



June 12, 2020

Mr. Matthew Harmon
U.S. Department of Homeland Security

Dear Mr. Harmon,

We have completed our nine usability evaluations within three demographics on Coronavirus.gov. In this document, you will find details on the methodology, findings, and recommendations.

Overall, the majority of the participants thought the website was organized and informative. However, we have identified three categories for improvement in terms of the website's design, findability, and missing information. We encountered a few consistent issues that affected the users' experience and have recommended the following revisions:

1. Make Coronavirus.gov the top search in Google for general keywords
2. Add data and statistics to the homepage
3. Add interactive maps to the homepage
4. Add search bar to homepage

In applying these changes, we believe that Coronavirus.gov will become a more effective source for informing the general public about coronavirus.

Amid the current COVID-19 pandemic, we thank you and the Department of Homeland Security for your concerted efforts and for the opportunity to evaluate the usability of Coronavirus.gov. We are in troubling times and your work is very appreciated. If you have any additional questions, please feel free to reach us at our respective email addresses.

Sincerely,

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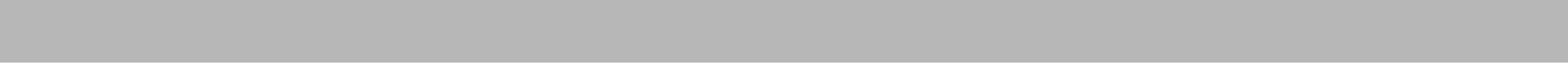
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Assessing the Usability of Coronavirus.gov

Prepared for
Mr. Matthew Harmon, Director of Web Communications

U.S. Department of Homeland Security

June 12, 2020



Executive Summary

Testing the usability of a website is an excellent way to gauge how easily users are able to navigate an interface to find what they are looking for. This study includes an evaluation of Coronavirus.gov, an analysis of the data, and a list of recommendations to improve the usability of the site.

The evaluation consisted of studying nine participants from three demographics (18-30 years old, 31-50 years old, and 51+ years old) via Zoom. Participants participated in an interactive interview that measured the findability, clarity, effectiveness, efficiency, and additional usability strengths and weaknesses of Coronavirus.gov.

Our team has determined three areas of frustration for the users:

- Findability
 - Most participants did not choose Coronavirus.gov as their go-to government site for coronavirus.
- Missing Information
 - Most participants expected to see data, statistics, and/or a map on the homepage.
- Design
 - Participants were disappointed that there was no search bar present on the homepage.

Based on these findings, we recommend implementing the following: **making Coronavirus.gov the top search in Google for general keywords, adding data and statistics to the homepage, adding interactive maps to the homepage, and adding a search bar to the homepage.**

With these changes, we believe Coronavirus.gov will provide visitors with a more streamlined experience.

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Assessing the Usability of Coronavirus.gov

Purpose Statement

The Department of Homeland Security would like to evaluate whether the Coronavirus.gov site is usable for the general population. Ideally, Coronavirus.gov would be able to provide members of the general population with information pertaining to coronavirus. However, the website has three areas of frustration: design, findability, and missing information.

Our purpose was to carefully analyze the user experience and provide feedback based on several sources of data: a pre-test questionnaire, an interactive interview, a System Usability Scale (SUS) evaluation, and a reaction cards evaluation. In this document, we will report on how the usability analysis was accomplished, as well as the results from testing participants. Finally, our team has a list of recommendations to fix these issues.

Methodology

This section outlines how the test was performed for each test participant. By following this prescribed methodology, we ensured that we obtained valid and reliable usability findings.

Test Objectives

The objectives of this test were to:

- Determine if the website and the information on the website are findable
- Examine the clarity of the purpose and author of the website
- Assess whether the content of the website meets user needs and expectations
- Identify any missing components of the website
- Highlight any additional usability strengths and weaknesses present

Participants

We were tasked with testing general members of the population. We tested a total of nine participants from three demographics: 18-30 years old, 31-50 years old, and 51+ years old.

We tested participants from three different demographics to ensure that we had a diverse sample of participants from the general population. Testing three demographics allowed us to better understand the varying needs and expectations of young adults through middle-aged adults for a government site related to coronavirus.

Evaluation Methods and Metrics

Our methodology was selected to include multiple methods of data collection resulting in both quantitative and qualitative data. The methods are listed below:

- Pre-test questionnaire
- Remote interactive interview
 - Time spent finding government site related to coronavirus
 - Failure or success when asked to find a government site related to coronavirus
- System Usability Scale (SUS) evaluation
- Reaction cards evaluation

Given Coronavirus.gov's status as a hub for coronavirus resources, we opted for an interactive interview over a traditional usability test to ensure that we tested the usability of Coronavirus.gov and not the usability of the external websites linked within Coronavirus.gov. Instead of asking participants to complete tasks on the website, we directed participants through the site and asked for their opinion on aspects such as, whether parts of the site met their expectations.

