Legal Aid Generative AI Readiness Model

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The State Bar of California

Legal Aid Justice Technology Collaborative

ABOUT THE STATE BAR OF CALIFORNIA

Created by the California Legislature in 1927, the State Bar of California is an administrative arm of the California Supreme Court. Its mission is to protect the public and includes the primary functions of licensing, regulation, and discipline of attorneys; the advancement of the ethical and competent practice of law; and support of efforts for greater access to, and inclusion in, the legal system. To learn more about the State Bar, please visit: www.calbar.ca.gov/About-Us

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The Office of Access & Inclusion (OA&I) advances the State Bar's mission to expand access to justice and promote diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in the legal profession. It develops policies and research to improve access to legal services, shares best practices to strengthen DEI, and administers funding for legal aid and public defender offices serving low-income California residents. Overseen by the Legal Services Trust Fund Commission, OA&I will administer approximately $283.7 million in 2026 to 118 organizations, including $253.1 million in core funding.

ABOUT THE OFFICE OF OPERATIONAL & DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

The Office of Operational and Digital Transformation (ODT) leads agency-wide initiatives to modernize technology, streamline operations, and enhance service delivery. The office oversees the State Bar's generative artificial intelligence (AI) portfolio from both a policy and technology perspective, manages digital transformation projects, and conducts process improvement analyses to increase organizational efficiency. ODT is also responsible for developing and implementing innovative tools and practices that improve the State Bar's systems, workflows, and overall operational effectiveness.

ABOUT THE LEGAL AID JUSTICE TECHNOLOGY COLLABORATIVE

The State Bar of California's Legal Aid Justice Technology Collaborative (LAJTC)—a grantee- and client-centered initiative shaped through broad stakeholder engagement—provides the broader framework for the Legal Aid Generative AI Readiness Model. Through its multiyear workplan, the LAJTC promotes responsible, ethical, and community-driven technology adoption across California's legal aid network.

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Introduction

The Legal Aid Generative AI Readiness Model is a planning tool designed primarily for State Bar grantee organizational leaders—including executive directors, chief operating officers, information technology directors, and others responsible for technology strategy, governance, and investment decisions. It helps legal aid organizations assess the capabilities, safeguards, and organizational conditions needed to make informed decisions about generative artificial intelligence (GenAI), whether they are choosing not to adopt GenAI, exploring limited uses, or expanding existing use. The model applies to legal, administrative, and support-service work. It does not prescribe a single path, recommend GenAI adoption, or measure success by the amount of GenAI an organization uses. Key technical terms are linked to a companion glossary, and the accompanying Legal Aid Generative AI Readiness Self-Assessment is a quiz-style tool that uses targeted questions to help organizations identify their readiness stage, clarify GenAI priorities, and determine practical next steps.

The following principles should guide usage of this model:

- ✔ Organizations should assess and improve underlying workflows before adding GenAI, including identifying problems to be solved, mapping current processes, and determining where human judgment is essential.
- ✔ GenAI readiness depends not only on technology, but also on leadership alignment, governance, clear policies, staff capacity, and community accountability. An organization may have strong readiness and governance while intentionally maintaining a limited degree of GenAI adoption.
- ✔ A solid technical and data foundation—including modernized systems, secure infrastructure, reliable data, and a clear understanding of where organizational data reside—is essential before introducing new tools. Organizations should establish appropriate controls before using data in GenAI-enabled systems.
- ✔ Strong security practices and consistent human-in-the-loop processes are essential foundations for any GenAI use, including agentic AI.
- ✔ Client-facing GenAI tools pose heightened risks, including providing unhelpful, inaccessible, confusing, biased, or incorrect information to people with no legal expertise. Therefore, these tools require appropriate readiness foundations, client feedback, language-access and accessibility testing, human escalation pathways, and ongoing monitoring. Without proper oversight, these tools may also implicate the Rules of Professional Conduct and statutory restrictions on the unauthorized practice of law (UPL).
- ✔ Internal use is not necessarily low risk. Substantive legal analysis, eligibility determinations, or decisions affecting client service may require stronger safeguards than routine administrative work.
- ✔ Generative AI is not the sole technology solution to the access to justice crisis. Organizations should continue advancing IT modernization efforts, rules-based automation, and other proven technologies that may provide more reliable, efficient, or ethically appropriate outcomes depending on the task.

