



**LEGAL SERVICES CORPORATION  
REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS:  
MICROSOFT STATEWIDE LEGAL ACCESS  
PORTAL PROJECT**

**OPEN: NOVEMBER 22, 2016  
CLOSE: JANUARY 19, 2017**

## INTRODUCTION

The [2013 Legal Services Corporation \(LSC\) Technology Summit Report](#) recommended that, to improve access to justice using technology, states should develop online, integrated access to justice portals to direct users to some form of effective legal assistance to help them address essential civil legal needs. Working with LSC and Pro Bono Net, Microsoft Corporation will provide at least \$1 million in technical development to create a pilot legal access portal.

This Request for Proposals (RFP) solicits the information and commitments that LSC, in consultation with other national stakeholders, needs to identify one or possibly two states or jurisdictions<sup>1</sup> to serve as pilot projects for implementing the legal access portal concept.

## ABOUT THE PARTNERS

### Legal Services Corporation

The Legal Services Corporation (LSC) is the single largest funder of civil legal aid for low-income Americans in the United States. Established in 1974, LSC is a private, 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation that provides grants, program support, and oversight to 134 civil legal aid organizations with approximately 800 offices serving every state and territory. LSC distributes 92 percent of its revenue in grants to legal aid programs. Virtually all of LSC's grant funding comes from an annual Congressional appropriation. The Corporation is led by a bipartisan board of directors whose 11 members are appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate.

### Microsoft Corporation

Founded in 1975, Microsoft is a worldwide leader in software, services, devices and solutions that help people and organizations to achieve more. Through the Microsoft Statewide Access Portal Project, Microsoft seeks to develop a pilot of a first-of-its-kind system that will be accessible from any device, standards-compliant and connected to legal aid organizations through open software interfaces.

### Pro Bono Net

Pro Bono Net is a national non-profit organization dedicated to increasing access to justice for the disadvantaged. Through innovative technology solutions and expertise in building and mobilizing justice networks, Pro Bono Net transforms the way legal help reaches the underserved. Since 1999, Pro Bono Net has worked with a broad network of access to justice partners to develop online services (including [www.probono.net](http://www.probono.net), [www.lawhelp.org](http://www.lawhelp.org) and [www.lawhelpinteractive.org](http://www.lawhelpinteractive.org)) that enable legal advocates to make a stronger impact, increase volunteer participation, and empower the public with information and self-help tools to improve their lives.

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<sup>1</sup> LSC will entertain proposals for pilots serving a significant portion, but less than all, of a state if the proposal provides compelling rationale for doing so and outlines how the pilot eventually can be expanded to be statewide.

## RFP OVERVIEW

### A Vision of an Integrated Service-Delivery System

Technology can and must play a vital role in transforming service delivery so that people who cannot afford a lawyer or easily locate guidance to deal with an essential civil legal need obtain some form of effective assistance.

The strategy for implementing this vision, as described in the Technology Summit Report linked above, has five main components:

1. Creating in each state a unified legal access portal which, using an automated triage process, directs persons needing legal assistance to the most appropriate form of assistance and guides self-represented litigants through the entire legal process.
2. Deploying sophisticated document assembly proposals to support the creation of legal documents by service providers and by portal users themselves and linking the document creation process to the delivery of legal information and limited scope legal representation.
3. Taking advantage of mobile technologies to reach more persons more effectively.
4. Applying business process simplification principles to all access to justice activities to make them as efficient as practicable.
5. Developing “expert systems” to assist clients, lawyers, and other services providers by using information provided by a client to create tailored legal information.

### A Vision for Statewide Legal Portals

Much has been done to improve access to resources for people seeking legal assistance, but potential litigants often face a complex patchwork of services. Each state now has multiple websites providing information on its courts, legal aid services, and organized bar resources. The variety of choices can be confusing to the user and wasteful of scarce resources. A better approach would be a single, statewide, web access portal to which a user would be directed no matter where he or she enters the system. The portal would support computers, tablets, and smartphones, and meet accessibility standards. Also, the portal should support users who have a legal need that does not require court intervention, such as the need for a will, a demand letter for a rental deposit, or to seek relief from unfair debt collection tactics.

