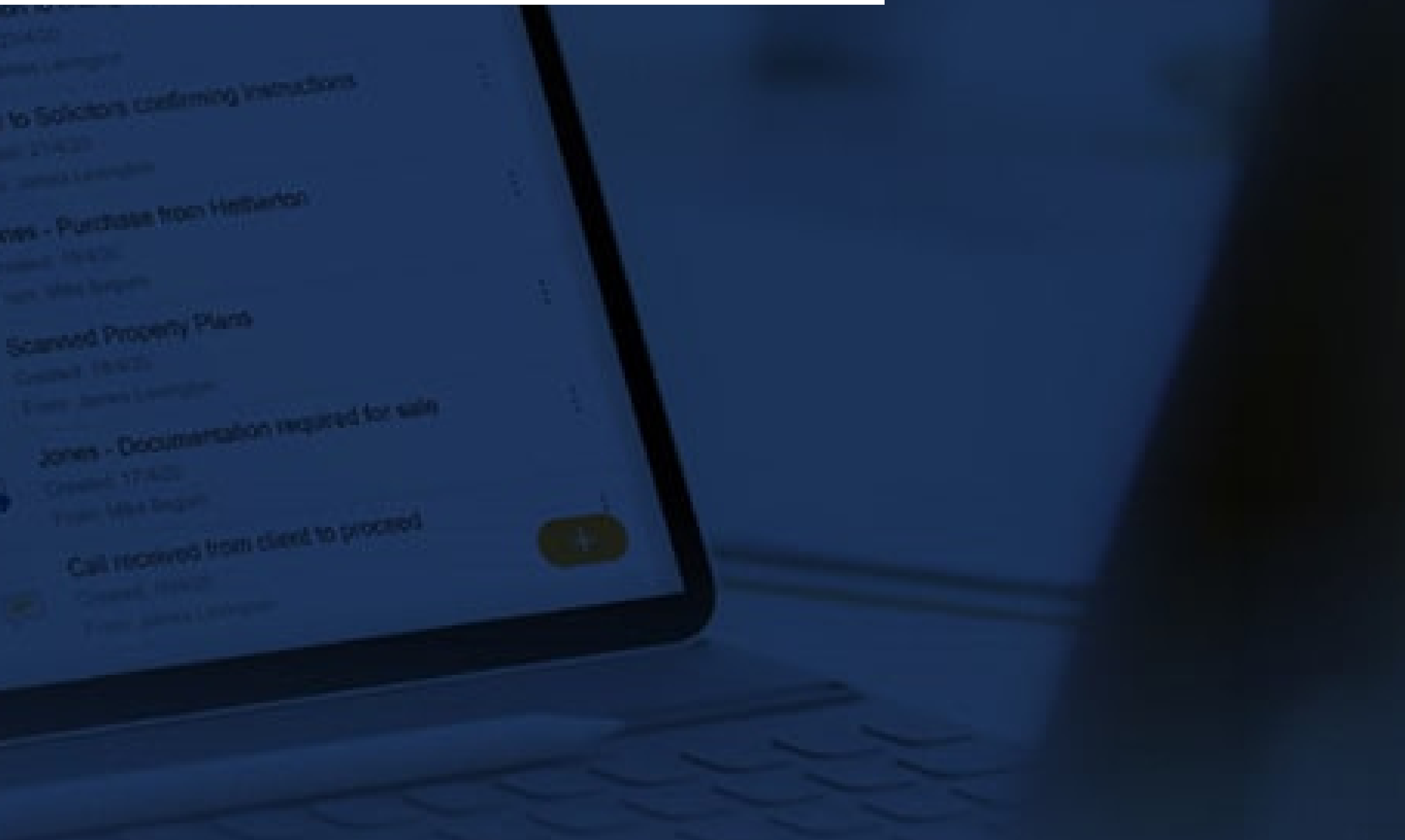
Streamlining civil case filing with LEAP



An eBook by

LEAP

In collaboration with

InfoTrack

Streamlining civil case filing with LEAP

by Natalie Kernke and Alex Braun

Introduction

In the United States, civil case filing is not a uniform process.

To be sure, the basic stages are universal. There must be a complaint and answer, often followed by preliminary motions and hearings, and a period of discovery. If a settlement is not reached, there may be a trial and, ultimately, a verdict. No matter the jurisdiction, the same types of information are exchanged between parties to the case.

But in the trial courts, the rules that must be followed to proceed within or between these stages differ from state to state, or even by county. Each court may have unique procedural requirements for filing a case and notifying parties. These little-known and undocumented local rules can create confusion and extra hurdles that add friction to the court filing process.

As state court procedures move online, tech-savvy law firms have an opportunity to eliminate these speed bumps like never before. Doing so requires a firm command of case information, its path through the legal system, and the software that can connect it at each stage.

This eBook will show you how to use LEAP and its integrations to improve the flow of information from your client to the court. You'll learn how to complete your matter, your court forms, and your filing information accurately in the least number of steps.

By drastically reducing your data entry burden, you can save hours of work each week and reduce the chance of making a costly mistake.

LEAP Intake, Document Automation, and Collaboration

The LEAP matter is your central organizing space for critical case information. The more current and accurate the data in the LEAP matter is, the more quickly you'll be able to complete filing tasks.

