

The Business Case for Law Firm Pro Bono

Executive Summary

- Pro bono is both a professional responsibility and a strategic asset. When designed as a core, well-supported practice (not an “add-on”), it strengthens a firm’s people, client relationships, brand, and long-term resilience.
- Talent outcomes are central: pro bono provides accelerated training, earlier responsibility, mentoring opportunities, improved morale/collegiality, and a purpose-driven culture that supports recruitment and retention.
- Client and market outcomes are increasingly measurable: co-counseling with in-house teams can deepen relationships and create positive points of differentiation.
- Societal expectations have moved the conversation forward. Pro bono is a visible way to demonstrate values, contribute to community impact, and support broader stakeholder expectations, including alignment with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Key Takeaways on Law Firm Pro Bono

- Pro bono is both an ethical obligation and a sound business strategy.
- The benefits of pro bono are cumulative and long term
- Firms that integrate pro bono into talent management, client relationships, and firm culture are better positioned for resilience and differentiation
- Firms who choose to be intentional and strategic with their pro bono programs will create measurable value across talent, clients, reputation, and firm sustainability.

The Business Case: How Pro Bono Creates Value

The justice gap remains severe: millions of low-income individuals face civil legal problems — housing instability, family safety, benefits access, and immigration status — without representation. Publicly funded legal services cannot meet demand.

Law firm pro bono is therefore both:

1. A professional obligation grounded in access to justice; and
2. A strategic capability that, when managed with the same rigor as billable work, creates measurable value across talent, clients, reputation, and firm sustainability.

Values, Purpose, and Institutional Legitimacy

**Visible Expression
of Values**



**Purpose-Driven
Culture**



**Professional
Responsibility**



Visible expression of values:

Pro bono makes a firm's commitments tangible and credible to lawyers, clients, recruits, and the community.

Purpose-driven culture:

Access-to-justice work supports a sense of purpose that can strengthen engagement and professional satisfaction.

Professional responsibility:

The ethical duty to expand access to justice remains foundational; the business case is strongest when it complements — rather than replaces— this rationale.

Client Relationships, Business Development, and Market Positioning

Client demand is rising:

Corporate clients increasingly engage their teams in pro bono legal services and seek meaningful engagement opportunities for their lawyers and legal staff.

Co-counseling builds relationships:

Joint pro bono matters with in-house counsel create low-friction opportunities to collaborate, deepen trust, and broaden relationships beyond active billable matters.

Values alignment matters:

As corporate citizenship and strategic philanthropy become more prominent, a credible pro bono program can support alignment with client culture and priorities.

Reputation with credibility:

Pro bono successes can generate authentic, third-party validated stories that offer a unique pathway to increasing brand credibility.



Talent: Recruitment, Retention, Training, and Leadership Development

Recruitment differentiator:

Pro bono attracts top graduates and laterals seeking meaningful work, earlier responsibility, and values alignment.

Retention and engagement:

Purposeful pro bono participation can increase morale and loyalty, helping reduce the high cost of attrition.

Accelerated skills:

Pro bono often provides earlier stand-up opportunities, client contact, advocacy, and case management than many commercial matters.



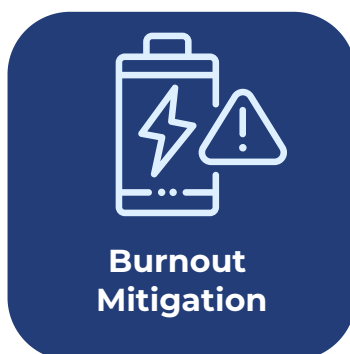
Mentoring and evaluation:

Structured pro bono staffing creates opportunities for partner/senior-lawyer supervision and more holistic assessment of junior-lawyer competencies.

Collegiality:

Cross-practice pro bono teams improve internal connectivity and collaboration, especially in multi-office firms.

Well-Being, Engagement, and Sustainable Performance



Sense of purpose:

Pro bono can provide meaning and connection that supports engagement during demanding periods.

Burnout mitigation:

Access-to-justice work is frequently described as a factor that can counteract burnout and improve satisfaction when paired with proper supervision, manageable staffing, and realistic timelines.

Conclusion

A modern pro bono practice is most effective when it is managed like other core firm capabilities: strategically focused, well-supervised, and measured. Done well, it advances access to justice while strengthening talent development, client relationships, brand credibility, and long-term resilience — making pro bono not merely compatible with firm performance, but an important contributor to it.

ACCESS THE FULL RESOURCE

To access the full *Business Case for Law Firm Pro Bono* resource, and for other law-firm specific resources, email PBI's Law Firm Pro Bono Project at lawfirm@probonoinst.org.

For more information on becoming a Law Firm Pro Bono Project Member, visit probonoinst.org/law-firm-pro-bono-project