

A faint, light blue silhouette of a pair of scales of justice is visible in the background. The scales are positioned behind a central shield and a banner. The shield is dark blue with a lighter blue section at the bottom. The banner is dark blue with a gold border. The text is in a serif font.

YILW+

**TOP FIRMS
REPORT**

2023

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YALE LAW WOMEN+ TOP FIRM AWARDS 2023

ADVANCEMENT

SULLIVAN & CROMWELL LLP

**AGENCY &
FLEXIBILITY**


orrick

COMPENSATION

SULLIVAN & CROMWELL LLP

CULTURE

AkinSM

DIVERSITY

Littler[®]

INTRODUCTION

Yale Law Women+ (YLW+) is proud to present our Eighteenth Annual Top Firms Report. Every year, YLW+ produces the Top Firms Report to raise awareness of inequities within the legal profession and highlight the progress being made in the industry. To reflect the distinct interests of law firm employees, our report honors individual firms for excelling in categories that relate to overall workplace equity. YLW+ hopes this report will serve as a resource for law firms, lawyers, and law students as we jointly aspire to build more equitable workplaces.

Like in previous years, YLW+ aims to contextualize our top firm awards within broader trends in the legal industry. In 2022, the legal industry continued to emphasize its commitment to diversity, maintaining the steady improvement observed in previous years in both recruiting and hiring efforts for women and minority summer associates and associates. Notably, this year we celebrate historic highs in representation for associates of color at over 28%. For the fifth year in a row, women account for over half of all summer associates, which is also reflected in the record high percentage of women in associate ranks. Additionally, the percentage of lawyers who are women of color surpassed 10% for the first time in 2022. Beyond improvement in overall representation, many firms in 2022 have continued to improve benefit packages and increase support for mentorship, hoping to prove they are meaningfully committed to investing in diverse attorney retention. These major milestones signify a shift in the legal profession's culture, one that is only possible thanks to decades of effort devoted to disrupting the industry's long history of inequality.

While there has been measurable success in recruiting and hiring diverse associates and summer associates, law firms have yet to demonstrate that same success in retaining diverse talent and, more importantly, ensuring partnership ranks reflect that diversity. The National Association for Law Placement (NALP), which has compiled and reported on associate and partnership representation data for over 30 years, notes in their 2022 Report on Diversity that "in just over 30 years, the representation of people of color at the partner level has increased by less than 10 percentage points and women by less than 16 points." At this rate, NALP stresses, even in another 30 years we will still not see parity in partnership ranks. To disrupt the disproportionate growth in partnership representation, law firms need to reexamine ingrained policies and practices that prevent retention. It is essential that law firms cultivate an environment where diverse associates recruited in the early stages of their careers can envision a path upwards at their firm. Cultivating this type of environment requires intentional efforts to eliminate bias, provide support, and create an inclusive work environment that promotes diversity at all levels.

YLW+ is committed to leveling the playing field and providing law students with comprehensive information on the state of the legal industry as they navigate law firm opportunities. To further this commitment, this year, YLW+ is introducing the State of the Market section, which presents survey results that shed light on trends and typical practices in the legal industry.

We deeply appreciate all of the firms who took the time to complete our survey and participate in this year's report.

“YLW+ REMAINS COMMITTED TO EQUITY WITHIN LAW SCHOOLS AND THROUGHOUT THE LEGAL PROFESSION. AS LAW STUDENTS, WE SEEK EMPLOYMENT AT LAW FIRMS THAT DEMONSTRATE THAT SAME COMMITMENT.”

STATE OF THE MARKET

HIRING



22.9% of firms that participated in this year's survey use assessment tools as a component of their hiring process

OFFICE PRACTICES

Flexible Work Policies



79% of firms required attorneys to work in-person at the office approximately 3 days per week