Readiness Stages

The model outlines four neutral readiness stages that describe organizational capabilities and safeguards, not a maturity score or required level of GenAI adoption.

Foundational: The organization is developing a baseline understanding of GenAI opportunities, limitations, risks, existing workflows, data, and technology systems. Formal GenAI use may be absent or intentionally limited, although informal or ad hoc staff use may occur.

Build: The organization is strengthening foundational capabilities and may conduct structured, internal-facing experimentation. It is establishing governance, workflow-assessment, data-management, procurement, implementation-planning, and evaluation practices.

Operational: The organization has established governance, procurement, data, security, implementation, and evaluation processes that can support regular internal use and carefully bounded external- or client-facing pilots. The designation reflects operational readiness, not a requirement to deploy client-facing GenAI.

Innovate: The organization can responsibly sustain, evaluate, adapt, and—where mission-aligned—scale GenAI-enabled systems. It uses continuous evaluation, client feedback, strong governance, and sustainability planning to improve services and share learning. Organization-wide GenAI adoption is not required.

Organizations will often exhibit characteristics across multiple stages, and readiness may vary across departments and programs—and even among staff members within the same department or program. A later readiness stage is not inherently better. The appropriate target depends on the organization's mission, community needs, resources, use cases, risk tolerance, and desired degree of GenAI adoption. Foundational safeguards should generally precede higher-risk uses; for example, an organization should not deploy a client-facing tool merely because it has access to the technology if governance, data, testing, language access, community engagement, and human escalation processes are not in place.

BUY, CONFIGURE, BUILD

Organizations may acquire GenAI capabilities by purchasing a vendor product (**buy**), enabling or tailoring features within an existing system (**configure**), or developing a new tool or system (**build**). Building may occur in-house or with a technology vendor, university, or other collaborator, and may involve application programming interfaces (APIs), low-code platforms, or fully custom development. Each approach creates different responsibilities relating to technical capacity, data governance, contracting, maintenance, security, evaluation, and long-term sustainability.

Capability Areas

Each readiness stage is described across four capability areas that reflect the organizational conditions needed for responsible decision-making and implementation. Capability areas are reference points, not performance targets. Organizations can use the companion Legal Aid Generative AI Readiness Self-Assessment to identify current strengths and gaps.

Use Cases

The organization's ability to identify, assess, select, implement, and evaluate potential GenAI uses in relation to the underlying problems, workflow, users, alternatives, expected benefits, and risks. Hyperlinked examples are illustrative and do not constitute State Bar endorsement.

Governance

Organizational management of GenAI use, including policies, oversight, decision-making authority, risk classification, procurement and contracting, implementation planning, cost and sustainability, evaluation, and change management.

Technology and Data

Technical systems, security, integrations, data readiness, and data governance required to support responsible GenAI use, including understanding where data resides and applying appropriate access, retention, deletion, and disposal controls.

People

Leadership, staff capabilities, defined roles, technical support, and internal structures needed to guide GenAI decision-making and implementation, including training, cross-functional coordination, change management, and organizational accountability.

Key Risks

This model also identifies three categories of key risks that organizations should consider at each stage. Risks identified at earlier stages may remain relevant.

Professional Obligations

Risks related to legal ethics and duties, such as confidentiality, accuracy, and the unauthorized practice of law.

Community Accountability

Risks and responsibilities related to the organization's mission and accountability to **client communities,** including bias, disparate impact, language access, accessibility, digital exclusion, community input, workforce impacts, and environmental justice.

Technology Management

Risks related to the deployment, operation, and ongoing governance of GenAI-enabled systems, including cybersecurity vulnerabilities, system reliability challenges, data quality, vendor terms and dependence, technology sprawl, resource limitations, and sustainability.

