

Access to Justice Board 2015 Communication Plan



Executive Summary

In 2014, twenty years after being established as the first access to justice commission in the country, the Washington Access to Justice Board commissioned an evaluation of its work. That evaluation found that, while the Board had been fundamentally successful over its twenty-year history, it had not always accomplished what it intended, or what was possible, in large part due to inadequate communication with its partners in the Alliance for Equal Justice and the larger community. To address this challenge, the Access to Justice Board has adopted a three-part communication plan.

Part I – Communicating about Our Work

In order to fulfill its mission to achieve equal access to the civil justice system for those facing economic and other significant barriers, the Access to Justice Board must effectively engage with the Alliance for Equal Justice and other close partners. These communications should further three related goals: ensuring awareness and effective implementation of initiatives, soliciting feedback to inform the Board's work and priorities, and engaging and energizing partners in the work. This section details the various communications channels that should be utilized and assigns responsibilities to Board members, other volunteers and staff.

Part II – Facilitating Alliance Communications

The Access to Justice Board has been charged by the Washington Supreme Court with coordinating a statewide, integrated, non-duplicative delivery system for civil legal aid. Inherent to the success of such a system, particularly one as dynamic and complex as Washington's, is effective communication among the many and diverse participants in that system. Recognizing that the system participants have many communication channels, Part II of the plan describes the ways that the Access to Justice Board has and should continue to support and facilitate these intra-Alliance communications.

Part III – Communicating with the Public

The Access to Justice Board is also charged by the Supreme Court with playing a key role in communicating with the public in order to promote understanding about and build support for civil legal aid. This section explains that much of this work is appropriately carried out by the providers of civil legal aid and the Equal Justice Coalition and its host organization the Legal Foundation of Washington. Together, these entities grow support for civil legal aid and make grants to the providers of that aid. Calling on the Board's responsibility to promote this communications work and ensure that it is done, this section provides a set of communication goals and expectations as well as recommended action for the Legal Foundation of Washington, the providers of civil legal aid and the Access to Justice Board.

Part I - Communicating about Our Work

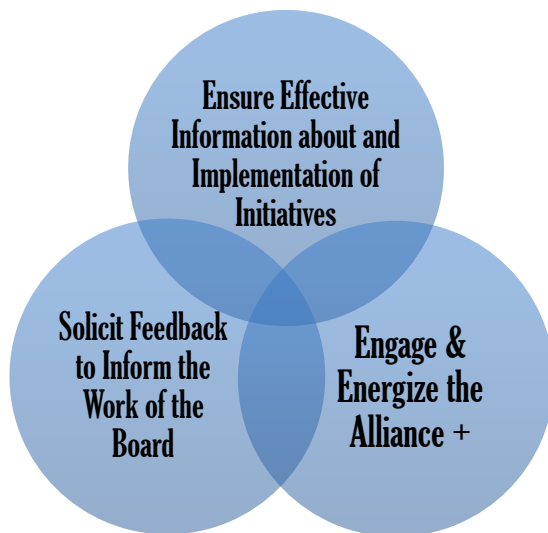
The ATJ Board should develop a broad communication and marketing strategy about its work and the issues that it addresses. The goal of the strategy should be to publicize important access to justice issues that it has addressed and the resources that are available to respond as a result of its work and the work of others. It should seek to increase its public profile and with it the profile of the access to justice community, with an eye toward enhancing its capacity to draw attention to access to justice issues with a broad spectrum of institutions.

~John A. Tull, *Washington Access to Justice Board: Twenty Years of Work: An Evaluation* (July 2014)

The Tull Report concluded if the Board is to fulfill its mission, it is essential that it effectively engage the Alliance and close partners to provide information on the work of the Board, to successfully implement its projects, for input on its priorities, feedback on its work and as a source to develop and engage volunteers. More effective communications with the Alliance and close partners will also allow the Board to raise awareness about its initiatives among those who might benefit from and draw attention to evolving access to justice issues.

The What

Communications from the ATJ Board to the Alliance for Equal Justice and other partners should further three related goals: ensuring awareness of and effective implementation of initiatives, soliciting feedback from the Alliance and other partners to inform the Board's work and priorities and engaging and energizing the Alliance and other partners in the work of the Board.



