<u>**TIG FINAL EVALUATION REPORT**</u>

Grantee name: Community Legal Aid   **TIG grant number: 12080**
Submission date: October 23, 2014 (revised)   **Approval date: October 23, 2014**

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I.   Project Goals and Objectives

Project Goal: The overall goal of this TIG was to develop and implement a web-based legal resource finder (LRF) system that enhances low income persons' access to legal assistance and information.

Objectives:

- Identify the elements/variables on which the automated client interview and internal search feature will be based and the information (e.g., organizations, self-help resources) which clients will receive or be directed based on their survey responses.
- Create a Drupal-based online LRF with the capacity to provide users – based on their responses to a short online interview – with information, referrals and, where available, links to the legal services and legal information that can best address their particular legal needs.
- Implement LRF system, thereby enhancing low income persons' access to legal assistance.

    All project goals and objectives were accomplished

II.   Evaluation Data and Methodologies

    The evaluation data and methodologies used to determine whether this project achieved its goals and objectives track those that were set out in the Evaluation Plan. The following list contains the key data sets or methodologies that were undertaken:

- The creation of a web form that incorporated the variables (inputs) on which a search of the LRF will be based
- The identification of legal issues to include in the LRF and their organization into "issue trees"
- The identification of the Massachusetts legal aid programs and other partner programs that have their program intake criteria and information included in the LFR data base
- The selection of legal education/self-help resources and other sources of assistance (e.g., websites for government agencies) that were linked to the legal issues included in the LRF
- The creation of the search engine in Drupal which locates the legal resources applicable to the inputs of the search
- The creation of a user-friendly results page

- The posting of the LRF on the SWWS
- Testing by the core LRF TIG Team
- Feedback received from targeted testers
- Outreach efforts
- Feedback from an end user satisfaction survey
- Google Analytics

III. Summary of Major Accomplishments, Recommendations and Future Steps

- In February 2014, Massachusetts launched the Massachusetts Legal Resource Finder which established a central location for accessing information on where get help on over 600 legal issues.   Among its key accomplishments:
    - It established for the first time in Massachusetts a central point for screening potential clients for LSC and MLAC funded legal aid programs.
    - It enhanced access to locating appropriate self-help resources on www.MassLegalHelp.org and similar legal information websites by its ability to direct users to specific web pages that apply to their legal issue. Over 300 webpages are connected through the search engine.
    - It also serves as a clearinghouse for identifying where you can get help if the local legal aid program can't help you. Such resources include court service centers, government agencies, lawyer of the day programs, and lawyer referral programs (many offer reduced-fee referral programs).

- Since its launch in February 2014, there have been over 21,000 completed searches. A user answers a few questions about him or herself (where do you live, age, and approximate income) and is then guided through selecting their legal issue from a series of unfolding issue trees.   After the user submits their answers, the LRF searches a database and gives back to the user information that could include any and all of the following:
    - If the issue is one which a Massachusetts legal services organization accepts for legal assistance, it would provide a link to their on-line application and/or provide information on how to call to complete an intake.
    - Live links to relevant self-help resources and court forms including automated Massachusetts forms on LHI and I-CAN.
    - Additional resources that exist for obtaining legal assistance such as lawyer of the day programs and other court-based help, lawyer referral services, other non profits, and government agencies.

- Based on feedback received from an end-user survey, 9 out 10 users stated that the LRF was helpful in locating applicable legal resources.   Most users would recommend the LRF to others. The overwhelming majority of users commented that the LRF was easy to use. Where there was negative feedback, it was directed at the lack of a legal aid program that accepted their legal issue for intake.

- Future Steps. Based on the success of the LRF, the Massachusetts Access to Justice Commission inquired with us about the possibility of building out the LRF to cover a wider spectrum of legal issues and constituencies involved in our legal system. If additional funding can be obtained, we are open to the possibility of work with the Access to Justice Commission on expanding this tool.

