

ABA 2010 Partnership Awards Program Nomination Form

- 1. Program Title:** LGBT Committee
- 2. Name of Bar Association:** Columbus Bar Association
- 3. Address:** 175 S. Third Street, 11th Floor
- 4. City/State/Zip Code** Columbus, Ohio 43215
- 5. Phone** 614-221-4112
- 6. Email Address** donna@cbalaw.org
- 7. Number of Association Members** 4,834

PROGRAM INFORMATION

8. Description of your program to include:

- Program's objectives
- History of program
- Number of times presented
- Targeted audience
- Number of people participating
- Measurable results of efforts to date (include statistics, program evaluation and follow-up)
- Future program plans

In August of 2009 The LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender) Committee of the Columbus Bar Association was established to bring together lawyers and legal professionals interested in the different facets of the LGBT community: those who represent members of the LGBT community, those who are members of the LGBT community, and those who share an interest in the laws and public policies related to the LGBT community. In an effort to better serve clients and the profession, the members of the LGBT Committee join together to share ideas and to update CBA members on topics of concern to all who participate in the field of LGBT law or deal with LGBT legal and public policy issues.

The LGBT Committee also seeks to create networking, social and mentoring opportunities and support systems within the LGBT law community to help committee members build successful and rewarding professional lives.

This is the first LGBT committee ever formed in an Ohio bar association. Its genesis began in 2000 when the Board of Governor's President Carl Smallwood commissioned a task force to examine the Central Ohio legal community's inclusion and understanding of the LGBT legal professional community and client base. This was part of the broader CBA Diversity Initiative project. After months of meeting with their peers, the task force employed the Feldman Group of Washington, D.C. to assist in the creation, distribution and analysis of a survey of the members of the CBA concerning their experiences and perceptions of the treatment of gay and lesbian attorneys and clients in the Central Ohio community.

The survey results, presented to the Board of Governors in the 2002 **Report of the Task Force on Sexual Orientation**, indicated that “while Columbus and its legal community are not perceived as a hostile environment for gays and lesbians, there were a number of significant ways in which the Columbus Bar Association could make the legal community and justice system more appropriately receptive of gays and lesbians.” The report was used to further inform discussion, and long term strategic initiatives at the Columbus Bar thereby creating opportunities for the future creation of a dedicated committee.

In August of 2008, the Columbus Bar employed a new CLE Program Coordinator. Shannon Zee Cross, a recent transplant for Philadelphia, PA and a former Business Manager of the LGBT civil rights non-profit Equality Advocates Pennsylvania, began her first week of work by reviewing the organization’s strategic plan, CLE department plans, member surveys and she read the **Report of the Task Force on Sexual Orientation**. Consistent in the documents, and statistically significant in the member wide survey, was the need for a dedicated LGBT committee, CLE programming to support it and more support in the legal community in general related the LGBT community. Ms. Cross had program development and grassroots organizing experience, and seeing an opportunity to bring a much needed service to the Columbus Bar, she engaged her superiors and asked permission to do an informal feasibility investigation. At their urging she proceeded.

In the time between the publication of the Task Force Report and Ms. Cross’ investigation, a group of law students from two of Central Ohio’s highly regarded law schools approached the Columbus Bar in hopes of supporting the formation of an LGBT committee. These individuals represented two established LGBT student groups and highlighted the fact that there was a current generation, and more to follow, of attorneys that would benefit from the Columbus Bar filling the need for inclusion of LGBT legal professionals.

In short order a working group was formed with the goal of committee creation within a year. This working group included seasoned attorneys that had, almost two decades earlier formed a loose, informal professional network for Ohio LGBT attorneys, young lawyers that simply expected a committee should exist, and attorneys that worked in government posts. The members of the working group had connections with well over a hundred individuals that they were confident would support and participate in an LGBT committee once it was formed.

In December of 2008, with confidence built that an LGBT committee could indeed be formed, and supported, the bar organized the first LGBT focused CLE program to serve as a trial balloon and gauge real participation in activities. The seminar was a success with close to 30 attendees and an interactive environment. In July of 2009, a second seminar featured Lambda Legal’s Midwest Region Senior Staff Attorney Camilla Taylor, the woman responsible for the Iowa marriage equality lawsuit *Varnum v. Brien*, resulting in Iowa becoming the third state in the nation to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples.

In July of 2009, the newly instated Board of Governors President Elizabeth Watters, brought the creation of an LGBT committee to the board as an agenda item for a vote at their annual retreat. Ms. Watters had read the task force report when it was first presented, and was committed to following through with their recommendations. Within a week, the working group met with a board liaison, presented their findings, and provided evidence that such a committee could be sustainable. The liaison presented to the Board of Governors at the August 2009 board retreat. The passage of the formation of an LGBT law committee passed unanimously.

