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[Back to Article](#)

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## Trying to make deferrals into something positive

Karen Sloan / Staff reporter

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NEWARK, N.J. — The lobby of the New Jersey Performing Arts Center was buzzing on April 8 with young attorneys and 3Ls looking for public-interest law opportunities, and with public-interest organizations looking to hire them for the short term — and for free.

The event, dubbed "New Jersey's First Deferred Associates Public Interest Job Fair," was intended to connect incoming associates whose start dates have been deferred by their law firms with public-interest organizations that could use some virtually no-cost help.

Leaders at the New Jersey pro bono program Volunteer Lawyers for Justice organized the event after a wave of law firms announced public-interest deferral programs in which they pay their incoming associates to work in public-interest law while awaiting their delayed start dates.

Twenty-six public-interest legal organizations attended, and about 50 registered job seekers. Quite a few of the job seekers were from Newark's Seton Hall University School of Law, just up the street from the New Jersey Performing Arts Center.

### Encore considered

Karen Sacks, the executive director of Volunteer Lawyers for Justice, said there was more interest from the organizations than the event could handle. She received calls from public-interest programs as far away as Washington and Tennessee asking to participate, but the group limited participants to those in New Jersey because of space constraints.

The group is considering holding another event in May or June, when students are finished with classes and have a clearer idea of their options, Sacks said. Some of the attendees at the event discovered only last week that their start dates had been deferred.

Although the fair was geared toward deferred associates heading to law firms, a wide range of job seekers showed up. Some were first-year law firm associates who had been laid off, others were 3Ls whose law firm job offers had been rescinded, and a few were simply law students soon to graduate without any employment secured.

Lori Outzs Borgen, the associate director of the Center for Social Justice at Seton Hall, said that about half of the attendees she spoke with were deferred associates, while the other half were people looking for full-time jobs or volunteer work. Borgen said that the center, which runs the law school's clinics, among other things, is looking for two deferred associates. The center simply lacks the funds to pay the salaries for additional full-time employees, she said.

Rohit Kumar was among those who didn't fall into the deferred-associate mold. Kumar completed his legal education in his native India and earned a master's degree from Georgetown University last May.

He has been volunteering as a mediator with the Better Business Bureau but hopes to become involved with an organization that deals with bankruptcy and foreclosures before his U.S. visa runs out in about five months.

Seton Hall 3L Brian Sturm circulated throughout the room talking to representatives of public-interest organizations. He is heading to a large New York law firm next year, but his start date was pushed back by three months.

Sturm was on the lookout for a productive way to spend the down time, although he said that his firm is providing a stipend to delayed associates regardless of whether they take a public-interest position.

"I think this is a good opportunity to do something good in the meantime and get some experience," Sturm said.

"I'm interested in doing something that's related to housing or litigation."

During a brief speech, Newark Mayor Cory Booker, a graduate of Yale Law School, encouraged students to think of their start date delays not as a hardship but as an opportunity. He said that his own experience as a Skadden Fellow — during which he worked at a public-interest law organization right out of law school — was invaluable to his professional development.