

# Building Public Trust and Confidence Through Model Court Websites

The screenshot displays the Texas Municipal Court website. At the top, a blue navigation bar contains the court's logo and the text "Texas Municipal Court" on the left, and links for "Coming to Court", "Respond to a Citation", "Jury Summons", "Your Rights", and "ESPAÑOL" on the right. Below the navigation bar is a white search area with the text "I want to" followed by a yellow dropdown menu currently set to "find the court hours". A large photograph of two women in a courtroom setting is featured below. A blue overlay on the left side of the photo contains the text "Mission Statement" and "Our mission is to be neutral, courteous, helpful, and fair for all members of the public." Below the photo, the page is divided into two columns. The left column is titled "Court Updates" and lists two items: "JAN 21, 2019 All court forms are now available online" and "Jan 1, 2019 Happy New Year!". The right column is titled "Upcoming Events" and lists three items: "Jan 30 Community Board meeting", "Feb 1 Family Neighborhood Potluck", and "Feb 12 Court Closed for Lincoln's Birthday".

## ABOUT THE CENTER FOR COURT INNOVATION

The Center for Court Innovation works to advance procedural fairness through demonstration projects, research, and training and technical assistance to court practitioners nationally. Through support from the State Justice Institute, the Bureau of Justice Assistance, and direct partnerships with localities, staff have trained hundreds of court professionals on procedural fairness and maintain a procedural fairness “speakers’ bureau” of topical experts from around the country who represent a variety of roles in the court system. The Center has developed a number of tools designed to help practitioners engage with the concept and improve their individual and agency-wide practice. Recent examples include:

- “What is Procedural Justice?,” a three-minute animated video introducing the topic, available on the Center’s Procedural Justice YouTube playlist;
- “To Be Fair,” a book of practitioner interviews about procedural justice and its applications in courts;
- “Procedural Justice: Fair Treatment Matters,” training materials that are applicable to a range of court audiences and are accompanied by a facilitator’s guide;
- “Practical Tips for Courts” outlines concrete communication strategies aligned with procedural justice; and
- Procedural Justice YouTube playlist.

[www.courtinnovation.org](http://www.courtinnovation.org)

## ABOUT THE TEXAS MUNICIPAL COURTS EDUCATION CENTER

The Texas Municipal Courts Education Center (TMCEC) strives to advance the fair and impartial administration of justice. In working toward this goal, TMCEC embraces its mission to provide high quality judicial education, technical assistance, and the necessary resource material to assist municipal judges, court support personnel, and prosecutors in obtaining and maintaining professional competence. Funded by the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals, the Center trains over 5,000 individuals each year on substantive legal issues, as well as best practices in court administration, such as the procedural justice initiative in partnership with the Center for Court Innovation.

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[www.tmcec.com](http://www.tmcec.com)

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A complementary product was developed under this award: “If Walls Could Talk: Can Better Court Signs Help Build Public Trust?”

This project would not be possible without the court leaders who volunteered their time and energy to advise during the planning period and pilot test the project prototype. Their efforts were significant – and the results impressive – within limited time and resource capacity.

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## Making a Case for Better Court Websites

The U.S. criminal justice system has recognized the need to engage new technologies to meet growing demands and changing priorities. Court websites have been among the resources through which courts can improve their service delivery for, as well as increase access to, diverse court users. As is the case across a range of sectors, court users now look online to answer questions about court procedures, available resources, and other court information, not to mention download court forms, pay fines, and access relevant online portals.

Municipal courts are no exception. National estimates suggest that upwards of 70 million cases a year are processed through municipal-level courts, and many states contain hundreds of these courts. As such, they are a common entry point to the justice system for hundreds of thousands of people across the country, and thus offer a prime opportunity for courts to make a good first impression. Some states have consolidated or reorganized the functions of these courts, and yet all states have some process by which to handle their high-volume, low-level dockets.

Despite the immense volume served by these courts, municipal courts (or similar) often have the most limited resources to dedicate to serving the public online and make meaningful investments in their websites from the user experience perspective. Also, as the operations of limited jurisdiction courts vary widely across the country, so do the practices surrounding the maintenance of their websites. Courts in small, rural jurisdictions may rely on one individual judge or magistrate to maintain their website, while courts in bigger cities may rely on their city's information technology department. Further, some courts may operate their websites on a paid content management system, while others may have the resources to operate their websites independently.

While most of these websites are designed and maintained by well-intentioned court professionals, the variety of capacity and quality varies considerably. These websites tend to be jargon-heavy and can fail to strike the right balance of quantity and quality of information. Some overly focus on the payment of fines and fees, perhaps shortcutting a process that should also assert the rights of defendants to plead not guilty and contest their charges. Others simply offer very little content because of limited resources and attention.

### Home pages of sample court websites

This screenshot shows a sample municipal court website. At the top, there is a breadcrumb trail: "You Are Here: [Home](#) > [Government](#) > [Departments](#) > Municipal Court". Below this is the title "Municipal Court" in a large, bold, red font. Underneath is a section titled "Responsibilities" in bold. The text below reads: "The [redacted] Municipal Court has jurisdiction over class C misdemeanors and City Ordinance violations that occur within the corporate city limits and are punishable by fine only." This is followed by a disclaimer: "Nothing contained herein is intended to be nor should be construed as legal advice and should not be relied upon as such. The information on this site is compiled and made available as a public service by the [redacted] Municipal Court. However, neither the Municipal Court nor the City of [redacted] makes any warranty as to the accuracy, reliability, or completeness of the information herein, and is not responsible for errors or omissions, or for results obtained from the use of this information. Distribution of the information does not constitute such a warranty. Use of the information is the sole responsibility of the user." Below the disclaimer is a link: "Have you received a citation? Learn [how to handle your ticket](#)." At the bottom of the page is a brown banner with white text: "Your hand may be on the wheel, but your mind is definitely not on the road. In fact, using your cell phone while driving quadruples your chances of being involved in a crash. Hang up and drive. It's the right call." To the right of this text is a logo for "TALKTEXTORCRASH" and a "Save a Life" logo.

This screenshot shows another sample municipal court website. At the top, there is a breadcrumb trail: "Departments". Below this is the title "MUNICIPAL COURT" in a large, bold, blue font. To the right of the title is a "Font Size:" control with a plus sign and a minus sign. Below the title is a paragraph: "The City of [redacted] Municipal Court is located at the corner of Main and [redacted] Street, adjacent to City Hall, and across from the Post Office Federal Building." This is followed by a paragraph: "You can pay traffic tickets [online](#), in person, or by mail." Below this is another paragraph: "The Justice of the Peace and Municipal Courts are the lowest level of the Texas Judicial System. More citizens come in contact with the Municipal Court than all other Texas courts combined." This is followed by a section titled "Our Mission:" in bold. The text below reads: "To serve the community through the promotion of justice by providing an impartial forum for the resolution of all cases brought before the court in a manner such that legal rights of individuals are safeguarded and public interest is protected." Below this is a section titled "Goals:" in bold. The text below lists four goals: "Ensure access to justice", "Ensure expedition and timeliness in case processing", "Strive for equality, fairness and integrity in court operations", and "Ensure independence and accountability of the court". Below this is a section titled "Jurisdiction:" in bold. The text below reads: "The City of [redacted] Municipal Court is responsible for the adjudication

All of these challenges, alongside a growing research basis for a concept called procedural justice, sparked the idea for this project. Procedural justice theory holds that when individuals feel that they are treated by the courts with respect and when they understand the process, have a chance to tell their side of the story, and view the system as transparent and unbiased, they are more likely to comply with and trust the court. This theory invites a number of questions about how courts might better meet the public's needs, while also improving compliance. What if court websites could leverage procedural justice research to help turn a simple online engagement into an opportunity to build trust between the public and courts? What opportunities do websites present to convey trust-building messages to a diverse set of users? How do those messages align with the court's other priorities? Might these changes even improve court staff morale and their sense of professionalism? This project documents an exploration of these questions.

## How to Use This Toolkit

This toolkit was developed to help court practitioners and other professionals who support court websites to improve their court's website. The end goal is to enhance court users' perceptions of fairness and improve trust and confidence in the justice system.

The core content of the toolkit is organized by a handful of key website components that were identified during project planning to be of highest priority to the broadest range of courts, as described below.

Recommendations are presented in two ways: first, through screenshots of a model website prototype for a fictional municipal court, and second, through screenshots of real courts in Texas that pilot tested the prototype. Lessons from the pilot efforts in these five Texas jurisdictions are embedded throughout.

The toolkit also provides some background on how the prototype was developed, outlines a recommended planning process for court website improvement project, and notes some design and communication basic tips.

All of these recommendations aim to connect back to one or more element of procedural fairness so that website improvements are more than a beautification effort, but rather one that may increase the public's trust and confidence in the court and improve court users' compliance with court orders.

Of course, this toolkit is not a substitute for professional technology or design services. But it may be helpful as a complement when considering desired improvements and starting a dialogue with relevant partners.

In addition to utilizing this toolkit, we encourage readers to explore the online prototype at [www.bit.ly/PJwebtemplate](http://www.bit.ly/PJwebtemplate). Clicking through the live prototype will give the best sense of how different components can interact with one another. The prototype is meant to serve as inspiration for design and content (as opposed to a plug-and-play website model). All of the content in the prototype can be used directly. You can copy and paste from the PDF version in the attachment at Appendix B.

## Developing the Project Prototype

The idea to develop a project prototype emerged after a planning process described below. Originally, project staff considered developing an actual model website, one that could be utilized directly by interested courts as a template of sorts. This was an alluring proposition because it would have offered a “plug and play” opportunity that offset some of the burden on court staff. Unfortunately, planning revealed that across Texas’s hundreds of municipal courts, there was no single platform that hosted all – or even most – of the existing court websites. To develop a model website would mean committing to a particular platform at the exclusion of others in use by other courts.

As an alternative, project staff developed a prototype. The prototype is meant to serve as design inspiration, as well as to provide recommended topic areas and model language. Unlike a model website, the prototype is viewable and accessible by all users, regardless of their existing platform. The hope is that these benefits would be outweighed by the need for individual courts to spend time adapting the content and style.

The prototype has four main components:

- 1) Home Page
- 2) Coming to Court
- 3) Respond to a Citation
- 4) Your Rights

Given the timeframe of the project, the goal was to zero in on and develop content for a small handful of topics. Of course, court websites are likely to have many more topics than this, but these four were identified as most universal across courts and best aligned with procedural justice principles.

This planning process included interviews with stakeholders at five different municipal courts in Texas. The roles of these stakeholders included judges, a court administrator, a director of court websites, and a vendor consultant. This process informed the Flow of Content Stakeholders Map (Fig. A), which illuminates the ways in which content flows from a particular stakeholder onto a website. While in some cases court personnel may have direct access to editing their website, in other cases, the content must be approved by city managers or other decision-makers.



