

DC Bar Foundation Public Funding Listening Sessions
REPORT
November 2006

I. Background

The Budget Support Act of 2006 allocates \$3.2 million to be awarded through the DC Bar Foundation to nonprofit organizations that deliver civil legal services to the poor. In order to obtain a range of insights on the process and structure of the grant program that the Foundation will use to award these funds, the Foundation convened a series of listening sessions with stakeholders in the legal services community. Invitations went out broadly to the relevant community. The Foundation sought, through the listening sessions, to capitalize on the unique expertise, vision, and experience of the legal service providers who are on the front lines every day. The organizations represented at each session are listed in Appendix A.

At each session, participants were asked to respond to a number of “thinking points” (see Appendix B for Agendas/Thinking Points for each session) germane to the following topics: increasing legal representation in underserved communities; increasing housing-related services; creating and administering a shared interpreter bank for legal services programs; and improving intake practices to avoid serial referrals of individuals seeking assistance. Participants were also invited to provide any other helpful suggestions on how to use the new funds to enhance the delivery of legal services in the District. Foundation representatives stressed at all sessions that there is no blueprint for use of the funds and urged participants to think creatively about strategies to use the anticipated funding most effectively. Foundation representatives also emphasized at each session that it is the role of the legal services organizations to design the programs they propose for funding. The role of the Foundation role is to develop a Request for Proposals (RFP) that encompasses the range of creative and effective programs that would be eligible, under statutory criteria, to receive funding, and to develop an evaluation matrix to assess the proposals in a manner that furthers the statutory goals and improves the system for delivery of legal services. The purpose of the listening sessions is to generate information that will assist the Foundation as it designs the RFP and the evaluation matrix.

In order to facilitate candid conversation, participants were assured that this report would not attribute comments to specific individuals (except where those individuals consented to attribution) and would only identify the organizations represented at each listening session. To provide context for certain comments, this report periodically describes the position and/or experience level of the speaker but does not identify speakers by name or organization.

This report summarizes the views provided by participants in the listening sessions. There is a separate heading for each listening session, and the discussion of each is organized around “thinking points.” The Foundation is deeply grateful to all who gave of their time, energy, and experience to participate in these sessions.