

Courts Matter Coalition Building Guide



National Council of Jewish Women

#CourtsMatter

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Introduction

Courts Matter. Federal courts impact every aspect of our lives. There is no part of our lives or of our democracy that hasn't been shaped by the federal courts – whether it is the quality of the air and water; the opportunity to get an equal education; our right to fair treatment on the job; voting rights; consumer protections; religious rights; and even marriage equality and pregnancy. The judges who sit in lifetime seats on our courts make decisions that last for generations, long after the president who nominated them has come and gone.

Many activists and organizations advocate for legislation and policies that advance their issue priorities and fight hard against harmful bills and policies. Regardless of the outcome of these efforts, ultimately our agendas are often upended by actions of the federal judiciary which has the power to overturn laws and policies deemed unconstitutional. And yet **few people know that they can make a difference when it comes to the judges who sit in lifetime seats on the federal bench.** In addition, for many activists, the federal judiciary means the Supreme Court. In fact, on most issues, it is the lower federal courts – the 12 circuit courts of appeals and the 94 district courts – that hear the vast majority of cases and are often the last word when it comes to deciding an issue. Simply put: all federal courts matter.

USEFUL TIP:

For more information about why courts matter, check out [NCJW's courtsmatter.org website](https://www.ncjw.org/courtsmatter.org).

Yes, we can make a difference. Just as we advocate to impact legislation and policy, so too can we advocate for a fair and independent federal judiciary with judges from diverse backgrounds who have a proven track record of commitment to constitutional values like equality and justice for all. [See this resource for information about whether a 501 c3 can support individual judicial nominees.]

Remember, that in Article II, Section 2, the Constitution states that presidents fill judicial posts with the “advice and consent” of the Senate. **Senators vote on the confirmation of every federal judicial nominee regardless of what court they will sit on and where it is located.** That means that as constituents, we can speak out to the senators from our state to insist that they vote to confirm a diverse group of judges who will be fair, independent, qualified, representing a diversity of experiences and backgrounds who are committed to constitutional values and oppose those who do not meet that most basic criteria.

Why a coalition? While we can make a difference as individual advocates or organizations, we are much stronger and more effective when we unite with other like-minded groups in coalition. For 20 years, NCJW has been assisting its local Sections in starting coalitions in their cities and states with the aim of uniting progressive organizations around the issue of the federal courts. Today there are NCJW coalitions in Florida, Illinois, Louisiana, Maine, Minnesota, Michigan, Missouri, and Nebraska.

Forming a coalition allows you and other organizations to:

- Increase your power to make change;
- Combine talents and resources like time, funds, and people to maximize your impact;
- Broaden and diversify your network of activists;
- Collaborate on strategies to advance your cause;
- Eliminate competition for resources and attention on your issue; and
- Increase attention from the community, media, and decision makers.

A Courts Matter coalition is able to more broadly and effectively educate and engage a community about the importance of the federal courts and judges as well as advocate with senators for a diverse, fair, qualified, and independent judiciary.

Am I/are we the best one to start a coalition? First, ask yourself if you have an interest in and commitment to ensuring that our federal judiciary is fair, independent, qualified, reflects the diverse communities it serves, and committed to constitutional values like equality and justice for all. Are there other progressive organizations in your community who share that vision? Are some of them willing to join you in creating a coalition? If so, you have the basic ingredients for a Courts Matter coalition.

This **Courts Matter Coalition Guide** contains information and resources to help you get a coalition off the ground. NCJW is committed to providing on-going technical assistance and resources as you move ahead – we are here for you.

Coalition Building Basics

First Things First. Are you committed to the ongoing work of ensuring a fair and independent judiciary that will uphold constitutional values? Are you committed to doing this work collaboratively in coalition? If the answer to these questions is yes, you are ready to begin planning for your coalition.

In order to launch and receive funding, NCJW requires that a Courts Matter coalition have at least two partner organizations from outside of the Jewish community. Once you have these partners, you can collaborate on a plan to:

- Outreach to build membership in your coalition;
- Develop a leadership structure;
- Carry out administrative tasks;
- Define coalition goals and guidelines for decision making.

Build Membership in Your Coalition

Start by building interest. We've learned from experience that once people learn about, or are reminded about, how the federal courts impact every aspect of our lives, they are eager to find out how they can weigh in on who sits as judges in lifetime seats on these courts.

