

INCORPORATING PRO BONO INTO IN-HOUSE ALL-HANDS MEETINGS

Introduction

Adding a pro bono component to periodic business meetings of the legal department, often referred to as “all-hands meetings,” is an increasingly common and effective way to promote and enhance in-house pro bono. Whether incorporating the provision of pro bono legal services or organizing a presentation about pro bono, the addition of pro bono to an all-hands meeting is a great way to bring together attorneys and other legal department staff. All-hands meetings provide an opportunity for pro bono leaders within the department to share information with legal staff employees, educate new volunteers about upcoming opportunities, recognize pro bono achievements, and engage in pro bono legal services.

This paper discusses how legal departments incorporate pro bono events, including both pro bono engagements and pro bono presentations, into their all-hands meetings.

What are All-Hands Meetings?

Many legal departments hold either all-attorney meetings or all-staff meetings, including paralegals, and sometimes legal assistants, as well as attorneys. The frequency of the meetings varies between companies based on factors such as the size and budget of the department. The meetings may occur quarterly, semi-annually, annually, every other year, or more sporadically. For companies where legal staff are located in more than one location, the meeting can be an opportunity for the full department to gather together. Alternatively, an office or a section within the legal department may host its own meeting. While some departments use the phrase “all-hands meetings,” others call their meetings “department meetings,” “staff meetings,” “annual meetings,” or “offsite meetings.” For purposes of this paper, we use the term “all-hands meetings” to refer to all variants of meetings that bring together members of the legal department.

How Can Departments Incorporate Pro Bono Into An All-Hands Meeting?

There are two principal ways to incorporate pro bono into an all-hands meeting: (1) engaging in pro bono legal services during the meeting, or (2) providing an opportunity to learn about pro bono.

Doing Pro Bono at All-Hands Meetings

One way to incorporate pro bono at an all-hands meeting is to offer the opportunity for the attendees to do pro bono at the meeting. This can take the form of hosting a clinic, offering bite-sized pro bono projects that can be accomplished during the meeting, or beginning work on a longer-term pro bono matter. By requiring pro bono participation at this time, a company can support pro bono engagement from employees who already do pro bono, and engage new volunteers who have never participated in pro bono.

Typically, same-day training is provided at the all-hands meeting, or in the days leading up to the meeting. Because the training occurs before client work begins, attorneys do not need prior knowledge of the subject matter at hand.

For new hires and more experienced lawyers alike, all-hands work offers non-hierarchical interaction among all members of the legal department. It builds teamwork and communication, bonding employees outside of the office setting. It is also an opportunity for lawyers and other professionals within the department to work side-by-side on pro bono teams.

While pro bono work at all-hands meetings most commonly takes the form of a clinic, it may also include dedicated time for document review or legal research efforts for either a short-term or long-term matter. The substantive legal issues range from veterans' affairs, asylum, birth certificate applications, powers of attorney, document expungement, and many others. Boasting a great variety of pro bono opportunities, all-hands pro bono has grown increasingly popular and has the potential to impact many ongoing issues in local communities.

Common Challenges and Solutions

All-hands pro bono holds countless benefits for legal departments, but companies face a few common challenges to implementing pro bono at their all-hands meetings. One concern involves finding appropriate projects that can engage the entire office or department, including lawyers and other professional staff of varying specialties. As an initial matter, legal departments should determine the kind of pro bono engagement they would like to host that will meet the goals of their all-hands meeting. Some departments may want to launch or expand a [signature project](#) at an all-hands meeting; others are looking to broaden participation and deepen engagement across the department; and other departments want to more closely align their pro bono program with the company's corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategy. Deciding what the department's pro bono priorities are for an all-hands meeting provides useful guidance in approaching the task of finding and working with the appropriate partners. Whether collaborating with legal services organizations, local nonprofits and/or law firms, communicating the department's vision and goals for pro bono at the all-hands meeting is key to developing successful pro bono engagement. These partners can help the department identify one or more opportunities that speak to the company's values and include roles for all staff.