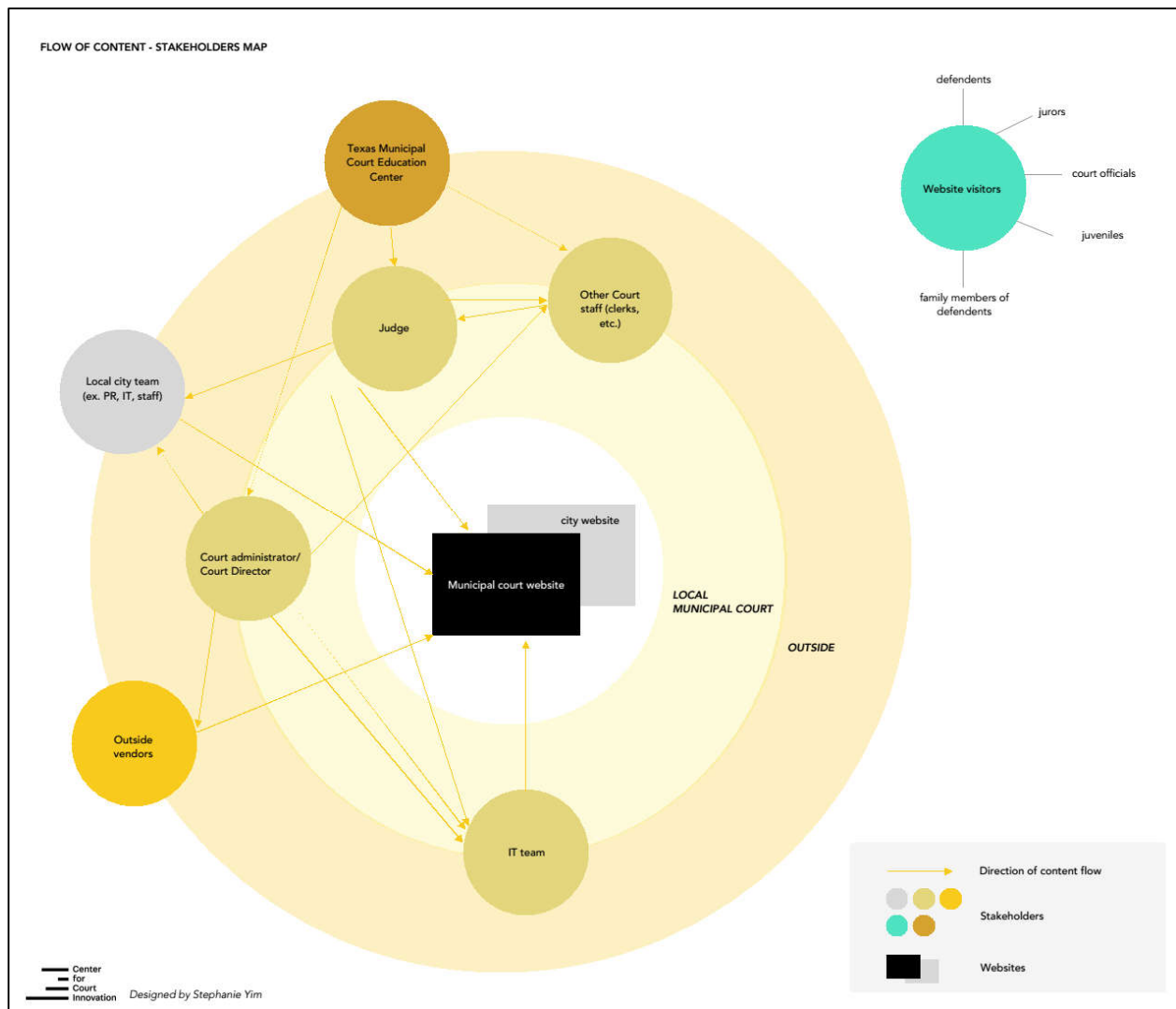


Fig. A, Flow of Content Stakeholders Map

Another focus of these interviews was to better understand stakeholders' user experience values. They indicated that they would like their websites to enable visitors to accomplish tasks, and that the website ought to feel both professional and approachable. These user experience values gleaned from stakeholder interviews included:

- Courts should feel professional but approachable;
- Websites should help users "feel like an adult" and enable visitors to do what they need to do;
- Websites should walk visitors through their options and their trade-offs;
- Websites should be interactive; the fewer the words the better; and
- Technology resources vary widely between municipalities.

The final stage of planning for the prototype was a multi-site website audit, in which project staff assessed ten existing municipal court websites for adherence to both user experience metrics and procedural justice principles. This audit illuminated common areas in need of improvement, as well as identified some promising practices. See Appendix A for the audit framework.

Project planners then worked to develop the prototype. Some elements of the prototype were tested using an online survey platform called Survey Monkey Audience, through which approximately 100 potential website users were asked about proposed website language. For example, two proposed court mission statements (one short in length, and one longer in length) were “A/B tested” to determine which made the user feel more confident in the fairness of the court. The survey was also used to explore trade-offs in providing more complete explanations of legal terms and rights, at the risk of being too text-heavy.

All of this input informed the development of the prototype, proving it ready to be tested by real live courts throughout Texas. Those pilot efforts, including recommendations for site-specific planning steps, are described on the following section.

## Planning a Website Improvement Project

Planning a website improvement project may not be like any other project the court has implemented. For one, it may need to involve many different stakeholders that work in the courthouse, which may be a large and diverse group. It should also incorporate user feedback, as noted below, which may be an unfamiliar process to the court. These tips are outlined to support planning efforts.

### 1. Engage system stakeholders

Involving all stakeholders who interface with court users, and who maintain the court website is essential. A variety of court staff may have unique insight into the types of information that are useful to court users. For example, court clerks may routinely answer questions in person or by phone that may be resolved if the information were available on the website. Court security may encounter court users who are unaware of courthouse rules, like not bringing a weapon, or being searched, and these situations may be avoided if this information was available on the website to be reviewed before someone arrives at court. Additionally, some content may need pre-approval by the local judge, or the city's technology department, so ensure that someone with the authority to approve changes to the website is on the planning team or notified of this project. Once the appropriate stakeholders are identified, consider what processes you will use to glean information (*e.g.*, one-on-one meetings, multidisciplinary focus groups) and strategies to collaborate to implement changes.

### 2. Determine goals and priorities

Once the appropriate stakeholders have been identified, the group should convene to decide together the goals of the improvement project, and priority areas to target. Redesigning an entire website can be a time-intensive undertaking and determining achievable objectives can help the project be more manageable. Consider, which areas of your website would benefit the most from promoting values of procedural justice? Review the website together and evaluate its current effectiveness in communicating elements of procedural justice (respect, voice, understanding, and neutrality); the audit framework [Appendix A] may be helpful with this process. The group should decide on priority content areas that are in need of improvement, as well as priority areas for enhancing the website user's experience (*i.e.*, navigation, accessibility, user-friendliness). Additionally, the process of reviewing the website as a group may elicit new ideas that hadn't before been considered.

### 3. Collect existing metrics that align with project goals

Measuring the impact of the changes to the website can be challenging, but essential. After deciding on the priority areas to tackle, the appropriate personnel should collect existing metrics that are relevant to the project goals. First, screenshots of the original website should be taken to memorialize old features and to visualize changes at the end of the project. If available, other metrics you can collect and record are the current number of unique user visits, the average time users spend on the website, top traffic sources (*e.g.*, where the visitor comes from), bounce rate (percentage of visits in which a person leaves your website from the landing page without browsing any further), and behavior flow (path visitors take when they come to website). Additional metrics to consider documenting if they are available and relevant to your project goals are the number of failures to appear at first appearance, the percentage of not guilty pleas at first appearance, and the percentage of citations resolved (paid) online. These are all areas that may change depending on the improvements to your court website.

#### 4. Measure the impact

In the planning phase, the team should determine the types of metrics to keep track of in the future to measure the impact of any changes. Some examples of strategies to keep track of metrics are to use Google Analytics, issue manual court surveys, prompt for feedback after a user pays a citation online, allow the visitors to rate the court (ex. 5 stars), or send a survey to each person who pays a fine online. Google Analytics can also be helpful with tracking website traffic, most visited pages, bounce rates, and seeing where visitors come from.

#### 5. Leverage this work to enhance other trust-building efforts

Website improvements can be a meaningful way to spur discussions among court personnel about other strategies to improve fairness and build public trust. Anticipate that planning discussions will generate ideas during the design phase that will amount to improvements beyond the website: such as improved communication between stakeholders or improvement of courthouse signage. Catalog these ideas and consider relevant planning needs.

## Design, Communication, and User Experience Basics

Below are some basic principles to keep in mind when beginning a project like this to improve court websites.

### User Experience

- **Layout and Site Hierarchy:** The narrative of your website is told through its structure and layout. The layout of your content helps a user understand what is important to pay attention to and helps guide them through your information. By using alignment, spacing, and size (*e.g.*, font size), you can craft a usable and delightful experience.
- **Navigation:** Upon deciding the site hierarchy of your content, your choice of navigation will affect how a user can access and move through your website. Navigation should always be easily accessible from all pages of your website and should allow users to get to what they need quickly. A site generally has a primary navigation system, usually located at the header, but can often have secondary navigation systems to help users reach more detailed information.
- **Language Access:** Allow easy and accessible way for users to switch the website into their preferred language. When designing a website that caters to multiple languages, make sure that your layout does not break the alignment and spacing of your content if the text length changes. Any non-English content should be coordinated with the court's certified interpreters to ensure consistency.
- **Mobile and Desktop Friendly (aka "responsiveness"):** Your website should be accessible through desktop browsers and various mobile phone sizes. Determine the breakpoints which works best for your users and choose the right font size and spacing that will make your content legible. Responsiveness does not mean translating every piece of content and imagery from a larger to smaller screen (*e.g.*, certain elements like complicated animations that work best in desktop may not need to be in the mobile experience). Responsiveness means creating a mobile experience that reflects the desktop experience without reducing anything that is important to the content.
- **Accessibility:** Your website should be designed so that people with disabilities can also navigate, perceive, understand, and interact with your website. Learn more about the elements of accessibility at <https://www.w3.org/WAI/fundamentals/accessibility-intro/>.

### Visual Design & Brand

- **Font size and type:** Fonts help define your site's overall brand and aesthetic. Choosing the right font is important to legibility of your content. Generally choosing one or two fonts that complement each other with different weights (*e.g.*, italic, normal, bold, extra bold) is a good place to start.
- **Colors:** Colors are what convey your brand and site's personality and the emotions you want your users to feel. Colors are an important foundation to the aesthetic of your website but also its accessibility. Your color palette is another language to describe and prioritize your content (*e.g.*, an error can be indicated with the color red). A good place to start is to choose one primary and one secondary color for your website.
- **Logo:** Your logo represents who you are as a brand or organization. Choosing the right treatment of colors, symbolism, and typography will set the tone of your brand. Ensure that

your logo is optimized not just for printing, but also for the digital space where multiple sizes are often needed (*e.g.*, mobile vs. desktop).

