



LEGAL SERVICES CORPORATION

Office of Program Performance

***FINAL
PROGRAM QUALITY REPORT***

FOR

Legal Assistance Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago

Recipient Number: 514020

May 23 – 27, 2011

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INTRODUCTION

Background

The Legal Services Corporation's (LSC) Office of Program Performance (OPP) conducted a program quality visit to the Legal Assistance Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago (LAF) from May 23 – 27, 2011. The team members were John Eidleman, OPP Senior Program Counsel/Team Leader, Cynthia Schneider, OPP Deputy Director, Mary-Christy Fisher and David Bonebrake, OPP Program Counsel, Carolyn Worrell, Peter Dellinger, Andrew Scherer, John E. Johnson, Jr., and Douglas German, Temporary Employees.

Program quality visits are designed to ensure that LSC grantees are providing the highest quality legal services to eligible clients. In conducting its assessment, the team carefully reviewed the documents LSC received from the program including its grant proposal narrative for 2010 and renewal narrative for 2011, its case service reports (CSRs) and other service reports (OSRs), the numerous documents the program submitted in advance of the visit, including advocates' writing samples, and the results of a survey of LAF staff conducted on the Internet. On-site, the team visited the program's four offices. In addition to speaking to all LAF staff members who were not on leave, the team interviewed a number of board members, judges and community organization members.

In performing its evaluation of the grantee's delivery system, OPP relies on the LSC Act and regulations, LSC Performance Criteria, LSC Program Letters, and the ABA Standards for the Provision of Civil Legal Aid. Its evaluation is organized according to the four LSC Performance Areas that cover needs assessment and priority setting; engagement with the low-income community; the quality of the legal work performed, including legal representation, its management and the written work produced; and program management including board governance, leadership, strategic and financial planning, resource development, and coordination within the delivery system.

Program Overview

LAF was incorporated in 1972 and began receiving the Legal Service Corporation grant for Chicago in 1975. LAF is a nonprofit law firm that provides a full range of legal services to Cook County. In addition, LAF provides services to some residents of Lake County through its ombudsmen project, as well as to migrant workers and immigrants throughout the entire state. The program's primarily urban service area, which covers 946 square miles, had a total population of 5,194,675 in 2010. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates, which date from 2005-2009, approximately one-fifth of the Cook County residents for whom poverty status was determined were found to be at 125% of the poverty level. The ACS estimates also indicated that for those individuals in LAF's service area at 100%

of the poverty level, 46% of the poverty population was African American, 30.5% was Caucasian, 28.5% was Hispanic, and 4.2% was Asian.

Since 2007, LAF has been engaged in extensive strategic planning that has resulted in the centralization of its telephone intake system, the establishment of practice groups to address clients' legal issues based on substantive areas of law and a plan to close all of its neighborhood offices. It has an evolving private attorney involvement (PAI) program and significant community outreach, including the creation of a unit to oversee such engagement.

LAF currently provides civil legal services from four offices that are located in downtown and Northwest Chicago and in the South and North suburbs. LAF is in the process of closing its offices in all but one of these locations and consolidating the staff in a new office in downtown Chicago. LAF's statewide Migrant Project, based in the downtown office, does outreach year round and can be reached throughout the year by a toll-free telephone number.

LAF is due to receive \$7,407,087 in total LSC funding (basic field and migrant) in 2011. The Migrant Project, which will receive \$275,520 in LSC funding in 2011, receives no other grants. The program anticipates receiving \$5,921,648 in non-LSC funding for the current year, for total 2011 revenue of \$13,328,735; this amount would represent a reduction of \$1,921,792 from last year's revenue.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Legal Assistance Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago consists of staff members who are dedicated to their clients, their work and access to justice for the low-income population of the service area. A number of the attorneys are highly experienced and very knowledgeable in their areas of practice.

The program and its leadership are well respected by judges, other stakeholders and peers and are perceived as leaders in the legal community. The judges interviewed consistently remarked on the advocates' high level of competence and professionalism.

LAF conducted its last comprehensive needs assessment in 2005 when it completed a study of client needs that helped result in its current *Priorities in the Provision of Legal Services*. The migrant component conducted a needs assessment in 2008.

LAF is engaged in extensive strategic planning that began in 2007. Implementation of the planning has been rolled out in a series of changes – the largest, to date, was its centralization of intake under its Client Screening Unit (CSU). It is now in the process of consolidating its entire staff in a new facility in downtown Chicago and has created new practice groups to address substantive legal areas. The program also established a Community Engagement Unit (CEU); this unit will enable LAF to

maintain and expand its community contacts throughout the service area. The CEU and the CSU are overseen by the program's director of client and community services.

LAF is highly sensitive to the legal and other needs of the low income community it serves including clients from diverse ethnic and racial groups. Its current offices are located near public transportation and in areas that are close to courts and state agencies; its new office will also be well-situated. LAF is now working with numerous community-based organizations. LAF's CEU is designed to coordinate LAF's ongoing outreach and engagement with the client community to ensure that the most pressing legal needs of the low-income community are met.

LAF established its CSU in 2009 in an effort to consolidate and make uniform its intake and screening of all applicants. The CSU is staffed by 12 intake specialists, some of whom are paralegals. In 2010, its first full year of operation, the CSU handled approximately 25,000 calls. The CSU has an excellent, comprehensive Intake Manual, as well as a Decision Guide that clearly outlines LAF's priorities and helps ensure that intake specialists can properly set appointments and make referrals. The intake staff and process is well supervised.

The program serves diverse populations that speak a number of languages other than English as their first language. LAF has a significant number of intake workers fluent in Spanish, the most common non-English language spoken by clients, and uses Cross Cultural Interpreting Services (CCIS) to address other language requests. LAF has a language services manager who oversees the program's 16 interpreters and ensures quality control of its language services.

LAF's talented and passionate advocates are committed to the goals and objectives of their clients. Attorneys approach their clients' legal issues in a holistic way and assess whether the problem stated leads to additional needs, which they will attempt to address. The staff is an appropriate mix of experienced and fairly new attorneys. Advocates have a considerable breadth of legal experience and a general breadth of knowledge about the issues affecting their clients and the programs available to them. LAF advocates have active practices in state and federal court. A number of the advocates have national reputations as experts in their areas of practice.

LAF provides excellent supervision, particularly to newer attorneys. The requirements for LAF supervisors are explicitly set out in a program manual governing the performance standards for all LAF legal staff. LAF supervisors monitor caseloads and work with staff, co-counseling, training and performing case reviews. Adequate training is available to staff members. The written work product of the advocates is uniformly excellent.

LAF has a PAI program that involves private attorneys in a number of ways. Volunteer attorneys work with the office in a variety of capacities, and a number of local firms and corporations are involved in specific projects.

LAF staff engages in extensive outreach and community education. In 2010, program staff maintained outreach projects throughout Chicago and suburban Cook County. That same year, LAF staff had significant relationships with more than 100 community organizations, participating in resource fairs and giving legal presentations to community groups. LAF's HIV/AIDS Project, Home Ownership Preservation Project (HOPP), and Veterans' Rights Project are examples of some of the special projects that provide outreach and community legal education, in addition to representation.

The LAF board of 39 members is engaged in the work of the program and is a supportive body that effectively promotes and expands the reach and influence of the program in the communities it serves. It is a diverse group. Client board members, who comprise a third of the 39 member board, serve on every committee and hold two board offices.

LAF has a Young Professionals Board (YPB) that consists of younger people from law firms, government agencies and other entities around Chicago. It serves as a potential pipeline for future board members, including non-lawyers.

The executive director and the other program leaders are generally highly respected by staff and by members of the broader community. The executive director has 29 years of legal experience, including serving for four years as the executive director of LAF.

LAF has a coherent and effective overall delivery system and it is an active participant in the regional and statewide justice community and legal services delivery system.

