

**LEGAL SERVICES CORPORATION
TIG FINAL EVALUATION REPORT**

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I. Project Goals and Objectives

The Project Goal was to develop and publish on the statewide Pro Se website legal information, guided interviews and form templates (created with A2J author and Hotdocs technologies) that enable pro se litigants to more easily and effectively represent themselves in their particular civil legal matters. The specific objectives were to:

- 1) Create and publish on the statewide Pro Se website guided interviews and form templates (using A2J author and HotDocs) that enable pro se litigants to easily produce accurate pro se pleadings. Produce 6 guided interviews and 7 interactive forms in the following substantive law areas: Small Claims, Wills and Powers of Attorney; Public Benefits, and Divorce/Custody; and
- 2) Create and publish on the statewide pro se website substantive legal information and guidance materials that enable pro se litigants to effectively identify and file the automated forms identified in Objective 1 that appropriately address their particular legal needs. Publicize availability of new content to users of the statewide Pro Se website and other partners.

While there were no significant changes in the goals during the course of this project, the final group of forms did change. This occurred as a result of community feedback and lower costs than expected to produce the automated forms and accompanying legal information materials. Ultimately, we created final group of forms and legal information materials in the areas of public benefits; consumer matters; landlord/tenant matters; and family/child support. A list of forms is provided in section IV below.

II. Evaluation Data and Methodologies

The approved evaluation plan had three major ways to assess the project's accomplishments, and there were few changes from that plan. For evaluation of the automated form interviews, we assessed quarterly LHI usage data to determine the number of interviews started and the number of documents produced overall and for each individual interview. We also obtained

user feedback through a survey that was attached to all interviews on LHI (not posted until June 2013; 13 LHI users have responded to date) and through user feedback emails to LHI (we have received approximately 80). We also received user feedback about the usability and usefulness of available materials through a survey on the Michigan Legal Help website; approximately 220 website users have completed that survey. Finally, phone interviews were conducted with self-help center navigators from Oakland, Oscoda, Wayne, and Kent County about their perceptions of users' ability to effectively and easily find and complete the forms, and suggestions for modifying existing forms. These interviews were conducted during the week of June 24, 2013.

Similar methods were used to assess the accomplishments of the project's second objective, which was to create legal information materials (articles, common questions, and procedural instructions) to supplement the automated interviews. To evaluate these materials, we looked at Google Analytics data from the statewide pro se website showing the number of page views of toolkits (which contain Articles, Common Questions, and Procedural Instructions) related to these topic areas. We looked at survey data from website users regarding the usability and usefulness of available materials, and identification of additional materials to enhance the website; as of 9/12/13, approximately 222 website users have completed that survey. Finally, during the phone interviews with self-help center navigators from Oakland, Oscoda, Wayne, and Kent County, we asked their perceptions of users' ability to effectively and easily understand the content on the website related to this project and suggestions for modification to existing content or additions.

III. Summary of Major Accomplishments, Recommendations and Future Steps:

This project was successful in broadening the impact of the Michigan Legal Help website for low-income and self-represented people in Michigan. Specifically, with this TIG:

- We created online interviews to help self-represented people more easily and effectively complete the forms they need to represent themselves in civil legal matters.
 - Output: Seven automated interviews were created that help users complete 17 different forms or documents in the areas of housing law, public benefits law, family law, and consumer law. A list of the interviews is included below in section IV.
 - Usage: As of September, 2013, website visitors began these interviews 4,401 times and compiled 1,423 sets of documents.
 - Feedback: Comments submitted through LHI and reports from Self-Help Center navigators reflected that users were completing the interviews with ease.

- We created legal information materials (articles, common questions, and procedural checklists) to help self-represented people better understand the legal processes they will be doing with these forms.
 - Output: The legal information materials that were created filled six toolkits in the areas of housing law, public benefits law, family law, and consumer law.
 - Usage: Nearly six thousand individuals visited these toolkits between when they were launched and the end of September, 2013.
 - Feedback: From interviews with Self-Help Center Navigators, we learned that the checklists were often missed the first time visitors viewed a toolkit (though they were helpful once they viewed them) and that visitors read the common questions more often than the articles.

- Whenever we launched a new interview or toolkit on Michigan Legal Help, we wanted to let the public know about the new content. We did this outreach through our social media outlets (Twitter, Facebook, and Google+); by email updates to Self-Help Center navigators, legal services attorneys and other project partners; and through general website outreach throughout the state.

