



Women's History Month Grant

Eligibility: Affiliate current with their 2012 HNBA Affiliate Membership

Criteria: Program related to Women's History Month. Event must be held in March 2012. HNBA encourages affiliates to adopt and implement the recommendations of the HNBA Report on the Status of Latinas in the Legal Profession. One successful program will be chosen to receive the \$3,000 grant award.

Requirements: Complete the attached application.

Deadline: Submit application by April 20th no later than 5:00 PM EST to Sarah Ramirez at sramirez@hnba.com.

Award Announcement: The HNBA will contact the Affiliate winner by May 27th.



Women's History Month Grant Application

Nominator:

Affiliate Name:

Contact Information for Nominator and Affiliate:

- 1) Provide a program description, including chair, organizer, etc.*
- 2) Was this program based on a recommendation from the HNBA Report on the Status of Latinas in the Legal Profession? If yes, why did your Affiliate select this recommendation.*
- 3) Was this the first time your Affiliate hosted this program? If no, please describe.*
- 4) State the goal your Affiliate sought to accomplish by hosting this program?*
- 5) Was your goal accomplished and if so, how?*
- 6) How many people attended this program?
- 7) Did you collect attendance feedback? If yes, please provide copies or a summary of the feedback.*

*Descriptions not to exceed 200 words or less.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

STRATEGIES TO INCREASE LATINA REPRESENTATION AND SUCCESS IN THE LEGAL PROFESSION

The following recommendations are based on the findings from both the focus group participants and survey respondents in the Study. The recommendations focus primarily on potential efforts by legal and business institutions to increase the presence and success of Latinas in the legal profession.

1. Support and Sponsor Mentoring Programs and Opportunities for Latinas at All Phases of their Educational and Career Development

The importance of mentoring has been well cited in the research of women of color in the legal profession.¹¹⁷ However, it is apparent that legal institutions are still not providing Latinas with this all-important component for success. In particular, Latinas underscored the importance of having access to mentors who can provide critical information and emotional support throughout their legal careers.

Although most participants expressed a preference for having Latina mentors, most recognized that this may be difficult, given the current underrepresentation of Latinas in the profession. They believe that the most critical component for successful mentoring relationships is one where the mentor is invested in and can advocate for their mentee, not someone who is undertaking the role as just another administrative responsibility. Many of the women also expressed the need for mentors to provide straight and honest feedback so that they can develop the skills and make the necessary improvements to advance in the profession.

The benefits of having formal mentoring programs are undeniable, especially within the women's workplaces. However, it appears that the more effective and long-lasting mentoring relationships are often informal. Opportunities and programs should be created to allow mentoring relationships to develop naturally, such as sponsoring opportunities for Latinas to network with other attorneys inside and outside their workplace.

Legal institutions and business leaders alike also need to critically evaluate their current mentoring programs to determine their use and effectiveness. A candid dialogue with Latinas, and all women of color, should take place so that these programs can be assessed and, if necessary, adjusted to meet the mentees' needs. This process will not

only promote accountability for the employer but can also provide opportunities for these women to communicate with their employers. These programs and initiatives should also be monitored on a regular and consistent basis to ensure that they are successful in achieving their intended goals. Furthermore, given the relatively low numbers of Latinas in legal academia, these institutions must take the necessary steps to increase the recruitment, retention, and advancement of Latina faculty who can serve as mentors and role models for Latina law students.

2. Increase the Visibility of Latina Role Models to Inspire and Encourage Others

Many Latinas stressed the value and importance of having visible and successful Latina role models for others to identify with and emulate. Several commented on how Latina attorney role models have influenced their own decisions to pursue a legal career, and they emphasized the need for all Latina attorneys to actively serve as role models for others, especially young Latinas. These role models can provide young Latinas with guidance and encouragement, which appears to be especially important throughout their formative years.

The women believe that learning the stories of how other Latinas have achieved success in the profession is a critical way to help influence others to follow in their footsteps. Legal and business leaders should identify Latinas within their organization who are willing to reach out to and educate others about the legal profession, and its various opportunities and roles. Social networking tools (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, MySpace) are becoming increasingly popular with Latina/o youth and can be used as a cost-effective outreach effort with those who desire more information about possible careers within the legal profession, or in opening up a dialogue or mentoring relationship with a particular Latina attorney. To avoid creating another professional challenge to advancement for Latinas and to encourage participation in outreach efforts, employers should place a concrete, positive value on their serving as role models, including granting such service appropriate work credit.

Several Latinas commented that success in the legal profession is defined too narrowly and does not reflect the many roles in which Latinas can become successful attorneys in the profession. The women in this Study believe that Latina role models from a cross-section of the legal profession should be encouraged to serve as “faces of diversity” for all legal sectors.