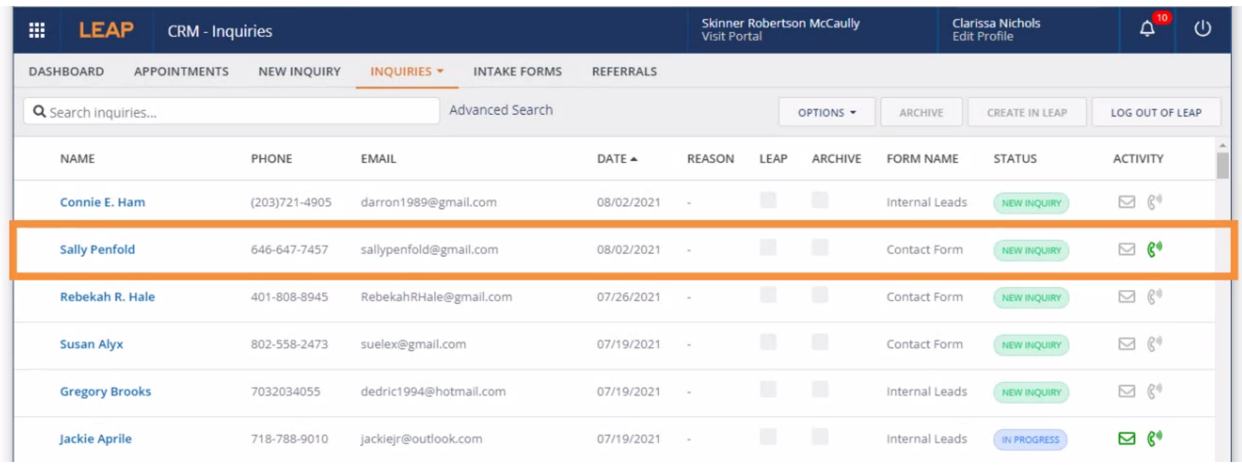
Though there are many ways to fill in your matter, we'll start with the most obvious.

Manual Entry
The standard way to populate a LEAP matter is to type the information yourself by transcribing a physical document, entering information from memory, or pasting it from another document. Aside from being the slowest method, manual data entry can also put you at risk for typos and mixed-up matters when you're working under pressure.

Automatic Entry via the LEAP Web Portal
Using a software integration to sync details automatically is the most efficient way to keep your matter information current.

One approach is to use an online form builder that integrates with your case management system. The reasoning here is simple: if your client provided information via an online form during intake, you should use that information rather than typing it yourself.

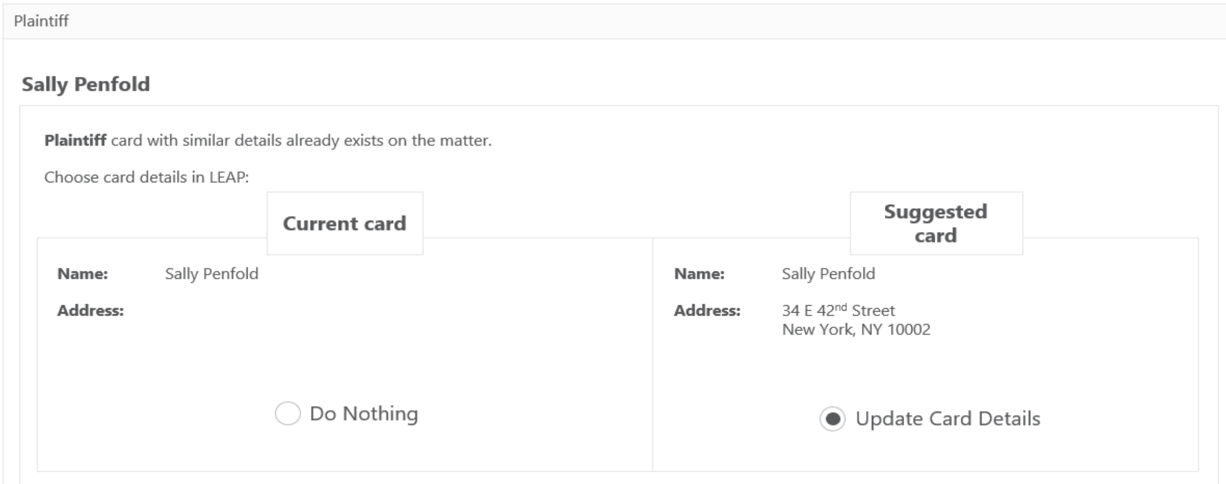
The [LEAP Web Portal](#) provides a place for clients and potential clients to interact with the law firm online. With over 400 automated intake forms available across various areas of law and states, potential or existing clients can provide the details of their case directly through the Web Portal. Once completed, client information is easily imported into LEAP, as a matter, with the click of a button.



Automatic Entry via DocketSync

Automation does not stop at intake. An alternative approach, useful for subsequent filings, is to sync information retrieved from an online docket search.

InfoTrack's [DocketSync service](#) allows LEAP users to import documents and information from select court docket systems directly into a LEAP matter. Users can view "before-and-after" comparisons to approve or reject updates to nearly any type of contact or case information available from the court.



Regularly syncing data directly from the docket minimizes the risk of errors in your matter record. It also eliminates the frequent, tedious task of searching docket numbers manually and downloading, renaming, and importing files into each active matter.

Generating Legal Forms

Legal forms do not have to be built from scratch—nor should they be.

At a minimum, frequent court filers should keep a library of commonly used form templates at hand. The clerk's website will often supply the latest version, which can be downloaded to your computer or file storage solution.