When a single, statewide, unified legal access portal is implemented:

- Information will be available anywhere, any time to every person seeking assistance.
- Assistance from a person – lawyer or otherwise – will be available anywhere, if resources are available.
- The portal will use methods such as branching logic questions and gamification to assess the capabilities and circumstances of an inquirer, which will be part of the referral logic.
- The portal will generate information on the legal needs of persons using it and on the results achieved from the referrals provided. The portal will aggregate this information and provide it regularly to all participating entities.

The portal will be an integrated system of resources, rules, and recommendations through which users can be matched with available services and applicable resources. The site will analyze users' responses to questions and direct them to the most appropriate resource, considering factors such as case or situations complexity, the user's capacity to use technology, strength and representation of the opponent, the importance of the user's stake in the outcome, and the availability of resources, updated in real time.

All access to justice entities in a participating jurisdiction (including legal aid entities, courts, court administrators, the organized bar, interested law firms and lawyers, law schools, libraries, pro bono support entities, and other interested community entities) will have a presence on the portal and will receive appropriate referrals from it. If a referral proves inappropriate, the entity to which the referral was made may make a different referral. The system will preserve the confidentiality of information an inquirer provides.

Service options will include:

- A link to a specific section of a website for substantive and procedural information and access to document assembly tools for completing forms.
- Connection to a legal services, court, or library staff person for information and navigation assistance (including a personal assessment of the capability of the service requester).
- Connection to a self-help center or legal services attorney.
- Connection to a pro bono lawyer.
- Connection to a lawyer providing unbundled services on a pro bono or compensated basis (if the client is able to pay for some services).
- Connection to the organized bar or other solutions that provide legal assistance.

If the inquirer is connected to a person, that person will have the capability to change the referral. Responses from a person will take the initial form of an email, text message, or live chat. Escalation can take the form of a phone call or video conference.

An essential function of the portal will be the accumulation of data on how cases progress and, based on outcome data, the relative efficacy of various service delivery mechanisms. The goal is to employ technology that is smart enough to refine referrals based on the data collected, but human review will be essential to the evaluation process.

### **Requirements for a Portal**

Tom Clarke of the National Center for State Courts (NCSC), with funding from the State Justice Institute, conducted a series of meetings with two advisory committees to develop model requirements for a portal. His findings were published in [Building a Litigant Portal – Business and Technical Requirements](#). Microsoft will oversee the development of the portal following the business and technical requirements described in this document. As a result, applicants should propose requirements that are compatible with those set forth in this document.

**PROPOSAL SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS**

States wishing to be considered as a pilot jurisdiction for this project should submit a response of 30 pages or less (not including proposal appendices described below, which may not exceed 32 pages) addressing the following sections, each of which is explained below:

1. Plan for Implementing a Legal Access Portal
2. Capacities in Place to Support a Portal
3. Governance
4. Funding for the Project (including a sustainability plan)
5. Evaluation Strategy
6. Project Staffing
7. Past Experience Implementing Technology Projects
8. Letters of Commitment
9. Letters of Support
10. Proposal Appendices

**1. Vision for Implementing a Legal Access Portal and Potential for Replication**

Describe in detail your state’s vision for a legal access portal. Explain the need, identify all of the entities that will be participating, and describe how this fits with your state’s access to justice objectives. Explain why your state should be a pilot for this project.

Because this is a pilot project, highlight your proposal’s potential for replication based on considerations such as cost and complexity. Please indicate your willingness to adhere to data standards. Finally, indicate what technology systems you have in place that are used elsewhere so that application program interfaces (APIs) developed for your systems could be used for systems in other jurisdictions.

**2. Capacities in Place to Support a Portal**

Describe in detail your state’s capacity to support a portal. We want to identify up to two sites that are ready to implement statewide or regional pilots and are prepared to commit significant resources and local partnerships to the endeavor. Because the portal is intended to get the user to the proper level of assistance, the pilot jurisdictions will need a full panoply of options available, such as:

- Strong partnerships among the courts, legal services providers, the organized bar, and community organizations.
- Well-developed self-help resources, including uniform, automated court forms; legal informational websites; online referral directories and instructional videos.
- Court-based self-help centers that use technology to provide services in remote areas.
- Alternative dispute resolution (ADR) programs.