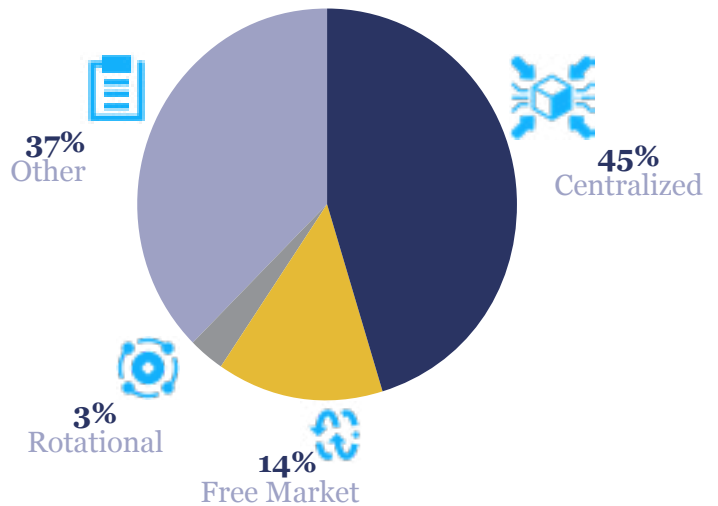


3% of firms still required staff attorneys to work fully in-person



17% of firms had no in-person work requirement

Work Assignment System



97% of firms allowed attorneys to request flexible full-time hours in 2022

COMPENSATION

54%

Use billable hours to credit & recognize attorneys at the firm

88%

Expect associates to work a minimum number of billable hours

88%

Offer associates billable hour credit for pro bono work

37%

Have a billable hour requirement for associates to receive a year-end bonus



ADVANCEMENT

SULLIVAN & CROMWELL LLP

HONORABLE MENTIONS

ALLEN & OVERY LLP
LITTLER MENDELSON P.C.

WHAT WE MEASURE The Advancement award factors in firms' training, mentorship, and review policies, focusing on how firms create equitable opportunities for associates to interact with supervisors and partners. This category also factors in how firms facilitate advancement opportunities for diverse attorneys, such as through affinity networks and promotion outcomes.

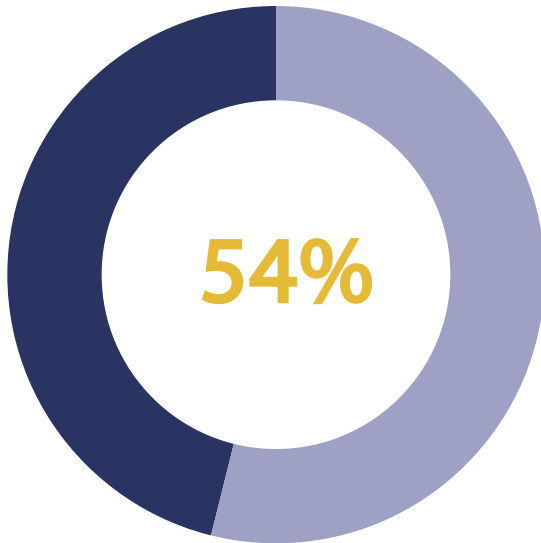
WHY IT MATTERS A law firm's opportunities for advancement reflects the firm's ability to elevate its associates through education, training, mentoring, networking, and promotions. The pandemic caused massive re-evaluations in the legal industry and provided law firms with the opportunity to reshape and reinvigorate how they create opportunities for their associates to reach their long-term career goals. That meant a greater emphasis on investing in young associates by helping them to navigate their careers according to their terms and being transparent about how to progress up the management structure of the firm. Young associates' experiences in firms are shaped by opportunities to cultivate their skills, expand their network, and find mentors who will provide invaluable advice and support throughout their careers. Such opportunities are generally less accessible to women and people of color, who face higher attrition within the firm (with their representation dropping at all levels in the pipeline) and experience barriers to mentorship and networking due to challenges in establishing intergenerational networks. For this reason, increasingly, firms are investing in affinity group networks to combat these disparities and promote opportunities for advancement within and beyond the firm.

WHY OUR WINNER STANDS OUT Sullivan & Cromwell excels in providing a robust feedback system. The firm has an established process for associates to challenge performance reviews and to provide upward feedback.

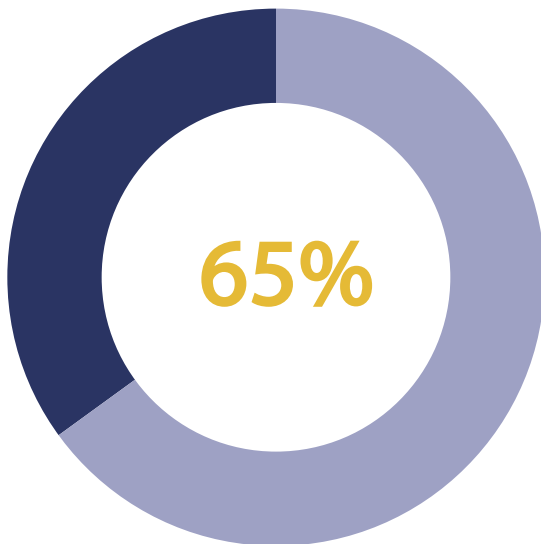
ADVANCEMENT

INDUSTRY STATISTICS & ALUMNI PERSPECTIVES

Of the firms that participated in this year's survey...



