

CELEBRATING MIE AT 25!



A Full and Free Exchange of Ideas

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I suspect that I speak on behalf of those who were involved in the early discussions about forming the Management Information Exchange, when I say that it is almost impossible to believe we are celebrating our organization's twenty-fifth year of existence. I can tell you that all of us would have called it a grand success if we just survived for another year much less twenty-five of them.



The idea of creating MIE began over a casual lunch table discussion at a management retreat facilitated by Joan Lieberman. Of the seventy-five program directors participating in the retreat, six of us were from programs that had unions. Our lunch table discussion centered on the isolation that each of us felt as managers of unionized programs. The conversation was unexpectedly cathartic and a decision was made to meet again at the next NLADA annual conference and send an invitation to about twenty other randomly selected executive directors to join us.

Soon after that meeting a small self-appointed design team met to discuss creating a structure that would support the holding of future meetings and the

development of a library to share union contracts, delivery systems and financial information. A program dues structure was set that hopefully would support an annual budget of \$15,000. We thought that this mighty figure would support the hiring of a part time coordinator and a leave a little left over for phones, mailings and travel. Our name, the Management Information Exchange, was chosen to reflect the vision for our organization. For us, the vision was quite simple. MIE was to be a home where a full and free exchange of ideas, techniques and philosophies on management issues would be encouraged.

There were three fundamental values that were at the core of the discussions in those early days. The first was that MIE would provide a place for an open, uncensored and frank dialogue on the variety of issues confronting managers of legal services programs. The second was that our activities would be of the highest

quality possible for the lowest cost. The third was that this new "soon to be" institution would be volunteer driven with most of the effort for design and delivery coming from our board and extended committee members. Those three core values still remain evident in MIE's activities today.



MIE Board of Directors, first retreat, 1992.

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Three primary activities were chosen as the vehicles through which MIE would fulfill its vision. They included a library that would help member programs share program materials, a series of annual events primarily focused on training program directors and a periodical we called the *MIE Journal*. Later years saw the adoption of fund development as a fourth activity as that responsibility became so central to program management.

I had the privilege of serving as the first editor of the *Journal* and savored that privilege until 1992. When the *Journal* was begun, the editorial committee hoped to create a free flowing vehicle for the sharing of ideas between legal aid managers. We wanted it to take risks and challenge comfortable assumptions. We hoped that the *Journal* would meet that mark more times than it would not. Any success the *Journal* had in meeting that goal was due to the support the editorial committee received from our program members and contributors.

In the early days, suggestions for articles came by letter, phone call, or whispered comments during a meeting. Over the years, the *Journal* has slowly evolved to become our community's primary vehicle for the exchange of critical opinions on program philosophy, design, etiquettes, direction and techniques.

Let me end on a personal note. I have been fortunate to work in the legal aid community for the past forty-two years. Somewhere during my twenty years of Catholic education, I lost my faith in religion. I began to rediscover a personal sense of spirituality again when I started to work with a committed group of dreamers, cohorts and conspirators at that management retreat lunch table twenty-five years ago. MIE has been a place for me to slowly replace my natural inclination to ego and aggression with a sense of community and unity of purpose. It has been a gathering place for ideas with each person involved in MIE over the past years to contribute what they could, when they could and on what they wanted. That's more than we ever could dream of twenty-five years ago.

On behalf of the *MIE Journal* Committee, I want to thank each of you for your personal support and contributions to the *Journal* and MIE over the past twenty-five years.