

TRUSTED INTERMEDIARIES AS USERS & FACILITATORS



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In mid-February, Minnesota Legal Services State Support (State Support) launched an easy-to-use portal called the **LawHelpMN Guide** (Guide). Designed to deliver a customized set of self-help resources and referrals that address an individual's specific legal concern or problem, the Guide generates curated results in response to an individual's answers to a series of simple questions. These "guided" questions are intended to narrow a person's legal topic and, if needed, assess their potential eligibility for services based on a variety of factors including location and income.

In developing the Guide for the redesigned www.LawHelpMN.org public portal, the Minnesota Supreme Court and state Access to Justice leaders recognized they would need to create community gateways to legal information and services--through local domestic violence and homeless shelters, schools, churches, public libraries, healthcare and social service providers, etc. These are the local institutions to which people are already turning in their communities when they need information or help. It is hoped these "**trusted intermediaries**" will facilitate use of LawHelpMN and the Guide.

*"Many people, especially those who have low incomes or who are vulnerable, do not receive help with their legal problems or do not find their way to the legal service provider they need without intervention from a **trusted intermediary** in a community organization."*

Trusted Help Report
The Law Foundation of Ontario

Project Overview

From September through December 2018, the project team engaged members of three “trusted intermediary” groups of stakeholders in a human-centered design research process:

- ❖ Public librarians
- ❖ Social service providers
- ❖ Faith-based service providers/ministries

We received input from our participants in a variety of ways, from *pre-session online surveys* to in-person, real-time *interviews and observations* as participants were using the MNLawHelp Guide to *exit interviews* and *facilitated group discussion*. The primary areas of inquiry were:

- How could the Guide be used in each stakeholder groups community work?
- How could stakeholders most effectively use the Guide in their community work?
- What gaps did stakeholders see in the Guide that, if filled, would make it more useful for them and/or the community?
- How might the Guide be adopted most broadly across each stakeholder sector?

The group feedback sessions for librarians and social service workers were conducted in two locations, one rural and one urban. The Minneapolis/St. Paul area served as the urban location and Beltrami County was chosen for the rural location. Members of faith-based programs and ministries were interviewed individually in locations of their choosing. A total of 28 stakeholders participated:

- 14 social service providers (13 rural and 1 urban)
- 5 librarians (4 urban and 1 rural)
- 9 faith-based service providers (central/south Minnesota).

The project also engaged almost two dozen student volunteers from the University of Minnesota and Bemidji State University (BSU) to serve as observer-interviewers. All volunteers were trained on their specific roles and on the basics of design-thinking and human-centered legal design, were provided librarian and social worker user personas and reviewed all the instruments used in the course of the project.



Top-Level Takeaways

Here we summarize the “big picture” learnings while more specific, individual responses appear in the full report.

Before the participants were introduced to the Guide, we wanted to begin with a better understanding of whether or not our participants were already using the internet in their work with community members. We also wanted to know whether participants were being asked about or were seeing problems they perceived to have a legal component of some kind.

In an online survey, we asked if the internet was ever a source of help or information for them in their work with clients or community members. **62% of the total participants said the internet was “always” or “usually” a source of help or information.**

In the same survey, we asked how often they were seeing clients or community members they (the intermediaries) thought might have a problem with a legal aspect to it--even though the client/community member did not identify the problem as a legal one. **70% of the participants were seeing clients or community members with legal problems at least once a week.**

After the participants used the Guide:

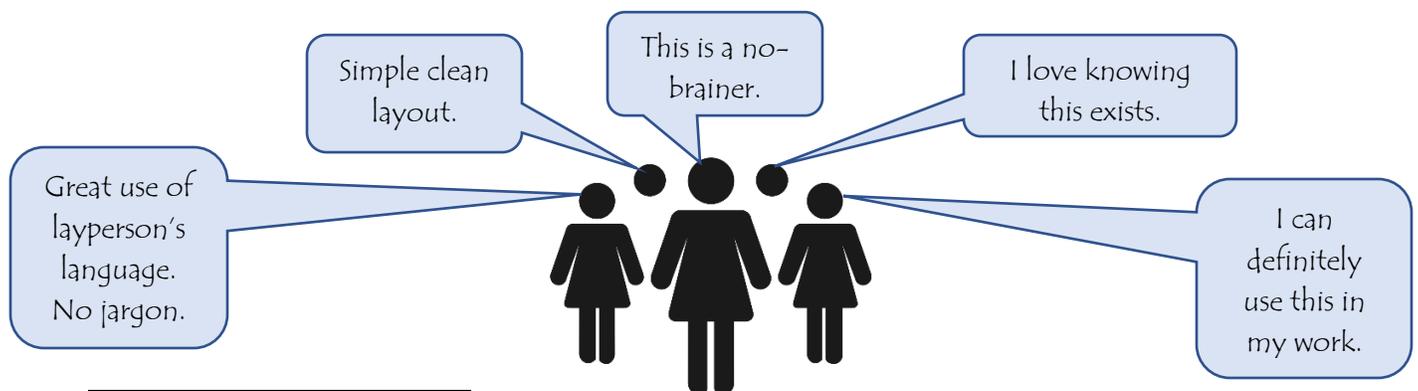
- **All but one participant responded that they would definitely or very likely use the LawHelpMN site and the LawHelpMN Guide.** The one who said she “might use” the LawHelpMN site and guide worked closely with the offender community and had already developed a set of self-help and other resources specifically for her clients.
- **All the participants found the site easy to use themselves** with the exception of one elderly participant who was not comfortable with computers. However, he was still quite enthusiastic about the site’s availability.
- **All felt that the site would be relatively easy to use for their clients and community members** if the user was literate.

Suggestions for tools like an audio reader¹ or chat function² were made while several felt they would make no changes at all. A number of the participants looked forward to the time it would be made **available in multiple languages**.

Facilitated group discussions underscored some of the comments made during the individual exit interviews, about **when and how to ask income eligibility questions**, wording that differentiates sexual assault from domestic violence and the often-repeated desire to see the site provide links or referrals to non-legal information and assistance.

During the discussion groups, participants encouraged us to make sure intermediary groups were made aware that the tool existed, how it can help and how it works. Questions to those assembled about **how best to create awareness** about the LawHelpMN site and **increase usage** of the LawHelpMN Guide among their peers produced valuable suggestions about who we needed to reach, what communication tools to use and the most meaningful messages we could convey.

All the participants were very excited about the existence of LawHelp MN and the Guide as a tool for community members and organizations to discover information and assistance pertinent to their specific problem. All said they would not only use it in their work and **would also recommend it to their co-workers and colleagues**.



¹ There are programs and networks who provide audio reading services “for people who have difficulty reading standard print due to vision loss, physical or learning disability, mobility challenges, and age.” <https://reader.ku.edu> (accessed March 23, 2019) as well as text-to-speech applications <http://dyslexiahelp.umich.edu/tools/software-assistive-technology/text-to-speech-readers> (accessed March 23, 2019)

² Chatbots “are computer programs designed to mimic human conversation. They create an artificially-generated response based on the input from a person, using dialogue-based text.” https://www.americanbar.org/groups/gpsolo/publications/gpsolo_ereport/2018/december-2018/chatbots-justice-is-that-thing/ (accessed March 23, 2019)