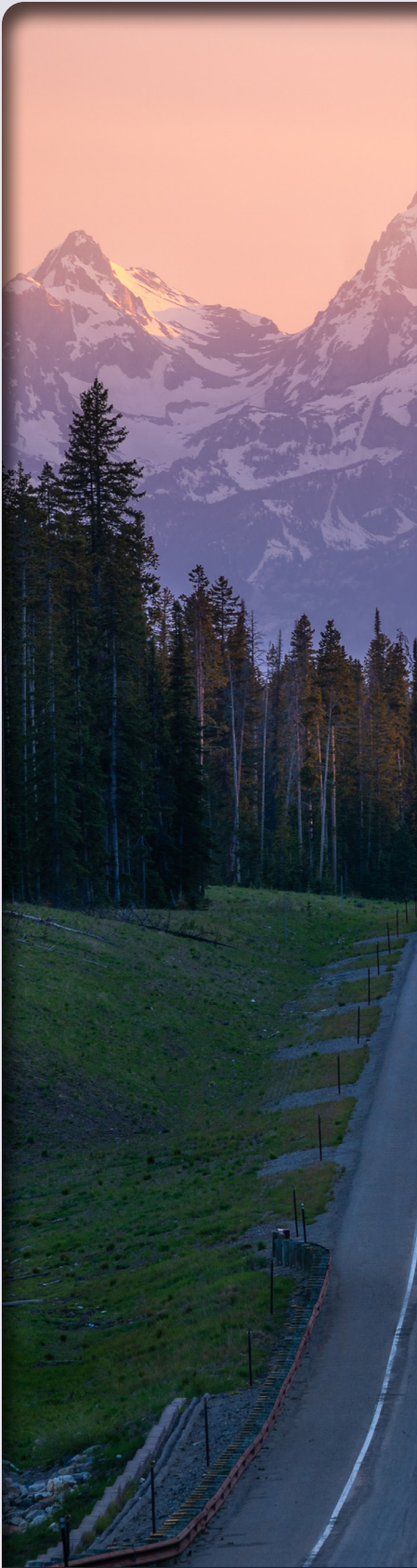




2026



Access to Justice

SUMMIT REPORT



On January 23, 2026, judicial leaders, attorneys, clerks of district court, legal service providers, and community stakeholders convened at the University of Wyoming College of Law for the Wyoming Access to Justice (ATJ) Summit. The Summit was designed to identify practical, impactful initiatives aimed at improving access to justice for Wyoming citizens.

Participants reviewed the work of the Access to Justice Commission (ATJ Commission) and ATJ 2.0, engaged in structured breakout sessions, and refined proposed initiatives. The resulting recommendations reflect the hard work of the attendees with a focus on initiatives that are realistic, impactful, and aligned with the Wyoming Judicial Branch Strategic Plan 2025–2027. Collectively, the Summit outcomes advance the Branch’s priorities related to access, operational excellence, innovation, legal workforce sustainability, and public trust.

Access to Justice Summit Meeting

The ATJ Commission Chair Justice Kari Jo Gray started the meeting by welcoming the attendees to the UW College of Law for an all-day brainstorming meeting focused on identifying barriers to justice and potential solutions to those problems. The group included several district and circuit judges, many clerks of district court, law school professors and students, legal services lawyers, private attorneys, and other interested stakeholders.

Chief Justice Lynne Boomgaarden made opening comments encouraging the group to think broadly as they identified issues. The Chief explained that access to justice efforts “are an ongoing process,” and the Summit was an opportunity to “step back, refresh, and reset” priorities for access to justice in Wyoming.

Attendees heard presentations on the history of Wyoming’s access to justice, as well as reports from attendees who had chaired recent ATJ Commission working groups. Then the attendees were divided into five groups to discuss ideas for future study. During the breakout sessions, participants were directed to focus on bold yet achievable ideas with the potential to produce measurable improvements in access to justice. Groups examined barriers such as limited attorney availability, technology access challenges, procedural complexity, and the difficulties faced by self-represented litigants. For each proposed initiative, groups considered leadership responsibility, rough cost levels, staffing and technology needs, partnership opportunities, and the anticipated effect on litigants and court operations.

After the breakout meetings, all attendees reconvened, and each breakout group identified its top issues. The groups identified twenty-one items, and those were revised and consolidated into fourteen final topics, which the attendees ranked in order of priority. This approach ensured that the final recommendations reflected the participants’ collective agreement on the urgency of the identified access challenges. The following represents the final prioritization of each topic by attendees at the Summit.

1. Strengthening Rural Practice and Attorney Availability

Participants consistently identified rural attorney availability and sustainability of rural practice as critical access to justice challenges. Discussions focused on building long-term workforce capacity and reducing geographic barriers. Potential initiatives included developing mentorship programs



for new rural attorneys, expanding law student internships and externships in rural communities and courts, and increasing networking and professional mobility opportunities for rural practitioners. Breakout groups also emphasized the importance of broadband expansion and strategically using remote appearances to reduce travel burdens for both attorneys and litigants. Together, these ideas are intended to make rural practice more viable and attractive while expanding access to legal services across the state.

