Legal matter intake and triage

Process Definition Document (PDD): template and worked example

Example company (fictional): Vellane Retail Group SA, a grocery and home goods retailer in Lyon, France (about 4,200 employees, in-house legal team of 9).

Document control

Field	Value
Process name	Legal matter intake and triage
Process owner	[Name, role]
Prepared by	[Name]
Reviewed by	[Names of the people who do the work]
Approved by	[Name, date]
Version	1.0 (as-is)
Status	Draft

How to use this template

This is a complete process definition document (PDD) for legal matter intake and triage, also called legal request management, legal helpdesk, matter management or legal service desk. It describes the process as it runs today at a fictional French retailer, where store managers, buyers, HR and finance send legal questions every day and a small team has to decide who handles what and how fast.

This is an operational process description. It is not legal advice, and the thresholds and rules it mentions are examples that each company must set with its own counsel. Use the document as a starting point: replace the company details, keep the sections, and walk through each step with the person who triages requests and the lawyer who receives the matters. Most teams change the urgency definitions, the matter types and the budget approval limits. The structure stays the same.

- Replace the company, the matter tool and the finance system with yours. A shared mailbox and a spreadsheet can serve as the register if every request gets a reference and an owner.
- Define urgency and risk in your own terms in step 8. The amount thresholds and the number of days for urgent matters are the points that differ most between companies.
- Set your own budget approval limits in step 15 and match them to your delegation of authority.
- Decide what counts as a matter. Some teams log every question, others only work that takes more than an hour. Whatever you choose, state it, because it changes every number in the report.
- Measure the time from the moment the request is sent, not from the moment legal registered it. Most teams find a gap, and closing it is often the quickest improvement.

1. Purpose and scope

This procedure describes how Vellane Retail Group SA receives, checks, triages, assigns, tracks and closes legal matters, and how it engages and controls external counsel. It gives the business and the legal team one description of how a request becomes a matter, who looks at it first, how quickly it is answered, and what happens to the knowledge when it is done. The process starts when a business user sends a legal request through the form or the legal mailbox. It ends when the matter is closed, the requester has the answer and the knowledge is recorded. The process covers advice, commercial and employment questions, regulatory queries, disputes and claims. Contract drafting follows the contract review procedure once the matter has been triaged as a contract request.

In scope

- Requests from the business through the form or the legal mailbox
- Conflict and duplicate check, triage by type, urgency and risk
- Assignment to an in-house lawyer or external counsel, with budget and fee estimate for external work
- Status updates, closure and capture of knowledge for reuse

Out of scope

- Execution of the work itself, such as drafting a contract or running a case
- Invoice approval and payment, which belong to finance
- Incident response under the data breach procedure, which starts at once and informs legal in parallel
- Board and shareholder matters handled by the company secretary

2. Process at a glance

Item	Description
Trigger	A business user submits a legal request in the form or emails the legal mailbox.
Starts when	The Legal Intake Coordinator receives the request in the matter queue.
Ends when	The matter is closed in the matter register, the requester has the answer and the lessons are filed in the knowledge library.
Inputs	Request with description, parties, dates and attachments, Requester business unit and cost centre, Matter type list, urgency rules and risk matrix, Panel of external counsel with agreed rates
Outputs	Matter record with type, urgency, risk and owner, Assignment to a lawyer or external counsel, Approved budget for external work, Status updates to the requester, Closure note and knowledge entry
Volume	About 2,600 requests a year, roughly 50 per week, of which about 180 go to external counsel
Working hours	Monday to Friday, 08:30 to 18:00. Triage is done within 4 working hours. Urgent matters are picked up within 1 hour in office time.

3. Roles and responsibilities

Role	Responsibilities
Requester	Describes the issue in the form, attaches documents, answers questions from legal and receives the answer. A requester is an employee in the business, not a lawyer.
Legal Intake Coordinator	Reads every new request, asks for missing information, runs the conflict and duplicate check, classifies the matter and assigns it, and keeps the matter register accurate.
In-house Lawyer	Handles matters assigned to them, gives the advice or manages the matter, updates the requester and closes the matter with a note.
Head of Legal	Decides on high-risk matters and conflicts, approves external counsel above the budget limit and owns the triage rules.
Business Unit Head	Approves the cost centre charge for external work and decides on the commercial side of matters in their unit.
Legal Operations Manager	Runs the counsel panel, checks fee estimates against agreed rates, tracks budgets and invoices, and owns the knowledge library.
External Counsel (external)	Gives an engagement letter and fee estimate, carries out the work, reports progress and sends invoices against the budget.

4. Systems

- Legal request form feeding the matter queue

- Matter management tool: matter register, status and documents
- Legal mailbox in Outlook: requests by email
- Conflict and party search in the matter register
- Counsel panel list with rates and budget tracker (Excel)
- Knowledge library (SharePoint): closure notes and reusable answers
- Finance system: cost centres and purchase orders for external counsel

5. Process map

Process diagram goes here

Draw one lane per role from section 3, the steps from section 6 in order, and a diamond for each decision in section 7.

