

FEC legal resources workshop

On March 1–2, we'll be conducting a 3.5 hour workshop with the goal of prioritizing the needs of users based on research conducted by Jeremy Canfield.

Decision-making

Three factors could go into choosing what to do next:

1. **Workshop output** – Through the workshop, attendees will determine which issues they feel are most important to their users.
2. **Commissioner interviews** – Through interviews, with the commissioners will express the things they feel most strongly about.
3. **Team feasibility assessment** – 18F team considers the level of effort and dependencies to determine sequence of efforts.

Rough outline of FEC - legal resources workshop 3.5 Hours

The primary objective of this workshop is to prioritize the upcoming Legal Resources related work around real user needs. The secondary objective is to build informed empathy for the people using the site through a persona exercise and then use that empathy to help make good decisions about what's most important.

0:00 - 0:15	Intro
0:15 - 0:45	Findings <i>The goal is to provide breadth of information across the 10 interviews. (Each group will later go deep into certain interviews.)</i>
0:45 - 1:00	Questions
1:00 - 1:10	Persona exercise intro <i>What is a persona? Why is it helpful? What we're going to do.</i>
1:10 - 1:45	Persona group creation <i>Break into groups of 4 or 5. This part of the exercise will have each group read two of Jeremy's interviews. The two will be a similar type. Each group would be given guidance about how they go about creating a persona, including the type of information to provide. They will create simple posters that are hung for others to see. They will also define the three most urgent needs of their persona.</i>

1:45 - 2:00	Break
2:00 - 2:20	Personas presented <i>Each group presents the personas they have created to the larger group. Some time included to look at the output of each group.</i>
2:20 - 2:30	Dot voting intro <i>A variety of user needs will be hung on the wall, some will be written prior, some will come out of the persona exercise. They will be drawn from the affinity groups Jeremy defined as part of his research and included in the Mural he put together. Each participant, now armed with the knowledge of the personas that have been created, will review all the needs and will vote on what they consider the most pressing issues users face.</i>
2:30 - 2:45	Dot voting <i>Each participant places dot marks on the issues they think are most pressing. Discussion will be encouraged.</i>
2:45 - 3:00	Review conclusions <i>Facilitators order the needs based on the voting. The group discusses. Review the idea that this ordering is part of the three factors for figuring out how to proceed, along with Commissioner ideas and technical feasibility.</i>
3:00 - 3:30	Open Questions

Materials needed:

- Synthesis presentation
- Dots for voting
- Printouts of scrubbed interviews (need to tidy up so no PII)
- User needs stickies for dot voting

High Level Overview

- Hello.
 - I'm Ed Mullen. I've just recently joined the project and am going to be presenting the results of our research phase.
- For the past few weeks, we've been conducting research aimed at understanding how people use FEC's legal resources.
 - Jeremy Canfield conducted 13 interviews of FEC.gov users.

- Most of these were recruited through a tool called Ethnio that was placed on the FEC site. Others were provided by FEC staff.
- He spoke with Compliance firm lawyers, Campaign Staffers and Treasurers.
- Across the campaign practitioners and legal advisors, we found
 - broad range of experience, levels of confidence and content needs
 - similar goals, motivations, and certain behaviors.
 - people are motivated by a specific activity or question, whether they know exactly what they are looking for or not.
 - They take pride in their work and want to stay current.
- These kinds of interviews are really just conversations, aimed at understanding what people want to accomplish, and how they try to do it.
 - We took notes during the conversations
 - pulled out key statements and ideas
 - grouped these ideas into similar “affinity groupings”
 - identified key themes.
- When we boil it down, the main challenge we see is fairly fundamental:
 - *People have a hard time finding the things they need, and little confidence the things they find are enough.*
 - So, *finding things*. This is a very common challenge, especially for sites that have built up over time and which house extensive content.
 - If we break down *finding things* a bit more, we see three main parts:
 - *Searching for things*
 - Using the existing search features doesn’t reliably produce useful or trustworthy results.
 - There are multiple siloed search fields looking into different databases.
 - Sometimes searching produces too few or too many results.
 - When there are too many, it’s difficult to refine the results to the meaningful ones.
 - When search on FEC.gov doesn’t produce the desired results, it either leaves users uncertain or sends them to external resources.
 - *Viewing things*
 - The actual display of individual resources is sometimes clunky or difficult to read.
 - Users are constantly assessing whether the resource in front of them is the right thing for them, so making the viewing of the thing easy is important.
 - Resources are frequently housed in frames, complicating sharing or printing
 - Sometimes they can’t be directly linked to, which is important for sharing or saving.
 - When direct direct links exist, some are actually just search query presets that sometimes aren’t always effective.

