

Pro Bono Week Planning A Statewide Education, Recognition and Service project.

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We all make plans everyday so it is a skill we all have. Some plans are so routine, like going to work each day, that you don't even consider them plans. Planning is simply defining a goal and then thinking through the steps and resources needed in order to reach that goal. For example if the goal is to get to work on time my plan includes time to fill up the car with gas. The more factors you add in, the more planning that is required. For example if we add in the need to pick a coworker for a carpool and a birthday cake for your assistants birthday on the way to work then more steps and resources are needed in order to reach the goal.

The first step in planning a statewide event like pro bono week is to set a specific goal. In Alabama that goal was set by the bar president. That goal was to have a truly statewide celebration with an event in every judicial circuit in the state during pro bono week. So this general goal was given to me, as a staff person, and to the person named as the task force chair. **The task force or committee chair is one of your first and most important resources.** Ideally for a statewide event you want someone who is organized, able and willing to spend time on the project and who has a statewide presence. Once the chair of the event is named I suggest that you meet with them to discuss the overall goal and how the group will meet that goal, what subcommittees will be needed in order to reach the goal, as well as the best people to be placed on those subcommittees and any additional resources they will need.

In Alabama, the Task Force chair and I discussed the overall goal we were given, an event in every circuit, and we defined it further. It was decided that the events during pro bono week should be centered around one of three elements: 1) Education of the public and the bar about providing access to justice for the poor particularly through pro bono assistance; 2) Recognition of the pro bono activity currently taking place and 3) Service, through the provision of pro bono services to the poor. With our goals further defined we determined we would need four subcommittees, 1) Publicity; 2) Law School; 3) Judicial; and 3) Circuit Bar Presidents coordination. **We then recruited and placed task force members** on these subcommittees ensuring that each had leadership or particular skills in one of these areas. Each subcommittee was given a list of steps or deliverables they were responsible for achieving in order to move us toward our goal. They were also asked to expand on these basic ideas to improve the project. For example the Publicity subcommittee was initially charged with developing a web page, a speakers list and a draft proclamation. As they worked through these ideas they developed Alabama's own pro bono week logo, which was used on all of our materials. They suggested the printing of banners which were placed throughout the state, developed a sample press release, and produced talking points and materials for use by speakers. (Although we decided to relate our events to one of several themes you could easily select one element or theme to build your celebration around.)

Once you have your goals defined and people in place to help you reach those goals **you need a time line** to follow in order to meet the goal. In the case of Pro Bono Week you know the end date so start at the end and work your way backward. In our case the taskforce chair and I had set up a monthly meeting schedule which as pro bono week became closer developed into a bi-monthly meeting and then into weekly meetings. All but four of our meetings were held by conference call. Our initial meeting was held in person so that everyone could meet who they were working with and to aid in general discussion of our goals. After that we had two additional face to face meetings at crucial points in our timeline. Our last face to face meeting was our final meeting, after all the pro bono week events were over. At this meeting we evaluated the project and made recommendations for the next year. Task force members were willing to participate in these meetings because they were as short as possible and because actions items, not general discussion, were on the agenda for each meeting. Every subcommittee was required to report at each meeting and at least one deliverable was due at each meeting.

Suggestions and Examples:

Some of the key elements of events that made our pro bono celebration successful were:

Education: **Pro Bono Celebration Task Force developed a continuing legal education resource** that could be used by local bar associations and other organizations to present a one hour ethics CLE program. The program was on the topic of the provision of pro bono services a subject not generally covered in CLE programs. The materials included speakers' notes, a power point presentation, sign-in sheets and evaluation forms. All a local bar needed to get an hour of CLE was a speaker to present the materials.

Pro Bono speech materials were also provided by the task force. These materials were directed at the public, designed to be used when talking to civic groups. These materials allowed for the spread of information about the pro bono work performed by the bar and the resources available to assist the low income community to groups outside of our standard stakeholder list

Branding of our event. Early on we developed our pro bono week brand. Our logo was circulated through the use of stickers, on email signature lines and on give away items at events through out the year. We also developed a public service announcement about the project that aired throughout the state and added recorded "hold" messages on our phone systems.

Recognition: The main push for recognition was through the use of **proclamations**. We developed a draft proclamation for use by government agencies and groups. We requested that our Governor designate Pro Bono week well in advance of October as we knew that his lead would allow others to follow. With the governors proclamation we next moved to the three judges associations and the Alabama State Bar. With these three key endorsements we moved on to local recognition of our bar members. We obtained at least one proclamation in every judicial circuit in Alabama. What these proclamations did was to educate the local

governmental agency about the pro bono work performed by the bar as well as the lack of public funding in Alabama for civil legal services to the poor. They also allowed a local volunteer to get involved in a new way and often to receive recognition in the local newspaper reporting the passage of the proclamation.

We also held three **receptions** during pro bono week honoring volunteers. These were usually held at the end of clinic or service events. The receptions were also held in conjunction with one of the three accredited law schools in the state and so also involved law students.

Service: There were two main service events tied into our pro bono week activities, **recruitment drives and pro bono clinics**. Both of these were very successful but varied depending on the needs of the local community and the resources available.

For example, four of the clinics were held in conjunction with law schools and involved both law students and local attorney volunteers. These clinics mainly centered on elder law issues. Another subset of clinics was held in conjunction with local bar associations and consisted of general counsel and advice clinics. The last groups of clinics were run by pro bono programs and were clinic models that have been used before but were repeated during pro bono week.

Recruitment drives also varied depending on the event or location. One of our most successful drives was in conjunction with the Alabama State Bar Admission Ceremony which was being held during pro bono week. The Chief Justice agreed to have lunch with 8 people selected at random who were being admitted to the bar that week and who enrolled in one of the state's four pro bono programs. This simple idea received a lot of recognition nationally and greatly increased the number of enrollments received from this group.

Suggestions: **Use the resources you have available, including the ABA web site.** We used the Project Initiation Document submitted by the State bar of Michigan to begin our planning in 2009(available in the Resources section of the website). We also went to the ABA site regularly to look at events taking place in other states to see if we could make them work in Alabama.

Start sooner rather than later. We had a fair amount of discussion about asking our Governor several months in advance for a proclamation in support of pro bono week. It helped us as we went to other groups seeking support.

Don't forget to evaluate the project after it is over. Our evaluation helped us determine the items that were the most successful during our pro bono week celebration. Instead of just repeating what we did last year we hope to concentrate our work and efforts on the items that had the biggest impact.