Heuristic Evaluation of Amicus

1. Problem/Prototype Description

Amicus is a mobile app that helps people navigating legal systems find local peer support groups, exchange advice, and connect with others who have experienced similar cases.

2. Violations Found

Task 1: Signing Up for the Application (Simple)

1. **H4: Consistency & Standards / Severity: 1 / Found By: C**
    1. **Description:** The "Sign up" header during the sign-up task flow is off center on the screen.
    2. **Rationale:** This is inconsistent with other headers in the app that are centered, leading to misdirection of the eye when skimming the page.
    3. **Fix:** Center the "Sign up" header horizontally.
2. **H4: Consistency & Standards / Severity: 2 / Found By: C, A**
    1. **Description:** The Create your account flow mentions both a "nickname" and a "username" in the explainer caption, and only lists an option to fill in your username.
    2. **Rationale:** The "nickname" and "username" terms sound very similar and may confuse users about whether they refer to the same thing. Leading with "use a nickname" may lead users to think this is the term predominantly used for the sign-up process.
    3. **Fix:** Rephrase the caption to something like, "If you would like to stay anonymous, use an alias for your username."
3. **H4: Consistency & Standards / Severity: 2 / Found By: B**
    1. **Description:** Sign-up lists Family Law and Custody as separate case types, while results place Custody within Family Law groups. The relationship between the sign-up choices is not explained. (See screen 41:1103.)
    2. **Rationale:** Inconsistent category relationships leave users with custody cases unsure which option to select and how it affects group matching.
    3. **Fix:** Explain that Family Law includes divorce and custody, and use the same grouping in sign-up and results.
4. **H8: Aesthetic & Minimalist Design / Severity: 2 / Found By: C, A**
    1. **Description:** The Create your account flow states twice on the same page that the username is the only name other members will see: once below "Create your account" and again below the username input box.
    2. **Rationale:** Repeating this information a second time is redundant.

3. **Fix:** Cut "Other members only see your username." from under "Create your account".

5. **H4: Consistency & Standards / Severity: 1 / Found By: D**
    1. **Description:** The listing screen displays the time as "7pm Tuesdays" while the group details screen displays "Tuesdays 7:00 pm".
    2. **Rationale:** Inconsistent formatting for the same information reduces consistency across screens and can make the information slightly harder to scan.
    3. **Fix:** Choose one format and use it for every instance.

Task 2: Finding and Joining a Group, Asking the Community Questions (Moderate)

1. **H1: Visibility of System Status / Severity: 2 / Found By: B, A**
    1. **Description:** In the community composer, Forms is selected for the fee-waiver question. After Post, the published card shows the question and author but no topic label. (See screen 46:1883.)
    2. **Rationale:** Without a visible topic label, users cannot verify whether the classification selected in the composer was applied to the published post.
    3. **Fix:** Show the selected topic as a chip on the published card and use the same topic display across posts.
2. **H10: Help & Documentation / Severity: 2 / Found By: B, D**
    1. **Description:** The Becoming a Group Leader screen explains confidentiality and sharing personal experience rather than legal advice. The ordinary-member New post screen offers an Advice topic but neither shows nor links to those rules. (See screen 46:1775.)
    2. **Rationale:** Members may never enter the leader-application flow, so guidance relevant to their posting decision is not surfaced when they are deciding what to share.
    3. **Fix:** Place a brief version of the existing guidance beside the composer, link to the full rules, and make them accessible from group chat.
3. **H12: Value Alignment & Inclusion / Severity: 2 / Found By: B**
    1. **Description:** Group details offers Join group without mentioning additional membership. After joining Palo Alto Divorce, Ask the Community shows California Divorce and explains that communities are assigned based on joined groups. (See screen 46:1482.)
    2. **Rationale:** The additional affiliation is disclosed only after the decision, preventing users from understanding the full membership change before committing.
    3. **Fix:** Before Join group, explain the associated statewide community membership and what it makes visible to others.
4. **H4: Consistency & Standards / Severity: 1 / Found By: C**
    1. **Description:** Icons under the Palo Alto Divorce support group appear to be different shades of black and gray.

