

Legal Aid Interagency Roundtable
2022 Report

Access to Justice through Simplification

A Roadmap for People-Centered
Simplification of Federal Government
Forms, Processes, and Language



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Roundtable Members

U.S. Department of State (State)

U.S. Department of the Treasury (Treasury)

U.S. Department of Defense (DOD)

U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ)

U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI)

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)

U.S. Department of Labor (DOL)

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)

U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT)

U.S. Department of Education (ED)

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)

U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS)

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)

Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS)

Office of Management and Budget (OMB)

U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)

Administrative Conference of the United States (ACUS)

National Science Foundation (NSF)

U.S. Digital Service (USDS)

Domestic Policy Council (DPC)

Office of the Vice President (OVP)

Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB)

Federal Communications Commission (FCC)

Federal Trade Commission (FTC)

Legal Services Corporation (LSC)

Social Security Administration (SSA)

Letter from the Co-Chairs



Dear Mr. President,

Thank you for your commitment to increasing meaningful access to our legal system and to the services and benefits of the federal government.

In May 2021, you reinvigorated the White House Legal Aid Interagency Roundtable (Roundtable) with several directives, including to “improve coordination and efficiency among Federal programs,” to “increase the availability of meaningful access to justice for individuals and families, regardless of wealth or status,” to “develop policy recommendations that improve access to justice in Federal, State, local, Tribal, and international jurisdictions,” and to “advance relevant evidence-based research, data collection, and analysis of civil legal aid and indigent defense.” These directives recognize that ensuring access to civil and criminal justice means far more than simply improving access to lawyers and courts.

In 2021, the White House Counsel’s Office and the Department of Justice convened the Roundtable and released its report, *Access to Justice in the Age of COVID-19*. That report examined the ways in which the pandemic exacerbated access to justice gaps in a variety of contexts and highlighted the innovative strategies adopted by Roundtable members in response.

In 2022, the Roundtable’s work continued to focus on bridging those gaps by examining how simplifying government forms and processes can help the American people access federal services, benefits, and programs. Too often, the public must contend with long, complex, and repetitive forms to access those programs and services.

These burdens are often felt most directly by older adults, people with disabilities, people with limited English proficiency, and people with limited access to a computer, the internet, a phone, or transportation. And while civil legal aid attorneys across the country often help people access federal benefits and appeal denials, for most people legal assistance remains out of reach.

When government forms and processes are only accessible to lawyers or those who can afford them, everyone suffers. People are shut out of benefits to which they are entitled and services on which they rely. Legal aid providers are overwhelmed and overworked. The justice gap widens. And the trust between federal agencies and the public they serve is eroded.

The 2022 Roundtable Report focuses on ways the federal government can simplify its forms and processes to reduce the need for individuals to seek legal assistance. The report also includes a roadmap to help federal agencies expand access to federal government programs and services. As demonstrated in the report, many agencies have already done a great deal to simplify forms and processes, and these efforts can serve as promising models for future work.

We look forward to building on this work in the years to come and remain committed to the urgent task of ensuring that every American can truly access the legal system, services, and benefits of this nation.

Merrick B. Garland
Attorney General

Stuart F. Delery
White House Counsel

Message from the Director of the Office for Access to Justice



In October 2021, Attorney General Merrick B. Garland reestablished the Office for Access to Justice (ATJ) as a standalone component within the United States Department of Justice. In May 2022, I was honored to be appointed the ATJ's Director.

ATJ's mission is to break down barriers to access so that all communities can enjoy the promises and protections of government and our legal systems. The Roundtable is a critical tool to advance this mission.

Attorney General Garland's 2021 Report to the President on access to justice directed ATJ to "ensure that the Office is adequately resourced to meet its responsibilities under the President's Memorandum to staff the Legal Aid Interagency Roundtable."

We continue to meet this directive. In 2022, we received our first enacted budget and continued hiring career staff. In December 2022, Allie Yang-Green was designated the Executive Director of the Roundtable.

Our office is honored to serve as the Roundtable staff. It is a privilege to collaborate with agency leaders across the federal government who demonstrate an energizing commitment toward our shared purpose of expanding access to justice. This report reflects that collaboration and commitment.

We take pride in, and will continue to broaden, our engagement with a range of stakeholders and communities as a central focus for the Roundtable's work.

ATJ has traveled across the country meeting with public defenders, legal service providers, pro bono organizations, state access to justice commissions, advocates and nonprofit organizations, judicial leaders, faith-based leaders, and community-based organizations, including historically underserved and marginalized groups. We visited partner countries to reinforce America's commitment to United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Goal 16.

This is only the beginning. As our office grows, we will continue to work with our Roundtable partners to increase the availability of meaningful access to justice for individuals and families, regardless of wealth or status. We will also continue to advance Attorney General Garland’s directive to “make real the promise of equal justice under law” through “innovation, collaboration and leadership across all levels of government and beyond.”

Rachel Rossi

Director, U.S. Department of Justice
Office for Access to Justice

2022 Roundtable Principals' Convening

On December 9, 2022, Attorney General **Merrick Garland** and Deputy White House Counsel **Stacey Grigsby** convened the Legal Aid Interagency Roundtable at the White House to highlight agencies' accomplishments and commitments to advance access to justice. The Second Gentleman of the United States **Douglas Emhoff** provided welcoming remarks.

Participants at the table also included:

- Department of Justice Associate Attorney General **Vanita Gupta**
- Department of Justice Office for Access to Justice Director **Rachel Rossi**
- Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary **Denis Richard McDonough**
- Department of Homeland Security Deputy Secretary **John Tien**
- Department of Labor Solicitor **Seema Nanda**
- Social Security Administration Acting Commissioner **Dr. Kilolo Kijakazi**
- Consumer Financial Protection Bureau Director **Rohit Chopra**
- Federal Communications Commission Chairwoman **Jessica Rosenworcel**
- Administrative Conference of the United States Chair **Andrew Fois**
- Legal Services Corporation President **Ron Flagg**
- Office of the Vice President Deputy Counsel **Nasrina Bargzie**
- Equal Employment Opportunity Commission Chair **Charlotte Burrows**
- Department of Education Under Secretary **James Kvaal**
- Department of Defense General Counsel **Caroline Krass**
- Domestic Policy Council for Racial Justice and Equity Deputy Director **Chiraag Bains**
- Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs Associate Administrator **Sabeel Rahman**



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Executive Summary

The 2022 Roundtable Report highlights strategies to simplify government forms and processes so the American people can access federal programs, services, and benefits without the need for legal help. People are often discouraged by the process of seeking government services for a number of reasons: long, complex, and repetitive forms; confusing policies and processes; inaccessible websites; long wait times for customer service; and unnecessarily burdensome documentation requirements. In many instances, legal help is needed to navigate the complex processes federal agencies employ. The public should not need, and often is unable, to rely on or afford a lawyer to access government programs, services, and benefits.

This report identifies a three-step simplification roadmap to help agencies expand access to federal government programs and services:

1. **Understand the Problem.** Agencies should meaningfully engage with the communities served and impacted by government programs to understand the barriers to access.
2. **Implement Strategies.** Agencies should incorporate feedback from that engagement to simplify their forms and processes.
3. **Evaluate Outcomes.** Agencies should evaluate the impact of the simplification efforts to determine whether they have meaningfully expanded access, or if further improvements are possible.

The report also highlights how federal agencies are using the simplification roadmap to make programs, services, and benefits easier to access. In particular, Roundtable member agencies are making programs and services more accessible by:

- simplifying government forms
- partnering with state, local, and Tribal government-administered programs to simplify processes
- eliminating unnecessary requirements
- using plain language
- offering information in multiple languages
- making default options favorable to beneficiaries
- providing assistance through trusted organizations
- allowing non-lawyers to assist where appropriate
- providing self-help information that is easy to find and understand

Finally, this report shares future initiatives and commitments by member agencies to expand access to federal programs and services. Agencies are planning new ways to engage with legal aid providers, advocacy organizations, and historically underserved and marginalized communities to better understand the problem and inform simplification efforts. Agencies have also committed to specific initiatives that will simplify processes, promote the use of plain language, simplify government forms, expand the use of self-help resources, and more.

The Roundtable will continue to refine and improve strategies to simplify federal forms, language, and processes. Through these efforts, we further our mission to expand access to the promises and protections of the federal government.

