



Access to Justice Board  
2018–2020 State Plan  
for the Coordinated  
Delivery of Civil Legal Aid  
to Low Income People



# Access to Justice Board 2018–2020 State Plan for the Coordinated Delivery of Civil Legal Aid to Low-Income People

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**WHAT**

The **purpose** of the state plan is to **expand access** to our civil justice system and **identify and eliminate barriers** that **perpetuate poverty** and **deny justice**.

**WHY**

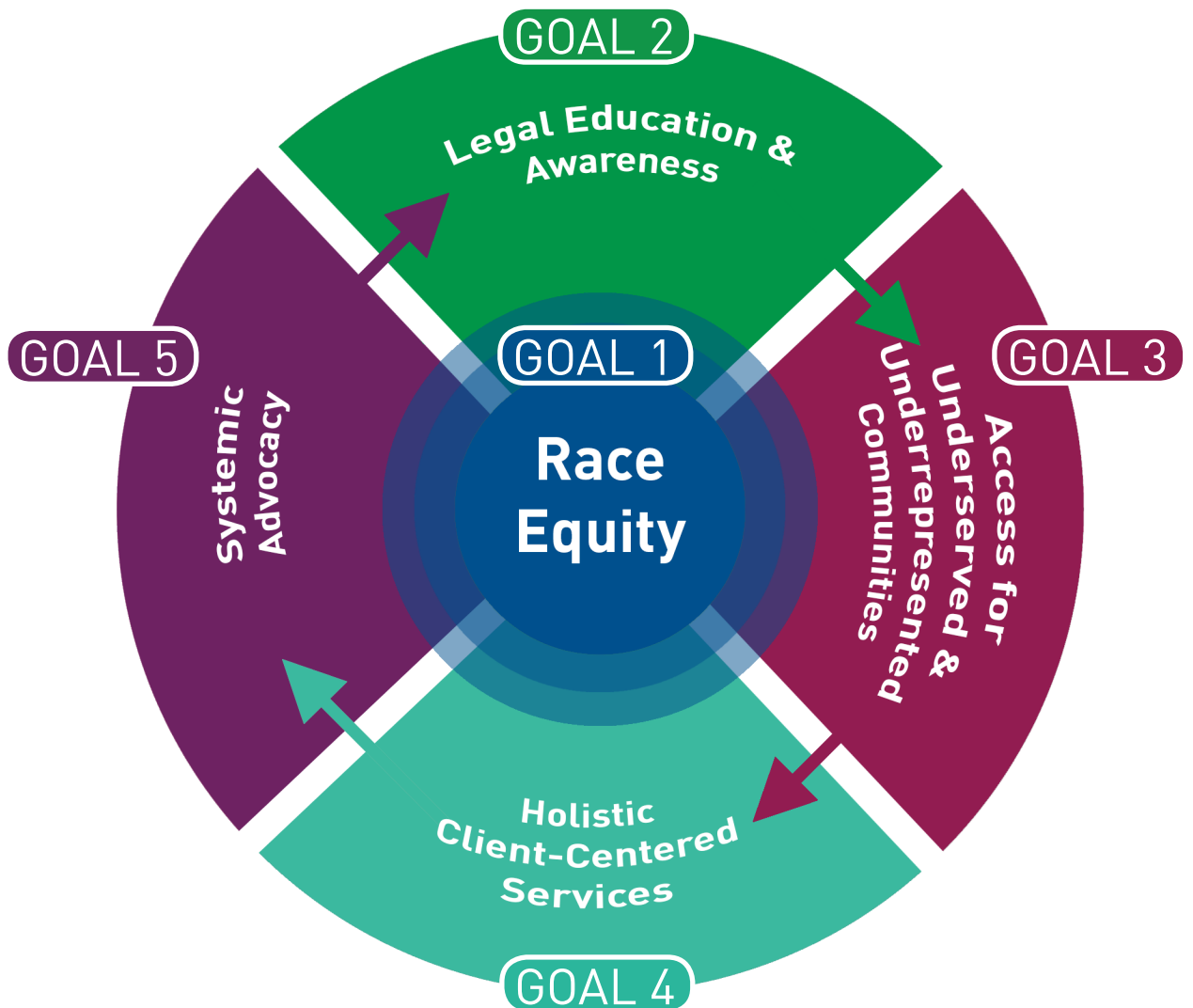
**7** in **10**  
low-income households face at least one significant legal problem each year

**AND**

many experience more than **9** legal problems for which the vast majority will not get needed help

**HOW**

**OUR SHARED COMMITMENTS FOR CHANGE**



# INTRODUCTION

## **Alliance for Equal Justice** or **Alliance**

We are lawyers, judges, legal workers, volunteers, and community leaders committed to the fair, effective, and inclusive administration of civil justice in Washington state. In partnership with clients and communities of low-income and vulnerable people, we work to expand meaningful access to the civil justice system and to identify and eliminate barriers that deny justice and perpetuate poverty.

