

# Court Chatbots

How to build a great chatbot for  
your court's website.

## Acknowledgments

---

**This project was made possible by support from the Pew Charitable Trust's Civil Legal System Modernization Project.**

It was prepared by NCSC's Access to Justice Team.

For more information, please visit: [www.ncsc.org/a2j](http://www.ncsc.org/a2j).

### Suggested Citation

A. Souza and Z. Zarnow. *Court Chatbots*.

[Williamsburg, VA: National Center for State Courts, 2024].

---

© 2024

National Center for State Courts

300 Newport Avenue

Williamsburg, VA 23185-414

# Contents

---

<b>Acknowledgments</b> .....	<b>i</b>
<b>Contents</b> .....	<b>ii</b>
<b>What is a chatbot?</b> .....	<b>1</b>
Chatbots versus live chat.....	1
<b>How do chatbots work?</b> .....	<b>2</b>
Rule-based chatbots.....	2
Artificial intelligence chatbots.....	3
<b>Why should courts consider using a chatbot?</b> .....	<b>4</b>
Remote access to court services benefits users .....	5
Remote access to court services benefits courts .....	5
Court can be overwhelming and complicated for users.....	6
Meet the needs of modern users .....	6
<b>How should courts use chatbots?</b> .....	<b>7</b>
Answering frequently asked questions.....	7
Navigating court websites and resources .....	8
<b>How should courts not use chatbots?</b> .....	<b>9</b>
A chatbot cannot replace your staff .....	9
A chatbot cannot, and should not, give legal advice .....	10
<b>What are the risks of using a chatbot?</b> .....	<b>10</b>
Misinterpretation.....	10
Vulnerability to hacking and data theft .....	10
<b>How can I make a great chatbot?</b> .....	<b>11</b>
A good chatbot has a good vendor contract.....	11
A good chatbot is easy to find and use .....	12
Make it easy to find .....	12
Instructions and expectation setting.....	13
Interaction types.....	14
Response length .....	16
Up to date .....	17
A good chatbot is accessible .....	18
Plain language .....	18

Disability access.....	18
Language access .....	19
Literacy access .....	20
Mobile access .....	20
A good chatbot provides transcripts and a way to follow up with the court.....	22
History and transcripts.....	22
Follow up with the court.....	23
Feedback surveys .....	23
A good chatbot is user tested .....	24
<b>Appendix A – What are some examples of chatbots?.....</b>	<b>25</b>
Court chatbots.....	25
Clerk chatbots .....	25
Legal aid chatbots .....	26
Non-court chatbots .....	26
<b>Appendix B – Table of Figures.....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Appendix C – Chatbot Checklist.....</b>	<b>28</b>

## What is a chatbot?

---

A chatbot is computer software that imitates a question-and-answer style interaction with a person, but in a virtual messaging platform for the purpose of resolving user inquiries. Chatbot technology has taken many forms, from phone trees to virtual assistants like Apple Inc.'s Siri.<sup>1</sup> Chatbots are commonly used in customer-facing organizations to improve efficiency, provide accurate and consistent answers, expand coverage, and better serve the public.<sup>2</sup>

Recently, AI chatbots have drawn significant national media attention with the debut of large language models such as ChatGPT, developed by OpenAI, and Bard, developed by Google. Many have raised concerns and fears related to use in the legal system, while others point to potentially positive applications, such as expanding access.

However, not all chatbots require big budget investments, the use of AI, or the ability to respond to all questions within human curiosity. Chatbots can be scaled to serve a narrow audience and topic: in this case, to give court users legal information. Currently, law firms, legal aid providers, clerks, and courts have developed chatbots to assist court users. See, [Appendix A – What are some examples of chatbots?](#)

This document gives an overview of how chatbots work, discusses how courts can use chatbots, and provides principles to build a great chatbot for your court website.

### Chatbots versus live chat

Live chat differs from chatbots in that live chat must be staffed by a person to provide a response. Live chats are a channel for communication between two people, whereas chatbots can assist without constant oversight. Because chatbots are software, they are available 24/7/365, whereas live chat is dependent on staff during working hours.

Some software supports both chatbots and live chat. In these instances, the chatbot attempts to answer the user's question first. If the chatbot is unable to provide the requested information or resource, it can transfer the user to the live chat. See, [Follow up with the court.](#)

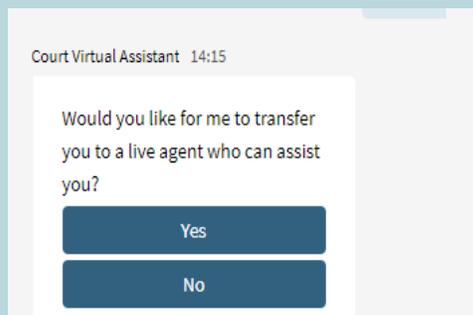


Figure 1. The Riverside Superior Court chatbot provides the option to transfer to a live agent for assistance if the user indicates that the chatbot was not able to resolve their question.

Riverside Superior Court, "Court Web Chat." <https://www.riverside.courts.ca.gov/OnlineServices/CourtWebCt/chat.php>.

---

<sup>1</sup> *What is a chatbot?* IBM. <https://www.ibm.com/topics/chatbots>; Forbes, "What Is a Chatbot? Everything You Need to Know." August 21, 2022. <https://www.forbes.com/advisor/business/software/what-is-a-chatbot/>.

<sup>2</sup> *Getting Started with a Chatbot.* Joint Technology Committee, April 20, 2020. [https://www.ncsc.org/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0028/28567/2020-04-15-qr-getting-started-with-a-chatbot.pdf](https://www.ncsc.org/data/assets/pdf_file/0028/28567/2020-04-15-qr-getting-started-with-a-chatbot.pdf)

## How do chatbots work?

---

There are two models to build a chatbot: rule-based chatbots or AI chatbots. Both models can be successful in the court context. Selecting the right model depends on how much time, labor, and money you can invest in developing the chatbot.

### Rule-based chatbots

Rule-based chatbots follow a set of “rules” that are predefined by their programming. These rules use conditional logic to pair keywords and/or phrases with prewritten answers. Once the user submits a question, the chatbot searches the text for keywords or phrases that it recognizes from its programming. The chatbot then applies the rules about each keyword or phrase included and omitted in the question to select a predefined answer. The predefined answer is a script that is sent as a response to the user.

If the user does not use keywords or phrases the chatbot recognizes, the chatbot may not be able to return an answer that provides substantive information. The programming can include prompts to the user to rephrase their question or even offer a best guess, though this risks being irrelevant or incorrect. Because the script is predetermined, rule-based models may struggle more with spelling errors and typos. They may also have trouble understanding slang terms or abbreviations and be unable to identify them as keywords if definitions are not included in the programming.

Further, because rules are manually programmed, the model is not scalable without manual edits by the programmer. Because rule-based chatbots rely on manual program rules, they require a clearly defined scope. This allows the programmer to create rules that reach end points without endless development. While scope may be expanded, this means that rule-based chatbots are slower to scale up.

To effectively maintain a rule-based chatbot, it is important to collect and review the queries that the chatbot receives, to continuously refine the chatbot to provide better responses. This collection and continuous review may uncover common questions that the original programming missed, allow responses to be refined and updated, and ensure that the chatbot remains aligned with current court processes, legislation, and available resources. See, [Up to date](#).

While the prescriptive nature of the rule-based chatbot may seem rigid, it can offer the developer more control over the interaction because the chatbot only uses the responses written for it.

Further, rule-based chatbots are often faster to train an early model because the rules allow for less variability and do not require a learning period like AI chatbots.

Rule-based chatbots are typically less expensive software options when compared to AI chatbots.

	PROS	CONS
Rule-based chatbots	<p><b>Controlled interaction</b> – The use of scripted answers offers greater control over interactions.</p> <p><b>Faster training</b> – No learning period is required once rules are provided.</p> <p><b>Cost effective</b> – The software is generally less expensive, though there is the associated cost of the programmer’s time.</p>	<p><b>Scalability</b> – Manual edits are required, making rule-based chatbots slower to increase in scale when compared to AI chatbots.</p> <p><b>Language recognition issues</b> – May struggle with errors, typos, slang, and abbreviations if not included in key terms.</p> <p><b>Potential rigidity</b> – The reliance on scripted answers may appear rigid and limited to users.</p>

## Artificial intelligence chatbots

Artificial intelligence (AI) chatbots use machine learning algorithms to understand users’ questions and form responses. Machine learning algorithms can use training data from documents, text, websites, and databases to build their knowledgebase. The algorithm studies the training data to understand patterns and learn how the language uses words and phrases in context, and a human analyst continuously verifies and validates the accuracy of the machine learning. The algorithm trains by analyzing correct or erroneous responses until it learns the “right” response.<sup>3</sup> Once the AI chatbot has trained on the data, it uses patterns and the language it identified to predict what users are looking for and generates a response for each query. Machine learning algorithms have the capacity to rate their level of accuracy in identifying key data, often referred to as a confidence threshold or score. This score may be tied to the level the software may act on its own or if the action requires further human-in-the-loop review. Confidence scores are from 0 to 100, with the higher numbers demonstrating a higher level of accuracy. Once launched, the AI chatbot adds the conversations into the knowledgebase to continue learning and improving the model based on actual use.<sup>4</sup>

Improvement is not guaranteed, however. There are concerns that AI models actually become less accurate over time, referred to as “drift.”<sup>5</sup> Data drift describes the possibility that the real-world user’s prompts may differ from the data the algorithm trained on, causing the performance

<sup>3</sup> C. Basu Mallick. *What Is a Chatbot? Meaning, Working, Types, and Examples*. Spiceworks. June 17, 2022. [https://www.spiceworks.com/tech/artificial-intelligence/articles/what-is-chatbot/#\\_002](https://www.spiceworks.com/tech/artificial-intelligence/articles/what-is-chatbot/#_002).

<sup>4</sup> M. Hingraja. *How do Chatbots Work? A Guide to Chatbot Architecture*.” Maruti Techlabs. December 19, 2022. <https://marutitech.com/chatbots-work-guide-chatbot-architecture/#How do Chatbots>.

<sup>5</sup> M. Ali. *Understanding Data Drift and Model Drift: Drift Detection in Python*. Data Camp. January 2023. <https://www.datacamp.com/tutorial/understanding-data-drift-model-drift>.

of the model to deteriorate rather than improve.<sup>6</sup> Conceptual drift refers to another way that the chatbot may become less accurate: as concepts change over time and the data the algorithm trained on slowly becomes outdated and can no longer accurately predict the right response.<sup>7</sup>

It is necessary to monitor both improvements and degradation. Regular maintenance and testing can help identify and prevent deterioration. The model can be retrained if drift is causing inaccurate responses. Improvements should also be monitored to ensure the chatbot does not attempt to meet user requests and unintentionally forms a tone in its responses that appears to convey legal advice rather than legal information.

AI chatbots are more complex and take more investment to develop, train, and maintain. They may be a significant investment of resources, but this model can handle more complex interactions as a result. A developed chatbot can be used as the basis for creating others, and the learning from one use may be transferred or shared, thus reducing some of the up-front learning time involved.

AI chatbots are also more complex software and are thus typically more expensive than a rule-based chatbot. However, vendors are increasingly making the user interface to program AI chatbots easier to use, so this complexity may be reduced over time.

