



The Rhode Island Bar Association

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Agenda

Establish the Diversity and Inclusion Task Force as a Standing Committee: The Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee

Committee Charge:

The Committee will meet regularly to discuss DEI-related matters of interest to the membership and to make recommendations which will foster a sense of equity and inclusion among members. The Committee will also propose DEI-related CLE and Annual Meeting programming, networking events with affinity legal organizations, and resources for the membership.

Next steps:

- Notice posted on Bar's website, in Bar Journal, and in DEI newsletter soliciting interest (30 or more members needed); invite Task Force members to serve
- Chairperson selected by President Laing

DEI Pledge (see Addendum A)

The DEI Pledge will invite all members and/or firms to participate in a pledge to show their commitment to increasing DEI in the legal profession. The Pledge, while completely optional, will offer helpful suggestions for members to achieve this goal. The Pledge is an aspirational model and execution of the Pledge is based on good faith efforts of signatories. Participants who sign the Pledge will be listed on a page of the RIBA website.

Create DEI web page on the RIBA website, including:

- DEI Member Survey - Executive Summary & Results
- DEI Agenda
- DEI Pledge
- Roster of Task Force (and committee, if/when established)
- DEI newsletters
- Leadership opportunities
- Resource links
- Links to diversity & affinity bar associations
- Links to articles in the Rhode Island Bar Journal (Focus on the Future features, RI Women Lawyers features, and other relevant articles)
- Highlight DEI efforts within the Association (committees, programs, leadership)

Distribute DEI Action Plan Checklist to Bar leaders on an annual basis (See Addendum B)

To support the Bar Association's recognition of the importance of integrating diverse perspectives in our activities and programs and having attorneys of diverse backgrounds and from underrepresented identity groups in positions of leadership within the Association, a voluntary Action Plan Checklist will be available to RIBA members on the website as well as distributed to all leaders on an annual basis.

Law Related Education

To enhance both the Lawyers in the Classroom program as well as the Speakers Bureau, topics related to DEI in the legal profession will be added to our current areas of focus. The following topics will be added to attorney LRE signup forms as members must volunteer to be available to speak:

Suggested legal topics related to DEI for Lawyers in the Classroom:

- Title VII as it relates to students/schools
- Equal opportunity and affirmative action

Suggested legal topics related to DEI for Speakers Bureau:

- Title VII and Employment Law
- Civil rights
- Harassment in the workplace

Bar Awards

The following language will be added to awards criteria:

The _____ Award Committee welcomes nominations for candidates of diverse backgrounds and from underrepresented identity groups.

Encourage DEI in Annual Meeting and CLE program proposals

Language will be added to Annual Meeting and regular CLE program proposals encouraging adding panelists from diverse backgrounds to forms:

“The RIBA believes that diverse perspectives are critically important to the justice system and to the success of those who practice law. Please make an effort to include speakers of diverse backgrounds on your panels. The broad concept of diversity includes, but is not limited to, psychological, physical, and social differences that occur among any and all individuals, such as race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, economic class, age, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, mental and physical ability, veteran status, and learning styles.”

The statement, “Please consider whether you are able to incorporate issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion into your program,” will also be added to CLE and Annual Meeting proposal forms.

The CLE Committee will be encouraged to be committed to monitoring the availability of programs from other legal organizations and offering constructive, comprehensive programming to educate members on DEI related matters.

Law Student Participation in CLE Programs

In an effort to foster networking opportunities for law students, facilitate a higher likelihood of staying in RI to practice law, and encourage a future supportive relationship with the Association, law student members will be allowed and encouraged to attend live RIBA CLE programs free of charge.

DEI Trailblazer Award (See Addendum C)

An award to recognize the exceptional efforts of Bar members related to advancing the interests of members from diverse backgrounds and underrepresented groups will be established and presented to an attorney or firm at the Annual Meeting in June on a biennial basis.

Establish a Point of Contact at RIBA for DEI-Related Inquiries from Members

At least one RIBA staff member will serve as a direct point of contact for inquiries from members on issues related to DEI. The staff person will attend all DEI Committee meetings. This staff person(s) will have title of DEI Liaison on the Bar's staff page on the website.

Establish Point of Contact at Affinity Bar Associations & Legal Organizations

RIBA staff will reach out to all affinity bar associations and legal organizations to affirm our commitment to collaborating on matters related to DEI within the scope of the Association and to establish a point of contact for such matters.

