

probono.net



# BRIDGING THE JUSTICE GAP

Pro Bono Net  
2011 Annual Report



## MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTORS

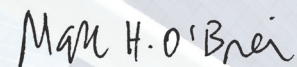
Since its founding in 1998, Pro Bono Net has been at the forefront of our community's efforts to develop innovative and sustainable solutions to narrow the justice gap. Our core programs—probono.net, LawHelp.org, LawHelp Interactive, Immigration Advocates Network, LiveHelp and Pro Bono Manager—connect poor people to information and tools that empower them to help themselves; connect volunteer lawyers to pro bono opportunities, training and support; and build the capacity of nonprofit organizations, courts and other justice allies to scale their efforts.

The need for our services has only increased as more Americans find themselves living near or below the poverty line, even as funding for legal aid declines. Against this backdrop, technology can have a powerful multiplier effect, allowing pro bono and legal services organizations to do more with less, facilitating collaboration and giving individuals more power

to protect their rights. We see this every day when our programs provide access to critically needed legal information in rural Texas, assist a lawful permanent resident to naturalize via a Spanish-language online interview, or make it easier for a pro bono attorney to help a client avoid losing her home to foreclosure.

In the following pages, you will learn how, in collaboration with our partners nationwide, we are leveraging technology to overcome barriers to justice. We are very proud of what we have accomplished together over the past year, and pleased to share with you these examples of how Pro Bono Net is bridging the justice gap.

Mark O'Brien



Executive Director, Pro Bono Net

Allison McDermott



Deputy Director, Pro Bono Net









Since its founding in 1998, Pro Bono Net has been a pioneering force in using innovative technologies to help bridge the justice gap.



## OVERVIEW

# BRIDGING THE JUSTICE GAP

Today, almost 1 in 6 Americans are living in poverty. Even more shockingly, 1 in 3 Americans live below 150% of the poverty guidelines. Virtually all of these people will have great difficulty paying an attorney when faced with a civil legal issue that may lead to the loss of their housing, income or even their children. Increasing poverty, coupled with decreased funding for legal services, means that millions of people are forced to navigate an often incomprehensible system with no help at all. The societal costs of failing to address these problems include increased homelessness, more families being broken apart, and even the risk of injury or death.

Since our founding in 1998, Pro Bono Net has been a pioneering force in using innovative technologies to help bridge the justice gap. Over the past 14 years, Pro Bono Net has empowered the public interest legal community nationwide to improve its knowledge sharing, increase private attorney involvement, provide better

tools for self-help and enhance collaboration. Our core programs—probono.net, LawHelp.org, LawHelp Interactive, Immigration Advocates Network, LiveHelp and Pro Bono Manager—help thousands of people every day, and millions each year, address potentially devastating legal issues.

As a leader in incorporating technology and collaboration into legal service delivery, Pro Bono Net is addressing significant barriers faced by legal aid organizations struggling to provide services with shrinking resources, and by individuals unable to secure the assistance of an attorney. By helping to overcome a range of different obstacles, Pro Bono Net's innovative programs are helping to bridge the justice gap.

## Our Core Programs

[probono.net](#)

[LawHelp.org](#)

[LawHelp Interactive](#)

[Immigration Advocates Network](#)

[Pro Bono Manager](#)

[LiveHelp](#)

probono.net membership  
increased by

**150%**

FROM 2006 – 2011





## BRIDGING GAPS IN GEOGRAPHY

Even in populous states, there is a disparity in the availability of and need for legal services in remote areas. In more rural states, this issue is particularly glaring. In Montana, the statewide legal aid program has a service area that spans more than 800 miles—roughly the distance from New York to Chicago. Pro Bono Net worked with the Montana Legal Services Association and other local partners on a project that placed legal assistance kiosks in public libraries and courthouses in eastern Montana, where the drive to access services can be more than 100 miles.

The kiosks allow people to easily access MontanaLawHelp.org, part of the national LawHelp.org network of nonprofit legal information portals developed by Pro Bono Net, which connects people with free online legal referrals, information about common civil legal issues and self-help tools. Those who have trouble navigating the site can turn to LiveHelp, a real-time, chat-based support service developed by Pro Bono Net for use on LawHelp sites. A trained navigator helps guide the user to needed resources. This service is particularly

valuable for those with low literacy, limited English proficiency, or who are uncomfortable navigating online.

