

# PUBLICATION

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## Getting (More) Serious About Pathways to Success for Diverse Lawyers

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*"When people come together to build something, they make implied promises to one another – a compact. They promise to work things out. They promise to do their fair share or more of the work. They promise to follow through on their intention to build something new."*

- David Brooks, *Second Mountain*

This year marked 17 years of Baker Donelson's internal Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) initiative. As we have done in years past, we conducted an internal audit to help us measure where our successes are and where we need to focus our next efforts. One of the tenets David Brooks lays out in his newest book, *The Second Mountain*, is the transformational change that occurs when we center our lives around making and keeping our commitments. I have experienced this in my own life and I believe it to be true. That is why, based on the results of our audit, we began to develop an enhanced D&I Plan around the concept of a compact that will build on our existing initiatives.

I have committed to our diverse lawyers and our clients that through this new D&I Compact, Baker Donelson will become an industry-leading law firm in diversity and inclusion **by December 31, 2025**, including in percentages of diverse attorneys (industry average is 15 percent), percentage of diverse shareholders (industry average is eight percent), percentage of diverse equity shareholders (industry average is six percent), and percentage of diverse management team (industry average is seven percent). We will do this by executing on three primary tenets of the D&I Compact:

- Offering robust support of diverse lawyers' progress and pathway success, including specific measurement and accountability of all Firm leaders
- Launching a signature program designed to support diverse attorneys that is structured around business generation training and execution
- Implementing a robust D&I attorney recruitment plan

Being more intentional toward diversity makes sense from both a human and business perspective. Diverse teams are simply better at solving problems than teams comprised of people with the same background and experiences. And when a workplace is more diverse, it typically leads to better retention and even more diversity – a Deloitte survey estimated that 63 percent of millennials would consider quitting if their employer didn't prioritize diversity and inclusion.

In 2002, when we first established our Diversity Initiative, we committed to increasing our minority attorney population by 100 percent in two years. We fulfilled that commitment. Today, we have nearly 60 minority attorneys and more than 250 attorneys who are women. While we have made strides over the years in recruiting, we want to provide clear pathways to success for our diverse lawyers. Toward that end, the D&I Compact will launch in 2020 and incorporate a specific roadmap to ensure success, including:

Assigning specific D&I metrics for each practice group and office to achieve by **December 31, 2025**;

Building an individualized D&I scorecard for each Firm leader that measures and rewards the leader's performance; and

Discussion of more robust D&I reporting in practice group and office leader calls with Firm management. In addition, each diverse lawyer will be assigned a Firm leader as a sponsor to open opportunities for the diverse lawyer's progress and success.

We also will promote the development of our top diverse associates through externally focused, professional development and business development training. Further, we will improve our recruiting process to ensure we are building a strong pipeline of diverse student hires by cultivating strongholds at Howard University and other HBCU law schools; and at all law schools by reaching out to BLSA and other minority organizations, affinity groups, minority faculty members, career services or trusted individuals at those law schools about top diverse candidates.

Our D&I Compact Advisory Board – to consist of diverse and non-diverse lawyers throughout Baker Donelson – will be led by [Marcus Maples](#) and will be a top priority of mine and our President & COO, Jennifer Keller, to implement and to ensure accountability and execution. The top priority of our D&I Compact is supporting our diverse lawyer progress and success at Baker Donelson, moving from associate to shareholder to equity shareholder.

As a best-run business, we know that our clients receive better counsel and innovative solutions to complex problems from diverse teams. The Baker Donelson D&I Compact is about more than benchmarks, numbers, and our own financial success. It is about building a workplace, a place of business, and an industry where *all* people feel not only welcomed, but at home. We want to offer a platform where all can thrive and achieve their career aspirations while serving the most sophisticated companies. I believe that the Baker Donelson D&I Compact will achieve this purpose.