

Public Libraries and Access to Justice:
8. Legal Aid, Law Library, and Court
Collaborations for Public Libraries



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Slide 1

Authoring Panel

- Debra Aggertt, Illinois State Library
- Melissa Barr, Ohio
- Mary Ann Van Cura, MN State Library Services
- Charles Dyer, Consultant, Retired San Antonio Law Librarian (Chair)
- Bonnie Hough, California AOC
- Claudia Johnson, Pro Bono Net
- Nelson (Yusheng) Lu, Queens Public Library
- Leah Margulies, LawHelp NY

Slide 2

Outline

- Examples from the field
- Partnering Goals and Discussion

Slide 3

There follow are number of very different accounts – use the ones that the presenter thinks will resonate.

The second section suggests products and processes that can come out of partnering – the slides act as a potential idea generator and checklist.

Stories

- Illinois Legal Aid Online and the Illinois Coalition for Equal Justice
- Minnesota Partnering Stories
- NY/Queens Librarian and New York Courts
- Web Chat initiatives in CA

Slide 4

Another nice example is Maine:

<http://www.bangordailynews.com/detail/126797.html>

Public Libraries and Access to Justice #8. Collaborations for Public Libraries

Illinois
Three Models of Legal Self-Help Centers in Illinois | 2010

Courthouse Model I

- Legal self-help center located in the county courthouse
- Used in counties with larger populations
- Either one full-time or two part-time navigators
- Separate space in courthouse, typically in the law library, and open during courthouse hours
- Initial funding (two years) provided by Illinois Equal Justice Foundation (IEJF)
- Examples:
 - Madison County
 - Peoria County

Courthouse Model II

- Legal self-help center located in the county courthouse or in both county courthouse and local public library
- Used in moderately populated counties
- One part-time navigator with set hours posted
- Initial funding (two years) provided by Illinois Equal Justice Foundation (IEJF)
- Examples:
 - Kane County
 - McHenry County
 - St. Clair County

Public Library Model

- Legal self-help center located at the public library in the county seat
- Used in rural counties
- Public library is more accessible than the courthouse in terms of hours and staff
- Start up funding (one year) provided by Illinois Equal Justice Foundation (IEJF) for the costs of equipment and supplies
- Examples:
 - Alexander County
 - Massac County
 - Wayne County

In all three models ...

- A Legal Self-Help Center is a community-based, collaborative project designed by a local planning committee that is chaired by the Chief or Presiding Judge; the Committee determines the specifics of the Center such as location, hours, staffing, etc.
- A Legal Self-Help Center is internet based and consists of one or two computers, a printer, and signage noting what staff can and cannot provide to Center patrons (e.g., "we cannot provide legal advice"; "we can provide legal information")
- High-speed internet connections and headphones are required for viewing videos/webcasts
- Each Legal Self-Help Center has its own homepage (<http://countyname.illinoislegalaid.org>)
- Circuit Clerk staff is given a one-page handout with legal assistance referral information to distribute to pro se litigants (pro se litigants are encouraged to seek legal counsel, if at all possible)
- Local court staff, library staff and domestic violence-victim advocates are trained on how to navigate the website and use the online / automated forms

Illinois Legal Aid Online

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The county legal self-help centers are based upon the public website www.IllinoisLegalAid.org – this is the free, statewide, legal-information website designed for Illinois residents who are unfamiliar with the civil legal system (meaning that they write the content on this website to be readable by everyday people, not lawyers). The website contains over 3000 pieces of content in 24 areas of law. The website includes videos, automated forms, and a “click to chat” service for people who can’t find the legal information that they are looking for.

Illinois Legal Aid Online (ILAO), provides ongoing support and training on the www.IllinoisLegalAid.org website for librarians, courthouse staff and domestic-violence-victims advocates. We also set up the county homepage for the legal self-help center.

Illinois Coalition for Equal Justice facilitates the legal self-help center planning process. They contact the important parties and sets up 2-3 planning meetings with a set agenda. They also work with the granting organization to make sure that the county or library gets its funds.

Some counties are willing to fund their own legal self-help centers (or use existing resources); this is usually true where the chief or presiding judges are particularly forward-thinking and supportive of providing resources to pro se litigants. In those counties, ILAO and ICEJ facilitate the same planning process and provide the same ongoing support but there is no grant/funding issues to address. Examples of these centers in Illinois are in Stephenson County, Will County and McHenry County.

