

Loss of Leaders: Recruitment and Retention

Background Information:

In the fall of 2006, the National Legal Aid & Defender Association (NLADA) conducted a nationwide survey of legal aid attorneys under the age of 35. NLADA undertook the survey to explore what motivates this new generation of attorneys to choose public interest law, and what barriers might exist that would prevent from them from remaining in public interest law positions during the initial years of their legal careers.

- The national survey data included 95 respondents from California under the age of 35, which represents about 13% of the approximately 750 total legal aid attorneys in California.
- The California respondents were primarily in urban areas (83%).
- The majority of them were Staff Attorneys (64%).
- About half of them were already receiving assistance from an LRAP program (53%).

Highlights of the Survey Results:

- More than half of California's legal aid attorneys under the age of 35 surveyed reported that they plan to leave their current job within the next three years (56%). One third even plan to leave within a year or less (33%).
- Nearly 90% of the California survey respondents graduated law school with educational debt. Of those with educational debt, 46% graduated with at least \$90,000 in educational debt. Even more startling, 22% found themselves with over \$120,000 worth of debt when they graduated. Almost half of these people expect to take at least 21 years to pay off their debt.
- When asked to "prioritize the top five issues that keep you working for your organization," the most frequently listed issues were as follows:
 - Opportunity to help others (79% of respondents listing it in their top 5)
 - Relationship with co-workers (61%)
 - Challenging work (55%)
 - "Family-friendly" work environment (flexible schedule, 8 hour days, good parental leave, etc) (51%)
 - Varied work (40%)
 - Training and professional development (33%)
- When asked to "prioritize the top five issues that may make you leave your organization" the most frequently listed issues were as follows:
 - Salary (69% of respondents listing it in their top 5)
 - Long-term salary plan (42%)
 - Opportunity to advance in the organization (33%)
 - Cost of living increases (33%)
 - Training and professional development (30%)
 - Quality of top management (29%)
 - Supervision (26%)

Additional Notes:

These survey results share many of the findings from the recent study by the Chicago Bar Foundation's more in-depth study of retention issues in the Illinois legal services community, allowing California programs to draw on their recommendations and experiences. For example, the Illinois study reported that there is a huge cost associated with hiring, training, and replacing an employee, as well as the "brain drain" of knowledge that leaves the organization with the employee. Illinois completed a turnover study and valued the cost of losing Illinois Legal Aid Attorneys at a minimum of \$32,549 per exiting attorney.

Also noteworthy is that both financial issues and human resources issues were frequently mentioned. It's important to consider HR issues such as quality of supervision and staff training & development, in addition to salary increases and loan repayment assistance.



LAAC would like to thank Recruitment and Retention Committee of the NLADA's Civil Policy Group for sharing the California responses collected as part of the NLADA's 2006 Recruitment and Retention Survey, and for allowing LAAC to in turn share that California-specific data with the California access to justice community. The NLADA's report on the national survey results will be released later this year.

NLADA is the nation's leading advocate for front-line attorneys and other equal justice professionals - those who make a difference in the lives of low-income clients and their families and communities. Representing legal aid and defender programs, as well as individual advocates, NLADA is proud to be the oldest and largest national, nonprofit membership association devoting 100 percent of its resources to serving the broad equal justice community.

LAAC is the statewide membership organization of legal services programs in California. LAAC provides support to the work of legal aid nonprofits through advocacy, training, and statewide coordination. In 2006, LAAC's membership included 74 organizations and over 90 individuals.

