

National Community Lawyering Network

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Project Summary

This project aims to address the issue of inequitable access to legal aid across the United States, especially for groups who have been historically marginalized in our country based on their ethnicity, citizenship status, and lifestyle. Community Activism Law Alliance (CALA), the sponsor of this project, is a legal aid organization focused on providing community based lawyering and legal assistance to marginalized communities in Chicago. They accomplish this through partnering with communities and other activist groups to create comprehensive, affordable, and accessible legal aid and community centers across the city.

The main goal of this project was to identify and create a network with other organizations across the US that had similar projects and accomplishments to those of CALA. Not only did these organizations need to be identified, they also needed to be interested in creating a nationwide network of community activism based legal aid, where resources and knowledge could be shared between organizations. Through this, and the “power in numbers”, we hope to create a more robust and active community of equitable and accessible legal aid across the US.

This goal would be visualized as a map that contains information pertaining to any and all legal organizations in the US where marginalized groups could go if they needed legal aid. This map will be available as a hard copy which can be used out in the streets to spread knowledge about these organizations to civilians, as well as an interactive web map which will allow users to easily identify organizations near them and find out further information.

Our research reveals a shortage of community activism based organizations across the US, as well as the possibility of other issues such as language barriers and access to information on organizations.

Needs Assessment

The reason CALA wanted to undertake a project such as this was because they as an organization are aware of the historical and pointed marginalization of minority groups that has occurred through lack of accessible and affordable legal aid. Many marginalized groups across the US, namely the elderly, the homeless, immigrants, and non-native English speakers, have been excluded from the realm of legal aid due to a number of factors (Legal Service Corporation, 2018). These factors include accessibility of legal aid clinics due to location, language barriers, and high fees, as well as the threat of consequences such as arrest, discrimination and deportation due to a client's ethnicity, lifestyle, or citizenship status (Schonteich, 2012). These issues with legal aid for marginalized groups exists nationwide, especially for the 11 million undocumented individuals living across the US ((Pallares and Gomberg- Munoz, 2016).

It is because of these issues that CALA wants to create an accessible, interactive, and user-friendly map that tells people in the US where they can go to receive legal aid without discrimination or fear of ulterior consequences. An inherent part of accomplishing this goal is the creation of a network of like-minded organizations to CALA who are willing to work towards a more just future for all people living in the US. Identifying these organizations, knowing they are willing to work with other organizations across the US, and building a network of community activism based legal aid centers is a vital part of the creation of this map.

Data Acquisition

A major part of this project was the creation of a database identifying community activism based legal clinics across the US. Prior to this project, this information did not exist, and many of these organizations worked in isolation from one another. The primary and main job of those of us working on this project was identifying organizations across the US whose mission and projects aligned similarly with CALA's: providing accessible, community driven and oriented legal aid to marginalized groups. Once we identified these organizations, we reached out to them one by one and asked them if they were interested in becoming a part of this larger network of community based legal aid and would like to be included on our map. Organizations were either emailed or telephoned by a CALA member, using contact information provided by the different organizations online.

Any organizations that agreed were then put into our Community Lawyering database, a CSV file that broke down information pertaining to the organizations such as their address, contact information, mission statement, area of legal work, and languages spoken. This data was double-checked and cleaned by CALA members to ensure accuracy and usability in ArcGIS functions. The addresses of organizations were broken down into separate fields (address line 1, address line 2, city, state, and zipcode) in order to be geocoded in ArcGIS, which allows us to very accurately place clinics on a map, showing their location. The rest of the information contained in this CSV was collected in order to be provided to users of the map, informing them about the services and characteristics of an organization they may be interested in going to. This CSV will continually be added to as more organizations are identified across the US and become part of our network.

For our physical map of the US, which would be used to show locations of these organizations across the country, we used a 2018 TIGER/Line US States shapefile which we received from the US Census Bureau.

