Chris Schwartz:

All right. I have one o'clock on my local computer here. Welcome everyone. We're excited to see you today. This is Panel 2D, our first breakout of the day. Case Studies of Effective Tech Collaborations. I am Chris Schwartz. I'm one of the moderators for this session. With me is Libby Vazquez, who is the other moderator, and we're very thankful to our panelists, Sal Curran, Sarah John, Lezlie Paulus, and Joseph Melo, who are going to be talking to us today about their effective tech collaborations.

In coming up with this entire conference awhile ago, the theme for us, what we were seeking to do is to bridge the justice gap, to use technology to bring clients closer to the courthouse doors. Today we're going to talk about ways to bridge connections between legal service providers, another way to multiply our ability with technology. We're going to hear about the wonderful projects that these folks have come up with.

If you are curious about any of our presenters, please take a look at the agenda for today if you want to check out their bios. We encourage you to ask questions throughout. Just put them in chat. Libby and I will call them out as we get to them during some natural breaks in the conversation. We're also going to leave some time at the end for additional questions if you have any or if we have any. We'll also read off the CLE code towards the end of the panel. With that, I'll turn it over to you, Libby.

Libby Vazquez:

Good afternoon. I'm happy to welcome our first presenters. Our first presenters are Sal Curran, who is the Executive Director at Volunteer Lawyers Project of Central New York Inc, and Joseph Melo, Director of Engineering at Just-Tech.

Sal Curran:

All right. Thanks so much Libby and thank you Chris. I just want to start by thanking everybody who's joining us here this afternoon. I know there's a lot of different presentations going on and we appreciate your time, and we hope to make this really valuable for you. Let's see. I’ve got to advance my slides here. Okay.

What we're going to be talking about today is a shared document access project that we did to address an urgent client services need. Just to start with, as a big picture issue, since I'm the Executive Director I really tend to think of big picture issues and then we try to use tech to solve them. The problem we had presented to us was - I think it'll be familiar to most people already here. With the collapse of Afghanistan, there was the incredibly rushed arrival of Afghans across our state, across our country.

Here in central New York, we have three refugee resettlement orgs. We actually had two, but one also joined the mix. Now we had three and we knew over 500 Afghan arrivals were coming into our community. We only had two legal aid orgs. that were doing immigration work, ourselves, and our partner agency Hiscock Legal Aid Society. Already the attorneys that we had doing immigration work in central New York were at capacity, so needless to say, all of us started panicking and trying to think about what could we do because we also knew there'd be some really tight time limits in terms of turnaround for providing legal service to these Afghan arrivals since they were coming in on a parolee basis.

We started problem solving this, my immigration team and Hiscock's immigration team, and we realized what we would need to do is recruit a massive number of volunteer attorneys and law students to respond to this issue. What I'll say is in the past, our pro bono immigration program had been very small because we had primarily depended upon immigration law practitioners of which there are only a handful or so in central New York who actually practice immigration law, not at one of our two agencies.

We knew we were going to have to train non-immigration attorneys on immigration law and pull in a ton of law students. We knew we were going to have to get the refugee resettlement staff on board to really help make this possible because we were short-staffed, and we didn't have any funding to do this work. We knew the best way for us to do this was going to be through a mass mobilization clinic process where we were going to have attorneys from Hiscock Legal Aid, from Volunteer Lawyers Project, several pro bono attorneys, tons of law students to help with the intake process and data gathering process, and we were going to need interpreters for every single family, either Dari or Pashto.

There was going to be a ton of data that needed to be transferred to us ahead of time to make this possible and a ton of follow-up that was going to need to happen. When thinking about how to do this in a really secure way, I went to Joseph and our friends at Just-Tech, because we are small, we are a small outfit, we have 26 people and no IT staff permanently on staff. We joke that I am the IT Department, which is for those who know me, sort of funny. I immediately called Joseph and said, "Hey Joseph, you built out our SharePoint site." Our personal programmatic SharePoint site is very locked down. It can't be shared externally at all, but I started to talk to him about what would be the option so that we could share data first between each of the resettlement agencies and our agency, and then also between the legal aid providers.