2. Enhanced Support for Self-Represented Litigants

Breakout groups emphasized that a significant portion of access barriers arises from the complexity of court processes and the limited ability of self-represented litigants to effectively navigate those processes. Proposed research areas focused on simplifying and modernizing support for pro se litigants through plain language forms, help sheets, guided interviews, and pre-filled forms. Participants also advocated for exploring a centralized, state-level portal to walk litigants through forms and processes, potentially incorporating carefully governed AI-supported tools. Expanded educational videos and increased access to eFiling for self-represented litigants were also identified as potential strategies.

These efforts advance Pillar 1 – Judicial Branch Excellence and Innovation, Goal 4 – Promote secure, effective, and innovative use of technology by exploring the responsible use of AI to promote public trust. They also align with Pillar 4 – Accessible Justice, Goal 1 – Promote resources for self-represented litigants for accessing and navigating the court system by looking to enhance forms and resources for self-represented litigants.

3. Education, Outreach, and Public Understanding

Participants identified education and outreach as essential to improving long-term access to justice and public confidence in the courts. Proposed discussion points included youth-focused civics outreach, multimedia campaigns explaining the judiciary and court processes, community outreach events, and expanded opportunities for court tours. The development of video benchbooks and other educational materials was also identified as a potential way to support both court users and justice system partners.

These efforts support Pillar 2 – Public Trust and Accountability, Goal 1 – Strengthen public confidence in the justice system by enhancing fair, impartial, and continuously-improving services that meet or exceed public expectations, while ensuring every individual is treated with dignity and respect by increasing public understanding and engagement, promoting transparency, and strengthening confidence in the judicial system.

4. Expanding Legal Licensing

Breakout groups explored strategies to expand the overall capacity of the legal services ecosystem. The primary area of discussion centered on limited licensing for paralegals and other legal professionals to increase the availability of legal services in Wyoming.

This proposed project supports Pillar 4 – Accessible Justice, Goal 2 – Foster a knowledgeable and available legal workforce by strengthening workforce capacity and increasing the availability of legal assistance for litigants with limited means.

5. Create agencies for Court-Appointed Counsel

Some breakout groups expressed an interest in evaluating the feasibility of new agency models for appointed counsel and increased funding and competitiveness for court-appointed attorney positions. Participants also discussed the potential for state-funded positions to support constitutionally or statutorily required appointments, modeled in part on the Office of Public Defender. The aim of this initiative is to promote knowledge, training, and expertise in certain areas of the law, such as parent attorneys.

This proposed project supports Pillar 4 – Accessible Justice, Goal 2 – Foster a knowledgeable and available legal workforce by strengthening workforce capacity and increasing the availability of legal representation for litigants with limited means.

6. Centralized and Simplified Resource Access

Participants identified fragmented information and inconsistent messaging as significant barriers for individuals seeking legal help. Breakout discussion focused on creating a condensed, centralized resource bank that consolidates existing information into a consistent, user-friendly format. Coordination with 211 and distributing standardized materials to libraries, senior centers, and community locations were potential ideas to ensure that accurate information is readily available statewide.

These proposed initiatives advance Pillar 4 – Accessible Justice, Goal 1 – Provide resources for self-represented litigants for access and navigating the court system by enhancing coordination and efficiency across service providers. It also touches upon Pillar 2 – Public Trust and Accountability, Goal 2 – Develop a Branch-wide communication plan with specific goals by expanding existing informational resources to enhance public engagement.

7. Unified Financial Eligibility and Intake

Breakout discussions highlighted the administrative burden created by multiple, individualized eligibility and intake systems. Participants proposed exploring universal means testing and streamlined intake processes across legal and public assistance programs. The goal is to reduce duplication, improve efficiency, and make it easier for eligible individuals to access appropriate services.

These proposed initiatives support Pillar 4, Goal 1: promoting resources for self-represented litigants for accessing and navigating the court system by lowering administrative barriers to assistance.

8. Pro Bono Incentives and Expanded Participation

Participants emphasized the importance of strengthening partnerships with the private bar to expand service capacity. Proposed initiatives included incentives such as waivers of bar dues or conference registration fees, expansion of limited scope pro bono opportunities, and targeted incentives for post conviction and rural focused pro bono work. Encouraging large firms to support service delivery in smaller communities was also identified as a potential strategy.

These ideas align with Pillar 4 – Accessible Justice, Goal 2 – Foster a knowledgeable and available legal workforce by expanding service capacity and strengthening partnerships and professional engagement.

9. Language Access and Court Access Aids

Breakout groups identified language barriers as a significant obstacle for some court users. Proposed initiatives included improved access to courtroom interpreters, Spanish translations of pro se forms, and expanded plain language materials for non English speakers. These efforts are intended to ensure meaningful access to the courts for all litigants, regardless of language proficiency.

