

Friends Profile: David Sternlieb

“Lawyers Alliance is an amazing place. Contributions for operating expenses lever vast pro bono services.”

David Sternlieb was Chief Operating Officer and General Counsel at The Atlantic Philanthropies and is now General Counsel at **Pursuit Transformation Company**, a Lawyers Alliance client. Pursuit helps adults from underserved communities develop computer coding and teamwork skills, find mentors, and build networks and confidence.

Q. How did you learn about Lawyers Alliance, and why and how have you remained involved?

It was 20 years ago, and I was with The Atlantic Philanthropies, a charitable foundation. We supported Lawyers Alliance and it interested me. I volunteered to help the Arab-American Family Support Center on a merger. It was fun to use my M&A experience in the nonprofit context and to learn about the Center’s challenges, notably Islamophobia. Eventually, I joined its Board. I also volunteered with the Gowanus Canal Conservancy. It was a start-up and presented questions around who “owns” an organization without shareholders. Practically, ownership then lies more in moral authority and sweat equity.

Atlantic was a limited life foundation, so in 2020 I started consulting. Through Lawyers Alliance, I also volunteered with Pursuit. I was impressed by the mission, people, thoughtfulness of strategy, and high-energy environment. Excited by the prospect of fresh challenges, I joined Pursuit as its General Counsel in October 2021.

Q. Pursuit runs a fellowship program for aspiring engineers from underserved communities. What issues have arisen from the pandemic-altered economy and recovery?

In 2020, Pursuit had to shut down classes for an extended period and reduce headcount by 40 percent before it successfully rebooted for remote classes, a turnaround which revived the organization and returned it to a strong growth track. The pandemic turbocharged the tech industry and created many jobs for Pursuit graduates. It also dispersed employees, which creates compliance obligations, and uncertainty about the future of office space. The expense of an office must be balanced with the value of in-person interaction, particularly for nonprofits delivering services.

The racial and social justice reckoning has accented the importance of Pursuit’s work. Pursuit focuses on helping people realize their potential, bringing underserved communities into fields not traditionally welcoming. Black Lives Matter has spurred tech company eagerness to expand the pipeline with more diverse talent. This eagerness has been a boon for Pursuit’s Fellows. The durability of industry’s commitment to a fairer society remains to be seen.

Q. Why do you feel it’s important to donate to Lawyers Alliance?

Lawyers Alliance is an amazing place. Contributions for operating expenses lever vast pro bono services. In philanthropy that’s the ideal – a major gift or collection of smaller gifts multiplied into critical services and needed systemic change. And a lawyer’s donation is in keeping with the pro bono spirit. Attorneys can donate time, money, or both.



David Sternlieb

About

Employment includes:

Pursuit Transformation Company

The Atlantic Philanthropies

RJR Nabisco

Jones Day Reavis & Pogue

Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher

Graduate of:

Columbia University School of Law

Princeton University

This profile is one in a series about people who have helped to build or been involved in Lawyers Alliance for New York since our founding in 1969.