

Board Member Training

The training will seek to accomplish four goals:

First, every board member will have a common base of information about the history of legal services delivery generally and about MVLS staff and program history specifically.

Second, every board member will understand the roles and responsibilities of a legal services board member to the program, the staff, the community, and the clients.

Third, each board member will have, through group discussion and exposure to communication skills, the opportunity to identify and resolve barriers to effective participation as an individual board member.

Fourth, each participant will understand his or her specific assignments and responsibilities as a member of the board of directors.

In the sample agenda below, the sessions are arranged independently in the preferred order of delivery.

Board Member Training: Sample Agenda¹

Legal Services: program history and information [2 hours]: The participants will learn the history of legal services generally and the history of MVLS specifically. The session will combine lecture and participation by using the history time line, in which, guided by a trainer, the group will chart significant developments nationally, locally, and personally. Each board member will discuss the values and commitments that led that member to service on the board.

Basics of Boards [3 hours]: The participants will learn the basic roles and responsibilities of legal services board members. The session will focus in particular on effective program planning, hiring and supervising an executive director, monitoring program services and finances, setting policies for priority setting and the allocation of resources, and assessing program performance. The session will also cover the role of the board in fostering staff and board diversity, in fundraising and in labor relations. Finally, the participants will learn how to develop a mission statement.

From the general, the board members will then learn the specifics of MVLS board membership. The session will cover the program's current priorities and mission statement, the program's by-laws and committees, the current staff, and the program's financial data including its budget, expenses, and funding sources. The handouts will describe each standing committee of the board and outline its task and responsibilities, membership, meeting schedules, and staff liaison.

Hiring an executive director [2 hours]: Many people believe that the single most important function of a board of directors is the exercise of its responsibility to hire an executive director. At this session, the participants will learn and evaluate the criteria that other legal services boards

¹ The examples listed are for MVLS, which would be the pilot program, but can be used generically.

have found useful to employ in the selection process, the use of outside consultants and the value of diversity in the selection process, arrange for staff or other support sufficient to handle the logistics of the selection process, and create an action plan for the hiring process. In this discussion, the board members will discuss and agree upon the roles and responsibilities of the executive director and the skills required of the successful candidate.

Board Agenda Planning [2 hours]: This session will be a formal meeting of the Board of Directors at which the participants will decide and agree upon the [calendar year] of board and committee meetings, all committee memberships and individual assignments and responsibilities, and set time lines for important goals such as the hiring of an executive director, the setting of priorities in service delivery, and the completion of an integrated plan for fundraising.

Making use of your time: effective board participation [1.5 hours]: In this interactive session, the participants will learn how to identify and handle barriers to effective board participation, how to run productive meetings, and how to develop and use resources to advance the program's primary function of delivering legal services to low income people.

Ongoing: Mini sessions [15-30 minutes per board meeting]: The following sessions, in most cases, will be led by an experienced board member, the executive director, or an accomplished staff person.

Basics of budgets: The board will learn how to read and analyze the program's fiscal information with an eye towards improving its fiscal oversight. The board's audit committee members will lead this session.

Priority setting: The board will learn the expectations of the Legal Services Corporation, the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation, and other funding sources with respect to priority setting and, together with the executive director, set the board's goals for priority setting.

Program planning: How does a program use the results of priority setting in an effective manner. The board will discuss and approve the overall planning process for MVLS.

Fundraising: What is the board's role in fundraising? Who does it and how? This session will be led by member's of the board's fundraising committee.

Constituent groups: An MVLS staff member will lead each session by describing the substantive area that MVLS provides representation in, who the client groups are, and what the representation accomplishes. If possible, an MVLS client or community agency representative will also appear at each session.