



## **Justice Infrastructure Project**

### **Legal Information and Referral for the Public: Consulting Group Recommendations**

**March 2026**

# Executive Summary

## Background

In late 2022, interest rates began to increase steeply as the Federal Reserve sought to contain inflation, which led to historic IOLA revenue growth. Recognizing that this increased revenue presented a generational opportunity to enhance the delivery system of civil legal aid in New York, the IOLA Board of Trustees endorsed the Justice Infrastructure Project, which seeks to ensure that every New Yorker with a legal problem has clear and timely access to high quality legal information, advice, and representation. The Project aims to accomplish this goal by working to increase **coordination**, **innovation**, and **capacity** of the civil legal services sector.

Over the course of 2024, IOLA engaged in significant community engagement across the state and researched initiatives across the country on how best to improve the civil legal services ecosystem. Ultimately, two goals were identified: a resurrected and modern **Statewide Support** function for legal service providers and an integrated **Legal Information and Referral** tool for the public.

## Legal Information and Referral for the Public

IOLA's vision for Legal Information and Referral for the Public contemplates a statewide function intended to foster an integrated ecosystem of consistent, reliable, comprehensive and up-to-date information and advice for critical and complex life problems, including legal problems. Members of the public (help seekers and people helping them) would experience this as an easily accessible entry point from which they would receive expert guidance to navigate a problem.

In September 2025, IOLA launched four Consulting Groups that would provide recommendations to IOLA as it considers priority actions to realize the Justice Infrastructure Project's Vision. The four Consulting Groups focused on one of four interdependent topics: User Experience, Community Engagement, Directory, and Governance.

Each Consulting Group was comprised of 12–15 people, primarily from the legal services community in New York. They convened six times over the course of six months, concluding in February 2026. IOLA's Project Manager for its Justice Infrastructure Project, Neil Steinkamp, facilitated all Consulting Group discussions, supported by IOLA staff.

Three nationally recognized subject matter experts supported the Consulting Groups, offering unique perspectives and questions:

- ❖ **Rebecca Sandefur**, Arizona State University;
- ❖ **Margaret Hagan**, Stanford University; and
- ❖ **Kathryne Young**, George Washington University Law School.

In addition, Greg Bloom, founder of Open Referral and Senior Director of Strategy and Partnerships for Inform USA, assisted in the discussions regarding Directory at the August 2025 Summit and has been available for assistance for the Directory Consulting Group.

## **Core Concepts from the Consulting Group Discussions**

The Consulting Groups developed over 100 recommendations, which are set out in the full report. The following key themes emerged.

### **User Experience**

- Trust and transparency must be built into every element of the user experience.
- An integrated, statewide service model must weave together multiple human roles, including lawyers, community helpers, and social workers, to ensure technology amplifies rather than replaces human capacity.
- Technology should be designed to streamline intake and referral through narrative-based interfaces that are nimble, accessible across multiple formats and languages, and capable of routing users to available human assistance when complexity, urgency, or risk is identified.
- A federated knowledge management platform should be developed to enable consistent, continuous, and coordinated service across the full user journey.
- Development should include iterative, carefully scoped pilots and be adaptive to rapid technological and social change.

### **Community Engagement**

- Community-based helpers supported with comprehensive wayfinding tools, a knowledge backbone, supervision structures, and tiered training models that build competency, enable escalation, and ensure accuracy should be integrated in the service delivery model.
- Effective community engagement requires a sustained physical presence in trusted locations such as libraries and Legal Hand-style storefronts, complemented by regular outreach activities, to reach help-seekers where they are and provide private, accessible, in-person assistance.
- Community-based organizations should be actively involved in the design, development, implementation, and evaluation of the system.

- Peer-to-peer training networks, consistent data collection, and coordinated learning across helpers statewide will create a self-improving system that can identify unmet needs, adapt to local circumstances, and continuously refine the quality and reach of community-based assistance.
- Comprehensive statewide and local outreach campaigns are essential to raise awareness and drive adoption of new tools, particularly in rural areas and among vulnerable populations.

