



# WSBA

## Washington State Bar Association Diversity & Inclusion Plan

### Mission Statement

The Washington State Bar Association's mission is to serve the public and the members of the Bar, ensure the integrity of the legal profession, and to champion justice.

### Commitment to Diversity

The Washington State Bar Association is committed to advancing diversity and inclusion within the legal profession. Toward that end, WSBA is committed to understanding and responding to the professional environment which exists for all lawyers in Washington. Inclusion is best understood as an environment which encourages and incorporates different perspectives, ideas and experiences. The profession is changing. The business interests of attorneys, employers and clients call for more diverse legal representation across the state. WSBA recognizes the need to enhance opportunity in the legal profession and the public's experience with lawyers by demonstrating to its members and the public at large a genuine commitment to supporting and advancing diversity and inclusion.

This plan reflects the unique roles for which WSBA is positioned, as a unified bar, to create and help nurture the conditions that will encourage diverse lawyers to enter, remain, thrive and ultimately lead the profession and inspire others to follow in their footsteps. The plan rests on a fundamental assumption that WSBA's commitment to its own culture of inclusion and cultural competence provides the best foundation for meaningful progress. We refer to this as "Inside – Out" diversity. It is our hope that stakeholders and partners will answer the call to involvement as we work from the inside out to distinguish the Washington State legal profession as an inclusive community.

### Background

In 2003 the Washington State Bar Association formally established diversity as one of its nine strategic goals. In 2006 the Board of Governors formed its own Diversity Committee to help improve diversity within the elected leadership. In 2007 WSBA adopted five guiding principles, one of which is advancing and promoting "Diversity, equality, and cultural understanding throughout the legal community." Consistent with this guiding principle, WSBA next adopted two focus areas: working to understand the lay of the land of the legal community and providing tools to members and employers in order to enhance the retention of minority lawyers in the community.

The guiding principle of promoting **diversity, equality, and cultural understanding throughout the legal community** was supported by the 2011- 2013 Strategic Goal: **Conduct a detailed study of the composition of the legal profession and retention rates within the profession in the state of Washington.** In 2011 WSBA launched this groundbreaking study. The purpose was to

create a statistically reliable study of the membership's demographics and trends. Study results were released in March 2012 and presented at the April 2012 Board of Governors meeting.

### **Purpose of the Plan**

With the baseline study completed, the Diversity & Inclusion Plan is intended to outline WSBA's next steps and long term priorities.

Staff, member and leadership participation are particularly important to the effective coordination and delivery of systems, services and programs. The Plan's objectives all work towards the goals of retaining diverse attorneys, increasing their participation within the profession and creating opportunities for leadership within the Association.

### **Plan Objectives**

#### **1. MEMBERSHIP DEMOGRAPHICS**

- a. Improve diverse representation across WSBA entities, especially with respect to faculty and leadership**
  - i. Provide tools, systems, and evaluation for intentional recruitment of diverse faculty and leadership in collaboration with Minority Bar Associations (MBAs)
- b. Measure demographics/ diversity indicators longitudinally**
  - i. Conduct bi-annual follow-up surveys and full study every 10 years
  - ii. Administer more frequent surveys and evaluations to gather timely information on trends and opportunities
- c. Be the resource for others who care about the demographic trends of Washington's legal community**
  - i. Publish, present and share demographic news, trends and information
  - ii. Host events, discussions and online chats about the data and its implications
  - iii. Help develop a more complete picture of the future of the profession by partnering with the Initiative for Diversity, the ABA, and law schools to measure complementary data and methods to address inequities

#### **2. EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

- a. Ensure everyone who represents WSBA is knowledgeable about membership demographics and trends**
  - i. Present updated information and resources to leadership, staff and entities regularly
  - ii. Conduct annual review and analysis of board, staff and leadership demographics
  - iii. Articulate case to members about the business case for diversity and improve overall understanding of why this effort matters
  - iv. Develop tools and shared language for WSBA representatives to educate members why diversity matters to everyone

- v. Deliver consistent, ongoing training on cultural competence and inclusion
- vi. Develop and adopt a shared dictionary of terms and meanings
- b. Leverage and target WSBA programming to remove barriers/ improve conditions identified in the study**
  - i. Target outreach, educational tracks and special offerings within existing WSBA programs (including Continuing Legal Education, New Lawyer Education, Law Office Management Assistance Program, Lawyer Assistance, Public Service, and the Law Clerk Program) to members *in all diversity groups* focusing on:
    - a. Strengthening mentorship opportunities
    - b. Accelerating outreach to members statewide
    - c. Expanding support for new and solo practitioners

### **3. COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIP**

- a. Provide the forum for dialogue, focusing on the conditions for lawyers to enter, stay, thrive and lead the profession**
  - i. Accelerate communications and education to address inequities relating to diverse populations, specifically via:
    - a. Town Hall Series with law schools and employers
    - b. Online chats to stimulate dialogue
    - c. Guest posts and articles that raise new voices
- b. Provide WSBA representation and information in support of community projects, task forces and initiatives that intersect with WSBA's commitment to diversity**
  - i. Awards and spotlights on innovation and success – using WSBA's reach for maximum exposure for good ideas
  - ii. Increase outreach and facilitation, specifically via:
    - a. Networking events to open access to bar leaders
    - b. Receptions and events to connect with stakeholders
    - c. Clarified support for MBAs
    - d. Facilitating and hosting a peer network of mentor programs

#### **Accountability & Reporting**

A report describing the progress of advancing WSBA's diversity and inclusion efforts will be presented at each Board of Governors meeting. The Diversity Chair and staff will present highlights of activities and ongoing advancement toward these objectives. WSBA will host an annual diversity convocation whereby each section and entity will report on the status of its efforts towards objectives 1 – 3 and to talk about what's working and what support is needed. Finally, staff will present an annual report at each September BOG meeting on the overall status of the Diversity & Inclusion Plan. The annual report will be published and distributed widely.