LEGAL SELF-HELP CENTER HOMEPAGE

Example: <http://Edgar.IllinoisLegalAid.org>

Legal Self-Help Center: Edgar County, Illinois

A Message from Edgar County
 Welcome to the online support for the Edgar County Legal Self-Help Center.
 Chief Judge Tracy W. Resch
[Watch Video](#)

Hours of Operation
 Summer Hours (June 1-Aug 31):
 Mon 10:00am-8:00pm
 Tue-Fri 10:00am-6:00pm
 Sat 10:00am-4:00pm

Edgar County Legal Information
[How Do I Get a Divorce in Illinois?](#)
 Information about how you can get a divorce, including automated forms
[How Do I Protect Myself and My Children From Domestic Violence?](#)
 Explains how to get an order of protection, along with the necessary forms and instructions
[How Do I Stop or Modify My Child Support Payments?](#)
 Explains how to modify your child support payments, or stop paying child support, and provides the necessary forms and instructions
[I Want to Sue Someone for \\$10,000 or Less](#)
 Explains the process for suing in small claims court in Illinois
[I Am Being Sued for \\$10,000 or Less](#)
 Explains the process for responding to a lawsuit in small claims court in Illinois
[How Do I Get Custody of a Child?](#)
 Information about how to get custody of a child in Illinois
[Search for other legal information](#)

Legal Self-Help Center Location
 Paris Carnegie Public Library
 207 S. Main Street
 Paris, IL 61944
 217.463.3950
[Helpful Organizations](#)

Illinois Legal Aid Online

Callout Boxes:
 - The Legal Self-Help Center hours are listed here. This can be either the hours that the library or courthouse is open or the hours that a navigator is available to assist people with using the website.
 - Click the "Watch Video" button to view a welcome video from the Chief Judge of the Judicial Circuit in which the county is located. The video is about two minutes long and makes clear that the Center exists to provide legal information, not legal advice.
 - This lists the location of the Legal Self-Help Center—typically, the Center is located at the courthouse or at a nearby public library.
 - The legal information included here is determined by the Center's Planning Committee. Based on its experience with pro se litigants in its county, the Committee picks the six most pressing civil legal issues for pro se litigants in the county.

Slide 6

What they are doing in these rural communities is building a community collaborative that will support the legal self-help center. That takes time and a willingness to trust other groups and share responsibility for the center. That's why all of the partners need to know (or get to know) the other partners and make a commitment to use the center and, pardon the expression, "own" it.

Some stories:

In November 2009, they opened four legal self-help centers in predominantly rural counties. As part of the training on using the legal self-help center, they usually tell the librarians, circuit clerks, DV advocates and others that they should try to use the center materials so that they become familiar with how the site works, particularly the automated forms. One of the automated forms is a Power of Attorney for Health Care. It is built on the A2J software. They always recommend that they try this form and complete it for themselves, particularly if they don't already have a POA. They always tell them that they should have one, no matter their age.

The library director in one of these counties was talking to her mother about the center and particularly about the POW for Health Care. The mother expressed interest, they read up on the POA on the website and after reading about it, the mother, a woman in her mid-70s decided that she wanted to have a POA. Because she also needed a will, she went to an attorney and he prepared a Will and a POW for Health Care and Finances. Less than two weeks later, the mother of the library director had a stroke and ultimately died in mid-December. The librarian wrote to tell me how much it meant to her that because of the POA, that she was able to make the decisions that needed to be made for her mother, knowing that she was doing exactly what her mother



The screenshot shows a registration page for a webinar titled "Website Navigator Training for Librarians" organized by Illinois Legal Aid Online. The page has a blue header with the website URL "www.IllinoisLegalAid.org" and the text "Please join us for a free online training". The main content area is white and includes a "REGISTER NOW" button, a "Space is limited" warning, and a registration link: <https://www1.gotometting.com/register/408650736>. It also lists the date (Thursday, May 21, 2009), time (1:00 PM - 2:30 PM CDT), and system requirements for PC and Mac users. Three small images on the right show people interacting with a computer screen.

www.IllinoisLegalAid.org

Please join us for a free online training

Website Navigator Training for Librarians

Join us for a Webinar on May 21

REGISTER NOW

Space is limited.
Reserve your Webinar Seat Now at:
<https://www1.gotometting.com/register/408650736>

This webinar will educate librarians on the free legal resources available online at www.IllinoisLegalAid.org. Participants will learn the features of the website and how to assist their patrons in accessing the legal information which they seek. The webinar also includes a brief explanation of the legal services delivery system in Illinois and ethical considerations when providing legal information to the public.

Title: Website Navigator Training for Librarians
Date: Thursday, May 21, 2009
Time: 1:00 PM - 2:30 PM CDT

System Requirements
PC-based attendees
Required: Windows® 2000, XP Home, XP Pro, 2003 Server, Vista
Macintosh®-based attendees
Required: Mac OS® X 10.4 (Tiger®) or newer

Please register by May 18 at ...
<https://www1.gotometting.com/register/408650736>