Following the visit, OPP sent a draft report to the program for its review. Legal Assistance Foundation's executive director responded to the draft report in a letter dated October 4, 2011.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Basic Field

PERFORMANCE AREA ONE. *Effectiveness in identifying the most pressing legal needs of low-income people in the service area and targeting resources to address those needs.*

Criterion 1. Periodic comprehensive assessment and ongoing consideration of legal needs.

Finding 1. The program has not conducted a recent comprehensive needs assessment.

LAF has not conducted a comprehensive needs assessment since 2005 when it completed a fifteen-month study of client needs that helped bring about its current

Priorities in the Provision of Legal Services. That same year, the Illinois legal community published *The Legal Aid Safety Net: A Report on the Legal Needs of Low-Income Illinoisans*, which LAF studied to help it formulate its priorities. More recently, the program reviewed the Chicago Bar Foundation's 2010 report, *Legal Aid in Cook County: A Report on Basic Trends in Need, Service and Funding*, to update its understanding of the legal needs of local clients.

Recommendation I.1.1.1^{1*}:

After LAF completes the formation of its practice groups and consolidates its offices, it should make plans to conduct a comprehensive needs assessment either on its own or in collaboration with other service providers and funding organizations.

Finding 2. LAF is acutely aware of and addresses emerging needs and adjusts its work accordingly.

Although LAF has not recently conducted a formal needs assessment, it does identify needs as part of its regular engagement with the client community and by reviewing the requests for services made to the program's offices. LAF makes adjustments to its case priorities after analysis of relevant data.

As it recognized new issues affecting its clients, LAF has made programmatic changes. The program responded to the foreclosure crisis in a series of ways including expanding its Home Ownership Preservation Project. In 2007, it created its Veterans' Rights Project to handle United States Department of Veterans Affairs benefit appeals, conduct outreach and provide representation to veterans in other substantive areas.

Finding 3. LAF uses its *Priorities in the Provision of Legal Services* developed in 2005 as the foundation for its current priorities. The program evaluates the outcomes achieved, but does not tie them to specific goals and objectives.

LAF has a manual entitled *Priorities in the Provision of Legal Services* that provides excellent guidance as to what types of cases are accepted. This manual was developed in 2005 by a committee of management and staff and approved by the LAF Board of Directors. The priorities are tied to the program's strategic plan and client needs studies. The program periodically reviews its intake data to ensure that the priorities address client needs. LAF updated the manual in April 2011.

¹ Recommendations in this report will have a Roman Numeral to identify the Performance Area, followed by three numbers identifying, respectively, the Criterion addressed by the recommendation, the number of the finding and a number designating whether it is the first, second, third, etc., recommendation under that finding. For example, III.2.14.3 designates Performance Area III, Criterion 2, and finding 14, third recommendation under finding 14. There are two levels of recommendations in this report: Tier One and Tier Two. Recommendations that are indicated with an asterisk are Tier One recommendations and are intended to have a direct and major impact on program quality and/or program performance. In your next grant renewal application or competitive grant application, your program will be required to report what it has done in response to Tier One Recommendations instead of submitting a full narrative.

LAF uses its case management system to track outcomes, monetary benefit to the client, level of service provided, and other data to determine if its goals and priorities are met. However, the program does not set forth specific goals and objectives for its legal work in major substantive areas, or through its projects.

Recommendation I.2.3.1:

LAF should develop work plans for each of its new practice groups and for each advocate that articulate specific goals and objectives for the groups and the individuals and correspond to the overall goals and priorities of the program.

Criterion 3. Implementation. (omitted)

Criterion 4. Evaluation and adjustment.

Finding 4. LAF is currently making numerous adjustments in response to its strategic planning.

LAF is engaged in extensive strategic planning that it began in 2007. Implementation of the planning has been rolled out in a series of changes; the first was the program's creation of its Client Screening Unit (CSU), discussed in Finding 6, to centralize intake. In addition, LAF created a Client and Community Services Unit. This unit is composed of the CSU and the Community Engagement Unit (CEU), discussed in Finding 8, which is designed to coordinate the program's outreach efforts. Through the CEU, LAF will work with community-based organizations to ensure that the program continues to meet the needs of all members of the community it serves. LAF created a Steering Committee, which is charged with moving the strategic planning process forward and meets with the executive director weekly.

This year, LAF also changed its staffing structure. All of its advocates are now in one of five practice groups - children and families, housing, consumer, public benefits, and immigrant and worker rights. Each group has a director and more than one supervisory attorney; the goal is to have 3-4 attorneys per supervisor. Practice group members will have both specialized and general backgrounds. LAF's director of advocacy will be overseeing the legal work of the new practice groups and of the director of training.

LAF expects all the groups to conduct strategic planning to prioritize the issues on which they will focus. The groups' priorities and procedures are to be in place by the end of 2011. LAF anticipates that such specialization will create efficiencies and maximize its advocates' ability to address client needs, while also permitting them to do more policy work.

Some of LAF's advocacy will be handled by program-wide task forces. The task forces will focus on distinct populations and issues – HIV/AIDS, Seniors, Veterans, Suburban issues, Domestic Violence, and People with Disabilities - that overlap practice

group divisions. Advocates can voluntarily join these groups, each of which will have a supervisor. The director of client and community services is to oversee the task forces.

Together, the director of advocacy and the director of client and community services will supervise the legal work of the entire program. It is expected that the two directors will meet regularly to assess client needs, determine emerging issues and ensure client access.

At the same time, LAF is consolidating its entire staff in one new downtown location. This move should be achieved by the end of this year.

PERFORMANCE AREA TWO. *Effectiveness in engaging and serving the low-income population throughout the service area.*

Criterion 1. Dignity and sensitivity.

Finding 5. LAF staff treats clients with dignity and sensitivity.

LAF is highly sensitive to the legal and other needs of the low income community it serves. Its staff members respond effectively and appropriately to clients from diverse ethnic and racial groups. The main office is staffed by bilingual receptionists, and its reception area contains “Point to your Language” posters as well as a notice about the availability of free interpreting services. It also contains various legal education materials, most of which were bilingual. The office has appropriate signage and the building is handicapped-accessible. The reception staff deals appropriately with individuals who have appointments as well as those who come in or call about emergency situations.²

Although LAF currently maintains four offices in the service area, it is planning on moving to a single office in downtown Chicago later this year. LAF’s new facility will be in close proximity to Chicago’s state and federal courthouses. Applicants and clients who formerly patronized the offices that are being closed will have to travel to the downtown office.

LAF currently attempts to communicate by phone and mail to the extent possible with those clients who find even accessible offices hard to reach. The program provides transit cards to clients who cannot afford to pay for the train or bus fare to or from the

² Subsequent to the OPP visit, LAF developed a walk-in policy. Walk-in applicants are now screened so that the program can determine whether they have an emergency; applicants without telephones are treated as emergencies. Intake specialists deal with walk-ins with emergencies. Walk-ins who do not have emergencies are advised to call the CSU and are given advice about how best to make contact. This policy will not change after LAF relocates. The program’s new office will have a private cubicle with a telephone off its waiting room so that walk-ins have the option of calling the CSU while they are on-site.

office; some clients are mailed cards prior to their appointments. Staff makes house calls, when necessary, and other staff, such as the ombudsmen, visits their client populations on-site in suburban Cook County as well as Lake County. Some of these staff expressed concern about the impact of LAF's centralization on their work, including the need to travel between the downtown office and their points of assignment.

The new CEU, discussed in Finding 8, is designed in part to provide a mechanism for LAF to remain connected to the whole service area.

Recommendation II.1.5.1:

In its process of centralization, LAF should focus on keeping its services accessible to its entire client population.

Recommendation II.1.5.2:

LAF should continue to develop flexible office attendance policies so that staffers whose work requires them to meet with clients outside of the office are able to work remotely throughout the work week.

