

JUMPSTART your *Public Interest* Job Search!

WHAT IS “PUBLIC INTEREST”?

“Public interest” and “public service” are used interchangeably, to mean work that is pursued on the basis of individual or group concepts of justice, fairness, and advancement of the public good, rather than for commercial or personal gain. It is a deliberately broad definition, one that encompasses working in government, as well as in non-profit organizations or public interest law firms and focuses on the critical needs of underserved populations. Public interest work allows students to explore different issues and practice settings, thus affording students opportunities to pursue their passion and worthy causes. Public interest practice is fast-paced; therefore, it is not uncommon for new attorneys to appear in court within the first few months, if not days, of employment. As such, public interest practice offers new practitioners early and significant responsibility for clients and cases.

WHERE CAN I GET A PUBLIC INTEREST JOB?

The term “public interest” encapsulates a multitude of issue areas and types of employers including: government (federal, state, and local), prosecuting attorneys, public defenders, direct legal services, public policy, international human rights, and public interest law firms. In addition to these major categories, labor unions, think tanks, alternative dispute resolution, and foundations also fall under the public interest umbrella. Public interest practice may involve litigation, regulation, and legislative or legal reform. A wonderful opportunity to learn about public interest employers and hot topics in public interest law is the Equal Justice Works Career Fair and Conference held in the Washington, DC Metropolitan area every October. Two additional events to keep on your radar are The Greater DC/Baltimore Public Service Career Fair and the WCL Externship Fair which both occur in January.

HOW DO I GET EXPERIENCE WORKING IN THE FIELD OF PUBLIC INTEREST?

Academic-year and summer internships/externships as well as pro bono projects are the perfect way to gain experience working for a public interest organization. To increase your chances of obtaining a post-graduate position in the public interest field, you are encouraged to take advantage of summer and academic-year positions while you are in law school. Because of the extreme diversity of public interest practice, carefully research those employers who serve the clients and issues that are of interest to you. The print and online resources listed on the back page will help you identify job postings and employer information. Although many positions are unpaid, a variety of funding sources and/or academic credit may be available. Funding a public interest career in light of law school debt may be a significant concern; however, there are several programs and resources for students, including WCL’s Public Interest Loan Repayment Assistance Program (PILRAP), and the College Cost Reduction and Access Act (CCRAA) to aid students in managing debt.

WHEN DO I APPLY FOR A PUBLIC INTEREST JOB?

Public interest positions are very competitive. The more organized public interest organizations start interviewing in October/November for 2Ls, and December/January for 1Ls. There are definitely organizations with deadlines in spring, but review listings early so you do not miss any opportunities. If you fail to secure a summer internship early in the semester, do not panic! More opportunities will become available. However, if you secure an internship by March, you

can apply for a WCL Equal Justice Foundation grant or funding through the Federal Work Study Program of approximately \$3,000-\$4,000 to use as a summer stipend. Additional sources of funding for summer public interest work are available through local bar foundations and other grant-making entities; information can be found in OCPD's library.

KEY RESOURCES

WCL's Public Interest Handbook

Provides an excellent overview of public interest programs, career planning and resources for pursuing a public interest career, including sections on debt and financing a public interest career and information on public interest internships. Hard copies are available in the Office of Public Interest or OCPD.

***Serving the Public: A Job Search Guide*, published by Harvard Law School**

Provides lists of public interest organizations, job search strategies, sample resumes, sample cover letters, and interview tips. The second volume is dedicated solely to international public interest law. Hard copies are available in OCPD.

Public Service Law Network (PSLawNet) (www.pslawnet.org)

A searchable database of jobs in the public interest field, including non-profit organizations, private firms, fellowships, judiciary, etc. Contains contact information for thousands of potential job resources, as well as specific job openings and essential information on post-graduate fellowship opportunities. Free for WCL students and alumni.

Equal Justice Works (www.equaljusticeworks.org)

The Equal Justice Works website provides valuable information for anyone interested in public interest law, including information about their annual public interest career fair, loan repayment, fellowships, other job opportunities and more.

Idealist (www.idealists.org)

A project of Action Without Borders that provides a directory of nonprofit and volunteer resources on the internet, with information on over 77,000 organizations in many countries. This resource is not focused on opportunities exclusively for lawyers or law students, but there are many listings that could be applicable to someone with a legal education.

CareerLink (<https://law-american-csm.symplicity.com>)

WCL's jobs database includes public interest job postings for the academic year and summer employment. Be sure to indicate your areas of interest and select the "Public Interest Listserv" in your CareerLink profile.

National Legal Aid and Defender Association (www.nlada.org)

The NLADA site provides legislative updates, information on defender-related legislation and NLADA conferences. Job listings can be found by clicking on "Jobs," are organized by region, and are posted by civil legal services or defender organizations, public interest organizations and academic institutions.

National Lawyers Guild (www.nlg.org)

For those interested in social justice, this site has great links to public interest organizations, NGOs and human rights organizations.

WCL's Public Interest Loan Repayment Assistance Program (<http://www.wcl.american.edu/finaid/pilrap.cfm>)

PILRAP is a program to help relieve the economic burden of law school debt by providing loan repayment assistance for JD graduates in full-time non-profit or government work where they serve under-represented or traditionally marginalized populations. In addition, Congress recently passed the College Cost Reduction and Access Act (CCRAA) to allow public service employees to obtain loan forgiveness after 10 years of qualifying service.

Leadership Directories: Non-Profit (www.wcl.american.edu/career/searchskills.cfm)

Provides contact information (mailing addresses, phone numbers, fax numbers and email addresses) for individuals within various public interest organizations. Access by going to the career services portion of the WCL website and clicking on "Job Search Skills and Resources." A hard copy is also available in the OCPD Library.