

**LEGAL SERVICES CORPORATION
Technology Initiative Grant (TIG) Program
Final Project Evaluation Report**

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I. PROJECT GOALS

In the application for the Web Site Continuation grant, the principal LawHelpCA.org program goals identified to be achieved with the help of TIG funding were increasing monthly user hits from the tens of thousands into the hundreds of thousands, expanding referrals and resources to close information gaps, and foreign language development. During the July 2006 – June 2008 reporting period LawHelpCA.org staff did not make any significant changes to the goals stated in the grant application.

When the Web Site Continuation grant was submitted in 2004, the CALegalAdvocates.org and ProBonoCA.org websites did not exist, therefore they were not included in the application. The idea for a website for advocates was introduced in late 2004, and planning began in December of that year. CALegalAdvocates.org, a project of the Legal Aid Association of California (LAAC), is the online community for all those working to ensure access to justice for low-income Californians. The goal of www.CALegalAdvocates.org is to connect individuals concerned with justice for low-income Californians through news articles, events, listservs, job opportunities, a library of materials, and information on LAAC programs. In early 2006, plans for a pro bono opportunities website were developed, and ProBonoCA.org was launched in September 2006. ProBonoCA.org aims to connect attorneys to volunteer opportunities and resources within the legal services community.

II. Web Site Description

The California stakeholder committee voted to use the Pro Bono Net template after extensive comparison with the Kaivo platform. Determining factors included the San Francisco Bar Association's existing advocate site, ProBono.net/sf; the lesser degree of in-house technology experience required; and the fact that enhancements can be shared nationally. LawHelpCA.org was soft-launched to the California legal aid community on September 25, 2003. The site was publicly launched at the annual Legal Services Stakeholders' meeting on August 27, 2004.

Between the private and public launches, staff focused on gathering feedback from advocates throughout the state, with emphasis on feedback from the 11 LSC-funded organizations, and made significant enhancements to the website's content and structure.

From July 2006 through June 2008, LawHelpCA.org greatly increased the quantity and variety of content in the library of self-help resources, adding 2,830 documents. LawHelpCA.org links to a wide range of documents, including "know your rights" publications, fact sheets, forms, and "how to" guides and there are 3,591 resources to date. Whenever possible, staff aims to include materials written at a fifth grade reading level with special attention paid to how formatting and organization of documents will impact low-literacy users. To protect the integrity of the site, LawHelpCA.org staff is highly selective when posting resources and have focused on posting content from accurate and reliable sources, such government agencies and organizations that are also listed as referrals on the site. Additionally, staff reviews weekly reports of broken links generated by the template, and updates the links accordingly.

While adding resources, LawHelpCA.org specifically focused on foreign language development. Currently, the site has over 1,700 self-help resources across 30 non-English languages. The Spanish foreign language resource page (<http://www.lawhelpcalifornia.org/link.cfm?2328>) is fully translated and contains nearly 700 self-help resources, including document assembly programs. LawHelpCA.org staff increases the amount of non-English information by reviewing usage statistics to determine the twenty most-viewed resources and then checking websites and contacting authors to see if other language versions are available.

Along with traditional publications, LawHelpCA.org includes document assembly modules such as HotDocs, I-CAN!, and EZ Legal File. LawHelpCA.org also links to benefits and payments calculators and eligibility screening tools. Currently, we link primarily to publications, as our template does not have the capacity to integrate multimedia. Additionally, the bandwidth and connection speed required for streaming content presents a challenge for users with limited technological capabilities. Because we strive to provide more open access to legal information, we are sensitive to potential frustration of clients who may already have trouble navigating the legal system. Nevertheless, we do link to helpful videos when they are especially relevant and are investigating ways to better incorporate multimedia in the near future.

