

Legal Services Corporation
TECHNOLOGY INITIATIVE GRANTS PROGRAM
Final Grant Report

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I. Project Goals and Objectives

The goal of this project was to enhance client services through the development and implementation of a tickler system to remind clients about appointments and deadlines through mobile communications.

Project partners sought to achieve this overarching goal by working toward the following objectives:

1. Create an easy to use text messaging interface within the LegalServer case management system to allow advocates to send automated text messages to clients
2. Increase efficiency of advocates by implementing an automated tickler system
3. Increase effectiveness and efficiency of pro-se clinics by implementing automated tickler system.

Over the course of the project, the objectives were slightly modified based on feedback from LawNY® staff, technological limitations, and business process changes but the overarching goal to enhance client services remained a priority. Project partners were able to build a user friendly, flexible, text messaging platform that advocates are able to use for appointment reminders, check-ins and general communication with their clients.

II. Evaluation Data and Methodologies

Several types of data sets and methods were used to assess the project's accomplishments, as set out in the project evaluation plan LawNY® submitted to the Legal Services Corporation (LSC). These included:

1. Advocate feedback
Throughout the grant period, LawNY® staff members were asked to respond to various surveys regarding the development and implementation of the SMS tool in LegalServer. Staff was surveyed prior to the development, soon after the launch of the tool and throughout the pilot phase of the project. Surveys were tailored based on the usage of the tool to gather accurate data from staff members who were using the tool and to determine the reasons why some staff members were not using the tool. The initial surveys helped in the development of a focus group that shaped the direction of the project and the functionality of the tool.

2. Client feedback

LawNY® also solicited feedback from clients in multiple stages. Prior to the launch of the tool, clients were asked if receiving text messages from their advocate would be something they were interested in. After launch, clients were sent one question surveys to determine whether they found the ability to text with the advocate useful.

3. Usage data

LawNY® collected a number of data points regarding the sending and receipt of text messages. Ideally, this data will help to set communication priorities and policy and make adjustments to the text messaging tool in the future.

III. Summary of Major Accomplishments

This project succeeded in developing, testing and implementing a solution for advocates who were looking to increase the efficiency of their legal work through text messaging. Through an integration with the Twilio API, advocates are able to send their clients a text message directly from their case within the LegalServer case management system. There are significant advantages to being able to communicate with a client via text message through a case management system. It allow for advocates to integrate client communications into their workflow, and for all text messages to be recorded within the case in LegalServer. Prior to the launch of the SMS tool, if an advocate wanted to send a text message to a client, they were relying on Google Voice numbers, shared office cell phones or personal cell phones which not only decentralized client communications, but made advocates hesitant to engage in a text messaging conversations with their client, even if it was requested.

Based on surveys completed by both advocates and clients, overall the SMS tool has been very well received. The staff members who use the tool find it to be very useful, stating “I think it's great! I've had an overall positive response from clients who have agreed to receive text messages. It really comes in handy and is a useful tool to communicate with clients.”

A non-technical accomplishment of this project was the successful shift in approach due to effective engagement with the LawNY® staff. The concept for this project originally revolved around integrating the text messaging functionality into the task creation component of LegalServer. However, after holding a focus group with representatives with different practice areas, offices and job descriptions, we agreed that a more flexible approach was ultimately going to be more useful. The focus group was instrumental in developing LawNY®'s policy and best practices

surrounding the usage of the text messaging tool. Effectively engaging the staff played a significant role in the success of this project and while it did ultimately change the course of the implementation, we believe that this led to a more successful outcome.

IV. In-Depth Analysis of Accomplishments

When this project was initially proposed, LawNY® was hoping to replicate the efforts of other legal services providers by developing appointment reminder systems within the LegalServer case management system. While reminders are a significant percentage of the usage, due to effective engagement with LawNY® staff, project partners were able to design, test and implement a flexible solution allowing for staff to correspond with their clients via text message.

In December 2015, the technology coordinator held a focus group made up of staff members representing different practice areas, offices and job duties. General feedback from the focus group included the following:

- Each office should have its own number
- There should be a way to turn off the ability to send and receive text messages in certain situations
- Add a field so that an advocate can record when they last asked about the safety of the number, make fields about safety available on the SMS page
- Texting to/from email
- Only send, not receive texts
- Make it more like chat rather than texting
- Clients should only be able to reply with keywords
- If replies are allowed, advocate on the case should receive an email or get an alert through LegalServer
- Set up some sort of verification process - send a text and if they reply with a keyword then advocate can continue texting them - if not, advocate should not be able to continue texting the client

Many of these suggestions were outside the scope of the project. However, LegalServer staff was able to add a notification to the homepage of LegalServer so the advocate receives an alert when a new text message is attached to a case. Using existing tools in LegalServer, LawNY® also developed a verification process that applied the policy that was developed by the technology coordinator.