	PROS	CONS
AI chatbots	<p><b>Complex interaction</b> – The ability to understand more complex user queries offers the potential for improved interactions.</p> <p><b>Continuous learning</b> – The algorithm adds user conversations to its knowledge base to continuously learn from interactions.</p> <p><b>Scalability</b> – Machine learning allows the algorithm to digest more materials and can be scaled quickly after the learning period.</p>	<p><b>Initial complexity</b> – A longer training period and larger knowledge base is required to train the initial model.</p> <p><b>Less control of tone</b> – Less control of the answer script leaves potential for a tone that unintentionally conveys legal advice, requiring ongoing monitoring.</p> <p><b>Higher cost</b> – More complex software is associated with a higher price.</p>

## Why should courts consider using a chatbot?

Millions of Americans go to court each year without a lawyer, and resources to help them are limited.<sup>8</sup> Courts should strive to make court processes as user-friendly as possible for all court

<sup>6</sup> *Id.*

<sup>7</sup> *Id.*

<sup>8</sup> Access to Justice Team. *The Things we Think and Do Not Always Say*. National Center for State Courts. Williamsburg, VA. March 2023. [https://www.ncsc.org/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0035/88838/Access\\_To\\_Justice\\_Manifesto\\_.pdf](https://www.ncsc.org/data/assets/pdf_file/0035/88838/Access_To_Justice_Manifesto_.pdf).

users. Further, courts have a duty to meet all users where they are and communicate about those processes clearly and effectively. Simplicity, clarity, and transparency are essential to promoting public trust and confidence in the judiciary.<sup>9</sup> Chatbots are a beneficial option to assist court users in finding relevant and reliable legal information and to fulfil the court's access obligations.

## Remote access to court services benefits users

It is now standard practice for courts to offer remote services, including virtual and hybrid hearings. Understandably, then, court users expect courts to have an online presence and to maintain updated modern websites, host legal information videos and tools online, and be available via email. Chatbots can be part of those offerings. Remote access to court resources reduces the required cost and time to travel to the court. Online resources help users resolve their issues without taking time away from work or arranging childcare, at a time that is convenient for them, 24/7/365.

Chatbots are another way for users to reach the court and find relevant information. Chatbots provide an alternative way to search and locate information through the court's website and materials. They can help answer questions and eliminate the need to ask court staff, but they can also help court patrons ask better questions, resulting in a better customer experience and more streamlined interactions with court staff.

Chatbots can also assist users in completing tasks online. A user may want to pay a court fee, traffic ticket, or file a pleading, but may not be aware that they can do so through an online portal. When the chatbot presents online functions, it reduces the need for staff interaction and the user is able complete the task in one sitting.

## Remote access to court services benefits courts

A chatbot can resolve user inquiries, and therefore limits the questions that require personal assistance. This can reduce the number of phone calls, emails, live chats, or in-person visits by court users and lessen the burden on court staff, allowing them to focus on more complex tasks and lead to greater efficiencies overall.<sup>10</sup>

Even if a question is not entirely resolved, users may be directed to other resources that may better address the specific issue(s) or be prepared to ask court staff more focused and relevant questions. Chatbots may direct a user to the right contact, so the user can connect to the correct department or resource on their first call.

---

<sup>9</sup> *Interactive Plain Language Glossary*. National Center for State Courts. Williamsburg, VA. <https://www.ncsc.org/consulting-and-research/areas-of-expertise/access-to-justice/plain-language/glossary>.

<sup>10</sup> E. Sigler and J. Holtzclaw. *A Miami chatbot means less staff time yet more help for users*. National Center for State Courts. July 12, 2023. <https://www.ncsc.org/information-and-resources/trending-topics/trending-topics-landing-pg/a-miami-chatbot-means-less-staff-time-yet-more-help-for-users>. See also, *Maricopa County saves \$185k by building citizen-centric experiences*. Twilio

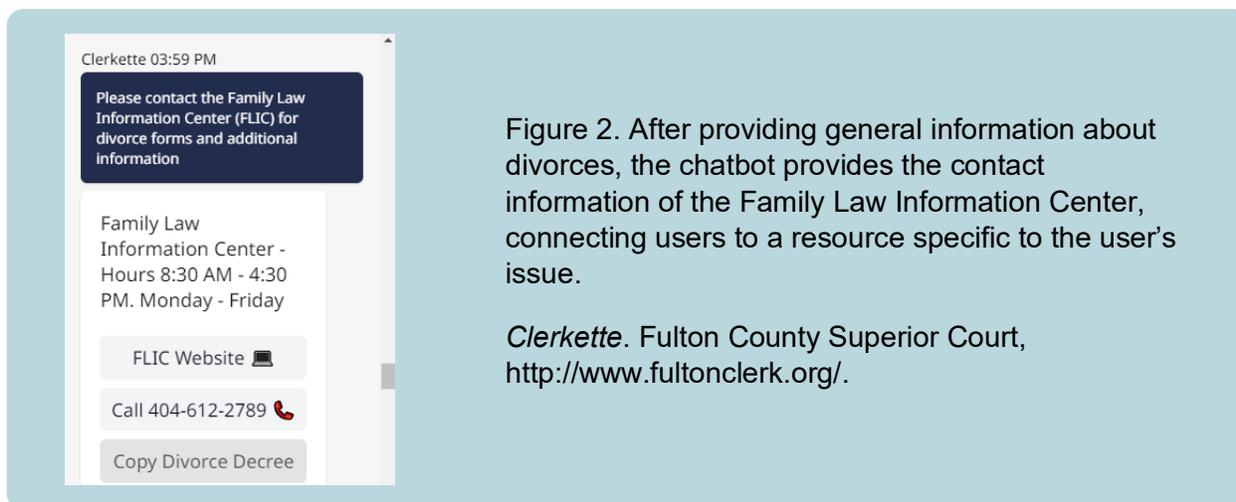


Figure 2. After providing general information about divorces, the chatbot provides the contact information of the Family Law Information Center, connecting users to a resource specific to the user’s issue.

*Clerkette*. Fulton County Superior Court, <http://www.fultonclerk.org/>.

## Court can be overwhelming and complicated for users

Litigants frequently navigate unfamiliar rules and procedures, within unfamiliar courthouse buildings, sometimes in an unfamiliar language. Many court websites are content rich in an attempt to help, but the information can be difficult to identify or find or may be written in difficult to understand legalese. Courts may not be able to reorganize a whole website due to lack of resources or direct control. Implementing a chatbot is a way to provide a plain-language navigation tool that can circumvent some of these issues.<sup>11</sup>

As discussed above, chatbots help users find answers to their questions, navigate court processes, and identify proper forms and other resources, all of which can reduce user stress and limit the need for help from court staff. For a user with fewer technical skills, a chatbot can allow them to focus on a single-stream conversation, rather than attempt to navigate a robust court website filled with attachments, hyperlinks, and subpages. For advanced or tech-savvy users, chatbots provide convenience as an efficient and direct path to information.

Finally, chatbots that use digital avatars may be helpful in mitigating fear and stress. Non-human avatars such as friendly robots, a gavel, or a scroll are appropriate to convey the chatbot is a trusted resource that offers a casual interaction.

## Meet the needs of modern users

Chatbots have become a standard offering across industries from retail to healthcare to finance. The legal community has also deployed chatbots to serve their users and can be found on the websites of law firms, government agencies, legal aid providers, and courts. In 2019, the

<sup>11</sup> Plain language is clear, direct writing that can be understood by all. Replace legal terms with plain language using the Plain Language Glossary. See, *Interactive Plain Language Glossary*. National Center for State Courts. <https://www.ncsc.org/consulting-and-research/areas-of-expertise/access-to-justice/plain-language/glossary>.

Judicial Branch of California’s Information Technology Advisory Committee noted “chatbots are part of the current norm.”<sup>12</sup>

Law firms host chatbots on their websites to complete client intake forms and answer frequently asked questions. Some chatbots can be integrated with their case management system and client portal. This lets clients access their case and seek updates and answers without directly contacting their attorney, reducing the cost of services for the client.

Government agencies are also using chatbots. The Nevada DMV created a chatbot to help users navigate popular topics.<sup>13</sup> Universal City, Texas created a chatbot called Jet to help navigate the city website, which includes court related information.<sup>14</sup>

Legal aid providers are also deploying chatbots to connect users with resources.<sup>15</sup> Law Center for Better Housing created a chatbot to help Chicago tenants learn about their rights, send a letter to their landlords, and find legal help.<sup>16</sup>

And, of course, courts have deployed chatbots. See, [Appendix A – What are some examples of chatbots?](#)

## How should courts use chatbots?

---

The initial target audience for a chatbot should be self-represented litigants and the general public. For a non-expert audience, a chatbot provides two main benefits: 1) answering frequently asked questions and 2) help navigating the court website and its resources.

### Answering frequently asked questions

Chatbots are ideal for assisting users with frequently asked questions, which though often routine, still can take up considerable staff time. Further, FAQs are also discrete and a good way to help your court learn how to use the chatbot software. FAQs have a limited scope and are easier to test in production because there are fewer ways to ask the question and they have clear, correct answers.

Prior to development, create a list of frequently asked questions for the court by working with court staff to track the questions asked in person, over the phone, and via e-mail. Be sure to speak with frontline staff who regularly interact with the public, like clerks, self-help center staff, bailiffs, and security. Website analytics of popular pages may also indicate information that

---

<sup>12</sup> *Information Technology Advisory Committee (ITAC) Public Business Meeting*. Judicial Branch of California, Information Technology Advisory Committee. August 19, 2019. <https://www.courts.ca.gov/documents/itac-20190819-slides.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> *Why Wait? Go online first*. Nevada Department of Motor Vehicles. <https://dmv.nv.gov/index.htm>.

<sup>14</sup> *Court*. Universal City, Texas. <https://www.universalcitytexas.gov/386/Court>.

<sup>15</sup> *Get Help*. Legal Aid Society of Hawai'i. <https://www.legalaidhawaii.org/get-help.html>.

<sup>16</sup> *Rentervention*. Law Center for Better Housing. <https://rentervention.com/>.

should be integrated early on. The chatbot should be able to provide basic information about the court, such as:

- Court address
- Court contact information
- Court hours
- Department hours, such as the self-help center, clerk's office, and court annexed programs
- Public transportation and parking information
- Information about what time court starts
- Information about reporting for jury duty
- How to request an in-person or remote hearing
- How to submit a request for an ADA accommodation
- How to submit a request for an interpreter
- How to request a fee waiver
- How to access online casefiles and case look-up portals
- How to make payments and set up a payment plan online

Once the chatbot can answer these routine questions, it is important to continue to expand the functionality to answer more advanced questions. See, [Navigating court websites and resources](#).

## Navigating court websites and resources

Many court websites are not organized in the most user-friendly way.<sup>17</sup> The general public doesn't necessarily understand the meanings or distinctions as to different departments, filing units, clerks' offices, and the like, so organizing a website to mirror the organizational structure of a court is not generally helpful. It is unfamiliar to self-represented litigants, jurors, and the general public.

A chatbot provides a map of the website designed specifically for these non-expert users. The chatbot accomplishes this by providing a reduced menu of choices specific to the audience and directing users to relevant pages. Chatbots do this by using their menu or allowing the user to ask questions they draft as they understand their issue. See,

[Interaction types](#).

