

# **ACTION PLAN OF THE KCMBA MANAGING PARTNERS' DIVERSITY INITIATIVE (2009-2014)**

## **INTRODUCTION**

In 2003, the Managing Partners Committee of the Kansas City Metropolitan Bar Association developed and implemented an action plan to promote diversity in the Kansas City legal community.

As a result of the Action Plan, a number of efforts were launched; including the Heartland Diversity Legal Job Fair (HDLJF) hiring of a KCMBA diversity coordinator, numerous panel presentations to the Bar, clerkship programs and general promotion of increased awareness of the value and importance of diversity in our profession.

These efforts have yielded significant progress. The participating firms reported the following gains from 2004 to 2008:

- the number of attorneys of color increased from 71 to 103
- the number of attorneys of color at the partnership level has increased from 16 to 26.
- the number of African American attorneys has nearly doubled, increasing from 29 to 52.
- the number of women attorneys has increased from 448 to 521.
- the number of women attorneys at the partnership level has increased from 116 to 142.
- the number of openly gay attorneys has increased from 7 to 22.
- the number of disabled attorneys has increased from 5 to 7.

Still, more work remains to be done, and we wish to recommit ourselves and broaden the definition of diversity to be more inclusive. Therefore, in addition, and also consistent with the goals and objectives of the original Action Plan, the member firms acknowledge that efforts to promote diversity must reflect a definition of diversity that is broader than race or ethnicity. The member firms agree that “diversity in its broadest sense” which the member firms commit to promote includes, without limitation, race, color, religion, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, national origin, disability, marital status, age and veteran status.

In addition to a broader definition of diversity, we renew our commitment to our original goal of promotion of diversity in our legal community, and will focus our efforts at retention, continued recruitment, and broader adoption and implementation of best practices as identified by our member firms. While best practices are firm specific and up to the individual firm, the

member firms overarching commitment is to the goal of increasing diversity in our profession and local legal community.

The areas of focus for the 2009-2014 Action Plan will include: Retention, Recruitment, and Education.

### **A. Retention**

The Diversity Action Plan, adopted by the Managing Partners of the KCMBA in 2003 sets forth specific objectives designed to increase the number of diverse attorneys employed by the member firms. Those objectives as implemented, including the HDLJF and the First Year Clerkship Program, were successful in helping firms meet that goal.

Although the member firms should continue to strive to increase the numbers of diverse attorneys hired, the challenge now includes the task of retaining those attorneys as they advance towards partnership. Retaining diverse attorneys first requires that firms recognize and understand why those attorneys might leave. By gaining an understanding of the stressors that lead to the loss of diverse attorney talent, firms can then create strategies to eliminate those causes.

Retention strategies should be incorporated into the fabric and culture of the firm and focus on retaining both new and current associates as they progress toward partnership. In order to assist the member firms with the retention of diverse attorneys, the following objectives are recommended:

1. The KCMBA and its Diversity Coordinator should create and make available to the member firms a databank of “best practices” employed by other firms locally and throughout the country regarding retention efforts and models.
2. Each member firm should, once a year, hold and promote an educational opportunity by which attorneys of the member firm can discuss and learn about retention.
3. Each member firm should track attrition and retention of diverse attorneys and conduct exit interviews with each diverse attorney who leaves the firm to determine the reasons therefore and report data to appropriate internal firm groups for follow-up.
4. Each member firm should establish its own form of mentor program to provide diverse attorneys with insight into firm practices and culture, substantive work opportunities and other matters that may be relevant to job satisfaction.
5. Each member firm should establish its own development plan for diverse attorneys to address their promotion and advancement within their respective firms.

### **B. Recruitment**

The member firms should continue their significant efforts to recruit diverse legal talent.

The members should, however, recognize and account for the likelihood that medium and small firms may not be able to take full advantage of the existing recruiting tools in place under the current Action Plan. To that end, the Managing Partners, with assistance from the Diversity Initiative Committee, should work with medium and small firms to find mutually acceptable means of enhancing their recruiting efforts and opportunities and to employ diverse legal talent.

It is also increasingly important that the firms promote not only their own firms and firm cultures, but the greater Kansas City metropolitan area as well. Diverse legal talent, especially those with no prior exposure to the area, may need to be educated regarding opportunities in the metro area to engage with other diverse professionals, business persons and citizens. Member firms and area law schools, along with the KCMBA, should increase efforts to publicly brand Kansas City as a “diverse community.”

In order to assist member firms and law schools in their collective recruiting efforts, the following objectives are recommended:

1. Continue to promote the HDLJF as an outstanding recruiting tool.
2. Expand the HDLJF to include programs discussing the attributes of Kansas City as well as trips to various points of interest, housing information and other relevant issues related to the Kansas City lifestyle.
3. Expand the First Year Clerkship Program to more member firms.
4. Recruit more member firms to the KCMBA Diversity Initiative.
5. Invite and secure corporate involvement in the KCMBA Diversity Initiative.
6. Encourage member firms to partner with one another to jointly host diversity events to promote the city of Kansas City.

### **C. Education**

The beneficial effects of the work of the participating firms over the past five years will only be enhanced and maximized if the firms are able to maintain a culture and environment that promotes and welcomes diversity. In addition to the other action steps that are described in this Action Plan, continuing education of all staff at participating law firms will be necessary to reach this goal.

The educational process should have at least three components:

1. Each firm should embrace diversity in its broadest sense by reaffirming its commitment to the Action Plan, as herein modified, and on a continuing basis, educating all employees and partners of the firm about the efforts of the firm to effectuate diversity and the goals of the Action Plan.
2. Firm leadership should be educated on the expanded definition of diversity and the types of

internal firm activities that can build diversity acceptance and strength throughout the firm. The commitment of firm leadership is absolutely essential to obtaining firm-wide involvement in support of the Action Plan.

3. All employees of the firm should receive annual education and training designed to maintain and enhance a firm culture which welcomes and supports diversity in recruitment and retention at all levels.

One of the primary goals of the Managing Partner's steering committee will be to identify sources for the external training described above and to communicate with the firms on opportunities for education and training in support of the Action Plan.

Continuing education and training will be instrumental in institutionalizing and building upon the gains of the past five years.