

December 2020

STRATEGIC PLAN:

2021 & 2022



Introduction from the Director of the Center for Social Justice

On behalf of the Center for Social Justice, I am pleased to present this Strategic Action Plan to move the work of the Center forward over the next two years. Since its launch in the spring of 2019, the Center has achieved great success in accomplishing its mission of *advancing justice through research, education, advocacy, innovation, and public engagement*. As we approach our two-year anniversary this spring, I am confident that we will be able to build on our early momentum and grow the Center into a preeminent hub for social justice in our community and beyond.

Two strategies will be critical to our ability to accomplish this vision: innovation and collaboration. Indeed, even drafting a strategic plan during COVID-19—in the midst of the greatest public health emergency the United States has experienced in at least 100 years—has been difficult. The challenge of not knowing what next month (let alone next year) will look like, is daunting. And yet, the pandemic has also afforded us many unprecedented opportunities:

- by going virtual this year, we were able to broadcast our programming to those far and wide, routinely garnering audiences of more than 500 attendees at Center events;
- we were able to quickly pivot to focus in nearly real time on the important social justice implications of both COVID-19 and the renewed racial justice calls to action following the tragic deaths of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, David McAtee, Tony McDade, Breonna Taylor, and all the others who have lost their lives at the hands of the police and as a result of racially motivated violence;
- we mobilized rapid legal responses to COVID-19 with funding from MassMutual that supported faculty members and students pursuing meaningful social justice work; and
- we have been working with others to establish technology access points for individuals in our community who now face an immense digital divide that prevents access to the courts, healthcare, schools, community centers, and so much more.

Part of our success has been a commitment to innovation—to adapting, as we must, to the new way of the world. The late Supreme Judicial Court Chief Justice Ralph D. Gants, a tireless advocate for access to justice who passed away earlier this year, assured those in the legal field that virtual court is here to stay. There is simply no going back to “normal.” With that knowledge, the experience of navigating these past nine months, and the many conversations held as part of the strategic planning process, we determined that innovation should be added as one of the key aspects of our mission statement. It has served us well so far, and will undeniably do so as we navigate our future.

The other key component thus far has been intentional, strategic, and robust collaboration. We strongly believe that together, we can do more, and do better for others. This has certainly been true of our relationship with Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Company (“MassMutual”), which came on board in spring 2020 as our primary funder – supporting the Center’s work with not only incredibly generous financial contributions that have allowed the Center to thrive, but also with support from volunteers, their Law Department Pro Bono Committee’s support and guidance, and collaboration with their Community Responsibility team and Foundation to invest in programming to benefit the citizens of Springfield who most need our help. It is a remarkable partnership, and one that we hope to replicate with others across the region and state.

We are also grateful for the other donors, supporters, and partners that we’ve been able to develop over the past two years, including Shatz, Schwartz and Fentin P.C. who contributed the Center’s first major donation, and all who donated to the Bruce Miller Social Justice Scholarship, which achieved its endowment goal this fall. We could not do this work without the support of so many in our community, across campus, and among our partners, and are deeply grateful to be engaging in this work with you.

Thank you for joining us!

Ariel R. Clemmer, Esq.

THE PLANNING PROCESS

The Center for Social Justice (Center or CSJ) engaged in a robust, multifaceted listening tour from March to October 2020. Center Director Ariel Clemmer spoke with internal, external, and key justice stakeholders from across the University and the region during this creative visioning process. These meetings included Law School faculty, staff, and students; student group leaders; community partners; alumni; potential and actual funders; city officials; and University administrators, faculty, students, and staff. The Center also has had regular communications with its two Law School faculty advisors, Harris Freeman and Lauren Carasik, and Dean Sudha Setty.

The central questions sought to understand what the Center currently is, can be, and should do as we look to the future. These conversations included:

- Identifying the Center's institutional strengths (including faculty expertise, Law School/ University resources, and regional dominance)
- Seeking input on the future potential of the CSJ
- Identifying ongoing needs and challenges, and
- Developing concrete ideas and strategies to strengthen and institutionalize the Center as a key initiative of the Law School and University.

At the end of October 2020, Director Clemmer presented a draft strategic plan to the Law School faculty. Discussion was held at the October 30, 2020 faculty meeting, after which a revised draft was created and disseminated to all members of the Law School community for additional comment in November 2020. The finalized plan was presented to external stakeholders, including funders and partners of the Center, in December 2020.



