

DC Social Justice Transformations Network Project Teams Subnetwork Brief



Background

The DC Bar Foundation is the leading funder of civil legal aid in the District of Columbia. We are committed to the vision that residents of the District have equal access to justice, regardless of income. Our mission is to fund, support, and improve legal representation of people who are financially disenfranchised or who are otherwise underserved in the District of Columbia. Learn more: dcbfoundation.org.

About This Project: The DC Social Justice Transformations Network (DCSJTN) creates space to meet, collaborate, and identify strategic action steps for establishing and advancing anti-racist, anti-poverty, user-centered systems that promote the wellbeing of all District residents. We have begun by establishing a Coordinated Intake and Referral system in DC, ensuring fair and easy access to legal aid services. Using network data captured via PARTNER and in collaboration with Visible Network Labs, the project identifies strengths and opportunities to enhance collaboration.

Method: A social network analysis examined partnerships, member engagement, and perceptions of the network's outcomes. Members provided feedback on the network's effectiveness and the existing ecosystem supporting legal aid access. This subnetwork brief focuses on the DCSJTN's referral initiatives.

Key Takeaways

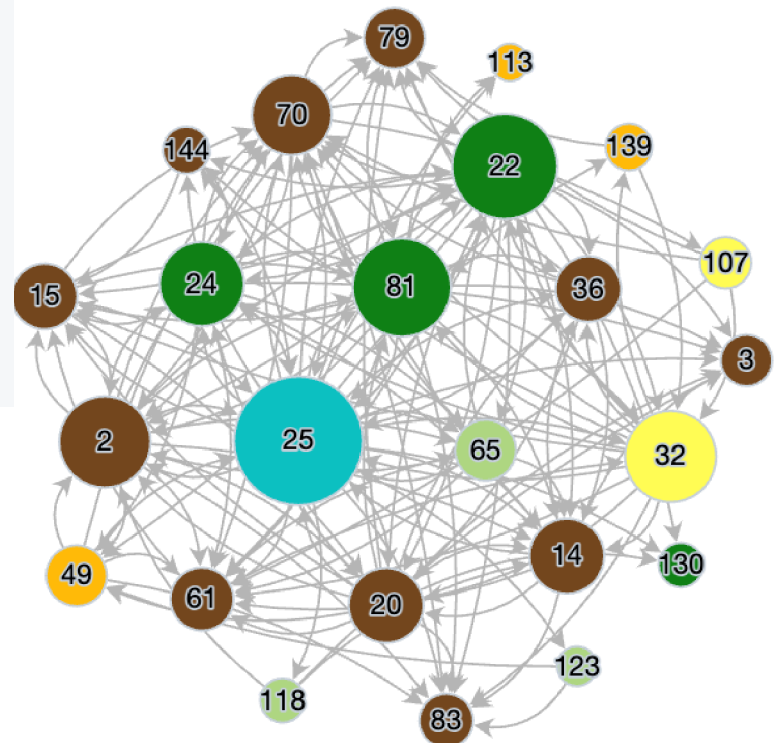
- **Role of Project Teams and NAT:** Project teams and NAT foster collaboration and support, with involved organizations being more connected. The DC Rape Crisis Center leads across all group types
- **Representation and Growth Opportunities:** Academia, government, and technology sectors are underrepresented, while legal aid providers dominate. High-centrality organizations are well-positioned to lead.
- **Focus Areas for Improvement:** Key needs include better communication, clearer goals, increased engagement, adequate resources, and stronger outcome measurement.

Network Structure

This is a map of the 163 relationships (lines among the nodes reported by respondents) among the 24 organizations (represented as a circle or "node") indicating they lead or are a member of a project team or a member of Network Action Team (NAT). The next page provides a further breakdown of these groups. Overall, **legal aid providers are the most common type of organization among project team or NAT members.**

Organizational Type*

- Academia (0)
- Business (3)
- Community Organization (3)
- Government (0)
- Health & Social Services (2)
- Legal (4)
- Legal Aid Provider (11)
- Philanthropy (1)
- Technology (0)



Key Players in the Project Team Network

Listed in order of highest centrality, the tables below list the organizations indicating they lead or are a member of a project team or are a member of Network Action Team (NAT). Organizations in bold have more than one role. In particular, **The DC Rape Crisis Center** appears in all three roles.

