



The Supreme Court of Montana Access to Justice Commission Standing Committee on Self-Represented Litigants

June 24, 2014

Re: Standing Committee on Self-Represented Litigants (SCSRL) Report

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

1. Strategic Plan.

In February 2013, the SCSRL submitted its strategic plan to the A2JC. Since then the SCSRL created working groups for each emphasis area: 1) self-help resources and tools, 2) education and training, 3) collaboration and communication, and 4) legislative and rule changes. The working groups are developing goals to implement the proposed strategic plan.

2. Forms.

The SCSRL released the dissolution with minor children packet for public comment. A link to the proposed forms is on the Supreme Courts home page. You can find the forms on the SCSRL web page:

[http://courts.mt.gov/supreme/boards/self represented litigants/default.mcp](http://courts.mt.gov/supreme/boards/self%20represented%20litigants/default.mcp)

After the public comment period, we will complete informational materials, including an introduction to family law and separate instructions for completing the forms. We expect to review the public comment, make appropriate changes, and formally approve the forms by September.

Finally, we are looking at means to automate these forms, including both fillable .pdf and Hot Docs, the program used by Montana Legal Services. MLSA has submitted a TIG grant to compete this part of the project.

3. Court Help Program

"The Court Help Program is designed to better meet the legal needs of Montana citizens through assisting self represented litigants and enhancing pro bono opportunities."¹

¹ Court Help Program Update Winter 2014

The Court Help Program recently released its Spring 2014 update. We are asking members of the A2JC to review the Court Help Program distribution list and to distribute the updates to individuals or organizations that would be interested.

The Court Help Program is about to begin recruiting for up to 6 positions across the state. Additional statewide programs recruiting AmeriCorps are MLSA, State Bar, and the Attorney General's Office of Consumer Protection.

AmeriCorps State positions require a high school diploma and are open to people of all ages. Benefits include a yearly education award that can be applied to student loan debt or college tuition. The positions are for approximately 40 hour work week with vacation. AmeriCorps State members may have supplemental employment or attend school during their term.

4. Contact Information

The Standing Committee on Self-Represented Litigants has a new state email account: scsrl@mt.gov.

5. Grant Opportunity

"Thanks to Lisa Mecklenberg-Jackson, the State Law Library acquired grant funds through the National Center for State Courts, for Self Represented Litigant Committee Chair, Judge Michele Snowberger, and Committee Member, Erin Farris- Olsen, to participate in a seminar featuring New York State's Access to Justice Program. Judge Snowberger and Ms. Farris-Olsen visited the Help Center located in Bronx, New York and studied the development of interactive forms using A2J software as well as best practices for access to justice programs. The Standing Committee is excited to assist Court Help in program planning and integrating some of the ideas explored in New York." ²

6. Justice Index

The National Center for Access to Justice at Cardoza Law School released the Justice Index. You can find it at justiceindex.org.

The Justice Index reviewed four areas: Number of Attorneys for People in Poverty, Self-Representation, Language Assistance, and Disability Assistance. Montana's composite score is 32.9. In the Self-Representation area, Montana received a score of 55.4. The Office of the Court Administrator recently gave additional information on Montana's Access to Justice efforts. Hopefully, this will improve our scoring.

² *Court Help Program Update, Spring 2014*

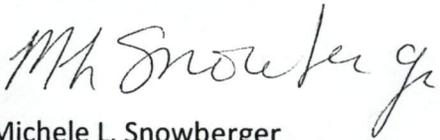
The SCSRL is reviewing the information on the index to determine if the SCSRL strategic plan aligns with the purpose of this index.

Attached are the following:

- *Court Help Program Update, Spring 2014*
- *Court Help Program Distribution List*
- SCSRL Strategic Plan and Priorities with Goals

If you have questions or concerns about the Committee or its work, please contact me or any committee member.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mh Snowberger". The signature is written in a cursive, somewhat stylized font.

Michele L. Snowberger
Standing Committee on Self-Represented Litigant Chair



The Supreme Court of Montana Access to Justice Commission
Standing Committee on Self-Represented Litigants
Strategic Plan and Priorities, and Goals
June 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 A Goal 1 Develop an internal use resource tool based on listed sites (DRM, PLC, Montana AG's office, MSU Extension, Montana's Fair Housing, Legal Services Developer). This tool will include a summary that clarifies which topic each resource provider assists in.

Responsible Party: AmeriCorps JFM Members

Timeline: January 1, 2015

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.

