

Element 1: Access to Justice and the Public Library

Access to Justice is, generally speaking, the ability of people to seek and obtain fair, accessible, and equitable assistance in reaching an outcome under the law. Legal needs fall in a broad spectrum, from a need for basic legal information, to problems that can be dealt with using self-help resources and limited legal representation, to complicated issues requiring full legal representation.



Many people who need assistance do not receive it, because:

- They do not know they have a legal problem
- They do not know how to access affordable legal help

These problems can be solved through:

- Raising public awareness of where to find quality legal information
- Bringing the law to the people, instead of having them come to it

The best way to do this is through strategic partnerships between service providers (courts, legal service agencies, bar associations) and information providers (libraries, both law-specific and general).

Public libraries are on the frontline for access to information, about the law itself and helpful services. Public library staff are trained to locate accurate, trustworthy, reliable information. Public libraries are already recognized as information locations, and are already embedded in communities. In fact, people are already coming to public libraries with legal questions. But public library staff may not feel fully equipped to handle the rising tide of questions about law and legal situations. The information contained on these pages is intended to help equip the generalists on public library staff with the basic skills to address legal information questions.

Read more about Access to Justice and the Role of Libraries

- [Maryland Access to Justice Department](#)
- [Maryland Access to Justice Commission](#)
- [U.S. Department of Justice, Office for Access to Justice](#)