Background

In May 2021, President Joseph Biden issued a Presidential Memorandum reconstituting the Legal Aid Interagency Roundtable.¹ The Roundtable is a collaboration of over 28 federal agencies asked to “increase the availability of meaningful access to justice for individuals and families, regardless of wealth or status.”² To accomplish this mission, the Roundtable works to “improve coordination among Federal programs,” to “develop policy recommendations that improve access to justice,” and to advance “evidence-based research, data collection, and analysis of civil legal aid and indigent defense.”³

The 2021 report, *Access to Justice in the Age of COVID-19*, explored the many areas where access to justice gaps were both exposed and exacerbated during the global pandemic.⁴

In particular, the 2021 report noted that the pandemic placed an increased strain on legal service providers to assist individuals facing eviction, foreclosure, job loss, and other harms, and discussed the importance of improving access to benefits for income security and consumer debt relief.⁵

Though the 2021 report applauded the many federal programs, policies, and initiatives that were established or expanded during the pandemic, it also emphasized that the success of these efforts “continues to depend on whether they are actually accessible to the communities they are designed to serve.”⁶

The 2021 report highlighted three areas of innovation for further study:

1. leveraging federal funding to expand programs that assist individuals in need
2. expanding access to technology and virtual services to permit individuals to resolve legal problems remotely
3. expanding strategic collaboration between federal agencies, legal aid providers, and others to improve access to justice⁷

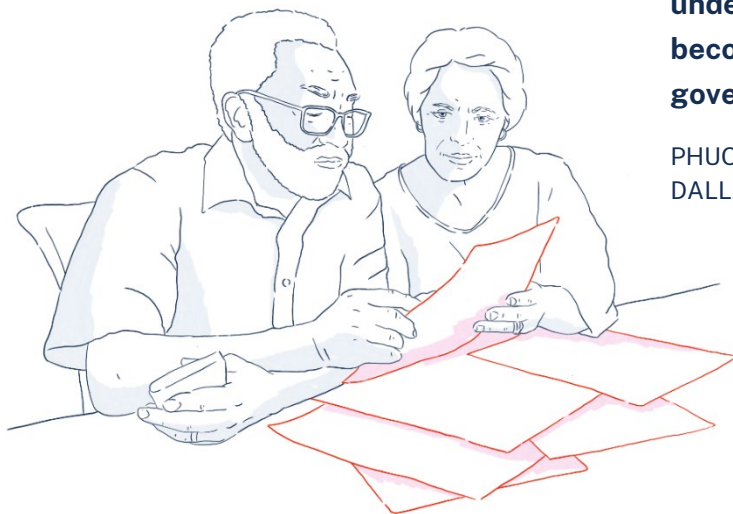
The Roundtable’s focus for its 2022 report builds on the collaborative efforts and lessons learned during the 2021 Convening. Roundtable members acknowledged that legal assistance is needed in some circumstances, but they also recognized that reducing the need for legal help is a step in closing the justice gap. Because many people seek legal assistance to access government programs and services, the 2022 Roundtable Report focuses on strategies to simplify federal forms, language, and processes to improve access, and ease the burden on legal aid providers.

The Simplification Challenge

Federal agencies serve diverse communities across this country through a wide array of programs, funding, benefits, and more. However, too often the public struggles to access those resources because of complex forms or processes — especially those who need assistance most. The American public spends approximately 11.5 billion hours a year responding to information requests from federal agencies.⁸ Additionally, complicated language, forms, and processes can result in mistakes and wasted time resulting in unnecessary applications, corrections, or appeals.

Legal aid providers frequently save people time and money by clarifying which federal government services are available to them. They explain processes, help complete applications and other forms, and use their own experience to connect with government staff. Research shows that people who receive legal assistance have better outcomes than those who do not.⁹

But legal aid is a scarce resource. Indeed, many people in this country are not able to find or afford an attorney to protect and enforce their rights in the civil legal context. This may include housing, predatory lending and scams, debt, protection orders and custody issues, employment, education, as well as government programs, services, and benefits.



“The thing keeping individuals who are seeking assistance [and] benefits away from services is a document that they have no understanding of and no support. ...It’s become so technical that they feel as if the government is purposely making it difficult.”

PHUONG TRAN
DALLAS AGING AND DISABILITY RESOURCE CENTER

Access to civil legal aid providers who deliver free legal assistance for low- and middle-income Americans is far too limited. The 2022 *Justice Gap Report* by the Legal Services Corporation found that low-income Americans did not receive any or enough legal help for 92 percent of their substantial civil legal problems,¹⁰ up from 86 percent in 2017.¹¹

Nearly a million low-income people who seek help for civil legal problems are turned away because of limited resources, and countless others do not even ask for assistance.¹² This leaves most people without a lawyer when addressing numerous potentially life-changing events. All too often, unaddressed legal issues push people further into poverty, deepening long-standing disparities.

This need for legal assistance is often disproportionately higher for historically underserved and marginalized communities, who may struggle the most to access government programs, services, and benefits.

Communities of color and rural communities also suffer from disproportionately high poverty rates and significant legal need. According to the Legal Services Corporation, Black and Hispanic communities are more than twice as likely to have household incomes below 125% of the poverty threshold.¹³ There are 8 million people below 125% of poverty thresholds in rural areas, with 77% of rural households experiencing one or more legal problems in 2021.¹⁴

People living in poverty may also lack the literacy and computer skills necessary to access government programs and services. Research reveals that 14 percent of all adults living in the United States read at the fourth-grade level at best.¹⁵ Another 30 percent can read and understand only common phrases.¹⁶ This means nearly half of the adult population in this country struggle as readers.¹⁷

Likewise, accessing government programs, services, and benefits is often particularly difficult for older adults; people with disabilities; people with limited access to a computer, the internet, a phone, or transportation; people who speak a language other than English; and people who do not have permanent housing.

This divide in access based on physical abilities, location, and other characteristics undermines our promise of equal justice under law.

In the face of this broad unmet civil justice need, critical legal services are often focused simply on accessing federal government programs and services. Notably, the *Justice Gap Report* found that 35 percent of individuals seeking legal assistance needed help filling out forms.¹⁸

For these underserved communities, government assistance is critical to meeting basic needs such as food, housing, and employment. For example, the U.S. Census Bureau found that access to government assistance resulted in 45.4 million fewer people living in poverty in 2021.¹⁹

Increasing access to federal services requires understanding the specific needs and access gaps faced by the intended recipients of those services. Because federal agencies serve many diverse communities across the nation, effective, broad, and strategic engagement often poses unique challenges. As described below, the Roundtable has developed strategies to address these challenges and to expand access to justice across the government through people-centered approaches to simplification.

The Roundtable's Engagement

As part of the 2022 Roundtable collaboration, we heard from over 70 state and local legal aid and advocacy organizations about the top federal forms and processes where simplification might significantly reduce the need for their clients to seek legal assistance to access benefits, services, programs, or resolve disputes.

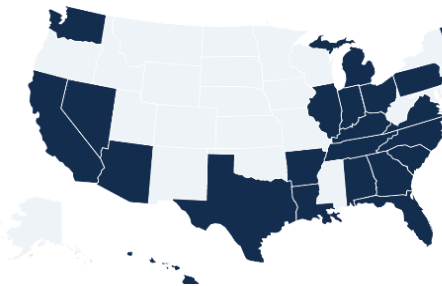
Their feedback included the following four recommendations:

- **Streamline processes**
Organizations highlighted complicated processes for access to federal benefits as a source of frustration and confusion for applicants, leading them to fail to qualify or lose benefits.
- **Expand access to in-person and call center support**
Organizations shared that posting federal applications and forms online has made some processes faster. However, many of the most marginalized communities lack computer literacy or access to technology required to complete forms. With that in mind, organizations shared the importance of having quality in-person and call center support.
- **Improve language access**
Organizations noted that those who are not proficient in English have trouble navigating forms, legal notices, and documents. They emphasized the significance of proactively understanding the language needs of communities and ensuring the accessibility of all programs, services, and benefits.
- **Simplify applications, forms, and notices**
Organizations shared countless examples of time spent helping clients understand complicated applications, forms, and notices. They stressed that simplifying these documents by using plain language and removing unnecessary questions would allow them to assist clients more efficiently, and in turn, serve more people.

WHO WE HEARD FROM:

72 Legal Aid and Advocacy Organizations

24 States, DC, and Puerto Rico



To inform this report, the Roundtable also gathered information from its member agencies, including:

- agency accomplishments and future commitments for the simplification of forms, processes, and language to reduce the need for legal assistance and improve access to programs and benefits
- agency collaboration with customer experience teams to obtain feedback on simplification concerns and efforts, especially from legal aid providers and advocacy groups
- agency collaboration with equity teams on advancing racial equity in relation to access to government programs and benefits
- common barriers agencies faced in efforts to simplify forms, language, and processes
- whether additional training, resources, or support would accelerate or facilitate the agency's simplification plans

Feedback from legal aid providers, advocacy organizations, and member agencies informed the Roundtable's formation of a simplification roadmap, which is detailed in this report.

The Simplification Roadmap

Simplification of process is a core tenet for the pursuit of access to justice in legal systems. Because legal assistance is rare, a simplification approach is essential to both increase the accessibility of the legal system and to reduce its costs.²⁰

Simplification efforts start by understanding how complexities create barriers for communities to access programs. Understanding the experiences of communities who apply for and use agency services reveals what works and what does not. This allows for a targeted and effective simplification response. Access to justice scholars, experts, and court professionals are increasingly exploring how human-centered approaches can effectively expand access to legal help for those without lawyers.²¹

The “needs and preferences of the user should be the guide”²² to improving access. A product, service, or system should be judged by “the experience of its audience.”²³ Placing the communities we serve at the center of efforts to improve access to justice is critical to ensure that government services have their desired reach and impact.

“There is a deeply held belief that assigning a lawyer to every poor person is the best way to achieve access to justice. The better approach, given limited resources, is to increase people’s ability to resolve legal problems with greater simplicity...”

JANICE CHIARETTO
STATEWIDE LEGAL SERVICES
OF CONNECTICUT



The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated efforts to simplify legal processes after unprecedented challenges to accessing courts. Some examples of simplification included eliminating requirements for wet signatures and expanded use of electronic signatures, developing alternatives to costly notarization, eliminating or modifying public notification requirements, expanding use of e-filing, and establishing of online application processes for licenses, among many other simplification initiatives.²⁴ Similar to court systems, simplification principles likewise expand access to federal government programs and benefits.

