

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

Diversity matters. We know this intuitively, and it has become increasingly apparent through research studies globally. Working with people who are different challenges our brain to overcome its entrenched way of thinking. Diverse teams focus more on facts, which leads to more accurate group thinking, and the debate and unfamiliarity that comes with diversity provides an important catalyst for innovation and creative thinking. Many of our clients realize this, and it is important for us to reflect our client orientation and that of our community.

While the case for greater diversity is compelling – inclusive decision-making improves business performance – in the end the true benefits of a diverse workforce can be felt only when there is a genuine sense of organizational inclusion. From our inception, we have been an entrepreneurial-minded firm, so for us, different people with different points of view give our clients more diverse teams, more innovative ideas and ultimately, better decisions.

Our goal as a firm has always been twofold – to provide the most sound and sophisticated legal counsel to our clients, and to create an environment that attracts, retains and promotes exceptional people. Diversity is critical to achieving both.

Because we value and celebrate diversity, you will never be asked to check your personality at the door. We each have our own unique characteristics, perspectives, passions and experiences. To help leverage these differences we create opportunities that allow for open dialogue around important issues to help us learn from each other. We recognize that the drive to diversify is an ongoing effort, and we are committed to promoting a truly diverse environment by providing ongoing training and education to reduce personal biases, by improving organizational processes to eliminate biases in decision making and by addressing potential mindset barriers through change management efforts.



International Women's Day 2025

Honoring Pride Month

We believe in celebrating diversity, promoting inclusivity, and championing equality every day of the year. While Pride Month is a dedicated time to honor and recognize the LGBTQ+ community, our commitment to these values extends far beyond the month of June.

Pride In-House

During Pride Month we celebrate sexual diversity and the achievements and contributions of LGBTQ Americans who have courageously fought for change. In 2020, we were extremely proud to celebrate the United States Supreme Court's landmark decision in *Bostock v. Clayton Co.* confirming workplace anti-discrimination protections for LGBTQ people across the country. We remain strongly committed to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer equality, and to fostering an inclusive environment where we see each other as individuals instead of simply representatives of groups.

We recognize that effective LGBTQ inclusion requires an ongoing evolution of our thinking and understanding and constant reevaluation of our policies and practices. Recent action includes:

- Hosting a virtual screening of the award-winning documentary *CURED*, which explores the battle that led the American Psychiatric Association to remove homosexuality from its manual of mental illnesses in 1973. Following the screening, filmmakers Patrick Sammon and Bennett Singer led us in a discussion and Q&A session to explore the lessons of the film and the work of the LGBTQ+ activists who changed history.
- Inviting Dr. Leila J. Rupp for a virtual fireside chat with our then managing partner Scott Fisher in celebration of Pride Month 2020. Dr. Rupp is a distinguished scholar and one of the leading voices on the history of same-sex sexuality. She shared with our attorneys and staff her wisdom as well as a historical perspective on the struggle for LGBTQ equality.
- Hosting trial attorney, speaker and writer Ellie Krug for a program on "Gray Area Thinking." As someone who transitioned from male to female, Ellie shared with us her personal story and discussed what it means to be transgender. She provided us with tools we can employ to limit tribal behaviors, to be more inclusive generally, and discussed our tendency as humans to categorize and group others who are different from us, and the negative effects of the "black and white" thinking that results.
- Encouraging everyone at our firm to publicly share gender pronouns in their contact information, including email signatures, business cards, and bios. This included sharing that while many may think that since their gender pronouns matched their birth-assigned gender they didn't need to provide others with their pronouns, this small step in being more inclusive can have a huge impact on those who otherwise feel unseen or marginalized by preventing them from being the only person who needs to self-identify pronouns.

- Given our desire as a firm to be more inclusive and welcoming of individuals beyond narrow demographic categories traditionally used, we redesigned our Voluntary Employee Self-Identification Form to be inclusive of gender identity and sexual orientation.
- Adding gender identification as an option in the firm's employment application form.
- Attaining Mansfield 3.0 Certification after successfully completing the twelve-month certification program led by Diversity Lab. To achieve Mansfield certification, we verified that at least 30 percent of the candidate pool for partner promotions, lateral partner and associate hires, leadership positions, committee appointments, and formal client pitches at NGE consisted of women, attorneys of color, LGBTQ+ lawyers, and lawyers with disabilities.

