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**The National Technology Assistance Project
(NTAP)**

**Final Evaluation Report
2002-03**

by

K. David Smith ! Ken Smith

The Resource for Great Programs, Inc.

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I.

Introduction and Summary

The National Technology Assistance Project (NTAP) was established in 2001, with funding from the Legal Services Corporation (LSC), to provide support, expertise, and coordination to the poverty law community's efforts to improve efficiency and client services through the effective implementation of technology. NTAP delivers assistance on specific technologies to LSC Technology Initiative Grant (TIG) recipients, their state justice communities, and the general poverty law community. In 2002, NTAP was funded by the Legal Services Corporation to develop and deliver trainings on technology topics to a wide variety of audiences in the legal services community. These trainings aim to foster coordination among legal services programs, encourage replication of working models, and build the legal aid community's collective ability to make technology solutions succeed. In 2003, NTAP expanded its role to act as a clearinghouse for technologies that can be used by programs nationwide, and to help create national networks to effectively deploy these technologies within and beyond the legal services community.

An evaluation of the project was performed by *The Resource for Great Programs*.¹ The evaluation included coaching on evaluation design and implementation; development of an evaluation framework and "smart systems" for ongoing project management; design of a set of outcomes measures to be used going forward to evaluate program performance against critical objectives and milestones; and direct analysis of outcomes and satisfaction data on services provided by NTAP to produce this evaluation report. The latter encompassed feedback from participants in training sessions, workshops, and other forums used by NTAP in delivering services; interviews of key personnel at programs that have received support and assistance from NTAP²; and a review of satisfaction, outcome, and other data collected by NTAP as part of its ongoing quality improvement processes and provided to *The Resource* for use in the evaluation.

Where To Find It	
	Page
I. Introduction and Summary	1
II. Background on NTAP	3
III. Evaluation Design & Methodology	5
IV. Findings	
A. <i>Statistics: "NTAP has been highly productive"</i>	8
B. <i>Evaluation of Technical Assistance: "NTAP's assistance to programs gets good marks"</i>	9
C. <i>Trainings: "NTAP's trainings are effective"</i>	11
D. <i>Partners: "NTAP multiplies our impact"</i>	13
V. Conclusion	16
VI. Appendices	17

¹*The Resource for Great Programs* is a national corporation dedicated to providing strategic support to networks of community based organizations working in arenas having great impact on our society. For more information, refer to *The Resource's* website, www.GreatPrograms.org.

²Interviews were performed by NTAP project staff and temporary contractors, using interview instruments designed by *The Resource*. Completed interview instruments were provided to *The Resource* for analysis and inclusion in this report.

This report describes the evaluation design and summarizes its findings. In brief, the major findings were:

- 1. NTAP’s technical assistance gets high marks.** Recipients of NTAP’s technical assistance generally found it to be very helpful and gave high marks to the staff who helped them. Respondents indicated that NTAP allowed them to make better decisions on technology purchases and implementation, saved them time and effort, allowed them to avoid potential mistakes, and improved their knowledge about technology applications. Many cited NTAP’s ability to refer them to people in other programs who had addressed similar technology issues as one of the most effective and useful aspects of the assistance they received.
- 2. NTAP’s training is working, and NTAP’s “virtual training”³ is effective and high-quality.** Participants in NTAP’s virtual trainings reported that trainers were well-informed and did a good job of conveying information. Participants also noted that materials were useful and informative and that the trainings concretely impacted their ability to use technology effectively in their programs. Suggestions for improving the virtual trainings were focused primarily on technical and time-allocation issues. Feedback from participants in NTAP’s in-person training sessions was also highly positive. Respondents reported that the information they received saved them time and money; allowed them to make better, more informed decisions; and increased their awareness of, and ability to learn from, the experiences of other programs nationwide in implementing a wide range of technologies to improve client service and access.
- 3. NTAP multiplies the impact of other support providers.** Partners interviewed for this evaluation stated that NTAP has begun to close an important gap in the legal services community around technology issues and has been effective in increasing the ability of legal aid programs to leverage technology to improve client services and access to justice. They state that NTAP has helped build a greater sense of community around technology issues, has deployed several effective models for delivering technical assistance and training to legal aid programs, and has made this type of technical support more broadly available and raised its visibility within the community. Suggestions for improvement focused largely on obtaining increased funding and resources to be able to deliver more services, and expanding technology advocacy efforts at the national level (which several partners noted were a gap).

