

American Bar Association Section of Business Law

How To Get Involved: Active Section Involvement Through Committees and Subcommittees

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I. INTRODUCTION.

Welcome to membership in the ABA Section of Business Law (the “Section”). The Section is the nation’s preeminent bar entity focused on the practice of business law in its varied forms. The Section seeks to serve the public, the profession and the Section by furthering the development and improvement of business law, educating Section members in business law and related professional responsibilities, and helping Section members to serve their clients competently, efficiently and professionally. The Section will accomplish its mission by, among other things, providing services its members value; promoting full and equal participation in Section activities by minorities, women and persons with disabilities, and enhancing the professional collegiality of its members.

This Guide outlines various opportunities for you to become involved in the active work of the Section. The work of the Section is done primarily through its sixty plus substantive law and administrative Committees. Each Committee offers members the opportunity to meet and work with colleagues expert in that Committee’s area of concentration. This often includes interaction with government policymakers, regulators, law professors and in-house counsel. Committees produce programs, publications, reports, model statutes, and comments on pending legislation. This Guide provides a roadmap for you to join in the Section’s important work at a level that is right for you. Detailed below are suggestions from Section leaders describing strategies that will help you achieve your goals.

II. IDENTIFYING COMMITTEES OF INTEREST.

As an initial matter, it is important to identify Section Committees that address areas of expertise overlapping with your practice, or areas that you would like to expand your knowledge. We call these “areas of concentration.” Some ideas to help you identify Committees in your area of concentration are set forth below.

- Access the Section’s website – www.abanet.org/buslaw - and review the Section’s publication entitled *Committee Offerings: A Prospectus* (the “Prospectus”). The Prospectus provides a detailed overview of the Section’s Committees and their leadership.
- Once you identify several Committees of interest, access the homepage for these Committees on the Section’s website. The Section’s dynamic Committee homepages provide up-to-date information on the Committee’s current activities, programming, publications, projects and other information of note regarding that area of practice.
- After you analyze the detailed information about various Committees, select one or more Committees to join. Go to the Section’s home page and click on “Committees” on the left hand side. Scroll down and click on a specific Committee name. Then click on “Join the Committee.” Enter your ABA membership ID number and last name. Scroll down and click on “Submit the Join Request.” You have now joined that Committee and should received e-

mail confirmation of your selection! Remember that you must be a member of the Section to join a Committee.

- Most Committees follow-up with new Committee members through a welcome letter or e-mail. These welcome e-mails typically identify upcoming opportunities to join in the Committee's activities as well as contact information on the Committee's Chair, Membership Point Person ("MPP"), or other Committee leader. Feel free to correspond with these Committee leaders as you have questions or comments about the Committee's work.
- Now that you have joined a Committee, explore the Committee's homepage to further identify Subcommittees that are particularly applicable to your area of concentration. Ultimately, a large portion of the Committee's work occurs by and through the Subcommittees. The Subcommittees are an excellent portal into the Committee's and the Section's work. By way of example, perhaps you have joined the Section's Business Bankruptcy Committee. If a large portion of your bankruptcy practice involves representation of secured lenders, you may determine to join the Secured Lenders Subcommittee.
- Another Committee to consider if you are a lawyer aged 40 or under is the Section's Young Lawyer Forum ("YLF"). The YLF serves a center of gravity for new lawyers to transition into the work of the Section, while providing social and leadership opportunities. YLF's goal is to engage young lawyers in the substantive work of the Section and its Committees. The YLF assists young lawyers in finding a home in active Section work.

III. HOW TO GET INVOLVED IN THE WORK OF THE COMMITTEES.

Once you have joined one or more Committees and Subcommittees, you are ready to jump into the work of the Section to the extent that you choose. Just by joining a Committee and Subcommittee you will gain access to the latest business law developments in your area of concentration. However, if you are ready to join in substantive work, below are some helpful ideas for getting involved.

- Contact the Committee or Subcommittee Chair to inquire about programs, projects or publishing opportunities. Most Committees have an active MPP who can help you navigate the Committee's work and put in you in touch with Committee leaders to discuss opportunities for you to get involved.
- Identify specific projects that you would like to assist in. Determine an area of involvement that interests you. Call the individual heading up the project and offer to help. Committee and Subcommittee leaders welcome assistance with projects.
- Talk with a Committee or Subcommittee leader about contributing an article or other content for the Committee's e-newsletter. Help your Committee or Subcommittee stay up to date on the latest business law developments by contributing items of note for publication in an e-newsletter.
- Be persistent in your offer of help. We all face time constraints arising from work and client pressures that, occasionally, limit the ability to respond timely on bar activities. Persistence pays off. One young lawyer relays the story of

identifying a particular Subcommittee addressing his area of practice. He e-mailed the Subcommittee Chair on several occasions with various offers of help. He received little feedback from the Chair other than an acknowledgement and “welcome to the Subcommittee” note. The young lawyer continued to identify possible article or presentation topics to the Chair. He ultimately took the initiative to draft and send to the Chair an article on a recently published decision. The Chair was thrilled with content for an e-newsletter. This led the Chair to ask the young lawyer to help plan one of the Subcommittee’s CLE programs. In addition to developing a topic of interest and lining up an expert speaker, the Chair determined that the CLE program should also contain a short discussion of recent case developments. The Chair asked the young lawyer to speak about the case on which he had drafted the article. These opportunities arose from the young lawyer’s persistence.

