Impact

2015 Diversity & Inclusion Annual Report

Warner Norcross & Judd LLP
ATTORNEYS AT LAW
To our colleagues, clients and community friends:

This year marks the 10th time that I have written to you to share our results on diversity and inclusion initiatives. A lot has changed over this past decade – in that first letter, I focused on the business case for diversity, which is now a given. As a law firm, we have broadened the conversation and now routinely talk about diversity AND inclusion. We have benchmarks, programs and initiatives in place to ensure we are being deliberate in our approach. We see the impact of these results grow daily.

We also have a track record of successes – and a few misses – under our belt. And we still have more work to do.

In honor of the 10th anniversary of this report, I want to highlight our biggest accomplishments over the past years, as well as some of the challenges we continue to face – and how we plan to address them in the years ahead:

1. **Progress of women:** We have made significant strides when it comes to the number and role of women in the firm. A decade ago, we had eight women partners who comprised 7.9 percent of the partnership. Today, that number has more than doubled – 20 women now comprise 17.4 percent of the partnership. A decade ago, few women held leadership roles at the firm. Today, women serve in many key leadership roles, including on the Management Committee, as the firm’s General Counsel, as Executive Partner of our Holland office, as chairs of key practice groups and as client service managers for top firm clients. While we are proud of these advances, we still have more to do when it comes to retention efforts to ensure a successful path to partnership for incoming female associates.

2. **Progress of minorities:** While we have made progress, we have not done as well as we would like when it comes to minority attorneys. Attorneys of color account for 6.74 percent of attorneys today, up from 5 percent a decade ago. We now have five partners of color, an increase of 150 percent from 2005. Attracting and retaining minority attorneys remains one of our top priorities.

3. **Managing Partners Diversity Collaborative:** We have taken a lead role in this Grand Rapids Bar Association initiative, which is working to make West Michigan a destination for attorneys of color. Established in 2011, the Collaborative brought together the managing partners of 12 regional law firms to tackle the key issues of pipeline development, recruitment and retention. The following year, we unveiled a five-year action plan that outlines steps our firms need to take to increase diversity in the legal community.

4. **Mentoring programs:** As you will read in the following pages, we have significantly revised our mentoring program. To help us ensure a good match with a mentor, we ask each new associate to fill out a questionnaire that explores his or her goals, practice area interests, strengths, interests outside of work and concerns as they enter the practice of law. We provide our mentors with materials and training on coaching, mentorship and sponsorship, with an emphasis on coaching across differences of race and gender. We then follow up to ensure that mentors and mentees are building a successful relationship.

5. **Evaluation improvements:** We have come a long way in improving our evaluation system to reduce the potential for unconscious bias. Studies have shown that preconceived notions can unconsciously – and unfairly – guide the way work is evaluated. Last year, the firm replaced its check-the-box scoring system with one that requires partners to write narrative responses when reviewing associates. We are already seeing more detailed evaluations that provide concrete examples of associate performance and offer meaningful suggestions for improvement.
6. **Metrics:** Challenging work assignments are critical to developing legal skills and advancing to partnership. To help ensure access to opportunities, the Management Committee reviews the demographics of the people assigned to work for the firm’s 50 largest clients. Over the past three years, we have seen the percentage of work for these clients assigned to female attorneys grow significantly. In fact, for the first six months of 2015, female attorneys did more work for our top 50 clients than reflected in their percentage of attorneys in the firm.

7. **Community initiatives:** As a firm, we are committed to engaging with and giving back to the communities in which we live and work. Over the last decade, we have sponsored plays that promote thoughtful dialogue on race, supported exhibits and programs, volunteered to coach high school mock trial programs and teach special civics classes and supported an essay contest. We also facilitated café conversations on race, provided internships, sat on boards and more to support our commitment to diversity and inclusion. The Grand Rapids community in particular recognizes the leadership we have shown in this area and it’s not uncommon to have Diversity Partner Rodney Martin’s name rise to the top of the list of people to meet in this arena.

8. **Scholarships:** We believe it’s important to invest in people and programs. Over the past decade, we have committed more than $162,000 to fund scholarships to help minority students prepare for the LSAT and to support Michigan minority students pursuing legal studies. We also participate in minority externship programs in Detroit and Grand Rapids, as well as providing financial support to other programs around the state that encourage our profession to be more diverse and inclusive.

