New Jersey Unemployment Insurance Emails

Redesign, Beta Results, and Analysis (A Case Study)

New Jersey Department of Labor   The Office of Innovation   Semicolon Design Group

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New Jersey (NJ) claimants, like many other state claimants, struggled to receive their Unemployment Insurance (UI) benefits as COVID-19 began to transform the world in early 2020.

Some are still sorting out their pandemic benefits three years later — a scenario that is common across the country. While states did all they could with the resources they had to distribute benefits to those in need, many states are still recovering from the aftermath of UI chaos, leaving leadership to think, "What if this happens again?" or "Could it have gone better?"

Various aspects of unemployment insurance touch a claimant and notices are often communication points from a state to a claimant that are critical to benefit resolution. Notices include requests for information, application deadlines, missing document alerts, determinations, etc. and they are vital to how states distribute benefits while adhering to policies. Claimants are responsible for answering in a timely manner and the end goal is the same between states and their residents: (Eligible) Benefits must be paid.

In March 2022, the State of New Jersey's Department of Labor (DOL), New Jersey's Office of Innovation, and Semicolon Design Group joined efforts in taking on communication reform for UI. Notices were being sent to claimants from various systems with unidentifiable patterns, documentation, and synchronization of intention. Some were printed, some were emailed, and some were available online. Choosing a starting point required strategy and careful execution.

With modernization at the forefront of New Jersey DOL's leadership, emails were chosen as the starting point to innovate using the human-centered design process and philosophy. Printed notices and claimant dashboards are also being transformed in tandem, but this report focuses on email reform efforts and their impact on New Jersey's unemployment system.

> *...the end goal is the same between states and their residents: (Eligible) Benefits must be paid.*

> *With modernization at the forefront of New Jersey DOL's leadership, emails were chosen as the starting point to innovate using the human-centered design process and philosophy.*

Emails began playing a larger role in New Jersey's unemployment system when Salesforce was implemented in 2018.

A standard template was set up which consisted of a banner that included the New Jersey state seal and a letter addressed to the claimant. New software had replaced old and opened the door for more automation and changes in operations.

Image of New Jersey's email before this project.

Challenges

- New Jersey emails did not have usability tests run against them with claimants and/or general human subjects
- There were no resources representing a claimant's point of view while drafting the UI communication from New Jersey
- Emails were policy-driven by UI experts in fear of auditing
- Communication review was not conducted on the emails in production
- Emails were not mobile-friendly
- Language used in letters to claimants had no typographical dimension and content was delivered as long paragraphs in the form of wall text

Opportunities

- HTML implementation is as easy as cut and paste once it is written and tested
- Pathway from design to implementation had the least amount of friction and a shorter operational route when analyzing UI communication channels
- New Jersey team was willing to try and experiment with design changes
- Technical team was strong and agile
- Leadership was supportive of these new changes
- Relationship between the Office of Innovation and New Jersey DOL was carefully crafted for efficiency

The ideal end vision for New Jersey's email reform is to deliver clearer, mobile-friendly messages to claimants that inspire action in a timely manner.

Emails should have a recognizable subject line that drives a user to open the email, contain plain and action-forward language for quick comprehension, display easy call-to-action (CTA) buttons for swift action, and be delivered at the right time of day on specific days of the week to increase the likelihood of successful collaboration. Claimants tend to perceive being ostracized from and in conflict with states when engaging in transactions, so shifting communications to a "working together" perception is the goal.

Developing a product-centered team that fosters feedback from claimants, agents, and legal/policy initiatives while monitoring analytics tracking claimant behavior is an ideal way to ensure that more effective communication is thoughtfully delivered by the state — a structure that is inflight by Senior Advisor/Director of the Office of Unemployment Insurance Modernization, Jill Gutierrez, with support from the NJ Office of Innovation.

Before migrating all communication to "modernized" emails, it is important to create a prioritized service map showing where a claimant can find information. This helps to ensure that existing paper notices are revisited with intention and purpose instead of being completely removed without review. Having a service map that orchestrates communication across all channels that exist within the Department of Labor is also ideal, and this is also in development in New Jersey at this time.

Along with email reform, printed notices and claim status dashboard redesigns will benefit the larger goal of keeping claimants in tune with their benefit experience.

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Improvements to emails can positively impact a wide range of metrics from claimant outcomes to agent processing.

Metrics that will showcase the impact of email changes from this beta launch include:

Login Rate

Percentage of users who open the emails that are sent to them

Government related emails have the highest open rates (28.77%)*

Click-through Rate (CTR)

Percentage of users who click on the link in the email after seeing it

Conversion Rate (CR)

Percentage of users who complete the actions desired by an organization

No Response

Percentage of users who receive emails and ignore it

Data points around emails were recorded and documented focusing on the following attributes:

Clarity, Confidence, Urgency, Trust

🔗 **Resource:**

*https://mailchimp.com/help/about-open-and-click-rates/

https://mailchimp.com/resources/email-marketing-benchmarks/
#:~:text=Average%20Totals&text=The%20average%20email%20open%20rate,the%20emails%20you%20send%20them.

https://mailchimp.com/marketing-glossary/

Many human-centered design projects begin with extensive research interviews, shadowing, policy investigation, etc., which requires a lot of upfront time spent before getting to any solutions or usability testing. To bring greater speed to this project, it took on a product-centered, iterative approach, which ran in parallel the process of design, development, and usability testing, with legal review, production, and implementation. It relied (and continues to rely) on metrics and survey results to continuously improve design and delivery, with the strategy to evolve and iterate with user interaction from the public.

Human-centered design processes were thoroughly utilized to transform NJ UI emails. Additionally, there was a level of common-sense editing that was brought to the table. Communication that is hard to read is simply hard to read. Taking a step back and asking the question, "Does this make sense?" is a great way to anchor a project and to encourage the human side of staff to step up and out of their daily tasks.

To bring greater speed to this project, it took on a product-centered, iterative approach, which ran in parallel the process of design, development, and usability testing, with legal review, production, and implementation.

Starting March 2022, the team went from

Concept, Synthesis, Design, Testing, Implementation

within approximately five months.

It resulted in the redesign of around sixty emails with one program (containing nine emails) moving forward into beta launch.

As of April 2023, there are 44 emails that have been replaced within claimant communication platforms (Salesforce and AWS).

For more details on this timeline, visit Appendix A.

Summary
of Redesign

DESIGN SYSTEM

VISUAL AND UX DESIGN

SUBJECT LINE TRANSFORMATION

TEMPLATE STRUCTURE

PLAIN AND ACTION-FORWARD LANGUAGE

EMAIL HTML DEVELOPMENT

TIMING OF DELIVERY

Design System, Extending from USWDS

It was important to reference the U.S. Web Design System (USWDS) in order to have a conversation with and continue the larger efforts around modernizing and designing a better government digital service across the nation.

The redesigned New Jersey email templates used USWDS design patterns as a foundation to develop derivative designs and built a system that met New Jersey's design standards while providing new elements to add onto NJ's pattern library. There are currently no email template designs provided by USWDS.

New Jersey had already heavily adopted USWDS design patterns so this approach was strategic and stripped away upfront branding efforts that generally arise when starting a new project.

The new email design is developed to help further the USWDS design system and seeks to eventually be added to its larger design pattern library. Iconography, callout patterns, and typography are the core patterns that are adapted from USWDS. Process-oriented actions and status elements were also adapted with minor adjustments and reformatting. Color patterns have also been adapted from both USWDS and New Jersey's Design System.



🔗 **Resource:**

U.S. Web Design System

Visual and UX Design

Redistribution of White Space

For visual balance and to alleviate anxiety and stress created from heavy text walls, the distribution of white space was improved throughout the page

Organic margins on the right side of the page were prioritized in order to create a natural flow of information while scanning, which reduces the feeling of resistance prompted in most readers when encountering opaque, rectangular blocks of text
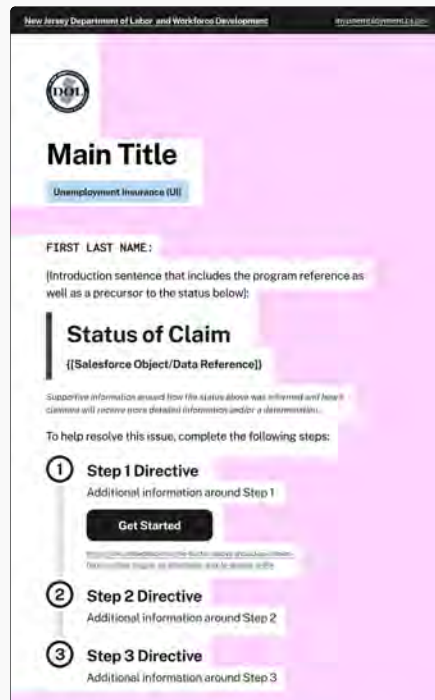
Responsiveness

Desktop and mobile standards were created to correspond to devices used by users
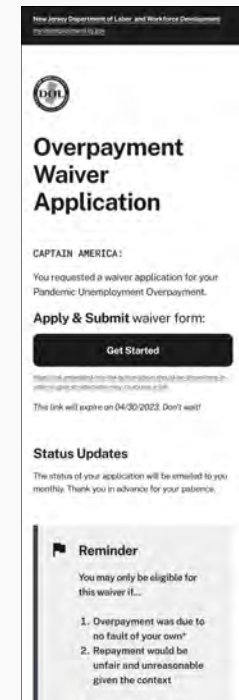
Restructuring Type Hierarchy

A type hierarchy was developed to include the following styles:

Primary Information
- *Heading 1 (Headline/Title)*
- *Heading 2 (Status of any material that is supplemental to title)*

