Harris County Law Library
Marketing and Outreach Plan

Promoting open and equal access to justice for all.
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**Purpose of Marketing and Outreach Plan**

The purpose of the Harris County Law Library Marketing and Outreach Plan (“Plan”) is to increase awareness of services and resources offered at the Law Library among all current and potential stakeholders in a manner that is consistent with the Law Library’s Mission.

**Mission Statement**

The Harris County Law Library is a public library that serves the legal information needs of self-represented litigants, legal professionals, the judiciary, and county and other governmental officials. Public access to legal information is a critical component of open and equal access to the justice system. The Harris County Law Library’s mission is to provide all of its patrons access to relevant, current, accurate, and practical legal information in the most appropriate and cost-effective formats possible and to provide educational opportunities designed to enhance patrons’ understanding of legal information and how it is accessed.
Stakeholder Demographics

Stakeholders identified in the Mission Statement include self-represented litigants, legal professionals, the judiciary, and county and other governmental officials. Information regarding the demographics of each patron group is presented here to inform practices for meeting each objective relative to each group.

**Harris County Demographics**

Harris County is the third-most populous in the United States with an estimated 4,336,853 people as of 2013. As of 2012, no single racial group comprised a majority of the population. Additionally, significant numbers of new residents move to Harris County each year from states throughout the country and from abroad. Regarding economic activity, Harris County boasts nearly 20% of the state’s private business entities. These businesses operate in a variety of fields, with large numbers falling into the categories of retail trade, health care, and accommodations/food services. However, the largest single category of economic activity relates to professional, scientific, and technical services.

**Self-represented Litigant Demographics**

Throughout the country, courts have experienced an increase in the number of parties representing themselves in civil legal matters. The same trend has been documented in Texas. Harris County leads the way with more new cases filed by self-represented litigants than any other county in the state. The most dramatic increase is in the number of family law cases filed by self-represented litigants. In Harris County District Courts, petitioners representing

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2 U.S. Census Bureau, State & County Quickfacts: Harris County, Texas (last revised June 11, 2014), available at [http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/48/48201.html](http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/48/48201.html) (hereinafter “HC Quickfacts”) (as of 2012, no single group denoted by race accounted for a majority of residents in Harris County).
4 HC Quickfacts, supra note 2.
5 HC Quickfacts, supra note 2 (18% of “nonemployer establishments, 2012” and 17.4% of “private nonfarm establishments, 2012”).
themselves filed 9,038 family cases between September 1, 2011, and August 31, 2012.\textsuperscript{9} Between September 1, 2012, and August 31, 2013, the number of self-represented petitioners in family law cases rose to 11,941, which constitutes more than 20\% of all family law cases filed during that year.\textsuperscript{10} The number of cases involving at least one party proceeding \textit{pro se} is likely much higher, given that respondents tend to represent themselves at high rates like petitioners. Although perhaps a high-water mark, as many as 95\% of Title IV-D cases involve at least one self-represented litigant.\textsuperscript{11} Regarding other legal matters, parties often represent themselves at various stages of justice court, probate, and general civil proceedings.

While it is difficult to describe the general demographics of Harris County’s self-represented litigants using the data collected to date, a few characteristics are suggested by available information. First, self-represented litigants have limited means. Large numbers of individuals who access the self-help website TexasLawHelp.org report having low incomes.\textsuperscript{12} Additionally, legal aid organizations and pro bono programs are able to help less than 25\% of individuals with civil legal needs who qualify for services based on income, which leaves many with few alternatives to self-representation.\textsuperscript{13} Second, litigants most often represent themselves in family law issues. The majority of cases filed by self-represented litigants in the County are family law cases, and the majority of TexasLawHelp.org users access information on divorce.\textsuperscript{14} Finally, self-represented litigants often lack legal training and are unfamiliar with court structures and processes.

