

Request for Proposals: Legal Services of North Florida, Inc. REGIONAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Issued: July 1, 2021

1. INTRODUCTION

Legal Services of North Florida, Inc. (LSNF) seeks an experienced program evaluator or comparably skilled professional to conduct a civil legal services needs assessment of its service area. LSNF's service area is made up of the 16-County Florida Panhandle (from Escambia County on the west to Jefferson County on the east). (See **Attachment A** for a description of common civil legal services utilized by our low-income clients.)

[NOTE: The terms "service area" and "Florida Panhandle" may be used interchangeably within this document to describe the same 16-county area of Florida described above.]

Purpose of Needs Assessment:

The needs assessment will be used as a key strategic planning tool to assist in better understanding how to best allocate resources, track and improve client/case outcomes, and identify the Florida Panhandle's most pressing needs in providing civil legal services for its low-income client-eligible population.

The assessment will also be used to educate LSNF and other key stakeholders in the issues and legal needs of low-income and vulnerable families in the Panhandle, including government officials and relevant policy professionals, the Florida Bar and its pro-bono attorneys, the media, as well as donors and funders.

Results of the completed needs assessment will help identify:

- Predominant civil legal issues currently facing the Florida Panhandle's client-eligible low-income population and whether those issues are being adequately addressed;
- Demographic and other relevant trends likely to affect the legal needs of low-income communities in the reasonably foreseeable future;
- Populations (demographic and geographic) considered over-served, well-served, moderately served, and underserved;
- Barriers to access that eligible clients currently face when seeking civil legal services, either when accessing a civil legal services attorney or navigating the court system on a pro-se (self-represented) basis;
- Barriers to eligible clients who are in need of civil legal services who are unable to identify that the problem they face has a resolution through civil legal help;
- Whether particular services are duplicative and in need of consolidation, reduction, or elimination;
- How future funding, programming, and staff might be best allocated across the service area to better serve eligible populations;

- Whether technology should play a greater or different role in civil legal service delivery and if so, how;
- What constitutes effective consumer/client/stakeholder outreach in the Florida Panhandle's civil legal services community;
- The impact of specific legislative or court rule changes on the civil legal services target client; and
- What particular standardized data sets statewide civil legal aid providers, and the courts, could collect in order to benchmark collective progress moving forward.

2. REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL (RFP)

Legal Services of North Florida, Inc. has issued this Request for Proposals (RFP) from qualified companies, nonprofits, academic institutions, and independent consultants (Respondent/Contractor) to conduct a regional needs assessment of its service area as described in section 1 above. The goal is to select the most capable contractor offering the most competitive price.

3. TIMELINE/DUE DATES

1	RFP Release Date	July 1, 2021
2	RFP Letter of Interest (LOI) Deadline	July 19, 2021
3	RFP Questions Deadline	July 19, 2021
4	Response to Questions Provided to LOI Respondents	July 29, 2021
5	Proposals Due to LSNF	August 20, 2021
6	Notice of Award Released (on or before)	October 25, 2021
7	Draft Document Submitted to LSNF	March 5, 2022
8	Final Document Submitted to LSNF	April 15, 2022
9	Contractor Presentation to LSNF Working Group	May 18, 2022

Notes:

As part of the selection process, LSNF may conduct interviews with a shortlist of RFP respondents being considered for this contract. LSNF must proceed through a fiscal process prior to award. Should announcement of the award be delayed due to this process, all respondents will be advised as to the delay and anticipated release of Notice of Award.

Above-listed deadlines are an estimate. Actual deliverable deadlines will be negotiated with the Respondent/Contractor. (There may be advantages to spreading the study over a longer period; we will discuss this option with our shortlist of RFP respondents during the further interview/negotiation stages.)

4. DESCRIPTION OF SERVICES

The selected Respondent/Contractor will be responsible for:

A. *Coordination of a fully-completed written Community Needs Assessment, following, at minimum, the below outline:*

- An Executive Summary
- Description of Design and Methods Used
- Results of quantitative and qualitative data collection from: surveys, interviews, focus groups, relevant datasets, etc.
- Analysis of civil legal services needs and strengths
- Project findings
- Recommendations
- Supporting Appendices

B. *Data Collection, Design, and Analysis:*

Respondent/Contractor shall design all relevant surveys, interview questionnaires, and facilitation guides necessary to collect and analyze data regarding the civil legal service needs within LSNF's service area.

