



**Office of Program Performance**

***FINAL  
PROGRAM QUALITY REPORT***

***FOR***

***Legal Aid of Southeastern Pennsylvania***

Recipient Number: 339141

October 17-21, 2011

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## INTRODUCTION

The Legal Services Corporation's (LSC) Office of Program Performance (OPP) conducted a program quality visit to Legal Aid of Southeastern Pennsylvania (LASP) from October 17- 21, 2011. The team members were team leader John Eidleman (Senior Program Counsel), Tillie Lacayo (Program Counsel), Christy Fisher (Program Counsel), David Bonebrake (Program Counsel), César Britos (OPP Temporary Employee), and John Johnson (OPP Temporary Employee.)

Program quality visits are designed to ensure that LSC grantees provide the highest quality legal services to eligible clients. In conducting its assessment, the team carefully reviewed the documents LSC received from the program, including its LSC grant application for 2012 funding, 2010 case service reports (CSRs), 2010 other service reports (OSRs), the numerous documents the program submitted in advance of the visit including advocates' writing samples, and staff responses to an anonymous Internet survey conducted by LSC in advance of the visit.

On site, the team visited all six of the LASP staffed offices. In addition to interviewing all of the staff members throughout the program, the team met or had telephone conversations with a number of LASP board members, judges, representatives of local government agencies, and representatives of community organizations.

In performing its evaluation of the grantee's delivery system, OPP relies on the LSC Act and regulations, LSC Performance Criteria, LSC Program Letters, and the ABA Standards for the Provision of Civil Legal Aid. This evaluation is organized according to the four LSC Performance Areas that cover: (1) needs assessment, priority setting, and strategic planning; (2) engagement of the low income community; (3) legal work management and the legal work produced; and (4) program management including board governance, leadership, resource development, and coordination within the delivery system.

### Program Overview

LASP has six offices in the four counties that the program serves.<sup>1</sup> The main office is in Norristown with branch offices in the cities of Pottstown, Bristol, Doylestown, Chester, and West Chester.<sup>2</sup>

The program has a large service area that includes 2,030 square miles. There are 201,802 persons living in poverty in the service area.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> LASP serves Bucks, Montgomery, Delaware, and Chester Counties.

<sup>2</sup> LASP has two outreach offices in Montgomery County that are not staffed. They are in the towns of Lansdale and Willow Grove.

<sup>3</sup> Persons living in poverty by county number 44,245 in Bucks County, 37,274 in Chester County, 64,867 in Delaware County and 55,416 in Montgomery County. U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 1-year estimates, Table S1701 by County (2010).

LASP's delivery system consists of limited service, *pro se* assistance, and full representation. LASP has a total staff of 62 employees, including 31 attorneys and 11 paralegals. The co-executive directors have been in their positions since the program was created by merging four separate county specific legal services programs on January 1, 2001.

The program's LSC funding for 2011 is \$1,243,870. The non-LSC funding total for 2011 was approximately \$4.12 million. LSC's 2011 basic field funding was reduced by \$53,636 from the 2010 grant. LSC currently projects that all of its recipients will face a 14.85% reduction in LSC funding in 2012.

In 2010, most of the program's 6,961 total closed LSC eligible cases were in family law – 40.2%. Housing constituted 20.3% of the cases closed. Consumer/finance was 15.8% and income maintenance was 11.5%.

The service area is a mixture of suburban and rural. The four suburban areas nearest Philadelphia are the most populated, with Norristown and Chester being the largest. Parts of Chester, Montgomery and Bucks Counties are quite rural. Transportation between the counties and between cities is limited, and a car is needed. Mass transportation to and from Philadelphia is more available.

### **Summary of Findings**

LASP last carried out a formal comprehensive needs assessment in 2010. The assessment was conducted between May 2009 and March 2010. LASP published the results of the assessment, *Perspectives on Poverty & Civil Legal Needs in Bucks, Chester, Delaware, & Montgomery Counties* in March of 2010.

LASP's leadership is centered in the program's two co-executive directors. They complement each other and each person's strengths are valuable support for the other and enhance the overall leadership of the program.

LASP's management team consists of the co-executive directors, the managing attorneys from the branch offices and the Helpline, the fiscal manager, and the development and technology director. The managers meet regularly to discuss the programmatic issues affecting LASP. Decision-making is concentrated in the co-executive directors with input from the management team.

LASP has developed a succession plan to address transition if one or both of the executive directors leave the program. LASP also has a well-conceived strategic plan for 2008-2011 that requires more effort in execution. The program recognizes that it has numerous long-term staff, many of whom are approaching retirement age. There does not appear to be a comprehensive plan to address the pending need to groom new leadership at the middle management level.

LASP has a very thoughtful strategic plan for 2011-2014 that will be presented to the board as a follow-up to its 2008-2011 strategic plan. The plan sets out goals to

enhance engagement with the client community, nurture and develop its staff, and improve knowledge and engagement of the board and expand resources.

LASP has a superior centralized intake unit (Helpline) that is an excellent entrance to the program's services and has resulted in improved client access, which is important given the transportation issues that the service area presents. It contains a separate number for its Don't Borrow Trouble hotline for persons facing foreclosure. While most clients access LASP by telephone, the branch offices also conduct intake on site for those that prefer personal contact. On the whole, the LASP offices are well maintained, convenient for clients, have a very professional atmosphere, are handicapped accessible, and create a pleasant surrounding for both the staff and clients. The physical conditions in some of the LASP offices are in need of improvement. The team noted disrepair and possible environmental problems in at least one office.

For the most part, the program's use of technology is adequate, though not highly innovative. The program has capable technology staff and effectively and appropriately utilizes a technology contractor. Staff also utilizes a robust, well-maintained wiki that is available across all offices. At the same time, LASP does face some technology challenges. The program does not have a wide area network (WAN) and generally lacks an Information Technology (IT) environment that supports operating as an integrated law firm. Staff cannot easily share calendars and important files with individuals in other offices. Fortunately, LASP can address many of its IT challenges through the adoption of a secure, reliable cloud computing solution.

The program has a dedicated staff that provides the client eligible population in the service area with extensive access to quality legal services. LASP has many highly experienced, skilled and capable advocates on staff, however program attorneys rarely engage in complex litigation. LASP appears to have made an affirmative decision to focus more on volume rather than handling complex or other issues that would benefit a larger number of low-income persons. In some instances, experienced advocates had a very high caseload and were engaged in routine case work that could be addressed by a less experienced advocate. The program could benefit by having an advocacy/litigation director to coordinate the program's legal work and to help staff focus on more extended and systemic advocacy. The program and its work are well respected by the judiciary and social service community throughout its service area.

LASP does not have a written legal work management and procedures manual or performance standards that set out guidelines for legal supervision.<sup>4</sup> The level of supervision of both new and more experienced advocates varies among supervisors. On the whole, managers do not meet with their staff to go over newly assigned cases or meet on a regular basis to review on-going open cases. Some supervisors meet monthly and others bimonthly with their supervisees.

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<sup>4</sup> LASP's comments to the draft report are attached. They note that LASP has a staff manual posted on its WIKI that covers such topics as file reviews and file management. The LASP staff manual does not, however, fully address legal work management and procedures or performance standards.

