



Uncertain about Whether to Start Your Own Practice? Legal Incubators Can Help

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Amidst changing market conditions, including economic influence, technological disruption, and new competition from a growing number of alternative legal service providers, recent graduates are rethinking traditional pathways into employment. Some are exploring entrepreneurship as an option, and I don't mean the "hip, Silicon Valley, tech start-up with a foosball table in the office" type of entrepreneurship. I mean the "starting your own law firm" type of entrepreneurship. Although, for many, the thought of hanging their own shingle is daunting. They waver back and forth—listing the pros and cons in their heads. Exhilarated by the possibility of tremendous growth, autonomy, and the opportunity to make an impact, they are also fraught with fear and trepidation. Understandable. The decision to go solo is not for everyone.

Fear not. Legal incubators can help. If you're not familiar with these types of programs, incubators essentially

provide training and infrastructure for lawyers seeking to create their own sustainable practices. Although the structure and design of incubators vary from one program to another (most are sponsored by law schools or are collaborative efforts by bar associations, state bars, and other nonprofits), all incubators provide a network of experienced lawyers, educators, and administrators who offer support and encouragement for incubator participants. And with more than 60 legal incubators spanning 33 states and four countries, entrepreneurial lawyers are bound to find one that's the right fit. While by no means comprehensive, here's a snapshot of some of the major characteristics of most legal incubator programs.

Training and Educational Programs

Participants may learn about practice management covering basic business issues such as bookkeeping, accounting, and taxes. They may learn how to brand their firm or how to develop a marketing and business development strategy. They may also receive subject-based training in various practice areas such as small business law, family law, immigration, and real estate.

Mentoring from Seasoned Practitioners

Participants will have access to experienced attorneys who can provide professional guidance and share practical knowledge and skills. Whether it is a question on billing practices or a question on how to handle a deposition, seasoned mentors can provide additional experiential advice and training that can be quite beneficial for new attorneys.

Free or Discounted Office Space

Starting a law firm can be difficult especially in the early stages when participants are faced with necessary start-up costs, not to mention the added challenge of building a client base. Thus, incubators do what they can to reduce participants' overhead. Some programs offer free or discounted office space to ease the initial costs of launching a firm.

Various Resources and Practice Tools

Through legal services vendors, incubators provide an array of practice management resources and tools for its participants. From practice management software and online legal research services to CLE programming, participants can test-drive several products to learn, streamline, and create efficiencies in their practices. Vendors who support or have supported incubators include Clio, Lexis, Westlaw, Ross Intelligence, and Practising Law Institute, among others.

Commitment to Social Responsibility

Incubators work toward expanding access to justice to low- and moderate-income populations. Strong relationships with legal aid organizations, the private bar, and other nonprofits offer participants opportunities to learn and develop necessary skills while providing pro bono services to our community's most underserved populations.

Camaraderie, Community, and Innovation among Lawyers

Incubators also act as a safe and creative hub of innovation—where participants share novel ideas on building better, cost-effective ways to deliver legal services. Participants explore flexible pricing options (such as flat fees, contingency fees, fee-shifting, subscription fees, and prepaid legal services), and many incubators offer sample forms, checklists, and training on alternative fee arrangements to help lawyers deliver more transparency and affordable pricing to their clients. Incubators also help participants figure out how to use technology to increase efficiency and decrease their clients' bottom line. From automating routine, time-consuming tasks to incorporating cloud-based products in their firms to increasing accessibility, participants are experimenting with ways to benefit their clients and their practices. Incubators also provide training on the future of law, including emerging technologies. For example, Chicago-Kent College of Law's [Solo & Small Practice Incubator](#) provides training on trending topics in blockchain, smart contracts, and cryptocurrency.

Legal incubators can help new solos tackle the hurdles and challenges that are common when launching a law practice. For more information on incubators, visit the ABA for [incubator resources and program profiles](#).