Roadmap

The Roundtable engaged with stakeholders, listened to feedback, and reviewed forms and processes to identify a path toward simplification.



1. Understand the Problem

Agencies should take steps to understand barriers to accessing programs and services through people-centered engagement efforts. Engagement efforts should prioritize the voices of those who frequently seek access to the agency's programs, including historically underserved and marginalized communities.

Engage with legal aid and advocacy organizations to understand needs and opportunities for improvement

Given their frequent engagement with communities seeking access to federal government services and benefits, civil legal aid providers and advocacy organizations are uniquely positioned to identify opportunities for improvement.²⁵

Federal agencies can benefit from regular engagement with legal services organizations to understand specific access difficulties faced by communities and can result in recommendations to improve access.



In September 2022, Attorney General Merrick Garland, Associate Attorney General Vanita Gupta, and Office for Access to Justice Director Rachel Rossi met with the leadership, staff and board members of the Legal Services Corporation, and the Executive Directors of 132 legal aid organizations from across the country funded by the Legal Services Corporation.

WHY THIS WORKS

Legal service providers and organizations can:

- work directly to help low-income and other underserved communities access federal programs
- identify and resolve issues, often uncovering barriers to access that affect many people
- identify issues common to specific groups of people, such as older adults, people with disabilities, or people without access to transportation, to target specific interventions
- connect with other legal aid providers across the country, which can provide further insight into systemic issues as well as best practices from other organizations

- understand the broader context of the most pressing civil justice needs of underserved communities, and where their time and energy could have a bigger impact

WHAT AGENCIES ARE DOING

- **Social Security Administration (SSA).** SSA has a long-standing practice of regularly engaging with the advocacy community. In 2021, SSA renewed its outreach to include recurring advocate-executive meetings. Although the initial goal was to address short-term issues caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the mission expanded to include long-term issues that address Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) administrative simplification and evidence-based outreach.

Together, SSA and the advocacy community developed five subgroups: (1) SSI application streamlining and accessibility, (2) third-party assistance, (3) exploration of regulatory/sub-regulatory changes, (4) outreach to SSI kids, and (5) targeted mailing for the Title II population who may also be eligible for SSI. In October 2022, SSA kicked-off a new series of quarterly meetings titled, *Roundtable Discussions with SSA and the Advocacy Community*. The meetings will include additional aging and research organizations, and will focus on access to services, customer experience, and initiatives to support executive orders. The first meeting addressed language access issues, and the next meeting will focus on equity.

- **Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).** VA has engaged with legal service providers to design two new legal services grant programs to help veterans with their civil legal needs. In 2023, VA will provide more than \$11 million in grants for up to 75 organizations to provide legal services to veterans who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. A separate pilot program will issue grants to eligible organizations to provide free legal assistance to any individual who has served in the Armed Forces. Such legal assistance will include improving military discharges or characterization of service, correcting military records, or providing legal assistance with any program administered by VA.
- **Department of Justice (DOJ).** In May 2022, DOJ announced the launching of the new Office of Environmental Justice (OEJ) within the Justice Department to protect overburdened and underserved communities from the harms caused by environmental crime, pollution, and climate change. To build a partnership with community advocates, OEJ will conduct outreach to communities regarding environmental

justice concerns through local, regional, and national listening sessions and other outreach events. In August 2022, DOJ's Civil Rights and Environment and Natural Resources Divisions held a listening session in Houston, Texas to hear environmental justice concerns from legal aid providers and other advocacy organizations representing historically underserved and marginalized communities. The organizations suggested ways the Justice Department can best help state and local partners address illegal trash dumping, air quality and pollution, transportation, and infrastructure development, as well as further engage with the local community to address problems and seek solutions.

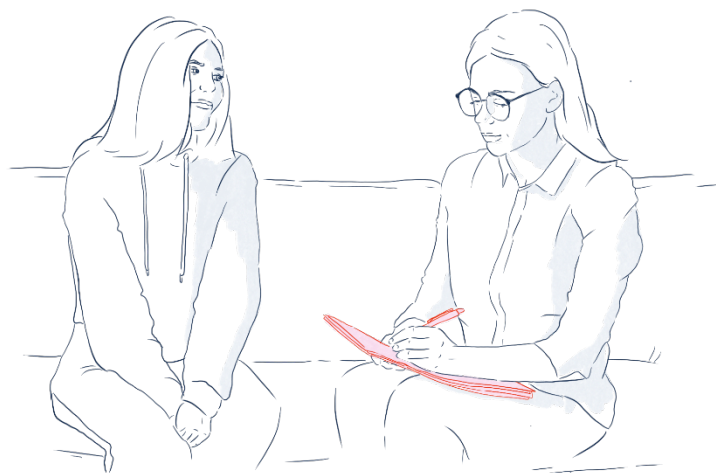
CASE STUDY

How the Department of Labor is engaging Legal Aid to improve Unemployment Insurance

In 2021, the **Department of Labor (DOL) Office of Unemployment Insurance Modernization** began meeting regularly with legal service organizations to identify challenges applicants faced when applying for unemployment benefits. In addition, the Office regularly engages with claimants and legal aid providers to help identify barriers and develop solutions to the problems encountered by claimants when applying for unemployment insurance.

Here are some of the solutions DOL implemented following its engagement with legal aid providers:

- issued guidance in both 2021 and 2022 to provide additional scenarios under which states could stop trying to collect overpayments from groups of claimants who were not at fault
- created a glossary that provides plain language definitions of commonly used terms like “laid off,” “fired,” and “quit.” Conducted user-testing to ensure claimants understand terms on forms and apply them correctly
- created a way for legal aid providers and advocates, in addition to clients, to access state websites, making it easier for lawyers to help their clients
- created teams of experts that include legal aid providers to work with two pilot states to make their processes easier to access. As a result, these experts will generate solutions for other states and advise technical assistance teams on how to improve benefit delivery in more than 30 states



Engage with members of underserved and marginalized communities to identify urgent problems and innovative solutions

Consistent and meaningful engagement with historically underserved and marginalized communities is critical to understand the access gaps to federal government programs. This may include:

- communities of color
- communities without access to broadband, a computer, or phone
- older adults
- low-income communities
- people who do not have permanent housing
- rural communities
- those who are not proficient in English
- those who are not literate or have low literacy skills
- those with disabilities
- those without transportation
- veterans

WHY THIS WORKS

This engagement:

- advances equity, civil rights, racial justice, and equal opportunity
- ensures a broad understanding of the hurdles faced by some communities as they attempt to access federal programs, services, and benefits
- enhances trust and collaboration with communities who may have a lack of confidence in government
- increases awareness of federal government programs, policies, and resources
- expands access for communities who are most impacted by barriers in accessing federal government programs, services, and resources

WHAT AGENCIES ARE DOING

- **Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).** In 2021, VA initiated the Tribal Representation Expansion Project, an effort to collaborate with Tribal governments to promote access to culturally competent representation for American Indian and Alaskan Native veterans. For veterans who do not have existing options for representation, VA aims to facilitate access to representation by traditional means of accreditation. VA will also use the General Counsel’s discretionary authority to authorize certain individuals affiliated with Tribal governments to represent veterans before VA.
- **Department of Agriculture (USDA).** In 2021, USDA established an Equity Commission composed of people who have personal and professional experience with USDA’s programs, civil rights, and trust and treaty responsibilities with Native American tribes. The independent commission is assessing USDA’s systems, processes, and programs and making recommendations to the Secretary to reduce barriers and help ensure that underserved communities have a fair shot at accessing economic opportunities.
- **Department of Transportation (DOT).** In October 2022, DOT published the “Promising Practices for Meaningful Public Involvement in Transportation Decision-Making” to share promising practices that incorporate the voices of diverse communities into each stage of the transportation decision-making process. This guide includes techniques for meaningful involvement that DOT funding recipients can use to engage with affected communities to understand their concerns and to gather input from the public during planning and project development. DOT will conduct training sessions on the Promising Practices document in 2023 and track attendance metrics on participation and usages by the ten Operating Agencies.
- **Federal Communications Commission (FCC).** In August 2022, the FCC established the Affordability Connectivity Program Outreach Grant Program, which will provide up to \$80 million in grant funds to conduct outreach in support of the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP). The ACP provides eligible households with up to \$30 off their monthly internet service bill, or \$75 if the household is on qualifying Tribal Lands, as well as a one-time up to \$100 discount on purchasing a laptop, desktop, or tablet from participating providers.

ACP’s outreach efforts will include in-person events, literature campaigns, digital campaigns, paid media campaigns, and application assistance to promote ACP enrollment. The FCC has

allocated up to \$10 million of this grant funding for participants in two pilot programs aimed at increasing ACP awareness and providing ACP application assistance. The "Your Home, Your Internet" Pilot Program will provide participants with up to \$5 million in grant funding to increase awareness of and encourage participation in the ACP for households receiving federal housing assistance. In addition, the ACP Navigator Pilot Program will provide participants with up to \$5 million in grant funding to support direct ACP application assistance through the verification database. FCC is partnering with the U.S. Digital Service (USDS) to identify specific pain points in the application process and further improve the customer experience by better understanding the enrollment barriers of applicants and advocates as they apply for assistance.