Slide 7

The Illinois group adds that it is also important to note that when they go through the planning process, they "sell" librarians on the concept by offering them a complete set of materials for the centers, whether library-based or courthouse-based, which are personalized for each county, including a county-specific front page. The goal is to make it as easy as possible for the libraries to make this resource available to their patrons and, at the same time, to provide training and support to the librarians. They want these local people, the librarians, the judges and the circuit clerks to "own" the site to ensure that people are being referred to it from as many locations as possible. In the planning, they typically include as a planning committee the presiding or chief judge, the circuit clerk, the public library director, someone from the local domestic violence victim advocates, some legal aid representative and sometimes a member of the local bar association. They want to ensure that these people are aware of what's going on and that they are communicating with one another about the legal self-help center. The materials that they provide libraries and the judges and circuit clerks include signs that remind patrons what the librarians can and cannot do and a brochure about preparing for self-representation in court. They also provide training and training materials for the librarians and circuit clerks even when the center is located in the libraries. They want everyone to know what the centers can provide and what they cannot provide. As part of the continuing support, they have also instituted a regular update to navigators and librarian/navigators using a list serv. to keep them current on the changing resources available from Illinois Legal Aid Online and to re-enforce the role of the legal self-help center to provide legal information, not legal advice, to the people who use it.

Minnesota Collaboration Examples

Minnesota has been active in PL/ATJ via:

- Professional Library Associations
- Court, Legal Aid, Volunteer Attorneys
- Public Library/Law Library Connections
- State Library and State Law Library Support

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Minnesota has been very active in collaborations and access to online legal information. Players have included the range shown on this slide.

These slides show many of the projects done for outreach. The slides contain hot links to key Minnesota-created resources. We hope you'll have time to explore the hot-linked resources outside this presentation.

This focuses on a few stories of collaborative efforts in Minnesota.

1. County Law Library/Public Library staffing collaborations – e.g. Washington County, Dakota County. [Brian Huffman]
2. Minnesota Legal Services Coalition – past and planned collaborations with public libraries [John Freeman]
3. 2004 Gates Grant for Public Library training in online legal information [Mary Ann Van Cura, 3-6, as time permits]
4. Grants for Content Creation - Federal LSTA grants, administered by State Library agency, were awarded to county law libraries working in partnership with state courts and mn legal services coalition.
5. Map of Open-to-the-Public Libraries (Planned) – State Library Services is collaborating with the Dept of Education's IT division to create an interactive GIS map of open-to-the-public libraries (i.e. public, county law, depository libraries whether in public, academic, or law libraries.
6. Champions make all the difference.

MN Professional Library Assns

- MLA (MN Library Association) Conference
 - Programs on self-help legal resources (for librarians)
 - [Access to Justice for All: The Public Library Role](#)(2009)
- MALL (MN Association of Law Libraries)
 - Core list of [Legal Resources for Public Libraries](#)
 - “Locating Legal Information on the Web”,
[workshops and curriculum](#) (2004 Gates grant)-for PL staff, grant from MN State Library Services/Gates Foundation
 - Legal Research Institute (LRI)—annual, open training
 - [Outreach Committee](#) positioned to develop and centralize legal resources for public librarians

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This slide illustrates:

*Collaborations across library associations – MLA supported MALL members/ law librarians in presenting on legal topics. Click to view an excellent powerpoint presentation from 11/2009.

*Collaborations between MALL + Public Libraries + State Library agency (Gates grant-funded workshops) – the State Library administered funds and promoted to library staff, MALL found members willing to develop the workshop materials, MALL found members willing to train at 13 locations around state, public libraries provided workshop locations and promoted to library staff.

*Importance of champions – things happen in Minnesota because there are individuals who work on there are certain names that come up regularly -- people who regularly look for ways to support public library staff in serving the legal needs of the public.

MN Collaboration with Courts, Legal Aid & Attorney Volunteers

- Court Self-Help Workstation program-- in 6 public libraries, some county law libraries, and all county courthouses
- Training by staff of mncourts.gov/ and LawHelpMN.org for public librarians
- Pro Bono Clinics - coordinated by the county law librarian, hosted in public library or county law library
- Legal Info sessions for public, arranged by county law librarian, hosted in public library or county law library

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These collaborations include state courts, legal aid, county law libraries, and public libraries.

LSTA grant awards to Ramsey and Dakota co law libs. Dakota's grant for content on the court self help website; Ramsey's grant for Md Mn Legal Svc development of interactive legal forms (more like letters and correspondence and not court forms). Both grants included training for public librarians; both grants include funds to place court pro se workstations in public libraries. The forms are powered by LawHelp Interactive as are the Illinois forms shared above.

State Library and Federal Grants Reward Partnerships, Build Content

- Federal LSTA Grants administered by MN State Library Services for **content development** of Access to Justice Materials, awarded to :
 - Dakota County Law Library + MN State Court - grant for development of materials on state court self-help website - mncourts.gov
 - Ramsey County Law Library + Mid-Minnesota Legal Assistance – grant for development of interactive legal forms - health care directive, power of attorney, stop collection, security deposit, third party child custody (in development)

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=collaboration of state court, a legal aid coalition, law librarians, state library agency, federal LSTA dollars (IMLS)

With reduced staff and resources, the state court system, legal aid, and law librarians saw the need to make it easier for the public to find understandable information and help themselves. Minnesota State Library Services and its federal LSTA grant committee recognized the value of the proposed new online content and the value of the partnership between the county law libraries and courts and/or legal aid. Self-help materials are available now. Interactive forms are in development (as of 1/2010).

