

# **Front Office Guidelines**

## **Front Office Guidelines**

### **1. Background and Rationale:-**

Legal Services Authorities are providing free and competent legal services to weaker and marginalized sections of society. Front office is one of the units of the entire framework to render such services. As per Regulation 2(c) of National Legal Services Authority (Free and Competent Legal Services) Regulations, 2010 “Front office means a room in the Legal Services Institution where legal services are made available”. Regulation 4 of the National Legal Services Authority (Free and Competent Legal Services) Regulations, 2010 provides that all Legal Services Institutions shall have a Front Office. In the Front office are deputed Retainer Lawyer, Para Legal Volunteers (PLVs) and Panel Advocates. Moreover, persons with the qualification of Masters Degree in Social Work or Diploma or Masters Degree in psychiatric or psychology may also be called to the Front Office as and when necessary.

It is imperative to make Front Office efficient and effective so that quality and meaningful legal services are rendered to the visitors/legal aid seekers. At present, there is no uniformity in the functioning of Front Offices across the country. Moreover, in most of the Front Offices, legal services of the required standard are not delivered. It is important to strengthen Front Offices so that high-quality legal services are rendered and Front Office work as One Stop Centre for legal aid seekers/beneficiaries. Hence, arises the need of guidelines suggesting the operational framework for rendering legal services in Front Office.

### **2. Legal Services through Front Office**

Front Office is expected to provide legal services in an effective and expeditious manner. Functions of Front Office include:

- (i) Providing Legal advice;
- (ii) Drafting applications, petitions, replies etc.;
- (iii) Attending legal aid helpline number
- (iv) Receiving and maintain in record with regard to legal aid applications;

- (v) Uploading legal aid applications on Web Portal of NALSA;
- (vi) Maintaining up-to-date data of court based matters and maintaining data in prescribed formats.
- (vii) Updating Legal Aid Beneficiary about particulars of a Panel Lawyer marked for his matter and also updating him regularly about the status of his case.

### **3. Suggestive framework:**

#### **(1) Location:-**

As per Regulation 4 of National Legal Services Authority (Free and Competent Legal Services) Regulations, 2010, all Legal Services Institutions have to set up a Front office. The location of the Front Office should be such as is visible to litigants and other people who are visiting courts or the offices of Legal Services Institutions. It should not be far away from the courts. It should not be at a place which is not visible. Front Offices should be setup at the level of State, District and Taluk level legal services institution. Sign boards spelling out Front Office and the time of opening and closing of Front Office be put outside the Front Office.

#### **(2) Infrastructure:-**

Front office shall be well painted. It shall have at least one table, three chairs for PLVs, and one/two chairs for Panel Lawyers. It shall have at least two visitors chairs. It shall have a notice board, a computer, a scanner and printer and a legal helpline number. Suggestion box and complaint box be also kept in the Front office. In the waiting area there should be sufficient seating arrangements. Drinking water facility should be made available at the waiting area. DLSA may also subscribe newspaper and news magazines, to be kept in waiting area. LED monitor be also affixed at appropriate place in the Front office for displaying the functions of the Legal Services Authorities, entitlements to free legal services, documentaries related to Legal Services, NALSA Theme Song, Success Stories etc. the LED monitor can also be utilised for video conferencing along with necessary equipment's such as a webcam or a desktop VC facility.

**(3) Duty Roasters and list of Panel Advocates and PLVs:**

A daily roster regarding the Front Office should be put on the notice board. It shall clearly spell out the names of the PLVs, Retainer/Panel Lawyers along with their telephone numbers. The duty roster of all the Front offices of SLSA/DLSAs and Taluka shall also be uploaded on the website of the State Legal Services Authorities. Front office shall also have a list of all panel advocates and PLVs of concerned Legal Services Institution along with their addresses and telephone numbers for ready reference. A copy of list containing duty roster of all the Legal Services Clinics be also kept in the Front Office for ready reference. Following points should be kept in view while deputing PLV/Retainer/Panel lawyers etc. at the Front Office.

**(a) Professionalism:** - The person deputed shall have a professional appearance and attitude. The office of Secretary should take into account the said aspect while deputing a person.

**(b) Technical prowess:** - The person deputed should be comfortable in using phone system, copier, scanner and printer. Basic technical knowledge of using e-mail, etc. should be possessed by the candidate.

**(4) Registers and booklets to be kept and maintained in the Front Office**

Following registers/records are to be maintained in Front Office:

- (i) Front Office Register for visitors
- (ii) Legal Aid Monitoring Register
- (iii) Legal Services Helpline Register These registers can be maintained in soft version in computers on Excel sheets or any other software deemed fit. The suggestive format is provided in the Annexures A to C. In the Front office, shall be kept updated data of court based matters so that legal aid beneficiaries can be apprised about the same. Feedback forms regarding the court based matters be also kept at the Front Office. A suggestive feedback proforma is attached herewith as Annexure D

#### **(5) Daily reporting about case proceedings**

The panel lawyer shall report at the Front Office about the proceedings conducted in the case and the next date and purpose, if the case is adjourned. This shall be reported on daily basis. The communication in this regard to the Front Office may be sent through email also. The office of DLSA shall mark the duty to a PLV in the Front Office to update the information on the record on daily basis under the supervision/guidance of Retainer Lawyers. If a panel lawyer at the end of the day fails to report about the next date of hearing and the proceedings, he be contacted to provide the same on the morning of next day. Panel Lawyers be sensitized about the importance of updating the record at the Front office on daily basis. PLV maintaining the record shall be trained in data entry. In this regard, PLVs and Retainer Lawyers deputed at the Front Office be trained and sensitized to make use of NALSA portal.

