

# Roadmap to Enrolling Diverse Law School Classes

**VOLUME 3:** Assessing Recruitment Efforts

January 2019





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EMPOWERING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LAWYERS®

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# 01 Introduction

Law schools expend extensive resources on initiatives aimed at engaging prospective students from underrepresented backgrounds. Still, many law schools struggle to admit and matriculate critical masses of underrepresented students. Efforts are vital, but they must be tied to results. Assessing the impact of efforts to increase diversity is critical to achieving diversity goals and to ensuring that resources are expended efficiently.

Law school recruitment takes many forms, for instance, recruiting students prior to admission with the hope that they will apply and recruiting students after they have been offered admission with the hope that they will enroll. These efforts take place over extended periods of time, sometimes years, and can involve extensive coordination, effort and expense.

Below are examples of recruitment strategies and activities that law schools commonly undertake:

- Admission/scholarship interviews
- Application fee waivers
- Decision letters (e.g., admission offer, scholarship awards)
- General correspondence: emails, letters, phone calls
- Information sessions
- Law school fair participation
- Open house events (for prospects and/or admitted applicants)
- Outreach by students and alumni
- Scholarships and grants
- Travel/visit stipends

The purpose of this third volume of the [\*Roadmap to Enrolling Diverse Law School Classes\*](#) series is to provide law schools with methods for assessing the quality and effectiveness of recruitment efforts aimed at increasing the enrollment of underrepresented students.

Each volume in the *Roadmap to Enrolling Diverse Law School Classes* series will provide tactics for achieving diversity goals. Volumes of the series include: *Five Tactics for Increasing Racial, Ethnic, and Socioeconomic Diversity*; *Developing a Diversity Plan*; *Assessing Recruitment Efforts*; *Contextualizing Admissions Factors*; and *Leveraging Scholarships*. The series will be released in its entirety in early/mid 2019.



# Conducting an Assessment

At its core, assessment is “a constant cycle of improvement.”<sup>1</sup> It functions through ongoing data-gathering, analysis and adjustment. This volume builds on the second volume in the series, *Developing a Diversity Plan*, in that the process of developing goals, outcomes and measures, explained in Volume 2, is the basis of the assessment practices presented in this volume.

Assessment consists of the following four steps:

**Step 1:** Set diversity goals and objectives

**Step 2:** Design and perform assessment

**Step 3:** Develop and implement improvement strategies

**Step 4:** Repeat process

## Step 1: Set Diversity Goals and Objectives

Volume 2 of the *Roadmap to Enrolling Diverse Law School Classes* series discusses the process of setting diversity goals and objectives. A principal takeaway from that discussion is that goals should be SMART: specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time-sensitive.

The foregoing discussion in this volume will be based on the following SMART goal:

*Increase the number of students from underrepresented racial, ethnic and socio-economic groups who enroll in the next entering class, compared to the previous.*

Volume 2 also discusses the manner in which objectives “transform goals ... into tangible plans of action.” Objectives are rooted in the specific steps needed to achieve the stipulated goals.

For information about devising diversity goals and objectives, please read [\*Volume 2: Developing a Diversity Plan\*](#).

<sup>1</sup> Missouri State, Assessment of Student Learning, The Assessment Process, Retrieved from <https://www.missouristate.edu/assessment/the-assessment-process.htm>

## Step 2: Design and Perform Assessment

The assessment plan will be designed to gather information that will provide insight on whether goals and objectives are being met. The plan will identify data sources and provide specific methods for using those sources to gain relevant information about progress towards goals and objectives. It will also determine the assessment timeline and how and to whom the results will be distributed.

The assessment plan should require a basic inquiry into whether the actions underlying the objectives were undertaken. For example, if an objective in furtherance of the student diversity goal was to deliver at least twelve admission presentations at minority-serving institutions (MSIs), the assessment plan would call for determining the number of such presentations delivered within the stipulated timeframe.

The assessment plan should also require that impact of efforts be measured. Benchmarking is an essential component of impact analysis. What is the baseline or standard against which efforts and impact will be measured?

