

## **SOLUTIONS TO YOUR MANAGEMENT PROBLEMS**

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ALA Management Solutions (ALAMS) is a full-time information and reference service exclusively for ALA members. ALAMS has a number of features or components, including Documents-on-Demand and Fax-on-Demand services, and an extensive Peer Consulting Database that is available on-line and in hard copy form in the ALA Membership Directory. Those are extremely useful resources but to me the heart and soul of ALAMS is our Reference Desk - a service which increasing numbers of ALA members are turning to for assistance in resolving and addressing all sorts of management issues.

When you contact the Reference Desk you are really accessing an ever-growing central collection and database of legal management information at ALA Headquarters. Our trained and experienced staff uses a systematic approach to understanding your questions, doing the research through our proprietary database and other resources, and delivering to you information, copies of relevant articles and other sources to answer your question or guide your approach. The Reference Desk response may include referral to other ALA members who can provide the benefit of personal experience with the same type of problem or issue. The total response package may also include electronic links to Internet resources and any other form of information that the Reference Desk staff can access on the subject. Results are often so detailed that they take the form of individually crafted mini-reference manuals specifically developed in response to your particular inquiry.

What sort of questions does the Reference Desk field? The short answer is almost anything that relates to law firm management and administration. Some specific examples of actual recent inquiries (reduced to their simplest form) include:

- "I would like to develop a satisfaction survey to distribute following my firm's retreat. Do you have any suggestions or resources?"
- "Do you have any information with respect to standards/ranges of debt to equity ratios in the legal industry?"
- "What different methods do most law firms use in recovering client costs (i.e. photocopies, fax, long distance telephone, postage charges, etc.)?"
- "Do you have any job descriptions for a Public Relations Specialist - not a Marketing Director but a true PR Specialist?"
- "Do you have any information on lawyer attrition and staff turnover? What about strategies for retaining associates?"

Who answers these questions? The ALAMS program has two experienced full-time staffers on the Reference Desk. Gary Weitzel is the program Administrator. Gary has over 20 years of broad-based management experience, including with the CMS Consulting Group in St. Louis and, just before joining the ALA staff in 1998, as a member of the financial management team at the 165-lawyer Chicago firm of Wildman, Harrold, Allen & Dixon. Gary earned his B.S. degree from the University of Wisconsin,

did Masters level work in Public Administration at Roosevelt University and received a Master of Science in Legal Administration from the University of Denver. Gary is ably assisted by Susan Umbdenstock, who earned her undergraduate degree at Macalester college and her Master of Science in Library Science from the University of Illinois. Prior to joining ALA, Sue spent 10-years at Chicago's Rudnick & Wolfe where she was Assistant Librarian and then Library Director for that 275-lawyer firm. Sue adds tremendous expertise in research/reference work and in collection development to our Reference Desk Operation.

You can reach the Reference Desk through the "Members Only" section of the ALA Web site, by fax at (847) 816-1213 or by phone at (847) 247-5582. If you are contacting the Reference Desk by e-mail or fax, be sure to include your name, firm and telephone number. You can typically expect a response within 24 hours, unless there are uncompleted studies ahead of yours or if your request will require some extraordinary research. In that sort of case, either Gary or Sue will do their best to contact you and give you an expected completion date. Every effort is made to respond as needed to help you out, however time and a systematic approach are necessary components of a thorough response - so don't wait until the last minute to turn to the Reference Desk for help.

The Reference Desk is currently averaging around 22 requests for help per week, ranging from simple questions to complex research projects. It's designed to be a resource for you as a benefit of your ALA membership - so give it a try the next time you're stuck and ready to cry "Help!"