

#TalkJustice

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1) What is the Access to Justice Coordinating Committee (A2JCC)?

The Access to Justice Coordinating Committee (A2JCC) is a group working to make Nova Scotia's family, civil and criminal courts more efficient and effective, less costly and easier to navigate for all Nova Scotians.

The Committee was formed in June 2014 in response to the findings of *A Roadmap for Change*, a 2013 report by the Canadian Forum on Civil Justice and Justice Thomas Cromwell, now retired from the Supreme Court of Canada. Co-chaired by the provincial Minister of Justice and the Chief Justice of Nova Scotia, the group also includes a public representative and leaders from the Nova Scotia Barristers' Society, the Nova Scotia Legal Aid Commission, the Schulich School of Law and the Canadian Bar Association's Nova Scotia Branch.

2) What is #TalkJustice?

#TalkJustice started as an initiative of the Nova Scotia Barristers' Society in 2014. Its goal was to bring the public voice to the centre of justice system reform. It sought the opinions, ideas and stories of members of equity-seeking and economically disadvantaged communities, as well as those working within the justice system. The work started a public conversation around access to justice to more fully understand the legal needs and experiences of Nova Scotia's diverse communities, and to better integrate their voices into the legal system.

3) What is #TalkJustice 2.0?

#TalkJustice 2.0 is a new way to engage Nova Scotians about their experiences with the justice system. The project builds on what we learned in the first phase of #TalkJustice: that the complex issues revealed by people's experiences are often too much for a single department or organization to tackle alone. A larger, system-wide approach is needed. The Access to Justice Coordinating Committee (A2JCC) is designed precisely to address this level of complexity.

Earlier this year it convened the second phase of #TalkJustice. The project began with sharing circles last fall. From that, we developed an online tool to ask Nova Scotians about their experiences with the justice system.

4) Who is involved in the #TalkJustice project?

The project team is comprised of staff from the Nova Scotia Barristers' Society, Nova Scotia Legal Aid, the Nova Scotia Department of Justice and the Executive Office of the Nova Scotia Judiciary, as well as experienced facilitators, Rachel Derrah and LaMeia Reddick.

5) How much is the project expected to cost?

The total cost is estimated at approximately \$25,000, not including almost \$74,000 in in-kind donations and volunteer time from staff and students.

6) Who is funding the project?

The Nova Scotia Department of Justice is funding the project as part of its involvement in the Access to Justice Coordinating Committee.

7) What do you hope to accomplish?

Government and organizations typically fund and evaluate services on a program basis. But examining things at the program level doesn't reflect how people experience the justice system. Complexities, connections and relationships are lost, divorcing a program from its context.

Using *SenseMaker*, we hope to produce statistical data based on the patterns and relationships that emerge from people's shared experiences. The software takes stories, a highly qualitative research method, and from them creates the quantitative data that is required for system-level change. Ideally, the project will demand that we look at a pool of hundreds of complex stories and consider how we could turn the negative stories into positive ones.

8) Who do you want to speak with?

The project team is looking to gather experiences directly from people who have experienced or are working in the provincial justice system, including judges, justice, corrections and law enforcement staff, citizens, service providers and members of the media.

9) How will you be collecting the stories?

The first round of stories was collected at sharing circles in Halifax last September. The themes that emerged were used to develop an online tool that asks Nova Scotians about their experiences with legal services and the justice system. The online tool is now available at www.talkjustice.ca. Those without access to a computer or the Internet can also share their story. Paper copies are available by calling Jane Willwerth at 902-422-1491 or by email at jwillwerth@nsbs.org.

10) How can people participate?

Members of community justice groups, and people working in or with experience in the provincial justice system were invited to participate in the sharing circles. The online tool is now available at www.talkjustice.ca. Those without access to a computer or the Internet can also share their story. Paper copies are available by calling Jane Willwerth at 902-422-1491 or by email at jwillwerth@nsbs.org.

11) How will this project help to address gaps in service?

To fix a problem, you first need to know it exists. Listening to the public is still one of the best ways to identify issues with services. We expect the experiences shared will reveal the complex relationships that exist between individuals, their communities and the justice system, which in turn will help develop what are referred to as “safe-to-fail” experiments. These experiments will be designed to test possible solutions that if implemented will ultimately improve access to justice and ensure the justice system is putting the public first.

12) How long is the project expected to run?

This is a pilot project that will continue until the end of June 2017. At that time, the data will be analyzed and compiled in a report back to the A2JCC, with the goal of making it a permanent project.

13) How does Nova Scotia compare with other jurisdictions when it comes to access to justice?

In his report, Justice Thomas Cromwell concluded that there is a serious access to justice problem in Canada. Recurring themes were identified across the country. For example, the report acknowledged that the poor and vulnerable are particularly prone to legal problems and that legal problems tend to multiply, leading to other legal, social and health related problems.

Some great work is already being done in Nova Scotia, including the formation of the Access to Justice Coordinating Committee and the Criminal Justice Transformation Group. In family law, the courts have adopted a triage approach like the one used in therapeutic courts like the Mental Health Court and the court-monitored drug treatment programs. As well, Nova Scotia Legal Aid has shown itself to be a transformative force with its Aboriginal Justice Plan and its continued focus on social justice.