What Volunteers Can and Can’t Do in Legal Work

It is critical that volunteers be assigned appropriate work when trying to serve the needs of a huge influx of clients under Comprehensive Immigration Reform. There are many tasks that non-legal volunteer staff can do.

**What constitutes legal work?**

- Providing a client with a form based on a person's interest in a particular immigration benefit.
- Helping a client fill out an application form by providing your input or opinion on how to answer questions.
- Providing clients with an update on their case using case file information.

**Why should a volunteer avoid doing legal work?**

- Irreparable harm can be done to a client (e.g. deportation)
- There is an increased likelihood of mistakes on an application or even in determining eligibility
- The agency is liable for all legal work completed by staff, both paid and volunteer.
- Most states could investigate an agency using unaccredited volunteers doing legal work for unauthorized practice of law.

**Situation 1**

An immigrant walks into your agency and says “I’ve been a refugee for three years. Now I want to apply for a green card. Which forms do I need? Can you give them to me?” A volunteer hands her a packet of forms.

**Situation 2**

An immigrant brings a form to the office and asks a volunteer for help filling it out. The volunteer decides to help and gives his opinion on what is meant by the questions “date of last entry” and “current immigration status.”