LiveHelp is used on sites in ten states, and in 2011 nearly 12,000 visitors used it to find vitally needed information and referrals. The LawHelp network assists more than 4.3 million visitors per year in 25 states nationwide. A redesign deployed in 2011 made it more accessible and user-friendly, and enables better use of multimedia and multilingual resources. We also secured funding to develop a mobile version of LawHelp.

### LawHelp Network

USED IN  
**25**  
STATES  
NATIONWIDE

ASSISTING

**4.3M**  
VISITORS  
PER YEAR

“Without the collaboration with Pro Bono Net, Montana Legal Services wouldn’t be able to do half of what we can do to help people. We’ve had success getting information to domestic violence victims that live in rural locations where their abuser is watching every move they make. They can go down to the library and get on the computer and say they’re getting books for their kids but actually get information about how to be safe.”

—Alison Paul, Executive Director,  
Montana Legal Services Association



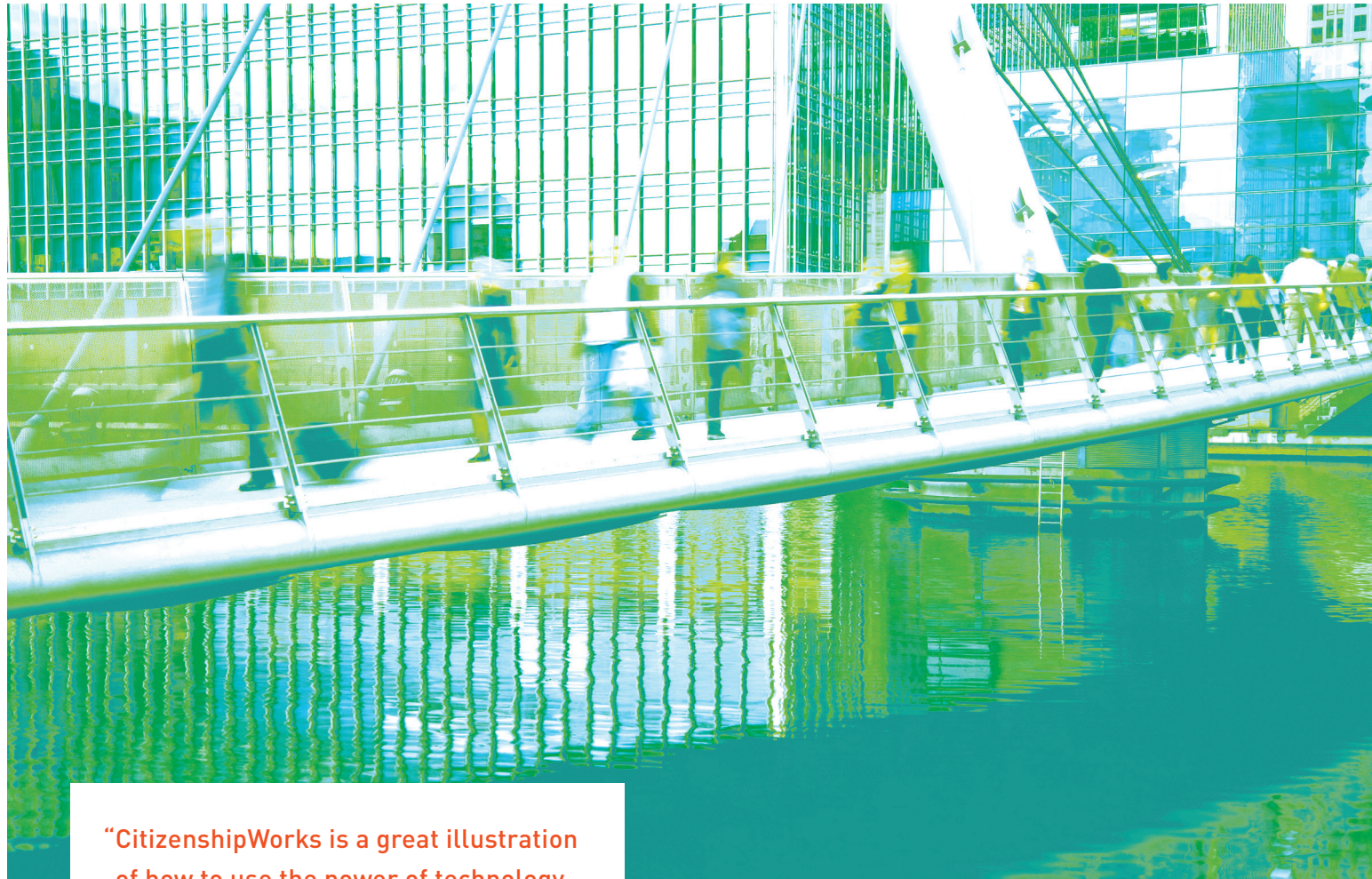


## BRIDGING GAPS IN LANGUAGE

Language and culture are two significant factors that can prevent meaningful access to legal information and services. Pro Bono Net, in partnership with the Immigration Advocates Network and the Immigrant Legal Resource Center, is helping immigrants overcome obstacles to navigating the citizenship process with CitizenshipWorks.org.

