Checklist for Improving Court Forms

Important court forms are often long and use complicated legal language. This makes it hard for people to understand their obligations, like when to appear in court. If you're interested in improving your court forms, see the checklist below.

☐ **Simplify language.** Aim to use language at a 6th grade reading level. You can easily figure out the grade level of your document using Microsoft Word; find the instructions here.

☐ **Add a spot for people to write down their contact information, if they choose.** Adding an option for personal contact information, like a phone number, could allow for easier notification and rescheduling if someone doesn't show up for court.

☐ **Highlight court appearance information, including consequences.** Put the court date, time, and location at the top of the form so people don't miss it. Highlight the consequences for missing court at the top as well. Some people don't realize that they can be arrested for a missed court date.

☐ **Organize information into sections.** Generally, grouping relevant information together and creating clear, labeled sections can help increase readability and understanding.

☐ **Tell people who to contact for help.** Include a phone number, email address, website URL, and/or QR code where people can get more information about coming to court.

Want to Learn More?

ideas42 helped stakeholders redesign forms to make court appearance information more accessible. See their redesigned forms for Harris County, TX, here and for New York City here.

The National Center for State Courts also has tips for making court forms user-friendly; find them here.