## Directory

- A comprehensive, authoritative, statewide directory of legal services resources should include real-time information on availability, eligibility, intake processes, language access, and services not offered so that users and helpers never need to contact an organization simply to learn whether help is available.
- Rather than a single centralized website, the directory should function as interoperable infrastructure—accurate, reliable data that can be integrated into multiple platforms, tools, and systems—with legal aid organizations required to submit information only once, and interoperability enabling that data to flow across systems.
- Diagnosis tools must use a consistent, collaboratively developed taxonomy and a holistic assessment process so that users receive accurate, appropriately escalated guidance regardless of how they express their situation.
- The directory and diagnosis system should be piloted first within the legal services community in selected geographies or matter areas to identify complications and refine processes with human assistance required during initial phases of diagnosis-to-referral transitions.
- Directory infrastructure should be integrated with social services directories, designed to accommodate local partnerships and shared-capacity, and built with interoperability that expands access without creating new burdens for organizations or barriers for the public.

## Governance

- Any governance structure must be built on a foundation of trust among legal services providers across New York.
- Governance should begin with existing coalitions of legal services organizations as an initial governing body, with a defined path toward broader governance that incorporates a hub-and-spoke model, rotating board membership, geographic and organizational representation, and clear conflict resolution processes.
- A Statement of Principles, Commitment to Collaboration, or equivalent foundational document is essential to anchor the mission, align participants, and provide a moral and ethical guide.
- Specialized working groups or a steering council should be established for key

governance functions with clear mandates distinguishing advisory from decision-making authority.

- Data privacy, confidentiality, and security must be core governance responsibilities from the start, with consideration given to models that can provide independent, transparent oversight of data collected from multiple organizations for the public good.

## **Next Steps**

IOLA will use the recommendations from these four Consulting Groups to inform its next steps related to the Justice Infrastructure Project’s Legal Information and Referral for the Public component. Subject to its New York State budget appropriation, IOLA’s focus in fiscal year 2027 could include the design and prototyping of tools for diagnosis, directory, referral, and intake, as well as the development of governance for these new tools and initial programming for community-based helpers. To advance its vision, IOLA may issue Requests for Information for additional feedback from the community, release Requests for Proposals to fund initiatives, or take other action as determined by IOLA’s Board of Trustees.

IOLA remains committed to collaborating with civil legal services providers and the communities they serve to reach the Justice Infrastructure Project’s ultimate goal of ensuring that every New Yorker with a legal problem has clear and timely access to high quality legal information, advice, and representation.

# User Experience Consulting Group

Participants were asked to discuss how we can design, implement and evaluate legal information, forms, call center functions, automated chat functions, interactive generative AI, and other public facing tools and processes (as well as tools and processes to assist legal aid organizations) to provide effective options for people seeking help with life problems involving legal issues.

## **Integrating People, Technology and Process to Build Trust and Expand Access to Justice**

### **Human Roles**

1. A variety of human roles will be crucial to implement the Enhanced Information and Referral vision of the Justice Infrastructure Project. These roles include, but are not limited to:
  - **Lawyers** – there continues to be an acute shortage of lawyers available to assist New York residents with legal problems. Consider ways to increase the number of lawyers through additional funding, as well as tools and staff that can increase their individual capacity, avoid duplicating processes, and allow them to capitalize more easily on other parts of the justice ecosystem.
  - **Community-based helpers** – full-time paid staff deployed across the state to raise awareness about new tools, provide training to community organizations, and assist help seekers at community events and other settings.
  - **Statewide call center staff** – a new group of employees who would be trained to provide first-contact assistance with members of the public. This would include diagnostic assistance, legal information or guidance, community navigation and ways to route users to relevant, available, and appropriate services for their problems.
  - **Centralized System / Platform Staff (Humans-in-the-loop)** – full-time staff dedicated to directory management, content review, data platform management and other functions designed to support and maintain new technology and tools, and to help lawyers troubleshoot technology and directory issues as they respond to client needs.
  - **Social workers** - Having social workers, or other trained personnel, available to help de-escalate situations where help-seekers are anxious, confused, or other heightened situations where lawyers or other staff may need specialized support.
2. Given the variety of human roles to support this vision of Justice Infrastructure Project, training tools and techniques will be essential, as well as the implementation of practices to encourage feedback as the roles are being calibrated, and to facilitate ongoing communication between people of different roles.
  - Non-lawyers should be supervised by lawyers with subject matter expertise.