CitizenshipWorks provides easy-to-use, online tools to help low-income individuals answer important questions about their eligibility for naturalization, better understand the naturalization process and prepare for the naturalization tests. Resources are available in English, Spanish, Chinese and Vietnamese. In addition to its use by individuals, the service is used by nonprofits that provide free or low-cost naturalization application services, often in the context of group processing workshops that allow large numbers of people to receive services.

CitizenshipWorks improves the quantity, quality and efficiency of naturalization legal services, reducing the overall cost to both organizations and individuals. It also empowers clients to take a more active and informed role in the naturalization process. CitizenshipWorks was recognized with the 2012 Webby Award for Best Law Site.



**“CitizenshipWorks is a great illustration of how to use the power of technology to increase your impact.”**

**-Manuel J. Santamaria, Grantmaking Director  
at Silicon Valley Community Foundation**



## BRIDGING GAPS IN SUPPORT

In recent years, courts have seen rising numbers of unrepresented litigants who must navigate a bewildering system with little guidance. In New York alone, 2.3 million people a year navigate the State's complex civil justice system without an attorney. Studies have shown that 99% of defendants in consumer debt and landlord-tenant cases have no lawyer, leaving them on their own in an incredibly intimidating and stressful situation. The rising number of unrepresented litigants also puts extra pressure on court staff and contributes to delays and increased costs throughout the court system, which is struggling to manage a significant budget reduction.

LawHelp Interactive was used  
to complete more than

**300,000**

FORMS NATIONWIDE  
IN 2011

**47%**

INCREASE  
FROM 2010

A major source of relief for both unrepresented litigants and court staff in New York is a series of "do-it-yourself" legal forms developed by the court using LawHelp Interactive, the national online document assembly service operated by Pro Bono Net. The DIY forms, available online and in court self-help centers, help litigants prepare personalized, ready-to-file forms by leading them through a series of simple questions.

A 2011 case study on the New York Courts concluded: "By building and hosting DIY court forms with LawHelp Interactive, the NY State Unified Court System is improving access

to justice for unrepresented litigants, easing the administrative burden on court staff, and working within its tightening resources."

New York is one of 26 states using LawHelp Interactive, with at least a dozen more in the process of implementing the service. By providing a national infrastructure that also includes training and technical assistance, and promoting cross-jurisdictional sharing of templates and best practices, Pro Bono Net enables the creation and distribution of online forms and the sharing of expertise with minimal cost and effort. Nationwide, more than 300,000 forms were completed using LawHelp Interactive during 2011, a 47% increase over the prior year.

**"Extremely helpful and easy to use—  
more convenient than reading lengthy  
instructions in court and nervously  
filling them out. Thank you"**

—LawHelp Interactive User, Chicago, Illinois







## BRIDGING GAPS IN CAPACITY

At a time when legal services organizations and pro bono programs are trying to do more with less, Pro Bono Net plays a unique role, providing technology, bolstering collaboration and sharing information to ensure best practices. The probono.net network of sites for pro bono and legal services attorneys provides training, practice resources and information to thousands of attorneys nationwide, and allows legal services organizations to recruit and engage volunteers. The probono.net platform also ensures that other technology tools, such as online legal forms, are fully leveraged.

**“Pro Bono Manager is one of our key management tools...connecting lawyers to pro bono opportunities of interest and putting controls and procedures in place to assure that our pro bono clients are receiving the same high level of service provided to our paying clients.”**

**—Thomas A. Gottschalk, Of Counsel, Kirkland & Ellis**

In Minnesota, for example, Legal Services State Support and local partners used LawHelp Interactive to build an online tool to help pro bono attorneys take on expungement cases—a serious need in a state where all encounters with the criminal justice system, including brief encounters with police, minor charges, and decades-old convictions, generate

publicly accessible records that can prevent someone from getting a job or renting a home.

