



UNITED STATES CIVIL SOCIETY STANDING STRONG ON GOAL 16

On the eve of the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit, President Obama issued a Presidential Memorandum demonstrating the universal nature of Goal 16 by formally establishing the White House Legal Aid Interagency Roundtable (LAIR) and charged it with “assist[ing] the United States with implementation of Goal 16.” The activities of LAIR recognize that **access to justice is necessary to end poverty within our nation’s borders**. As Ambassador Samantha Power said at the time of the 2030 Agenda’s adoption, “it would be a serious mistake – and would run contrary to the universal character of the 2030 Agenda – to think that this goal [Goal 16] only applies to fragile or conflict-ridden countries ... all governments – including developed democracies, including mine and many of yours – must work at building more just, inclusive, and transparent societies.”

While access to justice is a distinct goal in the 2030 Agenda, it is also necessary to realizing many of the other Sustainable Development Goals. The same is true of the work done to advance access to justice by LAIR and its civil society partners. Through integrating civil legal aid into federal programs that support underserved communities, not only is access to justice improved, federal programs that focus on poverty (Goal 1), hunger prevention (Goal 2), health (Goal 3), education (Goal 4), the empowerment of women (Goal 5), employment (Goal 8), inequality (Goal 10), and safety (Goal 11) are also strengthened.

And that is how the [National Legal Aid and Defender Association](#) and the [Justice in Government Project](#) have been so successful expanding legal help for individuals and families by unlocking funding opportunities for civil legal aid in the United States.

NATIONAL LEGAL AID & DEFENDER ASSOCIATION

(NLADA) *Project to Advance Civil Legal Aid Collaborations* builds upon the work of the federal LAIR to integrate civil legal aid into federal programs. NLADA supports civil legal aid’s ability to secure funding to grow and sustain these collaborations.

NLADA supports a range of efforts to [incorporate legal aid providers among government partners](#) including:

- Partnering with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Supportive Services for Veteran Families representatives to work with grantees to include civil legal aid as subgrantees, including by creating opportunities to present at our conferences with civil legal aid partners;
- Promoting broadly the \$1 billion increase in U.S. Department of Health and Human Services opioid response grants in FY 2018 and providing tailored technical assistance to providers and statewide alliances to advocate with their state administrators to include and fund civil legal aid as part of their strategic plans to address the crisis; and
- Coordinating with U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) Civil Rights Division staff in areas of importance to that office that align with the work and mission of the civil legal aid community by organizing listening sessions between these communities. Our goals are to maintain relationships between civil legal aid and the DOJ to ensure the Department’s initiatives are informed by experiences in the field.

THE JUSTICE IN GOVERNMENT PROJECT

(JGP) provides strategic guidance to state and local officials and their justice system partners seeking to leverage civil legal aid to achieve policy and programmatic goals and ensure the maximum benefit from public dollars spent on low- and moderate-income people and communities.

JGP supports a range of efforts to [incorporate legal aid providers among government partners](#) including efforts by:

- Hawaii’s Director of the Department of Human Services convened a Legal Aid Interagency Roundtable with representatives from the State Department of Justice, Department of Health, Department of Labor and Industrial Relations, and others, working to identify which programs could be more effective and efficient with legal services;
- Executive Director of a government-created Workforce Center in Oklahoma adopted a new supportive services policy that includes providing legal aid to jobseekers to help with barriers to employment such as expunging or sealing old criminal records, obtaining or reinstating a revoked driver’s license or occupational license, resolving credit report problems, filing for domestic violence restraining orders, and assisting veterans with accessing healthcare, education grants, and housing services; and
- Collaborating with NLADA and state partners to increase use of U.S. Department of Justice Office for Victims of Crime (DOJ OVC) funding for legal aid to victims of domestic violence, elder abuse, wage theft, financial fraud, and human trafficking in more than 40 states.



NLADA supports efforts to secure funding for legal aid providers to **serve underserved populations**, including:

- Using a variety of mechanisms to educate providers about recurring and emerging programs. These outreach methods include in-person and virtual presentations, as well as dissemination of information through LegalAidResources.org, NLADA-hosted listservs, and listservs of partner organizations;
- Promoting a wide array of federal programs, ranging from longstanding and well-known grant programs to new initiatives and demonstration projects. This includes programs for which civil legal aid can apply as a primary grantee, as a partner subgrantee, or advocate with state and local government entities for funding through block and formula grants; and
- Reaching additional providers not only to increase the number of federal grant programs of which providers are aware, but also the number of providers who are aware of these grant programs. Through this outreach, we engaged programs beyond the traditional community of providers as well as civil legal aid programs who do not regularly consider pursuing federal funding.

NLADA works to increase awareness of how **legal aid advances policymaker and grant administrators' goals**:

- Continuing to educate on the importance of the Legal Services Corporation federal funding, which is necessary for the provision of civil legal aid across the United States; and
- By submitting official comments to federal agencies on their program designs, including official comments to the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) to emphasize the critical role Public Service Loan Forgiveness and other federal programs play in underwriting the availability and quality of critical public services, and specifically legal services.

JGP supports efforts to secure funding for legal aid providers to **serve underserved populations**, including:

- Civil legal aid programs in Kentucky, Ohio, Oklahoma, and West Virginia launching projects that partner with schools and health clinics to provide legal help to children and their caregivers affected by the opioid crisis through DOJ OVC funds;
- The Los Angeles Mayor's Office for Reentry use of state funds for legal help to remove barriers to employment for people with criminal records;
- Arizona Bar Foundation receipt of DOJ OVC funding to develop a service provider technology coalition and interactive website about the housing, consumer, family, and guardianship civil legal needs of crime victims, bringing this information to both rural and urban parts of the state; and
- State-administered federal crime victims funds by extending the categories of crime victims that can be reached by legal help to victims of wage theft and other employment-related crimes and financial fraud.

JGP works to increase awareness of how **legal aid advances policymaker and grant administrators' goals**:

- In collaboration with NLADA, JGP conducted outreach for commentators when the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) issued a Notice of Request for Information on the VA's Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers that included a section on legal needs;
- Collaborated with Legal Aid Association of California to support incorporating legal aid into a new grant program funded by the state's cannabis tax; and
- Recognizing the federal government's call for resources to address the ongoing opioid crisis, JGP and NLADA produced a factsheet about how civil legal aid can be a partner for addressing this crisis.



For more about the NLADA's work, check out this [page](#).

The [Justice in Government Project's Toolkit](#) helps government policymakers, grant administrators, and advocates learn about the evidence base for legal aid, funding opportunities, and examples of successful state partnerships.

To learn more about LAIR's work, check out their [annual report](#) and [Toolkit](#). Learn more about Goal 16 [here](#).