

Weekly Report 1/13/10

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### Public Libraries and Access to Justice Conference

Young, with Melanie Solon, Law Librarian, Berks County Court of Common Pleas Law Library, and Jane Sullivan, Trainer for the Berks County Library System, attended the Public Libraries and Access to Justice Conference, held in Austin, TX, funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Solon wrote the grant application and Julie Rinehart asked Young to participate because of her role in coordinating continuing education in PA.

Forty-three applications were submitted, but only 13 teams were chosen, so Solon and Young were surprised and pleased that they were awarded the grant.

The conference presentations were enlightening regarding the tremendous “access to justice” needs of people with limited finances who cannot, or choose not, to hire an attorney. Other information, such as what constitutes “advice” and legally what can and cannot be shared with a litigant was very interesting.

In addition to presenting what is currently being done in other states, a main purpose of the conference was to encourage cooperation among law libraries, other organizations that provide law information, and public libraries so that resources could be shared and become more accessible to the public.

Teams from each state were given the task to develop a plan to improve access to legal information through public libraries. Young, Solon and Sullivan developed a plan to create web resources that both law librarians and public librarians can access and to offer workshops to train librarians to use the web resources. Here is the plan that the team developed:

- In February, PA law librarians will be invited to a meeting where they will be asked what resources, pathfinders, forms or documents they have already developed that could be shared with public libraries on Web Junction. Randall Tenor will also be invited.
- Melanie Solon will review the law librarians’ documents and links and forward those that are relevant to Young to put on the HSLC website.
- In May, workshops will be held for reference librarians, law librarians, System trainers, and other librarians interested in learning about the newly developed law resources on the PA Web Junction page. Law librarians will be invited so that the public librarians can meet them. Melanie Solon will be a trainer and Hank Leone

of [www.palawhelp.org](http://www.palawhelp.org) will also be asked. After training public librarians on how to use the resources, Jane Sullivan will facilitate a conversation with the public librarians to see if they have any other needs regarding answering the types of law questions that patrons ask them.

- After the workshops, law librarians will meet a second time to discuss developing further web resources that might fill the needs expressed by the public librarians.