Have an established process for associates to challenge performance reviews



Allow associates to give feedback to their supervisors through performance reviews

“Women occupy prominent external-facing positions of leadership at the firm, and women partners are leaders in their practice groups. Not only does the firm care deeply about workplace equity--these women are helping advance gender equity initiatives at the firm.”

– SENIOR ASSOCIATE

“My firm’s promotion and leadership practices give me comfort that I’m working at a place that is aligned with my values regarding workplace equity. We are intentional in our commitment; we talk about and act on it.”

– EQUITY PARTNER



AGENCY & FLEXIBILITY

ORRICK HERRINGTON & SUTCLIFFE LLP

HONORABLE MENTIONS

MUNGER, TOLLES & OLSON LLP
LATHAM & WATKINS LLP

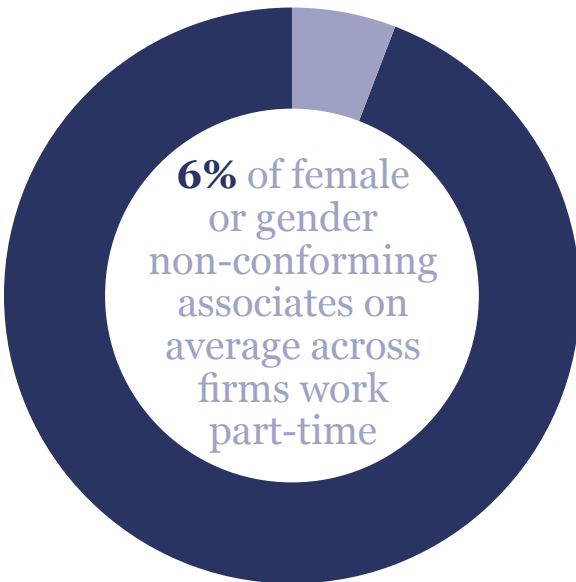
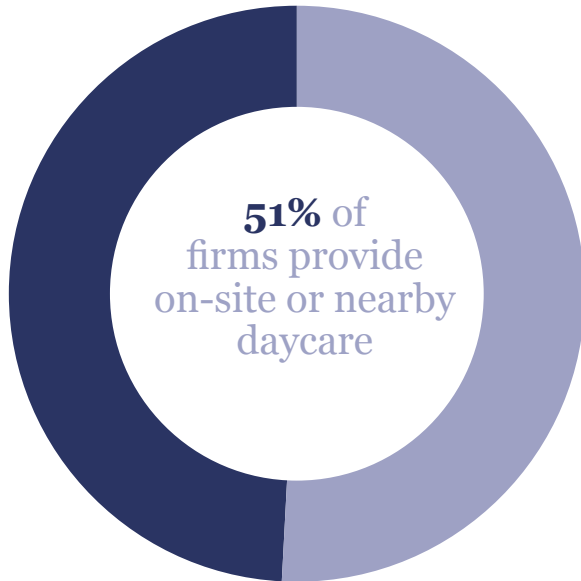
WHAT WE MEASURE The Agency and Flexibility award factors in caregiver support policies, including paid leave caregiving policies for disability, birth, adoption, foster care, and family illness; unpaid and job-protected leave policies for medical or family needs; childcare options; and support for nursing parents. This category also factors in part-time, flexible-schedule, and remote work policies, including policy uptake and associated impact on promotions and bonuses.

WHY IT MATTERS Following the COVID-19 pandemic, law firms face increasing pressure to cultivate environments that support work-life balance. Providing parents, guardians, and other caregivers with supportive measures to help them care for children and other dependents is critical to creating a diverse, equitable workplace and to boosting employee retention and satisfaction. In addition to adopting flexible work policies, it is crucial that firms implement these policies in a way that makes employees comfortable opting in. The decision to opt into alternative work arrangements remains gendered, and women may fear the negative impact that part-time and flex-time work may have on their careers. When firms demonstrate a meaningful commitment to supporting employee success both at work and at home, they are more likely to attract and retain top talent and encourage employees to do their best work.

WHY OUR WINNER STANDS OUT Orrick has significant flexibility in allowing part-time, remote, and flexible work. The firm also stands out for providing a wide range of caregiver options to attorneys at all levels.