- **Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).** In September 2022, EPA established the Office of Environmental Justice and External Civil Rights to advance environmental justice and civil rights. The new office will dedicate more than 200 EPA employees toward solving environmental challenges in communities that have been underserved for far too long. This office will engage with communities that have environmental justice concerns to understand their needs and help ensure the lived experiences of underserved communities are central to EPA's decision-making while supporting community-driven solutions.
- **AmeriCorps.** AmeriCorps works toward strengthening communities by supporting and increasing civil engagement and volunteerism around the country.²⁶ One way AmeriCorps strengthens communities is through participatory research grants and technical assistance. Participatory research empowers residents as experts who can educate and aid researchers about their communities from within. This innovative research approach emphasizes the importance of involving members of the community as active and equal participants in all phases of the research project to produce more impactful, equitable community-based solutions. AmeriCorps national service programs and community stakeholders use their findings to address the community issues identified during the research process.
- **United States Agency for International Development (USAID).** In November 2021, the agency launched WorkwithUSAID.org, a website designed to lower barriers to working with USAID, allowing more local partners, small businesses, and minority-serving institutions to compete for USAID funding. To support local leadership and foster sustainable results, USAID pledged to provide at least a quarter of

agency funds to local partners within the next four years and expand the authorization for USAID's locally employed staff to play a larger role in awarding and managing assistance. A key component of the website is the [Partner Directory](#), which allows organizations to create a profile and connect with others in the development community to explore forming prime and/or sub-partnerships in acquisition and assistance. Organizations can also take a pre-engagement assessment to self-evaluate their readiness to compete for USAID funding. Other website features include a library link, a blog link, and an FAQ page that answers the most common questions organizations ask about engaging with USAID.

- **Department of Justice (DOJ) and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).** In December 2022, DOJ and the EPA held a listening session regarding the ongoing water crisis in Jackson, Mississippi with leaders from faith, business, health, education, and non-profit communities, as well as state and local governments. Community leaders talked about the impacts of the crisis and provided recommendations for long-term solutions. DOJ and the EPA provided updates on their enforcement activities and committed to further engagements with the local communities to implement solutions.

CASE STUDY

How the Department of Interior is engaging with Tribal Nations to foster Nation-to-Nation relationships in support of the federal trust responsibility

Department of Interior (DOI) is engaging with Tribal Nations to understand what resources are needed and how federal agencies can improve outreach, information-sharing, and services. DOI is spearheading several key actions to minimize barriers and advance government-to-government relationships:

- In September 2022, DOI convened the 2022 National Tribal Broadband Summit in collaboration with the White House, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), and other federal agencies. During the summit, participants discussed how to make broadband development on Tribal lands less burdensome and shared best practices, new ideas, and lessons learned.
- In September 2022, DOI convened the first Secretary's Tribal Advisory Committee that creates a formal structure for Tribal leaders to engage in routine and robust conversations directly with the Secretary and high-level DOI leadership.
- In November 2022, President Biden, Tribal leaders, Cabinet members, and senior officials²⁷ gathered at the White House Tribal Nations Summit hosted by the Department of the Interior in Washington, D.C. The President announced a new memorandum establishing uniform standards to be implemented across all federal agencies regarding how Tribal consultations are conducted. DOI updated the Interior Tribal Consultation policy and procedures to strengthen consultation between DOI and Tribal Nations.
- In November 2022, DOI announced the new Office of Indigenous Communications and Technology to assist Tribal Nations and Tribal entities in managing and developing spectrum resources, wireless services, electric vehicles, and other technological services to promote economic development initiatives.
- In 2022, DOI became the first federal agency to work with states to designate post-secondary Tribal institutions as voter registration agencies under the National Voter Registration Act. This designation facilitates voter registration opportunities for enrolled students and community members.

2. Implement Strategies

After agencies obtain regular feedback to understand the problem, they should incorporate that information and adopt strategies to address the problems identified. People-centered engagement can lead to specific recommendations on how to simplify process, forms, and language. For example, agencies can modify a specific section of a form that is frequently misunderstood, or streamline processes that have led to unintended hurdles.



Simplify government forms

WHY THIS WORKS

- reduces the burden on applicants to understand and complete a form, thereby encouraging more applications
- reduces errors in the completion of forms
- reduces the need for unnecessary multiple applications and administrative appeal processes
- reduces the need for legal assistance, freeing legal aid providers to engage on more complex or urgent legal issues

WHAT AGENCIES ARE DOING

- **Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).** The HHS Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services have simplified forms that affect millions of people each year, including Medicare Premium Bill and Easy Pay forms. These forms are mailed to over 2 million people each month who don't have their premiums deducted from their Social Security benefits. Medicare Easy Pay is a free way to set up recurring monthly payments for these premiums. The form was revised to use plainer language and better design practices and was tested with the public.
- **Department of Homeland Security (DHS).** The Office of the Citizenship and Immigration Services Ombudsman revised its case assistance request form (DHS Form 7001) to be simpler and to allow for submission of more specific information, thereby reducing the need for multiple interactions with the office.

- **Social Security Administration (SSA).** SSA is engaged in a multiyear initiative to reduce the length and complexity of the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) application to make it easier for individuals to apply for SSI benefits. SSA is engaging in user experience group testing to inform the design.

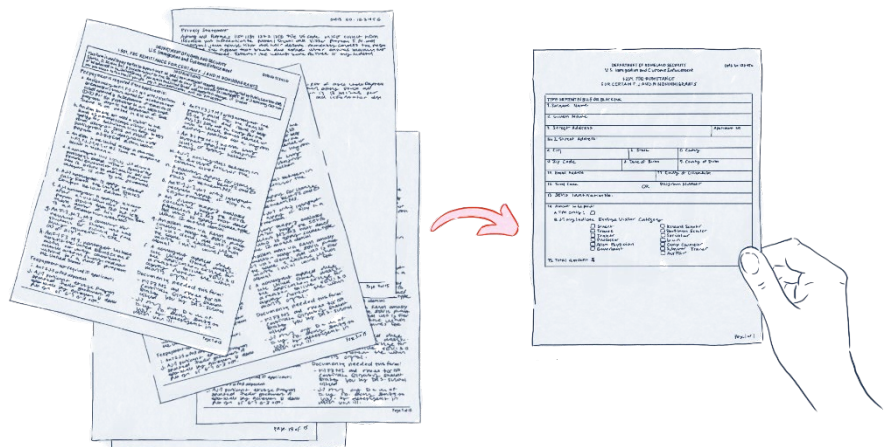
CASE STUDY

How the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is simplifying forms to reduce paperwork burdens on the public

In 2022, the **Department of Homeland Security (DHS)** launched a Paperwork Reduction Act Burden Reduction Initiative with the goal of reducing the paperwork burden on the public by twenty million hours agency-wide by May 20, 2023. As part of its initiative, DHS issued a memorandum that outlined the following burden reduction best practices and strategies: the use of simplification and plain language; automatic renewals; “short form” options; online submission of all forms, where appropriate; use of electronic or digital signatures; and usability testing during the creation and revision process for all forms. DHS also developed resources and guides to assist with its consumer and user experience efforts.

To that end, the DHS Customer Experience (CX) team has worked with Components and Offices on burden reduction strategies through the lens of human-centered design and has developed a range of resources and guides to assist Components and Offices in their customer and user experience (CX/UX) efforts. These include:

- the development of a DHS CX/UX Community of Practice for DHS employees and contractors to learn about and discuss customer improvements across DHS
- a DHS [Usability Testing Kit](#)
- CX Playbooks and Guides
- federal CX case studies
- a CX Glossary





Partner with state, local, and Tribal government-administered programs to simplify forms and processes

WHY THIS WORKS

Often federal programs partner with state, local, and Tribal government-administered programs, or rely on these governments to issue resources and services. Streamlining and improving collaboration, or assisting states with processes, can reduce unnecessary burdens to access. It can also promote consistency in process across jurisdictions and can ease administrative burdens.

WHAT AGENCIES ARE DOING

- **U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).** In October 2022, the USDA Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) began a project to help state SNAP agencies with the design of their applications to strengthen customer service and provide clear directions to clients on where to send their completed forms. This project includes a webinar and best practices document for all states, as well as targeted assistance to three states. USDA has also created a toolkit to help states improve notices to SNAP clients so they are easier to understand and better meet clients' needs. Additionally, USDA is coordinating with the Department of Health and Human Services to streamline the certification process for eligible participants in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infant, and Children (WIC) by determining income eligibility for the program through data-sharing.
- **Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).** The HHS Office of Child Care developed a model application and guide to help states improve their application and verification processes for childcare subsidies. This reduces the administrative burden on both families and states agencies. The model application, which was developed in partnership with the U.S. Digital Service, uses human-centered design and plain language to streamline the information collected.
- **Department of Treasury (Treasury).** Treasury's Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERA), which has implemented several administrative flexibilities, has made millions of payments to renters and their families at risk of eviction, with over 80% of assistance going to very low-income renters and other

underserved communities. Researchers like Princeton University's Eviction Lab credit the success of ERA programs across the country, as well as the increase in eviction diversion programs and access to counsel initiatives, for (1) keeping eviction filings below the pre-pandemic average, (2) helping millions of renters avoid the threat of eviction in 2021, and (3) helping to build a robust eviction prevention infrastructure. Many of these new efforts were funded by ERA and included significant efforts in partnership with legal aid providers.