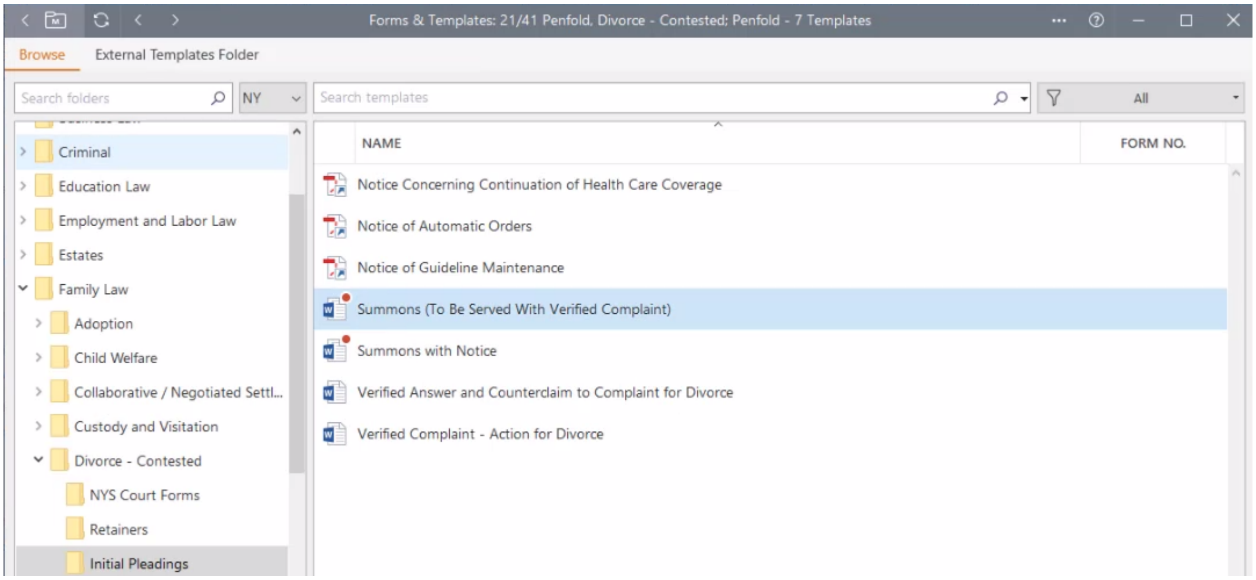
Manual Entry

Using these form templates, filers can fill in the blanks in a PDF or complete any required information in a word processor like Microsoft Word, saving each completed form under a new file name in LEAP.

With this method, forms must be generated individually. However, the process can be sped up to some degree by using advanced Word copy-and-paste techniques to preserve formatting in frequently used passages. Step-by-step walkthroughs for these techniques can be found on the website of Microsoft Office guru Deborah Savadra.

Using LEAP Forms

LEAP has a growing library of over 10,100 court forms, all of which have been expertly automated. These have been designed to work in conjunction with the matter types in LEAP to help maximize efficiency and minimize the risk of errors that come with re-keying information.



To use a LEAP form:

- Open a matter in LEAP.
- Make sure you are on the **Details & Correspondence** tab.
- Click the **Forms & Templates** button on the toolbar.
- Find the template you wish to create by navigating through the folders or by using the search function.
- Click **Select**.

Creating Custom Forms & Templates

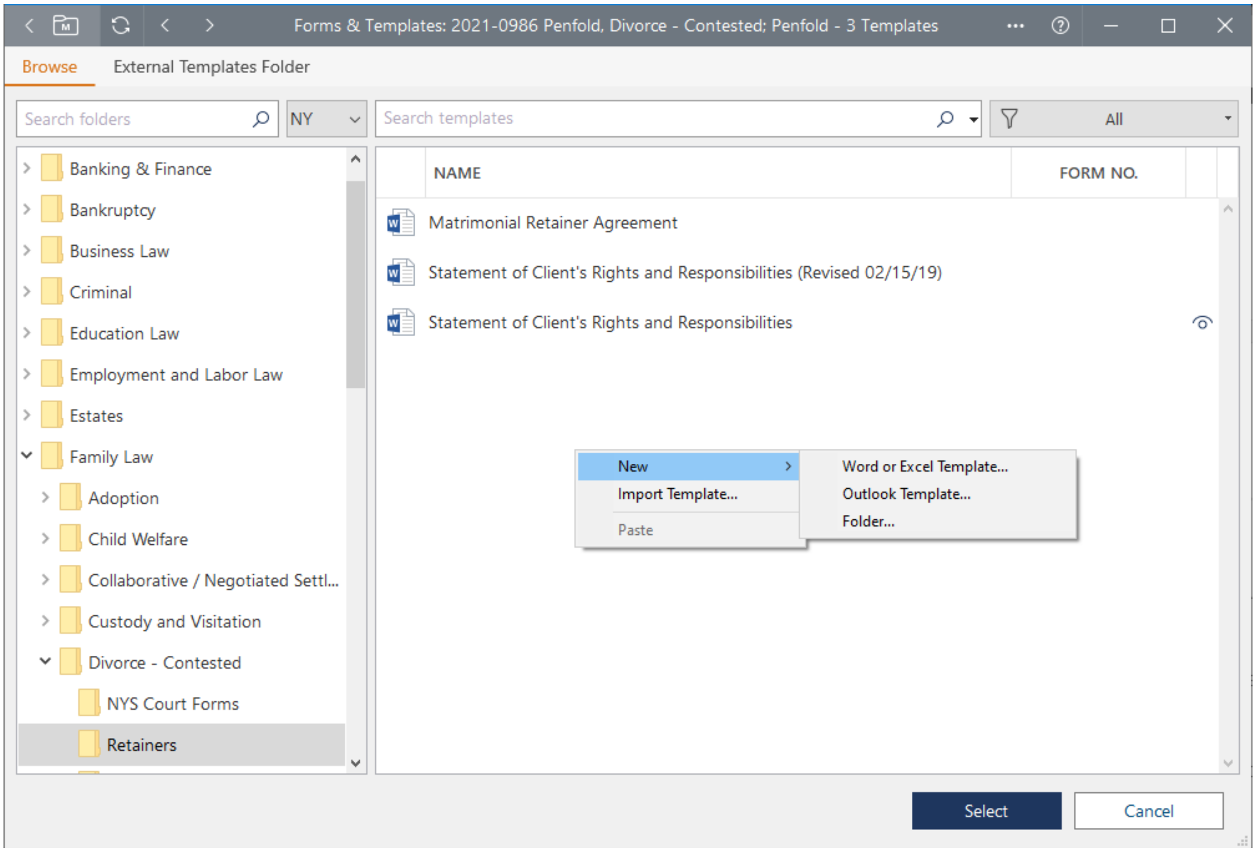
You can also create and automate your own firm-specific templates—such as a form from a court website—in LEAP. To do this:

- Open a relevant matter in LEAP and click the **Forms & Templates** button at the top of the matter.