#### **(6) Updating legal aid Beneficiaries:-**

Panel Lawyers/Retainer Lawyers/PLVs be trained in updating legal aid beneficiaries regarding court based matters through SMS and Emails. System of updating legal aid beneficiary through SMSs may be adopted. Legal aid beneficiary should be updated about the decision taken on his/her legal aid application, name & phone number of legal aid counsel marked to the applicant in case legal aid is decided to be given. He be regularly updated about the progress of case. Standard format of SMS and Email be devised.

#### **(7) Handling legal Aid Helpline professionally:**

(a) Legal Aid Helpline telephone should be kept in the Front Office. The PLV be trained to attend legal aid calls properly. In case of complex issues, he should refer the call to the panel lawyer/retainer lawyer instead of himself advising on legal matters. With regard to all this, suitable training be provided to PLVs and Retainer Lawyers/ Panel Lawyers who are deputed for the purpose in the Front Office.

(b) Persons deputed for handling legal aid helpline should be courteous and have good communication skills.

(c) In this regard, the following points must be kept in view:-

- i. Answering a call- a pleasant buffer phrase such as “Good Morning” or “Thank you for calling Legal Services Authority” may be used.
- ii. Avoid excuses- Callers want solution. They do not want excuses. If the person handling the legal aid helpline is not capable of advising on a particular legal problem. Then, he should refer the call to the Retainer/Panel lawyers deputed at the Front Office.

**(8) Bare Acts, compilation of welfare schemes etc :-**

In the Front Office, be kept Bare Acts of various important enactments such as Code of Civil Procedure, Code of Criminal Procedure, Indian Evidence Act etc. This is important for ready reference of the panel lawyers. A compilation of welfare schemes of Central and State Government be also kept in the office so that visitors also can get knowledge about the existing welfare schemes.

**(9) Connect with Legal Services Clinics:-**

Front office shall have database of all the Legal Services Clinics including the telephone numbers of the panel advocates and PLVs deputed in the Legal Services Clinics. Any update in the matter falling within the jurisdiction of any Legal Services Clinic be given to the concerned Legal Services Clinic by Front Office so that the legal aid beneficiary escapes from the trouble of travelling to the District or Taluka Headquarters to know about the status of his/her application/case.

**(10) Regular Monitoring of Front Offices**

Regular monitoring be made of Front Offices at the State, District and Taluka Level. At least in a fortnight, registers be checked and interaction be done with the visitors for assessing the working of Front Office. Suggestions, complaints and the feedback forms be dealt and evaluated on regular basis. Remedial steps be taken to remedy the deficiency, if any noticed.

**(11) Maintenance of Digital Record**

Legal Aid applications may be received by way of post, email, web portal or applicant may deliver it in person at the office of Legal Services Authority or in Front Office. The record of all the legal aid applications be maintained at the Front Office. The applications received in hard copy form be scanned

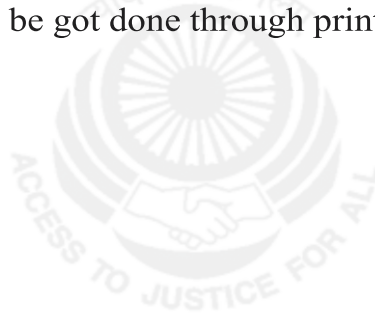
and kept in scanned form in the computer. The same be uploaded on NALSA portal. Record in soft copy form of the notices, replies, representations drafted at the front offices be also kept.

**(12) Assistance of lawyer having expertise in particular branch of law –**

It may happen that the notice to be drafted at the Front Office or legal advice to be rendered may be beyond the specialized field of the Retainer lawyer or panel lawyer deputed at the Front office. In such a scenario, complex legal issues requiring special knowledge of any particular branch of law be referred to the office of Secretary, DLSA which in turn shall depute the lawyers from its panel who are having special knowledge needed to draft the application/ notice or deal with the issue to render correct legal advice.

**(13) Promotional Activities**

Public need to be apprised about the existence of Front office and the various legal services being rendered by Front Office. Hence, adequate publicity of Front Office be got done through print and electronic media.



## FRONT OFFICE REGISTERS (Annexures A)

MONTH \_\_\_\_\_

S. No.	Date	Name & address of visitor	Problem	Action taken	Remarks

## LEGAL AID HELPLINE REGISTER

( Annexure B)

S. No.	Name & address & phone no. of caller	Date & time of call	Problem discussed	Action taken/advice given	Remarks

## LEGAL AID (MONITORING) REGISTER

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

(Annexure C)

S. No.	Title of case	Name of Counsel	Name of Party to whom legal aid given	Previous date	Next date	Purpose to which case adjourned

**Annexure 'D'**

**Feedback Form**

(1) How would you rate the performance of the lawyer assigned to your matter?

- ☐ Bad
- ☐ Average
- ☐ Good
- ☐ Excellent

(2) How responsive was the lawyer who worked on your matter?

- ☐ Bad
- ☐ Average
- ☐ Good
- ☐ Excellent

(3) How were you treated by the members of our staff with whom you came into contact?

- ☐ Bad
- ☐ Average
- ☐ Good
- ☐ Excellent

(4) How would you rate the overall communication on the part of our lawyer/staff?

- ☐ Bad
- ☐ Average
- ☐ Good
- ☐ Excellent

(5) Other Comments.