

# **LAW FIRM LIBRARY PRIORITIES FOR 2022 AND BEYOND: ENHANCING CLIENT SERVICE DELIVERY AND FIRM OPERATIONS SUPPORT**







## INTRODUCTION

The abrupt shift to a virtual environment over the past two years made law firm leaders acutely aware of the valuable role that library/information service departments play in their firms. When COVID-19 lockdowns forced us into remote working conditions, law librarians quickly shifted into 24/7 providers of legal research services and access, which quite literally kept the firm working.

While 2020 was a year in which legal information professionals reacted to change, 2021 was a year in which they began to rethink those changes to evaluate which shifts were temporary and which ones are likely to be permanent. We believe 2022 will be the time to capitalize on the gains made and further the level and reach of service provision.

HBR's 2021 whitepaper "[Are you Maximizing the Value of Your Firm's Library? Three Law Firm Library Areas to Prioritize](#)" laid out three recommendations for maximizing a law firm library's value, strategically positioning both the department and the firm for the future. Those priorities included cost management, talent and service delivery, and client-centric focus. One year later, our recommendations build on those priorities, evolving to reflect the changing market conditions and offer new considerations for maximizing value in the year ahead.



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## PRIORITIES FOR 2022 AND BEYOND

This is a time of unprecedented opportunity for the library. Most notably, we believe that the library's role in client service delivery should be the focus for 2022 and beyond. Because of their sophisticated research skills, information professionals are well-positioned to help firms gain a competitive advantage through direct and indirect support of the firm's clients.



### RECOMMENDED LAW FIRM LIBRARY PRIORITIES

2022

1

#### OPTIMIZATION OF CLIENT SERVICES

Supporting the firm's clients either directly or indirectly

2

#### CROSS-FUNCTIONAL COLLABORATION

Collaboration between operational functions enabling productivity and efficiency

3

#### EVOLUTION OF LIBRARY STRUCTURE + ROLES

Maximizing operational benefits via the transformation of the operating model

2021

1

#### COST MANAGEMENT

2

#### TALENT + SERVICE DELIVERY

3

#### CLIENT-CENTRIC FOCUS

There are also multiple emerging opportunities for the firm's information professionals within the library to more directly support the firm's operations via cross-collaboration initiatives. These opportunities can become reality if law firm leaders support the transformation of the structure and function of their library departments.

We will unpack these strategic priorities in the pages that follow. Law firms that act upon these recommendations will more fully leverage their investment in the library and set themselves up to have a strategic advantage over their competitors.



## OPTIMIZATION OF CLIENT SERVICES

As law firms seek to differentiate themselves from their competitors, the library can and should support the firm's client service efforts beyond providing traditional legal research. This requires cultivation of a client-centric focus within the department, in which law firm library leadership considers ways to leverage the strengths of the department and its professionals to advance initiatives that directly and indirectly support the firm's clients. Identifying these opportunities will require library leadership to be attuned with the firm's client service needs and to think creatively about how the library's unique capabilities can contribute to the firm's support of those needs.

Following are a few examples of opportunities where the library can support client services in non-traditional ways:

### DIVERSITY AND ESG ISSUES

Environmental, social and governance (ESG) issues—as well as diversity, equity, and inclusion—continue to be a priority for law firms and their clients. There has been [a recognition of the lack of diversity and equity at Big Law](#), and the legal space has seen “a growing number of major global companies” indicate “[they'll take their work elsewhere](#) or cut fees unless they see more racial and gender diversity in the law firms they hire.” Clients' diversity requirements extend beyond requiring diverse talent on their legal

matters; they also often want their firms to promote supplier diversity and track other ESG metrics. Law firm libraries have an opportunity to help the firm achieve these goals through research avenues such as investigating supplier policies, not just within the library but firm-wide or by providing the firm with business and competitive intelligence, such as industry and peer group statistics, which may prove helpful when responding to RFPs. In addition to supporting the firm's DEI and ESG efforts, the library can also indirectly serve clients in these areas by, for example, establishing news alerts that allow attorneys to monitor social issues important to their clients and key sectors.

### RESOURCE CENTERS AND SELF-SERVICE TOOLS

The pandemic saw the emergence of COVID-19 resource centers on many firm websites, where clients could find articles, litigation trackers, regulatory updates, and more. Centers like these provide a value-add for clients looking to navigate a rapidly changing legal landscape, and firms can establish them on a range of topics of interest to their clients. The firm's information professionals can assist with recommending and/or curating content for these client-facing resource centers.

Similarly, as the “digital native” generations increase their presence throughout the professional world—and bring their tech-savviness with them—some law firms are exploring ways to provide clients with self-service forms or apps that support alternative fee arrangements or combat competition from cheaper legal providers by allowing clients to easily

find answers to recurring simple, straightforward issues. These are often quicker options for clients and less expensive for firms, once set up, because they don't necessarily involve lawyer time. The firm's information professionals can support these projects via the identification of vendors, robust testing, and gathering of feedback, as well as finding third-party data that can be added.

## CROSS-FUNCTIONAL COLLABORATION

Greater internal collaboration supports efficient law firm operations. By taking a fresh look at how the firm's information professionals currently engage or could engage not just with the firm's fee earners, but also with other operational departments, the firm can improve productivity and reduce the chances for redundancy of efforts.

[Bloomberg Law's](#) 2021 Legal Operations Survey reported that 82% of lawyers surveyed believe multidisciplinary teams can consist solely of licensed attorneys from different practice areas and seniority levels. Collaboration only among fee earners, however, omits a wider swath of the firm's professionals, including support staff who can help address client issues, solve unique firm challenges, and identify business development opportunities.