LEGAL ETHICS AND PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY

See the **State Bar of California's** ***Practical Guidance for the Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence in the Practice of Law*** for guidance on professional responsibilities related to GenAI.

Table 1. Capability Areas Across Stages

Capability Area	Foundational	Build	Operational	Innovate
Use Cases	Formal GenAI use is absent or intentionally limited while the organization builds awareness and considers alignment with its mission and service model.	The organization may test limited internal uses to understand their benefits and risks, with restrictions and human review.	GenAI supports regular internal workflows and may be piloted in carefully bounded client-facing uses with appropriate testing and human oversight.	GenAI is strategically integrated across multiple internal workflows and client-facing services, including automated and agentic AI uses.
Governance	The organization has not established formal GenAI governance and may rely on policies created before GenAI emerged.	The organization establishes initial guardrails for acceptable use, client data, staff training, proposed uses, and risk-based review.	Formal governance guides tool selection and use, oversight, and evaluation, with additional review for client-facing and other higher-risk systems.	GenAI governance is integrated into operations and regularly reassessed, with consistent oversight of risks, vendors, and client-facing tools.
Technology and Data	Legacy or fragmented systems, limited cybersecurity, and inconsistent data practices provide minimal support for responsible GenAI use.	Cloud platforms, cybersecurity, and centralized data support initial GenAI use, though data practices, integrations, and workflows may vary.	Secure and integrated infrastructure, well-managed data, performance tracking, and source management support routine GenAI use.	Mature, scalable systems support reliable, integrated GenAI use, advanced data governance, continuous monitoring, and adaptation across programs.
People	GenAI expertise, technical capacity, and leadership and board engagement may be limited, and staff roles are generally undefined.	Staff champions, informal working groups, basic training, and IT support provide early capacity for GenAI exploration.	Designated staff, cross-functional governance, and technical expertise provide ownership and coordination for GenAI implementation.	Broad staff participation, leadership and board engagement, coordination, and ongoing staff development sustain GenAI use and shared learning.

Table 2. Key Risks Across Stages

Risk Area	Foundational	Build	Operational	Innovate
Professional Obligations	Limited understanding of confidentiality, accuracy, and professional duties.	Confidentiality breaches; false or misleading outputs; inadequate understanding of data practices; emerging legal and regulatory risks.	UPL risks; inaccurate client-facing guidance; inadequate supervision or disclosure; noncompliance as professional duties evolve.	Overreliance on automated systems, with superficial human review that weakens professional judgment.
Community Accountability	Misinformation, distrust, and competing concerns about adoption, non-adoption, service quality, community impacts, and the widening justice gap.	Environmental, vendor-alignment, and reliability concerns; limited client input; disproportionate risks to communities under government scrutiny.	Bias; digital access, literacy, and accessibility barriers; language inequities; broader workforce concerns.	Disparate impacts at scale; reduced trust from user frustration or limited human support; hallucinations in court filings.
Technology Management	Unapproved or unmonitored GenAI use; embedded features introduced without adequate safeguards; insufficient foundational systems or data.	Cybersecurity risks; unclear vendor data practices or terms; poorly scoped or unsustainable pilots; misalignment between leadership and staff.	Overinvestment; technology sprawl; vendor dependence or instability; inconsistent adoption; malicious use of client-facing tools.	Complex system failures; loss of specialized staff; insufficient monitoring capacity; GenAI demands that strain IT resources.
Potential Next Steps and Mitigation Strategies	Build awareness and leadership; assess mission alignment and readiness gaps; monitor guidance; inventory current GenAI use; draft a GenAI use policy.	Test use cases; align leadership and staff; provide training; establish data-use and human-review guardrails; structure pilots; evaluate vendors.	Monitor systems and vendors; conduct adversarial testing; maintain incident response and client safeguards; enforce policies and human review.	Maintain continuous monitoring; evaluate impacts and systemic risks; plan for sustainability; communicate transparently; share learning.