Minnesota continues to create valuable forms and contents for its statewide website. The materials created are shared with the public at large using the statewide website. From the website anyone with an internet connection can create the stop collection letters, power of attorneys, etc. Some people access the forms in libraries, some of them access them from court kiosks, and others access them from home or work.

MN Public Library/Law Library Connections

- Public libraries have: space, hours, resources, staff, computers, Internet access
- County law librarians/libraries may:
 - Train public library (PL) staff in their county
 - Train the public directly in PL computer labs
 - Support the AskLawLibn feature on PL websites
 - Assess PL's collection, advise on development
 - Pay for self-help books - PL handles circulation
- State Law Library provides legal resources

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Public libraries are natural meeting places and places where the community naturally goes to look for assistance. They are designed to have access to online computers that serve as gateways to the internet. In addition, they also have meeting rooms that the community can use, and staff that is available to help find information. Many public libraries have speaker events and they welcome legal issues and experts to be part of their speaker series.

MN Public Library/Law Library Connections –
Collaborative Staffing Models

- Exploration of collaborative staffing models
 - Embed a law librarian, from county law library, in the public library (Dakota county)
 - Place a law librarian, who is a public library employee, in the county law library to manage it (e.g. Washington, Carver, Scott counties)
 - Note: MN county law libraries are statutory entities (MnStat 134A) and must be located in county courthouses and governed by county law library boards
 - Start small! Dakota county started with a “hotline” and small collection in the nearby public library

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One way to enhance public access to legal information and to trained assistance is via collaboration between public libraries and county law libraries.

Formal agreements are essential – between public libraries and county commissioners, etc. Expectations, legal requirements, and cost assignments must be clear.

More detail on Dakota County Progression toward collaborative staffing model:

Self-help and law librarian assistance provided to public in law library inside county courthouse.

Added: Hot line in public library, with small print collection and with terminal for access to online legal database. Law librarian readily available by phone.

Later: Full-time law librarian, who reports to county law library and is paid by county law library, works in a branch of the local public library.

Later: Public library staff benefit from interaction with embedded law librarian. Can answer increasing number of questions on their own.

MN Collaborations - Networking

- State Library Services invited local law librarian to blog on legal resources for public/librarians -- [Legal Reference and "Do It Yourself" Resources \(Guest Blogger, Sara Galligan\)](#) (BlogJunction Minnesota)
- Guest blog invite led to sharing of new guide -- ["Self-Help Legal Resources—A Guide for Minnesota Public Librarians"](#)
- Map of Open-to-the Public Libraries
- Numerous efforts to work with public librarians are coalescing around more achievable outcomes, with more parties coming forward for widespread planning and implementation

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Map of Open-to-the-Public Libraries – State Library Services is collaborating with the Dept of Education's IT division to create an interactive GIS map of open-to-the-public libraries (i.e. public, county law, depository libraries whether in public, academic, or law libraries.

Queens Library – Enrich Your Life

- 4th largest public library in US in terms of size of collections
- One Central Library and 62 Community Libraries
- 7 Adult Learning Centers
- >23 million items circulated (#1 in the US) in FY 2009
- >15 million customers visited a Queens Library location
- >28,000 programs attended by > 500,000 customers
- 3.6 million daily unique visitors to our web pages

Twitter & FriendFeed • Marketing the House Brand • On Stieg Larsson

LIBRARY JOURNAL

June 22, 2009 | Volume 135 No. 12 | ISSN 0361-0177 | \$6.00


Queens Library

Library of the Year 2009

SHUE 13

A huge potential

The Community We Serve - Queens



- 2,293,007 people per 2008 data from the US Census
- 10th in Population among U.S. Counties
- 1st in Asian Indians, Bangladeshis, Pakistanis, Ecuadorians, and Greek Speakers
- 2nd in Koreans, Colombians, Italians Speakers.
- 3rd in Speakers of Chinese, Russian, Polish, Hebrew and Hungarian
- 47.4% of total population foreign-born
- 54.9% Speak a Language other than English at home
- 160 languages spoken, in addition to English, representing 190 ethnic groups

Source: 2007 American Community Survey & 2000 U.S. Census

Slide 16

Scope of the challenge

QL Collaboration Examples:
--The Services...



