

# Introduction to A2J Online Intake – Getting Started with the Development Process

Legal Aid Line (LAL) is “live” as a link from the <http://www.legalaidline.org> website:



Legal Aid Line of Western Ohio currently offers three ways to submit your online application for free legal help. All options will be processed in the same amount of time and will provide additional information about your legal problem after completing and submitting the application.

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- 1 Select the **new online application** for an interactive interview process. This easy-to-follow question and answer session will help us better understand your problem so we can give you a more accurate response. We hope you will find our new system easy to use.



## Assumptions:

- The program is familiar with A2J and online document assembly, including HotDocs development
- The program has grant funding or other funding support development

**Note: If you are applying for funding for an online intake project, please include consulting budget for OLAF, NTAP and CALI.**

- A project manager, and project management practices, are in place
- The use of an online project management tool (e.g., Basecamp, Central Desktop, SharePoint) is embraced as a best practice
- An internal intake project team has been identified that will “own” the project from start to finish
- An evaluation (measurement) plan is in place prior to the start of the project

### Tools to Begin

1. Copy of any of the Ohio or Iowa interview “scripts” in Word and the A2J templates from the A2J Author website – [www.a2jauthor.org](http://www.a2jauthor.org)
2. Project manager in place to kick off project.

### Project Management

There are four phases to the development of any project:

**Inception Phase** – The inception phase outlines the goals, objectives, concepts, assumptions, limitations and possible scope of a project or initiative. Meetings with stakeholders are held to understand what is driving the need for the project, costs are reviewed against possible budget requirements, and resources are preliminarily assigned.

**Elaboration Phase** – The elaboration phase focuses on the details of the project, including specific requirements that are needed to complete the project. It also assists in collecting ideas for future phases of development, and, helps to define the clear scope of a particular project.

**Construction Phase** – Nothing is “built” (meaning, actual coding and/or final work and design for a collateral) until stakeholders agree with the desired outcome and goals of a project. (This applies to a website, a marketing collateral piece, or a newsletter.) Once agreement is achieved (through various meetings, conferences and documented actions), and then construction of a project is commenced.

**Testing and Transition Phase** – Beta testing begins once initial construction has been completed. Code is not “locked in” until feedback from beta testers is received and processed by the project team. Once feedback has been incorporated, then final coding (or other artifact or piece of collateral) is completed, and the project is transitioned to users. Finally the next phase of development starts over with the inception phase.

**Tracking Project Progress** – Regular meetings (and online conferences) are held with key stakeholders and tasks are assigned and monitored in accordance to project goals.

It is not uncommon for a project to experience “scope creep”, thus the phased methodology helps keep the project on-task while fostering creative flow of new ideas.

The Ohio team utilizes Basecamp for project management. Used for over two dozen projects, this online system is easy-to-use both by technology staff and legal services advocates. Other systems such as Central Desktop and SharePoint are good tools as well, as is Microsoft’s Project. It doesn’t really matter what project management system you use as long as it (1) fits your needs, and (2) you are comfortable and familiar enough with it that you actually use it over the course of your project.

### **DISCLAIMER:**

A few notes about the Ohio project:

- Ohio template(s) are not connected to a HotDocs template because we do not create a paper version of the intake application. This is why you will not see HotDocs variables, and why there is no component file included with the template.
- Ohio programs host their own A2J interview, with no connection to LHI.
- Ohio templates are customized for the program, and security issues related to these specific pieces may account for the missing files you may encounter. Each and every program will have different in their needs. In an ideal world, we would have the time and resources to create more standardized “templates” for different scenarios, but even with that, there would be customizations that would be required based on program practice (we see this every day as we support six different customized versions of Pika in Ohio).

## **Getting Started**

### **Step 1:**

Review the A2J online intake documentation and other available information on the A2J Author website – see [www.a2Jauthor.org](http://www.a2Jauthor.org) and select “Online Intake” from the left-side navigation.

Participate in the Center for Access to Justice & Technology (CAJT) trainings for online intake offered the third Thursday of each month. You can register for monthly trainings on the [www.a2.author.org](http://www.a2.author.org) website.

### **Step 2:**

Working from something is always easier than working from nothing, so utilizing what has already been done with Iowa, Ohio and other states can make the development process for your program flow in a more efficient manner. To this end, you can

download from the A2J Author website the “script” (in Word) of the interviews and the A2J templates used in Ohio and Iowa.