- This project was part of the larger work of building content on the Michigan Legal Help website during its first year of existence, and it enhanced the overall success of the website in its first year by nearly doubling the amount of content available to SRLs.

- This project greatly improved the quality of services available to clients, as the resources that were available prior to the existence of Michigan Legal Help were not always reliable, accurate, or user-friendly.

- This project solidified existing partnerships between the Michigan Legal Help Program and the State Court Administrative Office, and with the volunteer attorneys on the content review groups.

- Through this project we learned valuable lessons about how to work with A2J and HotDocs programmers more efficiently; how to gather more feedback from users, and creative ways to use A2J and HotDocs other than to complete forms. These lessons have helped us to make Michigan Legal Help an even better resource in 2013 and 2014.

IV. In-Depth Analysis of Accomplishments

The two primary project goals listed on the evaluation plan were achieved.

Guided Interviews – Objective 1

Guided Interviews: Output

With this TIG, we created seven guided interviews that helped users complete 17 forms/documents. These interviews are (with links to the landing pages on MLH):

- 1) [Request for Hearing \(Department of Human Services\) – including fact sheets for different possible reasons for denial/termination](#)
- 2) [Small Claims Complaint & Order](#)
- 3) [Motion and Order to Set Aside Default \(Landlord/Tenant\)](#)
- 4) [Answer to Complaint for Eviction to Recover Possession of Property \(including Affirmative Defenses and Counterclaims addenda\)](#)
- 5) [Answer to Complaint for Eviction from a Mobile Home Park \(including Affirmative Defenses and Counterclaims addenda\)](#)
- 6) [Motion & Order Regarding Child Support](#)
- 7) [Answer to Complaint on a Debt](#)

After we selected the forms to automate, a staff member was assigned to each and an RFP for the A2J/HD programming was developed. Several proposals were received in response to the RFP and a vendor was chosen.

Michigan Legal Help (MLH) staff developed each interview; for the most part, the court forms already existed and were approved by the State Court Administrative Office (SCAO). Only the Fact Sheets for the DHS interview and the Addenda for the eviction answers needed to be drafted by MLH staff. After drafting the interview questions and logic, and having them approved by the content manager of MLH, the drafts were reviewed by the appropriate legal content expert at the Michigan Poverty Law Program. MLH staff then worked with these content development experts to refine and modify the interviews to ensure they were completely legally accurate and effective. The drafts were then circulated to the appropriate Content Review Committee for additional review and comment. Content Review Committees consist of private attorneys and SCAO staff who practice regularly in a specific area of law and/or are considered highly qualified and knowledgeable in that area.

Draft interviews and SCAO-approved (or MLH –drafted) forms were then forwarded to our A2J/Hotdocs programmer, who created the templates and corresponding A2J interviews, and uploaded them to LHI. Testing and refinement was done initially by the MLH staff person who drafted the interview, and then additional testing was done by other MLH staff, including summer students. Some testing scenarios were created to ensure that all aspects of the interviews were tested, and at other times, testers created their own scenarios. Interviews in testing mode were also shared with Self-Help Center navigators who assisted in testing and

gave feedback. Working together, the MLH staff and A2J/HD programmer refined the interviews until everything was working as intended; then the interview was published to the Michigan Legal Help website along with a description of each interview and form. Whenever new interviews were published, this was publicized via social media (Facebook, Twitter, Google+) and via periodic news updates published on the website and circulated to Self-Help Center navigators and other project partners.

This project plan helped us to publish interviews that self-represented people in Michigan can use to learn more about their legal problems, and to complete the forms they need in order to move a case forward in court or respond to a case filed against them. Making the resources available is one way to measure success; another is to look at user statistics and feedback received from users and from self-Help Center navigators.