The top 10 law topics of interest to our customers:

- Immigration & Citizenship
- Legal Forms
- Free Legal Advise
- Finding and Hiring a Lawyer
- Self-Representation
- Court System (Small Claims Court)
- Starting Small Business
- Bankruptcy
- Tenant Landlord Issues
- Writing Your Own Will

The most frequently used websites:

- www.lawhelp.org/NY
- www.NYcourts.gov
- www.gpoaccess.gov
- www.loc.gov/law
- www.plol.org
- www.getlegal.com
- www.justicelearning.org

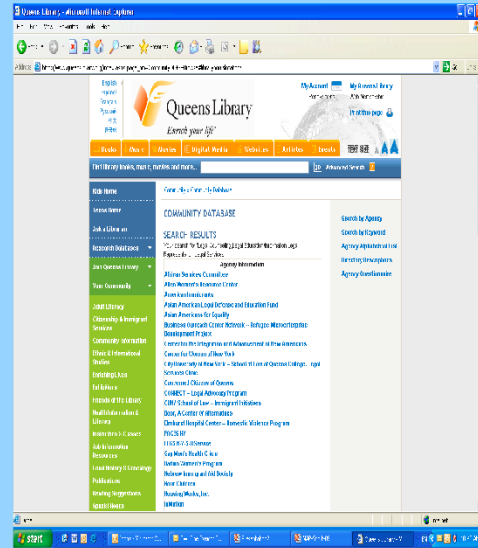
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What patrons need and want.

QL Collaboration Examples:



- Collaborated with more than 200 local organizations, agencies, Queens library has created and maintained this database.
- These organizations provide various services to the residents of Queens
- There are a total of 78 organizations, agencies are related to legal assistance categories.
- The search can be by service offered, location, target group, language, ethnic groups, zip code or just key word.
- The result includes name, address, telephone/fax #, website, alternative contact information, description, hours, eligibility requirements, service offered, language etc.



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A collaborations base already in existence.

QL Collaboration Examples:

--Other Online Information


(by foreign languages – WorldLinQ)

Queens Library's WorldLinQ is the revolutionary international electronic resource.

WorldLinQ™ provides scholarly and popular multilingual web resources to our customers worldwide. It has compiled and maintained by a team of specialist librarians with expertise in their language fields;

WorldLinQ™ currently has eleven language modules including Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, Croatian, Czech, French, Korean, Romanian, Russian, Spanish, and Ukrainian. More language modules are under development.

Providing excellent international electronic resources to our world-wide customers is the goal of WorldLinQ™.



QL Collaboration Examples:

--The Programs/Outreach Activities


(The New American Program)

The New Americans Program of Queens Library serves residents of Queens whose primary language is not English.

The program works closely with ethnic community organizations and community libraries to assess local needs, link residents with existing neighborhood and system-wide library services, and create new services, programs and outreach activities.

Examples:

NYCourts; NYCACCESS



Queens Borough Public Library
New Americans Program
*in collaboration with Asian Americans for Equality
and Korean Immigrant Services of New York*
present

Program to Korean

A free workshop in Korean

U.S. Citizenship: The Road to Mainstream Society

Topics:

- Citizenship
- To be or not to be (benefits to becoming a U.S. citizen)
- 21st Century Future of U.S. Immigration

Speakers:

Margaret Chin
Mayor, BROOKLYN DISTRICT
NEW YORK CITY GOVERNMENT

Sok H. Kang
Executive Director
Korean Immigrant Services of New York

Susie Kim
Assistant to Mayor

Tuesday, November 16
6:00 p.m.
Flushing Library
(Rooms A & B)
31-17 Main Street
718-259-1497

Admission is free.
Register on the web page:
in Korean: 212-312-3195, 212-312-3196
in English: 718-259-2602


**Public Library
of Queens
Room A & B
Flushing, NY
11355**

By order of the Queens Board of Education
By order of the Queens Board of Education

www.queenslibrary.org

-Please post on Korean side-

QL Collaboration
--The Next Steps...



- Videoclips on the web
- Free legal forms online
- Legal Librarian/Law Library
- Staff training
- Partnership/stakeholder
- Law at the Library
- Programs/Outreach activities
- Pamphlets and bookmarks

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What they will build next.

LawHelp.org/NY

Collaborations/trainings with public and court libraries

- Public libraries have public access computers—making libraries a key location for information about the LawHelp/ NY website
- We have targeted trainings to librarians who are often on the front line of questions regarding legal problems
 - We have trained hundreds of public library (PL) staff in the following large libraries:
 - Queens Library System
 - Brooklyn Library System
 - Main Manhattan Library
 - Bronx Library Center

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The bar/legal aid partnering perspective in NY

LawHelp.org/NY

Collaborations/trainings with public and court libraries (cont.)

