

26th JUDICIAL DISTRICT/COMMUNITY BUILDING INITIATIVE RESOURCE TEAM PROJECT

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In 1999, the Mecklenburg County Alliance for the Improvement of Justice was formed and charged with developing a five-year strategic plan for the 26th Judicial District. This diverse group of court, government, and community leaders decided that the goals they would develop should be grounded on the widely accepted and respected Trial Court Performance Standards: Access to Justice; Expedition and Timeliness; Equality, Fairness, and Integrity; Independence and Accountability; and Public Trust and Confidence. From the outset, the area of Equality, Fairness, and Integrity drew special interest and much discussion among the members of the Alliance. As a result, a strategy was developed around the goal of ensuring that cases are decided without undue disparity among like cases and upon legally relevant factors. Specifically, the group sought to develop a mechanism which would capture whether real or perceived disparate treatment and discrimination, especially that based upon race and ethnicity, existed within the 26th Judicial District. Because the court system did not possess the inherent expertise or credibility in addressing issues of racial and ethnic equity and inclusiveness, an external community resource was sought to provide the necessary assistance and guidance. Fortunately, court officials became aware of a local organization called Community Building Initiative and their innovative Resource Team Model. In short order, a partnership was formed and the judicial district set forth on its groundbreaking and courageous journey of self-examination, discovery and self-improvement. This joint effort is called the 26th Judicial District/CBI Resource Team Partnership Project.

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THE EXISTING PROCESS & SPECIFIC PROBLEM

In August of 1999, the Mecklenburg County Alliance for the Improvement of Justice was formed and charged with developing a five-year strategic plan for the 26th Judicial District. This diverse group of court, government, and community leaders decided that the goals they would develop should be grounded on the widely accepted and respected Trial Court Performance Standards: Access to Justice; Expedition and Timeliness; Equality, Fairness, and Integrity; Independence and Accountability; and Public Trust and Confidence.

The area of Equality, Fairness, and Integrity was of special interest to many and generated much discussion. Several members of the Alliance were able to recite instances where they either observed or personally experienced disparate treatment and discrimination in past dealings with the court system. In fact, much of the discussion was generated by judges who were able to share experiences from when they were in private practice and the profound and devastating impact that these experiences had upon them. This exchange led the Alliance to develop a strategy centered on the goal of ensuring that decisions are made without undue disparity among like cases and upon legally relevant factors. Specifically, the group sought to develop a mechanism which would capture whether real or perceived disparate treatment and discrimination, especially that based upon race and ethnicity, existed within the 26th Judicial District.

In developing this strategy, the Alliance articulated two desired outcomes: (1) To improve overall equality and fairness within the court system; and, (2) To improve the *perception* of equality and fairness within the court system. The distinction is paramount in that each presents a unique problem in need of a solution. Should the research reveal that there actually was disparate treatment; there would be grave need for fundamental systemic change. Should the findings reveal that there was a *perception* of disparate treatment; the focus would shift to internal and external communications and creating a dialogue that would form the foundation of greater trust and confidence in the court system.

In general terms, courts are not viewed as innovative or progressive organizations. They are institutions steeped in tradition where adherence to precedent and the rule of law are seen as the primary governing principles. Historically, courts have also operated in relative isolation in comparison to the other branches of government. Community feedback has not been sought and public approval has not been considered in shaping their direction and management. Given this backdrop of insularity, the 26th Judicial District's creation of a five-year strategic plan and its decision to further embark upon a study of self-examination regarding the issues of racial and ethnic equity and inclusiveness are innovative, even revolutionary, concepts. Opening itself up to outside analysis, by inviting a community organization to partner with the court in conducting this self-examination, demonstrates an even greater shift away from conventional thinking.

TARGET GROUP

The court system itself was the target group for the project. The orders and judgments rendered by the judges and the every day statements and actions taken by other supporting actors in the

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system were documented, examined, and reported as a means of assessing and addressing the issues of racial and ethnic equity and inclusiveness throughout the system.

