



Legal Service Corporation at 40: A Campaign for Justice

Anna is a domestic violence survivor. When she finally fled from her abusive husband she needed an order of protection to keep him from hurting her again. She cannot afford an attorney and is overwhelmed by the legal process. Her husband has an attorney, leaving Anna to represent herself and face her abuser alone.

Frank served his country through two tours in Iraq. When he came home, he tried to access mental health benefits through the VA and was turned away. He doesn't know where to go for help.

Edna and her husband, Joe, had lived in their home for 30 years before falling victim to a mortgage scam. Now they are being threatened with foreclosure, eviction, and have no idea what to do. They need help from an attorney quickly before they lose their home.

Anna, Frank, Edna and Joe are among the almost 2 million Americans whose lives were impacted by an LSC funded civil legal aid program in 2012. However the sad reality is that more than 61 million Americans are eligible for civil legal aid in this country, many of whom we are not able to help because of limits in funding and access. Without this aid, they will not have the protection of a lawyer in disputes that could place their children, their safety, their homes, or their financial well-being at risk.

The **Legal Services Corporation (LSC)** is the nation's largest single funder of civil legal aid for low-income Americans. At a time when all sources of funding for legal aid is in jeopardy, community legal aid programs are even more dependent on LSC's funding and support. Federal funding and other sources of funding for LSC grantees has fallen while the number of people eligible for civil legal aid through LSC grantees has grown. The economic downturn, the millions of veterans re-entering home and work life with serious needs, the devastating foreclosure crisis, continuing rise of domestic violence cases, all of these factors occurring simultaneously over the last five years has led to a surge need coupled with an ebb in resources.

LSC's board of directors and senior management have witnessed this growing crisis and consulted stakeholders, funders, partners, pro bono experts, and others to strategically identify the greatest needs for focused investments that would make the biggest difference. In its 40th year, LSC is launching a groundbreaking campaign to fund new projects and programs that will extend the work of civil legal aid providers around the country. This campaign focuses on expanding access to justice through technology, new service initiatives, and leadership development.

"Equal justice under law is not merely a caption on the facade of the Supreme Court building – it is perhaps the most inspiring ideal of our society. It is one of the ends for which our entire legal system exists...it is fundamental that justice should be the same, in substance and availability, without regard to economic status."

Justice Lewis Powell

Service Initiatives

In the last three years, LSC-funded legal aid programs have had to reduce their workforce by 10 percent, including attorneys and paralegals who offer vital legal support for clients. As part of its 40th anniversary, LSC will launch three fellowship programs to attract and fund new lawyers and law students to serve clients in need. Fellowship programs engage a new group of lawyers with civil legal aid; fellows often seek positions with the host organization after the fellowship ends. Fellowships offer avenues to enter the field when entry level positions otherwise do not exist, and to help organize and extend pro bono efforts in a community. And finally, fellows provide much-needed service to clients in need.

The Task Force to Expand Access to Civil Legal Services in New York reported in 2012 that funding of civil legal aid provides a strong return on investment. For every \$1 spent there is \$6 in benefit.

1. Fellows

LSC will support 25-35 law school graduates in largely two-year, possibly one-year competitive fellowship program. Each fellow will receive an annual salary commensurate with the first-year attorney salary of a legal aid lawyer, training and orientation prior to placement, and a laptop computer. In the initial phase, LSC grantee applicants and their fellowship candidates will propose projects that will have a significant impact on how the grantee's clients are served. These fellowship projects will focus on innovation, creativity, and locally-driven ideas from LSC grantees LSC intends to encourage projects that will:

- Promote outreach and relationship-building in underserved communities
- Build multidisciplinary partnerships with other service providers
- Facilitate assessments of community needs to identify services of most value to clients.

Investment: \$2,005,500 per year, (\$57,300 per fellow) with a six- year investment of \$12,033,000

2. Rural Legal Summer Corps

Legal services in rural areas face even more challenges because of distance, access to transportation, and awareness. Attorneys are often asked to travel several hours to appear in court with a client. Clients may lack access to internet services or are unable to find a local lawyer to help them. LSC wants to establish a Rural Legal Corps of law students to:

- Increase the availability of legal services to low-income people in rural areas;
- Develop the students' skills in serving low-income clients and expand their awareness of the legal needs of people in rural poverty;
- Increase rural legal services programs' ability to recruit highly qualified law students and new attorneys;

- Increase collaboration between law schools and rural legal services programs.

