



Diversity & Inclusion

Association of Legal Administrators

How to Start A Diversity & Inclusion Committee or Special Interest Group at the Chapter Level

Volunteer – a person who freely offers to take part in an enterprise or undertakes a task or objective. *It just takes one...*

Many ALA Chapters already have diversity and inclusion initiatives, but there continue to be chapters, large and small, that have yet to start diversity and inclusion committees. Some chapters have started to ask “Why?” Others have begun to ask “How?”

ALA’s Committee on Diversity and Inclusion (CDI) realized chapters and members’ legal organizations needed assistance with developing effective programs and as a result, launched the Diversity Initiative Scorecard – Roadmap to Change. This scorecard is a best practices resource to assist those who wish to develop an initiative or expand an existing program either in their legal organizations or ALA Chapters. Another tool available to you is The Association of Legal Administrators Diversity Toolkit which was recently published by the Institute for Inclusion in the Legal Profession and is available on ALA’s website at <http://www.alanet.org/about/diversity/ala-diversity-toolkit>. Both of these resources are a valuable guide. But we found that chapters and member organizations still needed more. So let’s get started.

What Is Diversity and Inclusion?

Diversity is about recognizing, respecting and valuing differences based on ethnicity, gender, color, age, race, religion, disability, national origin and sexual orientation. It also includes an infinite range of individual unique characteristics and experiences, such as communication style, career path, life experience, educational background, geographic location, income level, marital status, military experience, parental status and other variables that influence personal perspectives.

These life experiences and personal perspectives make us react and think differently, approach challenges and solve problems differently, make suggestions and decisions differently, and see different opportunities. Diversity, then, is also about diversity of thought. And superior business performance requires tapping into these unique perspectives.”

WHY do business professionals need it?

To be successful in an increasingly diverse world, leaders must be able to manage and leverage the differences that exist within their workforce, suppliers, and clients to develop an inclusive environment. Leaders must possess and develop cultural competence in their workforce to promote inclusion. Clients demand it. Recruitment and retention of members and employees require it. Our chapters and legal organizations are richer because of it. The legal industry is behind other industries in developing an inclusive community.

How Should a Chapter Get Started?

Whether your chapter has 10 members or 300 members, these steps apply. Modify them as needed to fit the culture of your organization.

Step 1: Form a TEAM. Seek out others who are passionate about the importance of diversity and inclusion. Consider sending an email to the chapter members asking for volunteers who want to facilitate change. The responses will astound you!

Step 2: Steps 1 and 2 are nearly interchangeable. Get buy-in from the leadership of your chapter. If Chapter Leadership hasn't asked for volunteers, then VOLUNTEER to be the Chair for the Diversity and Inclusion Committee or Special Interest Group. Remind your Chapter Leadership that extra points can be earned in the Presidents' award of excellence for diversity and inclusion initiatives.

Step 3: Review the ALA Diversity & Inclusion Webpage to gather ideas and resources. One resource of particular value for this step is the Chapter Scorecard: A Roadmap to Change for ALA Chapter Leaders. The Scorecard identifies 25 best practices to ensure success and advancement of your initiatives at the chapter level. Familiarize yourself with the Diversity Toolkit for more ideas.

Step 4: Plan your first meeting. Set a framework for a conversation to:

- Define diversity and inclusion so all committee members have a common understanding.
- Lay out potential initial goals. What is it you want to accomplish?
- What is a possible mission statement?
- What resources might be available within the chapter membership or business partners to support this initiative?
- Begin preliminary discussions with Chapter Leadership on a budget. A large budget is not required. Call in favors from your Business Partners, member firms and local bar associations for speakers, space, drinks & snacks.
- Consider an initial meeting schedule for your committee. Meeting more frequently at the beginning, at least once every two months, while you are learning, creating programming and exchanging ideas.
- Consider how you will begin to educate your chapter about this new initiative.

Step 5: Prior to the first meeting, distribute your agenda and the ALA Chapter Scorecard: A Roadmap to Change for ALA Chapter Leaders. This will allow your team to come to the first meeting inspired to plan!

Step 6: Hold your first meeting. Have a volunteer take minutes. Discuss and set the initial goals, mission statement, resources, and activities for your committee. Set your meeting schedule.

Step 7: Plan your next meeting. What will your agenda include?