There are seven Resident Superior Court Judges, one Special Superior Court Judge, seventeen District Court Judges, the Office of the Trial Court Administrator; the Office of the Clerk of Superior Court; the Offices of the District Attorney and Public Defender; and various other supporting agencies that participate in the administration of justice in the 26th Judicial District. Given the depth and breadth of court types and organizations involved, not every aspect of the system could be researched. Therefore, a select number of areas were targeted because they were viewed as being able to provide the most representative sample and/or they were areas where evidence of discrimination would be readily identifiable.

By design, Resource Team members divided into two sub groups: the Perception Sub-Team and the Case Review Sub-Team. Each sub-team's assignment was aligned to the desired outputs of the strategy created by the Alliance: (1) Survey and analyze the perception of participants as to whether the court is fair and equitable; and, (2) Measure and evaluate any disparity among like cases by reviewing court files. The Perception Sub-Team conducted interviews with court participants outside three District Court courtrooms and one Superior Court courtroom. The Case Review Sub-Team collected and analyzed data from a Superior Courtroom dedicated to prosecuting drug offenses and from the District Traffic Courts dedicated to handling motor vehicle infractions. These courts were chosen because there were fewer variables outside of race and ethnicity to effect outcomes.

So, while the overall court system was the target group for assessing and addressing problems that might be identified, specific areas of the court system were targeted for data collection and analysis. By examining ourselves with the assistance of an outside organization, we were able to obtain a snapshot of how effectively we adhere to the quality of justice and have planted the roots to grow further, practice self-awareness and implement a system of accountability.

WORK TEAM

CBI and the 26th Judicial District formed a partnership in the spring of 2000 and collaborated to develop and implement the Resource Team Model as a vehicle for advancing an element of the court system's strategic plan. The Resource Team (RT) process is a signature model developed by the Community Building Initiative (CBI). Resource Teams are designed to work with a community institution in partnership with CBI to address a particular issue or concern in that institution related to racial and ethnic inclusion and equity. Resource Team members represented: 1) 26th Judicial District; 2) CBI; 3) relevant community organizations; and 4) the community at large (interested residents).

To support the project, CBI engaged 37 individuals who played key roles, 22 of whom were Resource Team members. More than 500 additional people contributed to the project research through participation in focus groups and surveys.

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Resource Team Members: With support of the 26th Judicial District Partnership Project, CBI assembled a racially and ethnically diverse team of 22 members to examine the court system and identify evidence of racial and ethnic disparity through the use of research, team dialogue and personal discovery. The Resource Team was comprised of court employees, attorneys and community residents. Demographically the team consisted of 10 Caucasians, 8 African Americans, 2 Hispanic/Latinos, one Asian and one person of Middle Eastern ancestry. CBI engaged organizational development specialists to guide the process and support the team.

Rickye McKoy-Mitchell, District Court Judge (co-chair)
Cyndee Patterson, Lynnwood Foundation President (co-chair)
Kellie Anderson, Family Court Case Manager
Jay Ashendorf, Assistant District Attorney
Bob Bell, Superior Court Judge
Martha Curran, Clerk of Superior Court
Jose Dominguez, First Union/Wachovia
Catherine El-Khoury, Assistant Public Defender
Victoria Gonzalez, Attorney
Ted Holmes, Small Business Owner
Mary Howerton, Mecklenburg County Bar Association
Charles Johnson, Mecklenburg County Sheriff's Department
Gerald Johnson, Charlotte Post
Mary Klenz, League of Women Voters
Pat Lambright, Consultant, Criminal Justice Information System
Michael Long, Court Interpreter
Pender McElroy, Attorney
Cynthia Mitchell, Probation and Parole
Calvin Murphy, Attorney
Ken Schorr, Legal Services of Southern Piedmont
Karen Simon, Drug Treatment Court Director
Dave Stephens, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department

The Resource Team gained support from several other groups as they participated in the team process and conducted research. The categories of support are shown below, as well as the people who served in these roles.

