DC Consortium of Legal Services Providers
Community Listening Project
Recommendations
By Movement Matters
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\(^a\) The Community Listening Project Report can be found at http://tinyurl.com/yaxq2vcu.
Executive Summary

Nearly five years ago, the DC Consortium of Legal Service Providers (the Consortium) embarked on an extensive Community Listening Project (the Project) designed to learn from low-income DC residents about the challenges they face and the barriers that prevent them from overcoming poverty. The Project emerged from a collective interest in increasing the engagement of community members in the work of DC’s legal services providers (LSPs). To that end, the Project strove to elicit community members’ voices and experiences to inform decisions about how LSPs structure and focus their work – both individually and collectively. In 2014, more than 700 District residents—both active clients of Consortium member organizations and non-client residents—participated in a combination of focus group conversations and surveys.

In April 2016, the Consortium issued a Community Listening Project Report (the Report) that summarized the results of the focus groups and the surveys. In addition to affirming many of the known challenges faced by District residents (including those in the areas of housing, income, health care, debt, education, police and public safety, and transportation), the Report also helped the Consortium better understand how community residents perceived these problems, their assessment of community strengths, their views of the judicial system, their knowledge of the legal services community and the accessibility of services offered by legal services providers, most of whom are Consortium members. Following issuance of the Report, the Consortium undertook a planning process to explore how it and its member organizations could respond to the findings and to consider how to more extensively and effectively engage members of their client communities in their work.

The planning focused on several sets of issues raised by the Report and the Project as a whole. Some of the most salient points on which Consortium members thought it important to focus included:

1. A significant portion of persons who have problems with a legal dimension, and are likely eligible for LSP services, are not connecting with one. Only 11% of those surveyed in the Project who had actual or potential legal issues sought out an LSP for help. Of those who did seek help, a majority received assistance and found that assistance useful. The residents who did not seek out an LSP, however, identified several reasons why, including:
   a. A lack of knowledge about services;
   b. Skepticism that free or reduced cost legal services are high quality;
   c. Not having easy access to legal service organizations.

2. Despite an increasing number of legal services providers in the District, core systemic issues that thwart the ability of low-income communities to overcome poverty have not necessarily improved. Although many individual clients receive favorable outcomes in their legal cases, the Report showed that DC residents more generally continue to struggle with basic problems related to the accessibility and quality of affordable housing, lack of employment,
poor workplace treatment, insufficient income, transportation costs, police harassment and public safety issues, among others.

3. Most Consortium member organizations have not consistently engaged community residents in their work or advocacy despite their interest in doing so. Consortium members generally agreed that community member engagement is particularly useful and important for informing and guiding the difficult choices that LSPs and others need to make about the allocation of scarce resources and the work they do. Indeed, the consistent engagement of community members in the formation and implementation of the Project showed that such efforts have significant value. The challenges of meaningfully engaging low-income community workers in the work of the Consortium members came up throughout the subsequent planning process as well, as discussed in greater detail below.

**Approach**

From its inception, the goal of the Community Listening Project was to learn from and engage members of the low-income communities served by the Consortium’s member organizations. The completion of the surveying portion of the Project was to be the beginning of a dialogue with the community and within the Consortium about how to respond to the Report’s findings. To this end, the Consortium undertook a second phase of the work that would consider those findings and make strategic decisions as to how to respond. To assist it with this part of the process, the Consortium hired Movement Matters, a DC-based consulting organization that specializes in “capacity building for community organizing, popular education, and organizational development.”

Movement Matters brought to the planning process a long history and specialization in community engagement and strategic thinking. Its role in building capacity for community organizing and advocacy groups in the District positioned it well to both understand the landscape in which the Consortium was operating and to help the Consortium and its members forge impactful and realistic responses to the issues posed by the Report.

Movement Matters structured the planning process (see details below) around the salient points that emerged from the report. Movement Matters convened representatives from the Consortium and other community members to examine:

1. How to better connect LSPs and low-income communities whose members could benefit from their services;

2. How to think critically about new ways the Consortium or its members could have a meaningful, positive impact on the core “policy” issues that emerged from the Listening Project Report; and

3. How to position Consortium members to be better able to engage members of the communities they serve as partners in this process.

