Financial Planning for Legal Aid in the Time of the Pandemic

With Lonnie Powers, Jon Asher, Jacquelynne Bowman, Steven Pelletier and Rhodia Thomas

Note from the MIE Journal Committee: Practical lessons learned from earlier financial experiences can make surviving the COVID-19 crisis less painful for civil legal aid organizations. An MIE webinar held on July 23, 2020, entitled Financial Planning for Legal Aid in the Time of the Pandemic, brought together five experienced civil legal aid leaders to talk about the financial steps they took in response to prior crises, what worked, what did not, and how to successfully guide your program through the current crisis. The webinar reviewed available financial planning tools, how to use scenario planning techniques, and emphasized the necessity of grounding planning in the mission of the program. This article is abridged from the webinar presentations. The recorded webinar is available to be viewed on the MIE website at https://mielegalaid.org/training/recorded.

Practical Lessons
By Lonnie Powers, former Executive Director, Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation, moderator

Let us begin with three brief reflections:

- We live on land that was taken from Indigenous People by guile and violence. We must never forget that debt.
- This week we lost C. T. Vivian, John Lewis, and Charles Evers, three giants in the struggle against the systemic racism that infects our nation. As the Jewish tradition says, may their memories be a blessing.
- And let us always remember that we are trustees of this land and this nation, responsible for preserving and improving both for future generations.

For months now, we have been reeling from the devastating effects of the COVID-19 virus and the attendant economic disaster. Both of which have fallen disproportionately on low income people generally and particularly on people of color. The effects of the economic devastation and the illnesses and deaths from the virus pandemic will continue to be felt for months if not years.

Now as a result of the murder of yet another Black man at the hands of the police, we are seeing an unprecedented outpouring of support for addressing systemic racism in our country. Despite sometimes harsh efforts to quash a nationwide, largely peaceful movement demanding change, support continues to grow.

Some are also using the pandemic as an excuse to weaken and to eliminate environmental protections which will exacerbate the already disproportionate effects of pollution and climate change on communities of color.

All this makes it even more critical that civil legal aid programs are sustainable and remain focused on their core mission of ensuring justice and economic equality for low income people.

We have a distinguished group of civil legal aid leaders who were panelists during the webinar and whose edited presentations follow. They are Jon Asher, Executive Director, Colorado Legal Services, Jacquelynne Bowman, Executive Director, Greater Boston Legal Services, Rhodia Thomas, Executive Director, MidPenn Legal Services, and Steven Pelletier, Director of Finance, Northwest Justice Project.

We hope that you will view a pre-recorded presentation from Gerry Singsen available with the webinar.
materials. In that video Gerry discussed his paper, “Riding the Dragon Coaster,” which also is included in the materials for this webinar. Over his long career in legal aid beginning as a Reginald Heber Smith Fellow in 1968, he wrote extensively on legal services goals, management, practice, and regulation. Until his retirement, he was a trainer and remains a leading thinker on legal aid funding and financial analysis. Many of us learned financial matters from Gerry.

We hope that this discussion of practical lessons learned from past funding crises will assist you to successfully navigate the economic effects of the COVID–19 crisis. We do not have answers to all the questions that will arise as you plan but we will give you a framework for finding the answers for your own programs.

The presenters will describe what was done, what worked, what did not during prior crises, and how this crisis is like but different from earlier crises. You will learn what financial planning tools are available and how to use scenario planning including the necessity of grounding planning in the missions of your programs.

Our message to you is that civil legal aid has faced funding crises before and survived. This one may present more difficulties, but we will make it through.

Legal Aid History

By Jon Asher, Executive Director, Colorado Legal Services

The COVID pandemic is very different but is nonetheless far from the first challenge to have confronted those of us who have chosen to devote our professional lives to the delivery of legal services to those in greatest economic need. We have confronted each of these past challenges with energy, creativity, dedication, resiliency and surprising success. Legal services as a safety net program began 150 years ago with small locally funded programs but federal funding only began as part of the Lyndon Baines Johnson War on Poverty in 1964.

Federal funding was first provided through the Office of Economic Opportunity created by the Economic Opportunity Act. The funding resulted in the use of attorneys and community organizers to utilize the power of the law to improve the lives of the poor with a goal of using systemic advocacy to literally end poverty and oppression.

