

PUBLIC INTEREST SETTINGS

PUBLIC INTEREST ORGANIZATIONS

- ❑ **Direct Service Organizations** provide legal assistance to people who could otherwise not afford representation. Legal assistance providers usually handle matters involving government benefits, housing, family law, consumer law, and employment issues. Some organizations specialize in particular matters such as housing or the elderly. Lawyers in legal assistance programs have significant client contact through client counseling, negotiations, and assistance with legal documents, research, and representation. Some local examples include the University of Illinois Civil Law Clinic, Land of Lincoln Legal Assistance Foundation, Prairie State Legal Services, and the Legal Assistance Foundation of Chicago.
- ❑ **Policy Oriented Organizations** specialize in larger scale strategies to protect legal rights or bring about social changes in a particular area.¹ These organizations rely on impact and class action litigation, lobbying for legislation, provide information on current developments in their specialty area and much more.² Examples of such organizations are the American Civil Liberties Union, Lawyer's Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, and Earth Justice Legal Defense Fund.

PUBLIC SERVICE

- ❑ **Public Defenders** are responsible for providing legal services in criminal matters to people who could not otherwise afford representation by a lawyer. Public defenders accept cases referred to their offices by the courts. While the structure of public defenders' offices depends on location, lawyers typically engage in pretrial and trial activities. Usually, new lawyers will move up through the ranks to handle more complex cases.
- ❑ **Prosecuting Attorneys** work at local, state, and federal levels through offices representing a particular level of government. Office structure and caseload differ depending on the level of government and location. Prosecutors will also engage in significant pretrial and trial activities. Prosecuting attorneys include District Attorneys, State's Attorneys General, United State Department of Justice and United State's Attorneys Office.
- ❑ **Executive Agencies** employ lawyers as in-house counsel to develop regulations, monitor compliance, draft and research legislation, and participate in administrative hearings. Opportunities for lawyers interested in this type of employment are available in both the state and federal arenas. The Federal Trade Commission, Environmental Protection Agency, and Illinois Department of Education are all examples of executive agencies.
- ❑ **Elected Offices** provide another outlet for people with legal backgrounds. Lawyers elected to office are in an excellent position to pursue public interest initiatives through introducing legislation and community advocacy.

¹ Information Adapted from Harvard Law School's *Public Interest Job Search Guide 2001-2002*

² Information Adapted from Harvard Law School's *Public Interest Job Search Guide 2001-2002*

- ❑ **Legislatures**, both state and federal, hire lawyers as staff for legislative committees. Also, individual legislators employ lawyers as staff members and legislative counsel. Lawyers working for committees and representatives may draft and research legislation, investigate pertinent matters, and advise legislators. For most committee positions, previous relevant employment is required. Many legislative committees and offices hire summer interns and externs.
- ❑ **Courts** afford lawyers with a variety of public service opportunities. Judicial clerkships and staff attorney positions exist at state and federal levels. Judicial clerks work as close legal assistants to judges. Typically, clerks, as recent law school graduates, analyze briefs or memoranda; perform additional legal research; write memoranda; and consult with the judges on various issues. Judges also hire law students for short-term employment as interns and externs to assist in research and drafting judicial opinions.

LAW FIRMS

- ❑ **Public Interest Firms** offer legal services in a traditional setting. There are three types of public interest firms: firms that represent individual clients, firms specializing in issues traditionally associated with the public interest (i.e. civil rights litigation or employment discrimination), and firms representing non profit organizations or labor unions. Lawyers in these firms may split their time between *pro bono* and paid work. Others charge reduced fees, on a sliding scale, or contingency fees.
- ❑ **Private Law Firms** might encourage lawyers to participate in *pro bono* activities similar to those associated with public interest firms. These firms permit lawyers to apply a portion of their billable hours to public interest work. Some large firms also offer *pro bono* experiences for summer associates. Information about a firm's *pro bono* commitment can be determined through interviews and reviewing the firm's materials regarding their *pro bono* policy and commitment to public service. Depending on the firm's goals, many law firms are actively engaged in representing lower income clients. In fact, according to NALP, 75% of low and moderate-income citizens have their legal needs met through small and medium sized law firms.

OTHER

- ❑ **Labor Unions** represent both public and private sector employers and unions offer a significant number of opportunities. Almost all national and international unions have a central legal department that provides overall legal direction and advice for both the leadership and local constituents.
- ❑ **International Public Interest** opportunities vary widely as do the settings which you can practice in. The United States government, non-profit organizations including human rights organizations, and international fellowships all offer wonderful opportunities in this field.³

³ Information Adapted from Harvard Law School's *Public Interest Job Search Guide 2001-2002*