

## NH Citizens Commission on the State Courts

### Steering Committee Meeting Notes

June 29, 2005

**Attendees:** Kathy Eneguess, Will Abbott, Eric Herr, Mike Ostrowski, Nina Gardner, Ed Kelly, Kelly Ayotte, John Crosier, Laura Kiernan, Ann McArdle

#### **Mission of the Commission:**

- Identify what we should change within our current court system
- Identify what we would do if we were creating a whole new system

#### **Budget:**

- Ann reviewed the current budget situation. We have two grants from the NH Bar Foundation – one at 25K for the work of Andy Smith of the NH Survey Center, and one for 5K for administrative support. We are working with Don Goodnow of the Administrative Office of the Courts to get these funds transferred from the Supreme Court to our fiscal agent, the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation. The NHCF Board approved the fiscal agency at its meeting on June 22 and the \$30,000 grant from NHCF is now in our account.
- Will commented that the fundraising, the budget and how we expend funds should be posted on the website and the steering committee members agreed. Will also commented on the need to be sensitive and thoughtful about where we raise money. We cannot solicit contributions from organizations that may have business in front of a NH court.
- Some ideas for possible sources of additional funding (target is an additional \$60,000):
  - Dudley Orr Trust for the administration of justice
  - State Justice Institute
  - Kelly Ayotte will check whether there are any grant opportunities in her division
  - “Justice Works” budget within UNH.
- Ann will also contact Molly Coleman, a consultant in southern Maine, who has an excellent reputation for identifying grant sources.

#### **Commission Work Plan:**

- The steering committee agreed that at the July 25<sup>th</sup> Commission meeting, commissioners should become totally familiar with the Commission process and expected outcomes:

- **Andy Smith survey**
  - **Public feedback process – listening sessions around the state to take place between September and December 2005**
  - **Other ways of gaining input – website? Focus groups?**
  - **Deliberative phase – January through March 2006 including subcommittees or working task forces on various areas to develop recommendations**
  - **Need to identify how the steering committee will work with subcommittee chairs**
  - **Need to identify how to pull together the recommendations from subcommittees into a full report**
  - **Need to clarify (when possible) who will accept the report, prioritize and decide on action items and then act to implement**
- **Steering committee members asked whether we should set up listening sessions by topic area, not necessarily by geography.**
  - **The steering committee also recommended that we develop an electronic methodology of gaining input.**
  - **For the listening sessions, we need to develop a list of questions (for consistency across all sessions) that will prompt people to talk about what they want to be different/better about our courts system.**
  - **The question also arose regarding the focus groups that were part of the original plan for services from Andy Smith and the Survey Institute. Should we ask Andy to do focus groups with some of the advocacy groups? With litigants, jurors, social workers, court staff, judges, etc?**
  - **The steering committee discussed the fact that we have a body of information, research and recommendations from a number of task forces and commissions that have preceded ours. Ann will contact the following organizations/people to gather these reports and recommendations, so that we can get this information to the various subcommittees for their review (we do not need to reinvent anything accomplished by previous groups):**
    - **Jeanine McCoy – NH Bar Association (Red Jacket Report, others)**
    - **Marty Gross – Sulloway and Hollis**
    - **Don Gardner – Administrative Office of the Courts**
    - **Laura Kiernan – Supreme Court**
    - **Anne Fitzgerald – House of Representatives**
  - **With this information, we can conduct a gap analysis of what recommendations have already been made and what have/have not been acted upon**
  - **We discussed how to gain broad input through email, through state-wide discussions by topic area. The steering committee recommended having fewer “wide open” public sessions and adding a small number of focus groups that are more topic-focused, using Andy Smith to run these focus groups. We would anticipate using public venues (University System of**

NH, NH Community Technical College System, National Guard facilities, etc.) Possible topic areas include: mental health and substance abuse, criminal law, civil law, small claims court, pro se litigants. We did agree that enough work has been completed by other groups in the area of family law that we do not need to re-survey regarding this arena.

- The steering committee agreed that we need to discuss how to get input from the legislative body.
- The steering committee agreed it would be useful if Andy Smith came to our next meeting (July 12 at 3pm) to clarify and confirm the specific steps that will be involved in gaining input through focus groups, in addition to the survey itself. Ann to contact Andy.
- Ann will also contact Kathy Mays and David Steelman about how to gain input as to what other states have done to date in terms of courts reform.

#### Miscellaneous and Next Steps:

- Kelly A. indicated that she believed (and later confirmed via email) that only commissions identified by the executive branch are required to file financial disclosures.
- Ann to get list (from several sources) of the reports, recommendations that have come from other commissions/task forces.
- Ann to talk with Andy Smith about the components of his contract and ask him to join us on July 12
- Ann will draft a “role description” for Commission members, a charter for “research committees,” and a charter for the steering committee – to be reviewed by Commission Co-Chairs and the steering committee.
- At the July 12 meeting, we should identify the “topic” committees (to be called “research” committees?) and try to identify potential committee chairs. Possible topics include: use of technology, business model (time, cost efficiencies, outcomes) of the courts system, courts interaction with the public – customer service, public education (civic education,) pro se litigants, accountability, access to ADR and the legal system overall .
- Ann to identify possible locations for listening systems. The steering committee recommends that we hold a late afternoon and early evening session in each location identified. We agreed that we need to arrange for security, transcription, food/beverages.
- We need to post ALL meetings (Commission, task force/subcommittees, steering committee) both on the website and as “public meetings,” according to regulations.
- Will recommended and the steering committee agreed that our regular schedule of meetings will be the second Tuesday of each month at 10am. Location will be the Administrative Office of the Courts, unless otherwise noted. Meeting schedule:
  - Tuesday, July 12 (3pm for this meeting only)
  - Tuesday, August 9
  - Tuesday, September 13

- **Tuesday, October 11**
  - **Tuesday, November 8**
  - **Tuesday, December 13**
- **At the July 12 steering committee meeting, we should identify a schedule for full Commission meetings for the rest of 2005 at least.**

**There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 2:45pm.\**

**Respectfully submitted,**

**Ann McArdle  
Project Manager**