

Handbook for Local Bar Associations

**Produced as part of
The Mississippi Bar's Local Bar Initiative**



**Presented By:
Professionalism Committee for the Mississippi Bar**

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Introduction

In my year of President of the Mississippi Bar, one of my objectives was to assist the local bar associations of our state. As part of that process, we met with the presidents of the local bars this year and last to allow each to share their success stories and ideas. The Professionalism Committee also investigated other initiatives of successful local bar associations. The result of those efforts is this handbook, which packages those ideas into a pamphlet designed to give each local bar a roadmap for greater success in the years to come.

Local bar associations are incredibly important. They are a wonderful ground for attorneys to forge professional relationships and connections. They provide the optimal chance for networking, since most offer regular luncheons, mixers, and forums for attorney to interact. They are great places for mentorship – a spot where seasoned lawyers often guide and support newer members, sharing advice, experiences, and a helping hand. They also offer opportunities to obtain continuing legal education, to serve the community on projects, and to assist with statewide projects. Participation also offers lawyers the chance to simply become known in the legal community.

Local bars provide opportunities for lawyers of any practice to meet and get to know one another, and the camaraderie of lawyers at the local level is a key driver of civility and professionalism in any legal community. The more connected the lawyers of Mississippi are with one another, the greater the promotion of the concepts of civility and professionalism, and that increased strength and connection in the local bars equals increased strength and connection of the state bar.

We hope this handbook will be a valuable aid in promoting and strengthening all the local bar associations throughout the state.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Meade W. Mitchell', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Meade W. Mitchell
MS Bar President – 2024-25

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'John T. Rouse', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

John T. Rouse
Chair, MS Bar Professionalism Committee – 2024-25

Organizational Aids

Local Bar Dues -- Range from \$25-\$120 with some including the price of lunch.

Meetings -- Most local meetings are CLE events with speakers, monthly or quarterly. Local Associations note better attendance when continuing education credit is provided. Having strong judicial attendance can also increase member involvement. Speaker ideas include judges, elected officials, candidates during election season, local businesspersons in the news and charitable organization leaders.

Meeting venue – Most associations maintain the same venue for consistent attendance with alternating menus.

Activities Outside of Meetings –

- Socials
 - Spring, Fall, Summer, and/or Holiday
 - Restaurant Meet Up
 - Ticketed Happy Hour
 - Holiday parties with bands and catered hor d'oeuvres
 - Family Night (Baseball game, Topgolf)
- Legal Aid Clinics (expungements, wills, family matters)
- Essay Contest for middle school students in connection with ABA Law Day (Capital Area Bar Association - “CABA”)
- Themis Law Camp for high school students (Lee County)
- Boy Scout Law Badge project
- Golf Tournament
- Tennis Tournament
- Pickle Ball Tournament
- Judiciary Dinner/Event
- 5k Run/Walk (CABA Legal Beagle)
- Cooking Contest (Trustmark Red Beans & Rice Festival)
- Newsletters (quarterly)
- Service Projects (Beautification, Toy Drive, Adopt a Mile, Mentoring with local schools)
- Attorney Composites (some local bars have composites in courthouses. Composites are normally free for the local bar)
- Attorney Directory (CABA – this is usually a paid publication)

Communications –

E-mail. Usually, the main form of communication between local bar leadership and members. Local bar associations’ practices range from e-mails that simply advertise meetings/events to regularly published emailed newsletters.

Most local bar associations include all attorneys in the county on the e-mail communications or all collected e-mail addresses whether they have paid dues or not. Some larger associations like CABA and Jackson Young Lawyers (“JYL”) only send e-mail communications to dues paying members.

Social Media. Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn. Local bar associations use these to advertise upcoming events and engage with members by posting pictures from meetings they can share. Larger associations like CABA and JYL use a vendor for their social media presence.

Newsletters. CABA and JYL provide e-newsletters to dues paying members.

Websites. CABA and JYL have websites with meeting information, past newsletters, and upcoming events. There are vendors that can create simple websites.

Bylaws

Creating bylaws for a local bar association for the first time is a good opportunity to lay a solid foundation for the organization's structure, governance, and purpose.

Local Examples:

- Capital Area Bar Association’s Bylaws provide a great example of the structure needed for a larger group. Available at <https://caba.ms/assets/downloads/caba-revised-bylaws.pdf>
- The Madison County Bar Association’s Bylaws provide a simpler example for a smaller organization. Their Bylaws can be obtained directly from the Madison County Bar on request.

Membership Outreach Strategies

Attracting new members for a local bar is vital. Below are some ideas and strategies to accomplishing this in furtherance of cultivating the vitality of your local bar community.