3. Reach Out to Latina Youth At an Early Age

Related to the need for visible Latina attorney role models, many of the women stressed the need for the legal profession to increase outreach programs to Latina youth to expose them at an early age to the many aspects of the legal profession, and to encourage and guide them in their pursuit of a legal career. Many believe that this type of intervention is necessary to counteract the gender and cultural inhibitors that dissuade Latina youth from considering careers in the legal profession, as well as the institutionalized discouragement to which these young women are routinely subjected.

This outreach will require the legal industry and business leaders to support and participate in educational pipeline programs in schools serving Latina/o communities. These programs work to expose children as early as elementary school, to models for success. Legal institutions should develop and sponsor programs and initiatives that incorporate lesson plans about careers in the law into curricula used by educational institutions and nonprofit agencies that educate and work with Latina/o youth. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, more Latina/o families need to continue and be further educated on the critical role they play in influencing their children's education and career aspirations, by instilling the value of education.¹¹⁸

4. Encourage the Creation of Latina-Based Networks and Support Systems This Study clearly indicates that one of the greatest challenges Latinas face is feelings of isolation and a sense of being disconnected from their workplaces. This isolation bars many from developing critical professional relationships or benefiting from informal workplace networks that often lead to mentoring relationships, key assignments, and important opportunities for advancement.

Informal networking programs and affinity groups provide significant opportunities for Latinas to develop professional relationships, where they can receive emotional support, share best practices, and connect with other Latinas in the legal profession. In fact, the focus group sessions served as a cathartic outlet and supportive network for many of the Latinas, who shared their experiences and connected with other Latinas in their legal communities. Several of the focus group members have continued to meet on a regular basis to network informally and socialize. The legal profession and its business leaders should support these types of informal networking opportunities by hosting and organizing panels and functions where Latinas and all women of color can build their social support networks.

5. Support Gender Neutral and Family Supportive Workplaces

Just as the “glass ceiling” restricts advancement for women, the “maternal wall” continues to be one of the strongest forms of gender bias.¹¹⁹ Many Latinas, both with and without children at home, identified the task of pursuing a legal career and motherhood as one of the biggest challenges to Latinas’ success in the legal profession. This Study seems to suggest that some Latinas may in fact be strategically delaying or not having children in order to advance their careers. Although women currently represent almost half of all law school graduates, the perception is that law offices remain relatively inhospitable to those with significant family-care responsibilities.

To retain women (and men) with significant child-care responsibilities, legal employers need to develop and implement institutional policies that are gender-neutral and family-supportive. Families no longer fit within traditional caregiver models; both male and female attorneys require more flexible work arrangements. Broadening the focus to include both gender neutral and flexible workplaces can help alleviate the negative stigma that women of color, in particular, encounter.

6. Support and Fund Continued Research and Data Collection on Latinas in the Legal Profession

While this Study begins to fill the informational void that exists on the status and experiences of Latina attorneys in the United States, the legal profession must continue to support additional research in this area. Future research should conduct and test, a finer-grained analysis of the general conclusions advanced in this Study. This will allow the profession to keep pace with research that has been conducted on other groups to provide a deeper understanding of the complexity of these issues.

Related to the need for pertinent data, the legal profession must also require bar associations and other groups to collect and report more detailed data on gender, racial, and ethnic groups, including Latinas/os, on a more systematic basis.¹²⁰ This includes disaggregating data on Latinas/os from other ethnic and racial groups, and allowing attorneys to self-identify their ethnicity and race separately rather than treating them as the same. It is hoped that this will help the legal profession better track and monitor the recruitment, retention, and advancement of Latinas in the profession.

7. Educate the Legal Profession about Latina Underrepresentation

The Latina participants emphasized the need to increase awareness about the underrepresentation of Latinas in the profession. Many felt that continued education is warranted, with business and legal industry leaders sponsoring forums to address the experiences and barriers Latinas face. By doing so, legal industry and business leaders will

better understand how these experiences and barriers contribute to the underrepresentation of Latinas and may serve to remove the negative stereotyping that Latinas encounter. As the Latina/o population continues to grow, so does the need for legal institutions to serve and work within Latina/o communities. In order to capture this growing market, legal and business leaders need to understand the business case for supporting a more diverse attorney workforce that includes greater Latina representation. In order to do so, the legal profession and business industry should identify and communicate best practices for recruiting, retaining, and advancing Latinas in the profession.

8. Monitor Latina Progress

Increasing the representation of Latinas across all legal sectors is a significant goal, which requires monitoring their career progression. Measuring their progress will promote accountability and awareness, not only within these organizations, but also to the larger legal community.

This Study provides a snapshot of where Latinas are at present. As an indicator, it suggests that they are not well-represented in leadership roles. Furthermore, while the results suggest that the Latinas are generally satisfied with their overall legal experience, they hold a dim view of their future opportunities for advancement. Therefore, these attorneys may leave their legal employers prematurely because of these lingering concerns. To address this obstacle to advancement, the hiring, attrition, and promotion rates of Latinas should be compared against White female colleagues and other ethnic and racial groups, and a comparative analysis should be done with assignment type and client development opportunities. The comparative results should be used to develop and adjust diversity initiatives.