


# What Can We Do for IMLA?

*By DeWitt F. McCarley*



First, let me say "Thank You" for allowing me to serve as your President this year. I've been a member of IMLA since 1981; a faithful attendee at the Conferences and Mid-Year Seminars throughout those years, and a committed advocate for the value of this organization. Prior to becoming the city attorney in Charlotte, North Carolina, a city with a staff of 25 attorneys, I was the City Attorney for Greenville, North Carolina. The total legal staff when I served there was one; it has since doubled to two. The value of the IMLA magazine and the papers I collected at the Conferences and Seminars in those days was immeasurable. No matter what the latest federal statute or court case covered, I knew I'd get everything I needed at the next IMLA event.

Nowadays, I also count on my network, developed over the years, of friends and colleagues for sharing best practices for managing attorneys or budgets, or getting the most out of our IT geeks.

## The Value of IMLA

The point is, no matter what I've needed at different points in my career, IMLA was there to help me. In addition to CLE on the latest topics, you folks taught me how to be a city attorney. For that, I thank you, and I thank IMLA. But, as the world moves faster and the economy has focused our attention on every dime in our budgets, what is IMLA's role in our practice? What is IMLA's value to us as municipal lawyers?

Nationally, membership organizations like ours are seeing declines as high as 30% among their members. Fortunately, IMLA's experience has not been as bad as the national average, but that doesn't mean we aren't feeling the sharp pain of this recession. We are not seeing very many new members join, and we're losing members due to budget problems at a higher rate than normal. As a membership organization, that trend can't continue forever without having a significant effect on the organization's ability to meet your needs.

Here are the simple facts about our finances: roughly half of our income comes from membership dues; a third comes from registration fees for the Annual Conference, the Mid-Year Seminar, and other CLE programs; and another ten percent or so comes from sponsorships. All of these revenue sources are at risk in a recession, and we're feeling the pressure. When local governments cut travel and training budgets for their legal staff, we feel the pain. When budget line items for dues and subscriptions are cut, we feel the pain. When vendors and sponsors cut their advertising and client-relations budgets, we feel the pain.

## How You Can Help

"So what?" you may ask. (I hope that isn't your response, but let's cover all the bases). IMLA is proud to be a provider of the highest quality CLE on local government legal issues. If a local government wins or loses a big case in the highest courts, expect to read about it in an e-blast, the next issue of IMLA's *Municipal Lawyer* magazine, or in the bi-weekly *IMLA News* e-mails, or to hear about it at a session at the next Annual Conference or Seminar. If it's a hot topic, there may be a "stand-alone" seminar covering just that issue, or a teleconference devoted to the latest information. IMLA is our best source for up-to-the-minute information on national legal issues affecting local government.

So what can each of us do in these difficult times to make sure that IMLA is there for us when we need it?

First and most important: keep membership dues for IMLA in your budget. One of the corollaries to Murphy's Law is that once something comes out of a government budget, it's hard to get it back in. For the strength of our organization, I hope you will fight to keep IMLA dues in your budget. Second, help us keep a strong membership in your state or province. Talk with any of your colleagues who are considering dropping their membership and remind them of the long-term value of the organization. Next, make it a point to attend the Mid-Year Seminar in Washington, D.C. this coming spring, and plan on attending the Annual Conference next October in San Francisco. Fight to keep the travel and training money in your budget. And, when you have a choice of provider for CLE for your office, choose IMLA.

The way we get through this rough time is to exercise loyalty to an organization that has benefitted all of us over the years. We're still strong, and with everyone making a conscious effort to support the organization through the recession, we'll emerge strong on the other side of this downturn. It's up to us—let's make decisions that support our long-term best interests and keep IMLA strong. **ML**