



PIMA COUNTY EVICTION SETTLEMENT CONFERENCE AND ENGAGEMENT



OVERVIEW

Pima County's Office of Emergency Eviction Legal Services (EELS) was established in 2021 to dramatically reduce eviction numbers by focusing on two goals: (1) "ensuring justice is done in eviction cases," and (2) "keeping tenants housed." EELS seeks to meet these goals by connecting tenants facing eviction proceedings who qualify for EELS services to attorneys who offer free legal advice. In addition to providing legal representation to qualifying tenants, EELS seeks to connect tenants to rental assistance, job training, job assistance, and other services. Tenants who receive free legal advice through EELS are also eligible to participate in settlement conferences through the Pima County Justice Court; the settlement conference is designed to resolve the eviction issue prior to judgment.

Resolving eviction cases outside of court judgment can benefit tenants by keeping them housed, affording them time to locate new housing, and helping them to avoid an eviction judgment and the collateral consequences of an eviction judgment. At the start of this project, few landlords were engaging with EELS or Pima County Justice Court settlement conferences. Reluctance of landlords to engage is not unique to Pima County; evidence from other jurisdictions indicates that landlord participation is generally low, specifically in mediation and settlement conference options. However, research also indicates that successful mediation of eviction disputes leads to mutually beneficial relationships for landlords and tenants.



Project Problem Statement

How might we encourage landlords to engage in eviction settlement conferences?



OBJECTIVES

- 1 Understand the current EELS process and identify pain points and opportunity spaces**
- 2 Design and test landlord engagement materials around settlement conference participation**
- 3 Make actionable recommendations to the EELS team for next steps**



PROCESS

1

Legal Landscape Analysis

Conducted research to better understand eviction and housing instability in Pima County, including court data, investigative reporting, and legal research about the process.

2

Interviews

Conducted interviews with EELS staff, court stakeholders, and landlords to understand the current EELS process, including challenges and pain points from multiple perspectives.

3

Define

Used interview data to create a process map visualization of the EELS process from multiple perspectives, identifying pain points and opportunity spaces for potential intervention points to bring more landlords into the process.

4

Ideate

Generated a large number of potential solutions to encourage landlord engagement in settlement conferences using a variety of How Might We questions to drive brainstorming and innovation. Ranked ideas for ease and impact.

5

Prototype & Test

Developed high-priority ideas into prototypes that were tested with Pima County landlords, seeking to test assumptions and ideas about what would incentivize landlords to engage.

6

Recommend

Changes were made to the prototype after the first round of testing, and insights were surfaced about what will likely incentivize landlords to participate, and areas for further testing.



RECOMMENDATIONS

After conducting the multi-phase research as outlined above, the research team recommended:

1

Standardize language about court-facilitated eviction settlement conferences to avoid confusion.

2

Focus engagement materials on how settlement conferences are smart business decisions that save property owners time and money.

3

Avoid engagement materials that emphasize the landlord-tenant relationship.

4

Encourage trusted sources, such as the court, the EELS program, and landlord organizations, to collaborate on a landlord engagement strategy that includes emails and letters with educational materials about eviction settlement conferences.