



4 min read

DIY PD

(Do-It-Yourself
Professional Development)

HOW TO BUILD LAWYER PD PROGRAMS ON A BUDGET

By Jennifer Lucas-Ross

D-I-Y projects involve creating something new (and often spectacular) out of the materials we have at our disposal. There are several steps inherent in every D-I-Y project: inspiration, planning, preparation, execution, and reflection. D-I-Y projects are often undertaken to save money and limit waste by taking advantage of existing resources. While we often envision D-I-Y in the context of home improvement, holiday gifts, or children's crafts, professional development professionals can utilize the principles of D-I-Y to create customized training and development within their firm.

Get inspired: All projects start with a spark. The spark can be a noticed need within the firm: a change in a process, a mental health checkup, or the introduction of a new technology. Oftentimes, these sparks of inspiration happen during casual discussions with others inside or outside your firm, but may also derive from an article, webinar, training, or a program held in a different, non-legal industry. This inspirational spark is the motivation to begin the process of developing a customized, in-house professional development program.

Plan objectives: The “why” is the seed of the “how.” Beginning a program starts with understanding an organization's training needs and goals for an in-house program. Professionals

should begin each new initiative with a set of objectives that serves as the foundation. The objectives derive from a shared vision of the firm's desired outcome. They serve as a reason and roadmap for the program.

Prepare Existing Resources: Identify and acknowledge the raw materials at your disposal. Money can feel like a limitation, but programs can be created within existing departmental budgets. Work with your budget and not against it. Note each part of a program during the drafting stage to get a sense of the money to be allocated to needs such as food, materials, and fees. Start with what you have and build from there.

There are several steps inherent in every D-I-Y project: inspiration, planning, preparation, execution, and reflection.

No matter the size of the firm, the training needs tend to be greater than the number of PD professionals operating within the firm. Of course, human capital exists outside the PD department. There are knowledgeable

individuals throughout the firm who can assist with programs. Identify the individuals within the firm who can support various aspects of the program including administrative needs, implementation, and presentation. Consider smaller sessions, allotting shorter periods of time to multiple presenters. Identify subject matter experts outside of partners who can co-present a portion of a session, such as inclusion of insights from a skilled staff member.

Time is always the most limited resource. Creating and implementing a program can be a daunting challenge. However, preparing in multiple stages, each with its own deadline – transforms a massive project into manageable steps. Investigate synchronicities that could lead to shared planning with other business leaders, such as opportunities to create relevant training for staff and associates, or for clients and associates. Breaking down silos and collaborating with others within the firm lends itself to essential time savings and increased engagement.

Get Creative: The execution is the fun part. A benefit of in-house development is the lack of constraints that can accompany programs that have been run multiple times. You can think outside the box. Use your skills, knowledge, experience, and network to create something. Connect with peers at other firms or attend

conferences for idea generation. Play with the options, brainstorm, and sculpt a program customized to the needs and values of your firm. Consider using Generative AI as a tool for the development of companion pieces of a program, such as ideas for icebreakers or training exercises.

Know Your Limits: Reflect on what is possible within your ability and authority. Start small and build out. Programs can, and should, evolve as the needs of the firm's lawyers shift and grow. Excellent in-house programs are those that continually align with a firm's strategic initiatives. +



Jennifer Lucas-Ross (Lucas-Ross@morrisjames.com) is the Director of Attorney Recruiting and Professional Development at Morris James LLP in Wilmington, Delaware.

Jennifer is co-chair of the NALP Small & Mid-Sized Law Firm Interest Group.