Data Analysis and Visualization

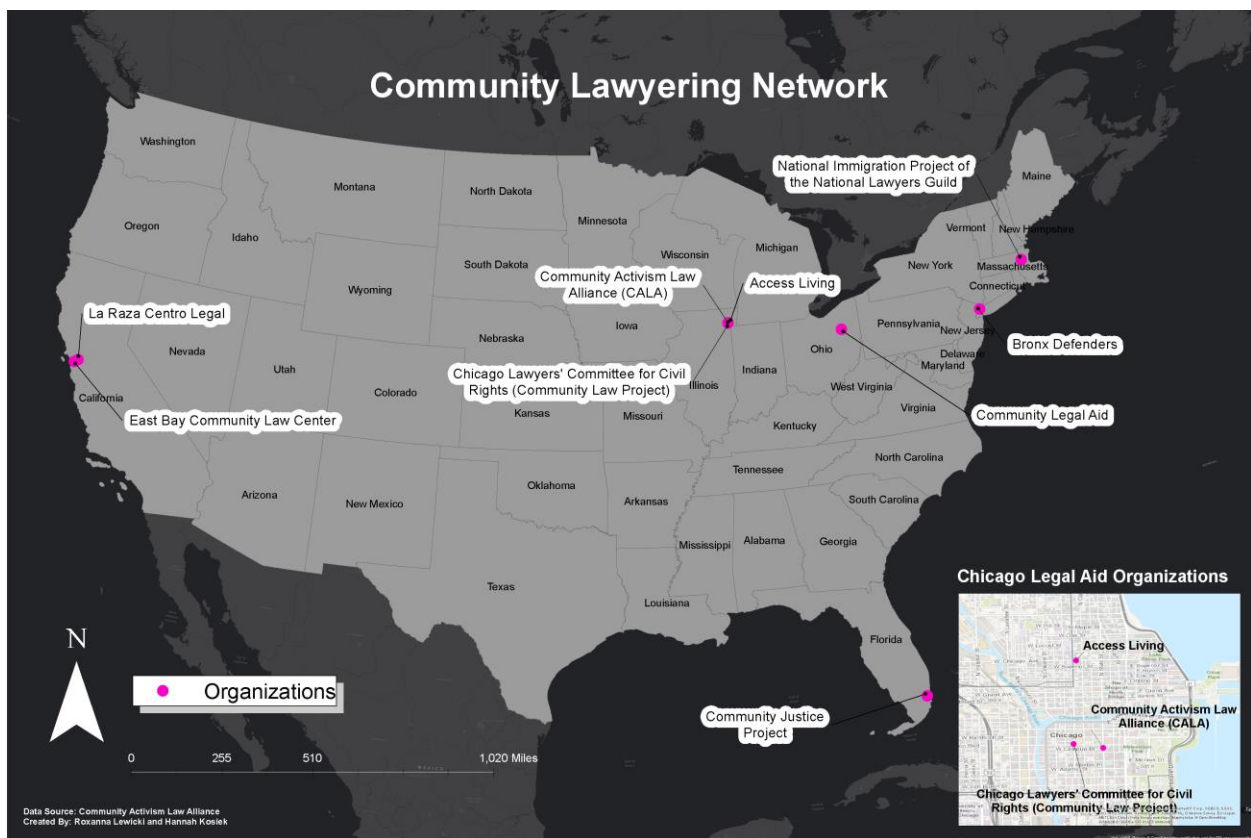
With all of our data, we ended up with three final information products. One was the CSV containing information pertaining to organizations that were to be shown on our maps, as described in the section above.

Secondly, we created a hard copy map in the ArcMap application using the CSV file and the US States shapefile. We changed the projection of the shapefile to that of an USA Contiguous Albers Equal Area Conic projection to portray the contiguous US realistically. From here, we geocoded the addresses of organizations from the CSV, which plotted the location of clinics onto our map. We represented these locations using hot pink points and added labels so that the organizations could be identified by name. This map gave an overall visual of how many organizations were part of our network and their general locations across the country.