Organizational Development Consultants: Two CBI consultants, one African American and one Caucasian, who specialize in issues of race, ethnicity and diversity in organizations, guided the development of the Resource Team model. Octavia Seawell served as the conceptual architect of the Resource Team model and provided consulting guidance in developing and testing the model. Both this model and her work with CBI's Issue Action Team were influenced by models for institutional change developed by the Gestalt Institute of Cleveland. Ms. Seawell teamed with Nay Howell, also an organizational development consultant, to plan and facilitate the team meetings, support the team co-chairs in their leadership roles, and design and facilitate team development and educational activities.

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*Nay Howell, Community Building Initiative Consultant
Octavia Seawell, Community Building Initiative Consultant*

Accountability Team: A six-member team, representing leadership of the 26th Judicial District and CBI, provided oversight and guidance to ensure that each organization's strategic goals were met. This group consisted of 4 Caucasians and 2 African Americans.

*Claude Alexander, CBI Leadership Team Co-Chair
Dianne English, CBI Executive Director
Mac Everett, CBI Leadership Team Co-Chair
Shirley Fulton, Superior Court Judge (retired)
Bill Jones, District Court Judge (retired)
Todd Nuccio, Trial Court Administrator*

Lead Researchers: Two pairs of university-based researchers designed and conducted research projects in the court system, with direction and participation from the Resource Team. A team from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte Department of Criminal Justice conducted case reviews, and a team from the Johnson C. Smith University Urban Research Group conducted a perception survey of defendants and other court participants. The research teams included university professors and over 30 student research assistants, collectively.

*Dr. Deborah B. Carter, Urban Research Group, Johnson C. Smith University
Dr. Thomas B. Priest, Urban Research Group, Johnson C. Smith University*

*Dr. Pauline K. Brennan, Department of Criminal Justice, UNC-Charlotte
Dr. Paul C. Friday, Department of Criminal Justice, UNC-Charlotte*

CBI Staff: Two staff members coordinated communication among project participants and handled the logistics for team meetings.

*Christi Robinson Lee, CBI Program Assistant
Annetta Watkins, CBI Administrative Assistant*

Project Recorder/Documenter: One researcher was charged with chronicling the development and implementation of the Resource Team model and with compiling the final report.

Valaida Fullwood, Project Consultant

ALTERNATIVES & SELECTED SOLUTION

Upon finalizing the 26th Judicial District's strategic plan document, an Implementation Committee was formed to prioritize which strategies would be initially pursued and what resources would be required to address them. Developing a mechanism to capture whether real or perceived disparate treatment and discrimination existed in the court system was deemed by many to be a somewhat daunting task. Despite some trepidation regarding how to tackle the

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issue, the Committee concluded that the matter was critical to the Court's stated mission and its overall legitimacy as a public institution. For that reason, it was chosen as one of the first strategies to be addressed.

Once this decision was made, the Committee began a review and inventory of the internal resources that might be available to conduct the research. At the same time, an analysis was conducted to determine what other institutions or organizations might be engaged to assist with the effort. The internal review concluded that neither the resources nor the expertise were available to directly and independently conduct such a study. The review of outside organizations and institutions concluded that colleges and universities in the area might be natural partners in conducting the research and that contact should be made to determine what role they might play.

Before contact was made, however, then Chief District Court Judge William Jones (retired) informed the Implementation Committee about his past participation with a local community organization called Community Building Initiative (CBI). He noted that CBI was formed in response to a series of incidents in the fall of 1996 that focused attention on racial division within the community. CBI was instrumental in bringing together over six hundred residents to participate in a community conference that examined ways to bring the community together and identified issues that needed to be addressed. He further stated that CBI had also worked with other groups to examine how race and ethnicity affect education, job opportunities, neighborhood development and public safety. The Committee quickly recognized CBI's significant experience and expertise with the subject matter and the advantages of using the organization's models and resources to examine and address racial and ethnic discrimination and disparity.