6. Procedure, step by step

#	Step	Who	What happens	System	Output
1	Submit the legal request	Requester	Describes the issue, names the other parties, gives dates and deadlines, attaches documents and says what outcome is needed. Takes 10 to 20 minutes. About 35% of requests come by email instead of the form.	Legal request form, legal mailbox	Legal request
2	Register the request as a matter	Legal Intake Coordinator	Turns each email into a record with the requester, business unit and attachments, so that every request is in the queue and has a reference number. Takes 5 minutes per email request. Form requests register automatically.	Matter management tool	Matter record with reference
3	Check the request is clear enough	Legal Intake Coordinator	Reads the request and decides whether it can be triaged. If key facts are missing, such as parties, deadline or documents (about 25% of requests), sends the requester a short list of questions. The clock stops until the answers arrive. Takes 10 minutes.	Matter management tool	Clear request, or questions to the requester
4	Run the duplicate check	Legal Intake Coordinator	Searches open and recent matters for the same parties, contract or subject. If a matching matter exists (about 9% of requests), links the new request to it and sends it to the lawyer who owns that matter. Takes 5 to 10 minutes.	Matter register	Linked to existing matter, or confirmed as new
5	Run the conflict check	Legal Intake Coordinator	Searches the names of the other parties against past and current matters and against the list of group companies, to see whether the company or a lawyer has acted	Matter register	No conflict, or possible conflict flagged

#	Step	Who	What happens	System	Output
			for or against them. A possible conflict goes to the Head of Legal. Takes 5 to 10 minutes.		
6	Decide on a possible conflict	Head of Legal	Reviews the flagged match, decides whether it is a real conflict and, if it is, who may and may not work on the matter. Takes 15 to 30 minutes. About 2% of requests. A conflict can mean external counsel is needed even for work that would otherwise be done in house.	Matter management tool	Conflict decision
7	Classify by type	Legal Intake Coordinator	Selects the matter type from the list: commercial, employment, regulatory, litigation, intellectual property, real estate, data protection or other. The type decides which lawyer group sees it. Takes 5 minutes.	Matter management tool	Matter type
8	Rate urgency and risk	Legal Intake Coordinator	Sets urgency by deadline: urgent if a legal or contractual deadline falls within 5 working days, normal otherwise. Sets risk from the risk matrix by amount at stake, regulatory exposure and reputational effect: low, medium or high. About 70% are normal and low, 25% medium and 5% high or urgent. Takes 5 to 10 minutes.	Matter management tool	Urgency and risk
9	Review high-risk and urgent matters	Head of Legal	Looks at every matter rated high risk or urgent on the same day, confirms the rating, decides whether to inform the general management and chooses the owner. Takes 10 to 20 minutes.	Matter management tool	Confirmed rating and owner for high-risk matters
10	Decide the route: in house or external	Legal Intake Coordinator	Applies the routing rules. Routine advice, standard contract questions and employment queries go to an in-house lawyer. Litigation, matters in other countries, specialist regulatory work and cases where a conflict applies go to external counsel, with the Head of Legal's agreement. About 93% stay in house. Takes 5 minutes.	Matter management tool	Route decision
11	Assign an in-house lawyer	Legal Intake Coordinator	Assigns the matter by type, current workload and any previous work with the same business unit. Sends the lawyer a short summary and the requester a message with the owner's name and the expected first reply date. Takes 5 minutes.	Matter management tool	Matter owner and acknowledgement to requester
12	Select external counsel from the panel	Legal Operations Manager	For matters that go outside, proposes two or three firms from the panel by speciality, location and capacity, and checks that none has a conflict with the company. Takes 20 to 30 minutes.	Counsel panel list	Shortlist of counsel
13	Send the engagement letter and fee estimate	External Counsel	Sends an estimate with scope, staffing, hourly rates or a fixed fee, expected total and key assumptions. Usually takes 1 to 3 working days. The rates must match the panel agreement.	Outlook	Fee estimate
14	Check the estimate against the panel rates	Legal Operations Manager	Compares the rates and staffing with the agreement, challenges any gap and records the estimate in the budget tracker. Takes 15 to 20 minutes.	Counsel panel list	Checked estimate
15	Approve the	Head of Legal	Approves estimates up to 25,000 EUR.	Matter	Budget approval

#	Step	Who	What happens	System	Output
	external budget		Estimates above that also need the Business Unit Head's approval for the cost centre. Estimates above 100,000 EUR need the general management as well. Takes 10 minutes plus 1 to 3 days of waiting.	management tool	
16	Approve the cost centre charge	Business Unit Head	Confirms that the cost of external work is charged to the unit, and a purchase order is raised. Takes 10 minutes. Needed in about 35% of external matters.	Finance system	Cost centre confirmed and purchase order
17	Do the work and update the requester	In-house Lawyer	Does the work, or manages external counsel on it, and records each step. Updates the requester at the dates promised and at every turning point, with a plain summary in two or three sentences. A normal matter takes 4 to 10 working days. High-risk matters take weeks or months.	Matter management tool	Advice or outcome, with status updates
18	Monitor external budget	Legal Operations Manager	Compares invoices and time reports with the estimate each month. If spend reaches 80% of the budget, asks the lawyer for a forecast. A rise of more than 10% above the approved budget needs a new approval under step 15. Takes 30 minutes a month per matter.	Counsel panel list	Budget status, revised approval if needed
19	Close the matter	In-house Lawyer	Confirms with the requester that the answer meets the need, records the outcome, final cost and time, and writes a closure note covering what happened, what was decided and what would help next time. Takes 15 to 30 minutes.	Matter management tool	Closed matter and closure note
20	Capture knowledge	Legal Operations Manager	Reviews the closure note and, where the question will come back, turns it into a short reusable answer or template in the knowledge library and links it to the matter type. Takes 15 minutes. About 30% of closed matters produce an entry.	Knowledge library	Knowledge entry

