

## II. STATE PLANNING PRINCIPLES

### A. Ohio Legal Services Planning Principles

State planning in Ohio serves two major purposes. First, state planning offers Ohio's legal aid programs and other stakeholders the opportunity to collaboratively plan, prioritize, and coordinate services. Second, state planning fulfills a mandate for grantees of the Legal Services Corporation (LSC), the administrator of federal civil legal funding and grantor of most legal aid providers in Ohio, to engage in statewide strategic planning. LSC challenges its grantees to respond as a state, rather than as separate programs or regions, to funding shortfalls and the changing needs of clients with a plan to improve coordination and integration of services. Through this state planning process, we have attempted to incorporate the state planning resources offered by LSC (Program Letters 98-1, 98-6, 2000-7, and State Planning Configuration Standards) with the experience, knowledge and skill of state planners.

Central to this new state plan is our shared *vision* for the delivery system:

**A legal services delivery system in Ohio that provides comprehensive, integrated high quality legal services to our client community.**

The overarching statewide *goal*, adopted by the Steering Committee, is:

**100% access to essential legal services for low income Ohioans, so as to secure equal justice, both substantive and procedural, for our client community.**

Integral to this vision for Ohio is a set of specific vision statements for the key topic areas within the delivery system. These vision statements are:

**Intake and the Provision of Advice and Brief Services**

Programs will use state resources effectively and efficiently to have intake systems which are: 1) accessible for all clients, client-friendly, and adaptable and responsive to client needs and abilities; 2) capable of identifying client problems, using best practices and available and effective technology; and, 3) coordinated throughout all systems in the State.

**Effective Use of Technology**

Effective information technology is vital to successful legal services programs. Legal services programs in Ohio will fully utilize affordable, efficient, and effective technology to 1) achieve full access to high quality legal services for all eligible clients and 2) to create and support user-friendly and effective means for comprehensive collaboration and information sharing between all legal services advocates, regardless of geographic location.

**Increased Access to Self-Help and Prevention Information**

Self-help and prevention information are effective and efficient methods of service in a system of legal services delivery that provides adequate and appropriate legal assistance to all who need it.

**Staff Capacities and Development**

Ohio's legal aid delivery system will maintain and improve a diverse, knowledgeable and high-quality, professional, engaged, and empowered work force.

**Engagement of Pro Bono Attorneys**

100% participation by Ohio lawyers in organized pro bono projects.

**Development of Additional Resources**

Ohio's legal aid delivery system will encourage and support the necessary resource development capacity to support existing and emerging statewide and regional priorities.

**Configuration of a Comprehensive, Integrated Statewide Delivery System**

Regardless of where in the state a client resides, she or he has the same access to legal services and the outcomes for that client, including quality of service he or she receives, should not be dependent on circumstances of residence.

**Full-Range of Client Services Capacities**

Access to appropriate, effective, high-quality legal services for all potential clients in Ohio.

Within the discussion of each of these topic areas, which begins on page 54 of this document, we offer specific goals and activities to move the delivery system closer to fulfilling these vision statements.

**B. Legal Services Corporation and Strategic Planning<sup>1</sup>**

The Legal Services Corporation (LSC) is a private, non-profit corporation established by Congress to ensure equal access to justice under the law for all Americans. LSC seeks to achieve this goal by funding civil legal assistance programs for those who otherwise would be unable to afford it. During the most recent federal fiscal year (2003), LSC allocated \$11.8 million for legal services in Ohio, which represents over one-third of all funding for legal services in Ohio. As a major partner in the delivery of legal services in Ohio and across the country, LSC offers a wide spectrum of resources for legal services delivery systems and programs. These resources offer guidance to states in their efforts to maximize their limited resources through the creation of statewide justice communities.

During the late 1990's, Program Letters 98-1 and 98-6 initiated LSC's renewed effort to promote state planning activities. Pressured by funding shortfalls and the changing needs of clients and concerned with enhancing system efficiency, effectiveness, and the ability to meet clients' legal needs, legal services programs throughout the United States were challenged by these two program letters to become actively engaged in a process of reassessing their delivery practices and policies, restructuring their legal services delivery systems and reallocating their legal services dollars. Essentially, LSC Program Letters 98-1 and 98-6 asked grantees to look at their roles in a new way -- to expand their horizons from what's best for the clients in my service area to what is best for clients throughout the state. Using this new lens, programs were asked to report on how they would coordinate and integrate their work in seven important areas -- enhancing client access, efficiently delivering high quality legal assistance; effectively using technology to expand access and enhance services; promoting client self-help and preventive legal education and advice; coordinating legal work and training staff; coordinating and collaborating with the private bar; developing additional resources to support legal services delivery; and designing a legal services delivery configuration that enhanced client services, reduced barriers and operated efficiently and effectively.

On January 28, 2000, the LSC Board of Directors approved LSC's 5-year Strategic Direction Plan. This document commits LSC to dramatically enhance the impact of Legal

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<sup>1</sup> Text contained in this section of the Plan was obtained from LSC's Program Letter 2000-7 and its Web site.

Services programs throughout the nation by improving access to legal services among eligible persons while enhancing the quality of the services delivered. The Plan highlighted LSC's State Planning Initiative as the primary strategy for expanding access to and availability of services throughout the United States.

LSC notes that comprehensive and integrated legal services delivery systems:

- 1) Recognize that state justice communities must be broader than just LSC-funded grantees to include both LSC-funded and non-LSC funded sectors of the legal services delivery system, and
- 2) Provide a continuum of services that encompasses individual representation, extended representation, advice, pro se advocacy, preventative education, community involvement and support, and the use of technology to expand essential services to all low-income persons within a state.

To this end, LSC's expectation is that the statewide delivery system be constructed and maintained to provide for: (a) relative equity of client access to the civil legal services delivery system throughout the state; (b) relative equity in the availability of the full range of client service capacities necessary to meet the full continuum of client legal needs regardless of where in the state clients live; (c) relative equity in the capacity to serve client communities in all of their diversity; and, (d) relative equity in the investment of civil equal justice resources (federal, state, private, and in-kind/pro bono) throughout the state.

LSC states that a hallmark of an integrated delivery system is its flexibility to deploy resources in geographic or substantive areas so that quality of services is improved, funds are increased and outcomes for clients are expanded in areas where they are weak. In this context, then, relative equity considers the system's various capacities throughout the state, from region to region, and directs necessary resources to locales where improvement of any sort is required to assure that all low-income people in the state have similar degrees of access to the full spectrum of equal justice services.

During the planning phase of the 2004-2007 Ohio State Plan, state planners utilized numerous LSC planning resources to guide the promotion of a more integrated delivery system. Specifically, state planners referenced, in addition to Program Letters 98-1 and 98-6, "areas of inquiry," found in LSC Program Letter 2000-7, and LSC's State Planning Configuration Standards. A matrix between these LSC materials and the topic areas in this Plan may be found in Attachment A.