



## **FORD MOTOR COMPANY BEST PRACTICES IN PRO BONO**

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### **Program Background**

Ford Motor Company (Ford), a Signatory to the Corporate Pro Bono Challenge<sup>SM</sup>, first launched its pro bono program in 1984, working with organizations like the Legal Aid and Defender Association of Detroit to provide assistance drafting wills, handling consumer and probate matters, acting as counsel in divorce proceedings, and assisting with estate planning. It also founded, with General Motors Company and the Detroit Metropolitan Bar Association, the Detroit Legal Service Clinic to provide advice and counsel to the indigent in the metropolitan Detroit area.

In 2009, the Ford Office of the General Counsel (OGC) sought to revitalize its pro bono efforts to ensure robust participation and provide the OGC staff with meaningful opportunities. Under the direction of the General Counsel, David Leitch, the Pro Bono Committee revived OGC's program. Now, more than 75 percent of the attorneys in OGC participate in the pro bono program on an annual basis.

### **Pro Bono Program Structure**

Currently, Ford's Pro Bono Committee consists of at least one representative from each practice group within OGC. Having updated the pro bono policy for OGC, the Committee regularly reviews the policy to ensure it meets the needs of the department and its volunteers. The policy does not mandate that department staff engage in pro bono, but it does encourage pro bono participation. It specifies that "time spent on pro bono matters through the OGC pro bono program is counted as part of total productive hours and may be considered in performance evaluations."

Ford's General Counsel, David Leitch, has been a tremendous advocate of the program. At each employee meeting, Leitch promotes pro bono participation within the OGC, and he consistently discusses the importance and value of pro bono work with Ford's senior management.

### **Pro Bono Projects and Corporate Social Responsibility**

Ford's pro bono program strategically ties into the company's larger corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts. The company supports a variety of community service work through an organization called the Ford Volunteer Corps. Each year, the Ford Volunteer Corps designates at least four "Accelerated Action Days" to encourage and provide opportunities for Ford employees to partake in community service work. In conjunction with the company's Accelerated Action Days, the Pro Bono Committee partners with legal services organizations in

Southeast Michigan to host a variety of pro bono clinics. By supporting the company's overall CSR plan, the legal department has received much praise from company leadership. The clinics also enable legal department staff to take part in company-wide community service efforts that foster a real sense of company pride and teamwork.

The Accelerated Action Day clinics address a wide range of legal issues and thus present Ford lawyers with exposure to areas of legal practice that they otherwise would not encounter. Each of the clinics is focused on meeting the needs of low-income individuals who are the most vulnerable and have been the most affected by the global economic crisis. As David Leitch puts it, members of the OGC feel fortunate to be working at Ford, so there is a real spirit of giving back, particularly at this time and in this community.

One clinic on each Accelerated Action Day focuses on assisting individuals prepare the documentation to have a past criminal conviction expunged making them more employable. Another clinic is operated in conjunction with the Detroit Public Schools to help low-income families navigate the food stamp process so they are better able to meet their most basic needs. Other clinics assist veterans with obtaining their benefits and local nonprofit organizations with legal issues that have arisen as a result of the economic crisis.

In addition to the clinics, Ford lawyers participate in a number of other pro bono projects that allow the lawyers to serve communities that are of personal importance and interest. Some of the projects include immigration work, primarily for unaccompanied alien children, veteran benefits and expungement cases.

## Lessons Learned

- 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.
- Use of pro bono mentors adds great value. Matching volunteers experienced in a particular pro bono subject matter with others who are interested in that type of work is a great way to build cross department relationships and promote pro bono work.
- Offer variety to ensure growth. Regularly identifying new pro bono opportunities allows the attorneys to serve where their interests lie and increases the likelihood that they will remain engaged.
- Partnerships accelerate growth. Connecting with local law firms provides access to a broader variety of opportunities and a valuable resource when questions arise.
- Leverage technology. Utilizing an internal website to maintain pro bono policies and current information from legal services organizations helps to efficiently keep attorneys aware of pro bono needs and opportunities.

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