These conversations had to take place in the context of the Consortium and its member organizations’ capacities and cultures. One of Movement Matters’ strengths in working in the DC advocacy and organizing field is understanding the limits that groups have and finding ways to help push those limits without breaking them. This planning
process seeks to avoid developing plans that will never come to fruition because they don't match the organizations’ ability to implement them. Throughout the planning process, Movement Matters intentionally discussed the dynamic tension between what is needed and what can be done by the Consortium to produce new, impactful approaches that are also realistic.

**Process**

In order to fully explore the issues that emerged from the Report, Movement Matters designed a multi-stage planning process. This process involved:

- **Interviews with key Consortium members.** To better ground the planning process, an overview of the history and current state of the Consortium was necessary. In depth interviews were conducted with Consortium directors, both those who are currently active and those who have been involved in the past. These interviews helped to create a baseline understanding for considering how the Consortium’s history and current practices have shaped its culture and capacity to respond to the Listening Project.

- **Convening of two meetings open to all Consortium members.** A broad cross-section of Consortium members were brought together to develop and refine strategies for addressing the issues raised in the Report. These meetings book-ended the process. The first session allowed Consortium members to think critically about the Report, brainstorm potential solutions to the three critical questions identified in the Approach section of this report, and identify working groups to address those questions. The second session focused on implementation steps to move these ideas forward. In both meetings, participants developed a wide range of potential approaches and options, which were then further reviewed, prioritized and refined into the recommendations set forth in this Memorandum.

- **Two sessions held with community members.** The community sessions were a chance for community members to contribute their views on the Report results, as well as to respond to emerging ideas from the first Consortium meetings. They were part of the on-going effort to ensure community voices and participation at every stage of the process and to engage community members in prioritizing future endeavors.

- **Facilitation of three Consortium working groups.** The groups that formed to address the three questions posed above and explored in the larger sessions had more extensive discussion, conducted research, and developed “final” recommendations.

- **Use of Community Resource Maps to understand the distribution of available services.** Students from the University of the District of Columbia completed several GIS maps that compare Consortium services locations to a variety of socio-economic and other demographic indicators. These maps helped to frame conversations about challenges and opportunities related to service delivery and were incorporated into Consortium planning sessions as part of the landscape.
Strengths and Challenges

The conceptualization and execution of the planning process identified some strengths and assets for the Consortium to draw on, as well as some challenges that it faces. Recognizing these strengths and challenges is important as the Consortium begins to implement the recommendations that came out of the planning process. The strengths are resources that the Consortium should continue to cultivate as it moves forward and builds its capacity. The challenges were incorporated into discussions about implementation steps and should be continually kept in mind as further steps are developed.

Elements that count as both a strength and a challenge are the culture and capacity of the Consortium. As noted above, one of the guiding principles of this process was to intentionally position recommendations within a framework of the Consortium’s capacity and culture. The Consortium currently operates as an informal organization driven mostly by volunteer labor; it has neither the structure nor the culture to bind its member organizations to enact Consortium decisions. It also lacks the financial or staffing resources necessary to undertake significant new initiatives. Instead, it operates as a place for information sharing, discussion of ideas, and mutual learning. The lack of institutional authority and limited staff capacity of the Consortium was taken into account in envisioning achievable collaborative solutions to the issues that were unearthed in the Project. The planning process intentionally took these realities into consideration when exploring responses, developing recommendations, and deciding how to proceed. As a result, some recommendations include ways to adapt the Consortium’s practices and role.

Some of the elements of the process that fit solely in the strengths category are:

- *Excitement and engagement of representatives from the Consortium’s member organizations.* Participation by staff of Consortium member organizations in the meetings and working groups described above was outstanding. The Consortium-wide meetings brought together approximately 35 individuals representing a wide range of 27 member organizations. Meeting attendees and workgroup participants were highly engaged in the conversations, generating many ideas and much enthusiasm about new approaches, demonstrating Consortium members’ willingness to engage in critical reflection and the seriousness with which they took feedback from the community. Maintaining this excitement in future Consortium meetings and newly developed subcommittees/task forces will be a critical element in moving forward the recommendations described below.

- *Willingness to consider undertaking a range of strategies.* From the first planning meeting, Movement Matters framed potential solutions to issues raised in the Report in the context of “light”, “medium”, and “heavy” lifts, based on the Consortium’s culture and capacity. Participants recognized that solutions that were all “light lifts” (i.e. easy to achieve) would not, in themselves, have a dramatic impact on the issues that were being considered. On the other hand, focusing solely on solutions that would be “heavy lifts” would likely create a set of unattainable recommendations. This multi-dimensional frame was designed to produce a mix of final recommendations.
that are feasible to implement but also stretch the Consortium’s impact.

