

Give Back by Getting Involved
BPLA's Patent Pro Bono Program

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The Pro Bono Committee of the BPLA serves to coordinate and support the BPLA community's involvement in civic, charitable, and educational events. In recent years, efforts have focused on supporting the establishment of a regional pro bono program in New England. The impetus for such a program comes from passage of the [America Invents Act \(AIA\)](#), which includes a directive for the establishment of regional pro bono programs designed to assist financially under-resourced independent inventors and small businesses in protecting their intellectual property. The BPLA has partnered with the [USPTO](#) and the [Arts & Business Council of Greater Boston/Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts \(VLA\)](#) to create a regional pro bono program covering eligible inventors in Massachusetts, Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont.

The pro bono program is administered by the VLA, who accepts applications, screens for eligibility, and distributes eligible matters to a panel of volunteer attorneys. A [2012 survey](#) of BPLA membership indicated strong support for the pro bono program and willingness to volunteer in providing legal assistance, but program administrators often find there are not enough attorneys to handle eligible cases. To address this, **a primary goal of the pro bono committee this year is to capitalize on existing support by getting more members actively involved.** The value of pro bono service is unquestioned in the legal profession and the Pro Bono Committee is sure that anyone who gets involved will find their service rewarding.

In addition, practitioners who provide at least 50 hours of patent pro bono service to local pro bono programs like the VLA during 2017 will be recognized with a personalized certificate signed by Commissioner of Patents Andrew Hirshfeld and William Covey, Director for the Office of Enrollment and Discipline, as well as listed on the USPTO website.

An initial first step is as simple as expressing willingness to get involved and to receive notifications from the VLA regarding new pro bono matters. We encourage anyone willing to

take this first step to email probono@bpla.org. The Pro Bono Committee is also interested in exploring other ways to encourage community involvement in providing pro bono legal assistance. If you have an interest in helping or ideas for programming, please use the same address to share with the Committee chairpersons!