LSC aims to place 40 fellows each summer in rural legal aid programs. This Corps will be open to law students who have completed their second year of law school at the time the summer fellowship starts. The Corps members begin their summer with a four-day intensive national training from poverty law experts on housing, domestic violence, public benefits, migrant farmworker and Native American law. After the training, Corps members travel directly to rural locations to begin their summer fellowship. Each Corps member will receive a stipend, travel expenses and accommodations for the training, and travel expenses to and from the placement site. LSC seeks funding for a minimum of five years to launch this program.

Investment: \$520,000 per year, (\$13,000 per Corps member) and a five-year investment of \$2,600,000

3. Senior Pro Bono Fellows

There is a large cohort of 'baby-boom' attorneys who are retiring or leaving traditional legal practice in the coming years. These attorneys have a wealth of knowledge and commitment to the legal field that is infinitely valuable to a civil legal aid program in need of support to expand or operationalize their pro bono programs. LSC will launch a one-year fellowship program for senior or emeritus attorneys to support pro bono programs in the legal aid organizations it funds. Fellows will make contacts with pro bono lawyers, engage with local firms and corporate legal departments, and promote sustainable pro bono systems within grantee organizations. Each fellow will receive a small annual stipend of \$15,000, and the host organization will receive \$15,000 to invest in its pro bono efforts. This program will be initiated in 40 grantee programs.

Investment: \$1,200,000 per year, five-year investment of \$6,000,000

"Anne," legally blind and suffering from a multitude of other physical disabilities, received a notice from the IRS informing her that her income-tax refund had been intercepted by the Social Security Administration (SSA) as a result of an overpayment of benefits. Puzzled, she contacted Wyoming Legal Services.

An attorney was able to guide Anne through the long dispute that ensued, ending when an administrative law judge found that the SSA had failed to provide proper notice to her regarding her alleged overpayment, and that, in the end, there simply was no overpayment of benefits.

Anne was reimbursed for her income-tax refund and benefits lost during the dispute. Her continuing benefits were reinstated, affording her much-needed peace of mind and allowing her to concentrate on her job and day-to-day care for her elderly mother.



“798 years ago ... the Magna Carta established that no man, even a king – or in our constitutional system, a President – is or should be above the law. In a sense, the enterprise that all of you are engaged in is achieving the equal but converse principle – that just as no person should be above the law, no person should be below it.”

Colorado's U.S. Attorney John Walsh

Technology

LSC champions the use of innovative technology by legal aid providers to provide efficient, effective, and high-quality assistance to the more than 61 million eligible Americans. Through its Technology Innovation Grants (TIG), LSC funding has provided a remarkable opportunity to explore new ways to serve eligible persons, to help build legal aid programs' capacities, and to support the efforts of pro bono attorneys. TIG has supported projects to develop, test and replicate technologies that improve client access to high quality legal information and pro se assistance. It has also helped programs enhance their overall information technology infrastructure. These projects use a broad range of technologies -- including mobile, cloud computing, big data, and automated document assembly -- to make the delivery of legal services in the United States more efficient and effective.

Most legal needs surveys in the United States indicate that no more than 20 percent of low-income people with civil legal problems are able to get help. The power of the Internet, sophisticated software programs, personal computers and mobile devices -- combined with the development of high-quality legal information and tools -- can broaden the reach of legal services practitioners and expand access to legal assistance for people who cannot afford a lawyer.

LSC hosts an annual technology conference for TIG recipients and other experts in the field. In 2013, the Technology Summit issued a report with several recommendations that would change the landscape for those in need of civil legal aid. LSC wants to build on and expand the technological innovation it has fostered over the last decade.

1. Integrated Service-Delivery System

Technology can play a vital role in enabling the provision of some level of legal assistance to all people living in poverty in the United States when they need it. An Integrated Service-Delivery System (ISDS) will create a platform giving every state a statewide online access point for persons seeking assistance with a civil legal issue. The portal employs a sophisticated algorithm to direct the user to an appropriate type of assistance for the user's need. The system will employ a document-assembly application for court-approved forms using “smart document” tags and will be linked to a website for access to detailed information about the legal principles and terms underlying the form. The portal will also link to legal aid programs, pro bono lawyers, court self-help centers, libraries, and courts' electronic filing and fee paying systems.

