



International Bar Association
the global voice of the legal profession



WOMEN LAWYERS' COMMITTEE: MENTORSHIP TOOLKIT



At the International Bar Association Women Lawyers' Committee (WLC) we aim at empowering female attorneys from all over the world to engage, network and share knowledge, level the playing field in the legal profession and inspire leaders to work to achieve gender parity. Our 20 committee officers create awareness tools to help the legal profession achieve this goal and at the same time facilitate an efficient global network for women lawyers to connect and develop business and expertise.

Understanding that empowerment comes mainly from the recognition of the personal and professional abilities of each individual, continuous learning and the establishment of development plans in light of the experiences of professionals who have already walked the path, the WLC wishes to collaborate with this journey by consolidating the experience of IBA members around the world on mentoring programmes, hoping that it may be used by law firms that have not developed their own programmes, as well as lawyers who may not have access to mentoring programs at their own firms.

Focusing on gender equality is no longer considered just 'the right thing to do', but rather 'the smart thing to do'. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) shows that gender disparity in world societies and in the labour market has a US\$12tn impact on the global economy, equivalent to

16 per cent of global gross domestic product.¹ Therefore, this is one of the ESG topics that is mostly addressed in organisations around the world and is on the agenda of UN conferences and the World Economic Forum.

Numerous studies show that mentoring is a determining factor in developing a successful career path and that it generally occurs spontaneously, not as a formal practice. In principle, it usually happens between individuals with similar characteristics, and given that most leadership positions in the world are held by men, it is not surprising that informal mentoring usually occurs among men.² Research also shows that executives who had a mentor – whether formal or not – are more likely to design and follow a career plan, have a higher income and level of education and be mentors to the next generation.³ Mentoring programmes have been proven to directly affect the development of strategic and soft skills, ability to receive feedback, make decisions and, generally, the mentee's self-esteem. Moreover, they also impact positively on mentors themselves.

Regarding diversity, 'Cornell University's School of Industrial and Labor Relations found that mentoring programs boosted minority representation at the management level by 9% to 24% (compared to -2% to 18% with other diversity initiatives). The same study found that mentoring programs also dramatically improved promotion and retention rates for

1 Gaëlle Ferrant and Alexandre Kolev, The economic cost of gender-based discrimination in social institutions (OECD Development Centre, June 2016) www.oecd.org/development/gender-development/SIGI_cost_final.pdf accessed 1 April 2022.

2 Catalyst, Creating Successful Mentoring Programs: A Catalyst Guide (2002).

3 R Gerard Roche, 'Much ado about mentors' Harvard Law Review. <https://hbr.org/1979/01/much-ado-about-mentors>.

minorities and women—15% to 38% as compared to non-mentored employees.⁴

According to McKinsey's 2017 report on women in law firms,⁵ the gender gap is much wider in law firms than in other industries. Women are relatively well-represented in the professional pipeline until the equity partner level, where women's representation drops sharply. Women who are associates want promotion to the next level as much as men but are less excited about making partner. Furthermore, in accordance with Forbes' Women need mentors more than ever,⁶ the Covid-19 pandemic has had a far more negative impact on working women than men. Women have disproportionately lost jobs, reduced their work hours and increased the time they spend on childcare and household responsibilities. Although a mentoring programme is not a cure-all, it may support and become a tool for sorting the obstacles that affect the growth and career advancement not only of women,

but also of any lawyer who is interested in continuous improvement and access to growth. We hope that this toolkit is just the beginning of a document that may be adjusted and supplemented from time to time in the future to accelerate the careers of many lawyers who are looking for this opportunity. So please, do send us your feedback and feel free to reach out to the officers at the WLC.

In the construction of this toolkit, the WLC has received the support and collaboration of many firms and professional groups around the world that shared their own toolkits, mentorship programme information and documents, and agreed to interviews through which they shared with us a number of relevant experiences and recommendations that we have tried to summarise in this document. There is a special acknowledgement to all the firms, groups and professionals that collaborated with us at the end of the toolkit.

4 Andie Kramer, 'Women needs mentors more than ever' Forbes (14 July 2021) www.forbes.com/sites/andiekramer/2021/07/14/women-need-mentors-now-more-than-ever/?sh=14284af2bbdc accessed 1 April 2022.

5. Marc Brodherson, Laura McGee and Mariana Pires dos Reis, Women in law firms (McKinsey & Company, October 2017) www.mckinsey.com/~/media/mckinsey/featured%20insights/gender%20equality/women%20in%20law%20firms/women-in-law-firms-final-103017.ashx accessed 1 April 2022.