Secondary Information
- *Heading 3 ("By the way" introductions–high-level themes that add more color to next steps or what-ifs)*
- *Paragraph 1 ("Inside voice" communication — as if an agent were speaking to a claimant)*
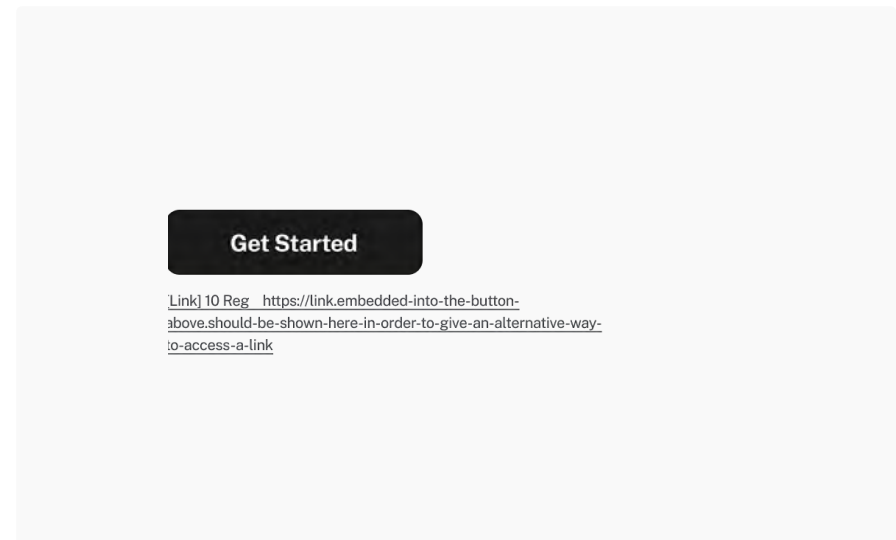
Tertiary Information
- *Paragraph 2 (Extra information that the claimant should know to further their understanding of their notice)*
- *Paragraph 3 (Extra information that the claimant can read if curious about more details regarding their situation)*
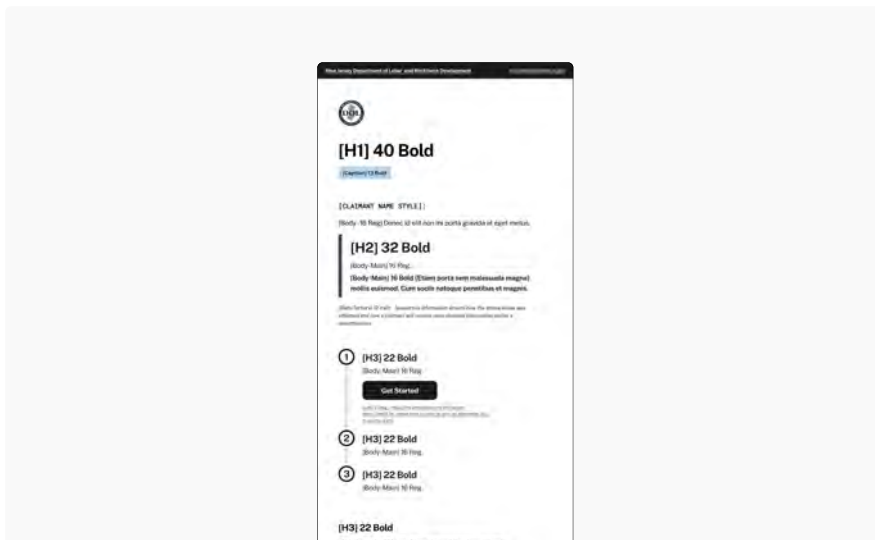
Creating Buttons

Visual buttons that are clear CTAs were created to guide users to act on correspondence

Simple Steps for Action

1,2,3 step process was used in favor of paragraphed information to provide clear next steps using plain and action-oriented language

Identifiable Patterns and Sections

Clear visual distinctions between sections/components were organized and designed to help users navigate their way through content

① **Login & Answer** the questions
This form will expire on 5/12/2022

Get Started

https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?
id=0cN2UAI4n0uzauCkG9ZCp8zTKxTpe0RMmjY7qrMr_3BUOFlV
UklYTzhDQjlWR0NaMVk1NjBQODJDWCQlQCN0PWcu

② **Upload** documentation
Required proofs must be sent by 00/00/0000

③ **Submit** your form. **Don't wait.**
Look for a confirmation email

Retaining/Increasing Trust

Balancing a modern design with government-like seriousness was carefully architected so that states didn't swing to the other edge of the pendulum — from "too serious" to "too lax."

- *State DOL logos and state seals were added to signal brand alignment and trust*
- *A serif font was inserted at the bottom when spelling out "The State of New Jersey" to balance out the sans-serif typography used in the email (it is common to feel more seriousness and rigidity with a serif font as opposed to a sans-serif font)*
- *Disclaimer and anti-fraud language were placed in the footer*
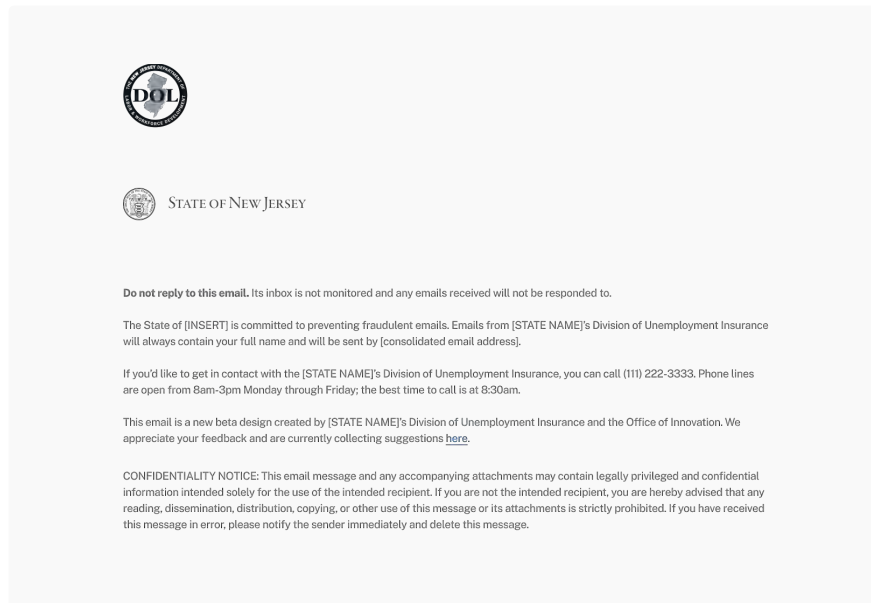
Honoring Names

An all-caps mono font was brought in to display first and last names of claimants in order to "computerize" the variability of name nuances — many intake forms have a variety of issues within their data collection where some will be saved exactly as the user typed them, some will transform them into all caps, and some will title-case whatever content is received.

- *For example, New Jerseyans who have last names with CamelCases were found to have their names incorrectly saved by whatever system that was processing their data. In order to try and honor the correct way names are formatted, an all-caps approach with a monotype font was used. Although all-caps is not an ideal way to solve this issue, this decision felt balanced because a monotype font further reinforces the "technological" appearance of information, diluting potential moments of disappointment and reorienting the focus on the confirmation that the user's name is part of the system's data.*

Do not reply to this email. Its inbox is not monitored and any emails received will not be responded to.

The State of [INSERT] is committed to preventing fraudulent emails. Emails from [STATE NAME]'s Division of Unemployment Insurance will always contain your full name and will be sent by [consolidated email address].

If you'd like to get in contact with the [STATE NAME]'s Division of Unemployment Insurance, you can call (111) 222-3333. Phone lines are open from 8am-3pm Monday through Friday; the best time to call is at 8:30am.

This email is a new beta design created by [STATE NAME]'s Division of Unemployment Insurance and the Office of Innovation. We appreciate your feedback and are currently collecting suggestions here.

CONFIDENTIALITY NOTICE: This email message and any accompanying attachments may contain legally privileged and confidential information intended solely for the use of the intended recipient. If you are not the intended recipient, you are hereby advised that any reading, dissemination, distribution, copying, or other use of this message or its attachments is strictly prohibited. If you have received this message in error, please notify the sender immediately and delete this message.

FIRST LAST NAME:

Visual and UX Design developed according to human-centric principles guide how people read and absorb information. Primary information will be seen first as a reader scans a page to gain a general understanding of the content. Secondary information begins to fill in some of the gaps as readers slow down to read more. Tertiary information is purely additive if a user would like to know more. Ideally, primary and secondary information are written in a manner that encourages further reading and clarity and action-forward language increases engagement.

(For more on Design Process and Timeline, See Appendix A)

Subject Line Transformation

Subscriptions, newsletters, shipping confirmations, etc. saturate inboxes, and it is important to acknowledge the kind of "inbox chaos" individuals experience on a daily basis.
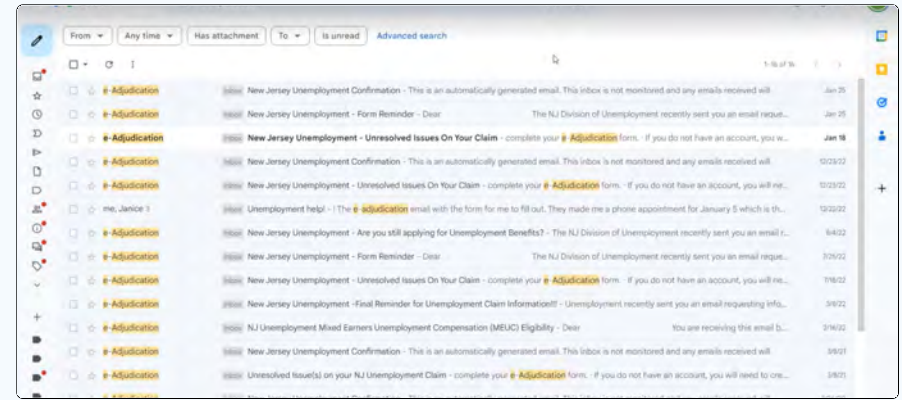

Image of a claimant's inbox:

Based on the volume of email that people receive, innovating on the subject line was a piece of the puzzle that could not be ignored. This is a new area of consideration for many states because printed notices do not have subject lines on their envelopes, and more so because many states have not yet migrated to email communication. Thankfully, marketing departments within e-commerce, healthcare, education, etc. can help us with their learnings, and patterns found in campaigns/programs like these can be borrowed. Because the subject line is the first touchpoint with which a user interacts, it is important to establish a consistent new pattern that is effective and recognizable in order to increase Open Rate (OR).

The objective of this aspect of the redesign was to establish a communication pattern that would drive a claimant to click on the email as soon as possible as it would ultimately help them achieve their end goals. The subject line needed to clearly communicate the purpose of a message and promote action.

Many email campaigns outside of government are continuously experimenting with ways to raise their OR, and culture will dictate how this subject line must morph while we evolve as a society. A successful pattern that is being used amongst other industries is to write within the subject line what is needed followed by the issue being addressed.

An example of this in use is the Apple Developer program. Developers around the world need to certify their distribution certificates to be able to keep their developed apps on the App Store. One of their subject lines reads: "Action Needed: Distribution Certificate Expires in 30 Days." Another example is Slack, a chat portal used mostly for work purposes, which has a subject line, "ACTION REQUIRED - New certificate authority for slack-edge.com."

The objective of this aspect of the redesign was to establish a communication pattern that would drive a claimant to click on the email as soon as possible as it would ultimately help them achieve their end goals.

To build off of subject-line examples in use by other industries, the UI emails created a pattern for subject lines that could scale by program and allow for another level of reform within UI communication.

This pattern has been shown to create more success and urgency for the claimant, and a bit more desire to actually click on the email.

An insertion of a bracket was introduced at the beginning of the subject line that consists of one to three words. This wrapped the primary motivation/action the state was notifying the claimant to take. Words such as "Application," "Received," "Determination Enclosed," or "FAQs" can be used to synthesize what a claimant is about to encounter. In cases where immediate action is required, putting "Action Needed" within these brackets helps create more urgency.

[Application]

[Received]

[Determination Enclosed]

Something to experiment with is "Action Needed" vs "Action Requested" where it changes the notice from a demand to an ask. As of the time of publishing this report, A/B tests were not performed to see if this alternate positioning would yield higher interaction.

After the brackets, adding a program-specific name such as "Unemployment Insurance Claim" or "Pandemic Assistance Program" can bring more color to what the claimant is about to read when clicking on the email. This pattern has been shown to create more success and urgency for the claimant, and a bit more desire to actually click on the email.

During the beta launch, this change was not able to be measured through an OR rate, but Login Rates (LR) were captured instead, which was a guaranteed Click-Through Rate (CTR). As a result, this subject line change created an increase of at least 35.8% in CTR. Although an accurate OR was unable to be captured, it is guaranteed that the OR is higher than 35.8%.

