



Civil Legal Justice Group Activities

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Introduction

This guide is designed to help facilitate discussion and activities for learning groups that are working together through the **Creating Pathways to Civil Legal Justice** (CPCLJ) series of 4 self-paced courses created by WebJunction. It is intended as a companion to WebJunction's [Learning Group Facilitation Guide](#), which offers guidance to anyone wishing to function as a facilitator for a learning group that is collectively taking self-paced courses—managing the organizing logistics, group dynamics, and discussions. The Learning Group Facilitation Guide is intended for use broadly with any self-paced course. This Civil Legal Justice Group Activities guide provides guidance specific to the discussions and activities in the CPCLJ courses.

Why a Learning Group for Civil Legal Justice Training?

The **Creating Pathways to Civil Legal Justice** series lends itself particularly well to a group learning approach:

- The civil laws and the legal system that these courses address are almost entirely defined at the state and local levels. As a result, the courses require learners to discover legal resources and service providers specific to their location. Working together in a local group will help them build strong collections.
- In addition to building individual skills, knowledge and confidence around providing civil legal reference services, many of the course activities involve creating resources and partnerships for the library as a whole. Group members from the same library can collaborate to create better resources and partnerships more easily than individuals working alone.
- Legal issues and information resources can be complex, and individuals needing legal information are often involved in stressful and life-changing events. Thus, it is often an intimidating topic for library staff to address. Working together in an organized learning group of supportive peers is an effective way to build skills and confidence in this area through practice with each other.
- The opportunity to have group discussions aligned with each course is valuable. Discussions could occur both before and after doing the activities. There is value in debriefing together about the activities and following up on questions that come up in the first discussion.



The Justice Gap and the US Legal System

Course Content

Introduction

- Video: Intro to the Civil Legal Justice Gap - 6:04 min

The Civil Legal Justice Gap

- Video: *Barriers to Access* - 4:30 min
- Read: *The Justice Gap: Measuring the Unmet Civil Legal Needs of Low-income Americans* - through at least page 36
- Read: *LAW LIBRARIES AND ACCESS TO JUSTICE A Report of the American Association of Law Libraries Special Committee on Access to Justice* - through page 12
- Read: *Justice for Some*

Legal Information vs Legal Advice

- Video: *Legal Information vs Legal Advice* - 9:05 min
- Read: *Unauthorized Practice of Law in the Library: Considerations for librarians facing legal questions*
- Read: *The Supreme Court of Ohio: Law Library Legal Research & Advice Policy - Public Patrons*

The US Legal System

- Video: *Legal System Basics* - 6:06 min
- Video: *Sources of Law in the United States* - 7:38 min
- Read: *The U.S. Legal System - FindLaw*

Court Rules and Civil Procedure

- Video: *Court Rules and Civil Procedure* - 3:51 min
- Read: *Civil procedure in the United States*
- Read: *Cases Without Counsel: Research on Experiences of Self-Representation in U.S. Family Court* Executive Summary and from the bottom of page 30 to the top of page 37.

Course Notes

This first course in the CPCLJ series focuses on ideas and information that are foundational to the remaining courses. It includes a knowledge-check quiz at the end, but no other activity assignments. For the group, the focus should be on discussing the ideas and information presented and coming to an understanding of them and how they might impact the legal reference services you provide to your community.

Discussion Questions

Suggested questions for your learning group discussion:

1. What was surprising in the Justice Gap readings and videos? What do you know about the Justice Gap in your community? Have you helped patrons who are having difficulty finding legal representation?
2. How might this content impact your library's work or your perception of the role of your library? What barriers do you see to the library playing a role in your community's access to justice?
3. What was new or surprising in the Legal Information vs. Legal Advice content? This content is foundational to the CPCLJ series. Take the time your group needs to explore their perceptions of this distinction.
4. What was new or surprising in the US Legal System content? How might this content impact your work? What is still unclear for you from this content?
5. What was new or surprising in the Court Rules and Civil Procedure content? How might this content impact your work? What is still unclear for you from this content?

