




**Vermont Bar Foundation**  
Invest in Justice

**VBF STRATEGIC PLAN**  
2022-2025

Last Updated: February 17, 2023



## VISION

To create a just and compassionate society through a fair and effective justice system.

## MISSION

To create a just community by funding legal services for the disadvantaged and developing programs that enhance the understanding of and access to the Vermont legal system.

## CORE VALUES

Our four core values support our mission and vision. They guide our actions and assist us in evaluating our current performance and positioning us for sustainable growth.

**Learning.** Our services and programs inform people about the Vermont legal system and its challenges and impacts.

**Collaboration.** We believe in the value of healthy, lasting relationships between and among our staff, board, partners, sister organizations, stakeholders, and Vermont individuals, families, and businesses, and we do our part to contribute to the Vermont community.

**Fairness & Equity.** We strive for an equitable and inclusive legal system to make our society more fair and just, and we seek solutions to structural and systemic inequalities that impact our most vulnerable.

**Adaptability.** We are attentive and endeavor to respond to the changing needs of our Vermont community.

## DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION & BELONGING

In pursuing our mission, the Vermont Bar Foundation is committed to representing and reflecting the diversity of our people, our partners, and the communities we serve. We strive to use our collective energy to champion equity, justice, inclusion, and belonging for all. These commitments are at the heart of our mission and are central to our everyday work and who we are. We invite you to join us.

## History and Process Overview

The Vermont Bar Foundation is a nonprofit organization dedicated to increasing access to justice for Vermonters who are low-income, underserved, or marginalized. The Vermont Bar Foundation was founded in 1982 and is the state's only foundation solely dedicated to the legal services community. Since its inception, the VBF has given over \$27 million in grants and other assistance to more than 60 deserving organizations.

Our impact not only helps those in need, but it also helps boost the Vermont economy. Based on a 2018-19 economic impact study, there is an \$11 return on investment for every dollar donated to the VBF to fund low-income legal services in Vermont, or a 1106% social impact return on investment. Our grants make a significant difference in the lives of low-income Vermonters by assisting them with critical legal issues affecting their families, homes, incomes, jobs, and access to essential services.

In early May 2022, VBF's Board of Directors and Executive Director decided to allocate time and resources to strategic planning. During a strategic planning retreat on July 11, 2022, the Board of Directors participated in a robust and frank discussion about the current state of the organization and where we want to be in the next 10 years. With insights gathered throughout the day and input received from a well-crafted survey, the Vermont Bar Foundation produced this three-year strategic plan as a roadmap for our immediate and long-term future.

In addition to revisiting and refining our Vision and Mission, and creating new Core Values, the Board, with input from the VBF staff and community stakeholders, identified the following strategic priorities:

- **Philanthropy**
- **Partnerships**
- **Community Engagement & Education**
- **Sustainability & Capacity**

The Board and Executive Director worked together to develop these priorities, which address both internal and external community needs.

## **Strategic Priorities Overview**

### Strategic Priorities: Philanthropy

Support and grow the VBF's fundraising beyond the Vermont legal community to increase our capacity and ability to meet our Mission, Vision and strategic priorities.

### Strategic Priorities: Partnerships

Increase and strengthen transparent, mutually beneficial partnerships and relationships with donors, grantees, stakeholders, community-based partners, businesses, legal organizations, and elected officials.

### Strategic Priorities: Community Engagement & Education

Create educational programs and services for community members, including providing informational resources on racial, social, and economic equity issues and how such inequities impede access justice.

### Strategic Priorities: Sustainability & Capacity

Ensure adequate and appropriate organizational staffing and build Board capacity in light of strategic priorities.

## **Strategic Priorities: Philanthropy**

Support and grow the VBF's fundraising beyond the Vermont legal community to increase our capacity and ability to meet our Mission, Vision and strategic priorities.

- 2022/23
  - Explore fundraising ideas with Revenue Enhancement & Promotions Committee
  - Review best practices of recent Poverty Law Fellowship campaigns
  - Reinstate the live Justice Fest events, one in every county
  - Explore fundraising collaborations with Access to Justice Coalition, Vermont Bar Association, and other stakeholders
  - Evaluate donor management software to determine how it can better assist us in our fundraising efforts
  - Support an online silent auction
  - Board members focus on fundraising and contributing commensurate with their capacity
  - Obtain a commitment from each Board member to do one thing (beyond their Board responsibilities) to assist us in meeting our fundraising goals each year
  - Collect stories of success and impact among key audiences
  
- 2023/24
  - Design marketing materials that influence support and make a compelling case for support; use stories to increase impact
  - Create a corporate sponsorship page on our website for Justice Fest events
  - Begin developing statewide fundraising events, such as a fun run
  - Develop campaign that stresses the economic benefits of a population with equitable access to justice
  - Support a joint fundraiser with the VBA and all Sections/Divisions and County Bar Associations
  
- 2024/25
  - Launch statewide fundraising events
  - Continue evaluation of unrestricted fundraising activities
  - Provide training to Board and key stakeholders on major donor fundraising
  - Establish major gifts strategy
  - Explore digitally enhanced fundraising drive; develop and test prototype by summer 2025, such as online gala, crowdfunding campaign, virtual happy hour or raffle, etc.