Guided Interviews: Usage

LHI Data

According to LHI statistics, by the end of September, 2013, website visitors began these interviews 4,401 times and compiled 1,423 sets of documents. Breakdown of each interview is below:

Interview	Interviews	Docs Generated	Date launched
Motion Regarding Support	2,427	489	6/2012
Small Claims Complaint	854	306	6/2012
Answer to Complaint on a Debt	708	405	12/2012
Request for Hearing (DHS)	233	140	12/2012
Answers to Eviction Complaint (combined Possession and Mobile Home Park Answers)	161	80	6/2013
Motion/Order to Set Aside Default (landlord/tenant)	18	3	6/2013

These data show that the interviews are being started in large numbers, and that some are being completed in large proportions (Answer to Civil Complaint and Request for Hearing) while others (Motion Regarding Support and Small Claims Complaint) are not. This could be because the former are defensive pleadings in suits started by others, and the latter are proactive and users may decide not to pursue the action and finish the interview. It could also be related to the complexity of these two interviews or the rate with which people aren't able to finish the interview because they aren't truly qualified. We will keep an eye on this and investigate further to make sure it is not due to an error in the interview, or it being too hard.

MichiganLegalHelp.org Analytics

We use Google Analytics to track traffic and activity on Michigan Legal Help.org. From this data we can tell how many times users have visited the landing page of each interview, as well as the legal information accompanying each interview (discussed below).

Interview landing page	Number of Visits as of 9/12/2013	Date launched
Motion Regarding Support	3,260	6/2012
Small Claims Complaint	1,698	6/2012
Answer to Complaint on a Debt	438	12/2012
Request for Hearing (DHS)	439	12/2012
Answers to Eviction Complaint: Recover Possession of Property	57	6/2013
Answer to Eviction Complaint: Mobile Home Park	26	6/2013
Motion/Order to Set Aside Default (landlord/tenant)	65	6/2013

Guided Interviews: Feedback

LHI Feedback

Occasionally we get email feedback from users through LHI related to these interviews:

- From the Small Claims Complaint interview: “Very helpful, time saving and easy to use. Good for us novice who have no idea where to even start. Thanks”
- From the Answer to Complaint on a Debt interview: “This was very helpful! Now I know what to do.”
- From the Answer to Complaint on a Debt interview: “yes, extremely helpful!!! thank you very much!!”

Post-Interview Survey

Of the 13 users who completed interviews and then completed our post-interview survey, only two were doing the interviews funded by this TIG. Those users reported that the interviews were “Very Easy” to complete, and found the interview to be “Very Helpful.” One user commented, “Your service was fantastic!” Because the survey wasn’t launched until June 2013, there haven’t been many responses yet.

Interviews with Self-Help Center Navigators

Through interviews with the Self-Help Center navigators, we learned three key points about the interviews created with this TIG:

- Of all the interviews affiliated with this grant, the Small Claims interview was the one most often used in the centers; navigators reported no one having problems using it or any of the other interviews funded by this TIG.
- Overall, once patrons got started on the interviews they did pretty well, with only minor questions about things, most often related to technical issues with retrieving the documents (email, saving, creating the log in, etc.).
- No navigators had received any feedback from court staff about the forms created using the interviews.

Legal Information Materials – Objective 2

Legal Information Materials: Output

With this TIG, we created numerous pieces of legal information content, including articles, common questions, and checklists of procedural instructions for users. These legal information materials went into building six toolkits for specific legal problems – I Need to Change or Get a Child Support Order; I Have a Small Claims Case; I’ve Been Sued in a Debt Collection Case; I Need to Appeal DHS’s Denial or Termination of My Benefits; I’m Being Evicted Because My Landlords Wants to Recover Possession of My Home; and I’m Being Evicted From a Mobile Home Park. The seventh interview (Motion to Set Aside a Default (Landlord/Tenant) doesn’t have its own toolkit, but is included in every toolkit related to eviction with an article explaining why a user might need it and how to use it. Not every piece of content in these toolkits was created specifically with TIG funding due to timing and repetition of some content items in multiple toolkits.

Toolkits, using a combination of articles, common questions, and checklists, are designed to help self-represented people who use a wide range of techniques to learn online – whether they want to read longer articles and learn general information; whether they want to read only short, direct questions to find the answers they seek, or whether they want no background legal information at all, and just want to know what to do after creating their forms. Because users have different needs and therefore utilize the information differently, we will focus on statistics related to the toolkits instead of each individual piece of content.

The legal information content funded by this project was drafted by content development staff, and then approved by the content manager of MLH. Then, drafts were reviewed by the

appropriate content expert at the Michigan Poverty Law Program to ensure they were completely legally accurate. All items of content go through two separate levels of review for plain language and to ensure they are written at a sixth grade reading level. The drafts were then circulated to the appropriate Content Review Committee for additional review and comment. Content Review Committees consist of private attorneys and SCAO staff who practice regularly in a specific area of law and/or are considered highly qualified and knowledgeable in that area. After final approval, the individual pieces of content are posted on the website and the toolkits are created. Making the resources available is one way to measure success; another is to look at website use statistics and feedback received from users and from Self-Help Center navigators.

