
COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND EDUCATION PROJECT

I. Project Description

A. Identification of Need

The Washington State Bar Association Young Lawyers Division (WYLD) is dedicated to public service projects; as a member organization of the Equal Justice Coalition, WYLD has affirmed its commitment to developing ideas to provide support for civil legal services. The Legal Services Corporation (LSC) has identified the needs of communities across the nation and it is well known that many individuals cannot afford legal representation. The situation is now so dire that the Washington State Bar Association declared a crisis in funding for civil legal services. Between 60-70% of low-income people and families who need direct legal representation on important civil legal problems (such as child custody, domestic violence, eviction/home foreclosure and illegal termination or mistreatment by employers) are unable to secure legal assistance.

After speaking with different individuals involved with the EJC, LSC, and the Access to Justice Network, WYLD developed the Community Education and Outreach Project in an effort to promote community awareness of the legal services available on a local level and to educate the public about their basic legal rights on various issues, such as family law, domestic violence, worker's rights, seniors' issues, and immigration. It was made very clear that there was a great need for outreach to the non-English speaking communities and low income families. Through contact with community based organizations, WYLD found that many individuals felt that they were denied access to justice due to language barriers. For this reason, the WYLD Community Outreach and Education Project committee focused its outreach efforts on non-English speaking communities and rural areas where there were higher numbers of low income families and migrant farmworkers present in the area.

B. Determination of Project Goals And Design

1. Decisions to be made

a. Options – Project Goals

It had been previously determined that the goal of the project would not be to provide individual legal representation due to limited resources of this pilot project. Other issues taken into consideration when developing the project goals included liability issues and malpractice insurance costs. While a long-term goal of the project could ultimately result in a legal services clinic, it was determined that the most effective advocacy effort would be to educate the targeted communities about the local resources currently available, to educate them about their general legal rights, and to distribute as much information as possible to families across the State which would help them better understand the legal system. The community outreach efforts would also

improve the public's perception of the bar association and help build a better working relationship with other community organizations.

b. Options – Project Design

It was determined that limiting the project presentations to a “know your rights” seminar/town meeting format would allow volunteer lawyers the opportunity to provide general information to the community members without running the risk of liability issues triggered by individual legal representation. The planning committee determined that developing a basic format/outline for the presentation and gathering the materials to be distributed during the program would make it easier for volunteer lawyers to feel more comfortable about conducting the presentations. Another option to be used for the presentation was to recruit Judges or attorneys who specialized in an area of practice to deliver the presentation. Allowing the volunteers to address issues they felt comfortable discussing made recruitment efforts less difficult.

After contacting the Bar association, legal services offices, the American Bar Association, and various government offices, it was found that most agencies and organizations printed materials which were available to the public for free or at low cost. Various “know your rights” pamphlets or instructional manuals and videos had been produced for distribution to the public and so the planning committee found that it was not necessary to develop new materials for the project. By collecting materials available through other agencies and organizations, the project costs were drastically reduced and it was found that each program could be completed with minimal/no cost other than the cost of advertising and publicity.

The project design of legal seminars allowed for maximum outreach to community members. Most community based organizations (CBOs) contacted by the planning committee agreed to host the seminars at their facilities or suggested other locations in the community which could be reserved for no cost or minimal fees. It was determined that it would be most effective to schedule programs at community centers, schools, churches, domestic violence shelters, or CBOs where groups of individuals held general meetings for other purposes. By coordinating the schedule with the host organization, maximum attendance would be more likely to occur since the groups were already planning to attend on the specific date for other activities.

The production of a manual had been considered however the cost of production and distribution would put a significant strain on the budget. Since the project goals included an actual physical presence of attorneys in rural communities, it was determined that the project goals would be more likely achieved if the funding was used to assist with travel costs and other meeting costs.

2. Decision Making Process

The senior bar has promoted public legal education as a significant resource for the community. With the continuous restrictions placed on legal services and court assistance programs, the bar association is often asked to provide volunteer legal services to pro se clients. For this reason, the

Community Outreach and Education Project found great support within the senior bar. The planning committee should make every effort to communicate with various organizations to ensure that the program is well received within the community. In doing so, the program is more likely to have widespread support.

3. Considerations in Project Planning

a. Community Resources

This project is easily conducted through partnerships with specialty bar associations, court personnel, and community organizations. Because the project is designed to offer basic legal education rather than individual representation it does not compete with the practice of private attorneys. Since one of the project goals was to reach limited English speaking communities, the Hispanic Bar Association and the Asian Bar Association were contacted in an effort to recruit bilingual attorneys. Other agencies were asked if they had volunteers available to act as interpreters.

The project coordinator also had experience working with community organizations through similar public education outreach efforts and this project was designed to supplement those efforts rather than replace the established programs. Most CBOs and agencies offered their facilities/meeting rooms at minimal or no cost so that the presentations could be offered to their clients. Working through partnerships builds a strong base of support for the project and contributes to the success of the program presentations.

b. Personnel

Depending on the number of presentations scheduled during the year, the project can function with any number of volunteers. A solo attorney can present a program which could be duplicated at different sites within the community. If the committee plans to conduct outreach in rural communities it would probably be more practical to work in teams of two to four attorneys so that one or two presentations could be conducted simultaneously at different sites and the attorneys could save on travel costs by organizing carpools.