In a number of cities, NCJW has helped local sections organize small gatherings of leaders from progressive organizations. These gatherings – part trainings, part brainstorming sessions – usually take place in person over half a day, including breakfast and lunch for participants (subsidized by NCJW). They may also take place virtually in a shortened format. We have included a sample agenda for each format in the Resources section as well as a sample invitation.

The idea is to provide some basic information about why the federal courts matter and the process for confirming judges to these courts, including how groups can influence the process. Ideally, the gathering will involve 10-15 groups with no more than two people attending from each group, preferably leaders with decision-making power in their organizations. After the training segment, an interactive and facilitated discussion takes place about the value and power of coalitions to make change. An NCJW speaker provides information about how Courts Matter coalitions around the country are organized and how they educate and take action.

Finally, over lunch, participants discuss whether they might be interested in starting a Courts Matter coalition in their locale; how it might function; what groups besides those gathered should be invited; and what kinds of activities they might plan to educate their constituencies, community, and senators. At a virtual gathering this concluding discussion may take place in breakout rooms followed by a report-back to the full group. **At the gathering, it is important to schedule a follow-up meeting within a week or two to operationalize some of the ideas generated at the gathering.**

USEFUL TIP:

For an in-person gathering, choose a spot that is centrally located, accessible for all, and close to transportation or parking. Ensure that it is set up for a PowerPoint presentation. Arrange for a light breakfast and lunch for participants.

Identify initial partner organizations. You know what they say – go for the low-hanging fruit first. Which organizations do you work closely with in your city or state on issues such as: reproductive rights, work-family issues, children’s issues, voting rights, LGBTQ+ issues? If you are engaged in community service or education projects with other progressive organizations, what are their core issues? Invariably these will be issues impacted by the federal courts – every issue is in some way.

You may have leaders in your section who are also active in other progressive, non-partisan groups – use those connections to approach likely partner organizations. Finally, **check with NCJW to ask if they might approach national partners engaged on federal court issues who might have affiliates in your community.** If these are groups that you already know and work with, they might be likely potential “founding” partners given that they are affiliated with organizations that already work on the federal judiciary.

Identify the best person to approach each group and set up a meeting with someone who is a decision-maker in that group. Don’t forget to build on personal relationships. If someone in your section sits on an existing issue-based coalition and knows the players, that’s an example of someone who would be best positioned to do outreach to groups around that table. **Along with identifying groups for outreach, think about your approach and be ready to answer questions about why courts matter and why a coalition is needed. Your first approach might be to invite the organization to send leaders to the gathering (described above).**

USEFUL TIP:

Diversity makes coalitions stronger. Reach out to diverse constituencies or sectors (labor unions, civil rights organizations, faith groups, student groups). If you don’t have connections there, enlist the suggestions and help of some of the people who have already indicated an interest, and who have a relationship with the groups.

Persistent outreach is key. Once you have identified the organizations and leaders you want to approach, be sure to formally assign the appropriate person to make the initial contact and then follow-up to make sure that they did the outreach. Build on existing relationships whether they be personal or the result of past collaboration. The initial outreach to these groups might be by email, text, or another digital method, making sure that the person doing the outreach clearly identifies themselves and how they know the person they are communicating with. If a few days goes by without a response, reach out to the person or group by phone or, if you know them, in person to call attention to your initial communication. **The most effective form of outreach is a conversation. Try to schedule time to talk and share why you care about the federal courts and judges, why you are exploring a Courts Matter coalition, and why you think the group you've contacted might be interested and a valued coalition partner. Some Talking Points for an outreach conversation may be found in the Resource section.**

Continuously grow your membership. Even once your coalition gets off the ground, a key focus should be on bringing in new member organizations, seeking diverse groups, and approaching new leaders of existing organizations. Remember, a particular leader might not be interested in joining your coalition, but a new leader of the same organization might have a different perspective and interest. Developments regarding the federal courts and judicial nominations like a Supreme Court vacancy or upcoming election, for example, may increase interest in the work of your coalition. Just as new leaders and changes in organizations may offer new opportunities for your coalition, there is also the chance that a member group may become less active over time. **As you build membership also build your leadership ranks from among the most interested and active groups and individuals.** In many coalitions, member organizations are represented by staff members. In the vast majority of cases, member groups get involved based on their organization's agenda and self-interest. A successful coalition provides a forum for these individual groups to actively collaborate to advance a shared goal. Here is a [list of organizations](#) involved in Courts Matter coalitions nationwide.

