

JUMPSTART your *Small/Medium Law Firm* Job Search!

WHAT IS A SMALL/MEDIUM LAW FIRM AND WHY SHOULD I WORK FOR ONE?

Making a determination as to whether a firm is small or medium is relative depending on the legal market in any given city. For instance, a small or medium firm in Washington, DC or New York City would have more attorneys than a small or medium firm in Baltimore or Phoenix. You will find that each small or medium firm is unique in terms of size, practice areas, culture, and reputation. Small or medium firms can be “boutique” firms, with a specialization in one or more practice areas, or can be general practices that provide counsel in several areas of law. In many cases, junior associates working at a small or medium firm will be entrusted with significant responsibility from the outset. This allows new associates to have major client contact very early on. Small and medium firms also provide potential for advancement earlier than larger firms. Often times, the firm will reward quality work with an accelerated partnership track. If you are concerned about work/life balance, small and medium firms may provide a more manageable workload and work schedule.

WHERE CAN I GET A JOB WITH A SMALL/MEDIUM LAW FIRM?

One of the most common methods for students finding positions with smaller firms is through a personal job search. Contact an OCPD counselor for assistance with this search. During WCL’s Spring Recruitment many small and medium sized law firms interview for law clerks and new attorneys. (Use CareerLink to access Spring Recruitment employers). This should be one of your sources for applying to positions. OCPD also has a number of other resources to help, including the Legal Times Directory of Metro D.C. Law Offices. If you are conducting a job search outside of the Washington area, OCPD counselors will help you to devise a strategy for the long-distance job search. Also, web-based job links such as LawCrossing, etc., provide access to jobs nationwide.

HOW DO I GET EXPERIENCE WORKING FOR A SMALL/MEDIUM LAW FIRM?

Some smaller firms will hire law clerks who have worked for a year or more. But do not be discouraged if the firm you are working for does not offer you a position. Often, law clerk positions lead to other opportunities within private practice. It is the experience you gain and the connections you make which will serve you well in your career search. There are over 9,000 alumni in the Washington area, many of whom work at smaller law firms. These lawyers are important resources for you – often they are partners in their firms. By contacting alumni who are in these firms, you can build a base of people to help with job leads, inside information, and potential employment. OCPD and the Office of Development & Alumni Relations can help you find alumni in the areas in which you are looking.

WHEN DO I APPLY FOR A JOB WITH A SMALL/MEDIUM LAW FIRM?

Smaller firms may hire one or two lawyers a year, depending on need. They do not hire eight or nine months in advance of a lawyer starting his/her position; they hire shortly before that lawyer begins working. (Often, because of the bar exam, some small firms will wait a few months before a new lawyer begins the job.) Most medium and small law firms do not evaluate their hiring needs for the summer or for post-graduate positions until the spring. Regardless of this timeframe, you can still prepare for the upcoming recruitment season by drafting a generic cover letter (that will become targeted once you have a specific job to apply for); reviewing and updating your resume; and researching (through Martindale or the Legal Times Directory of Metro D.C. Law Offices) small and medium law firms in a designated area for future direct mailings in the Spring. The best time to prepare for the direct mailing is during the winter recess. Moreover, if you have a contact person working at a desired firm, contact the attorney and try to schedule an informational meeting during the winter recess. Once the spring semester begins, plan to send out a direct mailing.

To discuss options for obtaining legal experience with a small or medium law firm, schedule an appointment with a Career Counselor in OCPD.

KEY RESOURCES

Law Student Jobs Online (www.lawschool.westlaw.com): Provides access to a database that focuses on positions for current law students, plus special programs for new grads such as fellowships, honors programs, and judicial clerkships. This website, which generally requires a subscription, is available to WCL students without charge through Westlaw at www.lawschool.westlaw.com.

Martindale.com (www.martindale.com): This website provides information on individual attorneys as well as law firms. You can search for lawyers by law school, firm name, geographic location and/or practice area. You can search law firms by geographic location, practice area and firm size using the advanced search function. This site does not feature job listings, but can be helpful in identifying potential employers.

National Association for Law Placement (www.nalp.org): NALP's website contains information on employers, job searching, placement statistics, starting salaries and career planning resources. Students can also use the NALP Directory (www.nalpdirectory.com) to locate potential employers and firm recruiter contact information. Using the "Advanced Search" function, this directory is searchable by practice area, geographic location, firm size and you can also locate employers that may be interested in hiring first year students for summer associate positions.

Lexis (www.lexis-nexis.com): Lexis is available to all WCL law students. Lexis enables you to research background information on any employer. Use the case files and search by employer name or by the names of individual lawyers to see what kinds of cases they have worked on recently. Look in the Legal News file to find out what publications, such as *The American Lawyer*, *The Legal Times*, or *The National Law Journal*, may have said about the employer or any of its lawyers. Search other files for periodicals and publications.

Westlaw (www.lawschool.westlaw.com): Westlaw provides access to numerous directories, including the West Legal Directory, which contains information about both individual attorneys and organizations and is searchable by firm size, location, areas of practice, law school attended and more. *Westlaw's Employer Directory* contains more detailed information about larger law firms based on survey responses. Search caselaw and news articles through the Westnews directory. Westlaw is free to students.

Legal Employment Search Site (www.legalemploy.com): This site is a good source for links to job listings and places to post your resume online.

FindLaw's Information (careers.findlaw.com): Click "Students" from main page to access career information including an employer directory, salary charts and access to the Greedy Associates boards, where associates chime in with their views on employers. Be aware that some information on the site is outdated.

Heiros Gamos (www.hg.org): Under Legal Directories, click on "Law Firms" to access information about law firms in the U.S. and abroad. Provides lists of the largest firms in each city, which is particularly useful for those seeking positions abroad. Also contains listings of legal associations and bar associations.

Law.com (www.law.com): Provides news and features, along with classified listings separated by states in the Career Center. The sections for California, Pennsylvania, DC and New York provide related information from legal magazines. Provides links to many law firms from the Law Firm Central section. Can use law firm finder to conduct advanced searches.

LawCrossing (www.lawcrossing.com): This site lists active job postings for internships, law clerk positions, judicial clerkships, entry-level attorney positions and law firm support staff positions. The database is searchable by employer type, candidate experience level, geographic location, and keyword. WCL Students may utilize this subscription-based service for free by registering with a "@wcl.american.edu" email address.