

Inclusive Recruitment

Best practice guidance on facilitating inclusive hiring processes by Diverse Women in Law



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OUR MISSION

Diverse Women in Law (DWL) aims to support women who identify as women, non-binary and gender diverse, and who also identify as being from an underrepresented backgrounds. 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.** For details about our mission and cause, visit our [website](#).

ABOUT THE GUIDE

DWL is committed to working with our corporate partners and stakeholders to identify tangible solutions and strategies to increase the representation of Diverse Women in clerkship and graduate cohorts. **This guide sets out some potential areas for consideration at 3 critical phases of recruitment.** These tips have been informed by qualitative and quantitative data collected from DWL members who have undergone the interview process at commercial law firms.



BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

1. TARGETED MATCHING OF BUDDIES

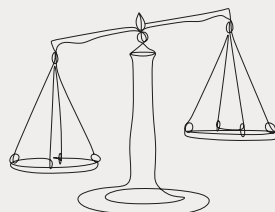
We recommend taking active steps to match applicants with a buddy from a diverse background or with similar lived experiences to help create a safe space for applicants to ask questions about the firm prior to their interview.

The involvement of “interview buddies” with similar backgrounds can help diverse applicants feel valued by a firm and provide a valuable source of information about the firm’s initiatives, people and practice groups.

2. DIVERSE REPRESENTATION AT RECRUITMENT EVENTS

We recommend that firms take active steps to ensure that recruitment events are attended by representatives from diverse backgrounds.

Visible role models at recruitment events can be perceived as a reflection of the composition of diverse lawyers at a firm and help applications with facilitating conversations on culture and the firm’s commitment towards diversity and inclusion.



3. NOMINATE DIVERSITY CHAMPIONS

We recommend nominating suitable employees to act as “diversity champions” for the interview to provide applicants with a single point of contact to ask questions about the firm’s D&I objectives.

Whilst there is considerable information available about the diversity and inclusion objectives of the firm, there is often a gap in understanding how it translates to everyday practice.

“I am the first in my family to attend university, let alone law school and come from significant economic disadvantage. Going to uni in the city has made me realise how much of a private school club law is, and as a disabled queer woman from a tiny rural town, I wanted to apply to firms that actively encouraged unique perspectives”

DWL 2023 Survey Respondent

“The presence of Diverse Women at the firm, particularly in senior and leadership positions, showed to me that the firm genuinely cares about diversity and will take action on this value. If a firm ticked all these boxes for me, then I reasoned that I would likely enjoy the work, be in a team with people that I get along well with, and that I would be working in a firm where advancement is possible for women.”

DWL 2023 Survey Respondent

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW (contd..)

4. MOCK INTERVIEW SUPPORT

We recommend that firms direct candidates to organisations that offer mock interview workshops and involve their staff. Many applicants will not have attended a formal interview prior to their clerkship/graduate interview, and may not have access to professionals to help with their preparation.

“Culture was important to me, so I felt like meeting people who work at the firm could provide more insight into the reality of the culture/collaborative/mentoring relationships available at a firm than generic marketing material would”

DWL 2023 Survey Respondent

“Overall I felt the interview process did not align with the firms supposed commitment to diversity and inclusion. When I spoke about my experiences as a diverse woman and how those experiences had shaped me into a suitable candidate, the panel disconnected and I felt a shift in body language and engagement.”

DWL 2023 Survey Respondent

“Many firms would make grand statements about their diversity initiatives but I would only be interviewed or in contact with straight white old men... I felt that firms that didn't advertise their diversity initiatives as much, but obviously had lawyers/partners from many different backgrounds clearly seemed to value diversity more than other firms.” **2023 Survey Respondent**

5. ARRANGE TRAINING & BRIEF INTERVIEWERS ON OUR EXPERIENCES

We recommend that interviewers should receive cultural awareness training before the interview (covering topics such as use of pronouns) and take the time to inform themselves of the unique experiences of diverse candidates and its relevance to a commercial setting.



DURING THE INTERVIEW

1. FACILITATE AN INCLUSIVE INTERVIEW SETTING

We recommend exercising a degree of flexibility with respect to the format of the interview. This could include choice to conduct a virtual interview or having a confidential discussion about a candidate's special needs.

Candidates perform exponentially better in an interview setting that is welcoming, embraces their differences and accommodates any special needs that a candidate may require.