IV.   In-Depth Analysis of Accomplishments

Massachusetts may differ from many states in that it has over 20 legal aid programs (including four funded by LSC). It also does not have a single state-wide program that is the responsible for conducting intake for other programs.   For several years prior to the submission of this TIG application, the intake managers for several of the larger Massachusetts programs had been meeting regularly to discuss issues of common concern.   The concept of a legal resource finder was born-out of their collective desire to find a more efficient way to manage the huge volume of applicants to our many state legal aid programs in the wake of shrinking resources.   In a nutshell, we were looking to develop a tool that would allow those who have access to the internet to self-screen; thereby helping to reduce the number of phone or on-line inquiries programs received for help that were outside program priorities.

How it works?

A user completes a short on-line form with a limited number of questions about their legal problem, location, age and household income (What a receptionist or screener would ask when someone first calls into the program). After the user submits their answers, the LRF searches the database and gives back to the user information that could include any or all of the following:

➢ If the issue is one which a Massachusetts legal services organization accepts for legal assistance, it provides a link to their on-line application and/or provides information on how to call to complete an intake.

➢ Live links to relevant self-help resources and court forms including automated Massachusetts forms on LHI and I-CAN.

➢ Additional resources that exist for obtaining legal assistance such as lawyer of the day programs and other court-based help, lawyer referral services, other non profits, and government agencies.

How It Was Built?

Our first task was to define the scope of legal issues that would be included in the LRF. Working with the intake managers of state partner programs, we came-up with a list of over 600 distinct legal issues that applicants commonly present to legal aid programs.

After identifying the legal issues to be included in the LRF, our core working group went to work matching each legal issue to the relevant legal education pages located on our statewide website, www.MassLegalHelp.org, and the websites of other trusted organizations (such as the Massachusetts Trial Court, Massachusetts Law Library, Social Security Administration, National Consumer Law Center). We also added links to legal forms including links to our ICAN and A2J Author interviews and forms located on our state trial court website. We also added information on lawyer-for-the-day programs, government programs, bar association lawyer referral programs, and other non profit agencies that offered free or low cost legal assistance.

We also set about defining the criteria (variables) that a user would need to input to locate resources. We chose as our criteria 1) location (city or zipcode), 2) whether someone was 60 or older (because different resources are available for someone 60 or older), 3) household size and 4) income. When a legal aid program sets up their program profile, it can decide what income guideline it wants to apply for its results, including none at all. (For example, elder funding usually does not have an upper income cap; in setting up the profile for users who are 60 and older, the program can deactivate any income guideline).

TIG monies were then used to pay for a Drupal programmer who developed the framework to organize the substantive content in the data base. This consultant also created the search mechanism that powers the LRF. Working closely with the Drupal programmer, our core working group also developed the format of the launch page (homepage) and the results pages.

Once we created the search engine, participating programs were invited to set-up profiles in the database.

Program profiles include setting a maximum income percentage, identification of service area