Activities

Here are some additional activities your group may find useful:

- Investigate what you can discover about the justice gap in your area. Some things to look for:
 - How many lawyers are available in your municipality or county, and what size population do they serve?
 - What percentage of your local population lives below or near the federal poverty level?
 - Try using this [minimum justice gap calculator](https://bit.ly/3tuo2VT) (bit.ly/3tuo2VT) from an American [Association of Law Libraries](#) blog.
- Research whether there is any official direction offered for non-lawyers offering legal information to the public or a definition of Unauthorized Practice of Law specific to your state. Not all states will have these resources, but your state court system, supreme court, or attorney general are good places to look.
- If you adopt one of these activities, discuss how it went, how easy or difficult was it to find the information, and did you find it helpful.



Civil Legal Issues and Resources

Course Content

Civil Legal Issues

- Video: *Civil Legal Issues* - 3:36 min
- Read: *Many U.S. Families Faced Civil Legal Issues in 2018*

Preparing a Legal Resource Collection

- Video: *Preparing a Legal Resource Collection* - 3:36 min
- Video: *Free Online Legal Resources* - 5:16 min
- Read: *AALL Public Library Collection Guidelines for a Legal Research Collection*
- Review: *Civil Legal Resource Starter List* – (course handout)

Evaluating Legal Resources

- Video: *Evaluating Online Legal Resources* - 3:26
- Video: *Print Legal Reference Collections* - 4:02
- Read: *AALL Access to Legal Information*

Course Notes

The second course begins by describing the most common types of civil legal issues that people experience, but the primary focus of the course and activities is on creating and managing your library's legal resource collection.

Discussion Questions

Suggested questions for your learning group discussion:

1. The course gives statistics about the most **common civil legal issues** nationally, but what issues do you hear at your library? Has that changed in the last year?
2. Does your service area include any special populations that should be considered when building or refining a civil legal reference collection, e.g. veterans, seniors, any language issues to be considered? Does your existing legal resource collection serve these populations well?
3. What issues are the most difficult for you to assist in providing information?
4. Take a critical look at your library's current **print legal reference collection**. Is there some weeding or acquiring to do? As a group, discuss specific recommendations for what to weed and what you think is still worth the cost of acquiring.

5. Brainstorm guidelines for evaluating new resources for acquisition. What will you be looking for as you **evaluate online legal resources**? What will help you feel more confident in evaluating those resources?
6. After the group has done the research for the resource list (see Activities below), have a discussion about what they discovered:
 - What sites were outstanding and should be highlighted? Do you recommend diving deeper into those sites and exploring more of what they have to offer?
 - Do any of the list categories need immediate further development?
 - How can the group work together to explore and compile online resources so they feel better equipped to answer questions?
7. What is still unclear or needing attention for you from this content?

Activities

The main learning activity in Course 2 is to create a Civil Legal Resource List for your library. How you organize this activity and divide the work for your learning group will be significantly influenced by the size of your group and the number of libraries represented. Whatever the makeup of the group, you will begin the research working from the **Civil Legal Resource List**.

If your library already has a legal resource list, the group might update it, develop the listings further, adding more detailed descriptions of the resources, and perhaps creating detailed instructions for using some of the key online resources, such as your state's LawHelp.org site.

For one library

- As a group, you should be able to complete a list that is ready for your library to use.
- The Legal Resource Starter List is broken into four categories for online resources and one for print resources. Allow individuals or small groups to take on each topic. Note that the different topics may require different levels of effort, and some members may want to research more than one.

For multiple libraries

- Assuming you are all in the same US state, most of the resources will apply to all group members' libraries, but also make sure you are uncovering county and municipality-specific resource for all the communities your libraries serve. Ultimately, each library is likely to require a unique version of the list.



