

# Charity begins at work

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## Leading the pack

**As more law firms work to expand their provision of pro bono, some firms are outstripping others in both effort and accomplishment. We decided to celebrate those firms with an award to the law firm most committed to the practice of pro bono.**

But this, the first of our awards, was just too close to call. We convened a committee of pro bono experts both in the region and outside, in law firms, bar associations, universities and pro bono clearing-houses (see box, bottom right). Their opinions on winning law firms were evenly split.

Winning firms
<b><u>Morales, Noguera, Valdivieso &amp; Besa</u> - Chile</b>
<b><u>Von Wobeser y Sierra SC</u> - Mexico</b>
<b><u>Siqueira Castro - Advogados</u> - Brazil</b>

So, together with the committee, we decided to celebrate the achievements of three firms - [Morales, Noguera, Valdivieso & Besa](#) in Chile, [Von Wobeser y Sierra SC](#) in Mexico, and [Siqueira Castro - Advogados](#) in Brazil.

All three firms have a demonstrable commitment to pro bono. Each has a structured pro bono programme, with a nominated coordinator, and all measure and record the number of pro bono hours the firm does. In 2006, the lawyers at Morales Noguera Valdivieso & Besa did over 20 hours each (on average) of pro bono work. Von Wobeser y Sierra's lawyers did 19 hours each, and this year the firm has committed to increasing that to 25. All 296 of **Siqueira Castro's** lawyers between them did more than 4,000 hours of pro bono work – 13.5 per lawyer.

All of the firms also firmly place pro bono within their associates' professional development. Most notable in this sphere was **Siqueira Castro**, which uses an associate's commitment to pro bono as one of the considerations when deciding whether to promote them – one of our judges picked that as a key reason for choosing the firm. Von Wobeser y Sierra, meanwhile, not only demands that all lawyers and interns contribute to the firm's pro bono effort but has also created an award for the most committed member of staff. Morales Noguera was perhaps most conscious of the difficulties of evenly balancing pro bono work throughout the firm, acknowledging that some associates do too much pro bono and some too little. Nonetheless they too include pro bono in each associates' annual evaluation and heavily promote broad participation.

When deciding what type of pro bono they want to be involved in, all of the firms, to a greater or lesser extent, also ensure they use their legal skills to maximise the usefulness of the pro bono programme. Von Wobeser y Sierra acknowledges in its policy that not all uncharged work is considered pro bono, and that to qualify, legal advice must be rendered to underprivileged groups or individuals, to the organisations that help them or to not-for-profit cultural, educational, ecological or sports organisations.

Morales Noguera has a similar approach, advising for example a project called 'Servicios Virtuales', headed by Christian Rodríguez, a professional diver who had an accident and was disabled. His organisation offers a call centre service, staffed by disabled people who can work from home.

### Other shortlisted firms

Barrera, Siqueiros y Torres Landa SC, Mexico

Carey y Cía, Chile

Estudio Echecopar, Peru

Estudio Olaechea, Peru

Gómez-Pinzón Abogados, Colombia

Mattos Filho, Veiga Filho, Marrey Jr e Quiroga  
Advogados, Brazil

Negri & Teijeiro Abogados, Argentina

### The judging committee

#### **Marcos Fuchs**

Executive director, Instituto Pro Bono, Brazil

#### **Alicia Merchant**

General coordinator, Asociación de Servicios Legales, Barra Mexicana

#### **Michael Gillespie and Laren spirer**

Partner and pro bono coordinator, respectively, [Debevoise & Plimpton LLP](#)

#### **Dan Grunfeld**

President and CEO, Public Counsel

#### **Helena Alviar**

Los Andes Law School, Colombia

#### **Francesca Lavin**

Partner, [Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton LLP](#)

The firm has also given corporate advice to the 'Make a Wish Foundation' as it set up a branch in Chile. The charity makes the dreams of terminally ill children come true.

**Siqueira Castro** provides legal advice to a number of foundations and institutions, including CAMP Mangueira, a programme started in Rio de Janeiro Mangueira's shanty town to train young people for the job market, or MAE, an institution which works to rehabilitate prisoners. Siqueira Castro does do a great deal of volunteer work, which some might not consider 'true' pro bono – although the firm also contributes a significant, and rising, amount financially to charities (as does Von Wobeser, although the firm thinks of this as separate from its pro bono policy).

All of the firms did acknowledge that they faced obstacles building their pro bono programme into the future. Those at Morales Noguera said that encouraging senior members of the firm to take part could be tricky, and those at **Siqueira Castro** also felt that it could be hard to convince all members of legal staff to participate, particularly at busy times. Von Wobeser y Sierra, meanwhile, felt that ensuring all its lawyers felt they were improving access to justice, rather than simply working for free, might take some work.

Our three leading firms, then, have hardly perfected the art and reality of pro bono, and acknowledge that they are continuing to improve their programmes, for the good of society. Nonetheless, in terms of a demonstrable commitment, and in terms of the tangible good they have done for the neediest and least privileged members of their society, **they deserve to be congratulated.**

Fonte:

<http://www.latinlawyer.com/article.php?id=11811&pageno=4>