

# AALL's INNOVATION TOURNAMENT

## DRIVES CREATIVE SOLUTIONS

The 2018 finalist and winners talk innovations and share successes and next steps.

A simple definition of innovation is a change that adds value. In the legal world, innovation can often take on different meanings, from offering a better solution to a problem to expanding on an already established idea and taking it in a whole new direction. After the success of last year's Innovation Tournament and the accomplishments of the winners within the last year, the American Association of Law Libraries (AALL) will host the tournament again with the hope of bringing new creative solutions to the legal community.

Leading up to the 111th AALL Annual Meeting in Baltimore, Maryland, legal information professionals were invited to showcase their innovative ideas and turn those ideas into results. AALL's second Innovation Tournament (once again sponsored by Bloomberg Law) attracted all kinds of applicants with real, tangible solutions. In the end, three concepts made it to the final round, and their creators—John W. Adkins (director of libraries, San Diego Law Library); Ayyoub Ajmi (associate director of the law library, University of Missouri-Kansas City); and Todd T. Ito (head of instruction and outreach and lecturer in law) and Scott Vanderlin (student services librarian), both at the University of Chicago D'Angelo Law Library—presented them to a live audience and a select panel of judges during the AALL Annual Meeting.

Below we discuss the process for how applicants were selected and check in with the 2018 finalists to see how their innovative ideas are progressing.

### Selecting the Finalists

Applications for the Innovation Tournament were solicited with a deadline of May 5. A sub-team made up of Annual Meeting Program Committee members from each library type—academic, private, and government—was established to

review applications and determine who would present their ideas to a live audience and panel of judges in Baltimore.

Judges used the following criteria to score finalists:

- Clear articulation of the problem
- Clear articulation of the innovation
- Detailed demonstration of who will be served
- Approach is novel/unique/creative
- Information provided suggests likely successful outcomes if the innovation is implemented

Finalists were given five minutes each to pitch their innovation plans.

Judges for the live contest included: Kenton S. Brice (University of Oklahoma Law Library); Casandra Laskowski (Duke University School of Law); Katherine Lowry (BakerHostetler LLP); Andrew Weber (Library of Congress); and Melanie Heller (Bloomberg BNA).

Judges were given five minutes to ask the presenters questions about their innovation plans before taking time to debrief and choose a winner. While the judges were busy adding up their scores, audience members were asked to select the innovation that impressed them the most. Using a voting feature in the AALL Annual Meeting conference app, they determined the Audience Choice Winner.

At the conclusion of the tournament, Todd T. Ito and Scott Vanderlin were selected as the Audience Choice Winners for their “Browser Extension (Superseed) to Determine the Version of a Cited Statute” concept. Ayyoub Ajmi was chosen as the Judges’ Choice Winner for “Using CiviCRM as a Comprehensive Case Management Tool.” Although John Adkins did not win, he still went ahead with his innovation plans.

## Audience Choice Winners:

### Todd T. Ito & Scott Vanderlin Browser Extension (Superseed) to Determine the Version of a Cited Statute

Ito and Vanderlin wanted a tool to locate the exact version of a statute discussed in a legal opinion or within a journal article but were unable to find one in the current legal marketplace. So, they proposed creating a browser extension that uses an algorithm to scan the information provided in a legal opinion or journal article, such as the citation information, to determine which version of the statute is being cited. The information would then be used to check against a database of all different versions of every statute. Here, they share some insights about Superseed.

#### How will “Superseed” work?

Imagine that in 2019, you are reading a 2007 judicial opinion interpreting a statute as it applied to events that

occurred in 2004, and the statute was amended in 2005 and then again in 2009. If you are using a service such as Westlaw or Lexis, the link to the statute will send you to the most current version of the statute, which could be drastically different from the version in force in 2004 when the relevant events occurred or in 2007 when the case was decided.

