

California Firms Lead in Diversity

By Irene Plagianos

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It seems California firms have a leg up on more than Hollywood megadeals and Silicon Alley start-ups. New diversity statistics suggest Golden State firms are leading the way in hiring and retaining women, gay and lesbian, and minority attorneys, sibling publication *The National Law Journal* reports.

In comparison to top national firms, for example, there are nearly twice as many minority partners in major California firms, the NLJ reports, citing a study commissioned by Fenwick & West and conducted by consulting firm Talent Advisory Board. Overall, the numbers of California nonpartner women and minority lawyers are also greater than their national counterparts. The study looked at the seven major firms, including Bingham McCutchen and Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe.

Perhaps more important than the stats are the lessons top firms can glean from the study. Bingham McCutchen's San Francisco office has grown more diverse by looking beyond grades and recruiting outside of top-tier schools. A substantial pro bono practice, like Morrison & Foerster's work on civil rights and AIDS cases, can also bolster a firm's reputation as diversity-friendly and help attract a more diverse pool of lawyers.

Ultimately, strong mentoring programs for women and minorities are crucial to growing a diverse practice. "Diverse attorneys need senior-level role models," Tina Paikeday, a principal at Talent Advisory Board told the NLJ. If they don't find them, "they may decide to go somewhere else. It helps when an attorney can look around and see folks like themselves."

Source: The AmLaw Daily