



WSBA Diversity

2017 Washington State Bar Association Experience Exchange Mentorship Event

About Experience Exchange:

The Washington State Bar Association launched a new, annual breakfast event in 2016 designed to match [new lawyers](#) from historically underrepresented backgrounds with luminaries of the profession. The event is funded by the Washington State Bar Foundation's President and Governors Diversity Fund. The format will create an intimate setting for new lawyers to connect with and learn from bar and bench leaders they might not otherwise have access to in the early days of their career. While no formal mentoring relationship is intended, we expect that some of the connections made at this event may lead organically to longer term mentoring-type relationships.

Facilitating this type of opportunity for new attorneys is an important milestone for encouraging members from historically underrepresented backgrounds to enter, stay, and thrive in the profession. Creating the opportunity to engage in a short-term event with legal luminaries is something that many lawyers never realize in their career.

One of the most powerful experiences for members from under-represented groups is hearing that they too can succeed and are needed in the profession. Connecting the changing face of the profession with seasoned lawyers is an important element absent from the experience of many lawyers from underrepresented groups. Unfettered access to luminaries willing to share the insight and wisdom gained through their own experiential learning is a valuable asset.

According to multiple [research](#) sources attorneys from underrepresented groups face the challenge of succeeding in practice over the long-term. A meaningful opportunity to engage with seasoned leadership is one way of expanding the experience and network of underrepresented groups. These connections have the potential to positively influence an

WOMEN AND ATTORNEYS OF COLOR

"Qualitative research with women in the WSBA details the many micro-aggressions women face within the profession. Specifically, female attorneys, particularly younger women, report experiencing discrimination or sexual harassment in the legal workplace, including "inappropriate behavior by supervisors, clients who preferred to work with male attorneys, and insinuations of weakness or incompetence." These challenges are so significant that nearly 7% of female attorneys have considered taking legal action against their employer because of discrimination."

"TrueBearing's research indicates that there is substantial variation among workplaces and employers' approach to race. Specifically, some attorneys feel that their workplaces need "racial sensitivity discussions," others believe their race is ignored, and in some cases, attorneys feel that their race is "seen as an asset to the workplace." In addition, more than 19% of attorneys of color responding to the 2012 survey indicated that they faced "social barriers" in the practice of law — the highest for any under-represented group."



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attorney's commitment to remaining in the profession. The Experience Exchange is a micro-strategy in support of WSBA's broader [Mentorlink](#) program. Building an ever increasing pool of engaged, and confident attorneys from underrepresented groups is the intended outcome of this event.

What to Expect:

The format of the event will involve one mentor for each mentee. A hot complimentary breakfast will be served. A keynote address will open the event and set the stage for the mentor/mentee engagement. Each table will be provided several pre-staged questions as well as the opportunity for informal questions and discussions over breakfast.

During breakfast, you'll have plenty of time with your mentor, and also the opportunity to meet the other mentors and each other. We're hoping — and expecting — the mentor/mentee relationship will result in a meaningful exchange.

Selection Criteria:

WSBA members who identify as part of an underrepresented community, including African Americans, Latinos, other people of color, women, LGBTQ people, and people with disabilities, are encouraged to [register here](#).

Mentors will be senior level attorneys representing a broad range of practice areas and settings. Based on your application, we will make every effort to match you with a mentor who shares your interests within the legal profession and can best address the issues you raise.

The deadline to apply is May 5, 2017. The event is limited to 50 participants. Once the maximum is reached the remaining applicants will be moved to a waiting list for future consideration.

Goals for Mentor/Mentee Composition:

Our goal is to reflect the under-represented communities experiencing the highest level of barriers identified through WSBA research; those groups are women, people of color, attorney's with disabilities/impairments and members who identify as LGBTQ.

DISABILITY AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION

"In the 2012 TrueBearing study, 21 percent of survey respondents reported living with at least one disability or impairment. This definition of "disability" is broader than is typically found in research studies and likely accounts for the higher affirmative response rate.

Of those indicating a disability, nearly 8% have considered taking legal action against employers because of discrimination — the highest percentage among all under-represented groups studied. Qualitative research sheds light on the reasons for this. Attorneys with disabilities report that legal employers frequently will not hire them, thus resulting in severely limited career opportunities. They also report a lack of consistency in enforcing applicable court and ethics rules by judges and resistance when seeking accommodations from commissioners and judges."

"TrueBearing's qualitative research indicates that not all LGBTQ members feel comfortable disclosing their sexual orientation in the workplace and the "attitudes of supervisors and the workplace culture" are a "major determining factor" when deciding to disclose. Qualitative data also suggest that "normal behavior" in some workplaces "includes treating being gay as a joke or as something to avoid."