



Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Professionalism

Underrepresented Attorneys Mentoring Toolkit

WELCOME!

About this Toolkit

The Commissioners and staff of the Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Professionalism, in conjunction with a working group of participants from various organizations, explored the feasibility and efficacy of a customized mentoring program **to support the advancement and retention of underrepresented attorneys**. The development of this open-source Underrepresented Attorney Mentoring Toolkit is a product of their efforts.

According to the National Association for Law Placement (NALP), diversity metrics in the legal profession have remained virtually flat over the past 20 years. We still have a long way to go to achieve a diverse and inclusive profession, but mentorship can help. In fact, mentoring can play a key role in the retention of diverse talent and open doors for the professional advancement of underrepresented attorneys.

Some mentorship programs get caught up in matching the ideal mentoring pairs. However, a program's focus should be on the mentoring process itself as a diversity of thought and experiences fosters some of the most meaningful and beneficial relationships.

We hope this toolkit supports your organization in the development of meaningful mentoring programs for underrepresented attorneys, which the profession so greatly needs.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to everyone who was involved in the development of this toolkit for devoting your time and energy to the thoughtful consideration of these issues. We are indebted to your service on behalf of professionalism.

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How to Use This Toolkit

Organizations of all sizes can use this toolkit to develop and implement new mentoring programs or to supplement existing programs. The toolkit provides a structured – yet flexible – curriculum that can be used in one-on-one mentoring or group settings.

The toolkit provides:

- A customized mentoring program designed **to support the advancement and retention of underrepresented attorneys** in the legal profession.
- **Action items** that encourage mentors and mentees to share their professional judgment and skills in a mentoring context with the goal of professional development.
- **A unique professional responsibility focus** with five categories of action items – civility, professionalism, ethics, diversity and inclusion, and mental health, substance abuse, and well-being – founded in the tenets of professional responsibility under the [Illinois Supreme Court Rules](#).

To assist in fostering diverse mentorships, we have also gathered best practices, important terms to understand, and resources that will be beneficial to mentors and mentees in developing their relationships.

Feedback

At the [Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Professionalism](#), we seek to promote a culture of civility and inclusion, in which Illinois lawyers and judges embody the ideals of the legal profession in service to the administration of justice in our democratic society.

If you have feedback or recommendations for this toolkit, or if we can support your professionalism efforts in other ways, please reach out to us at mail@2civility.org.

GETTING STARTED

Best Practices for Mentees

1. Discuss from the onset how you prefer to communicate (e.g., by email, in person, video calls) as well as your preferred cadence, structure, etc.
2. Set goals and expectations for the program.
3. Be an active listener.
4. Accept and provide authentic, constructive feedback.
5. Be prepared for each meeting, e.g., doing work you agreed upon during your last meeting or researching the background of someone you're scheduled to meet.
6. Honor your commitments and communicate promptly if something changes.
7. Don't treat your mentor as a recruiter, but as a resource.
8. Understand that while your mentor will be knowledgeable and have more experience than you, they will not have the answer to every question. Explore and learn together.
9. Share your successes and challenges with your mentor.
10. Be willing to step outside of your comfort zone.