\textbf{Local Attorney Demographics}

At the end of 2012, there were 22,208 active attorneys in the County,\textsuperscript{15} and an additional 3,555 attorneys in surrounding counties,\textsuperscript{16} many of whom commute to Harris County for court, client meetings, and other professional activities. Among this group, several key characteristics are revealed by the State Bar of Texas demographics measures. First, a large number of local attorneys practice in smaller settings. The three largest practice-setting categories are solo

\textsuperscript{11} Pro Se Statistics, \textit{supra} note 8, at 3.
\textsuperscript{12} Id.
\textsuperscript{14} Pro Se Statistics, \textit{supra} note 8, at 3.
\textsuperscript{15} State Bar of Texas Department of Research and Analysis, Harris County: Attorney Statistical Profile (2012-2013), \textit{available at} http://www.texasbar.com/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Demographic_and_Economic_Trends&Template=/CM/Conte ntDisplay.cfm&ContentID=23536 (hereinafter “HC Attorney Statistics”).
practices (22%), private firms with 2-5 attorneys (16%), and corporate/in-house counsel (14%).

Second, Harris County attorneys, as a group, are slightly younger than average for Texas and the U.S. The median age for attorneys in Harris County (47 years) is one year younger than the state average and two years younger than the national average. Specifically, Harris County has more attorneys in the “26 to 30 years” and “31 to 35 years” categories than other counties.

Third, a large number of local attorneys tend to graduate from local law schools, with University of Houston Law Center and South Texas College of Law alumni accounting for approximately half of all attorneys in Harris County.

Regarding practice areas of interest, bar association section membership rates suggest that local attorneys are a diverse group. However, the areas of litigation, oil & gas law, criminal law, business/corporate law, probate, trusts & estates, real estate law, labor & employment, and family law tend to garner the attention of attorneys in Harris County more than other areas. For example, Harris County has members in each of the 45 state bar sections, but only the Litigation Section attracts more than 10% of local attorneys with 2,640 members. Nevertheless, the Business Law, Corporate Counsel, Family Law, Oil, Gas and Energy Resources Law, and Real Estate, Probate & Trust Law Sections each count more than 1,000 local attorneys among their members, making them significant for determining local interest.

Similar areas of interest emerge when examining membership rates in local bar association sections. Among the Houston Bar Association’s 27 sections, Litigation and Oil, Gas & Mineral Law Sections are the most popular, with each boasting more than 1,000 members. A second tier composed of sections with approximately 500 members includes Corporate Counsel, Family Law, Labor & Employment Law, Mergers & Acquisitions, Probate, Trusts & Estates, and Real Estate. Finally, the popularity of membership in the specialized Harris County Criminal Lawyers Association suggests that criminal law is an area of interest for local attorneys. The group reports having “more than 700 active members,” which makes it “the largest local criminal defense bar in the United States.” As such, it has more members than any of the second-tier HBA sections. Taking into account the popularity of certain bar association sections at the state and local levels, the practice areas in which local attorneys display the most interest are litigation, oil & gas law, criminal law, business/corporate law, probate, trusts & estates, real estate law, labor & employment, and family law.

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17 HC Attorney Statistics, supra note 15.
18 Id. For national statistics, see American Bar Association, Lawyer Demographics, available at http://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/migrated/marketresearch/PublicDocuments/lawyer_demographics_2012_revised.authcheckdam.pdf.
20 Id.
The Judiciary

Within a few blocks of the Law Library, there are 85 courts\(^2\) that serve the residents of the County. The First and Fourteenth Courts of Appeals are one block away in the Historic 1910 Courthouse. Each appellate court has one chief justice and eight justices. At the local level, the Harris County District and County Courts are within a four block radius of the Law Library. In Harris County, there are 59 District Courts (22 civil, 24 criminal, 10 family, 3 juvenile), 19 County Courts (4 civil, 15 criminal), and 4 Probate Courts. In addition to the elected judge, many of these courts have associate judges, magistrates, and other court staff who assist with the judicial process. Additionally, the Justice of the Peace for Precinct One, Place Two is located within a few blocks of the Law Library. Beyond the immediate vicinity, there are 15 additional JP courts in Harris County.

