

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Council
September 11th, 2023 Meeting Minutes

The DEI Council advances diversity, equity, and inclusion and addresses the problems of bias, systemic inequities and underrepresentation in the legal profession and legal system.

Attendance

DEI Council Members: WSBA Gov. Sunitha Anjilvel, WSBA Gov. Alec Stephens, Raina Wagner, SaNni Lemonidis, Sharon Sakamoto, Christopher Swaby, Noelle Chung, Miryam Gordon, Mia Scavella

WSBA Staff: Diana Singleton, Nicholas Mejía, Saleena Salango

Guests: Denise Gertis, WSBA Gov. Francis Adewale

August Minutes

Miryam made a motion to approve the minutes with an amendment to correct minor typos, Sharon seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

BOG Update

The law schools expressed great interest in the WSBA's DEI plan. The Dean of Gonzaga School of Law reported that the percentage of incoming law students identifying as BIPOC was 28%, while UW School of Law was approximately 30%, SU School of Law ranged from 40-50%, and the University of Idaho was currently around 25%. The schools of law showed strong interest in and support for the plan.

The Board also discussed conversations relating to the purchase or lease of a space for the next WSBA office. The BOG approved negotiations for a new leasing agreement.

The BOG also approved funds for a summit related to the Pathway to Profession workgroup, and funding was approved for an additional position on the Equity and Justice Team.

Gov. Sunitha Anjilvel was sworn in as the President Elect for the year 2025. As for the DEI Council, the council will be working to ensure the bylaws are in order.

New Member Selection Process Update

The co-chairs have made their final recommendations for appointment to the DEI Council. Given that we had more applications than seats, Diana and Saleena have invited applicants to serve on the workgroups, as they do not need to be members of the DEI Council. Miryam mentioned that it was challenging to make decisions.

Gov. Alec Stephens asked if the co-chairs have been reappointed for the following year. Gov. Sunitha Anjilvel expressed uncertainty about her appointment to the council, but Raina confirmed that she was reappointed to serve. Gov. Alec Stephens mentioned that it's not uncommon for there to be a delay in governors knowing which councils they will serve on.

WASHINGTON STATE BAR ASSOCIATION

Membership Demographic Study

Diana mentioned that there were some challenges in sending out the survey and ensuring it reached members who are also bar staff. Around 20 members outside of the WSBA staff have notified the Equity and Justice Team that they did not receive the survey. Approximately 1500 WSBA members have completed the survey at the time of this Council meeting.

Miryam mentioned that some questions were difficult to answer as they did not relate to LLLTs. Diana clarified that the survey was intended to be designed around different types of legal professionals. She also mentioned that the next phase will involve focus groups, and that staff have recommended focus groups specifically comprised of non-attorney licenses or non-traditional practice of law groups.

Pathways Into The Profession Update

The workgroup has decided to use Google Drive to track resources. It was noted the NYC Bar is hosting a Power of the Pipeline conference on October 30th and some members were interested in attending. Noelle mentioned she is working with the AGO's racial justice unit to foster relationships to increase pipeline discussion and collaboration. Gov. Alec Stephens mentioned that all three Law School Deans expressed interest in and support the efforts towards Pathway to Profession work as showcased at the last BOG meeting. Saleena mentioned that much of the committee's focus is on creating a summit to bring together organizations and schools engaged in Pathway to Profession work, with the aim of identifying potential gaps. She also mentioned that the language used is being updated to reflect the various pathways into the legal profession outside of law school. Diana reiterated that all three law school deans are excited to be involved. It was emphasized that the summit is crucial to creating a space for conversation and preventing duplicative efforts.

DEI Plan Committee Update

Miryam stated that the primary focus has been on bringing in consultants. They are hoping to officially start around October 1st. Sharon mentioned that they are looking at ways to improve focus and produce a draft of the plan within a year's time.

Member Recognition

Diana took the time to thank members of the committee for their work. Council members will be receiving a gift card as a token of appreciation. Sharon expressed gratitude to the staff for their efforts.

Intersectionality and Additional Trainings

Gov. Alec Stephens mentioned his interest in intersectionality and expressed a desire for additional trainings. Saleena provided additional details about resources related to intersectionality as a legal framework. Miryam expressed interest in participating in these trainings. Saleena mentioned that she and Diana are working on various training options. Christopher Swaby mentioned that it is encouraging to see members of the board of governors discussing DEI. WSBA Gov. Francis Adewale reiterated this notion, noting that in the past, DEI discussions were often dismissed.

Announcements

There were announcements for various upcoming MBA events and CLEs.