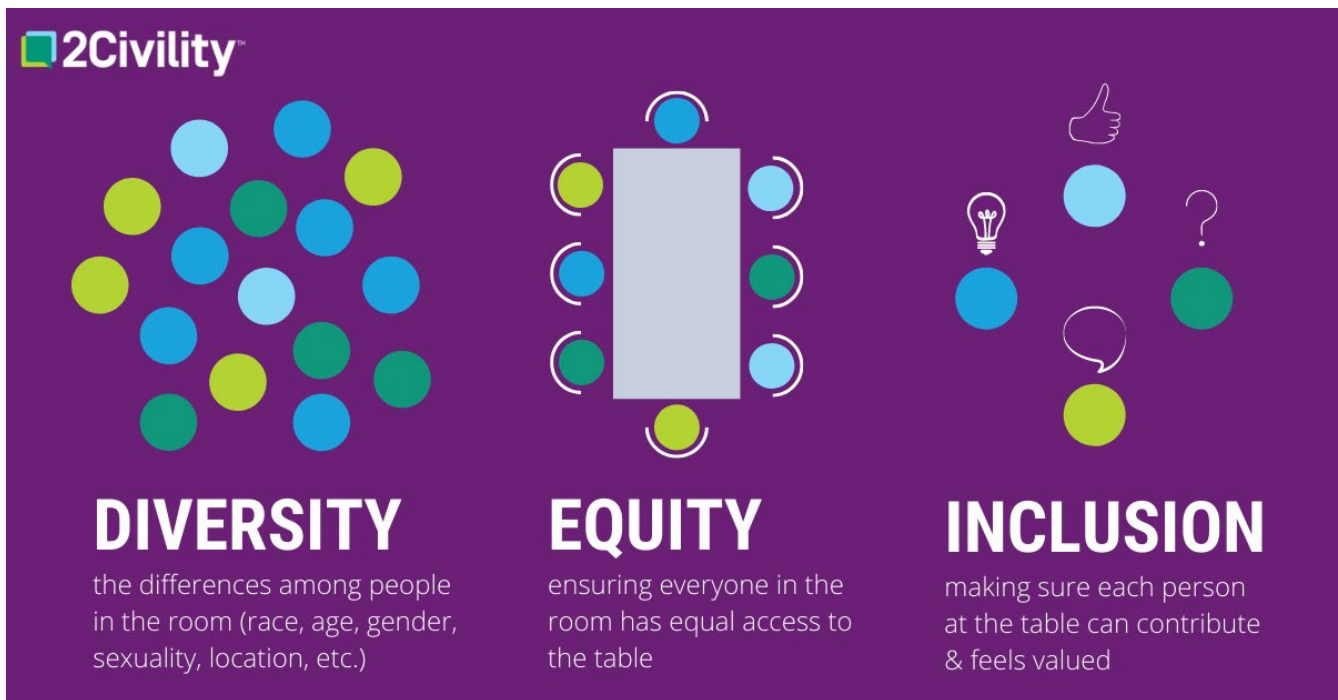
Best Practices for Mentors

1. Get to know your mentee on a personal level before you jump into the work.
2. Find connections and similarities that extend beyond law and your careers. This may require you to venture outside of some of your normal interests or hobbies.
3. Establish a commitment agreement. While we have a guide for you, you should both set expectations to ensure you're accomplishing a common goal and building a foundation for how to achieve that goal together.
4. Help each other develop detailed goals to progress toward larger goals.
5. Master the balance of talking and listening. Asking questions can spark development more than providing answers.
6. Check your assumptions and hunches. If you sense that something is missing or not going well, address any potential issues as soon as possible.
7. Set the expectation of two-way feedback early. "Reverse mentoring" is important for the mentoring relationship, so make sure your mentee feels empowered to be open and frank.

Terms to Know

Understanding these terms and how they apply to you and your mentoring partner will be key to building trust and cultivating a mutually beneficial relationship.

- **Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) -**
 - **Diversity** – All the ways that people differ. This can include demographics such as gender, race, ethnicity, age, national origin, religion, disability status, and sexual orientation, and deeper characteristics such as a person’s personality, values, passions, and interests.
 - **Equity** – Creating fairness and justice in the way people are treated. This means equal access, opportunities, and advancement for all.
 - **Inclusion** – The extent to which people feel a sense of belonging and value within organizational or other settings.



- **Disengagement** – An individual's sense of apathy for and detachment from work or life. This is characterized by being withdrawn, burnt out, showing no effort, or “just going through the motions.”

