Call Center Technology

A TOOLKIT FOR LEGAL AID ORGANIZATIONS

Table of Contents

AUTHORS

Amadie Hart

Angela Tripp

Introduction

Over the past two decades, legal aid offices have employed call center technology to meet a variety of needs. Some have developed hotlines to answer client questions or provide brief services. Some use call centers for intake and screening. Others have developed centralized regional or statewide intake and referral centers. Regardless of their purpose, call centers have become an integral part of service delivery.

A well-run call center can improve client access to legal aid services, streamline the intake process, and allow offices to provide services to a greater number of clients. A single point of access to legal aid offices simplifies the process for new clients seeking services. Clients with mobility challenges or who live in rural areas can access services without having to visit an office. Call centers are the most efficient way to deliver services to individuals who need advice or brief services (which, according to Legal Services Corporation data, represent more than three-fourths of all cases closed each year).

Call centers also confer management benefits on legal aid organizations. Technology has made it easier for personnel to work remotely, which allows offices to implement more flexible work policies that can improve employee recruitment and retention. Data provided from call management software can help supervisors identify areas where training or workflow can be improved. Productivity can increase, with fewer missed appointments and the ability to serve a greater number of clients.

The efficiency of call center operations is dependent on a variety of factors, including personnel, equipment, software, automation, workflows, and integration. More than 150 legal aid "hotlines" throughout the country were established over the past two decades, and many can benefit from taking a look at the systems they currently have in place and see what they can do to make their telephone intake, advice, and referral systems more integrated and efficient.

Advances in call center technology have kept pace with other technological advances, and today a number of legal aid organizations that have developed a call center are looking to upgrade their systems, implement new features, or streamline their workflow. This toolkit will help legal aid organizations understand the call management technology and software features that are available on the market today, see how their peers have integrated other software solutions into their call center operations, and help organizations think through the options available to upgrade their existing call centers.

Call Center Models

Call centers break down into three different types:

- Inbound call centers, where clients call a single number and are placed into a queue to be routed to trained operators.

- Outbound call centers, where operators call individuals or businesses for purposes such as fundraising or sales.

- Hybrid models that have both inbound and outbound functions.

While all call centers can both make and receive calls, the classification of a call center depends on the primary function of the business model. Legal aid organizations operate inbound call centers, and there's as much variety in their features as there is among the legal aid organizations that operate them.

For example, organizations with multiple offices can use some form of call center technology to route calls for screening, qualification, and intake. Florida Rural Legal Services uses its phone system to route incoming calls to trained agents at one of seven offices that do screening and intake, and to then set an appointment for qualified clients to speak with an onsite attorney. Similarly, Legal Aid Services of Oklahoma operates a toll-free number that connects individuals in the state seeking assistance to paralegals trained to do screening and intake, and then refers qualified clients to one of its 18 offices throughout the state.

Some regions and states use call centers to provide centralized intake, screening, and referral for multiple legal aid organizations within a geographic area, and/or operate hotlines for seniors, veterans, or people who need help with housing law or other matters that fall under the purview of civil legal aid. In the state of Washington, the Coordinated Legal Advice, Education, and Referral hotline, or CLEAR, serves as a single point of entry for civil legal services for all low-income people, providing intake, advice, and referral.

A number of state-level organizations use call centers to provide individuals with free legal advice and brief services. If a client requires extended representation, they can refer cases out to a network of partners. The Counsel and Advocacy Law Line (CALL) in Michigan provides individuals with advice and *pro se* assistance. Its aim is to give clients as much advice as possible so they can handle matters on their own, but CALL staff will also make phone calls to opposing parties and landlords to resolve matters without litigation. If a client requires direct representation and the case falls within a local office's priorities, they can refer them to local legal services offices in the state.

Finally, there are some independent organizations that operate hotlines to provide advice and brief services to clients. The largest of these is CARPLS, based in Cook County, Illinois. Launched in 1993, CARPLS—originally known as the Coordinated Advice & Referral Program for Legal Services—was one of the first legal aid hotlines in the country, and it provides legal triage and limited representation to callers. Clients needing extended representation are referred to a network of external partners, but the organization is able to resolve approximately 85 percent of all calls in-house.

Call Center Technology

The technology behind call centers has come a long way in a short time. What do you need to know to put it to work for you?

While phone systems and call management software are at the heart of call center operations, integrations with other in-house tools—such as case management systems, knowledge base applications, client portals, and more—are becoming increasingly sought after in order to streamline workflow, improve caller experiences, and shorten time to resolution.

When call centers were first being deployed in legal aid organizations, the predominant technology underlying phone systems was what is known as Time Division Multiplexing, or TDM. These systems use physical switches to route calls, and are deployed over existing telecommunications infrastructure. Over the past decade, Voice Over Internet Protocol (VoIP) systems have become increasingly prevalent in all types of business settings. VoIP does away with the need to have physical phone jacks, instead using data connections to route calls, and allows virtually any internet-connected device to be used as a phone.

Calls that come into a centralized number are routed through switches that are either connected to an in-office server or hosted in the Cloud (this switching is known as PBX, or Private Branch Exchange; calls switched on VoIP lines use IP PBX). Local server-based systems are generally priced based on a one-time hardware expense and are managed by the purchaser. Cloud-based systems are generally priced on a subscription model determined by number of users. Offices needing a large number of phone lines often look to systems that they can host locally, provided they also have the personnel and resources to manage the server, software, and hardware in-house. Smaller offices tend to prefer Cloud-based systems that are easier to set up and manage, and that do not require initial capital investment.

SERVER OR CLOUD: WHAT IS BEST FOR MY ORGANIZATION'S TELEPHONY?

	On-Premises Server	Cloud-Based Hosted Solution
What is it?	An IP PBX system is owned and managed by the customer.	A provider manages an IP PBX server in their data center, and then routes calls to a customer's network.
Typical cost structure	The customer makes an upfront capital expenditure for the equipment and is responsible for maintenance and support.	The customer pays a monthly fee, either based on the number of users, features, and/or usage.
Support	In-house or contract IT support is necessary to maintain the equipment and perform updates and security patches.	Support and maintenance is the responsibility of the provider.
Flexibility	The customer has the ability to make any changes necessary to the system at any time with their own resources, assuming they have the technical capacity to do so.	The provider has ultimate control over the system, and they must make any changes.
Implementation	Requires in-house or contract IT resources.	Quick and easy, with little to no in-house technical resources.
Growth	Lower cost of ownership over the long term, and scalable.	Can be limited, as some companies may not support large-scale growth, or it may be cost-prohibitive.

