



NEBRASKA  
SUPREME  
COURT



# ACCESS TO JUSTICE COMMISSION

STRATEGIC PLAN: FY2023-2028



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# ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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The Nebraska Supreme Court’s Access to Justice Commission has been developing this strategic plan for several years, but the foundational work began long before the Commission existed. For decades, members of volunteer advisory committees appointed by the Nebraska Supreme Court—including the Self-Represented Litigation Committee, the former Nebraska Minority Justice Task Force and Implementation Committee, the former Nebraska Language Access Committee, and the former Nebraska Supreme Court Task Force on Gender Fairness in the Courts—have been studying barriers to equal access and developing specific recommendations to remove those barriers and improve the quality of justice in Nebraska. We want to acknowledge the transformative work of the many judges, lawyers, court and probation staff, and legal professionals who volunteered on those committees over the years. Their innovative ideas have fundamentally changed how the Judicial Branch administers and delivers justice in Nebraska, and their dedication to the principles of equal justice continues to inspire the work of the Access to Justice Commission moving forward.



On behalf of the Commission, Liz Neeley and Justice Stephanie Stacy accept the Robert M. Spire Award from the Omaha Bar Association.

We also want to acknowledge the significant assistance provided over the years by the National Center for State Courts, the Conference of Chief Justices, the Conference of State Court Administrators, State Justice Institute, and University of Nebraska Public Policy Center. These organizations have provided professional expertise, resources, and funding opportunities that have supported, and continue to shape, the ongoing work of access to justice in Nebraska.

The process of building this Strategic Plan was collaborative by design, and we want to thank the many community partners who helped the Commission to identify and prioritize the strategic goals and initiatives included in this plan. Those collaborative partners are identified individually under each strategic principle, and the Commission looks forward to working alongside these partners to implement these initiatives over the next five years. As part of its strategic planning, the Commission also made a special effort to better understand the experiences and perceptions of Nebraska’s court users, and we gratefully acknowledge the court users from across the state who responded to surveys and provided feedback in other ways.

Of course, we want to thank all of the members of the Access to Justice Commission, and the members of each of its Standing Committees, for the considerable time and energy they have devoted to the strategic planning process. We also want to acknowledge the significant contributions of Danielle Hirsch, Interim Court Services Director for the National Center for State Courts, and Amy Prenda, Deputy Administrator of the Court Services Division of the Administrative Office of the Courts and Probation, whose insight and enthusiasm in developing and finalizing this Strategic Plan cannot be overstated.

Finally, the Commission wants to thank the Nebraska Supreme Court for its unwavering commitment to the fundamental principles of equal access to swift, fair justice for all court users in Nebraska.



Justice Stephanie F. Stacy  
Co-Chair, Access to Justice Commission



Liz M. Neeley, Ph.D.  
Co-Chair, Access to Justice Commission

# MEMBERSHIP

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## ACCESS TO JUSTICE COMMISSION

### **Name**

Justice Stephanie Stacy (Co-Chair)

Dr. Elizabeth Neeley (Co-Chair)

Deb Minardi

Tania Diaz

Judge Chad Brown

Kenny Jacobs

Kenneth Wentz

Sharmin Gonzales

Paul McGreal

Carole McMahan-Boies

Judge Frankie Moore

Milo Mumgaard

Casey Karges

Joe Nigro

Stefanie Pearlman

Doug Peterson

Tina DeVoe

Kevin Ruser

Jose Soto

Corey Steel

Kelly Varguez

Judge Derek Vaughn

Senator Justin Wayne

Judge Stefanie Martinez

Judge Andrea Miller

Judge Patrick Runge

Jennifer Verhein

Amy Prenda

### **Organization**

Nebraska Supreme Court Justice

Executive Director, NSBA

Probation Administrator, AOC

Legal Services Director, Disability Rights  
Nebraska

Juvenile Court Judge

Attorney

Attorney

Clerk Magistrate

Professor, Creighton University School of Law  
Administrator, Attorney Services Division