3. DEMONSTRATE GENUINE CURIOSITY ABOUT EXPERIENCES

We recommend that interviewers frame questions that demonstrates their genuine curiosity of a candidate's diverse experiences. Candidates are most confident in interviews where they are invited to speak about their lived experiences in an open, candid and honest manner. Formulaic interviews, where a checklist of questions is adopted can affect a candidate's ability to link their unique skills, experience and attributes to the requirements of the role.

"I had two rounds of interviews that were conducted by partners who were women. To have not one but two female partners interview me during the interviewing process was a key indicator that women could be successful in this firm. It also showed me that I would have female role models at this firm, and that I could learn from their career journeys." **2023 Survey Respondent**

2. SHARE COMMON LIVED EXPERIENCES WITH YOUR INTERVIEWEE

We recommend interviewers are matched with interviewees with similar lived experiences (beyond university background and preference of practice group) and that at least one female employee interacts with the candidate during the interview process. The presence of diverse interviewers is perhaps the most influential factor that affects a candidate's perception of the firm and performance during the interview.

4. MEANINGFUL DISCUSSION OF THE FIRMS D&I INITIATIVES

We recommend diversity is a topic better raised by the candidate and that responses should include reference to practical measures undertaken by the firm such as targets or quotas, investment in diversity committees and relevant statistics. Providing information on a firm's diversity and inclusion initiatives without context can be perceived as stereotyping a diverse candidate. Be mindful of making a judgment on the candidate based on whether or not they address their diversity during the interview.

"[During my interview] I also really appreciated when interviewers phrased their questions in a way that invited me to tell them more. Articulating their questions in this way instilled me with confidence during the interview because it did not feel as if I had to prove myself as a worthy applicant, but instead allowed me to talk more candidly about my experiences and skills"

2022 Clerkship applicant

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

1. PROVIDE TAILORED SUPPORT TO CANDIDATE BEFORE COMMENCING ROLE

At the time of deciding on whether to accept an offer, candidates can often feel overwhelmed or anxious and lack access to appropriate information channels about a firm. When it is time to start their role, many applicants may face feelings of self-doubt, whether they are deserving of the role or that they have been selected because of their diverse backgrounds.

We recommend that firms:

- nominate a senior representative (not the interviewer or HR representative) that can help facilitate the decision making process for a candidate.
- take steps to link diverse employees with an ongoing point of contact who can help them navigate their role and create a knowledge bank of resources to assist their understanding of the role.

“My choice to go with [firm] was centered around their inclusivity in the process, their culture, knowing other diverse women who work there, and their proven track record through their commitment to diversity initiatives and organisations such as DWL.”

2023 Survey Respondent

“My experience with my buddy telling me to highlight my queerness in my interview influenced me to turn down that offer along with the seeming standardisation of the interview. I accepted an offer at a firm where there were a number of queer representatives throughout the hiring process.”

2023 Survey Respondent



APPENDIX A: SURVEY FINDINGS

In May 2023, DWL released a survey to Diverse Women law students and young lawyers seeking to gather empirical data on the challenges faced during the clerkship and graduate recruitment process at commercial firms.

The questions in the survey were focussed on the factors that influenced decision-making when applying for a role and the interview process. The results of the survey are summarised on the right.



41% of respondents were paired with a buddy who shared their lived experience.

33.3% of survey respondents did not have any support when preparing for their interview, of those who did, the primary source of advice was from friends (**43.6%**).

51.3% of survey respondents faced an interview panel with someone from a diverse background.

73.5% of survey respondents indicated that firm culture was the most important factor when deciding not to apply for a firm. A number of respondents provided anecdotes of negative interactions they had with firm representatives which disincentivised them from applying.

[1] The DWL Clerkship and Graduate Recruitment Survey was open from 12 May 2023 - 22 May 2023 and was completed by 39 respondents. The Survey was circulated to DWL student members, our commercial firm sponsors of which Allens, Ashurst, Clyde & Co and Minter Ellison circulated the survey to their graduate cohorts and was advertised on the social media channels of DWL, Macquarie University Law Society, Sydney University Law Society and UTS Law Society. We estimate that the Survey was circulated to 300 - 400 eligible respondents in total (i.e. those who had applied for a clerkship or graduate position at a commercial law firm).