

Where Do We Go From Here?: Big Law's Struggle With Recruiting and Retaining Female Talent



Executive Summary

*At this rate, women equity partners will not reach 30 percent until 2081.
Without extraordinary new efforts, parity remains only a distant possibility¹*

It is no secret that a lack of gender diversity is a longtime issue for most industries. As a result, women face a greater risk of disenfranchisement by implicit bias within predominantly male organizations and are underrepresented in top leadership roles.

Big Law, in particular, is at a crossroads when it comes to gender diversity. In fact, the number of female lawyers in the Am Law 200 has flatlined for the past five years at slightly over 30% of the workforce. There is no disputing that this is an embarrassing statistic. As enforcers of equal opportunity, lawyers are at the forefront of the push for equality as a legal matter. At the same time, the legal sector is consistently ranked as one of the worst industries for hiring and retaining a diverse workforce, and it has failed to improve despite efforts to change.

ALM Intelligence analysis provides a new understanding of how to assist Big Law in recruiting and retaining top female talent by focusing on market metrics to illustrate the critical role that underlying data (such as practice area and location statistics by gender) may have in Big Law diversity. Empowered with a new way to view the problem, Big Law can begin to improve its reputation.

The report, *Where Do We Go From Here?: Big Law's Struggle With Recruiting and Retaining Female Talent*, offers a new way to approach solving gender diversity in the legal industry and equips firms with a checklist of best practices to assist firms in this endeavor. It also includes notable findings such as:

- **Underlying metrics are the keys to a solution:** Firms that analyze their underlying statistics can gain greater understanding into which practice areas and locations are enabling implicit bias.
- **Niche practice areas are better represented by female attorneys:** Niche practice areas (including immigration, family law, healthcare, education, and labor and employment) are the practice areas with the greatest proportion of women. Top practice areas for Big Law (including litigation, corporate, and banking), however, are not well-represented by female attorneys.
- **Female talent is often underrepresented in states with large law school talent pools:** The data indicates that Big Law struggles with hiring and retention even in locations with strong pools of female talent.

ALM Intelligence's research offers a new way to approach increasing gender diversity in the legal industry. Practice areas and locations with a lower female presence face more hurdles in battling implicit bias and in providing necessary training and mentorship to attract more female talent.

While the headline data indicates that law firms are a long way off from resolving this issue, the underlying data shows that there are defined areas where creative analysis and problem solving are crucial to crossing the gender divide.

¹ *The American Lawyer* on the National Association of Women Lawyers (NAWL) Challenge.