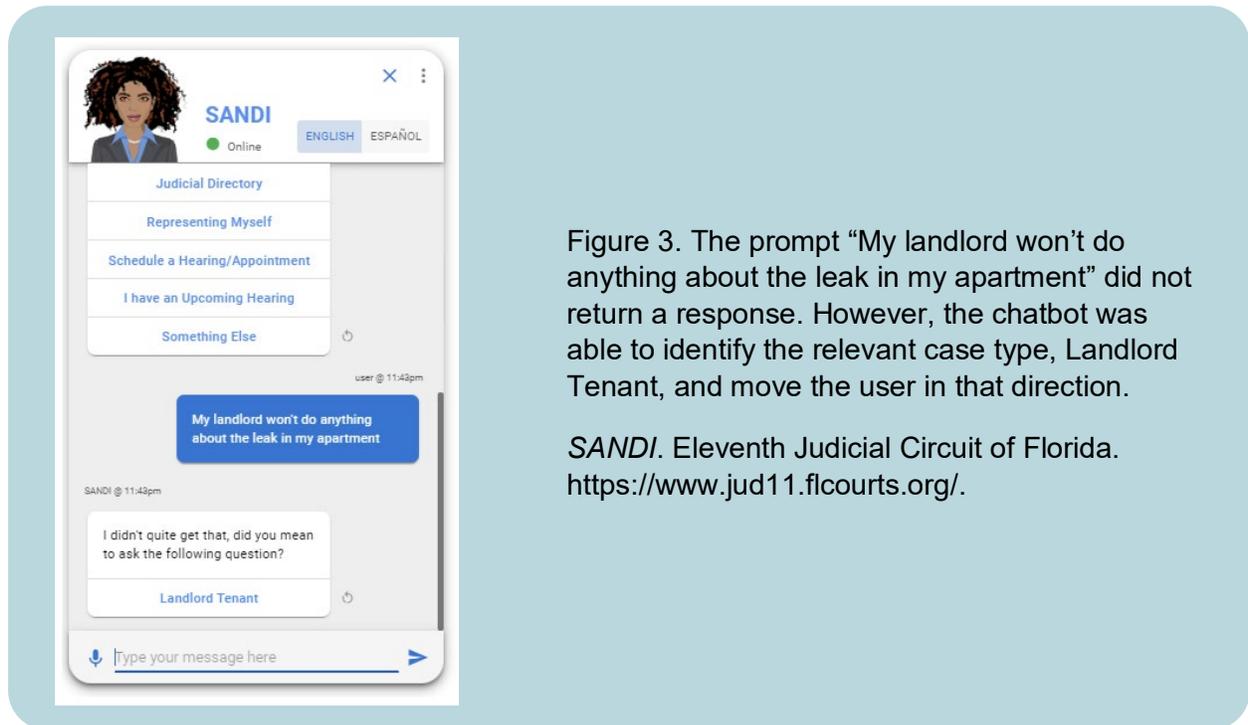
Further, even if the court website or processes are not yet in plain language, the chatbot can "translate" legalese by using plain language in the menu and responses. The chatbot can also understand the plain-language questions and tie these to the legal terms used by the court. For example, a user is unlikely to ask about an "in forma pauperis petition" but may ask for a "fee waiver." The chatbot's ability to use and understand plain language connects the user to the

---

<sup>17</sup> But not all! These websites are just a few examples of courts and others rising to the challenge. See, Philadelphia Municipal Court, <https://www.courts.phila.gov/municipal/>. See, Michigan Legal Help, <https://michiganlegalhelp.org/>. See, Illinois Legal Aid Online, <https://www.illinoislegalaid.org/>. See also, *Tiny Chat 101: Website Design*. National Center for State Courts. Williamsburg, VA. August 30, 2022. <https://vimeo.com/showcase/7003975/video/744563891>.

information they are looking for while building the user's understanding of how the court will talk about their issue.

Many users may reach for the chatbot only after failing to locate a satisfying or correct resource through their independent navigation of the website. The chatbot must be able to assist a user in navigating to these more advanced webpages and resources or the user may lose faith in the chatbot and the website as a source of reliable information.



## How should courts not use chatbots?

### A chatbot cannot replace your staff

Chatbots should be one of many ways users can find court information. Chatbots can make public interactions with staff more efficient and can eliminate the need for some in-person or phone-based interactions, but they cannot and should not replace staff. Chatbots are just one part of a help and navigation ecosystem that includes self-help materials, websites, staff, online tools, hotlines, and more. Some court users will not be capable of using a chatbot, either because of issues with connectivity, equipment, or lack of comfort.<sup>18</sup> Other court users may simply better understand the information if they can have a conversation with staff.

Furthermore, chatbots are reliant on court staff to keep them (and the court website) up to date. See, [Up to date](#).

<sup>18</sup> *Tiny Chat 4: Digital Divide*. National Center for State Courts. Williamsburg, VA. April 27, 2020. <https://vimeo.com/showcase/7003975/video/412333503>.

## A chatbot cannot, and should not, give legal advice

Chatbots cannot and should not attempt to provide legal advice. A chatbot is not licensed to practice law and an attempt to provide legal advice may raise unauthorized practice of law concerns. Legal advice is tailored information designed to tell someone what they should do in a given circumstance. In other words, legal information is the rules of the game. Legal advice is how to win.<sup>19</sup>

However, chatbots are great navigational tools to help locate legal information. See, [Navigating court websites and resources](#). Legal information is procedural, and includes information about how to navigate a process, what options exist, and what someone needs to do to comply with the law.<sup>20</sup>

When a court users includes details specific to their situation in their queries, even though the chatbot is not responding after weighing those details, the user may believe the answer is legal advice. For this reason, all chatbots should include clear disclaimers about the services that it does and does not provide. See, [Instructions and expectation setting](#).

## What are the risks of using a chatbot?

---

### Misinterpretation

Chatbots do not provide responses tailored to the user's personal circumstances. Often, users include personal details and facts in their questions. A chatbot may use personal details or facts to identify a specific subcategory or piece of information. However, the responses are general information and are not about the user's circumstances.

This expectation mismatch can lead a user to believe they are receiving information about their case, or even legal advice. Thus, it is important to have clear instructions and use disclaimers. See, [Instructions and expectation setting](#).

Similarly, chatbots may misinterpret the user input and provide irrelevant or even incorrect responses. For this reason, chatbots should be regularly reviewed and updated. See, [Up to date](#).

### Vulnerability to hacking and data theft

Any software the court uses will require security measures to protect the court IT environment and users from improper access and use of data.

If chat transcripts are accessed by malicious, unauthorized persons, users may be exposed to scams or fraud. As noted above, users tend to tell chatbots personal information, even if promoted not too. Part of the chatbot's maintenance model should include regular security checks. See, [Up to date](#).

---

<sup>19</sup> *Tiny Chat 26: Legal Advice vs. Legal Information*. National Center for State Courts. Williamsburg, VA. October 9, 2020. <https://vimeo.com/showcase/7003975/video/466698942>.

<sup>20</sup> *Id.*

## How can I make a great chatbot?

---

A great chatbot can resolve user inquiries and lessen the burden on court staff. However, a poorly designed chatbot can leave users confused, frustrated, or worse, give wrong information. Part of deciding whether to use a chatbot on your court website is whether you can invest the time and attention to build and maintain a great chatbot. Use the below principles when building your chatbot to ensure it is helpful to users.

- Start with a [good vendor contract](#).
- Make the chatbot [easy to find](#) on the court website.
- Provide [instructions](#) to help users learn how to interact and [disclaimers](#) to set expectations.
- Make the [responses easy to understand](#) by using plain language and limiting their length.
- Use the [interaction type](#) that works best for the chatbot's sophistication.
- Keep the information [up to date](#) with a maintenance model.
- Ensure all users have access, including users with [disabilities](#), [limited English proficiency](#), [low literacy](#), and [mobile phone users](#).
- Provide users with a way to keep the information they found helpful with a [chat history](#) or [a transcript](#) they can save.
- Give users a path to [follow up with the court](#) if they need more help.
- [Test](#) the chatbot prior to publication and collect continuous [user feedback](#).

### A good chatbot has a good vendor contract

Most chatbots are built using software from a vendor or by contracting with a vendor to have them build the bot. Once the decision to pursue a chatbot is made, court should be mindful of their procurement and RFI/RFP processes.<sup>21</sup> These can be powerful tools to ensure a good relationship with the vendor that contemplates maintenance, updates, security, data ownership, troubleshooting, and more.

Digital services contracts require special attention to “procedural rights,” assigning roles and designating processes for changes and updates.<sup>22</sup> Contracting software's support requirements is vital. Considerations must include the court staff's ability to make modifications independently, the types of changes possible without vendor assistance, and the frequency and duration of required vendor support.<sup>23</sup> Chatbots are likely to require continued maintenance to keep the information current with potential expansion overtime. Division of responsibilities between the court and the vendor must be contracted for explicitly.

Digital services contracts also require attention to the use and ownership of data generated by the chatbot. Understanding the data rights outlined in the agreement is vital to protect court

---

<sup>21</sup> *Tiny Chat 56: Procurement*. National Center for State Courts. Williamsburg, VA. June 28, 2021. <https://vimeo.com/showcase/7003975/video/568389850>.

<sup>22</sup> See, Access to Justice Team. *Contracting Digital Services for Courts*. National Center for State Courts. Williamsburg, VA. 2022. [www.ncsc.org/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0029/76754/Contracting-Digital-Services.pdf](http://www.ncsc.org/data/assets/pdf_file/0029/76754/Contracting-Digital-Services.pdf).

<sup>23</sup> See, *Exiting technology projects*. Small Scale, National Center for State Courts. 2021. [https://www.ncsc.org/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0028/74782/Exiting-Tech-Projects-v2.pdf](https://www.ncsc.org/data/assets/pdf_file/0028/74782/Exiting-Tech-Projects-v2.pdf)

users and the court. “Courts using technologies that generate, categorize, or publish data about stakeholders should include provisions that ensure both transparency and acceptable use limitations.”<sup>24</sup>

Dive deeper into [Contracting Digital Services for Courts](#) and what to consider when contracting. You may also explore the [Exiting Technology Projects](#) booklet as a resource for planning vendor conversations.

## A good chatbot is easy to find and use

### *Make it easy to find*

Chatbots on court websites should be easy to find. Use visual signals to draw a users’ attention to the chatbot. Use a logo that is large enough to be obvious and stands out from the rest of the page. Court users are familiar with chat interfaces from their phones and other websites, so use that familiar format. A text bubble with dots and a heading that says “chat with us” are good examples of ways to invite the user to engage with the chatbot. See [Figure 4](#), [Figure 5](#), and [Figure 6](#). Non-human avatars are also appropriate and avoid the tendency to making digital assistants female by default.