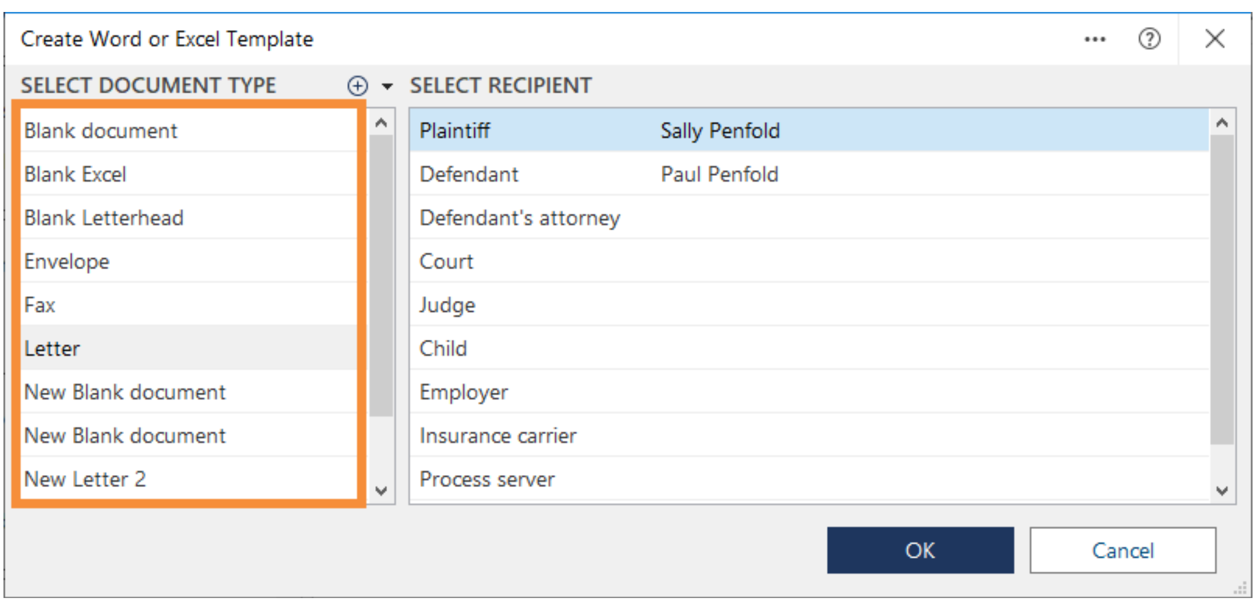
- When you right-click, you will see a few options. You can select **New Template** (Word, Excel, or Outlook) or select **Import Template**.

- **New Template** opens a new blank document for you to create and automate a new template from scratch.

- **Import Template** imports an existing document into LEAP as a template, ready for automation.



- When selecting **New Template**, you will be presented with a selection of document types (Letter, Blank document, etc.).
- Click the appropriate document type from the left, select a recipient from the right, and click the **OK** button.



- Your template will open in Microsoft Word.

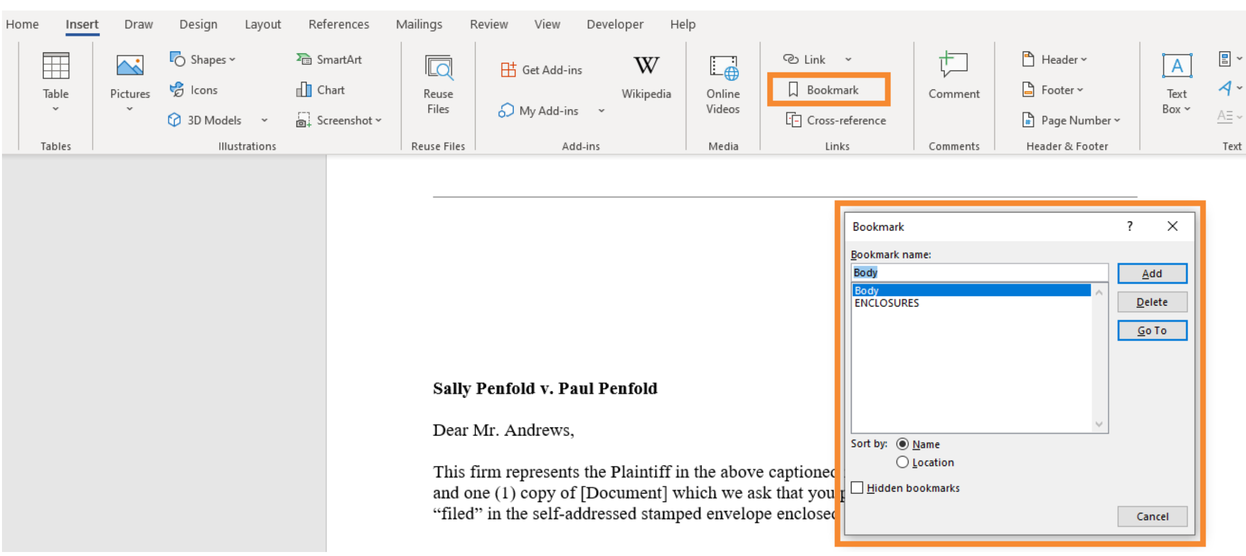
- Your cursor should flash at the beginning of the body of your letter. Enter the contents of your document.

- When you have finished, click the **Save & Close** button on the LEAP Toolbar in Microsoft Word.

- You will be prompted to rename your template.

Body Bookmark: Make sure your document contains a body bookmark. To add a body bookmark:

- Click the **Insert** tab on the Microsoft Word toolbar.
- Click **Bookmark**. A bookmark named **Body** should appear in the list. If the bookmark is not listed:
  - Close the bookmark window.
  - Highlight the section below the RE: line and above the signature.
  - Click the **Insert** tab.
  - Click **Bookmark**.
  - Under the bookmark name, type **Body**.
  - Click **Add**.
  - Once the body bookmark is listed, click **Go To**. The section between the RE: line and above the signature should be highlighted.
  -



- Enter the contents of your template in the highlighted section.