Those early legal services lawyers changed the law as it related to the rights of the poor. New and expanded legal services programs were so effective though that they created powerful enemies — federal, state and local governments and agencies, banks, landlords, growers and farmers, even future presidents and vice presidents. Richard Nixon elected in 1968 ended LBJ’s War on Poverty. In the very late 1960s and early 1970s, he dismantled and did away with OEO but that serious challenge resulted in the creation of the Legal Services Corporation in 1974, one of the very last acts signed by Nixon before he resigned the Presidency in August 1974.

LSC was created as an independent federal agency with strong American Bar Association, NLADA and others allies’ support. Its deliberately changed orientation of systemic advocacy and law reform to access to justice was very successful in significantly increasing federal funding. LSC expanded the reach of new and existing programs to cover and provide services at least theoretically to every county in the country.

The election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 — given his history as Governor of California and his overt disdain for the effective work of California Rural Legal Assistance and other legal aid programs in California — brought LSC a 25% cut in federal funding from which at least in real dollars we have never fully recovered. But the assault on LSC also brought us a new funding source — Interest on Lawyer Trust Account programs which began in Florida and now exist in every state and US territory. And new and greatly expanded pro bono programs began. It brought us surprising Congressional support and protection including formula funding required by LSC which protects us to this day.

The Newt Gingrich Congress elected in 1994 with its Contact with America called for the total elimination of LSC. In 1996 Congress took its first of a planned three steps to eliminate LSC by reducing LSC funding by 30% — another huge hit — and worse by imposing significant restrictions on programs. But that effort to eliminate LSC galvanized bar support and never were the next two steps to eliminate LSC taken by Congress. That effort not only resulted in strong bar support, but moved programs and their supporters to secure and increase state funding in almost everyone state and to begin new initiatives, including the creation of independent unrestricted spin off programs and new hotlines, increased use of clinics, use of the private bar, creation of access to justice commissions, and more thoughtful deliberate statewide delivery systems.

The Great Recession of 2008–2010 and beyond saw
up to an 80–85% reduction in IOLTA and other funding but it also saw new and improved partnerships with state supreme courts, increased work with access to justice commissions, enhanced attention to pro se litigants and enhanced use of technology and other efforts to maintain and improve the delivery of legal services. Our relationships and our support and the quality of our work has made recent efforts to defund LSC totally unsuccessful.

So we as a community are not new to very serious challenges and threats. We are, if anything, resilient and creative. We respond to challenges with new ideas but a steady adherence to our core values — to equality, fairness, and diversity; to justice and to providing high quality legal assistance to those in need. Each challenge has brought opportunities seized by us and our allies to use the challenges to create responses that have kept legal services alive — not always well, not without undeniable costs, but nonetheless able to respond to the legal needs of the most marginalized among us.

I was taught that hope is not the light at the end of the tunnel, it is the light within the tunnel. I know we will respond to this current challenge with utmost energy, creativity, ability and resilience. As in the past, the question is not whether legal services will survive but whether we will continue to deserve to survive. I know we will.

Watching Gerry’s video brought back “Dragon Coaster” nightmares and jubilation related to legal services challenges and struggles that we have faced and overcome in the past.

This current wild ride — “The COVID-19 Coaster” — includes many of the same twists and turns of those faced before, only this time they take place during a deadly Global Pandemic and we are being issued Face Coverings as we begin this ride. Just hold on.

**Scenario Planning**
*By Jacquelynne Bowman, Executive Director, Greater Boston Legal Services*

How do we plan? Greater Boston Legal Services has used scenario planning on several unfortunate occasions. I will describe two of those occasions today and the Great Recession. We learned a lot of lessons from the Great Recession.

During the Great Recession, we created a plan modeled on corporate downsizing but adapted it to our non-profit environment. We are a heavily specialized program, so we looked at our practice groups as cost centers, deciding what funding each requires. Where was there dedicated funding; what was the cost of staffing, what was the minimum staffing required to meet the goals, what are the outputs? A cost benefits analysis of sorts. We held focus groups of staff to gather input on community needs, on action steps, on critical priorities.

This sounds good but it was a failure. As a legal aid community, we value process and input and involvement in decision-making from many. A lesson learned through this earlier process is that you must be strategic and careful in deciding who should be involved and at what point in the planning. Think about what information can be contributed as well as how you communicate the planning to the rest of the staff. Communication is key.

