Tip Sheet for Volunteers in the Classroom

When professionals from the legal community partner with teachers in primary and secondary schools, the law automatically comes alive for students. A lawyer's personal engagement with the law gives them credibility with students. Such credibility can get a classroom visit off to the right start. By engaging students in interactive explorations of the law, volunteers can leave a classroom knowing they have helped students grasp the law and legal issues.

While the activities provided in this toolkit offer a range of interactive instructional strategies to teachers for use in their classrooms, volunteers in the classroom can equally benefit from these resources. You are invited to adjust the activities to fit the goals of the class you are visiting. Your teacher/partner will work with you to select the strategies that meet those goals.

Above all and perhaps most importantly, enjoy yourself – you want your love for what you do and your respect for the students and for the law to show!

If you are a lawyer, judge, or law student preparing for a classroom presentation, you may find the following tips helpful:

- **Know your subject.** Spend some time reviewing the material prior to addressing the students. If you don't know the answer to a question, don't be afraid to tell the students that you don't. Students will know very quickly if you are trying to make up an answer and then your credibility will be lost.

- **Work with the teacher before your session.** Let her or him know what you plan to do and provide background materials. Ask what the class has been studying, and integrate your session with classroom studies.

- **Be prepared.** Before you walk into the classroom, you should know what you want to say and how you are going to say it. Establish a presentation outline.

- **The first few minutes important are important.** To ensure students remain engaged for the duration of the presentation, get them involved immediately. Start your presentation with a statement that gets their attention or ask a question that they can't wait to answer.

- **Talk with the students, not at them.** A lecture may work for a professor in a law class, but it is not the best way to interact with young students in primary or secondary grades. Most students are interested in the law, and they will engage in meaningful discussion if given the opportunity. Give them that opportunity!

- **Work the room.** Don't stand in one place. Move around the classroom, interact with students, and get each one involved. Encourage participation by your own enthusiasm for the topic.

- **Have a plan, but be prepared to vary from it.** When you do generate interest and enthusiasm in the students, their questions and comments may lead you away from your plan. Don't be afraid of this, but don't put yourself in the position where you are unable to get back on topic.

- **Talk to students in language they can understand.** Don't be afraid to broach tough topics either. However, remember you are not addressing a judge, but rather a group of students. Talk with them in words they can understand and take time to explain words or concepts that might not be readily known to your audience.

- **Create hypothetical situations.** Use examples to illustrate points you are trying to make. Develop an imaginary situation based on hot topics in the news or use your imagination to make one up. It will be much easier for students to make a connection to simple, real world scenarios.

- **Be in control of classroom.** When you are in front of the class, you will be tested on your knowledge of the subject and your management of the students. If a student misbehaves, do something — don't ignore the situation. Try to handle the situation yourself, and let the students know that you are in control of the classroom for the time you are there.

- **Watch the clock.** No matter how interesting you may be, most students' attention will last no longer than the normal class period. Know when the class is over and time your presentation accordingly.