- How will you establish the committee's presence? Keep diversity and inclusion visible throughout the year by weaving it into every aspect of chapter leadership, programs, and activities.
- How will you educate chapter members? Writing articles? Sharing articles already written? Start discussions on your chapter discussion board or listserv. Update the chapter website to include the efforts of the committee.
- When will you launch your first educational session? Aim for the end of the first year or at the beginning of the second year, after your members have been reading about diversity and inclusion. Now they are curious and will want to attend your educational session so they can hear this information in person.
- What resources do you have to source speakers? Larger firms in your area might have connections to speakers, as may the local bar association and business partners. Invite ALA's Committee on Diversity and Inclusion to speak at an event!
- How will you include business partners? As owners or employees of a business, they face the same diversity, inclusion, retention, recruiting and client demands you do.
- How will you get out in the community to make a difference? Several chapters work closely with local high schools to mentor students about professional work life. Some offer internships.

Step 8: The next steps are now up to you and your committee. Still looking for ideas?

- Consult with your local experts and create relationships.
- Ask other ALA chapters what they are doing. Chapters with model diversity and inclusion programs can provide ideas and creativity.
- Build relationships with various diversity groups. Extend yourself beyond the limits of the legal environment; attend diversity events outside of law, network with various community groups outside of law to inspire ideas.
- A full library of free, dynamic resources can be found at www.alanet.org/about/diversity. The *Diversity & Inclusion Scorecard for Law Office Administrators* provides best practices, examples and offers a tool to measure your current efforts. Utilize the Scorecard to earn the "We Participate" seal for your website, along with recognition validating your firm's achievement. Contact the Committee on Diversity and Inclusion at diversity@alanet.org.

In closing...Diversity and inclusion efforts are a work in progress. These efforts are never-ending, evolve slowly and reflect the ever-changing culture of the organization. Key factors needed to achieve successful outcomes include:

- Encourage frequent, candid communication to correct misperceptions about diversity and diversity programs.
- Create an atmosphere of sensitivity and inclusion.
- Cultivate an attitude of respect and dignity in the workplace.
- Continue to evaluate the performance and results achieved; require accountability.
- Obtain commitment not only by senior management, as evidenced in both words and actions, but at all levels of the organization.
- Provide effective mentoring and sponsorship.
- Reward and recognize diversity successes and achievements.
- Make the financial commitment inside and outside the legal organization.

Whatever reasons lead your legal organization to develop and implement a diversity program, one thing remains consistent: be prepared. To stand the test of time, leaders must be proactive, forward-thinking, and establish the foundation for a diversity initiative that is flexible and reflective of their organization's unique culture.

**S A M P L E
INITIAL DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION
COMMITTEE AGENDA**

1. Getting to know each other
2. What is Diversity and Inclusion?
3. Set Goals
4. Mission/Vision statement – put it on your webpage
5. Education – Plan programming for the year
6. Community outreach
 - Working with high schools in area
 - Diversity & Inclusion Scholarship
7. ALA’s Scorecard for Law Firm Administrators (use of)
8. ALA’s Scorecard for Chapter Leaders (use of)
9. Business partner involvement

HOW TO START A D&I COMMITTEE AT CHAPTER LEVEL

Getting Started

- First and foremost, be sure to get buy-in from your chapter leadership. You will need their support as you plan your year.
- Form a committee with 2 co-chairs (for succession planning purposes) and several committee members (a healthy size is preferable) who will assist with the programs and events.
- Once the committee is formed, plan your first meeting. Make sure that committee members are familiar with diversity and inclusion concepts and ideas.
- Create a mission statement that clearly defines your goals and the goals of the chapter.
- During the first year, your committee should focus on awareness. Begin by educating your membership on D&I issues. This can be done in several ways: write informative articles for your chapter newsletter; post interesting and thought-provoking questions on your chapter discussion board or Listserv to pique interest and generate conversation; create a D&I tab or webpage on your chapter's website and populate it with articles, pictures, etc. In other words, generate buzz.