The pre-test questionnaire was implemented as a way to gauge our participants' expectations for a government site related to coronavirus. We chose the System Usability Scale (SUS) to provide reliable quantitative data regarding the usability of Coronavirus.gov. In addition, the reaction cards evaluation was utilized to allow our participants to summarize their experience with Coronavirus.gov.

General Protocol

Each test session began with the moderator sending a pre-test email to the participant. The pre-test email included links to the Zoom call, consent form, pre-test questionnaire, SUS evaluation, and reaction cards evaluation. Once the participant joined the Zoom meeting, the note-taker muted her microphone and turned her webcam off and the moderator began the test session.

The moderator began recording the Zoom meeting and the participant was directed through the consent form and the pre-test questionnaire. Once the pre-test questionnaire was completed, the interactive interview commenced.

The participant's first task was to find a government site related to coronavirus. The note-taker recorded the time taken to find such a site, in addition to whether the participant chose Coronavirus.gov. If the participant did not select Coronavirus.gov, the moderator redirected the participant to the correct site. From there, the moderator asked the participant four additional

questions relating to the functions of the website. The note-taker recorded any notable behaviors, quotes, and metrics.

After completing the interactive interview, the participant was asked to complete a System Usability Scale (SUS) evaluation and a reaction cards evaluation. Afterwards, the participant was thanked for their time and the test session was concluded.

Interactive Interview Questions

Each participant was asked the following questions:

1. If you were looking for a government site related to coronavirus, where would you go?
Please demonstrate how you would find this site.
2. As you look at the site, what do you think the purpose is?
 - a. Can you also tell me who the author of this page is?
3. If you were going to do a search on coronavirus, what would you look for? Find the answer to this question using this site.
 - a. Does this answer meet your expectations?
4. The site serves as a hub for coronavirus resources. Based on this understanding, do you think there is anything missing?
5. Overall, does this site meet your expectations?
 - a. How would you improve this site?

Findings

We analyzed our findings based on a comprehensive evaluation of our data. We noted three main areas of frustration for our participants: design, findability, and missing information. See Table 1 below for an overview of findings.

Table 1: Overview of Findings

Category	Problem Identified	Description	Number of Participants Affected	Priority (highest priority being 1)
Findability	Finding Coronavirus.gov	Most participants did not choose Coronavirus.gov as their go-to government site for coronavirus.	7/9	1
Missing Information	Data, Statistics and Map	Most participants expected to see data, statistics, and/or a map on the homepage.	6/9	2
Design	Search Bar Location	Participants were disappointed that there was no search bar present on the homepage.	2/9	3

Positive Findings

Our team used reaction cards for the post-test evaluation which consisted of 16 different adjectives the participant could choose from that described their overall experience with Coronavirus.gov. The top five adjectives used to describe the website were all positive. As shown in Figure 1 below, the top adjectives chosen were: organized, professional, easy to use, clear, and convenient. Direct quotes of why each participant chose those words are located in Table 8 in Appendix E.

Eight out of nine participants thought the site was organized. For instance, the two general questions are located at the top of the webpage and more specific details are located towards the bottom. Towards the bottom, the specific resources are on the left and the news is located on the right.

Seven out of nine participants thought the overall website looked professional. The website answered the users' questions with research-supported evidence. The organizational logos at the top of the homepage gave the site credibility. One participant was impressed about the lack of popup ads present.

According to five out of nine participants, the website was easy to use. Coronavirus.gov provided straightforward answers to users' questions. The different subsections and categories on the website were useful guides to help users quickly search for what they need.

According to four out of nine participants, Coronavirus.gov was clear and convenient. The website was not complex and did not contain any distracting content. The organization of the website played a large role in the clearness. The website guided the user to the correct resource, such as an external webpage. Most of the information requested by the user was present on the website.