You can automate your forms even more by inserting fields in forms or templates. This means your matter information can be merged into a LEAP Form or Template by inserting fields:

- Open a matter in LEAP and click the **Forms & Templates** button at the top of the matter.

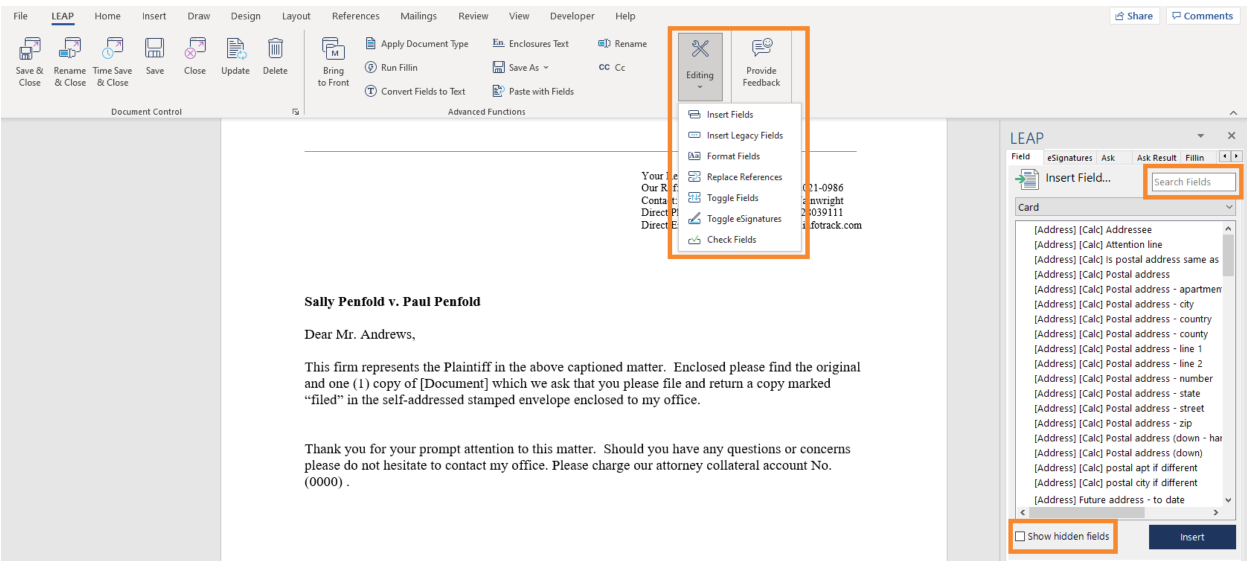
- Right-click the template and select **Edit Template**.

- Your template will open in Microsoft Word.

- Click the drop-down arrow next to **Editing** on the LEAP Ribbon within Microsoft Word and select **Insert Legacy Fields**. A list of available fields is displayed on the right-hand side of the Microsoft Word window.

- Use the **Search Fields** bar to locate the field(s) you want.

- If you cannot see the fields you want, check the **Show Hidden Fields** checkbox to search additional fields.
- Place the cursor in the template where you wish to insert the field and click to position it.
- Select the field and then click Insert.
- When you have finished, click **Save & Close**.
- Insert a reason for the change and click **OK**.



Changes made to the field on your matter are automatically reflected in the document, either when it is re-generated or when you click the Update button on the LEAP Ribbon in Microsoft Word.

Tip: *To toggle between the field name and the actual matter data, press **ALT+F9** on your keyboard.*

InfoTrack eFiling and Docket Management

Many states now offer a standard process for filing civil cases online. While the systems used often vary, the standard model employed in many U.S. states is a three-part, "open" eFiling system.

In an open state eFiling system—for example, Tyler Technologies' eFileTexas, filers connect to each clerk's office through a unified state or regional eFiling manager system (EFM) that sets standards for how filings must be submitted to the court. However, filers can still choose from a list of certified eFiling service providers—or EFSPs—to log into to complete their filings.

This allows some vendors to provide professional features catering to the needs of higher-volume filers like law firms, while others offer more basic functions for free, ensuring broad access to justice.

About EFSPs

To earn certification in most eFiling states, an eFiling service provider must be capable of securely storing attorney work product behind security credentials and filing it to the state's eFiling system. But EFSPs designed for law firm users are often capable of much more.

Typical professional EFSP features include:

- An electronic service of process system that can verify when documents are received
- Automatically converting documents to the court’s required format
- Ability to add physical service of process
- Ability to add paper court filing delivery where required
- Live customer support with extended hours
- Ability to file cases in multiple states

Integrated EFSPs

By harnessing practice management system data, integrated EFSPs like InfoTrack can add capabilities that are not possible through EFSPs that depend on manual data entry.

These include:

- **Direct selection of files from a practice or document management system.**
  Choosing files directly from your matter eliminates redundant storage solutions and sidesteps the unnecessary complexity of moving documents repeatedly during the filing and serving process.

- **Automatic expensing of filing and other order costs.**
  The fees involved in court filing and service of process orders can be difficult and time-consuming to track by hand. By automatically tracking and consolidating these fees in LEAP's Operating Account tab, an integrated EFSP can make it possible to bill through all your order expenses to the client with no additional effort.

- **Syncing of court returned documents.**
  Typically, court-endorsed copies of each filing must be downloaded manually when a filer is notified that they have been accepted by the court. With an integrated EFSP, they return to your matter automatically.

- **E-signature management.**
  The ability to access documents directly from LEAP may also enable editing of those documents with a third-party application like DocuSign.

- **Syncing of docket information.**
  A connected matter record also makes it possible to sync matter updates from public records systems—a vastly simpler proposition than frequently checking and copying these sources by hand.

Using InfoTrack with your LEAP matter allows you to order a wide variety of litigation services and invoice the total cost of those orders to your client.

