneyissuesiowe.

Massachusetts Courts Self-Help Website

Why We Chose It:

- The site uses headings to break up text.
- The font is large and easy to read.
- The site uses white space and color successfully.
- This site links to various topics instead of including a large body of text on a single page.
- The site has an explainer video on the main page.

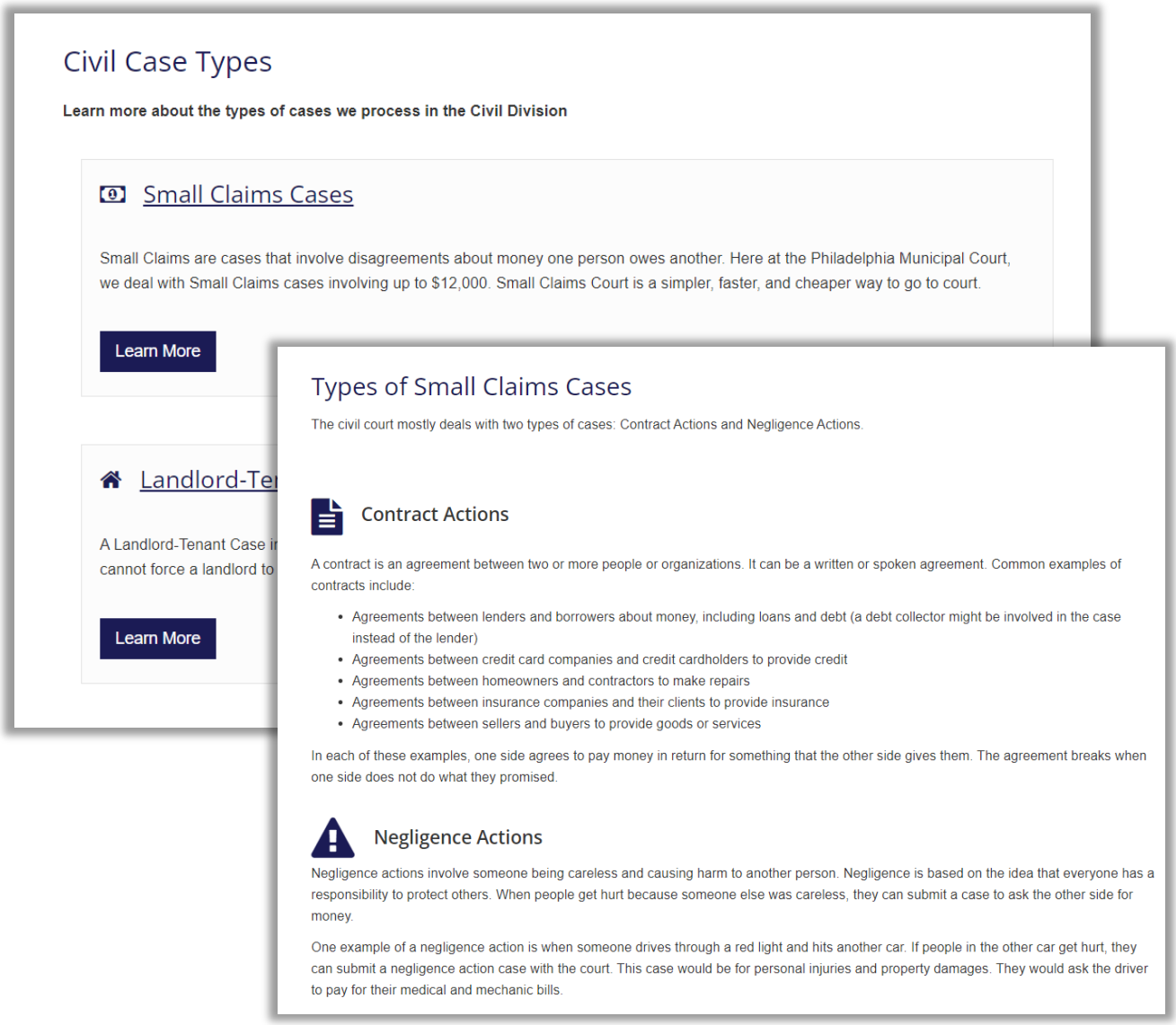


See more at https://www.mass.gov/small-claims.

