



Center of Excellence

FAQ

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What is the Center of Excellence?

A **Center of Excellence** is a designated jurisdiction that is specially supported in order to create, disseminate, and establish stakeholder best practices for immigration and nationality adjudication. The CoE is comprised of a vanguard, remote teams, support teams, advocacy teams and a coordination team. It relies on verticalized advocacy and communications strategies, intensive data collection and dissemination, and strategizing in a collaborative space.

What is the Vanguard?

The **vanguard** is a select group of lawyers who litigate complex or novel immigration cases and collaborate by sharing information, strategy, tactics and talent with each other and allied advocates in order to establish best practices for stakeholders, advance a due process-centric approach to adjudication and promote access to counsel. The vanguard is **specially supported** with technical assistance with case development, case theory, access to curriculum-based trainings that focus on substantive and procedural law, trainings for strategic and tactical decision making, access to generalized CLEs in a flood-the-zone concept, access to LawLab case management and curated expert declarations and templates.

Can anyone join the vanguard?

To join the vanguard send an email to info@innovationlawlab.org. Members of the vanguard are attorneys who have agreed to intensely collaborate in the presentation of asylum claims and adhere to the highest ethical and professional standards.

Why have a Center of Excellence?

Within the 100,000 square miles that generally comprise the physical reach of the Atlanta Immigration Court, there is, statistically speaking, no law. There is the formal, well-kept apparatus of law: there are immigration judges, there are lawyers, there are court clerks, and there are hearings. There are noncitizens who appear in immigration court every day; some with lawyers, most without. Motions are filed. Papers are processed. *Things* happen on the surface every day such that an

observer could feel the daily rhythm play out and conclude that this is the manifestation of the rule of law for asylum claimants.

That conclusion would be mistaken. If the rule of law means that individual cases should be determined by the *law* rather than by the personal biases, attitudes, policies, or ideologies of the adjudicators, then the asylum outcomes at the Atlanta Immigration Court are the single most important metric that this jurisdiction is a law-free zone. The Atlanta Immigration Court asylum denial rate is around 90%. Ninety-eight percent of the asylum claims made at the Georgia immigration detention center were denied. By way of comparison, the national average for asylum denials is around 47%. It is anomalous that a uniform federal law applying an international standard guided by binding Supreme Court precedent would result in the denial of almost every asylum claim presented in Atlanta at twice the national rate.

The CoE builds power and authority for the lawyers to bring health back to the adjudication ecosystem by rebalancing the asymmetries in power between the immigration judges, the deportation agency, and the bar.

Who are the clients?

The CoE collaborates with the CARA Detention Project to place women with children who were recently released from detention after passing a threshold asylum screening.

If I am new to immigration or am not an immigration lawyer, what resources are available?

The CoE specially supports all lawyers and advocates in the vanguard with a specially trained experts in immigration law, asylum jurisprudence, and process questions. There are also special resources, including access to curated expert declarations and legal templates. No one goes it alone in the CoE.

How are cases placed with an attorney in the vanguard?

The CoE relies on an informal queue of lawyers in the vanguard who have indicated they are ready to take the lead on a particular case. A lawyer will receive a case brief that provides the known critical information about the case. All case information is maintained in a central, cloud-based case management system that every member of the vanguard has access to and should use in defending the case. The CoE conducts conflict checks for clients using the CARA database and the CoE database. Each attorney in the vanguard is responsible for completing conflict checks within her or his own firm.

Is there training for the case management system?

The CoE provides training to lawyers on using the case management system. The system is simple and easy to use.

How does the data collection process happen?

All clients placed through the CoE have consented to allow their confidential client information to be aggregated and anonymized for use in advocacy and litigation purposes. The case management system seamlessly collects and sorts the data. No special action is required by a vanguard lawyer other than using the case management system itself.

How do I use the coe-atlanta@innovationlawlab.org listserve?

Every participant in the CoE has access to the listserve. It is a forum to allow for information sharing and collaboration. Only members of the CoE are part of the listserve. The etiquette of the listserve is that messages posted on the listserve should not be shared beyond the CoE. Confidential client information should *not* be posted on the CoE; however, client case #'s may be posted (every client is assigned a case# by the case management system) to invite assistance or collaboration on a case issue. The listserve should be used only for topics related to the CoE.

How often are cases placed with vanguard attorneys?

During the pilot phase of the CoE, we expect to place 10 cases initially to get a feel for the placement process and work out kinks. Thereafter, we expect to place as many several cases each month on a rolling basis to attorneys in the queue. Right now, the queue is maintained by hand.