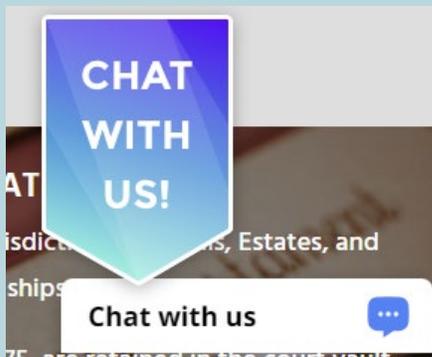


Figure 4. Cook County Probate Court Chatbot Support Agent calls attention to the chatbot with the bright blue tag the first time you visit the page. After opening and then closing the chatbot, the large blue tag disappears but the white bar remains available, making it less prominent on the page.

*Court Agent.* Cook County Probate Court. <https://cookcountyprobatecourt.com/>.

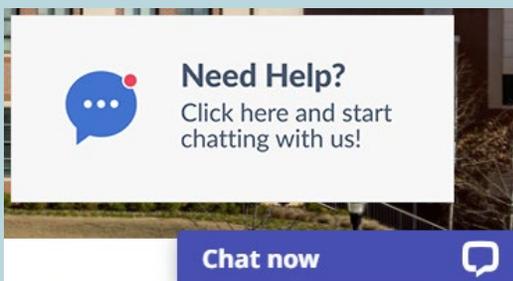


Figure 5. Forsyth Clerk ChatBot uses the prompt “Need Help?” to invite users to use the chat.

*Forsyth Clerk ChatBot.* Clerk of Superior, State & Juvenile Courts, Forsyth County, Georgia <https://www.forsythclerk.com/>.

<sup>24</sup> See, *Contracting Digital Services for Courts*, [www.ncsc.org/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0029/76754/Contracting-Digital-Services.pdf](http://www.ncsc.org/_data/assets/pdf_file/0029/76754/Contracting-Digital-Services.pdf).



Figure 6. This chatbot draws the attention with a large talk bubble and the phrase “Let’s talk!”

Clerkette. Fulton County Clerk of Superior and Magistrate Courts.  
<http://www.fultonclerk.org/>.

Most chatbots are in the lower right-hand corner of the page. This allows the chatbot to be out of the way and not interfere with the navigation of the page if users choose not to use it. However, when placed in the lower right-hand corner, those who use a screen reader must tab through the entire page to locate the chatbot. See, [Disability access](#). Add an additional banner or other signal to help all users find the chatbot sooner.

Do not make the chatbot distracting. Features like a moving icon or a repeating noise interrupt users. Include a minimize, close, or mute function for users who do not want to interact with the chatbot.

Further, the chatbot should be accessible on all pages of the court website. Don’t embed the chatbot into a website page. If a chatbot only lives on one page, the user will often navigate away from it as they follow the instructions and referrals the chatbot provides and move through the website content.

At a minimum, the chatbot should be available on:

- The home page
- Webpages with self-help resources
- Webpages with information about attending court
- Any webpages that relate to subjects the chatbot can help with

### ***Instructions and expectation setting***

Instructions should tell the user exactly what to do and how the chatbot can help, making it easier and more enjoyable to use.

Inform the user how they can interact with the chatbot: free text, menu choices, speak to chat, or a combination of the choices. See,

[Interaction](#) types. If free text is an interaction option, provide well-constructed example prompts for users to mimic. Instructions should appear again if the chatbot is unable to provide an answer. This helps users build the skills to interact with the chatbot.

The instructions must also include a disclaimer about how the chatbot can and cannot help. Inform the user that chatbots can only provide general information. This is easier to manage when the chatbot is limited to menu choices because the user does not write their own, lengthy questions that may include personal circumstances. However, the limitation should be shared regardless. Disclaimers are important to set expectations about what the chatbot can do.

Chatbots cannot provide legal advice. Chatbots are not real people. It is important to make this limitation clear early to avoid confusion and misleading the user.

Embed these instructions and disclaimers into the chatbot. This increases the likelihood that the user will read them. And, like with all technology, providing instructions makes the chatbot easier to use and increases user success.

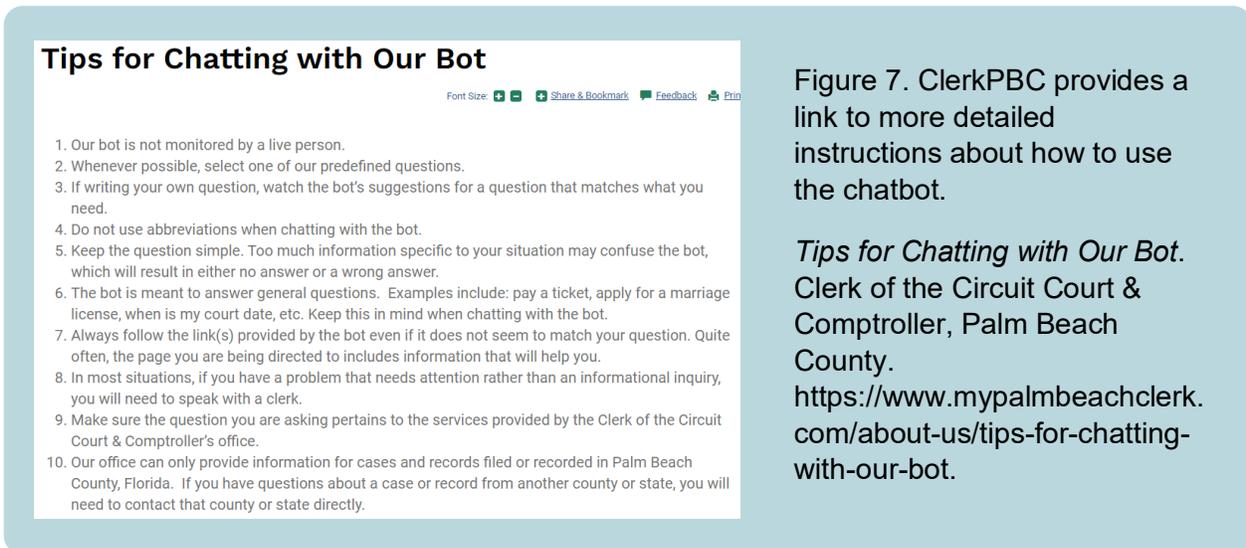


Figure 7. ClerkPBC provides a link to more detailed instructions about how to use the chatbot.

*Tips for Chatting with Our Bot.*  
Clerk of the Circuit Court & Comptroller, Palm Beach County.  
<https://www.mypalmbeachclerk.com/about-us/tips-for-chatting-with-our-bot>.

### Interaction types

Chatbots can offer two modes of user interaction.<sup>25</sup> Users can either select from a menu or input free text, typing their own questions as they understand them. Some chatbots combine both methods and allow the user to select the method of interaction they wish to use. Both models offer benefits to the user.

#### Menu selection

Menu selection benefits the user because it displays available options, similar to a website navigational menu. The court website menu serves many audiences including lawyers, jurors, litigants, probationers, parents and guardians, partner agencies and court employees. The chatbot menu is typically smaller than the website menu because it helps with a selection of issues.

Providing a menu of options is particularly important for those who do not know how to interact with a chatbot. Menu-based chatbots ask questions for the user to respond to within a set path. However, menu-based chatbots can require more clicks before providing information about the user's narrow question. This is sometimes frustrating for a user who may already know their question and want to ask it immediately; however, those users may be better served by navigating the court website menu instead.

---

<sup>25</sup> Both rule-based and AI chatbots can use a menu of options or free text input.

## Free text

Free text input benefits the user by allowing them to ask the question in terms they understand. This mimics a conversation that can feel natural to users. Like a Google search, the question-and-answer interaction is familiar. If the question is well formed, the chatbot can move directly to substantive information.

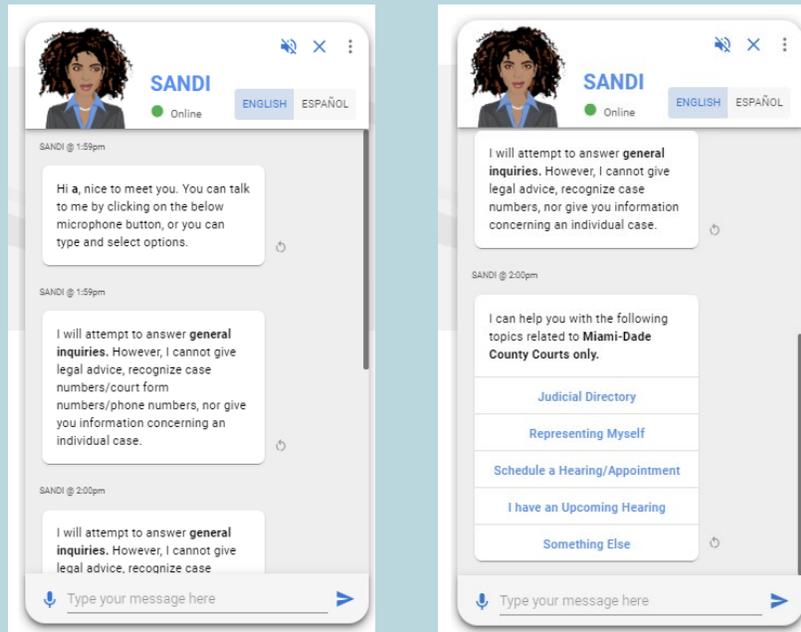


Figure 8. SANDI greets the user and explains the methods of interacting: using the microphone, typing a question, or selecting from their menu. It then sets expectations by stating what it can help with, general inquiries, and what it cannot do.

*SANDI*. Eleventh Judicial Circuit of Florida, <https://www.jud11.flcourts.org/>.

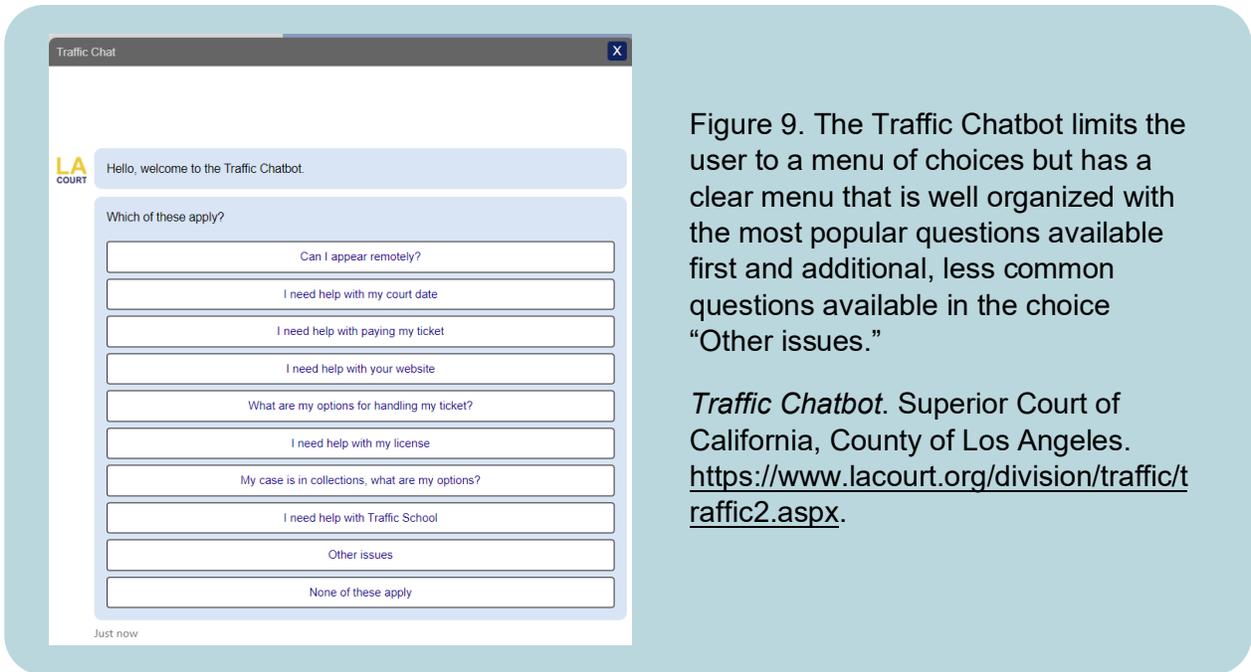


Figure 9. The Traffic Chatbot limits the user to a menu of choices but has a clear menu that is well organized with the most popular questions available first and additional, less common questions available in the choice “Other issues.”