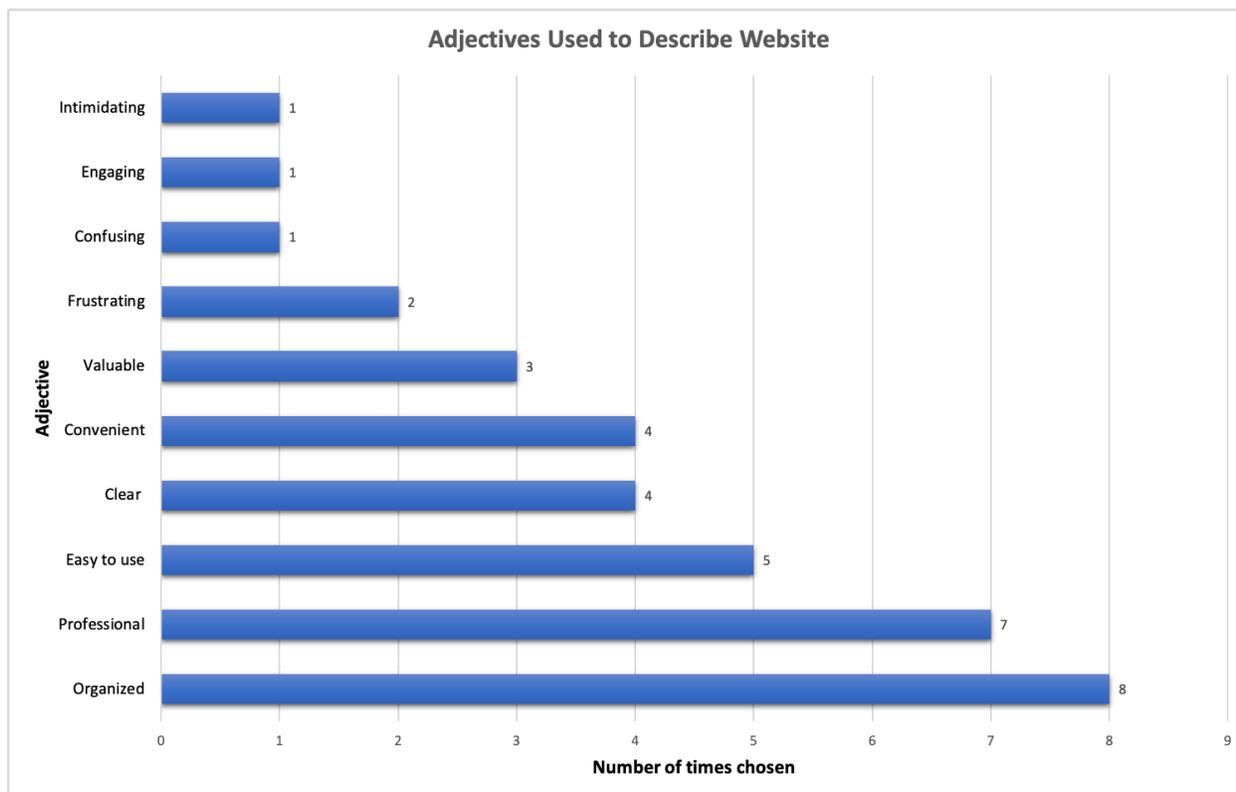


Figure 1. Reaction Cards Results

Additionally, we conducted a System Usability Scale (SUS) analysis on Coronavirus.gov and obtained an average score of 75.8. Scores above a 68 indicate that the website has a higher than average usability level. As such, the majority of participants believed Coronavirus.gov is more usable than an average site. See Appendix D for an in-depth SUS analysis.

Findability - Finding Coronavirus.gov

Seven out of nine participants did not choose Coronavirus.gov when asked to find a government site related to coronavirus. Participants searched for keywords such as “government website on Coronavirus,” “Federal website about COVID,” “CDC,” and “COVID” (see Table 4 for finding Coronavirus.gov results) and four of the seven participants navigated to the CDC.gov site.

The two participants who navigated to Coronavirus.gov searched the keywords “Federal Coronavirus website” and “US government information Coronavirus.” Both participants who successfully navigated to Coronavirus.gov were from the 18-30 and 51+ age groups.

On average, it took these two participants 43 seconds to find the site. Overall, it took all nine participants approximately 1 minute and 17 seconds to find a site.

In addition, three participants, one from each age group, searched simply “Coronavirus” in Google and all three were unable to locate Coronavirus.gov.

Missing Information - Data, Statistics, and Map

The pre-test questionnaire revealed that six out of nine participants expected to see “data, statistics, maps and/or graphs” on a government site related to coronavirus (see Appendix B for the pre-test questionnaire analysis).

Specifically, participants expected to see “*current data*” (Participant 9, 51+), “*science-derived data, data presentation, [and] facts*” (Participant 7, 51+), “*maps showing updated numbers of confirmed cases and graphs showing changes in numbers*” (Participant 5, 31-50 and Participant 8, 51+), “*a Google map of test locations*” (Participant 4, 31-50), “*statistics related to testing, the duplication rate, [and] the number of deaths and total cases*” (Participant 3, 18-30).

All three participants from the 51+ age group listed data and statistics as something they would expect to see on a government site related to coronavirus. Two participants from the 31-50 age group and one participant from the 18-30 age group also expressed this expectation.

Design - Search Bar Location

The current location of the search bar is not on the homepage; it is located on the FAQs page. Most websites are expected to have a search bar on the homepage because it allows the users to easily search for what they want. When participants were asked about how they would improve Coronavirus.gov, two participants recommended the search bar be placed near the top of the homepage. See Table 5 for the results of overall website expectations and improvements.

