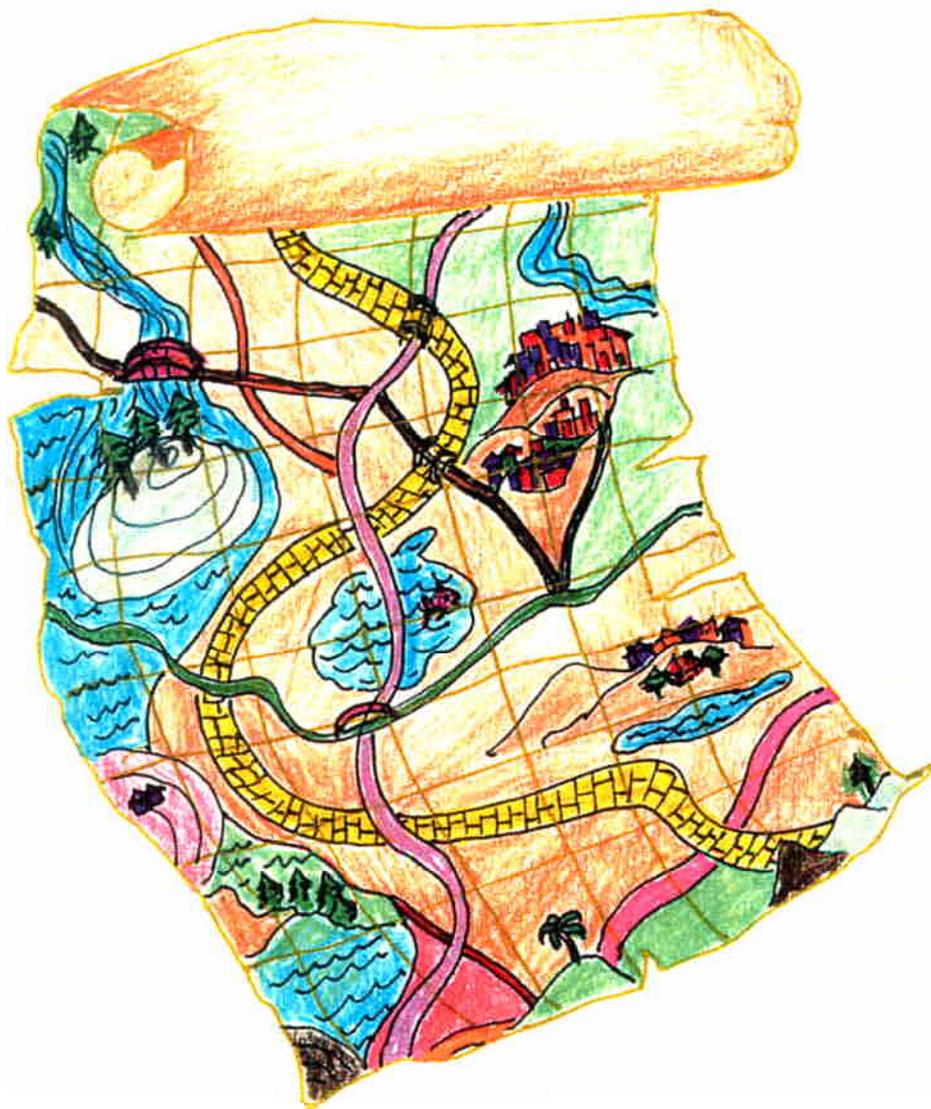


***EQUAL JUSTICE...***

***"The Noblest Common Denominator"***

***A Road Map for Building  
An Equal Justice Community***



FUNDED BY THE LAW AND SOCIETY PROGRAM OF THE OPEN SOCIETY INSTITUTE



*This handbook is dedicated to  
the Honorable Richard P. Guy,  
Retired Chief Justice of the Washington State Supreme Court*

*We are grateful for your vision, leadership and commitment to access to justice.  
Washington State's Equal Justice Community would not be where it is today  
without your help.*

*January 2001*



# EQUAL JUSTICE...

## "THE NOBLEST COMMON DENOMINATOR"

### A ROAD MAP FOR BUILDING AN EQUAL JUSTICE COMMUNITY

*Equal Justice Community: A group of individuals and organizations united through a common, expressed vision and a shared set of values, who are bound together by a sense of fidelity to the promise of justice and equality, and who are willing to put personal, professional and organizational allegiances aside in pursuit of a common justice ideal.*

It takes an Equal Justice Community to deliver the best civil legal services to low income people. This handbook documents one state's "best practices" in its as yet uncompleted task of building a lasting Equal Justice Community.