*Traffic Chatbot.* Superior Court of California, County of Los Angeles. <https://www.lacourt.org/division/traffic/traffic2.aspx>.

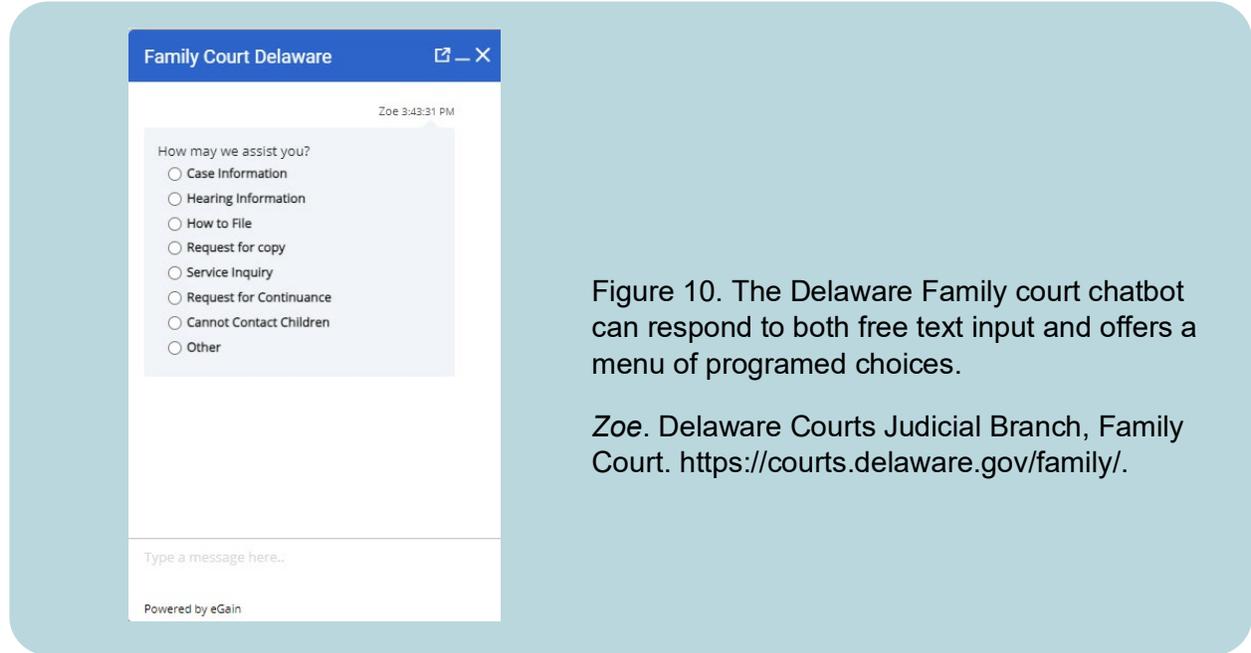


Figure 10. The Delaware Family court chatbot can respond to both free text input and offers a menu of programed choices.

*Zoe.* Delaware Courts Judicial Branch, Family Court. <https://courts.delaware.gov/family/>.

**Response length**

Keep response length relatively short. Chatbots are small windows with limited space for text. If the response is long, it is challenging to read in the window. The chatbot should be used as a wayfinding tool, not a place to recreate the entire court website. Use the chatbot to link to or

even redirect the user to the webpage that hosts the information that can answer their question, like Clara in New Mexico.<sup>26</sup>

If the user's prompt requires a lengthy response, consider whether that information should be a webpage, and direct the user to that page. Alternatively, you may have trusted partners such as self-help centers that may host content on their websites the chatbot can link to rather than creating new content.

When linking to external websites, the response should describe the hyperlink and inform the user that it will take them away from the court's website. The hyperlink should open in a new tab so that the user does not lose their place on the court website.

### **Up to date**

Chatbots require a maintenance model to stay up to date. Maintenance models should cover accuracy, improvements, security, and technical support. Assign responsibility for maintenance to court staff and the chatbot vendor. See, [A good chatbot has a good vendor contract](#).

When changes are made to processes, forms, and other information, the chatbot must receive updated information. Once launched, you cannot "set it and forget it," and must have a plan to check and recheck that the chatbot continues to provide accurate, relevant information. Reviews should be conducted on a regular schedule. Define a method of evaluation that does not rely on a single point of expertise. This may include outreach to various court departments for updates and collaborating on updating the chatbot and website together.

Maintenance should also include improvements to the chatbot. The initial version of the chatbot may be based on a small set of training information to test its success. For continued updates and success, review [transcripts](#) and [feedback surveys](#) regularly to identify areas to expand the chatbot, identify where corrections or clarifications need to be made, and indicate how users are using the chatbot.

Assign responsibility for chatbot updates and improvement maintenance. This is likely a partnership where court staff are primarily responsible for content, and the vendor is responsible for implementing the changes in the software. Both updates and improvement maintenance should be contracted for explicitly.<sup>27</sup> See, [A good chatbot has a good vendor contract](#).

Maintaining the technology with technical and security features must also be contracted for and included in the service. It is likely that the chatbot will require ongoing support from the vendor, though court IT staff should play a role in integrating the chatbot into the website and monitoring it for security risks.

---

<sup>26</sup> See, *Clara*. The Judicial Branch of New Mexico. <https://languageaccess.nmcourts.gov/?avn>.

<sup>27</sup> See, *Digital Public, Contracting Digital Services for Courts*. National Center for State Courts. May 2022. [www.ncsc.org/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0029/76754/Contracting-Digital-Services.pdf](http://www.ncsc.org/_data/assets/pdf_file/0029/76754/Contracting-Digital-Services.pdf). See also, *Exiting technology projects*. Small Scale, National Center for State Courts. 2021. [https://www.ncsc.org/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0028/74782/Exiting-Tech-Projects-v2.pdf](https://www.ncsc.org/_data/assets/pdf_file/0028/74782/Exiting-Tech-Projects-v2.pdf)

## A good chatbot is accessible

### *Plain language*

Chatbots are designed to mimic a question-and-answer conversation. The responses from the chatbot define the user's experience and should be easy to understand. Prompts, answers, and content should all be written in plain language to provide clear and concise interaction.

Even if the court website is not yet written in plain language, the chatbot is a place to start translating legalese.<sup>28</sup> Explaining the legalese on the webpage in the chatbot builds the user's understanding of how the court may talk about their issue.

### *Disability access*

Website features, including chatbots, must be accessible for users with disabilities.<sup>29</sup>

General principles for website accessibility<sup>30</sup> will benefit all users:

- Body font sizes should be at least 12 pt (16px) font
- Use high contrast colors in the design so that is friendly for users with colorblindness and other vision issues
- Text can be adjusted up to 200% without loss of content/functionality
- Include text on buttons to indicate use, and ensure the button is large enough for easy selection

Further, chatbots should be compatible with screen readers. Screen readers are software programs that allow blind or visually impaired users to read the text that is displayed on the computer screen with a speech synthesizer or braille display.<sup>31</sup> The Bureau of Internet Accessibility notes that the button to activate and respond to the chatbot is often at the bottom lower right of the screen. This placement requires the user to tab through the whole screen every time they want to interact with the page.<sup>32</sup> Add an additional banner or signals to help all users find the chatbot sooner.

Some chatbots, including the New Mexico Courts' Clara, have a speak-to-chat option, where the software reads the messages to the user and allows the user to respond with their voice instead of navigating the chatbot through the menu or typing.<sup>33</sup> This feature can provide assistance for

---

<sup>28</sup> See, *Interactive Plain Language Glossary*. National Center for State Courts. <https://www.ncsc.org/consulting-and-research/areas-of-expertise/access-to-justice/plain-language/glossary>.

<sup>29</sup> Under the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) state and local governments must follow the ADA in pursuit of providing equal access for people with disabilities. ADA compliance applies to websites in addition to building access and hiring processes. 42 U.S.C. § 12101. Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act applies to federal agencies and requires that information and communications technology can be used by people with disabilities. 29 U.S.C. § 798, S. 508.

<sup>30</sup> See, *Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG2) Overview*. Web Accessibility Initiative. <https://www.w3.org/WAI/standards-guidelines/wcag/>.

<sup>31</sup> *Screen readers*. American Foundation for the Blind, <https://www.afb.org/blindness-and-low-vision/using-technology/assistive-technology-products/screen-readers>

<sup>32</sup> *Five Key Accessibility Considerations for Chatbots*, Bureau of Internet Accessibility. Bureau of Internet Accessibility. February 18, 2020. <https://www.boia.org/blog/five-key-accessibility-considerations-for-chatbots>

<sup>33</sup> *Clara*. New Mexico Courts. <https://languageaccess.nmcourts.gov/?avn>.

blind and visually impaired users as well as users with mobility challenges or lower literacy levels, or those who are less technically skilled.

### Language access

Equal justice depends on everyone’s ability to understand what is happening in court and in court-adjacent settings, regardless of what language they speak.<sup>34</sup> In 2019, 8 percent of the U.S. population spoke English less than “very well.”<sup>35</sup> Courts that receive federal funding are “required to take reasonable steps to ensure that an [limited English proficiency (LEP)] individual has meaningful access to the court and can communicate effectively.”<sup>36</sup>

Website materials should be offered in multiple languages, including the chatbot. Courts can use the data from the United States Census Bureau data to identify the most common languages spoken at home to target the most popular languages within the court’s jurisdiction.<sup>37</sup>

The instructions and welcome screen should notify users what languages the chatbot is offered in and allow them to make the change immediately. See, [Figure 11](#).

When the chatbot is used in a language other than English, automatically inform the user of their right to request language access services from the court and how to submit a request for interpreter services.

