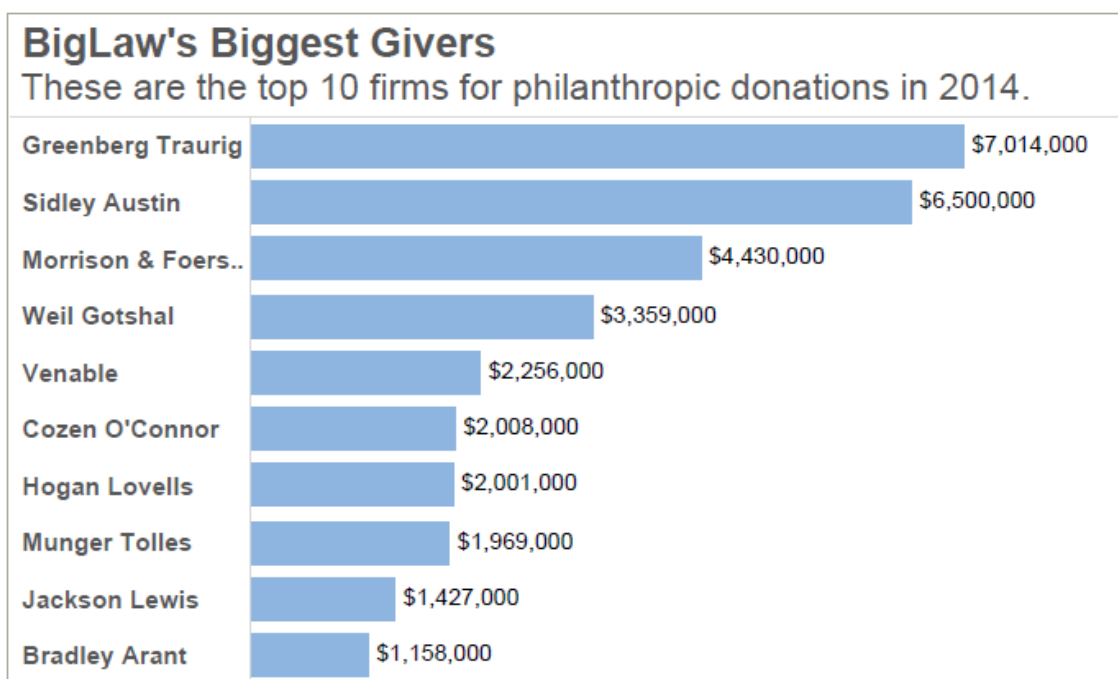


The 10 Most Charitable Law Firms

By **Melissa Maleske**

Law360, New York (September 29, 2015, 8:36 PM ET) -- The 10 law firms that made the largest charitable donations in 2014 according to a Law360 survey gave back to their communities by funneling millions of dollars into worthy organizations and programs to fund legal aid efforts, education programs and services for the disadvantaged.

For many of the firms that responded to Law360's philanthropy survey, charitable giving is as much a part of their culture as pro bono efforts are. While their committee structures and areas of focus may vary, the firms all approach philanthropy as an informal mandate, and donations are a key part of that.



"The strategy is one of maximum giving and giving back to the communities in which we work and live," says Barry Wolf, executive partner at Weil Gotshal & Manges LLP, one of Law360's top-donating firms.

At Weil, financial gifts are one of its three philanthropic legs, along with pro bono service and nonlegal services, such as serving on nonprofit boards and other individual involvement with charitable

organizations. Giving back, Wolf says, has always been part of the firm's culture.

"Fortunately, the firm is successful, and therefore the partners are successful, and we feel it's our obligation to give back," he says.

Topping the list at more than \$7 million in donations last year is Greenberg Traurig LLP.

"[For] many years, Greenberg Traurig lawyers from across the firm regularly help the most needy on matters as wide-reaching as human rights and economic development, and as personal as domestic violence, children's issues and immigration," says CEO Richard Rosenbaum. "Our mission is not only about helping clients navigate change; we also need to help our neighborhoods and families stay strong in changing times."

One special point of pride for the firm is its ongoing support for Equal Justice Works fellowships through the Greenberg Traurig Holly Skolnick Fellowship Foundation, which funds recent law school graduates who want to pursue a public interest career. Since 1999, the foundation has become the largest sponsor of Equal Justice Works fellowships, investing more than \$8 million to support 127 Equal Justice Works fellows who have provided more than 432,000 attorney hours to disadvantaged populations. Eighty-nine percent of those fellows remain in public interest jobs today.

