



V2.0 FINAL

Ministry of Attorney General

Family Justice Portal / Gateway

Context and Pre-feasibility Study

June 16, 2006

Executive Summary

In June, 2005, a foundational report entitled “A New Justice System for Families and Children” was released by the Family Justice Reform Working Group, appointed by the Justice Review Task Force. Recognizing that families find the present justice system complicated and confusing, the study made a significant number of recommendations for family justice reform, including increased emphasis on mediation and other consensual forms of dispute resolution, innovative use of technology, and implementation of Family Justice Information Hubs in communities throughout B.C.. These Hubs would be the focal point for those involved in separation and divorce and needing to self-represent due to limited financial resources. Mindful of the benefits of technology and the Internet particularly, the report also envisioned a Family Justice Portal (FJP) as a complement to and virtual equivalent of the Hub.

The present study has been commissioned by the Ministry of Attorney General Justice Services Branch to examine the technology opportunities around Family Justice Hubs in greater detail, focusing particularly on the Family Justice Portal. The underlying objective of the study is to provide a foundation of information to assist in decision making and to steward the implementation of the portal should a decision be made to proceed. The study has benefited significantly from the expertise and valued inputs of nine key stakeholder organizations in the B.C. family justice system. These organizations include the B.C. Mediator Roster Society, the Court Services Branch (CSB), the Family Justice Services Division (FJSD), the Family Maintenance Enforcement Program (FMEP), the Law Courts Education Society (LCES), the Legal Services Society (LSS), the Maintenance Enforcement and Locate Services Division (MELS), the Ministry of Attorney General (MAG), and the Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance (MEIA).

A key challenge in preparing this paper has been that that the Portal is to be the virtual equivalent of the Hub, which is itself at the conceptual stage. With this in mind, the study places significant emphasis on characterizing the types of functions, services and systems that may be optimal to support the Hub and its assessment and referral role. While many of these may ultimately be available via the Internet (the Portal), these decisions will need to be made at a later point once the vision is more clearly defined and priorities, security and platform issues have been resolved. The paper is characterized as a “context and pre-feasibility study” since its primary objective is to provide a solid foundation of information from which the Portal initiative can proceed in a logical, structured and effective manner. A corollary objective is to provide a common knowledge base / reference point for the stakeholders involved in implementing this vision.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study encompasses the following major areas of investigation.

OVERVIEW OF FAMILY JUSTICE

This section provides the essential context for the study by characterizing the scope of family justice as it pertains to Hub and Portal, and the key stakeholders (study participants) and their services and clients. The characteristics of the family client base are explored in some detail, since these are important in Portal strategy and design. Finally this section looks at the key service providers that are or may be of interest to the Hub and Portal, based on the premise that persons facing family law issues may also be dealing with a range of other related challenges, including, for example, parenting, family abuse and financial and debt management. A preliminary listing of level 1 (family justice) and level 2 (peripheral) services is provided on this basis.

THE HUB MODEL

This section examines various aspects of the Family Justice Information Hub model including the general vision for the model, process automation (appointment scheduling, auto-orders, form completion and filing, intake and applications), service integration (improved collaboration and communication among service organizations in providing 'end-to-end' support for clients) and database and system support. Some emphasis is placed on the systems required to support two key elements of the Hub model: assessment (relying on a Case Management database) and referral (relying on a Provider database). Considerations around implementation of these systems, including deployment strategies, security, privacy and confidentiality, among others, are also discussed, since these ultimately have a bearing on the Portal strategy.

RELEVANT CURRENT OR NEAR TERM INITIATIVES

This section summarizes a range of initiatives that are currently underway in the justice system and relevant to the Hub and Portal initiatives. These are grouped into two main logical categories: initiatives such as LawLINK, MultiLingoLegal and the Supreme Court Self Help Information Center that are related to service provision, and initiatives such as the Multilingual Legal Dictionary, BC-211, the PLEI Portal and the PLEI Taxonomy that have a direct bearing on the Portal itself.

CURRENT WEB RESOURCES

This section overviews the benefits and limitations of Internet resources that already exist in the area of family law in British Columbia. The inventory of related information is immense and includes a significant number of sites that are of immediate relevance and offer high quality content. This benefit, though, can also be considered a drawback due to the sheer abundance of information that is available. "Information overload" represents a significant challenge to those seeking to resolve family matters and often requiring fairly specific information. The present text-based paradigm often places users in the position of having to 'research' solutions rather than efficiently providing them with the specific information they require. This challenge is compounded by literacy, education, ESL and other challenges often faced by the target clientele.

The nature and abundance of Internet content helps to highlight the need for and benefit of a Portal. At the same time, it hints at a couple of key challenges of the Portal, which will be to select the content that is optimal and to minimize redundancy to the extent possible.

THE FAMILY JUSTICE PORTAL

This section is the primary focus of the study, building on the information and foundation provided in previous sections. It addresses a broad range of relevant topics including objectives, target population, priorities, tools and automation, design, media and content, deployment, benefits, operation and governance.

The concept of a 'triage' application is discussed at some length. This on-line application would be designed to capture client information entered by users (e.g. regarding legal and financial circumstances) and 'filter out' a list of potential service options, effectively providing the virtual equivalent of the assessment and referral function offered at the Hub. The media and content section focuses on the range of multi-media solutions that are becoming increasingly common on the Internet and represent a key element of the vision for the Portal.

STUDY OUTCOMES

Significantly, the nine organizations consulted during this study are united in their vision for the portal. There is strong consensus that the Portal is a timely, important and beneficial initiative, which should become the de facto *virtual* 'entry point' for family justice in B.C. There is also strong consensus that, in order to realize the vision and truly 'make a difference', the Portal must be innovative and take a step 'to the next level'. In essence, the underlying vision is to move from a paradigm, which focuses on vast amounts of text-based content that clients must explore on their own, to one which focuses on directing clients to the specific information and services they need. Innovative design and content, on-line triage and optimal use of evolving multi-media solutions are key elements of the vision. Participants have also expressed reluctance to deploy a portal, which is just (another) window into the vast inventory of text-based information that is available on the Internet and see this as a risk of the project.

Elements of the model, which bear particular emphasis, are summarized below.

CLIENTELE

Service design of the physical Hubs must take into account individuals in the lower to middle social-economic range, including self-representing litigants. While this is also generally true of the Portal, various attributes of web-based resources tend to favor a more 'middle class' audience, which is generally better educated and better equipped to access, understand and utilize the resources that are provided. It is probable that a significant segment of the target population, faced by a variety of challenges (education, income, disabilities, ESL) will struggle to benefit from the information or services that are available. For many in this population, human intervention and support will always be an important requirement, which is a consideration in Portal design and the functionality that is available (i.e. providing a means of connecting with a live support person). At the same time, design innovation in delivering Internet content can play an important role in enhancing usability, effectively lowering the access threshold and enabling more people to benefit from these resources.

END-TO-END SUPPORT

A key objective of the Hub (and Portal) is to facilitate clients' access to the family justice system via an assessment and referral process. Participants consulted during this study envision a model whereby providers are better able to steward clients through the system by directing them from service to service as required, thereby helping to ensure that they don't 'drop out' of the system. This degree of 'hand holding' implies the need for database supports that will track essential client and case information (identifiers, financial information, services received, outcomes) and make it available to providers as the client proceeds through the system. A number of privacy and confidentiality issues will need to be addressed in delivering this solution.

DEPLOYMENT AND OVERLAPS WITH THE PLEI PORTAL

The Family Justice Portal is one of two major portal projects that are under active consideration in or overlapping the family justice system. The other project is the PLEI Portal, envisioned to facilitate access to Public Legal Education and Information (PLEI) resources, across areas of law, but including family. It is important, in the interests of optimizing resources and minimizing redundancy, to identify a strategy under which these two important resources can co-exist, while balancing and complementing each other. Definition of the respective strategies for these two portals also holds implications for design, content, branding and promotion.

GOVERNANCE

Implementation and management of the Portal will require a sound governance model. Collaborative governance can be very challenging due to the differing priorities and resource capabilities of participants, and may place the initiative at risk. A ‘modified collaborative’ model is probably optimal for Family Justice Portal. This model would place responsibility for day to day operations with an operating entity, but allow for high level direction by an advisory committee of key stakeholder organizations and consultation with the broad range of other stakeholders. It is important for the operating organization to have a significant degree of autonomy and the ability to adopt web standards that provide the level of flexibility that is necessary to realize the vision. Current government standards may not provide this level of flexibility.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Implementation of the Family Justice Portal as it is described in this paper represents a major, multi-year undertaking, and it is important to proceed in stages based on sound planning tied to the overall strategy for Family Justice Hubs. Delivery of this solution will require effective high level sponsorship in government, strong operational leadership, secure and sustained funding to address requirements for implementation and ongoing maintenance, and effective collaboration among participants.

This paper, while providing a reasonably comprehensive foundation for undertaking the project, is only a starting point for the decision making and planning process, which represents the logical next step.

In that context, the recommendation of this study is to appoint a core Steering Committee comprising representatives from three or perhaps four organizations that are considered to be key stakeholders in this initiative over the long term. It is important that members of this group subscribe to the salient elements of the portal vision as it is outlined in this study, particularly the need for innovation. The role of this committee will be to steward the early stages of the Portal initiative, with at least the following initial priorities:

- Reach agreement on the core elements of the Portal vision (e.g. target audience, service scope). Interface with representatives of the PLEI Working Group as required to resolve overlaps, since this is important in finessing the vision.
- Formalize decisions and related documentation on operations, ownership, governance and membership. The question of whether this project will be operated by government or ‘outside of’ government (to provide an optimal level of flexibility) is a key consideration.
- Develop a strategy for taking the project forward. Elements of this strategy include consideration of technology issues, definition of logical project stages, tasks, time frames and deliverables, and budgeting.
- Initiate work on early stage ‘requirements-gathering’ initiatives that will help to finesse the vision and provide input into planning and design.

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Document Information

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1 Introduction

In June, 2005, the Family Justice Reform Working Group, appointed by the Justice Review Task Force¹, released a foundational report entitled “A New Justice System for Families and Children”. The report noted that families find the justice system complicated and confusing, which can increase and prolong conflict, especially for those who do not have legal representation. A fundamental conclusion of the study was that family law needs to move away from the present adversarial framework toward a justice system favouring mediation and other consensual processes for dispute resolution. Among other recommendations, the report focused on the potential benefits of implementing *Family Justice Information Hubs* in communities throughout BC, where practical, located in courthouses, since these represent a logical venue for people seeking assistance with legal issues. Such Hubs would effectively represent the ‘front door’ to the family justice system and provide a focal point for local services for people facing family law issues. Services offered would include information, assessments and referrals to a range of service providers. Hubs would take a holistic approach to problem resolution, recognizing that persons facing family law issues may also be dealing with issues around parenting, child protection, alcohol and drug use, family abuse, financial and debt management, and mental health. Assessment and referral services are a key element of the hub model and would address this range of potential needs.

Innovative use of technology is seen as an important element of family justice reform². Web-based and other systems have been proposed to expedite access to information and services and improve overall efficiency of the system. Suggested improvements include on-line completion and filing of court forms, presentation of information in multiple formats (multi-media) and languages to better target specific niche populations, auto-orders³, and court attendance by telephone and video conference. A family justice service database is important to support this vision; for example to track client information, partially completed form details (e.g. if a client gets part way through a form and finds s/he needs more information to complete it), assessment and referral information and appointments.

The family justice reform report also envisioned a Family Justice Information Portal as the ‘virtual’ equivalent of the physical Hub. This Internet portal or gateway would have three main purposes: 1) to act as a ‘virtual hub’ serving people who are unable to access the physical hub, 2) to link existing and new information sources that are pertinent to people with family justice issues, and 3) to assist people in accessing relevant services, including court services and resources outside of the justice system by supporting interactive programs (e.g. on-line form completion, applications, and so on).

The present report has been commissioned by the Ministry of Attorney General Justice Services Branch to provide a foundation of information to assist in decision making and to steward the implementation of the portal, should a decision be made to proceed. The study relies to a large

¹ The Justice Review Task Force (JRTF) was established in March, 2002 to identify a wide range of potential reform initiatives aimed at making the justice system more responsive, accessible and efficient. The Family Justice Reform Working Group, one of several related initiatives, was formed in July 2003 to “explore opportunities for fundamental reform of British Columbia’s family justice system... to better meet the needs of today’s separating and divorcing families.”

² Section 5.2, p. 62 of “A New Justice System for Children and Families”

³ Auto-orders are system-generated court orders utilizing a database of common ‘plain language’ clauses.

extent on the valued inputs of nine key stakeholder organizations in the B.C. family justice system, which are identified in the following section (see 2 “Study Methodology and Acknowledgements”). A key challenge in preparing a study of this type lies in the observation cited above, that the portal is to be the virtual equivalent of the Hub, which itself is still in the visioning stages. While the model has strong support within government and among key stakeholders, it has not been formally approved and its precise definition and scope have not been rigorously defined. It is clear, however, that the Hub model and supporting technologies and services (including the family justice service database and portal) represent very large initiatives, which, if approved, will need to be deployed in stages over a period of years.

These observations are valuable in setting the stage for this paper, which is described as a ‘context and pre-feasibility study’. Recognizing that it is still early in the process and that the vision for the portal is tied fundamentally to the vision for the physical Hub (which is still maturing), the study focuses significant effort on characterizing the types of functions and services that may be optimal to support the Hub. While many of these may ultimately be accessible via the Internet (the portal), these decisions must be made at a later point once the vision is more clearly defined and priorities, and security and platform issues have been resolved. Though the study deals with technology issues at the level of detail that is ‘optimal’ at this point, it is not focused on the technology challenges of delivering a web portal, since these can be addressed in due course. As one participant in the study noted, “*technology is the easy part; the challenge will lie in organization and process*” (e.g. resources, governance, planning).

With this in mind, the primary objective of this study is to provide a solid foundation of information from which the portal initiative can move forward in a logical, structured and effective manner. A corollary objective is to provide an effective communication tool and focal point, which can be referenced by key stakeholders involved in implementing the vision. In this context, the study includes overviews of the following general types of information:

- Family justice services, key service providers and clientele, with a view to characterizing the environment within which the Hub and Portal solutions may be provided;
- Services that may be offered from the Hub and the types of databases that may be optimal to support them;
- Current or pending initiatives in family justice (various stakeholders) which are relevant to or potentially have a direct bearing on the Portal;
- Objectives and potential benefits of the portal;
- Target population for the portal and related constraints (e.g. disability, language, education);
- Preliminary comments on portal design, content and multi-media (and related considerations, e.g. technology issues and standards);
- Implementation and management considerations (e.g. membership and governance).

While the paper makes specific recommendations for ‘next steps’, it does not provide detailed information on project planning, resourcing and infrastructure, which would be premature at this stage. These considerations will, however, need to be addressed as an early priority by the governing committee, once it has been appointed.

2 Study Methodology and Acknowledgements

This study reflects the inputs and opinions of nine government or quasi-government organizations that are key stakeholders in the area of family justice in British Columbia. These organizations and the specific individuals who were consulted are identified in Table 1 on the following page. The study benefited particularly from ongoing consultation with Dan VanderSluis, who provided inputs on background and strategy and reviewed the draft version of the report prior to finalization.

Study participants were selected by the Justice Services Branch based on their pivotal role in family justice services. Each of these organizations plays a unique role in providing services and information and / or education to members of the public and other participants in the family justice system. Additionally, each of these organizations maintains a web presence and has expertise in the delivery and maintenance of web resources, which in some cases include multi-media solutions and sophisticated web-applications of the general types envisioned under this study. Several of these organizations have also participated in or collaborated on joint initiatives that are relevant to this project, including the Supreme Court Self Help Center.

Information for the study derives primarily from a series of interviews undertaken individually with participating organizations. Interviews were based on a structured questionnaire developed for the specific purpose of garnering information relative to the portal and its implementation (a copy of the questionnaire is appended for reference). The questionnaire and a complementary project ‘overview’ document were distributed to participants prior to the interviews and participants were given an opportunity to review and provide feedback on the resulting notes to ensure that the final versions of these ‘source’ documents accurately reflected the organizations’ roles and viewpoints relative to the portal⁴. As a complement to these consultations, follow-ups were undertaken in certain specific areas as appropriate in order to verify information or gain a better perspective on the context for the Hub model. This included a tour of both the Supreme Court Self Help Center and the “Robson Project⁵”, which is seen as a potential model for the family justice Hub in Vancouver (‘proto-Hub’).

Due to the nature of the process, much of the information in this document is anecdotal in nature, rather than purely objective or statistical, relying on the vision, expertise and experience of study participants. In this regard, it is important to note that these participants collectively represent a very significant level of knowledge and ‘front-line’ experience in dealing with the day to day issues of family law, the range of clients who participate in the process and require support, and on-going stewardship of innovative services and solutions, including those available on the Internet. Their contributions to this study have been invaluable and very much appreciated.

⁴ Participants were provided with a copy of the final version of their questionnaire / notes for the record.

⁵ So-named because it is located in the Robson Street Courthouse.

Table 1: List of Study Participants		
Organization		Participants (Questionnaire)
1. B.C. Mediator Roster Society	BCMRS	Susanna Jani, Roster Administrator
2. Court Services Branch	CSB	Bev Clark, a Policy Analyst Nadia Hughes, Internet Web Portal Jim Stuart, a Business Planning Analyst
3. Family Justice Services Division	FJSD	Irene Robertson, a Senior Policy Analyst Dan VanderSluis, a Senior Policy Analyst
4. Family Maintenance Enforcement Program	FMPEP	Hannah Roots, Program Managing Director
5. Law Courts Education Society	LCES	Rick Craig, Executive Director
6. Legal Services Society ⁶	LSS	Carol McEown, Manager Public Information and Community Liason Thom Quine, Manager Electronic Access and Operational Support Candice Lee, Supervisor Publishing Program Winnifred Assman, Editor Lois Shelton, Fieldworker Denise Tremblay, Graphic Designer
7. Maintenance Enforcement and Locate Services Division	MELS	Ringo Dosanjh, a Deputy Director
8. Ministry of the Attorney General	MAG	Kirsten Smestad, Web Coordinator Andrew Mitchell, Web and print media Carol Carman, AG Director of Public Affairs Peter Edwards, ITSD
9. Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance	MEIA	Carolyn Wadel, Web Manager Linda Horner, a Policy Analyst Dianne Campbell, a Program Manager

⁶ In addition to those who participated directly in the questionnaire process, a number of other LSS staff members with particular expertise in family law, were consulted during this process: Heidi Mason (Director, Public Legal Information and Applications), Allan Parker (Manager, LawLINE Program), David Griffiths (Manager, Civil Law), and Janet Freeman (Legal Information Outreach Worker [LIOW])

3 A Common Vision

It is beneficial at the outset of this paper to emphasize the extent to which stakeholder organizations have demonstrated a common vision for the portal. The main challenge in compiling this report has been one of assimilating the very significant amount of information that has been provided by stakeholders, rather than in balancing differing perspectives and priorities.

Significantly, there is strong consensus regarding the importance of *'doing it right'*. Participants are in agreement that, in order for the portal to fulfil the vision, become the de facto *virtual* entry point for family justice in B.C. and truly make a difference, it must add real value through innovation and taking a step 'to the next level'. In essence, the underlying vision is to move from a paradigm, which focuses on vast amounts of text-based information that clients must explore on their own⁷, to one which focuses, to the extent practical, on directing clients to the specific information and services that they need. Innovative design and content, optimal use of evolving multi-media solutions, and participation of skilled resources in different areas are key elements of this vision. While participants have expressed universal support for this vision, they have also expressed reluctance to deploy a portal, which is just (another) window into the vast inventory of text-based information that is available on the Internet and see this as a risk of the project. They feel that the primary focus must be on directing clients to services and focused pieces of information that address specific needs (characterized by one participant as providing "users with what they *need* rather than a bunch of detail for them to read"). Delivery of the solution that participants envision will require committed government sponsorship at a high level, effective governance (with some emphasis on autonomy) and a long term perspective benefiting from careful planning and stable funding and human resources.

