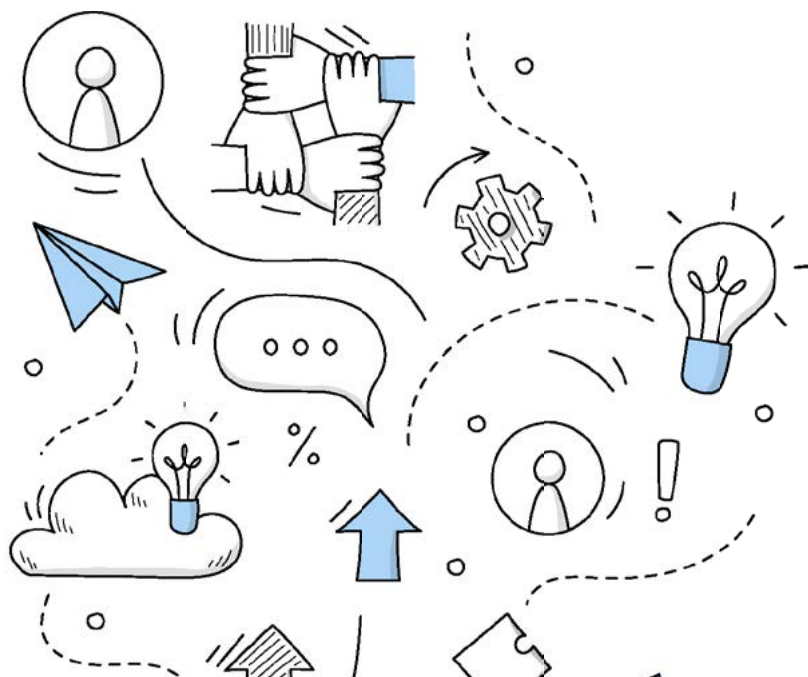




# **IBA WOMEN LAWYERS' COMMITTEE: TOOLKIT FOR SPONSORSHIP PROGRAMMES IN LAW FIRMS**



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# WHAT AND WHY



The International Bar Association (IBA) Women Lawyers' Committee (WLC) aims to empower female attorneys 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 while also facilitating an efficient global network for women lawyers to connect and develop business and expertise.

Empowerment requires the recognition of the personal and professional abilities of each individual; continuous learning; and the implementation of development plans informed by the insights of senior lawyers who have already walked this path. The WLC wishes to promote broad-based women empowerment in the industry by providing guidance collated from the experience of IBA members around the world on practical programmes that firms may implement to achieve this end.

According to the World Bank, in 2021 women comprised 49.7 per cent of the global population, but only 39.7 per cent of the labour force. Women are not only the minority of the workforce, but they also face more challenges, particularly regarding disparities in promotions and salaries. Senior management roles are held by only 36 per cent of women – this



gap widens significantly further up the executive ladder. For example, only 28 per cent of all senior vice-president roles are held by women. For every 100 men who are promoted, only 87 women achieve the same.<sup>1</sup>

Despite this, ‘Confronting the early-career gender gap’<sup>2</sup> published by McKinsey – a global management consulting firm – reports that in 2020, 24 per cent more women were occupying management positions than in 2015. This study suggests that the progress to gender parity can be accelerated if companies focus less on levelling the scales at the top of the talent pipeline and more on strategies to hire and promote women into top-level positions at the same rate as men.<sup>3</sup>

Ideally, companies should implement a multi-pronged approach with different programmes, each one focused on separate aspects to promote diversity, but all designed for a common goal: a more diverse, inclusive and egalitarian work place.

Sponsorship programmes in law firms aim to pair the firm’s senior lawyers in leadership positions with high-potential junior lawyers, to map out a clear path to the promotion of junior employees to equity partnership or other senior positions.

How are they different to mentorship programmes? Mentorship, which may be formal or informal, focuses on transferring knowledge and cultural awareness to the mentee (and there is

an opportunity for reverse mentoring as well). Sponsorship focuses on the sponsor’s influence and reputation to open doors to key clients and other senior leaders within the firm, and secure opportunities for the sponsoree for top-end work. In short, mentors act as teachers or advisers, whereas sponsors are advocates.

Research suggests that women generally start their career paths behind men and will often remain behind even if they are mentored.<sup>4</sup> It also shows that when women are backed by influential individuals in an organisation, they are as likely as men to be promoted.<sup>5</sup> A sponsor may propel and accelerate the progression of the career of a sponsoree. Since sponsors open doors and advocate for their sponsoree, their reputations are tied to each other. If sponsors leverage their influence and reputation to source opportunities for sponsorees, sponsorees should in turn repay their sponsors by excelling in everything they do for the firm.