Additional Finding - FAQs

When asked to find the answer to their own questions about coronavirus, two out of the nine participants navigated to the FAQs to look for their answers. Both participants were in the 31-50 age group and they searched for “*the likelihood of universities reopening*” and “*how long the virus lasts once contracted.*”

The first participant was able to locate an article about schools, but this answer did not meet his expectations as the article was last updated over two months ago. The second participant was also unable to find an answer to her question.

Recommendations

1. Make Coronavirus.gov the top search in Google for general keywords

Coronavirus.gov does not appear in the top search results for more general keywords such as “Coronavirus” and “COVID”. It would be beneficial to adjust the search engine optimization (SEO) of Coronavirus.gov and list the site as one of the top three search results for general keywords, especially if the user is conducting a search within the United States.

It may also be helpful to consider browser location permissions and adjust the search results accordingly if the user is conducting a search for “Coronavirus” within the United States. If a user in the United States allows the browser to access their location, Coronavirus.gov could appear as one of the top search results if the user searched a general keyword.

2. Add data and statistics to the homepage

We recommend adding statistics of total confirmed cases in the U.S. and total coronavirus deaths in the U.S. to the Coronavirus.gov homepage. It would allow the user to quickly get statistics about the virus. See Figure 2 below for a mockup on how adding data and statistics on the homepage could be presented.



Figure 2. Mockup of Adding Statistics to Coronavirus.gov Homepage

3. Add interactive maps to the homepage

By adding interactive maps to the homepage, the users would be able to look at statistics specific to a state. The user should be able to see the reported number of coronavirus cases and deaths for each state on one map (see Figure 3). An additional map could show coronavirus testing locations. Users would find this addition a very convenient way of finding their local testing site (see Figure 4).

