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| <b>Page: Submitter's Information</b>  |
| <b>Chapter Name</b><br>ACC St. Louis  |
| <b>Page: Achievement Award</b>  |
| <b>Category</b><br>Innovative Programming Effort  |
| <b>Chapter Name</b><br>ACC St. Louis  |
| <b>Chapter Size</b><br>Mid-Sized (301-850 members)  |
| <b>Entry Title</b><br>Checkmate! Building Legal Strategy and Community Through Chess  |
| <b>Entry Description</b><br><p>In the fall of 2024, the St. Louis Chapter of the Association of Corporate Counsel launched an innovative four-part program titled "Checkmate! How Chess Strategy Can Make You a Better Litigator." This interdisciplinary series combined professional development, social connection, and intellectual challenge in a format that was both engaging and effective. Hosted in partnership with the World Chess Hall of Fame, the program featured three progressively-themed chess lessons taught by Grandmasters in Residence, ending with a CLE-eligible capstone event. Each session explored the parallels between chess strategy and litigation—anticipating an opponent's next move, weighing long-term risk against short-term advantage, and planning for your end game. Attendees were invited to apply these principles in real time through open chess play and strategic discussion.</p> <p>More than just a learning experience, the program served as a valuable platform for member connection and collaboration. Each session included networking receptions, chess-themed challenges, and shared engagement in a unique setting. Held at the iconic World Chess Hall of Fame, the series also gave participants access to exhibits, live demonstrations, and nationally ranked players. The final session, a CLE-eligible capstone titled Defending the King in a Black and White World: How Political and Cultural Polarization Drives Jury Verdicts developed by attorneys at Galloway Johnson, examined how polarization influences trial outcomes. The final event included a live chess demonstration by the Woman Grandmaster in Residence and was complete with a custom chess cake!</p> <p>By blending legal education with game theory and experiential learning, Checkmate provided ACC members with new tools for advocacy while strengthening ties across the in-house counsel community. This program represents a fresh approach to member engagement, knowledge-building, and cross-industry connection—aligned with the ACC's mission to lead and innovate in the in-house legal profession.</p> |
| <b>When was the program initiated?</b><br>9/4/2024  |
| <b>What was the project objective? Describe the steps you took to achieve this objective, including key strategies, activities, or milestones.</b><br><p>The objective of Checkmate! How Chess Strategy Can Make You a Better Litigator was to deliver an innovative and engaging professional development experience that sharpened litigation strategy skills while strengthening the ACC St. Louis in-house community. Through an approach that combined legal education, chess instruction, and interactive programming, the series aimed to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Equip in-house counsel with tools for better strategic thinking, pattern recognition, and risk evaluation;</li><li>• Reinforce the connection between chess principles and litigation tactics such as anticipating opposing moves, managing limited resources, and maintaining composure under pressure;</li><li>• Create meaningful opportunities for peer-to-peer learning, relationship-building, and informal mentorship through shared participation in a novel educational setting.</li></ul> <p>The culminating CLE session titled "Defending the King in a Black and White World: How Political and Cultural Polarization Drives Jury Verdicts" extended the metaphor of the chessboard to real-world litigation challenges. It gave participants an opportunity to analyze how polarization and social context can shape jury dynamics, complementing the skills explored in the preceding sessions with current, high-stakes relevance.</p> <p>By incorporating lessons taught by the Grandmasters in Residence, museum partnerships, and live demonstrations, the program created an immersive environment for reflection, connection, and professional growth. The format also encouraged sustained engagement across four months, offering continuity and community for participants in a demanding profession.</p>  |

**How was the objective achieved? How did you measure success, and to what extent do you believe the objective was met?**

The success of the Checkmate! program was reflected not only in strong attendance, but also in the enthusiasm it generated among members throughout its four-part run. Each session drew in-house counsel who returned repeatedly, which was an encouraging sign of both the program's value and the community it fostered.

Feedback from participants highlighted how the series stood apart from typical CLE programming. Members shared that the chess-based format sharpened their ability to think several moves ahead, mirroring real-world litigation decisions. Just as importantly, they appreciated the opportunity to connect with fellow in-house professionals in a relaxed, intellectually engaging setting. Many commented that the networking aspect was one of the most rewarding elements because the event was easy, natural, and fostered a shared experience.

The capstone CLE, Defending the King in a Black and White World, brought everything full circle. Attendance remained strong, and the combination of live chess play, litigation discussion, and museum setting made for a truly memorable close to the series. The event sparked meaningful conversations about how broader cultural forces shape jury behavior—an issue deeply relevant to litigators today.

The format also reinvigorated in-person engagement for the chapter. The buzz around the program continued between sessions and has inspired conversations about future series that build on its interdisciplinary approach or possibility partnering with other bar associations or legal communities in the St Louis area. While the core goal was professional development, the lasting takeaway may have been how much shared learning—especially when it's a little outside the box—can strengthen community.

**Please describe the total budget allocated for your program or initiative. Include a brief breakdown of how the funds were distributed across key areas. In addition, explain how the budget was used effectively or creatively to maximize impact.**

The total budget for this event was \$7,500.00, which was divided between the first three (3) events. The budget consisted of the cost of rental space at the World Chess Hall of Fame, which included the Grandmasters in Residence teaching lessons at the first three events, as well as food and drinks supplied for a local restaurant and valet parking, as parking is difficult in that area. The costs of the final event in December were paid by our sponsor Galloway Johnson, who presented the CLE at the event. Each event had attendance prizes and giveaways for the members that were chess-themed, including a travel chess board, chess instructions, and chess themed cookies.

