

August 27, 2025

# Integrating Legal Services Within Social Services Organizations

Strategies to Enhance Client Outcomes

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connecting resettlement experts





# **This training is presented to you by Switchboard.**

Switchboard is a one-stop resource hub for refugee service providers in the United States.





# **Thank you for joining today's training!**

We will begin momentarily.



# Today's Facilitator



**Maria Laura Arabbo**

Executive Director,  
VECINA



# Today's Roundtable Panelists



**Ashley DiGiore**

Immigration Legal Services  
Program Director, Westside  
Community Center,  
West Chester, PA



**Charlotte English**

Staff Attorney, Tennessee  
Justice for Our Neighbors,  
Nashville, TN



**Mamadou Balde**

Immigration Legal Services  
Program Manager, Catholic  
Charities of Central Texas,  
Austin, TX



**Alex Miller**

Senior Advisor,  
VECINA,  
Tucson, AZ

# Learning Objectives



By the end of this roundtable, you will be able to:

1

## IDENTIFY

the benefits and challenges of embedding legal services programs within organizations with broader community mandates

2

## EXPLAIN

solutions to key challenges that these legal departments may face operating alongside other refugee service programs

3

## APPLY

key takeaways on ethical communication, referral coordination, role clarity, and organizational support when embedding legal services within social service teams



**In your experience, what are some of the main challenges surrounding legal services departments embedded within social services organizations?**



**In your experience, what are some of the main benefits of legal services departments embedded within social services organizations?**



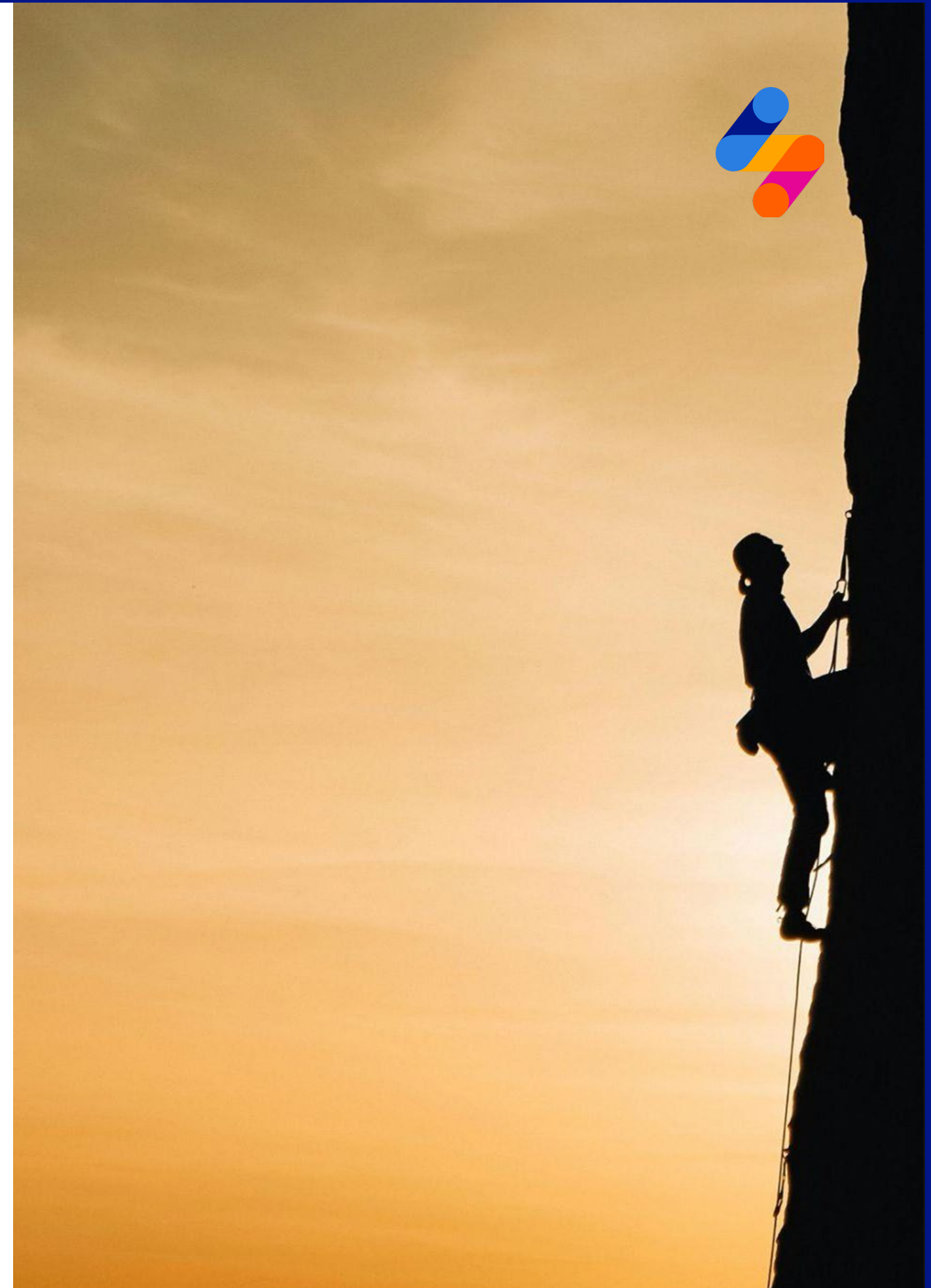
# Why provide legal services at an organization with a broader mandate?

