For 30 years from 1977 to 2007, Sheldon Roodman was the executive director of the Legal Assistance Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago (LAF), the principal provider of free legal services in civil cases to the poor and other vulnerable groups in Cook County, Illinois. During this period he played a dynamic leadership role in expanding legal services for these disadvantaged groups in the Chicago area and in establishing LAF’s reputation as one of the best legal services programs in the United States. A sampling of legal projects he helped to create and sustain include LAF’s Legal Center for Immigrants, its Children’s Law Project, Home Ownership Preservation Project, and the Veteran’s Law Project.

During the 1970s Roodman was an active litigator and lead counsel in a number of class actions on behalf of low-income individuals seeking unemployment benefits, food stamps, welfare and/or Medicaid benefits. His most important case reached the United States Supreme Court twice (Edelman v. Jordan and Quern v. Jordan) and dealt with the rights of a class of aged, blind, and disabled welfare applicants. The Supreme Court decisions clarified the scope and application of the Eleventh Amendment to the United States Constitution.

During his career Roodman received recognition from a number of groups, including the Chicago Bar Foundation and Chicago Bar Association, which presented him with the United States Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens Award. The Chicago Public Interest Law Initiative recognized him for Distinguished Public Service, and LAF presented him with a Lifetime Achievement Award.

Through the years Roodman has served on numerous boards and committees, including the boards of the Management Information Exchange, the Center on Social Welfare Policy and Law, and the Judicial Screening Committees for Illinois Supreme Court Chief Justice Mary Ann McMorrow and Illinois Supreme Court Justice Anne Burke.

Roodman earned his undergraduate degree from the University of Michigan and his JD from Washington University in 1966. He was managing editor of the Washington University Law Quarterly. After law school, he received a one-year Bigelow Teaching Fellowship from the University of Chicago Law School. After the fellowship he practiced with a major Chicago law firm, Mayer Brown, and then in 1969 started his public interest career.