[Application] NJ DOL Pandemic Overpayment Waiver

[Reminder] NJ DOL Pandemic Overpayment Waiver

It is hypothesized that consistency of a pattern in use is of more importance than the pattern itself (within designed boundaries that make sense).

While marketing departments may want to explore inserting emojis into subject lines, which in other industries is appropriate and increases open rates, this may not be the best solution for program-related communication where benefits are distributed. Perhaps in a few years, this may be revisited based on cultural analysis related to how emojis are perceived by the general public. As of the time of this report, they are perceived as too casual and not formal enough to represent government communication.

Template Structure

This new email structure is comprised of nine components and they are as follows:

1

A banner that includes links to a state's UI Page and DOL page

2

A header that includes the state's DOL logo, a title, and an optional program related tag

3

An an introductory section that includes the claimant's name as well as an overall statement **of the number-one thing that they need to know** about what they're about to read (which often refers to a status of some sort)

4

A numbered step-by-step instructional method of the next thing that they need to do (limited to three steps)

5

Supplemental content that comes in the form of a title and a paragraph, usually consisting of either one paragraph or two (limited to two sections)

6

A callout section depending on the nature of the email that would consist of things like appeal rights or rights in general that a claimant should have in their back pocket to understand and know their options

7

An additional color-highlighted callout that is integral to a claimant achieving their goal but doesn't necessarily have a core piece in their success unless they run into errors (such as login information)

8

A footer that includes a note about equal opportunities and a state seal with the name of the state

9

A disclaimer that includes information about fraud, contact information, and general disclaimer content

These nine components can be mixed and matched and are the foundation for delivering a successful communication piece that a claimant can easily understand and act upon.

It is important to note that these components were designed with a specific organizational structure to ensure effective communication. The structure provides a way for each element to have a purpose, and is arranged in order of purpose according to human-centric principles of information absorption. Variations of these components are available depending on context but the overall flow of information in the email is fixed.

To make sure emails have the most impact and create the action desired, the elements must not be reordered. The banner and footer will always be at the top and bottom, respectively, but between those elements there is some flexibility with regards to the rest. Some of these pieces might be removed when they are not needed but their order should not be reshuffled from the predetermined structure. For example, components 3 and 4 can be skipped, so 5 follows directly after 2. But 2 should not be placed after 5.

Variations of these components are available depending on context but the overall flow of information in the email is fixed.
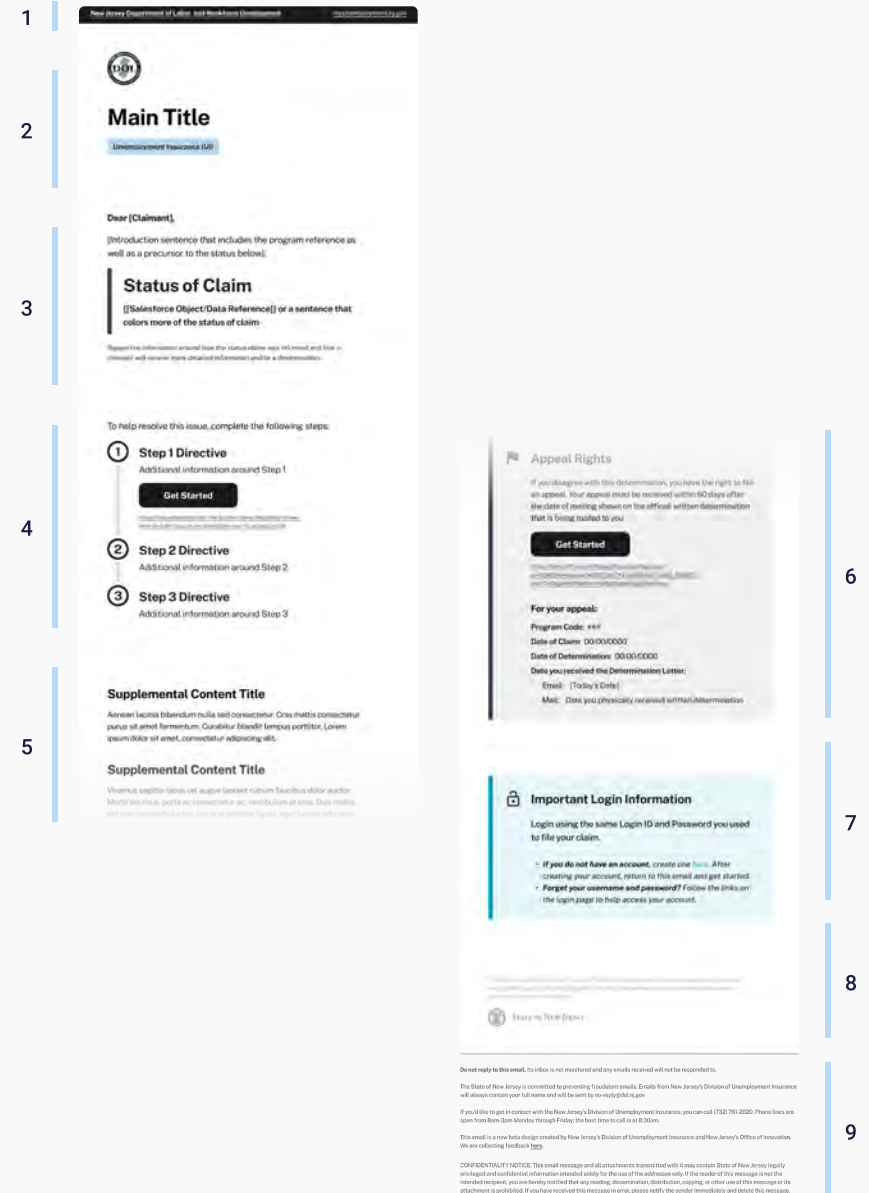
Plain and Action-Forward Language

Language rewrites for this project were completed based on the following principles:

PRIMARY CONTENT

Primary content involves the first scan of information which involves the title, a status, and an action based on that status. **It consists of one or two things claimants take away from the email.** Within 15 seconds of reading an email, users should know what it is trying to say and understand why they received it in the first place.

SECONDARY CONTENT

Secondary content **adds color to the primary content but does not outshine it.** It is supportive but necessary for a user to complete their task successfully and feel confident that they accomplished the ask that has been requested of them.

TERTIARY CONTENT

Tertiary content includes details that are often serving edge-case scenarios where users look for policy information or supportive material to help further their understanding of primary and secondary content. **This content is to be ignored in the initial digestion of information,** but able to be quickly found by those looking for supportive material to help better understand the issue at hand.

This organization of content does not mean they are linearly placed in this order throughout the page. For example, it should not be assumed that Primary content is followed by Secondary content, which is then followed by Tertiary content. In the graphic on the previous page, you can see how Primary content flows throughout the page with Secondary and Tertiary content coming in between to support the main takeaway.

In addition to breaking down content in these three ways, action-forward language was used to simplify and guide users in an upfront and direct way. For many who are hoping to create human-centric communications, the inclination is to write in an overly friendly, conciliatory manner. Conversations with users reveal that this kind of language produced by the government seems condescending and overly explanatory. It is clear that users prefer direct, no-frill language that is understandable and does not create a sense of anxiety or presumed intellectual ignorance.

Using verbs that create movement and prompt responses was key to this email redesign. The question, "What do we need this claimant to do?" began the rewrite journey, and thus produced action-forward language. Action-based directives are words like "Login," "Answer," "Upload," etc. and drive a user to understand that there are things to do — breaking these down to a maximum of three steps makes them feel like it is achievable and increases the motivation to complete the task.

If you visit any instructional class, you can find a similar pattern to how someone directs you. "Lift your left leg," "Open your heart," "Raise your right arm," are a few examples from a yoga class that follows this pattern.

Providing as much personalized content as possible was also the goal. Whenever possible, and whenever there was data to provide this extra context, it was put to use. For example, the ability to provide a claimant with their username for login was worth an extra session of collaboration so that fixing login issues met its highest potential as far as what the state could provide.

Other example data sets include:

- The beginning and end of the week dates for when a claimant needs to certify, provide extra materials, or receives a determination
- Calculating deadline dates with formulas that correspond to a claimant's date of claim
- Providing the tax year in question when asking for documentation
- Reasons why a claim is being investigated
- Appeal process details such as program codes, date of claim, date of determination, etc.

Using verbs that create movement and prompt responses was key to this email redesign.

(For commentary on Plain Language, See Plain Language Commentary)

Email HTML Development

Email platforms render emails with wild unpredictability, making email engineering challenging to master.

A strong example of this is Gmail (where millions of people access their emails), which strips out custom fonts from all email designs, as opposed to iOS systems that honor custom fonts. Products like MailChimp exist because of this challenge, where user customization is restricted and engineering is ultimately handled by the product itself.

In-line CSS is critical to maintaining consistent design in the delivery of an email and careful attention has been paid toward the development of these new email templates. Developing this kind of HTML format requires a lot more labor but once it is correctly written, content can be edited seamlessly. In addition to making sure that emails are delivered in the way they are intended to be read, it was created to be mobile-friendly, ensuring greater success.

Over 61.9%* of people access their emails via mobile phone and therefore mobile access and legibility needed to be prioritized. New Jersey UI email templates are created and delivered to be read on both mobile and desktop.

Litmus https://www.litmus.com/ is a great tool to test emails throughout platforms for Quality Assurance.

(For detailed information on the development process, see Appendix B)

🔗 **Resource:**
https://www.emailmonday.com/mobile-email-usage-statistics/

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Timing of Delivery

The beta launch not only transformed the design and language of emails but the time of delivery was also carefully crafted to ensure success.

Comparing this concept to a printed notice that arrives when a postal worker makes their rounds (generally within a timeframe that is expected and repetitive on a daily basis), it is up to the United States Postal Service (USPS) to deliver on their own operational time schedule. But for email, it's left to the sender to set that regularity and optimal time for delivery.

The timing of when an email appears in the inbox of the claimant is critical to raising the likelihood of them opening the email and acting in a timely manner. When looking at marketing efforts from outside of government, especially in e-commerce, data shows that sending emails on a Tuesday or Wednesday at 9 a.m. leads to a higher CTR rate because people typically open email around 10 a.m*.

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Before the email redesign process, New Jersey DOL's automated emails were sent by Salesforce according to date of delivery, which meant they would often be dispatched at midnight on the date in question. When thinking through what the experience would be like for a claimant receiving an email in the middle of the night, it didn't make sense to potentially aggravate and confuse an email receiver with this timing. With the support of data that reveals most recipients open emails around 10am, New Jersey DOL's emails are now scheduled to be sent at around 9 a.m.

As a domino effect, by scheduling emails at 9am, automated triggers within Salesforce began to work better for New Jersey. It is common to find automated restrictions amongst platforms like Salesforce because of its off-the-shelf technology condition. Because subsequent reminders are commonly restricted to "1 day" or "7 days," or rather, "24 hrs" or "168 hrs," as long as the initial email is set at an intentional time, emails within workflows will follow suit. Occasionally this may lead to delivery on a weekend, but it is a worthwhile tradeoff where an email arrival will occur at a more convenient time.

