

Legal Resources for Public Libraries

CURATED BY THE MINNESOTA COALITION OF COUNTY OF LAW
LIBRARIES AND THE MINNESOTA STATE LAW LIBRARY (MCCLL)

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED 2004; REVISED 2012
CURRENT REVISION:2020

Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Section 1: Referrals	5
Referral directories	5
Section 2: Reference materials	6
Reference materials	6
Basic collections:	6
Enhanced collections:	6
History and overview of the law	6
Section 3: Research materials in print	7
Basic collection	7
From Nolo Press	7
From the ABA	7
From Homeline	7
From the Minnesota Attorney General’s Office	7
From legal aid and other organizations	7
Enhanced collection	8
From Nolo Press	8
Other titles of interest from independent publishers:	8
Nutshell series from West Academic	8
Section 4: Online legal research	10
Free resources	10
Subscription (available through some public library systems)	10
Section 5: Forms	11
Free resources	11
Subscription (available through a library or library system)	11
Section 6: Directories	12
Basic	12
Enhanced	12
Section 7: Statutes, laws, ordinances	13
Minnesota	13
Federal	13

Section 8: Regulatory materials	14
Minnesota	14
Federal	14
Section 9: Case law	15
Minnesota	15
Federal	15
Section 10: Court rules.....	16
Minnesota.....	16
Federal Court Rules.....	16
Section 11: Currency and Upkeep.....	17
Currency.....	17
Upkeep.....	17
Section 12: Reference policies	17

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.

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 referrals section of this guide. The larger collections of the Minnesota State Law Library, Hennepin County Law Library and local law schools are available for more in-depth research.

The Minnesota Coalition of County Law Libraries (MCCLL) offers annual training in the spring for public librarians on legal topics. For more information, visit the MCCLL website at <https://mccll.wordpress.com/>. Individual county law libraries and the State Law Library may also offer training opportunities.

Public librarians are encouraged to contact their local county law library for assistance. The MCCLL website also has more information about county law libraries.

Section 1: Referrals

The resources in this guide are intended to help build a legal collection, but remember MCCLL and the State Law Library are always available to assist if you have a patron who needs help with legal research.

Minnesota State Law Library Ask a Librarian: askalibrarian@courts.state.mn.us

Minnesota County Law Libraries: <https://mn.gov/law-library/research-links/county-law-libraries.jsp>

Referral directories

- Legal Referrals by County: <https://mn.gov/law-library/research-links/legal-referrals/legal-referrals-by-county.jsp>
- MN Courts Self-Help Centers: <http://www.mncourts.gov/selfhelp/>
- Legal Advice Clinics: <http://www.mncourts.gov/Help-Topics/Self-Help-Centers.aspx#tab06ClinicLocations>
- LawHelpMN Providers and Clinics Directory: <https://www.lawhelpmn.org/providers-and-clinics>
- Minnesota State Bar Association Lawyer Referral: <http://www.mnfindalawyer.com/>

Section 2: Reference materials

Reference materials

Basic collections:

- *Black's Law Dictionary* (Thomson Reuters)
- *Legal Research: How to Find & Understand the Law* (Nolo Press)
- *Nolo's Plain-English Law Dictionary* (Nolo Press)

Enhanced collections:

- *Acronyms, Initialisms & Abbreviations Directory* (Gale), updated annually
- Kendall Svengalis, *A Layperson's Guide to Legal Research and Self-Help Law Books* (New England Law Press)
- Paul D. Healey, *Legal Reference for Librarians: How and Where to Find the Answers* (ALA)
- Foreign language legal dictionaries as needed for patrons. Some suggested titles:

Spanish

Dahl's Law Dictionary, Spanish-English/English-Spanish (Hein)

Merl Bilingual Criminal Law Dictionary (Spanish) (Merl Publications)

The ABA Spanish Legal Phrasebook (ABA)

West's Spanish-English/English-Spanish Law Dictionary (Thomson Reuters)

Somali

English-Somali, Somali-English Dictionary (Star Publications)

Hmong

English Hmong Legal Glossary (California Superior Court)

Hmong Legal Glossary (Wisconsin Court Interpreter Program)

Karen

The Drum Dictionary: English-Sgaw Karen Dictionary

History and overview of the law

- *The First 100 Years...* (Minnesota State Bar Association), 1983
- *For the Record: 150 Years of Law & Lawyers in Minnesota* (Minnesota State Bar Association), 1999
- Gilbertson, Victor, C. *Minnesota Courthouses* (Galde Press, Inc, MN) 2005
- *Introduction to the Law and the Legal System* (Cengage Learning) 11th ed., 2014
- *Oxford Companion to American Law* (Oxford Univ. Pr.)

