

VERMONT LAWYER INCUBATOR PILOT PROJECT

The Vermont Bar Association and Vermont Law School are partnering on a Lawyer Incubator Pilot Project to test a model of encouraging new lawyers to establish law practices in underserved areas of Vermont.

The Incubator Pilot will run 18 months in 2014-15 and will involve 2-3 new lawyers, existing staff of VLS and VBA, and volunteer seasoned attorneys. The Pilot staff will oversee the development of each new lawyer's practice skills, and set up CLE trainings and mentorship opportunities. Project lawyers will be linked via list serve and will meet frequently for in-person trainings and peer review. Lawyers will move through a series of tasks and trainings over the course of their 18 month involvement with the program, at the end of which they should have established a profitable solo or small firm practice in one of the underserved areas of Vermont.

GOALS:

- Launch new lawyers in small or solo practice
- Attract and keep new lawyers who desire to practice in Vermont
- Serve underserved populations and geographic areas
- Support new lawyers with relevant CLEs, help them avoid ethical problems, and build their competence and confidence
- Refresh the bar (and ultimately the bench)

THE PILOT PROJECT:

The Pilot Project will be overseen by Mary Ashcroft of the VBA and Margaret Barry of VLS, with the assistance of Robert Paolini and Daniel Richardson. Together as an advisory committee they will:

- provide general guidance and day-to-day mentoring to the new lawyers;
- recruit experienced lawyers to provide case-specific mentoring and informal advice sessions as needed;
- identify firms and solo practitioners with lawyers nearing retirement in underserved communities, and plan exit strategy using Project lawyers;
- assist new lawyers in refining and revising their business plans;
- assist new lawyers to select a community and help to find office space and/or client meeting space at a reduced fee or free;
- insure that appropriate pro bono and low bono cases are funneled into the Project for new lawyers.

OUTLINE OF 18 MONTH PROGRAM:

First 3 months:

- Orientation and work on business planning, including VLS Law Practice Management course as available;
- New lawyer establishes a practice location, office space, client trust account, obtains professional liability insurance and begins to practice;
- New lawyer accepts and begins one pro bono case and one low bono case before end of first 3 months;
- New Lawyer begins work on “scavenger hunt” of legal and community tasks to be accomplished before the first 6 months are completed;
- Meet weekly for case “rounds” discussion with other new lawyers;
- Meet weekly, individually with Attorney Ashcroft or Barry;
- Update business plan and review with advisory committee.

Second Three Months:

- Weekly case rounds continue;
- Meet bi-weekly with Attorney Ashcroft or Barry or other advisory committee members to review progress toward business goals;
- New lawyer finishes “scavenger hunt” and becomes involved in at least one community organization;
- New lawyer focuses on marketing and development of caseload and clients;
- Advisory committee assists in finding leads for new cases/clients;
- New lawyer follows up on leads;
- New lawyer participates in Bridge the Gap or Basic Skills in Vermont Practice and Procedure Programs

Second Six Months:

- New lawyer accepts and begins second pro bono case and second low bono case;
- New lawyer registers with Vt. Lawyer Referral service or accepts contract with Public Defender and begins to accept cases/referrals;

—New lawyer meets monthly with Attorneys Ashcroft or Barry or advisory committee to review progress toward business plan goals and practice management generally, to discuss overall goals, and to discuss integration with the community and the local bar;

—Case rounds drop to bi-weekly;

— Advisory committee and Attorneys Ashcroft and Barry continue to provide leads for cases/clients, and lawyers to follow up;

—Continue to attend CLE for Project lawyers; new lawyer to have completed 12 MCLE credit hours by the end of first year in Project;

--New lawyer to have completed 50 hours of Pro bono/low bono work per VRPC 6.1 by end of second 6 months

—Adjustment in law practice areas, community, and any remedial work to be done during these middle 6 months. New Lawyers should begin to make a small profit at this point in their cycle.

Final Six Months:

—Project lawyers meet monthly for rounds discussion;

—Attorneys Ashcroft and Barry visit law office of Project lawyer, review of case load, systems in place, etc.;

—Attorney Ashcroft or Barry observes Project lawyer in court;

—Final review of business plan progress;

—Project lawyer completes all 20 MCLE hours required by end of 18 months;

--Project lawyer participates with Attorneys Ashcroft and Barry and the advisory committee to assess the pilot project, make revisions and recommendations.

—Final review of community involvement and marketing—Attorneys Ashcroft or Barry check in with local lawyers, judges, clerks and provide feedback to Project lawyer;

—Graduation!