6. See n 4 above.

GETTING STARTED

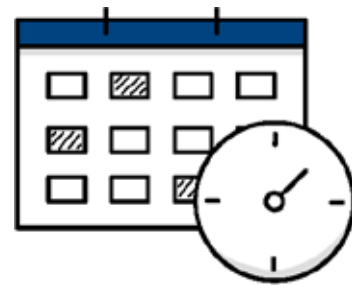
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- It is of utmost importance that any programme be part of an institutional effort and is supported and sponsored by the firm's management, especially the managing partner and the board, if applicable. This will facilitate adherence to the programme, as well as lawyers' willingness to participate. These programmes require dedication from both ends; mentors and mentees need to prepare the sessions in advance and it is advisable to be very clear about what the expectations and roles for both ends are.



- Firms also need to bear in mind that any mentoring programme will require time investment by their lawyers, be it mentors and mentees, the mentorship committee or human resources. For the programme to succeed – in a billable hour world – this should be approved and encouraged by the firm.



- Firms should have a committee in place that will follow up on the design, execution, results and analysis of the programme and to which participants can appeal if necessary. This committee should be bound by confidentiality and, if possible, supported by an external consultant who is specialised in diversity. Someone from the firm's senior management should be part of the committee.



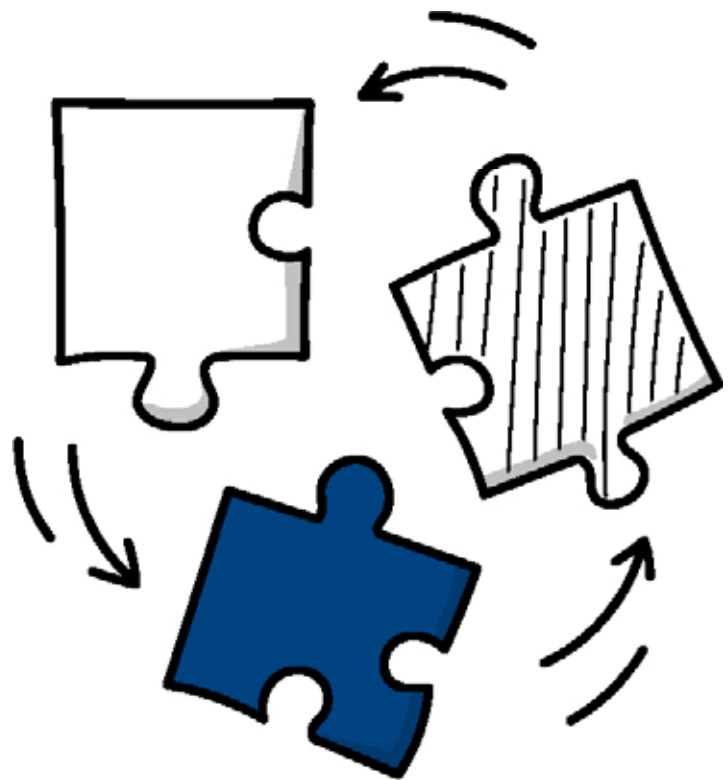
- It is imperative that both parties understand and agree to keep all discussions confidential. It is suggested they execute a short non-disclosure agreement, so they are both in alignment.



- The aims of the firm's mentoring programme should be clearly defined. For example, to:
 - have a positive impact on the mentee's career development;
 - change the mentee's self-perception as a lawyer and increase their self-confidence;
 - for the mentee, gain clarity on how they wish to orientate their career;
 - for the mentee, develop new skills and learn to make use of the available tools;
 - for the mentee, have a better understanding of the firm's culture;
 - build a relationship of trust between the mentor and mentee;
 - for the mentor, strengthen their skills and knowledge to help others grow;
 - for the mentor, learn more about new generations' concerns and acquire new tools for their own development as lawyers and bosses;
 - increase talent retention and more diverse leadership;
 - drive culture change;
 - share skills throughout the firm; and
 - expand the internal network.



DESIGNING AN AD-HOC STRUCTURE THAT WORKS FOR THE FIRM



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We recommend setting a structure to be followed throughout the length of the programme and hand it in writing to all participants. Some firms have had success just establishing the number of sessions that need to be had between mentors and mentees, giving them complete freedom as to the frequency they meet and how and which subjects to discuss.