4 Overview of Family Justice

For purposes of this study, the term 'family justice' encompasses an intricate mix of complex legal issues, clients who are confronted by these issues, and service providers working to steward clients through the family justice system. Table 2, beginning on the following page, summarizes some of the core services that are provided, based on interviews with stakeholder organizations, and also provides a sense of the clientele who access and benefit from those services. It is important to emphasize the summary nature of the information provided in this table; in detail, the services provided by these and other relevant organizations are far broader and more complex, and the clientele more diverse than indicated.

The definition of a family justice client is fundamental to the concept of the family justice Hub and the associated Portal, since it largely dictates the types of services that may need to be provided. In turn, the general framework of clients and service providers⁸ (and related interactions) substantially dictates the types of system supports that will be optimal. These concepts are addressed in greater detail in the following sections.

⁷ commonly referred to as 'information overload', an attribute of the information age that can be both beneficial and detrimental depending on users' skills, perspectives, and the details of their circumstances (education, emotional state, language, etc.).

⁸ within (e.g. court services, mediators) and outside of the justice system (e.g. debt and mental health counselors).

Table 1: Summary of Key Stakeholders, Services and Clients

Description	Services	Client Profile
B.C. MEDIATOR ROSTER SOCIETY		
<p>The Society’s role is to facilitate / ensure public access to qualified mediators and can be viewed as the ‘door’ to the world of mediation in B.C.. A primary goal is to promote mediation as a viable alternative to the courts, through education and facilitation activities. The Society maintains a roster of mediators who satisfy standards in training, education and credibility, and agree to adhere to the Society’s Standards of Conduct. Individuals who access a mediator through the Society can have confidence in the services they receive. Services were initially in support of civil, non-family matters, but were expanded in about 2002 to include family mediation. Support for child protection mediation was added in 2004 (via an affiliation with the AGs Child Protection Mediation Program Roster).</p>	<p>Key functions of the Society include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Promote the use of mediation and educate the public about mediation; ● Admit mediators to the roster via a formal process; ● Manage membership on the roster, based on annual educational requirements for members; ● Promote the child protection mediation program of the AG; ● Handle calls from the public regarding mediation services and provide assistance where possible (including referrals to services other than mediation); ● Support members’ professional development through workshops, teleconferences, and access to printed resources. <p>The Society’s role in facilitating mediation can be expected to increase significantly under the proposed model for mandatory mediation.</p>	<p>Persons contacting the Society (clients) represent a very broad base, including 1) lawyers (civil matters primarily, less so for family), 2) members of the public who are seeking a mediator for themselves, 3) mediators who want to get onto the roster or require resources or support (e.g. changes to their profile on the roster), and 4) agencies / counseling services seeking support for a client.</p> <p>Members of the public who are looking for or think they might need a mediator are the largest client group by far. They have typically become aware of mediation as an option and are calling to find out more. Many claim that they are unable to afford mediation services, which average from \$150 - \$200 / hour and are referred to Family Justice Counselors who mediate for no charge when children are involved.</p> <p>There is a sense that users of the website are more affluent, and disadvantaged clients are more inclined to phone for information (presumably not comfortable with or unable to access the Internet). The main target audience is people with literacy, violence, drug and alcohol, mental health, language (‘huge’), poverty and other issues who need a live person to talk to. Drug, alcohol and psychological problems are common and complicate things considerably. Some callers are in acute distress, occasionally considering suicide. <i>Most callers are very grateful to reach a human voice.</i></p>

Table 2: Summary of Key Stakeholders, Services and Clients

Description	Services	Client Profile
COURT SERVICES BRANCH		
<p>The role of Court Services is to facilitate the court process; it supports the hearing of matters before the court, maintains records of court proceedings, and assists the judiciary in hearing matters brought before them. Production of court orders is a central part of the process.</p>	<p>Key roles / services include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Court Clerks – maintain records of court proceedings, and facilitate the court process; • Court Interpreters – provide interpretation services for hearings as requested; • Registry Clerks – file, prepare and process court documents, produce court orders following court events, and inform clients regarding community services and court proceedings; • Sheriffs – maintain courtroom security, serve documents. 	<p>A broad spectrum of people facing family issues. Clients are parties under the following Acts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adult Guardianship Act; • Child, Family and Community Service Act (CFCSA); • Family Maintenance Enforcement Act (FMEA); • Family Relations Act (FRA); • Interjurisdictional Support Orders Act (ISO).
FAMILY JUSTICE SERVICES DIVISION (FJSD)		
<p>Family Justice Services Division delivers services that promote the timely and just resolution of family disputes within a comprehensive family justice system.</p>	<p>Key roles / services are as follows:</p> <p>DISPUTE RESOLUTION – Family Justice Counsellors (FJCs) provide information, referral, short-term counselling and mediation services related to issues of child custody and access, guardianship and child support. Services are provided primarily to people of modest means.</p> <p>PARENTING AFTER SEPARATION (PAS) PROGRAM – PAS offers a three-hour information session, which provides participants with information about the impact of separation on children and adults, the full range of dispute resolution options and services available in the justice system and the community, and child support guidelines.</p>	<p>Family Justice Services Division directs its services primarily to persons of modest means. The services are specific to separation and divorce matters, with a particular focus on issues of custody, guardianship, access and family support. Income levels are generally low. Approximately two-thirds of clients earn less than \$30,000 per year despite being in their peak earning years and many of them have young children. Most clients of the Division are confronted by multiple issues in addition to their family law disputes, with a significant portion experiencing issues related to substance abuse, family abuse, mental health, child protection, and / or financial challenges. A large proportion of clients have had or are currently involved in either a Provincial or Supreme Court family law matter.</p>

Table 2: Summary of Key Stakeholders, Services and Clients

Description	Services	Client Profile
	<p>CHILD CUSTODY AND ACCESS ASSESSMENTS – a limited number of parenting assessments, focused on the best interests of children, are prepared upon order of the court to assist the court in determining child custody and access matters.</p> <p>In addition to the above, FJSD oversees or contributes to a number of justice reform initiatives, which promote access to the civil family justice system. These include the Self-Help Center for Supreme Court Self-Represented Litigants, Rule 5 Family Justice Registries, Comprehensive Child Support Services and the Child Support Recalculation Services Project.</p>	
FAMILY MAINTENANCE ENFORCEMENT PROGRAM (FMPEP)		
<p>FMPEP is mandated to monitor and enforce court orders or agreements filed with the program for the collection of child support and spousal maintenance and for ensuring payments to individuals. Maintenance enforcement is the step immediately following a court proceeding where a decision has been reached on support. FMPEP is one of four services provided under Maintenance and Enforcement (see “Maintenance Enforcement and Locate Services Division”).</p>	<p>The program supports both child and spousal maintenance. Approximately 97% of cases deal with child support, in part because spousal support is only payable for a limited (transitional) period following marriage break-up, after which the focus is on child support. Key services include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enforce maintenance orders (court orders) or agreements filed with the court (through garnishment and other provisions); • Provide a neutral ‘forwarding service’ in situations where opposing parties don’t wish to deal with each other directly. 	<p>Most clients approach the program because maintenance is not being paid; they are often referred by MEIA, the courts, their lawyers, MLAs and FJCs. Use of the program is voluntary except for people on income assistance forwarded by MEIA, who must enroll in the program to receive assistance payments. Clients are divorced or separated people who fall into two groups: recipients and payors. About 97% of payors are male. There are presently about 50,000 files comprising 100,000 clients (opposing parties). Clients often reside in other jurisdictions (recipient in 5600 cases, payor in 6600 cases). FMPEP is a ‘middle class’ operation; the service is not needed by well off individuals or by the poor because of the very low income threshold⁹. The immigrant and first nations client base is low, probably because support from family is more important in these</p>

⁹ Low income threshold for FMPEP – people earning less than about \$13k per year are not required to pay maintenance.

Table 2: Summary of Key Stakeholders, Services and Clients

Description	Services	Client Profile
<p>FMEP is contracted to / managed by Themis Program Management and Consulting.</p>		<p>cultures. Clients on the recipient side tend to be more sophisticated / better educated since they have benefited from government training programs.</p>
<p>LAW COURTS EDUCATION SOCIETY (LCES)</p>		
<p>LCES' mandate is twofold: 1) to educate the public on how to access and use the courts, and 2) to work with the justice system to assist them in providing access to the courts (e.g. through programs to educate court staff on meeting the needs of the public), and the Supreme Court Self Help Center, which focuses on civil and family law for self-represented litigants.</p>	<p>Key family-related services include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivers Parenting After Separation Services (PAS) in 2/3 of the lower mainland¹⁰; • Develops family law education resources for schools and the public; provides training to end users in how to use these materials to assist education; • Provides support for counselors and parents to work with children in divorce / separation situations; • Develops a range of PAS products in different languages; also directed toward the aboriginal community; • Provides training to teachers regarding family law resources. 	<p>Students are the primary clientele (much work is done with schools around access to the courts). Special programs are also provided for niche groups such as those who require assistance with parenting (PAS), aboriginal communities, youth at risk, and the immigrant community (mostly criminal accused), who don't speak English and need to access the courts. There is no economic cut-off for services.</p> <p>The Society provides services to about 50,000 people per year, including over 1300 school groups, over 500 people in the immigrant / ESL community and about 2500 participants in the PAS program. Most learning is experiential, focusing on education only (no advice is given).</p>

¹⁰ Funding has recently been allocated to develop resources to assist with finances after separation, which, after parenting, is the second major issue facing people involved in separation.

Table 2: Summary of Key Stakeholders, Services and Clients

Description	Services	Client Profile
LEGAL SERVICES SOCIETY (“LEGAL AID”)		
<p>LSS’ mandate is to 1) assist low income individuals to resolve their legal problems and facilitate access to justice for them, 2) establish and administer an effective and efficient system for providing legal aid to low income people in B.C, and 3) provide advice to the AG regarding legal aid. LSS provides a broad range of services aimed at optimizing service delivery to a broad range of clients within existing funding provisions.</p>	<p>Services range from full representation to various advice and brief services, to information. Key services include 1) representation in criminal and family law, 2) assistance with refugee claims or immigration problems, 3) assistance for mental health and prison law, 4) brief legal advice services by telephone, 5) criminal and family duty counsel, and 6) a variety of legal education and information materials (hardcopy and web-based materials).</p>	<p><i>Target</i> clientele are low income people who have serious legal problems and are striving to resolve them. In general, services other than information are subject to financial eligibility guidelines, which are more rigorous for representation and less rigorous for advice services (e.g. family duty counsel and LawLINE). Because of the scope of services that are available, LSS clientele vary widely, but in general can be characterized as financially disadvantaged. LSS is sensitive to the range of challenges that may be faced by this population including literacy, computer literacy, education and language (ESL). LSS has traditionally dedicated considerable resources addressing the special needs of the aboriginal population.</p>
MAINTENANCE ENFORCEMENT AND LOCATE SERVICES DIVISION (MELS)		
<p>The role of MELS is to ensure that B.C. families receive the child and spousal support they’re entitled to.</p>	<p>MELS mandate is accomplished via four programs: 1) Family Maintenance Enforcement Program (see entry), 2) Family Search Program (searches for parents who have gone missing, utilizing various confidential databases), 3) Debtor’s Assistance Program (presently operating at a reduced level), and 4) Interjurisdictional Support Orders / ISO (intermediary role between B.C. and other jurisdictions on support matters, where clients reside in different jurisdictions). MELS helps to distribute about \$150m per year in child and spousal support.</p>	<p>The primary client base is parties involved in a divorce (payors and recipients); this is the same client base as for FMEP discussed above. Other stakeholders in this program (which includes FMEP) are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MEIA – forwards clients to FMEP; • Supreme and Provincial Courts – may initiate a search if there’s court action; • Lawyers – can request a search if they have a case before the Supreme Court; • Family Justice Counselors – MELS assists in locating a party so FJCs can offer mediation; • Reciprocating Jurisdictions regarding ISO; • HAGUE Convention – when a parent abducts a child into another jurisdiction.

Table 2: Summary of Key Stakeholders, Services and Clients

Description	Services	Client Profile
MINISTRY OF EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME ASSISTANCE (MEIA)		
<p>MEIA provides services that move British Columbians toward sustainable income and assists individuals in need. Services include income assistance, disability assistance and employment programs (provided under various acts). Assigned recipients are referred to the Family Maintenance Program (FMP) within the MEIA.</p>	<p>Under the FMP, single parents, separated spouses and persons under 19 years of age must assign their family maintenance rights to the MEIA as a condition of payment of assistance. Family maintenance workers (FMWs) assist single parents in securing financial support for their families. They help to promote the clients' financial independence and economic security by ensuring they receive enforceable maintenance orders. The FMP overlaps and has close ties with the Family Justice Counselor program under Family Justice (AG).</p>	<p>Clients may include 1) people with mental, physical, educational and other disabilities, 2) single parents and two-parent families (which can be a barrier to work), and 3) people from abusive relationships who need support to get their lives back on track. People experiencing poverty are at a low point in their lives and often in difficult circumstances. They can feel marginalized and have a negative frame of mind (not feeling good about themselves, which can be a barrier to seeking, obtaining and retaining employment). Clients frequently feel guilty asking for what they feel is a hand-out.</p>

4.1 Geographic Constraints

Geographic factors play a role in access to justice and related support services, since service providers and Internet access¹¹, particularly broadband, are more limited in small centers and rural locations.

The availability of service providers is a significant concern in some areas, and limits the assistance that can be provided in some cases (e.g. via referral). Mediation services are a particularly relevant case in point, because mediation is a focus of family justice reform. A major issue faced by the Mediator Roster Society is lack of private mediators in many areas of the province; there are only 34 mediators on the Family Roster and they're mostly in major centers in the southern part of the province. Because of these shortages, the Mediator Roster Society is reluctant to promote its services too aggressively in certain parts of the province.

Notwithstanding limitations in access, Internet service, where available, provides a potentially valuable tool for accessing legal information and resources. Remote clients can also benefit from telephone-based services such as LawLINE.

4.2 Clients and Client Attributes

The essential clients of the family justice system are families that are involved in separation and divorce. This represents a population of significant size, which speaks to the importance and potential impact of this initiative. In 2002, there were 10,125 divorces in British Columbia; the province's divorce rate by the 30th anniversary is 41.0% (against a Canadian average of 37.6%)¹².

Divorce affects the entire family. The family as a client of the justice system includes single and two parent families, children, teens, and even seniors in some cases¹³. As suggested by Table 2, client attributes vary widely. Attributes that are particularly germane to this study, which is focused on the family justice hub and portal, however, are summarized below.

4.2.1 Financial Resources / Poverty

While divorce affects all socio-economic levels of society, there is a general sense that the Hub and Portal would be targeted (or perhaps of interest) primarily to those in the lower or middle income ranges who are self-representing, in general because it is the only option reasonably available to them (part of this group may be described as 'the working poor'). The converse of this is that people who are better off financially would tend to engage the professional services of a lawyer to see them through the divorce process¹⁴.

Financially disadvantaged people are often facing a range of other challenges, including literacy, computer literacy, disability (physical, emotional, mental), education and English language skills. However, this population may also be well educated. It is important to remember that the divorce

¹¹ Client Internet access is discussed in greater detail later in this report.

¹² Divorce statistics are from Statistics Canada "The Daily" for May 4, 2006.

¹³ Seniors occasionally need assistance in family matters; e.g. divorce, pension splitting, and situations where they are raising their grandchildren.

¹⁴ This is a generalization, but appears to be reasonably valid. It has been pointed out, though, that people who are relatively well off may choose to self-represent for a variety of reasons, and because they are generally well-educated, they may do so with some success.

process itself often places partners who were financially stable prior to divorce, in positions of financial hardship (due primarily to support requirements and the costs of maintaining duplicate dwellings). While some of these clients may benefit from the limited services of a lawyer or counselor, they often need to do much of the work themselves.

People experiencing poverty are at a low point in their lives and often in difficult circumstances. They can feel marginalized and are often not in a positive frame of mind, which can limit their ability to work their way through legal issues and related matters such as seeking, gaining and retaining employment.

4.2.2 Language and Culture

The population of British Columbia is becoming increasingly diverse. The latest Canadian census indicated that 25% of B.C residents identify their mother tongue as ‘other than English’; in Vancouver, this number increases to almost 51% (267, 545). According to MultiLingoLegal¹⁵, a key resource to this population, “newcomers who face cultural and linguistic barriers are a particularly disadvantaged group when trying to find legal information in their first language”. Several agencies and services are actively working to address this problem, but the multi-cultural and ESL issue is a key consideration in facilitating access to justice, and very pertinent to both the Hub and Portal initiatives. The feasibility of providing multi-language and multi-cultural support, given the number of variables, is a key underlying consideration. Translation of existing resources ‘word for word’ can also be challenging.

A variety of strategies are presently employed to address this need, including the use of interpreter services in courts,¹⁶ and the use of third party telephone-based translation services by providers such as LSS / LawLINE, and FMEP. It has also been noted that ESL clients often attend service providers with family or friends who are English-literate and able to provide translation services.

Cultural factors must also be taken into consideration. Cultural groups may have specific needs (e.g. aboriginal people) and behaviors relative to the justice system (e.g. support from extended family [reduced reliance on government] is more pronounced in some cultures).

4.2.3 Emotional State

Separation and divorce impose significant levels of stress. People going through family law situations can tend to be emotional, depressed, and anxious. Individuals can occasionally be in acute distress, in some cases considering suicide. They are also often angry or bitter as a result of relationship issues that led to the breakdown and subsequent issues around maintenance. Emotional issues can be exacerbated when children are involved. All of these factors can make it difficult for them to use and access services generally, but particularly Internet services. Family situations can also involve periods of crisis, which further impede people’s ability to help themselves. Clients in these situations tend to need ‘hands on’ assistance from a service provider (“a helping hand from someone they can trust”).

¹⁵ Statistics are derived from the MultiLingoLegal website (www.multilingolegal.ca) (see “About Us”).

¹⁶ Study participants noted that interpreter services in court go a long ways to supporting access to justice for this group and will continue to be important.

Frustration, emotional and other issues can occasionally lead to threats of violence or actual violent incidents on service providers (as well as family members), which is a concern for worker safety¹⁷.

4.2.4 Disadvantaged Clients

Many clients in family justice can be characterized as disadvantaged in various ways, including poverty and language issues noted above. Clients may face a range of additional challenges including limited education and literacy, computer literacy, physical disabilities, mental and emotional health issues, psychological problems, drug and alcohol dependencies and others. These challenges limit people's ability to help themselves in the family justice system and also dictate a need for the involvement of various service providers and support systems.

Disadvantaged clients are often not even capable of understanding their legal problem, which is a key first step. These individuals need consultation to help them work through the issues and clearly define what they are facing before solutions or solution providers (referrals) can be identified. Such clients require 'hands on' assistance by service providers or intermediaries (e.g. advocates, friends, family) and would be challenged to benefit from Internet resources on their own. This is particularly true where Internet utilization involves researching answers from volumes of text-based information.

4.3 Services and Service Providers

Service providers in family law can be divided broadly into two groups: level 1 providers who deal directly with family law clients on legal matters (e.g. mediation, legal aid, maintenance), and level 2 services who provide clients with support on a broad range of matters that impact on or are related to their family situation (e.g. alcohol abuse counseling, debt counseling). In detail, however, the issues are complex and there are many overlaps and shades of grey. For example, family law overlaps into other areas of law on certain issues; e.g. with criminal justice in the area of victim services and immigration law where a marriage breaks down and one partner has been sponsored by the other. Significant overlaps also exist between a number of players in government in the interest of common clients; e.g. regarding Emergency Shelters (BC Housing), Emergency Social Services (Solicitor General), Family Justice (AG), Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) programs (e.g. child protection and child care subsidy programs), and others. There are also important potential overlaps with small business skills and labour, and the Ministry of Health. These considerations pose a significant challenge to scope definition and containment for the portal particularly.

4.3.1 Level 1: Legal Service Providers and Facilitators

For the purposes of this paper, the key providers at level 1 are primarily those organizations who participated in this study, with potential additions:

Study Participants

- Family Justice Counselors (Ministry of Attorney General);
- Court Services (Ministry of Attorney General) – facilitates clients' interaction with the court system;

¹⁷ Worker safety is a key issue at MEIA for example, since angry respondents and threats to workers are common. An incident tracking and reporting process is in place to deal with this.

