GSA.gov Per Diem Usability Test

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General Services Administration
Template by GSA & Forum One

Section 1

Background

Per diem and its current interface

Per diem

“An allowance for lodging, meals, and incidental expenses”

GSA sets rates for contiguous 48 states and has a rate lookup tool on their website.

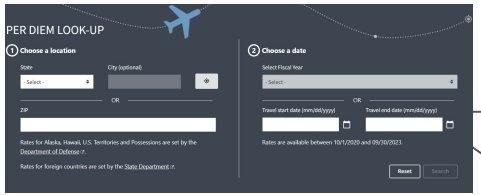
Per diem users

	13.9 million annual GSA.gov users
x	56.7% use for per diem/travel
=	7.9 million annual per diem/travel users

annual users from 06/01/22 to 05/31/23 (Google Analytics)
per diem/travel as primary reason for visit (Survey 3.0, Qualtrics) (n = 7477)

Current interface (July 2023)

New form

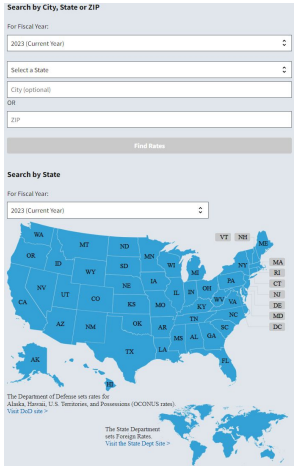


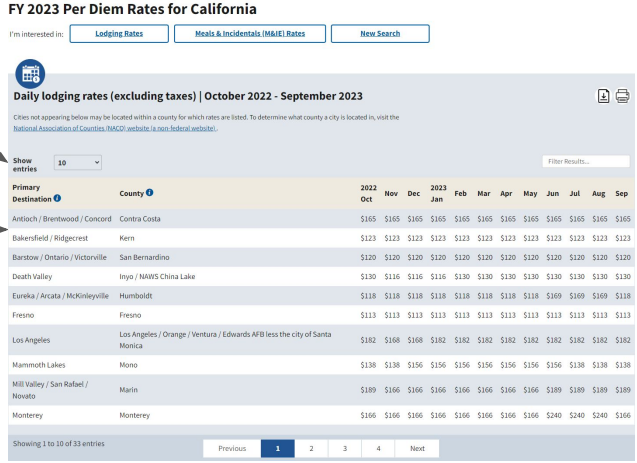
Results by trip

Results by fiscal year

New results

Old form





Old results

Section 2

Study design

The methods and tasks

Testing (July 2023)

Session style	Moderated usability tests with UserTesting.com. Sessions are recorded and participants think aloud.
Total participants	10 participants ● 7 web, 3 mobile
Participant criteria	Federal employees ● Travel is part (or potential part) of job duties
Session structure	● Introduction (5 minutes) ● Tasks (15 minutes) - 8 tasks ● Interview (10 minutes) - 12 questions Total: 30 minutes

Tasks

Task #	Location	Date	PD location	Ask
1	Fairplay, CO	Daily rate for August	Standard rate	Lodging
2	Doylestown, PA	Daily rate for August	Non-standard rate: Bucks, Bucks County	Lodging
3	Davis, CA	Daily rate for August	Non-standard rate: West Sacramento / Davis, Yolo County	Lodging, meals, and incidental expenses
4	Honolulu, HI	September 3-5 (2 nights)	Outside GSA jurisdiction - Department of Defense rate	Lodging
5	Austin, TX	September 10-14 (4 nights)	Non-standard rate: Austin, Travis County	Lodging, meals, and incidental expenses
6	Participant's current location	Daily rate for today	*Varies	Lodging

Tasks

Task #	Question
7	Is per diem based on where you are lodged or where your work site is?
8	If you can’t find a hotel below the maximum lodging rate for your destination, what do you do next?

