



LEGAL SERVICES CORPORATION

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS
FOR WEBSITE ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION SERVICES

February 11, 2016

INTRODUCTION

The Legal Services Corporation (LSC) is seeking proposals from qualified consultants or consulting firms to assist LSC in evaluating and improving the network of state-specific legal aid websites. Specifically, LSC seeks to measure whether the web content is accessible, understandable, and actually used by the intended low-income clients of LSC funded assistance. The successful applicant will evaluate the websites and develop key findings for improving them, so that all states can provide effective, modern information portals for self-represented litigants.

ABOUT LEGAL SERVICES CORPORATION

LSC is a federally established and funded, yet private and independent 501(c)(3) grant-making organization that supports civil legal aid providers across the country. Its mission is to expand access to justice by funding high-quality, free attorneys for low-income Americans in basic civil matters like divorce, child custody, and eviction. It does not provide direct legal services itself.

LSC is headed by a bipartisan board of directors, whose 11 members are appointed by the President of the United States and confirmed by the United States Senate. Much like federal agencies, LSC receives an annual appropriation and is subject to ongoing congressional oversight. But as a private nonprofit, it enjoys greater independence and flexibility than its federal counterparts. For example, LSC has initiated a large-scale fundraising campaign in conjunction with its 40th anniversary celebration and generally conducts its day-to-day business like any other charitable organization.

LSC promotes equal access to justice by awarding grants to independent legal aid providers through a competitive grants process. LSC distributes almost 95 percent of its total funding in grants. LSC currently has 134 grantees with more than 800 offices in every county in the United States, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, and Micronesia.

LSC performs robust oversight of its grantees, conducting audits and on-site visits to evaluate grantee quality and compliance with statutory and regulatory requirements and various funding restrictions. LSC also provides training and technical assistance to grantees. LSC encourages its grantees to leverage limited resources by partnering and collaborating with other funders of civil legal aid, including state and local governments, Interest on Lawyers' Trust Accounts programs, state access to justice commissions, the private bar, philanthropic foundations, law schools, and the business community.

LSC grantees are independent 501(c)(3) organizations with their own boards of directors, which are statutorily required to be comprised of mostly attorneys and client-eligible members. The legal services provided by grantees differ based on the unique and pressing needs of the respective communities served. The most common practice areas, however, are family, housing, income maintenance, consumer, health, and employment law. The types of cases frequently encountered by LSC grantees include evictions, debt collection, foreclosures, divorces, child

custody, spousal abuse, child abuse or neglect, access to health care, and benefit claims such as unemployment, disability, food stamps and public assistance.

RFP OVERVIEW

Technology can be a powerful tool in narrowing the justice gap – the widely documented difference between the people who need civil legal services and the attorneys available to meet that need.

Beginning in 2000, LSC developed a network of state-specific legal aid websites to serve the millions of low-income litigants who are unable to afford an attorney. Statewide websites provide users with a variety of legal tools and resources, including overviews of common poverty law issues and step-by-step guides for individuals representing themselves. They also connect users to appropriate legal aid providers, self-help centers, and lawyer referral services in their community. Increasingly, sites host collections of automated court forms. These interactive interviews guide users through simple questions and then deliver the forms necessary to engage in a legal process, such as filing for a simple divorce, filing a response in a consumer debt case, initiating a name change, or expunging criminal records.

LSC has also developed two statewide website templates and awarded grants to local legal aid providers to create websites in every state using one of the templates. All 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. territories now have websites, and the vast majority of these sites still utilize one of the two original templates. LSC continues to support the statewide website network by funding creative and innovative enhancements through its annual technology grant program.

While statewide websites undoubtedly provide useful assistance to the self-represented, they vary in quality and quantity of content. Leading states such as Illinois, Michigan, New York, Washington, and Connecticut have capitalized on the support of LSC and other forward-thinking funders to develop modern web portals with a wide range of legal tools and information. Conversely, some states have invested little in their websites and do not serve the needs of the self-represented as effectively.

To address this discrepancy, LSC applied for and received a private grant from the Ford Foundation. LSC's grant project goal is to assess key components of the statewide website network and to determine what has worked, what more needs to be done, and how successful components can be replicated.

LSC seeks a seasoned website evaluator to assist with this evaluation. Specifically, LSC seeks to evaluate mobile friendliness, plain language, language access, depth of materials, ease of navigation, and search engine optimization – the minimum components of a high-quality informational website.

