

# LISTEN > LEARN > LEAD

A GUIDE TO IMPROVING COURT SERVICES  
THROUGH USER-CENTERED DESIGN



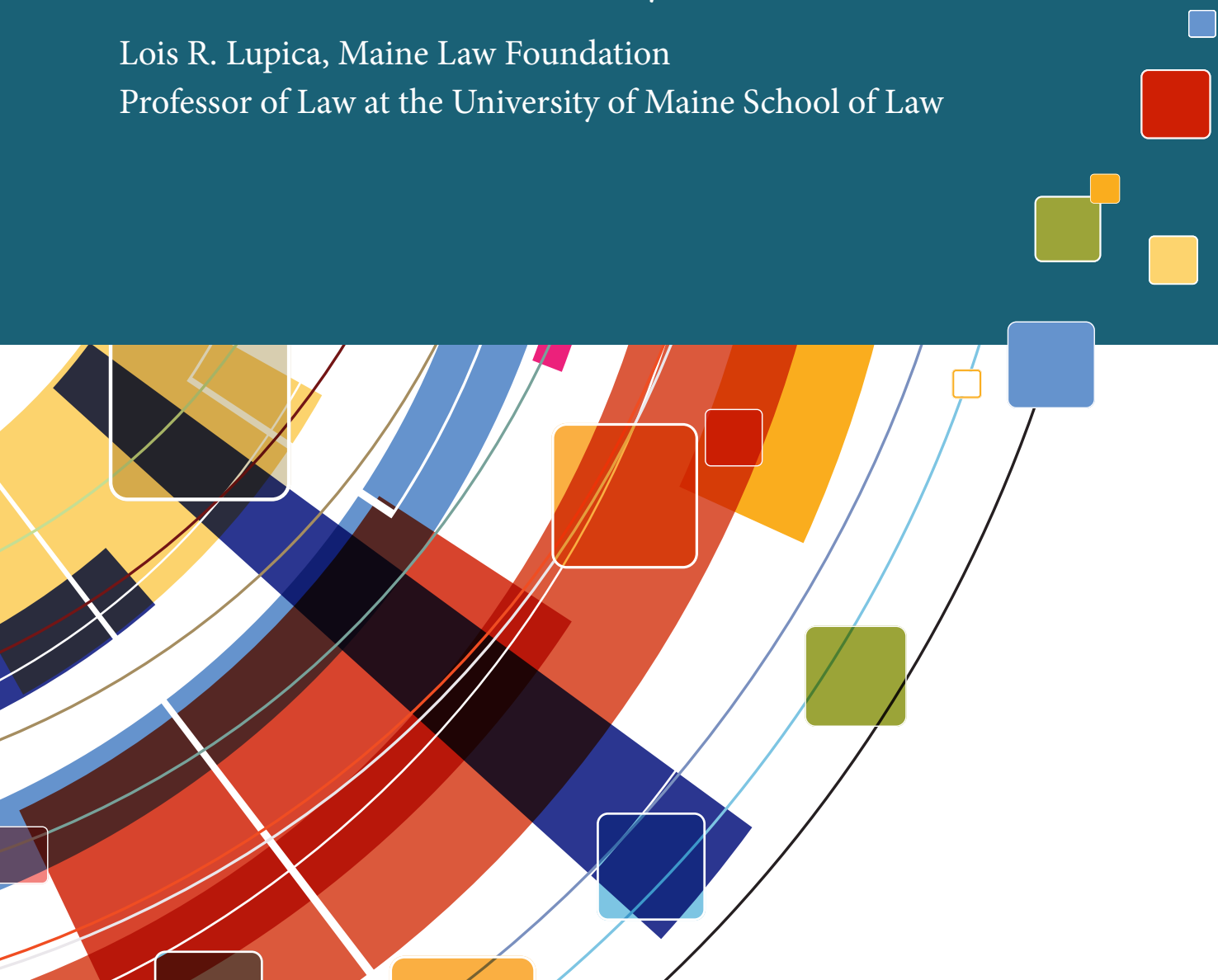
# COURT COMPASS DESIGN SPRINT TEAM:

IAALS, the Institute for the Advancement of the American Legal System

Margaret Hagan, Director, Legal Design Lab at Stanford Law School

Dan Jackson, Executive Director,  
NuLawLab at Northeastern University School of Law

Lois R. Lupica, Maine Law Foundation  
Professor of Law at the University of Maine School of Law



# A NOTE ABOUT THIS SHORT BOOK

**IAALS**, the Institute for the Advancement of the American Legal System, is a national, independent research center at the University of Denver dedicated to facilitating continuous improvement and advancing excellence in the American legal system.

