



JUDICIAL COUNCIL  
OF CALIFORNIA

ACCESS AND FAIRNESS  
ADVISORY COMMITTEE

## 2014 Summary of Projects

*The Access and Fairness Advisory Committee was established by the Chief Justice in 1994. It works closely with the Education Division of the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) to develop education and training programs on fairness issues for judges, court managers, and staff. The committee also collaborates closely with other justice system partners, such as the State Bar of California's Council on Access and Fairness. A summary of the advisory committee's current projects related to the areas of racial and ethnic fairness follows.*

### Pilot Mentoring Program for Superior Court Staff

The advisory committee oversaw a pilot mentoring program for court staff in the Superior Courts of Alameda, Contra Costa, San Francisco, and Solano. The evaluation of the pilot was very positive and the Judicial Council has approved a recommendation that it be offered statewide. The advisory committee is now working on developing a court staff mentoring toolkit for the AOC's website for judicial officers and court staff, and will identify strategies to communicate with other trial courts about the program.

### Focus Groups on Gender Fairness and Women of Color in the Courts

The advisory committee has held a series of focus groups with judges, attorneys and court users around the state to determine what progress has been achieved since the landmark study and report entitled, *Achieving Equal Justice for Women and Men in the California Courts*, which produced findings and recommendations concerning issues of gender bias in the courts. The goal of the project is to identify promising practices and model programs or guidelines that individual courts have instituted that can be shared through educational modules or in other ways that might provide meaningful assistance to the courts in these areas.

### Judicial Diversity

In September 2011, a summit was held at the AOC at the invitation of the Chief Justice and the president of The State Bar of California. The summit was the third in a series on increasing diversity in the judiciary. In response to this invitation, more than 75 justices, judges, other judicial branch leaders, bar leaders, and law school deans or their designees gathered at the summit. In October 2012, the interagency Judicial Summit Planning Committee presented a final report to the Judicial Council, *Continuing a Legacy of Excellence: A Summit on Achieving Diversity in the Judiciary*. The Judicial Council directed the Access and Fairness Advisory Committee to consider the report's recommendations and initiate the review and approval process for those that merit council action. That process is underway and many of the recommendations from the summit have been addressed by including guidance for presiding judges making assignments in a publication entitled "Making Judicial Assignments," distributed statewide and at a recent training for presiding judges.

## Representative Civil Grand Juries

California Rule of Court 10.625 requires courts to, among other things, annually collect and release to the public, upon request, certain data regarding prospective and seated civil grand juries. The advisory committee developed templates designed to assist trial courts in collecting the demographic data required by the rule of court and to provide this information to the public. The courts can adapt and use the templates for annual data collection and illustration for each civil grand jury recruitment and selection. The template has now been made available to the courts on a dedicated website. The courts now also have access to a software program that automatically collects the data from online applications and creates graphic depictions of that data.

## California Tribal Court/State Court Forum

The committee works closely with the California Tribal Court/State Court Forum appointed by the Chief Justice. The purpose of the forum is to develop measures to improve the working relationship between California's tribal and state courts and to focus on areas of mutual concern. Forum members provide recommendations on such areas as enforcement and recognition of protective and other kinds of orders and judgments, jurisdictional issues, and how to ensure access to justice in Indian country in the areas of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and teen-dating violence. Members of the forum include tribal court judges, state court judges, chairs of the Judicial Council's advisory committees on access and fairness, criminal law, civil and small claims, family and juvenile, and traffic; and the director of Native American Affairs for the State Attorney General's Office.

## Language Access

Representatives from the committee are participating in the development of a statewide Language Access Plan (LAP) for the branch to expand interpreter services in civil cases and enhance access to the courts for persons with limited English proficiency. Additionally, the AOC has developed a training curriculum specifically for bilingual court staff to better assist self-help center users with limited English proficiency (LEP). The curriculum has been piloted using California JusticeCorps members serving in Los Angeles, San Diego and the Bay Area.

## Court Appointed Counsel

The committee developed a brochure to encourage attorneys to consider joining a panel to provide representation in court. These panels provide representation in criminal and juvenile matters where compensation is provided by the court to the appointed attorneys. The brochure will be distributed to minority bars throughout the state to ensure that the diversity of the state is reflected in the attorneys hired by the court.