

The Pot of Gold at the End of the Rainbow: Recruiting Pro Bono Lawyers of Color

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Brief Description:

What approaches do diversity bar associations use to perform outreach and recruit pro bono attorneys? How do these bar associations undertake pro bono advocacy? How best can pro bono program staff collaborate with these associations to increase pro bono activity? Attend this session to hear ideas from current and former representatives of the National Bar Association, the Dallas Asian-American Bar Association, the Hispanic Bar Association of Dallas, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and receive project ideas and strategies for increasing pro bono participation.

Topical Outline:

- I. Tips for Recruiting Minority Lawyers To Do Pro Bono Work
 - a. Know your target market. Pro bono program staff must do some homework in this area. For instance, how many minority lawyers are in the service area? What areas of law do these attorneys practice? Is there a local minority bar association in the service area?
 - b. Create a recruiting message.
 - i. Minority lawyers are already familiar with the plight of the disenfranchised and the poor. Many work in either solo-practice or government offices and frequently deal with segments of the society who lack access to sufficient resources. Consequently, tap into their sense of duty to the community. The trick here is to bring them back to the sense of community involvement or at least giving back like their forefathers.
 1. Example: Thurgood Marshal and Fredrick Douglas who paved the way for the success of African American attorneys. Note that this technique is only for the brave and informed on historical issues that affected African Americans.

- ii. Recruiting message should offer incentives for taking on pro bono cases.
 - 1. If your program offers CLE's at a reasonable rate or even free to those who will volunteer, use this approach because every practicing attorney needs CLE credits. In addition, offer scholarships to CLE's if your program has that as an incentive.
 - 2. Other incentives include:
 - a. Client contact
 - b. Networking with other lawyers
 - c. Trial experience
 - d. Feeling of involvement in the community
 - e. Recognition and visibility
 - iii. Make sure that the recruiting message includes, at a minimum:
 - 1. The type of work you need the volunteer lawyers to engage in
 - 2. The need the volunteer lawyer will fulfill and how participating will benefit the program's requirements for participation (e.g. lawyer in good standing, etc.
 - 3. The expected number of hours you need the volunteer lawyer to commit to
 - iv. Consider including a testimonial from a minority lawyer on how the lawyer's pro bono experience benefited that lawyer as well as how it benefited your program.
- c. Get the word out.
- i. General mailings to the entire legal community
 - ii. Targeted mailings to minority lawyers
 - iii. In-person presentations at bar association meetings or other events
 - iv. Telephone calls to respected minority judges or lawyers
 - v. Advertisements or articles in local legal newspapers or bar association journals
 - vi. Local minority bar association resolutions calling on its members to take a pro bono case or work with a pro bono program
- d. Keep it simple. Tell the attorney exactly what will be expected of them and how much assistance they will obtain from your program. The less they have to do and the more resources your program has to offer, the more likely you are to find help.
- e. Offer support to volunteers. Examples:
- i. Malpractice insurance
 - ii. Trainings, seminars, and resource materials
 - iii. Litigation funds
 - iv. Forms on discs
 - v. Experienced lawyers as mentors for new lawyers or lawyers with more experience in particular practice areas

- f. Have mechanisms in place to screen cases to screen and match case to make sure the right attorney gets the right case for him or her. Provide volunteer lawyers with appropriate training in program operations, including a reference manual. This will help the cases move more efficient and expeditiously.
- g. Start out easy.
 - i. Begin with very easy simple projects. Start with an intake session at a legal services clinic that serves a minority community.
 - ii. Explain that they don't have to take a case. Stress that the clinic requires a limited time commitment. Just identify the issues and translate if necessary.
 - iii. Work up to projects where attorneys will represent individuals with easier issues, i.e. uncontested divorces.
- h. Make the project fun. Host a dinner or happy hour before the clinic.
- i. Recognize your volunteers.
 - i. Make sure that those who give to your program receive the most coveted awards your program has to offer and let every media outlet you have access to know about it!
 - ii. Pro bono programs should design a recognition program that will provide both appreciation for the volunteers' participation and recognition of outstanding service.
 - iii. Examples of ways to show your appreciation include the following:
 - 1. Hosting an annual awards luncheon
 - 2. Providing plaques, pins, and certificates
 - 3. Publishing "honor rolls" of participating attorneys
 - 4. Sending handwritten thank you notes
 - 5. Having clients send their volunteer a thank-you
 - 6. Planning a golf outing for lawyers
- j. Remember, the best recruiters are persons who have volunteered for your program and enjoyed their experience!

II. Tips for Conducting Outreach to Minority Bar Associations

- a. Build a relation with the minority bar.
 - i. Become a member or ask to become a liaison to the minority bar.
 - ii. Try to attend the monthly meetings. Even attending 3 or 4 times a year would be helpful.

- iii. Find out what the association's focus for the year is and match your recruiting message to the focus.
 - 1. If, for example, the association's president has set an agenda focused on housing issues, send a member of your team who specializes in housing to assist the association with their project.
 - iv. At the meetings, find out what pro bono challenges or issues the members are interested in.
 - b. Address the unique needs of the minority community.
 - i. Find out what needs are unique to the minority community that the minority bar represents.
 - ii. For Asian and Hispanic bars, language barriers are formidable.
 - iii. Appeal to the minority bar and target the language capabilities of the minority attorney.
 - iv. Asian and Hispanic communities are different. Asians are reluctant to seek help outside the Asian community. Hispanics are more likely to seek outside help.
 - c. Assure the minority bars that your organization will provide support (see examples above under I.e.)
 - d. Partner with the minority bar in hosting recognition events and/or social gatherings.
- III. Successful Pro Bono Projects (examples):
 - a. Neighborhood Law School
 - i. This public service program is designed to provide citizens with a basic understanding of the legal system and to offer advice concerning their legal rights and responsibilities. This program helps narrow the gap and provide invaluable information to urban citizens who normally do not have access to attorneys.
 - b. Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) Program.
 - i. Lawyers help low-income clients prepare and file federal income tax forms.

Bibliography & Website Links:

1. ABA, Standing Committee on Pro Bono and Public Service <http://www.abanet.org/legalservices/probono/>
2. National Bar Association <http://www.nationalbar.org/html>
3. National Asian Pacific American Bar Association <http://www.napaba.org/napaba/showpage.asp?code=home>
4. Hispanic National Bar Association <http://www.hnba.com/>
5. National Association for the Advancement of Colored People <http://www.naacp.org/>