

# Creating Effective Legal Outreach Programs

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# Housekeeping

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- Problems getting on the webinar? Send an e-mail to [NCLER@acl.hhs.gov](mailto:NCLER@acl.hhs.gov).
- Written materials and a recording will be available at [NCLER.acl.gov](http://NCLER.acl.gov). See also the chat box for this web address.

# About NCLER

The National Center on Law and Elder Rights (NCLER) provides the legal services and aging and disability communities with the tools and resources they need to serve older adults with the greatest economic and social needs. A centralized, one-stop shop for legal assistance, NCLER provides Legal Training, Case Consultations, and Technical Assistance on Legal Systems Development. Justice in Aging administers the NCLER through a contract with the Administration for Community Living's Administration on Aging.

# About Justice in Aging

Justice in Aging is a national organization that uses the power of law to fight senior poverty by securing access to affordable health care, economic security, and the courts for older adults with limited resources.

Since 1972 we've focused our efforts primarily on populations that have traditionally lacked legal protection such as women, people of color, LGBT individuals, and people with limited English proficiency.

# About Center for Elder Law & Justice

The mission of Center for Elder Law & Justice (CELJ) is to improve the quality of life for elderly, disabled, and low-income persons in Western New York, through the provision of free civil legal services.

Each unit specializes in their fields to ensure justice for our clients and community. Not only does CELJ provide a multitude of services, we interact with the community regularly through outreaches and advocacy on a state and local stage. We believe that living independently and with dignity is the hallmark of justice.

# Key Lessons

- Outreach is a key part of the delivery of legal assistance to older adults.
- Outreach requires planning, relationship building, and evaluation.
- Existing models for outreach events provide good starting points.
- Spotlight on: Mobile Legal Unit

# Why Do Outreach?

Sam attended a senior center in a rural town. The senior center staff noticed he was not going to lunch with his friends as often as he used to. The senior center hosted a legal outreach event, and Sam spoke with the presenter afterwards. It turned out that Sam's rent had increased and he was also paying back rent. This occurred after the housing authority re-calculated his rent. Sam was barely making ends meet, and couldn't do many activities outside of his apartment due to a lack of funds.

After speaking with the legal assistance program at the senior center, the program opened a file to look into Sam's rent issue. The housing authority had made a mistake in the calculation of his income, and Sam received a refund of the back rent he had been paying, and his rent payment was reduced.

# Sam

- Was not previously aware that legal services might be available to him.
- Was not aware that his problem was a “legal problem.”
- May not have had the funds to get to the main legal assistance office in the closest city.



# Poll #1

How many outreach events for older adults do you plan or attend in a year?

- A. 0-5
- B. 5-10
- C. 10-15
- D. 15 or more

# Outreach & Community Engagement

- Can include:
  - Presentations
  - Clinics
  - Community events (picnics, information fairs, etc.)
  - Office hours at community partner locations
  - Training events
- It is about making a proactive effort to reach people with legal needs.
- There is no one-size fits all model that works for every community.

# Role of Outreach

- Not separate, but a critical part of the full spectrum of legal services delivery
  - Education & awareness
  - Availability of resources
  - Recognition of legal issues
  - Reaching potential clients
- Provides connections with communities & individuals.

# Benefits to Older Adults

- Reduces some of the barriers to access legal assistance
  - Limited resources
  - Transportation
  - Access to internet
- Brings assistance to trusted spaces
- Provides legal empowerment
  - Understanding of legal problems and how to solve them

# Benefits to Your Program

- Identify needs and emerging issues.
- Reach older adults who might not otherwise come through your door.
- Build relationships with community members and advocates across professional fields.

# Essential Groundwork

- Who are the clients, populations, or communities that you want to reach?
- What are the issues faced by older adults in the community?
- Who can you develop relationships with in the communities that you want to reach?
  - Include members of the community in your program planning.
- What do you want to achieve/What does success look like?

# Outreach Plan

- Just like any other services in your office, a plan with goals and tactics.
  - Specify responsibilities
- Be flexible—plan may need to change as community needs or issues change.

# Using Data to Evaluate

- Don't forget about collecting data on the outreach event itself
  - How many people came to the event?
  - What did they seek help with and were any files opened?
  - What questions did you get?
- Review your past events and make informed decisions about improvements or new outreach
  - Case management system
  - Google forms
  - Spreadsheets



# Poll #2

What are some of the challenges you have faced when planning outreach events?

- A. Reaching enough people or reaching the people with the greatest need
- B. Finding a location
- C. Working with community partners
- D. Finding the time to do the events
- E. Having funds to do outreach

# Reaching Older Adults

# Identifying & Reaching Your Audience

- What are the unmet legal needs?
  - Current issues based on changes in law or environment
  - Issues identified by stakeholders & community leaders
  - Trends seen in your office (or not seen)
- Who is not coming through your door?
  - Rural residents
  - Older adults of color
  - LGBT older adults
  - Older adults with limited English proficiency
  - Older adults in long-term care facilities

# Topics

- Members of the community can help inform topics of presentations or clinics
  - What are older adults facing
- Think about merging topics, particularly for issues that might not have a large draw, but are important
  - Debt issues = financial stability
  - Scam prevention presentations could include information about elder abuse & neglect
- What will more people connect with?

# Advertising

- Think about your audience and how they are most likely to hear about your event:
  - Flyers & posters
  - Community bulletins & local papers
  - Social media
- Your community partners can play a key role in spreading the word about the event.
- Another consideration: time of year.

