

**NOMINATION FORM  
2013 ANNUAL NCWBA PUBLIC SERVICE AND  
OUTSTANDING MEMBER PROGRAM AWARDS**

Name of your organization's project:

Project FUTURE

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Please indicate whether your submission is for the Public Service Award or Outstanding Member Program Award: Public Service Award

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Name of sponsoring women's bar association:

El Paso Women's Bar Association

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Name of Sponsoring Organization's contact person:

Janet Monteros

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E-mail address: janet.monteros@att.net

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Telephone No: (915) 834-7521

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Number of members: 70

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Name of contact person for purposes of award notification:

Lily Stroud

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**PLEASE MAKE SURE TO NOTIFY THE NCWBA OF ANY CHANGE IN YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION AFTER SUBMISSION OF YOUR AWARD APPLICATION TO ENSURE YOU RECEIVE TIMELY NOTIFICATION REGARDING WHETHER YOU HAVE BEEN SELECTED TO RECEIVE AN AWARD.**

The nomination materials may be e-mailed to be received no later than Thursday, January 31, 2013:    *Awards Chair Wendy Weigler, E-mail: [awards@ncwba.org](mailto:awards@ncwba.org)*

**El Paso Women's Bar Association  
Project FUTURE**

Project FUTURE was created to assist young adults in the DFPS/foster care system who reach 18 years of age and are not adopted or returned to their parents. Project FUTURE helps these young people by providing meaningful work experiences and assisting them in developing a goal-oriented future that is productive to both the individual and the community. The project sought to place approximately 20 participants in part-time (20 hours a week) law-related internships for 6 weeks. The project also sought to provide pro bono legal assistance with expunctions and/or sealing of juvenile records for qualified indigent participants.

The Project FUTURE committee generally met once a month, with additional meetings to address specific issues that arose during the course of the project. Committee members included Lily Stroud, the EPWBA President at the time, County Commissioner Anna Perez (Pct. 1), Judge Maria Salas-Mendoza of the 120<sup>th</sup> District Court, Judge Yahara Gutierrez of the 65<sup>th</sup> District Court, County Attorney Jo Anne Bernal, Assistant County Attorneys Marilyn Mungerson and Gabriella Edwards, Assistant District Attorney Toni Estaville, Wallace Hardgrove of the County Auditor's Office, Gabriel Herrera with the County Human Resources Department, Cezy Collins with the law firm of Kemp Smith, Rita Ruelas, the Director for Mental Health Support Services (MHSS), Angelica Terrazas and Michelle Noriega with the PRIDE (Preparation and Resources for Independence through Determination with Excellence) Center, and Rene Acosta, the Community Outreach/Events Coordinator of the Law School Preparation Institute at the University of Texas at El Paso.

In November of 2011, the committee created a job application form (the standard application form for the County of El Paso that was modified for purposes of this program) and Project FUTURE brochures, which was then made available to prospective applicants. Applicants were required to submit their applications by December 15, 2011. In December of 2011, and January of 2012, the committee reviewed the applications it received and decided which applicants would be accepted into the program. The County Attorney's Office conducted the necessary criminal-background checks for each applicant with the applicant's consent. The purpose of the criminal-background check was two-fold: (1) to determine the applicant's suitability for employment in various County departments, and (2) to determine the applicant's eligibility for an expunction, sealing of juvenile records, and/or assistance with municipal warrants for unpaid traffic violations.

The committee also decided that because one of the purposes of the program was to prepare the interns for the workforce, the applicants would be required to undergo an interview process without knowing that the interview process was an exercise for which they would be evaluated. The applicants were to receive their interview evaluations after they were formally accepted into the program. The interview process would also assist the committee in placing the interns in the County department most suitable to their interests and career goals. In furtherance of providing the interns with a full and meaningful work experience, the committee also determined that as a condition of their internships, the interns would be required to attend a mandatory employee orientation, which was presented by the County HR department.



In March of 2012, all applicants received a letter notifying them of the committee's decision to either accept or not accept them into the program. Each applicant who was accepted into the program received a letter advising them of their interview date and time. The committee conducted 20-minute interviews on March 27, 2012, through March 29, 2012. Each interview was conducted with a panel of three to four committee members, and each interviewer completed a written interview evaluation for the interviewee. In April of 2012, the committee mailed acceptance letters, extending an offer for the six-week internship and advising the accepted applicants of the date, time, and location of their mandatory employee orientation.