This handbook is designed to be used in small groups to jump-start and stimulate discussion and ideas. Part I identifies and explains 11 key steps for building an Equal Justice Community. Each of the 11 chapters has exercises that will assist you in developing useful tools for building and enhancing your own Equal Justice Community. Part II contains reference materials and information specific to Washington State's own efforts.

We first considered writing a "nuts and bolts" handbook documenting in detail the steps we took. On reflection, we concluded that level of detail is more appropriate and more useful for on-site or telephonic consulting because of the uniqueness of each locale. We chose instead to describe what we believe are the key components for an Equal Justice Community and to incorporate those into what we view as a "journey" to equal justice.

We wish to thank the Law and Society Program of the Open Society Institute for its funding and support of this project. OSI is interested in the development of collaborative and broad-based Equal Justice Communities across this country, and chose us to write a manual that – with our 20/20 hindsight – will help you learn not only from our successes, but from our failures as well. We also wish to thank Guy Lescault and our colleagues in the State Planning Assistance Network (SPAN) for their very insightful and helpful comments on our drafts, for helping us envision what will be most useful for you, and for their support of our efforts.

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As one of our SPAN colleagues correctly observed, we in Washington State are far from completing our own journey to equal justice. It is true that we have been building our current Equal Justice Community over a number of years. Our hope is that you may be able to find ideas from our experience, and thereby ease your own journey by some measure.

Jim Bamberger, Columbia Legal Services

Barbara Clark, Legal Foundation of Washington

\* Marla Elliott, Columbia Legal Services

Joan Fairbanks, Access to Justice Board and Washington State Bar Association

Pat McIntyre, Northwest Justice Project

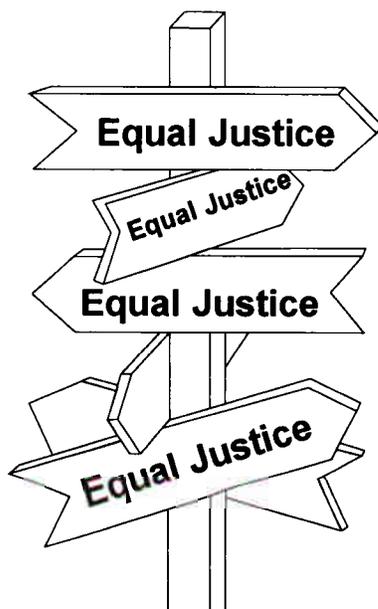
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January 31, 2001

~ ~ ~

\* “Playwrite-in-Residence” — Responsible for writing and directing our annual Access to Justice Conference skits, including writing the song lyrics in this handbook.

\*\* “Artist-in-Residence” — Responsible for designing the graphics and many of the drawings found throughout this handbook, including those used in the exercises.



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## *Part II*

## INTRODUCTION

### PURPOSE...

## WHY BUILD AN EQUAL JUSTICE COMMUNITY?

Dear Equal Justice Colleagues:

My name is Richard P. Guy and I have recently retired as Chief Justice of the Washington State Supreme Court. I care deeply about equal justice and am alarmed at the escalating equal justice crisis in my state and throughout the nation. As the leader of this state's justice system, I believe it is the Supreme Court's paramount responsibility to ensure equal justice for all the people of our state, not just those who can afford to pay for needed legal help. To this end, I am working hard to ensure that equal justice leaders in my state are actively building a justice system which provides meaningful access for all. I have visited our Congressional delegation to talk about the need for increased funding for legal services; I supported the establishment of our Access to Justice Board; I encouraged the expanded use of non-attorneys, such as courthouse facilitators, to improve access; I am advocating the development and use of cutting edge technology to expand access to our justice system; and every year I don a feather boa or other silly outfit and join the growing cast of our annual Access to Justice Conference skit.