- Helpers' knowledge backbone and supervision structures should involve legal expertise.
  - Non-lawyer helper models should feature robust training, oversight, and accreditation components.
3. Training for helpers of any kind should include fact-checking techniques to identify issues or inconsistencies that technology may not yet be able to identify.
  4. Carefully consider the skills, experience and expertise necessary for each human role, including cultural fluency. How information is sought and received will be impacted by users' ability to trust and connect with points of contact.
  5. Carefully mapping these roles is key to implementing an integrated, statewide service delivery model. Additionally, it will be necessary to ensure that human capacity can be scaled as adoption scales.

## **Technology Considerations**

1. Consider how technology can:
  - Amplify the work of legal aid lawyers and staff;
  - Enhance diagnosis and directory functions;
  - Provide guidance and assistance to help seekers and helpers;
  - Coordinate knowledge management statewide; and
  - Facilitate coordinated intake and referral systems across the state.
2. Any central platform created should be easily adaptable into other formats and available from multiple access points.
  - Technology should be used to enhance users' experience and enable more time and more effective human engagement.
  - Fund the development of a comprehensive knowledge backbone to enhance lawyers' and advocates' ability to provide assistance and representation. The knowledge backbone should draw on the shared experience, experience, interactions and feedback of legal aid staff, helper seekers, and other helpers.
  - Develop a comprehensive, innovative, and streamlined process to utilize technology to assist with both intake and referral. This may include, but would not be limited to:
    - An intake process based on narrative, where users are invited to tell their story in a guided but open-ended way;
    - Reactive intake that uses follow-up questions to help users describe their problem(s);
    - Nimble interfaces in which users and helpers can go forward or backward without losing their progress; and
    - Streamlining to limit the time and effort required in order to assess what forms of help are available.

3. Invest in the development of automated forms and guided interviews that incorporate plain language, have interactive reading guides and FAQs, and ensure accessibility for people seeking to file court forms or other applications.
4. Incorporate the ability to scan, upload and / or store documents and share them with helpers or advocates, both for the help-seeker's own convenience and to assist with intake, diagnosis, organization, etc.
5. Ensure technology provides users with options, reminders and prompts throughout the user journey.
6. Whenever possible, technology tools should be accessible – using plain language, multiple languages, visual aids, audio, and other accessibility best practices.
7. The technology should be able to integrate with social service platforms so that when a social service referral may be helpful, relevant information about the social services available can be provided.
8. Ensure the user journey involving technology has efficient and effective off-ramps to human assistance when there are identified risks, challenges, confusion, or complications.
9. Technology should be able to re-evaluate what resources are needed when someone's circumstances have changed and when those resources are available (including lawyers) throughout the user journey.
10. Technology should use wait-time indicators, call-back features, push notifications, and other techniques to inform people about the process, journey, and availability of assistance.
11. Technology should be able to advise people about what the journey may entail if certain steps are taken. These “legal care plans” could also be used by lawyers assisting clients.
12. Any use of technology to assist people with legal issues should be developed by lawyers mindful of ethical obligations and the need to provide accurate, reliable, and up-to-date information.
13. Remain open to the possibility that technology will need to enable multiple tools or user interfaces that are customized and accessible for certain populations or people experiencing certain circumstances.
14. Ensure transparency to the user regarding the use of AI in providing information.
15. The development and implementation of new tools using technology should emphasize ethics, validation, privacy, confidentiality and security of all user data and other information.

## **Developing Trust**

1. People can have difficulty understanding the complexity of a legal situation or why certain requirements are in place. Users need transparency about why these things matter, without being overwhelmed by information.

2. Be aware of how trust is changing in the current political landscape, as places people traditionally go to for trusted information or for assistance are being attacked or defunded. This may require siting entry points or help in new and varied places.
3. The public may have concerns about providing information that could be used to harm them. Be transparent about data collection requirements, usage, privacy, storage, etc.
  - Systems should be designed to ensure attorney-client privilege attaches to documents, correspondence and other information.
4. Consider techniques to effectively transfer trust between organizations with established trust to lesser-known referral organizations.
5. Empower users by providing choices regarding the data they share, the technology they are using, the resources they are connected with and the steps along the journey toward their goals and resolution of the problem. This will foster trust among users.
6. Throughout user testing and evaluation, carefully assess whether users trust the information, guidance and assistance they are receiving and why.
  - Trust is needed to ensure clients believe providers or community helpers when they say no assistance is available or when they provide information about options and potential solutions. Otherwise, users may go to other sources of help for second opinions, which we should try to avoid, when possible.
  - One essential element of trust occurs when humans listen to humans. Technology can be used to enable human interaction that fosters trust.