IAALS launched the **Court Compass** project to explore user-friendly, streamlined, and accessible solutions that help people through the divorce and separation process—even when they cannot afford or choose not to hire an attorney.

The project directly incorporated **court user feedback** in the process of designing family justice system solutions through in-person design sprints with self-represented litigants and other court system stakeholders. These design sprints facilitated the testing and refining of new processes and services in real time.

This guide is an overview of the **design sprint process** used in the Court Compass project and a broader reference on how to use this process for court process reform in areas beyond divorce and separation.

This guide's **intended audience** includes those who work on serving the public and delivering justice to court users, such as courts, self-help centers, legal aid organizations, community service providers, universities, startups and technology companies, and others.

# WHAT IS A "DESIGN SPRINT"?

**A design sprint is a time-limited group exercise that uses principles of human-centered design to guide collective brainstorming in pursuit of an easy-to-grasp challenge.**



The format, while inherently flexible, generally consists of activities that involve discovery, definition, brainstorming, prototyping, and testing.

Design sprints can be as brief as one hour and as long as one week. At their core, they are a condensed version of the human-centered design process intended to yield new solutions to longstanding problems.

Outcomes can form the foundation for a more in-depth design process or serve as a proposed solution ready for an implementation or beta phase.

# PHASES OF THE DESIGN SPRINT PROCESS

**1. Discover** – Explore what court users perceive to be challenges and opportunities in the current process.

**2. Identify the Problem** – Define the contours of the problem and those who are involved in the process at issue.

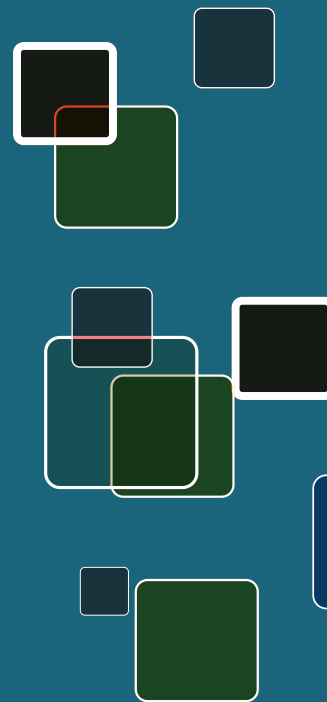
**3. Brainstorm** – Engage in structured, creative thinking about potential service, product, and process solutions.

**4. Build** – Develop concept prototypes around the highest-impact solutions.

**5. Test** – Solicit feedback through interactive, real-time testing of developed concept prototypes.

**6. Refine** – Revise the prototyped solutions based on the feedback received through the testing.

**7. Debrief** – Share feedback on process and ideas that were not already covered.





# BENEFITS OF ENGAGING USERS THROUGH DESIGN SPRINTS

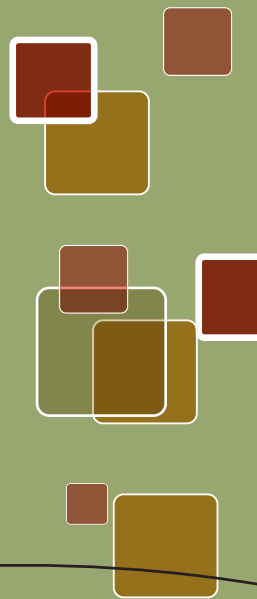
- Improve empathy with court users by understanding their experience and perspectives on the process.
- Identify key needs of court users (stepping away from prior assumptions about user needs).
- Review existing services and explore ways to make them more understandable and effective.
- Spot opportunities for new services, processes, or tools.
- Host a fun and dynamic session that builds a community of collaborators.
- Advance creative system redesign in a single session.



# LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR AND EXECUTING THE DESIGN SPRINT

These are the high-level issues to consider in planning a court process design sprint, which are detailed throughout this book:

- 1. Determine the Problem/Process to be Improved**
- 2. Identify the Necessary Stakeholders**
- 3. Reach and Recruit Participants**
- 4. Develop the Design Sprint Protocol**
- 5. Logistical Considerations**
- 6. Collect Feedback on the Sprint**



# 1

## DETERMINE THE PROBLEM/PROCESS TO BE IMPROVED

The first step is to determine the problem you wish to address or what process you wish to improve. The IAALS Court Compass project focused on the divorce and separation process. For a successful design sprint, the problem should be something that can be quickly and easily summarized. If you can't state the challenge in a couple sentences, a more complex design process is likely called for.

# 2

## IDENTIFY THE NECESSARY STAKEHOLDERS

**Litigants** – The Court Compass project identified **self-represented litigants** in divorce and separation cases as the core Court Compass stakeholder group. We considered those who represented themselves *at any point* in the process as having “self-represented.” We specifically targeted self-represented litigants whose case closed within the last two to three years.

Engaging litigants in court process redesign is crucial, but reaching and recruiting this stakeholder group can present unique challenges. The Court Compass design sprint process highlights a number of best-practice strategies.



# 3

## REACH AND RECRUIT PARTICIPANTS

### **Best Practices for Litigant Outreach –**

A strategy that includes email and mail letter outreach invitations will reach the largest potential participant group (and, to the extent possible, will not bias in favor of the tech-savvy).

Where appropriate, the initial outreach invitation to participate in the design sprint benefits from a clear connection to (or partnership with) the local court or service provider. This establishes legitimacy and facilitates trust on the part of the sprint participants.

Recruitment should begin sufficiently in advance of the design sprint date to ensure maximum availability, but not so far out that the date is too removed to consider or remember. Four to six weeks should usually suffice.

A registration process (by phone and online) can help organizers ensure that participants meet all eligibility criteria before guaranteeing registrants' participation. This process can also screen for individuals who may be unnecessarily stressed or traumatized by participating in the sprint—a particularly important consideration with divorce and separation cases. Be attuned to participants whose experience is so extreme that it will dominate a small group discussion.

# COURT COMPASS PROVEN PRACTICE: OUTREACH LETTER TO SRLS



INSTITUTE *for the* ADVANCEMENT  
of the AMERICAN LEGAL SYSTEM  UNIVERSITY of  
DENVER

[DATE]

[FIRST NAME] [LAST NAME]  
[STREET ADDRESS]  
[CITY], [STATE] [ZIP]

Dear [FIRST NAME],

The legal divorce process can be difficult—especially for people who don't have a lawyer. Experts from IAALS at the University of Denver, Stanford University, and Northeastern University are working with court users, volunteer [STATE] judicial system employees, and other stakeholders to identify ways to improve the divorce process in our state.

We need input from people who actually experienced the process to help us figure out what needs to change. If you did not have a lawyer for at least part of your divorce, we would like to hear your ideas on how to make the [STATE] family court system better.

#### **What are we doing?**

We are reaching out to people in your area—whose recent completed divorce is a matter of public record—because we want to hear your voice. The [STATE] Judicial Branch provided this public information from your closed case in order to get feedback about the court process.

*Your input is very important to us.* IAALS is hosting a **one-day workshop** in [CITY, STATE] on [DATE] from [TIME].

#### **What is IAALS?**

IAALS, the Institute for the Advancement of the American Legal System, is a national, independent research center at the University of Denver dedicated to improving the civil justice system for all those who need it. IAALS is conducting these workshops in different states across the United States to make suggestions to courts about court processes from a court user view. IAALS will *never ask you to share personal information* about yourself, your family, or your case.

#### **How can I participate?**

IAALS is offering court users like you an incentive for your participation in this one-day workshop. Those who are selected to take part will receive a \$150 gift card for their participation.

#### **Ready to sign up?**

You can **sign up** to be considered for participation in any of the following ways:

- Register online at <http://iaals.du.edu/courtcompass>
- Email [CourtCompass@du.edu](mailto:CourtCompass@du.edu)
- Call toll-free 1-833-663-6177

**IAALS will provide you with a \$5 gift card to Target or Amazon just for signing up. Workshop space is limited, but if you are selected to participate you will be offered a choice between a \$150 Amazon or Visa gift card for your time and effort in helping us.**

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Natalie Knowlton".

Natalie Knowlton  
Director, Special Projects  
IAALS, Institute for the Advancement of the American Legal System  
University of Denver

# COURT COMPASS PROVEN PRACTICE: INCENTIVES TO PARTICIPATE

Showing appreciation for litigants' participation is an important and effective means of increasing participation rates. IAALS has found that many participants cited a dearth of financial resources as the reason they did not have an attorney in their divorce cases.

