

**Final Report and Action Plan of the  
Columbus Bar Association's  
Managing Partners Diversity Initiative: 2016 - 2021**

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**INTRODUCTION**

In October 2000, the Managing Partners of twenty Columbus, Ohio law firms convened with the Columbus Bar Association, the John Mercer Langston Bar Association, and the Deans of the Capital University Law School, The Ohio State University Moritz College of Law, and the Columbus City Attorney. The goal of this meeting was to develop the most accurate assessment of diversity within law firms and to establish a baseline diversity measurement against which future efforts might be compared.

The Managing Partners utilized these meetings as educational and planning sessions. The first Action Plan emerged and was signed in May 2001. The Action Plan committed to recruiting and retaining African-American/Black, Asian-Pacific American, Native American Indian, and Hispanic associates and partners in significantly higher percentages than in the past. All agreed that in order for the Columbus community to achieve appreciable changes in the racial demography of its major law firms, the member firms must, individually and collectively, commit to some new courses of action that will depart from previous practices.

Twenty-four firms signed a second Action Plan in May 2006 that built on the success of the original plan, while introducing strategies to both sustain and leverage the reported traction against recruitment and advancement. Based on the successful recruitment efforts of the member firms, the 2006 Action Plan realigned some of the strategic focus to retention, while maintaining that a keen focus on recruiting attorneys of color remained critical. As in 2006, this plan seeks to continue to realign its focus to create a more coordinated approach to recruitment and retention across various legal segments.

While this Fourth Action Plan's objectives are directed to increasing racial diversity, we, the Managing Partners of twenty-three Columbus, Ohio law firms acknowledge that inclusion of diversity in its many facets, including, without limitation, race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, generational differences and differently-abled individuals, enriches us all.

**I. HISTORY AND STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES**

We agreed to collaborate in this undertaking because it was apparent to all that despite individual efforts and good intentions, we have been unsuccessful in achieving an ideal level of diversity.

As attorneys, we understand better than most the meaning of the words "Equal Opportunity." Yet we are acutely aware that, in Columbus, as elsewhere, the legal profession has not achieved sufficient diversity. We are committed to increasing the number of attorneys of color recruited, hired, trained, retained, and invited to join the partnership ranks in Columbus' large, mid-sized and small majority-owned law firms.

We believe that Columbus's law firms must take a leadership role and make positive and determined efforts to achieve needed diversity. The firm's managing partner and/or

executive committee, as well as high-level majority members of the firm's hierarchy should vigorously support these programs.

We recognize that individual member firms vary greatly in size, management style and resources. We expect, therefore, that the member firms will develop their own unique diversity and inclusion plans to achieve the goals in this action plan. While accountability will ultimately be an individual firm, law school, and bar association responsibility, collective efforts will provide a powerful statement that the City of Columbus is a diverse community of lawyers.

We remain committed to recruiting, hiring, training, retaining, and inviting to partnership African-American/Black, Asian-Pacific American, Native American Indian, and Hispanic attorneys. We understand that the necessary changes will not be achieved by good intentions alone. In order to achieve meaningful, measurable and lasting progress toward greater inclusion of minority legal talent, it is essential that we not only commit philosophically to those goals, but also to commit resources, individually and collectively, towards activities that we as a group believe will have a positive impact.

## II. STATEMENT OF GOALS AND ACTION PLAN OBJECTIVES

### A. Pipeline

We understand that the legal pipeline is in a precarious state. Law school enrollment has been in a steady decline. Individuals considering graduate degrees are turning to other options with more efficient opportunity tracks. Shrinking law school enrollment leads to fewer new attorneys entering the profession, particularly minorities. We will address this challenge by identifying partners at each stage of the pipeline and designing an environment that fosters collaboration.

#### **Objective 1**

##### **Create an ecosystem to support and connect central Ohio diversity and inclusion organizations**

The MPDI will convene local and state organizations that share the common goal of promoting diversity and inclusion in the legal profession. It is advantageous for these groups to coordinate efforts to maximize effective outcomes. As facilitator, the MPDI will serve as a point of connection for these groups to coordinate the pooling of resources. The goal is to help existing organizations expand their impact and thrive as integral parts of the legal pipeline.

The various organizations currently receive financial and volunteer support from the MPDI member firms. Funding groups in the pipeline consortium will allow for collaboration when appropriate and expanded opportunities for all participants. Participation in the pipeline consortium will ensure that groups will receive maximum benefit and firms will experience optimal return on investment.

