

# Fundraising for Central New York Justice Alliance Legal HelpLine Telephone System

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## Our Project: Central New York Legal Helpline



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## The "Justice Alliance"

The Central New York Legal HelpLine is a joint project of the Legal Aid Society of Mid-New York (LASMNY), an LSC program, and Legal Services of Central New York (LSCNY), LASMNY's "twin" non-LSC program. LASMNY and LSCNY came together to form the Justice Alliance of Central New York.

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## Goals of Project:

- Raise \$260,000 to purchase voice over-IP telephone system, creating a centralized intake system linking eight offices.
- Increase quantity and quality of services for clients.

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## If we can do it, you can too!

Characteristics of our service area:

- Thirteen counties (12,803 square miles)
- One medium-sized city (Syracuse, pop. 147,306)
- Two small cities (Binghamton, pop. 47,380 and Utica, pop. 60,679)
- Numerous small towns/villages and rural areas in between

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## Obstacles we faced:

- Multiple small community foundations with small giving caps (\$5000-\$20,000 range)
- Tendency of foundations to fund projects only within a single county or several counties
- Sub-regions within new LSC-reconfigured service area that had not previously identified with one another or worked together

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As if that wasn't bad enough, we  
faced:

- Lack of understanding of technology and/or unwillingness to fund it
- Unwillingness of downstate foundations to fund upstate projects
- Lack of interest by large corporate and/or national foundations in rural service areas such as ours
- Lack of understanding on the part of foundations about what legal services is and how it meets community needs
- Struggling local bar with limited giving dollars

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Where we began: in disagreement  
and disappointment...

- Lack of support from statewide planning body
- Disagreement within LASMNY and LSCNY as to whether Project would be in programs' best interest
- Several failed proposals to national and local foundations

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Two years later, we have raised...

**\$225,262!!!!**

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## Necessity breeds invention...

With assistance from a supportive local community foundation, we developed a new strategy of requesting contributions to the overall project from local foundations *in proportion to the poverty populations in their respective service areas.*

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## Insider's View of our Strategy

Tip #1: Find a grantwriter with grant issues. If your program can't afford one, find someone within the program with writing talent and send him/her to grantwriting trainings. In our case, a LASMNY staff attorney who had some past experience writing grants ended up writing over ten grant proposals for our Project.

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## Support begins at home

Tip#2: Get board and staff support. Meet with the board and staff, hear their ideas and concerns, and make adjustments to your Project as needed. In our case, the Executive Directors of LASMNY and LSCNY, along with a board member, visited a program in Ohio which had already implemented a similar project.

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## Find your first ally

Tip#3: Make a close ally of the local foundation most likely to support your project. If you do not have any foundation contacts, canvas your board and staff; most likely, someone will. Meet with this foundation, bringing along anyone with personal contacts. Discuss your proposal, ask for constructive criticism, and follow it!

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## The “Domino Effect” Theory of Grantwriting

- Tip#4: Submit your proposal to the foundation most likely to fund it first, before attempting to submit others. Getting even one grant award will give you tremendous leverage when you submit your other proposals. As each award is made, your Project will gain respect and legitimacy.

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## The personal touch

Tip#5: Meet face-to-face with foundations if at all possible. Writing to a foundation cold rarely yields any results. A face-to-face meeting not only puts a human “face” on your project, but also gives a chance for the foundation to ask questions and give advice about how to prepare your proposal. Personal contacts among your board and/or staff should arrange and attend the meetings.

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## As all politics are local, so all funding is local

Tip#6: In your proposal, emphasize how local residents will benefit from the local investment. Describing the Project only in broad strokes will overwhelm foundation officers and make them concerned that the award money will not benefit their constituents. Provide a few examples in your narrative of how local people will be helped.

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## Focus on service

Tip #7: Focus on how your Project will improve services to clients, not on the technology or benefits to staff. Give projected numbers and sample client stories wherever possible. For our Project, we focused on the fact that a one-time investment would increase numbers of clients served dramatically for years to come.

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## Sell what sells...

Tip#8: Pay careful attention to foundation giving guidelines, priorities and grantmaking history in recent years. Emphasize the parts of your Project that meet the foundation's priorities. For example, a state bar foundation may be most interested in the implications for PAI. A community foundation, by contrast, will likely be more interested in how the Project meets basic human needs.

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## Never assume

Tip#9: Never assume that a funder knows what civil legal services is or why lawyers would be asking for money. Any funder not connected with the law and/or lawyers probably has no idea what you do. Always start out describing your organizational mission in basic terms, translating the “justice” language we so often use into “human service” language.

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### Examples:

We obtain court orders of protection for victims of domestic violence, *keeping them and their children safe from death and serious bodily harm.*

We represent clients in eviction court, *preventing homelessness.*

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## Turn the tables on collaboration: Use your “secret allies”

Tip #10: Once you’ve found a foundation ally, ask if he/she will speak to his/her contacts in other foundations. You may find yourself serving as the catalyst for cross-regional collaboration among foundations, with lasting benefits for all involved.

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## Not a “Flash in the Pan”

Tip#11: Don't give up in the face of rejection. Ask for feedback on your failed proposal and learn from it. Within two years, we had turned the statewide planning body completely around and had received an award from a foundation that had initially rejected us.

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## Other Tips:

- Make a brochure promoting your project (visuals are good tools, and lend credibility)
- Use LSC resources
- Take advantage of luck when it crosses your path!

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## The Final Analysis

Community Foundation of Herkimer & Oneida Counties: \$52,000  
Central New York Community Foundation: \$20,000  
New York Bar Foundation: \$10,000  
Northern New York Community Foundation: \$20,000  
Community Foundation of South Central New York: \$10,000  
Partner's Trust Bank: \$10,000  
Utica National Foundation: \$14,462  
TIG: \$52,900  
NYS Special Member Item: \$30,000  
Private Attorney Drive: \$5,900

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