Competency-Based Hiring: Linking Associate Development Competencies to Recruiting
NALP 2023 Annual Education Conference

Preparing for Interview

Send candidate information on interview structure, including competencies and related standard interview questions they should expect to receive.

Review Candidate packet including resume, statement of interest, any supplemental materials.

- Highlight items related to competencies, noting gaps and questions about experience.

- Write one or two questions question related to candidate experience or their statement to dig into during the interview.

Prepare interview summary sheet for note taking, adding in specific examples from resume interviewer would like to hear more about as part of the assessment.

Sample Interview Questions – NALP Example

Passion for NALP

Tell me what you learned about NALP while serving on {COMMITTEE/TASK FORCE} committee/task force. How have those experiences shaped your vision of NALP and how have they shaped your contributions to NALP?

Diversity & Inclusion

Describe how you have worked within your organization/community to promote and encourage diversity (including what the climate for diversity, equity and inclusion is at your institution). Discuss any successes and challenges you have faced and how you approached them.

Resilience

Tell me about a time that you adapted your approach to an issue in light of an unexpected change in circumstances or a professional setback.

Change Management

What leadership skill do you possess that would help navigate change in leadership at an organization? How have you used that skill to navigate any kind of change?

Communication & Collaboration

Tell me about a time when you collaborated with other NALP members (or work colleagues) with differing opinions. How did you help the group establish and promote consensus?

Efficiency & Organization

During your busiest time of year, how do you handle things that don't get done due to time constraints or other constraints? How do you prioritize demands?

Empathy & Emotional Intelligence

What are some things you have done to develop a good relationship with clients or coworkers, specifically when not able to be together in person?

Wrap-up Questions

- If someone raised these two points [note questions from Statement of Interest evaluation] in response to your Statement of Interest, how would you respond?

    <u>or</u>

    Let's talk more about XXX [item interviewer highlighted and candidate may have missed].

- Anything else we should know about your candidacy?

Sample Candidate Communication

In advance of your interview on {Date} at {Time}, we wanted to share a few important points regarding the interview to help you prepare. You may want to save this and return to it as you prepare for this stage in the process.

1. {Organization} will use a competency-based, structured interview format for all candidates. The slate of questions appears below. The focus will be on hearing specific illustrations of how you've demonstrated each of the competencies. We offer the questions to help you prepare and also as a matter of equity, so each candidate knows what to expect. We hope you will otherwise treat the meeting as if it were a regular, in-person one-on-one (or two-on one) interview.

2. In addition to competency-based questions, you can expect follow-up questions on the substance of your written materials.

3. We interview in pairs to reduce bias and record as faithfully as possible your answers; one person may do most of the questioning while the other interviewer records your responses. Don't be thrown if you don't hear from the second interviewer much during the interview.

4. Given the structured nature of the interview and our strong desire to provide as much space as possible for you to highlight your abilities and interest in the limited time we have, we'll plan to dive right in; we'll limit the prelude or "chit chat" before the questions. There will be plenty of time for you to ask your questions.

5. After your interview, we will speak to your references, and prepare a summary of your candidacy for the Recruiting Committee to consider based on our review of your materials, the interview, and the reference check. The committee will meet {STATE THE CADENCE}. You can expect notification about your candidacy {TYPICAL TIME FRAME}.

<u>Interview Questions</u>:

Competency #1
Question(s)

Competency #2
Question(s)

Competency #3
Question(s)

Competency #4
Question(s)

Sample Reference Checks– NALP Example

- Apply same rules as when interviewing: prepare, actively listen, be inclusive, be mindful of nonverbal cues, be an ambassador of the organization.

- Stay focused on competencies. What competency will be the candidate's biggest challenge?

- Reference check can be done by email instead, though a conversation may allow for follow up questions and opportunity to listen for cues where the reference may leave something out.

Sample Questions

What is your relationship with the candidate?

Have you been in a position to observe the candidate's skills in these areas? If so, how would you describe those skills? Please provide examples I may share with the hiring committee:

- List Competencies

What qualities does the candidate possess that would make them an effective {position}?

How could you see {Candidate}'s experience and skills enhancing this organization? What opportunities do they have for growth in skills?

Can {Candidate} see multiple points of view? Can {Candidate} be objective?

If {Candidate} was in a group collaborating on a project, how would you describe the role they would likely to play in that group?

Please provide example of {Candidate}'s demonstrated commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

In your experience, is {Candidate} someone who can be relied on to lead projects of significance and is successful in accomplishing desired goals? Can you provide an example?

Sample Email to Reference

I am writing because {Candidate} is interviewing for a position with {Organization} and listed you as a professional reference. I would like to set up a brief reference check call with you so that we might discuss {Candidate First Name}'s candidacy. Please let me know your availability on {DATES} for a 20-30 minute call.

As a reference, we are very interested in your perspective of the candidate's skills and experience in the following areas: {Competencies}. Please do not hesitate to let me know if you have an assistant I should contact for scheduling purposes.

The selection process for positions with {Organization} is intensely competitive, and we have to turn down more candidates than we are able to hire, so your candid input is important. I look forward to speaking with you soon.

Presenting the Candidate

Sample candidate presentations formatted to speak to competencies:

- **Basic Stats**: Candidate experience from resume, including extra-curricular activities

- **Highlights & Competencies**: Summary of learnings from candidate materials and interview for each competency, include learnings from references.

- **Unique Perspective/Skillsets**: Summary of what candidate brings that may be unique or different.

- **Drawbacks/Concerns**: Note any concerns or drawbacks.

- **Overall Assessment**: Recommendation for next steps/offer.

FROM NALP BOARD OF DIRECTORS POLICY MEMORANDUM 113

COMPETENCIES OF EFFECTIVE NALP LEADERS

Passion for NALP	Effective leaders: • Have a passion for NALP and its mission • Serve as an ambassador for the organization • Understand and uphold the mission and core values of NALP
Communication and Collaboration	Effective leaders: • Build consensus among a variety of constituents • Collaborate with others to develop and implement plans to accomplish objectives • Speak clearly and persuasively • Conduct productive meetings • Actively seek diverse viewpoints • Listen to all viewpoints and provide thoughtful feedback • Are inquisitive and ask questions to understand issues before acting
Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI)	Effective leaders: • Are well-informed and seek continued personal and professional growth in relation to DEI issues in the legal profession and society • Embed DEI into all of their professional efforts • Actively work to make NALP and the legal profession more diverse, equitable and inclusive • Collaborate effectively with a broad range of stakeholders • Seek to understand all perspectives to arrive at creative solutions that benefit all parties • Push for systemic change using the tools within their power
Empathy and Emotional Intelligence	Effective leaders: • Routinely strive to understand and relate to the perspectives, experiences, and needs of others • Develop trust through empathy • Focus on people-oriented management and problem-solving
Efficiency and Organization	Effective leaders: • Deliver and execute projects and assignments with a high degree of efficiency and organization • Effectively delegate work assignments • Provide members with authority to work independently • Monitor deadlines • Promote quality and demonstrate accuracy and thoroughness

