DATA + DESIGN
Justice Projects

For starting off new initiatives that can harness information to improve access to justice
How to use

1. This is for understanding what types of data-driven services, research, policies, and tools have been developed in the justice + poverty space.

2. Use it to inform groups’ brainstorming about what might be possible -- after they have done initial needs-finding, agenda-setting, and brainstorming work.

3. For Project Case Studies: have each group read through each slide/card, talk through what the story involves, and if it could be applied directly or analogously to their problem statement.

4. For Project Plan + Card: print out the Brainstorm template + cards. Have groups brainstorm combinations of problems, stakeholders, and datasets that could define a Data-driven design space. The Case Studies can inform these combinations too.
Project Case Studies
MD Expungement is a data-driven web application that lets a person or advocate identify if someone qualifies for Expungement of their criminal record -- and then populate the forms needed to request an Expungement.

Matthew Stubenberg, then at the Maryland Volunteer Legal Services, as a lawyer and technologist, built MD Expungement to increase his own (and others’) capability to see people’s expungement eligibility.

How It Works

- Matthew built an algorithm to regularly scrape Maryland Judiciary Case Search database to find records of individuals. The records are scraped into machine-readable data.
- Then this data is fed into an algorithm to determine if the user’s particular case number is expungeable based on the requirements for expungement in Maryland.
- A person comes to the application and searches a record based on name or number.
- If the person’s case is eligible for expungement, the algorithm will auto-populate some fields of the relevant forms. Then the person must complete them, sign them, and turn them into the courts to request expungement.

https://www.mdexpungement.com/
Clear My Record

The Code for America team that works on criminal justice identified that expungement (clearing or sealing criminal records of those eligible for it) was a huge possible benefit to people struggling to get employed or housed. But few people eligible for expungement in California were able to navigate the system to get their record expunged. It involves filling in paperwork, getting your fingerprints or biometrics taken, waiting for your papers to be processed and assessed, and following through on what the court/agencies ask from you next.

Their first solution was to build a website that would help people initiate the paperwork and understand the process.

Now they have moved onto a policy-oriented design. They are working with the California government to have all people eligible for expungement to have records automatically forwarded for expungement. Instead of people having to shoulder the burden of initiating the request and navigating procedure, the burden is shifted to the government to default to expunging all eligible criminal records. Their pilot has:

- Government agencies uploading criminal records data into a tool Code for America made
- The tool checks for records eligible for expungement based on the logical rules they wrote
- They then automatically fill in the paperwork to submit to the court
- The courts and DOJ then decides on the application, and notifies people if their record is cleared

https://www.clearmyrecord.org/
Project

Water Bill Scraper

The legal aid lawyer Matthew Stubenberg created a tool to scrape local Baltimore and Maryland databases of people’s overdue water bills.

When he was sitting down with clients, who were there to talk to him about other issues, he then got their permission to check if they had overdue water bills. (Often, when he had just asked people if they had other outstanding problems or bills, they would report ‘no’.)

He was then able to see if they did have overdue bills, and connect them with assistance to get them taken care of promptly. He then expanded this to run any (opted-in) client/applicants’ names through a series of public database queries, to see possible criminal records to expunge, property taxes overdue, court warrants, etc.

The theory behind the project was that catching overdue bills early -- like water bills, car payments, mortgage payments, rent, etc. -- he could help his clients from staving off a larger financial crisis later on. Before, he would typically be doing “putting out fires” work with clients, when they had already been far behind on bills or called into court for debt or housing. This helped him get help to people earlier.

He trained other lawyers in his office how to use the same Water Bill checkup tool. The scraping was done on his own initiative, without explicit permission. The code is open source, but is hard to replicate in all jurisdictions because of different government website policies about opening this data and making it open for scraping or searching.

https://pt.slideshare.net/MatthewStubenber gastiinterissues-using-public-big-data
https://github.com/MVLSLAW/WaterBillScraper
Learned Hands is a project to train machine learning models to identify people’s legal issues from text or transcripts of their stories about problems.

It uses a set of 75,000 posts that people made on Reddit’s Legal Advice board. All the posts are public, and users consent to them being used for research. They are usually 1-6 paragraphs describing the person’s problem, and asking for legal help.