These findings are explored in further detail in Section IV below.

³“Virtual trainings” refer to those that use web conferencing technologies (e.g., WebEx™) that allow participants to dial in to an audio conference call and simultaneously link up through the Internet to a reserved space on a web site that enables interactive review of online materials and electronic documents such as Powerpoint presentations, word-processing documents, and spreadsheets. Web conferencing sessions include many features that enable participants to do such things as mark up documents, use “chat” features and send messages to each other and to the facilitator. NTAP partners with Legal Meetings of Lone Star Legal Aid to use their WebEx™ licenses for its trainings.

II. Background on NTAP

The National Technology Assistance Project has three strategic goals:

- A. Build technology capacity in the civil justice community** *to promote the effective deployment of technology applications and initiatives that improve delivery of legal services for clients. Such technologies include phone intake and advice systems, case management systems, statewide web sites, video conferencing, and self-help innovations.*

Strategies used for capacity building:

- Build a national network of technology managers and experts (“Technology Consortium”), who have successfully designed and implemented client-oriented technologies, to provide assistance and guidance to foster national dialogue about working technology applications, solutions, and issues.
- Build capacity and expertise in individual programs by using the Technology Consortium to provide guidance and assistance to other novice technology managers or technology-responsible persons in the legal services community.
- Build a national communication system for delivering specific information about these technologies (e.g., e-newsletters, websites, e-mail lists, national coordination of training and technical assistance)
- Develop a body of content on key technology issues.
- Develop “virtual”⁴ and in-person trainings and relevant materials on key topics needed to apply these technologies.
- Promote communication among “technology responsible persons” across programs to support basic infrastructure and operations.

- B. Make the acquisition of new technology in the field easier, more efficient, and more effective.** *Help programs prevent costly, avoidable mistakes. Make training, technical assistance and information accessible to all programs and staff regardless of program budget, location, or staff person’s title.*

Strategies used:

- Directly deliver affordable, effective “virtual” trainings on technology topics relevant to improving client services or legal aid efficiency and advocacy -- e.g., intake and phone systems; case management systems; websites; video conferencing; self-help technologies; technology management; and others. NTAP partners with Legal Meetings to offer free trainings using web conferencing.
- Coordinate training sessions at national conferences.
- Collaborate with other national organizations providing assistance to the poverty law community – e.g., LStech.Org, ProBono Net, Legal Meetings, the National Legal Aid and Defender Association (NLADA), and LSC.

⁴See footnote 3 above.

- Serve as a catalyst, clearinghouse, and advocate for emerging technologies to promote their use in a larger national arena. Ensure that roadblocks to deploying technologies nationally are resolved.

C. Provide technology advocacy at the national level (both within and beyond legal services) to promote and support programs that effectively apply technology as a tool to improve the lives of low-income people. *Create community service delivery networks and integrate legal services programs within existing or emerging social service networks.*

Strategies used:

- Provide direct training and technical support to Technology Initiative Grant recipients, on a proactive basis, to ensure that scarce resources for technology initiatives are utilized as efficiently and effectively as possible.
- Provide advocacy at the national level to increase awareness, within and beyond the legal services community, of the ways in which technology can be leveraged to improve the lives of low-income people.
- Create a network of partners nationally across legal services, low-income technology centers, social services providers, community based tax providers, and cities who could potentially refer or use effective self-help technologies – e.g., the I-CAN! Earned Income Credit (EIC) system⁵ – to impact the lives of their clients.
- Provide direct training to I-CAN! EIC partners to promote the effective, timely implementation of the I-CAN! EIC system to benefit low-income clients.

⁵The I-CAN! Earned Income Credit module was developed in 2002-2003 as an expansion of the I-CAN! kiosk-based self-help system. Using a fifth-grade literacy level and a video guide, the EIC module enables low-income people to prepare their own income tax returns and apply for the Earned Income Tax Credit. The module helps low-income taxpayers in Spanish, English, or Vietnamese to prepare the Schedule EIC and fill out the appropriate 1040, 1040A or 1040EZ tax forms. Once they have completed the forms, taxpayers can then file them either in traditional paper format or electronically.

III.