But I am just one of the leaders in our state. I couldn't do it all, and I couldn't do it alone. I relied heavily on a strong partnership between the Supreme Court and the Washington State Bar Association; I trusted the collective experience, wisdom, and dedication of our legal services project directors, volunteer attorney legal services program coordinators, specialty legal services providers, law schools, and other equal justice partners; and I benefited from the experience and ideas of members of bar, bench, court administrators, clerks, courthouse facilitators, law librarians, and other court personnel. In short, I was (and will continue to be) a partner in Washington State's Equal Justice Community whose members all share the NOBLEST COMMON DENOMINATOR: EQUAL JUSTICE.

HOW TO GET STARTED: Regardless of where you are on your journey to building an Equal Justice Community, I cannot overstate the value of what you are doing. If you are just beginning this journey – or even just thinking of beginning this journey – I offer these observations and suggestions as one who has traveled this road:

1. Organize A Guiding Coalition. Do not worry about inclusion/exclusion at this stage. Someone has to take the initial responsibility! You are reading this handbook because you believe that equal justice is an urgent issue that must be embraced by your state or community in a coordinated manner. You are not alone. Identify a few others that share your sense of urgency and who will become part of a guiding coalition to take the first steps towards building an Equal Justice Community. Don't limit membership to the legal services community. I know that many judges, private attorneys, court clerks, clergy and others who observe this crisis on a daily basis share your concerns and will welcome the opportunity.
2. Establish A Preliminary Agreement For Members Of The Guiding Coalition. The agreement will bind the members to a common mission and will provide the foundation for building your Equal Justice Community.

1. Agree that you have a PURPOSE and define it (see Vision, Chapter 1)
2. Agree that it is your responsibility to achieve your PURPOSE
3. Agree on a set of values to guide you (see Values, Chapter 2)
4. Agree that you must develop a culture of INCLUSION, via a broad-based group in order to achieve the PURPOSE.

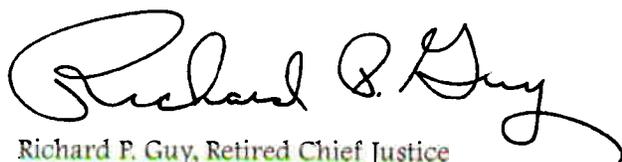
3. Use This Handbook As A Guide. The handbook employs the metaphor of a road map for building an Equal Justice Community. The journey begins with determining the destination (Chapter 1, Vision). Before departing, you are reminded to check your compass (Chapter 2, Values); identify your drivers, navigators and explorers (Chapter 3, Leadership); invite along your traveling companions (Chapter 4, Partners) and bond with them (Chapter 5, Humor and Entertainment); obtain an appropriate vehicle (Chapter 6, Structure); and of course, consult your map (Chapter 7, Map). Once you're on your way, good things start happening (Chapter 8, Making Weather). Even so, you are admonished to pay attention so you'll stay on the road (Chapter 9, Pitfalls/Discipline) and continue to consult your compass and map so you don't get lost (Chapter 10, Staying Mission-Driven). And as you're traveling, you'll appreciate that your careful preparations are bringing you closer and closer to your destination (Chapter 11, Systems Gains).

HOW TO USE THE HANDBOOK: I recommend that you use this handbook as a guide regardless of where you are on your journey. The organizational chronology of this road map reflects Washington State's own journey. Your journey will look and feel very different. For example, you may already have in place a statewide coordinating entity but no agreed-upon principles and core values. You may have a highly coordinated legal services delivery system but no overarching vision. You may have abundant resources, but a lot of non-productive and fragmented duplication, competition or dilution of your effort. This journey is not linear. You may need to revisit your values or take a detour from your state plan to address a looming funding crisis. You may want to reevaluate your network for inclusiveness and your leadership for vision.

TAKE A LEAP OF FAITH: While we have a dynamic and productive Equal Justice Community in Washington State (of which I am very proud, and for which I am very appreciative), we are still a long way from our destination. For as long as equal justice is an illusory promise, or an inaccessible dream for tens of thousands of our community's poorest and most vulnerable people, each day we delay making this journey is a wasted day and a squandered opportunity. Jump in, take the journey!

Best wishes for a rewarding trip.

Sincerely,



Richard P. Guy, Retired Chief Justice

Washington State Supreme Court