LEAP Case Management, E-Billing, and Online Payments

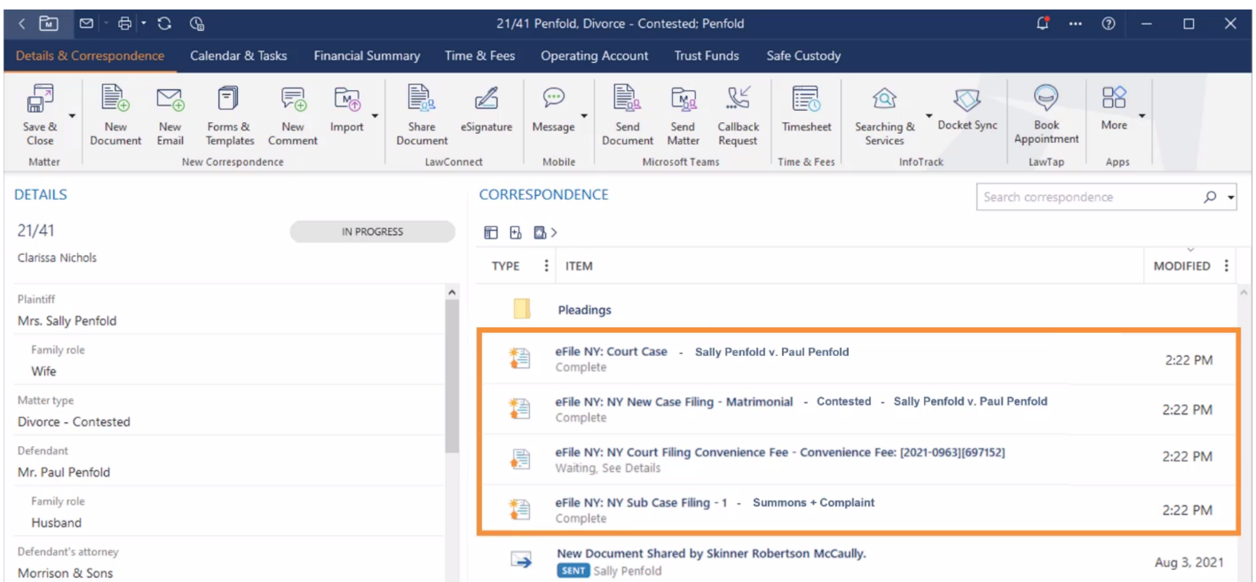
Experienced filers know that the work is not over once a filing has been submitted to the court. When the clerk issues accepted documents, they must be organized and often served to other parties, with all expenses documented for accounting purposes.

Efficiently recording the true costs of case filing may make it possible to seek reimbursement from your client or opposing counsel and make the process of court filing more profitable.

Retrieving Court-Returned Documents
In a traditional EFSP, filers will receive an email notification from the clerk's office or the filing system itself when a court-endorsed copy of their filing is available. The filer then downloads the document from a link in the email itself or logs into their EFSP to retrieve it.

When saving your document to your matter, make sure to save it with a name and in a folder structure that makes it clear that it is the endorsed copy from the court. This avoids issues with version control and eliminates the risk of serving unendorsed copies.

LEAP users with the [InfoTrack integration] can skip this process entirely. Once a document has been accepted by the court, it is automatically synced back to a separate folder in the matter record. There is no delay or risk of missing a critical email; the process simply moves forward.



Service of Process
After documents receive the clerk's stamp of approval, notice can be served to other parties in the case.

Some EFSPs for the legal market also allow users to place service of process orders by routing the order request to a local vendor for fulfillment.

While your EFSP might not always carry your favorite local vendor, ordering in the same platform has key advantages that make the overall process more efficient.

Serving through your EFSP can:

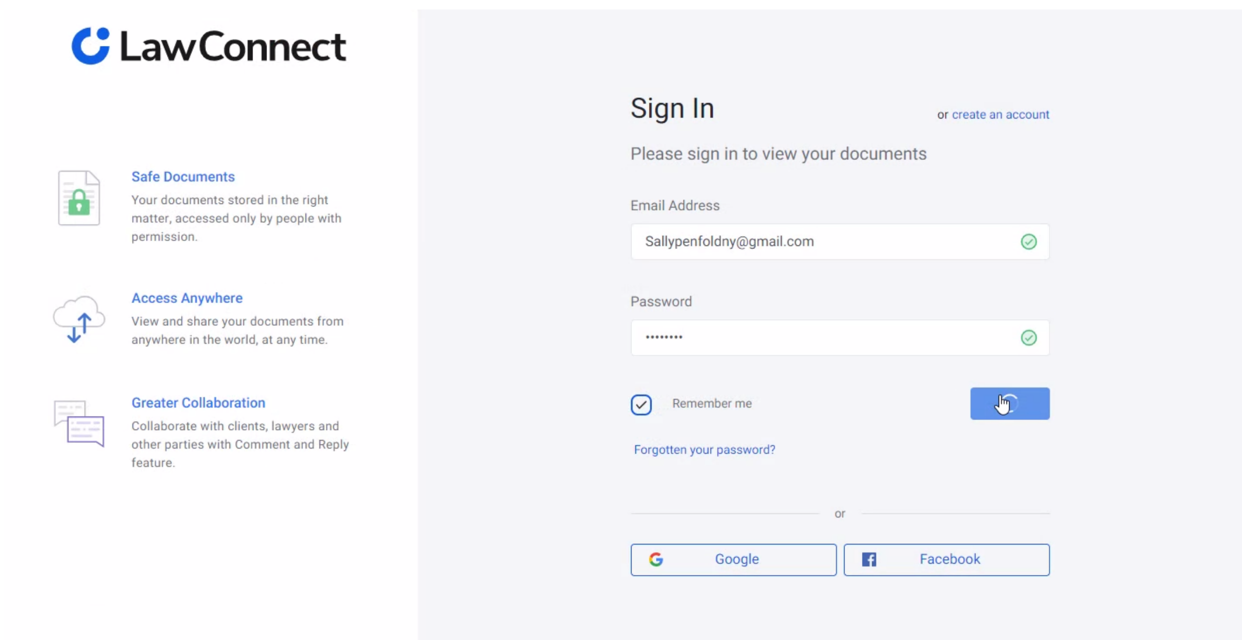
- Reduce your data entry burden and limit errors by pre-filling some service information from the related court filing
- Simplify billing when service of process fees automatically save to the matter and appear on your next invoice.

