



JUSTICE, INFRASTRUCTURE, AND ENVIRONMENT

An Evaluation of New Mexico's Online Intake System for Civil Legal Aid

Shamena Anwar, Mauri Matsuda, Cassia Spohn, Meagan Cahill

For more information on this publication, visit www.rand.org/t/RR2640

Published by the RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, Calif.

© Copyright 2018 RAND Corporation

RAND® is a registered trademark.

Limited Print and Electronic Distribution Rights

This document and trademark(s) contained herein are protected by law. This representation of RAND intellectual property is provided for noncommercial use only. Unauthorized posting of this publication online is prohibited. Permission is given to duplicate this document for personal use only, as long as it is unaltered and complete. Permission is required from RAND to reproduce, or reuse in another form, any of its research documents for commercial use. For information on reprint and linking permissions, please visit www.rand.org/pubs/permissions.

The RAND Corporation is a research organization that develops solutions to public policy challenges to help make communities throughout the world safer and more secure, healthier and more prosperous. RAND is nonprofit, nonpartisan, and committed to the public interest.

RAND's publications do not necessarily reflect the opinions of its research clients and sponsors.

Support RAND

Make a tax-deductible charitable contribution at
www.rand.org/giving/contribute

www.rand.org

Preface

This report evaluates New Mexico’s online intake system for civil legal aid and was conducted under the RAND Corporation’s Justice Innovation Center for Small, Rural, Tribal, and Border Criminal Justice Agencies. This report documents some of the implementation issues New Mexico faced and conducts quantitative analyses that examine the general usage level of the online intake system, as well as aspects related to the efficiency of the system. We also assess some of the barriers to using the online intake system, as well as the proportion of the individuals who use the online system who were unlikely to use civil legal aid services when only the prior intake methods were available. We expect these results to be helpful to other civil legal aid agencies interested in developing online intake systems.

RAND Justice Policy

The research reported here was conducted in the RAND Justice Policy Program, which spans both criminal and civil justice system issues with such topics as public safety, effective policing, police-community relations, drug policy and enforcement, corrections policy, use of technology in law enforcement, tort reform, catastrophe and mass-injury compensation, court resourcing, and insurance regulation. Program research is supported by government agencies, foundations, and the private sector.

RAND Justice, Infrastructure, and Environment (JIE) conducts research and analysis in civil and criminal justice, infrastructure development and financing, environmental policy, transportation planning and technology, immigration and border protection, public and occupational safety, energy policy, science and innovation policy, space, telecommunications, and trends and implications of artificial intelligence and other computational technologies.

Questions or comments about this report should be sent to the project leader, Shamena Anwar (Shamena_Anwar@rand.org). For more information about RAND Justice Policy, see www.rand.org/jie/justice-policy or contact the director at justice@rand.org.

Contents

| | |
|--|-----|
| Preface | iii |
| Figures | v |
| Tables..... | vi |
| Summary..... | vii |
| Acknowledgments | xiv |
| Abbreviations..... | xv |
| | |
| 1. Introduction | 1 |
| Overview | 1 |
| Background on Online Intake Systems for Civil Legal Aid Agencies | 3 |
| 2. The Triage and Intake Process at Baseline | 6 |
| The Triage Process | 7 |
| The Intake Process | 9 |
| Comparison of New Mexico's Intake System with Other States | 10 |
| Comparison of Law Access New Mexico and New Mexico Legal Aid Clients | 11 |
| 3. The Implementation of the Online Intake System | 14 |
| Development and Rollout of the Online Intake System..... | 14 |
| How New Mexico's Online Intake System Works..... | 15 |
| How Does New Mexico's System Compare to Optimal Online Intake Systems? | 18 |
| The Potential Impact of the Online Intake System | 19 |
| Implementation Issues with New Mexico's Online Intake System | 22 |
| Contemporaneous Issues | 24 |
| 4. Quantitative Data | 26 |
| Administrative Data | 26 |
| Survey Data | 28 |
| 5. The Impacts of New Mexico's Online Intake System | 31 |
| Overview of Evaluation Plan | 31 |
| Process Comparison Between the Online and Traditional Intake Methods..... | 32 |
| Usage of the Online Intake System | 44 |
| What Can Be Said About How the Online Intake System Affects Access to Justice..... | 51 |
| 6. Conclusion | 59 |
| Conclusions | 59 |
| Future Changes to the Online Intake System..... | 60 |
| Appendix A: Sample Restrictions and Matching Process for Administrative Data | 63 |
| Appendix B: Surveys | 65 |
| References..... | 70 |

Figures

| | |
|---|----|
| Figure 2.1. Map of New Mexico and NMLA Offices | 7 |
| Figure 3.1. Process Map of the Online Intake System | 16 |
| Figure 3.2. Logic Model of Potential Impact of Online Intake System | 19 |
| Figure 3.3. Issues with the Online Intake System | 24 |
| Figure 5.1. Flow Chart of Cases Triaged to LANM Through the Online Intake System | 33 |
| Figure 5.2. Flow Chart of Cases Triaged to NMLA Through the Online Intake System | 39 |
| Figure 5.3. Period When Online Intake Application Was Submitted | 53 |
| Figure 5.4. Did the Online Intake System Allow New Clients Access to Legal Aid? | 54 |
| Figure 5.5. LANM’s Average Monthly Number of Intakes and Cases with Services Received During 2015 and 2016 | 57 |

Tables

| | |
|--|-----|
| Table S.1. Implemented and Potential Future Changes of the Online Intake System | xii |
| Table 2.1. The Assignment Mechanism of Cases to LANM and NMLA | 8 |
| Table 2.2. A Comparison of LANM and NMLA Clients at Baseline | 12 |
| Table 4.1. Descriptive Statistics of Survey Respondents | 29 |
| Table 5.1. A Process Comparison of the Online and Traditional Intake Methods for LANM..... | 35 |
| Table 5.2. Regression of Unable to Be Reached Indicator on Applicant and Case Characteristics for LANM Online Intakes | 37 |
| Table 5.3. A Process Comparison of the Online and Traditional Intake Methods for NMLA..... | 41 |
| Table 5.4. Usage Rate of the Online Intake System | 45 |
| Table 5.5. Reasons Applicants Stated for Not Wanting to Use the Online Intake System | 48 |
| Table 5.6. Regression of Online Intake Indicator on Applicant and Case Characteristics | 50 |
| Table 6.1. Implemented and Potential Future Changes of the Online Intake System | 61 |

Summary

Introduction

Recent studies suggest that more than half of low- and middle-income households in the United States experience at least one civil legal problem, which can include issues with housing stability (eviction and foreclosure), obtaining government benefits, domestic violence, divorce, child custody, and debt (Sandefur and Smyth, 2011). Because civil legal aid is not an entitlement, the number of individuals seeking legal assistance who receive help is constrained by the available resources (Sandefur and Smyth, 2011). One way to enable the scarce existing resources to serve more individuals in need is to increase the overall efficiency of the process. In recent years, many agencies have pursued efficiency gains by developing online platforms to assist with client intake, where intake is defined as the process by which legal aid agencies collect information from the applicant to determine if they are eligible to receive services.

Generally, online intake systems for legal aid services allow individuals to enter relevant information online and will immediately screen out individuals who do not qualify. For individuals who are not screened out, their case will be triaged to the appropriate legal aid agency. The agency will then call the applicant back during regular business hours to complete the intake process. Note that this means these online intake systems do not result in an intake process that is solely online—rather, they are hybrid systems that allow individuals to initiate the intake process when it is convenient for them but require them to complete it through a phone call during regular business hours. This system is expected to increase intake efficiency for two key reasons: (1) online intake systems can easily screen out individuals who do not qualify for services, which can potentially reduce the time intake screeners spend on applicants that will not qualify, and (2) the information applicants supply online is supposed to be fed directly into the relevant legal aid agency’s case management system (CMS), which allows the intake screeners to quickly confirm the information with applicants over the phone rather than collecting it from scratch as they do with intakes that do not use the online system. To the extent large efficiency gains in the intake process are realized, agencies can divert some of their resources spent on intake to attorneys and will thus be able to increase the overall number of individuals who receive services.¹ Online intake systems can also induce more individuals to reach out to legal aid agencies for help. In particular, individuals who are time sensitive will likely find the new process more convenient—instead of dealing with potentially long phone waits and the

¹ Note that agencies do not necessarily have to divert the money saved on intake toward attorneys to increase access. For example, depending on their needs, they could use these resources to hire additional support staff or adopt additional technologies that could also allow for more individuals to have access to civil legal aid.

possibility of not getting through, applicants can now quickly enter their information online and receive a call back if they qualify.

While, theoretically, online intake systems seem to have many benefits, it is useful to understand the experiences of agencies that have implemented these systems to see if these benefits are realized, as well as whether there are unintended consequences that arise after implementation. To better assess the effects online intake systems might have in practice, this project conducts an evaluation of the online intake system for civil legal aid that New Mexico implemented in April 2016, using information collected from staff interviews conducted during a site visit, surveys administered to applicants, and administrative data collected from both the online intake system and the two largest legal aid providers in New Mexico: New Mexico Legal Aid (NMLA) and Law Access New Mexico (LANM). New Mexico's online intake system only triaged cases to NMLA and LANM.

This evaluation examines the effects of the online system for the first eight months after rollout (from May 2016 through December 2016) and thus is a relatively short-term evaluation that likely cannot identify the eventual effects of the online system. However, New Mexico was one of the earlier adopters of an online intake system for civil legal aid, and many other agencies across the United States are currently using this system as a starting point in developing their own systems. We expect our evaluation to be helpful to other legal aid agencies as the results identify many potential issues that agencies will need to think about as they develop their online intake system. This summary presents the central results of our study in four separate sections below and then concludes with the key takeaways.

Implementation Issues with New Mexico's Online Intake System

During our site visit in September 2016, which was five months after the online intake system was first rolled out in New Mexico, staff noted several issues with the existing version of the system that indicated that the intake process for applicants using the online system was not as efficient as it was originally envisioned to be. Below we list some of the key issues that staff highlighted:

- The applicant information from the online intake system did not feed directly into LANM and NMLA's CMS. This required intake screeners at these two agencies to manually copy and paste the applicant's information from the online intake system into their CMS, which took several minutes per applicant.² However, once this information was entered in the CMS, intake screeners noted the intake process was much faster than before.
- Once the case was triaged in the online system to either NMLA or LANM, continuing with the intake process required that these agencies reach these applicants by phone during business hours to complete the intake process. Staff noted it was difficult to reach

² In February 2017 this issue was resolved by adjusting the online intake system so that cases could directly feed into LANM and NMLA's CMS. However, this issue was present during the entire time of our evaluation (from May 2016 through December 2016).

many of these applicants, and thus a large fraction of the online applicants dropped out of the process before completing intake.

- NMLA staff noted that the online system triaged too many applicants to NMLA, which only takes domestic violence cases or individuals who require services immediately. Staff noted that the screening questions in the online intake system needed to be altered to ensure NMLA only received the specific subset of applicants they serve.
- While this online intake system was designed as an additional point of entry into the same legal aid assistance system, staff had the perception that some individuals thought this was an additional service provider. Thus, it is possible that some of the applicants who used the online intake system also called one of these agencies.
- The online intake system allowed individuals to skip entering information in certain fields; staff noted that the system should require individuals to answer the questions before they were allowed to move on to the next screen.
- Some individuals filled out the form for others, which made it difficult when the person who received the callback did not speak English. Staff noted that there needs to be an entry in the triage that allows applicants to indicate the language for the callback.
- Staff at NMLA and LANM were not able to modify the online intake system themselves. This meant that there was a considerable time lag between when issues were identified and when they could be addressed.

Process Comparison Between the Online and Traditional Intake Methods

Using administrative data on intakes, we conducted a process comparison that examined whether applicants who entered the intake process through the online system had similar process outcomes to individuals who entered the intake process through the traditional way (either by calling or walking in). We find that individuals who initiated their cases through the online system had their cases treated similarly to cases that initiated intake through traditional routes, although the online cases tended to take a few extra days to resolve.

Our results also highlighted one of the key inefficiencies with the online intake system—35 percent of the 772 online applicants triaged to LANM dropped out of the process because they could not be reached by the legal aid agency to complete intake, which wasted intake screener time.³ For these applicants, screeners not only had to copy and paste information from their online application into the agency’s CMS, but they also spent time calling these applicants back. This issue of having a high dropout rate likely occurred because this online intake system is not truly online—rather, it is a hybrid system that allows individuals to initiate the intake process when it is convenient for them but requires them to complete it through a phone call during regular business hours. Because we were not able to collect data on the total number of

³ We could not generate this percentage for NMLA as they do not code why cases were withdrawn (i.e., whether it is because the applicant could not be contacted or because the applicant declined to continue). Further, NMLA only had 70 cases that originated through the online system during this period, which makes it difficult to draw conclusions with this small sample.

hours spent on intake before and after adoption of the online system, we cannot evaluate the precise impact of the online system on intake efficiency. However, the fact that a large fraction of individuals dropped out and that online applications had to be copied and pasted into the agency's CMS implies that the online intake system may not have led to an increase in intake efficiency during the eight-month period after rollout that we evaluated.

Usage of the Online Intake System

It is important to measure the extent to which the online intake system is used, as the only way efficiency gains in the intake process can significantly reduce staff hours devoted to intake is if a reasonable fraction of applicants use the online system. While New Mexico hopes that eventually two-thirds of applicants will use the online intake system, they purposefully did not widely advertise the online system during the first eight months after rollout as they wanted to ensure that the key issues that were identified with the system were addressed first. Thus, during our evaluation period, the usage of the online system was lower than it is likely to be in the future.

We find that between May and December 2016, 13 percent of all 5,992 intakes that were conducted by LANM came through the online system, while for NMLA only 2 percent of their 2,983 intakes came through the online system. While we cannot definitively conclude why the usage rate of the online system for NMLA clients is lower, it is likely due in part to intrinsic differences between NMLA and LANM clients. Specifically, NMLA clients are more likely to live outside of the urban hubs of the state, and they are more likely to need immediate services. LANM decided not to take family law cases through the online system during most of our evaluation period, which forced usage of the online system to be lower than it otherwise would have been.

Our survey given to applicants who accessed legal aid through the traditional routes (either by directly calling or walking in) indicated that one of the biggest barriers to using the online system was simply that applicants were not aware of it. Out of the 100 survey respondents who answered all relevant questions, 40 percent said they would have used the online intake option had they known about it, which indicates that wider advertising of the online system should result in increased usage. Among the survey respondents who indicated they would not use the online system, the key reasons stated were due to issues with internet access, as well as the perception that the online intake system might be too difficult for them to use without help. It is important to note, however, that our survey had a relatively low number of respondents and had a response rate of 20 percent and thus may not be representative of all individuals that went through the traditional intake process.

How Does the Online System Affect Access to Justice?

There are two ways in which the online intake system might be expected to affect access to justice. First, the online system can allow individuals to access civil legal aid who would not

otherwise have had access because they cannot use the traditional intake methods—this implies a new type of client is receiving access. Note that the traditional benefits of an online system, which usually means clients can access the system at any time convenient to them, are not entirely relevant here. While clients can use the online system whenever they choose, they cannot complete intake and receive services unless they are available during regular business hours. Thus, while this system will likely attract individuals that are time sensitive, it is not a viable outlet for those who are not available for a phone call during regular business hours. Our survey given to applicants using the online intake system indicates that between 7.6 percent and 13.3 percent of the respondents are a new type of applicant who would not have been able to access legal aid without this online intake option. However, the low sample size of the survey (there were 105 respondents that answered all relevant questions) indicates there is a wide margin of error surrounding this estimate. Further, because the response rate for this survey was only 6 percent, one needs to be cautious about generalizing these results to all users of the online intake system.

The second way in which the online intake system might be expected to affect access to justice is that if legal aid agencies experience substantial increases in intake efficiency, they can reduce the number of staff hours devoted to intake and divert some of these resources toward attorney hours. This would allow for the agency to serve a higher number of individuals than before. During the first eight months after rollout, there were key inefficiencies in the online system that had not been resolved (identified above). Our results suggest that the legal aid agencies likely did not see any real improvement in efficiency during this period, and they also did not make any staffing changes due to perceived efficiency improvements. It is thus unrealistic to expect to see any real change in the number of individuals whom these legal aid agencies can serve in response to the online intake system. Due to consistent staff declines at the legal aid agencies from 2015 through 2016, we are unfortunately unable to identify how the number of individuals receiving services changed in response to the implementation of the online intake system. Thus, while we do not expect to see a change, we cannot empirically determine what actually happened.

Conclusions

Our evaluation of New Mexico’s online intake system examines a relatively short eight-month period after implementation, and thus it is not surprising that many of the key goals (which are more long-term) were not achieved during this time window. In particular, usage of the online system was relatively low, efficiency gains in the intake process were not yet realized, and thus there was no real way for agencies to increase the number of people receiving services.

However, it is possible that these goals can be achieved as the system matures. Both NMLA and LANM are aware of the inefficiencies of the online system and are working on addressing them. The first column of Table S.1 summarizes the key changes agencies made to the online intake system after our evaluation period was over, as well as other potential changes agency

Table S.1. Implemented and Potential Future Changes of the Online Intake System

| Implemented Changes | Purpose of Change |
|---|---|
| The online system was altered so that the information applicants entered online fed directly into the agency's CMS. | Improve efficiency of the online intake process, as intake workers no longer had to copy and paste information from the online system into the agency's CMS. |
| LANM altered their callback procedure for online intakes such that an attorney called the applicant back and both completed intake and provided services on the same call (as opposed to LANM having both the intake worker and the attorney make two separate calls to the applicant). | Improve efficiency of the online intake process by reducing the number of online applicants that drop out of the process because they cannot be reached. |
| LANM now allows all case types (including family law cases) to use the online intake system. | Increase usage of the online intake system. |
| Potential Future Changes | Purpose of Change |
| The online system should make clear up front that the system is an online-phone hybrid system and will require the applicant to be available during normal business hours to complete intake and receive services. | Improve efficiency of the online intake process by reducing the number of online applicants that drop out of the process because they cannot be reached. |
| The online system should request that applicants provide several time windows during which they would be available to receive a callback. | Improve efficiency of the online intake process by reducing the number of online applicants that drop out of the process because they cannot be reached. |
| The online system should require individuals to complete certain fields in the online form before they can move on to the next field. | Improve efficiency of the online intake process by ensuring the applicant's case ends up at the right agency and allowing the call completing the intake process to be faster (as more fields required for intake will already be completed). |
| The online system should alter the way it triages cases to LANM versus NMLA, as too many cases that were more appropriate for LANM were triaged by the system to NMLA. | Improve efficiency of the online intake process by reducing the need for NMLA to conduct an initial prescreen phone call with online applicants to ensure NMLA was the appropriate agency for their case. |
| The online system should ask applicants what language they would like a callback in. | Improve efficiency of the online intake process by reducing the number of instances in which the intake worker that calls the applicant back does not speak the same language as them. |
| The online intake option should be more widely advertised. | Increase usage of the online intake system. |
| The online intake system should be made available in Spanish. | Increase usage of the online intake system. |

staff recommended be implemented at some point in the near future. The second column notes what impact each specific change might have.

Shortly after our evaluation period ended, the online system was altered so that the information applicants entered fed directly into the agency's CMS, which should significantly improve efficiency. LANM also altered their callback procedure for online applicants such that an attorney would directly call the applicant back after their online application was received. The attorney now completes intake and provides services on the same call, with the hope that reducing the number of phone calls applicants receive from two to one will reduce the number of

applicants who drop out. Other potential improvements to the online system that might reduce the rate at which applicants drop out include having applicants select a time window when they can most easily receive a callback. The online system should also make it clear to applicants before they even begin the online session that they must be available during regular business hours to complete the process. Once these efficiency issues are addressed, New Mexico can work to increase usage of the tool by more widely advertising it, as well as creating a Spanish-language version.

While it is logical that the changes (both potential and already implemented) listed in Table S.1 might lead to increased efficiency and usage of the online intake system, it is important to note that there is no empirical evidence to support this yet. Due to the recentness of some of the changes, as well as the fact that most of the changes suggested have not yet been implemented, it is not possible at this point to understand what the effects of these changes will eventually be. This suggests that future evaluations of online intake systems should be longer-term, so they can evaluate what the effects of these systems are once tweaks of the online system are made. Regardless, we think the general list of problems identified in this study and the potential solutions listed in Table S.1 are important issues other legal aid agencies implementing online intake systems will need to consider when they are developing their online platform.

Finally, the fact that so many individuals who accessed the online intake system subsequently dropped out indicates there is likely a reasonable fraction of the population that cannot access civil legal aid services during regular business hours. This online intake system is really a hybrid of an online and traditional call-in/walk-in system. This suggests that there is a demand for a fully online civil legal aid service or for agencies to complete intake and provide services outside of regular business hours.

Acknowledgments

We are extremely grateful to Ed Marks, the director of New Mexico Legal Aid, for his assistance throughout the project. We would also like to thank Carol Garner, Sandra Gomez, John Tull, and the staff at New Mexico Legal Aid and Law Access New Mexico that participated in interviews for this project.

Our quality assurance reviewers, Samuel Peterson of RAND and James W. Meeker, professor emeritus at the University of California, Irvine, made invaluable contributions to the clarity and comprehensiveness of this report. We thank them for making the time to provide such perceptive reviews.

The report was made possible through a grant from the National Institute of Justice.

Abbreviations

| | |
|-------|---|
| CLEAR | Coordinated Legal Education Advice and Referral |
| CMS | case management system |
| FTE | full-time equivalent |
| LANM | Law Access New Mexico |
| LAWO | Legal Aid of Western Ohio |
| LSC | Legal Services Corporation |
| NMLA | New Mexico Legal Aid |
| RUCA | rural urban commuting area |
| TIG | Technology Initiative Grant |

1. Introduction

Overview

Recent studies suggest that more than half of low- and middle-income households in the United States experience at least one civil legal problem, which can include issues with housing stability (eviction and foreclosure), obtaining government benefits, domestic violence, divorce, child custody, and debt (Sandefur and Smyth, 2011). While low-income individuals facing serious civil legal issues are not entitled to legal assistance, there are a variety of agencies and services that exist to provide civil legal assistance, which is defined as free legal advice and representation to qualifying (low-income) individuals. These service providers include staffed civil legal aid offices, telephone hotlines delivering legal advice, organized civil pro bono programs, and law school clinics (Sandefur and Smyth, 2011). Service providers typically receive funding to provide legal aid services. The Legal Services Corporation (LSC) is the central national funder of civil legal aid.