## Other User Experience Considerations

1. Develop grounding values that can guide the design, development, implementation and evaluation of new tools and processes. Examples may include:
  - Ensure New Tools and Processes Are: Timely, Targeted, Trustworthy and Transparent
  - Avoid the Development of Tools and Processes that Are: Hammers, Headaches or Heartless
2. Any integrated, statewide service delivery model should offer the opportunity to engage through multiple formats, such as written materials, audio / voice, call center, video, AI, in-person, etc., and these formats should be integrated.
3. The platform should be flexible enough to provide a range of *types* of interactions for users, from short-term transactional information to open-ended conversations about what a problem-solving journey might entail.
4. The platform should be flexible enough to accommodate people who are in acute crisis (and may need immediate human assistance, at least initially), people who need help but less immediately, and people who are in a more initial, information-gathering stage.

5. The platform, human and technology, should be able to assess and diagnose, throughout the user journey, complexity, urgency, and seriousness.
6. The platform should create a chain of care – continuity of service and interaction throughout the user journey regardless of who is helping and how they are helping.
7. In any system created, user data should be collected (with all necessary data security, privacy and confidentiality controls) and used to analyze trends, fight for policy advocacy, and to inform decisions of future clients and show they are not alone in their legal issues.
8. Identify key performance metrics that will demonstrate the successful design, development and implementation of new tools and processes.
  - This should be an intentional part of any strategic design, testing and evaluation.
  - Identify and define metrics that are observable and consistently measurable.
    - For example, an integrated, statewide service model should minimize the number of steps necessary to go from diagnosis to assistance.
  - Consider the use of a rubric or similar evaluation structure that could define what failure (or a poor user experience) would look like as well as what success would look like.
    - There may be existing evaluation metrics or strategies that could inform the development of such metrics for the Justice Infrastructure Project.
  - Consider forms of measurement that will assess the value of the investment in these tools and processes.
    - Develop quantitative measurement techniques (such as the number of steps required to reach effective assistance) and the data strategies necessary to perform such measurements.
  - Ensure alignment between identified metrics / evaluation criteria and overall data strategy.
  - Gather user feedback that can provide both quantitative and qualitative guidance context to certain metrics.
  - Provide adequate staffing for the analysis of information and evaluation of program design and implementation.
9. Mechanisms for quantitative and qualitative feedback to improve processes, and an integrated model that can continually learn, evolve and adapt based on these data.
10. The user experience should ensure legal empowerment, regardless of the outcome, meaning that interaction with the system should make people feel better equipped to handle future problems, and confident returning to the statewide system and/or recommending it to others.
11. It may be helpful to identify life problems with legal dimensions that are most common and have the most consistency in their diagnosis and solutions as initial opportunities for development and testing.
12. Extensive user testing and piloting will be essential in the development of any elements of this platform.
  - Recognize the importance of geographic differences across New York and ensure that

the development of enhanced legal information and referral includes voices from different sized programs throughout the state.

13. Seek ways to advance the objectives of the Justice Infrastructure Project through iterative, incremental steps that can inform the continued design and development of new tools.
  - Be intentional and careful about the intended reach of each phase to ensure it advances the goals of the project while not inviting unnecessary risks from a multitude of unknowns.
  - Consider a particular matter type or workflow that can be tested and evaluated through the full legal journey a user may take.
    - This will provide the opportunity to consider each step in the user journey from diagnosis to resolution and a variety of user types that can assist in developing effective tools that are appropriately integrated throughout the user journey.
    - Consumer Debt is one interesting opportunity because of recent changes in consumer protections, CLARO projects and legal clinics across the state, high rates of default, high volume of cases and lesser degree of common complexity.
      - Consider other tools, pilots, technology and initiatives that could be leveraged to inform program development (such as [Debt Help Illinois](#)).
    - Child Support may also be an interesting opportunity based on IOLA’s JIP analysis and survey results.
    - Foreclosure may also be an interesting starting point – though the complexity of legal issues and duration of foreclosure cases may present certain challenges.
14. Ensure design processes are adaptive and that any development is mindful of the rapid pace of technological and social change.
15. Consider opportunities to connect people with advocacy organizations working to advance policy change, particularly when there are not current legal remedies or when an individual expresses frustration with the available remedies.
16. Consider the application of inclusive design principles and how other collaborative technology efforts in the social or human services sector have applied these principles.