Additionally, [serving through an integrated EFSP](#) makes it feasible to bill through process serving expenses to your client without any extra legwork.

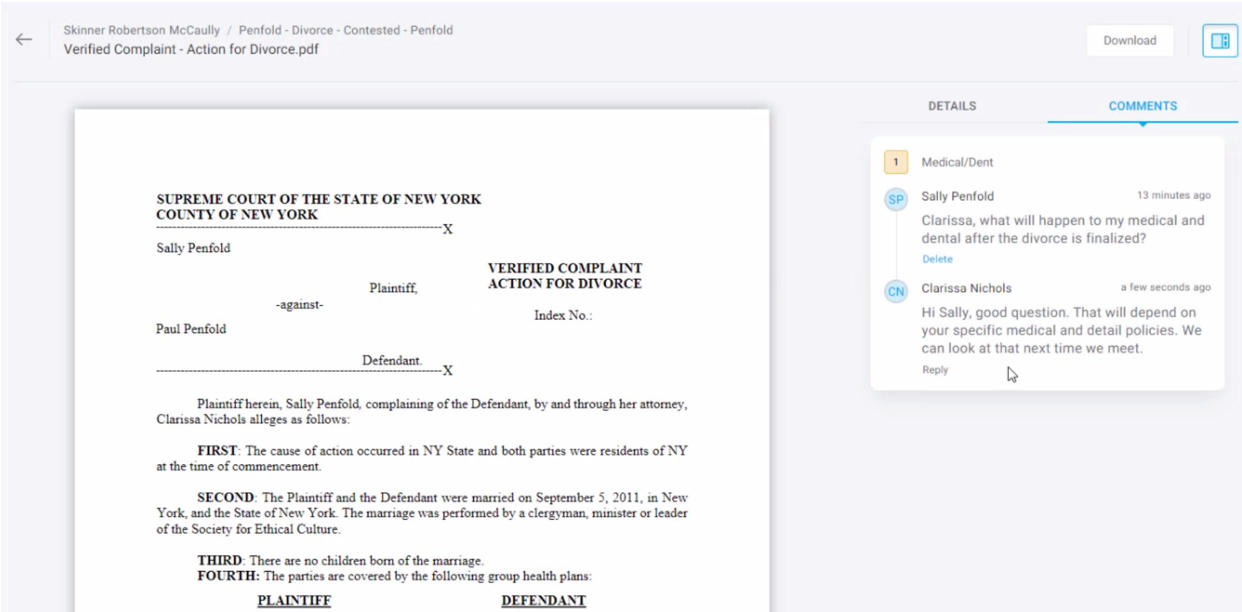
Sharing Documents
You can securely share documents with your clients and other associated parties with a matter using [LawConnect](#).

LawConnect is a cloud-based document management system for your clients that integrates seamlessly with LEAP. Your clients simply create an online account, choose a unique password, and log in. You use LawConnect with your existing LEAP username and password. With LawConnect:

- You can share documents with your clients
- Your clients can upload documents into LawConnect to share with you.



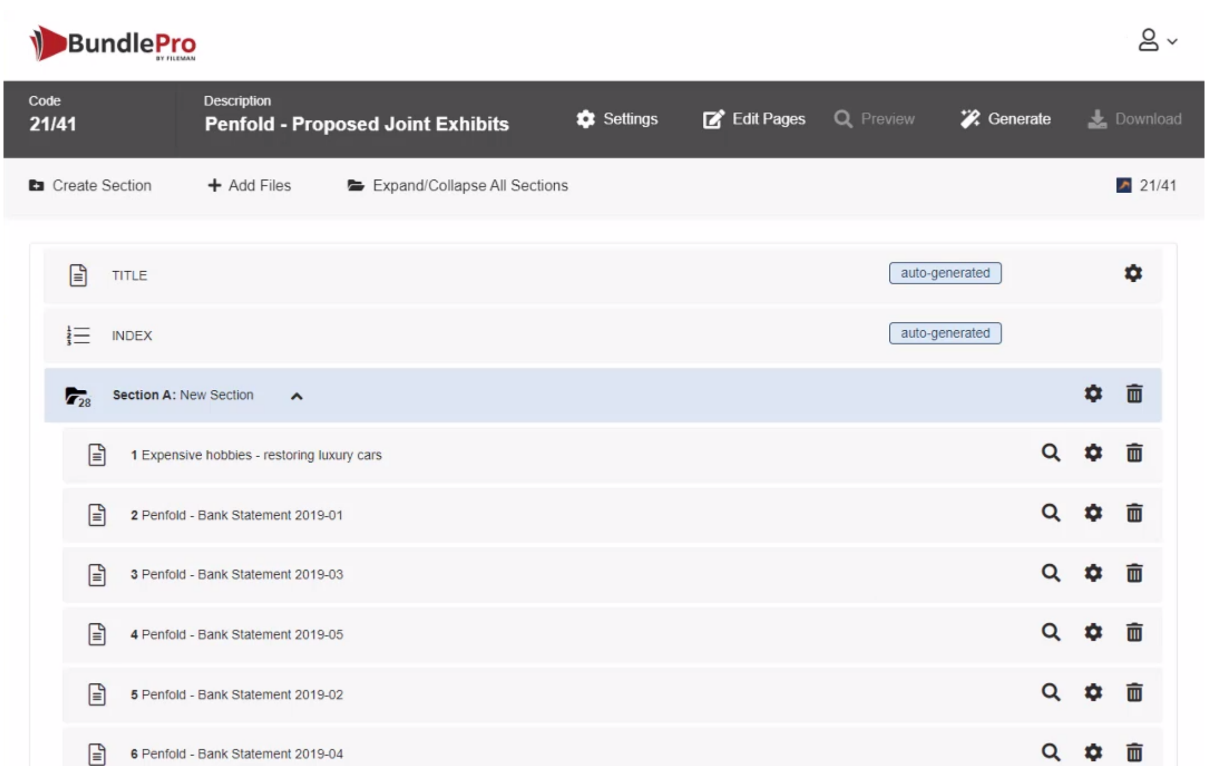
It is easy for you to share documents directly from the matter and instantly see whether a shared document has been read. Unlike email, you can also revoke access to a document.