Through this evaluation, LSC hopes to achieve the following outcomes:

1. A better understanding of how to maximize the value of the statewide website network.

In the United States, the statewide website network is arguably the fastest-growing component of the legal aid service delivery system. Still, providers and funders in some states either do not see the full potential of online legal assistance or lack the technical expertise and the commitment from justice community stakeholders necessary to design an effective statewide website. This evaluation will demonstrate that high quality online legal assistance is already available to many low-income people across the country and provide a clear pathway for other states to catch up to leaders in the field. Ultimately, this evaluation will accelerate the investment in online legal assistance and bring about a more modern and effective service delivery.

2. A better understanding of the quality of resources available on the statewide website network, including what types of online resources and tools are available across the country and whether content is set up to meet the needs of low-income users. The planned evaluation will highlight both the strengths and weaknesses of the statewide website network. It will give all states a better understanding of how to improve their sites and replicate successful initiatives. The proposed toolkit, which includes the project's final report and additional resources, will serve as a comprehensive guide for states seeking to re-launch their statewide website or improve their existing efforts.

3. A better understanding of how LSC can allocate resources to strengthen statewide websites and transition programs to a delivery system in which online legal assistance plays a critical role. Over the last five years, LSC has awarded at least \$3 million annually through its technology grant program for creative and innovative IT enhancements. We will utilize our unique position as both a funder and a subject-matter expert to highlight the evaluation findings and ensure that we address areas of improvement. This could include special areas of focus in future grant cycles, capacity-building sessions at the national legal aid technology conference, special technology grants to enhance the statewide website templates, and online training programs and resources. LSC will also use the evaluation and toolkit as resources for its grantee program quality assessments. These resources will allow LSC program staff to better analyze the quality of a grantee's website and make more specific recommendations for improvement. Grantees are required to serve on the statewide website steering committee if they are not the site manager. Additionally they are required to support the site with funds and with content. Grantees that need a more thorough overhaul of their site will be directed to the toolkit as well as LSC's technology subject-matter experts for more detailed guidance on developing an effective web presence. We believe this work will encourage other funders, including courts and state legislatures court, to support statewide websites around the country.

DUTIES, TASKS, MILESTONES, AND DELIVERABLES

The successful applicant will be expected to perform the following duties and tasks and complete the following milestones and deliverables during the project term:

Duties, Tasks, and Milestones

LSC anticipates the website evaluator completing this project in three stages: (1) Defining a research methodology, including intended outcomes for both the overall project and specific areas of evaluation, (2) analyzing a representative sampling of statewide websites, the

entire statewide website network, and/or the two LSC-funded statewide website templates according to six criteria, and (3) creating and disseminating a toolkit that shares findings of the evaluation and serves as a guide for states to maximize an effective statewide web presence.

Stage 1: Definition. The website evaluator will define a research methodology for LSC's consideration, including intended outcomes for both the overall project and specific areas of evaluation. Additionally, the evaluator will be expected to identify specific evaluation criteria and data collection protocols to ensure a uniform assessment of the statewide website network.

While the project's assessment strategy will be finalized after engaging an outside evaluator, LSC anticipates detailed evaluations of the following six areas.

1. Mobile friendly. The evaluator will review sites and materials to see what remains inaccessible and what revisions are needed to provide legal assistance content to the growing population of mobile users.
2. Plain language. Best practices for website development indicate that self-help legal materials should be targeted at no more than a sixth-grade reading level. The evaluator will review content on the statewide websites to measure how much of the information available meets this standard and what needs to be "translated" into plain language. The evaluation will assess how well understood existing materials are and what is needed to close the comprehension gap.
3. Language access. The evaluator will review the statewide websites to identify how well they are providing users with legal information in an accessible language. This will include evaluating the availability of mirror sites or key sets of resources in languages other than English, and differentiating between human-translated and machine-translated information.
4. Depth of materials. Determining the level of detail and responsiveness to reader questions is another important task for evaluation of statewide websites. The evaluator will review not only the number of topic areas, ensuring that those most likely to affect eligible clients are covered, but also at the depth of the materials provided. This evaluation should prioritize interactive resources such as automated legal forms, guided interviews, instructional videos, and interactive live chat features that may be more likely to help users meet their legal needs than static web content.
5. Ease of navigation. The evaluator will review the design of the two most widely used templates (DLAW and LawHelp) and a representative sampling of sites to determine the extent to which the design structure is user-friendly and is implementing the existing design elements in the optimal configuration for user accessibility. This should include an analysis of sites compliance with Section 508 and/or other key website accessibility standards.
6. Community engagement. The evaluator will review how effectively sites engage their