- Rules that facilitate the unbundling of legal services.
- Robust lawyer-referral programs with affordable limited scope and full representation options.
- Strong pro bono attorney resources.
- Online intake for legal aid programs.
- Databases and website APIs with the technical ability to share information easily.
- A commitment to sustain the portal after the pilot.

The Microsoft contribution is to provide technical development consultation to build the portal. It is not to provide funding for the resources to which users will be directed for assistance with their legal problems. The strongest respondents will be those with the best systems and resources in place to support the referrals of the portal. It will be of no benefit to a user to go through the assessment process only to be informed that no assistance is available. To help you assess if you are ready to support a portal, you might find helpful the [Justice for All Guidance Materials](#) recently published by the NCSC.

### **3. Governance**

The portal project will need a governance structure that ensures participation by necessary parties while allowing efficient and timely management and decision-making. The composition of the governing body may vary by jurisdiction, but the following entities are likely participants:

- Courts (clerks separately represented in some states)
- Civil legal aid organizations
- Pro bono support organizations
- State and local bar associations
- Libraries
- “Discovery” organizations (aid the public to know about and find portal)
- Social and human services organizations
- Self-help centers
- Non-court alternative dispute resolution (ADR) providers
- Law schools
- Administrative agencies
- Public representatives
- Other key referring agencies

In this section of the response, explain in detail what organizations will participate in the portal and how governance of the project will be handled. Describe any previous

collaborations of all or some of the participants that demonstrate their ability to work toward a common goal.

#### **4. Funding for the Project (including sustainability)**

Microsoft will:

- Contribute funding and oversee a technology/solutions firm to build a proof of concept
- Establish detailed technical requirements
- Provide technical project management
- Provide consultation for solution development

The pilot jurisdiction must provide all other funding to create and operate the portal. This includes funding to sustain the portal after the pilot phase has ended. The advisory group for the NCSC project concluded that the court budget was a good place to host the necessary funds, but that ongoing operational funding for a portal might be supplemented in a number of ways, including advertising, donations, fees for referrals to for-profit entities, provider subscription fees, and bar contributions.

The applicant should include in its proposal a budget, including funding resources, to create and operate the portal, as well as a cost/benefit analysis to determine how to measure return on investment (ROI) and what the target ROI will be. Subsequent analyses should confirm whether or not the portal actually delivers the expected value in the expected ways. Participating entities will want to perform similar exercises from their own perspective to confirm that they or their stakeholders get value from their participation.

Applicants must also provide a sustainability plan that includes an estimate of the projected ongoing costs of the project two (2) years after the completion of the pilot, including, but not limited to, projected staffing, equipment, and overhead costs in dollar values. Applicants should also provide details on how the funding to sustain the portal will be obtained.

#### **5. Evaluation Strategy**

In addition to the ROI study described above, applicants should detail their evaluation plan so that the benefits for users can be clearly measured. The evaluation plan should articulate the goals and objectives of the project, identify the activities and strategies that will be implemented to achieve the goals and objectives, and specify the methodologies and data sets that will be used to evaluate the project's progress and accomplishments.

Some example objectives from the NSCS paper are:

- Increased assistance for legal problems
- Improved integration of self-help resources
- Improved focus on potential litigants
- Increased use of non-traditional resources

Example performance measures are:

- Percentage of portal users who receive meaningful assistance
- Percentage of providers who participate in the portal
- Reduction in litigant time and cost to court systems
- Change in user satisfaction
- Percentage of potential litigants who use alternative dispute resolution

LSC provides guidance on developing evaluation plans for technology projects, including a [sample form](#). You may find these materials useful in responding to this section.

## **6. Project Staffing**

Provide a staffing plan that identifies specific personnel from particular organizations with sufficient capacity, qualifications, and experience to manage the portal. If they are current employees, state for whom they work and the percentage of their time they will devote to the project. If you propose to hire new staff, indicate for whom they will work and the percentage of their time to be devoted to the project. Please provide information on staff experience that is directly relevant to successfully completing this project and include their bios in the Proposal Appendices.

Provide a single point of contact (POC) that will be the primary conduit and liaison with pilot teams. Responsibilities will include but are not limited to:

- Authority to make key decisions in development of the pilot
- Primary POC to liaise with pilot teams on a regular cadence to ensure appropriate representation from your state
- Own identification and resolution of any technical or business requirements
- Coordination point for state resources and staff

## **7. Past Experience Implementing Technology Projects**

Provide information on past technology projects by partners participating in this access portal project that improved access to justice. State how this experience will be relevant to what is proposed for this project, including lessons learned that can be applied here.