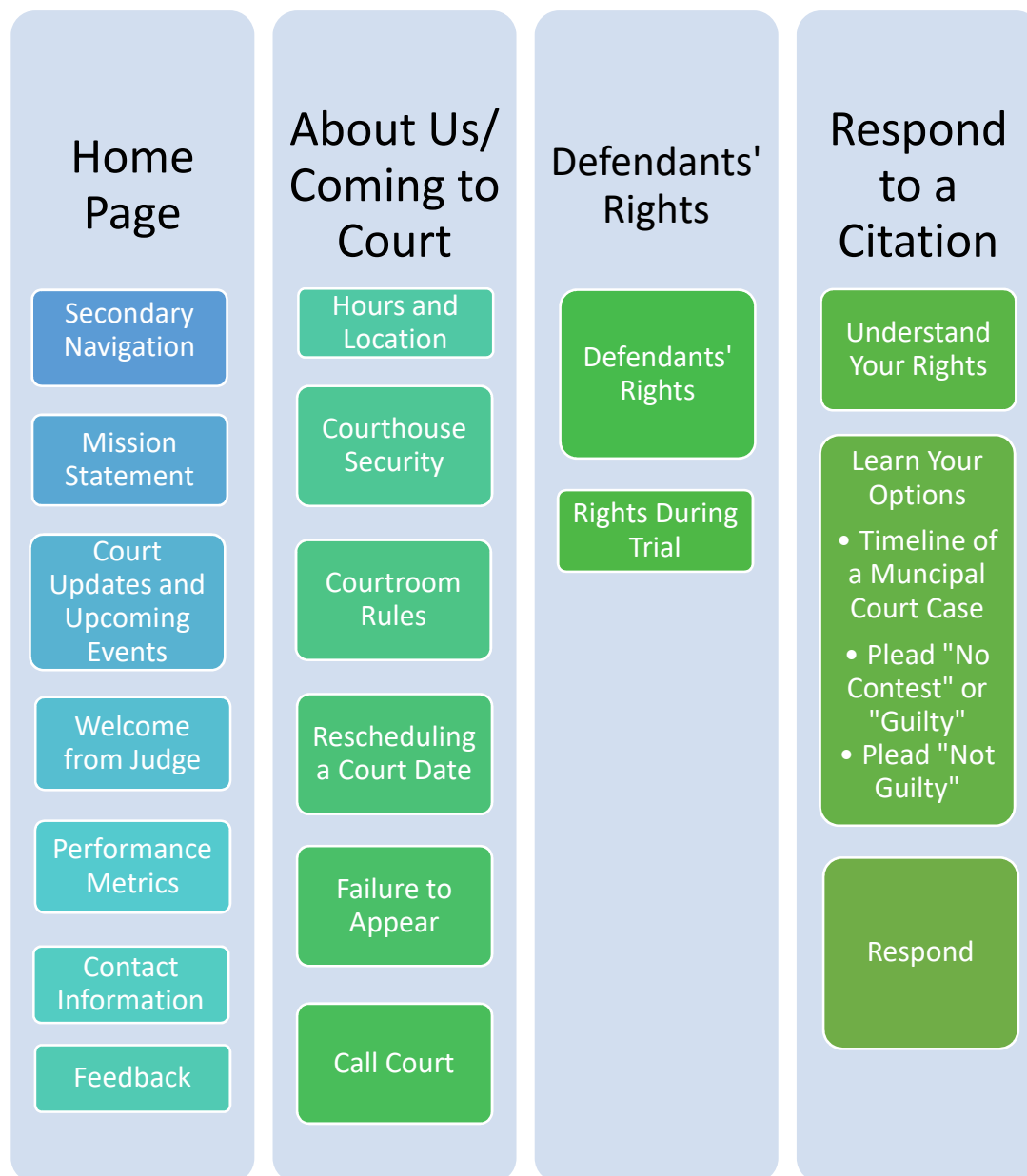
- **Imagery:** Using imagery to complement your content is very useful. High-quality, well-lit images on your website can set the tone of your content and also instill trust in your brand. In addition, using imagery to highlight the people behind the court is an effective way to add a sense of humanity to your content. Avoid stock images if possible (*e.g.*, a judge's gavel); use photos or images unique to your court instead.
- **Quality and Accessibility:** Content is integral to the usefulness of your website. Content is generally prioritized in terms of importance and frequency of use to the user. Choosing the right content and way to display them will also affect the search engine optimization (SEO) of your website through internet searches.
- **Reading Level:** Your website content should be written at an appropriate reading level for the court's audience – approximately 6th grade or below (this is the reading level of the average American). Use plain language in place of legal jargon or terms, and when possible limit the number of words per sentence, as well as the use of complex, multisyllabic words.

What follows is a walk-through of the key aspects of a model website, from the site map, to each of the key topic areas explored as part of this project.

Elements drawn from the prototype are highlighted with a **green outline**; elements drawn from the pilot sites are noted with a **black outline**.

## Site Map

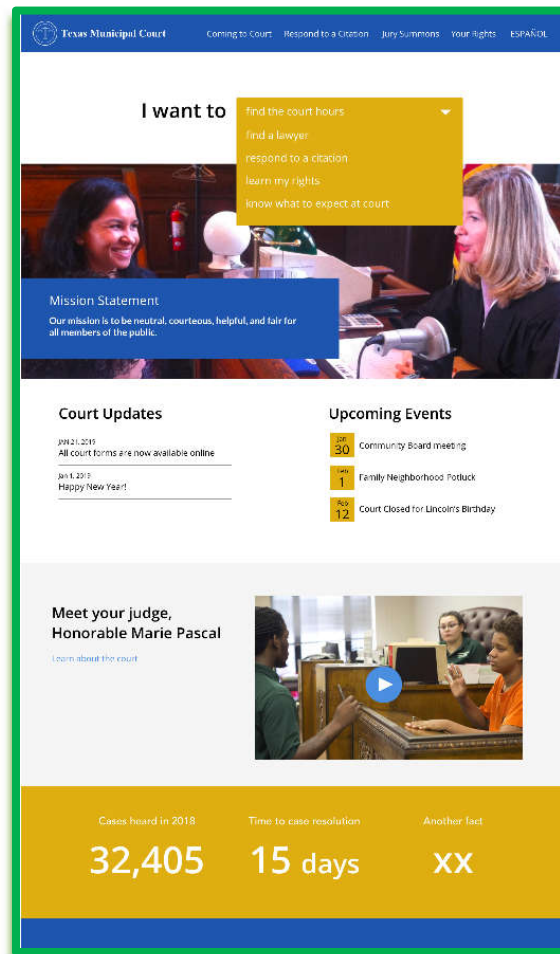
A site map defines and organizes the key content areas for a website. The prototype for this project follows the site map below with several subtopics filed under each of the four primary areas. These pages are recommended areas to target for improvement, but as discussed above, are not the only pages that a court website can or should have. Your court website should be responsive to the needs of your community, and should have pages that reflect important local interests.



## Home Page

A website home page provides the first impression for visitors that can either reinforce or enhance the perceptions they have about the court. For users contacting the court for the first time, the website may in fact be the very first impression they have of the court. Therefore, the court website home page is a great opportunity to impart the court's mission and values, and build the user's trust. The subtopics below aim to help website developers and court stakeholders strike the right balance in terms of image, content quantity, and usability for this important landing page.

### Home Page

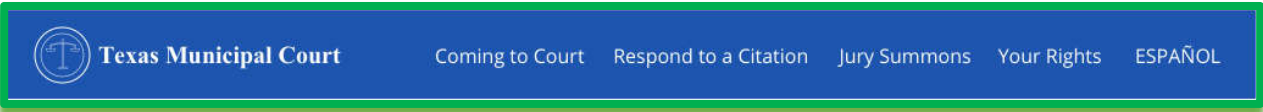


## Navigation

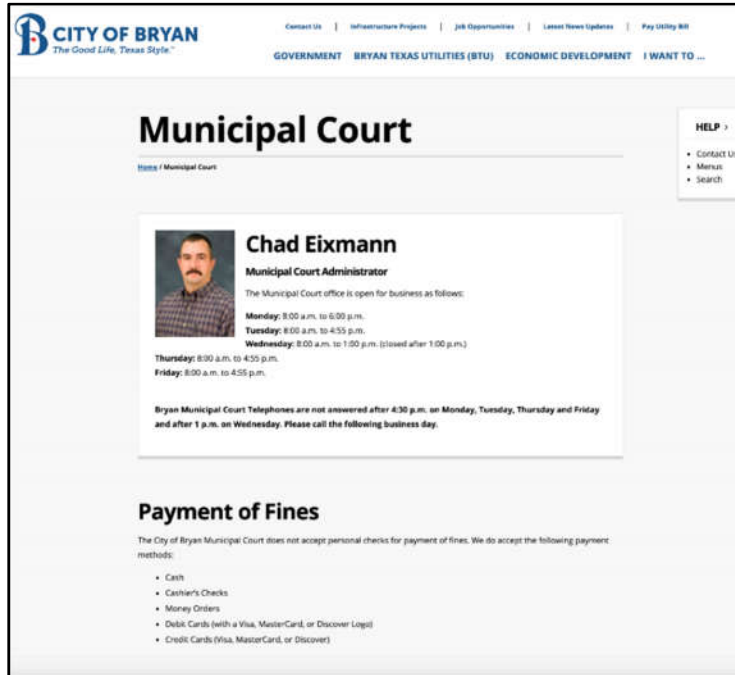
Although the home page is an important section of the website, it is critical not to overload the home page with an excess of information. Use it as a starting point to navigate the user to other sections of the website. The main navigation bar at the top of the home page (and every page) should allow a user to visit the primary pages of your website, which should be the most useful or frequently visited primary pages.



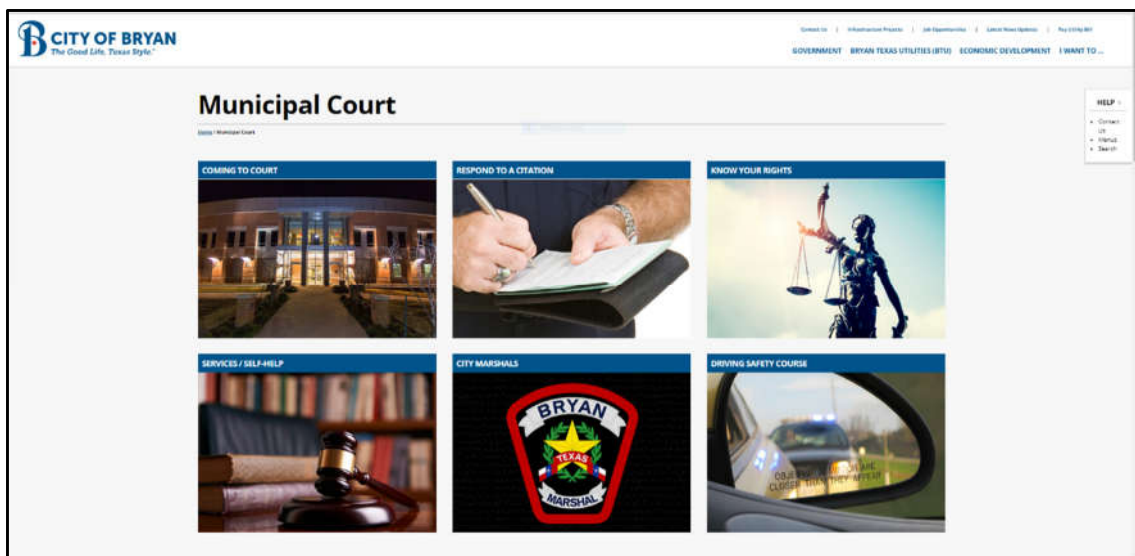
Main Navigation Bar



Before the pilot, one court that participated in the pilot project had only a single page for their website. This put a heavy burden on this sole page to house all of the information the court aimed to convey. During the pilot, court leadership created new subpages and a navigation system to alleviate this burden on the home page. See below for before and after images.