RWU Diversity Symposium

If there is an invitation from organizers of the RWU Diversity Symposium for RIBA to collaborate on planning, RIBA will gladly participate as long as the requested level of participation falls within the scope of the Association.

Intro

~~The~~ For those who may be interested, the Rhode Island Bar Association's Diversity and Inclusion Task Force created this Diversity, Equity and Inclusion ("DEI") Pledge and invites lawyers, law firms, legal departments, legal services, and law-related organizations to join RIBA in its commitment to increase diversity in the legal profession. ~~Those who participate in the Pledge will be acknowledged on the RIBA website for their good faith efforts. Our first pledge period will begin July 1, 2021 and efforts will be evaluated before the Bar's Annual Meeting in June of each year, but you or your legal employer can start at any time. Members of the Task Force will check in with signatories throughout the year to see how you or your firm is progressing and offer suggestions, if desired.~~ We hope you will join this effort with all of us to better our profession for the future **by signing on to the Pledge set forth below.**

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DEI Statement of Principles

The RIBA recognizes that diversity, equity and inclusion within the profession supports our mission and promotes a fair and equal justice system. The Diversity and Inclusion Task Force was established to integrate diverse perspectives in our activities and educational programming to encourage and cultivate social discourse among all members of the Rhode Island Bar, elevate attorneys of diverse backgrounds to positions of leadership within the Association, and promote interest in the practice of law among diverse populations. **We believe that a diverse group of talented legal professionals is critically important to the justice system and to the success of every law firm, legal department, legal service, and law-related organization.** ~~as we~~ We recognize that those upholding the law should reflect **all the diverse community** whose civil liberties ~~they~~ we strive to protect.

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DEI PLEDGE:

Those signing this DEI Pledge ~~hereby commit themselves~~ agree to make good faith efforts to foster diversity, equity and inclusion in the legal profession and within their spheres of influence as set forth in the Statement of Principles above. To this end, we pledge to use our best efforts to meet the following goals:

1. Increase diversity within the profession;
2. Ensure equity in internal employee policies and practices, and promote the inclusion of all types of individuals at all levels in the profession; and
3. Ensure equity in availability and accessibility of legal services provided.

Organization: _____

Name & Title: _____

Address: _____

E-mail: _____ Phone: _____ Date:----- _____

Signing as: ___ Solo/Individual ___ 2-6 lawyer office ___ 7-15 lawyer office ___ 15+ lawyer office

For specific action items to assist you in fulfilling your pledge above, please click here. [link connects to checklist below](#) ~~This checklist will also be used to evaluate your progress in April 2022.~~

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Pledge Checklist

~~While Every~~ every individual ~~may identify and can~~ take steps to increase diversity, equity and inclusion in their spheres of influence, ~~the Diversity and Inclusion Task Force understands that not all suggested action items may apply to or be feasible for~~ Some activities may or may not be appropriate or feasible depending on whether you are a solo practitioners, in-house counsel, government lawyers ~~and or~~ a member of a small firms. ~~Concepts~~ Some helpful, optional activities are listed below ~~are flexible and and~~ can be personalized to fit your working situation. Although this is not an exhaustive list of actions that can be undertaken, we suggest the following goals:

~~Solo and Individual: Complete 4 items of your choice*~~

~~Offices with 2-6 Lawyers: Complete 8 items of your choice~~

~~Offices with 7-15 lawyers: Complete 12 items of your choice~~

~~Offices with 15+ lawyers: Complete 15 items of your choice~~

~~*checklist items flexible for solo/individual; Task Force will be considerate of limitations for solo/individual signatories upon checklist review~~

Community

By completing items in this category, you or your organization ~~intend to may~~ evidence ~~show~~ a commitment to promoting community-facing involvement and action with regard to DEI efforts.

- Become involved with or encourage and offer incentives for attorneys to become involved with DEI efforts sponsored by law schools, bar associations, and community organizations. *Involvement and collaboration with other organizations on DEI efforts supports a joint mission to make Rhode Island a more attractive place to practice law for a broader base of lawyers from more diverse backgrounds. Consider awards for exceptional participation.*
- Join or encourage employee attorneys to join an affinity bar association such as Thurgood Marshall Law Society, Women’s Bar Association, Hispanic Bar Association, or the Cape Verdean American Lawyers Association.
- Become an active member of or make donations to a community organization that supports underrepresented or historically marginalized groups. *Please [click here](#) for a full list of the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Opportunity’s partner organizations.*

- Consider a company's commitment to and progress toward achieving DEI goals when selecting vendors.