# Location & Venue

# Finding the Right Location

- Can be informed by your topic and intended audience
  - Is it a place where your intended audience already visits?
- Logistics are also important:
  - Is the space accessible?
  - Is it on a public transportation line?
  - Is it a trusted space?
  - Does it have a place for one-on-one meetings?
  - Does it have internet access?

# Outreach Models: Location

- Lawyer in the Library- Maryland Legal Aid
  - Brings lawyers to libraries in various parts of Maryland, including rural and urban branches.
  - Topics are based on the needs of the particular towns or communities.
  - Libraries are trusted spaces, and most have access to public transportation.
- Food Pantry- Bet Tzedek
  - Partners with the SOVA Community Food & Resource Program to have staff on site.



# Outreach Collaboration

# Working with Community Partners

- Your state's Legal Assistance Developer
- Area Agencies on Aging
- Nutrition services (i.e.: Meals on Wheels and meal sites)
- Long-Term Care Ombudsman
- Adult Protective Services
- Aging & Disability Resource Centers
- Veteran's services
- HUD Housing Counseling Providers
- Consumer credit counseling service providers
- Local pride centers
- Utility services community liaisons
- United States Postal Inspection Service
- Domestic violence and shelter services

# Relationship Building

- Community leaders often know what issues people are facing
  - Check in and make sure you are including their perspective in both planning and evaluation.
- Logistics & Details
  - Is a MOU needed?
  - Any privacy or confidentiality concerns?
  - For ongoing relationships, it can be helpful to establish referral protocols and understanding of ethical obligations.

# Outreach Model: Collaboration

- NY Region 15 Long Term Care Ombudsman Program
  - Partnered with a legal services program to create a rack card (flat brochure) that ombudsman volunteers could distribute to residents of long term care facilities.
  - Rack cards advised residents of their rights for therapy services and how they could connect to legal assistance.
  - Good example of identifying a need and a population.
  - Outreach does not have to be in-person to be effective.

# Time & Resources

# Sharing Responsibility

- Can be helpful to have a point person in your office who is responsible for outreach coordination & tracking.
- All staff should have some responsibility in the overall outreach strategy.
  - Building relationships and engaging with the communities is beneficial.
  - Think about time allocations & targets—outreach plans are helpful.

# Tracking Effectiveness

- Legal assistance advocates have limited time—outreach programs should be evaluated to ensure time is spent on programs that work.
- Success is not always based on the number of files you open
  - People may not have a legal problem right then, but you have empowered them to know when they should seek help.
  - You could be reaching populations that have not typically come to your office.

# Funding

- For outreach programs, one-time funding can help get an idea off the ground
  - Foundations and small grants may be enough to cover equipment, initial time investment of planning and set-up.
  - Your local library may have access to foundation and grant search programs.
- Current funding opportunity through ACL: [Legal Assistance Enhancement Program](#)



# Role of Technology

- Technology has opened new possibilities for legal assistance programs to connect with people in rural areas or who lack the ability to get to their office.
  - Many programs have started using video conferencing technology, even at outreach events.
  - Allows staff to connect with clients without travel time.
- Utilizing technology does not have to be expensive.

# Outreach Model: Technology

- Virtual Office- Community Legal Aid (Ohio)
  - Partnered with a community center in a rural part of their service area to have a “virtual office.”
  - Amazon Echo Show devices are used to connect people at the community center with legal aid staff in their main office.
  - Allows individuals to go through the intake process and talk to legal aid staff.
  - Utilizes affordable technology and community partners.

# Mobile Legal Unit

# Mobile Legal Unit (MLU)

- Purpose:
  - Operate outside of “typical outreach areas”
    - Rural community centers
    - Congregate meal sites
    - Local libraries
  - Address multiple issues for attendees
    - “Done-in-a-day” representation
    - Screening tools increase impact
    - Cross-train staff on common issues

# MLU Perks

- Benefits
  - Presentation not required
    - Quality conversations tailored for attendee.
  - Increased flexibility
    - Open schedule allows for walk-ins.
  - No reliance on callbacks or wait time to resolve concerns
    - Meet with an attorney or paralegal immediately.
  - Promotes cross-training & team building
    - Build staff awareness regarding common legal issues.
    - Offer holistic solutions.

# What is needed for a MLU?

- Helpful Technology :
  - Laptops/tablets
  - Wireless Printer(s)
  - Jet pack(s)
  - Large sandwich board signs
  - Additional costs
    - Flyers, promotional materials, ads
- Partner Cooperation
- Topic variety
- Consistency

# MLU Impact

- Just like receiving a yearly physical from your doctor, it is important to take preventative measures to identify any legal issues before they become an emergency.
- Increase organization recognition in areas where you do not have a physical presence.
- Improve community partnerships.
- Schedule regular events.

# MLU Best Practices

- Combine with an existing event
  - Increase exposure and impact
  - Promote on social media
- Know your audience
  - Staff based upon needs of the area
  - Bring referral materials for attendees outside your scope of service
- Commit to a regular schedule – geographically or by location.
- Be visible and arrange for private meeting space.
- Use “down time” to promote your agency.
- Conduct outreach training with staff – generate excitement.



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# Case Consultations

Case consultation assistance is available for attorneys and professionals seeking more information to help older adults. Contact NCLER at [ConsultNCLER@acl.hhs.gov](mailto:ConsultNCLER@acl.hhs.gov).