STAGE PROFILE

Foundational

Organization does not formally use GenAI tools, though limited, informal, or ad hoc use may occur among staff. Leadership and staff are building foundational awareness, capacity, and understanding of GenAI capabilities, risks, organizational implications, and readiness needs. The organization may take a cautious approach while assessing whether and how GenAI aligns with its mission, systems, and service model.

NON-ADOPTION

Non-adoption may align with an organization's mission. Organizations should regularly monitor client expectations, opposing-party practices, funder and insurer requirements, embedded AI, and service-delivery tools and systems.

FOUNDATIONAL | Capability Areas

Use Cases

- GenAI use is not formally authorized by organizational leadership.
- Activities may include:
  - Reading about GenAI opportunities and risks, including ethical guidance;
  - Attending legal aid GenAI trainings, demos, conferences, or other convenings; and
  - Facilitating discussions among staff, leadership, and board members about GenAI's alignment with the organization's mission.

Governance

- Organization lacks formal GenAI governance. This may include:
  - Reliance on legacy IT policies and systems developed before GenAI emerged; and
  - No GenAI use policy.

Technology and Data

- Organization operates with foundational technology systems that offer minimal readiness for GenAI use. This may include:
  - Reliance on on-premise servers, legacy software, desktop-installed applications, paper files, manual reporting processes, spreadsheets, and/or single-staff workflows;
  - Siloed, inconsistently structured data that are difficult to locate or interpret, with limited understanding of where data reside, who can access them, how long they are retained, and how they are deleted;
  - Limited organizational understanding of existing data systems, data quality, ownership and stewardship, permissions, retention requirements, and related privacy or security risks;
  - Fragmented tools and workflows, including unapproved technologies or unapproved uses of approved tools; and
  - Basic cybersecurity protections and limited adoption of secure cloud collaboration tools.

People

- Undefined staff roles and limited awareness of GenAI capabilities and risks reflect early GenAI readiness. This may include:
  - Few or no internal GenAI champions;
  - Outsourced IT teams and limited internal technology knowledge and decision-making capacity;
  - No formal expectations for GenAI learning and use; and
  - Limited or no board engagement concerning GenAI use.

FOUNDATIONAL | Key Risks and Considerations

Professional Obligations

- Gaps in staff understanding of GenAI risks, including confidentiality, accuracy limitations, and other professional obligations.
- Additional time and accuracy burdens from reviewing or responding to GenAI-generated materials submitted by clients, opposing parties, or other external actors, including inaccurate or fabricated facts and authorities.

Community Accountability

- Misinformation or misconceptions and legitimate concerns about GenAI capabilities, limitations, labor impacts, data practices, environmental costs, or alignment with community values shaping early expectations among staff or community members.
- Concerns that using GenAI signals a shift away from human-centered or high-quality client service.
- Distrust or apprehension in the community based on broader societal skepticism about GenAI.
- Perceptions that the organization is falling behind peers or broader sector expectations.
- Worry that the justice gap may widen if the organization does not proactively explore emerging technologies.
- Strategic considerations associated with non-adoption, including changes in opposing-party practices, funder requirements, embedded AI features, client expectations, efficiency, or service capacity.

Technology Management

- Unapproved or unmonitored staff use of GenAI tools that the organization lacks the capacity to identify, assess, or oversee.
- Upgrades to existing systems (phones, case management systems, productivity suites, etc.) may introduce GenAI features by default before necessary infrastructure and data privacy protections are in place.
- Effectiveness gaps if foundational systems or data quality are insufficient for GenAI use.