AGENCY & FLEXIBILITY

INDUSTRY STATISTICS & ALUMNI PERSPECTIVES



“I have been supported in electing part-time work for many years by the leadership of the firm, up to the very top, and have been promoted several times while on part-time. Many of our firm leaders explicitly model managing client obligations while honoring holidays and vacations.”

– EQUITY PARTNER

“After conversations with the talent development team and with other associates who had taken advantage of these policies, I understand these to be legitimate options with no negative professional repercussions. This has increased my comfort with the idea of utilizing these policies whenever I need them.”

– SENIOR ASSOCIATE



COMPENSATION

SULLIVAN & CROMWELL LLP

HONORABLE MENTIONS

SIMPSON THACHER & BARTLETT LLP
CAHILL GORDON & REINDEL LLP

WHAT WE MEASURE The Compensation award considers a firm's compensation model for associates, base salary for full-time associates, billable hour requirements, and paid time off (PTO) policy. Firms with generous PTO policies are highlighted in our honorable mentions.

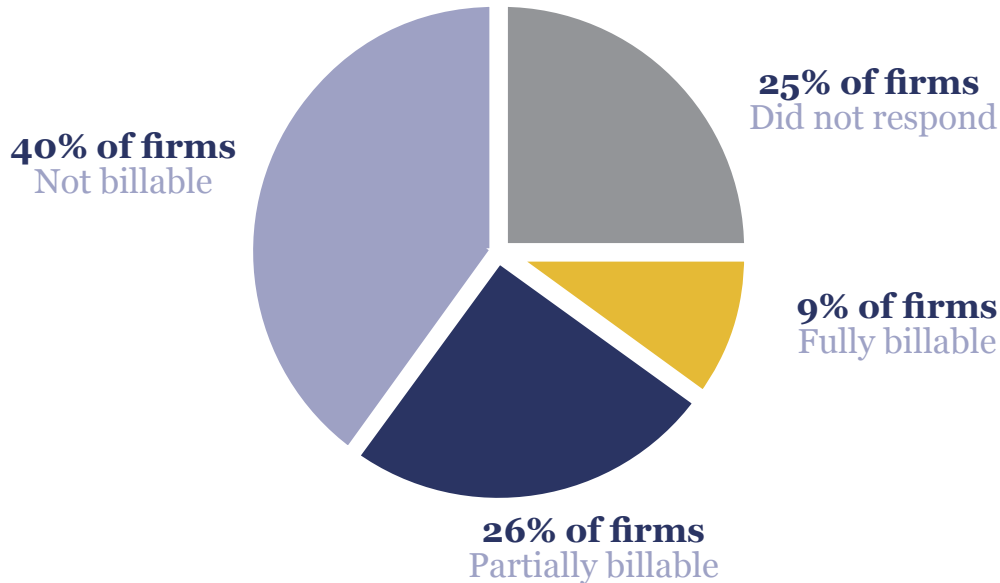
WHY IT MATTERS A law firm's compensation policies attract talent, reflect how the firm values its attorneys, and create incentives for workplace culture. These policies are also impacted by the state of the market. The economic uncertainty in 2022 led to concerns from attorneys and prospective law firm applicants that law firms would not be able to maintain or exceed the growth in full-time associate compensation firms experienced in 2021. These concerns were realized. For Am Law 100 firms, full-time associate compensation growth decreased from 12.2% in 2021 to 9.6% in November 2022. Despite this decrease in associate compensation growth, the 2022 Partner Compensation Survey found that the wage gap between male and female partners decreased from 44% to 34%. Equitable compensation is crucial for attracting talent and advancing women and underrepresented minorities in the legal profession. Billable hour requirements not only reflect a firm's willingness to reward attorneys, but also the type of work the firm values.

WHY OUR WINNER STANDS OUT Sullivan & Cromwell has a lockstep compensation model for associates, a competitive base salary for associates, and no billable hour requirement. The firm also has a comprehensive paid time off policy, which includes paid caregiver leave for family members with disabilities and illnesses as well as parental leave for childbirth and adoption.