Launched in 2019, the **Center for Social Justice** strengthens collaborative efforts between the Law School and the region to work toward a *more just, equitable, and inclusive society*.



OUR MISSION

Advancing social justice through research, education, advocacy, innovation, and public engagement.



OUR VISION

The Center provides a cohesive hub for the Law School's justice-related teaching, scholarship, and service. We also broaden social justice academic offerings, help students aspiring to be social justice lawyers achieve their goals, imbue a culture of pro bono volunteerism in students, faculty, and other legal professionals, manage in-house pro bono projects, and work closely with community organizations and partners to identify and address unmet needs that require a multi-dimensional response cutting across law and other fields.

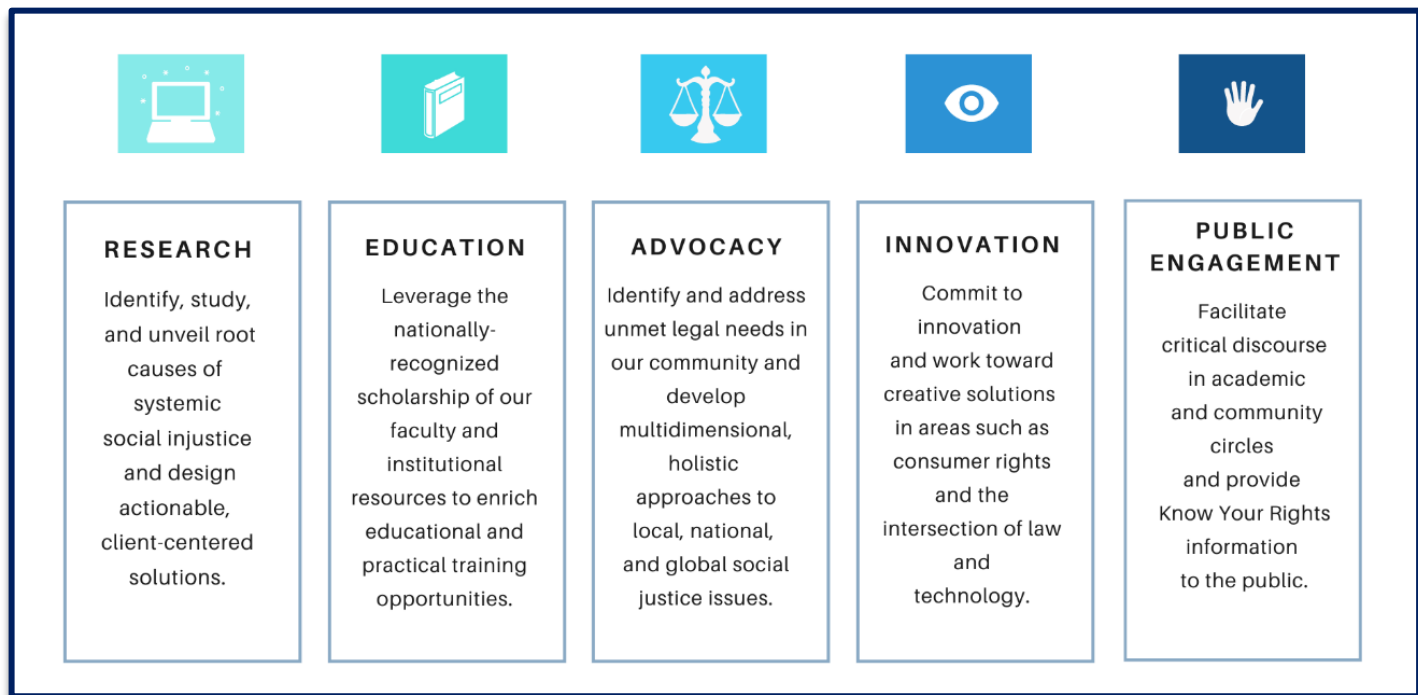
We aim to be a preeminent Center for Social Justice—locally, regionally, and nationally—that works to ***understand and address the root causes of social injustice and develop innovative, human-centered solutions for change.***

Through cooperation, communication, and collaboration, the CSJ seeks to advance, enhance, and support this vision by:

- Enriching the University's and Law School's intellectual community and promoting interdisciplinary, synergistic projects rooted in social justice.
- Generating expanded opportunities for student involvement in advocacy, research, and CSJ programming.
- Supporting innovative conversation, research, scholarship, and pedagogy of those whose work aligns with our mission.
- Developing relationships and partnerships with other like-minded organizations in our community.
- Supporting the Law School's public engagement efforts to provide popular legal education and pro bono services to those in need.
- Supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion and anti-racism efforts across the University and Law School, including through pipeline programming designed to diversify the student body and legal profession as a whole.

