

Innovation Tournament Implementation Guide: A Model For Legal Aid Organizations

Created by: Legal Aid of North Carolina, Innovation Lab



PURPOSE

To catalyze staff-driven innovation by inviting employees across roles to identify challenges, propose solutions, and co-design impactful service or operational improvements in a structured, gamified format.

QUICK SNAPSHOT OF LANC'S MODEL

- Firm-wide invitation to staff to submit improvement ideas.
- Multi-stage process: submission → pitch → expert coaching → final presentations.
- Staff-wide voting decides the winner.
- Tools used: Email campaigns, info sessions, videos, internal committee.
- Focus on equity, access, and process efficiency.

1. PLANNING & INTERNAL BUY-IN

- Form a small Planning and Implementation Committee
 - Include a cross section of staff members. For example: from the field, operations, legal, IT, and innovation departments.
 - Define the tournaments scope and timeline.
 - Assign a Lead and Implementation Ambassadors.
- Design the Innovation Framework
 - Create/adapt templates: idea proposals, judging rubric, one-pagers.
 - Choose a tech platform for submissions and voting.
 - Develop a communications strategy (emails, info sessions, deadlines).

2. LAUNCH THE INNOVATION TOURNAMENT

- Announce & Promote
 - Launch video/email from leadership.
 - Host optional info/Q&A sessions.
 - Emphasize that ideas don't need to be fully developed.
- Registration & Submission Phase
 - Open to teams or individuals.
 - Use a proposal form with idea prompts.

3. EVENT STRUCTURE

<i>Phase</i>	<i>Activity</i>
<i>Opening Ceremony</i>	Launch video and call for ideas
<i>Idea Submission</i>	Staff register and submit ideas through a form
<i>Pitch Round</i>	Live “Shark Tank”-style 15-min pitches in front of a panel of judges
<i>Coaching Phase</i>	5 finalists receive expert coaching to develop their ideas further
<i>Final Presentation</i>	Staff-wide event with 30-minute final pitches and a staff vote
<i>Feedback & Follow-up</i>	Feedback collected for all teams; planning begins for pilot implementation

4. JUDGING & SELECTION

- Pitch Round
 - Audience: judges and implementation team only
 - Judges score using rubric: innovation, impact, feasibility, clarity.
 - Pitch participants receive gift cards.
- Final Round
 - Top 5 teams present
 - Audience: Entire firm
 - Winner chosen via staff vote.

5. AWARDS & IMPLEMENTATION

- Winner presents at LSC ITC conference.
- Leadership supports top ideas for pilot implementation.
- Document lessons and share progress firm-wide.

6. TOOLS & TEMPLATES – [Click Here for Materials](#)

- Idea Submission Form
- Judging Rubric
- One-Pager Template
- Email Scripts (launch, reminders, info sessions)
- Promotional videos

7. LESSONS LEARNED & TIPS

- Low-barrier entry = higher participation.
- Drop-in info sessions increase turnout.
- Staff ownership fosters excitement.
- Prizes and visibility motivate.
- Design sprints work well with time to iterate.

8. SAMPLE TIMELINE

<i>Date Range</i>	<i>Milestone</i>
<i>Aug 1–15</i>	Planning & ambassador team formation
<i>Aug 16</i>	Tournament launch + registration opens
<i>Aug 30</i>	Submission deadline
<i>Sept 10–15</i>	Pitch round
<i>Sept 16–30</i>	Coaching & prototyping
<i>Oct 15</i>	Final presentations + voting
<i>Post</i>	Implementation planning for top teams & winner pilot kickoff

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