25. Please prioritize the top five issues that keep you working for your organization.

| | First | Second | Third | Fourth | Fifth | Response Total | Reponse Percent |
|--|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Opportunity to help others | 64% (44) | 16% (11) | 13% (9) | 1% (1) | 6% (4) | 69 | 79% |
| Relationships with co-workers | 13% (7) | 32% (17) | 13% (7) | 21% (11) | 21% (11) | 53 | 61% |
| Challenging work | 10% (5) | 33% (16) | 21% (10) | 21% (10) | 15% (7) | 48 | 55% |
| “Family-friendly” work environment (flexible schedule, 8 hour days, good parental leave, etc.) | 25% (11) | 25% (11) | 16% (7) | 18% (8) | 16% (7) | 44 | 51% |
| Varied work | 6% (2) | 9% (3) | 37% (13) | 26% (9) | 23% (8) | 35 | 40% |
| Training and professional development | 7% (2) | 31% (9) | 24% (7) | 28% (8) | 10% (3) | 29 | 33% |
| Benefits package | 5% (1) | 14% (3) | 38% (8) | 10% (2) | 33% (7) | 21 | 24% |
| Salary | 17% (3) | 6% (1) | 17% (3) | 39% (7) | 22% (4) | 18 | 21% |
| Opportunity to advance in the organization | 6% (1) | 31% (5) | 19% (3) | 25% (4) | 19% (3) | 16 | 18% |
| Involvement in the organization’s direction | 13% (2) | 13% (2) | 13% (2) | 40% (6) | 20% (3) | 15 | 17% |
| Top management | 17% (2) | 17% (2) | 17% (2) | 8% (1) | 42% (5) | 12 | 14% |
| Supervision | 18% (2) | 9% (1) | 9% (1) | 27% (3) | 36% (4) | 11 | 13% |
| Loan Repayment Assistance Program | 10% (1) | 20% (2) | 10% (1) | 20% (2) | 40% (4) | 10 | 11% |
| Mentoring | 10% (1) | 10% (1) | 0% (0) | 40% (4) | 40% (4) | 10 | 11% |
| Diverse workforce | 0% (0) | 0% (0) | 56% (5) | 22% (2) | 22% (2) | 9 | 10% |
| Recognition of meritorious work | 12% (1) | 12% (1) | 25% (2) | 50% (4) | 0% (0) | 8 | 9% |
| Middle management | 0% (0) | 29% (2) | 43% (3) | 29% (2) | 0% (0) | 7 | 8% |
| Sick leave pool | 0% (0) | 0% (0) | 25% (1) | 50% (2) | 25% (1) | 4 | 5% |
| Long-term salary plan | 33% (1) | 0% (0) | 0% (0) | 0% (0) | 67% (2) | 3 | 3% |
| Facilities | 0% (0) | 0% (0) | 33% (1) | 0% (0) | 67% (2) | 3 | 3% |
| Cost of living increases | 0% (0) | 0% (0) | 50% (1) | 0% (0) | 50% (1) | 2 | 2% |
| Pension | 0% (0) | 0% (0) | 100% (1) | 0% (0) | 0% (0) | 1 | 1% |
| State of the art technology | 0% (0) | 0% (0) | 0% (0) | 0% (0) | 100% (1) | 1 | 1% |
| Quality of support staff | 0% (0) | 0% (0) | 0% (0) | 0% (0) | 0% (0) | 0 | 0% |
| Total Respondents | | | | | | 87 | |