Finding 6. LAF implemented a coordinated intake system in late 2009.

LAF established its Client Screening Unit (CSU) in an effort to centralize and make uniform its intake and screening of all applicants. The CSU is supervised by two directors; they are assisted by other LAF staff attorneys who rotate in on a periodic basis. The unit is staffed by 12 intake specialists, some of whom are paralegals. In 2010, its first full year of operation, the CSU handled approximately 25,000 calls.

CSU telephones are officially open from 8:00 AM – 4:00 PM, Monday to Friday. The unit has an automated call distribution system including a callback feature that automatically calls a person back at the same time their call would have been answered if they had remained in the queue. Once a call is answered, a caller goes through an automated screening menu, including language preference, basic eligibility information, program priorities (including mention of the types of cases LAF does not take), complaint procedures, and information about special LAF projects. Callers are instructed to indicate if they are phoning regarding emergencies, such as lockouts, imminent court dates, utility shutoffs, or domestic violence issues. The recording also advises all callers that, due to high volume, the best time to call is between 8:00 – 10:00 AM.

The CSU utilizes Internet-based telecommunication available for hard-of-hearing callers, a video relay service for callers communicating through American Sign Language (ASL) and free telephone interpretation for those who do not speak English. Individuals who do not select either English or Spanish at the beginning of their call will speak with a receptionist who determines if the call should be referred to the CSU or to another LAF unit. If it is a CSU call and an interpreter is needed, an intake specialist will directly contact the client on a conference call with Cross Cultural Interpreting Service.

When callers are connected with an intake specialist, their information is entered into the Legal Server Case Management System (CMS) and they are screened for eligibility. Non-eligible callers, such as those who are over-income or have problems outside of LAF's priorities, are referred to other entities including the Coordinated Advice and Referral Program for Legal Services (CARPLS) which has a Legal Aid Hotline as well as court-based advice desks.

Once eligibility is determined, the caller is interviewed by the intake specialist concerning her legal problem. Specialists may provide advice at this point after consulting with an attorney. All advice/brief service case files are reviewed by one of the CSU attorneys by the end of the day.

Callers who are neither advised nor referred are scheduled for an appointment with an attorney or paralegal. These meetings, confirmed by letter, are conducted in person or by telephone. LAF has found that more of the clients whose appointments are made through the CSU keep their appointments.

Due to the large volume of calls the CSU receives, the phone lines are typically closed to new calls mid-morning between 10:30 - 11:00 AM in order to ensure that intake staff can respond to all the calls that have come in on a given day by the close of business. LAF finds that, on average, 200 calls a day do not get in when the line is closed. If CSU staff responds to all the calls received before the lines are closed, including those in the queue, the telephone lines may be reopened to accept more callers later in the day.

Some aspects of the intake process need refinement. For example, there is no required system for how intake specialists record the information they obtain from applicants. Although most specialists directly enter a caller's information into Legal Server Case Management System (CMS) fields in "real time," some intake specialists write out their notes and enter the data into the case management system later. It appeared to the team that numerous intake specialists regularly leave their desks during the course of telephone calls to consult with supervising attorney staff before they proceed to determine eligibility, provide a caller with information or refer them to other services.

Although CSU currently handles the bulk of the calls coming to the program, LAF still maintains several of its special projects' telephone numbers. It is the program's intent that the calls now directed to most of these other numbers will eventually be handled by the CSU staff.

The CSU has an excellent, comprehensive Intake Manual, as well as a Decision Guide that clearly outlines LAF's priorities and helps ensure that intake specialists can properly set appointments, make referrals, etc. Members of the CSU staff appreciate these guides and some said they rely on them extensively.

The CSU makes good use of technology. Intake specialists are provided with dual monitors that permit them to conduct the intake process on one screen while consulting numerous information sources on the other. The system, utilizing the CMS, was designed so that relevant brochures, pro se materials, guides, and referral lists can be selected, printed and immediately mailed to callers. Supervising attorneys can remotely view files, which promotes supervision and prompt attorney review. The system also allows LAF to quantify “unmet demand,” as it can track the number of callers who are unable to get through when the line is closed. The CSU staff also utilizes the Illinois Legal Aid On-line (ILAO) website (www.illinoislegalaid.org) to provide resources to clients.

Overall, the CSU intake specialists appear to be dedicated and engaged and to care about helping prospective clients navigate the intake process. The specialists are well supervised.

There are no regularly scheduled CSU staff meetings. Staff received initial training on the phone and the computer systems, which included shadowing existing staff members, as well as some training about variations in the law and how to deal with people. Some CSU staff members consult the ILAO website to obtain or verify substantive law information.

The CSU continues to evolve and adapt to LAF’s needs; its procedures were most recently updated in February 2011. It is possible that the CSU staff will eventually be divided by specialties or will expand into a Brief Services Unit.

Recommendation II.1.6.1:

The program should continue to provide training to its intake staff so that specialists are able to more efficiently establish eligibility or provide routine advice, brief service or referral information and that fewer calls require immediate discussion with CSU attorney staff.

Recommendation II.1.6.2:

CSU staff should enter data directly into the CMS whenever it is feasible to do so, so that they do not spend time rewriting intake notes.

Recommendation II.1.6.3*:

The CSU should establish a regular meeting time when the phones are closed to review program issues, discuss best practices, receive substantive training, and learn about the outcomes of earlier CSU screenings.

Criterion 2. Engagement with the low-income population.

Finding 7. LAF is involved with members of the low-income community and with organizations based in its service area to ensure that the needs of the community are met.

LAF is currently working with numerous community-based organizations. For example, both family law and immigration attorneys meet on a regular basis with victims of domestic violence at Mujeres Latinas En Acción. In another successful model of community-based outreach and education, LAF conducts family law, domestic violence and general poverty law legal clinics primarily in Spanish at four to five area Head Start Centers. LAF partners with the AIDS Legal Council of Chicago (ALCC) to address the variety of legal issues faced by the AIDS/HIV community. The groups refer clients to each other and co-ordinate on trainings and grants.

Finding 8. LAF's new Community Engagement Unit will allow it to coordinate the program's outreach efforts.

LAF recognizes the importance of maintaining its established community ties as it consolidates its services in one office. Its newly-created Community Engagement Unit is designed to coordinate LAF's ongoing outreach efforts. The program anticipates that this unit will permit LAF to remain visible in low income neighborhoods throughout metropolitan Chicago and allow it to see and respond to emerging trends so that advocates can be more proactive than reactive.

The current plan is that the unit's director will be assisted by a staff attorney, an outreach coordinator, a number of VISTA attorneys and paralegals, as well as volunteers. The CEU staffers, who will be mobile, will collaborate with social service agencies, grassroots organizations, religious groups, etc. to expand LAF's education and outreach component through the development of self-help materials as well as legal presentations. Although the CEU is not designed to be an intake vehicle, it may conduct some intake.

Some staff expressed concerns about how the CEU will integrate its work with that of the advocates in the substantive practice groups. There is also concern that the existing ties of current staff members to local communities will be broken.

The CEU is attempting to address these concerns by enlisting practice group members to help conduct presentations. Their participation will be tracked to prevent undue burden and to match requests with the persons having the appropriate expertise. If there is no in-house expertise, the CEU will try to find a private attorney who has the necessary skills. Staff attorneys who conduct a presentation are "rewarded" by being able to work "remotely" and non-attorney staff members receive compensatory time. These incentives tripled the number of staff who volunteered to make presentations.

The CEU will give LAF greater opportunities to assess client satisfaction with its services. When LAF last conducted such a survey in early 2011, the results were found to be of limited value because there was a very low response rate.

Recommendation II.2.8.1*:

LAF should keep the agencies and community groups that are located in areas where offices are closing fully informed of the program's move and how LAF intends to stay connected with and to serve these communities in the future.