Benchmarks can be standalone or comparative. An example of a standalone benchmark is the number of admission presentations at MSIs in the example above. Virtually any number of presentations could have been stipulated in the objective. Twelve was chosen for purposes of the example, but a law school could determine that some other number makes more sense. That number is the benchmark. Standalone benchmarks should not be arbitrary. They should be rooted in reasoning that makes sense, based on goals, resources, insights from past experiences and other relevant factors.

Comparative benchmarks tie the baseline against which impact will be measured to some other set of trends or phenomena. An example of comparative benchmarking would be to use as the baseline the previous year's number of applications from underrepresented students at the schools where the admission presentations were delivered. An increase from that year's total could suggest that the presentations had a favorable impact. No change or a decrease could suggest that the plan was not impactful (or possibly had a negative impact).

Insights about the impact of efforts can be obtained from applicants and students themselves, mainly through surveying and, where possible, focus groups. Many schools survey students early in their matriculation about their perceptions of the admission process. Some schools also survey admitted applicants who opt not to enroll about their perceptions and reasons for declining the admission offer. Whatever the tools and methods, the assessment plan will lay out and explain their use.

Other important components of the assessment plan are the assessment timeline and the documentation and distribution of the results. When will assessment activities take place? (Ideally, the activities will be embedded components of diversity efforts.) At what intervals will the data be compiled and analyzed? With whom will the results be shared? When will results be distributed? Are there confidentiality issues? These are important questions that the assessment plan should address.

Once the plan is developed and the efforts undertaken, assessment activities should begin in accordance with the plan.

### **Step 3: Develop and Implement Improvement Strategies**

Assessment is about improvement; therefore, insights gleaned from the analyses should be used to inform action aimed at increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of efforts. These improvement strategies must be developed and implemented with goals, relevant objectives and insights from the assessment in mind.

Imagine a scenario in which all objectives of a diversity plan have been undertaken and achieved, but insufficient progress towards diversity goals is made. The assessment process would demonstrate that efforts alone are often insufficient, prompting consideration of ways in which those efforts can be designed for better impact.

Even in scenarios where progress towards goals is being made and objectives have been achieved, the assessment process should spur consideration of ways in which efforts could be made even more impactful. It might be that no further impact is possible and, therefore, no changes are necessary, but that conclusion can be reached only after a rigorous process of assessment.

## Step 4: Repeat Process

The goal of assessment is spurring maximum impact through continuous improvement. Therefore, every step of the assessment process should be repeated, including the development of goals and objectives. If, after a cycle of assessment, it becomes clear that a goal or objective is ill-conceived, irrelevant or unrealistic, it should be altered or removed. But to be clear, the urge to alter or remove goals and objectives for expedience or convenience should be resisted.

The assessment plan should be revisited as well. Important questions include:

- Did the design and implementation of the plan yield the most useful information possible? If not, what aspects need to be altered?
- How do the improvement strategies adopted after the last assessment affect the design of the next assessment?

Improvement strategies will always be dependent on the results of the assessments; therefore, the reconsideration of these strategies should be a highly intuitive part of the assessment cycle.



# 03

## Assessing Diversity Recruitment Efforts

The purpose of this section is to illustrate tangible ways in which common recruitment activities can be assessed. The illustrations will be based on the goal presented earlier:

*Increase the number of students from underrepresented racial, ethnic and socio-economic groups who enroll in the next entering class, compared to the previous.*

The first illustration will involve an email campaign aimed at generating applications for admission from prospects from underrepresented backgrounds.

The second illustration will involve efforts to encourage admitted applicants from underrepresented backgrounds to enroll.

### Email Campaign

Email campaigns are frequently used by law schools to generate awareness, interest and, eventually, applications among prospective students. These campaigns are typically multifaceted, often featuring targeted messaging and the use of incentives, like fee waivers, to encourage applications. These campaigns are typically guided by distribution plans or schedules.

The following illustration will discuss how an assessment of such efforts could be performed, using the steps laid out earlier. The discussion will center principally on the objectives presented below.