Specific Communications Topics

- Projects and initiatives of the Board and Committees
- Profiles/Work of Committees and workgroups
- Profiles/Work of Board Members and volunteers
- Issues relevant to access to justice that need attention or work
- Recognition of people and institutions doing extraordinary work
- Recognition of Alliance successes

The How

The Access to Justice Board should make use of a wide range of communication channels, including email distribution lists, blogs, websites, appropriate print media, social media and new media as it becomes available. Because communication channels are constantly changing, the Board should reevaluate its media strategy frequently. Where possible it should engage with the Alliance and other partners through interactive dialog. While communication work will be largely organized and

implemented by staff, this work should be directed by the Board, and Board members and volunteers shall provide much of the content, including newsletter and magazine articles and blog posts.

| Communication Channel | Frequency | Purpose | Person(s) Responsible |
|-----------------------|-----------|---|--|
| Twitter | As Needed | Alerts, Requests for Feedback | Staff to ATJ Board |
| Facebook | As Needed | Alerts, Requests for Feedback | Staff to ATJ Board and Designated Volunteers |
| ATJ Email Blasts | As Needed | Alerts, Requests for Feedback | Staff to ATJ Board |
| Take Note | As Needed | Alerts with Broad Appeal to the Legal Community | Staff to ATJ Board |
| ATJ Newsletter | 3x / Year | Report on ATJ Activities, Solicit Feedback, Engage Volunteers | Staff Coordinates; Board Provides Content |
| ATJ Annual Report | 1x / Year | Report on ATJ Activities, Solicit Feedback, Engage Volunteers | Staff Coordinates; Board Provides Content |
| NWSidebar | Quarterly | Engage Legal Community in Specific ATJ Issues & Projects | ATJ Board Members, Volunteers |
| NW Lawyer | 2x / Year | Engage Legal Community in Specific ATJ Issues & Projects | ATJ Board Members, Volunteers |
| ATJ Website | Ongoing | Maintain Basic ATJ Info & Important Documents | Staff to ATJ Board |
| ATJ Community Website | Ongoing | Communicate the ATJ Story | |
| WSBA Website | Ongoing | Alert Legal Community to Events | Staff to ATJ Board |
| ATJ Conference | Biennial | Engage Alliance+, Report on ATJ Activities, Solicit Feedback | Staff and Board |

Twitter, Facebook and Other Social Media

WSBA staff to the ATJ Board and a cadre of designated volunteers with administrative privileges should share issues relevant to access to justice, event announcements, Alliance news items and requests for feedback to the Alliance and other followers through Facebook. Posts should be made as needed with a minimum target of at least four posts per month. Wherever possible, posts should include images and encourage dialogue. WSBA staff and volunteers should work with other partners active on social media to share, “like”, and comment on each other’s posts to ensure maximum impact and visibility.

Twitter can also be used in a similar way, but because it requires a much higher volume of posting, the ATJ Board’s initial use of the medium will be to “follow” other stakeholders and influencers posting about Access to Justice issues as a way to direct additional traffic to their feeds.

ATJ Email Blasts and TakeNote

WSBA staff to the ATJ Board should share issues relevant to access to justice, event announcements, Alliance news items and requests for feedback to the Alliance through the atj-leadership@list.wsba.org e-list as needed. Items of broad appeal to the legal community, such as information about the Access to Justice Conference, should be shared through WSBA’s bimonthly email digest, TakeNote.

In addition, the schedule of ATJ Board, committee and other meetings should be communicated via e-blast on a monthly basis.

ATJ Newsletter

The purpose of the Access to Justice Board Newsletter is to engage volunteers, potential volunteers and other stakeholders in the work of the Access to Justice Board. The newsletter should be emailed out on a quarterly basis (March, September, December), except in the quarter that the Annual Report is disseminated (June), and should include approachable and interesting stories about ongoing projects, accomplishments and individuals involved in the work of the Board. The content for the newsletters should be provided by ATJ Board members, committee chairs and other volunteers.

ATJ Annual Report

An annual report of the Access to Justice Board is required by Supreme Court Order. Typically published in June, the purpose of the Annual Report is very similar to the ATJ Newsletter, except that it should focus on the accomplishments of the prior 12 months and provide a roadmap for the year to come. It should also be shared with a larger audience including the national access to justice community. The annual report should primarily be presented in a digital format, web-optimized to be engaging and searchable. The content for the newsletters should be provided by ATJ Board members, committee chairs and other volunteers.

