



## *Bringing the access to justice pieces together*

SRLN is the Self-Represented Litigation Network, a non-profit dedicated to civil justice reform by providing a collaborative professional network for change leaders who improve access to justice for self-represented litigants. SRLN doesn't represent a single voice, but rather is a diverse national and international network of justice system professionals within the judicial, government, academic, research, philanthropic, non-profit and for-profit sectors who provide services to self-represented litigants and influence civil justice systems and 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 rights.

*SRLN's leadership gives all states access to proven resources, strategies, and opportunities that reform their civil justice systems so everyone, whether or not they are represented by a lawyer, has a fair chance at justice.*

SRLN estimates more than 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.

SRLN addresses the challenge of self-representation by supporting leaders who believe in a justice system that works for everyone. We do this 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. 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, expanded legal help capacity with non-lawyer navigators in the court and the community, and judicial education to improve the adjudicatory process in the self-represented litigant (SRL) courtroom environment.

*Civil justice reform grounded by inclusive collaboration among justice system professionals who*

- ✓ *Learn from colleagues with diverse perspectives*
- ✓ *Share learning so others can benefit*
- ✓ *Leverage technology and process improvements to drive simplification and access*
- ✓ *Improve justice for people without lawyers and make courts better*



## *Bringing the access to justice pieces together*

### What leaders 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 advance a fair and transparent civil justice system by building networks that produce leaders who collaborate and adopt best practices for people without lawyers.

### 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 building a fair justice system.



*Bringing the access to justice pieces together*

## SRLN History

SRLN was established in 2005 by operation of an MOU between leading civil sector organizations, the Conference of Chief Justices/Conference of State Court Administrators (CCJ/COSCA), and the National Center for State Courts (NCSC). By combining volunteer hours and targeted grants, SRLN 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](#). This investment enabled SRLN to separate from NCSC and broaden the range of collaborative partners and advocate for system wide reforms that strengthen the continuum of services. Since 2014, SRLN has been hosted by the New Venture Fund, a public charity that provides fiscal sponsorship.

## SRLN Today

SRLN today is a diverse coalition of approximately 3,000 individuals actively engaged in reforming the civil justice sector. Collaborations are frequent and comprehensive, responding to the needs of our colleagues, who are the essential “ground wire” to what is happening locally and inform SRLN’s national agenda. The initial path into the SRLN community is often through our listservs, which quickly leads to participation in the many weekly national teleconferences and webinars. With the onset of COVID, we experienced a 51% jump in the pace of new members who gravitated to our platform as leaders in the field worked to respond to the multiple crises presented. SRLN is a trusted and valued partner and woven into the daily work of our participants, whether they

### A Few of SRLN Allies for Justice

*(affiliation for identification only - full list at [srln.org](http://srln.org))*

