



## IOWA PRE-FILING EVICTION ODR ENGAGEMENT EVALUATION



### OVERVIEW

In 2018, the Iowa Judicial Branch (IJB) engaged in strategic planning efforts intended to improve access in rural courts, develop a broader array of access to justice resources, and take advantage of digital opportunities. IJB identified online dispute resolution (ODR) capabilities as a potential component of this effort, and over the next year, a statewide ODR planning team met to design an ODR pilot project, select pilot project sites, investigate and select an ODR vendor, and engage stakeholders in program design and implementation plans.

The team selected Story County as a pilot site for an eviction ODR platform. In response to issues raised by external stakeholders, the team decided that the landlord/tenant ODR pilot project would be designed as a pre-filing program, which by definition makes it a voluntary, rather than a mandatory, program. If implemented, the Iowa ODR pilot would be the first pre-filing ODR platform for eviction cases in the nation.



### Project Problem Statement

How might we encourage landlords and tenants to engage prior to an eviction to ensure successful implementation of a pre-filing online dispute resolution platform?



### OBJECTIVES

- 1 Identify current barriers to negotiated settlements between landlords and tenants in eviction cases**
- 2 Identify how those barriers may be alleviated by participating in a pre-filing online dispute resolution software platform**
- 3 Identify strategies that will serve as incentives for landlords and tenants to use the pre-filing online dispute resolution software platform**



## PROCESS

1

### Legal Landscape Analysis

Conducted research to better understand eviction and housing instability in Story County, including analyses and reports prepared by IJB, meeting with IJB and ODR stakeholders, Story County court data from eviction cases, geocoding and plotting defendant addresses, hot spot analysis, review of eviction case data, and review of the rules of procedure for eviction cases in Story County.

2

### Interviews

Conducted interviews with tenants who had received an eviction notice in Story County, property managers who had filed an eviction in Story County, and other stakeholders who interface with eviction in Story County to understand the current eviction process, challenges, and pain points.

3

### Persona Creation & Journey Mapping

Working from the coded interview transcripts and identified themes, landlord and tenant personas were created that reflected the typical types of landlords and typical types of tenants. Using the insights gathered from the legal landscape analysis and interviews, storytelling and visualization tools called journey maps were created to identify, understand, and address landlord and tenant needs.

4

### Prototype Design

Created early-stage prototypes of engagement materials for landlords and tenants based on data-informed research questions. The prototypes were tested with tenants and landlords, and the results were analyzed for common themes and insights.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

After conducting a multi-phase research project, data was analyzed and insights were surfaced with results suggesting that:

- 1 ODR is unlikely to be widely used in Story County without aggressive and strategic landlord outreach.**
- 2 ODR is more likely to be successful if the role of Housing Navigator is clarified.**
- 3 ODR is more likely to be successful if it can quickly and efficiently connect tenants to meaningful rental assistance.**
- 4 Engagement materials should distinguish ODR as a customized space built for landlords and tenants to resolve rental housing issue disputes without going to court.**
- 5 Engagement materials should emphasize ODR's ability to start a dialogue between landlords and tenants when an issue first arises.**
- 6 Ensure that the ODR focuses on accessibility and usability for all user types and across use cases, and emphasize that in the engagement materials.**
- 7 Tenants want ODR to include information about eviction law, legal rights and broader rental housing issues.**
- 8 Tenants want to hear about ODR from their landlord and know that their landlord will use it.**