

A Beginner's Guide to
Public Interest
at Texas Law



Welcome!

We would like to welcome you to the public interest community here at Texas Law!

Our community is full of passionate, intelligent, caring people; we're glad you'll be a part of it.

We've assembled a guide based on what current students wish they knew as incoming 1Ls interested in a career in public interest law. Anything in blue is a hyperlink. Your public interest journey begins right as you start law school!

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What is Public Interest?

[Public interest work](#) involves advocating for people or causes not typically served by the private legal sector. It can include different types of employers, such as legal aid, public defender offices, advocacy or nonprofit organizations, government agencies, and private law firms devoted to serving the underrepresented.

We highly recommend connecting with the [William Wayne Justice Center](#). This is a hub for all things public interest on the Texas Law campus. Their work includes:

Education: Teaching students about public interest lawyering and the need to increase access to justice.

Pro Bono: Creating opportunities for the Texas Law community to gain legal skills and serve the public through the Richard and Ginni Mithoff Pro Bono Program.

Programming: Informing students, faculty, staff, attorneys, and the community about public interest legal issues.

Community Building: Fostering a community of support for students and alumni engaged in public service.

Financial Support: Awarding scholarships and fellowships to ensure that public interest law practice is accessible to and sustainable for all.

Connecting with Peers and Employers

Organizations on Campus

Several organizations on campus focus on public interest legal work or host exciting events. Getting involved with these organizations is a great way to immerse yourself in the public interest community on campus!

The Public Interest Law Association, Getting Radical in the South (GRITS), the Environmental Law Society, If/When/How, Law Students for Black Lives, and Texas Law Fellowships are just a few organizations dedicated to public interest work. You can find a complete list of Texas Law student organizations [here](#).

Public Interest Listserv

The Career Services Office (CSO) manages the public interest listserv, which sends information about summer internships, postgraduate opportunities, networking events, and public interest programming sponsored by the CSO, the William Wayne Justice Center, and the Rapoport Center for Human Rights and Justice. You can stay up to date with public interest opportunities by signing up [here](#).

Public Interest Employer Interviewing Opportunities

Keep in mind that public interest work is often on a different timeline from private sector work.

It can sometimes be nerve-racking watching private-sector peers interview for jobs in November, but the public interest timeline just starts later.

Getting a summer job offer in mid-spring is normal! And there are lots of resources to help you do that.

Each fall, Texas Law hosts [Texas Talks: Public Service Expo](#), which allows students to informally meet with government agencies and public interest organizations to learn about the employers as well as available internship and job opportunities. This is a more casual setting, as students can filter in and out of the event and visit employer tables to chat, ask questions, and pick up promotional materials.

Each spring semester, Texas Law organizes the [Public Service Career Fair](#), the largest public service interview program for law students in Texas. During both PSCF days, public interest and government employers conduct interviews for paid and unpaid summer and postgraduate positions.

Summer Internship Funding

You might already be thinking about where you would like to intern this summer and wondering how to finance it.

Below are the main funding opportunities available at Texas Law for public interest students:

Summer Public Service Program (SPSP)

Justice Center Named Fellowships

Rapoport Center Summer Human Rights Fellowships

Texas Law Fellowships (TLF)

Equal Justice America (EJA)

Summer Public Service Program (SPSP)

The [William Wayne Justice Center for Public Interest Law](#) administers the [Summer Public Service Program](#). This program offers \$800 per week to students working in unpaid or low-paying summer positions with nonprofit, government, and legislative offices.

The SPSP serves as an umbrella for general fellowships and named summer fellowships made possible through grants and gifts from generous donors. Each funded student will receive either a general fellowship or a [named fellowship](#). Students awarded named fellowships will receive special recognition.

To receive an SPSP fellowship, students must work full time at eligible sponsoring organizations for a minimum of five weeks and a maximum of ten weeks.

The SPSP application typically opens at the end of the fall semester and is due toward the end of the spring semester. Students can submit their applications once they have accepted an offer from an eligible sponsoring organization.

The Justice Center will host an informational session to explain the application and answer your questions. The application process is straightforward and completed online.

Rapoport Center Summer Human Rights Fellowships

The [Bernard and Audre Rapoport Center for Human Rights and Justice](#) offers [Summer Human Rights Fellowships](#) to Texas Law students interested in transnational or international work in human rights or social justice issues.

The Rapoport Center oversees the Orlando Letelier and Ronni Karpen Moffitt Endowed Presidential Scholarship in Law and the Charles Moyer Human Rights Fellowship. These fellowships provide a \$8,000 stipend for 400 hours of service (a 10-week internship).

