

# Promoting Diversity and Inclusion

By Melody Finnemore

*“Diversity and inclusion mean acknowledging, embracing and valuing the unique contributions our individual backgrounds make to strengthen our legal community, increase access to justice, and promote laws and creative solutions that better serve clients and communities. Diversity includes, but is not limited to: age; culture; disability; ethnicity; gender and gender identity; geographic location; national origin; race; religion; sexual orientation; and socio-economic status.” — Oregon State Bar*



**A**s director of the Oregon State Bar Diversity & Inclusion Department, Mariann Hyland faces a perplexing conundrum. The bar wants to gain a full picture of the diversity of Oregon lawyers and identify ways it can continue to support minority attorneys. However, just over half —

58 percent, to be exact — of bar members have shared their racial and ethnic heritage with the bar when filling out member registration forms or using the new member “dashboard” online. In addition to demographic information, members may disclose if they have a disability or identify as multiracial/ethnic or as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT).

“We hope to increase the self-identification rate to 75 percent by the end of 2013,” Hyland says. “Information regarding the diversity of our membership is important for the bar to identify strategic priorities, enhance outreach efforts and measure progress toward creating a more diverse and inclusive bar.”

The effort to capture this data more comprehensively is one of several initiatives the bar has launched in its ongoing endeavor to promote diversity and inclusion within the profession. It has established a diversity advisory council that is developing a diversity action plan to ensure the bar’s programs, services and activities are delivered in an inclusive and culturally responsive manner. This includes recruiting and retaining diverse bar staff, developing diversity best practices for the organization and identifying resources that can help bar staff improve their cultural proficiency.

The department also launched two rebranding initiatives. Along with fine-tuning its definition of diversity and inclusion (see opening text above), it developed a business case statement for diversity and inclusion and a new tagline, “Diversity and Inclusion: Making Us Stronger.”

The second rebranding effort targeted the Opportunities for Law in Oregon (OLIO) program. “One of the first things I wanted to do when I came on board was clarify OLIO’s goals

and objectives,” Hyland says. “We looked at new ways to market the program, explain its value and enhance its outreach to those attending law school outside of Oregon.”

Part of that effort involved translating what “developing community” means to people who might not understand the concept. If Oregon is to foster a diverse community of legal talent, she explains, it must examine that from an economic, business perspective as well its importance to access to justice.

To the reach of the bar’s efforts both statewide and nationally, social media, promotional videos and other vehicles are being employed. Another major element is an upcoming Diversity Story Wall, which will focus on the contributions of Oregon’s underrepresented lawyers and judges, as well as historical legal milestones in Oregon and nationally. The bar began a fundraising campaign to raise \$30,000 for the wall to be installed at its Tigard center. In addition, portraits of Oregon’s diverse speciality bar leaders are now displayed in the bar center in Tigard.

“I’ve been really inspired by that shift in terms of increasing the visibility of minority bar members,” Hyland says.

The initiatives include an economic survey that has been expanded to include a demographic question about race, ethnicity, LGBT status and disability. “The idea behind that is to create some baseline data so we can get a feel for how everyone in our bar is doing in terms of the key indicators of success and prosperity,” Hyland says.

The bar’s initiatives will build on the 2011 Convocation on Equality by including a chapter about the bar’s diversity data in a toolkit to be published. The toolkit is designed to summarize the findings from the convocation and help legal employers and practitioners use best practices to advance diversity and inclusion.

In addition, the bar’s Diversity & Inclusion Department is creating a quarterly electronic newsletter. Each newsletter will include a “Member Spotlight” featuring two to three diverse members of the bar, including a video clip with an informal interview about a subject of interest. The first newsletter will feature Beth Allen, recently appointed to the Multnomah County Circuit Court bench, and Sam Hernandez, an associate at Barran Liebman. Both are military veterans and will address the recent lifting of the ban against women engaging in combat, among other topics.

Above all, Hyland says, the initiatives to capture information about bar members is meant to increase the diversity and inclusion of the bar, as well as enhance services and resources to the bar and community. ■