
PRO SE BROCHURE

I. Project Description

The idea for the Pro Se Brochure Project originated with Texas State Civil District Court Judge Catharina Haynes. Recognizing the difficulties encountered by pro se litigants and the burden pro se litigants can cause to court personnel, Judge Haynes requested that the Dallas Association of Young Lawyers assist in the creation of the Pro Se Brochure. The purpose of the brochure is to (1) provide fundamental procedural and court information to pro se litigants, (2) emphasize to pro se litigants the need for representation by counsel if at all possible, and (3) direct pro se litigants to sources where they might secure legal counsel at a reduced or no cost.

II. Identification of Need

A. Project Goal

Many civil litigants lack legal counsel and basic knowledge as to the procedure of a civil court case. Pro se litigants often do not know even the most fundamental information as to how to conduct themselves in the legal process, such as how to address a judge, or what to wear to court. Many pro se litigants also are unaware of the rules of procedure governing a civil case, or where to find the rules. Unaware that neither judges nor court personnel can offer legal advice, pro se litigants often seek answers from the court. By the time pro se litigants come to understand the role of the court and learn that myriad technical procedural rules apply to their case, many of them have prejudiced their cases beyond the point of repair.

As such, the goal of the Pro Se Brochure is to provide pro se litigants with an information source that explains (1) the difficulty of representing oneself, (2) some of the most important rules governing a civil case, (3) where to find the rules, (4) how to dress in court, (5) how to address the court and opposing counsel, and (6) where they can look to find legal representation.

B. Project Design

The Committee that drafted the Pro Se Brochure knew the brochure needed to be reasonable in length and written for the layperson. Also, the brochure needed to offer substantive information without providing legal advice. The Committee drafted the brochure with the hopes that it would ultimately be placed in the civil court for access by pro se litigants. Thus, the Committee decided that the brochure would most effectively be presented in a pamphlet-like form.

C. Decision Making Process

In drafting the brochure, the Committee involved (1) the Dallas County Civil Court Judiciary, (2) numerous DAYL officers and members, and (3) a non-lawyer community activist who had drafted similar brochures. Members of the Dallas Bar Association also were contacted with respect to project funding.

D. Considerations in Project Planning

As mentioned above, the Committee obtained invaluable help from the Dallas County Civil Court Judiciary. After an initial draft of the brochure was put together by Judge Haynes and the Committee, Judge Haynes distributed the brochure to her fellow judges for review. Several judges offered substantive comments to the contents of the brochure. A non-lawyer also took an active role in the brochure by reviewing and editing the brochure once an initial draft had been prepared. The review of the brochure by a non-lawyer assisted in making the brochure easier to read from the standpoint of a layperson.

E. Revenue Availability/Fund Raising

The Committee had no budget at the time the Brochure Project was initiated. However, with the help of a community activist and Judge Haynes, enough funding was obtained from the Dallas Bar Association to print 10,000 brochures.

F. Obtaining Funding/Project Cost

The Committee approached the leadership of the Dallas Bar Association for funding for the brochure. The Dallas Bar Association then requested that the Dallas Bar Foundation provide \$5,000 for the costs of printing the pro se brochure and other similar community service brochures that had been prepared by others. With that funding, the Committee was able to print 10,000 brochures. The total cost for the paper, printing and formatting of the pro se brochures was approximately \$2,500. It should be kept in mind, however, that the companies involved in formatting and printing of the brochures did so at a reduced cost.

G. Distribution of the Brochures

After the brochures had been printed, they were given to Judge Haynes. Judge Haynes then distributed the brochures to the various judges at the District Court. The judges now have the brochures available in their respective clerks' offices. Copies of the brochure are also located at the main filing desk.

III. Implementation . . . How to Replicate this Project

A. Timetable

An affiliate should begin planning this project at least six months in advance.

Six Months Prior to the Publication Date:

1. Identify committee members.
2. Involve a member of the judiciary who will work closely with the committee.
3. Consider the number of brochures to be printed, and the funding that will be required.
4. Delegate portions of brochure to particular committee members and begin first draft of the brochure.

Four Months Prior to the Publication Date:

1. Compile various portions of brochure from committee members into a single draft.
2. Committee members review and edit first rough draft.
3. Continue work to obtain funding.
4. Schedule meeting for review of next draft.

Three Months Prior to the Publication Date:

1. Review and edit second draft.
2. Distribute draft brochure to other members of the judiciary if possible for comment.
3. Determine the final look and format of the brochure.
4. Complete fund-raising.

Two Months Prior to the Publication Date:

1. Obtain comments from judiciary and incorporate into a final draft.
2. Provide final draft to non-lawyer for review.
3. Incorporate any changes needed to make brochure more comprehensible from the perspective of a layperson.

One Month Prior to the Publication Date:

1. Final formatting and editing.
2. Send final draft to printers.

After Printing:

1. Provide brochure to courts and other sources for distribution.

B. Publicity

The Pro Se Brochure is not a project requiring publicity. Once the brochure is distributed, it likely will be met with a great degree of support and appreciation, if the DAYL's project is any indication.

C. Day-To-Day Operations

Another advantage of this Project is that it is not ongoing and does not require day to day operations once completed.

IV. Evaluation and Impact

The DAYL's Pro Se Brochure, thus far, has received a tremendous response. Numerous of the Dallas County District Civil Court Judges have expressed their appreciation for the brochure and believe it will be a true benefit to the community and the courts. Judges outside the civil district court, such as the JP court, are now inquiring how they can get a brochure drafted for use in their courts.

V. Bibliography

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