USEFUL TIP:

As you approach new groups, offer them several options for involvement. Some groups may want to sign on but are unable to be active at the present time. Others may choose to be more involved. Welcome either type of involvement and be flexible if needs change.

Develop a Leadership Structure

Share leadership. Collaborative, shared leadership is more sustainable than investing leadership responsibilities in one individual from one organization. Sharing responsibility, planning, decisions, and ideas among a small number of committed organizations promotes buy-in and accountability for the coalition's activities and success.

Often, coalitions have a small steering committee of organizations – often only two or three – that choose to be more involved. In this case, it is helpful for roles to be defined and tasks to be clearly assigned with the leadership group holding individuals accountable for follow-through. Meetings may be led by a rotating group of leaders or, if the group agrees, one leader may serve that role. As new groups join the coalition, they may want to be on the steering committee. As new leaders take over member groups, they may want to step up their involvement (or likewise, decrease it). In other coalitions, the group that initiated the coalition assumes the leadership initially, opening the way for others to join in. **NCJW provides funding for a coalition administrator who is supervised by one designated leader, but who should work closely with the coalition leadership.**

A word about administrators. NCJW is able to fund a part-time administrator who could be someone hired for this purpose or might be an existing staff member from a section or a coalition member organization whose hours are increased in order to conduct coalition business. The coalition must submit a formal funding proposal to NCJW. The administrator should attend meetings and coalition events to stay current on the issues and on coalition activities and thinking. One coalition leader should supervise the administrator so that they aren't managed by multiple people. If the administrator is an existing staff member, that organization should supervise the administrator in conjunction with the coalition leadership. We have included a sample job description in Resources. Some of the administrative tasks may include but are not limited to:

- Setting up and managing the coalition listserv;
- Maintaining the social media accounts of the coalition;
- Ensuring that the coalition website is up-to-date (although they may not necessarily be the one to create the website or actually enter the updates);
- Keeping an updated membership list;
- Notifying members of upcoming meetings and events and following up for RSVPs;
- Creating invitations for events and programs and maintaining the RSVP list;
- Assisting with logistics for coalition meetings and programs, including dealing with vendors and venues;
- Maintaining an updated coalition calendar; and
- Submitting receipts to NCJW for any pre-approved reimbursable coalition expenses.

Goals and a plan - the first order of "business." Once you have a leadership team, however formally or informally constituted, it's time to set some initial goals for the coalition and decide on how to decide going forward. **Your first goals should be doable, measurable, and centered on getting the coalition off the ground.** First goals might involve: the number of member groups you hope to sign up by the end of the year; hiring an administrator; the number of meetings and/or programs you hope to hold; what social media accounts you will establish and how often you use them; etc. Be realistic about what you think you can accomplish and the time frame. Seek input from all of the leaders and groups who are involved in establishing the coalition. As the coalition grows, evaluate your progress on your goals and feel free to adjust and add new goals as appropriate, getting input from new member groups.

USEFUL TIP:

Work together to articulate a brief, clear Mission Statement that describes your coalition's overarching goal and generally how you will work to achieve that goal. Get ideas from other Courts Matter coalitions' Mission Statements.

Once you have set agreed-upon goals, it's time to begin to decide what tactics to use to meet those goals. For example: What will you do to increase membership? What process will you use to seek and hire an administrator? How will you set up and maintain social media accounts? This process forms the beginning of a coalition plan which would include the steps you will take to meet your goals, who will be responsible for what, and what is the timetable for each step. A good plan is just detailed enough to be a useful guide and flexible enough to allow for revisions along the way. We have included an example of a coalition plan in the Resources section.

Set Up a Decision-Making Process

Decide how to decide. Regardless of whether you have one coalition leader or a steering committee, your decision-making process should be inclusive, reflecting the ideas, interests, and views of the organizations who choose to be involved. Decisions come in all sizes, of course: small ones like scheduling meeting times and agendas and big ones like whether the coalition will support or oppose a judicial nominee. The first step is for the whole group to decide which decisions should be made by a vote of the entire coalition (decided based on a majority vote) and which may be delegated to the leadership team. For decisions where you want the entire coalition to weigh in, you might use an emailed survey tool like Survey Monkey. Set a deadline for responses. Let groups know if you plan to consider only those responses received by the deadline (a great way to ensure timely decisions).

