



## Mecklenburg County Bar 2015 Membership Survey

### SUMMARY OF RESULTS

The following report summarizes the results of the 2015 MCB membership survey. The survey was developed in the summer of 2015 and distributed to 5,030 MCB members via email. The survey was active from September through November 2015. Five hundred fifty-two individuals started the survey and approximately 350 respondents completed the survey. The response rate ranged from 11% at the start of the survey to 7% toward the end of the survey. The margin of error is +/-6% or better. Compared with MCB membership overall, the survey respondents include a higher proportion of women. Also, Caucasians were a slightly higher proportion of respondents than the MCB membership overall. We do not have reliable age data for the MCB membership overall, but the survey sample age breakdowns reflect the national population of lawyers within the margin of error.

#### 1. DEMOGRAPHICS & PRACTICE INFORMATION

Side-by-side comparison of gender and race/ethnicity with MCB membership overall:

	Survey respondents	MCB membership
<b>Gender</b>		
Women	45%	38%
Men	55%	62%
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>		
African-American	7.2%	10%
Asian	.6%	1.8%
American Indian or Alaska Native	.3%	.2%
Hispanic/Latino	1.2%	2.1%
Caucasian/White	88%	84.6%
Multiracial	1.2%	--
Other	1.5%	1.4%
<b>Age</b>		
Under 30	6%	No reliable data
30-39	24%	
40-49	24%	
50-59	25%	
60-69	16%	
70+	5%	

**Practice setting:** 67% percent of respondents are in private practice (15% solo, 13% 2-5 lawyer firm, 20% 6-20 lawyer firm, 20% 21+ lawyer firm); 10% are in a government setting; 8% are public sector; 7% are in-house counsel. (Please note that practice setting percentages here do not match the survey results; results were recalculated to account for respondents who skipped questions.)

**Age:** The MCB does not appear to be as susceptible to the graying membership trends that are affecting other bars throughout the country. The MCB membership is relatively balanced in terms of age; 54% of respondents are under 50 (the national median age of lawyers is 49). However, 11% of respondents do expect to retire in the next five years.

## 2. GENERAL PERCEPTION OF THE MCB

- Overall perception of the MCB is good:
  - 82% agree or strongly agree that the MCB offers quality programs and services
  - 79% agree or strongly agree that the MCB offers many ways to become involved
  - 60% agree or strongly agree that the MCB sponsors and supports activities that are important to me
- Still, there was a notable (if predictable) diversity of opinion about the value of a mandatory local bar throughout the survey. Also, the facilitator noted the frequency and intensity of comments relating to dues and the cost of CLE. There is opportunity to continue to strengthen member perception in these critical areas:
  - 57% agree or strongly agree that the MCB makes me a better, more informed lawyer
  - 44% agree or strongly agree that the MCB provides good value for my dues
- MCB leaders recognized the need to “think like a voluntary bar” and begin to identify tangible opportunities to bolster the value of membership. Preliminary ideas included:
  - Including a free ethics hour with dues
  - Focusing more on business development
  - Focusing the monthly luncheons on critical topics of interest to members
  - Rethinking the CLE and event fee structure
- A repeated perception in the survey was the MCB’s orientation toward large firms (in terms of commitment to diversity and pro bono, as well as CLE) and that the bar could do more to serve solo and small firm practitioners, as well as government/public interest attorneys. MCB leaders observed that the MCB is seeing increasing involvement from medium firms, small firms and government lawyers. How does the bar continue to emphasize that it is a welcoming place for everyone?
- A majority of respondents have visited the new building. While many were likely to visit the building in the future for education or training, there currently is little interest from members in using the building in other ways. How will the MCB build a sense of community around the building so that members see it as hub of activity and resources?
- On a positive note, the percentage of respondents who described their involvement as “I pay my dues and otherwise have no involvement in the MCB” is small relative to survey results from other mandatory bars. Still, there may be opportunity to move some of the 40% who describe themselves as minimally involved into a higher level of engagement with the bar. Also, the significant number of respondents who indicated an interest in future leadership opportunities should be immediately engaged and cultivated. The most significant obstacles to greater involvement are money and time.