These efforts advance Pillar 2 – Public Trust and Accountability, Goal 1 – Strengthen public confidence in the justice system by delivering fair, impartial, and continuously-improving services that meet or exceed public expectations, while ensuring every individual is treated with dignity and respect by promoting fairness, equity, and confidence in the justice system.

10. Domestic Relations Targeted Rule Review

Participants also focused on opportunities to reduce procedural complexity in domestic relations cases. Proposed initiatives included customized or streamlined rules for divorce and domestic relations cases. These proposals reflect a recognition that targeted procedural reforms can significantly improve user experience and reduce unnecessary barriers.

11. Juvenile Expungements

Breakout groups explored the availability of expungements for juveniles and the lack of knowledge surrounding the expungement process. Groups recommended exploring automatic expungement for juvenile cases when the juvenile reaches the appropriate age and, in the absence of opposition from the State, or in the alternative, other smaller steps that would ease the process of expunging juvenile records.

This proposed initiative supports Pillar 4 – Accessible Justice, Goal 1 Promote resources for self-represented litigants for accessing and navigating the court system by reducing barriers to achieve desired outcomes.

12. Centralized Grant Information

This initiative would centralize information about grants related to legal assistance into a single, accessible resource for providers statewide. By consolidating grant opportunities, guidance, and timelines, the initiative would reduce duplication of effort and improve transparency for applicants. Where feasible, the initiative would also explore opportunities to streamline and align application requirements across entities, making it easier for providers to pursue funding and increasing the overall efficiency and effectiveness of grant-supported access to justice services.

These efforts advance Pillar 3 – Predictable and Secure Funding to Uphold Judicial Integrity and Efficiency, Goal 3 – Explore and prioritize opportunities for external funding as it relates to Judicial Branch initiatives and priorities by collaborating with other statewide funding sources and streamlining the grant process for grantees.

13. Technology and AI Exploration

Breakout groups discussed the potential role of emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, in expanding access to justice. Participants supported careful exploration of AI tools to assist self-represented litigants and small providers, coupled with thoughtful evaluation of risks, governance, and ethical considerations. The emphasis was on responsible innovation that enhances, rather than replaces, human judgment and support.

These initiatives strongly align with Pillar 1 – Judicial Branch Excellence and Innovation, Goal 4 – Promote secure, effective, and innovative use of technology by developing clear parameters and procedures for the responsible use of AI.

14. Conflict Shopping

This initiative would explore potential rule or policy changes to reduce the practice of “conflict shopping,” in which litigants intentionally meet with multiple attorneys in small or rural communities for the purpose of creating conflicts and limiting opposing parties’ access to local counsel. Addressing this issue would help preserve the availability of legal representation in rural areas, promote fairness in the legal process, and reduce unnecessary strain on limited attorney resources while maintaining appropriate ethical protections.

This proposed project supports Pillar 4 – Accessible Justice, Goal 2 – Foster a knowledgeable and available legal workforce by strengthening workforce capacity and increasing the availability of legal representation for litigants in rural communities.

Access to Justice Commission Recommendations

Immediately following the Access to Justice Summit, the Access to Justice Commission convened to review the Summit outcomes, including the ideas generated, the barriers identified, and the relative priority assigned to each issue by participants. Based on that review, the Commission determined that several themes consistently emerged as both high-impact and well-aligned with the Wyoming Judicial Branch's Strategic Plan. As a result, the Commission voted to recommend that the Wyoming Judicial Council consider advancing five initiatives at its March meeting. Those include:

Priority #1: Strengthening Rural Practice and Attorney Availability

Priority #2: Enhanced Support for Self Represented Litigants

Priority #3: Education, Outreach, and Public Understanding

Priority #4: Expanding Legal Licensing

Priority #7: Unified Financial Eligibility and Intake

The ATJ Commission members recognized that moving all fourteen proposed initiatives forward was unrealistic, and instead determined that the projects recommended needed to be narrowed. The members debated whether to select initiatives based purely on priority, or whether it would be wiser to recommend a mix of priority initiatives and others that may take less time and effort to implement. In the end, the Commission determined that the work should focus primarily on priority initiatives but also include a topic that may be implemented more easily.

The Access to Justice Commission recommends that the Wyoming Judicial Council approve these topic areas for further exploration by the ATJ Commission. If approved, the ATJ Commission anticipates establishing separate sub-committees for each recommended initiative. These committees would be charged with studying the issues in greater depth and would include interested stakeholders from across the state. The new committees would complement and work alongside the Commission's two existing committees—the Family Law Solutions Committee and the Partnerships Committee, which are continuing the work initiated in 2025.

One other important recommendation arose during the ATJ Commission meeting – all members expressed great appreciation for the Summit and those who attended, recognizing its remarkable success. To ensure continued commitment to access to justice in Wyoming, the Commission recommends convening an Access to Justice Summit every other year.

Conclusion

The Access to Justice Summit reflects a strong, statewide commitment to improving access to justice. It provides a structured, strategic roadmap for advancing meaningful, sustainable improvements across Wyoming's justice system.