Evaluation Design and Methodology

Evaluation Design and Objectives

The evaluation of the NTAP project was designed to accomplish three results:

1. **Measure outcomes:** Develop a system of outcome measures to assess the project’s success in meeting key objectives and areas for improvement which can be celebrated and addressed going forward.
2. **Improve “smart systems” project management:** Provide a “feedback loop” by which key success measures are generated from performance data that can be used by system managers to make adjustments in real time, continually improving outcomes and success and allowing project staff to respond aggressively and proactively to the evolving needs of users and partners.
3. **Produce a summary assessment report** outlining what worked and what didn’t, with practical implications for future service delivery in later phases of the program.

The evaluation was intended to lay the groundwork for an ongoing system of feedback that would provide guidance to the project’s leadership, as well as to obtain valuable insights into progress achieved to date and potential areas for improvement. The evaluation team and project leadership were guided by the concept of “program-owned evaluation”⁶ and made every effort, wherever possible and appropriate, to apply evaluation and data-gathering tools that were either already in use within the program or that could be readily adapted for ongoing use by NTAP staff.

The evaluation was designed to assess NTAP’s success to date in meeting several “critical success factors” based upon the project’s mission and purpose, namely:

- Do recipients of NTAP’s assistance find its services useful and effective?
- Does NTAP provide a capacity that did not previously exist within legal services? What gaps remain, and what could NTAP do to address those gaps?
- What aspects of the NTAP model have worked most (and least) effectively?
- Has NTAP fostered collaboration, innovation, and expertise-sharing at the national level?
- What impact has NTAP had on the use of technology to benefit the low-income community to date?

Evaluation Tools

To evaluate NTAP’s success against the above-mentioned critical success factors, the evaluation used three tools which incorporated both pre-existing mechanisms already in use within the project and materials and data developed specifically for this evaluation.

⁶ “Program-owned evaluation” tools are increasingly being used by legal services managers to assess their programs’ own performance against strategic goals, and to apply the information for improving the outcomes they can deliver to clients. The program, not the funder, directs the evaluation and applies its results for improving program management.

These tools included:

- 1. Activity and service data.** The Resource analyzed the following data: (a) participation statistics from NTAP's virtual training sessions, and (b) statistics on materials and content developed by NTAP.
- 2. Feedback from users and partners.** The Resource collected and analyzed feedback from users and partners regarding (a) outcomes achieved as a result of the NTAP services ("What's working?"), and (b) suggestions for improving outcomes ("What would you change or add to make it work better?").
- 3. Project quarterly report.** NTAP provided the Resource with quarterly and annual reports that summarized its progress against program milestones, e.g., number of partners enlisted and number of partner staff trained.

Data Collection and Methodology

1. User Interviews

Follow-up individual telephone interviews were conducted in June 2003 with 14 past recipients of NTAP services. Interviewees were the technical coordinators and other technology-responsible personnel at programs distributed broadly across the nation. The sampling included programs and people who received assistance from NTAP. This included:

- Assistance via e-mail
- Assistance via phone
- In-person assistance
- Training participants

Programs sampled were:

- Inland County Legal Services (CA)
- Neighborhood Legal Services (PA)
- California Indian Legal Services (CA)
- Legal Aid and Defender Association of Detroit (MI)
- Legal Services Corporation of Delaware (DE)
- Bay Area Legal Services (FL)
- Bedford Stuyvesant Legal Services (NY)
- Massachusetts Legal Services (MA)
- Northern Kentucky Legal Services (KY)
- Legal Aid Services of Oregon (OR)
- Acadiana Legal Services Association (LA)
- Montana Legal Services (MT)
- DNA Legal Services (NM)
- Kentucky Legal Aid (KY)

Those interviewed were asked to provide input on a broad array of aspects of the services they received, including outcomes as a result of those services, the quality of the service, what was most (and least)

effective, to what degree NTAP met their expectations, and what tools and lessons were most useful. See Appendix B for a copy of the interview format.

An administrative person was hired by NTAP to conduct the interviews in order to allow interviewees to talk freely to someone other than NTAP's permanent staff members who delivered services to them. The interviews used an instrument created by The Resource, and the materials collected through the interview process were forwarded directly to the evaluation team.

2. Evaluations Received from Training Sessions

NTAP regularly collects feedback from participants in its virtual, web conference-based training sessions.⁷ For the purposes of this evaluation, 44 evaluation forms from nine training sessions delivered between January and March of 2003 were reviewed. The training sessions from which the evaluation forms were drawn covered a variety of topics, including:

- Statewide Website Development (5 sessions)
- Case Management Systems (2 session)
- Telephone and Call Center Technology (1 session)
- Virus Busting on a Legal Services Budget (1 session)

The number of participants (who returned evaluation forms) in each of the sessions covered in the evaluation ranged from a low of one to a high of nine.