- **Engagement** – A sense of purpose and energy that’s evident to others in a display of personal initiative, adaptability, effort, and persistence directed toward organizational goals.
- **Mentorship** – A learning relationship between two people or more to share in experience, knowledge, or connections.
- **Microaffirmations** – Small, brief acts that affirm other people’s competence and value. Examples include nodding your head in response to what someone is saying, backing someone up publicly, or giving someone your complete attention while they’re speaking.
- **Microaggressions** – Small, subtle acts that show dominance. Specifically, when members of a higher status group behave in ways that effectively exert or reinforce dominance over members of a lower status group. Examples include interrupting someone before they finish speaking, mispronouncing their name, or telling them that they’re articulate. These have negative consequences in the workplace.
- **Sponsorship** – A relationship between a protégé and a person who has the authority or influence to help them in their career development or advancement. A sponsor can help open doors for another.
- **Implicit Bias** – Snap judgments that result from the shortcuts or preexisting knowledge structures in our brains, which make us very efficient at interpreting incoming information quickly (below our level of conscious awareness) about what or who we see. These judgments tell us who or what is likable, safe, valuable, right, or competent. They impact how we see people and are influenced by society and our experiences. They affect our objective observations.
- **Explicit Bias** - The attitudes and beliefs we have about a person or group on a conscious level. Much of the time, these biases and their expression arise as the direct result of a perceived threat. When people feel threatened, they are more likely to draw group boundaries to distinguish themselves from others.

Resources

Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Professionalism

Online Courses

- [Rebalance the Scales: Implicit Bias, Diversity, and the Legal Profession](#)
- [Advancing Women in Law Summit](#)

Videos

- [Reimagining Law: DEI in the Legal Profession – What’s Working and What Isn’t](#)

- [Reimagining Law: Systemic Racism in the Legal Profession](#)
- [Reimagining Law: Supporting LGBTQ Legal Professionals](#)
- [Reimagining Law: Creating a Sense of “Belonging” in the Legal Profession](#)
- [Reimagining Law: How Lawyers Can Combat Discriminatory Behavior](#)

Articles

- Commission’s most recent [DEI news and articles](#)
- [Implicit Bias: Cloaked in Color-Blind Clothing](#)
- [Addressing Diversity Challenges in Law Firms](#)
- [What Kids Can Teach Lawyers About Diversity and Representation](#)
- [5 Things to Know About Lawyers with Disabilities](#)
- [3 Ways Lawyers Can Promote DEI and More with the CBA Racial Justice Coalition](#)
- [Inclusive Language is Allyship](#)
- [Unconscious Bias in Mentoring Relationships](#)
- [Four Reasons You Need a Mentor](#)
- [The Truth About Millennials and Building Collaborative Practices](#)

American Bar Association

- [Bias Interrupters Project](#) - You Can't Change What You Can't See: Interrupting Racial and Gender Bias in the Legal Profession
- [Model Diversity Survey](#) from the Commission on Racial and Ethnic Diversity in the Profession
- [Implicit Bias Videos and Toolkit](#) from the ABA Diversity and Inclusion Center

The Institute for Inclusion in the Legal Profession (IILP)

- [Where We Stand: Real Change. Now.](#)

MENTORING ACTION ITEMS

1. Professionalism

Elected ✓	Action Identifier	Action Item	Completion Date
	1A	Introduce mentee to other lawyers in the community, in a variety of practice areas, through attendance at bar association (national, state, local, and affinity) meetings and other networking opportunities.	
	1B	Discuss developing networks early in one’s career. Find points of entry to target.	
	1C	Discuss the importance of and how to build a network to help underrepresented attorneys become “stars” at work.	
	1D	Facilitate a discussion with other underrepresented attorneys to share successes and challenges.	
	1E	Discuss the importance of client communication, how to maintain appropriate ongoing communication (e.g., returning telephone calls, emails) to keep clients informed.	
	1F	If applicable, discuss how to develop business effectively and professionally. Consider examples of tweaking or rebuilding a practice due to client demand and market needs.	
	1G	Discuss sponsorship/advocate relationships and how they differ from mentors (e.g., how having a sponsor is a key component for career advancement).	
	1H	Evaluate Individual Development Plans: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Building goal-oriented results (goal setting). 2. Setting expectations from the standpoint of employee and employer. 3. Acting intentionally (e.g., Where do I want to be in five years with my professional development?). 	
	1I	If you work in a government/corporate setting, introduce the mentee to the respective roles of other agencies/departments, and their representatives.	
	1J	Acquaint mentee with access to justice issues, various legal service and legal aid organizations, and opportunities to engage in pro bono activities. If appropriate, work together on a pro bono matter, charitable event, or public service project.	