- Law Courts Education Society – facilitates clients’ interaction with the court system and provides relevant courses (e.g. Parenting After Separation, Finances After Separation);
- B.C. Mediator Roster Society – stewards clients’ progress through mediation;
- Legal Services Society – supports legal aid referral and brief services to financially eligible clients; provides LawLINE and Family Duty Counsel services;
- Maintenance Enforcement and Locate Services, including FMEP (Ministry of Attorney General) – facilitates family maintenance;
- Family Maintenance Program (Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance) – assists family clients in getting back on their feet financially following divorce or separation.

Potential Additions

- Pro Bono Services – assist qualified clients in obtaining Pro Bono legal assistance;
- Lawyer Referral Services – assist clients in obtaining professional legal assistance (which will be engaged at their expense);
- The Provincial and Supreme Court Judiciary.

4.3.2 Level 2: Support Services

The following list, compiled from study participants, is included to provide a general sense of the potential range of such services. The number of actual providers represented by this list could be very extensive.

- Children in strife support services (e.g. young adults on the run who often have no place to turn but are web-literate);
- Children with special needs support services;
- Co-dependent support groups (including men’s support groups);
- Cultural and aboriginal support services;
- Day care services (to support single parents who need to work);
- Emergency service providers, potentially including 911;
- Emotional and mental health support services;
- Employment training (a significant focus of MEIA);
- Family counseling;
- Financial support and advice services (debt management / credit counseling);
- Government agent’s office (various services - more important in smaller communities);
- Housing support services;
- Immigration services;
- Interpretation services and language support groups (ESL clients);
- Paternity labs (marginal into health care);
- Religious community resources (various affiliations);

- Social benefits programs for the poor (e.g. federal Child Tax Credit, BC Medical Premium Assistance, GST rebates, child care subsidies and others)¹⁸;
- Social workers (commonly involved in family matters);
- Substance abuse (drug and alcohol) support and rehabilitation services;
- Suicide prevention services;
- Victims of violence support services and counseling for violence¹⁹;
- Women's transition houses (battered women's services).

5 The Hub Model

5.1 General Vision

The concept of a family justice Hub draws on the premise that court houses are where people logically come to deal with legal issues. Hubs would, in effect, place services in the paths of clients, which would be beneficial. Court houses are also a logical venue because court services will continue to be an important part of family justice and Hubs would complement the range of related services that are already available. On the assumption that people with significant financial resources will engage the professional services of a lawyer, the primary focus of the Hub would be to assist self-representing individuals to work their way through the system in a non-litigious way, without having to engage a lawyer or engaging one on a limited basis only (e.g. to assist in understanding rights). The process would identify clients' specific circumstances and determine an appropriate course of action. Where possible, the Hub would direct clients to mediation and alternate sources of dispute resolution, thereby lessening demands on the court system.

The process that is envisioned is essentially one of 'assessment and referral' during which clients will be interviewed by a skilled and knowledgeable resource ('assessment') and directed to an appropriate service provider ('referral'). This process was originally envisioned to support mandatory mediation, for which assessment criteria would include coverage, eligibility, and risk to the client (e.g. emergency / non-emergency). On a broader level, however, the process could be invoked to support the range of issues faced by family clients, including legal matters (certainly), and frequently, financial and parenting matters; clients may also be dealing with psychological problems, trauma and other circumstances for which assistance is required.

The appropriate provider would generally be the one best suited to address the client's circumstances, at minimum taking into account the issue they're facing, their location / address, and their financial circumstances. Alternates might also be provided. Co-housing of key service providers (e.g. legal aid intake, Family Duty Counsel, Family Justice Counselors and others), will facilitate communication among agencies. The ideal might be to offer clients as many services as possible in an environment they are familiar with, keeping in mind that face to face interactions are the most effective. Services such as the Supreme Court Self Help Center would be logical and beneficial complements to the Hub.

¹⁸ A lot of government (federal and provincial) 'safety net' initiatives are available, but people aren't always aware of them, particularly when they're in crisis. Financial supports can be diverse and the rules complex; e.g. CPP, rules for aboriginals, pension entitlements, RRSPs, etc.

¹⁹ Various groups provide support in this area including Victim Assistance (AG), police-based victim's services and community-based services, which receive contracts to provide counseling.

5.2 Process Automation

The vision for the Hub may potentially involve the following types of automated / system-supported services²⁰:

APPOINTMENT SCHEDULING: the ability to schedule and confirm an appointment with a service provider²¹ and potentially notify the client by e-mail. This function may also apply to booking for courses such as Parenting After Separation.

Implementation Note: the experience of Court Services in scheduling trial dates is relevant to this initiative. Scheduling can be risky due to commitment considerations (spurious appointments and ‘no shows’). Participants’ level of commitment tends to be higher if they’ve spoken to an authorized person to schedule an event. On-line scheduling functions (e.g. allowing clients to schedule their own appointments) will be problematic for this reason; however, this can be mitigated through imposition of fees prior to commitment or penalties for no shows (e.g. a non-refundable fee as for ferry reservations)²².

Protocols could be implemented with selected providers to allow appointment scheduling on behalf of clients.

AUTO-ORDERS: system-generated court orders utilizing a database of common ‘plain language’ clauses. These forms would be prepared ‘on the spot’ by the court clerk, mitigating the delays in the current process (preparation by the parties or their lawyers).

Implementation Note: while potentially very beneficial, implementation may be constrained by preferences of the judiciary regarding phraseology and the use of standard plain language clauses. Certain existing (non-plain language) phrases have proven meaning in law whereas plain language clauses can potentially invoke interpretation. Present workflows may also be a consideration.

FORM COMPLETION AND FILING: clients would enter relevant information into interactive or dynamic on-line forms. Underlying logic would modify the path and focus of the questions depending on answers provided, and generate court forms in a standard format. Forms could also potentially be filed on-line. Ideally, database (or other; e.g. Adobe?) support for this process would retain basic client information, precluding the need for the client to enter certain information repeatedly on multiple forms in the course of the legal process.

Implementation Note: forward-looking initiatives by Court Services (e.g. Court Services On-line), described later in this document, have identified the following challenges:

- Client Identity Validation – optimal means of validating that a person is who they say they are. Certificates, if employed, may in fact ‘set the bar higher’ than the status quo (signatures on a manual form for which no validation is required). In general, court procedures following filing of the form mitigate against identity fraud or misrepresentation; i.e. the adversarial process itself imposes a number of checks and balances (e.g. through notices to opposing parties, opportunities to set aside orders made, etc.).
- Client Signatures – optimal approach to capture client signatures / authorization.

²⁰ Suggestions in part from study participants.

²¹ E.g. Family Justice Counselor, Family Duty Counsel, etc..

²² There have traditionally been no fees in the family court area in order to foster accessibility. Imposition of refundable deposits is a workload issue.

Partially completed forms are a further consideration; an approach is required, for example, to handle situations where a client gets part way through a form and finds s/he needs more information to complete it. The experience of Court Services to date is that the incidence of incomplete electronic forms is reasonably high in small claims, where such forms have been implemented. People are unfamiliar with the process if they haven't done it before and don't always have the documents they need (e.g. information on addresses, witnesses, etc). It is important for the system to provide examples where possible, or ask leading questions²³.

INTAKE AND APPLICATIONS – application support for various types of services (e.g. legal aid) that individuals must qualify for (financial eligibility is a key consideration for a number of such services).

Implementation Note: this could be accomplished through protocols with various relevant organizations (system implications may vary widely; e.g. paper intake, simple on-line forms, secured access to providers' systems (by provider or Hub staff)). Financial eligibility requirements are non-standard across provider organizations. Access to the EIS system is a consideration to expedite 'proof of income' for persons on income assistance.

REMOTE ATTENDANCE AT COURT – attendance via telephone and video conferencing.

5.3 Service Integration

The present service paradigm involves a significant number and variety of service providers, even in the area of what might be described as 'core family services'. Some of the issues with this approach include:

- Providers tend to work in 'silos' and are not always well informed about the role of other providers, who to contact in these organizations, and barriers to entry²⁴. They can end up escalating a problem by referring to the wrong provider; e.g referring to a lawyer when another service can resolve the issue more efficiently or at a lower cost;
- For a variety of reasons, clients often don't follow up on a referral that has been provided; i.e. they 'fall down' going from service to service and lose momentum as a result;
- Providers who receive a client often don't know where the client has been and who s/he's been dealing with;
- Clients have to 're-tell' aspects of their story with each provider and providers need to capture this information for their own records.

Though somewhat visionary and challenging to achieve, these problems could be addressed through a framework of service integration, wherein providers have convenient access to information on both clients and other providers. In essence, when a client attends an office, the provider would have ready access to 'tombstone' information on the client (name, address, etc.) and basic (summary) information on the issues faced, services already provided and outcomes of those services. This would allow the provider to more readily assess the client's situation and direct the client to other relevant providers with an increased level of confidence. This process

²³ Issues and concerns have been mitigated with small claims forms by allowing users to save information on their local (user) drive only, rather than on a central database. In this way, Court Services avoids the need to deal with partially completed forms, FOI issues, etc. Users are allowed 30 minutes to complete the form on-line with a warning (5 minutes ahead of cut-off) to save the file if they wish.

²⁴ Providers may not see themselves as part of a continuum or larger picture.

has been described as akin to the ‘warm hand-off’ in call center services, wherein an advocate forwards a caller to another advocate but stays on the line briefly to introduce the client’s situation. This approach of ‘end-to-end’ support, effectively executed, would resolve many of the issues with the current system and yield benefits to both clients and providers as a result of improved efficiency (moving clients as seamlessly as possible through the system).

THE CASE WORKER CONCEPT

In the context of ‘hand holding’ through the life cycle, consideration could be given to assigning a specific advocate or case worker to the client to facilitate their progress through the entire system. There are a number of constraints on this model which would need to be carefully assessed (for example, sheer volumes may make it untenable). This role could potentially be filled by a single person on the physical hub or by different people at different stages of the process. On the portal, consideration could be given to assigning the case to an electronic advocate (‘wizard’- very ‘forward looking’).

5.4 Database and System Support

5.4.1 Overview and Vision

Database support (“Family Justice Service database”) is critical to realize the vision of the family justice Hub. Aside from the tools required to support solutions such as auto-orders, applications and on-line forms, two main database solutions would be required to support the full vision for the Hub, including assessment and referral and service integration:

1. **CASE MANAGEMENT DATABASE** – to capture client information including contact details (name, address, and phone), relevant information on the client’s legal situation and service history (e.g. services s/he has received and summary outcomes of those services). This database may also capture information relevant to ‘incident tracking’ (violent incidents / threats) relative to a specific client. This database would primarily support the ‘assessment’ step in the ‘assessment and referral’ process.
2. **PROVIDER DATABASE** – to identify service providers that are appropriate to assist with a client’s problems, once the client has been assessed. This database would capture relevant information on providers including organization name, address, contact information, hours of operation and type(s) of service provided. An enhanced version of this system might also support an appointment scheduling function, focusing at least initially on key service providers in the justice system²⁵ (e.g. Family Justice Counsellors, Family Duty Counsel, Family Maintenance Enforcement). This database would support the ‘referral’ step in the ‘assessment and referral’ process.

A number of databases of this general type are already available via different providers in B.C., for example Calico (Legal Services Society), and the Red Book On-line (Information Services Vancouver), which is a key resource for providers in the lower mainland. A more comprehensive, B.C.-wide resource (BC-211), discussed later in this document, is currently under development.

²⁵ Business and system implications of extending the scheduling function to outside providers are potentially far reaching and impractical and would need to be considered carefully.

In practice, some degree of integration between these systems may be appropriate to support the level of service that is envisioned, for example, in the “warm hand-off²⁶” model, as per the following sample encounter:

- New client attends a family justice Hub and is interviewed by an advocate;
- Advocate creates a new record by capturing basic information on the client (contact details, etc.) and his /her legal situation in the Case Management Database and determines the optimal course of action;
- Advocate accesses the Provider Database to identify an appropriate resource to assist the client and books an appointment; the system prints an Appointment Confirmation with provider (e.g. name, address, phone) and appointment (e.g. date, time, duration) details and a location map, and provides it to the client²⁷. Referral information is automatically captured against client history.
- Client attends the provider’s office for the appointment; the provider, with access to the system, has prepared for the interview by reviewing the information that has already been captured on the client / case (‘history’)²⁸. The client’s arrival for the appointment is acknowledged in the system (if the client fails to show, s/he is automatically flagged in the system for follow-up). Once the interview is completed, the provider captures outcomes from the service encounter in the system and books an appointment with another provider to assist with follow-up activities.
- The client attends the appointment with the next provider, who has access to client information and accrued history (issues and outcomes) to facilitate the encounter with the client.

5.4.2 Issues and Implementation Considerations

The vision described, while beneficial, also poses many system and process complexities (as well as implementation options), which would need to be addressed carefully over an extended period of time. In practice, it is probably optimal to start with a robust provider database to support the referral process. Client and case management and tracking may (depending on scope) be a considerably larger and more complex undertaking, which would be addressed as a second priority, with a view to practical constraints.

Some of the key (in part inter-related) factors identified by study participants that would need to be considered in the system strategy are summarized below.

DEPLOYMENT– this deals with the question of whether the systems would be deployed as web-applications (potentially available to the public) or back-house applications (with access limited to authorized service providers). The provider database would almost certainly be a web-based resource, since security concerns are manageable and this model would support self-service by the public, which would be highly beneficial. Due to the very sensitive and confidential nature of client and case information, the Case Management component is more likely to be a back-office

²⁶ In the event of ‘end-to-end’ support, underlying system logic might be used to steward the process; e.g. services the client has already received or those earlier in the life cycle might be unavailable (greyed out). The system might also be intelligent enough to direct clients based on key attributes such as language (e.g. English vs French).

²⁷ Or alternately e-mails the confirmation to the client, where the client is using email.

²⁸ i.e. in encounters subsequent to the initial encounter when the record is created, the client does not need to ‘re-tell’ salient details of his / her story or provide basic identifiers and contact information (though these will be verified by the service provider during the interview).

application, accessible to authorized individuals only, though this is not necessarily the case, again, depending on decisions on scope.

SYSTEM SECURITY – as noted above, application security is critical to the deployment of the Case Management System given the confidential nature of client and case information and the associated risks. Access would probably be limited to key providers within the justice system or core framework of the Hub model. Security provisions would need to be robust and sophisticated, with details dependent to some extent on the functionality that is provided and the level of detail that is retained. Functional and data access (e.g. client vs case data) may well vary by provider and role within an organization (risk-based approach). Access to the scheduling function would probably be similarly secured.

Web applications raise a number of specific concerns around security and the risk of hackers accessing client information. Additionally, while the system is BC-focused, an Internet-enabled application is subject to access outside of this jurisdiction (effectively worldwide), so it could be subject to a lot of hits, raising performance issues, risk of system crashes, and breach of sensitive information.

Risks could be mitigated to some extent by limiting capture of information that supports identity theft, but capturing basic contact information such as phone number. Consideration could also be given to secret or temporary identifiers and to the use of forward-looking technologies such as biometrics (e.g. finger and palm prints).

LEVEL OF DETAIL – the level of detail at which information is retained in the Case Management application is a key consideration in the model. Factors underlying the decision include:

- Business objectives – essentially whether the system is viewed as ‘system of record’ for in-depth capture of client, case and service details, or merely a tool to steward the client’s process through the legal system;
- Redundancy – many providers have their own sophisticated applications to track client and case information (e.g. the Case Management System (CMS) at Legal Services Society).

Given these considerations, the optimal approach might be to track only data required to guide a client through the system; essentially client identifiers and contact information, and summary information on legal challenges, services received and outcomes. Under this model, emphasis would be placed on the use of tick boxes or other precise means of capturing salient information. Presumably, the service provider could use this information as a basic profile for the client, following up where required for more detailed information (and potentially capturing this detail in relevant corporate systems once the interviewee becomes a client).

PRIVACY, CONFIDENTIALITY AND CONFLICTS: privacy and confidentiality are important considerations regarding client and case information but impose potential constraints on realizing business goals. The sensitivity of information may well vary by stakeholder group or service area; for example, client and encounter information tracked by MEIA tends to be very confidential and sensitive in nature. As noted above, risks, to a considerable extent, depend on the level of detail / nature of information that is retained in the system. These concerns will need to be addressed effectively in order to realize the vision for the portal. Measures other than, or complementary to, robust system security can also be invoked. One option is to inform clients of the consequences of including their information in a database and have them accept the risk via a consent (placing both the decision and the risk with clients). Agreements between key providers would also be required regarding sharing of information.

Conflicts are a related matter, which may be an important consideration for certain service providers in dealing with opposing parties (potentially posing a need for conflicts checking).

CLIENT DATA ACCESS – the question of whether clients should be able to enter and retrieve their own information or access services on the Internet is integral to the overall strategy and to a large extent dependent on type of functionality and services that are envisioned. A number of organizations interviewed for this study provide secured on-line solutions for their clients. For example, Legal Services Society provides an ‘e-services’ area, which is accessible to lawyers to support billing and other relevant processes. FMEP also provides a secured area on its site for use by clients, which include family maintenance workers, payors, recipients, and others. Issues include passwords, forgotten passwords, and maintenance of data entry standards (including spelling and compliance).

MAINTENANCE – system maintenance is a fundamental requirement and holds potentially significant implications. Issues include system administration and DBA functions, ongoing user training (due to staff turnover), and system modification and evolution (as requirements change). Maintenance of current provider information in the provider database is well recognized as a very significant challenge due to the dynamic nature of the provider pool and related staff turnover.

OWNERSHIP – the question of ownership is critical since it impacts a number of factors including maintenance and support, hosting and related funding.

5.4.3 System Alternatives or Complements: “Legal Health” Cards

Use of a “Legal Health Card” has been suggested as a possible alternative (or complement) to a Case Management database. In this instance, pertinent information would be written (by a computer) to a card which would be the property of the client and ‘read’ electronically as required by subsequent providers. A key service provider might also retain the information in a database but it would not be available to all providers at the database level. However the card would contain salient information on the client and his / her status in the system (e.g. services received, summary outcomes). Card technology is being increasingly used in the health care sector. Security of the information stored on the card is an important consideration for this as for other solutions, suggesting the potential use of encryption technologies to ensure that information is not readable except via authorized systems.

6 Relevant Current or Near Term Initiatives

This section, while not exhaustive, attempts to document some of the key developments in the area of family law service provision that are or may be relevant to the Hub and Portal initiatives. Information is provided under two main sub-headings: Initiatives Related to Service Provision and Initiatives of Potential Direct Relevance to the Portal.

6.1 Initiatives Related to Service Provision

6.1.1 LawLINK Kiosks and LIOWs

Affiliation: Legal Services Society of British Columbia (LSS) and others.

LSS’ LawLINK initiative involves maintenance of dedicated Internet kiosks at sites around the province, including all Regional (Intake) Centers. The LawLINK portal, described below, is the primary resource. The Society’s hope, longer term, is to be able to focus on site content only (kiosks would be maintained by a third party to be determined).

The LawLINK site (<http://www.lawlink.bc.ca/>) is a portal targeted to low income people who want to resolve or find out more about their legal problems across all areas of law. The portal directs readers to carefully selected (and credible) sites and resources (e.g. publications) that provide information and assistance on a wide range of legal topics. These resources are annotated

/ briefly described at the portal level. The primary index on the home page, is divided into key subject areas, many, but not all of which are 'areas of law'. Sample entries include Aboriginal, Crime, Family, Legal Help and Welfare. About 40% of the resources accessible from the portal are family-oriented. The hope at present is to implement the new PLEI Taxonomy, described below, on this site.

LIOWs (Legal Information Outreach Workers) are employed by the Society to meet with clients who have been refused legal aid and provide them with assistance, where possible via PLEI and Internet resources. Experience has shown that a relatively small percentage of these clients use or are familiar with computers; the vast majority want the LIOW to locate the information and print it out for them (or alternatively refer them to an alternate service provider for assistance). This emphasizes the benefit of having a human resource at hand to assist clients with Internet use.