FOUNDATIONAL | Potential Next Steps and Mitigation Strategies

- Learning about GenAI capabilities, limitations, and emerging risks.
- Assessing potential benefits and risks for legal aid service delivery.
- Identifying foundational data, system, and infrastructure gaps.
- Monitoring developments in legal ethics guidance and GenAI-related regulatory shifts.
- Building internal competencies and leadership on GenAI.
- Joining GenAI peer learning cohorts.
- Developing an initial GenAI use policy, including limits or prohibitions if GenAI use is not mission-aligned.
- Conducting an inventory of GenAI tools, embedded GenAI features, and any current GenAI users and use cases, including on personal accounts, and monitoring existing software for new GenAI features or vendor-term changes.

STAGE PROFILE

Build

Organization is strengthening foundational capabilities and may conduct structured experimentation with internal-facing tools. It is improving technology and data readiness, building staff capacity, establishing initial governance and procurement guardrails, and planning how pilots will be implemented, evaluated, funded, and sustained.

AI USE POLICY RESOURCES

Organizations developing a GenAI use policy can use the Legal Services National Technology Assistance Project's AI Policy Builder and consult the State Bar's *Guidelines for Use of Generative AI* as well as other legal aid organizations' policies.

BUILD | Capability Areas

Use Cases

- GenAI use is primarily limited to off-the-shelf tools for internal purposes, including general-purpose large language models (LLMs), legal-specific tools, and GenAI features embedded in existing systems (e.g., case management systems).
- Internal uses may include:
  - Common tasks such as composing emails, drafting memos, grant writing, and summarizing notes and documents; and
  - Translation, transcription, and plain-language assistance for internal, informational, or training materials, subject to qualified human review and additional restrictions for sworn, signed, court-filed, or otherwise legally consequential documents.
- Early exploration may include internal chatbots and experimentation with different GenAI products to understand capabilities and risks.

Governance

- Initial governance guardrails are established. These may include:
  - GenAI acceptable-use policy;
  - Confidentiality guidance and restrictions on entering client information into systems not expressly approved for client data;
  - Staff training(s) on GenAI tools and risks;
  - Cross-functional GenAI working group;
  - Approval processes for proposed uses;
  - Initial risk-classification approach; and
  - Initial criteria and practices for GenAI notice and consent.

Technology and Data

- Foundational systems support limited GenAI use, but interoperability remains constrained. This may include:
  - Migration to secure cloud platforms and improved device and identity management, including multifactor authentication and security awareness training;
  - More centralized data and an initial inventory of systems and data locations, though access, quality, ownership, retention, disposal, and transparency may remain inconsistent;
  - Integrations that rely on file exports or vendor-provided connectors;
  - Available but unused application programming interfaces (APIs);
  - Steps to reduce redundant tools and standardize platforms; and
  - Isolated GenAI pilots rather than integrated workflows.

People

- Emerging staff leadership and informal structures support early GenAI exploration and experimentation. This may include:
  - An informal GenAI working group composed of staff piloting tools;
  - Support from IT staff or a managed service provider (MSP); and
  - Basic staff training on GenAI risks and acceptable uses.

BUILD | Key Risks and Considerations

Professional Obligations

- Confidentiality risks, including inadvertent disclosure of client information through GenAI systems without adequate security or data-use protections.
- Hallucinations and false or misleading outputs, including fabricated citations and inaccurate legal authorities.
- Insufficient understanding of tool limitations, terms of use, data retention, or model-training practices.
- Risk that client or organizational data entered into third-party GenAI systems may be retained, disclosed under subpoenas or other legal demands, or accessed by government entities.
- Emerging compliance risks involving privacy, intellectual property, and GenAI-specific laws and regulations.

Community Accountability

- Environmental and community health impacts from GenAI infrastructure's energy and computing demands.
- Concerns about perceived alignment with major GenAI providers' commercial interests.
- Early planning decisions that inadvertently prioritize certain client groups or service areas.
- Limited community input in early decisions about GenAI direction.
- Disproportionate risks to communities facing immigration enforcement, criminal-system involvement, housing surveillance, family regulation, or other government scrutiny if sensitive information is retained or disclosed through GenAI systems.
- Bias, cultural or contextual errors, and uneven performance across languages, dialects, disability-related communication patterns, names, or demographic groups, even in internal drafting, summarization, or analysis.

