

**FPA Pro Bono Program**

**Frequently Asked Questions[[1]](#footnote-1)**

1. **What is the FPA Pro Bono Program?**

A way for FPA members to give back to their communities by providing free financial planning advice to individuals and families in need or crisis.

1. **Who is eligible for pro bono services?**

The FPA program targets underserved individuals and families who lack the resources to retain a financial planner on their own, as well as nonprofit community-based organizations (CBOs) that serve this population.

1. **Who manages the pro bono program?**

FPA manages the program with support from FPA’s pro bono program partner, the Foundation for Financial Planning.

FPA’s pro bono program partner, the Foundation for Financial Planning, has been serving as the administrator of FPA’s pro bono program in recent years. It is through continued, open collaboration that the organizations have transitioned the management of FPA's pro bono program to FPA.

FPA and the Foundation have been working together with a focus on delivering optimal management for pro bono initiatives and support to the volunteers that serve people in need of education and financial planning. Through its strategic partnership, FPA and the Foundation provide thousands of pro bono hours annually in communities across the country. In 2017, the Foundation’s grants to FPA supports its national pro bono program, as well as local chapter events and programs.

1. **How is pro bono financial planning defined?**

FPA’s nationwide network of nearly 86 chapters lead the way to help thousands of Americans struggling to financially achieve their goals and dreams through a variety of community outreach programs through FPA chapters.

The FPA Pro Bono Program targets underserved individuals and families striving to build assets and improve their lives but cannot afford to engage a planner on their own. Chapters may also outreach to other populations in need to meet the specific needs of their communities.

1. **What is the difference between pro bono advice and other community services programs?**

FPA’s community service activities can be divided into three basic areas: 1) pro bono; 2) disaster relief; and 3) financial education. In addition, FPA actively promotes public awareness of the value of financial planning to encourage the use of paid financial planning services provided by its members.

An example of a disaster relief program would be helping victims in the immediate aftermath of a natural disaster by providing them with basic financial advice about personal finance issues that arise as a result of the disaster, no matter their net worth or ability to pay for professional advice. A financial education program might be teaching middle and high school students about basic financial planning issues as part of a Junior Achievement program. All are encouraged by FPA and equally valued as a way to give back to your community.

1. **What is the difference between pro bono and public awareness?**

Pro bono and the other forms of community service (disaster relief and financial education) involve providing free services to targeted populations for the good of the community, with no expectation of return. It has a charity aspect. Public awareness involves improving the general public’s knowledge of financial issues and the planning process, with the expectation that some of them will engage FPA members in business relationships. It has a marketing aspect. Though different, they do share some rules (no promotion or sales of specific products, etc.) and they are both valuable activities for FPA.

1. **Who is eligible to participate in the FPA Pro Bono Program?**

To ensure consistency of representation, information and procedures for pro bono financial planning efforts, FPA’s policy on pro bono volunteer eligibility is as follows:

To serve as an FPA pro bono volunteer providing financial planning education to the public, individuals must:

* Be a FPA member in good standing
* Complete FPA’s Pro Bono Financial Training (formerly known as Pro Bono Boot Camp)
* Sign the pro bono letter of engagement that states he/she will take responsibility for services provided in the engagement
* Be a CFP professional in good standing with CFP Board, or
* Be a non CFP professional who agrees to abide by FPA’s Code of Ethics and Standard of Care and who works in conjunction with a CFP practitioner.

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All those involved in a pro bono engagement on behalf of FPA must adhere to FPA’s *pro* *bono* procedures and guidelines found in the FPA Connect “Pro Bono 360” group library 🡺

1. **If I do not provide advice, is there something else I can do?**

Chapter program management, content creation and outreach to potential partners are open to all FPA members.

1. **Can I provide pro bono advice to a group instead of an individual?**

A pro bono client may also be a nonprofit community-based organization (CBO) with 501(c) (3) status whose mission and/or application of whose mission focuses on our target population. In such engagements, advice tailored to the general needs of the organization’s participants may be presented on a group basis as well as one-on-one. All other guidelines and restrictions on marketing and promoting professional services would apply.

1. **How should a chapter determine who is eligible for public benefits?**

There are several ways to determine who is best suited to receive pro bono help. Ideally, screening for eligibility should be done by the FPA chapter’s partner CBO, which understands its client population best.