[Click here for the state's Minority or Women Owned Business Enterprise.](#)

~~Host a social event for employee attorneys related to DEI or to build connections that support employee inclusion.~~ **Host a social event for employees to enhance connections with and among diverse attorneys and staff and support employee inclusion.**

This a simple act that will help all attorneys in the firm feel truly welcome and part of the fabric of the firm.

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- Provide pro bono legal services to members of the public.
- Volunteer at, participate in or sponsor an event geared towards underrepresented or historically marginalized groups.

~~host a table at an LGTBO+ Pride event and offer w/helpful services related if applicable to your work you are qualified to provide.~~

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Workplace

By completing items in this category, you or your organization are **committing to supporting and increasing diversity, equity, and inclusion in your particular workplace.**

- Hire entry-level attorneys that reflect the demographics of our state.
This includes underrepresented and historically marginalized groups, LGBTQ+ individuals and people with disabilities, including learning disabilities and mental health conditions. Ensure jobs are posted in job boards or within networks that reach underrepresented groups.

- Publicly recognize DEI efforts of employees.
Create social media posts or press releases to highlight exceptional efforts from attorneys.

- Maintain statistics on DEI efforts; track demographic information of applicants and hires to ~~identify problem areas.~~ **Identify under-represented populations and marginalized groups to remediate those deficiencies in hiring and compensation.**
Consider including percentages of attorneys in all levels of practice, compensation statistics, and numbers of hours spent on meaningful legal matters.

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- Consider a law firm's commitment to and progress toward achieving DEI goals when selecting outside counsel.
Ensure that attorneys who work on and have responsibility for your matters are representative of various identity groups. Also seek to expand opportunities for firms owned by individuals from underrepresented or historically marginalized groups.

· **Create a DEI policy.**

Include diversity, equity and inclusion principles in your employer mission statement, annual goals, or core principles, as well as in any handbook, paperwork, or firm orientation session. Ideally these principles will be repeated throughout your documentation and not just be a line included on a main page.

· **Create a DEI Committee, serve on such committee, or assign a person to lead initiative.**

Diversity committee recommended practices include the development of a mission statement and formal goals, analysis of the organization's historical diversity practices, identification of current needs, development and implementation of practices designed to promote diversity, equity and inclusion and establishment of a system of metrics to gauge the organization's success.

· **Make diversity and equity an integral part of company culture by encouraging attorneys to become involved with DEI efforts sponsored by law schools, bar associations, and community organizations.**

This encouragement should be backed by real incentives such as a financial incentive, an extra PTO day, or any other non-monetary reward.

· **Laterally hire attorneys and staff of underrepresented groups.**

The strategy benefits the hiring firms, who can then offer a more diverse team to their clients.

· **Include attorneys from underrepresented groups in recruitment and interview process for new and lateral hires.**

Provide a description of the internal controls your employer has in place, or otherwise observes, that demonstrates that diverse attorneys both (a) participate in recruiting and interviewing new and lateral hires, and (b) have an active "say" in the evaluation of new and lateral candidates.

· **Adopt programs and policies that promote work-life balance in a gender-neutral manner, such as parental leave and childcare.**

List the benefits or perks relating to parental leave for all attorneys, regardless of their gender identity, as well as other programs to assist working attorneys who are currently expecting a child or are new parents returning to work. Some examples include the number of parental leave weeks offered to attorneys (beyond the federal requirements), reduced hours expectation, telecommuting, etc.

· **Provide all attorneys with opportunities for flexible work schedules.**

Flexible work arrangements open up your pool of applicants, and also help employees to feel more seen and heard, and therefore included.

- Provide channels of communication between underrepresented attorney groups and senior management.

Also provide timely and constructive feedback which is crucial to steady growth.

- Hire staff that reflect the demographics of our state.

This includes underrepresented groups, LGBTQ+ individuals and people with disabilities, including learning disabilities and mental health conditions. Include sourcing methods that contain more diverse candidate pipelines.