Technology Management

- Cybersecurity risks, including mishandling of confidential data.
- Unclear or unfavorable vendor terms governing data use, retention, and confidentiality.
- Resources spent on pilots that fail or cannot scale.
- Leadership-staff misalignment on the scope or direction of GenAI use.

BUILD | Potential Next Steps and Mitigation Strategies

- Identifying potential use cases.
- Conducting early testing and evaluation of tools.
- Establishing initial processes to align leadership and staff on GenAI direction and scope.
- Establishing clear guardrails on using client data in GenAI systems and ensuring human review of GenAI outputs.
- Training staff on responsible GenAI use, including confidentiality, accuracy limitations, and risk awareness.
- Developing pilot templates covering scope, owners, costs, success measures, and opportunities for client input.
- Conducting documented, risk-based vendor reviews of product suitability, accessibility, performance, data practices, privacy, security, contracts, integration, cost, vendor sustainability, and government-access risks.
- Monitoring changes in GenAI-related laws and regulations to maintain regulatory compliance.

STAGE PROFILE

Operational

GenAI tools are regularly used in internal workflows and may be piloted in limited client-facing contexts. The organization has established governance structures, policies, and oversight mechanisms to support responsible implementation and use.

VENDOR REVIEW

The *Guide for Evaluating AI Vendors*, from the Lawyers Trust Fund of Illinois and Ashurst Perkins Coie, offers a comprehensive vendor checklist for legal aid organizations. Vendor review should reflect the proposed use case, data involved, and affected users. The State Bar's *Vendor AI Factsheet* illustrates incorporating AI-specific questions into general procurement.

OPERATIONAL | Capability Areas

Use Cases

- GenAI is regularly used across internal workflows, including tailored tools or configurations, with limited client-facing pilots possible.
- Internal uses may include:
  - Supervised drafting, editing, or reviewing of substantive legal work;
  - Benefits, eligibility, or procedural-navigation assistance based on verified sources and bounded rules; and
  - Knowledge assistants, including internal chatbots and retrieval-augmented generation (RAG) tools drawing from approved policies, training materials, legal resources, or document repositories.
- Client-facing pilots (subject to language-specific testing) may include legal triage tools, guided legal information, and document assembly.

Governance

- Formal governance, procurement, implementation, and evaluation structures may include:
  - Governance documents, including a GenAI governance framework (e.g., State Bar's *Generative AI Governance Framework*), data-handling standards, and an inventory of GenAI tools and uses;
  - Documented, comprehensive vendor and product evaluations;
  - Independent review of client-facing and other higher-risk systems;
  - Monitoring and evaluation of user feedback, language access, accessibility, outcomes, errors, biases, and unintended impacts;
  - Standardized pilot templates covering budgets, success measures, exit criteria, and sustainability; and
  - Executive, and possibly board, oversight of GenAI strategy and risk.

Technology and Data

- IT infrastructure supports secure, interoperable, and partially integrated GenAI use. This may include:
  - APIs, webhooks, and integrations that move data across systems;
  - Monitoring and logging of system usage, performance, and issues;
  - Structured, accessible data supported by documented systems of record, inventories and maps, stewardship, quality standards, role-based access, retention schedules, and secure disposal; and
  - Processes for maintaining authoritative sources used by knowledge assistants or RAG systems, including access controls, versioning, attribution, and review for outdated information.

People

- Defined expertise, staff roles, and coordinated governance support structured GenAI implementation. This may include:
  - Cross-functional governance team representing varied staff roles;
  - Designated staff or teams responsible for GenAI planning, implementation, evaluation, and coordination; and
  - IT staff or MSP capable of evaluating GenAI tools and integrations.

OPERATIONAL | Key Risks and Considerations

Professional Obligations

- Risk of unauthorized practice of law (UPL) when client-facing tools are mistaken for legal advice.
- Harm to self-represented litigants from inaccurate or outdated GenAI-generated legal or procedural guidance.
- Inadequate supervision of staff, contractors, or automated systems using GenAI.
- Insufficient client communication about GenAI when disclosure may be required or appropriate.
- Noncompliance with evolving GenAI-related laws, regulations, and professional requirements.

