

Remote Legal Support:

A Post-Pandemic Guide to Nonprofit and
Pro Bono Innovation

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About the Guide

Welcome to the second edition of the Remote Legal Support Guide. The Immigration Advocates Network of Pro Bono Net published the first edition in 2020 to share our 2019 national survey findings and partner models for success. We highlighted strategies for leveraging technology to connect people remotely to legal information or services. The guide included best practices from national partners and project profiles from across the nonprofit sector. The profiles addressed logistics, processes, challenges, tools, checklists, sample documents and more for remote legal support (RLS). In creating the original guide, we hoped to inspire confidence and help nonprofits and pro bono lawyers reach rural and underserved communities.

Unfortunately, the timing for the first edition of the RLS guide could not have been better. We published in March, 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic set in and nonprofit organizations closed their offices to in-person services. The RLS guide was downloaded more than 3,500 times. In the years since, service providers have become experts at working remotely, and we have learned more about the advantages and disadvantages to remote services. Some clients struggled to access and use the technology, especially at first. For others, it was easier than traveling, arranging daycare, or missing many hours of work. As in-person services became safer, organizations continued to offer remote services, or set up hybrid arrangements and options for clients.

In early 2021 we launched another national survey, to understand how nonprofit immigration advocates continued legal and related services throughout the pandemic. In this second edition, we share key findings from the latest survey. We followed up with our national partners to highlight projects that developed remote opportunities for volunteers. Learn how the field and your colleagues have adapted; and how some nonprofits have integrated pro bono services.

We hope the collective wisdom and expertise of our field supports your work for immigrant justice. Contribute to the effort - click [here](#) to share your feedback and ideas.

Pat Malone, Associate & Legal Director
Immigration Advocates Network
Pro Bono Net

Introduction

The demand for immigration legal services is far-ranging, and our field is exploring innovative solutions to stretch capacity. Immigration and other nonprofits are implementing multiple strategies to reach more people. They are leveraging technology; legal empowerment tools and information; community-based advocacy; and legal volunteers.

In the wake of the pandemic, reliance on technology has grown. Service providers shifted from in-person services to online meetings and case preparation with clients via Zoom, WhatsApp, Facetime, SMS/text, and more. Clients can use online screening interviews to connect to legal help. They can use their phones to take pictures and text or upload documents for review.

In addition, clients can use online tools to complete parts of applications on their own, or with volunteers and community-based organizations. The legal advocates can focus their time reviewing eligibility, red flags, or legal concerns. This allows the legal staff to work at the top of their license and the nonprofits to allocate resources more efficiently.

Legal service providers are also working with organizers, navigators, volunteers, and non-legal services staff to add capacity. Some have found new strategies or strengthened existing projects to engage pro bono lawyers to assist and represent community members remotely. This manual provides examples of ways that nonprofit organizations have leveraged technology *and* integrated volunteers to provide **remote legal support** and extend capacity.

Contributed by:

Laura Vazquez
Senior Program Manager, Immigration Initiatives
UnidosUS

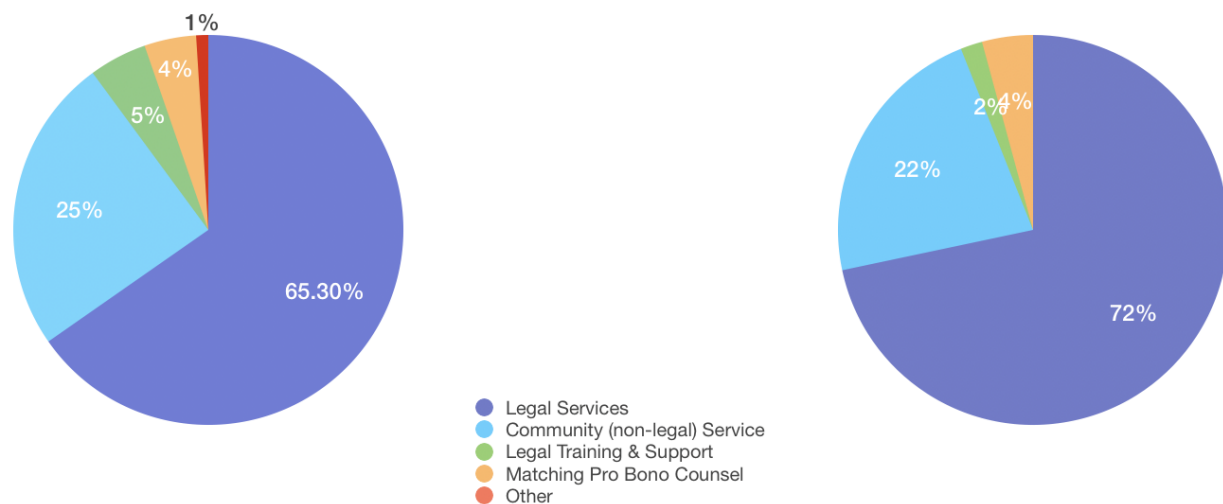
Chapter 1: Survey Trends

In early 2021, Pro Bono Net's Immigration Advocates Network conducted a second national survey on Remote Legal Support (RLS). The survey was intended as a barometer of attitudes towards remote legal support and technology-based initiatives. We wanted to understand and measure the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on remote strategies, and whether nonprofit organizations were able to integrate pro bono lawyers in a new service delivery model. This chapter will spotlight critical changes between the 2019 and 2021 surveys, key findings, and the pandemic's catalytic effect of removing barriers to technology.

Response Pool

Both the 2019 and 2021 surveys were sent to approximately 6,000 nonprofit immigration advocates. The 2019 survey received about 200 responses and the 2021 survey received about 170 responses. The two surveys had a similar distribution of respondent occupations. About two-thirds were legal service providers and a quarter were community advocates. The remaining respondents worked in legal training and support projects, or matching pro bono counsel. See Figure 1.

Figure 1: Types of Organizations Responding

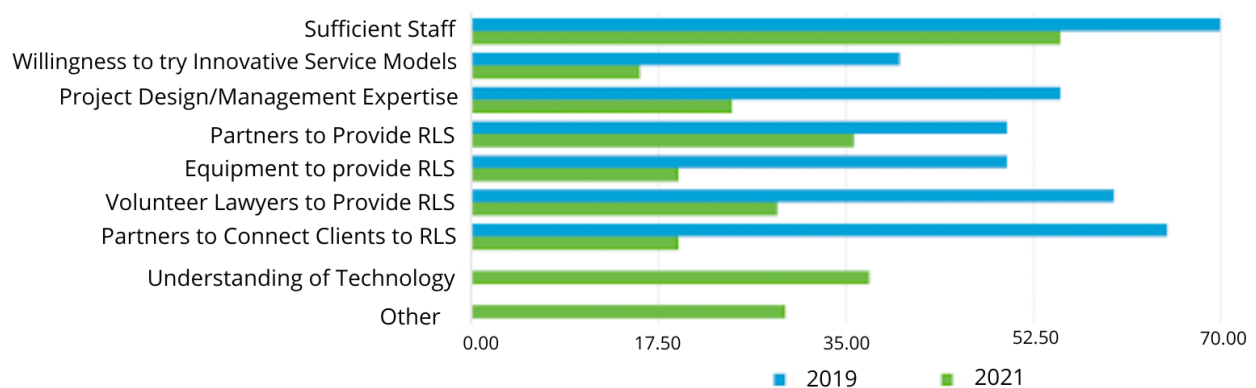


Barriers to Starting Remote Legal Projects

The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically changed the ways nonprofit organizations operated. In the two years between our 2019 and 2021 surveys, barriers to technology fell away and the field pivoted to serve clients remotely. The biggest change was in “Partners to Connect Community Members Who Need Legal Support,” reflecting an increase in remote legal providers or partnerships. Technological literacy is still a challenge during the pandemic, as 37% of organizations indicated “lack of understanding technology” as a barrier, second only to insufficient staff.

