



Request for Proposals
Neighborhood Legal Services and Summit Legal Aid
Regional Legal Needs Assessment
Issued: December 4, 2024

I. INTRODUCTION

Neighborhood Legal Services (NLS) is a private, not-for-profit law firm that provides free civil legal assistance to low-income residents in Allegheny, Beaver, Butler, and Lawrence Counties in Southwestern PA. Since its founding in 1966, NLS is dedicated to improving the lives of low-income people and victims of domestic violence by providing access to justice.

Summit Legal Aid (SLA) is a not-for-profit legal aid organization funded by federal, state, and local contracts that provides free legal services to qualified residents in a ten-county region in Southwestern Pennsylvania. Summit Legal Aid is dedicated to equality, justice, and breaking down barriers and works to provide vital services that empower our clients by keeping families protected, homes secured, and finances stabilized. Summit Legal Aid was created in July, 2023, when two former legal services programs joined forces to better serve clients and improve operational efficiencies. These former entities were Southwestern Pennsylvania Legal Aid and Laurel Legal Services, Inc.

NLS and SLA have a strong history of collaboration in such areas of training, technology and planning. Our last joint needs assessment occurred in 2020-2022.

Counties served by NLS include Allegheny, Beaver, Butler and Lawrence

Counties served by SLA include Armstrong, Cambria, Clarion, Fayette, Greene, Indiana, Jefferson, Somerset, Washington, and Westmoreland.

The combined service area of NLS and SLA comprise a 14-county region of Southwestern Pennsylvania and is a mix of urban, suburban and rural areas.

II. PURPOSE OF LEGAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT

As part of its commitment to providing high-quality civil legal services, NLS and SLA are jointly seeking a consultant to conduct a comprehensive legal needs assessment. The purpose of this assessment is to identify the legal needs of low-income individuals and families in the counties that both NLS and SLA serve, and to determine how the programs can better address those needs and aid in the determination of service delivery priorities. The assessment will also identify any gaps in services and potential barriers to accessing legal aid. Furthermore, the

assessment will be used to develop a strategic planning tool to lead each organization's work in the community and identify potential resource development projects.

Results of the needs assessment will help identify:

● **Community Legal Needs**

- Identify priority needs in the community so each organization can align its priorities for programming and resource allocation;
- Identify how each program can better support community organizations dealing with evictions/housing when it cannot directly represent or serve their participants/clients;
- Understand how people in the community would like to access legal aid services;
- Understand where NLS and SLA are serving people today. Are services available where we are and are there additional services we could be providing?
- Determine whether access to legal services is limited because of language barriers;
- Determine whether NLS and SLA are accessible to low-income communities;
- Determine whether NLS and SLA offices provide a safe, welcoming environment that maximizes client privacy;
- Determine the accessibility of legal services offered to the community.

● **Community Assets**

- Resources available in the community to which NLS and SLA can align themselves;
- Gain Insight from individual donors, board members, institutional donors, and court systems;
- Identify community needs based on staff experience working with and input from community partners.

● **Existing Services vs Identified Services**

- Opportunities to expand and adjust legal services into areas that are not already being served in the community by other organizations;
- Determine whether NLS and SLA offer technology solutions that are accessible and user friendly to their client population;
- Identify opportunities to educate organizations and community groups about services;

● **Geographic and/or Demographic Disparities**

- Determine how NLS and SLA may address, within our organization's restrictions, greater systemic and economic issues underlying our clients' current needs.

● **Regional and National Comparison**

- Gather and analyze national/state/regional data regarding legal service substantive practice areas and compare to each agency's data.

III. REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL (RFP)

Together, Neighborhood Legal Services (NLS) and Summit Legal Aid (SLA) are jointly issuing this RFP to qualified companies, non-profits, academic institutions, and individual consultants, to conduct a needs assessment of its service area as described above. Together, NLS and SLA will award the consultancy based first and foremost on the quality of the proposal and will also consider cost.

