

Tennessee Supreme Court Access to Justice Commission Statewide Communications Plan

Executive Summary

When the Tennessee Supreme Court Access to Justice Commission (the “Commission”) developed its fourth strategic plan, it recognized that it was entering a new phase in its existence. The Commission has become an integral part of the Tennessee access to justice community over its first eight years. When assessing its achievements and crafting its strategic vision, the Commission determined that it is the entity best positioned to assume the role of the statewide coordinating arm for communications on legal aid, pro bono, self-represented litigants resources, and access to justice stakeholders. The Commission’s first step to assuming this role is to create a statewide communications plan with legal aid and access to justice programs.

The Commission identified five areas of focus in its 2016 Strategic Plan to address in the communications plan.

- The general public is largely unaware of existing civil legal resources, as demonstrated in the 2014 Legal Needs Study.
- Legal professionals are likewise often unaware of existing civil legal resources and available volunteer opportunities and resources, as indicated in various surveys conducted by the Commission.
- Social service providers may be aware of their local legal aid office but do not know of the many civil legal resources available to their clients.
- There is a general lack of knowledge and understanding about civil legal aid, as illustrated by research conducted by Voices for Civil Justice.
- The Commission’s Advisory Committees struggle to publicize new initiatives and activities and all can benefit and draw upon the expertise of an integrated communications plan.

To begin the process of developing this statewide communications plan, the Commission worked with Voices for Civil Justice and examined communications plans from other access to justice organizations in other states. The Commission was very impressed with the communications plan developed by the Washington State Access to Justice Board and modeled portions of this communications plan after it.

The Commission will create a small workgroup of select communications experts to assist in creating and facilitating the projects outlined in this plan. In addition, the Commission will ask partners to commit to “liking” and “sharing” its social media posts and will commit to do the same for its partners.

This communications plan is separated into three broad sections and includes functions the Commission will commit to undertaking and suggested actions for its access to justice stakeholders throughout Tennessee.

I. Communicating about Supreme Court ATJ Initiative/Commission

For the Commission to meet its obligation of identifying priorities to meet the need of improved access to justice and make recommendations to the Supreme Court for projects and programs necessary and appropriate to enhance access to justice, the Commission must engage with its existing and potential access to justice stakeholders. "Stakeholders" here is defined broadly to include close strategic partners and more-removed individuals and organizations. This type of communications ensures that new initiatives are effectively implemented, provides a mechanism for feedback to inform the Commission, and connects and motivates our partners in the work. This section explains the various communications channels that will be utilized and assigns responsibility for each channel.

II. Facilitating Communications Network with ATJ Partners/Community

The Tennessee Supreme Court tasked the Commission with working with a variety of stakeholders in Tennessee Supreme Court Rule 50. The Commission translated these directives into the goal of becoming the statewide coordinating arm for communications on legal aid, pro bono, self-represented litigants resources, and access to justice stakeholders. To succeed, the Commission must foster effective communication between the numerous and varied members of the access to justice community. This section details the methods the Commission will use to facilitate inter-stakeholder communication while continuing to support each stakeholder's existing communication channels.

III. Communicating with the Public and Policy Makers

The 2014 Legal Needs Study indicated that there are many Tennesseans who do not know how to access the legal system or to connect with existing resources. Rule 50 tasks the Commission to promote an increased understanding of the importance of access to justice and the barriers faced by many Tennesseans in gaining effective access to the civil justice system. It also charges the Commission to study and recommend strategies to increase resources and funding for access to justice in civil matters.

This section is divided into two parts. The first is to inform and educate policy makers and members of the public who need or may need civil legal help about their rights,

available resources, and how to access the justice system. The second part ties into the research done by Voices for Civil Justice showing that there is a general lack of understanding about civil legal aid. The second part will detail the Commission's vision for the Tennessee access to justice community to build support for and promote public investment in civil legal aid.

I. Communicating about Supreme Court ATJ Initiative/Commission

Effectively communicating the Commission's successes and planned initiatives addresses three of the areas of focus identified in the 2016 Strategic Plan: educating legal professionals on existing services and volunteer opportunities and resources, informing social service providers of civil legal resources available for their clients, and integrating the Public Awareness Committee with other Committees. The Commission must engage legal professionals and social service providers to implement its projects to recruit volunteers and make referrals to access to justice programs. These audiences are on the "front line" of providing disadvantaged Tennesseans with civil and social resources therefore their feedback on projects and initiatives is invaluable. Seeing the impact their work has on disadvantaged Tennesseans will motivate volunteers to continue to donate their time and expertise to further the Commission's goals.