Since trust is the foundation of a successful sponsorship programme and can only be built over time, it is most likely that any sponsorship programme will have some sort of mentorship component by which knowledge and cultural awareness are exchanged. Furthermore, some mentorship relationships may organically evolve into sponsorship.

<sup>1</sup>Anu Madgavkar, Olivia White, Mekala Krishnan, Deepa Mahajan and Xavier Azcue, ‘COVID-19 and gender equality: Countering the regressive effects (McKinsey & Company) <[www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/covid-19-and-gender-equality-countering-the-regressive-effects#](http://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/covid-19-and-gender-equality-countering-the-regressive-effects#)> Accessed April, 2023.

<sup>2</sup>Kevin Sneider and Lareina Yee, ‘Confronting the early-career gender gap’ (McKinsey & Company, 9 January 2020) <[www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/confronting-the-early-career-gender-gap](http://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/confronting-the-early-career-gender-gap)>. Accessed April, 2023.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Heather Foust-Cummings, Sarah Dinolfo and Jennifer Kohler, ‘Sponsoring women to success’ (Catalyst, 2011) <[www.catalyst.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/sponsoring\\_women\\_to\\_success.pdf](http://www.catalyst.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/sponsoring_women_to_success.pdf)>. Accessed April, 2023.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.



# What are the benefits of sponsorship programmes?

A survey by McKinsey showed that 56 per cent of senior executive women believe that individual sponsorship was a key factor for their success.<sup>6</sup> Most datum supports this, confirming that women who are sponsored are more likely to:

- ✓ advance in their careers;
- ✓ be satisfied with their career advancement;
- ✓ have better salaries;
- ✓ be involved in projects of high visibility;
- ✓ have their ideas approved and implemented;
- ✓ stay in their jobs even after having children;
- ✓ experience better quality of work;
- ✓ be more satisfied with the pace of their careers' advancement;<sup>7</sup> and
- ✓ be more likely to ask for more high-profile assignments to showcase their leadership skills.<sup>8</sup>

Additionally, mothers who are sponsored continue in their careers in higher numbers than unsponsored mothers.

Benefits for sponsors:

- ✓ they experience a significant increase in satisfaction with their work and related matters;<sup>9</sup>
- ✓ they are more likely to be satisfied with their career prospects and their level of awareness of junior colleagues' concerns;<sup>10</sup> and
- ✓ they may be able to attract better talent for their team.

Benefits for firms:

- ✓ increased diversity in higher positions, which may translate into better business;<sup>11</sup>
- ✓ supporting the growth and capacity of the firm in the targeted areas;
- ✓ supporting younger partners and senior associates in growing their business portfolio.
- ✓ enhancing the profile of the firm, for clients and potential laterals;
- ✓ improving leverage and profitability;
- ✓ increasing the retention rate of young talent;
- ✓ creating a diverse and inclusive culture; and
- ✓ supporting the succession planning in respect of retiring partners.

<sup>6</sup>Alexis Krivkovich and Nadeau Marie-Claude, 'The link between sponsorship and risk-taking for women in financial services' (McKinsey & Company, 2019) [www.mckinsey.com/industries/financial-services/our-insights/banking-matters/the-link-between-sponsorship-and-risk-taking-for-women-in-financial-services](http://www.mckinsey.com/industries/financial-services/our-insights/banking-matters/the-link-between-sponsorship-and-risk-taking-for-women-in-financial-services). Accessed April, 2023.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Cassandra Melvin and Jolie Leblanc, 'Sponsorship Of Women Drives Innovation And Improves Organizational Performance' (Accenture & Semi, 2020) <[www.accenture.com/\\_acnmedia/PDF-119/Accenture-Sponsorship-Women-Drives-Innovation.pdf](http://www.accenture.com/_acnmedia/PDF-119/Accenture-Sponsorship-Women-Drives-Innovation.pdf)> Accessed April, 2023.

<sup>9</sup>The Sponsor Dividend: Key Findings' (Coqual, 2019) <[https://coqual.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/CoqualTheSponsorDividend\\_KeyFindingsCombined090720.pdf](https://coqual.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/CoqualTheSponsorDividend_KeyFindingsCombined090720.pdf)> Accessed April, 2023.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