The Court Compass project employed a dual monetary incentive structure:

- All self-represented litigants who registered to participate in the design sprint received a \$5 gift card. Registration did not guarantee participation in the sprint.
- Those who were selected to participate received a \$150 gift card at the conclusion of the design sprint. Participants were given a choice between an electronic Amazon gift card or a physical VISA gift card. Most participants selected the VISA option. *Be sure to clear any financial incentives with your partnering organizations to ensure compliance with applicable ethical rules.*

Additionally, the Court Compass design sprints were largely held on Saturdays, which facilitated litigant participation. Accessible parking was a primary consideration in facility selection.

# COURT COMPASS PROVEN PRACTICE: COMMUNICATING WITH LITIGANTS

If possible, designate a single person to be responsible for communication with litigants. **Consistency in communication** will help forge a connection with, and provide support to, workshop participants.

Whether registration is done online or by phone (best practice is to offer both), **following up promptly and respectfully** to any litigant outreach will set the stage for a positive working relationship.

Many litigants demonstrate some degree of curiosity or skepticism when first responding to a design sprint invitation. **Describe the workshop in short, simple terms**—for example, “We’re trying to improve the divorce process, and we’d love your input.”

Maintain a **waiting list** of interested litigants—plans change and some participants may withdraw in advance of the workshop.

Provide **logistical details** about the workshop (time, place, what to expect) about 10 days prior to the event, and provide a reminder a day or two ahead of time. It’s also wise to set some common-sense ground rules that are conveyed to participants in advance. This will guard against including people who are not comfortable with the creative exercises that make up a design sprint.

# COURT COMPASS PROVEN PRACTICE: RULES & PARTICIPANT INFORMATION



## WORKSHOP RULES AND CONFIDENTIALITY

### Workshop Rules Acknowledgment

To ensure that everyone is comfortable voicing their opinion and speaking freely, participants must agree to the following rules:

- Address one another on a first name basis;
- Refrain from sharing any official titles with other participants;
- Be open-minded;
- Be respectful;
- Be inclusive;
- Be honest;
- Encourage others to speak/voice their thoughts;
- Take turns speaking;
- Engage full-group discussions;
- Do not solicit any business during our design sprint (including before or after);
- Do not take any photographs or recordings on your personal device(s).

### Confidentiality

Though we are not asking about personal or private information, during the course of the workshop, participants may share such information with their teams as part of the process. Participants must agree to not share any such information with any third parties outside of the workshop to ensure that the confidentiality of such information is respected.

By signing this form, you acknowledge that you have read each of the above rules and agree to follow all of them.

---

Printed Name

---

Signature

---

Date

# 3

## REACH AND RECRUIT PARTICIPANTS

**Non-Litigant Stakeholders** – While litigants will likely be the key stakeholder group for many court process improvement sprints, it is usually essential to identify other stakeholders—individuals inside or connected to the court system who have direct experience with the issue or problem.

Court Compass design sprints engaged **court employees, judges, practitioners, legal aid staff, technologists,** and other **providers** serving divorcing and separating families.

Be sure to ask your partnering organizations to send participants who have open minds and creative spirits. The wrong vibe, especially from an employee of the courts, can inhibit ideation.



# 4

## DEVELOP THE DESIGN SPRINT PROTOCOL

**The Court Compass project team experimented with several different protocols, but each broadly followed a similar path:**

### PROCESS MAPPING

Self-represented litigant participants are asked to map their journey through the divorce and separation process, including challenges and opportunities they encountered.

### PROBLEM & SOLUTION BRAINSTORM

Building from the individual case mapping, full sprint teams are asked to document broad problems and opportunities in the current process.