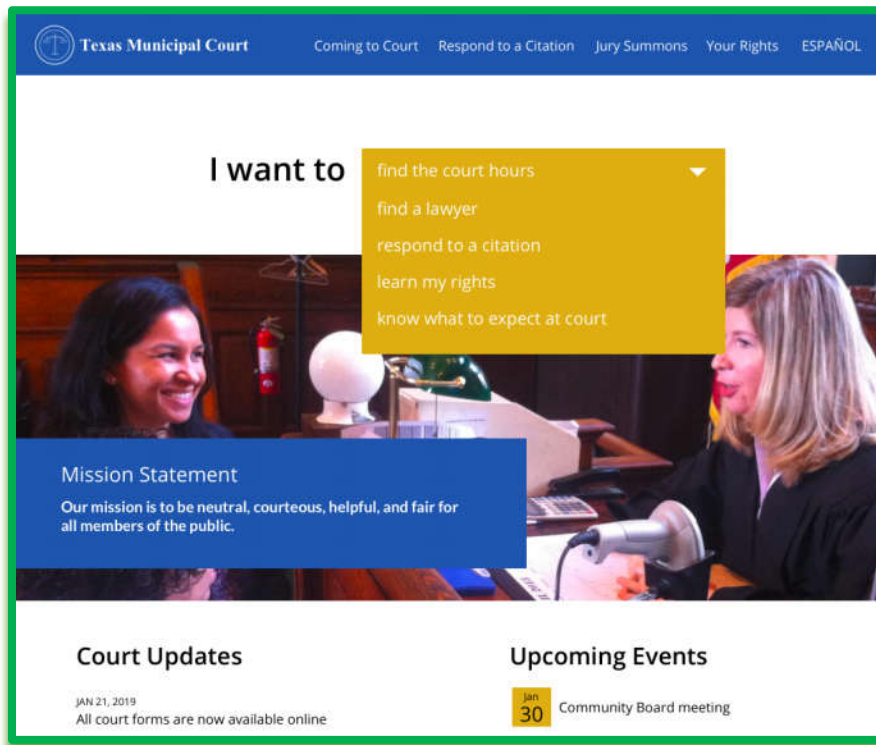
Bryan, TX home page (before the pilot)



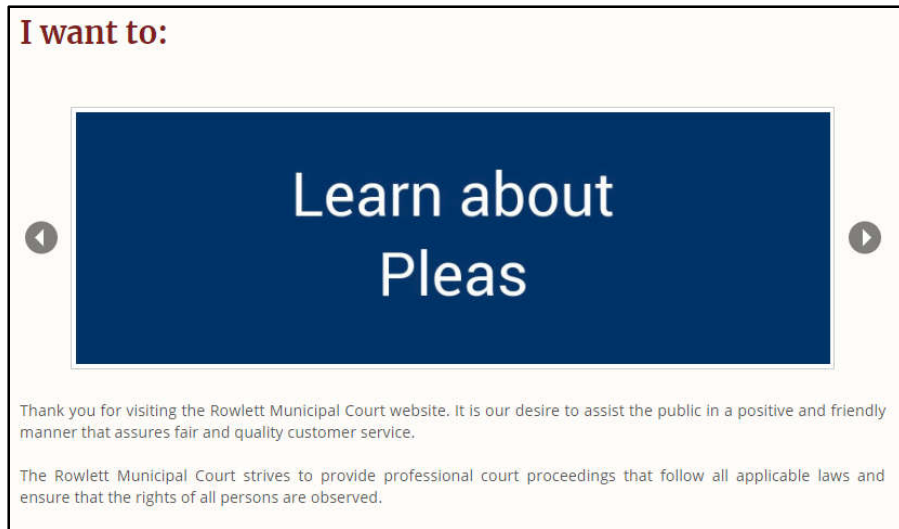
Bryan, TX home page (after the pilot)

The main navigation bar allows the court user to access primary pages, but there may be specific actions that the court user wants to take, for which a second navigation system is useful. Using active, empowering language like “I want to,” can impart to the court user a sense of agency over the court process. This secondary navigation system can be tailored to the website’s technological capacity, and in addition to a drop-down list, could be a “rotating carousel” (rotating imagery and/or text), or a group of clickable icons. These links should be to secondary pages, rather than primary pages. The two navigation systems work to increase the website’s usability, by reducing the amount of time the user spends working to find what they are looking for.

### Secondary Navigation



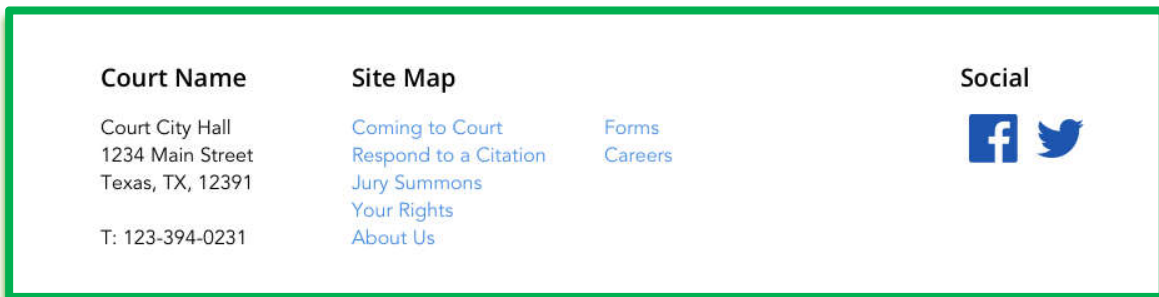
In many jurisdictions, the design capacity of court websites is limited by their external content management platform. Some platforms don’t allow for a drop-down menu, and several pilot sites found creative solutions, like rotating carousels, to implementing a secondary navigation system, as shown in the Rowlett example below.



*Rowlett, TX secondary navigation (after the pilot)*

A final way in which navigation on the home page can increase the usability of the website is to include a site map at the bottom of every page. Additional pages that are not as important to include in the main navigation, such as auxiliary pages, can be included in the footer in the site map (ex. forms or careers page).

*Site Map*



### Mission Statement

Another way in which the home page can increase procedural justice is by showcasing the court’s commitment to fairness via its mission statement. If your court does not yet have a mission statement, this website improvement project is an excellent excuse for court stakeholders to convene and develop one together. Although there may be a lot that the court would like to convey, the mission statement should be kept concise, about one to three sentences. Adding the mission statement of the court upfront on the home page helps the user better understand the values of the court. Some courts choose to highlight the specific elements of procedural justice within their mission statements: respect, voice, understanding, and neutrality.

During the planning phase for the pilot, many municipal courts expressed concern that they were perceived as revenue-generators by collecting fines and fees, even though there are clear rules requiring their neutrality and objectivity in this regard. To address this concern, some courts participating in the pilot chose to deemphasize the message of payment that was previously quite prominent on their home

pages, and instead acknowledge defendants' rights and options before connecting users to payment options.

**BEFORE PILOT**

- Citation search is most prominent
- Navigation is solely in the left toolbar

West Lake Hills, TX home page

The screenshot shows the West Lake Hills, TX home page for the Municipal Court. The page has a green header with the title 'West Lake Hills, TX home page' and a search bar. Below the header is a navigation menu with icons for 'Agendas & Minutes', 'Citizen Alert', 'Pay Online', 'Notify Me', and 'Let Us Know'. The main content area is titled 'Municipal Court' and features a large 'CITATION SEARCH' button with a link 'click here to look up your citation...'. Below the button are sections for 'Responsibilities', 'Contacting the Court', and 'Jurisdiction & Functions'. The left sidebar contains a list of navigation options: 'Ways to Handle a Ticket', 'Court Appearance Requests', 'Deferred Disposition', 'Alcohol Awareness', 'Driving Safety Course', 'Dismissal Information', 'Juveniles', 'Warrants', 'Extensions & Payment Plans', 'Forms', 'Frequently Asked Questions', and 'Pay Online'. The right sidebar contains contact information for the Municipal Court, including the address '911 Westlake Drive, West Lake Hills, TX 78746', phone number '512-327-1862', hours 'Monday - Friday 7:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.', and a 'Quick Links' section with links to 'DPS' Failure to Appear Program', 'Alcohol-Drug-Tobacco Courses', 'Defensive Driving Courses', 'Certified Driving Record form (3A)', and 'Express Lane Driving Safety Course E-file'.

## AFTER PILOT

- The court's jurisdiction and defendants' rights are most prominent
- Additional navigation routes users to commonly accessed topics, including fine alternatives
- Users still have easy access to Citation Search

The screenshot shows the homepage of the West Lake Hills Municipal Court website. At the top, there is a banner with the text "West Lake Hills Texas" in a stylized font over a background image of a stone wall and greenery. Below the banner is a navigation bar with a search box and several utility links: "Agenda & Minutes", "Citizen Alert", "Pay Online", "Notify Me\*", and "Let Us Know".

The main content area is titled "Municipal Court" and features a large image of a courtroom interior with a wooden wall and a circular logo that reads "WEST LAKE HILLS TEXAS". Below the image, a paragraph states: "The West Lake Hills Municipal Court of Record is a state court with jurisdiction over Class C and fine-only misdemeanors that occur in the city's territorial limits. Cases heard in this court include traffic, juvenile, and state penal code offenses where the maximum punishment is a fine."

At the bottom of the main content area, there are three prominent buttons: "YOUR RIGHTS", "COURSES & COMMUNITY SERVICE", and "CITATION SEARCH".

On the left side, there is a vertical navigation menu with the following items: "Ways to Handle a Ticket", "Courses & Community Service", "Rights", "Court Appearance Requests", "Deferred Disposition", "Alcohol Awareness", "Driving Safety Course", "Dismissal Information", "Juveniles", "Warrants", "Extensions & Payment Plans", "Forms", "Frequently Asked Questions", and "Pay Online".

On the right side, there are two sections: "Contact Us" and "Quick Links". The "Contact Us" section provides the address "911 Westlake Drive, West Lake Hills, TX 78746", the phone number "Ph: 512-327-1862", and the hours "Monday - Friday 7:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.". The "Quick Links" section lists several services: "DPS' Failure to Appear Program", "Alcohol-Drug-Tobacco Courses", "Defensive Driving Courses", "Certified Driving Record form (3A)", and "Express Lane Driving Safety Course E-file".

Below the navigation buttons, the West Lake Hills home page also offers a scrolling slideshow with additional information, including courtroom sign-in instructions, procedures for speaking with the prosecutor and accessing alternative sentencing, legal representation, and the court’s contact information.