Interview

1. Have you used GSA's per diem feature before? How often?
2. Have you ever used your agency's electronic travel system or travel management system?
3. What brought you to use GSA's per diem tool?
4. Were there any tasks today that were easier than you expected?
5. Were there any tasks today that were harder than you expected?
6. What could be changed that would make things easier?
7. [New form] What parts of the interface do you like or dislike?
8. [New results] What parts of the interface do you like or dislike?
9. [Old form] What parts of the interface do you like or dislike?
10. [Old results] What parts of the interface do you like or dislike?
11. Is there anything else I should have asked you or that you would like to share?
12. Do you have any questions for me?

Section 3

Study results

Findings from the tests

Reasons for using GSA.gov

Users plan for their trip with GSA.gov, and then book the trip with their agency’s electronic travel system, Concur or DTS.

“We typically have to present to leadership and say, we want to go to these sites, and here's why, and here's what it would cost.”

Accuracy

Participant	Task 1	Task 2	Task 3	Task 4	Task 5	Task 6	Task 7	Task 8
1								
2								
3								
4				***				
5								
6	***							
7								
8								
9								
10	***			***				

Color code	Performance	Tasks	Percentage
	Success	47	61.0%
	Partial success	6	7.8%
	Partial failure	3	3.9%
	Failure	21	27.3%

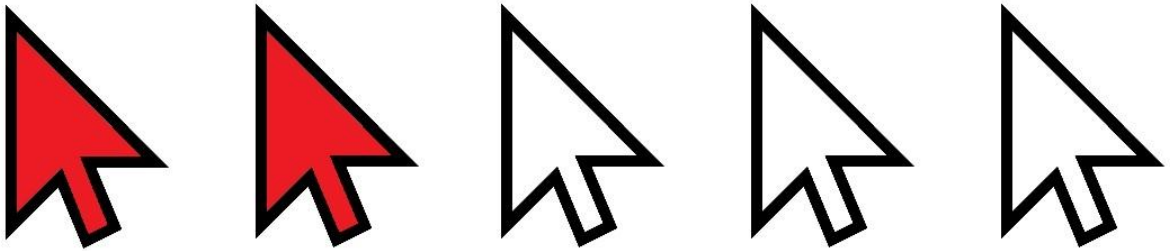
Color code	Device	Participants
	Web	7
	Mobile	3

*** indicates that the participant gave up after not being able to complete the task

Interactions

Interactions included mouse clicks, text entries, significant scrolling, and zooming in and out.

Errors were defined as interactions that did not bring users any closer to their goal.



Two of every five interactions were errors.

Behaviors

Efficacy - smiles, nods

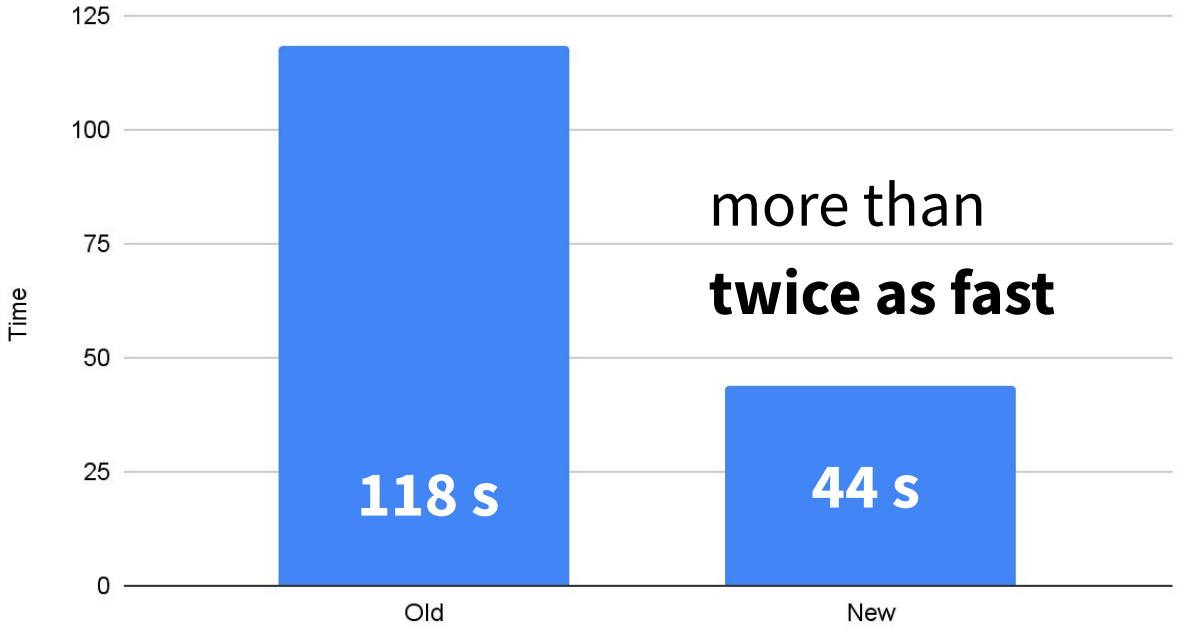
Weariness - rests head on chin, pursed lips, sighs