### **Also consider utilizing Google Docs for collaboration**

Since each program has their own way of conducting an intake, it can be helpful to compare interviews (in Word redline/strike out) side-by-side to see what differences there may be, and to perhaps make changes to the intake process to make it more efficient. During this step, it is advantageous to review and compare the Ohio Legal Aid of Western Ohio (LAWO) A2J interview in Word and the Iowa interview in Word. Then, save either document as your working copy (e.g., Save File As “Program A Draft Intake Interview”) and begin editing it for use in your program.

### Step 3:

Engage your internal intake project team and solicit comments from the group on the working draft of your online interview. The project manager is responsible for facilitating working meetings to help move the interview development process along. Soliciting feedback and documenting the development is the key in getting program buy-in and engagement of the intake team; however, it can also be a very time-consuming activity. It is recommended that the team agree to, and follow through with, meeting on a weekly and/or bi-weekly basis not only during the interview development process, but also throughout the entire project. This helps team stakeholders keep on track and in touch with what is happening at the various stages of the process.

Note: This stage of the process can take days, weeks or even months depending upon the cohesion of the group, the collaboration between group members, and the general turnaround speed of the program working with a new project.

### Step 4:

While your project intake team is developing the interview in Word, you (or your designated staff) should be learning more about how to develop a template using the A2J Authoring tool (see [www.a2jauthor.org](http://www.a2jauthor.org)).

The person(s) responsible for developing the template should be someone that (1) finds this type of project stimulating, and that (2) will be working with the program for quite some time. This second point may not seem to be important, but it is specifically in terms of future changes that will need to be made as your template evolves (which it will). For example, if the person who developed the A2J template is an intern, they will learn the tool but then take the knowledge regarding the template with them when they leave the program.

Note: Most people can pick up a new skill in a short period of time, such as during a training session. However, if the new knowledge is not applied either immediately and/or on a regular basis, the knowledge will be lost. Therefore, don't start the review

of the tutorial information on the A2J Author website until it is closer to actually developing the template from the approved intake interview.

#### Step 5:

Once the interview “script” in Word has been approved by the intake project team, the development of the A2J template can begin. The person responsible for the development will use the Word document to develop the A2J template. Use of an existing A2J template (either Iowa or Ohio) can help short-cut the development process; the person simply modifies the questions as appropriate.

Assistance in specific features of your program can be acquired from viewing trainings and presentation on the [www.a2jauthor.org](http://www.a2jauthor.org) website, attending CAJT monthly New User or Advanced User webinar trainings, or by contacting Dina Nikitaides at CAJT (email: [dnikitaides@kentlaw.edu](mailto:dnikitaides@kentlaw.edu)).

Note: If you are developing an A2J template that will collect information to be inserted into your case management system, then it is a good idea to create an Excel or Google spreadsheet as you progress. At a minimum, you should have three columns on the spreadsheet:

- First Column: Question being asked
- Second Column: Name of the A2J field label, variable and value
- Third Column: Corresponding field in your case management system

The idea of the spreadsheet is to make the transform work, and the integration with your case management system, go faster. If you would like an example spreadsheet, you can email Cynthia Vaughn at [cvaughn@olaf.org](mailto:cvaughn@olaf.org).

#### Step 6:

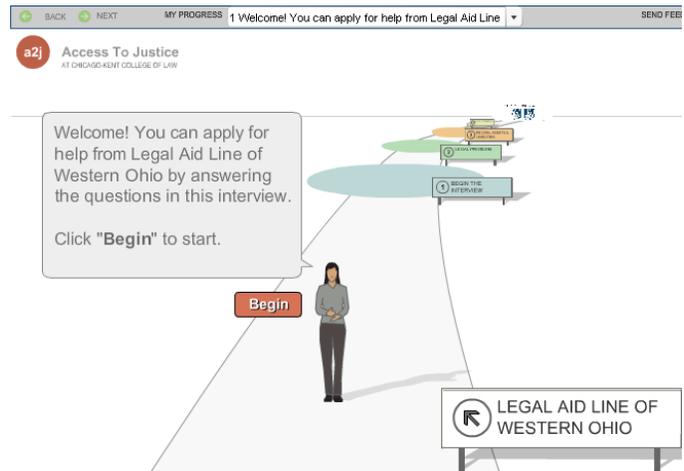
Once the A2J template interview is developed in its “first draft”, the internal team should then begin testing it to see if it “matches” with both the existing intake process and the expected online experience. Modifications will be part of the process, so you should expect to have a lot of revisions at this stage of the development.

