

About SRLN



[About SRLN - 2020 Report](#)

Introduction

The composition of state court litigants has changed dramatically over the past ten years. Where complex civil litigation and lawyer represented parties had been the norm, 60 -100% of cases today involve at least one pro se (self-represented) party in matters such as family, housing and consumer litigation. The rise of the self-represented litigant (SRL) has created an unprecedented disruption in the practice of law and the management of courts.

The Self-Represented Litigation Network (SRLN), a leading voice in the national movement for 100% access to civil justice, supports justice system professionals focused on the question of how best to reform ALL aspects of the legal system

(courts, legal aid, the bar, and non-legal partners) so that SRLs experience the courts (and indeed the legal system) as a consumer-oriented environment guided by the principles of equal protection and due process. SRLN is a resource center that provides toolkits, evaluation, implementation guidance and thought leadership; we are a network that connects and supports reform-minded leaders throughout the country; and offer a geospatial data and analysis hub for the civil justice space. (See [SRLN Brief: Envisioning 100% Access to Civil Justice](#))

The Need

In the United States, civil legal disputes are handled in more than 15,000 courts, resulting in a patchwork of jurisdictions among state, county, municipal authorities. An estimated 46 million people are appearing in the courts, handling cases involving divorce, custody, child support, guardianship, housing, and consumer. These courts consistently report through sampling that 75% or more of these cases have at least one self-represented litigant. Extrapolations based on these estimates, and factoring in the nearly 52 million traffic cases filed annually, suggest that approximately 1 out of 10 people in the United States is involved in newly filed case each year and that 3 out of 5 in civil cases do not have a lawyer. See [NCSC Statistics Project](#), NCSC Summary of SRL Stats 2006, and [SRLN Brief: How Many SRLs? \(SRLN 2015\)](#).

The Response

In 2005, the Self-Represented Litigation Network (SRLN) was formed as a national organization under the leadership of [Richard Zorza](#) and others dedicated to transforming our legal system so that people would no longer need to face some of life's most difficult challenges alone and without help. SRLN doesn't represent a single voice. We are a network of judges, court managers, attorneys, librarians, scholars, technologists, and community leaders who believe everyone deserves access to justice and that when people come to court, they have a right to procedural justice and to understand the proceedings in which they are participating. As the only organization in the United States focused on the needs of the self-represented in civil courts, we envision a nation in which **every person can get some form of effective assistance with their civil legal needs**. To that end, SRLN identifies, supports and evaluates innovative services and strategies to

create a user-friendly legal system for self-represented litigants.

Since our inception, we have identified a successful multi-faceted approach to advancing access oriented solutions for the self-represented by coordinating the following services and activities that shape the national conversation:

- Hosting an online resource center and communications hub that monitors trends and events, provides analysis and includes a curated collection of seminal materials, training curricula, best practices manuals, toolkits, event calendar, and newsletter;
- Coordinating substantive [Working Groups](#) with reform agendas chaired by national leaders in areas including Courtroom Services & Case Management, Federal Courts, Forms & Technology, Judicial, Law Libraries, Research, and Strategy & Outreach;
- Producing scholarship, studies, and reports that are distinguished by their innovative thought leadership and analysis of emerging practices;
- Shaping and conducting research and evaluation to support evidence-based practice, innovation, and sustained excellence;
- Providing training and education tailored to the unique needs and perspectives of various stakeholders via conferences and webinars.

Accomplishments

Over the last decade, the SRLN has successfully incubated and championed innovations including self-help centers, standardized forms, case management reform, procedural simplification, plain language and multi-lingual resources and services, strategic and empowering uses of technology, integrated delivery systems among providers, and judicial education to improve the self-represented litigant (SRL) courtroom environment. Our leading publications include:

- [Best Practices in Court-Based Programs for the Self-Represented: Concepts, Attributes, Issues for Exploration, Examples, Contacts, and Resources](#) (2008)

This document, now in its second version, summarizes forty-two best practices in this area of innovation, with descriptions of each practice, suggested attributes, examples, and contacts.

- [Effectiveness of Courtroom Communication in Hearings Involving Two Self-Represented Litigants](#)(2008)

These materials are the product of research conducted by the Network and its partners into the effectiveness of, and best practices in, communication between judges and the self-represented. They include a 30-minute DVD in which a judge summarizes the results of the research, and in which the litigants and judges study comment on their cases.

- [A Model for a Comprehensive Self Assessment of Court Programs to Assist Self-Represented Litigants](#) (2007)

These materials are a comprehensive packet of surveys and tools designed to help courts assess how well they deal with the self-represented and to make improvements in their practices.

