

## PATHWAYS TO CIVIL LEGAL JUSTICE FINAL EVALUATION REPORT – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2019, with the support of private grant funding, the Legal Services Corporation (LSC) contracted with OCLC, a global library cooperative, to have their WebJunction program develop and deliver online training to instruct public librarians on how to help patrons find civil legal information and connect them with additional resources. WebJunction — a program that provides free online professional development and continuing education to library staff — designed both instructor-led and self-paced courses aimed at strengthening library staff’s knowledge and ability to identify when there is a civil legal issue at play and to direct library users to relevant, helpful information. Additionally, WebJunction designed a facilitator training to prepare library staff to guide peer learning groups through the self-paced version of the course.

Thomas P. Miller and Associates (TPMA) was hired by LSC to conduct an evaluation of the courses once they were made available to library staff via WebJunction’s Course Catalog. The purpose of this evaluation is to use qualitative and quantitative data to determine the outcomes of the courses, assess the effectiveness of the project, and provide recommendations for improving the content and delivery. Data was collected through pre-course, post-course, and follow-up surveys, participant focus groups, instructor interviews, and course enrollment data. The following report presents final evaluation findings from the instructor-led course, the self-paced courses, and the facilitator training.

### Description of the Courses

The **instructor-led course** included four lessons, covering the role of public libraries in addressing the justice gap, the difference between legal information and legal advice, legal reference interviews, civil legal reference collections in libraries, local- and state-specific online self-help resources, and identifying and cultivating relationships with local civil legal aid organizations. Participants attended live sessions (or watched the recordings), read assigned readings, participated in discussion forums, and completed several interactive activities (e.g., identifying local resources, practicing conducting a legal reference interview).

Instructor-Led  
Course

Self-Paced  
Courses

The **self-paced curriculum** adapted the instructor-led content to create four separate courses, which cover: (1) the role of public libraries in addressing the justice gap and the difference between legal information and legal advice, (2) commonly addressed and important civil legal topics, and reviewing and strengthening civil legal reference collections in libraries, (3) identifying and cultivating relationships with local organizations that provide civil legal aid and legal referrals, and (4) conducting a legal reference interview. Participants watch recordings, read assigned readings, complete assignments, participate in discussion forums, and complete interactive activities (e.g., practicing conducting a legal reference interview).

The **facilitator training** was designed to provide anyone working in or with a US public library with the knowledge, skills, and confidence they need to organize and facilitate a peer learning group in collaboratively taking and successfully completing the 4-course Civil Legal Justice self-paced series. Training participants participated in two live online sessions and

Facilitator  
Training

completed asynchronous work, including watching recordings, reading assigned readings, participating in discussion forums, and completing training assignments.

## Evaluation Findings

**Participants in the instructor-led and self-paced courses reported patron/community need, personal interest, and professional development as key motivations for taking the course.** One instructor-led participant shared that they were interested in gaining “knowledge to be better able to help [patrons].” A self-paced course survey respondent shared, “I look forward to learning more about that [civil legal justice] and how to better help patrons.” Additionally, self-paced course participants specifically reported being interested in enrolling in the course because of its self-paced format.

**Across all three course types, participants reported increased knowledge of course content.** Moreover, participants in the instructor-led course showed a statistically significant increase in knowledge from before to after the course.<sup>1</sup> Focus group participants from the instructor-led and self-paced courses shared that they valued learning about local resources, the distinction between legal advice and legal information, and how to conduct a legal reference interview. One participant shared that the “formal practice in legal reference interview...made [them] feel more confident in doing that with patrons in the future.” Facilitator training participants reported increased understanding of the purpose of learning groups and how they facilitate learning. Focus group participants also shared they appreciated the usefulness of the list of facilitator questions that were provided and intended to use the facilitation guides as they begin to plan and lead their own groups.

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*Instructor-led course participants showed statistically significant increases in knowledge and confidence from before the course to after.*

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**Participants overwhelmingly responded that the courses had increased their confidence in applying course concepts across all three course types.** Participants in the instructor-led course also showed a statistically significant increase in confidence from before to after the course.<sup>2</sup> For example, at the end of the course, 97% of survey respondents “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that they were confident in their ability to discern the difference between legal advice and legal information, compared to 68% before the course. A self-paced course focus group participant shared that the “class helped alleviate the fear involved” when providing assistance, while another noted the course helped them feel more confident in distinguishing between legal information and legal advice because it “drew definite lines between those two.”

Facilitator training participants reported having increased confidence in facilitating a learning group on the Civil Legal Justice courses. In the post-training survey, respondents were asked to compare their confidence in facilitating a learning group both before and after the training. Over half (60%) of respondents rated their level of confidence in facilitating a learning group prior to the training as “poor” or “fair.” After the training, 80% of respondents rated their confidence as “good” or “excellent” with only two respondents (6%) rating their confidence as “poor” or “fair.”