Nebraska Court of Appeals Judge

Executive Director, Legal Aid of Nebraska

Executive Director, The Mediation Center

Lancaster County Public Defender

Professor, Schmid Law Library, Nebraska  
College of Law

Attorney General

Clerk of the District Court

Professor, Nebraska College of Law

Vice President for Access/Equity/Diversity,  
Southeast Community College

State Court Administrator, AOC

Freelance Spanish Interpreter

County Court Judge

Senator, Nebraska Legislature

District Court Judge

District Court Judge

Tribal Judge

Director, State Language Access

Staff, Access to Justice Commission

# SELF-REPRESENTED LITIGANT COMMITTEE

## **Name**

Judge Frankie Moore (Chair)  
Ann Borer

Judge Rachel Daugherty (Vice-Chair)

Jennifer Rasmussen

Kelly Riley

Judge Leo Dobrovolny

Maureen Eck

Marsha Fangmeyer

Scott Hahn

Judge Russell Harford

Muirne Heaney

Laurel "Laurie" Heer Dale

Judge Timothy Hoeft

Katelyn Cherney

Dr. Elizabeth Neeley

Judge Michael Piccolo

Vickie Prince

Kimberly Durow

Kevin Ruser

Corey Steel

Judge Horacio Wheelock

Judge Julie Martin

Dave Sommers

Sheryl Connolly

Valorie Bendixen

Carole McMahan-Boies

Amy Prenda

## **Organization**

Nebraska Court of Appeals Judge

Deputy Court Administrator, 4th

District Court of Nebraska

District Court Judge

Deputy Administrator for IT, AOC

Director, Office of Dispute Resolution

District Court Judge

Deputy Librarian, State Law Library

Attorney

Attorney

County Court Judge

Access to Justice Attorney, Legal Aid of Nebraska

Director of VLP, NSBA

County Court Judge

Staff Attorney, Creighton Legal Clinic

Executive Director, NSBA

District Court Judge

Clerk of the District Court

Clerk Magistrate

Director, Nebraska College of Law Clinical Programs

State Court Administrator, AOC

District Court Judge

Workers' Compensation Court Judge

Executive Director, Omaha Bar Association

County Court Trial Court Services Director, AOC

District Court Trial Court Services Director, AOC

Administrator, Attorney Services Division

Staff, Access to Justice Commission

# COMMITTEE ON EQUITY AND FAIRNESS

## **Name**

Judge Stefanie Martinez (Chair)  
Judge Ryan Carson  
Jamie Cooper  
Gene Cotter  
Kim Etherton  
Brandie Fowler  
Mandy Gruhlkey  
Amy Jacobsen  
Judge Matthew Kahler  
Jessica Kerkhofs  
Dr. Elizabeth Neeley  
Jose Rodriguez  
Corey Steel  
Yvonne Sosa  
Jose J Soto  
  
Judge Susan Strong  
Judge Donna Taylor  
Korey Taylor  
Amy Prenda

## **Organization**

District Court Judge  
District Court Judge  
Attorney  
Deputy Administrator for Operations, AOCPC  
Pretrial Services  
Statewide Child Support Referee  
Attorney  
Deputy County Attorney  
Juvenile Court Judge  
Chief City Attorney  
Executive Director, NSBA  
Deputy County Attorney  
State Court Administrator, AOCPC  
Deputy Public Defender  
Vice President for Access/Equity/Diversity,  
Southeast Community College  
District Court Judge  
County Court Judge  
Assistant Public Defender  
Staff, Access to Justice Commission

# CONSORTIUM OF TRIBAL, STATE, AND FEDERAL COURTS

## **Name**

Judge Andrea Miller (Co-Chair)  
Chief Judge Patrick Runge (Co-Chair)  
Dr. Elizabeth Neeley  
Justice Stephanie Stacy  
Judge Susan Bazis  
Misty Flowers  
Judi gaiashkibos  
Judge John Gerrard  
Judge Thayne Glenn  
Judge Shellie Sabata  
Corey Steel  
Judge Ken Vampola  
Chief Judge Ed Zendejas  
Chief Judge Brooktyn Blood  
Deb VanDyke-Ries  
Amy Prenda

## **Organization**

District Court Judge  
Winnebago Tribe Court Judge  
Executive Director, NSBA  
Nebraska Supreme Court Justice  
U.S. Magistrate Judge  
Nebraska Indian Child Welfare Coalition  
Nebraska Commission on Indian Affairs  
U.S. District Judge  
Santee Sioux Nation Tribal Court Judge  
Separate Juvenile Court Judge  
State Court Administrator, AOCPC  
County Court Judge  
Omaha Tribal Court Judge  
Ponca Tribe of Nebraska Judge  
Court Improvement Project Director  
Staff, Access to Justice Commission



