

So, what is a SAM-Legal initiative going to cost?

By [LawVision](#) on September 6, 2022

Last week's post ([The Dollars are in the Details](#)) was the second of this series. It offered a strong recommendation that firms adopt high-level strategic account management (SAM) programs, which require budget considerations beyond the normal. In today's installment—the last in this series of edited excerpts from [SAM-Legal: Turning Key Clients into Strategic Accounts / A Guide to Law Firm Strategic Account Management](#) (© 2021 LawVision, Inc.) by [Steven M. Bell](#) & [Silvia L. Coulter](#)—we define what is meant by the tested truism: **It takes money to make money.**

Throughout (this series), as well as in the list below, we have described key elements of a SAM-Legal strategy. No doubt, an engaged team leader can conjure ideas in addition to the categories we mention below. From this list, each SAM-Legal team leader will develop a plan that is highly tailored and specific to her or his SAM-Legal client.

Here is a list of expenditures commonly encountered in SAM-Legal programs.

- **Research** – Can the preliminary and continuing research necessary to mount a SAM-Legal initiative be accommodated by in-house support teams who presumably already have access to tools such as research resources, data compilation, and client industry-specific publications (digital and hard copy)? If not, who will conduct these activities and acquire these resources? The firm's information resources and/or business development professionals will know how to acquire and budget for these research tools.
- **Training** – As we discussed in an earlier section, lawyers and other professionals at law firms don't necessarily arrive "out of the box" with the proper credentials and training to lead and participate in SAM-Legal initiatives. Firms should anticipate the costs associated with acquiring the necessary lead-off and continuing training requirements for each SAM-Legal team. What will be the source of this training and what will its cost be?
- **Travel to the client** – No SAM-Legal effort should be undertaken absent consultation and collaboration with the client. Although much communication with clients will occur over the telephone or virtually, a face-to-face meeting with the client(s) is the most effective, and much preferred. How many team members will attend? How much will the kickoff client visit cost? For this category, consider type of transportation, lodging, and meals (or other entertainment). Later in the development of the SAM-Legal team strategy, as we have suggested, it may be appropriate for team members, perhaps the entire core team, to spend time on-site with the client(s) – another category requiring potentially sizeable budget.
And what about client travel to the law firm? If that is to occur, who will pick up the tab? If the law firm opts to pay for client travel, what is the estimated cost?

Finally, in the Travel to Client category, we strongly recommend at least an annual service review. The client is important to the future of the firm; therefore, client service reviews should include in-person participation of senior firm leadership, up to and including the firm chair.

For all of these travel projections, a firm's travel department or travel provider can help to estimate and shape many of these costs. The point here is that the recommended amount of travel, on at least three occasions during the year, is a material out-of-pocket budget consideration that must be estimated and built into the SAM-Legal

budget plan.

- **Team-planning travel** — As we have suggested, it is critical that at least the core client team get together in person at the kickoff, and annually or more thereafter, to research and prepare for the years-long campaign ahead. As with client-related travel, the costs related to gatherings of teams of five or more lawyers and support professionals may be material if they are located in different jurisdictions. In addition to expenses for ground transportation, airfare or train fare, lodging, and firm meals, consider a team-building exercise that might involve an off-campus event such as an industry colloquium, a major sports or entertainment event, or a firm retreat. If your law firm is anything like the ones we have encountered, a team gathering will be capped off with celebration at the hotel restaurant and bar. Remember to include that expenditure in the budget, as well.
- **Consultants** — It certainly is possible for a SAM-Legal team to conduct its business totally in-house, particularly if the law firm is well-endowed with the necessary support professionals who can design, lead, and facilitate team meetings; conduct business and competitive research and analysis; apply team-motivational techniques; provide strategic, leadership, sales, and account management training; advise on approach and follow-up strategies; craft proposals and pitches; create annual reports for the team; provide industry insights; and more. If a firm does not have requisite support resources to handle these potential needs, consider which consultants best fit the need, and build into the budget the necessary consultant fees.
- **Time is money** — So far, we have spoken about out-of-pocket costs, but anyone who has worked at a law firm knows that time is money. In parallel with all of the out-of-pocket calculations described above, consider the time commitment and the concomitant cost of the hours that will be required to implement the program. Start with the number of hours available. Perhaps the SAM-Legal team leader will be able to devote the lion's share of her or his hours to launching and operating the program. That may not be the same for all team members. Early in the planning and preparation stage, it's important to make a candid assessment of the available client development hours for all the lawyers and professional staff who will be involved. Can the envisioned program be accomplished in the available time? If not, can firm leadership make available the additional hours that will be required, and if not, how will the SAM-Legal program be adapted or right-sized to accommodate the hours that *are* available? Just as funding for SAM-Legal is important, the amount of time that can be contributed is an extraordinarily important consideration, particularly given the fact that lawyer time is part of the profit calculation of any firm, and also that the use of client development hours is a precious commodity at performance-evaluation and compensation-adjustment season. Each team member's investment of time had better be worth it to the firm, firm leadership, and each team member.

The time and effort required to prepare accurate and reasonable revenue and out-of-pocket budgets for a SAM-Legal exercise will go to waste if the investment is not actually expended wisely. Don't go through the trouble of preparing a budget unless the plan is to follow it rigorously and use it fully. Spending money can be difficult for those who are footing the bill. However, there also is great prescience in the old saw: "It takes money to make money." If you budget it, spend it, and spend it wisely with an eye always on creating results that benefit the firm and the client.