There are nearly 500 referrals to legal services organizations, court programs, and lawyer referral services across all 13 topic areas on the website. We continue to add referrals as court self-help centers are established and as new programs receive IOLTA-funding. Non-IOLTA legal services providers are added after recommendation and screening. User feedback has increasingly reflected high levels of satisfaction among users. Our user survey shows that 75% of users find at least some of the information that they were looking for [Appendix A]. Through that same survey, we have consistently received anecdotal evidence from users who comment that the site is "well organized" and "easy to use."

Both advocate sites were launched on the Pro Bono Net template as part of the LawHelpCA.org contract. CALegalAdvocates.org, which was launched on June 2, 2005, features five main sections. The News & Alerts section is updated daily with news items from sources all across California affecting the legal services community at large, and averages 40-60 news items per

month. The training and event calendar contains information regarding trainings from around the state and nationally; the calendar usually lists 20 to 30 items each month. The site's Library has over 700 resources, including materials from trainings and substantive resources. The site also features a Job Postings section that lists legal services job opportunities, and a Listserv section that allows members to join six different listservs in six different areas. CALegalAdvocates.org began adding webcasts in October 2007 and currently has over 10 webcasted trainings available. Staff plans to expand the site's multimedia content by adding more online trainings.

CALegalAdvocates.org utilizes several quality control mechanisms, including: membership levels, usage reports as generated by the template, number of items and content posted by programs, and an online satisfaction survey. In a recent survey rating the overall effectiveness of the website, 69.5 percent gave a rating of either good or very good of those who participated [Appendix B].

ProBonoCA.org, launched in September 2006, is a statewide network utilized to support local pro bono efforts by linking the private bar to local programs. The four main resources include an events & trainings calendar, the Pro Bono Programs Guide, up-to-date listings of legal clinics, and news relevant to pro bono in California. General information about the importance of pro bono in California is also available on the site, with an emphasis on building pro bono in rural areas.

The Calendar and Clinics pages on ProBonoCA.org link private attorneys directly to volunteer opportunities. Programs are able to upload information regarding upcoming trainings, seminars, special events, and assorted volunteer opportunities to the Calendar by completing an online form directly through ProBonoCA.org. Following administrator approval, the new data is listed along with other upcoming events, which can be sorted by date or location. The Clinics area functions similarly, but with content limited to recurring weekly/monthly volunteer opportunities at programs.

The Pro Bono Programs Guide is an online directory intended to provide private attorneys with a direct contact at local programs offering suitable pro bono opportunities. The directory filters programs by location, types of clients served, types of volunteers needed, and area of law. Programs can modify these fields, input contact information, link to one or more websites, and provide additional information. Because PIC encourages programs to provide up-to-date information regarding their pro bono opportunities on an on-going basis, the directory now boasts over 100 programs.

ProBonoCA.org operates with the input of three main stakeholders. First, programs are involved by generating content in order to maintain the site's appeal to attorneys as an expansive source of connections to pro bono support and opportunities. PIC conducts targeted outreach efforts to integrate programs into the Pro Bono Programs Guide, and follows up by encouraging registered programs to list their clinics, trainings, and other pro bono-related resources. Second, one or more administrators (PIC staff) monitors all incoming content in order to ensure that it is authentic, pro bono-related, and in accordance with the intended use of the site. The administrator also extensively researches public content and content shared from other Pro Bono

Net sites. Third, the administrator seeks feedback from selected large firms who are integral pro bono players in California.

ProBonoCA.org's quality controls include usage reports as generated by the template and focus groups with pro bono coordinators at firms and legal services programs. Additionally, PIC staff regularly communicate with the California Access to Justice Commission Task Force on Pro Bono for potential projects intended to affect additional communities. Staff are also in regular communication with Pro Bono Net support in order to best utilize existing features or updates to the site template.

III. Major Accomplishments

LawHelpCA.org staff is proud to announce that as of April 2008 page views each month have been over 100,000, thus meeting our goal of having user hits jump from the tens of thousands into the hundreds of thousands [Appendix C]. As we continue to expand outreach and marketing efforts, we expect this trend to continue.

