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From the Experts

## Expanding Corporate Pro Bono Partnerships

Case Study: The San Francisco Pro Bono Alliance

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For some, a position as in-house counsel is the dream legal career. And it is, in many ways. Yet for in-house attorneys, finding quality pro bono opportunities is not always easy. Only a fortunate few in-house counsel are with companies that have the infrastructure and resources to identify and create robust pro bono opportunities. And realistically, given the varying size and stage of in-house legal departments, few companies can accomplish this working alone.

The San Francisco Pro Bono Alliance was formed in late 2013 to address this reality. It seeks to provide accessible pro bono opportunities to in-house counsel working in San Francisco and its surrounding area. The alliance was modeled after, and took its inspiration from, the Bay Area Pro Bono Cooperative (the co-op) that has existed in Silicon Valley since 2009.

The purpose of the alliance is to encourage broad participation in pro bono legal work by in-house counsel, and to provide quality pro bono assistance to those in need in the San Francisco Bay Area. It has focused initially on U Visas, reflecting the large unmet legal need faced by the immigrant communities here. The U Visa is a temporary visa offered to individuals who have suffered substantial injury as the victims of certain crimes here in the United States, and have assisted the authorities in the investigation or prosecution of that crime. Sources estimate that more than 80 percent of the applicants for a U Visa are survivors of criminal domestic violence. The U Visa, which is granted to only 10,000 applicants nationwide each year, is a temporary immigration status, but it can ultimately serve as a gateway to permanent resident status for qualifying immigrants.

As was the case with the co-op, the alliance was born from the successful pro bono partnership that DLA Piper has had with its corporate clients—in this case, Gap Inc. and Verizon Communications Inc. In 2010, Gap's legal department was exploring new pro bono opportunities and learned about U Visa work and the incredible need in the Bay Area for volunteers to assist with the backlog of qualified individuals. In partnership with DLA Piper, members of the Gap legal department started taking on U Visa clients through one of their existing nonprofit intake organizations, Community Legal Services of East Palo Alto.

While brainstorming about how to maximize the ability of in-house counsel to continue to serve this client population, DLA Piper shared with Gap the successful model for pro bono placement used by the co-op and through which a number of in-house departments had participated over the years. DLA Piper also noted its robust, international pro bono partnership with Verizon, which has included co-counseling on U Visa work since 2009.

Realizing the synergies that existed in San Francisco because of these ongoing projects, and recognizing the significant logistical challenges faced by San Francisco-based in-house attorneys who might wish to participate in the co-op (which operates well outside city limits), Gap and DLA Piper agreed that the wider San Francisco in-house community could benefit from a consortium. Thus, the alliance was born.

Currently, the alliance offers in-house participants an opportunity to work in partnership with a DLA Piper attorney, and with another experienced in-house attorney if desired, to assist a client through the U Visa application process. The partnership with DLA Piper permits both attorneys and nonattorney volunteers to participate in the pro bono work, providing opportunities to nonlicensed in-house personnel that otherwise are unavailable to them. This is a significant reason to support the alliance, as many companies (such as Gap) have legal departments comprised mostly of nonattorney staff.

Most important, the work of the alliance is truly accessible to all. No prior experience is required. The alliance provides all of the necessary training and support, which is facilitated by DLA Piper, Bay Area Legal Aid and the Cooperative Restraining Order Clinic, two of the alliance's nonprofit legal services organizations that refer their clients to the alliance for help. In addition, the alliance provides a unique opportunity for in-house legal teams to gain experience with direct client access.

To say that this work has been rewarding is a huge understatement. For example, one of the authors of this piece, Marie Ma, has to date completed five U Visa applications covering more than 20 individuals and continues to participate in the work today. In fact, her first two U Visa clients and their families now are preparing for their permanent resident status application process.

Why should other lawyers consider joining (or starting) pro bono opportunities like this? Beyond the fact that we attorneys have a duty to give back, it's incredibly rewarding. Experiencing the impact that we can have on our communities has made both authors tremendously more excited about the legal profession. Also, did we mention that there's a huge need? There are an estimated 800,000 survivors of crime in the United States who are eligible for U Visa protection.

While the alliance currently is handling only U Visa pro bono matters, the hope is to eventually expand the program to include other types of pro bono projects to meet other unmet legal needs. Since the launch of the Alliance, U Visa cases have been placed with lawyers and staff from Gap, Verizon and other companies. The hope is that the alliance will become the one-stop shop for in-house pro bono opportunities in San Francisco and its environs. The key to accomplishing this? The in-house counsel community itself. The more participation by in-house legal departments, the quicker the alliance can and will expand.

In short, the work is accessible, there is a huge need and in-house counsel will get more out of the experience than the few hours they put in. In exchange for the privilege of helping survivors and families through the U Visa process, the experience will leave a permanent impression. These deeply personal pro bono experiences ultimately make us better lawyers, advisors and

business partners. Each of the authors truly has grown because of their pro bono experiences over the years, and look forward to building on these experiences.

For Bay Area lawyers, we invite you to join us to celebrate the alliance's first anniversary on Thursday, February 5, 2015, from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. at the San Francisco office of DLA Piper (555 Mission Street, Suite 2400).

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