On September 18, 2020, Louisiana’s Justice for All Advisory Council (“Advisory Council”) met for a final review of the learnings from an intensive and comprehensive inventory assessment process that began in November 2019. Like virtually every aspect of 2020, the Justice for All (“JFA”) assessment and planning stages were filled with unexpected turns and challenges - community listening sessions were cancelled during the height of the pandemic and Advisory Council meetings were moved online and condensed to accommodate overloaded and disrupted schedules. Despite these challenges, the Advisory Council and Louisiana State Bar Association (LSBA) Access to Justice team succeeded in completing a thorough review of the 15 components deemed by the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) to be necessary for achieving the promise of justice for all. The resulting assessment includes a powerful new Geographic Information Systems (“GIS”) visual mapping tool that demonstrates the layered barriers that remain for large swaths of the population in Louisiana living in identified “civil legal deserts,” areas where access to legal aid, transportation, and broadband are limited.

After considering the assessment findings by component, the key findings summarized below, and the associated potential implementation activities, the JFA Advisory Council recommended that the Access to Justice Commission consider avenues for pursuing activities and strategies focused on the priority areas identified on the following page without diverting resources from the critically important legal aid, self-help, pro bono, clinic and court based services already being delivered without sufficient financial resources.
LOUISIANA’S CIVIL LEGAL DESERTS

Areas in red represent places where in-person civil legal help (at either a civil legal aid office, law library, or self-help center) is at least a 45-minute drive away. These areas frequently also have high rates of poverty and limited access to broadband internet, making civil legal help effectively inaccessible.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>PRIORITY ACTIVITIES AND STRATEGIES FOR CONSIDERATION</th>
<th>RELEVANT COMMITTEES AND LEADING ENTITIES</th>
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| 1. Increase support for access to justice efforts by developing and implementing a comprehensive outreach and communications plan that includes but is not limited to:  
  - Widespread distribution of the findings from the GIS mapping project to legal stakeholders, community, funders, legislators, and leaders.  
  - Communication, coordination, and cross-trainings with non-traditional community partners | Jurisdiction Infrastructure  
  - Stakeholder Capacity & Governance of Traditional Stakeholders  
  - Community Integration & Prevention | |
| 2. Pursue a strategy for including an annual mandatory access to justice training for judges and court staff that includes but is not limited to:  
  - Information about barriers to civil legal justice ("legal deserts")  
  - Information about the importance of uniformity and consistency in overcoming those barriers | Judicial & Court Staff Education | |
| 3. Explore improvements to triage and referral by:  
  - Communication, coordination, and cross-trainings with non-legal referral mechanisms such as 211  
  - Studying the effectiveness of existing referral systems and recommending opportunities for improvements | Triage & Referral | |
| 4. Increase and centralize self-help resources for residents living in Louisiana’s civil legal deserts by:  
  - Increasing the availability of self-help kiosks/access points located at courthouses or community gathering spots  
  - Coordinating efforts for statewide endorsement of current forms  
  - Creating additional plain language forms and instructions | Self-Help Centers  
  - Plain Language Forms  
  - Courtroom Assistance Services  
  - Compliance Assistance | |
| 5. Continue to invest in communication, education, and outreach to increase lawyer and litigant participation in:  
  - Alternative dispute resolution  
  - Limited scope representation | Alternative Dispute Resolution  
  Limited Scope Representation | |
With the above identified priorities in mind, the LSBA Access to Justice team recommends the following framework for moving from JFA assessment to JFA implementation.

1. Seek NSCS funding for JFA implementation (up to $100,000 available) to support a multi-pronged strategy for addressing barriers to civil justice in up to [3] parishes located in civil legal deserts, as identified in the GIS mapping project. The funding would be used to develop and implement a tailored approach to the local community that includes:
   - outreach and education to nonlegal partners
   - cross-training for and with community partners
   - mapping community assets to identify areas for creating effective legal access points such as self-help kiosks
   - mini-grant funding available to assist community partners with implementing locally identified projects and strategies
   - judicial and court education and outreach
   - communication, education, and outreach to legislators, funders, and other leaders, using the GIS mapping project as a mechanism for (1) developing a greater understanding of the barriers to access to justice and (2) building support for increased funding

2. Explore opportunities for incorporating the JFA key findings and priorities into the existing ATJ Commission strategic plan.

3. Offer planning facilitation to ATJ committees interested in looking more closely at the JFA findings and discussing ways to incorporate the findings into committee workplans.
The following key findings emerged from the recently completed Justice for All (JFA) inventory assessment. Following each key finding is a set of potential strategies and activities that were presented to the Advisory Council for consideration as options for closing gaps and continuing Louisiana’s march toward greater access to justice. The list was not intended to be exhaustive but rather was offered as a menu to spur conversation and prioritization during the planning meeting, which ultimately led to the priority areas and recommendations highlighted above.

1. **Louisiana has achieved significant system-level ATJ coordination among legal stakeholders, primarily through the Access to Justice (ATJ) Commission and committee structure.** Opportunities exist to further develop communication strategies, increase participation of community stakeholders, and broaden the geographic diversity of participating members to increase representation of rural communities.

