



Renewal (Second) Web Site Grant Narrative Final Report

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I. Project Goals

The Arkansas Legal Services Partnership (ALSP) website was launched in October 2004 as a statewide effort representing both the Center for Arkansas Legal Services and Legal Aid of Arkansas. The goal of the statewide website (SWWS) is to provide clear, concise and relevant legal information for low-income Arkansans, as well as providing a clearinghouse for poverty law resources for legal services advocates, pro bono attorneys and other community providers.

The Arkansas SWWS is a success. The SWWS does provide clear, concise and relevant legal information to low-income Arkansans and it has become an online clearinghouse for poverty law resources. Achievement of these goals, however, was not immediate and maintaining the success of the SWWS project is an ongoing effort demanding time, expertise, innovation, creativity, and financial support. The following provides descriptions of both successes and failures of the Arkansas SWWS.

The first objective in attaining the over all goal of the SWWS project was to provide a statewide online identity for the two Arkansas legal services providers. The launch of the statewide website, however, did not immediately result in a statewide identity. The second specific objective (still ongoing) was to provide high quality self-help legal information (fact sheets) written for low-literacy users. These two main objectives were the focus of the initial SWWS development effort.

Stakeholders decided to begin by focusing resources on developing tools for legal services advocates and pro bono attorneys such as model client letters and court forms for use with HelpLine and Staff attorneys. Beyond these fundamental goals stakeholders desired to provide automated documents for pro se use; provide automated documents for advocate use; and provide other relevant resources for the poverty law community.

During the course of the Initial website grant Arkansas determined that increased usage was needed by the legal services staff themselves. To achieve this goal the Website Content Coordinator (WCC) began a series of staff trainings. These trainings were done both in person and via LegalMeetings technology. Stakeholders determined that these trainings and the addition of a staff e-newsletter was needed to solidify staff usage of the SWWS. The e-newsletter is now in its fourth volume.

ALSP launched the advocate area first and focused on developing advocate content before fully launching the client area. The data gathered from phase 1 evaluations from the First (Initial) Website grant, therefore identified the weaker elements of the advocate area. The areas found to be in need of strengthening included: The search functionality (not narrow enough to be useful); increase number of general advice letters, fact sheets, and pleadings; make the interface more user, volunteer, and attorney friendly; more consistent form criteria; more content should be released to the public side of the website; and more pro bono Internet outreach.

The results of feedback listed above became goals of the Renewal (Second) Website Grant to achieve. ALSP has addressed all the feedback listed above and achieved these goals and many others since the launch of the SWWS.

II. Web Site Description

Arkansas selected to use the Kaivo Open Source Template (OST) for the SWWS Content Management System (CMS). The OST is based on an open source Zope Platform. Arkansas began customizing the OST in late 2003. ALSP decided to use the OST primarily because of the ability to modify, customize and replicate the template as compared to the Pro Bono Net Template. Additionally, the philosophy behind open source projects generally is more aligned with the concepts of access to justice that ALSP and the Access to Justice Commission promote through the website.

The OST provided the website with functionality that has made the SWWS an effective tool, improving the effectiveness of advocacy, improving access and saving case handlers time and effort. The OST was launched in October 2004.

The SWWS includes an online legal library with over 700 documents, including model client advice letters, fact sheets, and legal forms that are both static and automated. The public side of the website contains over 150 fact sheets and 12 automated forms, as well as a FAQ page, Legal Glossary, Research links and other legal resources. Teams of case handlers edited the public documents via Online LegalMeetings to ensure that the materials are the highest quality possible. These documents are provided to the public as legal information and as pro se court assistance. These documents are also provided as tools to case handlers to improve the effectiveness of advice provided through the HelpLine and to provide staff attorneys with tools to improve their efficiency and effectiveness.

The SWWS has several member areas including: Legal Services (both Center for Arkansas Legal Services and Legal Aid of Arkansas), Pro Bono, Community Partners and Access to Justice Commission areas. The use of multiple areas has increased the benefit of the website for each audience. News, events, discussion groups and specific documents are catered to specific audiences. Additionally, marketing and training for the website is done audience specifically. *See 2007 Website Trainings attachment.*

The statewide has witnessed a steady and substantial increase of website traffic since its launch in 2002 and its incorporation into the statewide OST in 2004. Traffic has increased by both advocates and those seeking self-help solutions. *See the graph below.*