Legal Information Materials: Usage

MichiganLegalHelp.org Analytics

We use Google Analytics to track traffic and activity on Michigan Legal Help.org. From this data we can tell how many times users have visited the toolkits containing the legal information accompanying each interview developed with this TIG. For this report, we are only sharing number of visits to the toolkits (with one exception) because each toolkit contains numerous articles, common questions, and the procedural instructions that a visitor might use to learn more about handling a civil legal problem. Users can access the forms through a toolkit, or directly through the forms landing page, so these numbers are different from the other report about forms. Also, some toolkits are launched with legal information only (before the interviews are launched).

Toolkit or Article	Number of Visits as of 9/12/2013	Date launched
I Need to Change or Get a Child Support Order	9,324	9/2012
I Have a Small Claims Case	1,469	1/2013
I've Been Sued in a Debt Collection Case	2,537	9/2012
I Need to Appeal DHS's Denial or Termination of My Benefits	56	12/2012
I'm Being Evicted Because My Landlords Wants to Recover Possession of My Home	1,841	11/2012
I'm Being Evicted From a Mobile Home Park	146	7/2013
Judgments in Eviction Cases article (in various toolkits; discusses setting aside a default)	466	12/2012

Legal Information Materials: Feedback

MichiganLegalHelp.org Survey

Since the launch of the website (8/17/12), approximately 222 people have started the user's survey on Michigan Legal Help. Because the survey doesn't ask about specific items of content on the website, it is useful only as a review of the website overall. Of users answering the survey, 75% found it to be Very, Moderately, or Slightly Helpful; 25% found it Not Helpful. 63% found some or all of the information they needed, while 37% did not find the information they needed. When asked whether the legal information they found was useful, 17% reported that it helped them understand their legal problem; 28% reported that it helped them to know what they need to do next to resolve their legal problem; 20% reported learning more about the law; only 9% reported that the legal information was too hard to understand or too general. (Users could select more than one option under this question.) Many survey respondents also left comments about the usefulness of materials, or requesting additional topics to be covered.

Interviews with Self-Help Center Navigators

Through interviews with the self-help center navigators, we learned two key points about the legal information that was created with this TIG:

- Sometimes people would forget to go back to the website to get the checklist to find out what to do next. But, once people do get them, they find the checklists helpful. This has led us to reconsider the layout of the toolkits so as to highlight the checklists.
- Many patrons go right to the interview without reading articles first, although many get help from navigators prior to reaching the interviews. For people who do read the legal information materials first, it is more common for people to read the common questions than the articles.

Outreach and Publicity

Whenever we launched a new automated interview or toolkit with legal information materials on Michigan Legal Help, we wanted to let people know that the new content was ready. We did this through a variety of methods:

- Postings on social media outlets Twitter, Facebook, and Google+
- Publishing periodic news articles on Michigan Legal Help (which people can follow via RSS feed)
- Email updates to Self-Help Center Navigator list serve
- Email updates to all legal services attorneys in Michigan
- Handouts at all outreach events listing toolkits and interviews available now, and those coming soon. Outreach events include presentations at community service organization

collaboration meetings; presentations at conferences to judges, friend of the court, and other court personnel; presentations at conferences to legal services attorneys; and others.

- General Michigan Legal Help website outreach was also done through distribution of PR materials (posters, flyers, business cards advertising the website) and through occasional press releases (at the launch, at the launch of each Self-Help Center; at the one-year anniversary of the website).

V. Factors Affecting Project Accomplishments

We are grateful that we only encountered relatively minor challenges when completing this project. The first set of challenges were due to the fact that when we began work on this TIG, it was at the same time we were beginning all content development for the website, and there were many learning curves. We weren't sure how to estimate cost or time needed to create automated interviews; how to work with programmers most effectively to create the interviews we envisioned; or how long it would take to move all of the legal information content through the fairly lengthy process of review.

While these challenges created frustration on the part of our staff and HD/A2J programmers, ultimately it did not adversely affect the outcome of the project. Additionally, when it appeared that content cost less to develop than originally anticipated, we were able to work with LSC to add another toolkit and interview to the list of items created with this TIG.