However, we found that it may be advisable to at least start with a more standardised programme for all firm members. It will be easier to execute, follow up and to measure results at the end. We recommend considering topics such as:

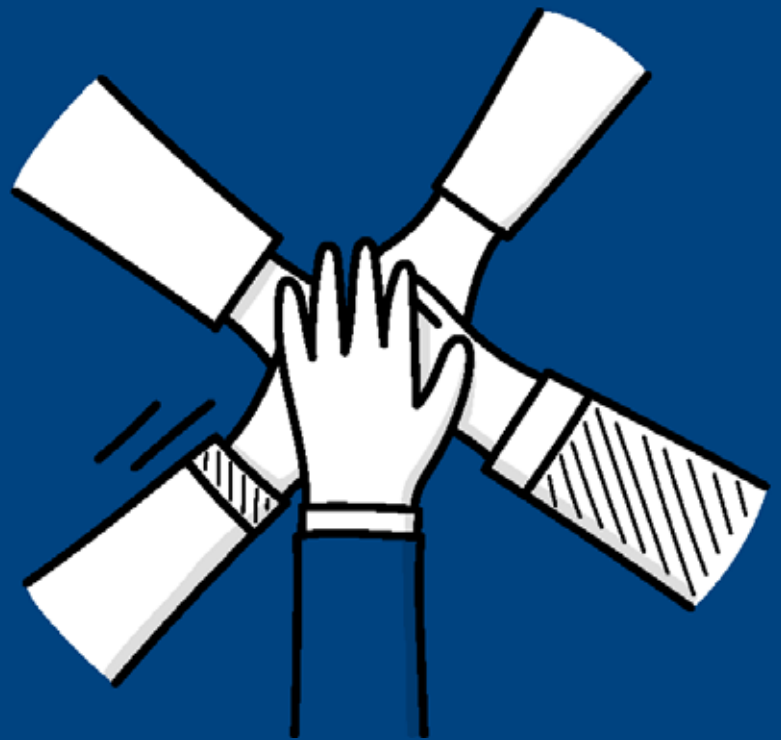
- What is the aim of the programme? What does the firm expect or want to gain at the end of the programme? Is it going to work as reversed mentorship as well? Is the firm setting any target for the programme?
- Is it going to be a mixed programme, a female programme, LGBTQI+, and so on? From experience, to help diversity and inclusion it is important to include not only female attorneys, but also male attorneys as part of the mentee group. They will be allies in changing the firm's culture and future management in general.
- How many pairs will join the programme? Is it going to run yearly?
- Is it going to be open to all the firm's associates? Is it going to be an aid for associates to consolidate within the firm? Is the aim to help female attorneys reach partnership?
- Process of mentee and mentor selection as well as pairing.
- Duration of the programme.
- Frequency and length of meetings.
- Responsibilities and roles of each of the parties, as well as the minimum number of hours to be spent on the programme. In a formal programme, hours should be invested by both mentors and mentees to prepare for sessions, for example, reading or watching material. It is advisable for them to know in advance what will be expected of them.