Our earlier process had a negative impact on staff morale. Looking at costs caused senior staff to feel devalued as they believed we thought they were too expensive. Case types varied in terms of outputs versus costs, and speed of cases turning over, and some staff felt their work was being devalued if their numbers were lower. We learned a lot about what not to do. So, we changed our process and today’s crisis has benefited from the lessons learned.

Our initial planning group this time was much smaller. We chose to include the chief financial officer, the development director and the board finance committee in the initial planning. We first reviewed our income streams over the past five years to determine:

- What are our key funding sources?
- What income has been steady? Reliable?
- What are our fixed expenses?
- Where is there flexibility?

Then we reviewed external factors impacting funding, including our experience of the last major funding crisis — what happened then and the chances of history repeating:

- What will be the COVID-19 impact on employment?
- What will be its probable impact on our law firm and other campaigns, for example?
- How will the reduction of the interest rate to near zero impact legislative funding or interest on lawyers trust accounts?
- Legislative funding is dependent on tax receipts.
in Massachusetts. With restaurants closed and tax filings delayed, what is the impact?

- Who are our individual donors and what is the probable impact on them?
- Are there new funding sources that we can tap into as a result of current issues? CARES Act; CDBG; Racial Justice; Access to health care, housing stability for example?
- Are foundations changing priorities and will that have an impact on us — positive or negative?

It is important to note here that you have to remember your mission and resist chasing money that does not fit! In the Great Recession, we went after dollars that were close to the work we did, but did not exactly match. We got the dollars but staff were disappointed that we were a bit outside our mission. We did not reapply.

Once you have all of the information, we developed best case, moderate case, and worst case scenarios based on our history and guesses about the probability of funding and expenses. There is no need for precision because you are creating a living document. It will change as you learn more information.

Look at risk factors: what happens to your budget if you face a reduction in a key funding source? What happens to your staffing if you obtain grants but lose unrestricted funds?

As part of developing scenarios, you also need to think about action steps at certain critical points. If we lose 5% of our funding, we will use rainy day funds to cover, but you must also think about how long that can last. Will the economy bounce back by year’s end? What about the first quarter of 2021? What if not until some later point?

At each critical point you have to consider what your next step will be. What is the trigger for determining that you will downsize, for instance? These should be factored into your scenarios. If x happens then we will do this, which will save these amounts in our budget.

We need to think about timing as well as financial impact. One mistake from last time for us was underestimating the length of the Great Recession and dragging out the inevitable, which of course led to morale issues and a brain drain and made the pain of recovery longer. Just because you have healthy reserves going into your scenarios, you still need to know when to pull the trigger. If you relied on furloughs and attrition, at what point do you need to do something more comprehensive like re-sizing the program? If you wait too long you need to cut deeper, so you need to balance.

Staff can and should be involved in helping the program identify organizational priorities, but in a more holistic way. We involved middle managers and practice group leaders next. We wanted real on the ground knowledge of what it took to meet grant requirements, what were the expectations of the communities we served, what is the minimum staff required.

We have two unions and our contract requires us to give varying notices based on anticipated percentage of staff reduction. In the Great Recession, the union pushed for preserving staff positions and we bought into this. We agreed to furloughs and salary freezes. We are still playing catch up because while those actions preserved jobs, they prolonged the agony and the costs. Staff were falling further behind in meeting family needs. When we resumed salary scales we were still behind in terms of cost of living and also it was hard to attract new staff. The actions of the past have consequences for the future.

Also by holistic I mean what does the community we serve need from us? How can we meet emerging needs with reduced resources? How do we prioritize what we do with limited resources? It helps significantly if you have identified your core priorities. What do you stand for? What activity must be preserved? Do you have a strategic plan to guide your definition of trigger points and action steps?

Having a full vision of your mission makes it easier to decide what you need to preserve in your various scenarios. We look at the current situation as an opportunity to preserve the core of the program and to look for where we can expand into racial justice, to use this to build for the future.

Look at the MIE library. There are good articles about scenario planning and a template for scenario planning which raise the questions that need to be answered: Where is money coming from? What are the threats to the money? What are the opportunities for more money? What is our core?

**What Do I Need as the Finance Manager for Planning Purposes in a Crisis and Where Do I Get It?**

By Steven Pelletier, Director of Finance, Northwest Justice Project

COVID-19 Financial Planning appears to be a mix of what we have learned from the past (more recently the Great Recession) coupled with a host of significant operational, health and logistical
Financial Planning for Legal Aid in the Pandemic
Continued from page 27

wrinkles. This particular challenge requires financial managers to be on high alert, agile, creative and decisive.