West Lake Hills, TX home page (after the pilot)

**CITATION SEARCH**

**THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION IS INTENDED TO PROVIDE YOU WITH COURT RULES AND PROCEDURES.**

**PLEASE WATCH.**

**CITATION SEARCH**

**SIGN -IN**

1. Upon arrival, check in with the bailiff on duty.
2. Legibly print your full name on the sign-in sheet for your court time.
3. Have a seat until your name is called by the Prosecutor or Judge.

**CITATION SEARCH**

**BE PREPARED**

It is best to have the following items readily available when approaching the Judge's bench:

- DRIVER'S LICENSE / PROOF OF IDENTIFICATION
- VEHICLE INSURANCE WITH CURRENT DATE COVERAGE
- SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION
- PAYMENT – We accept Visa, Mastercard, Discover, Cash, Money orders, Cashier's checks. A 3% processing fee is applied to all card transactions. **No personal checks.**

**CITATION SEARCH**

**SPEAKING WITH THE PROSECUTOR**

- The prosecutor will call your name in the order that you signed in.
- The prosecutor will decide whether to offer you a plea bargain, which must be approved and granted by the court.
- After speaking with the prosecutor, be seated and wait for the court to call your case.

**CITATION SEARCH**

**CONTACT INFORMATION**

**WEST LAKE HILLS MUNICIPAL COURT**  
 911 Westlake Drive  
 West Lake Hills, Texas 78746

✉ court@westlakehills.org  
 www. www.westlakehills.org/court  
 ☎ 512-327-1862  
 📠 512-327-1863

## Court Updates and Events

The home page is also a great place to provide visitors with relevant, current information about court updates or upcoming events. The court can increase perceptions of respect for visitors if they relay up-to-date information about court closures and can build a sense of community by announcing local events.

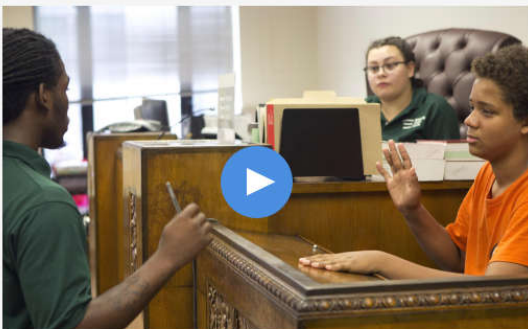
### *Court Updates*

Court Updates	Upcoming Events
JAN 21, 2019 All court forms are now available online	Jan 30 Community Board meeting
Jan 1, 2019 Happy New Year!	Feb 1 Family Neighborhood Potluck
	Feb 12 Court Closed for Lincoln's Birthday

## Welcome Message from Judge

The home page can also include a welcome message from the judge of the court to help make the visitor feel welcomed and heard. If possible, consider using or creating multimedia, such as a video with the judge welcoming visitors. This personalized touch can be continued throughout the website, as well, by including photos and/or names of other key court personnel.

### *Welcome Message*

<p><b>Meet your judge, Honorable Marie Pascal</b></p> <p><a href="#">Learn about the court</a></p>	
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### Meet your judge



Honorable Belinda Herrera

Judge Herrera is the Presiding Municipal Court Judge for the City of Bee Cave, Texas. She was appointed to this position in June 2018 and worked as an associate judge for the City of Bee Cave since 2011.

Judge Herrera also serves as an associate judge for the City of Austin. She has worked in public service most of her career. Judge Herrera has lived in Austin since 1983, received her undergraduate degree from University of Texas at Austin and her law degree from the University of Houston.

*Welcome message from the judge in Bee Cave, TX (after the pilot)*

#### Presiding Judge

### The Honorable Albert Navarro



Albert Navarro, Presiding Judge of Bryan Municipal Court, was born and raised in Waco, Texas. After high school, he attended Baylor University and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree with a major in Political Science. He was accepted to and graduated from the University of Texas School of Law with a Doctor of Jurisprudence degree. After receiving his license to practice law by the State Bar of Texas in 1989, he moved to the Bryan/College Station area and began his legal career.

Judge Navarro served 13 years as an attorney for legal services representing indigent clients in the Brazos and surrounding counties. After leaving the legal services program, he became the prosecutor for the City of Bryan in 2003 and continued as a prosecutor through 2007. Navarro maintained a full time private practice after 2007 but always had a desire for public and community service. In June of 2010, he was appointed as an Associate Judge for the Bryan Municipal Court. After the retirement of then Presiding Judge Latham Boone III, Albert Navarro was sworn in as the Presiding Judge for the Municipal Court on June 1, 2015.

*Welcome message from the judge in Bryan, TX (after the pilot)*



## Court Performance Measures

Another feature to consider adding to the home page is relevant court performance measures. The goal of highlighting court statistics is to provide transparency, increase the perception of neutrality of the court, and add more context around the workings of the court. The planning team should think about which metrics might be appropriate for their community. These may include number of cases heard, average disposition rates, average time to disposition, court user survey results, etc.



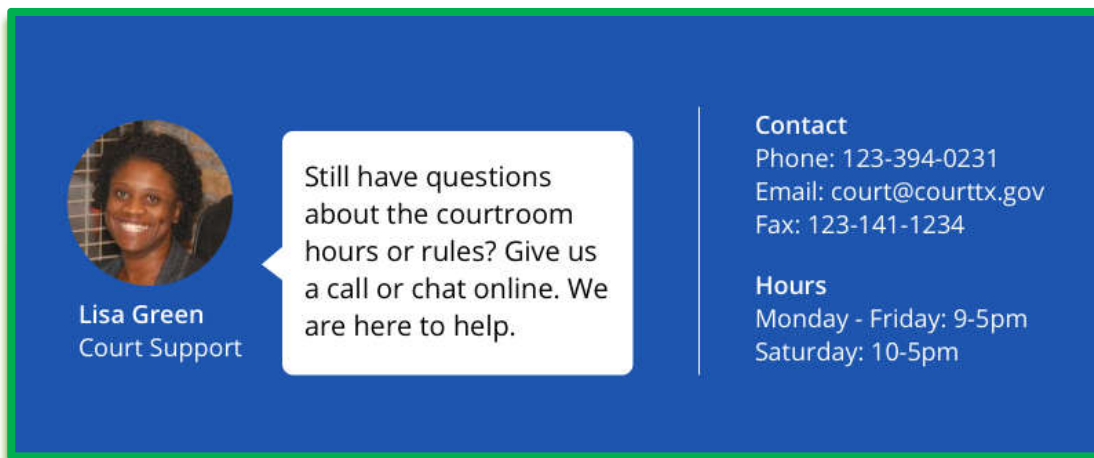
The screenshot shows a white rectangular box with a thin black border. On the left side, there is a circular profile picture of a man with a beard and a blue button-down shirt. Below the picture, the text reads "Jacob Wetzel, Court Administrator". To the right of the picture, a quote in blue text says: "It is my goal to provide the highest quality court services. Please let me know how I can help." Below the quote, there are two performance metrics. The first is "Case Filed in 2018:" followed by the number "9,820". The second is "Clearance Rate for 2018:" followed by "115.7%". A smaller line of text below the clearance rate reads: "(The number of outgoing cases as a percentage of the number of incoming cases. Target: 90%)".

*Performance metrics on home page, Rowlett, TX (after the pilot)*

## Contact Information

The home page should also include contact information for court personnel so that visitors can readily access a phone number in case they are not able to resolve their question or concern online. The contact information should be situated near the bottom of the home page so that it isn't the first thing the user relies on. If possible, provide an online chat option if that resource can be made available for your community.

*Contact Information*



The screenshot shows a blue rectangular box with a green border. On the left side, there is a circular profile picture of a woman with dark hair. Below the picture, the text reads "Lisa Green Court Support". To the right of the picture, a white speech bubble contains the text: "Still have questions about the courtroom hours or rules? Give us a call or chat online. We are here to help." To the right of the speech bubble, there is contact information. Under the heading "Contact", it lists: "Phone: 123-394-0231", "Email: court@courtx.gov", and "Fax: 123-141-1234". Below that, under the heading "Hours", it lists: "Monday - Friday: 9-5pm" and "Saturday: 10-5pm".

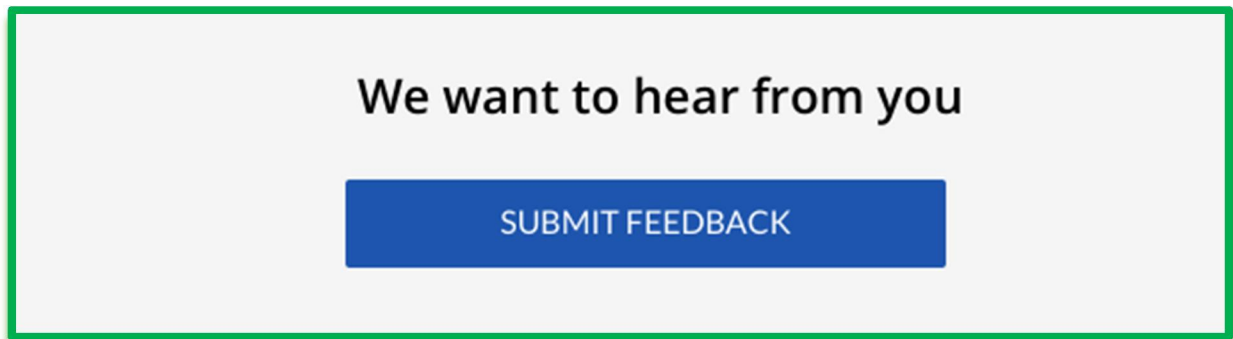
## User Feedback

In order to give the court user more voice in the process, websites can solicit user feedback about both their experience on the website but also with the court overall. Be sure to determine a goal for the user feedback. Is the primary purpose to improve accessibility? Is the primary purpose to make the website more helpful? When asking questions/creating survey questions, be aware of leading questions and questions that focus on subjective opinions (*e.g.*, “Do you like this new redesign?”). Focus on questions that help highlight the user's experience and the usability of the service (*e.g.*, “On a scale of 1-5, 1 being least helpful and 5 being most helpful, please indicate whether the side navigation is useful to find x.”).

When considering user feedback, keep in mind that you are not the user and the user is not you. Understand that users often don't know what they want or need. It is preferable to observe user behavior to extract design insights rather than ask a user what they need or want. At the same time, procedural justice research does give court staff great guidance about what users want to feel or experience.

Surveys are a low-cost, low-tech way to access user feedback. These can be embedded within the website directly or administered in person at the courthouse. Other methods include “think alouds” or focus groups, which are good for understanding a user's thought process while going through an experience. Similarly, in-person observation of users going through an actual process – such as paying a fine online or accessing information about lawyer referrals – can also be helpful, albeit time-consuming.

### *Feedback*



## About Us / Coming to Court

### Hours and Location

The Coming to Court section of the website provides visitors with useful information in anticipation of their day in court. The hours and directions of the courthouse should be prominently displayed, as well as a map of the court to increase a visitor's understanding. Google Map integration allows for individualized directions. Some jurisdictions may consider including special notes on hours and availability, as Bryan, TX did below. It may seem obvious, but ensure that contact information is accurate and reliably matches the services available at the court. Providing a phone number to a line that rings and rings unanswered may actually work against perceptions of fairness. Similarly, if court operations differ from the posted hours of operation, this can be perceived as disrespectful of court users.