Well-connected organizations (those with high centrality) may be positioned to serve as leaders because of their reach.

Leader of a project team focused on specific issue or objective

Organization	Map Label	Centrality	Org Type
DC Access to Justice Commission	22	57%	Legal
Washington Council of Lawyers	81	55%	Legal
DC Rape Crisis Center	32	50%	Health & Social Services
Children's Law Center	14	38%	Legal Aid Provider
Rising for Justice	70	37%	Legal Aid Provider
Christian Legal Aid of DC	15	30%	Legal Aid Provider
Tzedek DC	79	28%	Legal Aid Provider
Advocates for Justice and Education	3	20%	Legal Aid Provider
Changing Perceptions	107	16%	Health & Social Services
Retired Attorney - Barbara Kagan	130	11%	Legal
Maya Brennan Consulting	123	5%	Business
District Bridges	113	4%	Community Organization

Member of a DCSJTN project team

Organization	Map Label	Centrality	Org Type
DC Bar Foundation	25	79%	Philanthropy
DC Access to Justice Commission	22	57%	Legal
Washington Council of Lawyers	81	55%	Legal
DC Rape Crisis Center	32	50%	Health & Social Services
DC Bar	24	43%	Legal
Children's Law Center	14	38%	Legal Aid Provider
Rising for Justice	70	37%	Legal Aid Provider
DC KinCare Alliance	20	36%	Legal Aid Provider
Neighborhood Legal Services Program of the District of Columbia	61	29%	Legal Aid Provider
Housing Counseling Services, Inc	49	24%	Community Organization
Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless	83	21%	Legal Aid Provider
Changing Perceptions	107	16%	Health & Social Services

Member of Network Action Team (NAT)

Organization	Map Label	Centrality	Org Type
DC Bar Foundation	25	79%	Philanthropy
DC Rape Crisis Center	32	50%	Health & Social Services
DC Bar	24	43%	Legal
Legal Counsel for the Elderly	2	42%	Legal Aid Provider
DC KinCare Alliance	20	36%	Legal Aid Provider
DC Volunteer Lawyers Project	36	26%	Legal Aid Provider
NPC Research	65	21%	Business
Independent Consultant - Sam Crane	118	12%	Business
The Person Center	139	12%	Community Organization
Torture Abolition & Survivors Support Coalition	144	11%	Legal Aid Provider

Gaps in Participation

Among the organization types currently represented there are three organizations with high centrality ratings that are not currently involved in NAT or a project team:

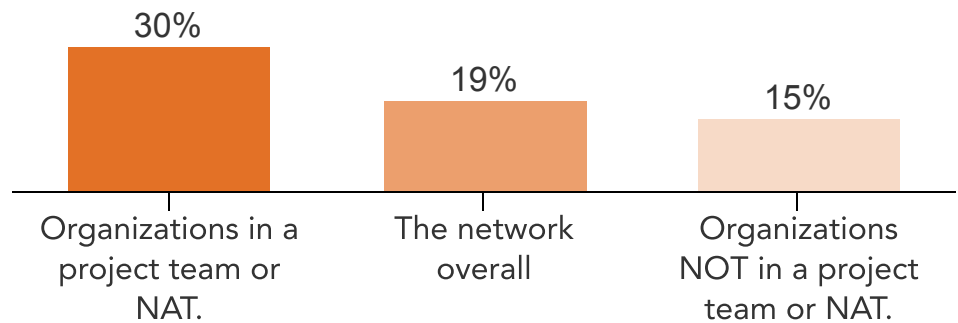
- **Network for Victim Recovery of DC**
- **Legal Aid DC**
- **Council for Court Excellence**

Academia, **government**, and **technology** organizations are not represented at all in the project teams or NAT and an area of potential growth. The organizations with the highest centrality scores in these areas are listed below. Note: A2J is the only respondent technology organization.