During the reporting period, the amount of resources available in the self-help library more than quadrupled. Although resources were added across all areas of the site, staff made concerted efforts to fill gaps. Staff highly values and is extremely responsive to user feedback. For example, at a client training at the Mountain View Public Library, staff helped a user navigate the site to find information about mobile home law. At the time, there was very little information in that area. Consequently, staff searched county and state government websites and contacted housing law support centers for information, then added it to the website.

In addition to adding multilingual content to the website, LawHelpCA.org staff worked very hard towards its goal of foreign language development by fully translating the Spanish foreign language resources page. Currently, a literate monolingual Spanish speaker is able to navigate the website to find legal information in Spanish. In March 2008 the translations done by staff were reviewed by professional translators and minor changes were made. Given the navigability of the site for Spanish speakers and the wealth of information, the LawHelpCA.org user brochure was modified and translated in May 2008 to clearly show Spanish-speaking users how to find legal information [Appendices D-E].

Staff is dedicated to ensuring the accuracy of referral profiles on the website. In addition to updating profiles after receiving updates from the Legal Services Trust Fund, organizations are contacted every six to nine months regarding a complete profile review. While it can sometimes take several months to receive a complete update from an organization, nearly all profiles on the website at any given time have been reviewed within the last year. Also, staff has expanded review mechanisms from an online tool to include fax and phone components that may be more accessible for some advocates. Staff tracks which method works best for advocates and sends review materials accordingly.

An unanticipated success during the reporting period was a 2008 partnership with the State Bar of California to build a website dedicated to helping both homeowners and renters during the foreclosure crisis. Publicly launched in September 2008, ForeclosureInfoCA.org is a website that

contains exemplary self-help information for individuals wishing to find manageable home loans, report predatory lending practices, avoid foreclosure, and who are renters facing eviction due to a foreclosure on their landlord's property. Resources are also available in Spanish. Additionally, there is a section for attorneys to find information on trainings about foreclosure-related legal services and which organizations are looking for volunteers. Marketing materials are being created for both attorneys and clients, and minor adjustments are being made to the site.

In the effort to make www.CALegalAdvocates.org the online community all those working to ensure access to justice for low-income Californians, LAAC has worked tirelessly to promote and expand its resources. Over 1,900 people who work in Legal Services or are a part of the justice community have joined CALegalAdvocates.org as a member. In coordination with Pro Bono Net, each member receives the upcoming month's event Calendar via email. Our six listservs covering topics from education access to medical-legal issues have over 300 members. Since January of 2008, CALegalAdvocates.org has averaged over 8,000 page views per month and continues to grow [Appendix F].

Since its launch in 2006, ProBonoCA.org has integrated a wealth of pro bono references and resources for private attorneys. In addition to listing attorneys to over 100 pro bono programs throughout California, the site hosts roughly 75 individual trainings, clinics, and other events per month. In coordination with ForeclosureInfoCA.org, ProBonoCA.org has integrated the ability to link attorneys with local volunteer opportunities with programs offering assistance to victims of the current housing crisis. As more firms sign on to include the Pro Bono Manager application, utilization of the site's pro bono resources by private attorneys is expected to increase by a significant amount, which in turn will accelerate programs' contribution of pro bono resources to the site.

IV. Assessment of Web Site

Increasingly higher numbers of users are accessing LawHelpCA.org to find legal information and learn about organizations, clinics, and workshops that they might not have been aware of. Although month by month usage statistics fluctuate, since July 2006 there has been a trend of increased site usage. In July 2006 LawHelpCA.org received 88,552 page views, and in June 2008 it received 142,863. Though staff has no practical way to determine whether users are effectively resolving their legal issues after visiting the website, the following anecdotal evidence from our user survey suggests that LawHelpCA.org is fulfilling its goals by helping users get on the right track to finding the information and help they need to address their legal issues. In September 2007, an anonymous user said, "Thank you. The access to forms and to applicable websites enabled me to focus my questions and clarify my issues. The site is easy to understand." In December 2007, another anonymous user commented, "Thank you for helping to remove the veil of misunderstanding/confusion about the legal process surrounding eviction."

