



# THE NEIGHBORHOOD ENTREPRENEUR LAW PROJECT: "BUILDING COMMUNITIES ONE SMALL BUSINESS AT A TIME."

## 2020 REPORT

### WHO WE ARE

The City Bar Justice Center (CBJC) operates the largest general free civil legal hotline in New York City along with 11 core substantive projects, assisting over 26,000 clients with legal issues each year through the efforts of pro bono attorneys and CBJC staff. Our close relationship with the New York City Bar Association and our proven experience in responding to emerging legal needs give us a unique ability to leverage pro bono legal services for low-to-moderate income New Yorkers. We look to our partners in the law to raise the funds necessary to operate the Neighborhood Entrepreneur Law Project, in addition to other CBJC core projects.

### ABOUT THE NEIGHBORHOOD ENTREPRENEUR LAW PROJECT

Small businesses are the foundation of our economy, accounting for more than 56 million jobs and creating two out of three net new private sector jobs in the U.S. each year, according to the United States Small Business Administration. Starting a small business, however, is not easy, especially for low-income individuals. Without an understanding of the relevant laws or without having the resources to access legal assistance, many potentially successful projects fail.

Recognizing the vital role small businesses play in our economy, the CBJC launched the Neighborhood Entrepreneur Law Project (NELP) in 2003 to provide low- to moderate-income micro-entrepreneurs with the legal services they need to start their businesses. NELP's staff and volunteer attorneys guide clients through matters such as corporate formation, drafting contracts, negotiating and reviewing commercial leases, and protecting intellectual property through copyrights, trademarks, and patents. Volunteer attorneys also participate in presentations and legal clinics at community-based organizations on issues of relevance to micro-entrepreneurs.

Since its founding, NELP has partnered with more than 100 law firms, 25 corporate legal departments, and 30 community-based organizations to assist more than 16,400 clients through the provision of brief services, direct representation, legal clinics, and community presentations.

### A UNIQUE VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY

The Neighborhood Entrepreneur Law Project offers a unique opportunity for transactional attorneys to work on pro bono cases that are more in line with their practice area than traditional pro bono litigation work. NELP also provides training for attorneys who are new to transactional work, as well as access to mentors and other attorneys experienced in the field.



### Become a Pro Bono Partner!

**The City Bar Justice Center**  
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## LESSONS LEARNED IN WORKING WITH SMALL BUSINESS OWNERS

Based on 15 years of experience, the Neighborhood Entrepreneur Law Project offers the following tips for pro bono volunteers interested in working with small businesses.

### Unbundle the Services:

At the start of their partnership with NELP, volunteer attorneys may want to get their feet wet by participating in one of NELP's more discrete, bite-size pro bono activities, such as a community-based presentation or legal clinic. This provides the opportunity to meet and interact in person with a varied group of micro-entrepreneurs, and can even spark an interest to provide direct, ongoing legal representation to a client.

### Team Up with the Referral Organization:

If volunteers are interested in engaging in direct pro bono representation through NELP, we act as a facilitator between the attorney and the client, assisting if any questions or concerns arise, and providing additional resources or mentoring, if needed. Before assigning a pro bono case, NELP screens clients to make sure they qualify for pro bono assistance and conducts an assessment of their legal issues and needs.

### Legal Clinics Make it Easier for Volunteers:

Legal clinics offer a team of interested attorneys the opportunity to provide brief counseling and limited assistance and guidance. Attorneys can assist a significant number of microentrepreneurs within a relatively short period of time, usually 30 minutes per client. A legal team may even be able to "sponsor" a site and provide clinics on a regular basis (e.g., quarterly or monthly).

### Mind the Details:

While many NELP clients may be enthusiastic to launch their small businesses right away, they often need pro bono counsel to help them focus on their immediate legal needs. They usually require assistance in realizing their short-term goals, such as selecting the best corporate structure for their current situation, protecting their intellectual property rights, and acquiring the required licenses to operate their small business.

### Presentations are Great Pro Bono Opportunities:

Presentations are a great way to get involved with both clients and other attorneys. Materials are available for standard topics, and volunteers are generally required to make a time commitment of two to three hours.

### Work in Teams:

Attorneys may prefer to work with colleagues, as it allows for different opinions, varied expertise, and a shared workload. Clients will also benefit from working with a team of attorneys, as there will always be someone available to address their concerns.

## How NELP Provides Pro Bono Assistance to Microentrepreneurs

NELP staff interview each client to ascertain the scope of his/her legal needs and eligibility for pro bono services. If the entrepreneur is approved for services, NELP staff will connect the client with a pro bono attorney who will meet with the client and handle representation. Periodic follow-up calls and meetings are scheduled to make sure each client's needs are met.