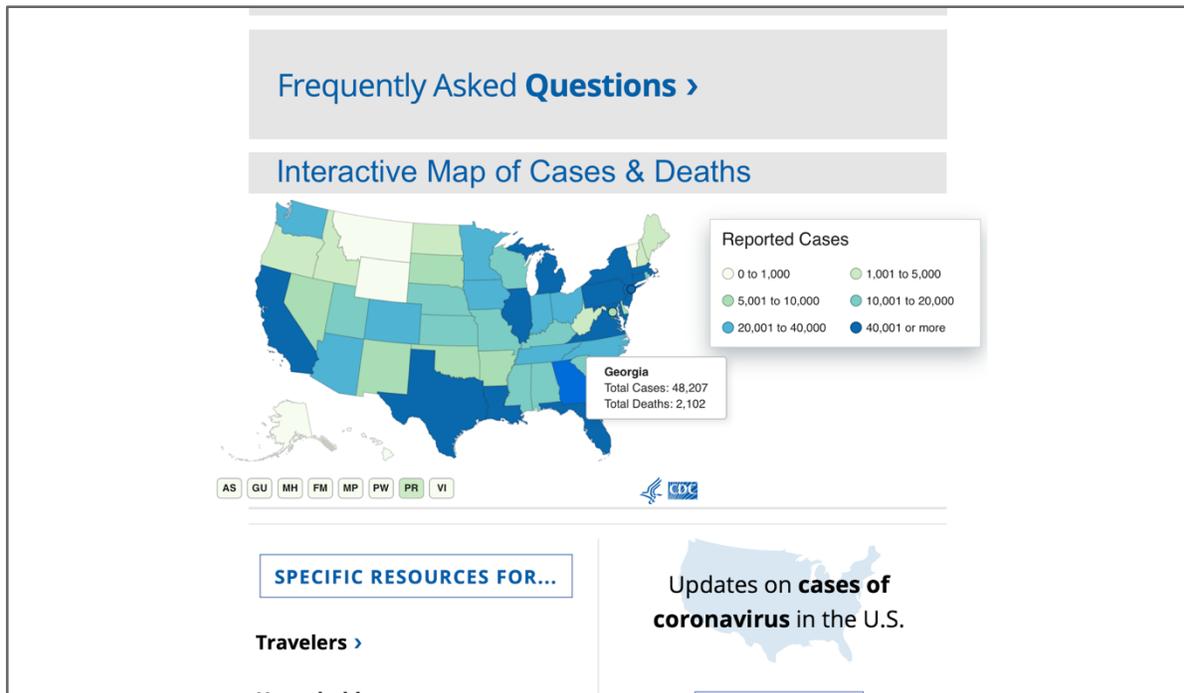


Figure 3. Mockup of Adding Cases & Deaths Map to Coronavirus.gov Homepage

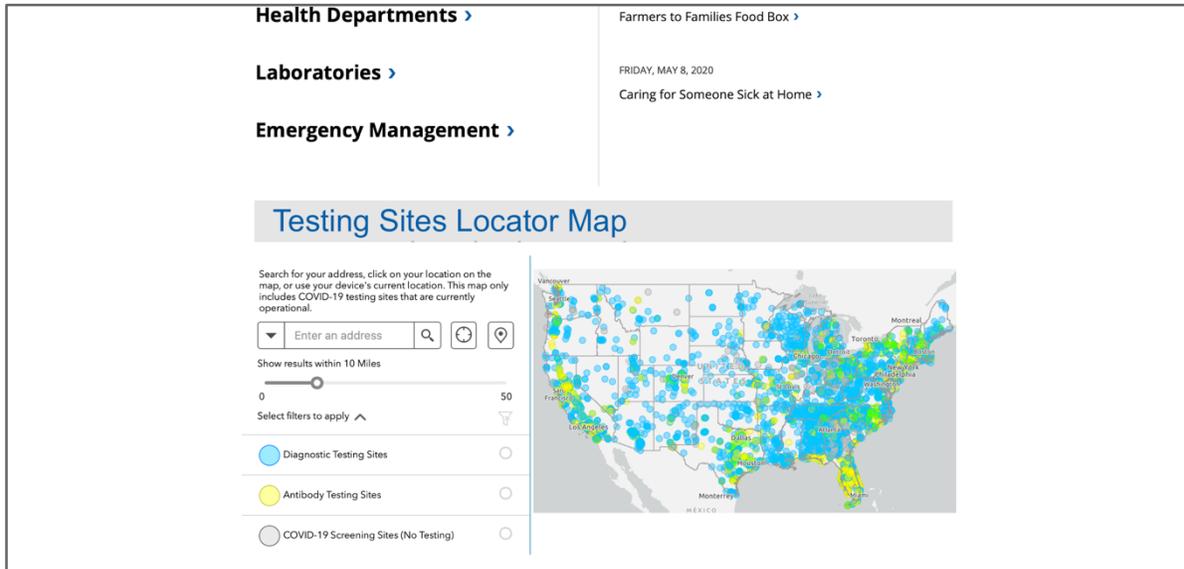


Figure 4. Mockup of Adding Testing Sites Locator to Coronavirus.gov Homepage

4. Add search bar to homepage

Adding a search bar to the homepage would be convenient for users who may have specific questions that are not addressed on the homepage. In addition, it would take less time for users to locate a search bar, as users would no longer have to navigate to the FAQs section of Coronavirus.gov to do so (see Figure 5).

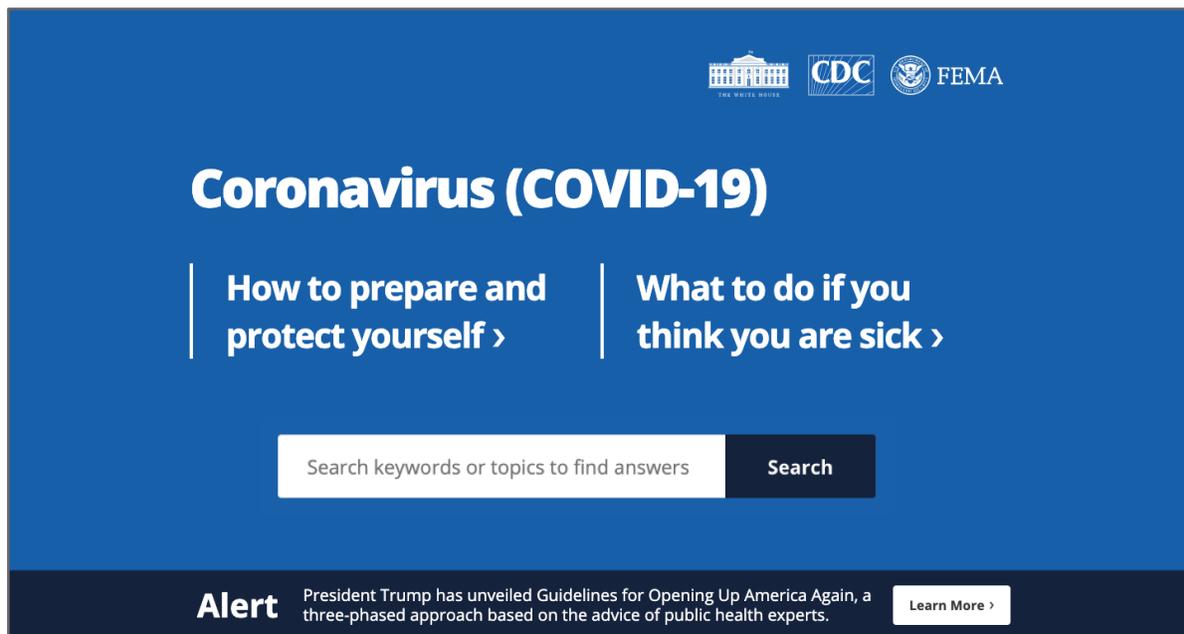


Figure 5. Mockup of Adding Search Bar to Coronavirus.gov Homepage

Appendix A: Moderator's Script

This script was adapted from (Barnum, 2011, pp. 193-195).