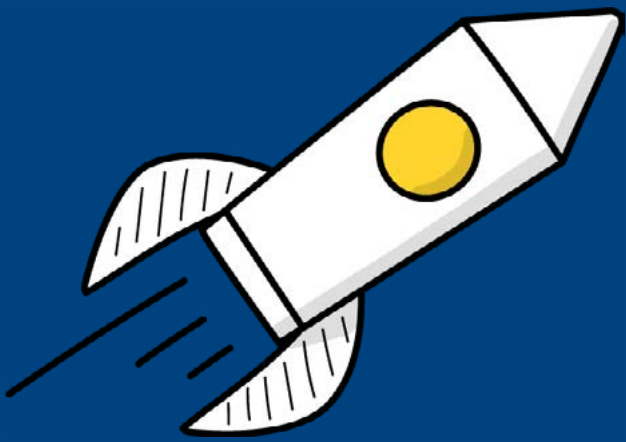
<sup>11</sup>Sylvia Ann Hewlett, Melinda Marshall, and Laura Sherbin, 'How Diversity Can Drive Innovation', Harvard Business Review [2013] <<https://hbr.org/2013/12/how-diversity-can-drive-innovation>>. Accessed April, 2023.



# HOW?



# 01



## Getting started

It is of utmost importance that any sponsorship programme is part of an institutional effort and therefore openly supported and promoted by the firm's management, especially the managing partner and the board, if applicable. This will facilitate lawyers' willingness to participate and the dedication of the participants which is required for the programme to succeed.

The programme should have clear guidelines (the 'sponsorship policy') and the firm should document:

- ✓ the programme's alignment with the firm's overall strategy for talent retention (eg, to have more female attorneys on the partnership track, better talent retention, better work environment, more opportunities for high potential individuals);
- ✓ the programme's goals and objectives;
- ✓ the manner in which the programme will be managed, monitored and evaluated;
- ✓ the criteria for selection of sponsors and sponsorees; and
- ✓ how sponsors and sponsorees will be paired.

Firms must accept that a successful sponsorship programme will require time investment by their lawyers. For the programme to succeed, in a business environment measured by billable hours, non-billable time recorded to the programme should be acknowledged by the firm's management and considered in the performance evaluations of the lawyers concerned.

Firms may consider setting up a sponsorship committee comprising of senior leadership of the firm (eg, senior partners, talent management/human resources (HR), learning and development (L&D), business development (BD) and finance). The sponsorship committee should be responsible for the implementation of the sponsorship policy and the governance of the programme<sup>12</sup>. The specific functions of the committee should be considered:

- ✓ will it be responsible for selecting sponsors and sponsorees?
- ✓ will it be responsible for pairing sponsors and sponsorees?
- ✓ will it have the power to review the sponsorship policy and propose any changes thereto?

The sponsorship committee should meet regularly and report to the managing partner or, if applicable, the management board. The members of the sponsorship committee and participants should be bound by confidentiality: sponsors and sponsorees should agree to maintain confidentiality in respect of their communications in connection with their sponsorships. It is recommended that they execute a standard form non-disclosure agreement, so they are both in alignment.

The following questions will help set the scope and remit of the sponsorship programme, but this will obviously be informed by the context in which each firm operates:

- ✓ What is the firm’s overall strategy for talent retention?
- ✓ What is the firm’s employee value proposition?

✓ What are the objectives of the programme? It is important that the key objectives are identified upfront, so that the programme’s progress and success are measurable. These may be:

- more female partners towards gender parity within the partnership pool;
- more female attorneys in leadership;
- talent retention;
- more opportunities and visibility for female attorneys;
- accelerate the professional development of female attorneys;
- nurturing junior lawyers as they take on new responsibilities;
- reducing the gestation period for younger professionals to contribute to the top and bottom line of the firm;
- using the institutional experience of the firm;
- bringing about a symbiotic relationship between the sponsor and sponsoree, where the sponsor is able to take ownership for the success of the sponsoree and the sponsoree is able to collaborate with the sponsor; and
- a better work environment.

<sup>12</sup> A similar body is proposed in our Mentorship Toolkit <[www.ibanet.org/document?id=IBA-WLC-Mentorship-Toolkit-2022](http://www.ibanet.org/document?id=IBA-WLC-Mentorship-Toolkit-2022)>. The same body could lead both programmes.

- ✓ Will the programme be run at a practice group level, or will it be firm-wide with cross-practice area lawyers being involved? What are the qualifying criteria/targets for the selection of sponsors and sponsorees:
  - female associates, senior associates and/or salaried partners?
  - a focus on any particular practice areas (eg, where women or minority groups are particularly underrepresented in the firm)? and
  - a minimum performance evaluation score confirming high potential?
- ✓ Can sponsors sponsor more than one sponsoree at a time?
- ✓ How many pairs will participate in the programme?
- ✓ How will pairs be selected?
- ✓ What should the duration of the programme be? It will take a year or two for the participants to see value. It is therefore necessary that the programme provide sufficient time for the participants to develop trust and get into a mutually beneficial relationship. Since the programme entails pairing lawyers who may have no prior relationship and a level of trust will need to develop, consider providing introductory topics for them to discuss and reading materials (or videos where necessary).
- ✓ Is the sponsoree's performance evaluation report going to be available for the sponsor?
- ✓ Will the policy set down expectations for frequency of meetings between the pairs or work allocation 'opportunities' presented to the sponsoree?
- ✓ How will the relationship be monitored to ensure that the participants are succeeding in building the relationship and comfortable working together? Will this be the responsibility of the sponsorship committee itself or HR, or will it be outsourced to an external consultant?
- ✓ What steps will be taken to address any discomfort or lack of chemistry between sponsors and sponsorees?
- ✓ How will the success of the programme be measured?
- ✓ Will the programme have tangible incentives or penalties? It is recommended that appropriate incentives are included as part of the formal key performance indicators of sponsors and sponsorees.





