











LANC Innovation Lab Project Overview: LIA (Legal Information Assistant) *Last Updated: June 2025*



[Click here to watch a video overview of LIA!](#)

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What is LIA?

The Legal Information Assistant (LIA) — pronounced “Leah” — is LANC’s AI-powered virtual legal assistant chatbot designed to help the public navigate common civil legal problems. LIA provides 24/7, bilingual, conversational assistance via a chat interface, guiding users through issues like housing, public benefits, family law, and more.

LIA supports our mission by increasing access to justice for clients who may face barriers such as limited internet literacy, geographic isolation, or eligibility constraints for direct services. Funding for this project was provided by a private donation from an Innovation Lab Advisory Board member.

User Interface & Usage Flow

- Users interact with LIA via a chat-style interface on legalaidnc.org.
- Options include selecting pre-defined prompts in blue tabs or typing custom questions such as “*What are my rights as a tenant?*”
- LIA gives structured responses, highlights key points, and links to self-help resources, legal clinics, and other LANC services.
- The chatbot automatically translate and respond in Spanish and potentially many other languages in the future.

Example Use Cases

1. *Tenant eviction scenario*: LIA guides a user on what to do if being evicted, appeal options, and what documents are needed.
2. *Court preparation*: Offers guidance on how to dress, punctuality, and etiquette.
3. *Spanish-language query*: LIA correctly understands and responds to a child custody question posed in Spanish.
4. *Low-literacy input*: LIA handles vague or typo-ridden queries like “*I got go cort what i do*” by understanding the intent and delivering useful responses.

Why LIA? Identifying the Need

LANC faces a growing demand for legal help, with limited staffing and funding to address every case. Research and community feedback revealed:

- Thousands of North Carolinians struggle with legal problems but never connect with an attorney.
- Many of our web visitors seek answers outside of standard office hours.
- Staff time is often consumed by repetitive questions or administrative intake tasks.
- Many North Carolinians need easier access to basic legal information and education that hasn’t yet escalated to a need for direct representation yet.

LIA was created to fill these gaps—offering a consistent, accurate, and client-friendly resource to guide users toward information and services that might otherwise be inaccessible.

The Philosophy Behind LIA

The guiding principles of LIA’s development include:

- *Access First*: Every design decision centers on increasing equity in legal access.
- *Client Empowerment*: LIA aims not to replace human help but to empower users to understand and act on their own behalf.
- *Transparency & Trust*: We disclose when users are interacting with AI and explain its limits.
- *Ethical Use of AI*: All tools and platforms used in LIA’s development were vetted to ensure privacy, security, and responsible data practices.
- *Plain Language*: LIA speaks in clear, everyday terms to make legal issues understandable and navigable.