# CIVIL JUSTICE REFORM WORK GROUP

## Name

Justice Jonathan J. Papik  
Judge Darla S. Ideus  
Judge Horacio J. Wheelock  
Judge Ryan Carson  
Judge James E. Doyle, IV  
Judge Derek R. Vaughn  
Judge Thomas K. Harmon  
Ron Murtaugh  
Troy Hawk  
Senator Mike Hilgers  
Kevin Ruser  
Jane Martin-Hoffman  
Milo Mumgaard  
Andrew D. Sibbersen  
Renee Eveland  
Amie Martinez  
Tim Engler  
Jim Welsh  
Corey Steel  
Carole McMahon-Boies  
Amy Prenda

## Organization

Nebraska Supreme Court Justice  
District Court Judge  
District Court Judge  
District Court Judge  
District Court Judge  
County Court Judge  
County Court Judge  
Judicial Administrator  
Clerk of the District Court  
Senator, Nebraska Legislature  
Professor, Nebraska College of Law  
Nebraska Mediation Center  
Executive Director, Legal Aid of Nebraska  
Attorney  
Attorney  
Attorney  
Attorney  
State Court Administrator, AOCP  
Administrator, Attorney Services Division  
Staff, Access to Justice Commission

## ACCESS TO JUSTICE COMMISSION'S STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

- **Justice Stephanie Stacy**, Nebraska Supreme Court, Access to Justice Commission (Co-Chair)
- **Dr. Elizabeth Neeley**, Executive Director, Nebraska State Bar Association, Access to Justice Commission (Co-Chair)
- **Judge Frankie Moore**, Nebraska Court of Appeals, Self-Represented Litigation Committee (Chair)
- **Judge Stefanie Martinez**, District Court Judge, Committee on Equity and Fairness (Chair)
- **Judge Andrea Miller**, District Court Judge, Consortium of Tribal, State, and Federal Courts (Chair)
- **Milo Mumgaard**, Executive Director, Legal Aid of Nebraska, Access to Justice Commission
- **Stefanie Pearlman**, Professor of Law Library & Reference Librarian, University of Nebraska College of Law, Access to Justice Commission
- **Jennifer Verhein**, Director of Language Access, AOCP, Access to Justice Commission



# HISTORY & BACKGROUND

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In 2015, the Conference of Chief Justices and the Conference of State Court Administrators reaffirmed their commitment to meaningful access to justice, and resolved to support the “aspirational goal of 100 percent access to effective assistance for essential civil legal needs.” To accomplish this, they encouraged state courts, state Access to Justice Commissions and state bar associations to continue to create and promote a “continuum of meaningful and appropriate services to secure effective assistance for essential civil legal needs,” which includes expanding self-help services, adopting or modifying court rules and processes that facilitate access, providing limited scope representation by counsel, increasing pro bono assistance, expanding the availability of effective use of technology, increasing the availability of legal aid services, enhancing language access services, and developing triage models to match specific needs to the appropriate level of service needed. Nebraska’s Access to Justice Commission fully supports the aspirational goal of 100% access, and has developed this strategic plan to guide the collaborative work necessary to achieve that goal.



## NEBRASKA SUPREME COURT STRATEGIC AGENDA

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In the *Nebraska Supreme Court Strategic Agenda* (July 1, 2021 – June 30, 2023), the first of six overarching goals is “providing access to swift, fair justice.” The Supreme Court’s Strategic Agenda states that the “Courts must provide meaningful access to all, ensuring that no litigant is denied justice due to lack of counsel, the inability to understand legal proceedings or because of their race, ethnicity, gender, disability, English language proficiency, or immigration status.” To advance meaningful access to justice, the Nebraska Supreme Court has identified the following areas of focus:

**[P]roviding adequate funding for the Judicial Branch; implementing and maintaining modern technology to support the internal work of the courts; enhancing technological access for external court users; processing and managing cases efficiently to resolve disputes in a fair and timely manner; continuously improving access to justice for limited English-proficient and the deaf or hard of hearing litigants; ensuring quality continuing education for judges and staff of the Judicial Branch; addressing bias and racial inequality in the judicial system; providing meaningful assistance to self-represented litigants; integrating alternative dispute resolution approaches to improve how trial and appellate courts conduct their business; and planning for courthouse accessibility, access during an emergency event and security.**

The areas of focus identified by the Nebraska Supreme Court were the starting point for the strategic plan developed by the Access to Justice Commission.