### In 2019, NELP conducted the following:



**30 legal clinics** where entrepreneurs received legal counsel regarding their specific small business concerns.

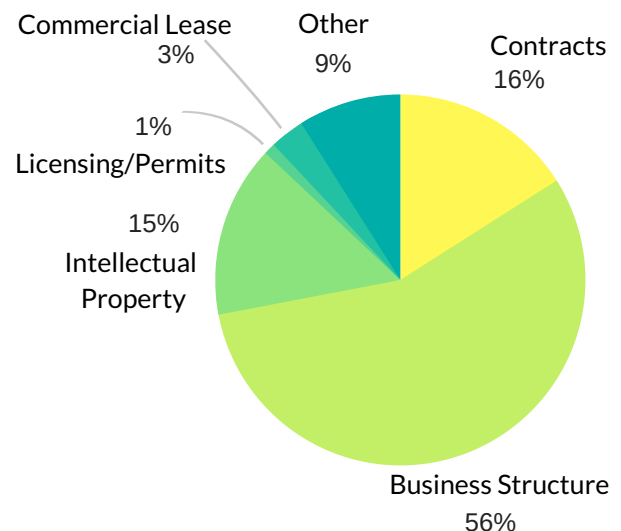


**11 legal presentations** on topics including entity formation, intellectual property, and contracts.



Management of **109 pro bono cases** where entrepreneurs received further or ongoing legal assistance from staff and volunteer attorneys.

### Types of legal issues NELP assisted clients with :



## NELP'S 2019 HIGHLIGHTS



NELP provided legal assistance to **857** entrepreneurs.



**383** attorneys provided pro bono legal assistance to NELP clients.



NELP partnered with volunteers from **49** law firms and corporate legal departments throughout NYC.



Collaborated with **9** community-based organizations to host NELP events.

## SMALL BUSINESS SUCCESSES

### Soccer Education and Inspiration for All

A professional soccer player turned social entrepreneur, Qiana Martin founded *Eat Soccer* after noticing that there was an untapped market for people who 'live and breathe' soccer in the US. She thus came up with the idea of developing a consumer-based business for soccer enthusiasts provides entertaining digital content, insightful data and engaging experiences for millions of soccer fans in the US. Shortly after reaching out to NELP with her business plan in 2016, Ms. Martin was placed with a team of attorneys who helped her create a business entity and assisted with drafting business agreements. She has now successfully developed an expanding network for soccer enthusiasts from all over the world and she continues to reach out to her legal team to invite them to *Eat Soccer's* sponsored events.

### Capturing Brooklyn's Essence

When Sofia Sylvester's children started experiencing severe skin conditions that no medical prescription could cure, she decided to take matters into her own hands by creating homemade, all-natural products. After noticing the significant improvement of her children's skin and receiving praise from people who had sampled her products, Ms. Sylvester reached out to NELP, determined to start a small business. NELP's volunteer attorneys assisted Ms. Sylvester with getting a trademark for the business' name, Brooklyn Flavors, and some of the product names, which were based on historical locations in Brooklyn. Ms. Sylvester returned to NELP for help with reviewing and negotiating a commercial lease so that she could open up a storefront business. Brooklyn Flavors' products are also available for purchase through its online-based store.

### Raising Community Health Consciousness

Realizing the widespread health problems amongst the Latino community due to a lack of affordable, healthy food alternatives, Tania Lopez, a Puerto Rican native and Bronx resident, was inspired to start Coqui the Chef. Coqui the Chef, a mascot, provides a fun approach to building healthy eating habits through homemade recipes using fresh ingredients. NELP's pro bono volunteers assisted the entrepreneur with obtaining a trademark for her business name and logo, and provided counsel on other intellectual property matters. Ms. Lopez launched a website and YouTube channel where she shares a range of recipes and promotes her cookbooks in an effort to continue raising nutritional awareness for Latino families.

## CLIENT TESTIMONIALS



"With the help of NELP and the extraordinary lawyers ..., PS4e1, Inc. was launched. The original concept is no longer a mirage. It exists. And we at PS4e1 will forever be grateful to NELP for all it has given us and made possible,"  
- Peitho, PS4e1

"This is a phenomenal program. Early stage start-ups often can't afford the sound legal advice they need to get off the ground. NELP increases the chances of good start-ups surviving."

- Marc Lara, MicroHealth, Inc.

"NELP has been nothing short of a blessing. As an amazing resource and through its extensive network, they connected me with top firms that catered to my needs. They have helped me build the foundation to my business and I will be forever grateful."