- And staff of smaller city and county libraries including:
Pioneer Library System, Penn Yann Public Library, Buffalo & Erie County Public Library, Buffalo Central Library, Onondago County Library, Wood Library, Guilderland Public Library, etc.
- Collaborations with the Office of Court Administration:
 - We led a training for Law Librarians throughout the state, held at the NYS Judicial Institute
 - In court houses throughout New York State, LawHelp.org/NY & CourtHelp.org are jointly promoted on big posters in English & Spanish
 - Trainings to key civil society organizations such as religious institutions
 - Promotion of jointly produced (with legal services community) D.I.Y. A2J resources

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LawHelp.org/NY

[Collaborations/trainings with public and court libraries \(cont.\)](#)

- Other collaborative strategies include:
 - Links on public library websites and on other website serving large populations
 - Links on NYC's 311 website and on 211 websites serving upstate counties
 - Mailings with brochures and other information (We have already sent more than 1,000 mailings to state agencies and libraries)

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LawHelp.org/NY

Opportunities for future collaborations:

- Joint planning of outreach efforts re legal issues between legal service organizations, LawHelp/NY and library systems
 - Identifying problems
 - Setting goals and timetables
- Identifying more training and education opportunities
- Identifying key constituencies at the community level for targeted trainings—eg:
 - Focusing on top legal issues—foreclosures, bankruptcy and/or dealing with debt, domestic violence, immigration, etc.
 - Specific strategies to reach multilingual and LEP (limited English proficient) communities
 - Mining available data to target outreach, such as census figures, poverty data, prevalent language data, etc.

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For other ideas that come up



The California law libraries have a collaborative service to answer questions by reference librarians throughout the state. Local library websites provide a link.



The California courts have added this link to their self-help website. That website gets over 7 million views each year and the volume of requests for information from the libraries increased substantially once the link was added. This provides the opportunity to users to get information that is not addressed, or that they cannot find on the website.

If your court has a self help webpage (not all courts do) link to it. If they don't have a website for those without lawyers, ask that they provide one and volunteer to help them out what information to post on it and encourage them talk to your legal aid groups also. There is no point in creating duplicative websites.

Public Libraries and Access to Justice #8. Collaborations for Public Libraries



The screenshot shows a webpage titled "Get Help From The Librarian In Real Time With ASKNOW". The page is framed by a light blue border. The main content area is white and contains the following text:

**Get Help From The Librarian
In Real Time With ASKNOW**

AskNow's law librarian service lets you ask questions and get answers, in real time, right here on the Internet, from live law librarians throughout California. The AskNow law librarian service is available from the Los Angeles County Law Library :

**Monday 8 a.m.-5 p.m. & 6p.m.- 8 p.m.
Tuesday-Thursday 8 a.m. - 6 p.m.
Friday 8 a.m. - 5 p.m.
Live Reference staff are not available on Holidays**

When you click on the AskNow button on this page, the law librarian who answers your question may or may not be a librarian at your local law library. When the law librarian cannot answer your question by referring to free Internet resources, you may be referred to your local public law library. The law librarian expert service is not available at all times. If a law librarian is not available we recommend that you call or visit your county public law library.

It is unlawful for librarians to interpret legal information or advise an individual how the law might apply to one's situation. This kind of service would constitute the unauthorized practice of law. If you need further help to solve your legal problem, we recommend that you consult an attorney.

[About AskNow's law librarian service](#) [Participating Law Libraries](#) [Privacy Statement](#)

ASK NOW ⚡ Once you are connected, please do not use your "forward" or "refresh/reload" buttons on your browser, or you will be disconnected!!
If this is your first visit to our site:
You may be asked to accept a Meadco Security Certificate. You must accept this in order for our site to work for you. You will then be taken directly to our

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This is the webpage for the law librarian question page. It provides hours of operation and information about what services are available.

As your library partner if they have access to web chat platforms. If not, and you are in a legal aid program, contact Liz Keith at probono.net to find out if LiveHelp may be an option to increasing the success of finding legal information by the public at large.

Partnering Goals - 1

Library staff fully trained to assist SRL

- All library staff who have direct contact with SRLs have received training either in-person or online about their state's client (LawHelp) website.
- Library staff are familiar with the range of resources and referral information available from LawHelp sites, and feel confident about their ability to navigate the site on behalf of SRL.

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These next slides focus on the potential partnering goals that can be achieved.

They provide a checklist for partnerships to review how they are doing.

These seem like reasonable starting goals for libraries.

Partnering Goals - 1
Library staff fully trained to assist
SRL

- Library staff are knowledgeable about which Do-It-Yourself interactive legal resources are available in their State, and
- Library staff are able to assist SRLs in DIY Interview, or can advise SRL where to get help if needed.
- Library staff are able to advise SRL on where to find other self-help forms on their state's court website.

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Partnering Goals - 2 Content Comprehensive and Appropriate

- Know the public library's abilities and limits (staffing, budget, technology, computer policies, time limits, meeting rooms)
- Know abilities/limits for all partners (services, accessibility, budget, staffing)

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Know the public library's abilities and limits such as how the library is staffed as some libraries may not have reference staff with MLS degrees, may have to limit reference services, may have some restrictions or time limits on computer access, may have very limited budgets for computer upgrades and staff training, and will serve a very diverse group of patrons – only a small percentage will be there for legal reference. Don't unintentionally create unrealistic expectations of service.