The Private Attorney Involvement (PAI) effort at LASP is managed on an office by office basis, and is very much tied to the local bar associations and their memberships. LASP works with local bar associations in each of its counties to recruit and involve the private bar in its work. Each office has a PAI coordinator. There is no one person coordinating the PAI efforts program wide. There is no regular communication among the PAI coordinators to discuss common issues, challenges, successes, and ideas that may be common to each PAI program. It does not appear that technology is used to its fullest extent in the PAI programs.

The LASP board has 36 members. There is a core of fifteen to eighteen dedicated members that faithfully attend the meetings. The client board members are supportive of the program but some are not active participants in board meetings. The board currently has four committees in addition to the executive committee: the finance and audit, nominations, legal services, and personnel committees. In February 2011, the board eliminated the development committee and instituted four county committees that focus on fundraising and revenue enhancement. There is no formal board training for new board members. There is no board manual. The board chair is very committed to the program. He sees his major role as enhancing financial resources along with finishing the strategic plan and the succession plan. Many board members played an active part on the program's strategic planning process, and supported the program as it addressed its fiscal issues.

LASP has been very successful in developing non-LSC resources. LASP has capable and effective staff dedicated to resource development. The development director was hired in 2006, and has worked diligently with other program staff to expand the program's number of funding sources from 32 to 48 and to increase its non-LSC contributions and grants. The development director works closely with the co-executive directors and the financial manager in the design and implementation of the resource development plan.

The team's review of the program's financial administration was limited. In addition to reviewing financial information submitted prior to the visit and budget information on file at LSC, the team, while on-site, interviewed the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) and her assistant. The program has written fiscal policies and procedures that are regularly updated. Systems are in place to ensure the regular monitoring of expenses and revenue. Monthly financial reports are prepared, and discussed in a meeting that usually includes the co-executive directors, CFO, development director, and grants manager.

LASP does not have a professional assigned to human resource tasks. The financial assistant handles the administration of benefits, but no one is specifically charged with human resource recruitment, discipline or other personnel policies. It does appear, however, that basic services, such as payroll, benefit enrollment and claims are handled competently. LASP conducts annual evaluations of staff.

LASP is an active participant in the regional and statewide justice community and legal services delivery system through its active membership in the Pennsylvania Legal

Aid Network (PLAN) at an executive director and staff level. The co-executive directors attend PLAN board meetings, participate in committees, and actively work with PLAN on issues that affect the overall legal service community such as funding, training, technology, intake systems, systemic legal issues, and improvement of the delivery system.

## **FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND ITEMS FOR ACTION**

**PERFORMANCE AREA ONE.** *Effectiveness in identifying the most pressing legal needs of low-income people in the service area and targeting resources to address those needs.*

**Criterion 1.** Periodic comprehensive assessment and ongoing consideration of legal needs.

**Finding 1.** **LASP completed its last comprehensive legal needs assessment in 2010.**

LASP conducted a comprehensive assessment of the most pressing legal problems and needs of the low-income population in its service area beginning in May 2009 and ending in March 2010 when it published the report entitled *Perspectives on Poverty & Civil Legal Needs in Bucks, Chester, Delaware, & Montgomery Counties*.

LASP engaged a consulting firm, The Resource for Great Programs, Inc. to help in conducting the needs assessment.<sup>5</sup> The Resource analyzed the service area's population characteristics and trends based on U.S. Census Bureau data and made an estimate of the incidence of legal problems among low-income households in Southeastern Pennsylvania. It examined the U.S. Census Bureau's 2005-2007 American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates to quantify the total, legal aid-eligible population and its major demographic segments in Bucks, Chester, Delaware, and Montgomery Counties and seven communities in the service area for which data was available. The Resource ran the demographic information through a quantitative model it developed, to estimate the number of civil legal problems faced annually by the legal aid-eligible population in Bucks, Chester, Delaware, and Montgomery Counties. The Resource then conducted surveys of the client-eligible population, held focus group meetings, and performed stakeholder interviews. Management found that the use of LASP staff persons to lead the focus groups was very useful.

A sample of low-income people in the four-county service area were asked in the fall of 2009 to complete an extensive written survey that inquired about their legal problems during the last two years, household demographics, and knowledge and use of services provided by Legal Aid of Southeastern Pennsylvania. The surveys were distributed to a mix of low-income people via community services agencies in the four

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<sup>5</sup> The Resource for Great Programs provides support to civil legal aid and justice programs, IOLTA organizations and others in the civil justice community. Its services include helping programs in conducting strategic planning, program assessment and evaluation, marketing services/ resource development, low-income population trends analysis and IOLTA revenue enhancement campaigns.

county service area and some who walked into LASP offices; 151 client-eligible surveys were completed and 20 community agency leaders were interviewed.

The needs assessment report concluded that “there are 203,769 people eligible for civil legal aid in Bucks, Chester, Delaware, and Montgomery Counties who experience an estimated 79,700 legal problems per year. During fiscal year 2008, LASP advocates and the program’s pro bono volunteers handled 10,665 legal cases, which addressed 13.4 percent of the estimated legal problems of those residing in the four-county service area.” The report also found that in FY 2009, the program provided some form of community legal education to 33,000 people, referred 9,300 people to other non-profit agencies and private bar providers of civil legal services, and assisted 700 people with pro se materials.

The assessment concluded that there “is a significant unmet need for legal assistance resulting primarily from limited resources to meet that need and that bridging the gap calls for preserving the funding streams LASP has, generating new revenue sources, continuing and working to expand services that are achieving positive results, strengthening the referral network, and deploying funds in new ways ... that result in even greater impact to the community.”

While the legal needs of the low-income population varied in types of case from county to county across the entire program, family and public benefit problems appeared to be the greatest needs. These were followed by consumer then housing and employment-related problems.

LASP also held an all staff meeting in May of 2010 to discuss emerging needs, methods of service delivery and program priorities. LASP then merged the results of the assessment, staff discussion and Board input together to develop new program priorities and case acceptance guidelines. In June of 2010, the LASP Board adopted the program’s priorities. While the priorities did not fundamentally change, LASP is now more involved in mortgage foreclosure and expungement advocacy than previously.<sup>6</sup>

Management opined that the focus group process itself was the most valuable aspect of the needs assessment. The needs assessment process also strengthened the program’s relationships with agencies and organizations in the service area and increased awareness about what LASP does.

**Criteria 2 and 3. Setting goals and objectives, developing strategies, allocating resources and their implementation.**

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<sup>6</sup> LASP’s seven priorities are housing (maintaining or obtaining decent, affordable, available housing for low-income people); family (maintaining family unity and safety); public benefits (promoting economic stability for low-income children, families and individuals); employment (maintaining family or household employment and income); consumer (maintaining economic stability through debt relief); elder law (preserving and enforcing legal rights of low-income elderly people); and expanding access (maximizing access to legal assistance and informing low-income people of their legal rights and responsibilities.)

**Finding 2. The LASP board engages in an annual review of the program’s priorities that are grounded in the needs assessment and ongoing input from staff.**

As part of the annual review of priorities the board considers the recommendations of the program staff and management. LASP tracks cases and outcomes using its case management system and reviews the level of services provided in cases. It also generates reports to the board on measurable outcomes of cases in specific substantive legal areas. The reports are reviewed periodically by the co-executive directors and managing attorneys and summarized for presentation to the LSAP Board.