If a CBO partner does not check for public benefits eligibility as part of its own screening process, FPA encourages your chapter and partner to focus on clients with little or no assets and incomes at or below 80% of the local median income, the income limit designated by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for determining eligibility for public housing. The limits for every county and metropolitan area can be found at http://www.huduser.org/datasets/il.html (see the entry at the end of this FAQ for details).

1. **Why is FPA using an income limit to determine the eligibility of pro bono clients?**

FPA’s pro bono program cannot serve every need and must be focused to be effective and sustainable. To this end, the program seeks to serve those with the greatest need who have the least access to financial planning, i.e. those who are underserved and have little to no assets. Using an income limit is a means to focus on this population.

1. **Can I provide pro bono advice to some with higher income limits than FPA’s guidelines?**

FPA chapters and members are free to determine their own criteria for delivery of pro bono services. There is a need for flexibility and freedom at the local level to handle special situations and borderline cases. However, to establish priorities at the national level, provide quality assurance to outside partners, and distinguish pro bono from other forms of community service, FPA has set parameters designed to help those most in need.

1. **I can appreciate that underserved populations have difficulty paying for financial planning, but how do we help disaster victims and military veterans if they exceed certain income requirements? Don’t they deserve pro bono help, too?**

It is up to a chapter to prioritize its work in the community service area. The national emphasis on low income people is not meant to exclude other populations. It is meant to focus FPA resources on the most vulnerable segment of all populations, whether they are disaster victims, military personnel, cancer survivors, etc.Certain chaptersmay wish to focus on disaster relief or helping our nation’s veterans without regard to income thresholds. But if the target population is very large, income thresholds can help to focus services on the segment most in need.

1. **What is a “mini-plan?”**

A mini plan is the basic financial planning process minus implementation and monitoring. It consists of three steps – 1) gathering data and setting goals, 2) data review and clarification, 3) plan presentation and discussion. It was conceived to help both volunteers and partners/clients determine the scope and limitations of a *pro bono* engagement.

1. **Why does FPA recommend the use of a mini-plan in a pro bono engagement?**

Many partner organizations and their clients may not be familiar with financial planning. The mini plan is a framework to help them understand that financial planning is not only financial literacy education but a powerful problem-solving process.

1. **Can I use pro bono in order to develop my business?**

No. Pro bono means working with vulnerable populations, and any suggestion that FPA volunteers are using it to sell something would seriously damage our credibility. Therefore, do not promote your business or any products or services while working on a pro bono engagement. Avoid using materials with corporate logos on them. Do not hand out your name card at group sessions unless someone specifically asks you for it. When working as a pro bono volunteer, you are not representing your business; you are representing FPA and the financial planning profession.

1. **How can I find out more about FPA’s pro bono program?**
* Contact a participating local FPA chapter, or consider starting a program within your own chapter - [Map of FPA Chapters](https://www.onefpa.org/community/PublishingImages/FPA_USAChapters2013.pdf).
* Join [FPA Connect “Pro Bono 360”](https://connect.onefpa.org/communities/community-home?CommunityKey=c1156798-6b11-4397-bd4e-c76fe5bbeea9) and check out the library folders.
* We suggest you start with your chapter president, pro bono director, or chapter executive. For additional assistance, contact Monica Tall at FPAProBono@onefpa.org.

**Determining Pro Bono Recipient/Client Eligibility**

FPA relies on U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) income limits for housing assistance in determining reasonable criteria for providing pro bono services. HUD determines the median income for every county and/or metropolitan area. These are updated each year, and correspond to unique economic conditions in all parts of the country. HUD defines 80% of the local median as “low income.”

To review HUD income limits:

* Click on http://www.huduser.org/datasets/il.html
* Review the Financial Year Income Limits
* Select a state and county OR select a metropolitan area.

Many community-based organizations screen their clients based on other public benefits, most of which have stricter criteria than the HUD income limits. Discuss with your partner the best and most practical way to ensure you reach the clients you want to reach.

1. These questions are guidelines only, and not requirements for participation in FPA’s national pro bono program. As separate 501(c)(6) organizations, FPA chapter affiliates may adapt programs to the unique needs of their own community. FPA has developed guidelines solely for the purpose of setting priorities at the national level, and to provide quality assurance to our national partners in the administration of pro bono programs around the country. FPA reserves the right to review and approve in advance the use of any programs and materials containing FPA’s logo or trademarks. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)