



Section FAQ

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What are best practices to strengthen section membership?

- Keep your website current, including event information and your most recent annual report
- Communicate with your members regularly – through your SBM Connect discussion group, e-blasts, etc.
- Form a leadership team, work together, delegate tasks, and always seek input from others
- Understand and articulate your section's value proposition
- Follow a strategic plan
- Provide substantive education programs and fun networking opportunities; consider inviting non-lawyers to your events
- Partner and collaborate with other sections and with affinity bar associations
- Develop leadership: educate current leaders, encourage new leadership
- Develop, promote, and encourage mentoring opportunities

2. We have questions about how to get financial reports, expense reimbursements, and bills paid. How does that work?

The Finance Department holds a Finance FAQ conference call with section treasurers and chairs every fall—usually in November. Finance reports are sent to the treasurer and chair by email from Jim Horsch and Becky Weaver on or before the 15th of each month (except at year-end). You may go online and use the expense reimbursement form to submit reimbursement requests and mail or email them to Alpa Patel at apatel@michbar.org. The treasurer or chair must approve payment requests. Checks are issued every Friday. Payment requests received by Wednesday at 2:00 pm will be processed the same week unless further documentation or approval is required.

3. Sections must have all contracts reviewed and approved by the SBM Office of General Counsel. Why is this required?

The conduct of section members may subject the State Bar to liability, so they are covered by the Bar's indemnification and insurance policies. If the Bar is

going to insure and indemnify sections and potentially subject itself and its members to liability, it needs to be apprised of any contract or conduct that might give rise to liability. In addition, the Bar has experience with event and vendor contracts and can negotiate the removal of any onerous terms. As an example, the General Counsel's Office negotiated the removal of unfavorable indemnification and arbitration clauses from a State Bar venue contract and achieved the same result for a section event held at that facility.

Contract Review and Approval Checklist:

1. Always list the contracting party as: [Name of Section] of the State Bar of Michigan
2. Submit all section contracts to contractreview@michbar.org
3. Include in the body of the e-mail the date by which the contract needs to be signed
4. Allow five (5) business days for SBM review and approval, absent extenuating circumstances
5. Send questions to contractreview@michbar.org or contact Nkrumah Johnson-Wynn at (517) 346-6310

4. We want to change our section's name, dues, and/or bylaws. What do we do?

First, contact Darin Day, director of outreach, at (517) 346-6330 or dday@michbar.org. Second, follow closely and **document** the amendment procedures set forth in your section's current bylaws. Such procedures usually include provisions for notice, quorum, and similar matters. Please be aware that the Board of Commissioners must approve all changes to a section's name, dues structure, or section bylaws. Darin will help you get the matter before the Board.

5. Communication with our members is key to our success. What services does the State Bar offer to help sections with this?

- **SBM Connect:** Post minutes, notices, council information; communicate via your section discussion group, post upcoming events; take advantage of your section member directory, leadership roster, demographics reports, customizable document library, and archived materials.
- **e-Blasts:** SBM offers an e-blast service to sections, to send section-branded, professionally designed messages by email. Typical cost is \$100 to \$150.
- **Membership lists and mailing labels**

- ***e-Journal:*** Section events and news releases may be featured in the *e-Journal*.
- ***Michigan Bar Journal:*** A regular monthly feature in the *Michigan Bar Journal* entitled “Section Briefs” allows sections to include announcements or news items of up to 75 words free of charge. Sections also may schedule theme issues; send photos/information for inclusion in the *Bar Journal*’s “Up Front” section; and advertise upcoming events for a fee in the *Michigan Bar Journal*.
- ***Social media:*** We can assist you.
- ***Press releases:*** We can assist you.
- ***Media opportunities:*** Section leaders may be asked to participate in radio or TV talk shows, podcasts, or other interview opportunities.
- ***Design and Typesetting:*** The SBM offers in-house typesetting, design, and print services for section newsletters, printed directories, brochures, meeting notices, event registration forms, and meeting materials.

6. We are thinking of starting an e-newsletter. What’s been the experience of other sections?

A growing number of sections find that using an e-newsletter saves a substantial amount of printing and postage costs. Your section prepares the content; the e-newsletter can be designed by SBM staff and posted as a web page, a series of pages, or a .pdf file, then emailed to your members. You have the option of making the e-newsletter publicly available or for section members only. Ample lead time is needed and design service fees will be charged. SBM staff can also edit content for a fee. Some sections send event information to members in a section-branded eblast; the typical cost is \$100.