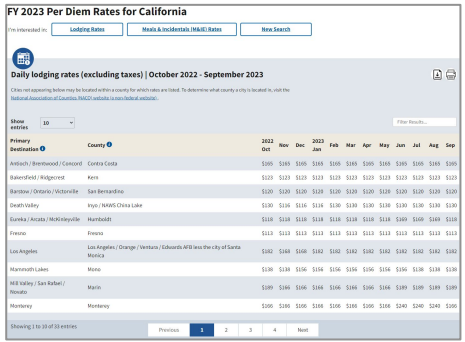
Confusion - “hmm…”, “umm…”, “huh?”, squints eyes, pushes lips to side, tilts head

Frustration - frowns, shakes or jolts head, furrows brows, crosses arms, throws hands in air

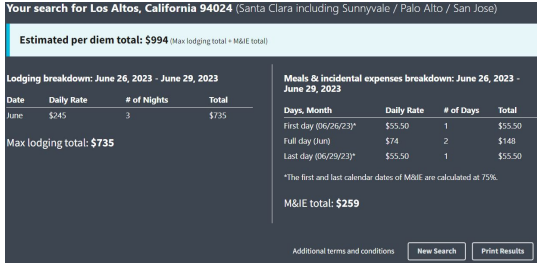
Anxiety - picks at face, laughs uneasily, swallows hard, breathes in sharply through nose, excessive blinking

