

Rule 68. Offer of Judgment or Settlement**68.01 Offer**

(a) Time of Offer. At any time more than 14 days before the trial begins, any party may serve upon an adverse party a written damages-only or total-obligation offer to allow judgment to be entered to the effect specified in the offer, or to settle the case on the terms specified in the offer.

(b) Applicability of Rule. An offer does not have the consequences provided in Rules 68.02 and 68.03 unless it expressly refers to Rule 68.

(c) Damages-only Offers. An offer made under this rule is a "damages-only" offer unless the offer expressly states that it is a "total-obligation" offer. A damages-only offer does not include then-accrued applicable prejudgment interest, costs and disbursements, or applicable attorney fees, all of which shall be added to the amount stated as provided in Rule 68.02(b)(2) and (c).

(d) Total-obligation Offers. The amount stated in an offer that is expressly identified as a "total-obligation" offer includes then-accrued applicable prejudgment interest, costs and disbursements, and applicable attorney fees.

(e) Offer Following Determination of Liability. When the liability of one party to another has been determined by verdict, order, or judgment, but the amount or extent of the liability remains to be determined by further proceedings, the party adjudged liable may make an offer of judgment, which shall have the same effect as an offer made before trial if it is served within a reasonable time not less than 14 days before the commencement of a hearing or trial to determine the amount or extent of liability.

(f) Filing. Notwithstanding the provisions of Rule 5.04, no offer under this rule need be filed with the court unless the offer is accepted.

(Added effective July 1, 2008; amended effective January 1, 2020.)

68.02 Acceptance or Rejection of Offer

(a) Time for Acceptance. Acceptance of the offer shall be made by service of written notice of acceptance within 14 days after service of the offer. During the 14-day period the offer is irrevocable.

(b) Effect of Acceptance of Offer of Judgment. If the offer accepted is an offer of judgment, either party may file the offer and the notice of acceptance, together with the proof of service thereof, and the court shall order entry of judgment as follows:

(1) If the offer is a total-obligation offer as provided in Rule 68.01(d), judgment shall be for the amount of the offer.

(2) If the offer is a damages-only offer, applicable prejudgment interest, the plaintiff-offeree's costs and disbursements, and applicable attorney fees, all as accrued to the date of the offer, shall be determined by the court and included in the judgment.

(c) Effect of Acceptance of Offer of Settlement. If the offer accepted is an offer of settlement, the settled claim(s) shall be dismissed upon:

(1) the filing of a stipulation of dismissal stating that the terms of the offer, including payment of applicable prejudgment interest, costs and disbursements, and applicable attorney fees, all accrued to the date of the offer, have been satisfied; or

(2) order of the court implementing the terms of the agreement.

(d) Offer Deemed Withdrawn. If the offer is not accepted within the 14-day period, it shall be deemed withdrawn.

(e) Subsequent Offers. The fact that an offer is made but not accepted does not preclude a subsequent offer. Any subsequent offer by the same party under this rule supersedes all prior offers by that party.

(Added effective July 1, 2008; amended effective January 1, 2020.)

68.03 Effect of Unaccepted Offer

(a) Unaccepted Offer Not Admissible. Evidence of an unaccepted offer is not admissible, except in a proceeding to determine costs and disbursements.

(b) Effect of Offer on Recovery of Costs. An unaccepted offer affects the parties' obligations and entitlements regarding costs and disbursements as follows:

(1) If the offeror is a defendant, and the defendant-offeror prevails or the relief awarded to the plaintiff-offeree is less favorable than the offer, the plaintiff-offeree must pay the defendant-offeror's costs and disbursements incurred in the defense of the action after service of the offer, and the plaintiff-offeree shall not recover its costs and disbursements incurred after service of the offer, provided that applicable attorney fees available to the plaintiff-offeree shall not be affected by this provision.

(2) If the offeror is a plaintiff, and the relief awarded is less favorable to the defendant-offeree than the offer, the defendant-offeree must pay, in addition to the costs and disbursements to which the plaintiff-offeror is entitled under Rule 54.04, an amount equal to the plaintiff-offeror's costs and disbursements incurred after service of the offer. Applicable attorney fees available to the plaintiff-offeror shall not be affected by this provision.