**Criterion 4. Evaluation and adjustment.**

**Finding 3. LASP is well attuned to the community needs and uses this knowledge to adjust its provision of legal services.**

LASP staff is engaged with numerous community groups and organizations that serve the low-income population, which keeps them cognizant of emerging issues. The program also considers requests for service that appear during the intake process. LASP has responded to the increase in demand for legal services to seniors and clients with mortgage foreclosure issues and credit card debt problems. It secured additional funding to address the legal issues faced by seniors, instituted with others a mortgage foreclosure diversion project and expanded resources devoted to serving clients with credit card payment issues.

**Finding 4. LASP engages in strategic planning to move the program forward.**

LASP was very deliberate in approaching its strategic planning and authored a plan for the years 2008-2011. At the time of the visit, staff had finished a new plan for 2011-2014 to be presented to the board for approval.<sup>7</sup> The plan serves as a matrix on how to achieve the most effective and efficient delivery system for addressing client needs. LASP engaged in an extensive strategic planning process in 2008; retained a consultant; engaged with board and staff; set goals and priorities; and developed plans for achieving them. The plan set out goals to enhance engagement with the client community; nurture and develop its staff; improve knowledge and engagement of the board; and expand resources. LASP achieved some but not all of the goals in the 2008-2011 plan. Many of the goals are retained in the new plan.

**Recommendation I.4.4.1\*:**<sup>8</sup> After the strategic plan for 2011-2014 is adopted by the board, management and the board should consider prioritizing key areas of the plan and

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<sup>7</sup> The strategic plan was approved by the board in December 2011.

<sup>8</sup> Recommendations in this report will have a Roman Numeral to identify the Performance Area, followed by three numbers identifying, respectively, the Criterion addressed by the recommendation, the number of the finding and a number designating whether it is the first, second, third, etc., recommendation under that finding. For example, III.2.14.3 designates Performance Area III, Criterion 2, Finding 14, and third recommendation under Finding 14. There are two levels of recommendations in this report: Tier One and Tier Two. Recommendations that are indicated with an asterisk are Tier One Recommendations and are

determining the best way to achieve the plan's goals. It may want to develop committees and work plans to assist management with implementation and set time frames for follow-through in key areas such as staff development and board knowledge and engagement.

**PERFORMANCE AREA TWO. *Effectiveness in engaging and serving the low-income population throughout the service area***

**Criterion 1. Dignity and sensitivity.**

**Finding 5. On the whole LASP treats clients with dignity and sensitivity.**

The team uniformly heard from stakeholders that the staff treated clients with dignity and respect. LASP made a strategic decision to provide the eligible client community with quality legal representation and maximum access to legal services. Its strategic plan states that it seeks “*to empower... [low-income and vulnerable people in its service area] to solve problems without legal representation through legal education and increased access to the courts, and to change community practices and systems that cause or aggravate poverty.*” It seeks to maximize access to its services by conducting a significant number of trainings for the low-income community and locating offices in the most populated areas in the service area that are close to the courts and state agencies and near sources of transportation. LASP has an office in all four counties and two offices in Montgomery and Bucks Counties. It maintains reasonable office hours, 8:30 am - 4:30 p.m., which reflect the schedules of the courts and agencies with which the clients engage. Applicants can access a local office by telephone. The offices remain open during lunch but no office has evening intake. In some instances, advocates make home visits or make other efforts to accommodate clients.

Most of the offices are well maintained, have a very professional atmosphere and a pleasant surrounding for both the staff and clients. The waiting areas have informational materials and brochures in English and Spanish for clients. Some have toys for clients' children. The offices are, for the most part, easily accessible to handicapped and other clients with mobility issues. Those that are in older buildings are enhanced by ramps, although some of them are difficult to use. The program has made efforts to ensure that clients receive services despite the location of some facilities on the second floor. Interview suites are made available on the first floor in some of its offices.

While LASP offices are generally in good condition and LASP has made repairs as needed, some problems persist. LSC credits LASP on its effort to improve conditions in the city of Chester office in Delaware County. However, some areas of the office and roof appear to require repair. LASP should evaluate ventilation, cleanliness and other aspects of the working conditions. In addition, some attention should be given to addressing the quality of the work environment afforded every staff member.

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intended to have a direct and major impact on program quality and/or program performance. In your next grant renewal application or competitive grant application, your program will be required to report what it has done in response to Tier One Recommendations instead of submitting a full narrative.

**Recommendation II.1.5.1\*:** LASP should continue to address the leaking roof, mold smell and other conditions in the city of Chester office.

**Finding 6. LASP has an excellent coordinated intake system.**

LASP has an outstanding centralized intake unit (Helpline) that is an excellent gateway to the program's services and has greatly improved client access to legal services. This is a significant achievement given the transportation issues that the service area presents. The Helpline limits its custody intake and currently takes custody calls from Delaware and Chester Counties only. The calls on custody from Montgomery and Bucks Counties are referred to those offices. Calls on all other legal issues (and some of the calls directed to Don't Borrow Trouble) come through the Helpline. In addition, local offices are open for walk-in intake hours and by appointment. The largest walk-in intake occurs in Montgomery County, in the Norristown and Pottstown offices.

The Helpline staff members conduct intake Monday through Friday from 9-1. Each intake specialist is on intake four out of every five week days between 9-1. Some of the intake staff makes use of their fifth day to conduct intake off-site at Area Agencies on Aging, where they have an opportunity to interact in person with applicants. The six LASP offices have different walk-in intake days/hours, based upon that office's staffing and location. The program's staff attorneys also conduct outreach and intake offsite at a number of organizations such as the Victims' Service Policy Board.

The Helpline has seven paralegal intake specialists that are supervised by a managing attorney and four other attorneys (two fulltime and two part-time), all of whom maintain an open door policy.<sup>9</sup> The intake specialists regularly coordinate with one of the attorneys regarding how to handle difficult clients or legal issues that are more complicated. The managing attorney also updates the program's wiki, which contains both organizational and substantive resources. When applicants call during intake hours they are quickly connected with a paralegal or attorney who checks for conflicts and financial eligibility while determining the nature of the call. Applicants who are not eligible or have concerns outside of the program's priorities are referred to appropriate organizations for further help. The intake specialists usually do not enter the applicant's data contemporaneously with the call into the KEMPS case management system (CMS) but do so at a later time. After screening is completed applicants receive initial brief advice from the paralegal screener and are then transferred to an attorney in the Helpline for help with complex or challenging cases that the paralegal cannot handle. At that point they may receive advice or brief service, referral to a staff attorney in one of the offices for further help or a PAI referral.

The method of referring cases to and accepting cases by the service offices varies among the offices. For example, the Helpline does not conduct intake for the Bucks County custody cases. The callers are to call the Doylestown office directly. Another office (Delaware County) requires the Helpline to schedule client appointments, while

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<sup>9</sup> This includes the Don't Borrow Trouble Unit (DBT) intake staff.

others do not. When cases are referred, both the fax cover sheet and the case notes are reviewed before the fax is sent to the area office. In this way, the managing attorney is able to check to be sure that the referral is appropriate for extended service and that any legal advice that has been provided is correct. Monthly, each paralegal's open case list is reviewed. The technical director checks errors in entries in the CMS towards the end of every quarter.

