

COVID-19 Response: Technology Strategies for Remote Legal Assistance

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Introduction

During the COVID-19 pandemic, most legal assistance providers have shifted to remote legal work to continue operations and keep clients and staff safe. This shift is important for everyone's health and safety, but these temporary practices are particularly important for those who serve older adults and people with compromised immune systems who are at greater risk from COVID-19. Remote legal work requires access to communication tools, files, documents, case management systems, and mechanisms to have meetings.

Technology tools are available to assist with the setup of remote legal work and the delivery of legal services. The number of older adults who are using technology is growing, particularly among people aged 60-75, and online tools should be included in the options available for older clients to connect to legal assistance, when possible.¹ Many of the tools in this Tip Sheet also enhance phone-based services and streamline the workflow of legal staff. For staff who would like more training on using technology tools, the [Legal Services National Technology Assistance Project](#) and [Tech Soup](#) have libraries of trainings on a variety of tools.

This tip sheet offers examples and suggestions for current available technology tools, but these lists are not exhaustive and this resource is not an endorsement of any particular company or solution. Individual legal services providers should evaluate their own needs before utilizing a tool, and consider other factors, such as staff and client preferences, cost, and compatibility with existing programs.

Connectivity Options

Access to internet is necessary for many of the technology tools shared in this tip sheet. Many service providers are offering discounted internet access for new customers, expanding special programs for low-income customers, and boosting speeds on low cost plans.

Legal assistance providers can also consider purchasing hotspots (and/or cell phones with a plan that includes using it for a hotspot) to provide their staff with connectivity. [Mobile Beacon](#) and [Tech Soup](#) are potential sources for affordable hotspot devices.

Privacy & Security

When using technology tools for remote work, privacy and security must be considered. [SANS Security Awareness](#) has resources available for creating a secure remote workforce. [Technology Safety](#) also has resources to help programs evaluate the security and privacy feature of many technology tools and offers a [chart for comparison of video conferencing tools](#). Staff should update (or install) anti-virus, anti-malware and firewall software on the equipment they are using for remote work.

¹ [Pew Research Center: Tech Adoption Climbs Among Older Adults](#). (May 2017).

Phone Services

In this time of social distancing, phone services are a critical component of continued operations for legal assistance providers. For full service legal providers, phone service will be needed for intake and ongoing client interactions. Legal helplines that utilize phone-based service models will need to continue operations of both brief service and referrals to other providers.

While legal assistance staff may have personal phones available, concerns may exist about privacy and compensation for utilization of personal phones. Programs will also want to have the continuity of phone numbers that clients and the community are familiar with and receive from referral sources. Some options for continuing phone service include:

- **VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol):** VoIP can allow you to make a call directly from a computer, a specific VoIP phone, or a traditional phone connected to a particular adapter.²
- **Call-forwarding:** Redirect calls from an office number to ring at another number. This may be available from your current phone system, or you may wish to explore other options, such as the examples below.
- **Vonage:** Currently offering 90 days of free services to help with business continuity, including voice & text messaging (SMS).
- **Google Voice:** Utilizes smartphones and internet to place and receive calls from anywhere.
- **RingCentral Office:** Can provide a business cloud-based telephone system, video meetings, team messaging, faxing, and SMS. Currently, it is available to nonprofits for free for three months.
- **TalkRoute:** Offers a trial period, and provides a virtual phone system to make & receive calls from computers or smartphones.
- **Amazon Connect:** Creates a virtual contact center.

Internal Meetings & Workflow

Legal assistance providers will need to continue collaborative efforts within their offices. Case management systems may have options for managing workflow associated with individual client cases. Additional programs are available for virtual office meetings and collaborative conversations, such as:

- **Microsoft Teams:** Integrated with Office 365, and can be used for meeting, calls, and collaboration.
- **Slack:** Helps organize communication channels for group discussions or one-to-one messaging. Currently offers a three month free trial for nonprofits.
- **Basecamp:** Online project management platform (document sharing, messaging boards, etc.).
- **Zoom:** For video conferencing. Offers a limited free version and a nonprofit discount.
- **LogMeIn:** Offers nonprofits with free, organization-wide use of many products such as GoToMeeting for three months through its “Emergency Remote Work Kit.”
- **Gruveo:** One-click video conferencing. Offers a 45-day extended trial period.

2 [Federal Communications Commission: Voice Over Internet Protocol.](#)(2020)

Document Sharing

Legal assistance providers may need to rely more heavily on scanning and e-signatures for sharing documents internally and with clients. Some staff and clients may not have a printer or scanner at home, but apps can facilitate a similar function. Some examples include:

Scanning:

- Microsoft Office Lens
- ClearScanner App
- Scanner Pro App
- Adobe Scan App
- iPhone Notes App

E-Signature Tools

- SignRequest.com
- DocuSign
- Adobe Sign
- SignNow
- HelloSign & Dropbox

Legal aid providers can also consider using a secure mailing service, such as [Postal Methods](#), which generates a mailed letter from an uploaded or emailed document. The service lists itself as HIPAA compliant.

Remote Online Notarization

The rules and acceptability of electronic or remote notarization will vary by state, and adoption of these rules is changing quickly in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. More information and updates are available from the National Notary Association.

Communications

As legal assistance providers continue operations remotely, it is important that the community and partners are aware that legal assistance is still available to older adults and how it can be accessed. Some suggestions for distributing this information include:

- Prominent website banner in plain language
- Inform partners of changes to services and availability
- Press release
- Inform constituent services staff for elected officials
- Social media
- Information at grocery stores and pharmacies with special hours for older adults (AARP is maintaining an extensive list) and/or ask these stores to include a flyer with delivery services

Any materials that are being distributed to the public will benefit from being adapted to plain language and translated. You can connect with other local community organizations to find out about translation options in your community. [Transcend Translations](#) is offering legal aid organizations free Plain English and Spanish translations and icons for signage and messages, up to 150 words per language. Transcend will compile all messages so they can be shared by the community. To request a translation, send your text to end@Transcend.net.

Additional Resources:

- [ACL & NCLER: Legal Assistance for Older Americans & COVID-19](#)
- [Administration for Community Living: COVID-19](#)
- [Tech Soup: Non-Profit Resources for Remote Work During the COVID-19 Outbreak](#)
- [Prepare.Respond.SERVE.](#)
- [Remote Legal Support Guide: A Best Practices Manual for Nonprofit and Pro Bono Innovation](#)
- [Legal Services National Technology Assistance Project](#)
- [Law Help Interactive](#)
- [Management Information Exchange: COVID-19 Resources](#)

Please contact ConsultNCLER@acl.hhs.gov for free case consultation assistance. Sign up for our email list and access more resources at NCLER.acl.gov.

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