Organization Type	Organization	Centrality
Academia	Georgetown University	24%
	American University Washington College	18%
	DC Superior Court	46%
Government	DC Metropolitan Police Department	14%
	A2J Tech	9%

Average Centrality Scores

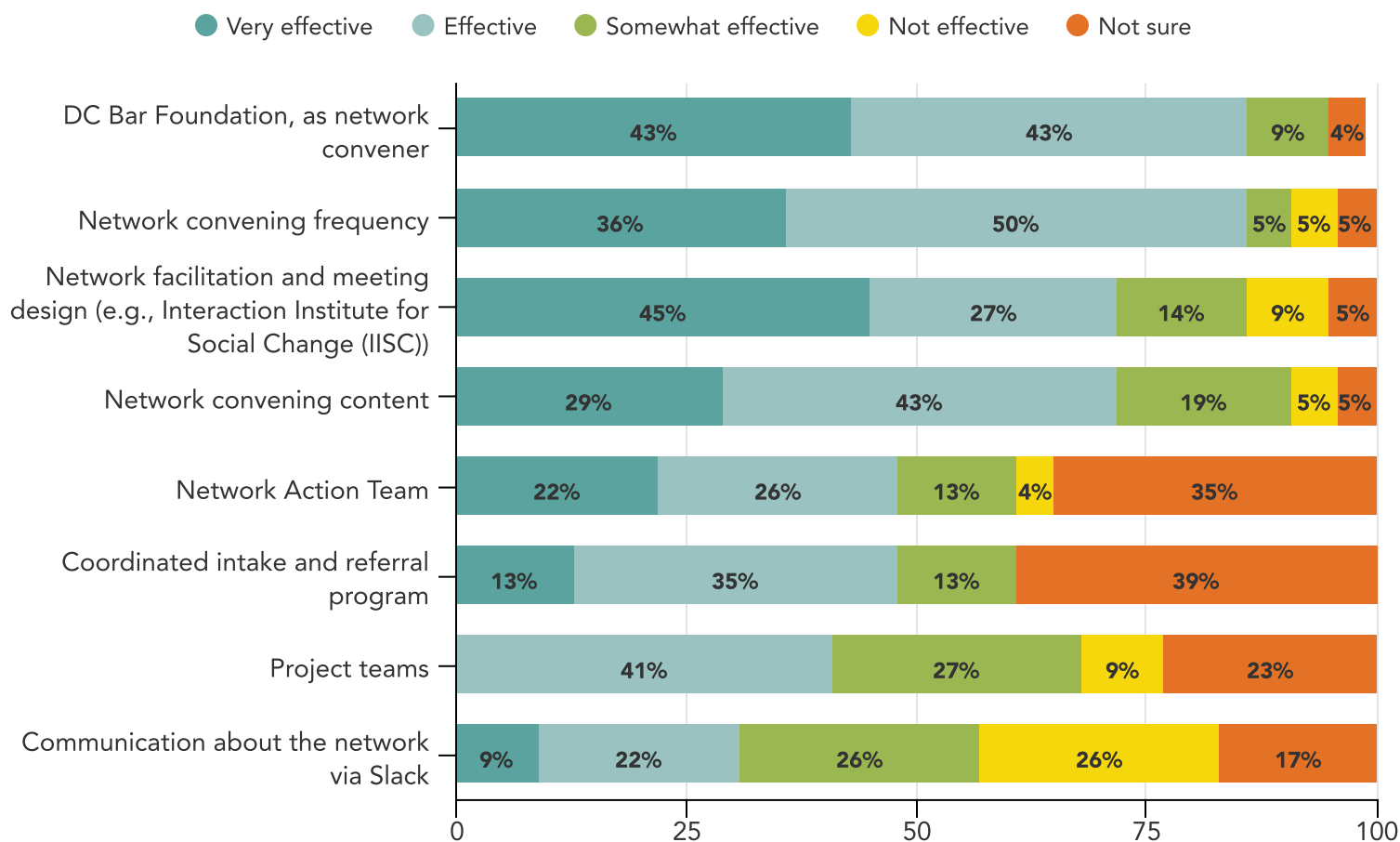
Organizations that are part of a project team or NAT are more connected than organizations not part of a project team or NAT.



