Tips for Law Firms on Coordinating and Supporting Pro Bono Immigration Work

These tips were compiled based on conversations with pro bono staff at law firms across the United States. They are intended as suggestions and opportunities for pro bono counsel to grow immigration pro bono programs within the firm.

NATIONAL IMMIGRANT JUSTICE CENTER
A HEARTLAND ALLIANCE PROGRAM

Relationship Building:

- **Sow the seeds of future success.** Try to incorporate summer associates in this work. Encourage attorneys to add a summer associate (or two) to their teams.
- **Recognize professional accomplishments.** When attorneys "win" a case, make sure their superiors and the marketing department are apprised of the accomplishment. Ask for a record of the victory to be entered into the attorney's personnel file.
- **Be a primary resource and sounding board.** When speaking at any internal gathering of pro bono attorneys always encourage them to reach out to you with any questions, but especially if they are overwhelmed, frozen, or confused about the next steps in their case. Make this statement repeatedly.

Staffing:

- **Expand staffing for discrete involvement.** Consider organizing an internal group of senior, mid-level, and junior attorneys to assist by conducting moot court sessions as asylum cases approach merits hearing dates.
- **Increase support at critical times.** As cases arrive at key moments, such as merits hearings, consider adding additional attorney staffing.
- **Include professional staff.** Consider polling your professional staff seeking anyone with foreign language fluency who might want to assist on immigration cases.

Resource Management:

- **Utilize partner organization resources.** Make sure attorneys know what materials the partner organization expects them to review. Encourage them to review available training materials, particularly those developed by the partner organization, prior to asking questions. The National Immigrant Justice Center (NIJC) offers a variety of detailed and regularly updated materials. The Center for Refugee and Gender Studies (CGRS) also provides case assistance and materials for certain types of claims.
- **Utilize research librarians.** Ask attorneys to consider utilizing the firm's research librarians to assist in conducting research, especially with questions about country conditions, specific events in the news from within a certain country, and other specific data points.
- **Keep training!** Encourage attorneys to attend a basic training on the relevant immigration claim type every year or two to remain current on changes in law, procedures, and practice advice.
- **Leverage technology**. Learn about your respective firm's technology. Ask your technology department if they have any software suggestions on tools to use in tracking cases, storing resources (brief banks, training materials, etc.), or calendaring deadlines.

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Case Monitoring:

- **Know the cases and make connections.** Track the specific types of immigration matter each attorney is handling and try to connect attorneys handling matters with similar claims or issues.
- **Keep team members accountable.** Pull the time spent on immigration matters and check against assignments to see if the people who are supposed to be working the matter are doing so.
- **Include the mail and docketing departments.** Work with the mailroom and docketing team to create a coordinated process for mail routing and the scanning of immigration mail and notices.
- **Monitor frequency of client communication.** In cases that are dormant for long periods of time (i.e. U Visa, asylum, etc.) ask attorneys to schedule a call with their clients at least every three months.
  - ⇒ These calls should begin with general questions that allow the client space to talk (the attorney should focus on listening).
  - ⇒ Then seek information regarding any life changes that could impact the case, such as changes in address or marital status or interactions with law enforcement.

Case Audits and Review:

- **Review representation.** Make sure you know which attorney has an appearance on file with USCIS or the immigration court, particularly during times of attorney transition.
  - ⇒ Inform the partner organization of any transfer of representation within the firm or of the addition of attorneys to the legal team.
- **Conduct individual attorney check-ins.** Ask everyone on the team to respond individually. Team members sometimes assume the lawyer leading the team knows everything, but case updates can uncover individuals in unique situations with unique questions. Ask:
  - ⇒ What has recently been done?
  - ⇒ What tasks are left to do?
  - ⇒ Are there any new deadlines? If you learn of new deadlines, inform your Docket Department.

Docketing Dates and Automatic Emails:

If you have the ability to set-up automatic emails to remind attorneys of important internal and external deadlines and check-ins, consider utilizing the attached docketing list to affirmatively prompt attorneys regarding key dates and responsibilities.