Introduction

Hello! Thank you for being here with us today.

My name is Cathy and Sydnei and I am here to evaluate the usability of a government site related to coronavirus. For your information, I am reading from a script to ensure I say the exact same thing to each participant and to ensure that nothing is skipped or missed.

Your participation will help us understand what changes should be made to develop an informative, usable website.

Video Recording Permission

This session will be recorded. The reason for recording the session is so that we can collect additional data after the test. If you look at the email that you were sent prior to the test, you will find a link to a legal consent form that gives us permission to record your use of the site. If you are comfortable with signing this form, please do so. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask.

Introduction to Testing

Before we begin, I will explain how this test will work.

I will ask you to view a government site related to coronavirus and ask you questions about the website. I really appreciate your feedback about your experience, so I would like you to think aloud as you navigate the site. You may want to say things like, "I'm clicking this because..." or "I don't like this because...". Additionally, this test is meant to evaluate the website, not your abilities. You do not need to know anything about the website beforehand.

Pre-Test Questionnaire

Do you have any questions before we begin?

In the center of the Zoom toolbar, there is a large green button that says "share screen". Please click that. Now there will be an option asking which screen you would like to share; please share whichever display you will be using (ie. desktop/screen 1).

To begin, I would like you to return to the email you were sent prior to this test and open the pre-test questionnaire link. This questionnaire will help me understand your expectations for a government site related to coronavirus. As you complete it, please tell me what you are typing and why you are writing these answers.

[After the questionnaire is completed:] Thank you for your feedback.

Testing

I have several questions to ask you as we go through the site. Remember, this is not a test of you; it is a test of the website, and I'm very interested in your reactions about it. Please remember to think out loud.

1. If you were looking for a government site related to coronavirus, where would you go? Please demonstrate how you would find this site.
2. As you look at the site, what do you think the purpose is?
 - a. Can you also tell me who the author of this page is?
3. If you were going to do a search on coronavirus, what would you look for? Find the answer to this question using this site.
 - a. Does this answer meet your expectations?
4. The site serves as a hub for coronavirus resources. Based on this understanding, do you think there is anything missing?
5. Overall, does this site meet your expectations?
 - a. How would you improve this site?

Thank you for your feedback. We have a few extra forms for you to fill out in order to help us gather some more data.

SUS Questionnaire

Please return to the email you were sent prior to the test and open the SUS questionnaire. This will help us understand your experience with this website. Additionally, please explain why you are choosing each answer.

Reaction Cards

Please open the reaction cards form at the bottom of the email you were sent. This form contains sixteen different words that may be used to describe Coronavirus.gov. Please choose four words from the list that you would use to describe your experience with the site and please elaborate on why you chose those words.

After Testing

Thank you for participating in this test! We really appreciate your feedback and we hope you have a wonderful day.

Appendix B: Pre-Test Questionnaire

1. What is your name?
2. What kind of pages or information would you expect to see in a government site about coronavirus?
3. What would be your top 3 reasons for visiting a government site about coronavirus?

Table 2: Information Expected on Coronavirus.gov

Info Expected	Age Group 18-30	Age Group 31-50	Age Group 51+	Total
Data, Statistics, Maps and/or Graphs	1 of 3 participants	2 of 3 participants	3 of 3 participants	6 of 9 participants
General Virus Information	1 of 3 participants	2 of 3 participants	3 of 3 participants	6 of 9 participants
Credible Sources	2 of 3 participants	0 of 3 participants	0 of 3 participants	2 of 9 participants
Symptoms	1 of 3 participants	1 of 3 participants	0 of 3 participants	2 of 9 participants
Links to Important Resources	1 of 3 participants	0 of 3 participants	0 of 3 participants	1 of 9 participants
State Reopening	0 of 3 participants	1 of 3 participants	0 of 3 participants	1 of 9 participants
Progress of Vaccine	0 of 3 participants	0 of 3 participants	1 of 3 participants	1 of 9 participants

Table 3: Top Reasons to Visit Coronavirus.gov

Reasons for Visiting Website	Age Group 18-30	Age Group 31-50	Age Group 51+	Total
Learn about Virus	3 of 3 participants	2 of 3 participants	2 of 3 participants	7 of 9 participants
Statistics and/or Research	2 of 3 participants	1 of 3 participants	3 of 3 participants	6 of 9 participants
Federal Policy Announcements	1 of 3 participants	3 of 3 participants	0 of 3 participants	4 of 9 participants
Contact Info of CDC or Other Personnel	1 of 3 participants	0 of 3 participants	0 of 3 participants	1 of 9 participants
Testing Sites and/or Treatment Center	0 of 3 participants	1 of 3 participants	0 of 3 participants	1 of 9 participants
News	0 of 3 participants	0 of 3 participants	1 of 3 participants	1 of 9 participants