I just wanted to, so it's not all words, throw in some pictures. These are some pictures from those mobilization days. We had 20 plus clients coming through, we were using a free space in our building and had, like I said, eight to 10 attorneys at any given moment meeting with clients with interpreters. It was really on those days a very energizing and beautiful process, but it was complicated.

Before we got there, we decided to have a multi-party signed client release so that we could share. We knew we were going to have to divvy up cases at the end, both between our legal aid orgs and the two refugee resettlement programs that are DOJ accredited, and then we also created MOUs regarding the data sharing. I just wanted to mention that so that if this particular project appeals to any of you as a solution, you're welcome to reach out to look at those documents. I'm not going to share them today, but it's just so you know that is out there.

I'm going to hand it over to Joseph to talk a little bit about what we designed and the sharing features, mainly because I think we came up with a very simple system and it's something that many of you could employ today.

Joseph Melo:

Thank you, Sal. My name is Joseph Melo. I work for Just-Tech. I'm the Director of Engineering. Sal asked myself and other members of the Just-Tech team to help with this project they were working on. I guess just to start off, and not necessarily just focusing on VLP here, it's just general best practices to have in SharePoint -- it's to have the restrictions on who should have permissions to what exactly in the environment. Not any single person should have access to everything in the environment. The concern of course is that that account was compromised in any way. You don't want the attacker to have access to everything that the user has.

One of the views we did was take a look at the overall external sharing policies that were in place that applies to everything within SharePoint and OneDrive, and we tightened that down instead of allowing anonymous links to be allowed from everywhere because anonymous links could be just shared and shared and shared and passed on to other people. You don't know who has access to it. You have it locked down so that you decide whether it's sharing it to specific people, and they have to authenticate, or you share to external guests. That's one of the options we went with Sal on one of the sites is, and you can see here in the screenshot, external sharing is set for this site to be shared with existing guests only so that Sal has that ability to decide who exactly we're sharing with. It's not just a matter of saying, "Hey, I want to share with John Doe." It's, "Well, is John Doe an active guest in the environment?" Sal would go in and create John Doe as a guest in the environment to begin with first.

You could see here in one of the screenshots what that creation of that invite would be like for John Doe. You put the email, the display name, it gets sent out to them and they are now part of your system and now they could access that share. You could hopefully bring it up to this step if that's what you're looking to do. There is a little bit of administrative overhead because Sal is creating these guests, but you could tighten the bolt a bit more. You could also loosen the bolt a bit more. You could just allow it so that people are authenticating in the environment, but generally you want to have that best practice and you decide which site falls under which category for that.

One of the other things we did in the environment were to also make sure that even the default sharing options, although I don't believe we have a screenshot for this, but one of the default sharing options is when you share it out to people, you want to have the default option to say whether it's a view or edit when you're sending it out to people. By default, when you share something out, it's set to edit already and maybe that's not something you always want somebody to have. You change it to view first instead.

We did a bunch of these changes in the environment. We made sure all the sites were set to the appropriate levels, and then we made sure the important sites for these immigration ones were set for guests only. Sal had developed this process internally to make sure to create that, so that only the guests that we allow are in it. And then the final step, one of the final steps we did is actually make sure that we allow sharing only from specific people. In other words, not everyone in VLP is allowed to share things out to everyone. It's a security group we have in place. Only very specific people are actually allowed to do the external sharing in the environment. Again, further locking things down.

Chris Schwartz:

Sal, you are on mute.

Sal Curran:

You knew it would happen at least once. I win.

Here on this screenshot, you can see this is the list of the members for one of our groups that had at this moment in time all the members of the immigration teams for both Hiscock Legal Aid Society and for us. That was one of the sites. Really simple. I just want to show how simple some of these sites are. Really, we are just using document libraries. We had done some plans in terms of checking off to-do lists, but really very, very simple sites. What you can see is that we've got in these shared sites, this immigration legal, which is the one for our two programs, it started out with the Afghan legal Services project files and our clinic files, but then we built it into a resource library with recurring legal issues. We have the TPS for Afghans, and we actually went further into expanding it into our other ongoing collaborations.

As a result of this collaborative work, we screened 500 individuals, but some of them were family groups. We ended up with 174 individual cases. If it weren't for this shared project, these shared sites, it would just be so complicated to keep track of which cases have been assigned out, which cases haven't, what are the priorities. We actually went through in the screening process and identified a priority score for how ready people were to file or how urgent their case was and had been using that. These colors mean things to the attorneys working with them, but we use it as a way to decide how were we going to assign out the cases, not only between our two agencies but also within VLP, between our staff attorneys and our pro bono attorneys.

