

## Standard 6.1 on Characteristics of Staff

# STANDARD 6.1 ON CHARACTERISTICS OF STAFF

### STANDARD

*A provider's staff should be diverse, well-qualified and competent, sensitive to low income persons and their legal needs, and committed to providing high quality legal services.*

### COMMENTARY

Legal aid for low income persons should be provided by staff members who are professionally well-qualified and competent, are sensitive to persons they are serving and cognizant of their legal needs, and are committed to high quality legal work to address the problems of low income persons. To this end a legal aid provider should recruit and strive to retain diverse staff<sup>1</sup> with the professional skills and knowledge to provide high quality assistance to persons served, committed to providing such assistance and capable of communicating effectively with members of the low income communities served by the provider.<sup>2</sup>

Providers should take steps to facilitate high quality work by its staff practitioners by offering training in professional skills and substantive law and assuring that staff members have meaningful opportunities for professional development.<sup>3</sup> It should supervise its staff members to foster their professional growth and assure effective assistance to clients.<sup>4</sup> The provider should strive to retain staff by providing fair compensation, benefits and satisfactory working conditions. A provider's capacity to attract and retain high quality staff will be enhanced by the degree to which it is engaged with the low income communities it serves,<sup>5</sup> accomplishes meaningful results for them<sup>6</sup> and has institutional stature and credibility.<sup>7</sup>

High quality representation also calls for practitioners who can communicate effectively with their clients and who are aware of and sensitive to the cultural diversity that exists in the low income communities that the provider serves.<sup>8</sup> The provider should seek out practitioners who have the capacity to empathize with the concerns of low income clients and bridge differences that may exist regarding their understanding of their legal problems and the legal system in

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<sup>1</sup> See ABA Standards for the Provision of Civil Legal Aid (2006), Standard 2.5 (on Staff Diversity).

<sup>2</sup> See ABA Standards for the Provision of Civil Legal Aid (2006), Standard 2.4 (on Cultural Competence).

<sup>3</sup> See ABA Standards for the Provision of Civil Legal Aid (2006), Standard 6.5 (on Training).

<sup>4</sup> See ABA Standards for the Provision of Civil Legal Aid (2006): Standard 6.3 (on Responsibility for the Conduct of Representation); Standard 6.4 (on Review of Representation).

<sup>5</sup> See ABA Standards for the Provision of Civil Legal Aid (2006), Standard 2.1 (on Identifying Legal Needs and Planning to Respond).

<sup>6</sup> See ABA Standards for the Provision of Civil Legal Aid (2006), Standard 2.6 (on Achieving Lasting Results for Low Income Individuals and Communities).

<sup>7</sup> See ABA Standards for the Provision of Civil Legal Aid (2006), Standard 2.12 (on Institutional Stature and Credibility).

<sup>8</sup> See ABA Standards for the Provision of Civil Legal Aid (2006): Standard 2.4 (on Cultural Competence); Standard 2.5 (on Staff Diversity).

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general.<sup>9</sup> Providers should recruit bilingual practitioners and staff who can effectively communicate with applicants and clients who may have limited proficiency in English or who are hearing-impaired.<sup>10</sup> Providers should conduct training for its staff to assure that they are equipped to provide services to members of diverse client communities in a culturally competent manner.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> See ABA Standards for the Provision of Civil Legal Aid (2006): Standard 7.1 (on Establishing an Effective Relationship and a Clear Understanding with the Client); Standard 6.5 (on Training); Standard 7.8 (on Legal Counseling); Standard 2.1 (on Identifying Legal Needs and Planning to Respond).

<sup>10</sup> See ABA Standards for the Provision of Civil Legal Aid (2006), Standard 4.6 (on Communication in the Primary Languages of Persons Served).

<sup>11</sup> See ABA Standards for the Provision of Civil Legal Aid (2006), Standard 2.4 (on Cultural Competence).