9. **One Book, One Firm:** Eight years ago, we launched the One Book, One Firm lunch-and-learn program to explore issues of diversity and inclusion. The summer event is modeled after the success of community-ready programs that encourage all residents of a city to read, discuss and share the experience of the same book. Over the years, we have come together as a firm to talk about race and gender issues as they have been explored in fiction, non-fiction and memoirs. More recently, we launched a Diversity Book Club that offers year-round reading and discussion opportunities.

10. **Inclusion:** In 2013, we established an Inclusion Committee that allows attorneys from throughout our eight offices to be a bigger part of the conversation. The firm’s business plan calls for our Inclusion Committee to prepare a report to the Management Committee in 2016 on the barriers to inclusion in the firm and recommended steps to reduce or eliminate those barriers.

   While I am in the process of transitioning from my role as Managing Partner, our firm remains committed to ensuring that Warner Norcross is an inclusive place for attorneys and staff. We remain focused on developing and supporting programs that ensure a pathway to legal careers for students of color. We will continue to be expansive in our recruitment and innovative in our retention programs. We will explore new ways to ensure that all attorneys and staff feel welcomed and valued as members of the law firm. We will be mindful of the impact all these programs and initiatives will have on the firm.

   I have appreciated the opportunity to both review and preview our diversity and inclusion initiatives over the past decade. The work we have done in this area is critical to making us a better firm, our communities a better place to live and work, and our state a true destination for businesses and the arts.

   Best regards,

Douglas E. Wagner
Managing Partner, 2006-2015
The mentor you start with at Warner Norcross may be one of several you have during your tenure with the firm. That was the case for **RYAN GRONDZIK**, who was assigned a mentor when he joined the firm in 2011. Warner partner **ANDREA BERNARD** put a couple of labor and employment cases in the Job Jar, which Ryan was happy to tackle.

Like all new associates, Ryan spent his first year in the Job Jar – so named because Warner doesn’t allow incoming attorneys to specialize right away. Instead, they draw assignments from the “Jar” designed to give them exposure to all practice areas so they can make an informed choice before “declaring a major” at the end of their first year.

Ryan found himself gravitating to litigation. He most enjoyed the cases where he felt he had the chance to help business owners facing employment-related issues – much more engaging, he felt, than the average contract dispute.

Warner partner Andrea Bernard put a couple of labor and employment cases in the Job Jar, which Ryan was happy to tackle. The two did several projects together before finding themselves in an informal mentoring relationship.

“It was mostly because of his writing,” Andrea recalled. “One of the biggest things we struggle with in young associates is the ability to write well. Ryan’s writing was good and, when I talked with him and saw the research he did, I saw that he had all the tools needed for success in his tool box.

“At the first lunch we went to together, I offered to be his mentor. I told him that meant I would also be his harshest critic and that I would push him harder than anyone else.”

Ryan wouldn’t have it any other way.

“One of the most valuable things about this mentor relationship is that I get honest and sometimes brutal feedback,” Ryan explained. “It is developmental. It helps me grow and refine my practice and, I hope, elevate it. You don’t get that from a lot of people you work with.”

Ryan has a number of informal mentors at the firm, including his assigned mentor, whose practice area doesn’t sync with Ryan’s goals. Not only does Andrea’s practice area align with Ryan’s interests, their personalities mesh well.

“Andrea helps me understand the unwritten rules of business and of the firm,” Ryan said. “Mentoring relationships don’t have to just be about legal work. Andrea is always pushing me to develop basic competencies in business development, networking and getting out in the community. All of these are aspects of having a successful legal practice.”

Those softer skills are part and parcel to the mentoring role for Andrea.

“Graduating from law school doesn’t make you a good lawyer,” she said. “The ability to write and think and get the answer for your clients is the basic price of admission. But once you get past that, the client service piece really distinguishes us as a firm.

