



Highlights from the
American Bar Foundation
Strategic Plan
2024-2029



AMERICAN BAR
FOUNDATION

A Letter from the Co-Chairs of the Strategic Planning Committee

Dear Colleagues and Friends,

We are pleased to present the Highlights from the American Bar Foundation Strategic Plan, formally adopted in July 2024. This plan emerges from an extensive deliberative process, led by the Strategic Planning Executive Committee (SPEC), which ensured broad representation from across the ABF community. Beginning with a comprehensive survey, the process unfolded through town halls, departmental meetings, and community-wide brainstorming sessions. Throughout every stage, we worked together—board, faculty, and staff—to foster transparent, open, and candid conversations across the ABF's diverse constituencies. The resulting plan both celebrates the ABF's many strengths and sets out an ambitious agenda for future innovation and growth.

In the pages that follow, you will discover our vision for the next five years, positioning the ABF as a global leader in socio-legal research. This vision focuses on strengthening our intellectual community, expanding our resources, and enhancing our capabilities to foster innovation and guide policy and practice worldwide. Central to this vision are the core values that drive both our scholarship and our workplace. We uphold the highest standards of integrity, independence, and expertise in our research while promoting a culture of inclusivity, teamwork, and respect across our organization.

Five overarching goals provide the foundation for this plan, ensuring that our research, operations, communications, and development strategies work in concert to sustain and grow the ABF's role as a cornerstone of the socio-legal research community. Our strategic priorities lay out a practical path from these goals to tangible outcomes. They address both current and future needs, guiding us as we strive to expand knowledge and advance justice.

This plan positions us to strengthen the ABF's community of scholars and staff while increasing our impact on the legal profession, the law, and society at large. We are profoundly grateful for your continued support and engagement as we embark on this exciting new chapter.

Sincerely,



Mark Suchman, Executive Director



Sandra Chan, Board President

Our Mission

The ABF seeks to expand knowledge and advance justice through innovative, interdisciplinary, and rigorous empirical research on law, legal processes, and legal institutions. To further this mission, the ABF will produce timely, cutting-edge research of the highest quality to inform and guide the legal profession, the academy, and society in the United States and internationally.

Our Vision for 2024-2029

We envision the ABF as a cornerstone and wellspring of the global socio-legal research community. By enriching our intellectual climate, bolstering our operational capabilities, and expanding our resources, we will reinforce the ABF's ability to sustain a thriving core of co-located interdisciplinary empirical scholars with both the internal strength and the external reach to foster dialog, inspire innovation, and guide policy and practice worldwide.

Our Values

In our scholarship, we seek to uphold the highest values of scientific inquiry:

- Integrity
- Objectivity
- Independence
- Expertise
- Curiosity
- Collegiality

In our workplace, we seek to uphold the highest values of civil collaboration:

- Excellence
- Teamwork
- Candor
- Responsibility
- Inclusion
- Respect

Our Goals and Strategic Priorities

Five overarching goals guide us toward our vision, ensuring that all aspects of our organization work in harmony.

Our strategic priorities define the pathways we will follow to translate our overarching goals into tangible outcomes.

1

Foster Community

The ABF seeks to cultivate a vibrant and inclusive environment in which all feel valued. By enhancing internal dialog and expanding global outreach, we aim to solidify our role as a hub and a home at the core of the socio-legal field.

1.1 Climate

Ensure a welcoming, engaging, diverse, equitable, and inclusive environment at the ABF, where every participant feels a deep sense of belonging, responsibility, and pride.

1.2 Connection

Expand mutual understanding, engagement, and synergy within the ABF community, through collegial dialog and cooperation among ABF researchers, staff, alumni, and affiliates.

1.3 Outreach

Reinforce the ABF's role as a cornerstone of the local, national, and global socio-legal research ecosystem.

2

Advance Research

The ABF seeks to pioneer transformative socio-legal research that brings new perspectives and new evidence to bear on pressing topics of scholarly and public concern. Through strategic hiring, collegial collaboration, and dedicated mentorship, we strive to expand knowledge and advance justice.

2.1 Hiring

Expand and nurture a core of researchers who work primarily onsite, have limited competing demands on their energies, and are able to create an in-office nexus of intellectual dialog and mutual support.

2.2 Collaboration

Reinforce the benefits of the ABF's faculty-in-residence model by encouraging collegial conversations, contributions, and co-investigations that engage multiple ABF researchers.

2.3 Training

Build on the ABF's record of supporting and mentoring emerging scholars, in order to expand and invigorate the socio-legal research field while also expanding and invigorating the ABF's own engagement with shifting research agendas and evolving researcher communities.

2.4 Targeting

Explore mechanisms to cluster new research initiatives around topics that are:
(a) of emerging interest in the research community and the legal profession and
(b) relevant to pressing or rising policy concerns.

2.5 Translation

Explore "translational research" models aimed at converting scholarly findings into practical applications, either through in-house faculty or through external collaborations and networks, possibly involving project-specific ("soft money") personnel.

3

Refine Operations

The ABF seeks to optimize its operations, enhancing efficiency, coordination, and transparency while preserving creativity and adaptability. By clarifying processes, establishing robust metrics, and anticipating future challenges and opportunities, we aim to strengthen the ABF as an agile organization where innovation and predictability can thrive in tandem.

3.1 Process

Ensure that baseline principles, procedures, and expectations are clear and evenhanded; support inter-departmental cooperation; and facilitate flexibility and experimentation.

3.2 Evaluation

Refine, expand, and systematize metrics for assessing the effectiveness of both recurring activities and experimental initiatives.

3.3 Foresight

Broaden planning for future needs and opportunities in light of emerging intellectual developments, economic trends, financial goals, and mission priorities.

4

Enhance Communication

The ABF seeks to elevate its communication efforts to ensure that its groundbreaking research reaches and resonates with as wide an audience as possible, in the academy, the bar, the bench, and beyond. By streamlining internal workflows and expanding external outreach, we intend to broaden our visibility and deepen our impact on policy, practice, and public discourse.

4.1 Coordination

Enhance the efficiency and cohesiveness of communication workflows, both within the Communications team and among Research, Communications, and Development.

4.2 Dissemination

While maintaining and enhancing current channels for dissemination of ABF research to the academy, develop and expand efforts to convey ABF research for wider impact and greater accessibility among non-academic audiences, including the bench, the bar, policy makers, and the general public.

4.3 Partnership

Increase engagement with the legal community by leveraging connections with ABF Fellows and the ABA.

4.4 Publicity

Reinforce the ABF brand by elevating the visibility, recognition, and discussion of the ABF, its research, and its researchers among the media and policymakers.

5

Expand Resources

The ABF seeks to intensify and diversify its development efforts, to deepen support and increase funding for both our research and our outreach. By reinforcing our ties to the bar, growing our Fellows program, and broadening our sources of gifts, grants, and other support, we aim to secure our resilience, elevate our research, and amplify our impact.

5.1 Bar Relations

Maintain strong, collaborative relations with the American Bar Association (ABA), American Bar Endowment (ABE), and the ABA Fund for Justice and Education (FJE), while also expanding relationships with other international, state and local, affinity, and specialty bar associations.

5.2 Fellows

Increase net Fellows revenue by building membership, enhancing engagement, increasing contributions, and streamlining operations.

5.3 Grants

Renew, increase, and diversify grant support for ABF research projects and traineeships.

5.4 Gifts

Increase financial support from individual and organizational donors both within and beyond the legal community.