Collaborations

- In Philadelphia, VIP and the city's two largest legal aid providers (LSC-funded Philadelphia Legal Assistance, and non LSC-funded Community Legal Services) are working together on a case management software system to facilitate case placement and referrals to pro bono lawyers. The organizations also will use the software to look at trends in client needs and service patterns, and then use that information to improve client representation and advocacy.

- In Washington State, LSC-funded Northwest Justice Project has recently created an online access system, which is designed to get people to the appropriate level of service as quickly as possible, using basic screening and branching logic tools. The system diverts people with problems that the legal aid providers are not likely to address to the next-best resources as quickly as possible, freeing up telephone queue space for more in-depth interviews in the providers' higher-priority areas. Because NJP and the legal aid programs in the state of Washington use a common case-management system, cases can be transferred quickly and without duplication of effort.

- The three LSC-funded organizations in Illinois (LAF, Prairie State, and Land of Lincoln) are working with Illinois Legal Aid Online to develop an online access system, with the goal of extending it to half a dozen other organizations that share the same case management system. The Illinois model also will use the data gathered to determine which geographic areas in the state are underserved, and which areas need more or better referral resources or pro se materials.

- The Bar Association of San Francisco's Volunteer Legal Services Program (VLSP) and LSC-grantee Bay Area Legal Aid (BayLegal) worked together to set up a toll-free number for intake. BayLegal handles the first intake interview and inputs information into a database that address both BayLegal and VLSP's requirements. The information in the database then enables VLSP to run a conflict check and follow-up with a short (usually ten minute) second-level intake interview. This process allows the two entities to share information and results in better referrals to pro bono lawyers without a lengthy follow-up interview.

- Following a study by bar associations in the Twin Cities, the private bar and leading legal services providers in the area created Call for Justice LLC, a comprehensive telephone referral system. Call for Justice builds on existing infrastructure by using the United Way's 211 system. The 211 information and referral specialists are trained about existing community legal resources and are given real-time information on availability, priority, and eligibility for existing legal services. The technology used by 211 also permits extensive data collection to facilitate ongoing assessment of the program.

- In 2011, LLM students at Stanford Law School and fellows at Stanford's Law, Science, and Technology Program developed LawGives, a new low-cost technology platform to serve as a resource portal and case referral and mentoring match service for law students, lawyers at smaller firms, and pro se litigants. LawGives connects young lawyers and law students with supervising lawyers and provides resources to smaller law firms and solo practitioners who need assistance to take on pro bono cases while managing their own caseloads without associates, research paralegals, or other legal staff. Once volunteers register with LawGives, the platform generates a list of pro bono opportunities that most closely match their interests. A lawyer may choose one or more opportunities or may make a direct referral to a colleague. The LawGives platform will advise the pro bono lawyer if any law students have expressed interest in working on the matter, and lawyers also may seek assistance from students.

- The Pro Bono Collaborative (PBC) in Rhode Island is a project housed at Roger Williams School of Law that forms long-term and sustainable collaborations between the law school, community organizations, and law firms. PBC is not a referral program; rather it identifies unmet legal needs through its community-based partners, develops pro bono projects to meet those needs,
and then pitches projects to member firms, who work with law students. Operating with just two part-time attorneys and an annual budget of $150,000, PBC annually runs approximately 18 projects with 10-13 law firms, over 20 community organizations, and 15-25 law students.

• In Richmond, Virginia, 10 law firms work together on a “Firms in Service” model, which fosters collaboration rather than competition among firms for pro bono projects. Started in 2007, it has doubled in size to involve over 1,300 lawyers at both large and small firms in the city. Entirely firm led and without a formal institutional or administrative structure, it operates by rotating meetings, and, in part because of the level of buy-in and relationships developed, has provided critical leadership within the community.

• The Philadelphia Bar Association’s Delivery of Legal Services Committee (DLSC) provides an innovative forum for leaders of the city’s public interest legal community to work collaboratively with the private bar, judiciary, and other key community stakeholders to develop and implement pro bono initiatives. DLSC members help develop and implement specialized public interest and poverty pro bono practice groups at firms. Members routinely plan and conduct joint pro bono training programs for summer law student volunteers, interns working at public interest legal organizations, and private firms, which are usually offered free to participants in exchange for handling a pro bono case. Philadelphia VIP developed and maintains a Resource List of Pro Bono Experts and Professionals, which is available to all DLSC member organizations and includes experts, title companies, graphic designers, IT professionals, forensic accountants, translators, and court reporters available to assist pro bono lawyers on their matters.