Once the final A2J template is approved, then the next step is to create the Full Element Report from within the A2J Authoring tool and emailing to John Mayer at CALI for work to create what is called the transform code (a.k.a., “miracle happens here”). John will create the LS-XML code that will convert the A2J interview into the PHP code that Pika can understand. John’s email is [jmayer@cali.org](mailto:jmayer@cali.org).

**Note: Ohio uses Pika Case Management, so the transform code for Ohio is used to translate the A2J template data into PHP.**

## Step 7:

Your IT administrator will most likely be the person responsible for setting up the A2J template and will create the link to your case management system. Ohio is not using the National HotDocs Server for its programs' A2J intake templates because we are not generating a document. Therefore, each program in Ohio is hosting their respective templates on their own internal Pika servers. See the "Developers Section" of this document for tips for integrating A2J with your case management system.



## Step 8:

Once your A2J template is created, you will need to engage John Mayer at CALI (email [jmayer@cali.org](mailto:jmayer@cali.org)) to write what is called the "transform" for the translation between A2J and your case management system. (Assumption: If you are using John to do your transform work, you will need to contract with him directly for his consulting services.) The transform takes the variable from A2J and translates it into the appropriate variable in your case management system. Below is a sample of what the transform looks like for the LAWO A2J interview:

Saving Data | Access To Justice

<http://pika.olaf.org/ablelawo/a2j/A2JSetData.php>

Access To Justice Saving Data

Acker's xml class

```
stdClass Object
(
    [CLIENTINTAKE] => Array
        (
            [0] => stdClass Object
                (
                    [CLIENTIDENTIFICATION] => Array
                        (
                            [0] => stdClass Object
                                (
                                    [CLIENTIDENTIFIER] => Array
                                        (
                                            [0] =>
                                        )
                                    [PERSONINFORMATION] => Array
                                        (
                                            [0] => stdClass Object
                                                (
                                                    [PERSONNAME] => Array
                                                        (
                                                            [0] => stdClass Object
                                                                (
                                                                    [NAMEPREFIX] => Array
                                                                        (
                                                                            [0] =>
                                                                        )
                                                                    )
                                                                )
                                                            )
                                                        )
                                                    )
                                                )
                                            )
                                        )
                                    )
                                )
                            )
                        )
                    )
                )
            )
        )
    )
```

**Step 9 - Completed Application to Intake Review** – When a user/applicant completes the A2J interview and clicks “Send”, the data from the A2J application is run through the transform and is pushed into a holding table in Pika; an email is sent to the LAWO intake group letting them know there is a new application waiting for review.

**ABLE - LAWO**  
 Pika Home > Cases > Current Case List  
 You are logged in as am

Case List Mode: ▶ My Open Cases ▶ My Closed Cases ▶ All Open and Closed Cases ▶ More Options

Show...  
 Open  
 Closed  
 All

Case Number	Client Name	Status	Staff	Office	Code	Opened	Closed	Funding	Time
LAL-09-44037	Taylor, John M.	Hold	Not-Assigned, ZZZ	Legal Aid Line		7/31/2009			
LAL-09-44039	Taylor, John M.	Hold	Not-Assigned, ZZZ	Legal Aid Line		7/31/2009			
LAL-09-44041	Taylor, John M.	Hold	Not-Assigned, ZZZ	Legal Aid Line		7/31/2009			
LAL-09-44043	Taylor, John M.	Hold	Not-Assigned, ZZZ	Legal Aid Line		7/31/2009			

Case information is “parked” in the staging table in Pika, where a conflict check is run to determine if the case can be accepted into the program’s Pika case database. Below is the screenshot of the conflict check screen.

Pika Home > Case List > LAL-09-44064  
 You are logged in as .