NAT and Project Team Effectiveness

Ratings of Effectiveness of the NAT and Project Teams

The chart below shows the ratings of effectiveness among organizations that are currently leading a project team, a member of a project team, or part of a NAT. DC Bar Foundation as a network convener and the network convening frequency are the most effective organizational and logistical aspects of DCSJTN.



Open-Ended Effectiveness Responses

Current Effectiveness: Overall, respondents suggest that project teams are valuable in promoting collaboration, providing support, and enabling focused discussions within the network.

- **Collaboration and Peer Support:** Project teams bring together members from diverse backgrounds, enabling collaboration, idea-sharing, and mutual support. This environment fosters stronger relationships and shared learning experiences, as highlighted by the praise for the ED peer support group.
- **Focused Specialization:** Each project team addresses specific issues, allowing members to dive deep into targeted discussions and develop actionable strategies for particular challenges.
- **Resource Sharing and Capacity Building:** Through regular meetings, members have opportunities to exchange resources and insights, which can enhance individual and organizational capacity.
- **Structure and Formalization:** The formal setup of the project teams, with defined topics and designated leads, is seen as a valuable approach to tackling complex issues within the network. This structure provides a foundation for organized action and sustained engagement.
- **Increased Engagement Over Time:** There is optimism that as time goes on, participation and engagement in the project teams will continue to grow, making them even more effective in driving the network’s mission forward.

Areas for Improvement: Key improvements needed are better communication, clearer goals, increased engagement, sufficient resources, and outcome measurement.

- **Communication and Consistency:** Many feel a need for more consistent communication, both during and between meetings, to keep members informed and engaged. There's a desire for clear, regular updates through various platforms, like Slack, to maintain continuity, especially for those who miss convenings.
- **Clear Goals and Structure:** Respondents note a lack of well-defined goals, objectives, and structured leadership within some groups. Suggestions include setting clear mandates, expected deliverables, and tenure for project team leaders and members.
- **Membership and Engagement:** Several comments reflect concerns over inconsistent attendance and engagement, with frequent changes in participants leading to repetition in discussions and slow progress. Some suggest assigning committed network staff or resources to help sustain engagement.
- **Resource Allocation and Capacity:** There is mention of limited capacity for nonprofits to increase involvement, suggesting that additional resources or dedicated support may be necessary. Some project teams lack clear support to turn ideas into actionable steps, and there is a need for assistance in allocating resources effectively.
- **Outcome Measurement:** There is a call for establishing metrics and reporting outcomes to assess progress and keep members motivated and aligned with broader network goals.
- **Focus on Current Project Teams:** A recurring suggestion is to improve the functioning and structure of current project teams before creating new ones.

Proposed New Project Teams: These project teams aim to address emerging needs within the network and provide focused support for specific areas.

- **Technology and Innovation:** Leverage technology to advance social justice, focusing on digital equity and tech solutions. Activities could include hackathons, app development, and tech training sessions.
- **Mental Health and Wellness:** Tackle community mental health challenges and promote well-being through workshops, support groups, and partnerships with mental health organizations.
- **Youth Empowerment:** Engage and empower young people in social justice initiatives by offering youth leadership programs, mentorship, and youth-led advocacy.
- **Economic Empowerment:** Foster economic justice by supporting financial literacy, job training, and entrepreneurship through activities like workshops and career fairs.
- **Environmental Justice:** Address environmental and social justice intersections by promoting sustainable practices, climate education, and green initiatives.
- **Continual Improvement Group:** A proposed group could focus on reviewing and improving processes across the network, allowing for ongoing adaptation and better alignment.

Unique Benefits and Value from Participating in DCSJTN Related to Project Teams: Responses highlight involvement in project teams and specialized groups, indicating both the benefits of collaborative focus areas and the practical impacts on organizational processes.

- **Participation in CIR Project Team:** Informed internal restructuring of intake technology and procedures.
- **Executive Director Meet-Up Group:** Noted as helpful, especially for executive directors of legal-aid-related organizations.
- **Orientation and Training Group:** Provides opportunities to understand the needs of other organizations and adapt services accordingly.
- **Network Science Discussion with a Focus on CIR:** Reference to a specific focus area within a project team context.