Because civil legal aid is not an entitlement to eligible populations, the number of individuals seeking legal assistance who receive help is constrained by the available resources (Sandefur and Smyth, 2011). LSC estimates that no more than 20 percent of low-income individuals with civil legal needs are able to get assistance (Cabral et al., 2012). While other studies have disputed the sheer magnitude of this number (Sandefur, 2015), most legal aid providers agree that their services are heavily oversubscribed, with many more eligible people wishing to use them than can be served with existing resources (Sandefur, 2015).

Recognizing that one way to enable the scarce existing resources to serve more individuals in need is to increase the overall efficiency of the process by which individuals interact with legal aid agencies, many agencies have in recent years pursued efficiency gains by developing online platforms to assist with client intake. Intake, which is defined as the process by which legal aid agencies collect information from applicants to determine if they are eligible to receive services, has traditionally been done by having individuals calling or walking in to an office and having the intake worker collect their information. As will be discussed in more detail in the next section, conducting intake online allows the legal aid agency to partially automate the intake process, thus potentially saving the agency significant resources traditionally spent on intake that can be used elsewhere. However, while, theoretically, online intake methods should increase efficiency, due to implementation issues and the potential for unintended consequences, it is largely an empirical question as to the extent to which these gains are realized.

To better assess the extent to which online intake methods can increase process efficiency and may thus eventually be able to increase the number of civil legal aid recipients, this project evaluates New Mexico's implementation of an online intake system for civil legal aid, which

was launched in April 2016. This system allowed New Mexico's two largest legal aid agencies, Law Access New Mexico (LANM) and New Mexico Legal Aid (NMLA), which serve the majority of legal aid applicants in New Mexico, to conduct intakes online as well as through traditional call-in or walk-in methods. Data were collected from three sources: (1) staff interviews were conducted with agency directors and intake staff at the two legal aid agencies involved five months after the online intake system was implemented; (2) administrative data were collected on all of LANM's and NMLA's online and traditional intakes between April 2015 and December 2016; and (3) surveys were administered to both individuals using the online intake method and the traditional intake method to better assess both the barriers to using the online tool and the extent to which online users were unlikely to use the traditional intake methods.

We use the data collected to conduct a variety of analyses designed to assess the impact of the online intake system during the first eight months after it was rolled out (from May 2016 through December 2016). Staff interview data is used to document how New Mexico's online intake process differed from its traditional intake methods, as well as to document the issues with implementation that hampered efficiency gains in the short term. Administrative data are used to conduct several quantitative analyses that examine the extent to which the key desired outputs of the online intake system were (or were not) realized—these analyses include identifying the overall usage level of the online system, as well as examining the extent of several of the process inefficiencies in the online system that staff described. We then use the survey data to identify the barriers to using the online intake system, as well as identify the extent to which an online intake process allows new users access to civil legal assistance who likely would not have applied when only the traditional intake methods were available. Because our evaluation examines the impact of the online intake system for the first eight months after rollout, realistically this time frame is too early to expect to see any large changes in the number of individuals who receive legal aid services. Further, due to contemporaneous staff declines that occurred both before and after the online system was adopted, we are unable to make any conclusions regarding even the short-term impact of the online system on the number of individuals receiving service. For completeness, we do present results that show how the number of intakes per month and the number of applicants that receive services per month at one of the main legal aid agencies changed over the period from April 2015 through December 2016. However, as will be discussed, the trends identified are likely to mainly reflect the staff declines occurring over this period.

New Mexico is one of the earlier adopters of an online intake system for civil legal aid. Many other legal aid agencies across the United States are currently using this system as a starting point in developing their own system. We thus expect these results to be helpful to other legal aid agencies as they identify many potential issues that agencies will need to think about as they develop their online intake system.

The remainder of this chapter provides a more detailed discussion on the potential benefits of an online intake system for legal aid and then summarizes the experiences of other jurisdictions that have previously adopted these online systems. Chapter 2 discusses the triage and intake process for civil legal aid in New Mexico before the online intake system was adopted, while Chapter 3 discusses how the online system works, as well as what staff noted were the key implementation issues with the system. Chapter 4 describes the quantitative data used, Chapter 5 presents the results from our evaluation, and Chapter 6 concludes.

Background on Online Intake Systems for Civil Legal Aid Agencies

In 2011, just 22 percent of states had at least one legal aid agency that used a web interface to assist with client intake (Sandefur and Smyth, 2011). In recent years an increasing number of organizations have been developing online intake capabilities due to the potential efficiency gains that come with partially automating the intake process. This transition to online intake systems has been further supported by the LSC, which launched the Technology Initiative Grant (TIG) program in 2000 to provide funds to legal aid agencies that use technology to transform service delivery to more effectively meet the needs of low-income individuals. Many of the agencies that have implemented online intake systems in recent years have done so with funding from the TIG program. Below we describe in more detail the theoretical potential for the efficiency gains online intake systems provide and then detail the experiences of several agencies that received TIG funding to implement an online intake system.

While the exact procedure varies by agency, online intake systems typically require individuals to enter information online concerning both their legal issue and their income level. For individuals who may qualify for services, their cases are automatically triaged to the relevant legal aid agency, which will call the applicant back to complete the intake process during regular business hours. Note that this means these online intake systems do not result in an intake process that is solely online—rather, they are hybrid systems that allow individuals to initiate the intake process when it is convenient for them but require them to complete intake through a phone call during regular business hours.¹ This method of online intake can be more efficient than traditional methods (i.e., walk-in or call-in) for agencies for several reasons. First, online intake methods can easily screen out individuals who do not qualify for services. This can potentially reduce the portion of intake hours that are spent on litigants who are over the income threshold (or who have an issue outside the range the agency handles) and that they therefore cannot help; instead these intake hours can primarily focus on working with individuals who are eligible to receive help. Second, for individuals who may qualify for services, the information they enter online can automatically be transferred into the agency’s case management system (CMS). This makes the remaining intake process much faster, as intake screeners are mainly

¹ This is typically because it is relatively difficult to conduct accurate income screens online, and thus legal aid agencies typically like to complete this part of the process over the phone.

confirming the entered information rather than collecting all this information for the first time. Both mechanisms suggest that online intake should allow intake screeners to conduct more intakes in a given hour of screening time and thus reach more individuals in need of assistance. Online intake systems can also induce more individuals to reach out to legal aid agencies for help. In particular, individuals who are time-sensitive will likely find the new process more convenient—instead of dealing with potentially long phone waits and the possibility of not getting through to an intake screener, they can now quickly enter their information online and receive a callback if they qualify.² Importantly, online intake is being presented as an additional option for intake—applicants can still use the call-in or walk-in method if they are more comfortable with that.

While, theoretically, online intake systems seem to have many benefits, it is useful to understand the experiences of agencies that have implemented these systems to see if these benefits are realized. In 2012 the state of Washington’s intake and referral hotline (termed CLEAR, for Coordinated Legal Education Advice and Referral) used TIG funding to implement an online intake system that focused on two high-priority issues—housing and benefits. All individuals who used the online intake system who qualified for assistance and had either a housing or benefits issue received a callback from CLEAR; individuals who qualified but had an issue outside of housing and benefits were told they had to call CLEAR themselves, although their information was transferred to CLEAR’s CMS for a faster intake process when they called. CLEAR considered their online system a success, as it increased the number of preferred cases they handled (benefits and housing) by 23 percent and reduced the number of ineligible applicants calling in (Northwest Justice Project, 2012). Further, the majority of screeners reported a faster intake screening process.

In 2009, Legal Aid of Western Ohio (LAWO) used TIG funding to update their online intake process. Note that this agency already had an existing online intake process that accounted for one-third of all intakes. TIG funding was used to overhaul their online intake web interface such that it was more user-friendly and to have the online information collected from individuals feed directly into their CMS, as before they had to copy and paste this information in. LAWO estimated that the increased efficiency of having the online application feed directly into the CMS resulted in a time savings equivalent of 1.0–1.5 intake full-time equivalents (FTE) (Vaughn, 2010).

Minnesota’s experience with online intake provides an example of how implementation issues can lead to inefficiencies. A recent report that summarized the civil legal aid intake infrastructure in Minnesota noted that while a majority of the legal aid organizations in the state did allow online intakes, the general perception by legal aid staff was that it had no real impact

² Note that we define a time-sensitive individual as one that does not want to spend a lot of time waiting (on the phone) to speak to an intake worker, especially when there is a chance they will not qualify. We are not referring to an individual with a time-sensitive legal issue, which would mean they need services immediately.

on intake efficiency (Tull, 2017). This was caused by the fact that, for many of these agencies, the applicant's online information did not directly feed into the agency's CMS, and thus this information had to be collected again when individuals called in.

Civil legal aid organizations that are newly implementing online intake systems will often look to the experiences of other agencies when designing their system. For example, LAWO modeled their system on an online intake system that was implemented in Iowa (Vaughn, 2010). New Mexico, whose online intake system implementation is the focus of this report, first reviewed the online triage and intake systems in place in Illinois, Massachusetts, Ohio, Iowa, and New York City before developing their system (Tull, 2016). Further, other jurisdictions are now modeling their system on New Mexico's recently implemented system. These jurisdictions include the state of Oklahoma and Clay County, Florida. Because the design and implementation experiences of early online intake adopters, such as New Mexico, have the potential to seriously affect how future agencies design their systems, it is important to conduct an in-depth evaluation of these online systems to better ensure that the issues these jurisdictions faced are not repeated. Agencies that received TIG funding to implement their systems are required to submit final reports on the success of their project. While these reports are extremely useful at flagging major implementation issues, they tend to be conducted too soon after implementation and often are not able to go into detail regarding the extent of process inefficiencies, whether these online systems reach new types of applicants, and what the key barriers are for applicants in using the online system. We thus feel our in-depth study of New Mexico's online intake system will add to this literature and will be especially useful for organizations planning to adopt an online intake system.

2. The Triage and Intake Process at Baseline

To understand the impact New Mexico’s new online intake system can potentially have, it is important to first detail how the triage and intake process for free legal aid worked in New Mexico before the online intake system was implemented. NMLA and LANM are responsible for conducting all client intakes in the state and provide the majority of free civil legal aid services; the online intake system provides direct referrals to only these two agencies. We thus focus our main attention in this section on explaining how the triage and intake process works within (and across) these two agencies.

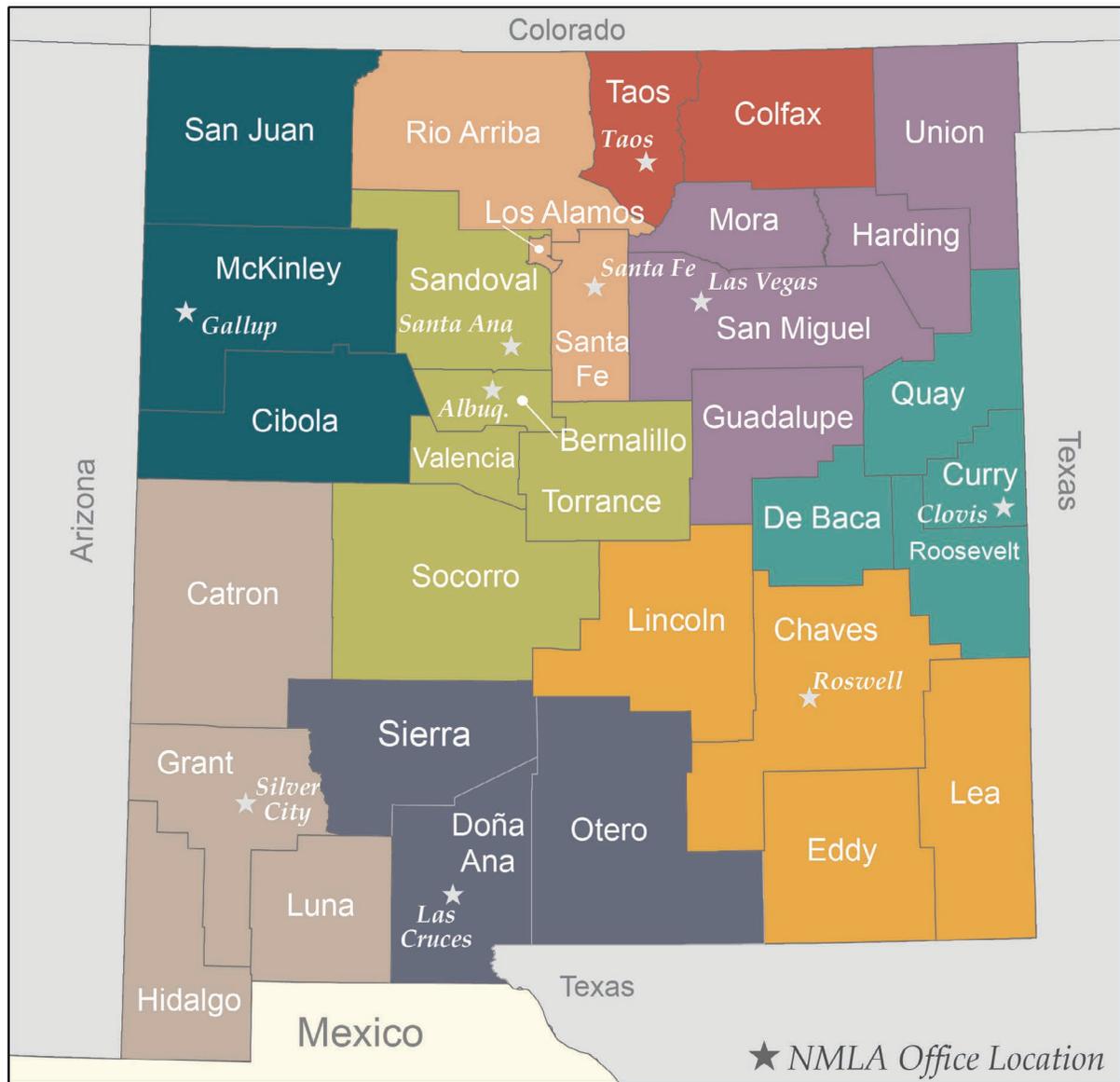
Most of the information presented in this chapter was obtained during a site visit we conducted in September 2016. Semistructured interviews were conducted with approximately 25 staff members at both NMLA and LANM. We talked with the agency directors, as well as the civil legal aid attorneys and staff members involved with intake, to better understand how the triage and intake process worked for applicants contacting agencies prior to the implementation of the online intake system. NMLA is composed of ten offices throughout the state; during our site visit to the Albuquerque office, we conducted interviews via Skype with attorneys and intake screeners at several of the other offices.¹

NMLA and LANM both provide free civil legal services to eligible low-income New Mexico residents, but they are set up to provide distinctly different services. LANM is a legal hotline and has one office located in Albuquerque and is reachable by potential clients only by phone. For individuals who qualify to receive representation, LANM only provides services over the phone. This includes providing advice and counsel, as well as providing such brief services as helping pro se litigants complete documents.

By contrast, NMLA has ten office locations spread throughout New Mexico, and clients can reach them by either calling or walking in to the nearest office. Figure 2.1 shows where these ten offices are located. NMLA provides a much wider range of services than LANM, which includes advice and brief services, as well as full representation in some cases in civil court. In general, LANM can advise on a much wider range of civil legal issues than NMLA can, but LANM is much more restricted in the range of services they can provide as compared to NMLA. Around the time in which the online intake system was implemented, LANM had approximately 16 staff members, while NMLA had approximately 65 staff members.

¹ We conducted our site visit together with John Tull, who authored the evaluation of the TIG grant that provided funding for New Mexico’s online intake system (Tull, 2016). Our research team conducted interviews jointly with the TIG evaluator, and we shared our notes and observations from the site visit with each other.

Figure 2.1. Map of New Mexico and NMLA Offices



The Triage Process

LANM and NMLA are set up to conduct all intakes for individuals in need of civil legal assistance in New Mexico.² The second column of Table 2.1 shows how it is intended for cases to be triaged to the two agencies, where we define triage as how an applicant is initially directed

² There are a few other small legal aid agencies that serve a very narrow range of issues. While cases that eventually receive services from these boutique agencies are supposed to be initially triaged to LANM for intake, it sometimes happens that individuals directly contact these other agencies and go through intake with them. Thus, while all intakes should technically be conducted by LANM and NMLA, there are some instances where this does not happen.

Table 2.1. The Assignment Mechanism of Cases to LANM and NMLA

| Case Type | Triaged To | Intake Conducted By | Services Provided By |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Domestic violence and emergency cases | NMLA | NMLA | NMLA |
| All other cases | LANM | LANM | LANM, NMLA |

to an organization. This means that, regardless of which agency the applicant initially contacts, the applicant is supposed to be directed to the agency as shown in Table 2.1.³ Note that triage is distinct from intake, which is the process by which information from the applicant is collected and entered in the CMS to determine if they are eligible to receive services. (The intake process will be discussed in detail in the next section.)

The agency an applicant is triaged to depends on the type of case they have. In general, any case that involves domestic violence or is deemed an emergency (e.g., there is an eviction hearing in two days) will be triaged to NMLA. Cases for which the applicant cannot communicate well over the phone (e.g., they have a cognitive disability) also tend to be triaged to NMLA. NMLA will conduct the intake on all of these cases and will provide services to these individuals if they are eligible.

All other cases are supposed to be triaged to LANM for intake. Note that even if it is known that a case will eventually require representation and will thus need NMLA services, if it is not an emergency or domestic violence case, the applicant is supposed to be directed to LANM for intake. Once the applicant goes through intake and qualifies for services, LANM can refer the case back to NMLA for services, or they can provide services (i.e., legal advice) themselves.⁴ Thus, with the exception of domestic violence and emergency cases, LANM is set up to be the centralized point of intake for civil legal assistance in New Mexico. This information is summarized in Table 2.1.

It is sometimes unclear to applicants that NMLA and LANM are part of the same system, and thus they may try to contact both agencies simultaneously to increase the chances they receive legal assistance. For privacy reasons NMLA and LANM cannot share intake data, so these agencies cannot identify individuals who are applying to both agencies simultaneously. The triage system outlined in Table 2.1 is specifically set up such that a particular case type should only be triaged to one agency, which should minimize the number of instances in which an applicant goes through intake with both agencies simultaneously.

While Table 2.1 outlines the general triage policy that is to be followed, our discussions with intake workers at the various NMLA offices indicated there is office-level variation with respect

³ In practice, this means that if an applicant calls the wrong agency, they will be told to call the other agency.

⁴ If LANM refers a case, they can directly transfer the applicant’s intake information to the new agency, so the applicant will not need to go through the intake process again.

to how closely this triage rule tends to be adhered to, although all offices we spoke with were aware of the formal policy and most indicated they generally followed the policy. Some of the NMLA offices that served more outlying areas noted that if an individual physically came in to their office, which often requires long travel times in some of these more rural communities, the office did not want to just refer them elsewhere and so would sometimes conduct the intake and service these cases themselves rather than transfer them to LANM. Further, many of these offices serving the outer areas of the state used to be their own separate entities, so they are still getting used to the idea of a more centralized intake system.⁵

The Intake Process

Once individuals are triaged to either NMLA or LANM, intake workers at those respective agencies will begin the screening process to determine if individuals qualify for services. Intake workers will first ask the applicant general information about the case and will turn away cases for the following reasons: (1) the case is a criminal matter; (2) the applicant is a third party (i.e., they are applying on behalf of someone else); (3) the case is outside the priorities of NMLA and LANM—this always includes civil rights and tort cases and sometimes includes other topics they cannot take due to temporary lack of staff; and (4) the individuals do not live in New Mexico. This is what we define as a prescreening stage, as applicants who are screened out at this stage do not have their information entered into the agency’s CMS, and there are no records kept regarding them. All applicants who do not get screened out at this stage move on to what we define as the formal intake process.

Formal intake involves intake screeners collecting information on the applicant’s income level, location of residence, precise civil legal problem, the relevant parties involved in the case, and the applicant’s demographics, including race, gender, age, and ethnicity. This information is entered in the agencies’ CMS. Both NMLA and LANM use Pika as their CMS. Note that because NMLA receives federal funding through the LSC, they can only serve U.S. citizens. As LANM does not receive federal funds, they do not ask about the citizenship status of applicants.

Once this information is collected, the agency will determine whether to accept the case, reject the case, or refer it elsewhere. At this stage, there are two main reasons why applicants have their cases rejected: (1) they do not have an income that is low enough to qualify,⁶ or (2) there is a conflict of interest, which can occur, for example, if the agency has previously

⁵ It was not until 2003 that all ten offices were formally part of NMLA.

⁶ The income eligibility requirements depend on both the agency and case type. NMLA is funded by LSC, and thus the general income requirement is that applicants must have an annual income level that is at or below 125 percent of the federal poverty guidelines, although there are exceptions for domestic violence cases, veterans, and special factors (such as child care expenses or unpaid debt). LANM provides services for individuals with an annual income that is at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty guidelines, although there are exceptions for kinship guardianship and landlord/tenant cases in Albuquerque.

represented another party in the current case. There are no income limits for domestic violence victims or veterans, so income information does not need to be collected for these groups.

After completing intake, agencies can also decide to refer the case to another agency if they feel that agency may be better able to serve the needs of the applicant. For example, nonemergency cases that require representation are supposed to have their intake completed by LANM, but these cases are likely to be referred back to NMLA after intake because only NMLA can provide representation. In addition to referrals between the two main agencies, both agencies can refer cases to smaller legal aid agencies that are part of the same system but serve a much narrower range of customer needs. These agencies include Pegasus Legal Services for Children, Senior Citizens Law Office, Disability Rights New Mexico, and the Southwest Women’s Law Center. When a case is referred, the agency that completed intake can send this information to the new agency if the applicant consents to having the information transferred. Thus, applicants who have their cases formally referred to another agency do not need to go through the intake process again.