. . .and selection of the legal issues (aka, "priorities") programs want referred to their intake systems.
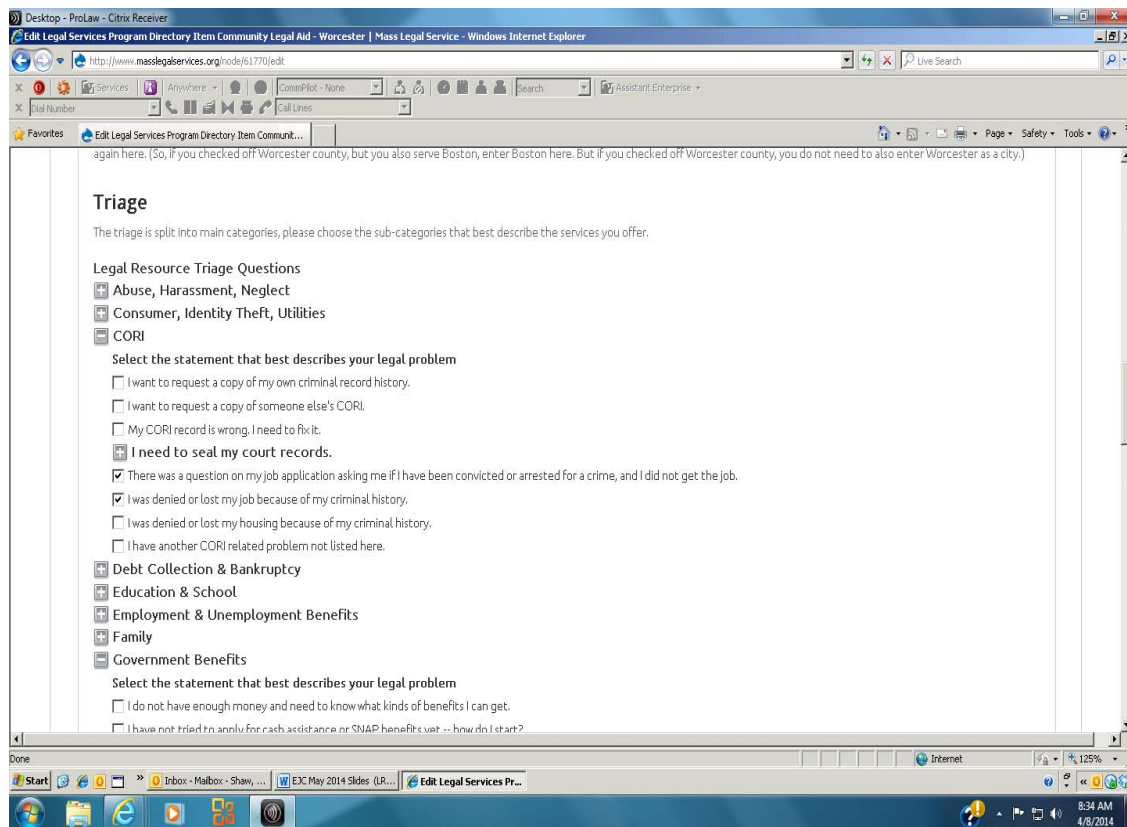
Project Launch and Impact

The LRF was soft-launched in February 2014. This meant we made the site live in the SWWS but only publicized its launch among colleagues and partner programs. As part of this soft launch, we reached out to our legal aid colleagues across the state to test the LRF. We sought their help verifying that the LRF was providing accurate results in terms of their programs' intake criteria. We also asked our colleagues to tell us about alternative resources we may have overlooked.

As the SWWS already receives a lot of hits from the general public, it was inevitable that the larger client community would discover it on its own. To capture their feedback, we added in an end user survey. As of the date of this final report was prepared, we received nearly 50 surveys back.

A few adjustments or modifications were made to the LRF based on this feedback. Key adjustments included adding clearer instructions on how to use the LRF, adding a location only search feature, adding more branches to issue trees where there was too much content appearing on a single branch, and conversely, consolidating some

issues when there really was no difference in terms of how a program handled those issues. We also made many adjustments to the way information is displayed on the results page. Colleagues also provided us with suggestions for additional alternative resources.

The LRF was officially launched on April 28, 2014 with the dissemination of a general press release. A copy appears in the Appendix. We followed this up with the distribution of information posters and business cards to partner programs, law libraries and other locations. A copy of the poster/business card template is also included in the Appendix.

The LRF has already begun to have an impact on the way our client community locates legal resources. Between February and September 2014, over 21,000 users have used the LRF to locate legal resources. Community Legal Aid, the lead grantee on this TIG, has included the LRF as part of its application process. On its website, applicants are instructed to visit the LRF before completing an on-line application or calling for phone-intake. Other Massachusetts legal aid programs have added similar instructions on their websites.

