

# ARCHIVES.GOV GRAPHIC DESIGN USABILITY TEST FINDINGS

Version 1.0

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This document describes the conclusions drawn based on the results of the graphic design usability tests for the Archives.gov redesign project.

## Overview

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Twenty participants including seven general public citizens, three genealogists, six veterans, and four researchers exercised three sets of graphically designed top-level pages of redesigned archives.gov web site. The pages supported a limited amount of link clicking functionality. One of two sets of pages was presented to each user during the course of their usability test. Test site version 1 used the “Research Our Records” label, arrow click cues on the buttons, and the following checkbox labels on the locations page: "All Research Locations", "Archives Program Facilities", and "Records Management". Test site version 2 used the “Research Our Collections” label, no arrow click cues on the buttons, and the following checkbox labels on the locations page: "Regional Archives", "Research Centers", and "Affiliated Archives". Test site version 3 was identical to test site version 2 except for that it displayed a larger mega footer heading and revised boxes on the Veterans’ Service Records’ main page, edited according to feedback received from NARA.

Please visit the following URLs, using the username “demo” and the password “summer” to view the sets of pages tested.

Test Site 1: <http://www.videritydev.com/designtest1/> (tested by seven participants)

Test Site 2: <http://www.videritydev.com/designtest2/> (tested by nine participants)

Test Site 3: <http://www.videritydev.com/designtest3/> (tested by four participants)

# Findings

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## Sunken Arrow Buttons on Boxes

Testers readily clicked on box headers when no sunken arrow was present in the lower right corner of the boxes on the Research Our Records, Teachers' Resources, and Veterans' Service Records main pages. Consequently, it is recommended that sunken arrows not be included on the boxes.



FIGURE 1: BOXES WITHOUT ARROWS (PREFERRED)



FIGURE 2: BOXES WITH ARROWS

## Descriptions at Top of Larger Boxes

Three veterans were asked “When using this [Research or Veterans] page did you notice the descriptions at the top of the larger two boxes that begin with "Use the eVetRecs system to order..." and "Learn about the online..."? If yes, did you find those descriptions helpful or unnecessary?”. Two of the three veterans understood the question and answered that they overlooked the descriptions and did not find them necessary. Additionally, a researcher was asked: “When using this page did you notice the descriptions at the top of the larger two boxes that begin with "Search our site for records..." and "Take your research on the road..."? If yes, did you find those descriptions helpful or unnecessary?”. That researcher indicated that they found the descriptions overall unnecessary and only helpful if read. Consequently, we recommend eliminating the descriptions from the boxes.



FIGURE 3: BOXES WITHOUT DESCRIPTIONS (PREFERRED)

FIGURE 4: BOXES WITH DESCRIPTIONS

## Linking of text in Larger Boxes

At least one test participant interpreted the larger boxes on the Research Our Records and Veterans' Service Records pages as single links instead of lists of different links. Because of that, and for the following reasons, we recommend considering linking the entire bulleted items in the larger boxes on the portal/main pages.

- The trend on the existing site is to link entire bulleted items (e.g., see "Information for Educators" on <http://archives.gov/education/> and "New to Genealogy?" on <http://archives.gov/genealogy/> and "I want to know more about..." on <http://archives.gov/fed-employees/>) and to only link key phrases in very long sentences and paragraphs.
- Someone who has poor vision or who is color blind may have a difficult time identifying the linked text in the bullets lines.
- Screen readers would read the existing bullets as "Learn about [pause] link military service records [pause] (e.g., DD Form 214).



FIGURE 3: ENTIRE BULLETS HYPERLINKED (PREFERRED)

FIGURE 6: KEYWORDS IN BULLETS HYPERLINKED

## "Research Our Records" Label

Test participants sufficiently described both the “Research Our Records” and “Research Our Collections” links. Test participants consistently correctly clicked on those links in applicable tasks. Because the labels performed equally, test participants were asked which they prefer in a follow-up question via the usertesting.com messaging system. Eleven of the fifteen testers who answered the question stated a preference for the “Research Our Records” label. Consequently, there is evidence that the “Research Our Records” label should be used.

## **Veterans' Service Records**

Veteran test participants successfully identified the Veterans' Service Records home page label as a link pointing to a page where they could request military service records and other veterans' services. Participants were also able to use the word “veterans” as a cue to complete tasks unrelated to service records, including obtaining replacement medals and benefit information. Additionally, they were able to successfully complete tasks using the interior Veterans' Service Records main category page.

However, some testers were unable to successfully complete the task involving finding service members to attend a reunion – a task ideally concluding with the clicking of the “Locate Service Members” link in the mega footer. This task was retested in the test site version 3 that uses larger mega footer headings, and the testers found the link in that test site. Therefore, we recommend using the larger mega footer headers as a means for drawing users eyes to the footer and it's breadcrumb style header that repeats the section's title.

Also, two of three testers asked to describe the veterans' mega footer links “Events” and “FAQ” assumed that those links applied generically to National Archives' events and FAQ and were not specific to veterans. Consequently, we suggest changing those link names to “Events for Veterans” and “Veterans FAQ.”, and the genealogy mega footer FAQ link to “Genealogy FAQ” for consistency.

Finally, in the task “You need to obtain hard copy records of your military service for your application to receive government health benefits. Where would you go to initiate your request?”, testers successfully went to the Veterans' main page, but did not click on the eVetRecs link. Since getting users to eVetRecs is one of the single most important tasks on Archives.gov, users need to be able to accomplish this task with ease. We propose ensuring that all pages in the “Request Service Records” section have an eVetRecs link in the right hand

column to ensure that even if users make a wrong turn, the option is still clearly available. We also propose to make the “Request Records with eVetRecs” link on the Veterans’ Service Records main page bold.