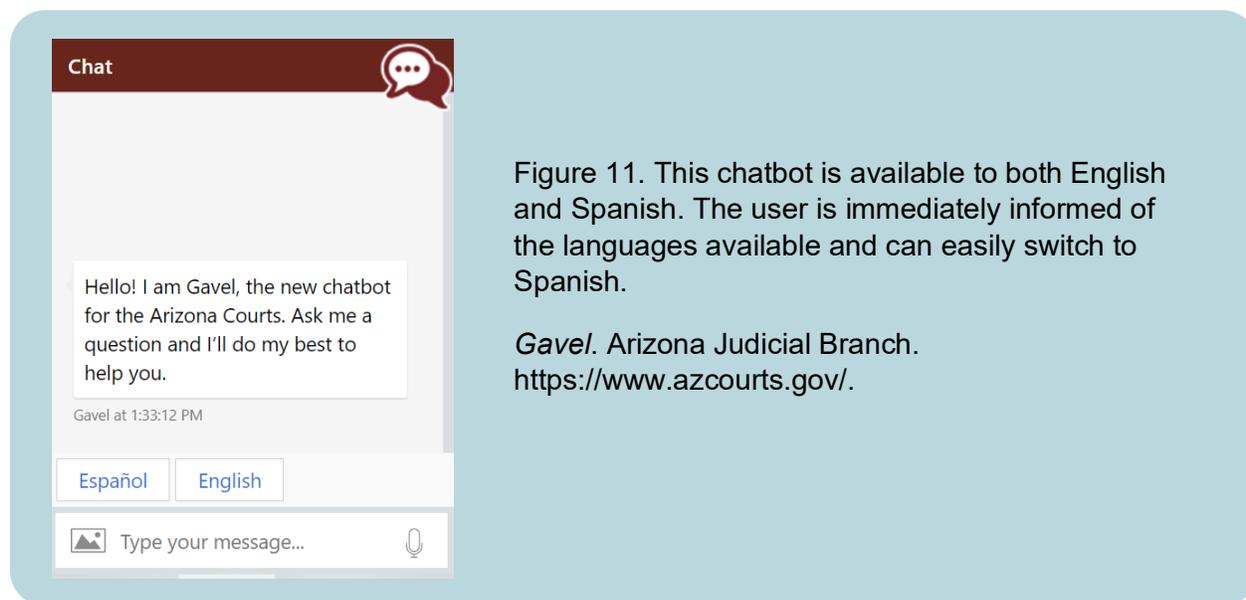


Figure 11. This chatbot is available to both English and Spanish. The user is immediately informed of the languages available and can easily switch to Spanish.

*Gavel*. Arizona Judicial Branch.  
<https://www.azcourts.gov/>.

<sup>34</sup> *Statement of the Issue*. National Center for State Courts, <https://www.ncsc.org/consulting-andresearch/areas-of-expertise/interpreter-info/called-to-action/statement-of-the-issue>.

<sup>35</sup> S. Dietrich and E. Hernandez. *Language Use in the United States: 2019*. August 2022. <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2022/acs/acs-50.pdf>.

<sup>36</sup> This obligation stems from the nondiscrimination provisions of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. 2000d, et seq. (Title VI); Executive Order 12250; Executive Order 13166 (2000); Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968; 34 U.S.C. § 10101, and the Court Interpreters Act, 28 U.S.C. § 1827.30. See, *LEP.gov*. <https://www.lep.gov/>.

<sup>37</sup> See, *Explore Census Data*. The United States Census Bureau. <https://data.census.gov/>. See also, *Tiny Chat 122: GIS Mapping and Census Data*. National Center for State Courts. Williamsburg, VA. April 27, 2023. <https://vimeo.com/showcase/7003975/video/821732364>.

## **Literacy access**

One in five adults lack the English literacy skills to complete tasks that require comparing information, paraphrasing, or making low-level inferences.<sup>38</sup> More than eight million people in the United States are functionally illiterate in English.<sup>39</sup> This means they cannot successfully determine the meaning of sentences, read relatively short texts to locate a single piece of information, or complete simple forms.<sup>40</sup>

Though chatbots are a text medium, they can include multimedia information such as sound, video, or images to assist users with low literacy.<sup>41</sup> Providing the option to speak to the chatbot and read aloud responses can assist users who may struggle to use the chatbot if relying on the written functions.<sup>42</sup>

## **Mobile access**

97% of Americans own cellphones, and 85% own a smartphone, compared to 77% of U.S. adults who own a desktop or laptop computer or 50% that own a tablet computer.<sup>43</sup> Though smartphone dependency has decreased over time, 15% of American adults are “smartphone-only” internet users.<sup>44</sup> Many users browse on their phones, even if they are not reliant on their phone for internet access.

Chatbots should be mobile friendly. The mobile version of the website should not be disrupted by the chatbot, meaning that it does not block access to the website content, and should provide the same experience and information as it would on a desktop browser

Cleo from the Superior Court in Maricopa County, Arizona is not only available on the website, but is also mobile friendly, and can even be accessed through Amazon Alexa, SMS text messaging, and email.<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> *Adult Literacy in the United States*. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, July 2019, <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2019/2019179.pdf>.

<sup>39</sup> *Id.*

<sup>40</sup> *Id.*

<sup>41</sup> Translators without Borders states their multilingual chatbots use multimedia content to assist people with low literacy levels. NCSC was unable to verify the type of media used, however video, sound, and images would all be valuable content to incorporate into chatbots. *TWB Chatbots*. Translators without Borders. <https://translatorswithoutborders.org/chatbots#:~:text=TWB%20is%20building%20chatbots%20using,people%20with%20lower%20literacy%20levels...>

<sup>42</sup> The New Mexico chatbot reads the script aloud and lets the user speak to select an option instead of selecting from the menu. See, *Clara*. The Judicial Branch of New Mexico. <https://languageaccess.nmcourts.gov/?avn>. See also, *SANDI*. Eleventh Judicial Circuit of Florida, <https://www.jud11.flcourts.org/>.

<sup>43</sup> *Mobile Fact Sheet*. Pew Research Center, April 2021, <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/mobile/>.

<sup>44</sup> *Id.*

<sup>45</sup> *AI to Improve the Customer and Employee Experience*. Clerk of the Superior Court, Maricopa County. <https://cocappagents.maricopa.gov/experience/index.html>.

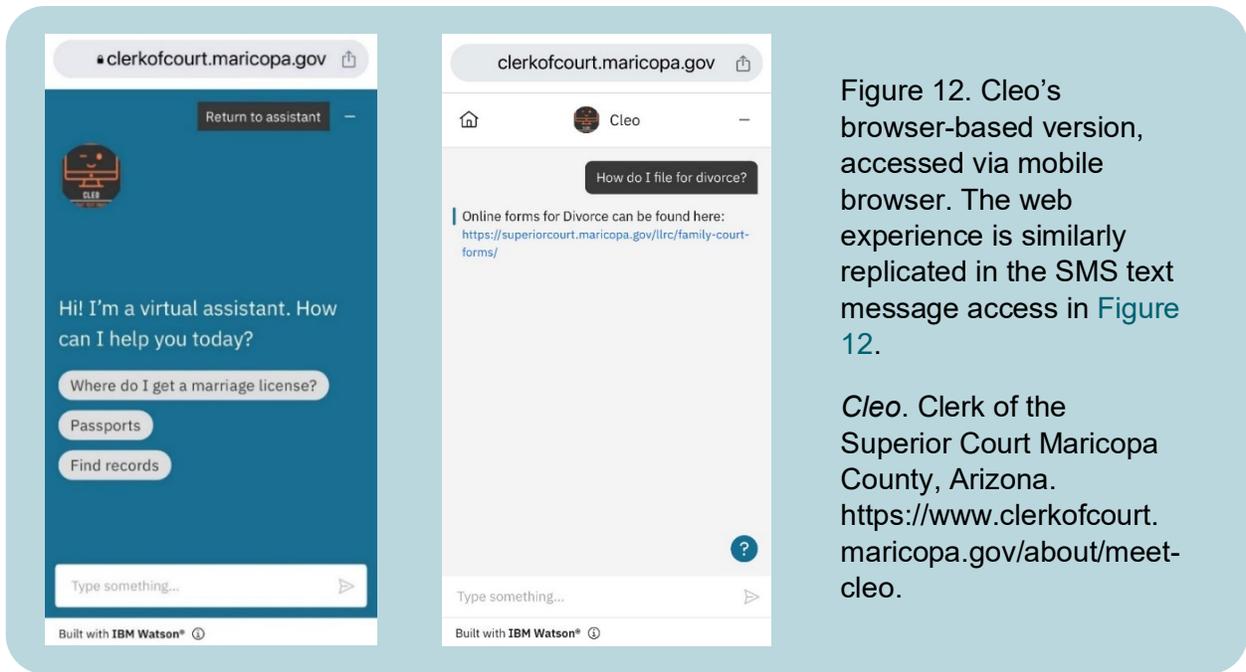


Figure 12. Cleo’s browser-based version, accessed via mobile browser. The web experience is similarly replicated in the SMS text message access in Figure 12.

*Cleo*. Clerk of the Superior Court Maricopa County, Arizona.  
<https://www.clerkofcourt.maricopa.gov/about/meet-cleo>.

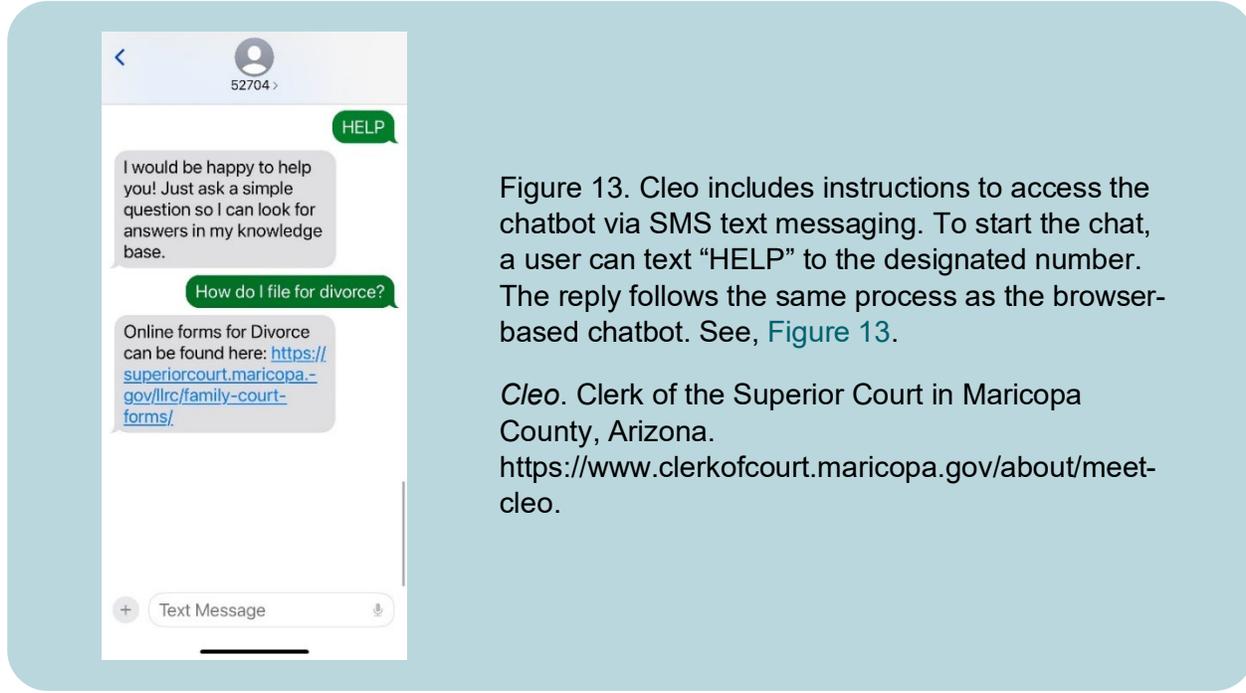


Figure 13. Cleo includes instructions to access the chatbot via SMS text messaging. To start the chat, a user can text “HELP” to the designated number. The reply follows the same process as the browser-based chatbot. See, Figure 13.

