

Big Firms Build Veteran Groups Across Offices for Community Service, Pro Bono

Firms such as Reed Smith and Kirkland & Ellis are ramping up their pro bono and community outreach efforts for military veterans, often seeking attorneys and staff with service records to lead the charge.

By Samantha Stokes
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For Reed Smith partner Jesse Miller, some of the same character traits that help him as a corporate litigator at a large law firm have also helped him succeed in the military.

Miller is a decorated colonel in the Army National Guard who is currently the brigade commander for the 115th Regional Support Group to the California Army National Guard, where he leads more than 1,000 soldiers. Over his career in the armed forces, Miller, who is in San Francisco, has served in Yugoslavia, Iraq and Afghanistan and has provided support in multiple natural disasters, including the recent California wildfires.

“There’s a certain synergy between what we do in the military—in terms of planning, having a mission and getting things done—and what we do for clients,” Miller said. “It’s important to be candid and direct, and not wishy-washy—both in interactions with clients as well as what I do as an infantry officer.”

And while working full-time as a trial attorney, he leads the firm’s Veterans Inclusion Group, known in Reed Smith as RS Vets. Reed Smith said the 75-person group, formed in 2017, brings attorneys and staff together who have served in the military, have family members of friends who served in the military or who are interested in supporting military and veteran-related issues.



Col. Jesse Miller (left), a litigation partner at Reed Smith, shown at the Joint Multinational Training Center in Yavoriv, Ukraine, on Sept. 20 with Command Sgt. Maj. Scott Witt.

Reed Smith isn’t alone in launching an internal veterans team. Big firms are building the groups with multiple missions in mind: providing an internal community for veterans and their support networks, raising awareness about veterans’ needs and offering pro bono services to veterans in their own communities.

For these initiatives, firms often lean on attorneys and staff with service records themselves to lead the charge.

(Courtesy photo)

At Kirkland & Ellis, third-year M&A associate Brandon Remington in New York mobilized a handful of veterans that informally gathered at the firm into an official group in 2018. Although he had only been at the firm for a few months at the time, Remington, an infantry officer in the U.S. Marine Corps Reserves who served in Afghanistan as a platoon commander and Afghan uniformed police adviser, found the firm welcomed and supported his initiative.

“It was really grassroots,” he said of how the 100-member group, formally known as the Military Service Group, was started. “You don’t need to be a senior person with a good idea; it can come from anywhere.”

Remington said the firm lent all of its resources to support the group as it became more established, including the human resources department handling the logistics of a fundraiser, to the communications department designing a logo, newsletter and other material.

When Josh Mathew joined Kirkland’s New York office in September, the first-year litigation associate said he was surprised by just how many people wanted to participate in the group. Mathew served in the U.S. Army for three and a half years as an infantry platoon leader at Camp Casey, South Korea and at Fort Irwin, California. Mathew said that many people he’s come to know in the group are not only veterans but also family members of veterans and supporters of veterans.

“A lot of nonveterans asked, ‘is it appropriate if I join?’” he said. “The answer is always yes, of course. You’re always welcome.”

Since joining Kirkland and becoming active in the military service group, Mathew has been preparing for Veterans Day programming, namely a letter and gift drive for the New York State Veterans’ Home of St. Albans, a veterans retirement home. The effort

is a fundraiser for the DAV (Disabled American Veterans) Charitable Service Trust.

At Reed Smith, the RS Vets group is teaming up with Operation Gratitude to hold a day of service where attorneys and staff at the firm can write letters thanking veterans for their service and making paracord survival bracelets.

Reed Smith’s diversity and inclusion efforts support military veterans, Miller said.

“It’s powerful for me to see the firm include this in other diversity groups because I do feel passionately that veterans are a minority and marginalized group that folks could learn more about through outreach,” he said.

Both Reed Smith and Kirkland say their military affinity groups work closely with their pro bono departments to find matters that benefit military veterans. For instance, Reed Smith partnered with the National Veterans Legal Services Program to win retroactive and continued compensation for veterans suffering from PTSD and also won a pro bono case for Sam Yanni, a U.S. Army combat veteran who was wounded in combat and had his life savings stolen while recovering at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center.

Kirkland said that, in 2018, it dedicated more than 4,650 pro bono hours to veteran-related work, and more than 100 of its pro bono clients last year were veterans.

“There are a lot of pro bono opportunities out there, and there are a lot more to be found,” said Remington, the Kirkland M&A associate. “We want to be a gathering point for these opportunities, and there’s more to come.”

***Samantha Stokes**, based in New York, is a staff reporter at American Lawyer covering the business of law. You can reach her at [sstokes@alm.com](mailto:ssstokes@alm.com) or on Twitter: [@stokessamanthaj](https://twitter.com/stokessamanthaj)*