

The Best Firms For Women And Minority Attorneys

By **Jacqueline Bell and Cristina Violante**

Law360, New York (August 28, 2017, 10:33 AM EDT) -- Even among firms that are leaders on diversity, only a few are consistently above-average on hiring and promoting women and minorities throughout their ranks, according to a pair of Law360 surveys.

A firm might, for example, have a relatively high percentage of minority associates but few minority equity partners. Or it might be a pacesetter on gender diversity while being behind the curve when it comes to representation of minorities.

But a few firms are defying these norms, maintaining above-average diversity at all levels when looking at race and ethnicity as well as gender, Law360's latest Glass Ceiling Report and Diversity Snapshot found.

At firms of 600 or more attorneys, a group that often posts the highest averages on diversity when compared with its smaller counterparts, only two — Littler Mendelson PC and WilmerHale — fit the bill.

This year's Glass Ceiling Report showed only incremental growth in the representation of female attorneys at every level of a firm. The increase — less than 1 percentage point — echoes Law360's findings in two previous annual reports.

Despite the fact that women now make up half of law school students, according to the American Bar Association, the Glass Ceiling Report found that just under 35 percent of attorneys and 23 percent of partners in private practice are women.

Similarly, the 2017 Diversity Snapshot shows that at every level of a typical law firm, minority attorney representation grew by less than a percentage point compared with last year's survey.

ABA statistics indicate that minorities have made up more than 20 percent of law students for almost two decades — and that they recently surpassed 30 percent. But only 15 percent of attorneys and less than 9 percent of partners at surveyed law firms identify as a minority.

After surveying over 300 U.S. firms, Law360 dug into the numbers and spoke with everyone from firm leaders and in-house counsel to diversity experts and academics on the issue, culminating in July's Glass Ceiling Report and August's Diversity Snapshot.

We also identified some firms that have made significant efforts to boost their female and minority headcount over the past year.

The willingness of firms and legal industry experts to talk through these issues shows that there is no dearth of discussion around diversity and inclusion in private practice. Putting it into practice has proved a tougher task.

“The legal profession, among all the industry sectors I’m in, seems to be very, very critical of itself. There’s a great deal of self-scrutiny,” said Mauricio Velasquez, president and CEO of Diversity Training Group. “You don’t see that in any other industry.”

Despite such reflection, the ranks of lawyers are far less diverse than those of other highly skilled U.S. professionals, according to 2016 data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The bureau reports the proportion of employed lawyers who are female as just over 35 percent and the minority representation just shy of 15 percent.

By comparison, women made up 38 percent of employed physicians in 2016 and minorities made up nearly 33 percent, according to the bureau. Accountants were made up of 61 percent women and 28 percent minorities.

Although their struggles persist, a few firms in Law360’s annual headcount survey are making strides toward a more diverse profession.

Law360 collected survey data from more than 300 U.S. law firms. The 18 firms identified here reported above-average representation of both women and minorities at every tier, from associates to equity partners.

At WilmerHale, one of the two firms on the list with at least 600 attorneys, diverse attorneys have long been at the helm — first with former co-managing partner William Lee, an Asian-American, and now with Susan Murley, a female co-managing partner, said Catherine Carroll, partner-in-charge of the Washington office.

“It’s great because it really sets the standard up at the top, and demonstrates at the highest levels what we’re hoping to achieve throughout the firm,” Carroll said.

Women make up 25 percent of the management committee and 40 percent of the compensation committee, Carroll said, “which obviously is an important inflection point for setting firm priorities and standards.”

At Littler, diversity and inclusion is always on the agenda at management committee meetings and is part of the firm’s long-term vision for growth and strategic planning, said Tom Bender, co-president and co-managing director.

The firm has several initiatives to drive diversity, including affinity groups, a women’s leadership initiative and a career advocacy program, which matches diverse attorneys with influential shareholders and firm leaders to make sure they’re getting sufficient guidance and career support.

Outside general counsel also have signed on to support the program, which in 2016 produced 40 percent of the firm’s newly promoted shareholders.

“When you focus on it, it happens,” Bender said. “It’s doing a lot of things on an everyday basis.”

Here are the 18 firms that are outpacing their peers in maintaining a diverse attorney workforce:

Pulling Ahead On Diversity

These firms have above-average representation of both women and minorities at every level.

Firms with 600+ Lawyers

- Littler*
- WilmerHale
- Average of firms 600+

Female Attorneys	Female Nonpartners	Female Partners	Female Equity Partners
49.1%	62.1%	33.6%	28.5%

Minority Attorneys	Minority Nonpartners	Minority Partners	Minority Equity Partners
19.1%	26.3%	10.6%	8.7%

Firms with 300-599 Lawyers

- Crowell & Moring
- Fragomen, Del Rey
- Schiff Hardin*
- Average of firms 300-599

Female Attorneys	Female Nonpartners	Female Partners	Female Equity Partners
40.8%	51.4%	22.9%	20.0%

Minority Attorneys	Minority Nonpartners	Minority Partners	Minority Equity Partners
18.8%	24.3%	9.4%	7.4%

Firms with 150-299 Lawyers

- Best Best
- Bowman and Brooke
- Epstein Becker Green
- FordHarrison
- Miller Nash
- Average of firms 150-299

Female Attorneys	Female Nonpartners	Female Partners	Female Equity Partners
40.9%	49.4%	33.3%	29.1%

Minority Attorneys	Minority Nonpartners	Minority Partners	Minority Equity Partners
20.4%	23.0%	18.2%	20.0%

Firms with 20-149 Lawyers

- Berry Appleman
- Burke Williams
- Caldwell Leslie
- Liebert Cassidy
- Outten & Golden
- Riddell Williams
- Roig Lawyers
- Stander Reubens
- Average of firms 20-149

Female Attorneys	Female Nonpartners	Female Partners	Female Equity Partners
61.4%	61.1%	62.5%	42.9%

Minority Attorneys	Minority Nonpartners	Minority Partners	Minority Equity Partners
47.7%	50.0%	37.5%	28.6%

*Some attorneys declined to self-identify

--Editing by Jocelyn Allison and Jeremy Barker.

Methodology: Law360 surveyed more than 300 U.S. firms, or vereins with a U.S. component, about their overall and minority headcount numbers as of Dec. 31, 2016. Only U.S.-based attorneys were included in the survey, and firms had to have at least 20 U.S.-based attorneys to participate.

At firms marked with an asterisk, some attorneys declined to self-identify a race.

For the list, firms were first grouped according to size: 20-149 attorneys, 150-299 attorneys, 300-599 attorneys and 600-plus attorneys. Then, firms that fell below the average in their group in any of the following categories were deemed ineligible for the list: (1) percentage of female attorneys; (2) percentage of female nonpartners; (3) percentage of female partners, both equity and nonequity; (4) percentage of female equity partners; (5) percentage of minority attorneys; (6) percentage of minority nonpartners; (7) percentage of minority partners, both equity and nonequity; and (8) percentage of minority equity partners.