

A GUIDE TO INCLUSIVE RECRUITMENT

DIVERSE WOMEN IN
LAW



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WHO ARE WE?

Diverse Women in Law (DWL) aims to support women who self-identify as women, non-binary and gender diverse, and who also self-identify as being from one or more of the following underrepresented backgrounds:

- culturally and linguistically diverse persons;
 - Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander persons;
 - LGBTQI+ persons;
 - people living with a disability;
 - people who are or have experienced socioeconomic disadvantage; and
 - people with caring responsibilities,
- (together, **Diverse Women**).

By empowering Diverse Women through mentoring, networking and support initiatives, and particularly by engaging with stakeholders to raise awareness of the untapped diverse talent that exists, DWL hopes to enable positive change across the profession.



ADVERTISING A POSITION

When advertising a role, there are a number of factors that are relevant to Diverse Women applicants, including:

- **Accessibility of information** – Access to information about the firm and application process can vary for each applicant based on factors such as the university they attend, or whether or not the applicant has pre-existing contacts or previous exposure to the law.
- **Representative advertising** – A lack of visible role models at informational events and in advertising material can disincentivise applicants from applying for a role.
- **A gap in intersectionality** – Whether or not a firm has a genuine commitment to intersectional diversity (ie diversity in all of its forms, and not limited to gender).

"Knowing that other people like me had gone through the process and made it to the other end helped with the undoing of any subconscious or perceived limitations that I thought I might face. Where a firm paid attention to the details in their advertising – e.g. using gender-neutral language (they/them) in their social media/recruitment adverts – I developed the impression that they were truly committed to being inclusive and was more likely to apply to them"

DWL STUDENT & 2021 CLERKSHIP APPLICANT



ADVERTISING A POSITION

OUR TOP TIPS:

We recommend that firms:

- continue to make application information available through online mediums such as webinars and virtual events. This could involve facilitating sessions on commercial awareness, diversity initiatives within the firm and the application process for specific universities that are underrepresented in your firm.
- target pre-penultimate year students when advertising positions. This raises awareness of opportunities that are available at an earlier stage and instils motivation in students in the earlier years of their education to work towards that goal.
- involve and consult diverse employees in developing the strategy and content of recruitment events and advertising materials. This includes employees who have taken alternative pathways to being a lawyer and visible role models from varied socio-economic, LGBTQI+, indigenous and other backgrounds.
- highlight diversity initiatives that focus on intersectionality. This includes various diversity committees within the firm, mentoring programs for Diverse Women and whether the firm is considering targets for improving intersectional representation.

"I found out about new opportunities mainly through emails from my university's Faculty of Law, university law society posts, and organisations such as DWL. Communications through university faculties and organisations like DWL are also particularly helpful in reaching students who may not know where to look themselves (e.g. not knowing which firms offer clerkships etc.)"

ASSESSING WRITTEN APPLICATIONS

When preparing a written application such as a CV or cover letter, Diverse Women face a number of obstacles including:

- **Demonstrating desired skills and experiences** – applicants who have not worked in a legal or office environment may opt-out of applying for clerkships as they might assume that they cannot demonstrate the skills required in a legal atmosphere.
- **Emphasising skills and suitability for the role** – being able to ‘sell yourself’ might be foreign concept to some applicants, particularly those from non-legal backgrounds or battling with imposter syndrome. Similarly, in certain cultures it is inappropriate for younger people to boast about their achievements or over-emphasise their experiences.
- **Lack of guidance and support** – when preparing applications, applicants may not have access to CV or cover letter templates or support networks to review their written applications.

"I applied for clerkships two years in a row. The first year, it was particularly difficult for me to articulate my experience and strengths in the written application. I did not know how to write a clerkship application and often felt as though I was losing my authenticity to try and sell myself as an 'ideal candidate' for these firms. It is challenging applying as a diverse woman, particularly knowing that the likelihood of being hired was significantly less than other candidates. In my second year, because of organisations like DWL, I was able to network and connect with other senior diverse practitioners, who were able to support me and guide me through this complex process. It was incredibly helpful being able to brainstorm how to outline my experiences confidently and share aspects of myself that were beyond my legal experience."