The Finance Manager needs to be part of the Crisis Management Team.

That means “in the communications loop” with the executive director, deputy director, director of advocacy, operations manager, technology team, human resources director, board of directors, accounting team, other stakeholders and major funders. The Finance Manager needs to be available to respond to budget issues around various crisis actions and ideas.

The Finance Manager needs to address immediate fiscal stress.

Take the daily temperature, especially cash position: Cash balances? Receivables balances? How quickly are they accessible? How long will they last?

Establish accounting department logistics for the wild ride. Do not lose sight of prudent internal controls and fraud awareness. Develop a plan for:
1. Payroll: remotely and accurately process payroll
2. Billings, Receipts, Deposits, Payables and Disbursements
3. Funder Emergency Plan: reach out to funders early to establish streamlined emergency billing and payment process protocols, e.g., billings based upon pre-bills with regular back-up to follow post pandemic.
4. Banking: Reach out to your banker and investment manager/broker to communicate possible needs. Suspend CD purchases to accumulate cash. Confirm that the line of credit is immediately available, if necessary.

The Finance Manager needs to be included in efforts to raise emergency revenues.

Examples of such emergency revenues might include:
- COVID-19 Cares Act Emergency Funding
- LSC Emergency Funding (Special Telework Grant and CARES Act COVID-19 Grant)
- State of Washington State Emergency Resources Disaster and Emergency CARES Act COVID-19 Grant and other special State funding
- PPP — Paycheck Protection Program — Forgivable Loan Opportunities
- FFRCA — Families First Coronavirus Response Act: Employer Paid Leave Requirements and Reimbursements

Evaluate and strategize about ways to take advantage of short-term resources in ways that stack or temporarily conserve basic and general funding.

Ramp-up private fundraising efforts for expenses such as:
- Crisis related expenditures (COVID-19 – Remote Work Costs)
- Laptops/Printers/internet access/home office furniture
- Remote technology, software, systems
- Home office supplies and expenses
- Return to work costs — PPE Personal Protective Equipment, office cleaning

The Finance Manager needs to develop projections and scenario planning.

After the adrenaline shock of the beginning of the ride and we are successfully processing payroll, serving clients and operating offsite, we then must look ahead to the coming possible turns, ascents and dips:

Develop Projections for 1–3 years for various funding scenarios, including Rosy, Likely, Not-So-Rosy.

Consider the strategic plan, mission, current deployment, client populations, service needs, geography, other community resources, etc. In Washington, we have the Washington Legal Needs Study and Matrix analysis to guide geographic staffing budgets.

Analyze the current expense budget in terms of authorized staffing levels, and personnel versus non-personnel costs. Evaluate each line item of current expense and consider ways to curtail certain costs.

Develop a list and value cost reduction possibilities to address projected shortfalls, e.g.:

- Hiring freezes
- Lay-offs (Per Attorney FTE Average Cost Calculation) 2%/5%/10%
- Consider trimming programs, consolidating offices, transferring activities to others, mergers, technology innovations for efficiency and adjusting service priorities.
- Suspension of COLAs
- Salary freezes
Curtailing employer retirement contributions
Curtailing travel and training
Unpaid furlough days (per day savings)
Reducing benefits costs
Curtailing the law loan reimbursement program
Voluntary FTE reductions, early retirements, job sharing

The resulting projections are useful in developing the annual budget, communicating with executive management, the Board of Directors, funders, lobbyists and bankers. They can be the blueprint or road map for charting and changing course based upon the circumstances that materialize.

It is important to note that these possible cost reductions above are not recommended, they are examples to consider. NJP during the Great Recession, for example, went six years no cost of living adjustments. It saved jobs but hurt moral.

Because this planning is sensitive and various scenarios can hit the rumor mill, at NJP we directly remind staff that these are “what if” possibilities for different circumstances that could arise. If not-so-rosey scenarios materialize, it is important to assess whether reductions and adjustments should be short term (salary freezes, COLA suspensions, 403(b) suspensions, furloughs, etc.) or longer-term lay-offs and downsizing.