**Helaine Barnett**, Former Legal Services Corporation President

**Peter Edelman**, Carmack Waterhouse Professor of Law and Public Policy at Georgetown Law

**Alex Folger**, Former Legal Services Corporation President

**The Hon. Lisa Foster (Ret.)**, Co-Director Fines and Fees Justice Center

**Ken Frazier**, Chairman of the Board and Chief Executive Officer of Merck & Co. Inc.

**Alan Jenkins**, Professor of Practice at Harvard Law School

**Sheldon Krantz**, Partner (Ret.), DLA Piper LLP

**Karen Lash**, Director, Justice in Government Project, American University

**John G. Levi**, Board Chair, Legal Services Corporation, Senior Partner, Sidley Austin LLP

**The Hon. Jonathan Lippman (Ret.)**, Partner, Latham & Watkins LLP, Former Chief Judge New York State

**Martha Minow**, Former Dean, Harvard Law School

**Cecilia Muñoz**, Vice President, New America

**Tanina Rostain**, Professor at Georgetown University Law Center

**Eve Runyon**, President and CEO, Pro Bono Institute

**Fern Schair**, Board Chair for Fordham Law School Feerick Center for Social Justice

**David Stern**, Executive Director, Equal Justice Works

**Laurence H. Tribe**, Carl M. Loeb University Professor and Professor of Constitutional Law at Harvard Law School

**David Udell**, Executive Director at National Center for Access to Justice

**The Hon. Laurie Zelon (Ret.)**, Former Associate



## *Bringing the access to justice pieces together*

lead courts and legal aid organizations, serve as front line providers in libraries and community organizations, or shape law school and university researcher. We typically have in-person engagement biennially at the SRLN conference, and then multiple times throughout the year at the various gatherings held by partner organizations such as NCSC, the American Bar Association (ABA), the Legal Service Corporation (LSC), the National Legal Aid and Defender Association (NLADA), and the American Association of Law Libraries (AALL). SRLN often hosts a well-loved *SRLN Breakfast* at these partner conferences to bring together colleagues for real-time engagement and problem solving. While COVID disrupted these gatherings, it has not significantly disrupted how SRLN engages with its constituencies or how we build and strengthen communities; as a primarily remote operation, our well-established remote communications infrastructure could immediately serve our wide-spread network.

In addition to the partner organizations described above, we collaborate, often in the capacity of advisor on SRL issues, with other justice sector actors such as Access to Justice Commissions, law schools, The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, the Judicial College, National Association of Administrative Law Judiciary, Justice in Aging, senior services networks in the states, the Institute for the Advancement of the American Legal System, the National Center for Access to Justice, ProBono.Net, and legal aid offices and court systems throughout the country. Increasingly, we are working to develop relationships with public libraries, disaster assistance networks, and disability rights organizations. SRLN has enabled the civil justice sector to stay connected and develop coordinated and collaborative responses to improve justice for all.

## SRLN Governance & Staff

SRLN is hosted by the [New Venture Fund](#), a 501(c)(3) public charity that provides full fiscal sponsorship including grant and contract management. Our Project Advisory Body is comprised of Sandra Ambrozy, Non-Resident Fellow Civil Legal Justice at Urban Institute, Kresge Foundation (Ret.); Mary McClymont, Senior Fellow at Georgetown Justice Lab, Former President and CEO of the Public Welfare Foundation and Leader of the Foundation's Civil Justice Reform Initiative; and Colleen Doremus, Director of Institutional Investment Solutions at SunTrust Bank. The Project Advisory Body is supported by the Planning Leadership Team that includes the Hon. Fern Fisher (Ret.), the Special Assistant for Social Justice Initiatives to the Dean of the Maurice A. Deane School of Law, former Deputy Chief Administrative Judge for New York City Courts and former Director of the New York State Courts Access to Justice Program; Jim Sandman, Distinguished Lecturer in Law at University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School and President Emeritus, Legal Services Corporation; Rebecca Sandefur, Professor at Arizona State University, Faculty Fellow American Bar Foundation, and Macarthur Genius recipient; and Paul Prettitore, Senior Governance Specialist at the World Bank. SRLN staff is comprised of [Katherine Alteneder](#), Consulting Senior Strategic Advisor, [Eduardo Gonzalez](#), Projects Manager, [Alison Davis-Holland](#) and [Suzanne Wade](#), Cartography and Story Maps, [Jacquelyn Tucker](#), Member Engagement Specialist. SRLN is funded through a combination of earned revenue, foundation support, and individual donations.



*Bringing the access to justice pieces together*

## SRLN's 4-Point Strategy for Change

COVID presents an unprecedented crisis to the civil justice sector, but also an opportunity to create fully accessible self-help. Relying on our proven four-point strategy for change, SRLN has proven to be nimble and adaptive during this period, providing the support necessary for leaders in the field to move forward with the information, resources, and ideas as they work to get access to justice for self-represented litigants back on track.

### Network & Leadership Development

We have established ourselves as a go-to community for connecting with leaders and innovators in the civil justice sector, particularly with respect to remote service delivery, an area of deep expertise. We serve the civil justice sector through a matured mix of engagement strategies that build relationships and knowledge through social media, listservs, webinars, problem solving teleconferences, projects, one-on-one phone calls, conferences, and pre-COVID local meet-ups, and in-person meetings.