#### Step 1: Set Diversity Goals and Objectives

**Objective 1:** Devise email campaign consisting of four messages highlighting aspects of the law school's commitment to diversity and inclusion for prospective students from underrepresented groups.

**Objective 2:** Devise and implement distribution plan that will identify recipients of the messages and lay out the order and general timing of messages.

**Objective 3:** Offer application fee waivers to recipients who submit applications in response to the email campaign.

## Step 2: Design and Perform Assessment

The objectives call for drafting four email messages, devising a plan for distributing the emails and offering application fee waivers. The assessment plan should be designed to answer two questions:

### 1. *Were the objectives met?*

*Were the emails written? To what extent was the distribution plan designed and implemented? How many fee waivers were distributed?*

### 2. *What was the impact of efforts?*

*As mentioned earlier, benchmarking is an essential component of impact analysis. The objective called for four emails to be drafted and distributed. How many were actually drafted and distributed? How many fee waivers were offered?*

From a comparative perspective, did the number of applications from underrepresented people increase after implementation of the email campaign? Did a higher proportion of fee waiver recipients apply compared to non-recipients?

The assessment plan lays out the information needed to assess progress towards goals and objectives, the sources of that information, and the manners in which that information will be analyzed and documented.

### **Information Needed:**

- Text of the emails comprising the campaign
- Distribution plan that includes recipients and distribution schedule
- Number of application fee waivers offered and the recipients
- Email campaign analytics, with information such as click-through rates
- Number of applicants who applied in response to campaign, including those who used fee waivers

### **Sources of Information:**

- Internal documents:
  - Text of emails
  - Distribution plan
- Email marketing service provider:
  - Analytics reports
- Admission database:
  - Applicant and application trends
  - Fee waiver distribution and usage data

### **Methods of Analysis:**

- Reviews of documents
- Statistical analyses
- Surveys
- Focus groups

The assessment plan should also lay out a timeline of analysis.

### **Step 3: Develop and Implement Improvement Strategies**

Improvements or adjustments to the recruitment process will hinge in significant part on the outcomes and insights gleaned from Step 2. Maximum impact is always the goal of improvement strategies. In this example, questions pertaining to the impact of the timing and content of the email messages, as well as the nature of application incentives would be important. The process of considering improvements may feel different if impact trends look favorable than if they look unfavorable. But the rigor with which impact and possible improvements are considered should be unaffected by trendlines.

### **Step 4: Repeat Process**

Revisit goals and objectives. Make necessary adjustments to assessment plan. Consider and implement improvement strategies. Start over.

# Admitted Applicant Recruitment

The goal of admitted applicant recruitment is to induce enrollment; therefore, the effectiveness of these efforts has direct implications on the composition and size of the entering class, as well as the law school's revenue bottom line. Ideally, admitted applicant recruitment is an extension of earlier recruitment efforts that may have induced applicants to apply in the first place. The stakes, however, are more tangible.

Admitted applicant recruitment takes many forms. It begins with the offer of admission, which is an expression of interest and a promotional piece. The letter is intended to flatter the applicant, while touting the school. It typically culminates with the school expressing a perception of "fit" between the applicant's qualifications and interests and the school's qualities and offerings.

The scholarship offer is another recruitment tool aimed at inducing enrollment. The premise is based on the simple proposition that an applicant may be more likely to enroll at a discounted price than at full price. Scholarship offers can also have a flattering effect on applicants.

Other forms of admitted applicant recruitment include open houses and informational events (e.g., Admitted Students Day), outreach by students and alumni, a special website or social media portal for admitted students, emails and other correspondence, and "swag" (e.g., shirts or pens featuring the school's insignia).

In a competitive climate in which there is much more "supply" in the nation's law schools than there is demand for the law degree, an assessment of the impact of admitted applicant recruitment efforts could be a very useful means of targeting scarce resources and efforts.

The following illustration will discuss how an assessment of admitted applicant recruitment efforts could be performed, using the steps laid out earlier. The discussion will center principally on the objectives that underlie the goal.

