IN-HOUSE PRO BONO IN PRACTICE PROFILE: HOUSTON ACC CHAPTER
March 2014

For approximately twenty-five years, the Houston ACC Chapter (ACC Houston) has been formally encouraging and providing opportunities for its members to engage in pro bono activities. Currently, ACC Houston is involved in a number of pro bono efforts in the Houston community. Members regularly provide pro bono legal services at one or more Houston Volunteer Lawyers clinics, including a legal advice clinic, a clinic for veterans, and a wills and estates clinic. In addition, members from time to time provide ongoing advice to non-profit organizations such as Houston Habitat for Humanity and local animal shelters. Recently, members began working with Baker & McKenzie and the Tahirih Justice Center on a pilot program to represent applicants for asylum.

Tim Howard, chair of the ACC Houston Pro Bono Committee, reports that ACC Houston's pro bono program benefits the chapter, its members, and the community. For members, it provides a supportive avenue for them to get involved, which is particularly important for those who are nervous or unsure of how to use their unique legal skills to contribute to the community. The result is improved morale among ACC Houston members. In addition, Howard says that providing members with the satisfaction of giving back to the community and fulfilling the highest ethical calling of the profession is a great asset for the chapter.

General Program Information	
Pro Bono Contact	Timothy J. Howard, Chair, Pro Bono Committee
Region Served	ACC Houston serves the greater Houston area: generally, the counties of Harris, Fort Bend, Montgomery, Brazoria, Galveston, Wharton, and Waller.
Number of Members	1,149 members
Pro Bono Program History	The ACC Houston Pro Bono Committee was formed in the late 1980s as a working body under the Board of Directors to serve a key function of the chapter. At the request of the Board, the committee adopted the following mission statement: "To increase the participation in pro bono legal services by members of the Houston area in-house legal community." Pro bono involvement is central to ACC Houston. Since formation of the pro bono committee, participation has waxed and waned, but with perseverance the program has grown and expanded. Since 2010, a new initiative has been added each year with great success.
Pro Bono Leadership Structure	The ACC Houston Pro Bono Committee usually numbers between nine and eleven people and is led by a chair or co-chairs.

	The committee chair or co-chairs are responsible for arranging committee meetings, proposing the yearly schedule of pro bono events, delegating to committee members event recruiting responsibilities, organizing the annual recognition event for pro bono participants, and generating new pro bono initiatives. Often, the committee chair is a board member, although it is not a requirement. The committee takes the lead in structuring, administering, and promoting the pro bono program. It convenes on a yearly basis to brainstorm events and then selects events in which to participate and host. As commissioned by the ACC Houston Board, the committee: • sponsors pro bono activities and recruits Chapter members to participate; • partners with local pro bono legal services providers to support and assist the outreach of those organizations; and • seeks new pro bono opportunities fit to the abilities and skills of in-house lawyers.
Pro Bono Policy	ACC Houston does not have a pro bono policy.
Communications	Chapter members receive information about pro bono activities a number of ways: • at the chapter-wide monthly meeting and CLE lunch; • on the chapter website (at least two months in advance); and • in the monthly "First Tuesday" email. In addition, chapter members who indicated an interest in pro bono in response to the chapter annual survey are contacted directly by committee members.
Recognitions/Awards	Annually, ACC Houston hosts a reception to honor participants in its pro bono program. The reception occurs prior to an annual comedy show organized by the local bar association. At the reception, a local community leader (often a judge) speaks and each pro bono participant is recognized individually with a gift (such as a desk clock, pen set, or shirt). In addition, the ACC Houston Pro Bono Committee purchases tickets to the comedy show for pro bono participants and chapter leaders.
Tracking Pro Bono	For purposes of determining participation for recognition and the like, ACC Houston or its partner organization records member attendance at sponsored events. The ACC Houston Pro Bono Committee retains a copy of the attendance record and tracks the total number of hours chapter members contribute.
Partnerships	Houston Volunteer Lawyers (HVL) is one of ACC Houston's longtime pro bono partners. As such, a significant portion of the