IV. TIMELINE/DUE DATES

1. RFP Release Date - December 4, 2024
2. RFP Questions will be entertained on a rolling basis and responses will be posted on a [shared Google Document](#).
3. Responses to Questions will be provided on a rolling basis
4. **Proposals Due from Respondents no later than January 10, 2025.**
5. Anticipated Notice of Award Released (on or before) Week of February 3rd, 2025
6. Anticipated completion of project: Subject to proposed or negotiated timeline with selected consultant. NLS and SLA ask each respondent to propose a start date and timeline to conduct needs assessment, share a draft report of the findings and deliver the final report. NLS and SLA require two weeks to review and provide feedback and suggestions for inclusion in the final report.

V. DESCRIPTION OF SERVICES

A. The selected contractor will be responsible for design, coordination, and implementation of a comprehensive community legal needs assessment.

B. Data Collection, Design, and Analysis

Respondent/Contractor shall design all relevant surveys, interview questionnaires, and facilitation guides necessary to collect and analyze data regarding the civil legal service needs within NLS and SLA's service area.

Respondent/Contractor will administer all interviews or surveys, and facilitate all focus groups OR, where appropriate, effectively train staff/volunteers from NLS and SLA's civil legal service community to undertake a defined portion of the surveying/interviewing.

Upon reviewing several other civil legal needs assessments that include similar populations, NLS and SLA tentatively prefer a "mixed-methods" approach. Ideally, the

needs assessment will incorporate the below-listed data sources (but NLS and SLA remain open to the contracted experts' guidance).

● **Surveys, Interviews, and/or Focus Groups (whichever is most effective) of the following:**

- Board members, executive leadership, attorneys, paralegals and support staff at both NLS and SLA;
- Judges, court clerks, administrators, and other relevant court staff/officials;
- Members and leadership of local bar associations;
- Existing/recent clients;
- Existing/recent pro se low-income civil court consumers (those who have represented themselves in court without seeking out services from NLS and SLA — that is, “pro se”);
- Potential clients (e.g., those eligible, but not yet using free civil legal services for any reason), including those in minority populations which we anticipate oversampling;
- Staff from other legal organizations providing free or low-cost civil legal aid to potential clients;
- Staff and students from local law school clinical programs engaged in serving the potential client populations;
- Staff from non-legal organizations serving the same client population (e.g., homeless shelters, victims' service providers, and other social service providers).

● **Trend Analysis of Open and Closed Cases at both NLS and SLA.** Review of a random selection of civil cases opened between 2022–2024 by client legal issue and geographic distribution; and a review of cases closed by legal issue, level of service provided, and geographic distribution. (Note: we can pull and categorize the types of cases for the consultant, so that the consultant can focus on identifying trends.)

● **Trend Analysis of Civil Law Court Cases by Client Eligible Population:** Some eligible clients that are unaware of our services choose to represent themselves, rather than seek free legal counsel. An analysis of pro-se court cases (2022-2024) will help identify how the collaborative team can better educate and prepare low-income Southwestern and Central Pennsylvania residents who wish to self-represent.

● **Demographic Analysis** (using existing publicly available data sources). Review of the service area's eligible client population, including estimated number, geographic location, and racial, gender, age, disability, and ethnic composition mapped in relation to availability of existing civil legal services for this community. If Respondent/Contractor deems it relevant, helpful, and affordable, we would also be interested in any data external to the combined service area.

C. Coordination and delivery of a fully completed written community needs assessment report, following, at minimum, the below outline:

- Executive Summary
- Description of Design and Methods Used
- Results of quantitative and qualitative data collection from: surveys, interviews, focus groups, relevant datasets, etc.
- Analysis of civil legal services needs and strengths
- Presentation of final needs assessment to staff and board
- Supporting Appendices

D. Respondent/Contractor Presentation:

The consultant shall provide at least two (2) presentations for each program for a grand total of four (4) presentations. One (1) for the staff and one (1) for the board of directors, including opportunities for questions, to NLS. One (1) for the staff and one (1) for the board of directors, including opportunities for questions, to SLA. These will be presented at the end of the engagement highlighting the needs assessment process, and findings.

