



Helping governments communicate more effectively

A case study of our work with Nevada's Department of Employment, Training and Rehabilitation



Overview

Governments work hard to create programs to support their residents. But sometimes, accessing them can be tough. A combined behavioral science and human-centered design approach can help. Applying this approach can identify parts of programs that people struggle with and create evidence-based solutions to help address them, ultimately improving residents' lives. This case study summarizes our work doing just that with the state of Nevada.

The Behavioral Insights Team (BIT) partnered with Nevada's Department of Employment, Training and Rehabilitation (DETR) and the National Association for State Workforce Agencies (NASWA) to strengthen Nevada's unemployment insurance (UI) program by:

- Eliminating pain points and barriers in the claims filing process and
- Improving communications to increase public understanding of program requirements and processes.

More specifically, we worked with DETR (the State) and NASWA to co-develop and test new versions of two claimant-facing communications: UI eligibility letters and the program's homepage. We were interested in seeing if versions written in plain language and designed with behavioral techniques would help people find the information they need more efficiently. The State was interested in expanding equitable access for eligible claimants, so there was also a focus on marginalized groups (e.g., applicants with low English proficiency, older applicants, those with low socioeconomic backgrounds, etc.). Our team evaluated these changes through two online trials and multiple rounds of in-person user testing.

We approached this challenge by leveraging our expertise in behavioral science and human-centered design.

Behavioral science is the study of human behavior and the ways that our actions are shaped by environmental and contextual factors. Human-centered design complements this by grounding us in empathy for people and an understanding of how they engage with products, services, and systems.

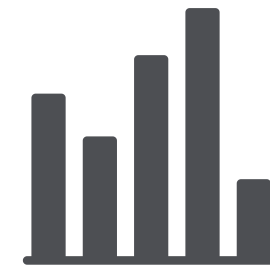
While this case study provides a more detailed look into the redesign and testing of eligibility letters (also referred to as determination letters) and homepages, our engagement with DETR included a variety of activities, including:

- Internal focus groups and 1:1 interviews with DETR staff
- Document review of existing materials
- Focus groups and usability testing of existing materials with former UI claimants
- Data review and analysis of administrative data and reports

These activities helped us better understand DETR, the UI system, and barriers faced by claimants—ultimately leading to solutions that could improve the claimant experience.

Evaluation methodology

When it came to evaluating effectiveness, we made sure to take a mixed methods approach, using both qualitative and quantitative findings to produce recommendations.



First, we tested the redesigned letters and homepages against the originals in an online experiment using [Predictiv](#), BIT's online testing platform. This allowed us to pilot the redesigns and generate rapid insights with a large sample representative of Nevada's UI claimant population.



Next, our team conducted in-person usability testing. We asked participants to review the letters and complete UI tasks on the homepages while verbalizing their thought processes in real-time. We then asked more specific questions to explore what people liked and disliked and how different groups interacted with the materials (e.g., age, English proficiency, disability status).