Investment: \$2,500,000 over three years

2. Technology Expansion Fund

For thirteen years, LSC has made grants to civil legal aid programs to create innovations in technology that result in more efficient and effective client services. Those innovations can be expensive to replicate in other markets. LSC wants to create a Replication Fund that will capitalize on LSC's renowned Technology

Innovation Grants and support grantees in taking successful innovations and expanding them in other areas of the country to reach more clients.

Investment: \$1.5 million per year, five-year investment of \$7,500,000

"Debra" was raising four children, ages five, six, seven, and nine, by herself when the unthinkable happened. Her estranged husband had never attempted to pay child support and had never gone to court to establish his parental rights. Yet, he filed for a protection order against Debra, alleging that she had abused the children. Based on his false accusations and misstatements, the father obtained an order granting him temporary custody. Debra contacted Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services (SMRLS) in a panic because the children had never been without their mother for a night, and the father had a history of abusive behavior.

Despite the fact that Debra contacted the office only one day before the hearing, an attorney from SMRLS was able to obtain documentary evidence from a domestic abuse shelter disproving the allegations. Her attorney immediately filed a motion for return of the children, attaching numerous exhibits that supported Debra's case. The pleadings were drafted only two hours before the scheduled hearing and were served right before the hearing began. The court found the evidence compelling, dismissed the protection order, and returned Debra's children to her.



Leadership Development

Approximately 80% of executive directors in LSC-funded programs have more than 30 years of experience, and the leadership of these organizations is likely to turn over in the next decade. The long-standing leaders offer a wealth of knowledge and experience that can inform the national response to the legal needs of those living in poverty, and together with LSC’s expertise in program and grants management, compliance, and fiscal management, they can continue to raise the bar of professionalism, efficiency, and excellence with leadership training and support. It is vitally important to establish to build the capacity of the next generation of leadership to anticipate change, develop innovations, and to become nonprofit entrepreneurs. We must prepare the next generation of leaders to meet the challenges of a modern legal aid program.

1. Biennial Conference

LSC will convene a biennial gathering of its grantee leadership that offers structured, substantive, peer-led working sessions that will highlight best practices, efficient use of resources, and create a vision for how to best serve those living in poverty that need legal support. The conference agenda would be led by an advisory group comprised of LSC grantees.

Investment: \$250,000 per conference, initial investment of \$750,000 for 3 conferences

2. Leadership Institute

LSC will create a Leadership Institute for 25 of its grantee program executive directors to come together for an intensive 12-18 month program to enhance leadership development and competencies in leading change, leading people, developing business acumen, and building collaborations. The participants will meet for two days six times over the course of the program in different parts of the country to focus on one of the core leadership competencies. Each session will follow a curriculum and use a variety of tools including 360° evaluations, readings, benchmarking activities, best business practice development, interviews, coaching, and discussion to enhance learning and inclusion of these new skills in the workplace. The inclusive cost per participant is \$18,250.

Investment: 25 participants per year: \$456,250, five-year commitment of \$2,281,250

“When the great majority of the individuals and small businesses of the nation no longer can, or believe they no longer can, get a lawyer, be represented effectively, go to court, settle their disputes in a fair and impartial way, and be treated like every other citizen, we quite simply, have lost the guiding principle of our republic—equal justice under law. When that goes, the rule of law goes, and when that goes, the great dreams of those patriots who founded and fought for this republic go with it—never to be reclaimed. Something must be done!”

The Honorable Deanell Reece Tacha, Dean of the Pepperdine School of Law and the former Chief Judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit

Innovation, Awareness, and Data

1. Pro Bono Innovation Match

In the face of great demand, and in light of the budgetary pressures on legal aid, one critical means of increasing the supply of legal services is through assistance from pro bono counsel. Large and small firm lawyers, government attorneys, in-house counsel, retired lawyers, law students, and even many non-lawyers are eager to assist by donating their time. And while pro bono lawyers cannot replace the excellent work of legal services lawyers, many of whom are subject-matter experts in the unique issues faced by the poor, the private bar can make important contributions to narrowing the justice gap.

