

Small & Mid-Sized Law Firm Interest Group

1st Quarter Report to NALP Board

June 2025

Jennifer Lucas-Ross and Sheryl Roberts, Co-Chairs

The Small & Mid-Sized Law Firm Interest Group was presented as a defined Interest Group at the NALP Annual Education Conference in April 2025. This Interest Group was developed through shared interests and experiences of professionals who work at small and mid-sized law firms and who often hold responsibility for multiple law firm functions, such as recruiting, professional development, DEI and wellness initiatives. As many law firm professionals in small to mid-size firms wear multiple hats and work in several departments in their firms, our Interest Group is working to create a schedule of webinars and meetings, identify shared objectives, and collaborate to bring opportunities and resources to our small to mid-sized law firm NALP members across their various roles.

Formal Interest Group

Our Interest Group includes two Co-Chairs, Sheryl Roberts and Jennifer Lucas-Ross, who are leading the development of our group and its initiatives with our Board Liaison, Jennifer Gewertz. Within our Interest Group, we have four Working Groups, Professional Development (Co-Chairs – Rob De Toni and Kate Harrison), Recruiting (Chair – Katie Greene), Diversity Equity & Inclusion, and Wellness (Sherry Lamb). We continue to work to fill the working group chairs/co-chairs roles for our DEI and Wellness Working Groups, but until they are filled, Sheryl and Jen will promote and facilitate programming and other presentations around those groups.

Updates

Our Interest Group currently has 69 members, which is an increase of 20 members since our last Board report. We hosted a formal in-person meeting at the NALP AEC in Cleveland on Thursday, April 10th at 1:00 p.m. There were approximately 25-30 members in attendance, and everyone enjoyed meeting in person, planning our year, and some immediately joined as Co-Chairs in our Working Groups. We received several recommendations for upcoming topics for presentations, webinars, and meetings and have started planning several events for the year.

We met as Co-Chairs following the AEC and formalized an agenda and a timeline for year, which we presented at our post-AEC meeting on Tuesday, April 22, 2025. We had approximately 25 in attendance and received very positive feedback from the new members around the Interest Group and our plans for the upcoming year.

Quarterly Meeting Dates

June 10, 2025 at 2:00 pm

September 9, 2025 at 2:00 pm

December 9, 2025 at 2:00 pm

On June 10, 2025, we held our first quarterly meeting, and we had the expected turnout. There were 16 members in attendance, but we had expected a smaller number given the current recruiting environment, summer programs, and OCI and callback compression.

Environmental Scanning

During our quarterly Interest Group meeting in June, we polled our members around early recruiting, and even though it was not a large swath of the NALP community or our members, the results showed that early recruiting among our members is increasing, and offers were made for 2Ls starting in April, with April and June seeing the most offers. Interestingly, we had a 50/50 split on whether it was a firm's first time in participating in early recruiting, but of those polled, 80% said they made early offers this year and 75% of those said it was their first time to make early offers. During discussions following the poll, we learned that while firms may not have participated in early recruiting, they ultimately made early offers due to compression by other firms. We also learned that the Mid-West/Rockies are not jumping on the early recruiting at the pace of the east coast and west coast firms, which was indicated by the numbers around those opting out of OCIs entirely (29%), those participating in fewer OCIs (57%), and those participating OCIs the same as in similar years (14%).

Pressure points were discussed, including how small/mid-size firms have traditionally smaller summer classes and use 1L recruiting as a pipeline. This recruiting strategy and business model is becoming increasingly difficult in this environment. Some of our members reported their 1Ls were offered 2L spots at another company before they walked in the door for their 1L program. This change in the recruiting timeline makes planning for the future particularly difficult for small and mid-sized firms who focus on strategic summer hiring.

In addition, the move away from traditional OCI is putting increased pressure on small/mid-size firms with smaller recruiting departments and limited staff, and are making it more difficult to reach out to a large number of students. Due to the small size of our staff and limited time of our attorneys, it becomes a struggle to get in front of students through the networking/meet the student events. Members reported being limited on time to spend on first semester networking events, then to only find out that students where connections were made were not doing well academically. Members also reported an inability to create a good and reliable process in this environment.