## **Fiscal Year**

For purposes of this Plan, the Fiscal Year is from October 1 to September 30.

## **Equity**

Fairness achieved based on an understanding that individuals and communities are subject to different forms of treatment and have access to different amounts of privilege. To be contrasted with fairness based on equal distribution of resources.

## **Race Equity**

A vision that race or color does not predict the amount and quality of opportunities, services, and benefits for impacted communities and individuals.

This Plan is intended to guide the collective efforts of the [Alliance for Equal Justice](#) to expand access to our civil justice system and identify and eliminate barriers that perpetuate poverty and deny justice. We adopt this Plan as communities across Washington report increasing fear and anxiety about a changing political climate that once again targets those who have historically been most vulnerable to marginalization. We adopt this Plan with the belief that we must coordinate our collective efforts, using all the legal tools we are privileged to wield, and take direction from community leaders in pursuit of a just and equitable system. As set forth in our [Hallmarks](#), the Alliance for Equal Justice (“the Alliance”) exists to ensure that poverty is not an impediment to justice; that legal barriers which perpetuate poverty and inequality will be dismantled; and that our laws and our justice system will be open and equally effective for all who need their protection, especially those who have been placed on the margins of society due to their identities.

The severity of Washington’s justice gap and the inadequate funding of civil legal aid cannot be overstated. The [2015 Civil Legal Needs Study](#) tells us that the need is greater than ever. Seven in 10 low-income households face at least one significant legal problem each year and, on average, experience more than nine legal problems for which the vast majority will not get the help they need. The study tells us that low-income Washingtonians do not understand that the challenges they face have legal remedies. It tells us that the nature of their legal problems is changing and that the problems intersect and compound, with one legal problem left unaddressed building into multiple legal problems. The study tells us that 20 years after the adoption of Washington’s first state Plan, we are far from delivering on our vision of equitable justice and it challenges us to do better. Closing the justice gap will require major investments to double the number of state-funded civil legal aid attorneys, expand the level of volunteer attorney involvement in the delivery of civil legal aid services, and create statewide support infrastructure for the Alliance. Closing the justice gap will also require acknowledging and breaking down the artificial silos that we have created between the civil, criminal, and juvenile justice systems and identifying and challenging structurally racialized systems and practices that disproportionately affect minority clients and client communities.

Our [Hallmarks](#) call on us to maximize the impact of our limited resources through coordination and the delivery of effective and economical legal aid. Recognizing that we may never have the resources needed to give every low-income household access to legal representation, this Plan seeks to improve the way we work together—within whatever resources are available.

The Plan sets forth five goals that represent a universal commitment of all Alliance members, while recognizing the differences among programs and their abilities to implement. Goal number 1 identifies **race equity** as a lens to apply to all of our work. Goals 2-5 identify the focus of our work at each stage that an individual might encounter a legal need, starting with ensuring that low-income communities

# INTRODUCTION

## **Holistic Services**

Services that are provided in a manner that takes into account the entirety of a client's barriers and goals, legal and nonlegal. This includes two primary components:

1. Helping clients identify legal and non-legal problems and potential solutions for their legal problems; and
2. Working in collaboration with legal and nonlegal community partners to ensure that the client's range of needs are addressed, whether through direct, unbundled, or referral services.

## **Client-centered Services**

Services delivered in a manner that takes into account clients' self-identified needs and designed to achieve the individual client's goals.

## **Systemic Advocacy**

Action that is designed to affect change in all parts of a local, regional, or statewide system that negatively affects low-income and marginalized people, and that takes into account the interrelationships and interdependencies among all of that system's parts.

## **Structural Racism**

Racial inequity perpetuated by a system of public policies, institutional practices, cultural representations, and other norms.