It is our hope that the LRF will reduce the number of applicants who contact legal aid with legal issues that are outside of priorities. However, we did not put in systems (or metrics) to measure this impact. We thought – at least initially – the impact the LRF would have on call volume would be imperceptible given the overwhelming demand that is put on our intake systems at this time. (Diverting one caller only means a spot in the phone queue opens up for someone who might have gotten a busy signal). CLA can say, anecdotally, that the LRF is being used to help clients access CLA as we have seen the LRF appear frequently in our intakes as the referral source. We just don't have a means to measure who is and how many are being re-directed away from CLA or other sister legal aid programs.

Through Google Analytics, the LRF is capable of producing reports that show what are the most-searched legal issues; it can also do this by geographic area. A report of this nature was recently given to the Massachusetts Project Directors and is included in the Appendix as an example of the type of data the LRF can provide. In this sense, the LRF can serve as an additional tool for helping programs complete periodic needs assessment.

V. Factors affecting project accomplishments, and
VI. Strategies to address major challenges

Up to the point when we were ready to have the participating programs and agencies set-up their profiles, progress on completing our milestone activities went very smoothly. We attribute this ease to the fact that we had clear sense of purpose, a well-defined set of activities that needed to be undertaken, a core working group that was committed to meeting regularly, and a supportive group of intake managers who were available to provide feedback on the legal issues to be included.

It was when it came time to inviting partner programs to set-up their profiles in the administrative sections of the LRF that we encountered our first challenge to the completion of the project. While the concept of the LRF had been readily embraced by our partner programs, programs were slow in responding to requests to enter their intake information into the data base.   For programs with multiple offices and special grants that covered a subset of their service area, this also meant creating multiple profiles within the data base. Given the number of legal issues included (over 600 issues), this proved to be a very time consuming task. We found ourselves having to spend a lot of time first prodding programs to get started, and in many cases we had to help them through the process of entering their data.   While this was unexpected, we took solace in the fact that once profiles were set-up, maintaining them should come a lot easier.

VII.   Major lessons and recommendations

- Who to include as a program or resource

At the outset of this project, it was clear to us that the Massachusetts legal aid programs funded by LSC and/or MLAC were going to be included in the data base. We also knew coming into this project that we would include a few other non profits whose mission was closely aligned with legal aid. When word got out about this new web tool, we began to get requests from a broader spectrum of programs or organizations asking to be included in the site including some that required a payment of a fee for services. These requests forced us to define for ourselves what kinds of programs or resources should get included. We reminded ourselves that the goal of this grant was to create a web-tool that would aid our client community with locating free or low cost legal assistance. It was not meant to be an all encompassing directory of where to find a lawyer. Yet, we also did not want to deny our users information about other legal resources that may be able to assist even if they did not share the same mission as legal aid. In the end, we decided to include in the data base only those programs that provide free or nominal fees for their services. The LRF does provide information about resources that are not free but we structured this as a single web page that can be accessed without going through a search.   In the introduction to LRF, you will see links to such things as Lawyer Referral Programs which are fee based.

- Issue trees: Balance between precision and overwhelming users

One of the ongoing concerns we had as we built the LRF was whether we had gone too far with the number of legal issues that could be searched in the LRF. (This concern is more about the number of sub-issues within a broader category, and not the number of major categories itself). Our concern was that with too many sub-issues, users might get overwhelmed. In earlier versions of our issue trees, some issues had as many as 20 sub-issues on one branch. As it turned out, feedback from colleagues and users helped us trim back some of the issue trees. We also devised ways to better group sub-issues so that we could limit the amount of issues showing on one branch. Ultimately, the lesson we share is only go as deep into an issue as it matters for intake and screening.

- The challenge of screening for income/financial eligibility

Programs building similar triage tools may want to give some thought as to whether it is necessary to include income in their search criteria. When someone conducts a search in our LRF, he or she is anonymous (no financial data is stored).   When a user gets a match to a legal aid program, he or she will then need to go through a formal financial eligibility screening with that program. Nevertheless, we decided to include household income in our search criteria because we felt it was important to *not* provide information about legal aid programs in the search results when the user was clearly over income for legal aid.