Choosing the most appropriate call center technology is dependent on a variety of factors, including (but not limited to): budget, existing technology and telecommunications infrastructure, number of offices, distribution of offices, staff size, staff capabilities, system features, ease of integration, and reporting capabilities.

CHOOSING THE CLOUD

When William Guyton arrived at Legal Aid Services of Oklahoma in 2015, he was confronted with an infrastructure that was old and failing. He determined the best approach was not to rebuild the infrastructure on the premises, but rather to start transitioning to the Cloud. He began by moving to Office365 and Microsoft's Azure, and when the phone system started to fail, moved to Skype for Business for telephony. As the office has implemented these changes, staff have begun to identify some of the areas where they need additional features to improve their call center, and are testing several different software options to determine which would be the best fit for the organization.

Features vary among call management software packages. The following is a review of the most helpful features for call centers:

CALLBACK OPTIONS

Individuals served by legal aid organizations may be more likely to have constraints as to how much time they are able to spend on hold, either in terms of limited minutes, pay-as-you-go mobile phone plans, or employer-imposed restraints on phone time. One helpful feature in those situations is the ability for a caller to opt to receive a callback rather than waiting on hold. This holds their place in the queue, and when it is their turn to speak with an available agent, the system will call them back and connect them with the agent. Some organizations opt not to enable the callback feature, as the client is not always available when they are called back and the result can be a frustrating game of "phone tag" between the agent and the client. Others express concern that providing this option will result in a high number of clients requesting a callback, which could exceed the organization's capacity to respond in a timely manner.

CALL ROUTING/SORTING/QUEUING

When a call comes into a call center number, call management software routes the caller to an agent based on a series of criteria determined during the set-up of the system. Some of these routing criteria are based on caller selections made in response to prompts provided when the call is connected, such as pressing a number to access a Spanish-language menu or to specify the topic they are calling about. Others are based on agent availability and caller queues. Certain systems allow supervisors to assign skill-sets to agents so that calls requiring specific skills can be routed to the agent that can best meet their needs. For example, the software used by CLEAR allows them to assign issue area expertise to certain attorneys. Those attorneys will then be the first resource selected to answer calls related to those issue areas if they are available when the caller is in the queue.

Agents log into the system to indicate availability to take calls, and can also indicate when they are on a break. Supervisors can log into the system to see the available agents, review the caller queues, and redistribute calls to shorten wait times. Inbound call management software can also provide callers with estimates of time on hold or the caller's place in the queue, giving callers the option to leave a number for a callback or to leave a voicemail message for an agent.

While callers are waiting in the queue, some systems include the ability to play recorded messages, such as public service announcements or information on how to find self-service information online.

DASHBOARDS AND REPORTING

Reporting capabilities within call management software packages are essential to program evaluation and improvement. Typical metrics tracked include number of incoming calls, number of completed calls, caller wait times, call resolution times, queue sizes, and agent/operator statistics. A number of software solutions offer the ability to build custom reports from data in the system, and data can be combined with metrics from other systems (such as case management systems) for more sophisticated analysis and reporting.

Certain systems provide real-time data on dashboards that displays the number of callers in different queues and allows supervisors to drag and drop callers from one operator's queue into another to help reduce wait times. These dashboards can also provide real-time information on the other data points discussed above.

INSTANT MESSAGING/ONLINE CHAT

Some call center software systems feature messaging options that allow agents to correspond with clients via an instant messaging app or an online chat feature and have the interaction and records saved within the system and logged on reports. This is fairly prevalent in the for-profit sector, with many retail and banking websites displaying a prominent "Chat with an operator" box. As of this writing, these features do not seem to be in wide use in the legal aid field, although several organizations are either experimenting with this or considering integrating it during future upgrades.

CARPLS attempted doing triage via online chat in the past. According to Executive Director Al Schwartz, it was not effective for the organization's purposes. It conducted a study documenting the number of questions an attorney asks during a triage session and discovered the average was approximately 25, with some asking as many as 35 questions, and that there was a lot of back and forth between attorney and client. Overall, CARPLS found that triage was much more efficient to do in a conversation.

REMOTE ACCESS

The term "call center" conjures images of a room full of cubicles with people on headsets answering telephone calls all day long. However, today's technology allows intake specialists and attorneys to perform their jobs in just about any type of office or home office setup. While some call management software requires corresponding telephone hardware, other systems are hardware-agnostic and can be accessed with an internet connection, an app (or by logging into an office Virtual Private Network (VPN), and a headset. This allows agents to log in and take calls from just about anywhere, using mobile devices, tablets, laptops, or desktop computers.

ENHANCING ACCESS TO SERVICES

Legal Services of Northern Virginia used a TIG for its Automated Appointment Reminder project, which extracts data from the case management system and uses SMS and voicemail to remind clients of appointments and court hearings. The system, which went live in September 2014, had an immediate impact, reducing the number of client no-shows by 45 percent within six months.

Reducing no-shows helps improve the efficiency of the telephone hotline, as it frees up staff from having to make and handle calls regarding missed and rescheduled appointments. It also minimizes the amount of time an applicant has to wait for a new appointment. In addition to the productivity benefits, clients also appreciate this service; in a follow-up survey, 94 percent of clients found the automated reminder system to be helpful. Overall 78 percent of their clients indicate a preference for text messages over voicemail.

TEXT MESSAGING

Data from the Pew Research Center shows that 95 percent of Americans own some sort of cell phone. This includes more than 90 percent of Americans with incomes below $50,000.[2] Low income Americans are more likely to be smartphone-dependent, meaning that they are more likely to rely on a smartphone for internet access. In addition, text messaging options can also be helpful for individuals who are unable to have a private phone conversation or find it difficult to talk.

Some call management software provides options for text messaging with clients, but some organizations prefer to use SMS functionality built into their case management systems so that interactions are recorded on a case file. The most common applications for text messaging among the legal aid organizations interviewed for this report are sending out appointment reminders and following up on surveys. Early evaluations of these systems used by the Legal Aid Society of Cleveland and Legal Services of Northern Virginia have shown that they can be very effective (see sidebar). In addition, the Counsel and Advocacy Law Line is currently testing a text triage feature that will allow clients to then set up an appointment for call back or to provide limited advice.

