

LAW LIBRARY INSIGHTS



American Association of Law Libraries

Government Law Libraries

“As the primary providers of legal information, law libraries take the lead in providing services to those with legal needs.”

Inside

Building Blocks for Library Self-Help Programs.....	2
Advanced Self-Help Center Models.....	3
Collaboration with Public Librarians.....	5
Teaching Public Librarians	6
Advocacy.....	7
Best Practices Checklist	8

Access to Justice: Best Practices for Public Law Libraries

A Guide for Law Librarians

Why Access to Justice?

By Steve Anderson, Maryland State Law Library

Our democracy is founded upon the public trust and confidence in the justice system. The rule of law requires that all citizens possess an equal opportunity to resolve their disputes during their “day in court.” The goal of the “Access to Justice” movement is to create an even “playing field” for all Americans by removing barriers to court access. The movement strives to accomplish this by improving the quality of participation in the justice system of low- and moderate-income individuals with civil legal needs. The movement is a multi-faceted one, comprised of a variety of institutions, including courts, other government stakeholders, legal services providers, bar associations, and law libraries.

Today, members of the public use public law libraries to locate information to assist them in handling their own cases, without the assistance of counsel. For many of these self-represented litigants, attorneys’ fees were a burdensome expense and, for whatever reason, civil legal aid was unavailable to them. Unfortunately, many litigants without counsel find the legal system to be highly complex and one that favors those parties with sufficient resources, such as the benefit of counsel.



In spite of this, the number of self-represented litigants accessing the courts is rapidly growing. The Access to Justice movement challenges society to seek new ways to educate citizens about the law and legal procedures, to broaden the accessibility of counsel to those most in need, and to provide information and programs tailored to those handling their own cases.

By providing a variety of services, it is hoped that the disadvantaged and self-represented litigants will gain a more equitable foothold when resolving disputes with parties with more resources.

As the primary providers of legal information, law libraries take the lead in providing services to those with legal needs. Law libraries make “The Law” available, and law librarians serve as guides to finding the most relevant legal information.

Some may think that only court and government librarians can play a role in fostering access to justice. While it is true that these libraries often have that core responsibility, law schools, law firm libraries, and public libraries also can be leaders in promoting access to justice in their communities by fostering the rule of law.

The goal of this guide is to describe the valuable ways in which law libraries can take an active part in improving access to justice. The guide describes basic building blocks as well as best practices for library self-help services and programs, public library partnerships and training, and advocacy. These concepts should serve as models for law library participation in “Access to Justice” and demonstrate to stakeholders how law library services benefit those in need. ■



Building Blocks for a Library Self-Help or Lawyer in the Library Program

By Joan Bellistri, Anne Arundel County Public Law Library

A “lawyer in the library” or brief limited legal advice program is one way that libraries can expand access to justice beyond legal information. The elements discussed below provide any library with the tools to create such a program.

Relationships – The library needs the support of its parent organization, as well as buy-in from the local bar and legal service providers in order to create a library self-help or lawyer in the library program. A successful program can work with courts, bar associations, and other attorney organizations, legal service providers such as Legal Aid, law schools and other libraries, including court, academic, public, and even private firms.

Staffing – Consider whether the program can be staffed with a paid attorney or volunteer attorneys. Staff and volunteers benefit from learning about program procedures and resources with which they may be unfamiliar.

Location/space – Is there a space in the library that will allow for some privacy and a waiting area? Consider space in the court or even a public library. Technology can expand service outside of the library to serve remote areas.

Policy and Procedures

- **Scope** – Determine whether the subject matter will be limited to a certain area of law. What are the needs? If there is a family self-help center already in existence, there may be a need for a civil, non-family program.
- **Income qualifications** – How do local legal service providers determine eligibility? For a brief limited legal advice program, it may not be necessary or worth the time to income-qualify.
- **Hours and frequency** – Consider starting monthly for a few hours and expand as needed.
- **Sign-up** – You can manage the program as first-come, first-served, but the use of a lottery or appointments can eliminate people showing up hours before the program begins.
- **Referrals** – Should attorneys be able to take cases for a fee or should referrals be limited to referral services?
- **Limited legal advice agreement** – This should make it clear that the attorney will not be representing the client. The agreement may state that opposing parties may also make use of the program. Reasons for declining service,

such as a conflict of interest and issues not within the scope, might also be listed.