In short order, Judge Jones and then Senior Resident Superior Court Judge Shirley Fulton (retired), along with Trial Court Administrator Todd Nuccio, arranged a meeting with CBI's Executive Director, Dianne English. Further discussion ensued and everyone involved recognized the natural affinity that existed between the objectives of both organizations. Court officials recognized the advantages of using the organization's models and resources to reveal and address racial and ethnic discrimination and disparity. CBI realized that joining forces with the 26th Judicial District would provide an opportunity to test its Resource Team model and gain the benefit of their in-kind resources in the form of access to individuals and information.

A partnership was formed and steps were taken to solidify an arrangement with a local college and/or university to assist with the research. CBI submitted a grant proposal and soon received funding from the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation as part of its statewide "Race Will Not Divide Us" initiative. In addition to financial support, the grant connected the 26th Judicial District and CBI to a range of resources and a network of organizations working to address issues of racism.

PROJECT DETAILS

With funding secured, the 26th Judicial District and CBI began to formally collaborate in the spring of 2000 to develop and implement the Resource Team Model to serve as the vehicle for

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advancing the discussed goal of the court system's strategic plan. To guide the process and support the team, CBI engaged two organizational development specialists. Their knowledge and experience was critical to the eventual design of the model and the management of the project.

The Resource Team Model that was created had three distinct elements:

- Invitation from Institutional Leadership: Key leaders invited CBI to work as a partner on addressing issues already identified as concerns. Buy-in from key leadership set the stage for a collaborative and effective partnership.
- Racially Diverse Team: The team was composed of racially diverse people, drawn from inside the institution (internal stakeholders) and outside the institution (external stakeholders). Their varied experiences and points of view informed and enriched efforts to effect systematic change.
- Two-Tiered Process: The group had dual tracks: 1) Personal/group learning about race/ethnicity; and 2) Institutional assessment and recommendations.

When combined, these elements created a model that was and is an effective tool for institutional change.

The CBI / 26th Judicial District Resource Team



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By design, Resource Team members were divided into two sub groups.

The *Perception Sub-Team* collaborated with a pair of Johnson C. Smith University researchers to develop and conduct a perception survey of court participants. This Sub-Team conducted interviews with court participants outside three District Court courtrooms and one Superior Court courtroom and held a series of focus groups with judges, court personnel and other court participants.

The *Case Review Sub-Team* joined a pair of researchers from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte to conduct a review of drug and traffic cases. This Sub-Team collected and analyzed data from a Superior Courtroom dedicated to prosecuting drug offenses and from the District Traffic Courts dedicated to handling motor vehicle infractions. These courts were chosen because there were fewer variables outside of race and ethnicity to affect outcomes.

In addition to the considerable time invested by the university researchers and the organizational development specialists, the 22 members of the larger Resource Team met once or twice monthly for two to three hours over 15 months investing at least 40 hours each and over 1000 hours collectively. This impressive volunteer commitment of time and resources represents only a small percentage of the time spent by individuals participating in focus groups, completing surveys, etc.

Research Findings

Below are the key findings and themes that emerged from the Perception Survey, Case Review and focus group research of the Resource Team:

- There is no statistically significant data suggesting disparity based on race or ethnicity in traffic or drug prosecution cases. However, several areas “approached statistical significance.” The expectation was that traffic court would not show any disparity; indeed that seemed to be the case.
- Opinions divide along racial and ethnic lines on how individuals perceive fairness and equity in the court system. Whites noted far fewer disparities and inequities in the system than did African Americans and Hispanics/Latinos.
- Many defendants do not understand how the court system works or what “happens” to them in court. A Perception Survey found that 32.7 percent of those charged *disagreed* with the statement that they understood what occurred in the courtroom.
- A significantly higher proportion of defendants in court are African American.
- A significantly higher proportion of defendants in drug court, not traffic court, are African American. The overwhelming majority of the case review sample was male (86.2%) and African American (78.4%).
- Having an attorney has an impact on the outcome of cases. The presence of an attorney has the most significant influence on outcomes in traffic cases.
- Hispanics/Latinos fail to appear in some cases at a significantly higher rate than African Americans and Whites.
- Court participants perceive that judges were interested in their cases.

