DIVERSITY FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

PROGRAM OVERVIEW FOR EMPLOYERS
WHAT IS THE DIVERSITY FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM?

As part of our commitment to diversity, the San Diego County Bar Association (SDCBA) & the Association of Corporate Counsel - San Diego (ACC) have joined forces to bring you the Diversity Fellowship Program (Program).

Created in 2009, our Program provides an opportunity for diverse, first year and part-time second year law students from ABA accredited law schools to learn and develop skills that are necessary to be successful in a law firm, corporate legal department, and public agency environments and exposes law firms, corporate legal departments, and public agencies to qualified individuals who might not otherwise have come to your attention. Our Program is modeled after similarly successful programs in Sacramento, Puget Sound/Seattle, Cleveland, St. Louis, Columbus, Atlanta, and the Bay Area. The Program is not a recruitment tool, but an educational tool.

Our Program was created to: 1) Increase the number of diverse attorneys practicing in San Diego County law firms, corporate legal departments, and public sector agencies, by providing first year and part time second year law students with an opportunity to develop skills and make professional contacts through Fellowship opportunities at law firms, corporate legal departments, and public sector agencies; and 2) To assist San Diego County law firms, corporate legal departments, and public sector agencies in their efforts to recruit competent diverse attorneys by introducing them to qualified, diverse law students who may not have been selected for employment through traditional summer programs. In addition, employment of these students affords a diversity of ideas which enhances the quality of legal services that participating employers may provide their clients.

The diversity of San Diego population demands diverse lawyers. Helping to facilitate the development of practice skills in our diverse law students helps law firms, corporations, agencies, and our community at large.

WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?

Plain and simple, diversity is good for business. Studies have shown that diverse companies outperform homogenous ones, relate better to and serve the needs of their clients, are more innovative and have better reputations in the community. By participating in the Program, employers are provided Fellows from diverse backgrounds who can contribute their life experiences, talents, and skills to your organization in a way that can be unique to the majority of your employed staff.

Please see our article in the San Diego Lawyer magazine located on our website at www.sdcba.org/diversityFellowship, which provides detailed insight from each of our participating employers about how the Program positively impacted and enriched their firm’s strength and adaptability in an ever increasing diverse world.

WHAT IS THE TERM OF THE FELLOWSHIP?

The duration of the Program is eight to ten weeks during the summer. The start and end dates are set between the employer and their Fellow to make sure the dates work with schedules of both parties.
HOW QUALIFIED ARE THE FELLOWS?

All Fellows must be:

1. First year or part-time second year law students;
2. Diverse;
3. Enrolled in an American Bar Association (ABA) accredited law school; and
4. In good academic standing

A Committee evaluates the student applications based upon a number of factors, including, but not limited to the Fellow’s:

1. Application;
2. Resume;
3. Writing Sample based on a prompt SDCBA provides;
4. Personal Statement;
5. Confirmation of Good Academic Standing by the Career Services Department of the law school attended;
6. Two letters of recommendation; and
7. In-person interview.

By the time a Fellow is selected into the Program, five to seven attorneys have reviewed the application and evaluated the student. We evaluate the Fellows in a holistic method with focus centered on the strength of the writing sample, personal statement, and interview skills, rather than grades alone. This is based on the idea that after completing one semester of law school, the Fellow’s grades are not available and not the best indicator of the Fellow’s potential for success.

Even though grades are not a required factor in choosing candidates for this Program, the purpose of the Confirmation of Good Academic Standing is to ensure that the Fellow will be enrolled in law school for the Fall semester and is not on academic probation and/or in danger of being removed from law school.

HOW MUCH OF MY TIME IS REQUIRED TO OBTAIN A FELLOW?

A wonderful facet of the Program is that the SDCBA handles all the legwork, so you do not have to. We understand your time is valuable, so we handle all the details including reviewing the candidates’ applications, the interview process, and selecting the best Fellow for your organization.

The interview is conducted by a panel of two or three attorney interviewers from an SDCBA committee who ensure that interviews are conducted in a fair and equitable manner and in compliance with state and federal employment laws and best practices. All interviewers are required to ask candidates a minimum of five primary questions selected from a standardized question list and are permitted to ask additional follow up questions based on the responses provided by the candidates.

Interviewers discuss and accept the top candidates into the Program based on a number of factors including, but not limited to, (1) overall application strength, (2) interview skills, and (3) criteria given to the Committee by the participating employers. The selection committee will remain blind as to which law school the candidate attends throughout the selection process.

After the selection of Fellows, the participating employers are given copies of all of the application materials the Fellows submitted to SDCBA, and Fellows are invited to a reception with all of the employers (the Meet and Greet). After the reception, the participating employers have an opportunity to give their input on the candidates to the DFP Director, including preferences regarding the placement of potential Fellows.
The SDCBA then handles the final step of matching Fellows with employers that best fit their needs and cultural competencies. SDCBA makes every effort to match a Fellow to an employer that selected them for placement preference after the reception. In addition, the SDCBA takes into consideration that final Fellowship offers are fair and balanced among the candidates from all participating local law schools. The law school attended by the student shall not be known to employers prior to placement with the employer.

All final decisions regarding Fellowship offers and placements are the sole discretion of the SDCBA.

**WHO TO TELL THE SPECIAL CRITERIA AT OUR WORKPLACE?**

Upon joining the Program, you are welcome to provide us with your preferences and criteria regarding your ideal Fellow. We will take these items into consideration when placing a Fellow in your organization. You can email the DFP Director, Nima Shull at nshuldfp@outlook.com and/or call him at (949) 945-4071.