Philadelphia Municipal Court Website

Why We Chose It:

- This website uses headings and icons to organize content.
- The information is broken up with headings, graphics, and bullets.
- The website contains an explainer video for each topic.



Civil Case Types

Learn more about the types of cases we process in the Civil Division

Small Claims Cases

Small Claims are cases that involve disagreements about money one person owes another. Here at the Philadelphia Municipal Court, we deal with Small Claims cases involving up to $12,000. Small Claims Court is a simpler, faster, and cheaper way to go to court.

Learn More

Landlord-Ten

A Landlord-Tenant Case i
cannot force a landlord to

Learn More

Types of Small Claims Cases

The civil court mostly deals with two types of cases: Contract Actions and Negligence Actions.

Contract Actions

A contract is an agreement between two or more people or organizations. It can be a written or spoken agreement. Common examples of contracts include:

- Agreements between lenders and borrowers about money, including loans and debt (a debt collector might be involved in the case instead of the lender)
- Agreements between credit card companies and credit cardholders to provide credit
- Agreements between homeowners and contractors to make repairs
- Agreements between insurance companies and their clients to provide insurance
- Agreements between sellers and buyers to provide goods or services

In each of these examples, one side agrees to pay money in return for something that the other side gives them. The agreement breaks when one side does not do what they promised.

Negligence Actions

Negligence actions involve someone being careless and causing harm to another person. Negligence is based on the idea that everyone has a responsibility to protect others. When people get hurt because someone else was careless, they can submit a case to ask the other side for money.

One example of a negligence action is when someone drives through a red light and hits another car. If people in the other car get hurt, they can submit a negligence action case with the court. This case would be for personal injuries and property damages. They would ask the driver to pay for their medical and mechanic bills.

See more at https://www.courts.phila.gov/municipal/civil/.

04 Is the information available in a variety of formats?

Offer information in multiple formats to make sure they are accessible to all users. It is important to consider user preference and user characteristics when thinking about how and where the information is made available. Different users will prefer to access materials in different ways (e.g., using mobile devices, viewing videos, having writing information to reference). Some users will only be able to access materials in particular formats (e.g., users with low literacy may only be able to access information in video form). Suggested formats include video, audio, transcripts, tip sheets, other written information, interactive websites, and social media posts. Videos should be closed captioned to support accessibility with multilingual translations where appropriate.

Web-Based Materials

Here are some questions specific to web-based materials:

- How do users learn about the website?
- Is the website mobile-friendly?
- Can users easily find the resources on the website?
- Are the materials organized by topic?
- Can the materials be shared or linked on social media?
- Is the website accessible? (See the information below about accessibility and WCAG 3 standards.)
- Are documents available in multiple file or other formats (e.g., PDF, Word, HTML)? (Fillable forms should be available in both Word and PDF to increase users' ability to access and save. Also consider putting information in downloadable documents onto the website itself (HTML format) to increase ease of use for mobile-device users. Note that not all resources need to be available in multiple formats, especially if there is a format that works best for a particular document.)

05 Where did the resource come from?

Telling users who created a resource and when it was created is important. It can increase trust and confidence in the resource. It can also ensure that users are working with the most recent version of a resource. And if they are not, the date stamp can help court staff direct them to a more current version.

Here are some key questions to ask about resource creation:

- Does the resource say who created it and the date it was created?
- Does the resource tell users where to go to get more information (e.g., a website, a phone number, or a physical location for a court's self-help center)?

06 Do the materials explain key steps a user must take and any deadlines?

Court processes often require that participants take certain actions and respond according to firm deadlines. Well-designed self-help materials should provide clear information about deadlines (including how to calculate deadlines, if necessary) and next steps.

Make sure that explanations are in plain language. Use pictures and infographics to convey information about steps as well as words. See the sample documents above for examples.

07 Are the materials accessible to people with disabilities?

Resource Accessibility Generally

Federal law requires that all content, including web-based content, be accessible to users with disabilities. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires, among other things, that state and local governments and businesses open to the general public do not discriminate against people on the basis of a disability and provide reasonable accommodations to ensure that people with disabilities are able to access services. This includes resources and services provided by state and local courts and legal service agencies, including websites.