*Cleo*. Clerk of the Superior Court in Maricopa County, Arizona.  
<https://www.clerkofcourt.maricopa.gov/about/meet-cleo>.

## A good chatbot provides transcripts and a way to follow up with the court

### *History and transcripts*

Many of the surveyed chatbots kept the conversation history in the chat window when later returning to the page. This benefits users who return for the information so that they are not required to repeat the interaction and can reuse their history. However, be conscious of privacy issues for users who may use a shared computer. Users may be put at risk if the chatbot stores the conversation and resources automatically. Sensitive topics such as orders of protection and questions related to domestic violence require special considerations to keep your users safe. A common online safety tool is a “quick exit” button that leaves the court website and goes to a neutral webpage, but it is not a complete solution.<sup>46</sup> Quick exit buttons do not clear the browser history that records that the court website was visited. They also do not clear the cache that keeps the conversation history stored in the chat window. To protect your users, include safe browsing tips on topics like: 1) how to clear the conversation history through the platform, or 2) clearing the browser history, cache, and cookies, or 3) how to use a private browser.

Transcripts allow the user to save the information outside of the chat window. Downloading or emailing the transcript are helpful ways to hold on to the information provided. This allows the user to organize the resources and maintain the information in their preferred manner

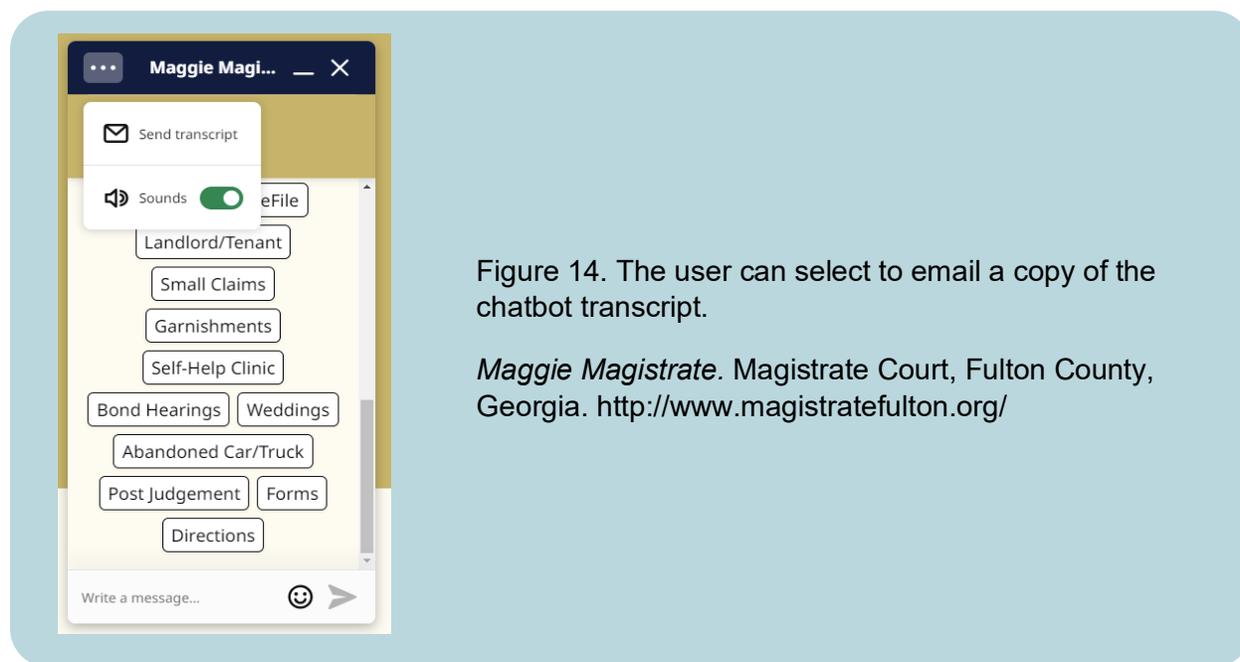


Figure 14. The user can select to email a copy of the chatbot transcript.

*Maggie Magistrate*. Magistrate Court, Fulton County, Georgia. <http://www.magistratefulton.org/>

<sup>46</sup> See an example of a quick exit button on Arizona’s Order of Protection guided interview AZPOINT. *Welcome to AZPoint*. The Judicial Branch of Arizona. <https://azpoint.azcourts.gov/>.

## Follow up with the court

A chatbot cannot answer every user's question nor is it a replacement for meaningful interaction with court staff. For unanswered issues, a chatbot should provide a clear path to contact the court or external resource.

This can be simple, such as providing contact information for the clerk or self-help center or forwarding user questions via email to the court.

During court hours, chatbots can be enabled to transfer the user to a live chat with court staff if the function is consistently staffed and enabled. Transferring to live chat allows the user to continue solving their problem on a single platform. This keeps the user engaged and increases the likelihood they will complete their task in one sitting. The court staff also interact with the chatbot more regularly and can continue to be aware of what issues the chatbot does not solve, creating a list of what corrections and improvements are needed. The live chat interactions then contribute to drafting the script for additions to the chatbot.

Seamless transfer is an ideal user experience for those who would have difficulty accessing the court in person or those who require discretion and privacy when reaching court services and cannot do so over the phone.

Starting with the chatbot can help resolve many questions, limit live chat interactions to users with more complex questions, and lessen the burden on court staff. See, [Remote access to court services benefits courts](#).

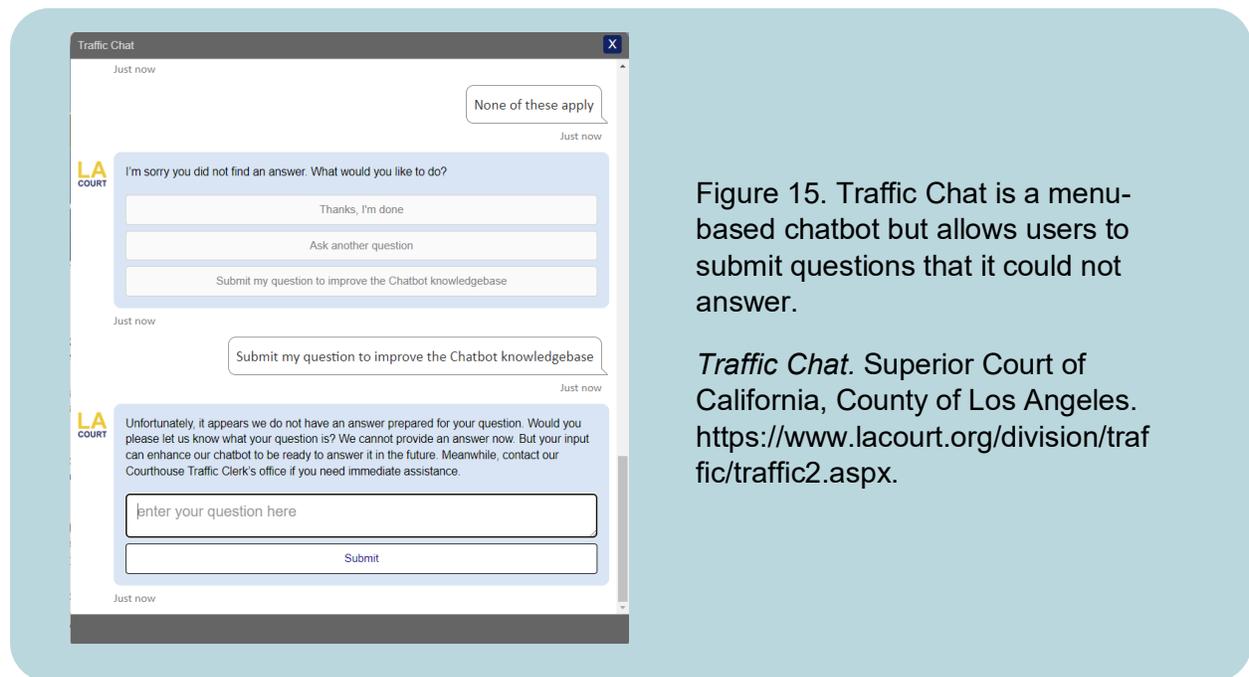


Figure 15. Traffic Chat is a menu-based chatbot but allows users to submit questions that it could not answer.

*Traffic Chat.* Superior Court of California, County of Los Angeles. <https://www.lacourt.org/division/traffic/traffic2.aspx>.

## Feedback surveys

Surveying your chatbot users can help improve your chatbot. Ask the user if they found their answer and review the transcripts when users answer "No." Determine a threshold for repeat

questions that indicates you should expand the website and/or chatbot content to answer users' questions.

Keep feedback surveys short to increase the likelihood of response. Only ask survey questions that you will use to improve the content and experience. Review the surveys regularly, at least once a month, if not more often, to spot bugs or urgent needs for attention.

Chatbots are iterative, meaning that the first version is not the final version. The chatbot should cycle through development, testing, use, feedback, and then development again for an improved version. Using transcript reviews and surveys during the feedback phase creates an information loop to learn how the chatbot is succeeding with real users and that shapes the chatbot to respond to their needs.

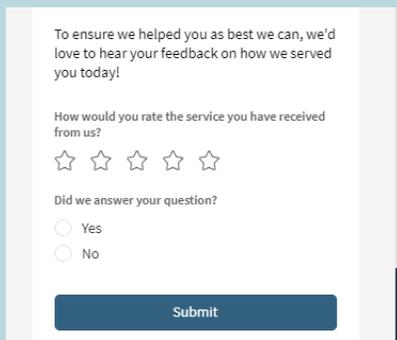
A screenshot of a chatbot feedback survey form. The form is white with a blue 'Submit' button at the bottom. The text on the form reads: 'To ensure we helped you as best we can, we'd love to hear your feedback on how we served you today!'. Below this is a question: 'How would you rate the service you have received from us?' followed by five empty star icons. The next question is 'Did we answer your question?' with two radio button options: 'Yes' and 'No'. A blue 'Submit' button is at the bottom.

Figure 16. This chatbot uses two simple questions to solicit user feedback and measure the success of the chatbot.

*Court Web Chat*. Riverside Superior Court.  
<https://www.riverside.courts.ca.gov/OnlineServices/CourtWebChat/chat.php>.

## A good chatbot is user tested

User testing should be used to develop public facing materials such as a new court form or technology projects like a chatbot.<sup>47</sup> User testing is the process of testing a product with real users.<sup>48</sup> A real user tests the tool by attempting a series of tasks that mimic the tool's intended use. The observation of the test looks for ease of use, whether the user is able to accomplish their task, accuracy, and user satisfaction. The feedback from the tester identifies unexpected use or behavior, areas of confusion, and provides insight into the actual perception of the tool. User testing can be done continuously during development and should always be done before a product is released to the general public.

Testing with real users is the best way to user test a chatbot because the general public is the intended audience. However, testing can be done internally by staff before becoming available to the public. Internal use and testing are an opportunity to test the chatbot, contribute to the training knowledgebase, and become familiar with the technology and review improvements to prepare for a public launch.