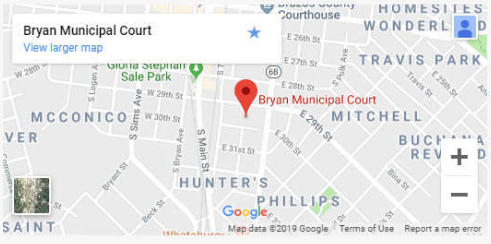
### Hours / Directions / Contact Us

**Address:**  
401 S. Tabor Avenue  
Bryan, Texas 77803

**Phone:** (979) 209-5400  
**Fax:** (979) 731-1760  
[Contact Us](#)

The Municipal Court office is open for business as follows:

- **Monday:** 8 a.m. – 6 p.m.
- **Tuesday:** 8 a.m. – 4:55 p.m.
- **Wednesday:** 8 a.m. – 1 p.m.
- **Thursday:** 8 a.m. – 4:55 p.m.
- **Friday:** 8 a.m. – 4:55 p.m.



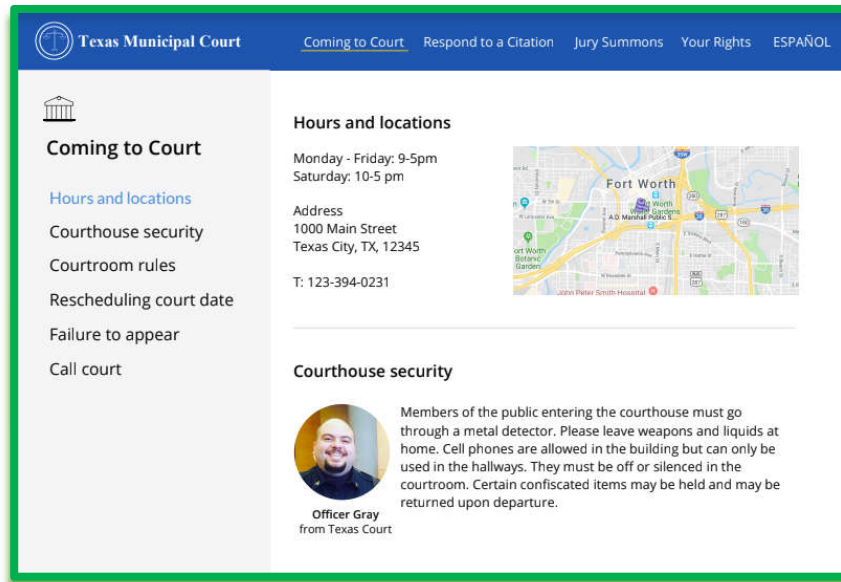
*Please note: Bryan Municipal Court telephones are not answered after 4:30 p.m. daily, or after 1 p.m. on Wednesday. Please call the following business day.*

*City of Bryan, TX (after the pilot)*

### Staff Names and Photos

As mentioned above, including staff names and photos can be a meaningful way to make the court feel more approachable and respectful of court users. Understandably, though, court staff may express concern about having this information available so readily to the public. Security concerns are paramount in a court setting, but consider whether there are certain individuals with prominent, public-facing roles who may be appropriate to help put a face on the court and its commitment to serving the public. The City of Bryan used this strategy before the pilot and displayed names and photos of the presiding judge and court administrator. Rowlett, TX included photos of key personnel, such as the court bailiff in their Coming to Court page, which can help put a friendly, human touch on the court website. Many courts participating in the pilot found ways to add or enhance this feature as part of their pilot improvements.

## Staff Names and Photos



The screenshot shows the Texas Municipal Court website. The header includes the court logo and navigation links: 'Coming to Court', 'Respond to a Citation', 'Jury Summons', 'Your Rights', and 'ESPAÑOL'. The main content area is titled 'Coming to Court' and lists several links: 'Hours and locations', 'Courthouse security', 'Courtroom rules', 'Rescheduling court date', 'Failure to appear', and 'Call court'. The 'Hours and locations' section provides the following information: Monday - Friday: 9-5pm, Saturday: 10-5 pm; Address: 1000 Main Street, Texas City, TX, 12345; and T: 123-394-0231. A map of Fort Worth is shown to the right. The 'Courthouse security' section features a photo of Officer Gray and a message: 'Members of the public entering the courthouse must go through a metal detector. Please leave weapons and liquids at home. Cell phones are allowed in the building but can only be used in the hallways. They must be off or silenced in the courtroom. Certain confiscated items may be held and may be returned upon departure.'



The graphic features a circular photograph of Officer D. Moore, a man in a dark police uniform with a badge. To the right of the photo is a quote in blue text: "I am happy to provide court security and help direct you where you need to go." Below the photo, the name "Officer D. Moore" is written in blue text.

*Security Information in Rowlett, TX (after the pilot)*

## Court Security and Rules

Court security procedures are an important part of knowing what to expect when a court user comes to court. These rules should be communicated respectfully and clearly and can be accompanied by a picture of the security personnel to minimize concerns users may have about uniformed officers. Additionally, this page can include the courtroom rules, which can help mitigate any violation of the rules in advance. Multimedia may also be utilized, if available, to communicate the rules.

## Court Rules

### Court rules



In fairness to everyone who is having their case heard, it is important to minimize noise in the courtroom. All phones and electronics must be turned off or silenced while in the courtroom. If you are causing a disturbance, you may be asked to leave the courtroom.

Please no food, drinks, or gum chewing in the courtroom.



### Rescheduling and Failure to Appear

Court users who have received a citation should be able to use the website to find information about how to reschedule a court date and the potential consequences for failing to appear. Clearly communicating this information on the website may help reduce the rate of failures to appear, and increase the user's perception of respect. This need not be more complicated than simple instructions and a phone number to call. Consider also whether there are more sophisticated technology solutions that would help court users to reschedule their court dates directly.

## Rescheduling a court date



**Elisa Red**  
Court Clerk

Mostrud exercitation ullamco laboris nisi ut aliquip ex ea commodo consequat. Duis aute irure dolor in reprehenderit in voluptate velit esse cillum dolore.

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## Failure to appear to court

If you do not come to a scheduled court date, the prosecutor may file additional charges against you (Bail Jumping and Failure to Appear or Violate Promise to Appear). These charges are misdemeanors that carry their own penalties, regardless of what happens with your original case. To avoid additional penalties, it is important to comply with scheduled court dates and payment agreements. If you are unable to pay, you can learn more about options that may be available to you in the next section.

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## Still have questions? Call us for more information

Contact  
Phone: 123-394-0231  
Email: [court@courttx.gov](mailto:court@courttx.gov)  
Fax: 123-141-1234

## Defendants' Rights

Defendants have many rights in the court process, but particularly for pro se users, it may be difficult to discern these rights and the ways in which court actors and the court process respect those rights. And yet, this is a key component of procedural justice.

During the planning process, many courts expressed concern that efforts to make fine payment easy and efficient may undercut the court's commitment to neutrality. Bringing defendants' rights to the forefront is one way to demonstrate respect for those rights to users, while also demonstrating the court's mandate to support a range of dispositions, not just those that result in the payment of fines and fees.


Part of the challenge, however, in conveying one's numerous rights is doing so clearly. User feedback during the planning process suggested that users would rather see rights rather detailed, as opposed to simplified. Rights in the prototype are located on a distinctive standalone page, written in plain language as much as possible, with more detailed definitions displayed in pop-up boxes. The use of these dialog boxes to reveal information serves to not overwhelm the user with too much information at once. Separating the essential information from the supplementary information will make it easier to ensure that different users with different needs have a user-friendly experience.

Few of the courts participating in the pilot detailed defendants' rights as part in their original websites and yet most found a way to incorporate this component after the pilot.

**Your Rights**

Texas Municipal Court    Coming to Court    Respond to a Citation    Jury Summons    Your Rights    ESPAÑOL

## Your Rights

 "Our mission is to be neutral, courteous, helpful, and fair for all members of the public."  
- Hon. Judge Worth, Municipal Court Judge

**You have many rights as a defendant in municipal court:**

1. You are presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt
2. You have the right to remain silent and to refuse to testify without consequences
3. You have the right to retain an lawyer [What does this mean?](#)
4. You may also represent yourself (as a pro se defendant) [What does this mean?](#)
5. You have the right to plead guilty, not guilty, or no contest
6. You have the right to receive a copy of the complaint before trial as well as other information the state has about your case (called "discovery").

If you need the services of an interpreter, please notify the municipal court administrator prior to your appearance in court

**Your rights during trial**

1. You have the right to a jury trial or a trial before a judge
2. You have the right to hear all testimony introduced against you
3. You have the right to cross examine witnesses who testify against you
4. You have the right to testify on your own behalf or refuse without consequences
5. You have the right to subpoena and call witnesses to testify on your behalf
6. You have the right to appeal within 20 days of any conviction

User feedback also indicated that, when users have a question, they would seek the answer by contacting a lawyer. For this reason, there should be a prominently displayed referral link to local lawyers. To avoid any appearances of favoritism or lack of neutrality, this list should be all relevant lawyers in the area, as opposed to some subset.

The screenshot shows a web page with a sidebar on the left and a main content area on the right. The sidebar has a dark red header with the text "Your Rights" and four menu items: "Employment" (with a magnifying glass icon), "Utility Payments" (with a utility bill icon), "Court Payments" (with a court document icon), and "Submit a Request" (with a paper plane icon). The main content area has a breadcrumb trail: "Home > Departments > Municipal Court > Citation Information > Your Rights". Below the breadcrumb is a green heading "Your Rights". The main text starts with a bolded section: "You have many rights as a defendant in municipal court:". This is followed by a numbered list of six rights. Below the list is a paragraph: "If you need the services of an interpreter, please notify the municipal court administrator prior to your appearance in court." This is followed by another bolded section: "Your Rights During Trial:", followed by a numbered list of five rights.

Home > Departments > Municipal Court > Citation Information > Your Rights

## Your Rights

**You have many rights as a defendant in municipal court:**

1. You are presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt
2. You have the right to remain silent and to refuse to testify without consequences
3. You have the right to retain an lawyer
4. You may also represent yourself (as a pro se defendant)
5. You have the right to plead guilty, not guilty, or no contest
6. You have the right to receive a copy of the complaint before trial as well as other information the state has about your case (called "discovery").

If you need the services of an interpreter, please notify the municipal court administrator prior to your appearance in court.