Using the example above, Superseed would determine—from the language and citation information provided in the opinion—that the version of the statute at issue in the case is the version that was in force in 2004. The tool will then use information in the Credits or History note of the statute, as well as other available information, to surface the version that was in force in 2004, rather than the current version.

#### Who is your primary audience?

Due to our intimate familiarity with the frustrations of parsing different code versions, we anticipate that the most appreciative contingent of our audience will be fellow law librarians. With that said, our audience is truly anyone who regularly does legal research.



Melanie Heller, Bloomberg Law Vice President and Chief of Staff, Legal Division, presents the Judges’ Choice and Audience Choice winners with their checks.



### What have you learned since implementing your innovation?

We are currently still in the process of coding and testing new versions of our extension, so our learning process is still very much ongoing. I think that it's fair to say that we have learned more than we ever thought we would know about APIs (application program interfaces), browser specifications, responsive design, usability, and government information. In short, we've learned how much we didn't know, and are still learning just how much there still is to know about implementing even a relatively straightforward tool such as ours. We've also learned how expensive good coders can be.

### What has surprised you during the implementation process?

I can't say that it has been a surprise, exactly, but we have consistently been amazed and humbled by the creativity and generosity of our colleagues within the law librarian community. We have had so many people reach out to us offering help or encouragement for no other reason than that they saw our presentation and liked our idea. Again, not a surprise, but definitely reinforcement of the fact that we have great people all around us in this profession.

### Have you been able to measure the value of your innovation?

Yes and no. We have received overwhelmingly positive feedback from fellow law librarians who recognize the need for a tool that fills the research gap that we have identified. To us, the value of our innovation is clear, and is reinforced every time we speak to a colleague about what we are trying to accomplish. However, at this point we have not been able to gauge the reactions of actual users due to the lack of a working prototype.

### What's next?

Profit? I think we're both hoping for someone to make us an offer we can't refuse.

## Judges' Choice Winner:

### Ayyoub Ajmi Using CiviCRM as a Comprehensive Case Management Tool

After successfully deploying CiviCRM (an open source web-based constituent relationship management system) at the University of Missouri-Kansas City (UMKC) School of Law in spring 2017 as an event management and online payment platform for the Continuing Legal Education program, Ajmi and his team have extended its use to manage more than 20,000 contact records, the adjunct faculty program, the Bar Preparation program, and the *Law Review* journal membership. The platform is also now used to securely process online payments for the Law Foundation, the Study Abroad programs, the On-Demand Learning programs, and the *Law Review* subscriptions. Since its deployment, the law school has saved hundreds of hours of administrative work and more than \$150,000 in payment fees.

However, CiviCRM, much like many open source solutions, can be challenging for unskilled users. The lack of quick and direct support can also prevent small organizations from adopting it. Currently, there are seven clinics at the UMKC School of Law that offer real-life experience to law students while

helping hundreds of low-income clients every semester:

1. Appellate Practice Clinic
2. Child and Family Services Clinic
3. Guardian and Litem Clinic
4. Entrepreneurial Legal Services Clinic
5. Incubator Clinic
6. Kansas City Tax Clinic
7. The Midwest Innocence Project

At the time of Ajmi's presentation, only one clinic was using a commercial case management system. However, the system was not tailored for education and is missing several features needed by the clinic. The other clinics are still operating largely as a paper-filled office with some tasks conducted using off-the-shelf consumer grade solutions. Once a working solution that answers the needs of the clinics and their clients is developed, Ajmi hopes to expand the tool to other law school clinics.

In his application, Ajmi noted that "My goal is to package CiviCRM as a comprehensive low-cost case management tool and promote its use among law school clinics."