*This case is in the Holding Pen.*

**Clients for LAL-09-44064**  
**Problem:**  
 Aaron Test 092909 Worley  
 Client  
 SSN: 222-33-4444  
 DOB: 2/2/1969  
 10 Main Street  
 Columbus, OHIO 44444  
 Phone: (614) 555-5555  
 Primary Phone Before 12:00 noon

**Opposing Parties for LAL-09-44064**  
 Badguy  
 Opposing Party  
 SSN:  
 DOB:  
 Columbus,  
 Phone: ()

**ADDRESS BOOK MATCHES & CONFLICT CHECKING**

**CLIENTS:**  
**Aaron Test 092909 Worley ssn: 222-33-4444**  
 No SSN matches...  
 Phone Matches (7)

- A Program Test OLAF CV  
 SSN: 555-55-5555 Phone: 555-5555  Use
- Little Program Test CV  
 SSN: 555-44-4444 Phone: 555-5555  Use
- AProgramTestDMJ None DMJ  
 SSN: Phone: 555-5555  Use
- Testadult1 None Test  
 SSN: Phone: 555-5555  Use
- TestChild1 Test  
 SSN: Phone: 555-5555  Use
- Testchild2 Test  
 SSN: Phone: 555-5555  Use

**OPPOSING PARTIES:**  
**Badguy**  
 No SSN matches...  
 Phone Matches (7)  
 Phonetic Matches (2)

- Bad Guy  
 SSN: Phone:  Use
- Badguy  
 SSN: Phone:  Use

Skip Contact  
 Copy Contact

A program intake staff person manually reviews the case for potential conflicts. Note that the only information that is visible to staff is the contact information, potential opposing parties, and the problem (as identified through the answers to the questions in the A2J interview). Then, the case is either accepted into Pika or rejected for conflict. If the case is rejected, the program's written follow up process is invoked. Rejected cases are not deleted but are instead held in a part of the database that is not visible to staff.

ADDRESS BOOK MATCHES & CONFLICT CHECKING	
<b>CLIENTS:</b>	<b>OPPOSING PARTIES:</b>
<b>Aaron Test 092909 Worley ssn: 222-33-4444</b> No SSN matches... <i>Phone Matches (7)</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><u>A Program Test OLAF CV</u> SSN: 555-55-5555 Phone: 555-5555 <input type="radio"/> Use</li> <li><u>Little Program Test CV</u> SSN: 555-44-4444 Phone: 555-5555 <input type="radio"/> Use</li> <li><u>AProgramTestDMJ None DMJ</u> SSN: Phone: 555-5555 <input type="radio"/> Use</li> <li><u>Testadult1 None Test</u> SSN: Phone: 555-5555 <input type="radio"/> Use</li> <li><u>TestChild1 Test</u> SSN: Phone: 555-5555 <input type="radio"/> Use</li> <li><u>Testchild2 Test</u> SSN: Phone: 555-5555 <input type="radio"/> Use</li> <li><u>Testchild3 Test</u> SSN: Phone: 555-5555 <input type="radio"/> Use</li> </ol> No Phonetic matches... <input checked="" type="radio"/> Skip Contact <input type="radio"/> Copy Contact	<b>Badguy</b> No SSN matches... <i>Phone Matches (7)</i> <i>Phonetic Matches (2)</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><u>Bad Guy</u> SSN: Phone: <input type="radio"/> Use</li> <li><u>Badguy</u> SSN: Phone: <input type="radio"/> Use  <input checked="" type="radio"/> Skip Contact  <input type="radio"/> Copy Contact</li> </ol>
<input type="button" value="Accept Case From Holding Pen"/> <input type="button" value="CONFLICT Deny Case"/>	

### Holding Pen and Conflict Checking from A2J to Pika Case Management System (CMS)

Data coming into the case management system from A2J is manipulated (by the programmer) so that the data can be written directly to the Pika system in order to create case data and contact/client information. Then, utilizing built in case management security (and customization unique to the program), these cases and contacts are hidden and/or not accessible to regular CMS users.

See Appendix A - Ohio Sample Code for Integration of Transform with Pika's Holding Pen for information on sample files for this integration.

The case record is then copied and assigned to, in most cases, the office that is responsible for intake, and ear marked in some manner. The parent “case wrapper” file(s) of the CMS are then customized to branch to different screen(s) if the ear mark is present. This is the essence of the holding pen or staging area.