EXPANDING CLIENT SERVICES THROUGH TEXT MESSAGING

In 2015, the Legal Aid Society of Cleveland received a TIG to send text messages to clients who received brief services in order to increase the amount of outcome data they collect. It had previously sent paper surveys, but the surveys were resource-intensive to produce and generated low response rates.

When the texting pilot began in February 2017, more than 14,000 clients had provided a mobile phone number and agreed to receive texts from the organization. In the pilot, the Legal Aid Society sent three types of text messages related to the specific brief service the organization provided to the client: outcome messages, informational messages, and community legal education and outreach messages.

Overall, the organization saw a 61.9 percent response rate to outcome text messages sent to 995 individuals during the pilot. In addition, informational and community outreach messages generated responses and engagement with the general public and service providers. (For a more in-depth look at the project and its results, visit https://bit.ly/2svf1yS)

---

2   "Mobile Fact Sheet." Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech, Pew Research Center, 5 Feb. 2018, www.pewinternet.org/fact-sheet/mobile/.
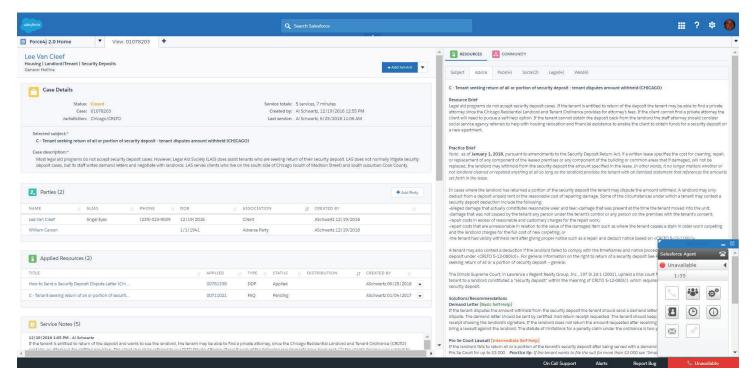
Integrating With Other Systems

Integrations with other in-house databases and systems can extend the capabilities of call management software and hardware, making them more useful.

The most popular integration for legal aid organizations that operate call centers is to connect call management software with a case management system by using either system's Application Programming Interface, or API. APIs consist of routines and protocols that allow for sharing and displaying data. As a simple example, if you have ever embedded a Twitter Feed on your website, you have used the Twitter API. Most online software applications have some sort of API that allow you to share and display data.

At a basic level, integrating call center and case management software makes it possible to match incoming phone numbers with existing clients in the case management database and, if a match exists, pop up a screen with the client information for the agent that answers the call. The extent of these integrations can vary, depending on the capabilities of the telephone system, the call management software, and the case management system. In some instances, the agent is able to see the client name, phone number, and case identifier, but must copy and paste the identifier into the case management system to bring up the client record. More deeply integrated systems can open up the case file and allow the agent to take notes and log the call. Some systems allow the original agent to access the case file but cannot port this data over to another person if the call is transferred.

A less common integration is between the call management software or case management system and a knowledge management database, which would allow an agent to pull up context-specific information and resources during the course of a session. These systems can assist with the provision of brief services, make documents available to send out, and provide paralegals and other trained agents with information to provide immediate advice on specified issues. CARPLS has developed an extensive in-house knowledge management system on the Salesforce platform that is integrated with its case management system. It allows attorneys to easily look up information and publish automated documents queued up in the system during a call. The CARPLS system has a catalog of more than 1,700 legal issues that are at agents' fingertips during a call.

CARPLS has integrated their knowledge management database with their case management system so that attorneys can easily find information from a catalog of more than 1,700 legal issues when they are on a call.

Alternately, an office can build a knowledge management database or wiki that is available for agents to use while on a call, but that is not integrated with the call management software. CALL has a wiki that it developed years ago, and that is continually updated. Organized around an index that breaks down substantive areas of the law by subject area, it also includes an interactive map of the state where agents can click on a county to find out local requirements, county information, and referral protocols for local offices in that county.

CLEAR uses Sharepoint as a knowledge management system. It has a dashboard set up for the hotline with the most frequently-needed information, such as social services referrals, local court practices, and information by substantive area. (For more information on how legal aid organizations are using knowledge management practices, download the free TIG toolkit, *Knowledge Management: A Toolkit for Legal Aid Organizations,* at https://www.idealware.org/reports/legal-aid-technology-toolkits/)

CALL also is working to integrate its online intake tool with its call center. Clients complete the online intake screening through the Michigan Legal Help website, which helps triage and direct clients to the appropriate resource and routes applications from income-eligible clients to the "waiting room" in the client management database. The online form gives the client the ability to select the best time to reach them (using four-hour windows). CALL will then make two attempts to reach an eligible client during the requested time, leaving a detailed message if necessary, and when it reaches the client, provide legal advice and/or brief service. The organization estimates this process saves approximately five to seven minutes per file. While CALL does not have statistics about client satisfaction, it reports that clients appear to appreciate the ability to apply online and receive a callback.

Substantive Manual Index

Consumer [edit]

Banking
- ATM and Debit Transactions
- Bank Accounts
- Bank Setoff
- Checks
- Filing Complaints with Regulators
- Money Orders
- Payment of Federal Benefits

Debt and Collection
- 1099-C or Debt Forgiveness
- Bankruptcy
- Civil Litigation
- Claim & Delivery
- Collection
  - Statutes Regulating Debt Collection
  - Collection suit
  - Collection Defense
  - Fraudulent Transfers
  - Post-Judgment
- Liability for Spousal Debt
- Credit Reports
- Debt Management
- FDCPA
- Garnishment
- Judgment Expiration
- Judgment Interest
- Liens & Executions
- Seizure
- Servicemembers Civil Relief Act

Motor Vehicles

Family [edit]
- Family Case Codes
- Filing Fees
- Jurisdiction and Venue
- Michigan Court Rules
- Objections to Ex Parte Orders & FOC Recommendations
- Orders - How to Get them Entered/Signed by the Judge
- Post-Judgment Transfers of Family Law Cases
- Proceedings Affecting Minors - Where to file?
- Service in Domestic Relations Cases
- Statute(s) of Limitations
- Terminology

- Affidavit of Parentage (AOP)
- Annulment
- Attorney Fees
- Bigamy
- Birth Certificates
- Change of Domicile
- Child Abuse
- Child Care: When May Kids Stay Home Alone?
- Child Custody
- Child Protective Services
  - Age you can leave child home alone
- Child Support
  - Enforcement
  - Modification
  - Uniform Interstate Family Support Act (UIFSA)
- Child Tax Issues
- Citizenship of Children
- COBRA
  - Military

