

## How Law Firms Measure Progress On Diversity And Inclusion

By **Aebra Coe**

*Law360 (July 22, 2022, 10:39 AM EDT)* -- Large law firms have publicly stated their commitment to diversity and inclusion and have implemented a number of programs and initiatives aimed at improving in the area, and yet how do those firms ensure the action they take leads to measurable progress?

Industrywide diversity metrics have shown slow progress over the past decade, and in some cases a lack of headway toward creating a legal profession that reflects the wider population.

In recent years attention has often turned from hiring practices, which are important to ensuring lawyers from underrepresented groups have a chance to get a foot in the door, to also include a strong emphasis on inclusion. Inclusion means ensuring those lawyers feel there is a place for them at the table, that they are a vital part of the fabric of the law firm, and that there are opportunities for advancement for them there.

While measuring diversity through demographic surveys has been relatively straightforward, measuring inclusion can be a little more abstract.

Here are thoughts from diversity and inclusion leaders at five large law firms on how they view and measure diversity and inclusion.



**KIA N. SCIPIO**

**Ropes & Gray LLP Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion**

Data is powerful in keeping us honest. Diversity is one area where data is particularly helpful. Over the past two years, we looked at diversity data and said, "We need to do better." "How do we move the needle?" We wanted to see greater diversity in our associate ranks. We wanted to see greater diversity in leadership positions. We got to work.

Through our DE&I strategic plan, we created systems to track actions at the practice group and partnership level to develop a better understanding for how effectively diverse lawyers are being brought into client matters. Because we now know which lawyers are handling what types of tasks, we can say "All right, this lawyer is getting assignments that are key to their growth," or "We think we could engage this particular lawyer in a different way to bring them into new or different opportunities."

We also revised our review and feedback loops by increasing the frequency of reviews along with retooling the administrative process. We time reviews more frequently, and we retooled the process. The new review process is designed to provide very specific developmental feedback — more so than before. There is also mandatory feedback training program for all partners as well as associates and administrators in supervisory roles.



**VIRGINIA ESSANDOH**

Ballard Spahr LLP Chief Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Officer

For demographic related goals, we benchmark ourselves against national surveys. More importantly, we set our own aspirational goals that exceed the national benchmarks.

We track our increase in diversity in real time on our Ballard360 dashboard. Increases and declines are accessible on our internal site and shared with firm leadership. Leaders are accountable to the management board and must "show their work" in advancing diversity, equity and inclusion.

Diversity, equity and inclusion are core values of the firm, and it is reflected in the performance evaluation for lawyers and staff and is considered in the partner compensation process. The chief diversity, equity and inclusion officer serves on the firm's management committee, and the diversity, equity and inclusion department shares monthly demographics related to diverse lawyers and staff to firm leadership.

Ultimately, success is realized when everyone knows they have a role in demonstrating inclusion in the firm. From the top of leadership and those in the middle, to the person who is new to the firm.



**SATRA SAMPSON-AROKIUM**

Dechert LLP Chief Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Officer

We track success both quantitatively and qualitatively. A diversity dashboard allows us to measure everything from the makeup of client teams to the distribution of hours and work. And through surveys and otherwise, we regularly seek feedback about what is working and what can be improved.

Our dashboards provide firm leadership with important real-time metrics, increase transparency and goal setting, and facilitate follow through. And through qualitative measurement, we've had diverse attorneys tell us that DEI initiatives strengthened their desire to work for Dechert.

Inclusion is creating and embracing a culture that respects and values everyone's voice and empowers people from different backgrounds, experiences and points of view to be fully themselves. Inclusion is not only inviting someone to the dance but, once they get there, asking them to dance and letting them dance to their full potential. It means providing opportunities for growth, mentorship and advancement. Inclusion is one of the secret ingredients of retention.



**MALAIKA LINDO**

**Morgan Lewis & Bockius LLP Senior Director of Diversity and Inclusion**

Recruiting diverse talent is just one piece of the puzzle. We also work on creating safe and inclusive workplaces where everyone has an opportunity to fully engage in the practice of law in an environment that respects, values and supports their development and contributions throughout their careers.

In recent years, Morgan Lewis has focused on connecting our diverse associates with both our law firm leaders and in-house counsel, to deepen and widen their networks as they navigate their careers. We also added specific programming to our annual associate academy tailored to BIPOC and LGBTQ+ lawyers. The firm routinely monitors recruitment, retention and advancement statistics ... and tracks participation in firmwide programs.

As much as we encourage people to share what makes them unique, we also recognize the importance of having a network of people who share similar backgrounds and cultures. Our lawyers find comfort and community in one or more of our nine lawyer networks. ... Our networks provide essential support and guidance to their membership. In addition, through thoughtful programming, each network contributes to the cultural fabric of the firm, raising our collective cultural competency, which is a tool to help disrupt unconscious biases. These often very personal and inspiring panel discussions and fireside chats are great supplements to the mandatory implicit bias training all lawyers and managers take.



**COURTNEY CARTER**

Jenner & Block LLP Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Every partner in the firm participates in a diversity and inclusion action plan program, DAP, which launched in 2018 and asks all partners to contribute to diversity and inclusion by selecting, committing to and completing specific measurable business development, matter staffing and recruiting actions throughout the year.

Completion of the DAP is included as a part of the partner compensation process for the following year. Reports detail how each partner personally furthered the firm's diversity and inclusion goals. The firm's management committee also considers all aspects of a partner's contribution to the firm.

We solicit feedback from our attorneys, both partners and associates, regarding the success of our programs. We also track a variety of metrics pertaining to hiring, promotion and retention of our diverse lawyers so we can keep tabs on the overall success of these programs and identify growth opportunities for the firm.

Measuring success on DEI can be challenging, but we know that it is key in holding ourselves accountable and in building a future state where we become a more diverse and inclusive firm.

--Editing by Brian Baresch.