



PLAIN LANGUAGE LEGAL INFORMATION WEBSITE

Phase 1 Summary Report

Introduction

The Northern Territory Community Legal Education Network (CLE Network) received funding from the Law Society Public Purpose Trust NT to develop a *plain language legal information website* for the Northern Territory. The website aims to enable Territorians to get simple, plain language information and tools¹ to uphold their legal rights by linking website users to existing online resources and connecting Territorians to service providers that can assist them.

This one-year project commenced in September 2015 and has three phases:

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|-------------------------|---|
| 1. Sep. 2015 – Jan 2016 | Review legal needs and plain language resources with stakeholders |
| 2. Feb. – June 2016 | Develop a draft website with web user experience design experts |
| 3. July – Aug. 2016 | Test the resource, adjust it then promote widely to users. |

More information on the project and its activities are in the project work plan (**Annex I**). This brief progress report will outline learning from Phase 1 about:

- The intended **users** of the website, and how we are working to understand their needs through consultations, and review of existing research on legal need;
- The type of **information** the website should provide to help users meet their needs;
- Insights into the **website** that will be developed; and
- **Recommendations** for future action.

The Users

The website aims to provide information that is accessible to vulnerable Territorians from diverse backgrounds living across the Northern Territory. These include:²

- i. Children and young people (up to 24 years);
- ii. Indigenous Australians;
- iii. Older people (over 65 years);
- iv. People experiencing, or at risk of, domestic and family violence;
- v. People experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness;
- vi. Advocates assisting people in custody and prisoners;
- vii. People residing in rural or remote areas;
- viii. People who are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds;
- ix. People with a disability or mental illness;
- x. People with low education levels; and
- xi. Single parents.

¹ The website will link to a range of other resources including the Northern Territory Law Handbook, but will not overwhelm people with excessive content held on the site.

² Points I – xi are sourced from the Council of Australian Governments, National Partnership Agreement on Legal Assistance Services, Schedule B, paragraph B3.



- xii. After consultations we have added “people with health problems, including drug and alcohol issues”.

To ensure the website is user-centred,³ the project has engaged with over 75 diverse stakeholders from legal and non-legal backgrounds across the Territory to help identify legal information needs, gaps, and ways to provide information to those who most need legal information and help and are unlikely to get it elsewhere. Specific inputs from each are outlined in **Annex II**. This first phase of consultation focused heavily on service providers who are likely to contribute to the website, use it themselves and promote it to others, out of recognition that many vulnerable people often use the support of others to help them identify legal problems and access legal information. In phase 2, we will seek to engage appropriately with community member users.

To clarify the legal needs of potential website users, this project has drawn on existing studies by the Law and Justice Foundation of New South Wales and James Cook University,⁴ and has surveyed people across the Territory. Survey results to date are found in **Annex III**. Some of the key gaps in plain language legal information for vulnerable Northern Territorians are:

- Domestic and family violence;
- Family law processes generally;
- Criminal matters, especially in relation to drugs and alcohol, driving;
- Tenancy issues;
- Consumer issues including contracts, debt, and scams; and
- General information on court and bail processes.

The Information

A key feature of the project and the website is promotion of the importance of plain language and the need for legal information available in the Northern Territory to adopt this form. Plain language meets the audience’s needs by communicating clear messages so that people can best find what they need, understand it and use it. This project is developing clear “plain language legal information guidelines”. These guidelines will be based on existing work in a number of jurisdictions⁵ and adapted to the Territory’s unique demography through consultations. Draft guidelines are set out in **Annex IV**. The guidelines will be used to guide the website and to develop “bite-size” information provided by the website to introduce the “snack” and “meal” size resources that the website will choose to link to for their plain language suitability. The guidelines will also assist organisations to develop future legal information resources appropriate to the Territory.

To date, over 420 existing web-based legal information resources have been documented in a database, set out in **Annex V**. The website will leverage existing online legal resources that meet plain language criteria, produced by organisations such as CAWLS, NAAJA, CAALAS, NTLAC and ARDS. However, many existing resources are less accessible to the target audience because they are too complicated, contain legal jargon, or are presented in hard to access formats (e.g. a brochure).

³ Co-designed by a team with diverse skills and views who research the whole experience, context needs and challenges for Territorians and involve users throughout the development (International Usability Standard, [ISO 13407](#)).

⁴ See the [Legal Australia-Wide Survey, Legal Need in the Northern Territory](#) and the [Collaborative Planning Resource – Service Planning](#)).

⁵ See, for example, the Victorian Legal Assistance Forum’s [Online Legal Information Guidelines](#).



The Website

The website development will take into account broad communication needs and the internet limitations of users. Users will be able to seek and find information using familiar search terms, icons, images and other features. Wherever possible a range of accessible media will be used including audio, multiple languages, written text, film, picture, story-based and easy-to-read tools. The project has been investigating internet coverage in the Territory and designing a website to suit current and future coverage and bandwidth, including NBN rollout, mobile broadband access and other factors impacting on Territorians use of the web. Considering sustainability of the website (see recommendation 4 below), the information on the website will be kept up to date by linking wherever possible to external experts' sites and using the shared expertise of the NT CLE Network.

To date, we have consulted with a number of web developers and user experience design experts and constructed a draft design brief (**Annex IV**). This will evolve further through meetings with designers and stakeholders. Current research suggests a long term, sustainable website requires an open source platform such as Word press, rather than working with web developers who develop and maintain an independent website, incurring ongoing future costs. We have experienced some challenges in locating suitable web developers in the Territory with skills in user experience design concepts, or working in open source platforms such as Word press using user-centred principles.

Next steps

We recommend the following next steps to progress the project:

1. Ongoing consultations with stakeholders across the Northern Territory in particular community based users and community-based service providers in urban, remote and regional communities, to continue to raise awareness and involve them in design and rollout of the website;
2. Further meetings with web and user experience design experts to identify the technical provider who best understands the project context to develop a user-centred website;
3. Designing sample scenarios and flow charts based on different ways people look for information/ask questions and continuing to test them with 1 and 2;
4. Developing a plan to sustain, keep up to date and extend the plain language website and its content through relations with key partners in government, legal and community sectors.
5. Developing a plan to roll out and train users of Plain language legal information website.

List of Annexes⁶:

Annex I – Work plan

Annex II – Stakeholder register

Annex III – Survey results

Annex IV – Draft plain language resource guidelines for the website

Annex V – Plain language resource database

Annex VI – Draft design brief

⁶ Available on request from Stephanie.Booker@ntlac.nt.gov.au)