Our decision to include income as a search criteria meant that we had to devise a framework in the LRF for programs to be able to set different income guidelines (or none at all) for some subset of legal issues handled within their program.   Several of our core partner programs have Title III (elder), Fair Housing/HUD and Foreclosure Prevention grants that do not have an upper income cap.   Creating a structure to accommodate these variations was probably our biggest programming challenge.   We devised a framework that allowed programs to set up special "nodes" for certain legal issues that – in effect – operated as an override for their general income guidelines.   For example, CLA - as an LSC funded program - generally applies LSC income guidelines for its legal services. However, CLA also has a special foreclosure prevention grant that has no upper income restriction. CLA was able to setup its profile in the data base so that users seeking help with preventing foreclosure would not be screened out if their household income was above 200% of federal poverty guidelines.

- Managing Expectations

Make sure you are clear in your explanation of what this tool is meant to do. Where there was negative reaction to the LRF, it was because the user was disappointed that the LRF did not lead them to a free lawyer.   When this negative feedback started coming in, it made us revise how we explained what this website will do.   Unfortunately, there are not free lawyers for all of the issues we included in the LRF.

- Where the gaps are in our self-help/pro se materials.

One of the ancillary benefits to this entire project was that it allowed us to take inventory of what self-help/legal education resources existed in our state.   While we were able to locate a web page to match with all of the legal issues, some of these materials were really not specific to the legal issue that was defined; sometimes all we had was a general overview for a legal topic with not a lot of information on the specific sub-issue.

APPENDIX

Legal Resource Finder Feedback

We value your feedback about the Legal Resource Finder! Please let us know what you think.
Important: we cannot give legal advice or information through this form. If you want legal advice or information, please use one of the resources in the Legal Resource Finder.
How did you find out about the Legal Resource Finder? (Check all that apply.)

☐ Internet search

☐ Legal aid website

☐ Court

☐ Library

☐ Advocate or social worker

☐ Friend

☐ Other

Where are you using the Legal Resource Finder? (Check all that apply.)

☐ Home computer

☐ Phone

☐ At work

☐ Friend or relative's computer

☐ Library

☐ Courthouse

☐ Social service office

☐ Legal aid office

☐ Other

How easy was the Legal Resource Finder to use?

⊙ Very easy

⊙ Somewhat easy

⊙ Not easy

The LRF gave me the following resources for my legal problem (Check all that apply.) *

☐ Contact information for free or low cost a lawyer or legal aid program

☐ Contact information for a lawyer referral program

☐ Links to self-help or legal information

☐ Information about court based programs

☐ Information about government agency programs

☐ Other

I would use the LRF again or recommend it to a friend

☐ Yes

☐ No

Other comments?

MASSACHUSETTS LEGAL RESOURCE FINDER LAUNCHED – FREE ONLINE RESOURCE WILL HELP LOW-INCOME AND ELDERLY FIND LEGAL HELP

Community Legal Aid (CLA) and the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute (MLRI) are pleased to announce the launch of a new website to help elders and low-income persons locate legal assistance and information for a wide range of civil legal problems. This tool –the Massachusetts Legal Resource Finder (LRF) – can be accessed at www.masslrf.org. A Technology Initiative Grant (TIG) from the federal Legal Services Corporation (LSC) funded its development.

"Massachusetts has a wide range of programs to help low-income people with legal needs, including LSC- and state-funded legal services programs, other nonprofits that provide legal assistance, court-based programs, attorney referral services, and web based self-help materials," said Gordon Shaw, Director of Client Access at Community Legal Aid. "Until now, there has not been a centralized way to direct people to these resources."