NMLA office hours for intake are Monday through Friday 8:30 a.m.–12:00 p.m. and 1:00 p.m.–5:00 p.m. LANM office hours for intake are Monday through Friday 8:45 a.m.–11:45 a.m. and 12:30 p.m.–3:45 p.m. Individuals are placed on hold until an intake worker is available to speak with them. Individuals who call in to LANM will automatically have their call dropped if they are waiting to get through (i.e., on hold) for more than 15 minutes. Between April 2015 and March 2016 (corresponding to the one-year period before the online intake system was implemented), LANM received 26,692 calls during intake hours. They were able to answer 71 percent of these. Of the calls received, 2 percent were automatically dropped because the caller had still not gotten through after 15 minutes. For the remaining 27 percent of the calls, the caller hung up while they were on hold waiting to speak to an intake worker.⁷

Comparison of New Mexico’s Intake System with Other States

Before moving on, it is useful to understand how New Mexico’s intake system for civil legal aid compares to systems found in other states, as the ease of adoption and potential impact of an online intake system will likely depend on how coordinated the state’s baseline intake process is. According to Sandefur and Smyth (2011), almost half the states have a statewide intake system that serves the low-income population. While New Mexico does not technically have a statewide centralized intake system, where one agency conducts all intakes for the state and refers cases out to other providers, its system closely resembles these as each person in the state who needs assistance should be triaged to a distinct agency, and only two agencies conduct all of the intakes for the state. This system stands in contrast to other states that have sets of agencies that cluster together in networks (typically based on having the same funding source), and where applicants who call one agency will only be referred to other agencies in that cluster. These systems are more

⁷ These summary statistics were calculated from LANM call-volume data—these data are discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

diffuse and thus have many more agencies conducting intake. In general, it is much easier for states that have centralized intake systems to adopt new online intake processes, as only a limited set of agencies will need to adopt this technology. For states that have diffuse intake systems, implementing an online intake system will require many agencies to adopt this technology.

Comparison of Law Access New Mexico and New Mexico Legal Aid Clients

Table 2.2 presents summary statistics of the cases LANM and NMLA saw between April 1, 2015, and March 30, 2016, which corresponds to the one-year period before the online intake system was launched in April 2016.⁸ Unless otherwise noted, the statistics presented correspond to the proportion of cases within a given category at LANM and NMLA. The statistics presented in this table provide a baseline understanding of who the legal aid clients are, as well as the differences between LANM and NMLA clients. This information will be helpful going forward when we examine the impact the online intake system had at each of the agencies.⁹ During this period, 78 percent of NMLA intakes were conducted over the phone, and the remaining 22 percent were conducted in person with walk-in applicants.

The first row of Table 2.2 shows that LANM conducted more than twice the number of intakes that NMLA did over this one-year period prior to the adoption of the online intake system. The “Result” panel shows that LANM rejected 23.7 percent of the cases that went through the intake process with them, referred 4.8 percent of the cases to another agency (including NMLA), and provided services for 54.8 percent of the cases; the remaining 16.8 percent of cases were closed because the client withdrew. Note that “client withdrew” can either mean the client actively declined to continue with services or that the agency could not reach the client when they called back to provide services. The corresponding statistics for NMLA show that NMLA provided services for a higher fraction of the cases they conducted intake on and very rarely referred cases to another agency. For cases that received services, the median time it took for a case to close at NMLA was 52 days, while it was only 1 day at LANM. This is to be expected as NMLA provides more in-depth services than LANM.

The statistics presented in the remainder of Table 2.2 are only computed on the sample of cases where services were received. Because agencies tended not to collect as detailed data on applicants who did not receive services from them, we only have complete demographic data for the set of applicants who received services from that agency. The statistics in the “Applicant Characteristics” panel indicate that females and Hispanics make up a sizeable fraction of the client population at both agencies. While Native Americans also make up a large fraction of

⁸ This table was created using the administrative intake data we obtained from both LANM and NMLA—these data are discussed in detail in both Chapter 4 and Appendix A.

⁹ Note that, as will be discussed in Chapter 3, LANM did not accept family law cases through the online intake system for most of the period we will be evaluating. Family law cases fall into the categories Divorce/Separation/Annulment and Custody/Visitation listed in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2. A Comparison of LANM and NMLA Clients at Baseline

| | LANM | NMLA |
|---|--------|-------|
| Total intakes conducted | 11,310 | 4,927 |
| <i>Result</i> | | |
| Client withdrew | .168 | .124 |
| Case rejected | .237 | .157 |
| Case referred to another agency | .048 | .001 |
| Case received service | .548 | .718 |
| Median disposition time for serviced cases (days) | 1 | 52 |
| <i>Applicant characteristics</i> | | |
| Female | .674 | .743 |
| Age 24 or less | .103 | .109 |
| Age 25–54 | .662 | .661 |
| Age 55 plus | .235 | .230 |
| White | .321 | .237 |
| Black | .039 | .028 |
| Hispanic | .520 | .443 |
| Native American | .065 | .265 |
| Primary language English | .921 | .873 |
| Primary language Spanish | .079 | .080 |
| Primary language other | .001 | .047 |
| Disability | .383 | .263 |
| <i>Issue applicant sought help for</i> | | |
| Domestic abuse | .011 | .212 |
| Divorce/separation/annulment | .113 | .167 |
| Custody/visitation | .134 | .087 |
| Consumer finance | .110 | .079 |
| Housing | .393 | .213 |
| Public benefits | .049 | .126 |
| Other | .189 | .118 |
| <i>Location [county]</i> | | |
| Albuquerque/Santa Ana [Bernalillo, Sandoval, Torrance, Valencia, Socorro] | .600 | .446 |
| Clovis [Curry, Quay, Roosevelt, De Baca] | .022 | .009 |
| Gallup [McKinley, Cibola, San Juan] | .033 | .170 |
| Las Cruces [Dona Ana, Sierra, Otero] | .115 | .150 |
| Las Vegas [San Miguel, Guadalupe, Mora, Harding, Union] | .030 | .028 |
| Roswell [Chaves, Lincoln, Eddy, Lea] | .060 | .073 |
| Santa Fe [Santa Fe, Los Alamos, Rio Arriba] | .081 | .042 |
| Silver City [Grant, Luna, Hidalgo, Catron] | .034 | .039 |
| Taos [Taos, Colfax] | .026 | .032 |
| Urban | .819 | .720 |

NOTE: This table uses data on intakes conducted between April 2015 and March 2016. The bottom three panels only include the sample of cases for which the applicant received services.

NMLA clients, they are a relatively small fraction of the LANM client base.¹⁰ The majority of the clients served at both agencies cite English as their primary language, although roughly 8 percent of the clients at both agencies are primarily Spanish speakers. A significant fraction of both agencies' client bases have either a mental or physical disability.

The third panel of Table 2.2 shows that the civil legal issues for which applicants received assistance varied by agency. One-fifth of the cases NMLA handled were domestic abuse cases, while LANM effectively did not handle these at all. This is exactly as expected as the triage policy is for domestic abuse cases to be triaged to and handled by NMLA. Other case types that both agencies handled include such family issues as divorce/separation/annulment and custody/visitation; such consumer finance issues as repossessions; such housing issues as landlord/tenant disputes; and such public benefit issues as help with Medicaid or unemployment compensation. While all of the remaining case types were seen by both agencies, the composition and the nature of the case within a category will differ across the agencies.

The "Location" panel in Table 2.2 looks at the county groupings where applicants reside. The county groupings listed were devised based on the locations of the ten NMLA offices shown on the map presented in Figure 2.1. With the exception of the Albuquerque and Santa Ana offices, each of the other eight NMLA offices serves a specific set of counties, where all of the counties with the same color on the map are served by the same NMLA office. For example, the Las Cruces office serves individuals who live in Sierra, Dona Ana, and Otero Counties. The Albuquerque and Santa Ana offices serve overlapping counties, but the Santa Ana office is specialized to serve the Native American population; for simplicity, we coded this into one county grouping. To make applicant location comparisons with LANM, we used these same county groupings for LANM applicants, even though LANM only has one central office that individuals do not visit. For simplicity, we refer to the county grouping by the main city that resides in it (which corresponds to the NMLA office location). In general, the key difference is that a greater percentage of LANM's client base are from the larger cities of Albuquerque/Santa Ana and Santa Fe, whereas NMLA has a much larger fraction of its client base from Gallup, which also tends to serve more Native American populations. The 2010 Census (U.S. Census Bureau [2010], Table 8) indicates that 54 percent of New Mexicans live in the Albuquerque/Santa Ana and Santa Fe county groupings, while 68 percent of LANM clients and 49 percent of NMLA clients reside there. To understand which applicants lived in an urban area, we coded each zip code in New Mexico as either corresponding to an urban or rural area using Rural Urban Commuting Area (RUCA) data. The last line of Table 2.2 shows that a higher fraction of LANM clients live in zip codes that are classified as urban areas.¹¹

¹⁰ Staff noted that NMLA had more attorneys that were able to practice law in the Navajo or Zuni court system, which is one possible reason that Native Americans are more likely to receive services from NMLA than LANM.

¹¹ RUCA data were developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. There are various schemes users can select to code zip codes into rural or urban areas. We used the method that defined urban as all places that have 30 percent or more of their workers going to a defined Urbanized Area.

3. The Implementation of the Online Intake System

This chapter discusses the implementation of New Mexico’s Online Legal Aid Intake and Referral System, which we refer to as the online intake system.¹ This online intake system was designed to give individuals in need of legal aid assistance another way to be initially triaged to either LANM or NMLA. Whereas before individuals would initially contact one of the two agencies (usually by phone) and then would be triaged to the appropriate agency where they would go through the intake process, individuals could now instead use the online intake system to triage their case to the appropriate legal aid agency. Unlike the agencies themselves, which could only be contacted during business hours, the online intake system was available for use at all hours. The agency the case was triaged to would then call the applicant back to complete the intake process and would already have access to the information the applicant provided online to make a faster intake process. All traditional intake methods—defined as the intake methods used before the online intake system was in place (i.e., either call-in or walk-in methods)—continued to be in use.

Below we discuss how the online intake system was developed and rolled out, the mechanics of how the online intake system works, and the theory behind why it might be expected to eventually increase access to civil legal aid services. We conclude by documenting the various issues that occurred that made implementation challenging. Most of the information presented in this chapter was collected through the interviews and discussions with staff members we conducted during our site visit to both NMLA and LANM in September 2016 (discussed earlier), which was five months after the online intake system was first rolled out. Key questions we asked the program directors, intake staff, and attorneys were how the online triage system affected them and whether there were any issues with how the online system was currently working.

Development and Rollout of the Online Intake System

The development of New Mexico’s online intake system was funded by a TIG received by NMLA. The key project partners were the two key legal aid organizations involved—NMLA and LANM—as well as Pro Bono Net, which provided technical assistance on developing the web interface. The online system was constructed by Neota Logic.

Our evaluation began after the online intake system was already implemented, and thus we did not directly study how the project partners settled on the final version of the online system that was adopted. However, all projects that receive TIG funding are required to submit an

¹ The online intake system is also referred to as “Together for Justice.”

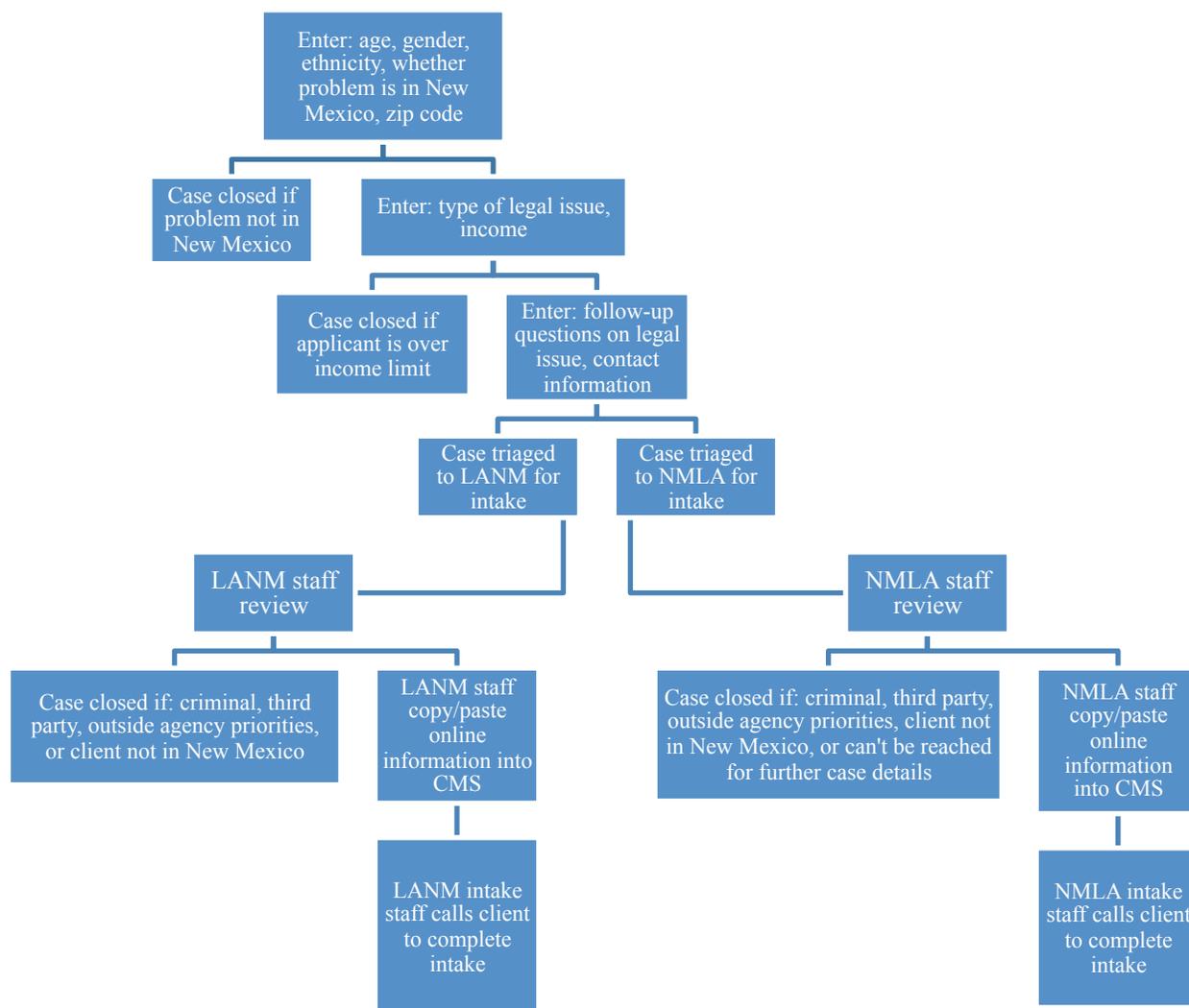
evaluation report, which includes details regarding the decisionmaking process. We thus briefly summarize some of the insights that were provided in the final evaluation report of NMLA's TIG funding (Tull, 2016). The project goals were to improve individuals' access to services and increase the efficiency of the legal aid providers (Tull, 2016). The project partners developed the online intake system during 2014 and 2015 and began by reviewing the documentation for triage systems in place in Illinois, Massachusetts, Ohio, Iowa, and New York City (Tull, 2016). They settled on developing detailed interviews for the areas of family law, consumer finance, housing, and public benefits, as these were the four areas known to have the highest volume and also were the issues best suited for an online interview (Tull, 2016). For any issues outside of these four areas, applicants would describe the issue in a text box. The interview questions were designed to strike a balance between seeking to obtain the most detailed information possible from applicants and keeping the tool simple, direct, and easy to use (Tull, 2016). The system was tested internally among staff and project partners, and the feedback was incorporated into the final version (Tull, 2016).

The online intake system was officially rolled out on April 25, 2016. NMLA and LANM purposefully did not do any widespread marketing as they wanted to make sure they would be able to keep up with the applications, as well as determine if they needed to make any changes to the online platform before they encouraged widespread use. The only outreach these organizations conducted regarding the online intake system was talking to community leaders (including those who work with domestic violence victims) about the system and informing the directors of the other legal aid agencies in their network about this. The link for the online intake system was placed on the websites for both LANM and NMLA so that individuals who reached these pages should be aware of the tool. Note that the system was rolled out to everyone in New Mexico at once, as there were no restrictions as to who could access the online intake system. Importantly, the agencies continued to treat applicants who contacted their office directly (either by phone or by walking in) exactly as they had before and did not actively encourage any of these applicants reaching out in the traditional way to use the online intake system instead.

How New Mexico's Online Intake System Works

Individuals who access the online intake system are first asked if their issue involves either a criminal law or traffic violation; if they indicate that it does not, they are allowed to begin a session. Figure 3.1 presents a process map of the information that is collected from applicants during an online intake session, as well as the stages in which the online system can reject their case. The figure also shows what happens on the part of the legal aid agencies after the case has been triaged to them. For simplicity, this process map does not show that cases may be transferred between the agencies once the online system has assigned them. We show in Chapter 5 that many of the cases that the online system triages to NMLA are later transferred over to LANM. Very rarely is a case transferred from LANM to NMLA.

Figure 3.1. Process Map of the Online Intake System



The first screen asks individuals to enter the following information: their age, gender, race/ethnicity, whether their legal problem is in New Mexico, and the zip code of their current residence. If their legal problem is not in New Mexico, the session will automatically end. The next screen asks individuals to select all areas where they need legal assistance and provides a bulleted list of options to select from. The options are arranged in four case types: (1) family law, which includes options for domestic violence, divorce/separation/annulment, custody, visitation, child support, guardianship, and name change; (2) consumer law, which includes options for debt collection, payday loans, car title loans, car repossession, car repair problems, small claims court case, and other scams or fraud; (3) housing law, which includes options for housing issues related to domestic violence, evictions, repairs, public housing and Section 8, utilities, mobile homes, foreclosures, lockouts, and security deposits; and (4) public benefits law, which includes

options for cash assistance, food stamps, government health care, and disability. Individuals can provide a brief free-form description of the legal issue if it is not included in any of the above choices.

The next set of questions screens for financial eligibility. Individuals are asked to estimate their family income and are given options to estimate it by hour, week, month, or year; they are also asked about the number of people who live in their household. The online tool uses this information to determine where individuals are relative to the poverty line. Individuals with an income that is more than 300 percent above the federal poverty line are told they are not eligible, and their online session ends. Note that this 300-percent threshold is above the actual income threshold that individuals must meet to qualify for services. Because it is difficult to conduct exact income qualification screens with individuals self-entering information (and likely generating noisy estimates of their actual income), the system purposefully tries to let in more individuals than may eventually qualify to help ensure that qualified individuals are not screened out here.

Individuals are then presented with a screen that asks follow-up questions related to the legal issues the individual selected. These questions are designed to better understand both the nature and the urgency of the issue. For example, if individuals select Eviction, they are asked whether the landlord has locked them out of their home and whether they have received a court summons in connection with an eviction proceeding. If they select Custody, they are asked if they have a case in court now and whether there is a scheduled hearing in the next five days. Individuals are then asked to provide their name, date of birth, phone number, address, and email address so that they can be contacted. Note that except for age, which is a free-form field, all of the other questions provide a bulleted list of options for individuals to select from.

Once individuals complete their contact information, their case will be triaged to either NMLA or LANM based on their responses. Note that the online system is designed to triage cases based on the criteria noted in Table 2.1 (the triage process for cases entering the traditional way). Individuals are told the agency their case has been triaged to and are told someone will call them within two business days. They are also provided the contact information of the agency their case was triaged to and told to call the agency if they do not hear back within two business days.

NMLA and LANM receive the information applicants entered into the system for all cases referred to them. Note that this information will not be sufficient for the intake process, as the agencies will need to conduct a more detailed income screen on applicants, as well as verify the other information applicants entered. However, the intake process is expected to be much quicker, as these agencies already have the majority of the information they need for intake as opposed to having to collect all of this themselves for first-time callers.

Both LANM and NMLA had one staff member who received information on all the triaged cases and decided which ones would move further in the process. The screeners looked at the information provided, which often included the applicant's free text description of the legal

issue, and would automatically reject cases that were obviously criminal matters, from a third party, outside current priorities, or from individuals who did not reside in New Mexico. Note that this is the same prescreening criteria that intake screeners use when applicants either call or walk in (described in Chapter 2). LANM took the remaining cases and automatically entered those into their CMS and had their intake screeners call the applicants back during their normal intake hours to complete the intake process. Intake screeners would quickly verify the online information that applicants provided and conduct a more detailed income screen. Once this was completed, the process for applicants who entered through the online intake system was exactly the same as for individuals who entered through the traditional ways.

NMLA used slightly different procedures to handle the online intake cases that were triaged to them. Once NMLA screened out the cases they could automatically reject (for the reasons noted above), the screener would call each of the applicants to get a better understanding of the legal problem to ensure that it should have been triaged to NMLA (versus LANM). If it was deemed the case was more appropriate for LANM, the case would be transferred to that agency. Otherwise, the initial NMLA screener would enter the case in the CMS and send the case to the appropriate NMLA intake screener to complete intake. Because NMLA has ten offices, the case would be sent to the office nearest to where the applicant resides. NMLA intake screeners would then call applicants back to complete intake during normal intake hours.

From the description of how New Mexico's online intake system works, it should be clear that the intake process is not solely online but instead also requires an applicant to be available during regular business hours to receive a callback from either NMLA or LANM to complete intake. For this reason, we consider this system to technically be a hybrid between an online and call-in system. For simplicity, we refer to this system as an online intake system, but when relevant to understand aspects of the system, we will note that this is actually a hybrid system.

How Does New Mexico's System Compare to Optimal Online Intake Systems?

In Zorza's (2011) seminal article on how individuals gain access to civil legal aid, he outlines several important features optimal online intake systems should possess. New Mexico's online system contains several of these features in that it was designed to be user-friendly, minimizes the need for users to provide repeated information, has the capacity to directly export an applicant's case to the appropriate legal aid agency, is comprehensive in the range of issues that can be addressed, and can be used on a mobile phone.

