Infrastructure & Innovation Examples

Legal Aid Infrastructure & Innovation Grants are available to nonprofit organizations that provide civil legal services to indigent persons, and are to be used to support the infrastructure and innovation needs of legal services in civil matters for indigent persons. This is an opportunity to strategically expand service delivery systems. Applicants are encouraged to utilize funds to expand the scope and effectiveness of their work.

The examples below are intended to provide applicants with ideas, but do not represent an exhaustive list of what is allowable. Some examples could be classified as both infrastructure and innovation. Please use this information as a starting point and feel free to incorporate infrastructure and/or innovation ideas that are not listed.

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1. Infrastructure: Similar to capacity building, infrastructure refers to foundational elements that help a nonprofit reach new levels of operational, programmatic, financial, or organizational maturity, so it may more effectively and efficiently advance its mission into the future. Infrastructure projects may include planning, governance, staffing, evaluation, financial management, legal accountability, communications, administrative functions, and technology. Infrastructure can also include leveraging relationships to access resources, exchange ideas, address shared issues, and collectively problem-solve in an effort to build capacity, both for a nonprofit and for the broader network, with the common goal of addressing pressing social concerns.[1]

The ABA Standing Committee on Legal Aid and Indigent Defense, promulgated new [Standards for the Provision of Civil Legal Aid](#) ("ABA Standards") to provide broad aspirational principles to guide nonprofit legal aid organizations in providing ethical and efficient services to low income constituencies. We encourage programs to use the Standards to identify organizational needs. Think about proposed infrastructure projects from the perspective of how the grant funds will address any current impediments that are preventing your organization from meeting important Standards that are critical to the effective accomplishment of your mission. Organizations should also consider the overlap between infrastructure and innovation projects.

EXAMPLES

Strategic and Community Planning: Projects might focus on organizational strategic planning, facilitating long-term community visioning, developing regional growth plans, or engaging community partners in planning efforts, such as for shared training programs, or to establish recruitment pools, or joint community outreach or client intake. Community or regional planning might also include fostering government agency or community partnerships in order to serve the community more effectively. Regional or statewide programs may support systemic infrastructure development to lift the sector.
   ● Standard 4.1 provides that a legal aid organization should interact with the individuals it serves as well as other groups serving similar client communities to identify compelling needs and to implement plans. Infrastructure development can

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[1] Adapted from the [National Council of Nonprofits](#).

include collaborative planning to engage clients, community partners, funders, and other stakeholders in addressing a particular issue area, either regionally or statewide.

- Create joint intake systems and collaborative delivery systems, for example, modeled after the SF Tenant Right to Counsel Program or the Stay Housed LA project.
- Identify creative solutions to establishing a brick and mortar presence in the community being served (e.g., purchasing a building to avoid being priced out, and leasing available space to other community partners and grassroots organizations).

Staff Development and Governance: Projects might focus on ensuring staff members are qualified to operate effectively in their roles, or improving project management. These capacities might address morale issues, or help programs to create staff development plans to create a career ladder that will inspire and retain staff. While infrastructure often is associated with long-term solutions, the values identified in the ABA Standards reference the importance of responding to the needs of client communities. Infrastructure changes can inherently support both long-term and immediate improvements.

- Standard 4.5 recognizes the importance of retaining a diverse workforce that mirrors the communities and individuals they serve (recruiting, establishing pipelines or mentorships, or otherwise ensuring board and staff makeup incorporate critical perspectives of people with lived experience).
- Develop policies related to diversity, equity, and inclusion, that ensure an organization's stated values around equity are reflected not only externally, but internally as well.
- Conduct a salary and classification review to inform a living wage salary structure and improve staff retention.
- Standard 2.2 notes the importance of effective leadership that maintains a shared sense of vision and mission and models teamwork, transparency, excellence and innovation and a commitment to and achievement of the organization's goals and objectives. To that end, projects might include success planning, leadership training and development.

Technology: ABA Standard 4.10 provides that organizations should utilize technology to support efficient operations and the provision of high-quality and responsive services. Technology has the power to increase efficiencies and leverage resources. Lack of adequate technology can have the opposite effect of impeding organizational effectiveness. Technology projects may be to support the organization as a whole, such as to update computer hardware or software, improve internet access or enhance social media, or it can directly enable program services.

- Conduct a technology audit and upgrade, including an accessibility audit and accessibility improvements.
- Purchase computer equipment and/or upgrade internet to enable remote hearing and clinic sites.
- Purchase home printers and scanners for remote workers during COVID to ensure office procedures are not disrupted.
- Purchase or upgrade software related to staff training, financial management, or human resources.

- Incorporate website language translation services to improve accessibility.
- Enhance internet security, including policies for advocates working remotely or in a hybrid work environment; data privacy and security; email encryption for enhanced security.

Support Evaluation through Better Tracking and Use of Data: Standard 4.11 provides that a legal aid organization should regularly evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of its operations and infrastructure. Projects might focus on improving case management systems to enable data-informed decisions; developing processes to collect, manage, and analyze data; or training staff on software and/or evaluation skills.
- Acquisition or development of case management software for purposes of collecting, analyzing and reporting services and outcomes.
- Develop an evaluation methodology and approach that identifies ongoing improvement opportunities related to serving clients.

Other Ideas?
The above are some ideas to feed your own creative thinking. How could funds support your infrastructure and make your organization more effective? We welcome ideas on how funds can be used to increase not only individual organizational effectiveness, but also the larger legal aid delivery system.

Restrictions: Infrastructure funding is not available for projects to pay construction costs or defray personnel costs of existing programs and services.