This ongoing shared master list has been absolutely critical. Again, it's such a simple concept. I almost felt silly proposing this for the tech conference, but it has been so effective. The reason it's been so effective is because it is simple. My immigration team often claims that they are the least tech savvy group in our organization. They often joke that they operate on PDFs only and they don't like tech, and all of them uniformly love this system because it's made life so much easier. Whether it's keeping track in one centralized place of all of the cases or it's sharing planning materials, now we're using it for joint grant reporting and sharing other resources. It's really been a game changer.

Now, I just wanted to share screenshots of two additional SharePoint sites we have now. We have one for our immigration volunteers that has in it a very detailed, super thorough list of resources in all kinds of different areas that these volunteers can tap into to try to help them in taking on cases that they're just learning the law on. Later in 2022, we received the ONA upstate pro bono grant in collaboration with Erie County Bar Association and Volunteer Lawyers Project, Just Cause in Monroe County, and Legal Aid Society of Rochester, to provide a comprehensive pro bono immigration legal aid program that would go all the way from western New York across our immigration program covers CNY and the North country and through our collaboration with Hiscock Mohawk Valley. We are covering a pretty large swath of upstate New York at this point.

Chris Schwartz:

Five minutes left.

Sal Curran:

Yeah. We'll be done in two probably.

They now have access to our resources and we're building this resource library together, but then also we have our reporting here. For those who are familiar with ONA, you know that it is a very extensive reporting process where you have to upload the backup documentation of every training, every client served, everything. This has just made it so much easier to gather that reporting, not only for our upstate pro bono but for our other ONA joint grants.

Again, I would just say it is simple, it is straightforward. I built out a lot of these sites with the help of Joseph, and again, I'm not an IT person, but it just takes understanding how SharePoint sites work. We are continually refining. Like Joseph said, we just made a shift when it became evident this past week that we wanted to be able to share certain folders with people who are not part of the team. We just made this shift to the security setting. It's a forever developing thing, but it's been a game changer for our immigration team, and I encourage others to consider using it.

Chris Schwartz:

That is awesome. The efficiency there is just wonderful. I was wondering, I didn't see any questions in chat yet, just to encourage people to ask questions. You don't have to wait until the end. One question that I have is, did you go with SharePoint because that's what the majority of programs had, and are there other document management programs that have similar functions that you either explored or you know of? Joseph, that last question, the broad range of programs might be for you. Are there other programs if people don't have SharePoint that can maybe do the same?

Sal Curran:

Yeah. I'll say we used SharePoint because that is the environment that VLP, that my Volunteer Lawyers Project of Central New York uses, and also because I know that Microsoft has a very high level of security behind it. We had individual sites set up with Catholic Charities of Central New York and with Interfaith Works, different sites. In order to meet the security requirements of every single different agency, knowing that we were going to be sharing very sensitive data, it seemed like the best solution, and it was and ended up working very well. I can't speak to other sharing platforms. That would be Joseph.

Joseph Melo:

Yeah. I would say that a lot of it is going to be the SharePoint side of things because a lot of organizations already have Office 365 to begin with. It's just really easy to get that license and have everything unlocked. Unlike other solutions that probably involve a lot more to get started, get implemented, get accounts in there, already you skipped a lot of those steps by just adding the license in and you're just kind of in. The danger is that of course you don't go and configure all the stuff on the backend. There is configuration that you should do on the backend in terms of the permissions and the external access that we did for VLP. That's what you want to be careful. Train your users on what your policies and procedures are, put them in place when you get that access.

Chris Schwartz:

Great. Thank you both.

Libby Vazquez:

Yeah. I was going to ask, what kind of maintenance is involved in this project? What is key to maintaining?

Sal Curran:

Yeah. The maintenance on my end has been adding new users as they come in and removing users as they leave in terms of staff turnover. I'm trying to think. I think just making sure that we're continually responding to the needs of the program. Like I said, originally, we had it really locked down where people were only allowed to view these sites if I had entered them into our system and then entered them into that SharePoint document, that SharePoint site.