Each of those people’s posts are then presented in the application Learned Hands, one at a time. The Learned Hands users are asked whether a certain legal issue is present in the story, and they respond yes, no, or pass. They are asked about a series of issues: is there a Family law issue present here? Housing? IP? Immigration? etc.

The labels are then used to train models to spot these legal issues on their own. The models learn from the labeled story data, and then are able to spot the legal issues in new text that are given to them.

The goal is that these models become an effective ‘classifier’ -- an automated tool that can look at text and classify what issues are present. This classifier could be integrated into other applications and services. Future chatbots, voice lines, or other tools could use the classifier to automatically spot issues.

https://learnedhands.law.stanford.edu/
Use Case

Mapping Problems

Mapping through geographic information system (GIS) is a system designed to capture, store, manipulate, analyze, manage, and present all types of geographical data. The key word to this technology is Geography – this means that some portion of the data is spatial.

How It Works

The data you use needs to have some sort of geographic marker in order to map it. Those markers can be states, counties, census tracts or local neighborhood boundaries. Whatever it is it must be represented in the data. The most common map display is a “chloropleth map”. It basically displays the variation in a given data point across different areas of the map.

The image on the right is from a study of evictions in Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The analysis was done but UNC but it was done in partnership with Legal Aid of North Carolina.
Use Case

Reddit Divorce Bot

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The developer, Nora al-Haider, built an automated bot that lives on Reddit’s boards where family and domestic problems are discussed.

The bot searches the postings about divorce-related issues -- looking for keywords that indicate the person posting is considering filing for divorce.

Then the bot posts an automated reply on the page, with links to official legal help webpages for that jurisdiction. The links provide self-help divorce resources from the local court website or legal help portal.

The goal is to spot where people are talking about legal problems, and to connect them with official resources there.

https://medium.com/@ahnora/the-reddit-divorce-bot-85cf1acdcae8
AZ Eviction Help

Project: AZ Eviction Help
Name: Daniel Bernal @ Stanford Legal Design Lab
Project Type: Eviction Coaching

Project Description:
This is a combination of a service and web application. Individuals in Arizona facing eviction receive customized information for assistance in the mail. The postcard content will provide a web address detailing instructions/next steps and referral to a web coach that can assist them in navigating the eviction process.

Data Involved & General Process:
Court sends or Stanford scrapes nightly new eviction filings, in which landlords are submitting summons and complaint to initiate an eviction action against a tenant. The application identifies name of tenant and street address from the court records. Potentially, also scan the summons and complaint PDFs to determine the reason for eviction, the date, time, and place of the hearing. The application uses that to send postcard to tenant, and to refer to web coach. Web site has hearing lookup, as well as coaching information.

https://www.azevictionhelp.org
Better Legal Internet

How can we connect people who are searching online, on Google or other search engines, with legal help?

This project at Stanford's Legal Design Lab is using the Schema.org project (a non-profit initiative of the search engines Google, Yahoo, Bing, Yandex, etc.) to start structuring online services information so that it shows up more effectively in search results.

This entails:

- Making comprehensive lists of the websites in each jurisdictions that present services or DIY information for a given legal problem (like legal aid groups, courts, self help centers, etc.)
- Defining a standard set of terms with which these websites will be marked up
- Having teams of RAs and librarians completing these ‘mark-up’ terms for each of the websites
- Working with Google to get this mark-up to be applied to the legal organizations’ websites
- Tracking how it changes the search results.

The goal is that by applying structured Schema.org markup to legal help websites, the search results will be more effective. They will show correct information for the jurisdiction, actionable links to services and DIY info, and step-by-step guidance directly on the Search Results page.

https://betterinternet.law.stanford.edu
Project

Regulatory Sandbox

What if a jurisdiction -- like California, or Bay Area counties -- removed many of the regulations that currently inhibit new services or business models that could serve consumers with legal needs?

Australia, UK, and some US states are considering a new policy design called a Regulatory Sandbox. (It’s already popular in Fintech). In this scheme, the current regulators allow companies to propose new innovations that might be illegal under current regulations. If the company can show that the consumer benefit likely outweighs the harm, and pledges to track outcome data that would help the regulator judge risk -- then the current regulations can be relaxed for their company to run this new offering.