Resilience	Effective Leaders: • Have the ability to be adaptable, flexible and creative in all circumstances • Possess the awareness to recognize when change/progress/innovation is needed • Have the fortitude and grit to work through changes and setbacks to pursue the best outcomes for all stakeholders • Convert challenges into opportunities • Are able to pivot and regroup when necessary • Can sustain a positive and forward-thinking attitude when faced with unforeseen circumstances
Leadership	Effective leaders: • Have a strong sense of their own strengths and limits • Display a willingness to make decisions • Exhibit sound and accurate judgment • Make timely decisions • Include other member volunteers in planning and decision-making • Make themselves available to members and are responsive • Develop others • Create strategies and processes to achieve objectives • Proactively identify and help develop NALP leaders from diverse backgrounds by ensuring they are engaged and aware of opportunities related to their interests and talents • Have a strategic vision for their section, group, committee or NALP as a whole

Adopted: November 9, 2013
Amended: August 2, 2018
Amended: July 28, 2020

REPORT ON 2020 SURVEY OF LAW FIRM COMPETENCY EXPECTATIONS FOR ASSOCIATE DEVELOPMENT

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

In November 2020, NALP invited its U.S. law firm members to complete the 2020 Survey of Law Firm Competency Expectations for Associate Development ("Survey"). The Survey was open from the first week of November through the first week of December 2020.

The Survey inquired about:

- Whether law firms have competency models or development expectations for assessing the progress of their associates, and if so, whether the competency model is in writing;
- Whether and how those competency models are shared with associates and partners;
- What competencies are measured in the competency models; and
- How competency models are used in performance evaluations, compensation, promotion, training, and recruiting.

This Report summarizes the Survey results. For brevity, this Report uses the phrase "competency model" to describe a set of competencies or developmental expectations law firms have for their associates.

The Survey and this Report were developed by the Professional Identity Formation Work Group of NALP's Lawyer Professional Development Section and Law Student Professional Development Section in partnership with the Holloran Center for Ethical Leadership in the Professions and NALP staff and leadership. The Work Group members are:

- Melissa Berry, Director of Professional Development & Diversity at Lane Powell PC; Co-Vice Chair, Professional Identity Formation Work Group; member, Lawyer Professional Development Section
- Kendra Brodin, Chief Attorney Development Officer at Taft Stettinius & Hollister LLP; Co-Vice Chair, Professional Identity Formation Work Group; member, Lawyer Professional Development Section
- Laura Friedman, Director of Professional Development and Career Counseling at Case Western Reserve University School of Law; Vice Chair, Professional Identity Formation Work Group; member, Law Student Professional Development Section
- Jerry Organ, Bakken Professor of Law and Co-Director of the Holloran Center for Ethical Leadership in the Professions at the University of St. Thomas School of Law
- Debbie Shapiro, Assistant Director of Career & Professional Development and Adjunct Professor at Mitchell Hamline School of Law; member, Professional Identity Formation Work Group; member, Law Student Professional Development Section

PARTICIPATION

NALP received Survey responses from 58 law firms distributed across four categories of law firms based on the number of attorneys in the firm. Of the 58 firms that responded to the Survey, 51 (nearly 88%) indicated they do have competency models, while seven (roughly 12%) indicated they do not have competency models. Table 1 shows the distribution of those with and without competency models across the four categories of firms.

Table 1: Does Your Firm Have Competencies or Developmental Expectations for Your Associates?

	Yes (#)	Yes (%)	No (#)	No (%)	# of Law Firms
All Law Firms	51	87.9%	7	12.1%	58
By Firm Size (# of Attorneys)					
250 or Fewer	15	83.3	3	16.7	18
251-500	13	92.9	1	7.1	14
501-700	5	83.3	1	16.7	6
701+	18	90.0	2	10.0	20

Notably, at least 83% of responding firms in each category of law firm have competency models for their associates. However, this may overstate the number of law firms with competency models; firms without competency models simply may have chosen not to participate in the Survey. Readers also should be cautious about generalizing these percentages across all law firms given that NALP's member law firms tend to be larger-sized firms.

Of the 51 law firms with competency models, 48 (94.1%) have memorialized their models in writing. Two of the 15 firms with 250 or fewer attorneys do not have written competency models; one firm with 701+ attorneys does not have a written competency model.

Because only 50 of the 51 firms with competency models provided more detailed information, the balance of this Report focuses on the data from those 50 firms.

HIGHLIGHTS

TYPES OF COMPETENCIES

The most common competencies — appearing in the competency models of over 90% of law firms that provided detailed information about their competency models — can be grouped into three distinct categories:

- **Traditional Legal and Communication Skills:** (Legal Analysis, Written Advocacy, Communicating Clearly, Legal Knowledge/Expertise, Judgment/Common Sense, and Oral Advocacy)
- **Character Traits and Relationship Skills:** (Responsibility/Reliability, Teamwork/Collaboration, Initiative, and Attention to Detail)
- **Client Focused Orientation:** (Responsiveness to Client and Understand Client's Business/Circumstances)

Other important competencies — appearing in 80% or more of the firms' competency models — include Leadership, Legal Research, Problem-Solving, and Respect for Others.

VARIABILITY OF COMPETENCIES RELATED TO LAW FIRM SIZE

For the vast majority of competencies identified in this Survey, law firm size did not suggest a meaningful difference in the frequency with which the competency appears in firm competency models. For 11 of the competencies, however, there was significant variability in the frequency with which firms of different sizes include the competency in their competency models.

GROUPING RELATED COMPETENCIES

Law firm competency models suggest that certain "groupings" of competencies are of greatest priority across law firms — particularly Technical Legal Skills/Knowledge and Communication Skills. Work Ethic Traits, Character Traits, Relationship Skills, and Client Service Orientation also appear to be fairly important, with Self-Development Traits and Technological Skills of lesser significance.

COMPETENCIES BY EXPERIENCE LEVEL

Almost all firms (92.2%) with competency models emphasize different competencies for different experience levels of associates. Firms of all sizes favor this approach, with two-thirds of firms identifying three levels of associates. More than half of the firms using three levels referred to them as junior-, mid-, and senior-level associates; others delineate specific years of experience tied to particular levels.

DISTRIBUTION OF COMPETENCY MODELS TO ASSOCIATES

All firms with competency models share the models with their associates in one or more ways. The three main methods of distribution are posting on the firm's intranet, providing during onboarding, and sharing during the performance review process.

DISTRIBUTION OF COMPETENCY MODELS TO PARTNERS

All firms with competency models share the models with the partners who review associate performance. Most firms share competency models with their partners by posting the models on the firm's intranet and providing them during the associate performance review process.

USE OF COMPETENCY MODELS IN PERFORMANCE EVALUATIONS

All firms with competency models reported that they use either all or some of the competencies during their associate performance review process. The overwhelming majority of firms use all of the competencies in associate performance evaluations; the balance use some of the competencies. Two-thirds of firms evaluate associates twice yearly or more frequently, while one-third of firms conduct performance reviews annually.