Community Accountability

- Digital access, literacy, and accessibility barriers that limit equitable use of client-facing tools.
- Bias from model design, training data, or implementation choices, and uneven performance across languages.
- Staff or union concerns that GenAI-enabled efficiencies may reduce staff positions.

Technology Management

- Overinvestment despite unclear benefits, limited sustainability, or competing process and technology needs.
- Technology sprawl from overlapping or redundant GenAI-enabled tools.
- System dependencies that reduce flexibility or complicate replacement.
- Vendor lock-in that limits flexibility or increases reliance on proprietary ecosystems.
- Inconsistent adoption across units, fragmenting workflows or duplicating efforts.
- Market instability, including vendor changes, product discontinuation, and abrupt price shifts.
- Model availability or behavior changes requiring ongoing validation, testing, and evaluation.
- Continued unauthorized use of personal or unapproved GenAI accounts despite available organizational tools.
- Adversarial use of client-facing GenAI systems to make them ignore built-in restrictions, disclose confidential information, or produce harmful outputs, including through prompt injection or automated attacks.

OPERATIONAL | Potential Next Steps and Mitigation Strategies

- Maintaining detection and response processes for security incidents and data breaches.
- Incorporating GenAI and technology into continuity of operations planning (COOP).
- Tracking vendor stability, product life cycles, pricing changes, and model availability.
- Preventing technology sprawl through tool rationalization and procurement review.
- Ongoing role-specific training, enforcement of GenAI policies, and escalation and human-review processes.
- Continuously evaluating performance, outputs, errors, security, reliability, and bias, including vendor-specific issues.
- Providing notice, alternatives and opt-out options, human escalation, and feedback channels for client-facing tools.
- Setting procedures for adversarial testing, rate limits, safeguards, logging, abuse monitoring, and incident response.
- Conducting periodic use inventories, access reviews, and staff surveys to identify and limit unauthorized GenAI use.

STAGE PROFILE

Innovate

GenAI is strategically integrated across multiple organizational workflows and client-facing services, supported by mature governance, evaluation, and risk-management practices. The organization continuously evaluates GenAI systems, measures impacts on service delivery and client outcomes, incorporates GenAI into organizational strategy, and develops and shares replicable systems and practices.

INNOVATE | Capability Areas

Use Cases

- GenAI is integrated across workflows and client-facing services.
- Internal uses may include:
  - Knowledge assistants integrated with case and/or document management systems, including RAG-based systems;
  - GenAI-supported document review, drafting, and editing;
  - Automated intake classification; and
  - Agentic AI tools supporting multi-step tasks.
- Client-facing uses may include:
  - Multilingual legal information chatbots;
  - GenAI-supported intake systems; and
  - Automated form generation and document assembly.

Governance

- GenAI governance is institutionalized and regularly reassessed. This may include:
  - Formal GenAI risk management framework;
  - Ongoing evaluation protocols and vendor oversight policies; and
  - Transparency, language access, accessibility, client feedback, and redress practices for client-facing GenAI.

Technology and Data

- Mature, scalable IT infrastructure enables reliable, integrated, and strategic GenAI deployment. This may include:
  - Flexible, modular systems that can integrate with other tools and scale across programs;
  - Advanced data governance addressing data flows, life cycle risks, and ethical treatment of sensitive or bias-relevant data;
  - Observability, auditability, and automated monitoring of GenAI systems and performance;
  - Interoperable systems designed for multiple use cases;
  - Infrastructure that supports agent-based workflows;
  - Continuous evaluation of GenAI systems; and
  - Ability to share architectures, standards, or best practices with the broader legal aid field.