SIMPLIFICATION EFFORTS ABROAD

USAID's development programming has helped government institutions around the world strengthen the use of simplified systems, processes, and guidelines to facilitate access to justice and legal aid. The recently released USAID Rule of Law Achievements Review Report (2005-2020) highlights best practices in more than a dozen countries across the world.

- For example, in Ghana, USAID partnered with the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice, to support the rollout of citizens' online reporting and filing of complaints, and promoted accessible judicial services via user-friendly mobile platforms.
- In Bangladesh, USAID worked to professionalize the provision of legal aid and strengthen the role of District Legal Aid Officers, including through simplified rules and regulations to enable legal aid workers to improve customer service for justice seekers, and to ensure an improved experience for stakeholders engaged in the justice process.
- In Serbia, USAID is working to strengthen confidence in the justice system by improving public engagement with judges and prosecutors through practical guides on citizens' rights and ways they can access justice services and solve their everyday legal problems. Also, Open Doors of Judiciary, a digital platform facilitated by USAID, was launched to improve transparency and facilitate online communication between judicial representatives and the communities they are mandated to serve through user-friendly tools, blog posts, and infographics.



Eliminate unnecessary requirements

WHY THIS WORKS

When a complex process is split up into easier tasks, any confusing, unnecessary, or wasteful steps can be removed or modified. This can be particularly necessary when procedures or requirements are poorly designed or outdated. Eliminating or improving unnecessary steps can also improve the cost-efficiency of administrative regulation, reduce the time and expense for users, and help expand access to justice.

WHAT AGENCIES ARE DOING

- **Department of Education (ED) and Social Security Administration (SSA).** In 2021, ED published a regulation that automatically provides debt relief for eligible student-loan borrowers with total and permanent disabilities, using an existing data match with SSA. Congress had granted these borrowers a right to loan forgiveness but, under the previous process, eligible borrowers needed to apply for relief after receiving a notification from ED. Many did not complete the application, even after they were identified in the data match. Under the new automated process, ED forgives the eligible borrowers' loans without additional steps by the borrower. This automation has helped 400,000 borrowers receive discharges, including 320,000 who had been eligible for years but had not applied.
- **Department of Homeland Security (DHS).** The DHS Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) changed its disaster assistance application process to allow additional types of documents to prove ownership or occupancy for homeowners and renters. These documents include motor vehicle registrations, letters from schools or social service organizations, court documents, and self-declarative statements of ownership or occupancy for mobile homes or travel trailers as a last resort.
- **Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).** Effective January 1, 2023, the HHS Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services eliminated two forms required for claims processing: the Certificate of Medical Necessity, and the Durable Medical Equipment Information form. These forms previously led to delays in claims payment and increased the number of appeals filed.

- **Department of Treasury (Treasury).** The broad reach of Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERA) assistance and legal services was made possible by administrative flexibilities that helped eligible households access rental assistance and housing stability services more easily. For example, Treasury developed guidance to allow grantees to rely on various methods for documenting eligibility like self-attestation, categorical eligibility, and fact-specific proxies. These changes allowed grantees to reach a greater number of eligible renters who otherwise may not have accessed the program due to burdensome documentation requirements. In addition, Treasury also reduced administrative burdens by publishing sample forms, highlighting promising practices, and conducting extensive outreach.



Use plain language

WHY THIS WORKS

Removing legalese and other technical jargon makes documents easier to read. It reduces incoming calls and questions from applicants, and it lessens the cost and burden of translating content into other languages because technical jargon can be more difficult to translate into multiple languages.

WHAT AGENCIES ARE DOING

- **Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC).** In October 2022, the EEOC released a “Know Your Rights” poster, updating the previous “EEO is the Law” poster. The revised poster summarizes the laws EEOC enforces in simpler terms and explains in plainer language how employees or applicants can file a charge if they believe that they have experienced discrimination. The revised poster also includes a QR code for applicants or employees to link directly to instructions on how to file a charge of workplace discrimination with the EEOC. The poster is available in English and Spanish and will soon be available in additional languages.
- **Department of State (State).** In 2022, the Bureau of Consular Affairs (CA) surveyed U.S. travelers on travel safety messaging, media consumption and travel planning habits. Based on traveler feedback, State redesigned passport forms and instructions to include plain language, step-by-step guidance, and other improvements to reduce processing delays. State updated its passport forms to allow applicants to select “X” unspecified or another gender identity. QR codes are also now provided on the backs of U.S. passports.



CASE STUDY

How the Department of Justice’s Civil Rights Division uses plain language to help the public understand their rights

In 2022, the **Department of Justice’s Civil Rights Division** began building a practice of plain language writing for its public facing documents to help people understand their legal rights and obligations.

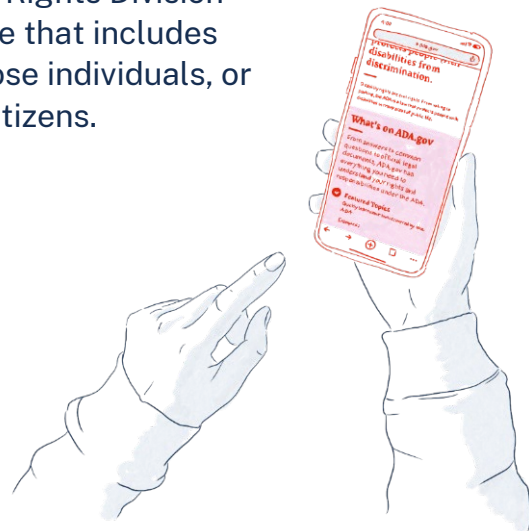
ADA.gov and Guidance on Web Accessibility and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

The Civil Rights Division launched its new and improved website, in November 2022. To ensure it met the needs of the people that use ADA.gov, the Civil Rights Division’s design process was guided by multiple rounds of user testing and feedback. This website includes simple explanations of the law designed for people without a legal or technical background. One example is the recently released Guidance on Web Accessibility and the ADA.

Justice.gov/voting

The Civil Rights Division developed a resource to help citizens understand their eligibility to vote after a criminal conviction.

For example, the "[Guide to State Voting Rules that Apply After a Criminal Conviction](#)" walks readers through a series of questions to help them understand age and residency requirements, and how each state’s laws work. It gives information about how to reach officials in a particular state if someone wants to register to vote, or if they have additional questions. With this document, the Civil Rights Division makes the information available to a wide audience that includes people convicted, organizations that work with those individuals, or the communities where they live, and interested citizens.





Offer information in other languages

WHY THIS WORKS

The communities served by federal government increasingly speak languages other than English. According to data from the U.S. Census, the number of people who speak a language other than English at home has outpaced the overall population growth, rising from 23.1 million people in 1980 to 67.8 million people in 2019.²⁸ Access to federal government programs and services requires expanded communication of information in other languages.

Further, Executive Order 13166, *Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency* (Aug. 16, 2000), requires federal agencies to ensure access to government programs and services for people who are not proficient in English.

Offering information in other languages is often easier when plain language is regularly used. Plain and concise language makes translating or interpreting information into another language easier and more cost-effective. Complex or technical language is often difficult to understand, which may result in errors and different messaging in each language.

WHAT AGENCIES ARE DOING

- **Social Security Administration (SSA).** In October 2022, SSA hosted a roundtable discussion with advocates, including legal aid providers, that focused on language access issues. The event included a presentation on [SSA's Language Access Plan](#) and featured a panel discussion on how SSA can improve services to individuals with no or limited ability to communicate in English. SSA is assessing the advocate community's recommendations.
- **Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).** EPA has a centrally funded contract that provides interpretation and translation services to all program and regional offices, including a telephonic interpretation service that is available for use by EPA employees 24/7, with over 175 languages. Significant accomplishments in this area include:

- all EPA public engagements include virtual and/or in-person interpretation services in at least Spanish, with other languages available upon request
 - EPA’s AirNOW digital platform provides real time air quality information around wildfires, and now is fully available real time in Spanish
 - all EPA press releases from headquarters and regional offices are translated into all appropriate languages
- **Department of Justice (DOJ).** In 2022, Attorney General Merrick B. Garland appointed the first Department-wide Language Access Coordinator within the Office for Access to Justice, reestablished the DOJ Language Access Working Group to expand language access efforts across the Department, and issued a Memorandum asking all federal agencies to review and update their language access practices and policies to ensure all individuals can access government services. DOJ translated the press release announcing the Attorney General Memorandum into seven languages.

**** For English see below****

للمزيد من المعلومات عن هذا الإعلان باللغة العربية ، الرجاء الإطلاع على [البيان الصحفي](#).

如需更多有关此公告简体中文形式的信息，请参阅本新闻稿。

如需更多有關此公告繁體中文形式的信息，請參閱本新聞稿。

이 공고에 관한 한국어로 된 추가 정보를 보시려면, 링크된 [보도자료](#)를 보십시오.

Para obtener más información sobre este anuncio en español, consulte este [comunicado de prensa](#).

Para sa karagdagang impormasyon tungkol sa anunsyong ito sa Tagalog, mangyaring tingnan ang [pahayag](#) na ito.

Để biết thêm về thông báo này bằng tiếng Việt, vui lòng xem [thông cáo báo chí](#) này.

For further information about this announcement in English, please see this [press release](#).



Make default options favorable to beneficiaries

WHY THIS WORKS

When default options benefit the beneficiary of a service or benefit, it creates less burden to notify beneficiaries of the service or benefit and allows access to government programs without lengthy or complex application processes. As one example, an “opt in” model requires a user to perform an affirmative action, or to engage in an application process before the beneficiary can obtain the benefit of a program or resource.