Promotion – Promotion is key. There are many ways to promote a local bar. These include social media (Facebook, etc.), email correspondence, text message groups, and, perhaps most importantly, word of mouth. As lawyers, it is possible that many experience “email fatigue” of some variety due to the hundreds of emails many lawyers deal with on a daily/weekly basis. Oftentimes, the most effective way of inviting new members is picking up the telephone and extending a personal invitation. Asking existing bar members to do the same and having each one invite two or three potential members, is an excellent way to “get the word out.” Promulgation at larger bar events, such as the annual Bar meeting, can also present an opportunity to invite and promote local bar membership.

Discount Memberships – Offering discount memberships can be a fantastic way to attract new members. Some local bar associations offer a \$25 or \$50 discount for the first one or two years of membership. This can often be a terrific way to appeal to new members: through their pocketbook!

Getting Young Lawyers Involved – Having young lawyers involved in a local bar is especially important to ensuring that the local bar association will endure for years to come. Some local bars give discounted memberships to new lawyers. Others have endeavored to arrange “take a lawyer to lunch” programs to connect more seasoned lawyers, or lawyers with greater than five years of experience, to young lawyers who are new to the area or fresh out of law school. Also, having a relationship with the “young lawyers” bar association is a great way to bridge the gap and make connections with young lawyers who may be involved in the “young lawyers” community, as well as the bar community as a whole.

Swearing In Ceremonies – Attendance and promulgation at swearing in ceremonies can be an effective way to “get the word out” concerning local bar associations. Some young lawyers, fresh out of law school, may not have heard of local bar associations, nor even know they exist. Displays, pamphlets, handouts, and membership forms at the ceremony can be a wonderful way to attract new lawyers who are eager to build relationships, advance their careers, and network. Local bar associations can offer great opportunities for this. Aside from furthering a career trajectory, having local bar associations available as a way for lawyers to reach out to lawyers and build a community of comradery, fraternity, fellowship, and civility is something that all local bar associations can aspire to achieve.

Firm Leaders Encourage Membership – Having firm leaders encourage membership can be instrumental in fostering new membership. When the managing partner calls up the new associate and invites him or her to the local bar meeting, this is a great motivator. It can also be a great way to build a team environment outside of the office. It also affords potential members an opportunity to learn and observe relationship building and community by seasoned lawyers who are their

mentors and teachers. It has been said that “the practice of law is not for the faint of heart.” Having firm leaders and leaders in the local bar community reach out to new potential members can be a great way to build solidarity and express that “you are not alone!”

Member Benefits – Meetings and dues include meals, which is a terrific way to invite members of the local legal community to gather for a local bar meeting. Typically, these meetings take place during the lunch hour.

- Local Judges often involve themselves with the local bar as well. By being involved, a lawyer can network with the Judges in an area so not to be a stranger in the next appearance before the Judges.
- Attorneys are specialists. Criminal Defense Attorneys do not handle Wills, and Bankruptcy Attorneys do not handle car wrecks. By becoming involved with a local bar, local practitioners know an area of expertise for possible referrals.
- Every attorney in Mississippi is required to get a certain amount of CLE hours. Attendance at Local Bar events is an effective way to get these hours. Attorneys are always open to gaining continuing education hours, especially through events such as panels and guest speakers that can be a part of the lunches.
- Just like attorneys advocate for clients, local bar associations advocate for members of the legal profession everywhere. Attorneys spend most of the time concerned about client’s issues and forget to consider fellow attorneys. Spending time with the local bar provides a chance to be clued in to current issues and events facing the legal community, and how to advocate the profession.
- Being a member of a local bar association is a terrific addition to a resume; it often stands out when looking for jobs or internships. It shows a commitment to being a part of your community as well as a successful practitioner.
- Local bar associations actively encourage involvement in community service initiatives. From pro bono legal assistance to outreach programs, these associations facilitate opportunities for attorneys to give back to their communities. Engaging in such initiatives not only aids the underprivileged but also enhances the association’s positive impact and visibility within the community.

Ideas for Effective Programming

A well-organized local bar association with structured meetings, continuing education offerings, community outreach, mentorship, and social activities will foster a more connected and impactful legal community.

Meeting Structure and Frequency – a local bar association should adopt a consistent meeting schedule to ensure effective communication and planning. Meetings can have various purposes: meetings early in the year can be to plan events for the year. Meetings in the middle of the year can consist of events such as continuing education or speakers. The last meeting of the year should be used to recap the successes and challenges of the last year and to elect officers and plan for the next year.

All associations are different, and the meeting frequency may vary depending on the number of members. For larger or more active associations monthly meetings may be appropriate. For smaller or less active bars, quarterly meetings may be more appropriate. The key is a meeting schedule that is publicized and maintained. The goal is to establish or develop a routine of meetings which will help develop a culture of involvement.

The key is to not let the perfect be the enemy of the good. Start small if necessary. Every meeting, event, or engagement that is sponsored by the bar association builds commitment and exposure. Even if a particular meeting is not as well attended or an event is not as successful as the membership would like, the key is to maintain the consistency and continuity of the association.

