

Future of Technology in Legal Services Legal Services XML- NLADA 2002

1. Explain the project or innovation (what is it; what technology was used; whom does it serve; who are the partners).

Legal Services XML is funded by a 2002 LSC TIG award to (1) develop and pilot test at two locations a set of XML standards for sharing client and advocate legal information documents, (2) create a national central server for news, jobs, and calendar feeds, and (3) create a set of standards that will support linking legal information documents to intake data systems.

This project is working with the Legal Services Corporation, Pro Bono Net, the National Center on Poverty Law, NLADA, Pine Tree Legal Assistance, Legal Services Technology Network, Massachusetts Law Reform Institute, the Illinois Technology Center for Law & Public Interest., many LS programs, and most of the major case management vendors.

2. What was the reason for the innovation? What problem was it designed to address?

Currently there many different web sites and multiple case management systems. Sharing documents and data between these different systems is very difficult. For example, if one program does intake for a client, only to find the case needs to be referred, the usual method is to print out the information and fax it to the partner organization, who has to re-enter the information into their CMS.

At the end of the project, the legal services community will have a tested set of standards that will support sharing legal information documents, a working XML server with relevant news, job, and calendar feeds available for any site to implement, and a set of intake XML protocols designed for integration into intake systems. These components provide the technological basis for sharing legal content from any XML-enabled national, state, or local Web site and integrating self-help legal information documents from those sites into the intake process.

3. What has been the benefit for the field and program? What has it delivered for you?

The goal of LSXML is to make easy and efficient the exchange of data between various members of the equal justice community. There will always be multiple Web-based sources of legal information because there are hundreds of content providers at the local, state, and national levels. To fully leverage the content from these sources, technology needs to be developed that allows users to conduct simultaneous searches of multiple web-based databases.

LSXML standards, when used by two different organizations would enable a user who has signed into one Web site to search the document databases at both sites. The LSXML standards would provide the technological platform to support extending this search capability to as many databases that utilize the standards and grant access to

the primary Web site, opening the door to sharing information across many legal services databases all over the country. Through these integrated databases, clients have access to more comprehensive self-help information and advocates have more efficient legal information and research materials.

Extensible Markup Language (XML) is a tool set that can make information available across platforms that otherwise might not be compatible. With a standardized tag dictionary, or document type definition (DTD), it defines elements of a Web document. Through common DTDs, combined with parsers to read the Web documents, we can create a national network of legal information and improving delivery of legal services.

The standards that will be developed eventually could be used by case management and intake system vendors to link internal case management systems with self-help documents stored on any Web site using the standards. Document assembly systems can use the standards to create documents from the intake data that are compliant with XML standards used in electronic court filing.

In addition, it will enable different organizations, even with different case management systems, to share client information for referrals and other purposes without the need to rekey the information. LSXML is working with the court filing LegalXML group to be sure what is developed will be compatible with the court filing XML to be sure legal services is ready for efilings.

4. What barriers did you encounter in implementing or creating the program?

The project has just gotten underway, so it is too early to answer this.

5. What kind of commitment did this project take financially, for your staff, etc?

The TIG award is for about \$90,000. In addition, the partners have put in many hours of planning prior to this undertaking. It will take commitments for the CMS vendors to implement LSXML into their systems, and web sites into their.

6. What do you see this project going in the future?

Successful development of these standards will offer legal services the technology platform for a coordinated national system of legal information far greater than anything we've had before. Use of these standards will enable the statewide Web sites to connect to each other, will enable any Web site to integrate content from LSXML-compliant national, state, and local content providers. It will support intake systems exchanging data with case management systems, with document assembly systems, and electronic court filing. This potential level of information integration has never existed in legal services.