Alternatively, pivoting to an “opt out” model creates a default that all beneficiaries may access a resource, and no additional action is needed by individuals. Another example of a beneficiary-favorable default is modification of prerequisites to presume the applicant has met any of them, where possible.

WHAT AGENCIES ARE DOING

- **Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).** Unless a veteran opts out, VA automatically shares basic information about a veteran’s eligibility for education benefits with school’s certifying official. This default option makes it easier for a school to access information about a veteran’s educational benefits and relieves the veteran of having to gather benefit information or fill out forms.



Provide assistance through trusted organizations

WHY THIS WORKS

The Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA) in the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) found that burden reduction efforts work best when they are done in partnership with trusted, community-based organizations.

Providing assistance through trusted community partners can increase participation rates, especially in historically underserved communities.

WHAT AGENCIES ARE DOING

- **U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).** Through the American Rescue Plan Technical Assistance Investment Program, since November 2021, USDA has provided over \$100 million in funding to 33 organizations to help connect underserved farmers, ranchers and forest landowners with USDA programs and services. The organizations were selected for their proven track records working with underserved producer communities, such as veterans, new farmers, limited resource producers, and producers living in high-poverty areas.
- **Department of Justice (DOJ).** The Executive Office for Immigration Review expanded the Immigration Court Helpdesk (ICH) program to 21 immigration court sites and 16 legal service providers. The ICH provides non-detained noncitizens with information regarding the immigration court process and their responsibilities and rights under immigration laws. The ICH uses plain language to define complex immigration terms in forms and instructions, provides translated materials to noncitizens in multiple languages, and creates videos for non-written language users. The ICH also conducts outreach to marginalized communities on how to navigate the immigration court process.
- **Federal Trade Commission (FTC).** Through the “Every Community” Initiative, the FTC hosted nearly 300 events to combat consumer fraud and other issues in historically underserved communities and other population segments, including communities of color, military members and their families, people with disabilities, low-income families, and Tribal communities. The FTC’s outreach program included events at the Virginia Poverty Law Conference, the California Central Valley

Legal Services Partners Meeting, and the Centers for Independent Living. The FTC also collaborated with organizations that work with Tribal leaders to share information on avoiding and reporting fraud, predatory lending practices, identity theft, and other consumer problems.

COLLABORATING WITH FRONT LINE ORGANIZATIONS

In addition to legal aid providers, people seeking to access government programs, services, and benefits may seek help at public libraries and self-help offices in courts, as well as from faith-based and culturally- or issue-specific community-based organizations. These organizations are often trusted by communities and have valuable insight on simplification and engagement opportunities. Agencies may collaborate with these types of organizations, disseminating information and instructional guides or ensuring access to internet to complete online forms for those without broadband.



Allow non-lawyer assistance when appropriate

WHY THIS WORKS

Where appropriate, the expanded use of non-lawyer assistance can reduce the burden on legal service providers in assisting applicants to obtain federal government services. This can include, for example, the use of legal navigators or hotlines to advise and assist beneficiaries, and to respond to process, application, or other questions.

WHAT AGENCIES ARE DOING

- **AmeriCorps.** AmeriCorps partnerships through its VISTA program at Fordham Law School's Feerick Center for Social Justice (FC) help AmeriCorps promote rights and address problems facing marginalized, low-income New Yorkers. Partners use strategies to reform policies, educate, and provide pathways for legal representation. At the Washington State Office of Attorney General / Office of Military and Veteran Legal Assistance, AmeriCorps members promote and facilitate civil legal assistance programs, pro bono services, and self-help services for servicemembers, veterans, and their families domiciled or stationed in Washington State. AmeriCorps members at the Legal Aid Society of Hawai'i Legal Aid Corps help low-income and disadvantaged residents navigate the justice system and connect with the information and resources they need to address their civil legal issues.
- **Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).** VA “accredits” representatives from Veterans Service Organization, agents, and attorneys to help veterans with benefits claims. To become accredited, one must demonstrate that the applicant has good character and reputation, and is competent to practice before the VA.
- **Social Security Administration (SSA).** The SSA allows non-attorneys who possess the necessary qualifications to advise and assist claimants throughout the administrative process.
- **Department of Defense (DOD).** The Department of the Army launched a new cloud-based tool that allows attorneys to supervise the drafting of estate planning documents by paralegal staff. This tool will allow non-attorney staff to significantly expand their legal assistance contributions, enabling attorneys to help their clients more efficiently and effectively.

- **Legal Services Corporation (LSC)** funded a grant to the Michigan Advocacy Program to create a legal navigator online program that engages non-attorney administrative volunteers to address the burdensome administrative tasks required for clients to apply for criminal records expungements. The Legal Navigator program will include partnerships with paralegal training programs, law schools and community groups.
- **Department of Justice (DOJ).** The Civil Rights Division has hotline programs that provides information and technical assistance to workers and employers. Through these hotline programs, the Civil Rights Division offers informal assistance to help workers and employers resolve work-related issues without needing a lawyer. Callers also receive information on how to file a charge through the hotline. Many issues are resolved informally, thereby avoiding the need to file a charge. Interpretation services are offered free of charge, and callers with auditory limitations can use TTY services.



Provide easy to access self-help information

WHY THIS WORKS

Self-help resources can be more accessible for communities who seek access to federal government resources, and can include informational guides, online portals, mobile applications, or self-help centers. They allow for proactive and targeted outreach to specific communities or populations who may need a particular service or program. Self-help resources can often be a lower cost option than other assistance. Use of plain language and translation of self-help information can expand the broad reach of these resources

WHAT AGENCIES ARE DOING

- **AmeriCorps.** AmeriCorps is partnering with the Montana Legal Services Association to improve access to legal information and legal services for low to moderate-income Montanans with regular travel to rural communities.

AmeriCorps members at Legal Assistance of Western New York, Inc. provide legal assistants in seven legal aid offices.

AmeriCorps members at Iowa Legal Aid support direct services to low-income and older clients. Members help communities in Iowa's 99 counties access legal information and obtain resources and support needed to resolve civil legal problems.

AmeriCorps members at Illinois JusticeCorps assist with efforts to make courts throughout the state more welcoming and less intimidating for people without lawyers by connecting people to needed information and resources.

- **Department of State (State).** State promotes easy access to records released under Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) in its Virtual Reading Room.
- **Department of Justice (DOJ).** The Executive Office for Immigration Review expanded Self-Help Legal Centers (SHLCs) in 12 immigration courts. These centers provide translated self-help materials to help pro se noncitizens understand immigration proceedings. SHLCs provide information on forms for immigration relief, such as asylum, special immigrant juvenile status, and cancellation of removal, as well as broad guidance on the immigration court process. This guidance includes explanations of immigration documents, information on how to

avoid becoming the victim of fraud, and instructions on how to file motions with the court. SHLCs currently offer thirteen self-help legal resource documents in English and Spanish, and two of the most used documents are also available in Portuguese and Haitian Creole. The Executive Office for Immigration Review is incorporating QR codes to make information more accessible to unrepresented noncitizens.

- **Department of Transportation (DOT).** DOT recently released the [DOT Navigator](#), a [website](#) designed to help communities understand the best ways to apply for its grants, and to plan for and deliver transformative infrastructure projects and services. DOT tracks monthly user statistics of the DOT Navigator, noting most used pages, and translates these into Spanish. DOT is exploring additional language translations for 2023.
- **Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).** HUD recently released the [HUD Easy Locator Portal](#), or HUD HELP for short, to be responsive to its customers, especially to those who may require additional assistance. This site connects individuals, families, community groups, state and local governments, nonprofit, philanthropic, faith-based, and private sector organizations, housing advocates, and others with easy to find information, contact phone numbers, email addresses, and state webpages for each of HUD's 64 local offices. A QR code (right) was developed to enable quick shares for communities during community events, public forums, and industry meetings.
- **Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB).** CFPB found that most people who visit [consumerfinance.gov](#) use a mobile device or smartphone, matching a nationwide trend of how people view websites. Research has shown that Black and Hispanic Americans, limited English-proficient consumers, those with disabilities, those living in rural areas, and lower-income Americans are more likely to own smartphones compared to desktop computers and rely on mobile networks compared to home broadband connections. In addition to providing self-help and consumer education for older Americans around using technology, CFPB websites offer inclusive designs to enhance older Americans' interface and experience with critical resources to help prevent risks related to their finances.



The CFPB is continuing to improve the mobile experience of its website and the accessibility of its documents and forms. CFPB continues its language access program by offering translations of

many of its publications in eight languages (Spanish, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, Tagalog, Haitian Creole, Arabic, and Russian), available on translated home pages. Additionally, CFPB's Consumer Response Office enables consumers to file complaints in 180 languages. CFPB has also created two pre-recorded webinars on Credit and Understanding Consumer Rights for Financial Practitioners. They can use these videos with consumers to help them understand their consumer rights and learn who to connect with when a consumer financial right may have been violated.

3. Evaluate Outcomes

After agencies implement simplification strategies, they should assess the impact of their simplification efforts. This assessment should include whether they have improved access to federal programs, and whether they reduced the administrative burden on individuals, legal aid and advocacy organizations, and the agencies themselves.