## 3. MCB KEY FUNCTIONS & EFFECTIVENESS

- The areas highlighted in blue below are the top four areas of importance and effectiveness for all members and for the YLD eligible segment. Survey respondents rated the MCB as effective in two of the categories that they rated as most important: “Providing members with opportunities to improve their legal acumen” and “Providing opportunities to meet and interact with other local lawyers.” Respondents also ranked the MCB effective in an area they ranked of slightly lesser importance: “Providing opportunities for pro bono and other community service with a legal nexus.” Less than half of respondents thought the MCB was effective in the other areas. MCB leaders observed that the MCB regularly provides information about local legal issues and courts, but that the information may need to be more visible or reframed in these terms.

Function	Importance (All respondents)	Effectiveness (All respondents)	Importance (YLD eligible)	Effectiveness (YLD eligible)
	Importance percentages = those who responded "important" or "very important" Effectiveness percentages = those who responded "effective" or "very effective"			
Providing opportunities for members to improve their legal acumen	79%	70%	79%	69%
Providing opportunities to meet and interact with other local lawyers	75%	60%	70%	66%
Providing information about local legal issues and courts	74%	41%	83%	37%
Improving the reputation of the legal profession	74%	28%	75%	29%
Fostering a strong relationship between the bench and the bar	65%	42%	69%	41%
Offering professional development opportunities (other than CLE)	58%	37%	62%	37%
Increasing public understanding about the law and the legal system	53%	25%	49%	29%
Providing opportunities for pro bono and other community service with a legal nexus	52%	60%	63%	61%
Fostering diversity in the legal profession	47%	35%	50%	32%

- CLE, Networking, Committee involvement, Social events and Section activities are the MCB's most valuable activities (CLE is #1 by a large margin).
- Members are most interested in the MCB's core activities. Members would most like to see the MCB enhance or improve: CLE, networking opportunities, community/public projects, and business development. Respondents who are YLD eligible had the same priorities for improvement, with the addition of social events.
  - The most frequent suggestions for improvement around CLE related to: diversity of offerings both in topic and in sophistication level; the cost of seminars; and online accessibility.
  - Respondents asked for more CLE topics in the following areas: ethics; practice management, especially for solos/smalls; business development; business and intellectual property; seminars relevant to prosecutors, public defenders and other public interest attorneys; immigration; practices that are not court-oriented; seminars for paralegals; technology; and seminars on basic processes for new lawyers.
- Those who were members of a section or division were generally satisfied with their entity's activities. However, given the tremendous value that is delivered through these smaller, more targeted groups, the MCB may want to explore ways to further bolster section and division activity.

#### 4. COMMUNICATIONS

- Bar blasts are overwhelmingly the preferred method for learning about MCB activities (84%), followed by the newsletter and the website. Social media use for this function is minimal. Respondents who are YLD eligible prefer the Bar blasts slightly less (77%) and social media more (e.g., 12% Facebook).
- MCB members are increasingly mobile with 68% of respondents using a smartphone and 46% using a tablet or Kindle for their professional reading. 84% of respondents who are YLD eligible use a smartphone.
- Does the fact that most members receive much of their information via the Bar blasts suggest that there needs to be a reorientation of content to ensure that members are seeing critical information?

## 5. JOB SATISFACTION & YOUR PRACTICE

- Respondents reported annual net income as follows: 30% of respondents - Under \$80,000; 29% of respondents - \$80,000 - \$139,999; 27% of respondents - \$140,000 - \$299,999; 15% of respondents - \$300,000 and above.
- 77% responded that they are satisfied with their jobs and 81% responded they are satisfied with their chosen profession as an attorney.
- The top items that would improve professional satisfaction and sense of fulfillment for respondents are:
  - Increased financial compensation (57%; 74% for YLD eligible)
  - Sense of purpose in the type of work I do (26%)
  - Opportunities for growth and advancement (25%; 34% for YLD eligible)
  - Sense of being appreciated and valued (25%)
- Respondents mainly deal with opposing counsel who are: Local (43%); Statewide (19%); Regional (10%); National (15%); and International (.8%)
- 43% of respondents' firms/organizations do not use billable hours; 30% do use billable hours but do not have a requirement. The remaining firms/organizations are most likely to have billable requirements of 1701-1900 hours (13%).
- 84% of respondents work full-time; 5% work part-time; 6% are scaling back toward retirement.