## Community Engagement Consulting Group

Participants were asked to discuss the role community members can play in enhancing access to justice in New York, including how we can “help the helpers” and explore the myriad of challenges and opportunities with “Justice Worker” models.

1. Ensure that legal information available to the community is centered on the 4 T’s:
  - Timely;
  - Targeted;
  - Trustworthy; and
  - Transparent.
2. Engage directly with community-based organizations when considering design and buy-in. Organizations with strong community organizing backgrounds may be helpful when considering different models of community engagement and outreach.
  - Local and statewide organizations with experience in alternative dispute resolution, including the Community Dispute Resolution Centers located in every county of the state, can be valuable partners for community engagement, raising awareness and as an integrated part of an integrated service delivery model.
  - Other grassroots organizations such as tenant associations, advocacy groups, etc. as well as individual community members should be incorporated in design, development, implementation and evaluation.
  - Ensure that community-based organizations receive adequate training on both functionality as well as privacy and confidentiality to ensure clients are protected from harm throughout the process, when possible.
3. Consider the experience and evidence-based practices of community justice worker programs in other jurisdictions, including, but not limited to, Frontline Justice and its experience in Alaska.
4. Consider the experience and evidence-based practices of other networks of community helpers that currently exist in New York, such as home health aides and care managers.
5. Consider that specialization of justice workers helps to build competency and trust. There may be certain legal practice areas (such as benefits) that are ripe for a justice worker model. When assessing initial steps and specialization, it can be helpful to consider areas of need that are most common where the community helper can be most effective, most easily.
6. Consider both physical locations for community assistance and activities or outreach in the community.
  - Community engagement should include a regular, physical presence in the community – providing training, developing community partnerships, navigation, assistance, distributing materials and gathering feedback.
    - Public libraries can be trusted community locations that people often go to for help and may be valuable partners for community-based assistance.

- Legal Hand presents a model of community assistance that could be amplified and expanded. The community engagement strategy should consider the value of having private, in-person locations for certain persons to seek and receive help.
7. An integrated, statewide service delivery model will need access to a statewide call center that can assist with issue spotting, trouble-shooting and specialized questions – also integrated with a comprehensive knowledge backbone and consistent diagnosis and way-finding tools
  8. Community helpers (dedicated staff and / or trained staff at community organizations) will require access to comprehensive way-finding tools that can assist in the diagnosis of life problems, the determination of whether resources are available to assist, and effective information and guidance when human assistance is not available or necessary. These tools may include, but would not be limited to, a knowledge backbone, training modules, comprehensive referral directory, ability to connect with legal experts for technical assistance, integration with human-in-the-loop AI, journey-based guidance, crisis de-escalation tools, and other elements. (See User Experience recommendations).
  9. Community engagement should be designed to assist people in *preventing* life problems with civil legal dimensions from emerging.
  10. Peer-to-peer training models and networks should be developed to provide continual opportunities for training, adaptation and the sharing of best practices.
  11. Community helpers will require adequate supervision to enable escalation and to ensure the accuracy of information and assistance provided.
  12. It may be helpful to consider various forms of community helpers or tiers of training such that can build upon each other, such as issue spotting, community navigator, and subject matter assistance.
    - Consider local training spaces and processes that can provide regular updates and access to assist in overcoming staff turnover at local community organizations.
  13. Coordination among community helpers across the state, integrated with consistent data collection, will provide a mechanism for continual learning and refinement of services.
  14. Community engagement strategies should be developed in a manner that can be evolved and adapted. Pilot activities, evaluation, and feedback techniques will be essential.
  15. Community engagement techniques should be customizable to the needs of local communities, particularly in rural areas and in support of vulnerable populations.
  16. Comprehensive statewide and local outreach and marketing campaigns will be essential to raise awareness about new tools and services.
    - Consider a consistent brand, logo or other forms of highly visible recognition.
    - Outreach within various communities should continuously help to identify pockets that are not being served.
    - Data strategies should be used to evaluate outreach techniques and identify emerging and unmet needs.
  17. Identify existing models of effective community partnerships that can be enhanced as initial

pilots to expand community-based assistance.