Recommendation II.2.8.2:

Although it is likely there will be much fine tuning of the CEU's efforts during its first year of operation, written work plans for the CEU staff should be considered as a way to measure its progress and success.

Recommendation II.2.8.3:

The CEU should continue to encourage all of LAF's advocacy staff to maintain and strengthen direct relationships with community and advocacy groups.

Recommendation I.2.8.4:

The CEU and the practice groups should institutionalize the practice of obtaining regular feedback from the community, using client satisfaction surveys and other methods, in order to ensure that LAF has the information necessary to understand the needs of the community and to help the program adjust to clients' emerging needs.

Recommendation I.2.8.5:

LSC encourages the CEU to work with the practice groups to devise broad-based solutions to the client problems they identify.

Criterion 3. Access and utilization by the low-income population.

Finding 9. LAF is conducting community-wide public benefits outreach efforts.

LAF has, with funding from both the City of Chicago and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), expanded its presence throughout its service area. Beginning in 2009, it placed paralegals in eight city service or workforce development offices. In 2010, LAF's receipt of funds from HHS allowed it to place additional paralegals at community sites. Under the supervision of LAF attorneys, these paralegals screen individuals for public benefit eligibility and, if appropriate, assist them in submitting applications. In some instances, the paralegals make internal referrals to the CSU or receive direct referrals from CSU staff.

The public benefits paralegals regularly identify clients who have legal issues in addition to their eligibility for benefits. Such clients may be referred to LAF or to other legal aid services programs in Chicago. The paralegals also conduct outreach and community education to inform community organizations and social service agencies of the services available to underserved populations through the project.

All of the public benefits paralegals meet weekly as a group with two attorneys at the LAF offices to review issues and receive substantive law training. Some reported

that they would appreciate receiving training on topics such as interviewing skills to improve their ability to interact with clients.

Although it is unclear whether LAF can maintain these efforts when the funding that supports them ends later this year, these projects are an example of the type of interaction the CEU and other LAF staff has been able to provide to clients as well as community groups and government agencies throughout its service area.

Recommendation II.2.9.1:

The weekly meetings of the public benefits outreach paralegals would be enhanced by including trainings relating to topics such as interviewing skills and tips for dealing with difficult clients.

Finding 10. LAF makes efforts to ensure access by its client population.

LAF has a number of special projects with individual contact numbers. For example, although both the HIV/AIDS Project and HOPP are based in the main office, they have their own telephone numbers. There are also separate numbers for the Crime Victims' Assistance Project and the Veterans' Rights Project. The Long Term Care Ombudsman Project can be reached through a toll-free number. Although all calls made to the Public Benefits Hotline's toll-free number are now being transferred to the CSU, LAF retained the telephone number because it is so well known.

As part of its CEU efforts, discussed in Finding 9, LAF is partnering with a number of local entities – the Chicago Bar Foundation, Chicago Bar Association, Metropolitan Family Services' Legal Aid Bureau (LAB), judges and ILAO - to establish a help desk in the Markham, IL courthouse. This location was chosen because Markham, southwest of Chicago, has a diverse population as well as the state's highest proportion of *pro se* litigants; it is also in Illinois' southern tier, which has been identified as the site of a concentrated poverty population. LAF and LAB will share the staffing of the desk for one-on-one counseling and ILAO will run the self-help kiosks.

Finding 11. LAF is committed to serving a diverse group of clients in its service area, including those with limited-English proficiency (LEP).

The program is equipped to communicate with non-English speaking people and makes reasonable accommodation for their special needs. The fastest-growing segment of the population in the program's primary service area is Latino. Ten of the twelve intake specialists are bilingual in English and Spanish and many of them also serve as translators. Callers who speak other languages are called back with the help of an interpreter. LAF's 2011 staff list indicates that the program has successfully hired persons with second language skills. One-third of the entire staff is bilingual; in addition to Spanish, they speak languages such as Urdu, Chinese, Cantonese, Polish, Hindi, Russian, French and Korean.

The language services manager oversees the program's 16 interpreters. She responds to attorney requests and assigns staff for internal (appointments, telephone, etc.) and external (court, depositions, etc.) services; she also reviews translated written material. LAF tests bilingual staff members to ensure that they are sufficiently competent to provide translating or interpreting services.

LAF's LEP plan addresses most of the components raised in LSC Program Letter 04-02, *Services to Client Eligible Individuals with Limited English Proficiency*. The plan, last updated in 2007, provides detailed instructions to staff on screening for language proficiency, providing written translations and/or summaries of important legal documents, and using commercial language services. It also has a good policy on not using a friend or family member to interpret.

PERFORMANCE AREA THREE. *Effectiveness of legal representation and other program activities intended to benefit the low-income population in the service area.*

Criterion 1. Legal work and legal work management.

Finding 12. LAF has a very experienced and dedicated legal staff that produces high quality legal work.

LAF has talented and passionate advocates who are committed to the goals and objectives of their clients. The staff is an appropriate mix of experienced and fairly new attorneys. At the time of the OPP visit, 13 of the program's 14 directors (including the executive director), were attorneys possessing an average of 24 years of legal experience, some of it gained before they began working at LAF. LAF's supervisory and senior attorneys have practiced for an average of 21 years. More than one-half of LAF's remaining attorney staff has been in the profession for ten years or less.³ Many of the program's experienced attorneys are readily available to answer questions, for consultations or to review written work for other attorneys in their areas of practice. The program prides itself on encouraging an open door policy.

The program has a history of renowned consumer and foreclosure defense work, and it has received praise from the judiciary and awards from state and national organizations for its efforts. Its bankruptcy advocates are recognized as national experts. Its Veterans' representation is creative and tenacious. LAF's employment and immigration advocacy enjoys a solid reputation. Many advocates have active practices

³ Numerous studies regarding the issues affecting public interest attorney longevity have been conducted. In 2006, the Chicago Bar Foundation and the Illinois Coalition for Equal Justice issued *Investing in Justice: A Framework for Effective Recruitment and Retention of Illinois Legal Aid Attorneys*, (www.chicagobarfoundation.org), which examined the importance of providing monetary and other supports to public interest lawyers early their careers. LAF's former executive director was a co-chair of the Illinois Coalition for Equal Justice steering committee that supervised this study.

before the Illinois Supreme Court and the 7th Circuit. LAF is seen as a valuable resource in matters relating to affordable medical and hospital care for low-income residents.

All the written legal work reviewed, ranging from 7th Circuit briefs to motions to advice letters to individual clients, was consistently excellent. The samples were well written, persuasive and thorough, demonstrated a command of the law, were clear and concise, and showed a high level of sophistication.

Attorneys are encouraged to and do routinely pursue aggressive litigation on behalf of their clients and are provided with resources for conducting depositions and other discovery as well as access to expert witnesses in order to maximize the opportunity for success. Neither the complexity nor difficulty of a given case is a discouragement for pursuing it, including appeals when necessary. New attorneys are trained and supported in this LAF value. Senior attorneys willingly co-counsel with more junior members of the staff, and often look outside of their substantive area when seeking assistance on cases. Despite such institutional supports, not all staff members appear aware of their ability to pursue systemic solutions to the problems their clients face.

Several LAF advocates recently secured a unanimous Illinois Supreme Court decision in a case involving the Trade Adjustment Assistance Reform Act, which was designed to provide additional financial support to those who lose their jobs to foreign competition; this decision is likely to have national implications. A recent 7th Circuit appeal of a Social Security case was preceded by the extensive involvement of LAF staff; many senior attorneys reviewed the brief, there were numerous moots before the oral argument, and a former LAF attorney with experience in this area of the law served as co-counsel. The court remanded the case for further review. Advocates often request jury trials. Although many result in settlements, LAF staff is capable of performing all the pre-trial and trial work. Junior attorneys, co-counseled by supervisors, take depositions, conduct other discovery and participate in witness preparation and exhibit production. At trial, they have the opportunity to conduct *voir dire*, give the opening or closing statements and handle direct examination, including that of adverse witnesses.