- Community trust
- Integrated services
- Trauma-informed care



# What are some of the challenges of providing legal services within a social services organization?

- Lack of support and oversight infrastructure
- Non-attorney management
- Departmental silos





# Case Scenario: Bailey



Bailey is an accredited representative at a resettlement organization. An immigration attorney supervises her, but they are the only two members of the immigration department. The team received a referral from a case manager who has been working with a client for over a year.

The case manager referred the client over a month ago, when he realized that a family member had been placed in removal proceedings. The case manager would like an update on the case and is frustrated that he has not heard back from the legal team yet. The client also told the case manager that they haven't heard from the legal team.

Despite a two-month backlog, Bailey was able to prioritize screening this case referral within two weeks in the client's primary language. The in-house legal team primarily provides ORR-funded legal assistance, though they have limited private funding to support legal assistance outside the scope of federally funded resettlement services.

The limited private funds permitted Bailey to *screen* the case, but the legal team does not have capacity, nor appropriate funding, to take on complicated removal defense cases. Instead, they provided the client with external referrals. Further complicating things for Bailey, the family member is in removal proceedings because of a conviction they do not want disclosed to the case worker.



**What aspects of your role in your organization do you find most challenging?**

# Turning Challenges into Learning Opportunities



1

## **Lack of oversight/support →**

- Consult with law firms/legal service providers
- Build out compliance checklists

2

## **Non-attorney supervision →**

- Rely on a technical unit
- Assign oversight to Legal Director
- Outsource technical assistance

3

## **Departmental Silos →**

- Clarify the scope and mandate of departments
- Establish a clear and transparent referral process

4

## **Funding tensions →**

- Highlight departmental interrelation and client impact
- Leverage opportunities for collaborative fundraising
- Acknowledge federal/private funding slip and differing service requirements or limitations

5

## **Lack of capacity →**

- Create processes for case placement and cross-referral
- Leverage outside resources and partnerships





# Case Scenario: Bailey (cont.)

Bailey reached out to the case manager to address their concerns. They flagged that, as an internal referral, the case referral had been prioritized and that they screened the referral within two weeks. Bailey highlighted attorney-client privilege and said that they were unfortunately unable to provide further details about the case.

Bailey then reached out to the client to clarify the scope of engagement and to reiterate that they would not be able to take on the case. Bailey then asked the client to sign a form granting the organization limited permission to disclose case details, solely for the purpose of referring the case out to organizational partners.

The case manager remained frustrated that the case did not seem to be moving forward based on information shared by the client. Bailey reached out to organizational leadership for support to help set appropriate expectations for other departments.



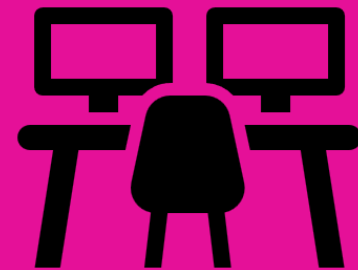


**Which of these challenges have you faced in your job?**



**Which of the following strategies have you tried to address structural challenges in your organization?**

# Overcoming Structural Challenges



## Organizational Support

How can workplaces better support ORR-funded immigration legal programs within social services organizations?



## Role Clarity

How can departmental roles be clarified to increase transparency and improve interdepartmental understanding?





# Case Scenario: Bailey (cont.)

Bailey's supervisor escalated the issue with the case manager to their deputy director.

Upon review of the situation, the deputy director decided to implement departmental highlights in staff meetings with presentations. They also updated the website descriptions of each department, which were outdated.

This web page was also updated to include information about referrals, granting department heads the ability to make updates in real time.

