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The largest legal aid group in town adopts a new name

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Chicago's largest legal aid organization is changing its name for the second time in a decade to make it easier to attract donations and volunteers.

LAF, known before 2011 as the Legal Assistance Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago, becomes Legal Aid Chicago today. With 83 lawyers on staff and a budget of \$15.2 million, the nonprofit served more than 20,000 clients last year who needed help with [civil legal matters](#) related to housing, family, work, immigration and public benefits.

The rechristening is a necessary step in raising the organization's profile, said CEO John Gallo. The first few minutes of every conversation about the organization was spent explaining the name. Too often people read the acronym as "laugh," or didn't know what industry LAF belonged to. They guessed it was a defense contractor, or an accounting firm.

"One of the things that we're trying to do is explain to people why legal aid is so important to changing the cycle of people living in poverty," he said. "It's the kind of modest intervention that can change the trajectory of someone's life, but getting to that conversation with the name we had was just too time-consuming, and sometimes we didn't get there."

Legal Aid Chicago has grown its headcount 15 percent since Gallo [moved from Sidley Austin](#) two years ago to take the job. Deputy Director Katherine Shank runs the organization internally, while Gallo glad-hands with potential donors and lawyers looking for pro bono

commitments. It has added a legal clinic in North Lawndale, for a total of four locations around the city.

When asking for money and volunteers, there's value in having a name that describes exactly what the organization does, said Jocelyn Brumbaugh, founder of the Chicago-based Brumbaugh Group, a law firm marketing consultancy. Adding the location at the end of the name could help, too, by assuring donors their dollars will be spent locally.

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