YEAR	PAGE VIEWS	VISITS	AVERAGE PAGE VIEWS PER DAY
2002	32,783	N/A	N/A
2003	83,440	43,784	228
2004	185,465	30,918	225
2005	515,171	78,953	1,411
2006	808,648	167,740	2,215

Efforts are continually made to extend the website to more Arkansans. Community outreach and promotional efforts include the following: distribution of wallet sized cards providing the HelpLine's toll free number and the website address; printed brochures highlighting the website, tabling at the statewide annual Arkansas Bar Conference, other tabling events, a monthly pro bono e-newsletter, monthly staff e-newsletters, several website presentations/trainings including the following audiences: Arkansas Bar Association Meetings; Attorney CLE presentations; Circuit Clerk trainings; Librarian trainings; and legal services staff trainings.

Through funding providing by a 2006 Replication TIG, ALSP is currently developing and implementing document assembly projects using both HotDocs® and A2J software. These documents are being developed and promoted through our partnership with the Arkansas Access to Justice Commission. The focus of the automation project is to utilize both the large amount of content that ALSP has already developed for the statewide website, as well as the templates created by other states. By standing on the shoulders of other states and building upon the effort of our own past technology grants, we are well on our way to creating a substantial library of automated legal documents. Currently we have the following dozen forms automated with detailed instructions for the pro se and advocate users: Divorce Complaint; Waiver of Service; Affidavit of Service by Mail; Service by Warning Order; Temporary Restraining Order; Divorce Decree; Petition for In Forma Pauperis Granting Leave for In Forma Pauperis; Affidavit of Financial Means for In Forma Pauperis; Living Will; Expungement Form (Convicted); Expungement Form (Not-Convicted).

Some of the forms listed above that utilize the A2J interface also include audio files for the user. Currently, the media formats on the SWWS are limited to the following: HTML, PDF, Word, A2J Flash interfaces including Mp3 audio files, and HotDocs® automated technology.

All content published to the public area of the website must be reviewed by two attorneys according to the content management protocol established by ALSP during the Initial website grant. Content may be posted to the advocate area without the two attorney editing process, but it will not receive a "Reviewed by Month/Year" date stamp until it has gone through the two attorney editing process. Files without the date stamp places the advocate on notice that the document has yet to be reviewed. Once the file becomes date stamped then the WCC determines whether it should be posted to the public area according to the document priorities developed for public and member areas.

The Client evaluations performed for this granting period revealed both successes and failures concerning accessibility and navigability for low-literacy and low-tech literate users. Changes in naming conventions/ layout and graphical variations are being considered as a result of the client surveys.

II. Achievements to Date

The SWWS has become an important vehicle for legal services delivery in Arkansas. The high level of traffic to the SWWS reflects the unmet legal needs and problems that low-income Arkansans face in acquiring access to justice. Through substantial outreach and training efforts Arkansas is proud of the amount and variety of visitors who use the SWWS. As shown in the graph above the SWWS experienced 808,648 page views in 2006 with 167,740 visits. There has been a steady increase in traffic since the launch of the SWWS in 2004. There is every indication that the SWWS will have over 1 million page views in 2007. For comparison purposes, the 2006 U.S. Census estimate of Arkansas' population is 2,810,872.

The raw data is not the only indication of the statewide website's success. Substantial trainings and outreach throughout the Arkansas community has resulted in feedback and input towards the SWWS. These trainings and outreach range from CLE accredited courses featuring online pro bono resources via the SWWS to training public librarians and circuit clerks to utilize the SWWS. In addition the SWWS has received both televised and print media coverage in 2007.

A key feature of the SWWS marketing campaign is the distribution of two monthly e-newsletters. The first e-newsletter (ALSP NewsLink) is in its fourth year of distribution. It was created initially for legal services staff, board members, Access to Justice Commissioners, and other justice community leaders. The initial goal of this publication was to create organizational buy-in and training for the technology and justice projects that were being developed in Arkansas. The e-newsletter has been a key component in the legal services community's acceptance and high usage of the website. The NewsLink Archive can be visited at <http://arkansaslegalservices.org/newsletter/archive.html>

A second e-newsletter was launched in 2006 directed to the pro bono community in Arkansas. Entitled "Pro Bono Case Alerts" each issue features several one paragraph case descriptions that the pro bono attorney can select by email link. This e-newsletter is distributed monthly to over 600 pro bono attorneys in Arkansas. Placement of cases has increased dramatically since the launch of this newsletter. The Pro Bono Case Alerts archive can be visited at: <http://arkansaslegalservices.org/probono/Newsletter/archive.html>

As a result of these marketing efforts we have experienced a growth in the membership areas. SWWS outreach efforts; both in person and online, have resulted in a steady growth and interest in the SWWS. Currently, Arkansas has 420 registered members of the SWWS.