### SRLN 4-Point Strategy for Change

- Network & Leadership Development
- Mentorship, Expert Assistance, and Problem-Solving
- Education & Resource Development
- Data Driven Communications Strategies relying on Geospatial Data and Policy Analysis

### SRLN Quick Facts:

#### 2020 Engagement Numbers

- 95 national working group and problem-solving calls, resulting in more than 2,375 hours of individual collaborations and development.
- 30+ sessions and day-long boot camp at SRLN2020 conference in early March for more than 200 attendees, resulting in 18,000 hours of individual training and development.
- 300 hours of member volunteer time invested in calls, webinars, and conference sessions.
- 600+ contributions to the listservs and national knowledge hub

### Mentorship, Expert Assistance, and Problem Solving

SRLN staff provide ad hoc assistance to members, serve on numerous advisory bodies, and present at national and international trainings, convenings, summits, and symposia. When COVID hit, SRLN immediately launched twice weekly national problem-solving calls to support court and legal aid leaders as they shifted to a virtual service delivery model, and addressed operational and substantive crises. We maintained these twice weekly calls for four months, and continue today with monthly open problem-solving calls focused on pandemic driven challenges. SRLN also serves as a project partner to NCSC on the [Justice for All Initiative](#), serving as the lead drafter of the [JFA Guidance Materials](#), and provides guidance and technical assistance to the fourteen JFA states and others.

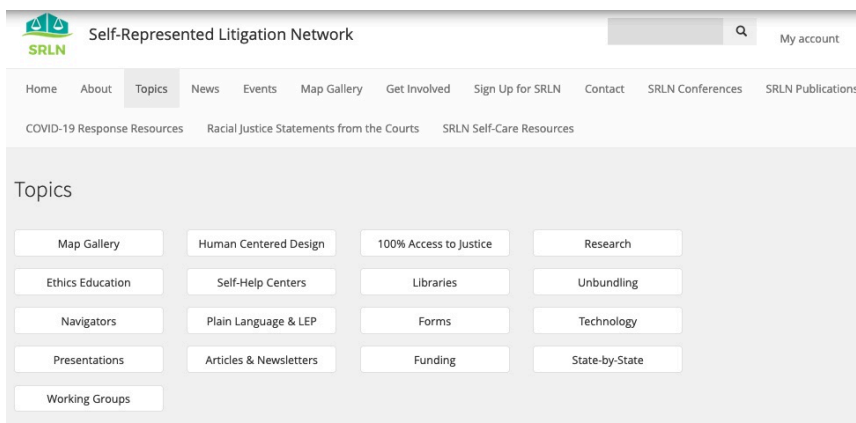




*Bringing the access to justice pieces together*

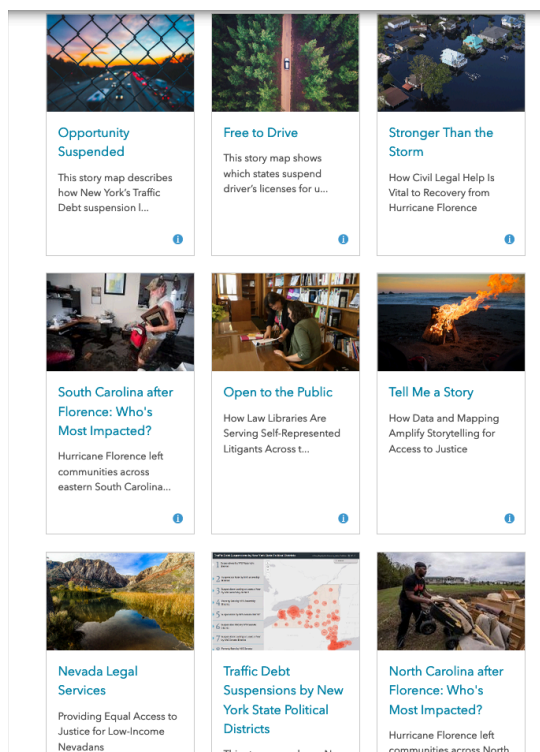
## Education & Resource Development: Online Library

Our comprehensive online curated library at [srln.org](http://srln.org) serves as a knowledge hub for up-to-date materials that operationalize systemic change to make courts better for self-represented and to advance justice for all. The collection currently serves as the only national repository of pro se conference and training



materials dating back to the mid-2000s, as well as more than 1,300 items, in a variety of formats including print, audio, and video. In addition to actively curating the work of colleagues from the more than thirty participating constituencies, SRLN regularly publishes short-form pieces such as *SRLN Briefs* (editorialized pieces on practices and policies), *SRLN News* (showcasing successful innovations), *SRLN Best Practice Tips* (drawn from analysis of work in the field), and field guides such as *Resource Guide on Serving Self-Represented Litigants Remotely* (SRLN 2016).