(3) If the court determines that the obligations imposed under this rule as a result of a party's failure to accept an offer would impose undue hardship or otherwise be inequitable, the court may reduce the amount of the obligations to eliminate the undue hardship or inequity.

(c) Measuring Result Compared to Offer. To determine for purposes of this rule if the relief awarded is less favorable to the offeree than the offer:

(1) a damages-only offer is compared with the amount of damages awarded to the plaintiff; and

(2) a total-obligation offer is compared with the amount of damages awarded to the plaintiff, plus applicable prejudgment interest, the plaintiff's taxable costs and disbursements, and applicable attorney fees, all as accrued to the date of the offer.

(Added effective July 1, 2008.)

68.04 Applicable Attorney Fees and Prejudgment Interest

(a) "Applicable Attorney Fees" Defined. "Applicable attorney fees" for purposes of Rule 68 means any attorney fees to which a party is entitled by statute, common law, or contract for one or more of the claims resolved by an offer made under the rule. Nothing in this rule shall be construed to create a right to attorney fees not provided for under the applicable substantive law.

(b) "Applicable Prejudgment Interest" Defined. "Applicable prejudgment interest" for the purposes of Rule 68 means any prejudgment interest to which a party is entitled by statute, rule, common law, or contract for one or more of the claims resolved by an offer made under the rule.

Nothing in this rule shall be construed to create a right to prejudgment interest not provided for under the applicable substantive law.

(Added effective July 1, 2008.)

Advisory Committee Comment - 2008 Amendment

Rule 68 is extensively revamped both to clarify its operation and to make it more effective in its purpose of encouraging the settlement of litigation. The overarching goal of this set of amendments is to add certainty to the operation of the rule and to remove surprises both to parties making offers and those receiving and deciding whether to accept them. Additionally, Rule 68.03 is revised to make the mechanism of Rule 68 better address the goal of providing incentives for both claimants and parties opposing claims. This rule is not as closely modeled on its federal counterpart, Fed. R. Civ. P. 68, as is the existing rule, so that rule and decisions construing it may not be persuasive guidance in construing this rule.

Rule 68 uses the term "offer" to include offers to settle made by any party. Thus, both an offer by a defendant to pay a sum in return for a dismissal of a claim and an offer by a claimant to accept a sum in return for dismissal - often termed a "demand" and not an "offer" - are offers for the purposes of the rule.

*Rule 68.01(b) is a new provision that requires that in order to be given the cost-shifting effect of the rule an offer must include express reference to the rule. See *Matheiu v. Freeman*, 472 N.W.2d 187 (Minn. App. 1991). This provision is intended to make it unlikely that an offer would come within the scope of the rule without the offeror intending that and the offeree having notice that it is an offer with particular consequences as defined in the rule.*

*The revised rule carries forward the former rule's application both to offers of judgment and to offers of settlement. The effects of these two types of offer are different, and are clarified in Rule 68.02. Rules 68.01(c) and (d) create an additional dichotomy in the rule, creating new categories of "damages-only" and "total-obligation" offers. This dichotomy is important to the operation of the rule, and is intended to remove a significant "trap for the unwary" where an accepted offer may be given two substantially different interpretations by offeror and offeree. Under the former rule, if a statute allowed the recovery of attorney fees as costs and a Rule 68 offer were made and did not expressly include reference to attorney fees, fees could be recovered in addition to the amount offered. See, e.g., *Collins v. Minn. Sch. of Business, Inc.*, 655 N.W.2d 320 (Minn. 2003). Fees recoverable by contract, rather than statute, would be subsumed within the offer, and not be recoverable in addition to the amount of the accepted offer. See, e.g., *Schwickerdt, Inc. v. Winnebago Seniors, Ltd.*, 680 N.W.2d 79 (Minn. 2004). Similar uncertainty may exist as to whether prejudgment interest is included in or to be added to the amount of an offer. See, e.g., *Collins; Stinson v. Clark Equip. Co.*, 743 N.W.2d 333 (Minn. App. 1991). Discussion of other ambiguities under the federal counterpart to Rule 68, Fed. R. Civ. P. 68, is included in *Danielle M. Shelton, Rewriting Rule 68: Realizing the Benefits of the Federal Settlement Rule by Injecting Certainty into Offers of Judgment*, 91 Minn. L. Rev. 865 (2007).*