# OVERVIEW OF STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

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This is the first comprehensive strategic plan developed by the Nebraska Supreme Court's Access to Justice Commission. The planning process began with a statewide online survey of Nebraska court users to collect baseline data on current perceptions related to access and fairness in our trial courts. The Commission also conducted a comprehensive online survey of Commission members, asking for specific recommendations aimed at:

1. Improving access to legal resources for self-represented litigants,
2. Increasing access to direct legal representation for all court users,
3. Expanding the efficient use of technology in Nebraska courts,
4. Expanding education and resources for judges and court staff on issues impacting access and equity,
5. Increasing diversity in the bar, on the bench, and among court and probation staff,
6. Improving communication and collaboration between Nebraska's state, federal, and tribal courts,
7. Addressing access challenges in Nebraska's rural communities,
8. Expanding access for court users with limited English proficiency,
9. Ensuring equal access and reasonable accommodation for court users with disabilities, and
10. Educating and engaging all justice stakeholders to advance the mission of the Access to Justice Commission.

A Strategic Planning Committee was selected to study the survey results, gather additional information, and recommend a slate of specific strategic principles and possible initiatives for discussion by the full Commission. As part of this process, the Strategic Planning Committee studied current initiatives and solicited ideas for future initiatives from the chairs and members of all the Commission's standing committees, consortium and working groups, as well as from legal aid providers, court administrators and staff, and probation administrators and staff.



Ultimately, the Strategic Planning Committee identified five overarching strategic principles, and a long list of possible initiatives to support and advance those principles, which it presented to the full Commission during its October 2021 annual meeting. Commission members had a robust discussion of the proposed strategic principles and initiatives and participated in a follow up online exercise to refine and prioritize the various initiatives. For each proposed initiative, potential collaborative partners were identified and consulted.

This collaborative process allowed the Commission to develop a comprehensive strategic plan that draws on the current experience of Nebraska court users, connects the expertise and ideas of groups that are committed to improving access, and engages a broad group of stakeholders in the critical work of advancing equal access to justice in Nebraska. The strategic principles and proposed initiatives in this Strategic Plan are intended to guide the work of the Commission, and all of its standing committees and working groups, for the next 5 years.



## VISION & MISSION STATEMENTS

**The vision** of the Nebraska Access to Justice Commission is to achieve 100 percent access to justice for all.

**The mission** of the Access to Justice Commission is to identify barriers to equal access in Nebraska and to recommend and coordinate effective solutions so that all court users have equal access to swift, fair justice.



# STRATEGIC PRINCIPLES & IMPLEMENTATION

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EQUALLY  
BEFORE THE  
LAW



# SUMMARY OF STRATEGIC PRINCIPLES

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ALL COURT USERS SHOULD HAVE ACCESS TO UNDERSTANDABLE LEGAL INFORMATION AND RESOURCES SO THEY CAN NAVIGATE THE COURT SYSTEM EFFICIENTLY AND EFFECTIVELY.

A significant percentage of Nebraska’s court users are self-represented, and this strategic principle recognizes that modern courts cannot deliver justice efficiently or fairly unless self-represented litigants have access to basic legal information and resources (*Nebraska Self Represented Litigants Report*, March 2020). Because legal resources can support meaningful access only if they are understandable, a key initiative is the adoption, and branch-wide implementation, of plain language guidelines. But meaningful access to the courts requires more than just a robust library of understandable forms, so other key initiatives focus on the continued expansion and improvement of self-help resources in all judicial districts, pilot projects testing the use of attorney and non-attorney court navigators, and judicial branch education focused on best practices and uniform procedures for fairly and efficiently handling cases involving self-represented litigants while maintaining impartiality. This would include supporting the implementation of system platforms to allow parties to participate in online dispute resolution and have the ability to electronically file pleadings and other documents with the appellate and trial courts.



