

Tennessee Alliance for Legal Services

Strengthening the Delivery of Civil Legal Help to Vulnerable Tennesseans



www.tals.org

ABA Free Legal Answers

Your state can have its own site too by joining ABA Free Legal Answers!

First, what is ABA Free Legal Answers?

ABA Free Legal Answers is a national program based off the Online TN Justice website. Qualifying users can ask a lawyer for help with a legal issue. Qualifying users can post civil legal questions on the website and receive basic legal information and advice from approved volunteer attorneys. Users are notified by email when their question is answered.

Qualifying users are (1) low-income people, whose household income is below two-hundred fifty percent (250%) of the Federal Poverty Guidelines, (2) are not incarcerated, (3) have less than five thousand dollars (\$5,000) in total assets and (4) are at least 18 years old.

Why is it needed?

ABA Free Legal Answers addresses the “connectivity” problem which most states experience. Clients in urban areas who can not connect to legal clinics because they lack transportation, have child care issues, face conflicting work schedules, etc., need a way to be served without having to be at a particular location at a set time. There are also many clients in rural areas where there are very few lawyers, clinics or other pro bono resources available. ABA Free Legal Answers addresses both problems and has spurred other models to help address these needs. It also assists clients who can not find help because their income is slightly higher than the poverty guidelines legal services agencies must follow.

The ABA Free Legal Answers Approach

Free Legal Answers is based on the walk-in clinic or dial-a-lawyer model where clients request brief advice and counsel about a specific civil legal issue from a volunteer lawyer. Lawyers provide information and basic legal advice without any expectation of long-term representation. In Tennessee, for example, attorneys are protected under the state of Tennessee Rules of Professional Conduct for limited scope representation. The site follows the following goals and

approach:

Goals

- to enhance access to justice for low income people and rural pro se litigants
- to serve clients who may not be served by traditional legal aid services
- to remove barriers to providing pro bono services for attorneys

Approach

Clients

- Free
- Easy-to-use
- Can access at any time of day from anywhere with internet access

Volunteer Attorneys

- Provide pro bono any time of day from anywhere with web access
- Limited scope representation
- Receive CLE credit for service

How it Works

In each state, that state's residents answer questions to determine their eligibility. Eligible users then select their legal category, list any upcoming court date and ask their civil legal question. Questions are posted to the queue where registered attorneys can review them. If an attorney chooses to answer a question, they "take" the question and provide a response. Attorneys and users have the option to reply back and forth to one another until one of them decides the interaction is complete and marks the question as answered. Volunteer attorneys have the option to subscribe to question categories and are notified weekly of questions waiting in the queue. Users have the opportunity to ask three different questions per year.

Recognition for the Original Online TN Justice Project

Online TN Justice was known in access to justice communities across the country. It was included in a panel at the 2013, 2015, and 2016 Equal Justice Conferences hosted by the National Legal Aid and Defender's Association (NLADA) and American Bar Association (ABA). Baker Donelson, the software owner, was named as a 2014 Beacon of Justice Award Winner by NLADA for their work with Online TN Justice. In 2014, the program was named a finalist for a Salute to Excellence Award for the Center for Nonprofit Management in Nashville, Tennessee. Online TN Justice was one of the programs featured in the TBA's Young Lawyers Division Tennessee Library Education Project. The project won first place in the 'Service to the Public' awards category at the ABA Meeting in August 2014.

Want More Information

The American Bar Association's Standing Committee on Pro Bono and Public Service unanimously approved the creation of a national virtual legal advice clinic ABA Free Legal Answers. If your state is interested in participating in the national model, please contact [Tim Hughes](#), for more information. You can also [visit the ABA's Free Legal Answers Page](#) to see a YouTube video demonstrating attorney and user webpages. Nearly 4/5ths of the country is participating in this approach to pro bono help. Join us!

Tennessee's site, tn.freelegalanswers.org, is a project of the [Tennessee Alliance for Legal Services \(TALS\)](#), the [Tennessee Bar Association \(TBA\)](#), the [Tennessee Supreme Court's Access to Justice Commission](#) and [Baker, Donelson, Bearman, Caldwell & Berkowitz, PC](#).

Looking for more information? See one of the following:

 [OTJ Volunteer Information for TN Attorneys](#)

 [April 2016 OTJ Service Report](#)

Printed: October 6, 2022

<http://www.tals.org/abafreelegalanswers>

©Tennessee Alliance for Legal Services