Partnering with Legal Service Providers

Course Content

Legal Assistance Options

- Video: *Legal Assistance Options* - 7:15 min
- Video: *Pine Tree Legal Assistance* - 5:30 min
- Read: *What is Legal Aid?*

Finding Legal Aid and Other Providers

- Video: *Finding Local Legal Aid* - 5:08 min
- Review: *Finding legal assistance options for your locality* (course handout)

Partnering with Legal Service Providers

- Video: *Creating Partnerships with Local Legal Organizations* - 17:51 min
- Read: *Resources for Creating Partnerships with Civil Legal Organizations*
- Video: *How Colorado Legal Services is partnering with libraries to serve rural communities* - 7:27 min
- Video: *Partnering with Public Libraries* - 4:50 min
- Read at least two of the following articles about public libraries partnering with legal organizations to provide programs and services to their communities.
 - *Cyber Legal Clinics Create Access to Employment at Wicomico Public Libraries* -
 - *Minnesota State Law Library Partners with Saint Paul Public Library to Promote Access to Justice*
 - *Civil Legal Aid Program at the Cleveland Public Library Meets Local Needs*
 - *Lawyers in Libraries: Meeting Local Needs at the Jacksonville Public Library*

Course Notes

Course three focuses on helping patrons find legal assistance that is available to them and appropriate to their legal and financial needs. Since we are not lawyers, or even law librarians (in most cases), a quality referral to a legal service provider is often the most valuable assistance you can offer.

Before the group discussion, members should query others at their library about any history of partnering or interacting with any legal service providers, including local lawyers, legal aid providers and law libraries. This information should inform the discussion and activities. Much like with Course 2, if the library already has a Civil Legal Resource list, look for ways to update and improve it, especially adding detail to important providers. If the library already partners with providers, focus on what kinds of new projects or programming might you engage in with them. Have the group collaborate on creating one or more proposals to present to library leadership and the provider partner.

Discussion Questions

Suggested questions for your learning group discussion:

1. Start with a brainstorm of the legal services of any kind you already know are available in your area. List as many as you can, indicating the kinds of service provided and whether they offer reduced cost options.
2. If your library already refers patrons to legal services, discuss how that currently meets patron needs:
 - a. What are the most common referrals needed by patrons?
 - b. Where have you had success referring patrons?
 - c. Have any referrals with different agencies been problematic?
3. Reviewing what you currently know about patron needs and providers, what are the gaps in service providers that you'd like to work on filling? How might you go about discovering more providers?
4. Has your library ever partnered with a legal service provider of any kind? If so, what worked and what did not?

Activities

- The first activity is similar to the Civil Legal Resource List activity in Course 2, but this time you will research legal service providers, creating a list that is as complete and broad as you can. As with Course 2, how you organize the activity will depend on the size of your group and the number of libraries represented. Refer to the Course 2 activity notes for more ideas.
- Before moving on to contacting providers, review your discussion of past or existing partnerships. Discuss areas of greatest need in terms of both area of law and ability to pay. What providers or agencies would make the most sense to approach about partnership? Brainstorm some ideas to prepare for the initial call. Look at the different ideas presented in this lesson as possible models to guide your discussion.
- Plan who will make the calls for a given library. Make sure you have approval from your library director or manager. If your group represents multiple libraries, consider whether you want to collaborate between libraries when reaching out to providers.
- Consider who you want to contact at the provider. Is there a job position, department or specific individual you think might be most promising?
- When making contact, have a few ideas of the type of partnership your library might be interested in, but keep an open mind and ask about their needs as well.
- Consider inviting a legal aid agency or a law library to your learning group discussion or to talk to your whole staff. Brainstorm in advance what you'd like to get out of the session.



The Legal Reference Interview

Course Content

Introduction to the Legal Reference Interview

- Video: *The Legal Reference Interview* - 16:18 min
- Review the *Legal Reference Skills Checklist* (course handout)
- Video (if not familiar with it): *Legal Information vs Legal Advice* - 9:05 min
- Read: *Legal Reference at the Library—Building Skill Through Practice*.
- Read: *Legal Reference at the Library—Financial Information to Empower Patron Decision-making*

Legal Reference Interview Demonstrations

- Video: *Legal Interview Demo – Family Law* - 4:31 min
- Video: *Legal Interview Demo – Landlord Tenant* - 8+ min

