

## The 10 Best Law Firms For Asian-American Attorneys

By Alex Wolf

*Law360, Boston (May 16, 2016, 9:37 PM ET)* -- Asian-American attorneys are the best represented minority group at the more than 300 firms surveyed by Law360, comprising 6.5 percent of all attorneys. But they still struggle to gain a foothold. Here, we look at the top 10 law firms for Asian-American attorneys, and what they are doing to retain these individuals and enhance their careers.

Compared to 2015, many of the same firms rank near the top, but the deck has been shuffled a little bit. Sughrue Mion PLLC has jumped from No. 5 to No. 1, sharing the top spot this year with Knobbe Martens Olson & Bear LLP, while notable BigLaw outfits Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati PC, White & Case LLP and Morrison & Foerster LLP have shifted just a few spots in one direction or the other. Another repeat trend is the dominance of intellectual property firms and immigration-focused groups. Law360's rankings take into account the number of Asian-American attorneys at each firm, as well as the percentage among partners and nonpartners.

As the data shows, Asian-Americans continue to struggle to climb the ranks at the largest law firms in the U.S., making up only 3 percent of lawyers at the partnership level. While many of the Asian-Americans who graduate from law school each year are able to land jobs, they can find it hard to overcome the unfair stereotype that they are hard workers able to churn out billable hours, but unable to cut it as rainmakers or firm leaders, according to National Asian Pacific American Bar Association President Jin Hwang.

“That same stereotype sometimes prevents APAs from getting in the court and litigating cases,” Hwang said. “They still think that we’re the translator or the interpreter, as opposed to the first chair in a big case.”

But some Asian-Americans are flourishing in genuinely inclusive environments, where their presence and input are prioritized and firm leaders are intent on helping young attorneys develop their careers within the firm.

### The 10 Best Firms For Asian-American Attys

Rank	Law Firm
1	Knobbe Martens Sughrue Mion
3	White & Case
4	Wilson Sonsini
5	Sterne Kessler
6	Fenwick & West Oblon
8	Morrison & Foerster
9	Berry Appleman
10	Fragomen, Del Rey

Source: Law360 survey data.

At Knobbe Martens, where Asian-Americans make up nearly 30 percent of nonpartners and 13 percent of total partners, the firm puts associates on six-year partnership tracks and promotes an environment where young lawyers are free to do work for various partners, Ben Katzenellenbogen, chair of the firm's recruiting committee told Law360.

The firm does not reward partners based on the amount of business and billable hours they accrue, but compensates them based on their equity in the firm, which removes the disincentive for associates to work for multiple partners, thereby allowing them to gain different types of experience and find mentors in different corners of the firm, Katzenellenbogen said.

"That probably has the biggest impact as far as law students and attorneys looking at our firm and seeing what our workforce looks like and what our partners look like," he said. "I'm not sure that I know why it is that the traditional BigLaw model that makes everyone miserable seems to disproportionately make minority attorneys more miserable."

But not all large firms are failing in this respect. For instance, White & Case earned the No. 1 spot on the list of the 100 top law firms for minority attorneys and is No. 3 with respect to Asian-Americans.

The globally minded firm credits its level of diversity to outreach initiatives and a focus on recruiting attorneys from a variety of backgrounds, according to attorney Bijal V. Vakil, executive partner of the firm's Silicon Valley office and a leader on its Asian Affinity Group.

"We try to staff our teams diversely, and we recognize that having positive role models is a significant contributor to developing our younger Asian-American attorneys at the firm," Vakil said. "Because our business has always been so global, we recognize the need to have diverse teams of lawyers working on matters."

Catering to the wants and needs of international clients has also factored into the hiring decisions at Sughrue Mion, which has represented international companies in Asia for decades, and the firm typically draws from a pool of lawyers that includes many with an Asian background, partner Susan Pan said. But, beyond building a workforce with cultural similarities to its client base, the firm is also structured to promote diversity and to encourage all of its members to build long-lasting practices at the firm, she added.

"If you have someone for a year or two, that helps. But if they stay five, 10 or 20 years ... that speaks to whether the firm is open to their ideas," she said. "I would hope that it would get better so that firms that actually do have diversity aren't newsworthy."

Keeping attorneys for the long term is a goal shared by many firms, and those that succeed often exhibit a culture that reflects a panoply of voices where diversity can continue to grow organically. That type of culture is a hallmark at Washington, D.C.-based IP firm Sterne Kessler Goldstein & Fox PLLC, said Gaby Longworth, the firm's diversity chair, who holds a Ph.D in human genetics and molecular biology.

"You want to be in a place where you're comfortable," she said. "It has to be a long-term view; you have to build it in."

Sterne Kessler continues to attract top talent from the Asian-American community and other ethnic and social groups because it not only implements mentoring and training programs for both attorneys and

staff, but because it has diverse faces at the leadership level and doesn't just "hire people for the hell of it," Longworth said.

Like all people, Asian-Americans want to advance and be recognized for their achievements, and the firms that are doing the best at recruiting and retaining these lawyers are not just keeping them on board to appear diverse, but instead challenging them and putting them in positions to prove themselves.

"No one wants to be viewed as the token. It's very demoralizing and debilitating," Hwang said. "You want to feel that you earned your seat at the table."

*Methodology: Law360 surveyed over 300 U.S. firms, or vereins with a U.S. component, about their overall and minority headcount numbers as of Dec. 31, 2015. Only U.S.-based attorneys were included in the survey. Firms are ranked based on three factors: 1) the percentage of partners, both equity and nonequity, who self-identify as Asian-American; 2) the percentage of nonpartners who self-identify as Asian-American; and 3) the number of attorneys at the firm who self-identify as Asian-American.*

--Editing by Mark Lebetkin and Philip Shea.

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