## Expectations

Formalising the sponsorship process can foster the long-term success of any sponsorship programme: the sponsoree will benefit from it, and the firm’s expectations should be clear. These expectations should include proactive support by the sponsors in respect of the sponsoree’s specific career-building stepping stones, including:

- ✓ building their internal and external work networks;
- ✓ building their profile to enhance their visibility within the firm and among clients;
- ✓ developing a strong business case;
- ✓ working on high-end or complex matters for key clients;
- ✓ developing their hard skills, specifically analytical, problem-solving and project management skills; and
- ✓ developing their soft skills, specifically being an effective communicator, self-aware, collaborative, confident and engaging.

Sponsors and sponsorees should be equipped with the tools and resources they need to excel in their roles. An induction workshop for all sponsors and sponsorees in each intake should be held to explain the sponsorship policy, and it may be particularly useful in that session to review a case study or blueprint of how a sponsorship could be put in practice.

At the outset, sponsors and sponsorees should be required to set out their respective expectations and thereafter to track their progress. The firm should conduct regular check-ins with sponsors and sponsorees, however, micro-managing the relationship should be avoided. It is essential to ensure enough flexibility to the sponsoring pair to find their own suitable way of working successfully together.

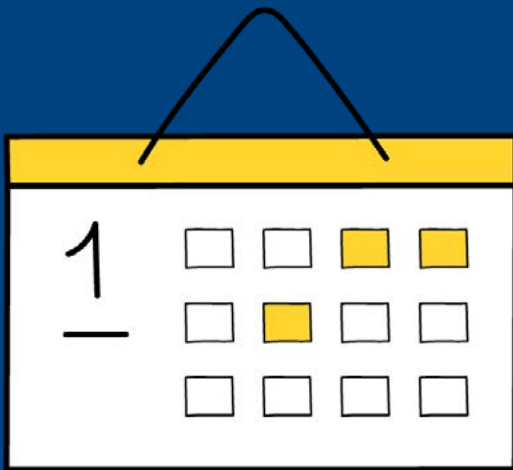


## Help the sponsorees develop through institutional workshops and activities:

Even high-potential employees will benefit from training courses and group and/or one-on-one coaching, particularly those focused on the soft skills. The L&D department and/or the committee itself should organise regular training sessions with the courses being specially designed to provide the tools required for the sponsoree to grow their network, develop their profile to enhance their visibility, and build a business case. This may include:

- ✓ client management;
- ✓ personal brand;
- ✓ business development; and
- ✓ building and expanding a network.

Sponsors should follow up with the sponsorees on the key takeaways from the training courses and coaching, and encourage the sponsoree to prepare and implement their own plan for personal development. If appropriate, external coaching should be included whether on a one-on-one basis or in groups of sponsorees, or on a joint basis for the sponsor-sponsoree pair.



## Set a timetable with regular check-ins with both parties

The sponsorship policy may prescribe minimum mandatory meetings between sponsor and sponsoree. The pairs may start with monthly hour-long meetings addressing topics as selected by them from a pre-set list of topics provided by the firm. The firm could also provide a list of topics to be followed by the pairs in order, so all pairs are discussing the same issues at the same time.

Sponsors should check in with their sponsorees regularly between meetings. Consistent check-ins are essential to grow trust and maintain focus on the pair's goals. Sponsors should also check in with the sponsorship committee and other similar suitable bodies within the firm (such as practice group leaders), and institutionalise the regular exchange of know-how among the sponsors.

