

Welcome to the Bernard Koteen Office of Public Interest Advising (OPIA)!

We are a career services office at Harvard Law School specializing in public interest law. Our primary goal is to encourage students and lawyers to embrace a career that incorporates an ongoing commitment to public service work. To achieve this goal, we offer **advising appointments, Internet resources, and speaker events and workshops.**

This guide is meant as a starting point to OPIA's many resources. You'll find answers to:

- What is public interest law?
- How can I gain public interest experience?
- How do I learn more about public interest work?
- Who can I talk to for advice?
- What if I'm also interested in private sector work?
- How do I find a public interest job?
- How do I land a public interest job?
- How can I afford a public interest job?

What is public interest law?

We define public interest law as any work conducted on behalf of individuals and causes not often served by the for-profit bar. It is pursued on the basis of concepts of justice, equity and public good, rather than for commercial or personal gain.

Public interest work covers a wide range of:

Issue areas, including AIDS/HIV rights, children/youth, civil liberties, labor/employment, family, environment, education, and voting access.

Practice settings, including nonprofits, government, legal services, public defenders, prosecuting attorneys, and private public interest firms.

Types of advocacy, such as direct client services, civil litigation, class action, community organizing, law reform, and policy work.

For more information on all of these, visit "[What is Public Interest Law.](#)"

How can I gain public interest experience?

Extracurricular activities: Student practice organizations provide legal services to low-income communities, while service organizations carry out more general public interest work.

Pro bono work: Any legal service offered without payment for the public good. All HLS students are required to complete at least 40 hours before graduating. More information on pro bono work is on the [Office of Clinical and Pro Bono Programs'](#) website.

Academic work: [Harvard's Research Programs and Centers](#), such as the Berkman Center, promote scholarly discourse on a range of legal fields and provide research opportunities. Students can also tailor

their curriculum to fit specific public interest issue and practice areas.

Law Reviews/Journals: An excellent way to build strong legal research, writing, and editing skills. HLS has 14 [student journals](#) devoted to different substantive areas of law and legal approaches.

Summer employment: Public interest jobs can help you gain valuable legal experience and demonstrate your commitment to public service. Most positions satisfy the pro bono requirement and qualify for guaranteed summer public interest funding, and some supplemental funding sources are available. For listings and evaluations of summer positions, visit the public service section of [HELIOS](#).

Research work for faculty: Many HLS faculty produce scholarly works on public interest topics and are often in need of research assistants to assist them in this work. Some faculty members are also involved in pro bono projects. For details, consult [OPIA's online directory of public interest faculty](#).

Clinical practice: Allows you to gain direct legal experience starting as a 2L under the supervision of mentoring attorneys along with companion classroom instruction. Opportunities include Harvard's "in-house" clinics, externship placements, and independent/winter term clinical work. Visit the Office of Clinical and Pro Bono Programs in WCC 3085 or [online under "Courses and Academic Programs."](#)

How do I learn more about public interest work?

Read OPIA's weekly event emails and attend OPIA's events, which explore different issue areas, practice settings, and types of public interest legal work. They can help you gain a broad understanding of the many different public interest opportunities available.

Legal Practice Settings panels feature attorneys from diverse legal fields who share their professional experiences and answer questions.

Lunch speaker events offer the chance to meet and interact with lawyers involved in public interest work. For more information on OPIA events and an up-to-date calendar, [visit the OPIA website](#).

Do your research. These resources can help you learn more about public interest work and discover where your interests lie.

[OPIA's website](#). In addition to listings of employers, fellowships, and funding sources, our site provides information on practice settings, networking tips, job search and resume writing strategies, and narratives by HLS alum in public interest work.

[Specialty Career Guides](#) provide in-depth information, narratives, and resources about specific practice areas. Along with the guides listed on our website, OPIA also publishes Insider's Guides on the Department of Justice application process, United Nations Careers, and the fellowship proposal process, password-protected and available only to HLS students.

[OPIA Public Interest Links](#) include a large list of informational and job posting sites, separated by issue area and geographic location. Go to our "[Job Search Toolkit](#)" website section for everything you need to know.

Who can I talk to for advice?

Advisors

[OPIA's Attorney Advisors](#) are always available for individual career counseling and advice. You can [sign up for an appointment online](#) (note that 1L advising begins on October 15).

[Wasserstein Fellows](#) are outstanding public interest attorneys selected each year to offer one-on-one

advising to HLS students.

[Alumni Advising Network](#) is an online database of HLS alums who have offered to serve as career mentors for current students.

Peers

Social Events for public interest-minded students take place throughout the year, including happy hours and potlucks.

Student to Student Public Service Job Fair features 2L and 3L students who are available to speak about their summer employers. This year's fair is tentatively scheduled for November 4.