However, there are several features of an optimal online intake system that were not reflected in the version of New Mexico's system that was first rolled out. As noted in Zorza (2011), online intake systems should include access to all service mechanisms in the state, which includes the ability to refer cases to all of the service providers, as well as providing links to online information that can help individuals who are over the income threshold and will need to represent themselves (pro se litigants). Currently, the system can only refer individuals to NMLA

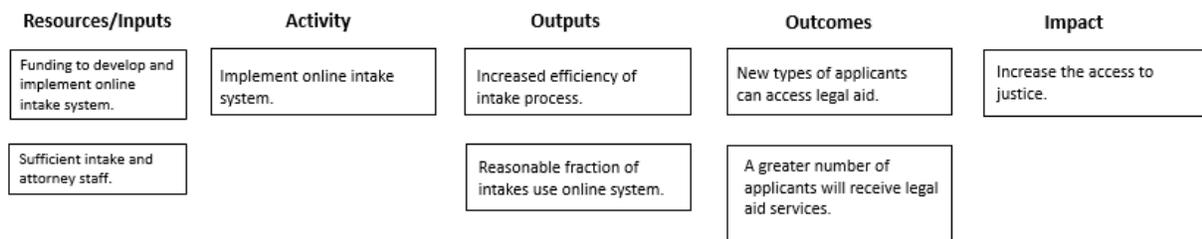
and LANM, albeit those are the agencies that handle the highest volume of cases in New Mexico. New Mexico does eventually plan to include four additional service providers in the online intake system (Pegasus Children’s Legal Services, Lawyer Referral for the Elderly Program, Senior Citizens Law Office, and the Southwest Women’s Law Center) and is also interested in including material that will help pro se litigants.

Finally, while an online intake system will naturally create barriers to access for those who cannot use the internet, the current version of the system requires that applicants can read English at a sixth-grade level. New Mexico eventually plans to develop a Spanish-language version of this online system. Other alternatives that have been suggested in the literature include placing audio links on the website that will read the questions to applicants.

The Potential Impact of the Online Intake System

This section describes the potential effects of the online intake system New Mexico implemented, which are reflected in the logic model we developed in Figure 3.2. The logic model is helpful in representing the outcomes that should be affected by the online intake system and the mechanisms through which this can happen. This will help inform the analyses that are useful to conduct as part of the evaluation, which will be discussed in Chapter 5. It is important to note that the logic model represents the *potential* impact of the online system if it operates as originally envisioned—this may not be what happens in practice, especially to the extent that there are implementation issues or unintended consequences. Further, some of the outcomes shown may take a long time (i.e., years) to realize, while our evaluation will only look at the first eight months after implementation. We discuss all of these issues in more detail in Chapter 5.

Figure 3.2. Logic Model of Potential Impact of Online Intake System



The “Impact” panel of the logic model indicates that the key long-term impact the online intake system is expected to have is to increase the access to justice for individuals who seek civil legal aid in New Mexico. This can happen through two potential mechanisms, which are reflected in the two outcomes listed in the “Outcome” panel: (1) the online intake system may make it possible for certain individuals who need legal aid to access the system who otherwise could not have done so when only traditional methods were available (i.e., call-in or walk-in

intake); and (2) the online intake system may make it possible for a greater number of individuals overall to receive civil legal aid. We discuss below how the online intake system can affect each of these outcomes.

Because the online intake system is available 24 hours a day, there is an expectation that individuals who are not available during regular business hours may now have the opportunity to receive legal aid services. This would increase the overall fairness of the legal aid system as it would indicate that a larger proportion of the population that needs civil legal aid now has the potential to apply for assistance. However, it is important to keep in mind that while the online intake system is always open, in order to formally go through intake and receive services an individual must be available during regular business hours when either the intake screener or legal aid attorney will call them. Thus, for individuals who truly are not available during business hours, they may be able to begin the process by using the online system but will not ultimately be available to receive services. The set of individuals who this online intake system is likely to increase access for are the individuals who can be available during normal business hours but are sensitive to the waiting time on the phone, perhaps either because they have limited time or have limited phone minutes. Instead of waiting on the line for several minutes and potentially finding out immediately they are not eligible or need to call another agency, these individuals can enter their information online and be called back directly by the relevant agency a couple of days later. Thus, the implementation of the online system might be expected to encourage this type of time-sensitive individual to seek assistance for legal aid. Note that because all of the traditional methods for intake are still available, this new online system will not limit the participation of others who prefer those methods. To the extent that more of these time-sensitive individuals now seek services, they will compete with individuals going through intake using the traditional methods for the limited services that are available.

The other key way the online intake system can increase access to justice is that it can increase the overall efficiency of the intake process, which in turn allows intake screeners to handle more applicants in a given period. Specifically, it is important to consider how many intakes an intake screener can handle in a given hour when they handle applicants who enter the system through the traditional methods versus those who enter the system through the online system. Using LANM as an example, when dealing with individuals who directly call in, intake staff will answer a certain fraction of calls for which the applicant is turned away without entering the formal intake process.² For the remainder of the time, intake screeners will go through the entire intake process with applicants. By contrast, when intake screeners spend an hour handling cases that were triaged to LANM through the online system, they will directly call a set of individuals who made it through an initial screening process online and had an issue that

² Recall from Chapter 2 that intake screeners first prescreen the case before entering the applicant's information into their CMS. At this stage some applicants may be outright rejected (if their case is criminal, outside of New Mexico, or outside priorities), or they may be referred to NMLA for intake (if their case involves domestic violence or is an emergency).

was deemed appropriate for that agency to address. Thus, these should all be individuals who are ready to go through intake, and the screener will not have to spend time talking to people who will be screened out before intake. Second, each applicant has already entered a majority of the information necessary for intake in the online system; the intake screener will have access to that information, so the process should go much faster. In particular, instead of asking about questions for the first time, screeners will just be quickly confirming most of the information and then conducting a more detailed income screen. Thus, if these efficiency gains are realized, and a sufficient fraction of applicants use the online system, this should allow more individuals to complete the intake process in a given hour.

Note that the above mechanism discusses how the online intake system can allow for a greater number of intakes in a certain period. However, it will then be up to the agency to decide how they want to shift resources to account for this efficiency. Specifically, both LANM and NMLA have a fixed set of lawyers who are at capacity, so it would not be practical to just increase intakes, as there would be no lawyers to service these extra cases. In general, agencies that face this decision could decide to just leave the lawyer staff as is, keep intakes fixed, and have lower operating costs. The alternative would be to reduce some staff time devoted to intake and shift these resources toward lawyers. This could allow for both greater intakes and increased provision of services. Because the New Mexico agencies indicated at the outset that they wanted to increase access to services, the logic model shows increasing the number of individuals who receive services as their desired outcome.³

Impact for Rural Residents

As 23 percent of New Mexico residents reside in rural areas (U.S. Census Bureau [2010], Table 1), it is useful to consider how the online intake system might specifically affect this group. Note that one would not necessarily expect the availability of an online intake system to benefit rural residents more than urban residents, because it was already possible for them to access services via the phone and internet availability is relatively limited in some of these rural areas. Staff working in the outlying offices noted that there is limited web and cell coverage in the southeast, southwest, and northwest quadrants of the state, as well as on Native lands, and that few people in these areas have computers (Tull, 2016). However, even if rural individuals face high barriers to using the online system themselves, they can still benefit overall. To the extent that many of the individuals in the more urban areas switch to the online intake system, this should free up the phone lines and make it easier for individuals in these rural areas to call in and get through in a shorter time. Thus, the online intake system can potentially increase their access to services in a more indirect route.

³ Note that if a reasonable proportion of clients decided to use the online intake system instead of the call-in system, it can potentially reduce the wait time for individuals that call in (i.e., the time from when they dial to when they speak to an intake worker). Unfortunately, we do not observe wait times and so cannot evaluate this.

Implementation Issues with New Mexico's Online Intake System

During our site visit in September 2016, which was five months after the online intake system was first rolled out, staff noted several issues with the existing version of the system that indicated the intake process for applicants using the online system was not as efficient as it was originally envisioned to be. These issues are listed below; the quantitative analyses conducted in Chapter 5 will provide greater context to some of these issues. Note that all of these issues will affect the extent to which the desired outputs and outcomes (shown in the logic model in Figure 3.2) were realized, so we will discuss the implications of these issues further in Chapter 5.

- The applicant information from the online intake system does not feed directly into LANM and NMLA's CMS. This requires intake screeners at these two agencies to manually copy and paste the applicant's information they receive from the online system into the CMS, which can take several minutes. However, once this information is entered in the CMS, intake screeners noted the intake process is much faster than it was before. One screener noted it reduced the intake time by half, from 12 minutes to 6 minutes. Thus, while the time it takes to conduct a given intake still decreases even when one takes into account the time it takes to copy and paste information on the case, having the information from the online system directly feed into the CMS could significantly increase efficiency.⁴
- As noted earlier, once the case is triaged in the online system to either NMLA or LANM, continuing with the intake process requires that these agencies can reach these individuals by phone during business hours to complete the intake process. Staff noted it was difficult to reach many of these applicants; in Chapter 5 we show quantitative evidence that a large percentage of these applicants could not be reached and were thus dropped from the process. This reduces the efficiency of the process, as now the intake screener will spend time both entering the online intake information into the CMS and calling the applicant back despite the fact that the applicant is not available during this time and thus cannot continue in the process. Staff noted that the online system should ask applicants to indicate the best callback time for them.
- NMLA staff noted that the current online system triaged too many applicants to NMLA. Many applicants are aware that domestic violence cases get preference, so some will select domestic violence even if it is not relevant for their case. As NMLA is the principal agency that handles domestic violence cases, these cases will be triaged to NMLA. Once intake screeners talk with these applicants, they will typically be referred to LANM. Staff noted the domestic violence questions needed to be worded better to reduce this issue. Our analyses in Chapter 5 indicate that a reasonable proportion of cases that were triaged to NMLA through the online system ended up being referred elsewhere.
- While this online intake system was designed as an additional point of entry into the same legal aid assistance system, staff had the perception that some individuals thought this was an additional service provider. Thus, it is possible that some of the applicants

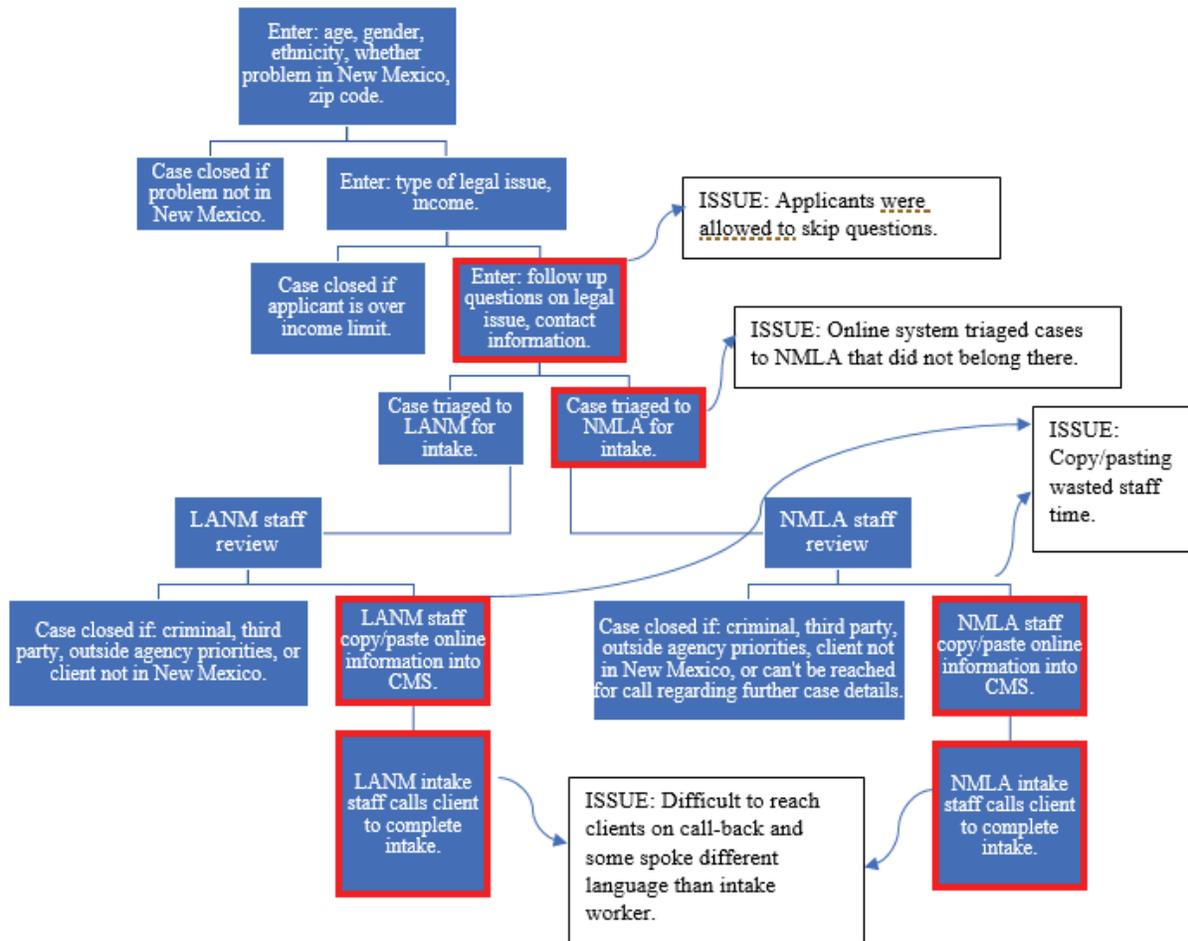
⁴ In February 2017 this issue was resolved by adjusting the online intake system so that cases could directly feed into LANM's and NMLA's CMS. However, this issue was present during the entire time of our evaluation (from May 2016 through December 2016).

who used the online intake system also called one of these agencies. Unfortunately, it is difficult to detect whether an applicant entered the system in multiple ways as it requires having applicant identifiers (such as name and date of birth), which we do not have for the data obtained from LANM.

- The online intake system allowed individuals to skip entering information in certain fields; staff noted that the system should require individuals to answer the questions before they are allowed to move on to the next screen. Some clients typed their issue instead of clicking from the drop-down menu, which made it more time-intensive for the screener to identify the case type and increased the chances the case would initially get triaged to the incorrect agency.
- Some of the questions might have been too complex for some of the applicants to correctly answer. For example, one question designed to help the agencies conduct a conflict check asked applicants whether there were any adverse parties; staff noted applicants generally did not understand how to respond to this question.
- When the online intake system sends the applicant's case to an agency (either NMLA or LANM), the applicant is given the contact information for the agency they were assigned to and told the agency will contact them within two days. Many individuals do not make note of the agency to which their case was assigned. Instead, because they often have found the link to the triage system on NMLA's web page, they will just assume they should call NMLA.
- All individuals who have their cases referred to either NMLA or LANM through the online system are supposed to receive a callback within two days. For individuals who have emergency cases (such as an impending eviction hearing), this two-day wait is too long.
- Some individuals will fill out the online form for others, which makes it difficult if the person who receives the callback does not speak English. Staff noted the need for an entry in the online form that allows applicants to indicate the language for the callback.
- While staff at NMLA and LANM were aware of all of the above difficulties, they were not able to modify the online intake system themselves. Instead, they had to rely on the developer of the online system to make the modifications, which meant there was a considerable lag between when issues were identified and when they could be addressed.

Figure 3.3 presents some of the key issues that were identified in graphical form. Specifically, using Figure 3.1 as a starting point (which presented a process map of the online system), we outline in red the stages in the online intake process at which some of the key issues arose and also detail next to these boxes what each of these issues was. For simplicity, this process map does not show that cases may be transferred between the agencies once the online system has assigned them. We show in Chapter 5 that many of the cases that the online system triages to NMLA are later transferred over to LANM. Very rarely is a case transferred from LANM to NMLA.

Figure 3.3. Issues with the Online Intake System



Contemporaneous Issues

During our site visit, we also discussed with agency staff the extent to which any contemporaneous issues occurred around the time of the implementation of the online intake system that might have affected the usage of the online system or affected any of the outcomes we may want to examine (such as the number of individuals that receive legal aid services in a month). Identifying the presence of confounding factors will be important to provide better context for the results of our quantitative analyses and will affect the strength of the conclusions we can make.

During the period surrounding implementation, LANM had a backlog in family law cases, and therefore they decided to not use the online intake system for these cases for most of the period that we evaluated the use of the online system (from May 2016 through December 2016). Because family law cases are a large proportion of LANM cases, this greatly reduced the number of cases that LANM received from the online intake system and made it less likely that one of

the key outputs listed in the logic model in Figure 3.2 (reasonable usage of the online system) could be achieved. The analyses presented in Chapter 5 will examine this in more detail.

Both LANM and NMLA were facing ongoing serious financial crises around the time the online intake system was implemented, in part because state tax revenues from oil and gas had declined. As a result, both agencies faced staff layoffs during this time (Tull, 2016), and it was noted that LANM was understaffed by 5 attorneys and NMLA was understaffed by 11 attorneys. Further, during this time, LANM faced severe cutbacks to their intake staff—while they had 3 full-time intake screeners in November 2015, by November 2016 they only had 1 full-time intake screener.

The above issue indicates that one of the key inputs listed in the logic model in Figure 3.2—sufficient intake and attorney staff—was not realized during the pre-post implementation period (from 2015 through 2016), which will have consequences on the outcomes realized. In particular, because intake screeners are essentially the gatekeepers to all legal aid services provided, the reduction in intake staff meant that the number of intakes conducted declined considerably around the time the online system was adopted.⁵ However, it is important to note that (assuming the outputs were realized) the online intake system could still have had a positive impact on individuals receiving service, as it could mean that the drop in the number of people receiving services was not as large as it would have been if there had been no online intake system. Put another way, the contemporaneous issues with staff declines imply we would expect to see a downward trend over time in terms of individuals receiving services; to the extent the online intake system simultaneously improved the efficiency of the intake process, it could have meant the downward trend in individuals receiving services was not as severe as it otherwise would have been. Unfortunately, as will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5, a pre-post research design will not be able to separate out the effects of the online intake system from the effects of the contemporaneous staffing declines. We will thus not be able to identify the impact the online system had on the number of individuals receiving services, although our other results will allow us to draw some preliminary conclusions regarding this.

⁵ This is shown in Figure 5.5.

4. Quantitative Data

In addition to the qualitative data we collected during our site visit, we also collected several quantitative data sets that form the crux of our analyses. We collected administrative data and also fielded surveys to legal aid applicants going through both the online and traditional intake routes. This chapter provides more detail on the data collected.

Administrative Data

We obtained several administrative data sets from both NMLA and LANM, including the following:

1. *NMLA Online Triage Data*, which included information on all individuals for which the online intake system referred their case to NMLA between April 2016 and December 2016.
2. *LANM Online Triage Data*, which included information on all individuals for which the online intake system referred their case to LANM between April 2016 and December 2016.
3. *NMLA CMS Data*, which included information on all cases that appear in NMLA's CMS between April 2015 and December 2016—these cases correspond to all of the cases that went through NMLA's formal intake process during this time (both online and via call-in or walk-in).
4. *LANM CMS Data*, which included information on all cases that appear in LANM's CMS between April 2015 and December 2016—these cases correspond to all of the cases that went through LANM's formal intake process during this time (both online and via call-in).
5. *LANM Call Volume Data*, which included monthly information on the call volume (including the number of calls inbound, the number of calls answered, and the number of hang-ups) to LANM between April 2015 and December 2016.

The data were obtained in early 2017 and thus do not contain any information on cases that began after December 2016. While the information in the fifth data set is aggregated at the monthly level, the information in the first four data sets is at the case level, meaning each observation in the data corresponds to a separate case. The first two data sets provide information on the date and time that individuals used the online system, their case type, the county they are from, and whether the case was accepted to go through the formal intake process (versus being rejected or referred elsewhere). Note that with this online triage data we were only able to obtain information on the individuals who had their cases triaged to either NMLA or LANM; we do not have data on the individuals who used the online system but had their cases screened out by the system.¹

¹ At the time we were collecting data, neither LANM nor NMLA had access to information on the cases screened out by the online system. While Neota Logic (who constructed the online intake system) presumably had access to this information, we were not able to obtain it.

The third and fourth data sets provide more detailed information on all cases that went through intake at NMLA and LANM, including the age, gender, race/ethnicity, disability status and zip code of the applicant, the case type, the date the case was opened and closed, and the final disposition of the case (including whether it was rejected and why, referred elsewhere, or received services). We obtained data on cases going back to April 2015 so that we could study aspects of the intake process for a full year prior to the implementation of the online intake system. Every individual in the LANM and NMLA CMS intake data sets either began the intake process by using the online intake system or by using the traditional method. Note the traditional method refers to the method individuals would have used in absence of the online system and is described in detail in Chapter 2. Based on the information provided in the online triage data sets (data sets 1 and 2 above), we were able to determine who from the NMLA and LANM CMS intake data sets were triaged there through the online system (versus through the traditional way). Appendix A describes in detail how we identified this intake method variable.² We also made several minor sample restrictions for each of these data sets, which are also discussed in detail in Appendix A.

Note that the online triage data is at the applicant level, so each record represents a unique applicant. However, the CMS intake data is at the case level and not the individual applicant level. While most of the time an applicant will only have one case at a time, sometimes two cases are opened simultaneously depending on the services required.³ For this reason, when we discuss the analyses results in Chapter 5, we use the following terminology: if the analysis involves the use of the online triage data, we discuss this in terms of applicants, and if the analysis involves the use of CMS intake data, we discuss this in terms of cases.

We only obtained data through December 2016, and thus our evaluation will necessarily be focused on examining various aspects of the online intake system for the first eight months after rollout, from May 2016 through December 2016. Our analyses drop the data from April 2016, as some of our analyses are calculated by month, so we did not want to use a month (April) where the online system was only in effect for a week. Note that Table 2.2 presents a detailed summary of the NMLA and LANM CMS data, and thus we do not present any further descriptive statistics here.

² While the CMS data for both LANM and NMLA had a variable that indicated whether the individual was triaged there through the online system, we felt identifying the cases that were in both data sets would help ensure the accuracy of this intake method variable, as any case that is identified as coming through the online system in the CMS data should also be present in the online triage data. Merging these data sets also allowed us to identify the length of time it takes to open a case in the CMS for online cases, as the time the applicant applied online is in the online triage data but the date the case is opened in the CMS is only in the intake data.

³ We can only determine the extent to which there are simultaneous cases in the NMLA CMS data, as that is the only data that provides the name and date of birth of the applicant. We define a simultaneous case as a new case being opened for an applicant that already has an open case. Only about 8 percent of the sample includes a case that is opened while another case was already opened. This can potentially cause us to underestimate the use of the online system, as our matching algorithm will only attribute one of these cases to the online system (since the triage data is at the applicant level). However, because the percentage of simultaneous cases is relatively low, we do not expect this to cause a significant issue.