- *Moving between things*
 - Relationships often exist between resources.
 - Complaints reference other MURs, AOs reference Regs. AOs often address similar issues.
 - Moving between things is important because users, once they determine that a given resource is not right, or that it's close and they want to dig deeper, they need to be able to move towards the answer easily.
 - Resources that relate to each other are frequently not hyperlinked, preventing easy cross-referencing and movement between.
 - Existing links can lead to dead ends instead of meaningful results.
 - Resources that deal with similar topics are not categorized as such.
- Some users overcome these issues
 - Particularly those whose work is heavily dependent on using the resources on a regular basis. They develop workarounds and habits that allow them to navigate the difficulties despite their challenges
 - Others with access to professional legal support often rely on it.
 - Others look to Lexis or Westlaw, which they find easier to use.
 - These considerations favor more established users over infrequent or new users.
- Tomorrow we will be digging deeper into the research.
 - We'll look at a number of characteristics that we've observed. Similarities and dissimilarities between different user groups.
 - We'll look at many of their pain-points and desires.
 - We'll be conducting an exercise aimed at helping us "get in the heads" of the users and build empathy.
 - Finally we'll employ that empathy to help us prioritize a variety of specific needs that we've identified through this research.

Introduction

"The purpose of this workshop to determine the most important needs for user of the FEC's online legal resources. This effort started with a series of interviews Jeremy Canfield conducted, which we will review. We will use these interviews as the basis for an exercise aimed at building empathy for our users, which will in turn help us to make good choices about how best to meet their needs.

"The decisions we make in this workshop will then be combined with information from interviews with the Commissioners and feasibility and sequencing considerations from the development team after this workshop to determine which activities we should tackle and in which order to deliver an improved experience for our users quickly and incrementally on an ongoing basis."

Findings

- Intro
 - [Title screen]
 - *“I know less about this world than anyone in the room. For now I’ll consider this a benefit as I can retain my “beginner’s mind” and lend fresh eyes to the matter.”*
 - Goals: How do people access
 - Process
 - What was done and how
 - Jeremy Canfield conducted 13 user interviews over the phone
 - The interviewees primarily came in through Ethnio, the recruiting tool we placed on the site.
 - Who did we talk to? (exists)
 - The interviewees were Campaign Practitioners, Legal Advisors and two FEC staff
 - Synthesizing
 - The notes were taken and synthesized into a Mural, identifying commonalities, or affinity groupings
 - [show mural]
 - From here, these groupings were divided into two groups
 - Characteristics of the people using FEC.gov
 - Pain-points and desires of those people.
 - From these pain-points and desires we identified a number of semi-specific user needs.
- Findings across interviews
 - **High level: Finding things**
 - This is intentionally simple language. *“People have a hard time finding the things they need”* is the biggest theme.
 - And another aspect of this a lack of confidence that the things they do find, are not enough.
 - *Finding things* is a very common challenge
 - The *Finding Things Team* is the largest single team at Gov.uk, the British government’s digital service.



[source](#)

- Digging deeper into the *finding things* challenge, there seem to be three big parts:
 - Searching for things
 - EVIDENCE
 - Moving between things
 - EVIDENCE
 - If a client called and asked how much they could spend to support a candidate, he'd start with the statute, go to the reg, go to the AO, go to enforcement matters, the legislative history, the rulemakings, the commission discussions on open meetings for advisory opinions or rulemakings, and court cases - U00
 - Viewing things
 - EVIDENCE
 - These categories may not be exhaustive. While we work to find practical solutions, let's keep in mind that the need remains abstract and won't be solved by any single feature.
 - *"People have a hard time finding the things they need"*
- Looking more deeply:
 - User characteristics

"Let's look for a moment at some characteristic about our users that we observed in the interviews."