Landlord/Tenant & Eviction [edit]
- Governing MCL, MCR & SCAO
- **Court Issues**
  - 5-Day Answer Counties
  - Attorney Fees & Judgment Costs-Fees
  - Consent Judgment
  - Default Judgment
  - Detroit Rental Ordinances
  - Order of Eviction
  - Post Judgment Motions
  - Summons/Time Before Hearing
- **Type of Housing & Eviction from**
  - Adult Foster Care
  - Assisted Living
  - Homes for the Aged
  - Nursing Home Residents
  - Campgrounds
  - Coops
  - Crops
  - Halfway Housing
  - LiHTC Housing
  - Mobile/Manufactured Homes
  - Motels/ Hotels/ Lodgers
  - Shelters
  - Student Housing
  - Storage Facility
- **Subsidized Housing**
  - Rural Development
  - Subsidized Housing
  - Subsidized Housing, General
  - Absence from the Unit Policies

Public Benefits [edit]

DHS (formerly FIA) and DCH
- DHS Program List
- Michigan Department of Health and Human Services -
  Progam Descriptions - FY 2017
- Adult Medical Program (DHS)
- Appeal Deadlines&Negative Action Notices(DHHS)
  - includes hearings
- Applying for State Assistance
- Cash Assistance / FIP
- Child Day Care Benefits (CDC)
- Department of Community Health (DCH)
- Drug-Related Convictions
- Employment Support Services
- Food Stamps (FAP)
- Healthy Michigan (Affordable Care Act)
- Hearing Opinions, DCH & DHS
- Home Help Services
- Marketplace Insurance
- Medicaid
- Medicaid Planning
- Medicare
- MiCap Food Assistance
- MI Health Link
- MI Marketplace Option
- Overpayment of State Benefits
- PATH
- Phone Numbers and Email Addresses for DHS Workers
- Refugee Assistance Program (RAP)
- SER
- Standard of Promptness (SOP) Chart

The Counsel and Advocacy Law Line's wiki breaks down substantive areas of the law by subject area and also includes an interactive map of the state where agents can click on a county to find out information specific to that locality.

CLEAR also has an online intake tool that clients can use when call volume is too heavy. Originally developed to allow individuals with high priority problems that need to be addressed within a certain time period to be able to request services when the lines were busy, the online tool has since expanded to include certain consumer problems as well. When the client completes the form, they are asked to specify the best time for a callback within one of three time windows. (For more information on how legal aid organizations are using online triage and intake, download the free TIG toolkit, *Online Triage and Intake: A Toolkit for Legal Aid Organizations,* at https://www.idealware.org/reports/legal-aid-technology-toolkits/)

CARPLS is also developing a secure online client portal targeted for release in 2019 that will allow clients to view case histories, upload documentation, review drafts, receive educational and legal content, and ask follow-up questions. Philadelphia Legal Services has set up a Twilio texting number to which clients can text photos of pertinent documents; they get converted to PDFs, and e-mailed to the advocate assigned to that client's case. These e-mails also go to a shared Outlook folder. This setup could be used by people who are not yet clients as part of a hotline system. At the end of online intake, applicants could be given this number with the option to text photos of pertinent documents; when the intake staff is talking with them to complete the intake, they could review the shared Outlook (or other email system) folder to find the pertinent documents. Some case management systems can also support document uploads by clients, either through the use of a case-specific email address or integration with an external form. Other legal aid organizations contacted for this report have considered software that would allow clients to upload documentation, but have not yet implemented a solution.

Taking Your Call Center to the Next Level

Technology changes quickly. How can you make sure your call center is not just up to the task to meet your current needs, but able to grow to meet your demands—and those of the people you serve—in the future, too?

A January 2018 blog post by telecommunications provider Mitel listed call center trends to watch, including comprehensive systems integration that improves customer experience, improved analytics, Cloud communications, more remote agents, access to self-serve documentation, and artificial intelligence integration.[3] Consultant Zahid Massoud is looking into Artificial Intelligence/speech recognition features that store information in a database to be sent to callers automatically based on their responses to certain questions. The price point for this technology is not quite there yet for legal services, but it is on the near horizon. (The TIG Toolkit on *Online Triage and Intake* includes a discussion of Artificial Intelligence and automating triage. Download it at https://www.idealware.org/reports/legal-aid-technology-toolkits/)

Such features may seem out of reach, considering the budgetary and personnel resource limitations faced by legal aid organizations. The Legal Services Corporation's Technology Initiative Grant (TIG) program is one source of funds to help launch technology initiatives or pilot programs that help improve call center operations. And organizations can take a number of other steps to upgrade or transform existing call centers.

ASSESS YOUR NEEDS

As with most technology projects, start by sitting down, taking an inventory of the systems you already have in place, evaluating what is and is not working, and identifying goals for the project. To get you started, we have put together a project planning sheet (Appendix A) to help you identify what you have and where you want to head.

The first question you should answer is whether you are looking for a Cloud-based or server-based system. If you are thinking about retaining existing TDM-based telecommunications in your office, it is important to keep in mind that many of the more advanced functions of call center technology today are dependent on the capabilities that VoIP provides, and may not be supported within TDM systems.

---

3   *https://www.mitel.com/blog/9-call-center-trends-2018*

However, the performance of Cloud-based systems is dependent on the bandwidth of the network available in your office. Each concurrent call takes up bandwidth, and that is layered on top of other software and hardware that use the internet (including Cloud-based software, video conferencing, audio and video streaming, etc.). While VoIP traffic can be prioritized over other network activity, if your overall bandwidth is limited, you will face such call quality problems as latency, dropped calls, and poor sound. Some businesses minimize the bandwidth problem by bringing a second data connection used exclusively for VoIP. More recently, organizations are turning to SD-WAN (Software-Defined Wide Area Network), which allows an organization to prioritize the different applications using the network. SD-WAN also includes features to detect and fix call quality problems. (Telecommunications provider Nexogy has a helpful explanation of VoIP and bandwidth available on its blog: http:// www.nexogy.com/blog/what-bandwidth-requirements-do-i-need-for-business-voip, and Network World has a layman's guide to SD-WAN and how it can help fix bandwidth issues at https://www.networkworld.com/article/3232379/wide-area-networking/sd-wan-will-fix-business-voip.html.)