Development

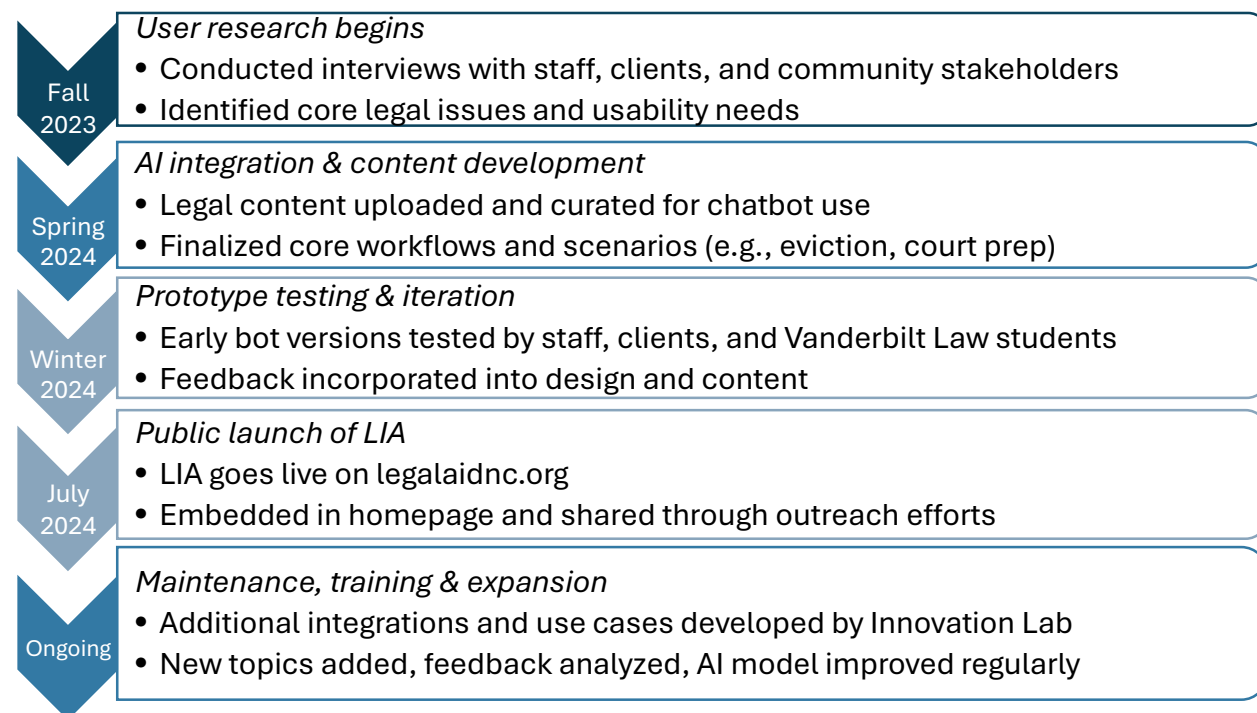
LIA was developed through a collaborative, cross-practice group effort led by the Innovation Lab in partnership with technology vendor LawDroid and

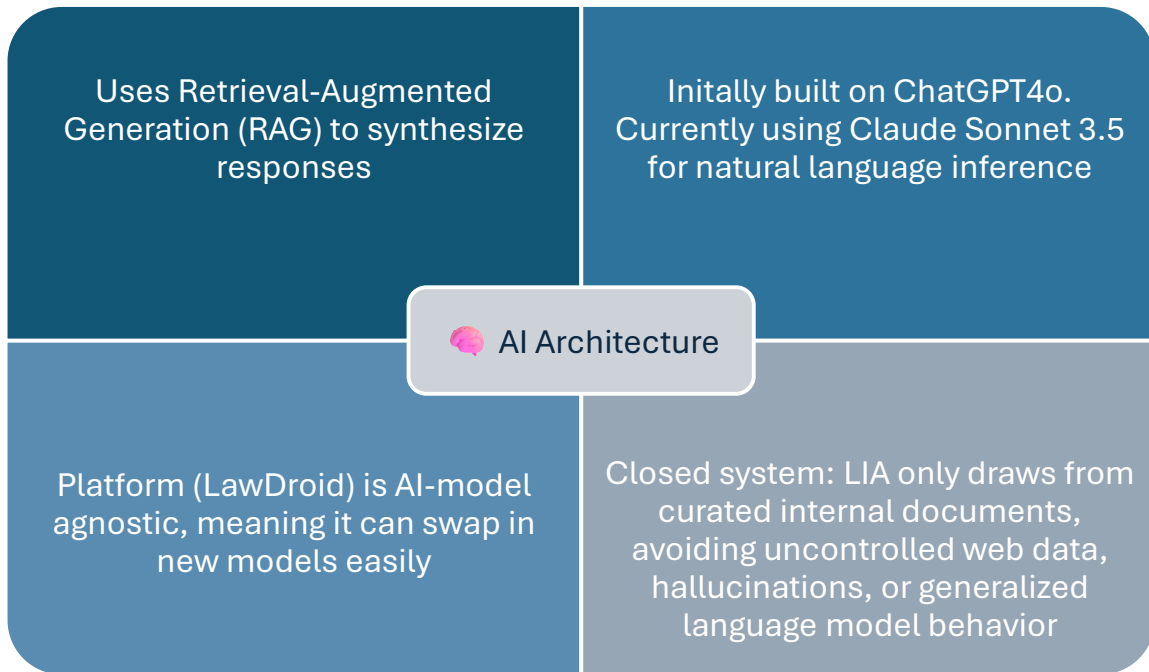


LANC's technology, content, and client-serving teams. LIA's development followed an iterative process informed by direct feedback, with the current version—iteration 8—refined over time based on usability input and system performance.