Volunteers from pipeline related organizations, specifically affinity bar associations, will benefit from coordinated efforts. These individuals are regularly requested as mentors, speakers,

and financial donors. In addition to their work obligations, they are leaders in organizations that feed and support the pipeline. Collaboration on mentoring and fundraising tasks will provide a depth of experience and will help prevent a small number of people from overextending themselves.

Relationships created through this collaborative and cooperative process will lead to a series of “warm handoffs” where prospective law students, recent law school graduates, and new lawyers easily transition through each stage of their career journeys. They will be introduced to allies as they matriculate from high school through entry into the profession and beyond. These introductions will assist in their development and acclimation to the legal community. The warm handoffs will lend to the retention of diverse talent in central Ohio.

### **Measurement**

The success of this effort will be measured by program growth, increased membership in affinity bar associations, and the conversion rates of undergraduate students to attorneys.

Affinity bar association leadership will report the successes of their programs - including collaborations. This will allow the MPDI donor firms to monitor the return on investment. Students will opt-in to the MPDI tracking their progress after high school graduation. This will include surveys after college acceptance, college graduation, law school enrollment, law school graduation, and bar passage.

## **B. Mentoring**

### **Objective 2**

#### **Design programs that will foster beneficial mentoring relationships for students and lawyers**

Mentoring is a vital part of developing and retaining talented attorneys. A successful mentoring program will cultivate relationships that will lead to multiple generations of mentors. Ideally, students who are mentored become mentors as attorneys and maintain the long-term integrity of an inclusive legal community.

The MPDI will build a program where students and new lawyers can access a network of mentors to guide them through each phase of career development. The network will be built based on the needs and expectations of the mentees. The MPDI will survey students, and later new lawyers, to determine the most effective way to implement mentoring relationships.

## C. Additional Considerations

### Infrastructure for Inclusion

To achieve meaningful progress toward increasing and retaining the number of attorneys of color who practice in Central Ohio law firms, the member firms, bar associations, and participating law schools commit to coordinate efforts to establish consistent processes for sustaining collective progress against the MPDI objectives, **including, but not limited to the following:**

- Create a tailored individual diversity and inclusion strategic plan that includes measurable actions.
- Actively participate in the ongoing advisory committee comprised of representatives from several firms and from the bar association leadership.
- Track and report annually relevant demographic information to the Columbus Bar Association in order to better understand both individual areas of opportunity as well as those of the aggregate Columbus legal community.
- Sustain and continue to build the Managing Partners' Diversity Initiative through appropriate financial support related to program implementation.
- Attend an annual meeting with other member firm managing partners, bar association leaders, and law school deans to share information and experiences, evaluate and analyze results, monitor progress, and celebrate successes.

### Align efforts to ensure Columbus is viewed as a community that supports the inclusion of diverse lawyers

The signatory bar associations, member firms, and law schools agree to create and promote a brand image that conveys the investment all interested parties have in Columbus as a community that embraces diverse lawyers. Marketing efforts focused on diversity and inclusion will impact the recruitment of law students, law clerks, and attorneys of color, build goodwill throughout the legal community, and enhance new business development. To this end, collective success hinges on the appeal of the overall community.

In furtherance this goal, the **member firms** commit to raise awareness of the member firms' efforts both within and outside the Columbus legal community by actively promoting the presence of people of color within the member firms' recruiting and marketing materials, and firm website.

In furtherance of supporting a culture of inclusion, the **bar associations** commit to communicate the bar associations' concern for and commitment to diversity and inclusion, and to raise awareness of the member firms' efforts both within and outside the Columbus legal community by maintaining an internet feature on their websites.

All signatories will commit to actively build the brand image of Columbus as a community that embraces diverse lawyers by developing diversity and inclusion marketing tools, and seeking opportunities to partner with the broader legal community and all interested parties

to gain commitment for building Columbus's image as community that supports the inclusion of attorneys from diverse ethnicities, races, and cultures.

### **Continue efforts to create an infrastructure for ownership and accountability**

#### **Diversity Director**

Continue the position of Diversity Director, a staff position housed and funded by the Columbus Bar Association. The Diversity Director's primary responsibility will be to work closely with the Columbus legal community, bar associations, law schools and other interested parties, to enhance Columbus' image as a diverse and inclusive legal community. The Diversity Director would act as the liaison between the bar associations, member firms, community-based organizations and law schools, assisting in the development and execution of their law-related diversity programs.

#### **Advisory Committee**

The Managing Partners have agreed that, in order to facilitate future meetings and activities in furtherance of these objectives, it might be helpful to designate an advisory committee comprised of representatives from several firms and from the bar association leadership. Annually the Columbus Bar Association's Executive Director and Managing Partners shall jointly determine who will serve on the advisory committee, giving due regard to include representatives from different sized law firms and other signatory groups.