



## **IN-HOUSE PRO BONO IN PRACTICE PROFILE: CITIGROUP INC.**

*April 2008*

### **Program Background**

In 2005, Michael Helfer, general counsel of Citigroup Inc. (Citi), and each of the general counsels of Citi's primary business units came together and decided that Citi was overdue to have its own pro bono program. No wonder, given that, prior to joining Citi, each of these general counsels worked at law firms with rich pro bono traditions and that each had earned an impressive track record of pro bono service. With Helfer's leadership, the general counsels designated one attorney from each of their groups to be on a pro bono steering committee (Steering Committee) and, with Associate General Counsel David Goldberg coordinating the effort as Helfer's designee, the CitiLegal Pro Bono Initiative ("Initiative") was underway.

One year earlier, Citi had adopted a corporate-wide philosophy of Shared Responsibilities, including a responsibility to "take an active role in the communities where its employees work and live." As part of that philosophy, Citi encouraged its employees to take one paid day per year to do volunteer work. With this mandate already in place and garnering enthusiastic support from the entire staff, including the chief executive officer, Helfer and the business general counsels were able to build internal support for the initiative by linking it with the company's existing volunteer projects. Furthermore, using the established model, they readily encouraged the legal staff to use their volunteer day to do legal pro bono work. In September of 2006, Helfer signed the Corporate Pro Bono Challenge<sup>SM</sup>.

### **Providing Legal Assistance to Katrina Victims**

At about the time that the Steering Committee was in the preliminary stages of identifying pro bono opportunities and developing pro bono guidelines, Hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast region. The Steering Committee immediately sought ways to provide legal assistance to hurricane victims. From March through August 2006, approximately 20 Citi lawyers, many of whom had never worked together before, traveled from different Citi offices around the country to work with hurricane victims in Jackson, Bay St. Louis, Gulfport, and Biloxi, Miss. Citi lawyers helped to staff several day-long legal clinics coordinated by Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law (Lawyers' Committee) and the Mississippi Center for Justice. The clinics consisted of a series of one-on-one consultations with hurricane victims covering a range of issues related to, among others, insurance, real estate, the U.S. Small Business Administration, and U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency. In addition to the lawyers who traveled to the Gulf Coast, approximately 25 other Citi lawyers participated in a program to help hurricane victims who were denied assistance to navigate the FEMA appeals process.

Citi also undertook a project to support small businesses impacted by the hurricanes. Working in partnership with lawyers from Stroock, Stroock & Lavan LLP and Lawyers' Committee, Citi helped create Second Wind, a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping small business owners



in New Orleans to organize and advocate for relief funds. In addition to dealing with traditional corporate issues, this collective legal effort also involved work in New Orleans, Baton Rouge, and Washington D.C., as lawyers helped Second Wind to identify the needs of the small business community and to work with elected officials and government agencies at the local, state, and federal levels. While Second Wind's initial meetings had as few as 10 to 15 attendees in early 2006, its membership grew to over 1,000 by the end of that year. Second Wind's efforts were also a significant factor in the government's \$100 million Business Recovery Grant and Loan Program, which provided relief funds of up to \$20,000 each to thousands of small businesses affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

### **Pro Bono Projects and Partnerships**

Citi's efforts for victims of Hurricane Katrina received considerable internal and external attention and helped to galvanize the company's pro bono efforts. In 2006, Citi's significant business units developed pro bono subcommittees to collaborate with the Steering Committee in identifying and developing pro bono opportunities for the legal staff of each division. For example, the pro bono committee in the Global Wealth Management business unit worked with the Justice Center of the New York City Bar (Association of the Bar of the City of New York) to develop long-term pro bono relationships with three organizations:

- The Door, through which Citi lawyers provide advice to young people on foster care, immigration, and family law issues at a bimonthly legal clinic;
- Workshop in Business Opportunities, through which Citi attorneys provide legal education and advice to newly formed small businesses; and
- Sanctuary for Families, through which Citi lawyers provide representation and financial education to victims of domestic violence.

Regardless of which business unit or subcommittee has developed them, all of the pro bono projects are open to lawyers throughout the corporation.

Citi has engaged in a number of other pro bono projects based on the model of partnering with legal service organizations or law firms. In 2007, Citi worked with Lawyers Alliance for New York, Weil, Gotshal & Manges LLP\* (Weil), and the Council of Senior Centers and Services of New York City, to host and participate in Senior Center Days. These one-day events for staff and directors of senior centers in the New York metropolitan region were comprised of two sessions. The first was the educational session, during which lawyers from Citi, Weil and Lawyers Alliance led seminars on topics such as employment law, contracts, and governance. The second was the diagnostic session, during which lawyers from Citi and Weil provided individual consultations to participants with specific legal questions. In some cases, these consultations led to follow-up work that Citi and Weil attorneys agreed to take on as longer-term pro bono matters with help from Lawyers Alliance.

Other pro bono partnerships include Citi's participation in a project with Greenberg Traurig LLP and several other law firms and corporate legal departments to offer free on-site legal advice at Family Court in Brooklyn on issues of custody, visitation, and guardianship. This project has been so successful that it is expanding to Family Court in Manhattan. More recently, Citi began



working on two projects with the New York City Bar, including the Cancer Advocacy Project, through which lawyers have the opportunity to provide legal information and advice to cancer patients, and the Legal Clinic for the Homeless, through which lawyers staff a monthly clinic at a shelter in Queens to assist homeless individuals with benefits and to represent them in hearings before an administrative law judge.

Given the success and popularity of Citi's pro bono work, the Initiative may expand its efforts to other regions in the U.S. and abroad where its lawyers work and live. As the program grows and matures, David Goldberg is hopeful that it will have more dedicated resources and that it will become further embedded in Citi's legal organization and the broader company culture. As he puts it, "No matter how much pro bono we do, we feel like we could be doing more."

## Lessons Learned

- Offer variety to ensure participation. Regularly identifying new pro bono opportunities allows the attorneys to serve where their interests lie and increases the likelihood that they will remain engaged.
- Management support is vital. Having the support of the general counsel and practice group leaders or other senior managers is critical to the development and growth of an in-house pro bono program.
- Capitalize on established volunteerism policies. Utilizing the company's preexisting enthusiasm for corporate social responsibility helps garner support from non-legal department staff and officers.
- Partnerships accelerate growth. Connecting with local law firms and legal service organizations provides access to a broader variety of opportunities.

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