- **Serving as a springboard for pilot projects of individual LSPs.** Many of the final recommendations incorporate the Consortium’s culture of information sharing, learning, and networking. They provide a platform for individual Consortium members to take a leading role in implementing recommendations through pilot projects scaled to their varying capacities. For example, in the recommendations below to increase community knowledge and utilization of LSPs, individual Consortium members are encouraged to experiment with outreach and efforts to improve accessibility, drawing at least in part from the Consortium’s exploration of best practices. These “leading experiments” will, in turn, also help to inform and shape further efforts among Consortium members to improve access, either individually or collaboratively.

The planning process also identified some clear challenges that the Consortium needs to continue to address as it moves forward. These challenges include:

- **Low community participation.** The community sessions that were included as part of the planning process had very low participation. Indeed, the process of engaging community members for the planning process and for the Project as a whole took a tremendous amount of time, resources, and energy. Those community members who did participate in the planning process came exclusively through two Consortium members (Bread for the City and the Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless), suggesting that most Consortium members do not have effective mechanisms to engage clients or other community members outside of a service relationship. To achieve the goal of having community members in decision-making or “co-production” roles regarding how legal services and advocacy are developed and delivered will require significant thinking about how to do that effectively on the part of both the Consortium as a collective forum for LSPs as well as individual legal services organizations.

- **The tendency to prioritize organizational over community needs.** True engagement of community members requires acknowledging and addressing uneven power dynamics between organizations and members of the communities they serve. Often, the power imbalance stems from an organization’s ability to control resources and set agendas. The first phase of the Community Listening Project was an important initial step in deliberately engaging community members in a way that is conscious of this dynamic. But, even in a planning process specifically designed to address community-identified issues, organizational needs often control the decision making. For example, there was some organizational hesitance to embrace ideas like reallocating staff resources for community engagement or thinking differently about service delivery to be more responsive to community-articulated needs. When this happened, there were several strong voices in the Consortium who recognized the implied power dynamics and reminded the group of the need to be accountable to the communities that the Consortium serves while also making sure that the organization is sustainable. Continuing to move toward greater connectedness between individual...
organizations and community groups and members is a clear imperative for the Consortium and its members.

- The difficulty of developing clear implementation steps. In part because of the limited staffing of the Consortium, some of the implementation steps for heavier lift solutions ended up being more incremental “process“ steps, such as the creation of a task force to further identify how the Consortium might take action. Though appropriate given the Consortium’s current capacity, these implementation plans left the issues feeling less resolved than other lighter lift solutions. This challenge is addressed later in the report, both in the framing of these recommendations and their corresponding implementations steps.

Recommendations and Implementation Steps

Utilizing the process described above, Consortium members formed work groups that examined potential strategies to address the three major challenges identified above:

1. Increasing community knowledge and use of LSPs;
2. Increasing impact on policy or broad-based issues surfaced in the Report; and
3. Increasing the Consortium’s capacity to engage the community on an ongoing basis.

The final recommendations are listed below, organized by the challenges they are meant to address. Each recommendation is also categorized by the expected difficulty of implementation (light, medium, or heavy lift) and is followed by the steps necessary to bring it to fruition.

As is evident when reading the recommendations and implementation steps, enactment of these efforts will require changes to the Consortium’s meeting structure, as well as new and greater engagement from the Consortium’s Co-Chairs and Steering Committee. A ripple effect of these increased responsibilities may also be an increased need for time and support from the Consortium Coordinator.

Additionally, as noted in the Strengths and Challenges section, many of the recommendations can be readily implemented directly from the planning process. Several of the heavier lifts, however, require that the Consortium set up the appropriate structures for implementation. Therefore, some of the implementation steps lay out more of a process for further evaluation and experimentation to reaching the desired outcomes as opposed to immediate “action” steps.