client communities, including how closely sites work with courts and legal aid partners throughout the state to connect users to resources available on the statewide website. The evaluation should also ensure that techniques for search engine optimization (SEO) have been properly implemented so that statewide website materials appear as high in the search results as possible. Finally, this assessment should look to whether sites properly refer users back to appropriate legal aid providers and other community partners.

Stage 2: Analysis. The evaluator will analyze a representative sampling of statewide websites, the entire statewide website network, and the two LSC-funded statewide website templates. LSC anticipates that the evaluator will analyze a representative sampling of statewide websites against, at a minimum, the six evaluation areas mentioned above, and the entire network of sites against more targeted criteria. Establishing clear research criteria and data collection protocols should allow the evaluator to conduct a straightforward analysis across a number of sites, if not the whole network. Finally, the evaluator will review the capabilities of the two website templates (DLAW and LawHelp) to determine (1) the ways in which the network is and is not making optimal use of the template's available features and (2) the extent to which deficiencies in sites relate back to design of the templates.

Stage 3: Dissemination. A key deliverable of this project is a toolkit that shares findings of the evaluation and serves as a guide for states to maximize an effective statewide web presence. The toolkit will include the following:

- *A final project report that shares findings and recommendations* from the evaluation, an overview of analysis methodology, and a set of website evaluation tools that can be made available for future analysis of legal aid websites.
- *A how-to guide addressing the main areas of improvement identified through the evaluation.* The goal of these guides is to facilitate better practices across the statewide website network and build capacity among statewide website managers. Users will benefit from a combination of written materials and interactive quizzes that guide them through concepts needed to build an effective statewide website. Because most statewide websites use one of the two templates, it will be easy to share step-by-step instructions for utilizing template features to improve a site.
- *Case studies on leading sites.* These case studies will document how the leaders in the statewide website network became interactive, content-rich portals capable of serving the legal needs of unrepresented litigants. They will include information about investment and staffing for these websites so that other states can replicate these strategies. Additionally, the evaluator should explore the use of social network analysis to determine the role of key players and relationships in developing leading statewide websites.
- *Conference sessions at LSC's annual legal aid technology conference and other national annual conferences including Equal Justice Conference, Nonprofit Technology Conference, and the National Legal Aid and Defender Association Conference.* More than 300 people attended LSC's 2015 technology conference, and organizers anticipate even larger turnouts in the coming years. LSC will use this platform to promote the project and conduct specialized workshops on specific areas of improvement identified

by the evaluators. LSC records key conference sessions and makes them available for free through its website.

- *Online Trainings and Support.* LSC funds the Legal Services National Technology Assistance project, which offers an annual technology webinar training series (<http://lsntap.org/trainings>) and on-demand, high-level technology assistance to LSC grantees. These evaluation resources will be used to promote the evaluation findings and provide additional training.

After the evaluator prepares and finalizes the toolkit, LSC will post it on its website through a user-friendly portal. LSC will conduct outreach to the statewide website network through social media platforms, press releases, and all-grantee emails reaching 134 LSC-funded providers across the country. The toolkit will also be promoted in the marketing materials developed for LSC's national conference and online training series.

The successful evaluator will be responsible for performing according to the project schedule listed below:

DELIVERABLE	TIMELINE
Assist LSC in defining a research methodology identifying specific evaluation criteria and data collection protocols	March – April 2016
Assist in forming an evaluation team with LSC staff to perform website evaluations	March – April 2016
Evaluate representative sample and 50+ state survey of statewide websites	April - September 2016
Analyze the capabilities of the two website templates (DLAW and LawHelp)	April –September 2016
Prepare final project report for toolkit	October – December 2016
Prepare a “how-to” guide addressing the main areas of improvement identified through the evaluation toolkit	October – December 2016
Prepare case studies on leading sites	October – December 2016
Present project at TIG Conference	January 2017
Present project at Equal Justice Conference	May 2017
Present project at Nonprofit Technology Conference	March 2017
Present project at National Legal Aid and Defender Association Conference	November 2017
Work with LSC to develop training programs for improving statewide websites	January 2017-May 2017

