



Compass Pro Bono partners with nonprofits whose work closely aligns with our mission and geographic focus regions.

Our mission: Compass Pro Bono forges lasting ties between local nonprofits and local business professionals to empower thriving, equitable, resilient communities.

The guidelines below explain how we interpret our eligibility criteria for all Compass Pro Bono programs, including pro bono consulting and board matching. If you are unsure about your organization's eligibility after reading this page, please contact Compass Pro Bono. We are happy to have a conversation with you!

1. 501(c)(3) status

To be eligible, your organization must:

- Have official 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status from the IRS (not just “in process”).
- Apply as the entity that will directly receive Compass Pro Bono support.

Compass Pro Bono is unable to provide support to organizations seeking to obtain their 501(c)(3) status, as this falls outside the scope of our services. If you are fiscally sponsored by another nonprofit, please reach out so we can determine if you are eligible for our services.

2. Active Board of Directors

Compass Pro Bono looks for nonprofits with an engaged governing board, defined as:

- Meeting regularly and providing genuine oversight and strategic leadership.
- Playing an active role in governance, strategy, and supporting the organization's health.

For organizations with national structures, Compass Pro Bono typically requires that a local board or advisory group be in place and engaged at the project location.

3. Focus on our metro regions

Your mission and core programs should be specifically and directly focused on communities within at least one of Compass Pro Bono's metro regions:

- Chicago
- Minneapolis–St. Paul
- New York City
- Philadelphia
- Washington, DC

National or multi-site organizations can be eligible when there is:

- A clearly defined program, site, or portfolio of work focused on one or more of these regions, and
- Local leadership (a board or advisory group) with real decision-making authority or influence over the work in that region, who can engage with Compass Pro Bono and act on recommendations.

If your work is primarily national or broadly distributed without a clear local focus, Compass Pro Bono is probably not a fit.

4. Core programs advance community well-being

When Compass Pro Bono says “core programs,” we mean the main, mission-driven services or initiatives that use most of your staff time and budget – typically the majority of your resources.

Eligible organizations typically:

- Deliver direct services or otherwise clearly advance community well-being, such as social justice initiatives, social services, education, health, arts and culture, or environmental programs.
- Can point to concrete programs where clients, students, patients, audiences, or community members experience the organization’s work on the ground.

Organizations whose work is limited to networks, convenings, or thought leadership may still be considered, but Compass Pro Bono will look closely at how those activities translate into tangible community benefits.

5. Lobbying and partisan politics are not the primary focus; many forms of advocacy are OK

Compass Pro Bono recognizes that advocacy and public education can be important tools for achieving impact. Programs of eligible nonprofits may include these strategies.

However, Compass Pro Bono is not able to support organizations whose mission and core programs are primarily focused on:

- Lobbying or other efforts to influence specific legislation, ballot measures, or regulations.
- Political campaigns or partisan initiatives primarily focused on electoral outcomes.

If you are unsure whether your lobbying or advocacy work affects your eligibility, please reach out and we can discuss further.

6. Faith-affiliated nonprofits

Faith-affiliated nonprofits can be strong partners for Compass Pro Bono when their work serves the broader community.

Faith-affiliated nonprofits may be eligible when:

- Services are open to people regardless of what they believe and are not limited only to people of one faith.
- The organization is seeking Compass Pro Bono's support to strengthen its non-religious programs.

Compass Pro Bono is generally not able to support projects that:

- Design, expand, or improve worship services, prayer meetings, or other religious gatherings.
- Focus on outreach, marketing, or communications aimed at increasing enrollment, membership, or recruitment into a faith community or faith-based institution.

If these activities are central to your proposed engagement with Compass Pro Bono—or tightly intertwined with your core programs—your organization may not be eligible for Compass Pro Bono support.

Still not sure if you qualify For Compass Pro Bono services?

If you are uncertain about your eligibility, please contact the Compass Pro Bono program director for your city. A brief conversation can usually clarify whether there is a good fit and, if not, help you decide whether to apply.