DWL STUDENT, 2021 & 2022 CLERKSHIP APPLICANT



ASSESSING WRITTEN APPLICATIONS

OUR TOP TIPS:

We recommend that firms:

1. Ask candidates to reflect on their lived experience, soft skills, cultural background and values and its transferability to legal practice. This can encourage applicants to draw upon a multitude of factors (beyond legal or commercial experience) in seeking to express their desire to apply for a firm.
2. Consider resources that can be provided to students on drafting and preparing their CV/Cover letter, including templates or tailored workshops, so that applicants have access to support prior to submitting their applications. This could involve partnering with law societies and organisations like DWL to run tailored information sessions for diverse candidates.
3. When seeking responses for the purpose of recruitment tools such as RARE, frame the questions in a manner that is positive and empowering of the candidate's lived experience. For example, include a section to provide 'further information about their lived experience' to add weight to their written application to incentivise more applicants to use the tool.
4. Implement blind assessment of written applications, removing data on name, high school and university to address any unconscious bias relating to these factors.

"One of the challenges I have faced when completing a written application is taking pride in my achievements and highlighting my strengths. However, after gaining exposure to mentorship and guidance from diverse women who have been through the application process, I have learned how to curate my unique experiences and sell myself in a way that is desirable to employers, whilst still highlighting my individuality. I now have a strong sense of confidence in myself, my background, and what I can bring to the workplace."

NETWORKING EVENTS

Attending networking events can be an overwhelming and daunting experience for Diverse Women. Such events can raise feelings of imposter syndrome due to the absence of visible role models in the room or lack of experience in formal and professional group environments.

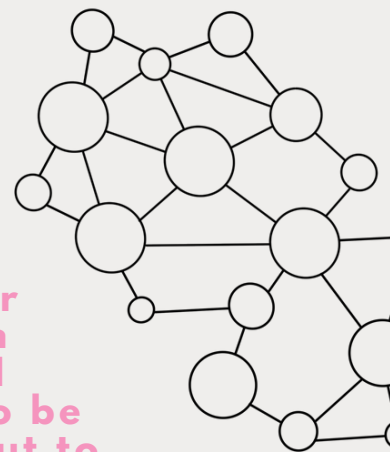
“Growing up in an Asian household was one aspect of my identity, but also coming from a low socioeconomic background meant that I didn’t know to navigate the corporate environment or what the industry would be like. Finding and connecting with people (at networking nights or information sessions) who had similar experiences, and who had once felt the same as I did (and had valuable tips to share!) was incredibly important. It was easier to buy into a firm’s diversity strategy when they had people who reflected the multiple facets of diversity (and its intersections). It also meant it was easier to have confidence that the firm was somewhere that I could see myself working and pursuing a career.”

DWL STUDENT & CLERKSHIP APPLICANT



“As an individual who had no experience or connections within the legal industry when applying to different Clerkship positions, I initially found attending networking events to be a nerve racking experience. My nerves were put to the side at networking events where firms made an effort to ensure that they highlighted their focus on diversity and there were diverse, friendly people from the firm who attended. I found networking events were a great way to introduce myself to different firms, make connections and learn about the culture of each firm in a low stress environment.”

DWL STUDENT, 2020 & 2021 CLERKSHIP APPLICANT



NETWORKING EVENTS

OUR TOP TIPS:

We recommend that firms:

- Consider alternative formats for running networking events: for example, in a location rather than a corporate office and by including an online and in-person component.
- Provide conversation starters or prompts, include set time blocks and a rotation system to encourage participation from all applicants. Unconscious bias can arise through incidental and social conversation topics such as sports, cultural celebrations and overseas holiday destinations that many people from diverse backgrounds cannot relate to.
- Encourage a buddy or pairing system at networking events (as well as before the interview) that includes employees who have shown genuine commitment and interest in D&I objectives.
- Ensure that catering is inclusive to all attendees (ie dietary requirements) with a range of non-alcoholic options available. This includes educating staff and employees in attendance to be aware of cultural sensitives when encouraging applicants to "have a drink" or assisting applicants to identify if vegetarian or halal food is being served.
- Endeavour to include diverse representation of employees who attend and speak at networking events.