As seen in Figure 2, fewer organizations experienced barriers to remote service or support between 2019 and 2021, across all the metrics we collected in both surveys.

Figure 2: Barriers to Remote Services

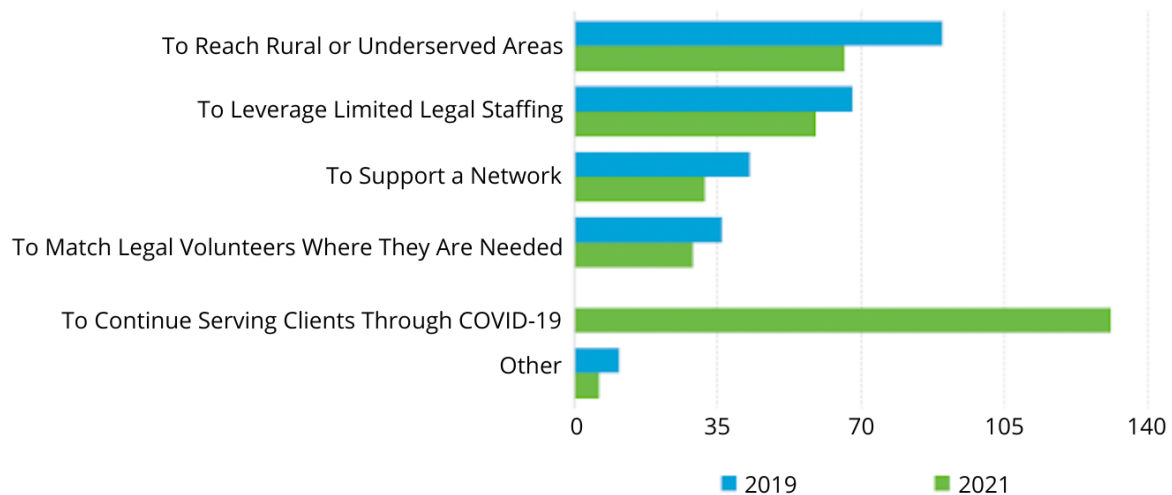


Note: Numbers across the bottom = percent of respondents experiencing the barrier at their organization

Using Remote Legal Strategies

This graph displays organizational goals for implementing remote strategies before and during the pandemic. While remote strategies may achieve many goals, a substantial 93% of respondents in the 2021 survey indicated that continuing to serve clients through COVID-19 was their primary goal.

Figure 3: Goals for Remote Legal Strategies

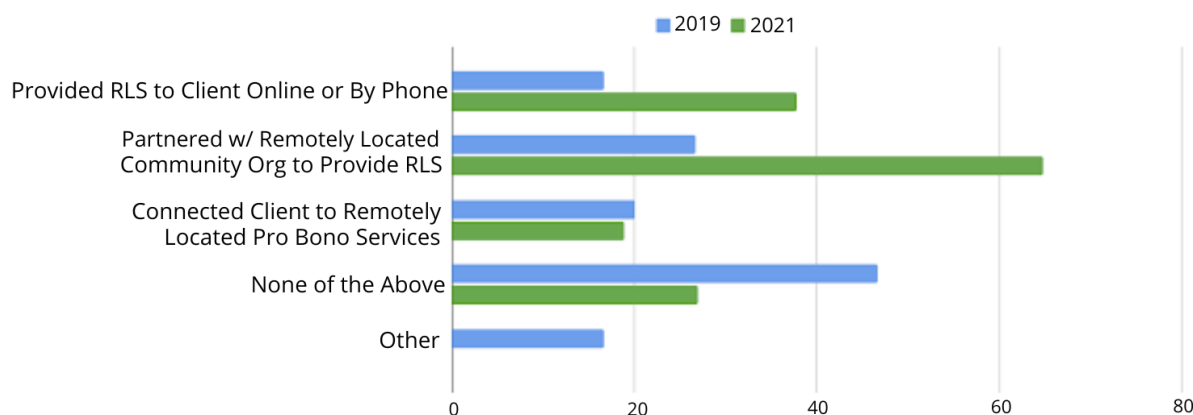


Note: Numbers across the bottom = number of affirmative responses

Pivoting in the Wake of the Pandemic

To protect everyone's health and comply with social distancing requirements, organizations found alternative ways to reach clients. Organizations reporting that they “partnered with remotely located legal services organizations to provide support to clients or community members” increased by 127% and organizations that “arranged for a community member to meet with a remotely located lawyer or accredited representative” increased by 143%. The number of organizations that did not use these strategies dropped by 42%, indicating a major shift in the field's service delivery models.

Figure 4: Innovations in How Organization Reached their Clients Remotely



Note: Numbers across the bottom = percent of affirmative responses

Conclusion

Reaching underserved communities is a challenge for legal service providers in the best of times. COVID-19 precipitated an unprecedented adoption of technology-based strategies. As documented in our surveys, the field rapidly implemented remote methods of legal support and connection. It will be interesting to see if the innovations continue beyond the pandemic.

Contributed by:
Treshauxn Dennis-Brown
AmeriCorps VISTA: Remote Project Volunteer Coordinator
Pro Bono Net

Chapter 2: Pandemic Pro Bono

Introduction

In 2020, Immigration Advocates Network came out with the first volume of the Remote Legal Support Guide, which focused on successful RLS programs. It addressed program processes, challenges, and best practices. It also featured organization-specific project profiles, with models from across the nonprofit sector, to serve as examples for other organizations seeking to innovate service delivery. This new edition of the Remote Legal Support Guide examines how the selected projects integrated pro bono volunteers into their remote service delivery. COVID-19 posed a challenge for pro bono work that relied heavily on direct, in-person communications and paperwork. However, nonprofits and pro bonos have proved resilient and capable of innovation in a new landscape. This innovation happened because it was essential: in the same moment that many organizations were forced to close their doors, the populations who needed help were at greater risk. In this chapter, we take a look at who has been most impacted by the pandemic and how pro bono advocacy helps meet their needs.

Who is Affected the Most?