When LawNY®'s technology coordinator proposed one-way text message reminders to the focus group, with the potential of setting up canned chats,

the members of the focus group responded with an alternative solution. After discussing the different options, LawNY® staff members decided that they wanted to be able to correspond generally with their clients via text message. While much of this correspondence would most likely be related to upcoming appointments or court appearances, staff members did not want to be limited to what would be available within the task creation process in LegalServer. Focus group participants cited numerous inquiries from clients about text messaging and needing to get in touch with a client who is out of pre-paid minutes on their cell phone plan as reasons for developing a more flexible interface. This decision also aligned with feedback that LawNY® received from clients during the initial phases of this project. Between May 1, 2015 and December 31, 2017, intake staff was asking clients whether they would be interested in corresponding with their advocate via text message. 1221 people responded that they would be interested in this service.

Project partners decided to focus on the development of a flexible text messaging tool and well thought out usage policies. LegalServer staff would continue to explore the technical requirements involved in the development of an application of the text messaging tool within the task or event processes in LegalServer and time and funding allowed.

While testing the text messaging tool on LawNY®'s LegalServer demo site, and preparing for launch, the LawNY® technology coordinator worked with the management team to develop a policy that was enacted prior to the launch of the tool. Key components of this policy included:

- Verification: Prior to sending a text message to a client for the first time, an advocate has to ask for their consent and send an initial verification message. This part of the policy is displayed on the page where an advocate can send a text message from:

"Are you interested in receiving text messages from our office regarding appointment reminders, court appearances or other case related information? You will be receiving text messages from (607)216-4500. LawNY does not charge you, but you may be charged for sending and receiving texts by your cell phone company"

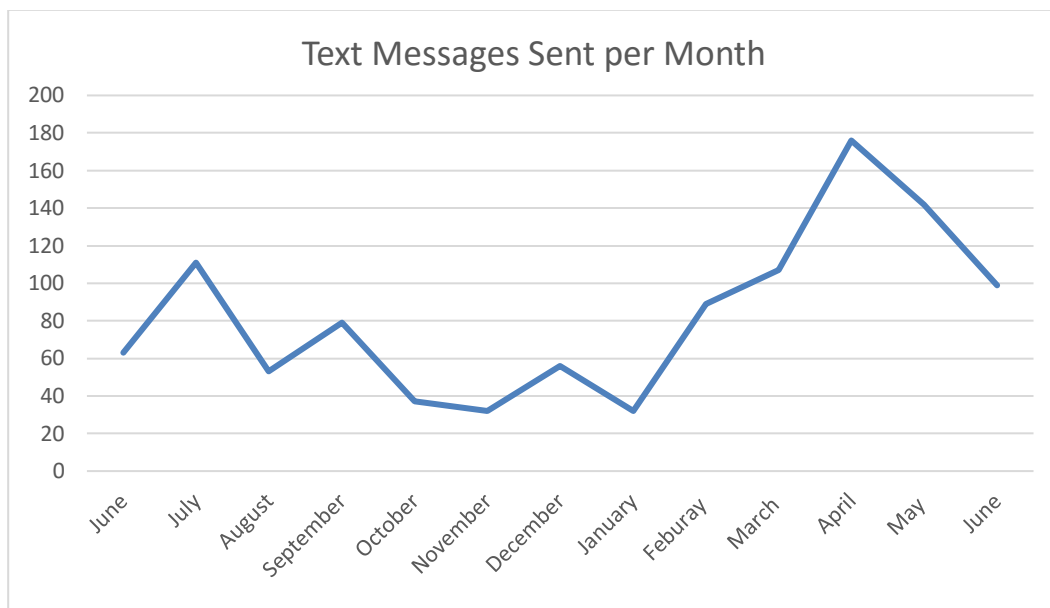
Once a client has agreed to receive text messages from you, the first text message that is sent to the client should be a confirmation text:

"We have received your request to get text message reminders about your case with LawNY. Please reply Y or YES to confirm. Msg&data rates may apply."

- Domestic Violence: Advocates are to pay close attention to whether the cell phone number on record is safe to use, especially if there is domestic violence involved

The text messaging tool was launched in June 2016. Since its launch, LawNY® has received positive feedback from both advocates and clients. Since launch 664 text messages have been sent and 427 have been received. Fifty-nine advocates have sent 203 clients text messages. Seventy-four clients did not respond to the initial confirmation message sent, and therefore did not continue to receive text messages from their advocate. The most common cases in which text messages are used for correspondence are landlord tenant, income maintenance, divorce, TANF and custody/visitation.

