



Aotearoa's Pro Bono Framework

Tracking our
Pro Bono performance 2025

Published May 2026



community law
free legal help
throughout aotearoa



Introduction

The Framework for Collaborative Pro Bono in Aotearoa was launched in November 2024. The Framework is a profession-led initiative dedicated to supporting and promoting pro bono within law firms in Aotearoa New Zealand. Participation is voluntary and non-exclusive. All firms are welcome.

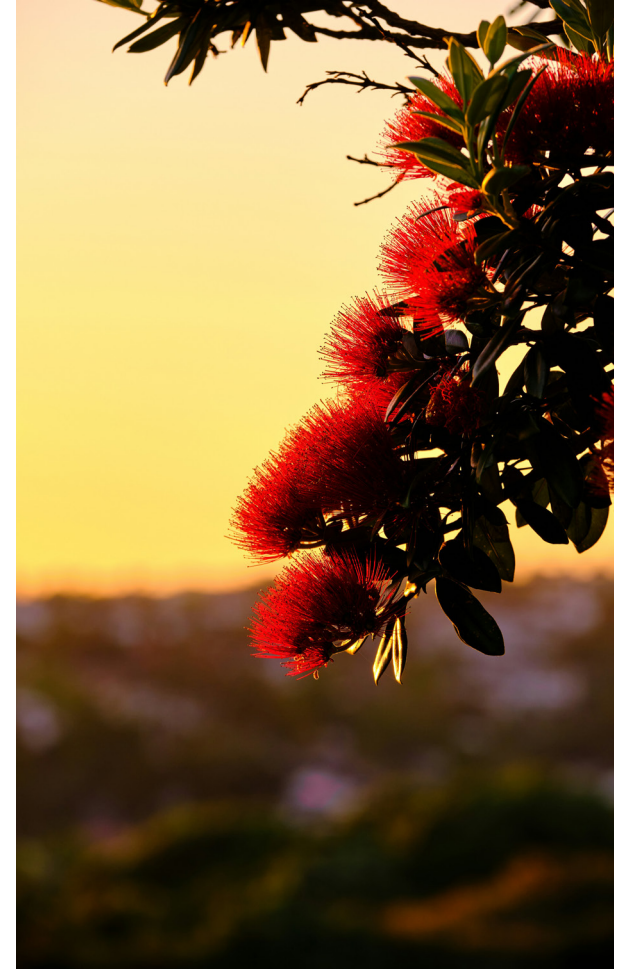
The Framework represents the first national collaboration of its kind in Aotearoa New Zealand, designed to bring structure, efficiency and shared momentum to the delivery of pro bono legal services across the motu, in ways that complement existing community services and respond more effectively to unmet legal need. Participating firms work with the support of Te Ara Ture (the pro bono clearinghouse within Community Law Centres Aotearoa). Te Ara Ture was established by Community Law Centres Aotearoa in 2021, to support the work of Community Law Centres by connecting clients in need with pro bono lawyers.

The Framework encourages participating firms to work to an aspirational target of 25 hours of pro bono legal work per fee earner

per year (averaged across the participating firm's FTE fee earners). In doing so it follows many other jurisdictions, whose legal professions have adopted pro bono targets to motivate lawyers to contribute some of their legal skills back into the community.

The Framework has the support of the New Zealand Law Society – Te Kāhui Ture o Aotearoa, recognising its ability to further increase access to justice for people who cannot afford legal representation. Participating firms agree to uphold a shared set of principles. The Framework offers a structured and identifiable pathway for lawyers to engage in pro bono legal work. It does so with a clear and inclusive definition of pro bono legal work.

For the New Zealand Law Society, Te Ara Ture and the participating firms in the Framework, there is a strong belief in a professional responsibility to promote access to justice through pro bono work and that this must be reinforced, safeguarded and promoted and the Framework provides a mechanism to do so.





Annual tracking of performance

This report covers pro bono legal work undertaken by participating firms during the 2025 calendar year (1 January to 31 December 2025), as reported to the New Zealand Law Society in early 2026.

Recognising the aims of the Framework, it is the next natural step to track progress of participating firms. Looking at the experience of other legal jurisdictions with a pro bono target, data tracking and reporting supports transparency and development of a pro bono sector.

As the Framework is still in its early stages, the questions asked of survey participants have not been complex. The survey looks to paint an initial snapshot of pro bono activity within law firms, its extent and its focus areas. It is hoped that over time the extent of survey data will increase, giving

us even more insight to the contributions, challenges and approaches law firms are taking to manage and deliver pro bono legal services. In time, the survey will form part of a longitudinal study of pro bono legal work performed by law firms in Aotearoa New Zealand.