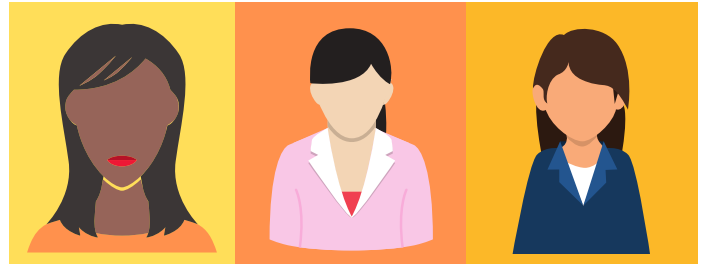
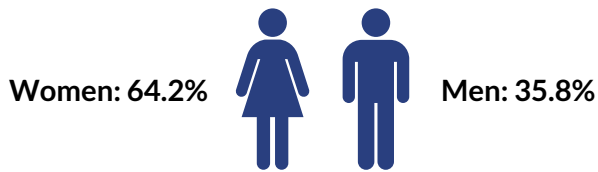
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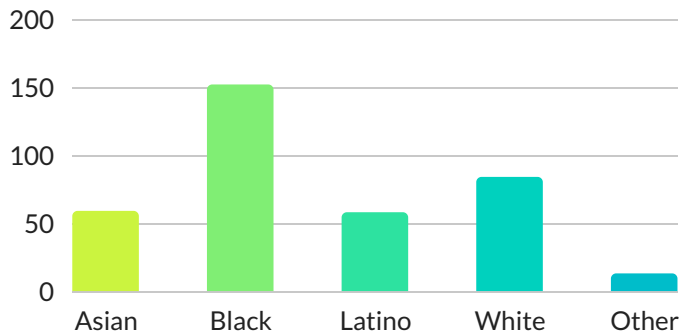
# NELP's 2019 CLIENT DEMOGRAPHICS

## SUPPORTING WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS OF COLOR

### GENDER IDENTITY



### RACE



A significant takeaway from these statistics points towards the large number of women entrepreneurs NELP assisted in 2019. For many years now, NELP has seen a consistent pattern whereby the significant majority of our clients have been women entrepreneurs. This pattern is indicative of the broader trends of small business development in NYC, where women entrepreneurs play an increasingly influential role. Furthermore, a majority of NELP's women clients are Black, Latina or Asian, thus evidencing NELP's commitment to empowering entrepreneurs who come from historically disadvantaged backgrounds.

## NELP'S 2019 SUPPORTERS

### Law Firm & Corporate Legal Departments

- AIG
- American Express
- AXA XL
- Arnold & Porter Kaye Scholer, LLP
- Bank of America
- Barclays Capital
- Blank Rome Tenzer & Greenblatt, LLP
- Bloomberg, LP
- Citigroup
- Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton, LLP
- Covington & Burling, LLP
- Credit Suisse Securities, LLC
- Davis Polk & Wardwell, LLP
- Debevoise & Plimpton, LLP
- Dechert, LLP
- Dentons US, LLP
- Deutsche Bank
- DLA Piper, LLP
- Duane Morris, LLP
- Goodwin Procter, LLP
- Hunton & Williams, LLP
- Jefferies Group, LLC
- JP Morgan Chase
- Kirkland & Ellis, LLP
- Latham & Watkins, LLP
- Mayer Brown, LLP
- Norton Rose Fulbright
- O'Melveny & Meyers, LLP
- Orrick Herrington & Sutcliffe, LLP
- Paul Hastings LLP
- Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton, & Garrison, LLP
- Proskauer & Rose, LLP
- Shearman & Sterling, LLP
- Sidley Austin LLP
- Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom, LLP
- Sullivan & Cromwell, LLP
- Weil Gotshal & Manges, LLP

### Community-Based Organizations

- Brooklyn Library Business and Career Center
- Harlem Commonwealth Council
- New York City Business Solutions Center (Brooklyn; Bronx; Upper Manhattan; Queens; Staten Island)
- New York City Technical College, Small Business Development Center
- Pace Small Business Development Center
- Queens Economic Development Corporation (QEDC)
- SCORE NYC
- The Entrepreneur Space
- WENYC

The Neighborhood Entrepreneur Law Project relies on the generosity of its NELP Partners to sustain the work of the project. NELP Partners are given priority for cases, clinics, presentations and training. To support NELP and/or to become a NELP Partner, please visit: [www.citybarjusticecenter.org](http://www.citybarjusticecenter.org) and enter "NELP" under Donation Tribute to specify your law firm or corporate legal department's support for this project.