Users can review the profiles of legal services programs to screen themselves for eligibility. Each organization listed as a referral has a profile that includes eligibility information, intake method, and services provided. Through in-person trainings, tabling at community outreach events, and the dissemination of navigational guides, users become intimately familiar with how

to use LawHelpCA.org effectively to find needed information and help. By reviewing the profile of an organization, clients can make an informed decision on whether to contact a legal services provider. This helps to eliminate client bounce, and in turn fight client frustration. Instead of blindly calling a laundry list of organizations in their areas, clients can call a select few who may be able to provide them with services in specific areas of need. Also, because clients can self-screen and use the library of self-help resources to learn about their issue, LSC grantees have better informed clients contacting them for services.

At the same time, we often receive feedback from users who find themselves unable to find referrals in their area. Users cite various reasons, with the most popular being: above income eligibility guidelines even though they cannot afford a private attorney and not meeting a specific subgroup, such as senior citizen or HIV positive individual. LawHelpCA.org staff understands that free legal services are in fact not available to all who need them, and works very hard to continuously expand referrals across counties and substantive areas, paying special attention to including options for individuals with modest means.

Training legal services and court staff also helps to eliminate client bounce. Attached is a list of trainings and outreach activities conducted during the reporting period [Appendix G]. When it becomes apparent that a program is unable to assist an individual, instead of turning them away, or giving them a standard list of service providers, they can use LawHelpCA.org as a referral directory and provide individually tailored lists of providers. Using the website as a referral directory allows intake staff at programs to quickly refer individuals they are unable to serve and dedicate time and resources to eligible clients. One advocate commented that LawHelpCA.org was, “Very helpful to find resources for a caller from outside my county. [I] was able to direct them to resources in their location for their specific issue.”

When assisting clients, LawHelpCA.org can serve as a database of legal information. If an attorney’s organization does not have a client handout on a certain issue, the attorney can use LawHelpCA.org to find that information to pass on to clients. The site can also be used to supplement the information an organization has produced. LawHelpCA.org staff e-mails a quarterly newsletter to alert advocates of new and relevant resources and features on the site [Appendices H-L]. It is also important to note that the library of self-help resources connects rural legal services providers and clients with the wealth of documents being created by the large number of urban providers. Urban organizations often have larger staff, more volunteers, and better funding that enables them to produce a relatively high volume of legal information for clients. More often than not, the information is relevant across all California counties. LawHelpCA.org eliminates the need for a rural organization with limited resources to duplicate efforts in producing the same document.

For the advocate sites, CALegalAdvocates.org improves the overall quality and efficiency of the services provided to advocates and administrative staff by ensuring these legal services staff members have access to the resources of the larger legal services community. In our user satisfaction survey, 93.2% said that it is easy to very easy to find resources at CALegalAdvocates.org [Appendix B]. Staff avoids reinventing the wheel by sharing information among programs through CALegalAdvocates.org’s six listservs. Additionally, legal services staff are kept informed of training opportunities to enhance their skills and knowledge through

CALegalAdvocates.org's statewide training calendar. 55.3% have said that they attended a training they found on CALegalAdvocates.org's event Calendar [Appendix B].

ProBonoCA.org has improved LSC programs effectiveness in delivering high quality services by connecting them to pro bono attorneys. All eleven California LSC grantees have profiles in the Pro Bono Programs Guide which has received a steadily increasing amount of traffic since 2007 [Appendix M.] ProBonoCA.org also boasts participation from over 100 pro bono programs throughout California, the majority being unique IOLTA-funded organizations.

