

Developing Successful Collaborations with Other Bar Associations

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The Mission

- Why do it?
 - Improve your financial bottom line
 - Gain a larger audience share
 - Enhance each organization's reputation
 - Provide enhancements to the legal community
 - Advance justice

- What to collaborate on?
 - CLE programs
 - Other local events (e.g., joint dinners or recreational activities)
 - Projects that benefit members of both groups (e.g., diversity clerkship program)
 - Legislation
 - Governmental issues: constitutional convention, court reorganization
 - Judicial evaluations

The Set-Up

- Request collaboration early
 - Create a straightforward statement of organizational goals for both associations.
 - Provide early-issue identification (roles, logistics, final takeaways).
 - Confirm through early agreement who does what.
 - Maintain a truly “collaborative” experience – one that benefits the mission of both bar associations.

- Provide regular communication on issues both great and small.

The Resources

- Outcomes depend on volunteer vs. staffed associations, as well as respective sizes.
 - Different bars of different sizes will have different processes and sense of time.
 - The same applies to financial resources, the number and kind of contacts each bar group has, as well as statewide or local connections.
 - The likelihood is staffed or larger bars have the capacity and processes to do more.
 - Similarly, the likelihood is staffed and / or larger associations may have the facilities and equipment useful for the project in development. This should be addressed early and with clarity among both associations.
 - Both bar groups can do marketing. Early agreement on marketing plan and marketing content is critical.
 - Each bar may have different capabilities for follow-up. It might be easier for staffed bars to do regular follow-up (before, during and after the event or project).

The Challenges

- Barriers
 - Incompatibility in structural capabilities
 - Different pricing models – e.g., bars that charge for CLE programs vs. bars that offer free CLE for its members.
 - Not knowing the history: What is the past relationship, if any, between partnering associations?

- What to avoid
 - Inviting collaboration too late in the process
 - Competing for members of each other's association
 - Assuming perceptions of the other bar (either by the other partner and / or potential audience) that may be rooted in relationship history or the status and reputation of each organization [the “bully” on the block, a bar that is non-communicative, etc.]
 - Appropriating the “sweet spot” of the partnering bar (e.g., taking on programs and events already well covered by women and affinity bar groups, a big bar “invading” another’s “territory” without mutual advantage)
 - Scheduling events that conflict with other bars’ events (including CLEs)

- How to build relationships between bars of different size
 - Treat each other as of equal weight in the partnership
 - The larger and better resourced bar resists the temptation to throw weight around or just do things because that’s how it’s been done. Both bars work to maintain a truly collaborate relationship.

The Results

- A collaboration that lasts
 - Equal, professional relationship – mutual respect, positive interactions during the process, open communication
 - Goals of both orgs. achieved (or, if not, both fall short equally)

- Those that don’t simply fail to address the challenges or construct a respectful, mutually beneficial relationship.

For more information, contact the [New York State Bar Association Office of Bar Services](#) (518.487.5540).