Estimated Contract Term and Schedule

LSC estimates that this project will take fourteen (14) months to complete. Work is expected to begin on **March 20, 2016 and be completed by May 2017.**

Oversight and Project Management

The evaluator will work closely with LSC's Vice President for Grants Management and an internal project coordinator, who are administering Statewide Website Evaluation project funded by the Ford Foundation. The facilitator will also work with LSC's TIG and OIT staff. The successful applicant will be expected to come to LSC's office for meetings and may work on-site every now and then, but otherwise will work remotely from their office. LSC expects to receive regular progress updates from the facilitator and to be notified immediately of any concerns or delays that may arise during the course of the engagement.

LSC will oversee the evaluator's performance by signing a milestone-driven services agreement and payment schedule, and holding regular meetings on project status and coordination issues.

The successful evaluator will be expected to comply with all LSC workplace policies, rules, and regulations, as well as the Ford Foundation's grant terms dated November 6, 2015. In addition, the successful applicant should demonstrate capability to meet the following requirements for project management:

1. Dedicated Team

The successful applicant should have dedicated staff assigned to the project, including a primary point of contact for the duration of the engagement.

2. Location of Performance

Applicant will be available at times to present its progress, finding, conclusions and recommendations to LSC in Washington, D.C. However, the applicant is not required to maintain a presence onsite at LSC or in Washington, D.C.

3. Project Management Plan

The successful applicant shall, along with its proposal, submit a detailed plan for completing this project. The plan should include how the project will be managed, where the work will be performed, and how LSC will be kept apprised of progress.

4. Informal information exchanges

LSC expects that the website evaluator will answer questions and discuss its progress on a regular basis throughout the engagement term. The website evaluator will be provided a primary point of contact at LSC.

RFP SCHEDULE

DATE	EVENT
Feb. 11, 2016	RFP issued
February 19	Deadline for respondents to submit RFP questions
February 22	LSC responds to RFP questions
March 4	Deadline for respondents to submit proposals
March 7-11	Evaluation of proposals
March 14	Notification to successful applicant of preliminary selection and contract negotiation
March 19	Contract approval
March 20, 2016	Performance begins

RFP RELATED QUESTIONS

Please submit questions relating to this RFP by email to Rebecca Weir at rweir@lsc.gov no later than **5:30 pm EST, on February 19, 2016**. Answers to all questions submitted will be posted on LSC's website at <http://www.lsc.gov/about-lsc/doing-business-lsc-rfp>.

PROPOSAL SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

Proposal Format

All proposals must be 15 pages or less (not including resumes and samples of comparable work), concise, well-organized, and demonstrate how your proposed services, approach and methodology, qualifications, experience, and terms meet or exceed LSC's requirements. All proposals must also contain the following:

Applicant Information

- Your full name, address, telephone number, email, and website.
- Firm overview, including a brief history, mission, number of employees, and number of years in operation.
- Your RFP point-person. Please include title, phone number, and email address.
- What, if any, experience do you have working with grant-making organizations?

Firm and Key Personnel Qualifications

Describe your familiarity with the use of technology in the delivery of legal services; legal information for self-help representation; websites including responsive design, search engine optimization (SEO), plain language, limited English proficiency (LEP); experience drafting evaluation methodologies for multiple faceted studies such as this; and the ability to organize these findings into strategies and then to memorialize the ideas and strategies into a toolkit useful for others in adopting the strategies. Highlight the breadth of knowledge and experience of the manager and individual key personnel who will be assigned to the project. Provide or describe a

sample of comparable work completed.

Provide resumes for the project manager and each of the key personnel identified, describing each individual's qualifications and experience which make him or her particularly suited for this project. Include relevant education, training and work experience, and certifications.

Statement and Methodology

Describe your understanding of the overall objective and the objectives and deliverables for each phase of the project. Include a clear description of the work to be performed, the anticipated methodology used to complete the work and the objectives to be reached and/or product to be delivered for each phase of the project. In particular, include a description of the particular work product to be produced by you at each stage in the process. Describe what resources you will need from outside of your organization to accomplish the deliverables of the project. Please include a timeline for project completion in the time designated for these deliverables.

