



Who You Gonna Call? If it's about pro bono, probably Pro Bono Institute

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Pro Bono Institute

Eve Runyon

Eve Runyon is the CEO and president of **Pro Bono Institute** in Washington, D.C. PBI is constantly cited by law departments and law firms alike as an indispensable resource for all things pro bono. Whether an organization is planning its first program or tweaking an aging one, this is often the first place they call. The interview has been edited for style and length.



Eve Runyon

What makes pro bono a special challenge for corporate law departments compared to law firms?

Eve Runyon: There are a number of practical barriers that distinguish in-house pro bono work from the pro bono work done at law firms. There are barriers around lack of insurance and restrictions on multijurisdictional practice for nonlocally licensed in-house counsel. There are differences in the resources that are available to in-house departments versus law firms. Legal departments tend to be leanly staffed. And there are programmatic goals that are often different. For example, when legal departments are developing pro bono programs, it is very common for them to create opportunities that engage all of the legal staff as opposed to just the lawyers within the department.

One of the things you just mentioned is an issue I know you've been involved with for a long time. In some states in-house lawyers are not allowed to do pro bono work unless they are licensed in that state. You've tried to get laws changed. How things are going? How many states still retain these laws?

Runyon: This has been a very important issue for us. We've been working in partnership with the Association of Corporate Counsel--a task force of in-house counsel and others--for several years, advocating in more than 20 jurisdictions to change rules that limit non-locally licensed in-house counsel from engaging in pro bono. In the past four years or so, 15 jurisdictions have amended their rules to permit these lawyers to participate in pro bono. However, there are still 27 states that do not have rules that explicitly permit this category of in-house counsel to engage in pro bono.

Are you optimistic that your success over the past four years will continue to result in changes going forward?

Runyon: We are optimistic. When we started to focus on this issue, we worked with the Conference of Chief Justices and Conference of State Court Administrators. They adopted a resolution that encourages jurisdictions to fashion rules that would allow for broader engagement by non-locally licensed in-house counsel. The fact that in-house pro bono continues to grow and that there are more legal departments engaging in pro bono is also encouraging.

Do you know what percentage of law departments have some sort of formal pro bono program?

Runyon: Corporate Pro Bono, PBI's partnership project with the Association of Corporate Counsel, has worked with more than 900 legal departments. More than half of the Fortune 100 have formal pro bono programs, and almost 50 percent of the Fortune 500 formally engage in pro bono.

How much does size matter? Are companies with larger law departments more likely to have formal programs?

Runyon: It may be easier for larger departments to organize their resources and develop formal pro bono programs, but pro bono is not just for larger departments. Smaller departments have also made commitments, formalized their efforts and participate in pro bono. Each year at the PBI Annual Dinner, Corporate Pro Bono presents the Corporate Pro Bono Partner Award, and we've created two categories – one for larger departments and another for smaller ones. In the large law category this year we are honoring UnitedHealth Group for their work with the Connecticut Veterans Legal Center. We are also honoring Alcoa and Arconic for their work in partnership with Meyer, Unkovic & Scott and the Pittsburgh Pro Bono Partnership. Alcoa and Arconic are smaller departments, so it is something that is possible, it is something that is happening.

You said you've seen growth in the number of law departments adding pro bono programs. Are there statistics you can point to?

Runyon: When Corporate Pro Bono was first started in 2000, there were only a handful of legal departments that had formal pro bono programs. Now there are hundreds.

How much would you attribute that to your 2006 Corporate Pro Bono Challenge?

Runyon: There are a number of reasons that help explain the tremendous growth of in-house pro bono over the past several years. One certainly is initiatives like the Corporate Pro Bono Challenge statement, which encourages in-house departments to increase participation, benchmark their activity, support growth and provide valuable pro bono services. Other reasons include organizations like Pro Bono Institute and its Corporate Pro Bono project developing resources and initiatives that provide services that address common barriers, highlight best practices and promote the growth of in-house pro bono. For example, CPBO does one-on-one consulting, webinars, podcasts, clinics, and there is an in-house track at the PBI Annual Conference. There is also an increased focus on corporate social responsibility and

being good corporate citizens by companies, and that certainly contributes to in-house legal departments looking to formalize pro bono. Additionally, there are lawyers who were actively engaged in pro bono at law firms moving in-house and wanting to create similar opportunities there.

Is it important for law departments to keep statistics about their pro bono programs, such as the number of lawyers who participate and the number of hours they work?

Runyon: Metrics are important. What gets measured gets valued; what gets valued gets done. The Corporate Pro Bono Challenge initiative is the benchmark for in-house pro bono and it tracks participation rates. The goal of the initiative is to encourage at least half of the legal staff in a law department to engage in pro bono. There are currently 170 Corporate Pro Bono Challenge signatories.

At least one company I talked to makes participation part of a lawyer's annual performance review. What do you think about that?

Runyon: It's important for legal departments to develop pro bono programs that encourage participation and engage volunteers. Whether it's through annual performance reviews or formal recognition during a legal department's annual meeting, incorporating pro bono into the operations of the legal department is a vital part of a successful pro bono program.

Why should a company that doesn't have a formal pro bono program consider starting one?

Runyon: There are a host of reasons. It allows the lawyers within the department to meet their ethical obligations. It is a benefit to the lawyers and other members of the legal department who are participating; it increases skills, provides opportunities for meaningful work, and it brings tremendous satisfaction. It is also a benefit to the legal department and the company in that it contributes to recruitment and retention, promotes employee engagement, increases morale, provides opportunities for lawyers and other legal staff to work together and builds the reputation of the legal department and the company. Most importantly, it is a tremendous benefit to the clients being served. The need for pro bono legal services and legal services to low-income individuals remains great.

How does the Pro Bono Institute help law departments that are only in the early stages of formalizing this process?

Runyon: Through our Corporate Pro Bono project, we provide free consulting services to legal departments interested in getting a program started. We also provide free consulting services to legal departments that have pro bono programs but are looking to refine, develop and grow those programs. We have a number of resources: We publish best-practice profiles, we publish resources that specifically address some of the barriers that are unique to in-house pro bono and talk about solutions. We also provide programming, which includes the Pro Bono Institute's Annual Conference in Washington, D.C. We host webinars and a number of other programs that specifically address in-house pro bono and how in-house legal departments can start their own programs.

Eve Runyon is the president and CEO of **Pro Bono Institute**. Runyon first joined PBI in 2005 to lead Corporate Pro Bono (CPBO), PBI's partnership project with the Association of Corporate Counsel. Under her leadership, CPBO designed and implemented innovative initiatives to expand the commitment to pro bono across in-house law departments. Before joining PBI, Runyon worked as a lawyer at Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher, & Flom in Washington, D.C. She can be reached at erunyon@probonoinst.org.

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