	Alternative Action	<i>Example: Have an earnest conversation about professionalism in the legal field.</i>	
	Alternative Action		

2. Legal Ethics

Elected ✓	Action Identifier	Action Item	Completion Date
	2A	Discuss practices to maintain client confidentiality.	
	2B	Discuss how to screen for, recognize, and avoid conflicts of interest.	
	2C	Discuss roles and responsibilities of paralegals, administrative assistants, and other office personnel, and how to establish good working relationships with support staff and colleagues.	
	2D	Discuss common malpractice and grievance traps in your practice area or setting, and how to recognize and avoid common pitfalls.	
	2E	Discuss community involvement in social, business, and networking events and in civic activities and organization boards.	
	2F	Discuss the political nature of law firms and legal organizations. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Examine your organization's structure and history. 2. Identify key decision-makers and informational "gatekeepers" and discuss how best to navigate these internal relationships. 	
	2G	Discuss the responsibilities of the client and the lawyer in decision-making, and the best ways to involve a client in their case.	
	2H	Discuss potential resources and procedures for dealing with complicated ethical issues, including conflicts of interest, billing, and client communications.	

	2I	Discuss appropriate ways to handle situations where a lawyer believes another lawyer has committed an ethical violation. 1. Examine your obligation to report misconduct. 2. Discuss the ethical responsibilities of supervision of other lawyers and non-lawyers in an organization.	
	2J	Discuss the grievance process and a lawyer's duty to cooperate with a disciplinary investigation. Consider attending an attorney discipline proceeding to watch the process.	
	Alternative Action	<i>Discuss challenges and learning opportunities you have experienced in your career dealing with legal ethics.</i>	
	Alternative Action		

3. Civility

Elected ✓	Action Identifier	Action Item	Completion Date
	3A	Discuss the Commission's Survey on Professionalism and how issues of incivility impact the legal profession and the administration of justice.	
	3B	Discuss strategies for managing incivility and highly charged situations.	
	3C	Discuss the importance of communication skills, including active listening skills. 1. Examine lawyer-to-lawyer communication. 2. Consider how you communicate with clients from an ethical and customer service perspective.	
	3D	Discuss the importance of feedback and advice. 1. For a variety of reasons, underrepresented attorneys don't get the same level of feedback that their (white) male counterparts may get. The quantity and quality of feedback an attorney receives on their work can have a substantial impact on career advancement and success. 2. Discuss how to ask for critical feedback and learn how to accept and act on criticism appropriately.	

		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Explore the ABA's Grit Project. The Grit Project and its tools are designed to enhance the effectiveness, retention, and promotion of women lawyers. 4. Read and discuss "Pulling for Feedback the Right Way." 5. Read and discuss "Stop Asking for Feedback. There is a Better Way." 	
	3E	<p>Discuss the importance of developing group-specific networks outside of a place of employment.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Explore affinity organizations. 2. Explore non-affinity organizations. 	
	3F	Discuss how to deal with difficult clients and establish strategies that best serve you, the organization, and the client.	
	Alternative Action	<i>Example: Share examples of times you've experienced incivility in the profession and create a safe space for your mentee to share the same.</i>	
	Alternative Action		

4. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Elected ✓	Action Identifier	Action Item	Completion Date
	4A	Have an earnest discussion about how you both see diversity, equity, and inclusion in today's legal profession. This exercise is designed to create a safe space for conversation and the sharing of different perspectives on where the legal profession stands.	
	4B	Discuss personal experiences involving diversity, equity, and inclusion in your academic or work settings. Discuss what your organization has done, or could do, to increase diversity, equity, and inclusion.	
	4C	Discuss what to do/how to respond when someone is being treated unequally based on their diversity.	
	4D	Discuss roadblocks you may have experienced because of your diverse identity, what methods you took to address them, and what resources you found helpful.	