When broadening engagement to lawyers across offices for an all-hands day, there are [multijurisdictional practice](#) issues that must be addressed. Some states provide pro bono exemptions to allow non-locally licensed in-house counsel and other out-of-state lawyers to deliver legal services, but in many jurisdictions, laws restrict engagement, requiring that they provide pro bono services only in association with an approved organization, under the supervision of a locally licensed lawyer, among other limitations. By adhering to these standards and creating opportunities for non-locally licensed lawyers to get involved, companies can engage the entire office in all-hands pro bono efforts.

Before beginning work, legal departments must ensure that employees have [professional liability or malpractice insurance](#). Strategies for covering lawyers in their pro bono practice include

partnering with legal services organizations that insure volunteers, securing coverage through a rider or an endorsement to an existing company policy, and/or self-funding a pro bono specific policy from the departmental budget, or the foundations associated with the company.

Support from the top through executive interaction is vital for the success of all-hands pro bono programs. Having a general counsel participate during all-hands days encourages engagement and empowers the employees who are planning the event.

Successful all-hands programs are characterized by strategic partnership and collaboration, bringing members of in-house legal departments together with local law firms and/or nonprofit organizations. Partnerships provide larger volunteer pools, training sessions, client referrals, and lowered costs for all-hands clinics.

Examples of Pro Bono Projects at All-Hands Meetings

Company	Event Type	Description
Eisai Inc.	Program launch & host Clinic in a Box® program	In 2015, Eisai's legal department launched its pro bono program in coordination with CPBO and Day Pitney*, holding a Clinic in a Box® program during a legal department-wide meeting. Lawyers and other department professionals were joined by members of the executive board and the general counsel for a training session covering governance, employment, intellectual property, tax, and real estate, after which the volunteers met with their nonprofit clients to conduct a legal audit on those five issue areas. Eisai's support from the top and a strategic partnership with Day Pitney contributed to the success of the pro bono program's launch. At a subsequent all-hands meeting in 2017, Eisai partnered with McCarter & English* to host a Clinic in a Box® program in which volunteer attorneys and other department professionals met with cancer patients to draft wills and healthcare proxies. As a pharmaceutical company, Eisai sought to align pro bono with the company's mission.
3M Company**	Day of Service	In 2014, 3M hosted its first day of service to provide both educational and participatory opportunities for 3M Legal Affairs personnel. 145 attorneys engaged in training and pro bono service with Minnesota-area nonprofits such as MN Children's Law Center, the VLN Housing Law Project, and Animal Folks MN. Volunteering attorneys staffed shifts in legal advice clinics, answered phone calls, and represented clients in landlord-tenant cases. By partnering with different organizations to bring in clients,

		3M was able to provide its volunteers a variety of options, engaging the unique interests of everyone inside the department.
Exelon Corporation**	Clinic	Since about 2005, Exelon's Legal Department has hosted an annual all-hands clinic, first in its Philadelphia and Chicago offices and then expanding to the Baltimore and Washington, DC offices. The clinic takes place during one of the Legal Department's regularly-scheduled quarterly meetings. Over time, the General Counsel and other Legal Department executives have traveled to each of the cities to participate, affirming the importance of pro bono service in the department and encouraging broader participation. The types of projects have varied from year to year, including clinics such as Wills for Heroes, Life Planning Clinics for Seniors, adjustment of immigration status clinics, and birth certificate clinics. In some years the offices may coordinate their all-hands pro bono events around a particular theme and in some years, a community service component is added to the pro bono clinic. Exelon has often partnered with a law firm on its all-hands events.
Mayo Clinic**	Clinic	In 2012, Mayo Clinic added pro bono to its annual meeting by hosting a clinic for local veterans whose service ranged from World War II to Afghanistan. Partnering with the Minnesota Counsel for Veterans, staff conducted intake, researched public data, drafted forms and correspondence, and provided technical support. Volunteer attorneys provided advice, both in person and over the phone. Many attorneys chose to continue representing the clients they met while attending the clinic.
Symantec Corporation**	Clinic	During the Symantec annual retreat in 2008, its legal department partnered with San Diego Volunteer Lawyer Program to host a clinic for undocumented women and children who are survivors of domestic violence. Volunteers, including both lawyers and other department professionals, helped clients complete applications to receive passports from the Mexican Consulate so that they may take the next step toward legal residency and ultimately secure legal protection against abusers. Tasks included measuring, weighing, and photographing clients, filling out necessary paperwork, and processing

		applications. This one-day clinic assisted more than one hundred clients in completing applications.
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Learning About Pro Bono at All-Hands Meetings

Another way to incorporate pro bono at an all-hands meeting is to share a presentation or host a discussion about pro bono, setting the stage for increased pro bono engagement following the meeting. Departments may choose to have volunteers share their experience with ongoing pro bono projects, or have former pro bono clients discuss the pro bono service they received and its impact on their lives. Storytelling can be a powerful means to motivate volunteers to do pro bono work.