The second question is the physical location and number of staff members who will be answering calls coming into the call center. For example, Florida Rural Legal Services runs seven offices, four of which are main offices and three of which are satellite. Each office has a trained intake specialist with knowledge of all counties served by the organization. When a call comes into the centralized number, the phone rings in any office with an available specialist who can do intake and make sure the caller qualifies for services. Legal Aid Services of Oklahoma is moving to a distributed staffing model as well, and therefore is testing systems that work using VoIP and headset technology. One thing to keep in mind is the quality of broadband access in all locations where staff will be connecting to the call management software. Unreliable, overtaxed, or lower speed access will result in poor call quality for VoIP-based calls.

The third question is what level of integration you need with other systems in use at your office. In general, the deeper the integration between the phone system and an organization's case management system and/or knowledge management system, the more likely it is that the call will be handled quickly, efficiently, and thoroughly. Each area that requires manual updates or look ups introduces an opportunity for operator error or omission and slows down the intake or advice process.

TRACK THE METRICS THAT MATTER

Measuring and evaluating your call center's performance is critical to ensuring that the investment you have made in technology and personnel is making a difference in the level and quality of service your organization provides.

In a presentation at the 2017 Equal Justice Conference, Al Schwartz and Pat Wrona from CARPLS discussed the importance of metrics in the optimization of their call center model. "Every dollar spent on intake is a dollar not spent helping clients," they said while discussing the need for streamlined intake. CARPLS used its metrics to determine how much it spent on annual intake, and then developed and implemented a plan to reduce those costs.

With today's software solutions, it's possible to track a wealth of data, but it is important to focus on data that is relevant, actionable, and important to your organization. It is also important not just to collect the data but also to make time to review it on a regular basis so that you can integrate your findings into your organization's activities. (For more information on collecting and using data, download Idealware's free report, *Becoming a Data-Informed Organization: How to Assess Your Nonprofit's Data Maturity and Create a Culture of Continuous Improvement* at https://www.idealware.org/reports/data_maturity/)

First, develop a list of the metrics you want to use to create a snapshot of your performance that you can use as a baseline. Call center software provides a certain number of pre-packaged reports that can be of assistance to this effort while other metrics require custom report development or data from another system. Some of the more common metrics to track are:

- **Average call length.** As with wait times, this metric can help you measure your staff's efficiency and can be an indicator of a need for training or additional resources. This can also be an indicator of the effectiveness of new technologies, such as integrating online intake or improving knowledge management resources.

- **Caller wait times.** The shorter the wait time, the better the user experience. If you find that wait times are too long or are increasing, it can be a sign that you may need to retrain staff who are answering calls or that you need to create a knowledge bank that provides staff with quick answers to frequently asked questions. You may also want to investigate whether you can implement a callback feature in your call center software that allows clients to reserve their place in the queue and have the system automatically call them back and connect them to an operator when they reach the front of the queue. This is especially beneficial to callers who may have limited minutes available on their cell phones.

- **Cases opened/closed.** This metric is usually tracked in a case management system, rather than in call management software, but is necessary for reporting to funders.

- **Case type/issue area.** If your system is set up to allow callers to self-select their case type or issue area when they get to the initial phone tree, then you can use your call management software reporting to track this data. This can help inform resources you can develop to address these types of calls more efficiently as well as staff training.

- **Client outcomes/satisfaction.** While not necessarily a feature of a call management system, follow up surveys sent to clients with completed cases can be a helpful tool for measuring staff and call center efficiency. These surveys can be sent by email or even by text message and can help identify areas that are functioning well and areas that need to be addressed.

- **Completed calls.** This can be a good marker for client satisfaction and system performance.

- **Dropped/Abandoned calls.** If a hotline provides pre-recorded messages directing callers to other available resources for callers waiting on hold, it can be useful to compare the timing of dropped calls related to the time when the message is played. If there is a correlation between the two, it is a good indicator that the recording is useful.

- **New/repeat callers.** This metric shows the number of callers that are new to your call center and the number of callers who have contacted you previously. This can tell you if you are reaching a wider segment of the population or if you have a number of "frequent fliers." This can also feed into the time to resolution metric (below), as repeat callers may be related to a case or matter that is not yet resolved.

- **Number of inbound calls.** This will help you determine the level of demand for services. If the number of calls is lower than you expect based on your experience in the community, it can also indicate that you may need to publicize your call center services more effectively.

- **Open cases by staff member.** This metric is also usually tracked in a case management system but is necessary to be able to assess the workload on certain staffers and reassign cases as necessary.

- **Time to resolution.** This is a more challenging metric to track, as it requires integration between a call management system and a case management system so that matters requiring more than one call can be tracked until completion.

The metrics that you track need to tie back to your goals for the call center. If the primary focus of your call center is intake, are you trying to increase the number of clients you can screen and qualify? Shorten the amount of time for intake? If the primary focus in on advice, are you trying to expand the number of individuals you assist? If the primary focus is on brief services, are your legal assistants or attorneys providing efficient and useful services?

Once you have your list of metrics to track, use the numbers you gather as a baseline for your performance and then monitor them over time for trends. Metrics that are indicators of easily fixed problems (e.g. wait times, call length) should be monitored on a daily or weekly basis, while others can be reviewed in monthly reporting.

CONSIDER YOUR STAFFING

The technology in place at a call center drives staffing decisions, both in terms of the type of staff answering the calls and the staff supervising the call center. However, the staffing in a legal aid organization can also be an input into the decision-making process for a call center solution.

The programs interviewed for this report had a wide variety of staffing models for their call centers. The most common set up for programs was to have initial screening and intake done either by trained legal assistants, trained non-legal staff, or paralegals. These individuals are supervised by attorneys. Paralegals also can provide advice when they are supervised and backed up by an attorney.

CARPLS, which has a greater focus on brief services, relies on attorneys to answer calls so that matters can be resolved faster and in fewer calls. If an issue is not resolved in the initial call, the attorney creates a "legal treatment plan" that is primarily executed by paralegals.

A couple of programs noted that they have built good relationships with law schools in their area and are interested in training law students to work in their call centers. One program anticipates expanding its program to involve pro bono attorneys who wish to volunteer in the call center.

In offices that rely on a distributed call center model, all agents need to be aware of and trained on issues and requirements for the entire service area of the agency.