Visit the library's website to see what resources are available, what policies and services are posted, and how the library presents online information to their patrons. Stroll through the building(s) to check out how the computers are laid out, if there is a separate computer lab open to the public, how busy it gets at the reference desk, and how the staff interacts with patrons.

The public librarians should also know what their partners or resources can do for patrons. Don't unintentionally promise services that your partner or resource cannot provide.

Partnering Goals - 2 Content Comprehensive and Appropriate

- Remember your patron base and their barriers (literacy, computer skills, fear of legal system, knowledge of court system)
- Be aware of broader issues (family problems, job situation, homelessness, mental health, stress)
- Be aware of social services and other services available for the broader issues

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Remember that your patrons have many barriers to information such as illiteracy or inability to speak English. They may have emotional barriers, such as fear of the legal system or court system, lack of knowledge about the court system, or distrust of authority. Other barriers can include lack of transportation to the courts, physical or mental disabilities, inability to find a babysitter for children, or inability to risk job loss by taking time off to go to the courthouse during business hours.

Be aware of broader issues that can distract the patron, such as family problems, job problems, homelessness, mental health issues, and stress. In their daily interactions with the public, librarians are aware of many of these issues. Librarians have dealt with young children left to fend for themselves at the library for days on end because the parent(s) could not afford day care, a situation that is especially prevalent during summer vacation and school breaks. Public libraries have experienced homeless people attempting to live in the library, washing their clothes in the library restrooms, attempting to store their belongings on unused shelves, and so on.

Be aware of social service agencies and government programs that can help patrons deal with their broader issues. One patron spent about forty minutes insisting that there were drug tunnels connecting her house to underground drug caves beneath Lake Erie, her house was under surveillance by various gangs and government agencies, and so on. Eventually she quieted down and said that she was seeing a therapist but had gone off her medications, and was upset because she was being evicted. Since her immediate need was the eviction, we referred her to the Tenants Organization, and also 211 First Call for Help, in case she needed emergency housing as well as further assistance with her medications and mental health issues.

Partnering Goals - 2 Content Comprehensive and Appropriate

- Bobby-Friendly How to do Everything E-Z in a Nutshell for Complete Idiots and Dummies using Nolo Press and other law for the layperson examples of Plain English (Sphinx Publishing, Everything Series, West Nutshell series, Alpha Publishing, Wiley, Nolo Press)

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Bobby-Friendly websites and law-for-the-layperson publishers can be great resources for library patrons. A list of publishers is available as a handout.. Nolo Press has many excellent plain English law books, but be aware that some are state-specific and should only be used for those states. The Nolo Press books tend to be generic, but they are readable and informative.

Partnering Goals - 3 Libraries Integrated into Marketing of Access

- Be in the room when planning occurs
- Know your patrons and how to reach them
- Know your partners and how to reach them
- Know your mutual goals and how you plan to achieve them
- Know about alternative resources

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It is of vital importance that public librarians be involved in planning programs or resources for public librarian patrons. Don't let others make assumptions about your library and its resources, including what is available in your collection. Because the assumption often is that every book ever published is always available, every court form is sitting at the reference desk for patrons to instantly pick up, every court form is a fill-in-the-blank form, and the librarians will fill it out for you and type your court documents! Know your Patrons – public libraries have many ways of marketing their programs and services to the public. Those same methods should be used to market legal resources and partnerships, by passing out bookmarks and flyers, through posters at the library, through interactions with staff and patrons at the reference and circulation desks, through local community events, by linking resources on the library home page, by designing library programs that showcase the partnerships or resources. Send some of those bookmarks and posters down to the local courthouse or legal aid office, or wherever your partners are located. Your partners should also provide website links to your library resources and materials. Know your partners and how to reach them – keep contact lists up-to-date, try to have face-to-face meetings with your contact people, be aware of what services they can offer, whether a real person answers the phone or if patrons will encounter a computerized phone tree, what time they are open (and closed) and alternative ways to contact them. Also have back-up services or agencies in case your primary resource or partner is not available. Government agencies and courts have limited services hours, are frequently closed on federal holidays, or may have to take furloughs because of budget considerations.

Partnering Goals - 3 Libraries Integrated into Marketing of Access

- Know what is going on in your community
- Listen – to patrons, to partners, to the community at large
- Utilize the “usual suspects” to deliver the message – reference or intake interview, bookmarks, table tents, website links, newsletters, library programs, news media, contests, book clubs, Friends groups

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Listen to your patrons, your partners, to the community at large. Is there a particular legal issue that is the hot topic in your community? Does the local court or legal aid office have information on the topic? Is another agency or organization available to provide information or services? The issues can be big or small, statewide or local.

