

PBI Session Notes: Pro Bono Zooms Into the Future: An Interactive Workshop

Question 1: One year into the COVID-19 emergency declaration, what reflections can you share about successful practices your firm or organization implemented for remote pro bono?

1. Project Types: Increased interest in research-based pro bono projects-election protection work was very popular. Also noted increase interest in pro bono as a result of the virtual aspect. Seems that the ability to do pro bono or attend trainings without needing to go somewhere has been helpful.
 - a. Push to policy projects and increasing partnerships. Organizations should be creative about partnerships in these types of projects (shifting from clinic work to that type of work)
 - b. "Bite-sized projects" are more popular, such as expungements, driver's license clinics, and racial justice.
 - c. Interest in helping people get out of immigration detention, so transitioned to volunteers in areas that don't require a court appearance, such as letters to DHS officials or hearings with telephonic appearances to accommodate remote opportunities.
2. Training: On-demand training by WebEx from the law firm side, it's been nice to see how helpful that has been for pro bono attorneys.
 - a. Remote pro bono training encourages people from all over the state to attend and share with each other.
 - b. Pre-recorded trainings available has been successful because then volunteers can do them when available and the programs can make the best use of the attorneys time for volunteering. Would like to see that aspect continue.
 - c. Interesting and fun ways to keep attorneys engaged during training. Ideas: Invite goats to show up? Goat To Meeting; Stand Up to Corona - Inviting stand up comedians to Zoom meetings catches people's attention.
3. Being creative about attracting clients and volunteers in new ways. Be thoughtful before diving into new projects/roles.
 - a. Utilizing different groups of volunteers who didn't traditionally participate (geographically far away, more law students)
 - b. One Firm began working with a local law school on COVID related issues, serving as a clearinghouse for projects of interest to civil legal aid providers and matching them with law students. The Firm provided supervision of the law students and this also turned into a course on COVID at the law school.
 - c. Expanding into other areas: Free Legal Answers expanded into immigration and veterans work.
 - d. One program noted an overall interest in skills-based volunteering beyond pro bono. Marketing/IT/HR resources for nonprofits, corporate social responsibility resulting in a program modeled like a legal pro bono program.

- e. Another project involves attorneys serving as referees to clear docket for conciliation courts-really cool opportunity for lawyers to act as "judges"-piloting since November and expanding to other counties.

Question 2: What practices did not work? Are there any lessons learned from any failures? Was there something that you thought would work but ultimately did not?

1. Unemployment needs: all telephone hearings-had a lot of people sign-up for the training, but very few take the cases, even when divided out pandemic vs. employer related. Very difficult time getting volunteers despite training and assistance.
2. Learning to focus more on positive best practices. There has been little reluctance from attorneys to engage in training.. A lot of willing folks to engage and participate in projects. We are trying to take positives from the projects over the past year and stick with them.
 - a. Virtual training gives more law firms the opportunity to brand projects, which is good.
 - b. We also have more lawyers who are more interested in doing remote hearings now, it's good to have a set time for a court hearing or a virtual appointment at a specified time.
3. Start saying no or "let me think on that and I'll come back to it" - trying too much all at once: getting caught up in the big idea and not considering the process.
4. We've underestimated volunteers' ability to do tech and didn't consider that clients might struggle with the technology. For example, lawyers sharing their calendar, clients not receiving. Lost volunteers recruited for pilot because of issues. Need to be sure to make time for staff to walk volunteers through these situations. Also, address volunteer concerns with using personal phones.
 - a. Introduce workarounds, such as Google Voice. Requires a lot of background work to move from a live clinic model to a telephone, with the in person totally disrupted by the pandemic.
5. Increased interest in racial justice, planned to work with volunteer paralegals, sounded great but VA law was so restrictive that every answer was essentially no, so they recruited the private defense bar instead who were used to saying no or could talk through other barriers and options.

Question 3: What have you learned about the client experience in remote pro bono? Are there any practices you can share? What was successful, or what was not?

1. Connecting with new & existing clients
 - a. Some more able to access, some less, particularly with certain client communities
 - i. It was necessary to adjust habits and self-reflect on follow up and diversity of contact methods
 - b. Lost referrals from partners who were no longer out in the community (for instance, when FEMA tents weren't out, clients weren't getting the referrals); had to search for other ways to connect, like utilizing existing and new relationships with court and nonprofit partners.
 - c. Helpful to set up remote sites where clients can access a computer or team up with local community organizations to facilitate this; especially difficult where such

arrangements are not possible, but being creative about connecting with the client population is key (ex: teaming up with other client resources, putting a magnet with information on the nonprofit in with other items for community members, etc.).

- d. Continue using some of the remote models after as well
2. Sharing case information
 - a. still some challenges with individual clients sharing documents, it really depends on the client 's circumstances and adjusting to their situation. For example, with lease questions, a lot of times the clients don't have a lease with them to share, so it becomes challenging to provide advice without the actual lease. We end up resorting to providing general advice.
 - b. Some cited the use of FedEx to receive or send client documents
 - c. Use of online platforms when available to share documents and e-sign
3. ABA Free Legal Answers is convenient and helpful for the client population
4. Data security: Has anyone seen anything negative come out of that? Shared more about Georgia Legal Connect's data security protocols. Someone cited the main room and breakout groups features from Zoom as a good model to keep conversations private.

Question #4: What does the future look like? What can we continue to carry forward in practice?

1. Hybrid approach moving forward-great to get in-person back, but excited about comfort in technology and cross-office projects. Technology to do more cross-office work-bring teams together across offices. People like to do pro bono across offices. Excited for Cross-office technology.
 2. Attorneys are more comfortable with FLA and more people with lower hours doing more with the remote projects. Less excuses to not do pro bono. Hybrid nice for the future. Happy when you can pick up in person opportunities, but more remote opportunities is helpful to get people involved who were holdouts.
 3. Some attorneys in smaller offices can get involved remotely to collaborate with colleagues. Any specific technology that has been helpful?
 - Miro-Whiteboarding technology-gets around file-sharing issues, for research and reference materials.
 - Google Suite-being able to share docs, letter templates, research.
 - Scheduling, so nice to be able to do over an open system that's free to everyone. Designated staff that rolls with what works for the firm's system because can't use google-invite into their system, and that worked. Move for legal service providers to leverage staff and what they use staff for as a wave for the future.
 4. The future will really depend on what the courts will allow and the buy-in from bar associations to help persuade the legal community in terms of ongoing remote workflows.
 5. Switched to remote uncontested divorce screening (used to be in person at an inaccessible location) - has been easier on the clients, no transportation/traffic issues.
- Additional comments:
- Moving to webinar-based trainings, recording it for later;
 - Potentially remote hearings, depending on the courts;

- Using volunteers from other states & geographic areas;
- Opened law student recruitment nationwide, utilizing attorneys outside the area, clients in rural areas;
- Using people who aren't barred in your state;
- Increased partnerships with other orgs & the court - recorded trainings are very helpful, ability to connect with the court & the clients remotely;
- Using voter protection design into housing crisis work.