

[**BIAS INTERRUPTERS**] *small steps big change*

BIAS INTERRUPTERS FOR MANAGERS & ORGANIZATIONS

Tools for Assignments

One approach to equalizing access to career-enhancing opportunities is to institute a formal assignment system. Some organizations may be ready and eager to make this transition. Others, such as law firms that operate on a “free market assignment system,” may worry about sacrificing an aspect of their culture — which enables associates to choose and pursue work that interests them the most and supervising partners to select the attorneys they want to staff their projects.

If your organization falls into the latter category, attaining buy-in to make this transition may take some work. Here are some steps you can take to build support for this transition both with senior leadership and with the managers and employees who will be making the shift:

- 1) Use metrics to illuminate the disparities in work allocation and get buy-in from senior leaders.** One law firm used data analytics to assess whether the free market system in their organization was creating billable hours disparities among their Level 1 associates and found that there were disparities by gender and race/ ethnicity. This, coupled with the organization’s attrition and progression data, which also showed disparities based on gender and race/ethnicity, provided a persuasive argument to senior leaders for implementing an assignment system that levels the playing field for advancement.
- 2) Assess benefits and barriers to implementing a formal work allocation system.** This organization also assembled a task force to identify pain points in the existing system, as well as to solicit feedback on the benefits and barriers to implementing a more formal system. This information proved useful in communicating the pros of transitioning to a new system (i.e., greater efficiency in assigning projects for partners and clearer expectations for associates). It also illuminated the barriers to successful implementation that needed to be addressed (i.e. resistance to change and convincing partners that there is a work-allocation problem).
- 3) Pilot the new system, use metrics, make adjustments as needed, then rollout.** The organization designed a new work allocation system to achieve parity in billable hours, assignment type opportunity and supervising partner exposure among level one associates within the first two years at their firm. Rather than rolling out the new system all at once to the entire organization, they started small by piloting the new system in a small cohort of practice groups and ironing out the kinks. Going forward, they will use metrics to measure their progress and will proceed in an iterative fashion — tweaking the system until their goal is achieved.