    2. **Rationale:** Having a different shade of black for each icon is distracting to the eye.
    3. **Fix:** Standardize the icon colors to one shade.
5. **H5: Error Prevention / Severity: 2 / Found By: C, D**
    1. **Description:** Joining a group is an instantaneous process.
    2. **Rationale:** Some users may join a group by mistake.
    3. **Fix:** Add a confirmation message before the user joins the group, or add an obvious "Leave group" button they can press immediately.
6. **H6: Recognition Rather Than Recall / Severity: 2 / Found By: A, B**
    1. **Description:** The joined-group Home card shows the group name, meeting time, and location, but opens the conversation without a Chat label. (See screen 118:2063.)
    2. **Rationale:** The destination cannot be recognized before selection. Users seeking meeting details may enter chat unexpectedly and need to reorient.
    3. **Fix:** Label the existing entry point "Open group chat" so users can predict its destination.
7. **H6: Recognition Rather Than Recall / Severity: 2 / Found By: A, B**
    1. **Description:** Incoming group-chat messages omit sender usernames. One has a LEADER badge, while the welcome message has no sender name. Community posts, by comparison, display usernames. (See screen 119:2140.)
    2. **Rationale:** A role badge does not identify a particular participant. Members must infer authorship, making it harder to attribute experiences and follow replies.
    3. **Fix:** Show usernames above incoming message groups and retain the leader badge as a separate role indicator.
8. **H8: Aesthetic & Minimalist Design / Severity: 1 / Found By: A**
    1. **Description:** Discussion post cards have inconsistent left and right spacing around their content because of the text wrapping.
    2. **Rationale:** The text wrapping creates visually uneven space within cards, weakening their alignment.
    3. **Fix:** Use consistent text container widths and horizontal padding, reserving a separate area for the bookmark icon.
9. **H1: Visibility of System Status / Severity: 1 / Found By: D**
    1. **Description:** After posting a question, the new post appears highlighted in yellow, but the interface doesn't give an explicit success message confirming it was posted.
    2. **Rationale:** Though the highlight provides some visual feedback, some users might not immediately understand whether the post was successfully sent.
    3. **Fix:** Show a temporary confirmation message when the post is delivered.
10. **H6: Recognition Rather Than Recall / Severity: 2 / Found By: D**
    1. **Description:** The group detail page shows the meeting location as Mitchell Park Library, Palo Alto, but the map underneath is only a location icon with no street address or location details.
    2. **Rationale:** Some users may need to leave the app to search for the exact location, rather than having all the necessary meeting info readily available.

3. **Fix:** Display the full street address with the map, and include an option to open directions.

Task 3: Becoming a Group Leader (Complex)