USE OF COMPETENCY MODELS BEYOND ASSOCIATE EVALUATIONS

Overall, 96% of firms use competencies to guide associate performance evaluations. While firms primarily use competency models to evaluate associates, some firms expand their use of competency models to guide decisions about training and professional development, promotions, compensation, and project-based feedback. Fewer firms actively use competency models in their recruiting and hiring processes.

SIGNIFICANT FINDINGS

TYPES OF COMPETENCIES

The most common competencies — appearing in the competency models of over 90% of law firms that provided detailed information about their competency models — include competencies that can be grouped into three distinct categories:

- ***Traditional Legal and Communication Skills:*** *(Legal Analysis, Written Advocacy, Communicating Clearly, Legal Knowledge/Expertise, Judgment/Common Sense, and Oral Advocacy)*
- ***Character Traits and Relationship Skills:*** *(Responsibility/Reliability, Teamwork/Collaboration, Initiative, and Attention to Detail)*
- ***Client Focused Orientation:*** *(Responsiveness to Client and Understand Client's Business/ Circumstances)*

Other important competencies — appearing in 80% or more of the firms' competency models — include Leadership, Legal Research, Problem-Solving, and Respect for Others.

Of the 50 law firms that provided detailed information about their competency models, over 90% have the 12 competencies shown in Table 2. For each competency, the number in parentheses reflects the number of law firms that identified the competency within their competency model.

Table 2: Competencies Included in Over 90% of Law Firm Competency Models

Traditional Legal and Communication Skills	Character Traits and Relationship Skills	Client Focused Orientation
Legal Analysis (49) Written Advocacy (49) Communicating Clearly (49) Legal Knowledge/Expertise (48) Judgment/Common Sense (48) Oral Advocacy (47)	Teamwork/Collaboration (48) Initiative (47) Responsibility/Reliability (47) Attention to Detail (46)	Responsiveness to Client (47) Understand Client's Business/Circumstances (47)

- **Four competencies appear in 80% to 90% of competency models:**
    - Leadership (44)
    - Legal Research (43)
    - Problem-Solving (42)
    - Respect for Others (40)

- **Nine competencies appear in 50% to 70% of competency models:**
    - Listening (35)
    - Integrity (33)
    - Self-Direction (33)
    - Project Management (33)
    - Diligence (32)
    - Trustworthiness (29)
    - Confidentiality (29)
    - Intellectual Curiosity (27)
    - Honesty (26)

- **Twelve competencies appear in less than 50% of competency models:**
    - Business/Financial Knowledge (24)
    - Cultural Competence (21)
    - Perseverance (21)
    - Analyzing Data (21)
    - Loyalty (21)
    - Self-Discipline (20)
    - Emotional Intelligence/Empathy (16)
    - Self-Awareness (16)
    - Facility with Programs (Word, Excel, PowerPoint, etc.) (16)
    - Respecting Client Autonomy (13)
    - Well-Being (8)
    - Social Media Expertise (3)

VARIABILITY OF COMPETENCIES RELATED TO LAW FIRM SIZE

For the vast majority of competencies identified in this Survey, law firm size did not suggest a meaningful difference in the frequency with which the competency appears in firm competency models. For 11 of the competencies, however, there was significant variability in the frequency with which firms of different sizes include the competency in their competency models.

The Survey results demonstrated no major differences across firms of different sizes for 26 of the 37 competencies. For these 26 competencies, the range of frequency was generally within 25% and often within 10% to 15%. For the other 11 competencies, however, greater variability was noted in three contexts.

In the first set of competencies with significant variability (a range greater than 25%), the pattern showed one category of firm as an outlier either on the low side (Problem-Solving) or on the high side (Confidentiality, Cultural Competence, Business/Financial Knowledge, Respecting Client Autonomy, and Well-Being):

- **Problem-Solving** is present in at least 80.0% of competency models in the three larger firm size categories (including in 100% of competency models of firms with 701+ attorneys), but it is present in only 60.0% of competency models of firms with 250 or fewer attorneys.

- **Confidentiality** is present in 80.0% of the competency models of firms with 501-700 attorneys, but in the other three firm size categories, it is in the range of 53.3% to 58.8%.

- **Cultural Competence** is present in 80.0% of the competency models of firms with 501-700 attorneys, but in the other three firm size categories, it is in the range of 33.3% to 41.2%.

- **Business/Financial Knowledge** is present in 70.6% of the competency models of firms with 701+ attorneys, but in the other three firm size categories, it is in the range of 33.3% to 40.0%.

- **Respecting Client Autonomy** is present in 60.0% of the competency models of firms with 501-700 attorneys, but in the other three firm size categories, it is in the range of 15.4% to 33.3%.

- **Well-Being** is present in 40.0% of the competency models of firms with 501-700 attorneys, but it is present in no more than 20.0% of competency models in the other three firm size categories.

For the second set of competencies with significant variability — Listening and Facility with Various Programs — law firm size coincided with the frequency with which the competency appears in competency models:

- **Listening** is present in 88.2% of competency models of firms with 701+ attorneys, 80.0% of competency models of firms with 501-700 attorneys, 61.5% of competency models of firms with 251-500 attorneys, and 53.3% of competency models of firms with 250 or fewer attorneys.

- **Facility with Various Programs (Word, Excel, PowerPoint, etc.)** is present in 52.9% of competency models of firms with 701+ attorneys, 40.0% of competency models of firms with 501-700 attorneys, 23.1% of competency models of firms with 251-500 attorneys, and 13.3% of competency models of firms with 250 or fewer attorneys.

For the third set of competencies with significant variability — Honesty, Integrity, and Perseverance — there was a broad range with no relationship to firm size:

- **Integrity** is present in 92.3% of competency models of firms with 251-500 attorneys, 80.0% of competency models of firms with 501-700 attorneys, 58.8% of competency models of firms of 701+ attorneys, and 46.7% of competency models of firms with 250 or fewer attorneys.

- **Honesty** is present in 76.9% of competency models of firms with 251-500 attorneys, 60.0% of competency models of firms with 501-700 attorneys, 47.1% of competency models of firms of 701+ attorneys, and 33.3% of competency models of firms with 250 or fewer attorneys.

- **Perseverance** is present in 61.5% of competency models of firms with 251-500 attorneys, 46.7% of competency models of firms with 250 or fewer attorneys, 29.4% of competency models of firms of 701+ attorneys, and 20.0% of competency models of firms with 501-700 attorneys.

GROUPING RELATED COMPETENCIES

Law firm competency models suggest that certain "groupings" of competencies are of greatest priority across law firms — particularly Technical Legal Skills/Knowledge and Communication Skills. Work Ethic Traits, Character Traits, Relationship Skills, and Client Service Orientation also appear to be fairly important, with Self-Development Traits and Technological Skills of lesser significance.