LIOWs also work closely with Family Duty Counsel on a scheduled basis and with Community groups, which they provide with training in the use of key on-line resources (e.g. LawLINK, Family Law in BC) on the premise that these groups will be better able to assist their clients with these resources (expanded outreach). The hope is to be able to expand this service, which has been very successful overall.

6.1.2 Public Access Computers

Public access PCs located at government agents, courthouses and libraries (and potentially Internet cafes) are affordable options for individuals who wouldn't otherwise have access to the Internet. Experience at the Self Help center and with LawLINK has shown that these tools are more effective when a human resource is nearby to assist. For example, with LawLINK, utilization increases when LIOWs are nearby to assist (in some locations where help is not available use is much reduced). It has also been demonstrated (LawLINK experience) that people prefer privacy when using these resources.

6.1.3 Supreme Court Self Help Information Center and Website

Affiliation: funded by the Law Foundation of British Columbia, Vancouver Foundation, Ministry of Attorney General and Department of Justice Canada; working with partners in the B.C. Justice System²⁹.

The BC Supreme Court Self-Help Information Center (SHC) is located in the Vancouver Location of the Supreme Court of B.C. The overall goal of the center is to improve access to justice for unrepresented litigants involved in civil actions (including family) through improved knowledge of the civil justice system. The center assists self-represented litigants in obtaining the information needed to prepare their Supreme Court civil or family case. This is a free drop-in service for interested parties who can access PLEI resources on the Internet, with assistance, as required, from skilled support staff. The center provides free printing and copying facilities (with limitations) for materials generated on-site and also refers clients to other sources of assistance, where appropriate (e.g. legal aid, family duty counsel). The program has been very successful and well received by a grateful public.

The SHC website (<http://www.supremecourtselfhelp.bc.ca/>) was developed as the primary support for the center. LSS developed and maintains the site but is not responsible for the content, which is determined by stakeholders ('partners'). The site contains a variety of useful

²⁹ Partners include BC Courthouse Library Society, Law Courts Education Society of BC, Law Society of BC, Legal Services Society, Ministry of Attorney General Court Services Branch and Justice Services Branch, and several others.

resources, including links to a range of relevant providers, a wide range of on-line (PDF) documents explaining the BC Supreme Court civil process, links to resources able to provide or facilitate legal advice, links to services and resources such as mediation and collaborative law that provide an alternative to court, and information on relevant free classes and workshops. The family component of this site consists primarily of links to the LSS website.

Though Internet resources are in English, most ESL clients come in with a friend or relative who speaks English, or return with someone who can assist them. A significant number of people need assistance to get started but once going are generally fine.

Overlaps and synergies with other initiatives such as the PLEI and Family Justice portals may become increasingly relevant over time depending in part on decisions regarding family justice reform.

6.1.4 MultiLingoLegal

Affiliation: funded by the Law Foundation of BC and implemented by the Latin American Community Counsel and MOSAIC³⁰ working in partnership.

This important website (www.multilingolegal.ca/) is a comprehensive source for legal information in languages other than English (different providers / areas of law). MultiLingoLegal is an on-line resource designed to provide newcomers to Canada and community workers comprehensive legal information in languages other than English. Resources are available in Spanish, French, Vietnamese, Chinese, Punjabi, Persian, Korean, and Arabic.

6.1.5 Unbundled Services

Affiliation: Legal Services Society of B.C., Ministry of AG and others.

The term unbundled services refers to limited scope legal services such as brief advice or support for a court appearance. Such services are becoming increasingly common (and beneficial) within the evolving paradigm of legal support services. Though they are, by definition, limited, unbundled (“brief”) services benefit clients by providing a degree of free or relatively affordable professional legal support. Where funds are limited, these offerings help to optimize service and outreach by providing an effective ‘bridge’ between PLEI on the one hand and full legal representation on the other. Legal Services Society, for example, offers a number of related services including LawLINE, Family Duty Counsel, and Supreme Court Advice Lawyers. Other examples include the Family Justice Counselor project (Attorney General), and programs such as the “Robson Project” described below. Many family justice clients are looking for brief advice and answers to their questions and find going to a private bar lawyer intimidating and expensive. Brief advice services such as those cited above serve their needs very effectively.

6.1.6 Robson Project

Affiliation: Legal Services Society and Ministry of AG.

This service, located in the Robson Street court house comprises family justice counselors (FJC) and family duty counsel (FDC) co-located with a triage worker who determines which service is appropriate for the client, and maintains related files. FJC and FDC roles have a different focus and clients are able to go back and forth between the two as needed. This joint service approaches the vision of an assessment and referral Hub but on a smaller scale. Addition of a

³⁰ A Vancouver-based multi-lingual non-profit organization dedicated to addressing issues that affect immigrants and refugees integrating into Canadian Society.

family intake function (legal aid) may be added during 2006, which will expand the service further and bring it closer to the vision. The center also includes a LawLINK kiosk and a taxi phone to LawLINE. The project previously included a finance counselor but funding for this service was cancelled.

6.2 Initiatives of Potential Direct Relevance to the Portal

6.2.1 Multilingual Legal Dictionary

Affiliation: funded by the Law Foundation of BC and the Notary Foundation of BC. Development of the dictionary was overseen by the Interpreting Programs department of Vancouver Community College, Center for Continuing Studies.

The Multilingual Legal Glossary is a web-enabled dictionary of common legal terms. The dictionary has been developed over a period of about six years by the students and faculty of Vancouver Community College working in consultation with members of the bar. Completion of the English version of the glossary is tentatively scheduled for June, 2006. Work on other language versions (Punjabi, Farsi, Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Russian) is also nearing completion but delayed by resource issues (lawyers with relevant language skills). The project overall is scheduled for completion in the fall of 2006.

6.2.2 PLEI Portal

Affiliation: PLEI Working Group of British Columbia³¹.

The Public Legal Education and Information Working Group of British Columbia (PLEIWG BC) consists of eleven member organizations or agencies, each with its own website and each offering public information services. The group's mission is to work cooperatively to promote the effective delivery of legal education and information to British Columbians.

The PLEI Portal was initially proposed in 2004 to enhance this mission by 1) facilitating access to PLEI materials and resources, 2) enhancing the visibility of the PLEIWG and its members, and 3) facilitating collaborative efforts among members with a view to improving PLEI materials and services. The main goal and benefit of the portal as envisioned by the PLEIWG is that it will provide 'one stop shopping' for BC-oriented PLEI resources for the people of British Columbia. Branding of the portal is important to distinguish it from other web-based resources and portals; considerations in this regard include 1) BC focus, 2) broad scope across areas of law, and 3) broad target audience. The perceived scope of the portal, across areas of law (e.g. criminal, family, civil, immigration) is a key factor distinguishing it from the Family Justice Portal, which will be focused on a single area of law.

A formal proposal for the portal was prepared in September, 2004, and while further analysis has been completed since, work has not proceeded on the portal itself due in part to uncertainties regarding other major initiatives, particularly the Family Justice Portal. The PLEI working group met very recently (April 10, 2006) to review status and decided to proceed with the project beginning with a feasibility study.

³¹ PLEIWG members include The People's Law School, Law Courts Education Society of British Columbia, Courthouse Library Society, Legal Services Society, The Law Foundation of B.C., Simon Fraser University Center for Education, Law and Society, The Canadian Bar Association of BC, The Law Center, University of Victoria, U.B.C. Law Students' Legal Advice Program, Ministry of Attorney General and Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General.

6.2.3 PLEI Taxonomy Project

Affiliation: PLEI Working Group of British Columbia.

The PLEI Taxonomy Project was sponsored by the PLEI Working Group, with the goal of defining and enabling a coordinated, structured approach to describing PLEI resources from group members. Development of this taxonomy is seen as complementary to the PLEI portal, since it will provide a standard classification of PLEI resources using a common vocabulary. The taxonomy will provide the following benefits 1) facilitate searches and access to information on members' sites, 2) help identify gaps in PLEI programming, and 3) improve consistency across the range of resources (web and other) provided by member organizations. *The taxonomy is targeted for use by the public (the way they see things) rather than lawyers / legal professionals who may have a different perspective.*

The final version of the taxonomy was released as a report on March 21, 2006. The recommendation of both LSS and the PLEI Working Group is that any organization dealing with PLEI matters in BC could use the taxonomy to categorize their content and facilitate searches. This is potentially a very useful resource for the Family Justice Portal.

6.2.4 BC-211 Initiative

Affiliation: A partnership involving the United Ways of BC (led by United Way of the Lower Mainland (UWLM)), Information and Referral Services Vancouver (ISV), and the Government of B.C. (represented by the Ministry of Labour and Citizen's Services).

211 is a three digit telephone number, which is emerging as an international 'standard' non-emergency (vs 911) service for connecting people to community services and programs. 211 services already exist in many parts of the U.S. and in Toronto, Calgary and Edmonton. A province-wide BC service is currently in the planning stages; the Government of B.C. announced its support for this service in September, 2005. An implementation plan is to be completed by September 30, 2006.

Once fully deployed, BC 211 will link people to community, social, health and government services and programs easily and efficiently ("citizen-centered service delivery"). Calls will be answered by skilled information specialists who will assess callers' needs and refer them to the best available services on a 24x7 basis. A user-friendly database equivalent of this service will also be accessible on the Internet.

This should probably be a key resource to the portal.

6.2.5 Electronic Content Management (ECM)

Affiliation: Ministry of AG.

This initiative is looking at mechanisms to support on-line conferencing, web-casting and similar technological solutions on a significant scale as part of the AG Intranet ("Family Justice Web Casting"), which may have synergies with the Family Justice Hub and Portal.

6.2.6 On-line Forms (Court Services Branch)

Affiliation: Court Services Branch.

Client support for form completion is well recognized among family justice service providers as an important area of opportunity for reasons that are well documented³².

Court services is involved in three important initiatives, which, though focused on small claims forms, hold implications for improved automation in family law processes, and hence to the family law portal.

AUTOMATION OF SMALL CLAIMS FORMS

An initiative is underway in collaboration with the Justice Services Branch to improve and automate the production of three small claims forms: 1) to initiate a claim, 2) to reply to a claim, and 3) to support third party notice. Form 1 is presently 'live' as a proof of concept and being evaluated via an on-line questionnaire, which is completed by users. Implementation of Forms 2 and 3 are immediately pending (or 'just live') at the time of writing. The service is accessed via the "On-Line Filing Assistant" and utilizes an on-line questionnaire, which prompts users for information and generates the actual court form based on the information that is entered. Questions were designed to encourage ('force') capture of information that is considered 'optimal' to the decision-making process (this information is not always provided on unstructured paper forms). Context-sensitive (field-level) on-line help can be accessed as needed.

The system provides print preview and print functions and allows users to save the form to their local drive (no central database) either as they are working on it or upon completion. Once completed, users print the form and file it manually with the Court Registry (electronic filing will be implemented at some point via the CSO function described below).

COURT SERVICES ON-LINE (CSO)

This initiative deals with electronic searching³³ and filing of court documents (emphasis on filing). A pilot project (proof of concept) commenced in 2005, but work was initiated approximately five years previously. The pilot involves law firms, search firms and court registries located in a number of communities including Kelowna, Prince Rupert, Chilliwack, Abbotsford and Victoria. Expansion of the pilot to the Vancouver Law Courts is pending.

CSO, once fully implemented, will be a secured function; users will be required to register (on-line) to gain access (*to be confirmed*). The current focus is on Supreme Court filings since law firms are more involved in this area³⁴ as opposed to provincial court. Participating law firms have been set-up to file documents electronically and registries are able to receive and process them electronically. The intention is to make the e-filing of small claims forms available in the

³² A number of agencies and services are available to assist with form completion, including commercial services, though these can be expensive. The Separation and Divorce Resource Center (Victoria) and Self Counsel Press provide form completion services at reasonable cost.

³³ Searches in court (manual or electronic) refer to looking up a court file on a specific (e.g. family) incident. Such access is secured and limited to those who are directly involved in a case (as a litigant or counsel).

³⁴ A lawyer or other qualified resource is generally needed to assist with form completion due to the nature of these forms (complex, not user-friendly). Court Services staff are not allowed to assist with form completion, since this is considered to be a form of legal advice invoking potential liability.

future. Charges are levied for use of the service and a transaction fee also applies (a fee schedule applies to Supreme Court and Small Claims forms, but not to provincial family forms).

Users complete and save an on-line Adobe form, attach it to a header sheet and submit it to CSO. The system retains an electronic copy of the completed PDF form (field level data is not retained in an electronic database). Further processing (e.g. payment of fees, stamping, provision of copies to litigants, etc.) takes place once the form has been received by Court Services.

COURT ELECTRONIC INFORMATION SYSTEM (CEIS)

This system has been developed to track and manage civil (small claims, family) cases in court (e.g. enter litigants, record receipt of documents, produce court-generated forms, assist in scheduling appearance, etc.). This system is the basis for the Court Services On-line functions described above, which expand on the basic case tracking system to allow for the processing of electronic documents.

6.2.7 E-Vision Project

Affiliation: FMEP (Themis)

This large, multi-year project is focused on database and website redesign to support improved access to information by stakeholders. The initiative will address two main issues: 1) provision of more detailed client information (not presently accessible on-line), and 2) improved access to case information (access to multiple cases in a single session). These improvements will support a range of stakeholders, possibly with some emphasis on functionality for attachees³⁵ and reciprocating jurisdictions. This initiative is expected to be completed in stages in about three years.

Another key goal (outside of the above project) is to implement ability for stakeholders (especially payers and recipients) to fill out and submit forms on-line into a database.

6.3 Miscellaneous Stakeholder Initiatives

Provider	Description
LCES	Move toward increased use of multi-media resources as a complement to text. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finances After Separation courses are in progress (complement to “Parenting After Separation”); • New Camtasia presentation for people changing support orders (self-representing in family law); • LCES Knowledge Network video on self representation on family (on the web); • Educational CD on aboriginal parenting after separation; • Considering a website that will allow victims of violence to access information on their cases prior to trial and obtain support for their trial (potential area of overlap between criminal and family law).
LSS	Major restructuring of the Family Law website during 2006. A key objective is to improve user-friendliness, accessibility and usability (e.g. regarding on-line forms). The site will also undergo a technical upgrade to accommodate CSS and W3C standards.

³⁵ Attachees are organizations that participate in the garnishment process.

Provider	Description
MEIA	Redevelop the site to make it more user-friendly, particularly for disadvantaged individuals. Address standards by bringing the site up to W3C / WAI compliance and move toward plain language and simplification of web documents.
Mediator Roster	Subject to funding, develop mini-videos of the mediation process to help clients envision the process (i.e. 'mock mediation'). Review mediator qualification guidelines with a view to encouraging more people to apply for admission (in part a strategy to address mediator shortages in outlying areas).
AG	Re-engineer the Court Services site including initiatives on court forms. Planned changes to the Families Change website ("kids and teens") to improve the on-line manual that adults use to assist their children with the site.
MELS	Updates to the ISO forms website to make it more interactive including improvements to 1) help clients identify and select the forms they need, and 2) allow clients to complete forms (and possibly submit them) on-line. Changes have recently been proposed to expedite the search request process for FJCs. These will allow FJCs to submit a search request directly to MELS, rather than via the court.
FMEP	Expansion of the level of service by outreach workers. Service to clients is primarily handled by phone (since this is considerably more efficient), complemented by three outreach workers (lower mainland and Kelowna) who attend a family justice center on a scheduled basis and answer questions from clients. This role, which is presently a traveling 'support person' would be a logical fit for the family justice hub model.

7 Current Web Resources

7.1 Benefits

Existing web resources on family law in British Columbia are extensive and a wealth of excellent information is available. Much of this material will comprise a valuable resource for the portal, either directly or via site links, depending on design and governance decisions and priorities. Many of the key sites and resources can be accessed from existing portals such as LawLINK and the Supreme Court Self Help Center. Appendix C provides a concise summary of a number of the key family law sites as well as other sites of interest (for example, sites which participants have identified as particularly effective portals). A thorough compilation of resources is also available in "PLEIWG online", a report prepared for the PLEI Working Group in April, 2005³⁶.

In designing and deploying the portal, it is important to take advantage of the significant amount of excellent resource material that is already available.

³⁶ By Gayla Reid

7.2 Challenges

'Information overload' is a key problem of the information age. The problem can be readily evinced via a Google search on "Family Law in British Columbia", for which the results header on page 1 identifies "Results **1 – 10** of about **38,600,000**". Thankfully, page 1 contains some of the key resources identified in this study (Family Law in British Columbia is number 1), but the point is made, and highlights the need for and benefit of a family law portal. It also hints at a couple of key challenges of the portal initiative, which will be to select the content that is optimal and to minimize redundancy to the extent possible.

Aside from information overload, study participants have identified a number of other attributes of present web resources and methodologies, many of which provide a useful context for the vision and design of the portal. The following are generalizations only (compiled from a number of observations on various sites):

- There is a strong focus on information (primarily text-based) rather than services;
- Sites vary widely in complexity, presentation, and usability. Site complexity and user-friendliness can be issues;
- Sites are not always targeted to end-users (family law clients), nor is content always organized or available from their perspective or in the manner in which they would tend to try and access it;
- Content can be out-of-date; older, unreliable and out-of-date information doesn't always get removed in a timely manner;
- Similar / related content may be available on different sites (redundancy). Additionally, this information is not always synchronized (even within ministries for example); i.e. information on a given topic may differ between sites, where one is outdated, for example, begging the question of which source should be relied upon;
- Content is often written at a level of sophistication that is challenging for the less educated or disadvantaged to benefit from. Additionally, content is not always written by professional writers, which may compromise its effectiveness (e.g. for use by clients of the family justice system);
- Orphaned / outdated links are an ongoing maintenance issue;
- Lack of automated, database-driven content and change management tools compels participants to spend considerable time on maintenance and administrative activities that could be better spent developing and improving content;
- Family Internet resources relevant to British Columbians are predominantly in English (with notable exceptions); recent immigrants may be marginalized by this and Internet resources generally, depending in part on their socio-economic group.

One study participant made the following comment, which may come fairly close to summarizing many of the points outlined above, "*websites tend to be impersonal and better suited to well educated, English speaking, literate people with a computer. Our experience suggests that the people who would use it are the same people who can afford a lawyer*". Another participant characterized the Internet as "*a middle class tool*", which imparts the same general message.

In noting these points, it is important to emphasize that the Internet is relatively new and web and content design is an evolving art, which is ever-changing as tools and resources (e.g. multi-media) evolve. Many of these problems are difficult to overcome in a text-based paradigm, where web sites have grown organically with a view to delivering optimal solutions with limited

funding. Sustainable budgets are a key consideration underlying both the development of quality content (text or otherwise) and ongoing maintenance requirements. Participants repeatedly emphasized the importance of maintenance budgets to support content updates in a dynamic environment (e.g. changes in the law, providers, ministry names and affiliations, etc.).

8 Internet Access and Utilization Considerations

Clients' ability to access and use the Internet is a key consideration underlying the portal initiative. Study participants have made the following related observations.

8.1 Physical Access

- While Internet access has traditionally been more limited in remote / urban locations (e.g. dial-ups), access generally, and broadband access particularly, is improving over time and is becoming less of an issue.
- Bandwidth (broadband access) is still an issue in some areas and may limit access to certain media (e.g. streaming video, complex graphics).
- For many people in rural areas the Internet is a lifeline, perhaps particularly so for community and legal supports, which are limited in these communities (phone services such as LawLINE are also beneficial in these areas);
- Many people access the Internet from work, which may have high speed Internet, even though resources at home are limited. Thus it may be important to consider where people work in addition to where they live. Access at work poses limitations for communications (e.g. sending a client's confidential information to his employer's office). For this reason 'hosted' accounts such as MSN and Canada.com are a consideration.
- While physical Internet infrastructures may be more limited in rural areas, it should not be assumed that clients living in urban areas are web-enabled; many are not.

