

WYOMING CENTER FOR LEGAL AID 2012 STRATEGIC PLAN

The Wyoming Center for Legal Aid (Center) was formed on April 19, 2011, by the Wyoming Supreme Court. Since then, the Center has: 1) hired one full time employee; 2) canvassed existing civil legal aid programs in Wyoming and other states; 3) met extensively with the Wyoming State Bar to coordinate support for the Center; 4) developed policies and a form of private attorney contract for representation of Center-referred clients; 5) obtained private attorney input for Center priorities; 6) funded four civil legal aid programs operating in Wyoming; 7) begun test-piloting new programs with local community organizations; and 8) begun development of an integrated website that will serve as a single coordinated point of entry for all Wyoming citizens seeking referrals to existing programs and other community resources for legal assistance. A considerable effort has also been taken to evaluate long-term program priorities for the Center, including an assessment of the various options that may be pursued to stretch as far as possible the limited available funds across Wyoming.

This plan updates and expands the initial Strategic Plan of the Center adopted in 2011 and sets specific program targets and priorities for 2012.

I. The Issues and Challenges Facing a New Legal Aid Program in Wyoming

This plan is the product of months of in-depth discussions, brainstorming sessions and informal surveys of various stakeholders and interested parties. For every idea put forth, an analysis of its benefits, ramifications and costs followed. Primary topics of discussion focused on the Center becoming essentially a law firm with multiple offices and walk-in clients, having a website and hotline, contracting with private attorneys or going into communities to offer education and outreach on a broader scale. Regardless of the idea explored, the conclusion was the same: there are several ways the Center can help individuals with their legal problems, but there are not enough resources to do everything. Fundamentally, the question to be answered is this: how can the Center help the most people possible?

After exploring possibilities of what the Center **could** do, conversations shifted to what the Center **should** do. Many expect the Center to provide direct legal representation as the primary method for helping individuals with their legal problems. This is the standard clinic model, where a clinic operates essentially as a publicly-funded law firm for the income eligible. But others have urged the Center to undertake efforts with perhaps a broader reach, including the development of pro se forms, hosting a content-rich website, funding pilot projects with local community organizations and other court-centered initiatives that a state-wide judicial branch entity is well-positioned undertake. The Wyoming Civil Legal Services Act requires the Center to provide a single point of entry and coordinate with existing providers throughout the state. "Center" connotes a hub of sorts, a place where information and ideas are exchanged. It should be a reliable location where

resources come in, but also go out. An active, vibrant Center must be dynamic, flexible and current on issues relevant to its purpose.

As judicial branch entity, coordination with other organizations is important. The legal community is an important partner in the Center's Mission—the State Bar Association, members of the private bar, court clerks, judges and existing legal service providers. To connect with the target demographic the Center must also work through organizations that serve those individuals in their respective communities. The specific organizations vary from one community to the next, but low-cost health clinics, senior centers, soup kitchens and safe houses stand out as potential partners. In addition to being the link between Center resources and income-eligible clients, community organizations can relay the legal issues that their participants face, ensuring the Center stays abreast of those needs.

These considerations gave birth to the plan detailed below. In general it is conservative, moving forward cautiously so that the Center has a solid infrastructure and is prepared for the challenges that lie ahead. Although some may wish the Center move more quickly, the Center's position is that creating a sustainable and respectable organization will take time.

Based upon input from: 1) the Access to Justice Commission; 2) meetings with the Supreme Court and Court personnel about the Court's various access to justice initiatives; 3) existing civil legal aid providers in Wyoming; and 4) civil legal aid providers outside Wyoming willing to share their experiences, we have distilled the competing needs and priorities identified over the last six months to the following.

II. Identified Needs and Priorities to Consider

A. Improving self help

Many have identified the need for more simplified self-help legal processes. Pro se representation is expanding rapidly in Wyoming and current pro se forms can be complex to navigate, often leaving court personnel (clerks and judges alike) struggling with pro se litigants who appear with erroneous or incomplete paperwork. The Supreme Court is interested in automating some of the pro se forms that already exist to make it simpler for persons to fill out necessary paperwork properly, as well as gain a better understanding of the process itself. The self-help process can also be aided by court facilitators, who might assist the public in navigating simple pro se cases. While improving the efficacy of self-help forms is not tied directly to income, increasing the ability of individuals to get directly into the legal system will undoubtedly be of greatest benefit to those who cannot afford a lawyer themselves. While the State Bar has an understandable interest in ensuring that people who can afford and need a lawyer continue to hire one, pro se access to the most basic of necessary legal procedures remains a priority of the Supreme Court. The Center believes that supporting this effort, particularly through its website, is a major priority. The Center also believes that making access to the legal system simpler will benefit both the public and the private bar by helping people become more knowledgeable about the legal process and the resources which exist to help them.