**ONCE WE HAVE A FELLOW, WHAT ARE OUR RESPONSIBILITIES?**

Success of the Program will depend, in large part, on the extent to which the Fellow is completely submerged in the law firm, corporate legal department, or public sector agency, which includes their involvement and participation in social activities of the employer. We encourage employers to incorporate your Fellow into the organization in the same manner and to the same extent as first year summer clerks.

In addition, employers are encouraged to ask attorneys to devote appropriate attention and to provide supplemental support to the Fellows; it is anticipated that this process will be informal. Whenever possible, each Fellow should be assigned a mentor attorney who will be asked to closely follow the Fellow’s progress and to assure that he/she/they are in the mainstream of activities.

Upon conclusion of the fellowship, your Fellow should receive an exit interview with the employer.

**DO I HAVE TO PAY THE FELLOW?**

Yes. Each participating employer is requested to compensate their Fellow at a minimum rate of $20 per hour and is responsible for complying with all applicable federal and state wage, hour and employment laws.

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1 County employers, in accordance with their policies, they may pay $19.79.

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No matter how many years of legal experience we may have under our belts, it's refreshing to experience the eagerness of these fellows and their commitment to practicing law. This helps keep the rest of us invigorated and mindful of why we chose this career.

*John Alessio*

*Managing Partner - Procopio, Cory, Hargreaves & Savitch, LLP*
WHAT ARE THE EXPECTATIONS OF FELLOWS DURING THEIR FELLOWSHIP WITH US?

**Time Commitment.** The Program is intensive and requires the full-time commitment of the Fellows. Upon acceptance of a Fellowship position, Fellows may not solicit nor accept employment of any kind for the Fellowship period. Upon acceptance of a Fellowship, participants agree to complete the Program in its entirety.

**Professionalism & Integrity.** Upon acceptance of a Fellowship position, Fellows agree to conduct themselves in the highest level of professionalism, honesty, and integrity. Fellows are required to act ethically and uphold the reputation of the profession. Fellows should take pride in their work and strive for excellence in fulfilling the employer’s provided roles and responsibilities in line with the employer’s values and core competencies.

**Attendance at Program Events.** The Program includes events intended to enhance the Fellowship experience for all participants including a reception at the commencement and conclusion of the Program; educational seminars covering a variety of topics such as time management, professionalism in the workplace, networking, creating mentoring relationships and/or other topics relevant to professional development and advancement. Each Fellow is expected to participate in these events.

**Employer Specific Requirements.** Some participating employers may have additional requirements to meet such as minimum GPA and/or require Fellows to submit to and pass a background check, drug test, or conflicts of interest check prior to accepting the Fellow’s employment.

HOW DO I PARTICIPATE IN THE PROGRAM?

If you are interested in participating in Program, please contact DFP Director, Nima Shull at nshulldfp@outlook.com and/or call him at (949) 945-4071. Each participating employer will be given an Employer Agreement to sign. There is also an administrative fee of $250 to cover administration costs associated with the Program. You can also visit our website, www.sdcba.org/diversityFellowship, for more information.

CAN I PROMOTE THIS PARTNERSHIP?

Yes. We encourage you to promote your partnership with the Program and your pledge to diversity in the community.

WHAT IF I WANT TO RETAIN THE FELLOW AFTER THE PROGRAM?

Great! While employers participating in the Program are not expected to extend an offer beyond the fellowship, employers are welcomed to do so following the completion of the Fellowship term. Whether the participating employer makes an offer of employment after the Program or if the Fellow accepts is a decision for the participating employer and Fellow. SDCBA/Program has no expectations for either party. We have had employers extend offers to continue after the fellowship to stay on as law clerks.

CAN I BILL TIME FOR THE FELLOW?

Yes. A Fellow’s billable time should be treated in the same manner as any employed law clerk working for your organization at the hourly billing rate of your choosing.
WHAT DO I DO IF I HAVE AN ISSUE WITH THE FELLOW?

We want this to be a great opportunity and an enriching experience for both the Fellow and the employer. If any issues arise at any time with your Fellow that cannot be handled internally, the SDCBA has assigned the DFP Director as an ombudsperson to this Program who is available for any reason. You can reach the DFP Director, Nima Shull at nshulldfp@outlook.com or (949) 945-4071.

WHAT ABOUT COVID-19?

Though the wide-scale shutdowns seen earlier during the COVID-19 pandemic seem remote, there is a small chance that they could return during Summer 2023. As an employer, you are agreeing to hire the Fellow for in-person or potentially remote/virtual work, or combination of the two.

WHAT IS THE PROGRAM OVERSIGHT STRUCTURE?

The DFP Director, as the point person for this Program, works closely with SDCBA staff, Chairs of the Committee on Diversity and Inclusion (formerly ERDC), and DFP Committees to carry out the various aspects of the Program. The DFP Director regularly submits reports on Program matters to SDCBA’s Committee on Diversity and Inclusion (CDI) comprised of representatives from diverse bar associations around the County; as well as SDCBA’s Executive Director and Board of Directors.

DFP Committees include Application Review Committee and Interview Committee, among others. These Committees are comprised of volunteer attorneys from SDCBA Board, CDI, and other attorney members of the legal community.

DFP Director also keep ACC San Diego Chapter apprised of the Program on a quarter-annual basis.

Increasing diversity in our profession is of utmost importance. We have an obligation to reflect our community and represent our clients to the best of our ability. A diversity initiative or program is a key component of that objective.

Patricia Hollenbeck
Partner - Duane Morris, LLP