

# Give a Little, Get a Lot

## How Volunteering Benefits Attorneys Launching Careers and During Job Transitions

BY JACLYN VARY

**F**or attorneys at all stages of their career, volunteering can enrich your life and help shape a sense of purpose and community. For attorneys just starting their careers or in transition, volunteering offers a range of special benefits as well. Jaclyn Vary (mentor and volunteer leader with the CMBA's Reach Out for Nonprofits and Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts programs) offers her thoughts on common questions attorneys may have when considering how and when to volunteer.

**Q. What do potential employers think when they see non-legal work on a resume?**

A. For individuals I informally mentor, I am interested in learning what skills (work ethic and interpersonal skills) they developed during their non-legal work. I have a section on my resume covering community involvement and volunteer activities, which I believe is helpful to employers. You show a different side of yourself in what you choose to do with your downtime. If you volunteer while working at your current position, you also show your ability to manage multiple projects and priorities.

**Q. What if volunteering takes away time from the job hunt?**

A. Yes, volunteering takes time away from the job hunt. However, if you are volunteering at Legal Aid's Brief Advice Clinics or take on a pro bono case with the Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts (VLA), you can show that your legal experience continued during a period which would otherwise be a gap in work history.

**Q. What advice do you have for someone who takes on a pro bono opportunity then has a job come up?**

A. Most pro bono organizations/clients will be understanding if you need to appropriately transition the project, especially if you've mentioned upfront that you were concurrently searching for a paid position. Additionally, most employers will understand that you need time to transition from what you are doing to the new job, and many may support your volunteer/pro bono services. Keep things professional and give your current position proper notice so that you have time to appropriately transition matters if necessary.

**Q. How do you balance volunteer work with your career?**

A. For many, true "balance" may seem impossible, but integrating volunteer work with my career is a priority for me. Volunteering gives me the opportunity to gain valuable experience outside my usual legal practice. While I normally do not work in the Medicaid area, I recently reviewed an issue for an artist on Medicaid who was interested in setting up a trust. I have now utilized the information I learned about QIT/Miller Trusts on a fee-paying matter.

Volunteering is also an opportunity to network. One of the best parts of working with the VLA is that our volunteers often partner together so that a newer attorney may gain experience in other practice areas.

**Q. Are volunteer positions worth it?**

A. I often think that Legal Aid Brief Advice Clinic clients will not need my estate planning

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knowledge. However, the issues I addressed at a recent clinic were interesting and applicable to my practice area:

- A daughter was living with her elderly mother who then passed away. The mother's will was destroyed by her other children. What will happen to the mother's home?
- Will a limited power of attorney allow a couple moving out of town to allow someone else to transport their dog?

In my opinion, volunteer positions are what you make of the experience. I find that volunteering can be very personally rewarding. If I make the time, it is well worth the effort. The true impact when someone gives their time, talent and treasure is immeasurable.



*Jaclyn Vary's day job is serving clients an Estate & Succession Planning attorney at Calfee, Halter & Griswold LLP. Her side hustles include serving as a member of the CMBA's Volunteer*

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