## ALL COURT USERS SHOULD HAVE ACCESS TO LEGAL REPRESENTATION AND ADVICE.

This strategic principle recognizes that our adversarial system of justice simply works better when all parties are represented by counsel. To ensure that any court user who wants legal representation has access to it regardless of where they live or their ability to pay, the initiatives under this principle focus on supporting the expansion of civil legal aid services across Nebraska, incentivizing attorneys to provide direct legal services in underserved communities, finding innovative ways to increase the number of attorneys practicing in greater Nebraska, expanding the number of attorneys who offer limited scope and reduced fee representation, and incentivizing additional hours of pro bono and low bono legal service in Nebraska communities.

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## ALL COURT USERS SHOULD HAVE THEIR CASES RESOLVED FAIRLY AND EFFICIENTLY.



Nebraska's Constitution declares the fundamental principles that all courts shall be open, and that every person shall have justice administered without denial or delay (*Neb. Const. Art. I, Sec. 13*). Meaningful access to justice is frustrated by lengthy delays in scheduling court appearances and resolving cases. The initiatives under this principle are designed to improve the efficiency of the judicial process by expanding traditional court hours through innovations in calendaring and technology, studying the expanded use of specialized dockets, recommending practical civil justice reforms, and conducting a state-wide inventory of support staff provided to trial judges in each county with the goal of documenting disparities, identifying best practices, and recommending reforms to improve the efficient progression and disposition of cases in every judicial district.







## ALL COURT USERS SHOULD HAVE EQUAL ACCESS TO COURT SERVICES, ENJOY FULL PARTICIPATION IN THE JUDICIAL PROCESS, AND BE TREATED WITH FAIRNESS, DIGNITY, AND RESPECT.

Nebraska’s State motto is “Equality Before the Law.” These words also represent the fundamental promise of the Judicial Branch. To realize that promise, courts must be willing to critically examine existing practices, processes, and outcomes, and make necessary changes so the scales of justice are evenly balanced. The initiatives under this strategic principle are designed to promote public confidence in the accessibility, fairness and impartiality of the court system by identifying, and addressing, practices and procedures which tend to exclude or disadvantage any court users. This strategic principle also recognizes that to achieve full participation in the court system, all members of the public must feel safe and welcome in the courthouse, and our judges, court staff, and probation staff should reflect the diversity of the communities they serve.

Initiatives designed to advance this principle include a statewide Racial Equity Initiative, ongoing educational programs focused on diversity and inclusion, initiatives designed to remove barriers to jury service and achieve a more representative jury pool, a statewide review of the procedures for providing reasonable accommodations to court users with disabilities, and pilot projects focused on improving the understandability of court proceedings through the innovative use of technology such as automated captioning and hearing loops. There are also initiatives which support expanded recruitment of multilingual and diverse probation and court staff, including forming educational partnerships with high schools and community colleges to build a career pipeline for applicants from all backgrounds. A system-wide review of the rules and procedures governing the in forma pauperis process in our trial and appellate courts will help to identify potential barriers and inequities and inform recommendations to improve the transparency and uniformity of the process by which low-income court users request to proceed without payment of filing fees.

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## THE ACCESS TO JUSTICE COMMISSION SHOULD COLLABORATE WITH COURT USERS, COURT ADMINISTRATION, AND JUSTICE STAKEHOLDERS TO ENGAGE AND EDUCATE THE PUBLIC ABOUT THE COURTS, AND TO IMPROVE THE COLLECTION OF RELIABLE DATA TO SUPPORT EVIDENCE-BASED RECOMMENDATIONS.



This strategic principle recognizes that access to reliable data is central to the vision and mission of the Access to Justice Commission. The Commission supports efforts to improve the collection, interpretation, and sharing of data on court users and court cases. Access to reliable data is essential to the important work of identifying gaps and disparities in access and measuring the impact of reforms so that best practices can be identified and implemented. In addition to initiatives focused on gathering and reporting reliable statistical data on access to justice, the Commission plans to engage and educate the public through a series of initiatives including regular online surveys and focused public engagement sessions, to learn about the experiences and concerns of court users. Other initiatives include outreach designed to educate the public about the daily work of the courts, and the resources and technology available to help court users access and navigate the judicial system.

# IMPLEMENTATION, STRATEGIC PRINCIPLE 1:



ALL COURT USERS SHOULD HAVE ACCESS TO UNDERSTANDABLE LEGAL INFORMATION AND RESOURCES SO THEY CAN NAVIGATE THE COURT SYSTEM EFFICIENTLY AND EFFECTIVELY.