Pride in Support

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- The LAGBAC (Lesbian and Gay Bar Association of Chicago) Foundation 35th Anniversary Gala and the Lawyers for Diversity BBQ. The Foundation educates legal professionals and the public about legal issues affecting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and questioning persons.
- The Bon Foster Civil Rights Celebration, held on May 19, 2023. This annual event is hosted by Lambda Legal, a national nonprofit organization committed to achieving full recognition of the civil rights of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transgender people, and everyone living with HIV.
- 2023 Lavender Law Annual Conference and Career Fair, held on July 24, 2023. The annual conference is hosted by the National LGBTQ+ Bar Association and is designed to achieve a sense of community and inclusion for LGBTQ+ candidates within the legal profession's recruiting efforts.
- The Equality Illinois Gala, the Midwest's largest LGBTQ formal celebration, was held on February 4, 2023. Hosted by Equality Illinois, the state's largest LGBTQ civil rights advocacy organization.

Additional Events

- In 2021, we partnered with the Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center for a virtual tour of the "Mandela: Struggle for Freedom." Attendees learned about Nelson Mandela's life, his achievements of mobilizing people around the globe for human rights, and his worldwide crusade demanding racial equality.
- In celebration of Black History Month 2021, we screened a documentary focused on our theme: The Black Family: Representation, Identity, and Diversity. The documentary, "Against All Odds: The Fight for a Black Middle Class," explores the historical efforts of Black Americans to establish a middle-class standard of living, and the role of the Black family in the fight for upward mobility. Following the screening, our staff

and attorneys were invited to participate in small-group roundtable discussions to learn more about our theme of Black Families, and to share and listen to their colleagues' experiences.

- We partnered with the Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center in 2021 for a virtual tour of the "Notorious RBG: The Life and Times of Ruth Bader Ginsburg" exhibit. In honor of Justice Ginsburg's achievements, our trailblazing and award-winning women leaders also shared their thoughts on "What RBG meant to me."
- We hosted Kate Harrington-Rosen in 2020 for an interactive workshop on "Navigating Difficult Conversations About Race, Diversity and Inequity," to provide a framework for understanding bias, prejudice and oppression, and how those concepts play out in interpersonal and workplace settings. Kate introduced strategies for interrupting harm and provided guidance about how to employ those strategies in real-world scenarios.
- To celebrate Black History Month in 2020, we screened "A More Perfect Union (1968-2013)," the sixth episode of the PBS miniseries "The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross, with Henry Louis Gates, Jr." The episode discussed African Americans' continued struggle for social and economic equality after the civil rights movement, and included a look back at the historic election of President Obama. The series, which premiered in 2013, chronicles African American history from the origins of slavery on the African continent through the early 2000s.
- We partnered with the Coalition of Women's Initiatives in Law in 2020 to host a book discussion on "It's Not You, It's the Workplace: Women's Conflict at Work and the Bias That Built It." Authors Andie Kramer and Alton Harris led the discussion on how to avoid workplace conflict and build strong, positive women-to-women relationships that foster career success.
- To honor Black History Month in 2019, we hosted a viewing of the movie, "*Mr. Civil Rights: Thurgood Marshall and the NAACP*", for our attorneys and staff. The film focuses on the career of civil rights attorney (and future Supreme Court Justice) Thurgood Marshall and his triumph in the 1954 Supreme Court case—*Brown v. Board of Education*—that ended legal segregation in America's public schools. In addition, we hosted journalist, award-winning author and Pulitzer finalist, Wil Haygood for an informative discussion of his book and New York Times bestseller "*Showdown: Thurgood Marshall and the Supreme Court Nomination that Changed America*." His presentation examined Thurgood Marshall's nomination in the context of racial and class tensions in the 1940s and 1950s and explained how the lessons from the nomination are relevant today.
- We hosted Sam Mihara, one of the 120,000 Japanese Americans forced into a prison camp during World War II. Sam shared his powerful account of the conditions within the camp and life after release. He also shared his unique perspective on how this history is relevant today, leading to very thoughtful and engaging Q&A.

- In 2017, to honor Black History Month, the entire firm was invited to a private screening of the Oscar-nominated movie *Hidden Figures*. The movie recounted the experiences of three African-American women who were mathematicians at NASA and were the brains behind the launch of astronaut John Glenn into space.
- We were one of the first law firms in Chicago to screen the much-celebrated film *Brother Outsider*, a moving documentary chronicling the life of Bayard Rustin, a tireless activist whose work has been widely forgotten by history, largely because he was silenced, arrested and imprisoned for being openly gay in the 1960s. To engage our invited clients and friends in a dialogue, filmmaker Bennett Singer and Bayard Rustin's long-time partner Walter Naegle led a discussion and Q&A session immediately following the screening about the film, its lessons for battling discrimination and homophobia in the workplace and legal community.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION

Far too often, law firms tout their diversity initiatives, but the work is relegated to a handful of people who are part of their diversity committee. To truly move the needle forward, however, the commitment to a more diverse and inclusive environment has to come from the top.

