

## The Best Firms For Minority Equity Partners

By Erin Coe

*Law360 (June 18, 2018, 10:02 PM EDT)* -- The legal industry is making sluggish gains when it comes to attracting and retaining attorneys of color, but a select few law firms are taking broader strides to diversify at the top, Law360's 2018 Diversity Snapshot found.

Our annual survey of more than 300 firms revealed that the representation of minority attorneys hasn't changed much over the years, with the proportion of minority equity partners growing from 7.1 percent in 2014 to 8.2 percent last year.

At law schools, the proportion of minorities has long been much higher. American Bar Association data shows that minorities made up 26.2 percent of law students in 2011, and that percentage has grown steadily over the years, reaching 31.3 percent in 2017.

While plenty of firms would like to have greater diversity within their ranks, not as many are willing to put in the effort to adequately support, cultivate and retain minority attorneys once they come on board, according to diversity experts.

"There is a lot of tinkering around, not true transformation," said Vernā Myers of The Vernā Myers Co., which provides keynote addresses and online training courses on diversity and inclusion. "There are regrettable losses among people of color often because they don't see a future in their firms, and that's often because they haven't found the kind of investment from senior lawyers that they know they need in order to succeed."

It doesn't help that it's become tougher for all attorneys to make equity partner, and now most firms have two-tiered partnerships.

"The competition and requirements for equity partnership have only gotten more difficult," Myers said. "When things get harder in general, that can have a negative impact on a group that is already underrepresented, and often the impact is disproportionate."

When the leadership of a firm is truly committed to diversity, that radiates throughout the firm.

**ERNEST  
LAMONT GREER**  
Greenberg Traurig



## The Best Law Firms For Minority Partners

Firm Size	Rank	Firm	% Minority Equity Partners
600+ attorneys	1	Wilson Sonsini	21.58%
	2	Morrison & Foerster	15.61%
	3	Lewis Brisbois	14.91%
	4	Paul Weiss	14.39%
	5	Greenberg Traurig	13.27%
	6	Cooley	13.26%
	7	Covington & Burling	13.22%
	8	DLA Piper*	13.16%
	9	Sheppard Mullin	11.54%
	10	WilmerHale*	11.48%
300-599	1	Fragomen*	22.22%
	2	Carlton Fields	18.41%
	3	Fenwick & West*	11.71%
	4	Andrews Kurth*	10.94%
	5	Shearman & Sterling*	10.84%
	6	Ballard Spahr	10.48%
	7	Finnegan	10.47%
	8	Haynes and Boone	10.43%
	9	Kutak Rock	9.30%
	10	Step toe & Johnson LLP*	9.26%
150-299	1	Atkinson Andelson	28.00%
	2	Best Best	19.64%
	3	Hanson Bridgett*	19.05%
	4	Shutts & Bowen	17.65%
	5	Nossaman	17.24%
	6	FordHarrison	17.14%
	7	Curtis Mallet-Prevost	16.67%
		Wood Smith*	16.67%
	9	Bowman and Brooke*	15.91%
	10	Kasowitz Benson*	15.38%

20-149	1	Bookoff McAndrews	50.00%
		Nelson Hardiman	50.00%
		Pearl Law Group*	50.00%
		Roig Lawyers	50.00%
	5	Hunt Ortmann	40.00%
	6	Durie Tangri	38.46%
	7	Linebarger Goggan	37.78%
	8	Hoge Fenton	37.50%
	9	Berry Appleman*	28.57%
	10	Seed IP Law Group*	27.78%

\*Some attorneys declined to self-identify a race.

However, some firms are going beyond their peers to diversify their equity partnership ranks, with actions that include creating sponsorship opportunities and showing their commitment starts at the top.

Law360 ranked firms with the highest percentages of minority attorneys in their equity partnerships for firms of their size. While a handful of firms beat their peers by a wide margin, the top 10 in each size group can vary widely.

For example, among midsize firms with 300 to 599 lawyers, firms toward the end of the top 10 are only a few percentage points above that size group's average of 7.1 percent. At the same time, the equity partnership at immigration law firm Fragomen, Del Rey, Bernsen & Loewy LLP is made up of more than 22 percent minority attorneys — over three times the average.

Small firms with 20 to 149 attorneys boast the most diverse equity partnerships, with an overall average of 9.5 percent. Firms ranked at the top of that list, including patent prosecution firm Bookoff McAndrews PLLC and health care firm Nelson Hardiman LLP, each have a percentage of minority equity partners that is more than five times higher than that size group's average.

### Supporting Lawyers

Several firms that ranked high on Law360's list are making sponsorship and training of attorneys a top priority.

Following an eight-year stint at the U.S. Department of Justice, Wendy Huang Waszmer returned to private practice in 2013 and was surprised to find that there were few diverse female litigation partners like herself around.