Another option is to invite one or more legal services organizations to make a presentation about pro bono opportunities or provide training for work on those pro bono matters. The organizations can familiarize employees with the opportunities in their communities, and the training ensures that the employees will be prepared to accept a pro bono engagement.

An all-hands presentation can include programming that highlights the deep need for pro bono legal services, messages of support for pro bono work from senior leadership, discussion of the staff's pro bono interests, or some combination thereof. It can also be a forum to recognize employees who serve on the pro bono committee or have already engaged in pro bono work. Recognition can be as simple as asking pro bono volunteers to stand up for applause during the meeting. A smaller department might read out the names of all involved in pro bono, while a larger department might highlight the noteworthy accomplishments of a few individuals. When senior leadership recognizes pro bono work in front of the entire department, it sends the message that the work is valued and encouraged.

An educational presentation about pro bono can be particularly effective for a department that is looking to jump-start or re-invigorate a pro bono program, especially if many members of the department have not had much prior exposure to pro bono. The all-hands day can also provide opportunities for volunteers to sign up for new pro bono matters or clinics to take place following the meeting.

Examples of Pro Bono Learning at All-Hands Meetings

*Comcast Corporation***.

In 2018, Comcast held a panel discussion on pro bono during an offsite legal department meeting that included attorneys from all of its offices, with about 250 attorneys participating in person. The session featured a panel including Syon Bhanot, a professor who discussed the behavioral economics underlying why individuals volunteer to do pro bono; Daniel McKenna, a partner at Ballard Spahr* and President of the Wills for Heroes Foundation, who talked about his experience with pro bono and pro bono opportunities through Wills for Heroes; and Eve Runyon, the President and CEO of Pro Bono Institute, who discussed in-house pro bono trends and the need for pro bono legal services to close the justice gap. During the session, Comcast

leadership recognized pro bono volunteers and leaders of the pro bono program for their achievements since the company's formal pro bono program began in 2016; discussed the impact the pro bono program has had on Comcast's communities; and shared upcoming opportunities for each office to get involved in pro bono. The company affirmed its commitment to pro bono by announcing that Comcast became a Corporate Pro Bono Challenge[®] signatory.

*The Bank of New York Mellon Corporation***.

In 2016, BNY Mellon held a global off-site meeting at which 700 attorneys from all over the world participated. The meeting featured a lively program about pro bono. It began with a discussion of why pro bono services are necessary for indigent individuals struggling with poverty and homelessness. The discussion led into an interactive poverty simulation using the [SPENT](#) tool, where participants were asked to imagine that they were homeless, unemployed, down to their last \$1000, and facing a series of difficult choices. The simulation, designed to increase understanding of low-income families and individuals, illustrated the difference that free legal advice or assistance can make in their lives. Next, a panel led by an Equal Justice Works fellow sponsored by BNY Mellon shared compelling anecdotes about providing pro bono legal services, including to abused immigrant children. Following the event, attorneys had the opportunity to visit the Pro Bono Table staffed by the Pro Bono Committee, which displayed pro bono project descriptions for all BNY Mellon offices. Participants were invited to sign-up for projects at the Pro Bono Table. The department reported that participation in pro bono increased after the event.

Conclusion

Pro bono at all-hands meetings presents opportunities for legal staff to explore pro bono in a supported and collegial environment. It can increase the impact of pro bono work in the local community, bringing large numbers of attorneys and department professionals together to help. It can also connect in-house departments and volunteers with law firms or legal services organizations involved with this work. By hosting pro bono engagements during all-hands meetings, in-house legal departments can transform a routine gathering into a platform to showcase their company's commitment to social responsibility and make an impact on underserved communities.

**denotes a Law Firm Pro Bono Challenge[®] signatory*

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