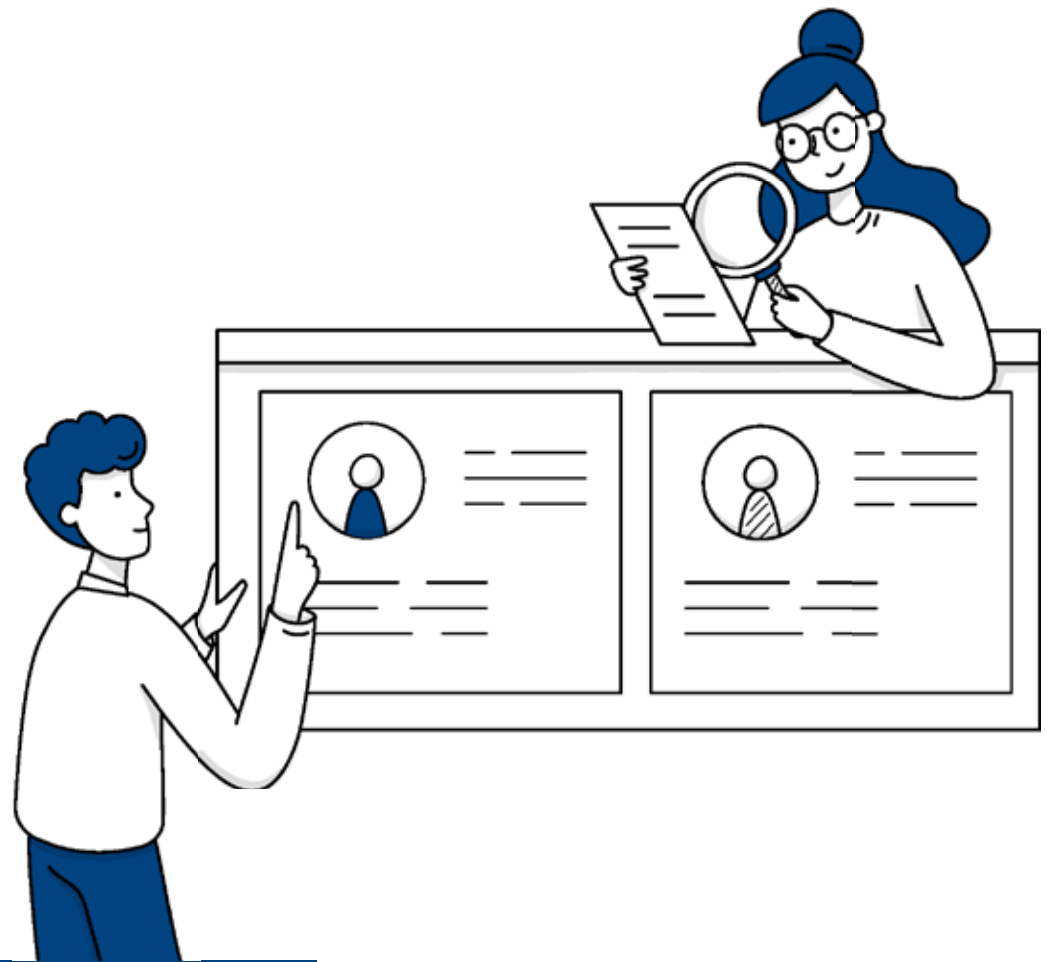
- Content and guidelines for each topic should be provided to mentors, as well as the firm's position on each topic. Some firms have been successful in training mentors beforehand on each topic – this allowed them to make sure all topics were addressed from the same starting point and understood the same way, but also allowed them to touch on each topic from their own point of view. Consider having a meeting with all mentors once a month to discuss each topic before the actual mentoring session – this will also provide mentors with tools to work with mentees.
- If possible, list materials recommended for each session (reading material, TED Talks, etc). That way mentors and mentees have the same base on which to start the conversation.
- Consider developing training workshops or opening the discussion of each topic to be addressed in the programme for all firm members. There is an opportunity for all of the firm's members to benefit from the programme even if they are not participating directly. These could be taught by mentors or by consultants.
- Consider establishing follow-up sessions by members of the mentorship committee to make sure both parties feel comfortable with each other and that the development of the programme is conducted in accordance with what has been agreed, for example, that sessions are being carried out regularly.
- Have an inaugural ceremony in which all pairs are formally introduced and welcomed into the programme. The mentorship committee should be introduced as well, giving all couples options to communicate with them.



ABOUT MENTORS AND MENTEES



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Choosing mentors

There are firms that have developed mentoring programmes that include 'matching' systems to determine the best mentor for each mentee based on different criteria. To choose a good mentor, it is necessary to understand what a mentor means.

The role of a mentor is to teach, guide and help to shape the professional growth and learning of the mentee and to serve them as a positive role model.⁷ Mentors do not give answers, but support mentees on the reflection process, share their own experiences, ask the right questions and in general aid mentees to see and find tools to develop their own potential. 'Mentors are different from coaches and act as guides to their mentees. They do this by offering advice and support, as well as helping them develop new skills.'⁸

7 Office for Alumni Affairs & Career Advancement, 'The Mentor – Mentee Relationship' Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health (15 October 2015) https://cdn1.sph.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/36/2016/06/The-Mentor-Mentee-Relationship-Handout_October-2015.pdf accessed 1 April 2022.

8 Shona Waters, 'Mentor-mentee relationships are beyond powerful, here's why' BetterUp (18 August 2021) www.betterup.com/blog/mentor-mentee-relationship accessed 1 April 2022.

There are many things to be considered when pairing mentorship couples. Here are some recommendations gathered from our research:



- We advise mentees not to be in a direct subordinate relationship to mentors, and not part of the same practice group.



- If possible, mentees who are parents must be matched with mentors who are also parents.



- It is advisable to have an application process including a few questions that will make it easier to understand the expectations of both mentors and mentees, as well as to make it easier to pair the couples. Ideally, the pairing will respond to clear needs identified on both parties. For example, an associate who needs to work on client management should be paired with a senior lawyer who excels at this. It is also always advisable to interview all potential mentors before pairing couples – not all individuals have the skills and time to mentor younger lawyers.