- If you see a new development in your area of concentration, pass it along to the Committee or Subcommittee Chair. They may not be aware of the development. They may ask you to summarize the recent development for e-mail alert to the Subcommittee listserv identifying the issue.
- Agree to contribute course materials for a CLE program. One new Section member told a Subcommittee Chair of her interest in becoming actively involved in the Subcommittee’s work. The Subcommittee was planning a CLE program for an upcoming national meeting regarding expert testimony necessary to prevail in a certain area of business litigation. The program centered around an actual direct and cross-examination of an expert in front of a sitting Federal Judge. The Chair asked the new member if she would draft a fact pattern and coordinate with the expert to prepare the expert report for program participants to use in the mock trial. The new member provided invaluable assistance to the program participants on a very successful program. As a result of these efforts in preparing course material, the Chair asked the new member to serve as a panel member for a subsequent CLE program.
- Talk with a Subcommittee leader about serving as a program chair. There is a lot of planning and organizing that goes into a successful program, such as determining the ideal date and time for the program, the size and set-up of the program room, complying with deadlines for materials, and holding periodic conference calls of the program participants.. You can alleviate some of these pressures from the Subcommittee Chair, while at the same time interacting with the expert program panelists.
- Agree to serve on a Subcommittee task force.
- Many Committees and Subcommittees have special projects that involve gathering information to help inform opinion on issues important to that particular area of concentration. Agree to help research case law, legislative history, practical applications or other helpful information to assist with the special project.
- Determine if the Committee has any ongoing drafting projects that you can assist with, such as model statutes, model rules, books, publication of a

symposium issue in *The Business Lawyer*, a series of articles for *Business Law Today*, pamphlets, or other publications. Ask the project leader if there are discrete areas of the project for which you can provide assistance.

- As you progress in your efforts with the Committee or Subcommittee, other opportunities for involvement may include serving as the Committee's MPP, point person for the Committee's Homepage, e-newsletter editor, chair of the Committee's stand-alone meeting, or teleconference chair. Each of these is an important position that provides you the opportunity to contribute to the Section's efforts.

IV. INTERACTING WITH YOUR COMMITTEE.

Some of the greatest opportunities for you to become active in the Section's Committees and Subcommittees involve attending Section's events. Whether it is a Committee teleconference, participation in a Subcommittee's blog or attending a national meeting, the interaction will prove invaluable. Set forth below are some helpful hints on maximizing involvement through attending Section events.

- Attend the Committee Round-Up held at the Section's Spring Meeting. This is an excellent opportunity to discuss opportunities for involvement with Committee leaders.
- Inquire about Committee dinners at the Section's national meetings. Most Committees host a dinner for its members during its meetings. This is a great opportunity to meet and greet active Committee members and offer your interest in the Committee's work.
- Attend programming sponsored by your Committees and Subcommittees. This will give you insight into the efforts these entities undertake. Often, the Subcommittees will also hold "business" meetings in conjunction with the programming. This is an opportunity to hear about projects that you can join in. One new member attended his first Subcommittee meeting and learned of an ongoing project involving drafting of a compendium of case decisions in a particular area of the law. The new member volunteered to provide summaries of several cases for the compendium. This ultimately led to a speaking opportunity on the topic covered by the compendium, and later to a Vice-Chair position of the Subcommittee.
- Attend YLF programming or social function. YLF members will welcome you and help you find a home within the Section. Much of YLF's programming focuses on professional development. This is a good opportunity to meet young lawyers who are active in the Section's activities.
- Ask the leadership of your Committee or Subcommittee whether they have a mentor program. Determine whether a seasoned Subcommittee member will assist your introduction into the Subcommittee's work and provide you a mentor to discuss ongoing involvement.

- Pick up meeting handouts. This provides you materials and insight into the structure and format of the substantive work of the Committee or Subcommittee.
- Approach Committee and Subcommittee leaders and volunteer for projects of interest.

V. CONCLUSION.

Through its members, the Section provides unparalleled expertise in further the development and improvement of business law. This expertise is evidenced in numerous ways, including publication of an extensive line of practical books, periodicals and other publications designed to help members stay on top of current developments in the business arena. The Section sponsors over 125 CLE programs annually covering topics from broad to specialized interests in business law. The Section maintains searchable online access to the full text of CLE program materials from Section meetings. The Section remains at the forefront of business law developments. As a new Section member, now is the time to join leaders in your field to continue the Section's efforts to serve the public, the profession and the Section by furthering the development and improvement of business law. We look forward to working with you in these ongoing efforts.