

*Grand Rapids Bar Association*

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MANAGING PARTNERS DIVERSITY COLLABORATIVE

**Action Plan:  
Outcomes, Strategies  
& Action Steps**

March 22, 2012

**ACTION PLAN  
FOR THE GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN  
MANAGING PARTNERS DIVERSITY COLLABORATIVE**

**BACKGROUND**

In January 2011, the Grand Rapids Bar Association invited the Managing Partners of medium and large law offices in Grand Rapids, Michigan, to join in a discussion of diversity and inclusion in their firms and the Grand Rapids Bar Association. That meeting was followed by several more during which the Managing Partners continued our discussion of how our law firms could work together to address the need to become more diverse and inclusive.

In June 2011, the Managing Partners of twelve law offices, along with a representative of the Grand Rapids Bar Association, signed *The Managing Partners Diversity Collaborative Agreement*. In that agreement, we shared our common commitment to increasing the diversity and inclusiveness of our individual organizations and our profession. Each of the Signatories expressed its commitment to working with others to achieve diversity and inclusion in the education, hiring, retention, and promotion of attorneys and in the elevation of attorneys to leadership positions within our organizations, the judiciary, and the profession. We share a belief that diversity encompasses, among other things, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, religion, nationality, language, age, disability, marital and parental status, geographic origin, and socioeconomic background.

Through our discussions, the Managing Partners concluded that we can accomplish much more together than we can individually. We desire to collaborate to bring about change in our organizations and in the Greater Grand Rapids legal community, change that will increase our diversity and ensure that our firms and the Bar Association are open and inclusive. To this end, we agreed to develop a five-year Action Plan to address three pressing challenges facing our organizations and the Bar Association:

- a. Increasing the number attorneys of color in our organizations within five years;
- b. Improving the rate of retention and advancement of female attorneys and attorneys of color in our organizations;
- c. Expanding the pipeline of persons of color who enter law school and the profession.

During the summer of 2011, the members of the Managing Partners Diversity Collaborative broke into three working groups, one on pipeline development, one on recruiting and one on retention. Each working group developed proposed action steps for the 5 year plan. Throughout the fall we gathered to hear reports from each working group and to fashion this Strategic Plan.

## **CRITICAL ISSUE: PIPELINE DEVELOPMENT**

**Outcome:** Expand the pipeline of persons of color from the Grand Rapids area entering law school and the profession.

- 1. Strategy:** Develop programs to encourage high school seniors and college students of color to consider a career in the law in Grand Rapids.
  - a. Action Step:** The Collaborative Firms shall immediately create a Collaborative Pipeline Committee comprising members of each firm to work with the Grand Rapids Bar Association to develop the pipeline programs envisioned by this Action Plan.
  - b. Action Step:** By June 1, 2012, the Collaborative Pipeline Committee and representatives of the Grand Rapids Bar Association shall meet with high school guidance counselors and college pre-law advisors to explore how the Collaborative Firms and the Bar Association can serve as a resource to encourage students to consider and pursue a career in the law. The Collaborative Pipeline Committee shall report its findings and recommendations to the Collaborative at its first semi-annual meeting.
  - c. Action Step:** By December 31, 2012, the Collaborative Pipeline Committee and the Grand Rapids Bar Association shall work with the Collaborative Recruiting Committee to develop a social media strategy to make information and resources about a legal career and the practice of law in Grand Rapids available to high school and college students of color and students interested in working in a diverse legal community.
  - d. Action Step:** By June 1, 2013, the Collaborative Pipeline Committee and the Grand Rapids Bar Association shall develop a model for an internship/job shadowing program for high school and college students of color interested in a legal career. The model shall include program timelines, student criteria, intern training, and metrics for measuring its success. The program shall be presented to the Collaborative for approval at its mid-year meeting in 2013.
  - e. Action Step:** By June 1, 2014, the Collaborative Pipeline Committee and the Grand Rapids Bar Association shall develop a mentorship program model to provide introduction and exposure to law firms for high school and college students of color interested in a legal career. The program model shall include program timelines, student criteria, mentee training and metrics for measuring the success. The program shall be presented to the Collaborative for approval at its mid-year meeting in 2014.