## Offer regular tips and counselling for sponsors

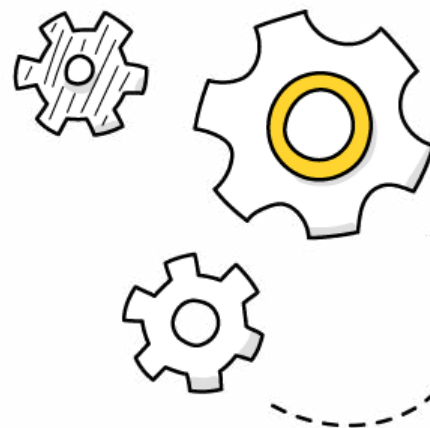
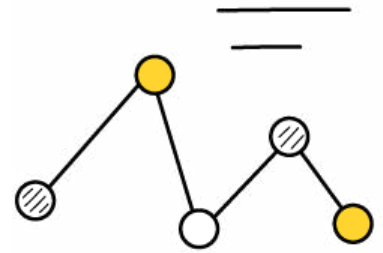
It is imperative that confidentiality is maintained. This ensures trust and lays a solid foundation for the development of the future relationship between sponsor and sponsoree.

Ideally, firms should provide group coaching to sponsors to facilitate an exchange of ideas and sponsorship experiences so that the sponsors can ensure that the firm's goals and objectives – and thus its expectations of the participants, particularly the sponsorees – are uniformly articulated.

Pre-defining the sponsor's role in a formal sponsorship policy is not always enough. Some senior lawyers are natural leaders in fostering the growth of others but others are not. A successful senior lawyer is not necessarily a great sponsor. Firms should therefore critically assess each sponsor candidate's strengths and weaknesses and provide tailored guidance to each of them on how to maintain a good professional relationship at all times; how to relate to a sponsoree from a different demographic to that of the sponsor (if applicable); how to constructively approach a sponsoree's expressed fears and/or self-doubt, and so on.

Firms should clearly articulate to sponsors that the quality of their sponsoring is a key performance metric and they will be accountable for how they perform their sponsorship duties and responsibilities.

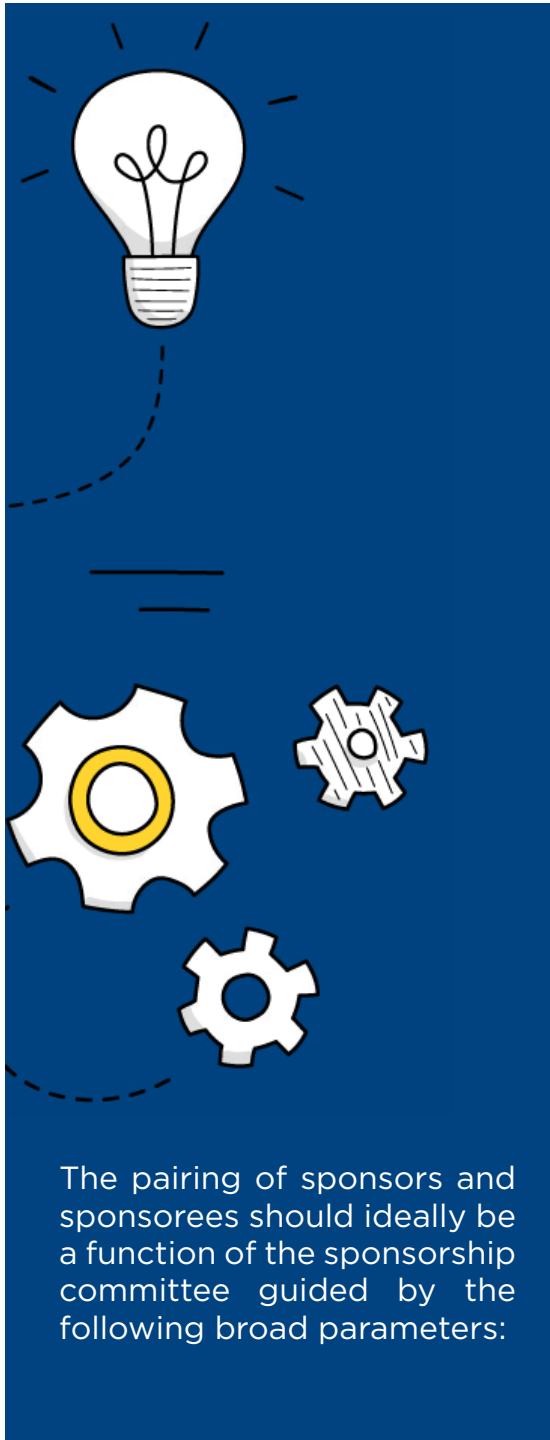
Every sponsor should be required to regularly reflect as to whether they are the right match for the relevant sponsoree. This doesn't just involve the sponsor's assessment of the sponsoree's capabilities but also whether – and to what extent – the sponsor can open the right doors and facilitate opportunities relevant to the sponsoree's business case, and if not, why not. If the sponsor lacks confidence in the sponsoree themselves or their fit, the sponsorship has found its natural end.



