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Implementing Baker Donelson's D&I Compact Sponsorship Program

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Third Quarter 2020

In January's *Diversity Matters* issue, we introduced Baker Donelson's Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) Compact. Eighteen years after the commencement of Baker Donelson's internal D&I initiative, CEO Timothy M. Lupinacci affirmed his commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion through the creation of a D&I Compact. The purpose of the Compact is to address areas of improvement revealed in a 2019 internal audit of the Firm's efforts and progress related to diversity, equity and inclusion. The Firm identified four priorities: recruitment and retention of diverse attorneys; business generation training and execution; leadership accountability; and creating pathways for success.

We know from years of research studies that diverse teams and fostering inclusive climates are critical to creating high-performing teams that improve work product and financial return. Feeling supported and a sense of belonging are critical for all employees, particularly diverse employees. The Compact is our Firm's plan to work toward a more inclusive environment that results in highly engaged and successful diverse attorneys. Notwithstanding the COVID-19 pandemic, Baker Donelson remains dedicated to its goal of increasing the percentage of diverse attorneys, shareholders and management personnel by December 31, 2025.

The Compact was internally launched in August 2020. Since then, Baker Donelson has begun implementing a robust sponsorship program to support the four Compact priorities. In the coming weeks, the Firm's Chief Operating Officer Jennifer Keller, Diversity Committee Chair Mark Baugh, Compact Chair Marcus Maples, D&I Manager Cheryl Hunt, and other members of the Compact Advisory Board will meet to match diverse associate, staff attorney, of counsel and income shareholder protégés with Firm sponsors. Following the rollout of these matches, sponsorship relationships will commence with sponsors and protégés working together to develop an individualized strategy for each protégé's pathway to success.

Companies interested in pursuing their own sponsorship programs can consider these tips to jumpstart the sponsor-protégé relationship:

1. Create opportunities to get to know one another. The sponsorship will thrive if the sponsors and protégés get to know each other on a personal level.
2. Identify goals for each sponsorship relationship. Sponsors and protégés should discuss their expectations and set attainable goals that can be used to measure success based on the protégé's career dreams and aspirations.
3. Share valuable insight. Sponsors should be encouraged to take advantage of their unique perspectives on (and positions within) the organization to help their protégés identify opportunities and make strategic contributions that will increase their profiles and value within the company.
4. Provide candid feedback. The sponsorship relationship should have a feedback component. The sponsor and protégé should provide candid constructive feedback about the sponsorship but also about the protégés' progression and reputation in the organization.

5. Be committed. The sponsor and protégé must be fully invested and proactive to achieve their goals, recognizing that career growth will require consistency and dedication.
6. Advocate. Ideally, the sponsor will be the protégé's advocate and connect the protégé with power players within and outside the organization. Advocating includes notifying others of the protégé's accomplishments and mentioning them for opportunities discussed during closed-door meetings.
7. Own and deliver. Participants should own and deliver as sponsor and protégé, work together, and hold each other accountable.