

NALP 2011 Annual Education Conference

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DIVERSITY COMMITTEES THAT  
WORK:  
CREATION, UTILIZATION, AND  
REFORMATION

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# Creation: What's Your Culture?

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- Determine your firm culture
- Assessment will facilitate development of Committee goals and mission
- Consider utilizing an external consultant to do an assessment
- Completing your own assessment:
  - Strategize from your specific vantage point as a legal professional within your firm (e.g., “insider” or “newbie”)
  - Goal to issue-spot and problem-solve

# A Responsive Structure

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- Determine synergies with domestic and overseas offices
  - ▣ Firmwide Committee?
  - ▣ Local office committees?
  - ▣ Headquarters Only?
  - ▣ U.S. only?
- Subcommittees: the blessing and the curse
  - ▣ Divide up responsibilities, focus and execute!
  - ▣ Too many different groups with their own demands and agendas

# A Bifurcated Structure?

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- Separate Diversity and Women's Committees?
- Pros:
  - Each committee can focus on it's core objectives and target group
  - Engage more people in diversity and inclusion efforts
  - More people involved promotes innovation and facilitates implementation
- Cons:
  - Difficult to manage multiple committees without a lot of strategic coordination (which requires resources)
  - Competition for time and resources
  - Competing interests = not working together
  - More people = more headaches

# Who's at the Table?

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- Member criteria
  - Partners only? Associate members? Staff members?
  - Chair / Co-Chairs?
    - Managing Partner: top level leadership commitment sends a strong message to everyone in the firm
  - Practice Group Leaders
    - Key to have people in positions of leadership, able to open doors and make things happen
    - Key to have the "doers" on the committee
  - Allies?
  - Diversification in wide representation across firm

# What's the Endgame?

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- Develop a “core curriculum”
- Utilize firm lawyers in creating a framework
- Create clear goals and time lines
- Connect to key firm initiatives, strategy, and goals
- Provide relevant diversity programs that address your firm's greatest needs

# Committee Utilization

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- Extremely critical platform and catalyst for numerous firm management areas:
  - Recruiting
  - Retention
    - Lawyer training and development
    - Promotion
    - Mentoring
  - Marketing
  - New lawyer orientation and integration to the firm
  - Building networks and business development
  - Development of alumni programs and relations

# Not an Island . . .

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- Committee should not be an independent group and should work very closely with other committees/teams, practice leaders and departments
- This collaboration can positively market any initiatives
  - ▣ Allow greater buy-in
  - ▣ Educate lawyers across different groups as to any activities

# But independent identity matters!

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- Branding is critical
  - ▣ Engender buy-in and future support to expand
- Challenges:
  - ▣ Which Firm team gets the credit?
  - ▣ Who's job is it anyway?

# Report the News

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- Externally:
  - ▣ Individual Clients and local national surveys: throughout the year
- Internally:
  - ▣ Management Committee: as requested
  - ▣ Partner or Affinity Group Retreats: 1x per year
  - ▣ Practice Group, Department or Affinity Group Meetings: quarterly or monthly
- Effectiveness?

# Reformation: build and sustain momentum

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- Want creativity? Create member term limits
- Add committee members who are not in “the choir”
- Collaborate with external committees (*clients*) and/or related groups (*law schools, pro bono organizations*) to get fresh perspectives
- Establish new benchmarks and measure progress
- Create processes for accountability

# Global Recommendations

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- Establish strategy
- Set priorities and stick to them!
- Set regular meetings with action items
- Measure progress
- Keep the committee relatively small: keep everyone engaged and accountable
- Establish an external advisory board