In addition to local and state courts, there are two federal courts\(^3\) located in central Harris County. These are the Texas Southern District Court and Texas Southern Bankruptcy Court. Additionally, the main offices of the Texas Southern Public Defender, Texas Southern Pretrial Services, and Texas Southern Probation Office are located in close proximity to the federal courts they serve. The Fifth Circuit Library System maintains a local satellite library to serve the legal research needs of the courts and ancillary offices.\(^4\)

County and Other Governmental Officials

Harris County, the City of Houston, the State of Texas, and the federal government are large governmental entities with a presence in central Harris County. Each governmental body, as well as each agency at each level of government, has different legal research needs based on its unique mission and oversight structure. In general, any agency may need to research its own authority to act under law, but agencies connected with the judiciary, legislative bodies, or law enforcement are likely to do more research than others. At the county level, this may include the County Attorney, District Attorney, Public Defender, District Clerk, and County Clerk. Additionally, law enforcement agencies sometimes require legal research as part of cadet training or continuing education.

\(^2\) Information concerning the number and characteristics of Harris County Courts and Texas Courts of Appeals may be found on the Harris County website, [www.harriscountytx.gov](http://www.harriscountytx.gov).

\(^3\) Information concerning the number and characteristics of federal courts in Harris County may be found on the U.S. Courts – Court Locator website, [http://www.uscourts.gov/court_locator.aspx](http://www.uscourts.gov/court_locator.aspx).

\(^4\) See, Frequently Asked Questions @ the Fifth Circuit Library, [http://www.lb5.uscourts.gov/FAQ/](http://www.lb5.uscourts.gov/FAQ/).
Objectives

Objective 1: Consistently brand materials generated by the Law Library for all stakeholders.

Objective 2: Create an online presence consistent with pervasive current practices.

Objective 3: Coordinate print and online Law Library communications.

Objective 4: Create speaking opportunities concerning the Law Library.

Objective 5: Increase interaction with organizations within the local legal community.

Objective 6: Increase attorney traffic in Law Library.

Objective 7: Create a media kit.

Objective 8: Publish an article on Law Library services and resources.
Objective 1: Consistently brand materials generated by the Law Library for all stakeholders.

Analysis: Whether in print or online, much of the information communicated by the Law Library to patrons is written. To ensure consistent recognition by the patron of the relationship between the Law Library and the high-quality information resources it produces, each document intended for dissemination should have consistent branding. Additionally, consistent branding will help demarcate between library-produced materials and third-party materials, which is especially helpful for self-represented litigants who often need assistance distinguishing materials from different sources (e.g., courts, clerks, Texas Law Help, etc.). Finally, establishing and maintaining a marketing brand for written materials supports all other marketing efforts by ensuring those efforts are attributed to the Law Library.

Steps for Implementation:

1. Create a Law Library logo and place it on handouts, informational signage, and websites and other online documents maintained by the Law Library.
2. Maintain a consistent look for all materials.
   a. Use blues and complementary colors that are consistent with the look of HCAO and Law Library websites.
   b. Use same or similar headers and footers for similar documents (e.g., same elements for all research guides).
   c. Use same font on all documents (suggested: Times New Roman, which is the font used for motto in entryway signage).

Objective 2: Create an online presence consistent with pervasive current practices.

Analysis: An online presence is an ubiquitous requirement for any law library seeking to better engage its stakeholders. Elements of an online presence include, at minimum, a website that conforms to current practices and may also include a social media outlet, blog, events calendar, PDF/multimedia newsletter, and screencast tutorials.

Steps for Implementation:

1. Website
a. Work with HCAO to include Law Library homepage and subpages in reorganization of HCAO website using SquareSpace.
b. Study webpages of comparable and larger law libraries as well as law libraries known for their web presence to determine current practices.
c. Develop information architecture that is consistent with current practices.
d. Add other elements as user support warrants and staff time allows.

2. Build presence on LinkedIn with regular updates that will attract professionals.
3. Interconnect web activities to ensure awareness of Law Library services (e.g., post a new research guide on the website, write a blog post about the new research guide, and post a LinkedIn update with a link to the blog post).