On the LRF homepage, the user answers a few screening questions and then clicks on a "search" button. The results page shows whether there is a match to a legal aid program and gives information on how to apply for legal aid at that program. The results page also shows links to alternative resources (such as court-based programs, government programs, and bar association lawyer referral programs) as well as links to relevant legal education pages on www.masslegalhelp.org and other trusted websites.

"People need civil legal aid to resolve many critical problems, including housing stability, child custody conflicts, denial of unemployment insurance or healthcare coverage, and domestic violence," said Rochelle Hahn, Director of MLRI's masslegalservices.org website. "The LRF not only connects people with legal aid and other programs that can help – it also provides people with self-help materials to better understand their legal situations and to guide them when legal assistance is not available due to limited resources."

About Community Legal Aid
Community Legal Aid (www.communitylegal.org) is the civil legal aid program that provides free legal services to low-income and elderly residents of central and western Massachusetts. Through its advocacy in over 5,000 cases each year, the region's most vulnerable residents obtain safe and stable housing, access disability and other benefits programs, and break free from domestic violence. With a dedicated staff of over 70 people, CLA provides critical legal representation to clients who cannot afford to pay for a lawyer to assist them with their most basic needs.

About the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute
Massachusetts Law Reform Institute (www.mlri.org) is the statewide poverty law and policy institute whose mission is to advance economic, racial and social justice through legal action, advocacy and public information. MLRI advocates for systemic reforms to policies and practices that harm people living in poverty and works to ensure that the fundamental needs of traditionally underserved, low-income populations are met. In addition, MLRI serves as the statewide support center for local and regional legal services providers and advocacy organizations. MLRI is also home to the Massachusetts Legal Aid Websites Project providing access to legal information on a wide variety of legal topics that affect low income residents of Massachusetts. See www.masslegalhelp.org for the general public and www.masslegalservices.org for attorneys and advocates.

About the Legal Services Corporation
Since 2000, when Congress first appropriated special funds for its Technology Initiative Grants (TIG) program, LSC has been a leader in the development and use of technology to more effectively meet the legal needs of low-income Americans. TIG has supported projects to develop, test and replicate technologies that improve client access to high-quality legal information and assistance. It has also helped programs enhance their overall information technology infrastructure. TIG 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. Through 2013, LSC has made nearly 600 TIG awards, totaling over $40 million. For more information, please see www.tig.lsc.gov.

Poster/Business Card Template

Do you need help with a legal problem in Massachusetts?

The Massachusetts Legal Resource Finder,
www.MassLRF.org, can help you find:

- Free civil legal aid.
- Free self-help materials and legal information.
- Court-based lawyer for the day programs.
- Lawyer referral services.

MassLegalAid.org

LSC

TO: Massachusetts Project Directors
FROM: Rochelle Hahn
DATE: June 11, 2014
RE: The Legal Resource Finder – Data Analysis of Searches, April and
May 2014

The Legal Resource Finder went live in February 2014. In addition to providing Massachusetts residents with referrals to legal services, nonprofits, courts and self–help materials, the data collected through the Legal Resource finder is a valuable source of information about legal needs in Massachusetts.