Time





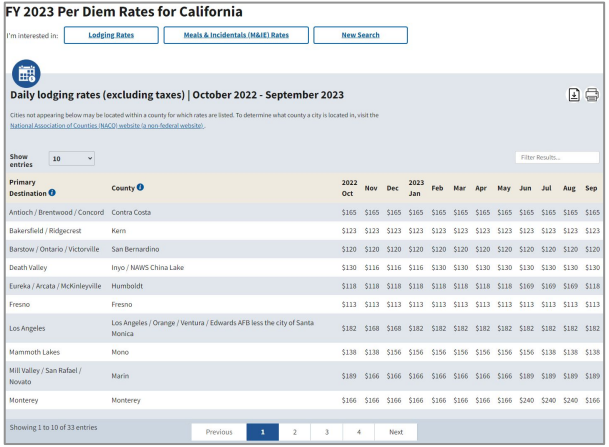
Results



Subjective

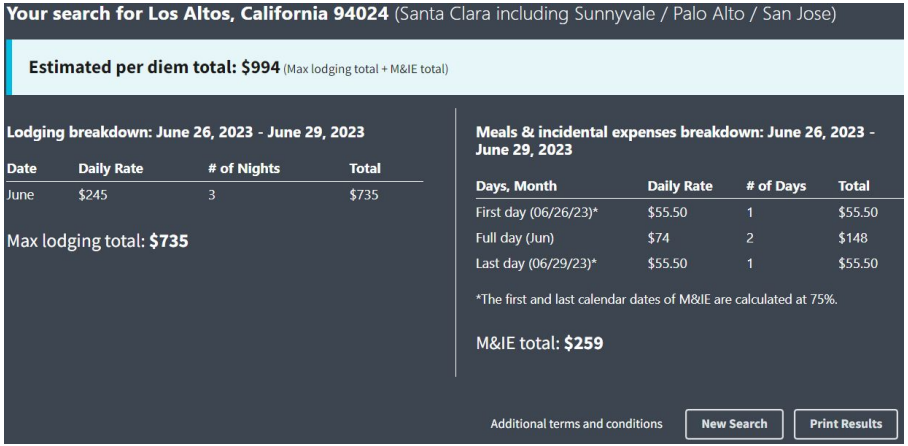
“Smarter,

not harder”



Subjective

"Oh look at that! That's awesome! I was just saying I wish there was a calculator and there is one. Has this always been here? This is wonderful. I'm excited, lots of good news today."



Your search for Los Altos, California 94024 (Santa Clara including Sunnyvale / Palo Alto / San Jose)

Estimated per diem total: $994 (Max lodging total + M&IE total)

Lodging breakdown: June 26, 2023 - June 29, 2023

Date	Daily Rate	# of Nights	Total
June	$245	3	$735

Max lodging total: **$735**

Meals & incidental expenses breakdown: June 26, 2023 - June 29, 2023

Days, Month	Daily Rate	# of Days	Total
First day (06/26/23)*	$55.50	1	$55.50
Full day (Jun)	$74	2	$148
Last day (06/29/23)*	$55.50	1	$55.50

*The first and last calendar dates of M&IE are calculated at 75%.