Pro bono programs have listed over sixty recurring legal clinics to ProBonoCA.org, all of which have provided direct contacts for attorneys seeking volunteer opportunities among various locations and areas of law. Since 2007, close to 400 scheduled trainings, volunteer opportunities, and other pro bono related events have been posted on the public calendar, all of which provide private attorneys and legal services representatives with a connection to relevant events occurring throughout the California pro bono community.

In addition to the page views captured by Appendix M, additional exposure of pro bono programs' resources to private attorneys has increased due to the introduction of the Pro Bono Manager platform. This interface streams data directly to attorneys at firms under contract with pro bono net, ensuring increased distribution of materials and opportunities provided by legal services' pro bono programs. The number of large national firms utilizing the Pro Bono Manager Platform in the future is expected to increase, further expanding exposure to the site's content.

V. Partnerships

Because of the stability and recognized quality of LawHelpCA.org, the CalJustice Advisory Committee determined that formal quarterly meetings were no longer necessary. LawHelpCA.org staff enjoy the strong support of all of its constituent programs. We continue to develop strong connections with individual stakeholders, and remain in constant contact with them through profile updates and outreach materials and events. Additionally, we formally meet in person with stakeholders at an annual statewide meeting. During this reporting period, LawHelpCA.org staff met with stakeholders at the "Connecting the Dots" Annual Legal Services Stakeholders Meeting in April 2007. This year, stakeholders met informally at the statewide "Pathways to Justice" conference that was held in lieu of "Connecting the Dots." Also, LawHelpCA.org staff works directly with the Legal Services Trust Fund Program of the State Bar to ensure that IOLTA-funded organizations maintain contact with LawHelpCA.org and update their profiles every year. Aside from working with the State Bar, we contact all organizations listed on the site every six to nine months to update their profile(s). For court program and lawyer referral service listings, we share databases with the Administrative Office of the Courts and the State Bar to keep information updated. LawHelpCA.org is only valuable to users if it has current and accessible information.

Additionally, we actively solicit advocate feedback to find out how advocates are using the site and what they would like to see included in it. For example, during the grant period we identified that the subtopics in the Families and Kids, Immigration, and Disability topic areas needed reorganization and worked with advocates to eliminate obsolete subtopics, rename current subtopics, and add newly relevant subtopics. Also, during all trainings we show advocates how to send feedback through the website.

In 2007 we partnered with the Santa Clara County Court Self-Help Center and Santa Clara County libraries to hold a series of trainings for clients throughout the county. Clients became familiar with the services available at the Self-Help Center and were taught how to use LawHelpCA.org to find help and information. Also in these sessions, staff of the library and Self-Help Center learned to use LawHelpCA.org to help their clients. Because public libraries generally have computers for public use, we have found librarians to be key allies. Librarians are often asked legal questions and usually have little capacity to help clients find an answer. We offer trainings and client brochures to librarians through personal email and listservs.

Advocates frequently request client brochures to distribute at their offices and outreach events. During the reporting period, over 18,000 English brochures were distributed. After translating the brochure into Spanish in May 2008, nearly 7,500 were sent to advocates [Appendix N].

Through outreach to non-traditional partners, we have created additional access points for Californians. Often, initial contact is not made with a member of the legal community such as an attorney or court staff, but rather with a librarian, church leader, or social services provider. This is particularly true for rural areas and immigrant communities. By training and providing brochures to these groups, we have equipped them to steer clients away from fraudulent or exploitative organizations and towards reliable legal help and information. Attached are handouts we have created for such groups [Appendices O-P]. This idea served as the basis for the Language Access and Expansion Project launched in 2008. Through this project LawHelpCA.org staff will make two trips to rural Northern California to train community based organizations and other non traditional partners how to connect their clientele to reliable and free legal help and information. One trip was conducted in July 2008 to the Glenn, Butte, and Tehama tri-county area. Advocates from local senior support groups, domestic violence agencies, and Departments of Probation and Child Support Services were trained. The next trip will take place in late 2008 in Lassen County, in partnership with the Superior Court's Access to Justice Center in Susanville.

