

# Back to School: Tapping into Law School, Graduate & Professional Programs

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## Sampling of Mississippi Center for Justice Work Product through NYU Wagner Capstone Teams

### 1. Proposal Abstract from our 2009 Application:

*Child care centers are the most effective workforce support available for working mothers. However, child care businesses in Mississippi operate with the slightest of margins. The Mississippi Center for Justice would like for a Capstone team to do an economic impact study of child care centers to demonstrate their value to Mississippi's economy. In addition, the team would explore and analyze policy issues that make it difficult to obtain child care certificates.*

*We would welcome receiving some combination of the following deliverables (though welcome the ultimate Capstone Team's advice on what would be most useful):*

- Preparation of a paper describing the economic impact of child care centers in Mississippi*
- Advice and recommendations to child care centers about ways to cut costs in business operations*
- Advice and recommendations regarding potential policy and legislative strategies to make child care centers more economically viable*
- Suggestion of ways to persuade government agencies to adopt a single application for social services.*

**Actual result:** The Capstone Team produced a comprehensive Business Manual we are preparing to copy and distribute in conjunction with a series of workshops that will match seasoned small business owner "mentors" with the mostly women-owned child care centers in the Delta.

### 2. Proposal Abstract from our 2008 Application:

*The working poor often don't have bank accounts. Without bank access they use an alternative system: payday lenders and check cashing stores. These institutions charge extraordinarily high fees compared to traditional banks. The poor pay a penalty, reducing already lean assets and further inhibiting savings. Mississippi is home to roughly 1200 payday lenders (among the most per capita in the nation), and the largest poverty population. MCJ seeks a committed Capstone Team to analyze the problem, and propose strategies for reform.*

*We would welcome receiving some combination of the following deliverables (though welcome the ultimate Capstone Team's advice on what would be most useful):*

- Research on the scale and nature of the dysfunction caused by payday lenders, including an estimate of the cost to the poor community and the institutional dynamics that support the environment for predatory lending.*
- Outline of an economic justice campaign that includes "how to do it" guidance, possibly informed by states that have successfully run similar change campaigns.*

- *Recommended reforms including legislative fixes, new systems, alternative markets, social entrepreneur possibilities.*
- *Recommended strategies for addressing both the short term needs (individual advice and community education about existing alternatives) and putting in place better systems for the long term.*

**Actual result:** Our Capstone Team produced a “Tool Kit for Combating Payday Lending in Mississippi” that included an Executive Summary, and sections on Education (an outline for Financial Literacy Workshops, ready to print Financial Literacy Brochures and Workshop Flyers, PSA Scripts and Newspaper Ad, MS Radio and Newspaper Contacts), Organizing (Power Analysis Map, Petition, Testimony Collection Form, Lobby Day Planning Guide) (Legislation (Legislative Best Practices, Sample Legislation, Letter to Senator Durbin), Financial Support (Funding Opportunities). **The materials helped us achieve an important victory: a moratorium on new payday lending storefronts in Jackson, MS. We are currently planning our strategy to build on this momentum and seek moratoria in cities throughout the state.**

## **2. Proposal Abstract from our 2007 Application:**

*Many historically significant communities in southern Mississippi ravaged by Hurricane Katrina remain invisible and without the means to secure cultural and historic preservation program opportunities, despite being home to neighborhoods founded by freed slaves, beach wade-ins, early African American labor and voting rights organizing, cross-burnings, businesses first to service blacks, etc. We hope a Capstone Team will help redocument these neighborhoods and prepare a community development action plan to capitalize on these historic treasures.*

*We would welcome receiving some combination of the following deliverables (though welcome the ultimate Capstone Team’s advice on what would be most useful):*

- *Explore the potential applications for historic designation, working drafts of community histories, applications for community development grants, and zoning and coding overlays for historic districts.*
- *Preparation of a community development action plan to revitalize historic African American communities, based on research of historic highlights in specific neighborhoods, and the availability of various national, state and local historic landmark and designation and preservation programs.*
- *Advice and recommendations about which of these government and private programs fit best with the communities studied.*

**Actual result:** The Capstone Team made well-attended community presentations in two African American communities, the Quarters and Soria City. Their Handbook included comprehensive coverage of eight topic areas: Workforce Development/Job Training, Housing Preservation and Rehabilitation, Infrastructure and Environment, Greenway Development, Cultural Tourism, Small Business Development. Organizational Capacity and Urban Planning Resources, along with detailed business plans for two Soria City businesses. Known in our office as “The Business Bible”, the Manual has been used by small business owners and as the basis for pro bono work performed by Big Firms seeking to help them.

*Karen is available to brainstorm with any attendees about possible projects that could be a match for their program*