Seeking input from the entire coalition often promotes buy-in. When it comes to the decisions involved in setting up a program: time and place; who will present; format; etc., you might have a preliminary discussion at a coalition meeting to get input and then ask people to volunteer if they are interested in getting more involved in a planning committee that would decide the details of the program.

Taking a position on a judicial nominee. NCJW and many other national organizations often take positions on federal judicial nominees because, ultimately, the judges who serve in lifetime seats on the courts influence whether the court is fair, independent, and reflective of demographic and experiential diversity. There are some national organizations – many of whom are those who litigate in the federal courts – that do not take positions on nominees except in rare instances. **Often these organizations will want to know how this situation will be handled before joining your coalition. Having a written coalition policy on judicial nominee endorsements is helpful in this regard.** The coalition can still discuss particular nominees and follow updates on their confirmation process but must follow the agreed-upon policy when it comes to making an endorsement. That policy may require a unanimous vote of the coalition. The organizations that do want to take a position can act jointly without using the coalition name, sending a letter to your senators on blank letterhead, for example.

USEFUL TIP:

Avoid using coalition letterhead or in any other way giving the impression that you are acting in the coalition's name which implies that every member agrees. You might say that the organizations weighing in are "among the members of the coalition" or leave the coalition name out completely, depending on the policy agreed to by the coalition.

The Work of a Courts Matter Coalition

To meet or not to meet. Some people tend to groan when you talk about scheduling yet another meeting – by Zoom or in-person. **But meetings serve an important function especially in the early days of a coalition. They help build relationships among the coalition members and allow for a more robust planning process and exchange of ideas.** Some Courts Matter coalitions meet on a monthly schedule either in person or via conference call or Zoom. Others meet less frequently as a whole coalition but hold more regular meetings of the steering committee. Figuring this out is a decision for the whole group or the steering committee. For convenience in scheduling, meetings should be set in advance on a particular schedule (and last no more than an hour if possible). For example: meetings on the last Tuesday of the month at 2 pm; or every other month on the second Wednesday at 10 am; or holding a monthly or quarterly in-person brown-bag lunch meeting (with beverages and dessert provided by the host). Consider changing the venue each meeting to allow for different groups to host in different locations but be cognizant of issues like parking/transportation, audio-visual needs, and accessibility for those with mobility issues. Maintain some flexibility so that during the holiday season or in months where there's a big program, you can adjust your meeting schedule accordingly with sufficient advance notice to members.

USEFUL TIP:

Enlist member groups to do presentations about developments in the federal courts on their focus issues. For example, invite an LGBTQ+ group to talk about a recent or upcoming court decision. Tap the expertise of your member organizations and urge them to invite other allied organizations who aren't yet coalition members.

Encouraging attendance. Every meeting should have an agenda shared in advance with everyone, inviting members to add items or questions. Send a calendar invite, reminding members of the upcoming meeting and future meetings. Plan to email a reminder, requesting an RSVP, the week before. If responses are sparse, the administrator and/or the steering committee members might make reminder calls. It may sometimes feel like an uphill battle to get people to show up – everyone is juggling many tasks and meetings – follow-up with members to see what would make it easier for them to attend. Maybe virtual meetings are easier or the agreed-upon time should be reconsidered, but be persistent with your outreach. An interesting speaker can spur attendance.

Many coalitions begin their meetings with an update, reporting on the latest federal court actions and news of judicial nominees. NCJW is happy to provide staff or recommend a coalition leader from DC to provide a virtual update. Think about using the expertise in your own community. Meetings are a great place to generate ideas for ways to educate your community about why courts matter. It's also a good forum for keeping tabs on progress around your coalition goals and plotting tactics to achieve your goals.