Objective:

Successfully recruit and inform legal professionals and social service providers of the Commission's on-going and planned initiatives to ensure successful implementation and sustainability.

Decision Makers:

- Legal professionals
- Social service providers and partner organizations
- Law schools

Messages/Topics to Communicate:

- Commission/Committee projects and initiatives
- Profiles/Work of Committees and Subcommittees
- Profiles/Work of Commission and Committee Members
- Issues relevant to access to justice that need the Commission's attention
- Recognition of people and institutions doing extraordinary work
- Recognition of Commission and partner successes
- Encourage and support law students doing pro bono work

Communications Channels and Tactics:

The Commission will use all channels of communication available to it and will regularly reevaluate its media strategy to stay current with ever-changing media channels. The Commission will coordinate with its partners to leverage their networks and ensure a wider audience. The Administrative Office of the Courts staff will be primarily responsible for this section but Commission members and Advisory Committee members will be called upon to provide content.

The chart below outlines the channels the Commission oversees and will use to communicate its successes and planned projects.

| Communication Channel | Frequency | Purpose | Person(s) Responsible |
|--|--------------------|--|------------------------------|
| Facebook | Twice per week | Alerts, Requests for Feedback, Share issues relevant to ATJ | ATJC Staff |
| Twitter | 4 times per week | Alerts, Requests for Feedback, Share issues relevant to ATJ | ATJC Staff |
| ATJ Website, www.justiceforalltn.com | On-going | Serve as a resource to find legal help or connect people who want to help with the ATJ community | ATJC Staff |
| TFJA Newsletter | Monthly | Spotlight TJFA clinics/programs, Solicit volunteers, Provide list of upcoming clinics | ATJC Staff |
| ATJC Pro Bono Report | Annually | Highlight pro bono performed across the state, recruit new volunteers/supporters | ATJC Staff |
| ATJC Annual Report (will encompass Pro Bono Report) | Annually | Summarize successes, increase support for ATJ Initiative and civil legal aid | ATJC Staff |
| ATJC Newsletter | 2-3 times per year | Inform stakeholders, attorneys, judges, of new projects or calls to action | ATJC Staff |

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|--|------------|---|------------|
| ATJ Community Webpage | On-going | Provide access to justice community members with informal space to read/post on successes, blogs, upcoming events, call for volunteers | ATJC Staff |
| ATJC Google Docs/Drive/Groups | On-going | Method for Commission and Advisory Committee members to learn about and participate in any or all of the Commission's projects | ATJC Staff |
| ATJC Conference | Biennially | Bring Committee members physically together every two years to coincide with strategic planning to introduce new plan and begin working it. | ATJC Staff |
| ATJC/Supreme Court Pro Bono Recognition Ceremonies | Annually | Highlight volunteers, encourage new volunteers | ATJC Staff |

Measureable Outcomes:

- Increased attendance and increase in number of attorneys being recognized for doing 50 or more hours of pro bono annually
- Increase in number of followers on social media posts
- Increase in number of shares and likes on social media posts
- Increase in number of lawyers reporting pro bono hours
- Increase in number of pro bono hours reported
- Increase in number of access to justice partners

Messengers:

- ATJC Staff

II. Facilitating Communications Network with ATJ Partners/Community

There are numerous Tennessee access to justice partners including state and local bar associations, access to justice organizations, pro bono programs, judges, court clerks, law schools, mediators, and mediation centers. Further, the Tennessee Supreme Court directed the Commission to develop and recommend systemic changes to reduce barriers to access to justice for persons who do not qualify for help from legal aid organizations because of their income, persons with disabilities, and persons in language minorities. The Commission must work with organizations that serve these populations to meet this charge. The Commission has identified other partners that serve as access points to Tennesseans with civil legal needs including librarians, faith and community leaders, and state and local governments.

Just as the Commission must organize and develop a blueprint for how its Committees will connect with each other to leverage Committee members expertise and experience, the many access to justice stakeholders in Tennessee must map out how they will share information. Many access to justice partners have established robust and effective communications channels. To our knowledge, there has not been an attempt to gather these communications in one place.