1.1 B Goal 1 Survey Court Help Staff.

Responsible Party: Erin Farris
Timeline: July 30, 2014

1.1 B Goal 2 Create Survey for Court Help Staff.

Responsible Party: August S.
Timeline: June 16, 2014

1.1 B Goal 3 Analyze data from judge & clerk's survey and court help data and write report for SCSRL Committee.

Responsible Party: August S.
Timeline: September 19, 2014

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 A Goal 1 Each member of the SCSRL will become familiar with the operations of their local Court Help Center. For example, visit your local self-help center. Meet all local staff and discuss their jobs with them. What do they do most often and what are the primary challenges serving in their community. You may also choose to volunteer in the center for a few hours a month.

Responsible Party: All SCSRL members
Timeline: July 30, 2014

1.2 A Goal 2 Discuss observations from previous goal with SCSRL as a whole.

Responsible Party: All SCSRL members

Timeline: Fall 2014 meeting

1.2 A Goal 3 Provide suggestions on improvements and funding opportunities on a center by center basis. Suggestions may be for local programs or statewide.

Responsible Party: All SCSRL members

Timeline: ongoing

1.2 A Goal 4 Evaluate the organizational structure of the Court Help Program.

Responsible Party: All SCSRL members

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.

1.2 B Goal 1 Develop a media fact sheet-concise effort for legislature or before.

Responsible Party: Erin F.

Timeline: Fall 2014, immediate and ongoing

1.2 B Goal 2 Each member will become an advocate for the center in their community.

Responsible Party: All SCSRL members

Timeline: Fall 2014, immediate and ongoing

1.2 B Goal 3 **Develop legislative strategy in collaboration with other Standing Committees.**

Responsible Party: Michele S.

Timeline: Fall 2014, immediate and ongoing

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 A Goal 1 Create a mechanism for members of the public to contact the SCSRL. For example, create a state email account.

Responsible Party: Form Sub-Committee

Timeline: 30 days

1.3 A Goal 2 Create Form Development Policy Manual, to include:

- Priority assessment for new form development
- Form development process
- Contact and comment protocol
- Review cycle schedule. For example, three or five year review cycle

Responsible Party: Form Sub-Committee

Timeline: End of 2014

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

Priority: High

Timeline: Ongoing

1.3 B Goal 1 Creation of Form Development Policy Manual
A good structure will give the judiciary, practitioners, and the public confidence in the form development process. See goal above

1.3 B Goal 2 Develop a methodology to encourage and appropriately respond to public comment.

Responsible Party: Form Sub-Committee

Timeline: End of 2014

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.

1.3 C Goal 1 Develop structured presentations for judiciary, practitioners, and public on how to use forms

Responsible Party: Form Sub-Committee

Timeline: End of 2014

1.3 C Goal 2 Review license “not for commercial use” to determine if this assists or hinders practitioners from using forms

Responsible Party: Form Sub-Committee

Timeline: September 2014

1.3 C Goal 3 Develop plan to connect with local bar leadership and appropriate Montana Bar Association Section

Responsible Party: Form Sub-Committee

Timeline: End of 2014

1.3 C Goal 4 Track national use of court approved forms, including use of mandatory forms

Responsible Party: Form Sub-Committee

Timeline: Ongoing

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 A Goal 1 Increase outreach to public including which programs are available statewide.

Responsible Party: Self-Help Working Group will monitor and bring things back to SCSRL as needed.
Timeline: ongoing

1.4 A Goal 2 To keep SHLC in the courthouses or closely located and keeping the conversation open through regular evaluation and review of data.

Responsible Party: Self-Help Working Group will monitor and bring things back to SCSRL as needed.
Timeline: ongoing

1.4 A Goal 1 Ongoing Education to Judiciary.

Responsible Party: Michele S.
Timeline: June 12, 2014

1.4 A Goal 1 Improve coordination between service providers.

Responsible Party: Self-Help Working Group will monitor and bring things back to SCSRL as needed.
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

Timeline: December 2014

2.1.C A2JC endorsement on the training materials

Priority: High Timeline: December 2014 or early 2015

2.1 C Goal 1 Receive A2JC endorsement at next Commission Meeting.

Responsible Party: Michele S.