## **Alliance Organizations**

Programs or organizations that participate in the Alliance for Equal Justice. Note that the Alliance describes a fluid network, rather than a specific set of organizations. There is no entity responsible for determining which organizations are considered to be a part of the Alliance.

and individuals understand their legal rights and responsibilities in goal 2. Once a legal problem has been identified and an individual desires legal help, goal 3 asks the Alliance to ensure that members of underserved and underrepresented communities will be able to obtain legal assistance regardless of their geographic and/or demographic circumstances. Once legal services have been engaged, goal 4 calls for **holistic** and **client-centered** approaches to address the complexity and breadth of legal needs and to help clients overcome demographic, systems-based, and other institutional barriers. And finally, goal 5 urges that in addition to the important work of seeking legal remedies for individuals, the Alliance continues to pursue **systemic advocacy** to effect structural reforms that maintain and defend progress and improve the well-being of communities and individuals and dismantle systems of institutional **racism** and other forms of oppression.

We expect that each **Alliance organization** will review the State Plan goals, strategies and implementation steps to determine, in collaboration with other Alliance members, the role(s) they should play in achieving these collective goals in the coming years. Specific strategies and implementation steps are intended as helpful guidance, but there is no substitute for the knowledge that individual organizations have about their own current and potential strengths and capabilities, the communities they serve, and the changing and evolving circumstances affecting clients, communities, and client service delivery.

The Plan also identifies measures of success for the purpose of better aligning organizational actions, providing feedback that leads to individual program and system improvements, and supporting Alliance accountability to the State Plan. The measures of success are intended to measure the progress of the Alliance as a whole. They are not intended to dictate strategic or funding decisions of any organization. Many performance measures are specifically embedded in the statements of strategy within the Plan. Other measures will require the collection and analysis of data. For those measures, we recommend that organizations/regions spend the first year of the Plan gathering baseline data, the second year establishing realistic targets, and the third year analyzing performance and implementing changes in support of the strategy. The Access to Justice Board's Delivery System Committee should determine how to coordinate collection and distribution of performance measure data. It is expected that implementation of the Plan will be evaluated annually and course corrections made as needed.

# INTRODUCTION

As the coordinator of this effort, the Access to Justice Board is tasked with supporting and monitoring the implementation of this Plan. In many places throughout the document, the Access to Justice Board and its committees are identified to play the role of clearinghouse. That role may include collecting the relevant information, reviewing and assessing the information, and communicating back to the Alliance the sharing of best practices or recommended next steps.

Achieving a just and equitable system will require courage, collective vision, and agility to respond to changing needs, challenges, and opportunities. The State Plan offers a framework for the Alliance to work together to rise to the occasion and act with common commitment, focus, and collective determination. Through this State Plan we recommit to our values and our common commitments.

## GOAL

# 1

The Alliance will promote racial equity both systemically and within its organizational practices, working toward a vision that race or color does not determine the availability and quality of services, fairness of outcomes, and opportunities for communities and individuals.

### WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

As stated in the [Washington Race Equity & Justice Initiative's \(REJI\) Acknowledgements and Commitments](#), many vulnerable communities, especially communities of color, are targeted and treated as less worthy. REJI is a call to action to work together, across systems, to challenge the racial **bias** that has been built into our societal fabric. The 2015 Civil Legal Needs Study Update tells us that people of color experience a substantially greater number of legal problems, that they regularly experience discrimination and unfair treatment on the basis of legally protected characteristics such as race, and that low-income communities and people of color have little confidence in the justice system. Consistent with the REJI Acknowledgments and Commitments, this goal and its strategies call on the Alliance to transform structures, policies, and practices that perpetuate disparate outcomes for communities of color, including by assessing and strengthening our organizations' own alignment with race equity and justice values and goals. This work must be done in collaboration with partners in the criminal, juvenile, and child welfare systems.

#### Implicit Bias

Attitudes and beliefs that result from subtle cognitive processes that often operate at a level below conscious awareness and without intentional control.

While this three-year Plan asks the Alliance to focus on race, we acknowledge that organizations are and should continue pursuing work to address the inequity that communities experience based on many other—often intersecting—identities.

### STRATEGY 1

Engage in activities that create a shared awareness and understanding of what is needed to achieve race equity in our legal systems and society.