Survey Data

To supplement this administrative data, we also developed separate surveys that were to be administered to those who used the online intake system (the online intake survey) and those who used the traditional intake methods at both NMLA and LANM (the traditional intake survey). These two surveys are shown in Appendix B. The surveys asked respondents for more detailed characteristics than were available in the CMS data, including their education, literacy level, and access to the internet. These questions were designed to allow us to conduct a more in-depth comparison of who uses the different methods of intake. These surveys also asked each user group whether they could have used the other method of intake and why or why not this was the case. These questions were designed to provide insight into the extent that the online intake method allowed new users to access civil legal aid who would not have used the traditional intake methods, as well as what the barriers to using this online intake method were.

Applicants who used the online intake system were given the option to take the online intake survey after their online session completed. Note that while these respondents had completed the online portion of the intake process, they had not yet completed the full intake process (as that required a callback from the legal aid agency). Applicants who used traditional intake methods were given the option to take the traditional intake survey after they completed intake. No personally identifying data was collected in the survey, and thus the survey data cannot be matched with records in the CMS intake data.

There are a couple of important issues to note regarding administration of the survey. First, we intended to administer the survey between September 2016 and June 2017. While the survey was fielded in this way to the individuals using the online system, the survey that was administered to the applicants using the traditional intake methods was mistakenly stopped in November 2016 and was then started up again in March 2017. Among the traditional intake surveys, 73 percent were completed between September and November 2016.

A second issue with how the survey was administered was that LANM was not able to administer the survey to those who entered intake through traditional means as they did not have enough staff. This means that all of the applicants entering through the traditional intake process who completed the survey were NMLA applicants. By contrast, the survey that was administered to the online applicants were those who had their case triaged either to NMLA or LANM. However, because 90 percent of these online cases were triaged to LANM, one can assume that the applicants who completed the online survey were mainly LANM customers.

It is important to note that our surveys did not ask users of the online system about their experience completing the online form, mainly because there was already a survey in place asking questions regarding this (as part of the evaluation of the TIG award). Tull (2016) summarizes the results from that survey using information on the 44 individuals that had responded as of October 2016. Tull finds that nearly half of the survey respondents said it took them 5–10 minutes to complete the online form, and 91 percent found it very easy or easy to use.

Among respondents, 61 percent felt the online form helped them explain their problem or need either extremely well or very well, with another 32 percent saying that it did relatively well.

The survey we administered was voluntary, and in total there were 103 respondents for the traditional intake survey and 106 respondents for the online intake survey. The response rate for the traditional intake survey was 20 percent. It is difficult to tell how representative these survey respondents are of all the individuals who were asked to take the survey because the only variables that are in both data sets (the survey and the CMS data) are age and gender. Based on this, females were slightly more likely to take the survey, while the age of the respondent did not affect the participation rate. The response rate for the online intake survey was 6 percent. The response rate for this online survey was likely lower because individuals were not being personally asked to take the survey, making it easier to say no. Because the online triage data do not contain personal characteristics on the applicants, we cannot compare any of the demographics of the survey respondents with the individuals who were asked to take the survey and thus cannot say anything regarding the representativeness of these survey results. Note that all survey respondents are likely to skew toward being primarily English speakers as we did not develop a Spanish version of the survey.

Table 4.1 presents descriptive statistics on the characteristics of the survey respondents, where the first column corresponds to those who took the online intake survey, and the second

Table 4.1. Descriptive Statistics of Survey Respondents

| Applicant Characteristics | Online Intake Survey^a | Traditional Intake Survey |
|----------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|
| Female | .698 | .814 |
| Age 24 or less | .067 | .124 |
| Age 25–54 | .670 | .660 |
| Age 55 plus | .255 | .216 |
| Less than high school education | .105 | .196 |
| High school graduate | .143 | .392 |
| Some college education | .390 | .340 |
| College graduate | .248 | .041 |
| Primary language English | .991 | .939 |
| Read English well | .981 | .921 |
| Easy internet access | .876 | .650 |
| Limited internet access | .124 | .243 |
| No internet access | .000 | .107 |
| Urban | .840 | .862 |
| Sample Size | 106 | 103 |

^a At the time of the survey, these online intake survey respondents had completed the online portion of the intake process but had not yet completed the full intake process (which required a callback from the legal aid agency).

column corresponds to those who took the traditional intake survey.⁴ The results indicate that online survey respondents are less likely to be female, more likely to have a higher education level, more likely to have English as their primary language and to state that they can read well in English, and more likely to be able to easily obtain access to the internet. Notably we find that the applicant's age and whether they live in a rural zip code do not differ across online intake and traditional intake survey respondents. While the differences in the columns likely highlight the differences between users of the online system versus the traditional system, it is important to note that they may also highlight some of the intrinsic differences between LANM and NMLA applicants as the online survey respondents are mainly LANM customers, and the traditional intake survey respondents are solely NMLA customers. In particular, Table 2.2 indicates that LANM has a lower percentage of female applicants than NMLA does (which is likely because NMLA has a large proportion of domestic violence cases). Thus, the difference between columns 1 and 2 in Table 4.1 may reflect the LANM-NMLA difference rather than the online-traditional intake difference.⁵ We will examine the differences between the online and traditional intake users in more detail in Chapter 5.

⁴ These characteristics were identified based on the survey respondents' answers to questions 1–9 on either survey.

⁵ There is also a possibility that the types of issues individuals seek civil legal aid for exhibit seasonal trends. Because the periods during which the surveys were administered to online intake users and traditional intake users were different, the differences between the columns in Table 4.1 may also represent a difference in case mixes due to seasonal trends.

5. The Impacts of New Mexico's Online Intake System

Overview of Evaluation Plan

The logic model shown in Figure 3.2 illustrates some of the key factors that should be examined in an ideal evaluation. In particular, one would want to document the outputs of the online system, which include measuring the realized efficiency gains in the intake process, as well as the usage level of the online intake system. One would then want to evaluate the extent to which outcomes were realized, which includes both enabling new types of individuals to access legal aid and increasing the overall number of individuals who can access services. To the extent that the impact on outcomes was not what was expected, this could be because the expected outputs were not realized, the required inputs were not present, or the theory of change laid out in the logic model was not valid.

While the above describes the ideal evaluation, there are two key limitations to our study that did not allow us to carry this out. First, there were limitations to the data we could collect, and thus we cannot conduct all of the analyses we ideally would want to include in our assessment. In particular, because we were not able to collect detailed information on staff hours devoted to intake, we cannot actually measure the impact the online intake system had on intake efficiency. We also were unable to access data on the individuals that were screened out by the online intake system; nor do we observe information on individuals that call in or walk in for intake but are screened out before they enter formal intake. We thus cannot examine the extent to which the online intake system affected the time in which intake workers spent on individuals that could not enter formal intake. However, we can conduct several analyses that examine the extent of some of the key implementation issues, which will allow us to draw rough conclusions regarding the impact on efficiency.

Second, because we are evaluating the impact of this system during the first eight months after rollout (from May through December 2016), realistically it was too early for any changes in the number of individuals receiving services to occur. It thus would not make sense to evaluate this and draw definitive conclusions regarding the impact of the online system. Further, as we discuss in detail later in this chapter, due to confounding factors, we could not have identified the impact on services received anyway. While we can examine what happened over time to the number of individuals who received services, the results are not that useful as it is not indicative of the impact of the system.

With these caveats in mind, this chapter presents a variety of analyses that aim to conduct as much of the ideal evaluation plan that is currently possible. The chapter is organized into three parts, which compose the three key prongs of the evaluation. First, we begin by comparing the process between the online and traditional intake methods, which identifies potential

inefficiencies as well as examines the extent to which user experiences are different under the two systems. Second, we discuss the usage of the online intake system over the first eight months, as well as examine some of the reasons applicants may not be using the online system. Third, we examine the extent to which new types of applicants were able to gain access under the online system and descriptively examine how the number of individuals that received legal aid services has changed over time. At the end of each of these three core sections, we summarize the main takeaway results from the analyses presented in that section and discuss potential recommendations that might be useful for future legal aid agencies looking to develop an online intake system.

Throughout this chapter it is important to recognize that although we refer to New Mexico's system as an online intake system, it is technically a hybrid system that allows individuals to initiate the intake process online when it is convenient for them but requires them to complete intake through a phone call during regular business hours. The fact that these individuals need to be available for a callback from an intake worker will be important to keep in mind when interpreting the results.

Process Comparison Between the Online and Traditional Intake Methods

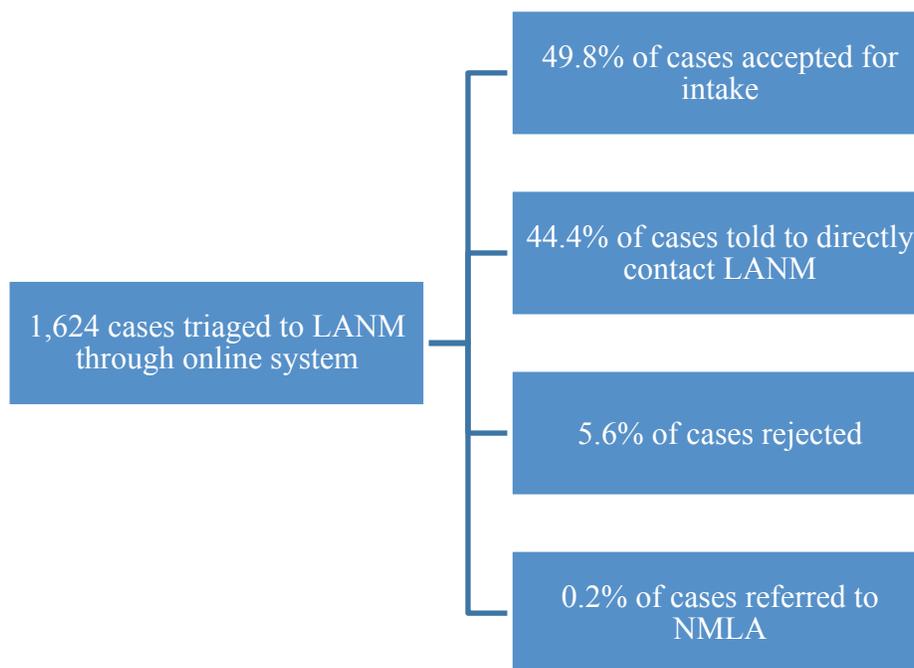
In this section we examine what happens to cases that are triaged to LANM or NMLA through the online intake system. We then conduct a process comparison whereby we examine whether individuals who entered the intake process through the online intake system had similar process outcomes to individuals who entered the intake process through the traditional methods. While Chapters 2 and 3 went into depth describing the traditional and online intake policies, respectively, the analyses here will allow us to identify whether there were any systematic differences in the way individuals' cases progressed based on their initial intake method, which can reveal whether users of the online intake system faced any drawbacks. Of particular importance, the analyses will also highlight some of the process inefficiencies in how the online intake system was operating during this time. Recall that in Chapter 3 we presented a list of issues that staff raised regarding the inefficiencies of the online intake system—our analyses in this section will allow us to assess the magnitude of some of these stated issues. Because the nature of the triage and intake process, as well as the cases accepted, is different for LANM and NMLA, we conduct these process comparisons separately by agency. At the conclusion of this section, we discuss some of the key takeaways regarding the likely impacts on efficiency the online intake system had, as well as potential improvements to the online system that could be implemented to increase future intake efficiency.

Process Comparison for LANM

Between May 1, 2016, and December 31, 2016, the online intake system sent 1,624 cases to LANM. Details on each of these cases is provided in the LANM Online Triage Data; each case

should correspond to a unique applicant.¹ As noted in Chapter 3, LANM had one point person within the agency who received the case from the online intake system and determined what should happen with it based on the information in the application. Figure 5.1 shows what happened at this decision point. Among the applicants, 50 percent had their cases accepted for intake, which meant the initial screener copied and pasted the information from the online application into LANM’s CMS. LANM intake workers would then contact these applicants by phone to complete the intake process. Among the applicants, 6 percent had their cases rejected at this stage (mainly because the applicant’s free text response indicated the case was either a criminal matter or was out of state); LANM sent these applicants an email informing them why the case was rejected. A very small percentage of applicants (0.2%) had their case referred to NMLA.

Figure 5.1. Flow Chart of Cases Triage to LANM Through the Online Intake System



The remaining 44 percent of the applicants were sent an email telling them to directly contact LANM during normal intake hours. All of these applicants had issues pertaining to family law. As we noted in Chapter 3, LANM had a backlog in handling family law cases and decided to not

¹ Appendix A describes additional sample restrictions that were used on the LANM Online Triage Data. There is a possibility that the same applicant may submit a new online application more than once within the eight-month period between May and December 2016. However, if an applicant submitted more than one case within a narrow time window, the initial screener would not open a new case. If the same applicant appears twice, it should be for a new issue, and thus we think of this data as being at the applicant level.

process any family law cases through the online intake system for most of our evaluation period.² While some of these applicants may have eventually entered the process through the traditional telephone intake process, they were not allowed to enter through the online intake system. This indicates that if LANM had not chosen to divert these family law cases, the usage of the online intake system would have been measurably higher during this period. We examine this issue in more detail later in this chapter when we discuss the usage level of the online intake system.³

Table 5.1 uses data on all cases that began the formal intake process at LANM between May and December 2016 and explicitly compares the outcomes of the cases that went through intake via the online process versus those that went through intake via the traditional method (i.e., the applicant directly called in during intake hours).^{4,5} Comparing the number of intakes conducted from each intake method (shown in the first row in Table 5.1) reveals that between May and December 2016, approximately 13 percent of LANM intakes were referred from the online system. Note that for the remainder of the table, the specific sample used for the results will vary across panels, and thus for each panel we state both the sample restrictions and the sample sizes used to obtain the results.

The “Result” panel of Table 5.1 compares the eventual results for the cases that were triaged to LANM using the online system versus the traditional call-in method. Because we are comparing the case outcomes, we further restrict the sample to closed cases (so that the outcome is observed).⁶ The last column presents the p value from a test of whether the percentage of the population or the median days for that particular characteristic is significantly different among cases that go through online intake versus those that go through traditional intake.⁷ The biggest difference is the client withdrawal rate—whereas 16 percent of the traditional cases resulted in

² Choosing not to accept any family law cases through the online intake system was noted to be somewhat of an arbitrary decision in hindsight, as they instead could have just processed cases from either intake method (online or call-in) on a first-come, first-served basis.

³ Note that 141 cases were coded in the data as having their case initially rejected, although the data noted that they had their case opened at a later date. As these were all family law cases, it seemed likely that these applicants may have been sent an email telling them to go through the intake process by directly calling in and that these subsequent case numbers noted in the data correspond to the case that was eventually opened for these applicants. As these applicants likely did not end up completing intake through the online system, we coded them in the “directly contact LANM” category.

⁴ These are the cases opened in LANM’s CMS between May 1, 2016, and December 31, 2016.

⁵ Note that the first row of Table 5.1 lists 772 cases as coming through the online intake system during this period, while Figure 5.1 notes that 808 cases were accepted for intake through the online system during this period. While there should be a one-to-one correspondence here, this discrepancy mainly arises because we were not able to match some of the cases from the LANM Online Triage Data that were accepted for intake with the data on their intake process that is present in the LANM CMS Data, although the number of cases lost is relatively small. More details on this matching process are provided in Appendix A.

⁶ Note that while we only include cases that were opened between May and December 2016, we observe the final outcome of these cases as long as they were closed by January 27, 2017. Thus, the cases that are dropped are the ones that were opened between May and December 2016 but had not yet finished by January 27, 2017.

⁷ We compare proportions using t -tests and compare median days using Fisher’s exact test.

Table 5.1. A Process Comparison of the Online and Traditional Intake Methods for LANM

| | Online Intake ^a | Traditional Intake | p value |
|--|----------------------------|--------------------|---------|
| Intakes conducted | 772 | 5,220 | |
| <i>Result</i> | | | |
| Sample: closed cases | | | |
| Client withdrew | .438 | .156 | .000 |
| Case rejected | .163 | .225 | .000 |
| Case referred to another agency | .034 | .059 | .004 |
| Case received service | .365 | .560 | .000 |
| Sample size | 772 | 5,215 | |
| <i>Result when withdrawals dropped</i> | | | |
| Sample: Closed cases, withdrawals dropped | | | |
| Case rejected | .290 | .266 | .282 |
| Case referred to another agency | .060 | .070 | .420 |
| Case received service | .650 | .663 | .564 |
| Sample size | 434 | 4,401 | |
| <i>Reason for withdrawal</i> | | | |
| Sample: closed cases | | | |
| Applicant declined to continue | .066 | .034 | .000 |
| Applicant unable to be reached | .350 | .077 | .000 |
| Ambiguous | .022 | .045 | .003 |
| Sample size | 772 | 5,215 | |
| <i>Disposition time (median days)</i> | | | |
| Sample: specific to category examined below | | | |
| Triage application to case opening | 1 (n = 772) | — | |
| Client withdrew | 4 (n = 338) | 3 (n = 814) | .218 |
| Case rejected | 2 (n = 126) | 0 (n = 1,172) | .000 |
| Case referred to another agency | 9.5 (n = 26) | 6 (n = 309) | .008 |
| Case received service | 7 (n = 282) | 2 (n = 2,920) | .000 |
| <i>Rejection reason (proportion of total rejections)</i> | | | |
| Sample: rejected cases only | | | |
| Conflict | .302 | .418 | .011 |
| Over income | .484 | .401 | .072 |
| Outside priorities | .119 | .098 | .458 |
| Out of area | .040 | .026 | .354 |
| Represented by counsel already | .008 | .020 | .355 |
| Third-party caller | .048 | .038 | .577 |
| Sample size | 126 | 1,172 | |

^a This online intake process is technically a hybrid system that allows individuals to initiate the intake process online when it is convenient for them but requires them to complete it by receiving a callback from an intake worker during regular business hours.

NOTE: p values are calculated from t-tests when proportions are being compared and are calculated from Fisher's exact test when median days are being compared.

the client withdrawing from the process, 44 percent of the online cases resulted in the client withdrawing from the process. The next panel in the table (“Results When Withdrawals Dropped”) shows that once withdrawals are dropped, there is no real difference in the case results for the different intake methods.

The “Reason for Withdrawal” panel looks in more depth at why the applicants withdrew, since that is the main area of discrepancy between the two intake methods. We separated withdrawal reasons into two categories: (1) the applicant declined to continue, and (2) the applicant could not be reached. There were some reasons we could not code distinctly into one of these categories, so we coded these reasons as ambiguous. By far, the main reason that online intake applicants withdrew from the process is that LANM was unable to reach them. Specifically, 35 percent of all online cases resulted in the applicant being unable to complete the intake process because they could not be reached, while this is only 8 percent for traditional cases. It is here that it is important to recall that this online intake process is not solely online but rather is a hybrid system. For those that go through the online intake system to receive services, they must receive two phone calls during regular business hours—one from the intake screener to complete the intake process and then (assuming they qualify) from the attorney to provide them services. If LANM cannot reach them at either of these points, they will close their case.⁸ To determine where in the process applicants were unable to be reached, we further examined the data for those who were in the online intake system who withdrew because they were unable to be reached. Because information on language spoken is not collected through the online intake system, we can infer that individuals who have this information listed in their intake data did at least speak with the intake worker to complete intake—this means these individuals likely completed the first phone call but not the second. We find that 36 percent of the 270 cases where applicants were unable to be reached had information on language spoken, implying that about one-third of this group completed the first call but not the second. The remaining two-thirds likely did not complete even the first phone call from the intake screener.

It was speculated by NMLA and LANM staff that many of these online applicants that cannot be reached might be only available for phone calls during off-hours—while they were able to fill out the online application to initiate the intake process, they may not be available by phone during business hours to complete it. In contrast, client withdrawal due to not being able to be reached is not a significant issue for those using traditional intake methods. As all of these individuals had to call in during normal business hours to begin the intake process, one would expect them to continue to be available during this time frame.⁹ This issue of the online cases

⁸ For the phone call by intake screeners, LANM would try to contact the applicant twice by phone during normal intake hours; if they could not be reached, the intake worker sent the applicant an email indicating they wanted to follow up on the online application and then closed the case.

⁹ Note that when individuals that access LANM through the traditional intake method are coded as not being able to be reached, this likely means that the attorneys calling to provide services could not reach the applicant (as the traditional intake method does not involve intake screeners calling applicants for intake).

disproportionately dropping out because applicants could not be reached was specifically noted by staff as an issue of the system (see Chapter 3); the analysis presented here shows that it was a significant problem for the period we evaluated.

To better understand whether there is anything distinctive about the individuals that are unable to be reached, which might allow us to say something about why they were unable to be reached, we used the sample of LANM cases originating from the online intake system and regressed an indicator for whether a case was dropped because the individual was unable to be reached on the characteristics of the applicant. The results are presented in Table 5.2. A logit specification is used because the dependent variable is binary; average partial effects are shown in the table so that the results are easier to interpret. Note that because the applicants that were unable to be reached only have limited information collected about them, we can only consider the following characteristics: gender, age, race/ethnicity, whether they resided in a zip code that is classified as being urban, and whether they completed the online application during business

Table 5.2. Regression of Unable to Be Reached Indicator on Applicant and Case Characteristics for LANM Online Intakes

| | Indicator for Whether Online Applicant Was Unable to Be Reached |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| Female | -.0538 (.0371) |
| Age 25–54 | .0436 (.0631) |
| Age 55 or over | -.0353 (.0744) |
| Black | .0919 (.0860) |
| Hispanic | -.0000471 (.0384) |
| Native American | .0260 (.0849) |
| Urban | -.0483 (.0421) |
| Applied online during business hours | -.0376 (.0371) |
| Sample size | 701 |

NOTE: The sample only includes cases that originated from the online intake system and had all nonmissing data on all characteristics examined. A logit specification was used, and the coefficients in the table represent average partial effects. Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors are in parentheses.

hours (which we define as completing it on Monday through Friday 8:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.). Each coefficient presented in Table 5.2 reveals how the proportion of online applicants in that group that were unable to be reached differs from the proportion of applicants that were unable to be reached in the reference group for that category. For example, the coefficient on *Female* indicates that in our sample, applicants that are female are 5.4 percentage points less likely to be unable to be reached than male applicants. However, none of the coefficients in this table are statistically significant, which indicates that none of the characteristics of online applicants (including whether they applied online outside of business hours) strongly predict whether they will later drop out because they cannot be reached. Thus, beyond speculation, we cannot make any definitive conclusions about why a significant fraction of individuals whose cases originated through the online system could not be reached to complete the process.