### What challenge/issue does your Comprehensive Case Management Tool address?

My goal is to build and deploy an easy-to-use case management system for law school clinics. While other commercial applications come with a high level of security, for some clinics and some

Screen capture of the case activities dashboard.

institutions, having their sensitive data stored locally is also very important. An open source program provides the peace of mind of knowing how your data is being handled and where it is being stored. Another challenge this system will address is the flexibility and customization lacking on every other commercial platform. During our implementation, we were able to customize the case management system to fit the needs of all of our clinics. We were able to build custom reports that provide valuable data to clinic directors and administrators. We were also able to create new activities and workflows tailored to each individual clinic. In addition, we supplemented the case management system with additional learning management features—things we couldn't achieve with any commercial alternative.

### How does your innovation work?

The system we built is based on an existing platform called CiviCRM. CiviCRM comes with several extensions, such as CiviEvents, CiviContribution, and also CiviCase. Our system relies primarily on the later.

Our first task was to simplify the user interface by disabling features that we are not using while providing the user with a simple yet powerful system. By the time we started working on the project, we discovered that a nonprofit organization based in the UK funded the development of a new user interface and made it available to the community. Implementing this new user interface saved us time and allowed us to move to the customization phase and to build additional features that we hope we can bring to a stable stage and share back with the community. The features we developed include:

- **Activity Timer:** We added a timer that automatically starts when a new activity is created. This allows for an accurate reporting on time spent on each task as well as the overall time spent on the case.
- **Productivity Report:** This report is available to students to allow them to easily track time spent on activities and cases.

- **Pro Bono Report:** This report generates the dollar amount or value of the work provided by each member of the clinic based on a predefined rate.

- **Expense Activity and Report:** This is a new activity created to track expenses associated with cases.

- **Demographic Report:** This report tracks the demographic distribution of the clients based on gender, age, race, household income, number of people in household, veteran status, and other parameters that can be customized for each clinic.

- **Reference Request Logger:** This is a new activity created to log library reference transactions for pro se users.

We also spent several hours fixing bugs and tweaking access permissions to accommodate each clinic.

### Who is your primary audience?

We are currently beta testing the case management system with two clinics: the Child and Family Services Clinic and the Library Pro Se Clinic. This limited deployment provides us with valuable customer validation and field testing. The feedback we received is tremendous and we are continually improving the system.

In its current state, we consider this system as a proof of concept. We hope we can have enough support to continue the development and share our progress with other schools and clinics.

### What have you learned since implementing your innovation?

While working with our clinics, I learned more about the value of the work they do. Some clinics have been providing free and outstanding services to our community for decades but they have never benefited from the new technologies and tools available to their for-profit counterparts.

Making the system available to end users dealing with real cases is the best way to identify bugs and issues we overlooked during the development. We also identified several new features that

could be further improved. While the system is flexible and can be customized for each clinic, we learned it is more beneficial to us at this stage to focus on few features and build a stable and consistent version that will accommodate most of our needs.

### What has surprised you during the implementation process?

The most challenging part of this process was to coordinate time with students and clinic directors to work on the case management system. Since most law students are taking a full load of classes, it is very difficult to have them work on this project or share their feedback unless it is part of a course or an assignment. Fortunately, our school is committed to providing students with various experiential learning opportunities through our clinics and externships. The idea of building a new case management system was exciting to some students as it allowed them to see behind the scenes of one of the most important tools in any law practice. Finally, in addition to the generous prize we received from Bloomberg Law during the 2018 AALL Innovation Tournament, we were able to secure additional funding thanks to the support of our dean and library director.

### Have you been able to measure the value of your innovation?

The built-in reports we developed will provide us with new data and analytics that we were not able to capture in the past. We hope we can learn from them and showcase the value of the work that our clinics provide to the community.

From prior experiences using CiviCRM and other open source platforms, we already know that this system will improve our productivity, secure our data, and save us money.

### What's next?

Our ultimate goal is to package the case management system as an easy-to-deploy extension that can be installed on any content management system, such as Drupal, WordPress, and Joomla. Reaching this goal requires additional testing and improvement

that we hope we can achieve with the help of our clinics.