8.2 Utilization (Assuming Physical Access)

- Age is a potential consideration. For example, seniors tend to be resistant to using / learning to use the Internet. Children, on the other hand, are growing up with and readily able to use the technology (and to assist their parents). The issue with children can be limiting rather than encouraging their use of the Internet.
- The ability to effectively use the Internet, even if access is available, is an important consideration for segments of the population facing literacy and computer literacy challenges. Skills and concepts that many of us take for granted will be foreign to this group and may be challenging to acquire; e.g. typing and mouse skills, protocols for moving between database fields, saving entries, and so on.
- Access probably has more to do with education and income than geographic location. Educated clients may be more likely to access or own a computer that is 'high-end' enough to support Internet access and evolving multi-media solutions. In general, the more disadvantaged a person's situation, the less likely s/he is to be using a computer.

9 The Family Justice Portal

The motivating vision for the Family Justice Portal is that it will be the virtual equivalent of the Family Justice Hub and an effective resource for people who, for a variety of reasons, may be unable to take advantage of services offered at the court house. In a complementary sense, the Portal is also seen as the Internet ‘entry’ point (“one stop shop”) for access to information and services related to Family Law in B.C. Inputs from study participants have helped to finesse this vision to some extent, clarifying the complementary nature of the two services, while also identifying some of the limitations associated with the Portal. “In person” support continues to be seen as a fundamental mechanism for assisting people who are experiencing problems accessing and working their way through the system. *The Portal can facilitate clients’ process through the system but it is important that they are able to access a human contact (person they can trust) when this is required.*

9.1 Portal Objectives

The overriding objective of the Family Justice Hub initiative, for which the portal is the virtual expression, is to build public confidence in a Family Justice System, which many people find confusing and frustrating. Improved confidence will be gained through innovation and improved access to information and services.

This broad goal includes several corollary objectives:

- To increase access to justice by efficiently directing people to resources that are appropriate to their situation and will help to ensure that they make good choices;
- To steward clients through their journey in the family justice system to help ensure they receive the assistance they need (‘warm hand off’) in the sequence that is appropriate so they do not ‘drop out’ of the process (i.e. to provide a ‘warm hand-off’);
- To facilitate collaboration and communication among core service providers, which in turn will benefit clients.

9.2 Target Population

A clear understanding of the target population for the Portal is important, since it will ultimately drive design and content strategies. Though the Portal is envisioned as the virtual equivalent of the Hub, there is a sense among study participants that it should address the needs of a broader spectrum of potential clients on the premise that it is also the Internet ‘entry point’ for information on family law in B.C..

Interestingly, because the Portal is an Internet resource, the target population may differ somewhat from that for the physical Hub. Firstly, the family clientele who may be able to make effective use of Internet resources is limited by considerations such as English language fluency and literacy and other challenges in the population which is characterized as ‘disadvantaged’. While these individuals would clearly benefit from services provided at the Hub, they may be challenged to benefit from the information and services available on the Portal. Secondly, the Portal, as the entry point for family justice in BC, may be of some interest as an information source to more middle class clients who may not be the primary audience for the Hub. Finally, because it is a comprehensive information source and a gateway to a broad range of services, it may be of interest to stakeholders other than family law clients. The two broad groups of interest – family law clients and other stakeholders - are described further in the following sections.

9.2.1 Family Law Clients

As noted earlier (see 5.1 “General Vision”) the primary audience for the Hub is families that are involved in separation and divorce and primarily those who are self-representing. This could potentially include single and two parent families, adults, children, teens, and even seniors in some cases. Within this group, participants have identified the following factors, which may influence targeting and strategy.

- There is a tendency to equate access to justice with justice for the poor. However, the portal needs to address the needs of a broader audience. People of all income groups split up and can therefore benefit from the portal.
- Clients’ ability to ‘do it themselves’ is important. They must be able to access and use the tools available and to understand the information provided. This may narrow the target audience to some extent particularly benefiting a ‘middle group’ who can use Internet resources effectively to self-represent³⁷. Clients dealing with literacy, computer literacy, emotional and other challenges may not benefit to the same extent, at least on their own. “The irony is that this is the population that frequently requires the most assistance”; it is important to recognize that a certain population will be unable to ‘do it on their own’ and will require assistance. This highlights the important role of intermediaries in assisting these clients and the need for them to be able to access human support when required.
- While the portal should explain things in plain language it’s important to recognize that it won’t work for everyone. Significantly, though, this ideal can be approached through the use of multi-media solutions, which is a factor in site design and content as noted later. As one participant noted, “the success of the portal will be in not targeting the lowest common denominator – this will allow us to take advantage of the tools that are now available.”
- A certain population in family law matters wants someone else to fix their problem; i.e. they don’t want to ‘self-help’ and may not benefit from the Portal.

9.2.2 Other Stakeholders

Some sense of the broad range of potential clients for the portal can be gleaned from Table 2. In general, the Portal may be of interest to the following general types of stakeholders:

- Students and Teachers – for example seeking to be educated on the court process or family law generally;
- Core Service Providers – to acquaint themselves with the roles of other provider organizations and the site generally so they are better able to assist clients;
- Intermediaries and Advocates – both formal (e.g. community groups, social workers, counselors) and informal (e.g. family, friends and acquaintances) who are assisting clients in family matters³⁸.

³⁷ A resulting benefit may be increased ‘in person’ support for those who really need it.

³⁸ People in family situations will often consult a live ‘helper’ before a website and it is important for this helper to be aware of the web resources that are available. The importance of this is recognized by a number of organizations including LSS, which provides education seminars on web resources to community organizations.

9.3 Portal Priorities

Study participants have identified the following priorities for the portal.

GENERAL

- Present information in a clear, user friendly and easy to use manner;
- Overcome the public's perception that they can't access the court system without a lawyer;
- Strive to improve access to people with disabilities and barriers to the extent possible, while being realistic that the portal may not be able to help everyone.

INFORMATION AND CONTENT

- Provide a single place to go to find out what the justice system looks like;
- Provide a repository of credible, accessible, current, and quality information, available at the level at which people want or are able to use it;
- Provide a simple gateway for first time users, enabling them to access basic information as a first step, with access to more detail as required ("the challenge is to keep it simple and complex at the same time");
- *Improve access and utility through the use of innovative design and multi-media.*

REFERRAL AND STEWARDSHIP

- Facilitate access to justice by directing clients to the services they need and motivating them to attend;
- Support progressive referrals ("warm hand-off) to steward clients' progress through the system and minimize the risk of having them 'drop out' of the system and be abandoned;
- Leverage what we know about clients at each step (i.e. through database support).

GENERAL SERVICES AND SERVICE PROVIDERS

- Provide a clear accessible definition of the range of (key) services that are available on family matters in order to avoid confusion and facilitate access³⁹. Clarify the roles of both key providers (e.g. LSS, LCES, FMEP) and key programs or services (e.g. LawLINE, Family Justice Counselors, Family Maintenance Program, mediators, Interjurisdictional Support Orders, and Family Search)⁴⁰;
- Clarify areas where there are service overlaps or redundancies or where names or terminology are similar (e.g. FMP and FMEP, which have similar names but significantly different roles);
- Encompass the entire 'lifecycle' of family matters both sequentially and temporally; i.e. not just people who are in crisis, but those who need to revisit orders and agreements (family issues can go on for years where maintenance is involved and parties' situations change over time).

³⁹ It was noted that the Portal should be the one place where the entire range of relevant services is defined.

⁴⁰ These definitions should be concise at the portal level and portray services positively. Benefits and value as a public service might also be included along with relevant summary statistics.

SERVICE COSTS

- Communicate the costs associated with different services;
- Clarify alternatives, particularly where cost savings can be realized by people who are not well off.

COURT-BASED VS CONSENSUAL RESOLUTION

Clarify court-based and consensual resolution options:

- Court-based Services
 - Clarify the services and remedies that are available by going to court so that people who attend need to be there or at least make an informed decision to be there. It is important for people to understand 1) what the court needs them to provide (i.e. one or more completed forms, possibly with supporting documentation such as financial information), and 2) the types of assistance they will receive (and not receive) at court (e.g. what they can expect the court registry to do for them);
 - Clarify services provided by different courts and what can be achieved through them (differences in services, resources and approach should be highlighted);
 - Clarify differences in Supreme Court vs Provincial forms in terms of complexity and usability.
- Consensual Services - communicate clearly and visibly that consensual dispute resolution is a significant alternative to court and that it includes mediation⁴¹.

FORMS AND FORM COMPLETION

- Provide support for accurately completing (and filing) forms that are required for both the court and other services (e.g. Interjurisdictional Support Orders) as appropriate⁴². Support for emergency areas (e.g. restraining orders, and certain kinds of notices of motion, interim custody or non-removal of children, etc.) where there is time pressure is a priority. Include assistance with maintenance, guardianship and non-urgent custody and access forms later in the process.

9.4 Tools and Automation

9.4.1 Triage Tool

One of the visions of the portal is to automate the assessment and referral process to the extent that is practical. The tool that is envisioned for this process is a custom ‘triage’ system, which would ‘explore’ a client’s situation by accepting key elements of information such as issue, location, marital status, and financial circumstances, and ‘filter’ out a list of viable options on this basis. These types of systems can be very effective and are becoming increasingly popular in a range of business environments.

⁴¹ It is particularly important to emphasize and heighten this awareness given the objectives of family justice reform.

⁴² The court expects receipt of adequately completed forms since these documents are placed before the court and inform the decision-making process; accuracy and quality form completion are presently significant issues.

An excellent example of such a system is the COMPASS site⁴³ (Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Access to Social Services), which allows users to “learn more about, screen for, apply for and renew various Social Services” offered by the state. The associated screening tool allows members of the public to self-assess the range of social services that may be available to them based on demographic, household and financial information. In response to the information provided, the system generates a list of services they may qualify for with an option to apply on-line.

The tool that is envisioned for the portal could potentially range from relatively straightforward to very complex. A more sophisticated solution might support information capture via a user-friendly questionnaire, which poses questions and changes dynamically in response to the answers provided (the system is essentially responding to an underlying ‘decision tree’ which may direct clients down different ‘paths’). Based on the information provided, the system would identify one or more suitable options, possibly in a priority order, and provide a link that the client could pursue to obtain more information.

This solution would be subject to the following general limitations or constraints:

- Family law is complex and characterized by multiple options, paths and decision points (and ‘grey areas’)⁴⁴. This may tend to limit the precision with which the computer can pinpoint appropriate options. Such systems are only as good as the design and the level of understanding of the complex details that underlie family justice issues. Careful analysis and design would be required to optimize the solution to a certain level of detail.
- Computer programs can’t capture or pick up on the subtleties that can be detected during a live interview. An advocate is often able to read body language, assess confidence, truthfulness, and other relevant attributes, and tailor the response and further questions on that basis.
- Financial eligibility cut-offs for services offered by various providers are not standardized between certain service providers, which stands to complicate the design of the system⁴⁵.

DATABASE AND INTEGRATION IMPLICATIONS

Consideration would need to be given to whether the triage system is a relatively straightforward ‘stand-alone’ filtering tool, or a more sophisticated application supported by a database (‘expert system’), which captures and retains client information. A further consideration is the extent to which this tool integrates with the ‘back-house’ case management tool, which is a key design consideration.

More sophisticated versions of this on-line resource might facilitate a client’s next steps in the system, for example by providing the following functionality:

- Lead the client to the next services provider in a sequential process (where relevant);
- Facilitate a client’s response to an instruction; e.g. if the instruction is to bring a court order, provide the client with relevant information (where to obtain and take the order).

Note: this function might also be used as a sort of ‘pre-interview’ tool in the Hub or with other providers. Under this scenario, clients would enter information on-line (legal, personal and

⁴³ <https://www.humanservices.state.pa.us/compass/PGM/ASP/SC001.asp>

⁴⁴ Participants noted that flow charting has been attempted in the past with limited success.

⁴⁵ Standardization of eligibility criteria is significant consideration / opportunity in implementing the Hub / Portal.

financial) as an initial step in entering the ‘process’. The service provider would then have access to this information as a starting point for the interview. There are a significant number of issues underlying this scenario, which would need to be considered carefully.

9.4.2 Other Tools and Resources

Study participants have identified a number of potential resources that might be included on or accessible from the portal.

INCOME / ELIGIBILITY ESTIMATOR

This could be a stand-alone tool or part of the triage system. In either case it would provide clients with the ability to self-determine their service eligibility, where applicable. The MEIA website, for example, includes an Income Assistance Estimator, which is available to the public (unsecured).

FORMS AND FORM AUTOMATION

Support for on-line form completion and filing (for various services including the court) is considered a key requirement for the portal (potentially seamlessly available from various member sites). A number of initiatives are already underway in this area (see 6.2.6 “On-line Forms Court Services Branch”, and 6.3 “Miscellaneous Stakeholder Initiatives”).

SEARCHES

Reliable and sophisticated search capability is a critical requirement for the portal. Various options are available and cost may be a factor in providing the optimal tool.

Nb: terminology and taxonomy (see 9.5.1 “Taxonomy”) are important related considerations in order to realize the full benefit of searches. Searches generally imply that a person needs to know what they are looking for before they can find it. This is not always the case with people facing family matters, which emphasizes the benefit of a triage tool, and the particular benefit of in-person contact at the Hub.

CALL CENTER / HELP DESK FUNCTIONS

Participants have repeatedly emphasized the importance of clients being able to connect with a human support when they are unable to assist themselves or encounter situations where they need additional support, potentially to link to a call center support function. Presumably, the site could contain a function to connect the caller with a back-house call center support function, where an advocate would be able to assist in various ways or potentially re-direct the call. This could be supported via MSN Messenger-type functionality or potentially through an on-line ‘forum or chat line’ function.

This type of support could also be accessible outside of the Internet paradigm via a 1-800 number or a taxi-phone at a public access PC (webcams could also be supported from such facilities).

Aspects of this vision are quite ‘forward looking’ but will become increasingly feasible over the intermediate term.

CHAT LINES AND FORUMS

Chat lines / forums provide a mechanism for clients to communicate with service providers or help desk personnel interactively⁴⁶. Under this scenario, clients would pose a question on-line

⁴⁶ Most mainstream call center packages support Agent Chat functionality (with an on-line helpdesk agent).

which would be answered by a provider⁴⁷. There are a range of possible options to consider in this area and security is a consideration. Forums, if employed, would probably be restricted to interactions between clients and providers, rather than between clients, which poses a significant risk of misinformation.

OTHER

The portal could also potentially support the following types of services:

E-mail	To facilitate and potentially automate various types of communications between clients and service providers.
FAQ	A posting of frequently asked questions and authorized responses by category (e.g. subject or provider).
Applications	Support for applying on-line for various types of services in the legal system.
Search Requests	Support for requesting an on-line search (MELS function). This would be a secured function to support requests from authorized services / providers such as lawyers, Supreme and Provincial Courts, and potentially FJCs (under consideration).
Registration and Scheduling	On-line registration for courses such as “Parenting After Separation” and “Finances after Separation”. Also appointment scheduling for these and other events (e.g. community legal seminars).
Event calendars	Listings of key relevant events and courses (subject, date, time, venue, and cost, plus relevant summary information). This is related to the registration and scheduling function noted above.
Notice Board	Listing describing key developments or changes in family justice (summary level targeted to the audience).

9.5 Other Site Components

9.5.1 Taxonomy

Taxonomy is a significant consideration, since it drives searches and navigation and also provides standard terms of reference for users (minimizing confusion). For these reasons, it is important to adopt a standard taxonomy within the portal (potentially the PLEI taxonomy cited earlier – see 6.2.3 “PLEI Taxonomy Project”).

It has been noted that the issues that give rise to the need for a taxonomy of legal terms, may also apply to other terminology commonly used in the justice system, for example acronyms such as FMP and FMEP, which are very similar but represent significantly different services. Also, a possible outcome of the development of a taxonomy is that service providers may incorporate the common terminology within their practice.

DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

The client’s perspective on ‘what s/he is searching for’ is an important consideration in facilitating access. It is important to be aware of how clients think of themselves and what they are looking for in implementing the required supports. *Ultimately, it’s important to ensure that the things clients enter in a search engine bring back relevant answers and resources.*

⁴⁷ Participants noted that a number of IT and other organizations presently offer this type of support.

CHALLENGES

Taxonomies pose a number of challenges:

- Development - they can be very challenging to develop because stakeholders have different preferences (reaching consensus can be an issue). Options can be limited in some cases, for example, when terminology is embedded in legislation.
- Implementation – it can take time for members to adapt / implement a taxonomy for their content; it may be important to make a timely decision on taxonomy for this reason.

ALTERNATIVES

Given the potential challenges of implementing a formal taxonomy, other options can be considered to facilitate searches (e.g. adding tags (synonyms) to documents for this purpose).

9.5.2 Collaboration Environment

Effective collaboration is critical to portal implementation and ongoing management and change control once it is live, and this environment would help to facilitate that collaboration (essentially a virtual meeting place). Participants were generally in agreement regarding the benefits of providing an on-line collaborative environment for members, but were unsure as to whether it should be included as secured resource on the Portal or via a shared environment separate from the Portal.

POTENTIAL FUNCTIONS AND SERVICES

An on-line collaboration environment might provide the following supports for members:

Notice Board	“What’s New”, advance notice on key developments or changes in family justice (policies, legislation) so that front-line staff are aware of these changes. This might also provide a mechanism for other participants to provide input.
Event Calendars	Information on what other providers are doing, timing of events.
Statistics	A pool of statistical information of common interest, e.g. documenting trends that might impact service levels or motivate changes.
Forum	For dealing with portal management matters, commenting on / responding to timely or evolving issues of mutual interest, and thoughts on how to better serve clients, deal with violent clients, suggested improvements, etc..
File Management	Common area for swapping project work files, with ability to comment on drafts of working documents.
Information	A means of advancing participants’ knowledge of roles, responsibilities and processes; improved understanding of different roles and services.
Link Management	Link management information, updates, new sites of interest, changed links.
Planning	Documentation of initiatives, plans and ideas.
Contacts	Contact information on key resources at other organizations (it’s not always clear who to contact with a question; e.g. regarding services provided and whether it’s appropriate to make a referral).

Cross-ministry sharing	Cross ministry sharing of information that's not for the public and sharing of information that member groups are collaborating on. This might include forms, legislation, and policy and procedure information that is of interest or benefit to other groups. Also certain non-public forms that are available on individual intranet sites that might be of interest to other organizations and could be shared in this way.
Surveys	Focal point for surveys on key issues.
Inter-agency Communications	Support for inter-agency communications re: a client's progress through the system, potentially including a status log or similar mechanism ('we understood you were going to remove the garnishee').
On-line Seminars	On matters of common interest.

CONCERNS AND LIMITATIONS

- May present FOI and confidentiality concerns;
- Risk of the portal becoming overly complex with too many agendas (a question of whether the portal is to service clients or the people who collaborate in that work);
- Potentially useful but not a substitute for face to face meetings.

IMPLEMENTATION

- Access should be limited to a small group of key people in member organizations;
- Might be more relevant for certain 'silos' or members than for the group as a whole;
- An effective environment would require a threshold number of participants to make it work;
- Maintenance of this environment is a significant consideration.

9.6 Portal Design

9.6.1 General Attributes

Study participants have identified the following preliminary considerations for the design of the portal.

USABILITY AND USER EXPERIENCE

User-friendliness and ease of use (simplicity) are critical to maximizing the public's use of the portal and fulfilling its vision as the 'entry point' for family justice.

- Optimize the use of graphics and multi-media resources to steward people through the site, and provide information in an interesting and informative way; for example:
 - Animated 'journeys' in law (as per the AG's 'families change' site);
 - Experiential videos (vignettes) of areas of particular interest (e.g. court processes, 'mock mediation');
 - Use of imagery and symbols to draw users to important resources;
 - Use of animation to 'hand hold' clients on the site; e.g. a 'wizard' might welcome a user to the portal, ask specific questions, which would be used to direct them to appropriate resources.

Graphics and multi-media resources are discussed in further detail in 9.7 "Media and Content".