Guidance on Making Web-Based Content Accessible

As indicated above, federal law requires that web-based content be accessible. Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act also requires that Federal agencies make electronic information and information technology accessible, and the General Services Administration has developed guidance that is helpful for all web designers. Likewise, the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) developed by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) provide in-depth requirements to ensure that web content is accessible.

Specific Accessibility Considerations for Web-Based Content and Documents

There are several accessibility considerations when it comes to resources, especially web-based resources. These include font choice, color contrast and use of color coding, captioning for videos, labeling for online forms, and creating alt text for images. Some of these features are necessary for people who use screen readers (e.g., alt text to access images) and others are essential for people who have low vision, color blindness, or dyslexia (e.g., font choice, eliminating color coding.)

Here are some additional resources to help with accessibility:

- Microsoft and Adobe have guides to help make documents more accessible.
- These resources on accessible design from the University of North Carolina Greensboro offer tips on checking contrast, selecting fonts that work well for people with low vision or learning disabilities, and creating alt text for images.
- This document from the federal Department of Health and Human Services has some guidance about checking contrast.
- For guidance on making social media content more accessible, use this toolkit from Digital.gov.

Individualized Accommodations

Accommodation needs will vary from person to person, and individuals with disabilities will need accommodations that are not included on this list. Make sure to include information about how users can request additional accommodations if needed. This section of the assessment guide touches on giving information about requesting accommodations and language access.

Accessibility: Tips and Warnings

- It can be difficult to check website accessibility since there are no tools or automated accessibility checkers that can address all aspects of accessibility.
- Use the checklist to find problems that are easily identified by viewing a webpage.

Warning! Don't assume that a website is fully accessible if it meets the above criteria.

- When building or assessing your own website, engage a website accessibility expert to make sure content is fully accessible.
- User testing should always be a part of your design and testing process. Including people with disabilities and different needs in your testing groups will help uncover any accessibility issues.

The checklist below can help you review materials for some common web and document accessibility needs.

Accessibility Checklist

Accessibility Checklist	
☐	The resource uses high contrast (e.g., black on white or similar). (This document has some guidance about checking contrast.)
☐	For a fillable form, fields are labeled.
☐	Alt text is included for any visuals.
☐	The resource limits the use of tables.
☐	The resource avoids color-coding or provides coded information in another format.
☐	For PDF, the text is searchable.
☐	For video, captioning is included.
☐	For websites, it is navigable by keyboard.

☐	The resource has information about how to request other accommodations or to report an accessibility problem. (For more information about making Word documents accessible, go here. For more information about making PDF documents accessible, go here.)

08 Are there clear instructions about how to request accommodations, interpreters, or translations?

Language Access Considerations

Self-help materials should be provided in the languages most used in your community. You can use census data, including American Community Survey data, and court interpreter use data to determine what languages are most commonly used in your community. If materials are not available in multiple languages, provide clear instructions about how users can request a translation.

When assessing materials, document what languages they are available in and who performed the translation. Don't forget to include date stamps on translated materials! If a resource is not available in multiple languages, consider whether it should be.

Accommodation Information

Include information about how a user can request an accommodation or report accessibility issues. This can be a contact phone number and email address, an online form, or a link to a website with more information.

09 Where can people get the materials?

Court users will want to access self-help materials in different ways. Some users will prefer paper, while others will want information that can be accessed on a mobile device. It is also important that people know where to go to get materials and that materials are available in community locations where people frequently ask for help.

Here are some key questions to ask about resource location:

- Where is the resource available?
- Is the resource available in multiple locations?
- Can additional community partners host and share the resources (either on websites or in physical spaces)?
- Where can people go to request more materials? If there is not an easy way for people to request more materials, consider creating one. See the example from the Maryland Judiciary below for an example of a self-help materials order form.

Sample Order Form

From the Maryland Judiciary Website

Court Help Materials Order Form

All materials provided **FREE OF CHARGE**.

These materials are also available to download and print at https://mdcourts.gov/accesstojustice/publications.

Materials Requested

Information about Court-Help Centers statewide, including the Maryland Courts Help Center (phone and chat service), the District Court Help Centers (walk-in), and the Family Law Help Centers (walk-in).