- Encourage attorney wellness initiatives (such as meditation, walking breaks) in order to support the mental health of all attorneys, including those that live with depression, anxiety, or addiction.

Attorneys face significant obstacles to their mental health and wellbeing, sometimes due to long hours, challenging expectations, and other facets of the legal profession.

- Create a sexual harassment policy.

- Create a discrimination and harassment policy.

- Create an anti-retaliation policy.

- Provide staff with information regarding resources for harassment/discrimination complaints.

- Create an equal pay policy.

- Support the creation of affinity groups in the workplace.

- Implement hiring practices that mitigate the impact of implicit bias in the hiring process and adopt hiring practices that ensure equitable hiring.

Search advocacy and see Women in the Workplace 2018 study from McKinsey & Co.

- Host trainings for all employees on discrimination, implicit bias, etc.

- If applicable, amend staff dress code to be gender neutral.

- Offer gender neutral bathroom options or create a policy that staff may use the bathroom that aligns with their gender identity.

- Adopt a written set of gender transition guidelines.

This should outline the protocols for gender transitions that clearly delineate responsibilities and expectations of transitioning employees, their supervisors, colleagues and other staff.

- Review accessibility of the services provided.

Is the building ADA accessible (wheelchair ramp, elevator)? Are forms available in Spanish, or ~~other~~ languages other than English? Is your website ADA compliant?

- Adopt a Limited English Proficiency plan.

This relates to how staff should assist members of the public that have limited English proficiency. Consider utilizing an interpretation service and/or have 'google translate' option on your website.

- Ensure internal policies are gender neutral.

Pipeline

By completing items in this category, you or your organization are ~~committed to~~ diversifying the attorney candidate pool, supporting the growth and promotion of attorneys from underrepresented and historically marginalized groups, and ensuring that the Rhode Island Bar is -a place where differences are welcomed, respected, and valued.

- Expand law school recruitment efforts to reach a more diverse student pool. *By recruiting lawyers from a wide range of schools, you're promoting a more diverse legal profession. Schools in different tiers and in different geographical locations should be considered. This may include participating in job fairs for more diverse groups of law students.*

- Adopt programs to expand recruitment, such as internships/summer associate programs and mentoring for law students from diverse backgrounds.

Your commitment to developing and training future lawyers from more diverse backgrounds supports diversity in the profession as a whole.

- Ensure attorneys from underrepresented groups receive significant work assignments including interaction with partners and clients.

Equal opportunities for significant work assignments not only helps retain diverse teams but also helps all feel valued.

- Establish a formal mentoring program for junior associates.

Provide a list of members that are part of the mentorship program as well as a description of the program, its goals, procedures, events, etc. Encourage a safe environment for people to communicate.

- Donate to or create scholarship/grant programs for members of underrepresented groups to assist with the financial cost of law school.

The financial burden of law school can be a significant detriment to underrepresented groups and discourages diversity within the profession. By minimizing the financial burden through grants or scholarships, it will be easier for members of underrepresented groups to access a legal education.

- Volunteer to serve in a capacity that helps bring legal education to children, teens and young adults, such as serving as a mock trial judge or coach.

- Participate in the Bar Association's law related education programs, such as Law Day, that inspire students from diverse backgrounds to become our future lawyers.

The Bar Association organizes Law Day (for lawyers), Lawyers in the Classroom, and our Speakers Bureau. Law Day and Lawyers in the Classroom provides students from a wide range of backgrounds with an opportunity to be inspired by lawyers and the practice of law.

- Ensure that those involved in hiring, mentoring or supervising interns receive training about implicit bias, cultural competency, and other DEI concerns.

Training & Learning

By completing items in this category, you or your organization demonstrate commitment to use training and learning to continuously improve the landscape of opportunity and access within the workplace, the Rhode Island bar, and the broader justice system and community.

- Write and submit an article related to DEI initiatives to the Rhode Island Bar Journal.

- Host a legal clinic on an area of law where underrepresented groups are often disproportionately impacted.

This could include clinics on disability rights, domestic violence, immigration, housing, discrimination, etc.

- Provide or participate in DEI and/or implicit bias training programs OR mandate employee attorney attendance at one or more CLE program(s) related to DEI.

Unconscious (or implicit) biases are learned stereotypes that are automatic, unintentional, deeply ingrained, universal and able to influence behavior. Unconscious bias training is designed to expose people to their unconscious biases, provide tools to adjust automatic patterns of thinking and ultimately eliminate discriminatory behaviors.