Number of Searches

Between February 1, 2014 and May 31, 2014, over **10,200 searches** were performed. A closer examination of the data from April and May 2014, when over **4,200 searches** were performed, is illustrative.
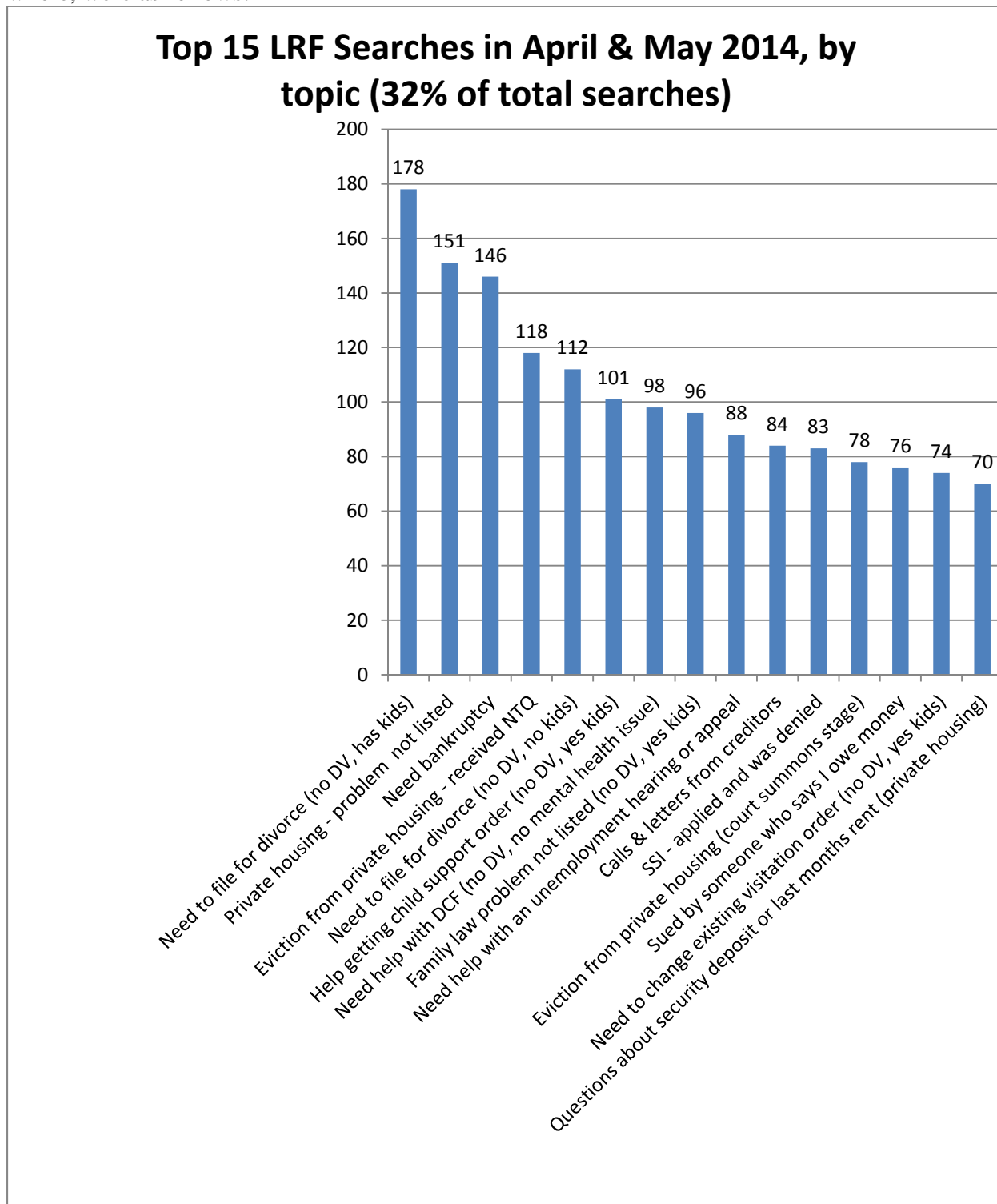
Searches by Location