   **Potential Strategies & Activities:**
   - Review current commission and committee rosters. Assess and make recommendations for opportunities to diversify input and representation.
   - Establish goals and metrics for tracking progress toward justice for all.
   - Develop communications plan and strategy to publicize the implementation phase of this project to garner support and recruit champions for these initiatives.

2. **Louisiana has a strong network of providers and community partners.** However, capacity constraints result in significant “legal deserts,” where access to legal aid, transportation, and broadband are limited. Approximately 600,000 people income-eligible for legal services are required to drive over 45 minutes to get to the nearest legal aid office. This accounts for 60% of the state’s land area and 34% of the population below 200% of the federal poverty line. Demand for all services, including full representation, far outstrips the capacity to serve. All of the efforts described in the inventory assessment make meaningful contributions to addressing these gaps, but significant barriers remain.

   **Potential Strategies & Activities:**
   - Strengthen resource planning and funding seeking efforts to increase legal aid office presence in the state where needed
   - Expand in-person self-help centers and self-help assistance, focusing on “legal deserts.”
   - Create virtual self-help centers and/or clinics targeted to residents with the greatest challenges reaching in-person assistance.
   - Use and enhance the GIS mapping project to identify potential high-impact future collaborations that support community partners in assessing, addressing, and/or effectively referring the legal needs of their patrons.
   - Create opportunities to learn from rural states like Alaska and Montana regarding practices for delivering services across great distances.
   - Create, systematize, and support ongoing efforts to attract, retain, mentor, and train pro bono attorneys.
3. Louisiana has well-established models in place for community integration and prevention. Through disaster preparedness and response programs, stakeholders have a history of coordinating trainings, services, and resources to organizations and people affected by disaster. Additionally, several collaborative models exist through individual organizations and joint initiatives to address a variety of legal matters arising from medical issues, domestic violence, and incarceration. Strong partnerships with public libraries through the Legal Education Assistance Program (LEAP) have also bolstered outreach efforts to the public about available legal resources. Expanding these models to address a wider variety of legal issues through coordinated outreach and education involving legal and nonlegal providers would strengthen information exchange across agencies, increase access to existing legal resources, and help continuously identify unmet legal needs and opportunities.

Potential Strategies & Activities:
- Use and enhance the GIS mapping project to identify potential high-impact future collaborations that support community partners in assessing, addressing, and/or referring the legal needs of their patrons.
- Create and track goals for additional outreach, communication, and collaboration with community partners.
- Support individual stakeholder efforts by developing and distributing template materials for outreach to community partners.

4. In Louisiana, strong local triage and referral systems exist in the highest populated areas of the state – namely, Alexandria, Baton Rouge, Lafayette, Lake Charles, New Orleans, and Shreveport. Additionally, the Find Legal Help webpage has improved the accessibility of online information for those seeking legal help by centralizing contacts, organization information, and resources. While community stakeholders reported awareness and frequent use of the referral resources available, additional opportunities exist to centralize triage and referral systems through partnerships with health and human services networks like 211. This would ultimately enhance the “no-wrong door” approach and ensure those with and without internet access can connect with the legal help they need. Robust triage with other community partners has not been systematically implemented.

Potential Strategies & Activities:
- Coordinate with 211 to identify and implement opportunities for increasing the effectiveness of legal referrals through the network.
- Offer training to legal providers on how to use 211 or other resources to ensure seamless referrals for addressing the non-legal needs of clients.
- Study the effectiveness of current referral protocols and practices, including the capacity, eligibility, and priority constraints of the entities receiving referrals, and recommend opportunities to improve effectiveness and information sharing.
- Study emerging best practices and innovative models for creating cohesive triage and referral models across the system of legal and community providers.
5. End user feedback and data are collected and used by some access to justice providers, programs, and projects. However, there are opportunities to improve collection, sharing, and utilization of user input and data to help guide system-level decisions and improvements.

**Potential Strategies & Activities:**
- Work with judges and court staff to develop a system to track litigant (user) experiences, outcomes, and knowledge.
- Provide regular or ongoing opportunities for users of the justice system to provide feedback on their experiences through community meetings, focus groups, or surveys.
- Provide a regular forum for providers and other stakeholders to share and learn from each other’s end-user data.
- Provide a statewide training for ATJ stakeholders on best practices for incorporating, ongoing end-user feedback.
- Diversify the ATJ Commission and subcommittees.
- Select several metrics for end-user feedback that are tracked across time by the ATJ Commission or appropriate subcommittee.
- Commit to including end-user feedback in any future projects of the ATJ Commission.

6. The technology committee of the ATJ Commission coordinates technology projects, ensuring that technological innovation is an ongoing topic for discussion and planning. Significant innovation is taking place, including work on the civil legal navigator program. However, no systematic approach is currently in place for identifying new opportunities for innovation (including non-technological). Opportunities to simplify processes and develop best practice standards through a systemic approach remain challenging due to variations in local rules, processes, and procedures.