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<sup>1</sup> Due to differences in the survey methodology, only the instructor-led course data allowed for statistical analysis.

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**Course participants reported that they had applied what they learned in their work, although opportunities were limited by the COVID-19 pandemic.** Participants from both the instructor-led and self-paced courses shared they were able to apply course content by developing resources (e.g., LibGuides on civil legal topics, local civil legal resource sheets, etc.) and sharing their knowledge with colleagues. Several participants shared that they had reached out to other local organizations to initiate partnerships (e.g., with legal aid, bar association, law library). Some participants also reported using course content in direct work with patrons, including providing legal information to patrons over the phone or in person.

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*“I feel this is a great benefit to our patrons. I think that by leading a learning group of staff members and getting them comfortable with the resources, this would be a great service to our residents.”*  
 – Facilitator Training Participant

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Following the facilitator training, participants felt prepared to lead a learning group, though they had not yet started a learning group. Prior to the facilitator training, over half (57%) of survey respondents rated their level of preparedness to facilitate a learning group as “fair” or “poor.” After the training, 86% respondents rated their preparedness as “good” or “excellent.” One respondent shared, “I feel this is a great benefit to our patrons. I think that by leading a learning group of staff members and getting them comfortable with the resources, this would be a great service to our residents.”

## Participant Course Feedback

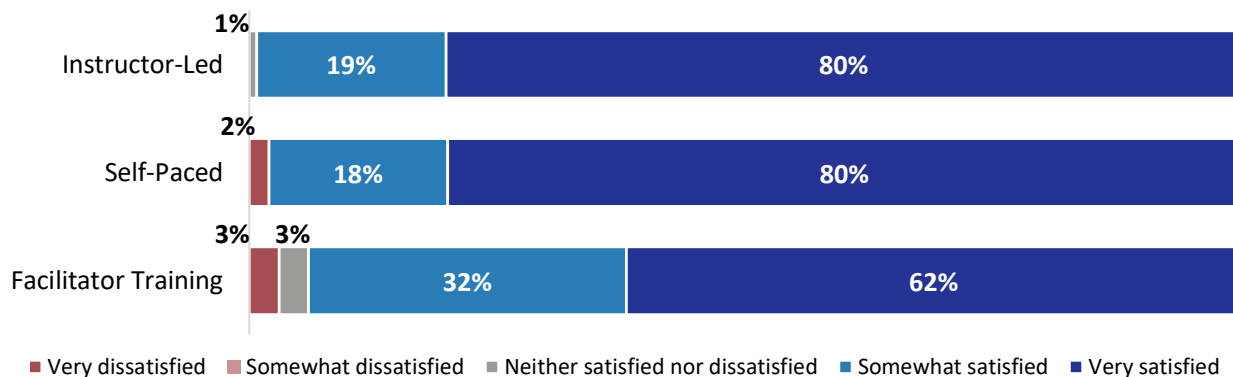
Overall, participants were highly satisfied with all three of the course types. Participants were particularly pleased with the structure and format of the courses and the instructors. A self-paced course survey respondent shared, “These courses have been extremely well written and organized. They have been some of the best self-paced online courses I have ever taken.” Participants also reported that the assignments were relevant to the course and that the discussion forums were useful. One instructor-led course participant stated in a focus group that they thought the assignments worked well because they “increased in complexity but never felt outside my range given what was presented.” While participants reported that the workload matched their expectations, some shared that the time commitment was larger than they anticipated, especially for the instructor-led course.

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 – Self-Paced Course Participant

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Figure 1: Participant Satisfaction



## Lessons Learned

The following lessons were identified by WebJunction and LSC staff as they reflected on the development and implementation of the courses. These lessons provide valuable insight for similar initiatives in the future.

- WebJunction had to develop courses that are both general enough to apply to a broad, national audience as well as detailed on civil legal justice topics.
- Course developers adapted the instructor-led curriculum to be four short self-paced courses, rather than a single larger course, to better serve participants' needs.
- One challenge with the implementation of the facilitator training was in clearly communicating the purpose of the facilitator training to participants, as many people have different understanding of "facilitation."

## Recommendations

Based on the participant and instructor feedback, TPMA provides the following recommendations for future courses:

- Incorporate opportunities for participants to interact in smaller groups, particularly for the instructor-led course and facilitator training, to facilitate deeper discussions and connections.
- Explore future opportunities to offer additional courses related civil legal justice or related issues.
- When possible, similar courses should be offered in both synchronous and asynchronous formats to accommodate participants' learning styles.
- Encourage facilitator training participants to enroll in at least one self-paced course prior to the training to provide a foundation for the training discussions.