

**Richard Zorza's Access to Justice Blog***Networking for Access to Justice*

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**Taking Advantage of the Moment of Opportunity — An Institutional Strategy for Access**Posted on [May 23, 2011](#) by [richardzorza](#)

As I indicated in a [recent prior post about the EJC](#), this is a moment of great opportunity for the access to justice community, but one that is occurring in a complex larger environment. The complexity of the environment may be obscuring the opportunity, and preventing our realizing now important it is to take advantage of it — and to do so now.

We have, for the first time, a [DOJ Initiative focused on access](#), a President who [gets access](#), a strong [LSC Board](#) and [President](#), an access-friendly [SJI Board](#), an expanding [network of state access commissions](#), and an incoming President of the [Conference of Chief Justices](#) CJ [Eric Washington](#) of Washington DC) who, like the current incumbent (CJ [Wallace Jefferson](#) of Texas), is deeply committed to access.

We will never again have anything like this alignment.

At the same time, we have renewed pressure on budgets from the state of the economy, state and federal budgets, and, at least the risk of politically based budget attacks.

This suggests that the right strategy right now is not to focus on funding (while of course energy must go into protecting budgets to the extent possible) but rather on areas in which the political alignment gives us a unique opportunity to build for the future (i.e those that do not depend on getting higher appropriations through House and Senate.)

Among those strategies might be creating permanent national voices on access to justice, establishing joint research agendas, taking advantage of the access-friendly alignment of leadership to look at court simplification, making sure we fill out the network of Commissions, improving networking among existing state Commissions, collaborating with administrative agencies (including Federal) to make those systems more accessible, encouraging pro bono and market unbundling (including by getting questions on it into the Multi-State Professional Responsibility Exam and pushing lawyer referral services to offer the option), expanding collaborations with the Federal Courts, creating LL. M programs in access to justice, etc, etc.

In particular, the key is to set up bodies that can carry these agendas when there is more money. A strategic approach *might* even require diverting small amounts of money from immediate direct services into some of these ground laying activities, if that was needed to get them moving. For example, some seed money into creating a common research agenda would bring together the leadership organizations in relationships that could and should become permanent, and put the community in a position to raise money quickly to conduct the research when the financial climate improves.

It might well be possible to raise some of that seed money from foundations, but, if not, it would be worth it to find the money even from current reduced budgets. (And some investment, even if only of management time, is needed even to raise seed money.)

6/3/2011

Taking Advdantage of the Moment of ...

Lets not be in the place that ten or more years from now, when there is money on the table, but inadequate institutional structures and relationships to argue for it, or administer it, that we look back and realize that we missed our unique moment of opportunity to build those structures and spread those ideas to the partners that would then be needed.

I encourage people to share their thoughts on this set of approaches — and to expand on it. I also ask that you spread this around, so we can have some robust debate.

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**About richardzorza**

I work in access to justice.

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