However, the [Rapoport Center Fellowships](#) require a [separate application from the general SPSP funding](#). The application is found on the Rapoport Center's website (see the website for more information).

As mentioned, you will receive many emails reminding you of the deadline and the separate application process.

Texas Law Fellowships (TLF)

[TLF](#) is a student-run organization that supports public interest at Texas Law by providing summer stipends to students engaged in unpaid public interest work. Eligible students must work full time in a 10-week internship at a qualified public interest organization. TLF raises money through several events and fundraisers that have become Texas Law traditions, such as an annual auction and TLF Tailgates.

Those interested in a TLF stipend must apply through the TLF Google Form in the spring. TLF will host an informational session to explain the entire application process. TLF stipends are not part of the SPSP funding, and students may receive funds from both SPSP funding and TLF.

Equal Justice America (EJA)

[EJA](#) offers summer fellowship grants to law students working full time for a civil legal aid or civil rights organization. Students must submit applications through the EJA website. EJA is an outside organization, and many Texas Law public interest students secure additional summer funding through it.

Clinics

Texas Law offers [16 clinics](#) covering a range of legal issues.

Joining a clinic is a great opportunity to provide legal services directly or work closely with faculty members on active cases.

You cannot participate in a clinic in your first year of law school. However, it's always wise to use 1L year to research clinics and ask around to see if one interests you!

A clinic and internship informational session is held each semester, which allows students to visit each clinic's table to ask questions, pick up materials, and learn about their projects.

1Ls apply for clinics in their second semester during registration week. Students use one application form to apply to up to three clinics, with questions unique to each clinic.

Students must also rank their options. Attending the clinic and informational session can be very useful, as some clinic faculty offer advice on strategically ranking your clinic options.

Pro Bono Projects

While students cannot participate in a clinic until they become 2Ls, they can participate in pro bono projects as 1Ls.

The [Richard and Ginni Mithoff Pro Bono Program](#) housed within the Justice Center hosts several pro bono opportunities for students to practice their legal skills and serve the community.

Students can check for current pro bono opportunities [here](#). Students can also sign a voluntary [Pro Bono Pledge](#) to provide at least 50 hours of pro bono service by the end of law school. Signing the Pro Bono Pledge enrolls students in Texas Law's pro bono listserv so they can receive early notice of new pro bono opportunities.

Those subscribed to the listserv will receive an email every Sunday with a list of ongoing pro bono projects, the required training, and the dates and times. Students can choose among projects ranging in topic and duration. Some projects are commitments for the entire school year, while others are one-time commitments.

Some pro bono projects tend to be reserved quickly, so you should keep an eye out for projects that interest you!

Judicial Clerkships

A [judicial clerkship](#) offers law school graduates the unique opportunity to work directly with a trial or appellate judge in a state or federal court. These one-to-two-year positions can be among the most rewarding in a legal career.

They are prestigious positions that often serve as a springboard to permanent positions with law firms or in the public sector.

A judicial clerkship is different from a judicial internship, which provides the opportunity to gain exposure to the judicial process and the inner workings of a court *while you are still in law school*.

If you want to set yourself up for a clerkship, check out [1Ls: Becoming a Successful Judicial Clerkship Candidate](#).

2Ls, 3Ls, and Alumni should click [here](#).

2026-2027 Events

While there will be more events that you'll want to look out for, here are some of the important events to remember this school year!

Justice Center Open House

Justice Center Mentoring Program Kickoff

Public Service Expo

Information Session: Texas Law Postgraduate Fellowships

Mock Interview Program: Public Sector

Public Service Career Fair

Justice Center Open House

September 23, 2026 from 11:50 am - 1:15 pm

Chat over lunch with Justice Center staff and students who are involved in our projects to learn more about how the Justice Center supports public interest students.

Public Service Expo

September 29-30, 2026 from 11:30am to 1:15pm

Texas Law students have opportunities to informally meet with government agencies and public interest organizations to learn about the employers and available internship and job opportunities.

Justice Center Mentoring Program Kickoff

October 1, 2026 from 11:45 am - 12:50 pm

Peer Mentors help 1L and LLM students build community, navigate law school, and explore pathways in public interest law. Each Peer Mentor will be matched with two student mentees and one alumni advisor. Each pod will also be paired with a sister pod for selected activities and events.

Information Session: Texas Law Postgraduate Fellowships

October 7, 2026 from 12:00 pm to 1:00pm

Join us to learn more about Texas Law's 2027 Postgraduate Fellowships.