- **Malpractice insurance** – Consider operating under the umbrella of another organization through a partnership or obtain insurance through an organization like NLADA.
- **Scheduling** – Having attorneys commit on a regular basis is ideal, but as conflicts develop, be willing to arrange scheduling switches for attorneys. Having a firm agree to cover a particular time or day is a good solution, since the firm will take the responsibility of sending an attorney on a certain day. Even with a schedule, send reminder emails and request confirmation.
- **Statistics** – Keeping track of attorney hours will help attorneys report pro bono hours. Keeping records of subject matter and the number of clients helped is important for showing the value of the program.
- **Resources** – Ideally, access to online Westlaw or Lexis for the attorney is helpful, but free online sources, access to print code, rules, and forms can be made available, too. Resources and referrals created by the library and tailored to the program parameters can be essential. Most importantly, library staff can provide back-up in locating information and referrals to assist program clients.
- **Marketing** – Use local free weekly publications, local bar association newsletters, fliers for the library, court departments, government agencies, and public libraries to market the program. Library and court websites and social media should be considered as well to reach a wider audience.
- **Recognition** – Share photos and articles about program volunteers, staff, and events in newsletters, local news outlets, websites, and social media. Provide volunteers with special privileges in the library, such as circulation, use of library rooms, free copies, and prints. Host special events, such as recognition lunches, breakfasts, or receptions to honor pro bono volunteers.
- **Program evaluation** – Testing out the program with a pilot event for a special occasion such as Pro Bono Week or Law Day is a good way to start and to show prospective partners the value of the program. Once the program is established, it’s a good idea to reevaluate and determine the need for additional volunteers, locations, or times. ■

“The library needs the support of its parent organization, as well as buy-in from the local bar and legal service providers in order to create a library self-help or lawyer in the library program.”

Law Library Self-Help Centers – Advanced

Three county law libraries located in California, Texas, and Washington have achieved a more advanced level of service with the self-help center more comprehensively integrated into the law library program, including an attorney(s) employed by the law library. While the programs at the three law libraries described here differ, they offer an exciting direction for enhancing self-help center services in law libraries.

ADVANCED MODEL

Marc Lampson, King County (Seattle) Law Library

Limited legal assistance is available at the Public Law Library of King County in Seattle, Washington, through the Rita R. Dermody Legal Help Center. The library's public services attorney meets briefly with patrons on Monday and Friday mornings to decide if they can benefit from a longer appointment later that morning. During those appointments, the attorney may draft documents, find appropriate forms, help fill out those forms, look up the law, and print reference sources and practice guides for the patron. The attorney will also help patrons understand the next steps to take in their cases. The pilot project opened in January 2016, and in April, it expanded to more hours and to a satellite law library in nearby Kent, Washington. ■

ADVANCED MODEL

California

By Coral Henning, Sacramento County Public Law Library

The Sacramento County Public Law Library's Civil Self-Help Center (CSHC) uses a unique approach to provide legal information services and access to justice to self-represented litigants. The CSHC is California's only library self-help center dedicated solely to assisting pro se patrons with civil litigation. The CSHC is also distinctive because it is staffed exclusively by law library employees and is funded by the law library.

HISTORY

In 2008, the Sacramento County Superior Court received a grant to help fund a civil self-help center for self-represented litigants. The CSHC was originally a joint project between the Sacramento County Superior Court, the Voluntary Legal Services Program of Northern California (VLSP), and the Sacramento County Bar Association. It was housed in the courthouse.

In spring 2009, budget cuts and space constraints led the court to cut its funding and facilities for the CSHC. The law library's director, Coral Henning, recognized the value of the CSHC, and felt that its services were a good match with the law library's services. The law library board of trustees, which understood the CSHC's effectiveness in preparing self-represented litigants for the courtroom, approved bringing the CSHC into the law library. With a memorandum of understanding in place, the law library proceeded with a plan to acquire the CSHC and to provide for most of its funding.

SCOPE OF SERVICE

The CSHC focuses on civil litigation matters in Sacramento Superior Court. In addition to filling a service gap, this

focus enables CSHC staff to refine their expertise in a specialized area of law. Thus, the CSHC provides assistance with a narrow list of issues, including simple complaints and answers for breach of contract, personal injury, and property damage; fee waivers; requests for, and motions to set aside, default judgments; name changes; oppositions to civil forfeiture; guardianship, and discovery.