Data needs to be stored to reference the copied case to the original a2j case, so that the contact information can be retrieved from the defacto ‘a2j’ case and presented to the intake worker reviewing the ‘holding pen case’. The CMS is customized or newly designed to perform a fuzzy logic contact match and present the results to the intake worker – this match takes the ‘hidden’ contacts and attempts to find them in the standard address book. The intake worker is then able to review the results and determine if a conflict exists or not. In the screenshot below, the status of the incoming A2J case is “Hold”, and the Office it is assigned to is “A2J”.

The worker is presented with options to ‘use’ the contact that was found (meaning associated that contact to the case once released/accepted), ‘skip’ the contact or ‘copy’ the contact over and assign to the case once released/accepted.

Once all contacts have been assigned an action (use, skip, copy, etc) the case is then able to be released from the holding pen, or other options, such as ‘deny for conflict’, ‘delete’, etc, also exist based on individual program workflow or procedures. When released the ear mark is removed and all applicable contacts are associated to the newly released case and the CMS will now display all ‘standard’ case handler screens.

**Step 10:** Once the case is accepted by intake staff, the data fields in Pika are populated based on answers in the A2J interview, AND based on the specific Pika customization for the program.

**ABLE - LAWO**  
 Pika Home > Cases > LAL-09-44064

Citizenship Status is Blank  
  Funding Code is Blank  
  Income Info is Blank  
  LSC Problem Code is B

**CASE SUMMARY**   Notes   Conflict   Assets   Liabilities   Scheduler   **Case Info**   Documents

**Hold**   VAWA   ProBono   Lit.   Compen   Compliance

**ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION**

**ACTIONS**

- ▶ [Popup Timer](#)
- ▶ [Add Tickle](#)
- ▶ [Add LSC Other Matter](#)
- ▶ [Transfer this case](#)
- ▶ [Duplicate this case](#)
- ▶ [Delete this case](#)
- ▶ [Archive this case](#)
- ▶ [LITC Info](#)
- ▶ [Foreclosure Screen](#)
- ▶ [Add to this case:](#)
  - Client:
  - First:
  - Middle:
  - Last (or Org. Name):

Case Number: LAL-09-44064  
 Case Status: Hold  
 Disposition:   
 Date Disposition Determined:   
 Date File Opened: 9/29/2009  
 Office: Legal Aid Line  
 Primary Client: 13360729  
 LAL Transfer:

Primary Counsel: Not-Assigned, ZZZ  
 Co-counsel #1 (in-house):   
 Co-counsel #2 (in-house):   
 Co-counseled with ABLE, LAWO, VLP, TBA   
 Undup. Service:   
 LSC-CSR   
 OLAF-CSR   
 Other   
 Court File Number:   
 No Call Back:

In terms of follow up with an applicant, the standard practice for LAWO is 24 to 48 hours. From this point forward, the applicant is processed using current intake practices.

Handling Rejections – If an applicant is rejected for conflict or eligibility, the conflict rejection letter is printed automatically and will be sent out by the intake manager. The rejection letter itself is in the document assembly section of Pika, but staff just see's the letter come up as part of the integration with Pika.

## **Developers Section**

Test the data mapping (spreadsheet) of A2J variables with Pika variables in the program's database directly BEFORE installing the Holding Pen (conflict check) code. This is to ensure that the interview data is being populated correctly in the right field in Pika.

The data coming in from A2J needs to be stored in somewhere. This can either be separate tables or in the existing Pika core tables. The logical place to store it is in Pika itself as Pika already has code to handle case and contact operations. By storing the data here you can re-use much of the existing code to perform the contact matches, and various other case/contact record manipulations. These contact records are hidden and cannot be retrieved by users of Pika, the case record should then be only accessible to users belonging to the 'system' group (which should be like 3 people).

The case record then is copied (status changes to 'a2j pending') but without any of the client associations and placed in the pen, this is the only way to bring data over and make it accessible to the masses, but give the user control to review the contacts and do the conflict check.

The A2J case record remains, at this point, as a "just in case it needs to be referred back to" or for "insurance" purposes but it could be removed once the auto transfer/copy is done, so you never see it.

## **Setting Up "Offices" for A2J in Pika – Questions & Answers**

Question: Which office do I choose in Pika to review A2J applications (from your search screen) and why should I do it that way?