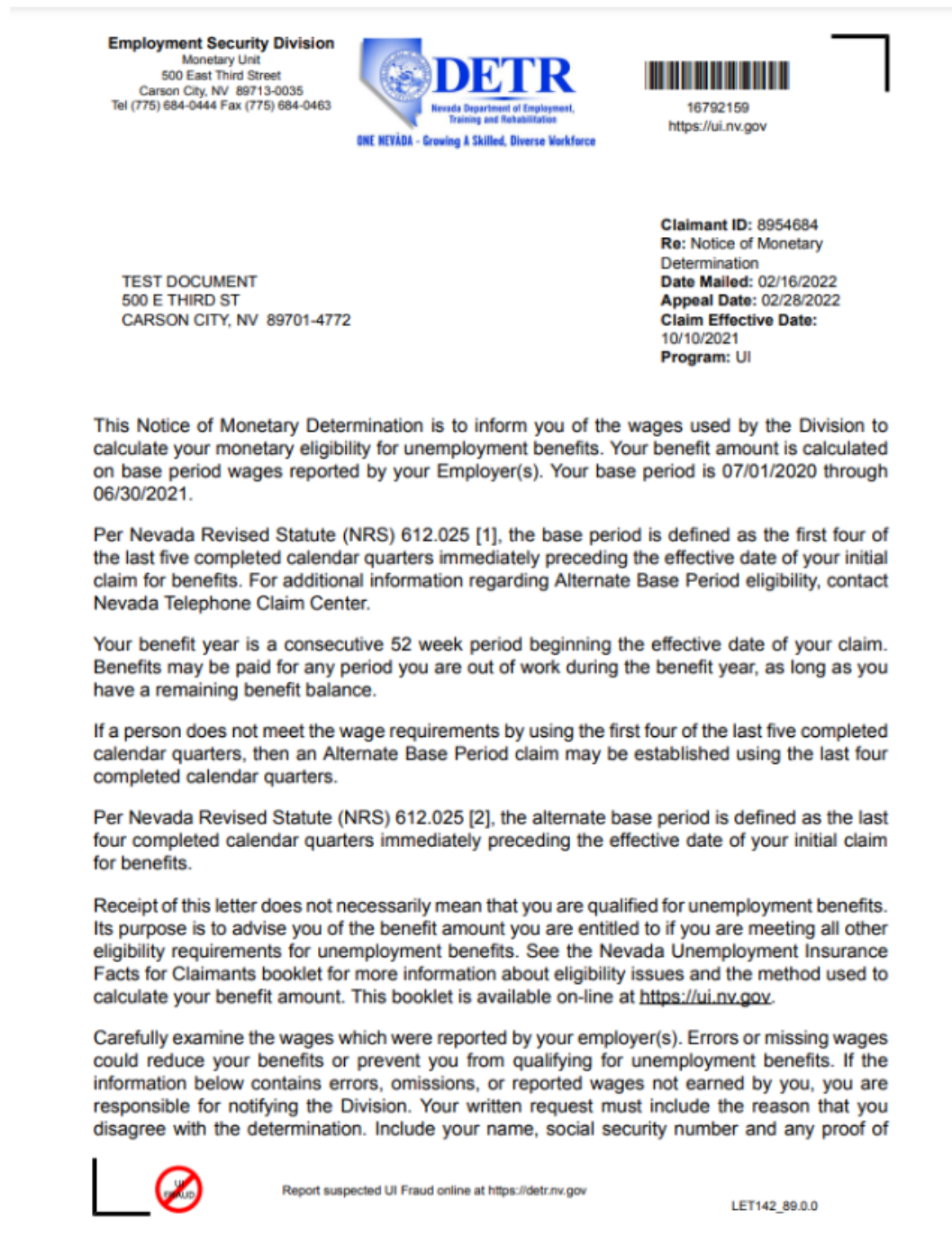
By taking this mixed methods approach, we enhanced our understanding of the quantitative data by digging deeper into the *why*. This strengthened our findings and ensured that the recommendations we proposed were aligned with the realities of Nevadan claimants.

Applying behavioral insights

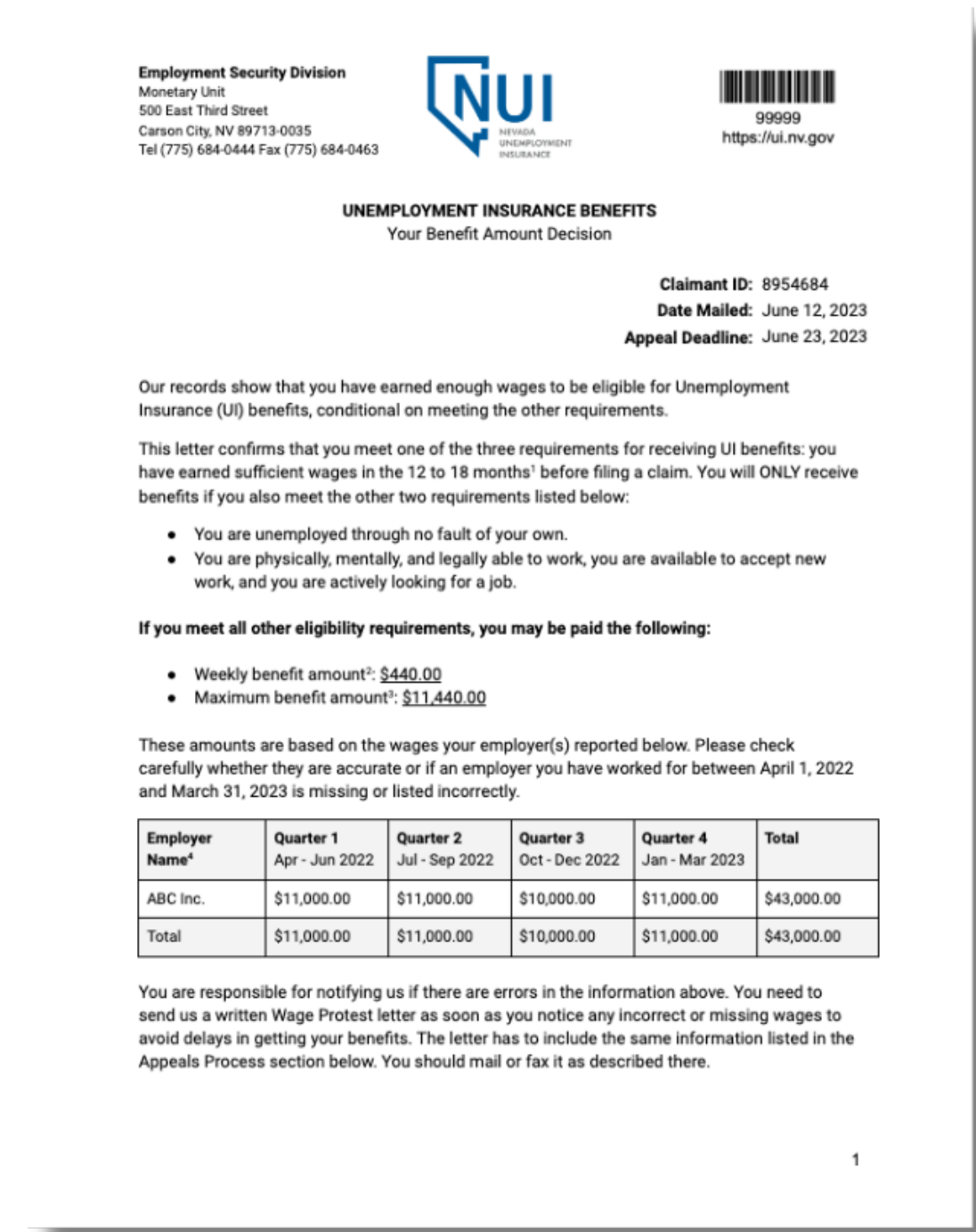
A determination letter from the state workforce agency tells the applicant if they are eligible for UI benefits.

