Chapter 12
Designing Online Information Systems for Volunteer-Based Court Appointed Special Advocate Organizations:
The Case of Florida Guardian *ad Litem*

Charles C. Hinnant
Florida State University, USA

Jisue Lee
Florida State University, USA

Lorri Mon
Florida State University, USA

ABSTRACT

For public organizations, the ability to harness web-based Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) to make information and services directly available to the public has become an important goal. Simultaneously, the use of volunteers by public organizations has become a crucial component of service delivery within the US. Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) programs rely heavily upon volunteers to advocate for neglected children. While there is no doubt variation exists across specific CASA programs, their generally ubiquitous reliance on volunteers indicates a need for recruitment, training, and coordination to successfully achieve program goals. While the discussion of User-Centered Design (UCD) factors illustrates issues for consideration, the case study of Florida's Guardian ad Litem (GAL) program more concretely illustrates how a state-level CASA can begin to harness online ICT to achieve programmatic goals. This chapter discusses key information design characteristics needed for online systems to effectively deliver required information to both volunteers and staff.

INTRODUCTION

A key foundational element to the design and effective operation of any organization is the ability to match the capabilities and requirements for information processing (Daft and Lengel, 1986). In most complex organizations, this has come to mean a sizeable investment in the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). As the adoption of web-based ICT has increased over the past fifteen years, the ability to design and implement such systems to effectively deliver information to both internal and external stakeholders has become crucial for an organization's success. For local, state, and federal government organizations, the ability to harness the use of distributed networks to make information and services directly available to the public has become an important goal. So-called electronic government, or *e-government*, has become a foundational component of broader government reforms to improve programs by increasing access to programmatic information and services for citizens and stakeholders (Hinnant and O'Looney, 2007; Kraemer and King, 2003; Watson & Mundy, 2001).

While government has sought to make use of ICT to increase efficiencies and effectiveness, many governments have also begun to rely more heavily upon large numbers of volunteers to effectively carry out key mission activities. The use of volunteers by public organizations has become a crucial component of service delivery in the United States. As government budgets are reduced in times of economic austerity, public programs are forced to rely more on voluntary labor to deliver key services. Over a decade ago, Brudney and Kellough (2000) reported approximately 25-30% of all volunteer labor was directed toward government activities. While recent economic difficulties have sharply impacted the ability of agencies to deliver many services and increased the need for volunteer labor, there is also an increased need for improving the ability to effectively prepare and manage such a labor resource (Brudney, 1999).

The increased reliance on both ICT and voluntary labor has brought about the need to effectively design information systems that facilitate access to key information resources by a broader set of stakeholders. There is also a concomitant need for the volunteers, as primary users, to not only access, but to effectively use information that is necessary for them to carry out assigned activities. This chapter discusses key information design characteristics needed for online systems to effectively deliver required information to both volunteers and staff. Particular focus is given to a user-centered process for assessing the information needs and capabilities of Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) volunteers who may not have the requisite knowledge to advocate for, or represent, children within the court and/or social service systems (Schneiderman and Plaisant, 2005). Furthermore, the chapter will highlight and describe multiple design considerations emanating from the diverse needs of staff who manage a CASA program's internal operations, the volunteers who actually serve as advocates, as well as other stakeholders such as financial donors and the children themselves. The chapter will use information obtained, and lessons learned, from an ongoing research and service project to redesign the online information systems for a state-level CASA, the Florida Guardian ad Litem program (GAL).

VOLUNTARY LABOR AND CASA PROGRAMS

Voluntary Labor in the USA

Voluntary labor has become an important factor in the ability of many organizations to fulfill their primary goals. The value of annual volunteer time in the U.S. is astounding. Calculations performed by the National Center for Charitable Statistics (NCCS) on the Bureau of Labor Statistics' (BLS's) 2010 American Time Use Survey indicates that of

20 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/chapter/designing-online-information-systems-for-volunteer-based-court-appointed-special-advocate-organizations/74962

Related Content

The eXtensible Business Reporting Language: A Digital Tool to Enhance Public Sector Accountability
Michela Soverchiaand Andrea Fradeani (2018). *Innovative Perspectives on Public Administration in the Digital Age (pp. 106-120).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/the-extensible-business-reporting-language/205097

Diffusion of Personalized E-Government Services among Dutch Municipalities: An Empirical Investigation and Explanation
Vincent M.F Homburgand Andres Dijkshoorn (2011). *International Journal of Electronic Government Research (pp. 21-37).*
www.irma-international.org/article/diffusion-personalized-government-services-among/56097

Examining the Impacts of Technology and Trust on I-Voting Acceptance in the COVID-19 Aftermath
Mitja Decmanand Edvard Kozel (2023). *International Journal of Electronic Government Research (pp. 1-23).*
www.irma-international.org/article/examining-the-impacts-of-technology-and-trust-on-i-voting-acceptance-in-the-covid-19-aftermath/327454

Implementing Interoperability Standards for Electronic Government: An Exploratory Case Study of the E-PING Brazilian Framework
Ernani Marques dos Santos (2008). *International Journal of Electronic Government Research (pp. 103-112).*
www.irma-international.org/article/implementing-interoperability-standards-electronic-government/2057

E-Governance and Natural Hazards in Mozambique: A Challenge for Backasting Method Used for Flood Risk Management Strategies
Avelino Mondlane, Karin Hassonand Oliver Popov (2015). *Emerging Issues and Prospects in African E-Government (pp. 253-268).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/e-governance-and-natural-hazards-in-mozambique/115679