#### Alliance organizations can implement this strategy by:

- Identifying currently existing annual events focused on race equity, or with a substantial race equity focus, and engaging Alliance organizations, Access to Justice Board members, legal aid funders, community members, and officers of the broader justice system to attend those events.
- Identifying, coordinating, and collaborating with different groups including those across the civil, criminal, and juvenile justice systems that are already focused on race equity and utilizing social media and emerging technology to collaborate and share resources and tools to increase our understanding of race equity in order to achieve racial equity across systems.

#### Our vision of success is:

- Alliance organizations are using common language to demonstrate a shared understanding and awareness of the reforms needed to achieve race equity in our systems.



## GOAL

# 1

### Indicators of success include:

- Alliance organizations are participating in an annual conference or events that focus on race equity.
- Alliance organizations report increased relationships, collaborations, and activities around advancing race equity.
- Alliance organizations are incorporating race equity language into their statements of mission, vision, and values, strategic plans, and other guiding documents.

### STRATEGY 2

Increase the diversity of staff, boards, and volunteers.

### Alliance organizations can implement this strategy by:

- Identifying and adopting existing tools (e.g., the Implicit Bias test from Harvard University, the City of Seattle Race Equity Tool Kit, and REJI's Acknowledgements and Commitments) in order to conduct a race equity self-audit at all levels in their organizations.
- After conducting the self-audit, addressing and developing strategies to eliminate practices that operate as impediments to the recruitment and retention of a diverse staff, board, and volunteers.
- Developing capacity and technical resources to enable organizations to implement their strategies for race equity and diversity.

### Our vision of success is:

- Alliance organizations that reflect the diversity of the communities we serve at all levels.

### Indicators of success include:

- All Alliance organizations have completed a self-audit by the end of **year one**.
- All Alliance organizations will incorporate race equity awareness and provide individualized tools and resources as part of the orientation for all board, staff, and volunteers.
- An increase in staff, board, and volunteer diversity for Alliance organizations that is reflective of the clients they serve.

### STRATEGY 3

Raise organizational competency and capacity to advance race equity in our legal system and society.

### Alliance organizations can implement this strategy by:

#### Year One

Spans the WSBA and Access to Justice Board fiscal year that begins on October 1, 2017 and ends on September 30, 2018.

## GOAL

# 1

### Race Equity Lens

Examining a practice, system, behavior, or event with an awareness and focus on the vision that race or color should not predict the amount and quality of opportunities, services, and benefits for impacted communities and individuals.

- Identifying and adopting existing tools and trainings (e.g., the Implicit Bias test from Harvard University, the City of Seattle Race Equity Tool Kit, and REJI's Acknowledgements and Commitments) to identify, evaluate, and build solutions for creating organizational and systemic racial equity.
- Employing a **race equity lens** in all aspects of its operations and the delivery of legal services.
- Identifying, coordinating, and collaborating with different groups including those across the civil, criminal, and juvenile justice systems that are already focused on race equity and utilizing social media and emerging technology to collaborate and share resources and tools to achieve racial equity across systems.

#### Our vision of success is:

- Alliance organization staff demonstrate increased awareness of the impacts of race and structurally racialized systems and practices on our society and the client communities we serve.
- Alliance organizations are participating in cross-systems dialogue about race.

#### An indicator of success will be:

- All Alliance organization staff have had training on how to talk to each other about race.

## STRATEGY 4

Promote and raise the visibility of Alliance organizations' and the legal community's activities and successes in advancing race equity.

#### Alliance organizations can implement this strategy by:

- Collaborating with WSBA and local bar associations to nominate people for and promote existing awards (and, where none exist, to establish awards) recognizing legal aid organizations or individuals within organizations that make significant contributions to the advancement of race equity.
- Incorporating race equity topics into all communications channels, including through the Access to Justice Board's Communications Committee and the Equal Justice Coalition.

#### Our vision of success is:

- The Alliance is viewed as an effective partner in advancing race equity.

#### An indicator of success will be:

- At least five earned media pieces related to Alliance organizations' work to advance race equity each year.

## GOAL

# 2

The Alliance will work to ensure that low-income communities and individuals understand their legal rights and responsibilities and where to seek legal assistance.

### WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

The [2015 Civil Legal Needs Study](#) tells us that nearly 50 percent of low-income households are not aware that the problems they are facing have a legal component; and they do not seek legal help. This gap in understanding persists despite decades of effort to provide legal education to low-income people through websites like [WashingtonLawHelp.com](#) and through grass-roots community outreach and engagement. This goal and suggested strategies call on Alliance organizations to take a critical look at our educational efforts and consider new approaches to empowering clients to understand the legal nature of the problems they experience and to make informed decisions about whether, when, and where to go for legal help.

