

SECTIONS AND COMMITTEES

Background

Most state and local bars nationwide use a similar section and committee structure, with governing bodies relying on their sections and committees as substantive law resources and to initiate opportunities for professional development of members.

The American Bar Association also incorporates sections and committees into an internal structure that also includes a broader national focus addressed through divisions, commissions, forums, and centers. However, ABA sections differ significantly from those within state or local bars. In fact, ABA sections act more like independent bar associations with their own officers, dues, and committees. ABA sections are self-sustaining entities producing revenue-generating sources, including a variety of publications. ABA sections also differ from state and local entities in that they maintain a certain autonomy in relation to the ABA House of Delegate.

The Missouri Bar functions through a Board of Governors, standing committees, special committees, and sections. Each standing committee and section has a scope to help delineate the area within which it will function, and special committees are developed for tasks of a narrow or limited nature.

For many lawyers, the opportunities for professional development, continuing legal education and networking available within committees and sections are the most relevant, tangible reasons for initial bar involvement. For some of these lawyers, membership becomes an entrée to expanded involvement and interest in positions of leadership.

Committees and sections are a critical resource to further the goals and mission of The Missouri Bar. Besides section/committee-initiated professional development and continuing legal education, these internal entities are called on to provide expertise and counsel on legislation and issues related to the specific areas of the law within the scope of the committee or section. Many bar sections and committees also regularly initiate efforts promoting a better public understanding of the legal system and lawyers.

Missouri Bar Activities

The Missouri Bar has two sections (Young Lawyers and Family Law) and more than 50 standing and special committees. As outlined above, all of these entities function through the Board of Governors, with no independent authority. Section and committee scopes vary, but generally include:

- (1) Aiding in the professional development of bar members and conducting CLE related to the section or committee area of law.
- (2) Reviewing and making recommendations to the Board of Governors regarding legislation related to the section or committee areas of law.
- (3) Drafting proposed legislation for Missouri Bar sponsorship consideration, intended to improve or benefit the administration of justice.
- (4) Promoting a better public understanding of the legal system, lawyers and the respective area of law.

While sections and committees share similar functions related to scope, they differ in many of their internal structures.

Leadership

Committee leadership consists of a chair appointed by the bar's president, one or more vice chairs, and a secretary. A member of the Board of Governors is appointed liaison. In some instances, leadership has also appointed committee councils, if needed, to help plan and perform the tasks of the entity. Subcommittees are commonly used, when necessary, to focus on narrower subjects or committee objectives.

In contrast, executive councils govern sections. Councils consist of a chair, a vice-chair, secretary, the immediate past chair (ex officio with a vote), a liaison from the Board of Governors (without a vote) and four to 12 additional members, one of whom is a young lawyer. The president of the bar has the option to appoint one-half of the council and the other half is elected for two-year staggered terms.

Membership

Any member of the bar in good standing can join a standing open committee. While all bar members receive a membership solicitation to all open committees once each year, online registration is always available. Family Law Section members, on the other hand, must complete a registration each year and pay annual dues.

Meetings

The bar conducts a fall and spring meeting of committees each year. Committees are expected to use the fall meeting to involve the rest of the committee in working plans and objectives for the year. The spring meeting allows for a review and arrangements to complete the annual objectives.

Sections are also expected to have two meetings each bar year and, whenever possible, these should take place with the Annual Meeting or committee meetings. Unlike committee meetings, however, provisions are made for sections to have up to three council meetings during a year. While committees are encouraged to include educational sessions at their biannual meetings, a section is expected to produce two educational programs for its members each year.

Publications and Internet Use

Each section is also expected to prepare a minimum of two newsletters and a maximum of four newsletters for distribution to membership annually. In addition, committees are encouraged to create websites on the bar's homepage.

Committee/Section List Serves

To strengthen communication, the bar has created a listserve for members of every section and standing committee. Members have an opportunity to subscribe to the list serves when joining a committee or at anytime by updating their members-only record. Levels of listserve activity vary. An exception is the Solo & Small Firm list serve, which consistently experiences high traffic. For the rest of the list serves, most of the activity will result from a question or specific issue introduced by a list member. When resolved, activity levels subside.

The bar periodically uses the listserves for quickly and efficiently disseminating information to committees and sections, including providing notices of meetings, seeking member input on issues and alerting members about CLE opportunities. While most list serves do not experience a high volume of traffic, they are a ready and available communication tool that has proven to be valuable, when needed.

Committee/Section Member Involvement

Just as listserve activity varies, so does committee and section member involvement. Since it is fairly inexpensive to support bar committees, leadership can be selective when considering the dissolution of a standing committee. Instead, a new “inactive” category is an option. This category allows the bar to keep a committee experiencing a low-level of activity on record and continue to keep the list of members without expecting the group to actively conduct committee business. The rationale is that it is worthwhile to continue to maintain a list of members should an issue arise where the board would need to seek counsel and recommendations about the area of law related to the committee. In addition, should circumstances dictate activation, a base of membership would already be in place.

Special Committees

For those special tasks or issues that do not lend themselves to the work of a standing committee, special committees have been formed. Usually, these committees are dissolved once the work is completed.

Committees of The Missouri Bar

Active Open Committees:

- Administrative Law
- Alternative Dispute Resolution
- Animal Law
- Business Law
- Civil Practice & Procedure
- Commercial Law
- Committee on Minority Issues
- Construction Law
- Criminal Law
- Delivery of Legal Services
- Division of Judicial Administration
- Education Law
- Elder Law
- Eminent Domain
- Environmental & Energy Law
- Gender & Justice
- Government Attorneys
- Health & Hospital Law
- Insurance Law
- International Law

- Juvenile Courts & Laws
- Labor & Employment Law
- Law Practice Management/Law Office Technology
- Lawyers' Assistance
- Local Government Law
- Media Law
- Military Law
- Paralegals Committee
- Patent, Trademark & Copyright Law
- Probate & Trust Law
- Professionalism
- Property Law
- Solo & Small Firm Practice
- Sports & Entertainment Law
- Taxation Law
- Technology & Computer Law
- Tort Law
- Transportation Law
- Workers' Compensation Law

Inactive Open Committees:

- Agricultural Law
- Employee Benefits Law

Sections:

- Family Law Section

Special Committees (CLOSED):

- Advisory Committee on Citizenship Education
- Client Security Fund
- Commission on Children & The Law
- Complaint Resolution Program Committee
- Editorial Board
- Electronic Filing Committee (Inactive)
- Fee Dispute Resolution
- Finance Committee
- Insurance Programs Committee
- Intervention Committee
- Legal Education Committee
- Legislative Committee
- Mentor Committee
- Press-Bar Commission
- Special Committee on Diversity (Inactive)

- Special Committee on Legal Services Funding (Inactive)
- Special Committee Reviewing the Annual Meeting
- Special Committee on Rules of Professional Conduct (Inactive)
- Staff Pension & Benefits Committee
- Travel Committee

Inactive Special Committees:

- Committee on Predatory Advertising
- Missouri Statewide Legal Services Commission
- Pro Se Committee
- Special Committee on Mental & Developmental Disabilities