A copy of the evaluation form is attached as Appendix A.

3. Partner Interviews

In pursuit of its mission and objectives, NTAP has worked closely with several "partner" organizations, including the National Legal Aid and Defender Association (NLADA), Pro Bono Net, LStech.Org, and the One Economy Corporation.⁸ Key staff from each of these partners were interviewed for this evaluation to provide perspective on NTAP's success against its objectives. Specifically, they were asked to comment on:

- elements of the NTAP model that have worked best (and what could be improved);
- the "before/after" picture in legal services technology;
- what collaborations they have undertaken and which have worked well (and less well);
- lessons learned; and
- suggestions for improvement.

Interviews were conducted by administrative staff hired by NTAP for this purpose, using an instrument designed by The Resource. Completed interview instruments were forwarded to The Resource for analysis and inclusion in this report. A copy of the partner interview questionnaire is attached as Appendix C.

⁷Topics covered by the feedback included quality of the presenter(s), usefulness and relevance of the content, appropriateness of the class size and time allotted, and effectiveness of the class format and virtual training medium. (See Appendix B.)

⁸NTAP also partners with Legal Meetings; however, staff from this organization were not interviewed as part of this evaluation.

IV. Summary of Findings

A. Statistics: “NTAP Has Been Highly Productive.”

Technical assistance. From the project’s inception in 2001 through July 1, 2003, NTAP reports that it had assisted 79 different programs across 52 states and territories. Altogether, these 79 programs were assisted with a total of 113 “service requests.” NTAP responded to these requests with 284 distinct contacts. These programs were provided with the following types of technical assistance:

- telephone technology (21 programs)
- case management (31 programs)
- web site development and promotion (29 programs)
- technology management (12 programs)
- self-help systems (17 programs)
- video conferencing (2 programs)
- other (1 program)

Assistance to Technology Initiative Grant (TIG) recipients. NTAP has proactively contacted recipients of LSC TIG grants, offering one-on-one assistance and follow-up on project status; delivered “day of service” assistance to individual programs around technology issues facing their programs; and worked with selected programs prior to TIG conferences to help them with technology management or capacity issues. NTAP staff participated in TIG conferences and provided training, small-group consultation, and advice to participants.

Training. Through July 1, 2003, NTAP delivered 24 trainings on 13 topics to 392 persons. Attendees included executive directors, managing attorneys, administrators, advocates, technology-responsible personnel, and others. NTAP also assisted in organizing 62 programs to participate in the I-CAN! Earned Income Credit project, and began the process of organizing Geographic Information Survey trainings and implementations, both as part of its “technology clearinghouse” function.

Materials. NTAP has produced more than 45 articles, training modules, and “white papers” on specific technology topics. These materials are written for different legal services audiences and are all posted online on LStech.Org’s web page.

Materials include topics such as (for more information, see <http://lstech.org/ntap/publications/journal>):

- Open Source Technology (6 articles in May 2002 edition of *LStechie e-Journal*)
- Telephone and Telephony (7 articles in August 2002 edition of *LStechie e-Journal*)
- Case Management (10 articles in December 2002 edition)
- Statewide Website (12 articles on statewide websites, content development, and stakeholders in April 2003 edition)

Fourteen training modules have been created in seven technology topics (for more information, see <http://lstech.org/ntap/trainings/modules>):

- Telephone (2 modules)
- Case Management (2 modules)
- Statewide Website (5 modules)
- Video Conferencing (2 modules)
- Virus Protection and Security (1 module)
- Geographic Information Survey (1 module)
- I-CAN! Earned Income Credit (1 module)

B. Evaluation of Technical Assistance: “NTAP’s Assistance to Programs Gets Good Marks.”

Strengths

NTAP provides access to the community’s collective expertise. Broadly speaking, interviewees were highly appreciative of the assistance provided by NTAP, and several particularly cited NTAP’s Project Director for her helpfulness, expertise, and responsiveness to their needs. A sizable majority of the respondents stated that NTAP’s assistance had saved them a considerable amount of time and money by helping them avoid costly mistakes. Others reported that NTAP’s help allowed them to make better, more informed decisions; increased their confidence in addressing technology issues; and/or helped increase their understanding of key technologies, in particular by informing them of the experiences of other programs in implementing those technologies. Many reported that NTAP increased their awareness of the broad range of technological solutions that are available to address important legal services needs and priorities, and a substantial number of interviewees reported that their plans had changed (for the better) as a result of NTAP’s assistance. All those interviewed reported that NTAP met or exceeded their expectations.

