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**Lawyers' Committee For Civil Rights of the San Francisco Bay Area**

**LEGAL SERVICES FOR ENTREPRENEURS**

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**FACT SHEET FOR ATTORNEYS**

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**PURPOSE:**

Legal Services for Entrepreneurs ("LSE") is an economic justice project of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights of the San Francisco Bay Area.\* LSE provides free legal assistance to:

- low-income individuals, including women and people of color, who want to start or develop for-profit businesses; and
- for-profit businesses investing in economically distressed neighborhoods.

LSE matches individuals who generally would not have access to specialized legal services with transactional attorneys interested in representing *pro bono* clients. Currently, there are over 20 firms and corporate counsel offices participating in LSE, including many major Bay Area law firms and corporations.

**BACKGROUND:**

In 1997, the Lawyers' Committee formed LSE to assist low-income individuals who desire to improve their own economic well-being and that of their communities, and to aid businesses that wished to invest directly in disadvantaged neighborhoods. LSE focuses on clients who propose to start or develop for-profit businesses which will enhance the economic infrastructure of their neighborhoods, but who are not experienced in starting or running a venture and have limited access to capital. To date, LSE has assisted more than 400 clients.

**OPPORTUNITIES FOR ATTORNEYS:**

LSE offers transactional attorneys a unique opportunity to work on *pro bono* cases that are more relevant to their practice areas than traditional *pro bono* litigation work. LSE seeks attorneys to assist entrepreneurs in transactional matters. These matters cover the entire range of legal services necessary to begin or develop a business, including business entity, intellectual property, real estate, tax, labor, and employment issues. The legal services provided by LSE and its participating *pro bono* attorneys are limited to discrete business law matters and do not include disputes, claims, or lawsuits. All legal services provided by LSE and its participating *pro bono* attorneys are free to entrepreneurs, except for certain costs incurred by the particular law firm on behalf of the client.

LSE also has numerous opportunities for transactional attorneys to lead legal workshops on business law issues to classes of low-income entrepreneurs.

**EXAMPLES OF SERVICES PROVIDED**

**BY LSE ATTORNEYS:**

- Formation of a limited liability company for an apparel business on Grant Avenue in San Francisco
- Protection of trade names and trade marks for a discount club in the Mission District of San Francisco
- Negotiation of the sale of a soul food restaurant in East Palo Alto
- Formation of a joint venture for a landscaping business in the Bayview Hunter's Point District of San Francisco
- Negotiation of a conditional use permit for an auto body shop in Hayward

**HOW LSE MATCHES ENTREPRENEURS**

**WITH *PRO BONO* ATTORNEYS:**

A potential client will contact LSE, usually based on a referral from a community development organization. The following procedures are then taken:

- LSE will conduct an in-person screening interview to ascertain the scope of the entrepreneur's legal needs and to determine whether the entrepreneur qualifies for LSE's services.
- If the entrepreneur is approved for services by LSE's Screening Committee, LSE will notify liaisons at each of its participating law firms/corporate counsel offices and the liaison is responsible for notifying attorneys in their respective firms of the *pro bono* opportunity.
- The law firm that accepts the entrepreneur as a client, and is approved by LSE, will hold an initial meeting between the client and the attorney to discuss the client's particular legal issue(s).
- The law firm will then handle the representation of the client for the discrete business law matter(s) identified at the initial meeting.

**TO QUALIFY AS AN LSE CLIENT,**

**AN INDIVIDUAL MUST:**

- Want to start or expand a for-profit business;
- Either be low-income or have a for-profit business that exists in, or will assist in developing, an economically distressed neighborhood; and
- Be in need of discrete business legal services or advice.

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**For more information about LSE, please call Helen Smolinski at (415) 543-9444 ext. 217.**

*\*The Lawyers' Committee is a civil rights and legal services organization devoted to advancing the rights of people of color, poor people, and immigrants and refugees, while maintaining its historical commitment to provide legal advocacy for African-Americans.*

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