

**Public Interest Law Initiative**  
Law Firm Pro Bono Roundtable  
Wednesday, November 12, 2014  
Barnes & Thornburg LLP  
One North Wacker Drive, Suite 4400

**I. Welcome & Introductions**

Pro bono leaders from various law firms introduced themselves and shared recent successes and challenges faced by their firm pro bono programs.

**II. Information and Idea Exchange**

Roundtable participants engaged in an information and idea exchange, where pro bono leaders from different law firms led short discussions on the below topics while sharing insight into lessons learned from their law firm's own pro bono programs. The following topics and ideas were discussed:

**1. Communicating the Value of Pro Bono Service**

Three key constituencies come into play when communicating about pro bono legal services within a firm. Communications with individual attorneys are used to increase motivation, communications with firm management seek to gain internal support, and communications with public interest organizations serve to ensure the quality of pro bono opportunities. When crafting communications to these key constituencies there are four main questions to consider. First, what is the content of the message, and what do you need to hear back? Second, who and how is the best vehicle for messaging? Third, who in the firm is the best messenger? And fourth, when is best to communicate and at what interval is it best to repeat the message? This includes consideration of the best time of day, year and point in one's career.

In order to maximize the possibility of communications receiving attention, it is suggested to have department heads distribute pro bono messages, when possible. Another suggestion is to make personal visits to those targeted for involvement, making a request harder to ignore than an email. One strategy being used by some firms who have established pro bono committee's is to assign individual partners who are part of the committee to different agencies and pro bono opportunities, in order to develop project and agency champions.

Communicating the value of pro bono can be made more difficult when the firms' top level management expresses support, but then the front-line partners who work directly with associates discourage pro bono in any way. The result is fewer influential pro bono supervisors involved, and less frequent modeling of pro bono services. Modeling pro bono service assists in overcoming a natural tendency for new associate's to have anxiety paralysis, and provides an example of an action to take to help advance their value and career. Expressing the importance of pro bono and capturing new associates as pro bono volunteers right away is essential to building pro bono into a person's natural workload. Pro bono leaders have found the toughest sell for pro bono is often the senior associate working towards partner.

Interest in, and value of pro bono may be increased when corporate clients express a desire to partner in pro bono programming. Law firm pro bono leaders can approach clients and inquire about the causes the corporation cares most about, and offer opportunities to advance the cause through pro bono service. A recent trends is corporations seeking technical assistance in supporting pro bono matters and law firms can provide an opportunity to support these interests.

## **2. Reinforcing Your Program for the Future**

Pro Bono committees need to explore ways to make pro bono leadership changes a non-event. The survival of a pro bono program may depend upon several organizational touch points: firm management must have buy-in and act as cheerleaders for pro bono involvement; partnership decisions should include pro bono experience and leadership; and recruitment of pro bono leaders at varying points in their career should be a committee priority.

One suggestion for building lasting pro bono programs is for firms to assign a lawyer to a particular agency relationship, which provides practice in cultivating relationships. Assignments can be made strategically, through a matching process of lawyers and areas of interest. One way firms have matched areas of interest with pro bono leaders is through a process of having attorneys advocate for pro bono partnership with an agency they are involved in or would like to be involved in and make a case to partner.

Successful succession planning requires adaptation to constantly changing law firm models. This currently demonstrated through the increased inclusion of law firm staff who are not associates or partners in pro bono opportunities. This may include paralegals and contract attorneys.

## **3. Pro Bono Mile after Magnificent Mile**

Two limiting factors to providing pro bono legal services outside of Chicago includes the number of attorneys, and the number of legal aid agencies serving a particular area. As a way to address and increase agency capacity, Seyfarth Shaw LLP is working with Land of Lincoln through their proprietary service model, *SeyfarthLean*. The work done will automate and standardize the agencies' central intake process for their consumer and housing groups, ultimately increasing efficiency.