



The Supreme Court of Montana Access to Justice Commission
Standing Committee on Self-Represented Litigants
Strategic Plan and Priorities
February 2014

Vision: To achieve the fair and efficient resolution of unmet legal needs

1.0 EMPHASIS AREA: SELF-HELP RESOURCES AND TOOLS

1.1 All court users will have the necessary tools to navigate the court system

Priority: High

Timeline: Ongoing

1.1.A Inventory current self-help resources and tools

Priority: High

Timeline: Ongoing

Comment: The SCSRL will begin by gathering a list of materials available on Montana Court website and lawhelp.org website.

1.1.B Identify areas where SRLs currently lack information to successfully navigate the system.

Priority: High

Timeline: Ongoing

Comment: The SCSRL will begin by starting with information gathered by the court-help program and our data gathering project.

1.2 Support the court-help program

Priority: High

Timeline: Ongoing

Comment: The Committee recommends this strategy be adopted by the entire A2JC, including the Standing Committee on Communication and Outreach and the Standing Committee on Policy and Resources

1.2.A Observe its operation and, if necessary, recommend changes for its improvement or expansion

Priority: High

Timeline: Ongoing

1.2.B Advocate for permanent funding for the Court-Help program by the legislature

Priority: High

Timeline: 2015

Comment: This priority should be shared by the A2JC as a whole. This priority will require preparation for 2015 legislative session. If the legislature grants permanent funding then this priority would be completed in 2015. If not, this priority will continue.

1.3 Develop court forms and informational materials for SRL use

Priority: High

Timeline: Ongoing

Comment: The Form Sub-Committee puts in between 60 - 90 hours per month on form development.

1.3.A Develop a mechanism for ongoing development, review, and updating forms for SRLs use

Priority: High

Timeline: Ongoing

1.3.B Consider means to foster greater acceptance of forms by the legal community and the public

Priority: High

Timeline: Ongoing

1.3.C Develop webinars or other online informational materials on how to use forms

Priority: High

Timeline: Ongoing

Comment: Informational materials are currently in development. Webinars will be developed as time and funding permits.

1.4 Evaluate the value and feasibility of existing or future means of supporting SRLs.

Priority: Medium

Timeline: Ongoing

1.4.A Improve SRL access to all sponsored programs, including self-help services and pro bono programs

Priority: High

Timeline: Ongoing

1.4.B Toll-free hotline

Priority: Low

Timeline: Ongoing

1.4.C Web-based assistance, including webinars, video conferencing, automated forms, videos, and live chat

Priority: Medium

Timeline: Ongoing

Comment: Automated forms are a high priority, limited only by funding. Other web-based assistance will be added as we receive the necessary resources.

1.4.D Brochures and other publications

Priority: Medium

Timeline: Ongoing

1.4.E Other appropriate means identified by the Committee

Priority: Low

Timeline: Backdrop

Comment: This priority acts as a backdrop to the Committee's work. The Committee will take up individual goals as we identify items.

2.0 EMPHASIS AREA: EDUCATION AND TRAINING

2.1 All clerks of court and other judicial staff will understand how to assist SRLs without giving legal advice

2.1.A Develop training materials on the difference between legal information and legal advice

Priority: High

Timeline: December 2014

Comment: The Committee will review and revise current training materials. As appropriate, the Committee will develop new materials.

2.1.B Complete trainings on legal information vs advice, including live and online trainings

Priority: High

Timeline: Begin in 2015, ongoing

2.1.C ATJC endorsement on the training materials

Priority: High

Timeline: December 2014 or early 2015

2.2 The public, public service providers, attorneys, judges, and clerks will understand the SRL experience and the best practices for helping SRLs navigate the judicial system

2.2.A Create a consistent message for and about SRLs and how to improve our judicial system to help SRLs

Priority: Medium Timeline: Ongoing

2.2.B Create a tool kit for giving information on SRLs

Priority: Medium Timeline: 2015

2.2.C Create practice tips for attorneys who work with SRLs

Priority: Medium Timeline: 2015

Comment: These practice tips should address both attorneys who are helping the SRL (at a clinic or through LSR) or who are representing the opposing party.

2.2.D Establish communication method for regular updates to attorneys, judges, public on our work.

Priority: Medium Timeline: 2015

2.2.E Update SRL judicial bench book

Priority: Medium Timeline: 2015

2.2.F Encourage use of the SRL judicial bench book

Priority: Medium Timeline: 2015

2.2.G Create checklists or one page guides for working with SRLs

Priority: Medium Timeline: 2015

2.2.H Create training opportunities to show judiciary how to access local, state, and national resources

Priority: Medium Timeline: 2015

2.3 Create opportunities for the public to learn about the law and our judicial system

2.3.A Develop Law in the Library Trainings

Priority: Medium Timeline: 2015

Comment: The Committee expects to run these types of events around Law Day activities.

2.3.B Conduct trainings for librarians and public service providers

Priority: Medium

Timeline: 2015

3.0 EMPHASIS AREA: COLLABORATION AND COMMUNICATION

3.1 Individuals will have the ability to contact the SCSRL

3.1.A Develop portal for public contact

Priority: Low

Timeline: 2015

Comment: It is important that there is a method for individuals to contact the SCSRL about its work. For example, input on forms currently in use.

3.2 Promote collaboration across agencies, governments, and organizations

3.2.A Identify current and potential partners

Priority: Medium

Timeline: 2015 and ongoing

3.2.B Actively partner with other agencies, governments, and organizations, including tribes, public service organizations, and local organizations

Priority: Low-High

Timeline: Ongoing

Comment: The Committee identifies this goal as a high priority for current projects and as a low priority for new projects.

3.3 Create a State of Montana SRL report

Priority: Low

Timeline: 2016

3.3.A Identify the purpose of the SRL report

3.3.B Identify areas to be covered in the report

3.3.C Analyze data gathered from judges and clerks

3.3.D Complete and analyze data gathering from lawyers and SRLs

3.3.E Analyze the causes of the significant increases in the SRLS numbers

3.3.F Write report, including executive summary and recommendations

4.0 EMPHASIS AREA: LEGISLATIVE AND RULE CHANGES

Priority: Medium

Timeline: Ongoing

Comment: The Committee will advocate for changes as we identify them.

- 4.1 Identify and advocate appropriate changes to judicial canons**
- 4.2 Identify and advocate appropriate changes to Rules of Professional Responsibility**
- 4.3 Identify and advocate for legislative changes to specific areas of the law**
- 4.4 Identify and advocate for possible changes to court rules**
- 4.5 Identify areas for improvement for uniformity across judicial districts**