### DEVELOP & TEST SOLUTION

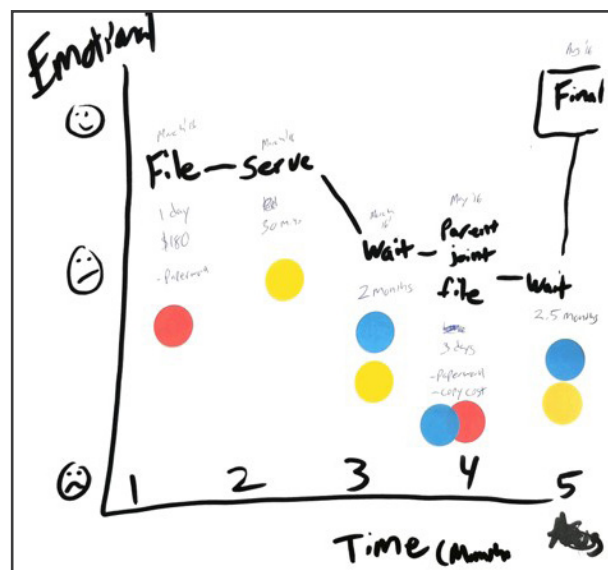
Teams brainstorm product, service, and policy solutions, ultimately selecting one to prototype and test with other teams.

## PROCESS MAPPING

Self-represented litigant participants are asked to map their journey through the divorce and separation process, including challenges and opportunities they encountered.

During the first stage of the design sprint, participants were asked to outline their perceptions of a self-represented litigant's legal journey. The self-represented litigants mapped their personal journey. For others, they mapped the journey as observed from their personal/professional vantage point. In addition to the procedural steps people took, these maps included other details of the experience:

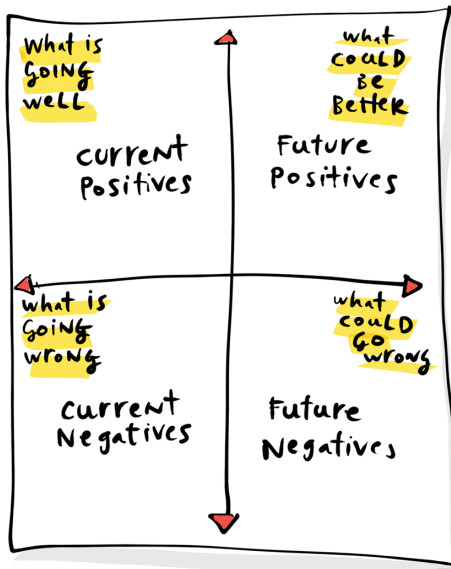
- Emotions experienced during various steps of the process, including components that were particularly confusing and/or frustrating
- Time required to complete various steps of the process
- Money spent during the various steps of the process





## PROBLEM & SOLUTION BRAINSTORM

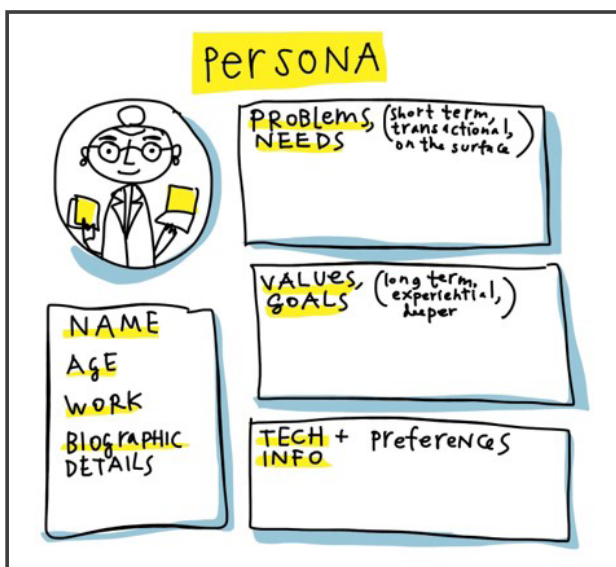
Building from the individual case mapping, full sprint teams are asked to document broad problems and opportunities in the current process.



Sprint teams of four to six people populated a matrix with ideas on what is going well or not so well in the current process. This activity also asked teams what meaningful opportunities and potential challenges might exist in the future.

During this brainstorming stage, sprint teams identified a real or hypothetical user in the divorce and separation system around whom to develop solutions.