Respondent/Contractor will also be expected to either administer all interviews, surveys, and facilitation groups **OR**, where appropriate, effectively train staff/volunteers from the Florida Panhandle's civil legal service community to undertake some of the surveying/interviewing.

Upon reviewing several other civil legal needs assessments that include rural populations (e.g. New Mexico, Wyoming, Illinois, Wisconsin), LSNF tentatively prefers a "mixed-methods" approach. Ideally, the needs assessment will incorporate the below-listed data sources (but we remain open to the contracted experts' guidance).

- *Surveys, interviews, or facilitated meetings (whichever is most effective) of the following:*
 - Executive leadership, attorneys, and paralegals from LSNF;
 - Judges, court clerks, administrators, and other relevant court staff/officials;
 - Members of local bar associations;
 - Existing/recent civil legal services clients;
 - Existing/recent low-income civil court consumers (those who have represented themselves in court without seeking out free advice/services from a nonprofit civil legal services organization— "pro-se");
 - Potential clients (e.g. those eligible, but not yet using free civil legal services for whatever reason);

- Staff from other legal, complimentary organizations providing civil legal aid on a no-cost or low-cost basis to potential clients;
 - Staff and students from local law school clinical programs engaged in serving the potential client populations;
 - Staff from non-legal, complimentary organizations serving our same eligible client population (e.g. homeless shelters, victims' service providers, Department of Children and Families "DCF" caseworkers, and other social service providers).
- *Trend Analysis of Open and Closed Cases at Civil Legal Service Providers.* Review of a random selection of civil cases opened between 2018-2021 by client legal issue and geographic distribution; and a review of cases closed by legal issue, level of service provided, and geographic distribution. (Note: our collaborative team can pull and categorize the types of cases for the Respondent/Contractor, so that the Respondent/Contractor can focus on identifying trends.)
 - *Trend Analysis of Civil Law Court Cases by Client Eligible Population:* Some eligible clients choose to represent themselves, rather than seek free legal counsel. An analysis of pro-se court cases (2018-2021) will help identify how the collaborative team can better educate and prepare low-income Florida Panhandle residents who wish to self-represent.
 - *Demographic Analysis (using existing publicly available data sources).* Review of the service area's eligible client population, including estimated number, geographic location, and racial, gender, age, disability, and ethnic composition mapped in relation to availability of existing civil legal services for this community. If Respondent/Contractor deems it relevant, helpful, and affordable, we would also be interested in any data external to the Florida Panhandle that could affect future service delivery trends or provide a useful base for comparison.

C. Respondent/Contractor Presentation: Respondent/Contractor shall provide at least one (1) in-person presentation, including opportunity for questions, to LSNF at the end of the engagement highlighting the needs assessment process, findings, recommendations, and answering questions.

5. PROPOSAL CONTENTS AND SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS:

Respondent/Contractor proposals should include:

1. A written narrative answering the following:
 - a. With the information provided in this RFP (especially Section 4, A, B, & C), how does the RFP respondent propose implementing the needs assessment? (Where possible, RFP respondent should quantify how many interviews, surveys, or facilitated meetings they propose doing during the data collection stage.)
 - b. What additional analysis or processes does the RFP respondent suggest be undertaken as part of this needs assessment, if any, and why?
 - c. What cost or efficiency suggestions does the RFP respondent have for our proposed needs assessment project, if any?
 - d. How will the RFP respondent commit to meeting the deadlines listed in Section 3 (Timeline/Due Dates), if awarded this Contract? Would the RFP respondent be willing to phase the work over a longer period if advantageous for substantive or funding reasons?

- e. Price for the project.
2. A bio, resume and/or other items outlining RFP respondent's experience with community needs assessments and similar projects, and facility with skill sets commonly used in community needs assessments (e.g. statistical analysis, data visualization, survey design, project management, community outreach and technical writing, etc.);
3. A list of other personnel/subcontractors that will work on the project (please provide resumes or bios);
4. Samples or case studies of similar work projects that the RFP respondent has successfully completed; and
5. Contact name, title, affiliated organization, phone number and e-mail of three contacts for whom the RFP respondent has conducted similar work in the past five years.