The Helpline has certain technological limitations, many of which seem to flow from its case management system. Several staff raised issues with the CMS and noted that sometimes notes entered into the system are erased in the process of conducting an intake. The Helpline has a sophisticated telephone system which provides automatic call distribution and the ability to capture data on how long callers have been in the queue, number of calls abandoned, number of calls to each staff member, and length of calls. A review of the Helpline information shows that for the period July 2011 to November 2011 the program averaged 159 calls a day. Of that total, an average of 79 calls or 50.2% were answered daily and the applicant received some help. The other applicants abandoned the call. The information gathered by the program indicates that many of the abandoned calls are generated by repeat callers that drop off after a short wait only to call back numerous times in the course of one day in an attempt to speak with an advocate. Callers wait approximately three minutes in the queue until they speak with an intake staff member. The longest wait time for callers in the queue is approximately eight minutes. However, it would be helpful to know how long the average dropped call lasted and if the time corresponded with the caller hearing one and one half minute recorded informational introduction to the Helpline.

The technology allows the managing attorney to see which staff is logged into the system and can print out monthly reports showing how many calls were received, how many were abandoned, how many were transferred, and how long they lasted. The phone system has some limitations, however. For example, there is no call back element; it cannot do a voice menu (Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system). Other than an option for Spanish speakers, there is no voice menu that LASP could use to help distinguish calls. As a result, LASP is not unable to provide a message informing callers requiring criminal representation of the public defender or other options available to them, nor is it able to have callers indicate where they stand in the legal process or what type of services – housing, benefits, etc. – they are seeking. While the program has voice mail, it allows only current clients to leave a message to avoid overloading the system and make it impossible to review all of the messages.

The Helpline managing attorney has been the driving force behind the creation of LASP's admirable wiki, which contains information about the program itself, about governmental and social service agencies to which referrals can be made and about substantive law – including questionnaires for use by intake workers.

The intake staff meets regularly, usually weekly, for staff meetings, at which they review both administrative and substantive issues. In addition, the intake staff takes part in monthly lunch sessions, at which they discuss substantive law. The group takes advantage of the years of substantial knowledge that some of its members have and

shares information about housing law and other issues. The Helpline has benefited from the inclusion of a staff person who is responsible for ensuring that information that is faxed to the offices is received.

LASP has a separate helpline designed for clients with mortgage and predatory lending issues. The “Don’t Borrow Trouble” project is staffed by one of the seven intake paralegals and an attorney. The project’s efforts are enhanced by the Helpline, which also receives calls relating to these issues.

**Recommendation II.1.6.1\*:** LASP should develop a system which allows intake staff to enter notes contemporaneously into the CMS.

**Recommendation II.1.6.2\*:** LASP should investigate the cost to overcome the technological challenges such as losing notes in the CMS and to install an IVR system; and if fiscally reasonable, make those improvements.

**Recommendation II.1.6.3:** LASP should examine the reasons for the high proportion of abandoned calls and determine if they relate to the recorded information.

**Criterion 2. Engagement with the low-income population.**

**Finding 7. LASP is involved with the low-income community and the organizations in its service area providing services to that community.**

LASP is very engaged with the client community. Many staff members regularly make educational presentations to clients and stakeholder organizations. Staff members conduct a significant amount of community education. LASP participated in, presented or led 119 trainings in 2010, and 88 as of September 2011. Most advocates in the program are involved in outreach. Advocates also speak at seminars and workshops for the county bar associations as well as workshops for landlords. In most offices, staff members regularly attend meetings of community organizations, including homeless consortiums, the Economic Analysis and Research Network (EARN), Head Start, Office on Aging, senior centers, coalitions of service providers, Montgomery County Housing Authority and bar associations. Staff members routinely conduct outreach to vulnerable populations including the homeless, residents of mobile home parks, seniors, disabled persons, veterans, ex-offenders, persons needing expungements, and domestic violence victims, among others. In addition, the staff works collaboratively with and as a component of an array of human services organizations, client-centered groups and governmental agencies that serve the low-income population. This involvement includes attending meetings, conducting outreach and intake, presenting educational programs and conducting clinics, and accepting referrals of eligible clients. LASP is also a member of interagency groups in each county.

Interviews with representatives of community organizations and with staff and board members confirm that the program is actively engaged with the low-income population and with organizations and agencies that serve the poor. Many of the stakeholders had high praise for the LASP staff they engaged with in their work with

clients. LASP has a client satisfaction survey mechanism that surveys clients on both the quality of the services received on the Helpline and for extended service cases. The process consists of sending surveys each month to two randomly selected clients for each full-time advocate whose files have been closed that month including extended and brief advice services. The Helpline sends out surveys which are somewhat different from those sent from local offices. The program receives approximately a 20% return rate. A brief review conducted by one of the co-executive directors indicates that of the 27 surveys returned between September 1 and December 21, 2011 the client response was marked "excellent" or somehow indicated on the form a very high level of satisfaction.

**Criterion 3. Access and utilization by the low-income population.**

**Finding 8. LASP is committed to serving a diverse group of clients in the service area including those with limited-English proficiency (LEP).**

The program has procedures for communicating with non-English speaking people and makes reasonable accommodations for their special needs. LASP has an LEP plan that calls for providing trained interpreters at no cost to clients and making efforts to hire bilingual staff. LASP has four persons on staff who are bilingual in Spanish and English. Two of the paralegals in the Helpline unit are bilingual in Spanish; the Norristown office has a Spanish speaking receptionist, as does the West Chester office. LASP also provides the services of Language Line for those who speak languages other than English.

The program's LEP plan sets forth LASP's values with respect to serving people facing language access barriers, but it does not provide detail on when or how the program staff make determinations concerning when interpretation services or translation of vital documents is needed.

Staff members interviewed are aware of the LEP policy and staff members appear familiar with Language Line and have used it on appropriate occasions. Staff members know which employees are bilingual and available for translation and interpretation in other LASP offices.

Some staff members interviewed allowed clients to use family members as interpreters during interviews. While this practice is permitted by LASP's LEP policy as long as the client's preference is noted in the file and the client is aware of the availability of free interpretation services, the better practice is to encourage clients to use staff within the program or trained interpreters, rather than family members.

There is a significant LEP community that includes Hispanic and Asian low-income persons in Upper Darby, Delaware County. There appears to have been no outreach conducted to this population.

Based on conversations with the executive directors, the program is committed to maintaining, expanding and improving its capacity to serve people with limited English proficiency.

**Recommendation II.3.8.1\*:** LASP should conduct training on the LEP policy.

**Recommendation II.3.8.2:** LASP should consider conducting outreach to the LEP populations in Upper Darby.

**PERFORMANCE AREA THREE.** *Effectiveness of legal representation and other program activities intended to benefit the low-income population in the service area.*

**Criterion 1. Legal representation.**

**Finding 9. LASP has a very experienced legal staff.**

The program has a dedicated staff that provides the client eligible population in the service area with extensive access to quality legal services. The program and its work are well respected by the judiciary and social service community throughout its service area.

LASP has seven attorneys that have been with the program and one of the predecessors for a total of more than 30 years. Four additional attorneys have been with LASP and a predecessor for over 20 years. Three have between 11 and 20 years legal services experience, seven have been in legal services between five and ten years and eight have fewer than five years' experience. Thirteen of the attorneys have over 30 years' experience when counting legal services and non-legal services experience. Together the staff attorneys in the program average 19 years of experience. Three of LASP's paralegals have 35 or more years' experience and the paralegals as a group average 13 years of experience. One co-executive director has been with legal services 35 years and the other for 15 years.

Overall, the attorneys are enthusiastic about their work. In most offices, the attorneys concentrate in specific areas of the law and when confronted with clients that have multiple legal issues, some which may be outside the particular attorney's area of expertise, they refer the issue to a colleagues in the office with expertise in that area.

