

Law360's Diversity Snapshot: How Firms Stack Up

By **Gerald Schiffman**

Law360 (July 25, 2023, 2:02 PM EDT) -- Law360 Pulse's 2023 law firm survey has revealed a familiar finding: Firms are continuing to diversify their attorney ranks, although progress remains slow.

Just 17% of firms top the benchmarks for the 2023 Diversity Snapshot ranking, which is based on the pipeline score methodology outlined below. That percentage is slightly larger than last year's result, but it's still small enough to signal that many law firms aren't keeping pace with the talent pool.

Nearly half of the ranked firms score between five and 15 points below the benchmarks. The largest 15 firms in the ranking all trail their target — although for some, that story is close to being flipped. Three firms in that group of BigLaw titans miss the mark by less than one percentage point, which puts them within striking distance of a positive score in a future edition. Other firms in the BigLaw contingent posted positive scores, as Morrison Foerster LLP, Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati PC and Cooley LLP pushed past the benchmarks by more than three points.

Among the 283 firms to qualify for this edition of the Diversity Snapshot, there are some success stories. Three midsize firms — Berry Appleman & Leiden LLP, Atkinson Andelson Loya Ruud & Romo PLC, and Kubicki Draper — exceeded the benchmarks by more than 10 points. As a headcount increase has put Fragomen, Del Rey, Bernsen & Loewy LLP onto the BigLaw bubble, the firm has maintained a similarly strong pipeline score. The very best scores were posted by Wong Fleming and by Roig Lawyers, two firms with fewer than 100 attorneys.

This ranking isn't the final word on law firms' diversity, equity and inclusion efforts. Later this year, Law360 will release the new edition of its Social Impact Leaders, which merges the Diversity Snapshot ranking with measures of leadership diversity to take a more holistic view of firms' diversity. But this headcount-driven ranking makes clear that the industry still has a long road ahead in recruiting and retaining attorneys of color.



How Do Firms Measure Up?

The top firms in each size category are shown with their pipeline score, as well as their proportion of attorneys of color at each tier.

601+ attorneys 251 to 600 attorneys **101 to 250 attorneys** 100 or fewer attorneys

Rank ^	Firm ^	Total Attorneys ↕	All Partners ↕	Equity Partners ↕	Nonequity Partners ↕	Associates ↕	Other Lawyers ↕	Score ↕
10	Sterne Kessler	155	24.6%	27.9%	18.2%	33.3%	25%	+2.2

--Editing by Pamela Wilkinson, John Campbell and Xavier Chauvris. Graphics by Ben Jay.

Methodology

To evaluate firms at the associate level, Law360 Pulse computed the 2014–2021 portion of minority juris doctor degree recipients from all law schools accredited by the American Bar Association. That figure amounts to 30.2% when non-U.S. residents are omitted. The eight-year window accounts for the fact that attorneys often work as associates for several years.

Representation of nonequity partners was gauged against the percentage of minority associates and other attorneys reported by firms in 2019–2021 Law360 survey data. ("Other attorneys" is a catchall tier that's generally composed of counsel and staff attorneys.) This benchmark came out to 24.1%.

Firm diversity at the equity partner level was assessed against the aggregated rate of minority nonequity partners, associates and other attorneys across the same three years of survey data. That benchmark amounts to 21.8%. The benchmark for other attorneys is computed as the harmonic mean of the equity partner, nonequity partner and associate benchmarks, which comes out to 24.9%.

For two-tier firms that didn't split up their partner data at the equity and nonequity level, the diversity rate for their total partners was evaluated against a composite version of the equity and nonequity benchmarks, which was based on the average industrywide split of partners across the two levels. This total partner benchmark amounted to 22.9%.

Benchmarks were subtracted from the proportion of attorneys of color at each level of seniority. The differentials were then summed together, with each level weighted by its proportion of the firm's total attorneys. Calculations and rankings use unrounded numbers.

Firms that did not provide a racial and ethnic breakdown for their U.S. attorney headcounts were ineligible for the Diversity Snapshot.

All data shown uses firm headcounts as of Dec. 31, 2022. More details about Law360's data-gathering process and definitions are available in the survey FAQ.