Samples of some of the feedback users provided in the interviews include:

- *“Before the training, I was not aware that there were so many different ways to implement technology. NTAP has greatly saved our program money and time.”*
- *“The amount of time required when trying to figure something out has been cut. The errors have been eliminated, as well as the amount of research required to implement technology.”*
- *“We’ve been able to learn from other programs’ mistakes and accomplishments.”*
- *“NTAP’s consultants have allowed us to make better decisions regarding what vendor to use, and saved us time. We were able to go directly to doing what our funders were looking for.”*
- *“Having support from NTAP gave us more confidence in implementing new technology.”*
- *“I learned that whatever the issue, someone else has already done it, and we can learn from their experience.”*
- *“NTAP helped broaden my perspective on how others are using technology.”*

NTAP helps programs investing in technology overcome isolation. Many of the respondents reported that one of the strongest benefits of NTAP's assistance was that it put them in touch with other programs around the nation that have faced similar technology questions, and that NTAP helped make them aware of the fact that they do not have to "reinvent the wheel" but can instead learn from the experiences of others. An important, strategic-level finding from the interviews indicates that, prior to NTAP, few programs had much awareness of what others were doing relative to technology advancements for legal services. NTAP plays a critical role in coordinating a formerly fragmented approach to implementing technology solutions. It is important to note that except for their contact with NTAP, many programs feel isolated from others who could help them.

NTAP fills a critical niche. It needs to be expanded. Interviewees generally stated that prior to NTAP, there were few comparable services available to them, and that those that they were able to access were generally expensive and fragmented, and took much longer to find (delivered primarily by private consultants and/or local technology vendors of questionable objectivity). Many reported that NTAP has helped close an important gap in service availability at the national level in this regard.

Suggestions for Improvement

Expand assistance and resources. Where interviewees had suggestions for improvement in the technical assistance area, it was generally to desire more of the same – more staff and funding to enable NTAP to deliver more services more often. Users believe the technical assistance NTAP provides is highly valuable, and simply want more of it to be available to more programs throughout the legal aid community. As one user put it, *"I would like to see more of the same be available, and have NTAP advertise to other people who don't yet know about the program."* (Note that this sort of service expansion will likely require NTAP to secure additional funding and staff.)

Expand role as clearinghouse of technology issues. As noted above, respondents indicated that, prior to NTAP, few programs were familiar with what others were doing to implement and leverage technology, and that NTAP has helped increase their awareness of the efforts other programs have undertaken and the lessons they have learned from those experiences. The fact that this was cited so often as a key benefit to NTAP seems to indicate both a strength and a potential area for improvement. On the one hand, NTAP is making progress against one of the critical elements of its mission and purpose: building a national network and communication system for technology in the legal services community. On the other hand, this response shows strongly just how much of a gap there remains in this area, and just how isolated and "stovepiped" technology-responsible people remain within their own programs.

It also points to NTAP's need to seek ways to increase the visibility and impact of its national communication systems – including newsletters, conferences, and other communication media – to expand the audience, improve cross-program networking and expertise-sharing, and foster a national network of technology experts working in close collaboration to push forward the collective ability of the legal services community to leverage technology efficiently and effectively.

Finally, it reveals the need for increased emphasis on the "technology advocacy" element of NTAP's mission, a point which several of its partners also emphasized as an outstanding need (see below). Although NTAP appears to be making progress on this front (and is recognized as such by both users of its services and partners), the interviews clearly indicate just how critical this task is, and how much work remains to be done.

C. Trainings: “NTAP’s trainings are effective.”

Overall, participants gave the training sessions high marks. Participants seemed to find them very relevant and effective in increasing their understanding of the technology issues covered. On a scale of 1 to 4 (with 4 representing “excellent” or “very effective”), participants awarded these trainings with an average combined rating of 3.5 across all the areas covered by the evaluation forms. (See Exhibit 1 below.)

