

Minnesota Association of Law Libraries

Legal Resources for Public Libraries

Introduction

This outline guides public librarians in building good legal research collections for the non-attorney legal researcher. With an emphasis upon print, sources are suggested for basic collections (for small libraries) and for enhanced collections (for larger public libraries and library systems). Some online resources (both fee and free) are listed. Regarding acquisitions, Section X provides information about ordering, pricing, and vendor contacts. Public librarians should also refer patrons to their local county law libraries, and a website for the Minnesota county law library directory is included in the last section of this guide. The larger collections of the Minnesota State Law Library and local law schools are available for more in depth research.

I. Reference Materials

Basic—

Black's Law Dictionary (Thomson/West)

Findlaw's Merriam Webster Dictionary of Law at <http://dictionary.lp.findlaw.com>

Legal Research: How to Find & Understand the Law (Nolo Press)

Minnesota Legal Research Guide, Second Edition (Wm. S. Hein & Co., Inc.)

Minnesota Legislative Manual (MN State Bookstore)

Zimmerman's Research Guide (a free online legal encyclopedia, available from Lexisone.com/infopro/zimmerman)

Enhanced—

Bieber's Dictionary of Legal Abbreviations (Hein)

Dahl's Law Dictionary: Spanish-English/Inglés -Español (Hein)

Finding the Law (Thomson/West)

Legal Research in a Nutshell (Thomson/West)

West's Encyclopedia of American Law (Thomson/West)

II. History and Overviews of the Law

Basic—

American Law in the Twentieth Century, (Yale Univ. Pr.)

Famous Trials -- (<http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/ftrials.htm>)--a website maintained by Univ. of Missouri-Kansas City Law School

For the Record: 150 Years of Law and Lawyers in Minnesota: an illustrated history, 1999 (Minnesota State Bar Association)

Introduction to the Law and the Legal System (Houghton Mifflin)

Introduction to the Law and Legal System of the United States (Thomson/West)

Oxford Companion to American Law (Oxford Univ. Pr.)

III. General

Basic—

Self-Help Materials, including the following:

(from Nolo Press)

101 Forms for Personal Use

Beat Your Ticket

Criminal Law Handbook

Every Dog's Legal Guide: a must-have for your owner

Every Landlord's Legal Guide

Every Tenant's Legal Guide

Everybody's Guide to Small Claims Court

How to Get a Green Card

Neighbor Law

Nolo's Guide to Social Security Disability

Nolo's Simple Will Book

Represent Yourself in Court

Social Security, Medicare & Government Pensions

U.S. Immigration Made Easy

(from Sphinx Publishing)

Collect Your Judgment in 5 Easy Steps

Father's Rights

Grandparents' Rights

How to Form a Corporation in Minnesota

How to Make a Minnesota Will

Teen Rights and Responsibilities

(from LexisNexis)

Employment in Minnesota

Minnesota Family Law Practice Manual

(from MN State Bar Association (MSBA) Continuing Legal Education)

Minnesota DWI Deskbook

Pamphlets from Minnesota's Attorney General and MN Legal Services Corporation

Fact Sheets from the Legal Aid Society of Minneapolis

Enhanced—

In general, titles related to bankruptcy, copyright, corporations, criminal law, elder law, employment, family law, human rights, landlord-tenant, probate, tax law, workplace rights.

(from LexisNexis)

Minnesota Civil Practice, 4th edition

Minnesota Misdemeanors and Moving Traffic Violations

(from Nolo Press)

Titles not listed in the basic section (unless specific to another state)

(“Nutshells” from West)

American Indian Law in a Nutshell

Constitutional Law in a Nutshell

Contracts in a Nutshell

Criminal Procedure in a Nutshell

Employment Law in a Nutshell

Federal Disability Law in a Nutshell

First Amendment Law in a Nutshell

The Law of Schools, Students, and Teachers

Personal Property in a Nutshell

Real Property in a Nutshell

(from Minnesota State Bar Association (MSBA))

Minnesota Estate Administration

Drafting Wills and Trust Agreements

Guardianship and Conservatorship Law Handbook

Minnesota Custody and Child Support Deskbook

(from National Business Institute)

Probate Process from Start to Finish (for Minnesota)

Using a Mechanic’s Lien to Get Your Money (Minnesota ed.)