Section 3: Research materials in print

This section lists books from reputable sources that explain the law and legal concepts to non-attorneys.

Basic collection

From Nolo Press

General titles

- *101 Forms for Personal Use*
- *Everybody's Guide to Small Claims Court*
- *How to Win Your Personal Injury Claim*
- *Legal Research*
- *Mediate, Don't Litigate*
- *Nolo's Plain-English Law Dictionary*
- *Represent Yourself in Court*

Criminal law

- *Beat Your Ticket*
- *Criminal Law Handbook*

Employment law

- *The Employer's Legal Handbook*
- *Your Rights in the Workplace*

Family law

- *Nolo's Essential Guide to Divorce*
- *Nolo's Essential Guide to Child Custody and Support*
- *Divorce after 50*
- *Building a Parenting Agreement that Works*
- *Legal Guide for Lesbian and Gay Couples*

Landlord/Tenant/Homeowner interests

- *Every Landlord's Legal Guide*
- *Every Tenant's Legal Guide*
- *Renter's Rights*

Wills

- *Quick and Legal Will Book*

From the ABA

ABA Consumer Guide to Employee Rights: Understanding and Asserting Your Rights on the Job, Randy Freking, 2015.

From Homeline

The Landlord's Guide to Minnesota Law, Michael Vraa and Sam Spaid, 2015.

How to be the Smartest Renter on Your Block, Homeline staff, 2011. A new edition of this title will hopefully be published in 2020.

From the Minnesota Attorney General's Office

Pamphlets and sheets on all topics relating to consumer protection from Minnesota's Attorney General office. Order via website: <https://www.ag.state.mn.us/Office/Publications.asp> or call (651) 757-1408.

From legal aid and other organizations

Pamphlets from Minnesota Legal Services Corporation. Titles include *Orders for Protection; Dealing with Debt, Guide to Public Housing, Tenants Rights, Child Support, Rights and Responsibilities of Unmarried Parents, Getting a Divorce*. Order via website (for tax-exempt organizations): <http://www.mnlegalservices.org/buy-booklet-tax-exempt>

Fact sheets and resources from the LawHelpMN.org. Fact sheets are updated yearly, are grouped by topic, can be downloaded for free at the LawhelpMN.org website. Fact sheet topics are:

family, housing, money and debt, work, seniors, government benefits, immigration, youth, disability, taxes, and criminal law. You can print out the document for free, or you can order up to 20 copies/per document from LawHelpMN.org. They can be downloaded/ordered here:

<https://www.lawhelpmn.org/form/fact-sheet-order-form>

Enhanced collection

If your library can supplement its legal information collection, you can choose from the titles listed below. In general, the titles provided relate to bankruptcy, copyright, corporations, criminal law, elder law, employment, guardianship/conservatorship, human rights, landlord-tenant, probate, tax law, workplace rights.

From Nolo Press

In addition to the books above, Nolo Press publishes books for non-lawyers on the following topics. You can go to their website to see a full listing of topics and titles. <https://store.nolo.com/products/>

Other titles of interest from independent publishers:

Minnesota Permit to Carry a Firearm Fundamentals, 5th Edition, by Michael Martin, Key House Press, 2013.

An Employer's Guide to Employment Law Issues in Minnesota, a collaborative effort between the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development and Lindquist & Vennum, LLP. The title is currently on the 14th edition. The most current edition is a free download available at this link: <https://mn.gov/deed/newscenter/publications/allpubs2.jsp?id=1045-259395>

Minnesota Housing Court Benchbook, compiled by Referee Mark Labine, published by CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2010, revised 2018.