26. Please prioritize the top five issues below that may make you leave your organization.

| | First | Second | Third | Fourth | Fifth | Response Total | Response Percent |
|--|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|----------------|------------------|
| Salary | 64% (38) | 20% (12) | 5% (3) | 5% (3) | 5% (3) | 59 | 69% |
| Long-term salary plan | 8% (3) | 25% (9) | 31% (11) | 14% (5) | 22% (8) | 36 | 42% |
| Opportunity to advance in the | 25% (7) | 14% (4) | 18% (5) | 18% (5) | 25% (7) | 28 | 33% |
| Cost of living increases | 4% (1) | 39% (11) | 7% (2) | 18% (5) | 32% (9) | 28 | 33% |
| Training and professional | 15% (4) | 19% (5) | 19% (5) | 12% (3) | 35% (9) | 26 | 30% |
| Quality of top management | 48% (12) | 8% (2) | 28% (7) | 16% (4) | 0% (0) | 25 | 29% |
| Supervision | 9% (2) | 23% (5) | 32% (7) | 32% (7) | 5% (1) | 22 | 26% |
| Benefits package | 6% (1) | 22% (4) | 39% (7) | 17% (3) | 17% (3) | 18 | 21% |
| Pension | 0% (0) | 22% (4) | 22% (4) | 56% (10) | 0% (0) | 18 | 21% |
| Challenging work | 28% (5) | 22% (4) | 17% (3) | 6% (1) | 28% (5) | 18 | 21% |
| Quality of support staff | 7% (1) | 33% (5) | 13% (2) | 27% (4) | 20% (3) | 15 | 17% |
| Loan Repayment Assistance | 0% (0) | 14% (2) | 43% (6) | 21% (3) | 21% (3) | 14 | 16% |
| Recognition of meritorious work | 0% (0) | 7% (1) | 36% (5) | 21% (3) | 36% (5) | 14 | 16% |
| Quality of middle management | 7% (1) | 36% (5) | 21% (3) | 21% (3) | 14% (2) | 14 | 16% |
| Varied work | 23% (3) | 15% (2) | 31% (4) | 23% (3) | 8% (1) | 13 | 15% |
| Mentoring | 0% (0) | 15% (2) | 23% (3) | 15% (2) | 46% (6) | 13 | 15% |
| Involvement in the organization's | 8% (1) | 33% (4) | 8% (1) | 33% (4) | 17% (2) | 12 | 14% |
| Relationships with co-workers | 33% (4) | 17% (2) | 8% (1) | 33% (4) | 8% (1) | 12 | 14% |
| "Family-friendly" work environment (flexible schedule, 8 hour days, good parental leave, etc.) | 20% (2) | 20% (2) | 20% (2) | 30% (3) | 10% (1) | 10 | 12% |
| Diverse workforce | 0% (0) | 0% (0) | 0% (0) | 40% (2) | 60% (3) | 5 | 6% |
| Opportunity to help others | 25% (1) | 25% (1) | 0% (0) | 0% (0) | 50% (2) | 4 | 5% |
| Facilities | 0% (0) | 0% (0) | 25% (1) | 25% (1) | 50% (2) | 4 | 5% |
| State of the art technology | 0% (0) | 0% (0) | 50% (1) | 0% (0) | 50% (1) | 2 | 2% |
| Sick leave pool | 0% (0) | 0% (0) | 0% (0) | 50% (1) | 50% (1) | 2 | 2% |
| Total Respondents | | | | | | 86 | |

What is the number one change your program should make so that it is a place where you and other young attorneys want to work and stay for a long time?

- [1.](#) Allow for more intellectually challenging work.
- [2.](#) Create an environment where we feel that the impact of our work is real and tangible on the communities we serve, and worth the sacrifices we make to do it.
- [3.](#) Living wage such that a solo wage earner can have a good standard of living and live like a professional. It's a basic issue of how we are actually "valued" in or organization, our profession, and in society in general.
- [4.](#) Increase salary.
- [5.](#) Increase salary.
- [6.](#) Competitive salary
- [7.](#) competitive salary, opportunities to advance
- [8.](#) Increase salaries
- [9.](#) Focus more on career development and retention; i.e. actually drafting career development plans with younger attorneys and encouraging a variety of experiences to prevent burnout (such as writing for a poverty law journal, giving presentations, etc).
- [10.](#) We need to have opportunities for advancement.
- [11.](#) The organization needs to pay more of an attorney's competitive salary. Young attorneys can not afford to work for this organization and live. As I see it, young attorneys will work here a year or two, get some experience and then move on, not because we don't love the work, but the salary is just not reasonable.
- [12.](#) Generally speaking I think my organization, and most other legal service organizations, need to recognize that today's young attorneys are likely carrying more debt than ever before. As a result, unless something is done to improve the LRAP and/or general compensation structure at legal service organizations this is not going to be a viable long-term career path or individuals that are the primary bread-winners within their respective households.
- [13.](#) Top and middle management need to address and take seriously the concerns of young attorneys.
- [14.](#) I find this question difficult to answer considering my short experience with this organization. If pressed for an answer, I would say that a facilities upgrade is most dire. Several attorneys, including myself, are working in small cubicles or other cramped spaces. My understanding is that the organization has made a commitment to alleviating this problem.
- [15.](#) They need to increase the pay.
- [16.](#) Higher salary and loan repayment are the most challenging issues facing recent