As part of its structural changes, LAF aims to increase its extended representation as well as its handling of cases with significant impact. The program anticipates that practice group directors will focus on impact work and “big picture” matters, and that all attorneys will have the necessary support and training to enable them to do more extended representation.

Members of the local judiciary the team spoke to are impressed with the quality of the LAF attorneys’ work. LAF attorneys are found to be professional, respectful, conscientious, and well-prepared. The attorneys staffing the *pro se* eviction desk were praised not only for being able to get results but also for being able to recognize larger legal issues that tenants face. LAF has been an active participant in Illinois’ efforts to address the state’s foreclosure issues; recently, one of its attorneys was appointed to serve on a Foreclosure Proceedings Committee formed by the Illinois Supreme Court.

Recommendation III.1.12.1:

LAF should use this time of organizational change to encourage a program-wide awareness of the value of systemic work.

Finding 13. LAF provides excellent supervision, particularly to newer attorneys.

Supervision requirements are explicitly set out in a program manual governing the performance standards for all LAF legal staff. LAF supervisors monitor caseloads and work with staff, co-counseling, training and performing case reviews. Case acceptance meetings are held routinely, supervisors review advocates' open cases every six months and can access Legal Server to look at cases at any time from any location. Closed cases are reviewed by supervisory attorneys; in some instances, all cases are reviewed, in others, there is a spot check of cases using Legal Server.

Attorneys are encouraged not to handle too many cases at one time. LAF implemented caseload caps of 35 active open cases for staff attorneys in general practice and 20 cases for supervisors. Caseloads are governed by the Collective Bargaining Agreement and the limits are adhered to by staff attorneys and supervisors. This generally seems to be viewed as working well.

New attorneys are carefully supervised and mentored, and the new attorney training, as described in the Collective Bargaining Agreement, is excellent. New attorneys have a probationary status for the first 12 months; and are evaluated somewhere between the sixth to ninth month in their tenures. In addition, hands-on case reviews take place at three-month intervals.

All staff attorneys are supposed to be evaluated annually; the procedure includes a self-evaluation, an evaluation by the staff attorney's supervisor and then an in-person meeting with the supervisor and the executive director. Although the staff attorney evaluation process was re-designed last year, it has been more than a year since such evaluations were conducted.

All advocates interviewed spoke well of their supervising attorneys. They were reported to be available, supportive, knowledgeable, and helpful.

Finding 14. LAF has appropriate training and professional development policies.

LAF advocates can participate in trainings run by the Chicago Bar Association (CBA); all LAF staff members have access to these programs as a result of their free CBA memberships underwritten by the Chicago Bar Foundation. LAF also conducts in-house trainings, and it encourages hands-on training through the co-counseling of cases.

In January 2011, LAF installed its first full-time director of training; she is responsible for developing internal training for the entire staff as well as securing access to external training. She will also be working with the existing program-wide training committee to determine how they can work together.

One focus will be on identifying training needs. When the practice groups are established, LAF will do a more formalized assessment, as well as a survey of supervisors to determine their training needs.

Some LAF attorneys meet periodically in substantive law area groups outside the program; these groups involve other legal services providers as well as community partners. These meetings include discussions of substantive matters, presentations from conferences as well as regulatory and statutory updates.

Finding 15. LAF advocates lack sufficient administrative support.

Attorneys generally have inadequate administrative support for their legal work. LAF released all of its secretaries three years ago; the remaining support staff members are primarily located in the current service offices. The program anticipates that, as it closes the branch offices, the support staff from those locations will be trained to fill positions in human resources, facilities management, development, and information technology at the one downtown location.

Many attorneys described the added difficulties they encounter in having to allow time for copying, preparing items for mailing and other administrative tasks, while also trying to accomplish court filings. Not only does the attorneys' lack of sufficient administrative support impinge on their efficiency, it also limits the time available to advocates to spend performing work on behalf of clients.

However, LAF does make very good use of its program wide-calendar, which allows all staff to see who is in which court each day. This information allows attorneys to file motions, appearances and other court documents for each other and coordinate their court appearances and other activities. The program also has an administrative staffer who is available to file court papers.

Recommendation III.1.15.1:

LAF should consider finding ways to provide attorney staff with secretarial or other administrative support in order to increase their efficiency.

Finding 16. The program's extended service case closings are relatively low.

In 2010, LAF closed a total of 17,465 cases; all but 184 of these were basic field cases. They were primarily in the areas of income maintenance (27.1%, of which almost half were food stamp cases, and many of which were food stamps applications), housing (24.6%), family (21%), and consumer/finance (12.4%). Proportionally, 15,242 (87.3%)

of all the cases closed by the program in 2010 were categorized as limited service cases; extended services were provided in the remaining 2,223 (12.7%) of its closed cases.

In 2010, LAF closed 247 cases per 10,000 poor persons – somewhat less than the national median (284) of closed cases per 10,000 poor persons. However, in 2010, the program closed only 31 extended service cases per 10,000 poor persons; this was approximately half of the national median (61) for closed extended cases per 10,000 poverty population. LAF’s relatively low extended case numbers may result from the complexity of some of its extended service cases, including the comprehensive nature of the discovery required, the number of jury trials conducted and the number of appeals to both federal and state courts.

Recommendation III.1.16.1:

With the formation of its practice groups, LAF should analyze its case work to ensure that it provides maximum service to and achieves maximum efficiency on behalf of its clients.

Criterion 2. Private attorney involvement.

Finding 17. LAF is in the process of reorganizing its PAI program.

LAF currently works with private attorneys in a number of ways. Volunteer attorneys, including retired attorneys, assist the office in a variety of capacities. LAF has developed sustained relationships with a number of local firms and corporations that are involved in specific projects. Members of a State Bar Association section, which includes corporation counsels as well as private firm attorneys, assist clients obtain benefits as part of one of LAF’s *pro bono* projects. *Pro bono* advocates help with administrative law cases under LAF supervision; many oversee the completion of the paperwork required in the U-Visa and VAWA cases while others handle adjustment of status and removal hearings. LAF oversees two *pro se* clinics that handle simple uncontested divorce and bankruptcy cases. In conjunction with LAF attorneys and paralegals, private attorneys and law students conduct the clinics, review the documents and provide individual consultations. One of the Domestic Relations Court judges praised the quality of the *Pro Se* Divorce Clinic attendees’ preparation for and presentation at hearings.

Despite these efforts, LAF’s PAI numbers are lower than the national medians. In 2010, LAF closed a total of 693 PAI cases. LAF categorized 540 as *pro bono* cases. The remaining 153 PAI cases were those in which staff co-counseled with private attorneys; this allowed LAF staff to benefit from the legal expertise and financial support of the local bar. More than half (56%) of the 693 PAI cases were family law matters and close to 80% were closed as limited representation. LAF closed nine PAI cases per 10,000 poor persons compared with a national median of 23; it closed two extended PAI cases per 10,000 poor persons compared with a national median of nine closed extended PAI cases per 10,000 poor persons.

The program is in the process of reorganizing its PAI efforts. LAF's *pro bono* efforts, previously directed by the program's chief operating officer, will now be supervised by the director of training and administered by a staff attorney. Together they will conduct an assessment of the work currently being done in an effort to ensure that the needs of clients and the goals of participating attorneys are being met. They will focus on building new relationships while continuing to work with law firms that have already assumed responsibilities for signature projects. LAF will continue to send blast e-mails with a description of the case to attorneys who have indicated a willingness to accept cases. LAF is working in conjunction with ILAO to conduct website recruitment of attorneys.⁴

LAF describes improved oversight procedures of PAI work since switching to Legal Server.