The "damages-only" or "total-obligation" offer choice allows the party making the offer to control and understand the effect of the offer, if accepted; similarly, a party deciding how to respond to an offer should be able to determine the total cost of accepting an offer. Rule 68.01(c) creates a presumption that an offer made under Rule 68 is a "damages-only" offer unless it expressly meets the criteria of Rule 68.01(d) by stating that it is a "total-obligation" offer. The added precision allowed by distinguishing the types of offers permits the new rule to provide greater clarity and certainty as to the effect both of accepted offers and unaccepted offers.

Rule 68.03(b)(1) changes the effect of Rule 68 on costs and disbursements when a defendant's offer is rejected and the judgment is less favorable to the plaintiff offeree. Under the former rule, the offeree would nevertheless recover its costs and disbursements from the offeror. Borchert v. Maloney, 581 N.W.2d 838 (Minn. 1998). The revised rule provides that the offeree does not recover its costs and disbursements incurred after service of the offer. But this change does not affect a prevailing plaintiff's right to attorney fees to which it is entitled under law or contract. In this respect the revised rule, like the former rule, does not incorporate the cut-off of attorney fees that occurs under the federal Rule 68 as interpreted in Marek v. Chesney, 473 U.S. 1 (1986). Additionally, under the former rule, the offeror was entitled to its costs and disbursements incurred from the beginning of the case. Vandenhoevel v. Wagner, 690 N.W.2d 757 (Minn. 2005). As to this issue, the revised rule now has the same effect as the federal rule (although with language that is not identical), requiring the offeree to pay the offeror's costs and disbursements incurred after service of the offer.

Rule 68.03(b)(2) introduces a consequence for a defendant's rejection of a plaintiff's Rule 68 offer if the judgment is less favorable to the defendant offeree. In that circumstance, this new provision requires the defendant to pay double the offeror's costs and disbursements incurred after service of the offer. If the defendant is merely required to pay the offeror's costs, as under the current rule, there is no adverse consequence for a defendant who rejects a Rule 68 offer. In contrast, under the revised rule, a plaintiff who rejects a Rule 68 offer suffers dual adverse consequences: loss of the right to recover his costs and required payment of the defendant's costs.

Rule 68.04(a) expressly provides that the rule does not create a right to recover attorney fees. This provision is intended only to avoid confusion. The rule might affect the extent of fees recoverable by statute, common law, or by contract, but it does not create any right to recover fees that does not exist outside of Rule 68.

Similarly, Rule 68.04(b) expressly provides that the rule does not create a right to recover prejudgment interest, which right must rather be drawn from an applicable statute, rule, contract, or common law. It is noteworthy that Minnesota Statutes, section 549.09, subdivision 1, paragraph (b), which governs prejudgment interest in most cases, contains a mechanism analogous to this rule that adjusts calculation of prejudgment interest based on the relationship between the parties' offers of settlement and the ultimate judgment or award in the case.

Advisory Committee Comment - 2019 Amendments

Rule 68.01, 68.02(a) and (d) are amended as part of the extensive amendments made to the timing provisions of the rules. These amendments implement the adoption of a standard "day" for counting deadlines under the rules - counting all days regardless of the length of the period and standardizing the time periods, where practicable, to a 7-, 14-, 21- or 28-day schedule. The only change to Rule 68.01 extends the time to make an offer of judgment from 10 days before trial begins to 14 days before trial begins. The change to Rule 68.02 extends the time to respond to an offer of judgment from 10 days to 14 days. These changes affect only the time limits, and are not intended to have any other effect.