



National Association of Women Lawyers
The Voice of Women in the Law™

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NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF WOMEN LAWYERS RELEASES SIXTH ANNUAL SURVEY

CHICAGO – Today, the National Association of Women Lawyers (NAWL®) and The NAWL Foundation® released the results of their sixth annual Survey on Retention and Promotion of Women in Law Firms. The Survey is the only national study of the nation’s 200 largest law firms which annually tracks the progress of women lawyers at all levels of private practice, including the most senior positions, and collects data on firms as a whole rather than from a subset of individual lawyers.

For the first time since the Survey began in 2006, there was a noted decline in the number of women entering big-firm practice. “Women lawyers already leave big-firm practice at a greater pace than their male counterparts, and this narrowing of the pipeline at the entry level, however slight, only further decreases the pool of women available for promotion,” said NAWL President Heather Giordanella, Counsel at Drinker Biddle & Reath LLP. “We hope that this decrease does not signal the beginning of a downward trend for women in the profession.”

The Survey once again examined the impact that the changing structure of law firms had on women lawyers, examining in greater detail the impact of non-partner track roles on women’s advancement. Firms are employing staff attorneys at greater rates with women lawyers—most with considerable seniority—continuing to hold the majority of these positions. Additionally, women account for more than one-third of counsel attorneys; however, only a minority of firms indicated that most of their counsel are eligible to become partners.

“The sixth year of the Survey presents a sobering picture,” said The NAWL Foundation President Stephanie Scharf, Partner at Schoeman Updike Kaufman & Scharf in Chicago, who has designed and developed the Survey since 2006. “Not only do women represent a decreasing percentage of lawyers in big firms, they are more likely to occupy positions—like staff attorneys, counsel, and fixed-income equity partners—with diminished opportunity for advancement or participation in firm leadership.”

“We are heartened that 95% of responding firms sponsor women’s initiatives and programs for assisting with career advancement,” added Barbara Flom, Secretary of The NAWL Foundation and Chair of the 2011 Survey Committee. “We hope the benchmarks provided by the Survey will further such efforts.”

Highlights of the Survey include:

- **Women's Ranks in Firms Are Thinning.** For the first time since the Survey began in 2006, there was a decline in the percentage of women lawyers who are associates and non-equity partners in the nation's largest firms.
- **Women Lawyers Are More Likely to Occupy Positions that Are Not Partner Track.** More than three-quarters of responding firms employ nontraditional “staff” attorneys, which are not partner-track jobs. Women represent 55% of staff attorneys, the highest percentage of women lawyers in any law firm position; significantly, a large percentage of lawyers holding these positions graduated from law school between 10 and 20 years ago. A similar phenomenon occurs at the counsel level where women lawyers comprise 34% of these positions in firms. In many firms, lawyers in the counsel position view it as the stepping stone between associate and promotion to partner. However, only a minority of firms indicated that most of their counsel are eligible to become partners.
- **Women Have a Much Lower Rate than Men in Promotion to Equity Partnership.** Women lawyers account for barely 15% of equity partners. This number remains essentially unchanged since 2006, the first year of the Survey. In fact, that level of equity partnership has been fixed at the same level for 20 years.
- **Women Are Not Credited as Rainmakers.** The data show that women partners are less likely than men to receive credit for even a relatively modest \$500,000 “book of business.” Parallel research highlights the difficulties women experience in obtaining credit for business development, opportunities for team development of new business, credit for new matters from existing clients, and other similar measures of “rainmaking.”
- **Women Have Low Representation in Law Firm Leadership.** Women continue to be markedly underrepresented in the leadership ranks of firms. The majority of large firms have, at most, two women members on their highest governing committee.
- **Compensation Decisions Disfavor Women.** As has been the case ever since the Survey began collecting data, women at every stage of practice earn less than their male counterparts, with the biggest difference at the equity-partner level. In 2011, women equity partners are earning 86% of the compensation earned by their male peers.
- **Two-Tier/Mixed-Tier Firms Are Less Favorable to Women.** The phenomena of two-tier and mixed-tier partnership structures continue to have a negative impact on women lawyers. Women represent an astonishing 80% of “fixed-income equity partners,” those lawyers in mixed-tier firms who are required to contribute capital but do not share in the overall profits of the firm.

The full NAWL Survey Report can be accessed by visiting: <http://bit.ly/sBokSu>

Since 1899, the National Association of Women Lawyers (NAWL®) has been committed to fostering diversity and advancing women in the legal profession. NAWL is the only national women's bar association with individual and organizational members nationwide, including law firms, law firm attorneys, corporations, in-house counsel, government attorneys, law schools, and law school professors. Please visit www.nawl.org.