	4E	Discuss how to embrace your individual diversity by focusing on topics such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Managing and balancing non-billable commitments that are unique to underrepresented attorneys and advance individual and organization goals (e.g., speaking commitments, business pitches, writing opportunities). 2. When and how to use your voice to support underrepresented attorneys. 	
	4F	Attend a diversity awareness or training workshop or CLE. Discuss your takeaways and next steps in applying what you learned.	
	4G	Discuss various career paths such as Big Law, small firm, government, corporate, legal aid, and nontraditional legal positions. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Examine resources for underrepresented attorneys in such organizations like the Cook County Bar Association, Alliance for Women, etc. 2. Discuss how lessons from these paths might influence or support your professional development. 	
	4H	Discuss long-term and short-term career objectives and identify ways to achieve them.	
	Alternative Action	<i>Example: Attend an affinity bar association meeting together.</i>	
	Alternative Action		

5. Mental Health, Substance Abuse, and Well-Being

Elected ✓	Action Identifier	Action Item	Completion Date
	5A	Share techniques to create and maintain a balance between personal and professional life. Explore each of your experiences, including successes and failures, in finding a balance between your personal lives and careers.	
	5B	Discuss strategies for achieving the following components of a balanced personal and professional life:	

		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Creating expectations for your employer and clients that are compatible with a healthy and balanced lifestyle. 2. Giving your all at work while saving energy and emotion for family and self. 3. Maintaining your physical health amid a busy schedule and how doing so contributes to your productivity and success. 4. Making nutritious choices at home, work, or on the road, and how doing so maximizes performance and energy levels. 5. Planning for the challenges of caring for children or aging parents. 6. Developing and maintaining friendships or other relationships when time seems to be in short supply. 7. Fostering professional relationships. 8. Demonstrating efficiency and productivity at work, as well as prioritizing and delegating tasks. 	
	5C	Share stress management techniques.	
	5D	<p>Discuss how to reconcile job expectations with your actual experiences at work.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Discuss the mentee's job expectations and the rationales underlying those expectations. 2. With these rationales in mind, identify aspects of the mentor's job that don't meet their expectations. 3. Together, determine whether the expectations are realistic and discuss ways to make changes that will positively affect the work experience. 	
	5E	Discuss ways to maintain a positive attitude at work and create a positive work environment to maximize enjoyment.	
	5F	Discuss the importance of identifying an individual or individuals at work who can help answer questions about office culture and how to balance a career with one's personal life.	
	5G	Discuss ways to positively deal with criticism from employers and clients.	
	5H	Discuss the "dos" and "don'ts" of leaving a job due to job dissatisfaction, including the following tips:	

		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. DO work hard until you leave. If you are in the process of looking for another job, it may be easier to find one while you still have one. 2. DON'T burn bridges by leaving on bad terms. You never know when or how you will have to interact with a member of your old firm, or whether you may want to come back to the firm. 3. DO be careful about the reasons you say you're leaving. To keep the relationships you have built intact, keep your reasons for leaving focused on the growth you expect to happen by moving on rather than any negative experiences that caused you to leave. Consider if there is room for a discussion of how to provide constructive feedback to an employer who is genuinely interested in improving. 4. DON'T forget to mend difficult relationships before you go. Find something nice to say and shake hands with those you had problems with at your old employer so that you will be remembered as pleasantly as possible. 5. DO stay in touch with your old employer. Maintain the good relationships you built because an old employer always influences your career and your reputation. 	
	51	<p>Discuss the prominence of substance abuse and mental health issues in the legal profession. Review the warning signs of mental health and substance abuse problems including what to do if a colleague or superior is impacted.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Examine what resources, internally and externally, are available. 2. Explore resources from the Commission on Lawyer Assistance Programs. 3. Explore Lawyer Assistance Programs (LAP) in your state (LAP Directory). 	
	Alternative Action	<i>Example: Discuss setting boundaries to maintain a healthy balance and what that would look like in your career.</i>	
	Alternative Action		