VI. PROPOSAL CONTENTS AND SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

Consultant proposals should include:

A. Written narrative answering the following:

- a. With the information provided in this RFP [especially Section/Item V (5): A, B, C & D, how does the RFP respondent propose implementing the needs assessment? (Where possible, RFP respondent should quantify how many interviews, surveys, or facilitated meetings they propose doing during the data collection stage.)
- b. What additional analysis or processes does the RFP respondent suggest being undertaken as part of this needs assessment, if any, and why?
- c. What cost or efficiency suggestions does the RFP respondent have for NLS and SLA's proposed needs assessment project, if any?
- d. Proposed timeline inclusive of the date respondent is available to start the project.
- e. How will the RFP respondent commit to meeting its proposed timeline if awarded this contract?

B. Price and payment schedule for the project.

- C. A bio, resume and/or other items outlining RFP respondent’s experience with community legal needs assessments and similar projects, and facility with skill sets commonly used in community legal needs assessments (e.g., statistical analysis, data visualization, survey design, project management, community outreach, and technical writing, etc.);
- D. A list of personnel/subcontractors who will work on the project (please provide resumes or bios);
- E. Samples or case studies of similar work projects that the RFP respondent has successfully completed; and
- F. Contact name, title, affiliated organization, phone number and e-mail of three contacts for whom the RFP respondent has conducted similar work in the past five years.

All final proposals and supplementary attachments must be emailed to **kim@summitlegal.org** (subject line: “Southwestern Pennsylvania Civil Legal Needs Assessment Proposal”) no later than Friday, January 10th, 2025. Late submissions will not be accepted.

VII. INQUIRIES

Questions regarding this RFP are to be submitted to kim@summitlegal.org (subject line: “**NLS and SLA Civil Needs Assessment Questions**”). A list of questions and their answers will be provided in a [shared Google Document](#), as described in Section IV. Questions regarding this RFP will only be accepted by email at the e-mail address provided.

VIII. AWARD OF CONTRACT

Award of the contract resulting from this RFP will be based on the RFP respondent whose offer will be most advantageous to NLS and SLA and the client population in terms of quality, functionality, experience, effectiveness of past work, cost and other factors specified elsewhere in this RFP.

NLS and SLA reserve the right to: 1) Consider proposals based on their relative merit, risk, and values to the organization; 2) Negotiate with all service providers; 3) Reject any or all offers and discontinue this RFP process without obligation or liability to any potential contractor, when it is in the organization’s best interest; 4) Accept other than the lowest priced offer.

Proposals received will be evaluated by NLS and SLA on the following selection criteria:

1. Demonstrated experience with community civil legal needs assessments and similar projects, and necessary skill sets.
2. Appropriateness and quality of the proposed approach.
3. Familiarity with the legal aid and/or human services landscape.
4. Price and/or consultants willingness to help the collaborative team find cost-effective solutions to complete the assessment.
5. Level of detail in respondent's description of staffing for the project.
6. Clarity of the description of services to be provided.
7. Clarity of the timeline for the project, including payment schedule, information gathering, report production, and meetings.
8. Results of professional reference checks.

Finalists may be asked to revise their proposal to address emerging needs that may arise, as mutually agreed upon (i.e. changes to scope, timeline, changes in quantities, etc.). This document represents an initial request for proposals only and in no way should be construed as a contract or letter of intent.

IX. CONFIDENTIALITY

Unless otherwise required by law, all information disclosed by NLS and/or SLA during the proposal process shall be considered confidential and shall not be released to outside parties. Likewise, all proposals from RFP respondents will only be reviewed by NLS and SLA staff and/or Board as necessary for the fair selection of the contractor and will not be shared with outside parties, unless otherwise required by law.

X. PROJECT DELIVERABLES

All recommendations identified during this engagement will be documented and reviewed with NLS and SLA management. All deliverables produced during the engagement are for the sole use of NLS and SLA and will remain the property of NLS and SLA.

XI. SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

Respondents may find it useful to review the following links:

[Legal Services Corporation](#)

[Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network](#)

[Pennsylvania IOLTA Board](#) (See [Reports](#) Section)

[Neighborhood Legal Services](#)

[Summit Legal Aid](#)