With the goal of true and sustained progress, where every individual has the same opportunities to advance and succeed as others, we continue to develop best practices and policies to foster individual growth, development and the diversity of our firm, including:

- **Inclusivity** – Achieved Mansfield Certification, which confirms that at least 30% of the candidates considered for leadership and governance roles, equity partner promotions, formal client pitch opportunities, and senior lateral positions were attorneys from historically underrepresented groups, including women, attorneys of color, LGBTQ+ lawyers and lawyers with disabilities.
- **Engagement** – Encouraging attorneys and staff to support professional, civic and community organizations that advance the interests of minorities and women in the legal community and the community at large
- **Equity** – Implementing a core competency system for associate development to mitigate unconscious bias and ensure equal opportunity for associates in assignments and business development opportunities
- **Flexibility** – Introduced flexible and reduced work schedules for attorneys, aiming to help them balance their professional responsibilities with their family and personal commitments. Our primary focus is on fostering an environment where every attorney feels confident in utilizing these flexible hours and parental leave policies, free from any concerns about negative consequences.
- **Scholarship** – Providing scholarship support to minority students



- **Recognition** – Named One of the “Best Law Firms for Women and Diversity” by Seramount, which recognizes firms for using best practices in recruiting, retaining, promoting, and developing women lawyers and lawyers from underrepresented groups, including people of color.
- **Pro Bono** – Providing billable credit for work on pro bono matters, including many that involve and affect minorities and women
- **Mentorship** – Providing the opportunity for minority attorneys to participate in the Chicago Committee’s Mentorship Academy that utilizes a curriculum-based approach to provide structure and content to mentoring relationships
- **Collaboration** – Supporting and working with organizations such as the Minority Corporate Counsel Association, In Legal Color and other similar organizations to increase opportunities and diversity within the legal profession
- **Recruitment** – Participating in minority recruitment programs such as the Cook County Bar Association Minority Law Student Job Fair
- **Representation** – Including senior leaders and influential individuals on the firm’s Diversity & Inclusion Committee

DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION

NGE recognizes that inclusion is a skillset and not an attitude, so our firm regularly offers skills-based programming designed to help attorneys and staff manage and communicate across differences.

- We have hosted Michelle Silverthorn, acclaimed speaker and Founder of Inclusion Nation, for presentations on Inclusive Leadership and Equity.
- In October 2022, we hosted Mini Timmaraju, the President of Reproductive Freedom for All, for a fireside chat on effective leadership and the work being done by NARAL at the national and state levels. Managing Partner Bobby Gerber and Partner Sonya Rosenberg moderated the discussion.
- In October 2022, we hosted Rachael Bosch, founder of Fringe Professional Development, for the program “It’s Not Just Semantics: Why Your Language Matters” for a discussion on creating inclusive spaces.
- In September 2022, we hosted Deepa Purushothaman, author and co-founder of nFormation, for a webinar on Allyship for a discussion on the concept of allyship and how to be effective colleagues in daily interactions and conversations. The program was moderated by D&I Committee chairs Bobby Gerber and Tanvi Patel.

- In honor of Juneteenth 2022, we hosted distinguished speaker and professor Dr. Mary Frances Berry for the webinar “Juneteenth: History, Commemoration, and Lessons for Today” where she discussed laws related to the enslavement and emancipation of people in America and how Juneteenth has been commemorated over the years.
- In June 2022, our Women’s Network team partnered with non-profits Girls on the Run, StepUp and Ms. JD for *Lifting as you Climb: Empowering for Success*, a luncheon dedicated to connecting and discussing advocacy and female empowerment inside and outside the workplace.
- In 2022, we partnered with the Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center for a virtual tour of the “Rise Up: Stonewall and the LGBTQ Rights Movement” exhibit. Our guide, Arielle Weininger, explored critical moments in gay rights history, and showcased powerful artifacts and historic print publications from celebrations of LGBTQ+ pride in Chicagoland.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION

Since its creation in 2002, our Diversity & Inclusion Committee has worked to expand and enhance the firm’s diversity initiatives and to build upon the philosophy of inclusion long existing in the firm work environment. The Diversity & Inclusion Committee also launched two significant subgroups within the firm. The Women’s Network and the Minority Initiative are designed to support and enhance opportunities available to women and minorities, respectively, and to provide forums for them to network and develop, personally and professionally, both inside and outside of the firm.

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