Another firm with a clear focus is Morrison & Foerster LLP. Since 1986, the Morrison & Foerster Foundation has given away about \$45 million, and about three-quarters of its grants now go to nonprofit organizations that help disadvantaged children and youth.

"It's an area where we can do an enormous amount of good," says Jamie Levitt, president of the Morrison & Foerster Foundation. "We can reach out to disadvantaged youth and children, and with our charitable giving we can address all sorts of issues: education, health care, housing, justice. Part of the thinking was that this is a part of the population we can really help, and this way it's not just limited to one area — children and youth have needs across the spectrum of giving."

Annual spending is determined as a percentage of annual partner profits, and the foundation gives shape and strategy to the firm's philanthropic goals. Along with regular grants, MoFo's foundation gives special project grants that range from \$100,000 to \$300,000 to launch new organizations or new programs aimed at serving disadvantaged youth.

Its first special project grant went to iMentor, which used the funds to launch college-readiness initiatives at three New York high schools; others have gone to the Richstone Family Center to launch a mobile counseling and parenting support unit that serves southwest Los Angeles and to the Children's Law Center in Washington to launch the Starting Life with a Solid Foundation Program to provide early childhood and early special education services.

At Hogan Lovells, the firm votes regularly to select charities of focus for Touch, its matched giving program, both for the global firm and its local and regional offices. Currently the firm is in a two-year partnership with Lendwithcare, a microfinance initiative. Hogan Lovells' support will provide loans for approximately 400 entrepreneurs and create additional employment for up to 200 people, with loan payments being reinvested into the Lendwithcare program.

The firm's local offices tend to choose charities that serve the communities in which they operate. The Hong Kong office, for example, supports Save the Children HK efforts within China and Hong Kong. The

Washington office comes together every year through events like video game tournaments to raise funds for various causes and its Backpacks for Kids drive, which sees Hogan Lovells staff members and attorneys raising funds, gathering donated school supplies, personally packing up the supplies and delivering them to area schools.

Like many firms, Hogan Lovells is all ears when employees pitch new causes and charities for the firm to support.

“It’s gratifying to see both the number of ideas that people bring in — things from their communities they’re involved in and activities they want to share with their colleagues and friends at the firm — and also, to hear from people when they come back from doing this,” says Beth Halpern, a Hogan Lovells partner in Washington.

Sidley Austin LLP donated \$6.5 million in charitable gifts last year, an amount that has increased each year and often is accompanied by partner matching contributions, says Larry Barden, chair of the firm’s management committee. The firm budgets annually for charitable giving and rotates among organizations.

“We tend to allocate resources to Section 501(c)(3) organizations which are sufficiently related to the firm’s philanthropic interests and those of the clients and communities we serve — major civic, charitable or legal aid organizations in the cities in which we operate — as compared to ... organizations where the ties are primarily personal to an individual lawyer or staff member,” Barden says. “We look to the individual partners to address such personal requests.”

Cozen O’Connor makes about \$2 million in charitable donations every year to organizations that are suggested to the firm by lawyers or clients. Part of the firm’s criteria for choosing recipients is that either its attorneys or clients must be involved in the organization as a board member, trustee or event chair.

Many of the nonprofits the firm supports provide services to the communities in which Cozen O’Connor’s offices are based, covering a diverse set of educational, medical, legal, civic and arts initiatives. Last year the firm made about 600 individual donations.

“One of our core values is to give back to the communities in which we function, and the founders of the firm, Steve Cozen and Patrick O’Connor, are extremely generous people and set the tone for our generosity and philanthropic activities, almost from day one,” says Harmon Spolan, who has been chair of the Cozen O’Connor Foundation since 2007.

While all the firms Law360 interviewed for this story emphasized that their biggest incentive for charitable donations is the drive to help the less privileged and give back to their communities, there is no doubt that when a client asks its firm to, say, sponsor a table at a charity dinner, the firms are unlikely to turn them down.

Spolan is straightforward about the client-centric nature of some of the firm’s charitable donations.

“As you might expect, it’s also part of a marketing effort on our part. We want our clients to be happy with us, and in addition to being very good lawyers, we also want to express our appreciation for their business by supporting their own charitable activities,” Spolan says. “It works both ways.”

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