graduates of law school

- [17.](#) Not necessarily for me, but increases in benefits & salary would help.
- [18.](#) Our agency needs a more defined salary as well as professional plan for attorneys. This would be achieved by obtaining more funding.
- [19.](#) Management should value legal aid attorneys as professionals who are not expendable. The lack of retention has become a norm and this should not be accepted.
- [20.](#) More family-friendly environment (35-40 hour work week), salary increase
- [21.](#) Better supervision and guidance. Opportunities for professional growth.
- [22.](#) Invest financially through increased salary, benefits and loan repayment assistance.
- [23.](#) Hire young attorneys not in a fellowship method. For instance, I am currently serving in a fellowship and it ends June 30th. I'll have to go back to the drawing board to find a new job, which is really scary as I'm further along in my loan payments. We need money allocated for employer-LRAPs and post-grad STAFF positions. Otherwise, we're going to lose the next generation of legal aid lawyers.
- [24.](#) Salary increases.
- [25.](#) Top management is more responsive to staff needs (e.g., technology, support, provision of supervision).
- [26.](#) Consistency. Equal treatment of staff. Consequences for failure to perform. Improved recruitment will equate to improved retention.
- [27.](#) There needs to be a significant increase in salary so that what we earn is actually on par with the very high cost of living in this area.
- [28.](#) flexibility for bar leaves and ability to use sick leave time for bar leave.
- [29.](#) geographically based cost of living increases, or at least, commuter assistance (vouchers or subsidies)
- [30.](#) Increase salaries
- [31.](#) Increase in salary
- [32.](#) Increase salaries.
- [33.](#) More support re: career development
- [34.](#) Increase salaries.
- [35.](#) Make the salary competitive with other programs statewide (i.e., NLS, BALA, LAFLA, WCLP, etc.)
- [36.](#) Paid family leave
- [37.](#) The salary is very low. I think most people work for legal aid and non-profits b/c of the nature of the work, not for the money. But in order for someone to stay, it becomes less

and less feasible economically b/c of student loans, wanting to buy a home, having a family, etc.

- [38.](#) Higher salary Recruit individuals based on their grades and commitment, not grades alone
- [39.](#) Involve staff attorneys in program changes - we're going to be the ones implementing, we know what will work/what won't work.
- [40.](#) Actual salary increases.
- [41.](#) Greater starting salary for staff attorneys
- [42.](#) Merit-based salary scale.
- [43.](#) INvolvement in bigger projects for new attorneys so they are not overrunwith service work.
- [44.](#) Stop being so dysfunctional.
- [45.](#) mentoring; competitive salary
- [46.](#) More funding would allow us to pay higher salaries!
- [47.](#) I don't think that there's much any legal services program can do.
- [48.](#) Top management
- [49.](#) There are two issues that are equally important. We need a more careful personnel selection process that focuses both on finding experienced lawyers who can provide the office with technical support and good managers who can handle personnel issues. Also, attorneys need to earn more money, enough to pay off our loans and have a little left over for savings or buying a (small) house.
- [50.](#) Salary and paying for transporation.
- [51.](#) Raise our pay by at least 125%, with larger annual raises. Right now for each year we are here as staff attorneys, our pay increases by \$1500.00 - that amounts to \$28 per week. That is is just pitiful.
- [52.](#) The work is enjoyable and meaningful but it will be impossible to stay long term because of the low salary.
- [53.](#) Train management how to manage. Efficiency, efficacy. Lawyers often do not have the personality or skills to do this without a lot of training and assistance.
- [54.](#) Inspire people with a vision of social justice and think creatively about achieving that vision. Include staff in organizational decisions so that they feel a stake in the outcome of the organization, and focus on PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT so people will want to stay. Legal services can become a grind just like any other job, and people need reminders about why their job is different and why they became involved in the first place. They need INSPIRATION and a sense of community in the workplace.
- [55.](#) More opportunity to work part-time.