7. Decision points and business rules

- Is the request clear enough to triage? No (about 25%): the requester gets questions and the clock stops (step 3).
- Does a matching matter already exist? Yes (about 9%): the new request is linked to it and goes to its owner (step 4).
- Is there a possible conflict? Yes (about 2%): the Head of Legal decides who can work on it (steps 5 and 6).
- Which matter type? The type decides the lawyer group (step 7).
- Is it urgent or high risk? Urgent if a deadline falls within 5 working days. High risk by the matrix. Both go to the Head of Legal on the same day (steps 8 and 9).
- In house or external? Litigation, other countries, specialist regulatory work and conflicts go to external counsel. The rest stay in house (step 10).
- Does the fee estimate match the panel rates? No: the Legal Operations Manager challenges it before approval (step 14).
- Who approves the budget? The Head of Legal up to 25,000 EUR, then the Business Unit Head, then general management above 100,000 EUR (steps 15 and 16).
- Has spend passed 80% of the budget, or exceeded it by more than 10%? Yes: a forecast, then a new approval (step 18).

8. Exceptions

- Request sent straight to a lawyer (about 15%): the lawyer forwards it to the legal mailbox or registers it, so that the matter register stays complete.
- Matter that cannot wait for approval (about 3%): the Head of Legal may let external counsel start with a capped first phase of up to 5,000 EUR, to be covered by a normal estimate within 5 working days.
- Requester disagrees with the triage (about 4%): the Head of Legal reviews the type, urgency and risk and the decision is recorded.
- Matter involves a manager of the legal team or the Head of Legal: it goes to the general counsel of the parent company, or to external counsel, and is not visible to the team.
- Intake Coordinator on leave: a named deputy covers the queue and the 4-hour triage target.

9. Controls

- Every request becomes a matter record with a reference, so that nothing is handled outside the register.
- A conflict and duplicate check is done before assignment.
- High-risk and urgent matters are reviewed by the Head of Legal on the day they arrive.
- External counsel is engaged only from the panel at agreed rates, or with a recorded exception.
- Budgets are approved by value in line with the delegation of authority, and overruns over 10% need a new approval.
- Matters are closed with a note on outcome, cost and time, and the register is reviewed every quarter for matters open longer than their target.
- Matter files are kept for the period set by company policy and the limitation rules that apply to the matter type.

10. Known issues today

- About a third of requests arrive by email or in conversation and are registered late, so response times are measured from the wrong moment.
- One request in four lacks the facts needed for triage and loses a day or two in questions.
- Requesters ask for updates by email because they cannot see the status of their matter.
- Fee estimates from external counsel arrive in different formats and are compared by hand.
- Closure notes are written in a hurry, so the knowledge library has too few entries to help with the next similar question.

11. RACI matrix

R = responsible (does the work), A = accountable (owns the outcome), C = consulted, I = informed.

Activity	Requester	Legal Intake Coord.	In-house Lawyer	Head of Legal	Legal Ops Manager	BU Head
Submit the request	A/R	I				
Register and check the request	C	A/R		I		
Conflict and duplicate check		R	C	A		
Classify by type, urgency and risk	I	A/R	C	C		
Review high-risk and urgent matters	I	R	C	A		
Assign owner or external counsel	I	R	I	A	C	
Estimate and budget for external work	I		C	A	R	C
Do the work and update the requester	C	I	A/R	I		

Activity	Requester	Legal Intake Coord.	In-house Lawyer	Head of Legal	Legal Ops Manager	BU Head
Monitor budget			C	A	R	I
Close the matter and capture knowledge	C	I	R	I	A	

12. KPIs

KPI	Definition	Target
Hours from request to triage	Working hours from the request arriving to the type, urgency, risk and owner being set. Target 4 hours.	[set]
Days from assignment to closure	Working days from assignment to closure, by matter type and risk.	[set]
Requests needing questions before triage	Share of requests sent back for missing facts at step 3. Today about 25%.	[set]
External spend against approved budget	Total of invoices as a share of the approved budget for each external matter, and the number of matters above 110%.	[set]
Matters closed with a knowledge entry	Share of closed matters that produced a knowledge library entry. Today about 30%.	[set]

13. Revision history

Version	Date	Author	Change
1.0	[date]	[name]	First as-is version

Free template from processfix.ai. You may copy and adapt it. The company in the example is fictional.