COMPENSATION

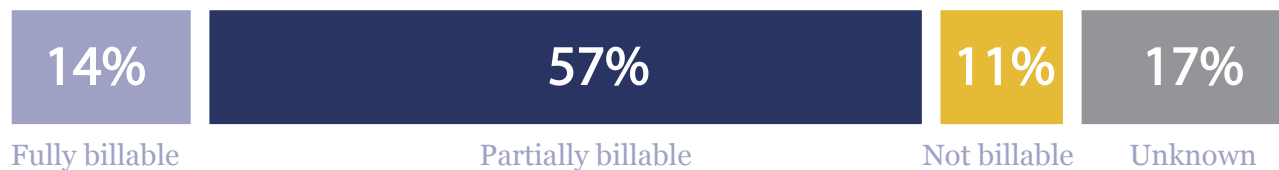
INDUSTRY STATISTICS & ALUMNI PERSPECTIVES

COMPENSATION FOR COMMITTEE PARTICIPATION*



**excluding Diversity and Inclusion Committee*

For Associates, participation on the Diversity and Inclusion Committee is...



“I appreciate the firm’s transparency as to compensation, though I think that any firm with a billable hours requirement should count ALL attorney work (including pro bono, mentoring, diversity and governance committees, etc.) towards billable hours. Otherwise you are disincentivizing any non-billable activities, and punishing those who engage in such firm-building activities as their time goes uncounted on these activities, forcing them to make up the billable work to hit target hours for the year.”

- SENIOR ASSOCIATE

“The firm is liberal in its billable hours policies. Pro bono work is strongly encouraged, and fully credited up to 300 hours, and available beyond that with notice to the firm. Participation in the pro bono program is a positive consideration in compensation decisions. Part-time work is fully available and widely used. The firm’s policies make it easier to attract and retain attorneys and staff on an equitable basis.”

- EQUITY PARTNER



CULTURE

AKIN GUMP STRAUSS HAUER & FELD LLP

HONORABLE MENTIONS

ORRICK HERRINGTON & SUTCLIFFE LLP
MUNGER, TOLLES & OLSON LLP

WHAT WE MEASURE The Culture award factors in firms' pro bono work policies, workplace sensitivity training, arbitration and related legal policies, and health and wellness services for employees. The award further accounts for the extent to which employees utilize caregiving benefits and for the level of attorney attrition across gender and race. This category also factors in the firm's community engagement through support for social justice causes.

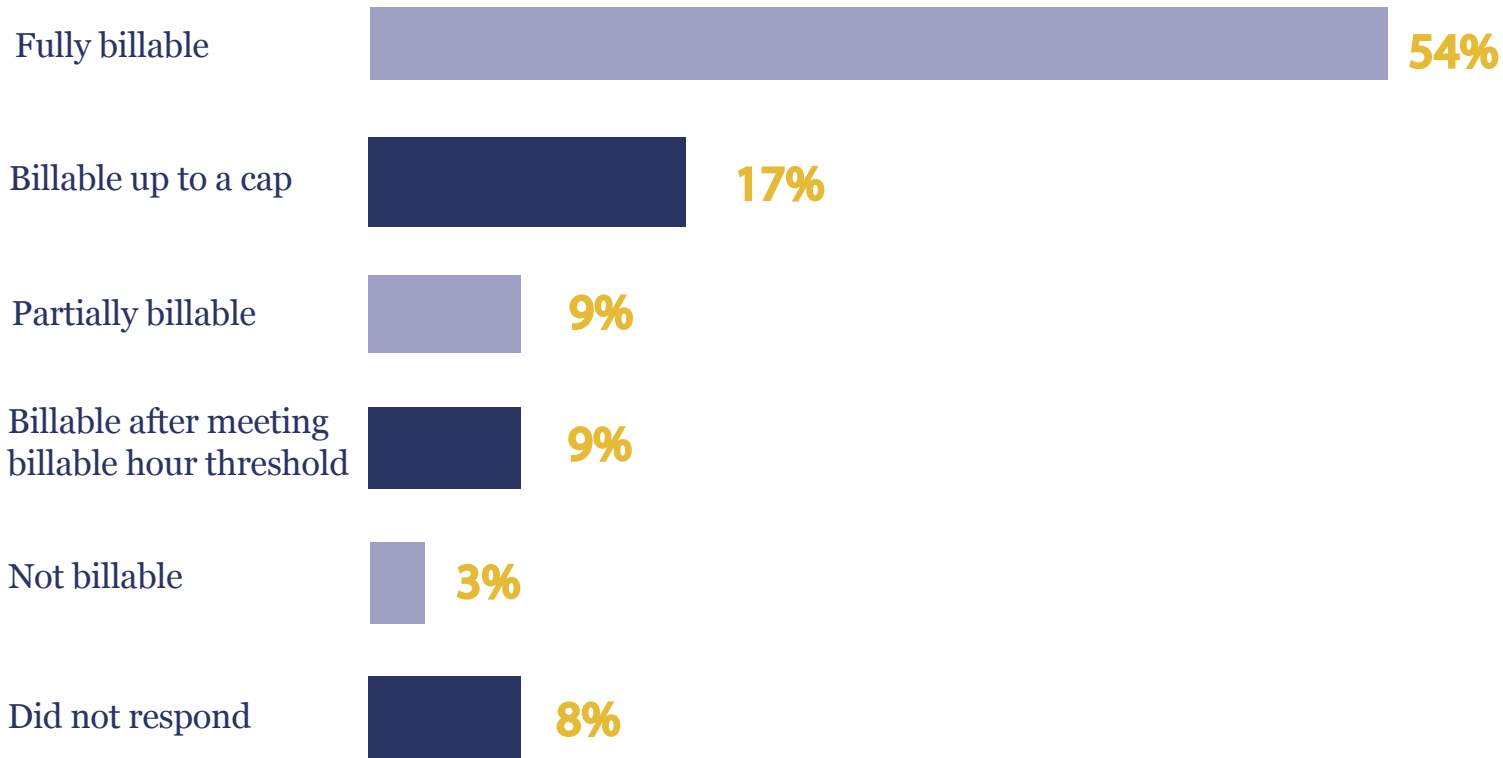
WHY IT MATTERS When deciding on a firm, we often hear about "fit." In addition to one's preferences regarding compensation and advancement, a firm's culture is another critical factor that new hires weigh in the selection process. Firms with strong and healthy cultures embody values of community engagement, supportive work environments, and work-life balance. They recognize the importance of investing in communities and the public good, both by investing financially and encouraging their attorneys to engage in pro bono work. These firms also don't take health and wellness lightly, providing generous benefits in this area to nurture their attorneys' wellbeing. With many firms offering similar compensation and advancement opportunities, it has become more important than ever for firms to heavily invest in the elements that bring its culture to life.