Recommendations for mentors

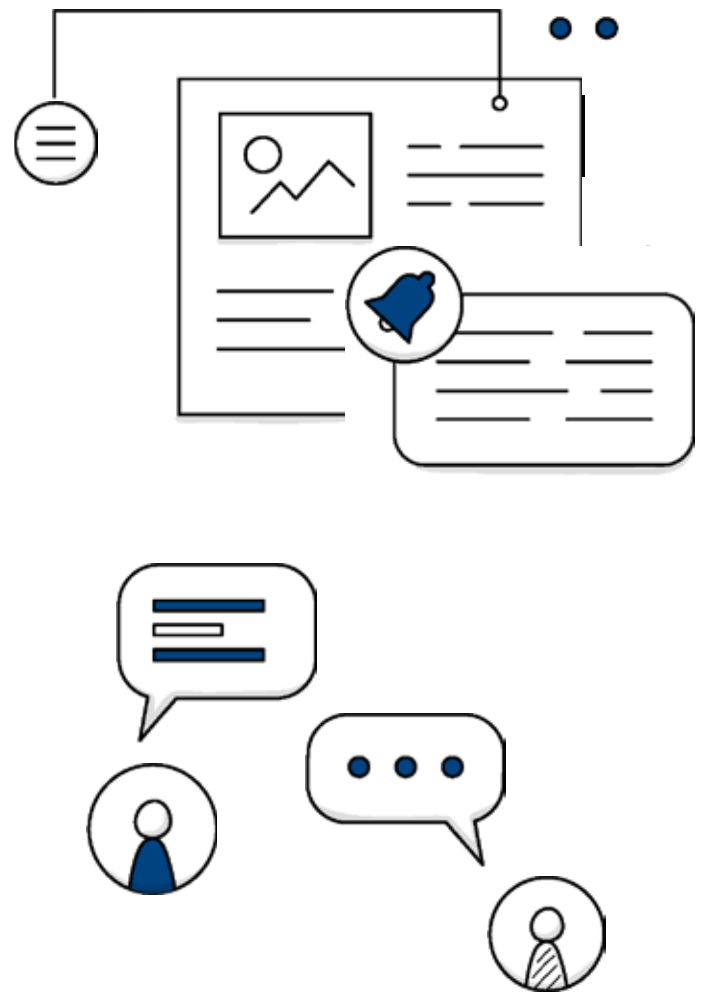
It is the mentor's responsibility to have regular check-ins with the mentee to review their professional development, acknowledge successes, discuss challenges and provide advice and feedback. It will be helpful for the mentor to think about the time when they were a new associate or a younger lawyer. As a mentor it is important to put yourself back in the shoes of a younger lawyer and consider the world from their perspective. Some tips for mentors:



- Review the mentee's profile and ask the mentorship committee whether there is additional information that could be shared to help them make the most of the programme. In some cases, having a conversation with the mentee's head of practice before the start of the programme may be useful to understand the mentee's professional context and specific needs.
- Approach the programme with the attitude that this is a professional relationship focused on career support and advancement.



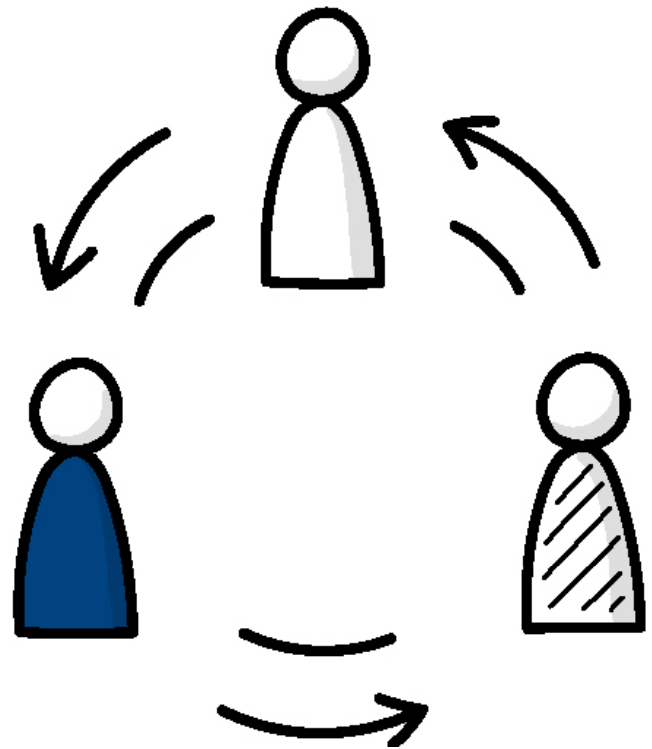
- Discuss the issues of confidentiality, commitment and respect. Understand that this is not a working relationship or friendship, but a session in which personal issues can be discussed, but always with a professional approach.
- Schedule all sessions in advance, so they are a commitment for both of you, and have an agenda for each session.
- Give your mentee the attention they deserve. To the extent possible, avoid calls, emails and interruptions during meetings.
- Practise active listening and ask questions. Your role is not to tell them what to do, but to ask questions and shed light on some issues that will help your mentee reflect on things. Share your personal experiences.
- Check up on your mentee regularly. An occasional stop by your mentee's office or a quick Teams or Zoom video check-in to chat informally is a great way of building and maintaining a positive connection.



