

# Ideas for Initiatives in 2016

by Jeremy Smith



*Jeremy D. Smith is an associate in the business litigation practice group at Thompson Hine LLP in Dayton, Ohio. Smith is the Membership Chair of the Dayton Chapter and a member of the National Younger Lawyers Division Board. He is a graduate of Otterbein College and the Notre Dame Law School.*

From 2013 through 2015, I served as the chair of the Younger Lawyers Division for the Dayton, Ohio, Chapter of the Federal Bar Association. The Dayton Chapter has experienced significant growth in the past few years, and one of our goals during this period was to have a more active Younger Lawyers Division. Fortunately we were able to accomplish this goal, and I attribute that success primarily to three things: applying for programming grants, volunteering, and increasing coordination with our local law student chapter.

I know there are Younger Lawyers Divisions who are looking for new activities for their chapters outside of the occasional happy hour (all due respect to the occasional happy hour). I recommend these three initiatives that the Younger Lawyers Division of your chapter can lead. Our chapter has found each to be successful and enjoyable, and I hope yours does, too.

### Apply for a Community Outreach Grant

First, if your chapter is interested in more programming, I suggest applying for a Community Outreach Grant from the Foundation of the Federal Bar Association. This program was started in 2011 to support chapters' participation in community service or community outreach projects. Under this program, local chapters apply to the Foundation for a grant to fund any project that meets the Foundation's mission, which is to "promote and support legal research and education; advance the science of jurisprudence; facilitate the administration of justice; [and] foster improvements in the practice of federal law."

In 2015, the Dayton Chapter used a Community Outreach Grant to host an event for the Clemency Project 2014. The Clemency Project assists certain federal prisoners in submitting petitions to commute their sentences. Under criteria released by the Justice Department, prisoners are eligible for a clemency petition if they are serving a federal sentence that would be substantially shorter if imposed today, have a nonviolent history, have served at least 10 years, have no significant prior convictions, and have demonstrated good conduct in prison. The Clemency Project has, at any given time, fewer than five employees and is responsible for reviewing thousands of petitions each year. In July 2015, the Dayton Chapter hosted Cynthia

Roseberry, executive director of the Clemency Project. Roseberry spoke about the Clemency Project's needs for volunteers and monetary donations. David Singleton, the executive director of the Ohio Justice and Policy Center, spoke about his experience with clemency petitions in Ohio state courts and encouraged those in attendance to volunteer.

Our chapter found this experience to be rewarding in several respects. First, members of the Younger Lawyers Division worked together to pick a project, complete the application, and—after we were awarded the grant—to plan the event. Second, it provided an opportunity for all members of our chapter to get together for an evening and learn about a program many of us were unfamiliar with. Third, because the grant allowed us to host high-profile speakers, we were able to attract members from our neighboring chapters (Cincinnati and Columbus), which allowed for a unique networking opportunity.

Other chapters have used Community Outreach Grants to host a wide variety of programs, for example:

- Creating a mentorship program to support the newly created federal drug court in Charleston, S.C., known as the Bridge Program (South Carolina Chapter, 2016);
- Sponsoring a civics program for middle school students designed to introduce students to members of the judiciary and help them understand and appreciate the rights and responsibilities of citizenship (Eastern District of New York Chapter, 2016);
- Hosting a "Women In The Law" Conference that included panel discussions centering on the hurdles to women's leadership in the legal profession and strategies for overcoming those challenges (San Diego Chapter, 2015); and
- Hosting a Pro Bono Promotion lunch that identified available federal pro bono opportunities, highlighted the value of participation to attorneys, and recognized volunteers with exceptional contributions (Orange County Chapter, 2014).

I highly recommend applying for a Community Outreach Grant—this is a great way for a Younger Lawyers Division to obtain funding for programming

that will be beneficial to the entire chapter. Applicants can apply for Community Outreach Grants by downloading and completing the Foundation's application from its webpage. The Foundation awards Community Outreach Grants twice a year: Aug. 31 (application due June 15) and Feb. 28 (application due Dec. 15 of the previous year).

### Volunteer

Lawyers have a reputation for working lots of hours in a stressful environment. Wouldn't it be great if you could provide members of your chapter with an activity that (1) made them feel like they had more free time, (2) is positively linked with physical and mental well-being, (3) benefits the community, and (4) is free? You can do just that by identifying and promoting volunteer opportunities in your community.

In 2015, the Dayton Chapter sponsored two Habitat for Humanity build projects organized by the University of Dayton School of Law (UDSL). Both build projects helped Dayton residents obtain affordable and necessary housing. One house was for a lifelong Dayton resident who had previously been unable to find affordable housing with the proper equipment to keep her warm during cold Ohio winters. Another was for a woman who had previously found it impossible to obtain housing with the requisite amenities for her handicapped son. Members from our Younger Lawyers Division assisted in both build projects, which included painting and some light construction.

We found volunteering to be an enjoyable and easy way to give back to the community in ways that do not present themselves to most attorneys during regular business hours. I strongly encourage Younger Lawyers Divisions to find volunteer opportunities for their chapters.

### Increase Law Student Membership and Collaboration

Finally, I suggest finding ways to boost law student membership in your local student chapters as well as increasing collaboration between the Younger Lawyers Division and the local law student chapters.

Fortunately, the Dayton Chapter is close in proximity to the UDSL, which has a very active law student chapter. Over the past several years, we have taken a number of steps to integrate the UDSL Chapter with the Dayton Chapter. First, we invite the UDSL Chapter's executive officers to our monthly board meetings. On several occasions, we have actually held our monthly meetings at the law school.

Second, we have held an annual Younger Lawyers Division panel at UDSL. Each panel has had five to six attorneys from different practice groups who vary in experience from one year of practice to up to 10 years. The law students typically ask the panel about a wide range of topics—from interview advice and networking tips to substantive practical and legal issues. Our Younger Lawyers Division members have found these panels to be enjoyable, and the law students have found them to be very informative.

Third, the Dayton Chapter hosts an annual Summer Associate Reception. This event allows all of our local law firms and government offices to bring their summer associates and clerks together for cocktails, appetizers, and networking. We have found this to be a very successful event; it's also a good way to introduce law students who are from out of town to our local chapter.

Most chapters are close to at least one law school, and making an effort to increase collaboration between student members and Younger Lawyers Division members can be mutually beneficial, providing numerous networking opportunities with local practicing attorneys to law students, while also exposing law students to the benefits of joining the FBA—particularly given that each law student membership comes with one year of post-graduation membership at no additional cost. If a Younger Lawyers Division can successfully increase collaboration between their chapter and the local law student division, it will increase the chances that law students will become members of the chapter after graduation and, eventually, become the next leaders of the Younger Lawyers Division. ☺

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