[Who Worked Where](#) lists where students have worked in public interest summer jobs.

Faculty

Faculty are available to discuss your public service interests. To access information about HLS faculty research and public interest work, visit [OPIA's online faculty directory](#).

What if I'm also interested in private sector work?

Many public interest-minded students spend anywhere from a split summer to several years working in the private sector before moving into public service. Others spend their entire careers in the private sector but contribute a great deal in terms of pro bono work, board membership, and other forms of community service. For more on pro bono, split summers, holding private firm offers, and moving from the private sector to public service, see the "[Public Service in the Private Sector](#)" page of our "What is Public Interest Law" section.

How do I find a public interest job?

Once you have determined what kinds of public interest work you would like to pursue, you are ready to begin your job search. The following resources can help you find a public interest job that is right for you.

[The Public Service section of HELIOS](#) is an excellent resource only available to HLS students and alumni. Separate from the OCS listings, this database is devoted exclusively to public interest work and includes summer internships, pro bono opportunities, and post-graduate positions. It also provides online evaluations from HLS students who have recently worked in public service positions.

OPIA's weekly jobs bulletins (sent via email starting later in the fall) featuring postings for new summer job opportunities.

[PSJD](#) is a nationwide database of law-related public service opportunities available by subscription only. HLS students have access privileges and can register themselves online at www.psjd.org.

Online resources posted on our website include many public interest job posting sites. Visit the "[Public Interest Career Links](#)" page of our "[Job Search Toolkit](#)" section.

Job fairs, Employer Informational Meetings, and other OPIA Events. See the [OPIA calendar](#), and save the following dates:

Massachusetts Law School Consortium's Government/Public Interest Recruitment Program:
10/21/13 – 10/22/13 (for 2Ls and 3Ls) and 1/27/14 – 1/28/14 (for 1Ls)

Equal Justice Works Career Fair: 10/25/13 – 10/26/13 (2Ls and 3Ls)

Many public interest job seekers also find work through friends, alumni, former employers, faculty and professional contacts. More [advice on networking](#) is on our website.

Government and Honors Internship Handbook, published by the University of Arizona (and referred to as the Arizona Guide) covers Federal employment and summer programs. To see these opportunities, go to: <http://www.law.arizona.edu/career/honorshandbook.cfm> (HLS students have access privileges; e-mail OPIA for the username and password).

How do I land a public interest job?

1L Job Search Strategy Sessions cover the nuts and bolts of the job search process for 1Ls. Dates and details on the OPIA website.

OPIA offers resume/cover letter review on an individual basis. We strongly suggest that students follow the tips and templates on our website. Once students have used our tips and templates, OPIA advisors will review resumes and cover letters.

During the **Public Interest Interviewing Program**, employers come to HLS to recruit 2Ls & 3Ls for summer and full-time positions. Employers also come to interview 1Ls during the spring semester.

Interviewing, Negotiating Offers, & Security Clearances: As part of our Mock Interview Program, 1Ls have the opportunity to participate in thirty-minute interviews with HLS alumni and friends of HLS representing the public and private sectors. Dates and details are on the OPIA website. For additional [tips on interviewing and follow up](#), visit the “Job Search Toolkit” on our website.

How can I afford a public interest job?

Summer Fellowships & Funding

Summer Public Interest Funding (SPIF) guarantees funding for all HLS students who take public interest summer jobs, awarded through summer stipends or Federal Work Study grants. For eligibility, requirements, and more information, contact Student Financial Services.

HLS Summer Fellowships are available to support a variety of summer public interest work, from international human rights to federal government. Outside funding sources can also be used to supplement summer earnings and include “split-summer” opportunities sponsored by law firms.

Post-Graduate Fellowships & Funding

Low Income Protection Plan (LIPP) helps HLS graduates who have taken public interest jobs repay their student debt. LIPP participants pay a limited portion of their annual income toward their loan repayment obligations, and LIPP covers the remainder. For eligibility, requirements, and more info, visit the [Student Financial Services website](#).

HLS Fellowships are awarded on a competitive basis and support a variety of public service work after graduation.

Harvard-wide Fellowships are open to all Harvard students, and many are awarded to HLS students each year.

External Fellowships and Federal Honors Programs support graduating law students seeking entry-level public service opportunities within existing offices or agencies. Other grants also support public interest entrepreneurs who launch new projects or organizations.

Public Service Venture Fund: Harvard Law School’s Public Service Venture Fund will award \$1 million in grants every year to help graduating Harvard Law School students pursue careers in public

service.

Many **fellowship listings** can be found in [HELIOS](#) or on [PSJD](#).

Fellowships Advising: OPIA's Fellowships Director, Judy Murciano, is an excellent resource for those interested in applying for fellowships. She helps students select fellowships, craft application materials, and prepare for interviews. [Appointments can be made online](#).

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