2. **Strategy:** Provide programs, information and resources regarding the law and legal careers to elementary, middle and high school students in ethnically diverse school systems.
  - a. **Action Step:** By September 1, 2012, the Collaborative and the Grand Rapids Bar Association will recruit attorneys and staff members to participate in the Schools of Hope tutoring program, Big Brothers/Big Sisters or similar programs for at least one year.
  - b. **Action Step:** By June 1, 2013, the Collaborative Pipeline Committee and the Grand Rapids Bar Association shall develop three annual programs (such as Constitution Day, legal career panels, story book trials and civics education) to be presented to elementary, middle, and/or high school students beginning in the second half of the 2013-2014 school year. The plans shall be presented to the Collaborative for approval at its mid-year meeting in 2013.
  - c. **Action Step:** By December 31, 2012, Grand Rapids Bar Association President will convene a small group of managing partners from the Collaborative to meet with the superintendents and other stakeholders to identify ways law firms can assist in meeting educational goals.
3. **Strategy:** Establish a program that provides financial assistance to college students and/or law students of color pursuing a legal career.
  - a. **Action Step:** By December 31, 2012, the Collaborative Pipeline Committee will propose to the Collaborative a program in which Collaborative Firms can pool resources to provide students of color financial assistance for LSAT prep courses and/or law school scholarships. The proposal shall be presented to the Collaborative for approval at its first meeting in 2013.
  - b. **Action Step:** The Collaborative Firms and the Grand Rapids Bar Association shall publicize information regarding available financial assistance on their websites.

## CRITICAL ISSUE: RECRUITMENT OF DIVERSE CANDIDATES

**Outcome:** Increase the percentage of minority attorneys who practice in the Grand Rapids community.

1. **Strategy:** Create a collective marketing campaign to promote Grand Rapids to diverse candidates.
  - a. **Action Step:** The Grand Rapids Bar Association shall promptly post this Action Plan on its website and the Collaborative Firms are encouraged to do so as well.
  - b. **Action Step:** The Collaborative Firms shall immediately create a Collaborative Recruiting Committee comprising recruiting and marketing professionals from the Collaborative Firms to work with the Grand Rapids Bar Association to develop the recruitment programs envisioned by this Action Plan. The Collaborative Recruiting Committee should ensure that it taps into diverse resources in the community for thoughts and ideas on how to promote Grand Rapids to diverse candidates.
  - c. **Action Step:** By June 1, 2012, the Collaborative Recruiting Committee shall complete a proposed marketing and communication plan that will detail how the Collaborative Firms and the Grand Rapids Bar Association shall promote the opportunities and advantages of Grand Rapids to diverse candidates through written materials and social media. The proposed plan shall be presented to the Collaborative for approval at its first semi-annual meeting.
2. **Strategy:** Strengthen and expand the Grand Rapids Bar Association/Floyd Skinner Bar Association Minority Clerkship Program.
  - a. **Action Step:** The Collaborative recommends that all Collaborative Firms participate in the 2012 Clerkship Program for at least 8 weeks. Firms that decline to participate should report their reasons to the Collaborative so they may be taken into account in recommending changes to the Clerkship Program.
  - b. **Action Step:** The Collaborative Recruiting Committee shall work with the Clerkship Program Committee to create opportunities beginning in the summer of 2012 for participants in the Clerkship Program to interact with each other and with their peers in the legal and business community to develop camaraderie and a greater understanding of the benefits of living and practicing in West Michigan.
  - c. **Action Step:** By December 31, 2012, the Collaborative Recruiting Committee shall work with the Clerkship Program Committee to identify ways that the program can be expanded in 2013, such as permitting smaller firms to offer a split clerkship with another firm or corporate legal office participating in the program.



