Yale Law School Public Interest Volunteer Opportunities (PIVO)
Information for Students
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What is the PIVO?

Public Interest Volunteer Opportunities (PIVO) is a clearinghouse for public interest projects and research opportunities. PIVO takes place during the spring semester and aims to match you with organizations in need of assistance.

In prior years, PIVO has partnered with:
- ACLU
- Brennan Center for Justice
- Center for Popular Democracy
- East Bay Community Law Center
- Lambda Legal
- Louisiana Center for Children’s Rights
- NAACP
- National Coalition for the Homeless
- New York Legal Assistance Group
- Animal Legal Defense Fund
- Center for Constitutional Rights
- Earthrights International
- HIV Law Project
- Legal Aid Society
- Mexican American Legal Defense & Educational Fund
- National Center for Youth Law
- National Employment Law Project
- Urban Justice Center

How do I join?

The best way to “join” is to attend the PIVO Information Session, which typically takes place at the end of January.

What happens when I join?

Just before the info session, we will send you a list of available projects. They will also be posted on the PIVO website and in CMS. If you are interested in a project, sign up in CMS. After the sign-up deadline, we will provide you with any available details about the project and with the contact information for the outside attorney in charge of the project. You will then work directly with the attorney to devise the substance, scope and time-frame of your project.

Many projects are staffed by a team of students, which allows you to spread out responsibilities, develop working relationships in the Yale community and retain flexibility in your life.

Students have worked on a variety of projects, including:
- Drafting proposed legislation to expand ethics requirements for all executive branch officials in Connecticut
- Investigating causes of action in cases of domestic agricultural slavery
- Researching whether the Clean Air Act and other EPA regulations can be used to force automakers to reduce mercury emissions
• Participating in litigation efforts seeking redress for abuse of immigrants in a Brooklyn detention center
• And many others...

Why should I do it?

Work on a cause you believe in. Many of our partner organizations are not well-funded and give us projects that they will not otherwise have the resources to complete. Your help is invaluable to these organizations and the people they represent.

Explore new areas of practice. Don’t know what you want to do with your legal education? PIVO offers a tremendous opportunity to explore potential areas of interest without committing an entire summer or years after graduation.

Cultivate relationships in the public interest community. The public interest community is small and highly interconnected. Establishing contacts now can help you learn about openings at your partner organization and others and get your foot in the door.

Develop research and writing skills. Research and writing skills are of paramount importance in the legal world, and Yale provides limited opportunities for the kind of advocacy work most common in the practice of “real world” law. There’s no better way to learn than to do, and PIVO projects are all “doing.”

Find ideas for a substantial or SAW. Looking for a paper topic you can be excited about? PIVO projects often provide a springboard into cutting-edge areas of law or specific topics worthy of additional research and writing.

Demonstrate your commitment to public interest. Working on a PIVO project is a tangible example of your interest in this kind of work. It is also a great resume-builder and a fantastic talking point in interviews when asked about legal experience.

FAQs

I'm interested, but already very busy—what should I do?  
PIVO projects are typically short and very flexible. Projects normally take 20-50 hours over the course of the spring semester, and some take even less. In addition, supervising attorneys are typically very appreciative of your help and so are willing to accommodate your busy schedule and other time commitments. It is always appropriate to talk to your supervising attorney or the PIVO student director whenever you have concerns.

I'm a 1L and not a proficient legal researcher—can I still participate?  
Yes! Supervising attorneys understand that you are working on the project in part to develop your skills and so tailor the projects accordingly.

I'm a 2L or 3L and already have a job—why should I do a project?  
Public interest organizations are particularly excited to work with 2Ls and 3Ls because they know you can assume greater responsibility and conduct more in-depth research. Furthermore, PIVO provides you with a way to keep one foot in the public interest world should you ever want to give up the firm lifestyle or transition careers. Public interest organizations look for commitment to public interest work whenever
they fill positions, and working on a PIVO project provides an excellent contact, an interesting resume item, and a relevant talking point in an interview.

Questions? Concerns?

Please do not hesitate to contact PIVO staff at any time with questions or concerns about your project.

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