But then over time, it became evident that some of our pro bono attorneys wanted to use the shared folder there to be able to maintain their client files, particularly since they were often partnered with one or two law students to help them with the research end, but we didn't want them to have access to the whole document library. That's where I'd have to keep coming back to Joseph, "Okay. This is what I want. How do we make that happen?" He'd be like, "Oh, well, we can do it this way or that way." We're even right now looking at creating new document libraries to remove versioning for the versions that we send to the grantors as opposed to keeping the versioning on the other document libraries because that way, if anybody messes up that Excel document, we can find the old version, that kind of thing.

Chris Schwartz:

Sometimes key for sure, reverting when someone's made an inadvertent change. Question in the chat from Emily. I swear I have not slipped her any money here for this question. She noticed in the Excel screenshot that each entry had a LegalServer case number. Was LegalServer technology used in any way to facilitate this collaboration?

Sal Curran:

We have LegalServer and Hiscock has LegalServer, and we split up whose LegalServer it went into based upon who did the screening, but if the other agency ended up taking the case in the long run, then we did the electronic transfer of the case over to the other LegalServer system. In that sense, it was used in the collaboration. We're just setting up now for some of our power users, we're going to have them do limited pro bono access. We have that set up and we've used it in the past, but we've not used it with this immigration program. We're going to be rolling that out in the next week or two for some of our immigration team, but because our program and Hiscock's program, so much of what we do is conflicts for each other, that's part of why we partner in almost every way is because we do conflicts, our systems only talk through E-transfers.

Libby Vazquez:

Got it. Thank you. Okay. If the next panel would share their slide, that would be great.

Sarah John:

Is it visible?

Libby Vazquez:

Yes, it is. Thank you. I want to introduce Sarah John who is the Program Manager at ACE coordinated intake system, part of Civil Justice Inc, and Lezlie Paulus, the Intake Project Manager at A2J Tech. Welcome and thank you.

Sarah John:

Thank you. It's great to see so many little square boxes on the side there. Thank you all for coming. As was mentioned, I'm Sarah John. I'm Civil Justice Inc's Program Manager for Maryland Access to Counsel in Evictions Coordinated Intake, and with Lezlie Paulus we'll be talking about one of the collaborations we're engaged in between a referral organization, a technology company, and a legal services organization, which together are creating the Counsel in Evictions Coordinated Intake System. For the sake of my tongue and for brevity, I'm going to refer to the coordinated intake system as an ACE CIS or just CIS. ACE being for Access to Counsel in Evictions program. The CIS is about to be soft launched in Baltimore City in actually just over a week, so this is a really exciting time for me to be talking to you all. Somewhat a stressful time I guess too as well.

Before we launch into the collaboration between the three groups, I wanted to give you some background about how the ACE program came into existence. Some of you might be aware that Maryland is an especially notable place in the evictions world. It combines three aspects, a low filing fee for evictions matters, and in the past an absence of strict notice requirements and the ability to file just a few days after a tenant falls behind on rent to ensure that there are really high rates of eviction filing. In Baltimore, there are sometimes more evictions filings in a year than renter households. Landlords are routinely filing failure pay rent suits as a way to essentially collect rent, use the state to collect rent.

In response to this problem, there'd been significant agitation for a right to counsel in evictions in Baltimore before the pandemic. In late 2020, the City Council passed a right to counsel, and it was less than a year later that Maryland followed suit. The Maryland State legislature passed a bill, but not a right to counsel. It was renamed to access, access to counsel in evictions. This program provides access to counsel for eligible Maryland tenants, those with less than 50% of the Maryland median household income, for specific types of eviction and subsidy termination cases. The specificity of that legislation will prove to be important for our task.

ACE services started in the more populous jurisdictions in Maryland in July 2022, and statewide implementation is expected by October 2025. The Coordinated Intake System, the CIS is a central part of ACE. It's going to be one of the central, maybe the central funnel to connect tenants facing eviction with legal representation, and it's going to be a particularly important one because it works using 211, the ubiquity of 211.

We have the ability to capture all of these tenants who otherwise wouldn't know where to look for legal help and might not even have known that their problem was justiciable or they could get legal help, or who didn't know that free legal help was available, didn't know that they had legal rights. That's one of the key powers of this program. All right.