The State of Ohio listened when the foreclosure crisis hit the state, and set up the Save the Dream program, with public libraries as the meeting places for participants. The program had statewide impact. Several years ago our patrons repeatedly asked for information about emancipation of minors and about expungement of criminal records, issues not covered on the Ohio Bar Association website at that time. We contacted the Bar Association and they were able to post articles on those topics on their public resources page. Although the issue started out as a local inquiry, posting the articles on a statewide resource gave it much greater impact.

Pass the word about legal resources and partnerships via the usual suspects discussed earlier, but also be cognizant of web-based methods, like Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, Twitter, and new methods as they develop. Pass out bookmarks and flyers at book clubs and book discussions, Friends of the Library meetings, job fairs, local newspapers and radio programs, senior centers, and other community gathering places.

Partnering Goals - 4
Libraries are Ready and Willing to do
Triage and Make Referrals

- Librarians have capacity to identify broad area of law
- Legal content is organized by substantive area of law and region
- Librarians are “natural” researchers

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This requires training that goes beyond knowing what content is where.

It requires an ability to know what areas of law may apply, who needs help, and where it is.

The referral portions of websites are a valuable tool, particularly lawhelp, since its referrals are by topic area.

Partnering Goals - 4
Libraries are Reading and Willing to do
Triage and Make Referrals

- Librarians can quickly identify best source of legal assistance based on the problem/issue presented by using online and other tools
- Ideas to streamline process (for example, adding lawhelp.org to favorites link, etc)

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Partnering Goals - 5

Libraries are Regarded as Potential Trainers for Other Components of Access System.

- Librarians can train users how to use the Internet and how (physically) to fill in online forms.
- Literacy programs for ESL students who have legal problems.
 - Cultural competency issues.

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One common barrier to self represented litigants who might be referred to online access tools to court forms, etc., is simply unfamiliarity with using computers, the Internet, and such things as interactive forms. Public libraries already train many users in these devices. Using online legal materials as samples in such training can be useful for those who are there because of legal needs. Such training should be based on hypothetical situations, not the users' own personal situations, thus avoiding giving legal advice, but care should be given in arranging such exercises. Consultation with law trained researchers and field testing can improve results.

Public libraries already refer English as a second language users to either their own literacy programs or programs supplied by other agencies. For users who have both legal problems and English language proficiency issues, public librarians can recommend literacy programs as helpful. In addition to training in regular grammar and vocabulary, exposure to linguistic representations of local cultural content, such as idioms and business jargon, improves comprehension for such litigants. In civil matters, exposure to American business culture is especially helpful. Within particular immigrant populations, there are also cultural differences with regard to family relations, property rights, and zoning, which can be noted in literacy training.

Partnering Goals - 5

Libraries are Regarded as Potential Trainers for Other Components of Access System.

- Libraries can host trainers such as law librarians and attorneys.
 - Teaching legal research.
 - Substantive law classes.
 - Training through videoconference.
- Chat room reference.
 - Bringing law libraries into the group.

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Librarians at public law libraries, especially in the larger metropolitan areas, sometimes hold classes for self represented litigants. Several have partnered with public libraries to make such presentations at public libraries. Public libraries have also partnered with local bar associations, who will supply attorneys for short courses at the libraries in substantive law areas, such as getting a divorce, landlord-tenant problems, consumer protection, and immigration cases. One under-utilized technology in this regard is videoconferencing. Many courthouses, and indeed, some large law firms, already have videoconferencing facilities, which with planning could be hooked up with those available at public libraries.

If your public library is already using chat room reference services, such as Question Point, and there are public law libraries within your state, consider bringing those libraries into the group that is servicing the chat room reference service. The Southern California Library Cooperative works with several California county law libraries to provide law reference for part of the day.

Partnering Goals - 6

Libraries are Included in Planning for Access to Justice

Types of organizations:-

- Commissions on Access to Justice
- Task Forces on Self-Represented Litigants
- Legal Aid Planning Groups/including participating in legal aid surveys of need
- Local court committees

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Each state has an access to justice commission. Try to find out who the members are, and get to know them. Ask your legal aid contacts to share information with the library on those groups and the projects they are working on. Sometimes there are openings to join a commission. When such opportunities arise, get involved. In addition, legal aid groups also do routine needs assessment. Ask Legal Aid to include you in the surveys they do to determine what needs the public presents. A good person to talk may be the legal aid litigation director or an executive director.

See separate PowerPoint #7 on these Commissions and equivalent bodies.

Partnering Goals - 6
Libraries are Included in Planning for
Access to Justice

Approaches

- Identify your issues of particular interest
- Reach out to members of your state team
- Identify members and staff of the groups you're interested in – reaching out to key members
- Submit feedback to the statewide websites

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Conclusion

- Partnering take work
- Partnering takes commitment
- Partnering has huge payoff

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