**Exhibit 1:
Summary of Training Evaluation Ratings (n=44)**

Topic/Question	Average Rating ¹
Presenter:	
1. <i>The presenter(s) had a good understanding of the topic</i>	3.6
2. <i>The presenter(s) was able to convey necessary information in a useful manner</i>	3.5
3. <i>The presenter(s) was able to answer questions and respond to the needs of the group</i>	3.5
Topic and Content:	
1. <i>The topic presented was relevant and on-point to what I expected to learn</i>	3.4
2. <i>The content presented was useful and informative</i>	3.5
3. <i>The material on-line was useful and written in a way I could understand</i>	3.3
Class Size and Time:	
1. <i>The class size and format was adequate for the learning needed</i>	3.7
2. <i>The time allotted for the training was adequate</i>	3.6
Class Format and Virtual Training:	
1. <i>The WebEx Conferencing was useful in delivering the training and conveying the application in a group setting</i>	3.6
2. <i>There was much opportunity for questions and dialogue</i>	3.4
3. <i>The on-line materials were relevant to what was being discussed</i>	3.3
4. <i>These trainings are useful and worth keeping alive in the legal services community</i>	3.2

¹ Respondents were asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 meaning unsatisfactory, least true, or not effective; 2 meaning satisfactory; 3 meaning above average or good; and 4 representing excellent, very effective, or true.

Strengths of the trainings

Good presenters, format and class size. The presenters received particularly high ratings for their expertise and their ability to convey that expertise in a useful, understandable manner. Participants also appeared to feel that the format and class size were appropriate, and generally found the use of web conferencing effective, with noted areas for improvement.

Good outcomes for participants. In their comments, many participants stated that the trainings had provided them with knowledge and information that would have a real, tangible effect on their immediate work and technology plans. It appeared that a large majority of the respondents found the sessions very useful

in a variety of ways and were highly appreciative of the assistance they received. Many walked away with new ideas, a better understanding of the experiences that others had had in approaching similar issues, and/or changes to their existing plans and approaches to ongoing work based on what they had learned.

Web format is useful. Many participants appeared to find the web conferencing format extremely useful, and particularly noted the ability to reference the on-line training materials after the session as an especially valuable feature. It might be worthwhile to send participants a follow-up e-mail to remind them of this capability, with a link to the relevant materials for quick reference, to ensure that as many participants as possible learn of this feature and make best use of it.⁹

Areas for Improvement/Suggestions

Consider technology capacity of attendees. There was often a wide disparity in the background and experience levels of participants, some of whom found a given topic too advanced while others found it excessively basic. Although NTAP advertises trainings as “101” or “201” or targets them to particular audiences, it was noted that regardless of how a training was labeled, attendees ranged from self-rated “novice” to “advanced” in technology familiarity. A recommendation might be to survey participants before the training to assess their experience level relative to the training topic and/or to share agendas prior to the training.

Manage time and technology. In assessments of whether or not the time allotted was adequate (although numeric ratings in this area were generally high), a considerable number of participants noted in their comments that more time was needed and/or that presenters could have done a better job staying on-topic and avoiding unproductive diversions, especially introductions.

Several interviewees reported issues with the WebEx™/Legal Meetings format, in particular that the system would go down or was not entirely reliable.¹⁰ Given NTAP’s heavy reliance on Internet and web conferencing tools for several aspects of service delivery, it is critical that NTAP ensure that participants have access to tutorials in advance wherever possible to minimize the technical barriers and distractions wherever possible. Other suggestions that arose from a minority of the interviews include sending out an agenda and/or allowing participants to download the materials in advance; leaving more time at the end of sessions or calls for Q&A; and (in one case) not relying on WebEx™ when simpler media (such as a telephone call) would work just as well.

Several participants, in their evaluation comments, also noted that they did not understand how to use all the features of the web conferencing format (such as chat). They suggested it might be useful and appropriate to send participants an e-mail in advance with instructions on how to make the most of the web conferencing features. This might include a link to a short tutorial on the system, if possible, in order to ensure that technical issues with the web conferencing format do not distract or deter participants from the content of the training any more than absolutely necessary.

⁹NTAP reports that it began following this practice in April 2003.

¹⁰It should be noted that the feedback obtained is from a specific set of virtual trainings conducted between January and March 2003, and that many of the technical issues experienced at that time have since been addressed by NTAP.

