

An Atmosphere of Inclusion

By Jason L. Brown

NAMWOLF Executive Director & General Counsel

The Institute for Inclusion in the Legal Profession (IILP) recently published a report, titled *The Business Case for Diversity: Reality or Wishful Thinking?*, that has the legal community talking. IILP formed a partnership with the Association of Legal Administrators (ALA) to gather data on the three primary stakeholders in diversity initiatives: corporate clients, law firms, and diverse partners. Specifically, they address the question of whether the business case for diversity is working. The report is regarded as a much needed shift away from the “anecdotal commentary on the subject” to hard data relative to the business case for diversity.

The report ultimately concludes that the business case for diversity is working but also cautions that there exist serious complications affecting the impact and effectiveness of the effort. For example, expectations differ dramatically from one group of stakeholders to the next, giving each group a unique set of problems to overcome. However, there is one hurdle that affects both corporate counsel and minority and women outside counsel alike: attorneys need to develop strategic connections within a company and have meaningful one-on-one interactions with them to forge relationships that could result in business opportunities. Many attorneys report that forming these relationships, or rather not forming them, is holding back progress of diversity and inclusion in the legal profession.

This year, NAMWOLF celebrates its 10th Anniversary as an organization dedicated to diversity and advocating for inclusion. At our upcoming Annual Meeting & Law Firm Expo, I am pleased to say that our organization provides its members with the crucial opportunities they need—now more than ever—to create, develop and maintain those relationships with corporate counsel. IILP’s data suggests

opportunities to interact with prospective clients one-on-one is the most effective strategy for developing business relationships, opposed to situations where there are simply a large gathering of attorneys. Over the past several years, NAMWOLF has successfully created an atmosphere of inclusion during our events in the hopes of increasing the exposure and the utilization of minority and women owned law firms. This formula has proven to be tremendously successful for our law firm members and those corporations and public entities who approach the organization seeking diverse outside counsel .

The business case for diversity will continue to be discussed at conferences and examined through studies as we strive to make the legal profession more inclusive. NAMWOLF is just one of several organizations that have made great strides in this effort. For the past 10 years, we have been committed to making our profession better. We will continue to find more ways help bolster the business case of diversity by providing an atmosphere of inclusion for minority and women owned law firms. This is our mission.