

Richard Sloane

From: Jim Sandman
Sent: Thursday, July 12, 2012 4:49 AM
To: Richard Sloane
Subject: Fw: LSC Draft Strategic Plan

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----- Original Message -----

From: Linda Rexer [mailto:Linda@msbf.org]
Sent: Thursday, July 12, 2012 12:47 AM
To: Jim Sandman
Subject: LSC Draft Strategic Plan

Dear Jim:

This is to provide some input on LSC's draft Strategic Plan, 2012-2016. Forgive the brief email format – I am in the middle of a vacation but wanted to get a few thoughts to you about the plan.

This feedback is from me personally, but I want you to know that it is consistent with what I have heard from Executive Directors of several other large programs managing IOLTA and/or other state funding.

Having a plan in and of itself helps the organization focus activities toward identified goals and clarifies the organization's role. Also, I think other funders and the grantees all appreciate that the process allows for considering input before finalizing it. So, though there are many positive ideas in the plan, I will get right to my concerns (due to my limited time).

In a nutshell, to me the plan appears unrealistically ambitious, particularly because it is not likely that there could be enough funds to fully develop and support the new strategies planned. For example, if the quantitative output requirements are not implemented with adequate support, it is possible the resulting system could not only increase LSC's administrative costs but could be counterproductive to its goals of improving quality. Also, inappropriate use of metrics by a different future LSC administration could be destructive to the overall delivery system.

Regarding the quantitative metrics, I think this plan goes further than the outcomes group discussed or the PWF grants seemed headed for. Some output measures could be positive but not to "rank" programs in the fashion proposed, rather to help programs use data better in improving and communicating about their work. As our outcomes group noted (but this plan does not appear to envision in this plan), the field needs to be involved in testing new outcome measures, perhaps with pilots and models that may help individual programs better use such data. Also, the new plan does not seem to emphasize the continued use of LSC's performance criteria, which has been widely accepted by the field and other funders and which is too helpful a tool to be replaced (unclear if that is the intention).

Increasing LSC's federal funding is not as prioritized as it was in the earlier plan, (Strategic Directions 2006-2010). IOLTA funders know all too well that LSC dollars provide an important base on which other funding is built – especially true

now with decreased IOLTA and other state/local funding. The prior plan named two areas for increased funding – the federal government and, for projects of national significance, the private sector. Those were appropriate focus areas. The new plan seems broader in establishing more general private fundraising, including with foundations. Depending on how this would be implemented, I would be concerned that approaching foundations for more general funding could be in competition with grantees and other justice system stakeholders for whom foundation support is an increased need due to other resources declining. If LSC proceeds with this initiative, it should define its carefully to avoid the perception or reality of competition.

LSC has long collected best practices and resources to assist grantees in improving operations. The emphasis on continuing this approach to promote best practices is good in the new plan, except that I fear the training initiative may duplicate efforts of existing entities who already conduct training free of restrictions that benefits the entire legal aid community. To the extent that new training is needed, these entities may be in a better position to be responsive to emerging needs. Another reason LSC should avoid being too much in the training business is that training events could be perceived as promoting values about representation that could prompt questions given today's political environment (this concern could also apply to research). But, LSC remains in a good position to promote best practices by continuing to collect and provide information, being a convener (LSC has been an effective convener, e.g. TIG Conferences) and working as a strategic partner with others who can provide in-depth training.

In summary, I worry that this vision could unnecessarily compete with others in an era of limited resources, that some areas (e.g., metrics, fundraising, etc.) may not have been thought through enough and that LSC's administrative resources will be too limited to adequately support the breadth of this plan. I think the plan needs to be reviewed further regarding the issues I have mentioned before it is adopted.

Again, apologies for the summary fashion of this email - I have to stop now while I can hit send as my Internet connection has already crashed several times as I tried to write this from a remote area in northern Michigan.

I look forward to seeing you soon in Ann Arbor. Linda

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