We are also considering applying for a grant to complete the development and perhaps provide a hosting and support option for other law school clinics interested in this tool. It is important to note that we are not trying to compete with commercial case management systems. We value the work they do and we appreciate the generosity of those who provide these powerful tools to law school students. However, students will also benefit from learning about alternative systems, especially if they can be involved in building and improving them.

And, in conclusion, I would like to invite anyone who is interested in supporting or learning more about this initiative to get in touch with us. In the true spirit of free and open source software, we want to talk to you and share our progress with you—for the greater benefit of all of our communities.

## Finalist:

### John W. Adkins Access-to-Justice Incubator

Looking for a cost-effective way to increase access to legal representation and the courts for underserved populations, Adkins proposed creating the Access-to-Justice Incubator. The incubator will be housed inside the Superior Court itself, in the San Diego Law Library's South Bay branch, to help new lawyers open cost-conscious firms and bring legal help to those in need. His premise—giving pro se litigants access to low- or no-cost legal representation—would allow them to pursue their claims with the advice of counsel.

This start-up incubator would be hosted by local American Bar Association (ABA)-accredited law schools in San Diego County and aimed at recent law school graduates who want to start their own firms. Participants would receive up to a year's worth of advanced legal and

entrepreneurial training through mentorship with established lawyers. They would also be provided with office space, access to legal print resources, legal databases and research sites, restrooms, kitchen privileges, and a relaxation lounge via the law library. In exchange, participants would devote some of their billable hours to providing pro bono legal services for indigent clients in San Diego County.

#### What challenges/issues does your Access-to-Justice Incubator address?

Our first challenge is taking an abstract concept and getting buy-in from community leaders. Although other county law libraries have created self-help centers, to our knowledge, this would be the first to reside inside the courthouse. Sacramento County Public Law Library, Kern County Law Library, Harris County, and many others serve as great blueprints for success.

#### How will it be implemented?

A blue-ribbon committee of legal community leaders met at the end of February to discuss the concept and mechanics of the proposal. The committee is chaired by a Superior Court judge and the Court's family law facilitator. Members include president of the county bar and its referral service, a city attorney, representatives from nonprofit legal aid providers, and the legal clinic directors from three ABA-accredited law schools. The committee has been briefed about the work done in other county law libraries to create hybrid opportunities for legal services between the law library and legal aid providers.

#### Who is your primary audience?

The self-help center will serve the population of the South Bay region, many of whom are Spanish-speaking immigrants. The U.S./Mexico border is a short distance away, so immigration law topics are likely to be a priority.

#### What have you learned since implementing your innovation?

This is a work in progress. With a recent infusion of funds from the state

legislature for increasing access to justice projects, the law library is ready for whatever the committee decides to implement.

#### What has surprised you during the implementation process?

I was surprised by how eager and responsive people in the legal community were to the invitation to serve on this committee. There was a lot of enthusiasm, which I hope translates into energy, momentum, and eventually success.

#### Have you been able to measure the value of your innovation?

The self-help center concept will be invaluable to the people of San Diego County, especially Spanish-speakers. Value will be measured by number of users, user survey feedback, and focus groups, along with interviews with attorneys and their supervisors.

#### What's next?

The committee will assess the incubator's potential for a host of possibilities. With the input of court staff and judges, bar leaders and nonprofits, as well as the city attorney and legal educators, we are heading in the right direction. Which way is up? We are finding out with every step we take toward the creation of this new public legal service center, and we are looking forward to the day we open our doors to expand access to people seeking justice in San Diego County. ■

#### THE NEXT INNOVATION

Are you in the process of developing a new, innovative, and implementable idea to improve your workplace? We want to hear from you! Submit your idea by May 6 for a chance to win one of two \$2,500 prizes to help you put your plan into action. Submit your application at [bit.ly/AALL19innovation](http://bit.ly/AALL19innovation).

#### READ

Learn about the 2017 Innovation Tournament winner's and finalists in the May/June 2018 *AALL Spectrum* at [bit.ly/MJ18Innovation](http://bit.ly/MJ18Innovation).

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