



ALABAMA CIVIL JUSTICE FOUNDATION HISTORY (1992 – 2025)

The Alabama Association for Justice (formerly known as the Alabama Trial Lawyers Association) began work to create the Alabama Civil Justice Foundation in 1992. With permission from the Alabama Supreme Court, ACJF was established as an IOLTA Foundation to receive interest from lawyer's trust accounts for charitable efforts throughout the state. Participation grew from 50 attorneys in 1993 to more than 3,400 this year.

ACJF began operating as a grant-making foundation in 1993 with the first set of grants awarded in December of that year. Since then, over \$15 million has been awarded to organizations throughout the state that serve Alabama's needy families and children. Organizations in every county in the state have received one or more grants through the annual competitive grant cycle of ACJF.

There have been many milestones in giving.

1998 - 2006

- In 1998, a Board Initiated Grant was made to facilitate the state's activities focusing on "Birth to Three" research.
- Since 1999, when ACJF allowed for the establishment of Donor Advised Funds by individuals and law firms, over \$250,000 has been awarded through these separate funds.
- In 2001, ACJF received funds from a Lee County Court to develop a state-wide, grassroots organization with a focus on consumer protection issues that disproportionately impact Alabama's poor.
- In January 2002, Alabama Watch became an independent organization.

- In 2002, ACJF took a lead in the state by awarding Capacity Building grants for nonprofits.
- In 2003, ACJF advocated on behalf of Alabama's poor children and families for a fair and adequate tax system.
- In 2004, ACJF received a \$1 million contribution from four plaintiff law firms to be used to improve educational opportunities in the Anniston area.
- In 2004 and 2005, ACJF offered operating expense grants to organizations in order to provide the most flexible use of our funds as nonprofits across the state faced cutbacks from state and national funding.
- In 2005, ACJF awarded close to \$100,000 to be used for Katrina Relief within our state from donations received from trial lawyers across the country.
- In 2006, ACJF sought to meet its mission through participation in advocacy efforts to increase pre-K programs for Alabama four-year-olds and to increase support for constitutional reform.

2007

- ACJF employed an outside consultant to work with the board, staff and participating members to make strategic recommendations for building the capacity of the foundation.
- The Alabama Supreme Court mandates that, as of January 2008, every pooled trust account must be established as an IOLTA.
- the Court gave ACJF permission to provide funding for access to justice/civil legal aid.

2008

- ACJF awarded \$420,000 in Justice Grants to organizations that provided civil legal aid to the poor as well as other justice-related initiatives.
- ACJF's board of directors created a "Junior Board" to pass on a legacy of giving to young attorneys to share the message of giving and "lawyers helping people" for generations to come.
- ACJF established the Pioneers of Justice Society to recognize deceased attorneys and to raise funds to support ACJF. Francis H. Hare, Sr. was the first honoree.

2009

- Howell Heflin, Jr. was recognized as the second honoree for the Pioneers of Justice Society.
- ACJF held a Roast and Toast Gala in honor of retired federal court judge, U.W. Clemon.

2010

- ACJF opened its Pioneers of Justice Society membership to individuals who made \$10,000 pledges designated for access to justice grants.
- ACJF establishes the Advocates of Justice Society for attorneys and community leaders under the age of 40 as an effort to offer large charitable giving to support the work of the Foundation.
- ACJF was selected to host a Hess Fellow from Birmingham Southern College.
- ACJF partnered with the Alabama Association of Nonprofits to plan and sponsor CLEs on Nonprofit Law.
- ACJF partners with one of its grantees, the American Board of Trial Advocates to expand the use of the curriculum “Justice for the People” in elementary and middle schools across the state on and around Constitution Day.

2011

- ACJF honored former Governor Albert Brewer at a Roast & Toast Gala.
- ACJF began accepting grant applications through an online system.
- ACJF completed its grantmaking through the Anniston Civil Justice Fund.
- ACJF hosted the first FABu/ous Beach Party at the summer conference of the Alabama Association of Justice.

2012

- ACJF awarded a \$100,000 2-year grant to the Alabama Network of Family Resource Centers to build the capacity to expand the number of community-based centers using this successful model for delivering services and providing support.

2013

- ACJF moved to the ALAJ office in the newly renovated House of Mayors.
- ACJF Roast & Toast Gala honored Herman “Buck” Watson with record attendance.

2014

- ACJF began a focus on how to best communicate to the public and stakeholders about civil legal aid.
- ACJF was awarded a Foundation Leadership Grant for \$15,020 from the National Association of IOLTA Programs (NAIP) to encourage non-IOLTA foundations and other funders to increase their support for civil legal aid.
- ACJF commissioned three Social Return on Investment Studies on the 2014 civil legal aid services provided by Legal Services AL and all Volunteer Lawyers Programs, the 2014 family services provided by members of the AL Network of Family Resource Centers, and a combined study projecting the results if these providers had partnered together.

2015

- As a part of the NAIP grant awarded in 2014 to ACJF, all civil legal aid partners collaborated to hold four Community Conversations about Civil Legal Aid to expand awareness of this valuable service to communities in Alabama.
- ACJF received \$273,000 from the national Bank of America Settlement that was used for legal services in areas of foreclosure prevention and community redevelopment legal services.
- ACJF hosted a very successful Roast & Toast Gala on September 17, honoring former UA Law School Dean and Professor Charles W. Gamble. Over 400 guests attended the event.

2016

- Foreclosure Prevention Grants were awarded to seven civil legal aid organizations totaling \$266,000 from the Department of Justice/Bank of America Settlement funds.

- ACJF partnered with several civil legal aid providers to conduct a workshop entitled “Enhancing Social Services with Civil Legal Aid” at the 2016 Nonprofit Summit hosted by the Alabama Association of Nonprofits.
- Received a second disbursement from the Department of Justice and Bank of America Settlement in the amount of \$3,341,232 million that was used for foreclosure prevention and community redevelopment legal services.

