

August E-filing Update

Workshop Read-out, Research Plan & Next steps

Sept 1, 2016

In July, 18F and FEC staff participated in a workshop dedicated to understanding the principal goals of the e-filing study. Since then, we have held follow-ups with various staff, synthesized the workshop, and begun to plan the user research for the study. Additionally, considerable work has been happening on the technical research front, where staff have been notably prompt, insightful and cooperative; while no read-out is included from that portion of the research at this point, progress continues apace. The following is a read-out of the workshop activities as well as a draft plan and tentative schedule for the upcoming user research spike.

1. [recruiting request](#)
2. [draft user research plan & interview protocol](#)
3. [workshop read-out](#)

1. Recruiting request

We would like to start interviewing people next week and continue interviews into the following three weeks. We are going to start with a mix of remote and in-person user interviews for our first sessions, meeting with folks in our respective cities. **On the week of 10/3**, we would like to **plan on being in DC to conduct user interviews** as well as interviews with internal users. In order to make this happen, we need your help in recruiting now.

As our filer's schedules are likely to be erratic, we'd like to start by scheduling one full day with RAD (with visits to EFO as well), and spend the remainder of the week talking to filers based in the DC area.

Research spike 1:

As was prioritized during our workshop ([see section 3](#)), for the first research spike, we want to focus on the following user types: self-filers, filers who file as a service, FEC RAD analysts, FEC EFO specialists, and software vendors.

- **File for self** (7-8 users total)
 - Timing: 9/6 - 9/30 *before DC*, ideally in NYC and Seattle if possible.
- **File as a service** - Professionals who file for others (3-4 users)
 - Timing: 9/6 - 9/30 *before DC*, ideally in NYC and Seattle if possible.
- **FEC - RAD** (3-4 users)
 - Timing: **in DC** - Wednesday, 10/5

- **FEC - EFO** (1-2 users)
 - Timing: **in DC** - Wednesday, 10/5
- **Vendors** (2-3 users)
 - Timing: **in DC** - Friday, 10/7

After the first research spike, we will schedule additional interviews as needed with both stakeholders and users to fill knowledge gaps, validate hypotheses, and test prototypes. We will determine the targets of that ask during the first research spike.

In our experience, doing about 3-4 interviews per day maximum gives the researchers enough time to prepare for, conduct, and document interviews and observations. Ideally, each interview should last about 1 hour, is held in the context of the individual's workspace, involves observing users use the tools that they need in doing their relevant work, and is attended by 2 interviewers (one to interview, one to take notes).

2. Draft User Research Plan

From the workshop, initial analysis, and follow-up conversations, we have drafted a tentative research plan to help us understand what form and format e-filing should take. To this end, the following **research questions** guide our work:

- How do **filers** currently use e-filing software? What aspects of their process are particularly cumbersome or error prone? What barriers drive them crazy? What short-cuts, workarounds, and help do they employ? What's working well?
- **E-filing analysts** (internal to the FEC): how does the form and format of e-filing negatively and positively affect RAD analysts' workflow? What systems do RAD Analysts and the Electronic Filing Office use to do their work?
- How do different kinds of **vendors** interact with their filers and the FEC? How might software vendors be impacted by changes to the FEC's filing process?

We plan to conduct the research in three phases: (1) planning and field research, (2) analysis and synthesis, and (3) iterative prototyping.

2. A. Planning, Recruitment, and Field Research

Recruitment

We will recruit users to participate in interviews and observations via several methods: Referral from Subject Matter Experts and FEC contacts, an Ethn.io screener posted to the Beta FEC website, and an attempt to subcontract with a professional recruiting firm.

Interviews and Observations

The goal of these interviews and observations is to gain a baseline understanding of different types of users' interaction with e-filing software and how it can be made better. Our interview protocol documents our user research procedures and will be tailored to meet unique needs of each user group. In general, the focus of the sessions will be users' work processes, the information they need in order to do their work, and pain points and areas for improvement. Interviews and observations will be conducted in-person or remotely using video conferencing software, following a semi-structured interview format with observation of users actually doing work tasks. When acceptable to the participants, the sessions will be audio and screen recorded, and we will also take notes.

