

WYOMING CENTER FOR LEGAL AID 2014 STRATEGIC PLAN

The Wyoming Center for Legal Aid was created by the Wyoming Supreme Court as an entity of the Supreme Court and is governed by a Board of Commissioners. The Center came into existence on April 19, 2011, and is authorized and funded by the Wyoming Civil Legal Services Act, Wyo. Stat. §§ 5-2-121 et. seq. The Act charges the Center with developing a statewide program for improving access to justice and providing civil legal services to Wyoming's low-income population. The Wyoming Center for Legal Aid is dedicated to helping income-eligible individuals in Wyoming connect with legal resources and find ways to address their legal needs.

The Center continually seeks innovative ways to address the issues that face the low-income in accessing the justice system. By leveraging available resources, the Center's reach and impact is much greater. The Center continues to strive to coordinate legal services throughout the state in order to have a statewide system of legal resources and service providers that work together to meet legal needs in Wyoming, to avoid duplication of services, and to efficiently and effectively manage the state's resources allocated to civil legal aid to the indigent.

Vision: Access to justice for every person in Wyoming.

The Center's vision is to work toward a legal system that is accessible and provides justice to everyone in Wyoming, including those who cannot afford an attorney. This vision is a lofty goal that cannot be accomplished without innovations in the delivery of legal services to the low-income. Available resources are limited and will never be enough to provide an attorney for each person who has a civil legal issue and cannot afford an attorney. Therefore, programs that address broad issues of access to justice must be coordinated along with the provision of traditional legal services in order to find ways to provide meaningful ways for the public to access the justice system.

The Center is a "hub", a central place where ideas and information are exchanged and shared. As such, the Center will continue to collaborate with many different organizations and agencies that share Center goals in order to improve the provision of legal assistance to the low-income community.

Mission: Serving the legal needs of low-income persons of Wyoming through community engagement, education, information, and expansion of legal services throughout the state.

Objectives: The Center was created to address inadequate access to legal assistance and the court system by low to moderate-income individuals in civil matters. Wyoming courts face the burden of an ever increasing number of unrepresented litigants and individuals who cannot access the court system because of financial barriers. This leaves many individuals without the ability to address their legal issues. This strategic plan is designed to develop a plan for addressing these problems and issues across the state.

At this time, the Center recognizes that information and self-help resources, increased pro bono, and partnerships with the state bar are foundations that still must be built upon in Wyoming. Over the next year, the Center will continue to focus on building the infrastructure to create a sustainable and workable system of civil legal assistance in the state. The Center is sensitive to the fact that there will not be an attorney available to accept every case for full representation. However, the Center will strive to put in place resources that will allow every person to obtain a basic level of information and resources which will allow every person meaningful access to the justice system.

The Center has identified needs and priorities that must be addressed in order to further our mission. These objectives include:

A. Self-Help Assistance and Resources

1. Begin testing the automation program for the Supreme Court pro se divorce forms.
2. Continue automation of other approved Supreme Court pro se forms and packets to aid self-represented litigants in completing necessary legal documents.
3. Maintaining a website to provide accurate and easy-to-understand information and self-help resources to persons throughout the state along with information about available legal services in Wyoming.
4. Provide a variety of self-help forms for common legal issues with plain language instructions for their use.
5. Host clinics and education events for the public.

B. Statewide Reach

1. Work through community organizations and existing providers that currently serve our target population to leverage resources and expand direct legal services to underserved areas of the state.
2. Continue to develop an integrated statewide plan to provide legal services to all areas of the state.

C. Increase Access to Services in Rural Areas

1. Develop innovative ways to reach the rural communities that are currently underserved.
2. Increase access to legal assistance in rural areas through the use of technology and self-help resources, outreach, and pro bono legal services.

D. Create Structured Pro Bono and Private Attorney Involvement Programs

1. Work with the Wyoming State Bar, the Access to Justice Commission, and legal service providers to coordinate pro bono programs throughout the state.
2. Develop pro bono programs designed to encourage private attorneys to increase pro bono services.

E. Single Point of Entry and Coordination of Services

1. Continue to fund and monitor the operation of a statewide hotline for legal advice and intake for legal services.

2. Continue to refine a referral system and network for persons applying for services on the hotline.

F. Coordinate and design a statewide pro bono program to assist qualifying veterans

1. Work with existing agencies and advocacy groups that currently serve veterans in order to identify the current legal needs of veterans.
2. Develop a program that will target assistance to qualifying veterans.

G. Develop and provide a support network of training and information for legal aid providers and pro bono attorneys

1. Provide training and education opportunities for legal aid attorneys.
2. Develop a forum for legal service providers to share information.

H. Coordinate with the Access to Justice Commission to address barriers that low-income individuals face in accessing the court system.

At this time, the Center's focus will be on these objectives. Meeting these objectives is essential for creating a statewide program for legal assistance.

Action Plan: In working to accomplish these objectives, the Center has created the following action plan, which is intended to be flexible in order to accommodate creativity and changes in order to best address the needs of our target population.

1. Complete the automation of the Supreme Court pro se divorce packet, including testing.
2. Begin automation of the Supreme Court pro se child custody modification packets.
3. Provide training opportunities for legal aid attorneys in the state.
4. Provide training opportunities and resources for pro bono attorneys throughout the state.
5. Expand direct provision of legal services to the Gillette area.
6. Evaluate potential locations and partnership opportunities or futures legal service expansion in underserved areas of the state.
7. Develop and adopt metrics to evaluate the provision of the legal services provided through Center funding.
8. Maintain supervision and oversight of grants and grantee operations.
9. Coordinate with the Supreme Court auditors to schedule regular reviews of grantees.
10. Develop a coordinated plan with the State Bar, the Access to Justice Commission, and Legal Aid of Wyoming to develop and promote a structured pro bono program and increase pro bono assistance.
11. Develop and set-up remote access sites in the designated rural areas of the state in order to develop pro bono Skype clinics as well as provide a place for persons to come to connect with a legal aid attorney via Skype.
12. Develop a relationship with the University Of Wyoming School Of Law to provide opportunities for students to gain experience and provide pro bono services.
13. Develop resources to support the work of legal aid providers throughout the state. This can be done through development of training manuals, password protected

- website access, and other resources for use by legal service providers to aid in the provision of quality legal services.
14. Provide updated information to clerks and courts to provide to the public to direct the public to available resources.
 15. Provide public education, awareness, and dissemination of the resources available to the public.
 16. Organize pro bono clinic and develop participation of local attorneys for pro bono involvement.

Priorities:

Although all of the above objectives are important and deserve the attention of the Center, the following have been identified as priorities of the Center in the upcoming year:

1. Develop a system to recruit, train, and support pro bono attorneys throughout the state;
2. Create a web resource for pro bono attorneys that will provide instructions and support for common issues and cases handled;
3. Pilot remote access sites in five rural communities to increase access to underserved areas of the state;
4. Expand legal services to the Gillette area through community partnership and placement of a full-time attorney in Gillette;
5. Complete the automation of the pro se divorce packets;
6. Develop a relationship with the VA and other service providers for veterans to create a system in which low-income veterans with legal needs can be identified, referred, and screened for eligibility and pro bono assistance.

The Center's resources will be allocated appropriately to meet these objectives. The Center's staff time and resources will be used to meet these objectives. The Center will continue to employ its current staff to work toward developing and implementing programs and projects that will enhance the delivery of legal services in Wyoming.

The Center also provides substantial funding to increase the capacity of our grantees' organizations so they may better address the legal needs of the low-income population. The Center will continue to work with existing and new organizations to help develop effective approaches to serving the large number of eligible persons who qualify for services.