



2007 CORPORATE PRO BONO ROUNDTABLE AND NETWORKING DINNER HIGHLIGHTS

As in years past, the Corporate Pro Bono Roundtable and Networking Dinner was one of the most valuable sessions at the 2007 Forum for In-house Corporate Pro Bono. The session offered an informal and friendly environment for in-house counsel to exchange information and ideas about the most innovative and effective practices in in-house pro bono.

The session began at 6:00 p.m. on Thursday, March 1, with a cocktail hour for participants to meet each other. A working dinner followed the cocktail hour in which participants shared their experiences and perspectives on in-house pro bono and the challenges and successes that their departments face. During this participant-led discussion, many topics were addressed including time constraints, non-litigation opportunities, the Corporate Pro Bono ChallengeSM, benchmarking, and institutionalizing pro bono in your legal department.

The topics discussed are some of the most pertinent issues that in-house counsel and legal departments face in their efforts to do pro bono. Time constraints, for example, often keep corporate counsel from engaging in pro bono. The attendees brainstormed and shared experiences of several bite-size pro bono opportunities, including mediating contract disputes, managing intake for legal service providers, and participating in an assortment of legal clinics such as a birth certificate clinic for the homeless and Corporate Pro Bono's Clinic in a Box model. Specifically, the Clinic in a Box removes the hurdles of pro bono by providing a one-time commitment for in-house counsel to meet with clients. The clinic provides volunteers with onsite training, CLE credit, malpractice coverage and pre-screened clients. Volunteers are only committed to a two-hour consultation with their client, but they do have the option of continuing to work with them if they choose.

Another challenge many legal departments confront is institutionalizing pro bono. The participants discussed tips for sustaining the momentum and developing a foundation for pro bono in their departments. Some suggestions included, getting support from your general counsel, finding manageable projects, implementing the buddy system on projects, and providing malpractice coverage for the department. Getting the support of the general counsel is a key component to developing support, involvement, enthusiasm, momentum, and sustainability for pro bono programs. Because of limited time and resources, it is also important to choose realistic and manageable projects which usually have small tasks and long deadlines. Once participants realize pro bono projects are achievable, their involvement will increase. The buddy system on projects provides your legal department an opportunity to partner with each other, build relationships, and strengthen company morale. Partnering also fosters support and accountability on projects. Malpractice insurance is often a hurdle that keeps in-house counsel from practicing pro bono, however it is easy to solve by either partnering with a legal services provider who will provide malpractice coverage for project volunteers or by purchasing affordable coverage for your department from the National Legal Aid and Defender Association.

The Corporate Pro Bono Roundtable and Networking Dinner is an attendee-driven, broad-based, free-flowing brainstorming session where corporate counsel can discuss their experiences and address their challenges in a lively and informal environment. The Roundtable and Networking Dinner is the only national and global meeting focused exclusively on pro bono in the in-house context.

Developed by Corporate Pro Bono
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1025 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Suite 205 • Washington, DC 20036
(202) 729.6699 Phone • (202) 296.0303 Fax
cpbo@probonoinst.org • www.cpbo.org