“We need to be able to communicate with clients – to give them good and bad news – and connect them with others in our community who can help provide the right solution. That is critical to our success as a firm – and to Ryan’s success as an attorney.”
Helping Ryan Grondzik develop the softer skills of being a lawyer is critical to Andrea Bernard.
Making internal contacts for new associate Ashley Chrysler is Job One for her mentor, Doug Dozeman.
As a newly minted attorney, ASHLEY CHRYSLER knows it’s critical for her to make connections both within her new law firm and her new community. That’s why the Midland native is grateful experienced Grand Rapids litigator DOUG DOZEMAN has agreed to be her mentor.

The two were paired last fall after filling out questionnaires as part of the firm’s revamped program that aims to match like-minded attorneys and establish mutually strong mentoring relationships.

“One of the things I’ve noticed is how willing to help everyone is at Warner Norcross,” said Ashley, who joined the firm last fall. “Since I’m not a seasoned attorney yet, there are a lot of things I don’t know how to do. Doug is patient and very willing to work with me.

“While I’m still in the Job Jar, I’ve been doing a lot of litigation work. I like writing and I like presenting oral arguments as well, so I thought this area would be a good fit for me.”

That’s important on both sides of the equation. Doug is using his past experiences as a mentor to shape the new relationship he’s establishing with Ashley. He’s also drawn from the accumulated wisdom of informal mentors he has had at Warner Norcross, including some of the firm’s top litigators.

“I’ve been a mentor in the past and found it really rewarding,” Doug explained. “I had that kind of support along the way, and this is a way to give back.

“You have to learn how to be a lawyer. It’s a lot different now than when I joined the firm. For instance, you are encouraged from day one to network, make contacts and get involved in the community. But you have to get your feet underneath you first, which is why I think it’s so important to make internal contacts at first.”

Ashley appreciates his initial emphasis on internal connections. She has lunch with Doug on a monthly basis, and the two talk about working with attorneys throughout the firm’s eight offices.

“Having a mentor is incredibly helpful,” she noted. “When we first started, the amount of information thrown at us was overwhelming. Doug can give me advice on what I should be focusing on most in my career and assessing where that should be going.

“One of the most important things to me right now is being introduced to a lot of people in the firm. I was also looking for someone who could help me focus on building myself up in the community.”
STEVE WATERBURY is the “mentor behind the mentor” for CORINNE SPRAGUE. While the relationship is not official and has never been formal, Steve emerged as Corinne’s de facto mentor when she was an associate in the Job Jar and began taking assignments from him.

She remembers the M&A lawyer had “more and more work” he needed to delegate – and not only was he willing to hand work off, he was also willing to teach her how to do it.

“I knew what a brief looked like from law school, and we had samples of contracts and term sheets,” Corinne remembered. “But how do you decide what goes in when you’re first starting to practice? You really do need someone who can tell you what you need, when and why.

“I remember one of my first projects was a supply contract. I thought I had very zealously represented the client and gave it to Steve to review, thinking it was phenomenal. Steve was very gentle, but told me that it would blow up the deal if we presented a contract this aggressive to the other side.

“There’s a lot of learning on the job to understand how to represent our clients effectively and help them accomplish their goals. I’m thankful to have Steve’s guidance.”

Corinne is now a senior associate in the Business Practice Group who will be up for partner in two years. She and Steve have worked on dozens of transactions together over the past six years, and she continues to work closely with him on general corporate matters for several multi-generational, family-owned business clients.

“One of these clients now goes directly to Corinne for all sorts of issues without going through me first,” Steve recalled. “Corinne is smart enough to know what she doesn’t know and to come to me when she needs to ask, ‘Is this something I should be doing?’

“I trust her. And that trust needs to go in both directions. It’s best for both people to know the other person has good judgment and for that to be the case.”

Corinne has learned a lot from Steve over the years – and from other informal mentors she has had who have worked with various firm clients. She appreciates the different perspectives they bring that help her be that “true corporate generalist” and see the big picture of what it takes to work effectively with clients.

“The key to a solid mentoring relationship is honesty,” Corinne noted. “Steve tells me when I do things well, but he also tells me when I need to fix something. Sometimes it’s subtle, letting me know that the tone of what I’m writing can come across in a certain way, but that by changing a few words, I can communicate more effectively.

“I never have to wonder if I am doing OK. I trust if there’s an issue with my work, it will be addressed in a constructive way.”