WHAT WE DO

We effectuate our mission and vision through five primary avenues: research, education, advocacy, innovation, and public engagement.



Current Projects and Initiatives

Pro Bono Opportunities:

- **Racial Justice Court Project(s):** in partnership with the Committee for Public Counsel Services (CPCS) and local family court attorneys, we are exploring the issues of racially disparate sentencing outcomes and overall involvement in the court system for people of color in our community. This project is largely data-driven and research/writing-based.
- **Consumer Debt Initiative:** 50% of people with a credit bureau record living in communities of color in Hampden County have a debt in collection. This pro bono program assists consumers facing small claims credit card collection actions in the Springfield District Court. We interview and counsel clients, negotiate with opposing counsel, and litigate trials while fighting for justice against the powerhouse debt collection industry.
- **Access to Technology Centers:** a lack of technology is the greatest barrier to access to justice in our time. Litigants now need specific technology access, applications, and capacity to “enter” the courthouse’s (now virtual) front door. We are engaging students and other volunteers to be part of the solution by working on community-based technology access centers, in partnership with other system stakeholders.
- **Independent Pro Bono Projects:** when students are passionate about a particular issue we help them to make it happen so they can go on to change the world.
- **National Expungement Week – Sealing and Expungement Clinics:** The CSJ has partnered with local grassroots organizers and other legal entities to provide a combination of legal information and advice, fine and fee reduction, education, and other wraparound services needed by individuals and communities harmed by the war on drugs. We plan to continue these clinics several times per year and have ongoing pro bono representation through students and other volunteers.

Externships, Internships, and Fellowships

- We are always excited to host students in these roles and do so throughout the academic year and summer. We also help provide stipends and connections to students pursuing social justice externships, internships, and fellowships external to the university.

Other Social Justice Work

- We are involved in a number of other projects, events, conferences, and conversations happening at the Law School and in the community. These include our ongoing social justice webinars and programming, such as our recent speaker series addressing COVID-19’s disproportionate impact on communities of color and lower income households. We also support a CPCS-Children and Family Law Division Pipeline Program, the Western Massachusetts Remote Immigration Assistance Project partnership, an ACLU Hotline, and co-sponsor the Northeast Region Fair Housing & Civil Rights Conference.

OUR FOCUS AREAS

In recognition of the intersected nature of many social justice issues, we have adopted a holistic approach to the substantive focus areas of the Center's work. These include:

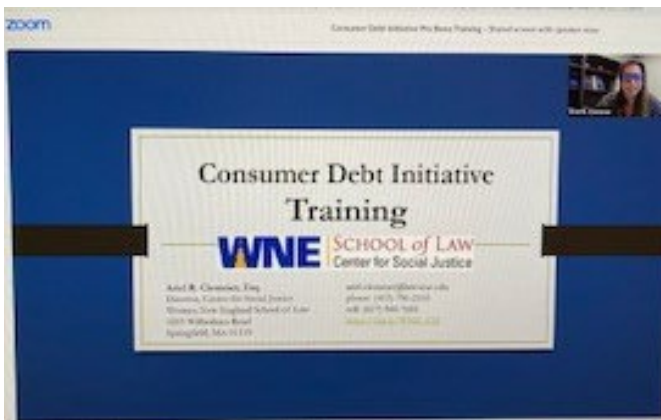
Access to Justice and Technology



Racial and Restorative Justice



Economic Justice



Diversity Equity & Inclusion and Pipeline Project Support



LGBTQ+ Rights



Immigrants' Rights



Civil and Human Rights



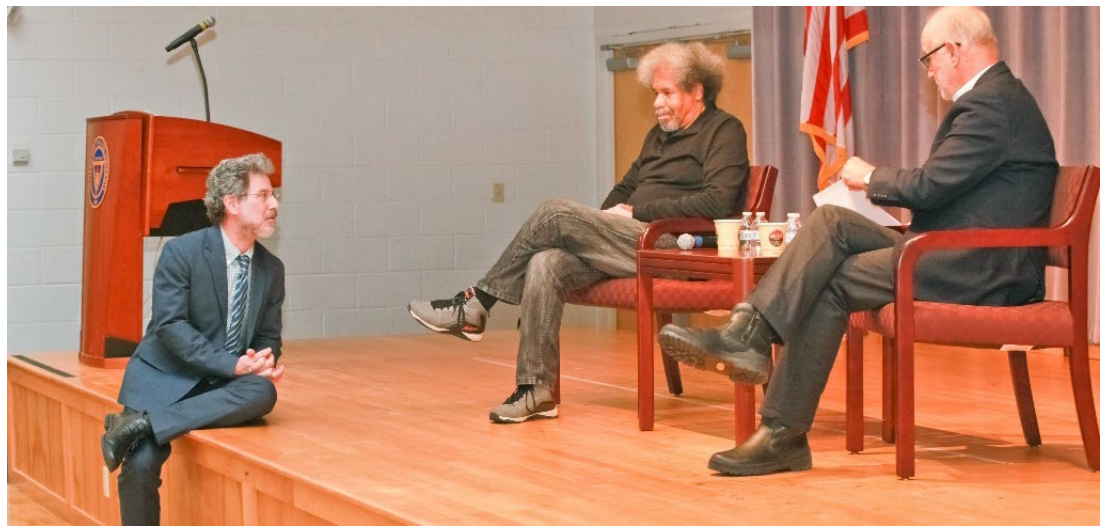
WE BELIEVE

We strive to live in a world that is **truly just**, and believe that *together*, we can create a **different and better future**.

We define social justice as: intentionally eradicating systems of oppression in order to advance equity and fairness through the redistribution and expansion of resources and opportunities, while centering human dignity and experience.

Our core values are:

- equity
- access
- diversity
- anti-racism
- equal rights
- education
- advocacy, action & activism
- collaboration
- inclusiveness
- community focus
- empathy
- solidarity
- human dignity
- service



OUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The Center had significant accomplishments in its first year. We developed innovative initiatives and robust partnerships across the campus and in our community. Some highlights include:

- As a result of successful fundraising, the Center was able to hire a full-time director, attorney Ariel Clemmer, in March 2020, which has greatly expanded our capacity and ability to fulfill our mission, vision and goals.
- Rapid response to community-based issues, including hosting a protest protection NLG Legal Observer training in June 2020, and awarding \$17,300 in student stipends and another \$13,000 over the 2020 summer to faculty who developed COVID-19 projects to address the impact of today's global pandemic on the ground. We also held a celebration event honoring the late Ruth Bader Ginsburg in September 2020.
- Development of relationships with social justice-minded students and student groups, including WNEU's U&ME, GSA, and Social Justice & Snacks, and the Law School's numerous student groups.
- Community outreach and partnership building, including jointly hosting virtual programming this fall with the Fair Housing and Civil Rights Conference, the Springfield Public Forum.
- This year, in addition to her support of the established Gervino-Ward LGBTQ+ Speaker Series, alumna Elena Gervino ('88) also funded ongoing summer stipends for LGBTQ+ rights which the CSJ will oversee.

- Successful grant funding totaling **\$777,039** since March 2020.
- Creation of new pro bono projects and opportunities for students, faculty and staff, including the Consumer Debt Initiative (small claims representation), Western MA Covid Relief Coalition (small business advice), and National Expungement Week Virtual Clinics.
- Numerous press pieces and media appearances, including in the Springfield Republican, Business West, Mass Live and Mass Lawyers Weekly, as well as a growing social media presence. Director Clemmer also led a session earlier this year at the national Pro Bono Institute's Annual Conference.
- High-profile events, including our fall 2019 inaugural speaker, Alfred Woodfox, author of *How I Survived Four Decades in Solitary Confinement*; and virtual webinars in 2020: *The Color of Life in a Time of Crisis: Thinking Through Racial Disparities During COVID-19*; and *From the Courthouse to the Streets: Lawyering in the Time of Black Lives Matter*; as well as *Big Dirty Money: The Shocking Injustice and Unseen Cost of White Collar Crime* with Law School Professor Jennifer Taub and Helaine Olen of the Washington Post. These virtual events have each attracted 500-600+ attendees!
- Completion of a robust listening tour and initial drafting of the CSJ's first marketing materials, fundraising pitches, grants, and strategic plans.