Appendix C: Interactive Interview

Table 4: Finding Coronavirus.gov Results

Participant	Age Group	Success/Failure	Time Spent (mins:secs)	Keywords Searched
Participant 1	18-30	Failure	2:15	Government website on Coronavirus
Participant 2	18-30	Failure	2:29	Coronavirus
Participant 3	18-30	Success	:33	Federal Coronavirus website
Participant 4	31-50	Failure	:30	CDC and COVID
Participant 5	31-50	Failure	2:52	Federal website about COVID
Participant 6	31-50	Failure	1:31	Coronavirus
Participant 7	51+	Failure	:17	CDC Coronavirus
Participant 8	51+	Failure	:48	Coronavirus
Participant 9	51+	Success	:54	US government information Coronavirus
Time average: 1 minute 17 seconds				

Table 5: Results of Overall Website Expectations and Improvements

Participant	Age Group	Expectations Met	Explanation and Improvement
Participant 1	18-30	Yes	All of the info is fact-checked and there are no ads. The font is too big and the middle section should be off to the side. The 4 boxes should be smaller and on the side. Everything is easy to find.
Participant 2	18-30	Yes	Really likes the website. The four boxes are really helpful. Likes how the site becomes more detailed towards the bottom. Would like the names of the people who created and update the website.
Participant 3	18-30	Yes	Website covers a wide variety and it is thorough for each section. The page does not crash. Would like to have more visible things of how people can adapt or function with the virus being present.
Participant 4	31-50	No	The site is too simple and broad. There are no locations for testing centers. The search bar should be near the top. Would prefer a google map of test locations instead of a news section. Participant considers herself an advanced user.
Participant 5	31-50	Yes	Participant considers himself to have low expectations and is not tech savvy. The website is clean and easy. No improvements necessary.
Participant 6	31-50	Yes	The overall website is fine. Would add a search bar to the homepage. An interactive map would be nice.
Participant 7	51+	No	Would include cdc links that direct users to rata data.
Participant 8	51+	Yes	No explanation or improvements to be made.
Participant 9	51+	Yes	It is a general information site. The latest news should be at the top.

Appendix D: SUS Survey

Table 6: Notable SUS Questions

Notable SUS Questions	1 (Strongly disagree)	2 (Disagree)	3 (Neutral)	4 (Agree)	5 (Strongly Agree)
I think I would need the support of a technical person to be able to use this website.	9 participants				
I would imagine that most people would learn to use this website very quickly.				6 participants	3 participants
I found the website unnecessarily complex.	4 participants	4 participants	1 participants		
I found the website very cumbersome to use.	5 participants	2 participants			2 participants
I thought the website was easy to use.		3 participants		2 participants	4 participants
I needed to learn a lot of things before I could get going with this website.	5 participants	2 participants	1 participants	1 participants	
I felt very confident using the website.	2 participants		1 participants	1 participants	5 participants

One of the participants who responded “strongly agree” to “I found the website very cumbersome to use” noted that she chose this answer because there was no way to return to Coronavirus.gov apart from using the back button on a browser (Participant 7, 51+).

One of the participants who responded “disagree” to “I thought the website was easy to use” did not like the lack of a search bar on the Coronavirus.gov homepage and stated that it took “too many clicks to get to something” (Participant 4, 31-50).

One of the participants who responded “strongly disagree” to “I felt very confident using the website” believed that “the creator put the information there but did not think about how people would use the information” (Participant 7, 51+).

Table 7: SUS Scores

Age Group	SUS Score	Average By Age Group
18-30	Participant 3 = 77.5	89.2
	Participant 2 = 90	
	Participant 1 = 100	
31-50	Participant 4 = 45	65
	Participant 5 = 70	
	Participant 6 = 80	
51+	Participant 7 = 45	73.3
	Participant 8 = 85	
	Participant 9 = 90	
Total Average		75.8

