



## The New “Public Service Center”

Ask someone—what do you think the State Bar of Arizona does for members of the public? Many will speculate that the SBA will help them find a lawyer. But they would be wrong.

That’s about to change.

The State Bar will soon launch its Public Service Center, a scalable hub where the SBA will connect the public with lawyers, provide legal resources and education, and further the Bar’s newly clarified mission to serve the public with respect to the provision of legal services and access to justice. Most important, the Public Service Center will deliver these services statewide and, we hope, increase and enhance the delivery of pro bono services in Arizona.

Ultimately, the Public Service Center will be more than a website, because almost every member of the public—including most of those living below the poverty level—have access to a smartphone. But our initial efforts will be the creation of a mobile-friendly online portal. This is where it gets exciting, because this is where the SBA is going to lead the way in *how* the public connects with lawyers.

After considering problems that the public encounters with existing models and studying alternatives, one model stood out as a clear winner. In essence, it is a hybrid of popular “on-demand” services like Uber or Postmates, and it’s already in existence in Chicago. It’s called Legal ServicesLink.com, and it’s a model that we intend to deploy in Arizona.

Although Arizona’s portal will differ from LSL’s portal in many respects, it will work in substantially the same way. That is, it will automatically match public requests for legal services to attorneys who have indicated a desire to provide those services based on areas of practice and rate categories. Instantly upon the submission of an approved project, participating lawyers will receive an electronic notification of the project in their practice area and have the opportunity to uniquely respond to the request with relevant information. The potential client would then select the lawyer who best suits them.

Now you probably have lots of questions, and for many questions we have answers discussed below, but for others we are still working through the details.

Let’s start with the most common question: What will it cost? The answer is, just like this magazine you’re reading, we do not expect the Public Service Center to ultimately cost the State Bar anything. Instead, it will be supported by revenue-sharing from subscriptions of participating members seeking compensated legal work. Initially, those members who elect to participate will pay an annual fee of \$300; pro bono opportunities, however, will be open to all licensed Arizona attorneys.

Although it’s our hope that providing easier access to pro bono opportunities—and ultimately legal education to assist

in providing these services—will by itself increase pro bono service, it’s human nature that incentives powerfully drive behavior. As a result, the Public Service Center also will offer interested lawyers the opportunity to offset all or a portion of their annual fees by

providing pro bono services to members of the public. Those details are still being developed.

Ultimately, it is the goal of the Public Service Center to increase access statewide to pro bono and modest means legal services. We anticipate this will be budget-neutral—that is, the Public Service Center will ultimately not rely on membership dues for its development and operation. If

only a small percentage of our membership participates, it is expected to be self-sustaining and, if it is an even greater success, it will likely generate revenue and fund additional services.

But what of other programs that already provide valuable resources to the public, such as some county bars, legal aid organizations, or the Arizona Bar Foundation? Although the Public Service Center may ultimately be disruptive to some existing models, we have met with various concerned stakeholders and will be taking steps to be as inclusive as possible so as to advance any existing services. Some of these ideas are still in development—meaning we don’t want to commit to any one idea just yet—but it is our intention to modify and refine the Public Service Center continually, even after its launch, to assist and promote existing services wherever possible.

Will we still have an online directory and provide the public with a lawyer’s most recent disciplinary information? Yes, the very same information that is available now

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**GEOFFREY M. TRACHTENBERG** is the Immediate Past President of the State Bar of Arizona and current President of the Arizona Association for Justice. Mr. Trachtenberg thanks the talented and enthusiastic SBA staff, and especially CEO John Phelps, for helping us to develop and shepherd the PSC project.

to the public—including whether the lawyer has malpractice coverage—will be made available through the Public Service Center. Moreover, participating lawyers will have the chance to provide even more information than is currently available to help them differentiate themselves and better inform the public of their unique skills and experience.

What about clients who—despite instructions not to do so—unwittingly include inappropriate information, such as names or other specific details, in their requests for legal assistance? The PSC will have a full-time staff member whose job

will be to approve projects before they are sent out or made available on the system. That staffer will make sure that requests for legal assistance only contain general descriptions and that no personal or other identifying information is posted.

Will the SBA be doing any vetting of attorneys? No. At least under our current model, anyone actively licensed in Arizona will be eligible to participate in the Public Service Center, much like they would be eligible to participate in services offered by AVVO, LegalZoom, or LegalMatch. It will be up to clients to make decisions,

aided by information available on the website and elsewhere, as to which attorneys would be most appropriate for them.

What then will the Public Service Center do differently than those services? Aside from providing lawyers a safe harbor to participate in an ethically blessed forum, the PSC will be dedicated to Arizona attorneys and, perforce, be more responsive to the needs of our community. It will also, of course, be focused on providing pro bono and modest means services.

This sounds great—but when will it be available? Our current plan anticipates a launch this summer,

but because the “best-laid plans of mice and men often go awry,” the better answer is that it will be available when it’s ready. Before then, it will be subject to review by ethics counsel and others to ensure that it is ready for prime time.

It’s been an honor to be associated with this project and I’m excited to see it through to the next phase. That said, the project will be ongoing and, even after its initial launch, your comments and ideas will be welcomed. We hope this gives you a preview of what’s to come and a sense of how your Bar is working to fulfill our mission as set by the Arizona Supreme Court. 