7. We would like to display our section name on print materials and gifts. What do we need to know, and can you help us?

The State Bar of Michigan is working hard to brand its image and identity through consistent and proper use of its logo and seal. As part of the State Bar, sections must follow the State Bar design standards to secure that identity. This is especially important when a section is partnering with other organizations or working with venues that have their own identity. A strong, clear identity benefits the section by strengthening credibility and visibility, and

reinforcing your relationship with the State Bar. Our graphic design staff is always available to help you place your section name on print materials and gifts in a way that reinforces the image and identity of the State Bar. In addition, we can help you find or work with your vendor to make sure that the State Bar logo and section name are correctly placed on any product. Please be sure to contact Heather Anderson before approving printed materials and gifts that bear your section name.

8. We want to publicize our events in the press. What should we do?

The easiest way to contact newspapers is through e-mail. For an updated list of the major daily newspapers in Michigan, go to www.newspaperlinks.com. You can also look up weekly newspapers at this site.

9. We want to take a position on a current bill in the legislature. How can we do that?

Follow your section’s bylaws on how to adopt a position, which is typically entrusted to a vote of the section council. Once a valid vote is attained, the position must be reported to the State Bar within 10 days. Reporting is easy to do using the online template at http://www.michbar.org/publicpolicy/report_public.cfm.

The template prompts you to provide all the information required under [Administrative Order 2004-01](#). After State Bar staff review the submitted information, they will inform the section whether it can advocate its position. Sections are permitted to advocate their positions as long as (1) the subject matter falls within the section’s jurisdiction; (2) the section’s bylaws were followed in taking the position; and (3) the position does not conflict with an existing State Bar position.

If these requirements are met, State Bar staff will send the section a “public policy position report” that satisfies all of the requirements under [AO 2004-01](#). The Order requires that before an advocacy, either written or oral, certain information must be disclosed to distinguish the section from the State Bar as a whole. This report can be used as the front page of any written letter communicating the position or read during other advocacy. In addition, State Bar staff will post the position on the State Bar and the section’s websites.

10. We want to be active in other policy matters, including amicus briefs and letters to editors. What do we need to know before we embark on these activities?

Sections may engage in a wide range of public policy beyond legislation. This includes court rules, amicus briefs, letters to the editor, ballot proposals, local ordinances, university policies, and administrative rules.

Any time a section wishes to engage in advocating a public policy position, it must follow its own bylaws in adopting the position, report the position to the State Bar within 10 days, and follow the guidelines under AO 2004-01 to distinguish the section from the entire State Bar.

When the Supreme Court invites sections to submit amicus briefs, the section will be alerted to the opportunity by State Bar staff.

There is a two-step process for reporting section positions for amicus briefs:

1. Once your section takes a position to submit an amicus brief in a particular case, please fill out the [public policy report](#) discussed above in Question 6 to inform the State Bar of your section's intention to submit an amicus brief.
2. After the brief has been filed with the court, please provide the State Bar with a copy of the brief. Briefs can be emailed to Carrie Sharlow at csharlow@michbar.org.

Sections can pursue other avenues to speak on public policy matters according to the discretion of the section. If the item involves a public policy position, it is imperative the position be reported before any other communication takes place. It must be clear that any communication is from the section, and not the State Bar of Michigan. It is also important that the guidelines of [AO 2004-01](#) are met where applicable.

11. Our section is charitable and community-minded. Can we award scholarships or make charitable contributions?

Sections should exercise caution when considering making a charitable contribution. The section's funds represent dues contributions of many, many members, some of whom may have strong opinions and may not share the section leadership's idea of what constitutes a worthwhile contribution. If your section is considering making a contribution, be sure it is for a cause that your general membership supports and is consistent with your section's purposes as stated in its bylaws. And be sure to document the amount and the reasoning in the minutes of the section's council meeting where the contribution is approved.

A check request for a charitable contribution must include (a) the minutes of the meeting where there donation was approved and (b) a Form W-9 from the intended recipient.

Sections may sponsor scholarships and writing contests. When setting up a scholarship or contest, be sure that the purpose of the scholarship or contest is consistent with the section's purposes as stated in its bylaws and that you comport with the Rules of the Supreme Court and of the State Bar regarding ideological activities. Take care to establish appropriate requirements and procedures for the scholarship or contest. For example, your section should provide that submissions not timely received will be ignored or returned and that your section has the right to publish any and all submissions in any forum of its choice, etc. Your section should also require some sort of attesting language, where the applicant confirms that his or her work is original. The Bar can assist you with your efforts.