WHY OUR WINNER STANDS OUT Akin is a leader in fostering positive work and social culture within and beyond the firm. Akin employees have the opportunity to participate in implicit bias training, work-life balance and mental health programming, and to take advantage of a broad array of subsidized male and female reproductive and infertility health care options. Employees are not subject to NDAs or mandatory arbitration policies. Employees of all races and genders at Akin make use of the firm's caregiving leave policies, and attorney attrition is low across the board as well.

CULTURE

INDUSTRY STATISTICS & ALUMNI PERSPECTIVES

BILLABLE POLICIES FOR PRO BONO HOURS



“Creating opportunities for associates of all backgrounds to find mentors and, more importantly, sponsors, within the firm is important. We have “mentoring circles” for women attorneys at the firm which are small groups of women attorneys at all stages of their career to learn from each other.”

– EQUITY PARTNER

“The firm has spoken out forcefully on social issues related to racial and gender equity, both internally and externally. Our pro bono efforts, moreover, have been highly responsive to those issues. Importantly, we have not taken on clients on matters that would compromise our commitment. I think the firm’s response has been exemplary.”

– EQUITY PARTNER



DIVERSITY

LITTLER MENDELSON P.C.

HONORABLE MENTIONS

MUNGER, TOLLES & OLSON LLP
GIBSON, DUNN & CRUTCHER LLP

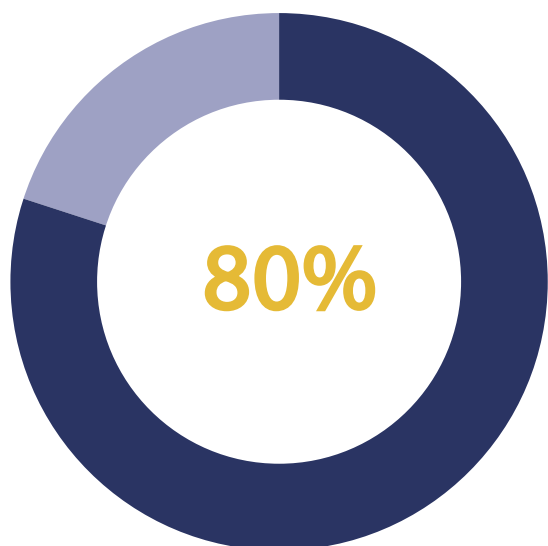
WHAT WE MEASURE The Diversity award factors in attorney diversity and firms' hiring and retention outcomes and initiatives, such as summer diversity programs. This category also factors in diverse representation in the firms' leadership.