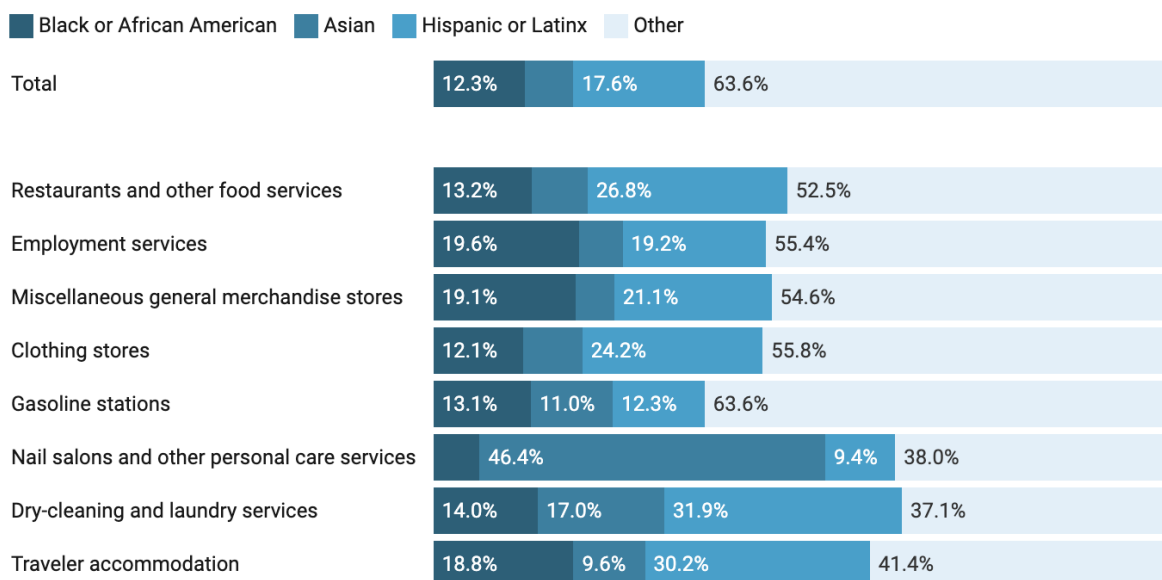
In times of economic downturn, the most vulnerable populations need pro bono advocacy more than ever. The pandemic sharply exacerbated existing inequalities among economic and demographic groups. COVID-19 lockdowns created an unequal surge in unemployment, stratified in race. This is especially pronounced when people of color inhabit the public-facing service professions that are the first to be laid off.¹ See the Table below. The COVID-19 risks for people of color are compounded by crowded housing in densely populated communities, or worse, a lack of employment that results in eviction, homelessness, or shared housing.² Black and Latinx households retain a fraction of wealth and solvency of White households (\$17,100 and \$20,765, compared with \$171,000), a socio economic divide that makes it harder to secure legal help or justice.³

¹ Couch, K. A., & Fairlie, R. (2010, February). *Last hired, first fired? black-white unemployment and the business cycle*. Demography. Retrieved May 9, 2022, from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3000014/>

² President, J. C. I. V., (2021, November 7). *Coronavirus compounds inequality and endangers communities of color*. Center for American Progress. Retrieved May 9, 2022, from <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/coronavirus-compounds-inequality-endangers-communities-color/>

³ President, J. C. I. V., (2021, November 7). *The economic fallout of the coronavirus for people of color*. Center for American Progress. Retrieved May 9, 2022, from <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/economic-fallout-coronavirus-people-color/>

Table: Share of total employed people over 16 years old by detailed industry, race, and ethnicity, 2019



Credit: Center for American Progress

People with disabilities have been hit hard by the pandemic too. A global health crisis has a twofold effect. First, it disproportionately diminishes the labor market participation of people with disabilities. Second, it acts as a “mass disabling event.” In other words, more people were unable to participate in the workforce because of the greater risk to their health. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1.2 million more individuals identified as having a disability in 2021.⁴ This number is hardly surprising, as a severe COVID-19 case can be debilitating or fatal; and the general stress of the pandemic has increased mental health issues.

⁴ President, J. C. I. V., (2022, April 11). *Covid-19 likely resulted in 1.2 million more disabled people by the end of 2021-workplaces and Policy will need to adapt*. Center for American Progress. Retrieved May 9, 2022, from <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/covid-19-likely-resulted-in-1-2-million-more-disabled-people-by-the-end-of-2021-workplaces-and-policy-will-need-to-adapt/>

Figure 2: Annual change in the average numbers of individuals with and without a disability from 2020 to 2021 (in thousands)



Credit: Center for American Progress

The increase in the number of people with disabilities in the workforce means an increase in demand for legal advocacy. Advocates may need to address the issue of reasonable accommodations in the workplace more frequently, as millions suffer from long COVID, and variants continue to circulate.

Pro Bono Response

Despite the challenges posed by COVID-19, pro bono advocates persevered. Studies show that pro bono advocacy actually increased during the pandemic, an impressive feat given the upheaval for nonprofits that would organize or supervise the work. According to the American Bar Association Journal, 120 law firms reported nearly 3.7 million hours of service to under-resourced populations and legal service organizations in 2020.⁵ This compares favorably to the 3.4 million pro bono hours reported in 2019. Our very own Pro Bono Net's searchable list of [pro bono opportunities](#) increased from 6,000 in 2019 to 24,000 since the start of the pandemic.

Even as in-person meetings become safer, pro bono advocates can maintain remote strategies to extend their reach. The report, "*Positive Change: How the Pandemic Changed Pro Bono and What We Should Keep*," by the Association of Pro Bono Counsel (APBCo), commends the changes in the courts and pro bono advocacy. It notes that technology and innovation paved the way for greater geographic reach; and cites social media, virtual clinics, and judicial integration of technology as innovations worth keeping for the future (see [Appendix](#)). The nonprofit organizations we spoke to for our "Project Profiles" generally concur with these findings. Colorado Legal Services expanded their virtual phone clinics and Kids in Need of Defense transitioned to virtual trainings, to extend their reach as well.

⁵ Robert, A. (n.d.). *Pro bono work increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, reports show*. ABA Journal. Retrieved May 9, 2022, from <https://www.abajournal.com/news/article/reports-show-pro-bono-work-increased-during-covid-19-pandemic>

Courts made impressive innovations during the pandemic too. At a June 9, 2021 webinar, “*Building a Bridge to Somewhere: Mobile Tech for Clients and Jurors*,” representatives from the New Jersey court system described their process to try new strategies. They slowly trialed and improved virtual Zoom jury proceedings, using 2,000 loaned tablets, questionnaires, and comprehensive surveys. They consulted state bar associations and public defenders. To facilitate the transition, they worked with a coalition of community groups, smaller grassroots organizations, and volunteers for justice with unique constituencies. Effective changes were truly possible because the court listened to the people who could speak for the community. As courts explore new strategies, remote options may point to a more accessible future for some in our client community, with less disruption to their work and home lives.

Conclusion

In the spring of 2020, the United States entered a national emergency that necessitated a mass shift to remote work across many professions. This shift included pro bono advocacy and court systems, with a profound impact on the people who needed those systems most.

In spite of the myriad complications and disadvantages introduced and exacerbated by COVID-19, the pro bono community banded together to provide more assistance than previous years. We are hopeful that the innovations spawned over the past two years may lead to greater and more efficient advocacy efforts in the future.

Contributed by:
Treshauxn Dennis-Brown
AmeriCorps VISTA/Remote Project Volunteer Coordinator
Pro Bono Net

Chapter 3: Service Delivery Models

Chapter 3 of this guide focuses on the many ways that our partners and institutions innovated their service models and expanded their reach. Whether you are a pro bono attorney who now can serve a client two state lines away via a virtual clinic, or a legal services organization director looking for tips and tricks on how to increase volunteer retention rates, we hope that you will find something that supports your adoption of remote services.