In the justice sector, this can mean that the current regulator (the Supreme Court of the court, and the Bar Association) might relax the rules that:

- Only licensed lawyers are allowed to give legal advice (specific, strategic recommendations about how to deal with a legal problem). If this was relaxed, than it would be possible for non-lawyers to do some advising, or for automated tools to give robo-advice.
- Organizations that provide legal advice can only be owned/controlled by lawyers. If this was relaxed, it might be possible for a legal organization to accept investment or to have leadership from businesspeople or technologists. This might foster more innovative solutions and business models.

https://www.fca.org.uk/publications/documents/regulatory-sandbox
Project Legal Link

This project in the Bay Area trains social service providers with how to make effective referrals to legal organizations. It was incubated at local foundations and legal aid organizations, with the mission of better connecting services so that people are not passed over from social services to cold, expensive, confusing referral lines to lawyers.

The project started as a shared Google Sheet that was updated by the project’s staff, with what type of legal organization might take which kind of client and issue. Now it also has a website for Referrals and Resources, to guide social service organizations to the right referral org. It also conducts in-person trainings of social service organizations, to teach them what legal issues are and how to spot and refer clients who could benefit from legal help.

The project also offers resources and guides that can educate social service organizations about the basics of legal rights and processes.

It is still focused on the Bay Area ecosystem only, with lawyers Sacha Steinberger and Kate Richardson running it.

https://projectlegallink.org/
Project

**JustFix.nyc**

JustFix is a New York-city project that combines a web-based mobile application for tenants with community organizing data.

The application lets any tenant record problems, issues, and questions they have with their housing situation. These records -- photos, text messages, emails, phone calls, notes -- can then be legal evidence if the tenant needs to bring a complaint or respond to an action. The records are a means to protect the tenants' rights and improve their position in a housing court action. It will also give official notice to landlords about repairs they need to make, with certified mail.

If a tenant receives an eviction notice, the app has a step-by-step guide on how to respond, and connect with services.

JustFix also helps people find organizations -- like tenants unions, community groups, and legal aid -- who can help tenants who need more support around their housing. The tenant can share their records (like a digital case file) with the advocates they choose to.

On the advocates’ side, JustFix aggregates data from tenants’ usage to find patterns in certain neighborhoods, or with certain landlords. This can help in organizing and policy-change efforts, with clear points of data about outbreaks of mold or pests, bad behavior, or other concerning trends. They recently launched Who Owns What, to let tenants and advocates search buildings and landlords by address to better understand the market.

https://www.justfix.nyc/
Right to Counsel

Several jurisdictions, including the state of New York and the city of San Francisco, have introduced a new policy: that all litigants in a certain type of court (namely, Housing Court) are guaranteed a free lawyer to help them through the legal process.

There are no eligibility requirements for who qualifies for the service. It is open to all tenants in SF (or New York), who are served an eviction notice.

This often is referred to ‘Civil Gideon’ -- an equivalent of the guarantee in the criminal justice system (that was established through a case called Gideon) that people in the criminal justice system are guaranteed free legal counsel.

In SF, it is also known as “Prop F”, the measure that was approved by voters in June 2018 to allow for Right to Counsel in SF. It will begin to be implemented in July 2019. The City has appropriated several million dollars to fund it.

Implementation of the Guaranteed Counsel policies are just beginning to be rolled out. There is not an established protocol that makes this policy completely clear in terms of service, offerings, measurement, etc.

The current plan in SF has partnerships with many different legal aid organizations, including Eviction Defense Collaborative, Bay Area Legal Aid, and many others -- who will be responsible for supplying the attorneys who will represent litigants.

http://civilrighttocounsel.org/
Wise Messenger is an application developed at Stanford Legal Design Lab. It is a text messaging platform that lets courts, legal aid groups, public defenders, or social service providers have automated conversations and/or reminders with their users.

It started as a tool to remind people of their upcoming hearings and appointments, to reduce the ‘Failure to Appear Rates’ at important court hearings. It was piloted with Maryland’s Office of the Public Defender, to send several reminders to criminal defendants about when and where their hearings were. The hope is that it could help people avoid fines, fees, warrants, and delays that come with missing appointments.