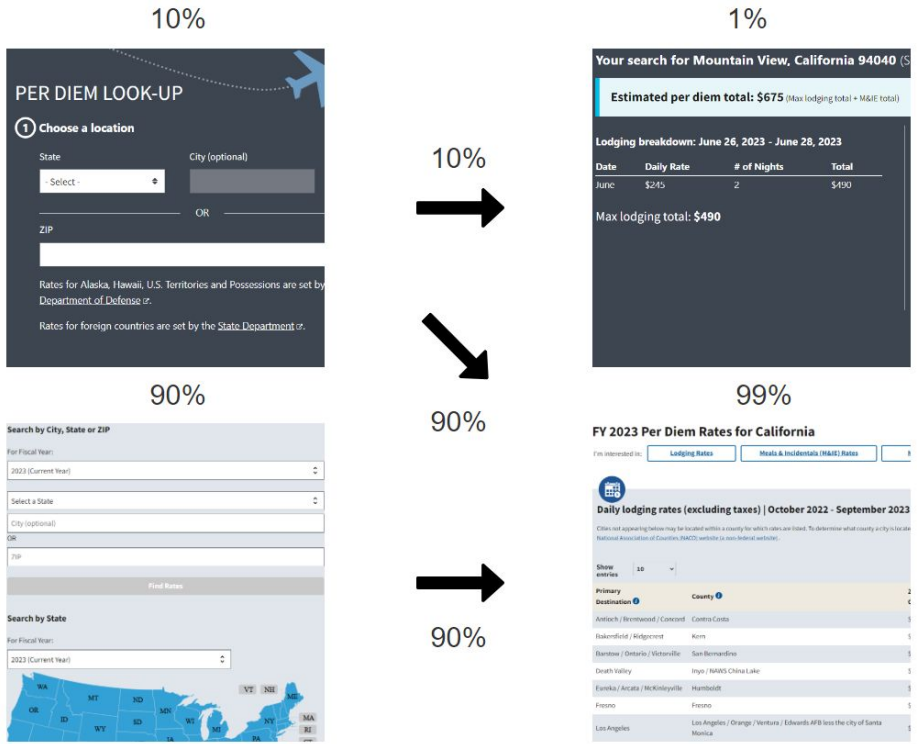
M&IE total: **$259**

Additional terms and conditions | New Search | Print Results

Web analytics

Percentage of web traffic on each lookup

Data collected from 06/01/22 to 06/30/23

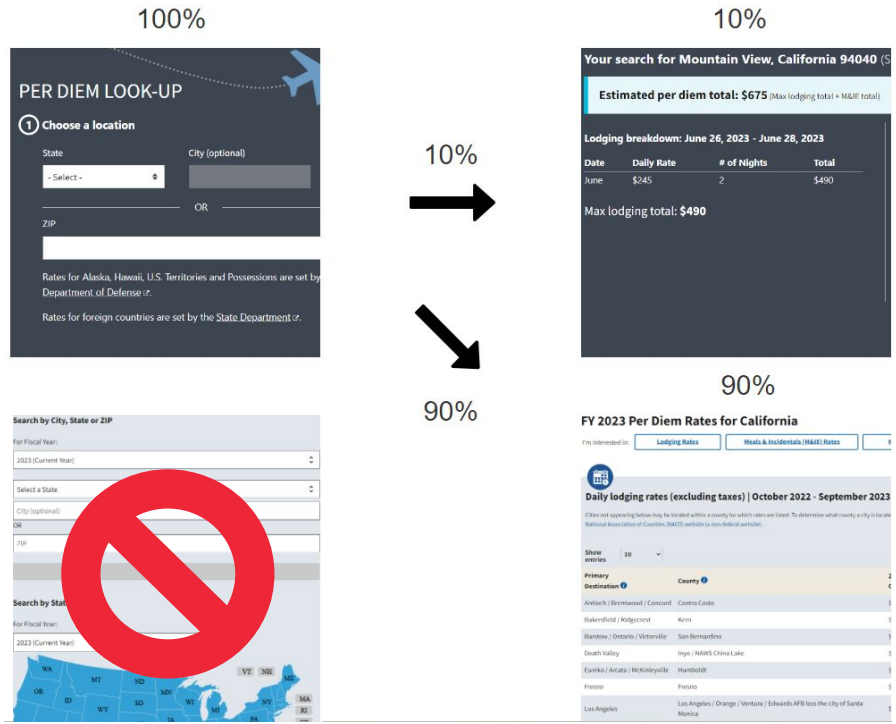


Section 4

Recommendations

Improving the per diem experience

Replace the old form with the new form.

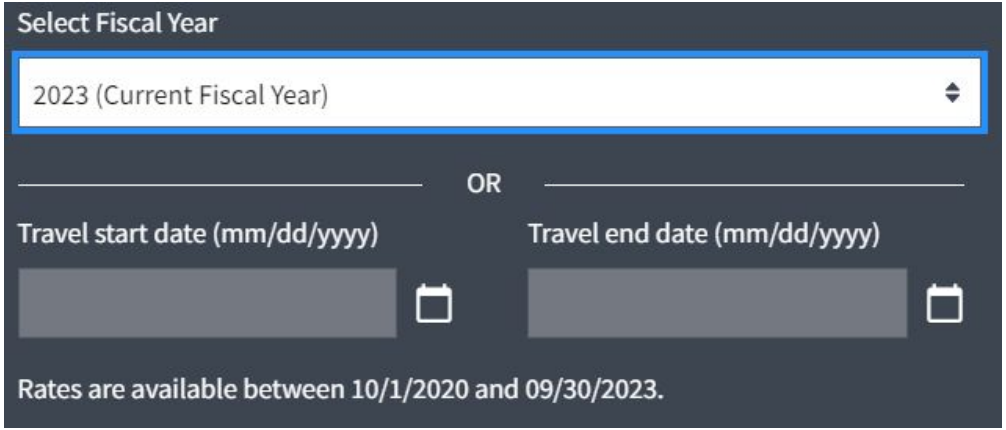


The amount of users seeing the new results increases from 1% to 10%, an order of magnitude larger.

Remove the conditional logic which disables the date fields.

“It's not letting me click the start date, so that to me is a little bonkers."