The Civil Self-Help Center and Sacramento County Public Law Library staff collaborate to provide this service. CSHC staff provides hands-on assistance with forms, case file review, and court document preparation. The law librarians, on the other hand, help patrons find materials that provide instructions, samples, and explanations.

TRIAGE

The Law Librarians work with the CSHC to schedule same day appointments. Each morning, a table is staffed for "triage" by a law librarian and the Spanish-speaking bilingual paralegal. At 8:30 a.m., patrons receive lottery numbers, which are drawn at random. As each patron's number is called, they speak briefly with the staff, who determines the appropriate type of assistance. Patrons are referred to a workshop, assigned a same-day, one-hour appointment, or referred to the reference desk to speak with the librarian. There are no income requirements. The only requirement is that they are a Sacramento County resident or have a pending case in Sacramento Superior Court.

Triage typically lasts 30-45 minutes, at which point responsibility for scheduling appointments transfers to the reference desk. Throughout the day, the librarian is responsible for speaking with patrons wanting CSHC assistance, and referring them to a workshop or setting appointments as appropriate, if available. If the CSHC cannot help, the librarian provides the patron with reference assistance.

continued pg. 4 ➔

California continued from page 3

ADVANCED INNOVATION

Patrons can benefit greatly from this kind of program. Those formerly overwhelmed by the Law Library's materials are now able to get the hands-on assistance they need. Litigants with questions outside the scope of the CSHC's services are able to research their cases without leaving the building. No matter what their case type, patrons are assisted. No one is turned away.

With an attorney on staff, law librarians are able to create highly

detailed step-by-step guides, which are reviewed by the staff attorney. These guides provide civil procedure, as well as completed sample forms. Screencasts, videos, and other materials are also made accessible on the website: saclaw.org. An example of the breadth of integrated materials can be found here: <http://saclaw.org/law-101/suing-topic/>.

Most importantly, the joint effort allows all involved to further their mission to assist patrons in using the legal system effectively, and thus improving access to justice. ■

ADVANCED MODEL

Texas

By Lisa Rush, Travis County (TX) Law Library

Why do you call your program "the Travis County Law Library and Self-Help Center"?

Our services are a continuum that begins at the reference desk and ends in the courtroom. The self-help movement would call the initial interview "triage," but to us it is the traditional reference interview. The librarian decides what happens in between—whether to direct the patron to the print/electronic materials or to the library's reference attorney program or to a legal aid program. If the patron is helped by our reference attorney program, then our services end in the uncontested docket courtroom where a library reference attorney facilitates between the court and the self-represented litigant (SRL).

What is a "reference attorney"?

The reference attorney works for the law library and provides more advanced legal information than a librarian can. At the Travis County Law Library, one of the reference attorneys supervises our daily family law clinic and drafts the forms and brochures. At the daily clinic, two or three reference attorneys assist SRLs with filling out family law forms for uncontested cases. One reference attorney will be in the courtroom when the SRL finalizes their case in the daily uncontested docket.

How did the library come to have reference attorneys?

Fourteen years ago, the civil district courts invited the law library to join a newly formed committee to study the effects SRLs were having on court processes. Uniformly, SRLs were having a negative effect on the efficiency of the court.

With the committee's support, we asked our Commissioners Court for the money to hire two reference attorneys. Our Commissioners Court approved the hires and have continued their support.

The courts love having the reference attorneys—so much so they quickly became addicted. That's why I call reference attorneys "crack unicorns." "Crack," because once judges experience having reference attorney help, they never want to give it up. "Unicorns" because no one believes reference attorneys exist until they meet one in person.

How does having reference attorneys affect the law library?

Reference attorneys are credited with having saved the law library. In 2001, our attorney patrons were visiting the library less frequently. Increasingly, our patrons were self-represented litigants, but we had little to offer them.

The first thing our reference attorneys did was to create plain-language name change and divorce forms, which became our most requested resource. Next came one-on-one help with the forms. Patrons would wait in the library as long as necessary for a reference attorney to help them complete their paperwork.

