

Setting Up Your Pro Bono Program

I. Getting Buy-In at Your Corporation

The first challenge in initiating a pro bono program is to build the necessary support among the leaders of your organization. You need to be prepared to dispel the “myths” of pro bono and to articulate why having a program will not only benefit the clients you intend to serve, but your organization and individual attorneys and staff as well. PILI’s Pro Bono Initiative is a key starting point in your efforts.

II. Promulgating a Pro Bono Policy

The less experience your organization has with pro bono work, the more important it will be to promulgate a policy explaining how the program will work. The policy should address:

- What your organization considers to be pro bono work;
- Who will approve the engagements and what type of information will need to be provided before a pro bono matter is accepted;
- Whether and how much credit will be given to pro bono matters;
- Whether and what insurance is available for pro bono services rendered;
- What type of support will be available on pro bono cases (i.e., use of administrative staff, copy equipment) and what type of expenses will be reimbursed (i.e., expert fees); and
- Whether pro bono work is expected or required of each attorney and if so, in what amount, or rather that pro bono work is encouraged and valued.

III. Rolling Out the Program

Once your pro bono policy has been adopted, you should consider the following to get your program off to a good start.

- Encouraging corporation and legal department leaders to lend their vocal support and encouragement to participation in the program, ideally by their own example;
- Having a few pro bono opportunities in hand to distribute to interested lawyers; and
- Announcing publicly the purposes and goals of the program.

IV. Maximizing the Program’s Potential

As your pro bono program gains traction, maximize its potential by:

- Appointing a program manager to encourage participation, track involvement and promote successes;
- Partnering with a pro bono or legal aid agency to pre-screen cases for your organization;
- Involving your legal staff actively in the program and encouraging them to spot worthy matters or causes for your organization to handle or support;
- Publicizing your pro bono program’s success and linking up the program with your organization’s marketing, recruiting and professional development efforts;
- Participating in the legal community’s efforts to identify best pro bono practices;
- Considering the creation of a partnership with a law firm that you have engaged as outside counsel; and
- Developing a program that is self-sustaining in order to ensure the program’s viability during times of staffing changes, particularly in the role of General Counsel.