Nutshell series from West Academic

West Academic authors a set of legal titles that outline the core areas of law in a small, compact volumes called nutshells. While these titles are aimed at attorneys and people who are familiar with legal terminology, they can be useful to the lay person because these nutshells provide citations to key statutes, regulations, and cases pertinent to the topic. They are also fairly inexpensive (approx., \$50 retail per title.) There are over 175 titles in the series, but not all are necessary to have. A few titles that would be of interest to public library patrons would be:

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
Real Property in a Nutshell

The full listing of nutshell titles can be found at the West Academic site, located at <http://store.westacademic.com/>.

Section 4: Online legal research

Free resources

- Findlaw. <https://public.findlaw.com/>
- Library of Congress. Law Library. Legal Research Guides. <http://www.loc.gov/law/help/how-find.php>
- HG.org <https://www.hg.org/practiceareas.html>
- Law Help MN <https://lawhelpmn.org>
- Minnesota State Law Library. Libguides. <https://mn.gov/law-library/legal-topics/>
- Nolo Press <https://www.nolo.com/legal-encyclopedia>

Subscription (available through some public library systems)

- ELM
- Infotrac

Section 5: Forms

Free resources

- Minnesota Judicial Branch Court Forms
<http://www.mncourts.gov/GetForms.aspx>
- LawHelpMN Legal Forms
<https://www.lawhelpmn.org/forms>
- Mn Department of Commerce Uniform Conveyancing Blanks
<https://mn.gov/commerce/consumers/tips-tools/uniform-conveyancing-forms/>
(mostly real estate forms but other forms are included such as power of attorney and health care directive)

Subscription (available through a library or library system)

- Gale LegalForms (Minnesota)
Includes real estate contracts, wills, pre-marital agreements, bankruptcy, divorce, landlord/tenant, and many more. Gale forms can be expensive as a subscription database. Note that government produced forms are authoritative, free resources. Consult with your local law librarian if you want more information about purchasing and subscribing to online forms.

Many people will use “Google” to locate forms. Some of those results will provide needed forms but will also charge a fee to access them. In most cases, these forms may be available for free. Please contact your local law librarian or the State Law Library for assistance.

Section 6: Directories

Basic

Referrals to Minnesota State Bar Association website: <http://www.mnfindalawyer.com> (a free online lawyer referral service)

Judicial Directory: <http://www.mncourts.gov/About-The-Courts/Overview/JudicialDirectory.aspx> lists district and appellate court judges

Lawyer Directory: <http://lprb.mncourts.gov/Pages/Default.aspx> Search for lawyers licensed to practice in Minnesota to determine whether they have been publicly disciplined or placed on disability status. It is a helpful tool to look up lawyers to make sure a lawyer is in good standing within the profession. This site also provides forms and instructions to file a complaint against an attorney.

The Minnesota Board on Judicial Standards: <http://www.bjs.state.mn.us/> This organization responds to complaints filed against Minnesota state court judges. This site provides instructions to file a complaint against a judge.

Enhanced

Minnesota Attorney's/Secretary's Handbook (Mariposa Pub.)

BNA's Directory of State and Federal Courts, Judges, and Clerks (updated annually)

Tribal Courts <http://www.tribal-institute.org/lists/justice.htm>

Section 7: Statutes, laws, ordinances

Statutes are general and permanent laws as passed by the legislature. They are updated as the legislature makes changes to the law by adding, amending, or repealing sections.

Session laws are a compilation of every bill the legislature passed during a given legislative session. Some session laws become statutes; others are temporary bills that do not become statutes.

Ordinances are the laws that govern cities, counties, or towns.

Minnesota

- Minnesota Statutes and Session Laws: <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/pubs>
- Minnesota Ordinances: <https://mn.gov/law-library/research-links/ordinances.jsp> (Note that not all Minnesota cities make their ordinances available online.)
- Minnesota Legislature (for current bills): <https://www.leg.state.mn.us/leg/legis>

Federal

- U.S. Code (official): <https://www.govinfo.gov/>

Section 8: Regulatory materials

Regulatory materials are created by administrative agencies (such as the Department of Health or Department of Transportation) that help the agency explain the laws it enforces, or to provide procedures specific to that agency. In Minnesota, regulatory materials are called rules; for Federal law and some other states, they are called regulations.