Team Member(s)	Role
Scheree Gilchrist, LANC CINO	Innovation Lab Lead
LawDroid – Tom Martin , Founder/CEO	AI Development Lead
Priceless Misc – Justin Ruckman, Partner	Website Developer
Helen Hobson, LANC CCO	Communications Lead, procured and refined resource materials; helped with readability and accessibility
LANC Practice Group Managers & Staff	Legal content generation, use cases, and review
LANC Client Council	Idea development, use cases, beta-testing, and feedback
LANC Compliance & General Counsel	Ensured responses align with regulations
Law Students – Vanderbilt University AI Law Lab	User experience, beta testing, and feedback

Development Timeline





How Content Was Created

LANC staff review and transitioned self-help resources already developed available on their website into Word documents, organized by legal topics. These documents were then uploaded to LawDroid's backend, forming LIA's knowledge base. The legal topics chosen to be included in the base were the most common issues among our client communities and services. New knowledge can be added to the base as needed, such as disaster relief information post-Hurricane Helene in Western North Carolina in Fall 2024 which was made available for public use only a few days after the storm initially hit.

Maintenance

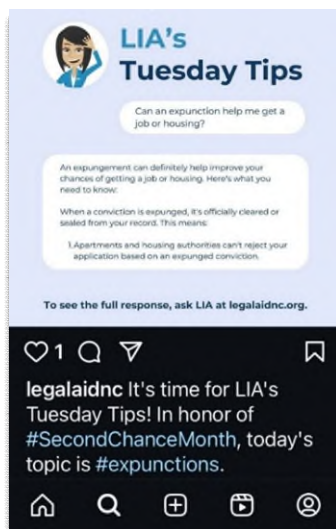
LIA is maintained by the LANC Chief Communications Officer and Innovation Lab Program Manager & Staff Attorney with support from content owners across practice areas who ensure that legal information remains accurate and up to date. Technology partners provide platform support and handle technical questions, while analytics and UX reviewers occasionally monitor user sessions to identify usage trends or content gaps. LANC staff are able to manage updates to the knowledge base by editing Word documents, allowing them to add or delete content without any coding required. Routine reviews of the knowledge base are conducted by the Lab in coordination with the broader review of LANC's self-help materials and the general information and resources provided by the Central Intake Unit.

Limitations & Ethical Safeguards

LIA is explicitly not a lawyer and cannot provide legal advice. It consistently presents a clear disclaimer at the beginning of each session and embeds cautionary language in its responses to reinforce this distinction. When a query falls outside of its knowledge base, LIA is intentionally programmed to respond with “I don’t know” rather than speculate or fabricate an answer. This “cautious design” helps reduce the risk of legal liability and aims to mitigate concerns about unauthorized practice of law (UPL). While this conservative approach may occasionally frustrate users seeking more detailed guidance, it is a deliberate safeguard to ensure that interactions remain within ethical and legal boundaries.

LIA also operates as a closed system, meaning it does not search the internet or use generalized large language model (LLM) knowledge. This design avoids the introduction of misinformation, AI “hallucinations,” and unauthorized or inaccurate legal advice. Instead, LIA delivers reliable, jurisdiction-specific information that is drawn solely from carefully vetted internal resources. To further protect against UPL and the dissemination of inaccurate content, LIA’s responses are built from static, expert-approved materials that are routinely reviewed by Legal Aid staff. By limiting the scope of its capabilities to well-defined, pre-approved knowledge, and by enabling only trained staff to update this content, LIA strikes a careful balance between innovation and the ethical obligations of legal service providers.