Two other challenges came from outside sources. One involved a controversy over how two court rules were interpreted, which impacted what one of the court forms looked like. We believed that the way the State Court Administrative Office interpreted the court rules and drafted the form was not the way that courts were interpreting the rules, which would lead to the outcome that the forms would not truly be helpful to self-represented litigants. The second outside challenge came from private attorneys in two sections of the state bar, who opposed our plans to make wills and powers of attorney available through the website. Again, we were able to work with LSC to select alternate forms and interviews to be created with this TIG.

A few factors that significantly enhanced our project's accomplishments were the highly skilled programmer and staff who worked tirelessly to test, and refine, and test the interviews again to be sure they worked properly. Several of the interviews are quite complex, and that benefit is also due to the skill and efforts of MLH staff and A2J/HD programmer.

VI. Strategies to Address Major Challenges

We used several strategies to overcome the challenges of being new to this work. Most importantly, we asked experienced people for assistance and guidance. From hiring a programmer, to designing a timeline, to realistic expectations, we got much help from staff at Illinois Legal Aid Online and from ProBono.Net. Our selected programmer, Steve Simon, was also helpful in guiding us how to best design interviews and test them. Webinars and trainings by PBN also helped us understand the logic behind the programs and how to design interviews. Through our own trial and error, we learned how to minimize major changes to the interviews after they have been programmed, and developed ways to effectively share testing results and necessary changes with programmers. These strategies were very effective in helping us to accomplish our goals, and to become more efficient in our work.

The strategies to address the external challenges were different. For the court form that we believed was inconsistent with court rules/practices, we reached out to staff at the State Court Administrative Office to discuss the differing views. We also consulted with the housing experts at Michigan Poverty Law Program who contributed to this discussion. What eventually happened was that the SCAO agreed to review and revise the court rule related to the process of setting aside a default in a landlord/tenant case, and make it clearer to courts that the form as drafted *is* adequate for the process. While that court rule change hasn't taken effect yet, we still programmed the interview to complete that form as drafted by SCAO, and in the supporting legal information content on the website, explained that some courts may ask for additional information, so that litigants would be prepared for that possibility.

The immediate challenge by the sections of the state bar that were opposed to the will and power of attorney content was resolved by working with LSC TIG staff to modify our project plan to substitute other content. However, we would like to create this content, so we are involved in a longer term strategy to resolve this through conversations with (and further education of) section members. We are also working on this in conjunction with other partners in the organized bar.

VII. Major Lessons and Recommendations

Through the challenges and through the evaluation process, we learned many lessons. We should have set up the post-interview survey earlier on in the process so we could get more feedback specifically about the interviews. We learned that users are having trouble getting back to the checklists after they do the interviews, and as a result are struggling with the procedural steps they need to follow. We are resolving that now by adding a cover sheet to the forms that are produced from the interview reminding users to return to a toolkit to get the checklist they need.

We learned many lessons about how to write our own interviews, and how to work with programmers to convey how we want them to interpret and create the interviews we have written. We learned that if we are going to get outside feedback on the interviews from substantive law experts, it is most efficient to do that before sending the interviews to be programmed. We have learned that using Google docs to track bugs discovered testing is an effective way to work with programmers (if the programmers are familiar and comfortable with Google docs). This works well because all testers can access the shared document, leaving testing scenario data for each test and also leaving notes and comments about any problems they found. This helps to track how many tests have been done and under what conditions, and also saves time communicating with the programmer, who can also review the docs and fix problems as they arise.

One other interesting lesson we learned was that interviews can be helpful for things other than completing forms. For the Appeal of a DHS's Termination or Denial of Benefits interview, the form that is created is very simple, and may not be needed by SRLs because the form is also available on the back side of the original notice of termination of benefits. In order to make the interview more useful, we created fact sheets based on several common reasons for termination or denial of benefits. Now, the interview can create the appeal form and/or one or more relevant fact sheets, and this information might be even more helpful than the form generated by the interview. Thinking about A2J in this way helped expand our vision of how we can use it in the future.

The Michigan Legal Help Program has been very successful so far, and this TIG project contributed greatly to that success. Since its launch on 8/17/12, it has received over one million page views and over 17,000 sets of documents generated. The Michigan Legal Help Program is looking forward to continuing this project and growing even more in 2014, and we are very grateful for the TIG funding that has helped us establish such a critical resource in Michigan.