Based on the first round of user testing for the version DETR currently uses with claimants, we were able to develop three additional versions that could potentially improve comprehension:

- **Simple:** A “simplified” version of the content using plain language guidelines
- **Design:** The simple version, plus plain language design features
- **Tone:** The design version, plus friendly and encouraging language



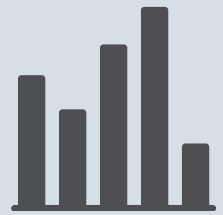
Original letter. This is the version currently used by DETR.



Simple letter (best performing). This letter simplified existing content by following easy-to-implement plain language guidelines.

Evaluating the letters

Our team tested three new versions of the state’s determination letter against the original using a mixed-methods evaluation—an online randomized controlled trial (RCT) and in-person user testing.



Using Predictiv, we recruited 2,009 participants that reflected Nevada’s claimant population and randomly assigned them to see either the original letter or one of the revised versions. Afterward, they answered questions measuring their comprehension and confidence in understanding the information.

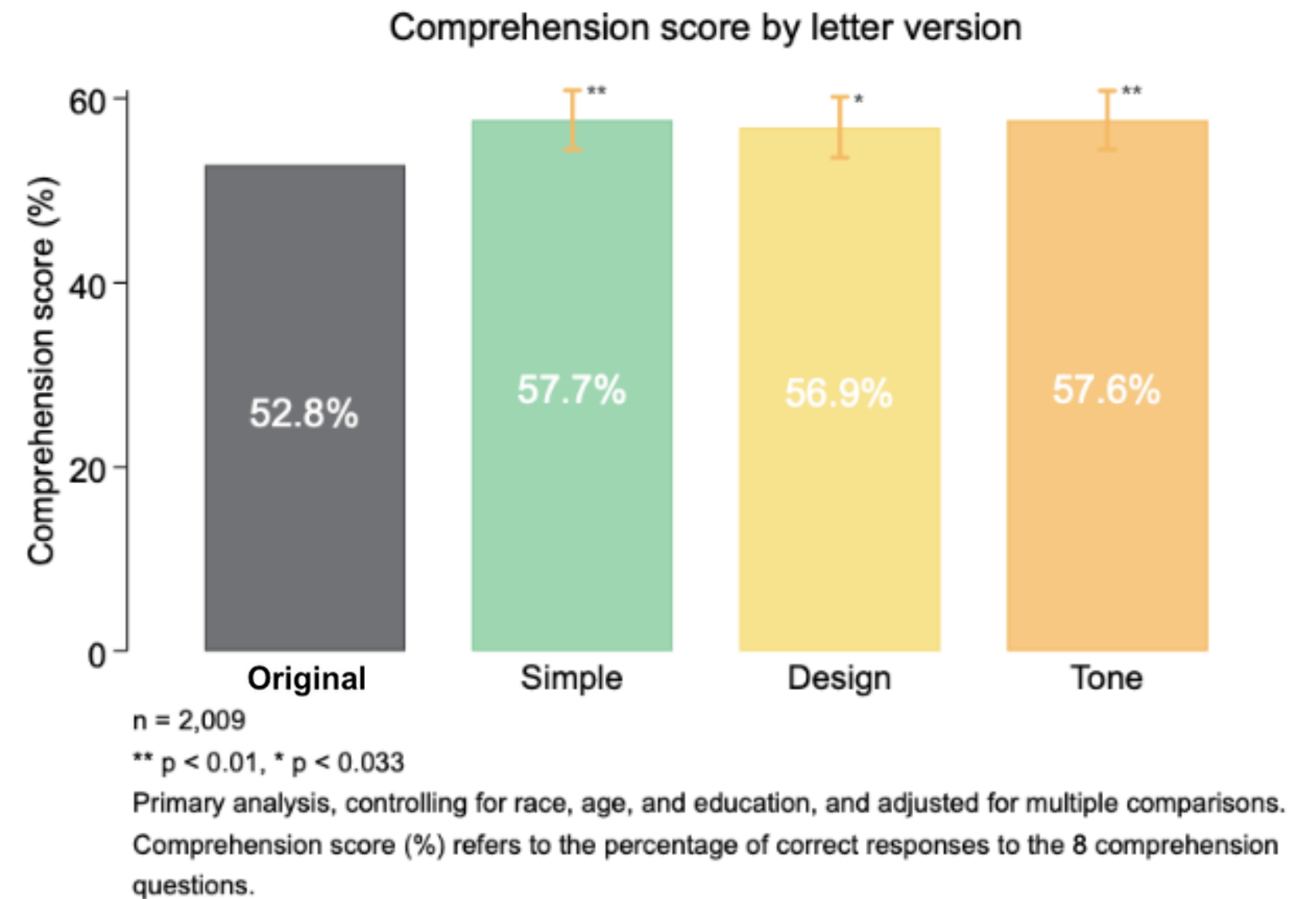


Then in Las Vegas, 16 Nevadans participated in user-testing. We asked them to look at two of the revised letters while thinking aloud and answering questions about what they liked and disliked.

Our team then analyzed all of the data. This mixed methods approach enabled DETR to learn what happened when people interacted with the revised versions and why, which helped clarify what works and how they should approach future revisions.

Revised letters significantly improved comprehension

In the online RCT, all three revised letters performed similarly in improving participants’ comprehension. All revised letters outperformed the Original letter, with the Simple letter achieving the biggest difference – it increased comprehension by nearly 5 percentage points.



Evaluating the letters

User testing illuminated helpful features

User testers provided helpful feedback on letter features that helped them understand the content, particularly:

- **Clear and succinct headers** added structure to the letter and made it easier to follow
- **Bullet points** made information easier to understand
- **Bolding important information** helped guide their eyes and emphasized the most important information

I dislike [that] they're telling me a bunch of stuff but it's not clear if I got [the UI benefits]... it's confusing and I'd have to call these numbers and talk to somebody.

– Original letter participant

I focused on the bullet points with the amounts - they caught my eye right away.

– Simple letter participant

What could the increase in comprehension mean?

More staff time

Claimants may ask fewer and better questions, which take less time for staff to answer.

More positive interactions

Claimants may be less frustrated, resulting in more positive interactions for both claimants and DETR staff.

Less adjudication

Claimants might also make fewer mistakes, which would lead to less adjudication and rework.