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2. Innovation: Innovation is not necessarily a new project. It could be an expansion project, or improvements to a unique service delivery model. Innovations in legal aid change the affordability, accessibility, or effectiveness of practices or tools used to provide high-quality legal assistance to low-income persons. This can include approaches for using technology or partnerships in legal services delivery; enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of existing technologies or partnerships so that they may be better used to increase the quality and quantity of services to clients; or replicating, adapting, or providing added value to the work of prior technology projects or partnerships. Innovation efforts can be applied to programs, products or devices, partnerships, communications, or operating processes. Innovation results in improvements to service delivery, quality of legal work, and managerial practices. Innovations often incorporate technology, but can also be reflected in partnerships, service delivery models, or frameworks.[2]

Innovation will mean different things to different organizations and there are no limits to the ways in which service delivery can be improved with innovation. There are a number of resources for ideas about innovation in legal aid, including the LSNTAP, LSC TIG Program, LSC Pro Bono Innovations, and the ABA Standards.

SAMPLE INNOVATION AREAS AND PROJECTS[3]

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[2] Adapted from PATH per Boston Consulting Group and Legal Services Corporation Technology Initiative Grant Program.
[3] Several samples are from LSC TIG Program and LSNTAP.

Re-envisioning Service Delivery in a Remote Environment: COVID has changed the office and the dynamics of interaction. The new ecosystem can be leveraged for a more efficient delivery model. Remote hearings are going to continue, and clients can now be served effectively through videoconference.

- Create an online intake and legal service delivery model which enables legal aid to provide legal representation remotely to hard-to-reach populations, or populations impacted by COVID.
- Leverage tools (e.g., InTune or online forms) for management in a remote work environment.
- Use tools (e.g., Laylaw) that provide automated document assembly, eSign, remote intake, and knowledge management for legal aid administration.

Document Assembly

- Create a comprehensive document assembly program to automate forms for a given practice area, with the potential expansion into other practice areas.
- Integrate document assembly and case management software to produce user-friendly client and court documents.
- Support a document assembly platform used by multiple legal aid providers, to help self-represented litigants, legal aid and pro bono lawyers, and self-help programs to create high-quality online forms for free.
- Conduct an assessment of the effectiveness and efficiency of the Microsoft Office365 application in delivering legal services, and developing customized programs, including ribbons, toolbars, and document assembly templates in Microsoft Word to improve legal services delivery standards and increase program efficiency.

Intake & Workflows

- Conduct an assessment to identify potential improvements in applicant-intake workflows and related technologies, which will enable people to more easily access legal services.
- Add new features to case management and online intake systems, including secure text messaging to share information and for the online intake process (bolstered by machine learning), or adding analytics to gather data about time spent on applications and eligibility determinations.
- Implement mobile-first web designs (e.g., allow subject matter experts to update content, help people understand the nature of their legal problem, improve the accuracy of referral information across platforms, and support scaling and modifications as community needs and service delivery methods evolve).
- Develop an online triage system to provide applicants with targeted legal results at any time of day (e.g., using Guided Navigation and the Knowledge Resource Library in LegalServer to make resources available via the web and by text in multiple languages).
- Use tools (e.g. Microsoft Power Automate) to streamline intake and workflow processes.

Accessibility

- Partner to increase website accessibility (e.g., creating short videos to guide users to more robust content, making homepages mobile-friendly, and ensuring that documents are accessible to the visually impaired).
- Create a messaging platform that allows program staff attorneys to communicate with limited English proficiency clients in multiple languages.

Pro Bono: Technology can be utilized to increase the quantity of pro bono support for legal aid and to innovative new ways. The [LSC Pro Bono Innovations](#) project lists numerous pro bono innovations on its website.
- Develop successful legal aid and private tech sector collaborations. Specific areas of focus could include onboarding and training, quality assurance, serving rural communities, etc.
- Integrate a case management system with a pro bono referral system to better match pro bono attorneys with cases.
- Create a regional hub for volunteer attorneys access pro bono opportunities and take cases
- Involve corporate counsel and in-house departments in pro bono (e.g., the [Bay Area Corporate Pro Bono Co-op](#) includes Symantec, HP and Apple legal and other legal departments in recruiting, training and staffing clinics).

Staff Training and Supervision: What are the implications for regional/statewide training now that staff are accustomed to Zoom webinars? Remote communications have widespread implications for increasing staff development and training opportunities at low cost
- Build remote meetings/task forces to help create a "movement" for legal aid.
- High level statewide training curriculum to lift the entire sector. For example, programs can develop training "ladders" so that advocates statewide can follow a progression of skill development in given substantive areas.

Supporting Self-Represented Litigants: Technology has vastly changed the landscape of tools available to support self-represented litigants. With efficient use of both new and old technologies, pro se assistance can be provided at scale. and with a greater likelihood of reaching clients.
- Building smartphone technology into the delivery system, including instant messaging and chat bots to support clients.
- Use accessibility tools effectively (e.g. utilizing tools such as ReadClearly, WriteClearly that help translate complex legal terms into plain language, or assess and improve the readability of webpages).
- Develop a series of self-help consumer law tools for users with debt-related legal problems (e.g. this could include a garnishment calculator, a tool to help identify possible claims, defenses and exempt income, resources on common consumer questions, and an automated interactive answer form to make it easier for self-represented litigants to respond to lawsuits).
- Expand a self-help bankruptcy platform to empower users to send letters to debt collectors, file complaints with the Consumer Bankruptcy Protection Bureau, assess eligibility for student loan discharge, and educate themselves about

consumer law issues.

Service Delivery Models: Service delivery can be enhanced through the use of technology, program development or enhanced partnerships.
- Multi-organization models such as Right to Counsel programs where one organization is the point of intake and then refers to other organizations in their collaboration.