The “Disposition Time” panel in Table 5.1 looks at the median number of days it took for a case to reach its final disposition. The first line within this panel shows it took a median time of one day from the time in which the online application was submitted to when the case was accepted for intake (i.e., entered in the LANM CMS), indicating that the prescreening process described in Chapter 3 happens relatively quickly. The remaining lines within the “Disposition Time” panel show, for a given case result, the median number of days from the time the case was accepted for intake until it reached its final disposition. In general, it took all cases longer to reach their final disposition if they came through the online intake system, but this delay is likely because it mechanically takes online applicants longer to complete intake than those who enter through the traditional call-in method. Specifically, for the online applicants, the intake screeners must first contact the online applicants to complete the intake process, which can take several days. In contrast, those who come through the traditional intake method directly call in and begin and complete intake during the same phone session, and thus the intake process is completed within roughly 12 minutes.

The “Rejection Reason” panel only includes cases that were rejected and explicitly compares whether the reasons cases were rejected depends on the intake method. Compared to cases that come through the traditional intake system, the online intake system had a higher percentage of rejected cases rejected because the applicant was over-income (48% versus 40%).¹⁰ By contrast, the online intake system had a lower percentage of cases rejected because they were conflict cases (30% versus 42%).

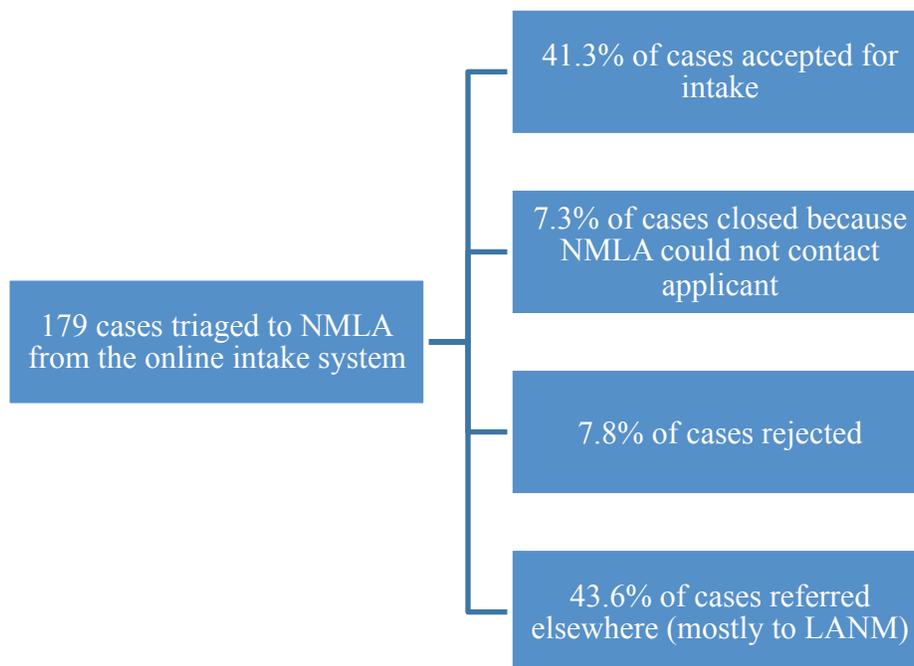
Process Comparison for NMLA

We now repeat the same analysis for NMLA. Between May 2016 and December 2016, the online intake system sent 179 cases to NMLA. Similar to the process at LANM, NMLA had

¹⁰ Note that a priori it was not clear which group would have the higher percentage of rejected cases that are rejected because the applicant is over-income. While the online intake system did purposely set a higher income threshold to prevent against screening out individuals that might end up qualifying, users of the traditional intake system generally go through no income screening at all before beginning the formal intake process.

one point person within the agency who would receive the case from the online system and determine what should happen with it. However, unlike LANM, the initial NMLA screener called all of the applicants for follow-up information before the decision was made to accept the case for intake. At this point, the NMLA screener mainly asked the applicant more information about the nature of the problem to ensure that NMLA should be the agency handling the intake—recall from Chapter 2 that NMLA has stringent criteria on the cases they will accept for intake. Figure 5.2 shows the outcomes of cases that the online system triaged to NMLA. In 7 percent of the cases, the NMLA screener was not able to contact the applicant for follow-up information, and the case was closed.¹¹ In 44 percent of the cases, the applicant was referred to another agency (typically LANM), and in 8 percent the case was closed for another reason (such as being a criminal case or outside NMLA priorities). The remaining 41 percent of cases were accepted for intake and entered into NMLA’s CMS. NMLA intake workers then followed up with these applicants to complete the intake process.

Figure 5.2. Flow Chart of Cases Triaged to NMLA Through the Online Intake System



Note that the online system triaged more than nine times as many cases over to LANM than to NMLA for intake between May and December 2016, which is to be expected as NMLA will only conduct intake on cases that fit a narrow set of requirements (namely, domestic violence

¹¹ Applicants being screened out because they could not be contacted did not happen at this stage with LANM, because LANM made the decision to accept the case for intake without speaking to the client.

cases or other emergencies). However, 44 percent of the cases that were triaged to NMLA were eventually referred elsewhere—the majority of these were referred to LANM for intake. This indicates that the online system’s mechanism for triaging cases to LANM versus NMLA needs to be improved as the online system sends significantly more cases to NMLA than actually belong there. Recall from Chapter 3 that this issue was brought up to us in discussions regarding the issues with the online system—these analyses provide evidence that confirms these perceptions.

Table 5.3 compares the outcomes of cases that went through intake at NMLA via the online process versus those that went through the traditional intake method. For NMLA, traditional intake includes applicants either directly calling in or walking in to an office—during this time, 76 percent of traditional intakes were over the phone.¹² The first row of Table 5.3 indicates that roughly 2.4 percent of NMLA cases that went through the intake process between May and December 2016 originated from the online intake system. This percentage is much lower than was found for LANM—we will discuss in more detail in the next section some potential reasons for this.

The “Result” panel of Table 5.3 indicates that the clients who are triaged through the online system were significantly more likely to withdraw from the process, as 27 percent of the online cases involved applicants who withdrew from the process, while only 14 percent of the traditional cases had applicants who withdrew.¹³ NMLA does not code the reason why the person withdrew, and thus we cannot determine the percentage of these applicants who withdrew because they could not be reached. Note that this percentage of withdrawal is lower than we found for LANM, but this is likely because, at this point, an initial NMLA screener had already contacted these individuals, and thus it is likely that the individuals at the highest risk of dropping out because they cannot be reached had already dropped out (see Figure 5.2).

The “Disposition Time” panel in Table 5.3 breaks down the median days it takes for cases in each disposition category to reach completion under the different intake methods. One should be cautious about drawing conclusions regarding this issue, as the sample sizes for the online intake system are quite small in these individual categories. The median time from when the applicant first submitted the application online to when the case was first entered into the intake system was one day, which is the same as with LANM. While the analyses indicate that it takes cases that come through the online system a shorter time to receive services, because of the small

¹² The first row of Table 5.3 indicates that 70 cases went through the online intake system, while Figure 5.2 notes that 74 cases were accepted for intake through the online system during this period. This discrepancy mainly arises because we were not able to match some of the cases from the NMLA Online Triage Data with the intake data that is presented in NMLA CMS Data.

¹³ The sample used for these analyses drop any cases that have not reached a final outcome by January 26, 2017. A total of 7 online intake cases and 489 traditional intake cases were dropped due to this sample restriction. While this restriction results in disproportionately dropping cases that are opened in November and December and that will receive services (since these will likely finish outside of the window we collected data on), this should skew the sample similarly for both the traditional and online intake methods, and thus the comparisons of the outcomes in the two groups should still be valid.

Table 5.3. A Process Comparison of the Online and Traditional Intake Methods for NMLA

| | Online Intake ^a | Traditional Intake | p value |
|---|----------------------------|--------------------|---------|
| Intakes conducted | 70 | 2,913 | |
| <i>Result</i> | | | |
| Sample: closed cases | | | |
| Client withdrew | .270 | .144 | .006 |
| Case rejected | .127 | .153 | .576 |
| Case referred to another agency | .000 | .004 | .610 |
| Case received service | .603 | .699 | .103 |
| Sample size | 63 | 2,424 | |
| <i>Disposition time (median days)</i> | | | |
| Sample: specific to category examined below | | | |
| Triage application to case opening | 1 (n = 70) | — | |
| Client withdrew | 35 (n = 17) | 24.5 (n = 350) | .465 |
| Case rejected | 20 (n = 8) | 6 (n = 369) | .494 |
| Case referred to another agency | — (n = 0) | 9 (n = 10) | — |
| Case received service | 17 (n = 38) | 41 (n = 1,694) | .052 |

^a This online intake process is technically a hybrid system that allows individuals to initiate the intake process online when it is convenient for them but requires them to complete it by receiving a callback from an intake worker during regular business hours.

NOTE: p values are calculated from t-tests when proportions are being compared and are calculated from Fisher's exact test when median days are being compared.

sample of online cases that received services, there could be substantial difference in the types of cases in each group, and thus the service time could be shorter due to these differences. Because the sample of rejections was so small, we did not explicitly compare the reasons cases were rejected across the different intake methods.¹⁴

Takeaways

Overall, the above analyses indicate that LANM clients who initiated intake through the online system had their cases treated similarly to cases that initiated intake through traditional routes, although they tended to take a few extra days to resolve. This likely occurred because there was a natural lag between when the applicant submitted the online application to when they were able to receive a call from the agency to complete intake. By contrast, applicants who initiated intake through the traditional routes completed intake immediately after they first contacted the agency, and thus there was no lag present with this route. Due to the low sample size for NMLA online intakes, we were unable to draw conclusions regarding the impact of the online intake system on case processing for NMLA.

¹⁴ There were only eight online intake cases that were rejected.

Our results also highlighted two key inefficiencies with the online system that existed between May and December 2016. First, 35 percent of the online cases resulted in applicants dropping out of the process because they could not be reached by LANM, which wastes the time of the intake screeners. In particular, for each applicant who eventually dropped out because they could not be reached, intake screeners spent several minutes transferring information from their online application to the CMS and spent time calling them back (potentially several times). Due to the low sample size for NMLA online intakes, as well as the fact that NMLA data did not provide a reason why an applicant withdrew, we could not make definitive conclusions on the extent of this dropout issue for NMLA, although the results we presented indicate dropouts are a significant issue for NMLA as well. Second, our results indicate that the online intake system is triaging too many cases to NMLA, which is causing NMLA to have their initial screener conduct an extra phone call with applicants to ensure their case was triaged to the correct agency.

Recall from Chapter 3 that one of the potential benefits of the online intake system is that it should increase efficiency and thus allow intake screeners to conduct more intakes in a given period. While our results touch on aspects of efficiency, the ideal way to evaluate what happened to efficiency overall is to examine the average number of intakes completed per staff hour devoted to intake both before and after the online intake process was put into place. Any applicants who were turned away before beginning the intake process (i.e., they did not pass the prescreening process) or who were duplicate applicants (i.e., they entered through multiple intake methods or reapplied with the same issue) should not be counted in the number of intakes completed. While we do observe the number of intakes in a given period, we unfortunately were not able to collect data on staff time spent on intakes—it is thus difficult to ascertain the overall impact of the online intake system on the efficiency of the intake process.¹⁵ However, there were several issues (including those discussed above) that indicate that the online intake system may not have led to an increase in efficiency during this eight-month period after rollout. While intake staff noted that the actual intake process was faster with the online applicants (as they mainly had to verify information rather than collect it from applicants themselves), this needs to be balanced with the fact that a screener had to copy and paste all of that applicant’s information into the CMS. This faster process also needs to be balanced with the fact that intake screeners spend time on a set of applicants who will never complete intake because they cannot be reached.¹⁶

¹⁵ Staff intake hours fluctuated quite a bit over the period examined—while the intake hours tended to stay the same, sometimes there was only one intake staffer working a given hour and sometimes there were more. It thus becomes difficult to understand how many intakes were conducted by one worker in an hour. Further, both NMLA and LANM used an additional staff member to conduct the initial screen of the online applicants, but this staff member had many other job responsibilities. It is thus difficult to identify how many hours in a given period these individuals spent on intake.

¹⁶ Another measure that may present an aspect of what happened to intake efficiency is the percentage of calls answered by LANM that resulted in an intake. While we do not have individual-level data that track all calls coming in, we do observe the monthly number of calls answered by LANM and the number of intakes LANM conducts per month through the call-in method. We find that prior to the online system (between April 2015 and March 2016), the number of intakes conducted per month was 60 percent of the number of calls answered. This percentage increased

It is important to note that the lack of efficiency gains that may have occurred during the first eight months of the online system does not mean this will be the long-term impact of the system. Both NMLA and LANM expected that there would be issues with the online system that could only be identified after rollout, and thus they purposefully did not widely advertise this system as they were hoping to be able to make potential fixes to the system before encouraging more widespread use. It is thus likely that many of these issues can be resolved and that eventually efficiency gains may be realized. In testament to this, several changes were made after the period we evaluated concluded. In February 2017, the online intake system was adjusted so that the cases would directly feed into LANM's and NMLA's CMS—this resolved one of the key inefficiencies with the system as following the change screeners did not have to spend several minutes copying and pasting the information from the online application into the CMS. In 2017, LANM also modified their process so that attorneys would directly call back the applicants who submitted online applications (and made it through the prescreening process). Instead of having the online applicants wait to receive two calls (one from the intake screener to complete intake and one from the attorney to provide services), they now have the attorney conduct the income screen and provide services in the same call. This should help with the cases that were dropping out between the intake and attorney call. Other potential improvements to the online intake system that might reduce the rate at which online applicants drop out include having applicants select a time window when they could most easily receive a callback. The online system should also make it clear to applicants before they even begin the online session that they must be available during regular business hours to complete the process. The online system should also be adjusted such that it asks a set of questions and uses triage criteria that better ensures that only cases appropriate for NMLA are triaged there. This would allow NMLA to eliminate their initial phone call to the applicant, as the sole purpose of this call is to confirm that the case actually belongs with NMLA.

Finally, the fact that so many individuals that accessed the online intake system subsequently dropped out indicates there is likely a measurable percentage of the population that cannot access civil legal aid services during regular business hours. This online intake system is really a hybrid of an online and traditional call-in or walk-in system and thus is likely not suitable for these individuals. This suggests that there is a demand for a fully online civil legal aid service or for agencies to complete intake and provide services outside of regular business hours.

to 63 percent between May 2016 and December 2016. While this potentially indicates that there might have been a slightly lower percentage of calls that needed to be prescreened out (which would represent an increase in efficiency), this trend can also be affected by whether LANM had changing priorities during this time that would have directly affected the percentage of calls that were prescreened out.

Usage of the Online Intake System

As shown in Figure 3.2, one of the principal outputs to measure is the usage level of the system, as an efficiency increase in the intake process will only significantly reduce the total time spent on intakes if a reasonable percentage of all intakes come through the online system. The legal aid agencies were hopeful that eventually two-thirds of all intakes would come through the online system. The analyses presented in this section take a closer look at the usage level of the online system over the first eight months to identify some of the barriers applicants faced in using the online system.

Monthly Usage of the Online Intake System

Tables 5.1 and 5.3 showed that between May and December 2016, applicants referred through the online system comprised 13 percent of LANM and 2 percent of NMLA intakes, respectively. Table 5.4 examines this in more detail by presenting the monthly usage level, where we define usage as the percentage of total intakes conducted that come from the online system. The last row of the table presents the usage level over the entire evaluation period. Monthly trends are important to examine as the average usage level will underestimate the usage level going forward if usage is increasing over time. Using data on LANM intakes, column 1 of Table 5.4 presents the total number of intakes that originated from the online system during the relevant month. Note that this table includes information on all intakes that were initiated (i.e., the case was entered into the CMS), regardless of whether they were completed.^{17,18} Because these numbers are likely to fluctuate (due to general month-to-month variation in demand for legal aid), when trying to identify trends, it is more useful to examine what percentage of total intakes is composed of online intakes—this is presented in column 2.

Notably, the period that had the greatest usage of the online system occurred in the first two months, when usage was more than 17 percent of total intakes; the usage rate dropped significantly after that and slowly started to climb again. The initial drop in online intake usage that is seen between June and July is to be expected as this corresponds to when LANM instituted the policy that they would not accept any family law cases through the online intake system, which forced these cases to come through the traditional intake method (i.e., call-in). To understand whether usage of the online system would have increased over time in absence of this policy, it is necessary to drop the family law cases because the inclusion of

¹⁷ This will include cases from the online system that made it past the prescreening process of the LANM intake worker and were entered in the CMS but then were closed because intake screeners could not reach the applicant to complete intake. Most intakes that come through the traditional route should be completed.

¹⁸ The data used for these analyses come from the LANM CMS Data, which was matched to the LANM Online Triage Data to identify which cases came through the online system—details on this matching are provided in Appendix A.

Table 5.4. Usage Rate of the Online Intake System

| Month (in 2016) | LANM | | | | NMLA | |
|-----------------|--|---|--|---|-------------------------------|---|
| | Number of LANM Online Intakes ^a | Percentage of LANM Intakes from Online System | Percentage of Non-Family Law LANM Intakes from Online System | Percentage of LANM Intakes from Online System—Withdrawals Dropped | Number of NMLA Online Intakes | Percentage of NMLA Intakes from Online System |
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) |
| May | 130 | 17.4 | 7.2 | 10.9 | 10 | 2.3 |
| June | 159 | 17.7 | 8.1 | 11.6 | 10 | 2.1 |
| July | 70 | 9.7 | 8.9 | 6.9 | 14 | 3.5 |
| August | 104 | 10.8 | 9.3 | 7.5 | 9 | 1.9 |
| September | 86 | 11.7 | 9.5 | 7.9 | 13 | 3.6 |
| October | 84 | 11.6 | 12.2 | 8.9 | 2 | 0.6 |
| November | 71 | 11.2 | 11.8 | 9.1 | 7 | 2.5 |
| December | 68 | 12.0 | 10.8 | 8.8 | 5 | 1.9 |
| May–Dec | | 12.9 | 9.7 | 9.0 | | 2.4 |

^a This online intake process is technically a hybrid system that allows individuals to initiate the intake process online when it is convenient for them but requires them to complete it by receiving a callback from an intake worker during regular business hours.

family law cases mechanically alters the underlying trend. Column 3 drops all cases that either list a family law issue as the main problem or do not list a problem at all. The results in column 3 show that usage of the online intake system generally increased over time, despite the fact that there was no change in the advertising process. A regression analysis (results not shown) indicated that the percentage of intakes coming from the online system increased by an average of 0.7 percentage points each month between May and December 2016.¹⁹

The other key takeaway from the LANM results is that in absence of the policy to divert family law cases from the online intake system, the usage of the online system would have been much higher—by December, it is likely that one-fifth of intakes would have been initiated online.²⁰ While this fraction falls short of the eventual goal of having two-thirds of the cases come through the online system, it occurred during a period when the system was not widely advertised. However, because of the disproportionately high fraction of client withdrawals that occur before

¹⁹ To conduct the regression, we numerically coded the variable *month* such that all intakes in May corresponded to *month* = 1, all intakes in June corresponded to *month* = 2, and so on. We then regressed (using a logit model) whether an intake was from the online system on *month* and found that the average partial effects coefficient is 0.007 with a standard error of 0.002 and is statistically significant at the 1-percent level. The sample size was 2,929.

²⁰ Comparing the June and July estimates for column 2 indicates that when family law cases were no longer taken, the percentage of intakes from the online system dropped by roughly 8 percentage points. This suggests that if LANM had taken family law cases in December, roughly 20 percent (12 + 8) of intakes would have been from the online system.

intake is completed, it is also important to examine the percentage of cases that completed intake that came through the online system. As a proxy for this, we drop all cases where the client withdrew from both the online and traditional intakes. We present the percentage of intakes coming from the online system for this subsample in column 4—the percentage of online intakes when withdrawals are dropped is about 4 percentage points lower than when all intakes are examined (comparing the estimate in the bottom row between columns 2 and 4).²¹

Columns 5 and 6 present both the raw number of intakes for NMLA that came through the online system and the percentage of total NMLA intakes. The results show that the usage rate of the online system was consistently low for NMLA during this entire period, and there does not seem to be any evidence of an upward usage trend. There have been several reasons postulated regarding why the usage rate was much lower for NMLA than LANM, although we cannot determine which of these reasons is the real cause. First, as documented in Table 2.2, the demographics of NMLA clients are quite different than those of LANM clients, as NMLA clients are more likely to be Native American, less likely to speak English, and more likely to live in an area outside the urban hubs of Albuquerque and Santa Fe. All of these characteristics suggest NMLA clients may be less likely to either have access to the internet or be comfortable using the internet. Second, NMLA is designed for people with relatively immediate issues—these clients may feel the need to talk with a person as soon as possible rather than submitting an online application and waiting to hear from someone. Our analyses in the above section indicate there is a delay between when an individual submits an application and is then able to speak with someone—this may be an excessive delay for most of these clients. A third potential reason is that a nonnegligible fraction of NMLA intakes are referrals from domestic violence shelters—these referrals do not use the online intake system, and thus there are a percentage of NMLA users for which the choice of the online system is irrelevant.²²

What Are the Current Barriers to Using the Online Intake System?

The results from Table 5.4 indicate that the usage of the online intake system during the first eight months after implementation was significantly below what is eventually envisioned for the system. As noted earlier, this is to be expected as the agencies purposefully did not advertise the online option in order to keep usage low while they were identifying potential problems. Because LANM and NMLA would eventually like to increase the usage of the intake system, the analyses presented in this section look more closely at the barriers to using the system. If the agencies are

²¹ Online intakes make up 29 percent of withdrawals, while they only make up 9 percent of nonwithdrawals. These percentages are statistically different at the 1-percent level.

²² In general, workers at the domestic violence shelters complete a worksheet that has all necessary intake information on the client. This referral worksheet is then sent over to NMLA (via email or fax), and NMLA intake screeners enter this in the CMS. Unfortunately, we do not observe whether the intake for a domestic violence case came through a referral from a shelter, and thus we cannot quantify the percentage of intakes that use this method. In our interviews with some of the outlying NMLA offices, staff suggested that a majority of their intakes came from the shelters.

able to address any of the current barriers, they may be able to increase usage of the online system.