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- People of color are less likely than Whites to *agree* that they were treated fairly by prosecutors. A 10- to 24-point gap exists between the perceptions of people of color and Whites.
- People of color are more likely than Whites to *disagree* that police officers in their cases had been courteous and fair. A 13- to 23-point gap exists between the perceptions of people of color and Whites.
- Approximately three-quarters of defendants believe that police officers clearly explained the reason for their ticket/arrest.
- Judges' discretion is a major factor in fairness. Discretion can be influenced by race, life experience, attitudes and beliefs.
- African American employees in the system and Hispanic/Latino participants view the system as less fair and equitable for defendants of color than for White defendants. Some Whites agree.
- African American *defendants* have a more positive view of the system than do African American *employees*.
- Hispanic/Latino defendants face a barrier to fair treatment because of cultural and language differences.
- The lack of awareness and resources in the system has an impact on fairness. It should be noted that opinions on what is lacking varied by race/ethnicity. Whites tended to refer to a lack of funding and capital resources, while African Americans and Hispanics/Latinos added that there was also a lack of understanding and sensitivity among personnel.

A more detailed description of the research findings can be obtained by reviewing the full reports, which are available upon request: *Case Review: Infractions (July 31, 2001): pp. 1-78; Case Review: Drug Offenders in Court Room 3303" (September 12, 2001): pp. 1-110, and "Report on Perceptions of the Courts" (May 2001): pp. 1-22. Documents are available upon request.*

Project Recommendations

Based on these comprehensive research findings, team members developed a set of recommendations aimed at improving how individuals and systems within the judicial district work and how they respond to institutional and community changes.

A key recommendation was to sponsor facilitated discussions within the various departments of the 26th Judicial District. These discussions would emphasize both positive news from the research and identify areas of concern.

Overall, the Resource Team specified opportunities for actions, which fall into the following five categories and address the stated questions:

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Recommendation 1: Gathering Additional Information

What else do we need to know?

Recommendation 2: Public Education and Information

How can those of us inside the system increase the public's knowledge about the courts and what we do?

Recommendation 3: Internal Education and Training

How can court personnel become better informed and skilled to respond more effectively to all court participants?

Recommendation 4: Hispanic/Latino Community and Other Non-Native English Speakers

How can the system become more responsive to community residents for whom English is not a first language?

Recommendation 5: System Entry and Maneuverability

What are the system's portals of entry and how could they become more user-friendly?

Project Cost

\$74,054

Funding Sources

Community Building Initiative (\$52,043)
Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation (\$20,000)
Johnson C. Smith University (\$2,011, in-kind).

Timeline

The partnership officially began on October 6, 2000, when CBI presented the Resource Team project to District and Superior Court judges and other key court personnel. The Resource Team had its first meeting on October 30, 2000, and continued to meet monthly through December 2001. In addition to these monthly full-team meetings, team members also participated in sub-team meetings during which they designed, guided and analyzed their respective research elements.

EVALUATION

The project's conclusion brought several opportunities to reflect on the 15-month process, advance and implement the team recommendations, and replicate the Resource Team model.

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Below is a review of some of the activities that CBI and the 26th Judicial District coordinated in the final months of their joint project that demonstrate the success of the initiative.

Engagement of Judges: Resource Team members and other project participants presented a project overview to Superior and District Court judges in November 2001. This overview included a review of the team’s research findings, personal experiences and recommendations. At the request of judges, this presentation was followed by a session in January 2002. The second session permitted judges to discuss their responses to the report and to offer input on how best to address identified issues through follow-up activities.

Engagement of Department Heads: Team members and project participants also made presentations in November 2001 to the heads of departments within the court system. These department heads included the District Attorney, Trial Court Administrator, Public Defender, Chief of Police, and Sheriff, among others. As with the judges, this session was followed by a second session in January 2002. During the second session, department heads discussed their responses to the report and expressed interest in implementing strategies that could help them address the issues identified by the Resource Team.