Not only does she appreciate her mentor for his legal expertise, she’s also been able to tap into his extensive “Waterburian connections” to engage with the Grand Rapids Symphony, Inforum and other community groups, as well as partners within the firm and prospective new clients.

“The reason I’ve been able to thrive here is because Steve told other people about me,” Corinne said. “If there’s a well-respected partner who introduces you to other partners, says good things about you and encourages his partners to give you work, you gain a lot more credibility within the firm.

“You also get to strengthen your credibility externally by connecting clients with the right people at the right time. It cements your relationship with a client to bring other people into the relationship. Steve is a master of establishing and strengthening relationships.”

Steve noted: “We are in a service business, and serving people is about relationships. You do this work because of relationships and you should do it with a servant-leadership model in mind. We succeed by helping others succeed.”
Impact:

Steve Waterbury has helped Corinne Sprague build and strengthen relationships in the community.
Practicing family law allows Roquia Draper and Nazli Sater to help families at a crossroads.
When **Nazli Sater** asked **Roquia Draper** to join the Family Law group, the response took her somewhat by surprise.

“Yeah, I’ll try this,” Roquia reluctantly told Nazli in 2011, shortly after both had joined the Southfield office of Warner Norcross. Nazli was a lateral partner who had built a successful practice in pre-nups, divorce mediation and custody over two decades. Roquia was a newly minted law school grad who imagined herself handling high-profile whistleblower actions and other employment-related claims.

“That’s the benefit of working for this firm – you can dip your toes in different areas of the law,” Roquia noted. “As soon as I started doing family law, Nazli took my hand yet gave me a lot of room to learn on my own.

“In time, as we began working more closely together, she’s not only been holding my hand – she’s taken me under her wing and helped me grow my practice.”

After four years of working closely together, Nazli has almost forgotten the response received from her initial offer.

“Roquia is very much a self-starter,” Nazli explained. “It was easy to have confidence in her very early and very quickly. She was very prepared and her progression has been quick and natural. After a lukewarm response, she was very enthusiastic.”

“As divorce attorneys, we have the ability to impact two of the things that are the most important to all of us: our family and our money. Attorneys can really set a tone for the case. It has really been wonderful watching Roquia work closely with clients and help shape that tone.”

For her part, Roquia has enjoyed the level of client interaction she has and the opportunity to guide people through a process that is life-changing for them and their families. She credits Nazli with going beyond their mentoring relationship to being a true sponsor – always ready to offer praise and recognition for Roquia’s work, introduce her to colleagues and make sure she’s connected in the greater Detroit community.

“Nazli is more a sponsor than a mentor,” Roquia said. “Not only will she critique me on an area of the law, but at the same time, she’s constantly reinforcing my work both inside and outside the firm. We have gone through an informal relationship to that of mentoring to the current sponsoring relationship, which is what any new lawyer wants to have.

“Nazli has an open-door policy, and I go to her for a lot of things. We also use one another to bounce ideas off one another. It’s nice to have that wealth of experience that Nazli brings.”

Having that back-and-forth dialogue benefits Roquia’s continued growth – and their clients.

“We had a case where the client wasn’t present, but his children came in and brought us a situation on his behalf;” Nazli recalled. “Roquia and I were able to brainstorm with them and say, ‘What if we did this’ or ‘how about if we try that way’ before deciding on a plan of action. Ultimately, it is a beneficial exercise for our clients.

“We pretty much still touch base every day to see what our clients are doing and how our weeks are shaping up. Seeing Roquia grow from ‘Yes, I’ll try family law’ into such a skilled family law practitioner is one of the most enjoyable aspects of practicing law for me.”
It started with a phone call and two Bankers Boxes. DAVE WHITFIELD remembers that he was wrapping up a great week. But Dave got a call at 1 p.m. from Warner Norcross partner CHARLES ASH. Would Dave stop down to talk about a rush litigation project that had just dropped onto his desk?

Dave’s parents were in Grand Rapids to watch his swearing-in ceremony. There would be a celebratory dinner afterward with his wife, followed by a weekend of relaxing with his family. Dave hesitated slightly – his oath to become a member of the Michigan Bar was at 3 p.m. His wife and parents were expecting him afterward.

Getting together later that night would be fine, Charles said. The client needs an answer by Monday.