Educating the community via programs. One of the primary reasons Courts Matter coalitions exist is to educate the community about the importance of the federal judiciary, the judges who sit in lifetime seats on the courts, the process for confirming those judges, and how groups and individuals can effectively speak out in support of a diverse, fair, and independent judiciary. Courts Matter coalitions have found many ways to successfully do this work. Whether it is a community-wide program featuring a speaker like a former federal judge, an attorney, law-school professor, or national leader from the Fair Courts Task Force; these programs have been very interesting and instructive. Other education techniques have included presentations at board meetings of progressive organizations (including those in your coalition) or NCJW's You Be the Judge interactive program where the audience tries their hand at judging real cases. Some coalitions have developed PowerPoints to "take on the road" to various meetings or gatherings. Some have created leaflets, brochures, or grip cards to distribute at community events that attract the progressive community. There's a myriad of creative ways you can educate the community. **NCJW provides a forum for sharing ideas and materials through the Courts Matter listserv and periodic calls for coalition leaders.** Coalition meetings of the entire group or steering committee are a great way to brainstorm and plan for one or two programs a year. NCJW has mini-grants to help subsidize these programs. Coalitions might choose to fundraise to help defray costs, listing donors in the program.

USEFUL TIP:

Several coalitions have held programs at colleges or universities, partnering with student organizations like Medical Students (or Law Students) for Choice. Before the pandemic, other coalitions held social events at venues like breweries, adding a speaker on the courts.

Educating the community via the media. A letter to the editor or op-ed in a popular local publication is a great way to educate the community. Most newspapers and online news sources report on high-profile court cases such as those that come down from the Supreme Court. That kind of reporting provides an opening for a response that talks about how all of the federal courts impact our lives and the fact that they hear far more cases than does the Supreme Court. This kind of letter might be submitted by more than one leader of your coalition and may allow you to share that x number of groups are united in your Courts Matter coalition. Whether the letter is published or not, send a copy to your senators as evidence of your interest. Op-eds are another way to get visibility for your coalition and educate about the federal judiciary. Most news sources have information online about whether they accept unsolicited op-eds and what the process is for writing and submitting them. When there is a major news story on the federal courts – a Supreme Court vacancy, for example – you might also seek an editorial board meeting with your paper. In this case, gather interested coalition members for a discussion of the best approach and messaging. NCJW can help you develop an “ed board memo” to bring along, stating your main points with the aim of influencing the editorial board as they consider their approach. Let them know that this is a great opportunity to talk in general about the need for diversity on the court and the importance of a fair and independent judiciary.

USEFUL TIP:

You may have coalition partners who have good relationships with the press – leverage this. If one of your coalition members has a communications or media professional on staff, see if they will offer advice or help.

Social Media and Communication

Be visible. A social media presence is critical to everything your coalition will do, from outreach to potential member organizations to educating the community to advocacy with your senators. **Early in the formation of your coalition, establish a Twitter and Facebook account for your coalition and make sure that all of your communications include your Twitter handle and Facebook address.** It may take some time to have a website up and running, so a good Facebook page can serve to let people know who you are and what you are doing. Maintaining and keeping your social media accounts might be one of the coalition’s administrator’s jobs. You may also ask if there is a coalition member who is interested and able to assist with social media. Ensure that all coalition members follow your accounts and retweet and like your posts when appropriate for them. **The Resources section of this guide includes some sample social media posts.**

Using Twitter. Periodically, NCJW or the Fair Courts Task Force will hold a Twitterstorm – usually an hour-long focused Twitter event. In advance, the coalition will send out some sample tweets that you may copy and send from your account. If the Twitterstorm is about supporting or opposing a nominee that your coalition isn’t taking a position on, do not participate using your coalition account. However, inform those coalition members who have taken a position on the nominee so that they might use their organizational accounts to join the Twitterstorm. Some ideas for Twitter content: interesting articles in the media on federal court cases or the importance of the federal courts; information about the need for diversity on the bench; action by the Senate Judiciary Committee or Senate on judicial nominees (for example, “Today the Senate confirmed the first African American woman to sit on the XX circuit court.”) Use the hashtag #CourtsMatter with your tweets and whatever other hashtag is designated for a particular issue. Plan to tweet at least once a day.

USEFUL TIP:

Follow your senators, coalition members, and national coalition partners on Twitter. Amplify tweets that relate to the federal courts by retweeting and liking them. Consider tweeting at your senators to make a particular relevant point.

Using Facebook. Establish a coalition Facebook page. Include pertinent information about your coalition, including its mission statement, member organizations, and public events on your page. Graphics and photos are key so be sure to take photos at any coalition event and make use of free art and photos in the public domain. Periodically, you will receive memes and infographics about the courts that you may use. Try to post at least once or twice a week. Share articles about federal court decisions or developments on judicial nominations and use the #CourtsMatter hashtag. If you are having a program that is open to the public, remember to use Facebook to invite people, solicit RSVP's, and share news afterwards. Consider using Facebook Live to stream events.

