

Assessing a Law Firm's Commitment to Pro Bono

If you want to work at a law firm with a strong pro bono program, do your research to assess a firm's true level of support for pro bono work. No one piece of information is necessarily dispositive of a firm's pro bono commitment or culture. This guide will help you evaluate which firm is right for you.

Timing is important. You can certainly raise questions about opportunities to do pro bono work during a callback interview. Please be mindful, however, that a firm is ultimately hiring you to do billable work, and it is best to wait until after you receive an offer to delve deeper. Once you receive an offer, ask to speak with an attorney who does pro bono work or the pro bono coordinator. You can find out how they incorporate pro bono into their caseload and learn more about the firm's commitment to pro bono.

As you evaluate a firm's commitment to pro bono, here are some things to consider:

Does the firm have a full-time person (or people) coordinating the pro bono program?

Most firms that are serious about pro bono have dedicated pro bono personnel, which often include partners or associates.

Does the pro bono attorney or manager work full- or part-time on pro bono matters in addition to managing the pro bono caseload and intake of matters?

Is pro bono highlighted on the law firm's webpage?

Does the firm encourage or require attorneys to perform a minimum number of pro bono hours? If so, how many?

- Do pro bono hours count as billable hours? If so, do they count towards the firm's minimum billable hours requirement? Is there a cap on how many pro bono hours will be credited towards the requirement?
- How involved are partners in doing and supervising pro bono work?

- What percentage of the lawyers/partners in the firm did pro bono work last year? (Look at the number of lawyers doing pro bono and the number of hours per lawyer.)
- What is the firm's pro bono ranking in the [American Lawyer magazine](#) (see below). Look at the rankings as part of the overall picture of the firm's commitment; the numbers are only part of the picture and sometimes don't accurately reflect the firm's pro bono culture.

What kinds of pro bono matters does the firm usually work on?

- According to the firm website, what kinds of work has the firm been involved in recently?
- Are you interested in working on those kinds of matters?
- How easy is it to be assigned to matters that interest you?
- Are there any issues/areas that the firm doesn't take?

How does the firm get its pro bono work?

- Does the firm work on pro bono cases with certain public interest organizations on a regular basis?
- How is a pro bono matter screened and selected?
- If you have a particular passion, is there an opportunity to bring your own pro bono matters?

How does pro bono factor into compensation, performance reviews, and partnership decisions?

What resources or training are made available to attorneys who perform pro bono work?

Is the firm a signatory to the Pro Bono Institute (PBI) Law Firm Pro Bono Challenge?

The PBI Law Firm Pro Bono Challenge lists those firms that have agreed to commit either 3% or 5% of their firm's total billable hours to pro bono work. The [list](#) is available on the PBI web site.

If your short- or long-term goals are to do public interest, government, or human rights work full-time, please connect with an [adviser from the Office of Public Interest/Public Service Law and Careers](#) to talk about other important ways to prepare for those transitions.

More Resources

[2023 Vault Guide to Law Firm Pro Bono Programs](#)

[American Lawyer Pro Bono Scorecard 2022](#) available through the Law Library (you will be prompted for your UNI and password)