Legal aid organizations that have a high number of non-English speakers in their community will often build alternate language options into the initial menu that will route calls to bilingual staff members and use Language Line (https://www.languageline.com/) for non-English speaking clients for which they do not have onsite language support. (The federal government has developed a resource that allows individuals to view the languages spoken by individuals with limited English proficiency by state or county, found at https://www.lep.gov/maps/. This can help inform staffing decisions for bilingual agents.)

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN CALL CENTER PERSONNEL

Even with the proper training, not everybody in an office is ideal at providing phone-based services. CARPLS has developed a list of the qualities that can help or hinder call center staff who are on the front lines of fielding calls in their office.

Who IS successful at call center work:

- Call center staff with more legal experience (substantive, courtroom, procedural).
- Call center staff with excellent client interviewing and interrogation skills (good at fact gathering).
- Call center staff who can naturally explain legal concepts to lay people in language they can understand.
- Call center staff who are friendly, and can instill confidence, but who can get to the point and end a consultation, politely.
- Multitaskers who can do many things at once.

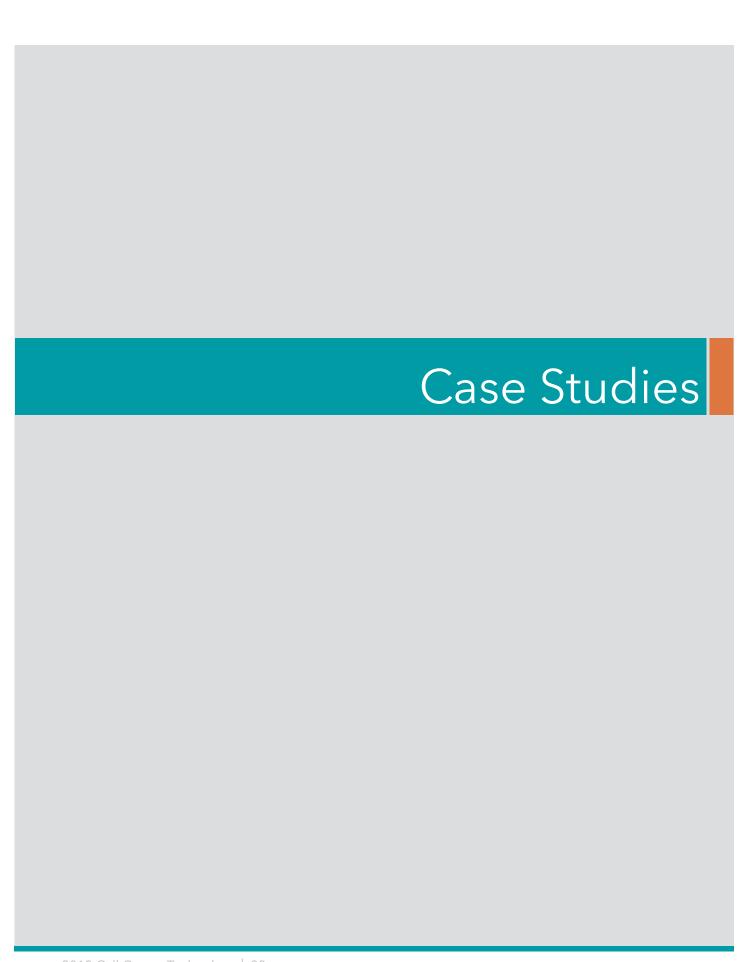Who is generally NOT successful at call center work:

- Brand new call center staff(who have less ingrained substantive knowledge).
- Call center staffwithout practical skills (no courtroom experience).
- Call center staff who are very contemplative, who need to think long and ruminate on an issue.
- Very sympathetic call center staff who want to help everyone, even outside the limits of the service model.
- Call center staff who are too chatty.
- Call center staff who lack good judgment, especially about *pro se* capabilities.
- Call center staff who cannot talk, think and write at the same time.

A variety of staff training programs are essential to the smooth operation of a call center.

The first consideration is training on the technology, which is usually provided following the implementation of a new call management system and when new call center staff are brought on board. Rudy Chagoya of Florida Rural Legal Services recommends that this training actually take place just prior to the launch of the new system so that it is fresh on peoples' minds as they start using the new technology. Training on the case management system is also essential when staff is using the software for intake, as is training on the knowledge management system if one is in use. Customer service training is also important for frontline phone agents. This includes training on how to deal with difficult callers, how to conduct an efficient online intake, and organization-specific policies and processes for handling different issues.

Finally, there is a need for substantive training on the issues for which callers may be seeking assistance. Since many of the organizations rely on legal assistants or trained non-legal staff to be the first to answer the call, they need to have some familiarity with the issues in order to better handle and route requests for assistance. Paralegals and attorneys also receive regular training on substantive issues throughout the year.

Scheduling ongoing training for call center staff can be challenging when there is a need to have staff available to answer calls. A number of organizations address this by limiting hours that phone services are available and conducting training during the times that the hotline is "closed." CALL does not offer services on Friday afternoons to allow time for all staff meetings and trainings. CLEAR only opens its hotline during morning hours, leaving afternoons free for training, meetings, and callbacks. Other organizations stagger their staff training so that groups participate in training during different times.

Case Studies

CARPLS

As one of the first legal aid hotlines in the country, CARPLS has built a successful brief services call center model on more than two decades of experience, ongoing collection and evaluation of data, and strategic investments in technology.

Today, each of the organization's staff of 20 attorneys can perform 3,000 consultations per year, with more than 60 percent of cases resolved during the initial call. The first leg in the organization's success is its willingness to invest in technology, a commitment that was reflected in the most recent strategic plan.

"Because we weren't investing in technology," explains CARPLS Executive Director Al Schwartz, "it was costing more over the long run not having these systems in place—especially in terms of staff time and effort to do reporting."

This led to the organization being late to catch and respond to trends. Increasing the investment in technology allowed it to upgrade reporting so that staff could look at data on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis; see and investigate outliers; and implement changes to make them more efficient.

Today the organization uses InContact to manage its call center, which was chosen due to its wide range of features and dynamic reporting capabilities. It's also integrated this software with the in-house case management system, a custom-built database developed on the Salesforce platform. This integration allows staff to identify existing clients when they call in and route them to specific groups for service.

In addition, the organization has integrated its case management system with a custom-built knowledge management system also developed on the Salesforce platform. Schwartz credits this integration with increasing the overall attorney service rate by 20 percent, from 1.8 to 2.17 consultations per hour, and helping to achieve the metric of resolving 65 percent of cases on initial consultation.