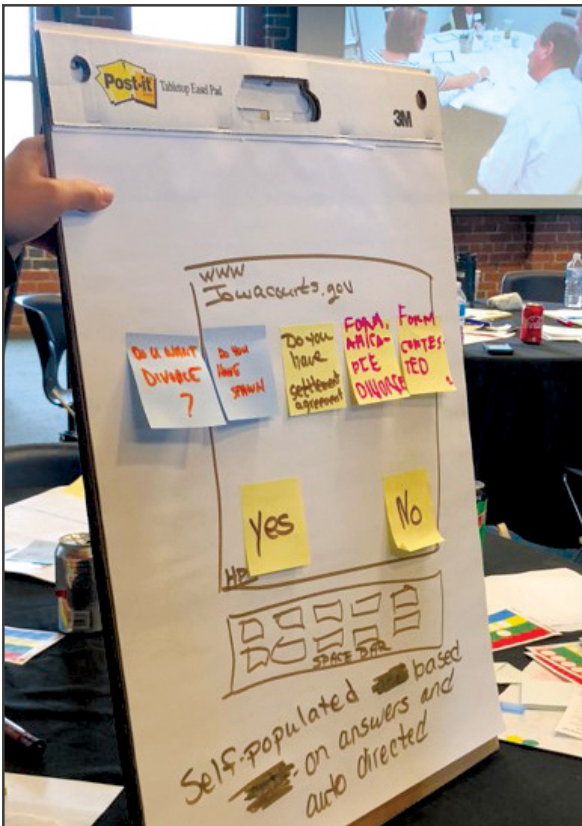
Teams then addressed the question: How might we help **[USER DESCRIPTION]** to achieve **[GOAL]** because **[INSIGHT INTO USER SITUATION]**?





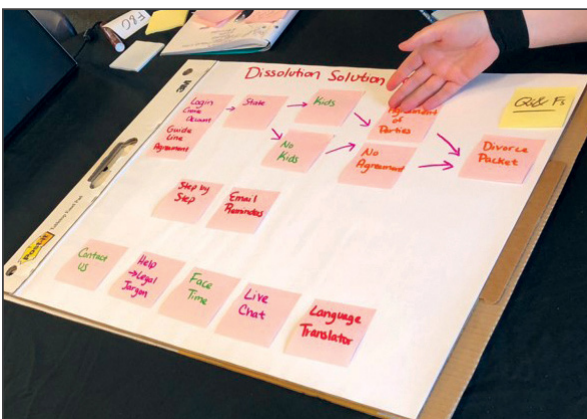
## DEVELOP & TEST SOLUTION

Teams brainstorm product, service, and policy solutions, ultimately selecting one to prototype and test with other teams.



Teams selected one of the many solutions they developed to prototype—building rough sketches, creating tangible props, mimicking interactive service solutions, etc. The goal of these prototypes was to make them detailed enough so as to be able to test them within the team and with other sprint teams.

This exercise facilitated real-time feedback on the various prototypes, which allowed for real-time improvements to the tested product, policy, or service.



# COURT COMPASS PROVEN PRACTICE: PARTICIPANT EMOTIONS AND COMFORT

The underlying issues in divorce and separation cases are often very personal and very emotional. Litigants who have experienced these issues (particularly self-represented litigants, given their proximity to the procedural aspects of these cases in addition to the underlying emotional issues) may encounter difficulty at times when sharing their experiences.

IAALS offers the following practices from the Court Compass design sprints (that build on prior IAALS user-centric research on the divorce process) for ensuring that potentially vulnerable sprint participants are comfortable throughout the process:

- **Assess during the recruitment process whether the person might be unnecessarily traumatized by participation.**
- **Circulate design sprint ground rules in advance so that all participants know to be respectful and encourage everyone to have a voice and participate in the sprint.**
- **Give participants an opportunity at the start of the sprint to share their personal experience.**
- **Watch for discomfort throughout the process and ensure that participants know they are free to leave at any time without compromising receipt of their gift card.**
- **Where necessary, intervene in a group discussion to either reestablish ground rules or pivot the discussion toward more fruitful territory.**

# 5

## LOGISTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

**Location** – All Court Compass design sprints were held in neutral, non-intimidating environments. University facilities, bar association offices, hotel conference rooms, and community centers are all potential venues. Important factors when considering the room itself include: natural light, big walls, and no expensive art/decorations.



**Time and Date** – All but one of the Court Compass design sprints were held on a Saturday. This date was selected to facilitate litigant availability. Broadly speaking, however, the date of the sprint should be selected based on the circumstances and needs of the participants.

# 5

## LOGISTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

**Length** – Depending on the focus of the sprint, the availability of key stakeholders, and the desired depth of prototype development, testing, and iteration, a design sprint for court process reform could range anywhere from a half day to several days. (Google Ventures partners Jake Knapp, John Zeratsky, and Braden Kowitz set out a week-long sprint process in *Sprint: How to Solve Big Problems and Test New Ideas in Just Five Days*.)

