

# Five Reasons to Keep Up Your Pro Bono Work

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The American Bar Association's [rules of professional conduct](#) state that “a lawyer should aspire to render at least 50 hours of pro bono publico legal services per year.” When you’re measured by billable hours, offering your services for free—or even at a substantial discount—may not seem to make business sense.

In reality, though, pro bono work remains popular in the legal industry. According to [a survey of 47,000 lawyers](#) in 24 states published this year by the ABA Standing Committee on Pro Bono & Public Service, 81 percent of respondents reported that they had engaged in pro bono work in their careers, while more than half said they had done so in 2016. Including lawyers who did zero pro bono work that year, respondents said they provided an average of nearly 40 hours of pro bono services in 2016. One in five of the lawyers surveyed reported meeting the ABA’s goal of at least 50 hours of pro bono work for the year.

For solo practitioners and smaller law firms—where operating margins can be tight—the obstacles to volunteering may feel insurmountable. Of course, ethical responsibilities and personal fulfillment remain the best reasons for smaller legal practices to stay engaged, but here are five more in support of setting aside pro bono time.

## 1. YOU CAN SHOWCASE YOUR EXPERTISE.

In addition to giving back to your community, think of pro bono engagements as a chance to show the value you bring to the table as a lawyer. Aside from the respect garnered from volunteering your services, you can [enhance your practice’s reputation](#) by demonstrating your dedication, professionalism, knowledge of the law, critical thinking skills and creativity.

You might even attract new paying clients, referrals from your peers or potential business partners in the process.

## 2. YOU CAN RECRUIT (AND RETAIN) TALENT.

For smaller law firms courting prospective employees, the chance to do pro bono work can strengthen their pitch to promising candidates.

The opposite may be true, too: The lack of a pro bono program could turn off an attorney who would be the ideal fit for your firm’s opening.

## 3. YOU CAN EXPAND YOUR HORIZONS.

As the founding partner of Doner Law, PLC, a four-person firm in the Northern Virginia suburbs of Washington, D.C., Karen Doner specializes in employment law and commercial litigation. Like many attorneys, she appreciates stepping outside her comfort zone in pro bono cases.

“I have always found pro bono work to be personally rewarding, especially in areas outside of my practice,” Doner says. “Early in my career, I represented victims of domestic violence in obtaining protective orders. It was not only a great opportunity to help women in need, but I also gained exposure to a different area of the law.”

#### 4. YOU CAN BUILD MORALE.

Lawyers in smaller firms might enjoy the esprit de corps that comes with teaming up on a pro bono project. That might be especially important for employees who don't often interact with each other as part of their typical job responsibilities.

#### 5. YOU CAN REFINE YOUR SKILLS.

Through pro bono work, less experienced attorneys also get the chance to develop the skills needed to thrive in their day jobs. That could include interviewing witnesses, taking depositions, participating in hearings and even handling some trial work. In doing so, green lawyers can boost their confidence and prepare for larger roles in their commercial work.

Additionally, working with people who aren't your typical clientele can help you sharpen your ability to communicate effectively with both existing and new clients.

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