After the introduction of the forms and assistance from reference attorneys, the library's patron statistics increased along with our budget and staffing. If the law library had not embraced the concept of assistance to self-represented litigants, the Travis County Law Library would not exist today because our parent organization would not have retained an underutilized service.

There are other ways that having an SRL-centric service model can affect the law library: floor space more than doubled and now there is an additional filter when making purchasing decisions. Using money to fund reference attorney time may be more beneficial than the purchase of expensive print materials.

But you still have law books and database access?

Yes, we have law books and electronic legal materials for our attorney patrons and for our self-represented litigant (SRL) patrons. The collection is part of the continuum of service.

The reference attorney program covers uncontested family law and occupational driver's license issues very well. But there are areas of law the reference attorney program doesn't cover, such as probate. Without the books and databases, a gulf of legal information needs would be unmet.

What is next for the program?

Last semester, we teamed up with the University of Texas Law School Expunction Clinic. The Law School manages the evening pro bono clinic, which the law library hosts. The clinic managers love having the clinic in the library where everyone can spread out and have their own table. We can offer printers, copiers, and parking spaces. We love the fact that even more people are finding help in the law library, and our next goal is to find ways to offer additional clinics. ■

Collaboration with Public Librarians: A Natural Partnership

By Sara Pic, Law Library of Louisiana

Partnerships are critical to providing holistic access to justice for self-represented litigants. Law libraries serve a unique role in partnership with public libraries, courts, and pro bono programs. As a bridge between both worlds, law libraries can serve as the initial connection and conduit between legal services providers and public libraries. Law libraries provide foundational support and service to courts and pro bono programs as well. These partnerships are critical to alleviating the large geographical disparities in access to justice. Together, we are a sum greater than our parts, enhancing each other's roles in advancing and expanding access to justice.

Public libraries are critical partners with law libraries in the fight for access to justice because, unlike law libraries, public libraries are typically located across the state, even in less-populated rural regions. Public library hours are usually more favorable to people who prefer evening and weekend access.

As such, partnerships with public librarians provide a unique opportunity for law librarians and other access to justice organizations to connect with patrons who otherwise would not be able to access authoritative legal reference assistance. Public librarians often shy away from answering legal reference questions for fear of “practicing law without a license.” However, when in partnership with law libraries and other legal services providers, public libraries can serve in an initial triage role. In this way, many of their fears are alleviated since they have back-up and support, and the importance of their role as a critical partner is emphasized.

At the initial triage, there are many questions public librarians can answer, but if they cannot, they know they can refer the patron to other resource providers, including law librarians and legal services providers. A list of providers should be compiled by the law librarians, in conjunction with legal services providers

and pro bono programs. Law librarians can also provide authoritative resources for legal information.

Since many public libraries don't have the budget to expand their collections to include legal materials, resources should be made available online for them to the extent possible. AALL-LISP SIS's Public Library Toolkit provides suggestions on basic legal collection development for those public libraries that can purchase materials, together with information about free online sources.

In addition to vital partnerships with public librarians, law librarians can help courts and pro bono programs by developing centralized websites with online research and informational guides for self-represented litigants. These guides can be general, such as the basics of legal research or how to find authoritative online resources. They can also be substantive, providing overviews of those areas of law that most often affect self-represented litigants, such as family law, landlord-tenant law, and expungements. The initial material for these guides can be produced by legal service providers, and then developed into online resources by law librarians, using our skills in user-based design. Public librarians can help provide feedback to ensure the guides are useful for themselves and their patrons.

While partnerships with public librarians are a long-standing and critical connection for law librarians, many potential partners in the legal community can also strengthen the law library's role. Even the smallest law library can greatly expand its reach of service by partnering with other committed advocates for access to justice. ■

“Law libraries serve a unique role in partnership with public libraries...”

Scott County Spanish-Speaking Skype Clinic

By Mary Freyberg, Scott County (MN) Law Library

At the Scott County Law Library, services are provided to people who speak Spanish as their first language and have simple legal questions regarding immigration, family, housing, or consumer law. Spanish-speaking volunteer lawyers recruited by Volunteer Lawyers Network (VLN) offer free legal advice via Skype.