A. Steps to increase community knowledge and utilization of LSPs

1. Better utilize lawhelp.org (Light Lift)

The Report suggested that a lack of knowledge about LSPs was one of the reasons that community members did not seek them out to address problems. Increasing Consortium members’ use of lawhelp.org and promotion of the website to the community will increase awareness and information to community members who may need to seek help from an LSP.
Implementation Steps

- The DC Bar Pro Bono Center will send out quarterly reminders to members to update information and list Know Your Rights trainings on lawhelp.org, as well as to promote lawhelp.org in their community-facing communications. Email reminders about lawhelp.org will be supplemented by in-person reminders on a quarterly basis at Consortium meetings.
- The Consortium is encouraged to explore ways to incentivize member organizations to use and update lawhelp.org.

2. Increase Participation in the “Intake and Outreach” Listserv (Light Lift)

In the planning process, some Consortium members discussed the frustration that occurs when community members have to visit several organizations before getting the help that they need. The Intake and Outreach listserv is a logical place for Consortium members to share information about services, eligibility and other issues so that referrals are based on more complete information and better targeted, thereby reducing “client bounce”.

Implementation Steps

The DC Bar Pro Bono Center will bring the list of people on the listserv to upcoming Consortium meetings to update membership and get new people to sign up. New recruitment will specifically focus on intake coordinators/supervisors to represent each organization on the listserv.

3. Examine Open Referral Systems (Light Lift)

Open referral systems are efforts by community-based organizations to build cooperative infrastructure that makes it easy to find, share, and use information. These systems work by creating shared database standards among organizations that allow information to be more easily compiled and accessed through common platforms, while still allowing each organization to maintain and protect its own individual database and system. Information sharing platforms can then be customized between organizations and/or with the community. Open referral systems being developed in other cities show promise for linking organizational intake systems and creating more interactive and dynamic service directories. These features could potentially reduce the frustrating “client bounce” mentioned above, allowing community members to have better information about LSPs and to connect to their services in more accessible ways through apps or other remote portals.

Implementation Steps

The Network for Victim Recovery of DC will investigate and report back on the usefulness of an open referral system as part of the system it is developing for the Victim Legal Network. Included in this research will be an effort to find information on the Consortium’s exploration of a centralized intake system about 8-10 years ago (this information may be held by the National Legal Aid and Defenders Association).
4. **Develop a Service Delivery and Transportation Task Force (Medium to Heavy Lift)**

Another barrier identified in the Report and further explored during the subsequent planning process was the accessibility of free legal services. The maps produced by UDC students demonstrate that LSP offices are clustered in downtown areas, rather than in areas where low-income residents are concentrated. In order to address impediments to access, the Consortium will set up a “Service Delivery and Transportation Task Force”, with a goal of developing ways to reduce those barriers through such things as innovative partnerships, use of technology or recommendations for changes in service delivery approaches. The Task Force will also coordinate with other non-Consortium stakeholders (e.g. foundations, other non-LSP non-profits, churches) to engage them in conversations about addressing concerns about accessibility. The Task Force will develop suggestions about strategies for bringing services to underserved or hard-to-reach areas and/or decreasing transportation barriers so that clients can access geographically remote services. In finalizing a set of approaches to these challenges, the Task Force will:

a. Utilize the maps generated by UDC students to identify underserved areas on which access strategies should be focused.

b. Identify opportunities for satellite service delivery through new or deeper partnerships with community-based institutions. Community assets identified in student maps as well as existing Consortium members’ community-based delivery partners are a starting point for this discussion.

c. Use technology to facilitate innovative approaches to access. For example, LSPs could conduct consultations and meetings by setting up virtual office hours using conferencing technology at remote sites located in “client dense” communities, with technology support at the remote sites.

d. Address transportation challenges faced by clients. Potential transportation solutions to be evaluated include:

i. Establishing a fund to subsidize client transportation, potentially in partnership with the DC Bar Foundation.

ii. Engaging in advocacy to establish a reduced metro fare or metro fare reimbursement for persons travelling to and from legal services offices or court. The DC Adult and Family Literacy Coalition (AFLC) recently successfully funded a budget initiative to provide similar subsidies to adult students going to/from classes. The Task Force should connect with representatives from AFLC to learn more about this effort.

iii. Organizing a car pool or ride sharing option for transportation to legal services. This could be linked to a Time Bank initiative.

iv. Including features on lawhelp.org that allow people to enter their address/location and
get the nearest service location that addresses their legal needs and/or an interactive map that gives real time travel info for getting to the offices, including public transportation.

