

Program Letter 09-1

President

Helaine M. Barnett

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TO: All Executive Directors

FROM: Helaine M. Barnett *HMB*

DATE: January 12, 2009

SUBJECT: Self-Inspection of 2008 CSR Data

The purpose of this Program Letter is to inform all LSC programs that LSC will require each program to conduct a Self-Inspection of a sample of closed cases prior to submitting 2008 Case Service Reporting (CSR) data to the Legal Services Corporation (LSC). The Self-Inspection must be completed, and the enclosed Certification and Summary Forms signed and submitted electronically to LSC, no later than March 2, 2009.

Introduction

LSC is committed to providing the United States Congress and the public the most accurate information possible. Closed case statistics are a major component of the data on program activities collected by LSC and a critical measure of the impact of federal funding on the civil legal problems of people living in poverty. It is essential to assure the accuracy of the 2008 CSR data and the Self-Inspection is an important quality assurance tool.

LSC considered whether the Self-Inspection process should be continued and we committed to making a decision for this year's CSR cycle – the first one to take place under the provisions of the 2008 CSR Handbook. As discussed at the 2008 Executive Directors Conference, LSC has decided that the Self-Inspection process will continue.

The Self-Inspection provides a national statistical measure of the accuracy of LSC grantee CSR reports. National CSR error rates were in the 4-5% range in 2001-2003, 3.9% in 2004 and in the 3-3.5% range 2005-2007. Thus the Self-Inspection gives us strong validation for the national CSR statistics. Furthermore, it provides a measure of oversight to the CSR reporting. Indeed, in the November 30, 2007 LSC response to GAO, LSC cited the results of the Self-Inspection as one risk-based factor in determining which programs OCE should visit.

The Self-Inspection is not just useful on a national basis. It is a useful tool of program oversight, providing LSC with a way of identifying programs that are having difficulty with correct CSR reporting and an opportunity to contact these programs to discuss the problems. One response has been to provide CSR training and technical assistance.

Although it is extra work, many programs have used it to identify their own weaknesses in CSR reporting and case management systems. There is significance not just in the number of errors but also in the type and distribution of errors. For example, two common problems are failure to record documentation of client assets or documentation of citizenship. Each of these sometimes constitutes the great majority of a program's CSR errors, indicating a need to revise grantee procedures and remind staff of these requirements. Also the errors may be concentrated in one office, indicating a need to train the staff of that office in CSR requirements.

Eligibility -- Reporting of Title III Cases and Expansion of Eligibility for Certain Aliens

Cases reported in the CSR must have, among other things, both financial and citizenship/alien eligibility documentation. However, the total number of cases funded under Titles III and IV of the Older Americans Act that lack financial eligibility documentation, but would otherwise be eligible, should be reported separately in the CSR (see Footnote 17a 2008 CSR Handbook). Such cases do not count as part of the "total cases reported" for the purposes of the Self-Inspection. If any such cases occur in the Self-Inspection sample, they are to be counted as exceptions for lack of financial documentation. LSC will keep a separate total of such cases for other programmatic and reporting purposes.

Pursuant to the Violence Against Women Act 2006 Amendments (VAWA 2006), the Kennedy Amendment exception for service to otherwise ineligible aliens who are battered women was expanded in 2006 to broaden the allowable categories of clients and cases and to allow the use of LSC funds for such cases. Consequently, such cases are considered LSC-eligible and may be reported without the documentation of citizenship or eligible alien status otherwise required in Section V of the 2008 CSR Handbook (see Program Letter 06-2 -- also in the Appendix to the CSR Handbook -- for details of this expanded eligibility). Also, under the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, as amended in 2003, otherwise ineligible alien victims of Trafficking have similar expanded eligibility (see Program Letter 05-2 -- also in the Appendix to the CSR Handbook -- for details of this expanded eligibility).