**Finding 10. LASP has made a decision to provide as much access to legal service as possible to the eligible client population in the service area.**

While LASP handles a high volume of cases each year, many of the cases lack complexity despite having many highly experienced, skilled and capable advocates on staff. While many of the cases in the custody, foreclosure and other areas may be challenging and difficult, the program attorneys rarely engage in litigation requiring discovery, motion practice, co-counseling, systemic, federal litigation or appellate advocacy. LASP's advocacy instead focuses more on volume. LASP appears to have made an affirmative decision to concentrate on quantity rather than handling complex or other issues that would benefit a larger number of low-income persons. Much of the legal work - as reflected by the writing samples submitted as examples of the advocates' best work - is fairly routine in nature. Some of the writing samples submitted could have benefited greatly from additional proofreading and editing. Some of the writing samples

benefited greatly from additional proofreading and editing. Some of the writing samples had typographical errors, at times weak arguments, lacked advocacy and had an inappropriate tone. It appears that a number of the attorneys interviewed believed that the volume of closed cases and maximum access to the legal system for clients is their most important objective. While this is commendable on one level it appears this belief has clouded the advocates' ability to see and seek out larger issues that impact multiple clients. Advocates handle a very high volume of cases and often don't appear to have time to reflect on bigger issues.<sup>10</sup> It also appears that with some exceptions, the advocates do not refer cases with systemic issues to or work in collaboration with the specialty programs in Pennsylvania such as Pennsylvania Health Law Project ("PHLP"), Pennsylvania Utility Law Project (PULP), Community Justice Project and Regional Housing Legal Services.<sup>11</sup>

As the legal needs of the client population have changed over the years, the program has shifted its focus to provide increased representation to the client population in emerging areas of legal need, most notably unemployment compensation, reentry/expungement cases, bankruptcy and foreclosure. The LSC team commends LASP for its development of expertise in the area of reentry and expungement; for its efforts to help persons with barriers to employment re-join the workforce; for its community education work in this area; and for informing the client community about LASP's work in this area and the availability of this form of relief. When LASP initiated its reentry work this area of the law was new to the program and to most legal services programs in the state. Assigning highly experienced lawyers to what was a new area was appropriate. However, most expungement cases are routine and can be handled by attorneys with little experience once they have received training in the area. The program also handles a large volume of bankruptcy cases and makes good use of paralegals to help manage the voluminous paperwork to prepare the petition. However, it appears that many of these are not complex and could be managed by attorneys with less experience who have been trained in the area.

Judges with whom team members spoke were highly complementary concerning the legal work of program advocates. Attorneys were described as being skilled at dealing with the client population, well-prepared, compassionate, professional in their dealings with the court, and excellent advocates for their clients. One judge interviewed indicated that they would not hesitate to hire any of the attorneys who practice in the judge's court.

**Recommendation III.1.10.1\*:** The program should consider ways in which to increase the complexity of the legal work of its highly experienced advocates.

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<sup>10</sup> Some managing attorneys expressed concern that the recently instituted program requirement that they review all closed cases for the advocates they supervise would limit the time they have available to represent clients in individual cases.

<sup>11</sup> LASP's comments to the draft report indicate that the staff regularly works with and refers matters to the Pennsylvania specialty programs.

**Recommendation III.1.10.2\*:** Program attorneys should be encouraged to expand their legal work beyond their comfort zone.

**Recommendation III.1.10.3\*:** LASP should establish a plan for regular reviews of significant pleadings, memoranda and briefs to ensure consistent high quality work from all advocates

**Finding 11. LASP has little coordination of advocacy.**

Though program advocates appear to have good collegial relationships - especially within each office - they tend to work independently of their colleagues doing similar work in other offices. There are no internal substantive law task forces or practice groups at LASP. Program task forces existed in the past, but were discontinued because many program advocates saw them as having no value. The consumer advocates do meet with some regularity while the housing advocates do not meet routinely. Advocates in some substantive law areas (for example, bankruptcy) appear to meet informally. Few advocates participate in the statewide substantive law groups coordinated by PLAN, though many do participate on the substantive law listservs.

There is no one at LASP charged with coordination and oversight of the program's advocacy. Interviews conducted during the visit reflect that staff at LASP appreciates the need for coordination and oversight of program advocacy.

**Recommendation III.1.11.1\*:** LASP should strive to create the position of advocacy director as soon as is feasible and should not wait until one of the co-executive directors departs to do so.

**Recommendation III.1.11.2\*:** LASP should develop an advocacy plan that addresses how the program's advocacy will be used to address key substantive legal issues, establishes goals and strategies to meet those goals.

**Recommendation III.1.11.3\*:** The program should formally re-institute the substantive law workgroups.

**Finding 12. The program closes a comparatively high number of cases and a significant number of those are closed as extended service cases.**

LASP generates a high number of cases. It closed 6,961 LSC eligible cases in 2010, primarily in the subject areas of family (40.2%), housing (20.3%), consumer/finance (15.8%), and income maintenance (11.5%). In 2010, the program closed 703 cases per 10,000 poor persons, far above the national median of 284 for that period. LASP staff closed 2,056 extended cases, 1,017 of which were contested cases. This constitutes 204 extended cases per 10,000 poor persons in 2010<sup>12</sup>, which is more

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<sup>12</sup> For example LASP closed as extended services cases 260 bankruptcy cases, 36 collection/repossessions cases, for a total of 341 consumer cases; 107 employment cases; 473 custody/visitation, 356 domestic abuse cases for a total of 911 family cases; 141 juvenile cases; 47 health cases; 313 income cases and 188 housing cases.

than three times the national median of 61 extended cases closed per 10,000 poor persons.

**Finding 13. The program does not have written performance standards for casework and case supervision.**

While a number of advocates interviewed stated that there was a written legal work and procedure manual none could produce a copy or refer team members to where it was located on the wiki. A performance standards manual that comprises written guidelines for legal work supervision is an important way to convey to all advocates what is expected of them in handling cases. It also can provide supervisors with the instructions they need to adequately perform their supervision. The standards for legal supervision provide a good foundation for supervision that should inform program advocates of best practices and supervisors of the supervision standards expected in the program.

The level of effective supervision of both new and more experienced advocates varies among supervisors. The LSC team found that on the whole managers do not meet with their staff to go over newly assigned cases or meet on a regular basis to review ongoing open cases. Some supervisors meet monthly and others bimonthly with the supervisee. A few review case files by opening a file in the CMS. Some do not have regular meetings.

**Recommendation III.1.13.1\*:** The program should make sure that all advocates are being appropriately and consistently supervised.

**Recommendation III.1.13.2\*:** LASP should consider creating a written performance standard manual for casework and case supervision that could be accessible on the LASP wiki.

**Finding 14. LASP has adequate training and support mechanisms and seeks to improve in this area as part of its focus in the Strategic Plan for 2011-2014.**

LASP's training and support mechanisms are sufficient to sustain the legal work of the program. The program's advocates have access to a variety of training opportunities throughout the year. There are various training opportunities available such as webinars and statewide trainings, as well as trainings offered by the Pennsylvania Bar Institute. Some advocates regularly attend trainings in the substantive law areas in which they practice. PLAN provides poverty law trainings throughout the year, including a comprehensive substantive poverty law statewide conference held yearly. The PLAN annual conference provides necessary exposure, training, and updates in all areas of poverty law with which all legal services advocates should have general familiarity. This conference is particularly important. However, some managing attorneys in the program have not attended the PLAN annual conference in recent years.

