



ATTORNEY SEARCH

# Top 14 Ways Law Firms Can Recruit and Retain Minority Attorneys

By A. Harrison Barnes





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Does your firm actively seek out minority applicants for attorney positions? If you are waiting for minority lawyers and law students to contact you, you may be waiting a long time. Given the small number of minorities in the practice and in law school, law firms must be proactive when seeking minorities. Take a close look at your firm's hiring practices.

- Does your firm tend to hire males?
- Whites?
- Graduates of a particular law school?
- Fraternity/sorority members?
- Golfers?

You need to recognize your firm's hiring tendencies to ensure diversity when hiring new lawyers.

Is your firm's hiring committee a diverse group of individuals? Because of our natural human tendency to feel comfortable with people who look like us and share our backgrounds, hiring committees should include females and minorities, and the best way to do that is through the summer clerkship program. Clerkships present the best opportunity for law firms to recruit minority law students. However, because of old habits, tradition and basic inertia, many law firms' recruitment programs are not designed to appeal to minority law students.

The following are 14 ways your law firm can recruit and retain minority attorneys:

- 1. Seek input from hiring committee members in selecting resumes for on-campus interviews.** A diverse hiring committee is an invaluable resource in selecting a diverse group of law school students to interview.
- 2. Broaden the scope of your talent search.** Use legal recruiters like BCG Attorney Search (hint, hint), [post jobs on sites like LawCrossing](#) (that distribute your jobs to 1,000+ sites) guaranteeing massive coverage.
- 3. Do not fixate on grades.** Recognize that grades are arbitrary, especially when comparing law schools. While grades are important, they should not be the sole basis for accepting or rejecting a law student's résumé.
- 4. Consider factors other than law school grades.** Recognize other indicators of success: Phi Beta Kappa membership; good grades at a strong undergraduate institution; military service; volunteer work; writing ability/writing awards; law journal experience; and involvement in student bar activities.
- 5. Implement a first-year summer clerkship program.** Because 1Ls typically do not have grades available in December and

January, decisions to hire 1Ls must be made on criteria other than grades.

6. **Participate in minority job fairs.** Job fairs allow you to interview many minority law students from a variety of law schools in one day.
7. **Include a female attorney and/or a minority attorney when interviewing on campus.** Whom you send — and don't send — to interview on campus sends a message to law students. Additionally, women and minority law students will feel more comfortable with the interviewing process if a woman and/or a minority attorney interviews them.
8. **Delete grades/GPAs from résumés of students coming in for in-office interviews.** Despite their interviews, students with high GPAs tend to get rave reviews, and students with lower GPAs tend to get lukewarm reviews. Taking grades and GPAs off résumés forces interviewing attorneys to judge an interviewee on attributes other than grades. (The theory here is that the hiring committee has already seen the student's grades and determined that the student is worth interviewing.)
9. **Include minority attorneys when conducting in-office interviews.** Minority law students may ask questions of minority lawyers at your firm that they would not otherwise ask.
10. **When pairing law students with attorney "mentors" or "liaisons," do not automatically pair minority students with minority lawyers.** Work to pair minority law students with lawyers who share a

common interest or work specialty, rather than pairing solely on ethnicity.

11. **During the clerkship, pick restaurants and activities that are less formal, at least at first.** Law firms are intimidating enough for minority law students without the added pressure of an unfamiliar social setting, such as lunch at the country club, golfing, or a seven-course meal at a four-star restaurant. Opt for the more informal restaurants and activities at the beginning of the summer clerkship.
12. **Include minority attorneys in summer clerk activities.** Again, it sends a message of inclusion.
13. **Use fall and spring clerkships to hire minority law students.** Good work can lead to a permanent offer despite grades that are lower than those in the "top 10 percent."
14. **Get your firm and the attorneys in your firm to participate in minority student bar activities.** Most law schools in California have active chapters of minority student bar associations. These groups often host banquets, mock interviews, mentoring opportunities and parties during the year. Involvement by attorneys in your firm will help you identify law students worth interviewing for the summer clerkship program.

While implementation of the ideas discussed above will not necessarily guarantee the hiring of more minority attorneys at a law firm, they do represent areas in which a law firm can begin to diversify. A true commitment to diversity and the hiring of minority attorneys will have a beneficial effect on a law firm and its attorneys.

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## **CONCLUSIONS**

There is no magic formula for hiring minority lawyers. To a large degree, minority lawyers are attracted by the same things that attract all lawyers – good pay, opportunity for advancement, the chance to do good work, and responsibility, just to name a few.

However, it is true that minority lawyers and minority law students do not often fit the profile of the typical lawyer or law student. As a result, law firms find it increasingly necessary to actively "recruit" minority lawyers and law students. Follow the above suggestions and you should succeed.