Project Profile: American Bar Association, Commission on Immigration

Organizational Overview

The American Bar Association's Commission on Immigration advocates for modifications in law and governmental practice, provides education to the immigration legal community, and assists pro bono programs that encourage volunteer lawyers to represent individuals in immigration proceedings.

Project Process and Tools

The Commission on Immigration partnered with the Office of New Americans Miami Dade, Americans for Immigrant Justice, AILA South Florida Chapter, Catholic Legal Services of Miami, Florida Immigrant Coalition, Florida Legal Services, and HIAS to run virtual clinics for Haitian, Ukrainian, and Venezuelan migrants seeking Temporary Protected Status (TPS). The virtual clinics are free for applicants and held via Zoom on the third week of each month with appointments on Thursday afternoons, Fridays, and Saturdays.

During the clinic, volunteer "Form Preparers" (attorneys who do not practice immigration law and law students) are placed into Zoom breakout rooms with an applicant and, if needed, an interpreter. Form Preparers help applicants complete the TPS and work authorization applications, review evidence, and draft cover letters to accompany the applications. Form Preparers are connected to a WhatsApp chat with "Legal Captains" (immigration attorneys with TPS experience), who enter the breakout rooms to answer questions and review all forms before they are finalized.

Working with Pro Bonos

All volunteers receive a comprehensive Virtual TPS Clinic Tip Sheet. The Tip Sheet is divided into three sections: "Frequently Asked Questions," "Before Your Shift," and "Day of Clinic."

Frequently Asked Questions are divided into three parts: eligibility, forms, and consequences of applying.

Before Your Shift Information and Materials include:

- Required recorded trainings on TPS 101 Legal Trainings that are Venezuela-focused, Haiti-focused, and Ukraine-focused, TPS Forms and Evidence Training, Virtual Volunteer Orientation
- Optional recorded trainings on Complex Issues for Venezuelan Dual Nationals, Haitian TPS seekers, USCIS FAQ, various practice advisories and practice pointers
- Step-by-step instructions on TPS eligibility and ineligibility
- Technology requirements for volunteers
- A guide to understanding the general flow of a volunteer shift, including Zoom login information

Day of Clinic Information and Materials include:

- Links to PDF versions of the TPS and Employment Authorization applications with interpreter and form preparer information already filled out, and with sections that do not need to be completed grayed out, so volunteers only complete the necessary parts of each form
- Checklists for each part of the process including reviewing the TPS process with the client, completing the forms with the applicant, legal review, and tips for best practices
- Clear warnings and examples of red flags that necessitate a conversation with one of the Legal Captains
- Detailed instructions on completing the cover letter and identifying evidence for each eligibility requirement
- USCIS fee chart with information depending on applicant circumstances
- List of USCIS addresses categorized by applicant location
- Checklist of information to give client regarding next steps and typical timeline

Contributed by:

Emily McCabe

Senior Staff Attorney

ABA Commission on Immigration

Project Profile: Asian Americans Advancing Justice - Southern California (AAAJ-SC)

Organizational Overview

Through direct service, impact litigation, policy advocacy, and capacity building, Asian Americans Advancing Justice - Southern California focuses on the most vulnerable members of Asian American and AANHPI communities while also building a strong voice for civil rights and social justice. Their immigration legal service work includes creating and managing pro bono opportunities for lawyers.

Project Process and Tools

AAAJ - SC helps clients nationally, and provides local services that were in-person until the pandemic. Before the pandemic, AAAJ - SC had only just begun to explore virtual services, with a pilot project in late 2018 and early 2019. AAAJ - SC's clients tend to be older, monolingual, and not technologically adept. To better serve them during the pandemic, AAAJ - SC chose telephonic services over other options.

AAAJ - SC's intake staff work hand in hand with less technologically adept clients by phone, to ensure a similar quality of service to their pre-pandemic standard. Intake staff provide services in the client's native language, set up scheduled interviews, and fill out application forms via the phone on the client's behalf. The intake process is every Friday.

AAAJ - SC has a well established project to provide remote naturalization assistance using Immigration Advocates Network's Citizenshipworks (CW) application. Staff or volunteers help applicants with citizenship questions, application completion, fee waiver assistance, legal review of a completed application, self-filing instructions, and more.

By using Citizenshipworks to collect information and supporting documents, the organization avoids volunteers downloading client sensitive information on their computers, a data security risk. Protecting client information in the virtual services landscape is critical to AAAJ -SC. They aspire to keep data as secure as when they are delivering in person services. When they resume in-person services, they will likely retain telephonic and CW hybrid services as an option for immunocompromised persons.

Working with Pro Bonos

AAAJ - SC did not suffer a dip in volunteer participation during the pandemic, an accomplishment they attribute to their vast array of partnerships with law firms. These are

established connections, maintained through events with the firms, and providing AAAJ - SC a steady stream of pro bono volunteers.

Volunteers sign routine client confidentiality forms. After a client is cleared for participation, intakes and client profiles are created on Citizenshipworks. AAAJ - SC allows two weeks in advance of meeting with a pro bono attorney to prepare the backend paperwork. The client relays their information by phone, for the staff or volunteer to complete or review the application on Citizenshipworks.

AAAJ - SC encourages similar organizations to develop partnerships with law firms or law schools, for convenient collaboration and co-education.

Contributed by:
Melissa Juan
Project Coordinator
Asian Americans Advancing Justice – SC

Project Profile: Colorado Legal Services

Organizational Overview

Colorado Legal Services (CLS) is a non-profit organization that provides free legal services to low-income Coloradans and seniors seeking civil legal assistance. CLS was founded in 1925 and has been providing legal help to those in need ever since.

Project Process and Tools

CLS used grants from the Legal Services Corporation through the Pro Bono Innovation Fund (PBIF) to create, evolve, and evaluate five clinic models that seek to increase legal resources available to low-income rural communities in Colorado. In order to do this, these clinics must effectively use technology, metro-based volunteer attorneys, and local partnerships.

CLS's original service delivery models were developed by asset mapping, a community-based program development process that resulted in clinics using multiple types of technology. A phone-based system already guaranteed continued services during the pandemic. But with COVID shutting down libraries and similar public resources, CLS had to address the lack of brick and mortar hosting sites. Of their five clinics, two clinics serving a collective eight counties had to temporarily shut down, and one clinic had to shift from videoconferencing to phone communication to stay open. The Call4All clinic, a phone-based clinic serving 39 out of 64 counties, immediately expanded its service area to include counties impacted by the closed clinics. Impressively, the original Call4All counties never experienced a downturn in service during the pandemic. The "5th JD Clinic" became the "NW Clinic" and pivoted from videoconferencing to phones, which allowed it to grow its service area from four to 15 counties.

Working with Pro Bonos

CLS didn't want to lose the pro bono volunteers it had fostered for its clinics. Because of the pandemic, CLS created a new volunteer program for the pro bonos to provide individual family law phone consultations. Some pro bono volunteers left during the pandemic, but CLS successfully retained most of them.

CLS recommends multi-tiered support for volunteers. This includes creating and distributing materials upfront, such as legal summaries and handbooks; and maintaining virtual availability during clinics to answer questions from volunteers, as a safety net and real time volunteer support.

