

MoFo To Launch Diversity And Inclusion Programs In 2022

By Rachel Rippetoe

Law360 (December 9, 2021, 4:48 PM EST) -- Morrison & Foerster announced plans this week to implement several new programs in 2022, including giving attorneys billable credit for promoting diversity and inclusion within the firm, building a global "allies network" and consolidating its mentorship and sponsorship programs.

Starting Jan. 1, the firm will let attorneys earn up to 50 hours of billable credit by participating in activities related to bolstering diversity and inclusion within the firm, including helping with recruiting and training of new attorneys and participating in the firms' affinity groups dedicated to promoting diversity in the legal industry.

Morrison & Foerster's chief diversity and inclusion officer, Natalie Kernisant, said in a statement Wednesday that in offering billable credit for diversity and inclusion work, the firm was acknowledging the "disproportionate amount of time" that women and attorneys from diverse ethnic, racial, socioeconomic, disabled or LGBTQ+ backgrounds spend helping the firm boost its diversity, and encouraging the rest of the firm's attorneys to join in on the efforts.

She said a few peer firms have also offered up billable hours for diversity efforts, but Morrison & Foerster's programming stands out with the launch of its global allies network.

"We've taken it a step further to also educate, encourage and provide a clear and concrete framework for our non-diverse/all attorneys to more actively engage in and begin to lead the firm's diversity and inclusion efforts through the launch of our allies network," she said.

According to the firm, the network already includes 150 attorneys and 80 partners who it says will replace the four formal engagement committees the firm created in the wake of George Floyd's murder in the summer of 2020. Tony Carbone, chair of the firm's tax department, leads the group.

To create the network, law school professors led the group through four programs designed to outline systemic inequalities in the talent recruitment and management procedures commonly used in BigLaw and give advice on how to address those flaws, the firm said.

In addition to the new network and credit offerings, the firm is taking "a more holistic approach to professional growth" by consolidating its mentorship program with its sponsorship program, calling the combined programs MoFo Navigate. Kernisant said the combined programs would help senior attorneys mentor more effectively.

"Our MoFo Navigate initiative is truly one-of-a-kind in that it encourages collaboration, and leverages insight, across departments, geography and over the course of an attorney's career, to create a support system flexible enough to respond to the changing needs of an attorney as they grow and develop," she said. "MoFo Navigate is also uniquely and specifically designed to promote greater equity and inclusion. In particular, both mentors and mentees will be trained on some of the common root causes of attrition, and how to mentor more effectively across difference."

Morrison & Foerster has been lauded in 2021 for its diversity efforts. In October, the Minority Corporate Counsel Association released a diversity scorecard that showed Morrison & Foerster was among the most diverse and inclusive firms that have more than 501 lawyers. And the firm topped Law360's list of firms with the most diverse equity partnerships published in August.

-- Additional reporting by Jacqueline Bell and Clarice Silber. Editing by Karin Roberts.

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