When related competencies are grouped together, law firms appear to highly prioritize two groups — Technical Legal Skills/Knowledge and Communication Skills. When the average frequency for each "group" of competencies is calculated, these two groups show an average frequency of approximately 90%:

- **Technical Legal Skills/Knowledge (Average: 45.5):** Legal Analysis (49); Legal Knowledge/Expertise (48); Legal Research (43); Problem-Solving (42)

- **Communication Skills (Average: 45.0):** Communicating Clearly (sharing information) (49); Written Advocacy (49); Oral Advocacy (47); Listening (receiving information) (35)

Four other groupings — Work Ethic Traits, Character Traits, Relationship Skills, and Client Service Orientation — appear to be less prioritized, as they have an average frequency of between 60% and 80%:

- **Work Ethic Traits (Average: 38.6):** Responsibility/Reliability (47); Initiative (47); Attention to Detail (46); Diligence (32); Perseverance (21)

- **Character Traits (Average: 34.0):** Judgment/Common Sense (48); Integrity (33); Trustworthiness (29); Honesty (26)

- **Relationship Skills (Average: 33.8):** Teamwork/Collaboration (48); Leadership (44); Respect for Others (40); Cultural Competence (21); Emotional Intelligence/Empathy (16)

- **Client Service Orientation (Average: 31.4):** Responsiveness to Clients (47); Understand Client's Business/Circumstances (47); Confidentiality (29); Loyalty (21); Respecting Client Autonomy (13)

The final two groupings — Self-Development Traits and Technological Skills — are the least prioritized, as they have an average frequency of roughly 40%:

- **Self-Development Traits (Average: 20.8):** Self-Direction (33); Intellectual Curiosity (27); Self-Discipline (20); Self-Awareness (16); Well-Being (8)

- **Technological Skills (Average: 19.4):** Project Management (33); Business/Financial Knowledge (24); Analyzing Data (21); Facility with Various Programs (Word, Excel, PowerPoint, etc.) (16); Social Media Expertise (3)

COMPETENCIES BY EXPERIENCE LEVEL

Almost all firms (92.2%) with competency models emphasize different competencies for different experience levels of associates. Firms of all sizes favor this approach, with two-thirds of firms identifying three levels of associates. More than half of the firms using three levels referred to them as junior-, mid-, and senior-level associates; others delineate specific years of experience tied to particular levels.

Of the firms with competency models, 92.2% indicated they emphasize different competencies for different experience levels of associates. Firms of all sizes favor this approach: 100% of firms with 251-500 and 501-700 attorneys, 94.4% of firms with 701+ attorneys, and 80.0% of firms with 250 or fewer attorneys.

Of the firms that emphasize different competency models for different experience levels of associates, nearly two-thirds elaborated that they divide associates into two, three, or four levels, with three levels being most popular, except among firms with 250 or fewer attorneys. More than half of the firms using three levels referred to them as junior-, mid-, and senior-level associates. The remaining firms did not define the associate levels. The following table includes the breakdown across firm size:

Table 3: Number and Frequency of Firms with Different Experience Levels within Competency Models

Firm Size	2 Levels		3 Levels		4 Levels		Undefined		# of Law Firms
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
All Law Firms	5	10.6%	20	42.6%	5	10.6%	17	36.2%	47
By Firm Size (# of Attorneys)									
250 or Fewer	2	16.7	2	16.7	3	25.0	5	41.7	12
251-500	1	7.7	7	53.8	0	0.0	5	38.5	13
501-700	0	0.0	4	80.0	0	0.0	1	20.0	5
701+	2	11.8	7	41.2	2	11.8	6	35.3	17

Of the firms using three levels, 25.0% indicated the number of years an associate spends in each level. Among these firms, 60.0% delineated the three levels as 1-2 years, 3-5 years, and 6+ years, while the remaining 40.0% defined their levels slightly differently as 1-3 years, 4-6 years, and 7+ years.

Of the nearly two-thirds of firms that emphasize different competency models for different experience levels, nearly half explained that those expectations may change based on the associate level. Just over 25% emphasize the same competencies for each associate level, but have different expectations based on the level. Slightly fewer firms emphasize additional or different competencies as associates progress in experience. A few firms noted that the competencies may vary by, or be particular to, a practice group. Only two firms added that associates must meet the competencies for their level before they can progress to the next level.

DISTRIBUTION OF COMPETENCY MODELS TO ASSOCIATES

All firms with competency models share the models with their associates in one or more ways. The three main methods of distribution are posting on the firm's intranet, providing during onboarding, and sharing during the performance review process.

All firms with competency models reported sharing those models with their associates. Firms use three main methods to distribute their competency models to associates: posting on the firm's intranet, providing during onboarding, and sharing during the performance review process. A limited number of firms distribute their competency models through other methods. Some firms use multiple methods, which explains why the percentages add up to more than 100%.

- Most firms (79.2%) post their competency models on the firm's intranet.
- Nearly as many firms (70.8%) provide their competency models during the onboarding process.
- Slightly more than half of firms (58.3%) share their competency models during the review process.
- About one-fifth of firms (20.8%) distribute their competency models through other methods.

All firms with 501-700 attorneys and 88.2% of firms with 701+ attorneys post their competency model to associates on the firm's intranet. The frequency of this method dropped with firm size: 76.9% of firms with 251-500 attorneys and 61.5% of firms with 250 or fewer attorneys use this method of distribution.

Firms of all sizes commonly provide competency models to associates during the onboarding process. This practice is most frequent in firms with 501-700 attorneys (80.0%) and 251-500 attorneys (76.9%). Firms with 250 or fewer attorneys and with 701+ attorneys are slightly less likely to use this method at 69.2% and 64.7%, respectively.

More than half of the firms share their competency models with associates during the review process. Firms with 501-700 attorneys are most likely (80.0%) to use this method. Firms with 251-500 and 250 or fewer attorneys are equally likely to use this method (61.5%), but less than half of firms with 701+ attorneys (47.1%) distribute competency models during the review process.

Approximately one-fifth of firms (20.8%) use other methods of distribution, such as during annual professional development plan creation and training programs/conferences, in advance of goal/competency progression discussion, or in employee handbooks. Firms with 250 or fewer attorneys (38.5%) and firms with 701+ attorneys (23.5%) are most likely to use other methods. Only 20.0% of firms with 501-700 attorneys and zero firms with 251-500 attorneys reported using other methods of distribution.

DISTRIBUTION OF COMPETENCY MODELS TO PARTNERS

All firms with competency models share the models with the partners who review associate performance. Most firms share competency models with their partners by posting the models on the firm's intranet and providing them during the associate performance review process.

All firms with competency models share the models with the partners who review associate performance. Firms use two main methods to distribute competency models to partners who evaluate associates: posting on the firm's intranet and sharing during the associate performance review process. A limited number of firms distribute their competency models through other methods. Some firms use multiple methods, which explains why the percentages add up to more than 100%.

- Most firms (83.3%) post their competency models on the firm's intranet.
- Over two-thirds of firms (68.8%) share their competency models with partners during the associate review process.
- Far fewer firms (20.8%) distribute their competency models through other methods.