The pair spent the entire weekend digging through two packed boxes of documents that detailed a bankruptcy claim in a case that was winding down. Their analysis of the documents ignited a massive case that would conclude four years later and after an 11-day trial in federal bankruptcy court.

It also led to a mentoring relationship that has guided Dave from virtually his first days at the firm to becoming a skilled litigator who has developed a successful practice in mining, oil and gas, energy and other environmental and commercial matters.

“Charles calling me two hours before being sworn in was probably the best thing that could have happened to my career,” recalled Dave, who will be considered for admission to the firm partnership this year. “I gained years’ worth of experience in a very short time. From the get-go, we were busy – and I had so many great opportunities as a first-year associate.

“It was overwhelming, but it was great. Charles trusted me and, for my part, I knew I had to step up. It’s a good thing, being challenged and testing skills you didn’t think you had.”

For his part, Charles agreed that trusting and relying on your team is a big part of mentoring. The case allowed Dave to develop skills from the pleading stage to the trial stage. He got experience around preparing witnesses and seeing first-hand how to prepare a case for trial. Dave even got some early lessons in the importance of managing time and paying attention to details.

“From a mentoring perspective, this case gave Dave the opportunity to see client management through the lens of a crisis,” Charles explained. “As he matured, which happened very quickly in this case, he had to field calls from the client as the number-two person on the team.

“It was a great education to see how that works and learning the business side of what the client worries about and some things that drive client decisions as to what positions we ultimately end up advocating for.

“As a mentor, I think a lot about ‘first principles,’ and Dave and I talk a lot about them. It means first and foremost integrity and providing excellent client service. We always give clients our best. It doesn’t matter if you’re tired, if it’s the weekend or if your parents are in town – this is what professionalism demands of us.

“Dave learned that right upfront. We don’t have anything if our clients can’t count on us.”

Since that first lawsuit, the pair has worked on dozens of cases together over the past six years. That early trust they developed has grown and their relationship has evolved.

“Now we’re at a very different phase,” Charles said. “I think a lot more about making sure that Dave’s lining himself up and doing the right things – planting seeds now, as it were, that will pay off when he’s a partner.”
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A casual introduction and a pair of Bankers Boxes have led to a strong working relationship for Dave Whitfield and Charles Ash.
The parallels between the two were intriguing – and worth exploring – to Rodney Martin, Warner Norcross Diversity Partner. They prompted him to select “Some of My Best Friends are Black: The Strange History of Integration in America” as the 2015 selection for the One Book, One Firm series.

Now in its eighth year, the series convenes attorneys and staff throughout the firm’s eight offices for a lunch-and-learn presentation each summer to discuss a work of fiction, non-fiction or memoir that addresses the issues of diversity and inclusion.

The session featured a panel discussion with civil rights attorney Stephen Drew, Father John Geaney, the Rector of the Cathedral of Saint Andrew in Grand Rapids, and Nancy Haynes, Executive Director of the Fair Housing Center of West Michigan.

Tanner Colby’s work, which was nominated for a Carnegie Medal for Excellence in Nonfiction, drew a bright line between desegregation and integration. He noted that desegregation in schools and the workplace had fallen prey to “racial accounting” – or tallying the number of dark faces among the white faces and counting it successful. But desegregation doesn’t mean that there is integration.
“Today’s focus on diversity is too often about ‘racial accounting,’ with insufficient regard for whether organizations and communities are actually inclusive. Colby’s thesis is that integration is more than moving people around to achieve a racial balance. Integration requires a conscious choice.

“Like integration in our society, inclusion in our schools, neighborhoods, churches and in our law firm is a choice. It cannot be mandated by politics. Instead, it requires a deeply personal commitment involving person-to-person relations.

“Unless we each choose to practice inclusion, we will never achieve the full potential of our diversity.”

Rodney Martin, Warner Norcross Diversity Partner

The Diversity Book Club at Warner Norcross has tackled these and other topics over the past two years – thanks to the leadership of Marilee Fisher and Nancy Gravelin.

Marilee works as a business analyst for the firm; Nancy is a legal assistant for the Technology & Intellectual Property Group. They share a friendship, bound by a love of reading and the desire to be lifelong learners.
And they were willing to step forward in July 2013 when Diversity Partner Rodney Martin first floated the idea of expanding the popular One Book, One Firm summer discussion group to a year-round book club.