The IAALS Court Compass project team tested a variety of sprint formats, including:

- A full day, 9 AM to 5 PM design sprint;
- A half day, 9 AM to 1 PM design sprint; and
- A three-quarter day sprint from 9 AM to 2:30 PM.

Based on participant feedback, the 9 AM to 2:30 PM format was used for most of the Court Compass sprints. This format provided sufficient time for a productive sprint without requiring that participants commit a full Saturday to the event.

# 5

## LOGISTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

**Sprint Teams** – The number of participants in each sprint will depend on the issue and the composition of the stakeholder group. For example, the IAALS Court Compass project team set a goal for 15 self-represented litigants and 10 court stakeholders (clerks, attorneys, judges, etc.), broken up into five teams. We endeavored to compose diverse teams in terms of self-represented litigants and other stakeholders.

**Staffing** – Sprint discussions and the materials generated during the sprint provide a wealth of information on problems, opportunities, and solutions. Sprint organizers should plan on staffing each sprint team with a dedicated notetaker to preserve the discussion. Google Forms provides an easy and organized way to take and condense notes; it is important to test any note-taking technology platform in advance.

**Coaches and Facilitators** – The one to two main design sprint facilitators who guide the protocol throughout the day benefit from having additional help facilitating discussion across the teams. These extra facilitators (maximum one per team) can be your own staff or partners you work with, and can help by moving from team to team to ensure that:

- Conversation is flowing and not stalled;
- Discussion is on topic;
- Everyone is participating; and
- Participant questions are answered quickly.

Facilitators can also help teams work through contentious discussions and, where necessary, diffuse tense situations.

# COURT COMPASS PROVEN PRACTICE: SAMPLE SPRINT PROTOCOL I

In this Court Compass sprint protocol—which was used in more than half of the sprints—participants moved from problem identification to opportunity identification to testing solutions.

TIME	TASK
9:00 – 9:15 AM	Team, Project, and Facilitator Introductions
9:15 – 10:00 AM	Mapping the Status Quo / User Experience: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where do positives and negatives occur?</li> <li>• What are some key breakdowns?</li> <li>• What are the specific pain points?</li> <li>• Where are the areas of opportunity?</li> </ul>
10:00 – 10:45 AM	Develop Stakeholder Personas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who are they (demographics)?</li> <li>• What is important to them?</li> <li>• What are their main concerns?</li> <li>• What are the big priorities?</li> </ul>
10:45 – 11:00 AM	Break
11:00 – 11:30 AM	If we didn't have any constraints, what would we change about the divorce process? Processes? Services? Products? Wildcard ideas?
11:30 – 11:45 AM	Select top three ideas and create a one-line description
11:45 – 12:15 PM	Lunch Break
12:15 – 12:45 PM	Develop Concept Prototype (create sketches, diagrams, improvisations)
12:45 – 1:00 PM	Break
1:00 – 1:30 PM	Group Prototype Testing and Refinement
1:30 – 2:15 PM	Plenary Reporting on Prototype and Feedback
2:15 – 2:45 PM	Closing Thoughts and Recommendations



# COURT COMPASS PROVEN PRACTICE: SAMPLE SPRINT PROTOCOL II

In this Court Compass sprint protocol—which was used in later sprints—participants selected from a number of initially prototyped solutions and further developed and refined these solutions.

TIME	TASK
9:00 – 9:15 AM	Team, Project, and Facilitator Introductions
9:15 – 10:00 AM	Mapping the Status Quo / User Experience: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where do positives and negatives occur?</li> <li>• What are some key breakdowns?</li> <li>• What are the specific pain points?</li> <li>• Where are the areas of opportunity?</li> </ul>
10:00 – 10:45 AM	Review Prototypes from Previous Sprints: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pros and cons of prototypes?</li> <li>• Changes we would make to the prototypes?</li> <li>• Additional prototype ideas?</li> <li>• Rank prototypes as high, medium, low, or no.</li> </ul>
10:45 – 11:00 AM	Break
11:00 – 11:45 AM	Choose the highest ranked idea to work on and list: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Target user;</li> <li>• Must do's for prototype;</li> <li>• Must not do's for prototype; and</li> <li>• Nice-to-have recommendations for prototype.</li> </ul>
11:45 – 12:15 PM	Lunch Break
12:15 – 1:00 PM	Develop Concept Prototype (create sketches, diagrams, improvisations)
1:00 – 1:30 PM	Group Prototype Testing
1:30 – 2:00 PM	Refine Prototype Based on User Feedback
2:00 – 2:30 PM	Closing Thoughts and Recommendations

# 6

## COLLECTING FEEDBACK ON THE SPRINT

At the conclusion of the Court Compass design sprints, participants were given an opportunity to share any final thoughts on the substance of, or the process used during, the sprint. IAALS administered an evaluation form to facilitate continuous improvement of the project design sprints.

