Strategic Planning for Systemic Broad-based Advocacy

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ABLE and LAWO

**ABLE**
- Unrestricted
- 2 offices
  - Toledo and Dayton
- Special Litigation Unit
  - Complex impact litigation
- Migrant Farmworkers
- Legal Aid Line
- Founded 1969

**LAWO**
- LSC recipient
- 7 offices
  - Smaller rural offices
- High volume of direct service, individual representation
- Consolidation of smaller local programs
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- State IOLTA funding (largest funding source for ABLE and LAWO)
  - 2007: $7.7 million
  - 2012: $3.6 million

- Reductions in staff over past three years:
  - 19 Attorney positions
  - 20 AmeriCorps attorneys
  - 18 intake specialist, paralegal, admin. support
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How will we respond?
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retrench and proportionally shrink services

v.

reassess and remobilize
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- Retrench and shrink services
  - Intakes processed: 25,000 annually
    - 2009: 0% priority denials
    - 2011: 27% priority denials

- Full Representation
  - 2009: 6,769 (26% of intakes)
  - 2011: 3,687 (15% of intakes)
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- Approximately 350,000 low-income people live in northwest and west central Ohio

- Reaching 25,000 people through intake
  - about 7%

- Capacity to handle 3,687 cases
  - about 1%
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So how do we reassess and remobilize?
What are we here for? What is our Mission?

- To help low-income individuals and groups achieve **self-reliance**, **equal justice** and **economic opportunity**
  - recognize poverty and inequality as systemic problems needing systemic solutions
  - address the severe imbalance of power and the structural inequities that perpetuate poverty

- And not just our mission, we are all poverty warriors
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Current model is not effectively supporting this approach:

- client contacts us and presents legal problem (symptom)
- clinical model tries to maximize capacity/volume
- demands a focus on treating the symptom
- does not account for ability to investigate underlying problem and develop systemic, broad-based solution
- reaches 1 – 7% of our community
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- Treating cancer in an emergency room
- Are we really treating poverty and inequality as acute illnesses?
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So how do we remobilize in order to be doing the systemic broad-based advocacy work that needs to be done?
Systemic broad-based advocacy

- Identify core poverty law priority areas
- Create an organizational structure that supports systemic broad-based advocacy
- Coordinate and collaborate with advocacy partners
- Develop appropriate measurements and evaluation systems
Core poverty law priorities
(we cannot be all things to all people – and when we try it makes us less effective)

Guiding Principles

- Identify where we can have the greatest impact

- Address the root causes of poverty and injustice
  - (but collaborate and develop other strategies for symptoms)

- Relevant to the client community, responsive to community needs, i.e. working with the community to identify issues and develop strategies

- Recognize the impact of poverty on low-income African-American and Latino children

- Focus on early childhood intervention strategies
“By the end of fourth grade, African American and Latino children, and children of all races who are living in poverty, are two years behind their more affluent, predominantly white peers in reading and math.”

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Priority poverty law areas

- Healthcare and Public Benefits
- Housing and Community Economic Development
- Meaningful and Appropriate Education
- Independence and Self-Determination for Women in Poverty
- Migrant Farmworker Rights
- Meaningful Access to Justice
Restructuring to support systemic broad-based advocacy

- Identify and implement needed changes in firm culture

- Organize advocates around advocacy work – not administrative efficiency (practice area/substantive work v. geography)

- Maximize advocacy time =
  - minimize administrative time (make things work efficiently)
  - Designing efficient lines of supervisory authority
Restructuring to support systemic broad-based advocacy

- Work plan goals must be grounded in systemic broad-based goals
  - If systemic advocacy is treated as a supplement or bonus, it probably won’t happen
  - Employ a variety of advocacy tools to achieve systemic goals:
    - strategic individual representation
    - complex impact litigation; class action
    - legislative and administrative advocacy
    - community lawyering strategies
    - public education and outreach

- Once work planning is done, push decision-making authority down
  - Empower your teams with the resources and support to do the work
Restructuring to support systemic broad-based advocacy

- Maximize allocation of resources (staff time, dollars) to key activities in priority areas, while decreasing use of resources for those activities which do not advance mission.

- Money follows priorities means you have to free up (and increase) unrestricted funding and use restricted funding in the most efficient manner.
  - Is our general funding paying for mostly administration and managers or advocates in the field?
Coordinate and collaborate with advocacy partners

- Working with communities to identify issues and develop strategies
- Collaborate with other advocacy partners to cover the gaps
- Develop and communicate clear message about what we do and why
Development of appropriate measurements/evaluation systems

- Program evaluation system – what is the quality and impact of the advocacy work?

- Strengthen individual staff evaluation systems

- Assess current substantive knowledge and skills – where do we need to enhance training and coaching?

- Developing reporting systems to capture the meaningful, long-term, systemic changes that you are achieving (v. calls received and cases opened)
Bottom Line for ABLE and LAWO
(a work in progress)

- Continuous process
  - making decisions each day at different levels that support the ability to carry out the work
- Ongoing commitment of resources
- Real support for advocates
- Clear direction and vision from directors
“Like slavery and apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is manmade, and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings. And overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of Justice. It is the protection of a fundamental human right, the right to dignity and human life.”

- Nelson Mandela
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Questions? Follow-up?

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