B. Single point of entry and coordination of services

Wyoming lacks a location to find all available legal aid clinics and services. Existing legal aid programs and clinics operate independently and community organizations helping the income eligible have no ready source of legal support. One of the Center's statutory charges is to provide a "single point of entry" to legal aid resources. For a large rural state, there is no question that a website hosting all this information is critical to meeting the statutory objective. An immediate priority of the Center is developing a resource-rich website, capable of directing any Wyoming citizen to the organizations in their communities that can provide help. The Center envisions a website with links to all the civil legal aid services existing in the State, including the pro bono programs sponsored by the State Bar, Legal Aid of Wyoming, Inc., the UW law clinics, the Coalition against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault and other formal and informal programs that are hosted around the state. In addition to the relevant links, the website can provide enough information so that a website user will know if a particular provider may or may not be a viable resource to pursue. Additionally, the website will be a portal whereby lawyers and judges can request support from the Center or provide on-going comments, suggestion and ideas for improving access to justice in Wyoming. The website will, as quickly as possible, be filled with substantive legal content, including pro se packets, automated forms, perhaps a chat line for persons with questions, and other resources for people who cannot afford a lawyer but need a basic introduction to the legal system. Ideally, the Center's website can also serve as a gateway into the services of the private bar and the programs of the Wyoming State Bar.

C. Statewide reach

There are many places in Wyoming not directly served by any legal aid resources. Legal Aid of Wyoming, Inc., the federally funded program, has offices in Cheyenne, Casper and Lander, and serves the Wind River Indian Reservation. It is facing significant funding cutbacks, the implications of which have not yet been realized. Other communities in Wyoming have no resident program. Many have suggested that the Center establish offices in Gillette and Rock Springs to provide broader coverage of legal aid offices in Wyoming. Ensuring state-wide coverage for civil legal aid services is a priority of the Center, although the establishment of separate offices is expensive and therefore should be undertaken only upon demonstration of need. Initially, the Center expects its website to reach across the State, and the Center should be able to connect citizens in far-flung rural areas with lawyers or resources in their areas under the programs described below.

Wyoming's rural character poses special challenges for the Center. Typically, legal aid clinics are located in large urban areas, which make the provision of one-on-one legal services easier and cheaper to accomplish than, for example, connecting a client in Greybull or Farson to a legal aid office. The Center will never have sufficient resources to open law firm-type offices in every community, and the temptation to place offices in larger communities like Rock Springs and Gillette can lead to continued neglect of the many small communities in Wyoming where there are few lawyers but many who may need services. Existing legal aid programs in Cheyenne and Laramie have had success representing

individuals across the State, particularly when local lawyers can be retained through clinic supervision to assist. In part for this reason the Center has developed policies and contracts for the hiring of private attorneys on a reduced-fee basis for service to clients in smaller communities. Based upon the experience of these programs, the Center expects to expand legal help across the state, but will need to build the community-based network described below to support that effort. The uniquely rural character of Wyoming suggests the Center should work through local community-based organizations to reach the income eligible public rather than pursue the typical “walk-in” model of traditional urban clinics.

D. Direct legal services

An option for the Center is to spend the bulk of its available funds providing direct legal services to income eligible clients with full-time paid staff, as is commonly done by many civil legal service providers around the country. Under this “law-firm” model, a clinic hires full-time lawyers to represent clients who come to the clinic and are screened for income eligibility and then paired with Center attorneys. This is the model employed by Legal Aid of Wyoming, Inc., but there are significant issues to consider before adopting this model as the Center’s primary template.