But for now, the survey and this Report that follows from it, help us to mark out a structured pathway for lawyers to provide pro bono legal services in a way that is intentional and effective.

Thanks

Much thanks are given to the New Zealand Law Society, who have undertaken this survey and analysed the data from it for this Report. In doing so they have played a crucial part for participating firms, ensuring that they provide their data confidentially and it will be held confidentially by the New Zealand Law Society. Use of the New Zealand

Law Society to analyse the data also ensures it is produced in an anonymised format.

As the Framework's name suggests, it is a vehicle to promote collaboration, not competition. In reporting the data and in setting up what is clearly described as an "aspirational" target, participating firms want to work to ensure that pro bono work is celebrated and grown.

Much thanks also to Te Ara Ture, that continues to meet its name as a "bridge" between the legal practitioners in Aotearoa who are prepared to undertake pro bono services, and those coming into the Community Law Centres of Aotearoa, needing legal advice and representation and unable to afford it.

Then lastly thanks to the participating firms for the way that they share ideas, discuss challenges in this space and better work in with Te Ara Ture to meet community needs.

The strength in collaborating to grow pro bono

Nāu te rourou, nāku te rourou,
ka ora ai te iwi

*With your food basket and my food
basket the people will thrive.*

In its early stages, the Framework has facilitated engagement with experienced pro bono practitioners and sector experts, including from Australia. These conversations have informed best-practice approaches to governance, delivery models, supervision and sustainability, and are now being complemented by training opportunities for member firm lawyers.

Over time, the Framework aims to support participating firms to build and maintain sustainable pro bono practices, enhance lawyer engagement and professional development, and contribute to a shared evidence base that demonstrates the collective value of pro bono legal services – expanding access to justice beyond what any individual firm could achieve alone.

While it's a small collaboration at present – being DLA Piper, Gilbert Walker, Holland Beckett, Luke Cunningham Clere, Russell McVeagh and Simpson Grierson – there is very much an open door and encouragement to any other law firms who wish to sign up to the Framework and endorse its principles.



This whakataukī talks to community, to collaboration and a strength-based approach. It acknowledges that everyone has something to offer, and by working together we can all flourish.

The Framework encourages lawyers and law firms to work together, bringing the strength of their legal experience and skills to assist charities, not-for-profit organisations and individuals in need.

Collaboration within the Framework does not mean firms working on the same matters or compromising their independence. Rather, it reflects a shared commitment to strengthening access to justice by aligning effort where it adds value. Participation offers firms a structured pathway to engage in pro bono work, increased visibility of opportunities, collective insight into unmet legal needs, and a stronger connection to the community law sector.

The Framework

The participants to the Framework agree to uphold a shared set of principles and strive toward an aspirational target.

The Framework includes a clear and inclusive definition of pro bono legal work. This includes legal work provided for free, or at a substantially reduced fee to:

- Individuals who can demonstrate a need for legal assistance but cannot obtain legal aid or otherwise access the legal system without incurring significant financial hardship; or
- Individuals or organisations whose matter raises an issue of public interest which would not otherwise be pursued; or
- Charities, other not-for-profit organisations, hapū/iwi organisations, or social enterprises whose primary purpose is to work in the interests of low income or disadvantaged members of the community, or for the public good; or
- Iwi, hapū or other Māori entities, authorities, or organisations where the nature or kaupapa of the matter subject

to the legal work directly promotes the collective wellbeing of iwi, hapū, or Māori generally, and/or of the wider public.

Within the Framework pro bono work may also include:

- Law reform and policy work on issues affecting low income or disadvantaged members of the community, or on issues of public interest; or
- Providing free community legal education on issues affecting low income or disadvantaged members of the community or on issues of public interest; or
- Providing a lawyer on secondment at a community organisation (including a community legal organisation).

The definition provides parameters around what pro bono work will be counted towards the target hours of a participating firm in the survey.

The participating firms calculate the number of full time equivalent (FTE) lawyers for the year by using the average number of FTE

lawyers on the first day and the last day of the relevant calendar year. The definition of lawyers will also include partners and consultants and law graduates not yet admitted to legal practice and registered legal executives. It will not include paralegals, summer clerks, interns, or other employees who have not yet graduated, although the survey has ensured that work by these personnel will be recorded elsewhere in its questionnaire and data produced.

The questions asked in the survey are set out in [Appendix A](#) to this Report.

