

# HOW TO INCREASE COLLABORATION BETWEEN RECRUITING AND DEI DEPARTMENTS

By Shannon Burke and Jessica Hoffer



This is the second full recruiting season since George Floyd's murder and the accompanying social justice movement that spread across the United States. Law firms of all sizes, practice areas, and geographic locations have taken a hard look at their spoken and unspoken cultures and values, evaluated deep-rooted systems within the firms, and wondered how they can improve. Some law firms or firm management representatives released public statements voicing their support for the Black Lives Matter movement, while others took

internal steps to reevaluate their diversity initiatives by strengthening diversity pipelines, retaining diverse talent, and increasing the number of diverse leaders.

As we continue moving through these difficult times, bringing with us a sense of determination and hope, we — as diversity, equity, and inclusion and recruiting professionals — are likely asking ourselves what we can do. What new initiatives or programs can we collaborate on together to help move the needle toward a more diverse legal

profession? While we do not pretend to have all of the answers, below are a few ideas for you to consider.

## A Quick Disclaimer

The below initiatives will require varying levels of collaboration between whatever versions of DEI and recruiting departments exist at your firm. We recognize that we are exceptionally fortunate to not only genuinely enjoy working with one another, but our team members do as well. We work in

a mid-sized law firm and both report to our firm's Chief Talent Officer. We and our team members sit near each other (or at least we used to pre-pandemic), regularly participate in group brainstorming sessions, and cover for each other when our workloads ebb and (over)flow.

We know, however, that is not the case at every firm. Perhaps your departments are on different floors and never have an

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opportunity to interact with one another, or maybe your departments are siloed and managed by different leaders with limited opportunities for collaboration. Whatever the situation, consider making a concerted effort to find collaborative opportunities and invest in growing the relationship such that you will be able to find common ground and work toward your shared goals.

### Do Some Soul Searching

How many DEI and recruiting departments have as one of their goals for 2021 to increase the number of diverse attorneys at their firm? We are assuming nearly everyone. The first step is to take an honest assessment of where you are and where you want to be, and view this as an opportunity to work together toward a common goal.

- **Get your departments on the same page** about how your firm defines diversity for recruiting purposes. Does it include gender, racial or ethnic diversity, religious diversity, sexual orientation and identity, first generation status, different abilities, veteran status, or other demographics?

- Once you know how your firm defines diversity for recruiting purposes, **get a true baseline of what diversity at your firm currently looks like.** If you don't know the statistics at your firm already, create and release a survey through which the attorneys can self-identify. (Tip: When creating your survey, think about whether you want to use terms that can easily translate into other diversity reports, surveys, etc. for which you may also be responsible.)
- **Review the metrics together.** Are there diversity groups that are not represented or are underrepresented at the firm? Is there currently representation of a particular group, but perhaps it is concentrated at one experience level and will likely be reduced significantly in a few years as people retire?
- **Develop a plan to track this data on a continuing basis,** as diversity statistics are likely to change. Keep in mind that attorneys may be included in a demographic one year and not included in the next. For example, someone who did not previously identify as disabled may become disabled as a result

of an injury or new condition. Consider whether your internal surveys should be redistributed on an annual basis to capture any changes in statuses.

- Now that you have a baseline of information from which to work, **develop a plan together on how you will bridge that gap.**

### Reach Out to Law Schools and Student Affinity Groups

Law firm recruiting departments and law school career services offices are in constant contact throughout the on-campus interview (OCI) season. But what about the rest of the year? And are you reaching out to the law students that are from the diverse demographics that you identified through the process above? Reach out together to the law school's career services office and the diversity office.

- If you haven't already forged a relationship with the school's career service and diversity offices, **set up a videoconference** to introduce yourselves and talk about your commitment to recruiting diverse students at the firm.

**The first step is to take an honest assessment of where you are and where you want to be.**

- **Offer to host “meet the employer” events** where diverse students can learn about the firm, its practice areas, and its culture.
- **Create opportunities for diverse attorneys to mentor** and share their experiences with diverse law students.
- **Reach out to student affinity groups** to introduce yourself and your team, and offer to set up an event, presentation, or mentoring program with firm attorneys.
- **Arrange mock interviews** so that diverse law students can hone their interview skills and receive

encouragement and constructive feedback from diverse attorneys.