People

- Capacity across relevant roles supports strategic and sustained GenAI use. This may include:
  - Broad staff involvement in identifying and developing use cases;
  - Leadership and board driving GenAI strategy and investments;
  - Coordinated management of GenAI initiatives and resources;
  - Staff development tied to effective and responsible GenAI use; and
  - Contributions to the field, including sharing resources and mentoring peer organizations.

INNOVATE | Key Risks and Considerations

Professional Obligations

- Overreliance on automated systems—including superficial or "rubber stamp" human review—that may replace, weaken, or overshadow necessary professional judgment.

Community Accountability

- Insufficient safeguards to detect and address disparate impacts from GenAI systems used at scale for screening, triage, intake, or other decision-related workflows.
- Reduced community trust when scaled GenAI tools frustrate users or limit access to human support.
- Concern or perception that the organization's GenAI usage is contributing to rising levels of court filings with GenAI hallucinations.

Technology Management

- Complex system failures arising from interconnected or customized GenAI-enabled systems.
- Agentic AI tools taking unintended actions or accessing data or systems beyond their intended scope.
- Loss of specialized staff, creating knowledge gaps affecting the operation or maintenance of GenAI systems.
- Insufficient GenAI-focused IT capacity to support advanced integrations or ongoing system monitoring.
- Outsized focus on GenAI strains resources for routine IT support.

INNOVATE | Potential Next Steps and Mitigation Strategies

- Assessing systemic risks from market consolidation and shared model dependencies.
- Promoting shared learning across the legal aid field and contributing reusable frameworks or practices.
- Ensuring transparent communication about GenAI use with staff, board, partners, stakeholders, and clients.
- Conducting continuous, organization-wide monitoring and evaluation of GenAI systems, including governance and long-term system dependencies.
- Measuring GenAI's impact on service delivery, staff experience, client outcomes, language access, accessibility, equity, community trust, costs, and the environment.
- Planning for long-term financial, operational, vendor, and workforce sustainability, including total cost of ownership, funding continuity, contingency and exit plans, data portability, and succession planning for specialized roles.

Conclusion

The landscape of GenAI will continue to evolve rapidly, and legal aid organizations will need flexible strategies that respond to shifting community needs, emerging regulations, and ongoing technology changes. The Legal Aid Generative AI Readiness Model supports that long-term work by helping organizational leaders assess capabilities and safeguards, identify a mission-aligned target for each capability area, and prioritize practical next steps. It does not presume that greater GenAI adoption is desirable. Instead, it provides a flexible framework for deciding whether, where, and under what conditions GenAI may strengthen services while protecting confidentiality, professional obligations, and community trust.

As GenAI capabilities evolve, commonly used legal aid systems are also beginning to integrate these tools in ways that will shape day-to-day practice. Case management systems used by many legal aid organizations—such as Clio, Justiceserver, and LegalServer—are introducing GenAI-supported features to help with tasks such as drafting, summarizing, and organizing case information, while productivity tools from Microsoft and Google now embed GenAI for email, document creation, and internal collaboration. These developments underscore the importance of maintaining flexible strategies that account for how GenAI is increasingly woven into core software relied on across the legal aid community. Organizations should recognize that GenAI deployment is an ongoing responsibility, not a onetime implementation. Even after systems are working as intended, they require sustained staff capacity for human oversight, monitoring, testing, and adaptation as models, data, vendors, and use cases change.

The State Bar plans to release more stage-specific implementation guidance and curated resources to help legal aid organizations advance their GenAI readiness.

Sustained collaboration around the use of GenAI will help ensure legal aid organizations can learn from one another and replicate, adapt, and scale best practices. Through ongoing collaboration with access to justice partners, low-income communities, and other advocates and providers, organizations can shape the future of GenAI and drive solutions that meaningfully protect the interests of and expand access to justice for all.

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- **Susan StVincent**, Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles
- **Angela Tripp**, National Center for State Courts
- **Pilot Participants:** Community Counsel, Family Violence Appellate Project, Greater Bakersfield Legal Assistance, Legal Aid of Sonoma County, Legal Services of Northern California, and Neighborhood Legal Services of Los Angeles County