

CHAPTER 18: DEVELOPING CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

As Chair-elect, then as Chair, you are responsible for establishing and developing relationships with other organizations in the legal profession and the community, particularly your senior bar counterpart. Because most state and local young lawyer organizations are divisions or sections of senior bar organizations, the suggestions below apply to all types of relationships between young lawyer groups and their senior bar counterparts. Nevertheless, there are some local and state young lawyer organizations that are independent, and are not part of a senior bar. Even independent organizations, however, need to cultivate relationships with other bar associations and other organizations within the community, and the suggested courses of action are equally applicable to these relationships.

In order to have a more effective year as chair, you will want to cultivate and maintain good relations and communications with a number of organizations.

1. The ABA/YLD

The ABA/YLD can be a tremendous source of information and inspiration. ABA/YLD staff members can provide information on funding and grant opportunities, program and project ideas or problems common to young lawyer affiliates. For example, through its Affiliate Outreach Project, the ABA/YLD runs an annual grant competition through which it provides subgrants to young lawyer affiliated organizations for their public and members service programs. Each year, a letter soliciting participation in the competition is sent to all affiliates. Priority is given to projects providing services to the public that are not currently being provided in the community. Special consideration is also given to first time applicants or to small affiliates with little current programming.

The ABA/YLD Fall and Spring Conferences provide opportunities for affiliates to share ideas on public service projects. To the extent feasible, you should encourage your board members and committee chairs to attend the ABA/YLD's conferences. As an affiliate leader, you should plan to attend as many ABA/YLD conferences as possible. It is important to your local or state young lawyers group that you are known within the ABA/YLD as an effective leader. The meetings are fun as well as educational and offer an excellent opportunity to meet young lawyer leaders from all over the country.

Each year, the ABA/YLD conducts an awards of achievement competition and invites its affiliated young lawyer organizations to submit information on their overall programming, their best public service program, their best service to the bar program, and the best minority project and affiliate newsletters. The applications are evaluated by a panel of young lawyer judges during the ABA's Annual Meeting and awards are given to the most outstanding programs and projects in categories that take into account the size of the bar association and whether it serves a state or local area. The national recognition accorded award winners is excellent reinforcement for the efforts of the young lawyers involved in the activity and also provides effective publicity with senior bar organizations.

Another valuable resource is your ABA/YLD District Representative. He or she can provide valuable information on activities throughout the ABA/YLD. You may want to invite your “District Rep” to a council meeting to have an opportunity to meet with him or her and ask questions about activities and resources available through the ABA/YLD and activities of other affiliates in the District Rep’s area of representation.

You may also want to invite your District Rep to attend your first organizational and planning meeting with your officers and executive committee.

2. Young Lawyer Affiliates Within Your State

Your young lawyers organization may be a section or division of a state or local bar, or it may be independent. Nevertheless, you need to develop close contacts with the leaders of your state bar.

If you are a division or section of a state bar, then the need for strong communications and ties with the bar’s governing bodies is obvious. This relationship affects your independence, power and income stream. You need to meet with the leaders of the statewide bar, attend the meetings, volunteer your organization for activities and events, and follow through, much in the same way that you develop a relationship with your senior bar.

A statewide young lawyers organization should also take responsibility for providing membership-oriented and public service projects on a statewide basis through affiliating with local young lawyer organizations. It must be willing and able to draw ideas and manpower from the local young lawyers group that are successful, assess the needs of those groups requiring more help, and support and encourage those holding their own. The statewide young lawyer organization should concern itself with the needs of young lawyers in localities that have no young lawyer organization. Also, a young lawyers organization at the state level should originate attempts to coordinate the efforts of the local young lawyer groups and to provide settings for group meetings and conferences. Information can more easily pass through the group if the statewide young lawyers section keeps it moving.

The statewide young lawyers section may also be in a position to provide funding for certain local projects that could not otherwise be undertaken. A word of caution is also in order, however. Statewide organizations are in the best position to develop the affiliate network within their states, but they must be careful that they are not perceived as trying to take over territory that belongs to the local bar or as trying to steal the accolades that should be going to the local bar. The statewide organization that learns to walk the fine line between supporting local programming and trying to take over can significantly enhance the public service and service to the bar programming that occurs throughout the state.