The Self-Inspection Process

Standards for Accuracy – 2008 CSR Handbook

Standards for accurate reporting of CSR data are contained in the 2008 CSR Handbook. Sections 3.2, 3.3, and 5.2 of the CSR Handbook contain specific guidance on single recording of cases, timely closing of cases, and documenting client eligibility. Section VI of the CSR Handbook contains guidance on the reporting of different levels of case services, Section VII contains guidance on the reporting of referrals, and Section X contains guidance on reporting and documentation of PAI cases.

Sample Selection Procedure

To reach a level of absolute confidence that every 2008 closed case is accurately reported to LSC, program staff would need to review each individual case. For most programs, such a review would be impractical. Therefore, the Self-Inspection process relies on the selection of a sample of cases from which programs can draw some inferences about the overall number of cases reported to LSC. In order for the inferences to be reliable, the sample must be reasonably representative of the total number of cases reported to LSC. If the sample is not representative, its unrepresentative character would undermine the integrity of the Self-Inspection results.

The attached Sample Selection Procedure details a process for selecting a sample of cases for review. The Procedure requires programs reporting over 1,000 total closed cases to select a sample of approximately 150 closed cases, and more in some large programs with multiple offices. Programs reporting fewer than 1,000 total closed cases will need to select a sample of 75 closed cases. Each grantee should document the steps taken in the Selection Procedure, and should clearly indicate any departures from the Selection Procedure. To consult with an LSC staff member about the sampling procedure, please contact Bert Thomas.

Review of Sampled Cases – Use of Case Review Form

The purpose of the Self-Inspection process is to give programs a means to verify, by reviewing a sample of cases, that their CSR data meets LSC standards for accuracy. The enclosed Case Review Form contains a list of questions which identify key requirements that need to be met in order to report a case to LSC. If the answers to the questions in the Case Review Form are generally “Yes”, then the sampled cases generally meet the requirements for reporting cases to LSC, and no further inquiry is necessary, unless program staff have reason to believe that the sample selected was not representative of the total number of cases to be reported to LSC or, for other reasons, problems outside the sample would affect the accuracy of the CSR data.

If there are “No” answers to one or more of the applicable questions in 10 percent or more of the cases sampled (look to the Certification Forms, not the Summary Forms to calculate

the 10% figure), or if the use of case management system queries reveals problems in a larger number of cases, then program staff will need to make a determination whether to initiate corrective action to remedy the problems identified.

For some problems, such as untimely closing of cases or duplicate reporting of cases in a particular branch office or unit, the expenditure of effort needed to identify the total number of affected cases may be justified. Case management system queries and reports could provide an easy means of detecting such cases. To achieve accurate reporting of closed cases, further effort to correct problems might be justified, provided doing so would not have a disproportionate impact on client services. While the decision to undertake corrective action rests with the program, LSC strongly encourages consultation before initiation of any corrective action. To consult with an LSC staff member as to whether corrective action is advisable or for other Self-Inspection questions (except sampling or case management queries), please contact John Meyer. If general corrective action is not taken before submission of the CSR, any corrections in the sample cases **MUST** be carefully documented and that documentation preserved with the case files, so the sample is preserved for any future review.

For each case in the sample, the enclosed Case Review Form must be completed, and a “Yes”, “No”, or NA (not applicable) answer must be recorded for all questions. Not all questions will be applicable to all cases. Upon completion, each Case Review Form must be retained for audit purposes.

Several questions in the Case Review Form require a determination whether a “notation” is present in the case file or in the case management system record. The following standards apply to these questions:

Questions (1) and (3) – Notation indicating no income or assets

A notation indicating that a client household has no income or assets may be the number zero, the word ‘none’ or a similar descriptive term to that effect.

Question (3) - Receipt of government benefits

A notation indicating that a client receives government benefits which required testing for assets may be the name of the government agency, or a brief description of the type of benefits received.

Question (4) – Citizenship or alien eligibility – telephone cases

A notation indicating that a client in a telephone case is a citizen or an eligible alien may be the word “Yes”, the letter “Y”, or a checkmark or other written indication in the appropriate section of an intake sheet.

