

Page: Achievement Award
Category Best Diversity Initiative
Chapter ACC Houston
Chapter Size Large (more than 851 members)
Entry Title ACC Houston is All In - ACC Houston made a commitment to reach the underserved Houston community from Kindergarten to Law School. ACC Houston is All In on its commitment to Diversity, Equity & Inclusion in a multi-level approach which began by awarding \$131,000 to women and minority law students during the award year, and so much more by creating a robust diversity pipeline program.
Entry Description <p>This award year, the ACC Houston's inspiration for the Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Initiative was taken from Marian Wright Edelman's famous quote of "improving the lives of others and...leaving your community and world better than you found it."</p> <p>The ACC Houston ("ACCH") was all in on improving and creating a robust diversity pipeline program to uplift historically marginalized communities by providing scholarships and hardship grants, providing a pro-bono clerkship stipend, facilitating legal internships and creating impactful programming in an effort to build equity and increase diversity within the legal community. Our approach did not stop there. We continued our financial support to Street Law throughout the COVID crisis. Additionally, we recognized the need for support to our local school through the Teachers Aid Program and the Houston Food Bank. Donations, calls for matching funds and school supply drives engaged our members throughout the year.</p> <p>Scholarships & Grants: ACCH awarded \$125,000 in scholarships and hardship grants to women and minority law school students – specifically awarding 24 scholarships and 10 hardship grants – at the three (3) Houston Law Schools – Thurgood Marshall School of Law, University of Houston Law Center and South Texas College of Law. Of the 24 scholarship recipients, 60% were awarded to students at Thurgood Marshall School of Law, a historically Black law school which empowers the disenfranchised and underserved by preparing lawyers to practice law and to shape social and public policy. Moreover, in excess of 83% were awarded to women striving toward a legal career.</p> <p>In addition to academic aptitude, many of the recipients faced hardships getting to and remaining in law school. From an orphan Latina raising her younger siblings to a recipient putting off necessary surgery to pay for law school, all of our recipients were committed to completing their law school journey no matter what. Each one of our recipients are committed to the legal profession and will bring their unique backgrounds and perspective as we continue to weave this diverse legal tapestry.</p> <p>Pro-Bono Clerkship Stipend: ACCH awarded \$6,000 to a rising 2L at South Texas College of Law who accepted a pro-bono internship opportunity in her preferred practice area.</p> <p>Internship Opportunities: ACCH connected a scholarship recipient from Thurgood Marshall School of Law with a local law firm, resulting in the student receiving a paid summer clerkship. ACCH also provides the scholarship recipients ways to access the Houston legal market, including via a resume pipeline and networking opportunities with our Sponsors.</p> <p>Other Initiatives:</p> <p>Street Law: ACCH partnered with Street Law, Inc. to introduce high school students at a local economically disadvantaged high school to the practice of law and the legal profession. While unable to work directly with students due to COVID restrictions, ACCH has continued to provide financial support to Street Law, and ACCH member volunteers are returning to the classrooms.</p> <p>Back to School Drive: ACCH hosted a Back-to-School drive benefiting local elementary, middle and high schools in underrepresented communities through our partnership with the Teachers Aid Program at the Houston Food Bank.</p> <p>Supporting Minority-Owned Businesses: To compound our efforts toward uplifting women and minority students, ACCH recognized the importance of supporting minority owned businesses by ordering meals for our scholarship recipients from Lucille's, a Black-owned restaurant specializing in we-refined Southern cuisine. Additionally, in November our Women in House committee, in collaboration with one of our Sponsors, hosted a "Holiday Market" supporting women and minority-owned businesses.</p>
When was the program initiated? 4/1/2021

What was the project objective?

Creating an all-in legal pipeline to ensure diverse representation in the profession by:

- (1) awarding scholarships amounting to \$5,000 per recipient to women and minority law students at the three (3) Houston area law schools;
- (2) awarding hardship grants amounting to \$500 per recipient to law students from the three (3) area law schools;
- (3) awarding a pro bono stipend amounting to \$6,000 to a law student who has accepted a pro bono summer clerkship opportunity;
- (4) connecting scholarship recipients with law firms for potential summer clerkship opportunities;
- (5) supporting a minority-owned business for the Diversity, Equity & Inclusion recognition dinner;
- (6) enhancing the use of diverse panelists during our chapter meetings, practice group meetings, and other CLE offerings.

How was the objective achieved?

ACC Houston achieved all of its stated objectives and more. Through the commitment of our Sponsors, Members and community members, ACCH was truly able to create a robust diversity legal pipeline by having significant touchpoints to students through law school.

Awarded \$120,000 in scholarships to 24 local law students from each one of the Houston area law schools.

Awarded \$5,000 in hardship grants to 10 local law students.