The expungement tool is accessible on ProJusticeMN, Minnesota’s statewide website for pro bono and legal aid attorneys, part of the probono.net network. It’s thus available to attorneys in rural parts of the state, as well as those participating in a monthly clinic run by Dorsey & Whitney, a Minneapolis law firm. Legal Services State Support was awarded the 2012 Law Technology News Innovation Award for Pro Bono in recognition of the expungement tool.

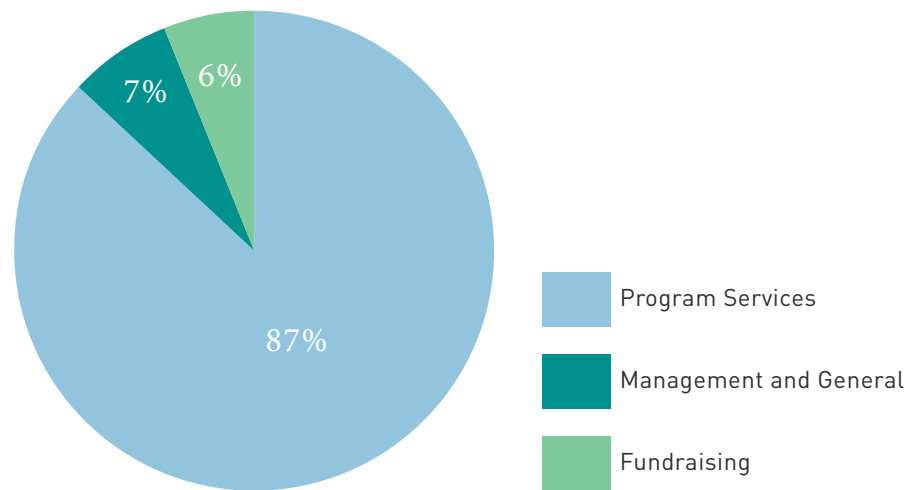
Pro Bono Net is also helping large law firms increase their pro bono capacity by helping them better manage their pro bono programs. Overseeing, monitoring and reporting on hundreds of pro bono matters, while also tracking the pro bono preferences and goals of hundreds of attorneys, is extremely time-consuming and labor-intensive. To address this, Pro Bono Net developed Pro Bono Manager, a pro bono practice management solution that is now used by a dozen large firms.

By streamlining the management and reporting involved in running a pro bono program, which can encompass hundreds of attorneys in multiple offices, Pro Bono Manager frees up more time for higher-value work such as forging new partnerships with nonprofit agencies and offering support to pro bono attorneys tackling a complex case or unfamiliar area of law. As an earned-income initiative, Pro Bono Manager also contributes to Pro Bono Net’s overall sustainability.