## **8. Letters of Commitment**

Firm commitments from all of the parties needed to implement and support an access portal are important. Please provide letters of commitment from all of those entities that will be participating in any capacity as described in your responses to previous sections. You will need letters from all who are to provide services to the project, take referrals from the project, or provide funding to it.

**9. Letters of Support**

If you have support for the project from entities that will not be direct participants in the project, please provide their letters of support separately from the letters of commitment.

**10. Proposal Appendices**

In addition to letters of commitment and support, you may include other documents in support of your submission. These may include timelines, technical diagrams, organizational charts, maps, and résumés. They may also include information on past projects and credentials of firms and outside consultants involved in the project. The total of all such submissions is limited to 32 pages.

**RFP SCHEDULE AND SELECTION REVIEW PROCESS**

The RFP process will last approximately 6 months and involves five stages, described below:

| DATE                        | EVENT   |
|-----------------------------|---|
| November 22, 2016           | RFP issued  |
| January 19, 2017            | Deadline for applicants to submit proposals   |
| January 23-27, 2017         | <p><b>Stage One: Initial Review for Completeness.</b><br/>           LSC will review applications for completeness and provide notice to applicant. A notice of a complete submission merely acknowledges receipt of a proposal that will be considered for a pilot project. Applicants receiving a notice of incomplete submission will have seven days to complete their application.</p> |
| January 30 – March 10, 2017 | <p><b>Stage Two: Substantive Review.</b><br/>           LSC and outside reviewers selected by LSC will evaluate proposals and select a small group of likely candidates for information gathering stage.</p>  |
| March 13-31, 2017           | <p><b>Stage Three: Information Gathering and Site Visits.</b><br/>           LSC and its outside reviewers will conduct information gathering with applicants. This may require site visits to meet with the proposed governance bodies and to examine technology structures currently in place.</p>  |
| April 1, 2017               | <p><b>Stage Four: Final Selection</b><br/>           LSC will notify the successful applicants of their selection.</p>  |

**RFP RELATED QUESTIONS**

Please submit questions relating to this RFP by email to Helen Gerostathos Guyton, Assistant General Counsel, at [guytonh@lsc.gov](mailto:guytonh@lsc.gov). Answers to all questions submitted will be posted on LSC’s website at <http://www.lsc.gov/microsoft-statewide-legal-access-portal-project> in the FAQ section at the end of this RFP, below.

**PROPOSAL DEADLINES AND MODE OF DELIVERY**

All proposals must be received by LSC **no later than 5:30 P.M., EST, on January 19, 2017.**

Proposals must be in electronic format (PDF or MS Word)

Email proposals to:

Helen Gerostathos Guyton

Assistant General Counsel

Legal Services Corporation

Email: [guytonh@lsc.gov](mailto:guytonh@lsc.gov)

Email Cc: Glenn Rawdon, Senior Program Counsel (Technology), [grawdon@lsc.gov](mailto:grawdon@lsc.gov)

You are solely responsible for ensuring that your proposal is delivered on time. Late proposals may be accepted in LSC's sole discretion. You must bear all costs incurred in preparing your proposal; contract awards will not cover proposal costs.

### **LSC's RIGHTS**

LSC reserves the right to:

- Accept or reject any or all proposals, or any part thereof;
- Waive any informalities or technicalities contained in any proposal received;
- Conduct discussions with respondents and accept revisions of proposals after the closing date;
- Request clarification from any respondents on any or all aspects of its proposals;
- Cancel or re-issue this RFP at any time;
- Retain all proposals submitted in response to this RFP;
- Invite some, all, or none of the respondents for interviews, demonstrations, presentations and further discussion;

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

During the RFP process, you may be given access to LSC's confidential or proprietary information. You agree not to use this information for your or any third-party's benefit, and will not disclose this information to any person who does not have a need to know.

### **FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT**

**The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and associated LSC regulations may require LSC to disclose certain documents to the public, including portions of your proposal. Generally, LSC will not release any documents that would cause your vendor competitive harm. You are encouraged, however, to label any confidential information contained in your proposal to facilitate LSC's ability to withhold it from disclosure.**