



Analysis – Office Size

The 2015 Index has again tracked the impact that the size of law firms' offices has on the amount of pro bono undertaken and the level of engagement of its lawyers. Where firms have provided data for different offices, or for teams in different jurisdictions, we have treated each data set as a separate 'office' to help understand what impact the size of a team has on providing pro bono.

For the purpose of the Index, a large 'office' means a team of more than 100 fee-earners working in the same jurisdiction, a medium-sized office means between 20 – 99 fee-earners in a single jurisdiction, and a small office is 19 or less. Where a firm has multiple offices in the same jurisdiction (and for these purposes the United States is considered one jurisdiction), these fee-earners are grouped together so an office means the entire legal team in a jurisdiction.

On average it is large offices where the most pro bono per fee-earner is performed, with these offices averaging 34.1 hours of pro bono per fee-earner over the last 12 months. Last year's findings indicated on average lawyers in large offices performed 34.2 hours so the result is largely unchanged.

On average, lawyers at medium sized offices undertook 19.3 hours of pro bono per fee-earner over the last 12 months compared to 15.8 hours last year while lawyers at small offices averaged 22.3 hours of pro bono per fee-earner in 2015, exactly the same as the 2014 findings.

The findings this year are less closely aligned when looking at the percentage of lawyers performing 10 hours or more of pro bono. In large offices an average of 41.7 percent of fee-earners performed 10 or more hours of pro bono, which is down from 53.7 percent last year. In medium-sized offices an average of 33.3 percent of fee-earners performed 10 or more hours of pro bono similar to the 28.9 percent last year. In small offices an average of 41.3 percent of fee-earners undertook 10 hours in 2015 Index, up from 35.1 percent in the 2014 findings.

SIZE OF FIRMS AND THE AVERAGE NUMBERS OF PRO BONO HOURS



On the whole the findings are similar to the 2014 survey and reaffirm the assessment that the size of a legal team has an impact on the amount of pro bono performed. It must be acknowledged that there is a link between the jurisdiction and the size of the legal team, which naturally has an impact on the findings. Many of the medium-sized offices are based in continental Europe, which does not have the same tradition of pro bono as jurisdictions like England, the United States, and Australia where the teams tend to be larger. The small offices are also often in jurisdictions that do not have the resources or sophisticated industry infrastructure in place to support pro bono initiatives.

One argument, posited last year, is that the size of the team is closely correlated to the resources available to devote to pro bono. Larger teams are likely to have both the finances and man-power to be able to support the development of a structured pro bono initiative and also the capacity to get involved in more projects. In small teams there tends to be more flexibility to get involved but it is far more due to the desires and capacity of passionate individuals which results in significant engagement levels.

Following this line of argument, it is the medium-sized teams that suffer here – too large to allow the individual flexibility seen in smaller firms, yet not large enough to have the capacity and resources to devote to these projects.