“As a participant, I can truly say I have learned from every book discussion and been touched by many personal stories and insights from others,” Marilee said. “It’s a great way to get to know others at the firm and immerse yourself in the ideals of diversity and inclusion.

“I think we were both surprised, as middle-aged white women in Grand Rapids, just how much we were learning. I think I have come to understand and respect cultural differences – to not be so quick to make assumptions and really work to look past stereotypes. It’s been eye-opening.”

The two choose from a list of suggestions from Rodney, other members of the firm and their own research. From fiction to nonfiction to memoir, they try to select books appropriate for the workplace on an issue that strengthens awareness of diverse cultures.

About six times a year, the Diversity Book Club meets on a Wednesday over the noon hour – Warner buys lunch and an invite is sent out across the firm to attorneys and staff. This past year, Marilee and Nancy have made a special effort to welcome new associates and new staff to the group.

“People are very respectful of each other and their opinions,” Nancy explained. “We try to create an atmosphere of trust where you can say how you’re feeling and what you’re thinking.

“Even when we’ve gotten into some of the touchier subjects, people have been very open and very accepting. It’s been very good.”

It’s also been impactful. After their club read a book about the education challenges facing parents and students in Harlem, Nancy was moved to volunteer with D.A. Blodgett-St. John’s Home as a mentor to a young, single mother who needs support. Had she not read that book, Nancy admits she probably wouldn’t have signed up for Sisters in Support.

Both are appreciative of the support the firm has shown of the Diversity Book Club – and of the opportunities to engage in thought-provoking discussions in the workplace.

“Everything that we’re reading and learning integrates into our daily lives,” Marilee said. “The firm really respects the principles of diversity and inclusion, and I feel they are walking the walk.”
Inclusive Leadership Training

This isn’t about helping other people, it’s about becoming a better firm.

Dr. Arin Reeves

Nearly four dozen attorneys and directors attended a day-long inclusive leadership training conducted at Warner Norcross last summer by Dr. Arin Reeves, a leading researcher, author and consultant.

Her workshop began with an intriguing formula: Diverse perspectives + inclusive leadership = higher levels of excellence, service and reputation. Distilled from studies by the University of Michigan, EY and the Credit Suisse Foundation, this formula underscores the fact that diverse organizations perform better than organizations with homogenous leadership.

It also served as a springboard into a larger discussion on the disconnect between the commitment that law firms have to diversity and inclusion in the workplace – and their actual workplaces. Reeves noted that more than 95 percent of law firm professionals are sincerely committed to the principles of diversity and inclusion, but the majority struggle with what that commitment means in terms of actual behaviors.

The gap between conscious commitment and unconscious behavior patterns explains the majority of inclusion challenges in law firms. These unconscious behavior patterns, Reeves said, are rooted in unconscious bias – basically, the mental shortcuts we take and the details we fill in from visual and cultural cues, often incorrectly, that cause us to affirm already established beliefs and affect our choices and actions.

Case in point: Reeves conducted a study that asked partners at law firms across the country to review a memo written by a third-year associate. Half thought the author was African-American; half thought the author was Caucasian. Partners reviewing the memo found more grammar, spelling, technical and factual errors in the memo they thought was written by the African-American attorney.

Using the process of active inclusion – or acknowledging unconscious bias and deliberately interrupting it – can upend confirmation bias like the one identified in the study and reduce its impact on decision making. Reeves explored how stereotype bias, availability bias and other varieties of these mental shortcuts can undermine the law firm workplace when it comes to assigning work, evaluating associates, serving clients and developing new business.

Reeves also equipped participants with “bias breakers” – effective ways to identify and interrupt unconscious bias. The session ended with attendees being challenged to develop a personal leadership action plan with immediate, short-term and long-term action steps they could take.
### Demographic Profile as of December 31, 2015

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Percent Female 56.4%  Percent Minority 12.8%

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Percent Female 17.4%  Percent Minority 4.3%

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Percent Female 50.0%  Percent Minority 8.3%

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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>54</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percent Female 30.3%  Percent Minority 6.7%
A BETTER PARTNERSHIP®

By providing discerning and proactive legal advice, we forge a better partnership with clients.