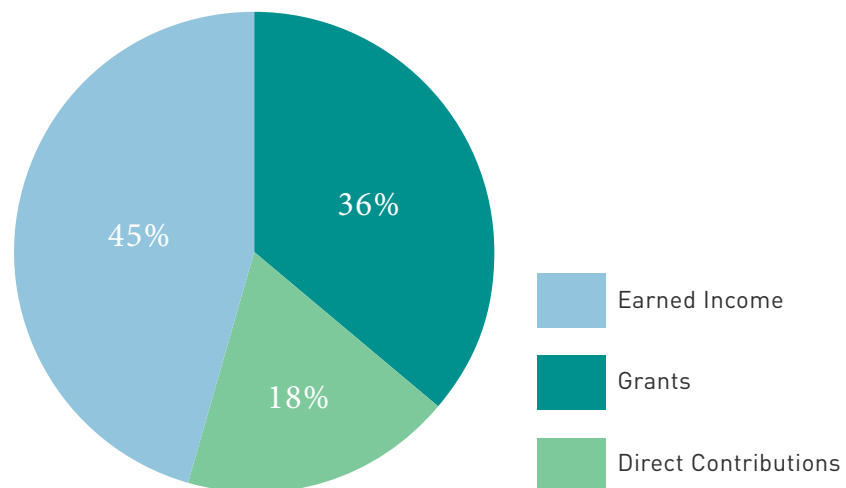


## FINANCIALS

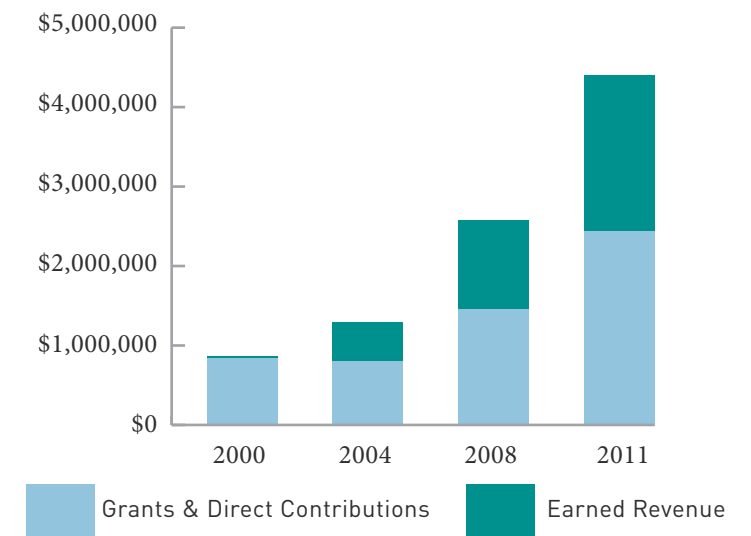
EXPENSES



INCOME DISTRIBUTION



REVENUE GROWTH





## STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES

For the Year Ended December 31, 2011

	Unrestricted	Temporarily Restricted	Total
<b>SUPPORT AND REVENUE</b>			
Contributions	\$937,198	\$926,003	\$1,863,201
Corporate sponsorship	192,070		192,070
Donated software	42,262		42,262
Donated goods and services	469,465		469,465
Interest and other income	73,279		73,279
Program fees	1,286,513		1,286,513
Product subscription fees	465,338		465,338
Net assets released from restriction	298,716	(298,716)	–
<b>Total support and revenue</b>	<b>3,764,841</b>	<b>627,287</b>	<b>4,392,128</b>
<b>EXPENSES</b>			
Program services	3,297,554		3,297,554
Management and general	251,266		251,266
Fund raising	244,020		244,020
<b>Total expenses</b>	<b>3,792,840</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3,792,840</b>
<b>NET ASSETS</b>			
Beginning	1,044,063	298,716	1,342,779
Change in Net Assets (Revenue minus Expenses)	(27,999)	627,287	599,288
Ending	\$1,016,064	\$926,003	\$1,942,067



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These organizations provided donated goods or services in 2011.

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Those listed below contributed \$1,000 or more in 2011.

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Suzette Brooks Masters and Seth Masters  
Michael Mills  
Kenneth O'Brien  
William Pollak  
Stephen Warnke



## PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

Among the more than 300 public interest legal organizations that have joined us in meeting the challenge of increasing access to justice by embracing collaboration and new technologies, the following partners merit special recognition:

### NATIONAL LAWHELP ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Jonathan Asher, Colorado Legal Services  
Joan Fairbanks, Washington State Bar Association and Access to Justice Board  
Phyllis Holmen, Georgia Legal Services Program  
Patrick McClintock, Iowa Legal Aid  
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Ron Staudt, Chicago-Kent College of Law  
Marc Lauritsen, Capstone Practice Systems  
Betty Balli Torres, Texas Access to Justice Foundation

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American Bar Association Commission on Immigration  
American Immigration Lawyers Association

American Immigration Council  
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Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc.  
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Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service  
National Immigration Law Center  
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OneJustice  
Colorado Legal Services  
Florida Legal Services  
Atlanta Legal Aid Society  
Georgia Legal Services Program  
Guam Legal Services Corporation  
Legal Aid Society of Hawaii

Iowa Legal Aid  
Southeast Louisiana Legal Services  
Micronesia Legal Services Corporation  
Legal Services State Support  
Minnesota State Bar Association  
North Mississippi Rural Legal Services  
Mississippi Volunteer Lawyers Project  
Mississippi Center for Legal Services  
Montana Legal Services Association  
Nevada Legal Services  
LawHelp/NY Consortium  
Legal Aid of North Carolina  
Legal Aid Services of Oklahoma  
Pro Bono Law Ontario  
Legal Aid Services of Oregon  
Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network  
South Carolina Legal Services  
Texas Legal Services Center  
Virginia Poverty Law Center  
Blue Ridge Legal Services  
Northwest Justice Project  
DC Bar Pro Bono Program

**probono.net**  
*lawyers serving the public good*

**LawHelp.org**

**LawHelp**  
INTERACTIVE

 **Immigration Advocates**  
NETWORK

**probonoMANAGER**

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