Set up a listserv. A listserv or Google group is a perfect way to communicate with your coalition members. Here's where you can promote upcoming Twitterstorms, meetings, and relevant events. In addition, your coalition leaders will be added to the national Courts Matter listserv hosted by NCJW which is a forum for sharing resources, ideas, and questions across coalitions. **On Fridays, a Weekly Wrap Up prepared by NCJW will be posted to this listserv which provides updates on judicial nominations, Supreme Court cases, and other federal court news plus links to relevant recent media articles (perfect for sharing on your social media sites!).** We recommend that you share the Weekly Wrap Up on your listserv shortly after you receive it and suggest to your coalition members that they share it within their organizations or use relevant selections when appropriate with their constituents. The coalition administrator should keep the listserv current by adding new members, changing contact information of coalition members when necessary, etc. Some state coalitions allow member organizations to post invites to their groups' events.

Develop a simple coalition website. There are probably many people in your community and among the members of your coalition who can help you get a domain name and set up a website. The site should be easy to navigate. Include the basics: your mission statement; a list of member organizations with links to their websites; information about upcoming events open to the public; information on the federal courts and how judges get confirmed (NCJW can supply information or links to help with this section); your senators' contact information including social media handles; and contact information for your coalition including your social media handle. You might be able to have your Twitter feed running on the homepage. **It is very important that the website be kept up to date — new members added as they join the coalition, events updated, etc. Be specific about who has the responsibility for updating the website.** Include a link to the courtsmatter.org website established by NCJW which has useful information about the judicial nominations process and the courts. NCJW may be able to assist with costs associated with setting up the website.

Conclusion and Helpful Links

The federal courts and the judges who sit in lifetime seats on these courts influence every aspect of our personal lives and our democracy. Most people do not realize the extent of the judiciary's influence or the fact that they can play a role in the kind of judges who sit on the courts. For decades, the right wing has educated its constituents on the courts and elevated the issue of judicial nominees on the agenda of their voters. In recent years, progressive organizations have stepped up their education efforts and focus on the courts and judges, successfully raising the issue for their constituents in the last election.

Courts Matter coalitions around the country play an important role in educating their communities about the courts, judges, and how individuals can effectively make their voices heard on the issue. We hope that this guide will encourage you to reach out to potential partner organizations and build a coalition in your state. We have tried to address the basics of coalition building in this guide and are committed to providing on-going resources and assistance to you and your coalition as you get off the ground and grow. Here are some important contacts and websites for you as you move forward:

Courts Matter www.courtsmatter.org

Alliance for Justice <https://www.afj.org/our-work/judicial-nominations/>

Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights <https://civilrights.org/value/courts/>

People For the American Way <https://www.pfaw.org/protecting-lower-courts/>

The US Courts www.uscourts.gov

Resources

Sample Agenda for In-person Gathering

Courts Matter Gathering Agenda

Date: xx/xx/20xx

Start Time: 8:45 am

8:45

Breakfast

9:00

Welcome & Introductions

9:30

Why Courts Matter: What's At Stake

10:00

The Confirmation Process

11:00

Nationwide Coalition Activities

11:30

Break to get Lunch

11:45

Lunch Discussion: Making a Difference in Our State

12:30

Wrap Up and Next Steps

NOTE: Having a light breakfast before you start allows people time to gather and sign in (providing their contact information and receiving any handouts). The timing for this agenda is just a suggestion but be sure to allow sufficient time for the lunch discussion about moving forward with a Courts Matter coalition.

Sample Agenda for Virtual Gathering

Courts Matter Virtual Gathering

Date: xx/xx/20xx

9:30-11:00 am ET

Length: 90 minutes

9:30 – 9:40

Welcome and Introductions

9:40 – 9:50

Why Courts Matter

9:50 – 10:10

Confirmation Process/How to Make a Difference

10:10 – 10:25

Nationwide Coalition Activities

10:25 – 10:50

Brainstorming: Making a Difference in Our State

10:50 – 11:00

Next Steps and Wrap Up

NOTE: This agenda is for a virtual gathering for times when meeting in-person may not be safe or feasible (if participants are geographically distant). Be flexible with the time allotments based on your needs and the number of participants. You might want to do breakout rooms for the Brainstorming and then a Report-Back with the entire group. We do not advise holding virtual gatherings that are longer than two hours without a substantial break.