🔗 ***Resource:
https://www.sender.net/blog/best-time-to-send-emails/**

Usability Testing

Usability Testing

The overall approach toward this redesign was to run just enough research on the unknown and ultimately build and design based on expertise, making room for product-centered activity.

As such, traditional usability testing was mixed in with more ad-hoc, guerilla formatted testing in order to gather quick feedback. Rapid changes with the goal to prioritize implementation and analytics informed how the redesign was impacting users, and iterations based on incoming data became part of the project plan.

Data points around the effectiveness of design interventions are required to measure the impact of a redesign and the behavioral changes it begins to foster. Throughout the development of the emails, Reddit users who were posting questions about their unemployment insurance within the state of New Jersey were targeted and user testing sessions were conducted against the email templates that were in development.

Rapid changes with the goal to prioritize implementation and analytics informed how the redesign was impacting users, and iterations based on incoming data became part of the project plan.

With the insights gained throughout this process, there were several edits to the emails that were made, but three are most notable:

1 **Anti-Fraud/Phishing/Scam and Trust**

2 **Call-to-Action (CTA) button placement in relation to 1,2,3 step process**

3 **Language and Understanding**

1

Anti-Fraud/Phishing/Scam and Trust

Early in the redesign process, visceral trust was managed through visual design but understanding how people sift through fraudulent content was an area that required further research. It was discovered that people generally look at the following to discern whether or not an email was actually coming from its declarer:

This ability to loop information back to the sender felt safe because there was a channel open for receiving information.

Sender's email address

Generally, the .gov email address brought forth immediate relief that it was trustworthy communication

Disclaminer Content

Information around phishing emails and clear descriptions on ways to tell the email was real.

One Reddit user referred to PayPal's footer where descriptions on common patterns were described to help customers understand that the email was not fraudulent. This example was pivotal to the development of New Jersey's footer content where not only does it contain disclaimer content, it now contains:

"The State of New Jersey is committed to preventing fraudulent emails. Emails from New Jersey's Division of Unemployment Insurance will always contain your full name and will be sent by no-reply@dol.nj.gov."

Displaying ways to contact the department

It was noted that in PayPal's footer, there was a way to contact PayPal if a fraudulent email was encountered. This ability to loop information back to the sender felt safe because there was a channel open for receiving information. Based on this need for an added sense of security, New Jersey's footer content now also includes:

"If you'd like to get in contact with New Jersey's Division of Unemployment Insurance, you can call 732-761-2020. Phone lines are open from 8am-3pm Monday through Friday; the best time to call is at 8:00am."

This triggered the reform of sent-by addresses that you can find in Appendix D.

2

Call-to-Action (CTA) button placement in relation to 1,2,3 step process

Printed notices do not have a CTA button and instructional directions are the core of the notice itself, but bringing this concept into a digital space needed testing and insight. Initially, placing the button after the three-step process seemed correct with the assumption that the state would want the claimant to read all three steps before taking action. However, when testing with users, this button was often overlooked and somehow psychologically hidden from sight.

To solve this issue, the composition of the three-step process was changed to place the CTA button under Step 1, which was often giving direction to login. With this placement, users saw the CTA button clearly, understood how to take action, and did not show any errors.

(For more information on CTA button journey, see Experimental Double Button section under Innovation)

> *Initially, placing the button after the three-step process seemed correct ... however, when testing with users, this button was often overlooked and somehow psychologically hidden from sight.*

① **Login & Answer** the questions
This form will expire on 5/12/2022

② **Upload** documentation
Required proofs must be sent by 00/00/0000

③ **Submit** your form. **Don't wait.**
Look for a confirmation email

[**Get Started**]

https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=0cN2UAl4n0uzauCkG9ZCp8zTKxTpe0RMmjY7qrMr_3BUOFlVUklYTzhDQjlWR0NaMVk1NjBQODJDWCQlQCN0PWcu

① **Login & Answer** the questions
This form will expire on 5/12/2022

[**Get Started**]

https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=0cN2UAl4n0uzauCkG9ZCp8zTKxTpe0RMmjY7qrMr_3BUOFlVUklYTzhDQjlWR0NaMVk1NjBQODJDWCQlQCN0PWcu

② **Upload** documentation
Required proofs must be sent by 00/00/0000

③ **Submit** your form. **Don't wait.**
Look for a confirmation email

3

Language and Understanding

For users across demographics and with varying proficiency in English comprehension, there were consistent trouble spots. An example of a change made based on user testing with non-native speakers is based on a word change. Users had a simple question, "What is 'queue'?" Based on this feedback, the title, "Still in our queue" was changed to "Still waiting for review."

Users had a simple question, "What is 'queue'?"

Still in our queue

Due to a high volume of requests, your waiver is waiting to be reviewed by an examiner.

↓

Still waiting for review

Due to a high volume of requests, your waiver is waiting to be reviewed by an examiner.

In addition to the Reddit users, a total of 10 people were interviewed, a mixture of New Jersey claimants as well as general human subjects, and usability tests were conducted with them.

Task-based testing was applied to determine comprehension and goal achievement metrics.

> *Initially, placing the button after the three-step process seemed correct ... however, when testing with users, this button was often overlooked and somehow psychologically hidden from sight.*

We asked the following questions within a session:

Exploratory

- *How does this email make you feel?*
- *How long did it take you to read/comprehend this email?*
- *What is this email trying to tell you?*

Task Based

Email Title
- *Based on this email title, what do you expect to find in this email?*

Email
- *Is there something this email requires of you?*
- *For what week is it referring to?*

Score based questions (1=low; 10=high)

Clarity
- *How clearly is this email communicating its content? (1-10)*

Urgency
- *How much urgency does this make you feel? (1-10)*

Confidence
- *How confident does it make you feel about moving forward and/or understanding what is required of you? (1-10)*

Trust
- *This is a secure email that I trust is from the State (1-10)*

Throughout usability tests, tasks were also timed and compared to measure any increase or decrease in time spent to achieve user goals.

Results and Synthesis

Clarity, urgency, confidence, and trust were target areas that were used to measure the effectiveness of the redesign.

Our findings indicated significant improvements to these target areas as well as additional more qualitative improvements.

It's important to note that these results are based on a small sample size, but this way of measuring impact is an innovative approach to taking qualitative data and making it quantitative. Tests like these will likely evolve in the future. We were not immediately testing for statistical significance, but rather for feedback and improved iterations. A/ B testing will drive statistical data that is currently in flight.

After testing the old emails and new emails side-by-side, it was found that with the redesign:

Users **were more engaged**

Users **read content faster**

Users **understood what was required of them faster**

Users **felt more agency**

Users **felt less alienated by the State**

Users **identified the presence of "new" information in the redesign even though the same content was present in the old design**

Measured via a self-reported scores:

Scale from 1-10

Clarity

4.5 → 9.75

+116.67%
Increase

AVG SCORE (OLD)   4.5

AVG SCORE (NEW)   9.75

DIFFERENCE   5.25

Urgency*

5.0 → 8.61

+72.22%
Increase

AVG SCORE (OLD)   5

AVG SCORE (NEW)   8.61

DIFFERENCE   3.61

Confidence

4.35 → 9.5

+118.39%
Increase

AVG SCORE (OLD)   4.35

AVG SCORE (NEW)   9.5

DIFFERENCE   9.69

Trust**

9.0 → 9.69

+7.64%
Increase

AVG SCORE (OLD)   9

AVG SCORE (NEW)   9.69

DIFFERENCE   .69
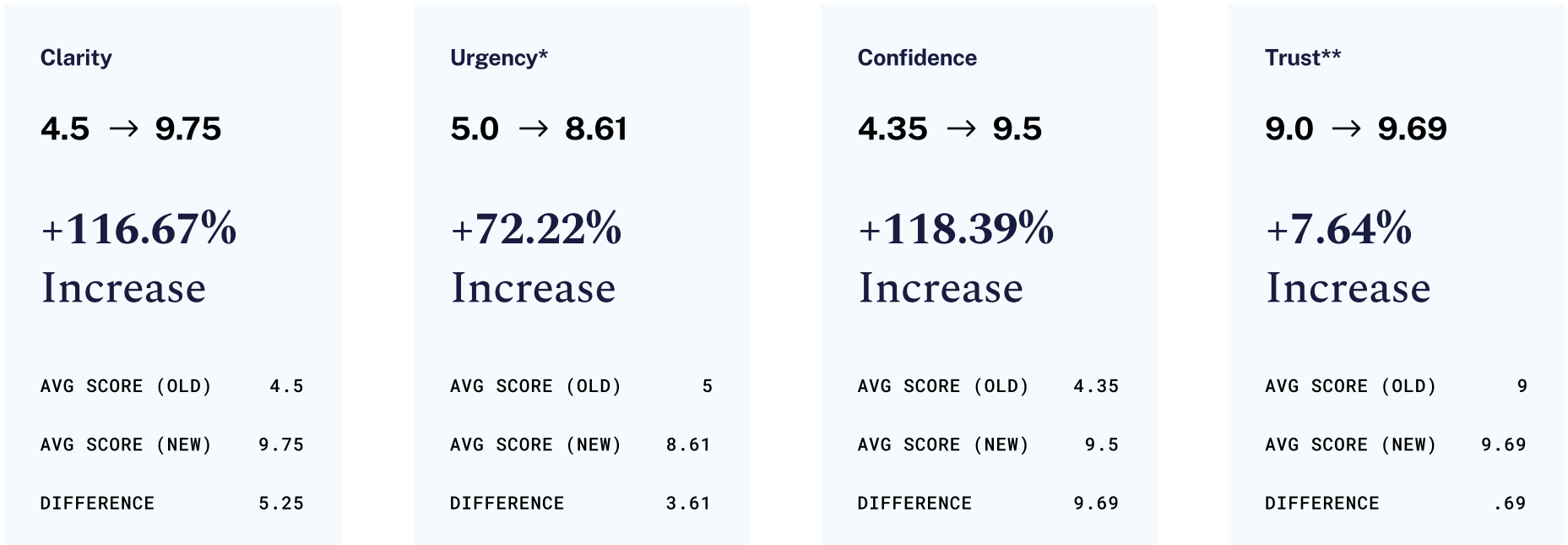
*While urgency increased, it is important to note the shift in the kind of urgency that users reported feeling. While the old email created a sense of anxious and stressful urgency, the new email elicited a more positive sense of urgency where users wanted to complete the task in front of them and felt the state was working with them to deliver their benefits.

> *The new email elicited a more positive sense of urgency where users wanted to complete the task in front of them and felt the state was working with them to deliver their benefits.*

**Trust was a subject that the redesign hoped to either keep at the same level the original emails were eliciting, or in the best case scenario, increase in score. Users noted that they trusted the original emails because it was expected that the state would send "bureaucratic-like" things. While the new design signals modern design with a friendlier font, it was successful in that it wasn't "too kind," where the user began to lose trust that the email was actually from the state.