- Create ‘silos’ or ‘worlds’ that address specific needs;
- Direct users seamlessly to relevant content on either the portal or member’s sites (site owner should be transparent to place emphasis on the client and service rather than the provider). The portal should lead people through a process of education and discovery, rather than just providing search capability;
- Provide users with different ways of accessing the information that they need (e.g. text and video);
- Organize the site and content from the client’s perspective to improve usability. Identify key areas where people have questions (e.g. based on queries received) and make information accessible based on the way clients would tend to look for it (i.e. a client’s perspective on a problem may differ from an administrator’s or designer’s perspective). Examples of the way information might be organized include topic, life event (milestone), and stage of life (kids, teens, adults).
- Consider cognition (how people perceive and learn) in designing the site and related content and services (e.g. level of detail that people are able to assimilate, duration of focus in a given session, etc.).

PORTAL INTEGRITY AND BRANDING

The design must ensure that the portal and related sites have a cohesive ‘look and feel’ so that users know they’re in the portal and take comfort from that (i.e. they’re in the ‘world of family law’). It’s important that members retain their own identity while also providing a sense that they’re part of the large portal.

Branding is important to identify the portal and member sites, for example if a user comes into the portal ‘sideways’ via an Internet search. Users should have a clear path to return to the portal from members’ sites.

PRIORITIZED ACCESS TO INFORMATION

- Where appropriate, guide clients to resources or services that are more affordable to government and better for families (i.e. emphasize these services rather than just letting clients choose);
- Identify a client’s financial eligibility early in the process since this will impact the path s/he takes and will ultimately save time and avoid confusion. For example, financially eligible clients might be referred to a Family Justice Counselor for mediation; others would be referred to a family practitioner mediator);
- Identify a client’s address early in the process so this can be matched to service availability. This will prevent a person from going through a process only to find that no services are available in their area.

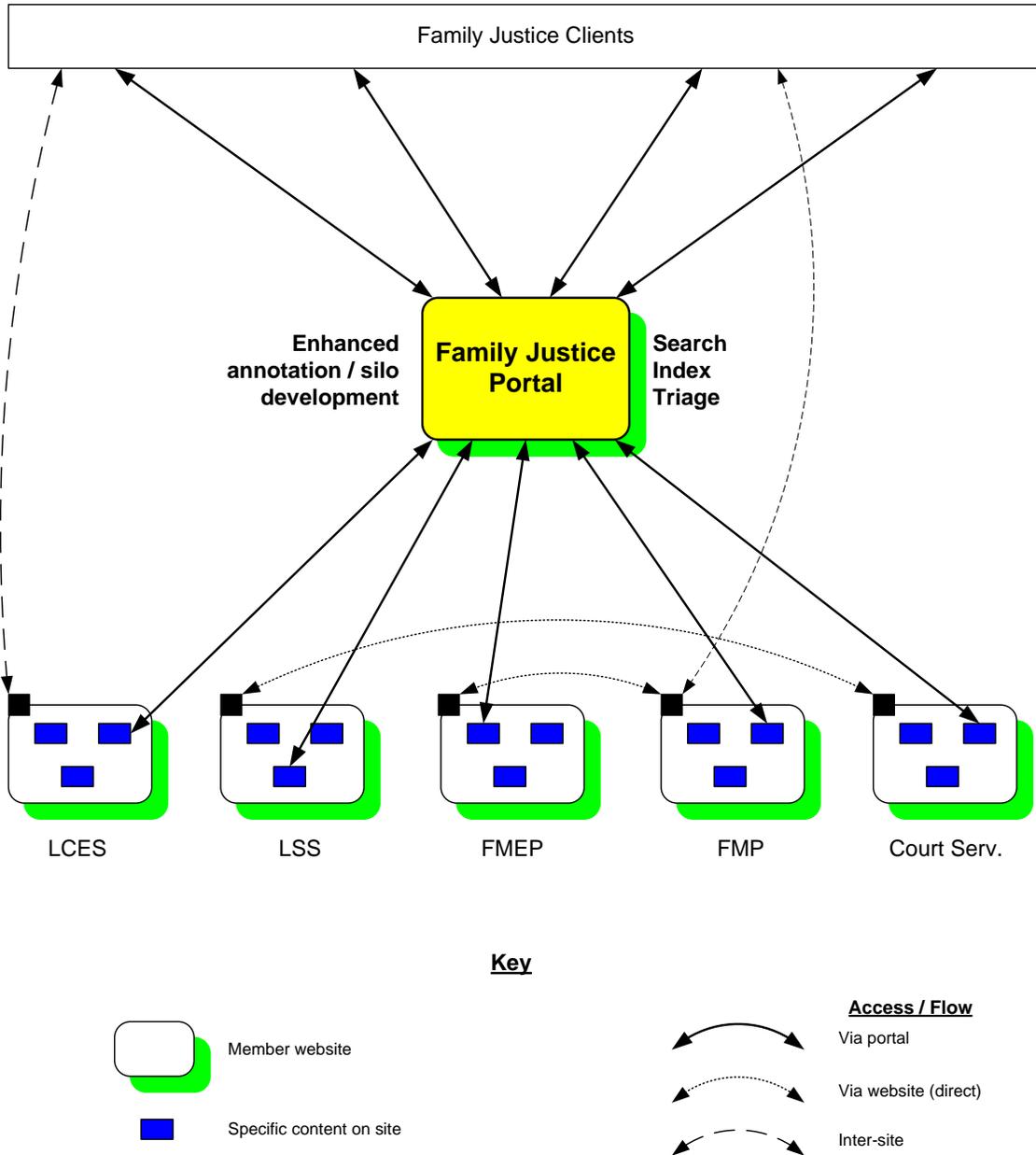
CONTENT AND SCOPE

- Minimize content redundancy between the portal and member sites;
- Limit the scope of the portal in order to keep things manageable and optimize utility.

9.6.2 Structure

Portal structure refers to the relationship between the portal and the member sites. In general, the purpose of the portal is to impose ‘logic’ on the rest of the system by supporting searches, indexing and triage to facilitate access to content that is, to a large extent, stored on members’ sites. This concept is illustrated conceptually in Figure 1 on the following page.

Figure 1 Family Justice Portal Structure (Conceptual)



While this general model is consistent with typical portal design (e.g. annotated links directing users to content on sub-sites), the vision for the Family Justice Portal seems to require what might be described as ‘enhanced annotation’ at the Portal level. While detailed content would still be available on members’ sites, the Portal would provide a high level framework defining the major service areas (‘silo’s) and a welcoming, informative environment to introduce users to the ‘world of family law’ and facilitate their entry into it.

While a primary goal of the portal is to minimize redundancy, some level of redundancy, under this model, might be beneficial to improve the users' experience. This would be a 'top down' sort of approach, with summary level information on the portal and detail on the members' sites.

This poses the interesting question of where the triage function should reside in the process flow; potential options include 1) at the top, as the entry point to the portal, or 2) within a silo in order to narrow the field of options once other techniques (e.g. a wizard) have positioned the user in a particular area.

Over time, the Portal may evolve and 'equilibrate' so that certain content 'migrates' more into the portal environment and out of members' sites. These strategies are ultimately tied to governance and ownership considerations.

Participants have noted the following points of interest:

- It is important to keep logically related material in one place (on one site); eg. if important information on mediation is missing, it should be implemented on a mediation site.
- Different levels of audience sophistication can be addressed by simplifying the language of web-based resources. Language issues can be partially addressed by providing the *essential* information in multiple languages (e.g. one pagers on how the court works, how to access mediation, etc.) at the Portal level.

9.6.3 Standards

Web and other appropriate standards are an important consideration in implementing the portal. A number of study participants are currently in the process or planning stages of upgrading to address various accessibility standards (e.g. for media, people with disabilities, etc.).

It is important for web guidelines and standards to be forward looking and able to accommodate the level of creativity, design innovation and multi-media (see 9.6.1 "General Attributes" and 9.7 "Media and Content") that are necessary to fulfill the vision for the portal. Current government standards may not provide the level of flexibility that is optimal to deliver this vision.

9.6.4 Advertising on the Site

Study participants agreed that it would be inappropriate to accept commercial advertising on the site due to the nature of the service provided and the providers. Advertising would tend to raise the perception of endorsement and potential conflicts, and decrease the public's confidence in the site as a result.

However, it may be suitable and beneficial to promote other family and justice services such as the Supreme Court Self Help Center, which are in the public interest.

Consideration might also be given to two 'lower key' strategies for off-setting the cost of providing the service (tasteful, subtle presentation is an important tenet of both strategies).

1. Garner funding support from agencies, law firms and others who wish to support development of certain products and resources (e.g. Camtasia presentations). Rather than allowing advertising, the portal could acknowledge funders.
2. Invoke annual sponsorship of the portal from various consortiums. Sponsors' names would be listed on the site (e.g. "this site was funded by").

9.7 Media and Content

Media diversification and improvements that have taken place over the past few years are a key consideration underlying the portal strategy. The vision for the Portal relies on innovative design and a balanced use of text and multi-media content in order to provide information in a more understandable, engaging and appealing manner than was previously possible.

The industry trend is increasingly toward use of multi-media resources as a complement to text and this strategy is strongly supported by participants⁴⁸. A key benefit of this strategy will be to make information (and services) more accessible to a larger group of people, effectively lowering the access ‘threshold’ in favor of the disadvantaged / less literate by decreasing the technical difficulty and simplifying the presentation.

While beneficial in terms of presentation, multi-media resources carry some ‘technical’ implications which may limit their availability in some environments or PCs. Issues include the need for special drivers, suitable media players, bandwidth and potentially even firewall constraints. PC performance is a significant issue with media players, which favors ‘higher-end’ machines. These issues can be mitigated to some extent by providing the same content in different formats; e.g. the AG ‘families change’ websites (for kids and teens) presents content in both flash and HTML. Increased deployment of public Internet PCs and kiosks able to support multi-media content will also help to address this issue.

Key media identified by this study are listed below with summary comments on implementation and utility.

Media	Comments
Videos	Various formats differing in bandwidth requirements, quality and file size. Must download before they can be viewed and may save to the client hard drive (set-up issue). User must have the appropriate media player.
Streaming Videos	Downloads and buffers as the user is viewing it, so bandwidth is very important. User must have the appropriate media player.
Flash / animation	A very powerful, relatively easy to use animation tool supporting enhanced creativity over HTML. Use of animation is becoming increasingly important and is an optimal approach for children especially (more interactive). Client PC requires installation of a macromedia browser plug-in (downloadable).
Camtasia	A new product which supports creation of small ‘individual’ lessons with someone speaking.
Pictures	Pictures / visual aids can be very beneficial since they simplify access and usability (and are appealing to children) and humans respond well to visual stimuli. Examples might include 1) visual guide to the justice system, 2) an interactive map of services and courthouses (user clicks on an icon or map location and the system provides relevant information) (‘pictorial index’), and 3) icons representing different services – clicking on an icon brings up a description.

⁴⁸ Multi-media is considered a key resource for educational, training, and self-help programs.

Media	Comments
Podcasts	Audio recordings (iPod), which can be listened to on the site or downloaded. Podcasting may be more straightforward than other media in terms of communicating information and may be particularly beneficial for ESL materials.

DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

- Favor increased use of oral presentations and small multi-media instructional pieces which are interesting, informative and able to hold the users’ interest.
- Provide content in multiple formats to address the needs of different populations; e.g. videos and text are of no use to the visually impaired⁴⁹.

COST OF MULTI-MEDIA RESOURCES

- Multi-media resources tend to be more difficult and expensive to redevelop when things change, so stability is important (also a consideration in design);
- Costs of developing multi-media resources can be expected to exceed traditional text-based resources, which is a key funding and strategy consideration. In general, costs increase in the general sequence HTML → Camtasia → Video → Streaming video. For example, a Camtasia presentation might cost on the order of about \$4k, whereas an animated / video production might cost \$25- 30k.

9.7.1 Plain Language

Plain language (text or other media) is generally considered optimal to reach a broader audience (e.g. ‘grade 8 level’ is a common target) and a number of organizations (LSS, FMEP and others) develop material at this level. Interestingly, FMEP has found that clients, particularly recipients, are pushing back a little, suggesting that they’re able to understand existing plain language content and interested in information at a more sophisticated level. This suggests that it may be beneficial for the Portal to provide a basic ‘front-end’ with drill downs to more detailed information for those who need it.

9.8 Deployment and Overlaps With the PLEI Portal

The Family Justice Portal (FJP) is one of two major portal projects that are under active consideration in or overlapping the family justice system. The other project, described earlier, is the PLEI Portal initiative, envisioned to facilitate access to Public Legal Education and Information (PLEI) resources, across areas of law, but including family. It is important, in the interest of optimizing resources and minimizing redundancy, to identify a strategy under which these two important resources can co-exist, while balancing and complementing each other. Consideration of the ‘fit’ between these two portals is important in helping to finesse the vision for both, which in turn holds implications for design, content, branding and promotion. It is also important to consider how these two sites fit within the larger strategy and inventory of government-affiliated web resources that deal with legal matters.

⁴⁹ It may also be helpful to provide videos / multi-media in different formats in order to accommodate a wider consumer audience; however, this will carry cost implications.

The following matrix, summarizing key differences between the Family Justice and PLEI portals as they are presently envisioned, is a useful reference in identifying an optimal solution.

Portal	Content / Focus	Area of Law	Integration	Target Clientele
PLEI	Information and educational materials.	All (most)	Horizontal – across areas of law.	Wide range & variable education, ability, income and interests.
FJP	Service facilitation and targeted information; technical sophistication (e.g. web-applications, multi-media, triage).	Family	Vertical – within one area of law (family).	Involved in divorce or separation, tend to be lower to middle class.

Important inter-related considerations in working toward this strategy are as follows.

- Structure** This deals with question of the relative deployment of the two portals; primarily whether they will be ‘side by side’, but branded differently, or hierarchical, in which case the Family Justice Portal might be accessed as one of several key ‘silos’ within the PLEI Portal (other silos might exist for criminal, immigration, and other key areas of law).
Under the latter model, the PLEI Portal might take on a broader role as the ‘entry point’ for justice in B.C. (e.g. “Justice in B.C.”⁵⁰).
- Branding** This deals with how the portals are promoted to the public and other potential users. Branding to a large extent comes down to decisions on ‘target audience’ (clientele), the needs of that audience and the content and / or services they will find useful to satisfy those needs. For example, the Family Justice Portal might be focused on facilitation and directing users to very specific content dealing with solutions to issues around separation and divorce. This portal might lie within a broader framework of more detailed family law information (PLEI) and family law information that is unrelated or peripheral to separation and divorce (e.g. adoption).
- Content** The nature of the content that is accessed from the two portals will be tied to a considerable extent to the issue of branding. If, for example, the PLEI portal has an information and education focus as presently envisioned, then it would direct clients to these resources rather than to service-related resources such as on-line court forms.
- Redundancy** This is a key consideration underlying all of the above. As a general premise, it is important to minimize redundancy between the two portals. On a practical level, however, this may be challenging to accomplish and some degree of overlap may actually be appropriate and beneficial, since users may need to access similar content for different reasons. Branding and the ‘entry point’ by which users find their way to this content remains an important consideration.

⁵⁰ Other suggested names are “Law in B.C.” and “Solving Legal Problems”.

There is much to think about in defining the strategy for the two portals. It will be helpful and important for stakeholders involved in these two initiatives to collaborate in determining the optimal deployment and in stewarding the development of the two portals to meet that vision.

9.9 Potential Benefits of the Portal

Benefits of the Hub and Portal to some extent overlap. The Portal would provide inter-related benefits to clients, core service providers and the Family Justice System in general as outlined below.

9.9.1 To Clients

The main overall benefit of the portal is that it would facilitate access to justice and thereby improve clients' experience with respect to the Justice System. This would be accomplished through 'one stop shopping' for information and services and improved stewardship of clients through the system ("the right resources"). Many people find the justice system daunting and strive to get information without engaging 'in person' resources (i.e. they prefer to obtain information "behind the scenes" as a first step). The Internet is an ideal resource for this population assuming they are able to access and understand the information that is provided.

Corollary benefits include:

- Reduced time spent 'in the system' due to streamlined and expedited processes and on-line forms and resources (barriers are reduced);
- Improved control through improved access to resources (e.g. ability to effectively identify appropriate resources on-line);
- Improved ability to make informed decisions themselves based on accessible, targeted information available at the appropriate level of detail;
- Reduced confusion, frustration and anxiety as a result of receiving the help they need.

9.9.2 To Core Service Providers

In a general sense, when clients benefit, service providers also benefit by fulfilling their mandate. A very significant benefit of the portal initiative, related to delivery on mandate, is that the portal (and the related implementation project) will provide a broad conceptual framework within which partners in the justice system can collaborate on a single 'holistic' solution. This in turn will provide an opportunity to identify and bridge gaps in service, and to improve and optimize the resources that are already in place.

Once the portal is in place, service providers will potentially benefit in a number of important ways, including:

- Improved matching of clients to services will reduce overhead associated with re-directing clients who show up at the wrong place;
- Improved communication and networking among providers, leading to improved awareness of the system as a whole and the services that are available. This will assist providers in performing their own jobs and in making referrals, ultimately leading to improved client service;
- Reduced workload providing information (which is more readily accessible), with improved emphasis on providing the types of support that are best delivered 'live', and improved ability to focus on core service delivery;

- Improved ability to focus on core services by migrating other activities to partners in the justice system who are more appropriately positioned to deal with them⁵¹;
- Improved relations with a client base that is better informed and better served. This in turn, eases the job of service providers and results in a more pleasant (e.g. easier, more productive client interviews) and potentially safer workplace (e.g. worker safety issues due to angry and frustrated clients as at MEIA);
- Increased exposure will heighten clients' awareness of service offerings and improve providers' ability to deliver those services as a result;
- Improved support in performing their jobs through the information and services available on the portal. Having a 'single' resource to point clients to rather than multiple sites, is considered beneficial.

9.9.3 To the Justice System / General

The Justice System as a whole stands to gain through improved efficiency, cost savings, and a better-served, less frustrated and more satisfied clientele. Potential corollary benefits include:

- Decreases in redundant effort and follow-ups as a result improved client service;
- Simplified procedures and increased standardization (e.g. standard application forms and eligibility criteria across providers);
- Reduced burden on the courts through more effective direction to alternatives where this is appropriate.

9.10 Operational Activities and Supports

Website maintenance involves a significant number of complex operational activities. For the purposes of this paper, three elements are worth highlighting.

9.10.1 Content Management

Content management is a fundamental aspect of web maintenance, which deals with both the change control (placing new content on a site) and process issues around developing and approving content. Content management among organizations that participated in this study is predominantly manual, with system or database support in a couple of cases.

There are a number of problems and limitations with manual processing that favor implementation of a database-driven content management tool that will improve process efficiency and the general management and quality of overall content. However, there are a great many options in this market and it will be important to identify a tool that is optimal for the purposes of the Portal (re: collaboration, process control, security, and other matters).

In detail, the content management strategy that is optimal for the portal will depend on the governance model and assigned responsibilities for various content elements (e.g. on the Portal vs Member sites). While a content management tool will certainly be beneficial in the intermediate term as the portal approaches its vision, it may not be an immediate priority.

⁵¹ Migration of Interactive Supreme court forms (in 'self-help kits') from LSS to Court Services is a case in point.

9.10.2 Link Management

Broken links are an ongoing issue in web maintenance and this will also be an important consideration for the Portal. Maintaining the right links and ensuring they are current can be a significant challenge, which tends to increase as the number of organizations increases.

In the absence of automation, maintenance requires an optimal level of communication and collaboration among stakeholders (e.g. notification of other stakeholders when a directory is changed). A formal process is optimal for this purpose to ensure that notification is provided even in the presence of staff turnover. Though link management can be handled manually, automated solutions are probably optimal to support the vision for the portal and should be investigated at some point (as for content management, this may not be an immediate priority).

A hierarchical structure could be considered to maintain links. Under this approach, the portal would 'link' to a key site in a niche area. The owner of this site would then be responsible for identifying and maintaining the links that are relevant in this specific area. This would 'decentralize' the maintenance process by placing the responsibility for identifying and maintaining links with a key player in each niche area.

9.10.3 Web Statistics and Metrics

It will be important to track web statistics to monitor usage patterns and provide metrics to gauge the success of the program and motivate changes that might be required.

9.11 Membership and Governance

9.11.1 Membership

Determination of which organizations should be (initial) members of the Portal is an important early step. Membership implies a range of responsibilities. A governing committee will need to confirm both the rules and responsibilities of membership and the actual members.