Sample Coalition Administrator Job Description

Louisiana Courts Matter Administrative Assistant

The Louisiana Courts Matter coalition, seeks a part-time Administrative Assistant to work with the coalition chairs to facilitate the functioning of the coalition.

Duties would include:

- Arranging meetings, conference calls, coalition outreach programs, and other events;
- Doing outreach to coalition members and other organizations by phone and email to set up educational presentations for their boards/membership;
- Managing and maintaining coalition social media (Facebook and Twitter) as well as the LouisianaCourtsMatter.org website;
- Developing and organizing a coalition membership, partner, and contact database;
- Developing and maintaining a coalition listserv;
- Disseminating materials and updates from national partners via the coalition listserv;
- Assist coalition chairs with creating action alerts in conjunction with national partners;

The ideal candidate would have excellent interpersonal skills and be able to take direction. Importantly, the candidate would have experience with various social media platforms and be able to or learn how to maintain the coalition website and listserv.

Louisiana Courts Matter is a coalition of organizations and individuals working to ensure the expeditious nominations and confirmation of qualified candidates to fill vacancies on the federal bench with judges who will represent a fair, independent and diverse judiciary committed to equal justice under the law.

Louisiana Courts Matter works to:

- *Educate our communities and our elected officials about the importance of federal judges who sit on the U.S. District, Circuit and Supreme Courts;*
- *Inform our communities about the judicial nominations process and the records of judicial nominees who will impact our Constitutional values and fundamental rights;*
- *Mobilize our communities to speak out and take action on the President's federal judicial nominees.*

Talking Points for Outreach Conversations

In outreach conversations with potential coalition partner leaders, the best approach is to speak personally about why you think the federal courts matter and why you are interested in forming a coalition. As a reminder, a conversation is a ‘two-way street’ with both parties sharing thoughts and opinions.

- **Start with why courts matter:** Federal courts influence every aspect of our lives, including: the quality of our environment; our rights at work and school; our ability to be safe and access health care; voting rights; marriage equality; and whether we can make our own reproductive decisions. (You might highlight the issue area of most importance to the organization you are approaching.) **Most importantly, talk about why the federal courts are important to you and your organization.**
- **Ask if their organization follows the federal courts or been involved with a case in federal court or a nominee.**
- **Why is a Courts Matter coalition starting?** Remind them that the Constitution gives the US Senate the power to ‘advise and consent’ when it comes to federal court nominees—senators recommend candidates to fill vacancies in their states and vote on whether or not to confirm judicial nominees to lifetime seats on the federal bench. Around the country, state Courts Matter coalitions are educating their communities about why courts and judges matter and are speaking out to their senators about the kind of judges they want to see on the bench. Uniting progressive organizations in a coalition focused on achieving a diverse, fair, and independent judiciary can make a difference on the kinds of courts and judges we have making important decisions about our lives.
- **Ask if there are any questions about the coalition or issue and allow time for the person to express their views on the topic.**
- **Close by inviting them or a representative from their organization to the next event/meeting.**

Example of Coalition Plan

Sample Coalition Plan from Courts Matter to ME

Goal: To increase the public understanding of the role of courts in public policy and the lives of Mainers.			
Activities	Timeline	Responsible Party	Target
Create a 'Courts Matter' program/information page on Maine Women's Lobby Ed Fund website	8/20 – 9/20		NA
Create a 'Courts Matter' infographic hand-out for tabling	8/20 – 9/20		Print 1500 items
Share handouts at relevant election season events	Ongoing	LM	5-6 events
Create series of social media shareables using infographic content and #courtsmatter election-season sharing	8/20 – 11/20	DHS, LM	4-5 shareables, reach of +10K on FB
Share on Facebook using #courtsmatter	Ongoing	LM	weekly
Share on Twitter using #courtsmatter	Ongoing	DHS, LM	weekly
Participate in #courtsmatter twitterstorms	As needed	DHS	As needed
Lead at least one #courtsmatter Twitterstorm	9/20 – 10/20	DHS	NA