The project coordinator can also schedule five to eight programs throughout the year and spend the first several months recruiting judges or attorneys for each different event. When coordinating team presentations, it is often beneficial for the newer attorneys to be paired with a more experienced attorney so that he/she can learn different presentation skills or how to deal with difficult troubleshooting situations. The coordinator should also take into account whether the presenters are bilingual or if interpreters will be necessary.

On site events coordinators and/or receptionists should be contacted well in advance of the presentation so that they are able to answer questions regarding the presentation. Coordinating logistics with the personnel on site will help your presentation run more smoothly. It is even helpful to check in with the custodian to make sure that the building will not be locked down after a certain hour if the program runs late, to check on parking, or to bring in extra chairs if necessary.

c. **Revenue Availability**

Funding requirements greatly depends on the design of the project. If the presentations are scheduled at local CBOs with a local attorneys, the affiliate will be able to facilitate this project with little or minimal funding. WYLD applied for funding through the senior bar and received \$2,000.00 to cover costs of the project. Since the project coordinator served as a volunteer and the presenters were volunteer attorneys, funding was used to provide additional materials for distribution, to reimburse speakers for travel costs when presenting in rural communities, and to provide refreshments to attendees during the presentation. Most CBOs and other agencies now communicate via e-mail so minimal costs were incurred through telephone contacts.

d. **Other...equipment/physical needs**

Depending on the expected numbers of attendees, the only physical needs for the project were the meeting space, chairs, and some tables to lay out materials. It would be helpful to use overhead projectors but that added cost could restrict the number of presentations unless the site agency provided one at no cost.

II. **Implementation...How to replicate the project**

A. **Timetable**

If the project goal is to set up several presentations during the year, start reserving sites several months in advance. Many agencies will schedule meetings at their facilities up to a year in advance so the project coordinator will want to reserve meeting space in advance. Once the sites are secured, contact your volunteers to coordinate schedules. Be very flexible and offer several dates to your volunteers so that they do not feel pressured by scheduling conflicts. Recruitment of at least 2-10 volunteer attorneys should be completed at least the month before contacting the various agencies to set up the meetings. Announcements about the presentation schedule should be made at least one month before the meeting with reminder notices going out on a weekly basis if funding allows for continuous publicity.

The committee should collect various materials from the state bar association and other resources on a continuous basis. Other resources to consider for materials are hospitals, police departments, unions, the court, legal services, and local county bar associations. A list of resources should be maintained so that the committee members can return for additional materials as necessary.

B. **Recruitment and Training of Volunteers/Personnel**

There is minimal training of volunteers required for the program. A general outline of the program presentation and the goals of the project should be provided to participants so that they have an understanding of the expectations of the planning committee. Once a volunteer has been confirmed, a welcome/thank you note should be delivered to the volunteer along with the schedule of events. New volunteers should also be encouraged to attend a session prior to their scheduled session so that they can observe the format of the program. Volunteers should be asked if there are any limitations on travel, time restraints for scheduling sessions in the evening or on weekends, and if they are willing to work on a team or if solo presentations are preferred.

An active effort should also be made to recruit volunteer interpreters in the event that bilingual attorneys are not available. The committee may also consider recruiting volunteers to provide childcare on site to assist parents who wish to attend the presentation. There are many activities/materials which could be used to educate children about their legal rights or provide information on "Safety Plans for Kids". This additional service of childcare is often appreciated by site coordinators, presenters, and parents.

C. Publicity

Many of the community agencies have newsletters or bulletins to announce events so it was not difficult to coordinate publicity for the project. It was also suggested by attendees that announcements be posted at the local library or grocery bulletin boards. E-mail announcements are widely distributed at no cost to the committee. Announcements during church services or on bulletin boards is also very effective. Developing a basic flyer to announce the program is very effective especially if there are resources available for widespread distribution.

The committee should also consider profiling the project in an article for the bar news/publications or for the local community newspapers. Some television newscasts will also highlight such programs as public service announcements or special interest stories.

D. Day-to-Day Operations

It is helpful to maintain a list of emergency back up presenters who are available to cover a presentation in the event that a conflict arises for the volunteer attorney scheduled for that evening. By scheduling team presentations (2-3 volunteers), unexpected no shows or last minute cancellations by a presenter will not be such a concern. The project coordinator should provide the presenters with a contact person on site and emergency telephone numbers in the event of lock-outs or power failures, etc. The project coordinator may also want to attend the first few sessions to note any problems which might occur so that they can be corrected and avoided at future presentations. Once the schedule is set and the volunteers are scheduled there is minimal day-to-day activity other than reminder calls or follow up announcements.

III. Evaluation and Impact

An evaluation may be performed through the use of a form evaluation distributed during the presentation. For best results, it is best to collect the forms on site before the end of the program. Attendees should be asked if the presenters were effective, if the materials distributed were helpful, if any improvements could be made in facilitating the program, and if any other topics should be addressed. A de-briefing session can also be conducted at the end of the presentation by simply inviting participants to make suggestions to the presenter directly who would then document the suggestions for the committee. A survey of participating volunteers should also be conducted to help facilitate the coordination of the project for the following year. Comment sections can also be used to quote in future requests for funding especially where positive feedback demonstrates the need for this particular type of community outreach project.

IV. **Bibliography/Other Resources**

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