## Geospatial Data and Policy Analysis: All Justice is Local



All justice is local and our geographic information systems (GIS) team is committed to telling stories that change minds and advance justice. Our geospatial team produces nationally acclaimed data analysis presented within interactive GIS communications tools that put powerful information in the hands of the reader. Most notably, SRLN has partnered with the *Fines and Fees Justice Center* for its campaigns in New York and Florida, as well as numerous Access to Justice Commissions, legal aid organizations, court systems, and libraries. SRLN's work has been featured in a number of news outlets including the New York Times, New York Post, Miami Herald, Orlando Sentinel, South Florida Sun-Sentinel, The Detroit News, NBC, ABC, All Things Considered on WNYC, the Investigative Post, and the Minority Reporter. Visit the [SRLN Map Gallery](http://srln.org/map-gallery) to engage with these powerful interactive policy tools.

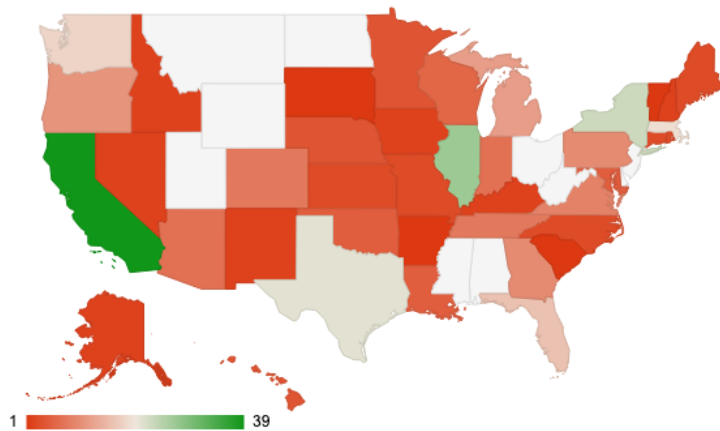


*Bringing the access to justice pieces together*

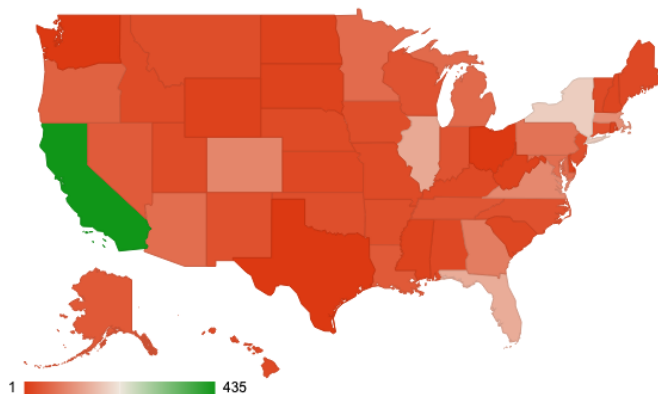
## Who are the change makers participating in SRLN?

The magic of SRLN comes from the dedication, diversity, and breadth of those participating, and 2020 has once again been a year of growth and collaboration across the US and the world.