This clinic is offered every couple of months at a local public library. Laptops are set up in meeting rooms, and the attorney is already on the screen when the participant enters the room. The program is offered from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. so that participants can come after work. If there is a waiting line, consultations are limited to 30 minutes. No preregistration or identification is required. ■

Chromebooks

By Janine Liebert, LA (Los Angeles) Law Library

The Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles (LAFLA) and LA Law Library now offer videoconferencing in the library that enables low-income people to communicate with an attorney from the law library without commuting to an LAFLA office. Library patrons and LAFLA lawyers confer via video and exchange scanned documents using LSC grant-funded Chromebook technology.

The attorneys provide legal advice to eligible individuals on a variety of civil matters. For patrons who do not qualify for LAFLA services, brief consultations, guidance, and referrals are offered. ■

Public Law Librarians Teaching Public Librarians: A Natural Alliance

By Sue Ludington, Washington County (OR) Law Library

One of the most effective ways public law libraries can advance access to justice is by offering legal information training to their public library colleagues. While providing this service isn't revolutionary, the trend has become more widespread, resulting in higher demand. In fact, the extent of trainings has inspired a 2016 Mellon Grant Library planning grant led by Legal Services Corporation; the goal is to comprehensively review current practices across the country in order to develop a framework for an online curriculum aimed at public librarians. Once completed, such an examination may significantly inform and improve the content and delivery of public library trainings.

The 2010 educational conference coordinated by Richard Zorza and the Self-Represented Litigation Network (SRLN) was one of the first efforts to reinforce the partnership role that public libraries have with legal information providers. The one-and-a-half-day "Public Libraries and Access to Justice" event in Austin, Texas, brought together law librarians, legal aid servicers, public library directors, court staff, and more; Zorza and organizers hoped the conference would "cement [attendees'] commitment to the use of public libraries for access to justice, and that it will help...build the partnerships and give...the tools to be effective in this work." Indeed, participants recall that conference as being instrumental in furthering their partnership endeavors.

It's increasingly common for public library patrons to pose legal problem questions at the reference desk, so training public library workers on legal information services is critical. Although a typical training message urges public librarians to reach out to law librarians for any needed assistance, it's agreed these public service employees are in an ideal position to serve as the first point of contact. Once comfortable recognizing and appropriately responding to patron legal questions, public library staffers can serve as effective navigators, guiding those in need to pertinent resources and referrals.

An investigation of several public law library/public library training arrangements reveals that these trainings focus on diverse types of content; moreover, a variety of methods are used to deliver training. Despite this, the most common and perhaps successful approach utilizes the in-person, classroom format to present a broad but not necessarily deep overview. Content generally incorporates reference interview strategies, a discussion of the unauthorized practice of law (UPL), and an introduction to legal information resources.

More comprehensive legal education, such as an introduction to lawmaking and basic legal research, has also been featured in public library trainings. One notable example, the Public Access to Legal Information Committee (PALI) of the Southern California Association of Law Libraries (SCALL), presents sessions on the American legal system, legal authority, and more tips referenced in their "Locating the Law" publication (www.aallnet.org/chapter/scall/locating.htm).

Other public law libraries provide training on more specific content. The Travis County Law Library offers training to public libraries, but remains focused on guiding attendees on the content and navigation of the TexasLawHelp website (www.texaslawhelp.org). State forms, a 180-page referral directory, informational videos, and more are available on the site, enabling public librarians to better help their patrons.



Some educational opportunities featuring particular areas of the law are delivered to a broader audience at state library or related conferences. For example, the Washington County (OR) Law Library regularly participates in the Oregon Library Association Annual Conference; past sessions have addressed making legal referrals, legal database instruction, and civic engagement. The Howard County (MD) Public Law Library has also presented at their state's library conference on topics such as creating local partnerships and starting a self-help legal clinic.

Webinars or video tutorials can offer yet another mode of training. Although less common, some public law libraries are investigating better ways to reach their often-distant colleagues. With virtual instruction—whether real-time webinars, self-paced videos, or Skype demonstrations—the internet offers many approaches. Online instruction videos may also be archived for future reference or for those unable to attend a live presentation. The University of Colorado Law Library, for example, offers a two-part YouTube video called "Helping Patrons with Legal Reference Questions: A Legal Research Primer for Public Librarians." (<https://youtu.be/2C9mPXAMxZI>)

Of course, informal training can occur in a myriad of ways. Hamilton County (OH) Law Library maintains a mailing list and regularly contacts library colleagues in their regional library organization, prompting numerous conversations. Reference staff meeting attendance, listserv participation, and joint committee work reflect other viable avenues for sharing expertise.

