

How to Take a Great Idea and Make Your Own Successful Program

By Jill M. Kastner

As a bar leader, you need to think about not only what your group is doing this year but also about what programs you should do next year. Successful programs don't happen overnight. They require careful planning and preparation. Even when you take an idea you learned about from another group, you need to determine how to implement that idea for your own group.

Here are some tips

Step 1: Learn About Other Programs to Get Ideas

You know the ABA YLD puts together great projects that affiliates can take back to their states and communities. Law Day, Wills for Heroes, domestic violence prevention, and this year's *They Had a Dream Too* are being successfully implemented by affiliates around the country.

You also know that you can learn about great projects other affiliates are doing by reading this newsletter, attending ABA YLD conferences, and going to the ABA YLD website. Each year the ABA YLD presents Awards of Achievement for great public and member service projects put on by affiliates. This spring the Affiliate Assistance Team (AAT) will do a podcast that focuses on Award of Achievement recipients and how they put together their projects. At the Spring Conference in St. Thomas, the AAT will have the 2009 award winning applications available for affiliates to view and get ideas.

Step 2: Decide What Program Will Work for Your Affiliate

When deciding what program to implement, there are many things to consider:

- *Cost:* What is your budget? How will you pay for it? Can you get sponsors, partner with other groups, or get other funding, such as an ABA YLD subgrant?
- *Human Resources:* How many members will you need to get the program implemented? What special skills will volunteers need to have? Do you need to form a new committee? Will you be diverting time and energy from another program?
- *Time Line:* How does the new program fit into your bar year? Should you implement the program this year or next?
- *Avoid Duplication:* There may be other groups doing similar programs. You need to know what they are doing so your program doesn't overlap. You also need to know what's been done in the past so you don't reinvent the wheel for something done a few years earlier. Talk to your leadership and staff.
- *Strategic Goals:* Does the program fit into your group's goals? I hate having to do SMART Goals as much as anyone else, but it is an important consideration. You have limited resources. Focus on what is most important to your group and its members.
- *Marketing:* To implement a program successfully, marketing is key! Use all available resources to get information out—newsletters, listservs, website, Facebook, postcards, fliers, and press releases.

Step 3: Before You Commit, Get Feedback and Buy-in from Your Board, Members, and the Big Bar

"It's always a great idea to bring up the idea with a number of different audiences and seek feedback before running with a new program," said Jeana Goosmann, President of the Iowa State Bar Association Young Lawyers Division and member of the AAT. "Discuss the program with your leadership, your bar staff, your council, and former leaders of your affiliate to gain insight on how the program will fit into your organization, how you might learn from past projects, and other resources and people who can help you launch the program. You want to create excitement and buy-in for your new program."

Step 4: Seek Advice

I don't know what it is about lawyers, but too many never want to pick up the phone or shoot an e-mail to another affiliate leader to get their insights.

American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division *The Affiliate*

The ABA YLD has the AAT to provide information and advice to affiliates. Many affiliate leaders are also more than happy to tell you all about their experiences—good and bad.

At the San Francisco Annual Meeting in 2007, the AAT held a panel of the three “Best of the Best YLD Projects.” One project by the Washington YLD was a “Legislative Academy.” After learning about that program, the Iowa YLD went to work to implement its own version. But how did they do it?

“The Iowa leadership contacted the Washington speaker and bar staff,” said Jeanna Goosmann. In January 2010 the Iowa YLD launches its “Legislative Leadership Academy” event. “By attending the ABA YLD affiliate programming, the Iowa YLD leadership generated the idea and learned from another affiliate.”

Making the Program Your Own

By taking the idea from another project and implementing it in your own affiliate, you can’t help but make the program your own. You have different leaders making decisions, “you change the agenda with your own speakers, hold the program at your own unique venue, and at a time that fits into your bar year,” said Goosmann. “You might change the way you promote the program and seek a different target audience.”

By seeking feedback and input before you launch a new program, you will ensure its success for your own unique organization.

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