## Teachers’ Resources

Test participants sufficiently described “Teacher Resources.” There were no tasks that were written to take testers into this section of the site; however, test participants occasionally wandered into this section when they could not find what they were looking for elsewhere.

## Our Locations

Test participants sufficiently described “Our Locations” and went to this section in the applicable tasks. This section proved to be used more often than anticipated. For example, in one task in which genealogists were asked how they would go about finding workshops taking place near them, instead of going to the Genealogy main page and choosing the “Genealogy Workshops” link, participants visited the Our Locations section, which is also a valid path for reaching genealogy workshop information.

Testers understood the map checkbox labels in test site version 1 better than the labels on in test site version 2. For example, one tester said that test site 2’s label “Federal Records Centers would have national information” and that test site 2’s label “Services for Federal Agencies would contain records on or for agencies like the FBI and CIA”. It can be expected that the task based labels used in test site 1 (e.g. Research in Person) would work well as checkbox options or tab options.

- Test Site Version 1 lists a “Show locations where I can:” heading with the following checkbox options:
  - Research in Person
  - Store and Access my Federal Agency Records
  - View Exhibits in Person
  - View Presidential Libraries

- Test Site Version 2 lists a “Show locations by type:” heading with the following checkbox options:
  - All Research Locations
  - Regional Archives
  - Federal Records Centers
  - Presidential Libraries
  - Services for Federal Agencies

## **Shop Online**

Test participants sufficiently described this section and successfully visited this section when required by tasks.

## **Research By Topic**

Test participants were consistently able to easily find the “Research By Topic” page when navigating from the home page or elsewhere. Testers found the page easy to use and predominately selected the research topic link that would have led them to the content they sought.

## **Resources for Genealogists**

Testers had difficulty finding links that would lead them to the Census records on the Resources for Genealogists main page. Consequently, we propose to add a list of Most Requested items to the right hand column of this page, with “Census Records” appropriately listed at the top of that list. The Most Requested list can be based on Google Page ranking, by Googling the term `site:www.archives.gov/genealogy/`. Google page rank is not biased by the prominence and presentation of various information on the Archives.gov pages.

Three of four testers could not find a preservation related link when asked "As a genealogist, many of your friends ask you about preserving important family documents. You decide to show them a helpful page on the National Archives web site. Where would you go to find information related to methods for preserving documents?" Given their varied responses, including “Our

Locations” and “Shop Online”, we can assume that the testers did not fully understand what “preserving” means in this context. Consequently, it is recommended that the “Preserving Family Records” link label be changed back to “Caring for Your Family Archives”. The label “Preserving Family Records” was derived from the card sort results; however, the genealogy card sorters tended to be professional genealogists versus casual family history researchers and consequently may have chosen slightly more technical terminology in some cases such as this.

## **Mega Footer**

Testers generally found and searched the mega footer last in completing their tasks. Most testers did successfully find the links they sought in the mega footer, with the exception of the task in which veterans were asked to find content associated with the “Locate Service Members” mega footer link. To improve the mega footer’s visibility and context comprehension, we suggest that the mega footer’s heading be increased slightly as shown in test site version 3. Doing so improved the mega footers findability and success rate for the “Locate Service Members” related veterans task.

## **Task Wording**

We discovered that some tasks needed to be reworded in order to prevent testers’ keyword matching tendencies that lead them astray. For example, one of three testers who were asked “You would like to obtain a hard copy of the land deed granted to your great–great–grandfather when he settled in California after the Gold Rush of 1848–49. How would you go about beginning your search?” hooked onto the “obtain a hard copy” phrase and looked for “Order Copies of Records” link. Eliminating and replacing keywords that testers sometimes put testers on the wrong track alleviated the issue and subsequent testers using revised tasks and test site 3 did not experience the same problems.

Additionally, while the role play (“Imagine you are a...”) task wording brings the tasks to life, we recommend that we eliminate role playing from future tests. Testers often became sidetracked by the keywords used in the roles they were playing (e.g., graduate student) and ignored the content they were seeking (e.g., grant information). So, instead of using a task worded as: “As a university graduate student in information science, you would like to apply for a grant to conduct research about preserving records. Where would you go to learn more about what

grants the National Archives offer?" we might simply ask: "You're trying to apply for a grant to do research. What do you do?"

## Page Layout and Design

Test participants' comments predominately indicated that the pages seemed attractive, well organized, and nicely laid out. Below is a sampling of positive comments received on the design:

- Public participant: "Nothing I think that everything looks great! I especially like the color coding and how colorful it is."
- Public participant: "I like the design, it's pretty traditional, but with good use of space and some nice design touches."
- Public participant: "I really did like the layout and especially the colors chosen for each of the five categories. The 'Home' page looked great with images representing each of the categories."
- Veteran participant: "The colors are soothing, easy to read, well written and easy to navigate around the site."
- Veteran participant: "I like the way the site is laid out, easy to flow through."
- Genealogist participant: "I think that the home page as it stands now is very well designed with the 5 navigational buttons at the top. Pretty much everything to get started is listed somewhere in these 5 categories. The home page is simple and straight forward."
- Researcher participant: "I really like the home page layout. The 4 or 5 main columns are especially helpful when getting started."
- Researcher participant: "I really like the layout and graphic design on the pages that I saw! I loved the home page -- beautiful images in the top navigation bar, and the content was clear and transparent."

- Researcher participant: “I think the layout is very clear: I like the fact that each sub page has the same format, so you soon get used to the payout and that makes it easier to navigate. The logos are also helpful.”