All firms with 501-700 attorneys, 88.2% of firms with 701+ attorneys, and 84.6% of firms with 251-500 attorneys post their competency models to partners on the firm's intranet. Firms with 250 or fewer attorneys are less likely (69.2%) to use this method.

While most firms share competency models with partners during the associate review process, there is a broad range depending on firm size. All firms with 501-700 attorneys, 76.9% of firms with 250 or fewer attorneys, and 69.2% of firms with 251-500 attorneys use this method. By contrast, just over half (52.9%) of firms with 701+ attorneys share competency models with their partners during the associate review process.

Similar to the distribution of competency models to associates, one-fifth of firms (20.8%) use other methods to share their competency models with partners, such as in the employee handbook, in training materials for mentors/mentees, during partner orientation, on an ad hoc basis, in platforms like viDesktop, or upon request. Firms with 250 or fewer attorneys are most likely (30.8%) to use one or more of these other methods.

USE OF COMPETENCY MODELS IN PERFORMANCE EVALUATIONS

All firms with competency models reported that they use either all or some of the competencies during their associate performance review process. The overwhelming majority of firms use all of the competencies in associate performance evaluations; the balance use some of the competencies. Two-thirds of firms evaluate associates twice yearly or more frequently, while one-third of firms conduct performance reviews annually.

All firms with competency models indicated they use their competency models in associate performance evaluations. Over two-thirds of firms (70.6%) evaluate associates on all of the competencies in the firm's competency model. Less than one-third of firms (29.4%) evaluate associates using a subset of competencies from their competency model.

Among the three firm-size categories with 700 or fewer attorneys, over 70% of the firms evaluate associates on all of the competencies in the firm's competency model. Specifically, 100% of firms with 501-700 attorneys, 76.9% of firms with 251-500 attorneys, and 73.3% of firms with 250 or fewer attorneys evaluate associates on all of the competencies in the firm's competency model. By contrast, only 55.6% of firms with 701+ attorneys evaluate associates on all of the competencies in the firm's competency model.

Firms vary in how often they evaluate associates. One-third of firms evaluate associates once a year, and one-third of firms evaluate associates twice each year. The remaining one-third of firms use other approaches. For example, some firms conduct annual evaluations coupled with real-time, ongoing feedback. Other firms conduct annual evaluations and mid-year reviews for certain attorneys, such as junior associates, lateral hires, and those with performance concerns.

USE OF COMPETENCY MODELS BEYOND ASSOCIATE EVALUATIONS

Overall, 96% of firms use competencies to guide associate performance evaluations. While firms primarily use competency models to evaluate associates, some firms expand their use of competency models to guide decisions about trainings and professional development, promotions, compensation, and project-based feedback. Fewer firms actively use competency models in their recruiting and hiring processes.

While 96.0% of firms use competency models to guide associate performance evaluations, firms also use competencies in different ways.

- **Training and Professional Development**: Nearly two-thirds of firms (64.0%) use competency models to determine which trainings and programs to offer. Additionally, 8.0% of firms use competency models for other purposes, including planning career development programs, guiding goal setting for associates, and building mentoring programs.

- **Promotion**: Over half of firms (58.0%) use competency models to determine whether an associate should be promoted to the next level of associate, and 68.0% of firms use competency models to decide if an associate is ready for partnership. Interestingly, larger firms are more likely to tie partnership promotion to progress on competencies. All firms with 501-700 attorneys consider competency models when determining which associates become partners. That number drops to 76.5% of firms with 701 or more attorneys, to 66.7% of firms with 250 or fewer attorneys, and to only 46.2% of firms with 251-500 attorneys.

- **Compensation**: Over one-third of firms (38.0%) use competency models when determining associate base salary. Additionally, 30.0% of firms consider competency models when determining associate bonuses.

- **Project-Based Feedback**: Roughly one-quarter of firms (26.0%) use competency models to give feedback on specific projects.

Fewer than half of the firms directly tie competencies to their recruiting and hiring processes, with 43.1% of firms considering the firm's competency model when hiring lateral associates, 39.2% considering the firm's competency model when recruiting and hiring summer associates and entry-level associates, and only 11.8% considering the firm's competency model when hiring lateral partners. Over one-third of firms (37.3%) indicate they do not use competency models in their recruiting and hiring process for attorneys at any level. This is particularly true for the largest firms: 61.1% of firms with 701+ attorneys do not use their firm's competency model in the hiring process. Notably, 15.7% of firm respondents did not know whether the firm referenced the firm's competency model in recruiting and hiring.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH AND EXPLORATION

The Survey analysis revealed three potential areas for further research related to competency models.

- First, because the Survey was limited to NALP's membership, further research could be conducted to determine the extent to which competency models for other types of

employers — county attorneys offices, offices of attorneys general, public defender offices, legal aid offices, small law firms, and in-house corporate legal departments — are comparable to those of the firms reflected in this Survey.

- Second, given that law school graduates should be prepared to meet the demands of the legal services market, research could be conducted to assess the extent to which law school learning outcomes align with the competencies most emphasized by firms in this Survey.

- Third, while this Survey touched briefly on the extent to which firms draw on their competency models in recruiting and hiring efforts, more research could be conducted about the extent to which firms connect recruiting and hiring practices with competency models and about institutional challenges firms may face in doing so.

APPENDIX – COPY OF SURVEY QUESTIONS

![NALP logo] *We advance law careers*

NALP 2020 Survey of Law Firm Competency Expectations for Associate Development

This research project will explore competencies and developmental expectations for law firm associates and will identify commonalities and differences among the competencies emphasized by law firms. Additionally, this research will help law firms understand the varied ways in which competencies and developmental expectations are being used by law firms across the U.S. as part of their associate development and evaluation processes. Finally, the research will benefit law schools by indicating the extent to which common competencies across law firms align with typical law school learning outcomes and by informing law school career and professional development offices about the extent to which these competencies are considered in the hiring process.

The information you submit in this survey is completely confidential. No information that could be attributed to your organization will be published. Please submit only one response per law firm.

For purposes of this survey, **"competencies"** and **"developmental expectations"** mean those skills, abilities, and attributes that your firm has decided are desirable for your associates to possess and that your firm believes contribute to the successful performance of your associates.

* **1. Does your firm have competencies or developmental expectations for your associates?**

◯ Yes

◯ No *(survey will skip to firm demographic items)*

1

NALP 2020 Survey of Law Firm Competency Expectations for Associate Development

For purposes of this survey, **"competencies"** and **"developmental expectations"** mean those skills, abilities, and attributes that your firm has decided are desirable for your associates to possess and that your firm believes contribute to the successful performance of your associates.

* **2. Are these competencies/developmental expectations formalized in writing?**

◯ Yes

◯ No

NALP 2020 Survey of Law Firm Competency Expectations for Associate Development

For purposes of this survey, **"competencies"** and **"developmental expectations"** mean those skills, abilities, and attributes that your firm has decided are desirable for your associates to possess and that your firm believes contribute to the successful performance of your associates.