1. **H1: Visibility of System Status / Severity: 2 / Found By: A**
    1. **Description:** After making the new Small Claims group, the Upcoming tab shows its Nov 4 meeting but no longer shows the previously listed Nov 3 Divorce meeting.
    2. **Rationale:** Removing a previously listed meeting without explanation makes users unsure whether it was canceled or simply hidden.
    3. **Fix:** Show upcoming meetings from all joined groups chronologically. Clearly indicate cancellations or schedule changes, and possibly include a drop-down filter to see meetings for specific groups only.
2. **H1: Visibility of System Status / Severity: 3 / Found By: B**
    1. **Description:** After approval for an existing group, Home highlights Palo Alto Divorce in yellow but retains its MEMBER badge. The required leadership-acceptance action appears only after opening the card. (See screen 29:545.)
    2. **Rationale:** The unexplained highlight hides a required next step. Applicants can overlook the offer and leave leadership activation unfinished.
    3. **Fix:** Add "Leadership approved: acceptance needed" and a visible Review offer action. Keep MEMBER until the offer is accepted.
3. **H1: Visibility of System Status / Severity: 2 / Found By: B**
    1. **Description:** The application confirmation says "Thank you for applying" but does not name the group or identify whether the request is to create a group or lead an existing one. (See screen 27:353.)
    2. **Rationale:** A generic confirmation forces applicants to remember earlier choices instead of checking that the intended request was recorded.
    3. **Fix:** Show the selected application type, target group, and pending-review status on the confirmation screen.
4. **H10: Help & Documentation / Severity: 2 / Found By: B, D**
    1. **Description:** The leader application asks "Any referrals?" with the hint "Names or emails, separated by commas." It does not explain who qualifies, whether the field is optional, or how the details will be used. (See screen 97:1801.)
    2. **Rationale:** The hint explains entry format but not the request's meaning. Applicants must guess whom to list and whether those people may be contacted.
    3. **Fix:** Explain who can be listed, whether the field is optional, how the details will be used, and whether contacts may receive messages.
5. **H4: Consistency & Standards / Severity: 2 / Found By: A**
    1. **Description:** Group cards use "Admin" but the badges in chat and the application text use "Leader".
    2. **Rationale:** Users may interpret Admin and Leader as different roles and not fully understand the responsibilities and permissions they are applying for.

    3. **Fix:** Choose one role name and use it across cards, chats, applications, and approval screens.
6. **H4: Consistency & Standards / Severity: 2 / Found By: A, C, D**
    1. **Description:** The New Group approval screen places navigation as a header, while the Admin approval screen keeps it as a footer.
    2. **Rationale:** Moving navigation between the top and bottom disrupts the location users have learned and makes flows inconsistent.
    3. **Fix:** Keep navigation at the bottom across both approval screens and the rest of the app.
7. **H4: Consistency & Standards / Severity: 1 / Found By: A**
    1. **Description:** The Profile's "Saved" card uses an outlined bookmark icon.
    2. **Rationale:** An outlined bookmark may suggest an unsaved state, especially because that is how unsaved posts appear on the discussion board. This weakens the visual distinction between saved and unsaved content.
    3. **Fix:** Use a filled bookmark for the "Saved" collection and maintain consistent styling throughout.
8. **H4: Consistency & Standards / Severity: 1 / Found By: C**
    1. **Description:** The flow for signing up to be a group leader concludes with a "Done!" button that includes an exclamation mark.
    2. **Rationale:** Other buttons in the app do not contain punctuation, so the "Done!" button stands out as an outlier in an otherwise standard flow.
    3. **Fix:** Remove the exclamation mark/punctuation from buttons.
9. **H4: Consistency & Standards / Severity: 2 / Found By: C, A**
    1. **Description:** The option to leave the group only appears under the "Accept your group leader status" card after applying to be a group leader.
    2. **Rationale:** Giving users who were just accepted as group leaders a convenient way to leave the group seems antithetical to onboarding group leadership.
    3. **Fix:** Remove the Leave group button from this flow and add it to the group's information button.
10. **H8: Aesthetic & Minimalist Design / Severity: 2 / Found By: A**
    1. **Description:** Saved note cards provide a small area for note text, with no suggested handling of longer notes.
    2. **Rationale:** Longer notes could be difficult to read if the card clips content or lacks a clear way to access the full text.
    3. **Fix:** Allow cards to expand, or show a preview with a clear "Read more" action that opens the complete note.
11. **H8: Aesthetic & Minimalist Design / Severity: 1 / Found By: A**
    1. **Description:** The Profile's "Sessions attended" and "Saved" cards have different heights and misaligned content.
    2. **Rationale:** Different card heights and misaligned content make the profile statistics appear visually unbalanced and less cohesive.
    3. **Fix:** Give both cards equal heights, consistent padding, and aligned labels and values.
12. **H1: Visibility of System Status / Severity: 2 / Found By: D**

    1. **Description:** After submitting an application, users are told they will receive email updates but aren't given an estimated timeline for review or a way to check the status of their application.
    2. **Rationale:** Without a clear indication of when to expect a decision, some users may feel uncertain whether their application is being reviewed or whether they need to take extra action.
    3. **Fix:** Add an estimated review timeframe and a status indicator on the user's profile.