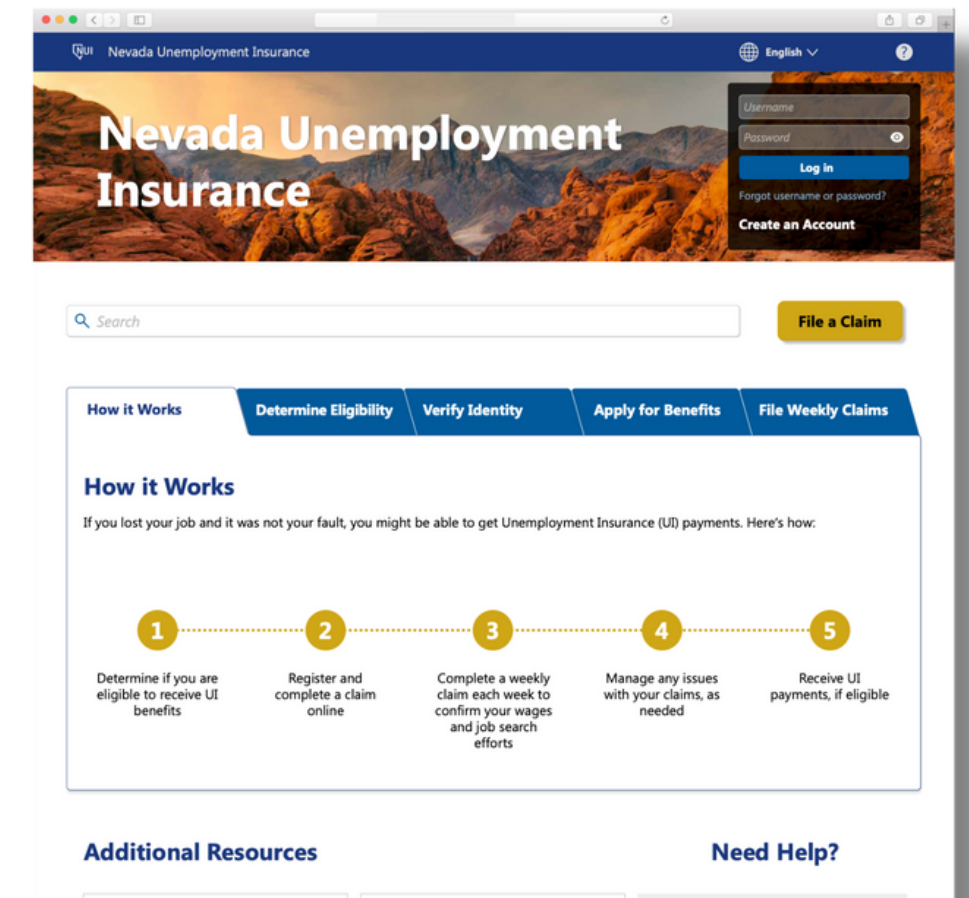
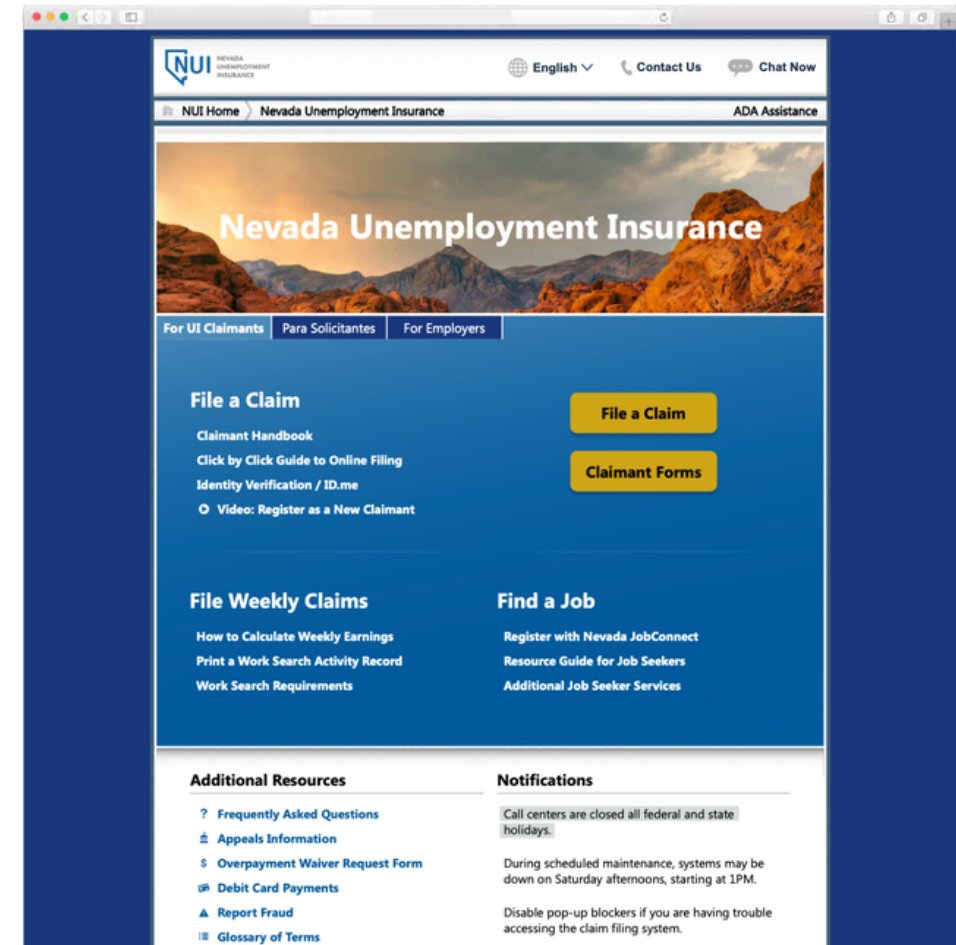
