

**CBF 2021 Strategic Plan**  
*Adopted July, 2021*

**Vision**

The Chicago Bar Foundation's vision is that all people in the Chicago metropolitan area have access to a justice system that is fair, equitable, and effective.

**Mission**

The Chicago Bar Foundation brings the legal community together through advocacy, funding, and innovation to improve access to justice for people in need and to make the legal system more fair, equitable, and effective.

**Values**

We believe in:

- (1) Effective and equitable access to justice for all.
- (2) The special responsibility of lawyers to uphold the value of effective and equitable justice for all.
- (3) The collective influence of the legal community as a powerful force.
- (4) Working together to serve the community and ensuring the inclusion of diverse perspectives in all we do.
- (5) A culture of innovation, adaptation, and continuous improvement in all aspects of how we work and serve.

## Strategic Focus Areas

### 1. Build justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI) into CBF programs and organizational culture.

- a. Justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI) are fundamental to our vision, integral to our values, and critical to achieving our mission.
- b. Specific action items to advance this goal include:
  - i. Work with consultant to undertake full board review and evaluation as precursor to developing and implementing a JEDI action plan that addresses board and organizational policies, board oversight of the CBF Executive Director, board governance, grants, advocacy and programs, and governance and administration.
  - ii. Work to eliminate barriers to representing low and moderate-income individuals. Specifically:
    - a) conduct a new legal aid recruitment/retention study that incorporates JEDI issues and use findings to improve salary/benefits for legal aid attorneys, and
    - b) continue advocacy for student debt reform.
  - iii. Increase involvement of other legal professionals in the CBF work, including representation on the Board and other committees. Propose amendment to CBF bylaws to The Chicago Bar Association (CBA) that would permit other legal professionals to serve on CBF board if they are CBA Associate Members.
  - iv. Work with the Illinois Racial Justice Working Group and other partners to support more JEDI professional development opportunities for pro bono and legal aid community.
  - v. Prioritize JEDI efforts in the CBF grants process and use that information to continually advance the CBF's overall JEDI efforts.
  - vi. Advocate for JEDI training and support to grantee leadership and volunteers covering issues of race, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability access, language access, etc.
- c. Create a standing JEDI agenda item for every board meeting to ensure that JEDI stays at the forefront of all decision-making.
- d. Consider a JEDI training for the Board once a year or once every 2 years so that the latest research and information is at their fingertips in decision making moments.

## **2. Incorporate innovation into CBF programs and organizational culture.**

- a. Innovation has been a hallmark of the CBF for years, and we want to ensure a culture of innovation is infused throughout the organization for the long term.
- b. Specific action items to advance this goal include:
  - i. Develop and implement a concrete plan to nurture a culture of innovation and commitment to continuous adaptation and improvement at the CBF. Consider how innovation in JEDI can be integrated into innovation overall for the CBF.
  - ii. Review and revise the CBF grants program to encourage and reward innovation among our pro bono, legal aid, and court partners and highlight JEDI innovations as one area of innovation priority for the CBF (potential ideas include an annual “Ideas Fest”).
  - iii. Use the CBF Justice Entrepreneurs Project (JEP) and Cook County Legal Aid for Housing and Debt program (CCLAHD) as models for innovation in the practice of law and delivery of justice.
  - iv. Continue to advocate for and assist with implementation of recommendations of the CBA/CBF Task Force on the Sustainable Practice of Law & Innovation.

## **3. Expand community connections, partnerships, and community-based services to better connect people in need with legal resources.**

- a. Research and experience has shown that people facing legal issues most often turn to trusted community-based networks for assistance first. We need to prioritize meeting people where they are to educate them about their legal rights and responsibilities, connect them to legal resources, and, where possible, resolve their legal issues in their communities.
- b. Specific action items to advance this goal include:
  - i. Work with Supreme Court Commission on Access to Justice and other partners and stakeholders to develop and implement the CBA/CBF Task Force “community justice navigator” proposal.
  - ii. Use the CCLAHD community outreach program as a model to test out, refine, and develop effective court, legal aid, and bar partnerships with community organizations, libraries, public officials, and other community-based groups.
  - iii. Work with the CBA to play a leadership role in expanding community-based legal services through various community

partnerships that connect the courts, legal aid, and the bar with underserved communities.

- iv. Prioritize community-based partnerships in the CBF grants process.
- v. Better connect with suburban Cook County courthouses and emphasize linkages and services in those communities.
- vi. Use all of the above connections to ask more questions about JEDI from all CBF partners.

**4. Build on the pandemic response to make technology and remote access an integral part of the court process for the long-term to improve access, equity, and efficiency.**

- a. The pandemic and the pivot to remote access to the courts it necessitated have given us a historic opportunity to modernize and reshape the court system to be more accessible longer term.
- b. Specific action items to advance this goal include:
  - i. Use the ongoing CCLAHD program as a model for developing a fair, accessible, and efficient hybrid court model where some parties appear in person and some remote.
  - ii. Continue to use partnerships/representation with CBF/Circuit Court Pro Se Advisory Committee, Supreme Court Commission on Access to Justice, Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts, and Illinois Judicial Conference to regularly review and refine policies, procedures, and resources to make remote access a central feature of the court process.
  - iii. Improve accessibility and transparency regarding the process of appearing virtually, giving litigants the choice of remote versus in-person access for all non-evidentiary proceedings.
  - iv. Reimagine the provision of legal services as courts have learned to operate remotely, and work with and support pro bono and legal aid organizations to ensure their ability to operate successfully in this new model.
  - v. Integrate “cultural accessibility” as one form of accessibility and integrate JEDI into consideration of and execution of accessibility.
  - vi. Utilize grantee partnerships to get more information on these ideas from the constituents that they serve.

**5. Develop an equity framework for the courts, identifying and advocating for the resources, assistance, and policies necessary to ensure all people--and principally people of color--can receive a fair hearing.**

- a. Acknowledging the historic inequities in the court system, the goal of this framework is twofold:
  - i. To ensure people who may be starting at a disadvantage have the resources and assistance they need to get a fair hearing, and
  - ii. To better understand what may be driving inequity and inequality in the court process and develop policies and procedures to ameliorate these disparate impacts.
- b. Specific action items to advance this goal include:
  - i. Identify best practices and promising models for this framework through feedback and collaboration with other partners and stakeholders tackling these issues, including the National Center on State Courts, other bar and judicial groups, and other jurisdictions.
  - ii. Connect with grantees and partners to define inequity and inequality from the perspectives of the people they serve, so that the ideas of equity and equality are constructed with diverse inputs.
  - iii. Develop model policies and processes for incorporating equity into the larger justice framework.
  - iv. Advocate for JEDI training and support for judges, lawyers, other legal professionals, and other court personnel.