 - ◆ People who use the site range in expertise from highly technical legal pros to novice practitioners.
User base ranges between highly technical legal professionals and plain language answer seeking novice practitioners
 - *Attorney turned unaffiliated PAC*
 - *Campaign staffer doing fundraising and event planning*
 - *Campaign treasure for state candidate turned Congressperson who is now switching to a firm*
 - People fall across a spectrum from between being scared of being wrong to expertly exploiting loopholes
 - *"we're all so scared of being wrong and no one wants to make a legal judgement outside of our purview"*
 - *"groups are skillfully evading the letter of the law by using the spirit of the law. you can share anything publicly, and it's not coordination"*
 - Many of the people take great pride in their work
 - *"Knew the original code numbers, by heart, and still sometimes reference them even after they were recoded."*
 - *Tries to give clients best possible advice in murky areas of the law. -U02*

- *Treasurer is a position of trust, in many cases been the same since the candidate first campaigned “best friend, someone you’d trust with your money”. -U03*
- People are usually motivated by a specific activity or question they need answered.
 - ~~A question about a specific activity motivates most seekers~~
 - *“How much can a client donate to a candidate?”*
 - *“Is this an independent activity?”*
 - *“Is this coordination?”*
 - *“How can a client host a fundraising event for a candidate?”*
 - *“Can we accept money from this person?”*
 - *“Where do disclosure messages go in a text message?”*
 - *“When do I take control of funds?”*
- When people find the right bit of content, they often find it very helpful.
 - *“Frankly i was impressed with the legal content that i’ve looked at so far”*
 - *“There’s so much information. i’ve learned so much from using this website but it’s just not organized”*
- Small simple plain language content appears to be a common entry point.
 - *“I get the newsletter, I find that helpful for updates.”*
 - *“The quick answers portion of the site is where i’ve been a lot.”*
 - *“This was actually a bulletin that came to me from the FEC, and I was like yeah! this is what i need. (Tips for Treasurers).”*
 - *“In the forms themselves, there are pretty good explanations for how to fill out the forms, but it definitely is very much appreciated when there are explicit instructions.”*
- Despite it’s shortcomings, the search is still where some people go first.
- People who have access to law firms, party committee lawyers, or the FEC rely on and benefit from their support. Those without this access rely fend for themselves and rely on the site.
 - ~~Law firms, party committee lawyers and FEC staff (for congressional incumbents) share specific answers to questions that users find valuable~~
 - *“working with outside counsel, and that definitely helped me find things on the website.”*

- *“When he has a question, he generally goes to the party committee, who has legal staff assigned to help, and a law firm for harder questions.”*
- *“Party Committee law firm does these finance calls every quarter reporting on being compliant, not letting us spend extra money, and would follow up about what you could and couldn’t do . “This is what’s kosher, this is what’s not.”*
- *“I have to be totally frank. when i have a question, I don’t go to the FEC. I go to the DCC, they’ve got a lawyer, and if they don’t know they have a law firm.”*
- *“Why should I research this if I can just ask someone and they will know the answer?”*
- Campaign practitioners learn the rules through mentoring, classes offered by law firms, and other person-to-person experiences..
 - *“Mostly learned from those above, mentors.”*
 - *“going to classes. working with outside counsel, and that definitely helped me find things on the website”*
 - *“Learned a lot about fundraising legal landscape by working for someone who had been doing it for 10 years, and knew it inside and out.”*
 - *“A lot of how I learned was from people above me. One of my managers at one point was me talking to my manager, can we accept money from this, what about this? just kind of figuring out those rules. “A lot of what I’ve learned so far is people telling me”*
- Perceptions of agency responsiveness and opacity sometimes very negative
 - *“pretty opaque agency. It’s good on disclosing the reports it gets from party committees and stuff. It’s not so good on explaining what it does itself.” - U001*

■ Pain-points & desires

- Some users seek topic clusters that cross guidance formats / FEC uses internal resources with topic clusters
 - *‘I might like to find every enforcement action that dealt with a particular regulation, but I have no easy way to do that’ (paraphrase) U00*
 - *1... should be able to find resources that are linked to topics (i.e. event hosting, airplane, independent expenditures, etc) TAO+1 AG+1*
- People want to stay up-to-date. Users recognize the importance of staying current with the latest updates