Timeline: Fall 2014 meeting

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 cannons
- 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



Court Help Program Update

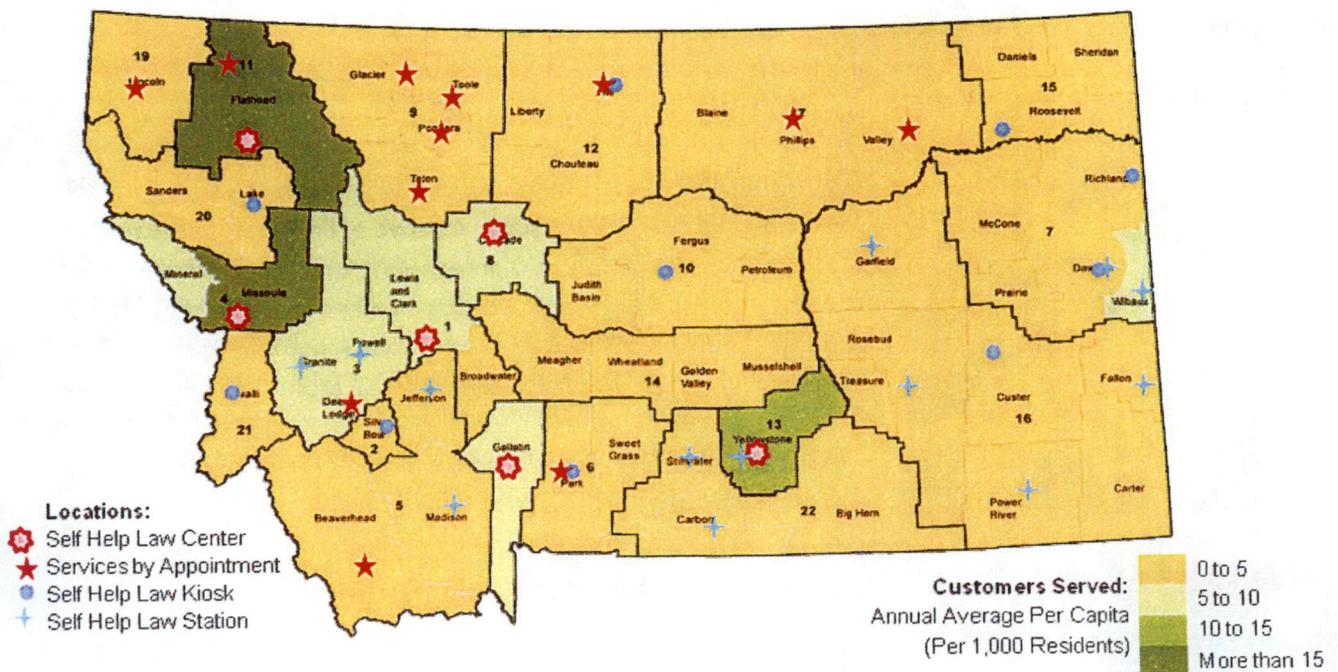
Spring 2014

The following summarizes the operations of the Court Help Program of the Montana Supreme Court. The Court Help Program is designed to better meet the legal needs of Montana citizens through assisting self represented litigants and enhancing pro bono opportunities.

Court Help Program Self Help Law Centers assist Montanans in acquiring legal information and resources to meet their legal needs. In addition to directing customers to attorney and agency referral resources, the Court Help Program is equipped to provide legal forms and assist self-represented litigants in successfully filing court documents. The Court Help Program Self Help Law Centers have served Montanans on over 6,200 occasions since January 2014. Approximately eighty percent of self help customers are seeking assistance in a family law or child support matter. Ninety three percent of customers indicate they are seeking legal forms or instructional information while approximately 682 visits were for attorney referral resources.

Updated Court Help Services

Over the last year we were able to expand our services by adding three new Self Help Kiosks in Park, Hill, and Dawson counties as well as numerous self help stations throughout eastern Montana. Here is a map of our service locations and break down of customers served per capita.



For more information about self help services near you visit our interactive website www.courts.mt.gov.



Pro Bono Spotlight



“Spring is nature’s way of saying, ‘Let’s party!’” – Robin Williams. And, I offer the perfect reason to celebrate! Each spring, the First Judicial District bestows their annual pro bono awards upon some incredibly deserving individuals. These 2014 recipients are emblematic of everything that is good in the legal profession. The humble nature and commitment to those less fortunate are often the very innate characteristics that move them to help. May it inspire more to join their in their ranks. Thank you for your service. Salute.

