

**FIRST STEPS FOR ATTORNEYS WHO ARE INTERESTED IN  
DEATH PENALTY CASES**

Many attorneys who are interested in working on a pro bono death penalty case are unsure of their first steps. While the process of getting approval to work on a case varies from firm to firm, attorneys should consider doing the following:

1. **Visit the Project website.** The Project maintains a website at [www.abanet.org/deathpenalty](http://www.abanet.org/deathpenalty) that contains resources, information about the Project, success stories, and lists of volunteer firms. The answers to many basic questions about volunteer representation can be found here.
2. **Locate a partner.** There are two important reasons why you need to find a partner who will lead the case. First, you will need someone who can demonstrate senior-level support for the case as you seek approval from your firm's pro bono committee or management. Once you have obtained that approval, it is important that the partner oversees management of the case, approval of necessary financial resources, and assigning tasks to other lawyers, and remains actively involved throughout the representation to make strategy decisions
3. **Talk to your pro bono coordinator.** Your pro bono coordinator can help you navigate your firms' specific policies and procedures and help you seek approval. He or she can give you advice on the best way to present the idea of volunteer death penalty representation, whether you need to select a specific case in advance, and whether you should seek out additional team members in advance of presenting to the approval committee.
4. **Consider issues and jurisdiction.** Although it is impossible to say with any certainty which issues will arise in any particular case, the Project can show you cases that are likely to involve certain issues. Some examples of common issues are mental retardation, mental illness, prosecutorial / police misconduct, ineffective assistance of counsel, and racial bias. You should let us know if you have a specific interest or expertise in any of these areas. In addition, the Project has cases from nearly every active death penalty jurisdiction in the country, so you should consider *where* you want to take your case, understanding that it may not be possible to find a case in or near the state where your office is located. We will provide you with information about the unique challenges and benefits of working in the various jurisdictions and tell you where we are currently in need of your assistance.
5. **Contact the Project.** Members of the Project staff are always here to answer your questions, give advice, and provide additional information. We've worked with hundreds of law firms and understand the demands of law firm practice. We can also put you in touch with other volunteer firms for more information. You can reach us during business hours by phone at 202-662-1738 or any time by email at [deathpenaltyproject@staff.abanet.org](mailto:deathpenaltyproject@staff.abanet.org).