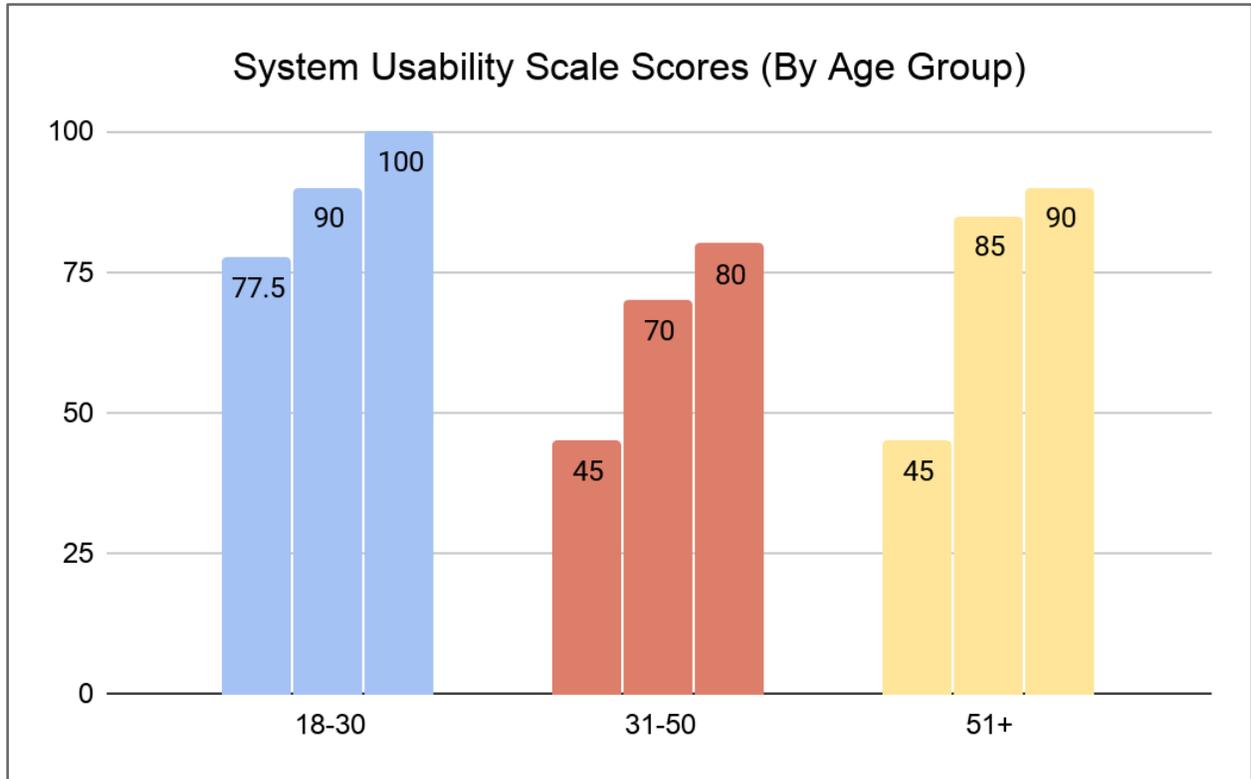


Figure 6: SUS Scores Categorized by Age Group

Appendix E: Reaction Cards

Table 8: Top Five Chosen Reaction Cards

Words Chosen	Quotes
Organized	<p>“The page is split; the main questions are at the top. As you scroll down, the info becomes more specific.” (Participant 2, 18-30)</p> <p>“Relevant questions were in the right place.” (Participant 3, 18-30)</p> <p>“The website had certain info clumped together.” (Participant 7, 51+)</p> <p>“Everything is on the left and the latest news is on the right.” (Participant 8, 51+)</p> <p>“The homepage is clean.” (Participant 6, 31-50)</p>
Professional	<p>“The government logos at the top, make the website look official. The picture is nice.” (Participant 2, 18-30)</p> <p>“The language seems to be medical.” (Participant 3, 18-30)</p> <p>“It looked inviting.” (Participant 4, 31-50)</p> <p>“The website answers your questions and gives you straight facts.” (Participant 6, 31-50)</p> <p>“The content is not jumbled up and there are no unnecessary icons like popups.” (Participant 8, 51+)</p>
Easy to use	<p>“I like the categories and it answers every question.” (Participant 3, 18-30)</p> <p>“You don’t have to sign up for memberships or give your email. You can search for everything you need.” (Participant 6, 31-50)</p> <p>“The website is straightforward.” (Participant 8, 51+)</p>
Clear	<p>“Everything is very well organized, concise, and easy to use.” (Participant 1, 18-30)</p> <p>“There are no bells and whistles. The fonts, colors, and stuff helped.” (Participant 5, 31-50)</p>

Table 8 Continued

	“Everything was straightforward.” (Participant 9, 51+)
Convenient	<p>“It was the first website to pop up on Google.” (Participant 3, 18-30)</p> <p>“Everything is there [on the website].” (Participant 4, 31-50)</p> <p>“The name of the website is great and it’s a government website.” (Participant 6, 31-50)</p>

Table 9: Negative Reaction Cards Chosen

Words Chosen	Quotes
Confusing	“It doesn’t consider basic web design principles.” (Participant 7, 51+)
Frustrating	<p>“It doesn’t flow well. I can’t get back to the main page with one click. Plus, I am disappointed the President’s opinion is involved in the science behind the virus.” (Participant 7, 51+)</p> <p>“I could not stay on the same website; it directed me to a different website.” (Participant 4, 31-50)</p>
Intimidating	“[CDC website] is hard to navigate.” (Participant 4, 31-50)