**Implementation Steps**

- The Consortium Steering Committee will spearhead a Task Force to address accessibility challenges and elicit participants from among Consortium members for the Task Force.
- The Task Force will meet on a regular basis over the course of a year to develop recommendations. The Task Force will keep Consortium members apprised of the work, and, where appropriate, encourage members to experiment with emerging recommendations. The Task Force will look for opportunities to develop pilot projects to test some of the ideas it generates.
- At the end of the year, the Task Force will present its findings at a Consortium meeting to discuss implementation/next steps.

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**Implementation Steps**

- The Consortium Steering Committee will develop a Training Subcommittee.
- The Training Subcommittee will develop a regular schedule of annual trainings based on the topics developed through this process. This schedule will begin by identifying training opportunities that already exist. For any topics for which there are not existing trainings, the Subcommittee will identify a mechanism for developing them.
  - For internally developed trainings, the Training Subcommittee will solicit Consortium member organizations to contribute to trainings based on their expertise in the topic. Organizations providing the training will be encouraged to host the training at their offices in order to deepen relationships among Consortium members.

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**5. Training on Outreach Best Practices (Medium Lift)**

Training for Consortium organizations was an important priority for participants in the planning process. Increasing Consortium members’ knowledge and capacity around outreach best practices increases the likelihood that organizations will effectively communicate the ways in which they can provide assistance to community members who could benefit from their services. In facilitating training around outreach best practices, the Consortium will support development and sharing of industry-wide practices as opposed to simply building the capacity of a few organizations.

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\[\text{\textsuperscript{b}}\] Several of the issue areas in the recommendation section have training as a next step. Though the topics will differ, the process for implementing them is the same, as noted below.
B. Steps to impact core issues facing low-income residents

1. Advocacy Presentations at Consortium meetings (Medium Lift)

One of the key findings in the Report was that community members face persistent challenges around key issues related to poverty and oppression. In order to increase the Consortium’s impact on the critical policy issues that were raised in the Report, Consortium meetings will regularly incorporate “deeper dive” presentations on advocacy issues (e.g. housing, transportation, income). These presentations will include suggestions for how individual Consortium members or the Consortium as a whole can support efforts to address the issue at hand (e.g. individual groups offering specific help, the Consortium creating a “legal task force” around the issue). By facilitating regular discussion of advocacy issues, the Consortium will increase its attention and efficacy in addressing systemic issues, both as individual members and as a whole.

2. Incorporate Advocacy into New Attorney Training (Medium Lift)

Orienting new attorneys of Consortium member organizations to advocacy issues and processes will help to insure that they enter their new positions with a mindset towards systemic change as well as individual client service.

Implementation Steps - continued

• As needed, the Training Subcommittee will solicit external organizations/trainers to conduct the training.

• The Training Subcommittee will work with trainers to provide concrete tools and resources to Consortium members after the training.

Implementation Steps

• The Consortium Coordinator/Steering Committee will survey Consortium membership to identify key advocacy issues of interest from the Listening Project.

• The Coordinator/Steering Committee will add a standing agenda item to Consortium meetings for a “deeper dive” on an advocacy issue. The issues identified in the advocacy survey will be plotted out on an annual schedule so that one issue is being addressed at each Consortium meeting.

• The Coordinator/Steering Committee will identify presenters for each advocacy issue in advance of the meeting in which the issue appears on the Consortium schedule.

• Shorter advocacy updates will be included in the “round robin” section of Consortium meetings.

Implementation Steps

See implementation steps for Section A, item 5, Steps to increase community knowledge and utilization of LSPs. (Page 9)
3. Create a Policy Directory (Heavy Lift)

Another key recommendation in the effort to address core issues impacting low-income residents was to keep an updated record of ongoing and upcoming policy changes, as well as a list of which member organizations have expertise around which issues. This directory will help orient the Consortium’s internal discussions around advocacy and will give external partners as well as Consortium members a guide to which Consortium members are the right ones to connect with around particular advocacy needs.

To this end, the Consortium will keep a continually updated list of emerging/pending policy issues (legislation or major changes in administrative policy, either at the local level or on the federal level if it will impact the DC landscape) indexed according to the list of issue areas below. Individual Consortium members will indicate on which of these policies they are or could be working, including information as to what specific actions they are taking or would be willing to take on the policy (e.g. provide research on gender-based violence, identify clients to testify about transportation, pursue impact litigation in the area of consumer rights). By better tracking ongoing policy issues and connecting Consortium members to these issues, the Consortium and its partners are poised to more strategically leverage the skills and resources of the LSP community toward systemic change.