- Provide enhanced tools, processes, systems, outreach and data collection.
- Encourage consistency, but allow for local customization.
  - Consider models of central coordination with local action – such as Legal Hand, Community Dispute Resolution Centers, etc.
- When assessing initial pilot activities, focusing on a particular topic area may provide the opportunity for more refined and impactful initial findings.
- Ensure collaboration and coordination across jurisdictions to share experiences, identify trends and opportunities, and inform expansion.

18. Using effective governance, design and sustainable funding, seek to ensure continuity of the project such that investment and participation can have a sustained impact.

19. Even with expanded access to information, improving referral efficiency, effectively utilizing technology and leveraging community justice workers or other forms of community engagement, there will not be sufficient end-stage capacity to serve those who need it. This lack of end-stage capacity for those who need it will likely cause people to continue to seek such assistance, if they are aware of alternatives. Consider how the systems, process and data contemplated by Justice Infrastructure Project can foster strategic advocacy to expand end-stage capacity.

## Directory Consulting Group

Participants were asked to discuss the development and maintenance of a comprehensive statewide legal services directory, with the goal of enhancing legal information and referral.

### Directory

1. A comprehensive directory could include, but not necessarily be limited to:
  - Organization / office name and address;
  - Program descriptions (problems they can assist with);
  - Real-time appointment availability – by service type and duration;
  - Intake process available (phone, walk-in, email, day and time they can be contacted, etc.);
  - Language access capability; and
  - Eligibility criteria;
2. Consider means of amplifying and leveraging current, and developing, directories of legal and social services and tools for diagnosis of life problems with legal dimensions (including those supported by recent LSC TIG initiatives).
  - 2-1-1 is currently developing data standards that may be able to help inform a legal services directory.
3. Directory information should be sufficiently comprehensive that you do not need to contact the organization to learn essential information about the availability of assistance for the problem you are experiencing.
4. Directory information should not be so complex, detailed or complicated that it creates barriers or perceptions that someone may not be able to receive help.
5. Provide adequate funding for a staff of people that will need to maintain directory information. These individuals need to be designated, trained, funded, and accountable.
  - Consider centralized staffing for data collection and review as well as the funding necessary for local organizations to develop and maintain necessary infrastructure to provide directory information.
6. There is no single solution that will work for all users. Think in terms of infrastructure enabling access to data. Instead of one centralized directory or website, accurate and reliable information that can be used in a variety of websites, systems, tools, etc. should be made widely available.
7. Clients do not view their issues in terms of legal categories. It is key to ensure that people who need assistance can easily find and use referral information and the tools that can help diagnose life problems with legal dimensions.

8. Any directory resource created should include information on what services an organization does *not* provide. Services provided often change, but services that will never be part of an organization's legal work are typically more static.
9. Determine when eligibility screening occurs in this directory system. At what point of the referral process should clients be screened, and by whom?
10. A comprehensive diagnosis and directory system will also need to evaluate and identify potential conflicts, or utilize disclosure and process to ensure people are aware of the need to review potential conflicts.
11. For some client communities, referral processes (to organizations where trust has not been established) can be confusing, technology can present difficulties and they may struggle to explain the problem or circumstances they are experiencing. As such, the diagnosis and referral process should also be accessible through multiple nodes – voice / call, technology, in-person, etc.
12. The directory system will need to accommodate unique program features, preferences and restrictions that may not be apparent in structured directory data. There may be unique factors for smaller programs that also need to be considered. In initial phases of testing, it will be important for a human to assist as users move from diagnosis to directory and referral (or self-help assistance).
  - A statewide function may (eventually) be able to conduct streamlined diagnosis assistance, intake and scheduling.
  - This will also require the development of comprehensive decision-trees and referral / scheduling rules that will need to be consistently applied.
13. When access to a lawyer is not immediately available, people should be informed what the timeline would be for when assistance may be available, how they will be contacted when help is available, and what steps they may be able to take as they wait for assistance.
14. When access to a lawyer is not available, an effective diagnosis, directory and screening process must:
  - Clearly and compassionately communicate why the person will not be represented, so that they will not waste their time (and defeat our streamlining goal) by continuing to shop their case to partners and other nonprofits; and
  - Connect them to relevant, updated, reliable self-help materials or other resources.
15. Consider how a diagnosis and directory process can connect people to other kinds of legal support (Legal Hand, LiveHelp, law librarians, accompaniment, etc.) as well as future opportunities for working with Community Justice Workers and other navigators as the law evolves.
16. A legal services diagnosis and directory tool should be integrated with social service directories, when possible.
17. Directory information should consider local partnerships and collaborations.
  - These partnerships can utilize various models of shared capacity, scheduling, etc. that will inform whether and how referral can be provided.