At launch, the LawNY® technology coordinator sent out documentation and conducted a webinar on the new functionality. The graph below shows the usage over time from launch in June, 2016 to June 2017.



The technology coordinator has met with the management team on multiple occasions to encourage them to encourage their staff to use the tool when appropriate. The technology coordinator has also periodically sent out the documentation to the staff and is encouraging that the text message functionality be incorporated into LegalServer training when new staff is onboarded.

The staff who are using the text messaging tool generally find it very useful. Of the fifty-nine advocates who have texted their clients, twenty-two completed a survey regarding the usage. Advocates are using the text messages for a mix

of reminders and and general communication with their client. Most advocates are finding that their clients are generally responsive and that the tool is working well. Some direct feedback from advocates include:

"Works well. Useful for when clients do not answer their phone or have no minutes available. Would like the alert for incoming messages to show up for the person who sent the message as well as the person whose case it is."

"It is a very useful tool. I like that you can write out a text message and have it sent out a later time/date."

"I think it's great! I've had an overall positive response from clients who have agreed to receive text messages. It really comes in handy and is a useful tool to communicate with clients."

Advocates who use the tool also made suggestions, some of which are outside the scope of the grant, and other which are being considered by the technology coordinator but need to go through the proper administrative channels prior to implementation.

"If possible is there a way to have the SMS reply feature on more than one place in Legalserver? I don't always go back to the homepage and sometimes do not see the reply."

"It would be nice if we had a report to run that would tell us who has agreed to text messaging. If an intake worker gets the OK for texts, a report with options to select advocates and the cases where clients have responded yes to receiving them. If you have several attorneys that you assist with cases, that's sometimes over 100 cases that we need to figure out who wants text reminders and then set them when needed."

"Wish that there was a way to select number that would appear with text - some way of saying "contact this number" with concerns if they wanted to call back instead of text."

LawNY® clients are also finding the tool to be helpful. We sent brief survey text messages to forty clients who have been having extended conversations with their advocates. We screened out clients in domestic violence situations, even though they have been communicating via text message with their advocate.

"Hello, On a scale of 1 - 5, how would your rate LawNY's text messaging service? 1 = bad, 5 = excellent. Thank you!"

Nineteen clients responded to the survey, the responses were as follows:

5: fifteen clients

4: two clients

3: one client

1: one client

LawNY® staff is continuing to brainstorm ways to better collect data from clients to ensure that we are meeting their needs. Advocates have also been collecting feedback from clients anecdotally. Clients have said that they appreciate the ability to text with their advocate, and that it is a preferable method of communication to voicemail. Clients have also noted that they find the reminders to be very helpful. One advocate shared that being able to correspond with clients via text message has been very helpful, particularly with non-verbal clients.

Members of the greater legal services community are already finding the tool to be a useful addition to their advocates' workflows. Since LawNY® launched and tested the text messaging tool in LegalServer in June 2016, eleven programs have started using the tool, seven of which are LSC funded, including Idaho Legal Aid Services, Legal Aid Society of Northeastern New York, Legal Services of Alabama, Montana Legal Services Association, Utah Legal Services, Legal Aid of Southeastern Pennsylvania and Legal Aid Services of Oregon.¹ As programs continue to incorporate the text messaging tool into the individual instances of LegalServer, the tool will continue to be refined to meet the needs of advocates and their clients.

With the shift in LawNY® priorities, LegalServer was ultimately able to explore the technical requirements related to integrating the text messaging functionality into the task creation process. A beta version of this functionality was launched on LawNY®'s demo site March 28, 2017. This functionality was pushed to LawNY's live site as a soft-launch in June, 2017. The LawNY technology coordinator will pull together a small group to test the functionality and make an organization-wide announcement once the group is confident that the functionality works as intended.

V. Factors affecting project accomplishments

Usage: Although the ability to securely communicate with clients via text message was a common request, once the text messaging tool went live in LegalServer, we noticed that usage was not as high as we expected it to be. When the tool was launched, LawNY®'s technology coordinator sent out a policy and documentation and conducted a webinar on the new functionality. The new tool was discussed at

¹ Note that the list of organizations utilizing SMS features in LegalServer may have changed since this report was originally written.

managers' meetings and staff meetings and the technology coordinator encouraged the technology responsible person in each office to include training on the functionality in new-user training. A survey was sent out to staff in an attempt to get a better understanding as to why certain staff members were not using the tool. Some staff members expressed concern with phone numbers changing and were hesitant to reach out to clients because they were not sure if they would be reaching the right person. Other staff members were indicating that they were not able to get consent from their clients. After further investigation into this matter it was discovered that some staff members were including a paper consent form in their opening letters. While we understand the concerns of these advocates, written consent is not required by LawNY®'s text messaging policy. Based on the survey, the largest factor in the lack of usage appears to be related to the advocates' workflow. Some advocates are still trying to figure out the best way to use the text messaging tool in their day-to-day work.