The searches broke down geographically by county as follows:
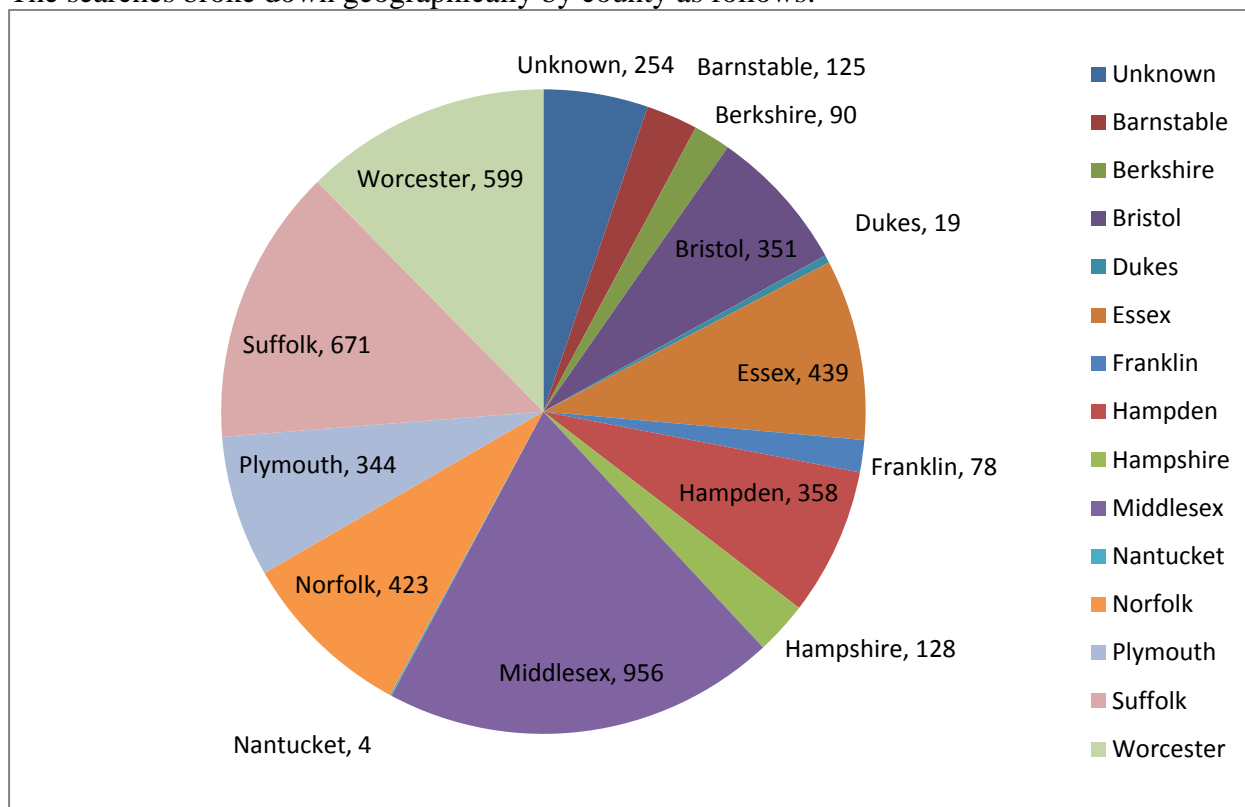
Searches by Issue Area

The top 15 issue areas searched, which collectively constituted 32% of the searches as a whole, were as follows:

Top 15 LRF Searches in April & May 2014, by topic (32% of total searches)

Topic	Searches
Need to file for divorce (no DV, has kids)	178
Private housing - problem not listed	151
Need bankruptcy	146
Eviction from private housing - received NTQ	118
Need to file for divorce (no DV, no kids)	112
Help getting child support order (no DV, yes kids)	101
Need help with DCF (no DV, no mental health issue)	98
Family law problem not listed (no DV, yes kids)	96
Need help with an unemployment hearing or appeal	88
Calls & letters from creditors	84
SSI - applied and was denied	83
Eviction from private housing (court summons stage)	78
Sued by someone who says I owe money	76
Need to change existing visitation order (no DV, yes kids)	74
Questions about security deposit or last months rent (private housing)	70

Family law issues (for those without domestic violence), housing and debt related issues were the top issue areas. Unemployment and SSI were also in the top 15 issue areas searched.

If any program would like more detailed information about issues being searched for in their service area, please contact Rochelle Hahn, rhahn@mlri.org