

Effort To Boost Diversity In Leadership Touts Top Law Firms

By **Bonnie Eslinger**

Law360 (August 20, 2018, 11:18 PM EDT) -- An effort launched last summer to encourage law firms to affirmatively consider women and attorneys of color for leadership roles and promotions by taking a page from the NFL's diversity playbook is cheering its first-year success — with 41 law firms crossing the goal line.

But this is no game. Similar to the Rooney Rule enacted by the National Football League in 2003 to promote diversity in general manager and head coach hiring, the goal of the Mansfield Rule is to increase the representation of women and minorities in law firm leadership. The corrective measure pushes law firms to widen the pool of candidates considered for leadership and governance opportunities, equity partner promotions and senior lateral positions, according to Diversity Lab, the organization championing the initiative.

The NFL rule, which requires every NFL team to interview at least one minority candidate for head coach vacancies, is named after former Pittsburgh Steelers Chairman Dan Rooney, who died last year. Arabella Mansfield, the first woman admitted to the practice of law in the United States, is the namesake inspiration behind the Diversity Lab program.

To be designated “Mansfield Certified,” law firms have to show that their list of candidates considered for leadership spots includes at least 30 percent women and attorneys of color.

Within the group of 41 celebrated law firms, 27 were tapped as “Mansfield Certification Plus,” because they have 30 percent diversity “in a notable number of their current leadership roles and committees,” according to Diversity Lab CEO Caren Ulrich Stacy.

Those firms are: Arnold & Porter, Brinks Gilson & Lione, Bryan Cave Leighton Paisner LLP, Buchanan Ingersoll & Rooney PC, Cooley LLP, Covington & Burling LLP, Day Pitney LLP, DLA Piper, Dorsey & Whitney LLP, Faegre Baker Daniels, Fish & Richardson PC, Holland & Hart LLP, Holland & Knight LLP, Latham & Watkins LLP, Littler Mendelson PC, Miller Canfield Paddock & Stone PLC, Morris Manning & Martin LLP, Morrison & Foerster LLP, Munger Tolles & Olson LLP, Nixon Peabody LLP, Orrick Herrington & Sutcliffe LLP, O’Melveny & Myers LLP, Reed Smith LLP, Seyfarth Shaw LLP, Sheppard Mullin Richter & Hampton LLP, WilmerHale and Winston & Strawn LLP.

The challenge put in place by the Mansfield Rule is already showing results. Diversity Lab said 40 percent of the participating firms have increased the representation of women and diverse lawyers in leadership and governance roles; 33 percent increased the number of women and diverse senior associates hired;

35 percent increased the number of women and diverse partners hired; and 38 percent increased the number of women and diverse lawyers promoted to partner.

Covington Chair Timothy Hester said the firm is “extremely proud” to be recognized for having taken steps to improve its diversity, particularly in firm leadership.

“Diversity makes our law firm stronger, and we see the differences among us as an asset and a source of value for our clients and our workplace,” Hester said in a statement, adding, “We recognize that the job is never done.”

Roger Meltzer, DLA Piper's global co-chairman and co-chairman of the Americas, said implementing the Mansfield Rule has had a meaningful impact on the firm's hiring and promotion processes.

"We are proud to have been designated a Mansfield Certified Plus firm and to be part of an innovative initiative to create a more diverse and inclusive legal profession," Meltzer said in a statement.

O'Melveny diversity and inclusion partner Darin Snyder, a member of the firm's policy and executive committees, said the firm's belief in the value of having a diverse law firm informs “everything we do at O'Melveny, from recruiting and hiring to developing our talent for the most important and high-profile roles.” Thus, the Mansfield Rule challenge became a logical extension of the firm's existing efforts, he said.

Orrick Chairman Mitch Zuklie said in a statement that the Mansfield Rule program has energized law firms.

“It's hard to think of a legal diversity program that has brought about more widespread and concrete change in as short a timeframe,” Zuklie said. “And it's exciting to see law firm and corporate legal departments working together to fix this problem.”

Likewise, Rose Ehler, co-chair of Munger's Women's Initiative, called the pilot program a “tremendous success.”

Nixon Peabody's director of diversity and inclusion, Rekha Chiruvolu, also celebrated the “Certification Plus” honor.

“For the last several years, we have been making a concerted effort to increase the diversity in our leadership and partnership ranks through innovative programs and initiatives. By weaving diversity and inclusion into all core functions throughout the firm, we ensured that it became part of the culture and a firm wide priority,” Chiruvolu said in an email, adding that participating in the Mansfield Rule pilot program allowed the firm to track its progress.

Sheppard Mullin Chair Guy Halgren called diverse organizations “stronger organizations,” and joined the chorus of law firms saying that participation in the Mansfield program further focused the firm's diversity efforts.

“We have prided ourselves in considering a diverse pool of candidates for leadership and promotion,” Halgren said in a statement. “We are flattered to be in such great company with so many outstanding firms.”

The other firms that reached the certification benchmark are: Akerman LLP, Blank Rome LLP, Brownstein Hyatt Farber Schreck LLP, Clifford Chance LLP, Dentons, Fasken, Fenwick & West LLP, Goodwin Procter LLP, Jenner & Block LLP, Katten Muchin Rosenman LLP, McDermott Will & Emery LLP, Morgan Lewis & Bockius LLP, Troutman Sanders LLP and White & Case LLP.

The Mansfield Rule was one of the winning ideas from a 2016 competition hosted by Diversity Lab, in collaboration with Bloomberg Law and Stanford Law School.

More than 44 law firms initially signed on to participate in the Mansfield Rule challenge, but Stacy said the point of this one-year celebration is not to call out those who missed the mark.

“Yes, there were a few firms that didn’t complete the process or meet the requirements for the inaugural year,” she told Law360 in an email Monday. “They will hopefully keep trying and we will work with them to do so. All of the participating firms — certified or not — recognized a problem and are trying to fix it.”

Law360's 2018 Diversity Snapshot revealed that just over 15 percent of attorneys and just over 8 percent of equity partners at surveyed law firms identify as a minority, results that are nearly identical to last year's report. Women of color make up 8 percent of surveyed attorneys, a number that shrinks to 3 percent at the partnership tier.

--Additional reporting by Jacqueline Bell, Brandon Lowrey and Aebra Coe. Editing by Breda Lund.