> *Users noted that they trusted the original emails because it was expected that the state would send "bureaucratic-like" things.*

Old Email

"It's violent"

"I feel like I don't understand English"

"It made me feel like I was guilty of something - Like I did something wrong"

"It took me a full day to understand it - and I sent it to my dad to understand it"

"The structure [...] doesn't make me feel super confident"

"It feels optional"

"Doesn't feel like they are here to help"

"I feel like I better do it but it is not super clear so it makes me anxious"

"It doesn't look professional"

"It is difficult to find the information in the email"

"The way it is set up just makes me think the answer is going to be the same way."

"There are two emails that look identical - I might ignore one of them I think - it looks like the same email sent twice"

"It made me feel like I was guilty of something - Like I did something wrong"

New Email

"It isn't shouting at me - it doesn't make me panic - but I want to get it done"

"The spacing and how it is laid out makes scanning through this a breeze"

"The layout and font size helps me understand almost immediately what is going on and what I need to do [...] I should do it now"

"I feel way more confident - before it felt like I might have to do so much - or it wasn't really clear, but here it becomes clear I just need to follow the three steps"

"It feels kinder"

"The former was alienating while this is more engaging"

"I can understand what it is saying"

"This email has clear labeling like 'Don't wait' and 'Action needed' in the subject line, that makes me feel like I should do this soon"

"This one gives me my rights and [the other] one doesn't" (when comparing two emails that both had rights written on them)"

"It feels kinder"

Time Spent

User tests were timed and compared between the old email design and the new in order to measure speed of comprehension and clarity of messaging.

Many notices point to clarifying potential mistakes within an application or the need for more information in order to process a claim. The speed of understanding this and the time it takes to act upon a request like this is integral to the entire UI system in that getting an answer quickly from a claimant means a decision can be made faster by the state.

When it came to reading the email, the old email template took an average of 118.5 seconds (~2 minutes) to complete while the new email took an average of 25 seconds to complete — a reduction of 93.5 seconds which is over a minute and a half of time saved. The new design was read and digested in 21.1% of the time it took with the old — a 78.9% reduction from the old. Tasks were also measured and the old email template took an average of 27.6 seconds to complete a task while the new email took an average of 6.4 seconds, resulting in a 76.8% reduction from the old.

NJDOL is judged by timeliness to first payment where USDOL looks at two different time lapses. 87% of all first payments must be made within 21 days and 93% must be made within 35 days — Acceptable Levels of Performance (ALP).

🔗 **Resource:**
https://oui.doleta.gov/unemploy/btq.asp

Getting an answer quickly from a claimant means a decision can be made faster by the state.

Average time to read email

OLD EMAIL	NEW EMAIL	DIFFERENCE
118.5 seconds*	25 seconds	-93.5 seconds
-	21.1%	**-78.9% reduction**

Average time to complete tasks

OLD EMAIL	NEW EMAIL	DIFFERENCE
27.6 Seconds	6.4 seconds	-21.2 seconds
-	23.2%	**-76.8% reduation**

*The old email also produced errors throughout the test where claimants were not able to determine an answer to the task at hand and sought out help from the tester.

Email Survey Results

The following scores represent the complete survey results from 8/22/2022-2/22/2023.

Responses were recorded according to the scale: 1= Strongly Disagree; 2=Somewhat Disagree; 3=Neutral; 4=Somewhat Agree; 5=Strongly Agree.

Those who answered 4+/5:

This email is clear and I understand what it is communicating

67.6%

I trust this email is from the State of New Jersey and is not fraudulent

83.1%

I feel this new email is more trustworthy than ones I have received in the past

45.0%

I feel this new email is clearer and less confusing than ones I have received in the past

56.5%

This email makes it easy for me to act on what is required of me

54.3%

I feel this new email is easier for me to act upon what is required of me than ones I have received in the past

56.0%

Quotes

The survey results include various forms of feedback related to claimants but none point to the need for more clarity or being in a state of confusion. Most negative comments were around the claimant's experience with UI as a whole and, more often than not, around the topic of not having received benefits after X amount of time.

"Well done. They've been clear"

"Es extremadamente mente claro"

"Trustful"

"Easy to use and can be trusted"

"This email explained everything clearly and I am grateful that I wasn't left wondering. Thank you."

"Is more better and understandable"

"The e-mail is clear and precise."

Beta Process and Results

CAMPAIGN SELECTION

CAMPAIGN DETAILS

METRICS AND ANALYTICS

Campaign Selection

New Jersey's unemployment insurance overpayment waiver campaign was chosen for beta launch because of the following reasons:

1 **This was a new communication need that presented a "blank slate" for a totally new design**

2 **Opt-in dynamic - Claimants had to elect to start the overpayment waiver process**

3 **Singular task-based campaign (no variability) - If claimants received an overpayment, they were able to obtain a waiver application**

4 **Timeliness of the CARES Act - Overpayment Waiver policy related to the CARES Act was published in February 2022 and needed to be implemented throughout the state**

5 **Size - Deadline-specific conditions of the campaign allowed for accurate measurement of user behavior within a tighter timeframe**

The campaign was simple enough to be dwindled down to an application, a confirmation, a reminder, as well as determinations that, for the first time, were being delivered only via email without any paper notices.

Additionally, Overpayment Waivers were chosen because there was existing data from a comparable campaign for New Jersey Mixed Earners Unemployment Compensation (MEUC) that was run in March 2022. These email campaigns were similar because neither of them were required steps for receiving benefits. It would only supplement their benefits in a positive way. There was enough data from the MEUC emails to see the response they generated, and comparisons between the two programs were deemed useful.

The other emails that exist within the New Jersey unemployment insurance system require claimants to respond in order for them to either resolve an issue to receive their unemployment payment and or to resolve other issues that are stopping them from receiving payment in general. The Overpayment Waiver program and the MEUC program require a claimant to opt in and ultimately benefits their livelihood.

Campaign Details

In August 2022, the Overpayment Waiver email campaign was beta launched and consisted of nine emails.

To begin the process of collecting applications for overpayment waivers, five emails were set up within Salesforce:

1 Application

2 Reminder

3 Final Reminder

4 Confirmation

5 Status Update

Determination emails were designed but not launched because agents were not yet trained on how to process CARES Act details. Training for this determination process was done in September 2022 and then three types of determination emails were implemented:

1 Eligible   **2 Ineligible**   **3 Partially Eligible**

The application was sent on August 19-23, 2022 to ~6,000 people — Salesforce had a limit to emails sent per day based on New Jersey's purchased account, so emails had to be split up and rolled out on different days. The reminder email was sent seven days after the application, and the final reminder was sent the day before the deadline. Claimants had a total of 21 days to log in to their application and submit their answers. Another batch of 735 emails were sent on September 6, 2022 which accounted for those who signed up in August to receive the waiver application. (These emails are sent monthly as the waiver program is still open.)

After submission, a confirmation email was sent to provide a receipt to the claimant. Because the applications were front-loaded while agents were being trained on how to conduct determinations, a monthly status update was scheduled to claimants who submitted their applications stating that their application was still being processed. This status update was sent on a monthly basis to claimants awaiting a determination due to an imbalance of staff and caseload. Determination emails were launched on October 11.

In November 2022, an additional "Not Applicable" email was created and implemented when UI agents ran into situations where, upon review, a claimant did not have an overpayment to process.

1. Application

2. Reminder

4. Confirmation

5. Status Review

Eligible

Partial

Denial
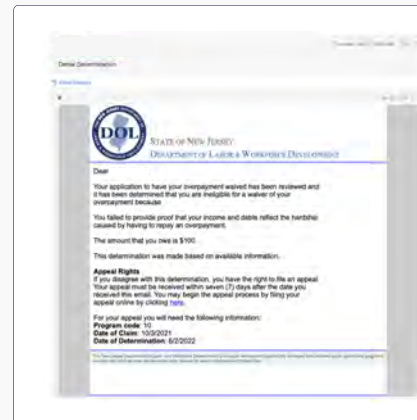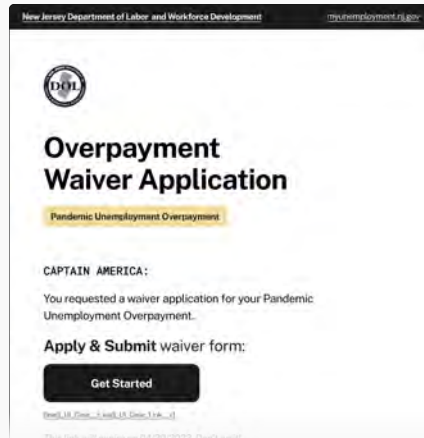
1. Application
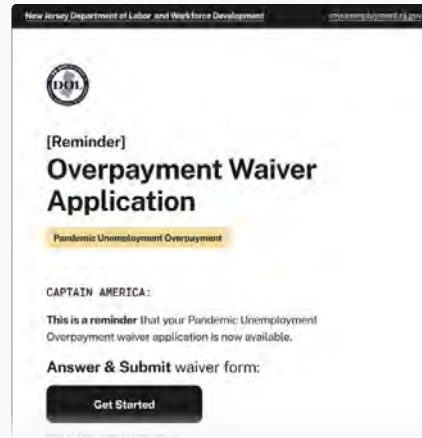
2. Reminder

3. Final Reminder
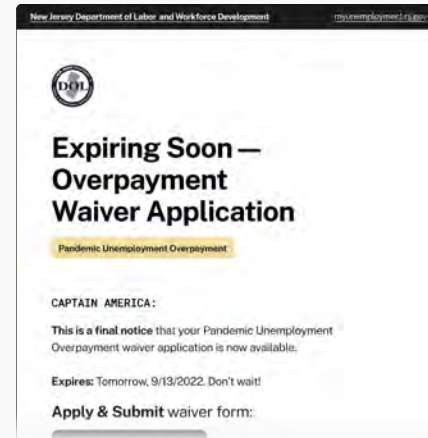
Sent 24 hours before application expires

4. Confirmation

5. Status Review

Denial

Partial

Eligible

Not Applicable

Metrics and Analytics

Data and metrics were gathered within Salesforce from August 19 - September 13, 2022.

It was accomplished without the help of Marketing Cloud, which resulted in the inability to capture true click-through rates, open rates, login attempts, and application drop-offs.

	MEUC	OVERPAYMENTS	DIFFERENCE
Total Emails Sent	74,107	6,597	
No Response	41,431	2,646	-15.80%
	55.91%	**40.11%**	
Logins*	32,675	3,951	+15.81%
	44.09%	**59.90%**	
Conversion	14,000	2,576	+20.16%
	18.89%	**39.05%**	

Impact Measurment

-28.3% Decrease

of people ignoring (not opening) the email

+35.8% Increase

of people taking action on the email (CTR)

+106.7% Increase

in conversation rate

Login counts were recorded in place of actual CTR counts. However, statistically, the national average CTR is 2.3%.

🔗 **Resource:**
https://www.campaignmonitor.com/resources/knowledge-base/what-are-good-email-metrics/

Insights
and Analytics

LEADERSHIP AND TEAM STRUCTURE

IN-HOUSE EXPERTISE

DELIVERY TINELINE

PRELIMINARY A/B TESTING

VARIABLES

Leadership and Team Structure

Leading a state agency through a communications redesign requires a dedicated team with technical mastery paired with a high level of emotional intelligence.