Internal process changes: Over the course of the grant period, the Geneva office of LawNY® changed its divorce clinic model. When the concept for this project was being developed, the divorce clinic was being run as a classroom style clinic. If someone did not show up to their appointment, the spot went unused, which impacted the efficiency of the clinic. There was a waiting list for the clinic and no-shows were impacting how many people could utilize the service. The divorce clinic is no longer run in a classroom setting and a significant amount of the work is now being done over the phone. Due to this change, we were unable to pilot the use of text messages in a clinic setting.

VI. Strategies to address major challenges

LawNY®'s technology coordinator took a multi-pronged approach to increase the usage of the text messaging. Internal outreach, modifications to LegalServer and policy development helped to increase staff usage of the text messaging tool in LegalServer over time.

Internal Outreach:

Whenever surveys were sent out, they were accompanied by documentation and information about how to use the tool in LegalServer. This documentation was made available to all employees through Google Drive and was referenced in trainings by technology responsible people. LawNY®'s technology coordinator also discussed the tool on multiple occasions on Advocacy Workgroup calls as well as the Technology Workgroup calls. The technology coordinator also did targeted outreach to specific advocates who had questions about the best way to text clients (prior to the launch of the tool) and to advocates who had participated in the focus group or showed interest in the development process of the tool.

Management support:

The LawNY® technology coordinator gives technology updates to the management team as part of the regular managers' meetings. Once the tool was launched and it became clear that advocate usage was lower than expected, the technology coordinator asked the managers to encourage the staff within their offices to utilize the tool. The technology coordinator gave examples of use cases to demonstrate the value of utilizing text messaging through LegalServer to communicate with clients. Management support was especially important when the technology coordinator found out that some advocates were requiring that their clients return signed consent forms prior to sending the client a text message. The management team was involved in the development of the policy that was put in place regarding text messaging in LegalServer and were supportive of the verbal consent that was required by the policy.

Modifications to LegalServer:

One of the primary barriers to advocates utilizing the text messaging tool in LegalServer was their ability to integrate the functionality into their workflow. The text messaging tool is accessible from the client profile of every case in LegalServer. The advocate has to navigate through the "Actions" menu in order to find the process where they send and receive text messages. The field where the advocate logs whether the client has consented to receiving text messages is also a part of this process. The technology coordinator moved the consent field to the front page of the case profile along with instructions on how to send and view received text messages.

VI. Major lessons and recommendations

Lessons Learned:

As discussed earlier in this report, one of the major lessons learned as a result of this project was the importance of allowing technology project to grow organically within an organization. Based on research and personal experience within the program, LawNY®'s technology coordinator developed an implementation plan that would allow for advocates to copy their clients via text message on reminders that they set for themselves. The technology coordinator thought that incorporating the text messaging capability into a function that was already being used and utilizing canned text messages based on the types of tasks being set would be a useful setup for advocates. After engaging with a number of staff members through surveys and a focus group, it became clear that advocates wanted a simpler, more flexible solution. In practice, many advocates were not using the task function in a way that would allow for streamlined communication with their clients. While usage many still not be as high as the technology coordinator had hoped, altering the project plan to build a more user friendly tool was critical to the success of the

project. This project highlights the importance of bridging the gap between the technology staff and the advocates doing the legal work. While technology staff may want to focus on bringing innovative tools into the everyday workflow advocates, advocates may be looking for a simple solution to an everyday problem. The legal services technology community should not slow or halt innovative projects. The technologists in the community need to make sure they are taking the proper steps to ensure that advocates feel comfortable with the innovative solutions that are being designed and that they are not creating solutions to problems that do not exist or are not a priority within an organization.

Recommendations:

LawNY® recommends that legal services providers, especially those that are currently using the LegalServer case management system strongly consider integrating the ability to send and receive text messages into their case management system. Service providers from many different industries are starting to use text messages as a way to communicate with their client, customers or patients and over time it will become more of an expectation rather than a convenience. However, it is also important to explore other tools that clients are using for instant communication. Mobile apps like Whatsapp, Facebook Messenger and iChat are used by millions of people daily and the legal services community should ensure that the communication methodologies that they are using works for both clients and advocates.

LawNY® also recommends that the legal services community continue exploring how to share or gather case specific information from their clients. There are other LSC TIG funded projects, including one that LawNY® is working on that will continue to examine how data can securely be transferred between a client and advocate through links sent by text message or email.