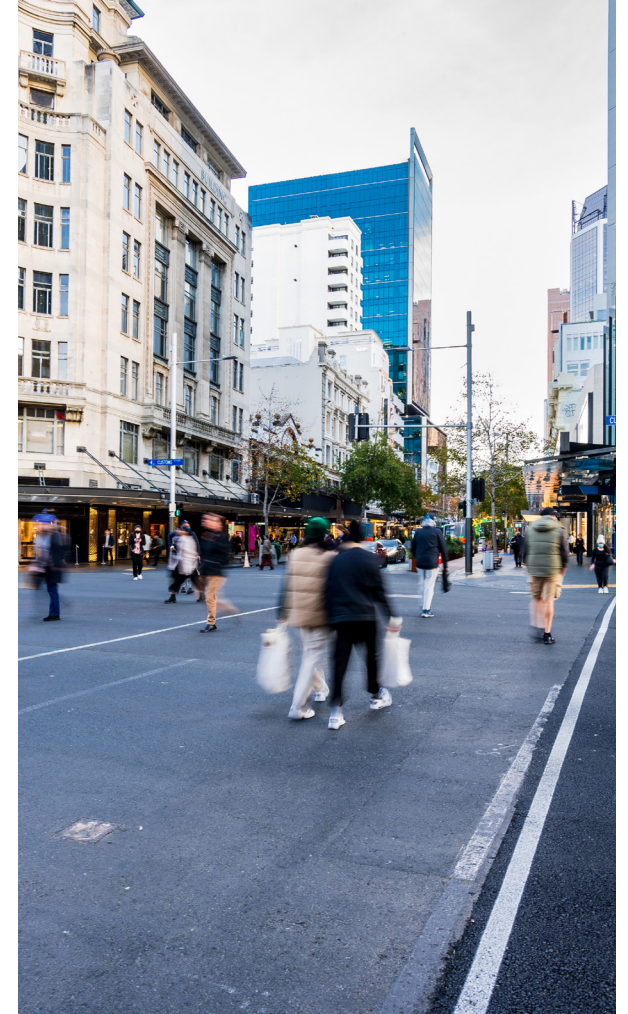
Interpreting the 2025 pro bono hours data

In 2025, participating firms reported an average of almost 28 pro bono hours per full-time equivalent lawyer across the Framework. This exceeds the Framework's aspirational target of 25 hours per FTE and reflects a strong collective commitment to pro bono engagement. It is important, however, that this result is understood in context. The Framework's inaugural cohort comprises six firms, each of which has an established pro bono practice and/or placed a deliberate focus on active pro bono engagement throughout the 2025 calendar year. The relatively small sample size means the data is more susceptible to year-on-year variation.

As additional firms join the Framework, it is anticipated that the reported average pro bono hours per FTE will decrease as the data comes to reflect a broader range of firm sizes, structures, and pro bono engagement models. While the exceptional result from 2025 is something to celebrate, the purpose of the Framework is not to create benchmarks that discourage participation, but to collectively expand access to justice across Aotearoa New Zealand.

Average pro bono hours per FTE lawyer provide a useful indicator of collective effort, however, the Framework's target of 25 hours is expressly aspirational. There is no expectation that all firms will be able to meet this target, and it is acknowledged that for some firms, it may never be achievable. Participation from those firms is no less valued. Experience from mature pro bono frameworks, including those supported by the Australian Pro Bono Centre, demonstrates that the greatest value of a collaborative framework lies not in uniform performance against a numerical benchmark, but in participation itself. In this context, sustained engagement, innovation in delivery models, and steady growth in participation and impact are more important than headline FTE averages alone.

The data also reveals strong participation across the Framework. Approximately two in three lawyers (67%) at participating firms undertook at least one hour of pro bono work during 2025. Among those who did, the average was notably higher at around 41 hours per lawyer. Together, these figures tell a richer story than the FTE average alone: pro bono engagement in these firms is not concentrated among a small group of senior practitioners but is spread broadly, reflecting a genuine culture of commitment.



Looking ahead to 2026

The Framework's ambition for 2026 is straightforward: more firms, more access, and more impact. The Framework welcomes participation from law firms of all sizes and at all stages of their pro bono journey, whether building a practice from the ground up or looking to formalise existing commitments. As more firms join, over time the Framework's data will become increasingly representative of the profession as a whole, and the collective impact on access to justice will grow.