Schwartz is a big believer in the importance of monitoring and using metrics to build an organization's service, calling its systems' reporting

CARPLS by the Numbers

- Consultations per year: 50,000+

- Cases opened: 28,000

- Legal issues addressed: 1,800

- Average consultation time: 28 minutes

- Average number of consults per case: 1.8

- Average total case time: 50 minutes

- Cases resolved on initial consult: 65 percent

- Cases resolved in-house: 85 percent

- Annual budget: <$2,000,000

- Average cost per case: $61

- Clients satisfied with their case resolution: 73 percent

- Clients who would recommend CARPLS to a friend/family: 96 percent

capabilities "CARPLS' biggest evolutionary driver." He recommends that legal aid organizations operating call centers identify some basic performance metrics that measure their service, such as average service rate of attorneys, number of consultations they do a year, time spent on consultations, and number of consultations until resolution, and use that data to measure performance and make decisions on how and where to build services moving forward.

In addition, he recommends organizations invest in building some form of knowledge management system that is available to all attorneys answering calls. While such a system does not need to be as extensive as CARPLS' database, he has discovered that 10 percent of the most frequently asked legal issues in their knowledge management system accounts for two-thirds of all cases served. Schwartz suggests that organizations identify their most frequently asked legal issues and develop the following content for those issues: summary of the law; recommended solutions/resources; forms, letters, and pleadings; legal referrals; social service referrals; and online resources. This, he says, will allow clients to get more consistent legal services and advice, resulting in a more consistent and reliable work product.

CLEAR

The hotline offered by the Northwest Justice Project, CLEAR, was created in the mid-1990s to serve as a statewide entry point for all civil legal aid services in the state of Washington.

One goal of CLEAR was to save clients the hassle of having to contact multiple agencies in order to find one that could help them. CLEAR provides intake, screening, advice, brief services, and referral services. From the outset, the program has faced a significant volume of calls, which the organization has struggled to accommodate. Joan Kleinberg, director of CLEAR, admits that lack of capacity has been one of its biggest challenges. She estimates that it receives approximately 20,000 calls each year. Potential clients were often met with busy signals, so in recent years the organization adopted a number of strategies to serve as many clients as possible. Staff developed a menu of options so that, rather than encountering a busy signal during high-volume times, people calling for a reason other than assistance can be helped separately from the hotline; callers who *do* require hotline assistance receive a message that CLEAR is unable to take calls due to heavy call volume and are encouraged to call back or use the online intake form.

Initial screening, conflict checking, and intake is done by 10 trained non-legal staff members (seven or eight of whom are online at any one time when the hotline is open). These screeners are experienced call center or customer service workers that receive extensive training on substantive matters and use decision trees built into the case management system (LegalServer) to guide them. Qualified callers are placed into a queue to speak with an attorney or paralegal. The hotline has 12 to 15 attorneys online at any one time.

While the call management system is set up so that attorneys are tagged according to specialization (although they all serve as generalists as well), callers are not forced into long queues to speak to a specialist. For example, if a person is calling for assistance with a housing matter, (s)he would be put into the queue, and if a housing specialist becomes available within two minutes, the caller would talk to that attorney. Otherwise, the caller would be put through to the next available attorney.

The call management software runs on an in-house server, with a fail-over server at a co-location facility, and is managed by two in-house network administrators. After running the same software from 1997 to 2016, the organization did a complete overhaul of telecommunications, switching the phone system to a unified VoIP communications system with call management software layered on top. Agents use headsets and remote staff can connect to the system via VPN.

CLEAR tried integrating its call management software with LegalServer so that it could do screen pop-ups with client names and case numbers based on the caller's phone number, but it was unsuccessful. As a workaround, staff use a functionality available within the call management system that allows them to append notes to a call that travel with the call as it is transferred and make a note of the caller's name and case number that the attorney can copy and paste into LegalServer to bring up the case file. The screener also transfers the case file into an "internal transfers" tab in LegalServer, making it easier to find.

Conclusion

Telephone-based intake, advice, brief service, and referral services help legal aid organizations provide convenient and effective connections with the populations they serve.

Technological advances over the past decade have allowed organizations to streamline their work and serve even greater numbers of clients. These advances include improved call routing, better support for remote staff, integration with case management and knowledge management software, and improved reporting capabilities.

Organizations looking to upgrade their existing call centers have a great number of options from which to choose. Knowing your goals and identifying the data that will help you monitor your progress toward those goals will help you identify the software and integrations that best meet your needs.

Appendix A: Sample Project Planning Sheet

The following are some resources to help walk you through the process of embarking on a project to modernize or upgrade your call center. This assumes that an organization is already doing some form of telephone-based intake and is looking to automate some processes or improve efficiency.

CALL CENTER EVALUATION

First, it is important to take a look at your existing phone intake to see what is working well, what can be improved, and what is not working at all. This can be gleaned from:

- Client surveys
- Call volume/wait times
- Case management software reports
- Staff feedback
- Demographic data

The data should help you answer the following questions:

- Are your clients satisfied with the services they receive over the phone?
- Do your communication tools align with the ways your clients prefer to communicate?
- What is your average call volume/wait time? Is it increasing?
- What percentage of your calls are limited service cases?
- How long does it take your office to resolve advice or brief service requests?
- What workflow or process improvements do your staff recommend? What challenges do they have with existing technology?
- Are you meeting the demand for services in your community?

The results from this evaluation can help you inform the focus of your modernization efforts. If it is helpful, you can organize the answers into a SWOT (Strengths-Weaknesses-Opportunities-Threats) matrix (a sample one is available here: http://diytoolkit.org/tools/swot-analysis-2/), but even without a matrix you should have a good picture of areas that are in need of focus.

PURPOSE/GOALS

These focus areas should form the basis of your project goals. As with any strategic approach, these should be SMART goals (Specific-Measurable-Attainable-Relevant-Timely).

Goal:	
Specific: What will you accomplish?	
Measurable: What metrics will indicate success?	
Attainable: Is this realistic? Do you have the resources to achieve this goal? If not, can you get those resources?	
Relevant: Is this goal consistent with your organizational goals?	
Timely: What is the time frame for completion?	