PAI attorneys have access to training and other resources via the Internet. It is LAF's intent to develop *pro bono* training for which CLE credit can be given. To do this, it will partner with ILAO and the Chicago Bar Foundation.

Recommendation II.2.17.1:

LAF should continue co-counseling appropriate cases with private firms as a means to expand client services, share litigation expenses and provide litigation experience to lesser-experienced attorneys.

Recommendation II.2.17.2:

LAF should expand its PAI efforts so that more *pro bono* attorneys are recruited, a wider variety of opportunities are offered, and the program refers more cases for extended representation.

Criteria 3 and 4. Other program services to and activities on behalf of the eligible client population.

Finding 18. LAF engages in a number of activities on behalf of the eligible client community.

LAF staff members engage in extensive community education activities. The HIV/AIDS Project conducts an employment training program; the Home Ownership Preservation Project holds trainings for housing counselors who work with homeowners seeking to avoid foreclosure; staff has conducted training for attorneys and counselors for the new foreclosure mediation project; the Veterans' Rights Project makes

⁴ LAF has also benefited from a number of statewide initiatives aimed at improving *pro bono* participation. The Illinois Supreme Court adopted rules both requiring that attorneys annually report *pro bono* hours and financial contributions to legal aid, and giving retired, inactive and corporate attorneys with limited status the ability to provide *pro bono* services in conjunction with a legal aid program. In early 2010, the Illinois Rules of Professional Conduct were amended to make it easier for private lawyers to provide short-term, limited scope *pro bono* representation.

presentations to veterans groups; ombudsmen make presentations to nursing home residents and staff; and domestic violence and family law attorneys and paralegals conduct community legal education programs through and at domestic violence shelters.

LAF also staffs *pro se* help desks in both federal and state courthouses so that individuals may secure legal information and assistance during specified hours. In 2010, 1,935 individuals received assistance from the desks at the district and bankruptcy courts, both of which were funded by the Chicago Bar Foundation. The Federal Court Self Help Desk is for individuals seeking assistance with District Court matters. The desk is staffed by two LAF attorneys who are overseen by a Supervisory Attorney with expertise in federal practice as well as employment law since the civil cases are primarily employment cases. They are assisted by a roster of volunteer attorneys, many of whom are veteran employment lawyers with federal court experience. Last year, those staffing the desk kept 900 appointments and saw 480 different individuals.

The Bankruptcy Help Desk is for *pro se* litigants appearing in bankruptcy court. Currently staffed by a temporary LAF staff attorney, it is designed to help either debtors or creditors, but not corporations.

LAF runs a third *pro se* help desk at the Skokie, IL courthouse for tenants facing eviction. LAF staff gives individuals advice; they also provide representation in 60-70% of the cases. Although there is no separate funding for this project, the court does make conference rooms available so that advocates can meet with clients.

Finding 19. LAF has a licensed social worker on staff to help clients best address their legal issues.

LAF is part of a growing trend to enhance the work of lawyers by having them partner with social workers. In LAF's case, a social worker has been on staff since February 2007. In the more than four years that she has been a part of the program, she has worked primarily in the area of family law, including domestic violence and parenting issues. She has also worked on some mental health and landlord-tenant cases. She can provide assistance and insight when clients' legal problems are rooted in their social environment.⁵

The social worker has also helped the program multiply available social work resources by taking part in the supervision of between two - four social work student interns placed at LAF each semester.

PERFORMANCE AREA FOUR. *Effectiveness of governance, leadership and administration.*

⁵ It should be noted that a number of LAF advocates hold degrees in areas other than law, such as nursing and counseling.

Criterion 1. Board governance.

Finding 20. The LAF board is engaged in the work of the program.

The LAF board is a supportive body that effectively promotes and expands the reach and influence of the program in the communities it serves. Many members of the board are actively engaged in fundraising, planning and oversight of the organization. The board has led the program's funding effort by making significant individual contributions and assisting in the development of additional program resources. Board members, including client members, contributed \$63,000 to LAF in 2010; the program's goal is to increase this amount to \$85,000 in 2011.

As a whole, the board is an appropriately diverse group, which is representative of the various geographical areas and low-income populations served by the program. The 39-member board is almost evenly divided by gender; its members are predominantly white and African American. Client board members comprise one-third of the board, serve on every board committee and hold two board offices.

LAF also has a Young Professionals Board (YPB) that consists of over 50 younger people from large firms, government agencies and other entities around Chicago who engage in fund-raising and outreach for LAF. The YPB, formed several years ago, supports the yearly golf outing and conducts other social events, including raising money for the annual LAF luncheon. It also serves as a potential pipeline for future board members, including non-lawyers. In 2010, the YPB raised \$46,000 for the program.

The board has five active committees – Audit; Budget and Compensation; Executive; Development and Marketing; and Nominating. The board Budget and Compensation Committee meets regularly, but does not, as a practice, routinely meet before full board meetings. This committee does receive monthly financial reports.

Board participation is uneven. The board bylaws do not have an attendance requirement and there are board members who do not regularly attend board meetings. The board did not have term limits until recently. It has now instituted a 12-year term limit on membership; this limit, which went into effect in 2011, will not have an impact until 2023. As a result, the change is not going to encourage immediate turnover of board members who are not assisting the organization.

New board members receive two three-hour orientations. Board training was re-instituted in 2010. The program has a board manual.

The board's evaluation of the executive director is led by the Budget and Compensation committee. The last evaluation was conducted in September 2010 and it included a written self-evaluation, a survey of the staff who immediately report to her and other members of the LAF steering committee, as well as input from other members

of the Budget and Compensation Committee. This committee oversees the evaluation, and its co-chairs personally reviewed the evaluation with the executive director.

Recommendation IV.1.20.1:

LAF should consider implementing the term limits sooner, with an option for re-appointment for active members. This will not only energize the board but it will also open up slots so that members of the YPB can move into full board membership.

Recommendation IV.1.20.2:

Board members should have a meeting attendance requirement and should be removed from the board when they miss too many meetings.

Criterion 2. Leadership.

Finding 21. LAF is governed by strong leadership.

The executive director and the other program leaders are generally highly respected by staff and by members of the broader community. The executive director has 29 years of legal experience, including four years serving as the executive director of LAF. She is well-liked and consistently praised for being open and willing to share information; her leadership model was described as providing a “sea change in transparency.”

The executive director is said to possess an excellent management style. At the same time that she is effectively exercising oversight and establishing clear lines of authority, she is also willing to delegate responsibility to her management team. The executive director makes major decisions with input from the team members and in consultation with the board; she obtains its approval prior to implementation of any new major policy. She has brought in experts, where appropriate, to help the program with its efforts. And, she respects and seeks out input from the entire staff. Committees were formed to study and plan for such matters as the transition to Legal Server, staff development and retention, and the formation of practice groups before such changes were implemented.

The director’s relationship with the union appears to be solid. She has been open with budget information, participated in bargaining and worked to ensure that staff endorsed the recent practice group changes that were made.

Criterion 3. Overall management and administration.

Finding 22. LAF management is shared by several levels of staff.

The executive director is not a micro-manager, and has worked successfully with a multi-layered management team. She is assisted by a chief operating officer, an attorney who has been with the program in a number of capacities for 40 years, and a chief financial officer, who has been at LAF for the past decade. Until recently, she

shared senior management responsibility with these two officers along with two deputy directors. LAF eliminated the deputy director positions and created other positions, expanding the leadership opportunities available to staff. Under the new system, the executive director will be working with the COO, the CFO-; and the directors of advocacy, client and community engagement, and external relations (all of whom report directly to the executive director), as well as the directors of training, technology for advocates, and the practice groups.

Supervisory attorneys meet monthly with the executive director to review the status of the program – funding issues, centralization, etc. These meetings are seen as being productive and allowing for the development and maintenance of a sense of shared mission.

