

Working Group II: Foundational Services

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Inventory Assessment: The Working Group reviewed existing resources in New York State for all components, and comparatively studied efforts and resources in other states to inform our priority-setting. The inventory assessment yielded the following information:

- The state's **Help Centers** in various courthouses and community centers and online resources are very effective, but there are very few of them and there is no plan for statewide expansion.
- New York provides extensive, free language services in most courts and has committed to do more. The court's March 2017 **Language Access Plan** provides a road-map to improve those services; more can be done with respect to translation services.
- There has been significant progress in developing **plain language forms** and other court documents, but there is no formal plan to continue that progress. Plain language/doc assembly can be further integrated with the courts' case management systems (CMS).

Priority-Setting and Strategic Action Points:

Help Centers: Help Centers and on-line resources have the potential to provide essential services to litigants who have difficulty navigating the court system. The Centers and/or the availability of on-line resources should be expanded, following guidance and standards set by OCA, and should include both physical locations and access to online resources.

Questions: What are the capabilities of the ideal Help Center, and which of those are essential? How can we plan for and track progress in building Help Centers in every court in the state? How do we find resources for Help Centers? What is the best way to develop and make online resources accessible?

Interpretation Services: The courts will begin implementing its Language Access plan this year. The availability of free interpreting services to all who need them must be clear to all litigants. Courts need more qualified interpreters, and improved testing protocols. Judges and court staff need annual training on working with interpreters. Legal terminology interpretations should be standard throughout the court system.

Courts also experience a critical need for expanded professional translation services. All plain language documents need professional translations. A common dictionary for common legal terms may also be useful.

Questions: How can we ensure the implementation of the Language Access Plan? What language services are most important? What, if anything, is missing from the Plan? What translation services are most critical to provide?

Plain language forms: All proposed court forms should be reviewed by a plain language office/expert; plain language training should be provided for all personnel involved in form creation. The state needs “official” or “standard” plain language forms for all case types. Efforts to revise Family Court forms into plain language should continue. Landlord/tenant forms should be the next priority. We should integrate self-help forms with the court’s case management system (e.g., e-filing).

Questions: What needs to happen before these programs and action points could be developed? What are the procedural barriers to setting plain language standards and reviews for court forms? How can we expand, expedite and improve current efforts? What are the highest priorities for CMS integration, and how can we accomplish it?

Additional Questions for the Group

- What guidance/mandates would be helpful?
- How should we prioritize—and then fund—these implementation efforts?
- What concerns are there about expansion of resources in these areas?