PROJECT BRIEF

Multnomah Law Library: Building the 21st Century Legal Resource Center and Law Library

March 2014 - September 2014

DELIVERABLES

A comprehensive report on the legal needs in Multnomah County, examples of best practices from around the country, and a three-part decision-making framework containing immediate, mid-term, and long-term action steps to develop and implement a legal self-help center.

CHALLENGES

Using existing County resources, develop a plan to transform the Multnomah Law Library into a 21st century library and self-help center that more effectively meets the legal needs of the public. There are significant unmet legal needs in Multnomah County:

- With self-represented litigants on the rise across the country, law libraries are seeing an increased need from the general public for legal assistance.
- In Multnomah County, litigants represent themselves in about 85% of Family Law cases, mostly because they cannot afford an attorney.
- Self-represented litigants face significant challenges navigating the justice system and can put a strain on court operations, for example, by failing to present necessary evidence and committing procedural errors.

STRATEGY

Assemble a highly skilled team, including a criminal justice professor, an attorney, a graduate research assistant, and a project manager with research and reporting experience to:

- Assess the legal needs of Multnomah County circuit court users by interviewing consumers, service providers, law library staff, judges, and court staff.
- Research best practices for law libraries and self-help centers, including services provided, service delivery models, and governance structures.
- Identify innovative solutions to persistent problems, such as video tutorials detailing court procedures.

RESULTS

Multnomah County is taking steps to develop a Self-Help Center for the new courthouse, slated to open in 2020.

- It has appointed a task force to begin implementing recommendations from the report.
- The Multnomah Law Library has developed a new, user-friendly website detailing its services and providing links to additional resources.