

## COMMITMENT TO LESBIAN, GAY, BISexual AND TRANSGENDER (LGBT) DIVERSITY

In the wake of the recession, the legal profession is more competitive than ever before. In law firms and board rooms across the country, smart employers know they must ensure that their best and brightest are not inhibited by any barriers to success, including barriers based on sexual orientation or gender identity. At a time when everyone must thrive with fewer resources, continued investment in LGBT workplace diversity is not a feel-good extravagance — it is an ongoing business imperative.

The most successful companies and law firms in the world understand the simple premise: employees with a wide range of backgrounds, experiences, contacts and sensitivities better meet corporate America's diverse needs. Increasingly, as the corporate world recognizes and caters to the larger LGBT community as a crucial market, companies are beginning to demand that the organizations with which they do business be LGBT-affirming and show LGBT representation as well; customers want to see a reflection of our communities in counsel they hire.

There are many reasons to ensure LGBT diversity within a firm, corporate legal department or office. No matter the size of company or firm, employers spend valuable time and money to identify, recruit, train and retain the brightest attorneys they can possibly find. During a slumping economy, a company must make more even effective staffing decisions. Smart employers know that a prospective hire will weigh quality of life issues alongside salary, benefits and location when making career decisions. When a potential hire declines a job offer because he or she perceives a lack of commitment to LGBT employees, the firm has fumbled a competitive opportunity.

On the other hand, a strategic acquisition of a diverse candidate can improve team morale, perspective and performance in this competitive world. In addition, when a high performing diverse employee jumps ship to another, more inclusive, firm or company, employers lose not only that employee's talents, but also the historic knowledge, client relationships and time and money spent to train the diverse employee.

Among other best practices, implementing LGBT-inclusive policies and hiring and retaining open LGBT personnel helps law firms and corporate legal departments recruit and retain lucrative corporate clients. In addition to making a firm more competitive to diversity-minded clients, the inclusion of pro-LGBT policies can make the firm more competitive to its diversity-minded employees. Examples of LGBT friendly policies include:

- Including sexual orientation in your diversity and/or Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) statement(s) and policies
- Including gender identity and expression in your diversity and/or EEO statement(s) and policies
- Offering domestic partner benefits
- Adjusting gross salary for employees in marriages, domestic partnerships, or civil unions to offset the federal tax burden
- Offering domestic partner bereavement, paternity and maternity leave, or other leave benefits typically reserved for reasons related to married heterosexual spouses
- Helping defray the cost of nontraditional family planning (in vitro, adoption fees, etc.)
- Establish a zero-tolerance policy for LGBT harassment or discrimination

Other best practices include:

- Ensuring that qualified LGBT, or other diverse employees, are appointed to leadership positions within a firm or corporation;
- Monitor LGBT data for your organization by creating a voluntary and confidential survey that allows LGBT persons to self-disclose their gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender status;
- Offer diversity or EEO training that includes reference to LGBT;
- Support the establishment of employee resource groups, including an LGBT group;
- Offer a private restrooms that allow gender neutral use, and gender neutral dress code policies;
- Sponsor participation in LGBT related associations or organizations;
- Include LGBT personnel in all professional development opportunities, including networking opportunities, mentorship and professional development programs;
- Create gender transition guidelines and/or policies and train personnel on those policies.

The National LGBT Bar Association has been working with companies and firms with a demonstrated commitment to LGBT diversity to develop the following Commitment Statement. As a leader within your organization, we urge you to strongly consider signing on and help us send the message that “LGBT diversity matters.”

## *Commitment Statement*

We aspire to hire, retain and promote the best attorneys by ensuring that our organization and programs are accessible to all attorneys, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. We pledge to be advocates for diversity in the legal profession by:

- **Demonstrating the importance of LGBT diversity by hiring, training, retaining and promoting diverse talent, including LGBT personnel;**
- **Creating or supporting the creation an appropriate committee, subcommittee or affinity group to guide our diversity and inclusion efforts;**
- **Encouraging professional development opportunities for all qualified diverse personnel, including monitoring and ensuring diversity in organizational leadership positions;**
- **Fostering and developing relationships with other businesses that share a commitment to diversity and inclusion in the legal profession, including LGBT diversity;**
- **Taking an active, ongoing role within my organization and the LGBT Bar to achieve these goals; and**
- **Sharing information with each other and the LGBT Bar regarding best practices which foster achievement of the above goals.**

**Name of Firm/Corporation:**

**Signature of Managing Partner/General Counsel:**

**Print Name:**

**Phone Number:**

**Email Address:**

**Date:**

Fully completed and executed Commitment Statements should be forward to:

National LGBT Bar Association  
1301 K Street NW, Suite 1100 East Tower  
Washington, DC 20050  
info@LGBTbar.org