**Brief Outline for Integrating Social Work into a Legal Practice**

**I. Structural assessment of Social Work for the organization**

a) Initial assessment: Identify current knowledge about social work, as well as the logistical and practical considerations of expanding social work into the practice.

   i) Use the assessment to identify current needs and gaps in the delivery of services, as well as to engage frontline staff and managers alike in the design processes.

   (1) What are the recurring challenges and needs that current staff cannot address? When doing this assessment, it is best to capture voices from all staff—especially those providing services at the frontlines.

   (2) What informs the organization’s information about social work practice? Your current practices and gaps in delivery of services will be a good starting point for this.

   (3) Do you know your stakeholders? Contact other organizations to flesh out your ideas and learn more about other models. There is no need to reinvent the wheel.

   (4) What is your vision for the social work role? Through it will evolve with time, use the design phase to identify focus areas and discuss your plan with managers/leaders in your organization. This is also a good opportunity to collect feedback and identify possible operational challenges.

   (5) What type of credentials will work best?

      (a) Bachelor’s in Social Work (BSW); Licensed Master Social Worker (LMSW); Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW).

      (b) Consider hiring a LMSW as a starting point. If funding allows, a LCSW might be best as these credentials allow for more in-depth clinical assessments that can strengthen legal strategies and applications for relief.

   (6) What are the current data collection tools? Which metrics will you use to measure efficiency, productivity and performance? Make a rough sketch of these during the design phase and review it on an ongoing basis. *See part V of this document for more information.*

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1 Developed by [Brenda Piñero, Esq.](mailto:bpinero@aba.probar.org), Director of Programs at ABA/ProBAR with contributions from [Rick Barinbaum](mailto:rbarinbaum@aba.probar.org), LMSW.
b) Organizational Structure: Review the organizational chart and identify if social workers will integrate into an existing division (for example, a Legal Department) or if they will make a completely new division/department/team.
   i) Address this step with an operational lens: know current processes for delivery of services (delivery of general legal orientations, intake assessments and interviews, processes for applications for relief, supervision of legal work product, etc.)
   ii) Identify supervisor roles and systems to evaluate performance, efficiency, and quality of services.

c) Culture and collaboration: decide if the practice will be *multidisciplinary* (people from different practice areas work for the same organization) or *interdisciplinary* (practitioners from different fields work together in teams).
   i) Engage leadership and promote teamwork within the organization. As the practice expands and becomes more diverse, assess if staff is receptive or hesitant to the proposed changes. Set time aside to hear their suggestions and solicit feedback on an ongoing basis.
   ii) Delineate a clear path for collaboration between social work staff, attorneys and support staff.

II. Confidentiality and mandated reporting
   a) Prepare to do research. Mandated reporting duties vary per state and jurisdictions.
   b) Identify which manager will be the point of contact for questions on this topic and who will make the ultimate decision. Staff members must feel supported; they should not make these decisions on their own and without consulting leadership.

III. Hiring and recruitment
   a) Develop a job description tailored to the organization needs.
   b) Research for samples in Indeed, LinkedIn, Google Jobs, etc. Email mailing lists are also a good source as many providers advertise job opportunities within their existing networks.
c) Decide strategically which compensation works best based on the needs, required qualifications and challenges in hiring. Consider higher salaries for remote locations or positions that require specialized expertise.
d) Advertise positions on job sites as well as local schools of social work.
e) Leverage on existing contacts who can help you promote the vacancy.
f) Announce the new opportunity to current staff within the organization—transparency is key in earning trust.

IV. Best practices for data collection, evaluation, and measurement
a) Start with identifying the parameters for funding and the reporting requirements to determine what type of data is needed.
b) Some funders require monthly/annual narrative reports with quantitative data, some require case narratives, etc.
c) Review current data collection processes and tools such as intakes and interview assessments.
d) Know your database systems. Become familiar with the database fields and learn how to run reports.
e) Ensure your data is accurate and review data collection systems on an ongoing basis.
f) Identify evaluation and metrics for quality and performance during the design process. Do not wait for the last minute to incorporate these.

V. Crisis = opportunity
a) Challenging times could bring new funding opportunities.
b) Identify strong players in the organization who could kick start projects and serve as project managers.
c) Engage in ongoing communication with new funders and consult with them first before reallocating funds or redesigning strategies that affect core services.
d) Know your why and learn how to say no. Stay away from projects with low return on investment as much as possible.

VI. Staff retention and growth
a) It is common for non-profits to have high attrition rates and changes in staff.
b) Reassess interview practices and performance evaluation models.
c) Keep an eye for biases and changes in work culture, especially those contrary to the organizational values.

d) Resources: *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team; The Five Languages of Appreciation in the Workplace*

VII. Develop a growth mindset

a) Some funders might provide seed funding for 6 or 12 months. Embrace those opportunities to build a platform and apply for additional grants/funding at the same time.

b) Leverage on existing networks for partnerships and collaborations.

c) Consider developing internships and try your best to provide stipends.

d) Develop yourself and others. Assign tasks and projects based on strength.

e) Assess for growth potential constantly. Invest on current staff and provide them with opportunities to grow.

f) YOU set the pace and the example. The success of any project starts with how much you know yourself and how committed you are to your growth and to develop others. In many occasions, organizations look for outside talent instead of looking at their existing staff first.

i) For example, there might be attorneys who have a Bachelor’s Degree in Social Work or support staff who have been doing social work-related duties for many years—consider them for promotions and opportunities for growth such as trainings, conferences, and workshops.

g) Lead from a mindset of possibility rather than scarcity. Provide ongoing feedback and ‘catch’ people when they are performing at their best rather than highlighting the areas in which they lack.

h) Listen and solicit feedback, especially from those who are expert in other areas.

i) Believe that you can accomplish it. Developing a more integrated practice starts from the top. Humbling confidence, inspiring leadership, and sound management are skills that can be learn.

i) Resource: *TED Talk: The skill of self confidence*. 