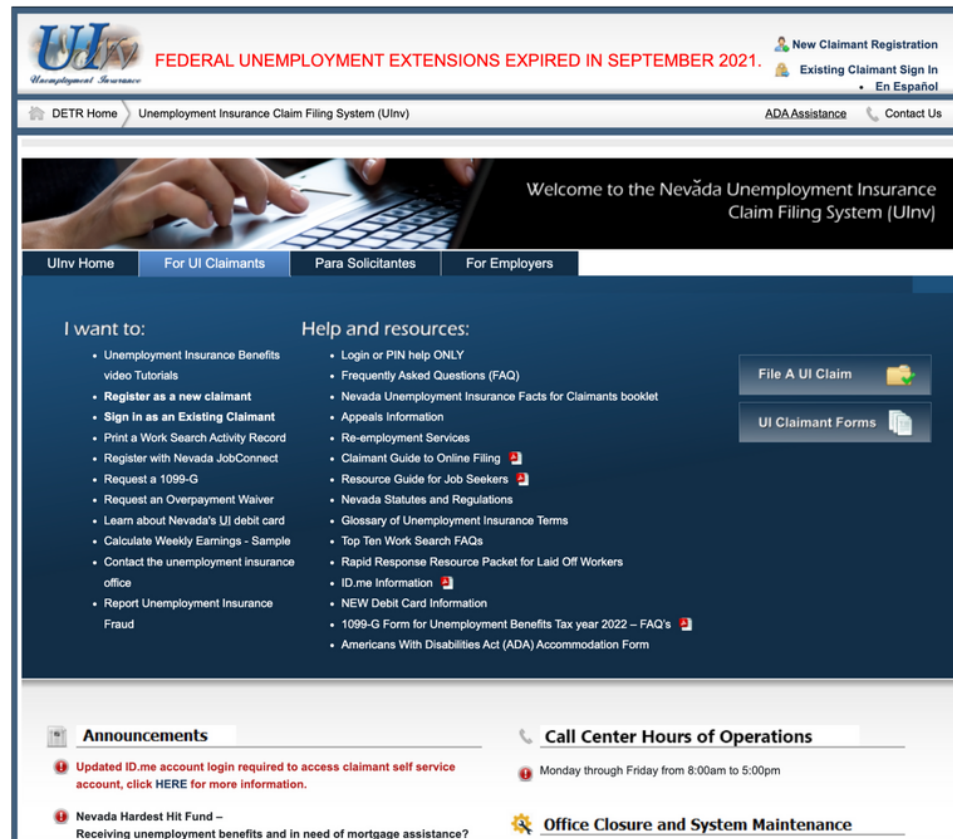
12,500 fewer calls