All Tasks

1. **H11: Accessible Design / Severity: 3 / Found By: C, D**
    1. **Description:** The secondary gray text throughout the application is too small to be read at a glance.
    2. **Rationale:** Users may strain their eyes trying to read this text.
    3. **Fix:** Increase the font size.

Extra Violations

1. **H10: Help & Documentation / Severity: 2 / Found By: A**
    1. **Description:** The profile displays a Sessions attended count without explaining how attendance is recorded or corrected, and without showing which group it is for.
    2. **Rationale:** Users cannot tell how attendance is calculated, how to correct errors, or whether the count includes all groups or one specific group. This makes the statistic difficult to find value in.
    3. **Fix:** Label its scope, such as "Total sessions attended", and provide an information button explaining how attendance is recorded and corrected.
2. **H3: User Control & Freedom / Severity: 1 / Found By: A, C, D**
    1. **Description:** The only way to leave a group is by clicking the information icon.
    2. **Rationale:** Users should have a clear avenue for leaving a group at all times. They may not think to check an information icon, which is typically associated with text rather than actions.
    3. **Fix:** Use a separate, clear control for leaving the group, or change it away from an information icon.
3. **H4: Consistency & Standards / Severity: 2 / Found By: A**
    1. **Description:** Yellow backgrounds highlight new content (newly posted content and newly added groups), but also an older leader message.
    2. **Rationale:** Using yellow for both new content and an older leader message makes its meaning unclear; users may interpret the leader message as new or unread.
    3. **Fix:** Reserve the yellow highlight for one purpose (new content), and identify leader messages using a consistent role badge and username.
4. **H4: Consistency & Standards / Severity: 2 / Found By: B**

    1. **Description:** The saved Paperwork card says "Bring ID and two copies of each form." Its full post says "Bring a copy of every form you filed plus a photo ID," without the two-copy instruction. (See screen 40:713.)
    2. **Rationale:** The summary and source give different quantities, forcing returning users to reconcile conflicting instructions before acting.
    3. **Fix:** Use a faithful excerpt that preserves the original quantities and qualifiers. Label any user-written summary separately.
5. **H6: Recognition Rather Than Recall / Severity: 2 / Found By: B**
    1. **Description:** The opened Paperwork item names its source community but omits the original author and posting date, which are displayed on community cards. (See screen 40:765.)
    2. **Rationale:** Users must recall source details from the feed to judge whose experience they saved and how old it is.
    3. **Fix:** Retain the original username and posting date beside the source community, separate from personal-note metadata.
6. **H6: Recognition Rather Than Recall / Severity: 2 / Found By: B**
    1. **Description:** The saved Paperwork item displays the personal note "do tmrw" without a creation or editing date. (See screen 40:765.)
    2. **Rationale:** On a later visit, "tomorrow" has no visible reference date. Users must remember when they wrote the note to interpret its timing.
    3. **Fix:** Show the note's creation and, if applicable, editing date, distinct from the original post date.

3. Summary of Violations

Category	# Viol. (sev 0)	# Viol. (sev 1)	# Viol. (sev 2)	# Viol. (sev 3)	# Viol. (sev 4)	# Viol. (total)
H1: Visibility of Status	0	1	4	1	0	6
H2: Match Sys & World	0	0	0	0	0	0

H3: User Control	0	1	0	0	0	1
H4: Consistency & Standards	0	5	7	0	0	12
H5: Error Prevention	0	0	1	0	0	1
H6: Recognition not Recall	0	0	5	0	0	5
H7: Efficiency of Use	0	0	0	0	0	0
H8: Minimalist Design	0	2	2	0	0	4
H9: Help Users with Errors	0	0	0	0	0	0
H10: Help & Documentation	0	0	3	0	0	3