The Coordinated Intake System fits in an interesting area. A lot of coordinated intake systems face a lot of political and funding challenges. That wasn't the challenge for us. There's a favorable political landscape. The Maryland Legal Services Corporation with the backing of the state is funding the ACE program. We don't have that many political or funding barriers, but what we do have is an interesting technological proposition or technical proposition.

The Coordinated Intake System is affected by these three categories of things that really make it quite a challenging technical proposition. The first one I've already mentioned is the sheer scale of the problem. There's overwhelming need, as I mentioned earlier, extraordinarily high rates of eviction filings in Maryland. In 2018, the eviction filing rate was about 70%, meaning there were seven eviction filings for every 10 Maryland renter households. Just craziness. That means that the upper ceiling for how many tenants could use the ACE program, extremely unlikely though it may be. It's of the order of something like 800,000 households. It is inevitable, I think, that once the CIS is fully operational statewide, that we'll be taking in tens of thousands of tenants each year. Maybe more. That's hundreds each day.

Now, that wouldn't be so much of a problem if the ask for the Coordinated Intake System was a simple cold referral system that minimal information was being extracted from callers and we could just quickly transfer them with a cold referral, say, "Go have a look at this service provider and see if they can help you." But that's not the situation here. Instead, what we have is legislation that sets up very specific coverage of legal issues. Some things are included in ACE and some slightly different landlord tenant issues are not. We have a set of providers that have specific case priorities. They specialize in some areas of landlord tenant, not others.

The ACE program legislation carves out very specific types of eviction filings that it covers. It doesn't include retaliatory eviction, except in Baltimore City where it also includes affirmative rent escrow. It doesn't cover wrongful detainer or security bond actions. It includes constructive evictions, but not illegal evictions, except in Baltimore. It only includes the first appeal for which there's a very short window. It does include subsidy terminations, even when they're separate from an eviction matter. It only covers representation, not brief advice. We've got a very specific set of matters that are within the scope.

The second issue is that providers have very specific specializations. That's not as unique to Maryland, but we do have the combination of organizations with particular population focuses, focusing on households with disabilities, households in subsidized housing or immigrants. We combine that with that extra layer of having highly specific preferences when it comes to landlord tenant matters. For example, one of the providers involved in ACE is a student clinic. They only want relatively basic failure to pay rent matters. A different organization is focused on more policy issues. They want the really complex cases that raise important policy questions. There are organizations that focus almost solely on day of court clinics, and so they don't want a series of more complicated ACE cases that require extended representation.

We end up with this very complicated landscape. Because we don't want to be essentially an additional step in the process, we don't want to send off referrals that then bounce back so the tenant has to go to and from different places. We want to make the process more efficient, not less efficient. We have this, I guess, technical need to make highly detailed and accurate referrals that aren't returned. We want to make sure we capture the eligibility requirements and the case specializations of providers, and we want to make a lot of those referrals.

We've got the volume and the specificity and the accuracy that's needed. Essentially our task is to collect a lot of information, a lot of specific legal information from tenants primarily on the phone, and match that information with information provided by legal organizations. How did we do this? We engaged in a collaborative partnership between the United Way of Central Maryland which runs 211 in the Baltimore area. They're experts at making efficient referrals. We involve Civil Justice, of course, who has the legal knowledge, and A2J Tech who has the tech know-how. Now I'm going to turn over to Lezlie who's going to talk about A2J Tech's role.

Lezlie Paulus:

Thanks, Sarah. Just real briefly, A2J Tech probably should have gone last on this slide if we were putting things in order of importance. Really, our role is to support both Civil Justice, the legal services organizations across Maryland and United Way in building a system that's efficient, that talks to itself and creates a closed loop so that information is being passed among the people who need to have it effectively and securely to support the ACE program within Maryland. Myself and Joseph Schieffer have been deeply engaged with Maryland and both the Civil Justice Passport in Maryland as well as this project, and have been working closely with Sarah's organization as well as United Way of Central Maryland to help build a system that we'll tell you a little bit more about in just a few minutes. Sarah?