Avoiding the Unintended Straying from Mission that Can Easily Happen During Times of Funding Uncertainty
By Rhodia Thomas, Executive Director, MidPenn Legal Services

Unfortunately, unintended straying from an organization’s mission can easily happen during times of funding uncertainty, which is why it is important to have a strong organizational mission that is supported by board and staff and understood by the client community as well as any collaborative partners. Any financial and other plans must start with an organization’s mission and stay within the mission. Once developed, plans should be reviewed to determine whether they align with the organization’s mission. If they do not, they should be revisited and or refined until they align with the organization’s mission.

For example, if your work is to serve low-income residents with civil legal problems, that goal should remain in the forefront as you budget and plan for your service delivery system. Throughout the process of developing plans, keep forefront in mind:
What do you do? What is our purpose?
Why do you do what you do? What is our vision?
If receiving funding, how will the funding fit within our mission?

This is important because mission creep can easily happen in times of funding uncertainty.

Over many years, legal aid has been through many financial life cycles, times of being up, times of being down and times when funding was stagnant. Recognize that our organizations are subject to the winds of change, many of which are political, some of which are not, such as the season in which we now find ourselves dealing with the COVID-19 public health crisis. COVID-19 is not only affecting the financial health of our organizations but also our service delivery models, which can affect the way we fulfill our missions of serving those with civil legal problems.

To that end, we need to be strategic with our planning, and while none of us has a crystal ball, I recently read an article in which the author wrote, “Consistent with our decision making processes when we are not in a pandemic, all we can do is closely scrutinize available evidence in order to make decisions that are appropriate for our short-term needs and our long-term goals.”

Our evidence includes having the best information available from various funders.

For example for those receiving IOLTA dollars, with the current climate of zero interest rates, how will this situation affect budgets in your current and upcoming fiscal years?
For those receiving filing fee dollars in states where courts were closed for some period of time, how is that going to affect your budget in the current or upcoming fiscal years?
What about those who receive state funding? How has COVID-19 affected state budgets and what does that mean for your organization? Similarly, city, county budgets, United Ways, foundations…
Does your organization have net assets? If so, do you have a board policy on maintaining a minimum amount of assets? How many months of assets does your organization have? Do you have more than the minimum amount of assets?
Does your organization have investments? If so, how readily accessible are those investments?

This is all the information that we reviewed when beginning to make plans for our organization. We had to have this in mind, given that we are on a July
Financial Planning for Legal Aid in the Pandemic
Continued from page 29

1–June 30 fiscal year as we planned for the upcoming fiscal year during the on-going pandemic. Throughout the process of developing our budget we worked to keep our organization’s mission in the forefront. This is the value of gathering the most relevant data and in scenario planning. Available information helps to guide the process of developing various scenarios that assist in formulating a mission centered plan.

Throughout the planning process key staff and board should be involved in the planning and the communicating to everyone about the fiscal outlook. This is important, because we all know that difficult decisions often result in times of financial uncertainty and anxiety among staff. Decreased funding can lead to staff downsizing as well as changes in service delivery systems. While none of us could have predicted a situation such as COVID-19, we all know that this is one of those times. I note that many of us are already expecting a downturn in our organization’s finances due to the health crisis. This means, we have to have plans that will address all the challenges we face or expect to face. For as Benjamin Franklin is credited with saying, “Without a plan, you are doomed to fail.” As important as it is to having a plan, those plans must relate to work that will fulfill the organization’s mission.

While we have no way of knowing everything about this situation, we do however know that the pandemic has and will continue to affect our organizations. Recognizing this, we must start with the best information we have. Awareness of your organization’s various funding streams is the starting point. You work to obtain the needed information. Most major funders, particularly those handling IOLTA and filing fees, are making projections based on the best information they have about what they expect for the balance of this calendar year as well as the next years. Like budgets, these are just projections, but are invaluable as you work to maintain your organization’s financial health, in order to continue to fulfill our critical mission of serving our client communities.

None of us can predict the end of this situation, and while our organizations have faced various economic crisis in this past, this pandemic is not only affecting our finances but our service delivery systems, as we now work remotely, offices that once had robust walk-in applicants and clients are now closed to walk-ins, and organizations are only seeing clients by appointment, even then utilizing technology such as Zoom and other such platforms. In addition, it has also curtailed other aspects of our work that specifically affect finances as we are unable to conduct in person fundraising events including those with bar associations. Volunteer attorney support may also be down as they too are working remotely and are no longer seeing clients in person. To accommodate some of these changes, many of our organizations have been brought fast-forward into the technological age, as we embrace Zoom, Web-Ex and other virtual media platforms to hold meetings and provide services.