The traditional intake survey, which was administered to the NMLA clients who completed intake through the traditional method, provides the most direct understanding of why some individuals do not use the online intake system. This survey is shown in Appendix B. In addition to asking about basic demographics, the survey specifically asks the applicant if they were aware of the online intake system and why they did not (or would not) use it. Using the 100 respondents in the survey who answered all of the questions critical for analysis, we find that 97 of these individuals were not aware of the online intake system; the remaining three were aware of it, and thus their use of the traditional system indicates their preference for that intake method.²³ Of the 97 respondents who were not aware of the online system, 40 stated they would have used it if they had known about it. This indicates that if all survey respondents had been aware of the online intake system, 40 percent of them would have switched to the online intake system, which is a substantial shift. These results indicate that if LANM and NMLA can increase their outreach to ensure that most potential clients are aware of the system, they should be able to significantly increase online intake usage. One caveat to these results is that they only apply to NMLA clients, who we know had an extremely low level of usage of the online system. It is possible that more LANM customers were already aware of the system, which would mean outreach efforts would not have as big an impact on the LANM client base. Another caveat to these results is that our survey specifically asked individuals if they would use an online intake system, when the system that is currently in use is an online hybrid system. Thus, some of these individuals that said they would use an online system may not want to use an online hybrid system, which could mean our results would overstate the percentage of individuals that would switch to the system currently in place.²⁴

The traditional intake survey also asks those who stated that they would not have used the online process why this was the case, where there were several bulleted options listed, including issues with internet access, not comfortable using the internet, not comfortable transmitting sensitive information on the internet, feel the case is too complex to use the online system, and can better understand questions when asked by a person. Note that individuals were allowed to check all reasons that applied and could also fill in a free response. Table 5.5 shows the percentage of these people who selected a given reason.²⁵ The first five reasons listed in the table correspond

²³ Three individuals were dropped from the data because they either did not answer whether they knew about the online intake system, or they did not answer whether they would have used the online intake system.

²⁴ Note, however, that the fact that these individuals had just gone through the traditional intake process indicates that they might be available for a callback during regular business hours.

²⁵ Four survey respondents did not provide a reason and were dropped from this analysis.

to the bulleted reasons, while the last two reasons were taken from free responses.²⁶ There is likely some overlap in these reasons as the last four reasons in the table all deal with respondents feeling they will have difficulty correctly filling out the form, although it is somewhat ambiguous why people state that they prefer a person. Among the respondents, 61 percent selected at least one of the last four reasons in the table, indicating that worries about the potential complexity of using the online system was a common issue. Note that none of these individuals have actually seen the online system; to the extent that the system is much less difficult to use than they perceive, this may not end up being such a strong barrier. Outreach efforts to promote use of the online system may want to mention the key information applicants will need to provide, so they are not unnecessarily worried about how complicated the system might be.²⁷ The other key reason individuals stated as being an issue was internet access, as 25 percent of individuals who stated they would not use the tool cited this as the reason.

Table 5.5. Reasons Applicants Stated for Not Wanting to Use the Online Intake System

| Stated Reason for Not Using Online Intake System | Percentage |
|--|-------------------|
| Issue with internet access | 25.0 |
| Not comfortable using the internet | 5.4 |
| Not comfortable transmitting sensitive information on internet | 19.6 |
| Feel case to be too complex to use online system | 19.6 |
| Can better understand questions when asked by a person | 25.0 |
| Cannot get help if have questions | 3.6 |
| Prefers to speak with a person | 19.6 |
| Sample size | 56 |

NOTE: This table uses data from the survey administered to NMLA applicants who conducted intake through the traditional route and who stated they would not use the online system and provided a reason why they would not. Respondents can select more than one reason.

While the survey results allow us to examine the barriers of using the online system for NMLA clients, unfortunately this survey was not able to be administered to LANM clients entering through the traditional intake route. As a proxy to understanding what some of the barriers to LANM clients might be, we directly compare the characteristics of the LANM clients who used the online intake system with those who used the traditional intake system using a

²⁶ We coded a respondent as having an issue with internet access if they selected either of the first two bulleted options (corresponding to either having no access to the internet or having an internet speed that is too low) or wrote in a free-text response indicating some issue with access to the internet.

²⁷ The survey respondents are likely to disproportionately be relatively good English speakers, so literacy issues may not necessarily be driving why respondents think the online tool might be too complex to use without help. However, literacy issues are likely to be a barrier for a reasonable percentage of legal aid applicants.

regression framework.²⁸ Seeing what characteristics predict usage of the online system should shed some light on what some potential barriers are. Table 5.6 presents the results from regressing whether an individual used the online intake system on their personal and case characteristics. A logit specification is used because the dependent variable is binary; average partial effects are shown in the table so that the results are easier to interpret. Because LANM only collects data on all applicant characteristics if they provide services, the regression only includes applicants who received services. Further, we dropped all applicants who either had a family law issue or where their issue category was not listed. As applicants with family law issues were not allowed to use the online system for most of the evaluation period, it would not make sense to include these cases as they do not represent an applicant's choice of intake method.

The coefficients presented in Table 5.6 reveal how the proportion of applicants in the group that used the online intake system differ from the proportion of applicants who used the online intake system in the reference group for that category. For example, for applicant age, the reference group (i.e., left-out group) is applicants who are age 24 or less. The coefficient for individuals age 55 or over indicates that applicants age 55 or older were 8.6 percentage points less likely to use the online system than individuals age 24 or less. The starred coefficients indicate the effect is significantly different than zero, and so we only focus on those coefficients. Applicants whose primary language is English were 15.8 percentage points more likely to use the online system than individuals who listed another language as their primary language. These coefficient patterns are to be expected as applicants in older generations may be the least comfortable using the internet and may also have less ability to access it. Not speaking English is a known barrier to the current system, as there is currently no Spanish-language version. All minority groups (i.e., blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans) were less likely to use the online system than whites. Applicants with physical disabilities were also less likely to use the online system, while applicants with consumer finance issues or public benefits issues were more likely to use the online system (relative to those with housing issues).

The last set of coefficients examines whether the location of applicants is related to whether they use the online system. We define an outside county as a county that is not included in the Albuquerque/Santa Ana and Santa Fe county groupings (which are the main urban hubs of the state)—these groupings were described in Chapter 2 and are shown on the map in Figure 2.1. The coefficient for *Urban Area in Outside County* indicates that applicants residing in urban zip codes in outside counties were 4.1 percentage points more likely to use the online intake

²⁸ A regression analysis is more useful than just comparing the demographic composition of the online and traditional intake samples, because a regression allows us to identify whether a characteristic is related to online intake usage once other variables in the regression have been controlled for. This will identify some of the key characteristics that predict usage of the online system rather than identifying variables that seem to be important only because they are correlated with variables that actually are important.

Table 5.6. Regression of Online Intake Indicator on Applicant and Case Characteristics

| | Indicator for Whether the Intake Came Through Online System ^a |
|------------------------------|--|
| Female | -.0123 (.0132) |
| Age 25–54 | -.0248 (.0206) |
| Age 55 or over | -.0858 ^b (.0237) |
| Primary language English | .158 ^c (.0626) |
| Black | -.0830 ^c (.0351) |
| Hispanic | -.0629 ^b (.0137) |
| Native American | -.0631 ^c (.0310) |
| Mental disability | -.0229 (.0194) |
| Physical disability | -.0641 ^b (.0194) |
| Consumer finance issue | .0880 ^b (.0154) |
| Public benefits issue | .0566 ^c (.0224) |
| Other issue | -.0167 (.0188) |
| Urban area in outside county | .0413 ^c (.0176) |
| Rural area in outside county | .00859 (.0183) |
| Sample size | 2,196 |

^a This online intake process is technically a hybrid system that allows individuals to initiate the intake process online when it is convenient for them but requires them to complete it by receiving a callback from an intake worker during regular business hours.

^b Denotes a coefficient is significant at the 1-percent level.

^c Denotes a coefficient is significant at the 5-percent level.

NOTE: A logit specification was used, and the coefficients in the table represent average partial effects. Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors are in parentheses. These data only use LANM applicants who received services and do not include cases for which the issue was either missing or related to family law. The reference group (i.e., left-out group) for the location groupings in the table is living in the Albuquerque/Santa Ana and Santa Fe county groupings. The reference group for the case type is housing issues.

system than applicants residing in the Albuquerque/Santa Ana and Santa Fe county groupings. Interestingly, our results indicate that applicants living in rural zip codes in the outside counties used the online intake system at exactly the same rate as applicants residing in the Albuquerque/Santa Ana and Santa Fe county groupings. It is often thought that rural applicants may be less likely to use online services (due to internet access issues), but that does not seem to be the case here.

Takeaways

Overall the results in this section indicate that usage of the online system at both agencies during the evaluation period fell well below what the eventual usage is hoped to be. While online system usage was still significant for LANM clients, very few NMLA clients went the online route. This difference in usage across the agencies is likely to be at least partly related to the intrinsic differences between NMLA and LANM clients.

We also conducted several analyses examining what the barriers were to using the online system during this period to potentially identify ways in which the agencies can increase usage. One of the biggest barriers was simply that applicants did not know about the online intake option—this is to be expected as LANM and NMLA did not conduct any widespread advertising of the tool. LANM also created a self-imposed barrier in that they would not take any family law cases through the online system for most of our evaluation period. They have since changed this policy so that all cases are allowed to use the system. Other barriers to using the online system that were identified were lack of internet access, lack of fluency in English, and a perception that the online system might be too difficult to use without help. A key caveat is that most of these barriers were identified using the results from the traditional intake survey. Because this survey had a low response rate and also had a low number of respondents, these results should be interpreted with caution.

New Mexico plans to implement a Spanish version of the online intake system, which should help address some of the English-language barriers applicants have. We find no evidence that applicants in rural areas used the online system at a different rate than applicants in the more central city areas, and thus location does not seem to be a barrier for use. However, due to the belief expressed by many staff that they thought use of the online system would be low in rural areas, this should be reexamined when usage of the tool increases.

What Can Be Said About How the Online Intake System Affects Access to Justice?

As discussed earlier in Chapter 3 (and shown in the logic model presented in Figure 3.2), there are two ways in which the online intake system might be expected to affect access to justice: (1) It can allow individuals to access civil legal aid who would not otherwise have had access because they could not use the traditional intake methods—this implies a new type of

client is receiving access. (2) Overall efficiency gains in the intake process can allow the agencies to reallocate some intake resources toward attorneys so that the agencies are able to serve a larger number of applicants—this results in the number of individuals who have access to civil legal aid increasing overall. In two separate sections below, we discuss what we can and cannot conclude regarding the impact of the online intake system on each of these outcomes.

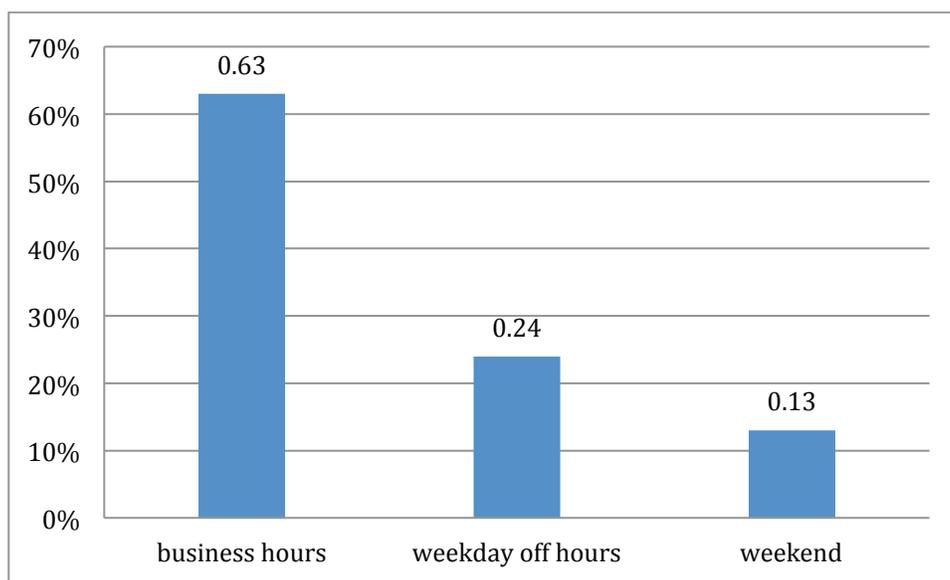
Did the Online Intake System Allow New Types of Clients to Access Civil Legal Aid?

Figure 5.3 summarizes the time of day during which online applicants submitted their initial application through the online system. The sample includes all cases submitted through the online system between May and December 2016 that were either triaged to LANM or NMLA. The time of day is coded as follows: (1) *business hours* are defined as completing the online application on a weekday between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.; (2) *weekday off-hours* are defined as completing the online application on a weekday outside the time window between 8:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.; and (3) *weekend* is defined as completing the online application at any time on a Saturday or Sunday. The results show that 63 percent of those that use the online intake system do so during regular business hours, while the remaining 37 percent used the online system during a time window when traditional intake methods would not have been available. Note that one of the reasons such a high percentage may choose to use the online system during business hours is because their main source of internet access may be through work, and thus they are more likely to have access during business hours.

While the results from Figure 5.3 are informative in that they show that a reasonable percentage of individuals seem to prefer accessing civil legal aid in off-hours, these results alone cannot allow us to draw definitive conclusions regarding the percentage of individuals who are now able to access civil legal aid solely because of the online intake system. Specifically, just because individuals might prefer to access legal aid during off-hours does not mean they can't access it during business hours. Further, while a large percentage of individuals actually used the online intake system during business hours, it does not necessarily mean they would have been available during that time to call in for legal aid assistance. In particular, many of the individuals who used the online system while they were at work during regular business hours may have found it difficult to use the traditional call-in service during that same time—calling in generally takes longer (as it includes waiting on the line for an available intake worker), and discussing sensitive matters over the phone in a workspace where they might be overheard might deter them from calling in.

To better understand the extent to which the online intake system may have enabled access for new types of individuals, we look at the results from the survey administered to individuals using the online intake system—recall from Chapter 4 these are likely to predominately be LANM clients. The last set of questions on this survey (questions 10–12 on the survey shown in

Figure 5.3. Period When Online Intake Application Was Submitted



Sample Size: 1,624

Appendix B) were specifically designed to answer this—Figure 5.4 summarizes the key results from these questions. Question 10 on the online intake survey asks respondents whether they would have been able to access civil legal assistance through traditional methods (i.e., the call-in or walk-in method) if the online system had not been available. Figure 5.4 shows that out of the 105 total survey respondents who answered question 10, 85 (81%) said they either would or probably would have been able to use a traditional intake method if the online service was not available.²⁹ This group of applicants should thus not be considered a new type of client as they could have accessed legal aid through traditional methods.³⁰

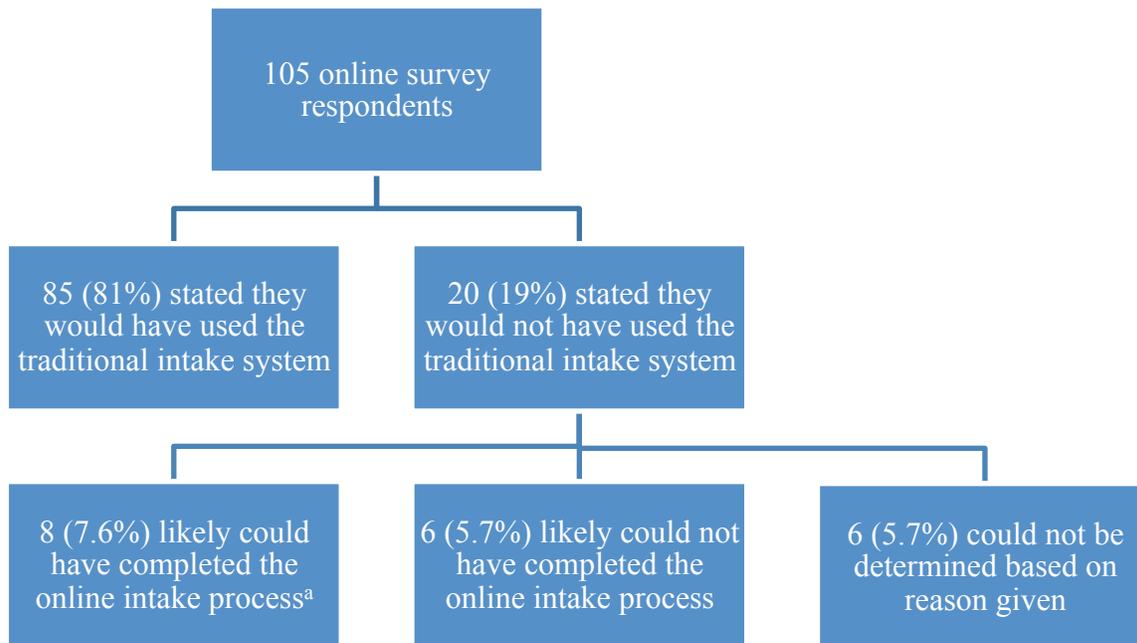
While the remaining 20 survey respondents indicated they would not have used other methods besides the online system, this does not necessarily mean all of these individuals have new access to civil legal aid. In particular, the online intake system is somewhat of a hybrid system in that while the first stage allows applicants to enter online, in order to actually receive assistance, one needs to be available during normal business hours to complete the process by phone. It is thus important to examine the reasons why applicants said they would not use the phone system (which is asked in question 11 of the survey) to determine whether each of these 20 applicants could actually have been able to complete the intake process.³¹

²⁹ One of the 106 survey respondents did not respond to this question and was dropped from the sample.

³⁰ This can potentially understate the percentage of clients that are likely to only use the online intake system, as some individuals may state that they could call in but may not end up doing so when they realize they need to wait on the line for several minutes.

³¹ Note that we cannot match these survey respondents up to their intake records, so we cannot explicitly determine what happened with their case.

Figure 5.4. Did the Online Intake System Allow New Clients Access to Legal Aid?



^a This online intake process is technically a hybrid system that allows individuals to initiate the intake process online when it is convenient for them but requires them to complete it by receiving a callback from an intake worker during regular business hours.

Based on the reason the applicant said they could not have called in for legal aid assistance, we coded them as either being able to make the online intake system work or not work. In particular, if applicants said they could not call in because they were not available during normal business hours or that they would not have called in because they cannot have a private phone conversation, we coded them as ultimately not being able to make the online intake system work for them. There were 6 individuals who fell into this category—while we cannot track what happened, it is likely they would have eventually had to drop out of the process. For individuals who listed the reason they could not use the call-in method as because they did not have enough minutes on their phone plan, they did not have time to wait on the line for someone to speak with them, or they couldn't get through using the call-in method, we coded these individuals as ultimately being able to make this online-phone hybrid system work.³² These are individuals who are likely to be sensitive to the amount of time they can spend on the phone (both with having phone minutes or having enough time to spare). However, the online intake system is much more efficient from an applicant's perspective in that it allows them to not wait on the line but rather be directly called back and have the intake process be shorter. Also, for individuals who clearly

³² Respondents could select as many reasons from the bulleted response options that were applicable, and they were also allowed to fill in a free-text response answer. If a respondent listed at least one reason that was consistent with them likely not being able to complete the online intake process, they were categorized as such regardless of what other reasons they had listed.

will not qualify, the online system can screen them out immediately. Thus, with the reasons given, it seems possible that these individuals would have been able to complete the intake process—these would then be the sole individuals who submitted an online application who would be able to complete the intake process and who would not have if only traditional intake methods were available. There are 8 individuals in this category. There were 6 other individuals who stated a reason that was nonrelevant and did not allow us to categorize them—that is, their reason did not allow us to make a reasonable guess as to whether they would have been able to complete the process. If we assume they could not, only 7.6% (8 out of 105) of the online survey respondents are likely to be new users who could only have gotten access through this online method; if we assume all 6 of the ambiguous cases could have continued through intake, this percentage is 13.3 percent (14 out of 105). Assuming the survey respondents are a representative cross-section of the online users, this suggests that somewhere between 7.6 percent and 13.3 percent of online users are a new type of applicant who otherwise would not have been able to receive services, although there is a wide margin of error surrounding these estimates.³³ Further, because the response rate to this survey was only 6 percent, these results may not be reflective of the population of users of the online intake system. Note that to the extent the overall ability for these agencies to serve applicants is the same (which is the subject of the next section), these new types of customers will come at the expense of some of the traditional customers.

Did the Online Intake System Allow a Greater Number of Individuals to Receive Civil Legal Aid Services?

While at the outset it was hoped that this online intake system would eventually increase the overall number of individuals who receive access to civil legal aid, it is important to discuss the effects that we would rationally expect to see in the first eight months after rollout (which is the period of this evaluation). In particular, as shown in the logic model in Figure 3.2, to increase the overall number of individuals who receive services requires an increase in intake efficiency, a reasonable fraction of intakes coming from the online system, and for the agencies to respond to this realized increase in intake efficiency by expanding attorney hours. Our evaluation results imply that none of these outputs have been realized, which is to be expected as our evaluation took place relatively early after implementation. Because of the implementation issues discussed earlier, efficiency gains had not yet been realized by the end of the evaluation. Because these efficiency gains had not been realized, LANM and NMLA were interested in keeping usage of the online system at a relatively low rate and had no reason to make adjustments to the intake screener-attorney staff ratio because there was no realized efficiency gain. Thus, one would not expect the online intake system to have any real impact on the overall level of individuals who received legal aid services from NMLA and LANM during this period.

³³ The margin of error (using a 95% confidence interval) for the lower bound of 7.6 percent is 5 percent; for the upper bound of 13.3 percent, the margin of error is 6 percent.