Contributed by:
Jen Cuesta, Esq.
Rural Pro Bono Program Attorney
Colorado Legal Services

Project Profile: GMHC, Inc.

Organizational Overview

GMHC is a New York City–based non-profit organization that delivers a broad range of services to individuals and communities affected by HIV and AIDS. Its volunteer-supported and community-based model includes immigration legal services.

Project Process and Tools

GMHC uses a live remote review model for citizenship applicants who have started their own N-400 applications on the Citizenshipworks online tool. The applicant completes the guided interview at their convenience; legal staff reviews and gives feedback via the tool or the applicant's preferred communication medium. Additionally, community-based partner organizations (e.g., libraries, unions, etc.) guide applicants on Citizenshipworks and refer them to GMHC for legal review.

For clients who arrived at their offices, GMHC previously used a heavily in-person model. Like many organizations, their client community had varying levels of access to technology. As GMHC shifted to remote operations, they developed a bilateral structure. Clients who are comfortable with technology and have a computer or smartphone use Citizenshipworks on their own. A GMHC volunteer or staff person engages others by phone and manually inputs their answers in Citizenshipworks.

In the wake of the pandemic, GMHC sought to provide the same range of services with little interruption. The main challenge for immigration services was obtaining documents and signatures from clients. To avoid delays, GMHC has used photos of documents, though they are lower quality than a scanned document. In other situations, they use FedEx to send documents back and forth with the client.

Working with Pro Bonos

With the widespread introduction of remote work, GMHC considered the advantages for remote volunteers. In the past, GMHC had to accommodate individual volunteers who came into the office as often as one to four times a week. Remote service would eliminate the problem of maintaining space and equipment for volunteer service providers—an issue in New York City.

These days, GMHC assigns a remote volunteer to a client, then the volunteer contacts the client to figure out a meeting time that works for both parties. If they are working together on a Citizenshipworks case, all parties can access the tool and application remotely, or the volunteer

can go through the questions with the client by phone. When a client's application reaches its final stages, the GMHC staff reviews it alongside the volunteer.

This approach has had varying levels of pros and cons: On one hand, GHMC can employ more volunteers remotely than in person. On the other hand, there's an increased risk of a disconnect or communication break-downs between volunteers and the parent organization. GMHC is strengthening its volunteer vetting process and monitoring volunteers who may be over-extended. As remote services continue, GMHC will check in on volunteers periodically for progress reports and seeks to better spell out expectations during recruiting to retain more dedicated volunteers.

Contributed by:

Vishal Trivedi, Esq.

Director of Immigration Legal Services

GMHC, Inc.

New Americans Campaign Virtual Review Partner

Project Profile: Human Rights First

Organizational 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.

Contributed by:
Maya El Cheikh
Legal Services Coordinator
Human Rights First

Project Profile: International Rescue Committee

Organizational Overview

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) has piloted a range of remote legal service models to streamline and target legal services and better reach under-served areas and populations. Remote legal services have helped:

- Increase efficiency to benefit both applicants and organizations
- Maximize the legal expertise of DOJ accredited representatives and attorneys
- Provide quality legal services in isolated and remote areas
- Serve more people through enhanced partnerships and technology

Project Process and Tools

For years, IRC has worked with partners and employed online tools and strategies to offer remote legal support. When the pandemic hit, IRC expanded their remote services, tools and strategies. They used telephone, Microsoft Teams, Zoom, and WhatsApp to continue to meet their clients' needs.

In March 2021, IRC created [CitizenshipHub](#), a national remote service project that uses the [Citizenshipworks](#) online tool to help applicants complete their forms. This was part of the New American Campaign to bring people together for an easier naturalization application process. Citizenship Hub is a completely remote project; it serves anyone in the country by connecting them with a regional or local legal provider or partner. The goal was to scale remote legal services and to reach underserved populations in areas such as Wyoming.

Working with Pro Bonos

Highly trained volunteers learned how to help at remote application workshops. For one-on-one pro bono meetings with clients, IRC implemented Zoom breakout rooms, with staff available and checking-in to answer questions and ensure quality services. Volunteer engagement has posed some challenges for IRC during the pandemic. Even as those involved get more accustomed to working remotely, the organization finds it challenging to remotely supervise volunteers. IRC has welcomed some volunteers back to in-person work by engaging them to open mail, call or text about appointments, and provide administrative support such as fingerprinting.

Contributed by:
Amber Mull
Associate Director, Immigration
International Rescue Committee

Project Profile: Kids in Need of Defense

Organizational Overview

Kids in Need of Defense (KIND) was founded in 2008 and has offices across the United States and Mexico that provide pro bono representation and other legal services to detained and released unaccompanied and separated children. KIND offers comprehensive guidance and training to private sector pro bono attorneys so they can represent thousands of unaccompanied children in their immigration proceedings. Before the pandemic, KIND attorneys regularly conducted in-person trainings, intake clinics, and office hours at pro bono partner offices. KIND staff also attended networking events to recruit new volunteers. Further along the volunteer retention and training cycle, KIND conducted mock asylum interviews and immigration hearings.

Finding solutions during the pandemic

During the pandemic, KIND's strategies focused on providing a range of trainings and guidance for pro bono attorneys, particularly to acclimate to a new way of working with clients. KIND found this additional support was critical for successful volunteer recruitment, representation, and retention in a remote environment.

With differing procedures for COVID era hearings in both immigration and state courts, KIND conducted virtual trainings and provided written guidance on making remote court appearances, obtaining the necessary client signatures remotely, and understanding changing court and immigration agency procedures. KIND supplemented this information with weekly e-mail updates and one-on-one guidance on any challenges with remote appearance. Although KIND benefited from increased training attendance by pro bono volunteers, due to the ease of fitting a virtual training into a busy schedule, creating connection via virtual trainings can be challenging. KIND used interactive and engaging training methods such as videos, hypotheticals, and active discussion. Finally, KIND adapted their limited scope and case launch clinics to a virtual format, by training participants on representing children, arranging interpretation, setting up virtual meeting rooms, and having KIND attorneys virtually available to answer any questions during the initial client meeting. Remote representation also meant that location is not considered a barrier for representation, allowing for pro bono case staffing with attorneys in different locations.

Working remotely with a child client presents unique difficulties, including building trust. KIND developed trainings and written guidance focusing on trauma-informed interview techniques. These trainings addressed dealing with technology barriers that clients may have and shared tips and strategies for approaching interviews using mobile phone and video platforms. KIND also highlighted important considerations when conducting remote advocacy such as planning logistics in advance, narrowing goals for each meeting, and ensuring client confidentiality.

Contributed by:
Nirupa L. Narayan
Senior Director for Pro Bono Partnerships
Kids in Need of Defense

Project Profile: LawHelpNY

Organizational Overview

[LawHelpNY](#), a Pro Bono Net project, is New York's statewide legal information website providing access to Know Your Rights information, DIY court forms, and referral information for over 250 free legal service providers. LiveHelp for LawHelpNY is a real-time chat feature of LawHelpNY, through which visitors can obtain tailored assistance from a LiveHelp Operator in navigating resources to find the legal information they need.