- Remember the personal stuff. Send a note on the mentee's birthday, or another milestone.
- Be self-aware and acknowledge if the mentoring relationship needs to change for any reason. Part of your job as a mentor is to consider whether there is a better resource available for the mentee based on their individual needs.
- Engage with the mentorship committee when necessary. Ask for assistance if it is needed.
- Empathy, trust, a lack of judgement, confidentiality and support should be the backbone of the mentorship relationship.
- Be humble. You may learn a thing or two during the mentorship programme.

Selecting mentees

As aforementioned, the firm needs to decide how many pairs a year will make up the mentorship programme. It may be that not all interested associates can become mentees in a particular year. In this case, consider reviewing performance evaluations – this will help to assess the needs of the mentee, such as support, career development, coaching on a particular topic or understanding firm culture. For instance, the firm may find it useful to look at tools such as the 'performance and potential matrix' to determine which mentees fit the programme's goals. The firm will also need to make sure the commitment is there to go through the whole process.



In addition, some firms interview mentors and mentees and have mentees apply for a particular programme by answering a few very simple questions. This allows for a more objective selection process if there are limited spots available.

Recommendations for mentees

- Be prepared. Start the programme with a general vision of what you expect to get out of it.



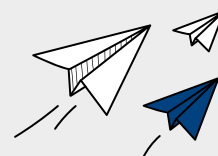
- Come to each meeting with a prepared agenda and a list of topics you want to discuss.



- It is your responsibility to take the leading role in your life and career development. Make the most of the mentorship programme and the time and effort the mentor is investing in you. Your mentor is there to support and guide you, not to tell you what to do.



- Be flexible and learn – take advantage of this relationship and learn as much as you can.



- Be willing to be mentored and be humble but have a voice and open up.



- Take responsibility for your own learning. Mentors may only give you tools and guidance. Take charge of your learning by asking questions and actively participating in the conversation. Interact with the mentorship committee if there is one in place.



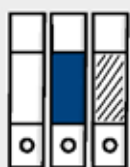
- Respect the rules of confidentiality of the programme.



- Demonstrate initiative and interest and be willing to exercise self-reflection and receive and seek feedback.



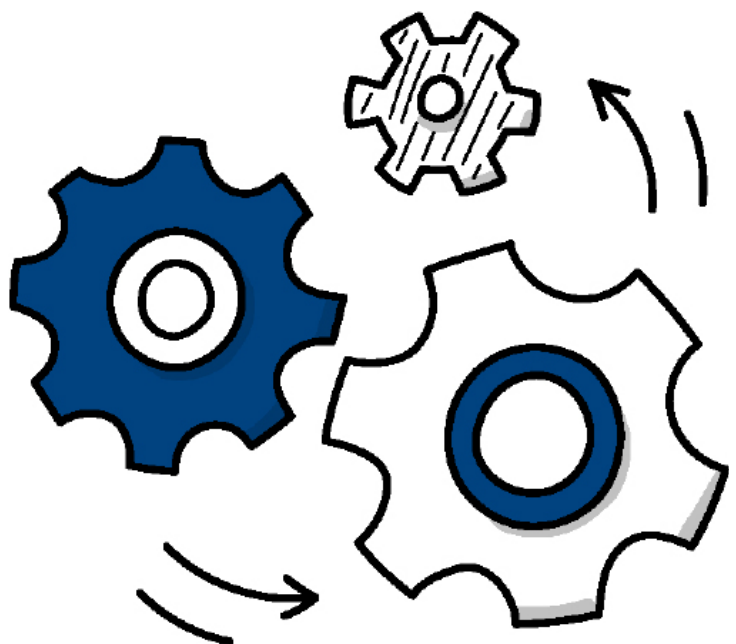
- Prepare for each meeting, ask for material and familiarise yourself with them before each session.