First, under this model the Center would be required to spend considerable resources in developing client intake and case management systems. Having personnel answer the phones, screen calls to determine the nature of the need, qualify clients under the income limits, and route clients to appropriate legal resources is a significant undertaking on a daily basis. The Center would also have to spend considerable resources developing the necessary software to track input for case management and fiscal accountability. Legal Aid of Wyoming has already developed all these systems, and has considerable experience managing them, so the Center must seriously consider the wisdom of duplicating all those efforts and creating what would essentially be a competing legal aid clinic performing many of the same functions as Legal Aid of Wyoming. In part for these reasons, several interested stakeholders have urged the Center not to undertake direct “off the street” representation of clients.

Second, the provision of direct legal services requires the Center to develop policies that inform when and how direct representation is undertaken. There are subtle but important ethical considerations to navigate. For example, should the Center represent one side of a contested divorce? If that is done, should Center funds be used to hire a lawyer for the other side of a contested divorce, as some legal aid clinics do? Is it appropriate for the state to be effectively funding both sides of a private divorce? Ethical issues like these are frequent problems for legal aid clinics and are best avoided, or navigated, with the use of well-thought-out guidelines and policies that take time to develop.

Third, experience teaches that direct representation of clients for extended legal problems is expensive and time consuming. Legal Aid of Wyoming reports that its staff attorneys represent about 40-45 clients a year in extensive representation through the court system. Similarly, the Coalition against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault reports that its staff attorneys each handle about 20-30 cases per year, as these cases typically involve extended

litigation through the Court system. This means that extensive direct representation of clients in court by the Center would consume available funds without allowing the Center to reach a very large number of the income eligible. Not surprisingly, therefore, most legal aid clinics focus on providing brief consultations with people who need advice or explanations of their legal rights, rather than extensive one-on-one representation in court. In 2011, Legal Aid of Wyoming helped about 2,040 people, but most of these contacts were in the form of brief consultations, advice and limited action. Approximately 110 of those cases involved more extensive representation, with or without going to court. These numbers were achieved with a budget of about \$900,000 in 2011. As a result, if the Center were organized around a similar model, with its annual estimated revenues of about \$1.3 million, the Center might expect to serve about 2,400 people, the vast majority of whom would receive brief consults. An important long-term challenge facing the Center is evaluating whether it can make the biggest difference in Wyoming using the standard in-house clinic model, or whether it can stretch its dollars more effectively by devoting at least some of its resources to other projects, as discussed below.

Finally, the provision of direct legal services by the Center may inhibit broader pro bono participation by the State Bar. If private attorneys believe that the needs of low income persons are being “covered” by the Center it becomes more difficult to recruit and sustain pro bono volunteer services by the private bar. Many well-established legal aid clinics were initially built from a volunteer pro bono effort by the private bar, a history that does not exist in Wyoming given its extremely rural character. However, the Center is committed to working closely with the State Bar to grow, rather than replace, its on-going efforts to expand pro bono undertakings by the private bar and therefore believes priority should be given, at least in the early years, to developing programs which have the potential to expand sustained pro bono services by the private bar.

The Center is committed to providing direct legal representation to the income eligible, and will expect that all of its staff attorneys, wherever located, to regularly represent individual clients. For at least its early development, however, the Center intends to explore activities that are different than the standard “clinic” model, with the goal of leveraging its limited resources further than might be possible as a walk-in clinic. The Center’s funding and statutory authority counsel for the development of a statewide coordination program that promotes and improves pro se forms, facilitates the development of information resources for the public and works with existing organizations to leverage the services they already provide, rather than duplicate them. At least initially in 2012, the Center will therefore focus primarily upon the development of a state-wide community-based network (described below) to expand the reach of civil legal aid resources and to bring into the legal system groups and organizations that currently do not have access to civil legal aid in their areas. If this experiment in community based organization is successful, the Center hopes to reach on an annual basis thousands more than it can help as a walk-in clinic.

E. Community involvement

The Center’s initial 2011 strategic plan was committed to the core objective of growing “community based systems rather than develop a state-wide agency within the judicial

branch of government for direct delivery of legal services.” Subsequent investigation by the Center confirms that approach. Wyoming is a large rural state with many small communities, and lacks the large urban centers best served by the classic legal aid clinic model. Further, the funding available to the Center is not expected to support a significant number of offices around the state. Nor does the Center gain by duplicating many of the functions already undertaken by Legal Aid of Wyoming, which already has client intake and case management systems. The Center and Legal Aid of Wyoming should find ways to work together to avoid duplicating efforts while maximizing their respective limited resources.