### STRATEGY 1

Conduct an assessment of the current educational activities, communication channels, resources, and tools, identify any gaps and needs for improvement, and develop and execute on plans and any necessary tools that will address those gaps and needs.

#### Alliance organizations can implement this strategy by:

- Conducting an inventory of educational activities and resources within their region(s) – within one year – identifying the gaps and need for improvements and communicating the results to the Access to Justice Board Delivery System Committee, which can serve as a clearinghouse.
- Addressing any identified gaps and needs for improvement, creating and executing plans to educate low-income persons about legal problems, rights, and responsibilities, and the availability of legal assistance, with a special emphasis on reaching underserved communities and breaking down the silos among the civil, criminal, and juvenile justice systems. These plans may be on an organizational and/or regional level based on need and resources. They should include developing and distributing educational resources through a variety of media and organizations and should incorporate best practices and common language. The Access to Justice Board’s Communications Committee can support these efforts as a clearinghouse.

#### The Access to Justice Board and its committees can implement this strategy by:

- Addressing any identified gaps and needs for improvement, creating tools and strategies to educate low-income persons about their legal rights and the services available to them within and outside the civil legal aid system,

## GOAL

# 2

and sharing them with Alliance organizations.

- Developing an interactive legal wellness tool – in collaboration with Alliance organizations, ATJ technology leaders, and the private sector – that will enable low-income people to describe the situations they are facing and gain an understanding of the legal rights implicated and the resources available to address them. Alliance organizations can determine how the tool can be used through their networks and communities and encourage its use.

### **Our vision of success is:**

- An improvement in the ability of low-income people to understand the legal dimensions of the problems that they are experiencing and to make informed decisions about whether, when, and where to go for legal help.

### **Indicators of success include:**

- An increase in the use and circulation of tools to help people identify their legal issues.

## STRATEGY 2

Communicate with low-income communities in ways that are accessible to low-income persons regardless of limited literacy, limited English proficiency, disability, or limited access to technology.

### **The Access to Justice Board and its committees can implement this strategy by:**

- Developing models for effective community-based outreach and education both on- and off-line and sharing them with all Alliance organizations

### **Our vision of success is:**

- A rise in client satisfaction with their ability to obtain information about their legal rights and responsibilities and the availability of legal assistance.

### **An indicator of success will be:**

- Increased contact with low-income persons, including those with limited literacy, limited English proficiency, disability, or limited access to technology.

Alliance organizations will work to ensure that low-income members of underserved and under-represented communities will be able to obtain legal assistance regardless of geographic and/or demographic circumstances or eligibility for federal and state funded legal services.

#### WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

Who you are matters. Federal and state legal aid funding restricts programs from serving certain groups of people, including those who are undocumented and incarcerated. Additionally, the [2015 Civil Legal Needs Study](#) demonstrates that low-income people who identify as African American or Native American experience a greater prevalence of legal problems in nearly every substantive area explored by the study. The same is true for people with disabilities and young people. It shows that low-income people regularly experience discrimination and unfair treatment on the basis of immigration status, prior juvenile or criminal system involvement, and credit history, and that victims of domestic violence or sexual assault report nearly double the prevalence of problems across all legal problem areas with an average of 19.7 legal problems per person, per year. The [LGBTQ Supplement](#) to the 2015 Civil Legal Needs Study illustrates that the LGBTQ community experiences different legal problems than the general low-income population and substantially higher levels of problems associated with discrimination and unfair treatment. Additionally, access to legal aid in rural areas remains a persistent challenge. Consistent with our [Hallmarks](#), this goal and its suggested strategies call on the Alliance to authentically engage with low-income communities, adapt our delivery systems to meet their needs, and focus our limited resources on meeting the civil justice needs of those who are most vulnerable and in need.

#### STRATEGY 1

Work with data, community-based partners, and communities to identify underserved and underrepresented communities on an ongoing basis and provide targeted legal assistance.