3. How/when is the document describing the competencies/developmental expectations distributed to associates? *Select all that apply.*

The document describing the competencies/developmental expectations is:

☐ Not distributed to associates **(do not select any other response options)**

☐ Distributed to associates during onboarding

☐ Distributed to associates during the review process

☐ Available to associates on law firm intranet

☐ Other (please describe)

4. How/when is the document describing the competencies/developmental expectations shared with partners who are evaluating associates? *Select all that apply.*

The document describing the competencies/developmental expectations is:

☐ Not distributed to partners **(do not select any other response options)**

☐ Distributed to partners during the review process for associates

☐ Available to partners on law firm intranet

☐ Other (please describe)

NALP 2020 Survey of Law Firm Competency Expectations for Associate Development

For purposes of this survey, **"competencies"** and **"developmental expectations"** mean those skills, abilities, and attributes that your firm has decided are desirable for your associates to possess and that your firm believes contribute to the successful performance of your associates.

3. Even though your competencies/developmental expectations are not memorialized in writing, how/when are these competencies/developmental expectations communicated to associates? *Select all that apply.*

The competencies/developmental expectations are:

☐ Not communicated to associates **(do not select any other response options)**

☐ Communicated to associates during onboarding

☐ Communicated to associates during the review process

☐ Other (please describe)

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4. Even though your competencies/developmental expectations are not memorialized in writing, how/when are these competencies/developmental expectations shared with partners who are evaluating associates? *Select all that apply.*

☐ Not communicated to partners **(do not select any other response options)**

☐ Communicated to partners during the review process

☐ Other (please describe)

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NALP 2020 Survey of Law Firm Competency Expectations for Associate Development

For purposes of this survey, **"competencies"** and **"developmental expectations"** mean those skills, abilities, and attributes that your firm has decided are desirable for your associates to possess and that your firm believes contribute to the successful performance of your associates.

5. Which of the following sets of competencies/developmental expectations are included in your competency expectations? *Select all that apply.*

Please note that in completing your responses to this question, **include only those things explicitly memorialized in the document describing your competencies/developmental expectations or explicitly articulated and communicated to associates as important competencies/developmental expectations.**

Technical Legal Skills/Knowledge

☐ Legal analysis

☐ Legal knowledge/Expertise

☐ Legal research

☐ Problem-solving

Relationship Skills

☐ Cultural competence   ☐ Teamwork/Collaboration

☐ Respect for others   ☐ Leadership

☐ Emotional intelligence/Empathy

Character Traits

☐ Honesty

☐ Integrity

☐ Trustworthiness

☐ Judgment/Common sense

Self-Development Traits

☐ Self-awareness   ☐ Well-being

☐ Self-discipline   ☐ Self-direction

☐ Intellectual curiosity

Work Ethic Traits

☐ Attention to detail   ☐ Perseverance

☐ Initiative   ☐ Responsibility/Reliability

☐ Diligence

Communication Skills

☐ Communicate clearly (sharing information)

☐ Listening (receiving information)

☐ Oral advocacy

☐ Written advocacy

Technological Skills

☐ Analyze data   ☐ Project management

☐ Social media expertise   ☐ Business/Financial knowledge

☐ Facility with various programs (Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint, etc.)

Client Service Orientation

☐ Responsiveness to client   ☐ Loyalty

☐ Understand client business/circumstances   ☐ Confidentiality

☐ Respect client autonomy

Please list any other competencies/developmental expectations your firm has for its associates not listed above.

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6. Does your firm use the competencies/developmental expectations that you selected from the list above in performance evaluations of your associates?

○ Yes, we use all of the competencies/developmental expectations selected from the list above in performance evaluations.

○ Yes, we use some, but not all, of the competencies/developmental expectations selected from the list above in performance evaluations.

○ No.

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For purposes of this survey, **"competencies"** and **"developmental expectations"** mean those skills, abilities, and attributes that your firm has decided are desirable for your associates to possess and that your firm believes contribute to the successful performance of your associates.

7. Does your firm have different competencies/developmental expectations for different experience levels of associates?

◯ No

◯ Yes (please explain)

[   ]

8. Please indicate whether your firm connects progress in competencies/developmental expectations to any of the following: *Select all that apply.*

☐ Feedback on specific projects

☐ Performance evaluations

☐ Base salary

☐ Bonus

☐ Promotion to higher levels of associate

☐ Promotion to partner

☐ Training programs tied to competencies

☐ Other (please describe)

[   ]

9. How often does your firm perform associate evaluations? S*elect all that apply.*

☐ Once a year

☐ Twice a year

☐ Real-time, ongoing feedback

☐ Other (please describe)

[   ]

10. Does your firm tie your competencies/developmental expectations to your hiring process and recruiting? *Select all that apply.*

☐ Yes, we use them for hiring summer associates or entry-level associates.	☐ No, we do not use them in our hiring process and recruiting. **(Do not select any other response options.)**
☐ Yes, we use them for hiring lateral associates.	☐ I don't know. **(Do not select any other response options.)**
☐ Yes, use them for hiring lateral partners.	

NALP 2020 Survey of Law Firm Competency Expectations for Associate Development

* **11. Please share the name of your firm in the box below so we can ensure that we only have one response per firm.**

[   ]

12. Please include the name, title, and email address of the person completing the survey in case follow up is needed.

* Name

[   ]

* Title

[   ]

Email address

[   ]

13. How many lawyers are in your law firm (firm-wide)?

( ) 100 or fewer   ( ) 501-700

( ) 101-250   ( ) 701+

( ) 251-500

WHAT FIRMS WANT: THE USE OF COMPETENCY MODELS IN ASSOCIATE PD

By Melissa Berry, Kendra Brodin, Laura Friedman, Jerry Organ, and Debbie Shapiro

Over the past several years, professional identity formation has been a topic of interest among a growing number of legal employers and law schools. The core of professional identity formation is competence, and evaluations are the primary way law firms measure competence. Despite this increased interest, little has been published in the past decade about how firms prioritize and evaluate progress on the developmental expectations — or competencies, as they are often called — which law firms require of their associates.

As legal professionals, we find ourselves asking: which competencies matter the most to firms when they are evaluating associates? Are there different expectations for associates at different levels? How often do evaluations take place? How much do competencies play a part in compensation, promotion, and hiring decisions?

Both law firms and law schools are motivated to support the development of professionally competent lawyers. Additionally, law firms want insights into what other firms are prioritizing during evaluations in terms of the skill sets and abilities in their associates. Similarly, law schools seek a deeper understanding of the competencies that firms place value on beyond the initial hire so that they can prepare their students for future success.

For these reasons, in fall 2020, the Professional Identity Formation Work Group, a collaboration of the Lawyer Professional Development and Law Student Professional Development Sections and the Holloran Center for Ethical Leadership at the University of St. Thomas School of Law, launched a nationwide survey about associate competencies with the hope of shedding light on how law firms are using competency models and developmental expectations to measure the growth and progress of their associates. This article provides a summary of the findings. The full report can be read at www.nalp.org/associate_competency.

