Technology Assisted Forms

Project Plan – Summary – 10/8/2018

Goal: to provide free, accessible, online tools for people without lawyers to find and complete the forms they need to succeed in family court.

People and Roles

- **Funder**: Office of Civil Legal Aid (OCLA), James Bamberger, Director
- **Project Management**: Northwest Justice Project (NJP), Laurie Garber, Project Manager; Sue Encherman, administrator for LSC-TIG grant
- **Contractor**: Pro Bono Net (PBN): Mark O'Brien, Executive Director, and Claudia Johnson, Law Help Interactive (LHI) Program Manager
- **Subcontractor**: Capstone Practice Systems (Capstone): Marc Lauritsen, President
- **Advisory Committee**: Hon. Susan Amini, King County Superior Court, Chairperson

Description

The Technology Assisted Forms Project will create a free online system of interactive plain language interviews to generate the highest priority mandatory family law forms in Washington. The purpose of the system is to help unrepresented litigants find and complete the forms they need to succeed in family court.

The Office of Civil Legal Aid (OCLA) will contract with Pro Bono Net (PBN) and subcontractor Capstone Practice Systems (Capstone) to develop, test, host and support the document assembly system. Capstone will program the interviews and templates on HotDocs software. PBN will host the interviews and assemble documents on their LawHelpInteractive (LHI) platform. Users will access the interviews via links from WashingtonLawHelp.org.

Northwest Justice Project (NJP) will provide a Project Manager with funding from a Legal Services Corporation Technology Innovation Grant (LSC-TIG). The Project Manager is also a family law and plain language expert who will edit interview language and create supporting and instructional content with help from other NJP staff. The NJP webmaster will create the public access pages for the project on WashingtonLawHelp.

The Access to Justice Board has established a Technology Assisted Forms Advisory Committee comprised of justice system stakeholders. The Advisory Committee will provide guidance and assistance to the Project Manager, monitor progress, and oversee the evaluation of the project.

The WashingtonLawHelp 'jump off' pages will include information to orient the user about when and how each interview should be used, how long it will take, and what type of information the user will need to provide. The user will follow a link to start the interview on LHI. On the LHI website, users can choose to do forms anonymously or create password protected accounts to save their answers. Those who create accounts can return and edit their saved answers after ending a session; anonymous users cannot.

The interview questions and instructions that accompany the completed forms will be written in plain language and will include help text and links to additional resources. The forms themselves will be the current versions of the plain language mandatory family law forms adopted by the state Pattern Forms Committee in 2016.

The end product for each interview will be a completed bundle of family law forms and instructions to accomplish a specific task in a family law case. Interviews will be created for both parties and all procedural postures (e.g., filing a new case, responding, moving for temporary orders, finishing a case). The user will be able to assemble, download, save and print their documents. Some interviews will assemble a single document; others will assemble multiple documents and may link to secondary interviews.

The Project Manager, PBN and Capstone will make design choices guided by project goals and the proposed ATJ Technology Court Rules submitted to the Supreme Court. Capstone will program the interviews with branching logic to minimize the number of questions the user must answer and to avoid generating unnecessary forms during a session. A user who has saved their answers from one interview can use those answers when starting a second interview to avoid retyping repeat information. However, users will have the opportunity to change previous answers if the information or choices have changed. In the course of a session, users will be able to change their answers and assemble their documents as many times as needed.

The interviews and supporting orientation and instructional content will all be thoroughly tested before public release. Capstone will do the initial testing, followed by NJP staff and volunteers. The Project Manager will share each group of interviews with justice system stakeholders for testing, with feedback to be collected via online tools. The Project Manager will conduct in-person testing with target end-users at least two times during the automation phase.

The Project Manager will coordinate with the Administrative Office of the Courts to place appropriate links from the courts' mandatory forms webpage to the interview jump off pages on WashingtonLawHelp. The Advisory Committee will support the Project Manager in outreach efforts to inform stakeholders and the public about the Project.

The Project Manager will give regular reports to the Advisory Committee and funders detailing progress on the work plan and deliverables, identifying obstacles to meeting deadlines, and

recommending changes, if any, in anticipated timelines. The Advisory Committee will help create and implement a plan for evaluating the project.

NJP hired the Project Manager to begin work in July 2018. OCLA contracted with Pro Bono Net and subcontractor Capstone to work with the Project Manager in an intensive planning phase from July through September 2018. The execution phase of the project will begin on October 1, 2018, and finish by June 30, 2020.