Where We Are Going

OUR GOALS & OBJECTIVES

GOAL 1: CONTINUE DEVELOPING KEY PROGRAMMING & INITIATIVES

To accomplish our goal of becoming a preeminent social justice center locally, regionally, and nationally, we will continue to develop essential programming and initiatives across our five key avenues of research, education, advocacy, innovation, and public engagement, in line with our priority issue areas. We will host events that solidify our reputation as the hub of such activity in our region and beyond. We will work to position ourselves as an important convener and critical part of the connective fibers between like-minded stakeholders in our region. Ultimately, we will strengthen collaborative efforts between the Law School and the region to work toward a more just, equitable, and inclusive society.

OBJECTIVES

A. Prioritize Important Social Justice Research

A critical component of addressing social injustice is to first identify, study, and unveil its root causes. Too often, although we may know of something's existence, it doesn't become actionable until we can examine and shine a spotlight on its truth. We know from the lived experience of our clients that they face disparate and racialized treatment in the course of their involvement in the justice system. In order to address these wrongs, we aim to provide data and other evidence to help inform the direction of change. The CSJ will develop a research agenda in line with our priorities and available opportunities. We will look for new ways that students and faculty can meaningfully contribute, while promoting our faculty's cutting-edge scholarship. We will also develop and contribute to forums featuring social justice research.

B. Remain a Leader in Social Justice Education

The CSJ has been, and will continue to be, a leader in providing social justice educational opportunities for WNEU students as well as the broader community. The Law School and Center have hosted or co-sponsored a number of speaker series, panel discussions, forums, symposia, conferences, trainings and other events that move us forward on social justice conversation and action. Many of these have been open to faculty, students, and staff across campus and to the public at large. Collectively, these programs have reached thousands of attendees in the past year alone. We will continue this important work by establishing signature annual events as well as creating new opportunities responsive to current needs. We will also support innovative and social-justice related curriculum and pedagogy at the Law School and promote diverse opportunities for learning and education in the social justice space.

C. Engage in Holistic, Multi-dimensional Advocacy

The CSJ will develop an advocacy agenda and create strategic opportunities for activism in line with our mission and values. We believe in crafting multi-dimensional and holistic justice solutions to systemic issues arising locally, nationally and globally. We also believe in providing students, faculty and other volunteers with meaningful ways to give back to those in our region who need help. We are able to both analyze issues in our community and to do something about them, in collaboration with the bright minds of our faculty, students, and volunteers. The CSJ will lend support to identified community-centered projects in which we believe we can make a difference. We hope to lead by example and inspire others at WNEU to become agents for social change.

D. Commitment to Justice Innovation

The justice system is transforming. In light of COVID-19, we now understand more than ever the pivotal need to be nimble, responsive, and innovative in our approach to social justice. We will continually commit ourselves to innovation as we move through the Law School's next century of service. The CSJ has already identified the need for technology-informed approaches to client challenges as a key priority for our work. The reality is that the use of technology in legal dispute resolution and the virtual provision of legal services are no longer a "thing of the future"—they are here. Lawyers will need education and training on tech-informed practices, and access to justice will require that clients be provided with remote forms of representation. The Center is uniquely positioned to be a leader in this emerging field, as we recently secured grant resources for this work, have broad student interest, and can enhance our partnerships to collaborate more fully with other players in this space across the state (e.g. MassMutual's data science team, UMASS Amherst's Center for Data Science, and Suffolk University's LIT Lab).

E. Continue Robust Public Engagement

As an institution devoted to social justice, the CSJ has an obligation to continue providing robust public engagement and educational opportunities on a wide range of social justice issues. This includes supporting the Law School's work with Springfield-area public school students, college students, and other law schools across the country, as well as creating public events that empower all residents in our area. We hope to develop a model of public engagement and programming that can be replicated across the country in places like ours. We also know that as an institution educating tomorrow's lawyers, we must work diligently to instill a culture of service and social justice in them for—and with—our community.

GOAL 2: DEEPEN PARTNERSHIPS

We believe that together, we can do more, and that collaboration will be the key to our success. The CSJ's overall strength and impact depends largely on the quality of its partnerships within the Law School and University communities, and those beyond our campus. The CSJ will build on the relationships we have already established and continue to enhance and further advance social justice engagement among faculty, staff, students, alumni, and the broader community. We will develop and nurture our growing networks to invite and explore synergistic opportunities for collaboration. The CSJ will also enhance strategic relationships; find stakeholders who align with CSJ's mission to be partners and change agents with us; and help to shape increased social justice conversation and action on a broad scale across the region.