Final Assessments: CBI administered a final survey of Resource Team members in December 2001 and conducted telephone interviews with key project participants (e.g., co-chairs, accountability team members and co-facilitators) in January 2002. These measures to document and assess the Resource Team process allowed both CBI and the 26th Judicial District to gauge perspectives on the project, evaluate its strengths and weaknesses, and direct their future work.

Below is a summary of responses to the final assessment.

Summarized Final Survey Results	
a.	92% of survey respondents said the project was “an important first step” in reducing racial/ethnic disparities in the 26th Judicial District.
b.	Resource Team members ranked the following features of the project as the top three “key factors” in its success: Buy-in from leaders in the 26th Judicial District. A mix of people from inside the 26th Judicial District (internal) and from outside (external). A mix of race & ethnicity among the project staff & oversight team.
c.	When asked about “the most important contribution” that the Resource Team made in improving the way the 26th Judicial District addresses racial /ethnic disparities, nearly 70% of survey respondents said bringing issues (on race or about the judicial district) to the forefront . Other contributions cited in their responses include the development of an educational process for judges and courthouse personnel and the emphasis on a need for further dialogue.

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Summarized Final Survey Results, <i>continued</i>	
d.	<p>Team members cited the following components of the project as “the most valuable part of the process”:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Institutional research Team work/development Self discovery Presentation of team recommendations
e.	<p>Team members cited the “challenges” as being:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Designing the research and interpreting the data Finding the time to attend team meetings Deciding next steps and determining how to change perceptions Talking about a very sensitive issue in a constructive way
f.	<p>Team members cautioned that “the most important obstacle(s) that the project needs to address in order to be successful” are:</p> <p>“Accepting the report as written and developing a process for continual research, to make sure concerns that were reported are being addressed.” (Following through on team recommendations to effect change)</p> <p>“Making the time commitment to working through the recommendations.” (Devoting the time)</p> <p>“Continuing energy, resources and focus on issues raised.” (Dedicating of resources)</p>
g.	<p>Team members had the following to say about what they thought was the “most important thing they learned” from the project:</p> <p>Some said they learned about <u>perceptions</u>. One respondent said, <i>“Perceptions may be different than what is occurring.”</i> And another commented, <i>“Perceptions are as diverse as there are people.”</i></p> <p>Others pointed to learning about the <u>benefits of the Resource Team model</u>. They made the following statements: <i>“Knowledge is power;”</i> <i>“Value of processing issues with committees;”</i> and <i>“When we intentionally work at it, we can come to know one another better and begin to change society.”</i></p> <p><u>Other learning</u> includes: <i>“...the 26th (Judicial District) is very fortunate to have individuals who will dedicate themselves to this issue;”</i> <i>“Discrimination affects us all;”</i> and <i>“...our work is only the first step in a long process.”</i></p>
h.	<p>Their suggestions for the 26th Judicial District as it takes additional steps to address issues of racial/ethnic disparity include:</p> <p><i>“Keep on building on what has been done.”</i></p> <p><i>“Do not let the process stop. It is just beginning...”</i></p>

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Engagement and Observations of an Outside Evaluator: An evaluator from UNC-Greensboro, working on behalf of the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation also assessed the Resource Team process and product. This evaluation included interviews with Accountability Team members, informal dialogues with project consultants, support staff, focus group participants, Resource Team members and evaluation of the data collected from team assessments and surveys.

This evaluator concluded that the 26th Judicial District/CBI Resource Team Partnership Project made “significant inroads in:

- *Raising critical issues in a very visible way;*
- *Educating key stakeholders on the need for change; and,*
- *Initiating a process of awareness-raising, personal growth and leadership development among those individuals who will ultimately be the ones to make the change happen.”*

The most notable comment of all, though, was as follows:

“This use of high-profile institutional leaders is one of the best examples I have seen of reforming a system from the top down, particularly since the strategies for reform emerge from a ‘democratic’ group process that represents all key sectors of the system.”