On May 21, 2012, the committee went before El Paso County Commissioners Court and obtained the approval to have the County of El Paso serve as the program's fiscal agent. The committee also approached and obtained the assistance of the Legal Charitable Foundation of El Paso (LCFEP), a 501(c)(3) charitable organization, in accepting donations on behalf of the program. Funds received by the LCFEP for payroll were to be forwarded to the County as needed to cover payroll expenses, while restricted funds for the payment of expenses associated with the expunctions and sealing of juvenile records would remain with the LCFEP.

Ultimately, thirteen applicants were accepted and participated in the program. These thirteen interns attended an all-day mandatory employee orientation on June 12, 2012. The following El Paso County department head/elected officials volunteered to provide mentorship and a meaningful work experience to the interns: Judge Maria Salas-Mendoza, 120<sup>th</sup> District Court; Judge Yahara Gutierrez, 65<sup>th</sup> District Court; Judge Linda Chew, 327<sup>th</sup> District Court; County Attorney Jo Anne Bernal, County Attorney's Office; District Attorney Jaime Esparza, District Attorney's Office; District Clerk Norma Favela, District Clerk's Office; County Clerk Delia Briones, County Clerk's Office; Rita Ruelas, Director, Mental Health Support Services; and Betsy Keller, Director, Human Resources Department.

The interns received compensation for the all-day employee orientation and was provided lunch. At the orientation, the interns were advised of their County department assignment and were introduced to the department head/elected official and/or their direct supervisors. At the end of the orientation, the interns met with representatives of the Human Resources department to complete necessary employment paperwork, and the interns were instructed to report for work at 8:00 a.m. on June 18, 2012. Because a number of the interns were impoverished, the committee inquired into their clothing needs and was able to obtain the assistance of the law firm of Scott Hulse, which held a clothing drive to provide suitable work clothes for the interns.

On June 13, 2012, the day after the employee orientation, the department heads/elected officials were asked to attend an employer orientation, which was presented by the PRIDE Center. So that the committee could ensure that the departments had a plan for providing their interns a meaningful work experience, the committee requested and obtained proposed curricula from the departments. The department heads were also presented with video introductions from their interns. The video format provided an informal and less awkward platform for the interns to share however much of his or her personal story that he or she was comfortable sharing with his or her employer.



The interns reported to their respective departments on June 18, 2012. For the following six weeks, the interns worked variable hours, which was adjusted to accommodate their transportation issues and school schedules. Each Friday, the interns were required to attend a one-hour “lunch-and-learn,” during which speakers would come and speak to the youths about various life skills, such as responsible money management. The interns were also given their interview evaluations.

On July 27, 2012, the committee held a “Completion Ceremony” for the interns, presenting them with “Completion Certificates” that were signed by the EPWBA President and the elected official/department head of the intern’s department. The interns were also provided job resource information, such as information on obtaining permanent employment with the County, and received letters of recommendation upon request. Interns were also asked to complete post-employment evaluations to quantify their learning experience and to provide feedback on how to improve the program. The Completion Ceremony received local television media coverage.

In terms of qualifying the success of this program in its pilot year, a number of the interns have expressed benefitting by learning a number of office skills and by being exposed to a professional work setting. The interns have also benefitted by being exposed to the inner workings of the legal system. Three Project FUTURE interns were later hired into permanent positions with the County. A majority of the interns have received pro bono legal assistance in some form, including the sealing of juvenile records, the resolution of municipal traffic tickets and warrants, post-conviction filings, and/or expunctions. The EPWBA also held an informal holiday party for the Project FUTURE interns in December of 2012.

Given the success of the program, the EPWBA has decided to continue Project FUTURE this year. The committee seeks to improve the overall organization of the program by providing standardized informational materials to interns and the employers that will contain information related to issues such as payroll, human-resources support, etc. The committee has also decided to add an additional mentorship component to the program, whereby EPWBA members may volunteer to serve as one-on-one mentors to the Project FUTURE interns.

With an eye towards making Project FUTURE a permanent feature of the organization, the EPWBA has created a manual that details the implementation and execution of the program so that the program may be more easily replicated by the EPWBA in future years and by other organizations in the State of Texas. The manual includes a copy of the program’s brochure, job application, interview letter, interview questions, interview-evaluation form, internship-offer letter, employee-orientation agenda, pre-employment evaluation form, employer orientation/training materials, employer curricula, sample lunch-and-learn curriculum, completion certificate, sample recommendation letter, and post-employment evaluation form.

While the short-term goals of the program involve providing much-needed immediate assistance to the program’s participants, the long-term goal of Project FUTURE is to create a permanent alliance between the legal community, public-service organizations, and the community at large in helping one of the most vulnerable cross-sections of the community.