## **CRITICAL ISSUE: RETENTION OF FEMALE ATTORNEYS AND ATTORNEYS OF COLOR**

**Outcome:** Increase the rate of retention of female attorneys and attorneys of color.

1. **Strategy:** Each firm shall provide all associates with a structured and equal opportunity to advance their careers at the firm.

In support of this strategy, each firm commits to implement the following best practices, whenever practicable and shall report its progress to the Collaborative at each semi-annual meeting of the Collaborative Managing Partners:

- a. **Action Step:** The Collaborative Firms shall immediately create a Collaborative Retention Committee comprising members from the Collaborative Firms to work with the Grand Rapids Bar Association to develop the retention programs envisioned by this Action Plan.
- b. **Action Step:** By December 31, 2012, establish a means to periodically monitor work assignments to ensure that all associates are given the opportunity to work on projects that offer them the chance to advance in their careers and to work on matters involving significant and meaningful engagements.
- c. **Action Step:** Establish clear benchmarks for professional development and core competencies that are necessary to advance at the firm and shall communicate the benchmarks to each associate.
- d. **Action Step:** Establish and maintain an evaluation system designed to ensure that each associate receives constructive, timely feedback and substantive performance evaluations based around its professional development benchmarks and core competencies.
- e. **Action Step:** Establish and maintain a meaningful mentoring program with clear descriptions of the roles of mentors and mentees and shall provide for the periodic review of the program's effectiveness, including through annual surveys of associates and partners/members.
- f. **Action Step:** Singly or in concert with other Collaborative Firms or the Grand Rapids Bar Association, offer training to mentors in mentoring across differences of gender and color, race or national origin. The Collaborative Retention Committee shall work with the Grand Rapids Bar Association to develop the mentoring training program by December 31, 2012. The training program shall be presented to the Collaborative for approval at its first meeting in 2013.
- g. **Action Step:** Use exit interviews/surveys to monitor the reasons for attrition among attorneys and staff and assess the information to identify organizational changes that would improve retention.

2. **Strategy:** Each firm shall establish and implement a plan to promote inclusiveness within the firm.

In support of this strategy, each firm commits to implement the following best practices, whenever practicable and shall report its progress to the Collaborative at each semi-annual meeting of the Collaborative Managing Partners:

- a. **Action Step:** By June 1, 2012, adopt a clear statement of the business case for diversity and inclusion and begin persistently to communicate the firm's commitment to diversity and inclusion both internally, to attorneys and staff, and externally to clients and the community.
- b. **Action Step:** By December 31, 2012, and periodically thereafter, complete a review of its policies, procedures and practices to identify and adopt a plan to remove impediments to inclusion and retention.
- c. **Action Step:** Adopt a policy permitting attorneys to engage in the part-time practice of law consistent with the imperative of fulfilling client needs and meeting client expectations as well as firm business needs, without a disproportionate reduction of income or credit toward partnership.
- d. **Action Step:** Ensure that its work environment and work-related social activities, whether formal or informal, are as hospitable and congenial for, and as inclusive of, female attorneys and attorneys of color as they are for all other attorneys.
- e. **Action Step:** Each firm shall develop a strategy to provide leadership experience to female attorneys and attorneys of color as beneficial as the experiences provided to other attorneys at the firm.
- f. **Action Step:** Develop a strategy to increase the number of female attorneys and attorneys of color in leadership positions in the firm.
- g. **Action Step:** Make inclusiveness a specific factor in any system adopted for the periodic evaluation of attorneys and staff members in the firm.
- h. **Action Step:** Ensure that female attorneys and attorneys of color, to the extent they are willing to serve, are represented on the firm's recruiting committee.
- i. **Action Step:** Ensure that female partners and partners of color are included in the process of evaluating all attorneys and staff.
- j. **Action Step:** Ensure that key managers of the firm attend training on diversity and inclusion, conducted by an outside consultant. The Collaborative shall work with the Grand Rapids Bar Association to offer an annual program of training on diversity and inclusion beginning in 2013, conducted by an outside consultant, for key members of firm management. The Collaborative Retention Committee shall develop a proposed training program by December 31, 2012, to be presented to the Collaborative for approval at its first meeting in 2013.