TRANSFER OR REPLICATION CHARACTERISTICS

Through its initial work with the court system, CBI set out to achieve three main goals:

- To produce a ***replicable*** model for use with a broad range of institutions and organizations;
- To create a committed and visible network of leaders who will take measures to improve how institutions address race and ethnicity; and,
- To raise community awareness about the impact of race and ethnicity on institutions.

As noted, a primary intent of the project was to specifically heighten community awareness and build social capital, so that replication would naturally occur. The success of this approach has already been clearly demonstrated.

Further Action: Activities have progressed well beyond the original charge of capturing whether real or perceived disparate treatment and discrimination existed within the overall court system to assessing whether these same issues are present within specific individual court offices and departments. For example, CBI has performed extensive follow-up work with the management and staff from each division of the Trial Court Administrator’s Office and is now launching a similar effort with the Department of Community Corrections. These two examples demonstrate continuing interest and commitment to addressing the issues of race and ethnicity and how the work that was completed at the macro level can be replicated at a new micro level. CBI has and will continue to work with court departments within the 26th Judicial District to further assess

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how the recommendations from the report can be implemented and to offer support to department leaders and staff.

A new initiative entitled Judicial Leadership in a Diverse Community (JLDC) also emerged from the partnership between CBI and the 26th Judicial District. The collaborative, one-year project connected and engaged Superior and District Court judges on issues of race, ethnicity, fairness and equality in the courtroom and across the Charlotte-Mecklenburg community. JLDC demonstrated that the connections among judges could be strengthened and that they could use each other as a resource in addressing issues related to race. Project activities took place during calendar year 2002 and further sustained the collaboration between CBI and the court system. Another grant from the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation helped to fund a portion of that project.

CBI has also forged a new partnership and launched another initiative based on its experiences and lessons from the 26th Judicial District/CBI Resource Team Partnership Project. The University City Community Building Project, conducted during 2002, joined as partners the University City YMCA, The Lee Institute and CBI. Using the resource team model piloted through the work with the 26th Judicial District, the partners assembled a group of neighborhood residents, corporate employees, and institutional representatives from the University City area to examine issues of diversity and connectivity in this fast-growing Charlotte community. Information from local and national studies was combined with facilitated discussions and interactive meetings to engage leaders and residents in a dialogue on the issues of racial and ethnic equity and leadership. As is evident from this description, the work that has been done within the court setting is not only applicable to other courts, but any other public institution or community organization.

Any court system that wants to ensure that cases are decided without undue disparity or that access to justice is not impaired by race and ethnicity in their jurisdiction can readily employ the model piloted in the 26th Judicial District. The key to success, however, will be the willingness of court officials to embark upon a journey of self-examination and to open their operations to the analysis of an outside organization. Although some fear and anxiety over what might be discovered is natural, the end result will always be positive for the court. No organization will ever be faulted for deciding to investigate and address a problem on its own. It is only when potential problems are ignored and outside forces become the impetus for change that real problems result. In short, the greater risk is in not replicating this influential work done in the 26th Judicial District. The road map has been created and transferability is only a matter of other jurisdictions having the will and the desire to take action.

ADDITIONAL PROCESS ANALYSIS

The CBI/26th Judicial District Resource Team Partnership Project proved an important first step for the courts and the community in addressing issues of race and ethnicity in the local judicial system. The project also clearly demonstrates how a public institution and community-based organization can successfully collaborate and strive to overcome identified social and institutional challenges.

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Finally, what separates this project from the other submissions is that it is not about methods for improving case processing times, enhancing the collection of fines or some new application of technology. It's about addressing the fundamental issues of fairness, equality, and integrity. It's about demonstrating what the justice system stands for. Court officials in the 26th Judicial District demonstrated courage and foresight by tackling the issues that many individuals avoid or find uncomfortable to discuss. Fortunately, these court officials understood that healthy organizations look at themselves. They ask the hard questions and they aren't afraid of the answers they might receive. The level of collaboration that took place among the court, its justice system partners, outside organizations and the community at large was unprecedented and this seminal approach to improving court community relationships is paying dividends never even anticipated.