



Bringing the access to justice pieces together

The [Self-Represented Litigation Network](#) (SRLN)¹ serves as the backbone organization for justice system professionals seeking to close the civil justice gap by reforming America's civil justice system. SRLN doesn't represent a single voice, but rather is a diverse network of more than 2,200 individuals from the judicial, government, academic, research, philanthropic, non-profit and for-profit sectors who provide services to self-represented litigants or influence civil justice policy.

The impact of civil legal entanglement on individuals and communities in matters involving essential basic needs such as housing, safety, food security, health, education, wages, and family matters is profound. Unlike criminal proceedings, there is no right to counsel in civil cases. In every county in America, nearly all people facing civil legal issues are without a lawyer or any legal help and must represent themselves to secure or protect their legal rights²

SRLN's leadership gives all states access to proven resources, strategies and opportunities to reform their civil justice systems to meet the challenges created by the rise of the self-represented litigant.

SRLN estimates 30 million people per year appear without legal representation in America's state and county courts, while millions more appear in the tens of thousands of unregulated municipal courts. And even millions more are left on their own to navigate state and federal administrative proceedings, which disproportionately involve the most vulnerable among veterans, the elderly, the disabled, children, the homeless and the hungry who are seeking to obtain or maintain benefits earned or established to support them.

Over the last decade, the SRLN has addressed the challenge of self-representation by producing leading scholarship and successfully incubating, evaluating and championing user centered design to bring innovative services and regulatory and policy reform throughout the country. SRLN's leadership gives all states access to proven resources, strategies and opportunities to reform their civil justice systems to meet the challenges created by the rise of the self-represented litigant. Successful innovations include self-help centers, standardized forms, comprehensive procedural information, transparent procedures, case management reform, procedural simplification, triage, plain language and multi-lingual resources and services, strategic and empowering uses of technology (including, diagnostic apps, e-filing, online dispute resolution (ODR) and on-line portals), integrated delivery systems among providers, utilization of allied professionals such as navigators both inside the courtroom and throughout the community, and judicial education to improve the adjudicatory process in the self-represented litigant (SRL) courtroom environment.

¹ SRLN is a managed project of [The New Venture Fund](#), a 501 (c)(3).

² Few jurisdictions formally report representation status, however based on snapshot and sample studies, it is accepted that in the aggregate, depending on case type and location, 75% - 100% of civil cases involve at least one self-represented litigant. In cases such as uncontested divorces and domestic violence proceedings nearly 100% of the parties are self-represented. However, in housing and consumer debt, the landlord and creditor are usually represented while the tenant or debtor represents themselves. In contested family matters, approximately 70% of cases involve at least one self-represented litigant. In matters involving government interests, such as child support, administrative proceedings or traffic cases, the government is represented (most often by a lawyer, but sometimes not) and the individual parties are self-represented. According to the [2017 Justice Gap Report](#) published by The Legal Services Corporation, 86% of the civil legal problems reported by low-income Americans in the past year received inadequate or no legal help.



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What members are saying

“While there are several other “access to justice” national consortiums, SRLN is uniquely positioned to bring together court partners together with researchers, designers, technologists and practitioners to reform court systems to expand access to justice. I have found SRLN to be invaluable to me, by introducing me to relevant and provocative research, fresh ideas and wonderful national partners and colleagues.”

- Court Administrator from Illinois

“SRLN's conferences have provided us with information, strategies, and contacts. SRLN is providing an important function by helping us avoid isolation, stay current and build on each other's energy and experiences.”

- Law Professor from Pennsylvania

“As the chief technology officer of a consulting firm involved in developing legal technology solutions for the legal aid sector for nearly a decade, I have depended on the SRLN to keep current with developments in the field and connect with peers working to improve access to justice.”

- Technologist from California

“The SRLN is one of the lifelines of the legal services technology community and a shining example of collaboration between diverse communities to create real solutions to a problem as big as the one faced by people attempting to represent themselves in the legal system.”

- Legal Aid Director from Michigan

Our vision is that every person gets the legal help they need, when they need it, in a format they can use.

Our mission is to foster access to justice leadership and facilitate the adoption of consumer oriented best practices among court, advocacy and service partners to create a fair civil justice system to ensure all Americans can protect their rights and, through reform, close the justice gap.

Connect the Dots

Build Networks

Innovate

Advance Quality

Advocate for Reform

The primary populations affected by SRLN are the thousands of justice system professionals in our network focused on the question of how best to reform and re-align the civil justice system to serve the primary user, the self-represented litigant.

The secondary population impacted by our work are the millions of self-represented litigants who, because of the accomplishments of our members, are increasingly able to access the legal help they need, when they need it, in a format they can use.

SRLN's success is measured by the success of our members in closing the justice gap.