Sarah John:

Yes. The second partner is United Way of Central Maryland, and they field the calls from tenants and provide a centralized, well-known number, 211 to funnel calls. They add a whole lot to this partnership. There's the ubiquity of the 211 line, which means that callers are already familiar with the service and trust it. They add this ability to catch those who otherwise might fall through the cracks and who we really don't have any other way of helping. Callers who don't know that there's free legal help or don't know that a lawyer could help in their situation throughout the process of engaging with a 211 operator that they may have called 211 for a totally different matter. But if it becomes clear that there's an eligible eviction matter, they can be elevated up to the ACE CIS line. It also provides the capacity to bundle services so people can call the same place in the one call and get legal help. They can get legal help as well as social services and financial assistance and have a holistic approach to their problem.

Then of course, there's the expertise that they provide in efficiently referring, extracting the information from a client that is needed, and then referring them, and of course, all of the ACE CIS line operators are going to be highly trained social workers who know how to deal with high stress situations and people facing really quite urgent situations.

Civil Justice brings the legal knowledge as a legal services organization and connections to the field. It is our legal knowledge that underpins the technological tools. CJ trains 211 specialists on landlord tenant law, so they know the important fact scenarios and the legally salient things to be looking for. CJ works with -- Civil Justice -- CJ works with legal services providers to get their input and feedback and buy-in about the system. Once the system launches, we are going to be the place where difficult or ambiguous cases are referred to for review, and we'll also be providing urgent action in appeals cases to essentially stop that appeals clock where otherwise it will take too long to make a referral and essentially the appeals window would vanish. Lezlie is now going to talk about how these three partners fit together in the system.

Lezlie Paulus:

Thank you, Sarah. This was a really interesting technology challenge. We had a set of diverse stakeholders and a set of diverse requirements that needed to be built into one closed loop system, as I mentioned before. Starting with 211 and United Way of Central Maryland, their intake system uses a system built on iCarol, which is a wonderful system for the work that they do, but was not a particularly open system and did not allow for customization to meet the needs of the ACE program. We tried to build a system that would sit alongside the iCarol system that the 211 reps could use without a lot of back and forth and a lot of cutting and pasting. That was the first requirement.

The second requirement was that we needed to build an effective and efficient way to screen for eligibility and collect over 30 data points that was reportable to our funders and to Stout who's watching this project very closely. We also needed to provide a branching logic system for the 211 operators who are not legally trained in order to facilitate their identification of legal issues. And then finally, we needed to provide system generated matches to the legal services organization, most likely to be able to help the caller.

From the LSO perspective, we needed a way for them to update their case priorities as well as their capacity in real time. We didn't want to be sending referrals to organizations who did not have the capacity or were not currently handling a type of case, and then have them bounce back into the system. The other thing we needed from a LSO perspective was a way for them to indicate whether they could accept a case or whether they had a conflict, and then they could quickly return that case to the organization. Then finally, we needed a way to securely electronically transfer case information data to a diverse set of case management systems amongst the LSOs. We have quite a variety. We have a couple of organizations using LegalServer, a couple of organizations using other legal services providers, and we even have an organization who uses an Excel spreadsheet. Dealing with a wide variety of case management systems.

A couple of other things that we needed to think about just broadly again was creating this feedback loop so that it was seamless, so that clients didn't spend time in limbo if the first organization they were referred to had a conflict. We looked through a bunch of different systems and applications that we thought would be a good support for the many varied needs that we have here. We ended up settling on building our legal workflows, which Sarah's going to show you in just a moment in Stacker. Part of what underlie the decision to go with Stacker was its extreme flexibility, the fact that it was a low code platform so it would be easy to maintain.

Sarah and her partner Sam Kessler have been trained on how to make edits and updates in Stacker, so they'll be fairly self-sufficient going forward with that. Also, that it was free for nonprofits. We really wanted to make this a cost-effective and affordable system. The final card that made Stacker the obvious choice for us is that this massive data collection effort that is being required by the funders and by Stout is being done in Airtable. The API integration between Stacker and Airtable is very robust and was able to support the data collection needs that we had. Sarah, you want to show them the next part of the system?

Chris Schwartz:

Five minutes left.

Lezlie Paulus:

Thank you.