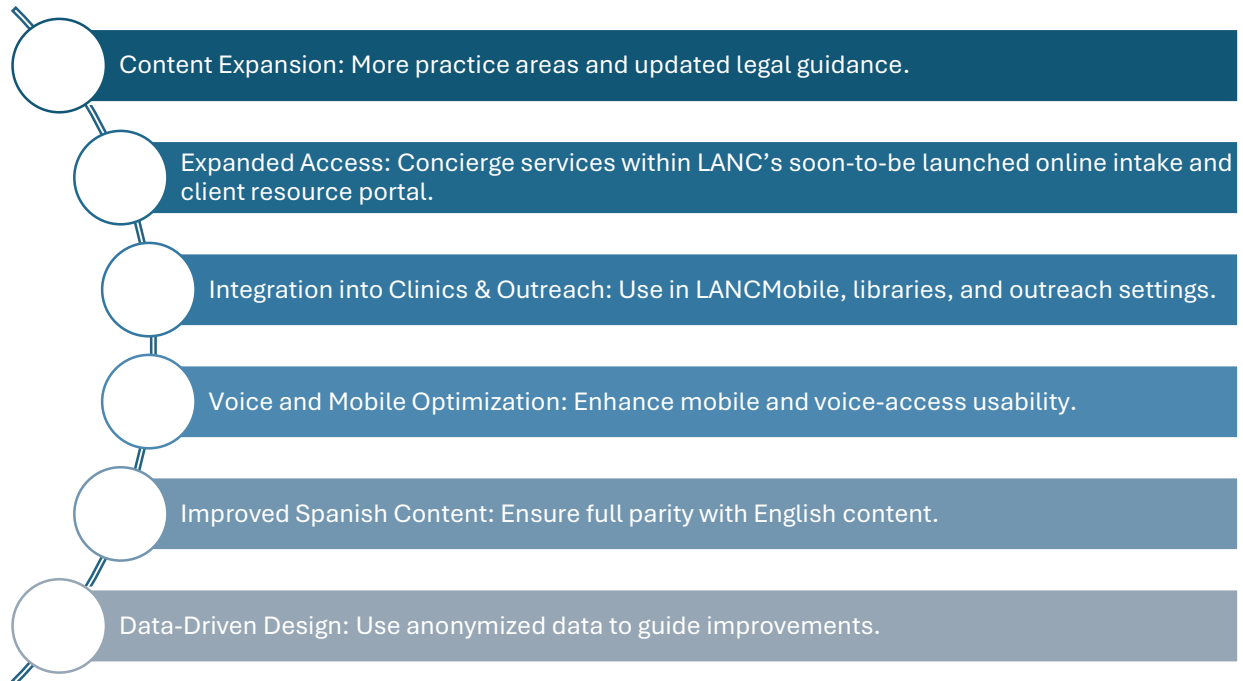
Visibility & Feedback



LIA is prominently featured on Legal Aid of North Carolina’s website via a bottom-right icon and is actively promoted through social media, drop-down menus, community outreach efforts, and intake sessions. It is also integrated into field operations, allowing legal staff to use it directly to assist clients in real time. Since its launch in July (year not specified), LIA has had over 15,000 conversations and maintains a steady monthly user base of around 2,000 individuals. Each interaction can be rated by users on a 1–5 star scale, with the option to leave written feedback. These ratings are stored in real time and are accessible through the backend interface. Notably, even non-legal questions—such as “I’m overwhelmed during my case”—often receive meaningful, empathetic responses and high satisfaction ratings. This continuous feedback loop enables Legal Aid to identify knowledge gaps, clarify or expand existing answers, and flag queries that LIA should not address to avoid veering into the unauthorized practice of law.

More data analysis and reports will be available soon as we study the usage, effectiveness, and reliability of LIA in partnership with Duke Law's Center on Law & Technology and the Digital Safety Research Institute.

Future Expansion Plans




Contact Information

For issues, ideas, or feedback related to LIA, please reach out to:

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The Program Manager is the point-person within the Lab to initially assess and address feedback. Practice Group Managers, the Chief Communications Officer, and LawDroid will be involved when necessary to adjust substantive legal information, address technical issues, and develop further avenues for deploying LIA or other generative AI solutions.