

Alum Profile: Ira Friedman

Ira Friedman retired as Senior Vice President and Chief Privacy Officer of MetLife, having spent most of his career there as an insurance mergers and acquisitions lawyer. He served on the Lawyers Alliance Board from 1998 to 2004, including as Chair from 2001 to 2004. During his Board tenure, Lawyers Alliance conducted its 35th Anniversary Campaign to secure program and endowment support, which has been critical to the organization's ability to provide vital services, particularly during recent challenging economic times.

How did you originally become involved with Lawyers Alliance?

In the 1990s, Cynthia Shoss, then Board Chair of Lawyers Alliance, introduced me to the organization and asked if I was interested in joining the Board. She knew that I was enthusiastic about pro bono and felt that lawyers should offer their services. I accepted the Chair position in 2001 because of my enormous respect for Lawyers Alliance's staff, especially Executive Director Sean Delany.

Describe the creation of the NYU Review of Law & Social Change.

As an NYU Law student in 1969, I heard that some students were creating the *NYU Review of Law & Social Change* and inviting article submissions. I wrote a piece on retaliatory eviction, inspired by volunteer legal work I undertook for a tenant who was being victimized by her landlord. The article ran in the first issue. I later became Managing Editor. Originally the *Review* was supported by private funding, but we lobbied the faculty publications committee to provide support from the School of Law. We got the funding, partly on condition that we produce two issues that year. We put the second issue to bed after we graduated! It's very gratifying that the *Review* is still going strong.

While you were Board Chair, Lawyers Alliance conducted a program priority setting process. Please explain.

Lawyers Alliance regularly reviews and refines its program priorities in order to focus on the areas of most significance to low-income communities. So, while I was Chair, the staff looked at service trends and needs in New York City and made recommendations that they felt would enable Lawyers Alliance to continue to have the most meaningful impact. The Board concluded that the recommendations were right on target. The Board and staff reaffirmed Lawyers Alliance's commitment to affordable housing and economic development clients, expanded legal services to organizations working with children and youth, and added immigrant communities and elder services to round out the five program priorities.

Lawyers Alliance is preparing to celebrate its 45th Anniversary in 2014. Please share your insights from the 35th Anniversary Campaign.

As we looked toward the organization's 35th Anniversary in 2004, the Board decided it was time to build an endowment, so we launched a capital campaign and planned a gala dinner. Sean and I visited every individual member of the Board to ask for a personal contribution; we secured 100% participation. We also visited several major law firms, asking for leadership grants over a five-year period; most of the firms we spoke to participated, some at very significant levels. This involved a huge team effort. We built the endowment and had a great event at Tavern on the Green. I learned two important lessons: personal contacts make all the difference, and don't be hesitant to put in a high ask. You're not asking for money for yourself; it's for a worthy cause.



Ira Friedman

About Ira

Ira is enjoying his retirement (plus a little consulting work) and spending time with his family, but still finds time to serve on the Board of Advisors of Lawyers Alliance and do volunteer work in his community.

This article is one of a series of profiles of the people who have helped to build Lawyers Alliance for New York since 1969.

 **Lawyers Alliance
for New York**

Connecting lawyers, nonprofits, and communities