Currently, we are in the middle of an outreach campaign to senior centers statewide. We are sending packets to the centers that include information about how staff can use LawHelpCA.org to help clients and a flyer for clients [Appendix Q]. We are also extending a training offer to all centers. By equipping senior center staff with LawHelpCA.org, they will be better able to help their clients get the help with common issues such as Medicare, conservatorship, and life and estate planning. Also in the works is an outreach and education campaign to statewide Department of Child Support Services offices. During the trainings conducted in partnership with SHARP, LawHelpCA.org staff became aware of the wide variety of family law questions that staff receives.

In evaluating ProBonoCA.org, we are closely partnered with direct service organizations, law firms, and pro bono clinics throughout California. They have shared their expertise with us and we have worked with them to ensure that ProBonoCA.org fills the missing gaps in the statewide pro bono community. We have also connected their websites and resources to ProBonoCA.org which is quickly becoming the gateway to all things pro bono.

Two statewide groups, the Education Task Force and the Public Benefits and Justice Group, have greatly increased the content of CALegalAdvocates.org's resource library. Staff has trained them and given them administrator privileges to add content to their section of the library. These groups use this library as a medium to share documents with each other and they have allowed all legal services advocates throughout the state to access their resources.

VI. Financial and in-kind support for the web site

From July 2006 – June 2008, we spent \$142,500 more than the TIG grants. Of that \$142,500, \$120,000 came from the State Bar LawHelpCalifornia.org addendum to our Legal Aid Association of California support contract, and \$22,500 came from the Legal Aid Association of California member voluntary dues. Including the first and second TIG website grants, we spent a total of \$164,500. These funds paid for two staff members and their benefits, part time intern assistance, and the related direct and indirect program costs dedicated to supporting the LawHelpCA.org website. Program costs include printing and postage costs associated with outreach and marketing, \$15,000 per year for Pro Bono Net contract fee, and travel costs to attend conferences.

VII. Major lessons and recommendations

We have learned that buy-in from key justice partners is a must. The support of the State Bar and the Administrative Office of the Courts has helped us not only provide accurate and robust information, but it has helped other entities recognize the website as legitimate and useful and thus want to be included as a referral and participate in its growth. Additionally, we have found that outreach to non-traditional partners is necessary to get the word about the website out to clients. Lawyers are generally not the first point of contact for low-income Californians in need of legal help. Therefore, partnering with trusted community based organizations has allowed us to reach sectors of the California population that wouldn't otherwise be exposed to the website.

We have also seen the importance of outside input when developing both CALegalAdvocates.org and ProBonoCA.org. Our focus groups, surveys, and discussions with partners, have given us invaluable insight into which sections of the websites are most helpful and how to best develop them. For example, ProBonoCA.org originally required users to create accounts to access much of the site. Our law firm partners explained that pro bono attorneys generally would not take the time to create an account and we would reach more users by making the entire site public. We removed the membership requirement and our site usage greatly increased.

When CALegalAdvocates.org was first created, a large majority of the material came from LAAC staff because they were the only administrators of the website. In working with the

Public Benefits Justice Group on materials for the Library, it became apparent that they should have the ability to add content themselves without sending it to LAAC staff. Members of the Public Benefits Group, among others have since been made has administrators of the Library, and Listservs sections. This development taught LAAC to encourage members of the website to post their own content to the website. Having multiple sources add content to CALegalAdvocates.org has made it more dynamic, and has ensured a steady number of total visits to the site [Appendix R].

We recommend that other grantees establish strong partnerships at the onset of the project with justice and community partners. Such partnerships help give the project validity, leverage resources, and paint a comprehensive picture of the legal need. Grantees should look beyond strictly legal community partners and tap into community resources.