

Access to Justice Commissions What Are They Good For? The North Carolina Example



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About me

- Executive Director of the NC Equal Access to Justice Commission since 2008
- Previously, Executive Coordinator for JAG
- First Coordinator of the Campaign for Justice
- Lobbyist, Consultant to other access to justice entities, Nonprofit management company



Why do we need a Commission?

- Why can't we work through existing groups?
 - Bar associations, IOLTA programs, the Judicial branch, and legal aid providers have separate and sometimes competing agendas
 - National movement of ATJ Commissions allows for regular communication about initiatives in other states
 - Political climates change and this presents opportunities for new advocacy from a neutral body



History of Commissions /ATJ entities

- There are now 40 ATJ Commissions/ATJ entities
- Serve an umbrella function to involve expanded range of stakeholders to develop meaningful systemic change
- Support of the judiciary, especially the state supreme court
- Support of the ABA, National Center for State Courts, NLADA, and national foundations

Findings from 2018 ABA Access to Justice Commissions Report



- Broad, active stakeholder involvement increases the impact of access to justice commissions
- Professional staff plays a key role with effective commissions
- The leadership of the Conference of Chief Justices, as well as individual chief justices in expanding access to justice commissions around the country cannot be overstated.
- The support of the legal aid community is extremely valuable for successful commissions

Findings from 2018 ABA Access to Justice Commissions Report



- Private philanthropy has strategically nurtured the expansion of commissions
- Small grants have a huge impact
- Approximately one-third of commissions are involved with fundraising for their operational expenses or special projects
- Coalitions working with commissions help ensure the success of special projects
- Very creative approaches to developing ongoing resources to support commissions are emerging across the country

Recommendations from report



- Be creative about potential funding sources
- Have a minimum staffing level as your goal
- Cultivate potential new supporters

NC Equal Access to Justice COMMISSION



It is the mission of the North Carolina Equal Access to Justice Commission to expand access to the civil justice system for people of low income and modest means in North Carolina.

The North Carolina Example



- Established in late 2005
- Not populated until late 2006
- No funding until 2008
- First staff hired part-time in 2008
- CLE fee implemented in 2009
- CLE fee doubled in 2015
- Second staff hired in 2015
- NC Pro Bono Resource Center established in 2016
- AOC move in 2017
- Now, 6 FTE staff, budget of \$790k

NC EATJC Structure



NC Equal Access to Justice Foundation 501(c)(3)

Fiscal Sponsorship
Equal Justice Alliance

Foundation Committees
Executive
Governance
Finance and Resource
Development

NC Equal
Access to
Justice
COMMISSION

NORTH CAROLINA
PRO BONO
RESOURCE CENTER

Pursuing Justice Through Service

NC EATJC Funding



- CLE Fee \$375,000
- Law Firms \$92,000
- Private Foundation \$70,000
- IOLTA \$75,000
- AOC \$130,000

- Total 2008 Budget \$25,000
- Total 2019 Budget \$794,000

EATJC Membership



- Judiciary-majority of Supreme Court
- All levels of judiciary
- Governor, Senate, House
- Business Community
- Philanthropic Community
- Legal Aid Providers
- Law Schools
- Private Bar
- 30 members-Chaired by Chief Justice, Vice Chair Associate Supreme Court Justice



Recent Projects of the NC EATJC:

- Advocacy for state and federal funding
- Economic Benefits Report
- Increasing Pro Bono Participation
- Development of Self Represented Litigant Materials

Additional Activities



- Implemented voluntary pro bono reporting and recognition statewide
- Developed statewide communications plan and messaging for civil legal aid
- Policy work around restorative justice-driver's license restoration, expungements, certificates of relief.
- Legal Services Conference



Final Thoughts

- A Commission is the only entity with broad stakeholder support that is neutral and independent to look at systemic civil justice issues
- Find the spaces no one is working in where you can make a big difference
- A little money can do a lot
- Success begets success

For more information:



www.ncaccesstojustice.org

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A word cloud featuring various terms related to law, social justice, and community support. The words are arranged in a dense, overlapping pattern. The largest words include 'justice', 'civil', 'aid', 'attorney', 'legal', 'poverty', 'services', 'protection', 'cases', 'client', 'lawyer', 'advocacy', 'system', 'community', 'Equal', 'domestic', 'education', 'policy', 'violence', 'access', 'representation', 'veterans', 'collaboration', 'immigrants', 'inmates', 'housing', 'stakeholders', 'collaborative', 'network', 'income', 'Alliance', 'military', 'litigation', 'assistance', 'need', 'evictions', 'funding', 'appeals', 'advice', 'screening', 'fairness', 'comprehensive', 'clients', 'consumer', 'eligibility', 'disabilities', 'employment', 'brief', 'development', 'victims', 'farmers', 'intake', 'people', 'limited', 'benefits', 'children', 'farmworkers', 'monitoring', 'centralized', 'statewide', 'seniors', 'service', 'healthcare', 'providers', 'expungements', 'volunteer', and 'rural'. The colors range from dark blue to dark red, with some words appearing in multiple colors.