Topic suggestions

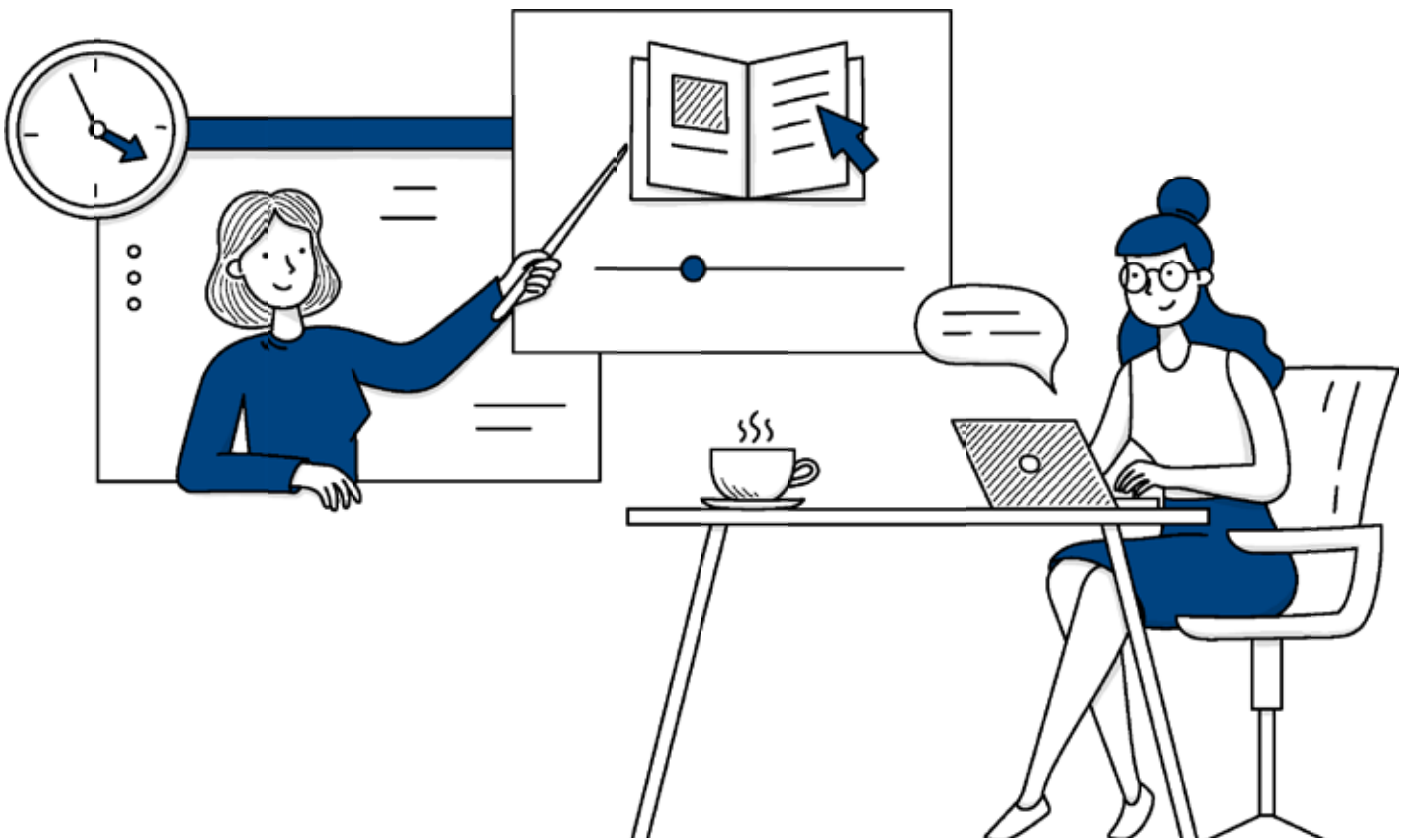
There are infinite topics that could be touched on in a mentoring programme. The following are topics that we found firms usually focus on during their programmes. We recommend developing each topic in some way so that mentors know how to address them, as well as providing reading and video materials so both mentors and mentees can prepare each session in advance.

First session: Introduce each other and discuss the programme's objectives, specific goals and work and communication methods. This should be a short session and should be done within the same month of session number two.