Please rate your level of agreement with each statement below.

	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neither Agree Nor Disagree 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
1. I understood the instructions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. The process maps were easy to use.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. Workshop activities happened in an order that made sense to me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. The workshop activities were engaging.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. The workshop activities produced useful ideas for improving the divorce process.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. All group members contributed ideas.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7. I felt comfortable expressing my views in the workshop setting.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8. I felt others were comfortable expressing their views.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9. I was able to contribute to the workshop activities in a meaningful way.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10. I felt all group members actively participated throughout.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11. I felt comfortable in the physical space where the workshop was held.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

# 6

## COLLECTING FEEDBACK ON THE SPRINT

The Court Compass project team analyzed the exit questionnaires on an ongoing basis and considered protocol amendments and other changes for future sprints in response to participant feedback.

How likely would you be to recommend a workshop like this one to a friend, family member, or colleague?

Extremely Unlikely											Extremely Likely
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o

What were the most positive aspects of the workshop?

---

---

---

---

---

What could we do to make future workshops better?

---

---

---

---

---

Additional Comments

---

---

---

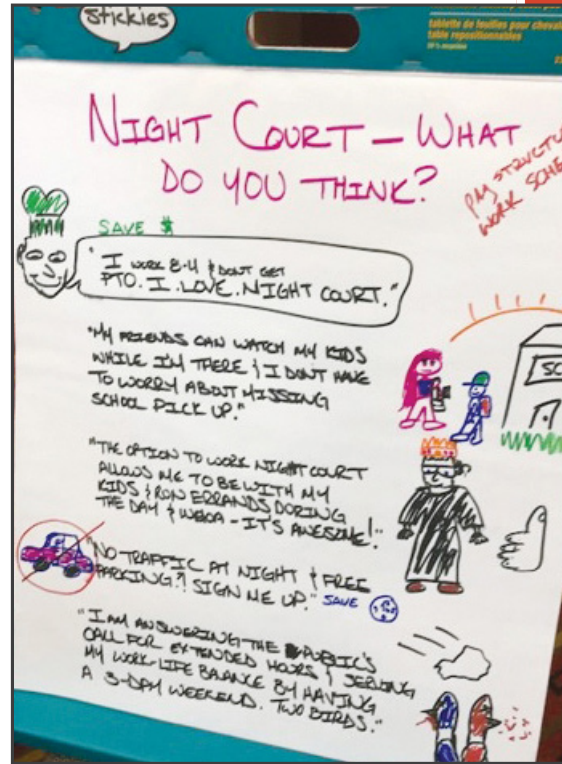
---

---

# Ideas/Prototypes that Have Come Out of Design Sprints



Family Law Resource Agency



Night Court



Court Concierge



Divorce Triage

# Further Resources

For further information on design sprints, please visit the following websites:



IAALS' Court Compass website provides information on the project and how design sprints play a role.

<http://iaals.du.edu/courtcompass>



Legal Design Lab is an interdisciplinary team based at Stanford Law School & d.school, working at the intersection of human-centered design, technology and law to build a new generation of legal products and services.

<http://www.legaltechdesign.com/>



The NuLawLab at Northeastern University School of Law merges creative arts and law to create novel approaches to legal empowerment. More information is available on the NuLawLab website.

<http://www.nulawlab.org/>

# Good Luck on Your Design Sprint!

Tell us what you think: [CourtCompass@du.edu](mailto:CourtCompass@du.edu)



**Natalie Anne Knowlton**  
Director, Special Projects



**Michael Houlberg**  
Manager



**Janet Drobinske**  
Senior Legal Assistant



**Logan Cornett**  
Senior Research Analyst

For reprint permission, please contact IAALS.  
Copyright © 2019 IAALS, the Institute for the  
Advancement of the American Legal System.  
All rights reserved