<sup>47</sup> *Forms Camp 2022: User Testing – If you love your forms, let them go*. National Center for State Courts. August 11, 2022. <https://vimeo.com/738650155>.

<sup>48</sup> See, *User Testing Guidelines*. National Center for State Courts. [www.ncsc.org/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0017/42722/User-testing.pdf](http://www.ncsc.org/_data/assets/pdf_file/0017/42722/User-testing.pdf). See also, *Tiny Chat 48: User Testing*. National Center for State Courts. Williamsburg, VA. April 19, 2021. <https://vimeo.com/538629268>.

## Appendix A – What are some examples of chatbots?

### Court chatbots

Arizona Judicial Branch	Gavel	<a href="https://www.azcourts.gov/">https://www.azcourts.gov/</a>
Superior Court of California, County of Riverside	Court Virtual Assistant	<a href="https://www.riverside.courts.ca.gov/OnlineServices/CourtWebChat/chat.php">https://www.riverside.courts.ca.gov/OnlineServices/CourtWebChat/chat.php</a>
Superior Court of California, County of Los Angeles	Traffic Chatbot & SitePal	<a href="https://www.lacourt.org/division/traffic/traffic2.aspx">https://www.lacourt.org/division/traffic/traffic2.aspx</a>
Eleventh Judicial Circuit of Florida	SANDI	<a href="https://www.jud11.flcourts.org/">https://www.jud11.flcourts.org/</a>
Delaware Courts Judicial Branch, Family Court	Zoe	<a href="https://courts.delaware.gov/family/">https://courts.delaware.gov/family/</a>
Cook County Probate Court	Support Agent	<a href="https://cookcountyprobatecourt.com/">https://cookcountyprobatecourt.com/</a>
Clerk of Superior, State & Juvenile Courts, Forsyth County, Georgia	Forsyth Clerk ChatBot	<a href="https://www.forsythclerk.com/">https://www.forsythclerk.com/</a>
Montana Judicial Branch	Virtual Agent	<a href="https://courts.mt.gov/">https://courts.mt.gov/</a>
New Jersey Courts	Jia (Judiciary Information Assistant)	<a href="https://www.njcourts.gov/">https://www.njcourts.gov/</a>
Judicial Branch of New Mexico	Clara	<a href="https://languageaccess.nmcourts.gov/?avn">https://languageaccess.nmcourts.gov/?avn</a>

### Clerk chatbots

Maricopa County, Arizona	Cleo	<a href="https://www.clerkofcourt.maricopa.gov/about/meet-cleo">https://www.clerkofcourt.maricopa.gov/about/meet-cleo</a>
Clerk of the Circuit Court & Comptroller Palm Beach County, Florida	ClerkPBC	<a href="https://www.mypalmbeachclerk.com/about-us/tips-for-chatting-with-our-bot">https://www.mypalmbeachclerk.com/about-us/tips-for-chatting-with-our-bot</a>
Clerk of the Circuit Court & Comptroller Pinellas County, Florida		<a href="https://www.mypinellasclerk.org/">https://www.mypinellasclerk.org/</a>

Fulton County Clerk of Superior & Magistrate Courts	Clerkette	<a href="https://www.fultonclerk.org/">https://www.fultonclerk.org/</a>
---	-----------	---

Magistrate Court, Fulton County	Maggie Magistrate	<a href="http://www.magistratefulton.org/">http://www.magistratefulton.org/</a>
---------------------------------	-------------------	---

## Legal aid chatbots

Law Center for Better Housing, Illinois	Rentervention	<a href="https://rentervention.com/">https://rentervention.com/</a>
---	---------------	---

Legal Aid Society of Hawai'i		<a href="https://www.legalaidhawaii.org/get-help.html">https://www.legalaidhawaii.org/get-help.html</a>
------------------------------	--	---

## Non-court chatbots

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services	Emma	<a href="https://www.uscis.gov/tools/meet-emma-our-virtual-assistant">https://www.uscis.gov/tools/meet-emma-our-virtual-assistant</a>
---	------	---

National Institutes of Health	Grants Virtual Assistant	<a href="https://grants.nih.gov/help/grants_virtual_assistant.html">https://grants.nih.gov/help/grants_virtual_assistant.html</a>
-------------------------------	--------------------------	---

Center for Disease Control	COVID-19 Viral Testing Tool	<a href="https://www.cdc.gov/TemplatePackage/contrib/widgets/healthBot/covid-testing-tool/">https://www.cdc.gov/TemplatePackage/contrib/widgets/healthBot/covid-testing-tool/</a>
----------------------------	-----------------------------	---

## Appendix B – Table of Figures

---

Figure 1. The Riverside Superior Court chatbot provides the option to transfer to a live agent for assistance if the user indicates that the chatbot was not able to resolve their question. ....	1
Figure 2. After providing general information about divorces, the chatbot provides the contact information of the Family Law Information Center, connecting users to a resource specific to the user’s issue. ....	6
Figure 3. The prompt “My landlord won’t do anything about the leak in my apartment” did not return a response. However, the chatbot was able to identify the relevant case type, Landlord Tenant, and move the user in that direction. ....	9
Figure 4. Cook County Probate Court Chatbot Support Agent calls attention to the chatbot with the bright blue tag the first time you visit the page. After opening and then closing the chatbot, the large blue tag disappears but the white bar remains available, making it less prominent on the page. ....	12
Figure 5. Forsyth Clerk ChatBot uses the prompt “Need Help?” to invite users to use the chat. ....	12
Figure 6. This chatbot draws the attention with a large talk bubble and the phrase “Let’s talk!” . ....	13
Figure 7. ClerkPBC provides a link to more detailed instructions about how to use the chatbot. ....	14
Figure 8. SANDI greets the user and explains the methods of interacting: using the microphone, typing a question, or selecting from their menu. It then sets expectations by stating what it can help with, general inquiries, and what it cannot do. ....	15
Figure 9. The Delaware Family court chatbot can respond to both free text input and offers a menu of programed choices. ....	16
Figure 10. The Traffic Chatbot limits the user to a menu of choices but has a clear menu that is well organized with the most popular questions available first and additional, less common questions available in the choice “Other issues.” ....	16
Figure 11. This chatbot is available to both English and Spanish. The user is immediately informed of the languages available and can easily switch to Spanish. ....	19
Figure 12. Cleo includes instructions to access the chatbot via SMS text messaging. To start the chat, a user can text “HELP” to the designated number. The reply follows the same process as the browser-based chatbot. See, Figure 13. ....	21
Figure 13. Cleo’s browser-based version, accessed via mobile browser. The web experience is similarly replicated in the SMS text message access in Figure 12. ....	21
Figure 14. The user can select to email a copy of the chatbot transcript. ....	22
Figure 15. Traffic Chat is a menu-based chatbot but allows users to submit questions that it could not answer. ....	23
Figure 16. This chatbot uses two simple questions to solicit user feedback and measure the success of the chatbot. ....	24

## Appendix C – Chatbot Checklist

---

Use this checklist from conception through planning, development, and launch of a court chatbot.

### Vendor considerations

#### Vendor functionality

---

- Model Selection:
  - Rule-based
  - AI chatbot
- Disability access compliance
  - Speak to chat/ Mute function
  - High contrast colors in the design
  - Text can be adjusted up to 200% without loss of content or functionality
  - Font size is at least 12 pt (16px) font
  - Buttons include text to indicate use
- Multilingual capability
- Mobile friendly view
- Compatibility with current website
- Transcripts available for users
- Live chat transfer
- Feedback survey
- Additional desired features:
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_

#### Contracting

---

- Read “[Contracting Digital Services for Courts](#)” from National Center for State Courts to prepare for vendor selection and contracting<sup>49</sup>
- Use “[Exiting technology projects](#)” by Small Scale and National Center for State Courts to work through vendor contracting before and during the process<sup>50</sup>
- Contract assigns responsibility for updates
- Contract assigns responsibility for improvement and maintenance
- Contract assigns responsibility for security, data privacy, and related maintenance

---

<sup>49</sup> See, Access to Justice Team. *Contracting Digital Services for Courts*. National Center for State Courts. Williamsburg, VA. 2022. [www.ncsc.org/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0029/76754/Contracting-Digital-Services.pdf](http://www.ncsc.org/data/assets/pdf_file/0029/76754/Contracting-Digital-Services.pdf).

<sup>50</sup> See, *Exiting technology projects*. Small Scale, National Center for State Courts. 2021. [https://www.ncsc.org/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0028/74782/Exiting-Tech-Projects-v2.pdf](https://www.ncsc.org/data/assets/pdf_file/0028/74782/Exiting-Tech-Projects-v2.pdf).

## Easy to find and use

### Logo or Icon

---

- Large enough to stand out from the rest of the page
- Recognizable logo such as a text bubble with dots, a phrase like “chat with us,” or a digital avatar

### Placement

---

- The chatbot should be available on as many pages as possible throughout the court website. At a minimum chatbot should be available on:
  - The home page
  - Webpages with self-help resources
  - Webpages with information about attending court
  - Any webpages that relate to subjects where the chatbot can help
- Placement does not interfere with the navigation of the webpage when not in use
- If placed in the lower right-hand corner an additional banner or indicator is higher on page to signal to users who use a screen reader of its availability
- Include a minimize function
- Include a mute function

## Instructions

- Inform the user how they can interact with the chatbot (free text, menu choices, speak to chat, etc.)
- Provide an example of a prompt for users to mimic if free text is an option
- Embed the instruction into the chatbot
- How to use history and transcripts
- How to follow up with the court

## Disclaimer

- Explain what the chatbot can help with (legal information)
- Explain what the chatbot cannot do (Not legal advice, is not an attorney, is not a person)
- Embed the disclaimer into the chatbot

## Maintenance

- Create a maintenance model for accuracy, improvements, security and technical support
  - Assign responsibility to court staff and vendor
  - Create schedule to review and update content
  - Create schedule to review transcripts and feedback surveys to implement updates

## Accessibility

### Plain language

---

- Responses should be written in plain language
- Use NCSC's [Plain Language Glossary](#) to translate legalese<sup>51</sup>

### Disability access

---

- Disability compliance reviewed with vendor
- Use high contrast colors
- Include text on buttons to indicate use
- Font size should be at least 12 pt (16px) font
- Compatible with screen readers

### Language and literacy access

---

- Chatbot is offered in languages other than English
  - Notify users immediately that the chatbot is available in languages other than English
- Include multimedia information such as sound, videos, or images for users with low literacy
- Speak to chat and read aloud

### Readability

---

- Keep response lengths relatively short
- Rely on page redirects where the information is hosted
- Answers explain to the user how to use the information on the webpage

---

<sup>51</sup> See, *Interactive Plain Language Glossary*. National Center for State Courts. <https://www.ncsc.org/consulting-and-research/areas-of-expertise/access-to-justice/plain-language/glossary>.

### History and transcripts

- Provide a chat transcript for users
- Instructions include how to use the transcript function
- If the chatbot assists with sensitive topics, provide safety features like a quick exit button or instructions on how to clear the conversation history

### Feedback survey

- Include a user feedback survey
- Only include questions you will use
- Review the surveys at least once a month if not more to spot bugs or urgent needs for attention/ correction

### User testing

- Test with court staff
- Test with real users