

Getting Professional Legal Help For Your Board

Most not-for-profit organizations have few legal problems. They may need help getting incorporated and then operate for years without needing any other kind of legal help. However, when problems arise, it is usually best to get help quickly before a small problem becomes a much larger one.

There are several ways of finding expert legal assistance:

The Lawyer on Your Board

Many organizations have adopted the practice of including at least one lawyer on their boards. They hope by doing so that they will have easy access to legal advice when they need it. If you have a lawyer on the board, check to see if your lawyer has the relevant experience needed to deal with particular legal issues as they arise. Many areas of the law are quite specialized. The board member may be familiar with some of those, but not all. In particular the laws governing not-for-profit organizations and charities have become quite complex and you may need to find someone who has more experience with those issues.

Be sure that your board member is comfortable playing this role. It may be awkward for the board member to say no, but it may be the right answer. Also, note that providing legal information is different from providing legal advice. If the Board is seeking legal advice, it is important to get it from someone who is qualified to give that advice and is properly insured.

Word of Mouth

One of the best ways of finding a lawyer is to get a referral from a satisfied client. Ask someone who sits on another board who they use and whether they have been happy with the service they have received.

Lawyer Referral

The Law Society of Alberta maintains a telephone service to help people find a lawyer who lives in the person's community and who practices the type of law the person needs. They may be able to help you locate a suitable lawyer. Lawyer Referral will give you the names of 3 lawyers in your area. You can speak to one, two or all three of the lawyers. Mention you got their contact information from Lawyer Referral and the first half-hour of conversation is free. Phone (403) 228-1722 in Calgary or 1-800-661-1095 toll free from other points in Alberta.

Alberta Limited Legal Services Project

The Alberta Limited Legal Services Project helps lawyers provide limited legal services to people who might not otherwise be able to hire a lawyer. Check out their Guide for Clients for information about the legal service options available, and whether limited legal services are right for you. The site also provides a listing of Alberta lawyers participating in the Alberta Limited Legal Services Project. <http://albertalegalservices.com/>.

Pro Bono Law Alberta – Volunteer Lawyer Services

Pro Bono Law Alberta (PBLA) matches charitable organizations with volunteer lawyers through a project called Volunteer Lawyer Services (VLS). Lawyers are available to provide assistance on

legal issues that impact not-for-profits and charities, such as: policy/governance, employment law and contracts, volunteer waivers, incorporation, charitable registration. The VLS program has a roster of volunteer lawyers who are advised of requests for pro bono services, according to location and area of practice. If one of the lawyers is able to help, VLS then provides the organization with the volunteer's contact information and the organization can then contact the volunteer directly. The volunteer decides whether to retain the applicant as a client and the scope of that retainer.

From time to time, PBLA also develops legal partnership projects with select not-for-profits and charities to provide legal services to individuals served by an organization. Phone (403) 541-4804 or email: info@pbla.ca .

Student Legal Services, University of Alberta

The law students at the University of Alberta provide assistance to not-for-profit organizations in dealing with some legal matters. The Pro Bono Students Canada Project matches law students with eligible not-for-profit organizations to provide legal services under the supervision of a lawyer. Phone the Pro Bono Students Canada Project at (780) 492-8287 or fax (780) 492-7574. Email: pbsc@ualberta.ca .

For more information about the law as it affects not-for-profit organizations:

[Legal Information vs. Legal Advice: What is the Difference?](#)

This tip sheet is a publication of the Centre for Public Legal Education Alberta. It looks at the key differences between providing legal information vs. legal advice.

[Is it Reliable: Seven Clues to Good Legal Information – TIP SHEET](#)

This tip sheet gives an outline of how to tell if the information you getting is good. Is it up-to-date, from a reliable source, and does it apply to the province in which you reside?

Alberta Community Development

The Board Development Program provides assistance to not-for-profit boards in the area of governance through workshops, consultations, training of volunteer instructors, resource materials, and special presentations to conferences and seminars. Contact the Board Development Program via email at bdp@gov.ab.ca or telephone (780) 427-2001 in Edmonton or from other points in Alberta call 310-0000 and ask to be connected to (780) 427-2001.

The Muttart Foundation

The Muttart Foundation has published a series of workbooks to help boards carry out their responsibilities. Topics include building good boards, meeting your board's legal and ethical responsibilities, and dealing with human resource and financial issues. For a full list of titles, visit <https://www.muttart.org/publications/board-development-workbooks/> .

Centre for Public Legal Education Alberta

The Centre for Public Legal Education Alberta has a wide range of resources, including websites, booklets, and tip sheets dealing with matters of interest to individuals and not-for-profit

organizations, including the website, Charity Central (<https://www.charitycentral.ca>). All of CPLEA's resources can be accessed through its website, <https://www.cplea.org>.

[Alberta Legal Information Service \(AJEFA\)](#)

The Association des juristes d'expression française de l'Alberta (AJEFA – French-speaking Lawyer's Association of Alberta) operates the **Alberta Legal Information Centre / Centre albertain d'information juridique**, which provides legal information, support and referral services with regard to clients' legal questions. These services are provided in French or English, in person or remotely, free of charge and in addition to existing resources. Funded by the Department of Justice Canada, the creation of the Centre is the result of a close collaboration between francophone and anglophone stakeholders.

[Alberta Law Libraries](#)

Part of the Alberta Court Services is access to the Alberta Law Libraries. The primary mission of Alberta Law Libraries is to facilitate access to legal information for the Alberta community, including its judiciary, lawyers, citizens, libraries and government agencies. A section of their website is dedicated to helping Albertans get pointed in the right direction as they begin their legal research. Members of the Alberta Law Libraries (ALL) team have prepared research guides on legislation, case law and a variety of subject-specific areas. In these guides, you will find information, resources and links about several areas of law. Alberta Law Libraries (ALL) were formed in 2009 when Alberta Court Libraries and Alberta Law Society Libraries were amalgamated. ALL has served the legal community in Alberta since 1885 and use of our collections is free to all who visit our libraries.

[Ask a Law Librarian - Alberta Law Libraries](#)

This webpage describes the types of information that can be provided and offers a web form for submitting a question.

Calgary Legal Guidance

The Dial-A-Law service offers 24-hour recorded information. Call (403) 234-9022. Note: operator assistance is available Monday – Friday, 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.