NWSidebar

The ATJ Board should strive to provide access to justice-related content for the WSBA blog, NWSidebar, on at least a quarterly basis. The goal of this communication is to engage the broader legal community in specific access to justice issues and projects. Blog articles can be adapted from annual report and quarterly newsletter articles.

NWLawyer

The ATJ Board should strive to provide access to justice-related content for the WSBA magazine, NWLawyer, at least twice per year. The goal of this communication is to engage the broader legal community in significant access to justice issues and projects. The content for these articles should be provided by ATJ Board members, committee chairs and other volunteers.

ATJ, WSBA and ATJ Community Websites

The Access to Justice Board should maintain a significant web-presence, with different sites achieving different goals and communicating with different audiences. The ATJ Board should communicate key events and be identified as a resource as appropriate on the WSBA website, www.wsba.org. The ATJ Board should also maintain key information about its meetings, make up and guiding documents on its pages on the WSBA website, www.wsba.org/atj. This site should link to a separate website with unique branding to effectively communicate the ATJ Board's story to the public and the Alliance+, as well as educate that audience about its accomplishments and projects and engage potential volunteers. The ATJ Community site should focus on engaging and encouraging intra- Alliance communication and conversations about equal justice. This site should also focus on attracting a broader audience than the

WSBA site. The site should provide a way for Alliance members, community partners and the public to connect to access to justice issues in Washington State. The ATJ site would provide information and postings about Alliance and community partners, links to Alliance and community partners, links for the public to access information and services. It also provides the ability to focus communication about particular issues affecting equal justice at particular times.

ATJ Conference

The ATJ Board should prioritize its biennial statewide conference, which was identified by respondents to the board's 20-year evaluation as "one of the Board's most successful undertakings in terms of communication, networking and community building." In addition to providing a venue for the Alliance+ to network, learn, share innovative solutions and get reenergized, it is also an important opportunity for the ATJ Board to share its accomplishments and engage potential volunteers.

Part II - Facilitating Alliance Communications

Washington's civil legal aid delivery system is complex and includes numerous organizations and entities, each of which is governed by myriad rules and regulations and all of which work together to deliver high quality, efficient and effective legal aid services in response to the full spectrum of client needs. In order to achieve maximum efficiency, ensure the most strategic use of all resources, and to limit the potential for unnecessary duplication of functions in a limited resource environment, it is necessary that all components of the system operate in accordance with a common set of objectives and expectations. Recognizing the complexity of the system and the need for effective planning and oversight, the Supreme Court directed the Access to Justice Board to "establish, coordinate and oversee a statewide, integrated, non-duplicative, civil legal services delivery system that is responsive to the needs of poor, vulnerable and moderate means individuals."

~Plan for the Delivery of Civil Legal Aid to Low Income People in Washington State (Revised 2006)

The initial charge from the Supreme Court in its 2012 Order reauthorizing the Access to Justice Board is to coordinate a statewide, integrated, non-duplicative delivery system. Inherent to the success of such a system is effective communication among the many and diverse actors in that system. Washington's civil legal aid delivery system is complex and dynamic. It has adapted over the years to address the changing needs of the communities it serves, while attempting to minimize the impacts of geography and funding restrictions. The court-order also charges the ATJ Board with serving as an effective clearinghouse and mechanism for communication and information dissemination.

In service of these related goals, the ATJ Board facilitates intra-Alliance communications in a variety of ways, including:

Delivery System Committee

The Delivery System Committee, comprised of legal aid service providers and funders from across the state, is charged with tracking the effectiveness and development of the civil legal aid delivery system. Monthly meetings provide an opportunity for system actors to share and discuss changes in the economic and political landscape the impact the scope and breadth and client needs. The Committee is also responsible for strategic planning related to the delivery system.

Pro Bono Council

The Pro Bono Council is a committee of the ATJ Board created in 2013 to engage the pro bono community in key policy initiatives affecting the statewide delivery system. Among other activities, the Council serves as forum for pro bono programs to discuss significant Alliance issues and communicate them to the ATJ Board and other Alliance members, serve as a forum for collaboration among each other and encourage pro bono program participation in regional planning efforts.

