

# Access to Justice in Wisconsin

## What is access to justice?

The most basic measure of access to justice is the ability of an individual (regardless of income) to navigate the legal system and advocate for their interests. Access to justice is a broad concept that addresses the cost and access to legal help, as well as fair and efficient legal systems, and access to information. Initiatives may include free legal aid, court navigators, accessible legal information, or official forms and checklists.

The justice gap is the difference between the civil legal needs of low-income Americans and the resources available to meet those needs.

<https://justicegap.lsc.gov/>

## What is civil legal aid?

Civil legal aid is the network of public and private resources that ensure fairness for all in the justice system, regardless of how much money you have. It includes self-help resources and forms, volunteers, and staffed legal services offices.

Voices for Civil Justice has a quick explainer video you can share: <https://vimeo.com/288425319>

## What services relate to access to justice?

Many types of services may affect access to justice in your community and fall along the continuum below.

Most library services fall in the earlier part of the legal services continuum. Access to technology, including the internet, computers, and printers, is an important part of supporting access to justice. Libraries can help with navigating websites and legal aid directories or services. Book or digital collections may provide information about legal issues. Laws and court opinions can be researched with print or online resources.

Legal aid providers may ask questions to determine whether and how they can help, or if individuals need to be referred to other services. Providers have limited funding and staff, so they have to triage requests for assistance. This screening may involve gathering information about the individual's financial situation (income and/or assets), and whether the person is at risk for abuse, homelessness, or hunger. Some providers have strict financial limits. Other programs may prioritize serving people who are over the age of 60, disabled, or victims of abuse.

Legal triage frameworks are helpful to get a better understanding of how civil legal aid providers may approach issues. This legal checkup tool gives one snapshot of how to navigate requests for legal help in a particular area (Milwaukee).

Marquette Legal Clinic Legal Checkup

<https://law.marquette.edu/assets/community/pdf/legal-checkup.pdf>

## Legal Services Continuum

Legal information online or in books	Legal information in person	Forms and procedural checklists	Intake screening & referrals	Advice and counsel	Brief legal services	Unbundled representation	Full case representation	Class action or other large scale work
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## Access to Justice Programs

Self Represented Litigation Network  
<https://www.srln.org/taxonomy/term/226>

Wisconsin Access to Justice Commission  
<https://wisatj.org/>

Legal Information Services to the Public, AALL  
Division  
<https://www.aallnet.org/lispsis/>

Legal Services Corporation Public Library Initiative  
<https://www.lsc.gov/initiatives/public-library-initiative>

## Resources for Legal Help & Information

When helping a patron to navigate a legal issue, government websites are often helpful to find more information on the law, find complaint resources, and get forms and checklists. Check the statewide court website, as well as county websites for court procedures, forms, and rules.

Legal service providers provide their own information on their websites, and can be excellent sources of information - particularly for common questions. Some organizations provide extensive information online, like the Tenant Resource Center or Greater Wisconsin Agency on Aging Resources.

Wisconsin Courts Self Help Center  
<https://www.wicourts.gov/services/public/selfhelp/index.htm>

Wisconsin State Law Library  
<https://wilawlibrary.gov/>

Wisconsin Legislature  
<https://legis.wisconsin.gov/>

GovInfo: Federal government information  
<https://www.govinfo.gov/>

There may be legal clinics or services in your area. The State Law Library maintains a free or low-cost legal assistance directory.  
<https://wilawlibrary.gov/topics/assist.php>

## Education for Librarians

Reach out for help or training for your staff. The Wisconsin State Law Library and University of Wisconsin Law Library partner to provide training on legal reference and legal research tips for your staff, and access to justice issues. The State Law Library also provides legal research training to the public through webinars and in-person classes.

Resources for librarians  
<https://wilawlibrary.gov/learn/legalresearch.html#librarians>

WebJunction training  
<https://www.webjunction.org/explore-topics/access-civil-legal-justice.html>

## Reference Support

Wisconsin State Law Library  
608) 267-9696 (M-F, 8:30-4:30)  
wsll.ref@wicourts.gov

University of Wisconsin Law Library  
(608) 262-3394 (M-F, plus evenings and weekends)  
askuwlaw@law.wisc.edu

## Legal Programs in Public Libraries

Programs in public libraries can range from supporting technology to hosting clinics in your library meeting spaces. Here are just a few examples.

**Legal collections and databases**  
Appleton Public Library's Westlaw access  
<https://apl.org/e/contains/Legal/>

LaCrosse Public Library's legal research collection  
<https://www.lacrosselibrary.org/research/law-legal-resources>

**Clinics and seminars**  
Menasha Public Library hosts a monthly clinic  
<https://www.menashalibrary.org/legalassistance>

Madison Public Library estate planning presentation  
<https://mplfoundation.org/event/estate-planning/>