Legal Reference Interview Practice

- Complete at least one of the two interactive practice scenarios:
 - *My Neighbor's Chickens*
 - *The Mechanic Took My Car*
- Practice at least one legal reference interview with another person, such as a colleague, friend, family member, learning group member

Course Notes

The final CPCLJ course is focused on preparing the learner to conduct successful legal reference interviews at their library. At this point in the series, learners should understand the important concepts: the difference between legal information and advice; the basics of how the legal system is structured; how and where to find authoritative legal information; and how to refer patrons to appropriate legal services. Now you will apply everything learned from the first three courses to helping community members who come to the library with questions and issues.

Note that Course 4 includes two interactive interview scenarios, but learners are only required to view one of them to complete the course. It may help your discussion if you decide ahead which you will all view, or if you will view both. Either way, you will also practice interviewing each other (see Activities on page 11).

Discussion Questions

Suggested questions for your learning group discussion:

1. In **The Legal Reference Interview** video, Catherine McGuire describes a legal reference interview as requiring all the same skills and behaviors as any other reference interview, but with an additional layer of skill and awareness (described in the **Legal Reference Skills Checklist** handout in Course 4).
 - a. How do you feel about that description?
 - b. Reviewing the skills checklist, which do you feel confident about and which are you challenged by? What might you do to improve those you need to develop?
 - c. How prepared overall do each of you feel at this point to handle civil legal issues that patrons bring in?
 - d. Discuss any specific areas of concern about the whole process.
 - e. The group has or will practice interviewing each other. What else might you be able to do to build confidence?

2. The course includes demonstration interviews involving family law and landlord/tenant issues. Consider watching these together, if feasible, or asking group members to watch them prior to your discussion:
 - a. For each demonstration, if you were the librarian, would you have immediately identified these inquiries as legal issues? If not, at what point would it have been clear?
 - b. The landlord/tenant demonstration has multiple possible responses. How well did your initial reactions match the best choices? Were there particular things that tripped you up?

3. We recommend everyone watch both interactive scenarios about a neighbor's chickens and a dispute with a mechanic, but if not, decide among the group on one that all will view. Recommend that group members review them just before meeting or take notes about their thoughts as they go through them.
 - a. How well did your choices match the identified best choices?
 - b. Were there particular types of questions that tripped you up?
 - c. Any questions raised or places you disagree with or were confused by the scenario advice?

Activities

It is strongly recommended that your learning group practice legal reference interviews with each other. We have provided a **Legal Reference Interview Practice** handout (also duplicated on the next pages) to support this activity. The handout includes a list of suggested patron issues and situations your group members can draw from, or they are also welcome to make up their own, being sure to think of a few follow-up questions to extend the interview.

Depending on the logistics and size of your group, as well as personal preference, there are several ways you might organize this. A few suggestions:

- Group members pair up, each taking turns interviewing the other at least once. Come back and debrief with the group if possible. Also consider switching partners and repeating.
- Group members break into groups of three, each taking turns as interviewer, patron and observer. The observer's role is to give constructive feedback after watching.
- With the whole group, have members take turns interviewing and being interviewed in front of everyone. Have a constructive feedback discussion after each turn.
- If you have an online group that cannot meet together live, arrange a way for members to practice with each other in a live online situation where they can see each other if at all possible, or via phone as an alternative.
- For any of these options, decide with the group whether you can do them during a real-time group meeting. If that won't work, plan to allow for extra time for this to happen outside of the group and set clear expectations for when they should be completed.

Follow-Up Discussion

After the legal reference interview practice we recommend a final group discussion to talk about both the interview experience as well as the course series and their learning overall.

1. After practicing interviews with each other, guide the group in a discussion about takeaways from this course and the overall experience.
 - a. Check in with learners about reference interview skills they still want to improve and areas of interest they want to explore further.
 - b. Consider making individual learning goals and have an accountability partner from the group to help them monitor progress going forward.
 - c. Does the group want to continue meeting to check in about legal reference interview learnings and/or practice?