WHAT AGENCIES ARE DOING

- **Department of Treasury (Treasury).** Treasury compiled promising practices for Emergency Rental Assistance programs that include sample forms, checklists, and examples of improvements in state processes. In partnership with Treasury, the Office of Evaluation Sciences at the General Services Administration is exploring two collaborations with state governments to study whether removing income eligibility requirements increases program access and helps get payments out faster.
- **The General Service Administration's (GSA's) Office of Evaluation Sciences (OES).** GSA and OES conducted a randomized controlled trial to test the effectiveness of simplifying forms to increase submission rates. Members of the public who were randomly assigned to receive a version of the form with instructions embedded throughout were 3.2 percentage points more likely to submit the form than those randomly assigned to a version with a long list of instructions at the beginning.
- **Department of Transportation (DOT).** DOT's Thriving Communities Program will also track metrics in terms of supported communities who submit, and successfully receive discretionary grant funds as part of the DOT's Equity Action Plan KPIs.
- **National Science Foundation (NSF).** NSF researches the science of engagement, including research projects relating to engagement with Tribal colleges and communities, and interactions with Indigenous Native communities in the northern polar regions. Agencies could collaborate with NSF on research projects that support their mission and inform their science of engagement with underserved communities.

What's Next

The Roundtable's work has revealed a variety of efforts across agencies to simplify forms and processes. The 2022 Roundtable collaboration has also confirmed that much more can be done to modernize and simplify access to federal government programs. Together, Roundtable member agencies are working to increase access to justice through engagement with legal aid organizations and reinvigorated efforts to simplify forms, processes, and language.

Additionally, Roundtable members have committed to regular engagement with civil legal aid providers to increase access for marginalized communities. Some plan to hold a listening session (or series of listening sessions) with legal aid providers and advocacy organizations.

Below are just a few examples of forward-looking commitments by Roundtable members to continue simplification efforts.

PROCESS SIMPLIFICATION

- **AmeriCorps.** AmeriCorps is using funding from the Technology Modernization Fund (TMF) to improve customer experience for more than 2,800 local, nonprofit, faith, Tribal, and community-based organizations applying for, or managing, existing federal national service grants. With the TMF funding from the American Rescue Plan, AmeriCorps will modernize its community grants system, reduce barriers to accessing AmeriCorps resources, and expand the agency's ability to recruit and retain new organizations. With a modern and agile grants system, AmeriCorps will help ensure that every American over 18 has an equal opportunity to participate in national service and that organizations in underserved and marginalized communities can benefit from national service resources.
- **Department of State (State).** A limited pool of public applicants is currently participating in an online U.S. passport renewal pilot. State expects to open online renewal to the public in 2023. This process is expected to reduce an applicant's time and cost related to renewing their U.S. passport.
- **Department of Justice (DOJ).** In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the United States Trustee Program (USTP) suspended in-person interactions during the bankruptcy process and transitioned to remote meetings of creditors, including a primarily telephonic format for required

administrative proceedings. Anecdotal information suggests that telephonic meetings resulted in greater participation from both debtors and creditors, fewer continuances, and substantial cost and time efficiencies for all participants. Based on this success, the USTP initiated a pilot project to conduct consumer debtor meetings of creditors by Zoom videoconference and develop procedures and best practices to ensure accessibility for all participants. The shift to virtual meetings of creditors represents a significant improvement for debtors, including self-represented debtors, creditors, and small business creditors by reducing the need to take time off from work and incur travel and childcare burdens, while protecting the integrity of the consumer bankruptcy system.

- **Department of Justice (DOJ).** The Justice Department’s Office of the Pardon Attorney is working to streamline and simplify application forms and processes for petitions seeking executive clemency, including requests for pardon, commutation of imprisonment, and remission of financial penalties.

PLAIN LANGUAGE

- **Department of Homeland Security (DHS).** The DHS Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is developing a simplified disaster assistance form, using plain language, and requiring minimum information to make initial eligibility determinations. FEMA envisions using an interview-style software to ask only relevant questions to disaster survivors, with data and eligibility status being shared with other agencies so that they can make eligibility determinations more quickly.
- **Department of Justice (DOJ).** DOJ grant-making components will simplify the language in their 2024 fiscal year funding announcements and related materials, where possible. They will continue their outreach to racial, ethnic, and other marginalized and underserved communities to better understand and address barriers to accessing DOJ programs and funding opportunities for which they are eligible.

FORM SIMPLIFICATION

- **Department of Education (ED).** ED is working to simplify the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) as required by Congress. This simplification of the free federal student aid application is intended to further reduce barriers for students seeking federal financial aid to attend college and other postsecondary institutions.

- **Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).** HUD’s Office of Public and Indian Housing is working on long-awaited guidance to simplify forms for services, such as housing choice vouchers.
- **Department of Justice (DOJ).** The Department will develop a uniform and simplified notice of non-discrimination protections for use by federally funded grantees when providing services to the public.

EXPANDED SELF-HELP RESOURCES

- **Federal Trade Commission (FTC).** The FTC is preparing to update its [consumer.gov](https://www.consumer.gov) campaign and website, including articles, print materials, presentations, and worksheets that organizations can use with low literacy audiences. These are all written in a clear and direct style on topics including managing money, credit, loans, debt, scams, and identity theft.

ENGAGEMENT WITH CIVIL LEGAL AID PROVIDERS

- **Department of Justice (DOJ).** As part of its pilot, the United States Trustee Program (USTP) intends to host a listening session with appropriate stakeholders and their representative organizations, including legal aid providers, to ensure the virtual meeting process addresses the needs, including accessibility needs, of all participants.
- **Social Security Administration (SSA).** SSA has a long-standing process to engage advocates including individuals from legal aid providers. However, SSA recognizes that the legal aid community may have a unique perspective on its work and the challenges faced by historically underserved and marginalized communities. As such, SSA commits to holding two listening sessions with legal aid providers to focus on their perspectives and to solicit ideas on how the agency can increase representation of individuals seeking Supplemental Security Income.
- **Federal Trade Commission (FTC).** The FTC will continue to partner with civil legal aid providers to learn more about the fraud and bad business practices affecting the communities they serve. Legal aid providers who join the FTC’s Community Advocate Center receive a dedicated link to the FTC’s consumer reporting website, [ReportFraud.ftc.gov](https://www.consumer.gov/reportfraud), and receive periodic information about the reports received from people in the areas they serve.

- **Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).** The HHS Office of Intergovernmental and External Affairs will host listening sessions with legal services lawyers concerning access to HHS programs and services of importance to low-income recipients and communities.
- **Department of Homeland Security (DHS).** Both FEMA and the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services will engage with legal aid providers and advocates in 2023 to identify additional ways to simplify their forms and processes.

Through the Roundtable’s collaboration ahead, we will continue to expand our efforts to understand barriers to access through meaningful engagement with the communities served and impacted by government programs, and to adopt effective strategies that incorporate feedback from that engagement. We will also continue to refine and improve our approach toward simplification of forms, processes and language. Through our efforts to simplify, we will further the Roundtable’s mission to “increase the availability of meaningful access to justice for individuals and families, regardless of wealth or status.”²⁹

Advancing other Administration Priorities

The efforts discussed in this report reinforce the policies established under Executive Order 13985, *Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government* (Jan. 20, 2021), as well as Executive Order 14058, *Transforming Federal Customer Experience and Service Delivery to Rebuild Trust in Government* (Dec. 13, 2021).

These efforts also align with the Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) statutory responsibility under the Paperwork Reduction Act, implemented through the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA). In April 2022, OMB issued Memorandum M-22-10, *Improving Access to Public Benefits Programs Through the Paperwork Reduction Act*, which reminds agencies of their responsibility under the Paperwork Reduction Act to (1) accurately estimate the burdens experienced by the public when accessing benefit programs, and (2) use that analysis to minimize burdens, with particular emphasis on burden reduction for historically underserved communities and systematic, rather than one-off, burden reductions.

OIRA has been supporting agencies in carrying out these two charges under Memorandum M-22-10. OIRA has participated in the Roundtable meetings and lent support and guidance to agencies as they worked on plans for simplification, such as by working with agencies to identify burden reduction possibilities and sharing relevant evidence-backed strategies that agencies can pursue.

Additionally, the Roundtable's simplification efforts complement priorities described in Section 15 of Executive Order 14074, *Advancing Effective, Accountable Policing and Criminal Justice Practices to Enhance Public Trust and Public Safety* (May. 25, 2022). The Executive Order directs federal government agencies to safely reduce unnecessary criminal justice system interactions, enhance rehabilitation in jails and prisons, and support successful reentry while addressing racial and other disparities in the federal, state, local, Tribal, and territorial criminal justice systems.

By expanding access to government programs, we can ensure that individuals receive the supportive services they need, which prevents interaction with the criminal justice system in the first instance and improves their outcomes — as well as those of their families and communities — if they become justice-involved.

Resources

The Office for Access to Justice (ATJ), in partnership with Roundtable members, created this list of resources for federal government agencies seeking to simplify forms, processes, or language. ATJ stands ready to serve as a resource to federal agency partners in this goal to expand access through simplification.