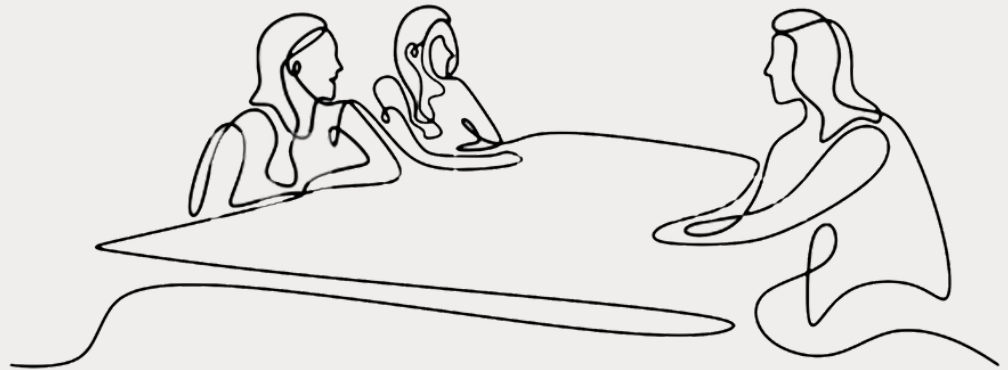
"I remember attending my first networking event and immediately noticing how everybody in the room looked the same, and yet noticeably different from me. The anxiety of not knowing where to go, who to approach, who I could find similarity or comradery with has shaped my experience at too many recruitment networking events and has often flowed onto my experience during other stages of the application process."

DWL STUDENT, 2021 & 2022 CLERKSHIP APPLICANT

INTERVIEWING DIVERSE CANDIDATES

Progressing to an interview stage of the application process is an exciting and nervous time for diverse candidates. Some of the challenges experienced include:

- **Lack of confidence** that they will be able to 'sell' themselves.
- **Feeling disconnected** with their interviewer.
- **Lack of support** to prepare or practice for their interview, which could present in applicants appearing less confident, articulate or competent.
- **Difficulties in obtaining corporate attire** for the interview or accessing a quiet and professional environment to participate in a virtual interview. Diverse Women are less willing to request necessary accommodations during the interview process, as they do not want to be considered to be more different.



"As a culturally and linguistically diverse applicant, I was excited when I was asked about my experiences of diversity in my interview. However, the indifferent response I received made me feel as if I had merely checked a box, rather than connecting with or relating to my interviewers, who seemed more interested by my interest in travelling and plans to train for a half-marathon. This experience made me realise that it is not only important to talk about diversity in interviews, but also to show applicants that diversity exists within the firm themselves, particularly on interview panels."

INTERVIEWING DIVERSE CANDIDATES

OUR TOP TIPS:

We recommend that firms:

- Endeavour to convene a diverse interview panel (with back-ups for last minute cancellations) to help the applicant feel at ease and reinforce the firm's commitment to valuing diverse voices.
- If diverse employees are unable to be sourced or unavailable for the interview, provide applicants with further support ahead of the interview. Communication (e.g. an email) from a partner or senior lawyer at the firm to reassure the candidate that they are valued and have much to offer could aid their performance in the interview.
- Ensure that all interviewers have received appropriate cultural awareness and unconscious bias training, to better prepare interviewers when interviewing diverse candidates. This can include raising awareness of subtle racism or microaggressions such as:
 - Being complimented on being very articulate;
 - Forming assumptions about a candidate's cultural background and openly discussing cultural stereotypes in an interview; and
 - Not making an effort to correctly pronounce a diverse candidate's name.

"My best interview experiences were those where I was given the space to show up as my authentic self. As opposed to following a list of questions, as a Diverse Woman I benefitted from having a loosely structured discussion about how my life experiences have broadly influenced my character and work ethic. Setting a casual tone to the meeting was also important for me to be able to talk about myself in a way that felt genuine and candid."

DWL STUDENT & 2021 CLERKSHIP APPLICANT

INTERVIEWING DIVERSE CANDIDATES

OUR TOP TIPS CONTINUED..

We recommend that firms:

- Interview candidates on their lived experience, cultural background/values and its transferability to legal practice. Ask questions about their international upbringing, migrating to Australia at a later stage in life, caring for family members and how this has helped developed an interest or passion for the law. Examples of questions include:
 - How their non-legal experience has contributed to skills that would be beneficial in a law firm.
 - How working or caring for family while studying has developed their time-management and multi-tasking skills.
 - How coming from a large family, living in various countries or attending an international school has contributed to their interpersonal skills.

"I think it is a good idea (particularly if the interviewee is a woman) to have a gender balance in the interview panel. The same can be said about interviewees with diverse (culturally, LGBTQI+, low SES etc.) backgrounds. I think there is some comfort in being able to see that someone with shared circumstances/background as you can make to it senior positions and, in turn, make the interview process seem a bit less scary and intimidating."

DWL STUDENT & 2021 CLERKSHIP APPLICANT



GET IN TOUCH

CONTACT US

If you would like to discuss this document further or partner with us, you can reach us at:

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