Minnesota

- Minnesota Rules: <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/pubs>
- Minnesota State Register: <https://mn.gov/admin/bookstore/register.jsp>

Minnesota Administrative Procedure, 3d ed., George A. Beck and Mehmet Konar-Steenberg, 2014.

A good treatise on Minnesota Administrative Law is co-written written by a retired Administrative Law Judge and a local law professor who teaches at Mitchell Hamline School of Law. The entire book is available for free on the school's website: <https://mitchellhamline.edu/minnesota-administrative-procedure/>

Minnesota Rulemaking Manual, available as a pdf at <https://www.health.state.mn.us/data/rules/manual/docs/manual2019.pdf>

Federal

- Code of Federal Regulations: <https://www.govinfo.gov/>
- Federal Register: <https://www.federalregister.gov/>

Section 9: Case law

Case law is the body of law created by judges when they decide cases and interpret the law. The opinions issued by judges can then be used to help decide future cases.

Minnesota

- Minnesota Court of Appeals and Supreme Court opinions, 1996 to present: <https://mn.gov/law-library/> (then select “Opinions” under “Quick Links”)
- Google Scholar, opinions 1950 to present: <https://scholar.google.com/>
- Ravel: <https://www.ravellaw.com/search>

Federal

- Supreme Court of the United States Opinions: <https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/opinions.aspx>
- Oyez: <https://www.oyez.org/>
- Ravel: <https://www.ravellaw.com/search>
- Google Scholar (coverage goes back to 1923 for federal district and appellate court cases, and it goes back to 1791 for U. S. Supreme Court cases): <https://scholar.google.com/>

Section 10: Court rules

Court rules create the procedures that must be followed in court cases. Court rules cover topics such as the timing for filing court documents, deadlines for judges to issue orders, and how to provide the other parties with documents.

Minnesota

- Minnesota Court Rules: https://www.revisor.mn.gov/court_rules/
- Minnesota Court Rules: <http://www.mncourts.gov/SupremeCourt/Court-Rules.aspx>

Federal Court Rules

- Minnesota Federal District Court: <https://www.mnd.uscourts.gov/>
- Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals: <https://www.ca8.uscourts.gov/>
- Bankruptcy Court: <https://www.mnb.uscourts.gov/>
- U.S. Supreme Court: https://www.supremecourt.gov/filingandrules/rules_guidance.aspx

Contact your local county law librarian if you have questions about court rules.

Section 11: Currency and Upkeep

Currency

Legal materials should be monitored for currency and 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. County law libraries (if staffed) or the Minnesota State Law Library (if local county law library is too small to have a staff) can assist with evaluating titles for currency.

Upkeep

Legal materials can represent an ongoing financial commitment. Many titles require ongoing supplementation to keep the resource current. Supplementation can include pocket parts, replacement pages, and/or pamphlets. Supplementation costs can be significant; vendors should be asked about supplementation costs at the time of the initial purchase.

Section 12: Reference policies

In general, law librarians provide access to legal information, and do not give legal advice. Legal information can include things like helping people find legal resources on a topic or referring a patron to an organization that can help them. Legal advice includes telling someone what options they should choose or explaining what a statute or case means. For more information about Legal Information v. Legal Advice, visit the State Law Library's Legal Reference Resources for Public Librarians guide:

<http://mncourts.libguides.com/publiclibrary/legal-info>.

SEE:

“Chapter 4: Legal Reference vs. Legal Advice” in *Locating the Law: A Handbook for Non-Law Librarians*, 6th ed., edited by Elizabeth Caulfield, Southern California Association of Law Libraries, 2018.

(<https://www.aallnet.org/lispsis/wp-content/uploads/sites/11/2019/01/Locating-the-Law-Sixth-Edition.pdf>)

A Layperson's Guide to Legal Research and Self-Help Law Books, by Kendall Svengalis, New England Law Press, 2019.

Legal Reference for Librarians: How and Where to Find the Answers, by Paul Healy, ALA, 2014.

“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.

For patrons needing more than legal information, offer referrals to state and county law libraries (*see also* Section 1), referrals to other legal assistance organizations, court self-help services (including the MN Courts Call Center at 651-435-6535), and volunteer attorneys.