VAULT GUIDE TO
LAW FIRM PRO BONO PROGRAMS

2007 EDITION

Get the scoop on pro bono work at the country's top firms

3rd Edition

THE STAFF OF VAULT
WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY IRENE DORZBACK, ASSISTANT DEAN OF NYU SCHOOL OF LAW, OFFICE OF CAREER SERVICES
WITH A FOREWORD BY MADELEINE SCHACHTER, VICE PRESIDENT AND DEPUTY GENERAL COUNSEL OF TIME WARNER BOOK GROUP, INC., CHAIR, TIME WARNER PRO BONO PROGRAM
RESEARCH UNDERWRITTEN BY 53 LAW FIRMS, NON-PROFITS AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONS
How To Use This Guide

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Service to clients who cannot afford legal counsel has been an ethical imperative of lawyers dating back to the creation of the legal profession. Over the course of the last few decades, large U.S. law firms collectively have devoted increasing resources to pro bono work, and also to the management and administration of those efforts. Nearly all have developed their own unique culture of service and methods of administration. This book was developed to provide law students and lawyers with the essential objective information necessary to make an informed evaluation of these firms’ pro bono culture and activities. Our intent is that the information contained within this Guide will enable you to match your interests with an appropriate firm.

The information presented in this Guide was developed through a partnership between Vault and pro bono coordinators at firms featured in this Guide. Despite the natural competitiveness among law firms, it is not unusual for law firm pro bono coordinators to collaborate with their colleagues at other firms. Law firms recognize that these collaborations not only promote greater pro bono work within their own firm but also foster increased service within the entire legal community. The result is that the ever-increasing legal needs of the poor and disadvantaged receive greater attention.

When examining law firm pro bono culture and comparing firms, we encourage you to look beyond raw numerical data. We encourage you to examine the hallmarks of a hospitable and productive pro bono culture: Leadership, Structure, Participation and Evaluation.

LEADERSHIP AND STRUCTURE

Once a firm has committed to create a pro bono practice, there are various ways in which the firm can structure its practice to meet that commitment. The first section, “Who’s Who,” is meant to explore firms’ pro bono leadership and structure. Many firms have a pro bono coordinator and/or a pro bono committee. In order to better understand the mandate and role of the pro bono coordinator and/or committee, take the following points into consideration. How much time does the coordinator devote to pro bono? Is it a full-time or part-time position? Keep in mind that although no pro bono practice can be successful without partner support, a coordinator need not be a partner or a lawyer to be an effective volunteer manager. At the same time, a firm may not have a coordinator if it has a strong committee culture. If a firm has a committee, consider the composition of its members. Is there partner and/or associate representation? When considering how often the committee meets, be aware that in some instances, a committee that does not meet often may still be very active, communicating regularly with the coordinator and individual attorneys on an ad hoc basis.

In the next section, “The Scoop,” firms are asked if they have written pro bono policies. Many firms do, often incorporated into their lawyers’ manual. To learn more about a firm’s practice, you may consider contacting the firm to request a copy. Firms were also asked how they decide which pro bono matters to work on. Responses to this question may be indicative of firm goals with respect to pro bono legal services, or may simply reflect their administrative procedures for taking on new matters.

The following question refers to the “Law Firm Pro Bono Challenge.” The Challenge is an aspirational minimum standard of pro bono service. The Challenge is posed to firms with 50 or more attorneys. Signatories to the Challenge target a pro bono commitment of either three or five percent of annual billable hours or an average of 60 or 100 hours per attorney per year. Many firms have signed on to the Challenge, and they use it as a goal for their pro bono practice. However, this does not mean that non-signatories do not have their own internal goals, particularly where a firm’s pro bono program is still maturing. Moreover, every firm that accepts the Challenge does not necessarily meet it every year. The results are self-reported, and they are not published.
PARTICIPATION

Participation means more than merely how many hours a firm devotes to pro bono work. Access to pro bono opportunities is a key to participation. The pro bono cases that lawyers enjoy most are those that meet their interests, and enhance their skills. Firms are asked to mention some of the areas of law in which they offer pro bono representation. A firm's pro bono work is a function of the interests of its attorneys, which can differ from office to office and class to class. Accordingly, the areas in which a firm does not practice may be more telling than the areas in which it does, since a firm may not practice in certain areas due to unavoidable conflicts of interest or ideological decisions. On the other hand, it simply may be due to a lack of attorney interest. Many firms will work with you to find a project that appeals to you.

Pro bono statistics should be viewed in the context not only of firm size (larger firms tend to have larger total pro bono hours due to economies of scale), but also with an understanding of the extent to which the average lawyer at the firm performs pro bono work. Responses to the "By the Numbers" section will help you understand this better. When following up with a firm, you may wish to consider the level of involvement among partners and senior management. You may also want to examine the participation among specific offices and departments—particularly the office or department that you are considering.

EVALUATION, COMPENSATION & ADVANCEMENT

While pro bono work is meant to serve the public good and should be engaged in for altruistic rather than self-interested reasons, many associates have legitimate concerns about whether or not time spent on pro bono matters will negatively impact their compensation and advancement within the firm. The section "Supervision and Evaluations" is meant to explore how pro bono work is evaluated and compensated as compared with work for commercial clients, and the impact of such work on an associate's professional development within the firm.

Although many firms require partner supervision of pro bono matters, the level of such partners' involvement varies from firm to firm and matter to matter. For example, some firms assign one partner to all pro bono matters while other firms encourage different partners to supervise different matters. In either instance, the partner may take an active role in the case or may be only nominally involved. In addition, some firms may encourage (or require) senior associate supervision in lieu of (or in addition to) partner supervision. Whatever the case, you may want to consider whether these supervisors provide any kind of written evaluations and, if so, the function they serve in determining compensation and advancement. For example, some firms have a formal review process for commercial client work; if so, is pro bono work evaluated under the same system? If not, how is pro bono work evaluated? Is it given the same weight as commercial work in terms of contributing to your potential advancement within the firm?

Many firms have billable hours requirements for associates or use billable hours to help determine bonus levels. You may want to consider the extent to which such firms count pro bono work as "billable" in this regard. If they do not, is there some other way in which pro bono work factors into an associate's compensation?

In conclusion, we hope that this book assists you in finding a pro bono practice that is a good match for your interests. Remember: although you can get a quick impression by flipping through these pages and looking at pro bono hours billed, and yes/no responses, the most important factor is the commitment of the partnership to meet defined pro bono goals and to structure the program to enable volunteers to meet those goals. This Guide is intended to be your first step in learning how to consider a firm's pro bono commitment within the context of the firm's unique culture.

Enjoy!

Carrie Grimm, Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton LLP
Mark Goldberg, Latham & Watkins LLP
Greg McConnell, Winston & Strawn LLP
Teresa Schiller, Clifford Chance US LLP