

## **Partnering to Harvest Rural Delivery of Pro Bono Legal Services**

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### **Brief Description:**

Impoverished persons living in rural areas are often overlooked in the delivery of legal services. This workshop is designed as a resource for legal services providers, bar associations and volunteer lawyer programs looking for ways to serve clients in rural areas and strengthen the support system for pro bono advocates who help rural clients. The workshop will discuss innovative delivery strategies and projects, such as using an email listserv to expand placement of rural pro bono cases, utilizing the internet to expand rural pro bono, and collaborating with multiple partners to enhance pro bono opportunities.

### **Topical Outline:**

- I. Barriers to Rural Delivery of Legal Services
  - a. Geographic distance – wide open spaces and isolation from larger urban communities
  - b. Spotty cell phone reception; high-speed web connections not yet widely available
  - c. Rural Law Practice
    - i. Critical shortage of attorneys
    - ii. Conflicts of interest that prevent representation
    - iii. Rural lawyer practice areas and rural client legal needs often do not mesh
    - iv. Rural practitioners often work in solo practices with few support staff
    - v. Rural lawyers face registration requirements in multiple districts and significant travel demands
    - vi. Rural lawyers need access to resources including: training manuals, CLE's, and bar association practice groups that offer sample forms and potential co-counsel arrangements or assistance
- II. Partnerships to Overcome Barriers to Rural Delivery of Legal Services
  - a. Tap into urban resources whenever possible
    - i. Long-established urban service agencies, bar associations and volunteer lawyer programs have much to offer newer rural projects including: volunteers, expertise, technology initiatives, sample forms, legal research, law students, and law firm pro bono panels, volunteer training and mentorship

- b. Engage the local community
  - i. Stay involved with key community stakeholders to help assess local needs and to develop region-specific pro bono plans
  - ii. Forge new community partnerships to assist with rural delivery, and look to other sectors' resources, such as government or corporate attorneys, judges, law clerks, paralegals, law students and retired attorneys
  - iii. Include partners from outside the legal community such as faith-based organizations and social service agencies
- c. Work with Access to Justice entities to fully integrate rural areas into the statewide delivery system
- d. Develop partnerships to expand volunteer recruitment long and wide: law firms, corporations, government offices, retired attorneys, small-practice and solo attorneys
- e. Expand ways to recognize and thank volunteers i.e., judicial networking events, free CLE's, etc.
- f. Open up to the idea of pro se projects
- g. Involve state and local bar associations

### III. Expanding Placement of Rural Pro Bono Cases: The Pro Bono Oregon Email Listserv Example

- a. Why did we decide to use a listserv as a service delivery tool?
  - i. A King County Washington system has been in use for two years and is now placing 40% of listed cases. System has 20 organizations and 30 + firms participating.
  - ii. Listservs are easy to use as they are understood by many user populations.
  - iii. Listservs are low cost, most are free.
  - iv. Listservs can be set up for minimal administration.
  - v. Listservs push information. You can ensure population sees the listing on a regular basis.
  - vi. Listservs can be adapted to any size of population - city, county, state.
  - vii. The listserv allows attorneys to review a large number at any time. Attorneys can pick a case based on their specific desires.
  - viii. A listserv is an easy recruiting tool.
- b. How does this system work?
  - i. Legal aid or pro bono organization creates a single list with multiple cases each week. Case descriptions follow a standard format.
  - ii. Each organization posts their email on the same specific day. Postings note the organization and geographical area served. A posting can be a case, training opportunity or call for specific types of volunteers.
  - iii. Firm pro bono coordinators or individual attorneys receive the emails and then review as desired.
  - iv. Individual attorney contacts the contact person noted. Contact is via phone or individual email address, not via the listserv.

- v. Organization discusses conflicts and more specific details once contact is made.
- vi. System requires a moderator to add organizations and attorneys. Our system is a controlled access system.
- c. What do you need to make a system work?
  - i. Decision on who are posting organizations and who are the receivers of postings.
  - ii. Standard format for listing title and case description. Help users to tailor their listings.
  - iii. Announcements to organizations and recipients that explain the system.
  - iv. Decision on who will be the moderator.
  - v. Marketing plan for organizations and recipients that allows for an equal entry of both to the system.
  - vi. Preliminary test and feedback system before opening the system.
  - vii. Group of stakeholders to help enlist participants.
- d. What problems did we experience?
  - i. Funding for test is needed for design of system and documents.
  - ii. Follow up funding needed for initial expansion.
  - iii. Procedures manual helps reduce problems with sign ups and listserv behavior.
  - iv. Organizations must continue to list even if no initial takers. Must establish continuous flow for recipients to see.
  - v. Set parameters that attorneys desire but try to be flexible with organizations.
- e. How can this help specifically in rural areas?
  - i. Ease of recruitment. Use local bar, existing pro bono providers. Link to state bar, etc.
  - ii. Tailor announcements to use attorneys outside of area - telephone consult , etc.
  - iii. Ease of use allows immediate placement opportunities.

#### IV. Strategies to Expand Rural Pro Bono Utilizing the Internet: The Georgia Online Justice Community Example

- a. Goals of <http://www.GeorgiaAdvocates.org/GOJC>
  - i. Create statewide community of volunteers
  - ii. Create central clearinghouse for training and support materials for volunteers
  - iii. Enhance communication among volunteers, programs, bar and courts on pro bono issues
  - iv. Provide tools for marketing pro bono matters for large and small pro bono and legal aid programs in the state
  - v. Enhance visibility of pro bono throughout the state (and nationally) thru web presence
- b. Using Technology to Addressing Barriers
  - i. To maintain and improve the quality of existing pro bono programs
  - ii. Create partnerships among service providers, law firms, client organizations, other disciplines for holistic delivery

- iii. Identify and address gaps in service
  - iv. Assist delivery organizations in the development of collaborative projects
  - v. Combat invented or assumed barriers to lawyer participation
  - vi. Provide common, consistent message regarding value of pro bono
  - c. Specific Projects as Examples for Breaking Down Barriers
    - i. Georgia's Nursing Home Medicaid Project
      - 1. Statewide emergency
      - 2. Centrality of materials, message and support
      - 3. Instant feedback
    - ii. Associating listservs (group e-mail) with your website
      - 1. Case placement functions
      - 2. Materials and training support linkages
      - 3. E-mail support from program and from individual listserv participants on collaborative projects
      - 4. News and periodic updates from your program that keep your volunteers "in the know" and connected to you
- V. Lone Star Legal Aid's Virtual Case Management System
- a. Accessible from any location
  - b. All program users have same information
  - c. Ability to facilitate client services from remote areas

### **Bibliography & Website Links:**

1. A Business Commitment Pro Bono Project <http://www.abc-georgia.org/>
2. Georgia Online Justice Community <http://www.GeorgiaAdvocates.org/GOJC>
3. Illinois Pro Bono <http://www.illinoisprobono.org/index.cfm>
4. Pro Bono Net <http://www.probono.net/>
5. Pro Bono Oregon Listserv – Self-Help CD (has forms and information on system) – Contact Lori Alton at [lorialton@yahoo.com](mailto:lorialton@yahoo.com) for a copy
6. *Rural Pro Bono Delivery: A Guide to Pro Bono Delivery in Rural Areas*  
To download free copy, see:  
[http://www.abanet.org/legalservices/probono/aba\\_rural\\_book.pdf](http://www.abanet.org/legalservices/probono/aba_rural_book.pdf)