In 2022, Nevada's UI call center received ~250,000 calls. We could imagine that a 5 percentage point increase in comprehension might lead to a proportionate decrease in callers—which could mean 12,500 fewer calls annually.

Applying behavioral insights

Along with support from DETR teammates, we developed two new versions of Nevada UI's homepage:

- **Simple:** A "simplified" version of the then-current homepage, using updated branding guidelines and existing content; the goal of this version was to reduce the amount of mental load people might feel when coming to the page.
- **Modern:** Builds off the Simple version by integrating design features inspired by DETR's modernization efforts. New content was added to this version to streamline and reduce the number of pages users needed to click through to find information.



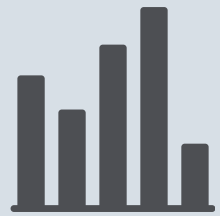
Original. Then-current version of Nevada's UI website.

Simple. The current version of the site. It's a simplified version of the original site, using updated branding guidelines and only existing content.

Modern. Builds off the Simple version by integrating design features inspired by DETR's modernization efforts.

Evaluating the homepages

Our team tested the two new versions of Nevada's UI homepage against the original.



In the online trial, 2,250 participants were randomly assigned to see one of the three homepages and asked to perform three tasks to find different types of information claimants commonly need in order to apply for benefits (e.g., eligibility requirements).

