



## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN THE STATE COURTS INITIATIVE

### Engaging with Minority and Economically Disadvantaged Communities to Enhance Public Trust and Confidence in the Nation's State Courts

Over the past several years, there has been a sharp and tangible decline of the public trust and confidence in the justice system as a whole and by inclusion, the court system. In particular, minority and economically disadvantaged communities have been vocalizing their concerns through public stance, social media, and protests. Over the past four decades, polls and research have shown that minority views reflecting trust and confidence in the courts are less favorable than those of white, non-Hispanics. Even more powerful, however, have been the highly-publicized recent cases such as Michael Brown in Missouri, Trayvon Martin in Florida, Eric Gardner in New York City, Antonio Zambrano-Monte in Washington, and similar cases that have demonstrated the discontent that exists, and also, has impacted the public trust and confidence in the judicial system, especially in African-American communities.

In April 2015, President Obama responded to the riots in Baltimore, Maryland, which was set off by the police custody death of Freddie Gray, condemning the violence and looting, *but also calling upon communities and the nation as a whole "to do some soul searching" to address the underlying trust issues between the community and the justice system.* This calls for a new approach that does not simply evaluate the problem, but rather devises a strategy that reaches deeply into the community to begin to resolve these issues and to heal relations.

#### Initiative Goals

The primary goal of this project is to establish an **engagement strategy** to bridge the gap between minority communities and court

leadership through collaborative efforts to reach out and dialogue through a partnership that will lead to an increase in the public trust and confidence in the courts.

Unlike previous outreach efforts, (which largely focused on educational outreach geared toward judges and attorneys) an engagement approach involves a **two-way dialogue** to generate outcomes that the communities recognize as needed and helpful. This is an outreach approach that brings the community leaders to the courts to establish a meaningful relationship built upon trust, respect, and understanding.

#### Multi-Phase Approach Strategy

This project offers a new way to explore building public trust and confidence in courts at all levels. It represents a long-term effort to complement and expand the efforts made to date - not replace them - in hopes of improving understanding and connecting better with the public in each community, which then will positively impact perceptions of trust and confidence across the country.

The project consists of a multi-phase approach with various elements over a three year period. Some of the elements proposed may include the following:

- Community Leader Convocation
- National Public Trust and Confidence Summit
- Pilot Sites
- National Town Hall
- Informational Meeting
- Measurement Assessment

## Mission Statement

*The mission of the Community Engagement in the State Courts' Advisory Board is to develop effective tools and resources that assist state court leaders in engaging marginalized and disenfranchised communities to ensure equal access to justice for all, and to improve the trust and confidence those communities have in state courts to protect their individual rights and liberties and resolve disputes fairly.*



*A Project of:*

**State Justice Institute  
Conference of Chief Justices  
National Consortium on Racial  
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