- Initiative 1.1:** Implement Plain Language Guidelines by the Nebraska Judicial Branch
- Initiative 1.2:** Support implementation of an electronic filing system for self-represented litigants
- Initiative 1.3:** Support implementation of an online dispute resolution platform
- Initiative 1.4:** Update and expand the information and resources available to self-represented litigants
- Initiative 1.5:** Utilize technology to expand public access to information and resources available at self-help centers or clinics

How would expanded availability of technology support self-represented litigants accessing the Nebraska court system?

- Support the expanded availability of virtually staffed self-help centers or clinics.
- Leverage technology and create dedicated space for self-represented litigants to access information, resources and assistance from a self-help center or clinic (e.g., courthouse, State Law Library, public libraries).
- Coordinate communication to self-represented litigants on what information and resources are available and how and where they can be accessed.

- Initiative 1.6:** Develop and facilitate best practices and uniform processes for handling cases involving self-represented litigants
- Initiative 1.7:** Study the use of attorney and non-attorney court navigator programs
- Initiative 1.8:** Create an efficient, cost-effective and sustainable process for translating vital court and probation documents and resources
- Initiative 1.9:** Provide court users with information explaining the roles of tribal, state and federal courts

# IMPLEMENTATION, STRATEGIC PRINCIPLE 1:

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ALL COURT USERS SHOULD HAVE ACCESS TO UNDERSTANDABLE LEGAL INFORMATION AND RESOURCES SO THEY CAN NAVIGATE THE COURT SYSTEM EFFICIENTLY AND EFFECTIVELY.

## **Collaborative Partners:**

- Administrative Office of the Courts and Probation (AOC), Nebraska Judicial Branch
- Committee on Practice and Procedure, Nebraska Supreme Court
- Consortium of Tribal, State, and Federal Courts, Access to Justice Commission
- Court Services Division, AOC, Nebraska Judicial Branch
- Creighton University School of Law
- Judicial Branch Education, AOC, Nebraska Judicial Branch
- Judicial Ethics Committee, Nebraska Supreme Court
- Legal Aid of Nebraska
- Nebraska Library Commission
- Nebraska State Bar Association
- Office of Dispute Resolution (ODR), AOC, Nebraska Judicial Branch
- ODR Approved Mediation Centers, Douglas County Conciliation and Mediation Office
- Self-Represented Litigation Committee, Access to Justice Commission
- Technology Committee, Nebraska Supreme Court
- University of Nebraska College of Law
- Workers' Compensation Court



# IMPLEMENTATION, STRATEGIC PRINCIPLE 2:



ALL COURT USERS SHOULD HAVE ACCESS TO DIRECT LEGAL REPRESENTATION AND LEGAL ADVICE.

- Initiative 2.1:** Support the expansion of civil legal aid services in Nebraska
- Initiative 2.2:** Support programs that encourage the practice of law in Nebraska's underserved communities
- Initiative 2.3:** Increase the number of attorneys providing limited scope representation and reduced fee services among Nebraska lawyers
- Initiative 2.4:** Increase the number of lawyers who provide pro bono services in Nebraska

## What can be done to increase the number of lawyers who provide pro bono services in Nebraska?

- Evaluate and provide recommended revisions to Nebraska Supreme Court rules and policies.
- Provide incentives and recognition for attorneys that encourages pro bono service.
- Promote existing pro bono opportunities.

## Collaborative Partners:

- Administrative Office of the Courts and Probation (AOCP), Nebraska Judicial Branch
- Attorney Services Division, Nebraska Judicial Branch
- Consortium of Tribal, State, and Federal Courts, Access to Justice Commission
- Creighton University School of Law
- Legal Aid of Nebraska
- Judicial Branch Education, AOCP, Nebraska Judicial Branch
- Nebraska State Bar Association
- Pro Bono Collaborative
- Office of Dispute Resolution Approved Mediation Centers
- Rural Law Opportunities Program
- Underserved Law Opportunities Program
- University of Nebraska College of Law

# IMPLEMENTATION, STRATEGIC PRINCIPLE 3:



ALL COURT USERS SHOULD HAVE THEIR CASES RESOLVED FAIRLY AND EFFICIENTLY.

