The Future of NALP: Innovation, Collaboration, and Lifelong Learning

by Sonia Menon

NALP will drive innovation and collaboration in the legal industry through lifelong education and career development. That is the vision of NALP’s Long Range Strategic Planning Committee. As 2009 was coming to an end, the committee met for three days in Washington, DC, to review the extensive member outreach and environmental scanning that had been conducted during the previous seven months and, from that, to build NALP’s 2010-2015 Long Range Strategic Plan.

One of the fundamental questions the committee faced was “what exactly is NALP — what is its core purpose and mission?” It is a question that I am sure every committee tasked with strategic planning has faced, and it is a question that is not easy to respond to because the answer changes over time. But for our committee, charged with looking at the next five years, the answer was clear: NALP connects its members by providing vision, expertise, research, and education; cultivating fair and ethical practices; and advocating for diversity and inclusion in the legal profession.

I am very pleased to present the draft Strategic Plan for your review and comment. It is included as an insert with this issue of the Bulletin and is also available online at www.nalp.org/strategic plan. We look forward to hearing your thoughts and reactions to the plan. Please feel free to call me or send me an email at soniamenon@nalp.org or contact any one of the strategic planning committee members. With your input I will present the draft plan to the Board for its approval in late February, and once it is adopted by the Board, I look forward to sharing a final version of NALP’s new strategic plan with you at the 2010 Annual Education Conference in San Juan!

The Plan

The plan itself is bold, and seeks to position NALP as an industry leader that will help shape our collective future. As you read through it, I think you will find that the plan sets out strong goals and objectives in the areas in which NALP has traditionally been strong, including education, research, ethical practices, member professional development, diversity and inclusion, and public service, and it also seeks to promote and develop excellence in key areas where NALP has not necessarily excelled historically, like technology.

A unifying theme underlying the goals in each area is NALP’s commitment to a vision of lifelong learning for its members, and for the lawyers and law students that our members support in their professional roles with law schools and legal employers. And at the heart of the plan is a rededication to member service, the core value that gives our professional association its very reason for existence. I believe the new plan offers us a very strong roadmap for the next five years and provides a framework that gives direction without setting limitations on achievements.

The Process

For a diehard NALP nerd like me, the process of preparing for and then drafting the actual plan was fascinating. Our December meeting was preceded by months of outreach through focus groups with members (we conducted over 75 outreach calls and live focus group meetings), through our member survey (over 500 of you responded), and through outreach to hiring partners, managing partners, deans, peer organizations, and consultants to get a sense of what the outside world thinks of
NALP. We received reports from every NALP Section and from three task forces specifically created to research and report on certain issues key to NALP’s future (see sidebar). The result was a mountain of extremely thoughtful information, insights, trends, emerging issues, and recommendations from all those who have been thinking about NALP’s future.

We began the meeting by working with strategic planning consultant John Sterling, who led us through the process of scenario-based vision development. This involved the active consideration and examination of a number of significant market trends and external influences likely to have an impact on NALP and its stakeholders. The process helped us to look beyond the current economic climate and to identify emerging realities and strategies that will serve NALP well in the face of a number of possible eventualities.

Next, we brainstormed about the input we received and identified key areas of strategic focus for NALP. We worked in teams to create objectives, which are our aspirational goals, for each area of strategic focus. We then set about identifying strategies, which are goal-oriented action items that will help us achieve our goals. You will see these goals and strategies as you read through the plan.

I want to thank members of the Long Range Strategic Planning Committee who devoted countless hours to this process. Throughout the process, committee members amazed me with the richness of their ideas and foresight. They thought big and bold for our organization, with innovation and collaboration as unifying themes. We wanted to capitalize on the unique market leadership position NALP currently enjoys and also respond to challenges NALP faces to remain responsive and relevant to its membership — and I think we have managed to do so. I hope you will agree! This is a collaborative process and we welcome and encourage your input as we lead NALP into the next five years. I look forward to hearing from you!

Task Force Contributions Critical to Strategic Planning Success

The Long Range Strategic Planning Committee would like to highlight the work of three task forces whose efforts were particularly instrumental in defining the course that NALP will take over the next five years:

The Innovation & Technology Task Force, led by Susan Robinson with members Debra Clarkson, Joni Peet, Gina Rowsam, Brad Sprayberry, and Tony Waller, presented the committee with a detailed and thought-provoking report addressing, among other things, the issues of the effective use of data to better serve the NALP membership, the viability of creating and maintaining an association-sponsored social networking presence, and additional viable streams of revenue through technology.

The Market Positioning & Branding Task Force, led by Gihan Fernando with members Diane Downs, Gwen Ferrell, Melissa Lennon and Leslie Ripley, provided us with a creative and thoughtful report on promoting NALP with new ways to support, strengthen, and enhance the value of the brand and reputation of the association in legal education and the legal employment marketplace.

Finally, the Leadership Task Force led by Elaine Petrossian and members Jessica Dworkin, Amy Hancock, and Stuart Smith researched and presented sound recommendations on leadership development, education and sustenance.

Thank you for your hard work, thoughtfulness and vision!

Sonia Menon is Director of Professional Recruitment & Development for Neal, Gerber & Eisenberg LLP. She is the Chair of the NALP Long Range Strategic Planning Committee.