

ILFS Guidance on References

References are the most important fact that directories take into account when ranking firms and individuals.

1. *This document is one of a series of ILFS Guidance Notes on how to maximise directory rankings. It is principally for ILFS clients and makes reference to **ILFS Work Highlights and References Review spreadsheet**. However, it is also of wider interest to all firms that participate in the directory submissions process.*
2. *Where possible, the comments are of general application, although there are variations between directories.*

The following related guidance documents are also available:

- ***ILFS Guidance on Work Highlights***
- ***ILFS Directory Support Guidance: Sample Work Highlights***
- ***ILFS Guidance on Directory Submissions***

This document provides guidance on how to maximise references, to support your submissions for new/improved rankings.

Please ensure that you complete all columns in the ILFS Work Highlights and References Review spreadsheet, which we will send to you with any draft submissions. We will then submit the References you provide to each directory in their specified format.

Why are references important?

References are the most important part of your submission. The feedback we receive from all directories if a firm or individual does not receive the ranking it wants, is that insufficient positive feedback was received from references. It is therefore extremely important to have sufficient references to provide the feedback required. There are some important principles to bear in mind when selecting references. Your references should be :

- Sufficient in number
- Likely to respond
- Likely to provide positive feedback
- Identify individuals for ranking (where appropriate)

Key Factors

1. **[Number of References](#)**

2. [Selecting References](#)
3. [Managing References to maximise Response Rates and obtain Positive Feedback](#)
4. [Notifying references about approaches from directories](#)
5. [Providing the information required](#)

1. Number of References

Please provide us with as many references as you can. Some directories place a limit on the number of references they will contact (Chambers has a maximum of 20), in which case we will ask you to indicate the best ones to put forward to the directory and the details of any others will be kept on our records for possible use in future submissions. (See table [below](#)).

The directories tell us that only about 20% of references respond to their requests for feedback so please ensure that you include at least as many references as the directory allows.

If you cannot put forward at least 4 references in a particular practice area, you should consider carefully whether it is worth making a submission in that area. If in doubt, please discuss with us.

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| Chambers and Partners | <p>Maximum 20 references per practice area</p> <p>Specific Guidance re References for Chambers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Please note that Chambers will not contact the same referee twice in a 6 month period. This means that when providing us with a referee for a particular practice area, it is worth considering whether he/she can give feedback on any other practice areas which Chambers may research at a later stage in their schedule. If a reference can be used in more than one practice area, please indicate this in the <i>Also Referee for (Additional Practice Areas)</i> column in the Work Highlights and References Review spreadsheet. That referee will then be asked about all areas when contacted and any feedback they give will be kept on file for use in future research. If possible, please select different individuals from within the same company for different practice areas as the 6 month contact rule relates to the individual referee and not the firm, for example, you may wish to select Mr AB from MegaCorp for Banking & Finance and then Mrs CD from MegaCorp for Employment. • Individual Rankings – If you are putting individuals forward for ranking, ensure that they have worked with at least 3 of the references provided and complete the Referring Lawyer column in the Work Highlights and References Review spreadsheet. (Note – a reference can have more than one Referring Lawyer) • Sub Categories – If there are sub-categories in the Practice Area, we will check with the researcher whether the full quota of 20 references may be used for each sub category and advise you accordingly. |
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| Legal 500 | Unlimited |
| IFLR 1000 | Unlimited |
| Other directories | These vary and we will provide specific recommendations relating to the number of references to be provided to other directories to which you may submit, when we prepare the draft documentation for your approval. |

2. Selecting References

For the researcher, gaining positive feedback from a reasonable number of your referees is the single most important factor in determining whether you will retain a ranking or gain a new one. ([See below](#))

So please put forward references that:-

- a. Are **likely to respond** – this may sound obvious but many firms do not respond to researcher requests for feedback. Consider who, in the company, is more likely to respond. Consider the following:

Who to use:

- **same client, different contacts** - You can include anyone with whom you have actually worked. This includes any individual contact at a client. **You can have more than one referee from the same client.**
 - **all levels** - Do not automatically just include the CEO/Chairman/Senior board members. They are busy people and may not be as inclined to respond as other client contacts. Include contacts with whom you have had personal contact and who can comment on your individual performance and contribution to a case, rather than someone with whom you have had limited day to day contact
 - **big and small** - Don't focus on well known clients - the directories don't mention clients by name so it is just as valuable to use a smaller client if the individual referee is more engaged .
- b. Will **speak positively** about your firm/individual lawyers – again this may sound obvious, but a surprising the number of references give negative feedback
 - c. Have **worked with the firm recently** (ideally in the past 12 months) in the area being researched.
 - d. **Are clients and non-clients** A non-exhaustive list of non-clients that you might consider are: representatives of international or other foreign law firms, other professionals who refer work to you, or work with you on matters, judges, other public officials. Indeed anyone who has worked with you on issues related to the relevant practice area in the past 18 months.