WHY IT MATTERS Diversity is one of the most important priorities for employers and employees across industries. Despite making up at least 40% of law students for the past several decades, women constitute only 23% of equity partners across U.S. law firms. Even with significant presence early in the legal pipeline, women attorneys are not well represented in firm leadership positions. Challenges associated with attaining leadership positions are exacerbated for women of color. While women of color make up 20% of first-year law students, they represent only 9% of law firm attorneys and about 3% of equity partners. Despite these vast disparities, there has been some modest growth in the representation of women at law firms. Since 2015, the percentage of female equity partners grew from 19.2% to 23.3%, while the percentage of female attorneys overall grew from 34% to 37.7%. Though there have undoubtedly been significant gains in the representation of women at law firms, much progress remains to be made. Given that there is significant early-career diverse talent, programs and initiatives that focus on retaining that diversity are critical investments for firms.

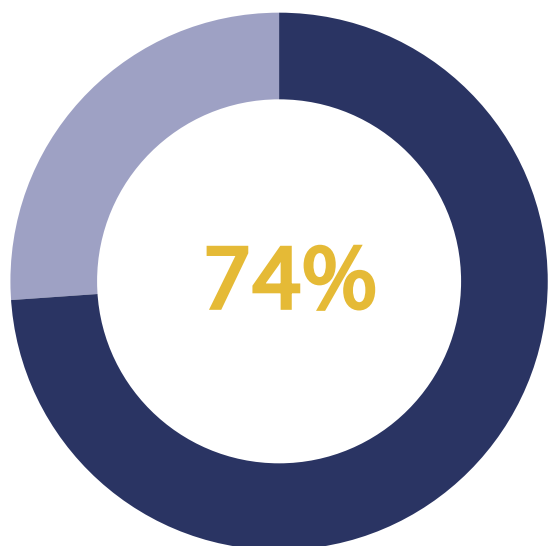
WHY OUR WINNER STANDS OUT Littler excels in attracting and, more importantly, retaining diverse attorneys. The firm is also a leader when it comes to promoting diverse attorneys to leadership positions.

DIVERSITY

INDUSTRY STATISTICS & ALUMNI PERSPECTIVES



Participating firms awarded either 1L or 2L Summer Diversity Fellowships or Scholarships



Participating firms awarded BOTH 1L & 2L Summer Diversity Fellowships or Scholarships

“The firm is deeply committed to equity and inclusion. The firm has formal policies and an official team that works on these issues and brings about real change (e.g., a recent expansion in firm-funded fertility benefits), but informal culture is even more important. Diversity and inclusion are a cultural touchstone of the firm, and in my experience that comes through in daily interactions and the overall lived experience of people working at the firm.”

– EQUITY PARTNER

“Having women and other historically underrepresented individuals in leadership positions within our firm has increased equitable decision-making across the board, it has given greater prominence to challenges they face, and it has created opportunities for junior attorneys to rise in the ranks.”

– EQUITY PARTNER

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STUDENTS

During the recruitment process, students should seek to evaluate how much a firm promotes diversity, work-life balance, and gender equity. Students may visit law firm websites or advocacy-oriented sites like The NALP Directory of Legal Employers, or speak with current associates and partners at firms they are interested in. Here are some terms students should know as they begin to consider the recruitment process:

1. Billable hours: time a lawyer works on a project that is charged to the client
2. Equity Partner: lawyer who has become an owner of the firm and who shares in the profits of the firm
3. Non-Equity Partner: partner who does not share in the profits of the firm and is not a firm decision-maker
4. Counsel / Of Counsel: lawyer who either has chosen not to go up for partner yet and may still become one or who has been sidelined off the partner track
5. Mandatory Arbitration: practice in which a firm requires employees to agree to arbitrate legal disputes with the firm rather than going to court
6. Lockstep Compensation Model: pay structure where associates in the same class are compensated with the same base salary
7. Merit Compensation Model: pay structure where associates are compensated based on performance
8. Executive / Management Committee: committee that makes management and strategic decisions for the firm and provides overall long-range planning
9. On-Ramp / Off-Ramp: program through which law firms allow their attorneys to take several years of leave with the option to return to the firm
10. Free Market Work Assignment System: associates have free reign to seek out the type of work they want to do and the partners they want to work for
11. Central Assignment Work Assignment System: an assignment partner (or full-time staffer) is devoted to managing associate work
12. Rotation Work Assignment System: a formal program where you rotate, either through practice groups, types of matters, or through partners, for as short as three months or as long as eighteen months

