

## HOTLINES MODELS: A QUICK COMPARISON OF PROS AND CONS<sup>1</sup>

There are several models of hotlines: stand-alone, single-office, multi-office, multi-program, and centralized intake.

**Stand-Alone.** A stand-alone hotline is not part of a full service program.

It can be useful where there are many legal service providers in a local area or state as it provides one place for people to call to get into the system.

It can take the intake and advice burden off of the other programs and make sure that clients are referred to the proper place without having to call around.

It can also fill in subject matter gaps in service, at least to the degree of advice and brief services.

Many full service programs also function as a stand-alone hotline in those areas for which they have no extended services; others provide full-service for a local area but may be a stand-alone hotline for a larger service area (i.e., mostly the senior statewide hotlines)

A stand-alone hotline runs the risk of not pulling on the braintrust of advocates with more in-depth knowledge.

Advice on these hotlines and quality control are top challenges to overcome. Additionally, integration of what a stand-alone hotline sees daily with the advocates representing clients must also be addressed to keep a conduit between representation and the trends/needs of the client community.

### **Single and Multi-Office Intake (or Centralized Intake Unit)**

This is the classic model where the intake unit handles eligibility screening, advice, referral, and possibly some brief services to unburden the full-service staff and allow them to concentrate on extended services.

It works best when the hotline advocate has the power to either make appointments for the full-service staff or at least make a tentative acceptance of the case subject to the full service staff's discretion.

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<sup>1</sup> Information located at <http://www.lsntap.org> in the LSTech Resource Center Tech Library section for Hotlines and Intake.

### **Multi-Program Intake Hotlines**

These hotlines perform intake, advice, and referral for more than one program.

They are similar to stand-alone hotlines in that they coordinate intake, advice, and referral for multiple programs, but do it in a more formal partnership with extended service programs, involving specific intake protocols, record keeping, and budgeting.

### **Some Centralized Eligibility Units**

Some programs say they have a CIU or a hotline because they have staff that receive telephone calls at certain times during the day and perform eligibility or other basic applications.

The applications are then reviewed by staff attorneys or at case review and a decision is then made whether to send the client an advice letter, make an advice call, or accept the case for representation.

The clients receive neither immediate advice nor find out quickly whether their case will be accepted.

## DEFINING THE SERVICES (AND MORE) OF YOUR HOTLINE

Your staffing, space requirements, telephone system needs, and other decisions will be affected by the services you want or expect the hotline to perform. Similarly, planning will require you to define other aspects of your hotline, such as clients served and geographic region served. See below for some examples and guidance on how to define **services of a hotline, clients served, geographic scope, and basic operations.**

**Services of a Hotline: What Will Your Hotline Actually Do?** Here are some examples of these services. Some hotlines do only a few of these; some try to do all of them, in conjunction with their legal aid programs or partners.

- Intake Screening: income eligibility, conflict checks, and general case acceptance
- Diagnosis of Legal Matter
- Fact-Specific Advice to All Callers or only Case-Eligible Callers
- Brief Service Centralization
- Pro Se Assistance
- Providing Written Client Information
- Directing Clients to Online or Written Resources
- Improved and Targeted Referrals to Agencies
- "Traffic" reports or systemic problem identification
- Developing Cases for Pro Bono Panel (hotline tells client how to prepare for meeting with lawyer)

### Clients Served

- People eligible by legal problem type
- People eligible by age
- People eligible by income
- Special needs. Will your hotline handle these types of callers? How?
  - Emergency cases that need extended service within 24 hours?
  - Seniors?
  - Limited English Proficient?
  - Some victims of domestic violence?
  - Specific legal matters that require specific handling?
  - Walk-ins?

Note: Many hotlines have grappled with how to handle special needs of clients. You can establish protocols among your hotline advocates to respond differently in these situations, depending on your goals. For example, there can be assigned staff to whom hotline staff can route emergency cases such as illegal lockouts. Many hotlines use AT&T Language Line to address diverse language needs; others hire bilingual speakers and use technology to route LEP clients to those advocates.

### **Geographic Scope**

There are special considerations if your hotline is serving a remote or rural area. In some areas, callers will not want to call an 800 number or number with a different prefix because it is considered foreign. This can be mitigated by specific call routing features that allows a local number to route to a centralized hotline.

Other considerations include ensuring local practices which are not revealed by obvious rule changes are effectively integrated into hotline support material and training.

The hotline staff will need to be acquainted with various court protocols and court forms from different areas, if applicable.

**Call Routing and Flow.** Call Routing and the Flow of Calls are important decisions for a hotline. There are many considerations.

[Use of Eligibility Screeners \(or Not\)](#)

[Handling Special Needs via the Hotline](#)

[Call-back Systems versus Immediate C&A](#)

### **Basic Operations**

Hours of Intake and Operations: Hotlines offer an opportunity to expand hours if resources allow, or to offer shifts after-hours to accommodate callers unable to call during the day. When you start your hotline, you can continue your intake hours and expand slowly.

Shifts and Hours. Shifts can be twice a day: 8:30 - 1 and 12 - 4:30. The shift may not always match the hotline hours. For example, you can have an intake shift from 12 - 4:30, but take the last calls at 4:00 to allow for advocates to finish typing applications and filling in notes. Alternately, you can operate the hotline in the morning and allow the afternoon for advocates to return calls, do limited services or assistance, or supervision of other hotline workers.