2017

- Second year of Foreclosure Prevention Grants were awarded to seven legal aid organizations that received funds in 2016.
- ACJF partnered with the Foreclosure Prevention Partnership and the Alabama Housing Finance Authority to increase the usage of Hardest Hit Funds awarded to eligible home owners facing difficulty paying their mortgages.
- ACJF hosted a training session for Housing Counselors and legal aid and family service providers on the process for assisting low income clients to access the Hardest Hit funds.
- ACJF planned Funders Huddle for the Alabama Network of Family Resource Centers to present their plans for expanding FRCs across the state and providing Family Support information and training to non-members across the state.
- ACJF planned for the fifth Roast & Toast Gala to honor former Attorney General and Lieutenant Governor William “Bill” Baxley on November 9.

2018

- The Foundation celebrated its 25th Anniversary!
- ACJF initiated a new grant process called *Thanks for Making a Difference* which required a letter of nomination by an attorney participating with ACJF’s IOLTA program.
- The Foundation offered grants from the Department of Justice/Bank of America Settlement for Community Redevelopment Legal Services.
- ACJF commissioned its second Social Return on Investment Study (SROI) to determine the economic value of legal services in Alabama during the years

- 2015 and 2016. The results had increased since the 2014 study (\$8.84) with a \$11.95 value.
- ACJF awarded \$1.6 Million to six nonprofit organizations as Community Redevelopment Grants with the of supporting and promoting economic development by providing legal services that revitalize or stabilize low-income communities and/or targeted vulnerable community groups.
- On November 15, 2018, Sue H. McInnish, esteemed ACJF Executive Director, retired after 25 years of service to the organization.
- November 16, 2018, Nikki Tucker Thomas was named ACJF Executive Director.

2019

- ACJF awarded *Thanks for Making a Difference* Grant of \$77,000.
- ACJF awarded \$585,250 in grants.
- In May 22, 2019, the Supreme Court amended Rule 1.15, Alabama Rules of Professional Conduct, to add a new paragraph (o) for quarterly reporting.

2020

- ACJF awarded \$510,350 in competitive grants and \$185,000 in Access to Justice grants.
- ACJF began the Meals for Healthcare Workers in response to the COVID-19 pandemic which raised more than \$50,000 for meals for healthcare workers in Jefferson and Shelby counties as well as provided funds for food banks.
- ACJF began the Alabama Public Interest Network to help build collaboration amongst public interest entities in the state.
- To help nonprofit organizations during the COVID-19 pandemic, ACJF began to award Emergency Relief Grants for unrestricted expenses. A total of \$62,700 was given to 16 organizations.
- ACJF started the Healthcare Workers program to give meals to healthcare workers who were on the frontlines of the pandemic. More than 3,000 meals were given to healthcare and hospital employees throughout the state.

2021

- In May 2021, the Board of Directors approved \$1 million in a second round of Community Redevelopment grants to support and promote economic development by providing legal services that revitalize or stabilize low-income communities and/or targeted vulnerable community groups.
- ACJF awarded \$387,403.50 in competitive grants.
- ACJF awarded \$235,000 in Access to Justice grants to support civil legal aid in the state.
- In December 2021, the Board of Directors approved nearly \$497,500 in grants to nonprofit organizations throughout the state.

2022

- ACJF 30th Anniversary Gala & Salute to The Honorable Charles Price
- ACJF sponsored the “Banking on Nonprofits” Seminar at the Renaissance Hotel Montgomery.
- In January, ACJF kicked off a celebration of “30 Years of Philanthropy,” with a statewide grants presentation blitz.
- ACJF awarded \$1,102,403 in grants.

2023

- Caroline Clark was named Executive Director in May.
- ACJF awarded \$513,250 in grants to 62 organizations.
- ACJF awarded a multiyear grant to BreakThrough Birmingham, positioning the organization to significantly expand its afterschool and summer programming for middle school students.
- ACJF awarded a multiyear grant to all five Alabama Volunteer Lawyer Programs, equipping them to collectively hire a grant writer to pursue joint grant opportunities and strengthen/stabilize their budgets.

2024

- ACJF awarded \$743,000 in grants to 61 organizations.

- On December 20, the Alabama Supreme Court changed Rule 1.15 to redirect all IOLTA funds to the Alabama Law Foundation, with all funding to support access to justice.
- At the Summer ALAJ Conference, The Cookery Project (a grantee) offered a cooking class for the children, demonstrating the work they do in STEM, health, and life skills with Title I schools, foster children, and others in Mobile.

2025

- ACJF awarded \$335,000 to 18 organizations in the categories of Abuse and Neglect, Afterschool/Summer Learning, Early Childhood, Family Stability, Mental Health, and Mentoring.
- The Foundation distributed a \$100,000 grant to Breakthrough Birmingham, the second installment of its three-year \$300,000 grant to support Birmingham City and Talladega County middle school students in summer and afterschool learning.
- ACJF distributed the first \$40,000 grant to Alabama's five Volunteer Lawyers Program, to fund a grantwriter. This three-year grant will distribute \$120,000 to help the VLPs collectively build their capacity to raise funds and create greater funding stability.
- At the Summer ALAJ Conference, children participated in ACJF's pickleball tournament.

The history of ACJF involves giving to others. However, this has been possible only because of the growing number of Alabama lawyers who provide financial support through IOLTAs and direct charitable contributions. With this collaborative effort, ACJF, and the lawyers it represents, have become recognized as a philanthropic leader in our support for Alabama's most vulnerable families and children. ACJF continues to make history as we represent the heart and soul of the legal profession in Alabama.



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