



Connecting Access to Advocacy: Technology Strategies to Build Community Power and Participation

Note taker: Ari Rivera

Speakers:

Panelists:

- Georges Clement, Co-Founder and Executive Director, JustFix.nyc
- Elizabeth Joynes Jordan, Deputy Legal Director, Make the Road New York
- David Rodriguez Andino, Attorney and Access to Justice Technology Coordinator, Ayuda Legal Puerto Rico, Inc

Moderator:

- Rodrigo Camarena, Director, Immigration Advocates Network

Notes:

From Session Guide:

“This panel will share three examples of digital tools designed to help communities, organizers and advocates know and shape laws and policies that impact them. Panelists will discuss how co-design technology and data can help connect individual casework and legal support with systemic advocacy, and what we are learning from these efforts to inform similar efforts in the field moving forward.”

Introduction: Rodrigo Camarena, Director, [Immigration Advocates Network](http://immigrationadvocatesnetwork.org/)

- Each panelist has experience in using digital tools in organizing advocacy efforts and engaging in participatory design to advance their missions

Panel:

Georges Clement, Co-Founder and Executive Director, JustFix.nyc

Approach to Co-design

- JustFix: Around 4-5 years and initially focused on housing issues and presenting cases in housing court - though found mission was much broader than this
- Asking how they can fill in gaps in service delivery alongside the legal aid community and leaders in the housing justice / tenant organizing community
- Trying to make complex processes simpler and more accessible for those seeking assistance
- In considering co-design, leaned on meeting in-person through workshops and panels and in this time had to focus on how to replicate this during Covid and how to adapt and find alternative ways to do outreach and organize
- Being creative in outreach:
 - WhatsApp
 - Convening a group over Zoom to creatively inform their products
- Reach out if interested in the design process!

Current Work

- Felt a need to step up at start of pandemic focusing on:
 - Loss of income from being laid off and subsequent fear of not being able to make rent
 - Those who needed significant apartment repairs now not being able to leave the home as a health precaution
- Using JustFix able to file using computer/phone/tablet without having to be in court
 - Around 2500 cases filed during pandemic period
- Partnering with others, for example SAJE collaboration in Los Angeles
- Additionally considering how to get latest info available to people, such as with eviction moratorium updates
 - How to quickly interpret and vet updated information
 - Translating and making this accessible
- Tackling general distrust of tech sector by communities they are seeking to assist

Leveraging Open Data Case Example

- Problem: Issue of finding other buildings across city that a problem landlord owns when each building is its own LLC
- Solution:
 - Applying investigative strategies across datasets
 - Mapped out complete corporate portfolios
- Additional Considerations:
 - Debunking myth of mom & pop landlords when many who claimed this were in fact part of bigger groups
 - Coordinating rent strikes across multiple buildings to create leverage

Elizabeth Joynes Jordan, Deputy Legal Director, [Make the Road New York](#)

Current Work During Pandemic

- Make the Road:
 - Membership based community organization, with 24k members across NY with mission to obtain dignity and justice
 - Combine organizing and direct service (immigration, housing and workplace justice)
- Organization is very much community based and driven so loss of meeting in-person strongly felt
 - Was able to start food distribution using a mutual aid model
- Moved services online for pandemic, including meetings and intake
 - Facebook Live webinars with a reach for hundreds of viewers live, and thousands recorded as watching post-stream
- Calls doubled once Covid hit
- Many members are essential workers
- Had to address issues including: being asked to go to unsafe workplaces, housing issues, where people could get food as a result of Covid-19 impact
- Services designed around needs being heard from the community
- Prioritized producing Know Your Rights resources and FAQs
 - As laws were coming out
 - Translation into Spanish
- Addressing additional resulting issues:
 - Clients not having access to wifi
 - Trying to collaborate using digital tools where not all participants may have the same levels of access (Ex. using Zoom)
 - Building client trust over Zoom

- Privacy concerns, especially while talking with members about traumatic experiences
- Upcoming highlight:
 - Priority fight to get Governor Cuomo to fund excluded workers, affecting most of their membership

Reclamo!: Organizing Efforts and Using Data

- Partnership with Immigration Advocates Network
- Developing *Reclamo!*, an app envisioned to be used by non-lawyer advocates to assist in tackling wage theft
 - Expected to be widely shared and not limited to use by Make the Road NY
 - Pilot tool designed for NY state, but hope is one day will go beyond to other states and partner organizations - reach out if interested in partnering!
- User goes through interview and tool populates a demand letter for their employer and complaint letter to the Department of Labor
- Also a Know Your Rights tool
- Wage theft is an issue Make the Road has been working on for decades and an issue heavily impacting immigrants
- Considerations:
 - Which locations are most affected
 - Engaging advocates not only with direct usage of the tool, but also in tackling wage theft issue more broadly

David Rodriguez Andino, Attorney and Access to Justice Technology Coordinator,
[Ayuda Legal Puerto Rico](#)

Background and Current Work

- Ayuda Legal Puerto Rico: creating systemic change through social justice
- Started work in 2015 in launching first and only statewide legal information guide for Puerto Rico in collaboration with Pro Bono Net and LawHelp Interactive
 - Initially faced some pushback from outsiders saying this wasn't needed, but today, particularly amidst the pandemic, it is clear that it is a widely used and necessary tool
- Reaching people concerning their rights and accessing benefits
- Have expanded live chat services with additional hires to five days a week, assisting thousands during the pandemic

- Notably, while other state websites were down, with heavy pandemic traffic Ayuda Legal was up and running
- Organization was able to compare and be informed by traffic and usage during the pandemic versus prior events such as during Hurricane Maria
- Upcoming highlights:
 - Tool assessing risk of foreclosure and connecting them with legal services providers, a co-design project with Pro Bono Net
 - Working more in next year on tenants' rights

Approach in Engaging Community

- Co-design important to them and something they try to implement across projects
 - Ex. creating content based on what questions are coming up from users in the live chats
- “The solution will come from the community.”
- Tech tools are not the endpoint and is a part of changing the system
 - Ex. celebrating open approach of the JustFix platform so others can be practically informed by their work

Resources Shared:

- Slack Channel:
https://decolonizingjustice.slack.com/join/shared_invite/zt-j41huvtg-dQjFnejoXKKANeM3Nhd4FQ#
- Decolonizing Justice Resource Guide:
<https://www.probono.net/decolonizingjustice/>
- From Ariadna Godreau Aubert: “Some of the work that David has been leading at Ayuda Legal is captured here, including portals to socialize info on issues such as migration, COVID-19, disasters and more: www.ayudalegalpr.org”
- Connecting Justice Communities Blog - [Reclamo!: Accessing Workplace Justice through Co-Design](#)
- NYC Worst Evictors created in partnership with the Right to Counsel Coalition here: <https://www.worstevictorsnyc.org/>
- Justfix.nyc's Who Owns What site: <https://whoownswhat.justfix.nyc/en/>
- Decolonizing Justice Resource Guide:
<https://www.probono.net/decolonizingjustice/>