



NATIONAL COUNCIL OF  
JUVENILE AND FAMILY COURT JUDGES  
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# Our Diversity Action Plan

**Board of Directors Meeting**

**February 11, 2017**

**New York, New York**

In November 2016, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ) Board of Directors met to strategically identify current organizational priorities and develop concrete Strategic Direction Statements. From that exercise emerged *Strategic Direction Statement #1: Increase diversity of organization.*

In keeping with their pledge to that priority, during the February 2017 meeting, the Board held a session – guided by The Raben Group out of Washington, DC – to discuss diversity in its innumerable aspects and implications. Board members were asked to draw from the organization’s Diversity Statement and Diversity Plan ***[Supporting Documents – most recently revised and adopted by the Board of Directors in November 2015]*** over the course of the session, as they examined the organization’s history and evolution in discussing diversity, and more importantly, elevating its implementation of the plan which had been set forth as a result of those previous discussions.

*Diversity Statement: The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ) is committed to diversity in every aspect of its composition and in performing its mission. Diversity in the judiciary is vital to upholding public trust and confidence in the legal system. Diversity in this context refers to communities and individuals who are identified by race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, religion, age, or disability status. To achieve its mission and promote diversity, the NCJFCJ asserts its commitment to diversity through the following principles:*

- *NCJFCJ will recruit membership and leadership which reflects the diversity of the children and families we serve.*
- *NCJFCJ will provide educational and training programs, publications, and policy positions that are relevant and culturally-sensitive.*
- *National policy and standards developed by NCJFCJ affecting courts will promote and encourage judges to be knowledgeable of diversity issues.*
- *NCJFCJ will engage in recruitment practices and retention strategies to achieve a diverse staff.*

Conversation opened with The Raben Group offering insight into the distinctions among and between the terms diversity, equity, and inclusion and how those definitions ought to be kept in mind and applied in helping to frame the dialogue:

*Diversity is the myriad of characteristics that people hold that make them different from one another (race, gender, sex, ethnicity, color, religion, thought, etc.). Inclusivity is a sense of belonging – meaning the freedom of expression and the accepted value of various opinions and perspectives. Equity is the equal opportunity to engage and/or actions / behaviors that allow for everyone to engage in an opportunity on the same level.*

*An inclusive environment is necessary in order to attract, retain, and celebrate diversity. Equity is a baseline. It speaks to things like compensation, access to resources, fair application of opportunities, etc. It impacts the culture of the environment and when it is lacking, it is very difficult to maintain an environment of inclusion.*

From there, Directors were called upon to revisit and verbalize the reasons (“The Why”) honoring diversity was a priority for them in their overlapping roles: as leaders / members / ambassadors of the NCJFCJ, as well as leaders in their own communities.

Many thoughts were repeated and/or emphasized by members of the group:

- Serving a diverse community
- To make better decisions
- Faith in the justice system is important
- It matters who is at the table
- Building trust with inclusion
- Empathy and understanding
- Shifting perceptions
- Gaining more talent
- Counter biases, both implicit and explicit

Emphasis was put on how compelling “The Why” is, and even more so if Directors can articulate it in their own vernacular when intersecting with the outside world and building a pipeline to spread the message and fulfill the mission. The power is behind the stories that are told and how far out they are told.

Using “The Why” as a foundation, discussion rose to “The How.” Using the Diversity Statement, Diversity Plan, and Strategic Direction Statement around Diversity, four “buckets” were identified in which to categorize priorities and next steps: Executive Committee / Board of Directors; CEO / Staff; Organization as a whole; and Curriculum and Other Activities. Board members were asked to brainstorm priorities under each of these headings.

## Priorities

### **Executive Committee and Board of Directors:**

- Race
- Ethnicity
- Geography
- Gender
- Socioeconomic awareness
- Nominations Criteria
- Succession Planning

### **CEO and Staff:**

- Recruitment opportunities / Building the pipeline
- Diversity within staff (of particular emphasis, increasing male and Latino/a presence)
- External partnerships
- Succession Planning
- Review programs

### **Organization as a Whole / Curriculum and Other Activities:**

- Building the pipeline
- Uniform messaging / speaking out regarding diversity efforts and issues of diversity
- External partnerships
- Review programs
- Support smaller and/or like-minded organizations
- Expand membership

## Action Steps

From those priorities, Board members discussed, refined, and assigned concrete action steps, with timelines for progress and/or completion.

- **Each Board member is to identify and recruit a person to attend the Pathways to Leadership Session this Tuesday, February 14**
  - Assigned to: Executive Committee / Board of Directors
  - Timeline: 1-3 days from today
- **Succession Planning / Board Recruitment: every Board member should be keeping open eyes and minds for potential leaders, and working to both recruit and groom those individuals by encouraging increased involvement in the Council through committee work, project work, program attendance, etc. and by being available to answer questions / converse.**
  - Assigned to: Executive Committee / Board of Directors
  - Timeline: start now! And ongoing.

- **Review, assess, reconsider the Nominations process and Board candidate criteria to identify pathways for more diverse members.**
  - Assigned to: Governance Committee
  - Timeline: Governance Committee to discuss and present an initial proposal to the Board by April 2017. Discussion to continue through July Board Meeting and no changes will be implemented until at least the next Nominations cycle in order to honor the process already in progress at this time.
  
- **Messaging regarding Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: develop a uniform messaging document and talking points that illustrate the “what and why” of the organization’s commitment and efforts around diversity.**
  - Assigned to: CEO / Staff, in consultation with KPS3
  - Timeline: provide draft to Board within 2 months
  
- **Outreach to bar associations, law schools, undergraduate institutions, community colleges, and high schools to heighten and expand interest in the law profession and eventually, the juvenile / family law bench.**

The Diversity Committee can provide a list of bar association outreach already conducted and share that information, including when any conferences may be taking place. The ABA also has an entire section on educating high school students on the law; contact could be made with them to help facilitate a long-term leadership / mentorship model for the NCJFCJ. Social media is a critical factor in reaching students and a means for them to share information among themselves (i.e. building the pipeline).

  - Assigned to: Executive Committee / Board of Directors
  - Timeline: Each Board member will commit to making at least one such outreach *and* visit to one of these entities in their communities by the end of 2017.
  - Social media will continue to be a significant outreach tool for the organization on all fronts, managed by staff and ongoing.
  
- **Assess diversity within staff. In conjunction, determine what local & national data / benchmarks are used for comparison and eventual reporting.**
  - Assigned to: CEO / Staff
  - Timeline: report back in one year
  
- **External Partnerships: who do we have and who is missing that we should tap into? Are there additional opportunities for reciprocal memberships like those with NJCSA and NAICJA?**
  - Assigned to: Membership and Diversity Committees
  - Timeline: recommendations for the Board by July 2017
  
- **Expand Membership: are there other strategies and membership options to consider, particularly in the context of engaging the next generation and changing societal trends?**
  - Assigned to: Membership Committee
  - Timeline: draft recommendations by mid-year 2017, to go to the Board in July