Answer: You can setup and choose the A2J office so that you can clearly see which cases they are, and that they have no overlap with anything else. An option is to use a "status" check to pull up the list of cases. You can then change the status to "accepted" if you take the case, so the A2J case disappears.

Question: Why are the conflict check screen buttons labeled like they are (in the screenshots)?

Answer: We want to be able to accept a case or to pull up a letter and delete the case. Note that if the case is deleted, it will still be there as a transferred case.

## **Setting Up Security for A2J Online Intake with Pika Case Management**

Each legal aid program has different network, system, databases and tools setup to support their practice. As such, **there is no “cookie-cutter solution” for integration of A2J with case management systems**, so each program IT person will need to work through their own individual access and security configurations.

### **Example of Security Setup**

The following is an example of how one Ohio program setup their security for access to the program's A2J interview online.

*“I took Pika [case management] out of the equation all together and created a virtual site in Apache for A2J. The document root of that site is set to the /pika/a2j folder. If a user happens to go to a2j.legalaid.org without the path to the A2J Viewer, they will be redirected to a secure site (<https://>) and are informed that access is forbidden.*

*Next, I used an iFrame (or wrapper) to pull A2J up as a page that is embedded in our website. The users will see <https://www.legalaid.org/index.php/a2j> but never see the actual address for A2J (a2j.legalaid.org/a2jViewer).*

*[In addition], I purchased a UCC certificate from Go Daddy (\$79/yr) that covers 5 sites and multiple servers. That way I could use it on all of the virtual servers and on my Exchange server.”*

**Management of A2J Interviews** – The A2J data written to your case management system can be purged as part the acceptance process or at regular maintenance intervals. Note that typically only IT staff has access to all of the data in the system, and that no intake staff has the level of access that an IT person does, so there shouldn't be any unauthorized viewing of confidential case information.

If you have other questions about the Ohio project, contact:

Cynthia Vaughn, Statewide Technology Project Manager  
Ohio Legal Assistance Foundation  
10 West Broad Street, Suite 950  
Columbus, OH 43215  
614-728-6930  
Email [cvaughn@olaf.org](mailto:cvaughn@olaf.org)

If you have other questions about the Iowa project, contact:

Eve Ricaurte  
Managing Attorney  
East Iowa Intake and Pro Se Projects  
Iowa Legal Aid  
736 Federal Street, Suite 2426  
Davenport, IA 52803  
800-532-1275 ext 1670  
Email [ericaurte@iowalaw.org](mailto:ericaurte@iowalaw.org)

## Appendix A

### Ohio Sample Code for Integration of Transform with Pika's Holding Pen

For Ohio -- John Mayer wrote the transform code from the A2J interview so that OLAF could populate the variable fields in Pika. Check with John Mayer on the status of his work with other case management providers such as Legal Server and Legal Files' in writing transforms for various programs. You will need to get an estimate from him for his transform work.

There are two files available (one for LAWO and one for Columbus) that are SAMPLE code that can be inserted into a program's Pika CMS. The files contain the two existing files for both programs using it in Ohio, as well as the "Pika conduit" file. These files can be opened in notepad or wordpad.

In terms of the holding pen in Pika – This is a function within Pika. The A2J data-to-Pika's holding pen was a customization for both LAWO and Columbus. Because each program's case management system is different, each program's IT person (or a programmer from either the case management software vendor or contracted) needs to make all the systems work together.

There is NOT a "one-size-fits-all" piece of code that makes everything run; it's a process of "A2J interview data – to – Transform code (based on program CMS)– to – case management system staging table/holding pen". The holding pen connects to the CMS conflict check system, which is customized based on the CMS and the program.

However, Ohio does have "sample code" files that are the conduit for the integration of the transform code in with Pika's holding pen and conflict check functionality. When you are ready for the construction and integration of the transform code into your case management system, contact Cynthia Vaughn and she will email the files to you.

Note: Customized programming for programs outside Ohio is not available from OLAF.

As of the writing of this document, Legal Files and Legal Server are charging programs for the customization coding done after the transform is run. Vendors have the capability to integrate the functionality, but charge a programming consulting fee to programs to "plug things in" based on that program's particular configuration, security, etc.