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Survey Shows Law Firms Increasing Attention to Diversity

WASHINGTON - A new survey shows that the nation's largest law firms are paying a lot more attention to diversity. In the last few years, large law firm diversity committees and diversity professionals have become the norm rather than the exception.

The 2008 Law Firm Diversity Professional Survey was jointly sponsored by the Minority Corporate Counsel Association (MCCA) and the Association of Law Firm Diversity Professionals (ALFDP). Research objectives were to examine the roles of diversity professionals and help quantify the resources law firms dedicate to diversity initiatives.

The survey was conducted online by The Flourishing Company, a national workplace consulting firm, during the first half of April, 2008. In addition to surveying ALFDP members, the Am-Law 200 firms were invited to participate. Eighty-nine law firm responses were received. The one-time survey produced a snapshot of law firm diversity efforts related to resources, roles and responsibilities and budgeting for diversity.

The survey showed that while diversity committees have become a staple of law firm operations, the hiring or appointment of a law firm diversity professional is a newer and growing happening.

All but one of the responding firms have diversity committees (and that one plans to create a committee this year). Seventy-eight percent report they have a diversity professional, but most of them created that position within the last one to three years.

"This growth in diversity activity at the largest law firms has brought us to a tipping point," said Veta Richardson, Executive Director of MCCA. "Five years ago, there were only a few full-time diversity officers in law firms. As their numbers increase, MCCA believes that these professionals are and will continue to play an essential role in furthering diversity in the legal profession. We will be studying the responsibilities that these professionals have and will offer training and additional resources to support them."

These diversity professionals tend to be diverse themselves. More than 88% of the survey respondents are female and 62% are African American. Eight percent are Hispanic; almost 5% are Asian American; and 21% are white/Caucasian.

Almost 19% of the diversity professionals are practicing lawyers within the firms; 44% are non-practicing lawyers within the firms; and 34% are non-lawyer professionals. Most of the diversity professionals are members of the firms' diversity committees (64%) or chair it (15%).

The importance firms are giving to diversity committees is supported by the fact that all of the committees include partners of the firms and 62.5% of the responding firms' committees include the managing partner or firm chair. Nearly 90% of the responding firms have a separate or unique billing number for diversity related activities, which shows that firms believe it is important enough to track time devoted to these activities. At almost all of the firms, the diversity professional presents regular reports or metrics to the chair or the managing partner regarding the firm's diversity results.

"We were very pleased to see that law firms are continuing to devote substantial resources towards their efforts in recruiting, increasing, and retaining diversity and inclusion in their law firms and in the profession," said Pauline Higgins, ALFDP's President. "In fact, 89% of law firm respondents now provide a separate time entry number for diversity related activities. The diversity and inclusion law firm leaders spend more than \$400,000, annually, on such diversity and inclusion efforts."

The survey shows that these large firms are allocating sizeable budgets for diversity activities. More than half of the firms budgeted \$150,000 or more for the internal activities, which included diversity related programming, retreats and training, but excluded salaries, bonuses and benefits for all diversity staff. These firms also budgeted the same amount - \$150,000 or more - for external diversity activities, which included funds for diversity related advertising, supporting diversity related organizations, diversity pipeline programs and law student organizations. A significant number of the firms, 20%, budgeted figures greater than \$400,000 for the internal activities, and 30% budgeted figures greater than \$400,000 for the firm's external activities.

The executive summary for this research survey is attached to this email. To review the entire survey report, go to the Latest News on the Homepage of the MCCA website at www.mcca.com

About ALFDP

The Association of Law Firm Diversity Professionals acts as a catalyst for the advancement of diversity in the legal professional through collective knowledge, vision, expertise and advocacy in the area of firm diversity. Founded in 2006, ALFDP's membership includes many AmLaw 100 firms, the nation's hundred largest law firms ranked by revenue.

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About MCCA

MCCA was founded in 1997 to advocate for the expanded hiring, promotion, and retention of minority attorneys in corporate legal departments and the law firms that serve them. In addition, MCCA stimulates an ongoing dialogue of diversity 'best practices.' MCCA accomplishes its mission through the collection and dissemination of information on diversity in the legal profession. MCCA's headquarters are in Washington, D.C., and it also has an office in Atlanta.

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