All final proposals and supplementary attachments must be emailed to Connie Davis (Connie@LSNF.org) by 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time (subject line: "LSNF Needs Assessment Proposal") on August 20, 2021. If the RFP respondent would like to send an additional hard copy of the proposal or additional materials to supplement the e-mailed version, submit to: Legal Services of North Florida, Attn: Connie Davis, 2119 Delta Blvd, Tallahassee, FL 32303 by 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time on August 20, 2021. Proposals must be formatted on letter-size paper. Each page should be numbered and with the RFP respondent's name.

RFP respondents shall bear all costs associated with the proposal meeting(s), interview(s), preparing, and submitting their bids. LSNF shall in no event be responsible or liable for those costs.

6. LETTERS OF INTEREST

Letters of Interest (LOIs) should be submitted to Connie Davis (Connie@LSNF.org) (subject line: "LSNF Needs Assessment LOI") and should include name and email address where you would like to receive responses to all inquiries received regarding this RFP prior to the deadline. Please see Section 3 for LOI deadline and date responses provided to respondents/contractors. Submitting an LOI does NOT obligate a respondent/contractor to provide a response to the RFP. **Letters of Interest will only be accepted by email at the e-mail address provided.**

7. INQUIRIES

Questions regarding this RFP are to be submitted to Connie Davis (Connie@LSNF.org) (subject line: "LSNF Assessment Questions"). A consolidated list of questions and their answers will then be emailed to anyone who provided valid contact information by the LOI deadline, July 19, 2021, as described in Section 3. **Questions regarding this RFP will only be accepted by email at the e-mail address provided.**

8. AWARD OF CONTRACT

Award of the contract resulting from this RFP will be based on the RFP respondent whose offer will be most advantageous to LSNF and the client population in terms of cost, functionality, experience, quality of past work, and other factors specified elsewhere in this RFP.

LSNF reserves the right to: 1) Consider proposals based on their relative merit, risk, and values to the organization; 2) Negotiate with all service providers; 3) Reject any or all offers and discontinue this RFP process without obligation or liability to any potential contractor, when it is in the organization's best interest; 4) Accept other than the lowest priced offer.

Proposals received will be evaluated by LSNF on the following selection criteria:

1. RFP respondent's demonstrated experience with community needs assessments and similar projects, and facility with skill sets commonly used in community needs assessments.
2. Description of the approach the RFP respondent proposes in accordance with the questions asked in Section 5, # 1.
3. Results of communications with the RFP respondent's client references.
4. RFP respondent's familiarity with the legal aid and/or human services landscape.
5. Price, and the RFP respondent's willingness to help the collaborative team find cost-effective solutions to complete the assessment.
6. Quality of RFP respondent's communications and responsiveness during the RFP process.

RFP respondents may be asked to revise their proposal based on further negotiations. This document represents an initial request for proposals only and in no way should be construed as a contract or letter of intent.

9. CONFIDENTIALITY

Unless otherwise required by law, all information disclosed by LSNF during the proposal process shall be considered confidential and should not be released to outside parties.

Likewise, all proposals from RFP respondents will only be reviewed by LSNF staff and/or Board as necessary for the fair selection of the contractor and will not be shared with outside parties, unless otherwise required by law.

10. PROJECT DELIVERABLES

All recommendations identified during this engagement will be documented and reviewed with LSNF management. All deliverables produced during the engagement are for the sole use of LSNF and will remain the property of LSNF.

11. SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

RFP respondents may find it useful to review the following links and documents before submitting a proposal. If there is additional, relevant information, RFP respondents would like to review prior to submission of a proposal, please notify us (see Section 6 for contact info).

Legal Services Corporation's [section on Comprehensive Needs Assessment and Priority Setting](#).

Common civil legal aid services (**Attachment A**)

List of current nonprofit civil legal service providers and office locations in our service area (**Attachment B**)

ATTACHMENT A

List of Common Civil Legal Services Provided to Client-Eligible population (at or below 125% of poverty or up to 200% of poverty with qualifying conditions):

Family Law: This includes divorces, custody disputes, adult and minor guardianship cases, child support modifications, paternity actions, grandparent visitation, and noncustodial parent visitation cases.

Victims Services: This includes Injunctions for Protection, contempt, victims' assistance, identity theft, and representation to adult and child victims of abuse, sexual assault, stalking, dating violence, and human trafficking. This may also include other victims of crimes such as burglary, homicide, and others who have a civil legal issue as a direct result of the crime.

Public Benefits: Cash Assistance (TANF), Food Stamps/SNAP, Medicaid, SSA (SSDI, SSI, SSR, etc.), Medicare, Unemployment/Re-employment assistance, and other welfare benefit denials, overpayments and underpayments.