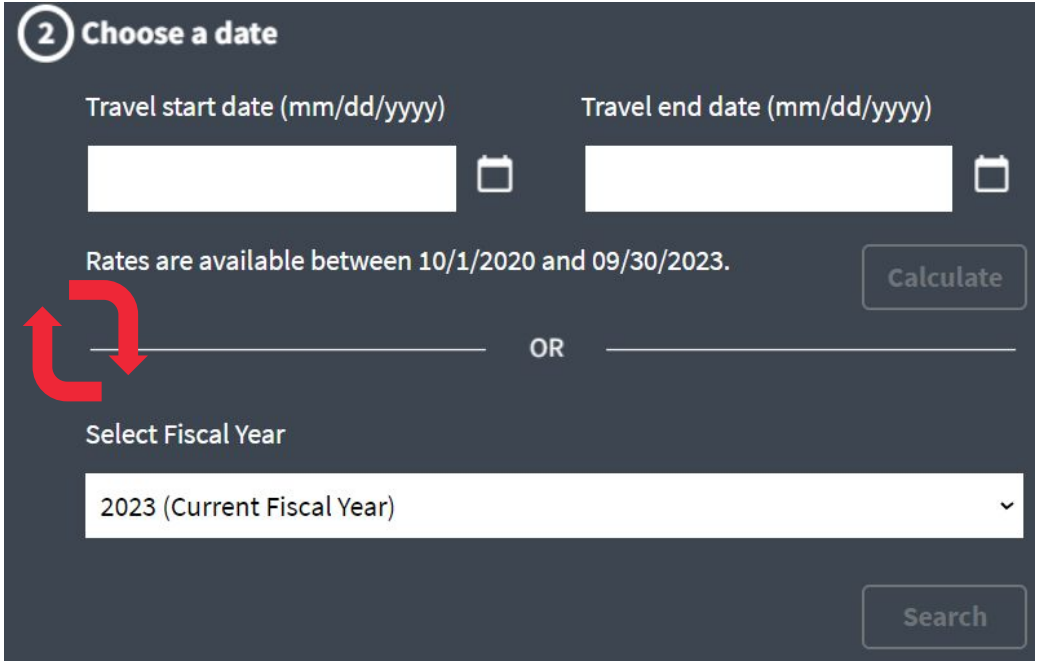
“Okay, does it even work? [laughs] I'm a little bit skeptical."



Swap the placement of the date picker and fiscal year dropdown.

"I think if it was ordered that way I would have naturally punched in the dates and maybe selected fiscal year underneath of that, and just see where it took me."