3. **Strategy:** Each firm shall support its female attorneys and attorneys of color in becoming connected in the legal and business communities.

In support of this strategy, each firm commits to implement the following best practices, whenever practicable and shall report its progress to the Collaborative at each semi-annual meeting of the Collaborative Managing Partners:

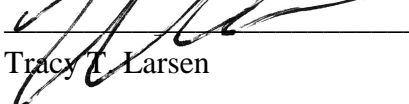
- a. **Action Step:** Encourage and support female attorneys and attorneys of color who wish to participate in special purpose bar associations, young professionals groups, and key business networking groups.
- b. **Action Step:** Encourage and support female attorneys and attorneys of color who wish to pursue leadership positions within community organizations and participate in community leadership training programs.
- c. **Action Step:** In cooperation with the other Collaborative Firms and the Grand Rapids Bar Association shall offer an annual conference that focuses on business development and leadership development for female attorneys and attorneys of color. By December 31, 2012, the Collaborative Retention Committee and the Grand Rapids Bar Association shall develop a proposal for the first annual conference to be held in during 2013. The proposal shall be presented to the Collaborative for approval at its first meeting in 2013.
- d. **Action Step:** Together with the other Collaborative Firms offer opportunities for attorneys from underrepresented groups to help members of the group network and develop business development opportunities. By December 31, 2013, the Collaborative Retention Committee shall propose to the Collaborative, for consideration at its first meeting in 2014, a vehicle for such networking activities.
- e. **Action Step:** Encourage and support the participation of female attorneys and attorneys of color in non-traditional marketing activities, such as charitable organizations, theatre, the arts and community activities.
- f. **Action Step:** Encourage the success of this Action Plan by expanding the number of female attorneys and attorneys of color to whom the Collaborative Firms make referrals.

#### **Additional Commitments**

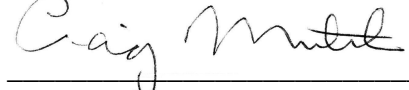
1. Each firm will adopt mechanisms to implement and monitor compliance with these commitments and report semi-annually to the Collaborative on the firm's progress.
2. The Managing Partners of the member firms and representatives of the Grand Rapids Bar Association shall meet semi-annually to assess progress under the Action Plan and to consider other opportunities to collaborate to further the goals of increasing diversity and inclusion in our firms and in the Grand Rapids Bar Association.

The undersigned have signed this Agreement the 22nd day of March 2012, to evidence their Commitment to work together toward becoming more diverse and inclusive.

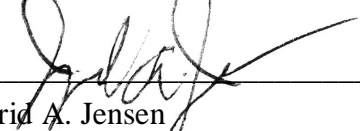
**Barnes & Thornburg, LLP**

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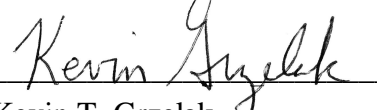
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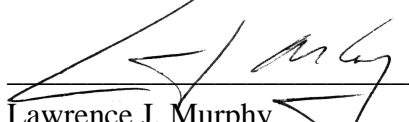
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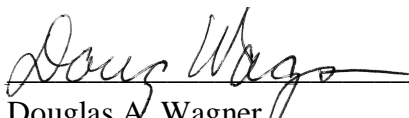
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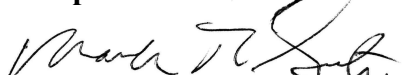
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Mark Smith, President



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