



Participants in Winston & Strawn's Diversity and Inclusion Associate Sponsorship Program Embark on Year of Training, Coaching, and Cohort Building

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Greater diversity and inclusion is a high priority at Winston & Strawn, starting at the top with our strategic plan that guides firmwide development and operations. We are proud that these efforts have led to meaningful results in attracting diverse law students and increasing the number of women who serve in leadership roles at our firm. We also recognize the need to do more to bridge the gap between law school graduation and law firm partnership.

To help improve retention and sustain a pipeline of diverse firm leaders, we created a Diversity and Inclusion Associate Sponsorship Program that pairs high-potential women, minority, and LGBTQ associates in their fifth and sixth year of practice with a sponsor from the firm's Executive Committee (EC).

Our newest class of 28 protégés-sponsor pairs gathered in Chicago on February 10-11 for the official launch of the 12-month program, which will include the opportunity for each protégé to work with their sponsor on a client or business development project; goal-setting supported by individual coaching; and training on executive presence, business development, leadership skills, and other topics.



Members of our 2018-2019 protégé class, led off the first day with “Lessons Learned: Making the Most of a Sponsorship Relationship.” They answered questions, moderated by Director of Diversity & Inclusion Sylvia James, about their relationship and interactions with their sponsors, what they most enjoyed about the program, and what they would have done differently. They emphasized the importance of both the protégé and sponsor fully committing to the experience, even with busy workloads.

Dan told attendees he was able to strengthen his connection with his sponsor, with whom he had regularly worked prior to the program, while Shawn enjoyed the opportunity to forge a new connection with an EC member she had not previously known. They both found particular value in the coaching circles facilitated by Director of Coaching and Well-Being Diane Costigan throughout the year and the relationships they developed with their cohorts in the program.

Protégés began the second day of programming with a discussion led by Partner Steve Flores and Sylvia James focused on tips for navigating challenges and obstacles to sponsoring across differences. The firm’s Director of Learning, Development and Well-Being presented a session designed to promote feedback-seeking behaviors and provide tips for navigating difficult conversations and building resilience.

These provided a strong foundation for Economist Sylvia Ann Hewlett’s “Sponsorship in Action” presentation, which protégés attended with their sponsors. Hewlett emphasized the “two-way street” of an effective protégé-sponsor relationship, with the sponsor *investing* their capital and advocacy and the protégé *delivering* on performance, trustworthiness, and value-add. She said this is different from a one-way mentoring relationship, which, while important, is meant to facilitate encouragement rather than advancement.

In identifying potential protégés, Hewlett advised sponsors to look for a pick who is:

- excellent at his/her job and leads with a yes
- believes in the organization and goes the extra mile

- can increase their sponsor’s thought leadership and amplify his/her vision

Some of the tactics of the successful protégé that she outlined include:

- demonstrating “fire in your belly” and showing gratitude for opportunity
- realizing he/she needs to give before they get
- focusing on making the sponsor’s life easier

According to Hewlett, sponsors who identify the right talent and protégés who display the right attitude both benefit from advancement and promotion opportunities throughout their careers.

Programming wrapped up with interactive sessions in which Diane Costigan helped set protégés up for success, and Sylvia James went over expectations with sponsors. Protégés met with their sponsors to discuss their goals as they prepared to embark on a year of training, coaching, and cohort building.

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