**Your Rights During Trial:**

1. You have the right to a jury trial or a trial before a judge
2. You have the right to hear all testimony introduced against you
3. You have the right to cross examine witnesses who testify against you
3. You have the right to testify on your own behalf or refuse without consequences
4. You have the right to subpoena and call witnesses to testify on your behalf
5. You have the right to appeal within 20 days of any conviction

*Rights page in Luling, TX (after the pilot)*



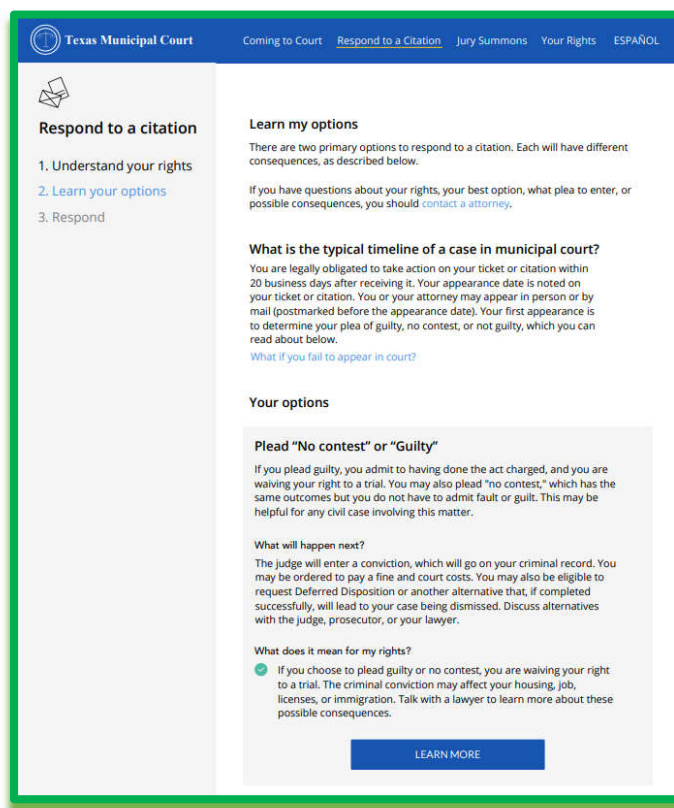
## Citations Process & Payment

Resolving a citation may be the main goal of some court users. In fact, some may go online with the sole purpose of paying a fine and putting the citation behind them. However, as noted above, courts can prioritize procedural justice by making clear what defendants' options are in response to a citation before displaying an option to pay. This may help increase users' perception of neutrality and understanding by providing more upfront information about their rights and options.

The toolkit developers identified three key steps to help court users respond to a citation: education of rights, presenting options and tradeoffs, and indicating next steps or outcomes of each option. In the prototype, each of these topics appear as standalone pages in order to not overload the user with an excess of information at once and provide contextual understandings of these topics by presenting them sequentially.

The user's rights are presented on the first page of "Respond to a Citation," and only after viewing this page, the user can select "Learn My Options" to learn about their plea options.

### *Learn My Options*



The "Learn My Options" page presents the user with information about the typical timeline of a case in municipal court, and clear information about plea options. The user can select the type of plea they'd like to enter to learn more about how that option will resolve their citation. For example, if the user selects "No contest/Guilty," they are provided information about how to pay the citation online, or request an alternative to payment, such as a driver safety course or deferred disposition.

# LEARN MY OPTIONS

**There are two primary options**

- There are two primary options when responding to a citation. Each will have different consequences as described below. If you have questions about your rights, your best option, what plea to enter or possible consequences, you should hire a lawyer.
  - Plead **"not guilty"**
  - Plead **"no contest" or "guilty"**

**What is the typical timeline of a case in municipal court?**

You are legally obligated to **take action on your ticket or citation within 15 business days** after receiving it. Your appearance date is noted on your citation. You or your attorney may appear in person or by mail (postmarked before the appearance date). Your first appearance is to determine your plea of guilty, no contest, or not guilty, which you can read about below.

**Your options**

**Plead "Not Guilty"**

You deny guilt of the violation of which you are accused and the state must provide its charge beyond a

*Learn My Options page in Bee Cave, TX (after the pilot)*

# PLEAD "NO CONTEST" OR "GUILTY"

**Option chosen: Plead "no contest" or "guilty"**

[Return to options !\[\]\(4bc17f06788033d9b8b3ff4b2e7856e6\_img.jpg\)](#)

**Pay online or in person**

Pay Online Now 

Request alternative 

**Pay your fine in person**

- Cash
- Money Order
- Cashier's Check
- Credit Card

*Plead No Contest or Guilty subpage in Bee Cave, TX (after the pilot)*

## Conclusion & Court Testimonials

This project was an experiment with an ambitious agenda. With limited time and resources but some solid inspiration, could courts make meaningful improvements to their websites? The answer was a resounding yes.

While further exploration is needed to better understand the needs and preferences among municipal court users, by relying upon the research basis of procedural justice, there is reason to believe that these improvements are helping courts to better message fairness to the public.

The hope going forward is that the courts participating in the pilot can continue a local dialogue about how to make ongoing enhancements to their websites and review available metrics and user input to guide those improvements. It is also hoped that the hard work of these initial courts will inspire other courts in Texas and beyond to undertake a similar process.

Of course, every court and its needs and priorities are unique. But the human desire to be treated fairly – to feel respected, have voice, understand the process, and be treated without bias – are universal. These principles, and some of the concrete messages offered in this toolkit, may be a good place to start.

*A few testimonials from the project's pilot sites:*

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*“One of our main priorities was to provide customers with information they need to make informed decisions.”*

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*“We can help control the conversation on this by promoting these efforts on social media. This improves transparency, too.”*

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*“When we looked at our website analytics, we were surprised to see that the Payment and Deferred Disposition pages weren't the most frequently visited pages. It was our page about trials and pleas.”*

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*“We were amazed by how much better it looked just by cleaning it up. It was less about changing a bunch of language and more about making the content we had easier to find and read.”*

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## Additional Resources

- "Plain Language Guide," National Association for Court Management, 2019. Available for purchase at <https://nacmnet.org/resources/publications/guides/plain-language-guide>.
- "10 Principles for Humane Justice Technology," Center for Court Innovation, 2019. Available at [https://www.courtinnovation.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/2019-04/cci\\_factsheet\\_techprinciples\\_04092019.pdf](https://www.courtinnovation.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/2019-04/cci_factsheet_techprinciples_04092019.pdf).

# Appendix A Court Website Audit: User Experience and Procedural Justice Measures

The following measures can be used to self-assess how the current website scores in terms of user experience and procedural justice priorities. To score each section, use this guide: 1=not at all, 2=somewhat, 3=neither yes or no, 4=fairly well, 5=very well

USER EXPERIENCE MEASURES												
Useful		Usable			Hypothetical User # 2: Can I find out how to pay for my fine online?			Delightful				
Regularly updated (scale 1-5)	Relevant info for user (scale 1-5)	Accessibility (scale 1-5)	Task load (scale 1-5)	Navigation (scale 1-5)	Language (scale 1-5)	Accessibility (scale 1-5)	Task load (scale 1-5)	Navigation (scale 1-5)	Language (scale 1-5)	Pleasant (scale 1-5)	Allow for user feedback (scale 1-5)	Mobile responsive (scale 1-5)

PROCEDURAL JUSTICE MEASURES												
Procedural Justice element: VOICE (scale 1-5)	Is it clear how users can contact the court with questions? (scale 1-5)	Is it clear when process users will have a chance to tell their side of the story? (scale 1-5)	Is it clear how users with Limited English Proficiency can get their questions answered and/or access an interpreter? (scale 1-5)	Are there other opportunities to provide feedback about their court experience? (scale 1-5)	Is there an opportunity to provide feedback about the website? (scale 1-5)	Does the website address potential concerns about wait times or rescheduling of court appearances? (scale 1-5)	Does the website content use respectful language and tone? (e.g., please, thank you) (scale 1-5)	Are key court leaders introduced by name? (scale 1-5)	Is a defendant's right to be presumed not guilty clear? (scale 1-5)	Are the key rights of defendants clearly outlined? (scale 1-5)	Procedural Justice element: RESPECT (scale 1-5)	Procedural Justice element: NEUTRAL DECISION-MAKING (scale 1-5)
Procedural Justice element: VOICE (scale 1-5)	Is it clear how users can contact the court with questions? (scale 1-5)	Is it clear when process users will have a chance to tell their side of the story? (scale 1-5)	Is it clear how users with Limited English Proficiency can get their questions answered and/or access an interpreter? (scale 1-5)	Are there other opportunities to provide feedback about their court experience? (scale 1-5)	Is there an opportunity to provide feedback about the website? (scale 1-5)	Does the website address potential concerns about wait times or rescheduling of court appearances? (scale 1-5)	Does the website content use respectful language and tone? (e.g., please, thank you) (scale 1-5)	Are key court leaders introduced by name? (scale 1-5)	Is a defendant's right to be presumed not guilty clear? (scale 1-5)	Are the key rights of defendants clearly outlined? (scale 1-5)	Procedural Justice element: RESPECT (scale 1-5)	Procedural Justice element: NEUTRAL DECISION-MAKING (scale 1-5)
Procedural Justice element: UNDERSTANDING (scale 1-5)	Is the website content written at a 6th grade reading level or below? (homepage) (scale 1-5)	Are legal terms defined in plain language? (scale 1-5)	Are the typical outcomes or case resolutions clearly outlined? (scale 1-5)	Does the website content outline the primary rules and decorum of appearing in court? (scale 1-5)	Is it clear how fine/fee payments can be made remotely? (scale 1-5)	Is there a place for last-minute updates (e.g., court closures)? (scale 1-5)	Is it clear that the court does not have an allegiance with defenders, prosecutors, or law enforcement? (scale 1-5)	Does the website content describe clearly how key decisions are made? (scale 1-5)	Do website images reflect values of diversity and inclusion? (scale 1-5)			





This website prototype is intended for the sole use of the pilot sites of the Procedural Justice Model Court Websites project. This project is designed to enhance courts' procedural justice efforts (voice, respect, neutrality, understanding) through website design.

Based on the results of the pilot project, the Texas Municipal Court Education Center and Center for Court Innovation will publish a national toolkit for this project later in 2019. Please contact [Emily LaGratta \(lagrattae@courtinnovation.org\)](mailto:lagrattae@courtinnovation.org) for more information.

Funding provided by the State Justice Institute.

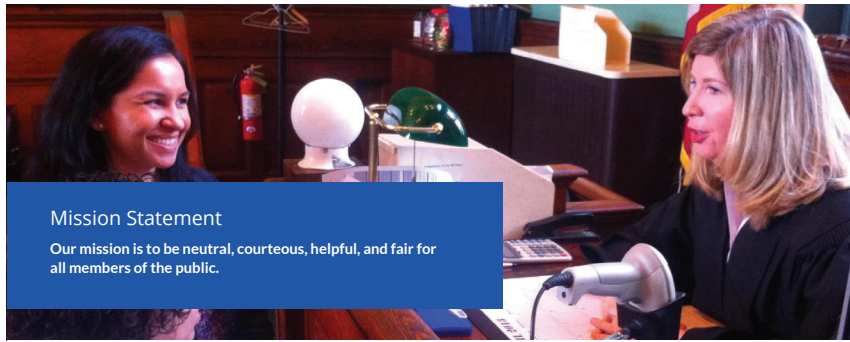
#### Quick notes about prototype

Click the blue tour points to get more context and learn about the design (Please don't reply on the tour points).  
Click anywhere on the prototype to reveal the hotspots.

[START PROTOTYPE](#)

*Prototype was designed by [Stephanie Yim](#) for Center for Court Innovation*

I want to [find the court hours](#)



### Court Updates

JAN 21, 2019  
All court forms are now available online

Jan 1, 2019  
Happy New Year!