Management

Provide a work plan for carrying out the project. Clearly identify the proposed project manager and key personnel. The Proposal must include the hours anticipated to complete the project and must demonstrate your ability and willingness to meet the proposed project schedule.

Cost

- Identify the estimated cost and the proposed cost basis for you to complete the project, including direct and indirect costs and expenses, any plans for utilizing students and interns for research to maximize the scope of the work that can be accomplished. Specify a maximum, all-inclusive cost for the project. Rates, whether fixed or hourly, must include all overhead costs and profit. LSC will give preference to a fixed rate quote. Costs for subcontractors, if any, must be clearly identified.
- LSC is a 501(c)(3) tax exempt organization and is eligible for GSA Schedule pricing.

Alternatives

The Proposal may include discussion of alternative tasks or areas of work the submitter believes will better enable LSC to reach its objectives for this project. If the Proposal contains any such alternatives, the Proposal must clearly identify the ways in which the proposal would modify the scope of work as presented in this RFP and be clearly identified in the proposed work plan.

Subcontractors

Identify all subcontractors and subcontract activities proposed to be used. Indicate the specific roles for each subcontractor and provide firm and key personnel qualification and experience

information similar to that provided for the submitter in accordance with Paragraph A of this section.

References

Provide three (3) recent references concerning your firm's performance on comparable projects. Indicate the project name, a brief description of the project and the name, title, telephone number and email address of a reference who is knowledgeable about the project and who may be contacted by proposal evaluators.

Other Information

You may provide other information or material that you believe is relevant to our evaluation or that provides additional value to LSC.

PROPOSAL DEADLINES AND MODE OF DELIVERY

Deadline for Submitting Proposals

All proposals must be received by LSC **no later than 5:30 P.M., EST, on March 4, 2016**. You are solely responsible for ensuring that your proposal is delivered on time. Late proposals may be accepted in LSC's discretion. Delays caused by any delivery service will not be grounds for extension of the proposal due date and time.

Delivery of Proposals

Please email (in Word or PDF format) **and** mail three (3) hard copies of your proposal to:

Rebecca Weir, Contract Coordinator
Legal Services Corporation
3333 K Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20007
Phone: (202) 295-1500
Email: rweir@lsc.gov

Cost of Proposal

All costs incurred in preparing Proposals will be borne by the applicant. The final contract will not reimburse the successful applicant for proposal preparation costs.

PROPOSAL EVALUATION CRITERIA

The contract will be awarded to the applicant who provides the **best value** – the most advantageous balance of price, quality, and performance – to LSC. Proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- ✓ **Price**
 - The reasonableness of the price for the service being provided.
 - Whether the price is realistic (especially if it is an estimate), reflects a clear understanding of LSC's need, and is consistent with other parts of the proposal.
 - Cost by labor category (if a times and materials contract).
 - The cost of incidental expenses, including taxes and service fees, administrative costs, maintenance/customer support costs, system or software conversion costs, travel and transportation costs.

- ✓ **Quality**
 - Qualifications and experience of web evaluator and proposed staff
 - Technical expertise
 - Project plan and approach

- ✓ **Performance**
 - Timeliness of deliverables
 - Capacity
 - Understanding of and ability to meet LSC's needs
 - Responsiveness to LSC
 - Professionalism of representatives (sales, customer support, technical assistance, designated consultants, etc.)

- ✓ **Reputation for excellence in price, performance, and quality**

- ✓ **Willingness to accept LSC's terms** (DC venue and governing law, no limitation on liability, no binding arbitration, indemnification, and estimated cost, but not to exceed clause.)

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 release to the public upon request certain third-party bid proposals. LSC will not, however, release a proposal that would cause competitive harm to the applicant. If your proposal is requested under FOIA, LSC will contact you before releasing it in whole or in part. Applicants are encouraged to label documents containing sensitive business and confidential information as such at the time of submission.

MISCELLANEOUS

Minor procedural or administrative exceptions to the requirements contained in this RFP may be made by LSC during the proposal review process. LSC may disqualify or reject any or all proposals. LSC reserves the right to have and retain all original data and working papers generated during the Project. LSC reserves the right to award the contract to the applicant with the best overall approach, regardless of cost, or to not award a contract to any applicant. Nothing in the RFP or this process creates any applicant's rights.