**Initiative 3.1:** Study docket management support currently provided to trial judges and recommend reforms designed to improve timely progression, scheduling and disposition of cases

## What types of support would facilitate more timely progression of cases?

- Support the creation of a centralized and uniform calendaring system.
- Support attorneys and parties having access to calendars and having the ability to set times for hearings and other court proceedings.
- Support the expansion of automated court notifications to reduce failures to appear and expedite dispositions.

**Initiative 3.2:** Expand the use of videoconferencing in court proceedings to improve judicial efficiency and reduce litigation expense

**Initiative 3.3:** Study the use of Expediated Litigation Tracks in district and county court civil cases

**Initiative 3.4:** Expand traditional courthouse hours and hearing availability in every judicial district

**Initiative 3.5:** Expand traditional courthouse hours and hearing availability in every judicial district

## Collaborative Partners:

- Administrative Office of the Courts and Probation (AOCP), Nebraska Judicial Branch
- Civil Justice Reform Work Group, Access to Justice Commission
- Douglas County District Court Administrator's Office
- Judicial Branch Education, Nebraska Judicial Branch
- Nebraska Clerks of the District Court Association
- Nebraska County Court Association – Clerk Magistrate Committee
- Nebraska County Judges Association
- Nebraska District Judges Association
- Nebraska Separate Juvenile Judges Association
- Nebraska State Bar Association
- Statewide Court Security Clearinghouse Committee, Nebraska Supreme Court
- Technology Committee, Nebraska Supreme Court
- Workers' Compensation Court

# IMPLEMENTATION, STRATEGIC PRINCIPLE 4:



ALL COURT USERS SHOULD HAVE EQUAL ACCESS TO COURT SERVICES, ENJOY FULL PARTICIPATION IN THE JUDICIAL PROCESS, AND BE TREATED WITH FAIRNESS, DIGNITY, AND RESPECT.

**Initiative 4.1:** Examine ways to improve the fairness, effectiveness, and transparency of existing court processes

## How could examining court processes improve equal access to court services and full participation?

- Make recommendations for standardizing the information and resources provided to jurors on implicit bias.
- Develop resources for judges to standardize the process for determining a defendant's ability to pay court-ordered legal financial obligations.
- Review and consider research and recommendations on justice system reforms.

**Initiative 4.2:** Continue commitment to supporting opportunities for diversity and inclusion education in the Nebraska Judicial Branch

**Initiative 4.3:** Complete the Racial Equity Initiative to learn the impact of race and ethnicity on access to court services and recommend necessary reforms

## What activities will guide the Racial Equity Initiative?

- Interpret and publish results from the statewide court user survey adapted from the National Center for State Courts' CourTools that provides baseline information about access and fairness.
- Conduct small focus groups with community leaders in various geographic locations across the state.
- Organize statewide public engagement sessions.

# IMPLEMENTATION, STRATEGIC PRINCIPLE 4:



ALL COURT USERS SHOULD HAVE EQUAL ACCESS TO COURT SERVICES, ENJOY FULL PARTICIPATION IN THE JUDICIAL PROCESS, AND BE TREATED WITH FAIRNESS, DIGNITY, AND RESPECT.

**Initiative 4.4:** Complete public engagement listening sessions of the Consortium of Tribal, State and Federal Courts and recommend necessary reforms to remove barriers to equal access, improve available resources, and promote full participation of Native American court users

## How can this be accomplished?

- Create resources for promoting and facilitating Tribal, State, and Federal collaboration.
- Create opportunities to improve relationships between Tribal, State, and Federal court and probation systems.
- Identify barriers and solutions for overcoming barriers on jurisdictional issues in an effort to reduce conflict and confusion.

**Initiative 4.5:** Continue to evaluate opportunities with collaborative partners to increase diversity of judicial applicants and court and probation staff

**Initiative 4.6:** Support and facilitate opportunities to increase the number of bilingual employees in the Nebraska Judicial Branch

**Initiative 4.7:** Support programs to increase the number and availability of registered and certified language interpreters

**Initiative 4.8:** Recommend procedural reforms to achieve a more representative jury pool

**Initiative 4.9:** Evaluate the Nebraska Judicial Branch's ADA accommodation process and recommend reforms

# IMPLEMENTATION, STRATEGIC PRINCIPLE 4:



ALL COURT USERS SHOULD HAVE EQUAL ACCESS TO COURT SERVICES, ENJOY FULL PARTICIPATION IN THE JUDICIAL PROCESS, AND BE TREATED WITH FAIRNESS, DIGNITY, AND RESPECT.