- [Judicial Education Curriculum Package](#)

This package includes curricula on Access to Justice in the Courtroom for the Self-Represented (Introductory and Comprehensive versions) and An Overview of Judicial Leadership in Access to Justice for the Self Represented. Each curriculum includes a PowerPoint, with detailed faculty notes, and an integrated Activity Guide and Resource Handbook. The package includes an integrated DVD of Courtroom Best Practices, based on courtroom research.

- [Court Leadership Package for Self-Represented Litigation Innovation](#)

This leadership package includes fifteen Solutions Modules, each highlighting a different innovation. Each module includes a PowerPoint, with preparation notes, a chapter of an integrated Activity Guide, a chapter of an integrated Resource Handbook, a set of brief Program Profiles that provide additional detail on programs discussed in the PowerPoint, and a selection of video segments from the accompanying DVD.

- [Public Libraries and Access to Justice Packet](#)

This set of materials assists public libraries and their partners in developing programs of informational assistance to the self-represented. The package of training PowerPoints and support materials includes a FAQ template that can be used to develop a customized set of links to key access to justice information. Ethical issues concerning how public librarians can appropriately assist the self-represented are also covered.

- [Diagnostic Toolkit](#)

A series of diagnostic protocols designed to assist courts in identifying problems experienced in providing access to justice, and implement solutions. Protocols include examples of solutions and resource materials.

- [The Sustainable 21st Century Law Library: Vision, Deployment and Assessment for Access to Justice](#) (2012)

This report, prepared in close collaboration with the Network, analyzes how law libraries can remain relevant by transforming themselves into access to justice centers. It addresses issues of mission, materials, technology, staffing, management, and evaluation.

- [Model Code of Judicial Conduct Provisions on Self-Represented Litigation: Options for Alternative Comment Language Prepared in Support of Potential State Activity in Response to 2012 Resolution 2 of the Conference of Chief Justices and the Conference of State Court Administrators](#) (2013)

This memorandum lays out ways that states can develop state-specific comment language for their judicial codes. The memo reflects recent research, as well as recent state developments.

- [Principles and Best Practices For Access- Friendly Court Electronic Filing](#) (2013)

This document, the preparation of which was funded by the Legal Services Corporation through a grant to Central Minnesota Legal Services, was developed in close collaboration with the Network. It explores a variety of principles and practices in areas from fee waiver to training, and from front end design to management.

- [IV-D Funding Resource Guide](#) (2014) (revised 2017)

Title IV-D of the Social Security Act allows for reimbursement to courts for the costs associated with assisting litigants with child support and paternity matters. Several states court systems and local courts have obtained significant resources for their court self help programs from this federal source. This Guide is designed to help states access this funding stream to support self-help activities.

- [Resource Guide on Serving Self-Represented Litigants Remotely](#) (2016)

The *Resource Guide* provides options for courts and other entities interested in providing services to self-represented litigants using means that are not face-to-face, instead of, or in addition to, in-person alternatives such as walk-in services, workshops, and clinics. It also includes information regarding technology and business process options and describes a study of how eight sites provide remote self-help services to self-represented litigants and its principal findings and recommendations.

Results

As a result of these efforts, the SRLN was pleased to recently confirm that forty-two states have adopted at least some SRLN best practices recommendations. Ten of these states have developed comprehensive SRL service delivery systems that ensure every person in those states have access to some level of legal self-help. Thanks to the spectacular efforts of our members during the last decade, we now have a robust menu of SRL service options that have been tested and refined under a variety of conditions. The central challenge of the next decade is developing the mechanisms necessary to ensure that every person in America, no matter where they live, has access to some meaningful level of self-help services. SRLN is committed to a multi-faceted strategy to bring about change in our courts and service providers that is grounded in a sophisticated communications strategy of facilitating peer-to-peer connections, as well as exposing members to the sector's most promising innovations and challenging members to shift their points of view and to problem solve from new perspectives.

The Organization

We are a hosted non-profit project, at the [Legal Aid Association of California](#), a 501(c)(3) public charity that provides full fiscal sponsorship including grant and contract management. Our Project Advisory Board is comprised of The Honorable Fern Fisher (Ret.), The Honorable Mark Juhas, [David Neumeyer](#), [Bonnie Hough](#), and serves as [Katherine Alteneader](#) Director Emerita.

Those participating in Network activities include individuals from national judicial and civil legal programs, including the [Conference of Chief Justices](#), the [Conference of State Court Administrators](#), the [National Center for State Courts](#), the [American Bar Association](#), the [Legal Services Corporation](#), the [American Association of Law Librarians](#) and the [National Center for Access to Justice](#), the [National Association for Court Management](#), and [ProBonoNet](#). Participants also include individuals from state and county courts, as well as from legal aid programs throughout the United States. Views expressed in any of our publications or on this website are not necessarily those of participant organizations, individuals or funders.

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