

Access to Justice Coalition (ATJC) Reset Working Session
DRAFT Meeting Minutes

Details: January 8, 2026, from 8:30–10:00 AM via MS Teams

Conveners: Hannah King, VBF; Jill Martin Diaz, VAAP

Minutes: Jill Martin Diaz, VAAP

Background and Purpose

- This working session was convened in response to concerns raised across ATJC member organizations following two developments announced in late 2025, each of which highlighted gaps in coalition coordination, communication, and shared infrastructure:
 - A public announcement regarding the 2026–2029 Vermont Poverty Law Fellowship (VPLF) placement at Vermont Law & Graduate School (VLGS) that occurred outside ATJC’s typical collaborative processes; and
 - The Judiciary’s announcement of a new commission focused on legal services deserts, convened with some access-to-justice partners but not others.
- Taken together, these developments prompted member organizations to express concern about the risk of fragmented convenings, potential barriers to systems-level issue resolution, and the possibility that ATJC could become less effective or obsolete as a coordinating venue without clearer governance and more predictable structure.
- In this context, Hannah King and Jill Martin Diaz coordinated this “reset” session to support relationship repair, clarify shared expectations, and identify concrete next steps to rebuild ATJC’s functionality going forward.

Attendees

- Vermont Bar Association (VBA): Kim Velk, Mary Ashcroft, Bob Paolini, Josh Diamond
- Vermont Legal Aid (VLA): Bessie Weiss, Rebecca Plummer
- Legal Services Vermont (LSV): Sam Abel-Palmer
- Vermont Law & Graduate School (VLGS): Brett Stokes
- Vermont Bar Foundation (VBF): Hannah King
- Vermont Asylum Assistance Project (VAAP): Jill Martin Diaz
- Vermont Judiciary / Court Administrator’s Office (CAO): Justice Nancy Waples, Teri Corsones, Scott Griffith

1. Welcome & Framing

- The meeting convened as a facilitated “reset” working session to reflect on the current state of ATJC, acknowledge areas of strain, and identify a constructive path forward.
- Participants engaged in brief check-ins focused on how organizations are showing up to coalition work and what they hoped the session would accomplish.
- Coalition partners emphasized the importance of returning to foundational principles, strengthening communication, and re-establishing a shared framework amid significant transition.

2. Coalition Origins and Prior Transition Work

- Coalition history was reviewed, including:

- ATJC's founding 6-seat composition and purpose as a coordination and information-sharing body among VBA (2 seats), VBF (1 seat), VLA (1 seat), LSV (legacy Lawline; 1 seat), Judiciary (1 seat).
- Past chairpersonship roles alternated between VBA and Judiciary.
- Notable accomplishments, including the creation of VPLF
- Prior fundraising practices, including rotating chairs and coordinated VPLF stewardship
- The Judiciary referenced prior *Justice for All* planning materials as potentially useful resources for governance and framing going forward (not for endorsement at this time).
- The Judiciary shared that it stepped back from convening once ATJC activity became primarily focused on fundraising in Legislature due to ethical constraints, while emphasizing its continued membership and willingness to support coalition work.

3. What Stalled and Why: Reflections on Recent Challenges

- Coalition partners discussed recent tensions and breakdowns, identifying systemic contributing factors, including:
 - lack of staffing or infrastructure for ATJC
 - leadership and transition gaps
 - siloed decision-making under time and capacity constraints
 - misalignment of fundraising, governance, and program calendars
 - insufficient communication during pivotal decisions, resulting in harm to trust
- Organizational perspectives were shared regarding the impacts of ATJC's limited involvement in recent major decisions, constraints affecting fundraising and programmatic action, and the need to re-tend relationships while strengthening structure.

4. Current Landscape and Structural Fit

- Participants discussed shifts in the broader access-to-justice ecosystem, including:
 - increased complexity of partnerships and initiatives
 - expanded advocacy and fundraising occurring outside ATJC
 - ongoing gaps in coordination, decision-making clarity, and accountability
- There was general agreement that ATJC has operated as a looser entity than originally anticipated and that expectations, structure, and capacity must be better aligned.

5. Future Membership, Leadership, and Structure

- **Membership**
 - Coalition partners broadly agreed that:
 - ATJC should remain inclusive of organizations providing free or low-bono legal services
 - membership criteria and onboarding should be clearly defined
 - additional partners, including Have Justice, Will Travel (HJWT) and the Vermont Network to End Domestic Violence (Network), should be invited
 - It was affirmed that former members are presumed current members, subject to updated organizational representation.
- **Leadership and Capacity**
 - Participants agreed that:
 - ATJC requires a neutral, trusted chair with time-limited tenure
 - chairpersonship must be supported by administrative capacity

- leadership should not rely solely on volunteer goodwill but dedicated capacity driving clearly defined structure and strategy
- The Judiciary shared that while it will not chair ATJC, the Judiciary's Court Administration Office (CAO) and Access & Resource Center (ARC) may be able to provide convening and administrative support, subject to internal confirmation.

6. Decisions and Closing

- **Agreed Action Items**

- **Josh Diamond (VBA)** will circulate a **Doodle poll** to schedule a **February ATJC meeting**, including current coalition members and newly invited organizations (HJWT and Vermont Network).
 - The **February meeting** will be structured to:
 - rebuild or reaffirm ATJC's governing or chartering document
 - clarify membership criteria and leadership structure
 - confirm chairpersonship
 - establish subcommittees and a regular meeting cadence
 - determine the institutional home for coalition records and public-facing materials
 - Future meetings can be structured to identify priorities for the next biennium, recognizing that unified advocacy for the 2026 legislative session may not be feasible
- **Jill Martin Diaz (VAAP)** will circulate these minutes for coalition review and endorsement at the February meeting.
- **Scott Griffith (Judiciary / CAO)** will update the ATJC webpage to reflect current coalition membership.
- **In closing**, participants expressed appreciation for the candid and respectful dialogue and a shared commitment to rebuilding ATJC in a way that is sustainable, transparent, and grounded in shared values.

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