Types of Competencies

The most common competencies — appearing in the competency models of over 90% of law firms that provided detailed information about their competency models — include those that can be grouped in three distinct categories:

- **Traditional Legal and Communication Skills:** Legal Analysis, Written Advocacy, Communicating Clearly, Legal Knowledge/Expertise, Judgment/Common Sense, and Oral Advocacy

- **Character Traits/Relationship Skills:** Responsibility/Reliability, Teamwork/Collaboration, Initiative, and Attention to Detail

- **Client-Focused Orientation:** Responsiveness to Client and Understand Client's Business Circumstance

Traditional Legal Skills and Communication Skills reflect the "bread and butter" of legal education and likely are competencies many legal professionals would expect to be emphasized broadly across law firms. On the other hand, the competencies related to Character Traits/Relationship Skills and Client-Focused Orientation — not traditionally focused on in legal education — were emphasized by firms in the study and that might be surprising to some.

Other important competencies, which appeared in 80% to 90% of the surveyed firms' competency models, include Leadership, Legal Research, Problem Solving, and Respect for Others. Nine competencies appear in 50% to 70% of competency models: Listening, Integrity, Self-Direction, Project Management, Diligence, Trustworthiness, Confidentiality, Intellectual Curiosity, and Honesty. Many of these skills are also not emphasized in traditional law school training and law schools also might find the prominence of these skills in the study enlightening.

Twelve competencies appear in less than 50% of competency models: Business/Financial Knowledge, Cultural Competence, Perseverance, Analyzing Data, Loyalty, Self-Discipline, Emotional Intelligence/Empathy, Self-Awareness, Facility with Programs (Word, Excel, PowerPoint, etc.), Respecting Client Autonomy, Well-Being, and Social Media Expertise.

Grouping Related Competencies

Law firm competency models suggest that certain "groupings" of competencies are of greatest priority across law firms — particularly Technical Legal Skills/Knowledge and Communication Skills. A second tier of competency groupings also appears to be fairly important, but less of a priority — Work Ethic Traits, Character Traits, Relationship Skills, and Client Service Orientation. The final two groupings of competencies, Self-Development Traits and Technological Skills, are of lesser significance.

When related competencies are grouped together, law firms appear to highly prioritize two groups — Technical Legal Skills/Knowledge and Communication Skills — for which the average frequency across the competencies within each group is roughly 90%.

- Technical Legal Skills/Knowledge (91% average): Legal Analysis, Legal Knowledge/Expertise, Legal Research, Problem Solving

- Communication Skills (90% average): Communicate Clearly (sharing information), Written Advocacy, Oral Advocacy, Listening (receiving information)

This probably doesn't come as a great surprise as these two groupings encompass much of what legal education emphasizes.

Four other groupings — Work Ethic Traits, Character Traits, Relationship Skills, and Client Service Orientation — appear to be less prioritized or receive less emphasis among law firms, as the average frequency across the competencies within each group is between 60% and 80% for each of these groupings:

- Work Ethic Traits (77% average): Responsibility/Reliability, Initiative, Attention to Detail, Diligence, Perseverance

- Character Traits (68% average): Judgment/Common Sense, Integrity, Trustworthiness, Honesty

- Relationship Skills (68% average): Teamwork/Collaboration, Leadership, Respect for Others, Cultural Competence, Emotional Intelligence/Empathy

- Client Service Orientation (63% average): Responsiveness to Clients, Understand Client's Business/Circumstances, Confidentiality, Loyalty, Respecting Client Autonomy

Across these groupings it is worth noting that Work Ethic Traits on average carry greater significance than Character Traits and Relationship Skills, even though the latter two remain of significant importance, with each grouping on average being present in roughly two-thirds of the law firm competency models. Additionally, there may be some overlap here as concepts like Integrity, Trustworthiness, and Honesty might have strong correlations. For example, lawyers who demonstrate Integrity and Honesty are more likely to demonstrate Trustworthiness. Similarly, lawyers with Emotional Intelligence and Empathy may also demonstrate Cultural Competence.

The final two groupings — Self-Development Traits and Technological Skills — are the least prioritized, as the average frequency for these groupings of competencies is roughly 40%:

- Self-Development Traits (42% average): Self-Direction, Intellectual Curiosity, Self-Discipline, Self-Awareness, Well-Being

- Technological Skills (39% average): Project Management, Business/ Financial Knowledge, Analyze Data, Facility with Various Programs (Word, Excel, PowerPoint, etc.), Social Media Expertise

Interestingly, Self-Development Traits and Technological Skills did not receive very much emphasis even though most successful lawyers tend to take initiative and ownership of their career development, relying on their capabilities in many of these competencies.

It is important to keep in mind that this survey reflects an analysis of what firms were prioritizing in fall 2020. The legal profession itself and the way firms practice and prioritize competencies are constantly changing. For example, while Social Media Expertise and Well-Being did not show up in competency models with great frequency, it is possible they would not have shown up at all 10 years ago and might be of greater significance five or 10 years from now.

Competencies by Experience Level

Almost all firms (92%) that reported using competency models indicated that they use different competencies for different experience levels of associates. Nearly two-thirds of those

firms elaborated that they divide associates into two, three, or four levels, with three levels being most popular. More than half of the firms using three refer to the levels as junior-level, mid-level, and senior-level associates.

Of the firms using three levels, 25% indicated the number of years an associate spends in each level. Among these firms, 60% delineated the three levels as 1-2 years, 3-5 years, and 6+ years, while the remaining 40% defined their levels slightly differently as 1-3 years, 4-6 years, and 7+ years.

Of the two-thirds of firms that emphasize different competency models for different experience levels, nearly half explained that those expectations may change based on the associate level. Just over 25% emphasize the same competencies for each associate level, but have different expectations based on the level. Slightly fewer firms emphasize additional or different competencies as associates progress in experience. A few firms noted that the competencies may vary by, or be particular to, a practice group.

Distribution of Competency Models to Associates and Partners

Firms clearly communicate their developmental expectations of associates; all firms with competency models reported sharing those models with their associates and partners. Some firms use multiple distribution methods,

which explains why the percentages below add up to more than 100%.

Firms use three main methods to distribute their competency models to associates: posting them on the firm's intranet (79.2%), providing them during onboarding (70.8%), and sharing them during the performance review process (58.3%). Fewer firms distribute their competency models to associates through other methods (20.8%).

Firms use two of the same methods to distribute competency models to partners who evaluate associates: posting them on the firm's intranet (83.3%) and sharing them during the associate performance review process (68.8%). A smaller number of firms distribute their competency models to partners through other methods (20.8%).

Use of Competency Models in Performance Evaluations

Not surprisingly, competency models play a large role in performance evaluations. Two-thirds of firms (70.6%) evaluate associates on all of the competencies in the firm's competency model, while less than one-third of firms (29.4%) evaluate associates using a subset of competencies from their competency model.