Newly hired LASP attorneys receive little formal training or orientation. Usually they receive a few days of hands on instruction by the managing attorney of the office

they are assigned to and then shadow a more experienced attorney in court and in the office for a brief period. It appears to be the norm for a supervisor or an experienced attorney to observe the new attorney's first court appearance. In addition, some managers spend time reviewing the advocate's written work for a time, depending on the advocate's level of experience.

LASP's 2008-2011 strategic plan recognizes the staff as an important asset that is essential to accomplishing its mission. The strategic plan established a goal to nurture and develop its staff through enhanced training. It called for the establishment and implementation of a Staff Training, Development and Recognition Program to address: "Customer Service, Communication and Team Skills, and Expertise on Legal Substantive Issues." Pursuant to the plan each staff member was to have increased opportunities for training and education to improve job performance and job satisfaction. It does not appear that this staff training program was established.

Another training related goal of the strategic plan was for staff members to have mentors and develop individual work plans. LASP defined work plans as professional development goals that are established during the annual performance evaluation process. Given this limited definition it does appear that work plans were established during individual evaluations. However, these plans did not detail the multifaceted obligations of the staff members' work or what part of their time is spent on each obligation. In addition no mentors were provided to staff.

**Recommendation III.1.14.1\*:** LASP should send as many advocates as possible to PLAN's annual statewide poverty law conference each year.

**Recommendation III.1.14.2\*:** LASP should implement a formal training program for new advocates that includes orientation to legal services and the program; basic lawyering skills, including a general overview of poverty law; and a period of direct supervision by the advocate's managing attorney or by another experienced lawyer. One of the responsibilities of an advocacy director could be to help develop such a training program.

**Recommendation III.1.14.3\*:** LASP should review the 2011-2014 strategic plan adopted by the board at its December meeting and follow it to establish and institute the Staff Training, Development and Recognition Program.

**Finding 15: Staff generally has sufficient resources and technology to support their work.**

The program's advocates have available to them research tools, including Lexis, case management systems, program applications for services and forms as well as a brief bank. Many staff commented on the ease of accessibility to substantive area expertise throughout the program. Program listservs and form pleadings are maintained for various substantive areas. However, the team heard that the pleading/brief bank is in need of attention and updating. Some staff felt it would be beneficial if there was more

meaningful interaction among those with similar caseloads such as meetings and/or conference calls.

Many of the experienced attorneys do not routinely use the computers available to them to produce their written work. Some dictate and others write their work in longhand and the support staff produces the typed letters, memos or pleadings.

**Recommendation III.1.15.1:** The program should work to update the pleadings/brief bank on the wiki.

**Criterion 2. Private attorney involvement.**

**Finding 16. LASP effectively integrates private attorneys in its work to supplement its representation and other services.**

LASP's PAI effort is managed on an office-by-office basis, and is very much tied to the local bar associations and their memberships. There is no mandatory *pro bono* in most counties, although in Delaware County the bar association mandates that all newly admitted members take two *pro bono* cases in the first year of membership.

LASP's has a localized PAI program provides participants with a variety of *pro bono* opportunities. LASP works with local bar associations in each of its counties to recruit and involve the private bar in its work. LASP makes good use of its volunteer attorneys in accordance with the needs of the local office and willingness of the local attorneys to participate. Some attorneys provide direct client representation; other private attorneys participate in outreach and legal presentations to clients and community groups. In some offices the participants handle Protection From Abuse cases (PFAs), in others bankruptcies and in others custody and divorce cases. The PAI programs are tailored to the needs of clients and willingness of the participant lawyers. The PAI programs address critical legal needs of their clients in the counties. The Delaware County office recently started using PAI attorneys to handle expungements.

Each office has a PAI coordinator. There is no one person coordinating the PAI efforts program wide. There is no regular communication among the PAI coordinators to discuss common issues, challenges, successes, and ideas that may be common to each PAI program. PAI coordinators in Montgomery, Chester and Bucks Counties were not aware of Delaware County's new expungements program.

LASP has made significant use of the talents of local law students and volunteer attorneys. Students from Widener University's Law School accept referrals of consumer cases; Villanova students assist clients with tax matters. There are a number of volunteers working on a regular basis throughout the program.

It does not appear that technology is used to its fullest extent in the PAI programs. For example, PAI programs mail notices to participating attorneys when new cases are distributed or reports are requested of the participants rather than use email.

The PAI program also closes a large number of cases. The number of cases closed under LASP closes 53 cases per 10,000 poor people, far in excess of the national median is 23. For extended cases the national median is 9 cases per 10,000 poor people and LASP closes 35.

**Recommendation III.2.16.1:** LASP should study the value of using more technology in the PAI programs.

**Criteria 3 and 4. Other program services and activities on behalf of the eligible client population.**

**Finding 17. LASP conducts a large variety of successful outreach, community education, and other activities on behalf of its clients.**

Program staff regularly interacts with the low-income population in the areas of substantive law in the program's priorities such as domestic violence, homelessness and elderly. LASP conducts extensive outreach to clients in the form of trainings, making presentations and distributing materials.

The program also conducts trainings to stakeholder organizations. Some LASP staff collaborate with the Visiting Nurses Association at outreach sites to encourage enrollment for health-related benefits and, if such applications are denied or the applicant encounters problems, to provide assistance and, possibly, representation. Additionally, a public benefits paralegal conducts regular public benefits informational sessions in the community.

Some LASP staff provides educational sessions at agencies relating to domestic violence victims, mortgage foreclosure; other advocates regularly provide outreach at women's and other shelters.

Consumer attorneys have many opportunities to interact with area agencies. The Southeast Consumer Advocates meet every month and a half.

LASP makes presentations to educate landlords at workshops about landlord-tenant law where LSAP staff, fair housing coalition staff and judges participate. The program distributes surveys after the presentations to assess the success of the presentation.

The program also conducts group classes for clients. For example, one office holds the consumer credit classes required as part of the bankruptcy filings and custody clinics in its office. Following the class, all attendees meet face-to-face with an advocate to receive individual advice. If a client wants help to proceed, LASP continues to counsel them, file pleadings, attend conferences and or hearing. As part of the custody clinic, the participant can have a twenty-minute consultation with the LASP attorney or one of the *pro bono* volunteers. It also distributes a bankruptcy packet with a comprehensive description of the process and documents needed. LASP also has a packet for clients that explain how to represent oneself in a small claims case in the Court of Common Pleas.

Most staff attorneys are active and involved in their local bar associations which has resulted in a variety of benefits to the program and its clients including more attorneys willing to take *pro bono* cases and contribute financially to the program.

**PERFORMANCE AREA FOUR. *Effectiveness of governance, leadership and administration.***

**Criterion 1. Board governance.**

**Finding 18. On the whole the board is engaged in the work of the program.**

The LASP board has 36 members. There is a core of fifteen to eighteen dedicated members that faithfully attend the meetings. Board meetings are held in Norristown on Wednesday afternoons. LASP staff members do not attend board meetings. Though board meetings in past years involved presentations by LASP staff about their legal work, this practice has diminished significantly. There is no formal board training for new board members or board manual. Some of the board members interviewed were not aware of all of the board committees.

