



## Celebrating a Decade of Attorneys Helping Artists

BY MEREDITH BADLER

It may come as no surprise that most artists or performers can't afford market-rate legal services. And yet, the creative industries generate \$19.7 billion annually for Colorado's economy, in addition to bringing joy, vibrancy, beauty, and inspiration to our daily lives. Volunteer attorneys through Colorado Attorneys for the Arts (CAFTA) have stepped up over the last decade to help artists and cultural entities to grow, protect, and sustain their work in Colorado.

CAFTA provides unique and meaningful ways for attorneys to give back to our cultural and creative community. Through referrals

for pro bono representation, as well as legal education and consultations, CAFTA attorneys have made a tremendous impact on our creative sector, which in turn makes Colorado a better place for all of us to live, work, visit, and play.

### Origin Story

CAFTA is the only pro bono legal services program dedicated to the creative industries in the state. In fact, it is the only program of its kind in the entire Mountain Time Zone.

CAFTA is a program of the Colorado Business Committee for the Arts (CBCA), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit membership organization that has

been advancing Colorado's creative economy by connecting arts and business since 1985. CBCA accomplishes this mission through advocacy, research, training, leadership development, volunteerism, and arts engagement initiatives. Programs range from training business leaders to serve on cultural boards of directors and providing member companies with free tickets to local arts events, to economic research on the financial impact of the cultural sector and lobbying at the Colorado General Assembly.

In 2014, Dave Ratner, managing partner at Creative Law Network, participated in CBCA's Leadership Arts program and struck up a conversation with the staff about what happened to the seemingly defunct Colorado Lawyers for the Arts (COLA). For many years, COLA had successfully supported artists with accessible legal services. However, no one had heard from them in years—neither artists seeking assistance, nor attorneys trying to volunteer. CBCA coordinated an initial meeting with Dave and CBCA board members Bob Keatinge, of counsel at Holland & Hart, and Mark Davidson, then at Lewis Roca, now a director at Fairfield & Woods, who also helped launch COLA in the 1980s, to figure out if there was a way to bring back this vital service.

Since CBCA's mission is to connect arts and business, then certainly it would make sense to connect artists with attorneys. Thus, after a year of meetings with law firms and pro bono coordinators, brainstorming sessions with local artists, certified letters to an unresponsive COLA, and calls with volunteer lawyers for the arts (VLA) programs in other states, CBCA was poised to launch its newest program. It was clear there was a critical need and gap to fill, and an appropriate home for this service at CBCA.

CBCA began recruiting volunteer attorneys in spring 2015 and accepted its first applications for pro bono legal referral in October 2015. Colorado Attorneys for the Arts was off and running.

### As Long as It's Related to Art

CAFTA clients represent the full spectrum of the creative industries in Colorado. Referral clients are musicians, dancers, designers,

Top: Attorney Morgan English presenting to the Pikes Peak Arts Council in Colorado Springs.

Bottom: Attorney Brian Hanning presenting at the Founded in FoCo conference.

painters, producers, poets, directors, singers, sculptors, authors, filmmakers, storytellers, technicians, and culture bearers. Clients are also small businesses and nonprofit organizations working in the creative industries. As a statewide program, clients apply from all over the state—rural, urban, mountain, and suburban regions.

The most important factor is that the client must be working in a creative field and have an arts-related legal matter. This spans a wide range of legal matters. Most transactional attorneys are equipped to help a CAFTA client with their basic legal needs.

CAFTA makes pro bono referrals for contract drafting and review, intellectual property protection (copyright and trademark), business entity formation, nonprofit and governance counsel, real estate transactions, landlord/tenant issues, employment law, estate planning, non-litigation dispute resolution, and many other legal matters.

As a small sampling, CAFTA recently made referrals to draft a commission contract for a textile artist, facilitate the real estate purchase of a historic opera house, settle a dispute about a municipal public art project, create bylaws for a new dance nonprofit, register a trademark for a collective of visual artists, and draft performance agreements for an annual Afro-Latino dance festival.

CAFTA also vets every single application to make sure the artist couldn't otherwise afford to pay for legal services. Financial documents are verified to ensure the pro bono applicant's household income does not exceed 300% of the federal poverty guideline. Cultural nonprofit organizations must demonstrate an annual budget at or below \$500,000.

Artists and creative entities don't have the same safety net and support resources as other workforce sectors. This is true despite the fact that the creative industries account for 3.7% of Colorado's economy and there are over



121,000 creative workers in the state, according to the US Bureau of Economic Analysis. The creative industries make up a larger share of the economy than mining, transportation, or agriculture in Colorado.

Through CAFTA, we are leveraging the strength of the legal community to help artists stay and thrive in Colorado.

### **Attorneys Stepping Up**

CAFTA could not operate without a dedicated network of volunteer attorneys who are willing to step up and take a pro bono referral to a CAFTA client.

There are approximately 120 volunteer attorneys on CAFTA's mailing list who are notified twice a month about available opportunities. They get a brief email with the list of available pro bono matters, each with an anonymous summary describing the artistic client and the scope of the client's request.

Each volunteer attorney has the autonomy to determine when and how they can contribute, based on their legal expertise, practice area, and level of interest. They are also best positioned to assess their own capacity and availability. It is the responsibility of each attorney to notify CAFTA when they are ready to take on a case.