### **Strategic Priorities: Partnerships**

Increase and strengthen transparent, mutually beneficial partnerships and relationships with donors, grantees, stakeholders, community-based partners, businesses, legal organizations, and elected officials.

- 2022/23
  - Make deliberate efforts to identify and partner with organizations led by diverse leadership
  - Strengthen partnership with Vermont Bar Association and all Sections/Divisions and County Bar Associations
  - Build relationships with business partners through Board connections with corporate in-house counsel or other methods
  - Create funding opportunities through collaborations with municipalities and the state
  - Nurture relationships with Vermont lawyers and law firms to build support for fundraising and other initiatives
- 2023/24
  - Convene meetings with nonprofit partner Board members
  - Build and strengthen relationship with Vermont Law and Graduate School
  - Start conversation with VBA & Vermont Law and Graduate School about VBF's participation in Constitution Day
  - Explore new legal and non-legal partnerships
  - Continue intentional engagement with strategic partners
  - Develop Businesses Advancing Justice Conference: Why Should Big & Small Businesses Support Access to Justice?
- 2024/25
  - Launch Businesses Advancing Justice Conference: Why Should Big & Small Businesses Support Access to Justice?
  - Continue to expand legal and non-legal partnerships in support of the VBF's strategic priorities
  - Foster new and existing legal business and community partnerships
  - Evaluate community service awards and annual awards ceremony in partnership with VBA or other partner organizations
  - Continue efforts to drive innovation and collaboration

## **Strategic Priorities: Community Engagement & Education**

Create educational programs and services for community members and position the VBF as a leading informational resource in racial, social and economic equity issues and how such inequities impede access to justice.

To clarify, VBF defines Education as a way to identify issues that are paramount to certain members of the community and connect them with the resources that can help support them and at the same time educate our partners and other stakeholders about what we believe are areas of significant need that will help us develop strong community support.

- 2022/23
  - Continue regular communication with grantees and other stakeholders
  - Identify potential educational needs of our communities that prohibit thriving communities
  - Develop educational seminars that focus on the valuable role lawyers play in achieving justice in an areas that serve the needs of the community
  - Create Statewide Stakeholder Meetings or Listening Tour to share knowledge, strategies, and best practices for developing and expanding local access to justice priorities
  - Develop annual report that tells our story and highlights our impact throughout Vermont
  
- 2023/24
  - Promote additional efforts to educate the non-legal community as to VBF's purpose
  - Develop media relationships
  - Collaborate with VBA and its committees to develop a speakers bureau by which lawyers can be made available to speak to students, civic groups and others about the legal profession
  - Create partnerships with key stakeholders for outreach to school and civic groups
  - Recognize lawyers and non-lawyers who contribute to the public understanding of the rule of law and the importance of lawyers in the maintenance of a free society
  - Evaluate support opportunities for the VBF with the Vermont Legislature
  
- 2024/25
  - Continue to assess community needs and provide timely educational seminars; also, use seminars to share the valuable role lawyers play in achieving justice in an areas that serve the needs of the community
  - Leverage relationships with nonprofit partner Boards to further community engagement efforts
  - Bolster our efforts to keep our stakeholders informed and to attract additional donors and stakeholders
  - Further support sharing the information of interest to the public regarding issues of access to justice

## **Strategic Priorities: Sustainability & Capacity**

Ensure adequate and appropriate organizational staffing and build Board capacity in light of strategic priorities.

- 2022/23
  - Diversify Board membership, including mechanisms to create a pipeline of potential candidates
  - Provide training to Board on effective storytelling
  - Tell our story clearly and engagingly, explaining complex social justice issues in a digestible way
  
- 2023/24
  - Identify key volunteers with specific expertise for committees or Board service
  - Enhance our communications strategy to reinforce our story
  - Foster relationships with new lawyers
  - Review the communications and technological capabilities of the VBF and initiate necessary improvements to improve communications with our stakeholders
  - To provide an up-to-date interactive website and information on Foundation's activities
  - Explore the feasibility of hiring a grants professional and/or social media expert who are familiar with local landscape
  - Implement training on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging for Board and staff that focuses on access to justice
  
- 2024/25
  - Continue to diversify the Board membership including mechanisms to create a pipeline of potential candidates
  - Create new programs that explore Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging issues in areas that advance the VBF mission
  - Improve the development of the Board to help with recruitment, retention and engagement
  - Introduce board effectiveness training and coaching
  - Initiate an annual Board engagement survey to refine expectations, accountabilities and training

**Approved by the Board of Directors of the Vermont Bar Foundation on February 17, 2023.**