

Legal Aid of North Carolina chooses Legal Files for full function case management and automated intake/eligibility

Background

Committed to equal justice for all people, Legal Aid of North Carolina, Inc. helps children, families, individuals and migrant workers solve problems that affect their basic needs, such as housing, safety from domestic violence or abuse, health care, subsistence income, environmental safety and consumer loan problems.

A statewide, nonprofit organization, Legal Aid of North Carolina operates in all 100 counties through geographically based offices and operates project units that focus on special areas of the law.

The Challenge

The organization was attempting to manage 17 separate databases, no two of which were exactly alike in design, structure or how they were used. The existing databases stored data, performed eligibility calculations and produced reports. LANC had no statewide access to document assembly, no document management, no way to easily standardize forms, systems or procedures. Creating consolidated reports for funding organizations also was a challenge.

The Results

At LANC, 13 offices and some 300 users are using Legal Files. Legal Files now incorporates a wide variety of functions that previously required several different applications, if they were available at all. Creating consolidated reports for funding organizations was a challenge. With Legal Files, consolidated reports are easy to create using Microsoft Access front-end query and report writer provided by Legal Files.

Ease of Customization

LANC finds the power and ease of Legal Files customization extremely beneficial. For instance, LANC has created its own entries for every field that uses a drop-down list; plus the fields can be modified when needed. Custom windows for new data requirements (as specified by a funding source, perhaps) have also been created. For example, when the Legal Services Corporation issued its new requirement regarding Matter Services, it required only a little thought and preparation for LANC develop a custom window for storing much of this data.

(more...)

“Legal Files is far more than just a way to store data; its many built-in features made it truly a case and office management system in the best possible sense of the term.”

Gray Wilson,
Legal Aid of North Carolina

Customer Profile

Legal Aid of North Carolina, Inc.

- Statewide nonprofit program
- Responsible for providing free legal services in civil matters to low-income people
- Approximately 300 users in 13 offices

Challenge:

- Consolidate 17 separate databases
- Share statewide resources while functioning as separate entities
- Improve reporting capabilities for funders

Solution:

- Implement Legal Files' Enterprise throughout the state
- Provide customization capabilities to meet ever-changing data requirements
- Provide intake/eligibility and case management functions in one program

Results:

- Leverage resources throughout organization
- Serve more clients more efficiently
- Produce consolidated reports for funding organizations on demand

LANC has also created custom windows to enter specialized data for certain types of cases, such as divorce or bankruptcy, and then uses that specialized data to populate form pleadings and other documents. Using File Menu Templates, LANC specifies which Legal Files components are available in different types of files, creating custom file menus for housing cases, PAI cases, cases involving wills and estates, etc.

LANC has also created file checklists outlining all the steps involved in a particular type of case—both to guide inexperienced staff members and to serve as visible reminders to busy staff members so a step will not be missed or forgotten. LANC has also created checklists for regulatory requirements such as the citizenship attestation or statement of facts. LANC has also created automatic reminders to do certain tasks whenever a case is opened, closed, assigned, unassigned or otherwise changes status.

LANC uses Legal Files' Enterprise System, which allows LANC to maintain each program's data separately and still prepare consolidated reports when needed. Using Enterprise, every office can share individual and group calendars, access an unlimited selection of document templates (the templates work especially well for substantive law questionnaires) search and copy a complete library of documents, and create and monitor task assignments for themselves and **other staff.**

Accommodating Security

Security is another highly customizable element of Legal Files. Users can be given full, limited or no access to virtually every individual component of Legal Files, either singly or as a member of a security group. Enterprise provides each office with its own secure view of the data, while providing administrative controls and system-wide reporting capabilities, all within a single database.

Benefits for Managers

Legal Files provides enormous benefits to LANC managers. From their desktop, they can review the work of their staff members at any time and use Legal Files' e-mail or tickler systems to comment, suggest additional tasks or send reminders. These e-mails, assignments and reminders are stored as part of the file for easy access later. When a file is ready to close, a complete history of everything done in a file is available electronically, and much of the supervisor's file review can be done within Legal Files, rather than paging through a thick file folder.

Intake and Eligibility, Too

Using Legal Files' intake and eligibility features, LANC manages the entire process with ease. Legal Files tracks the number of applicants—and the results, providing vital statistical information from one, comprehensive system. To quickly determine the financial eligibility of an applicant, Legal Files automatically calculates a financial summary based on factors selected by LANC.

Not Just for Legal Cases

LANC's administrative office is using Legal Files for all of its day-to-day work except payroll and accounting. Since Legal Files includes a feature called "Office Files," administrators can just use the software just as they would physical file folders, plus all the Legal File enhancement such as calendars, phone logs, e-mail and reminders "attached" to the file.

Bottom Line

Legal Files was designed with dozens of customizable features to manage every type of matter, integrating comprehensive contact/intake management with full-featured case management. For LANC, Legal Files brings a true team concept to case management, sharing and integrating the varied responsibilities of staff and pro bono attorneys, legal assistants, volunteers and administrators, enhancing productivity at every level.

Legal Files integrates all these features:

- Intake/Eligibility Screening
- Contacts/Parties
- E-mail
- Notes
- Document Assembly
- Document Management
- Phone Messaging
- Event/Calendar
- Tasks/Deadlines
- Time Tracking
- Case/Problem Info
- Demographic Info
- Pro Bono Attorney Info