**What significant obstacles or challenges did you encounter during the planning or implementation of your program or initiative? How did you address or overcome them? If you did not face major challenges, please explain why that may have been the case and what factors contributed to the smooth execution of your work.**

One of the most notable aspects of the Checkmate! program was how smoothly the planning process unfolded. The series was developed well in advance by a committee of experienced, highly collaborative ACC members who brought creativity, clear communication, and logistical expertise to the table. Each phase of planning for the program, including securing space at the World Chess Hall of Fame and preparing the Grandmasters in Residence for the chess lessons, selecting the food and beverages to be inclusive of dietary restrictions, marketing the event to ensure maximum attendance, to curating the CLE capstone with our sponsor, Galloway Johnson, benefited from this early, thoughtful preparation.

The strong partnership with the World Chess Hall of Fame also played a key role in eliminating many typical event-planning hurdles. The venue's staff were engaged and accommodating, the space itself lent unique energy to the program, and the integration of chess instruction and museum programming added depth with minimal complications.

While there were no significant obstacles, one area we hope to improve upon in the future is attendance. Those who participated found the content enriching and the networking valuable, and many returned for multiple sessions. However, the series deserved a wider audience. We believe that with increased outreach, member testimonials, and perhaps a preview-style kickoff, similar programs could attract even more participants. In short, the program's success was a testament to strong planning, clear vision, and a committee that worked exceptionally well together. If anything, the experience highlighted how a well-executed idea, especially one that combines education, culture, and community, can unfold with fewer hurdles when there's shared enthusiasm and preparation from the outset.

**What do you anticipate will be the long-term impact of your project or initiative? Describe how the outcomes will extend beyond the immediate results, including any lasting benefits to the local/global ACC community. If applicable, explain how the initiative might be sustained, scaled, or replicated in the future.**

The Checkmate! series demonstrated that continuing legal education doesn't have to follow a conventional script to be impactful. By blending strategy, culture, and community-building in an accessible and engaging format, the program planted the seeds for a more dynamic approach to professional development within the ACC network.

One of the most lasting outcomes is the sense of connection it fostered among members. The series created space for in-house counsel to engage not just as professionals, but as thinkers and peers with shared hobbies. That kind of sustained engagement builds trust, strengthens chapter identity, and encourages ongoing participation in ACC programming.

The program also serves as a strong model for other chapters. Its structure—anchored in a theme, supported by outside partners, and extended across multiple touchpoints—offers a replicable format that can be adapted to different regions, industries, or areas of legal practice. Whether applied to chess, art, theater, or other disciplines, the interdisciplinary format invites members to think creatively while learning collaboratively.

Ultimately, the long-term impact of this initiative lies in the way it reimagines what learning and connection can look like for in-house counsel. It invites a shift from one-time events to sustained, meaningful engagement, which offers a flexible framework for future growth across the global ACC community. Recently, the National Litigation Network has been inspired by this event to create an online chess club (on the chess.com platform) and plans to host online chess tournaments for its global membership as an opportunity for networking and engagement.

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| <p><b>Please share what you are most proud to report about execution of this program. Please explain what this accomplishment means to you and how it reflects the values or goals of your work.</b></p> <p>What our chapter is most proud of is seeing a creative idea come to life in a way that brought real joy, curiosity, and connection to our ACC community. Checkmate! began as a playful concept—using chess as a lens for litigation strategy—and it became something far richer: a unique blend of learning, fun, and professional growth. It was truly special to see our members engaging not just as lawyers, but as learners and thinkers in a new space. We explored ideas outside of traditional legal topics and applied them to our everyday work as in-house counsel. We talked about decision-making, anticipating opposition, and managing limited resources—not in a lecture hall, but while playing chess, talking tactics, and laughing together.</p> <p>One of the highlights was the opportunity to learn from Grandmasters in Residence at the World Chess Hall of Fame. Getting lessons from elite players, asking them questions, and even playing games with them was a rare and exciting experience. It brought a sense of awe and accessibility to the program. Exploring the exhibits and learning about the history and artistry of the game added depth and cultural richness that elevated the entire series. We created something fresh and meaningful, and we’re proud that it reflected both the creativity and community spirit of our chapter.</p>   |
| <p><b>Please share how your project or initiative is innovative. Describe any original approaches, strategies, or tools you used to address a problem or achieve your goals. What makes your work stand out from more traditional methods.</b></p> <p>The series was innovative because it reimagined what ACC programming could look like. Rather than starting with a CLE that focused on legal doctrine or case studies, we began with a game that most people may not play, or play well, but universally understood for its strategic framework, to explore the mindset and skills of effective litigators. The format broke the mold. Instead of a single session, the program was designed as a four-part experience, encouraging ongoing engagement and relationship-building over time. Each event layered new ideas, from tactical thinking to risk evaluation, while maintaining a sense of continuity and shared exploration among participants.</p> <p>Bringing in Grandmasters to teach strategy and facilitate play was another bold departure from the norm. Participants weren’t just listening to attorneys about the case law. Members were playing, asking questions, watching demonstrations, and interacting with world-class experts in a completely different field. That interdisciplinary approach made the learning active, memorable, and fun.</p> <p>The setting also played a major role in the program’s innovation. By hosting events at the World Chess Hall of Fame, we created a cultural and visual experience, enhancing the educational content. Members explored exhibits before lessons, connected over happy hour chess matches, and found themselves inspired in ways traditional meeting rooms simply couldn’t offer.</p> <p>Ultimately, the program was innovative because it blended intellectual rigor with playfulness, strategic thinking with social connection. We topped off chess lessons with a model presentation for legal education that drew on the chess theme and imparted legal wisdom that is the usual cornerstone of professional legal learning. The events were reflective of genuine member engagement. It proved that when we rethink the structure and setting of professional development, we can make it not only more effective, but far more enjoyable.</p> |
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**Please share the link to any video files related to your submission.**