- “You should always put out today’s information. So people don’t confuse it. New rulings aren’t going to be in manuals, so you better have a place to go.” U07
 - *2... should be able to know when something changes or was changed.*
 - *3... should know what the newest information is. AG+1*
 - *4... should know what is too new to be in the manuals.*
- Plain language guidance should provide links to the more technical rules
 - “It is important, to understand the legal requirements, to be go to the source statute or rule.” U01
 - *5... should be able to navigate from the plain language guidance to the related technical rules, regs, and other resources. TAO+1*
 - *6... should be able to navigate from the technical rules, regs, and other resources to the plain language guidance.*
- It's difficult to find (and re-find) items
 - “I do think that the explanation on coordination is pretty good... I’m trying to find it. I can’t find it. I remember reading it.” U04
 - *7... should know how I got where I am. TAO+1*
 - *8... should be able to find the right resources for my situation.*
 - *9... should be able to find things faster.*
- It's difficult to figure out if they have found everything.
 - “I don’t come out feeling like what I’ve done is sufficient.” U10
 - *10... should have confidence that I’ve found all the relevant resources. AG+1*
- Some users do not (or no longer) attempt to find the resources on the website
 - ‘Tried to use FEC materials in 2012 for something that the FEC flagged us on, was unable to get clarity despite doing a deep dive.’ (paraphrase) U03
 - *11... should be able to rely on the website for most of my legal questions, not need to go to counsel. AG+1*
- People find search to be too broad, returning too many results that are hard to filter down, and not encompassing enough, leaving out important resource types. Their experiences with search outside of FEC.gov (Google, Westlaw) affects their expectation for it on FEC.gov.

~~Users are familiar with other search tools and think they would be valuable applied to FEC~~
~~Users describe the search simultaneously as too broad and not sufficiently encompassing~~

- “if the FEC’s mission is to promote compliance, having these search functionalities be really intuitive, almost like a google search, that would be a real service to the regulated community.” U09
- *12... should be able to search for people’s names or the names of a company or committee and see everything that pertains to them.*
- *13... should be able to search for a term and see everything that’s related to that term.*
- *14... should be able to do a search that displays meaningful results from across all legal resource types (i.e. Regs, MURs, AOs, Guides, etc) TAO+1 AG+1STAR*
- *15... should be able to search for a specific regulation section or subsection or Advisory Opinion number and see related resources.*
- *16... should be able to easily narrow down the results I get, either by date, type, facets, relevancy or other factors. TAO+1 AG+1*
- *17... should receive qualitatively better results.*
- People using the site print and save resources they find helpful for later use. ~~Users print or otherwise save discovered reference material for later use~~
 - “I have tons of printouts. I can print things and attach. I challenge the lawyers all the time.” U07
 - *18... should be able to print resources I find.*
 - *19... should be able to bookmark or otherwise save resources I find. TAO+1STAR*
- People share the resources that they find as evidence of acceptable/unacceptable behavior. ~~discovered content is shared to make the case for what can be done~~
 - [Person] uses content from the website to argue with lawyers; sends portions of bulletins as emails to lawyers: “If it’s just a one-sheet thing, I attach it and say ‘see here, it’s a rule.’ Always includes reference to page or law.
 - *20... should be able to send a link directly to a resource, search query results, or other meaningful grouping of content to someone. AG+1*
- People look to AOs to show an activity is safe. MURs and EAs are sought to find similar cases. ~~,-wants better search tools~~
 - “The beauty of the AO is that it’s a shield. You’re now in a safe harbor.” -U02

- *“There are so many questions that are hard questions that are still hard questions, but the Commission has already been asked and answered.” -U02*
 - *21... should be able to focus my search on just AOs, MURs, or EAs. AG+1*
 - *22... should be able to search old AOs as easily as new ones.*
 - Professional attorneys don't frequently ~~hardly~~ reference the regulations directly.
 - *“Regs are fairly straightforward: annotating? I actually think...let me look at my regs book. i think they are sufficiently annotated for our purposes. I have a pdf copy of the most copy saved, i open it up it, and search through adobe pdf) - U08*
 - People find the Explanations & Justifications tables helpful. ~~Explanation & Justification may be a user's first or last stop~~
 - *“E&J tables are terrific. Parts of that E&J tables and click on subsection that you try to understand. It will link you to the PDF right from the table that gives you paragraphs of narratives to that regulation.” - U02*
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 - Others
 - *23...should be able to find resources that are **similar** to each other. Similar in the sense that the subject matter or a resource is similar to that of another resource. TAO+1 AG+1*
 - *24...should be able to move between resources that are **related** to each other. “Related” meaning that the resource stems from, is in response to, or otherwise directly pertains to another resource. TAO+1*
 - *25...should be eased into the new website experience because I'm used to where everything is now.*
- Segue
- “So we've talked about characteristics of people using FEC.gov and some of their pain-points and desires. This information helps us get into the heads of our users.
 - Through our review of this information, we've glean about 25 semi-specific needs.
 - We'll look at these in our next exercise and start to prioritize which of these needs are the most pressing.