The board currently has four committees in addition to the executive committee: the finance and audit, nominations, legal services, and personnel committees. In February of 2011, the board eliminated the development committee and instituted four county committees that focus on fundraising and revenue enhancement. The four committees attempt to meet regularly with the development director and executive directors to cultivate financial resources in each county. It appears that those committees are successful in expanding contributions and new sources of revenue from local individuals and organizations. Board attorneys have all contributed financially to LASP.

The Executive and Audit and Finance Committees are the most active. The vice president of the board, who usually serves as the next president, is a member of the Audit and Finance Committee. The board's treasurer chairs the committee. He leads a committee that is very active and diligent in its fiscal responsibility, conducting frequent meetings and receiving and analyzing both the monthly budget reports and credit card statements. The chair of the committee receives monthly financial reports from the CFO and the development director. The board also receives financial and development reports at its regular meetings. There are two ad hoc committees within the executive committee; one dealing with strategic planning, and the other dealing with succession.

The board chair is very committed to the program. He sees his major role as enhancing financial resources and finishing the strategic plan and the succession plan.

There are 16 men and 20 women that represent all parts of the service area; however, the membership of the board does not fully reflect the poverty population composition of the service area. While the poverty population of the service area is 68% Caucasian, 21% African American and 7% Hispanic, there are no Hispanic board

members. Five of the members are African Americans and the remainder is Caucasian. Most board members are appointed by local bar associations.

The attorney and client board members interviewed were all devoted to the program. The client board members interviewed reported that client members are engaged in important discussions on the board and treated with respect and fairness. However, it was also reported by board members that some client board members are not active participants at meetings. Some client board members interviewed did not have an in-depth knowledge or understanding of the program and board activities or if important policies (such as a conflict of interest policy) were in place.

Many board members played an active part in the program's strategic planning process, and supported the program as it addressed its fiscal issues and retrenchment plans. The members participate in efforts to recruit *pro bono* attorneys, make financial contributions, and participate in fundraising presentations. In 2011 all board members supported the program by making financial contributions.

The board concluded its first evaluation of the co-executive directors in 2011.

When the program was founded with the merger of four legal services programs, many board members believed that they had to protect the interest of the geographic area they represented. This is no longer the case as all members are pulling together for the good of all clients in the service area. However, Board members do not visit the offices outside of the geographic area they represent.

**Recommendation IV.1.18.1\*:** LASP should consider establishing a formal training for new board members and a routine update on board responsibilities for all board members.

**Recommendation IV.1.18.2\*:** LASP should develop a board manual.

**Recommendation IV.1.18.3\*:** Board members who are frequently absent should be encouraged to attend meetings or retire from the board.

**Recommendation IV.1.18.4\*:** Board members should visit all the offices at least every other year to fully comprehend the working conditions facing the staff and understand the daily work of the program.

**Recommendation IV.1.18.5\*:** LASP should increase the frequency of the staff presentations about their legal work at board meetings.

**Recommendation IV.1.18.6\*:** Staff should attend board meetings to have a greater appreciation of the board's commitment to the program.

**Recommendation IV.1.18.7\*:** LASP should work to engage the client board members more fully in the meetings and other board activities. This could include having the co-executive directors meet with client board members prior to board meetings explain what will transpire so they are comfortable participating in the meetings.

## **Criterion 2. Leadership.**

### **Finding 19. The co-executive directors work well together and provide leadership to the program.**

LASP's leadership is centered in the program's executive directors. One executive director has 38 years of legal experience, including 22 years as the executive director of Montgomery County Legal Aid Service. The other co-executive director has been a member of the bar for more than 30 years and in the active practice of law for 25 years. She was the executive director of Bucks County Legal Aid Society for three years.

The co-directors complement each other very well. Each person's strengths are valuable support for the other and enhance the overall leadership of the program. Though the co-directors work very well together and have great mutual respect for each other, most staff knows one of the two executive directors very well and do not know the other as well or at all. In this respect, the co-directorship gives LASP the aspect of two different programs and impedes the total realization of one cohesive and consolidated program. The co-directors attempt to visit all the offices monthly and strive to have regular contact with all staff in each office using email and a newsletter. Because each co-director had led one of the four offices prior to the merger, it appears that they continue to be seen by staff and some stakeholders, as well as the judiciary as the exclusive director of those offices to the exclusion of the other director.

The merger of four independent legal services programs was a challenge and the co-executive directors successfully overcame opposition from various sources including staff, board members and others to create a very well-functioning program. The co-directors have developed a focused client-centered mission to provide quality legal representation to low-income and vulnerable people in the service area and to empower them to solve problems without legal representation through legal education and increased access to the courts while changing community practices and systems that cause or aggravate poverty.

Both co-directors are active in the county bar associations in the service area and have served on a number of committees and governing bodies of the associations. Both are active in the Pennsylvania (Legal Services) Project Directors Association.

## **Criterion 3. Overall management and administration.**

### **Finding 20: LASP's management team includes legal work managers and other key personnel.**

The LASP management team consists of the two co-executive directors, six managing attorneys from the branch offices, and the manager of the CIU/Helpline, the fiscal manager, development director, and technical director. Managers meet monthly to discuss administrative, procedural and programmatic issues. Managers are tasked with disseminating information from the meetings to the staff in their office.

disseminating information from the meetings to the staff in their office.

A great deal of the decision-making is concentrated in the co-executive directors who appear to give weight to the input from the management team. The LASP managers appear to work together cohesively as a team for the program to advance client services.

While LASP's strategic plan states the program's commitment to nurture and develop staff, there are few formal efforts focused on developing new leadership as a means to build the program's capacity and long-term sustainability. The succession plan deals with transition if one of the executive directors leaves the program. The program recognizes that it has numerous long-term staff, many of who are approaching retirement age. There doesn't appear to be a plan to address the pending need to groom new leadership at the middle management level.

**Recommendation IV.3.20.1:** The program should develop a plan to develop future potential leadership.

**Criterion 4. Financial administration.**

**Finding 21. The program appears to have adequate financial policies, procedures and practices in place.<sup>13</sup>**

The team's review of the program's financial administration was limited. In addition to reviewing financial information submitted prior to the visit and budget information on file at LSC the team, while on-site, interviewed the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) and her assistant.

The CFO has 44 years of experience, and shouldered sole responsibility for managing the program's fiscal department and its multiple funding sources until the financial assistant was permanently hired in January 2009.

The program's Fiscal Year is July 1st to June 30th. Its budget reflects the program's obligations, mission and priorities. However, budgets only include one-year projections, and are not reviewed by the LASP board finance & audit committee prior to submitting them (in May or June) to the entire board for approval. The chair of the finance & audit committee is also the board treasurer, an attorney and certified public accountant. He receives monthly financial reports from the CFO and the development director. The finance & audit committee is active and the chair states that he is constantly working with the CFO on the budget, reviewing financial statements and monitoring the financial health of the program. He reviews the financial report before it is presented to the committee. The committee meets three times per year. It reviews and preliminarily approves the budget, before it is presented to the entire board. It also usually meets later to review amendments.

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<sup>13</sup> This visit was conducted by the Office of Program Performance (OPP) for the purposes set forth in the Introduction. OPP findings and recommendations under this criterion are limited to staffing, organization, and general functions. Assessment of fiscal operations is conducted by other offices at LSC.

The budget is usually amended two to three times per year. The current budget includes a deficit that may increase after November when the program receives next year's health insurance costs.