Summary

NTAP should partner with Legal Meetings or others to ensure that participants understand how best to use web conferencing technologies. It seems that one potential improvement theme that comes out of the comments in the evaluation forms is a need for enhanced preparation to better prepare participants, avoid potential technical “glitches,” and reinforce participants’ awareness of the features (such as chat) that are available to them.

NTAP should send out follow-up e-mails to participants. One of the most useful features participants cited was the ability to access training materials after the sessions are completed, allowing them to serve as ongoing reference tools. To maximize the benefit and effectiveness of this capability, and perhaps also to reinforce the learnings that participants obtain from the sessions, NTAP should consider sending participants follow-up e-mails reminding them that the materials are available online for future reference (with a link to the relevant site).¹¹

D. Partners: “NTAP Multiplies Our Impact.”

Overall, partners were highly supportive of NTAP and believe that it has been very effective, particularly in its trainings and newsletters, in increasing understanding and effectiveness of technology within legal services. All four partners interviewed feel that NTAP is an effective model for delivering these kinds of services to the legal aid community, and gave the program high ratings (4s and 5s, on a scale of 1 to 5) on its success in meeting its mission and objectives.

Strengths

The elements of NTAP’s approach that partners cited as most successful were:

- **The “distributed consulting” model**, by which NTAP mobilizes members of a national network of experts¹² to deliver assistance on particular topics and issues. One partner, when asked what aspects of NTAP’s model have worked best, responded: *“One of the most important things has been creating the network of technology people and technology support in the field.”*
- **Building a sense of community** around technology in legal services.
- **Improved coordination** of training and technical assistance at the national level.
- **Increasing access** to quality, affordable assistance with technology issues.
- **The “virtual training” component**, which partners (like participants; see above) see as very useful and effective in delivering both meaningful content in realtime and in providing materials that

¹¹See footnote 9 above.

¹²NTAP uses experts within the legal services community to provide technology support and assistance to newer technology project managers, executive directors, managers, and others implementing technology initiatives. Called the “Technology Consortium,” these people have successfully delivered and designed their own technology projects on behalf of clients or advocates and are recognized by the field as leaders. NTAP contracts with these individuals (now 14 people) to provide mentorship, consultation, assistance, and training as needed to the field.

can be referenced after the fact on an ongoing basis. One partner, for instance, stated: *“The virtual training component of NTAP has been an important tool for this community, both for actual training and for increasing the community’s knowledge around technology projects. The training modules that are available after each training are helpful resources for people to refer to later.”*

NTAP has created a new, centralized capacity within the legal services community. The partners indicated that prior to NTAP, there were few similar services available, and that those that existed were more fragmented, had limited funding, and were primarily focused on specific, narrow areas of technology as it relates to legal services. One partner states:

“Prior to NTAP, there was some capacity at the Project for the Future of Equal Justice, but the funding ran out on that. NLADA and Equal Justice were running trainings at their conferences, and LSC tried to provide a little bit of cohesion, but for the most part, the services NTAP provides weren’t available. Now, tons more people are getting help; tons more people are getting a lot more training. We are even starting to consider the advocacy side of things, which we hadn’t thought of before.”

Another, when asked what has changed since the project was founded, responds:

“Prior to NTAP, most of the help was from local vendors and there wasn’t much help from within the community. There is now a more coordinated approach to providing training and support. There is now a support function that wasn’t there before.”

NTAP raises the visibility of technology and technology support resources in legal services.

Although to some degree NTAP’s direct impact is difficult to distinguish from the broader increase of support for technology in legal services from other sources (such as LSC’s TIG grants), partners gave NTAP a large amount of credit for increasing the visibility and awareness of technology among legal services programs and helping to build a sense of community and shared experience around technology issues. Each of the partners indicated that NTAP has provided crucial support and assistance in helping them achieve key aspects of their own missions – which implies to the evaluation team that NTAP staff are highly effective in collaborations and proactively seek ways to support partner organizations in achieving disparate but complementary goals of importance to the low-income community. One partner stated:

“There is now a real sense of community around technology issues, and a greater depth of knowledge. This community is still too insulated from the larger non-profit technology community, but NTAP and LStech.Org are working to bridge that gap. That is an impressive task.”