**Implementation Steps**

- The Steering Committee will pull together a Policy Directory Subcommittee of Consortium members to set up the structure for this directory.
- The Subcommittee will coordinate with law schools to identify students to do some of the legwork and research for the directory.
- The Subcommittee will identify point people within the Consortium to take the lead on each issue. These point people will be selected because they already do work on the issue and, therefore, would already have a sense of active or pending policy changes in their respective areas.
- The Subcommittee will also connect with outside organizations (e.g. Fair Budget Coalition, DC Fiscal Policy Institute) as appropriate to have their expertise and input on issues covered by the directory.
- The Subcommittee will remind Consortium members and issue point people on a quarterly basis to review the directory and update it as necessary.

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**Initial Issue Categories for Policy Directory**

1. Worker Rights
2. Housing/Homelessness
3. Gender-Based Violence
4. LGBTQ Rights
5. Immigrant Rights
6. Health/Sexual Health
7. Reentry
8. Income Support
9. Consumer Rights
10. Criminal Law Reform
11. Transportation
12. Education and Literacy
13. Civil Liberties
14. Neighborhood Safety and Policing
15. Crime Victims Rights
C. Steps to increase the Consortium’s capacity to engage community members

1. Training on Community Engagement and Organizing (Medium Lift)

Participants in the planning process agreed that Consortium members needed training on the infrastructure and practices required to engage community members in an effective manner. Training will help Consortium members understand strategies for achieving effective community engagement and organizing, increasing the likelihood that organizations will develop appropriate mechanisms for engaging community members in their ongoing work and decision-making processes.

**Implementation Steps**

See implementation steps for Section A, item 5, *Steps to increase community knowledge and utilization of LSPs.* (Page 9)

2. Training on Racial Justice (Medium Lift)

Consortium members also recognized that anti-racism is a critical lens for developing effective community-based relationships. An intentional racial justice lens helps advocates identify and combat institutional racism in the community, governmental and other policies, and even within their own organizations and in their interactions with clients. Addressing issues of race and class are critical to engaging community members in authentic relationships. Training on racial justice, with a specific emphasis on how it can/should show up in a legal services context and how it should inform advocacy, will strengthen Consortium members’ understanding of institutional racism. It will also help advocates understand and reduce implicit bias, which, if not addressed, contributes to unhealthy community-LSP relationships that stymy genuine community engagement.

**Implementation Steps**

See implementation steps for Section A, item 5, *Steps to increase community knowledge and utilization of LSPs.* (Page 9)

3. Training Community Members on Legal Self-Advocacy (Medium-Heavy Lift)

This recommendation came directly from community residents engaged by Movement Matters in the planning process. The participants in the community member discussions recognized that community members rarely engage in the legal system except as defendants, even when the use of civil courts could help them address issues they face with landlords, other community members, employers, etc. In order to address this gap, the Consortium will sponsor trainings for community members on how to advocate for themselves and their community in the legal and policy realms. These trainings will go beyond "know your rights" and will help community members better understand existing legal and policy systems and how to proactively access them (e.g. how
to utilize civil court, present to the DC Council). This approach will increase community members’ ability to protect individual rights, push for systemic change independently of professional advocates and add their potentially powerful voices to policy debates.

### Implementation Steps

- **See implementation steps for Section A, item 5, **Steps to increase community knowledge and utilization of LSPs.** *(Page 9)*
- The Training Subcommittee will need to identify additional steps to promote and recruit community members for this training.
- The Training Subcommittee will also need to develop the location, time, and support (e.g. food, child care) that will maximize community members’ ability to attend the training.

#### 4. Building Engagement Capacity (Heavy Lift)

In order to be able to expand the involvement of community members in their work, more Consortium members need to have the capacity and resources to directly engage community members, to connect clients to non-legal support services and to build partnerships with those non-legal community-based services. Building this capacity is a long-term process, but will yield significant results in having community members who can more meaningfully engage in advocacy work with the Consortium, who can provide insight and perspective on service delivery, and who can add capacity to the Consortium’s work.