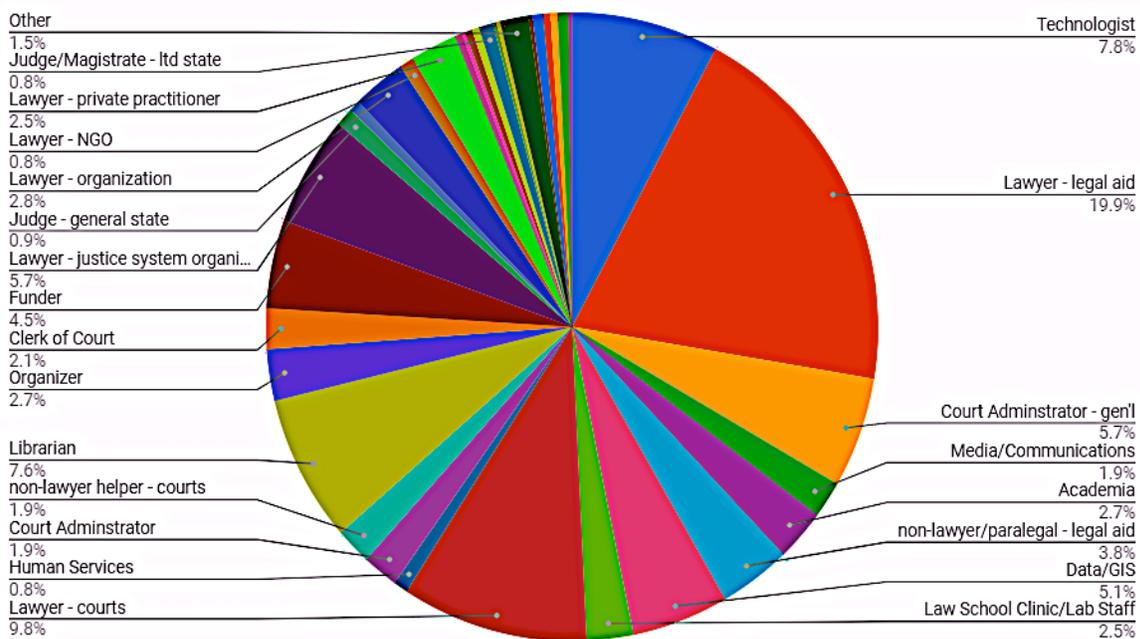


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At its inception in 2005, the Network was hosted by the [National Center for State Courts \(NCSC\)](#) and subsisted on volunteer hours and targeted grants that produced a [foundational body of scholarship and resource guides for courts and legal aid programs embarking on the delivery of services to self-represented litigants](#). In 2014, the [Public Welfare Foundation](#) and the [Kresge Foundation](#) awarded SRLN significant general support grants as part of their [Civil Legal Aid initiatives](#), thereby enabling SRLN to separate from NCSC and become a hosted project of The New Venture Fund. This move allowed SRLN to attract a broader range of constituencies within the civil justice space, and to begin to grow and scale the organization to become a sustainable national resource.

Today, our membership grows at an ever-increasing pace as a broader coalition of professionals become aware of the impact of access to civil justice has on the social and economic wellbeing of communities. This chart shows the constituencies in our network:

Count of Member Type



Our network is comprised of more than 2,200 access to civil justice leaders who together represent each state and eight nations. More than 400 of our members actively participate in monthly Working Groups. These members are committed to breaking down silos across sectors and jurisdictions to improve access to justice for all Americans. And with our international colleagues, we are working to establish an international collaborative affiliation of networks calling for user centered design in civil justice reform.



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Our activities fall into four broad categories:

Networking and Leadership Development

We believe that a collaborative network is the key to developing effective leadership across sectors to expand access to justice. We support approximately one dozen [Working Groups](#), each of which meets via teleconference on a monthly basis and is led by volunteer Co-Chairs, who serve as national leaders among members and provide more than 1,000 hours of learning and networking annually. These groups develop content and programming for conferences throughout the year, and through their leadership, and also set the national agenda. SRLN staff provides more than 150 hours of education per year at conferences, and serve as a speaker's bureau on access to justice issues domestically and internationally.

Education and Resource Development

We believe in learning, discovery and sharing. Our on-line library, Twitter feed, YouTube Channel and member listservs create a comprehensive knowledge hub for the community, whether as a clearinghouse of the resources from our members and others or through the original research, reports or analysis produced by staff. Our [annual three-day national conference](#) brings together more than 250 professionals who seek an advanced curriculum that integrates technology, operations, policy and judicial education.

Advising

We believe SRLN is successful when our members are successful. Staff advise across constituencies to develop research, resources and strategies for success. We focus on identifying and promoting sustainable reforms that impact operational re-alignment and simplification. In 2015, when the [Conference of Chief Justices called upon states](#) to create strategic action plans to support the aspirational goal of 100 percent access to effective assistance for essential civil legal needs, SRLN became the primary partner and essential knowledge hub with the National Center for State Courts on the [Justice for All national reform project](#) (JFA).

Geospatial Data and Analysis

We believe all justice is local and data analytics and geospatial analysis are central to closing the justice gap. We have professional cartographers and data analysts on staff to support reform, research and advocacy for access to justice, see for example [America's Civil Courts app](#) and [map gallery and GIS resources](#).

As illustrated by the bi-partisan efforts of [Congressman Joe Kennedy III \(MA-04\)](#) and [Congressman Susan W. Brooks \(IN-05\)](#) in their work as Co-Chairs of the [Congressional Access to Civil Legal Services Caucus](#), access to civil justice is an issue of critical and universal importance for the rule of law and public trust and confidence in the justice system. Our geospatial work illustrates that access to justice is ultimately a local issue with significant impact on community stability and wellbeing. The SRLN offers a neutral and effective forum to bring together leaders from throughout the justice system to find solutions that work for all Americans. We thank our current supporters and seek new partners to help us build a sustainable and effective network.