Public libraries are eager to receive training from their law librarian peers; empowering them with capable skills greatly supports advocates' access to justice goals. ■

Advocacy

By Janine Liebert and Sandra Levin, LA (Los Angeles) Law Library

Expanding Awareness

Both policymakers and the general public lack an understanding of the magnitude and severity of the problem of unmet legal needs in this country. In order to increase access to justice, these efforts must be focused on creating a better understanding of the access gap and its impacts. Libraries are actively involved in access to justice initiatives and are also a 'trusted brand'; they are therefore uniquely situated to educate the community about the breadth and scope of the problem. The primary recommendation of this section is that there is a critical role for law librarians in building awareness, not just of their own programs and services, but of the major social impacts that unmet legal needs can have on our communities.

The role of law libraries in access to justice is not limited to what is being done to address the problem of unmet legal needs within the library. Librarians can also be instrumental in ensuring that the results of courtroom closures, budget cutbacks, and unmet legal needs are known. Steps you can take:

Identify Issues

What are the impacts of the justice gap? Use your own experience and research to help identify the issues.

- The numbers are huge. According to the National Center for Access to Justice, more than 80 percent of litigants in matters as important as evictions, mortgage foreclosures, debt collection cases, and child custody and child support proceedings fend for themselves without counsel.
- It's not "just a low-income" problem. Basic family, consumer, and landlord-tenant law issues are now out of reach for middle income families.
- Courts are struggling because they are inundated with people who lack access to the resources necessary to navigate the system.
- Civil legal issues create enormous stress with health impacts.
- Disengagement and hostility is the result. People who are lost in our legal system not only lose confidence that they can obtain justice, they lose confidence in their government as a whole.
- It deprives individuals of basic justice and fairness. Lack of representation affects the outcome.

Lobby

Talk to legislators and policymakers. Ask that they address the current state of diminished funding in order to deal with the justice gap crisis; stress to them that increased funding will benefit our communities. Lobbying efforts would help to build awareness and advance support for access to justice initiatives. Legislators and policymakers are key as law libraries continue to mobilize support.

Engage in conversations about not only what your library is doing but how unmet legal needs affect your community.

Advocate for law libraries and the profession on National Legislative Library Days in Washington, D.C. or on Legislative Days in your state.

Advocate

Develop a strong elevator pitch that communicates the scope and severity of the problem to those who are not embroiled in it. Get some great advocacy resources, including elevator pitch basics, from AALL's Advocacy Toolkit at: <http://www.aallnet.org/mm/Advocacy/aallwash/Advocacy-Toolkit>.

Consider opportunities to build awareness, not just within the library community, but for a variety of audiences: policymakers and elected officials; the legal community; foundations and grant funders; patrons; colleagues; and friends and family. Think of everyone you meet as an opportunity to expand understanding of this critical issue.

Share Ideas

Creating and implementing a pro bono program, such as Lawyers in the Library, is great. But, to truly make it valuable, best practices should be documented and shared with those who are just getting started.

Identify Potential Partners

Who are your partners in expanding access? If your state has an Access to Justice Commission, find ways to engage with its efforts. Potential partners include courts, self-help centers, legal aid providers, health care organizations, homeless shelters, social service organizations, veterans' service centers, and others. Share information and experiences with them; develop collaborative programs; and cross-promote, not only to expand client/patron awareness of available resources, but to expand the general public's awareness of the problem and potential solutions.

Organize or Participate in Public Awareness Initiatives

The American Bar Association (ABA) founded Pro Bono Week in 2009 to raise awareness of meaningful pro bono accomplishments and to encourage involvement. Law librarians can also honor the ABA's mission (and those of similar organizations) by engaging in activities that promote and recognize pro bono services in their regions. Proclamations, thank you letters, and nominations for pro bono awards are a few ways that law librarians can engage in efforts that strengthen pro bono recognition and service.