IV. Periodicals

Basic—

ELM/Infotrac

Enhanced—

MLPI (Minnesota Legal Periodical Index) free and available online:

www.lawlibrary.state.mn.us

V. Forms

Basic—

Referrals to local forms companies such as Miller/Davis (612-312-1570; 800-752-

4221; <http://www.millerdavis.com>) or Kemske/Oswald (1-800-782-3532);

and to local public law libraries with forms resources

Minnesota Court Forms, plus links to other helpful forms:

www.mncourts.gov/selfhelp/?page=325

General and comprehensive (<http://www.lectlaw.com/form.html>)

Enhanced—

Online vendors such as Thomson/Gale Legal Forms

VI. Directories

Basic—

Referrals to Minnesota State Bar Association website:

<http://www.mnfindalawyer.com> (a free online lawyer referral service)

Judicial Directory—www.mncourts.gov; free online info. -- district and appellate court judges

Enhanced—

Minnesota Attorney's/Secretary's Handbook (Mariposa Pub.) or
Minnesota Lawyer Online Judicial Directory (free to *Minnesota Lawyer* subscribers)

VII. Statutes/Ordinances

Basic—

Official Minnesota Statutes (MN State Bookstore)

Laws of Minnesota (MN State Bookstore)

County and city ordinances for the area served by the public library; print copies if available; online websites if available (a comprehensive website for ordinances is available from the Minnesota State Law Library)—

<http://www.lawlibrary.state.mn.us/ordinance.html>

Enhanced—

Minnesota Statutes Annotated (Thomson/West)

U. S. Code (USGPO)

U. S. Code Service (Lexis)

VIII. Regulatory

Basic—

Minnesota Rules (MN State Bookstore)

Enhanced—

MN State Register (http://www.comm.media.state.mn.us/bookstore/state_register.asp)

Federal Register (USGPO)

Code of Federal Regulations (USGPO)

Major codes followed in Minnesota, e.g. The Fire Code; Building Code

IX. Case Law and Court Rules

Basic—

Minnesota Court Opinions—online at the state court website (for Minnesota published and unpublished decisions, 1996-):

<http://www.mncourts.gov/default.aspx?page=1235>

Minnesota Rules of Court (State and Federal) by Thomson/West; state rules also available at the state court website: <http://www.mncourts.gov/default.aspx?page=511>

U.S. Supreme Court cases are available at <http://www.lexisone.com> (as well as other websites); federal district and circuit court information also available

Enhanced—

Online services from lower cost legal research vendors, i.e. VersusLaw, Loislaw
Northwestern Reporter (print) (Thomson/West)

Dunnell's Minnesota Digest (a legal encyclopedia for MN law) (Lexis/Nexis)

Shepards (Lexis/Nexis) or Keycite (West) for citation checking

X. Ordering, Cost, Upkeep and Retention

Ordering— Libraries will ultimately consider materials they can afford. Since supplementation is essential for up to date legal research, buyers should ask about upkeep costs. Some costs for legal materials are listed here. Prices are subject to change, so vendors should be contacted for current pricing. Contact information for several of the major legal publishers is listed as well.

Cost— Legal materials can be quite expensive. They range from single volume (less expensive) titles to multi-volume sets and online services.