For these reasons, the Center wants to experiment with an innovative idea that may be well suited for a large rural state. Specifically, the Center wants to locate, identify and develop relationships with existing community organizations across the state that already serve the income eligible and therefore know what those individuals need in the way of legal services. By working directly with community organizations, the Center hopes to leverage its existing resources and harness more private attorney and pro bono efforts to reach a larger number of citizens across a larger swath of Wyoming than would be possible with a standard legal aid clinic model.

For example, the Center can reach out to senior citizen centers around the state, where clinics could be held on simple wills, living wills, and Medicare or Medicaid benefits. Similarly, Center staff could work with community-based safe houses and social service providers who are already working with income qualified clientele to organize and encourage their participants to attend targeted sessions on specific legal topics. The Center’s goal would be to develop a list of community organizations throughout the state (at least several in each county) to partner with to provide legal services to the income eligible on a regular basis, with the staffing help of the private bar, thereby leveraging limited Center resources into a grassroots program stretching throughout the state.

Another example is afforded by Judge Kautz’s recent suggestion that regular clinics be held to educate the public on basic forms and procedures in divorce cases, where there is an increasing amount of pro se litigation occurring. Hosting regular pro se clinics is not something that the private bar is readily able to do by itself on a sustained basis. If, however, the Center and the State Bar jointly focused on supporting efforts like these to create and then establish a dependable system for private attorneys to attend, clinics like these may be built around the state and hosted regularly in each county. Center staff could organize the event, screen potential participants for income eligibility, take care of the administrative chores associated with finding facilities to host, and then publicize the event. Center attorneys could attend monthly evening clinics and assist the qualified public with the participation of local attorneys providing pro bono services. Once up and running in Converse County, such a program could largely be supported on a sustained basis by pro bono private volunteers, who can help allow the program to keep running while Center staff go on to another community, perhaps Gillette, to replicate the program there. Ideally, over time, programs like this could become established across the state, leveraging limited Center resources with pro bono or partially paid support from the private bar to reach a larger number of Wyoming citizens that could be served by a walk-in clinic.

The advantages of working with and through existing community-based organizations are many. First, organizations exist in most Wyoming communities that have already identified, and work with, the income eligible. Working with these organizations directly would reduce the burdens on the Center associated with client intake. It also helps identify clients with “skin in the game,” in the sense that they will be organized and accountable to the community organizations that already serve their needs. For example, the Center is currently test-piloting a program with CLIMB Wyoming, where CLIMB is having its members prepare to meet with Center-sponsored pro bono private lawyers to address specific topics of need, under circumstances where the clients are required to come prepared and then be responsible for taking action afterward. CLIMB will have its participants prepared for the session and be responsible for following up on the advice they get. In this fashion, CLIMB can work with the Center to define the services needed and organize a specific event, and then the Center can locate and recruit appropriate experts from the private bar to establish a regularly scheduled and focused program than can recur on a repeated basis in the future. Replicating this approach around the state, Center lawyers will travel to similar community organizations, learn their needs, and then work with them to provide targeted brief consults on a regular basis. This method will extend the Center’s reach, while providing a targeted and supported platform for pro bono efforts from the private bar, which can be leveraged around the state to create a lasting web of legal services for income eligible persons who would otherwise never enter the legal system. Over time, persons around the state will learn to contact the Center to have the Center support similar programs in their communities, and the Center’s website would carry a calendar of upcoming events across the state on a regular basis.

All of this is not to say that the Center should eschew providing direct legal services with its own clients on a case-by-case basis. Doing so will always be a part of what the Center does, and over time may become the principal activity of the Center. In the short term, however, the Center believes that enduring success is more likely to be achieved if it truly creates a “presence” throughout the state by partnering with community organizations. If the Center begins its existence as a sole provider of civil legal services it would be difficult to shift its focus elsewhere. Understanding that the need for legal services is great and the demand is high, the Center is not prepared to open the floodgates and operate in an environment where one is struggling to stay afloat. The creation of a new legal services entity affords the Center an opportunity to be something different and unique in the legal aid arena.