PRELIMINARY REQUIREMENTS FOR MEMBERSHIP

The following preliminary requirements have been identified. Members:

- Share a common client (or range of clients that might include adults, children, teens, and seniors);
- Include non-profit and government organizations;
- Are non-partisan and have an unbiased / neutral position (i.e. avoid groups who advocate for niche populations)⁵²;
- Provide services (and / or information) that can be considered 'core services' ("Level 1" providers) in family law matters relevant to the target clientele (play a key role in assisting families in family law matters);
- Provide services at a professional level by skilled resources (similarly, support professional standards and qualifications for providers under their jurisdiction);

⁵² There are a significant number of 'partisan' organizations advocating for the specific rights of men and women, for example. A number of these provide valid and beneficial services and they should be assessed based on individual merit. Some participants in the study are able to deal with these groups while others can't or won't. This highlights the need for a unified strategy.

- Commit to participate and collaborate and to maintain and update resources. Players must be willing / able to effect changes in content as required to adhere to the guidelines set out by the governing committee. They must also commit to a certain level of participation;
- Are a key player or only player in a niche area ('silo')⁵³;
- Maintain web resources that meet high standards of content, accuracy, currency, usability and design (blatant advertising is considered a negative attribute);
- Maintain or have access to a skilled, knowledgeable web-development team.

Organization size, within reason, is not considered to be critical; some smaller organizations (e.g. transition houses) provide very important services.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

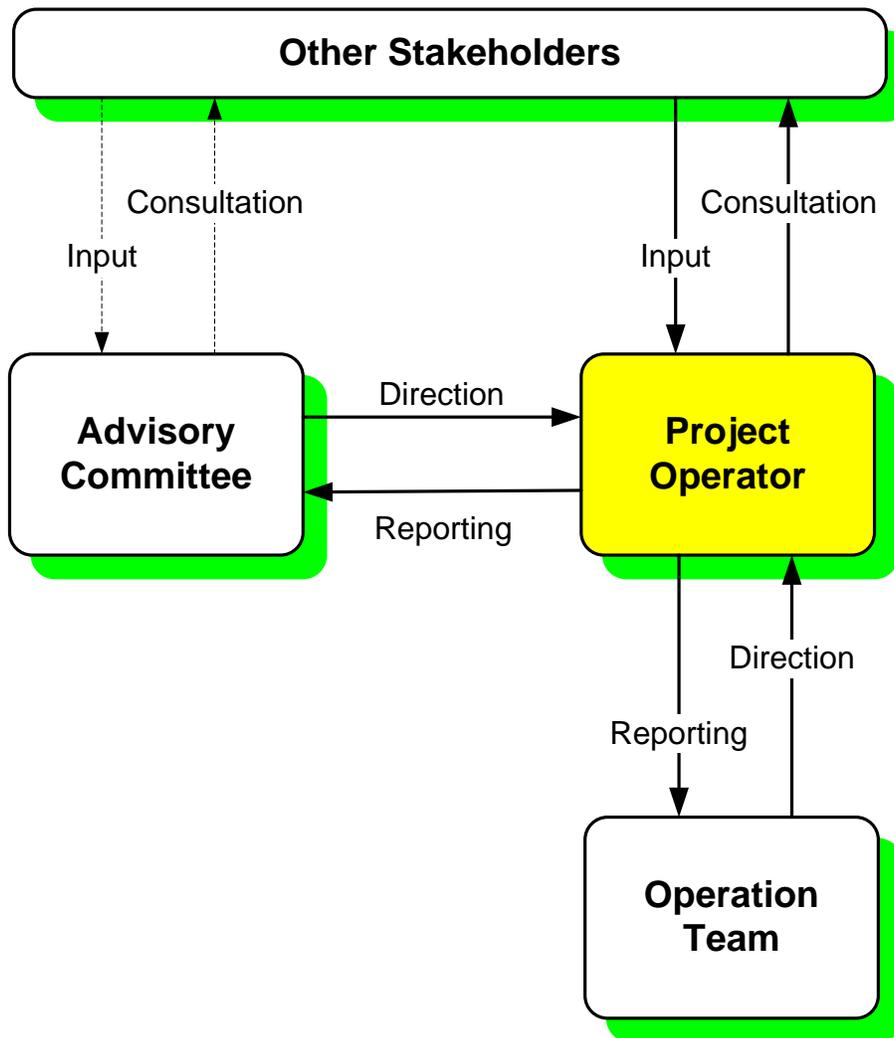
- Different levels of 'membership' might be considered (e.g. ranging from an organization providing a link to one which collaborates and participates fully in supporting and managing the portal);
- The number of member organizations should be of reasonable size (i.e. relatively small) in the interests of effective management;
- By definition, the portal would be endorsing the services of member organizations (the issue of endorsement for linked sites must also be considered).

9.11.2 Governance Model

Implementation and management of the portal will require strong leadership and a sound governance structure. Collaborative governance can be very challenging due to the differing priorities and resource capabilities of participants, and may place the initiative at risk. A potentially more effective "modified collaborative" model, illustrated in Figure 2 on the following page, involves three main groups: an Advisory Committee, a Project Operator, and an Operation Team. The benefit of this model is that it supports high level stewardship by key stakeholders ("members") via the Advisory Committee, while placing operational responsibility (and authority for day to day activities) with the Project Operator. As shown in the figure, this model also supports collaboration with the broad range of "other stakeholders" (e.g. key service and / or website providers) who have an interest in the Family Justice Portal. These stakeholders would provide inputs based on consultation with the Project Operator (primarily) and the Advisory Committee (secondarily).

⁵³ Multiple providers in a silo may introduce a risk of content redundancy and / or contradictory information. Where there are multiple providers of interest protocols will need to identify numbers and priorities. This issue can be problematic (e.g. complaints from providers and the public that a given site is not included).

Figure 2 Potential Governance Model



The relative roles and responsibilities of the three main groups are summarized below.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The Advisory Committee should comprise of representatives from the small group of organizations that have significant family law resources on-line, as they are the core stakeholder organizations. The Chair of the committee will be appointed by the group. It's also important that it has access to a highly skilled technical advisor who has a clear understanding of the vision and how to accomplish it based on both technical expertise and practical experience (i.e. a demonstrated track record of designing and delivering effective portals). This person may / may not be a member of the committee but will be an important resource to it.

Duties

- Espouse the vision, and promote and champion the portal;
- Provide overall direction and make high level decisions;
- Resolve major issues.

Member Attributes

- Support a common vision for the portal;
- Collaborate effectively together, in general, placing the interests of the Portal ahead of the interests of member organizations;
- Have a significant on-line presence in the area of family law.

PROJECT OPERATOR (“OPERATOR”)

This entity would be mandated to operate the portal as a distinct funded project and manage its day to day activities. The operator may be an individual, a stakeholder organization, or a third party organization appointed (or expressly set up) to manage the project. The operator is the ‘lead player’, who manages the site, process and relationships.

OPERATIONS TEAM (“WORKING GROUP”)

The operations team is the working group that would handle the ‘day to day’ details of operating the project (design, development, maintenance, etc.), based on general directions provided by the Operator. The working group would comprise technical and content resources; it is important for this team to have continuity. It is likely that the operations team will be made up primarily or even solely of staff and contractors of the operator.

GENERAL TENETS

- Portal content must be respectful of both clients and stakeholders;
- Portal content would be developed by the operations team; member organizations would be responsible for maintaining their own content (potentially with financial support from the Portal consortium for relevant content).

POLICIES AND PROTOCOLS

Clear protocols are required in the following areas:

- Effective mechanism to reach decisions (e.g. veto, unanimous consent, ‘final say’);
- Content management – creation, approval, removal;
- Content ownership;
- Link management (addition and removal); portal vs member sites;
- Controls over member participation - commitment⁵⁴, quality control, and adding and removing members;
- Cost-sharing (equitable arrangement to support the portal plus required upgrades to members’ sites);
- Web standards – portal vs member sites;
- Member autonomy and control.

9.12 Branding

The Family Justice Portal is an important initiative and branding will be important to build awareness of the service as the ‘entry point to family justice’ in British Columbia. Associations with the Hub and the service, assessment and referral focus will also need to be emphasized.

⁵⁴ E.g. provide for the possibility of reduced commitment tied to funding cuts in a member organization. The portal should not undermine an organization’s ability to respond to its own environment or satisfy its mandate.

9.13 Elements of Success

The vision for the Portal, as outlined in this document, represents a very significant, long range undertaking and there are numerous potential impediments to success. A key risk of the project, identified by participants, is that the portal will fail to realize its full vision and potential and be limited to a 'window' linking content on other sites. There is a large risk of redundancy in this instance, including overlaps and confusion with the significant resources that are already available (e.g. LSS Family Law Website).

In order to help ensure the success of the Portal, participants have identified the following key 'elements of success'.

- **SPONSORSHIP** – the project must have a senior level sponsor within the Ministry of AG, who believes in and will support and promote the project within government over the long term;
- **STRONG LEADERSHIP** – strong and sustained leadership is required, potentially at several levels, depending on details of the governance model (e.g. operational level, plus a champion in each member organization);

Strong sponsorship and leadership will be required particularly to overcome some of the larger impediments to the vision (e.g. confidentiality concerns around implementing a client / case management system).

- **AUTONOMY** – the project / project team must enjoy a reasonable level of autonomy to steward the vision, using web standards that provide an appropriate level of flexibility;
- **FUNDING** – the project must enjoy secure and sustained funding, which is adequate for both development and on-going annual maintenance. Funding strategies must consider not only the needs of the Portal per se, but also the needs of member sites to develop and maintain relevant content, make changes to adopt the taxonomy and so on. It is important to remember that the quality of the Portal overall is to some extent dependent on the quality of member sites. Finally, it is important to recognize that the costs of deploying and maintaining multi-media content and related innovations is likely to exceed, perhaps significantly, the costs of more traditional (text-based) solutions.
- **OWNERSHIP** – must be precisely defined, since it fundamentally impacts funding, development and maintenance strategies⁵⁵. This may be particularly important where different branches or ministries are involved (as in this case)⁵⁶;
- **EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION** – participants / members must be able to collaborate effectively on key elements and priorities in the interests of a common vision. To the extent that is reasonable and feasible, they must place the objectives of the Portal ahead of corporate / vested interests (effectively benefits to clients ahead of benefits to providers);
- **SKILL SETS** – take advantage skilled resources in key areas such as content development (e.g. professional writers, people knowledgeable in cognitive theory / 'how people learn');
- **PLANNING** – careful planning is required to steward the development of the portal in a logical, staged and cost-effective manner.

⁵⁵ This is a potentially complex area; ownership of the portal must be distinguished from ownership of the content.

⁵⁶ Noted that collaborative, cross-branch projects can be problematic and sometimes fail because of lack of ownership.

10 Summary and Recommendations

Family Justice Hubs, as proposed by the Family Justice Reform Working Group, hold much promise for improved access to justice for those dealing with family law issues (divorce, separation, and related matters) in British Columbia. As a support for this model, the Family Justice Portal also offers much promise and poses an opportunity to very significantly improve the ease and efficiency with which people, primarily self-litigants, are able to move through the system. A key requirement for the Portal, as the ‘virtual equivalent’ of the Hub, is to facilitate clients’ access to appropriate services within and peripheral to the family justice system.

Service design of the physical Hubs must take into account individuals in the lower to middle social-economic range, including self-representing litigants. While this is also generally true of the Portal, various attributes of web-based resources tend to favor a more ‘middle class’ audience, which is generally better educated and better equipped to access, understand and utilize the resources that are provided. With respect to web-based resources, it is recognized that a significant segment of the population, faced by a variety of challenges (education, income, disabilities, ESL), will struggle to benefit from the information or services that are available. For many in this population, human intervention and support will always be an important requirement. At the same time, design innovation in delivering Internet content can play an important role in improving usability, effectively lowering the access threshold and enabling more people to benefit from these resources.

In order to satisfy its role as the ‘virtual hub’ and serve as many as possible within the target population, the Portal will need to rely upon design innovation, increased use of evolving multi-media tools for content development⁵⁷, and use of web-applications to automate processes and help direct clients to services. This is a significant departure from the current web paradigm, which is strongly reliant on text-based information, and generally requires users to ‘find their own way’ supported by tools such as indexes and search engines. The vision for the Portal is essentially to move ‘to the next level’ and steward their progress through the system using a variety of innovative technology solutions. This is a very significant undertaking, which will require strong and sustained support from government, stable funding and resourcing, and careful planning. Funding is a particularly important consideration for the Portal. Due to the increased focus on technology and multi-media, costs of deployment and maintenance are likely to exceed, perhaps significantly, typical costs of maintaining text-based resources. Given the scope of this undertaking, and its potential inter-dependence on technology supports for the Hub, the Portal will need to be implemented in logical stages, maturing over a period of perhaps several years.

Overlaps with other initiatives in family justice are a key consideration in the Portal strategy and an appropriate level of communication and collaboration between involved parties will be beneficial in optimizing delivery. Potential synergies between the Family Justice Portal and the PLEI Portal need to be considered, given that both projects deal with family law and are still at the ‘visioning’ stage. It will be important for key stakeholders in these initiatives to work together to agree upon and evolve a vision that minimizes redundancy while optimizing service to end-users (those seeking information and assistance in family law matters). A differing focus on education and information (PLEI Portal) vs service and facilitation (Family Justice Portal) seems to be a reasonable starting point for that discussion.

RECOMMENDATIONS

⁵⁷ An optimal balance of text, graphics and multi-media.

The purpose of this report has been to provide a sound context or framework to support the implementation of a Family Justice Portal, should a decision be made to proceed. The initiative is still at a very early stage, however, and considerable ‘foundational’ work remains to provide a sound platform from which to begin development.

A fundamental first step is to appoint a core steering committee comprising representatives from three or perhaps four organizations that are considered to be key stakeholders in this initiative over the long term. It is important that members of this group subscribe to the salient elements of the portal vision as it is outlined in this study, particularly the need for innovation. The role of this committee will be to steward the early stages of the Portal initiative. Immediate priorities for the committee are as follows:

1. Reach agreement on core elements of the Portal vision, based on issues posed in this study (e.g. target audience, service scope). Interface with representatives of the PLEI Working Group as required to resolve overlaps, since this is important in finessing the vision.
2. Formalize decisions and related documentation on operations, ownership, governance and membership. This is a potentially major undertaking addressing a variety of complex considerations (e.g. ownership and maintenance of content, transfer of content between owners, funding allocations to the Portal vs members, etc.). The question of whether this project will be operated by government or ‘outside of government’ (e.g. to provide flexibility) is an important consideration.
3. Develop a strategy for taking the project forward. Elements of this strategy might include:
 - Technology framework, platform, hosting and tools (e.g. content and link management);
 - Logical project stages based on mandate, funding and risk;
 - Key tasks, deliverables (e.g. Project Charter) and timeframes;
 - Resource requirements;
 - Budget requirements;
 - Project Plan (optimal time frame based on mandate; perhaps 2 years).
4. Initiate work on early stage ‘requirements-gathering’ initiatives that will help to finesse the vision and provide input into planning and design. There are a number of areas where more detailed work would be beneficial:
 - Examine ‘best of breed’ portals and related web-applications to the extent possible to garner ideas on service delivery and automation (e.g. triage applications);
 - Compile information on available family justice services and providers that are of interest to the Portal, with a view to characterizing services (where this has not already been done), and identifying both redundancies and gaps in service delivery (‘fit gap’). View this from the end-users’ perspective (e.g. ask the question, “what does family justice need to provide to these people?”). Begin to define preliminary service area ‘silos’;
 - Compile more in depth information on Level 1 and Level 2 services and links;
 - Compile a preliminary inventory of current content (by provider) that might be of interest to the Portal; identify overlaps, redundancies and consider priorities;
 - Explore / better understand key resources such as the PLEI Taxonomy and the Multi-lingual Legal Dictionary that are of potential (early) interest to the Portal;
 - Define priorities for Stage 1 in terms of content, audience, and other factors (e.g. are disadvantaged the first priority or should this be addressed later).

11 Appendix A: Family Justice Portal Questionnaire

The following questionnaire was used to garner inputs from study participants regarding various elements of the proposed Family Justice Portal.

1. Organization Background

1. **ROLE AND SERVICES:** describe your organization's role and services relative to family justice.
2. **CLIENTS:** characterize the clientele that access your organization's services.

2. Current Web Presence & Technology

1. **SITE OVERVIEW:** summarize the objectives and functionality for each relevant site hosted / maintained by your organization.
2. **FUTURE PLANS:** summarize future plans for each site referenced above (eg. re: information and resources). Consider short (1 year), medium (3 years) and longer term (> 3 years) objectives. Also discuss the longer term 'innovative vision' for the site(s) (not yet reflecting in planning).
3. **RELEVANT CURRENT INITIATIVES:** identify and describe any current or planned initiatives that have particular relevance to the objectives of Family Justice Hubs and / or the portal (consider both web-related and general service initiatives).
4. **LEGAL INFORMATION:** identify and describe (in summary) the information on family justice that is or will be available on your site. Characterize this information as to level of sophistication, audience, and other relevant parameters.
5. **TOOLS AND CONTENT MANAGEMENT:** identify tools used by your organization to create and maintain sites and handle content management. If possible, describe your level of satisfaction with these tools (particularly limitations) (see also 5. "Organizational Involvement").

Family Justice Portal

1. **SCOPE:** discuss your (creative) vision for the functions and services that a portal could provide. If possible, address the issue of 'unmet demands'; services and functions that should be available to clients but aren't at the present time (i.e. 'gaps').
2. **CONTENT AND RESOURCES:** identify / discuss the types of content and resources (including various formats such as .pdf, video, etc.) that you think should be stored on (vs accessed from) the portal.
3. **ORGANIZATIONAL OBJECTIVES:** describe the objectives / priorities that the portal should address from your organization's perspective (including 'top 3').
4. **TARGET POPULATION:** identify and characterize what you feel is the target population for the portal identified in the report, including the resources it would provide access to. What types of services and support do they require? Consider their needs and challenges they may have in accessing the site (e.g. literacy, language, culture, technology access in remote areas). How can these be overcome?
5. **SPECIAL CHALLENGES (CLIENTELE):** Discuss the supposition that *"the less sophisticated the audience and the more remote from urban centers, the less likely people are to use the*

Internet and the more likely to rely on personal contact “(friends and service providers).
How can this be addressed?

6. RELATIONSHIP TO PLEI PORTAL: if possible and applicable, discuss synergies and differences between the vision for the Family Justice Portal and the PLEI portal, also under consideration.
7. NAVIGATION AND PORTAL: SITE INTERACTIONS: what level of interaction do you think is optimal between the portal and related websites (searching, indexing, etc. from the portal)?
8. TAXONOMY: do you see the need for / benefit of a glossary or taxonomy to provide standard terms of reference across ‘member’ sites? Discuss.
9. DATABASE SUPPORT: a “Family Justice Service” database is seen as a key resource in support of both the Hub and the portal. Other than FOI and confidentiality issues, do you foresee any concerns around providing this (secured) database support?
10. COLLABORATION: do you see a benefit to including a secured environment for collaboration and file sharing among ‘member’ organizations (e.g. file swapping, shared access, discussion boards, etc.)?
11. GENERAL BENEFITS: identify potential overall benefits of the portal (including ‘top 3’) to stakeholders (service providers, justice system, persons engaged in family law issues). Particularly emphasize benefits to end-users (clients). Consider this in terms of the current problems that it may resolve.
12. ORGANIZATIONAL BENEFITS: identify benefits this portal will provide to your organization.
13. ASSESSMENT OF ‘FIT’: provide a preliminary assessment of the ‘fit’ between the objectives and functions of the portal and those of your site(s). Consider especially potential overlaps and redundancies.
14. ASSESSMENT OF ‘IMPACT’: provide a preliminary assessment of the impact the portal may have on your current web resources.
15. SUMMARY: include other thoughts / overall impressions regarding the family justice portal initiative.