### Upcoming Events

Jan 30 Community Board meeting

Feb 1 Family Neighborhood Potluck

Feb 12 Court Closed for Lincoln's Birthday

### Meet your judge, Honorable Marie Pascal

[Learn about the court](#)



Cases heard in 2018

32,405

Time to case resolution

15 days

Another fact

XX



Lisa Green  
Court Support

Still have questions about the courtroom hours or rules? Give us a call or chat online. We are here to help.

#### Contact

Phone: 123-394-0231  
Email: [court@courtx.gov](mailto:court@courtx.gov)  
Fax: 123-141-1234

#### Hours

Monday - Friday: 9-5pm  
Saturday: 10-5pm

We want to hear from you

[SUBMIT FEEDBACK](#)

#### Court Name

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1234 Main Street  
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T: 123-394-0231

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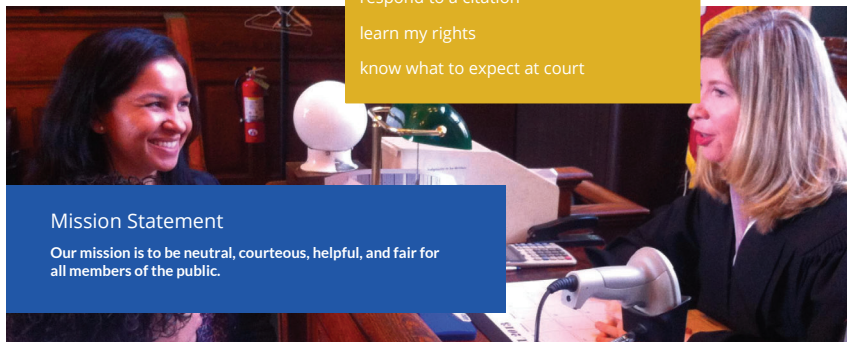
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## I want to

- [find the court hours](#)
- [find a lawyer](#)
- [respond to a citation](#)
- [learn my rights](#)
- [know what to expect at court](#)



### Mission Statement

Our mission is to be neutral, courteous, helpful, and fair for all members of the public.

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## Respond to a citation

### 1. Understand your rights

### 2. Learn your options

### 3. Respond



**“Our mission is to be neutral, courteous, helpful, and fair for all members of the public.”**

- Hon. Judge Worth, Municipal Court Judge

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### You have many rights as a defendant in municipal court:

1. You are presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt
2. You have the right to remain silent and to refuse to testify without consequences
3. You have the right to retain an lawyer [What does this mean?](#)
4. You may also represent yourself (as a pro se defendant) [What does this mean?](#)
5. You have the right to plead guilty, not guilty, or no contest
6. You have the right to receive a copy of the complaint before trial as well as other information the state has about your case (called "discovery").

If you need the services of an interpreter, please notify the municipal court administrator prior to your appearance in court

### Your rights during trial

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[LEARN YOUR OPTIONS](#)

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3. Respond



“Our mission is to be neutral, courteous,

public.”

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### Right to a lawyer

CLOSE

If you have questions about your rights or what to do about your case, you should contact a lawyer. Every person has the right to hire a lawyer to represent them in court. You will **not** be given a free, court-appointed lawyer because jail is not a possible sentence in municipal court. If you decide not to hire a lawyer, no one else can represent you in court.

[Find a list of local lawyers](#)

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"Our mission is to be neutral, courteous,

public."

Judge

doubt

this mean?

court

CLOSE

### Representing yourself (pro se)

Defendants in municipal court have the right to hire a lawyer, but many defendants accused of fine-only offenses appear in court pro se (pro se means "for oneself"). Please be advised that having a lawyer for your trial is recommended, as legal issues are complex and there may be outcomes you are not aware of.

#### Can I have someone else represent me (for example, my parent)?

No. There is no right to have anyone represent you except you or an lawyer, even if you are a minor. Allowing a non-lawyer to act as an lawyer for anyone other than himself or herself permits the unauthorized practice of law.

#### Where can I find more information?

For more information about representing yourself, please visit: <http://www.txcourts.gov/programs-services/self-help/self-represented-litigants/>

### Your rights during trial

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## Respond to a citation

1. Understand your rights
2. [Learn your options](#)
3. Respond

### Learn my options

There are two primary options to respond to a citation. Each will have different consequences, as described below.

If you have questions about your rights, your best option, what plea to enter, or possible consequences, you should [contact an attorney](#).

### What is the typical timeline of a case in municipal court?

You are legally obligated to take action on your ticket or citation within 20 business days after receiving it. Your appearance date is noted on your ticket or citation. You or your attorney may appear in person or by mail (postmarked before the appearance date). Your first appearance is to determine your plea of guilty, no contest, or not guilty, which you can read about below.

[What if you fail to appear in court?](#)

### Your options

#### Plead "No contest" or "Guilty"

If you plead guilty, you admit to having done the act charged, and you are waiving your right to a trial. You may also plead "no contest," which has the same outcomes but you do not have to admit fault or guilt. This may be helpful for any civil case involving this matter.

##### What will happen next?

The judge will enter a conviction, which will go on your criminal record. You may be ordered to pay a fine and court costs. You may also be eligible to request Deferred Disposition or another alternative that, if completed successfully, will lead to your case being dismissed. Discuss alternatives with the judge, prosecutor, or your lawyer.

##### What does it mean for my rights?

- ✔ If you choose to plead guilty or no contest, you are waiving your right to a trial. The criminal conviction may affect your housing, job, licenses, or immigration. Talk with a lawyer to learn more about these possible consequences.

[LEARN MORE](#)

#### Plead "Not guilty"

You deny guilt of the violation in which you were accused, and the state must prove its charge beyond a reasonable doubt.

##### What will happen next?

Your case will be scheduled for a trial date. Before trial, you may choose to discuss your case with the prosecutor and explore alternative resolutions. If your case will proceed to trial, please inform the court whether you want a trial by judge or jury. At your trial, a judge or jury will hear the evidence to determine your guilt or innocence.

##### What does it mean for my rights?

- ✔ If you are acquitted or found not guilty at trial, you will not have a record or owe payment to the court.
- ✔ If you are ultimately found guilty at trial, the court will explain your consequences and any payments owed.

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## Respond to a citation

1. Understand your rights
2. Learn your options
3. Respond

### Option chosen

Plead no contest or guilty

[RETURN TO LEARN MY OPTIONS](#)

### Respond by Paying the Fine

Pay your fine online

[PAY ONLINE NOW](#)

Pay your fine in person

Pay in person at Court City Hall, 1234 Main Street ([Directions and hours](#))

Payment methods include:

- Cash
- Money Order
- Cashier's Check
- Credit Card

*Payments may **not** be mailed.*

### Respond by Requesting an Alternative

#### Request for a Driving Safety Course

Driving Safety Courses allow defendants to complete a class in exchange for a dismissal of many traffic-related charges. In addition to completing (and paying for) the course, defendants must be assessed court costs and may be assessed an administrative fee. Only certain charges are eligible for this option and you cannot take more than one course in a 12-month period.

#### Request for a Deferred Disposition

Defendants may be eligible to have their charges dismissed by completing a term of probation known as deferred disposition. Only the judge can offer deferred disposition. In addition to completing any probation terms, such as avoiding further charges or completing community service, defendants are typically assessed court costs and administrative fees.

#### Request for Teen Court

Sed ut perspiciatis unde omnis iste natus error sit voluptatem accusantium doloremque laudantium, totam rem aperiam, eaque ipsa quae ab illo inventore.

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## Respond to a citation

1. Understand my rights
2. Learn my options
3. Respond

### Option chosen

Plead guilty

[RETURN TO LEARN MY OPTIONS](#)

### Respond by Paying

Pay your fine online

[PAY ONLINE NOW](#)

Pay your fine in person

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Payment methods include:

- Cash
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### Respond by Requesting [probationary language]

Request for a Driving Saftey Course

Sed ut perspiciatis unde omnis iste natus error sit voluptatem accusantium doloremque laudantium, totam rem aperiam, eaque ipsa quae ab illo inventore.

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# About Us

## About the Texas Municipal Court

The presiding judge of the Texas Municipal Court is Judge Elizabeth Worth. She is a native Texan and has served as a judge since 2012. She and all court staff are committed to being fair, neutral, and respectful to all individuals the court serves.

All Texas municipal courts are funded by the city or municipality. But the judges in these courts have judicial independence and are not allowed to be improperly influenced by other parts of government. All judges take an oath to uphold that promise.

### Meet the staff



Hon. Elizabeth Worth  
Judge



Katie Smith  
Court director



John Browne  
Court Clerk



Sean Bo  
Staff



Sarah Gonzalez  
IT



Dan Hill  
Office operations



Roger Lee  
Staff

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# Your Rights



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- Hon. Judge Worth, Municipal Court Judge

## You have many rights as a defendant in municipal court:

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If you need the services of an interpreter, please notify the municipal court administrator prior to your appearance in court

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Have questions about your rights? Hire a lawyer

[SEE LIST OF LAWYERS](#)

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## Your Rights

CLOSE

### Right to a lawyer

If you have questions about your rights or what to do about your case, you should contact a lawyer. Every person has the right to hire a lawyer to represent them in court. You will **not** be given a free, court-appointed lawyer because jail is not a possible sentence in municipal court. If you decide not to hire a lawyer, no one else can represent you in court.

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## Your Rights

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#### Can I have someone else represent me (for example, my parent)?

No. If you are not representing yourself pro se, you do not have a right to have anyone other than a licensed Texas attorney represent you.

#### Where can I find more information?

For more information about representing yourself, please visit: <http://www.txcourts.gov/programs-services/self-help/self-represented-litigants/>

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## Coming to Court

[Hours and directions](#)

[Courthouse security](#)

[Courtroom rules](#)

[Rescheduling court date](#)

[Failure to appear](#)

[Call court](#)

### Hours and directions

Monday - Friday: 9-5pm  
Saturday: 10-5 pm

Address  
1000 Main Street  
Texas city, TX, 12345

T: 123-394-0231



### Courthouse security



Officer Gray  
from Texas Court

Members of the public entering the courthouse must go through a metal detector. Please leave weapons and liquids at home. Cell phones are allowed in the building but can only be used in the hallways. They must be off or silenced in the courtroom. Certain confiscated items may be held and may be returned upon departure.

### Court rules



In fairness to everyone who is having their case heard, it is important to minimize noise in the courtroom. All phones and electronics must be turned off or silenced while in the courtroom. If you are causing a disturbance, you may be asked to leave the courtroom.

Please no food, drinks, or gum chewing in the courtroom.



### Rescheduling a court date



Elisa Red  
Court Clerk

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### Failure to appear to court

If you do not come to a scheduled court date, the prosecutor may file additional charges against you (Bail Jumping and Failure to Appear or Violate Promise to Appear). These charges are misdemeanors that carry their own penalties, regardless of what happens with your original case. To avoid additional penalties, it is important to comply with scheduled court dates and payment agreements. If you are unable to pay, you can learn more about options that may be available to you in the next section.

### Still have questions? Call us for more information

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