Project Process and Tools

LawHelpNY has extensive legal information which covers a wide array of civil legal topics, such as housing and family and safety law. LawHelpNY also has a featured legal service provider tool, for users to locate legal services. LiveHelp, LawHelpNY's bilingual chat program, available in English and Spanish, provides legal assistance, information and referrals to LiveHelp chat. Trained volunteers staff LiveHelp from 9 AM - 9 PM on weekdays, making this service readily accessible to low-income working clients, individuals in rural areas, or people who may be homebound, elderly or living with disabilities.

Working with Pro Bonos

LiveHelp for LawHelpNY recruits volunteers four times a year. Volunteers generally serve for about 10 weeks and complete 50 hours of service. (The New York State Bar requires 50 hours of qualifying pro bono work for admission). Annually, the LiveHelp program manages roughly 175 to 200 volunteers. During each cycle, the program reviews applications and provides volunteers with an extensive onboarding and training process. Volunteer recruitment outreach efforts include connecting to law schools, posting on social media, and listing the opportunity in the [ProBono.net Opportunity Guide](#). The training for volunteers combines pre-recorded videos and live sessions. Volunteers complete tasks that a supervising attorney reviews.

Supervising attorneys monitor and approve hours on Galaxy, a volunteer management system. Staff track and confirm the hours with data available on LiveHelpNY's integrative communication platform, Comm100. Staff encourage volunteers to contact them for support, and provide weekly "tips and tricks" newsletters to assist them during their volunteer service.

Contributed by:

Wantee Ramkaran, Esq.
Senior Program Associate for NY Programs
Pro Bono Net

Dennis Brink
Community Support Associate for NY Programs
Pro Bono Net

Project Profile: Volunteers of Legal Service

Organizational Overview

For over 20 years, the Volunteers of Legal Service (VOLS) Microenterprise Project has provided free legal education and direct representation to existing and aspiring low-income small business owners who cannot access professional services on the open market. Services are provided, in large part, by leveraging VOLS' pro bono network of attorneys at law firms and corporations. By partnering with these attorneys, VOLS provides small businesses with a broad range of information and transactional legal services on topics including business formation, contract drafting and review, commercial leasing, trademarking, and employment matters. Through this project, VOLS has helped thousands of New Yorkers to find an effective path out of poverty and into financial stability and independence. VOLS Microenterprise Project clients are low- to moderate-income. Over 75% are people of color, two-thirds are women, and many are immigrant business owners.

Project Process and Tools

For New York City's small businesses, the effects of the pandemic were immediate. Overnight, many New Yorkers were left without a source of income as public safety measures shuttered non-essential businesses. As the pandemic wore on, small business owners grappled with additional challenges such as bankruptcy, eviction, and navigating the patchwork of local, state, and federal government assistance programs. The Project quickly became overwhelmed with phone calls to its hotline, online inquiries, and referrals from community partners. Microenterprise Project attorneys balanced unprecedented workloads, with the pace of requests and referrals at times reaching 10 times pre-pandemic rates.

With so many seeking legal advice, the Project worked quickly to set up the Small Business Legal Relief Alliance (SBLRA), a partnership with over 20 New York City law firms, companies and nonprofits, to provide rapid response pro bono brief advice. The Project screened clients for their legal needs and referred their matters to the Alliance when appropriate. From 2020 to 2021, the Project helped place over 200 matters with the SBLRA.

As the Project receives referrals and inquiries, staff attorneys determine whether the matter is suitable for full representation through a pre-established pro bono placement process, or for brief advice services through the SBLRA. The matter is then sent through a listserv to the SBLRA network. Law firm and corporate members can volunteer by responding to the listserv. If a matter is not picked up within 48 hours, an SBLRA administrator assigns it to a member organization. The client receives services within two weeks. This partnership has allowed the Project to support more small business owners more effectively by expanding the capacity of pro bono attorneys and allowing them to provide timely legal advice.

Working with Pro Bonos

The VOLS Microenterprise Project continues to help clients and support volunteers as they face new and evolving pandemic and legal challenges. The pandemic has wreaked havoc on the economy, and low-income small business owners have been among the hardest hit. The resulting job loss and income insecurity among families and employees of small businesses has had an unprecedented effect on NYC communities.

Although the SBLRA today sees a different kind of caseload, it continues to serve small business owners navigating crisis situations. Pro bono efforts have exponentially increased through the SBLRA and these resources need to be carefully matched with increased and shifting needs. This is resource-intensive, but once established, these partnerships can be stewarded and sustained by VOLS staff and by the individual partners.

Contributed by:

Mai Toyohara
Pro Bono Coordinator
Volunteers of Legal Service

Project Profile: An Interview with Atlanta Legal Aid Society

Overview

Georgia Legal Connect (www.georgialegalconnect.org) is an online platform that enables Atlanta Legal Aid Society to enroll, manage, and connect staff and pro bono attorneys with remotely located clients for advice, counsel, and form preparation. The platform is powered by Pro Bono Net's program, Remote Legal Connect. Since 1924, Atlanta Legal Aid Society has offered free civil legal aid for low-income people across metro Atlanta. This project profile captures part of an interview with Atlanta Legal Aid's Senior Legal Innovation Specialist.

How is Atlanta Legal Aid using Georgia Legal Connect?

We do a lot of pro bono work at Atlanta Legal Aid. Through Georgia Legal Connect, Atlanta Legal Aid can quickly create an account for a pro bono attorney and assign them a client case. We use the platform for some of our domestic violence cases. The attorney has access to the case notes, client files, and the client's information. The attorney can also meet with their client through video chat, which is integrated into the platform.

Another way we also use Georgia Legal Connect is through the softphone feature. People love the softphone feature. We have our staff and volunteers use it by entering the client's phone number into Georgia Legal Connect. You can select the office from which you're calling so the client will see the office's number on their end. It's helpful to make the phone call through the app and talk to the client on your cell phone while also preparing forms and documents from within the platform.

How do clients use Georgia Legal Connect?

I like that we can send notes or appointment reminders to the client. We can send an email directly to the client and attach any files or notes about their case through the platform. Clients can also receive text message notifications from activity within Georgia Legal Connect. For example, if a volunteer updates a new document to the platform, the client can receive either an email or a text message about this so they can log in and review the document. It's also straightforward for the client to log in—there are no complicated passwords to enter and security questions that the client has to answer to access their account. I think of Georgia Legal Connect as our secondary platform that we use for case management, it's just a very smooth and simple process. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure it out, which is pretty awesome.

Why did Atlanta Legal Aid decide to use Georgia Legal Connect?

The platform is much more simplified than other tools. Because Atlanta Legal Aid receives funding from the Legal Services Corporation, we must comply with specific regulations when using our case management system. With Georgia Legal Connect, there are none of these formalities. We're able to create a user with ease.

The Remote Legal Connect platform also has an integration with LegalServer. If a client is already in Legal Server, our primary database, we can easily create an account for them in Georgia Legal Connect. We can also export documents from Georgia Legal Connect to a LegalServer case. Georgia Legal Connect is much more user-friendly and doesn't require all the hullabaloo to complete an intake.

What were the challenges to building a remote project during COVID-19?