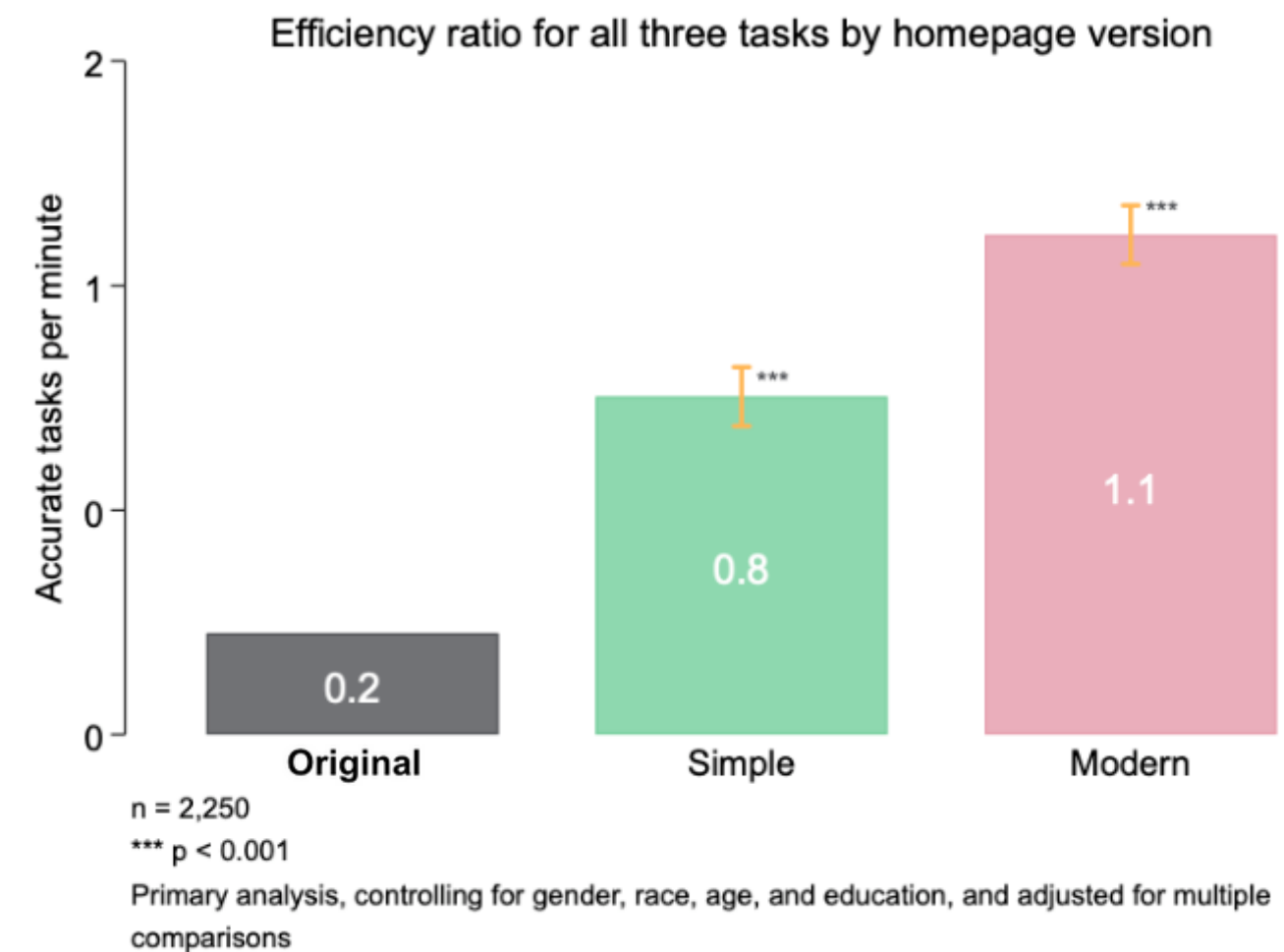
To measure efficiency, we calculated the number of tasks completed successfully divided by the time it took. We also measured how easy participants said their experience was.



These quantitative results were supported by in-person user testing. In Las Vegas, 16 people were shown the Simple version of the homepage and asked to complete the three tasks while thinking aloud and answering questions about what they liked and disliked.

The new homepages increased efficiency 4-5x

Participants were 5x more efficient at finding information on the Modern homepage and 4x more efficient on the Simple homepage compared to the original.



Participants who used the Modern homepage were the most successful at finding the resources overall (regardless of factoring in time)—27% of the Modern homepage participants completed all three tasks correctly, compared to just 2% of the Original homepage participants.