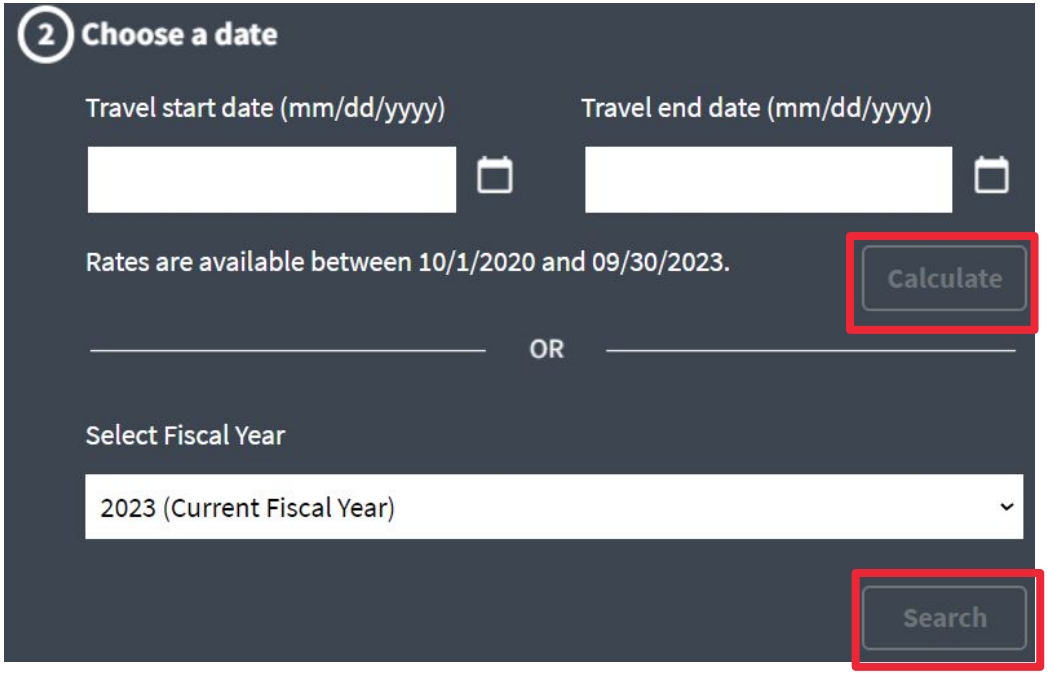
Proposed change ->



Highlight the new per diem calculator.

“if the start and end date was advertised as a calculator, people would pay more attention to it.”

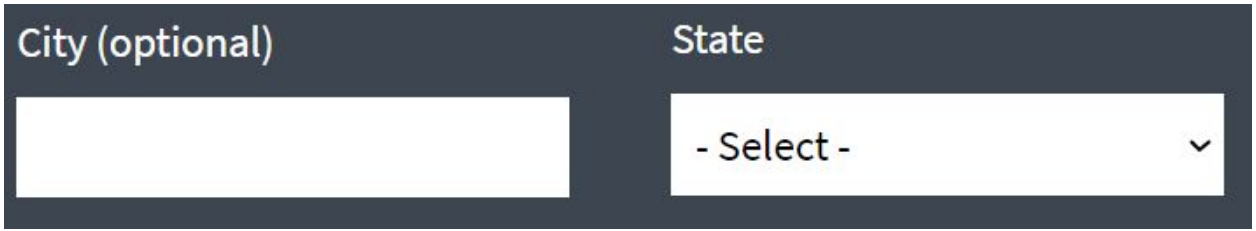
Proposed change ->



Swap the placement of the city and state fields.

Users are being encouraged to input a city because doing so increases their chance of success.

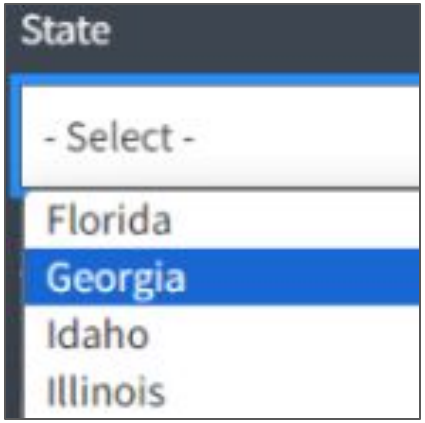
Proposed change



Add Alaska, Hawaii, and the U.S. territories to the state dropdown list.

“Okay, alphabet, not that hard. [pauses] Why, why? Why? Why?"

Super fun activity: try to find Hawaii in the image below.

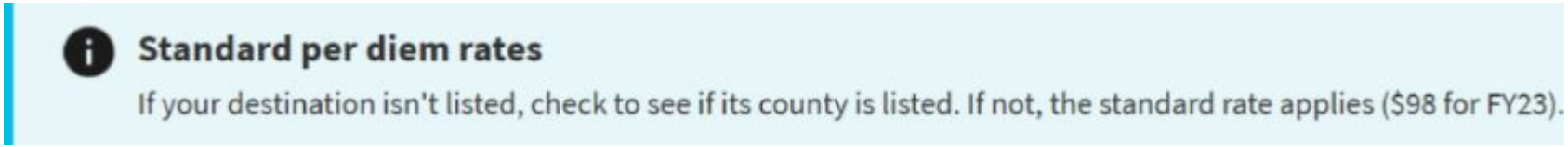


Highlight when the standard per diem rate applies.

Selecting the wrong per diem rate was the most common reason for failure.

"I don't see Fairplay listed. I feel like there's something I should be getting here that I'm not."

Proposed change



Summary of Recommendations

Complete report available upon request.

Email: eric.kellenberger@gsa.gov or kristal.byrd@gsa.gov

9	12	9
SEVERE	MODERATE	MILD