- Inexpensive-- Nolo Press and Sphinx titles are more reasonable and cost under \$50.00. West Nutshells are generally under \$40.00. West and Lexis practitioner titles cost \$200.00-300.00 (some of these are 2-3 volumes). MSBA and NBI materials range from about \$100-300.
- More Expensive--West prices for multivolume sets are: West's Encyclopedia of American Law (\$1500.00), and MSA (\$4000.00). US Code Service (Lexis) runs about \$2200. The official Minnesota Statutes costs about \$225.00 (each public library system should receive one free set of official statutes.) For case law, a full set of West's NW2d is \$8500, but used sets are usually available; space considerations make online resources more attractive for case law. For "digested" case law, Dunnell's Minnesota Digest from Lexis costs \$1600.00. All sets are updated annually at additional cost.
- Online vendors--Loislaw (available from Aspen Publishers) runs approximately \$135-300 per month, depending upon the package. VersusLaw is more basic in its coverage and costs \$14.00-40.00 per month. All prices are subject to change; vendors should be contacted for current pricing. West and Lexis also offer online services at higher costs.
- Legal Publishers Contact Information—
 - Hein— <http://www.wshein.com>
 - LexisNexis— <http://www.lexisnexis.com>
 - Loislaw— <http://www.loislaw.com>
 - Mariposa— <http://www.mariposapublishing.com>
 - Minnesota's Bookstore-<http://www.comm.media.state.mn.us/bookstore/bookstore.asp>
 - Minnesota Lawyer— <http://www.minnlawyer.com>
 - MSBA— <http://www.minncle.org>
 - National Business Institute (NBI)— <http://www.nbi-sems.com/bookstore.html>
 - Nolo Press— <http://www.nolopress.com>
 - Sphinx— <http://www.sphinxlegal.com>
 - Thomson/Gale— <http://www.galegroup.com>

- USGPO— <http://bookstore.gpo.gov>
- VersusLaw— <http://www.versuslaw.com>
- West/Thomson— <http://www.west.thomson.com>

Upkeep--Legal materials require supplementation. For many titles, the initial purchase requires ongoing supplementation to keep the resource current. Supplementation can include pocket parts, replacement pages, and/or pamphlets and advance sheets. Vendors should be asked about supplementation costs.

Retention--Legal materials should be monitored for currency. Out of date materials should be discarded. If primary legal materials lapse and remain in the collection, signage or labels should warn users that the material is no longer current.

XI. Reference Policies

Reference service can give legal information (ok); NOT legal advice (prohibited)

SEE: “Pro Se Users, Reference Liability, and the Unauthorized Practice of Law: twenty-five selected readings”, by Paul D. Healey, Law Library Journal, Winter 2002, vol. 94, pgs. 133-139.

Referrals to other law libraries (see also Section XIII)

Referrals to other legal assistance organizations, court self-help services (including the MN Courts Call Center at 651-259-3888), and volunteer attorneys.

XII. Free Internet Resources

Cornell Legal Information site: <http://www.law.cornell.edu>

LawMoose.com

MALL Legal Research Guide (<http://www.aallnet.org/chapter/mall/mnetgd.htm>)

Washlaw site: <http://www.washlaw.edu>

XIII. Referrals: Law Libraries, District Courts, Self-Help Centers

Minnesota County Law Library Directory --some have “AskLibrarian” features (<http://www.lawlibrary.state.mn.us/cllp.html>)

District Courts (<http://www.mncourts.gov>). District courts usually have information and forms regarding court procedures available; some also refer parties to self help centers which assist litigants with forms and refer them to local law libraries.

Self-Help Centers— services exist in Anoka, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott, St. Louis, Stearns and Washington Counties. Self Help Center listings are also available at: <http://www.mncourts.gov/selfhelp/?page=251> and at <http://www.lawhelpmn.org>

XIV. For Future Reference

The Minnesota Association of Law Libraries (MALL) welcomes questions or comments about this resource. Please consult the MALL website for contact information for the current MALL president

(<http://www.aallnet.org/chapter/mall/officers.htm>)

“Legal Resources for Public Libraries” is also available at the MALL website (<http://www.aallnet.org/chapter/mall>). The resource is a product of MALL’s Consulting and Community Outreach Committee and was originally published in 2004; it was most recently updated in October 2009.