New Jersey's Office of Unemployment Insurance Modernization is in the unique position of being led by Jill Gutierrez, a perceptive and empathic director who partnered with Office of Innovation lead, Dave Cole, a technical expert who prioritizes agile and iterative processes. This team and those who follow are uniquely qualified to create and implement change in an expeditious manner. Aligning on the importance of streamlining DOL processes and empathizing with claimants navigating their way through NJ's benefits system is a strength they both share.

Seek out team members with strong technical skills whose strengths and understanding are aligned with human-centered design practices and emotional intelligence. A level of intuition and perception of the way people feel when they are going through bureaucratic procedures is extremely valuable, and having a strategic plan for when bureaucracy interferes is critical to success. This will help create unity in decision-making and help to bolster support among stakeholders who can make change happen.

Other states that are inspired by the speed and effectiveness of New Jersey's updated processes should keep a few things in mind when launching their own initiatives. To move swiftly and with the purpose to implement changes, consider the makeup of your team. Seek out team members with strong technical skills whose strengths and understanding are aligned with human-centered design practices and emotional intelligence. A level of intuition and perception of the way people feel when they are going through bureaucratic procedures is extremely valuable, and having a strategic plan for when bureaucracy interferes is critical to success. This will help create unity in decision-making and help to bolster support among stakeholders who can make change happen.

In-house Expertise

In addition to leadership providing strategy, political structure to decision making, and an overall change in mindset to government work, expert staff within the Department of Labor were resourced to expedite implementation. Salesforce experts Jennifer Quinn and John Merris, both uniquely qualified also as UI experts, were partners who utilized their platform expertise to help implement the redesigned emails.

By fostering relationships and working collaboratively, the potential of each skill required for email transformation was reached while maintaining an effective workflow for all parties involved. Finding the appropriate data objects within the Salesforce system for someone unfamiliar with the platform would slow down any timeline, and learning to test emails with the intricacies of Salesforce workflow changes would have been a great challenge if learning from scratch.

Bringing in experts from within staff not only made this beta launch possible but it began to produce the muscle memory of agile processes so that future email launches would become part of workflows in the long run. Spending time with staff who have expert knowledge of a system that is key to a design intervention requires emotional labor and a ramp-up to reframing work already done and exploring what could be done better. This incorporation of in-house expertise is critical to the sustainability of the redesign and remains (and will remain) the core of its operational success.

Bringing in experts from within staff not only made this beta launch possible but it began to produce the muscle memory of agile processes so that future email launches would become part of workflows in the long run.

Speed of Project

Going from concept to launch within five months within a government organization is not an easy task, but this case study proves that with the right structure, mindset, and people who are willing to try, institutions can change and be efficient with coaching and collaboration.

Perfection is generally something that holds back performance because the fear of making a mistake is costly, and in this case, audit-worthy from the federal government. While policy-specific issues were managed with great care, and getting it right the first time was still held to a high standard, the spirit of learning and changing with the performance of a redesign was a piece of this beta launch that contributed to the speed of the project.

Feedback based on claimant surveys and insights discovered from analytics were a way to alleviate the pressure of failure — proving that iterations will happen was important to fueling the trust of the agile process. The New Jersey team took that leap of faith and continues to do so, but this mindset is regularly nudged and reminded as habits and routine are simply hard to change.

…proving that iterations will happen was important to fueling the trust of the agile process.

Preliminary A/B Testing

At the time of this report, another set of emails was launched within the UI system pertaining to cases with adjudication (when a case needs more information to resolve the distribution of benefits or when there is conflicting evidence against a claimant who wishes to collect UI).

While more data is being gathered, metrics that involve A/B testing around the old emails and the new include the following:

Average time from receiving email to logging in:

OLD EMAIL	NEW EMAIL	DIFFERENCE
40hrs 48min	30hrs 11min	-10hrs 37mins
-	73.98%	**-26.02%**

...the new design drove claimants to login faster than the original design.

The amount of time between a claimant receiving an email in their inbox to the moment where they log into their form is critical to measure an initial conversion rate. While this doesn't fully demonstrate the submission of the form, it shows how long it is taking for them to truly act upon what they are being asked to provide.

Reminder: A standard Click-Through-Rate was unable to be captured but a Login Rate was recorded instead — which is a "guaranteed" CTR.

It took claimants who were receiving the new emails an average of 30 hrs 11 min to log into their form where the old email was tracking 40 hrs 48 min to login. This showed a 26.02% decrease in the amount of time it took for a claimant to truly act on the email which saved 10 hrs 37 min.

With this data, it is safe to conclude that the new design drove claimants to login faster than the original design. It shows urgent action on the part of the claimant to participate in whatever was being asked of them and that the new design drove this increase in response.

Variables

While data collected and analyzed proves the success of the redesign, there are always variables to consider. The following are some to ponder when reviewing the results of the beta launch.

Open Rate Issue

- The inability to capture whether or not someone actually opened an email skews the percentage of a Conversion Rate as it is generally calculated based on the number of people who open the email as opposed to how many emails were sent
- It could be hypothesized that because a Login Rate was used in place of an Open Rate, the percentage of an open rate was higher than those who logged in after opening an email

Form Variations

- MEUC emails had some determinations provided within the form workflow after a user logged in and began their form where the form associated with Overpayment Waivers did not
  - The overpayment waivers also had UX expertise edits before launching where the MEUC form did not
- The difference in workflow for this particular aspect of the MEUC campaign potentially changes the Conversion Rate where some users found that they were ineligible through the workflow of the form rather than submitting the form and then receiving a determination from there
- It could be hypothesized that with the UX intervention of the Overpayment Waiver form also impacted the higher CR

Condition of MEUC vs. Overpayment Waivers

- While MEUC was helpful in spirit, there wasn't an undercurrent of "punishment" that Overpayment Waivers carried. Having an overpayment meant that you had to pay money back to the state which could cause more anxiety and a greater motivation to apply and finish a form
- It could be hypothesized that this led to a greater conversion rate and action on a claimant's part within Overpayment Waivers

Scalability

The new email templates are designed to scale out to different departments within New Jersey (it has already been adopted by two) as well as to other states.

Internally, not much change is needed as logos remain the same, but color choices based on program can help navigate program differentiation.

Because the art direction of the emails is type-forward, meaning its main design is around typography size and weight, it makes it easy to absorb within a larger brand. By developing a very simple way to replace the state DOL logo with another state's DOL logo and using a State's preferred color choice for the banner as well as CTA buttons, everything else outside of the content of the email can stay as is. The color used in the special callout component of part seven in the email template is based on the USWDS standards, so there is no need to change this component unless a state prefers to use a different color that aligns with their own design system.

> If states would like to see how these emails would potentially look like in their unemployment insurance communication system, the Figma file that is associated with this report includes state logos as well as color choices that are pulled from each state's DOL website associated with the US DOL's index. States can easily imagine what their emails could look like by using the open sourced design file that lives in the Figma community universe.
>
> Disclaimer: The Figma file color library is derived from colors that have been previously selected by states, so it's assumed that each state is using colors that are acceptable within USWDS standards and ADA standards.
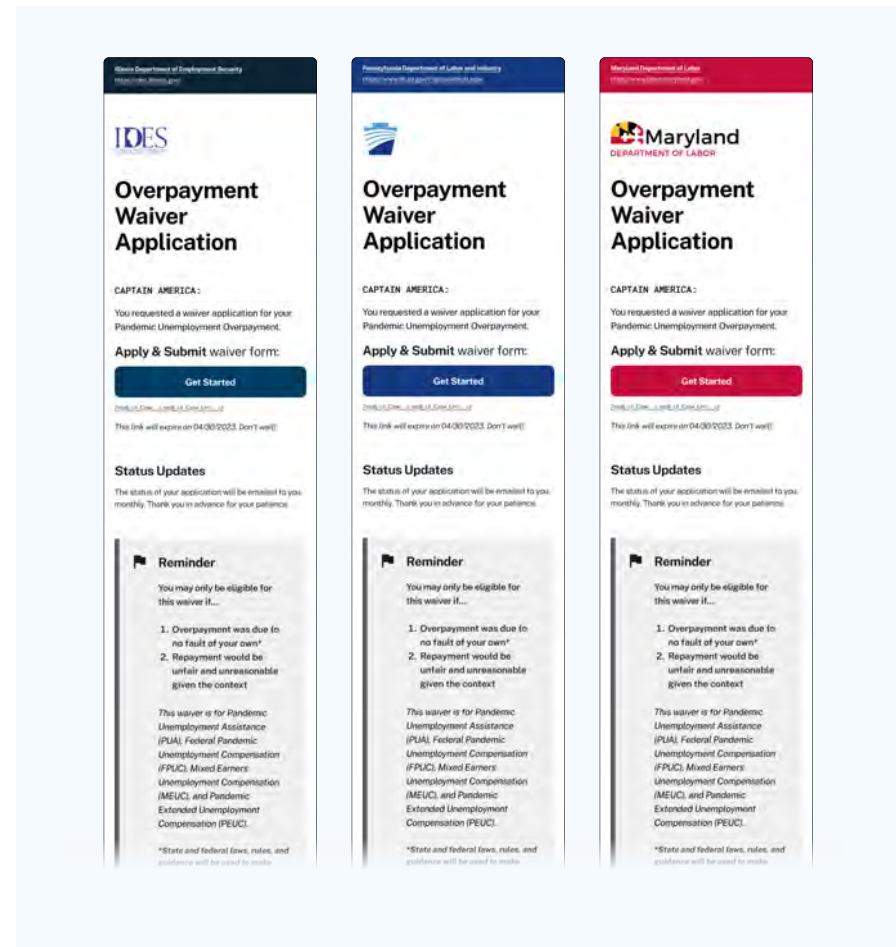
Because the art direction of the emails is type-forward, meaning its main design is around typography size and weight, it makes it easy to absorb within a larger brand.

Plain Language Commentary

Plain Language efforts in government communications have been beneficial in raising awareness around delivering simpler and clearer communication to citizens, but plain language/words alone cannot deliver an effective, comprehensible message.

It's simply not enough.

Without proper care, messages with plain language alone can easily turn into longer letters, and those longer letters can turn into solid blocks of text. This very common situation married with a poor font choice that lacks size dynamic, and the content becomes, yet again, a wall of text.

Plain language is important, but states need to move beyond plain language and meet in a space where action-forward language is prioritized. It doesn't stop there — a carefully rendered visual design with expert composition is an essential ingredient to ensure that a message is delivered clearly and that a desired action is prompted.

More than just making emails aesthetically pleasing, human-centered design takes into account the behaviors and perceptions of readers in order to facilitate how people absorb information. Engineering this knowledge into design patterns, and combining a visual design with action-forward language can create a higher sense of motivation and urgency around a desired action that is not achievable with plain language alone.

What the government needs from people is patience — and what people need from the government is efficiency. States are trying, whether citizens believe it or not, to become more efficient, and citizens are trying, whether states believe it or not, to empathize with human staff who are routinely sacrificed for systemic inefficiency.

Good design can buy states some extra patience from their citizens. Why? And how? Because in the same way we allow beauty to woo us and alter our expectations, design changes like this can give citizens more confidence that states are trying their best — because they can see it. It's visible and real and it shifts the perception of what an institution feels like. Visceral strategy has not yet been prioritized in government but it is time to raise the stakes and bring this level of detail into state and federal work.