Evaluating the homepages

User testing supported the online trial results

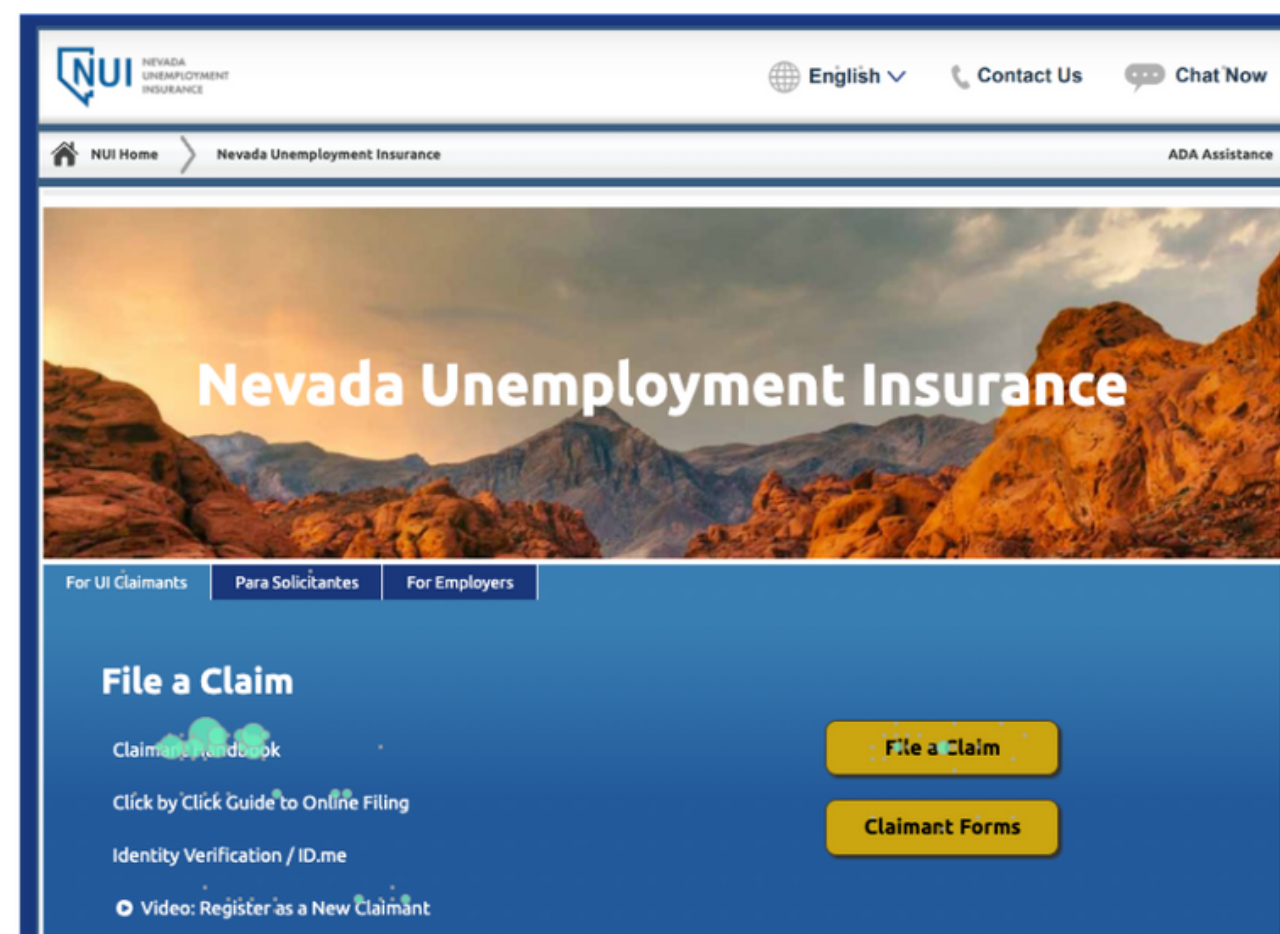
One participant remarked, “The [original] website needs better organization for finding these topics. They weren't in the places I would have expected.” This observation was supported by click map data, where we captured the exact location participants clicked on to find the right answer.

As shown below, participants in the Original group struggled to identify where they could find information on eligibility requirements compared to participants who saw the Modern homepage.

Original homepage click map



Simple homepage click map



Further qualitative feedback

User-testers were satisfied with the Simple homepage overall, but had valuable feedback on how to further improve experiences, including:

- **Larger font sizes** for buttons
- **Clearer section titles** (e.g., “File a claim” should be “How to file a claim”)
- A **better-organized** “Additional Resources” section

“The old site was frustrating to look at and this one is easier. Last time I just remember so many words, and I was overwhelmed. Basic is better.”
– Simple homepage participant

A program that works *with* people

As a result of our work together, DETR has implemented the **Simple homepage design**. You can see it [here](#) (as of January 2024). Over the next few years, as they fully upgrade their systems, they plan to continue updating their homepage, using the Modern design as inspiration.

Overall, the State of Nevada has **deeper insight into claimants' obstacles** in navigating their unemployment insurance program and practical, evidence-based strategies to address them. Taken together, these insights will help the State make the most of its resources and improve Nevadans' lives.

Do you have a government program that could better work *with* people?

We'd love to help you explore how a behavioral science approach could help. Get in touch with Elizabeth Bennett at elizabeth.bennett@bi.team to learn more.



THE
**BEHAVIORAL
INSIGHTS
TEAM**

This project was a collaboration between Nevada's Department of Employment, Training and Rehabilitation, the National Association of State Workforce Agencies, and the Behavioral Insights Team.