Continuing Legal Education (CLE) Programs – Continuing education programs are an excellent program for local bar associations. They provide a low-cost way for practitioners to gather, socialize or network, and obtain required CLE hours. The CLE does not have to be a daylong event (although that is certainly an option) but could be over the lunch hour at a local restaurant.

Potential CLE Speakers:

- Judges
 - Federal and Appellate Judges
 - Local Circuit, County, Municipal and Chancery Court Judges
- Local Prosecutors at U.S. Attorney and District Attorney Levels
- Mississippi Bar Leaders
- Elected officials
- Candidates for public office
- Local authors of legal publications
- Local Authors including Non-Legal Writers
- Newspaper Editors, Writers, and Illustrators
- Practicing attorneys with specialized knowledge
- Speakers, Rotary and other Civic Leadership, and City and County Leaders

- Thinking out of the Box Speakers such as Entertainers, Inspirational

Instructions for CLE Approval:

The Mississippi Supreme Court website has all the information needed to apply for accreditation of CLE credits.

- Mississippi Application for Accreditation of Continuing Legal Education. Available at: https://courts.ms.gov/cle_bccr/uniformapp.pdf
- Frequently Asked Questions about Continuing Legal Education. Available at: [\[https://courts.ms.gov/cle_bccr/clefaq.php\]](https://courts.ms.gov/cle_bccr/clefaq.php)

Outreach Programs to Increase Community Engagement – While meetings and continuing education provide an opportunity for lawyers to network and interact, community outreach programs help foster goodwill and educate the public about the legal system. Every local bar association can have some event that allows members to interact with the broader community. Below are examples of events that local bar associations have sponsored. However, it may be that the local bar association is not large enough or active enough to actually sponsor an event. In that case, the local bar membership could participate as a group in a community activity sponsored by another group. For example, participating in a 5K put on by a local non-profit as a group – perhaps with matching shirts referencing the bar association. Other examples could include neighborhood clean-up days, volunteering with habitat for humanity or other organizations.

Examples include:

- **Legal Clinics:** Free public events offering legal advice in areas like family law, landlord/tenant disputes, or estate planning.
- **Golf Tournament:** Fundraising and networking opportunity; proceeds can support scholarships or legal aid.
- **5K Race:** Example – JYL Legal Beagle; promotes visibility and raises funds for community causes.
- **Essay Contest:** Example – CABA’s essay contest for middle school students to write on legal topics.
- **Law Camp:** Example – Lee County’s high school law camp introduces students to the legal profession.
- **Judicial Dinner:** Example – CABA’s formal dinner honoring the judiciary; opportunity to strengthen bench-bar relations.

Mentorship Programs for New Lawyers – Mentorship initiatives support the development of young attorneys. Mentorship programs can assist in professional development of young lawyers by building their confidence and competence and by encouraging the mentees to stay engaged in the local community and to become a mentor themselves one day.

Although mentorship programs have tremendous upsides, these types of programs should be developed prior to implementation. Having a mentorship program on paper that is structured is better than no program at all. At the initial planning meeting, there should be discussions about the expectations of both the mentors and mentees. Discuss how to match mentors and mentees, and how to monitor that the mentorship is living up to its possibilities. Consider appointing a board that can monitor progress, address issues that arise, and collect feedback.

- Match new lawyers with experienced practitioners
- Schedule quarterly mentorship check-ins
- Host joint events to encourage informal networking and guidance
- Provide resources and tips for navigating early legal careers

Socials – Social events build camaraderie and strengthen the local legal community.

- **Socials:** Can be restaurants or any inexpensive venue (Country Club, Tennis Club, Yacht Club)
- **Holiday Parties:** Annual gatherings during December; can be formal or casual
- **Black Tie Events:** Example – Warren County’s formal holiday party
- **Fall and Spring Socials:** Informal mixers or receptions

Family Events – Builds wellbeing involving lawyers’ spouses and children.

- Picnic at park
- National Parks/Museums/Plays
- Halloween Trick/Trunk Event
- Holiday Party with Santa

Resources

MISSISSIPPI COUNTIES MAP



Local Bar Associations in Mississippi - www.msbar.org/programs-affiliates/local-bar-associations/

Mississippi Federal District Court Divisions, Supreme Court Districts, Court of Appeals Districts, Chancery Court Districts and Circuit Court Districts are outlined by the Mississippi Secretary's annual publication available at: www.sos.ms.gov/communications-publications/judiciary-directory-and-court-calendar

Mississippi Bar website - www.msbar.org

Mississippi Bar Leadership - www.msbar.org/inside-the-bar/leadership/board-of-commissioners/

Contacts within the Mississippi Bar - www.msbar.org/inside-the-bar/contacts/