III. Specific Program Plans and Priorities for 2012

With these principles in mind, the Center has created the following strategic plan for 2012, which is dynamic so that it can be flexible, forward-thinking and creative, but also reliable, sustainable and of high quality. While the discussion below explains the detailed reasons for our new action plan, the bottom-line is to:

1. Hire at least two additional staff attorneys as soon as reasonably possible;
2. Begin a search for an Executive Director to have in place by July 1;

3. Develop policies and guidelines for direct representation by Center attorneys;
4. Begin direct representation from Legal Aid of Wyoming referrals;
5. Design, populate and load with content a comprehensive website by July 1;
6. Contract with professional firm to automate pro se forms; begin automation;
7. Work with Legal Aid of Wyoming to explore ways to promote both organizations and avoid duplication;
8. Canvass the state to develop a list of community organizations and court contacts with which the Center can work to develop a statewide network of contacts with the income eligible;
9. Locate, contract for and support the opening of an office by July 1, 2012;
10. Complete the “branding” process so the Center can have a recognizable logo established prior to networking;
11. Begin test-piloting community based programs (e.g., CLIMB, divorce clinics);
12. Begin test-piloting private attorney contracts and client referrals;
13. Conduct another round of grant funding;
14. Supervise current grants;
15. Evaluate potential locations for future Center offices;
16. Hire support staff for Center office;
17. Work with State Bar’s pro bono programs to expand private pro bono efforts;
18. Continue to meet with representatives at the UW Law School to determine the best way to work together;
19. Develop and regularly circulate an electronic newsletter to AJC stakeholders and legislators; and
20. Work with Supreme Court to support/facilitate pilot court facilitator projects.

IV. Working with Legal Aid of Wyoming

Legal Aid of Wyoming is the federally funded low-income legal aid clinic, and has offices in Cheyenne, Casper and Lander, serving the Wind River Reservation as well. This program has been through many changes over the years, and is currently facing federal budget cuts. It does, however, have many years of experience operating a legal aid clinic in Wyoming, and serves some of the same clientele targeted by the Center.

Ideally, the Center should find a way to coordinate, rather than duplicate, the services provided by Legal Aid of Wyoming. For example, Legal Aid of Wyoming has already purchased, and has experience with, case management software, conflicts database management, a call-in hotline, and other components of a legal aid program that the Center might consider operating on its own. As a new entity, the Center needs to explore ways to leverage the Legal Aid program and its experience, to support Center programs, assist Legal Aid, and to avoid unnecessary duplication of efforts. The Center therefore intends to explore the current systems and operations of Legal Aid, evaluate ways to leverage its programs and support its efforts, and identify ways to avoid unnecessary duplication of effort. The Center will make it a priority over the first six months of 2012 to develop a strong working relationship with Legal Aid, and will investigate ways to avoid duplicating costs and services already provided by legal Aid. The goal will be to develop a comprehensive plan for supporting and expanding the work of both organizations with a minimum of duplication. The Center Board's and the Center's staff will begin a sustained interaction with Legal Aid, with the goal of developing and integrating a plan for the two organizations to coordinate services and resources by July 1, 2012.

V. The Center Website

One statewide website that contains a wealth of relevant legal information, including links to other available resources, is an immediate priority. For many, the statewide website may be the only point of contact they have with the Center. Ideally the website is the first place individuals will go. In addition to resource links the website will host a statewide calendar that lists ongoing programs and pertinent events occurring throughout the state. This may include regularly-held pro se workshops, but also other events such as seasonal tax-filing clinics.

The Center has contracted with Cheyenne Technology, Inc. to design and develop a website for the Center. Initially, the website will need to load existing pro se forms, provide links to existing programs and services statewide, provide contact information for the Center, contain a calendar of upcoming clinics and seminars, provide a "hotline" number, explain income eligibility requirements, and otherwise direct persons to all applicable legal resources.

The Center's website should contain as much legal content as possible for the use of the income eligible. The website should serve as a legal guide for persons to consult, both to gain a basic understanding of the legal process and to identify more readily their own legal needs, so that they can pursue appropriate resources. Content on the website should be

sufficiently robust to educate people on the appropriate gateways into the legal process, both through the hiring of private lawyers and direction, as appropriate, to legal aid resources, including basic pro se forms and instructions. At the Supreme Court's request, the Center has begun the process of automating existing legal forms, and it is expected that web-based access to automated forms will greatly help individuals who need to pursue pro se relief. To fill the website with accurate and useful content, at an appropriate level of explanation, the Center has decided to contract with appropriate legal specialists for the drafting of website content in targeted legal areas.

