

Pro Bono Clearinghouses:
A Resource for Law Firms Creating Public Interest Placement Programs

Law firms have not escaped the impact of the current economic decline. Many are deferring start dates of their 2009 incoming associates for up to a year, while others are downsizing their workforce. As a result, a number of law firms are offering these deferred and/or laid-off associates the opportunity to volunteer at a public interest agency for a significant period of time, with financial incentives attached. As law firms and public interest agencies try to make sense of these new relationships, we strongly encourage them to connect with an organization established to help facilitate successful placements, if one exists in their region. These organizations include:

California

Julia R. Wilson, Executive Director
[Public Interest Clearinghouse](#)
Legal Aid Association of California
415.834.0100 Ext. 306
jwilson@pic.org
www.pic.org

Chicago

Susan J. Curry, Executive Director
[Public Interest Law Initiative \(PILI\)](#)
321 N. Clark Street, #2800
Chicago, IL 60654
312.832.5128
scurry@pili-law.org
www.pili-law.org

D.C.

Mark Herzog, Associate Director
[D.C. Bar Pro Bono Program](#)
1250 H Street, N.W., Sixth Floor
Washington, D.C. 20005
202.737.4700, Ext. 206
mherzog@dcb.org
www.dcb.org

New York City

Carol Bockner, Director of Pro Bono Initiatives
New York City Bar
[City Bar Justice Center](#)
42 West 44th Street
New York, NY 10036
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cbockner@nycbar.org

These organizations each offer a range of supportive services, including:

- ◆ Have recruited dozens of public interest agencies in each region that are able to host associates, and can recruit additional agencies based on the interests of the associates and the law firms.
- ◆ Serve as hubs of information for law firms and associates about the number and types of placements available at agencies in their area, and for legal services agencies about the number of potential associates which may be available.
- ◆ (California) Work closely with programs serving rural areas to enhance their capacity to participate in this opportunity, both in the initial and post-placement phase.
- ◆ Counsel deferred and/or laid-off associates about the specific opportunities available at the public interest agencies, which they are able to do because of their extensive experience working with them.
- ◆ Help the public interest agencies determine what type and level of support they need to host associates, and coordinate/facilitate to assist public interest agencies obtain that support. Some support may come from the law firm sponsoring the associate (e.g., cash). Other support may come from other law firms (e.g. office space; legal assistants), public interest agencies (e.g., mentoring), etc.
- ◆ Provide structure and support, not just during the placement process but for the duration of the Fellowship.
 - Provide training opportunities on a statewide and/or regional basis.
 - Connect with the associates and the public interest agencies during the course and at the end of the Fellowships to assess satisfaction.
 - Help manage and renegotiate unsatisfactory relationships.
 - Provide support to the law firms and public interest agencies in the event of a separation.
- ◆ Facilitate and encourage associates to become ambassadors for their public interest agencies specifically, and pro bono generally, once they return to their law firms.

These organizations do not guarantee placements for all deferred and/or laid-off associates, nor do they facilitate certain placements (e.g., firms that wish to place some of their deferred or laid-off associates in-house with their clients or at government agencies).

There are certain fundamentals of placements to which these organizations adhere:

- Retail, Not Wholesale. The relationship between every law firm, public interest agency and associate is different. It is a mistake to approach these placements in a wholesale fashion.
- Choice. It is important for the associates and the public interest agencies to have a say in the placements. Law firms may want to pre-approve certain opportunities.
- Legal Work. The associates must engage in real legal work - direct representation, legislative advocacy, policy development, impact litigation, transactional, etc.

- Training and Supervision. Adequate training and supervision must be provided, and performance feedback should be provided at the associate's and/or firm's request.