The Commission will serve as the statewide repository and create a database of press releases, newspaper articles and pieces, newsletters, blogs and social media posts, and other distributions from members of the access to justice community. The electronic database will be shared with all partners. News items will be categorized by legal issue(s), location, and type of publication. These stories will also be posted on the ATJ community webpage of the ATJ website.

The Commission will also set up a Google drive or something similar for organizations to share drafts of documents for feedback. Users will also be able to share best practices and planned initiatives. The goal is to provide groups an opportunity to benefit from the experience of partner organizations, collaborate on projects that serve multiple client populations, and strengthen the bond of the Tennessee access to justice community.

Objective:

Establish an easy to use, searchable data base to serve as a repository of access to justice related media coverage in Tennessee.

Decision Makers/Audience:

Executive Directors of legal assistance organizations and/or bar associations

Messages/Topics to Communicate:

- All coverage relating to advocacy on behalf of low income Tennesseans by legal assistance organizations
- All coverage about expanding access to civil legal assistance in Tennessee
- Coverage about key civil justice issues

Communication Channels:

- Newspaper
- Radio
- YouTube or other online media
- Social media
- Bar associations

Tactics:

- Establish a working group made up of communications staff from legal aid and external media consultants to advise on creation and use of repository as well as build ongoing support for its use by legal assistance organizations and others
- Develop a blueprint for the Commission's committees to communicate with each other, to facilitate collaboration on common goals in the strategic plan.

Measurable outcomes:

- Participation by all legal assistance providers in contributing media coverage from their service area to the repository
- Use of media coverage from the repository in grant applications
- Increased media exposure due to organizations sharing media coverage from one service area that is relevant in another service area

Messenger:

- ATJ Commission

III. Communicating with the Public

When the Commission embarked upon creating this statewide communications plan, one of its primary goals was to create a system to support a common narrative about the importance of the civil justice system, and how different players are working together in Tennessee to make it more fair and accessible to all.

The Commission learned from Voices for Civil Justice that there is a common misconception of civil legal aid. Members of the target client populations may not even know they have a legal problem and many don't know of or how to connect with legal resources. Potential funders, influencers, government and community leaders, and

other professionals are not aware of the value of civil legal aid and how it helps ensure fairness in the justice system, regardless of how much money you make.

The Commission will build upon the work done by Voices for Civil Justice and task the workgroup to develop a common, standard message on civil legal aid and access to justice for Tennessee. The Commission will incorporate the message into posts and news items and request its partners to share and post the standard message at least once per month. Many of the tactics, strategies, outcomes, and other topics listed below apply to more than one type of audience, or part.

Part 1 – Informing and Educating Policy Makers and the Public About Civil Legal Resources

The Commission and its partners have created and enhanced many initiatives and projects to provide disadvantaged Tennesseans with civil legal resources yet many people in these target populations are unaware of the many ways they can get help. The Commission repopulated its Public Awareness Committee in 2014 to address the issue of connectivity. The Committee is credited with the recommendation to re-brand the statewide legal hotline managed by Tennessee Alliance for Legal Services to 1-844-Help4TN to serve as a companion resources to TALS' legal assistance web portal, www.Help4TN.org. Help4TN.org has become a clearinghouse for those with civil legal problems to connect with the appropriate resource.

Objective 1:

Increase the use of Help4TN.org and other existing resources by continuing to support and promote Help4TN.org as the primary way to access to civil legal resources in Tennessee.

Objective 2:

To inform policy makers in Tennessee on civil legal aid and how it benefits Tennesseans.

Tactics:

- Provide printed Help4TN posters and marketing materials at every conference for judges and court clerks
- Promote the continued use and distribution of the Help4TN.org PSA on television and radio
- Include information on Help4TN.org on all printed materials for TFJA projects, pro bono initiatives, and self-represented litigants resources
- Purchase 2,000 Help4TN.org wrist bands each year for distribution to identified access points

- The Commission will educate its members, staff, Advisory Committee members, and stakeholders on how to speak to legislators on civil legal aid, using the Voices for Civil Justice as a guide. The Commission will specifically invite the TALS Board of Directors and the TBA ATJ Committee to participate in this type of training.
- Share press releases, posts, etc., with particular legislators to serve the community mentioned in the release or who have interest in the issue
- Develop talking points so common language resonates
- Invite legislators to attend recognition events in their area
- Having Access to Justice Commission representation at the TBA Law School Summit and other strategic law school events

Decision Makers/Audience:

- Executive Directors, boards and staff of organizations who provide social services to vulnerable Tennesseans
- 211 staff
- Faith based organizations
- Court clerks
- Librarians
- State and federal Legislative Constituent Relations offices in Tennessee
- Bar associations
- Law schools

Communications Channels:

- Court clerk offices
- Libraries
- Houses of worship
- Social service providers offices and websites
- State and federal Legislative Constituent Relations offices

Measurable Outcomes:

- Increase number of social service agencies or faith-based organizations, court and legislative staff trained about the HELLP4TN resource
- Survey responses from 1 844 HELLP4TN indicating how callers learned about the service
- Increased number of site visits to www.HELLP4TN.org
- Increased use of 1 844-HELLP4TN
- Callers representing all 95 Tennessee counties to the helpline

Messengers:

- ATJ Commission
- TN Supreme Court
- Librarians
- Court Clerks
- Social Services Providers
- Faith Leaders
- Other Partners
- Bar associations
- Law schools

Part 2 – Build Support For and Promote Investment in Civil Legal Aid**Objective:**

The Commission will create and support a network of ATJ Commission stakeholders (civil legal aid organizations, Administrative Office of the Courts, Self-Represented Litigants Programs, bar association initiatives, etc.) who will each contribute at least one story about their work that demonstrates what a civil legal need is and the importance of legal help in getting it resolved. These stories will support a common narrative about the importance of the civil justice system, and how different players are working together in Tennessee to make it more fair and accessible to all. The Commission with assistance from Voices for Civil Justice and others will pitch at least three such stories to state media outlets each year and will begin to track and report on all media placements about civil legal aid and access to civil justice.

Decision Makers / Audiences:

- Media Outlets – Editorial Boards, Reporters; need to create good relationships with individual reporters
- Potential funders, influencers, policy makers and community leaders, and other professionals

Messages/Topics to communicate:

- Fairness
- Protecting livelihood
- Legal Aid as a poverty tool – clarify how to frame natural disaster and consumer issues in meaningful way with the goal being to link a local story to a national news focus then bring it home to local community
- Impact of civil justice work being done by legal assistance organizations
- Information about key civil justice issues impacting vulnerable Tennesseans
- Ways that access to justice is expanding in Tennessee/How to get civil legal help

Tactics:

- Create statewide message about value of legal aid for distribution to social service organizations, libraries, faith-based communities, policy makers, and other partners
- Use Social Media via Legal Aid, Pillar firms, and courts
 - Presentations, press releases, speaking engagements – include talking points with similar themes
- Create the communications working group (working group will facilitate multiple sections of this plan)
- Educate journalists about civil legal aid
- Create readily available “reservoir” of stories organized by theme as identified in II. Facilitating Communications Network with ATJ Partners/Community
- Develop talking points so common narrative resonates with target audience
- Secure non-attorney media expert to serve on each ATJ Advisory Committees who has the expertise and time to assist the respective Committees
- Provide access to justice data to the Administrative Office of the Courts for use in their state budget presentation
- Identify an opportunity for a representative from the civil legal assistance community to testify before a committee of the general assembly about the impact of civil legal assistance
- Create a Fact Sheet or other short document setting forth the compelling impact of civil legal assistance in Tennessee and distribute to current and potential funders of legal assistance organizations and to all state and federal legislators and their staff members

Measurable Outcome(s):

- Number of media impressions (including tracking comments to articles)
- Track the call to action or objective in each article, news item, press release, etc. to determine impact of the news piece.
 - Want to track: “Did the reader respond how we wanted them to in the piece?”
- Distribution of at least one article or story statewide to support the common narrative, based on research by Voices for Civil Justice, about the importance of the civil justice system.
- Increase in number of attorneys reporting pro bono work
- Increase in the number of pro bono hours reported
- Increase in number of attorneys being recognized an annual Supreme Court recognition events for completing 50 or more pro bono hours annually
- All civil legal assistance organizations participate in the media repository by contributing articles as described in II. Facilitating Communications Network with ATJ Partners/Community

- Distribute relevant media coverage to funders of legal assistance organizations and to all state and federal legislators and their staff members

Messengers:

- Tennessee Supreme Court Justices
- Legal Aid attorneys
- Private attorneys / bar associations
- Clients willing to share story
- Celebrity Spokesperson – such as actor, musician, or athlete; consider Titans Foundation and their high profile donors