**Initiative 4.10:** Conduct pilot projects focused on improving the understandability of court proceedings through the innovative use of technology

## What technology could be considered to improve understandability of court proceedings?

- Increasing the availability of telecoil looping systems in the courtrooms.
- Piloting the use of automated talk-to-text captioning in the courtrooms.
- Live-streaming of select trial court proceedings to increase public awareness and understanding of Nebraska courts.

**Initiative 4.11:** Coordinate a study of the In Forma Pauperis procedure in the trial and appellate courts and recommend reforms

**Initiative 4.12:** Encourage and support recommended reforms to Nebraska's policies and practices in cases governed by the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA)

## Collaborative Partners:

- Administrative Office of the Courts and Probation (AOC), Nebraska Judicial Branch
- Commission on Children in the Courts, Nebraska Supreme Court
- Committee on Equity and Fairness, Access to Justice Commission
- Consortium of Tribal, State, and Federal Courts, Access to Justice Commission
- Judicial Branch Education, AOC, Nebraska Judicial Branch
- Language Access Program, Court Services Division, Nebraska Judicial Branch
- Operations Division, AOC, Nebraska Judicial Branch
- Nebraska Legal Diversity Council
- Legal Aid of Nebraska
- Nebraska State Bar Association
- Research and Data Division, Nebraska Judicial Branch
- Technology Committee, Nebraska Supreme Court



# IMPLEMENTATION, STRATEGIC PRINCIPLE 5:



THE ACCESS TO JUSTICE COMMISSION SHOULD COLLABORATE WITH COURT USERS, COURT ADMINISTRATION, AND JUSTICE STAKEHOLDERS TO ENGAGE AND EDUCATE THE PUBLIC ABOUT THE COURTS, AND TO IMPROVE THE COLLECTION OF RELIABLE DATA TO SUPPORT EVIDENCE-BASED RECOMMENDATIONS.

**Initiative 5.1:** Develop standardized data reports that support the mission and vision of the Access to Justice Commission and its standing committees

## What data is necessary to support the mission and vision of the commission and standing committees?

- Data on Self-Represented Litigants and by case type.
- Data on attorneys that provide limited scope representation and by case type.
- Data on Nebraska ICWA youth.
- Data on court users.

**Initiative 5.2:** Provide opportunities for the public to share experiences and concerns through the use of surveys, listening sessions, focus groups, and public engagement sessions

**Initiative 5.3:** Increase communication with court users regarding objectives and initiatives of the Access to Justice Commission and its Standing Committees

## How can the Access to Justice Commission increase communication to court users?

- Improve community outreach through strategic use of social media and creation of educational videos about the courts.
- Establish an Access to Justice Commission Speakers Bureau available for public speaking engagements on matters related to access and fairness in the courts.

# IMPLEMENTATION, STRATEGIC PRINCIPLE 5:

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THE ACCESS TO JUSTICE COMMISSION SHOULD COLLABORATE WITH COURT USERS, COURT ADMINISTRATION, AND JUSTICE STAKEHOLDERS TO ENGAGE AND EDUCATE THE PUBLIC ABOUT THE COURTS, AND TO IMPROVE THE COLLECTION OF RELIABLE DATA TO SUPPORT EVIDENCE-BASED RECOMMENDATIONS.

## **Collaborative Partners:**

- Access to Justice Commission’s Standing Committees
- Administrative Office of the Courts and Probation (AOCP), Nebraska Judicial Branch
- Judicial Branch Education, AOCP, Nebraska Judicial Branch
- Research and Data Division, AOCP, Nebraska Judicial Branch
- Technology Committee, Nebraska Supreme Court
- Nebraska Clerks of the District Court Association
- Nebraska County Court Association – Clerk Magistrate Committee
- Nebraska State Bar Association
- Nebraska State Bar Foundation





# NEBRASKA SUPREME COURT ACCESS TO JUSTICE COMMISSION

*Strategic Plan FY2023 – 2028*

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**Approved by the  
Access to Justice  
Commission:**

**May 5, 2022**



**Accepted by the  
Nebraska Supreme  
Court:**

**June 15, 2022**