18. Interoperability will be an important consideration for any platform intended to assist with diagnosis and directory of legal services. When interoperability exists, it can expand access and opportunities for partnership. However, it should be designed in a way that avoids creating new barriers for the public or legal services organizations.
  - Ensure legal aid organizations are only required to provide information to one system. Interoperability can enable data sharing of common information across multiple platforms.
19. It will be important to consider the variation in information that will be helpful for the public, non-profit organizations and legal aid organizations that may be using diagnosis and directory tools. Different users may require different information, different features, and different interfaces.
20. The initial development of a comprehensive directory could be piloted by the legal services community first. This would assist in identifying complications and refinements, without disappointing or frustrating the public users and overwhelming the legal services organization.
  - It may also be appropriate to pilot the use of a comprehensive diagnosis and directory system in selected geographies and communities that can further assist with feedback and refinement.
  - It may also be appropriate to pilot the use of a comprehensive diagnosis and directory system for a particular matter area familiar to the legal services organizations.
    - Any pilot selection will need to consider the limitations of the selected criteria. For example, there can often be significant overlap for certain areas of the law (people may often experience more than 1 legal issue at a time).

## **Diagnosis**

1. The diagnosis phase should be as holistic as possible to identify the variety of circumstances that may inform the client's options and needs for other services or assistance. This includes assessment of the person's problem, the legal dimensions, documents they may have received, actions they have already taken, concerns they have, their ability to proceed independently, and other circumstances that may inform the severity, risks and urgency of the situation.
2. The diagnosis phase should assess the degree of urgency and incorporate emergency protocols that enable an escalated response that may bypass certain steps or connect directly to a person to further evaluate and / or facilitate the necessary referral connection.
3. Diagnosis tools should use a consistent taxonomy, developed in collaboration with the legal services community, to ensure consistent outputs based on the variety of inputs users may contribute.
4. A comprehensive diagnosis and directory system should be integrated with a data collection

framework that can learn about how people express certain problems, what combinations of problems are common, what follow-up questions are often required, where there are regional differences, where in the process people may disengage, and other information that can contribute to the knowledge backbone on an ongoing basis.

5. Technology, including AI, may be able to assist in automating or streamlining certain elements of the input, collection and use of diagnosis and directory information.
6. As with all elements of the Justice Infrastructure Project, and as noted throughout these recommendations, the Diagnosis and Directory functions should also emphasize the importance of data privacy (including AI and other forms of technology-assisted service or interaction), confidentiality and data security in a coordinated/shared system.
  - Transparency regarding effective and comprehensive data privacy, confidentiality and data security will be an important way to foster trust among users.

## Governance Consulting Group

Participants were asked to discuss how we should govern an integrated, statewide function for Enhanced Legal Information and Referral for the Public in New York State.

1. Prioritize building trust between providers across New York, both legal providers and others, throughout the development of the Justice Infrastructure Project. This trust-building will be essential in programs' willingness to participate in coordinated referrals and the information sharing necessary to create a comprehensive, statewide knowledge backbone.
  - Receiving input from client communities and different kinds of staff members at civil legal aid providers will be essential in designing a sustainable solution.
  - Be mindful that collaboration on this scale, required to develop the concepts considered by the other Enhanced Information and Referral Consulting Groups, will require a culture shift in the legal services sector in New York.
2. When considering the creation of independent governance functions, avoid the creation of new entities that could compete with legal aid organizations for current or future funding.
  - The goal of the entity that will govern this function of the Justice Infrastructure Project should be to support the diversity of existing operations, because this kind of variety is a strength. Local organizations should be supported, not supplanted, by new structures.
3. Ensure growth and expansion of the governing function is aligned with purpose and scaled appropriately to the objectives provided.
  - Nonprofits often turn to hub & spoke models when building collaborative efforts. There are always concerns that the hub will overtake the spokes.
4. Incorporate programs' concerns over data privacy (including AI and other forms of technology-assisted service or interaction) in a coordinated/shared system. Work with IT professionals on developing a framework that ensures data privacy, confidentiality and security.
5. Evaluate incremental ways to foster this type of collaboration (such as a pilot) that can help ensure buy-in and pace development.
  - For example, this could begin as a collaborative network with formal governance with the goal of evolving into a more centralized structure.
  - However, it will be essential that some governance structure be implemented at the outset, regardless of the initial design and development steps taken. This will ensure that initial efforts align with a consistent mission and vision to expand access to justice for those who are not able to access a lawyer.
  - Consider current coalitions of legal services organizations that may be able to serve as an effective initial governing organization able to incorporate the views and