The following are nice to have, but not essential:

- a. **Well-known companies:** international companies and global brands are easily recognisable and it will not do you any harm to have some amongst your references. However, there is no merit in putting one forward unless they are likely to respond.
- b. It is also an advantage if references have a **good standard of English**, but often not essential as many researchers speak the languages of the countries they research.

3. Managing References to maximise Response Rates

Response rates

Please put forward references that are likely to respond –this may sound obvious, but it is most important of all. The directories tell us that only about 20% of references do respond.

Use of References for several directories in the same year

An issue for some firms is that the same references are used and contacted by the directories several times a year. This can result in either the referees not responding or, at worst, putting a strain on the firm's relationship with them.

Suggestions to limit this are:

- a) to discuss with referees whether they are willing to act on a multiple basis
- b) to have as wide a reference base as possible and not to use references repeatedly
- c) to monitor how often you use references

Advising References when to expect contact from directories

We ask the researchers to advise us when they will contact the references and, providing they do so, we will let you know so that you can inform the references. However, they do not always tell us. [See below](#)

4. Notifying references about approaches from directories

The main reasons that references do not respond to directories are that:

- a. **they do not recognise the directory or researcher names** when they are contacted and/or they think it is an unsolicited approach and/or
- b. the researcher's e-mail goes in to the referee's junk mail.

To maximise their rankings, we suggest that firms

- a. **ask referees whether they are willing to act before putting them forward** and
- b. **encourage them to respond** when contacted by the directories. We appreciate that this can be a sensitive issue and not everyone will chose to do so.

If you do contact the references, quite how you do so will depend on your relationship with them and, if you have time, **a call would probably be best.**

However, if you wish to **e-mail when the researcher is about to contact them**, a sample e-mail is set out [below](#), which you can adapt if you wish for the purpose. Note: we ask the researchers to tell us when they are going to contact the references and providing they do, we will tell you.

CAUTION: DO NOT PREPARE WRITTEN RESPONSES FOR CLIENTS OR SUGGEST RESPONSES TO THEM. The Directories take a very negative view of this as it undermines their independence and it can have a very negative impact on your rankings.

E-mail to referee advising them to expect contact from a researcher

NOTE – When we write to inform you that a directory is about to contact your referees, we will provide you with a version of the email below with the name of the relevant directory, the researcher and their email address already inserted.

Dear [],

Thank you for kindly agreeing to be named as a referee for the UK-based legal directory (NAME OF DIRECTORY). You should shortly (on or around DATE) receive an e-mail from researcher (NAME AND EMAIL ADDRESS OF RESEARCHER) If you do not receive such contact within that week please can you let me know. You may wish to check your Junk mail box as spam filters sometimes catch bulk emails from the directories.

The coverage we get in the legal directories is very important to us so we really appreciate your time in this matter. It would be most helpful if you could assist (NAME OF RESEARCHER) and give them your feedback about our firm and its lawyers.

[CHAMBERS ONLY] If you work with other lawyers in other departments across the firm we would also be grateful if you could provide any additional feedback to the researcher.

If you have already replied to the researcher, many thanks. If you have not done so, we would be very grateful if you would. If you do not wish to be used as a reference in the future, please let us know and we will ensure that your name is not put forward again.

5. Providing the information required

Key Points: Please try to **complete ALL of the columns** in the **ILFS Work Highlights and References Spreadsheet** as these relate to the information specifically requested by the directories. Those of particular importance that are often ignored are:

- **Client/ Organisation**
- **Practice Area**
- **Referee Title/ Forename/ Surname**
- **Position**

- Referee E-mail Address – **Very Important. If this is wrong the referee is unlikely to be contacted**
- Referee Phone Number
- Referring Lawyers – **Very Important – i.e. which lawyers has the referee worked with – note you can include more than 1 – see [above](#)**
- Also Referee for (Additional Practice Areas) - – **Very Important – this enables you to maximise the use of your referees, so please complete this if your referees are able to give feedback on your work in any other practice areas. (See [above](#))**

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