Question (5) – Attestation of citizenship

The attestation may consist of a signature on an intake sheet, retainer agreement or other document containing language stating that the client is a United States citizen.

Use of Case Management System Queries

LSC encourages programs to use their case management systems to augment the Self-Inspection process. Case management system queries and reports can easily provide useful information about all closed cases, not just a sample of cases. For example, a case management system query could readily identify cases which lack either income or assets information. For assistance with case management system queries, contact your vendor or LSC staff member Glenn Rawdon.

Certification Process – Certification, Summary, and Non-LSC Case Forms

All programs must electronically submit Self-Inspection Certification, Summary, and Non-LSC Case Forms to LSC by March 1, 2008, regardless of the results of the Self-Inspection.

Certification Form: This form requires submission of information about the number of cases found to have one or more problems in the Self-Inspection, as well as information about whether action was taken before, during, or after the Self-Inspection either to remedy problems found or not to report some cases at all. It also includes a report on the number of cases that were excluded (removed) from the CSR report because of corrective action taken **after** the Self-Inspection. The purpose of collecting this information is to enable LSC to determine the accuracy of CSR submissions and the frequency with which programs are unable to report cases because they do not meet LSC reporting requirements. **Please be sure to enter all requested information, especially inserting the number of cases reviewed and exceptions found, before submitting the Certification Form.**

Self-Inspection Summary Form: This form collects information about the types and frequency of exceptions noted during the Self-Inspection process. The twelve categories listed in the Summary Form correspond with the twelve questions in the Case Review Form. The “Numbers of Cases” column in the Summary Form should accurately reflect the numbers of sampled cases for which exceptions were noted (by “No” answers) in the completion of the Case Review Forms for cases sampled. The collection of this information will enable LSC and program staff to identify those areas where LSC reporting requirements may have been difficult to meet, as well as to indicate where programs should focus their efforts to achieve further improvements in the accuracy of their case reporting.

The Summary Form also collects information as to whether programs undertook any corrective action, as a result of the Self-Inspection process, which resulted in adjustments to the CSR data submitted to LSC. If corrective action is undertaken, it must apply to all affected

cases, not just to cases in the Self-Inspection sample. Programs undertaking corrective action which resulted in adjustments to the CSR data submitted to LSC should note the categories in which they have taken corrective action in the Self-Inspection Summary Form. This information will enable LSC to determine the extent to which programs have been able to correct problems identified during the Self-Inspection process.

Unreported Non-LSC Case Form: This form collects information on how many cases were closed with non-LSC funds in 2008 and not reported to LSC. Such cases may be cases for clients who are not financially eligible under LSC guidelines but are eligible under a non-LSC program; they may be cases that are for clients who are LSC-ineligible but are eligible for civil legal assistance supported with non-LSC funds; or they may be cases where eligibility documentation was insufficient to support LSC eligibility but sufficient to support eligibility for assistance with non-LSC funds. It is a very simple form, requiring only the submission of a total number of cases which may be an estimate if a program does not have complete data available. This information will give LSC a more complete picture of all the civil legal assistance rendered by our programs.

Attachments

- (1) Self-Inspection Certification Form (Sample - Actual Form is in the "Submit Form G-6" module in LSC Grants)
- (2) Self-Inspection Summary Form (Sample - Actual Form is in the "Submit Form G-6" module in LSC Grants)
- (3) Self-Inspection Case Review Form
- (4) Self-Inspection Sample Selection Procedure
- (5) Self-Inspection Unreported Non-LSC Case Form (Sample - Actual Form is in the "Submit Form G-6" module in LSC Grants)

LSC Staff Contact List

Modifications of Self-Inspection; General Self-Inspection Questions

John Meyer – meyerj@lsc.gov; Phone 202-295-1505

Sample Selection

Bert Thomas -- thomasb@lsc.gov; Phone 202-295-1528

Case Management System Questions

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