



PHILADELPHIA
BAR ASSOCIATION



Board Observer Program Overview

The Philadelphia Bar Foundation, in partnership with the Young Lawyers Division of the Philadelphia Bar Association (YLD) and the Delivery of Legal Services Committee of the Philadelphia Bar Association (DLSC), has developed the Board Observer Program (BOP), an initiative that gives young lawyers practicing in Philadelphia the opportunity to learn more about local non-profit organizations, and in particular public interest legal services agencies, and to develop leadership skills necessary to serve on the boards of such organizations as well as succeed in their future careers.

Through the program, a young lawyer will be paired with a Philadelphia non-profit organization so as to observe that organization's board activities during the one-year program.

The goals of the program are:

1. To help young lawyers develop leadership skills; to provide them the chance to serve their community; to enable them to network with others; and to give them the opportunity to learn about board membership without incurring the costs of officially joining a board.
2. To create connections between legal services organizations and other non-profit organizations and the local law firms and other legal entities that employ the young lawyers participating in the program and to give these organizations the benefit of the time and energy a young lawyer brings.
3. To create a cohort of young lawyers who will continue to work with legal services and other non-profit organizations throughout their careers and who will become advocates for the Philadelphia public interest legal community and larger non-profit community. We hope that program "alumni" will remain connected to each other and to the program even after their participation ends by, among other things, becoming mentors to future BOP participants.

The selection process and program specifications are as follows:

- The BOP will be administered by a committee of representatives from the Bar Foundation and the YLD.
- The participating lawyers will be board observers, **not** full board members of the organizations with which they are paired. The BOP committee will work with the observers and organizations regarding any potential conflict of interest and/or confidentiality issues before the program begins. *Please note that although most boards require members to make a financial contribution, participants in the BOP will not be held to this obligation during the Program.*
- The BOP committee will perform the initial applicant screening. Based on the materials and the expressions of interest provided by both the applicants and the organization, the committee will provide a participating organization with a candidate who the committee believes will be a good

match. If the organization agrees, the applicant and an organization representative will meet for an interview. If, after the interview, both the applicant and organization believe there is a good fit, the applicant will be matched with the organization as a board observer. If either party does not believe there is a good fit, the applicant and organization will be returned to the general pool, and the committee will revisit the matching process.

- A participating organization will pair the young lawyer with a mentor (either a board member or staff member who attends board meetings). The mentor will orient the observer to the organization and its board and be available to answer questions and resolve any issues that may arise during the course of the program.
- The observer will attend board meetings, and participating organizations are encouraged to involve observers in board activities to the fullest extent possible. For example, organizations are encouraged to allow observers to participate in committees, program planning, and other activities.
- In addition to assigning a board mentor, participating organizations are also encouraged (to the extent they have the capacity to do so) to pair the observer with a staff attorney or other staff member at the organization who can familiarize the observer with the organization and its day-to-day activities. This will give the observer insight into the organization's functions as well as its governance and will give the staff member experience with teaching a third party about the organization.
- The BOP committee will be in touch with participants at regular intervals throughout the year for feedback about the program and its components.

The tentative timeline for the 2014-2015 program is as follows, and the events listed below are mandatory for Board Observers:

1. Mid-July 2014: Application forms circulated.
2. September 12, 2014: Deadline for legal services and non-profit organizations to submit Expression of Interest forms.
3. September 26, 2014: Application deadline.
4. October 17, 2014: Candidates will be matched with organizations.
5. End of October/Early November 2014: Program kick-off event in conjunction with National Pro Bono Week, which will include a CLE regarding board service.
6. Five times during 2015: Lunchtime presentations on topics relating to nonprofit board service such as organizational structure, finances and fundraising.
7. June-July 2014: Mid-year check-ins to give observers the opportunity to share their experiences with each other and a BOP committee member.
8. November 2015: Year-End Wrap Up Event to celebrate the conclusion of the program and to recognize the participating young lawyers, their firms and the organizations at which they have volunteered. A short year-end evaluation will be completed by all participants prior to this event.

The Board Observer Program is a wonderful opportunity for young lawyers to get involved in the non-profit community and for this community to benefit from the ideas, energy and connections the young lawyers will provide. Ideally, at the end of the program, those organizations participating will gain a new asset in the form of a lawyer who will be committed to continuing the organization's work in the community throughout the course of his or her career.