## **Services to Pro Se Patrons & Prisoners:** LISP/RIPS/SR-SIS Joint Roundtable AALL 2004

Monday July 12, 2004 (5:15-6:15pm)

**Prisoner Mail: Suggestions & Resources** 

## **Suggestions for Handling Prisoner Requests**

- Establish written procedures/policies for handling requests. Creating a "model policy" is difficult because there are so many variables involved. Questions to consider when drafting a policy for <u>your library</u>:
  - What is required under your library or institution mission statement regarding services provided and populations served?
  - o Will you serve only in-state prisoners or all prisoners?
  - o Is there any law library in your state assisting prisoners?
  - o What services will you provide? Lend material? Photocopy material?
  - Will you charge money for these services? How much? Will you charge a "service fee"? postage?
  - o If you charge a fee, how will prisoners pay? Prepayment by check or money order? Create a "debit account" at your library?
  - If you do not charge a fee, what part of the library budget will cover the expense (copying, staff time etc.)? Is there another source for monetary support (state agency, grant, etc.)
  - Will you set limits on the number of copies you will provide per prisoner? Per institution? Per week? Per month? If so, how will you track this?
  - Will you require "exact citations"? Will you do any reference work to clarify questionable cites? If so, will you charge a "research fee"?
  - Will you maintain a copy of the correspondence with prisoners? If so, for how long? Are they stored securely?
  - Will you set up a system to monitor your service to prisoners (statistics)? Will
    you re-evaluate this service on a regular basis and summarize the information
    for the Library Director?
  - What Department and/or staff member is responsible for handling prisoner requests?
- Consider drafting a "form letter" for handling prisoner requests. Possible elements:
  - statement of your library policy (what you will and will not provide)
  - photocopy costs and process for requesting (if relevant)
  - referral to another library that can assist prisoner (your state law library? See *Directory of Law Libraries Serving Prisoners*, <a href="http://www.aallnet.org/sis/srsis/llsp/">http://www.aallnet.org/sis/srsis/llsp/</a>, for others)
  - o some libraries create a standard signature line using departmental name, fictional name, or library name rather than librarian's actual name.
  - See "Sample Letters to Prisoners" handout
- Keep statistics of your responses. Information to collect: prisoner's institution, nature of request (legal research, photocopies, lending of materials), number of requests received, number of photocopies made etc.
  - See, Santa Clara University Heafey Law Library statistics

- Other considerations
  - If you have investigated what law library and library services are provided to prisoners in your state, share that information and the appropriate contact person, with the prisoner.
  - Most prisoners do not have access to the Internet, so general website referrals may not be helpful. Send mailing addresses and phone numbers.
  - Vendors are creating online legal database for prisoner environment
    - LexisNexis and Touch Sonic Technologies Inc.
       (http://www.touchsonic.com/) have installed wall-mounted kiosks
       (TSTLL) with shatterproof touch screens in correctional facilities in Hawaii and Riverside County, CA.

## **Resources for Prisoner Requests**

- Locate other law libraries that serve prisoners
  - Does your state law library serve prisoners? If not, who does? Public libraries?
     Does the state Dept. of Corrections or Dept. of Education have a library staff for prisoners? If there are any prison law librarians in your state, invite them to your local library association meetings find out what the job is like and how to effectively help prisoners.
  - If it is an out-of-state prisoner, send the list of libraries that serve prisoners in their state (information from the *Directory of Law Libraries Serving Prisoners*, <a href="http://www.aallnet.org/sis/srsis/llsp/">http://www.aallnet.org/sis/srsis/llsp/</a>).
    - free searchable list of law libraries around the country providing services to prisoners. Print off a section and mail it to the prisoner. Copy and paste the address into a letter. Add the website address to your catalog record for the title, *Directory: LAW LIBRARIES OFFERING SERVICES TO PRISONERS (AALL 1990)*.
- Locate attorneys or law students providing legal assistance/ research to prisoners
  - See handout: Law School Clinics Serving Prisoners (June 2004)
  - Locate an Innocence Project Clinic through the National Innocence Network, <u>http://www.innocenceproject.org/about/other\_projects.php</u>. At these clinics, found throughout the country, attorneys and law students work to exonerate indigent prisoners who have been wrongly convicted, often through the use of DNA evidence.
  - Create a list of local and national legal aid organizations that assist low-income individuals or inmates with civil (e.g., family law) and criminal issues in your area. Post this on your website for local patrons and send relevant library contact information to the prisoner.
    - E.g., Free or Low-Cost Legal Advocacy, Information, and Referral for King County Residents <a href="http://lib.law.washington.edu/ref/freecost.html">http://lib.law.washington.edu/ref/freecost.html</a>