It is also used to guide people through complex legal processes. In Orange County, California, it is being used by the Self Help Center to guide people through the lengthy process of filing a divorce. It has an automated logic flow to tell people of upcoming deadlines, the outcomes of their filings, whether they are on track or not, and what their next steps are.

Now the team is also piloting text-based follow-up plans for clients of social and legal services. Rather than handing people a sheet of things to do next, instead the providers sign the clients up to a text message line that can check in with them about whether they have followed up on next steps, reminds them about other services, and encourages them to follow through.

https://www.wisemessenger.co
A journalist in Detroit developed a public service project to proactively reach out to community residents through mass texting, offering everyone an automated channel to ask questions about property and housing. She mixes automatic services with manual research and replies from her team of journalists. They draw on large public databases that they’ve organized, to do research for people about their situation.

- Her team proactively sending text messages out to people in Detroit, announcing that they are journalists who can help with certain issues and welcome responses. They get these phone numbers from a data broker company, which has collected phone #s and demographic info from people who have opted in.

- They have some automated pathways (e.g., text 1 for utility shutoffs, text 2 for housing inspections) but also handle off-script replies.

- Some people write back immediately with questions about their house, utilities, or landlord. Others keep the outreach text and then write back weeks or months later, when a problem arises.

- Her team has programmed some automatic replies. When people enter in their address, their program can find property or utility issues. Other times, her team does customized research for that person’s issue.

- They also have a shortcode for people to text in, to learn more and get these services.

Outlier Media

https://outliermedia.org/
Project Plan
Project Brainstorm

Mix and match different Data-Design cards -- including ones you write yourselves.
Use these different matches to think widely about what kinds of project might be of value to you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Stakeholders</th>
<th>Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>that your organization or community is facing</td>
<td>Who could be involved in (or impacted by) your project</td>
<td>That would be helpful to understand or solve the problem</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How might we address [PROBLEM] by bringing together [STAKEHOLDERS] and using [INFORMATION]?
How can we better reach out to more people who need legal services, so that more people in our target client communities are aware of our services and their options?
How can we find potential clients who have specific problems that we’re seeking to address?
How can we demonstrate to (potential) funders how our organization is performing?
Problem Card

How do my services compare to those of other providers?
Stakeholders Card

Religious Leaders
(e.g., ministers, preachers, rabbis, nuns, imams, priests, congregation leaders, administrators)
Stakeholders Card

Universities and Schools

(e.g., Students, Professors, Classes, Researchers, Labs)
Stakeholders Card

Local Businesses

(e.g., retail stores, lawyers, paralegals, notarios, banks, car dealerships, grocery stories, etc.)
Stakeholders Card

Banking + Financial Companies

(e.g., Visa, H&R Block, Wells Fargo, Bank of America, Chase, Experian, insurance companies, etc.)
Stakeholders Card

Technology Companies

(e.g., Google, Amazon, Facebook, Reddit, Uber, NextDoor, etc.)
Stakeholders Card

Nonprofit Service Providers

(e.g. housing advocacy groups, domestic violence shelters, debt counselors, food shelters, etc.)
Stakeholders Card

Court Clerks

(e.g. those who accept filing forms, who mail out notices, who deal with people’s questions)
Your Own data

What does the information that you collect about clients needs or service provided tell you about the problem you are trying to address?
Information Card

Social Media Posts

(e.g., Tweets sent, online forum posts, Instagram photos, Facebook shares and messages)
Information Card

Funding for Services in Your Area

(e.g. government collects data on funds provided to legal service organizations; a foundation collects data on grant making)
Demographic Characteristics of Poverty Population

From Legal Services Corporation: https://public.tableau.com/profile/legal.services.corporation#!/vizhome/2015DemographicCharacteristicsofPovertyPopulationwithfilter/ACS Dashboard
Information Card

Staffing Type and Level of legal services

Legal Services Corporation: https://public.tableau.com/profile/legal.services.corporation#!/vizhome/2015DemographicCharacteristicsofPovertyPopulationwithfilter/ACS Dashboard
Data on county/neighborhood conditions
(e.g. Census data at the county or tract level)
Rates of case filings by debt collection agencies

or

Data from third parties (e.g. Debt in America)
Overdue Water Bills
Stakeholders Card
Stakeholders Card
Stakeholders Card