

LEGAL SERVICES OF SOUTH CENTRAL
MICHIGAN

NATIONAL SUBJECT MATTER INDEX REVIEW
PROJECT—OPINION LEADER INTERVIEWS, USER
RESEARCH AND TAXONOMY REVIEW REPORT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OPINION LEADERS AND USER INTERVIEWS

User research in the form of one-on-one interviews was performed to gather background information on the business context, users and content of the National Subject Matter Index (NSMI). The 20 individuals interviewed included opinion leaders, website content managers, case management intake users, web developers and case management software vendors.

Major Findings

- The fact that the Legal Services XML Group exists only as a collection of volunteers has caused difficulties with the efficient maintenance of the National Subject Matter Index (NSMI).
- There are no clear current plans for implementing information sharing projects and no existing roadmap for how to accomplish such programs, although expediting such information sharing was the impetus behind the creation of the NSMI.
- There is no written maintenance plan for regularly updating the NSMI; users are unaware of the update process for the index.
- Website content managers are often unable to find appropriate codes for tagging content.
- The NSMI has been revised and extended on a local basis to meet the needs of individual legal services programs. These multiple, inconsistent and possibly incompatible versions will impede the efficient sharing of documents.
- The content of the NSMI suffers from granularity, completeness and consistency issues.

Major Recommendations: Short Term

The Legal Services XML Group should:

- Reach out to the legal services community to (1) promote the activities and importance of the Group, (2) raise awareness in the legal services community of the importance of information sharing and (3) educate that community of the need for consistent content tagging.

- With the consultation of an individual with experience and expertise in building controlled vocabularies, undertake a complete ground-up review of the NSMI, revising it to improve consistency of coverage, granularity and terminology. Such a review must include an advisory body with a wide range of representatives from the field to ensure that the end product will be suitable for local use. This revision should include a thorough review of all individual local extensions of the NSMI to ensure that all appropriate additions are included in the revised NSMI.

Major Recommendations: Long Term

The Legal Services XML Group should:

- Be institutionalized so that its important work can be supported with appropriate staff and other administrative and financial resources.
- Involve technology experts in realistic discussions of how information sharing can be implemented in the legal services community. A project plan, including timeline and required resources for the implementation of information sharing projects should be developed.
- For greatest flexibility, develop an online, real-time, web-based interface for the management and maintenance of the index. Such an interface should allow local index users to “reserve” codes for topics currently not covered in the index.
- Develop a process for working with case management software vendors with the view toward having the NSMI included in that software, thus further expanding the opportunity for information sharing using the NSMI.
- Establish a written index maintenance plan outlining specific procedures and responsibilities for updating the index on a regular basis.

Complete findings and recommendations can be found in the main body of the report below.