Scope of Work

During the planning phase, the Project Manager identified 67 forms in 27 interviews as the targets for automation. These interviews will be be released in 12 groups sequentially over the remaining 22 months of the project as itemized on the proposed Interview-Bundle List (tab 1 – Top 12). This target is subject to review and approval by the Advisory Committee. The Project Manager will report on progress towards this target throughout the project, and will revise the target if necessary.

The first 9 groups cover the highest priority forms needed for divorce with and without children, parenting plans and child support for unmarried parents, and domestic violence protection orders – all from start to finish (including temporary orders) and from either party's perspective (petitioner and respondent). Groups 10-12 cover some of the medium priority forms including modification of parenting plans and renewing DV protection orders.

The Project Manager initially reviewed 125 forms that could be automated in 52 interviews and released in 20 groups. (See Interview-Bundle List at tab 2 – All 20.) She narrowed the scope of the project to 67 forms to stay within budget and allow adequate time for testing and to create all of the supporting orientation and instructional content for each interview. The Project Manager prioritized based on these criteria:

- Used in high volume by target user (unrepresented, low-income litigant)
- Necessary to complete an average case
- Important for litigant safety
- Stable (unlikely to change)

The Project Manager consulted Pierce County filing data to determine the most commonly filed types of cases, then balanced that data against the other three factors. For example, Petitions to Decide Parentage are relatively high volume filings, but the majority are filed by Prosecuting Attorneys on behalf of the state, not by unrepresented litigants. Moreover, Washington just adopted a new Uniform Parentage Act and new mandatory forms are still under development. For both those reasons, forms to decide parentage were designated a low priority.

Once the forms were prioritized, the Project Manager bundled the forms into logical interview groups so that each interview produces a complete set of forms for a discrete stage of the prioritized case types. Many forms will repeat across bundles because they are used in more than one type of case or at more than one stage of a case. The bundle list includes all of the forms that could possibly be generated by an interview; however, in practice the interview will only generate the forms indicated by the user's answers to questions. Several interviews will also direct users to a secondary interview to complete additional forms if necessary.

Work Plan

Project partners will undertake the activities described in detail in the Work Plan to achieve the following goals in each phase:

- Ramp Up
    - Finalize interview sequencing and bundles for priority forms.
    - Set interview design standards, informed by project goals, WA Tech Principles, and practical constraints.
    - Create accessible entry points for users to find interviews on WashingtonLawHelp.
    - Standardize support materials and user experience to maximize interview completion for target users.
    - Prepare for thorough, three-tiered testing of interviews and supporting content by staff, stakeholders and end users.
    - Develop business requirements with PBN to implement high priority LHI platform enhancements that improve the user experience with complex interviews and bundles.
- Automation & Testing
    - Automate highest priority forms into interactive interviews with supporting content (jump off page, FAQ, output instructions, next steps).
    - Thoroughly test interviews and assemblies for accuracy and usability in three tiers: with staff, stakeholders and end users.
    - Publish interviews on WashingtonLawHelp/LHI; troubleshoot.
- Outreach
    - Engage with target users and stakeholders to build support, test/improve interviews, and increase utilization.
    - Improve users' ability to identify and locate the right interview for their situation.
- Administration & Evaluation
    - Keep funders and stakeholders informed and engaged.
    - Make efficient use of A2J Tech Fellow.
    - Evaluate project impact; Find out if interviews are reaching target users.

- Sustainability
    - Develop local HotDocs programming capacity to maintain interviews after project completion.

Timeline

The TAF Project Timeline sets a proposed schedule for completing the activities detailed in the Work Plan between October 2018 and June 2020. This timeline is subject to review and approval by the Advisory Committee. The Project Manager will report on progress towards projected completion dates throughout the project, and will revise the timeline if necessary.

Budget

The state legislature appropriated $550,000 to this project for the July 2018 – June 2020 biennium to be administered by the Office of Civil Legal Aid. OCLA paid $16,870 to PBN/Capstone for work performed in the planning phase from July through September 2018. OCLA will reserve $72,330 for contingencies, testing and evaluation expenses, and to cover the costs of hiring and providing software for a local part-time developer. The remaining $460,800 will be allocated to the contract with PBN/Capstone per their Phase II Proposal dated 10/8/18.

Northwest Justice Project received a Legal Services Corporation – Technology Innovation Grant (TIG) of $187,450 to cover the cost of the TAF Project Manager. NJP will provide additional staff support for plain language content, user testing, and enhancements to WashingtonLawHelp as in-kind support to the project.

Budget Summary:

State funding administered by OCLA	
Phase I - planning contract with PBN/Capstone	16,870
Phase II - execution contract with PBN/Capstone	460,800
Reserve	72,330
Subtotal - State funding	550,000
LSC-TIG funding administered by NJP - Project Manager	187,450
Total Project Budget	737,450