

Self-Help Centre for Self-Representing Litigants: Evaluation Model and Plan

The proposed Self-Help Centre for self representing litigants (SRLs) will implement a service model comprising a range of different components under a common structure. The pilot period will last two years and operate in two locations.

Evaluation of the pilot phase will focus on different facets of the service model. Service model evaluation will examine the nature and quality of the services, experiences in relationship-building as well as degrees of project success in addressing the needs of SRLs.

The evaluation plan will be developed in detail with a view to incorporating Department of Justice requirements relating to the national “Access to Justice” network of service providers.

I. Service Model Recommendations

The *Proposed Service Vision and Program Design* report makes a number of recommendations that address the issue of pilot project evaluation. The recommendations speak to the range of interests driving the project’s approach to evaluation. They are as follows:

- 9.1 The research team recommends that service model and approach be evaluated, from the vantage point both of the services themselves and of the needs of SRLs.*
- 9.2 The research team recommends the evaluation approach be designed with a goal of sustainability beyond the initial pilot period, and with a view to making it adaptable to other locations.*
- 9.3 The research team recommends the evaluation plan ensure that the pilot project gathers required statistical information to document project experiences and outcomes.*
- 9.4 The research team recommends that formative evaluation approaches are used to provide ongoing assistance to the service model and that summative evaluation requirements be identified and met to ensure proper project accountability.*
- 9.5 The research team recommends that the evaluation strategy used for the pilot phase include components to address issues raised by the federal Department of Justice relating to the area of public access to legal aid services.*
- 9.6 The research team recommends that the evaluation strategy used for the pilot project be developed where possible to include components incorporating the Canadian Forum on Civil Justice’s Civil Justice System and the Public Project’s interest in improving communication between the civil justice system and the public with an end to showcasing the pilot service model as a case study example of good practices.*

These recommendations set out a number of expectations in regards to what pilot project evaluation must accomplish. They speak to the need to have a client-centred approach, to maintain focus on project sustainability beyond the pilot period, to gather required statistical information, to use formative as well as summative approaches, and to address the specific evaluation needs of the federal Department of Justice as well as the Canadian Forum on Civil Justice.

II. Evaluation Logic Model

The various aspects and components of the pilot model evaluation plan lend themselves to representation in an evaluation logic model. A graphic model is attached to the final page of this plan. The logic model breaks down the pilot model plan into the following:

1. Service Inputs
2. Process Activities and Variables, and
3. Impact and Outcomes

Items 1 and 2 will be supported by the planned compilation of statistical information related to operation or the Self-Help Centre. The statistical data gathering tool will help develop a database of information on self-representing litigants, the issues and challenges they seek assistance with, the kinds of assistance provided, and the areas of law this assistance falls within. This information will be used to develop a statistical profile of self-representing litigants. Statistics will be gathered for the entire two year course of the pilot project and will be reported on at the end of each year of this duration.

Item 3 is supported primarily by the interview and focus group plans that have been elaborated for the pilot project.

Specifics regarding planned data gathering, interviewing and focus group activity as they relate to the various service model components are elaborated in the next section.

III. Evaluation of Specific Service Model Components

The *Proposed Service Vision and Program Design* report identifies a range of service components to be housed within the common model provided by the Self-Help Centres. These components are listed below along with specific ideas as to how pilot project evaluators will approach their evaluation.

Information and referral:

<i>To provide SRLs with access to basic information on and orientation to the court system, procedures involved in self-representation, options and support services.</i>

To evaluate this component, pilot project evaluators will:

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- Collect and analyze statistical information regarding SRLs using the system, their needs, the areas of law touched by these needs, and services delivered by or through the Self-Help Centre;
- Interview Centre stakeholders, staff and administration regarding progress in implementing this component;
- Interview Centre stakeholders, staff and administration regarding success in developing and sustaining relationships required to operate the Centre's service model;
- Interview justice system personnel and other legal service providers regarding their perceptions of the quality and relevance of the information and referral services delivered by the Centre; and;
- Interview SRLs regarding their perceptions of the quality and relevance of the services delivered by the Centre.

Statistics gathering will proceed throughout the Project. Interviews will take place at three points in time: six months into the project, after completion of year 1 and at the end of year 2 (completion of the pilot).

Education:

To provide SRLs with the basics of moving a case through the court process: initial orientation to the court, the steps in a court action, what evidence is and how to get it into court, how to conduct a chambers motion and/or a trial, how to present in court and the mechanics of an appeal.

To evaluate this component, pilot project evaluators will:

- Interview Centre stakeholders, staff and administration regarding progress in implementing this component;
- Interview SRLs regarding their perceptions of the quality and relevance of the education and orientation services delivered by the Centre;
- Interview justice system personnel and other legal service providers regarding their perceptions of the Centre's impact in assisting SRLs by providing education and orientation services;
- Examine statistical information relating to numbers of courses offered, course areas and numbers of SRL attendees; and,
- Conduct focus groups with community-based service providers who also work with SRLs to determine their perceptions of the Centre's impact in delivering needed education and orientation support to SRLs.

