

Access to Justice Commission Standing Committee on Communications & Outreach
July 29, 2014, 11:00 A.M.
Via Teleconference

In Attendance: Melanie Reynolds, Matt Dale, Lisa Mecklenberg Jackson, Casey Stephenson, and Kate Kuykendall.

Call to Order: 11:00 AM

Lisa moved to approve; Melanie seconded. Ayes all around. Motion passed unanimously.

Consideration of Agenda

Matt said that some items are handled more quickly than others; let's move them forward. Lisa's willingness to take on the website issues identified by Justice Baker. Lisa suggested some changes that will be easy, and has begun that work. This includes a direct jump from the Supreme Court website to the ATJC materials. The State Bar may be willing to put a link on their website, as might MLSA. Matt asked Christine to check into MLSA linking.

We've addressed Justice Baker's concern for the time being; we'll wait to see if she has more later. The Committee thanked Lisa.

Melanie mentioned that the general public and lots of folks don't know about the Commission, and we need to look at that more specifically. If you're not in the know, you're out of the loop. That's just a comment, but we are the group to address this.

Matt agreed. The need to get the Commission's work out beyond a small group is worthy of effort.

Matt noted that there is a rule announcement and response to the Commission's cy pres recommendation. Additions were sent out with the minutes. Does anyone have concerns or suggestions and response to the article? Anything to add or concerns? When is the comment period over? We likely won't meet again before August 30. Do we need to do anything right now?

Kate clarified that the comment period ends September 2. Please comment if you are able. The Justice Foundation will be seeking comments from interested groups.

Christine said that MLSA will consider commenting.

Matt said thanks. Is there any topic not listed on agenda that we want to address besides the gaps & barriers study and our response to it? That's where we'll go now unless there's something else to be brought up. There was nothing new to add to the agenda.

Gaps & Barriers Study:

Matt said that everyone's had a chance to read the study. It was very thorough. It's a daunting document. What I think we're called to do is compare or lay over our strategic goals on top of that document. We have 7 of those as a Committee. I'm looking at the 1-page summary of our tasks. We're to read that study and recommend responsive strategies. Also called on to consider a strategy for the seven items total tasked to us by the Commission.

Matt asked for someone to be willing to give an opening response to what you see our first task to be now that we've had a chance to look at the study.

Lisa said she thinks we talked at the last meeting about doing some sort of summary of the study that we could distribute. It's dense. We won't get people to read it.

Melanie agreed. She recognizes that there's an executive summary, and suggested taking just the key points. It's important to develop a work plan from this. Otherwise it ends up being a reference item that sits on the shelf. Unless you have a work plan with specific follow-up items to the report, it just won't go anywhere. Our responsibility as part of the work plan would be around communications and outreach.

Matt asked Melanie if she sees an obvious 1 or 2 items that rise to top priority?

Melanie said that one of the work-plan items is just that: how do we get this out of the circle of the knowing few. Then when I look at things around phone and web services, it seems to be on the communications end. Possibly support around the shortage of funding in terms of preparing and making the case could be a priority item.

Matt asked for suggestions of obvious avenues to take. Are there any bite sized work plan items?

Casey said it would help her to list our tasks, and then under each develop a work plan including who will do what and by when. I'm feeling a little bit lost.

Matt said that's the key question. Outside of reviewing the study and recommending responsive strategies, this committee's call to action is pretty broad. Where do we go next outside of a summary?

Lisa said that in the executive summary, it talks about possible goals. The fourth is to increase awareness of services. That's a task we could tackle. If we do a key findings blurb, and an awareness piece of what's available currently and ship it out to news agencies, aging services, DPHHS, get it out through social services...it seems possible without being too difficult.

Casey said that's a great idea. That's something AmeriCorps members can help with. That's one of their goals. That's great.

Lisa said she has connections with libraries, and that's another avenue.

The Committee discussed possibilities for a press release from the Court about the Gaps & Barriers Study, agreeing that it would be a good thing to pursue.

Matt mentioned that this is a dilemma for him. The better we do about getting the message out, the greater need, and the greater the gap and our ability to fill it.

Casey countered that perspective by saying we've tended toward wanting to get more info out and not worry about increased requests for help. That's something we can show our funders. We don't want to hide it.

Matt said he agrees with our mandate that we're to get the information out, and we shouldn't hunker down. But there is a level of discomfort there for me.

Matt said we should identify the most do-able tasks. One is to shrink or synthesize the large report into more manageable, user-friendly elements. Would a 1 or 2 page summary be possible?

Lisa asked what we want the summary to look like. Melanie noted that it's important to consider the audience. Do we want it typed and pretty? Do we want it on the web? Does this go to judges and legislators? This will take money and time.

Matt asked what the goal length would be. Lisa said no more than one page. Melanie agreed, noting that it needs to be formatted in a way that works electronically and in hard copy.

Christine suggested creating different versions targeted for different audiences. The Committee settled on two: one for the public, and one for professionals. The goal is some sort of fact sheet appropriate to the audience.

Melanie stressed that there needs to be a place for the reader to go to get more information and act.

Christine suggested using the executive summary as a starting point, and listing resource information as well. Lisa said she thinks we just need to go ahead and do a draft. Lisa volunteered to give it a shot, and to then share the draft with the committee. Melanie agreed to help.

The Committee moved on to a discussion of its other tasks. Kate mentioned that Montana Legal Services Association is working to produce an economic impact study, which dovetails nicely with one of the Committee's priorities. Christine agreed to look into the details of the study.

The Committee discussed whether it should work on other items at this time as well, and decided to start with the summaries. Melanie suggested developing a mini-outreach plan detailing how we will distribute the summaries, and the Committee agreed this was a good idea. Melanie volunteered to work on this. Christine volunteered to help.

Mat said that people on the Committee will know potential newsletters or audiences, or libraries. It's incumbent on us to come up with a big picture idea of how to get this out, but the Commission is responsible for getting it all out to colleagues.

Matt asked if there is anything to work on before the Committee meets again. Christine asked what the priority relating to studying the impact of legal aid on the judiciary might mean. There was some discussion, but no definitive answer. Christine agreed to review other states' work on this issue.

The Committee agreed to look at the first three weeks of September for its next meeting.

There was no other business.

Meeting Adjourned: 11:5 AM.