There was a huge learning curve in terms of adapting to the new normal. To introduce Georgia Legal Connect to our staff and volunteers, we made the case that we were trying to streamline our processes and procedures to make it better for everyone. It's been a great experience, though. Our work through Georgia Legal Connect, with the support of Pro Bono Net, has helped bring efficiency into our process.

Contributed by:

Toni Bonds
Senior Legal Innovation Specialist
Atlanta Legal Aid Society

Treshaunx (Tre) Dennis-Brown
2021-2022 AmeriCorps VISTA Fellow
Pro Bono Net

Appendix:

Remote Legal Support Tools

- [Using Citizenshipworks to Create an RLS Program](#)
- [Remote Legal Connect: A Tool for RLS](#)
- [We the Action - volunteer recruitment tool](#) (external link)

Additional Resources (external links):

- [Best Practices for Providing Legal Aid and Working Remotely - Asylum Seeker Advocacy Project](#)
- [Legal Aid Tech Toolkits - Online Triage and Intake](#)
- [Legal Aid Tech Toolkits - Call Center Technology](#)
- [Rural Pro Bono Delivery: A Guide to Pro Bono Legal Services in Rural Areas - ABA Rural Pro Bono Delivery Initiative](#)
- [Remote Immigration Legal Services - Here to Stay?](#)
- [Positive Change: How the Pandemic Changed Pro Bono and What Should We Keep?](#)
- [IRAP Remote Legal Clinic for Afghan Parolees](#)

Citizenshipworks: A Tool for RLS

[Citizenshipworks](#) is a tool developed by Pro Bono Net. It is designed for workshops, individual use, one-on-one services, and Remote Legal Support (RLS). It is an easy way for an organization to experiment with RLS and integrate volunteers:

- Clients or community members fill out their citizenship application online, at their convenience.
- Any community based organization (CBO) can use Citizenshipworks. It does not require legal expertise.
- Community based and nonprofit legal organizations can also work with pro bono providers to review or assist applicants.

How it Works

Prospective applicants use a pre-screening interview on www.citizenshipworks.org to learn if they meet the basic requirements for citizenship. To continue with an application, they open a free account and answer the questions that fill out the form. Their account securely stores their information to fill out the form over time. In addition, the Citizenshipworks interview breaks the 20+ page application form into manageable sections that make sense and are easier to complete. As an applicant moves through the application, Citizenshipworks offers information to help them understand the questions and the application process. It also "flags" answers that may require legal help, and connects applicants to nonprofit or pro bono legal experts.

Outcomes

- Some applicants fill out the entire form on the Citizenshipworks platform on their own, and have a "clean" application to print and mail to the USCIS.
- Others fill out all or most of the form, but have questions about how to send it, or other logistics. These applicants may work with nonlegal and legal organizations, volunteers, or lawyers to understand the process.
- Some applicants have legal questions, or "red flags" (potential complications) on their application. Citizenshipworks or an affiliated CBO help them connect to nonprofit or pro bono legal experts.

Program Options

Nonprofits can join the Citizenshipworks partner network for training and technical support or use the tool "ad hoc." Applicants may grant partners access to their online applications, for offsite or in-person help with the forms.

For community based (nonlegal) organizations:

- CBOs conduct outreach or host information / application sessions, to encourage people to apply for citizenship. With Citizenshipworks, the CBO does not need staff lawyers to help people apply. And people can work on their application in an office or at home.

For legal service organizations (LSOs):

- LSOs conduct outreach or presentations on how to become a citizen. They encourage people to get started on the CW platform. The LSO may hold follow up events or appointments to provide additional legal guidance or review for applicants who have questions.

For partnerships:

- Community based and legal organizations can work together, using Citizenshipworks to create a holistic program with
 - Outreach and mobilization
 - Connection through trusted community organizations
 - A free, convenient, and safe application tool
 - Pro bono and nonprofit legal expert help with more complicated cases.

To become a partner, or learn more, contact: support@citizenshipworks.org

Contributed by:

Patricia Malone

Associate Director, Immigration Advocates Network

Pro Bono Net

Remote Legal Connect: A Tool for RLS

Overview

Pro Bono Net's Remote Legal Connect platform allows legal services providers, pro bono initiatives, courts and community partners to rapidly build and manage a remote legal support program to increase access to legal assistance for communities in need, regardless of location. By enabling organizations to enroll, manage and link volunteers with remotely located clients for advice, counsel and document preparation, the platform bridges barriers that prevent people from getting help.

Key Capabilities

- Tools for legal aid pro bono coordinators to manage client and volunteer enrollment and case assignment
- Real-time instant messaging and video-chat capabilities to allow an advocate to conduct a virtual consultation with a remote client. These tools do not require the advocate or client to download any special software.
- Ability for coordinators to create client accounts using an email address or phone number (clients who do not have email addresses can receive text message notifications)
- Document upload, sharing, and storage
- Ability for an advocate or volunteer to maintain a simple case history of their interactions with the client that can be reviewed by assigning organizations
- Ability for coordinators to export client information and documents to a third-party email address
- Mobile-friendly design and virtual consultation tools
- Customizable branding and configurable pages for program information, training materials, and legal resource guides
- All in one package (cloud-hosted SaaS platform)

Optional Features

- Support for integration of LawHelp Interactive-powered online forms to allow co-preparation of pleadings and legal documents by advocates and attorneys
- Support for integrating a third-party live chat service for pro bono coordinators to offer chat-based support to volunteer attorneys or advocates during virtual consultations

Contributed by

Jeanne Ortiz-Ortiz
Pro Bono & Strategic Initiatives Manager
www.probono.net

Editors, Writers & Reviewers

This guide is a collaboration of organizations and individuals, brought together by the Immigration Advocates Network, Pro Bono Net.

Patricia Malone / Editor

Pat brings nearly 20 years immigration law and project management experience to her role as Associate & Legal Director of the Immigration Advocates Network, Pro Bono Net. She helps manage staff and programs; and writes legal content for IAN's wide-ranging online resources and partner projects. Pat previously worked at Catholic Legal Immigration Network. (CLINIC), where she managed local outreach projects, represented immigrants in proceedings, trained and supported immigration practitioners, and recruited pro bono counsel to represent immigrant children. Prior to CLINIC, she represented clients in family-based, naturalization, and asylum cases with AYUDA in Washington, D.C.; and represented detained clients on the border at Proyecto Libertad in Texas.

Treshauxn Dennis-Brown / Project Lead Coordinator, Writer

Tre Dennis-Brown is the 2021-22 AmeriCorps VISTA at Pro Bono Net. Tre received a Bachelor's of Arts in Government, with a concentration in Political Theory, from Wesleyan University in 2019. He has previously worked as a Real Estate Legal Clerk at Greenberg, Glusker, Fields, Claman, Machtinger.

Dina Knott / Copy Editor, Project Management & Outreach

Dina Knott is the 2021-22 AmeriCorps VISTA at Immigration Advocates Network. Dina received a Bachelor's of Arts in Political Science from Kenyon College. She previously worked as an Americorps VISTA as a Contact Tracer with the Colorado Department of Health and Environment.

Brittany Long / Copy Editor, Project Outreach

Brittany Long is the 2022-23 AmeriCorps VISTA at Immigration Advocates Network. Brittany received a Bachelor's of Arts in Mass. Communication from the University of South Florida, St. Petersburg. She brings 10 years in immigration and refugee services to her role at IAN. She previously worked as the Director of The Unmentionables and as the Education Specialist for World Relief.