4. Portal Implementation and Management

1. SECONDARY LINKS: in addition to providing links to organizations that provide direct services and information in the area of family law (‘primary providers’ directly involved in the portal), the portal will also provide links to organizations (‘secondary providers’) that provide services and assistance in related areas such as substance abuse, mental health, child protection, family abuse and finance / debt management. Please identify and characterize the types of relevant ‘secondary’ organizations that you feel should be referenced from the Portal.
2. SITES OF INTEREST: identify any websites that you feel may be of interest in this initiative (e.g. highly rated family law sites in other jurisdictions, sites that include interactive programs, or sites that demonstrate particular innovation or creativity in areas relevant to the Family Justice Portal).
3. SIMILAR PORTALS: are you aware of other portals or sites either in other jurisdictions or other service areas (e.g. health or education) that have objectives / functionality similar to that envisioned for the Family Justice Portal? Please identify and discuss.

4. **PROTOCOLS FOR INCLUSION:** on what basis do you think organizations should be included in the portal initiative (i.e. as primary or secondary providers)?
5. **GOVERNANCE:** describe options / preferences for governance of the proposed portal based where possible on related experience. Identify benefits and limitations of different approaches.
6. **OBSTACLES:** based where possible on your experience, identify and discuss obstacles and challenges (technical or procedural) to implementing and maintaining a portal (e.g. user buy-in, collaboration among participants, ongoing resourcing and maintenance). Discuss potential solutions.
7. **RISKS AND CONCERNS:** identify and discuss any potential risks and / or concerns regarding the portal (e.g. design, implementation, maintenance, governance, etc.).

5. Organizational Involvement

1. **HOSTING:** the portal will ideally have a sophisticated technological capacity, capable of supporting functions like interactive forms, multiple media types (e.g. .pdf, streaming videos, animation technology (e.g. Flash)), and back-end databases. What is your organization's current capacity in relation to these areas?

12 Appendix B: Key Acronyms

Acronym	Stands For	Affiliation
MAG	Ministry of Attorney General (also 'AG')	
MEIA	Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance	
FJC	Family Justice Counselor	MAG
FJSD	Family Justice Services Division	MAG
FMEP	Family Maintenance Enforcement Program	MAG
LSS	Legal Services Society of British Columbia	MAG
FDC	Family Duty Counsel	MAG (LSS)
LIOW	Legal Information Outreach Worker	MAG (LSS)
FMP	Family Maintenance Program	MEIA
FMW	Family Maintenance Worker	MEIA
ISO	Interjurisdictional Support Orders	MAG
MELS	Maintenance Enforcement Locate Services	MAG

13 Appendix C: Some Sites of Interest

This appendix lists and provides brief descriptions of a range of sites identified by study participants during the questionnaire process. Sites are listed under different categories ranging from participants' sites to sites dealing with family law in B.C. and other jurisdictions, to sites and portals of general or design interest within and outside of British Columbia. Sites are listed alphabetically within each category. A significant number of these sites may be of interest as links from the Family Justice Portal; others of interest regarding design concepts or general awareness.

13.1 Participants' Sites

Site	Comments
A Kids Guide to Separation and Divorce	<p>http://www.familieschange.ca/kids_flash/index.htm Affiliation: developed by Family Justice Branch; hosted by LCES. Description: excellent example of a modern, user-friendly site, utilizing multi-media and targeted to the end-user (children). Excellent resource for the Family Justice Portal.</p>
A Teen Guide to Parental Separation and Divorce	<p>http://www.familieschange.ca/teen_flash/index.htm Affiliation: developed by Family Justice Branch; hosted by LCES. Description: excellent example of a modern, user-friendly site, utilizing multi-media and targeted to the end-user (teens). Excellent resource for the Family Justice Portal.</p>
B.C. Mediator Roster Society	<p>http://www.mediator-roster.bc.ca/ Affiliation: B.C. Mediator Roster Society. Description: information about mediation (civil including family) in B.C., an on-line directory of mediators and information on how to be admitted to a roster (membership). The site includes a secured area for members.</p>
Court Services	<p>http://www.ag.gov.bc.ca/courts/ Affiliation: Ministry of AG / Court Services Branch. Description: information on the Division and associated services. Includes the Family Court Manual (staff focus), downloadable family brochures, and family court forms (Provincial and Supreme).</p>
Court Services On-line (CSO)	<p>https://webapps.ag.gov.bc.ca/cso/index.do Affiliation: Ministry of AG / Court Services Branch. Description: province-wide electronic court registry. CSO provides electronic court services to the public, including the ability to search court files and file court documents at any registry in the province on a 24x7 basis.</p>

Site	Comments
Dispute Resolution Office	<p>http://www.ag.gov.bc.ca/dro/ Affiliation: Ministry of AG. Description: deals with mediation and arbitration and is oriented to professional mediators and lawyers. Contains family information but at a higher level.</p>
Family Justice Website	<p>http://www.ag.gov.bc.ca/family-justice/ Affiliation: Ministry of AG. Description: deals with family law and is targeted to families and the public at large. The site is very ‘deep’ but some content is outdated. Content was professionally written and is suitable for less literate clientele.</p>
Family Justice Services Division	<p>http://www.ag.gov.bc.ca/justice-services/divisions/fjsd.htm Affiliation: Justice Services Branch. Description: small site providing information on the Family Justice Services Division.</p>
Family Law in BC	<p>http://www.familylaw.lss.bc.ca/ Affiliation: Legal Services Society of British Columbia. Description: a major resource for people seeking information on family law in BC; includes publications, videos, self-help kits (with relevant court forms), and information on / links to family law services such as Family Justice Counselors, mediators, Family Duty Counsel, and Legal Information Outreach Workers.</p>
Family Maintenance Enforcement (under Family Justice)	<p>http://www.ag.gov.bc.ca/family-justice/help/fmep/index.htm Affiliation: Ministry of AG. Description: information on the Family Maintenance Enforcement program; nb: related information is also available on the FMEP site below (Themis).</p>
Family Maintenance Enforcement Program (FMEP) (Themis)	<p>http://www.fmep.gov.bc.ca/ Affiliation: administered and funded by the Ministry of Attorney General and managed by Themis Program Management and Consulting (Themis works with delegated authority from and in close partnership with government). Description: sophisticated on-line support for family maintenance enforcement in B.C.. Includes a public area and a secured area serving the needs of stakeholders (reciprocating jurisdictions, family maintenance workers), attachees (re: garnishments) and clients (payers and recipients).</p>

Site	Comments
Family Maintenance Program (FMP) within MEIA	http://www.eia.gov.bc.ca/publicat/bcea/fmp.htm Affiliation: Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance. Description: small site with a brief description of the FMP and implications for clients / users.
Justice Services Branch	http://www.ag.gov.bc.ca/justice-services/index.htm Affiliation: Ministry of AG. Description: information on the Branch and related divisions (via links) plus publications. Related divisions include Maintenance Enforcement Locate Services, the Family Justice Services Division, and others.
LawLINK	http://www.lawlink.bc.ca/ Affiliation: Legal Services Society of British Columbia. Description: portal targeted to low income people who want to find out more about or resolve their legal problems across all areas of law.
Legal Services Society of BC	http://www.lss.bc.ca Affiliation: Legal Services Society of British Columbia. Description: corporate information on LSS, downloadable PLEI documents (PDF) and secured resources for bar lawyers handling legal aid cases (e.g. on-line billing).
Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance (MEIA)	http://www.eia.gov.bc.ca/ Affiliation: B.C. Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance. Description: Detailed information on the ministry and related programs and services.
Supreme Court Self Help Center Website	http://www.supremecourtselfhelp.bc.ca/ Affiliation: collaboration of BC Courthouse Library Society, Law Courts Education Society of B.C., Law Society of B.C., Legal Services Society of B.C., Ministry of Attorney General Court Services Branch and Justice Services Branch, and several others. Description: developed as a resource to the Supreme Court Self Help Center; contains a variety of relevant resources and links pertaining to Supreme Court family or civil cases.

Site	Comments
Translated Publications On-line	<p>http://www.ag.gov.bc.ca/mib/translated_publications/index.htm Affiliation: Multiculturalism and Immigration Branch within the Ministry of AG. Description: lists current government of British Columbia publications that are posted on-line as PDFs in languages other than English.</p>
WorkAble Solutions	<p>http://www.workablesolutionsbc.ca/ Affiliation: Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance. Description: a resource for persons with disabilities (PWDs), employers and human resources professionals in B.C. This reflects partnerships between the ministry and businesses such as London Drugs, Thrifty Foods and many others. The site is a pilot project with a database-driven web application, which allows registered employers to post opportunities and registered PWDs to access them.</p>

13.2 Law and Family Law Sites – British Columbia

Site	Comments
Access Justice	<p>http://www.accessjustice.ca/ Affiliation: The Western Canada Society to Access Justice. Description: Pro Bono service for British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba.</p>
Canadian Bar Association British Columbia Family Law Site	<p>http://www.cba.org/BC/Public_Media/dal/family.aspx Affiliation: Canadian Bar Association (CBA), British Columbia Branch Description: information on a range of matters relating to family law in B.C. Major subject areas include 1) Divorce, Separation or Support, 2) Children, Custody or Adoption, 3) Common Law Relationships, and 4) Marriage, Family, Violence or other Family Law topics. This is part of a larger CBA site dealing with all areas of law; e.g. family, small claims, wills and estates, criminal, commercial, health and others.</p>
Courts of British Columbia	<p>www.courts.gov.bc.ca Affiliation: Courts of B.C.. Description: comprehensive reference on the court system in B.C.; includes sections on Provincial Court, Supreme Court, and Court of Appeal.</p>

Site	Comments
Dial-a-Law	http://www.cba.org/BC/Public_Media/dal/default.aspx Affiliation: funded by the Law Foundation of British Columbia and operated by the BC Branch of the CBA. Description: library of scripts on a variety of topics on law in B.C, but not including advice. Available by telephone and on the Internet.
Electronic Law Library	http://www.bcpl.gov.bc.ca/ell/ Affiliation: hosted by the Library Services Branch and maintained by the B.C. Courthouse Library Association (maintained by Legal Services Society of B.C. prior to April, 2006). Description: comprehensive reference for British Columbians on the law, the courts, and ‘law by category’. Extensive categorized and annotated references to content on other sites; includes information on the law in jurisdictions outside of B.C..
Family Law Research Guide	http://www.bccls.bc.ca/cms/index.cfm?group_id=2662&presto_format=print&group_id=2662 Affiliation: British Columbia Courthouse Library Society Description: listing of books, articles and electronic materials available in the courthouse library system on the topics of marriage, divorce, separation, annulment and child and spousal support.
JP Boyd’s Family Law Resource	http://www.bcfamilylawresource.com/ Affiliation: privately maintained site (law practitioner). Description: good BC family law resource.
MultiLingoLegal.ca	http://www.multilingolegal.ca/ Affiliation: funded by the Law Foundation of B.C. and implemented by the Latin American Community Counsel and MOSAIC, working in partnership. Description: comprehensive source for legal information in languages other than English (different providers / all areas of law).
Pro Bono Lawyer Consultation Program	http://www.probono.ca/ Affiliation: Salvation Army of British Columbia Description: information regarding the Pro Bono brief legal services, which are offered to qualified clients at sites throughout B.C..

Site	Comments
The Separation and Divorce Resource Center (Victoria, B.C.)	<p>http://www.separationdivorce.bc.ca/index_files/slide0001.htm</p> <p>Affiliation: independent self-sustaining organization.</p> <p>Description: information on this program, which offers counseling, emotional support, information and referral services for people of all ages affected by separation or divorce. Services include low cost assistance with form completion.</p>

13.3 Law and Family Law Sites – Other Jurisdictions

Site	Comments
Can I	<p>http://www.oag.state.tx.us/kids/home.php</p> <p>Affiliation: Texas Attorney General Kids' Page.</p> <p>Description: example of an interactive site using animation and video.</p>
Cleonet	<p>http://www.cleonet.ca/</p> <p>Affiliation: Community Legal Education Ontario.</p> <p>Description: on-line clearinghouse for community legal education in Ontario (good site referenced during the taxonomy project). This site is being considered as a potential model for the PLEI Portal.</p>
EZ Legal File	<p>http://www.ezlegalfile.org/go.jsp?act=actShowHome</p> <p>Affiliation: California Superior Court.</p> <p>Description: On-line form completion; family, small claims, etc..</p>
Family Court of Australia	<p>http://www.familycourt.gov.au/</p> <p>Affiliation: family court of Australia.</p> <p>Description: Australian family court website (comprehensive).</p>
LawHelp.org	<p>http://www.lawhelp.org/</p> <p>Affiliation: Pro Bono Net, a nonprofit organization headquartered in New York) and partnering legal aid organizations.</p> <p>Description: was created for people living on low-incomes and the legal organizations that serve them. It provides referrals to local legal aid and public interest law offices, basic information about legal rights, self-help information, court information, links to social service agencies, in all U.S. states.</p>

Site	Comments
Probono.net	http://www.probono.net/ Affiliation: Pro Bono Net Description: the online resource for lawyers interested in helping meet the civil legal needs of low-income citizens in selected U.S. states.
Self Counsel Press	http://www.self-counsel.com/ Affiliation: Publisher of self-help legal and business materials (on-line store). Description: family law support materials for both Canada and the US, including divorce guides and kits (with forms). They will assist clients in completing the forms (at reasonable cost).
Turbo Court	http://www.turbocourt.com/index.jsp Affiliation: Turbocourt (corporate). Description: US (Florida, Michigan, New York). Started with tax forms and were very successful so expanded the scope to cover family, divorce, custody and other matters (e.g. small claims). A pay service for on-line form completion. Clients enter data in a series of on-line forms and the system generates relevant forms. Clients have the option of registering on-line, which allows them to save, re-access and update their forms.

13.4 Advocates and Relevant Services – British Columbia / Canada

Site	Comments
BCCounsellor.com	http://www.bccounsellor.com/ Affiliation: West Coast Internet Directories. Description: on-line counselor directory and counseling information in British Columbia.
Canadian Drug Rehab Centres Directory	http://www.canadiandrugrehabcentres.com/drug_rebab_centres/index.html Affiliation: Canadian Drug Rehabilitation Centres. Description: information and resources on the substance abuse and addictions recovery industry within Canada. Dedicated professionals committed to becoming the primary Internet source for information relating to substance abuse, addiction treatment and counseling.
Canadian Mental Health Association	http://www.cmha.ca/bins/index.asp Affiliation: Canadian Mental Health Association Description: information on mental health and related services.

Site	Comments
Credit Counseling Society	<p>http://www.nomoredebts.org/index.html</p> <p>Affiliation: Credit Counseling Society of B.C..</p> <p>Description: Federally registered charitable organization dedicated to helping clients resolve their debt and money problems and gain control over their finances.</p>
Povnet.org	<p>http://www.povnet.org/about_PovNet.htm</p> <p>Affiliation: Povnet; steering committee is comprised of a number of provincial organizations within B.C.</p> <p>Description: for advocates, people on welfare, and community groups and individuals involved in anti-poverty work. It provides up-to-date information about welfare and housing laws and resources in British Columbia and Canada. PovNet links to current anti-poverty issues and also provides links to other anti-poverty organizations and resources in Canada and internationally. Although not a definitive source of information PovNet exists to be a clearinghouse of information necessary to address issues of anti-poverty</p>
Red Book, Online	<p>http://www2.vpl.vancouver.bc.ca/dbs/redbook/htmlpgs/home.html</p> <p>Affiliation: Partnership between Vancouver Public Library and Information Systems Vancouver.</p> <p>Description: comprehensive on-line guide to community, social and government t agencies across the lower mainland.</p>
Residential Tenancy Office (RTO)	<p>http://www.rto.gov.bc.ca/</p> <p>Affiliation: Residential Tenancy Office (RTO) within the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, Province of B.C..</p> <p>Description: office provides landlords and tenants with information and dispute resolution services. Information on the site assists users in understanding their rights and responsibilities under BC's Residential Tenancy Act and Manufactured Home Park Tenancy Act. The site has an on-line application, which is of interest to the Family Justice Portal (e.g. regarding retention of information for 72 hours).</p>
Family Mediation Canada	<p>http://www.fmc.ca/</p> <p>Affiliation: charitable not-for-profit association established in 1985.</p> <p>Description: interdisciplinary association of lawyers, social workers, human services and health care professionals, working to support co-operative conflict resolution relating to separation and divorce, adoption, child welfare, wills and estates, parent/teen counseling, organizations, etc.. The site provides information on mediation and assists clients in identifying a mediator in their area (Candaa-wide).</p>

Site	Comments
Single Parent Resource Center of Victoria (SPRC)	http://www.singleparentvictoria.ca/ Affiliation: not-for-profit agency offering a variety of programs and services to single parent families in the greater Victoria area. Description: information on programs and services.
Victims Services	http://www.pssg.gov.bc.ca/victim_services/index.htm Affiliation: Victims Services, within the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, B.C.. Description: information on programs and services.

13.5 Sites of General or Design Interest

Site	Comments
Compass	https://www.humanservices.state.pa.us/compass/PGM/ASP/SC001.asp Affiliation: Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Access to Social Services. Description: demonstrates an excellent example of an on-line screening / triage tool that members of the public can use for self-assessing the range of social services (not including legal aid) that may be available to them. Users enter demographic, household and financial information (income, resources, expenses) and the system produces a list of the services they may qualify for, with an option to apply on-line.
Liquor Control Board (B.C.)	Affiliation: Liquor Control and Licensing Branch within the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General. Description: of interest re: obtaining a liquor license via an on-line application (re: data retention strategy).
Money Claim On-line	http://www.moneyclaim.gov.uk/csmco2/index.jsp Affiliation: UK government (Her Majesty's Court Service). Description: service for claimants and defendants (secure means of making or responding to a money claim).
One Stop Domains	http://www.onestopdomains.com/ Affiliation: corporate. Description: on-line support for registering Internet domains (of interest re: data retention strategy).

Site	Comments
Small Claims Court Advisory Service	http://www.small-claims.co.uk/ Affiliation: UK (private organization). Description: on-line support service for small claims.
Toyota Canada	http://www.toyota.ca/ Affiliation: corporate. Description: triage process provides information on when vehicles require service based on make / model / year of vehicle.

13.6 Portals of Potential Design Interest

Site	Comments
About.com	www.about.com Affiliation: corporate. Description: comprehensive leader in on-line subject matter, covering more than 50,000 topics.
Australian Government Culture and Recreation Portal	http://www.cultureandrecreation.gov.au/ Affiliation: Government of Australia. Description: information, directory of services, events.
Australian Government Environment Portal	http://www.environment.gov.au/ Affiliation: Government of Australia. Description: information and resources.
Canadian Consumer Information Gateway	http://consumerinformation.ca/ Affiliation: Initiative of the Office of Consumer Affairs, Government of Canada. Description: extensive resource for consumers; e.g. search, file a complaint, consumer rights, etc..
Canada Health Portal	http://chp-pcs.gc.ca/CHP/index_e.jsp Affiliation: Government of Canada Description: extensive reference on health matters.

Site	Comments
Hieros Gamos	http://www.hg.org/ Affiliation: corporate (subscription-based membership / listings). Description: worldwide legal directories (law firms, expert witnesses, court reporters and other providers). Also includes extensive reference material / links under a number of categories including Employment Center, Law Practice, Student's Center, Business Center, US Law, International Law, and Associations.
ICBC	http://www.icbc.com/ Affiliation: Insurance Corporation of B.C.. Description: on-line claim registration
Infobasket	http://infobasket.gov.bc.ca/portal/server.pt Affiliation: government of B.C.. Comments: one stop shop for agri-food information on the Internet.
Justice Institute (JI) of British Columbia	http://www.jibc.bc.ca/ Affiliation: education institution. Description: justice, public safety and human services education and training.
News Is Free	http://www.newsisfree.com/ Affiliation: NewsKnowledge (corporate). Description: on-line news aggregator.
Senior's Portal	http://www.cserv.gov.bc.ca/seniors/ Affiliation: Government of B.C. / Ministry of Community Services Comments: Information for seniors.
Yahoo	www.yahoo.com Affiliation: fdsa Description: serves 237 million users in 25 countries and 13 languages; includes 'Enterprise Portal Solutions', an information portal that enables companies to communicate and interact directly with employees, customers, and shareholders via a secure, scalable platform.