The 2022 Pro Bono Ranking: How Firms Stack Up

By **Gerald Schifman**

Law360 (November 28, 2022, 1:05 PM EST) -- Attorneys have a unique ability to use their legal training to represent underserved communities. Pro bono work is among the most effective ways that law firms can make a positive impact, and these efforts are often central to firms' social responsibility portfolios.

The Law360 Pulse Social Impact Leaders is the first part of a larger project looking at how firms in the U.S. measure up. Check back on Dec. 5 for our next release, the Law360 Pulse Prestige Leaders, and mark your calendars for Dec. 12 to see where your firm lands on our ultimate ranking, the Law360 Pulse Leaderboard.

It's why Law360 Pulse tracks the amount of time that firms are spending on pro bono, using that data as an essential building block for the Social Impact Leaders ranking. The pro bono pillar is also broken out into this separate ranking, which allows for a more detailed comparison of how firms stand relative to their peers.

Law360 Pulse gauges firms' pro bono efforts in the United States through three different prisms. The first is the proportion of attorneys who provided at least 50 hours of free legal services, which is the American Bar Association's recommendation for all lawyers. The second measure is the proportion of attorneys who participated in any pro bono work; the third is average pro bono hours per attorney. These metrics are standardized and weighted according to the process outlined in the methodology for Social Impact Leaders.

Taken together, these three measures make it possible to evaluate just how ubiquitous the culture of pro bono is at each firm, while also crediting firms for employing attorneys who significantly exceed the ABA's 50-hour threshold. The upshot is that even when firms post a perfect participation rate, their final scores can sag if they're outpaced by their peers in the hour-based metrics. Scores in the graphic below can range from 0 to 100 points.
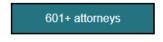
A handful of firms perform well on Law360's pro bono ranking, but the success stories are scarce. Fewer than 5% of ranked firms topped 75 points. Most firms fell below 25 points, leaving ample room for improvement.

These findings align with a recent report from the Pro Bono Institute, which found that firms in 2021 spent 4.6 million hours providing free legal services — the lowest total since 2015. Even as firms expanded their headcounts and the pandemic raged last year, the industry appears to have rolled

back its pro bono offerings. As firms strive to strengthen their social responsibility pledges, they'll need to recommit to serving the public's considerable need for pro bono work.

How Does Your Firm Measure Up?

Firms in each size category are ranked by their pro bono pillar score, which is based on their proportion of attorneys who provided at least 50 hours of free legal services, their full participation rate in pro bono activity and their average pro bono hours per attorney.

601+ attorneys

Rank	Firm	Total U.S. Attorneys	Participating Attys (50+ hours)	Participating Attys	Hours per Atty	Score
3	Morrison Foerster	790	52.9%	83.3%	74.6	83.4

Note:

For the number of attorneys participating in pro bono activity and the number working at least 50 pro bono hours, firms were requested to only provide figures for attorneys who were employed through the end of 2021. This brought pro bono data into alignment with the headcounts that Law360 Pulse uses across its rankings.

For average pro bono hours per attorney, firms were asked to provide their total output for the year, regardless of whether attorneys were employed through Dec. 31, 2021. Total hour figures were divided by the firm's average number of full-time equivalent attorneys. In instances where a full-time equivalent figure was unavailable, standard headcount was used as the denominator in its place.

--Editing by Pamela Wilkinson, John Campbell and Xavier Chauvris. Graphics by Ben Jay and Rachel Reimer.