- Provide or participate in sensitivity training on proper pronoun use and encourage use of pronouns in standard email signatures.

Many people in our state identify as transgender or non-binary, and proper pronoun use is a simple way to support these individuals and make sure they feel fully welcomed and embraced in the judicial system and legal community.

- Provide or participate in training on religious and political tolerance.

Employers should encourage open mindedness when it comes to others' belief systems. Employers can encourage religious tolerance, as well as inquisitiveness of all religious leanings, by providing training or information related to various religions. Political tolerance is the willingness to extend basic rights and civil liberties to persons and groups whose viewpoints differ from one's own.

- Provide or participate in training on work-life balance issues.

Some areas that need to be kept in mind when addressing work-life balance issues include the range of work-life balance options available to employees and the involvement of management in promoting work-life balance.

Organize, host, and/or sponsor periodic gatherings for attorneys that allow for discussions regarding issues that are important to and inclusive of members of underrepresented groups. For attorneys that are members of underrepresented groups, sponsored by the firm, to host events that allow for discussions regarding issues that are important to the members of underrepresented groups.

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Also consider establishing Employee Resource Groups (ERG) or affinity groups to create a safe environment for people to communicate. ERGs are voluntary, employee-led groups whose aim is to foster a diverse and inclusive workplace aligned with the organization they serve.

- Collaborate with affinity bar associations on events and programs OR sponsor a CLE program for an affinity bar association.

Rhode Island Bar Association
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Action Plan Checklist

The Rhode Island Bar Association is committed to advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion in the profession. The Association recognizes the importance of integrating diverse perspectives in our activities and programs, encouraging and cultivating social intercourse among all members of the Rhode Island Bar, elevating attorneys of diverse backgrounds to positions of leadership within the Association, and promoting interest in the practice of law to diverse populations.

Below are helpful ideas and activities for all members to help facilitate this initiative and promote a more inclusive Bar Association.

- ___ Develop a mentoring relationship with an attorney of a different race, ethnicity, gender, religion, age, disability, sexual orientation and gender identity, marital status, veteran status, parental status, socioeconomic status or other diversity dimension.

- ___ Mentor a law student of a diverse background.

- ___ Mentor a diverse high school or college student interested in becoming an attorney.

- ___ Invite a diverse attorney to Association programs and events and introduce him or her to your colleagues.

- ___ Speak with a diverse attorney about the benefits of Association membership.

- ___ Encourage a diverse attorney to join the Bar's House of Delegates and/or apply for an elected position within the Association.

- ___ Encourage a diverse attorney to join a Bar committee.

- ___ Add diversity-related topics to your committee meeting agenda.

- ___ Recommend a diverse attorney to speak on a CLE panel.

- ___ Attend a conference or CLE seminar on diversity and inclusion.

- ___ Attend a multicultural event.

- ___ Attend a function hosted by an affinity bar association.

- ___ Read or write an article about diversity and inclusion.

Rhode Island Bar Association Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Trailblazer Award

The Rhode Island Bar Association Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Trailblazer Award is awarded at the Annual Meeting in June to an attorney who encourages and cultivates social discourse related to DEI among all members of the Rhode Island Bar, supports the advancement of attorneys from diverse backgrounds to positions of leadership, and promotes interest in the practice of law among diverse populations. The recipient has shown a demonstrated commitment to promoting equity in the legal profession and participates in activities that increase the public's awareness of DEI efforts in the legal profession.

Award Selection Criteria

Selection by, but not limited to:

- Promotion and support of DEI initiatives within the legal community
- Support of the recruitment, hiring, and promotion of attorneys of diverse backgrounds and identities
- Cultivation of an equitable and inclusive climate within a law firm or organization
- Promotion and facilitation of education, community outreach, and social engagement with diverse populations
- Exhibition of insightful leadership to confront and resolve DEI inequities in the practice of law
- Commitment to mentoring attorneys of diverse backgrounds and identities
- Consideration and adoption of plans to continue to improve DEI within the law firm or organization
- Accessibility of services provided to clients (language services, ADA compliant building/website, etc)

Diversity describes psychological, physical, and social differences that occur among any and all individuals, such as race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, economic class, age, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, mental and physical ability, and learning styles.