#### Alliance organizations can implement this strategy by:

- Working with community partners to identify the common needs of the underrepresented and underserved communities they work with in order to provide targeted legal assistance.
- Working with communities of color, Native American communities, religious minorities, and other underserved and underrepresented communities to identify needs and provide targeted legal assistance.
- Considering and pursuing opportunities to increase the amount of services in community places frequented by underserved populations (e.g., libraries, shelters, community centers, hospitals, schools, churches).
- Considering and pursuing opportunities to co-locate legal aid and other community services on a limited or permanent basis..
- Training community partners to identify legal needs and make effective referrals.

## GOAL

# 3

### Year Two

Spans the WSBA and Access to Justice Board fiscal year that begins on October 1, 2018 and ends on September 30, 2019.

### Year Three

Spans the WSBA and Access to Justice Board fiscal year that begins on October 1, 2019 and ends on September 30, 2020

#### Our vision of success is:

- Community-based partners have an increased understanding of how to identify civil legal problems and help low-income and vulnerable people with whom they work to access legal aid.
- Legal aid providers' strategy in reaching underserved and underrepresented populations is improved through partnership with community-based partners.

#### Indicators of success include:

- An increase in the provision of legal aid outside of traditional legal aid program offices by the end of **year two**.
- An increase in the number of community organizations collaborating with Alliance organizations as partners by the end of **year three**.
- An increase in the number of community-based partners trained by Alliance members to identify legal problems of persons they serve and make effective referrals by the end of year two.
- An increase in the number of targeted referrals that Alliance organizations receive from community-based partners by the end of year three.

## STRATEGY 2

Leverage innovative models and technology to increase the provision of the full range of legal services to low-income clients in underserved and underrepresented communities

#### This strategy can be implemented by:

- Automating the new plain language family law forms and ensuring that the public has online access to the document assembly system at no cost through the collaboration of the Northwest Justice Project, the Administrative Office of the Courts, the Office of Civil Legal Aid, and the Access to Justice Board.
- Increasing the number of pro bono attorneys providing legal assistance to underserved and underrepresented communities using Skype (or other like systems), document viewing, and similar technologies through the collaboration of Alliance organizations, the Access to Justice Board committees, the Washington State Bar Association, and local courts.
- Developing a mentorship program for pro bono attorneys in attorney-rich areas willing to serve clients from underrepresented and underserved communities using technology and other means through the collaboration of the

## GOAL

# 3

Access to Justice Board, Alliance organizations, and the Washington State Bar Association.

### **Our vision of success is:**

- Increased services to low-income clients regardless of geography or other barriers to accessing legal aid in traditional settings.
- A rise in volunteer retention and satisfaction for attorneys in attorney-rich areas who are providing services to underrepresented and underserved communities using technology and other means.

### **STRATEGY 3**

Improve access to and the effectiveness of existing intake mechanisms.

**Alliance organizations and the Access to Justice Board can implement this strategy by convening an Alliance stakeholder group to assess and make recommendations on:**

- The strategic role of centralized intake, advice, and referral services as a component of statewide intake services.
- Flexible and efficient models for regional or local intake systems that complement centralized intake and support a variety of intake strategies.
- Innovative intake and referral methods used outside the state of Washington that could be implemented within the state.
- Client-centered approaches to intake for underserved and underrepresented populations, including consultation with the broader community of providers of social and human services to low-income people.

### **Our vision of success is:**

- More effective intake mechanisms, which may include reduced time between initial contact and initiation of services to clients.
- Increased services to communities identified as underrepresented and underserved regardless of any barriers to accessing legal aid through traditional intake mechanisms.

## GOAL

# 4

The Alliance will encourage the use of holistic and client-centered approaches to address the complexity and breadth of legal needs and to help clients overcome demographic, systems-based, and other institutional barriers.

### WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

The [2015 Civil Legal Needs Study](#) revealed that, on average, low-income households will experience more than nine civil legal problems annually. Experience shows us that these problems are often intertwined, and that helping an individual to address and overcome the problems faced often requires legal and nonlegal solutions. If the interrelated nature of these problems is not addressed, clients will continue to need civil legal aid for recurring and unaddressed legal problems. We also understand from the Civil Legal Needs Study Update that low-income people of color experience substantially higher rates of legal problems and that issues relating to discrimination and unfair treatment cut across every substantive legal category. This goal and its strategies call on Alliance organizations to fully realize the values articulated in our [Hallmarks](#) around authentic client and client community engagement, ensuring the availability of a full range of legal aid, and building effective partnerships with legal and community based organizations.