Sarah John:

Yeah. Running on time. It's great. Wanted to drill down on just two different aspects of the system and give you a bit of a view of what it looks like. The first one of these is the 211 operator view, the guided intake view. This is where we take that information from clients and turn it into a very specific and detailed referral. In Stacker, we developed a guided intake process with complex branch logic that essentially enables non-lawyers, non-paralegals 211 specialists to extract the legally salient information from callers in a non-threatening way. It captures common fact scenarios that are consistent with different legal problems in a relatively natural conversation or style. We don't make any legal determinations. We're just saying this suggests a pattern consistent with this sort of case type.

Civil Justice mapped the fact scenarios consistent with the eligible and ineligible landlord tenant matters in this giant flowchart that looks really, really scary. We developed questions and flows that underlie this guided intake process using Stacker with A2J Tech, it has programmed all the logic and data collection so that at the end of the intake process, you essentially have a provisional case type. These facts are consistent with this case type, like a failure to pay rent court date scheduled, court date in five days, or constructive eviction, or affirmative escrow or something similar. We do this. On this screen, you can see a pretty basic question about what your current rent is. That is a reporting question required by Stout for evaluation purposes, but you can also see a question about whether landlord claims that they're behind on rent. That yes or no answers will send you down a different part. If you say yes, then you get asked a series of questions about failure to pay rent. If you say no, we skip over to the next section and the next set of fact patterns that might be consistent with a different kind of evictions issue.

All the while as we proceed through this process, the system is collecting structured information that can be transmitted as fields directly to a legal services provider's case management system if they're fully integrated, or concatenated into a narrative summary and transmitted that way. Our goal, as I've said before, is really to make things as efficient as possible. The last thing we want is to essentially add an extra step for tenants or for legal services organizations. We don't want people repeating their story in full to intake staff. Our expectation is that we will be generating intake-like referrals or intake-like referrals that only need a soft touch by intake staff to process, to engage in a conflict check and to accept the case.

After the conflict check is complete, the intake-like referral will include full eligibility information, detailed information about the case and dates, escrow issues, the tenant's goals, documents received, and any other fields really that the legal service organization receiving the referral wants. To connect this sort of intake-like referral to an organization. The information collected during the guided interview will be melded with the live information from legal services organizations about capacity and preferences, which Lezlie is going to talk about now.

Lezlie Paulus:

Real quickly. I know we're coming up on time here. This is just a screenshot to show you what the legal services organizations are responsible for filling out and then updating in real time. Essentially, any legal services organization can go into this half of the system, update the case priorities for the types of cases that they're taking and how much capacity they have in any given moment to take additional referrals. Each organization has an assigned point person who's responsible for updating the piece of the legal services organization's ability and capacity so that when a referral is generated by the system that the 211 operators are using, they can match this up. The system will match this up to generate the appropriate referral organization. I did see a question pop up about whether this data will be transmitted automatically into the case management system.

We are currently working with the two LegalServer using organizations to build an API electronic transfer. We will be working with each individual organization as they come online to do the same for them. We do have a couple of providers who do not have "a modern" case management system with API capabilities such that we can do the electronic transfer. As Sarah mentioned, we are creating a special printout, if you will, aggregation of data from the guided interview that will be sent to them, and they will have to cut and paste over. That's the current plan for managing data transfer. Sarah, I think I'm going to turn it over to you to bring us home.

Sarah John:

Yeah. This is the final slide. I think I mentioned at the very beginning that the project is on the cusp of its soft launch in Baltimore. That's a little more than a week away. This launch is going to be quite soft, shall we say, with the only organic referrals from within 211 and very little publicity initially. What we are really focusing on now is testing the effectiveness of the guided interview logic at categorizing cases in real life situations. There's going to be a lot of testing and a lot of refining. Indeed, the interface looks somewhat different to the two pages we just showed you before because we've been doing so much refining. Come October this year, we plan to launch publicly and fully in Baltimore City and expect to be fully operational by then, and then expand quickly or pivot quickly to statewide expansion in 2024 with the system fully in place by mid-2025. That's the end.

Chris Schwartz:

That is wonderful. Thank you folks. Let's see. We're going to take a break in just a minute to announce the CLE code and also open questions up to all of the panelists. Before we do that, I'm going to use moderator's privilege just to say that I think that the system that you have in place to allow real-time updating of preferences for organizations is so important to have a built-in mechanism to do that. I think I saw on there that there's also an option to say we're not accepting any cases from your referral system at this time, which is something that's so overlooked with online intake and shared intake to be able to say we're at capacity or we've just lost capacity, or we're going on a holiday for the next month or so and we can't accept cases. How much input did you get from the providers that you're referring to as to what questions you're going to ask since you're taking into account some of their other preferences? I wonder if they played a role in that as well.