For questions, please contact Iris Joiner at Iris.Joiner@mdcourts.gov or 410-260-3606.

Put a number in for the quantity you would like then scroll to the bottom to enter your information and hit submit when complete.

Maryland Court Help Center
8.5x11 flier

Language	Quantity
English	0
Spanish	0
French	0
Russian	0
Chinese	0
Korean	0

Order Forms

- **Online Order Form: Court Help Materials**
- **Online Order Form: Public Access to Court Records Brochures**
- **Online Order Form: Court Support**
- **Online Order Form: Language Services**

See more at https://mdcourts.gov/form/court-help-materials-order-form.

10 Have the materials been user tested?

User testing means that actual or potential users of a resource or service give feedback about how well the resource works. User testing is critical to make sure that self-help resources actually help the people who are using them.

User testing can be done in a variety of ways and at multiple stages of resource development. Some common user-testing methods include surveys, focus groups, and individual interviews. You don't need a lot of people for successful user testing. Asking five people to review will give you good information about areas for improvement. You can ask clients, self-help center users, and members of community organizations with whom you partner to participate in user testing. Make sure to include non-English speakers and people with disabilities in your user testing to assess the accessibility of your materials.

Have a plan about what you will do with user feedback. Schedule regular updates to materials and incorporate user feedback into these updates.

Here are some easy ways to perform user testing:

- Ask self-help center customers or legal service clients what information they need.
- Ask self-help center customers or legal service clients who meet with staff to fill out a short survey about a particular form or informational resource. (Sample surveys are included at the end of this section.)
- Include digital surveys on websites or at the end of document assembly programs.
- Ask self-help center and legal clinic staff about common questions and areas where customers need help.

- Conduct focus groups. Again, you only need around five people. Ask non-legal community partners to help identify focus group participants. Non-legal community organization staff can also act as focus group participants. Ask participants to review material and summarize key points or fill out a form and identify areas of confusion.
- Use scenarios. Ask testers to complete a task, engage with a process, or attempt to achieve some goal. This will help you identify the kinds of resources they use, the kinds of resources that are lacking, and where they might get stuck or confused in their attempt.
- Identify specific elements of a particular form or document and ask for feedback on these elements. For example, for an infographic, ask whether images convey the information you want conveyed.
- Observe people using your material/tool/website/software platform and note where they struggle, have questions, or get something wrong.

Resources for User Testing

NCSC has the following resources that may help you plan and develop user testing:

- ODR User Testing advice: https://www.ncsc.org/odr/home/stakeholder-engagement
- Usability Testing Checklist: https://www.ncsc.org/__data/assets/pdf_file/0026/42389/Usability-Testing-Checklists.pdf
- Testing Facilitator Phrases: https://www.ncsc.org/__data/assets/pdf_file/0020/42392/Test-Facilitator-Resources.pdf
- Sample User Testing Script: https://www.ncsc.org/__data/assets/pdf_file/0024/42387/Sample-Usability-Test-Script.pdf
- Take a prerecorded training about user testing https://vimeo.com/738650155 and review the materials here: https://www.ncsc.org/__data/assets/pdf_file/0026/80846/User-Testing-8.10.22.pdf

Sample Surveys

The following pages give some sample content for surveys and focus groups. Remember: you do not need a lot of questions.

Sample 1 – General Survey

General Survey for Assessing Self-Help Materials	
After using this resource (note: customize with the name of the resource), indicate your level of agreement with the following statements by checking the boxes below.	
1. I understand my case better.	
☐	Strongly agree
☐	Agree
☐	I'm not sure
☐	Disagree
☐	Strongly disagree
2. I feel better prepared to handle my legal issue after using this resource.	
☐	Strongly agree
☐	Agree
☐	I'm not sure
☐	Disagree
☐	Strongly disagree
3. Where did you find this resource? Check all that apply.	
☐	Online – Google or Other Search
☐	Online – Court Website
☐	Online – Other: _____
☐	Friend or Family Member
☐	Lawyer or Non-Profit Organization
☐	Clerk's Office or Self-Help Center
☐	Other: _____

Sample 2 – Focus Group Questions

Focus Group Questions for Assessing Self-Help Materials
1. What did you like about this resource? _____ _____ _____ 2. What did you not like? _____ _____ _____ 3. Summarize the key points from this resource. _____ _____ _____ 4. What was confusing? _____ _____ _____ 5. After using this resource, do you understand what your next steps are? Describe those steps. _____ _____ _____

Next Steps

Think carefully about what types of self-help materials are needed in your community. What are common legal issues experienced by self-represented litigants? Where do people go for help, both in physical spaces and online?