Plain language is important, but states need to move beyond plain language and meet in a space where action-forward language is prioritized.

Policy and Legal
Review Commentary

The importance of including policy in writing emails is indisputable but it's also essential that policy does not dictate the message of communication pieces. Language and message are two different subjects, and understanding this distinction is critical to the success of state communication.

Policy-adherent messages are also very different from policy-driven messages, in which the main issue is where policy and legal departments live within the approval process. If user-centered activity doesn't exist, it is natural for policy and legal teams to drive communication because they are, first and foremost, writers. This is the main reason why so much of state communication is the way it is, but this is the very reason why it must change — the claimant is not represented in these types of scenarios, which is unfortunate and very un-human-centered.

A formalized legal review process has helped New Jersey DOL with foresight and planning because by incorporating legal and policy teams into the process, new changes to legislation are flagged ahead of time. Changes can be anticipated and getting ahead of what is to come removes "fire drill" activity that often results in the lack of usability activity, which is required to ensure the success of messaging and how it impacts a claimant.

If user-centered activity doesn't exist, it is natural for policy and legal teams to drive communication because they are, first and foremost, writers.

A simple way to intervene in policy-driven language is to create a process where UX teams, claimant representatives, or any other form of department that represents the voice of a claimant becomes the first and last step before implementation. Formalizing a process like this provides collaboration opportunities for policy teams and claimant representative teams to discuss what happy mediums are and what each side of the team struggles with when it comes to the problems they are trying to solve. This moment to create empathy within polarizing (at times) agendas can only drive better negotiations in the long term.

This kind of collaboration is critical to the change we are seeking in government and any opportune moments to develop relationships and deeper understandings within these departments must be seized.

When policy is inserted into emails, in most cases it is recommended to include it in the tertiary level of information. It's important for it to be available for those who want to dig deep as well as for auditing purposes. Policy language should never appear in primary level content; secondary content is negotiable but still not preferred.

When policy is inserted into emails, in most cases it is recommended to include it in the tertiary level of information.

Innovation

The word "innovation" has various definitions depending on the space in question and the debate of what is actually innovative is and always will be ripe with opinions.

Within this project, there are several aspects of what could be considered innovative and what could inspire innovation in other states. The following are a few ways New Jersey has innovated and will continue to innovate.

Iterations

Experimental Double Buttons

ChatGPT

Iterations

Soon after the beta launch of the Overpayment Waiver campaign, responses to a linked survey were tracked on a daily basis. Within a month or so, it was noted that several people were commenting on the inability to log in to their claim. This feedback was flagged and discussed amongst the team to see if there was a simple way to help correct this error within the email inviting claimants to apply.

A login section was quickly inserted, implemented, and relaunched on October 18 — less than two months from the initial launch of the campaign. It contained the username related to the claimant and provided a button to reset their password if needed. By providing users with a way to fix their login access, access was improved.

Another claimant wrote in, *"The confirmation email does not include the date you have completed the application for waiver. I would like to note that I have completed this waiver on 12/24 at 12:45 am for the records,"* which was simple, clear, and made sense. It was assumed that the email's date and time would cover this information but knowing that it would bring a sense of closure to a claimant, the email was edited and reimplemented in February 2022.

Subject Line:

[Application] NJ DOL Pandemic Overpayment Waiver
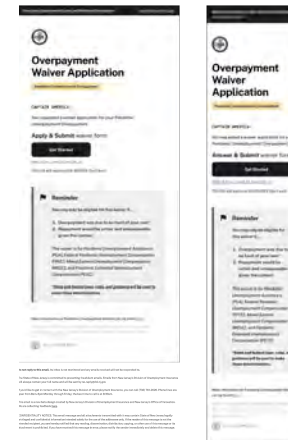
VERSION 1   UPDATED VERSION (WITH LOGIN INFO)

Experimental Double Button

A/B testing is underway on another iteration of the email design that incorporates a "double button" approach, which can be found in many consumer email campaigns. This is the practice of adding two strategically placed buttons that are exactly the same to increase CTR. The first button is located below the title, and the second button is placed within the body of the email — where it was redesigned to be.

Success achieved in consumer email design with repeated buttons hypothesizes that this format will increase the speed from email receipt to user login. Initial testing on New Jersey DOL e-Adjudication emails has proven that the time from inbox to open to login has been reduced, but more substantial data will be available soon.

Another New Jersey DOL department, Temporary Disability and Family Leave Insurance (TDI/FLI) has adopted the redesign email template and used this experimental approach. It was found that 15.9k clicked on the first button to open the link provided to them while 10.2k clicked on the second link. 60.9% of users were acting on the first button provided while 39.1% of users acted on the second button within the email.

This data, along with A/B testing data, will make room for a more analytical decision to be made with respect to which email design is more effective. There are many variables and cautionary suspicions around why putting a button immediately after a title would be more effective — the space in question deals with the tension between action taken and the intake of messaging around what claimants need to know while taking action. Metrics and analytics will inform this decision in the near future.
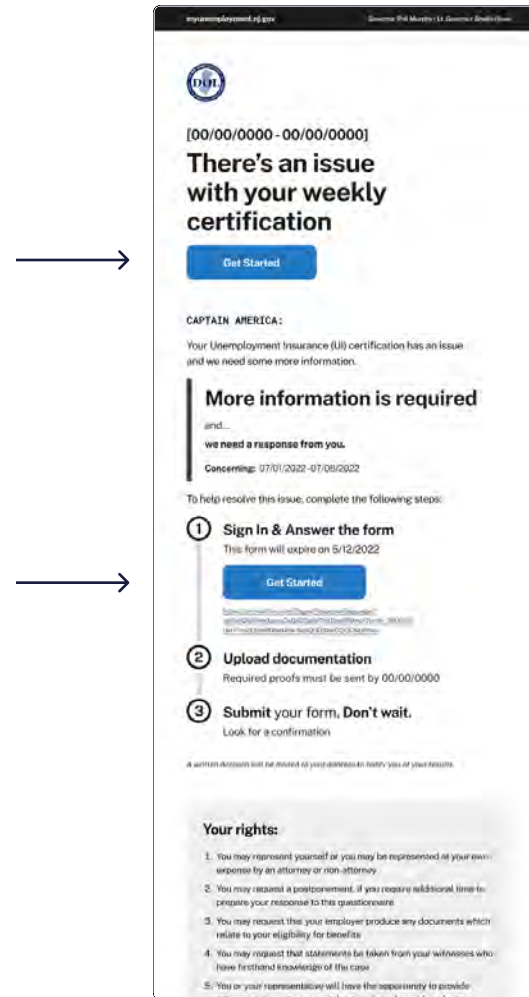
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ChatGPT

When ChatGPT opened to the wider public in December 2022, policy letters and statements were run against the AI, asking it to rewrite the information so that it could be better understood. While the greatest criticism of ChatGPT is that it is inaccurate when it comes to technical details, it is worth exploring as the AI produces incredible first drafts of what more digestible content could be.

Since December 2022, ChatGPT has been used regularly to start a rewrite of a communication piece but its translation/rewrite is not pulled directly from the AI without careful inspection. Below are a few examples of rewrites that further describe and analyze what the rewrites reveal during the synthesis journey to produce plain and action-forward content.

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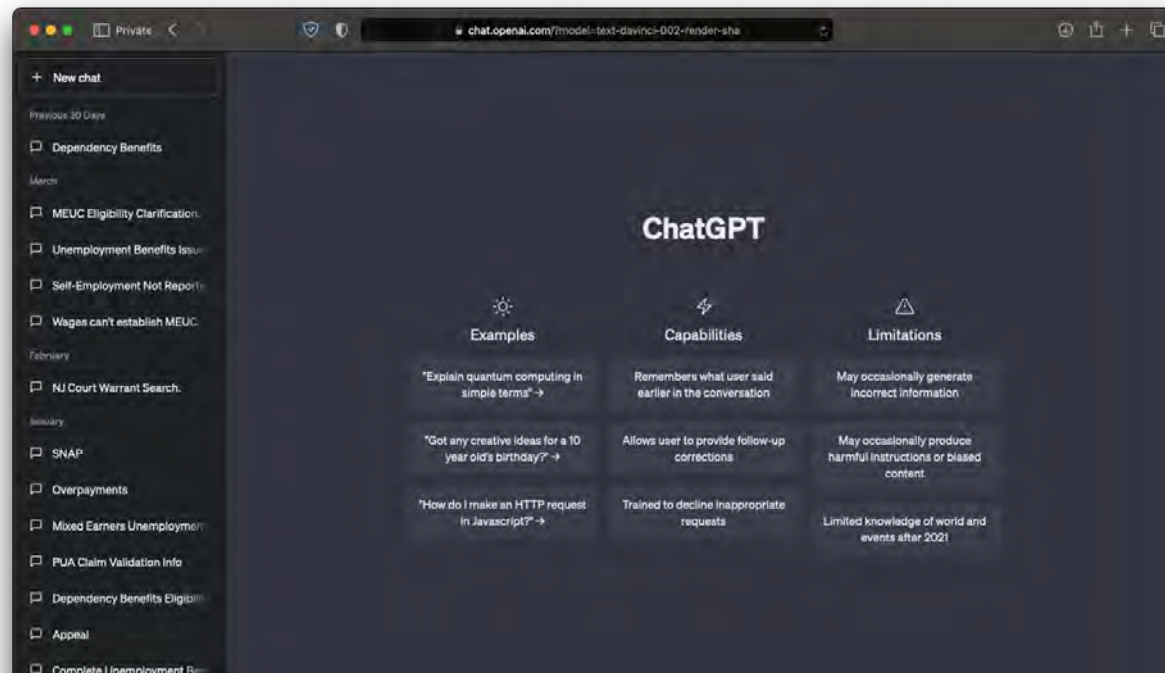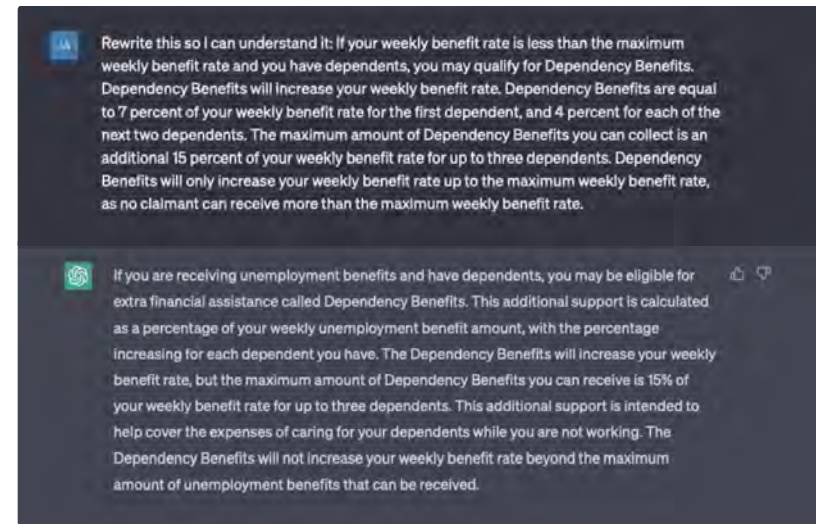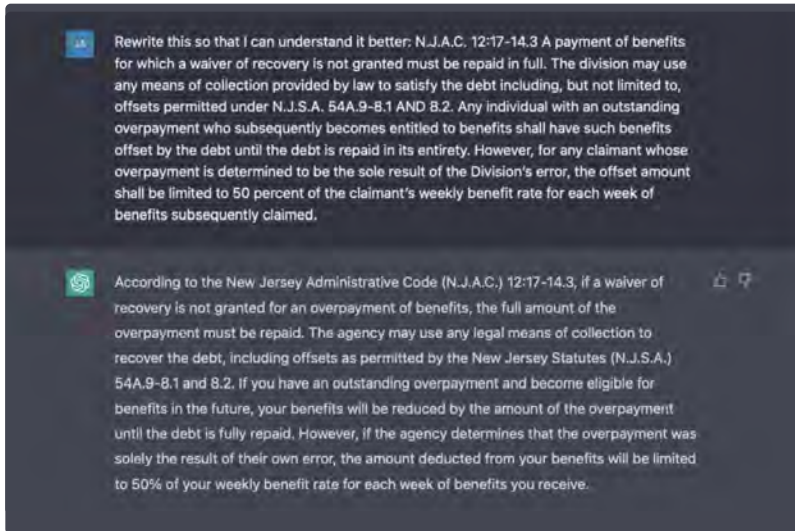
Policy Rewrite by ChatGPT