The Center does not want to go "live" with its website until Center staffing is sufficient to support it and until the Center has its own office space and location. The Center is therefore targeting July 1, 2012 as its initiation of the website in conjunction with its other plans.

VI. Staffing and Office Space

Evaluation of the programs and priorities described above suggest the following minimum staffing needs for 2012. First, a staff attorney will be needed to develop the website, supervise efforts to load it with accurate content, support it, and oversee the development of automation programs to make the forms and content accessible to the public. While long term the website should not be a full time job for a staff attorney, the Center expects website development to be a time-intensive commitment for at least the first half of 2012.

Another staff attorney will be needed to develop the contracts, policies and systems necessary to work with Legal Aid of Wyoming, and to begin the development of an integrated hotline, client intake and referral system. The Center will need to develop policies governing client intake, quality legal representation, coordination of grants, supervision of private attorneys contracting with the Center, and other infrastructure projects necessary to establish appropriate operating policies and programs.

The Center also needs to begin reaching out to communities around the state to locate those local programs that can partner with the Center to address the unmet needs of the income eligible. Ideally, Center staff should be canvassing the state, meeting community leaders, promoting Center policies and objectives, getting to know local court personnel and judges, and otherwise formally developing a statewide network of contacts.

The Center also needs to locate and move into its own office space. A client-friendly and approachable facility should be located, if possible, on state-owned properties, to house an office with at least five full-time staff. Efforts are already underway to identify possibilities, and the goal will be to locate, arrange for, and move into separate facilities by July 1, 2012. This will require attention to the infrastructure needed to support a stand-alone facility, including computers and IT support, phones, copiers and other components necessary to support an office. The person responsible for this effort can also begin investigating the costs and possibilities of opening additional offices, perhaps in Rock Springs or Gillette, in 2013.

As soon as possible, the Center should also host community-based programs (like the experiment with CLIMB Wyoming), referring clients to private attorneys under contract with the Center, and otherwise starting at least limited direct representation based upon referrals routed through Legal Aid of Wyoming.

Canvassing all these objectives suggests the Center will need to hire two more lawyers as soon as possible and a paralegal/secretary by July 1, 2012. The Center should also begin the search for an Executive Director, hopefully to have someone in place by about July 1, 2012 when the Center is targeting to be ready to open for business.

VII. Continue the Work with Key Stakeholders

The Center should also continue developing relationships and projects with other legal service providers in the state. They are an invaluable resource not only for their expertise and knowledge, but also as an integral component of a statewide network. The communication between the Center and key stakeholders must remain continuous and open.

A. Access to Justice Commission

The Commission has the respect of all branches of government and has the ability to bring a broad range of players to the table. It was successful in obtaining funding to create the Center and its ongoing relationship is essential for the Center's success. The Commission will be continuing to address other issues that create barriers to justice. Any future AJC initiatives should be supported by the Center, so long as there is no statutory conflict. Additionally, the Center can make recommendations to the Commission as it gains awareness of barriers that are faced in various communities and certain topics come to the fore.

B. UW Law School

The Law School houses the Legal Services Clinic and the Domestic Violence Clinic, each of which is managed by a faculty director. Third-year law students receive class credit while representing low-income clients. The Domestic Violence Clinic works closely with the Wyoming Coalition for Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault. It would be great if the Center could be another option for third-year law students seeking practical experience. However, if the Center draws from the pool of students available at the Law School, it must be sure that the clinics are staffed first.

The Center can also create internship opportunities through the Law School for students who are not eligible to work in a clinic, such as first- and second-year students. Additionally, the Center should establish a fellowship position for post-graduates which would ensure a consistent stream of staff attorneys.