All documents are stored safely in Amazon Web Services—the same secure storage solution where LEAP data is stored.

Creating Bundles
Some state or regional eFiling systems may require initial pleadings to be uploaded separately, so the court's clerk's case management system can identify and efficiently review new civil actions. However, at other stages of the case, larger document packets are more common. For example, trial exhibits and appellate record appendices.

You can quickly prepare document packets or "bundles" directly through BundlePro's integration with LEAP. Documents can be imported from the LEAP matter, or from storage locations outside of LEAP. Bundles include an auto-generated index page, dynamic page numbering, optional bates numbering as well as OCR functionality, meaning the bundle is completely searchable.



Just as with the InfoTrack integration, an automatic expense recovery is posted to the matter ledger, so this expense can be included in the next invoice to your client.

Accounting for Filing Expenses
Because multiple parties and different systems are often involved, court filing expenses can be notoriously difficult to document.

Expense Categories:

Court Fees
Check your court's fee schedule—normally posted on the clerk's website—for a breakdown of the costs associated with each filing. Most of these fees will typically be associated with a case initiation, but court appearances and special filing types can also incur costs during subsequent filings.

Service Provider Fees
To ensure the most basic court filing functions are available to everyone, most "open" court filing states have one state-subsidized free eFiling provider. Other EFSPs designed for the law firm market will often charge for professional court filing features and additional services, either on each filing transaction or via a subscription term.

If you intend to bill through any of your court filing expenses to the client, then flat, transaction-based pricing is often simpler.

Payment Processing Fees
When paying by credit card, you will often have to pay an additional percentage-based fee to cover the advancement of funds. A typical credit card processing fee is in the range of 3% for VISA transactions but can be higher for vendors that allow the use of American Express or Mastercard.

If your EFSP offers payment by ACH, the fee will be flat. Fees of anywhere from 25 cents to $1 are typical, depending on the state.

Expense Types:

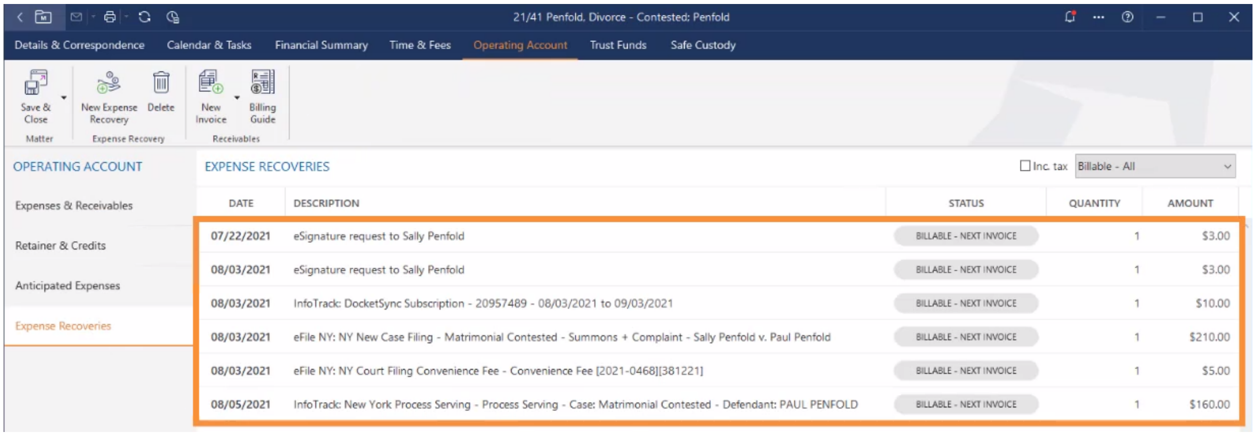
Recurring Fees
Software that you pay for on a subscription basis can be difficult to bill through to a client or opposing counsel because it's hard to argue how much of that subscription other parties should have to cover. More often, firms who rely on subscription court filing software during a case end up eating that part of the cost.

Transactional Fees
Software that charges per transaction can be more easily tied to specific actions in a case. However, it may be helpful to bundle all transactional costs associated with a court filing together for simplicity—i.e., fees from the court, service provider, and payment processor.

Billing for Expenses in LEAP
When activated, the InfoTrack integration will record all court filing and service of process expenses for your matter in LEAP's Operating Account tab, condensing court filing order expenses into a single line item.

The InfoTrack fees can be automatically included on the next invoice to the client, showing in the expense section of the invoice.

This ensures the law firm is always reimbursed for any of the costs associated with filing court documents.



Conclusion

Civil case filing continues to be a fragmented process involving many different entities, vendors, and systems. But today, integration between legal technology solutions is increasingly allowing firms to simplify and accelerate key tasks.

In this environment, tech-savvy firms with a clear understanding of how case data moves from the client to the firm, and ultimately through the legal process, have a distinct advantage. They can diagnose roadblocks inhibiting the efficient flow of case information and reduce the time that litigation support professionals must spend on low-value activities like data entry—tasks that are much more reliably left to software. Each task eliminated or automated reduces strain on overworked employees and the risk of a careless, consequential mistake.

By leveraging technology to streamline the civil case filing process, you'll run a more profitable, effective, and enjoyable practice.

LEAP integrations cited

InfoTrack – Smarter court filing, process serving and expense tracking
LawConnect – Secure, cloud-based document management for lawyers
BundlePro – Searchable PDF bundling for litigators
RapidPay - Secure, online credit card processing

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