



Diversity and Inclusion: Best Practices from Five Signatories to the Call to Action

A Report from Womble Carlyle Sandridge & Rice

Womble Carlyle started with a Task Force and developing a strategy. Their strategy has two components: an internal focus to increase retention in underrepresented groups (especially at partner level), and an external focus to support/promote diversity related initiatives outside our firm and helping our friends and clients to help them succeed. This requires proper leadership in the firm. Womble Carlyle's commitment to diversity is reflected in its leadership, as the firm has a new female Chair and Managing Partner, Betty Temple as well as a number of women attorneys who serve as practice group leaders, office managing partners, and members of the firm management committee.

The largest question is how do you carry out this strategy? Womble Carlyle has a 3 pronged approach: **education, outreach/service/sponsorship, recruiting/retention.**

- **Education** - The education piece is an evolving aspect. Womble Carlyle focused on being a diverse firm because it is the right thing to do, and clients desired more diverse representation. In recent years, the firm has obtained additional education and training from consultants like Vernā Myers (who also spoke to the MCB Signatories in late 2014) and learned how a diverse culture also improves an organization's decision-making for itself and clients. In short, "Diversity makes us better." The firm also regularly brings in speakers and conducts firm-wide video conferences on various diversity-related topics.
- **Outreach, Service, and Sponsorship** –Womble Carlyle sponsors and serves organizations promoting diversity and inclusion, such as the Human Rights Campaign, the Minority Corporate Counsel Association, the Thurgood Marshall College Fund, and the National Asian-Pacific American Bar Association, among others.
- **Recruiting/Retention** –
 - *Recruiting:* Womble Carlyle has made it a focus to recruit from schools with large minority enrollments. The firm launched the Womble Carlyle Scholars Program in 2004 for diverse rising second-year law students. They offer a \$30,000 scholarship and a spot in the firm's summer program for students after their 2nd year of law school. This has been a significant investment for the firm and has been successful. They also partner with law schools for various events.
 - *Retention:* The firm has started several internal resource groups promoting diversity, such as WOW (Women of Womble) and WIN (Womble Inclusion Network). This helps diverse members across different locations share their ideas and opportunities and allows members to connect and identify with others. It has been a long-standing practice of Womble Carlyle to be flexible with employment status designations to offer options for attorneys based on their needs. Womble Carlyle also has several other programs in place with the purpose of encouraging inclusion, including domestic partner benefits and insurance coverage for sex affirmation surgery.