Copies of this guide are available from:
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604.893.8932
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You can also find this guide at www.probononet.bc.ca/guide.php

PBLBC and PBSC would like to thank Pro Bono Law Ontario for the inspiration for this guide.

BC LAW FIRM
PRO BONO GUIDE
FOR STUDENTS
2007/2008
Introduction

Pro Bono Law of BC (PBLBC) and Pro Bono Students Canada (PBSC) present this information guide to law students so that they may assess the varying commitment of individual BC law firms to providing pro bono opportunities for their associates, students and staff. The guide provides some general information on the benefits of pro bono service, and how students may choose to consider law firm opportunities for pro bono service upon selecting a law firm for articles.

For the purposes of this guide, pro bono services are those legal services that are provided without expectation of a fee to disadvantaged or marginalized people who cannot otherwise afford them, to non-profit organizations working for such people, or for the public good on matters of broad public or community concern. Pro bono services include legal advice, courtroom advocacy, drafting of legal opinions and documents, legal research, mediation, negotiation, legal policy reform, community legal education and other diverse legal services.

PBLBC promotes access to justice in BC by developing and facilitating opportunities for the effective provision of high-quality pro bono services to people and non-profit organizations of limited means throughout BC, and by supporting potential and existing pro bono service providers in BC. PBSC is a national movement of law students committed to public interest legal work. Through PBSC, law students enhance access to justice by providing free legal information and assistance to non-profit organizations and to lawyers working on a pro bono basis. Both organizations hold the goals of improving the standard of pro bono policies in law firms and ingraining a pro bono ethic in the next generation of lawyers.
Introduction

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The Benefits of Pro Bono Work

Access to justice is fundamental to a free and democratic society. In BC, lawyers are members of a self-regulating profession that is vital to the integrity of the justice system. With the privilege of self-regulation, lawyers bear the responsibility to help ensure that individuals of limited means and other vulnerable populations are not excluded from the justice system.

In the present competitive environment of law student recruitment, those law firms that support effective pro bono programs enjoy a distinct competitive advantage in attracting top legal talent. The recent increase in law school public service projects confirms the growing interest in pro bono among the younger generation of lawyers. As law firms match monetary compensation rates, factors other than pay — such as work/life balance, effective mentoring programs and pro bono opportunities — often become deciding factors for law students as they select a law firm for articles.

A growing number of BC law firms are discovering the multiple benefits of providing pro bono opportunities for their junior lawyers. Firms are recognizing that pro bono partnerships are an inexpensive and efficient way for the firm to develop its associates. Junior lawyers are typically afforded greater autonomy in pro bono matters, which provides meaningful work experience and accelerated professional development opportunities.

Also, in contrast to the impersonal nature of some complex litigation and business practices, the experience of working on a close individual basis with a client can be very satisfying for junior and senior lawyers alike. Pro bono service affords both associates and partners the opportunity to work on cases involving diverse legal issues, and to develop a wide array of advocacy skills.

Developing a pro bono culture within a law firm also provides benefits beyond practical training skills. Pro bono service can build relationships between law firm partners and the boards of local community agencies. Further, pro bono service improves morale within the firm. It also enhances the firm’s reputation — both within the legal community and in the public eye — and strengthens a law firm’s profile in attracting and serving its commercial clientele.

By establishing formalized pro bono policies and programs, law firms increase their ability to recruit and retain talented lawyers. Students and associates derive a sense of connectedness and purpose from knowing that their job includes the ability to represent or assist needy clients with important legal matters. They find satisfaction in knowing that their efforts matter and make a difference in the community.