A key reason for the growth and success of the SWWS is the development of high quality content available on the website. The 150 fact sheets and automated document packets available to the public have all been written to target 5th – 8th grade literacy levels. Additionally all materials are branded both in layout and design to instantly be recognizable as an Arkansas Legal Services Publication. As our relationship with the

courts has become more involved it has been a great source of confidence for clerks and judges alike that they can immediately know where and how a pro se litigant received the information. This branding provides both recognition and accountability on our part resulting in a better relationship with the justice community and a better written product for the SWWS user.

Arkansas can confidently state that the SWWS project is a success and that it has become far more than a project but now is a key part of the service delivery in Arkansas. However, evaluations of the SWWS have resulted in acknowledging there are areas of the website that need modification and enhancement. Some of these changes have already been implemented and some are still being planned.

Some of these weak points were determined during the feedback gathered during the Renewal (Second) Website Grant (see section 1 above). Arkansas has addressed most of the feedback listed in Section 1 of this report and we currently have plans to re-evaluate and address all weak points that we find on the SWWS.

Specifically addressing the weakness listed in section 1 above, we have meet Kaivo and other OST developers to learn more about possible solutions to enhance the search features and roll-out possibilities of the enhancements. We are currently exploring a complete template upgrade. ALSP has steadily continued to increase the number of fact sheets online and has begun the “Court Assistance” Project that has greatly increased the number of pro se materials on the website, including automated materials. The WCC redesigned the home page and navigation resulting in highlighting certain sections and components of the websites. In a very successful effort to outreach to the pro bono community we launched a pro bono e-newsletter in March 2006 to a distribution list of over 600 attorneys.

Although not explicitly stated in any evaluation or feedback, Arkansas is exploring more multi-media formats to provide the pre-existing content to users in ways that may make it more accessible or easier to understand. For instance, we made several 45 second Mp3 abstracts of our fact sheets on various legal issues. We then looped them on our PBX telephone box so that those waiting to speak to a HelpLine attorney may hear pertinent legal information, as well as the website URL. We may expand that project to streaming audio on the website. Arkansas realizes a need to explore multi-media possibilities for the SWWS. We have a healthy awareness of what needs to be done, as well as, the achievements that the SWWS project as attained.

Lastly, one of the most significant achievements of the SWWS is its relationship to the Arkansas Access to Justice Commission. Section IV will speak more about the Commission’s impact, but it is through the use of the SWWS as a critical vehicle to address the needs of low-income Arkansans that validity was provided to the SWWS throughout the justice community. It is through this partnership that our relationships with the courts and libraries have begun to bloom. We look forward to extending these relationships to the betterment of access to justice for all Arkansans.

III. Partnerships

Awareness of the benefits of the ALSP statewide website for the low-income population of Arkansas has continued to increase among community organizations in the state resulting in strengthening relationships between legal services and other community organizations. Examples of such relationships include a partnership with the Arkansas Bar Association and ongoing support to over forty Arkansas public libraries that provide internet access and information on how to use the statewide website.

The Arkansas Access to Justice Commission (Commission) has become an important supporter of the website and the content it provides to low-income Arkansans. ALSP has partnered with the Commission for specific content and document assembly projects that bear the Commission's seal of approval. The Commission has continually lobbied the Arkansas legislature in an effort to attain funds for legal services including the technology projects. Procuring funding to sustain this website has become a voiced concern by the Commission.

The Commission's mission "to provide equal access to justice in civil cases to all Arkansans" supports the goals of Arkansas legal services providers. In fact, the Commission has formed three committees (Legal Services, Pro Bono, and Pro Se) that all benefit from the efficiency, consistency and access generated by the resources available on the SWWS. The Developer has presented document assembly technology to the Commission and they have voted to partner with the Arkansas Legal Services Partnership in creating Commission "Sanctioned" court forms and instructions. Specifically, twelve automated forms and directions have been developed through the partnership with the Commission since January 2007 and a least a dozen more are expected to be published by the end of the year.

Awareness of the benefits of the Arkansas SWWS for the low-income population of Arkansas has continued to increase among community organizations in the state resulting in strengthening relationships between legal services and other community organizations. Examples of such relationships include a partnership with the Arkansas Bar Association and ongoing support to over forty (40) Arkansas public libraries that provide internet access and information on how to use the statewide website. In person outreach trainings have begun to public libraries, and have been provided to the Bar, to solidify these relationships.