- expertise of a diverse collection of legal services organizations—but create a future path for expanding this to include more fulsome governance of different functions.
6. Consider the development of a Statement of Principles, Statement of Values, Commitment to Collaboration, Board Agreement or other documentation that provides a moral and ethical guide for the purpose and intent of function being governed.
    - Consider how such a document, with shared buy-in from the legal services community, can foster collaboration and a shared investment in the objectives of the function.
  7. If the governance is expected to change over time, identify the risk triggers that create the need for additional governance features (such as coordinated data contributions, hiring of programmatic staff, development of public-facing tools, etc.).
  8. When collaborate structures are contemplated, prior to initial development, consider the role of a Civic Trust or Data Trust model that can enable the effective management, oversight and governance of data collected from multiple organizations for the public good.<sup>1</sup>

## Governance Structure

1. Broad representation from the community (incorporating diversity of organization size, location (e.g., NYC vs non-NYC), specialty, funding (LSC / non-LSC), AOJ funded organizations vs. CLS funded organizations vs organizations not funded by IOLA, etc.), including rotating boards.
  - Ensure equal representation and authority from each IOLA unit in New York.
  - Be mindful that the governance structure, composition and functions may significantly impact the participation of the legal services community in the design, development and implementation of new tools, programs and resources – and will impact both trust and adoption.
2. Ensure that any governing body has strong bylaws and a clear and effective mission statement.
3. Ensure there is a clear plan for conflict resolution among members and member organizations of the governing body.
4. Ensure the governance structure is nimble and flexible so that it can adequately respond to problems that may emerge, changes to the law, etc.

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<sup>1</sup> For more on Civic Trusts and Data Trusts:

<https://hbr.org/2020/11/data-trusts-could-be-the-key-to-better-ai>

<https://medium.com/@digitalpublic/toward-a-civic-trust-e3265768dfe6>

<https://medium.com/@digitalpublic/the-civic-trust-e674f9acab43>

5. Ensure that a semi-independent quality control evaluation group is established, not comprised of board members.
6. Ensure the governance structure incorporates a Steering Council and/or Specialized Working Groups for key areas of decision-making, such as the functions listed below.
  - Note: Similar to the note above regarding the importance of careful and thoughtful board composition, structure and function, committees or working groups of the board would also have to be thoughtfully assembled. In addition, it will be important to consider whether these groups are simply advisory to the board or have decision-making authority (and what impact that has on composition and structure).
  - Data security
    - Ensure data security, confidentiality, and privacy. Consider a public trust structure, and (potentially) a separate governance structure to address data and privacy concerns (including about AI and other forms of technology-assisted service or interaction).
    - Facilitate efficient data sharing across organizations.
  - Fiscal oversight
    - Determine costs of maintenance, costs of improvements, develop budget.
  - Collaboration and continued participation among the legal services community
    - Monitor data input and data quality from member organizations.
    - Collaborate on content development and interactive justice journey development.
  - A people-centered user experience
    - Best practices for interface design, expert protocols for diagnosing life problems with legal dimensions.
  - Connective tissue creation with the broader justice ecosystem, ultimately including mental health services, financial services, government referrals where advisable, etc.
    - Involvement of community organizations not represented on the Board.
    - Involvement of/referrals to statewide services (other than legal).
    - Investigate other partnerships—e.g., with courts.
  - Capacity for iterative improvement/evaluation/quality control
    - Solicit regular feedback from member organizations, community members, system users, and subject matter experts.
    - Create a mechanism for evaluating and implementing feedback.
    - Evaluate who is not using the system (but could benefit from it), and why.
  - Human Services Oversight, including hiring employees and volunteers
    - Possible separation of duties and governance between human services and technology services; and a mechanism for resolving and acting on feedback.

## Appendix A: Acknowledgements

The IOLA Fund would like to express its tremendous gratitude to the many people who came together in dialogue to develop these recommendations. Their work exemplifies the Justice Infrastructure Project's priority of long-term, meaningful collaboration.

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