

How to Start a Program: Preliminary Considerations Worksheet

1. Finding your champions:

Identifying champions is pivotal for the success of a new program. These dedicated individuals or groups act as enthusiastic advocates, helping to rally support, navigate potential obstacles, and ensure sustained momentum for the program. Their commitment and influence can significantly amplify the program's impact, fostering a broader and more effective engagement with stakeholders.

List 3 individuals you feel could serve as champions for your project:

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

2. Connecting with other programs:

Establishing connections with existing programs can be extremely helpful when launching a new program. Collaborating with established efforts enables the sharing of resources, knowledge, and best practices, maximizing efficiency and avoiding unnecessary duplication of efforts. By building upon existing networks, new programs can tap into a broader pool of expertise and influence, fostering a more comprehensive and coordinated approach to proactively addressing legal issues.

List 3 programs you would like to connect with moving forward. (You may contact Emilie Cook at etcook2@emory.edu for help identifying similarly situated programs and contact information for cohort participants.)

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

3. Goal setting:

Goal setting plays a pivotal role in the creation of new preventive legal advocacy programs. Clearly defined goals provide a roadmap for program development, helping to focus efforts, allocate resources effectively, and measure success. In considering the program's goals, organizers may start by asking themselves whether they seek to avoid foster care at all costs, intend to support decisions by custodial parents, or are aiming to do something else altogether.

Note that a clear understanding of program goals can serve as a guidepost in identifying the target population, determining the services and scope of representation, defining the relationship with the agency, and partnering for referrals. Also note that program goals may shift with time. Effective preventive legal advocacy programs are shaped by the needs of their clients. We don't always understand those needs from the outset, and thus our understanding of what constitutes a successful outcome may change over time. The important thing is that we continue to reevaluate and redefine program goals as the work develops.

List 3 preliminary goals for your new program:

- A. _____
- B. _____
- C. _____

4. Identifying your target population:

Identifying the target population is a fundamental step when launching a new program. By working to define a specific target population, programs can ensure that resources and efforts are directed towards a specific subset of individuals most at risk for child welfare system involvement, thereby maximizing the program's relevance and impact. By understanding the unique challenges and barriers faced by the specific target population, the program can tailor its strategies and interventions to effectively address pressing legal needs and promote meaningful change.

Utilizing AFCARS (Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System) data can be helpful in pinpointing target populations. By analyzing the data, program organizers can identify trends, patterns, and demographic information that may enable a targeted approach to addressing those legal issues most likely to lead to system involvement.

That said, we know data is often misleading and there is no substitute for the wisdom of lived experience. When possible, we encourage programs to talk to individuals with lived experience as well as the legal community, direct care providers, and agency personnel to try and understand who is most likely to benefit from these upstream legal interventions.

What are your preliminary thoughts as to target population for your new program?

5. Building your team:

Multidisciplinary teams are a cornerstone of PLA and Pre-Petition programs and are considered vital to program success. Multidisciplinary teams bring together diverse expertise and different legal, social, and life experiences, enabling a holistic approach to addressing a family's legal and social issues. Collaboration among professionals from various backgrounds

impact, aligning with the intended goals. By setting boundaries and outlining the extent of legal support, the program can effectively manage expectations, optimize resource allocation, and provide consistent, high-quality assistance to the target population.

What services do you plan to offer?

- a) _____ b) _____
- c) _____ d) _____

What are your thoughts as to scope of representation? (Consider whether representation will be limited to upstream civil legal matters and/or CPS investigations, and whether your program will continue to represent clients through the course of a dependency case in the event a petition is filed in court.

- Upstream civil legal issues? yes no
- CPS Investigation defense? yes no
- Dependency case rep? yes no

8. Defining relationship with the agency:

Defining the program's relationship with the child welfare agency is vital. To a certain degree, the relationship between the agency and the new program may be dictated by the program's goals and the chosen service model. A collaborative partnership with the agency can ensure alignment of goals, promote information sharing, and facilitate a coordinated approach, ultimately enhancing the program's ability to advocate effectively for the rights and well-being of families involved in the child welfare system. That said, a collaborative partnership may not be feasible or even desirable at the outset, whether due to reluctance on the part of the agency, or a deliberate decision by the program to distance itself from the existing child welfare system.