Attend Conferences Outside the Library Field

Develop a reputation as a resource to those outside the library field. Those who position themselves as experts are often asked to present at conferences, write articles for publications, and be a resource to leaders and funders who have the influence to address the problem of unmet legal needs. ■

"In order to increase access to justice, these efforts must be focused on creating a better understanding of the access gap and its impacts."

Checklist: Best Practices for Self-Help Services

By Sara Galligan, Ramsey County Law Library



For self-help services in law libraries, the following checklist defines common

attributes that appear at the basic and intermediate levels. The checklist identifies detailed characteristics of self-help services in law libraries that promote best practices for establishing a basic service, as well as those libraries aspiring to move to an intermediate level.

Basic

A basic level program may not formally call itself a self-help center, but it may, with its collective resources and services for self-represented litigants, provide needed support with the following:

- Publicly Accessible Space
- Professional Law Librarian

- Reference and Research Assistance and Instruction
- Local Referrals List
- Basic Legal Collection
 - Non-lawyer resources
 - Print/Online
 - Westlaw/Lexis
- Court Forms
- Court Form Instructions
- Plain Language Form Books
- Document Assembly Tools as Available
- Public Computers
- Internet Access
- Access to Free, Centralized, Legal Websites
- Public Fax, Copier, Scanner, Phone

Intermediate

All/Most Items at the Basic Level PLUS:

- Guides and Pathfinders
- Law Library Website
- Email (AskLawLibrarian)
- Chat
- Document Delivery
- Referral Systems/Triage
- E-Filing
- Limited English Language Resources
- Online Forms with Document Assembly and Guided Interviews

- Services to Prisoners
- Onsite Notaries
- Workshops for SRLs (Directly by librarian or coordinated by library staff)
- Hosted Webinars
- Staff and Volunteer Training
- Public Librarian Partnerships
- Training Opportunities for Public Librarians Provided by Law Librarians
- Partnerships with Others in the Legal Community
- Facilitation of Mediation Programs
- Limited Legal Advice Clinics/ Lawyer in the Library Program
 - Staffed by pro bono attorney volunteers
 - Private meeting areas
 - Library administrative support, including possible recruitment of volunteer attorneys
 - Program evaluation
 - Formalized, onsite procedures
- Support for External Self-Help Centers as Available

Conclusion

The benefits of law library at the basic and intermediate levels offer: Triaging resources for timely/trusted/targeted services; Not a standalone service; No income eligibility; Open to all.

Resources

- Law Libraries and Access to Justice: A Report of the American Association of Law Libraries Special Committee on Access to Justice, July 2014, www.aallnet.org/mm/Publications/products/atjwhitepaper.pdf
 - Law Libraries Serving Self-Represented Litigants, Chi Hyon Song, Joan Bellistri, Sara Galligan Trends on State Courts 2015, www.ncsc.org/-/media/Microsites/Files/Trends%202015/LawLibrariesServing_Song_Bellistri_Galligan.aspx
 - LISP Toolkit, www.aallnet.org/sections/lisp/Public-Library-Toolkit
 - NCSC Center on Court Access to Justice for All, www.ncsc.org/atj
 - NCSC Center on Court Access to Justice for All: Partnering with Libraries, www.ncsc.org/microsites/access-to-justice/home/topics/partnering-with-libraries.aspx
 - SRLN/SCCLL (GLL) webinars:
 - Best Practices for Court, County, and Government Law Libraries (SRLN 2015), www.srln.org/node/45
 - Access to Justice: Who's Your Partner and Where Are You Going? (SRLN/SCCLL 2015), www.srln.org/node/44
 - SRLN.org (Request to be a member for access and to join the Law Librarians Working Group)
 - Survey: SRLN Library Working Group National Self-Help in Libraries Survey (SRLN 2013) www.srln.org/node/551
 - U.S. Department of Justice, Office for Access to Justice, www.justice.gov/atj
- Joan Bellistri, Co-editor
Sara Galligan, Co-editor
Sue Ludington, Production
Maureen McGuire, Copy Editor, Graphic Design

Law Library Insights
is supported by



and the Government Law Libraries
Special Interest Section
www.aallnet.org/sections/gll



American Association of
Law Libraries

105 W. Adams Street
Chicago, IL 60603
(312) 939-4764 • Fax (312) 431-1097
E-mail: aallhq@aall.org
www.aallnet.org