Sarah John:

They absolutely did. We had several series of stakeholder meetings, individual meetings with each group, and they gave us pretty thorough feedback at every stage, which we have incorporated duly.

Chris Schwartz:

Great. I'm sure that wasn't a headache at all. Great. Thank you so much. Final moments here. If anyone has any questions, don't be shy. I certainly have a few of my own. For the ACE CIS. In terms of language, we talked a little bit yesterday about how the system up in Canada is using artificial intelligence, which naturally is able to match language level, not necessarily something you can do with a guided interview or you're drafting it on your own. What mechanisms did you use to, or did you use any mechanisms to judge what language level your questions were at, both for conveying to the 211 system operators so they would understand and then further on to the people who were applying for service?

Sarah John:

Yeah. We worked primarily with 211 on that to get their feedback about what the language level of folks who call them typically are, but it is still a work in progress, refining the language, and that's going to be a key part of the testing process over the next few months. We also have a plan to offer the guided interview in Spanish, which is something forthcoming as well.

Chris Schwartz:

Great. When I hear everyone's projects, my mind's always moving ahead to what the next step might be. Question for both of the panels, if this is something that's occurred to you or if it's something you can answer off the top of your head. If you were in that golden situation where you had an influx of some crazy amount of cash and you had all the time in the world to hire someone else and to think about what the next phase would be, what would you build on to the system that you presented today? We can start with Sal and Joe. What would you add to the SharePoint mini-site collaboration to make it even more effective or even more wonderful?

Sal Curran:

Oh, goodness. I guess if I actually had money to have somebody build it out, we would use all of the many, many other tools of SharePoint. Right now, we're really just using, it is a document repository, but I would use other Microsoft tools. We could build in flows to do various document creation or to direct volunteers to the correct resources. We could build in video libraries of the trainings that would be readily accessible. We would maybe have a volunteer onboarding SharePoint site or the volunteer site would have a whole onboarding capacity to it. There's so many things I would do with it, but we just don't have the time, space, and expertise in-house and we don't have the funding externally to make that happen at this point.

Chris Schwartz:

Yeah. Seeing it become a knowledge resource for additional volunteers who you wanted to onboard, that would be very cool. Same question to Sarah and Lezlie. You guys are thinking in next phases already, but if you won the lottery, what would be the immediate thing you would go after to expand the system?

Lezlie Paulus:

One of the things that we're working on currently and we're building out is a client access portal so that the client can go in at any moment and see exactly where their case is at, exactly what the next steps are. We're building what we can with time and budget and space and all of that, but I think providing that window into the justice system for people who are in the system and whose cases are being considered both for access to eviction, but really any legal issue that our applicants and our clients deal with would be on my wishlist.

We're already starting to see this model being picked up by other states who are passing access to counsel and evictions-like legislation. I think that's such an important issue for low income populations. I'd love to see all 50 states adopting something similar. That's my wishlist. Sarah, I don't know if you have something different.

Sarah John:

No. I agree totally. And expanding it beyond just access to counsel in evictions to more legal areas. Yeah.

Chris Schwartz:

Absolutely. If there was some uniform system across the country where a resident of any state could call one number and get the same amount of information and get directed to the right resource. New York, since you passed a right to counsel, right to "counsel" and Housing Court, and if there are providers in the audience today who are thinking about something like this, please reach out to Sarah and Lezlie.

Thank you to all of our panelists. We really appreciate the great projects that you put into place and your service of the underserved. I think there's 10 minutes before the next pane. If you need a link back to day two, I'll throw it in the chat here. Thank you for joining us today.

Libby Vazquez:

Thank you everyone.

Sarah John:

Thank you.

Sal Curran:

Yeah. Thank you all. You have our contact info, so reach out if you have any further questions or want to even share templates or anything like that. We're always happy to do that for sure.

Chris Schwartz:

All right. Thank you folks. Have a good one.

Libby Vazquez:

Goodbye.