Mock Interview Program: Public Sector

October 30, 2026 from 9am to 5pm

The Career Services Office hosts a public-sector Mock Interview Program (government, public interest, and public defense) each year to introduce 1Ls to the legal interviewing process.

Public Service Career Fair

February 11-12, 2027 from 9am to 5pm

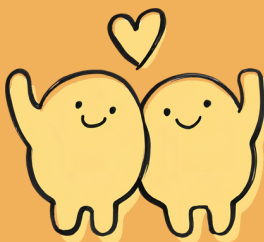
Public interest and government employers will conduct interviews for paid and unpaid summer and postgraduate positions.

Some Final Advice



We have the best professors in the world! The 1L professors especially are such a resource, and they want to help you succeed so much. Go to office hours, talk to them, learn from them! Also, try new things, but don't be afraid to opt out or quit when it's not for you. We all have limited time and energy, and it's important to use it for the things that are going to be worth it to you.

Isha



Believe in yourself!
You are an incredible individual, and you are doing amazing things! Therefore, please never count yourself out of an opportunity! Make sure you surround yourself with people and energy that support you and lift you up! Lead with empathy and don't compare yourself to others. We are each on our own timeline! Please reach out to 2Ls and 3Ls in the public interest community for anything you need! Also, through clinics and pro bono work, you will have hands-on experiences that allow you to grow as an advocate and make meaningful change wherever you can!

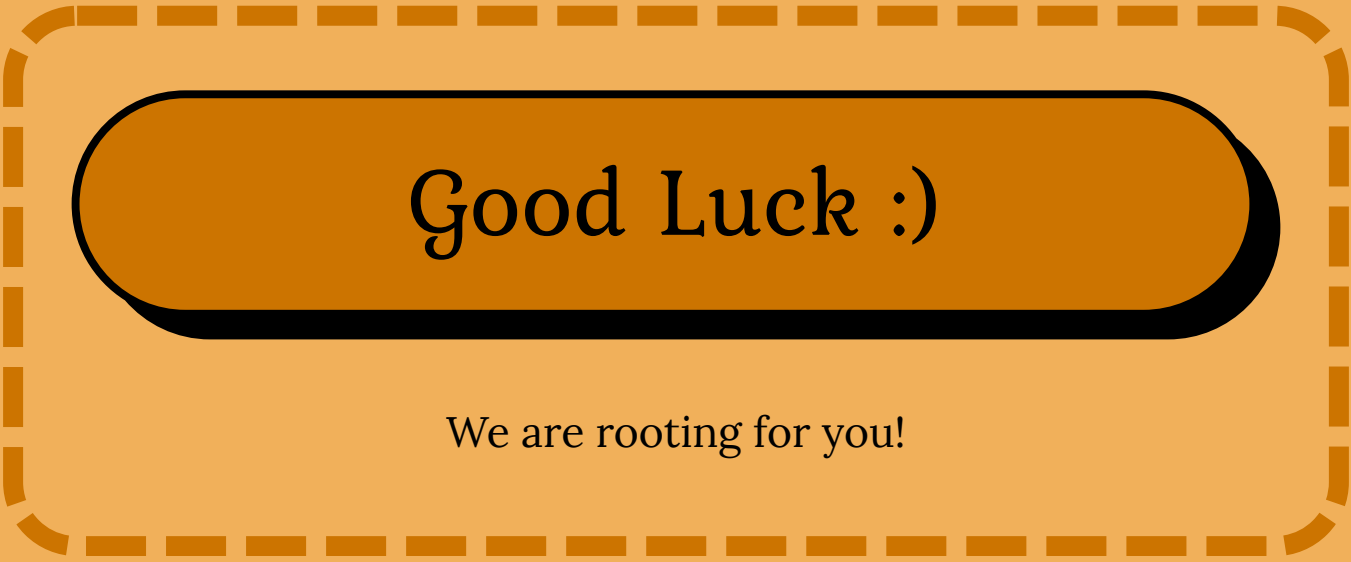
Camila

You deserve to get the most out of this experience!
Set your goals high and remember to lean on your Justice Center peers and faculty to help you reach them. You came here for a reason—hold fast to it.

Vale

Remember your why and lean on your friends. It will get hard—maybe a job you really wanted rejects you, or unexpected personal hardships arise, whatever it is, always remember your why and that people care about you. When life doesn't go our way it's super important to lean on those who care. Remember you always have us and the Justice Center. Lean on your why to motivate you get back on track when things are bleak, hang with your friends and broader PI community. I found that in my darkest times, people who dream and fight as hard as you inspire you, or at the very least help you keep going. Trust me, whatever it is you can and will get through!

Ariana



Good Luck :)

We are rooting for you!