Overall, our members are feeling the crunch this season and it has not been easy for their departments and their staff to manage OCIs, callbacks, offers, and a summer program all at the same time. And given that many of the same staff members handling student recruiting, are also handling lateral recruiting, PD, and other duties, the struggle is real. We are clearly trending away from OCIs and are having in-depth discussion around how to manage early recruiting as the main source of student recruiting.

Pending Meetings/Presentations

FloRecruit Recruiting Presentation - Monday, June 23, 2025, 2:00 pm

We have promoted and will hold a meeting hosted by Christina Wells of FloRecruit, who will speak to the legal market, the recruiting season, and offer data and intel specifically designed for our small and mid-sized firms.

Hotshot Presentation at Quarterly Meeting – September 9, 2025, 2:00 pm

We will be joined by members of Hot Shot, who will speak to training specific to summer associates, entry-level associates, and laterals.

PD Panel – Being Scheduled for Fall 2025

Our PD Co-Chairs, Rob De Toni and Kate Harrison, are in the process of putting together a panel to discuss developing a PD curriculum for your firm, including internal versus external programming, a combination, and tying that into competencies and benchmarks. Rob and Kate will be on the panel, and we are also hoping to add Julie Beavers of Lawyers Mutual (former NALPer).

Recruiting Panel – Being Scheduled for Fall 2025

Sheryl Roberts and Katie Greene are working to put together a panel of lawyers from various firms to discuss what led them to a small to mid-size firm out of law school, or what inspired them to lateral from big law. They will share the pros of small to mid-size firms and offer thoughts on branding and marketing for our firms to assist in recruiting students and laterals. We feel these insights will be incredibly valuable to our members.

2025-2026 Leadership Update

Co-Chairs - Sheryl Roberts and Jennifer Lucas-Ross

- Lawyer Professional Development Working Group Co-Chairs: Rob De Toni and Kate Harrison
- Recruiting Working Group Co-Chairs: Katie Greene (and Sheryl Roberts)
- Diversity, Equity & Inclusion: **[pending]**
- Well-Being Champion: Sherry Lamb

Interest Group Member Articles and Presentations

We have been working to solicit ideas and topics for Bulletin articles and presentations at the PDI and AEC. Currently, we have the following that we are planning to submit:

- Shannon DeGennaro and Melissa Forsey-Schwind are both on the Conference Planning Committee for the 2025 PDI.
- PDI RFP – Ian Nelson (Hotshot Legal) and Jennifer Lucas-Ross submitted an RFP for PDI 2025 on “Generating More: Using AI to Complement Small & Mid-Sized Law Firm Professional Development.”
- Bulletin Articles – We submitted four article topics written by members of our Interest Group to NALP for consideration in the 2025-26 issues of NALP Bulletin. The proposed articles included: 2L Recruiting Takeaways From the Mid-Size Firm Perspective, How to Succeed in Transitioning from Private Practice to a PD/Recruiting Role, DIY PD: How to Build Lawyer PD Curriculum on a Budget, Using takeaways from the 2L recruiting season to assist small/mid-sized firms when planning for recruitment.
- AEC RFP – Hot Topics in 2025 Recruiting for Small to Mid-Size Firms – which would be a recap of this 2L and the next 1L recruiting season, offering information from NALP-wide polls, environmental scans, and data.
- AEC RFP - Panel with two law schools and two law firms discussing the domino impact of early big law recruiting – Sheryl Roberts has been asked to be a law firm member and is in the process of lining up another law firm member from our Interest Group.

We continue to receive interest in our group from law firms, law schools, vendors, and others who are members of or connected to NALP, and there is quite a bit of interest in hearing insights and feedback from small to mid-size law firms with respect to our industry. The law schools in particular are interested and we are collaborating with some on RFPs and potential webinars this year.

We will continue to promote our new Interest Group through information sharing, education, and leadership over the coming year.