Access to Justice Board E-Lists

The Washington State Bar Association maintains a number of e-lists for use of the ATJ Board. The largest one, atj-leadership@wsba.list.org, is used by many Alliance actors to share news and opportunities. Any member of the list can post to it.

ATJ Conference

According to the ATJ Board's 20-year evaluation, the Access to Justice Conference has been one its most successful endeavors, providing an opportunity for delivery system actors to communicate with each other, network and become energized. After a brief hiatus, the conference was reinstated in 2015 and is contemplated to be held biennially in June.

Goldmark Awards Luncheon Activities

The Legal Foundation of Washington's annual Goldmark Awards Luncheon, held in February, brings together many Alliance participants. The ATJ Board has traditionally taken advantage of this opportunity to plan other events on the "Goldmark Day". These events have included an in-person meeting of the Pro Bono Council, forums with the Supreme Court and a reception co-hosted by Law Fund.

Equal Justice Coalition

The Equal Justice Coalition, a standing committee of the ATJ Board hosted, supported and administered by the Legal Foundation of Washington, is charged with educating policymakers and the public about the importance of civil legal aid in our communities and advocating for sufficient public funding for civil legal aid on behalf of low-income people in Washington State. This work includes sharing the work and achievements of Alliance organizations with the public and each other.

Part III - Communicating with the Public

The Access to Justice Board shall work to . . . Serve as an effective clearinghouse and mechanism for communication and information dissemination . . . promote, develop and implement policy initiatives and criteria which enhance the availability of resources for essential civil equal justice activities . . . [and] promote widespread understanding of civil equal justice among the members of the public through public legal education.

~Washington Supreme Court Order No. 25700-B-524 Reauthorizing the Access to Justice Board (2012)

Access to justice requires that the public have available understandable information about the justice system, its resources, and means of access. The justice system should promote ongoing public knowledge and understanding of the tools afforded by technology to access justice by developing and disseminating information and materials as broadly as possible in forms and by means that can reach the largest possible number and variety of people.

~Access to Justice Technology Principle Five, as adopted by the Washington Supreme Court (2004)

Included in its charge to “achieve equal access to the civil justice system for those facing economic and other significant barriers,” the Supreme Court has asked the ATJ Board to play a key role in communicating with the public in order to promote understanding about and rally support for civil legal aid. There are two key areas of communications called out here:

Informing and
Educating the Public

Building Support for
Civil Legal Aid

Informing and educating people who need or may need the civil justice system about their rights, the resources and services available to them, and how to access the civil justice system is appropriately carried out by providers of civil legal aid in partnership with justice system leaders and organizations. It is the ATJ Board’s responsibility to promote this work and to ensure that it is done. Much of the work **building support for and promoting public investment in civil legal aid** is carried out by the Equal Justice Coalition, a standing committee of the ATJ Board that is supported by the Legal Foundation of Washington. The Legal Foundation also houses the Campaign for Equal Justice and the Endowment for Equal Justice. Together these entities grow support for civil legal aid and make grants to the providers of that aid. Because of their experience and expertise in communications and fundraising, as well as their familiarity with the work of the providers of civil legal aid, these entities are well positioned to provide leadership to the Alliance in communicating with the publicⁱ about the purpose and value of civil legal aid.

Communication Goals & Expectations

Communications to the public should serve to inform and educate users and potential users of the civil justice system about the resources available to them as well as to develop public support and resources for civil legal aid. In addition, the ATJ Board expects:

- Consistent use of effective and tested messages and themes by Alliance partners in all areas of public communications and interaction, and in places and by means where engagement with the communication is maximized.
- Collaboration with and support for the Campaign for Equal Justice and the Equal Justice Coalition.

- Expanded and effective use of traditional media, websites, social media and new media as it becomes available.
- Engaging with communities through interactive dialog, while respecting clients’ privacy and confidentiality.
- Communications with the public will be consistent with and further the goals of the Washington State Hallmarks for Equal Justice and the ATJ Technology Principles.
- Communications work will be adequately resourced.

Recommended Action

The Legal Foundation of Washington, the Equal Justice Coalition and related entities are charged, under this plan with providing leadership, content and coordination for communicating with the public around the purpose and value of civil legal aid. Public information about access to the civil legal justice system and civil legal resources is expected to be provided, in large part, by providers, with the support and coordination provided by the ATJ Board.



ⁱ “Public” here is broadly defined to include any person present in the State of Washington.