**Potential Strategies & Activities:**
- Commit to ongoing participation in national conferences and trainings related to innovation and create systems for reporting and considering new approaches.
- Request technical assistance from NCSC on incremental projects that may assist in creating more uniformity in areas of innovation that would have the biggest impact on self-represented or low-income litigants.
7. The Louisiana Judicial College (LJC) provides quality and relevant continuing legal education for judges. However, the lack of requirement for ATJ training programs for judges and court staff has led to decentralized efforts on a select few issues. Recent collaborative educational efforts by the ATJ Commission committees with the Louisiana District Judges Association, the Louisiana Judicial College and Louisiana Clerks of Court Association have been positive. Opportunities exist for a more consistent, structured plan of education for judges and court staff.

Potential Strategies & Activities:
- Work with LJC to ensure ATJ topics are included in annual trainings available to the judiciary.
- Create and implement an annual ATJ training for court staff.
- Develop a toolkit of training materials that can be used by various presenters for judicial and court staff trainings.

8. In Louisiana, development of self-help forms has been a high priority for access to justice stakeholders for more than a decade. Forms for divorce, child custody and support, name change, and select court procedures are available. While the Louisiana Access to Justice Commission has adopted standardized forms, Louisiana’s non-unified court system has resulted in a lack of uniformity and led to variations in the content, availability, and costs to access the forms. As a result of these challenges, efforts to develop statewide approved forms have declined in recent years.

Potential Strategies & Activities:
- Prioritize creation of additional materials in areas other than domestic relations based on user data about areas of greatest needs. Explore additional options for encouraging or mandating adoption of simplified forms across jurisdictions.
- Engage in ongoing judicial education about the importance of uniformity and plain language in achieving access to justice.
- Continue to develop resources like automated forms and orders that offer efficiency for judges adopting standardized, user-friendly, plain language forms.
9. Louisiana’s self-help centers are a strong piece of Louisiana’s access to justice strategy. There are currently 13 physical centers, largely located in urban areas, meaning that access in rural areas is limited. Self-help services generally include assistance with issue identification, form completion, procedure information, and referrals to legal services or community resources. Services are largely limited to domestic matters, and generally stop at the courtroom door. For jurisdictions that may lack capacity to implement physical self-help centers, virtual options exist. Much like the physical centers, these websites contain guidance on self-representation, legal information and forms, and contact information for legal and community organizations that may be able to help. Currently, 18 judicial districts employ virtual self-help sites, and an additional 10 host similar content on their court websites. Louisiana’s non-unified system leads to inconsistencies in available services and forms.

Potential Strategies & Activities:
- Explore or expand remote technologies for enhancing customized assistance for individuals in jurisdictions without physical self-help centers. Examples include self-help clinics provided over video conference and virtual assistance kiosks in the courthouse.
- Consider expanding the availability of courtroom assistance or navigators to offer individualized assistance to self-represented litigants not currently available through the centers, perhaps through pilot projects.

10. Compliance assistance activities that help self-represented litigants understand and comply with court orders are virtually non-existent in Louisiana. Some judges provide oral explanations of judgements, and clerks of court are often approached by litigants trying to understand written orders. There is no indication of a concerted effort to support or ensure post-judgment compliance.

Potential Strategies & Activities:
- Provide automated, plain language orders based on standard forms to assist judges in completing written orders at the hearing. This may have the added benefit of encouraging broader use of standardized forms.
- Include trainings on the importance of compliance assistance in ongoing judicial education.
- Gather user and community feedback to identify areas where self-represented litigants have encountered the greatest challenges with compliance.
11. Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) programs have been initiated and tested for many years. Two Louisiana law school clinics are currently providing free conflict resolution services to individuals, organizations, and agencies by utilizing trained law students. Other ADR programs provide reduced-fee mediation on a sliding scale. A pilot project currently in review would offer mediation services through legal aid providers and volunteer mediators from the LSBA ADR Section. Survey results show that not many people know these services exist or what their function is in the legal system. Providing ADR services in rural areas is a challenge.

Potential Strategies & Activities:
- Explore online mediation options for locations not currently served by an established program.
- Create clear goals for educating stakeholders regarding available ADR options.
- If not already available, establish clear protocols and best practices for new mediation programs.
- If not already established, consider developing and passing a code of ethics for mediators.

12. Limited scope representation has been supported by the legal profession and courts in Louisiana for more than 20 years. While that support continues today, opportunities exist to increase participation by attorneys and litigants.

Potential Strategies & Activities:
- Create clear goals for educating stakeholders about existing LSR services.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of current efforts, including through the collection of feedback from attorneys providing LSR services.
- Adopt rules that further support and clarify attorneys’ roles, responsibilities, and limitations for the provision of LSR.
- Create or enhance training materials and support available for LSR attorneys.

13. Louisiana’s non-unified court system often results in challenges to efficiently expanding services and resources across the state or making existing resources more widely available.

Potential Strategies & Activities:
- Request technical assistance from NCSC on incremental projects that may assist in creating more uniformity across areas that would have the biggest impact on self-represented or low-income litigants.
- Convene key stakeholders to study and recommend improvements.