

Friend Profile: Maria Mottola

Maria Mottola is Executive Director of the New York Foundation. Founded in 1909, the Foundation is a steadfast supporter of community organizing and advocacy in New York City. Ms. Mottola became Executive Director of the Foundation in 2003, after serving as a Program Officer from 1994 to 2002.

New York Foundation first supported Lawyers Alliance in 1980. Why has the Foundation chosen to show such long-term commitment to Lawyers Alliance's mission and work?

Because the New York Foundation has always given priority to new organizations and untested programs, we began supporting "capacity building" 35 years ago, before it was referred to as a field. It was difficult to convince many foundations that supporting those who help nonprofits to work more effectively was a worthwhile idea. Today many more foundations support capacity building and many more nonprofits seek help to shore up their management systems, increase the effectiveness of their programs, and conduct their work within legal parameters.

The Foundation supports Lawyers Alliance's workshops and webinars, allowing Foundation grantees to attend trainings free of charge. What is the importance of educational programs to New York City nonprofits?

About half of our grantees are new organizations, often founded by visionary people who have little experience managing a nonprofit. Workshops, like those offered by Lawyers Alliance, are critical because they provide new leaders information that's not available anywhere else. In our experience, our grantees find that Lawyers Alliance attorneys understand and respect start-up nonprofits and their particular concerns.

Each year, the New York Foundation funds Lawyers Alliance trainings and legal services for its grantees that encourage them to engage in legislative advocacy and permissible, nonpartisan political activity. Why is this work important for the Foundation?

Our foundation has a history of supporting groups that engage in advocacy and community organizing around what can be controversial issues. Organizations we support often work on the community level, putting them in contact (and sometimes in conflict) with local elected officials and potential candidates for office. By nature, community organizing and policy advocacy involve confusing areas of law and ethics. Our relationship with Lawyers Alliance started because we knew our grantees are assertive and we wanted to make sure they are informed and protected.

Please describe how your background in social work and direct services informs your work.

I am not just a supporter of Lawyers Alliance, I was a client myself! Only six years out of social work school, I found myself at the helm of a new nonprofit with a mission to reform New York City's housing court system. I had no experience managing a nonprofit and I had to learn quickly. I gained so much from Lawyers Alliance's workshops and one-on-one consultation that people began to assume I had a law degree.

Now when new grantees ask me how to create readable bylaws, how to manage a pesky city council member who wants to hand out campaign fliers at their event, or whether they need an employee handbook – those early experiences come flooding back to me and I know exactly what to tell them. Contact Lawyers Alliance for New York!



Maria Mottola

About Maria

Employment includes:

- › Executive Director, New York Foundation
- › Executive Director, City Wide Task Force on Housing Court
- › Director of Neighborhood Programs, Lenox Hill Neighborhood House

Current activities include:

- › Adjunct Instructor, Hunter College Graduate School of Urban Affairs and Planning
- › Board Chair, New American Leaders Project
- › Board, Red Hook Initiative

Graduate of:

- › Fordham University, M.S.W.
- › University of Toronto, B.A.

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