Cost of living pressures and socioeconomic disadvantage remain significant drivers of legal need across Aotearoa, and participating firms see a meaningful role in responding in ways that are informed and co-designed with community. To join the Framework or find out more, contact Sabrina Muck, Director of Te Ara Ture: sabrina@clca.co.nz



First Annual Performance Report of Aotearoa's Pro Bono Framework



17,589.15

TOTAL PRO BONO HOURS



6
SIGNATORY
FIRMS



637.80

TOTAL FTE LAWYERS

67%

LAWYER
PARTICIPATION
RATE

41



AVERAGE PRO
BONO HOURS PER
PARTICIPATING LAWYER



27.58

AVERAGE PRO BONO
HOURS PER FTE
LAWYER

WORK FOR
NOT-FOR-PROFIT
ORGANISATIONS

86.7%

WORK FOR
INDIVIDUALS

13.3%

443 pro bono hours were dedicated to iwi, hapū and Māori entity matters. This reflects the presence of existing relationships and kaupapa-based work across the legal profession. The Framework will continue working with Te Ara Ture and Community Law Centres Aotearoa to consider how participating firms can better respond to access-to-justice needs for Māori.

Appendix A

Survey Questions

1. Name of firm signatory
First Name:
Last Name:
2. Email address of person completing this form
Email address:
3. What was the number of full-time equivalent lawyers in your firm during the 2025 calendar year?
Signatories should calculate the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) lawyers for the year by using the average of the number of FTE lawyers on the first day and the last day of the 2025 calendar year.
(FTE lawyers at 1 January 2025 + FTE lawyers at 31 December 2025) ÷ 2
"Lawyers" includes partners and consultants. It also includes law graduates not yet admitted to legal practice and registered legal executives.
"Lawyers" does not include paralegals, summer clerks, interns or other employees who have not yet graduated. Pro bono work undertaken by these people will be recorded elsewhere in this questionnaire.
4. How many hours of pro bono legal work (including any work undertaken for a substantially reduced fee) did lawyers in your firm carry out in total in 2025?
Only include work undertaken by "lawyers" as defined above.
The definition of pro bono legal services adopted by the Collaborative Framework can be found [here](#).
The New Zealand Law Society will calculate the average hours of pro bono legal work per FTE lawyer for you (by dividing the total of your answer in question 4 by your answer in question 3).
If you have undertaken work for a substantially reduced fee, this should be included in your reported hours at question 4. Substantially reduced fees are those fees that have been reduced by at least 50% of what would otherwise be charged by your firm for the matter.
If you are reporting on hours undertaken at a substantially reduced fee, the number of hours that you report in question 4 should only reflect the percentage of those hours that were not charged to the client. For example, if your firm undertook 100 hours of work on a matter that was agreed to have a substantially reduced fee, and the fee was reduced by 50% of what the firm would usually charge, you would report 50 hours for question 4.

Appendix A

Survey Questions

5. Did your answer at question 4 (total pro bono hours) include any work undertaken for a substantially reduced fee?
6. Did your lawyers undertake any Civil Legal Aid work during 2025?
7. Did your paralegals, summer clerks, interns, or equivalent employee who has not yet graduated, undertake any pro bono work of a legal nature during 2025?
8. How many hours of pro bono work of a legal nature did they do?
9. During 2025, what was the estimated number of pro bono hours devoted to work for individuals (as opposed to organisations)?
10. During 2025, what was the estimated number of pro bono hours devoted to work for organisations (as opposed to individuals)?
11. What percentage of your lawyers did at least one hour of pro bono work in 2025?

To answer this question, you need to identify the total headcount of all lawyers across the year as well as how many lawyers undertook at least one hour of pro bono legal work.

This answer reflects overall lawyer participation in pro bono work, not FTE. Please report the percentage of your firm's total lawyer headcount for the year, including those who joined or left, regardless of full-time or part-time status. For this calculation, it does not matter how long someone is with the firm and headcount should not be pro-rated. For example, if someone left the firm on 1 February 2025 only working one month of the year, they still need to be counted in this answer.

Divide the number of lawyers who performed 1+ pro bono hours by the total number of lawyers. Times by 100 to get the %.

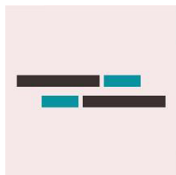
For example: If your firm had 50 lawyers working in 2025 (25 full-time, 25 part-time), and 35 of them completed at least one hour of pro bono work, your participation rate is $(35 \div 50) \times 100 = 70\%$.

12. How many pro bono legal hours were dedicated to iwi, hapū or other Māori entities, authorities or organisations, where the nature or kaupapa of the matter directly promotes the collective wellbeing of iwi, hapū or Māori generally, and/or the wider public?



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