### 2020 New SRLN Member US Geographic Distribution (362)



### All SRLN Participants Geographic Distribution (3,194)



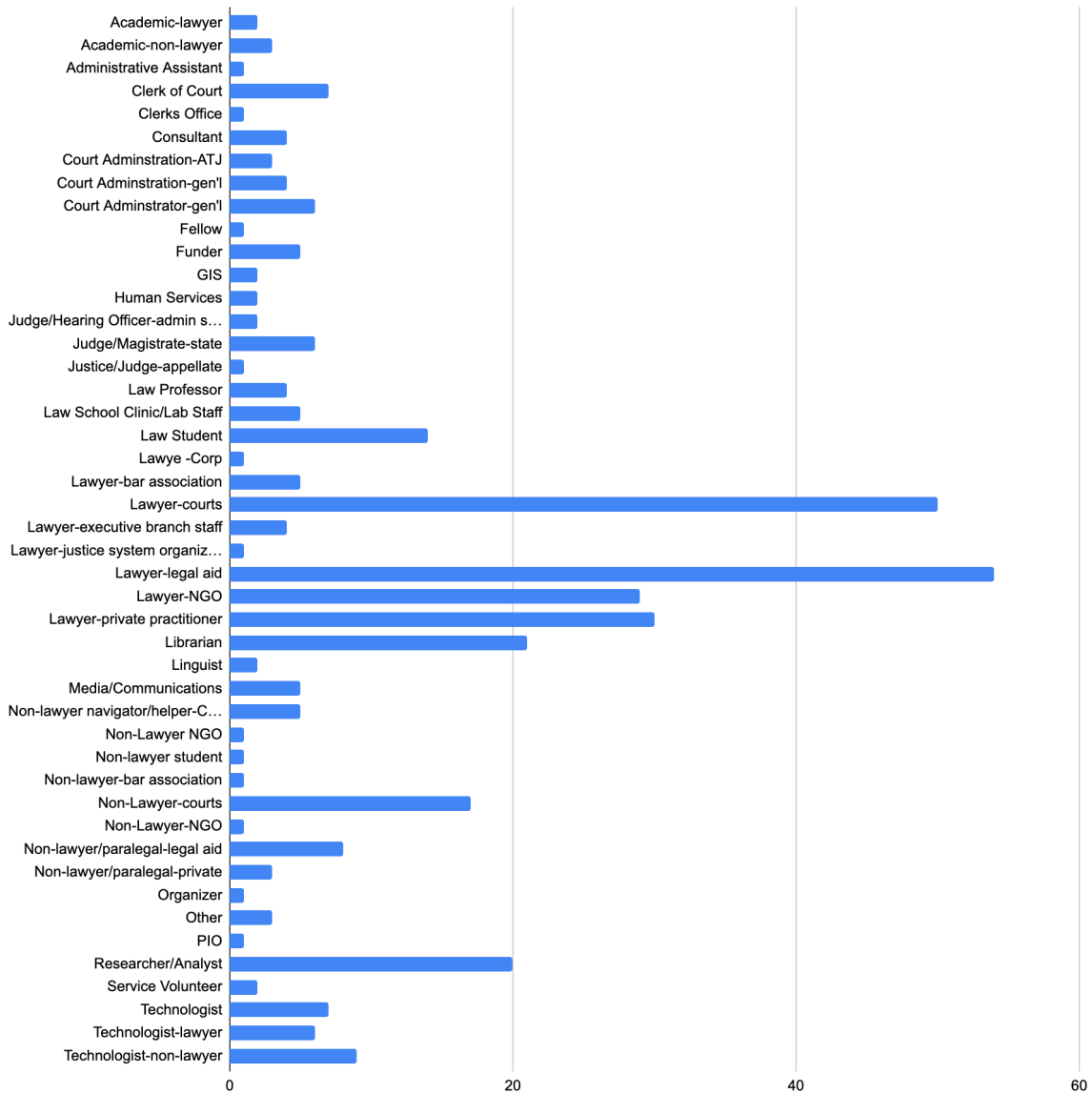
US representation not mapped: Guam, Micronesia, Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico

Countries other than US (20): Australia, Brazil, Canada, France, Guatemala, Italy, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Netherlands, New Zealand, Northern Ireland, Pakistan, Singapore, Slovenia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, UAE, UK



*Bringing the access to justice pieces together*

### Constituencies of SRLN Participants Newly Joined in 2020







*Bringing the access to justice pieces together*

## What did SRLN participants talk about in 2020?

SRLN listservs, teleconferences, webinars, and numerous other collaborations produced more than 600 listserv posts, and more than 20,000 hours of individual engagement across a broad range of topics in 2020. An analysis of listserv topics demonstrates clear and intentional movement by the sector to build a better system.

COVID responses strategies dominated the list, and included such operational challenges as e-signatures, service, appearances, filing, faxing, setting-up remote call centers, remote clinics, remote pro bono consultations, non-credit card payments, safety protocols for staff, preserving "open courts" and records of proceedings, online forms projects & advancing document assembly, court record digitization, triage strategies for services and case management, getting orders in the hands of litigants, requests for extensions and court appointments, zoom issues, funding strategies, remote mediation, SRLN's National POA & Delegation of Parental Authority project, evidence issues in remote environment, remote hearings, remote hearings, and more remote hearings.