Identify community partners, self-help staff, and other service providers who can help identify legal needs and common legal questions.[4]

When developing new materials, have a plan to update and maintain these materials. More information about data and asset management will be forthcoming in future tools and resources related to this project and other NCSC initiatives.

[4] This sample outreach kit has strategies and tools to help with community outreach and engagement: https://www.srln.org/system/files/attachments/Maryland%20Court%20Help%20Center%20Outreach%20Kit%20%28Spring%202021%29.pdf

Appendix 1: Global Checklist for Self-Help Materials

Checklist for Self-Help Materials	
Accuracy	
☐	The resource is accurate and up to date.
☐	The resource has been reviewed by subject-matter experts.
Who reviewed it? _____ _____ _____	
When was it reviewed? _____ _____ _____	
Creator Information	
☐	The resource says who created it.
☐	The resource contains the date it was created.
☐	The resource tells users where to go to get more information (e.g., website, phone number, physical location for court self-help center).
Plain Language	
☐	The resource has been checked for reading level.
The reading level of this document is: _____	
Strengths	
☐	Sentences and paragraphs are structured so important information comes first.
☐	The resource uses headings and subtitles to organize information.
☐	The resource uses bullets, numbered lists, or checklists to break up text and explain key steps.

☐	The resource uses white space to organize the text (i.e., there are not large blocks or "walls" of text.)
☐	The resource uses graphics to highlight and explain concepts. (See the information about alt text descriptors for graphics in the accessibility section of this resource and in the accessibility section of this checklist.)
☐	The resource uses text boxes.
Areas for Improvement	
☐	The resource uses all caps, bold, or italic fonts for extended periods.
If yes, how can the plain language/design principles above be used to help emphasize these concepts? (Can the bolded or all caps text be broken up into bullets or placed in a text box? Can all caps be reworked into a heading? Can a graphic (e.g., image of a warning sign) convey the importance of information?) _____ _____ _____ _____	
☐	The resource uses legalese or words that would be difficult to understand for a user who does not have experience with the court system.
If yes, how can these words be changed or explained? (See NCSC's plain language glossary for ideas.) _____ _____ _____ _____	
Web-Based Materials	
How do users learn about the website? _____ _____ _____	

☐	The website is mobile-first/mobile-friendly.
☐	Users can easily find resources on the website (e.g., the website is easily navigable, with menu and search options).
☐	The materials are organized by topic.
☐	The materials can be shared or linked on social media.
If no, does it make sense to have these resources available via social media?	
☐	The website avoids obvious accessibility problems. (See the information above about accessibility and WCAG 3 standards.)
Language	
☐	The resource is available in languages other than English.
If yes, what languages? _____ _____ _____	
Who translated it and when (if known)? _____ _____ _____	
Accessibility	
☐	The resource uses high contrast (e.g., black on white or similar). (This document has guidance about checking contrast.)
☐	For a fillable form, fields are labeled.
☐	Alt text is included for any visuals.
☐	The resource limits the use of tables.
☐	The resource avoids color-coding or provides coded information in another format.
☐	For PDF, the text is searchable.

☐	For video, captioning is included.
☐	The resource has information about who to contact to request other accommodations or to report accessibility problem. (For more information about making Word documents accessible, go here. For more information about making PDF documents accessible, go here.)
Resource Location	
Where is the resource available? _____ _____ _____	
If the resource is not available in multiple locations, should it be? _____ _____ _____	
Can additional community partners host and share the resource? _____ _____ _____	
User Testing	
☐	The resources have been user tested.
If so, how was it tested? _____ _____ _____	
Who tested it? _____ _____ _____	

When was it user tested? _____ _____ _____
Should updated user testing or feedback be done? _____ _____ _____