OBJECTIVES

A. Work with and Leverage Our Talented Law Faculty

To help the CSJ thrive and to actively develop a culture of social justice, we will enhance and continue to build partnerships with both internal and external partners. One of the deepest assets of the CSJ is our Law School faculty, whose nationally-recognized scholarship and teaching will be leveraged in designing CSJ programming and opportunities. The CSJ will develop a plan of engagement specifically for Law School faculty, drawing on the information gleaned through this strategic planning process, and periodic assessments moving ahead. In addition, the CSJ will support, amplify, and promote other faculty social justice work through available channels. Finally, the CSJ hopes to involve the faculty in the Center's pro bono projects and other service work that aligns with both their interests and obligation to participate in pro bono work.

B. Engage Students to become our Future Change Leaders

We are committed to attracting, retaining, and mentoring the next generation of public interest lawyers and social justice warriors, including those who come from diverse backgrounds or non-traditional paths. The CSJ will work actively with individual students and student groups interested in social justice to pursue action in line with our priorities. We will also develop a plan for amplifying law student engagement in CSJ work, including through pro bono, externship, internship, and fellowship opportunities. We will plan student-only events and provide ways for them to get to know and participate in the Center's work. Will also continuously build programming in events that fulfill our mission of having opportunities for social justice activism through education, research, innovation, advocacy, and public engagement.

C. Build Partnerships Across Campus in support of our Multidisciplinary Vision

The CSJ aims to be a thought leader in social justice issues at WNEU, but cannot and should not do this alone. Instead, the CSJ will work to build strategic partnerships across the entire University among students, faculty, and staff, in order to achieve

our vision of a truly collaborative and multi-disciplinary operation. We have already identified a number of partners and supporters, and will continue to do so. The CSJ will also work with University departments, such as Alumni Relations, Marketing, Advancement, Residence Life, and Student Affairs in order to ensure that our work, programming, and events are known campus-wide. Likewise, we will look internally at the Law School and specifically determine ways to enhance our current collaborations with Admissions and Career Services on aligned programming. This includes our support of existing pipeline programming and ensuring that diversity, equity, and inclusion remain a key priority.

D. Enhance Existing and Create New Strategic Relationships in Our Community

We will actively engage with others in our community and beyond who share our values to shape conversation and action in support of our mission and vision. This approach will broaden the impact of our work and deepen our ties to the public. Our current relationship with MassMutual is an exemplary model—we have a robust partnership that includes not only active MassMutual volunteer participation in CSJ programming, but also mentorship, innovative collaboration, and generous financial support of aligned initiatives. We will continue to look for ways to enhance and expand this relationship, as well as to adopt this unique and effective model with other corporations across Massachusetts. The CSJ will also look for ways to participate in opportunities off-campus, such as our involvement in the national virtual Justice Institute with Howard and Harvard Universities, collaboration with local groups to develop a women's economic hub in Springfield, and our work with the Western Division Housing Court, Hampden County Bar Association, and others to establish Zoom rooms for litigants facing digital divide barriers in area courts. While needing to be judicious in the number of projects we take on due to capacity limitations, these types of opportunities amplify the ongoing work of the CSJ and help us reach others in our community who should know about the work we are doing. These relationships will also increase our profile with prospective funders, as well as the communities we aim to serve. The CSJ will work to identify how we can enlist our partner organizations in broadening our reach. This will also help us in evaluating our community's unmet legal needs to inform our programming and initiatives. Ultimately, we aim to have a national profile in the social justice space, and will focus on the above four key constituencies to get there.

GOAL 3: INCREASE VISIBILITY

The Center's success depends not only on the impact of our work, but also on our ability to communicate that impact to others. We must, therefore, engage in intentional and effective strategies to publicize the CSJ and its initiatives. The CSJ will develop a plan for sharing our initiatives and successes with a broad audience, and informing them of the resources that we

offer. We will do so by building awareness of the CSJ on campus, publicize to current and prospective partners and supporters in the greater Pioneer Valley community, and ensure that the residents of our region know about the support we provide. We will also increase our footprint on social media and in the print/news media. An important component of visibility is also looking for innovative ways to promote the work of the CSJ, for example through awards and recognition opportunities for staff, volunteers, and the Center itself and by being part of local, regional, and national events or initiatives, and any other opportunities for recognition of our work.