**Objective 3:** Coordinate print and online Law Library communications.

**Analysis:** Ensuring that the information found on the Law Library’s website is consistent with information posted or distributed in the Law Library benefits the patrons in two ways. First, creating a consistent user experience between the marketing on the website and the destination of the Law Library will maximize the efficacy of promoting in-library resources online. For example, a patron who discovers a resource guide online that uses the same title for a database as the sign next to the public computer and the link on the screen is likely to have a positive experience that she will be willing to replicate and share positively with other similar patrons. Second, it maximizes the opportunities the patron has to learn about an event or resource. For example, if an event is posted consistently on LinkedIn, an events calendar, the digital display in the lobby, and on a sign at the reference desk, the patron has several opportunities to see the announcement without adding significantly to the staff workload.

**Steps for Implementation:**

1. Post items online that are posted in the Law Library concerning events, resources, rules, etc.
2. Whenever possible, use the same or similar documents and words to advertise events and resources in-house and online.

**Objective 4:** Create speaking opportunities concerning the Law Library.

**Analysis:** One of the best ways to engage patrons and community groups is by speaking at their events. For example, speaking at a local bar luncheon includes an hour with a desirable audience as well as the advertising of the event coordinators
who know the audience well. Additionally, there will be opportunities to distribute informational and promotional materials and to encourage attendees to visit the website or follow the Law Library on LinkedIn.

Steps for Implementation:

1. Develop modular presentations that can be tailored to different groups.
2. Contact and connect with leaders of local bar associations, bar sections, and other groups that offer speaking opportunities to members of the local legal community.

Objective 5: Increase interaction with organizations within the local legal community.

Analysis: In addition to speaking opportunities, there are many other ways to connect with local professional organizations that can increase dissemination of information to all Law Library stakeholders. For example, setting up a booth at a bar event presents opportunities to distribute informational and promotional materials and to engage current and potential professional patrons on a more individual basis than a presentation. In another setting, distributing informational materials about Law Library resources to HBA Legal Line volunteers would help connect self-represented litigants with needed Law Library resources and also show the volunteer attorneys how professional services from the Law Library can make their jobs easier through the effective use of available resources.

Steps for Implementation:

1. Seek out informal opportunities to connect with members of the local legal community.
2. Collaborate with community groups to promote Law Library resources where doing so would be mutually beneficial to the community group, the individuals they serve, and the Law Library.

Objective 6: Increase attorney traffic in Law Library.

Analysis: A major goal of this Plan is to increase attorney traffic by making the Law Library a destination for the local bar. As the major users of most of the print and electronic resources in the Law Library, local attorneys have to be considered disproportionately to their numbers within the general community. Currently, the number of attorneys entering the Law Library is tracked visually by reference desk staff. Using this method, the estimated average percentage of
attorney-patrons entering the Law Library between January and July of 2014 is 17.2%, or approximately 925 attorney visits each month.

**Steps for Implementation:**

1. Diligently track attorney use of Law Library facilities visually at the reference desk.
2. Market aspects of the collection and library services that will appeal to local attorneys who are likely to use the Law Library, including those without access to private law libraries. In particular, concentrate on the following practice areas:
   a. civil litigation;
   b. family law;
   c. criminal law;
   d. probate, trusts & estates;
   e. labor & employment; and
   f. real estate law.
3. Aspire to 1100 attorney visits per month.

**Objective 7: Create a media kit.**

**Analysis:** The Law Library should always be ready to take advantage of free publicity when it is offered. A common practice to be ready for such opportunities is to compile a media kit that can be distributed quickly to reporters, bloggers, newsletter editors, etc. Media kits typically include basic facts about the institution, contact information, and stock photos and logos. More recent practice includes compiling a short PDF document that promotes the organization in addition to conveying the facts.

**Steps for Implementation:**

1. Compile information about the Law Library to be included in a media kit.
2. Create a 2-page PDF file containing the compiled information in a manner consistent with Objective 1.

**Objective 8: Publish an article on Law Library services and resources.**

**Analysis:** Attorneys often prefer to obtain information from established sources. To reach attorneys who may read, for example, *The Houston Lawyer*, but who do not follow LinkedIn updates closely, an article published in the preferred periodical would be more effective than attracting the target audience to social
media. Additionally, the longer format provides a platform for conveying more information at once than is possible in many online venues.

**Steps for Implementation:**

1. Write an article about current services and resources of interest to local attorneys.
2. Get the article published in a periodical read by local attorneys (e.g., *The Houston Lawyer*).