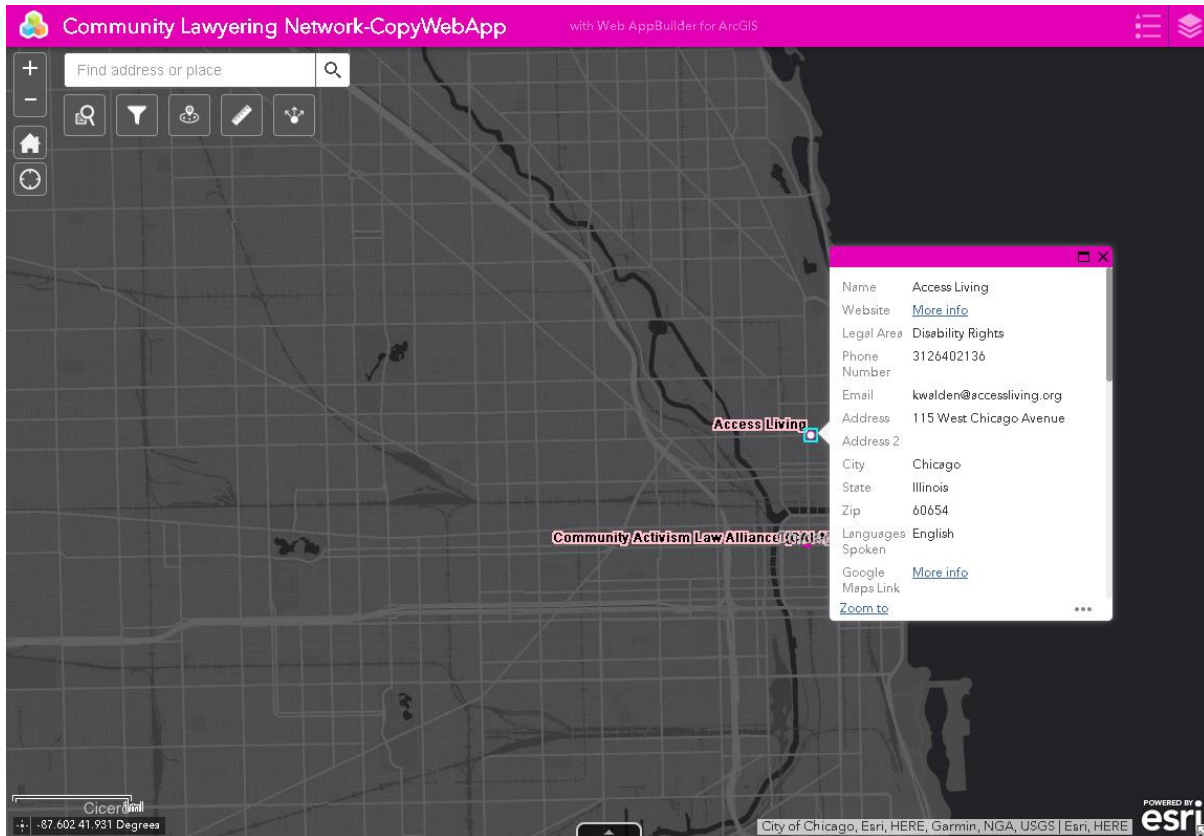
From this map, we created our final information product, an interactive web map, by exporting our hard copy map on to ArcGIS online. Here, we labeled the organizations by name on top of a dark greyscale basemap. We made it so that the labels of the organizations did not pop-up until zoomed into the state level, which will lessen any overcrowding that may occur when more organizations are added to the map. On this web map, each organization has a unique pop-up which contains the rest of the information in our CSV file, such as mission statement of the organization, language spoken, services provided, etc.

Results

Through our initial work of identifying community activism based legal aid organizations, we realized that there are not very many organizations similar to CALA in mind-set and overall goals. After very thorough research by the CALA team, only about 45 organizations across the US were considered to be of “high relevance,” meaning they had thorough and driven community based law practices similar to CALA. Out of these “high relevance” organizations, only nine had responded to our outreach and expressed desire to be on the map by the time of this report (some of these organizations had more than one location). Visualization of locations and information about these organizations can be seen in our hard copy map below, as well as the CSV file which is enclosed separately.



Our web map can be found at the following link: <https://arcg.is/0rS8bX>. The following figure shows a screen capture of the web map when zoomed into Chicago. There are other useful features in this web map as well, such as query, filter, and near me tools which allow users to identify specific organizations on our map based on their name, area of legal service, and proximity to the user.