H11: Accessible	0	0	0	1	0	1
H12: Value Alignment & Inclusion	0	0	1	0	0	1
Total Violations by Severity	0	9	23	2	0	34

4. Evaluation Statistics (in %)

Severity / Evaluator	Evaluator A	Evaluator B	Evaluator C	Evaluator D
Sev. 0	0%	0%	0%	0%
Sev. 1	11.7%	0%	11.7%	8.8%
Sev. 2	35.3%	32.4%	14.7%	17.6%
Sev. 3	0%	2.9%	2.9%	2.9%
Sev. 4	0%	0%	0%	0%

Total (sevs. 3 & 4)	0%	2.9%	2.9%	2.9%
Total (all severity levels)	47%	35.2%	29.4%	29.4%

Each cell is the evaluator's count at that severity divided by the total violations at that severity in table 3. The bottom rows are not calculated by adding the numbers above them.

5. Summary Recommendations

Amicus makes peer support approachable through clear language and joining feedback. Its main weakness is loss of context across screens: published posts omit selected topics, saved advice omits source details, and leadership approval lacks an explicit next step. For litigants navigating unfamiliar processes, these gaps add uncertainty when interpreting advice or deciding what to do next.

First, make participation and completion states explicit: explain the additional statewide community membership before joining and show a visible action for accepting leadership. This supports informed choices and helps applicants complete the leadership flow. Second, preserve the context needed to interpret advice: consistent excerpts, authors, dates, and dated personal notes. This reduces recall demands and distinguishes source material from personal reminders. Bring the existing confidentiality and peer-experience rules into the posting flow so members can apply them when sharing.

Overall, keep the terms, navigation and visual cues consistent so that once someone has worked out how something works, they can carry that knowledge through the app. Things like showing who sent each message, having the category tags on posts, and making it clearer how you get into the chats go a long way toward people actually finding and following the support they came for. We'd also separate rejecting the leader role from leaving the group completely (those are two very different decisions) and not present them in a way that lets the two be confused. Ensure that users have a way to leave a support group in an area of the app that makes sense for them to navigate to. That way, users who accidentally joined a group or changed their mind have the agency to correct their mistake and leave if they wish.

Severity Ratings

- 0 - not a usability problem
- 1 - cosmetic problem
- 2 - minor usability problem

- 3 - major usability problem; important to fix
- 4 - usability catastrophe; imperative to fix

Heuristics

H1: Visibility of System Status

- Keep users informed about what is going on

H2: Match Between System & Real World

- Speak the users' language
- Follow real world conventions

H3: User Control & Freedom

- "Exits" for mistaken choices, undo, redo
- Don't force down fixed paths

H4: Consistency & Standards

- Words, actions, and UI elements should be consistent across the entire platform
- Follow platform and industry conventions

H5: Error Prevention

- Minimize error-prone conditions
- Remove memory burdens, support undoing, and warn your users when necessary

H6: Recognition Rather Than Recall

- Make objects, actions, options, & directions visible or easily retrievable

H7: Flexibility & Efficiency of Use

- Accelerators for experts (e.g., gestures, keyboard shortcuts)
- Allow users to tailor frequent actions (e.g., macros)

H8: Aesthetic & Minimalist Design

- No irrelevant information. Focus on the essentials.

H9: Help Users Recognize, Diagnose, & Recover from Errors

- Error messages in plain language
- Precisely indicate the problem
- Constructively suggest a solution

H10: Help & Documentation

- Easy to search
- Focused on the user's task
- List concrete steps to carry out
- Not too large

H11: Accessible

- Users can interact with the system using alternative input methods.
- Content is legible with distinguishable contrast and text size.
- Key information is upfront and not nested for screen readers.
- Purely visual or auditory content has text-based alternatives for users with low vision and low hearing.

H12: Value Alignment and Inclusion

- The design should encode values that users can understand and relate to.
- It should make a diverse group of users feel included and respected.
- The design should prevent the reproduction of pre-existing inequities and not create additional burdens for members of disadvantaged populations.