- But we're not quite ready to do that. What I've just reviewed is a broad overview of the findings.
 - The exercise we're going to do is aimed at digging deeper into a particular interviews."
 - Archetypes
 - Groupings:
 - Lawyers political law firm -
 - U00 + U08 - good set
 - U09 + no pair
 - U02 + U10 - good set
 - Campaign treasurer - U01 + U07 - good set
 - FEC legal research - S01, S02
 - Junior Campaign staffer - , U05 + U06 - good set
 - Campaign Misc - U03, - U04 (not great)
 - U00, U01, U02, U03, U04, U05, U06, U07, U08, U09, U10, S01, S02
 - Introduction
 - What we're going to do
 - "The findings that I just went over give an overview across all the interviews. Hopefully that gives a general sense of what we've found. But we want to go a bit deeper now, and you're going to help.
 - What we'll be doing is breaking into small groups.
 - Each group will be given two interview transcriptions. The interviewees are going to be people who are in similar positions.
 - The task will be to read the interviews and create an archetype.
 - After we've created the archetypes, we'll come back together and each group will present them to the group.
 - After that, we're going to look at those 25 semi-specific user needs that I mentioned before and prioritize them.
 - Why
 - I know there has been some previous work with personas. Personas and pretty similar to archetypes.
 - The big difference is that a persona is a bit more demographics based. It can sort of become a bit of a stereotype.
 - An archetype is more about a type of user's behavior. We're going to be looking for the behaviors, goals, challenges and mental/emotional states.
 - We're doing this to help get into the minds of our users so that we can prioritize our attention to align with the needs of the users.
 - How
 - Every group will get those two interviews. You can either divvy them up or everyone can read both. You decide.

- Using those interviews, you'll construct the archetype.
- Let's talk a bit about how we'll make an archetype. What should you cover?
 - **Who are they?** Write a one sentence description of the type of person. Give the archetype a title, not a name. (Ex. *The Heavy Lifter*, *The Seeker*, *The First-timer*, etc.) Have fun with it.
 - **What are their goals?** What are the things they are trying to accomplish? What have they come to FEC.gov to achieve? Write a list of their goals.
 - **What are their behaviors.** What do they do when they come to FEC.gov? Or, if they do things off FEC.gov that helps them address their needs, what are they? Write a list of their behaviors.
 - **What motivates them?** Get into their heads. What's driving them? What is their mental state? How do they feel as they go about their work? Write a list of their motivations.
 - **What do they struggle with?** What are their pain-points and frustrations? Write a list of their struggles.
- Each group will get a sheet restating this stuff to help you remember what we're doing.
- We've got materials [somewhere] that you can write all this out on. We're going to be presenting them to the group, so try to write fairly big.
- We'll start with about 30 minutes and see how it goes. We can add or deduct time as needed.
- 15 minutes should be enough for presenting the archetypes.
- [Distribute materials]
 - These notes are sort of rough. They weren't really meant for distribution. This is sort of enlisting you to help make the sausage.
- Group time
 - Count off: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
 - [Ed roams around and helps stuck teams. Maybe another 18Fer does too.]
- Presentations
 - Run through each groups archetypes
- Break
 - [Post all the needs eye-level on the wall with enough space for mingling.]
- Dot voting
 - We have hung up all the user needs that were gleaned from the interviews. We're all going to take some time reviewing them.

- They have been phrased in a way that tries to get at a thing a person should be able to do without being overly specific about how they might do that.
- Example: Instead of saying “Add a share button to AOs search results page” we might say “I should be able to share all pages.”
- If you think there is something that’s missing, feel free to add to it.
- Everyone is going to get XXX dots. You can spread them out or add all your dots to one need.
- Each person should stick their dots on the needs that they feel, based on the results of the research and the archetype exercise, are most urgent to *our users*.
- Remember, this exercise is aimed at getting a sense of which needs are most pressing for our users. We’re not voting directly on what we should build next. We’ll need to balance user need urgency with some of the commissioner input as well as technical and phasing strategy considerations.
- We’ll discuss after.
- Discussion
 - [Order the needs on the wall by most to least.]
 - Discuss the implications.
- Wrap up
 - Next steps....