



## Prescription: Hatching local legal incubators

**On the Job** By Nancy Mackevich Glazer

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Looking for a new, morale-building, feel-good project for the whole firm? If the answer to that question is “yes,” consider the legacy that the collective leadership of Georgetown University Law Center; Arent, Fox LLP; and DLA Piper are currently creating in Washington, D.C.

These legal trailblazers are launching the D.C. Affordable Law Firm (DCALF), a nonprofit “low-bono” firm that will provide affordable and high-quality legal services to D.C. residents, small businesses and nonprofits. Their target clientele will be those who don’t qualify for free legal aid and who can’t generally afford to pay for private legal services.

The firm will be staffed by six Georgetown graduates who will work as part of a 15-month fellowship while also completing a Georgetown LL.M. — cost free. Both Arent, Fox and DLA Piper will provide attorneys to serve as mentors and advisers, and Arent, Fox will provide free office space. A retired DLA partner, Sheldon Krantz, will serve as DCALF’s first executive director.

Collectively, the three organizations will provide more than \$1 million in financial and pro bono support annually over the next three years.

While not yet set in stone, DCALF will likely represent working-class individuals making between \$25,000 and \$50,000 annually. The firm will consider charging non-hourly legal fees and small retainers. There may also be matters covered by prepaid legal insurance, and some clients may be able to take advantage of fee-shifting statutes when appropriate.

This legal training model follows the medical profession’s lead, providing an exceptional training ground for new graduates and supporting them during their “residency years.” This collaborative initiative resolves many of our profession’s challenges. Let me count the wins:

- New attorneys can obtain practical legal training in the most underrepresented areas of civil law: housing, family, employment, consumer and estate planning.
- Less-experienced lawyers can take ownership in their cases and be vested in their clients’ legal and business needs and outcomes.
- Some of the problems we’ve had training in our profession can be overcome. This kind of training will be first-rate.
- Midlevel and senior attorneys who mentor can also find gratification obtaining a “respite” from their daily commitments, helping train bright, new attorneys, giving back to the profession and the community and rekindling some of their own original motivations to attend law school years ago.
- Senior attorneys and the firms can benefit from “a honeymoon period,” observing and assessing new talent for future recruiting purposes.
- Senior partners will also be afforded the opportunity to test a teaching/mentoring encore career while helping train new attorneys and giving back to the underserved community.
- All contributors to this model — the private bar, the academic community, legal aid providers and even bar associations — will help close the gap in access to justice.

Trying to look objectively at our profession and the challenges we’ve faced in the last seven years, I ask, could collaboration like this achieve these greater purposes? If each player’s contribution is recognized and appreciated, the overall team effort could work effectively. In this model, no one player carries the ball the entire way alone.

Our clients, too, can feel good about the services they receive for a price they can afford to pay. They also contribute to the training of new attorneys in this model — the same way most of us feel as patients when we are admitted to a teaching hospital for medical care. When we acquiesce to receive care from a less-experienced doctor, we have decided to trust that doctor tremendously; we agree to willingly help train new medical talent and contribute to the greater good.

I've been writing about legal incubator projects for years. In retrospect, maybe the timing hasn't been right for their creation since 2008. Firms, companies, nonprofits, bar associations, the government — you name it — have been busy trying to overcome the financial challenges created by the Great Recession.

Despite the challenges, Chicago is already fortunate to have two excellent legal incubator initiatives: The Justice Entrepreneurs Project, created by The Chicago Bar Foundation, and the Solo & Small Practice Incubator, spearheaded by IIT Chicago-Kent College of Law. There are approximately 44 incubator programs across the country.

Some law firms have addressed these issues in recent years, too. For example, Greenberg, Traurig LLP implemented a similar residency program in its offices nationally, and the Much, Shelist P.C. developed an apprentice program years ago.

Overall, I believe that the training and hiring model used in the medical profession has been effective in the legal profession as well. We should be developing more incubators. These creative residencies for new lawyers have been proven extremely helpful in their training, soulful for mid-career and senior attorneys, reputable and far-reaching for law firms' legacies and valuable to the communities we serve.

After considering all this, if your law firm, company, law school, nonprofit or bar association is interested in taking the next steps to participate in a new incubator effort, pick up the phone or write me, and let's start this conversation.

Perhaps I can find other organizations that would like to contribute and form a team.