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## Creating a Diverse, Sustainable In-House Summer Program

By Cynthia R. White **All Articles**

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Some in-house law departments assume that hosting a summer intern program for any law students, much less diverse law students, is a daunting task. Some of the perceived hurdles are a lack of dedicated resources, infrastructure, time and recruitment know-how for a diverse pool of candidates. Given these challenges, it is easy to see why an in-house department may forgo a summer program. However, if you have one individual who has the interest and is willing to champion for and take on the responsibility of initiating the program, your company can have a sustainable diverse summer program.

Here are some tips for creating a diverse summer program:

### LEVERAGE ALIGNMENT

A vital step is to develop a program that fits your department. In the current business environment, it will be rare for a company/law department not to have a written diversity and inclusion statement. Therefore, a preliminary step is to review your law department's/company's written diversity statement. This review will give you an understanding of your law department's commitment to diversity, as well as help you identify whether a diversity summer program aligns with that diversity position. If your department has articulated a goal of increasing the diversity of its staff, then you can easily make the case that the implementation of a diverse summer program is a valuable opportunity for your department to expand its diversity efforts at the pipeline level.

### CONFIRM RESOURCES

A program can be created by using existing resources within your law department. Identify and meet with the key internal stakeholders, such as the diversity/inclusion officer, sponsor or committee. The goal of these discussions is to confirm that you have both the financial support and the leadership team's buy-in to host a program. Knowing what funds, staff and other resources will be available to you will give you a framework for creating your program. Once you have your framework, consult with your human resources department to determine whether there are any company rules or processes that you may need to follow.

### SOLICIT HELP

Identify the members of the law department who may have an interest in either mentoring or supervising a summer intern. Since many attorneys view mentorship as a way of giving back and investing in the development of a future attorney, you should not come up empty-handed. As a result, you will have a pool of individuals with whom you may match the students with for mentorship and supervision.

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## ENHANCE YOUR PROGRAM STRUCTURE

With funds and personnel resources dedicated to the summer program, at the very least your program will introduce the intern(s) to the varied and complex legal issues encountered in a corporate law setting as well as the various career paths that exist in-house. If you wish to further enhance your program, search the Internet for descriptions of internship programs for ideas. There may also be local organizations that will provide you with assistance. For example, the Delaware Valley chapter of the Association of Corporate Counsel's (DELVACCA) website states that DELVACCA will work with a member company to help it structure a good internship experience. Another organization, the Philadelphia Diversity Law Group (PDLG), hosts seminars for its member organizations on legal writing, interviewing, judicial clerkships and other topics of interest to assist diverse law students in their careers. If you do not have the access to these or similar organizations, you may reach out to other established in-house programs for guidance on program structure and to identify potential opportunities to engage in joint activities, such as a networking luncheon or dinner. Another option is to partner with your outside law firm to have the firm adopt your intern, which would allow the intern to participate in the firm's summer program activities.

## USE RECRUITMENT RESOURCES

Finding a diverse candidate pool has gotten a lot easier if you are located in an area where you can partner with an existing summer program feeder resource. Feeder programs advertise and recruit qualified candidates for potential employers. In the Philadelphia area, the PDLG 1L Fellows Program and the DELVACCA Diversity Corporate Summer Internship Program provide a pool of diverse law students that its corporate members may hire. Similar programs exist in other cities and regions, e.g., the New York City Bar Association Diversity Fellowship Program, the Boston Lawyers Group, the Lawyers Collaborative for Diversity in Connecticut, the Association of Corporate Counsel's Chicago Chapter Diversity Summer Internship Program and the North Carolina Bar Association 1L Summer Associate Program. On a national level, the Leadership Council on Legal Diversity (LCLD) has a 1L LCLD Scholars Program for diverse 1L students at many of its member corporate law departments. Even if you do not have access to a feeder program, many area law schools or affinity bar associations may be willing to work with you to identify potential candidates.

The key for starting an in-house summer program is that you don't have to reinvent the wheel. If you have a program champion, the ability to use existing law department resources and a computer with Internet access to research the numerous external resources that are available, then you have what you need to create a sustainable diverse summer internship program.

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