At the next staff meeting, staff also received an update on ethical duties related to clients, including information about client confidentiality within the legal department.







What is one concrete action you can take to strengthen collaboration between the legal team and other teams in your organization?

# Audience Q&A with Today's Roundtable Panelists



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Immigration Legal Services  
Program Director, Westside  
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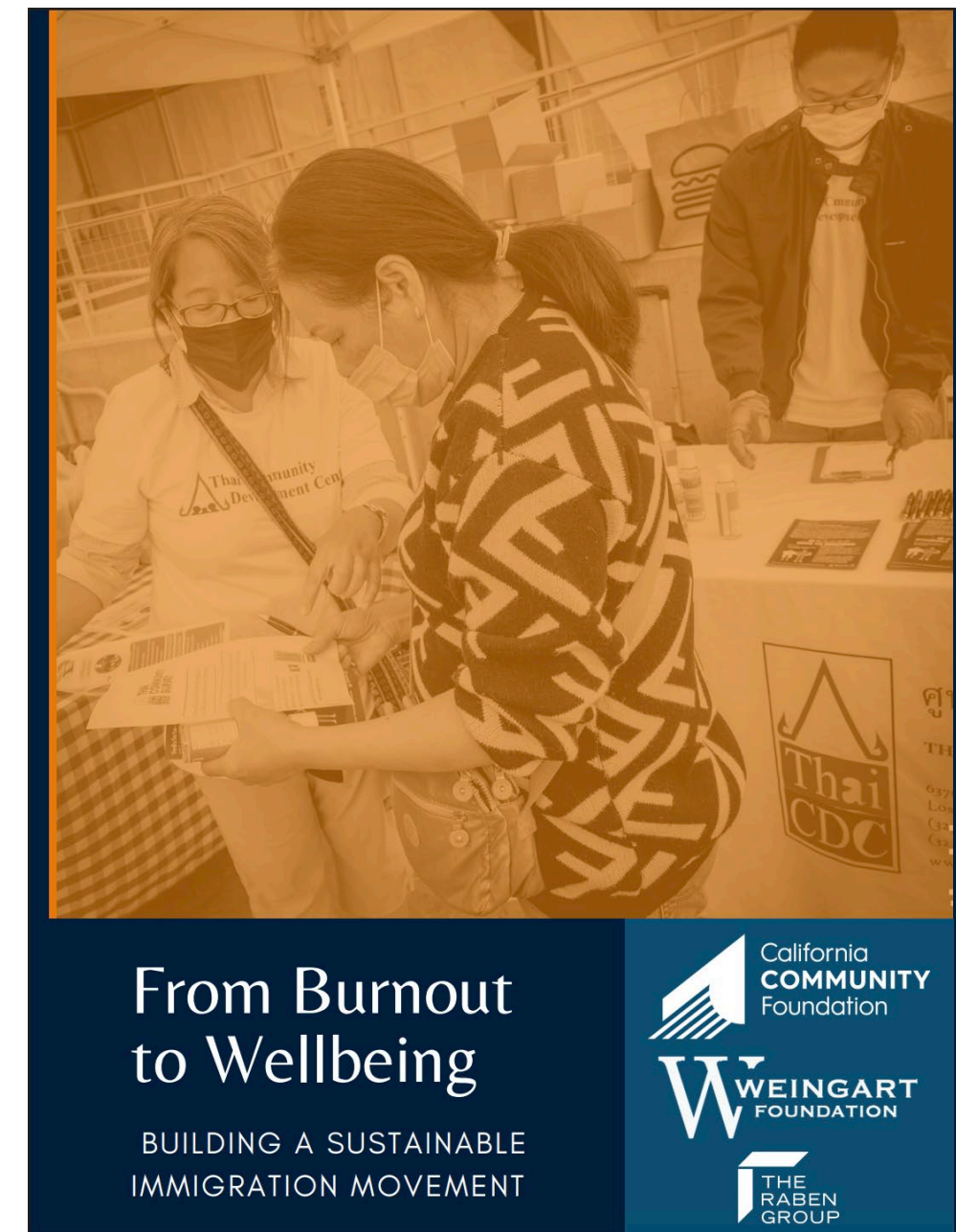
- Five questions
- 60 seconds
- Help us improve future training and technical assistance



# Recommended Resources



- [Weingart Foundation. \(2022, December\). From Burnout to Wellbeing: Building a Sustainable Immigration Movement](#)
- [UnidosUS. \(2022, May 24\). What immigration practitioners need to know about vicarious trauma and burnout](#)







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