The following is an example of a SMART goal: *We will implement new call management software that will allow us to increase the number of limited service cases we provide by 10 percent by the end of our fiscal year.*

DELIVERABLES

Once the goals for your project are defined, it is time to break them down into specific tasks or deliverables. These deliverables could be:

- Identifying and implementing new technology solutions (hardware or software) to improve the efficiency or increase the volume of your telephone services.
- Implementing new features of your existing call management software.
- Developing integrations between your call management software, case management system, and/or knowledge management system.
- Reorganizing call center staff, providing additional training, or hiring additional staff.
- Integrating complementary services, such as online intake or text messaging, into your existing call center workflow.

STAKEHOLDERS

Who are the stakeholders? Who is responsible for making decisions? Who needs to provide input? One simple way to track this is by creating a RACI (Responsible-Accountable-Consulted-Informed) chart.

Begin by compiling a list of all the individuals who have an interest in the project. This includes management and supervisors, IT staff, end users, and funders. Then, determine which role each stakeholder plays for the project deliverables. For example, if the first deliverable is to develop a list of call management software vendors, a staff person or consultant could be responsible, but the project manager would be accountable. A client intake screener could be consulted to provide input on important features, and management would be informed.

The goal of this exercise is to clarify the lines of communication and the decision makers for each stage of the process.

The following is a sample RACI chart format. For more information on RACI charts and a sample Excel file, visit http://racichart.org/.

	Stakeholder 1	Stakeholder 2	Stakeholder 3	Stakeholder 4
Deliverable 1	R	A	C	I
Deliverable 2	R	A	I	C
Deliverable 3	I	A	R	C
Deliverable 4	A	I	C	A

SELECTING THE RIGHT CALL CENTER SOLUTION

Should you decide you need to change the software and/or hardware for your call center, here is a quick worksheet to help make it easier to work with vendors to find the right solution.

Existing telecommunications system:

☐ TDM

☐ VoIP

If you have VoIP, is your PBX:

☐ On-premises

☐ Cloud-based

Broadband internet access:

☐ DSL

☐ Cable

☐ Fiber-optic/basic

☐ Fiber-optic/dedicated internet access (DIA)

☐ Other

Broadband internet speed:

_____

Max number of phone users:

_____

Phone operator location(s):

☐ Single business location

☐ Multiple business locations

☐ Multiple business and non-business locations

Number of in-house IT staff:

Weekly anticipated call volume:

Budget:

Features Requested/Needed:

☐ Callback option

☐ Skillset assignments

☐ Recorded hold messages

☐ Real-time dashboards

☐ Remote access

☐ Instant messaging/chat

☐ Text message

☐ Custom reports

☐ Integration with other databases

Appendix B: Additional Resources

Hotlines: The Next Generation (workshop from the 2018 LSC Tech Innovations Conference):
https://vimeo.com/255045109

Presentation slides on CALL's wiki:
https://lsc-live.app.box.com/s/xxmipsbxtjnhe1uvdthrj3sxy5wdgz9x

While technology continues to evolve rapidly, the following resources still provide a good overview of how to set up and manage a telephone hotline:

American Bar Association (ABA) Standards for the Operation of a Telephone Hotline Providing Legal Advice and Information (August 2001)
https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/delivery_legal_services/hotlinestandards.authcheckdam.pdf

Legal Hotlines: A How-to Manual (2001)
https://legalhotlines.org/?resource=legal-hotlines-a-how-to-manual

Appendix C: About This Toolkit

This Toolkit is the result of a collaboration between Idealware and the Michigan Advocacy Program (MAP), funded through the Technology Initiatives Grant Program of the Legal Services Corporation (LSC).

ABOUT IDEALWARE

Idealware, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, provides thoroughly researched, impartial and accessible resources about technology to help nonprofits make smart technology decisions. Idealware's research publications, assess- ments, and training save nonprofits time and money by providing guidance that gives nonprofit leaders the knowledge and confidence they need to decide what's best for their organization.

ABOUT MAP

Through direct legal help and statewide advocacy, the Michigan Advocacy Program provides access to the justice system for those who need it the most. The Michigan Advocacy Program's direct service components are Legal Services of South Central Michigan, which provides free civil legal advice and representation to low-income and senior citizens in thirteen counties, and Farmworker Legal Services, which provides free legal assistance and referrals to migrant and seasonal farmworkers throughout the state of Michigan. The Michigan Advocacy Program also provides administrative services to a number of independent statewide programs, including the Michigan Poverty Law Program, the Michigan Immigrant Rights Center, the Michigan Legal Help Program, the Michigan Elder Justice Initiative, and the Crime Victim Legal Assistance Project.

ABOUT LSC

The Legal Services Corporation (LSC) is an independent nonprofit organization established by Congress in 1974 to provide financial support for civil legal aid to low-income Americans. LSC was founded on the shared American ideal of access to justice regardless of one's economic status. LSC is the largest single funder of civil legal services to the poor in the United States. LSC is a grant-making organization,

distributing more than 93 percent of its federal appropriation to eligible nonprofit organizations delivering civil legal aid. LSC also administers special grant programs supporting innovative practices in the areas of technology and pro bono engagement.

AUTHORS

Amadie Hart, Idealware Contractor

Amadie is a contract writer and researcher for Idealware and President of Hart Strategic Marketing LLC. Amadie founded the company in February 2012 to provide smart marketing and communications consulting to nonprofits and small businesses. She helps clients develop strategic online marketing plans, create and implement online communications strategies, redevelop website content, make decisions about content management and customer relationship software, and integrate social media into outreach efforts.

Angela Tripp, Michigan Advocacy Program

Angela is the Director of the Michigan Legal Help (MLH) Program, which is responsible for the statewide website for self-represented litigants (MichiganLegalHelp.org) and 15 affiliated Self-Help Centers around the state. In 2016, over 770,000 people visited the MLH website and over 86,000 people used its resources to complete legal forms. She has led the development and growth of MLH from its inception in 2011. She is also the Co- Director of the Michigan Poverty Law Program, the state support program in Michigan, and holds a J.D. from Northeastern University School of Law in Boston and a B.A. from the University of Cincinnati.

CONTRIBUTORS

Valuable input into the toolkit was provided by the following people:

Rudy Chagoya, Florida Rural Legal Services
William Guyton, Legal Aid Services of Oklahoma
Jennifer Hartke, Counsel and Advocacy Law Line
Nanci Hoover, Legal Aid of Southeastern Pennsylvania
Joan Kleinberg, Northwest Justice Project
Zahid Masood, Z Consulting Group
Campbell Palmer, CenturyLink
Al Schwartz, CARPLS