Pro Bono/PD Corner:
Pro Bono Is a Training Ground for Higher Level Skills

from the NALP Pro Bono and Professional Development Task Force

The best way for associates to develop higher level skills is through hands-on experience that may not be available when they are working on larger matters. Encourage your associates to look to pro bono matters to gain essential experience that will position them to excel when given the opportunity. In addition, help them recognize the competencies they are building. Here are a few examples:

• Associates in a trial court pro bono program typically develop and oversee the case strategy from start to finish, with a partner supervising the work and consulting as needed. In addition to gaining trial experience, associates often have their first opportunity to make specific decisions about case strategy, oversee implementation of that strategy, and determine the resources that are needed for the case — key components of professional judgment.

• An asylum matter may require expert witnesses and in-depth research on the client’s country of origin. Associates may vet, hire, and supervise outside experts and supervise paralegals and others to develop needed information, demonstrating leadership and team work.

• In many pro bono matters, the associate is responsible for all aspects of the client relationship, including developing needed information, delivering news about case developments, and managing client expectations. This may be the best opportunity for new associates to develop their skills in client service.