IV. Factors affecting ability to implement the SWWS and accomplish project goals, and the strategies to address these challenges

The Arkansas SWWS was developed and launched at a time that was conducive for a statewide effort to be successful. Seven legal services programs merged into just two programs by the end of 2002. The website and a substantial amount of content was developed throughout 2003 and the SWWS went live in 2004. The large amount of content was developed by utilizing attorneys and paralegals from both organizations to meet weekly online via online LegalMeetings with the WCC editing fact sheets, forms and model letters. The online meeting technology allowed us to edit, in real time, a document that lawyers in different jurisdictions agreed upon. This resulted not only in a large volume of content for the SWWS, but also a community of ownership and awareness of the SWWS from each remaining program. Not everyone participated in the online editing sessions; however, enough advocates did participate to quickly make the SWWS a useful tool. To gain additional SWWS users beyond the editor pool, Arkansas launched a staff e-newsletter with a heavy focus on, but not limited to, new resources available on the SWWS. See Section III for a more detailed description of the e-newsletter.

Now, the SWWS functions not just as a bridge between the two organizations, but rather as the online presence of free legal aid in Arkansas and a clearinghouse for poverty law resources.

Besides program “buy-in” and staff supported content creation another challenge that faced the Arkansas program was the question of how the Arkansas Bar Association and the Arkansas Courts would react to the SWWS providing free pro se materials online. In fact there were some complaints from attorneys and judges. These initial complaints resulted in a very cautious approach to what we offered to the public. Arkansas actually went live with the advocate area before going live with the public area of the SWWS allowing time for further editing and planning. This cautious approach was due to hostility towards pro se litigants in the courtroom and a concern of market encroachment by the private sector.

When Arkansas did go live with the public side and public content we focused primarily on legal information in the form of fact sheets written to a 5th – 8th grade reading level rather than providing court forms.

However, we are now posting pro se forms in both automated and static versions on the public area. The change occurred primarily due to the relationship we forged with the Arkansas Access to Justice Commission as mention above in section IV. This relationship, and inroads made with the Arkansas Bar Association, has resulted in a level of comfort in providing “Court Assistance” in dealing with pro se litigants to the already overburdened judicial system. Although there are still pockets of opposition both in the Bar and on the bench, there is far more support of the SWWS pro se materials now that the Arkansas Access to Justice Commission and the Arkansas Bar Association has provided support for our efforts.

Technically Arkansas has had in-house capabilities for all Internet Technology needs. , Arkansas hired Vincent Morris as a 1st Year Law Student Intern for an internship of 8 weeks to help develop Model HelpLine Letters. Upon receipt of a 1st Year TIG Website Grant Mr. Morris was then hired as a full-time WCC to design and develop the SWWS. Mr. Morris designed and developed the website and then worked with Kaivo to launch in 2004. Mr. Morris also coordinates or develops all content for the SWWS; manages the two e-newsletters; designed, developed and manages the Poverty Law Practice Manual Wiki; manages the Access to Justice Website; provides technical outreach and trainings; develops all automated documents (HotDocs® and A2J) and writes and maintains TIG reporting and grant request. The benefit of having in-house technical and legal expertise has been a key aspect of the SWWS success.

V. Financial and in-kind support for the website

The website has become an integrated part of the delivery of legal services to low-income Arkansans. We are committed to continuing this resource even if it becomes necessary to use basic program funds for sustainability. We intend to maintain its continuation by including support of it as part of most non-LSC grants we submit. Currently, we are approaching local technology corporations for grants and/or donations for purposes of future funding for the website. These businesses include Axiom [an international data management firm headquarter in Little Rock], Aristotle [an Internet services provider] and the Arkansas Science & Technology Commission. Additionally, we have pending a grant request for an AT&T Exceleator Grant.

The Arkansas Access to Justice Commission has become a critical supporter of the website and the content it provides to low-income Arkansans. We have partnered with the Commission for specific content and document assembly projects that will bear the Commission's seal of approval. The Commission lobbied the Arkansas legislature in the 2007 session and lobbying efforts have already begun to lobby on our behalf. Procuring funding to sustain this website has become a voiced concern by the Commission.

Arkansas received some additional funding from the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation that has paid for website promotional materials.

