

**Recognizing:** ALA's Greater Los Angeles Chapter

**Project Title:** Sharks Rank

Shark's Rank - An interactive workshop to learn how to develop effective solutions through interdisciplinary collaboration and understanding.

The idea was to develop a unique interactive learning experience based on the type of educational experience similar to a precedent-based legal education delivered in a shorter, more dynamic format that borrows elements from current reality television programs.

The overall structure of the format was to have administrators present a Challenge Project and a solution to that challenge to a panel of three law firm industry experts, or "Sharks." The panel was given time to ask the presenting administrator questions about the challenge itself, the administrator's thinking process, and the solution. Similarly, the audience was encouraged to ask even more questions and to make comments. Part of the educational content of the program is the differing processes that each administrator uses; all attendees benefited from the insights expressed by members of the audience.

The benefits of this format allowed the attendees to:

1. Capitalize on the diversity of ALA members and members of other professional organizations serving the legal industry;
2. Encourage communication and genuine collaboration, among all disciplines and departments of a law firm and/or legal department including Finance, HR, IT, Facilities Management, Records, Library Services, etc.;
3. Create a safe environment for several attendees to gain practical experience making a presentation before a group of peers;
4. Showcase the expertise of the Sharks, experts from both the administrator and Business Partner ranks engaged in different disciplines who agreed to critique and evaluate the presentations; and
5. Develop collaboration skills and respectful communication skills of all attendees during the audience participation segment.

The object was to have the Sharks represent the diversity of thought, experience and expertise found in the legal industry. Accordingly, we reached out to three individuals who are experts in their various disciplines:

1. Beth Schroeder, Esq., a labor and employment attorney;
2. Michael Kemps, a Business Partner that provides IT solutions; and
3. Michael Palmer, experienced administrator and former ALA President.

Photos of the panel are here:

[https://www.dropbox.com/sh/rffg4olmkhwkdmq/AADgomtp7vim4\\_LI\\_PUpNNKa?dl=z](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/rffg4olmkhwkdmq/AADgomtp7vim4_LI_PUpNNKa?dl=z) .

These experts have the ability to approach each Challenge Project from his or her own special perspective and yet work collaboratively to make an overall evaluation and recommendation. Once the panel of Sharks was confirmed, we reached out to our members and business partners to ask what important challenge(s) are being experienced by the legal industry today. From these responses, we created Challenge Projects that described these challenges as well as some talking points. We wanted



to set forth elements of each challenge in a consistent way. To do that, we used the acronym SHARK:

S – Share the vision.

H – Harness resources.

A – Ask questions. Then ask more questions until all facts are unearthed.

R – Review and revise allocation of resources and actions; rinse and repeat.

K – Keep on track but continue to evaluate for threats and opportunities.

For a two-hour program, we prepared a total of five Challenge Projects. We secured administrators to volunteer to present one of the Challenge Projects and a solution to the Sharks. The Challenge Project synopses were completed and then distributed to the administrators and Sharks. At the event, we described the format, and provided all attendees with a copy of all of the Challenge Projects.

Event flyer is here:

[https://www.dropbox.com/sh/rffg4olmkhwkdmq/AADgomtp7vjm4\\_LI\\_PUpNNKa?dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/rffg4olmkhwkdmq/AADgomtp7vjm4_LI_PUpNNKa?dl=0)

Challenge Project documents are here:

[https://www.dropbox.com/sh/rffg4olmkhwkdmq/AADgomtp7vjm4\\_LI\\_PUpNNKa?dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/rffg4olmkhwkdmq/AADgomtp7vjm4_LI_PUpNNKa?dl=0) .

The event went quickly – the different topics, changing speakers and audience participation provided a great deal of variety and spontaneity. Because audience participation was lively, we saved the fifth Challenge Project for another event.

The budget for this program was essentially the same as for any other of our evening Chapter meetings. There was no cost for the presenting administrators; similarly, the Sharks generously donated their time to be at this event. As is our Chapter's usual practice, one of our Business Partners generously sponsored the event to defray the cost of the venue, meal and validated parking.

The immediate feedback from the participants at the event was extremely favorable. Even experienced administrators mentioned that they enjoyed the program and either received or shared valuable information. One positive result of this program was increased communication and understanding that occurred when one of the presenting administrators shared the Challenge Project with some of the members of his firm's management team. The sheer act of discussing some of the issues in the Challenge Project among the management team members using a set of fixed criteria was beneficial even before the administrator completely formulated his presentation or received any feedback from the experts.

Additionally, copious notes were taken during the program. Eventually, these notes will be transcribed and will be turned into a series of articles for the Chapter magazine.

This format has unlimited potential for inclusion and scalability. This format naturally lends itself to an event that includes members of other professional organizations. The goal of greater collaboration and understanding is a good way to bring professionals from different disciplines together. For this event, we invited members from ILTA and ARMA. Taking the concept of inclusion further, however, each Shark could be a member of a different professional organization, or a single Challenge Project could be presented by members of different professional organizations. This would give attendees more insight into how a situation is approached by those who work in different departments. This event could be scaled up into a workshop similar to the one presented by Carl Leonard at the ALA Annual Conference in Boston, or scaled down to a CLM study session in which participants take turns presenting and evaluating information for the exam. This event is also cost effective, requiring very little in terms of specialized space or equipment.



Depending on the educational goals of the attendees and presenters, however, the requirements can easily be modified. If the presenters are more concerned with written communications, PowerPoint presentations sample emails, written proposals and other documents could be required. This presentation could become similar to a mock oral exam. On the other end of the spectrum, administrators and other legal industry professionals could use the SHARK format, or any other consistent format outline, for roundtable discussions. For specific section meetings, a Business Partner from a particular discipline could be the moderator of that roundtable discussion.

In addition, to the scalability of scope, time, inclusion, cost, focus on presentation style, and topics or Challenge Projects, this format also has the benefit of being culturally relevant. When it comes to marketing educational events to busy professionals, using terms and phrases that sound familiar is one way to demonstrate that leaders are trying to find new and creative ways for professionals to learn. Other important aspects of this format's focus are collaboration, sharing information and inclusion. One part of the idea was to change the learning environment to imitate our real-world working environments. Traditional learning environments focus on one person lecturing to a group. That model bears little resemblance to our work environments. The Shark's Rank format, however, acknowledges group dynamics and differences of opinion; the structure of the format allows for inclusion and fosters respect for differing opinions – and this is the direction in which effective and profitable companies are going. It makes sense that our educational formats should go in this same direction.