### STRATEGY 1

Work with clients to identify and prioritize legal and non-legal needs and to develop strategies to meet those needs.

#### Alliance organizations can implement this strategy by:

- Continuing to develop flexible models, tools, and resources to help clients identify and prioritize the breadth of their legal and non-legal needs. These tools should be shared with the Access to Justice Board's Delivery System Committee as a clearinghouse.
- Developing and offering training to enable staff and volunteers to better identify clients' legal and non-legal needs.
- Employing a race equity lens – consistent with Goal 1 – in identifying client needs, local and statewide client service priorities, and strategies to address the problems experienced by low-income racial, religious, and ethnic minorities and communities of color including, but not limited to, those who are not eligible for state and federally-funded services.
- Establishing client satisfaction surveys or other tools to secure input from clients with respect to the services that they receive and the manner in which they receive them. Such systems should include questions that measure how well the organization is identifying and developing strategies to address the needs prioritized by the client.

#### Our vision of success is:

- A measurable rise in client satisfaction related to Alliance organizations'



## GOAL



ability to help them identify the full range of their legal and nonlegal needs and helping them make informed decisions about whether and, if so, how to address them.

### **An indicator of success will be:**

- A measurable increase in the number of and extent to which Alliance organizations are working with clients to help them make informed decisions about their goals, and to identify, prioritize and address their legal and nonlegal needs by the end of year two.

### **STRATEGY 2**

Expand and strengthen partnerships and collaborations to improve each client's ability to address legal and nonlegal needs.

### **Alliance organizations can implement this strategy by:**

- Strategically and intentionally collaborating with community-based organizations, as appropriate to the circumstances, in helping clients address their needs.
- Regularly seeking and securing input from community-based organizations in assessing and meeting the needs of clients.
- Sharing information about legal and nonlegal resources in the region.

### **The Access to Justice Board and its committees can implement this strategy by:**

- Facilitating the development of an improved model to ensure effective cross-referrals and collaboration among Alliance organizations. To the extent possible, clients should need only knock on one Alliance door to get the help they need.

### **Our vision of success is:**

- Clients are better able to address their legal and non-legal needs.

### **An indicator of success will be:**

- An increase in the quality and number of cross-referrals and collaborations to better serve the client.



**STRATEGY 3**

Develop and expand holistic service models to improve long-term outcomes for clients.

**Alliance organizations can implement this strategy by:**

- Identifying communities that would benefit the most from coordinated or holistic legal aid by the end of year one.
- Piloting or expanding holistic models with those populations.
- Assessing existing services to determine the feasibility of implementing a client-centered, holistic approach.
- Establishing client-centered systems to secure input from clients with respect to how well the organization is addressing the full range of clients' needs.
- Collaborating with partners in the criminal and juvenile justice systems to identify opportunities to work together to provide access to civil legal aid services to those involved in or reentering from the criminal and juvenile justice systems.

**The Access to Justice Board and its committees can implement this strategy by:**

- Identifying and providing tools that will allow Alliance organizations to capture the depth of the services they are providing and the outcomes they are achieving for clients. Alliance organizations can utilize the tool(s) to assess and report the depth of services being provided.

**Our vision of success is:**

- An end to the revolving door of legal aid, with fewer people returning because their issues have been resolved as a result of coordinated or holistic services.

**An indicator of success will be:**

- An expanded number of coordinated or holistic models being implemented by the end of year two.

## GOAL

# 5

The Alliance will pursue systemic advocacy to effect structural reforms that maintain and defend progress and improve the well-being of communities and individuals and dismantle systems of institutional racism and other forms of oppression.

### WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

Our [Hallmarks](#) call on us to identify and eliminate the systems that operate to deny justice to low-income members of racial, national, ethnic, and social minorities and other low-income persons who experience barriers due to explicit or implicit bias and other marginalizing dynamics. Despite many advocacy successes, the 2015 Civil Legal Needs Study reveals that low-income people of color, among other groups, experience substantially greater numbers of legal problems and regularly experience discrimination and unfair treatment on the basis of legally protected characteristics such as race. The study also tells us that low-income people have precious little confidence that the justice system can help people “like them” to enforce their rights. We know from various symposia sponsored by the Supreme Court’s Minority and Justice Commission, national and state-based research, and many years of experience that racialized systems and structures have developed that result in disparate treatment of people and communities of color and that drive disproportionate negative outcomes for members of these groups as well as other historically and currently marginalized groups. This goal and its strategies call on the Alliance to prioritize collaborative systemic advocacy designed to eliminate these systems, structures, and practices, and to root such advocacy in authentic engagement with client communities and partnerships with community-based organizations. This goal is not intended to deemphasize the essential work of providing direct legal assistance to individuals, but to acknowledge that systemic change is needed if we are ever to truly achieve equity for all.