"All along I'd been an anomaly and hadn't realized it," recalled Waszmer, who is a Chinese-American antitrust and litigation partner. "It really became clear how not-diverse law firms were only when I left the government."

She recently joined Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati PC's New York office, and she was glad to see that firm leaders were invested in making sure minority lawyers had concrete work opportunities and were integrated members of the firm, she said.

At Wilson Sonsini, the firm continuously checks that minority attorneys are represented in its board of directors, committees, working groups, and hiring and promotion efforts, according to managing partner Douglas Clark.

"There has to be diversity at the top level and mindfulness at all levels," he said. "That is how it becomes sustainable over time."

The firm has the most diverse equity partnership among those with 600 or more attorneys, according to the Law360 survey. It has nearly 22 percent attorneys of color at the equity level, much higher than the overall average of nearly 9.2 percent at similarly sized firms.

Firms that are successful at diversifying their top levels are making it clear to partners that it's their job to cultivate talent across differences, according to Myers. This includes speaking up for attorneys and getting them access to growth opportunities.

"It happens rather naturally, but it hasn't happened for a diverse group of people," she said. "So, sponsorship says, while natural is nice, until we can make sure we're not losing talented people who are different from the majority, we need to create a responsibility in partners to identify and support talent to succeed."

Greenberg Traurig LLP also ranks high for minority equity partners, with more than 13 percent attorneys of color at that level. It expects every one of its partners to sponsor at least one associate, said Brian Duffy, the firm's CEO. A firm can only be successful at diversity if senior partners, who control the business and have the most influence, provide their personal commitment to train lawyers of color.

"Without that, you'll just have a revolving door," he said.

At Atkinson Andelson Loya Ruud & Romo, 28 percent of its equity partners are minorities, topping Law360's list of firms with 150 to 299 attorneys. The overall average at other firms that size is about 7 percent.

When Elizabeth Zamora-Mejia joined Atkinson Andelson in 1999, she was mentored by two supervising partners who were Hispanic. One of them was a founding partner.

She also worked alongside other attorneys of color, including an African-American female partner, as well as a part-time female attorney.

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**ELIZABETH  
ZAMORA-MEJIA**  
Atkinson Andelson  
Loya Ruud & Romo



The environment immediately put Zamora-Mejia, a Hispanic attorney, at ease, and she credits the diverse work culture as one of the most important reasons she enjoys a rewarding career at the firm today — now as an equity partner and chair of its diversity and inclusion committee.

“It made all the difference in the world to me,” she said. “It’s about feeling welcomed. It’s about working in an inclusive environment, where you’re not sticking out like a sore thumb. You’re actually valued for the fact that you have a different background, experience and perspective.”

At Fragomen, enthusiasm for diversity is a must for attorneys who want to work for the immigration law firm. It conducts firmwide training to ensure lawyers are supportive of and responsive to the cultural differences of its clients.

“On a day-to-day basis, our lawyers might speak with someone who was born in China, and the next hour, someone born in Brazil, and the following hour, someone born in India,” said Gwen Robosson, a senior partner at the firm. “Clients want to know that the firms they are working with value diversity because diversity — at least in my experience — represents knowledge and the ability to be the best.”

### **From the Top**

Having a diversity director and designated affinity groups can be helpful, but those steps to bring change to a firm will only go so far if the firm’s leaders aren’t vocalizing their commitment to diversity and inclusion.

“The leadership of the firm has to visibly support minority attorneys,” said Katie Herzog, president of Eastern Point Consulting Group Inc. “It can’t delegate that to others; it has to come from the top.”

Herzog recalled doing diversity training at an international law firm’s various offices, and its managing partner traveled with her to spend the first 15 minutes of the program talking about the firm’s dedication to improving diversity. For more than 18 years, he spoke at about a dozen training programs each year, she said.

“It was incredibly powerful,” she said. “On the evaluations at the end of every program, people commented that his presence and comments made an enormous difference. They understood the firm’s commitment was for real.”

Having minority partners in leadership and other visible roles also can be crucial for recruitment and retention.

In 1999, Ernest LaMont Greer was an associate whose firm was about to be acquired by Greenberg Traurig.

Wondering whether he should join the firm or go elsewhere, Greer researched Greenberg online and was inspired by Cesar Alvarez, the first Hispanic CEO of a global law firm, who has since transitioned to a senior chair role.

Greer, who is black, hasn’t been disappointed by his decision to join the firm, where he now serves as co-president.

“When the leadership of a firm is truly committed to diversity,” he said, “that radiates throughout the firm.”

--Editing by Jocelyn Allison, Jeremy Barker and Aaron Pelc.

*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, 2017. Only U.S.-based attorneys were included in the survey, and firms had to have at least 20 U.S.-based attorneys to participate.*

*Firms are ranked based on the percentage of equity partners who self-identify as minorities. At firms marked with an asterisk, some attorneys declined to self-identify. Firms that declined to disclose their equity partnership data were not eligible for the ranking.*

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