Two chairs of the committee were installed, both were active in the working group, Mr. Travis Jackson and Ms. Carol Ann Fey. Mr. Jackson provided a connection to the young lawyer demographic and carried the support of the large firm, Jones Day. Ms. Fey, a pioneer in co-

custody law for Ohio LGBT families, served as an anchor in the history of Ohio's LGBT legal community.

The committee hosted an official "kick off" networking reception in the Fall of 2009 with nearly 100 lawyers in attendance. Since that time, the committee has convened monthly meetings in which current substantive issues are discussed, created a third CLE seminar, and started outreach to law students in our area universities. During the holiday season, the group partnered with other local minority bar associations for a happy hour and food drive to benefit the Mid-Ohio Foodbank.

Looking to the future, the committee is exploring how to include a mentor program for LGBT law students, investigating the potential of participating as co-sponsor at the annual Ohio Transgender Symposium, and creating a mid-west LGBT law conference within the next five years. The committee will also continue to offer monthly meetings, networking/social activities and CLE programming.

The establishment of this committee, in a city which boasts one of the largest LGBT communities in the US, will no doubt sustain an important minority group, and also has the potential to be a factor in contributing to retention of a talented workforce for Columbus and Central Ohio. Young LGBT legal professionals, seeing that there is fraternity for them may see fit to stay in the city, join the Columbus Bar, and be part of the work of strengthening our profession's capacity for inclusion.

9. Total Program Budget: \$2,000

10. Source of Program Funds: Funds for the program come from the Columbus Bar general committee budget.

11. Other Resources (e.g. inkind contributions, materials): The key resource to the success of this committee is the time donated by the two co-chairs, Attorneys Carol Fey and Travis Jackson. They have donated countless hours to this program from the initial discussion stages to the current operations related to monthly meetings, events and CLE programs. Their contribution of time is critical as the program would not be possible without their expertise and hands-on approach.

12. Identify other "partners" who supported your effort (e.g. bar associations, agencies, high schools/colleges/universities/law schools, law firms, etc.) We received strong support from many attorneys in our community, as well as the two local law schools.

13. Note any recognition that these efforts have received (e.g. media coverage, awards, etc.) To date, the recognition our program has received has been primarily within the legal community as many attorneys and local law students have expressed support for the creation of our committee and for the programs being offered.

14. Could another bar association easily replicate this program? If so, how? Are there materials, checklists, reports that lend themselves to a "how to" guide for other organizations? Please include any pertinent materials with the application form or send separately by e-mail.

Yes, this program could easily be replicated in another city. We have surveys, meeting topics to aid facilitation of discussion, key indicators, and a timeline to follow to go from investigation to

implementation and would be happy to share that information with other bar associations upon request. In addition, our co-chairs and staff members stand ready and willing to share information via email or phone conversations.

15. What suggestions or recommendations would you offer to others who might undertake a similar program?

The Columbus Bar recommends the beginning point of a diversity initiative such as this is to first investigate the community or population that an agency wishes to serve. Using a model of concentric circles, whereby an effort begins with a core group of invested coordinators, it then can expand out to include a wider community through deliberate engagement. Initially, it is best to invite contributors that identify as members of the community you wish to serve to lead the effort into such explorations. This will enable the agency to responsibly capitalize on cultural competencies and perspectives.

Recommended tools for analyzing the needs and existing support for the community of interest include: one-on-one conversations, surveys, consultations from relevant firms and establishment of attainable goals and objectives with timelines. Once connections and a knowledge base are established, maintaining flexibility in thinking of ways to best support the community is important. The service your agency may provide could be a committee, or an ad-hoc group, or producing more CLE programs related to issues of the community.

It is important to know the feasibility of an initiative to ensure success. As such, the agency should have strong leadership to move and maintain the project, a population large enough to support the type of initiative desired, and a strategic, long term vision of the service functions. These components may then be articulated to the appropriate forum for approval in a well planned, visually engaging presentation.

16. Program contact person, title, phone number: Donna Sweet, Committees and Special Events Director, 614-221-4112

17. Program contact person's snail mail and e-mail address: 175 S. Third Street, 11th Floor, Columbus, Ohio 43215 or donna@cbalaw.org

Return by **March 31, 2010** to:

Complete this online form. You can also email your submission as a Word document or as a PDF file to the attention of Kimberly Vann at vannk2@staff.abanet.org. You can view previous award submissions online at www.abanet.org/barserv/partnership. For further information, contact Kimberly Vann, ABA Division for Bar Services, at (312) 988-5364. Thank you for your interest.