VI. Major lessons and recommendations

Arkansas has developed a successful statewide web presence in Arkansas. The SWWS has become a vehicle for many other technology and justice projects that Arkansas coordinates. Fundamental to our success is the creation of accessible content that will benefit low-income Arkansans.

In pursuit of the goal of providing clear, concise and relevant legal information for low-income Arkansans via the SWWS the focus has remained consistently on the content development. By creating a large catalogue of relevant content that is both Arkansas specific and nationally applicable we have the key ingredient to several other technology and justice projects. Simply put, the content is more important than the technology. That statement is not intended to minimize the importance of the technology used to provide better access to justice; however, with a focus on maintaining high quality content other technology projects have naturally occurred as outgrowths of the original content creation. For instance, since Arkansas focused on developing fact sheets about many legal issues long before developing automated document assembly packets there was previously developed and edited instructions ready to be incorporated into the form packets. A large catalogue of content allows the developer to use the same content in various formats or Medias. For instance many previously developed fact sheets have been abstracted and used for model HelpLine Client letters.

Content development does not have to be done from scratch. Just as Arkansas has relied on replication for technology advantages so have we used replication efforts for content development. Arkansas has replicated content from various government organizations and from private organizations that have given us permission for reproduction. Our Content Protocol promotes incorporation of content into the SWWS both for branding purpose and user experience on the website. Although we do deep link to some content, we prefer incorporating other website's stable content. Any SWWS in need of content development would be well served to visit both their local government websites (such as the State Attorney Generals Office) and federal government websites (such as the Federal Trade Commission website) and utilize large volumes of relevant and pre-existing content. In this way the Arkansas SWWS seeks to function not only as the authority on Arkansas poverty law issues, but the clearing house for poverty law issues generally for any Arkansan in need of legal information at the state or federal level.

Replication is also critical in developing the technology itself that provides access to the content. As mentioned previously, Arkansas chose to work within the OST environment for both philosophical and practical reasons. The philosophical reasons include a greater sense of common ownership of a work product that provides access to justice for all. It just seems appropriate to freely share any tool developed to improve access with any other state pursuing the same access goal.

Thanks to the open source community of the OST we have included aspects of our SWWS that we would not have otherwise developed (such as a replication of Maine's Medicare Part D section and various administrator features). However, there are also a

many replication possibilities that are cross platform based that Arkansas is currently pursuing. Arkansas is actively replicating HotDocs® and A2J automated documents from the national server hosted by NPADO. Replication possibilities vary from full replication - to partial replication - to not replicating any work product all, but rather looking to another state's template to better understand how they achieved certain functionality. The benefit of access to this pool of knowledge and work product cannot be overstated.

Finally, in addressing the lessons learned from our SWWS project Arkansas has a success that was derived from a failure in relation to an attempt to provide actual computer terminal access via kiosks to SWWS users. Arkansas received a TIG to develop "Virtual Law Office" (VLO) terminals around the state that would access the SWWS.

Six locations were selected around Arkansas for this project; however, prior to installing hardware at all six of the locations selected for the VLO we installed a beta test VLO at a location convenient for monitoring. A six-month beta testing period provided helpful information in the difficulties and inefficiency in establishing and maintaining hardware in remote areas. A review of the experiences and data collected throughout the beta testing period quickly revealed a need to reassess the approach of placing hardware in remote locations due to the high maintenance demand and disruption to computer systems already in place. The decision was made to reallocate resources to develop marketing materials and instructions that can be placed near or at public terminals with internet access. All of the site providers that we contacted had preexisting equipment and high-speed Internet access that they could maintain more efficiently than what could be provided by the limited funds of legal services providers. The majority of the possible provider sites we contacted were public libraries throughout the state. For the sake of sustainability we reallocated the limited resources to creating partnerships with public internet access points instead of purchasing and maintaining hardware and bandwidth.

With this SWWS focused direction, we now have Virtual Law Offices in 46 locations statewide with a better possibility of sustainability, with considerable less cost, instead of the six locations previously anticipated.

When a project is faced with a small budget and limited resources it must utilize previously developed resources and replicate them for its own purposes. Although Arkansas has created new and innovative uses of technology and content we have replicated other successes as often as possible. These replications have ranged from computer code to legal content to even standing on the shoulders of pre-existing internet terminals to achieve better access to justice. We believe that Arkansas SWWS has had a substantial positive impact for Arkansans and we have achieved that impact with very limited resources. Arkansas looks forward to continuing to deepen the amount of resources on the website and further broadening access to these resources.