

ABA YLD Subgrants: Untapped Resource for Affiliate Funding

By Justin L. Heather

The American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division (ABA YLD), in conjunction with the ABA Fund for Justice and Education (ABA FJE), awards approximately \$25,000 annually to ABA YLD affiliates to support member and public service projects. The ABA YLD Subgrants Program is designed to promote projects developed by ABA YLD affiliates “by providing support through program funding.” The program represents a substantial source of critical funding to support the many public and member service projects performed by ABA YLD affiliates. This article provides a general overview of the ABA YLD Subgrants Program and tips for successfully applying for such funding.

What Is the ABA YLD Subgrants Program?

Over the past seventeen years, the ABA YLD Subgrants Program has provided more than \$530,000 to support ABA YLD affiliate-sponsored activities. As a result of the program, affiliates have implemented more than 500 different member and public service projects. In 2009 alone, the ABA YLD Subgrants Program awarded approximately \$28,000 to support thirty-four affiliate projects for the 2009–2010 bar year. The ABA YLD intends to award another \$25,000 this year to help support projects for the 2010–2011 bar year. This source of substantial funding for such projects, however, is an often overlooked and untapped resource.

The ABA YLD Subgrants Program provides funding to young lawyer organizations for activities that benefit local communities, bar leaders, and other lawyers. Subgrants are available for two categories of programming: public service projects and bar leadership/member service projects. Public service projects can receive up to \$2,000 per subgrant. Bar leadership/member service projects can get up to \$500.

Approximately 125 different affiliates have taken advantage of the ABA YLD Subgrants Program. The types of projects carried out with support from the program are as varied as the affiliates themselves. Public service projects include, among many others, those designed to combat domestic violence, inform youth regarding the legal system and their rights, and efforts to assist the elderly. Member service projects conducted by ABA YLD affiliates likewise cover a broad spectrum of topics, including legal guides addressing both general local practice and specific areas of law, networking programs, and diversity initiatives.

Lesley Pate Marlin, a member of the ABA YLD Subgrants and Awards of Achievement Team, noted that “applications [for 2009] far exceeded the amount of money the ABA YLD had to give to affiliates.” Thus, assuming the past year’s situation continues, Lesley further explained that affiliates must understand and follow the rules and guidelines for the ABA YLD Subgrant Program to maximize their chances of success in obtaining a subgrant.

Applying for ABA YLD Subgrants

Every ABA YLD affiliate that needs additional funding for a member or public service project for the upcoming bar year should look into applying for a subgrant. In the present economy, the need for member and public service projects is at an all-time high. Because many affiliates are experiencing budget constraints and decreasing sponsorships, the ABA YLD Subgrants Program can be the difference in whether an affiliate is able to implement a particular project.

Detailed information and guidelines for applying for an ABA YLD subgrant are available on-line at www.abanet.org/yld/awards/subgrants. Successful proposals should include well-defined and achievable goals, collaboration with minority or senior bar associations, inclusion of underrepresented or diverse groups, original and unique activi-

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ties, and projects that can be replicated elsewhere. In addition, this year, the website provides a sample successful application that the subgrants team encourages every applicant to review before submitting their request for funding.

“This year we included a sample of an application that was highly rated,” said Lesley. “A standard format makes it easier to judge competing projects on their merits.”

In addition to the materials regarding the ABA YLD Subgrants Program found on the website, Gina Sadler, ABA YLD Finance Administrator, and Lesley provide a few further suggestions. Gina noted the importance of attorney involvement in the member and public service projects forming the basis for the application. Lesley agreed.

“The Team wants to see that the project has some connection to the legal world.” Lesley explained, “A project with more of a legal connection may be the deciding factor if and when tough funding choices have to be made.”

Lesley and Gina also agreed that while the Team wants to see the total costs or budget for the project, affiliates must be mindful of what expenses or activities cannot be funded. The program does not fund such things as refreshments, meeting rental space, and travel reimbursement.

In short, the ABA YLD Subgrants Program represents an excellent, and somewhat untapped, source of funding for affiliate public and member service projects. Interested affiliates should review the program by visiting www.abanet.org/yld/awards/subgrants and make sure to get their applications in by March 1, 2010.

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