Regardless of just how closely a new program intends on working with the agency, it is important to set expectations from the outset, particularly as it relates to issues of case file communication and confidentiality. Given the nature of early legal representation, it is likely that some member of the legal team will benefit from the ability to speak with case workers and others involved in a family's case. Working with the agency from the outset to establish parameters for those communications will allow for early identification of future pain points and more efficient representation.

What role, if any, will the agency play in your new program? _____

Do you anticipate partnering directly with the agency for referrals? yes no

Do you anticipate needing an MOU with the agency to address referrals and/or confidential communications about ongoing investigations and case history? yes no

9. Partnering for referrals:

Partnering with multiple referral sources offers numerous benefits for new programs. Collaborating with various sources, such as community organizations, faith-based groups, social service and healthcare providers, expands the program's reach and enhances its ability to identify individuals in need of legal services. These partnerships create a network that can facilitate early intervention, provide a seamless continuum of care, and ensure that individuals facing legal challenges receive comprehensive assistance within a broader context of holistic support.

Note here that mandatory reporters are often great targets for program referrals. While our programs never ask that mandatory reporters call the program *instead* of calling in a report, they do partner with mandatory reporters to ensure that where a concern is raised, the reporter understands the services the PLA program offers and the additional resources available to at-risk families.

List some possible referral sources you would like to target:

- A. _____
- B. _____
- C. _____
- D. _____

10. Building community trust:

Building community trust is paramount when establishing a new preventive legal advocacy program. A foundation of trust fosters credibility and credibility enhances program engagement, making community members more likely to seek assistance and participate in the program's activities. By nurturing trust through community outreach, transparent communication, a consistent presence, and genuine empathy, the program can effectively bridge gaps, address legal concerns, and create a lasting positive impact within the communities it serves.

Preventive legal advocacy programs are a promising tool in combating racial disparity in the child welfare system, but to impact the racial disparity, new programs must work to build a positive relationship with impacted communities. This requires deliberate action; the desire to build community trust should inform early decisions about things like where a new program will be housed, the hours it will be staffed, and how the program publicly defines its relationship with the agency.

Where will your program be housed? _____

What opportunities are there in your jurisdiction for conducting community outreach and establishing connections with at-risk populations?

- A. _____
- B. _____
- C. _____

11. Organizing a client resource network:

Organizing a client resource network is essential when establishing a new early advocacy program. The goal is to create a support infrastructure that connects clients with a range of essential services beyond legal assistance, such as counseling, housing, drug treatment, education, and access to basic necessities. By fostering collaboration among various service providers, the program can address the holistic needs of its clients, promoting overall well-being and improving the chances of long-term stability for clients.

List service providers in your jurisdiction that you could partner with for warm-handoffs and direct services for your clients:

- A. _____
- B. _____
- C. _____
- D. _____

12. Gathering Data:

Gathering data is of utmost importance when launching a new program. Data-driven insights provide a comprehensive understanding of the issues at hand, enabling informed decision-making and targeted interventions. By collecting and analyzing relevant data, the program can assess its effectiveness, refine strategies, and demonstrate tangible outcomes, ultimately enhancing credibility, securing resources, and sustaining program impact over time.

What questions do you have as to data collection?

What outcome measures would you like to track? (For information about developing outcome measures, see placohort.org > resource library > resources by topic > program development materials > outcome measures.)

- A. _____
- B. _____
- C. _____
- D. _____

13. Evaluating the program:

Formal evaluations are crucial for new programs as they provide objective assessments of program effectiveness, efficiency, and impact. Through rigorous evaluation processes,

programs can identify strengths, uncover areas for improvement, and make data-driven adjustments to enhance their services and outcomes. These evaluations not only validate the program's contributions but also inform stakeholders, funders, and policymakers, ensuring continued support and fostering a culture of continuous improvement in achieving the program's goals.

Who could you partner with for a comprehensive program evaluation? (Local universities are often a great resource for program evaluations.)

What other preliminary questions or concerns do you have with respect to program design and implementation?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____