It is difficult to draw broad conclusions about the current state of community activism based legal aid in the US as a whole with a sample of this size. However, we can see (both in the CSV and in the informational pop-ups of the [web map](#)) that even though these organizations are all considered to be of “high relevance”, their areas of legal work cover quite a wide range, with no one legal area being more common than another. What is similar about these organizations is their mission statements which use common language such as the importance of community involvement and taking aim at the root causes of injustice. Lastly, we can also see that most of these organizations (8 out of 9) only advertise to provide services in English, which may have implications for the accessibility of organizations to their surrounding communities, especially in communities where other languages may be commonly spoken.

Summary, Conclusion, and recommendations

In this project, we were able to create a database containing information about legal organizations across the US with community activism and justice-oriented mindsets. From this database, we were able to create a hard copy map summarizing the locations of these organizations, as well as a web map which is interactive, user friendly, and provides additional information on each of these organizations.

To improve the effectiveness of this project, a more extensive research process on what community activism based legal organizations exist across the US may be required. Additional high relevancy organization may exist in the US that are not discoverable by online research. As our network of organization grows larger and stronger, we may be able to find out about additional high relevancy organizations that we may have missed through local knowledge and word of mouth. Additionally, we may need to improve our method of reaching out to high relevancy organizations in order to receive more responses and be able to add more organization to our map. Perhaps calling organizations individually instead of emailing them may elicit more responses.

Lastly, further research may be done on the different languages spoken in each clinic. As mentioned above, 8 out of the 9 organizations we have on our map only list English as a spoken language in their centers. Further research could be done to see whether or not this is true (i.e., perhaps there are workers who speak other languages inside the clinics who are able to assist clients), and on how language barriers can influence the effectiveness of organizations overall (i.e., in a Spanish speaking community, does an English-only clinic have limitations?).

Appendix A: Acknowledgements

Our main points of contact, data collectors, and sponsors throughout this project were Saul Brand Padilla, Antonio Gutierrez, and Ben Usha of CALA Chicago. Additionally, many interns and other workers at CALA assisted us with data collection and cleaning.

Appendix B: Works Cited & Sample Tables

(a) “LSC - Legal Services Corporation: America's Partner for Equal Justice.” (2018). *LSC – Legal Services Corporation: America's Partner for Equal Justice*, www.lsc.gov/

(b) Pallares, Amalia, and Ruth Gomberg-Muñoz (2016). “Politics of Motion: Ethnography with Undocumented Activists and of Undocumented Activism.” *North American Dialogue*, vol. 19, no. 1, pp. 4–12.

(c) Schönteich, M. (2012). A Powerful Tool of Justice. *SA Crime Quarterly*, (42), 21-27.

We used data collected by summer, CALA interns to contact organizations for their permission to disclose their information. A sample of the “Mapping Project” excel spreadsheet created by CALA interns, contains a total of 200 organizations:

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1	HI	Location	Description of Community Activism Activities	Communities Served	Relevance	Link to Website	Contact Email	Contact Pe
7	Alabama Appleseed	309 N Hull St, Montgomery, AL 36104	We recognize the interconnected nature of rights and develop and implement integrated culture and policy change campaigns that remedy the root causes of injustice. Our campaigns use policy analysis, research and documentation, public education, community organizing, pro bono engagement, coalition building, and litigation		Medium. Still need to find out if this org does any direct legal services	http://www.alabamaappleseed.org/#top		
8	Equal Justice Initiative	122 Commerce Street Montgomery, AL 36104	"EJI works with communities that have been marginalized by poverty and discouraged by unequal treatment. We are committed to changing the narrative about race in America." "we recently launched an ambitious national effort to create new spaces, markers, and memorials that address the legacy of slavery, lynching, and racial segregation, which shapes many issues today."		Low/Medium. Mission is on-point but they are not community lawyers	https://eji.org/		
9	Alaska							
10	Alaska Native Justice Center	3600 San Jeronimo Drive, Ste. 264 Anchorage, AK 99508	We provide services to all ethnicities and integrate Alaskan Native culturally based advocacy programs and intervention initiatives necessary to assist in the resolution of legal circumstances such as divorce, child custody, domestic violence/sexual assault, minor in consuming violations and adult prisoner reentry.	All communities, focused on Native population	Medium. I think this seems like short term legal advice resource and not full representation. Also, can't tell how rooted in community this org actually is.	http://www.anjcenter.org/		
11								