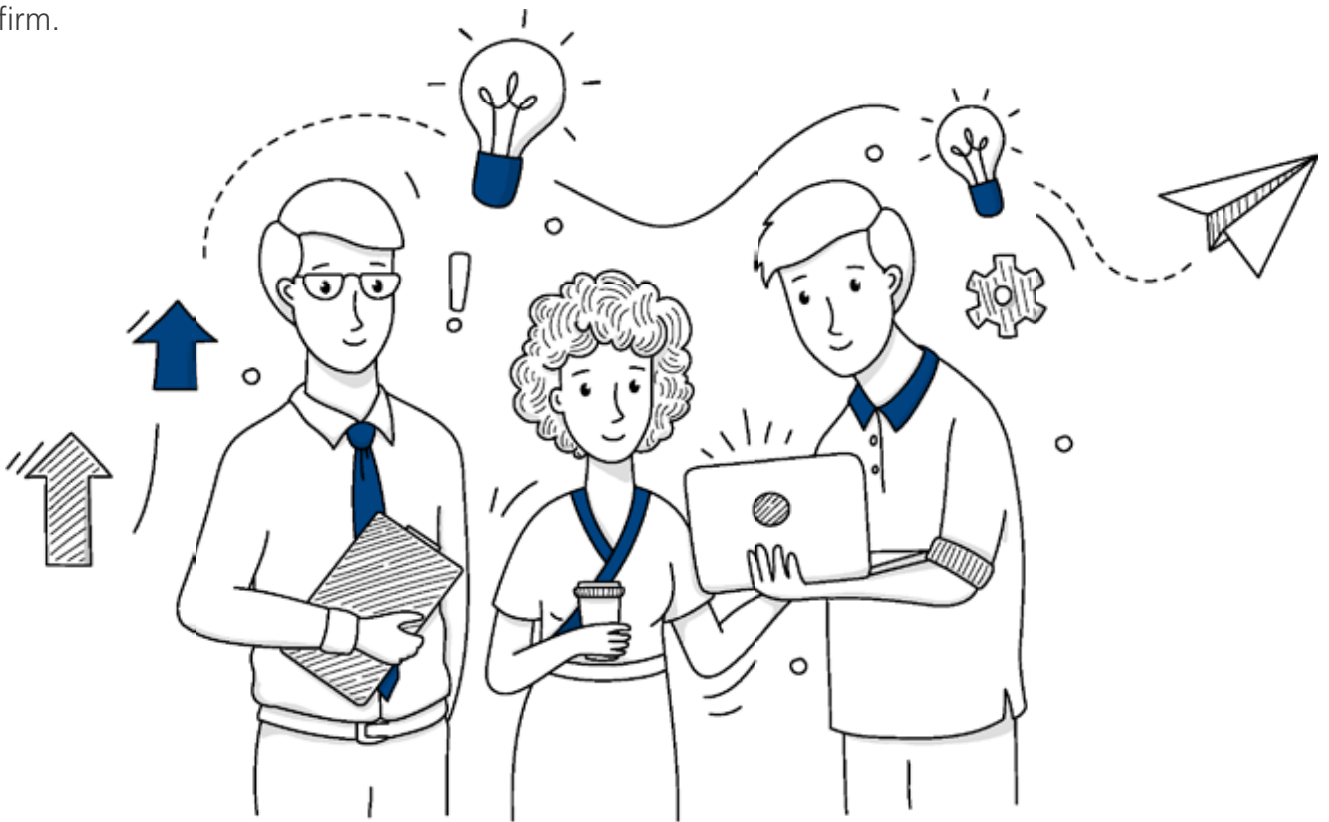
Subsequent sessions:

- Career development – create your own plan for one, two and five years' time. This topic should be revisited every session and a final meeting should be held to discuss changes at the end of the programme. It is recommended that all programmes include this topic.
- Being proactive with my career;
- Client management;
- Business development;
- Effective time management;
- Expanding my network within the firm;
- Personal branding and managing social media;
- Networking face-to-face and virtually;
- Personal image;
- Clear and efficient communication;
- Leadership;
- Being part of a team and leading a team;
- Giving and receiving feedback;
- Diversity and inclusion;
- Unconscious bias;
- Parents: being a team in and out of the office; and
- Work–life balance and wellbeing activities.



Assessment of results

Some firms report having had success running group tasks at the end of the programme, for instance, making suggestions to the firm on how to better their work culture and environment, communication, associate development and diversity. It will make mentees feel they have a voice in improving the firm.



It is also advisable to run anonymous surveys for mentors and mentees regarding programme satisfaction, suggestions for mentees and in general improvements that could be made to the programme. These will allow firms to assess if the goals of the programme were met and if adjustments need to be made in future.

Finally, it is always recommended to have a closing ceremony, a celebration with all the mentors, mentees, the committee and senior management of the firm. It was hard work for everybody. Congratulations!

Acknowledgements

We want to thank firms and lawyers around the world for their kindness and commitment to a more diverse and egalitarian legal industry. The generosity with which information about their mentorship and diversity programmes was shared with the WLC is unprecedented and moving.

Special thanks to:

Abogadas MX; Allen & Overy; Bowmans; BLP; Carey; Clifford Chance; Demarest; Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer; Gleiss Lutz; Greenberg Traurig; International Association of Young Lawyers; Mattos Filho; Morgan Lewis; Morrison & Foerster; Rodrigo, Elías & Medrano; Uría Menendez; White & Case and Women in the Profession Chile.

Alfredo Benavides, Flavia Mauricio and Arianna Robello from Rodrigo, Elías & Medrano, for helping the WLC doing the research for this project.

Carla Olavarria, a diversity coach, and Gabriela Llerena, a human resources specialist.

September, 2022