# PAIRING SPONSORS AND SPONSOREES



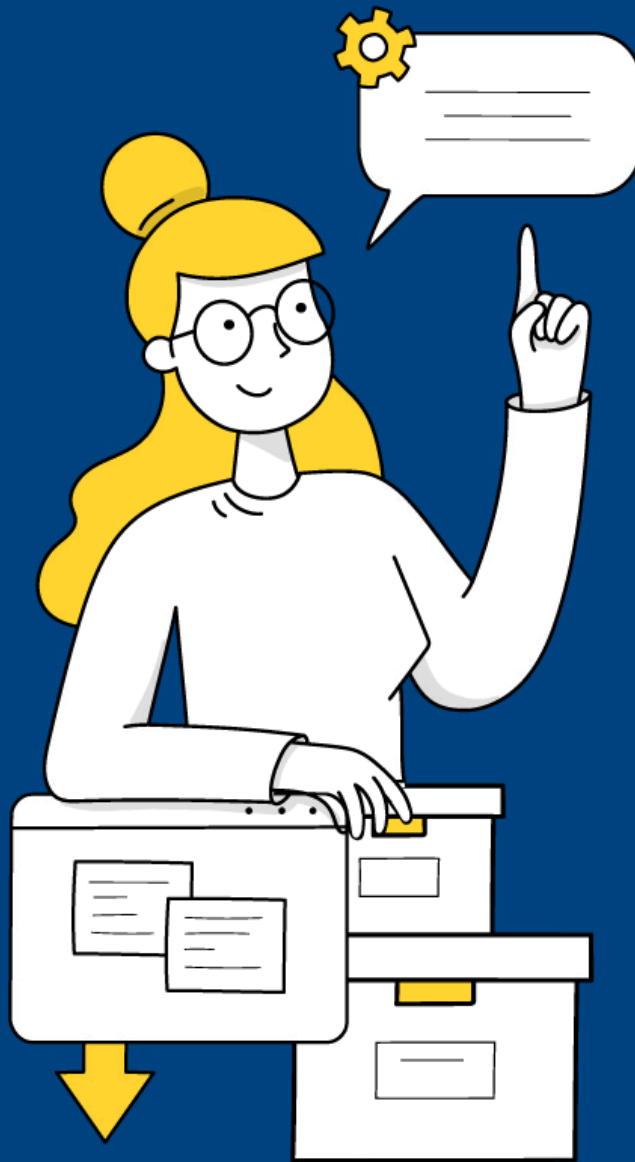
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The pairing of sponsors and sponsorees should ideally be a function of the sponsorship committee guided by the following broad parameters:

- ✓ voluntary participation is key;
- ✓ the choice of sponsors should be carefully done. They should ideally be senior partners who have the time and inclination to guide and be advocate of younger members of the firm and have enough standing at the firm to 'open doors' for their sponsorees;
- ✓ 'natural' pairings should be encouraged. For example, if the firm has a two-tier partnership, junior partners who collaborate with senior partners should ideally be paired together, unless the sponsoree expresses an interest to be sponsored by a different partner;
- ✓ the seniority of the sponsor to the sponsoree should be self-evident;
- ✓ flexibility should be available for one sponsor to guide multiple sponsorees, but this should be carefully assessed by the firm;
- ✓ the programme should have flexibility for mid-term course correction whether on the request of either sponsor or sponsoree or by the intervention of the sponsorship committee if it is of the view that the pairing is not optimum; and
- ✓ effort should be taken to avoid any biases/prejudices in the pairing or selection of sponsorees.

# ACCOUNTABILITY



03



A key factor in determining the success of a sponsorship programme is assessing the results of each initiative and being able to recalibrate them. The results of the evaluation are primarily opportunities for improvement, as well as adjusting the programme if needed.

The way the programme is assessed is directly linked to its objectives, which is why it is important to identify them before getting the ball rolling. Let's say a key objective is female talent retention: the assessment metrics should include a comparative chart of said metric, considering the results of the programme over several years. What is the pipeline of female talent, and are there more female attorneys eligible for partnership now? Are more women being considered than before?

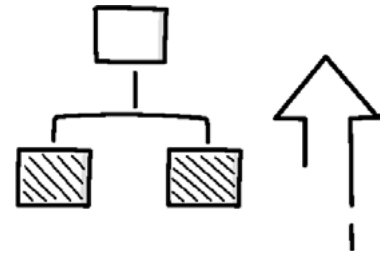
As the sponsor uses their social capital for the benefit of the sponsoree, the assessment should not become a disincentive for those who have voluntarily agreed to contribute much more than their knowledge to the programme. An evaluation with stringent consequences for the sponsors may discourage ideal potential sponsors from participating in the programme. Nonetheless, the evaluation needs to impact, in some way, both the sponsor and sponsoree.