Systems are in place to ensure the regular monitoring of expenses and revenue. Monthly financial reports are prepared, and discussed in a meeting that usually includes the co-executive directors, CFO, development director, and grants manager. The board's audit committee is engaged in the audit process. All program audits have resulted in no material findings.

**Criterion 5. Human resources administration.**

**Finding 22. The program does not have a Human Resources Director.**

LASP does not have a professional assigned to human resource tasks. The financial assistant handles the administration of benefits, but no one is specifically charged with human resource recruitment, discipline or other personnel policies. It does appear, however, that basic services, such as payroll, benefit enrollment and claims are handled competently. Payroll is out-sourced.

LASP conducts annual evaluations of staff using a process of self-evaluation, evaluation by the employee's supervisor, meetings between the staff member and supervisor to discuss any disagreement, setting annual goals for improvement and approval by the directors. The forms used for the evaluation are adequate.

LASP does not have a formal mentoring program to develop staff. LASP does not have written staff development plans.

**Recommendation IV.4.22.1:** LASP should consider implementing individual written staff development plans and mentoring programs.

**Criterion 6. Internal communication.**

**Finding 23. LASP uses several methodologies to promote its internal communication.**

LASP maintains effective intra-staff and staff-management communications and relations. LASP's systems and procedures for ensuring regular communication among all staff members primarily occur through in-person meetings with managers and directly between the co-executive directors and staff. LASP conducts program-wide staff meetings twice a year. Most offices attempt to have staff meetings each month. The co-executive directors try to attend these meeting with some frequency. Because of time commitments monthly meetings are not always held. The Helpline conducts weekly unit meetings. The leadership team meets monthly. The co-executive directors send out a bi-monthly email staff newsletter and updated program information is posted on the wiki.

## **Technology**

### **Finding 24. LASP's technology is mostly adequate and sustained by a capable technology staff with support of an outside contractor.**

For the most part, the program's use of technology is adequate, though not highly innovative. The program has capable technology staff and effectively and appropriately utilizes a technology contractor. Staff utilizes a robust, well-maintained wiki that is available across all offices. The LASP program website is also well designed and provides necessary information to both the local client and justice communities. Pennsylvania's statewide website, PA LawHelp, contains many helpful client education resources, including automated forms. Additionally, LASP works closely with its technology contractor NPower, a national organization focused on providing technology assistance to nonprofits. Staff members have attended technology training through NPower, including sessions on Microsoft Access and the Office 2010 productivity suite.

Yet LASP also faces several significant technology challenges. It does not have a wide area network (WAN) and generally lacks an information technology (IT) environment that supports operating as an integrated law firm. Some critical IT infrastructure, such as servers and phone systems in certain offices, is aging and will require upgrades. Fortunately, LASP can address many of its IT challenges through creative use of technologies that do not require the program to expend significant additional resources.

With the emergence of cloud solutions such as Google Apps and Microsoft Office 365, nonprofits such as LASP can receive the benefits of robust calendaring and document management software without the challenges of implementing and maintaining these systems on-premise. LASP does not currently use Microsoft Exchange, Microsoft SharePoint, or equivalent technology for essential technology functions such as program-wide calendaring and document management. Consequently, staff cannot easily share calendars or important documents across offices. Adding these services through traditional solutions would require new hardware, software, and significant staff and contractor time.

Several LSC-funded providers have adopted cloud solutions for email, calendaring, document collaboration, and other functionality. This approach is especially useful for programs that have limited resources to support technology. Google offers its Google Apps service free to nonprofits with less than three thousand users, and Microsoft provides Office 365 at a reduced rate. Over time, providers have found migration to these cloud services has provided cost-savings and increased efficiency.

**Recommendation IV.6.24.1:** LASP should migrate several of its systems to an established web-based solution provider, such as Google Apps or Microsoft Office 365. These solutions require minimal administration, reduce programs' reliance on expensive hardware and software, and can significantly improve collaboration and remote access.

**Recommendation IV.6.24.2:** LASP should continue to utilize web conferencing software to deliver trainings across the program.

**Criterion 7. General resource development and maintenance.**

**Finding 25. LASP is very successful in obtaining additional funding for the program.**

LASP has been very successful in developing non-LSC resources. LASP has capable and effective staff dedicated to resource development.

For 2010, LASP reported \$4,581,760 in non-LSC funding including more than \$440,000 in miscellaneous donors contributions. For 2011 the miscellaneous donor funds are listed as \$417,487. The program's future funding from federal and state sources remains uncertain. The development director, hired in 2006, has worked diligently with other program staff to expand the program's number of funding sources from 32 to 48. An increase in its non-LSC contributions and grants revenue of 16% or approximately \$200,000 was achieved in 2007. This amount was sustained for each fiscal year from 2007 to the recent funding cuts. This comports with a program Resource Development Plan, which was adopted in May 2011, and that details an effort to increase multi-year commitments and the size and frequency of donations; continue LASP's recent success in increasing the diversity and number of locally raised funding sources; increase communications with funders regarding the results of their legal work; centrally manage grant reporting requirements; and monitor grant requirements.

The development director works closely with the co-executive directors and the financial manager in developing the resource development plan. Each year LASP reviews prospects for the next fiscal year, reviews the renewal of existing grants and then considers new projects based on need. The program has been successful in increasing individual donations. LASP has also continued to develop a new list of foundations to approach for funds. The LASP board chair has asked each county to come up with new ways to raise money. Consequently, Montgomery County conducted the Montgomery Bar Association Legal Aid Golf Classic (raising \$38,000 in 2011); Bucks County sponsored a "Race Judicata" (raising \$20,000 in 2010 and \$20,000 in 2011); Delaware County had a silent auction (raising \$10,000); and Chester County had both a "Race Judicata" (raising \$17,000) and a "Taste of West Chester," sponsored by the paralegals' association (raising \$6,000). LASP has held donor recognition celebrations in Montgomery and Delaware Counties.

A grants manager was hired in 2010. She works with the development director, CFO and a program consultant to monitor grant compliance. She also coordinates with the staff to ensure that grant monies are applied correctly - and exhausted - before the end of the respective grant periods.

The development director provides regular reports to the LASP board in regards to the status of funding applications and the receipt of any new revenue.

**Criteria 8 and 9. Coherent and comprehensive delivery structure/Participation in an integrated legal services delivery system.**

**Finding 26. LASP is engaged in comprehensive and integrated service delivery.**

LASP is an active participant in the regional and statewide justice community and legal services delivery system through its active membership in the Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network (PLAN) at both an executive director and staff level. The co-executive directors attend PLAN board meetings, participate in committees and actively work with PLAN on issues that affect the overall legal service community such as funding, training, technology, intake systems, systemic legal issues, and improvement of the delivery system. Staff members attend and, at times, present at statewide trainings. LASP's Helpline is considered by many other legal services programs in the state to be a leader in innovation and one of the better intake structures. Under the Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network's coordination Pennsylvania has 10 law groups on 10 substantive areas in which advocates participate. Some members of LASP's staff participate in these groups. LASP is very active in the local bar associations.

LASP works in coordination with North Penn Legal Services to use HotDocs in helping clients, including producing follow up letters to clients. It will soon launch a HotDocs template to be used by clients to memorialize agreements with their landlords. It has also received a grant to set up kiosks in two LASP offices to allow clients to draft their own petitions for Protection from Abuse and Custody.