

Remote Legal Support Guide

Project Profile: Human Rights First



Immigration Advocates
NETWORK

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Overview

Human Rights First (HRF) is an independent advocacy and action organization that challenges America to live up to its ideals. They believe American leadership is essential in the global struggle for human rights, so they press the U.S. government and private companies to respect human rights and the rule of law. When these institutions fail, HRF steps in to demand reform, accountability and justice. Around the world, they work where they can best harness American influence to secure core freedoms.

Project Process and Tools

Before the pandemic, HRF held walk-in hours every Thursday. They conducted brief screenings to determine client eligibility for their services and provided referral lists of other nonprofit legal services if they could not take the case.

When COVID-19 hit, HRF switched to remote services, set their answering machine to direct inquiries accordingly, and reduced their number of screenings. They also distributed an updated list and specific instructions on how to reach other service organizations that had capacity. HRF directed many to the Catholic Charities Immigration Help Desk, which helped with filing deadlines and work authorization documents. They also cited New Sanctuary Coalition as a great resource for pro se guidance to individuals.

Like many organizations, HRF has struggled to provide screenings and services for clients who lacked privacy for virtual meetings. For example, an older man who lived in a shelter needed to file an asylum claim as his one year deadline was quickly approaching. It was difficult to get the information needed for his claim because he did not have a quiet place to speak. Remote language interpretation has been a challenge too, with more people on calls or meetings and more opportunities for miscommunications.

Working with Pro Bonos

Throughout the pandemic, HRF has found that many volunteer interpreters and experts are willing to volunteer their time remotely. In addition, individuals from other states can interpret for psychological evaluations being conducted remotely in New York. However, it has been difficult at times to retain volunteer lawyers.

HRF observes that the nonprofit community's willingness to help each other out and coordinate efforts was extremely helpful. They recommend developing those relationships and using listservs to find organizations for different types of referrals.

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Human Rights First