The D&I Committee

- Your committee should meet at least once every two months in the beginning because you are still learning and creating. Meeting frequently will spur exchange of creative ideas.
- Be organized. Have an agenda prepared in advance and be sure to distribute it prior to any meeting so that your committee is prepared to be engaged.
- Two people on the committee should be assigned to take turns in creating minutes for each meeting. This way, if one is not available, the other can take his/her place and ensure continuity in minute-keeping. The minutes should be shared with the entire committee shortly after the meeting so if anything is missed, it can be rectified.
- Agendas and minutes should be electronically stored for future reference and to forward to the next chair and committee. Minutes of the previous meeting should be reviewed at the beginning of each new meeting and action items should be addressed and crossed off the list.
- Create brief job descriptions for each committee position – chair, co-chair member – so that everyone on the committee understands what is to be expected of him.
- Create sub-committees within the committee so that members can use their skills and not feel overwhelmed with excessive duties. ALANYC created four sub-committees: Education (assist with ideas for programs and speakers); Public Relations (coordinate with the speakers, procure their bios and their presentation needs and work with chapter management to ensure proper posting of the session in a timely manner); Facilities (procure venues, prepare and distribute handouts and evaluation forms, coordinate speaker audio/visual needs, etc., take pictures at all events); and Metrics (prepare surveys and maintain attendance for each session, prepare an annual survey). Committee members can choose which sub-committee(s) they would like to work on.

Education Sessions

Topics:

- Now that you've piqued the interest of your chapter members, decide on the types of programs you want to host. The goal of the programs is to educate, raise awareness and start meaningful conversations about D&I issues.
- Start small – plan just a few sessions – perhaps 2-3 - so you don't bite off more than you can chew.
- In order to find out what the hot button topics are, speak to your colleagues and get information so you are better prepared to select topics.
- Contact larger chapters who have D&I Committees and ask them for a list of ideas.

Speakers:

- Source proven speakers, possibly from your own membership. Most big firms have diversity officers or departments and their diversity directors/managers will be happy to speak for you.
- Contact your local Bar Association.
- Don't overlook your business partners who often can be insightful speakers or may have knowledge of someone who is.

Venues:

- Look to members of your own chapter for help with venues. Many large, or even midsize firms, have large rooms that they can offer for your sessions.
- Work with your business partners to procure venues – they often have facilities that can accommodate your request.
- Contact your local bar associations for space.
- Ask the partners at your law firm if they are members of a local club and can help you get space.

Marketing:

- Think of creative ways to market your events. If your chapter does not already have a LinkedIn page, create one and post your events on it and post the events on your own personal LinkedIn page. Same goes for Facebook and Twitter – never underestimate the power of social media.
- Use **Eventbrite** (we should probably steer clear of recommending vendors) for registration purposes and allow non-ALA members to attend your event for a nominal fee. This extends your reach outside of the ALA, ensures that you will have a larger audience, and opens your chapter to prospective new members.
- Word-of-mouth. Use your best asset – your persuasive skills. Contact your friends and colleagues and encourage them to attend your sessions. Be sure that all members of the board try to attend at least one of your sessions to show support.
- Take lots of pictures at your events and post them everywhere.

- Have someone who attended a session write a short article about it and put it in your newsletter or on your chapter website. This will hopefully stir interest in future sessions.

Budget

- You do not need a large budget to host excellent sessions. Be creative.
- Call in favors from your Business Partners, member firms and local bar associations to help you with the details of a session.
- Be sure to ascertain if a speaker will have AV needs prior to convening the space. Many large law firms have AV equipment readily available.
- Many business partners are delighted to cover a portion of the event – i.e., breakfast costs, AV costs, etc. In exchange for the favor, allow the business partner a minute or two at the beginning of the session to say a few words about their company. In addition, they can introduce the speaker OR introduce a member of the committee who will then introduce the speaker.
- Contact your local bar association and determine if they will let you use their space.
- Minimize food expenses by offering the session as a brown bag.

Collaboration & Community Relations

- Diversity is about creating an inclusive environment within the law firms and legal community that your chapter serves. In order to effectively accomplish this, you should build relationships with diverse groups within and outside of legal.
- Extend yourself beyond the limits of the legal environment by attending diversity events within and outside of the legal profession. These will become resources you can tap into later. For example, ALANYC built a relationship with the Learning Disabilities Association of NY and ultimately engaged a member of their staff on a panel discussion about “neurodiversity”.
- Participate as a speaker on a topic or encourage others on your committee to do so – especially if their firm has a D&I program and others can learn from it.
- Develop open forum roundtable discussions in lieu of formal meetings with membership to encourage conversations.
- Collaborate with other committees within your organization to establish events and sessions, especially the education and community services committees since their work intersects with D&I efforts. Community services lend more visibility to your chapter and its efforts.

Resources

A full library of free, dynamic resources can be found at www.alanet.org/about/diversity. The Diversity & Inclusion Scorecard for Law Office Administrators provides best practices, examples and offers a tool to measure your current efforts. Utilize the Scorecard to earn the “We Participate” seal for your website, along with recognition validating your firm’s achievement. Contact the Committee on Diversity and Inclusion at diversity@alanet.org.