Introduction

The Individual Rights & Responsibilities Section of the American Bar Association (IRR) was formed in 1966, arising directly from efforts to support the battle for civil rights, which reached a climax during that decade. Through the years, the Section has acted on behalf of the civil and human rights of numerous groups, recognizing the diversity of our profession, our nation, and the world. Our positions have sometimes been unpopular or controversial, yet IRR remains willing to speak for justice, and has often persuaded our association and the public of our cause.

The reputation of the Section has produced a relatively significant level of diversity within its membership and leadership. A Section, however, that strives to represent the complex interests of women; racial, ethnic and religious minorities; seniors; youth; persons with disabilities; gay, lesbian, and transgender people; and immigrants requires a high level of diversity that can inform its positions and advocacy. While we have throughout our history considered diversity, we believe that it is time to follow the lead of other ABA Sections and entities that have developed written diversity plans. We are not satisfied that we have sufficient diversity in our Section, and we dedicate ourselves to doing better.

We support the need for increased diversity in all its aspects and for affirmative action to remedy the lack of diverse representation among our Officers, Council, Committees, and membership. We seek to foster wider representation of historically excluded groups, whether or not they have been the focus of traditional diversity efforts. We recognize that the need to foster diversity is neither temporary nor easy to achieve. It will be difficult to find sufficient diversity in a profession and an association that is striving to increase its own diversity. We will need to make it a priority, be willing to take chances with methods and individuals, and to make diversity a regular part of our ongoing work.

This plan will guide the work of the Section and will be provided to its officers, Council, and Committee Chairs. The plan will also be available to Section members and others interested in the IRR diversity commitment.

GOAL 1. Increase Diversity among Section Officers, Council Members, and Committee Leadership.

STRATEGIES
A. Use Diversity Plan to guide diversity and affirmative action efforts. Make available to all Committee Chairs and Council members and on website. Address its implications in filling every leadership position, in appointing planning panels, in addressing speaking opportunities, and in choosing meeting or event sites.

B. Diversity Committee will work with Executive Committee and Committee Chairs to identify underrepresented groups and possible candidates for Committee Leadership positions. These recommendations will be reported to the incoming Chair at the Annual Meeting.

C. Diversity Committee will work with Chair and Executive Committee to prepare affirmative action goals for the Officer and Council. Those goals must include fostering more diversity on the Nominating Committee. Nominating Committee will then consider these goals and attempt to recruit appropriate candidates. Committee's report will include progress in meeting these goals.

D. Committee Chairs will receive Diversity Plan and will report on efforts to increase diversity of all groups in committee membership.

E. 2 Council positions have been added to increase diversity on the Council. Positions are reserved for identified under-represented groups and/or representatives of minority bar associations.

F. Diversity Committee and the Executive Committee will organize a diversity discussion and training session for Committee Chairs, Council members, and other interested parties annually.

GOAL 2. Increase Diversity in the Section Membership. **

STRATEGIES

A. Hold events targeting minority lawyer and minority bar participation at Annual and Midyear Meetings, in D.C., and in other locations.

B. If practical, hold meetings in locations that will bring Section into greater contact with various minority communities and other groups. This will include specific sites, such as Howard University Law School, as well as cities or regions.

C. Participate in Minority Bar Association annual conventions and other significant events, both socially and on panels and other participation.

D. Some time at each meeting will be set aside for a presentation on a particular diversity issue or need.

E. Seek lists of minority and other diverse lawyers to pursue with targeted direct mail.

F. Develop outreach efforts to minority law student organizations and at law schools.

G. Develop programs cosponsored with Young Lawyer and Law Student Divisions aimed at minority lawyers, and involving minority lawyers.
GOAL 3. Value and Respect Diversity in all Section Operations and Activities. Communicate Diversity Values and Issues that Speak to the Civil and Human Rights of All.

STRATEGIES

A. Respect all members of the Council and Committees. Effort will be made to overcome any appearance of “insider” bias in Council or Committees.

B. Around each Council meeting, an informal get-together for minority members will be arranged and participation encouraged.

C. Every panel or presentation will consider diversity and will make an effort to go beyond usual participants.

D. Develop publications and/or portions of existing publications to demonstrate commitment to diverse programs and leadership.

E. Consider ways to overcome regional bias created by D.C.-based meetings, including possible meetings in other cities or piggybacking with minority or other events (such as the LavenderLaw Conference) that will enhance diverse attendance.

F. Consider Fellowships or scholarships to bring in new members, depending upon available resources to offset cost of meeting attendance. Where hotel costs are higher, consider developing more affordable locations.

G. Take the time to work out difficulties when they occur. Provide forum for Council or Committee members to raise issues relating to diversity. Secure the commitment of Officers to create opportunities for private airing of such issues for those concerned about confidentiality.

H. Whenever a Council or Committee member resigns or whose terms involve leaving a body, have an exit interview with member or officer to get feedback from departing member’s point of view.

I. Collect and disseminate additional information on Council members: their communities, backgrounds and other activities.

STRATEGIES

A. Diversity Committee will present at each Council Meeting at the Annual Meeting a report on the Section’s progress in achieving diversity and making recommendations for improvements in the coming year. Council will discuss and approve any changes to the Diversity Plan.

B. Proposals to adjust Diversity Plans can be made at any time, subject to approval by the Council. Diversity Plan implementation or goals can be adjusted as appropriate throughout the year to accommodate changes as they occur.

**Membership Committee will take the lead on membership efforts, coordination with Diversity Committee.**