



**Vanessa Finley, MBA, CAE**  
**Chief Executive Officer**

Vanessa Finley joined the National Association of Legal Assistants (NALA) as its Chief Executive Officer in 2019. As the CEO, she is responsible for the planning and day-to-day operations of the association, including oversight of strategic planning and implementation, member services for its 15,000 members and customers in the paralegal profession, program development and management, resource development, human resources, marketing and public relations, fiscal and legal affairs, and coordinating the Board of Directors and its committees.

Vanessa has been in nonprofit management and leadership for her entire career, spanning more than 28 years. She has had a primary focus on providing support to and advocacy for underrepresented groups and otherwise marginalized communities including women, people of color, immigrants, and those impacted by poverty. She started her career at a youth-serving agency in Kansas City, Kansas, that provided wrap-around support services for middle-school students identified as high risk for dropping out. She then served for 12 years as the Executive Director at First Step Fund in Kansas City, Missouri, where low- to moderate-income individuals could explore entrepreneurship, or microenterprise, as an alternative to public assistance and/or low-wage jobs. In addition to providing direct training in Kansas City, First Step Fund was the national distributor and certifying entity for the First Step FastTrac curriculum and the Family Child Care Entrepreneurship Program. During her tenure at First Step Fund, Vanessa was also the Chair of the Missouri Asset Development Coalition—the state microenterprise association in Missouri—and was an active board member of the national microenterprise trade association, Association for Enterprise Opportunity (AEO).

Vanessa continued her career in progressively larger and more complex organizations—serving as the Executive Director/CEO at Gilda’s Club Kansas City (psychosocial support for people impacted by cancer), Director of Development at Planned Parenthood of Kansas and Mid-Missouri (women’s health and sexual health education), Chief Executive Officer at YWCA Tulsa (racial justice, refugee and

immigration services, health and wellness, and women's empowerment), and Chief Program Officer at the Community Service Council of Greater Tulsa (a regional planning organization that operated 30+ programs and initiatives across Eastern Oklahoma in six different core investment areas of health & mental health, housing & homelessness, education, accessing resources, incarceration reduction, and veteran support).

Vanessa has dual Bachelor's degrees in Human Development/Applied Behavioral Science and Criminology from the University of Kansas (1993). She earned her Master of Business Administration with an emphasis in Leadership and Change in Human Systems from the Henry W. Bloch School of Management at the University of Missouri-Kansas City (2006) and earned her Certified Association Executive (CAE) certification through the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE) in 2020.

She and her husband of 33 years have three amazing children, an adult daughter working in the legal field, a daughter in college, and a foster son in high school. They share their home with Watson, Rain, Skully, and Sophie, the dog and three cats that really run the house!