In a structured programme, all three parties (sponsor, sponsoree and the firm) will have specific functions to be fulfilled. The evaluation of the fulfilment of some of these functions should be straightforward. Did the sponsor and sponsoree comply with each of their commitments to each other? For instance, did they attend the agreed meetings? Have they agreed on the working areas and objectives?

The assessment of other functions may be less straightforward, and the evaluator will need to 'dig in' for more information. For example, has the sponsor been successful in getting the sponsoree a certain promotion? If not, the 'why and how' should be explored by the evaluator and tailored into the assessment.



## How to evaluate



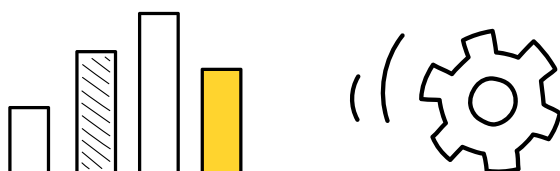
Who should be the evaluator? The evaluator may be the sponsorship committee itself or a person nominated by it, whether a member of the committee or not. Alternatively, the evaluator may be the person or team responsible for the routine evaluations of the relevant participants.

Who should be evaluated? The sponsorship programme has three main participants: the firm, the sponsors and the sponsorees. All three should be assessed.

- ✓ **The firm:** The firm will have a role in providing the resources required (including time and flexibility) for the sponsors and sponsorees to be able to execute the programme as designed. The commitment of the firm and its leadership to the programme is an essential factor for its success.
- ✓ **The sponsor:** Having committed to sponsor, the sponsors should use their best efforts to fulfil those commitments to establish a meaningful relationship that allows them to get to know the sponsoree and use their position and attributes to open the doors and foster the opportunities as agreed with the sponsoree.

- ✓ **The sponsoree:** The sponsorees are the main beneficiary of the programme, hence the success of the programme depends to a large extent on the efforts of the sponsorees. Have they employed their best efforts to capitalise on the opportunities provided by the sponsor? Have their efforts supported or enhanced the sponsor’s reputation?

How can the evaluation be done? Different evaluation tools could be used to undertake the evaluation process. A robust evaluation process could include all of the different tools, but a lighter process could only include a few of them. What is important is that the participants have confidence in the quality and integrity of the evaluation process; that confidentiality is respected by the firm and the participants; and that each of them is accountable for its conduct in participating in the programme.



Some available tools are:

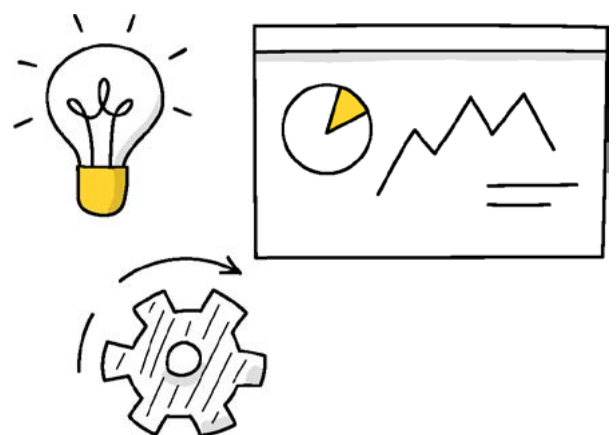
- ✓ Self-evaluation questionnaire. Both sponsor and sponsoree may complete a self-evaluation questionnaire, which would be compared to identify where they are in accord and where they are not. A key consideration is whether they will share each other's completed questionnaire or not.
- ✓ Interviews with sponsor and sponsoree. The evaluator should conduct individual interviews with both the sponsor and sponsoree. A key consideration is whether, apart from these individual interviews, there should also be joint interviews?
- ✓ Joint meeting. A joint meeting among evaluator, sponsor and sponsoree could be constructive, especially if there are discordant views amongst them or other challenges have arisen, but the pair remain committed to the sponsorship. The evaluator should carefully consider the information received from the parties in the earlier phases of the evaluation process in order not to undermine confidence in the programme. This option should be carefully assessed before undertaking it.
- ✓ Third party interviews (with other partners for instance). The evaluator interviews other persons involved with the work of the sponsoree as to have a more well-rounded view on whether the sponsorship has meaningfully benefited the sponsoree's overall performance. If the sponsorship has not been meaningfully beneficial and it is not clear whether this is mainly attributable to the sponsoree herself, the evaluator may consider interviews with other sponsorees of the same sponsor, but this should be done sensitively and taking into account considerations of confidentiality.