Goal: Strengthen the Courts Matter to ME Coalition in order to support long-term, systemic change related to the composition of the federal courts			
Activities	Timeline	Responsible Party	Target
Conduct a coalition-wide survey to assess interests, areas of focus, and capacity	4/20	DHS	All coalition members
Identify a coalition leadership team or steering committee	4/20	DHS	All coalition members
Work with coalition members to identify and invite new members	4/20 – 6/20	DHS, Steering Committee (SC)	3-5 new members
Meet with full coalition at least quarterly	Ongoing	DHS	4 meetings
Communicate tools, resources, and information with the coalition at least monthly	Ongoing	DHS	Monthly/ 12+ newsletters
Work with coalition to identify at least one shared, full coalition effort for election season	8/20 – 11/20	DHS, SC	TBD
Work with coalition to identify a messenger and complete at least one topical meeting with each of Maine's two senators	Ongoing	DHS, SC	2 meetings

NOTE: A good plan has specifics (as does this one) to help operationalize each of the steps toward the goals. Please note that this is specific to the Maine coalition and is offered only as one example of a plan. Most coalition plans have internal goals in addition to goals that address the issue of advancing a fair, diverse, and independent federal judiciary.

Sample Courts Matter Social Media Posts

Here are some social media posts to give you an idea (and a starting point) for your coalition's social media accounts. It is important to post regularly and keep the accounts current. Ask coalition member organizations to follow or like these accounts and follow theirs in return.

Twitter



Decisions made by federal judges often last for generations. We deserve a judiciary that represents us all.



Join [coalition name] to learn more about why **#CourtsMatter** and how you can make a difference in our judicial systems!
Courtsmatter.org



Even though we don't get to vote for our federal judges, we can advocate for an independent and fair federal judiciary that reflects our country's diversity. Visit courtsmatter.org to learn more about why **#CourtsMatter** and to join [Coalition Name]



Federal judges hold lifetime positions and make decisions long after the presidents that appointed them have come and gone.



Learn more about why **#CourtsMatter** and how to advocate for a fair judiciary at courtsmatter.org

Facebook



Decisions made by federal judges often last for generations. We deserve a judiciary that represents us all.



Join [coalition name] to learn more about why [#CourtsMatter](#) and how you can make a difference in our judicial systems!
[Courtsmatter.org](#)



Federal judges serve lifetime positions, but they aren't voted in by us – they're appointed by the president and confirmed by the US Senate.

Even so, we can all advocate for an independent and fair federal judiciary that reflects our country's diversity. Learn more about why [#CourtsMatter](#) and join [Coalition Name].



Federal judges hold lifetime positions and make decisions long after the presidents that appointed them have come and gone. Learn more about why [#CourtsMatter](#) and how to advocate for a fair judiciary at [courtsmatter.org](#)

Instagram



Decisions made by federal judges often last for generations. We deserve a judiciary that represents us all. Join [coalition name] to learn more about why [#CourtsMatter](#) and how you can make a difference! [Courtsmatter.org](#) (link in bio!)



Federal judges serve lifetime positions, but they aren't voted in by us – they're appointed by the president and confirmed by the US Senate.

Even so, we can all advocate for an independent and fair federal judiciary that reflects our country's diversity. Learn more about why [#CourtsMatter](#) and join [Coalition Name] at the link in our bio.



Federal judges hold lifetime positions and, many times, are still around making decisions long after the politicians that appointed and confirmed them have come and gone. Learn more about why [#CourtsMatter](#) and how to advocate for a fair judiciary at [courtsmatter.org](#) (link in bio!)

Additional copy options to pull from:

- If you care about [insert issue], you have to care about our federal courts! Every issue makes its way through the courts - including [insert issue] - and the decisions often last generations. Join [name coalition] to learn more about why [#CourtsMatter](#) and how you can make a difference!
- Did you know federal judges are appointed to lifetime positions? This means their decisions often last for decades - longer than legislation and long after the president who nominated them has come and gone. Who are these people and how do they get on the courts? Learn more by registering for [name event here] [[link to Facebook event](#)] [#CourtsMatter](#)
- Just as we advocate to impact legislation and policy, so too can we advocate for a fair and independent federal judiciary with judges from diverse backgrounds who have a proven track record of commitment to constitutional values like equality and justice for all. [#CourtsMatter](#) [insert state] coalition can help you get engaged in the fight for a fair judiciary. Find out more here [[link to Facebook page, event, coalition website, twitter, etc.](#)]