Contributors

Jennifer Cuesta / Rural Pro Bono Program Attorney, Colorado Legal Services

Jen Cuesta is the Rural Pro Bono Program Attorney for Colorado Legal Services. Jen was hired in 2015 by CLS to work on their Pro Bono Innovation Fund Grants. Through the grants Jen developed clinic models which recruited metropolitan attorneys to serve rural Coloradans by utilizing technology to bridge the geographic gap. Jen also has a case load focused on Record Sealing and Expungement, as well as cases from the Northwest Colorado Legal Services Project, an office of CLS. She is a member of the Colorado Bar, the Denver Bar and a board member of the Colorado Hispanic Bar Association.

Prior to joining LIFT, Ms. Ingram was a litigation attorney at Locke Lord LLP. Her practice focused on business and commercial disputes, bankruptcy, consumer finance, white collar criminal defense and antitrust issues. Before becoming a lawyer, Ms. Ingram was an elementary school teacher in the Bronx with Teach for America.

Melissa Juan / Project Coordinator, Asian Americans Advancing Justice – Los Angeles

Melissa Juan is the Project Coordinator for the Citizenship Virtual Review Pilot Project at Asian Americans Advancing Justice-LA, providing assistance to individuals with naturalization services through virtual service delivery. Prior to joining the Citizenship Virtual Review Project she was a Legal Advocate for the Citizenship Project at Asian Americans Advancing Justice-Los Angeles, providing assistance to primarily Spanish-speaking immigrants who wish to undergo the naturalization process. Melissa is also a Department of Justice Accredited Representative.

Wantee Ramkaran / Senior Program Associate for New York Programs, Pro Bono Net

Wantee joined Pro Bono Net in May 2020 and is currently the Senior Program Associate for New York Programs at Pro Bono Net. She received her J.D. from Touro College, Jacob D. Fuchsberg Law Center, and B.A. in Political Science from Queens College, City University of New York in 2017.

Dennis Brink / Community Support Associate for New York Programs, Pro Bono Net

Dennis joined Pro Bono Net in August 2018 as an AmeriCorps Vista. Dennis completed three Vista service years with Pro Bono Net, before transitioning into his current role as a Community Support Associate for New York Programs at Pro Bono Net. He is currently pursuing a Masters of Science in Public Policy and Management at Carnegie Mellon's Heinz School of Information Systems and Public Policy. He graduated with a B.A. in Global Legal Studies from Arcadia University in 2017.

Amber Mull / Associate Director of Immigration, International Rescue Committee

Amber Mull has worked with refugees, immigrants, and marginalized communities focusing on community integration and nonprofit capacity building in the U.S. and sub-Saharan Africa. Amber is currently Associate Director, Immigration, at the International Rescue Committee, where she provides technical assistance, support, and guidance to IRC's legal service programs across the United States. Amber is a DOJ accredited representative.

Vishal Trivedi / Director of Immigration Services, GMHC, Inc.

Vishal Trivedi has been with GMHC since 1997. He currently serves as the Director of Legal Immigration Services where he oversees the immigration legal services unit. He has been providing remote review support for the Immigration Advocates Network for over three years. He was the Co-Founder and Co-Director of Lift the Bar, Worldwide - an international coalition of HIV, immigrant, human rights and LGBT service, advocacy and activist organizations along with immigrants and People Living With HIV/AIDS who secured the removal of the HIV travel and immigration bar from the U.S. federal immigration laws. From 2001 to 2010, Vishal served as the Technical Advisor to UNAIDS where he provided legal assistance and travel restriction memorandum to delegates attending sessions at United Nations headquarters and other civil society meetings in New York City during the biennial United Nations High Level Meeting on HIV/AIDS.

Laura Vazquez / Senior Program Manager of Immigration Initiatives, UnidosUS

Laura is the Senior Program Manager of Immigration Initiatives at UnidosUS (formerly NCLR). She works with UnidosUS Affiliates and partners to start, expand and sustain legal immigration services for low-income immigrants. Laura also conducts legislative and administrative advocacy to promote immigrant integration.

Mai Toyohara / Pro Bono Coordinator, Volunteers of Legal Service

Mai Toyohara is the Pro Bono Coordinator at VOLS, where she manages the pro bono program and develops various pro bono initiatives for the organization. She joined VOLS as an AmeriCorps VISTA Fellow for the VOLS Microenterprise Project. She graduated with an Economics degree from Reed College and has experience in academic research, nonprofit impact evaluation, and advocacy for survivors of sexual violence.

Maya El Cheikh / Legal Services Coordinator, Human Rights First

Maya El Cheikh is the legal services coordinator at Human Rights First (New York), where she conducts screenings of potential clients; writes case assessments; supports pro bono and in-house attorneys; helps manage the New York office's client database; assists in supporting advocacy efforts; and helps select, train, and supervise interns. In addition, as a Department of Justice (DOJ) fully-accredited representative, Maya directly represents immigrants in removal proceedings before the Department of Homeland Security and the Executive Office for Immigration Review under the supervision of the New York office's managing attorney.

Emily McCabe / Senior Staff Attorney, American Bar Association

Emily McCabe (she/her/ella) is a Senior Staff Attorney for the Family Group Legal Orientation Program at the American Bar Association's Commission on Immigration. Emily creates resources and trainings intended for pro bono attorneys working on Dedicated Docket cases. Prior to being at COI, Emily worked for five years as an immigration attorney at Northern Virginia Family Service, where she represented mostly unaccompanied minors, asylum-seekers, and survivors of trafficking and criminal activity.

Nirupa L. Narayan / Senior Director for Pro Bono Partnerships, KIND

Nirupa L. Narayan is a Senior Director for Bono Partnerships at Kids In Need of Defense (KIND). Nirupa oversees KIND's national pro bono attorney recruitment and training efforts. Prior to joining KIND, Nirupa served as Pro Bono Legal Advisor at Justice Without Borders where she partnered with law students and pro bono attorneys to provide access to justice to abused and exploited migrant workers in Singapore. She also worked as head of the press office at the U.S. Embassy in Singapore. Previously, she managed the pro bono and immigration programs at the Tahiri Justice Center. Before her work at Tahiri, she represented immigrant survivors of domestic violence and human trafficking at Boat People SOS and individuals living with HIV at the Atlanta Legal Aid Society. Nirupa holds an LL.M. from American University, Washington College of Law, a J.D. from New York Law School, and a B.A. from Michigan State University.

Jeanne Ortiz-Ortiz / Pro Bono and Strategic Initiatives Manager, PBN

Jeanne Ortiz-Ortiz coordinates, develops and grows state and national digital initiatives that strengthen the work of legal advocates and pro bono attorneys helping communities with their legal problems. For two years, she was Pro Bono Net's Disaster Response Legal Fellow and organized initiatives to support disaster survivors and attorneys working on disaster legal aid. Before joining PBN, Jeanne provided free legal representation and employment discrimination litigation on behalf of low-income LGBT individuals in Puerto Rico and worked as a legal fellow with the Central Alabama Fair Housing Center.

Partners:

We are grateful to all of our partners contributing to the Guide.



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