OBJECTIVES

A. Build Awareness of CSJ's Successes and Programs

We will increase publicity of the CSJ and its programs among three specific constituents: the entire WNEU community, regional aligned organizations and institutions, and prospective clients in our community. The CSJ will do so by developing communications plans for each target group, as well as evaluating, creating, and revising current CSJ marketing materials and branding, website interface, social media presence, outreach and public campaign strategies, and overall CSJ communication plans as needed.

B. Awards and Recognition

Recognition and awards are a key way to increase participation with the CSJ by volunteers, supporters, and donors, as well as to increase the overall profile of the CSJ. We will identify opportunities for recognition and pursue them as appropriate. We will also plan and implement an annual recognition event.

C. Participation in Local/National Events and Initiatives

The CSJ will look for ways to continue participating in ongoing events, collaborations, and initiatives, both locally, and nationally. We also will draw on the expertise of our faculty and solicit the engagement of our passionate student body and student groups. We will look for ways to publicize this broad-based engagement and thereby increase the visibility and profile of the CSJ and our affiliates.

D. Develop our Online Presence

The CSJ will continue evaluating our online presence, website, and social media communications strategies. We will work with others across the University to determine available options and to create a virtual presence that supports our mission and goals. We aim to be educational, informative, and engaging in our online presence, and to use this platform to connect with others in meaningful ways.

GOAL 4: CREATE SUSTAINABILITY

For the Center to achieve its mission as well as to expand its capacity and ensure long-term viability, we will need a strong economic foundation and diversified support. This goal includes both internal infrastructure (operational costs, space, budget, personnel, endowment), and external resources (funding,

donations, grants, alliances, relationships). We will also need to

establish and update our budget, create an Advisory Board of CSJ ambassadors, and obtain broad-based financial support. We will create long-term sustainability by identifying and addressing the CSJ's infrastructure and personnel needs.

OBJECTIVES

A. Develop an Advisory Board for the CSJ

An Advisory Board is an important source of support, vision, and insight. This Board shall be comprised of representatives both internal and external to the Law School and will prioritize the diversity of its membership (broadly construed). The Advisory Board will serve as ambassadors of the CSJ in and around the region, as well as thought partners on how we can, and will, create a better future, together.

B. Secure a Permanent Annual Operating Budget

It is a challenge to obtain outside funding for operating costs of a relatively new initiative, as opposed to finding grants to support specific programs or projects. Establishing a permanent annual baseline operating budget is, therefore, essential to ensuring CSJ's work can continue year-to-year. In the future, we will look for University and other support to help the CSJ grow its work across the University.

C. Establish Additional Funding Sources for the CSJ

The CSJ has had great success thus far in its fundraising efforts, and we are deeply grateful to MassMutual and the MassMutual Foundation for their ongoing, generous support. It is not realistic nor prudent, however, to rely on one primary funder to support long-term efforts. The CSJ will need to apply for funding from diverse sources, including seeking donations and local, regional, and national grants. Ideally, the CSJ will create an endowment or other permanent source of operational funding to sustain its projects and initiatives. The CSJ will examine alternate means of funding such as fee-generating public service models once we have increased capacity to do so.

D. Expand Physical Infrastructure

Along with the CSJ's recent rapid expansion has come a need for additional offices, meeting space, program space, and community access to the CSJ. During COVID-19, these physical requirements are lessened, but in planning for the longer-term, the CSJ will work with the Law School to identify and create spaces that allow us to operate at full speed.

E. Invest in Personnel to Enhance Capacity and Profile

As the Center contemplates its next two years of growth, we must also consider increased staffing needs. Ideally the CSJ would have a dedicated support staff team member who is bilingual in Spanish (in order to best serve our client population), as well as other personnel to help the Director to build the profile and capacity of the CSJ. It is anticipated that in 2021 the CSJ will bring on a fulltime staff attorney and will also host several fellows. The CSJ will continue to evaluate and bring on additional staff as required.



We deeply appreciate our supporters, partners, funders, donors, volunteers, and community at WNEU and in the region.

CONNECT WITH US!

For more information about the Center for Social Justice, our upcoming events, or becoming a supporter, visit our website or contact us at:

**Center for Social Justice
Western New England School of Law**

1215 Wilbraham Road
Springfield, MA 01119

csj@law.wne.edu

phone: (413) 796-2103

https://bit.ly/WNE_CSJ

