

PUBLICATION

Make Pro Bono Service Part of Your 2021 New Year's Resolution

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Every year on January 1, the clock strikes midnight, a new year begins, and the same question emerges: "What is your New Year's resolution?" While there are numerous ways lawyers can brainstorm to better their practice and improve work-life balance, there are also infinite pro bono opportunities just waiting for someone to invest some time into. In 2020, we watched COVID-19 change the world we live in, which in turn, increased the need for pro bono legal service. So, why not make pro bono service part of your 2021 New Year's resolution?

While the most challenging part of getting involved in pro bono service can be finding where to begin, in order to truly appreciate your ability to become involved in pro bono service, and then act upon it, you must ask yourself: What? Why? And How?

Figure Out "The What"

What type of pro bono project do you want to participate in? Is it local service? International service? Do you want to take on a project in your specific practice area, or would you rather branch out?

Luckily, there are hundreds of resources available to attorneys to aid in finding the right pro bono project, starting with your law firm's pro bono counsel/coordinator. Or, if your firm does not have a pro bono counsel/coordinator, try reaching out to partners, mentors and associates who have previously participated in pro bono projects. Engaging in conversations about the types of projects your colleagues have participated in can open the door to opportunities you did not even know existed.

Alternatively, take a look at local pro bono resource centers, which typically provide platforms for attorneys to search for various pro bono projects in their local areas. These resource centers will often offer trainings in various practice areas so, for example, attorneys who specialize in tax law can try something different and perhaps take on a landlord-tenant matter. While branching out into a different practice area can be a deterrent to some, you do not have to tackle this challenge alone. Ask another attorney in your firm to work on a matter with you and simultaneously utilize the opportunity to make new connections in your firm.

For those attorneys who are still looking for something more, the American Bar Association has a [National Pro Bono Opportunities Guide](#), which provides attorneys access to a plethora of pro bono matters just waiting to be opened. It goes without saying that there is certainly no shortage of pro bono matters.

Figure Out "The Why"

As you begin to research various pro bono opportunities, ask yourself, "Why do I want to take on a pro bono project?" We all have reasons we became lawyers, and many of these reasons stem from having a passion for analyzing the law, for a particular practice area, and/or for helping others navigate the legal system. Whatever your career passion is, find it, embrace it, and use it to fuel your participation in pro bono service.

Figure Out "The How"

Finally, make a plan to help yourself get started and set forth how you are going to manage this pro bono project along with your current workload. Make note of whether this is a project that will need paralegal

assistance, or whether it is a project that requires you to be in court a certain number of days every week. Creating a plan upfront will enable you to more easily integrate your pro bono matters into your daily schedule.

How you are going to organize yourself and your involvement in whatever pro bono project you choose is significant, however, there is another "how" that is equally important: How are you going to continue your involvement in pro bono so you do not fall into the trap of taking one project and letting your commitment to pro bono service drop off your radar for the rest of the year (or forever)? Always maintain one foot in the door of pro bono service and do not close that door as soon as one matter wraps up. Keep challenging yourself to explore new pro bono matters. Take on cases that excite you, that challenge you, or that remind you of why you became a lawyer.

It is time to figure out your "what," "why," and "how," and make 2021 the year to grow your involvement in pro bono service!