However, additional topics summarized below reflect intentional movement. Justice system reformers are actively engaged in forward progress. They are doing their work within the framework of JFA, and not simply reacting to the COVID crisis:

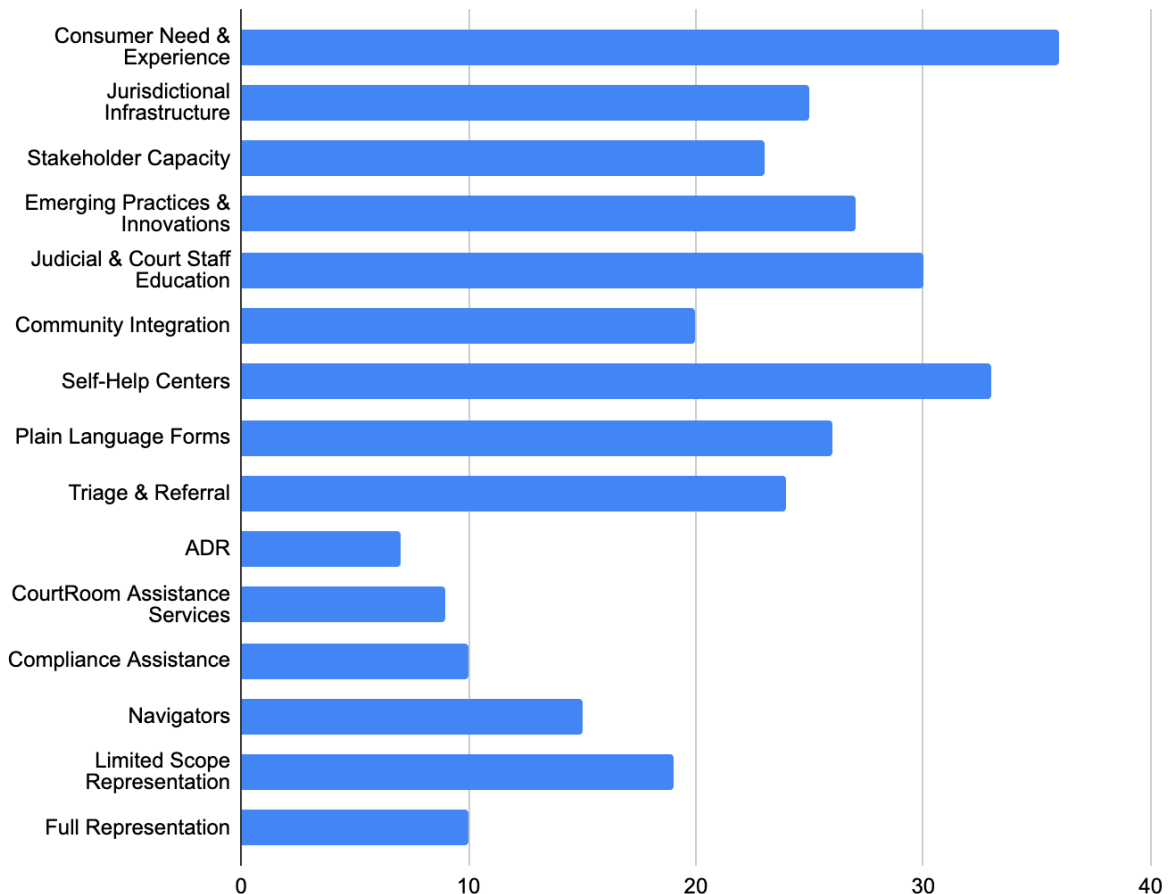
- Job postings, Fellowships & RFPs
- Conferences & training opportunities
- Expanding services in public libraries
- Digital inclusion strategies
- Cell phones in courts
- Self-Help Resource Development: plain language, video content, language access, disability access
- The good, bad, and ugly of court administrative orders
- Substantive areas of heightened interest: child support, evictions, UI, probate, DV, debt collection,
- ODR
- Fee waivers
- Pro bono expansion & integration
- Disability access
- Systemic advocacy
- Racial justice awakening for the judicial branch
- Justice tech entrepreneurs expanding products
- UX Design & User Testing
- Public communications strategies
- Partnering with community organizations
- Building new access to justice alliances with non-legal aid orgs
- Expansion of *Free Legal Answers*
- Unbundling referral mechanisms
- Building geospatial data hubs to guide reform
- Unbundling for incarcerated
- Expungements, pardons, & fines & fees
- SRL Appellate resources & strategies
- Ethics: Rules of Professional Conduct, Judicial Canons, Court Rules & Church/Court partnerships
- Quest for data and evaluation
- Community locations for remote access



## *Bringing the access to justice pieces together*

Mapping the Justice for All components to work being done throughout the year across all SRLN channels illustrates that the states are actively working on the range of activities necessary to advance a continuum of user-friendly services. One goal of JFA was to create a framework for a continuum of user centered services, and it is rewarding to see consumer need and experience as the highest rated category of activity, and instructive that reform depends so much on changes to the jurisdictional infrastructure. Court self-help centers and judicial and court staff education continue to be well established levers in advancing justice. As evidenced earlier in this report on the growing variety of stakeholders engaged in SRLN, we are also seeing good progress on the development of diverse coalitions at the state and local level. Change is not just possible, it is indeed happening, and the JFA Framework is proving successful in reinforcing consistent activities throughout the country, as well as bringing in new allies and champions.