## TESTIMONIALS

“CAFTA has been one of the most valuable resources for our organization in our early stages so far. The excellent pro bono legal services we have received through their help have not only saved us thousands of dollars but also allowed us to have the contractual framework to work with artists and get off the ground. I honestly don’t know how we could have moved forward in our first couple of years without the help of CAFTA.” —Music Nonprofit

“I did not know where to begin in figuring out what type of lawyer to contact with my legal question. Based on my application, CAFTA referred me to someone based on my needs and helped bridge the knowledge gap and overwhelm I felt . . . I’m very grateful for this organization!” —Podcaster

“CAFTA’s referral service was swift and introduced me to a friendly lawyer who understood my legal issue, prioritized my request, and promptly addressed my need. Now I breathe much easier knowing that my concern has been resolved, and I am able to fully invest in my creative project without worrying about potential legal problems.” —Author

“Very thankful to have access to an attorney for the arts through CAFTA. Resources like this make it feasible to be an independent artist and feel like I can keep going.” —Musician

“We were happy to receive excellent service that placed us with the right assistance at the right time. To have quality legal help at this time in our lives is priceless. We will be forever grateful.” —Art Gallery Owners

“I always appreciate the opportunity to work with artists who are in need of assistance and don’t get to connect with entertainment lawyers very often. I find that they are very receptive to learning about the law that affects them, and are sometimes fiercer advocates for themselves than paying clients are.” —Volunteer Attorney

“CAFTA connects me with very interesting clients and projects around the state, and it’s a very rewarding experience to be able to help organizations and individuals who are doing important work in the Colorado arts world. When the work is complete, and I’ve helped the clients achieve their goals, the expressions of gratitude from the clients are like nothing I receive from any other clients.” —Volunteer Attorney

“I love working with CAFTA, I get to work with some amazing people with fantastic ideas and goals.” —Volunteer Attorney

“I appreciate the opportunity to meet my pro bono obligations by helping Colorado’s creative community through CAFTA’s referral service. The personnel at CAFTA are compassionate and professional, respecting my time as a volunteer and my abilities as an experienced attorney.” —Volunteer Attorney

There is no minimum number of pro bono hours required, nor any annual quota to meet. However, CAFTA does rely on volunteer attorneys to consistently and regularly offer their support as opportunities arise.

CAFTA clients are one-of-a-kind. They are passionate. They are inspiring. They are committed to success because their art is their livelihood, their heart, and their soul. It comes from a deeper, more meaningful place, and often the artistic work they are creating or protecting is going to have a positive ripple effect on the community as well.

Rule 6.1 of the Colorado Rules of Professional Conduct states, “Every lawyer has a professional responsibility to provide legal services to those unable to pay. A lawyer should aspire to render at least fifty hours of pro bono publico legal services per year.” However, it can be difficult to find meaningful pro bono matters for transactional attorneys. That is another gap that CAFTA is filling by helping a wide range of attorneys achieve their pro bono goals every year. And, as an added bonus, volunteer attorneys can get CLE credit for their pro bono services through CAFTA—one CLE credit for every five hours working on a matter referred through CAFTA.

### A Decade of Impact

Through CAFTA’s pro bono legal referral service, consultations, and educational workshops, we are helping artists grow, protect, and sustain their work here in Colorado. And now, a decade later, CAFTA continues to have a tremendous impact across Colorado thanks to dedicated volunteer attorneys, funders, and partners.

Over the past 10 years, CAFTA has:

- made over 380 pro bono legal referrals in the arts (and counting);
- served over 2,800 Coloradans through educational presentations and webinars;
- engaged numerous volunteer attorneys, including those at national law firms, solo practitioners, and in-house counsel;
- presented educational workshops and CLEs across the state, from Telluride to Greeley and from Pueblo to Steamboat Springs;



- served artists across all creative disciplines: visual arts, music, theatre, dance, film, creative writing, graphic design, arts education, creative placemaking, and beyond.

These are impressive numbers. We are proud of them, and they are growing every day. There is an exciting future ahead for CAFTA.

### CAFTA Needs You!

The future of CAFTA depends on you—Colorado's legal community—to step up for our arts, culture, and creative industries.

It's not a revolutionary idea. There are over 20 other VLA programs across the country. In fact, CBCA hosted the National Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts Conference in Denver in September 2025 to commemorate CAFTA's 10th anniversary. Several of those organizations have been doing this work for 40 years or longer.

There are many other valuable and vital pro bono legal services programs in Colorado that address other important societal needs. CAFTA is honored to be working alongside these distinguished colleagues across the state and the country.

The coming decade is likely to bring increased uncertainty for Colorado's cultural sector: ongoing challenges in funding and sustainable resources, heightened concerns around censorship and freedom of creative expression, and growing complexities related to artificial intelligence and emerging technologies. As the creative landscape evolves, the demand for legal guidance will continue to rise. Artists are already feeling these shifts and are turning to CAFTA for support. To meet this need, CAFTA relies on Colorado attorneys to continue stepping forward and offering their expertise.

CAFTA has made great strides in its first 10 years and is positioned to support Colorado's artists and creative sector well into the future. Active participation from Colorado's legal community is essential to CAFTA's sustainability and success. Attorneys and artists need each other to support a Colorado that is culturally and economically vibrant. Please join us. Learn more at [coloradoattorneysforthearts.org](https://coloradoattorneysforthearts.org) or [cbca.org/colorado-attorneys-for-the-arts](https://cbca.org/colorado-attorneys-for-the-arts). 



**Meredith Badler** is the deputy director at Colorado Business Committee for the Arts, where she oversees all of CBCA's programming, research, and events. She also stewards CBCA's grassroots and direct advocacy for the arts and creative industries at the state and federal level. She serves on the board of directors for Art Students League of Denver and is co-chair of the Capacity Building Committee for the Creative States Coalition.



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