First Judicial District Pro Bono Award Recipients



Alissa Chambers, Esq.
*Crowley Fleck Law Firm
Helena Office*



Michael Fanning, Esq.
*Special Assistant Attorney General
(and Boston Marathon finisher!)*



Erin Farris-Olsen, Esq.
Law Office of Erin Farris-Olsen

Access to Justice Standing Committee examines New York Court System...

Thanks to Lisa Mecklenberg-Jackson, the State Law Library acquired grant funds through the National Center for State Courts, for Self Represented Litigant Committee Chair, Judge Michele Snowberger, and Committee Member, Erin Farris-Olsen, to participate in a seminar featuring New York State’s Access to Justice Program. Judge Snowberger and Ms. Farris-Olsen visited the Help Center located in Bronx, New York and studied the development of interactive forms using A2J software as well as best practices for access to justice programs. The Standing Committee is excited to assist Court Help in program planning and integrating some of the ideas explored in New York.

Welcome Catherine Baker!



Catherine Baker has decided to join our program as the new Self Help Law Facilitator in Gallatin County. A native of Bozeman, Catherine has two bachelor’s degrees from Montana State University including a B.A. in Political Science and B.S. in Sociology. Catherine earned her J.D. from Gonzaga School of Law in 2013. While in law school she was president of the Criminal Law Society and secretary of the Multi-Cultural Law Caucus. Catherine also worked in the Indian Law Clinic. Her passion for the public interest and extensive background has already demonstrated a substantial contribution to our Court Help team.

New!!! Dissolution with Children Forms Open for Public Comment...

Please take a moment to review the new proposed revised Dissolution with Children Forms on the Court’s website: http://courts.mt.gov/supreme/boards/self_represented_litigants. Email comments and suggestions to the Standing Committee: SCSLRS@mt.gov

Court Help Program Update Distribution List

Last Update November 2013

Title, Name	Contact	Request
Court Help Program	Contact List	Please circulate this update to program stakeholders and collaborating organizations in your area.
SRL Committee Chair, Michele Snowberger	MSnowberger@mt.gov	Please circulate this update to members of the Access to Justice Commission's Standing Committee on Self Represented Litigants.
Access to Justice Commission Chair, Beth Baker	bbaker@mt.gov	Please circulate this update to members of the Montana Supreme Court Access to Justice Commission.
Montana Supreme Court Chief, Mike McGrath	mmcgrath@mt.gov	Please circulate this update to members of the Montana Supreme Court
Montana State Bar, President Chris Manos	cmanos@montanabar.org	Please circulate this update to the State Bar Board of Trustees and local bar presidents.
Montana State Bar Justice Initiatives Committee, Chair Abigail St. Lawrence	Abigail.stlawrence@gmail.com	Please circulate this update to the State Bar Justice Initiatives Committee.
Montana Legal Services Association, Tracie Poindexter	tpoindex@mtlsa.org	Please circulate this update to the staff at Montana Legal Services Association.
Governor's Office of Community Service, Jim Auer	JAuer2@mt.gov	Please circulate this update to the Governor's Office of Community service and collaborating service organizations as you see fit.
Dept of Justice, Matt Dale	madale@mt.gov	Please circulate this update to the Department of Justice and collaborating service organizations as you see fit.
Governor's Office: Ali Bovingdon, Gov Office Tim Burton, Gov Office	ABovingdon@mt.gov TBurton@mt.gov	Please circulate this update to the Governor's office and collaborating entities as you see fit.
Legislative Services, Rachel Weiss	RWeiss@mt.gov	Please circulate this update to the staff at Legislative Services as you see fit.
Legislators Rep. Steve Gibson Rep. Randy Brodehl Sen. Edward Walker Sen. Eric Moore	stevedgibson52@gmail.com brodehl@centurytel.net ewalker@edwalker2010.com mail@SenatorEricMoore.com	<i>No request</i>

Rep. Kim Dudik Sen. Mitch Tropila	Kimberly.dudik@gmail.com Tropila@mt.net	
Other: Greg DeWitt Taryn Purdy Brent Doig Dan Villa	gcdewitt@mt.gov <u>tpurdy@mt.gov</u> <u>bdoig@mt.gov</u> DVilla@mt.gov	<i>No Request</i>

Message:

Hello [NAME],

Attached you will find our Court Help Program [season] Program Update which highlights our _____, _____, and _____. [REQUEST]. Quarterly updates and additional program information may be found on our Court Help Program Website: www.courts.mt.gov/selfhelp.

Thank you for your ongoing support!