**JFA Components Mapped to Topics Covered by SRLN in 2020**





*Bringing the access to justice pieces together*

## Why is SRLN a successful platform for change?

SRLN is a successful platform for change because people are naturally curious and want to be connected, but this takes intentional work. SRLN is able to maintain a daily dialogue with and among diverse disconnected stakeholders by intentionally building connections through a network of foundational working groups that allow individuals to focus on topics, build new relationships among similarly situated colleagues, and learn from entirely unfamiliar sectors. These working groups also serve to give SRLN a birds-eye view of the sector, which in turn allows for guidance to ensure a coordinated movement that builds a continuum of services for justice.

Working groups advance these best practices through a variety of lenses. Groups are chaired by volunteers and supported by SRLN, and currently include the following themes:

- Forms & Technology
- Research
- Unbundled Services
- Court Navigators
- Justice Tech Entrepreneurs
- Self-Help Center Management
- Triage
- Law Libraries
- Federal Courts
- Access to Justice Coordinators within Court Administration
- National Problem Solving

SRLN has proven that working groups are most effective when they include the following range of activities:

- General & subject matter listservs (*more than 600 posts in 2020*)
- Regularly scheduled monthly teleconferences & webinars (*more than 95 calls in 2020*)
- Networking & Mentoring (*one-on-one support prioritizes early career professionals*)
- Customized introductions to form smaller sub-groups
- Resource collection and curation (*10% growth in on-line library and archived recordings*)
- Right to have session at SRLN conference, and advice for session proposals at conferences other than SRLN (*more than 30 sessions at SRLN2020, and significant contributions to all sector conferences to drive agendas on issues such as regulatory reform and building continuum of services*)
- Copy writing for SRLN News and SRLN Briefs
- Light support to small groups drawn from larger group who are working on content creation



## *Bringing the access to justice pieces together*

But participation is not sufficient. SRLN intentionally asks all participants to consider whether a policy, practice, innovation or activity they are pursuing comports with SRLN's Principles for Justice Reform:

- Promotes accessibility & inclusivity
- Supports just and fair results
- Improves transparency
- Increases efficiencies
- Integrates and aligns with other resources
- Adopts user centered perspectives
- Promotes empowerment
- Reduces systemic inequities
- Advances an evaluative model
- Considers best practices
- Expands resources

AND whether their efforts will contribute to strengthening the innovation ecosystem to make a self-represented justice framework possible and makes courts better (and accountable) by advocating for the following best practices proven to make the justice system fair for all:

- 24-7 Court Help Centers & Customer Service
- Access to Lawyers (full representation & unbundled / market based, legal aid, & pro bono)
- Court, Community, and Market Based Non-Lawyer Navigators
- Courtroom Help
- Plain Language Forms
- Streamlined & Convenient Procedures (supported by targeted and tailored triage)
- Easy-to-Use, Secure & Supported Technology
- Updated Laws
- Community Engagement
- Upstream Solutions
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
- Language Access
- Disability Access
- Monitoring & Evaluation



*Bringing the access to justice pieces together*

## Next Steps: Strengthening key constituencies and developing a framework for measuring performance and change

By applying the well-accepted results-based management framework that seeks to show a progression of impacts from passive (such as increased awareness) to active (such as examples of actions), SRLN is beginning to be able to capture sector change over time, as well as establishing a mechanism to assess its own effectiveness. However, these efforts will be better accomplished by expanding the depth and engagement of the key constituencies of legal aid lawyers (who are well positioned to advocate for the rights of SRLs), law schools (who are uniquely positioned to impact the next generation of lawyers), and researchers (who will establish the metrics of what is valued). SRLN will also be prioritizing the identification of SRLN liaisons within each of the anchor institutions of the sector, and working with them to develop an intentional agenda so everyone, whether or not they are represented by a lawyer, has a fair chance at justice.