PBLBC works with BC law firms to help them engage in the process of creating pro bono policies and to locate pro bono opportunities for their lawyers and staff. PBLBC also helps law firms to develop targeted community projects. Many firms have or are beginning to develop formal pro bono policies and are actively working with organizations like PBLBC and PBSC to develop community projects and individual pro bono opportunities for their lawyers and staff.
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# Pro Bono Service at BC's 27 Largest Law Firms

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**PB Service Considerations:**
- AJ: Western Canada Society to Access Justice
- BWSS: Battered Women's Support Services
- CBA: Canadian Bar Association
- DNA: did not answer
- Law Centre: University of Victoria Law Centre
- LSLAP: UBC Law Students Legal Advice Program
- MSSBC: Multiple Sclerosis Society of BC
- N/A: not applicable
- PB: pro bono
- PBLBC: Pro Bono Law of BC
- SA: Salvation Army Pro Bono Program
Pro Bono Projects

Pro bono services are those legal services that, except for the nature of the client, would otherwise be billed by the law firm. By PBLBC’s definition, they do not include legal services performed for free as a favour to a friend, or to a client with the purpose of business development. Law firms may choose to focus their pro bono energies on certain legal areas or client groups.

PBLBC provides resources and support for non-profit organizations that are interested in connecting with a law firm partner for pro bono assistance. More specifically, PBLBC has assisted law firms in developing partnership opportunities with non-profit organizations that are in need of legal services on an ongoing basis. As a result, PBLBC has successfully brokered a number of innovative law firm pro bono projects.

Community non-profit organizations often approach PBLBC with a request for legal assistance. Such organizations may be matched with an interested lawyer or law firm partner through PBLBC’s Roster Programs, resulting in exciting opportunities for solicitors and litigators alike. By virtue of a formalized partnership, a law firm is able to bring its full range of resources and expertise to the aid of its client organization. Community partnerships thus provide unique opportunities for law firms to develop relationships with non-profit organizations that help low-income and disadvantaged communities, and contribute to community economic development.

Pro Bono Policies

As one of its main functions, PBLBC assists law firms to develop and adopt formal pro bono policies. It may take anywhere from a few months to a few years for a firm to successfully adopt a formal pro bono policy. Some larger firms adopt and expand their pro bono policies on a nation-wide basis.

The widespread adoption of pro bono policies is a relatively new phenomenon in the BC pro bono landscape. A formal pro bono policy is a good signifier of a law firm’s commitment to pro bono service. Furthermore, an effective formal pro bono policy will:

- count a specific number of pro bono service hours as billable hours in order to encourage lawyers to participate in pro bono without compromising their billable target;
- create a systematic approval process for pro bono cases, thereby avoiding client conflicts;
- transform pro bono ad hoc delivery into organized pro bono delivery, thus allowing for greater pro bono service and more effective use of firm resources;
- encourage all staff to participate in the provision of pro bono services;
- institutionalize pro bono service provision as an integral part of a firm’s culture; and
- ensure that pro bono clients receive the same quality of legal service as paying clients.

Formal pro bono policies and well-designed pro bono programs also contribute to improved student and associate supervision and higher quality pro bono service overall. They enable law firms to record and track the costs and benefits of pro bono service, while maximizing the benefits for both firms and their clients.
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Evaluating a Law Firm’s Commitment to Pro Bono

PBLBC and PBSC have published this guide in order to assist students in their assessment of a law firm’s commitment to creating pro bono opportunities and to supporting the provision of pro bono services by their lawyers, students and staff.

As a student entering an interview process for an articling position, consider consulting the comparison table of the 27 largest law firms in BC featured on pages 5 and 6 of this guide. As you scan the features for each law firm, take into account that smaller firms are more likely to coordinate their pro bono engagements on an informal basis. For those law firms that have adopted formal pro bono policies, note which firms have allowed for a specific number of pro bono hours to be counted toward their billable targets. Finally, note which firms present the least amount of administrative process and approval for opening and carrying a pro bono file.

During the interview process, consider posing the following questions to the law firms, both large and small, that you visit:

- Does the firm have a formal, written pro bono policy in place?
- Do pro bono hours count as billable hours?
- Are pro bono cases treated the same as other (paying) clients’ cases?
- Does the firm have a full-time person coordinating the pro bono program?
- Does the firm encourage lawyers to perform a minimum number of pro bono hours?
- How are pro bono hours counted when determining bonuses and promotions?
- Are associates who do pro bono respected in the firm and do they retain the same potential for advancement?
- Are support staff permitted to work on pro bono cases?
- How are pro bono cases brought into the firm?
- What kinds of pro bono programs is the firm currently participating in?
- Does the firm work with particular non-profit organizations on a pro bono basis?

For More Information

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