

Summary of Law Firm Recruiting Process

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I regularly receive questions from my candidates regarding the various stages of the "recruiting process," meaning the various steps of applying to and interviewing with (and hopefully receiving offers from) major law firms. This article seeks to summarize the primary stages in this process, and to hopefully answer many of the "process" questions that arise with candidates. This summary is based on a typical recruiting process from initial meeting to offer for a patent agent candidate aided by one of our recruiters. Of course, much (although not all) of this summary would apply to associate candidates as well. There is also some overlap with the typical process that partner candidates go through, but to a significantly lesser extent. Partner recruiting presents a number of unique characteristics that are not covered here. Lastly, it should be emphasized that only the most major steps are broadly described, and many details are necessarily left out (or covered elsewhere). You should confer with your recruiter for additional information. Also, although the processes for major firms do often share some basic characteristics, each firm's process is unique. This means that your experience as a candidate at a particular firm may differ substantially from what is generally described here. For purposes of our summary, there are 10 primary steps, each summarized below.

The first step is the introduction and evaluation stage. [When I first introduce myself to a candidate, I also go through an initial evaluation to determine which openings, if any, are viable opportunities for the candidate.](#) As I have written elsewhere, to be a strong patent agent candidate with the broadest array of opportunities, you must have: (1) an advanced degree (preferably a PhD) in a technical area that is in demand in the patent agent market, such as electrical engineering or chemistry; (2) registration with the patent bar; and (3) at least 2-3 years of patent prosecution experience. Candidates that are lacking in either requirement (2) or (3) will be limited to a handful of opportunities that do not expressly seek the missing requirement. Candidates that lack both of these requirements are essentially impossible to place in any major firm, so I must regretfully explain that I cannot help them on their [job search](#). After the initial evaluation, I obtain more information from the candidate so that I can prepare a list of firm opportunities that fits both their credentials and their interests. I call this the "Firm List."

See also [A Comprehensive Guide to Working with a Legal Recruiter](#) for more information.

[The second major part of the process is the candidate's selection of which firms to apply to from the Firm List.](#) Once this is done, I collect the documents I will need from the candidate to prepare each application (resume, cover letter, undergraduate and graduate transcripts and [writing sample](#), preferably a patent they drafted).

For the third step, I then prepare the application and accompanying materials for each selected firm using the information I have obtained from the candidate, as well as the information I have accumulated in my years of practice as a legal recruiter regarding the market and particular firms and opportunities.

The fourth step, also known as the "wait," is one of the most difficult. This is because this step is entirely out of the hands of the candidate and the recruiter. It is each law firm that will decide how and when it will respond. When I first send out applications, I inform each candidate that while some firms respond quickly (as in a few days), most firms will take weeks and even months before they respond. Moreover, sometimes (and not infrequently) firms will never respond to an application. This helps to make their expectations more realistic. Recruiters can try to hurry the process along with follow-up calls and emails to the firms, but I have found in my practice that, absent special circumstances, this is not usually very effective.

[If you do receive a positive response from a law firm, you will proceed to the fifth step, or the initial interview.](#)

This has been thoroughly covered in other articles by me and other recruiters.

If your initial interview goes well, you may get a special sixth step that appears to be primarily limited to patent agents and possibly IP associates. I call it the "test" step, as it seeks to test the candidate in some way. Not all firms use this step, but the ones that do take it seriously. Examples of some of the "tests" I have seen for my candidates include travelling to the firm's headquarters to take a written 2-hour test on the candidate's area of technical specialty, which is then graded on the spot and is used to determine whether the candidate will advance to interviewing certain senior partners later that day. Another example is a "take home test" where the candidate is asked to explain their doctoral thesis in physics, biochemistry or whatever their specialty in terms that can be understood by a normal person. In yet another example, the test will give the candidate the choice of either pretending it is early medieval times and preparing a patent application for the long bow, or pretending it is the distant future and preparing a patent application for a special cold-resistant buggy to ride around on Pluto. In other instance, the candidate was asked to evaluate complex patents and explain them during an interview.

The seventh step, should you get that far, are all of the follow-up interviews. Again, these are better covered elsewhere.

Step eight is usually a questionnaire that seeks information about a candidate's background. It is often used as the basis for a "background check," and it will typically involve questions about criminal convictions, credit and bankruptcy, past residences and aliases, prior lawsuits, and so forth. Its purpose is to essentially identify "red flags" regarding a candidate's past and character.

Step nine is the one you most want to reach, of course - the offer stage (assuming you get enough votes and you pass the background check).

Lastly, there is the offer negotiation and final decision stage, which has also been covered elsewhere.

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