## 6. CONCERNS

- Respondents' top concerns about their life and career were:
  - Providing good service to my clients with limited time (88% concerned or very concerned)
  - Keeping current in the law (81% concerned or very concerned)
  - Balancing work and personal life/family (78% concerned or very concerned)
  - Earning a living (78% concerned or very concerned)
  - Being adequately prepared for retirement (75% concerned or very concerned)
  - Keeping up with and using technology (59% concerned or very concerned)
- Respondents' top concerns about the profession were:
  - The way judges are selected (70% concerned or very concerned)
  - Public perception of the profession (66% concerned or very concerned)
  - Court budget challenges (63% concerned or very concerned)
  - Lack of public understanding/confidence in the judicial system (61% concerned or very concerned)
  - Access to justice (55% concerned or very concerned)
  - Increased client expectations about value of services rendered (50% concerned or very concerned)

## 7. THE BUILDING

- 61% of respondents have visited or attended a meeting at the new Bar & Foundation Center.
- Of those who have not visited, 59% responded that there were no programs/events scheduled that were of interest.
- Respondents were most likely to use the building for education/training programs (51% likely or very likely).

Respondents indicated they were significantly less likely to use of the building for any of the other functions that were suggested.

## 8. THE MECKLENBURG BAR FOUNDATION

- Respondents' top reasons for giving to the foundation were:
  - MBF's support of the bar's educational and charitable activities (44%)
  - MBF's grants to local nonprofits with a legal nexus (35%)
  - MBF's role in increasing access to the legal system (30%)
- Of non-donors, 58% of respondents prefer to donate to non-legal entities and 24% prefer to donate directly to local nonprofits with a legal nexus; 9% would like to learn more about MBF's goals and programs.
- Respondents top causes to which to donate are: religious institutions (68%); academic institutions (63%); homelessness/hunger (60%).
- 47% of respondents said they would be more likely to donate to the Lawyers' Impact Fund if they knew which recipients would receive grants. 53% of respondents would be more likely to donate if they knew the specific projects or programs that would be funded.
- Respondents prioritized support of well-established legal nonprofit agencies with a history of pro bono service.
- Familiarity with foundation programs vary. Awareness is highest with the Law & Society Luncheon and Bar Leadership Institute. Respondents knew the least about the Lawyers' Impact Fund, the McMillan Fellowship Program and the Bar Foundation Fund.
- Respondents thought the MBF's role in 1) promoting the highest ideals of professionalism, and 2) promoting public service and access to the legal system are the organization's most important goals.

## 9. OTHER DIFFERENCES/PRIORITIES AMONG YLD ELIGIBLE SEGMENT

Responses from the YLD-eligible contingent were consistent with member responses overall, except in the following areas:

- Respondents in this group described themselves as having slightly higher levels of involvement than respondents overall.
- Fewer agreed or strongly agreed that the MCB offers quality programs and services (-10%) and YLD eligible were less likely to agree or strongly agree that the MCB provides good value for the dues (-4%).
- Of the most valued activities, YLD is ranked third behind CLE and networking.
- Top concerns about life and career were:
  - Providing good service to my clients with limited time (87% concerned/very concerned)
  - Balancing work and personal life/family (85% concerned/very concerned)
  - Keeping current in the law (84% concerned/very concerned)
  - Career development (83% concerned/very concerned)
  - Being adequately prepared for retirement (69% concerned/very concerned)

- Managing the business aspects of my practice (61% concerned/very concerned)
- Student loans (59% concerned/very concerned)
- Top concerns about the profession were:
  - The way judges are selected (65% concerned/very concerned)
  - Lack of public understanding and confidence in the judicial system (61% concerned/very concerned)
  - Public perception of the profession (63% concerned/very concerned)
  - Increased client expectations about the value of services rendered (56% concerned/very concerned)
  - Court budget challenges (60% concerned/very concerned)
  - Access to justice (53% concerned/very concerned)
  - Long-term impact of the economic downturn of 2008 (53% concerned/very concerned)
- Predictably, respondents who are YLD eligible are considerably less familiar with the programs and activities sponsored by the MBF.
- 58% of YLD eligible respondents are generating an annual income of less than \$80,000 a year.
- 31% are in firms with 6-20 lawyers; 21% are in firms with 21+ lawyers; 17% are in firms with 2-5 lawyers. 11% are solos. 21% are not in private practice.