This example shows ChatGPT dealing with N.J.A.C 12:17-14:3 which is around the concept of "offset". It's a complex concept that policy writers thoroughly know and understand but for state DOL staff/agents, and ultimately, claimants, it must be introduced, explained, and learned. If you look at the difference between the policy language and ChatGPT's rewrite, policy language uses the word "offset" three times while ChatGPT uses it once. The reduction of the use of this word is already signaling a plain-er, more digestible description.

In addition to rewriting policy in simple terms, ChatGPT also reframes the entire policy to be understood by the person who is reading it, assuming that they will be impacted by this policy. While this can't be expected from policymakers, translating it to use words like "you" and "your" helps reframe how policy impacts humans because one can read it and feel the push and pull of what experience they will embark on if running into a situation like this in their projected thoughts.

Email Section Rewrite by ChatGPT

In this example of an email rewrite, what's important to note here is that ChatGPT takes a step back from what is written and synthesizes the context first.

What is excellent here is that while the first writeup prioritizes discussing the "weekly benefit rate," ChatGPT's version decides that distilling down that concept even further is important and transforms the first sentence into, "If you are receiving unemployment benefits and have dependents, you may be eligible for extra financial assistance called Dependency benefits."

Much of the work that was done without ChatGPT was around asking questions about what certain programs were about and how they related to Unemployment Insurance's umbrella. By using an initial translation by ChatGPT, it pushes us forward to understand the context better where, from there, one can point claimants in a better direction.

Appendix

Appendix A: Design Process Timeline

The first draft of the email design system was created in April 2022, at the same time the emails were being synthesized and rewritten in plain, action-oriented language. A rough draft of the design system was used to better understand email goals and to create a focal point for discussion and feedback from all collaborators involved. Before and after images of revised emails were shared as an internal tool to show improvement, elicit trust, and to inspire other departments to opt in and collaborate — without the visual proof of change, there would have been nothing to anchor the project and a unified vision could not have been imagined.

Alongside the initial draft of the email design system, heuristic analysis was done on all existing New Jersey DOL emails and print communications. It was synthesized to discover patterns, to identify opportunities for improvement, and to reveal any gaps in communication that would confuse claimants throughout their UI journey.

While reviewing rewritten and redesigned content with UI experts, process maps on how the emails interacted with each other began to form based on themes, which created further understanding of the actions and purpose of each email.

Aesthetic and functional benchmarking activities were done by researching other common forms of email communications sent by other governments and consumer entities across the world. Findings were collated and shared for brainstorming discussions with the New Jersey DOL team.
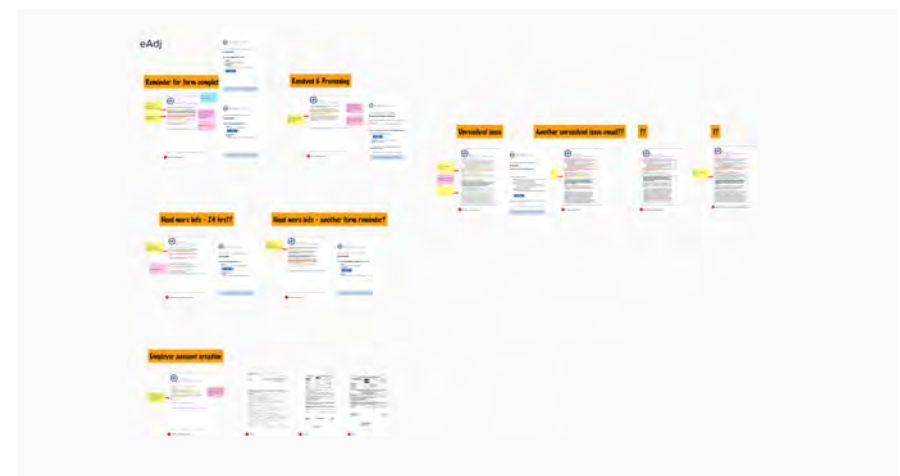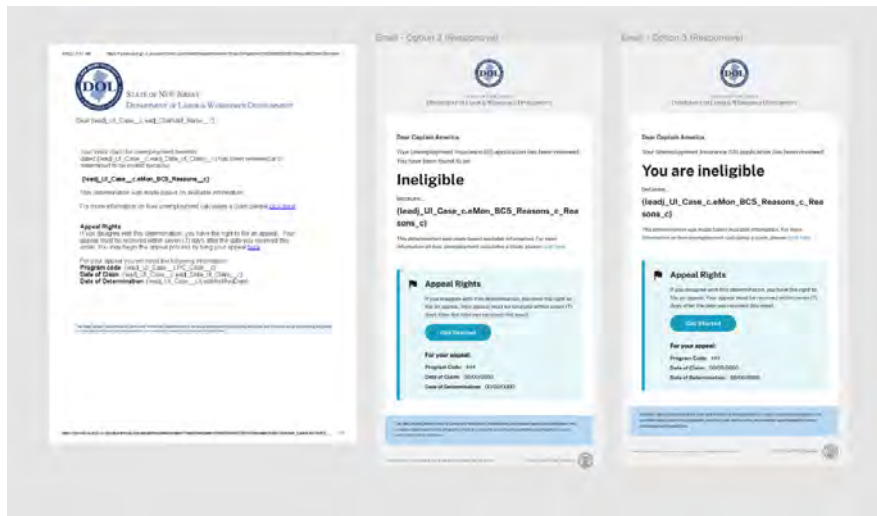
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Appendix A: Design Process Timeline (continued)

It was determined that titles, status, and three-step directions needed to be added consistently across all emails. And, after further discussion about policy and legal requirements, a design pattern for including supplemental content was also created. Through this analysis, a cohesive system of design components was designed; each piece of the email, from primary to tertiary information, was addressed, and a foundational list of components was created.

(See Email Structure)

In early June 2022, graphic design reformatting was done and an updated design system was developed and implemented into the emails starting June 13, 2022. This area of redesign was a very specific update to the design system that focused primarily on developing a clean, clear, and strong visual identity to bring to the emails across all programs. It was inspired by Gov.UK's high-contrast design system and other systems that are largely driven by typography. Not only did it provide a stronger visual identity to the emails as a whole but it also allowed for more room to scale due to its black and white nature.

Since then, these components have been tested and applied to various content pieces and have been found to be useful for a variety of communications that are delivered to the citizens of New Jersey. New content challenges drove minor adjustments that were continuously added to grow and expand the possible variations of the components, but the need to add an entirely new component has yet to become an issue.

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Appendix B: Implementation Process

In tandem with the design process, implementation was also tested and strategized to achieve long-term success throughout New Jersey's various platforms. This process was critical to understanding what could be implemented and whether or not New Jersey was capable of not only intervening in one platform but multiple platforms across the department.

When first investigating whether or not an HTML intervention could be accomplished, an open-sourced email from GitHub was used to see if both Salesforce and AWS would be able to properly absorb new HTML code. If this test worked, it would ensure that more than one platform could benefit from the work ahead of developing these emails. Both platforms performed beautifully and the next step was to see if one could pull HTML directly from Figma (where design and content was managed) without the help of a developer.

Plugins were explored but none were at the level required to produce clean, optimized HTML. This moment was discussed with Dave Cole and it was decided that as Figma evolves and as plugins evolve along with technology improvements, we could anticipate this ideal process to potentially come to fruition in the future. For the time being, however, it was decided that developing the HTMLs outside of Figma was a better route.

Although this added an extra layer of process where a developer must step in after designs are complete, it turned out to be a great learning environment for DOL staff who were interested in HTML development to accelerate their understanding of HTML and to be equipped with better knowledge of it moving forward.

Dave Cole and Naman Agrawal, developers from NJ's Innovation group, coded the initial set of emails that were chosen for beta launch and it is important to note that this was not done in a vacuum. Discussions around the design system and the various components future emails would contain were strategized and sections of email development were carefully divided in order to make way for variations in the future. All of the HTML emails are available via GitHub with a request from a .gov email (for added security).

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Appendix C: Reddit Examples

Appendix D: Sender Email Consolidation

New Jersey, like many states, had an issue where based on the various platforms developed over the years, email addresses were not consolidated and viewed as a whole from a claimant experience perspective.

The following are all the addresses that were (and are) sending messages to claimants from New Jersey:

- newjerseyunemploymentbenefits-donotreply@dol.nj.gov
- DoNotReplyUIEMail@dol.nj.gov
- NoReplyUIPay@dol.nj.gov
- Ui-noreply@dol.nj.gov
- + 27 different email addresses used throughout the NJ DOL

This problem has not been fully rectified, but it was primarily addressed with the emails related to Salesforce and AWS within a claimant's initial application workflow (along with any adjudication processes they might encounter).

A new email, no-reply@dol.nj.gov, was made which was added to the new beta launch email communications and 29 more emails are currently being consolidated for reform.

Impact Summary

Starting in March 2022, the team went from concept ➡ synthesis ➡ design ➡ testing ➡ implementation within five months. It resulted in the redesign of ~60 emails, with one program, containing nine emails, moving forward into beta launch.

Design Impact

CLARITY
+116.67% Increase

CONFIDENCE
+118.39% Increase

URGENCY
+72.22% Increase

TRUST
+7.64% Increase

Beta Launch Impact

-28.3% Decrease
of People ignoring (not opening the email)

+35.8% Increase
of People taking action on the email (ctr)

+106.7% Increase
in Conversion rate

Decrease in time to login (Preliminary Results)

Average time to read email

OLD EMAIL	NEW EMAIL	DIFFERENCE
118.5 seconds	25 seconds	**-93.5 seconds**
-	21.2%	
		-79.9% Decrease

Average time to complete tasks

OLD EMAIL	NEW EMAIL	DIFFERENCE
27.6 seconds	6.4 seconds	**-21.2 seconds**
-	23.2%	
		-76.8% Decrease

As of April 2023, there are 44 emails that have been replaced within claimant communication platforms (Salesforce and AWS).