C. The Wyoming Bar Association

The Bar Association is in the best position to communicate with the statewide legal community and must be a core partner with the Center on all Center programs and initiatives. The Center has already met repeatedly with the State Bar Commissioners, all of whom have expressed a commitment to the Center and its statutory charge. The question now will be finding ways to leverage the Bar's resources so as to maximize the Center's reach, while finding ways to benefit the private bar by introducing more persons to the legal system. In 2012, the Center intends to begin development of a community-based model under which targeted populations can be approached and serviced based both on need and income eligibility. Ideally, much of the legal assistance can be provided by pro bono efforts of the private bar. The Center hopes to partner with the State Bar and its pro bono resources to create more opportunities for pro bono involvement of the private bar, and anticipates a number of projects will be designed and implemented over the coming year. Whether or not the Center ultimately evolves into a facilitator/coordinator or a standard "clinic" will depend in significant part upon whether the private bar can support sustained community based services organized by the Center, and so the model will begin development in 2012, working with the State Bar.

VIII. Self-help/Pro Se

There are individuals who represent themselves in legal matters, either by choice or necessity. For several years the Wyoming Supreme Court has provided pro se packets that can be downloaded and printed by parties who are not represented by an attorney. These packets have only been available for domestic relations cases. Although the packets can be quite useful, they are still fairly dense and cumbersome. They are also not strictly available to low-income litigants.

There are supporters around the state who would like to see the pro se process become more user-friendly. The Supreme Court has made it a priority to automate pro se forms. Interactive forms are easier to use than the current packets because they ask the party specific questions and enter the answers so that at the end of the interview a party can print a complete, court-ready form.

In 2012, the Center will prioritize the forms to be automated and contract with a professional firm to begin the automation process. The Center should begin meeting with groups around the state who are currently working towards improving the pro se process (such as the Domestic Relations Litigation Committee, Family Court Facilitator pilot project, Unauthorized Practice of Law Committee). Concurrently, the Center should arrange several "pro se workshops" around the state based on local needs and availability of volunteer instructors.

IX. Direct Representation: Staff Attorneys; PAI; and Pro Bono

The Center has been tasked with providing civil legal services to income-eligible individuals. There are various ways in which this can be achieved, but generally there are two approaches: 1) the Center can provide support for (financial, technological, etc.) and

help coordinate existing providers, thereby becoming more of a manager/facilitator; or 2) the Center can hire attorneys and/or contract with private attorneys who provide direct representation.

The primary concern with the first approach is that there are not many existing providers and for some who are providing civil legal services, their caseload is limited by available supervision (law clinics) therefore giving more money in the form of grants would not dramatically increase the number of clients served. To address this issue, the Center plans on developing a network of community based programs to facilitate addressing unmet needs in local communities, hopefully supported by the private bar.

In this “facilitator” mode, the Center hopes to reach far more individuals than it could using the classic “law clinic” model, but success in this effort will require support from the private bar. The most cost-effective way to provide direct legal representation is through the use of pro bono attorneys. Although pro bono recruitment has been less than successful in Wyoming, it is hoped that the Center’s existence and support may increase participation. The Center plans to work with the State Bar and individual bar associations to design and implement programs which have the potential to expand pro bono participation by the private bar. In the short term, the Center can create and administer a survey through the State Bar to gauge interest in different ways that attorneys can volunteer, begin meeting directly with local bar associations, test pilot projects in select areas, and create a database of potential volunteers and what they are willing to do.

The Center will not, however, rely solely on the “facilitator” model, but also begin experimenting with direct representation of clients, both with staff attorneys and by contract with the private bar. After talking with several states and civil legal service providers, the general consensus is that contracting with private attorneys is costly and requires a significant amount of oversight. There are certainly situations in which a private attorney would be the best use of the Center’s resources. However, it should be done sparingly so as not to undermine the pro bono efforts. The Center should have very specific guidelines for when a private attorney will be contracted with (isolated geographical area or a case requiring a lot of face-to-face interaction, etc.).

The Center will develop a database of attorneys who are willing to take on cases at a reduced fee. Attorneys who also agree to work on a pro bono basis will be given priority for a reduced-fee case selection.

X. Grants

The Center has already awarded four grants to existing providers, allowing them to expand their current services. Ideally the Center will continue to be a grantor, especially in situations where a particular grantee is in a better position to provide specific legal services. Currently the grants are awarded annually. Short-term, the Center will continue oversight of existing grants, including site visits and managing quarterly reports, target another in April, make award decisions in May so that current grantees will know whether

or not Center funds will be available after June, and sign contracts with a second round of grantees.

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