### STRATEGY 1

Engage with client communities in order to inform and drive systemic advocacy.

#### Alliance organizations can implement this strategy by:

- Creating annual community engagement plans by organization, regional groups, and issue-specific task forces, as is helpful in each case, and distributing them to regional partners, stakeholders, and the Alliance.
- Revisiting, evaluating, and modifying their engagement plan annually based on results and distributing written results and modifications to regional partners, stakeholders, and the Alliance.

#### Our vision of success is:

- Alliance organizations will be able to demonstrate that community input is playing a role in helping identify systems, structures, and practices that result in disparate treatment or disproportionate negative outcomes for low-income people and communities, including but not limited to communities of color.

**An indicator of success will be:**

- Alliance organizations, any regional groups, and issue-specific task forces have client community engagement plans by the end of year two.

**STRATEGY 2**

Communicate and collaborate within the Alliance and with other allies — which may include those in the criminal and juvenile justice systems — in order to identify patterns within communities that point to the need for systemic change and identify opportunities for collaboration.

**Alliance organizations can implement this strategy by:**

- Engaging with one another and allies in existing statewide advocacy work by developing and supporting mechanisms for regular information sharing and for inviting participation, as appropriate, in regional and statewide advocacy activities.
- Developing and supporting mechanisms for regional input on systems, structures, and practices that result in disparate treatment and drive disproportionate negative outcomes for low-income and marginalized communities and considering the value of systemic change advocacy to address these.
- Convening a statewide stakeholder group at least biennially to revisit and refine statewide systemic reform work..

**Our vision of success is:**

- Alliance organizations are working together to effectively identify and develop statewide system reform strategies.

**An indicator of success will be:**

- Increased participation from a broad range of Alliance organizations in identifying statewide and regional advocacy priorities and in pursuing systemic change.
- Increased recruitment of and engagement with other allies, including community-based organizations and those in the criminal and juvenile justice systems, in identifying statewide and regional advocacy priorities and in pursuing systemic change.

**STRATEGY 3**

Partner with organizations external to the Alliance to develop resources and make strategic investments in the ability of Alliance organizations to engage in systemic advocacy.

**Alliance organizations can implement this strategy by:**

- Considering annually allocating specific resources for systemic change advocacy appropriate to their mission.
- Supporting community partners in their campaigns for systemic change.

**The Access to Justice Board and its committees can implement this strategy by:**

- Obtaining information annually from Alliance organizations on activities related to partnering with community-based organizations to develop resources for systemic change advocacy.

**Our vision of success is:**

- An increased focus on and support for advocacy that is intentionally focused on identifying and eliminating systems, structures, and practices that negatively affect low-income and marginalized communities and that result in disparate treatment and drive disparate outcomes for communities of color and other marginalized populations

**STRATEGY 4**

Develop leaders that are skilled in systemic advocacy.

**Alliance organizations can implement this strategy by:**

- Having staff, board members, and volunteers participate in the Equal Justice Community Leadership Academy.
- Having staff, board members, and volunteers participate in and provide opportunities for community lawyer training across the state on an ongoing basis.
- Having staff, board members, and volunteers participating in and providing opportunities for race equity training across the state on an ongoing basis.

## GOAL

# 5

### **Community Lawyering**

Using legal knowledge and skills, including community organizing techniques, to achieve goals that are identified by the community so the community can enhance its own power.

#### **Our vision of success is:**

- That **community lawyering** becomes a core component of each program's strategic client service mix.

#### **Indicators of success include:**

- Every Alliance organization has multiple members who have graduated from the Leadership Academy.
- By 2019 every Alliance organization will have a majority of staff engaged in community advocacy who received community lawyering training.

The Alliance has long demonstrated an ability to respond effectively to changing circumstances. While this Plan is intended to guide the Alliance within available resources, the Alliance is committed to meeting any eventuality with courage, consistent with the Hallmarks and our core values, with the clients and client communities foremost in our minds.