	chapter's projects are coordinated or organized by HVL. Additionally, in 2013, the Chapter included in its top-level sponsorship package for law firms the opportunity to collaborate on a pro bono endeavor. Due to interest expressed by area firms, more opportunities to partner on pro bono efforts were added to the 2014 sponsorship packages.
Professional Liability	ACC Houston relies on partner organizations to provide professional liability insurance.
Pro Bono Projects	
Legal Advice Clinics	• Two Saturdays a year, ACC Houston commits to recruit at least five of its members to participate in HVL's Legal Advice Clinic. For several years, as many as 12 members have volunteered per clinic to interview clients, render legal advice, and, if necessary, refer the case for further representation. ACC Houston volunteers often concentrate on matters related to family law, wills and estates, landlord/tenant, and debtor's issues. To address concerns volunteers have about the range of client request at the clinics, pro bono leaders at the chapter personally invite chapter members to participate and discuss with them the clinics' benefits. These conversations often alleviate concerns and have helped to increase member participation. • In 2014, ACC Houston will provide five volunteer lawyers for two of HVL's afternoon/evening, weekday, call-in, legal advice clinics (once in the spring and again in fall). ACC Houston participated in this clinic previously and has added it back to the calendar.
Veterans Clinic	Beginning in 2012, twice a year, five to ten chapter members staff a Friday afternoon clinic organized by HVL at the local VA hospital, during which legal advice is provided to military veterans. There, members provide legal advice regarding family law, wills and estates, landlord/tenant, and debtor's issues, as well as veterans benefits.
Wills & Estate Clinic	In a partnership with HVL and the Halliburton Corporation legal department, the ACC Houston assists low-income individuals prepare estate-planning documents. Since 2011, 10-12 chapter members have volunteered for each clinic, which is held over the course of two Saturday mornings, one month apart. Volunteers meet with one or two clients during the first Saturday, prepare the necessary documents over the course of the month, and then participate in a formal signing with their clients at the second. In addition, members of the ACC Houston Pro Bono Committee reach out through Houston Habitat for Humanity to new homeowners without wills to encourage them to attend.

Refugee Asylum Project	In 2013, ACC Houston began working with Baker & McKenzie (a sponsor law firm) and the Tahirih Justice Center to represent applicants for asylum. At the first clinic in 2014, two chapter members teamed together to assist a victim of violence and abuse who is resident in the U.S. without legal status. Such representation includes interviewing, fact development, and petition drafting.
Lessons Learned	
Give it a try.	Both for the organization and for the individual, some risk is involved. Some activities will work; some will not. With each attempt, one learns more. For the individual, the first involvement may seem daunting, but taking that first step is crucial.
Build a core group.	A relatively small number of people can motivate an entire group—but those who are dedicated to an endeavor will inspire others. Therefore, it is beneficial to identify this core group around whom a larger group of people willing to commit some time and effort to learn and grow will coalesce.
Find good legal services providers and partners.	Local legal services organizations can be of great assistance to an ACC chapter's pro bono program, while ACC members may provide crucial support for the organization. Working together is better for both parties. The Houston legal community, for example, offers many ways to be involved for persons at any experience level and with any legal skill. The most difficult aspect in programming has been discerning which pro bono activities will offer the most successful way for in-house counsel to serve.
Keep at it.	Activities, and participation, will ebb and flow. Keep the program going; keep looking for new opportunities; and encourage new people to become involved.
The support of Chapter leadership is a key.	The ACC Houston Board of Directors and the ACC Houston Pro Bono Committee serve as a powerful motivator and can set the pace for the chapter's engagement in pro bono efforts. Collectively, the board and the committee have many contacts throughout the chapter, and networking can be a big boost to these efforts.

Developed by Corporate Pro Bono
A global partnership project of the Pro Bono Institute and the Association of Corporate Counsel
www.cpbo.org
Copyright 2014 Pro Bono Institute
CPBO® is a registered trademark of Pro Bono Institute