This too requires planning and discussion about how we continue to maintain mission critical services. Whether times are difficult or not, planning is a constant that organizations must undertake, in order to remain a thriving organization that fulfills its mission. With that said planning is not always easy, it can be hard as it may mean change and in some instances hardships (i.e., job loss, changes in priorities, to name but a few) but we must not let those factors in this time of COVID-19 or any other time prevent us from continuing our mission of providing critical services for those in need.

1 Lonnie Powers served as Executive Director of the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation from its founding in 1983 through August 2018. He has 50 years of policy, legal, and organizational development experience at the state and national levels, having devoted the majority of his career to establishing, building, sustaining, and revitalizing legal aid organizations. Lonnie may be reached at lpowers@lonniepowersconsulting.com.

Jonathan Asher is Executive Director of Colorado Legal Services. He was Executive Director of the Legal Aid Society of Metropolitan Denver from Dec. 1, 1980 until October 1, 1999, when the three federally funded programs in Colorado became a single statewide program, Colorado Legal Services. He began his legal services career with Colorado Rural Legal Services in Greeley, Colorado in 1971. Jon is a member of the Colorado Access to Justice Commission and a member of the Colorado Bar Association’s Board of Governors. Since 2000, he has been a member of the NLADA Civil Policy Group Committee on Regulations. He earned his degrees from Harvard College and Harvard Law School. Jon may be reached at jasher@colegalerv.org.

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Steven Pelletier is the Director of Finance at the Northwest Justice Project in Seattle. Steve has 38 years of accounting and auditing experience and has served as NJP’s Director of Finance for the past 20 years. He is part of NJP’s executive management team and oversees accounting, finance, reporting, budgeting, fiscal policy and compliance. NJP is LSC’s grantee covering the State of Washington, has 30 funding sources, a budget of $34 million and staff of 260 FTE’s. Steve is an MIE Board member, a licensed CPA, and a member of the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants and the Washington Society of Certified Public Accountants. Steve may be reached at spelletier@nwjustice.org.

Rhodia D. Thomas is the Executive Director of MidPenn Legal Services, which that provides civil legal services to low-income individuals and domestic violence survivors in 18 counties in Central-Pennsylvania. She graduated magna cum laude from Syracuse University and received her J.D. from Widener Commonwealth Law School. She is active in the legal services community nationally and serves on the Board of the National Legal Aid and Defender Association where she currently holds the position of Chair. She also is also active in the State Bar Association, on the Minority Bar Committee, and in the House of Delegates. In addition, Rhodia serves on the Board of the Pennsylvania Bar Foundation. Since 2009, she has served as Chair of the Pennsylvania Project Directors Association and currently she serves as Chair of the African-American Project Director Association. Rhodia has received several awards including the 2018 Widener Commonwealth Law School Alumni Association Outstanding Service Award, the PLAN Excellence Award, and then Managing Attorney of the Family Law Unit. She left GBLS to work at Massachusetts Law Reform Institute as the state support attorney for family and juvenile law matters. Jacqui returned to GBLS, first as an Associate Director and then later became the Deputy Director. Jacqui is a graduate of the University of Chicago and Antioch University School of Law. She is a nationally recognized expert in family and juvenile law as well as in law practice management. She serves as a Commissioner on the ABA Commission on Homelessness and Poverty. She is active in the Boston Bar Association and the Massachusetts Bar Association. Jacqui also serves on Massachusetts’ Access to Justice Commission as well as the boards of several nonprofit organizations including MIE. Jacqui may be reached at jbowman@gbls.org.

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the Outstanding Minority Scholar Award, the Women of Excellence Award, the 2014 African-American Project Director Association Award and the 2016 Frank Grady Outstanding Professional Award. In 2002, she was named as one of 50 Minorities of Influence by the American Lawyer Media, publishers of the Legal Intelligencer and Pennsylvania Law Weekly. She has 30 years of experience in public interest law. Rhodia may be reached at rthomas@midpenn.org.

**MIE Listservs**

Connect with your colleagues through MIE’s listservs for executive directors, fundraisers, administrators and managers. Use these networks to have robust discussions about common issues, informally share information, documents, and policies, and ask questions and receive candid answers from peers. Email helpdesk@mielegalaid.org to join one of these active forums where you can share tips, brag about your successes, and provoke discussion among your colleagues in the legal aid community.