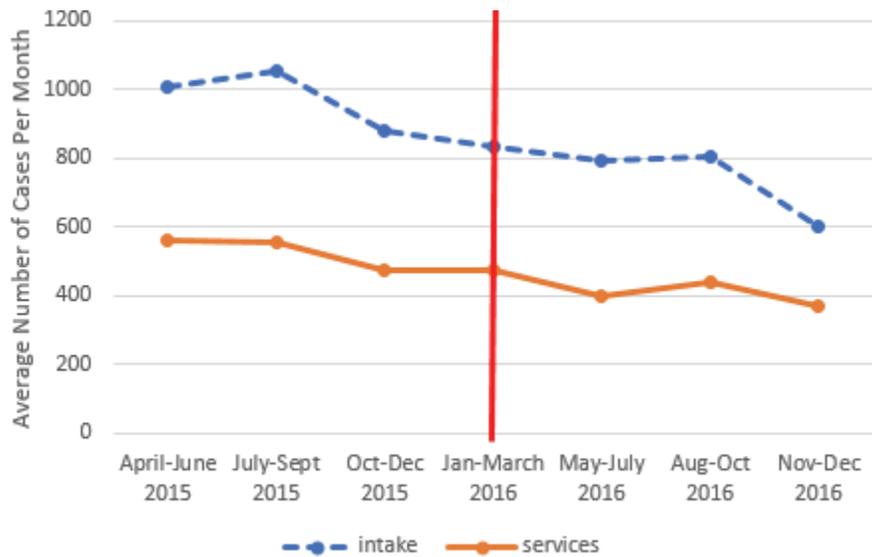
It is important to note that even if we might have expected the online system to increase the number of individuals who received services over this time, we could not have identified the amount of this increase. Because the online intake system was rolled out to all of New Mexico at once, the only potential research design that can be used is a pre-post research design. This involves comparing the number of individuals who received legal aid services per month after the implementation of the online system (in April 2016) with the number of individuals who received legal aid services per month before implementation. In order for this research design to identify the causal impact of the online intake system on the number of individuals who receive services per month, it must be the case that there were no other changes going on during this time that would have led to changes in the number of individuals receiving legal aid services. Another way to state this is that in absence of the online system, there should be no real-time trends in terms of the number of individuals who receive services per month.

Figure 5.5 examines how the number of intakes per month conducted by LANM, as well as the number of applicants who received services from LANM per month, changed over the period from April 2015 through December 2016.^{34,35} For each quarter shown on the graph, we calculated the average number of intakes and services received per month in that quarter. All data points to the right of the vertical line on the figure correspond to a period after the online intake system was implemented (in April 2016). In order for a pre-post research design to work, one would have wanted the trend lines to be relatively flat in quarters 1–4 (indicating that no time trends are present), and then the average change from quarters 1–4 to quarters 5–7 would have shown the impact on the number of individuals receiving services per month. However, Figure 5.5 clearly shows a consistent downward trend in both intakes and applicants receiving services throughout the entire time. This is consistent with staff declines that occurred at LANM. In April 2015 LANM had three intake screeners, which decreased to two in December 2015 and to one in November 2016. The intake screeners, who both man the phone lines and call the online intake system applicants back, are key to the entire intake process. Mechanically, reducing the number of hours they work will automatically reduce the number of individuals that can receive services. LANM was also consistently understaffed in attorneys across this period. Thus, because there was a general decline in the number of intakes and individuals receiving services over this period, one cannot identify the impact the online system had on these outcomes.

³⁴ A case was classified as occurring in a given month if the formal intake process was initiated during that month, although some of these cases likely did not conclude until the following month.

³⁵ We only examine time trends in LANM here because NMLA clients used the online system so minimally that it would not make sense to expect any increases in service.

Figure 5.5. LANM’s Average Monthly Number of Intakes and Cases with Services Received During 2015 and 2016



NOTE: All data points to the right of the vertical line correspond to a period after the online intake system was implemented. For the services-received line, the last data point only uses data from November 2016. We did not use December 2016 data for services received because many cases that originated in December 2016 would not have been completed yet, and thus we do not know if services are eventually received, which would artificially decrease the number of cases that were coded as receiving services in December 2016.

Takeaways

Overall, the results indicate that the online system results in a relatively small number of new customers gaining access to civil legal aid. This is likely because the online system is more of a hybrid system than a pure online option because while the first part is online, the remainder of the process must occur by phone during regular business hours. This system is thus likely to work for the percentage of individuals that are very time-sensitive, in that they are available during business hours but cannot spend too much time waiting on the phone. The fact that so many individuals who access the online system subsequently drop out indicates that there is likely a demand for a fully online civil legal aid service or for agencies to be available to complete intake and provide services outside of business hours.³⁶

³⁶ Examples of civil legal assistance that is fully online include systems that allow applicants to ask questions online and receive answers from attorneys through email, as well as systems that make it easy to fill out court forms for pro se applicants. Such organizations as the Tennessee Alliance for Legal Services and the Legal Services of Northern Michigan have implemented online systems for eligible low-income individuals to submit questions that are then answered by volunteer attorneys through email (Cabral et al., 2012). One of the primary websites used to assist individuals in filling out legal forms is Law Help Interactive, which was launched by Pro Bono Net in 2005.

Because our evaluation examines a relatively short period after implementation, it is not surprising that many of the key goals were not achieved during this time window. In particular, usage of the online system was relatively low, efficiency gains were not yet realized, and thus there was no real way for agencies to increase the number of people for whom they were able to provide services. However, it is possible that this goal can be achieved as more time goes by. Both NMLA and LANM are aware of the inefficiencies of the current online system and are working on addressing them—we have noted several of the modifications that have already been made and have made recommendations for other potential modifications. It will thus be important to evaluate the extent to which online intake systems allow agencies to handle more clients at a later time (after all implementation issues have been worked out) to better understand what the effects of online intake adoption might be.

6. Conclusion

Conclusions

In April 2016 New Mexico implemented an online intake system for civil legal aid. As we have noted throughout the report, this online intake system was really an online-phone hybrid intake system, as it required users of the online system (who were not screened out) to complete intake by speaking with an intake worker over the phone. This project conducted an evaluation of the effects of this online intake system over the first eight months after rollout. The goals New Mexico eventually hoped to achieve with the new intake system were the following: (1) have roughly two-thirds of all intakes enter through the online system; (2) increase the efficiency of the overall intake process; (3) allow a new type of client to access legal aid—one that would otherwise not have had access because they could not use the traditional intake methods; and (4) allow legal aid agencies to serve a larger number of clients than they had been able to before (due to potential efficiency gains in the intake process). Our evaluation of New Mexico’s online intake system examined a relatively short eight-month period after implementation, and thus it is not surprising that many of the key goals (which are more long-term) were not achieved during this time window. Below we briefly describe the extent to which our results suggest each of these goals was (or was not) achieved.

Usage of the online intake system fell short of the goal to have two-thirds of all intakes enter through the online system. During the eight-month period studied, only 13 percent of the 5,992 LANM intakes and 2 percent of the 2,983 NMLA intakes came through the online system. There are several likely reasons for the low usage rate of the online system over this period. First, New Mexico intentionally did not widely advertise the online system during this period as they wanted to ensure the system was working smoothly before encouraging widespread use. As evidence of this, our survey of individuals that used the traditional intake system revealed that 97 percent of the 100 respondents (who answered all relevant survey questions) did not know about the online intake system; 40 percent of these respondents indicated they would have used the system if they had known about it. Second, LANM intentionally restricted access to the online system by requiring individuals with family law issues to use the traditional intake process for most of our study period.

While our evaluation could not make definitive conclusions about the impact of the online intake system on the overall efficiency of the intake process (goal number two listed above) because we lacked data on staff hours spent on intake, two key issues implied that it was likely the system did not have a significant positive impact on efficiency in the time we studied. In particular, during our evaluation period, the information from the online system could not directly feed into the legal aid agency’s CMS, and thus staff had to spend several minutes

copying and pasting each applicant's information. Further, the online intake system required applicants to speak to an intake worker by phone to complete intake, and many applicants were not available when intake workers called them. This was evidenced by the fact that 35 percent of the 772 LANM clients that used the online intake system eventually had their cases withdrawn because intake staff could not reach them by phone to complete the follow-up interview. This large dropout rate implies a reasonable percentage of intake workers' time was being wasted, as they not only had to copy and paste information from these applicants' online application into their agency's CMS, but they also spent time calling these applicants back.

Our survey given to applicants using the online intake system indicated that between 7.6 percent and 13.3 percent of respondents are a new type of applicant that would not have been able to access legal aid without this online system. While these results do suggest that the new online system did allow for a new type of client to gain access (goal number three), these results should be interpreted with caution due to both the low sample size of the survey (105 respondents that answered all relevant survey questions) and the low response rate (6%).

Due to consistent staff declines at the legal aid agencies between 2015 through 2016, we are unfortunately unable to identify how the number of individuals receiving services changed in response to the implementation of the online intake system. However, our results suggest that during the first eight months after rollout, the legal aid agencies likely did not see real improvement in efficiency of the intake process, and they also did not make any staffing changes due to perceived efficiency improvements. Thus, while we do not expect to find that the online intake system allowed for more individuals to receive services (goal number four), we cannot empirically determine what happened.

Future Changes to the Online Intake System

While the key goals of the online intake system were not achieved during the eight-month period after rollout that we evaluated, it is possible that these goals can be achieved as more time goes by. Both NMLA and LANM are aware of the inefficiencies of the online intake system and are working on addressing them. The first column of Table 6.1 shows both the changes these agencies made to the online intake system after our evaluation period was over and the key changes staff indicated should eventually be made. The second column of the table notes what impact each specific change might have. All of these changes are targeted toward improving the two key outputs (as identified in the logic model shown in Figure 3.2) of the online intake system—improving the efficiency of the intake process and improving the overall usage of the online system, which should in theory allow for increased access to civil legal aid (the outcomes of the logic model shown in Figure 3.2). Many of the potential changes targeted at improving efficiency are specifically trying to address the fact that a large percentage of online applicants drop out of the process because they cannot be reached.

Table 6.1. Implemented and Potential Future Changes of the Online Intake System

| Implemented Changes | Purpose of Change |
|---|---|
| The online system was altered so that the information applicants entered online fed directly into the agency's CMS. | Improve efficiency of the online intake process, as intake workers no longer had to copy and paste information from the online system into the agency's CMS. |
| LANM altered their callback procedure for online intakes such that an attorney called the applicant back and both completed intake and provided services on the same call (as opposed to LANM having both the intake worker and the attorney make two separate calls to the applicant). | Improve efficiency of the online intake process by reducing the number of online applicants that drop out of the process because they cannot be reached. |
| LANM now allows all case types (including family law cases) to use the online intake system. | Increase usage of the online intake system. |
| Potential Future Changes | Purpose of Change |
| The online system should make clear up front that the system is an online-phone hybrid system and will require the applicant to be available during normal business hours to complete intake and receive services. | Improve efficiency of the online intake process by reducing the number of online applicants that drop out of the process because they cannot be reached. |
| The online system should request that applicants provide several time windows during which they would be available to receive a callback. | Improve efficiency of the online intake process by reducing the number of online applicants that drop out of the process because they cannot be reached. |
| The online system should require individuals to complete certain fields in the online form before they can move on to the next field. | Improve efficiency of the online intake process by ensuring the applicant's case ends up at the right agency and allowing the call completing the intake process to be faster. |
| The online system should alter the way it triages cases to LANM versus NMLA, as too many cases that were more appropriate for LANM were triaged by the system to NMLA. | Improve efficiency of the online intake process by reducing the need for NMLA to conduct an initial prescreen phone call with online applicants to ensure NMLA was the appropriate agency for their case. |
| The online system should ask applicants what language they would like a callback in. | Improve efficiency of the online intake process by reducing the number of instances in which the intake worker that calls the applicant back does not speak the same language as them. |
| The online intake option should be more widely advertised. | Increase usage of the online intake system. |
| The online intake system should be made available in Spanish. | Increase usage of the online intake system. |

While it is logical that each of the changes (both potential and already implemented) in Table 6.1 might lead to increased efficiency and usage of the online intake system, it is important to note that there is no empirical evidence to support this yet. Due to the recentness of some of the changes, as well as the fact that most of the changes suggested have not yet been implemented, it is not possible at this point to understand what the impacts of these changes will eventually be. This suggests that future evaluations of online intake systems should be longer-term, so they can evaluate what the impacts of these systems are once the inevitable tweaks of the online system are made. Regardless, we think these results should be helpful to other legal aid agencies since the results identify many potential issues that agencies will need to think about as they develop

their online system. Because New Mexico has a centralized intake system, it should allow for easier adoption of an online intake system, as it is easier to coordinate adoption across all of the participating agencies. Regions that have more diffuse intake systems may encounter additional issues than were identified in our evaluation of New Mexico's online intake system.

Finally, as has been noted throughout this report, this online intake system is really a hybrid of an online and traditional call-in or walk-in system. The fact that so many individuals that accessed the online intake system subsequently dropped out indicates there is likely a reasonable percentage of the population that cannot access civil legal aid services during regular business hours. This suggests that there is a demand for a fully online civil legal aid service or for agencies to complete intake and provide services outside of regular business hours.

Appendix A: Sample Restrictions and Matching Process for Administrative Data

This appendix discusses the sample restrictions we used on the various administrative data sets we obtained, as well as how we matched the online triage system data with the intake data for each organization. The sample restrictions noted below represent the baseline version of the data file. Many of the analyses called for us to further restrict the sample, typically based on either date or whether services were received. We note in the chapter text when we make any of these additional sample restrictions.

LANM Online Triage Data

The original data file included all cases for which the online triage tool referred the case to LANM between April 21, 2016, and December 31, 2016. We deleted 25 observations that were noted as “test” observations and 101 observations that had a duplicate case number. (We only kept the case that had the earliest application date.) This left us with 1,695 observations.

LANM CMS Data

As noted in Chapter 4, this file contains information on all individuals who went through formal intake, where the intake method could have originated via the online method or via the phone. To determine which cases came in through the online system, we matched the 877 cases from the LANM Online Triage Data that had their case opened (and were thus eligible to be matched) with the cases in the LANM CMS Data. Both data sets had a unique case identification number that facilitated this match. We found that 5 of the 877 cases found in the online triage data could not be found in the CMS data and were thus dropped. We dropped an additional 38 cases for which we found a match but for which the date listed on the formal intake was before the date on which they accessed the online system.

With the remaining file, we then dropped observations that seemed inconsistent. This included dropping 62 cases that were in the CMS data that were coded as using the online intake system but were not found in the online triage file. We also dropped 343 cases that had an outcome that was not consistent with what one would expect for a case that went through formal intake—this included cases that had two opposing dispositions as well as ones that noted they were test cases. This leaves us with a total of 18,147 observations.

NMLA Online Triage Data

The original data file included all cases for which the online triage tool referred the case to NMLA between April 25, 2016, and December 31, 2016. We deleted 3 observations that were duplicates (based on name, date of birth, and application time) and 6 observations that had no applicant name listed. This left us with 187 observations.

NMLA CMS Data

To determine which cases came in through the online system, we matched the 80 cases from the NMLA Online Triage Data that had their case opened (and were thus eligible to be matched) with the cases in the NMLA CMS Data. Both data sets had information on applicant names and date of birth that facilitated the match. However, because there were a lot of spelling errors in names, it required matching most of these records by hand. Of the 80 cases that were eligible to be matched, we were not able to match 8 of these records because we could not find these applicants in the CMS data; these cases were dropped.

With the remaining file, we then dropped observations that seemed inconsistent. We dropped 15 observations that were coded in the CMS data as coming through the online system but could not be found in the online triage data set. We then dropped 336 cases that were coded in the NMLA CMS data as either being records that were created erroneously (either because they were duplicates or administrative errors); dropped 208 observations for which the intake method was not either walk-in, call-in, or online; dropped 80 observations for which the case had no name associated with it; and dropped 9 observations that seemed irrelevant as the problem listed was to help a nonprofit organization. Note that all of these drops mainly just dropped nononline applicants. This leaves us with a total of 8,434 observations.

Appendix B: Surveys

Survey Administered to Users of the Online Intake System

1. Age:

- 18–24 years old
- 25–34 years old
- 35–44 years old
- 45–54 years old
- 55–64 years old
- 65–74 years old
- 75 years or older

2. Gender:

- Male
- Female

3. What is your zip code?

4. What is the highest level of education that you have completed?

- Eighth grade or less
- Went to high school but did not graduate
- High school graduate (or equivalent)
- Went to college but did not graduate
- Associate's degree (including occupational or academic degrees)
- Bachelor's degree
- Advanced degree (including master's, professional, or doctorate degree)

5. What is the language you speak most often?

- English
- Spanish
- Other (please specify): _____

6. How well can you read in English?

- Very well
- Well
- Not well
- Not at all

7. How often do you read in English? (this includes reading anything, such as instructions, forms, news, recipes, etc.)
- Every day
 - A few times a week
 - Once a week
 - Less than once a week
 - Never
8. How many hours do you use the internet in a typical week?
- 0 hours
 - 1–3 hours
 - 4–7 hours
 - 8–14 hours
 - 15 or more hours
9. If you wanted to use the internet, how easy would it be for you to get access (either at home or through work, a library, coffee shop, etc.)?
- It is easy for me to obtain access to the internet.
 - I can obtain access to the internet but not easily.
 - I have no access to the internet.

We would now like to ask some questions about how you would have asked for civil legal aid help if the online triage system you just used was not available. There are two other ways you could have asked for help: (1) call the New Mexico Legal Aid office during normal business hours or (2) go to a New Mexico Legal Aid office during normal business hours.

10. If the online triage system you just used was not available, would you have called in **or** physically gone to a New Mexico Legal Aid office to ask for help?
- Yes
 - Probably Yes
 - Probably No
 - No
11. [If survey participant answered “No” or “Probably No” to question 10:] Please select as many choices as are applicable for why you would not have called in:
- I am not available during normal business hours.
 - I do not have access to a phone.
 - I do not have enough minutes on my phone plan.
 - I am uncomfortable discussing these issues with a live person.
 - I do not have time to wait on the line until someone is available to speak with me.
 - Other (please state reason): _____

12. [If survey participant answered “No” or “Probably No” to question 10:] Please select as many choices as are applicable for why you would not have physically gone to a New Mexico Legal Aid office:

- I am not available during normal business hours.
- I have no means of transportation to get to an office.
- There is transportation available, but it would take too long.
- I am uncomfortable discussing these issues with a live person.
- I do not have time to wait in the office until someone is available to speak with me.
- Other (please state reason): _____

Survey Administered to Users of the Traditional Intake System

1. Age:

- 18–24 years old
- 25–34 years old
- 35–44 years old
- 45–54 years old
- 55–64 years old
- 65–74 years old
- 75 years or older

2. Gender:

- Male
- Female

3. What is your zip code?

4. What is the highest level of education that you have completed?

- Eighth grade or less
- Went to high school but did not graduate
- High school graduate (or equivalent)
- Went to college but did not graduate
- Associate’s degree (including occupational or academic degrees)
- Bachelor’s degree
- Advanced degree (including master’s, professional, or doctorate degree)

5. What is the language you speak most often?

- English
- Spanish
- Other (please specify): _____

6. How well can you read in English?
- Very well
 - Well
 - Not well
 - Not at all
7. How often do you read in English? (this includes reading anything such as instructions, forms, news, recipes, etc.)
- Every day
 - A few times a week
 - Once a week
 - Less than once a week
 - Never
8. How many hours do you use the internet in a typical week?
- 0 hours
 - 1–3 hours
 - 4–7 hours
 - 8–14 hours
 - 15 or more hours
9. If you wanted to use the internet, how easy would it be for you to get access (either at home or through work, a library, coffee shop, etc.)?
- It is easy for me to obtain access to the internet.
 - I can obtain access to the internet but not easily.
 - I have no access to the internet.

This set of questions pertains to the process you just completed where you talked with me about your need for civil legal aid. This process is known as intake.

10. Before today, did you know you could have completed this intake process online?
- Yes
 - No
11. [If survey participant answered “Yes” to question 10:] Why didn’t you complete this intake process online? (please mark ALL reasons that apply)
- I have no access to the internet.
 - My internet speed is too slow to complete the intake process online.
 - I am not comfortable using the internet.
 - I am not comfortable using the internet to transmit such sensitive information.
 - I feel my case is too complex to use the online service.
 - I can understand the questions better when someone asks them of me.
 - Other (please specify): _____

12. [If survey participant answered “No” to question 10:] Would you have gone through the intake process online if you had known about it? The process online asks a set of questions similar to what you were asked today.

- Yes
- Probably Yes
- Probably No
- No

13. [If survey participant answered “Probably No” or “No” to question 12:] Why would you have not used the online service? (please mark ALL reasons that apply)

- I have no access to the internet.
- My internet speed is too slow to complete the intake process online.
- I am not comfortable using the internet.
- I am not comfortable using the internet to transmit such sensitive information.
- I feel my case is too complex to use the online service.
- I can understand the questions better when someone asks them of me.
- Other (please specify): _____

References

- Cabral, James E., Abhijeet Chavan, Thomas M. Clarke, John Greacen, Bonnie Rose Hough, Linda Rexer, Jane Ribadeneyra, and Richard Zorza, “Using Technology to Enhance Access to Justice.” *Harvard Journal of Law and Technology*, Vol. 26, No. 1, 2012, pp. 241–324.
- Northwest Justice Project, “CLEAR Online Final Report LSC TIG #9558,” 2012. As of September 6, 2018:
<https://www.lsc.gov/sites/default/files/09558%20WA%20Clear%20Online%20Final%20Report.pdf>
- Sandefur, Rebecca, and Aaron Smyth, “Access Across America: First Report of the Civil Justice Infrastructure Mapping Project,” SSRN, October 11, 2011. As of September 6, 2018:
<http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1962790>
- Sandefur, Rebecca L., “What We Know and Need to Know About the Legal Needs of the Public,” *South Carolina Law Review*, Vol. 67, 2015, pp. 443–460.
- Tull, John, “Analysis of the Civil Legal Aid Intake Infrastructure in Minnesota Final Report,” 2017. As of September 6, 2018:
http://www.mncourts.gov/mncourtsgov/media/scao_library/documents/Minnesota-intake-study-Final-Report-6-14-17.pdf
- . “TIG #13048 Final Evaluation Report,” 2016. As of September 6, 2018:
<http://www.legalaidok.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/TIG-FINAL-EVALUATION-REPORT-NMLA-TIG-13048-rvsd-20161127.pdf>
- U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census of Population and Housing, *Population and Housing Unit Counts*, CPH-2-33, New Mexico U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 2012. As of September 6, 2018:
<https://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/cph-2-33.pdf>
- Vaughn, Cynthia, “LSC TIG #07193 Final Grant Report,” 2010. As of September 6, 2018:
https://www.lsc.gov/sites/default/files/TIG/07193_LAWO_Online_Intake.pdf
- Zorza, Richard, “The Access to Justice ‘Sorting Hat’: Towards a System of Triage and Intake That Maximizes Access and Outcomes.” *Denver University Law Review*, Vol. 89, No. 4, 2011, pp. 859–886.