

# January Diversity Tip Sheet: Celebrating MLK Day

Diversity

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[www.alanet.org/diversity](http://www.alanet.org/diversity)

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***“Like life, racial understanding is not something that we find but something that we must create.”  
- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.***

Since the first observance of the federal holiday in 1986, the third Monday in January has been set aside to commemorate the birth of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Dr. King was an activist for non-violent social change whose efforts to promote racial equality significantly altered the course of civil rights in our nation. He received the 1964 Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts and continued to inspire and advocate for change until his assassination in 1968.

In 2012, the Martin Luther King Jr. Federal Holiday will be observed on January 16. As law firm administrators, we are often called upon to find engaging ways to mark the Martin Luther King Day holiday in the workplace. While the numbers of law firms recognizing this day as a firm holiday is increasing, other law firms remain open for business. Regardless of your firm’s approach, there are ways to celebrate the life and contributions of Dr. King that can add meaning and continue to inspire beyond just another day at the office.

Hosting an activity or event to recognize the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday at your firm is an opportunity to build knowledge and increase awareness. This doesn’t need to be an elaborate event with a large-scale budget to be meaningful and memorable. There are numerous videos of Dr. King’s most compelling speeches and his message remains powerful over 25 years later. Distribute a link or the text to the “I Have a Dream” speech. Show a video of the “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop” speech, the last speech he gave prior to his assassination. Hearing his words today is a powerful reminder of the need to continue to advance the dialogue of acceptance and tolerance.

You may consider hosting a speaker who can provide a current perspective on civil rights and racial equality. Local bar associations and diversity groups often have lists of available speakers. Hosting a panel discussion with a variety of perspectives can be a great way to generate dynamic discussion and promote awareness. Work with your firm’s Diversity Committee or affinity group members, who may also have contacts or resources in the community. If you are with a small firm or one that does not have a Diversity Committee or affinity group members, reach out to the larger community through academic centers or non-profit organizations for resources.

In 1994, Congress designated the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday as the only federal holiday observed as a national day of service – a “day on, not a day off.” This designation asks Americans to find ways to work together to strengthen communities, overcome barriers, and find solutions to our continuing racial and social problems. The MLK Day of Service is part of the President’s national call to service initiative, United We Serve. Your local community may have events scheduled that your firm could join. However, there are also ways to bring participation into the office. For example, consider hosting a Blue Jeans for Charity Day, where anyone who wears jeans to work on a designated day contributes a minimum of five dollars towards an appropriate charitable cause for MLK Day of Service. More information and resources can be found at this link: <http://mlkday.gov/>

## Additional Resources:

**The Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change:** <http://www.thekingcenter.org/>  
Hosts a great deal of information, including a section on celebrating the holiday.

**The ALA Committee on Diversity and Inclusion:** If you would like additional information or have questions, please contact Vic Maurer, Staff Liaison, ALA Committee on Diversity and Inclusion at [vmaurer@alanet.org](mailto:vmaurer@alanet.org).

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