

Corporate Counsel Doing Pro Bono – Making a Difference in Texas



**Corporate law departments of all sizes,
small or large –
from a staff of *one* to a staff of *many* –
can succeed!**

- Learn about pro bono opportunities in Texas
- Identify pro bono corporate counsel mentors/contacts in the state
- Learn about existing Corporate Law departments' pro bono policies
- Develop, maintain and expand a pro bono program in your corporate legal department

www.TexasLawyersHelp.org/corporatecounsel

Consider these 10 steps when developing a pro bono policy in the workplace.

- **Choose** - consider attorney interest, availability, and possible impediments and design your program with these in mind
- **Examine** - review the unmet legal needs and already existing legal programs specific to your community — identify new opportunities in the community, create new partnerships, expand the breadth of pro bono opportunities offered
- **Support** - secure the support of your company's chief legal and/or executive officer
- **Structure** - develop a formal structure that fosters team building and volunteer recognition
- **Partner** - establish strategic partnerships with corporate law departments and law firms and legal services agencies that provide malpractice insurance
- **Publicize** - reach out to all the attorneys AND support staff in your organization emphasizing real commitment
- **Launch** - host kick off events to generate enthusiasm, explain program goals, and introduce participants and partnerships
- **Recognize** - remember the power of positive recognition - it makes a big difference in the level of participation and commitment
- **Measure** - gauge your program's success and effectiveness through performance measures, including client & community outcomes and benefits to program participants
- **Evaluate** - regularly reassess, re-evaluate and, if necessary, restructure

Excerpt from www.CorporateProBono.org

Pro bono cases offer attorneys solid experience in:

- Honing legal skills
- Exercising corporate citizenship
- Building teamwork
- Recruiting new attorneys

“Through participation in the Texas State Bar efforts to provide equal access to justice for all citizens, attorneys from Corporate Law Departments are reinforcing the spirit of community service, a cornerstone of corporate social responsibility, while fulfilling the professional responsibility that arises from being a licensed member of the legal profession.”

Charles W. Matthews, Jr., Vice President and General Counsel of Exxon Mobil Corporation and Chair of the Texas Access to Justice Commission's Corporate Counsel Committee

Pro bono involvement by corporate legal departments:

- Enhances the corporation's reputation in the community
- Offers additional hands-on training and networking opportunities for its participants
- Encourages community awareness and involvement
- Increases familiarity with the local courts and judges, affiliate firms and organizations



MAKE A DIFFERENCE



Did you know that Texas has the second largest poverty population in the United States?

- Approximately 3.9 million people live below the federal poverty level in Texas, which means over 938,000 (14.2 %) of Texas families live in poverty.
- Only 20-25% of the civil legal needs of low-income and poor Texans are being met.

Corporate counsel and in-house attorneys are in a unique position to utilize their legal training as a means of participating in community volunteer activities by providing pro bono legal services. In turn, these pro bono efforts extend the corporation's community efforts and enhance the corporation's external reputation in the local community.

"It is a privilege to make a living practicing law. It is an even greater privilege to make a difference in the lives of many Texans currently without access to our justice system. Please consider exercising your privilege and providing legal services to those in need by affording poor and low income Texans the knowledge and expertise that only attorneys are uniquely trained and gifted to provide."

Lawrence P. Tu, Senior Vice President and General Counsel for Dell, Inc.

"If all of the in-house corporate counsel who are members of the Texas State Bar join the counsel already participating in pro bono, this group, collectively, will make a critical difference in providing legal help to the literally more than 4 million low income and poor Texans who desperately need legal assistance. This effort, in turn, would send a powerful message to the entire legal community and provide meaningful hope for the Texas Supreme Court's avowed desire to make access to justice a reality for all Texans."

James B. Sales, Chair of the Texas Access to Justice Commission

Attorneys contribute valuable, much needed legal expertise by:

- Providing legal advice at evening clinics, such as a Community Justice clinic
- Offering legal advice on transactional issues
- Drafting contracts for non-profit legal services programs serving the poor
- Assisting in the creation of employee handbooks for non-profit legal services organizations
- Filing protective orders on behalf of domestic violence survivors



What support is available for attorneys who accept pro bono cases?

- **Malpractice insurance:** The State Bar of Texas provides malpractice insurance coverage for attorneys who volunteer with an approved legal services provider. Ask your provider whether they offer malpractice insurance.
- **Free training:** Many volunteer attorney programs offer substantive law and ethics training for volunteers handling pro bono cases.
- **Paralegals:** The Paralegal Division of the State Bar of Texas offers paralegal assistance to attorneys working on pro bono cases. For more information, pro bono attorneys should contact the Paralegal Division's pro bono committee chair at www.txpd.org/default.asp.
- **Court reporters:** The Texas Court Reporters Association (TCRA) can provide court reporting services for pro bono cases. To learn more, pro bono attorneys should contact TCRA's pro bono committee chair at www.tcra-online.com.

How do I set up a pro bono program at my company?

- **TexasLawyersHelp.org:** This website contains resources for pro bono attorneys to assist in the representation of low-income clients. See www.texaslawyershelp.org/corporatecounsel.
- **Corporate Pro Bono:** This website provides information for in-house lawyers and companies interested in starting or expanding an organized pro bono program. Visit www.cpbo.org.
- **Pro Bono Institute:** This institute provides information, training and consulting to large law firms and corporations interested in pro bono. See www.probonoinst.org.
- **ABA Center for Pro Bono:** The American Bar Association (ABA) contains a library of materials for pro bono program administrators and volunteers. This website offers training resources, technical assistance. To learn more, visit www.abanet.org/legalservices/probono.

Where can I volunteer to help low-income Texans?

- **Texas C-BAR (statewide):** Texas C-BAR provides free legal assistance to Texas nonprofits working to improve the quality of life in low-income neighborhoods. Experienced transactional attorneys can help these non profit organizations with their real estate, tax, corporate, and employment law needs. To learn more, visit www.texasbar.org/attorneys.
- **Volunteer Legal Services of Central Texas (Austin):** VLS attorneys help low-income clients with issues such as wrongful evictions or foreclosures, disability benefits, wills, family law and guardianships. For more information, visit www.vlsoct.org/volunteer.
- **Dallas Volunteer Attorney Program (Dallas):** DVAP volunteer attorneys assist low-income clients with benefits, consumer, employment, family, housing, landlord-tenant, probate, real property, tax and wills matters by providing advice, brief legal services and/or full representation. To learn more, visit www.dallasbar.org/dvap.
- **Houston Volunteer Attorney Program (Houston):** HVLP offers volunteer attorneys a wide range of pro bono opportunities in both family and non-family law, such as divorce, collection and repossession, DTPA (small claims only), bankruptcy, IRS matters, estate and incapacity planning, property law and non-profit assistance. For more information, visit www.hvlp.org/volunteers.
- **San Antonio Community Justice Program (San Antonio):** The CJP accepts uncontested matters such as divorce, child custody modifications, guardianship proceedings, bankruptcy, simple landlord/tenant disputes, probate matters and wills. To learn more, visit www.sabar.org/cjp.

To inquire about pro bono opportunities in your area, contact TLCmail@texasbar.com.