The program has worked to enhance the leadership skills of its staff. Almost all of the program’s supervisory staff took part in the Chicago Bar Foundation’s Legal Aid Academy courses on supervision and management. Some supervisors have attended Management Information Exchange (MIE) trainings. Other supervisors recently completed trainings on how to hold effective meetings; LAF will evaluate meetings these persons conduct to see if the training improved the efficiency and effectiveness of their meetings.

LAF’s efforts to create a more diverse and culturally competent workforce should be acknowledged. One of the program’s strategic goals was to secure “highly qualified, well trained, productive, and diverse people across the agency.” To achieve this, in 2008 LAF formed a Diversity Committee, which conducted an in-depth staff survey. The program aimed to develop a Diversity Mission Statement. In 2010, LAF hired a consultant to help it think strategically about diversity; she was going to review LAF recruitment, hiring, turnover, and advancement. Given LAF’s decision to accelerate its centralization timetable from November 2012 to November 2011, the consultant advised LAF against trying to address such issues while it was reorganizing its structure and moving its offices.

In restructuring, LAF increased the number of women and minority attorneys holding management and leadership positions. LAF’s current executive director is a woman. While all the practice groups are headed by non-minority male attorneys, the directors of training, client and community services, and technology for advocates, as well as the directors of the CSU and CEU are all females; a number of these women are also minorities. The director of external relations, a non-attorney, is also a woman.

LAF has a well-written disaster recovery plan, last updated in 2007, that addresses preparedness, response, mitigation and recovery in an emergency; protection of staff, office property, case files and technology; response to a disaster; and the program’s continuity of operation. The plan is quite detailed and delegates responsibility to both a program-wide disaster emergency committee and local office emergency committees. It takes into account both natural and manmade disasters, including the types of problems that would be encountered in an urban workplace.

Recommendation IV.3.22.1:

After the practice groups are established and the office consolidation is completed, the program should aim to work with the consultant and finish the work the diversity committee started in 2008.

Recommendation IV.3.22.2:

After LAF completes its office consolidation, it should update its disaster recovery plan so that it corresponds to the program's new configuration and present it to the board for approval, as needed.

Finding 23. The technology needs of the program are capably administered.

Generally, LAF handles technology effectively. The program is following the trend of placing an experienced attorney in the position of director of technology for advocates. The director has significant institutional knowledge and practice experience, but the program will need to invest in information technology (IT) training to ensure she can fulfill her duties.

The technology team is responsive to user needs. Several interviewees said that the Information Technology (IT) department is more focused on staff needs now than it had been previously. IT support tickets are handled quickly and reliably. The director of technology for advocates and the Legal Server transition team received high marks for their handling of the Legal Server migration. Most staff appears happy with the new system and believes the initial training was helpful. In addition to being a modern, web-based system, Legal Server also provides improved reporting functionality.

Besides the Legal Server orientation, most staff members have not attended technology trainings and were not aware that other technology trainings were available. LAF is in the process of offering in-person technology trainings through a local training company.

Some technology problems persist. Some of the staff members told the team of problems they would like to see fixed. They include: poorly operating fax and copy machines; lack of faxing capacity; no orientation and training for software and computer use; lack of a well-organized and complete brief/document bank; and lack of the latest technology with regard to trial presentations.

The program has begun moving to a "paperless" office in an effort to both cut costs and reduce space needs. Currently, LAF stores all but its 2010 and 2011 files off-site. Storage costs, including the cost of moving files to retrieve contents or for disposal, are high. With the assistance of some temporary staff, LAF has begun a Legal Server scanning effort. LAF's goal is to scan all files that physically remain in the office - citizenship papers, retainers, etc. - and eventually shred all paper, including client files.

They will only retain items such as documents with raised seals. The staff will ultimately have scanning responsibility. LAF anticipates that it will finish much of this before it moves to the new offices.

Recommendation IV.1.23.1:

The director of technology for advocates should attend national technology trainings such as the conferences held by the Nonprofit Technology Network (NTEN) and the LSC's Technology Initiative Grants (TIG) program.

Recommendation IV.1.23.2:

LAF should consider following a rollout model for the upcoming HotDocs-Legal Server integration project that is similar to its approach to the original Legal Server rollout. All users who could potentially benefit from this project should be involved in trainings.

Recommendation IV.1.23.3*:

The program should ensure that all staff are aware of technology training opportunities and consider making these sessions mandatory.

Recommendation IV.1.23.4:

As part of the program's ongoing technology planning, staff should be surveyed regarding their technology needs.

Criterion 4. Financial administration.

Finding 24. LAF's financial administration appears to be well-handled.⁶

LAF's fiscal operations are handled by a chief financial officer (CFO) who has been with the program for ten years. He holds a Master's Degree in Finance. Prior to LAF, he worked for 15 years as the Director of Finance for a social service agency with a multi-million dollar budget. In addition to the CFO, the department also consists of one accountant and three assistants.

The LAF budget reflects the program's obligations and mission, and systems are in place to ensure the regular monitoring of expenses and revenue. Reports to funders are prepared and submitted in a timely fashion. However, budgets include only one-year projections. The program operates on a calendar year budget; the full board does not normally adopt the yearly budget until February.

The CFO reported that it would be beneficial for financial personnel of the Illinois LSC-funded programs to meet regularly to discuss their challenges and ascertain how their work can be improved or streamlined.

⁶ This visit was conducted by the Office of Program Performance (OPP) for the purposes set forth in the Introduction. OPP findings and recommendations under this criterion are limited to staffing, organization, and general functions. Assessment of fiscal operations is conducted by other offices at LSC.

Recommendation IV.4.24.1:

To allow for better fiscal planning, the program should project revenue and expenses out for a three year horizon.

Recommendation IV.4.24.2:

The program should encourage its CFO and the fiscal officers of other Illinois legal services programs to meet periodically and discuss the challenges faced in accomplishing their duties.

Criterion 5. Human resources administration.

Finding 25. Responsibility for administration of the program's human resources duties is shared by several staff members.

Despite the size of its staff, LAF does not have one professional assigned to oversee all the program's human resources tasks. Instead, it has spread the duties among three mid-level employees who are under the direction of the program's administrator and chief operating officer; one of these employees now serves as the human resources coordinator. The program recognizes that this arrangement is not satisfactory.

Basic services (e.g., payroll, benefit enrollment, claims, etc.) are handled competently. Some of these duties, such as payroll, are not handled in-house.

The annual evaluation process, which is governed by the Collective Bargaining Agreement, calls for all staff to perform self-evaluations and goal-setting for the coming year. Although evaluations are not conducted annually for all staff, the program makes a good effort to do so. The human resources staff does not coordinate the performance evaluations.

Recommendation IV.5.25.1:

Given its size, LAF should consider retaining a professional director of human resources.

Criterion 6. Internal communication.

Finding 26. LAF utilizes many different forms of internal communication.

Management communicates to staff through e-mails and an intranet newsletter, where program information is posted. In 2010, staff members used this internal site to anonymously ask questions about the program's plan to centralize operations and the executive director used it to respond to those inquiries. The program convenes town hall meetings two to three times per year and uses those occasions to answer questions and solicit input.

Following management meetings, supervisors are encouraged to communicate program news to the staff members they supervise. Most staff reported that the program leadership keeps staff well informed of organizational developments and other matters that are of concern.

LAF's executive director, chief financial officer and chief operating officer meet regularly with the executive committee of the union to review the program's financial status, and staff committees have been involved in the budget process. Communication with the union is ongoing.

Recommendation IV.6.26.1:

LAF should continue to keep staff timely informed about the program's restructuring and, as appropriate, ensure that staff be given the opportunity to remain involved in programmatic changes and have input in the development of new procedures and policies.

Criterion 7. General resource development and maintenance.

Finding 27. LAF has an active development department.

