

# PROJECT *for* ATTORNEY RETENTION

## BEST PRACTICE

To make significant progress in improving retention and advancement of women and diverse attorneys, firms need to change their culture and infrastructure in three basic ways: Develop a formal system for handling **workflow and assignments**, with benchmarking, transparency, and accountability; design an **evaluation system** that accurately defines competencies, combined with active talent management and development; change the **compensation system** to require, value, and incent talent management. Our "Diversity Beyond the Body Count" initiative mobilizes the latest in social science to give legal employers concrete guidance on how evaluation, work allocation, and compensation systems need to be changed in order to support the retention and advancement of women lawyers and work/life balance for all. We highlight our PAR members' best practices in making progress "beyond the body count."

### Key Metrics for Assessing Progress on Diversity

The traditional self-assessment tool in diversity contexts is the "body count," which measures the number of women and people of color at various levels within the firm. The problem with the body count is that it tells an organization little about *whether* diverse attorneys are thriving—and if they are not thriving, why not.

In [\*New Millennium, Same Glass Ceiling: The Impact of Law Firm Compensation Systems on Women\*](#), co-authored by PAR Senior Counsel Joan C. Williams, one best-practice recommendation was to establish baseline information on where women and diverse attorneys fall in the compensation system, along with regular monitoring and analysis of that data.

PAR member [\*Dewey & LeBoeuf\*](#), a large, international law firm, recently took its metrics to the next level. This firm, like many others, has long tracked the demographics of its associate population and has measured utilization of associates in terms of billable hours. The firm's Diversity Chair came to the conclusion that a better method was needed because aggregate data does not reflect the relative success of different demographics, nor whether individual associates have been provided the opportunity for meaningful career development.

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The firm's new metric divides its associates into four categories:

1. Associates billing at 1800+ hours who have worked for at least 100 hours (annualized) on a top-ten matter for his/her practice group ("top ten" is measured by revenue);
2. Those billing at 1800+ hours who have *not* worked on any top-ten matters;
3. Those billing fewer than 1800 hours who have worked on a top-ten matter; and
4. Those billing fewer than 1800 hours who have not worked on any top-ten matters.

The firm looked first at all of its associates in the United States, and then at the following sub-groups: white male associates, female associates, ethnically diverse associates, and LGBT associates. The resulting data have already proved valuable both in reviewing the opportunities provided to individual associates and in reviewing the relative success of the various demographic cuts of the associate population. Going forward, the data will serve as a baseline for progress in its retention and promotion of diverse and female associates.