*Increase the number of students from underrepresented racial, ethnic and socioeconomic groups who enroll in the next entering class, compared to previous.*

## Step 1: Set Diversity Goals and Objectives

**Objective 1:** Host three diversity-themed admitted applicant events: one on campus, two in other locations in close proximity to large populations of admitted applicants from underrepresented backgrounds.

**Objective 2:** Encourage campus visits by admitted applicants from underrepresented backgrounds by offering ten travel stipends of up to \$500 each.

**Objective 3:** Connect admitted applicants from underrepresented backgrounds with current student "ambassadors" from similar backgrounds. The ambassadors would be designated sources of information and support for the admitted students.

## Step 2: Design and Perform Assessment

The objectives call for hosting three diversity-themed admitted student events, offering ten travel stipends to admitted applicants from underrepresented backgrounds and connecting

admitted applicants with “ambassadors” from similar backgrounds. As discussed earlier, there are two important questions in assessing these efforts:

### 1. *Were the objectives met?*

*Were the events planned and hosted? How many travel stipends were awarded and used? Were ambassadors hired?*

### 2. *What was the impact of efforts?*

*An important focus of benchmarks for each objective would be the extent to which the yield (proportion of admitted applicants who enrolled) differed between applicants who were targets of the objectives and other applicants. For example, to what extent did the yield among admitted applicants who had interactions with student ambassadors differ from the overall yield?*

In addition, the extent to which the efforts underlying the objectives led to more engagement could be benchmarked. Did more admitted applicants from underrepresented backgrounds attend recruitment events, compared to past years? Did the travel stipends result in more visits from underrepresented admitted applicants, compared to previous years?

The assessment plan lays out the information needed to assess progress towards goals and objectives, the sources of that information and the manners in which that information will be analyzed and documented.

#### **Information Needed:**

- Schedule and agendas for admitted applicant events
- Number of underrepresented admitted students who attended the events – individually and collectively
  - Number of attendees who ultimately enrolled
- Number of travel stipends awarded
  - Number of stipends used
  - Number of stipend recipients who enrolled
- Number of underrepresented admitted applicants who interacted with a student ambassador
  - Number of contacts at various percentiles
  - Forms of contact
  - Number and proportion of contacted admitted applicants who enrolled

#### **Sources of Information:**

- Internal documents
  - Schedule and agendas for admitted student events
  - Number of underrepresented admitted students who attended the events

- Number of travel stipends awarded
- Number of underrepresented admitted students who were contacted by a student ambassador
- Admission database
  - Enrollment trends

### **Methods of Analysis:**

- Reviews of documents
- Statistical analyses
- Surveys
- Focus groups

The assessment plan should also lay out a timeline of analysis.

### **Step 3: Develop and Implement Improvement Strategies**

Insights gleaned from the assessment could provide useful guidance on how the impact on admitted applicant recruitment can be maximized. Can the content, format or timing of the admitted applicant events be changed to better resonate with applicants or spur higher attendance? Should the stipend amounts be changed, or should they be eliminated altogether? Can the ambassador experience be made better? Are there opportunities for better training on information and engagement techniques?

### **Step 4: Repeat Process**

Revisit goals and objectives. Make necessary adjustments to assessment plan. Consider and implement improvement strategies. Start over.



# 04 Conclusion

Despite the good intentions of many in legal education, people from underrepresented backgrounds are still shut-out of law school at disproportionately high rates. Law school diversity is both necessary and possible, but it will not happen without a strategic approach. Assessment of efforts to increase student diversity is critical to achieving diversity goals. Assessment can help ensure that efforts yield results and that resources are expended in the most efficient manner possible.

This is the third volume in a five-part series on increasing diversity in legal education, and in turn the legal profession. *Volume 4: Contextualizing Admissions Factors* will focus on how law schools can use empirical research methods, like predictive validity studies, to gain a better understanding of the relative impact of admission factors on student outcomes, such as bar exam performance. This insight could better inform admission policies and practices in ways that could increase student diversity.

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