Awarded \$6,000 to a rising 2L at South Texas College of Law who accepted a pro-bono internship opportunity in her preferred practice area. Before ACCH awarded this student with the stipend, she was contemplating forgoing this opportunity because she desperately needed to find paid opportunity regardless of whether that paid opportunity was legal, secretarial or retail. Fortunately, ACCH recognized her passion and commitment to as she puts it her "calling" and was able to award her with the stipend.

Introduced Sponsors and local law firms to past and present scholarship recipients with a goal of facilitating clerkship and full-time opportunities.

Local law firm interviewed and extended a summer clerkship offer to a scholarship recipient, which was accepted.

Sponsor, Baker Wotring hired scholarship recipients as associates. Per Debra Baker, Partner at Baker Wotring, "[i]n addition to the sponsorship, our support has extended to employing some of the diversity scholarship recipients in our firm."

Supported Lucille's, a Black-owned restaurant specializing in we-refined Southern cuisine, as our vendor for our Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Recognition Dinner.

Emphasized to our Sponsors the need to use both racial and gender diversity on panel and achieved an outstanding 88% occurrence of diverse panels for all of our education.

In addition to achieving our stated goals, ACC Houston was able to enhance the diversity pipeline to impact students in elementary, middle and high school by:

Partnering with Street Law, Inc. to introduce high school students at a local economically disadvantaged high school to the practice of law and the legal profession.

Hosting a Back-to-School school supply drive benefiting local elementary, middle and high school teachers and students in underrepresented communities.

During our Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Recognition Dinners students heard from U.S. Congresswoman Sylvia Garcia and Amanda Edwards – a lawyer, former Houston City Council Member and former U.S. Senate Candidate. ACCH's Diversity Champion sponsor Debra Tsuchiyama Baker conducted a spellbinding interview with the Congresswoman. Her candor and lively stories of her path to the US Congress were truly inspirational. Additionally, Ms. Edwards' comments struck a chord with the scholarship recipients as she challenged students to reach for stretch goals. She warned that there will be "no's" along the way and gave relatable, tangible examples of the "no's" she'd heard in her life, while encouraging students to keep stretching and keeping moving forward. She assured the students that despite hearing "no's" that they would survive and ultimately thrive.

What was the project budget?

\$152,000. Sponsors provided \$40,000. The remaining \$112,000 was provided via ACC Houston, members and community supporters. This amount makes up almost 25% of our expense budget and makes clear our commitment to our all-in objective.

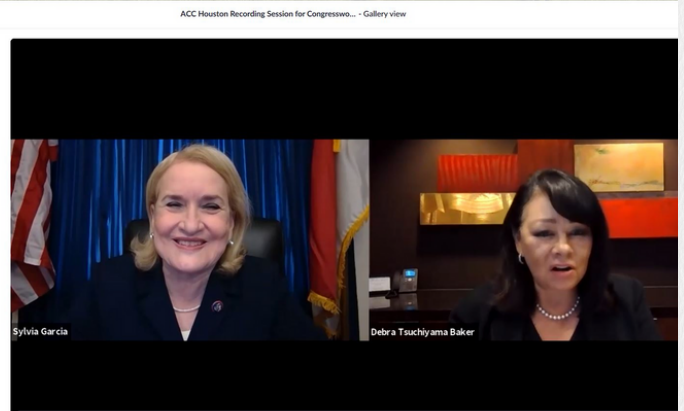
What obstacles were faced while doing this project/program?

The programming this fiscal year was so expansive with a lot of moving parts. Meaning the Co-Chairs had to be extremely organized and communicate frequently. The Co-Chairs identified the major buckets of work and each was assisted to lead certain buckets. Additionally, we employed a Scholarship Committee to assist with review of the scholarship applicants. We solicited assistance from the Board of Directors to assist with identifying additional law firms to engage for possible clerkship opportunities. Finally, our Executive Director was pivotal in ensuring all of the balls we had in the air successfully landed without incident.

In 300 words or less, please state how this project was innovative.

We looked at the totality of diversity, equity and inclusion within the legal profession and ultimately decided we needed to impact all educational levels – from elementary school to law school – in order to truly impact the legal pipeline. This year, ACCH took a holistic ALL-IN approach to diversity, equity, and inclusion and how the legal profession could work to strengthen the diversity pipeline in our community.

ACCH's commitment to enhancing and positively impacting the diversity pipeline within the legal community runs deep. We strategically structured this fiscal year's programming to have the widest reach to ensure students are exposed to and supported by members of ACC and specifically the Houston Chapter. We believe we not only achieved our goals, but we left our community better off than when we found it.



Keynote Speakers, Debra Tsuchiyama Baker and Congresswoman Sylvia Garcia