Areas for Improvement

NTAP’s national advocacy is important and needs to be expanded. The partners recognized that NTAP is a young program and a work in progress, and made important suggestions for improvement. Perhaps the most significant, cited by two of the partners, is a need for increased focus on advocacy at the national level to promote a better understanding of, and emphasis on, the effective application of technology within the legal services community as a whole.

Particularly cited was a need for greater advocacy toward Program Directors (not merely technology-responsible personnel, managers, and advocates) and a greater willingness on the part of NTAP to confront

“political” issues at the national level in order to promote a national framework and agenda around technology. Says one partner: *“It is not only important to make computer-responsible people feel supported, but also to educate the Program Directors and others about the ways technology can directly impact our clients.”* Another states that in order to make collaborative efforts at the national level work better, *“we really need to get the administration of NLADA more focused on the issue of technology.”* It was noted that this may require increasing staff to free up NTAP leadership to place greater focus on this advocacy effort.

Additional suggestions that arose from the partner interviews include:

- **Improving communication.** *“NTAP should focus on better, more regular communication to both partners and the larger community regarding NTAP’s work.”*
- **Enrolling and deploying a broader range of experts** to deliver trainings, technical assistance, and other services. It was noted that NTAP appears to draw upon the same pool of experts for trainings, technical assistance, and other services on a frequent basis, and at least one of the partners felt this pool needs to be broadened to increase the number of perspectives and the range of expertise available. *“NTAP should try to reach out to guest speakers beyond the ‘usual suspects’ of the legal services technology community, including non-legal non-profit community folks.”*
- **Continuing to develop the training formats and materials.** *“NTAP still needs to work on the training format to make it more interactive and dynamic.”*
- **Creating a “train the trainers” course.** *“Need better documentation for trainers regarding their responsibilities for each training and what NTAP will provide.”*
- **Further develop the national training curriculum** for use at conferences (*“still feels like a work in progress, given the number of political players on that level”*).
- **Hiring “a couple of really solid techies”** for the in-house staff to enhance the ability to provide technical support.

Overall, all the partner interviewees were strongly supportive of NTAP and its mission, and felt the project has provided a great service to the legal services community. The most common theme among those interviewed, as with the user interviews, was that NTAP needs more funding and more staff to enable it to deliver more services and increase its visibility within the community.

V.

Conclusion

Based upon the feedback obtained from users and partners, it is clear that NTAP has made a very strong start in achieving its mission and objectives and has won broad recognition within the legal services community for its expertise, relevance, collaboration, and dynamic leadership.

NTAP addresses a critical need within the community. It has begun to foster a greater degree of community and awareness about technology and the ways in which it can be applied to improve service levels and quality for the low-income population, both within the legal services area and beyond it. Particularly noted for their usefulness and success are the virtual trainings and the distributed consulting model, which appear to make high-quality, affordable, highly relevant assistance available to programs that would otherwise have limited access to such help.

Several suggestions for improvement arose from the evaluation as well. Based upon user and partner feedback, it appears that NTAP should focus on several areas going forward:

- Working to maximize effectiveness of time allocation and the web conferencing technology in training sessions, including:
 - S instituting a “train the trainers” course;
 - S training users on web conferencing technology;
 - S having back-up plans in case of Internet outages or problems with web conferencing; and
 - S required and stronger facilitation of each session with tighter time management.
- Increasing emphasis on advocacy and communication around technology issues at the national level and making greater efforts to engage Program Directors.
- Continuing to develop and strengthen a national technology training agenda and supporting tools and materials.
- Obtaining additional sources of funding in order to increase staff size and expand the availability of services.

A final recommendation is that NTAP incorporate two additional data collection activities as part of its ongoing management information and self-evaluation program. The first is a regular schedule of telephone interviews with a random sample of NTAP users, similar to the interviews carried out for this evaluation. The second is an annual process of evaluative feedback from NTAP partners, modeled along the lines of the partner interviews reported here. The data from these two efforts can be compared with the findings of this evaluation, providing a measure of how effective NTAP's efforts to address the issues outlined in this report have been.

This evaluation has produced both a baseline measure of NTAP's performance to date and a set of simple tools for tracking the impact of its efforts to improve services going forward. The assessment of users and partners is that NTAP is filling an important gap in helping legal services programs apply technology effectively. The project's leaders seem determined to do even better in the future, and have put in place the tools to show it.

VI.

Appendices

- A. NTAP Training Evaluation Form
- B. Follow-up Telephone Interview Questions
- C. Partner Interview Questions