As indicated interviews will take place at three points in time: six months into the project, after completion of year 1 and at the end of year 2 (completion of the

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pilot). Reports on evaluation findings will occur twice: at the end of year 1 (preliminary) and at the end of year 2 (final).

Access to legal advice:

To provide access to legal advice and assistance at strategic points

To evaluate this component, pilot project evaluators will:

- Interview Centre stakeholders, staff and administration regarding progress in implementing this component;
- Interview SRLs regarding their perceptions of the quality and relevance of the access to legal advice services provided by the Centre;
- Interview justice system personnel and other legal service providers regarding their perceptions of the Centre's impact in assisting SRLs in providing access to legal advice;
- Examine and report on specific statistical information relating to numbers of SRLs accessing legal advice, services provided or coordinated by the Centre, referrals made, pro bono providers involved; and,
- Conduct focus groups with community-based service providers who also work with SRLs to determine their perceptions of the Centre's impact in delivering needed legal advice support to SRLs.

Access to assistance with forms, organization and documents:

To provide SRLs with access to hands-on assistance to help them organize their materials, complete forms and documents and draft affidavits.

To evaluate this component, pilot project evaluators will:

- Interview Centre stakeholders, staff and administration regarding progress in implementing this component;
- Interview SRLs regarding their perceptions of the quality and relevance of the forms and documentation assistance services delivered by the Centre;
- Interview justice system personnel and other legal service providers regarding their perceptions of the Centre's impact in assisting SRLs in these areas;
- Examine and report on specific statistical information relating to numbers of forms and documents assistance provided;
- Conduct focus groups with community-based service providers who also work with SRLs to determine their perceptions of the Centre's impact in assisting SRLs in these areas; and,

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- Interview court registry personnel and possibly other court system personnel to determine whether SRLs drawing on Centre services in this area are better prepared and resourced than might otherwise be expected.

Substantive legal information:

To provide services to SRLs who may need or want more detailed legal information. SRLs will be referred to the Courthouse Library, where a librarian can assist them in finding the specific information they require.

To evaluate this component, pilot project evaluators will:

- Interview Centre stakeholders, staff and administration regarding progress in implementing this component;
- Interview SRLs regarding their perceptions of the quality and relevance of substantive information services delivered by or coordinated through the Centre;
- Interview justice system personnel and other legal service providers regarding their perceptions of the Centre's impact in assisting SRLs in providing substantive legal information;
- Conduct focus groups with community-based service providers who also work with SRLs to determine their perceptions of the Centre's impact in assisting SRLs in providing substantive legal information; and,
- Examine and report on specific statistical information relating to numbers of instances where substantive legal information has been provided by or through the Centre.

Problem resolution outside of the court process:

To refer where appropriate potential SRLs to dispute resolution mechanisms, such as mediation with Family Justice Counsellors.

To evaluate this component, pilot project evaluators will:

- Examine and report on specific statistical information relating to numbers of instances where substantive legal information has been provided by or through the Centre; and,
- Interview Family Justice Counsellors and possibly others regarding the volume and nature of referrals made and success in dealing with issues via the dispute resolution options made available to SRLs through referrals from the Centre.

IV. Evaluation Reporting: Schedule

Reporting requirements and timelines for the evaluation plan are as follows:

1. Six Month Process Report

Evaluators will conduct a set of focused six months into the first year.

These interviews will gather information regarding how services have been provided, perceptions of strategies and approaches that have worked well within the model, perceptions of problems and challenges, as well as ideas regarding project outcomes. The interviews will also look at the nature and quality of experiences with relationship-building amongst stakeholders involved in implementing the project with a view to learning about challenges associated with constructing a multi-stakeholder-based service model. Interviews will also be conducted with SRLs who have used project services and supports. The purpose of these interviews will be to gauge the quality and effectiveness of the service model as perceived by SRLs themselves.

The interviews are intended to help the project digest early experiences with the service model and to deal with emerging issues in service delivery. They will focus on clarifying necessary adjustments in the model so that the project has an opportunity to make improvements.

2. Year 1 Preliminary Evaluation Report

A preliminary report will be prepared by evaluators at the end of year 1 of the pilot phase summarizing service model experiences, challenges and degrees of success in meeting the needs of SRLs. The report will be based upon interviews conducted at the end of year one as well as focus groups with community based service providers in a position to comment on the impact in degree of success of the pilot project in meeting the needs of the self representing litigants. The report will also provide a statistical profile of SRLs drawn from data gathered during Year 1. The profile will offer insight into clients being served, legal issues being addressed, and patterns of referrals being made.

3. Year 2: Final Evaluation Report

A final evaluation report will be prepared at the end of the full pilot phase summarizing service model experiences, challenges, and degrees of success in meeting the needs of SRLs. As part of preparation for this report, evaluators will conduct a series of focused interviews with judges and court staff in order to determine whether these groups perceive a greater degree of organization, preparedness and readiness amongst those who have used services provided by the Self-Help Centre.

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SRL Self-Help Centre Evaluation Logic Model Graph

