

Meredith Brown Helps Districts Turn Community Dreams Into Legally Sound Realities

By Nicole Krueger



The community wanted a baseball field. The district had no money to spare – just an empty space behind a school and a bunch of helping hands eager to volunteer.

What they needed was someone to help them figure out how to do it without running afoul of the law.

That's the kind of project Meredith Brown loves to tackle.

"Most of my work has some sort of community aspect – people collectively working on addressing basic needs, such as education, transit or housing," says Brown, a partner with Atkinson, Andelson, Loya, Ruud & Romo (AALRR), a CASBO Premier Partner. "My favorite projects are the ones where everybody wants to work together and comply with the law, and they just need someone to help figure out how all the pieces fit together."

Brown has spent more than three decades helping school districts and other public entities navigate the ins and outs of construction law and regulatory compliance. Originally from Texas, she earned a bachelor's degree in agricultural economics and international development from Cornell University. "It was legal in nature, looking at the way people work out issues and disputes on a global scale," she says.

During her time at Boston University School of Law, visits to Ghana and Senegal showed that people around the world were grappling with many of the same problems. "I guess it's kind of the same thing, just a different zip code."

That global lens pairs naturally with Brown's hands-on background. She grew up helping her dad remodel houses, crawling across rooftops and mixing stucco with paint to get just the right texture. Over the course of her career, she has gone on to work on power plants, bridges and other large-scale infrastructure projects – experiences that gave her a deep appreciation for how things are built, both physically and bureaucratically.

Still, the projects that excite her most happen closer to home. "Sometimes districts decide to get creative and collaborate with a community partner to benefit the community, and people are trying to figure out how to work together and do something that maybe hasn't been done before."

Whether she's building a retaining wall for her chicken coop, bartering eggs at the farmer's market or helping a school develop affordable housing for teachers, the underlying principles remain the same.

"These are things people have been doing since they first made settlements by rivers. People have always bartered and traded with fellow community members," she says. "When I work with CBOs, it's like a microcosm of the global trade agreements I studied in school. Everyone is trying to figure out what's best for their community and find a solution that's fair and equitable."

For Brown, the work is about helping people figure out how to move forward within a complex web of rules. That role – knitting together compliance, fairness and shared goals – is where Brown feels most at home.

"People in education are generally heart people. They care what happens to others," she says. "It's rewarding if you can come up with a solution that helps make things work. The satisfaction is really in feeling like I'm helping society function in a positive way instead of chaos." ■■■