

William L. Dwyer Inn of Court

Seattle, Washington

Leadership Succession Plan

The William L. Dwyer Inn of Court is fortunate to have a highly engaged membership and an equally dedicated Executive Committee (hereinafter “EC”). For that reason, leadership succession is easily managed at our Inn. Historically, the process for succession, while consistent, has been largely organic, with individuals stepping up each year to run for office and serve on the Executive Committee. Moreover, many of our members, once elected, remain on the Board for several years, thereby developing a deep institutional knowledge of our organization which may then be passed on to new Board members. Our Inn, therefore, tries to maintain a balance of newer and more senior Board members so that we may capitalize on the experience of our more experienced Board members while tapping into the energy and new ideas of our newest Board members. Listed below is our relatively formalized succession plan, bearing in mind that our over-arching goal is to maintain a leadership team consisting of members willing to devote their passion, energy, and time to enhancing the Inn experience for all of our members.

Presidential Succession. The President of the William L. Dwyer Inn of Court serves a one-year term of office, although they end up serving on the Board for a total of three years: first year as President-Elect, second year as Current President, and third year as Past President. To run for President, a candidate must be a Barrister or Master of the Bench having been a member for five years or more. Our Inn alternates each year between having a judge, and having an attorney, serve as President. The judicial candidates for President may come from any jurisdiction or level of court – we’ve had Federal Judges serve as President as well as Municipal Court Magistrates. Presidential succession is facilitated by our Executive Committee, which consists of between 10 and 12 members of the Inn, including past presidents. Throughout the year, the Executive Committee will identify those members who either express interest in serving or those who have demonstrated leadership abilities. An EC member may then reach out to that individual and invite him or her to serve on our Executive Committee. This way, the potential presidential candidate has the opportunity to participate in the management of the Inn before assuming the presidency. While serving on the Board prior to running for president is preferable, it is not a strict requirement, as we do not want to arbitrarily limit our pool of qualified candidates. In our collective experience, long-time members who have demonstrated consistent and meaningful involvement with the Inn and its members can also adequately prepare one to assume office as president.

While other chapters may find it challenging to secure the commitment of a judicial officer to serve as president, our Inn is extremely fortunate in this regard. Our judicial members routinely bring their fellow judges as guests to the Inn as a way to bring new judges into the fold, thereby assuring we have a healthy number of judicial officers from which to solicit presidential

candidates. As for our attorney presidents, here again, the EC identifies potential leaders and, to date, have had no problem with finding dedicated, capable attorneys to lead the Inn.

Executive Committee Succession. The Executive Committee has flexibility on the number of its members. After serving for a number of years, Executive Committee members volunteer to step down to make way for other members or to pursue other activities. Once a sitting member indicates a desire to step down, the Executive Committee considers candidates and the president approaches the chosen candidate to consider membership on the Executive Committee. Since the Executive Committee meets several times over the course of the year, each candidate is asked to make a commitment to attend the meetings and assist in the management of the Inn. There has never been a shortage of regular Inn members who are willing to sit on the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee consists of a mix of judges, lawyers, and law professors. Moreover, each of our local law schools has its own representative, typically a law professor.

Team Leader Succession. The William L. Dwyer operates with seven teams of approximately 10 members who conduct the programs from October through April. Each pupilage is assigned two team leaders – one is a judicial officer and the other a master of the bench. Each summer, the Membership Chair proposes a slate of Team Leaders for the following year, to be approved by the Executive Committee. Often a new Judicial Master will be paired with an experienced team leader, or vice-versa, to gain perspective on the team process of producing an outstanding program. Then, in August, prior to the start of the Inn year, our EC holds a retreat and invites all team leaders to attend. At this meeting, the EC outlines the expectations and responsibilities of the team leaders, emphasizing that strong leadership is the key to a successful programs. We also use this time to brainstorm topics for the upcoming year. Then, throughout the year, the Team Leaders are managed by the Program Chair who checks in with the leaders to ensure that their pupilage is on track. Our EC instituted the Team Leader approach two years ago and, as a result, the quality of our programs has increased dramatically.