**Implementation Steps**

- The Consortium Steering Committee will convene a Community Engagement Subcommittee.
- The Subcommittee will identify a subset of Consortium organizations interested in doing more/better community engagement, as well as community organizing groups interested in exploring working relationships with LSPs. The Subcommittee will work with the Consortium Coordinator to schedule opportunities for these groups to get together for cross-training and deeper conversations about community engagement.
- The Subcommittee will explore the possibility of facilitating a conversation with funders about the need for community engagement and gauge funder interest in supporting it within the Consortium.
- The Subcommittee will evaluate ways to incentivize Consortium organizations to deepen community engagement, perhaps in collaboration with the few members who already have strong community engagement capacity.
- The Subcommittee will also evaluate and attempt to spur the creation of new capacity or expansion of existing capacity at one Consortium organization, which will then serve as an anchor organization for community engagement for the whole Consortium, along the lines of the interpreter bank model at Ayuda.
Monitoring progress and planning next steps

In order to both assess the impact that easily implementable steps are having and to check on progress on longer-term efforts, the Consortium will come back together in a year to reflect on which recommendations actually got implemented and why, as well as whether or not they had the intended impact. This reflection may result in adjustments or new approaches to existing recommendations or generate new ideas to address continuing challenges. Some potential “next step” opportunities outlined by Movement Matters could include:

- **Developing “learning cohorts” within the Consortium to deepen practice in emerging areas.** The Fair Budget Coalition has recently begun a Constituent Engagement Project that brings together staff from member organizations who are attempting to deepen their client engagement work to learn together, coordinate actions, and provide mutual support. The Consortium could examine this kind of model for a variety of areas, including outreach, community engagement, and advocacy. As the implementation of the recommendations in this report creates a baseline of knowledge and capacity, this type of peer learning and opportunities for mutual support can be very valuable to help LSPs deepen their practices. It should be noted, however, that learning cohorts often require a certain level of staffing and coordination that is currently beyond the Consortium’s staffing capacity.

- **Hosting regular Consortium-wide community dialogues.** As individual Consortium member organizations deepen their capacity to engage community members through the various recommendations described above, the Consortium itself could act as a convener for bringing a variety of constituencies together to examine and reflect on key challenges in the legal services environment. This dialogue could focus on issues related to service development and delivery as well as advocacy and policy change. Before attempting this type of regular convening, however, Consortium member organizations need to strengthen their ability to engage community members on a consistent basis. Additionally, care will need to be taken in structuring these conversations so that community input has real and immediate impact on how Consortium members approach the issues being discussed. Without these two steps, this type of convening will be under-populated and will leave community members feeling tokenized. However, with attention to detail and building off of increased community engagement capacity, such an effort could transform the way LSPs and community groups or members interact.

- **Changing the Consortium’s staffing structure.** This issue has been alluded to at various times in this report. In order for the Consortium to move a more ambitious agenda, it will need more capacity. Absent directly hiring more Consortium staff, this “staffing up” could...
involve key Consortium members allocating a certain amount of staff time for Consortium work. Specific staffing needs and scenarios for meeting them will likely emerge over the next several months as the Consortium begins its implementation process.

These suggestions are merely a few of the possibilities that can emerge as the Consortium stretches its capacity and identifies new ways of meeting the challenges identified in the Listening Project Report. They speak to the need for the Consortium to institutionalize the practice of reflective and critical thinking about new opportunities and approaches.

**Conclusion**

The Consortium's Community Listening Project represents a major departure in the way business is generally done in the legal services field. Too often community members are viewed simply as actual or potential clients. Their job is to bring their problems to an LSP and let the LSP do its work to solve them. This approach, however, ignores the very real expertise and insight that community members bring to these problems, including an understanding of their root causes and how they manifest in the community. Inclusion of these perspectives allows for better services, more effective delivery of services, and a stronger understanding of and voice for creating the systemic change needed to address the problems and their core sources.

By opening up this dialogue with the community, the Consortium began a process of self-reflection and change that has opened up new avenues to:

- Make sure that community members are aware of and in contact with LSPs;
- Strengthen the way the legal community engages in advocacy to address systemic issues; and
- Deepen authentic partnership with the community to work together.

These steps are not easy. This planning process helped to lay out a series of actions that the Consortium can take to reach these goals. These actions are challenging and represent only the first step that the Consortium will need to take in a continual process of reflection, critical thinking, and innovation. However, by developing steps that are rooted in a clear understanding of the Consortium's position and identifying ways that stretch its capacity, the Consortium is poised to achieve new things, have greater impact and, as importantly, continue a cycle of internal and external dialogue and community partnership that will allow for deeper and more meaningful change.