



AT&T INC. BEST PRACTICES IN PRO BONO

December 2011

Pro Bono Contacts: Pamela St. John and Susan McGahan, General Attorneys and Co-Chairs of Pro Bono Executive Committee

Program Background and Infrastructure

In 2009, AT&T Inc. (AT&T) revamped its pro bono program, affording regional offices more autonomy in selecting pro bono matters and in managing those matters. This was an important change for the legal department, which has 700 lawyers and legal staff in offices spread across the country. In restructuring the pro bono program, the legal department developed regional pro bono committees and formed an executive committee to oversee regional efforts and ensure a unified and cohesive program. The executive committee is comprised of 14 members including two co-chairs, and committee members serve two-year staggered terms. One paralegal serves on the executive committee and also acts as the administrator of the department's pro bono efforts. Regional committees range from seven to 11 members, and together, the regional committees comprise the 45-member national committee.

In addition to restructuring the pro bono committees, the legal department drafted a new pro bono policy based on models from other corporate legal departments. The policy does not set an hourly goal and it stipulates that any department-endorsed program must offer malpractice insurance coverage. The policy also defines pro bono for the purposes of AT&T lawyers and staff.

Under the new system, each region publishes a pro bono newsletter, which includes a listing of pro bono opportunities. In addition, opportunities are posted on the department's intranet site. The site also contains photos from pro bono activities, links to public interest organizations' websites with information about pro bono projects, a link to the tracking site in which lawyers and staff to log their pro bono hours, and articles about the program. The general counsel also puts out a newsletter each month, which often includes articles about the department's pro bono efforts. All of these efforts serve to encourage and support participation, assisting AT&T reach the goals set forth in the Corporate Pro Bono ChallengeSM, which General Counsel Wayne Watts signed in February of 2010.

Overall, AT&T's executive pro bono committee co-chairs report that the department's pro bono program has enriched the department's day-to-day operations and that it has served a recruitment tool for prospective new hires.

Pro Bono Projects Spanning the Country

In 2011, more than 100 AT&T lawyers and staff were involved in more than 25 headquarters-approved pro bono programs. These lawyers and staff logged participation in more than 200

unique pro bono projects. With tremendous support from Senior Executive Vice President and General Counsel Wayne Watts, the program has undertaken a variety of pro bono projects across the country.

Some examples of projects in each region include:

Center for Disability & Elder Law (Midwest Region)

More than 20 AT&T attorneys have participated in the Center for Disability & Elder Law's (CDEL) Senior Center Initiative in Chicago, which sends volunteer attorneys into low-income senior communities to assist seniors with completing living wills and powers of attorney for property and health care.

AT&T legal staff has also participated in CDEL's Senior Tax Opportunity Program (STOP). This innovative program uses a phone bank approach to speak with seniors who are in danger of losing their homes because they have delinquent tax bills.

Volunteer Lawyers for Justice (Northeast Region)

Several AT&T attorneys provide legal counsel and limited-scope representation to self-represented consumer debtors through the Newark Legal Advice and Resource Clinic for Consumers, a first-of-its kind clinic in New Jersey managed by Volunteer Lawyers for Justice. Attorneys provide assistance with frozen bank accounts/garnishments, improper service, credit report discrepancies, and amounts owed in dispute.

Pro Bono Wills and Healthcare Directive Project (Southeast Region)

The Southeast Regional Pro Bono Committee teamed with the Atlanta Volunteer Lawyers Foundation and Troutman Sanders LLP to provide AT&T lawyers the opportunity to participate in "Wills on Wheels". The Wills Project offers pro bono legal assistance in drafting wills, healthcare directives, and other estate planning documents for low income and elderly clients, as well as emergency personnel.

VA Hospital Clinics (Southwest Region)

AT&T attorneys in Houston volunteer at monthly clinics held at the VA Hospital in Houston, where they provide advice and counsel to veterans on a variety of family, probate, social security, criminal, landlord/tenant, and consumer matters.

Kids In Need of Defense (West Region)

AT&T attorneys in Los Angeles have teamed up with the law firm Paul Hastings to participate in Kids in Need of Defense (KIND), which represents unaccompanied minors in immigration courts. These minors range from teens who have fled abusive parents in their home countries to kidnapped children who are brought to the United States to work in sweatshops or other substandard conditions. Typically, if the minors have not been separated or orphaned while

coming to the United States, AT&T lawyers will assist with reunification with parents. These minors do not receive court-appointed counsel, so AT&T lawyers provide indispensable expertise as these minors navigate the legal process.

San Francisco Bar Association Volunteer Legal Services Program (West Region)

AT&T attorneys in San Francisco participate in the Housing Negotiation Project (HNP) through the Volunteer Legal Services Program (VLSP). HNP is VLSP's limited-scope project for eviction defense. Through this project, volunteer attorneys represent low-income individuals and families facing mandatory settlement conferences.

An Innovative Approach to Pro Bono: Rewarding Students for Pro Bono

In a clear demonstration of its commitment to pro bono, each year AT&T presents the AT&T Excellence in Pro Bono Legal Services Award. The AT&T Legal Department developed this program to:

- encourage law students to commit themselves to pro bono service;
- provide legal and administrative support to an existing pro bono program (the San Antonio Bar Association's Community Justice Program) by funding a law student to serve as an intern; and
- strategically invest AT&T's pro bono budget dollars in a way that aids an established pro bono program and promotes long-term commitment to pro bono service among law students.

AT&T has created similar scholarship and award programs through partnerships with Rutgers Law School in New Jersey, Emory Law School in Georgia, University of Houston Law Center and other law schools.

Rewarding Pro Bono

Though AT&T does not require its lawyers and legal staff to do pro bono, the legal department does reward for pro bono participation. Each quarter, AT&T's legal department leadership reviews the pro bono participation record, which is logged by individuals through an online system. Each region presents an award to an attorney or staff member who engaged in outstanding pro bono work in the previous year. Among the five regional award recipients, a national awardee is selected and honored at AT&T's national conference. This individual is recognized by the general counsel and AT&T makes a contribution to a charity of the awardee's choosing.

Lessons Learned and Practical Guidance

Based on their experience, AT&T executive pro bono committee co-chairs encourage other departments to consider the following when starting a pro bono program:

- Solicit information broadly. Draw upon as many people as possible for ideas and be sure to create opportunities that complement the interests and skills of the department's lawyers and staff.
- An administrator is key to success. Appoint a program administrator such as a paralegal who can be responsible for managing the list of pro bono opportunities, disseminate information, and oversee the logistical aspects of the program.
- Stagger leadership to avoid volunteer exhaustion, bring in fresh ideas, and ensure continued interest. In order to ensure the continuity of the program, having staggered executive committee terms has been immensely helpful. This way, the committee welcomes six new members each year, with six remaining from the previous year to provide guidance and experience.

Developed by Corporate Pro Bono
A global partnership project of the [Pro Bono Institute](#) and the [Association of Corporate Counsel](#)
www.cpbo.org

Copyright, Pro Bono Institute 2011, All Rights Reserved