Firms vary in the frequency with which they evaluate associates. One-third of firms evaluate associates once a year, and another third of

This survey demonstrates the need for associates to show progress on a wide array of competencies, not all of which are emphasized — or even taught — in many law schools.

firms evaluate associates twice each year. The remaining third of firms use other approaches. For example, some firms conduct annual evaluations coupled with real-time, ongoing feedback. Other firms conduct annual evaluations and mid-year reviews for junior-level associates, lateral hires, and those with performance concerns.

Based on our observations outside of this survey, there is a growing trend among law firms to provide more regular, consistent feedback to their associates. We anticipate that an increasing number of firms will begin to evaluate associates more often than annually. Some

firms may choose to evaluate associates twice a year, while other firms may implement a "real-time feedback" process to ensure that associates are receiving timely, relevant feedback on their performance. This will enable associates to grow and improve over time rather than waiting a full year for meaningful feedback.

Use of Competency Models Beyond Performance Evaluations

While firms primarily use competency models to evaluate associates, some firms also use competencies in the following ways:

- **Training and Professional Development:** Nearly two-thirds of firms (64%) use competency models to determine which training courses and programs to offer. Additionally, 8% of firms use competency models for other purposes, including planning career development programs, guiding goal setting for associates, and building mentoring programs.

- **Promotion:** Over half of firms (58%) use competency models to determine whether an associate should be promoted to the next level on the associate path, and 68% of firms use competency models to decide if an associate is ready for partnership.

- **Compensation:** Over one-third of firms (38%) use competency models when determining associate base salary.

Additionally, nearly one-third of firms (30%) consider competency models when determining associate bonuses.

- **Project-Based Feedback:** Roughly one-quarter of firms (26%) use competency models to give feedback on specific projects.

Fewer than half of firms directly tie competencies to their recruiting and hiring processes, with 43.1% of firms considering the firm's competency model when hiring lateral associates, 39.2% considering the firm's competency model when recruiting and hiring summer associates and entry-level associates, and only

> **It is critical that law firms align their developmental expectations with the true demands of the practice and the competencies that successful associates possess.**

11.8% considering the firm's competency model for lateral partner hiring. By contrast, 37.3% of firms indicate they do not use competency models in their recruiting and hiring process for lawyers at any level.

Notably, 15.7% of firm respondents did not know whether the firm referenced the firm's competency model in recruiting and hiring. This could be because those filling out the survey were lawyer development professionals rather than recruiting professionals. Since those functions are often separated, especially in large law firms, the person who completed the survey may not have been familiar with the recruiting practices of the firm.

It is interesting to see how firms use — or don't use — their competency models in other functions of their operations. If firms have clear competency models on which to evaluate their associates, there is great opportunity to weave those expectations throughout other areas, including program creation, promotion, compensation, and hiring. This would give associates predictability and consistency as they would know what is expected of them and what skills they should be developing.

Additionally, if firms were to use their competency models in multiple ways, the firm itself also would have greater alignment and consistency in developing programming and initiatives to teach particular competencies and subsequently to evaluate, compensate, and promote based on those competencies. Hiring

based on the firm's competencies would further ensure that associates entering the firm already have a foundational skillset in, and understanding of, the competencies that the firm would expect of them.
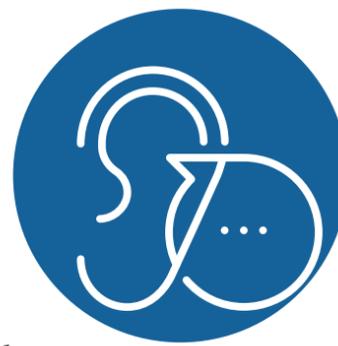
Suggestions for Further Research and Exploration

Due to the dynamic nature of the legal profession and in light of the enlightening survey findings, we see at least three areas of potential future research.

First, given that this survey was limited to NALP's membership, further research could be conducted to determine the extent to which competency models for other types of employers — county attorneys offices, offices of attorneys general, public defender offices, legal aid offices, small law firms, and in-house corporate legal departments — are comparable to those of the firms reflected in this survey.

Second, given that law school graduates should be prepared to meet the demands of the legal services market, research could be conducted to assess the extent to which law school learning outcomes align with the competencies most emphasized by firms in this survey.

Third, while this survey touched briefly on the extent to which firms draw on their competency models in recruiting and hiring efforts, more research could be conducted about the extent to which recruiting and hiring practices are connected with competency models and about institutional challenges firms may face in doing so.

Conclusion

This survey provides a snapshot taken in fall 2020; it provides the best information about what firms were expecting of their associates at that moment in time. With the rapid pace of change in the legal profession, which has been accelerated by technological advances, the COVID-19 pandemic, and current national and world events, it would be helpful to re-survey firms in the coming years to see if they have reprioritized or added competencies to their competency models.

This survey demonstrates the need for associates to show progress on a wide array of competencies, not all of which are emphasized — or even taught — in many law schools. It is critical that law firms align their developmental expectations with the true demands of the practice and the competencies that successful associates possess. Likewise, law firms and law schools have an opportunity to collaborate and partner to prepare the newest members of the profession. ✚

*The survey, report, and this article were developed by the Professional Identity Formation Work Group, a collaboration of NALP's Lawyer Professional Development and Law Student Professional Development Sections in partnership with the Holloran Center for Ethical Leadership in the Professions of the University of St. Thomas School of Law and NALP staff and leadership. The authors are: Professional Identity Formation Work Group of the Lawyer Professional Development Section Co-Vice Chair **Melissa Berry** (Director of Professional Development & Diversity at Lane Powell PC) and Co-Vice Chair **Kendra Brodin** (Chief Attorney Development Officer at Taft Stettinius & Hollister LLP); Vice Chair of the Professional Identity Formation Work Group of the Law Student Professional Development Section **Laura Friedman** (Director of Professional Development and Career Counseling at Case Western Reserve University School of Law); **Jerry Organ** (Bakken Professor of Law and Co-Director of the Holloran Center for Ethical Leadership in the Professions at the University of St. Thomas School of Law); and Law Student Professional Development Section member **Debbie Shapiro** (Assistant Director of Career & Professional Development and Adjunct Professor at Mitchell Hamline School of Law).*

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METHODOLOGY

In November 2020, NALP invited its U.S. law firm members to complete the 2020 Survey of Law Firm Competency Expectations for Associate Development. The survey was open from the first week of November through the first week of December 2020. The survey inquired about:

· Whether law firms have competency models or developmental expectations for assessing the progress of their associates, and if so, whether the competency model is in writing;

· Whether and how those competency models are shared with associates and partners;

· What competencies are featured in the written competency models; and

· How competency models are used in performance evaluations, compensation, promotion, training, and recruiting.

The 2020 Report on the Survey of Law Firm Competency Expectations for Associate Development, published on NALP's website in May 2021, summarizes the survey results. In the report and this article, the phrase "competency model" is used to describe a set of competencies or developmental expectations law firms have for their associates. Of the 58 firms that responded to the Survey, 51 (nearly 90%) indicated they do have competency models, while seven (roughly 12%) indicated they do not have competency models. Of the 51 law firms with competency models, 48 have memorialized their models in writing.