**Libraries Prepare to Answer Civil Legal Questions in Times of Crisis – Learner Guide**

# <https://www.webjunction.org/events/webjunction/libraries-prepare-to-answer-civil-legal-questions.html>

**Event description:** With the economy staggering, unemployment soaring to unprecedented heights, and families reeling from weeks of confinement and uncertainty, people are turning to their libraries for help. Many of the issues people are struggling with involve civil legal information; questions related to unemployment, debt/money issues, foreclosures and evictions, or family stressors are all on the rise due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In this webinar, two law librarians highlight the most common civil legal issues they are seeing, provide guidance on key ways for public libraries to respond to civil legal needs, and discuss best practices for online reference services. Let’s work together to re-empower our struggling communities and demonstrate just how essential libraries are in times of crisis.

**Presented by:** Jenny Silbiger, State Law Librarian, Access to Justice Coordinator, Hawaii Supreme Court Law Library; and Joseph Lawson, Deputy Director, Harris County Law Library (TX)

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| **What are your goals for viewing this webinar?** | |
| **Personal Goals** |  |
| **Team Goals** |  |

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| **Legal information vs. Legal Advice** |
| Begin by making sure you are clear about the difference between advice and information.   * Watch the video: [Legal Information vs Legal Advice](https://www.webjunction.org/news/webjunction/legal-information-vs-legal-advice.html) to learn about “unauthorized practice of law” (UPL) and the difference between offering legal information and legal advice. * Read: [Unauthorized Practice of Law in the Library](https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/2019/11/06/unauthorized-practice-of-law-in-the-library/), an article in *American Libraries*, which presents considerations for librarians facing legal questions.   Note a few key points from the video and the webinar presentation that will help you as you respond to civil legal reference questions with information rather than advice. |
| **COVID 19 Civil Legal Resources for My Patrons** |
| Legal resources are largely state-specific. To identify COVID-19 civil legal resources available for your area, find link(s) for your state in the [COVID 19 Civil Legal Resources Organized by State](https://www.webjunction.org/content/dam/WebJunction/Documents/webJunction/Topics/civil-legal-justice/COVID-19-civil-legal-resources.xlsx) (xls).  For further exploration, the following reference sources are helpful:   * [LawHelp.org](https://www.lawhelp.org/) * [LawHelp Interactive](https://lawhelpinteractive.org) * [Cornell Law School: Legal Information Institute](https://www.law.cornell.edu/) * [American Association of Law Libraries: Public Library Toolkit](https://www.aallnet.org/lispsis/resources-publications/public-library-toolkit/) * [Nolo Legal Encyclopedia](https://https:/www.nolo.com/legal-encyclopedia)   Note below which resources will be particularly helpful to inquiries you are receiving. |
| **Other Organizations and Partners** |
| The library does not have to navigate this crisis all on their own. There are legal aid organizations and law libraries that can help.  In your research above, you probably found the legal aid organization in your area ([lawhelp.org](https://www.lawhelp.org/) has a map if you need). You can refer patrons to these organizations when their needs are beyond what you can do. It is useful to understand who legal aid organizations can help and what services they provide so your referrals can be most successful. Spending time on their website to look at their client guidelines and/or calling them can be a good place to start. Note any important takeaways here.  Law libraries can be a great resource for questions that stump you. Look for a law library that serves your area. This [AALL list](https://www.aallnet.org/gllsis/resources-publications/member-libraries/) is a good place to start – law schools also have law libraries that can assist. See what is on the law library’s website about COVID-19. Look into their phone or chat reference options. Record any helpful information here. |
| **Sharing with Colleagues and Patrons** |
| The resources you’ve collected above may be helpful to your colleagues or in turn, your colleagues may be able to help with resources they know about. With whom should you share this information? In what form?  What is the easiest way to share these resources with patrons? Is there a place on the library’s website to list civil legal resource links? Could the resources be compiled in an article for the library’s newsletter? |
| **Action Plan: (include some simple next steps, along with who, when, etc.)** |
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