- **Office of Management and Budget (OMB).** OMB continues to compile leading practices in community engagement and customer research in support of [Executive Order 13985](#) on *Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities through the Federal Government* and [Executive Order 14058](#) on *Transforming Customer Experience and Improving Service Delivery*. OMB is designing templates, pilots, documenting case studies, and developing other “how-to” guides to support federal agencies.
- **Administrative Conference of the United States (ACUS).** ACUS is an independent agency that brings together senior federal officials and private-sector experts to improve administrative procedures. ACUS has offered many recommendations to help agencies improve access to their programs. For example, ACUS recommends best practices to agencies to ensure that [Virtual Hearings in Agency Adjudication](#) are fair, accurate and efficient, including the use of post-hearing surveys to solicit input from the parties and representatives. Additionally, ACUS recommends best practices for agencies to use when designing and updating automated tools to provide legal guidance to the public, such as interactive chatbots and virtual assistants. This recommendation, [Automated Legal Guidance at Federal Agencies](#), assists agencies in ensuring the automated legal information is accurate and current, and ensuring that the public understands the limitations of automated legal information.
- **Plainlanguage.gov.** This website includes information on the Plain Writing Act and resources for writing with plain language. It is maintained by the Plain Language Action and Information Network (PLAIN), a community of federal employees dedicated to the idea that citizens deserve clear communication from government.
- **Office of Evaluation Sciences (OES).** Agencies should consider partnering with OES to evaluate the effectiveness of efforts to reduce administrative burden and simplify forms. OES is an interdisciplinary team that works across the federal government to help agencies build and use evidence. They partner with agencies to answer priority questions with

rigorous evaluation methods and administrative data. OES designs and conducts evaluations of existing programs and evidence-based program changes. OES services include evidence-based program design, impact evaluation, technical assistance, and social and behavioral science research. Agencies must pay a fee for the services through an interagency agreement. Agencies can email oes@gsa.gov to learn more.

- **United States Digital Service (USDS).** USDS partners with government agencies to address some of the most complex technical and implementation challenges with the goal of delivering a better government experience to the American public. Agencies can collaborate with USDS to build digital services and tools, deliver programs, expand platforms, assist with talent acquisition, and contract for digital services. USDS brings experienced, outcome-oriented technical and implementation experts, including engineers, product managers, designers, and procurement experts to lead efforts which might vary from short-term support to longer-term capacity building engagements. To increase the success rate of projects, USDS created a [Digital Services Playbook](#) drawn from successful practices that help agencies build effective digital tools.
- **The Lab at OPM (The Lab).** The Lab helps build capacity throughout the government to transform programs, processes, and people through human-centered design. The Lab offers educational training in the form of open enrollment Center for Leadership Development or custom courses, and they partner with agencies on projects. The Lab offers services on human-centered design, capacity building, design education, design research, service design, and qualitative and participatory research. To contact the Lab, email lab@opm.gov.
- **18F.** 18F is a technology and design consultancy within the Technology Transformation Services housed under the General Service Administration (GSA). 18F partners with agencies to improve the user experience of government services by helping them build and buy digital services that instill trust; meet user needs; are accessible, secure, and delivered quickly at reasonable cost. One of 18F's core principles is to make its work available to the public whenever possible. To magnify the value of the joint efforts with agencies, 18F shares completed work through its blog, case studies, and reusable artifacts. 18F aims to strengthen government technology practices in ways that last beyond formal partnerships. 18F offers the following services: problem definition and discovery, building and implementation, coaching and capacity building, in-service building and buying technology such as public-facing websites and applications. Email inquiries18f@gsa.gov to contact 18F.

- **Center of Excellence (CoE).** The CoE collaborates with agency stakeholders and staff to address complex challenges that impact the experiences of their customers. The various CoE services include data and analytics, IT modernization, service design, customer experience strategy at both an enterprise and program level, organizational customer experience capability building, and customer experience measurement. To contact CoE, email connectcoe@gsa.gov.
- **Technology Modernization Fund (TMF).** The TMF is an innovative investment program that provides agencies with additional ways to deliver services to the American public more quickly, better secure sensitive systems and data, and uses taxpayer dollars more efficiently. TMF can provide the following services: technical expertise and support, acquisition, financial assistance, incremental funding and oversight, agile and dynamic IT modernization, and project implementation. To learn more about the TMF process, contact tmf@gsa.gov or submit an idea through the TMF's Expression of Interest form.

Endnotes

¹ The White House, Office of the Press Secretary. *Memorandum on Restoring the Department of Justice's Access-to-Justice Function and Reinvigorating the White House Legal Aid Interagency Roundtable*, Sec. 3, (May 18, 2021), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/05/18/memorandum-on-restoring-the-department-of-justices-access-to-justice-function-and-reinvigorating-the-white-house-legal-aid-interagency-roundtable/> [<https://perma.cc/PPK7-E2DW>].

² *Id.*

³ *Id.*

⁴ White House Legal Aid Interagency Roundtable. *Access to Justice in the Age of COVID-19*, (Sep. 2021), <https://www.justice.gov/media/1173811/dl?inline=https://perma.cc/8RZ7-TQGY>.

⁵ *Id.* at 13-15.

⁶ *Id.* at 15.

⁷ *Id.* at 16-23.

⁸ Office of Management and Budget, *Information Collection Budget of the United States Government*, 2 (2018), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/2018-ICB-Report-Final.pdf> [<https://perma.cc/PPK7-E2DW>].

⁹ Rebecca L. Sandefur, *The Impact of Counsel: An Analysis of Empirical Evidence*, 9 *Seattle Journal for Social Justice* 51, 52 (2010), <https://digitalcommons.law.seattleu.edu/sjsj/vol9/iss1/3/> [<https://perma.cc/97DA-5JQT>].

¹⁰ Legal Services Corporation, *The Justice Gap: The Unmet Civil Legal Needs of Low-income Americans*, 8 (April 2022), <https://lsc-live.app.box.com/s/xl2v2uraitobbzrhwtjlgioemp3myz1> [<https://perma.cc/QT25-46CX>].

¹¹ Legal Services Corporation, *The Justice Gap: Measuring the Unmet Civil Legal Needs of Low-Income Americans*, 6 (June 2017), <https://www.lsc.gov/our-impact/publications/other-publications-and-reports/2017-justice-gap-report> [<https://perma.cc/NK4M-YTPE>].

¹² Legal Services Corporation, (April 2022), *supra* note 10 at 9.

¹³ *Id.* at 23.

¹⁴ *Id.* at 10.

¹⁵ Tanina Rostain, *Techno-Optimism & Access to the Legal System*, 148 (1) *Daedalus* 93, 94 (2019), <https://scholarship.law.georgetown.edu/facpub/2357/> [<https://perma.cc/RZ4K-9H2K>]

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ Legal Services Corporation, (April 2022), *supra* note 10 at 46.

¹⁹ John Creamer, U.S. Census Bureau, *Government Assistance Lifts 45.4 Million Out of Poverty in 2021*, (September 2022), [Government Assistance Lifts 45.4 Million Out of Poverty in 2021 \(census.gov\)](https://www.census.gov/govaffairs/assistance/2021/poverty) [<https://perma.cc/KHB5-PJF2>]

²⁰ Richard Zorza, *Some First Thoughts On Court Simplification: The Key To Civil Access And Justice Transformation*, 61 Drake Law Review 845, 847 (2013), <https://www.srln.org/system/files/attachments/Zorza%20Simplification%202013.pdf> [<https://perma.cc/F4S8-DJQD>]

²¹ Margaret D. Hagan, *A Human-Centered Design Approach to Access to Justice: Generating New Prototypes and Hypotheses for Intervention to Make Courts User-Friendly*, 6 Indiana Journal of Law & Social Equality 199, 200 (2018), https://law.stanford.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/A-Human-Centered-Design-Approach-to-Access-to-Justice_-Generating.pdf [<https://perma.cc/L34K-PCXG>]

²² *Id.* at 202.

²³ *Id.* at 202.

²⁴ National Center for State Courts, *Pandemic Era Procedural Improvements That Courts Should Adopt Permanently*, 10-25 (September 2022), https://www.ncsc.org/_data/assets/pdf_file/0030/84873/Pandemic-Improvements-10.31.2022.pdf [<https://perma.cc/5TG7-4YHQ>]

²⁵ Legal services organizations often have a direct impact on expanding access to government programs and benefits, as these organizations frequently assist communities with access to government programs and assistance. A recent study in Michigan found that in over “5,300 cases involving public benefits like Social Security Disability Insurance, Michigan residents received more than \$2.2 million in immediate direct benefits and nearly \$84 million in long-term consequential financial benefits” because of the assistance of civil legal aid. Michigan’s Legal Aid Organizations, *Social Economic Impact and Social Return on Funding Investment (2019-2020)*, https://www.courts.michigan.gov/4a9445/siteassets/court-administration/resources/mi_sroi_final-opt.pdf [<https://perma.cc/8R4Z-3V36>]

²⁶ AmeriCorps is the operating name of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). 45 C.F.R. § 2500.1.

²⁷ Roundtable member agencies that participated in the 2022 White House Tribal Nation Summit: Departments of Agriculture, Education, Federal Communications Commission, Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, Justice, Transportation, Treasury, Veterans Affairs; Environmental Protection Agency, Domestic Policy Council, and Office of Management and Budget.

²⁸ Sandy Dietrich and Erik Hernandez, U.S. Census Bureau, *Language Use in the United States: 2019*, 2 (September 1, 2022), <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2022/acs/acs-50.pdf> [<https://perma.cc/GG7S-ANVC>]

²⁹ The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, (May 18, 2021), *supra* note 1.