In 2014, LSC will establish a Pro Bono Innovation Fund to support new and innovative projects that promote and enhance pro bono initiatives throughout the country. The Fund will provide special grants to create new partnerships and operationalize pro bono programs across the country that will match the available, often untapped, talent with the great unmet need. The Fund compliments the federal appropriated funds to increase free legal aid to low income Americans by engaging private attorneys. As recommended by LSC’s prestigious Pro Bono Task Force, the innovation fund will be an independent grant making program, modeled on the highly successful Technology Innovation Grant Program. Grants made to LSC-funded programs will invest in creating and maintaining robust and effective pro bono initiatives. Pro bono programs require considerable time, infrastructure, relationship-building, training, coordination, oversight and money from both the legal community and the public funders. LSC will manage this competitive grant program and provide annual grants for innovating programs.

Investment: \$1,500,000 per year, a five-year investment of \$7,500,000

2. Data-Driven Programming

Building on an extensive data needs survey of its grantees conducted in 2013, LSC will develop the capacity to collect and analyze essential data that will inform the legal aid community, policy makers, educators, and the public on issues currently affecting the civil legal system and those who need to access it. Research will be conducted with academic institutions for integrity of data collection and analysis on how best to a) assess the relationship between access to legal assistance and outcomes for low-income populations, in terms of i) meeting their legal needs; and ii) their perceptions of the fairness and legitimacy of the legal system; b) identify the role of court-access and pro bono legal representation in i) meeting the legal needs of low-income individuals and ii) civic engagement of providers and recipients of legal assistance; and c) identify the effective models of civic education involving legal services offices and pro bono attorneys. Data will help LSC and its grantees to develop evidence-based practices that should improve the quality of services.



Mr. Bradley, a 74-year old disabled man, lived with his mother until her death in 2003. Following her passing, his two brothers, ages 69 and 72, moved into the house with him. Soon after, Mr. Bradley received a condolence letter from Medi-Cal, which went on to demand more than \$20,000 for health care services received by his mother. In the event they could not pay the amount, the letter noted that the state would put a lien on their home.

The family home was owned jointly by the two younger brothers and their late mother. Living on a fixed income, the brothers could not afford to sell the house, as rent would be too high for them. They turned to LAFLA for help an attorney filed a hardship waiver on their behalf. It was subsequently approved by the state, and the brothers were allowed to keep their home.

Initial investment: \$500,000, five year commitment of \$2,500,000

3. Public Awareness

Most Americans are unaware that they are not entitled to a lawyer in civil cases. Most are not aware that they can lose their home, their benefits, their children, and their personal safety, all without an attorney present. Access to justice is a tenant on which our country is based, and as Vice President Joe Biden said at a recent LSC forum equal access to justice is “the right that makes all other rights possible.” Created by President Nixon and funded annually by Congress, LSC strives to expand that access to justice in every state and territory. LSC has a strong position to play as a convener of diverse voices; an organization with the largest national network of legal service providers; and LSC will work with stakeholders to raise awareness of the justice gap in our country.

Too frequently even members of the Bar are unaware of the great needs in civil legal aid and LSC will continue its efforts to educate and engage them on the vast need for legal help among the low income population of our country.

LSC will take the opportunity of its 40th year to spotlight the work of its 134 grantees across the country. LSC will coordinate events throughout the year that will bring together experts to discuss the challenges and opportunities facing civil legal aid now and in the years to come. These events and related materials and web presence will be available to LSC grantees, others in the civil legal aid field, and to sponsors and supporters of LSC’s 40th anniversary.

Investment of \$1,500,000 over five years

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Join Us

LSC’s Board of Directors has approved this multi-faceted initiative to raise funds for technology and leadership, innovation and service, during LSC’s 40th anniversary year. We seek to raise capital to fund the costs associated with launching, staffing, and maintaining these programs [and others identified by LSC](#) that will have a profound impact on how civil legal services are delivered across the country.

The LSC 40th Anniversary Fund, which will include all the programs mentioned, offers ways to recognize significant contributions. A wide variety of naming opportunities is available to memorialize the achievements of leading individuals in the field, leading donors to this effort, law firms, and businesses.

LSC believes that its 40th anniversary is a watershed moment – an opportunity to raise awareness of the life changing legal needs of millions of Americans living in poverty and to raise funds to forge a new level of national response to this crisis.

Help us work towards a system that indeed provides “justice for all.”



For more information on LSC’s 40th Anniversary Campaign please contact Wendy Rhein, Chief Development Officer, rheinw@lsc.gov or 202.295.1636.