LAF's efforts are headed by the director of external relations who oversees all fundraising and marketing, and creates both short- and long-term strategies. She has been highly successful in securing additional funding for the program; her efforts have expanded over the past four years and reflect the program's more aggressive approach. However, at the time of the OPP visit, the program anticipated obtaining somewhat less in non-LSC revenue in 2011 than it secured in 2010.

The director of external relations is assisted by a staff of two. This group has attended some fundraising conferences and trainings, a number of which have emphasized the use of technology and social networking. LAF has a general Facebook page and LAF created a secure online webpage link to facilitate donor contributions.

At the time of the late-May 2011 Program Quality Visit, LAF was preparing for its annual luncheon, which is held at the end of June. Development staff had sent out invitations and made all the arrangements with the venue. It utilizes eTapestry software to help with some fundraising planning functions. The program also enlists the help of volunteers. The annual luncheon raises more than \$500,000.

The establishment of the Young Professionals Board has energized LAF's development efforts. This collection of young professionals (primarily attorneys) serves as ambassadors for LAF; their coordinated fundraising efforts have raised thousands of dollars for the program. YPB has its own Facebook page.

In 2010, LAF received city, state and federal grants totaling over \$3 million, private grants totaling \$1.5 million, and over \$1 million in individual and law firm contributions. LAF continues to seek funding from a variety of sources. It is likely that,

as the program continues to work closely with community groups, it will find additional collaborative opportunities that can help it secure funding for group enterprises.

LAF received *cy pres* awards totaling over \$675,000 in 2010. LAF pursued attorneys' fees since the lifting of the LSC restrictions on such awards; in 2010, it secured fees from special education due process cases and Title VII matters.

LAF has increased its staff with the addition of Skadden and Equal Justice Works fellows, as well as VISTA volunteers. All of the VISTA volunteers have made a one year commitment to LAF.

Criterion 8. Coherent and comprehensive delivery structure. (omitted)

Criterion 9. Participation in an integrated legal services delivery system.

Finding 28. LAF is an active part of a network of providers situated in Chicago and throughout the state of Illinois.

LAF collaborates with numerous other legal services providers in the area and the state. It participates in the Illinois State Bar Association's Delivery of Legal Service Committee and the Chicago Bar Association's Legal Aid Committee. LAF has worked with other Illinois legal services programs to strategize about how to increase state revenues for access to justice, and has been part of the regular meetings of providers scheduled by the state's IOLTA program and the Chicago Bar Foundation. Since 2009, all three of Illinois' LSC-funded programs and CARPLS have utilized the same Legal Server Case Management System, which is also directly linked to Illinois Legal Aid Online.

Many attorney staff members are actively engaged in bar associations, community and social services organizations; teach in local law schools; and participate in other activities to further the interests of the client population and promote the organization. LAF attorneys have written contributions for the ILAO's website.

FINDINGS and RECOMMENDATIONS

Migrant Project

PERFORMANCE AREA ONE. *Effectiveness in identifying the most pressing legal needs of low-income people in the service area and targeting resources to address those needs.*

Criterion 1. Periodic comprehensive assessment and ongoing consideration of legal needs.

Finding M-1. LAF's Migrant Project conducted a needs assessment in 2008.

In 2008 LAF conducted a needs assessment for its migrant component as part of the project's case intake review that occurs every two years. It interviewed low-income persons, conducted meetings, met with community and social services organizations, and reviewed census data as well as other legal needs studies and internal data sources. The following year, the project did an internal review of its overall work. As a result, it decided to move one of its summer outreach sites.

Criterion 2. Setting goals and objectives, developing strategies and allocating resources.

Finding M-2. The Migrant Project's priorities are not clearly stated.

A review of the written materials LAF provided OPP revealed inconsistencies in the Migrant Project's priorities as set forth in the most recent version of LAF's *Priorities in the Provision of Legal Services* and the program's 2010 LSC competition narrative and its 2011 LSC renewal statement. The manual states that wage issues, AWP [Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act], housing, health, family law, civil rights, and tax advice are project priorities. Bilingual education and public benefits work are mentioned as project priorities in the 2010 LSC narrative but are not listed as priorities in the LAF manual. In its 2011 LSC renewal application, LAF again refers to public benefits and education cases, stating that the Migrant Project's "highest areas of concentration are AWP and FLSA [Fair Labor Standards Act] cases, public benefits cases, and housing and field sanitation cases. The Project has also undertaken representation of some cases involving migrant children's lack of access to education specifically funded for them." Although the LAF manual does state that "[t]he Migrant Project adheres to all the Priorities in this document, with the following additions and exceptions...", this introductory language does not help clear up these discrepancies.

Recommendation M-I.2.2.1*:

LAF should address the inconsistency in its written materials to ensure that the Migrant Project's actual work is consistent with the project's stated priorities.

PERFORMANCE AREA TWO. *Effectiveness in engaging and serving the low-income population throughout the service area.*

Criteria 1 and 2. Dignity and sensitivity, and engagement with and access and utilization by the low-income population.

Finding M-3. The program's migrant component makes a concerted effort to effectively serve the client population and conduct appropriate outreach.

The Migrant Project's full-time staff, which consists of the director, one staff attorney and one paralegal, is all bilingual in English and Spanish. The project serves the entire state, which it has divided into three regions. Since 2003, the Project has maintained at least one of its summer satellite offices on-site at Prairie State Legal Services.

In the summer, the project hires bilingual law students. The law students who staff the Migrant Project in the summer months begin work the Tuesday before Memorial Day. They live and work throughout the state, and spend 80 – 85% of their time doing outreach to migrant camps and other areas where migrants congregate. Students are given a mobile office (lap top, scanner, printer, and cell phone). Some have GPS units.

During the student's first week with the Migrant Project, they are required to meet with all the agencies in their geographic area. Based on these meetings, each student puts together a plan. Students let the project director know where they are going before an activity. Most weeks during the summer students see permanent staff at least two times a week. The project engages in outreach events all over the state. Examples of the project's outreach include presentations at agencies that serve migrants (e.g. River Valley Migrant and Seasonal Head Start), places of migrant employment (e.g. Tyson Foods processing plant), migrant camps (e.g. Union Jackson migrant camp in Southern Illinois), and community events (e.g. Rochelle Middle School parent night).

PERFORMANCE AREA THREE. *Effectiveness of legal representation and other program activities intended to benefit the low-income population in the service area.*

Criterion 1. Legal representation.

Finding M-4. The staff of LAF's Migrant Project is experienced. Its casework is impressive.

The current director of LAF's Migrant Project, who took over when the former director retired in 2009, has been affiliated with the project for ten years. He is involved with both regional and national organizations; he will be making a presentation on the use of the Fair Labor Standards Act at this fall's National Employment Lawyers' Association (NELA) conference in Washington, DC. The project's paralegal has been with the unit since 1999; before that he was the director of a community service agency on Chicago's Northside.

The Migrant Project's legal work is quite good, and the advocates do not hesitate to take on difficult cases. Over the years the project has developed solid ties with other migrant projects throughout the country. It has been litigating a Fair Labor Standards Act /Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act case on behalf of 91 farmworkers; it is co-counseling this case with Texas RioGrande Legal Aid, Inc. and Indiana Legal Services. One portion of this case, which had been pending in the 5th Circuit, was recently settled and one of the defendants agreed to pay the plaintiffs \$220,000, including \$68,000 in attorney fees.

Finding M-5. LAF ensures that Migrant Project staff receives appropriate training.

LAF's Migrant Project staff and students receive appropriate training. The students take part in in-house training and they have a manual, updated by students, about where outreach occurred the previous year. The project also takes advantage of regional and national farmworker law training. Last year the entire staff went to a national conference in Atlanta. This year, the staff and students attended a training in Ohio with other Midwest migrant project summer interns.

PERFORMANCE AREA FOUR. *Effectiveness of governance, leadership and administration.*

(Note: The discussion of program governance and management is the same for the migrant division as it is for the basic field program.)