Some examples of cross-department collaboration where the library can make a strong contribution include:

### INTEGRATED WORKFLOWS

Administrative groups such as new business intake, docketing, records and retention, information governance, pitches and proposals, and many more could benefit from a librarian's skills in the areas of information management and research. Rather than working in silos, these groups should examine key workflows to understand where an information professional could add value to the process. Some examples include identifying key risks during the new business intake process via investigative research or monitoring legislative changes to

enhance information governance efforts. Similarly, their combined knowledge of available information and the firm's strategies can greatly contribute to competitive intelligence insights that can be leveraged for a variety of marketing and business development efforts. Overall, such collaboration serves to streamline internal processes while providing internal efficiencies.

### DATA CURATION AND MANAGEMENT

In 2022, firms are looking for ways to leverage or manage their data to benefit their clients. Do not overlook the contributions that law firm information professionals might make in these efforts. Projects such as locating internal work product that can be used for machine learning, exploring new ways to leverage internal data and practice intelligence through tools such as SharePoint portals, and the development and management of taxonomies are all areas where their skillsets may benefit the firm. For example, to create useful taxonomies, natural language processing tools must be "trained"; librarians' facility with the use of language and alternate search terms ideally suits them for this role. Similarly, the firm can leverage the department when considering the creation of KM tools and programs, either with a vendor or in-house.

### SOFTWARE OR RESOURCE PROCUREMENT AND ADOPTION

Because librarians access and utilize an extensive number of databases, tools, and systems on a daily basis, they are in a unique position to assist with the firm's technology procurement efforts. For example, they can keep firm leadership updated regarding new tools, beta test products under review, assist with user adoption efforts and training where needed, and support the sunsetting of tools when appropriate.

### INNOVATION

Information professionals are well-positioned to lead or, at a minimum, participate in firm innovation initiatives. The skill sets of the law firm librarian can be leveraged to support these initiatives including APIs, document automation, AI/machine learning projects, data analytics, and more.





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## **EVOLUTION OF THE LIBRARY STRUCTURE AND ROLES**

The third area of opportunity is to further explore strategies for transforming the library department itself, including its structure and operating model. This requires a careful evaluation of the library's talent and service delivery model to ensure the right resources are being deployed to support the firm's strategies in both the short and long terms. An assessment of what the department does and who is doing it is a good place to start.

Building on our 2021 whitepaper, some specific strategies to consider in 2022 include:

### **OUTSOURCING**

The delegation or outsourcing of less-complex tasks, such as article retrieval, in order to free up the firm's librarians and data analysts for higher-value research projects, should be the first priority. We are already seeing this occur organically: Outsourcing of document retrieval grew from 13% in 2020 to 26% in 2021, according to [HBR's 2021 BLISS survey](#), as more

information services teams are being asked to deliver in-depth legal and non-legal research to support practice groups.

### **LEADERSHIP TRANSITION**

One-third of law firms are expecting departures and/or retirements from their library departments in the near term and nearly 50% believe these will occur in the next three years, per HBR's 2021 BLISS survey. This is a significant amount of turnover in the leadership ranks unlike anything that has occurred in the past. Firms should start succession planning well before any gaps in leadership occur. This planning should include a potential reimagining of the leadership role and overall department structure. It may also include a consideration of where within the organization the department should be aligned.

### **REMOTE WORKFORCE SUPPORT**

As the walls of the traditional office continue to disappear, so too will the traditional business hours during which research assistance is expected. Three out of four law firms expect their use of office space to decrease in the near future and more than one



in four expect that to be a “significant” decrease, according to [HBR’s 2021 Workplace of the Future survey](#). The law firm library function must evolve to support this permanent shift to a more remote workforce by increasing outreach to those not working in an office through efforts such as virtual trainings and research consultations. Savvy firms are already ahead of the curve on this emerging need, with a 50% increase last year in the number of library departments that offer full support on weekends, a 64% increase in those that offer support in the early-morning hours, and a 40% increase in those that offer full services during late-night hours, according to the 2021 BLISS survey.

## EVOLUTION OF ROLES

A fresh look at the specific roles and how they are defined and staffed within the information services department is imperative to enable support of law firms of the future. Momentum for knowledge management projects and competitive intelligence roles will continue to gain speed over the next year. Researchers may be tasked with becoming subject-matter specialists, using the opportunity to increase focused outreach to remote workers through efforts like virtual trainings. Firms should consider creating new roles and job descriptions for library department staff members dedicated to data analysis and curation, content creation, practice area research, and other roles to support the firm’s broader needs.



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## CONCLUSION

The law firm library is one of the areas within the law firm ecosystem that proved its value is greater than ever amid the disruption of the past two years. Law firm librarians can play an even more dynamic role in the growth of their firms in 2022 and beyond if leadership teams are willing to think carefully about how these strategically valuable departments evolve.

There are immediate opportunities in 2022 to leverage the strengths of information professionals to serve the firm's clients in innovative ways, collaborate across the firm to better support lawyers and professional staff, and transform the department's day-to-day operations to position the library for the future. Law firm leaders that rethink the function of their library departments for the changing marketplace—and leverage the unique value these teams can deliver—will be well-positioned to secure a competitive advantage for their firms in the future.

## CONNECT WITH OUR EXPERTS

HBR provides a range of services to law firm libraries, including strategic guidance, expense management, analytics, operations services, and research services. If you would like to discuss the priorities outlined here, please contact one of our experts.



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