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STUDENTS

When deciding between firms, here are some questions students may want to ask:

1. What steps has the firm taken to promote greater diversity?
2. How does your firm support the promotion of women and other diverse groups of people to partnership positions?
3. Is there gender parity on the firm's Executive Committee, Compensation Committee, and/or Hiring Committee?
4. What formal mentorship and training programs does your firm offer that focus on fostering the legal careers of women and attorneys who come from diverse backgrounds?
5. Does your firm count time spent on training and mentorship toward attorneys' billable hours?
6. Does your firm tie time spent on diversity and inclusion initiatives to compensation, bonuses, and/or promotion of attorneys?
7. Do men at the firm take advantage of the firm's work-life balance benefits, including leave?
8. Does the firm promote associates who have taken advantage of alternative work schedules?
9. What steps has the firm taken to improve attorneys' wellbeing and mental health?
10. How does your firm handle complaints of harassment or discrimination? It may be helpful not only to speak with a partner at the firm familiar with these processes but also someone who has recently left the firm and may be able to speak more candidly.

Note: It is often less stressful to approach difficult subjects like these once a student has secured the offer, rather than when they are still being evaluated. We encourage you to ask these questions before accepting a position with a firm.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FIRMS

Yale Law Women+ appreciates firms' participation in our report and understands that sustaining an equitable firm environment takes long-term dedication, adaptability, and goal-setting. Guided by alumni input, we recommend the following further actions:

- Institutionalizing a remote work policy
- Counting time spent on diversity and inclusion work as fully billable
- Implementing 360-degree review programs
- Prioritizing mental health resources
- Providing on-site daycare in all offices
- Institutionalizing generous, fully-paid parental leave across gender and caregiver status
- Offering lawyers billable credit for wellness hours
- Counting time spent on training and mentorship toward attorneys' billable hours
- Tracking the demographics of associates that work with each partner, to identify bias and encourage equity in mentorship opportunities
- Reconfiguring office spaces to ensure accessibility for all employees, including pregnant employees and people with disabilities
- Making firm management more transparent so associates feel empowered to speak out about managerial ideas and feedback
- Explicitly soliciting associate feedback for large managerial decisions, whether via inclusion committees or other methods
- Ensuring that part-time workers keep part-time hours
- Eliminating implicit and cultural expectations regarding parental leave and promotion
- Striving for complete transparency in regard to compensation
- Using a lockstep compensation model for associates
- Eliminating mandatory arbitration agreements
- Counting pro bono hours as fully billable

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Yale Law Women+ invited this year and last year's Vault Law 100 firms to participate in our annual survey and reached a participation rate of nearly 40 percent. Firm responses to our survey reflect the 2022 calendar year and U.S. office locations. Data are reported in the aggregate, with responses from individual firms kept entirely confidential. As in previous years, our survey questions focused on the status of equity and inclusion at law firms today, including policies and benefits available to firm employees and how employees used such policies and benefits by gender, race, and position. This year, we also asked additional questions regarding firms' hiring and layoff practices and their responses to current events. We collected this data seeking to demystify firm operations for incoming associates and to enable prospective firm employees to make informed decisions based on their own values and priorities. We did not factor this data into our category awards.

This year, we honor four firms across five categories, representing firm attributes that foster well-being and success among a diverse workforce. Category honorees are selected by tabulating metrics scores for each individual firm based on their survey responses. Categories are presented in alphabetical order, and each individual category is assessed independent of the others. For each section, selected data are aggregated and displayed to capture how all survey respondents report performing for a particular question related to the overall category. Some graphics, where marked, aggregate data across firms.

Additionally, we invited Yale Law School alumni of all genders working at Vault 100 firms to participate in a separate survey to add context to the firm survey. To promote honest responses, the survey was entirely anonymous. The alumni survey was completed by over 250 respondents. It contained questions about the importance of specific policies or practices in assessing firms' overall workplace equity, touching on each category of the firm survey. The alumni survey also provided space for alumni to comment generally on their assessment of firm practices and norms. These responses were incorporated into the tops firms report as unattributed quotes, to maintain anonymity and provide a qualitative perspective.

For more information about this report's methodology, please visit the YLW+ website: <https://ylw.yale.edu/>.

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Thank you to the entire Top Firms Committee for their outstanding work constructing, executing, and analyzing this year's survey.

Please direct all inquiries to Jenna Hoskison at jenna.hoskison@yale.edu.