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| <u>56.</u> | More professional trainings and procedural manuals for new staff attorneys are needed. |
| <u>57.</u> | We need very solid supervision, along with a great training and development program for new attorneys. Plus, I think we need a salary structure that will really reward longer term service. At my program (in California no less), I have to work almost 5 years to earn the 40k a year that I got before I went to law school. |
| <u>58.</u> | An increase in the salary offered staff attorneys would probably attract and keep more young attorneys, but increasing salary enough to the point where it would attract young attorneys to legal services instead of to private law offices is an unrealistic goal. Beyond that, more structured support and training for young attorneys just joining legal services would be helpful in retaining us. |
| <u>59.</u> | Competitive salary and benefits package |
| <u>60.</u> | Better loan repayment assistance. |
| <u>61.</u> | Mentorship |
| <u>62.</u> | Focus on retention and sustainability of projects...through fundraising and collaboration with others in the community to develop more effective services for our clients. |
| <u>63.</u> | Better middle management and supervision. |
| <u>64.</u> | Increase salaries and benefits with a lot of training and support. |
| <u>65.</u> | I hate direct services provision. It is frustrating and makes little long-term impact, as it is currently practiced. Legal services need to incorporate more community-wide and impact strategies, like Community Economic Development projects, and move away from a purely direct services model. |
| <u>66.</u> | The salary must provide single wage earners with a comfortable living. We work too hard to have to worry about paying our rent and other basic expenses. |
| <u>67.</u> | Better compensation (salary, benefits, loan repayment) |
| <u>68.</u> | Demonstrating in tangible ways that the organization values our contributions and our professional development, which would be accomplished through many of the things this survey addresses: mentoring and quality supervision, communication from management and involvement in organization-wide decisions that affect all of us, recognition of the work we are doing (e.g., high-quality, holistic services even if for a smaller number of clients), and salaries and benefits that take into account the very high cost of living in our area. |
| <u>69.</u> | Higher salaries |
| <u>70.</u> | Better facilities -- It really makes a difference when the technology and the office building are modern and well taken care of. I think my everyday stress and frustration would go down a full notch or perhaps two if the copy machine were not so low-end. I think legal services lawyers tend to have to use the copy machine a lot, and if that's the case, I think it's even more important that the copy machine be top of the line, so it doesn't add to the stress of practicing this type of law. Things like being able to have a |

blackberry, scan documents and email them rather than having to use snail mail, use a laptop rather than a big clunky desktop from the eighties, having updated programs on the computers, and also having a good network administrator to handle technical problems... all of these things can make or break a legal services attorney.

[71.](#) My organization is a small nonprofit legal services organization, but provides little or not direct services. It is mostly training and technical assistance and I did not go to law school to regurgitate training on the same material over and over. I want challenging work and the ability to help the underrepresented. Training here is not very good, as I have found is the case in many small specialized legal services organizations.

[72.](#) Increase salary, cost of living increases, help with loan repayment, better benefits, or give bonuses.

[73.](#) higher wages, loan assistance

[74.](#) More opportunities for advancement and appropriate salary increases that recognize long-term commitment and professional recognition.

[75.](#) Improve communication.

[76.](#) More involvement with decisions effecting the program.