2.B. Analysis and Synthesis

From this base, we will identify major themes in the research, with particular emphasis on the workflows employed in filing and the problems therein. We will document these workflows and capture their use of both physical and electronic information resources as well as how information constrains their workflow. We will develop this model iteratively and in collaboration with filers, and validate the model with filers via cognitive walkthroughs. In collaboration with users, we will identify pain points and how they might be addressed.

From the synthesis, we will develop hypotheses for possible interventions that we will hope to validate in the prototyping phase.

2.C. Iterative Prototyping and Testing

In this phase, we will seek to validate the hypotheses developed in the synthesis phase through the creation and testing of prototypes (From the Statement of Work: A prototype is basically a draft site built quickly and roughly with throw-away code that can be used to observe user interaction with examples of potential sites. It is built with a priority on quick and simple development for rapid learning and iteration, so it is not built in a way that it can serve as the foundation for future iterations of a production site. Consequently, it is different from a beta version of the site.) The results of prototype testing will inform the recommendations and study findings.

2. D. Draft Research Schedule

	8/22 - 8/26	8/29-9/2	9/6-9/9	9/12-9/16	9/19-9/23	9/26-9/30	10/3-10/7	10/10-10/14	10/17-10/21	10/24-10/28	10/31-11/4	11/7-11/11	11/14 - 11/18	11/21 - 11/25
	planning & field research						synthesis		prototyping, testing & iteration					generating recom
	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8	Week 9	Week 10	Week 11	Week 12	Week 13	Week 14
re acquisition														
earch														
ng matrices														
ing protocol														
ol for interviews/observations														
participants														
ith participants														
ws and field observations							DC Research Week 10/3-10/7							
oints														
a for selecting focus of														
rocess														
rocess														
ith SME														
goals, necessary features, and														
il benefits (level of fidelity tbd)														
l - in collaboration w/ developers														
ens/flow & recruit test participants														
ersion 1 (html/js?) [developer]														
rpe														
itype research														
mendations														

The research schedule tentatively lays out the primary activities of our research sprint, places them in the context Statement of Work phases, and lays them out on a grid of weeks. Our research schedule proceeds from the present time to the conclusion of the project, 14 weeks hence (the research phase is scoped for 10 weeks but due to staff outages, more time has been added to the schedule to make up for the time lost). Major phases include planning and field research (8/22-10/7), synthesis of field research (10/10-10/21) and prototyping testing, and iteration (10/24 - 11/18). After these phases are complete, a separate phase of generating recommendations will be slated for an additional 2-3 weeks. Notably, and as was made clear in the recruiting ask above, the first in-situ research is currently slated for 10/7-10/9.

3. Workshop Read-out

- A. Hopes & Fears
- B. Journey Maps
- C. User Prioritization
- D. Wrap-up

3. A. Hopes & Fears

To begin the workshop, we focused first on learning from the workshop participants what the greatest hopes they had for the outcomes of the project, were it wildly successful would be,

as well as what fears they had regarding the project. These were then both grouped into thematic clusters, and informed the remainder of the session. Major hope categories included:

- Senate E-Filing
- increased accuracy of filings,
- streamlined data flow with new format support,
- smoother development flow,
- better end-user platform support,
- better internal and filer experiences with plain language.

Major fear categories included:

- Lack of permission for changes proposed
- New process takes too long (to implement)
- Security Threats
- Lack of training on new system
- Poor filer experience
- Regression from current system
- Performance
- Not imaginative enough
- Internal users need to be supported
- Possible problems with the study findings

For the full list of hopes and fears, see the [full workshop notes](#).

