EIW Tip Sheet:
How to Pick Firms
For Your Bidlist

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HOW DO I FIGURE OUT WHICH FIRMS TO BID ON?

The EIW Process Guide explains the logistics of creating a bid list; this tip sheet provides some additional thoughts on how to strategically go through the process.

With more than 500 offices coming to interview during EIW, the process of narrowing the universe of possible employers to firms that are a good fit for you may feel like an overwhelming task. **We recommend you approach this as a funneling process: begin with the broadest possible list of firms, and then pare the list using factors that are important to you.** For example, you might start with 100 firms on your list (e.g., all firms with New York or DC offices) but, using some of the factors outlined below, quickly whittle the list to 30 firms that you think you might be a good fit. From there, you fine tune your research process and find that there five firms that you really like. You’d eventually bid on all 30 of those firms you thought might be a good fit, but those favorite five would be ranked at or near the top of the list.

Remember, there is no “correct” bid list and what is important to each student in selecting firms to bid on may vary widely, even from peers who seem to be set on similar paths. The following list provides factors that students commonly use to begin building and paring their bid list. Keep in mind that this list is not exhaustive—it isn’t intended to be. Supplement it and continue to refine your list with the issues that are most important to you.

1. **WHAT CITY/MARKET DO YOU WANT TO WORK IN?**

For many students, the first step in this process is selecting a city or cities where they would like to work after graduation. We often refer to this as identifying a “target market.” Some markets are an actual city, e.g., Chicago, while other markets are broader than a single city, e.g., the Bay Area. Because the amount of time it takes to properly research and network in target markets is considerable, and because law firm employers generally value commitment to a market, we advise that students select no more than two, and in rare circumstances, three target markets.

Students decide on target markets for any number of personal, financial, and professional considerations. If you would like to learn more about the type of work done in the major markets where MLaw students go after graduation, you can learn more by reviewing [OCP’s Market Series presentations](#). Alumni and rising 3Ls are also great resources for students to learn what is like to actually practice and live in a particular market.

As you make the decision about your target city, know that you will eventually need to explain your interest to others. You should expect to be asked in your networking conversations and interviews to provide a compelling work or personal reason behind selecting a market. Although the intensity with which firms require pre-existing ties to a location varies by market (and firm), many interviewers like to see that you have either a personal tie (family, close friends, undergrad, etc.) or a professional interest in the type of work that is prevalent in the market.
2. WHAT FIRMS IN YOUR TARGET MARKET ARE COMING TO EIW, AND HOW COMPETITIVE ARE YOUR GRADES AT THOSE FIRMS?

After selecting (a) target market(s), you should assess the firms at which you will be a competitive candidate, grades-wise.

To help you determine the academic selectivity of each employer, OCP has complied employers' historical hiring patterns in the GPA Profiles for 2Ls. This data is unique to employers’ hiring patterns at our law school and reflects special consideration employers give to Michigan Law students. This information is not intended to impose limits or barriers on students interested in particular employers, nor does it represent formal requirements used by employers. As you review this information, be mindful of how closely your grades match those of students who received offers in the past. Although you may choose to bid on a few "reach" firms, because your bids are limited, you will want your GPA to be near the median GPA for the majority of your firms.

As you build your list, ask yourself the following questions:

- How selective is the firm regarding academic achievement?
- How closely do your interests and experience match the firm’s business needs?
- How do you stack up in terms of intangibles like interviewing skills and passion for the firm or type of work?
- How large is the firm’s summer program? (Use the NALP Directory of Legal Employers for information).

3. WHICH FIRMS ARE STRONGEST IN YOUR AREA(S) OF INTEREST?

If you aren’t sure yet which practice area you’re interested in, you might be looking to identify firms that allow rotation for junior associates between departments/practice groups or that have programs to allow associates to enter the firm unassigned to practice areas. You can generally find this information on the Careers portion of firm websites or on Chambers Associate. If you already have a practice area interest, you can continue to refine your list of firms based on which firms are strongest in those areas. Students research firms’ practice area strengths using four primary methods:

i. Third-party “rating agency” or research resources such as Chambers and Partners, Chambers Associate, or Lexis.

ii. Firms' websites and printed glossy materials (but remember that these are primarily marketing tools and that just because a practice area is listed does not mean the firm or the office has true expertise in that area)

iii. Comparing the relative size of the practice group to other firms. You can use the NALP Directory to see practice area breakdowns by firm.

iv. Asking alumni and other practitioners.
4. **DO I FIT WITH THE FIRM’S CULTURE?**

You will hear many attorneys and recruiters talk about the firm’s culture and go to lengths attempting to define exactly what that phrase means to them. But, with the same adjectives being used by nearly every firm, students frequently come away frustrated thinking, “these firms all sound the same.” Firms are, in fact, very different from each other—just like law schools. A firm’s culture is an amorphous intertwined set of factors, policies, practices, and attitudes, some of which can be observed objectively and others that can only be perceived by meeting a group of attorneys from that firm.

Objectively, you can look at various statistical measures or policies to define a culture. For example, resources are available that show the number of pro bono hours spent by firm attorneys or that explain the firm’s diversity efforts. Those are certainly core components of a culture. Other indicators, like a firm’s compensation structure, might be more difficult for students to interpret but will give some sense for how the firm values contributions from its attorneys. Even the size of the summer class relative to the overall size of the office could reflect the firm’s approach to associate development (i.e., is junior associate attrition a necessary part of the business model).

**The best way to research and understand a firm’s culture is by speaking to students and attorneys who work there.** It is through these interactions where you will begin to understand what life is like at the firm. What are the unwritten rules of the office? Do attorneys really work collaboratively? How are the support staff treated by attorneys? Are the attorneys friends outside of work? Is this a place that fits my work style?

Many students begin this kind of subjective research by talking to current 2Ls and recent alums. You can leverage the **Student Summer Employer List** to find and contact current students who have worked or are currently working in your market(s).

Setting up informational interviews with alumni is also a helpful way to gain these insights. Most firm websites have the option to search their attorneys on a variety of different factors, including by office, practice area and law school. You can also find and connect with UMLS Alumni on LinkedIn to search for alumni by law firm or by geographic region.

Additionally, there are any number of events during the summer which will provide the opportunity to ask questions of practicing lawyers. The Law School will be hosting several student/alumni events this summer. Use these events to meet people and ask questions about their life as a practicing lawyer. Information about most of the events is also on the **Development and Alumni Relations website**. You can also attend firm or bar association receptions. Be sure you have signed up for the Summer Employment Directory so you will receive information about these receptions, which will be sent directly from the firms.

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR RESEARCHING LAW FIRMS:**

OCP has compiled a list of additional resources that may be helpful when researching firms. Refer to “**Resources for Researching Law Firms**” for links to some of OCP’s favorite resources in identifying and researching law firms. The **NALP Directory of Legal Employers** can also be a great source for information. Finally, don’t forget the **law librarians** – they specialize in research and are available all summer to help.