✓ What should be evaluated?

- Objective facts such as (1) attendance to the agreed meetings, (2) actions deployed by the sponsor, such as the number of introductions or cases in which the sponsor recommended the sponsoree for a job or promotion, and (3) actions undertaken by the sponsoree in response to recommendations from the sponsor, among other things;
- Subjective issues such as (1) the commitment of the parties to the success of the programme, (2) efforts of the sponsor to really get to know the sponsoree and understand her circumstances and needs, and (3) the sponsoree's attitude towards feedback from the sponsor, among others.

All D&I programmes are alive! They need to be adjusted to the firm's own culture and needs and scrutinised regularly so that they meet each pairs' needs.

Please let us know your comments and feedback in general. We would love to hear about your experience! Feel free to reach out to any of our officers: [www.ibanet.org/officer/officerList/3117](http://www.ibanet.org/officer/officerList/3117)

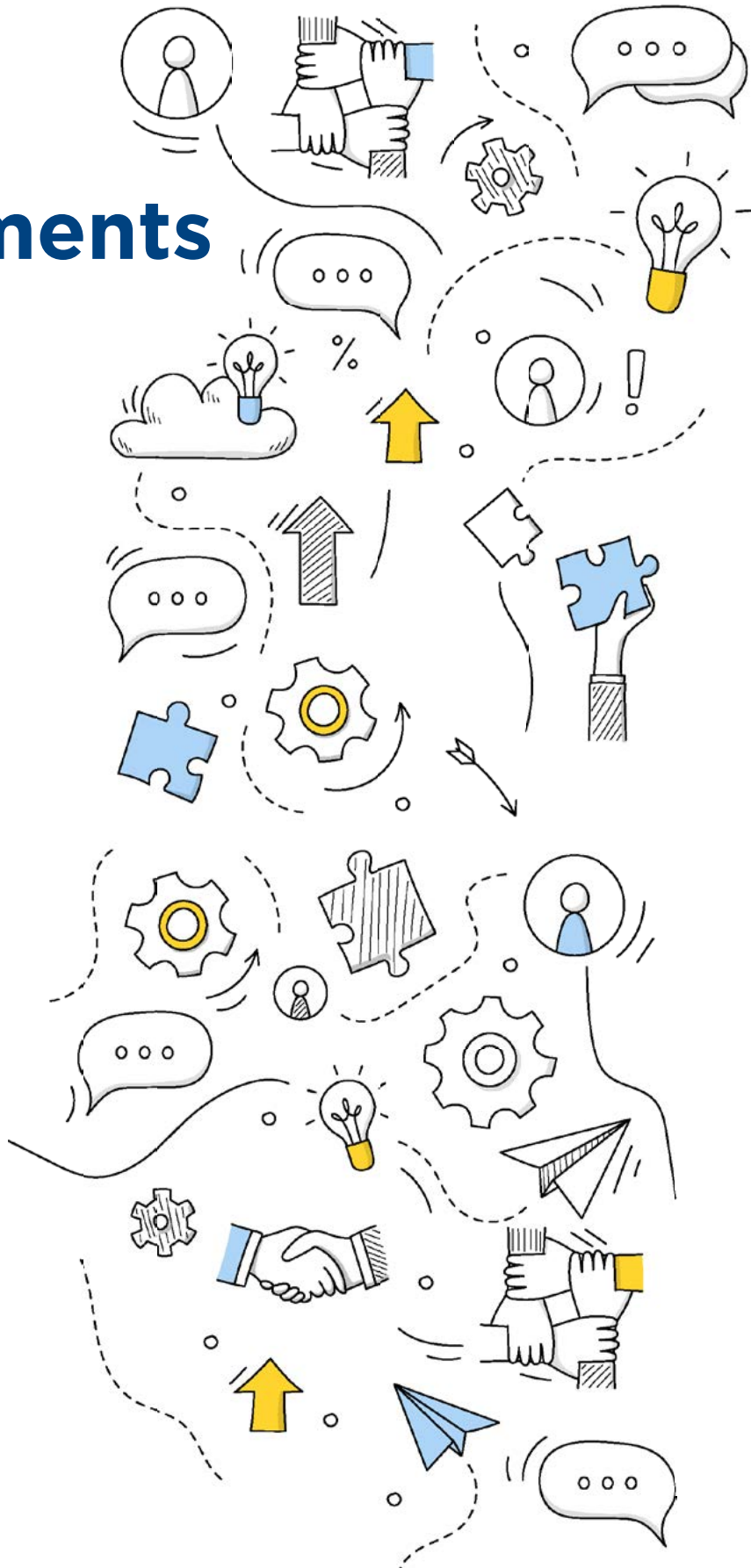


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