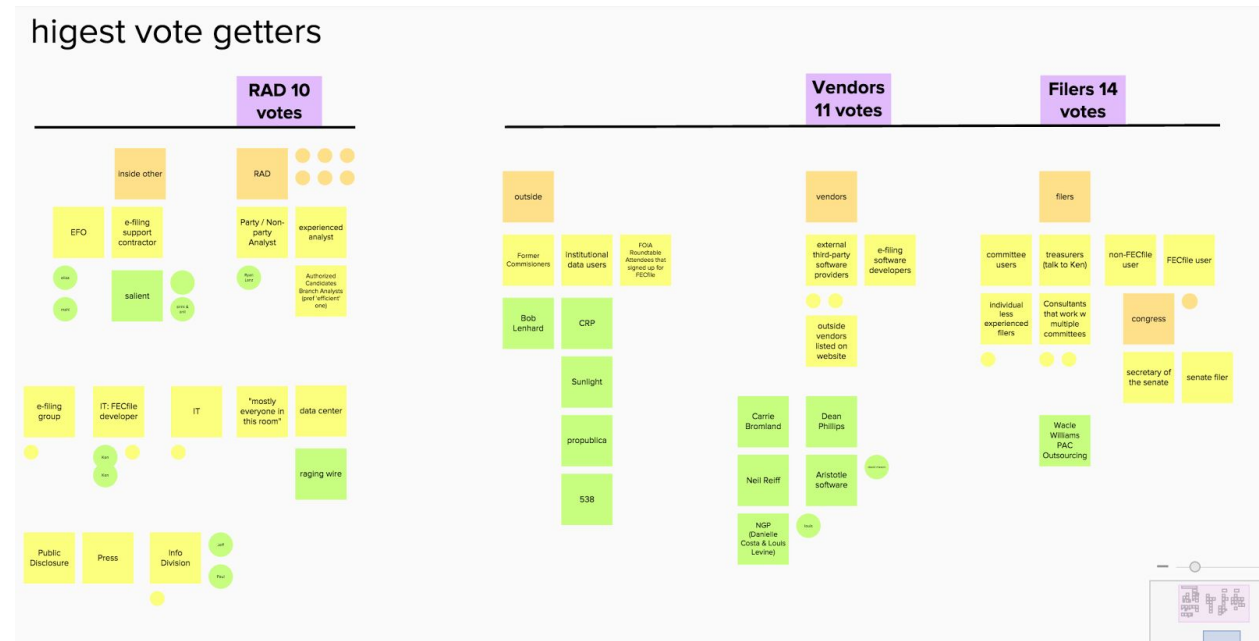
3. B. Process Mapping

During the workshop, small groups were assigned by relation to the e-filing process. Each group mapped the process flow for their specific area. These provided a great introduction into the way each part of the FEC works together in the current system, and highlighted the process snags along the way. These maps will form the basis for process analysis and be further fleshed out during follow-up interviews. The process maps are [viewable](#) on Mural.ly, and the notes from the session are in the [workshop notes document](#).

3. C. User Prioritization

The last section of the workshop focused on helping us to get an understanding of the kinds of users that would be important to include in the discovery, from the perspective of the people in the agency. Each participant wrote out sticky notes for who they thought would be most important to talk to, including the type of user, the user's group or organization, and, where possible, specific names that they might connect us to. Participants included users both internal and external to the FEC. This helped us to get an understanding of both the breadth of different individuals involved in the e-filing process, and provided a rough gauge of the importance of different user types, based on the aggregate mentions. The results of the activity clearly articulated that, filers were the most important group to focus on, but

highlighted both those who file as a service to others, as well as those who file on their own are both important. Outside these primary targets, vendors were also nearly as popular. Internal to FEC, the group most cited as important to talk to were the RAD analysts, and within this group, particular emphasis should be placed on Authorized Candidates Branch Analysts and Party/Non-Party Analysts. The Electronic Filing Office received the second highest number of votes.



Organized notes from user prioritization activity. Full size available [here](#).

3. D. Workshop Wrap-up thoughts

Finally, the workshop concluded with a brief session on what they learned from the workshop, and how that might inform the study. Some highlighted quotes:

- “There is an incredible amount of intelligence in the people across the project” (This was echoed across many participants)
- “This [project] is an opportunity for staff to form a cohesive vision and focus on goals together”
- “Great to see people bridging the system”
- “I have an improved understanding of what other departments do. I thought I knew how they functioned but I didn’t know what other people did day-to-day.”
- “Found out contacts in the building for e-filing and vendor questions.”
- “I want to make sure that internal users are not forgotten in the process.”
- “I want progress without a regression in the stability of the current system.”