### Seek Out Opinions and Resources

Your firm likely relies on diverse attorneys for assistance with recruiting diverse law students, but when was the last time you sat down with this group to seek their opinions and feedback? A candid conversation about the outcome of the most recent recruiting season and the firm’s ongoing initiatives can spark a dialogue on ways to improve diverse student recruiting.

- **Invite the recruiting team and chair of the firm’s recruiting initiatives**

**to attend internal affinity group or business resource group meetings** to present a summary of the firm’s recent recruiting efforts.

- **Solicit feedback from the group** — do they feel existing initiatives would have worked to recruit them? Do they recommend making any changes?
- **Prompt the group to ask questions** both in advance and during the meeting.
- **Listen to feedback if your diverse attorneys have concerns** about existing diverse recruiting initiatives (or lack thereof).
- **Use these touchpoints to solicit volunteers for additional recruiting efforts.** If the group is particularly interested in targeting a specific school or student affinity group, offer to set up an event, presentation, or mentoring program with firm attorneys.

### Pool Your Financial Resources

Aligning goals and financial resources can be a cost-saving measure for both the recruiting and DEI teams, especially during the ongoing pandemic and any cost-cutting measures your firm has implemented as a result. By

sharing resources, the recruiting and DEI teams can continue to work toward their shared goals.

- **Identify law student affinity groups you can support** with a financial or in-kind sponsorship.
- If your firm does not usually have a 1L summer associate position, **create a position for a diverse 1L student** who is interested in gaining experience at a law firm.
- **Sponsor a law student** to work for a social justice non-profit over the summer.
- **Create a scholarship** for diverse law students.
- When the recruiting department is making a purchase for swag or other items, **use diverse suppliers.**

### Build in DEI Training

In preparation for recruiting season, many law firm recruiting departments offer training for interviewers that reviews how to ask effective questions and actively listen to what is (or isn’t) stated in a response while



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## Develop a plan to track diversity data on a continuing basis.

highlighting the firm's positive attributes. The departments can work together to incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion training into these existing programs.

- **Explain blind recruitment** and why the firm may want to consider removing personally identifiable information from applicants' resumes.
- **Talk about implicit bias** and how it can appear throughout the interview process.
- **Teach interviewers to be mindful of others' personal experiences, economic demands, and other factors** that may affect why a candidate has a comparably lower GPA than other candidates or why a candidate may have needed to take a paid non-legal job rather than having an unpaid legal experience.
- **Consider removing the transcript and GPA from candidate materials** when conducting callback interviews.

- **Identify common cultural pitfalls** that occur during interviews and how to avoid them.
- **Track evaluations.** If interviewers routinely recommend not pursuing diverse candidates, consider if their recommendations are the result of conscious or unconscious biases and, if so, whether they could benefit from additional implicit bias training or should no longer interview on behalf of the firm.
- **Invite your DEI colleagues to present at the training** and give a primer on the diversity initiatives at the firm.

### Put Your Best Foot Forward

Many law firm recruiting departments invest substantial time and financial resources into their marketing materials such as website content, advertisements, brochures, swag, and other items. Although they carefully craft messages to highlight the firm's positive attributes, by consulting the DEI department and the firm's diverse attorneys, they reduce the

likelihood of inadvertently sending a message they did not intend. For example, a picture of four colleagues smiling and working on a project together may intend to send a message of collaboration. However, a picture of four white, non-disabled, male-presenting colleagues may inadvertently send the message that ethnically diverse, disabled, or female-presenting applicants need not apply.

- **Share the draft marketing materials with a variety of attorneys at the firm** and seek their impressions, input, and recommendations.
- If someone indicates that they are offended or upset by your marketing materials, **listen to them, learn from the mistake, and adjust the behavior going forward.**
- **Verify that any diversity statistics or other related information is accurate** and current.
- **Consider including in the marketing materials the firm's diversity initiatives, programs, trainings, and other events.** Cross-department collaboration to provide the most up-to-date information serves the dual purpose of educating potential applicants and

your attorneys about all of the diversity initiatives at your firm.

We readily recognize that not all of these suggestions will land well at every firm, for a variety of reasons. But hopefully there is at least one nugget in here that you can use to help bring positive change within your sphere of influence. Here's to wishing you and yours well in the upcoming OCI season and through the rest of the year. +



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