Free & Legal

Business Law Corps aims to deliver corporate law services to local startups at no cost.

Gregory Kim, a corporate attorney for 25 years, believed people who wanted to start their own businesses but had limited capital were hampered by, among other things, the cost of legal advice. So Kim and two other like-minded attorneys founded a nonprofit organization that channels free legal services to new entrepreneurs and small businesses.

Welcome to the offices of Business Law Corps.

"I think attorneys don't offer corporate law as a pro bono service because it seems like an oxymoron," Kim says. "But it is a legal need that provides social and economic justice. We help people in need who are then able to lift themselves and help others."

Kim, who also is a lecturer at the William S. Richardson School of Law, teamed with University of Hawai‘i law graduates Natalie Banach and Cat Taschner — both 2011 alumni — to start the nonprofit with a goal of creating work. BLC was launched in January and is helping to connect local startups with law firms willing to provide pro bono services.

"I think that businesses and startups are the ones creating value for society," explains Kim. "Most of the new jobs in the country are created by small business."

The challenge for fledgling entrepreneurs often begins with the initial expense of launching a business. In Hawai‘i, attorney fees to incorporate and assist businesses are often run between $250 and $500 an hour. On the Mainland that hourly rate can easily exceed $1,000.

Those expenses are often daunting and burdensome for startups, and that is where BLC comes in. The nonprofit offers services — from drafting formation documents to intellectual property protection assistance — to small business owners who demonstrate a financial need and can show that their business model will create positions in the workforce.

The three founders behind Business Law Corps are all passionate about business and entrepreneurship, and even have expansion plans.

“Our goal is to take it to the Mainland," says Kim. "We want to show that Hawai‘i nonprofits can make a difference on a national level."

— Tara Zirker