

**Chicago-Kent College of Law: Career Services Office
Public Interest Career Plan**

When you have completed this survey, please schedule an appointment with Michelle Mohr Vodenik in the Career Services Office, mvodenik@kentlaw.edu

Name: _____

Street Address: _____

City State Zip: _____

Home number: _____

Cell number: _____

Email other than Kent: _____

Expected Graduation: _____

Do you have professional work experience? _____Yes _____No

If so, please specify in what fields and how many years of experience you have:

Please list any past or present community service experience (include any legal or law-related community service):

Why are you interested in pursuing a certificate in public interest law?

Do you have any skills or certifications that will contribute to your pursuit of a career in public interest law (i.e. additional languages, mediator certification, etc.)

List any non-profit public interest organizations of which you are a member, that relate to your career goals:

Geographic Preference:

___ Chicago

___ Downstate Illinois

___ Washington, DC

Other location (s): _____

Public Interest Career Plan: Practice Areas

Public interest practice areas, please circle all that interest you:

Administrative Law

Government / Regulatory Law

AIDS / HIV

Health / Medical

Animal Rights

Homeless / Housing Law

Arts

Immigration Law

Bankruptcy and Consumer Debt

International Human Rights Law

Children / Youth

Judicial Clerking / Court Staff Attorney

Civil Rights / Civil Liberties

Legal Aid

Community Economic Development

Legislative Policy and Analysis

Constitutional

Litigation

Consumer Law

Migrant Workers

Criminal Law

Military JAG / Civilian Attorney

Death Penalty / Prisoners' Rights

Native American issues

Disability Law

Poverty

Education

Public Benefits / Welfare Reform

Elder Law

Reproductive Rights

Employment / Labor

Religious / Faith-based

Environmental / Energy

Tax

Family Law

Women

Gay / Lesbian / Transgender Law

Zoning and Land Use

Other:

Public Interest Career Plan: Practice Settings

**Public Interest Practice Settings, please circle all that interest you:
See information below regarding each of these settings.**

- A. Nonprofit Public Interest Organizations – Client Oriented / Legal Aid
- B. Nonprofit Public Interest Organizations – Policy Oriented
- C. Public Defenders
- D. Prosecuting Attorneys
- E. Executive / Administrative Agencies
- F. Legislatures
- G. Courts
- H. International Public Interest Work
- I. Private Public Interest Law Firms
- J. Law Firms Performing Pro Bono Work

Public Interest Practice Setting Descriptions

A. Nonprofit Public Interest Organizations – Client Oriented / Legal Aid

Client-oriented nonprofit public interest organizations provide legal assistance to people who could otherwise not afford representation. Legal assistance providers often referred to as legal service organizations or legal aid societies usually handle matters involving government benefits, housing, family law, consumer law, and employment issues. Some organizations specialize in particular areas such as the elderly, or immigration law. Lawyers in legal assistance programs have significant client contact through client counseling, negotiations, and assistance with legal documents, research, and representation. Examples of this kind of organization include the Legal Assistance Foundation of Chicago, Land of Lincoln Legal Assistance Foundation, AIDS Legal Council of Chicago, or Michigan Migrant Legal Assistance Project.

B. Nonprofit Public Interest Organization – Policy Oriented

Policy-oriented organizations often conduct impact litigation -- taking cases with the intention of creating legal policy and precedents that will affect large numbers of people on a particular issue. Often such offices supplement impact litigation with other forms of

advocacy including lobbying, grassroots organizing, and community-based education. Examples of such organizations include The American Civil Liberties Union, The Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law and Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund.

C. Public Defenders

Public defenders provide free criminal defense for the accused who cannot afford legal representation. They represent defendants charged with felonies and misdemeanors, as well as juveniles charged with delinquency. They exist on the state and federal levels. Although public defenders are usually government employees, in some states or cities the work is contracted out to private nonprofit organizations. Federal Defender offices operate in conjunction with U.S. District Courts. In addition to the Cook County Public Defender, all counties in the Chicago metropolitan area have governmental, attorney-staffed public defender offices. The State Appellate Defender handles appeals in the Illinois system, through several regional offices and a Capital Litigation Division. Public defenders gain extensive trial experience.

D. Prosecuting Attorneys

District or state attorneys prosecute people accused of violating state or local criminal laws, while US Attorneys prosecute people accused of violating federal criminal statutes. Like public defenders, prosecuting attorneys engage in significant pretrial and trial activities and gain extensive trial experience. Prosecuting attorney offices include the Cook County State's Attorney's Office, the Office of the Illinois Attorney General, the US Attorney's Office, and the United States Department of Justice.

E. Executive / Administrative Agencies

Executive agencies employ lawyers as in-house counsel to develop regulations, monitor compliance, draft and research legislation, and participate in administrative hearings. Opportunities for lawyers interested in this type of employment are available at both the state and federal levels. The Federal Trade Commission, Environmental Protection Agency, and the Illinois Department of Education are all examples of executive agencies.

The Department of Justice represents the federal government in court on a broad range of matters and is responsible for the prosecution of federal crimes. The state counterpart to the Department of Justice is the Attorney General's Office. In addition to representing the state government in court, many Attorney General offices assume regulatory and law enforcement responsibilities in a variety of areas, including criminal law, consumer protection, health insurance, and environmental protection.

On the local level, law departments are called City or County Attorney's or Corporation Counsel, and they represent city councils, county boards, mayors and other municipal employees, handling such diverse legal matters as economic development projects, labor relations, and civil rights cases. The City of Chicago Department of Law is an example.

F. Legislatures

Many opportunities exist for attorneys on Capitol Hill and in state legislatures, as legislative assistants on individual members' personal staffs and as staff attorneys for Senate and House committees. These lawyers help draft legislation, render legal advice regarding proposed legislation, and investigate matters of interest to the legislator or committee. For most committee positions, previous relevant employment is required.

G. Courts

Judicial clerkships and staff attorney positions exist at state and federal levels. Clerkships can be for a specific duration -- typically one or two years -- or for an indefinite time period as a permanent position. Judicial clerks analyze briefs or memoranda, perform additional legal research, write memoranda, and consult with judges on various issues. Judges also hire law students for short-term employment as interns and externs to assist in research and drafting judicial opinions.

H. International Public Interest Work

Public international law is one of the fastest growing fields within the public sector. The US Government hires attorneys to work on international issues in many of its agencies such as the State Department and the Department of Commerce. Many lawyers are also employed at the United Nations, the World Bank, the Organization of American States, and other quasi-governmental organizations. Finally, there are thousands of nonprofits, based both in the US and abroad that focus on international issues. Examples include Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the Heartland Alliance.

I. Private Public Interest Law Firms

A small but growing number of private practice firms practice public interest law. These private firms either emphasize, or exclusively practice, public interest legal work serving particular groups, such as union members, or specialize in issue-oriented work, such as civil rights litigation, tenant advocacy, school law, or representing "whistleblowers." They may support the work through contingent fees, statutory attorney's fees, or contracts with government or nonprofit entities.

J. Law Firms Performing Pro Bono Work

Several prominent law firms promote firm-wide pro bono programs in which lawyers are asked to handle a certain number of pro bono cases. These programs differ among the law firms but frequently include the following: Associate Service, where a law firm releases associates to work full-time for a period of time at a nonprofit legal service provider; Matching Projects, where law firms agree to be matched with agencies serving poor people; and Legal Clinics, where law firms have established their own legal clinic programs, staffed and administered exclusively by the attorneys and other employees of the firm.