Consumer: Defense in lawsuits brought by collection agencies, wrongful garnishments and/or seizures, small claims cases, credit report disputes, fair debt collection, and debt buyer cases. This also includes a limited number of hardship Chapter 7 Bankruptcies and security deposit collections.

Housing – Renters: Forcible entry and detainer actions, landlord/tenant evictions, security deposit disputes, enforcement of habitability requirements, housing benefit issues, and utility cutoffs. Issues involving lot rentals in mobile home parks. Cases in which someone's rental status is being threatened and the client is at imminent risk of homelessness.

Housing – Homeownership: Defense of foreclosure, including traditional, FHA, VA, USDA, and reverse mortgages; Defense of foreclosure on mechanic's liens and other contractor issues; Heirs' property and other title clearing issues; limited other real property issues involving easements, surveys, and property descriptions; theft of real property; issues involving mobile homes owned by a client and related title. Cases in which someone's homeownership status is being threatened and the client is at imminent risk of homelessness.

Elder Services: This priority targets low-income seniors in the service area facing civil legal issues impacting their health and economic stability. While focused mainly on issues like housing, Medicaid, long-term care, Medicare, Social Security, and other economic issues; these services also include advanced directives, grandparent visitation, and simple wills. Outreach is emphasized under this priority and Legal Aid attorneys regularly visit nursing homes, senior centers and libraries with various law topics of interest to seniors.

Taxpayer Assistance: Representation of taxpayers before the IRS. Providing outreach and materials to communities to assist with understanding and resolving tax issues.

Disaster Legal Services: LSNF attorneys may provide legal counseling, advice and when appropriate and necessary, full representation in the civil legal matters arising from a disaster including: FEMA assistance and FEMA appeals, help with insurance claims for property, damage, and loss of personal property, landlord disputes, property ownership disputes, help with home repair contracts and contractors, questions about consumer scams and consumer protection matters, replacing legal documents lost in a

storm, completing application for disaster loans and grants and assistance, help with Disaster Food Assistance, help with FEMA Notice of Potential Debt recoupment letters, heir property issues, and disaster benefits issues.

Emergency Assistance: There are times when a situation arises in which a person needs emergency services that do not fit within the Priorities or Case Acceptance Criteria of LSNF. These are situations where it is necessary to take immediate action to protect or eliminate a significant risk to the health or safety of an individual, secure or preserve the necessities of life, or address other significant legal issues that arise because of new and unforeseen circumstances.

Juvenile: Provide legal assistance to children in critical areas that affect their safety, well-being and future development, including children in dependency, the delinquency system, with special needs, and facing challenges receiving a free and adequate education.

Veteran Law: To increase and enhance access to legal services for veterans through the Florida Veteran Legal Helpline.

Immigration: Provide assistance to LSC-eligible immigrants in adjusting status, including for victims of domestic violence, sexual violence, and human trafficking, naturalizing individuals, and others with LSC-eligible status.

Legal Assistance to Non-Profits and Small Businesses: Represent small immigrant and minority-owned business, non-profit organizations, affordable housing, and community groups engaged in economic development efforts.

ATTACHMENT B

[Bay Area Legal Services, Florida Senior Legal Helpline](#)

1-888-895-7873

[Bay Area Legal Services, Veterans Legal Helpline](#)

1-866-486-6161

[Florida Legal Services](#)

PO Box 533986
Orlando, FL 32853
407-801-4350

[FSU Law School, Public Interest Law Center](#)

301 S Martin Luther King Blvd, Ste A010
Tallahassee, FL 32301
850-644-9928

[The Honorable Nikki A. Clark Low Bono Center](#)

Leon County Courthouse
301 S Monroe St, Rm 100Q, 1st Fl
Tallahassee, FL 32301
850-606-4091

[Legal Aid Foundation of Tallahassee](#)

Leon County Courthouse
301 S Monroe St, #108
Tallahassee, FL 32301
850-222-3292

[Northwest Florida Legal Services \(D/B/A Emerald Coast Legal Aid\)](#)

226 S Palafox Pl, Fl 10
Pensacola, FL 32502
850-432-2336

[Southside Community Law Center](#)

2902 S Monroe St
Tallahassee, FL 32301
850-570-9119

[Tallahassee Veterans Legal Collaborative](#)

229 Lake Ella Dr
Tallahassee, FL 32304
850-815-7686