SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS TO EVALUATE A LAW FIRM'S COMMITMENT TO PRO BONO

The following are questions which students may utilize to elicit a firm's pro bono commitment. Suggested questions include:

- If the firm has a billable hours target, does pro bono work count towards billable hours? Does the firm have a mandatory number of pro bono hours which may be applied toward the billable requirement?
- How does pro bono factor into compensation, performance reviews and partnership decisions?
- Does the firm have a written pro bono policy?
- If the firm has adopted a pro bono policy, has the firm made any recent changes to its policy? If so, why?
- Does the firm have a structured pro bono program? For example, does it have a pro bono committee?
- Does the firm have a pro bono coordinator? Is this person an attorney? Is this person a partner? Does this person work full or part-time on pro bono matters?
- What percentage of the lawyers in the firm did pro bono work last year? What percentage of the partners? What percentage of the lawyers who made partner this year handled a pro bono case?
- Is the firm a signatory to the Law Firm Pro Bono Challenge?
- What other resources does the firm make available to attorneys who perform pro bono work? For instance, is training available? Is support staff permitted to work on pro bono cases?
- How does the firm define pro bono work?
- Do partners supervise pro bono work?
- How does the firm decide which pro bono cases the firm will accept?
- Does the firm encourage attorneys to perform a minimum number of hours of pro bono work?
- In addition to a pro bono policy, does the firm have other programs encouraging public service — e.g., summer rotation, split mandates or post-graduate fellowships?

American Bar Association
Standing Committee on Pro Bono and Public Service
and the Center for Pro Bono

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INTRODUCTION

As Chair of the American Bar Association’s Standing Committee on Pro Bono and Public Service, I am pleased to present you this brochure designed to help you assess a law firm’s commitment to pro bono. Pro bono is an important part of your future career. It will provide you with an opportunity to give back to the community, and to develop your skills and excellence in legal work. It will also be a valuable experience for your professional growth.

In addition, as a partner in a major law firm, I have come to understand that one of the forces driving law firms to do pro bono work is their desire to recruit law students. Your commitment to serving the poor can and does drive the profession to do the right thing. Whether you are a law student or a lawyer, your commitment to pro bono work will be recognized.

Many law firms have established innovative pro bono programs. This guide is designed to assist you in evaluating a firm’s pro bono culture, to encourage your search for firms actively engaged in pro bono work, and to help you ask the questions that will lead law firms to maintain or increase their commitment to the poor.

As the next generation of lawyers, you are in a critical position to translate your ideals into action and to influence the future course of this profession. Now, more than ever, you can make a difference. So, please, ask the questions at the end of this brochure. Ask them again and again, every chance you get.

Robert N. Weiner
Chair
Standing Committee on Pro Bono and Public Service

WHAT IS PRO BONO?

Pro bono comes from the Latin “pro bono publico” and means “for the public good.” In a law school setting, pro bono may have many meanings. For the practicing lawyer, the American Bar Association has defined pro bono as any legal work performed by a lawyer on behalf of a person who is unable to afford payment, pro bono legal services are pro bono legal services.

Professional or non-profit, governmental, civic, community or religious organizations are entities designated primarily to address the issues of persons with limited resources.

A lawyer may also provide any additional services through:

- The delivery of legal services at a substantially reduced fee to individuals, groups or organizations seeking to secure civil and/or public rights and liberties or charitable, educational, civil, governmental and educational organizations.
- Delivery of legal services at a substantially reduced fee to persons or organizations;
- Participation in activities for improving the legal system or the legal profession.

Additionally, Model Rule 6.1 encourages lawyers to contribute financially to organizations that provide legal services to the poor. In emphasizing direct legal services to the poor, the Model Rules recognize that lawyers and only lawyers can secure access to justice for the poor.

Robert E. Hirsch
Partner
American Bar Association
Portland, Maine

THE ABA’S COMMITMENT TO LAW FIRM PRO BONO

Model Rule 6.1 applies to all lawyers regardless of size and how they practice — in big firms, small firms, corporate legal departments, law schools or elsewhere. To promote pro bono among the nation’s law firms, the ABA created the Law Firm Pro Bono Project. The Project is sponsored by the Pro Bono Institute in cooperation with the ABA Fund for Justice Education’s Steering Committee on Pro Bono and Public Service.

In 1993 the Project developed the Law Firm Pro Bono Challenge. The Challenge, a national aspirational standard comprised of law firms calls upon its members to commit substantial resources — either $3 or $5 per hour, at a time, to organizations for those of limited means.

A lawyer may also provide any additional services through:

- The delivery of legal services at a substantially reduced fee to persons or organizations;
- Participation in activities for improving the legal system or the legal profession.

THE IMPORTANCE OF EVALUATING A LAW FIRM’S COMMITMENT TO PRO BONO

Why is it important to ask questions about pro bono opportunities in a firm?

- As a partner in a major law firm, I have come to understand that one of the forces driving law firms to do pro bono work is their desire to recruit law students.
- As the next generation of lawyers, you are in a critical position to translate your ideals into action and to influence the future course of this profession.
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Make sure to consider the sample interview questions on the back of this brochure.

“Competitive firms are increasingly motivated to support the pro bono interests of their associates and pro bono.”

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